

# CRETHINK National Report – Denmark

## 1 State of the art: The national context

### A National strategies and policies on co-creation and sustainability

#### A1 Laws and strategies about citizen involvement and co-creation

Historically, the Danish state has been strong and well-functioning, supplemented by a strong, diverse civil society. Denmark has a long tradition for trust, collaboration and interplay between the public sector and civil society, where many of the core areas in the welfare system like kindergartens, nursing homes and support for the disabled were developed as civil initiatives and were later integrated into the public sector operations. The co-existence of a strong state and civil society has throughout history generated an interdependence and tradition for cross-sector collaboration and has given rise to strong networks between public and private actors, which has led to the development of different traditions and more or less formal norms and rules for the cooperation (1).

#### Citizen councils and hearings

In Denmark, there are multiple national policies that detail rules and regulations about the involvement of the general public and citizens in development of legal rules, plans, policies and programs, and the rights of citizens in terms of influence and hearing in matters of their own life and at national, regional and local (municipal) level. However, these rules do not directly address co-creation, but rather uses the words “cooperation”, “involvement” and “advice”. According to the Danish Service Law §16 municipalities must set up one or more citizen or civil society councils to advice the municipality in their organization of their offers. In 2008 the then sitting government also decided to set up the national volunteer council, which gives advice to the Social Ministry and the Parliament about the volunteer sector’s role and effort in relation to social challenges (2,3).

The newest contribution to the citizen involvement system, is the so-called “Citizen Proposal Scheme”, where all persons with the right to vote in the Danish parliamentary elections can submit a citizens' proposal. If at least 3 people want to be co-sponsors of the proposal and 50,000 citizens with the right to vote in parliamentary elections support the proposal, it can then be presented as a resolution and processed and voted on in the Danish Parliament. So far 9 proposals have been processed by the parliament, although none have been passed so far. It has been argued that this enables a more direct dialogue between citizens and the parliament and there are examples of citizen proposals that even though they have not been passed, have still raised dialogue and awareness among the politicians in the Parliament, such as a citizen proposal for a climate law (4).

#### Organisation of and cooperation with civil society

In relation to civil society and volunteer organisations, Denmark has rules about organisation and regulation of civil society and volunteer organisations, which detail how the public sector and volunteers/volunteer

organisations should handle volunteers, responsibilities and cooperation between the public sector and volunteers etc. (i.e. if a volunteer is on public benefits, requirements on criminal records, confidentiality, duty of notification, insurance, tax rules, hygiene, work environment etc.)(5). According to §18 in the Danish Service Law, the municipality is obliged to cooperate with volunteer social organisations and associations. Moreover, the municipality must set aside a yearly fund to support volunteer social work. The municipality must also report to the Ministry of Social and Domestic Affairs about the local development in the volunteer social work (3).

#### Charters and strategies for cooperation:

In terms of cooperation and co-creation between the public and private sector and civil society, there are a few strategies and charters that address these themes in different ways, mainly in the social welfare area. These express both a political approach to civil society as an instrument for solving welfare challenges, but also a respect for civil society as having a value in itself and as a fundamental part of the Danish society and an incremental part of democracy and active citizenship that both cooperates with and challenges the political system. The term co-creation is not mentioned directly, however, the documents shows a view and recognition that civil society can play a role as a partner in solving societal challenges and add a special value and competence that the public organisations do not possess.

In 2010 the then government formulated the "National civil society strategy – A strengthened involvement of civil society and volunteer organisations in the social effort", which addresses the civil society as "a societal resource that the government wants to cherish and develop". It formulates an ambition to strengthen civil society and ensure a more systematic involvement of civil society in the public social effort, by among other things, conjoining the activities of civil society and the public social effort. The strategy addresses the civil society as a crucial part of the welfare society and the aim of the strategy is to ensure a well-functioning interplay, where civil society and the private business community participate in a close interplay with the public sector, in order to give citizens the best possible conditions and the best possible quality of the available offers (9).

The "Charter for Interplay between the public and civil society" from 2013, which replaced a charter from 2001, outlines a shared vision and agreed framework for the interplay and cooperation between the public and the civil society organisations. The charter was formed by a workgroup which represented 19 civil society organisations, two umbrella organisation for Danish trade unions, the National Association of Municipalities, the interest and employer organization for the five Danish regions "Danish Regions" and the government. The aim of the charter is *"to ensure conditions to further develop a volunteer world that alone and together and in interplay with the public sector, can enrich, move and touch the individual, the community, society and which enhances a dynamic development"*. The charter is meant to be a guideline for both civil society and the public sector in order to improve the interplay. It highlights the importance of a meaningful framework for the volunteer, and a framework where the public can support the volunteers by providing the right framework and conditions, and moreover mutual trust and equality in dialogue and in praxis (10).

## A2 National laws and strategies for cooperation for sustainable development

According to the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) published in 2020 by Yale and Columbia University, Denmark scores as number one in climate action, mainly due to political climate leadership and the fact that Denmark has reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by more than half since peaking in 1996 and that 47 percent of electricity came from wind power in 2019 (11). This political will to take action in environmental and climate matters are also reflected in Denmark's laws. Environment has been on the Danish political agenda since the 1960's and in 1973 the first collected environment law, "the Law for Environment Protection" was passed and the first Ministry for Environment was set up. In 1987 the first water protection law was passed and in 1991 laws that introduced CO<sub>2</sub> fees and energy saving efforts were passed (12).

### Citizen councils and hearings for sustainable development

When it comes to laws about nature and the environment, the involvement of relevant stakeholders and citizens, as well as the structure of councils is recurring at national level. The Danish Environment Protection Law directly addresses that it has been put in place "to protect nature and the environment, so that the development of society can take place on a sustainable basis in respect for human living conditions and for the conservation of animal and plant life" (§1). In §11 it states that before the environment minister establishes new rules in accordance with the Environment Protection Law. The minister will have to negotiate with the nearest national businesses and environment organisations, The National Association of Municipalities, The Danish Regions and other influenced authorities, among others the employment minister (13).

The Forest Law, with the purpose to preserve and protect the country's forests and to increase the forest area, and to promote sustainable management of the country's forests, mentions the Forest Council in §47, which is organised under the Ministry for Environment and Food Products. The Forest Council gives advice to the Minister about forestry and other matters concerning forests (14). The Forest Council consists of representatives from relevant organisations across sectors such as the Danish Forest Association, Agriculture & Food, The Forrest Cultivators, the Danish Society for Nature Conservation, Danish Ornithological Association, Danish Wood Industries, WWF World Wildlife Fund, The Open Air Council, The National Association of Municipalities and the institutions that research forestry and science topics (15). Another example of a national council, representing cross sector stakeholders, is the National Bio Economy Panel, who gives advice on development of new, sustainable value chains within the bio economy in Denmark, for the benefit of the economy, employment, the environment and the climate. The panel is organised under the Ministry of Environment and Food Products and consists of a chairman with a business background, 11 members nominated by the following organizations / networks: Agriculture & Food, Danish Industry, Danish Energy, Danish Business, BioRefining Alliance, BioValue SPIR, INBIOM, CONCITO, 3F, The Danish Society for Nature Conservation, WWF World Wildlife Foundation and six researchers appointed directly by the Minister for the Environment and Food Products (16).

In 2014 the first Danish Climate law was passed, and in 2015 a new independent Climate Council was set up, in order to promote transparency and a professionally coherent decision basis for Denmark's climate policy. The Climate Council must provide independent advice to the government on the transition to a low-carbon society. The Climate Council must make recommendations at least once a year the government on climate efforts so that it can be arranged cost-effectively and with consideration for growth, competitiveness and

employment. In this connection, the Climate Council must consult in the preparation of its analyses and work and involve relevant parties, including i.e. business stakeholders, social partners and civil society. This can happen through conferences, media and the like, which can increase transparency. In the new Climate Law of 2020, the climate council has been strengthened by raising the number of members from 6-8. The council's professional expertise is strengthened with knowledge within behaviour and climate research. This in addition to the current expertise in energy, buildings, transport, agriculture, environment, nature and economics. At the same time, the Finance Law of 2020 has ensured more than a doubling of the funds for the Climate Council. The political independence of the Climate Council is also strengthened by the fact that the Council from now on will elect its own chairman and members of the council (17,18).

As part of the present government's climate action plan a new Climate Dialogue Forum will be set up, to systematize the Climate Council's dialogue with stakeholders across different sectors, in order to take into account broad societal considerations in climate efforts and the recommendations for the government. The Climate Dialogue Forum will be composed of i.e. industry organizations, think tanks, green organizations, workers' organizations and ministries (19). Moreover a Climate Citizen Parliament will be set up. It will consist of 99 citizens, who will be selected on the basis of simple criteria such as age, gender, geography, education and income. They will be tasked with debating citizen-related dilemmas and bring in concrete suggestions for solutions associated with the green transition as well as providing input and recommendations for the preparation of climate action plans. This happens by a series of citizens' meetings where relevant experts are convened who can prepare them professionally before discussing and concluding by vote. The Citizens' Parliament then presents its conclusions and recommendations for the Minister of Climate, Energy and Utilities and the Climate, Energy and Utilities Committee (20).

In 2019 a Youth Climate Council was also set up under the Minister for Climate, Energy and Utilities. The Youth Climate Council must bring new thinking into Danish climate policy and provide input to the Minister on future climate solutions. The members of the Youth Climate Council have been appointed for a one-year period, and they come from all parts of the country, from different fields of education and represent different approaches to the climate challenge (21).

#### Private partnerships for sustainable development

The private sector plays a large role in the political strategies of the present and previous governments. For example, as part of the Danish climate effort, the government has established 13 climate partnerships with the business community and a Green Business Forum in November 2019. The Green Business Forum must continuously follow the work of the 13 climate partnerships within the various sectors of the business community. The purpose is to strengthen the dialogue between the government, business and the trade union movement on opportunities and barriers in the green transition of business.

The 13 climate partnerships cover the sectors of:

- Land transport and logistics
- Service, IT and consulting
- Aviation
- Waste, water and the circular industry
- The construction sector

- Life Science and Biotech
- Trade
- Production
- Financial sector
- Energy and supply sector
- Blue Denmark
- Energy Heavy Industry
- Food production and agriculture

In a press release the Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, stated about the climate partnerships:

*"We must solve the climate challenge together. In respect of our unique, strong, Danish model of society. All parts of our society must contribute in order for us to achieve the government's ambitious climate goals. I know that people with different interests can find common solutions if they want to and sit down together. That community spirit is shown by companies and organizations every single day. They take responsibility for the community of which they are a part. I am happy and proud of the 13 climate partnerships we can present, each led by strong, competent business leaders. Together we can show the world that Denmark is both green, competitive and in solidarity" (26).*

The Energy Agreement of 2018, which was formed between the previous government and a line of political parties in the Parliament, presents a line of initiatives that were introduced in order to work towards zero emission in 2050 and the Paris Agreement. The agreement focuses on the energy industry and its role in the transition towards a sustainable, green society, with elements such as renewable energy, energy efficiency improvements, and research and energy regulation. It explains that the market's drive towards the green transition, and the technological development and competition between the best companies has ensured renewable energy deliverance and the agreement expresses the importance of the private sector and energy sector in particular, in relation to climate adaption. The agreement introduces a line of initiatives such as public investments in energy solutions that will both support the green transition and will support the green energy sector's ability to compete in the free market (27).

The Agreement about Circular Economy from 2018, between the then government and a line of political parties in the Parliament, again addresses the role of the private sector in relation to the green transition. The Agreement focuses on the benefits of circular economy both in terms of environmental value, and in terms of competitiveness of Danish companies. In order to promote the development and adoption of the circular economy approach in Danish companies, the agreement set aside 60 million Danish Kroners for a line of initiatives such as a Green Investment Fund that can support for example green building and renovation projects, more public procurements of green and circular solutions and available open data and analysis (28).

#### Strategies for implementing the UN SDGs and co-creation:

While climate is a big headline in Danish politics at the moment, the UN SDGs are not so visible at the national political level. The latest Danish national strategy or framework for implementing the UN SDGs was published in March 2017 by the former Government. The strategy has "partnerships" as the first headline in the action plan, which both expresses an emphasis and value of partnerships and cross sector cooperation and contribution to implementing the SDGs, but it could also be interpreted as a lack of will from the previous

government to “go all the way” with the implementation and rather count on the private sector, civil society and local public organisations to take the lead. The strategy highlights how partnerships can contribute to innovation and new solutions for sustainability, and it encourages all actors across society to engage and contribute to meet the SDGs. It states that the Government aims to involve the private sector, research and knowledge institutions, civil society, municipalities and regions in the implementation of the SDGs. It also acknowledges the value of the fact that many actors across all sectors are already engaged in working with the SDGs and that action is more important than financing new initiatives. The present government has been criticized for not formulating a new strategy, however the Danish Regions and multiple municipalities and companies and private and civil society organisations have formed their own strategies for implementing the SDGs (29,30).

## B Co-creation for sustainability in practice: Themes, approaches and main actors

### B1 Current and emerging themes, trends and approaches for co-creation for sustainability

Co-creation and cross sector partnerships is becoming an increasingly hot topic in Denmark. Both in relation to sustainability and the green transition, but also in general in relation to the services and challenges of the Danish society. The public sector is viewed increasingly as a platform or facilitator for development and the civil society and private sector as partners in developing services and innovative solutions. There is a growing challenge of the image of the citizen as passive receiver of public services. The new collaborations must both create innovation and solutions to the so-called “wicked problems”, and more democratic involvement of citizens. Citizens - as individuals or in groups - must be put more at the center as an expert in their own lives (31).

There is a long line of courses, guides, recommendations, studies etc. available, targeting both public, private and civil society organisations about co-creation and co-production of societal challenges and welfare services (5,32,33,34). The report of the so-called “Management Commission”, which was put in place by the then government in 2017 in order to provide an analysis and recommendations for improving the management of the public sector in Denmark, reflects this trend very well. In 2018 the commission published their report called “Put Citizens First”. By “*citizen*” they refer to the wide range of people and organizations of any kind which is in contact with the public sector. It can be companies, patients, clients, users, fellow citizens, etc. They argue that the focal point of organization, contact, culture and values in the public institutions ought to be the meeting with the citizens and value creation for society. The report addresses the citizen as both receiving and co-productive of the public services and that the public citizen perspective is about involving the citizens and letting them be part of defining and participate in solutions, within a professional framework provided by the public institution. The public manager must be able to participate in cooperation processes without knowing in advance where it might lead and where citizen dialogue has more influence on the decisions of the municipality activities. The Center for Public Innovation has in a study shown that external cooperation lead to higher quality of public services. 79 % of all innovations happen in cooperation between one or more external partners. Moreover, the employees in the public institutions play an important role either by initiating or promoting the innovation process (35).

Co-creation or co-production has the last 10-15 years seriously been placed on the agenda, not least in the Danish municipalities. Especially in the Danish municipalities and regions, there is an interest for local

democracy and citizen involvement. This is partly based on the Structure Reform in 2004, where 271 municipalities were merged to 98, which meant larger municipalities and more distance between the citizen and the politicians, and a growing realisation that sustainable solutions cannot be developed top-down without involvement of citizens. Several municipalities have developed strategies for local democracy and citizen involvement and several municipalities and regions are experimenting with citizen involvement, for example in development of new policies or citizen budgets (36). In another survey, conducted by the medias Altinget and Mandag Morgen in 2017 about the municipalities' involvement of citizens, the study indicated that many municipalities are moving from citizen hearings into genuine involvement and co-creation, and for example organize local councils and involvement to concrete local problem solving. For example Skanderborg Municipality talked about a "municipality 3.0" as part of a community. The study reflected, that this development was perhaps due to the fact that fewer Danes are active members of a political party and instead have to be directly involved in the work of the city council. Interestingly, a study made by The National Research and Analysis Center for Welfare, VIVE, found that 58 percent of Danes believe that the most important thing for good local self-government is that the municipality provides the necessary services and facilities. Only 37 percent believe that good local self-government is characterized by the municipality being democratic. This could indicate that the vast majority of citizens are not part of the new trend of more citizen involvement or that they are mostly interested in being able to contribute with their resources and input when it is relevant to them (37,38).

In terms of citizen involvement towards sustainability, the approach in Denmark has changed through the years. In the 70s the focus was on developing systems that can enable quick change and supportive structures, such as city ecology. In the 90s citizen directed activities like recruiting and educating green agents became the trend. These approaches have now become main stream in many places in Denmark, and today the focus is more on climate adaptation and circular economy. Another current approach, which has also become clear during the Covid19 crisis is a focus on changing behavior to adapt to the needs of the crisis and for example to buy more local. Moreover, the public institutions are now increasingly taking a stand and taking ownership for the development towards more resilient or sustainable local environments. It represents a mind-set where the municipality become "our place". An example of this is when municipalities are willing to invest in new green infrastructures like Vejle Municipality, which has invested in hydrogen and electric cars (39, 40).

Regarding citizen involvement and sustainable development, several articles, reports, good practices and examples exist, especially on municipal level, however they are still often represent cases and single projects, and not always the mainstream among the general public (34, 41, 42). One example is the guide "Innovative climate adaptation with citizens – a handbook for sustainable transition", published in 2015 by Center for Design, Innovation and Sustainable Development at Aalborg University in Denmark, based on research of Danish cases of citizen involvement projects for climate adaptation. The guide addressed how both citizens and politicians are aware of the climate change challenges such as heavy rain falls and the needs to take action. Some citizens still wait for finished solutions from the municipality, while others start experimenting themselves. Both politicians, administrators and citizens still need to get used to their new roles as teammates and sparring partners (43).

## B2 The drivers of and main actors in co-creation for sustainability:

Studies show that the general concern about climate changes and demands for higher ambitions is growing in Denmark, which in turn has influenced and put demands on the political level nationally and locally. In terms of co-creation for sustainable development you can find initiatives at national, regional and local, municipal level. In terms of who is taking the lead in the development, the municipalities are in the front. This is where you have most options to act and where you can spot the drive and actions the most (39). Research done by KORA, the National Institute for Local Government Analysis and Research in 2015, showed that 82 percent of the different subject and administrative areas in the municipalities had had a growing focus on cooperation with civil society. Out of the concrete cooperation activities, 40 percent went across the subject areas (35). In a study by LG Insight from 2018, 92 percent of municipalities claimed that they involved citizens in relation to city renewal (44). In the previously mentioned survey, conducted by the medias Altinget and Mandag Morgen in 2017 about the municipalities' involvement of citizens, they concluded that 2 out of 3 municipalities had formulated goals about citizen involvement, and that a large part of this development has happened since 2013. The National Association of Municipalities has also formulated a shared action plan for the municipalities' and the association's implementation of the UN SDGs, which include increased citizen involvement (45). A supporting factor, for the local involvement in the municipalities, is the fact that the Danish state is characterized by a strong decentralisation and a high degree of local political power and funding in the municipalities and regions (46). The municipality is the closest to the citizen and companies. The ownership of essential supply companies and planning of cities and countryside is placed under the municipal framework. In terms of renewable energy, buildings, public procurement, climate adaptation and infrastructure, many decisions are made and influenced at local level. The Green Think Tank CONSITO also found in a study in 2018 that 75 percent of citizens agree that the municipalities should prioritize investments in sustainable solutions within transportation, construction, waste management, energy consumption and public procurements. One concrete example of how municipalities are taking action, is the project DK2020, where 20 municipalities develop climate plans according to C40 standards that live up to the Paris Agreement. Part of the climate plans are the development of local partnerships and involvement of citizens and local companies (47).

Another important player, is the larger private companies in Denmark and private interest organisations like Danish Industry. Several training, advice and support offers regarding sustainability and the UN SDGs targeting companies and start-ups, developed by actors in the private industry exist. Large Danish companies like LEGO, Vestas, Novo Nordisk, Arla, Danish Crown and Mærsk have made goals to be CO2 neutral between 2030 and 2050 (48,49). According to a study by the business organization and employers' association Danish Industry among their members, 9 out of 10 work sustainably, while 6 out of 10 think the UN SDGs into their work (50). Another business organization and employers' association, Danish Business, did a mapping of Danish businesses' work with the UN SDGs, which show that the work areas mainly lie within economic growth, job, education and welfare. An example is how Salling Group, who own a large chain of different super markets, has had a growing focus on reducing food waste. They participate in several strategic partnerships with food waste organisations like FødevarerBanken (The Food Bank) and WeFood. The latest initiative is the super market Netto's new food waste app, which provides customers an overview of where they can save money and at the same time fight food waste in the local area. In 2018 alone, the group reduced their food waste by 1,200 tonnes compared with the previous year (51).



## C Co-creation for sustainability: Best practice, challenges and needs

### C1 Best practice examples of co-creation for sustainable development on the national level

#### National knowledge institutions and sector interest organisations disseminate about the important topics

In Denmark there are examples of national knowledge institutions or interest organisations that take responsibility or interest in dissemination knowledge about sustainability and co-creation. For example:

- Danish Industry and Danish Business, who are both business organisations and employers' associations within specific business areas, both directly address the issues of sustainability and the UN SDGs, and provide support for their members in making their businesses more sustainable (52, 53).
- The Danish Society for Nature Preservation, is a membership organisation that works to conserve nature and the environment in Denmark through local work, conservation, lobbying and specific projects. They directly target climate adaptation and sustainability in their activities, which includes information for individuals, organisations and politicians about what is needed to support the development, hereunder for example circular economy (54).
- News media like Mandag Morgen and Den Offentlige bring up important societal topics and have written extensively about co-creation and sustainability. Mandag Morgen is a media house and a think tank that helps decision-makers understand the challenges our society faces and develop and disseminate new solutions. Den Offentlige is an independent, digital media with a focus on the welfare state and the public sector in Denmark (55,56).
- The Center for Voluntary Social Work (CFSA) is a nationwide support and development center. Their purpose is to strengthen and develop voluntary social work in Denmark and collect and disseminate knowledge about civil society. One of their topics is cross-sector cooperation and co-creation. CFSA aims to build a bridge between knowledge and practice across the voluntary sector in the social field (57).
- The Danish Center for Social Science Research, VIVE is a public knowledge and analysis institution, which delivers knowledge that contributes to the development of the welfare society and the public sector. They cover topics like the social area, health, management, education, children and young people, employment, integration, elderly care, finance and public management. They have published several articles and reports about co-creation (58).

#### National and local cross sector partnerships

There are also examples of national cross-sector partnerships like the previously mentioned new 13 climate partnerships between the state and the private sectors, organised by the present government (26). Other examples of cross sector partnerships are:

- Welfare alliances between municipalities and civil society. In 2014 the National Association of Municipalities presented a new framework of Welfare Alliances, with the aim to bring all resources in the local community into play and to get the country's local councils to put co-creation on the agenda and to a greater extent open up to and enter into dialogue with the many actors in the local area, who can contribute to the development of new welfare solutions. Several examples of alliances have come into being since 2014, such as Holstebro Municipality, where a task force group with

representatives from local companies, educational institutions and the municipality joined together to create the workforce of the future by bringing challenged young people's talents into play. This means that the private companies have committed themselves to helping young people in education and jobs, among other things by offering training places to the young people in the companies (59).

- The National Movement for Co-creation was formed by a number of public organizations, private companies and voluntary associations. The purpose of the national co-creation movement is to promote the establishment of co-creative communities that bring relevant public, private and voluntary organizations and active and interested citizens together in a constructive collaboration in order to solve important societal problems, realize common visions and goals, and improve the quality of our collective welfare solutions by challenging habitual thinking and taking new and untried paths. The movement has focused on creating a framework, in the shape of a manifest, and they work to create opportunities for more organizations, companies, associations and citizens to use their knowledge, skills, experiences and ideas to further develop the welfare society (60).

#### Free information, guides, courses and data to support new actors

Different examples of public organisations offer free courses, advice or open data to support green transition or sustainable development in businesses and start-ups. For example:

- In Vejle Municipality, Green-Start-Up is an offer for entrepreneurs and start-ups within the green energy industry. They offer free advice and support, and an office environment with likeminded companies and start-ups (61).
- Danish Meteorological Institute, which is administered by the Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities, makes weather data available free of charge and easily accessible to citizens, companies and researchers. This is to support the government's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 70 percent by 2030 and strengthening economic growth. Around the clock, DMI collects and analyses a wide range of different data from, among other things, radars and measuring stations. Weather data can help support the business community with the green transition and ensure a better basis for developing the green, innovative solutions of the future. The better and easier access to weather data can also help weather-dependent sectors such as the agricultural sector and the energy sector to improve workflows, streamline resource consumption and make decisions that benefit the climate (62).

#### Public national cross-sector forums for dialogue and exchange of information and experience

Another good practice at national level is different forums that facilitate cross-sector dialogue and cooperation to find shared solutions to societal challenges. Some examples are:

- Folkemødet (The People Meeting) is a yearly event at the island Bornholm, where more than 65,000 people of all ages, representing associations, companies, interest groups and political parties participate and engage in speeches, dialogue meetings, presentations, workshops etc. The main aim of the Folkemøde is to strengthen the Danish democracy by reducing the distance and increasing trust between citizens and decision-makers. This is done by creating a new framework for meetings between business decision-makers, interest groups and politicians from the Folketing, the EU,

- municipalities and regions. And by giving citizens the opportunity to meet decision-makers face to face (63).
- Another similar event is the Klimafolkemødet, or Climate People Meeting, which is also a yearly event inspired by Folkemødet, with which focuses on climate issues. It takes place in Middelfart. The aim is to inspire citizens, politicians, companies, associations and NGOs to take action in climate adaptation and to facilitate cooperation and shared solutions (64).
  - The platform Challenges.dk was launched by the Danish Business Agency in 2017 and is run by a small partnership. The aim is to create an open platform where different professional groups, organizations, companies and individuals can meet and create and share ideas and solutions that benefit all. The idea is that co-creation is a foundation for better and more innovative solutions that can contribute to making Denmark more competitive and sustainable in the future. Everyone can post and contribute to problem solving of societal challenges. The only criteria is that the challenges are relevant and not commercial (65).

## C2 Main challenges and barriers to co-creation of sustainability on a national level

### Challenges

According to researcher Annika Agger, who is associate professor specializing in citizen involvement from the University of Roskilde, one of the biggest challenges for co-creation in Denmark is a clash in expectations between the public authorities and citizens. Citizens often don't feel that they get the influence they want, and many politicians have a hard time figuring out how much to delegate and how much influence to give. Usually the "front workers" in the public organisations want to co-creation but managers and politicians are nervous, which can create a large barrier and lead to pseudo co-creation where the intention is perhaps good from the public side, but they can have a hard time following through. Many in public administrators are tired of the word co-creation because it is considered a heavy and difficult process, whereas experiments and testing creates more positive energy and makes the process easier to deal with in terms of the administration (39). In many cases the terms "local democracy" and "citizen involvement" are becoming diluted and refer to hearing processes or dialogue in parts of the process where the possibility of influence is limited (36). Co-creative processes require both a framework and mind-set that allows for more influence to stakeholders outside of the public administration and competences to facilitate good inclusive and constructive processes. It can be a challenge to facilitate the good co-creative setting and process. So facilitation of the interaction and co-creation process is important, both in relation to the individuals in the meetings to make sure that no one is dominating the process and that everyone has a chance to be heard. It is also important to have a good process for following up on the process and make sure the overall process is coherent and transparent. There is also a difficult balance between time and the professional/subject content. It is important that citizens are prepared to deal with a specific topic, so they need a lot of introduction and information, but they have limited time, especially when they are volunteers and only can participate after work or have to balance it with family life (39).

According to the Birgitte Hoffman, researcher from Aalborg University and author of the handbook "Citizens in emergency preparedness - manage floods through increased cooperation with citizens" it is a paradox that Denmark has such a high number of skilled and committed citizens who volunteer, but often the public authorities still see them as a passive target group and not as resourceful partners in cooperation. The Danish

system has created a distance between the professional public system and the citizens, and many citizens have an expectation that it is the role of the public institutions to take care of the citizens and society, including the environment. Often the approach of public institutions is to make information campaigns when they want to affect the citizens, but research shows that this does not have much effect. Instead, Birgitte Hoffman argues, long-term innovation and learning processes need to be initiated in order to establish cooperation between the public and citizens (66).

According to a report from the national Volunteer Council in 2010, in the area of welfare, it has almost become the rule rather than the exception that state and municipalities see the voluntary sector as a supplement to public welfare services and not as an indispensable partner. The voluntary sector has in turn often argued that the volunteer effort is solely a supplement and not a substitute for public action, or “free work”. Unfortunately, this has had the unintended consequence that many municipalities do not take the cooperation seriously, especially in the areas where the public sector in many years has been the main actor. Many municipalities simply do not know enough about how voluntary initiatives and associations provide a large and indispensable welfare efforts that contribute to prevention, counselling and treatment of vulnerable people of all ages. Therefore, an extra effort must be made to strengthen the municipalities' knowledge and expand cooperation so that society does not continue to disapprove the real social value that the voluntary world contributes with (67). The former government's “National civil society strategy – A strengthened involvement of civil society and volunteer organisations in the social effort” of 2010, also highlights challenges to support that civil society can contribute to developing and challenging the public social efforts. They highlight that civil society organisations are very diverse and therefore have different preconditions and competences to participate in a mutual partnership with the public and private sector. They also describe how lack of knowledge and insight into each other's working conditions and efforts is often a barrier to collaboration and there is often a challenge in connection with involving civil society in the solution of social tasks that in the concrete cooperation between, for example, volunteers and a public institution, doubts may arise about guidelines for cooperation and the interpretation of the rules that form the framework for task management (9). Moreover, public pool making makes it difficult to ensure good initiatives, operation and long-term offers, just as bureaucracy stifles new initiatives and swallows many of civil society's resources. Moreover it is a bad business that voluntary initiatives have to seek about funds again and again (67).

Sometimes laws and systems create barriers such as laws about the waste management system, which means that it is forbidden to circulate the waste into new use after it has been delivered to the recycling center (39). According to the report made by the national Volunteer Council from 2010, there is a tendency in the Danish society, that society sets rules for the many because of distrust of the few who may not be able to do things right. For example, the unemployed have to familiarize themselves with a set of convoluted rules if they want to do voluntary work without being deducted from their unemployment benefits. Moreover, the system where public funds for volunteer initiatives, makes it difficult to ensure good volunteer initiatives, operation and long-term offers, just as bureaucracy stifles new initiatives and swallows many of civil society's resources. Moreover, it is a not financially sustainable that voluntary initiatives have to seek funds again and again (67).

Danish managers, experts and staff most often agree that cross sector partnerships are an important and meaningful means to solving many of the challenges connected with building a sustainable society. However, often partnerships end before they really get started and there is a risk for all parties in wasting resources on unfruitful activities. Often the reason for the unsuccessful partnerships is due to a lack of framework and

reconciliation of expectations about the partnership. The same goes for different governance mechanisms and languages of the sectors, which do not always complement each other. Those involved also experience that they do not sufficiently understand each other's organizations during the process and therefore collide. However, there are also examples of successful partnerships. According to a line of interviews, presented in the news media Altinget.dk with 5 organisations and companies, five main points are highlighted for establishing and operating successful partnerships:

- 1) Mutual respect is crucial before, during and after. In the meeting between a large company and a small NGO for example, the balance of power can easily become skewed and provide a tense collaborative environment. Here, mutual respect before, during and after can be a crucial ingredient.
- 2) All partners must be part of and have influence throughout the process. As an NGO in a partnership, it is important to not only encourage companies to develop well-defined solutions. They must also help to identify the problems, and this can only be done by taking them out and seeing the world with their own eyes.
- 3) One must dare to lose control and dare to work together with someone who sees the world in a slightly different way
- 4) Structure the process thoroughly, make a thorough search of which partners make sense to cooperate with, and make sure to set clear learning goals for the upcoming partnership process before starting in order to minimize risks and improve the quality of the process.
- 5) Be patient along the way - good things take time. One must be willing to spend some time finding the right idea and the right match. So it also requires companies that can look beyond the next quarter and have the profits, resources and commitment to being able to engage on a longer time basis (68).

## 2 The local context for the Vejle Case

### A Which role does co-creation and sustainability play in the strategy and policy?

#### A1 Policies and strategies concerning co-creation and sustainability among the stakeholders

##### Vejle Municipality:

In Vejle Municipality's political vision and several of the policies, co-creation or partnerships are stated as the way to find solutions to challenges. Vejle's Resilience Strategy also indicates capacity building in the local community via co-creation projects. However, there is no concrete co-creation strategy or active citizenship policy that can clarify the area for all administrations or the expectations for the content of co-creation (81).

According to the Municipality Plan for Vejle Municipality from 2019, which is the municipality's collected strategy for the physical development for the coming 12 years, Vejle has two overall strategies; the city council's city vision "Vejle on Purpose" and the "Resilience Strategy", on which the Municipality Plan is based. In the Municipality Plan they highlight 5 overall development themes. Under one theme called "Future Business Life", it says that "Vejle Municipality wants to be "Denmark's champion in partnerships across education, research, business and the public sector". They aim to participate in public-private innovation partnerships about for example reuse and rethinking of products and materials, and development of business plans. Under another theme called "Together We Take Responsibility – Climate and Energy", it is stated that

the municipality "cooperates with the supply companies about creating a resilient and future proof supply for the future city areas. It is also stated that the municipality must create solutions for climate adaptation and protect citizens and the material values, but also develop new innovative solutions and create new value in the municipality and new nature and recreational possibilities (69).

In the political vision of the sitting city council of Vejle (2018-21), called "Vejle on purpose", it is said that they want to create a vision for the future Vejle, so citizens, employees and partners can have a clear picture of the future that the City Council wants for the municipality. Sustainable growth, everyday innovation and co-creation are highlighted as the paths towards the desired vision:

- Sustainable growth is addressed through its transition from industrial to entrepreneurial city. It's about working innovatively in all areas from business to knowledge and welfare development, and about together developing sustainable and resilient growth that adapts to the social and environmental changes.
- Everyday innovation is addressed as an ability to "catch the wind, and testing and improving the welfare of the municipality, by involving citizens and seeing new partnerships, locally, regionally and internationally.
- Co-creation is addressed as wanting to do things together - the public, the private, education and research. It is about involving citizens, associations and the rest of civil society, and together develop welfare. It is about establishing partnerships between companies and learning environments, where the collaboration creates ideas, insights and opportunities (70).

Vejle Municipality is part of the project network 100 Resilient Cities. Here cities all over the world committed themselves to developing together and share new solutions for the 21st century major societal challenges. All city members committed themselves to formulate a strategy for resilience efforts for a period of 4 years. Vejle Municipality's Resilience Strategy covered the period of 2016-2020. The strategy identified four key development areas for Vejle Municipality, namely the "Co-creating City", "Climate Resilience", "Social Resilience" and "Smart City". Within each area, a number of concrete initiatives have been identified. In the strategy it is addressed how the aim is to "work for building resilience in cooperation across municipality, civil society and businesses, in order to build the ability to turn new challenges into opportunities through renewal, innovation and value-creating prevention". It is also stated that the targeted challenges require that the different stakeholders collaborate and co-create across organizations to find the necessary solutions, both now and in the future. Moreover, it states that the aim is to develop the cooperation in the local democracy, both at municipal level and in the local areas. They want to take departure from the identified challenges and the citizens and businesses that it affects. The first development area "the co-creative city" puts emphasis on developing a cooperation where all share the challenges, work together and contribute. One of the initiatives of the resilience strategy and the co-creation strategy is the development of the test area "Ny Rosborg", which will be developed towards 2040 – 2050, which is described below under the section about adoption of co-creation for sustainability (71,72).

In 2019 Vejle Municipality' first political biodiversity plan (2020-2024), about how to preserve a biodiverse nature in Vejle, was published. In the plan landowners are presented as an important partner, because their goodwill and cooperation to involve their land areas is part of the implementation of the plan to ensure biodiversity. The plan also includes an aim to test new methods with landowners, which can preserve the particular species. The plan also addresses "ordinary citizens" as a target for conveying information about biodiversity and to involve them in preserving the vulnerable species, for example in their own gardens. It

gives examples of successful partnerships like cow-grazing associations, where cows graze on several public nature areas close to the city of Vejle. More housing and landowner associations are also working to ensure more biodiversity in their common areas, as well as in public areas. The plan elaborates that it is important that the municipality inspires citizens to contribute to the conservation of biodiversity, whether it is with the help of gathering knowledge, participating actively in various types of nature conservation initiatives, work to increase biodiversity in own garden or work for a more extensive operation of common areas in their immediate area. It also formulates that these kind of activities require a close and trusting cooperation with the landowners who own forests, natural areas and agricultural land, and the people they work with on the operation of land, e.g. animal keepers, tenants, forest contractors and consultants. It will be this close collaboration where there also are funds to help and compensate the landowners who will could bring biodiversity work forward in a positive direction (73).

In 2013, a climate strategy called “Climate Vejle – strategy, goal, action” was formulated. In it’s goal formulation, it states that Vejle Municipality will cooperate with citizens and businesses to prevent climate change and contribute to the national goals of reducing CO2 emissions. It moreover states that Vejle Municipality involves citizens and companies in the work for a sustainable future. In 2013, the focus was on energy savings, energy renovation and renewable energy in private homes and businesses. Among other things, in cooperation with the supply companies. Moreover, the strategy elaborates on an initiative where the municipality will convey knowledge about nature, environment, energy and climate in particular with focus on local activities with new development of wastewater and rainwater management, as well as on waste, recycling and resource understanding in the science and information center Økolariet and at the municipality’s website [www.vejle.dk](http://www.vejle.dk). Moreover they will convey the interplay between urban development, business development and climate initiatives in the City Laboratory at Økolariet, where citizens can see exhibitions about city developments in light of sustainable development and climate adaptation (74).

#### Green Network:

Green Network A/S is a CSR knowledge and training center that works to promote sustainable development and growth in their partner companies. For more than 25 years, they have inspired and developed the corporate way to think about business and pave the way for new business opportunities through the work with business-focused social responsibility (CSR). Green Network is today one of Denmark's leading providers of knowledge, development and training in CSR and sustainability processes at Danish companies.

Green Network in Vejle represents a long line of medium and large companies who work for and are interested in implementing the UN SDGs in order to make a societal difference and make profit. They constantly try to improve their offers to the partner companies in their network and are among other things looking at ways to improve cooperation and partnerships with the municipality (75).

#### Green Forum:

The Green Forum was established in 1997, as a political initiative to support citizens in Vejle municipality, in bottom-up green initiatives and activities, as part of the UN Agenda21. Green Forum works to develop a partnership for green solutions, green innovation and green growth, where the voluntary, the public and the business efforts play together, for the benefit and joy of all citizens in Vejle Municipality. Green Forum is a

network for climate, nature and environment interested citizens, associations and companies in Vejle Municipality. Green Forum provides sparring and helps to develop projects that engage the local community around all topics within sustainability and resilience. For example: waste management, mobility, climate adaptation, construction, social communities, nature in the city, nature conservation, more life in the garden, renewable energy, etc.

Based on the general assembly for Green Forum's members in January 2020, three strategic themes were identified:

- 1) The waste sorting, recycling and recycling of the future as well as the circular economy.
- 2) More nature and biodiversity as well as more green public spaces.
- 3) Green mobility - in the city and in the countryside.

In a membership survey conducted in June 2020, the respondents replied that the most important tasks for Green Forum are:

- 1) Information, advice, awareness and action for the green transition and building sustainability
- 2) Coordinate and support green citizen driven activities
- 3) Build bridges and support dialogue and co-creation between the municipality and Green Forum's members (76, 77).

## A2 Adoption of co-creation (for sustainability) in Vejle

Vejle Municipality has been implementing initiatives for sustainability for many years, and at present the municipality is part of the national project DK2020, funded by the Danish fund Realdania. Part of DK2020 will take place as so-called 'peer-learning', where the selected municipalities will have the opportunity to learn from each other and exchange solutions and experiences with other participating municipalities. At the same time, the municipalities receive technical assistance and sparring from global and Danish experts from C40 and the green think tank CONCITO to develop, update and adapt the climate work so that it lives up to the C40's standard for climate planning. The municipalities' climate plans will include contain instructions on how the municipalities can become climate neutral by 2050 and set ambitious sub-goals for reducing greenhouse gases during the period. The plans must also contain instructions on how the municipalities are equipping citizens against the consequences of climate change and, for example, minimizing the risk of climate-related floods. As part of this project Vejle Municipality has decided to set up a Climate Council, which will support the development and implementation of the climate plan, and the finance agreement of 2020 in the municipal city council. During 2020 the mandate for the new council will be formulated along with the climate plan (78, 79, 80).

In many projects and initiatives in the different subject areas of the municipality at consultant and project level, co-creation and sustainability are integrated. Often co-creation is addressed as an important key for development, but at times the municipality end up deciding what elements they want to implement. Moreover, citizens do not always feel that the green initiatives that were proposed and developed in co-creation processes end up in implementation (77, 81).

Some examples of co-creation initiatives for sustainability are:



Vejle Folkemøde, or People Meeting, is inspired by the national event by the same name, as mentioned earlier. It takes place every year in June, except 2020, because of the covid19 crisis. The event was originally developed as part of the resilience strategy to build social resilience and support cross sector dialogue and co-creation by providing a neutral platform for dialogue and debate among citizens, businesses, politicians, municipality workers and NGOs can meet and talk about today's problems and future solutions. Vejle Municipality has a coordinator that facilitates the planning of the event, and all associations, companies, organizations, local councils or network groups can sign up to be part of the event. In 2019, almost 100 events connected with the Folkemøde took place (82).

The Ny Rosborg area is an area which will be developed into a new residence area in Vejle city to accommodate needs for new accommodating an increasing population in the municipality. The area at the same time has a lot of nature and has problems with high water levels. As a lighthouse project in the Resilience Strategy, it has been decided politically that Ny Rosborg will be developed into a sustainable living area based on co-creation and testing activities for climate adaptation. In 2016 a public involvement process where citizens, associations, citizen councils, companies etc. could give inputs to the development of the area was initiated and in 2017 a political vision for the area was decided on, which formulated that *“We are developing the district with all of you who want Ny Rosborg. Courage and ambition characterize our choices. Here is room for experiments and temporary activities. For architecture with attitude and culture with edge. We turn challenges into opportunities, water gains value and sustainability is of course part of it. Communities are something we build on purpose – together”*. Between 2016-2020 several activities took place in the area like shared study trips, analysis, debates and workshops, test activities and experiments like water management and forest garden and community garden boxes. Based on the activities and inputs from the previous 4 years, an action plan for the development of the area was published in 2020. This outlines the vision and more concrete plans for how to develop the area up till 2040-2050 where the area is expected to be finished (72,83).

## B What is the need for co-creation seen from the perspective of different stakeholders?

According to a member survey the framework for co-creation in Vejle Municipality is unclear, though there are many good examples of co-creation initiatives or projects, many experience that citizens lack influence in the municipality work. As such, citizen involvement and co-creation is viewed as relevant, when it works. Often citizens do not feel that politicians or the municipality take their inputs seriously in official co-creation or hearing processes, and this makes it more difficult for citizens to believe in the process or trust that their inputs will be taken seriously. Moreover, it was noted that there is a need for more information about how to get influence and participate in co-creation.

According to interviewed stakeholders, all areas can benefit and work with co-creation. In particular areas that work with people like the social area where the so-called “vulnerable groups” can benefit, for example in topics like integration, loneliness and building communities. It could also be in development areas, where new innovative thinking and testing is needed or in business areas. It could also be in citizen involvement around environment and climate topics and city development like creation of recreational green areas.

Especially the areas where initiatives and work are not specified precisely by laws and rules give better room for co-creation or areas with shared interests or where there is a shared used or shared ownership in the matter (77,81).

## C Stakeholders' experiences and methods with co-creation for sustainability

The municipality consultants and staff represent a wide range of competences and experiences in the area of co-creation processes and sustainability. For example we have representatives who work with the international research project Reflow, which aims to solve the issue of plastic waste and work with local citizens, companies, public institutions, researchers etc. to develop new approaches towards circular production and consumption of plastic in Vejle. The project has four cases that all combine partners across sectors, who together using design thinking to test and develop different possible solutions (86). Other municipal consultants work with match-making and collective impact as a method and have experience with development of safe spaces and relation formation in relation to co-creation. Moreover, the municipal science and information center Økolariet's activities and exhibitions about sustainability and a city lab about the developments in the municipality in relation to climate adaptation, resilience and sustainability are a strong experience basis for the living lab methodology. Across most subject areas in the municipality the topic of sustainability and the UN SDGs are highlighted, from the day-care and school department, to the culture, sports and leisure, hereunder the library, to health and welfare.

Green Forum's members represent about 400 private individuals and about 160 different organisations, associations and companies who are interested in the green transition and who work actively for it, in topics like forest gardens, butterfly and insect protection, biodiversity, more nature in the city, green mobility, waste management and clean up etc. The members represent an important resource of professional knowledge and experience, some members are professionals who have been working with for example nature and environment topics throughout their professional careers or in social areas and present competences in for example action learning, and others represent local knowledge and insight, a high motivation and engagement in the topics and a will to make a difference locally, while others represent specific social groups such as VEN who represent expats in Vejle municipality or local living areas.

In terms of private companies Vejle municipality has a rich and diverse representation of start-ups, SMVs and large companies who work actively for and have an expertise in the topics of sustainability, climate adaptation, circular economy, the triple helix co-creation model and CSR. Green Network represent a large proportion of these businesses, and offer information and teaching seminars, professional training and business development within these areas. Several companies participate in business partnerships or networks with the municipality, or in smaller one to one projects or activities (77,81).

## D Prerequisites and obstacles for co-creation

### D1 Prerequisites

The most important prerequisites for co-creation according to local stakeholders are trust and mutual expectation alignment. There must be a mutual openness and equality. All participants in the process must be open to and accept the other participants' opinions and must avoid prejudice. Moreover, it is important

that there is a possibility for true co-creation, not just hearing or orientation. This also means political responsiveness. It is also important to lift up and recognize the volunteers. Often politicians take some of the credit for the work of the volunteers, while the volunteers stand behind and seldom get the recognition for the large work they put into it.

A good and inclusive coordinator is essential in order to establish a sense of partnership, relation formation and ownership for all involved. The work Green Forum does for citizen involvement is really important. Coordination is very important so that things do not fall apart again and many times so that it actually happens at all. Knowing something about how the volunteer world works is important. Sometimes municipal employees think that you can just make a contract with volunteers and then it runs by itself. They forget that it has to be fun and make sense when doing volunteer work. When you do not get paid for your work, then you must receive something else. For example meaningful togetherness, manageable task, limited tasks, working together and not alone (77,81).

## D2 Challenges

Recruitment of participants can be a challenge, especially if the agenda of the municipality is not the same as among citizens. Different mind-sets and being able to understand is challenging. All need to understand that all participants are equal and that there is no competition about who is right or have the best solutions. This is related to an issue with lack of relationships and networks. Who should you contact and who wants to get involved?

A large challenge is also bureaucratic procedures in the municipality and box thinking between different administrative units. Moreover lack of resources and time among all parties makes the long co-creative processes challenging and moreover, it is a challenge when the municipality invites citizens in for workshops, discussions etc., but then do not follow up or take in the inputs from citizens. This can both be a communication issue, but also a matter about how much influence the citizens in reality get (77,81).

## D3 Barriers

Some important barriers for co-creation were identified by the stakeholders. The municipality often promises too much in co-creative processes, which they cannot deliver on, for example how much influence the citizens can get, and the citizens who contribute cannot see that it actually made an impact. Moreover, exclusion, municipal stiffness, too long process time, lack of concrete results and political responsiveness as well as a lack of communication between administrative units were also highlighted as essential barriers.

In turn a lack of trust and prejudice towards the other parties in the co-creative process or that individuals think that their area or interest is the most important can also be a barrier for co-creation. A general lack of resources, financial support, knowledge and insight into the different systems and worlds of the sectors involved in the co-creation process, for example how the volunteer world works, and a lack of relationships can be an important barrier (77,81).

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