



Co-creative **RETHINKing** for **sustainable** **cities**



**Co-creating tools to kick-start a green
journey for retail businesses and
customers in Vejle**

The Danish Case Study

Authors: Vejle



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Table of Contents

<i>Co-creating tools to kick-start a green journey for retail businesses and customers in Vejle</i>	0
The Danish Case Study	0
Authors: Vejle.....	0
Version history.....	1
Table of Contents	2
What are the Case Studies?	3
Introduction.....	4
The Process	4
Goals and target groups.....	4
Stakeholders involved.....	5
Activities.....	6
The Methodologies and Tools	15
Results, Impact and Tips for practitioners	19
Results and successes.....	19
Challenges.....	19
Tips for other practitioners	21
Annexes	22
Links:.....	22
Summary of the Project.....	23

What are the Case Studies?

These Case studies present under a methodological light the experiences of the local projects implemented by the Crethink project partners and their Change Agents. The idea is to use partners' experiences as testimonies, case-studies, practical examples of the application of co-creation methodologies in their different settings and with different targets. It's not just about telling the story of their project but also about providing a useful tool for other stakeholders who might want to adapt and use the same methodologies and/or work with similar targets.

Each case study includes an explanation of the processes triggered by the local project and of the methodologies and tools used, together with practical examples and/or templates as annex when available. Finally, they include recommendations and tips for practitioners who approach similar methodologies, contexts and/or target groups.

Introduction

This document presents that Danish case from the town of Vejle, where the group of change agents have been working with a project about promoting a sustainable development of local retail businesses and thereby more green choices for their customers.

In this document, you will find a description of the case project, the work process, the methodology and tools used and the results and tips for others who want to take inspiration from the case or apply parts of it in their own setting.

The Process

Goals and target groups

The topic of the project called "Vejle's Green Choices" (Vejles Grønne Valg) was to support local retail businesses in the town of Vejle, in becoming sustainable.

The overall goal with the project was both to support the resilience of small local businesses and support a community of cooperation and support between the local businesses, customers and other relevant stakeholders, but also to support local sustainable development in retail businesses, potentially spreading out the concept to other business networks locally and perhaps even further in Denmark.

More concretely, the project wanted to find out:

- How to motivate small local retail businesses to start their journey towards becoming more sustainable?
- What kind of tools and methods are relevant for small local retail businesses, who do not have the necessary resources to work with sustainability on their own?
- How to make it easier for customers to select and support sustainable initiatives among local businesses?

Stakeholders involved

The change agents and case facilitators:

The case was developed by 5 change agents representing a department of the Municipality of Vejle that work with innovation and business development (Spinderihallerne), the private company Green Network who provide guidance and training for companies in CSR and sustainable development, and three volunteer citizens who represent the international expat community in Vejle and citizens who are motivated to support local sustainable development. The three volunteers also had professional skills that were relevant to the project –facilitation of change processes, communication and social media management, and facilitation of design processes.



The change agents collaborated closely with 2 consultants from Green Forum, one of the partners in the CRETHINK project, and a department in Vejle Municipality, who work to support citizen driven projects within the themes of sustainable development, environment and climate. Green Forum took on a role as facilitators to the change agents and their project, supporting their development process and acting as bridge builders to municipal workers and local networks.

Partners:

The case involved about 20 local small retail businesses in the research, development and pilot testing of the project activities.

The manager of the local retail business association, City Vejle, was involved first in research and dialogue about the design of the project, but later became involved as a

partner and took on an active role in facilitating a platform for outreach to the local businesses and communication of the project activities to members and local media.

4 consultants from the business development department of the Municipality of Vejle became involved as partners in the project, as consultants of sustainable business development for the local retail business, who took part in the project by delivering professional support and advice to the retail businesses as well as inputs to the design and development of the project.

Local retail businesses and customers:

20 local retail business were involved in the project through individual meetings, pilot activities a Facebook group and network meetings.

Customers in Vejle were involved in the project through activities in the retail businesses, a local Food Festival in Vejle, dialogue on Facebook through the perspective of the volunteer change agents, who also took on the perspective of themselves as customers in Vejle.

Other professionals and consultants:

Other professionals, retail businesses and consultants in the municipality working within the field were involved and consulted in the project through interviews, meetings and visits.

Activities

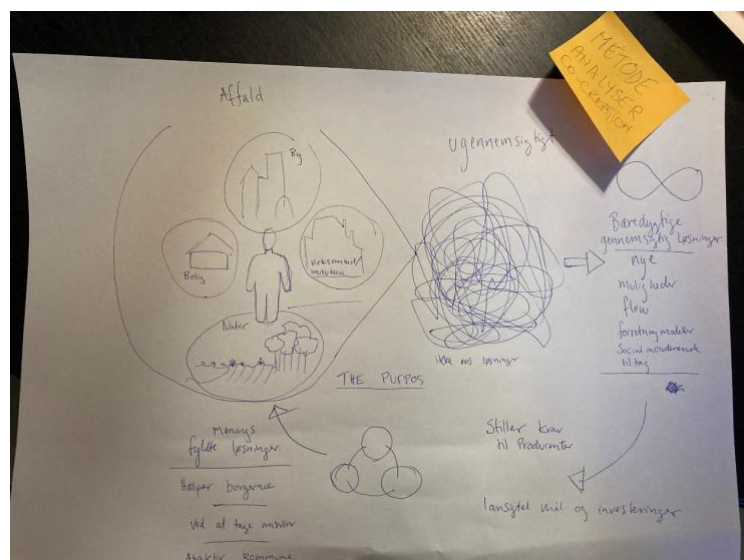
1) Kick-off – Understand the problem:

The project was initiated with the local training for the change agents in Vejle, in October 2020. The training focused on introducing the overall themes and methods of the CRETHINK project, and getting the change agents to get to know each other and start defining the problem area and focus of the project they wanted to work on within the theme of the UN SDG 11 – sustainable cities. Moreover, the training focused on developing the local case, and figuring out how to design the co-creation process, and which local partners to involve.



Using the workshop method "Hopes, fears and contributions", the change agents discussed what they hoped to get out of the project, their expectations, their worries and what they thought might be challenges in the project and introduced themselves and what competences and experiences they thought they might be able to contribute with in the project. The agents found that they had common interests in supporting the local community, working with businesses and helping citizens make more sustainable choices. A lot of the discussion focused on waste and plastic, such as packaging, and circulated around the potential areas where there were possibilities to make an impact. The agents were very focused on making sure that their actions in the project would make a difference and have an impact.

Using the workshop method "drawing the issue", the change agents discussed their perspectives on the issues and discussed how to approach it, while sharing their thoughts and experiences with the topics, as well as the things they would need to research to be able to better estimate what kind of research would need to be made.



In order for the change agents to find a common ground, framework and expectations for the project they together listed the ground rules and needs, they could agree on for the case. During the training, the change agents decided to work with local retail businesses, and the next step after the training was to start a stakeholder and needs analysis as an important basis for the project design.

See methodology description under section on methods and tools:

- ❑ Workshop on hopes, fears, contributions
- ❑ Sharing perspectives on the issue through drawing
- ❑ Lining up the necessary framework for the case – ground rules and needs
- ❑ Stakeholder and needs analysis

2) Designing the project – Seek solutions:

On the first meeting after the training, the change agents made a first game plan for the project, outlining important milestones, timeline and roles with a focus on the first analysis and research needs. This helped to give the group an overview of the process and gave a shared understanding of the tasks ahead. On the next couple of meetings the change agents continued to update the game plan.



After the planning and initial stakeholder analysis the change agents started to reach out to relevant stakeholders and research on the needs and relevant approaches. Different methods were used for this activity. Because of covid19 much of the activities had to be arranged online. Face-to-face meetings and workshops were possible to a

lesser extend, but it was possible to arrange a few workshops such as a needs analysis workshop and an online workshop using the platform Miro, to identify the special conditions and needs of the local retail businesses.



Based on the initial needs analysis the stakeholders formulated a first problem description and aim of the project as well as a communication strategy, a project logo and a postcard about the project. The change agents then reached out to 5 local stores, in order to initiate a dialogue and involvement process with the direct target group, to further develop the project.



The 5 shops were 2 coffee shops, a spectacle shop, a clothing store and a store selling Danish food products. The dialogue meetings were conducted by 1,2 or 3 change agents, who made an appointment to go to the store and together with the store, map out how they were already sustainable in some sense (looking at all three pillars of sustainability), where they had potential to promote themselves on existing sustainable efforts, and what they could potentially work towards in becoming more sustainable. Moreover the meetings were used to discuss needs, opportunities and methods for them to participate in the project and in becoming more sustainable.

Based on the first dialogue with stakeholders and needs analysis the change agents updated the problem description and began developing potential solutions or approaches to the challenge that they wanted to focus on in the project. From this several ideas and prototype products were developed, which were tested in the next phase.

The idea was to create a platform for dialogue between shops and customers about how to make green choices, and to support cooperation between stores in their pursuit to become more sustainable. For this a line of storytelling and dialogue initiating tools were created to test in local stores and a Facebook page and group was created. At the same time, the physical products were meant to be a visible statement that the individual store was part of a community and had taken their first step towards a “green journey”, and thereby a manifest they had to commit to. Other ideas for concrete actions were collected like developing a shared reusable shopping bag in Vejle, developing a reusable take away cup for the coffee shops, and developing further story telling tools for the shops to reach out to customers.

See methodology description under section on methods and tools:

- ❑ Game plan
- ❑ Online workshop platform – Miro
- ❑ Dialogue tools for local retail businesses to map out existing sustainable efforts and potential new actions
- ❑ Communication tools: Project logo and postcard

3) First prototype testing and further dialogue – Act and test.

In June 2021 there was a Food Festival in Vejle, which was a welcome opportunity to create a larger platform for the project. The change agents approached 5 local stores and asked if they wanted to help test out their first concept and prototypes of Vejle's Green Choices to test out if it would work as a tool. The stores agreed to put up the project tools: A large sticker in the window of the shop, a large mat at the entrance of the store or at a selected area in the store and postcards about the project.

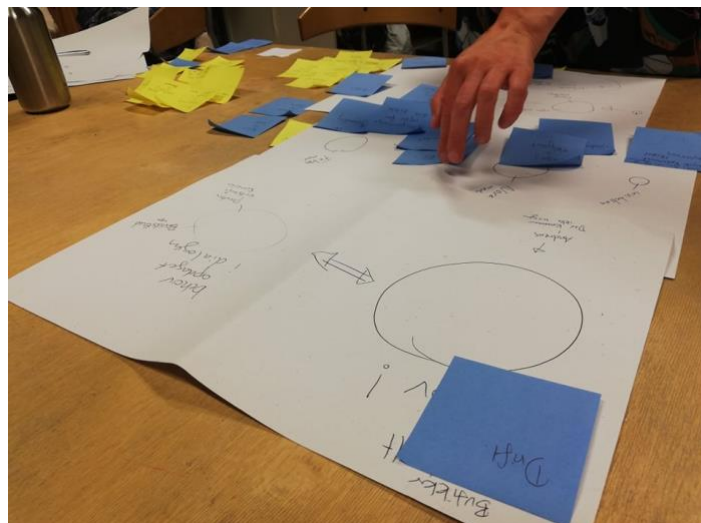


The materials would stay in the stores for 2 weeks, starting from the festival where the change agents would initiate a treasure hunt with a map and prices from the participating stores. Customers would have to go searching around town for the stores with the project materials, take a pictures, post it on the project Facebook group and name what a “green choice” meant for them.



This helped kick-start the Facebook group activities, which the change agents used to promote the project activities, inspired the shops to discuss and promote their own green choices and inspire customers to engage and inspire. Moreover, the festival was used to engage participating people in dialogue about the project and a gimmick activity – guessing which type of cup from a plastic, ceramic, bamboo or cardboard was the most sustainable – in order to promote the project and get customer inputs for the project.

After the festival and treasure hunt competition was over, the change agents followed up with the participating stores to gain feedback and inputs for further development. On the side-line one of the change agents had regular visits with a few of the stores to follow up on individual actions they wanted to do to become more sustainable. One of the change agents took charge of the Facebook activities and made sure to make updates about activities and make posts to engage the members and inspire for actions. The first results showed that the tools were useful and made sense for the stores to use. It was nice a concrete and they wanted to go further with more storytelling and delve deeper into how they could become more sustainable.



See methodology description under section on methods and tools:

- ❑ Products for the project with the aim to create storytelling, dialogue and a visible community and starting point of the green journey: Postcard, mat, stickers, flyers and treasure map, tested in cooperation with the retail businesses.
- ❑ Facebook page and group for the project.

4) Second prototype testing and further dialogue – Learn and adapt:

Following up on the first piloting, the change agents prepared a second round with an updated “program” to be tested. This time they wanted to add professional support and advice for business development, based on the identified need that the stores asked for more concrete advice on which steps to take to become more sustainable. The local retail business association City Vejle and the business development department of the municipality were engaged in developing an updated package, which contained:

- ❑ 2-3 individual visits to identify existing and new actions to take towards sustainability
- ❑ The product package with a mat, sticker and postcards
- ❑ A shared PR platform using City Vejle and Facebook

Three change agents, a representative from the business development department and a partner representative participated in a City Vejle network meeting in November 2021, where they presented the Vejle’s Green Choices project and the test program with an offer to sign up. 15 stores signed up to participate in the test program.



For the new round, one change agent and 4 business development consultants divided the 15 new and 5 old stores between them and planned the first visits from December 2021 – February 2022. For the visits they developed a matrix as a guide for the meetings and planned a line of follow up meetings to discuss how best to coordinate how to support and follow up on the needs and actions discussed with the stores. This activity will continue after the timeline of the CRETHINK project, and will make a follow up on a City Vejle member meeting in March 2022 to give a project status and discuss the future of the project with the stores. The change agents also reached out to the local press, which made 2 articles about the project with one of the stores as a local case.

More concrete pilot activities and projects are on the way such as:

- ❑ define the areas of the space they used
- ❑ a test for a shared reusable take away cup among the cafes in Vejle
- ❑ concrete guides and courses on sustainability targeting retail businesses
- ❑ a sustainability event and a sustainable shop award among the members of the City Vejle association as well as a subpage on the association's website about Vejle's Green Choices
- ❑ customer directed activities about how to extend the lifetime of the products they buy at the local shops (for example reparation of clothes and washing guides)
- ❑ activities to prevent food waste in local cafes and restaurants and reduce packaging in local shops
- ❑ more case stories about the participating stores to give inspiration to other stores
- ❑ a new EU-project that can continue the ground work laid out by the case and support sustainable business development for retail businesses

See methodology description under section on methods and tools:

- ❑ New interview tools – matrix and dialogue too

The Methodologies and Tools

Here you can read more about the methods and tools applied in the case.

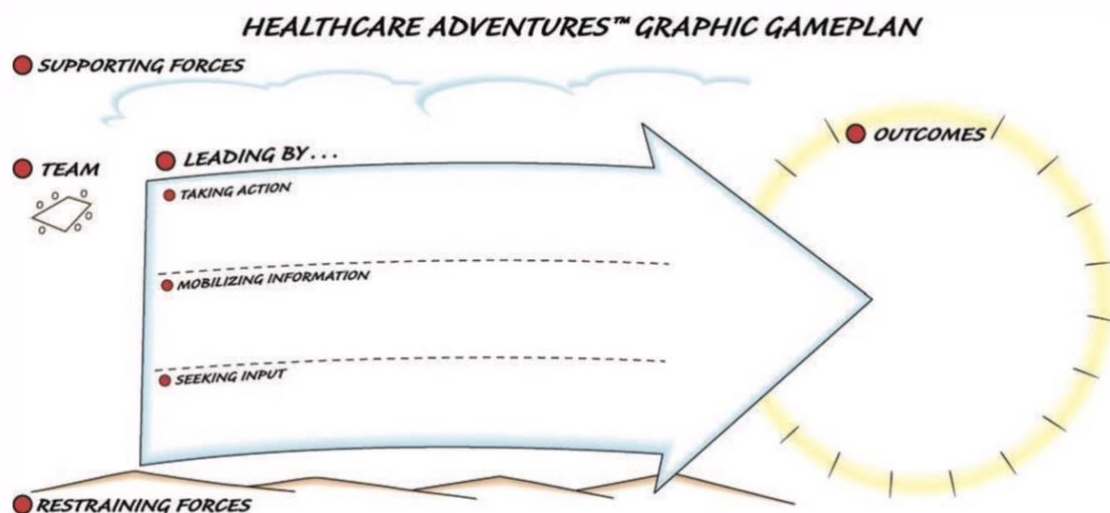
1) Kick-off – Understand the problem:

- ❑ Workshop about hopes, fears, and contributions: Each participant was asked to make a post-it on 1) their expectations and hopes for their participation in the project and the outcomes, 2) their fears or the challenges they saw for the project and 3) their own competences and strengths they hoped to contribute with to the project. After they had filled in the post-its, the participants took turns sharing first their post-its for 1) hopes, then 2) fears and lastly 3) contributions. For each point the facilitator addressed the topics and the group discussed how they could work with it in the project. The answers on the post-its were written down, and followed up on later in the project among the group, to be discussed as part of a project status.
- ❑ Sharing perspectives on the issue by drawing: Inspired by an animated talk on Youtube by Kennisland about how to work with wicket problems, an exercise where the change agents had to draw their perspectives on the challenges discussed and addressed in the project was set up. Each change agent was asked to draw and/or write how they saw the challenge in any way as they wanted. The agents then presented their drawings to each other and explain the content. This then led to a discussion about the different aspects of the challenge that were highlighted and a new drawing was made, that summed up the different highlights.
Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrWbicvDLPw&t=184s>
- ❑ Lining up the necessary framework for the case: The change agents discussed the different needs they themselves had for the participation and cooperation in the project and what they perceived as necessary. The different points were lined up on a flip over in a brainstorm. After this, they went over the list and selected the points they could agree on. This was written down in a summary so they could refer back to the list as a common ground for the case.
- ❑ Stakeholder and needs analysis: Over a few meetings the change agents identified the stakeholders related to the project case such as retail businesses, the retail business association, the municipal consultants, customers and suppliers, and made notes about their needs and interests in the project theme, their role, how they could and should be involved in the project and how they could

be reached. During the progression of the project activities, the knowledge about the stakeholders was updated.

2) Designing the project – Seek solutions:

- ❑ Game plan: The Game Plan template, which comes in many versions, was used by the change agents to design and plan the project activities. The selected illustration was borrowed from Center for Medical Simulation. The Game Plan helps to identify outcomes, concrete actions and what is needed here, roles in the team, supporting resources and challenges or barriers. The change agents worked with the game plan over several sessions and used it as a planning tool for the project.



- ❑ Online workshop platform Miro: The online platform Miro, which works as an online collaboration tool, was used as a shared whiteboard during online meeting sessions, where it was possible to create and share post-its during the session, which could be rearrange and updated live during the session.
Website: <https://miro.com/>
- ❑ Dialogue tools for local retail businesses to map out existing sustainable efforts and potential new actions: A list of materials were produced for the first dialogue with the local retail businesses:
 - *A list of reflection questions about existing activities and interests for the businesses was sent to the businesses beforehand to help them prepare for the meeting.*

- A handout with a visualisation of the three pillars of sustainability was produced to make notes for the mapping with the businesses (see material in appendix 1).
- A handout with images to give examples of activities to promote and communicate about sustainability in stores was brought to the meeting to inspire the conversation (see material in appendix 2).
- Communication tools - project logo and postcard: A project logo and postcard was developed early on to give the project a distinct visual identity and “business card” to help the change agents promote and communicate the project to stakeholders. One of the volunteer change agents designed and produced all the communication material.



3) First prototype testing and further dialogue – Act and test:

- The prototypes developed for the project with the aim to create storytelling, dialogue and a visible community and starting point of the green journey were: Mats, stickers and flyers. The prototypes were tested in cooperation with the retail businesses in phase 3 and 4. They were developed in a limited number by one of the change agents, who also produced the communication materials, based on the first research, needs analysis and dialogue with the local retail businesses. The plan is that the materials will be continued to be produced in cooperation with Vejle Municipality and the local retail business association City Vejle, so the activities can continue.



- ❑ Facebook page and group for the project: See links below

4) Second prototype testing and further dialogue – Learn and adapt:

- ❑ New interview tool – matrix: A matrix was developed, inspired by an initiative in Aalborg Municipality in Denmark, about mapping sustainability in retail businesses. The matrix was a dialogue tool for the 4th phase, where 15 retail businesses were visited by consultants from Vejle Municipality. The matrix can be found in appendix 3. It detail the “offer” in the package described in phase 4, and asks about the themes of:
 - *Store and operation*
 - *Goods and profile*
 - *Circular and sustainable initiatives*

In relation to each topic, it asks about the present situation, future initiatives and needs to get starter. The matrix was used as a summary from the meetings with the retail businesses, from which the consultants shared information inspirations from in order to further provide support and develop activities with the stores in the project. You can find the matrix in appendix 3.

Results, Impact and Tips for practitioners

Results and successes

The change agents are very happy about the results of the project. They have reached their goals within the planned timeframe and have reached more retail businesses and more impact than anticipated.

They have succeeded in inspiring 20 retail businesses in Vejle to take their first step on a journey to become more sustainable and have succeeded in making them more aware of the importance of this journey. The project has been anchored across the municipality, the city association and the local retail businesses.

A new movement has been created, both among the stores, but also among the stakeholders surrounding them – consultants, the business association and customers. There is a seed for a new network and community among the shops and other actors under the umbrella of sustainability and a shared mission to support Vejle as a strong and sustainable shopping city. Several tracks have been created that can continue to grow and lead the retail businesses forward. Online in terms of a Facebook group and social media coverage of the project and the participating stores, and physical meetings, events and cooperation.

Challenges

Covid and working online:

Shortly after the case kick-off with the training, the covid19 situation in Denmark worsened and in December 2020 the project faced a full lockdown, which meant that the change agents were only able to meet a couple of times before they had to switch to online meetings. This meant that the cooperation and project activities were challenged in terms of having to get to know each other through online meetings and finding a new way to cooperate and the practical activities and meetings planned with stakeholders had to be delayed. The change agents reacted to this by putting more focus on research and testing out some online workshop methods and platforms, like Miro.

Because the main target group of the project was small local retail businesses, it meant that the covid19 lockdown was hard on them and with limited resources, it became more tricky to involve the shops. The decision was made to try to involve the shops in a lighter way such as small interviews and visits to their stores and wait with bigger involvements.

Finding a concrete project idea and focus and going from research and ideas to actions and testing:

The group of change agents were different personalities and professions, which meant that they had different competences and perspectives, relevant for the project, but it also meant that they had different expectations and interests that they want to focus on. Some preferred to focus on research and some on practical application and activities. Some wanted to focus on communication and PR for the project. In the beginning the group spent a long time going into depth with research and theory in order to decide on a topic and focus. This meant that the case was well researched and had a strong foundation, but it also created some tensions in the group, because some of the change agents needed more action. The solution was to find a way to address all interests and needs in project meetings. For example when the discussion focused on theory, a change agent would address how to apply the theory in practice, or when discussing activities to ask about how to tell the story about it to others. It also became important for the case facilitators to step in once in a while and make sure to move the discussion and project activities along and make sure all the change agents were heard and involved in the decision making.

Challenges for retail businesses when it comes to sustainable development:

Retail businesses have an interesting potential when it comes to sustainable development, because they play a large part in the consumer value chain. They have direct contact with their customers and they have connections to many brands and companies like suppliers in their work. So potentially, they have a big part to play when it comes to making changes in our consumer patterns. However, they also face concrete challenges in their potential to become more sustainable. For the small shops it might be lack of resources in terms of especially time and work force to innovate and think strategically, and for many online shopping is both a competition, but also a source for large quantities of packaging, waste and transportation, which is difficult to avoid. Another thing is changing business models or products. Better quality and more sustainable products often mean a higher price and might make things more complicated. If you want to sell products that last longer or inspire the customer to repair their products you will need to think of new ways to sell a product and this require an innovation of your business model.

The experience from the project is that it is important to give concrete and relatable tools and methods to “kick-start the journey”. Then it is important to tackle issues of how to select and make the “right” green choice in the individual store and help avoid

greenwashing, while at the same time finding a business opportunity and positive storytelling about it. So far, Vejle's Green Choices has received a positive response because it is easy to apply and understand, and at the same time create a positive movement.

Tips for other practitioners

- ❑ The involvement of public, private and volunteer actors in co-creation is very relevant and beneficial for tackling complex issues and developing new resolutions. Make sure to involve the relevant actors and stakeholders from the beginning to understand the challenge you are addressing, the special needs and conditions you will have to work with and which solutions might be relevant for the project.
- ❑ It is important to create different ways to participate and engage. Some will jump in and out of the process and others will stay on for the whole process. Don't try to involve everyone at the same level in order to discuss and agree on everything. Instead try to facilitate the different actors involvement by understanding and addressing their needs and ability to participate and find ways to make space for everyone. Don't try to control every step of the process, but let people contribute and act and make steps along the way where you evaluate and estimate the direction and results. Just make sure there is a facilitator that has the bigger plan in mind and is able to ensure the approval of everyone participating through dialogue.
- ❑ It is important to find a meaningful way to involve the relevant target group or stakeholders. For the retail businesses, it has been about creating a positive storytelling and atmosphere as well as making it easy and accessible and meaningful in relation to their business. For example small retail businesses have limited resources in terms of time, are very action oriented and will expect to see fast results. So finding the right balance and method for involving them is key. Make sure to establish a good balance between dialogue, research and action. Try to interchange between analysis and action. Some approaches need to be tested out before you will know if they work and when it comes to business owners and practitioners, too much talk will drain the enthusiasm.
- ❑ Citizens represent a large resource of competences and knowledge relevant for co-creation projects. In the project the change agents have worked as equal partners with the municipal participants. This meant that the volunteer citizens could contribute as citizens and as professionals. This duality inspires the other

actors to participate both as professionals and share in the perspective as citizens. Which can improve the equal participation and sharing of insights and contributions.

Annexes

- 1) Mapping sustainability with stores tool – the three pillars of sustainability
- 2) Mapping sustainability with stores tool – Examples of sustainability activities in stores
- 3) Mapping sustainability with stores tool – matrix

Links:

- ❑ Project Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/Vejles-Gr%C3%B8nne-Valg-101055975441827>
- ❑ Project Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/188778589750563>
- ❑ Green Forum Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GroentForum>
- ❑ Green Forum website page about the project: <https://grontforum.vejle.dk/igangvaerende-projekter/crethink/>
- ❑ City Vejle website: <https://cityvejle.dk/>

Summary of the Project

The project "CRETHINK - Co-creative RETHINKing for sustainable cities" aims to promote sustainable practices in European cities through co-creation methodologies.

The project is a two-year Erasmus+ KA2 project which aims to foster citizens' active participation and influence in the local community and society. It achieves so by supporting adult learners within the public sector and the civil society in gaining competences, concrete methods and tools for co-creation and cross-sector cooperation towards sustainable development and complex problem solving.

With the UN SDG 11 as subject matter, the project is developing an online toolbox and recommendations on the use of co-creation methodologies, available on an open-access online platform. The toolbox contains training modules and curriculums, as well as sectors-specific guidelines and methodological documents, specifying how to implement the UN SDGs through co-creation and citizen participation. Its format allows individuals and groups to "self-learn" and implement the methods in their work or everyday activities.

Furthermore, in each partner country, local teams are implementing Pilot Projects that employ the aforementioned methodologies to create sustainable change in the urban environment. These projects are included as Case Studies in the project toolbox.

The project consortium comprises 5 partners from Denmark, Iceland, Slovenia and Italy. The project is coordinated by Vejle Kommune, which is the sixth largest municipality in the country and the capital region of South Denmark.



www.crethink.eu



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