

Cascade of ideas – European Rural Parliament

National Report

- DENMARK -

INTRODUCTION

The Rural Districts of Denmark are under steady change. Their fundamental challenges and conditions regarding local business, settlement, natural resources etc. are changing along with new national challenges. Challenges, that needs to be rethought, when the Rural Districts start new projects.

These changes can be seen a part of a changes paradigm (across rural and urban thinking). This paradigm points in the direction of putting the individual in the centre and the weakening of obligation for the common good. Desire is the light rather than obligation.

The Rural Districts represent a difference and an alternative to the growing cities. The difference lies in a) a unique nature; b) alternative options for personal development; c) Plurality and diversity; d) influence 'to be' alive; e) Attachment and close relation to the local; f) the common good; and g) affordable housing.

The resources in the Rural Districts are first and foremost the people living there. It is from those the initiative starts to develop. Therefore, it is obvious to begin with the strength locally.

The local citizens in the Rural Districts value the spectacular resources in the local societies and often see potentials in the Rural Districts, which other cannot. Thus, the locals are the natural resources to visualize the perspectives for outsiders and potential new settlers to the Rural Districts.



ABOUT THE PARTNER

Landdistrikternes Fællesråd (The Council of Rural Districts) is an unpolitical neutral organization – a Non-Government-Organization (NGO) – covering national associations and organizations.

- The Council of Rural Districts is the national expert in gathering, sharing and communicate knowledge and experiences for Rural Districts in Denmark.
- The Council of Rural Districts is the most important networking organization in Denmark with regard to coordinate issues on behalf of its members and other in matters of Rural Development, and is recognized as such in general.
- The Council of Rural Districts is the organization to deliver information and examples on Rural Districts between the political level and to the citizens in matters of promoting development locally and lobby on the national level.

GATHERING IDEAS AND STATEMENTS

The primary purpose for gathering ideas, comments and opinions regarding the development in the Danish Rural Districts has been to meet people and organizations locally and as wide spread as possible.

For a period of three months the purpose has been to meet villages, organizations, public and private partners as well as political counterparts in an open debate about the challenges and potentials in the rural areas.

Thus, the Council of Rural Districts has participated in conferences, seminars, workshops, annual meetings and political venues to put the cascade of ideas along with the debate about Rural Districts in front of the discussion around villages.

The interest for participating in discussions has been overwhelmingly positive, and many difference influences from all level of society have contributed to the content of the National Report.

Thus, the National Report has been formed by the comments and discussions during those activities, and the Report reflects the contributions and cases, that make the basis for the Report.



STATEMENT OF THE CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY RURAL PEOPLE, AND OF THEIR ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THEIR COMMUNITIES

CHALLENGES AND POTENTIALS FOR RURAL DISTRICTS

The Rural Districts face massive challenges.

It is crucial for the growth in Denmark, to include the development of Rural Districts. Thus, the Council of Rural Districts has in collaboration with 40 municipalities challenged the politicians to focus on the continued development of villages and rural areas.

It is important to have proper condition all over Denmark to run a business. It is important to focus on moving government institutions and educations outside the largest cities. It is important to build a well-functioning infrastructure and maintain the health services in the Rural Districts.

- Steffen Damsgaard, Chairman, the Council of Rural Districts

For the last months, it has been a general view that the current growth in Denmark has benefited the largest cities, and the rural areas have not been able to attract either public institutions as well as infrastructural improvements. Further, the situation for the rural districts has worsen, due to difficulties in achieving loans for buying houses.

Specifically, three challenges make it difficult for developing the Rural Districts.

- **The biggest challenge: Young people move away to study, lose contact with their network and will never come back again.**

This leads to a vicious circle in which the tax will disappear, because there are fewer to pay to the municipality. Businesses and services missing employees and customers, and the municipalities have fewer tax dollars to prevent even more moving out.

Suggested solution: According to surveys among students in universities and colleges is the biggest problem for the young people that it is too expensive to travel home regularly. Therefore, a concrete solution to ensure cheaper option of commuting home on weekends, so the switch to the homeland retained.

- **The second biggest challenge: Access to nature has become poorer.**

People move to the country to get fresh air into the lungs and grass underfoot. But access to the countryside, people are going to remote areas to enjoy, has become significantly worse. So families who move to the country, feel that they do not actually have access to the countryside, they came for.



Although you may have a view to the water a few hundred meters from your house, there is a path down to the beach. You must instead run three kilometers on a road to get there. In this way many villages have become islands where you cannot actually get to and from nature without leaving the court busy roads

Pia Heike Johansen, Lecturer, Centre for Rural Science, SDU

Proposed solution: Legislation to ensure better access to nature

- **The third challenge: Small food stores struggling with bureaucracy.**

The rules that control the area, is aimed at larger production. Small food stores in outlying areas ends thus "a bureaucracy of rules."

Suggested solution: Make legislation follow the size of business.

NO SPECIAL TREATMENT

The Mayor of Kalundborg Municipality Martin Damm (V) requests, that all 98 municipalities are equal, which is not the case at the moment.

It is crucial that rural areas will have the same terms as the urban municipalities. I'm not looking for that we need affirmative action, but we do not want to be decoupled from the infrastructure, finance and opportunities for fast Internet connections. Do not feel pity for us. We'd rather take care of ourselves, but it requires that we have the opportunity

Martin Damm, Mayor of Kalundborg Municipality

Jan Petersen (S), Mayor of Norddjurs Municipality, believes that the core problem is the lack on thinking and working across known barriers.

I would like to focus the debate on the development in Rural Districts. It is not about establishing another farm in the countryside. It is that one thinks in sector and forgets the whole Denmark. Every time they gather functions in the larger cities, it means moving out of the smaller.

Jan Petersen, Mayor of Norddjurs Municipality

HELP THE LOCAL IDEAMAKERS

The island Langeland is one of the areas that loses both population and jobs. And the villagers have some suggestions on how politicians could make the area more attractive.



They can fail to close down schools and kindergartens

Egon Nielsen of the Bagenkop village

Better and faster traffic across the island, so people can easily get here

Christian Petersen of the Rudkøbing village (centre village at Langeland)

It should be easier to borrow money for all the good projects, we actually have

Anne Mette Wandsøe, Chairman, Business association Langeland

You could move the state institutions away from Copenhagen.

Elene Nielsen of the Spodsbjerg village

Escape from the outer regions of Denmark has intensified in recent years. Rural areas have gained 5.2 percent fewer inhabitants since 2009, while the towns with over 20,000 inhabitants have seen a population increase of 7.9 percent.

CHALLENGES	POTENTIALS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current Digital and Physical infrastructure minimize the attractiveness of Rural Districts – regarding settlement and business. • Increased global competition challenges traditional rural industries such as agriculture, manufacturing industry and tourism. • Bad image - more bad than good examples of rural life. • Falling home prices, physical deterioration and lack of investment opportunities constitute a negative spiral and reduce investment. • Hard to generalize the diversity of rural areas. The challenges include legislative work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature is a great asset - both for residents and visitors. • Rural provides a necessary complement and alternative to the cities. • Local commitment, entrepreneurial spirit and resources of civil society is a major driving force in rural areas. • Affordable housing, value-for-money and space are tangible potentials in rural areas. • Proximity, security and unity is value-related potentials in rural areas • Great possibilities for production/ businesses that brings growth and wealth to the countryside

Source:

http://livogland.dk/sites/livogland.dk/files/dokumenter/publikationer/erfaringer_fra_landdistrikts_puljen.pdf



STATEMENT OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF RURAL COMMUNITIES, OR OF THE PUBLIC AND NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS WHICH SERVE THOSE COMMUNITIES

IDEA 1: DEMOCRATIC ENTREPRENEURS

Young people must be more withdrawn into democracy – especially the democracy in the local areas where they live.

At the Danish Folkemødet in June 2014 Association of Efterskoler and the Council of Rural Districts agreed on starting collaboration between 10 Efterskoler around Denmark and people in different associations in their local areas. The project was named *Democratic Entrepreneurs* and started in January 2015.

There were several purposes of the project:

1. Strengthen the democratic knowledge, actions and priorities of the students through an increased and more practical focus on the education of democracy on the schools and by establishing collaboration between the schools and the local communities.
2. Another purpose of the project was the aim at successful and beneficial collaborations between the schools and local communities. The hope is that all involved parts will gain some sort of benefits out of the collaborations and thereby be interested in continuing working together in the local community after the project is completed.
3. The collaborations give the students an experience, which teaches them that an interest and a commitment in the local area and its activities open an opportunity to be part of a great community and fellowship for them. But they will also be able to see what the local community and its municipality have to offer.
4. Furthermore the project will contribute to learning and a creation of new experiences for the young students that are beyond the traditional education and that will strengthen each student both personally and professionally.
5. The purpose for the participating local communities is the establishment of new acquaintances and possibilities for working together with both the school, its teachers, its young people and maybe even their parents in the future.
6. Schools and local people will through this project see that there are great resources hidden in both “worlds”, which they can both benefit from. There are great possibilities for involvement of the young people, who can contribute with new ideas, new ways of cooperating, new knowledge and new energy.



At the Folkemødet 2015 the concerns of how to withdraw the young people into democracy was expressed and discussed again. It happened through the debate: *How do we get the young people withdrawn into democracy, when the old people have the power?* The reason why this subject has been debated several times is that the citizens in the little local communities wish to keep the good life there. People want a living village with the possibility for different activities, common arrangements and a unity in the village. Based on that wish people want to start a focused effort in order to teach the young people about democracy and to show them that they are wanted and needed.

- Statements of the achievements –

In the spring 2015 10 Efterskoler (School to attend the final year of Primary education) are found to be part of the project *Democratic Entrepreneurs*. And they are in June working on how they wish to implement the project in their education.

The Council of Rural Districts has not yet seen the results of that. (It will be delivered to the organization in July).

The 10 Efterskoler has been offered a visit of the rolling office (caravan) from the Council of Rural Districts to keep informal meetings with people in their local society for instance.

In order to inform and inspire the schools and people in their local community including the local municipality to an upcoming (and future) collaboration a Kick off meeting was held in April 2015 with great success.

IDEA 2: VILLAGE SUMMIT MEETING

The Council of Rural Districts works on two levels; one is the political level trying to influence the frame conditions of the rural areas, second is the work on more citizen close activities. In order to do something special for one of the member groups in the Council of Rural Districts, the villages, a *Village summit meeting* was arranged.

The purpose was to inspire the enthusiasts and volunteers in the villages to continue their good and indispensable work. The organisation wanted to give them new ideas and energy which they could bring back home. The organisation wanted them to meet other people that also deal with the same tasks, challenges, great experiences etc. in their everyday life in other villages around Denmark.



- Statements of the achievements –

Through history great developments in Denmark have roots in tendencies, new thoughts and activities started in the rural areas. This is due to the special gift of working together and to prioritize the local community, a gift that rural people have. One of the conclusions of the *Village summit meeting* was to preserve this gift.

During the meeting there was a lot of networking, talking and exchanging of experiences. It gave new knowledge and inspiration to the participants.

Another conclusion from the meeting was the importance of villages to inform and involve the citizens at an often and regular basis. That must be done through a strong and effective intern communication. If people know about activities, meetings, future plans etc. they will be easier to involve in the volunteers jobs. That again will increase their feeling of responsibility and membership in the village, and they will become great ambassadors for the village – or the life in a village in general. But local ambassadors are not enough; the villages must also remember to give priority to extern communication as a part of their branding of the village.

IDEA 3: POLITICAL AND CITIZENS CLOSE ACTIVITIES FROM LANDDISTRIKTERNES FÆLLESRÅD

The Council of Rural Districts works on two levels; one is the political level trying to influence the frame conditions of the rural areas, second is the work on more citizen close activities. During 2015 the organisation has arranged more activities where the two perspectives are combined.

1. Årsmøde (the official annual meeting of the organisation)
2. Campingvognsturné (a caravan tour around Denmark meeting both local people and people from the municipalities)
3. Folkemødet 2015

- Statements of the achievements –

Caravan tour: The Council of Rural Districts visited the first municipality/local community in may 2015. It was a great success to discuss important issues in a more informal way where both politicians and ordinary people could join. During the summer and the autumn the organization will continue its visits in Denmark.

Folkemødet: In June 2015 the Council of Rural Districts participated in the annual Folkemødet. We had some amazing days meeting other professional organisations, which also have some sort of



interest in the Danish rural areas and focus points that the Council of Rural Districts works on. On the Folkemødet there is a rich opportunity to debate and talk and listen to all the different opinions on the subjects. And we have been inspired to the future work and new co-operations. At the Folkemødet, the Council of Rural Districts arranged 6 debates in 4 days and we participated in several more.

As a supplement to the meetings with local people and politicians on the caravan tour and the Folkemødet, the Council of Rural Districts created a collection of signatures of people who want *A Whole Denmark in Balance*.

STATEMENTS OF THE DEMANDS WHICH RURAL PEOPLE WISH TO MAKE TO THEIR LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL OR MULTI-NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

The statements that the Council of Rural Districts gained at these events are the same as mentioned:

The primary focus of the future work of the Council of Rural Districts is improvements of the basic frame conditions influencing the growth and development of the rural areas in Denmark:

- **Settlement** – It shall be possible for all citizens to get help at funding houses in the rural areas. More people would settle down if banks and credit institutions became more cooperative again. In order to increase the settlement in the rural areas both local and national politicians must help ensuring more job and educational opportunities, a decent public transport, a digital infrastructure that ensures a fast and stabile mobile and internet coverage and equal health services to all areas of Denmark.
- **Development of professions and jobs** – No matter where in Denmark a company is placed, it shall be possible for the traders to get help at funding an expansion of the company or starting a new one. The financial conditions must not be worse for the company owners in the rural areas than for those in the bigger cities. It is also necessary to ease the Danish laws according to the zones of land and coasts, and to relocate governmental workplaces and higher educations to all regions in Denmark.
- **Infrastructure** – All parts of Denmark need a fast and stabile mobile and internet coverage. Without that settlement and companies cannot exist in the modern world today. Not only will the digital infrastructure promote the growth of Denmark, also a more well developed network of roads, public transport in the rural areas and a development of the Danish ports will have a positive influence on the development of Denmark.



- **Education** – local areas need schools. In order to keep a local community alive and attractive for settlement the school is a fundamental factor. Also high schools and other educations for the young people must be placed in a decent distances, so it is possible for the young people to stay in their community and not move to the 2-3 biggest cities in Denmark. Universities etc. can also be more decentralized in order to strengthen the local business community and settlement.
- **Health** – all Danes must have the same opportunities for help and services when it comes to health and survival. Also in the health area, Danes from the rural areas have experienced severe rationalizations and centralizations, which have resulted in a loss of many workplaces. The politicians must ensure that there are doctors in all areas of Denmark, both in hospitals and as general practitioners.

WE ARE NOT ALONE

The Council of Rural Districts is not working alone with the focus on at positive development of the rural areas in Denmark. But we are the overall organisation in this field.

Several minor organisations have the same agenda as the Council of Rural Districts, and they are all examples of how people gather together on their initiative, without involvement of politicians or other authorities in the cause of trying to change the conditions for the rural areas in Denmark into something with more growth and a better publicity.

Also people who are not gathered in fixed organisations work in different ways with initiatives that support the lives in the local communities. The Council of Rural Districts has gathered and described examples of how the rural people work with local projects and activities. They are structured after the subjects: Settlements, Planning and Development, Culture and active citizenship, Nature and Environment, Public and private service, Employment, Profession and tourism.

The dream for the rural areas in Denmark to create cohesion in the welfare system, and it will only be achieved by prioritizing all regions.

Local, regional and national politicians must give better frame conditions for the development and growth in the rural areas. If they do so, the whole country and all Danes will benefit from it. Many people living in the rural areas believe, that together we stand strong and that all citizens shall have equal possibilities.

