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Rural Science-Society-Policy Interfaces

MAP Position Note

EMPOWERING RURAL AREAS IN MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

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MAP POSITION NOTE

MAP DENMARK

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1. Current situation based on background research

Rural areas in Denmark contain many local development initiatives, entrepreneurship, and green transition projects. Research shows that from a quality-of-life perspective, there is not a big difference between the city and the countryside when adjusting for socioeconomic variables (gender, age, health, partner, education, employment status, income), and in most of the years, the differences are not statistically significant. In the period 2002-2014, the value of the average life satisfaction in the countryside is 8.48, while in the city, it is 8.39 for the whole period (Sørensen 2018).

Research on rural areas has also focused on the development of national rural policies, exploitation of natural resources, employment, migration, and the discourse surrounding rural areas (Svendsen, Sørensen, Noe 2018). Previous studies have also shown how the optimal way to build local capacity is to ensure that external resources benefit internal mobilization (Tanvig and Herslund, 2020). Another recent study identifies a growth in civil society-driven initiatives that are also business-oriented and points to this as a grey area where the advice of rural coordinators often has certain limitations (Hedetoft og Broegaard, 2020).

Democratic participation and inclusion in governance processes are also crucial for the development of rural areas. There are several ways in which citizen involvement can be organized:

- Public meetings and hearings: Local authorities and other stakeholders can hold public meetings and hearings where citizens can provide input and ideas for the development of their communities.
- Local workshops and events: Local organizations and associations can hold workshops and events where citizens can collaborate and develop ideas for projects and initiatives in their community. National and regional conferences and seminars offer local actors the opportunity to meet decision-makers and professional actors within rural areas and expand their networks and knowledge sharing. Examples of such events include the annual rural district conference of the Danish Agency for Rural and Urban Areas and the Rural Day of Central Denmark Region.
- Many places, municipalities facilitate a co-creative process around the formulation of Local Development Plans (Lokaludviklings plan, LUP), which present local community representatives' visions and wishes for the development of the local community. LUPs are often based on local SWOT analyses (Thuesen and Ditlevsen, 2015).
- Online platforms and social media: There are several online platforms and social media where citizens can express their opinions and share ideas for the development of their community, such as Landsbyviden.
- Roles for volunteers and local groups: Volunteers and local groups can play an important role in rural development by taking initiative for projects and activities that can benefit the community.
- Local reference councils: Local reference councils can be a body that represents citizens, organizations, and local businesses in a given municipality or region. Reference councils can play an important role in involving citizens in the planning process for rural development and ensuring that local voices are heard.

Research emphasizes that it is important for citizen involvement to be open and inclusive, and for citizens to have real influence on decision-making. Regarding renewable energy projects near the coast and on land, it is crucial that the local community is involved since the results have significant effects on the local area - both negative and positive. Involvement is important already in the planning process to ensure that local needs and interests are considered. Certain projects can be directly owned by citizens, some projects have

a large share of equity owned by citizens, while other rural areas have other models of mixed forms of financing for energy projects.

There is a risk that renewable energy projects may encounter citizen resistance if it is solely external investors who want to build some large facilities on neighbouring fields without taking the considerations and wishes of the local community into account in the planning process (Landdistrikternes Fællesråd 2020). Generally, rural areas are characterized by the presence of volunteer local groups who contribute to and support development initiatives in the area.

2. Position of the Multi-Actor Platform

Public hearings: In Denmark, there are a number of laws and regulations that govern the hearing process. The legislation aims to ensure that citizens and other relevant stakeholders are involved in decision-making processes that affect their interests. It is public authorities that hold public hearings before making decisions that have a significant impact on the rights or interests of citizens or other stakeholders. This can be in connection with local plans, building permits, or major infrastructure projects. The hearings must be publicly announced, and everyone has the right to express their objections and views. Several regions and municipalities also use citizen panels and surveys in connection with the development of rural policies and regional development strategies.

Hearing processes for renewable energy installations: The hearing processes for establishing renewable energy installations in rural areas in Denmark generally follow the same laws and regulations as other decision-making processes, but some aspects are particularly important. In the case of wind turbines, it is the Danish Energy Agency that decides on the construction of new turbines on land. However, the agency is obliged to involve local citizens and stakeholders in the decision-making process, and therefore as a starting point, it conducts a public hearing where everyone can provide their objections and comments.

Generally, there is a growing trend for developers of renewable energy facilities to actively engage in dialogue with local citizens and stakeholders to create greater understanding of the project and avoid conflicts in connection with the establishment of the facilities. If a project requires an EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment), there is also a requirement for a public hearing, where relevant authorities and citizens can comment on the project. Citizens and organizations can appeal decisions made by public authorities. The right of appeal ensures that citizens and organizations can express their views and objections assessed by an independent body.

Investments in renewable energy systems: Overall, there is comprehensive legislation in this area that ensures an open, inclusive, and democratic decision-making process, where citizens and other relevant stakeholders are heard and involved in the decision-making processes. However, there are some specific dilemmas in rural areas in connection with the establishment of renewable energy systems on agricultural land. Rural areas experience increased competition for land also for a range of other uses, such as nature, raw materials, recreational purposes, climate/water, and drinking water protection. In addition, the increasing energy prices in recent years have increased interest in establishing wind turbines and solar panels in open land. Especially in some areas, solar panels have meant increased demand for land, and land leasing is often offered at 20,000 DKK/ha/year or acquisition for 300,000-400,000 DKK/ha. In addition to contributing more energy, solar panel systems can contribute to reducing the load of CO2 emissions and nitrogen loss from agricultural land and can provide more income to the local area, but this requires proactive planning. Currently, this task is left to the municipalities, and MAP DK believes that there is a need for coordination both nationally and at the EU level.

Renewable energy systems and local capacity: It is a strength that there are requirements for involving processes with hearings for municipalities and public meetings. However, it is often unclear how decision-making can be influenced in a rural area. There have been attempts with initiatives where citizens could buy

shares in renewable energy companies. However, this is difficult for some rural areas, and it is important to be aware of inequality and how it plays into the real ability of municipalities and local communities to influence processes so that it becomes attractive for the local population. Not all municipalities and local communities possess or have the same capacity to activate resources to influence decision-making processes and initiatives. This is precisely why the construction of strategic capacity is important (Tanvig, Andersen, and Bech, 2016). Due to the massive investments required for a green transition, inequality between actors can also play a role between municipalities and external investors and actors.
However, there are also positive examples where the placement of, for example, solar panels is planned with input from the population. In the area around Kolding, Better Energy, as a solar panel system owner, has restored 400 hectares of nature. The solar panels are hidden with the planting of new green growth and trees, and a path is established that citizens can use for recreational purposes. It has also contributed to the fact that house prices have increased in the area. Better Energy is also in the process of establishing renewable energy systems near Tønder municipality (see section 2.1). So far, the processes have shown that resourceful villages and municipalities can organize involvement that results in attractive solutions for citizens in the area. Involvement can range from collecting input for the preparation of a local development plan to involving citizens in decisions about the development of specific projects or initiatives in the area.

Welfare priorities and renewable energy installations: MAP Denmark highlights the paradox that some rural areas lack municipal welfare, such as the closure of schools, while the land around the communities is being offered at high prices for renewable energy installations, without the community benefiting from the income or ownership to compensate for the negative effects. An example is Lolland-Falster, where citizens can expect lower heating bills in the future if the current plans for renewable energy installations are realized. However, when basic infrastructure and local welfare, such as schools and other welfare institutions, are closed at the same time, lower heating bills become less important.

European and national counterproductive legislation on land use: Another challenge is the lack of coordination across sectors. There are subsidies under the EU's hectare support scheme that counteract the removal of agricultural land for climate, environmental, and nature purposes. For example, the requirement for 4% of land to be left fallow has led to increased demand for fallow land, resulting in a 20-50% increase in the price of "poor" agricultural land. These areas are often humus-rich low-lying areas along streams and rivers, which are precisely the areas that are desired to be removed from agricultural use. Many grassland areas are ploughed up, only to be left fallow the following year. This action increases CO2 emissions and is in direct conflict with the goal of protecting environmental and natural areas. In practice, this means that areas that farmers have designated for nature conservation must be left fallow and therefore cannot be used for grazing. As the purpose is to protect the environment and nature, several farmers find the regulations incomprehensible and harmful to their farming operations[1].

In addition to rules requiring a certain percentage of fallow land, many farmers are also affected by §3 of the Nature Protection Act, which deals with protected grassland areas. These grassland areas cannot be ploughed and cannot receive compensation from the EU. In practice, it is very difficult to distinguish and know whether an area is §3 protected. This has led to many conflicts and discussions about compensation.
On March 9, 2022, the Danish Agricultural Agency announced that it will no longer be possible to receive compensation for "nature areas" from 2023, even if they are included in low-lying and wetland projects. This was followed by a notice on July 1, 2022, prohibiting the spraying and fertilization of all §3 areas - even areas where this was previously allowed. The rule changes had unforeseen consequences - not only for the dairy farmers who had previously legally fertilized their grassland. It was 45 mayors who in April 2022 brought attention to the problem, and low-lying projects have since been at a standstill throughout the country, causing frustration for municipalities and the agriculture industry while authorities have tried to sort out the issues.

[1] Nye brakregler spænder ben for Oles naturpleje - det er en molbohistorie, siger han | LandbrugsAvisen

Another conflict of interest has arisen in connection with efforts to regulate the coastal watershed level. This concerns whether agriculture should be subject to stricter regulations to reduce the discharge of nutrients that pollute the aquatic environment. Denmark has had problems with oxygen depletion in coastal waters for many years, primarily due to an excess of nutrients, including nitrogen and phosphorus, coming from agriculture and other sources. Therefore, the government and environmental organizations have pushed to tighten regulation of agriculture and introduced mandatory requirements for reduced fertilization and other measures to reduce nutrient discharge. Agriculture and its farming organizations have protested against the proposed measures, claiming that they will be heavily economically burdened and lead to a decline in food production and the economy of rural areas. There are also concerns about whether the proposed measures will be effective enough to solve the problems of water pollution and whether the measures are cost-effective compared to other solutions. At the same time, there is a fund that provides support for nature projects, but according to one of MAP Denmark's members, there are not enough good project proposals. The few projects that are approved mostly deal with social events, hazel bushes, windbreaks, etc. These small measures do not change the structural problems. Instead, there is a need to think more multifunctionally and strategically in relation to public nature funds.

Multifunctional land use: Glamping is a combination of camping and luxury, and glamping sites may therefore be subject to different laws and regulations depending on their specific facilities and activities. Current legislation does not provide income opportunities from glamping while the same areas are a potential for increased biodiversity. With proper regulation, glamping could be an incentive for multifunctional use with extra income for such areas. Another example is the establishment of a *Termonet*[2]. Not all rural areas have access to district heating, and much heating still occurs through the burning of oil, gas, or wood pellets - solutions that are neither climate-friendly nor cheap. Several enclaves of villas have therefore invested in *Termonets* which is a shared geothermal heating systems which can supply the homes with cheap and locally produced heat. Ownership of the heat pumps is often individual, while the geothermal drilling and pipes are owned by a common association[3]. Since *Termonets* have a lifespan of 70-80 years, it is possible to establish, for example, football fields or other land use, but not forest.

Municipalities as autonomous governance entities: From a municipal perspective, there are challenges with a lack of control options within, among other things, energy and heat supply. Many villages have the potential for district heating, but not all can get it, and other solutions are needed. However, it is currently not possible to share electricity in communities consisting of individual houses. There is a requirement for each house to have its own meter installed. This leads to a demand for increased infrastructure and more expensive solutions than if solar energy were distributed on-site. There are technically good solutions, but they are difficult to exploit due to heavy bureaucratic processes, including those under the Energy Agency, which create obstacles to meeting climate ambitions.

The potential of green transformation: There is great potential in the green transformation - both for agriculture, for renewable energy use, for businesses and for new types of jobs. In this regard, rural populations and local communities are particularly important resources, and municipalities are important governance actors in many respects. In addition, the regions are also important as they have authority and coordination roles in areas such as raw material extraction, soil pollution, drinking water, infrastructure, climate and water conditions, as well as energy and district heating supply. A future priority is the new energy islands being established at sea. Here, it will be crucial to be able to ensure returns from these energy facilities to local businesses, which requires, for example, facilitating power conversion through the establishment of transformer stations at the same time as the energy facilities. In the context of the green

[2] A district heating system is a supply network that transports thermal energy from different types of energy sources. The network runs across many homes/buildings with a typical temperature range of 0 to 10 degrees Celsius. In combination with ground source heat pumps, a district heating system can provide heating and hot water.

[3] The Termonet Association works to promote this technology, and you can visit their website www.termonet.dk to read more and see concrete examples of its use.

transformation, it is relevant to point out that negotiations often take place between unequal parties: rural municipalities, which often struggle with limited resources, and large state, national or international/multinational actors.

Synergy between rural and urban areas: There are many areas where rural and urban areas are mutually dependent on each other. Food is a way to strengthen connections through, for example, food communities and local connections to agriculture for home consumption. It is relevant to analyze how a restructuring of part of agriculture can support a more plant-based diet. Generally, cultivation and food communities in the local area can be potentials that can strengthen connections between rural and urban areas.

The regional level for management of the EU's regional funds: Coordinated by the Business Promotion Board and demand driven. The structure of applications means that it is the "resource-strong" who apply who get funding, instead of those who need funding. After the business promotion reform, the regions no longer have the authority to work with business promotion. Many claim that centralization has resulted in the business promotion effort not reaching ordinary companies that do not have a professionally set up structure to seek financing through the EU's regional funds. When talking about regions as a "hidden" level of authority, it applies to rural development and the green transformation. The regional areas of authority within raw materials and soil pollution as well as a range of (often self-appointed) coordination tasks within, for example, climate adaptation, energy planning and infrastructure are of great importance for local areas and municipalities' rural development work in relation to the green transformation.

Regions can in several respects be a relevant level of authority to coordinate cooperation between municipalities, new forms of housing, ensure networking and knowledge sharing in a number of areas, ensure cooperation between LAGs, etc. Thus, it is also relevant that more resources and funding be allocated to LEADER and LAGs through the EU's Structural Funds. Large policy areas such as investment in energy facilities have many large negative effects and with large investments compared to the funds for LAGs, which are insignificant in comparison. It is also relevant to point out how small and insignificant the "rural district fund" is in relation to the area and themes it aims at. This can lead to a perception of Danish rural areas as a "residual category".

Citizen involvement and processes: There are many areas where the state regulates, but where few funds are allocated to the processes. An example is the extraction of lowland soils, where several billion have been allocated, but with few resources to clarify how the processes should be carried out, including ensuring public access to the areas and ensuring maintenance. MAP Denmark emphasizes the importance of achieving a balance between different considerations to ensure a more sustainable process. This involves allowing time for informal conversations and engaging in political manoeuvring, which is necessary to compete for resources and avoid imbalances, whether it is investments within municipalities or investments in multifunctional agriculture. In this context, the focus should be on supporting local initiatives to create good living conditions.

Instead of having a unilateral focus on cost savings through economies of scale and centralization, one should instead take into account a cost-benefit principle. This means that in each individual case, one carefully weighs the income and cost consequences of different policies, laws, circulars, and resolutions. In this way, one can better anticipate and evaluate the broad economic, social, and political consequences for rural areas of the individual initiatives in the long term. This principle will ensure that the long-term effects on society as a whole are taken into account, and not just the short-term bottom line. Therefore, it is important to have a broader approach to assessing political decisions, which includes an evaluation of the overall value of the measures and their potential consequences for society and the environment. In this way, one can ensure that decisions are not made that may initially seem cheap, but which can have negative long-term consequences for rural areas and on a general level the society.

2.1. Existing interventions and actions

Citizen Lab is a digital platform for citizen participation in municipalities and organizations. The platform enables an open and transparent dialogue between citizens and decision-makers in decision-making processes. Citizens can share their views, proposals, and ideas with the municipality or organization. The platform can be used to gather feedback and proposals for political decisions, urban planning, improving local services, and other local initiatives.

Citizen Lab enables municipalities to collect and analyze data on citizens' attitudes and proposals, which can be used to shape policies and decisions in a more inclusive and representative way. The platform also features functions for managing discussions and debates, and can be used to organize and plan citizen meetings and workshops. However, it is important to align expectations with the local community about how much can be decided and what can be influenced. Some elements are difficult to influence due to legislation, and therefore, it is necessary to clarify the areas in which the municipality wishes to engage citizens so that, for example, new local development initiatives can be created with input from those who live in the area.

The Sønderborg Model is an example of a model for collaboration and citizen participation is the Sønderborg Model, which is a partnership model for achieving sustainable development in Sønderborg Municipality. The model is based on a partnership between the municipality, business, civil society, and knowledge institutions.

- The Sønderborg Model shows how it is possible to create sustainable development by involving all stakeholders and by creating common goals and actions. The model focuses on reducing CO2 emissions and creating a more sustainable city and region.
- The Sønderborg Model has led to concrete results, including a 50% reduction in CO2 emissions in Sønderborg Municipality and an increased use of renewable energy sources and green technology. The model has also led to increased innovation and growth in the local business community and to strengthened cooperation between knowledge institutions and businesses.
- The Sønderborg Model can serve as an inspiration and model for other municipalities and regions in Denmark and internationally that wish to achieve sustainable development and reduce their CO2 emissions.

Lejre Municipality §17, paragraph 4 committee: Lejre Municipality has established a §17, paragraph 4 committee, which is a temporary political committee that a municipal council may establish under the Governance Act to perform special tasks as an advisory or preparatory committee for the municipal council, the finance committee, or other standing committees. The composition of the committee is decided by the municipal council, which also determines the detailed guidelines for the committee's work. In Lejre, the committee established a village fund for knowledge sharing and capacity building. The village fund is part of an association, which can also be used as a legal entity to seek local development projects. Today, Lejre has villages that are run by citizens.

Better Energy in Tønder Municipality: Tønder Municipality has become known for the Tønder Model, which is a strategy for transitioning to renewable energy. The strategy is based on a holistic approach that takes into account environmental, economic, and social factors in the transition to renewable energy sources. The model is based on a number of different initiatives, including:

- Energy efficiency: Tønder Municipality has focused on reducing energy consumption in municipal buildings and the transportation sector by investing in energy-saving technologies and behavioral changes.

- Renewable energy sources: The municipality has set ambitious goals for increasing the production of renewable energy from solar, wind, and biomass. This includes the development of local biogas plants and wind farms.
- Smart grid solutions: Tønder Municipality is working to develop intelligent energy systems that can integrate different sources of renewable energy and ensure a stable supply of electricity.
- Collaboration with the local community: Tønder Municipality has involved local citizens and businesses in the transition to renewable energy sources through partnerships and information campaigns.
- The Tønder Model has been used as an example of good practice in many other municipalities in Denmark and other countries, and it has proven to be effective in promoting the transition to renewable energy in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

2.2. Recommendations from the MAP

2.2.1. Recommendations for future rural policies

Local support scheme: A local support scheme in all municipalities is relevant for helping villages coordinate initiatives between public actors, seek funding and raise awareness of opportunities, for example in connection with LAG (local action groups funded by the EU), but also issues related to access to local welfare. To manage such a support scheme, municipalities need more resources, which could be placed through a national program called "Levende Landsbyer" (Living Villages). The support scheme could help organize local coffee meetings and ensure the creation of the synergies needed to strengthen villages in Denmark.

Regional coordination - across sectors and levels: There is a need for more coordination to ensure that European and national sectors, tools and initiatives support each other. The European agricultural policy is very controlling of the overall strategic priorities, while sectors such as natural resource management and renewable energy also have a major impact on rural areas. In this context, both municipalities and regions can advantageously have a more coordinating role and prioritization of activities within these structural policy areas and thus ensure that they can benefit rural development through coordination of dialogue and initiatives for the relevant sector areas and at the various levels of governance.

Long-term rural support: Rather than having rural area pools with support schemes and small projects randomly scattered based on which villages apply, it would be appropriate to establish more long-term forms of cooperation. The project-driven rural development often benefits the most resourceful, while the areas that do not have the capacity to apply for funding never benefit from the rural area pool. Such long-term support can be coordinated with structural fund and Business Promotion Fund. The partnerships should be relevant for the development of both social, environmental, and financial capital and here it is crucial to transform rural development from being based on projects to having long-term perspectives. A long-term rural support, which is adequately supported by resources, should integrate and cooperate with the LEADER approach and the work of LAGs. This will create synergies and ensure a more effective use of resources in rural development.

2.2.1. Recommendations for future research agendas

The centres dependence on the periphery: There is a significant amount of research that examines various urban and rural typologies and dependency mechanisms between the periphery and urban areas. However, there is limited knowledge on how centres, i.e., urban areas, depend on the periphery. By working with an understanding of mutual dependence, it can provide some new relevant insights into national

planning and rural policy. In this context, it is important to recognize that "rural areas" are not uniform and have different conditions, which is crucial for understanding the future "green investment landscape" and its potential effects. It is important to examine the various periphery processes to which rural areas are exposed and how they are linked to other areas. In addition, land use and development of knowledge about processes that lead to multifunctional land use and maximum local positive effects are crucial for sustainable development. Therefore, it is important to include these topics in a long-term rural support, which draws on the LEADER approach and the work of LAGs.

Broadband connectivity and digitization: Due to the market-driven structure that is the basis for establishing broadband connections in Denmark, many rural areas do not have the same digital opportunities because it has not been financially viable to establish a fast broadband connection. However, alternative solutions and cooperative models exist, and it may be relevant to investigate how such models can be implemented in a Danish context.

Impact measurement: At present, it may be difficult to measure the effects of a range of initiatives. Therefore, it could benefit rural areas to have a framework for measuring qualitative measures to investigate which measures should be prioritized in the future. Currently, there are different indicators; however, there is a limited understanding of the overall development, and a more holistic understanding of measuring effects is needed.

Analyse long-term consequences: In follow-up to this, MAP Denmark encourages analysing the long-term benefits of investing in rural areas, which involves both measuring effects and ensuring that the "soft factors" are included. This also involves critically analysing the rationales underlying existing analyses. This may involve analysing where national investments are made, where the municipality invests internally, how sector areas are prioritized, for example, within public transport in a region. For example, the one-sided focus on cost savings through economies of scale and centralization should be replaced by a cost-benefit principle that weighs the income and cost consequences of different policies, laws, circulars, and decisions in each individual case.

Revising the definition of rural areas: There is a need to revise the definition of what constitutes a "rural area." Currently, the definition is based on narrow socio-economic parameters that determine the conditions for a range of national/EU support schemes. However, an area's rural character is influenced by a wide range of factors, and it is therefore important to include new parameters in a more accurate definition. For example, a village close to a city may have just as much or even more rural character than a village in a more remote rural municipality. Place-based resources, infrastructure, and the recreational quality of the surrounding landscape are examples of parameters that should be considered in a new definition.

Conclusions

Transition to renewable energy has significant consequences for rural areas: A large part of renewable energy production occurs in rural areas, which can affect the landscape and local communities in the areas. It is important to take into account local conditions and ensure that development occurs in a sustainable way that also considers the social and economic consequences.

It is important to ensure involvement at all levels in the establishment of new large-scale energy projects: To ensure sustainable development, it is important to involve local stakeholders and collaborate across levels. This can help ensure that local experiences and perspectives are heard and taken into account in the process.

Processes that involve key stakeholders are important for sustainable management of Denmark's territory: To ensure sustainable management of Denmark's territory, it is important to involve key stakeholders, including local authorities, farmers, nature organizations, and other relevant actors. This can help ensure that different considerations are weighed and balanced.

The existing capacity in a given local community can determine development opportunities: The Rural District Fund is an important support option for local project development, but it requires resources and capacity to apply for and administer funds. Therefore, existing capacity in a local community may impact the opportunities to seek funding and implement projects.

More influence for both regions and municipalities to ensure locally adapted green transition: To ensure a locally adapted green transition, it is important to involve both regions and municipalities, as they have different responsibilities and opportunities to influence development in local communities. A more decentralized approach can help create greater local ownership and involvement in the process.

Assigning the right responsibilities to the appropriate authorities: To ensure effective and sustainable management of Denmark's territory, it is important to have clear and distinct frameworks for responsibility distribution among different authorities and levels. This can help ensure a more effective and coordinated effort and avoid overlaps and inefficiencies in the planning and management of rural areas.

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