

LANDSBY

Villages are
stronger together

KLYNGER

Guide to the municipalities

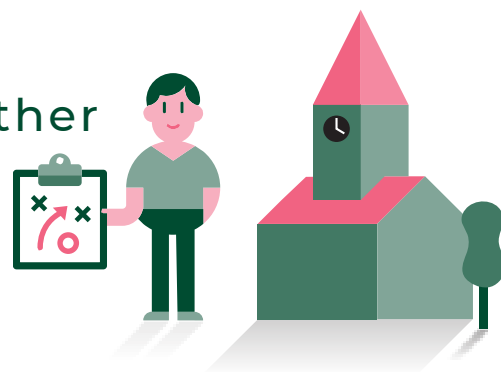
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To support without managing – your role as a municipal actor

Village clusters function as an innovative model for citizen-driven development in rural areas. This guide collects the good advice for the municipalities.

A cultural change is taking place in the countryside. 1.2 million people live in the Danish villages today, and there is plenty of life and volunteer zeal in the small local areas. The citizens' involvement represents a huge potential for the municipalities, and in recent years several municipalities have opened their eyes to village clusters as a concrete method to cooperate with the citizens on the development of rural districts. Village clusters as a method have been tested for the past four years, and the result of the campaign, which is supported by Realdania, DGI and the Local and Infrastructure Fund, is 29 village clusters that show new paths for development in rural areas. The concept has received great media coverage and national political interest – and is not least interesting today, when it has become a legal requirement for all municipalities to work strategically with the development of villages. Your municipality can become part of a larger national network across municipalities and benefit from the knowledge and experience available from 29 clusters throughout the country – a network that represents 25 municipalities and 120,000 citizens. "The village clusters are an interesting concept and a concrete method that fits the political ambitions of working with the municipalities' rural areas."

Zacharias Baden, planner in Svendborg Municipality

In this guide, you will be presented with some of the good arguments for allocating funds and resources to village clusters, as well as some concrete advice for the work in your municipality.

Effective model for village

development

Village clusters are a model for how municipalities and citizens can jointly develop local areas and strengthen the good life in the countryside. In a village cluster, several villages come together in a new social community, where citizens gather around everything from institutions and associations to halls and recreational facilities. In this way, the villages make use of the proximity of the small communities and each other's strengths to develop both the individual village and the entire cluster.

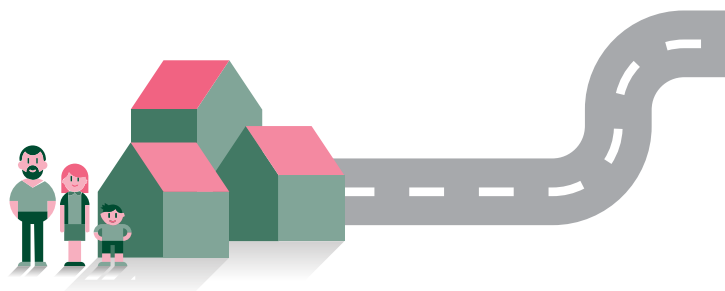
"Village clusters have put the villages on the political map. It is local politics now, but it also has national political attention."

*Grith Mortensen, chairman of
the village cluster Mols i
Udvikling*

The experience from the Village Clusters campaign is that the method helps to create strong local communities and new communities. The loose framework and network structure of village clusters have proven to be able to bring new and different types of volunteers into play than those who traditionally engage in associations, village councils and other established organisations. It could be the village craftsman who steps in when plant classes are to be built, the communications worker who helps with Facebook, and the accountant who helps with a budget. With village clusters, new types of citizens begin to engage in the development of the local area. The participating municipalities report that the cluster cooperation has promoted rural development in their municipality and has strengthened cooperation between the municipality and citizens. The expectation is also that, over time, the collaboration can reduce municipal expenses for service and operation.

What is a village cluster?

A village cluster is a number of villages that cooperate on common strategic goals. Read more about the idea behind village clusters: <http://landsbyklynger.dk/om%20landsbyklynger>



"The citizens are starting to think beyond their own village. They become aware that they have something in common and that they are stronger if they stand together."

Vivi Granby, architect and planner in Bornholm's Regional Municipality

Profits for the entire municipality

The cluster cooperation requires commitment and resources from the municipality - although not necessarily more resources. Experience also shows that efforts can pay off. Some of the many benefits for the municipality are:

- Better facilities and increased quality of life

The village clusters first and foremost create concrete improvements and increased quality of life in the villages, with great importance for retaining citizens. Shared facilities, infrastructure and cultural offerings strengthen the local community and support the good and active life in the countryside. It also means a lower overall operating burden for the municipality when activities are gathered on fewer registers and when more voluntary resources are activated.

- Stronger civil society and local engagement
- Through the collaboration, the citizens gain a greater understanding of municipal work procedures, and voluntary actors experience how, by standing together, they have a far greater influence on the municipality's decisions. The clusters also involve new user groups – not just the established associations. The cooperation in the clusters creates active communities and good energy in the local communities and can contribute positively to a settlement strategy.

The municipality achieves this quite tangibly.

- one direct contact for citizens across villages

- more and more committed and competent volunteers – also from new user groups

- a mapping of all the area's potential: meeting places, activities and common goals
- ongoing relevant communication about the area

- both internally and externally

- a strategic plan for development in the area.

- Overview of local resources

With village clusters, the municipality gains better knowledge of local resources, wishes and needs and thus inspiration for municipal development work. Part of the work is about mapping the area's potential: meeting places, activities and common goals.

- Better dialogue with citizens

The joint organization of the cluster gives the municipality one unified entry point for dialogue with several villages. This facilitates dialogue and increases mutual trust and respect between the municipality and citizens.

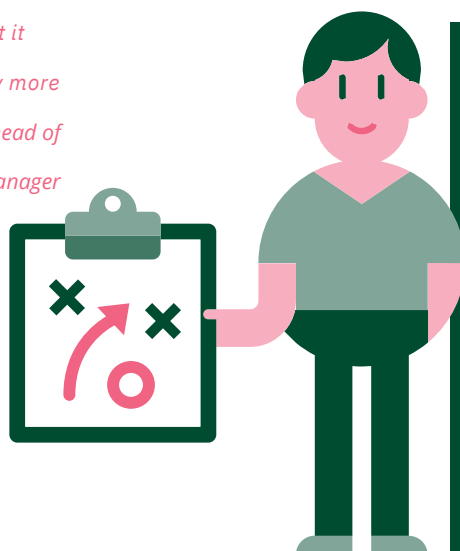
The role of the municipality

The strongest clusters grow from the bottom up and are driven by strong, local zealots. But even though village clusters are citizen-run, the municipality plays an important role. If you want to help the citizens to form village clusters in your municipality, it requires support both politically and at official level. - Ensure that there is political support for using resources on a process where the volunteers set the agenda.

- Appoint a contact person that both citizens and colleagues can go to, and set aside hours for work.

"You have to be aware that it requires new and different resources - not necessarily more resources."

Carsten Blomberg Hansen, head of department at DGI Local Development and project manager for Village Clusters



A constructive partner

The municipality's role in the cluster cooperation is to coordinate and spar, but not to drive the process. It is important to understand and recognize that a village cluster must grow from below. It is the citizens who know the local conditions best, and it is the citizens who designate areas of action, set the direction for the future of the cluster and lead the realization of the goals.

Good advice for you as municipal contact person:

- Give responsibility for and ownership of the cluster to the citizens in the cluster.
- Be available, guide, take part and create good relationships and trust. Motivate the volunteers in the cluster and help them create a clear vision for their idea.

- Explain to the volunteers about municipal policies, pools and workflows – e.g. in connection with budget negotiations - so that citizens get a better understanding of the municipality and your framework.

- Act as a bridge builder: When citizens seek knowledge about e.g. trail systems and conservation areas, you can pass on the contact to the right colleague.

- Provide help for self-help. If the citizens have to make a press release, you can help write it - or you can organize an evening for volunteers where you teach them to write themselves.

"It is good to have process and project manager knowledge. You don't have to manage it in the traditional sense, but start from the citizens' wishes and needs for cooperation and create trust."

Lotte Finnerup, rural district coordinator in Ringkøbing-Skjern Municipality

A good municipal contact person...

- has insight into the rural district area and the municipality's workflows and networks across disciplines

- is skilled in project management, process and coordination

- can support volunteers, form relationships, listen and contribute knowledge and inspiration – without managing the process.

"The consultant has been of great importance for sustainability and for guiding us through.

We couldn't have done that ourselves. The is important with professional help. Thank you for that!"

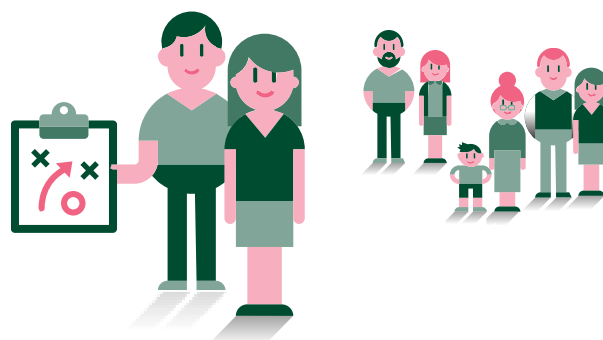
Steering group member in the Landet på Midtfyn pilot project

Drive and spirit from outside
Experience shows that an external, impartial consultant is essential to ensure the progress and direction of the project. A good process consultant who has dedicated time to the project can both create enthusiasm and cut through. The municipality can help by financing the external adviser. - Get external advice for the formation of the clusters

and
establishment

"Had the consultant not been there, we would have sat down and discussed our differences."

Steering group member in the pilot project Land between the fjords



Inspiring offers

A village cluster arises when citizens in different villages agree to share e.g. a sports hall or an assembly hall or to meet in a joint knitting, running or football club. The municipality cannot therefore start a new village cluster itself, but can present it as an offer that the citizens themselves have to work with. As a municipal official, you can contribute to the emergence of new village clusters by helping colleagues and citizens to discover village clusters as a method. - Inform about and inspire village clusters in-

tern in the municipality, e.g. via information meetings for local councils or study trips to village clusters.

- Clarify internally how you will support new villages

clusters – e.g. by allocating money to an external adviser – and tell the citizens about it.

"You cannot decide that now we want to work with village clusters - it must be a bottom-up process. But you can set it up as an offer. Make it clear that the municipality is willing. Then the citizens apply."

Lotte Finnerup, rural district coordinator in Ringkøbing-Skjern Municipality

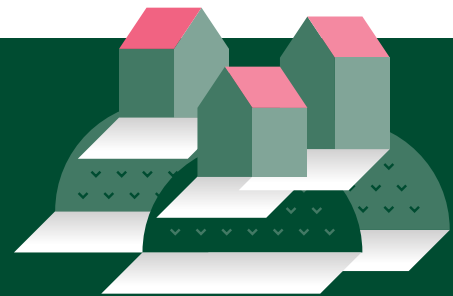
establish a village cluster – but the more the municipality invests, the further the cluster can reach and the more benefits the municipality gets in the long term. In the Village Clusters campaign, it has typically taken around 18 months and five phases to establish a village cluster. The municipality has been involved all the way along with an external consultant. In future initiatives for village clusters, the villages and the municipality will be able to work through all five phases or pick out the parts and elements that can best push the cooperation in the new cluster forward. The process will depend on the citizens' readiness, the area and the geography. As a starting point, expect the average working time for the municipal contact person to be 5-10 hours per month during the period the village cluster is established. After that, the cluster does not need more attention than the other rural towns in the municipality. Conversely, the municipality can save time compared to before, because the municipality now has dialogue with one unified village cluster instead of many different villages. In the campaign, it cost around DKK 400,000 to establish a village cluster, but less can also do it. The funds have primarily gone to the external process consultant and in addition to e.g. mapping and analysis of the local area.

A typical process

It takes time, patience and presence to

Start in 5 phases

Village clusters are developed in cooperation between the municipality and citizens, typically through five phases over 1.5 years. The graphic below describes a typical process in the campaign from start to finish. In future efforts, however, the municipality will have the opportunity to select and purchase individual elements. Read more about the process <http://landsbyklynger.dk/processen>



PHASE 1

Establishment

A steering group is formed with one up to special contact person from the municipality and an external consultant.

PHASE 2

Mapping

The cluster finds characteristics, potentials and meeting places.

PHASE 3

Vision

The steering group prioritizes which initiatives should be worked on further.

PHASE 4

Action plans

Concrete plans are made for the areas of action the cluster will work with.

PHASE 5

Implementation

The steering group makes a plan for the future organization of the cluster, etc.

Become part of the development

If the villages are to survive, it is necessary to look beyond town signs. The amendment to the law of 1 January 2019 obliges the municipalities to work strategically with the development of villages, and voluntary resources are invaluable in this regard. The village clusters have proven their worth as a model for cooperation between citizens and municipalities. The model has developed from a hypothesis and an idea into an actual, concrete tool that can be used as a catalyst for development in an area. If you want to know more about how you can contribute to new development in your municipality, you can contact the Secretariat for village clusters, which has experience and knowledge from 29 village clusters throughout the country, at sekretariat@landsbyklynger.dk. You can also call chief consultant Carsten Blomberg on phone 29 91 19 50 or consultant Lise Grønbæk on phone 40 19 87 41 for a non-binding chat about your challenges and opportunities. "There must be people who want to take the lead and want to challenge their own understanding of culture."

Jens Peter Jacobsen, rural district coordinator in Faaborg-Midtfyn Municipality

The Village Clusters campaign

- The feasibility study Village clusters as Sustainable Development Strategy - Opportunities, Barriers and Parameters was initiated in 2015 and uncovered existing village clusters as well as opportunities and barriers in working with village clusters.
- Five pilot projects were carried out in 2015- 2017 in Syddjurs, Faaborg-Midtfyn, Ringkøbing-Skjern, Vordingborg and Hjørring municipalities respectively.
- The Village Clusters campaign consists of 24 village clusters and runs until the end of 2019 – a total of 18 months.

