

VILLAGE CLUSTERS



THE FIRST
EXPERIENCES

2017





This folder has been prepared by the Secretariat for Village Clusters, DGI Landskontor, Vingsted Skovvej 1, 7182 Bredsten.

The leaflet conveys the main results of the report Evaluation of Pilot Project Village Clusters (2017), which gathers the results and experiences from five village clusters. Pilot project Landsbyklynger is a collaboration between Realdania, DGI and Lokale og Anlægsfonden. In 2017-18, the partners will, in collaboration with a number of the country's municipalities, establish a further 25 village clusters distributed throughout the country.

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See more about village clusters initiated by Realdania, DGI and Lokale og Anlægsfonden at www.landsbyklynger.dk.

CONTENT

4	PURPOSE AND DEFINITION
4	THE PURPOSE OF VILLAGE CLUSTERS THE DEFINITION OF A
4	VILLAGE CLUSTER THE CHALLENGE VILLAGES ARE
7	STRONGER WHEN THEY STAND TOGETHER
7	THIS IS HOW A VILLAGE CLUSTER BECOME FOCUS AREAS
8	
10	
11	FOCUS POINTS IN THE PROCESS
11	EXPERIENCES WITH THE FOCUS POINTS
14	VILLAGE CLUSTERS OF THE FUTURE

PURPOSE & DEFINITION

THE PURPOSE OF THE DEFINITION OF A VILLAGE CLUSTERS

Since 2015, Realdania, DGI and Lokale og Anlægsfonden have collaborated on the Village Clusters project. The purpose of the village clusters is to strengthen rural life. This is done by supporting new collaborations across villages, where the citizens, in collaboration with the municipality, prioritize and set common long-term goals for the entire cluster. The goal is for villages that are close to each other to cooperate on and prioritize different offers and facilities. Through this, the villages can strengthen the community and life in the villages, while at the same time optimizing the municipal service and operations.

A village cluster is a number of villages that cooperate on common strategic goals. This happens in a network structure, where the villages use each other's strengths to develop both the individual village and the entire cluster. Village clusters are about creating a common place identity, a social community and about gathering around and prioritizing shared physical facilities and activity opportunities. Village clusters are a model for village development which supports cooperation across villages and local areas. The model shows new ways of how cooperation can create the basis for a good life in the countryside.



"The purpose of village clusters is to support new collaborations across villages in order to thereby strengthen life in the countryside."



"A village cluster is a number of villages which cooperate in a network structure on common strategic goals."



VILLAGE CLUSTERS



THE CHALLENGE

The rural districts are in the midst of one of the biggest changes in recent times. While the larger cities experience growth, several of the smaller villages and local communities are left with significantly fewer inhabitants and jobs. This development requires that the individual local communities adapt. In the past, you could live, work and have an active leisure time in the village, but in recent years, many citizens in the rural areas have experienced that schools are closed, bus routes have been closed and merchants have turned the key. In parallel with this, the composition of the population in Denmark shows that, especially in rural areas, there are more and more elderly people and fewer people of working age.

1.2 million people live in the Danish villages today. Together with their catchment areas, the villages contain many voluntary citizens and active associations. But the changed population and social conditions mean that the villages must increasingly initiate new collaborations in order to maintain the quality of the existing offers. Only in this way can the rural districts continue to form the framework for the good life in the countryside.

VILLAGES ARE STRONGER WHEN THEY STAND TOGETHER

In 2014 and 2015, Realdania and DGI carried out the Village Clusters pilot project. Here, five village clusters were established in Syddjurs, Faaborg-Midtfyn, Ringkøbing-Skjern, Vordingborg and Hjørring municipalities respectively. The evaluation of the five pilot projects shows that villages are stronger when they stand together. That one

organizing villages in a cluster community strengthens cooperation and increases the villages' ability to take a long-term view of the development of the local area. This means that the formation of village clusters can be used as a planning tool to support the development of villages. This applies across villages and in the individual villages.



94 %

would recommend the project to other communities

87 %

believes that the project has strengthened the local communities' ability to cooperate

87 %

believe that the project has increased their ability to take a longer-term view of the development of the local area

HOW TO BECOME ONE VILLAGE CLUSTER TO

All clusters go through the same process in the establishment as a village cluster. The process consists of five phases and extends over 1½ years.

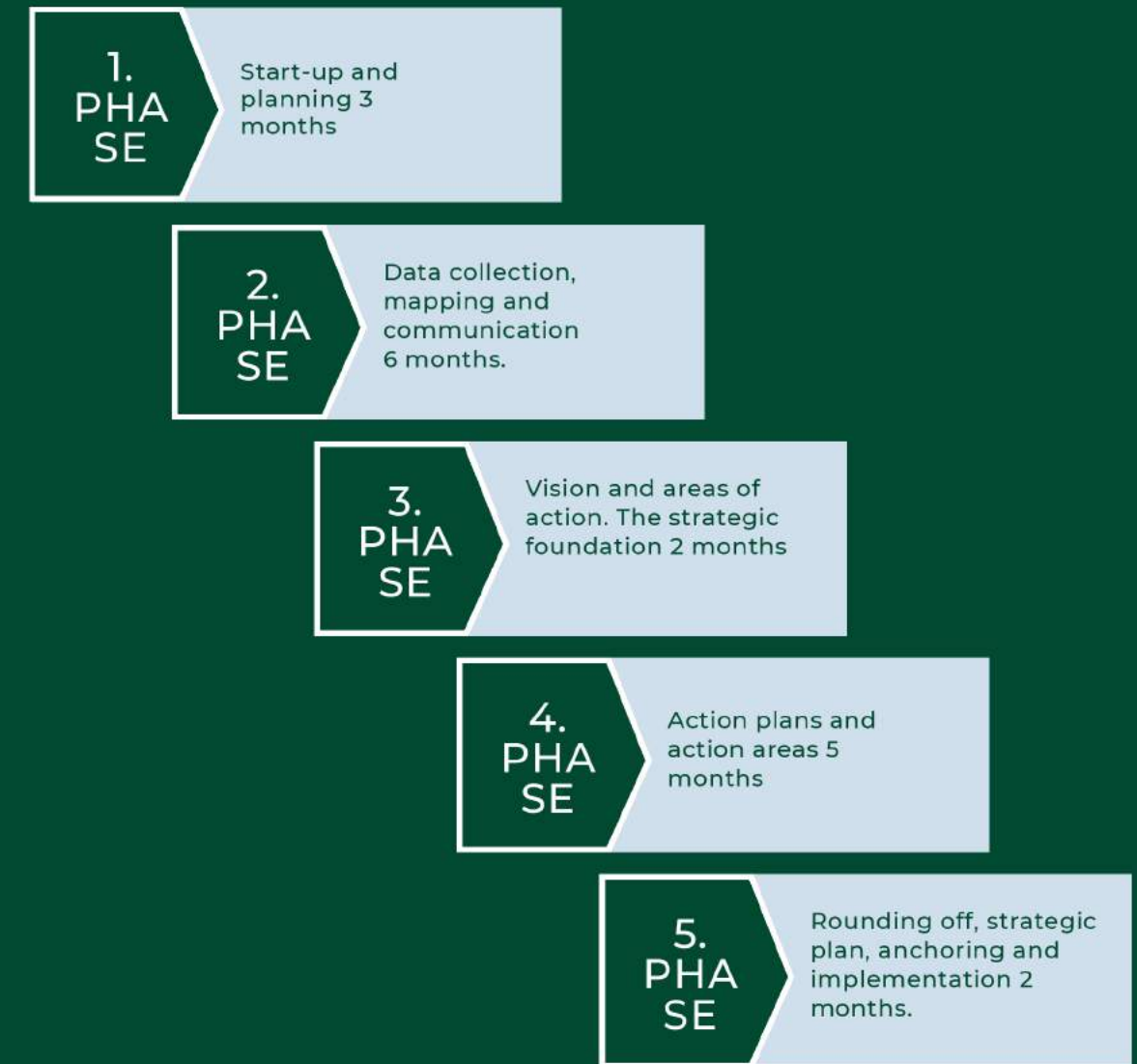
In the first phase, the cluster is established with a steering group, which will be responsible for the project and take care of its overall management. The project is also widely communicated, and volunteers are recruited who want to get involved in the new collaboration.

In the second phase, a mapping of the cluster is prepared with a focus on the potentials that can strengthen the cluster's common identity and development. This part consists, among other things, of a citizen survey, which is sent out to all citizens over the age of 16 in the cluster's geography. A common communication platform is also established in this phase.

In the third phase, work is done on the basis of the mapping from Phase 2 with a vision for the further work. Based on this vision, individual areas of action are selected, which will be prioritized going forward.

In the fourth phase, action plans and project descriptions are drawn up for the selected areas of action. In the fifth and final phase, the project is rounded off, and a strategic plan is drawn up, which acts as a benchmark for the long-term development of the area.

Throughout all the phases, the process is supported by a process consultant who supports the steering group's work and guides it on its way through the phases. The steering group consists of local volunteers and a representative from the municipality, who must help create synergy between the local initiatives and the municipal plans in the area.





FOCUS AREAS

FOCUS POINTS IN THE PROCESS

In Projekt Landsbyklynger, six focal points in particular form the basis for the work that takes place in the cluster. The six focal points are respectively organisation, communication, involvement, municipal cooperation, meeting places and range of activities. The focal points are important for the cluster's ability and capacity to become well-functioning and thus establish a successful village cluster. The focus points thus function throughout the process as targets for the clusters, and in this way they provide direction and structure for the establishment of the individual cluster. The focus points can be experienced as abstract and long-term, and therefore it is beneficial to also work with more concrete and short-term sub-goals, which give the volunteers an immediate gain.



"The six focus points in the project are organisation, communication, involvement, municipal cooperation, meeting places and range of activities."

EXPERIENCES WITH THE FOCUS POINTS

In the evaluation of Pilot Project Village Clusters, the participating steering group members were asked to relate to the work with the six focus areas. The extent to which they have succeeded in their work varies from cluster to cluster, but a number of general assessments emerge.

Organization

Specifically, a steering group is set up in each cluster, consisting of citizens from the various areas, a communal representative and an external process consultant who leads the steering group on its way through the phases. It is the organization that forms the foundation for the work and development that takes place in the cluster, and therefore the other goals will not be met unless the organization is in place. The establishment of the steering group must therefore be prioritized. In this connection, it is important to get volunteers with different skills in the steering group, so that they can complement each other.

The aim of the project is to establish a joint organization which coordinates across villages and known structures and, going forward, works with strategic perspectives for the cluster with respect for the individual villages.

83 %

believe overall that the project has built up a joint organisation, while 94% believe that the new organization is working forward with planned goals.

"We have gained a greater community in the local community. A feeling that together we can do more."
Steering group member

Communication

As part of the project, all the clusters get a common website, and they are encouraged to create a Facebook page or Facebook group.

The goal is to establish a strengthened and coordinated through this communication effort, which partly ensures information about the cluster to the citizens and partly ensures the involvement of the citizens.

86 %

believes that the collaboration has increased knowledge of the other villages and their activities. However, the evaluation also shows that the increased dialogue has not clearly led to better coordination. In connection with the strengthening of the common identity, 83% see a common website as an important element.

"Now we know a lot more about what happens in the small communities."
Steering group member

Involvement

Village clusters are a citizen-driven project. Without citizens' involvement and ownership, the cluster will not be successful. The citizens are the cornerstone as representatives in the steering group and in the established working groups, but also in the form of involvement of the wider population group in connection with, for example, the citizen survey and dialogue meetings.

The goal is in that connection *to involve citizens via questionnaire surveys, citizen and dialogue meetings and the establishment of working groups. To create coherence and ownership.*

49 %

believes that the project has succeeded satisfactorily in involving the citizens.

43 %

of the respondents believe that the project has strengthened volunteerism among the citizens, so that measures and activities that could not be established before can now be realized.

"Many citizens have become involved in a larger purpose. It is great that people will fight to create a wonderful area for themselves and for the citizens of the future."

Steering group member

Municipal cooperation

Despite the citizen-driven approach, cooperation with the municipality plays an important role. For example, a municipal representative participates in the steering group, and the municipality acts as a financial contributor. In this way, a strengthened connection is ensured between the villages and the plans for development that the commune has. The goal is in the project *to establish a strengthened co-work with the municipality so that citizens and the municipality can jointly optimize the municipal service.*

72 %

believes that cooperation with the municipality has been strengthened, so that citizens and the municipality have become better at collaborating and developing projects together.

"At the start of the village cluster project, the attitude towards the municipality was that it was biased, almost dismissive [...] after the village cluster project, there is a completely different perception that the citizens must play their cards right so that they get the most out of it. As part of a larger whole and not just as small, closed local communities."

Municipal representative

Meeting places

Meeting places are of great importance to everyday life and in everyday life strengthen the community in local communities. It is therefore crucial that a cluster's meeting places match the needs for common meeting places, who are among the citizens. The goal is to implement one mapping of meeting places in the cluster and working with a plan for adaptations.

In the clusters, a mapping of the cluster's meeting places has been carried out.

43 %

believes that the mapping has led to one or more adaptations.

"Our meeting places have been made visible. It is surprising that there were so many."

Steering group member

Activity offer

Activities are of great importance to the individual, and good activity offers help to make an area attractive, which can attract and retain citizens.

The goal is therefore to carry out a mapping of range of activities in the cluster and work with a plan for adaptations.

Through the mapping, citizens were asked for ideas for new activity offerings.

68 %

responds in the evaluation that the ideas have led to one or more measures of new activities or adaptations of already existing activities.

"The area's many activities have been made visible and thus we see new opportunities for collaboration."
Steering group member

VILLAGE CLUSTERS OF THE FUTURE

The evaluation of Pilot project Village clusters draws important lessons for future work with village clusters. In addition to concluding that villages are stronger when they stand together, the evaluation shows a large number of decisive perspectives.

Village clusters increase the social capital of villages

The establishment of village clusters leads to stronger cooperation between associations, networks and people. In short, the establishment of village clusters increases the villages' social capital.

"It has become obvious that it is necessary to collaborate across the cities."

Steering group member

Social capital is about trust and about networks between people. It is about the value you have by virtue of your social network through membership of an association, a group or a third community.

For citizens in rural areas, social capital is in practice about the experience of community and cohesion. Social capital is converted in everyday life in sustainable communities, where people exchange services, knowledge and set common goals that increase the joy of living in the countryside. The evaluation shows that village clusters strengthen this by creating better cooperation between people and building bridges between associations and networks in the cluster.

Cultivate the place-bound potentials

In the development of the village clusters, the focus must be on the site-bound potentials in the form of landscape, architectural, cultural, historical and human resources. In the pilot project Landsbyklynger, work has been done with the location-bound potentials, and the evaluation shows that the citizens in the individual clusters are a very large resource. It is the citizens who see the possibilities for cooperation between the villages. It is the citizens who have come up with proposals for adaptations of meeting places and proposals for new joint activities. And it is the citizens who have contributed





with knowledge and time to establish the cluster. By letting the citizens identify the local potentials, the local culture and the region-specific traditions are supported. Precisely the location-bound potentials are the foundation on which the cluster cooperation must be built.

"It has been an eye-opener in relation to the other parishes' potential and opportunities for collaboration across the board."

Steering group member

Strengthened communication is the way forward

By having a common website in the village cluster, the individual villages' communication is strengthened, and the cluster stands stronger. By having a common calendar, the individual villages can better coordinate and plan activities, while at the same time they are aware of what is going on in terms of events and other offers in the cluster. The improved communication therefore also strengthens the social capital, as the communication between the individual actors is improved.

"When there are several projects and activities going on at the same time, it is essential that those behind them get to talk together and ensure that synergy occurs rather than competition".

Process consultant

Citizen involvement is the key to success

Volunteering is changing today. The commitment of the volunteers and the number of volunteers are decisive for the development of a village cluster. The evaluation shows that in places where citizen involvement is successful, the ownership of development is placed in local hands. For many today, volunteering is acting

about creating something concrete in a matter that you are passionate about for a limited period of time. Here, the strength of the cluster method is that all citizens can put forward ideas. The strongest projects are formulated when it succeeds in involving the citizens in precisely what they are passionate about and know something about.

"Not all volunteers enjoy holding meetings, managing, organizing and coordinating. For many, it is about creating something concrete in shorter periods."

Steering group member

A new model for cooperation between the municipality and civil society

Village clusters give the municipalities one entry point for dialogue with several villages, and this gives the municipalities an overall overview of several villages' goals. The organization as a village cluster thus strengthens the relations and the mutual respect between the municipality and citizens, and it improves the cooperation between the municipality and civil society.

"The project has certainly developed the relationship between the municipality and the local community and the mutual respect for the better."

Municipal representative

The evaluation also shows that politicians and officials have opened their eyes to the area's voluntary resources, while the voluntary actors have gained an insight into how they know how to seek a broader and more strategic collaboration, where they stand together to solve more complex problems, has far greater influence on the municipality's decisions.

"The project has taken a big step towards an organization that can stand for strategic cooperation going forward."

Municipal representative

It requires a boost to get the clusters off to a good start

The process consultant plays a decisive role in the formation and establishment of the clusters. The volunteers do the same, but outside help is needed to boost cooperation so that the cluster project can grow large. The evaluation shows that the formation of the clusters could not be done without a facilitating consultant. This duality, where the citizens are on the one hand the strength and driving force of the clusters, but on the other hand need an outside consultant to run it well, shows an inherent paradox in the model; It is the citizens who designate areas of action, set the direction for the cluster's future and lead the realization of the goals. But it requires a boost to get the clusters off to a good start in the form of an outside consultant who ensures progress and direction for the project.

"The consultant has been of great importance for sustainability and for pointing out and guiding us through. We couldn't have done that ourselves. Professional help is important! Thank you for that."

Steering group member



