

# KOM MUNE FOR FRA

- Rethinking Local Government

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***We are in the midst of the most fundamental transformation of welfare since the development of the welfare society***

Aarhus and the Danish municipalities are in the midst of the most fundamental transformation of welfare since the development of the welfare society. We are breaking with the classical conception of welfare as a standard benefit or service. With the time when a caseworker, eyes glued to the Act on Social Services or some other piece of legislation, could offer a standardized product that the municipality supplied to all of its citizens.

Following a formula for how to transfer some specific quantity of welfare from municipality to citizen doesn't work very well. Instead, welfare must be created in the interplay between citizen, municipal caseworker, businesses, civil society and other forces.

In the Danish municipal context, the development of welfare can be divided into three phases:

The first phase was about the establishment and expansion of the welfare state, and was heavily influenced by industrial society and its structures.

Phase two was characterised by an increasing recognition of the fact that a one-size-fits-all approach does not necessarily provide the support that citizens need.

In phase three, which is where we are right now, the municipalities have begun to experiment with developing new forms of welfare in collaboration with citizens and other contributors in society. In Aarhus this initiative is called 'kommune forfra', which means something like 'restarting or rebooting municipal welfare'. In other

municipalities, it's referred to as sustainable welfare, new welfare, welfare rethought, and so on.

The plan is to start rolling out initiatives on a scale that really makes a difference and brings about real change after an implementation and test phase.

But these changes have to be experienced as legitimate by our citizens, and this is what has to determine the pace of implementation.

***THERE ARE TWO MOTIVATING FACTORS***

1. Strained finances and demographic challenges (growth in the number of senior citizens and children)
2. Increasing expectations in relation to the level of service citizens expect the municipality to deliver in terms of welfare.

If we are to succeed in meeting citizens' expectations and contribute to solving the problems they encounter in their everyday lives and to help them pursue their dreams and ambitions, we have to devote resources to changing the welfare system.

We are moving away from fixed ideas about what our citizens need and what kinds of standards or solutions are required to meet those needs. Instead, we need to shift our focus towards citizens' dreams and ambitions about what kind of life they want to live.

This is a shift we're currently in the midst of, which we want to encourage and develop even further.

For example, giving the long-term unemployed access to funds they administer themselves in order to bring them closer to the job market (such as removal of tattoos or debt counselling).

Or microloans to help realize our citizens' dreams. In this scenario, responsibility for welfare is entirely transferred to the individual citizen who wants to take responsibility for their life.

Another example is an app which creates a platform which makes it easy for citizens to participate actively and become co-responsible for helping to maintain the community's public spaces.

This is also why we set up a citizenship committee to help develop the municipality and relationships to other contributors in and around the municipality.

But we still have to make decisions. Including decisions that aren't pleasant for individual citizens.

In this connection, it's important that we are attentive to the citizen or citizens affected by the decision. That we are able to meet them eye-to-eye and as equals. We must seek out dialogue in order to create a constructive situation, not an antagonistic one. Find solutions together so that we can comply with the rules while at the same time building acceptance and legitimacy in relation to the individual citizens who are affected.

We are tasked with the exercise of authority, and we cannot decline this role. We have to assume it actively. We can't 'simply' focus on the dreams and ambitions of our citizens, because we operate in a different framework. On the other hand, the relational meeting with the individual citizen

becomes absolutely crucial. Because how we handle dialogue and interaction with individual citizens is decisive in enabling them to move forward in their lives!

We are still far from our goal. But we have made good progress on this long journey towards a very different and better future for the municipality and welfare services. A future in which there will be much greater focus on supporting and facilitating the development of relationships between citizens, between citizens and the municipality, between civil society and the municipality, between businesses and the municipality, and so on.

In the widest sense, this is about transitioning from a welfare state to a welfare society. A society in which active citizenship plays a much greater role than today. The municipality must play a smaller role where active citizenship can take over in order to focus instead on arenas in which there is the greatest need for municipal welfare services.

This also means that the city must clarify the limits of what municipal services can contribute to. A good example is when the City Council stopped funding the city's Botanical Garden. This provoked a group of citizens so much that they formed an association, Friends of the Botanical Garden, and have taken over caring for the garden – with the city's blessing. In other words, responsibility has been transferred from the municipality to the community.

As a politician in Aarhus, this means that we have to practice taking one step forward and two steps back.

A step forward in relation to promoting development and getting out there on the front lines to engage

citizens in dialogue about rethinking welfare. A dialogue focussed on the necessity of active citizenship. A dialogue about how the municipality can reduce the scope of its services with a focus on its core mission, while at the same time handing over more responsibility to citizens and active citizenship. Just as many private companies have been forced to prioritize in order to optimize their core business in the wake of the financial crisis.

Because we think that it is both possible and necessary to take two steps backward, precisely in order to hand over responsibility to citizens themselves and to active citizenship, which involves taking responsibility for our own lives and for the communities we are part of.

For this reason, the encounter between citizens and municipal employees must promote a new relationship in which both sides take on new roles. Citizens have to increase their responsibility and will to contribute, and municipal employees have to bring their competencies into play in new ways.

Our highly trained employees can sometimes have fixed ideas about what our citizens need. But now their professional competencies and experience must be brought into play with a focus on the individual citizen's desires, needs and dreams about what kind of life they want to live.

This development will not happen by itself. It requires conscious effort on the part of all of us, and to begin with, on the part of the City Council. We have to take the lead, put this development on the agenda and gain broad acceptance among our citizens. Because development and the positive effects won't come about

until we have developed acceptance and legitimacy.

The tools at our disposal include digitization, new welfare technologies, nudging, new manager and employee roles, citizenship, co-creation, and so on.

The municipality has skilled, committed employees and managers who are constantly working to find answers and new solutions – and they're doing a great job! But we must never cease to seek help and input from others. This is why we got involved in the partnership behind the Matchpoint 2018 seminars, and we're looking forward to discovering what new thoughts emerge from it...

It's a bumpy road full of dilemmas, and that's why we have sent out "KOMMUNE FORFRA" as a call for debate and discussion among citizens, academics, politicians, professionals, civic society etc. We need to address the dilemmas to find our way forward.

### ***In sum:***

Aarhus is in the process of rethinking welfare and the municipality's own role in that connection.

Aarhus has attempted to formulate what kind of development and process we find ourselves in the midst of. We haven't reached the goal – not by a long shot – but we're on the way. On the way in dialogue with all of the contributors without whom we cannot succeed. Because we can never succeed alone – only together. While it takes courage for all of us, we believe that being part of the municipality will be more meaningful for all compared to the present day – especially considering the future prospects of the municipality as we know it today.

# Rethinking ...

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service	community
citizen involvement	municipal involvement
vanguard	rearguard
building code violations	life between the buildings
system	person
do for	together with
next of kin	family and friends
expert	sparring partner
library	citizen center
help	self help
volunteer	citizen
decision	dialogue
skillset	attitude
permanent	temporary
client	partner
answer	question
standards	dreams
talk about	talk with



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