

Mondag Morgen, Denmark

Public sector leaders in Denmark have the good fortune of getting a weekly magazine dedicated to innovation in the public sector. The magazine called *Mondag Morgen* (Monday Morning) benefits from the dynamic leadership of its editor Mrs. Lisbeth Knudsen. Last February, the magazine was dedicated to the *New Synthesis* (NS) and in particular to the work of public sector leaders at the municipal, regional and national levels who are using the NS exploratory cycle and NS concepts to lead ambitious public transformations. Denmark has been a long-time partner of the NS Initiative.

Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's opening speech in the Folketing, on October 2019, was a call for action to rethink the relationships between government and citizens. It brought to the forefront the need for a different kind of relationship between the public sector, citizens and communities to encourage a sense of “closeness”, proximity and togetherness in achieving better societal results. Public sector reforms are not new to Denmark; in fact, there have been multiple waves of reform over the years. The government agenda outlined by the Prime Minister signals a shift of focus from productivity to the overall effectiveness of the social state, confidence, trust and the wellbeing of citizens and communities. Several municipalities are already pursuing ambitious reforms that are re-inventing the social state to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century

The Danish municipalities and regions are confronted to a number of complex challenges such as :an aging population combined with a decreasing workforce ; the fiscal sustainability of existing social safety nets; the need to prepare, attract and retain talents in high demand; the accelerating velocity of climate changes , etc.

What can be Learned from Municipalities in Denmark?

Several municipalities have been inspired by NS in recent years. Managers and employees are given more freedom to experiment. There are deliberate efforts to give citizens a greater role in the design and delivery of social policies and programs. Interdisciplinarity and collaborative approaches across government and with the private sector and civil society are encouraged. There are systematic efforts to ensure the active engagement of citizens.

Some municipalities such as Aarhus, Vejle, Hvidovre, Hørsholm and Næstved have adopted the NS exploratory cycle to generate innovative solutions, build confidence and uncover new pathways to a renewed and sustainable welfare society.

Vejle

Vejle is one of the municipalities that has been influenced by NS. It is a member of an international network of 100 resilient cities. Under the leadership of Niels Ågesen (municipal director), Vejle is focussing on thinking across issues ,finding solutions that engage citizens and generating societal results of higher public value .For instance Vejle, like other municipalities, is threatened by rising water

levels. The city has generated a plan through the active engagement of citizens that includes creating recreational paths, lakes and other public spaces that beautify the city, prevent erosion and improve the quality of life.

It generates new public spaces and redirects excess water. A partnership with private companies has contributed to the creation of more reliable sources of drinkable water.

Vejle's has successfully integrated kindergartens, nursing homes and residential care for people with mental health problems into a mutually beneficial network of organizations. They share common green spaces and common services. They conduct projects and go on trips together to fight loneliness. The children do their daily exercise at the nursing homes. They help when food must be served and benefit from the affection of older people. Mutual help between adults and children, employees and families lead to better results, improved life satisfaction and a lower overall cost for society as a whole

Næstved

In Næstved, public servants are thinking of welfare and social safety nets in new ways. The director of the municipality Hanne Dollerup, is using the four NS functions of *compliance*, *performance*, *emergence and resilience* to generate innovative welfare solutions and to build a sense of "togetherness" among citizens and in their relationship with government.

The municipality is focussing on the integration of young people at risk by involving them in decision making process. Young people working along side public servants jointly set a course of action relevant to their needs. The municipality is using co-creation and collaboration as a lever for change. The leaders of this initiative are confident that it will lead to better results for the participants and the municipality.

Aarhus

Aarhus is amid generating game-changing guidelines for the municipality's workforce. If approved by the municipality council, this would have major consequences for public servants, and it would transform the relationship with citizens.

For instance, the guidelines recognize that the role of the municipality and of all its employees is to create public value and to generate results of high value for society by working with citizens and private, civic and other public organisations. Aarhus's Mayor, *Jacob Bundsgaard*, argues that social welfare and wellbeing can only be achieved by working alongside citizens, and that there is a great appetite for people to contribute to the welfare of Aarhus.

Learning from Denmark

Denmark is one of the best performing society in the world. It enjoys one of the highest standards of living and some of the best results in the world for learning, health outcomes, innovations, life satisfaction and trust in government.

The NS does not provide answers, but it helps public sector leaders to explore systematically and consciously the expanding space of possibilities open to government to build the capacity for collective

problem solving. Governing is about inventing new ways to build and share a better future. Denmark is a country worth learning from. It has a long tradition of innovation in the public sphere. It is well positioned to re-invent a welfare state adapted to the challenges of the 21st century.