Providing space and place for public service innovation and new leadership: three new narratives from Aarhus

Case study based on the CHANGE! study visit held in Aarhus, Denmark, on 15-16 September, 2017 Ferenc Szigeti-Böröcz





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If you bring up a challenge, you are already part of the solution.

Tine Holm Mathiasen, Citizenship Coordinator, Mayor's Department

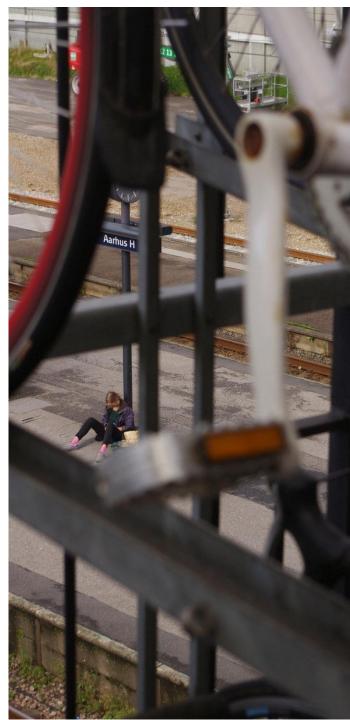
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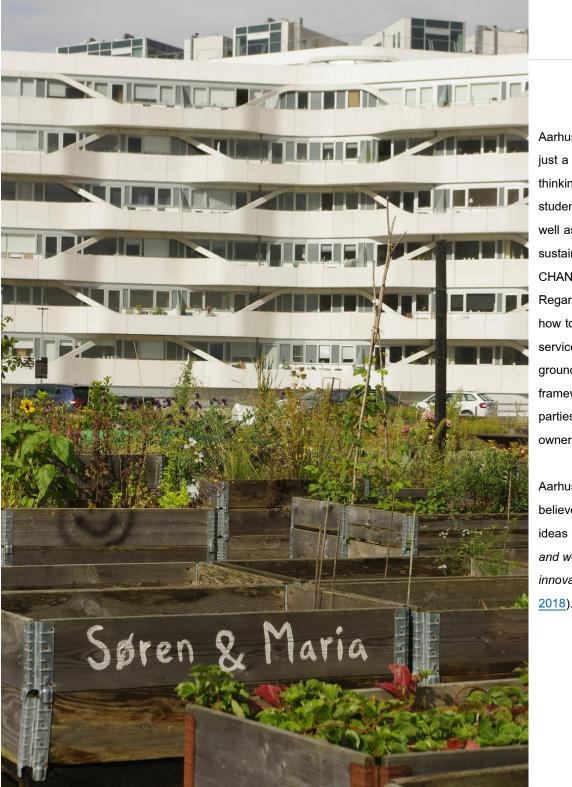
1. Let's Re-Think! - why CHANGE! partner cities met in Aarhus

Regarding innovation, leadership, trust, community engagement, and volunteering, Denmark - the world's happiest nation - undoubtedly has a good reputation. Just think about the fact that, not only is 40% of the country's energy needs met by wind turbines, 75% of these turbines are owned by local communities. You can also think about societal challenges, the activist Selina Juul for example, who reduced Danish food-waste by 20% in just five years. It is also widely known that Denmark has a long tradition of volunteering and active citizenship among its population, yet behind the trendy expression "hygge" (which means well-being and has recently gone viral – see Meik Wiking's book about "hygge") there are activities strongly related to community building: for example, creating a pop-up mini-library on a street corner, organising a swap with friend or having a spot in an urban garden — these are very much "hyggelig".

Although Aarhus has been a centre for research and education in the Nordic countries, and home to Aarhus University (Scandinavia's largest university) for many years, its industrial face and huge port has kept it in the capital's shadow. However, it is currently Europe's Capital of Culture, which translates into a real opportunity for the city to consciously mobilise its inner energies.

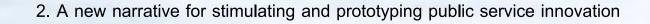
With a population of 320,000, Aarhus is Denmark's second-largest and fastest-growing city in the country. In the past ten years, the city has received 15,000 new residents and created 20,000 new jobs, the majority within the knowledge, service, and innovation industries. Being a city of engaged citizens, with innovative businesses and students from all over the world, Aarhus is characterised by a strong spirit of cooperation and social cohesion. The symbol of Aarhus' visible transition is DOKK1, Scandinavia's largest public library at the regenerated waterfront, where several of Denmark's leading innovators have also planted their headquarters.





Aarhus's motto in this special year is 'Let's Rethink'. This is definitely much more than just a theme – it is a mind-set for change, innovation and courage, a progressive way of thinking and acting smarter. Under this flagship the city invites everyone - its residents, students, politicians, civil servants, business communities, and peer cities in Denmark as well as Europe - to rethink standard values such as democracy, citizenship, sustainability, and diversity. The municipality has a key role in this change process so CHANGE! partner cities came to Aarhus to understand how it facilitates the change. Regarding the Collaborative Framework, Aarhus is a great example for demonstrating how to sustain outcomes-oriented, well-brokered and incentivised collaboration in public service delivery through new models of leadership, innovation and agility. Aarhus offers ground-breaking (but nonetheless rather simple) examples of how to create an open framework which allows for the municipality to be constantly challenged by outside parties regarding issues such as innovation and new models of leadership and ownership.

Aarhus is currently rethinking welfare through voluntarism and social action because they believe that active citizens are the key components in rethinking the traditional roles and ideas of welfare. "In Aarhus, there is a belief that there is always room for improvement, and we do not shy away from taking on big challenges. Whether it is giant leaps in innovation or small steps in efficiency" (Aarhus for European Volunteering Capital in



CENTER FOR INNOVATION IN AARHUS

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Innovation means finding new and creative ways to achieve results. Innovation, by definition, cannot be prescribed, but we are learning more and more about the conditions that encourage it: an openness to new ideas (e.g. see the CHANGE! <u>case study</u> on Amarante explaining how leaders got insights to prepare a new social innovation policy), flexible organizational structures (e.g. see the CHANGE! <u>case study</u> on Gdansk about its participatory policies), the ability to learn from failure (e.g. see how leaders in Amarante leant from failure linked to participatory budgets) and a focus on outcomes combined with a degree of creativity concerning the means required to get there (Kippin, 2015).

Innovation in public services means putting the citizen, family and community at the centre of policy thinking. Thus, the main question here is how to stimulate innovation within public organisations and especially regarding public services? Whatever thematic field we talk about, innovation and design needs time and place/space dedicated to it. This is offered to the municipal staff of Aarhus by the Center for Innovation in Aarhus (CFIA).

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CFIA looks like something between a designed training room, a theatre studio, and a fab lab, and is symbolically located in DOKK1, a brilliant location as it is one of the most powerful examples of democratic architecture — a place to learn, share and gather. The idea of CFIA was born in 2014 with the new strategy on innovation in Aarhus, entitled "New roads to welfare". The operational model behind CFIA is simple: it is funded by a cross-departmental fund and CFIA employs four full-time consultants (process facilitators and specialists on design thinking methods). Ownership and engagement is provided by the cross-departmental board of directors. Its main goal is to solve future challenges in a smarter and more efficient way, and to reach ambitious goals for growth and development. CFIA, together with project initiators, organises the design process and involves all internal and external stakeholders.

Aarhus City Council has appointed five strategic areas for innovation: 1. Increased self-sufficiency; 2. Promote equality; 3. The city's development and growth; 4. Prevention and early action; 5. Increased quality of life for adults and elderly citizens with disabilities. These so called "wicked problems" and many other public challenges cut across municipal silos and as such the solutions must be developed by bringing stakeholders together across silos in a systematic design process facilitated by CFIA. CFIA also supports innovation across municipal silos through the facilitation of a cross-departmental innovation network of approximately 30 selected employees. Furthermore, as a physical space it is a common meeting place with an excellent workshop zone and a temporary office spaces for those municipal employees working on cross-departmental innovation projects.

CFIA operates as a design agency within the municipality across all departments and applies a design thinking approach focusing on a deep understanding of people when innovating welfare services. In doing so, CFIA brings together political and strategic leadership, professionals, and citizens in the development of solutions and services that create public value and effect both the citizens of Aarhus and the municipality. CFIA involves citizens and civil society in the creation of new and improved services.



Innovation partner



When we visited the CFIA, a group of employees from the educational department and stakeholders (school teachers and managers) prototyped a Danish adaption of an American inclusion programme for students with autism in community schools called "Nest". But on CFIA's website there are many more case studies, what follows is a summary of the most interesting ones.

For example, the Center for Urban Development and Mobility in Aarhus wanted to further develop the coastal road that crosses the city by using a new and user-centred approach. So the Center for Urban Development and Mobility wished a greater insight into how to address the challenge of one of the city's main thoroughfare, and CFIA helped make the issue more user-centred.

Another example is when the Cultural Advisor asked CFIA to help open a dynamic cooperation process in the design of the forthcoming cultural policy. The aim was to develop a cultural policy that would be relevant to the whole of the municipality by gaining and involving knowledge from its other departments. CFIA organised the cross-cutting process and served as co-organizer and process facilitator.

To gain insight into the ideas and expectation of the politicians from various political parties on the subject of a cultural policy, CFIA prepared a "Culture Kit" for each political member of the board of cultural affairs. The members had to visualise and document ideas for themes as well as describe what a good cultural policy in Aarhus would be. Then the project team held five specific events called "Conversation Salons". At each salon, cultural actors, representatives of NGOs, municipal staff from different departments, and politicians were invited to discuss agendas like: "Culture as bridge-building", "Equal learning communities" and "The city as a cultural element". The many different insights and points from the discussions were included in the Cultural Administration's subsequent work on designing the new cultural policy.







The Cultural Administration has gained new insights and gained hands-on experience involving the users in their work towards a new cultural policy. The collaborative cooperation has also given inspiration and concrete input to the design of the forthcoming cultural policy, qualifying the policy and making it more relevant across the municipality.

In the case of "home, dear home", CFIA worked on transforming political visions into everyday practice in five selected nursing homes. The political vision is to make nursing homes more "homely" and personal to residents — a place where citizens would want to live out the rest of their lives. In this assignment, CFIA, together with the initiators, conducted comprehensive field work in the five nursing homes, generating insight into what homeliness can look like. The insights from this first phase have been transformed into ideas that the participants have continually tested "at home" in the nursing homes. Through a series of workshops, the ideas have been further qualified and concretized by employees and the management. In conclusion, each nursing home has developed their own operational plan to help them implement a long list of initiatives which in time should make citizens feel at home in their nursing home.

On the top of that, CFIA has gathered experiences from 28 different municipal innovation projects that were carried out and finalized *before* CFIA existed. This collection of experiences (*Inspiration Catalogue*) aims to create a stronger foundation of knowledge for future innovation initiatives such as the further development of CFIA itself. Within this assignment, CFIA has collected and conveyed experience of "making" innovation in the municipality of Aarhus. Representatives from all projects were invited to a workshop, where project leaders discussed each other's perspectives and experiences about various topics such as "What has helped innovation on the way," "What made it difficult", "What can be done differently".

"Although there are smaller conflicts within and between departments as it is not always easy to let an employee go to CFIA for a week of prototyping, staff members in general feel themselves encouraged as there is institutionalised space (strategy) and place for innovation" summarised Johanne Mose Entwistle, a CFIA staff member what is the main feature (and challenge) of CFIA.

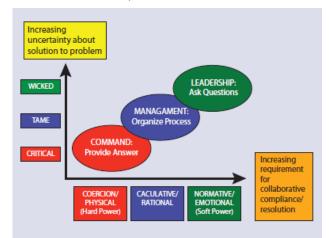
CFIA's work is very much in line with European Commission's recommendations summed up within the <u>report</u> "Powering European Public Sector Innovation: Towards a New Architecture". This essential report suggests among others that a "critical mass" of decision-makers, leaders and 'doers' must have the right mind-set, skills and support to drive innovation within the public sector (the intent is to focus on 50,000 key actors in the public sector). CFIA-like activities can be effective to understand innovation approaches, techniques and tools, to promote innovation in own organizations, and to be able to lead specific innovation initiatives. The report also suggests having an innovation toolbox (similar to the Inspiration Catalogue) consisting of 1. a coherent set of tools focusing on collaborative innovation processes, including methodologies in human centred design and co-creation; and 2. comprehensive inventory of 'tools of government': a repository of innovative new approaches which may be applied by policy makers and public managers to achieve better public services and outcomes.

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3. A new narrative for socially innovative leadership:The Active Citizenship Policy

Another simple but revolutionary policy tool in Aarhus is to let the administration be constantly challenged. This is the Active Citizenship Policy. This model explains very well the attributes of 'leadership' and 'agility' within the Collaborative Framework. Sustaining effective collaboration requires consistent quality leadership, creating a shared vision at the top of the organization or partnership, but also the means to catalyse behavioural and operational change at the delivery level. There are many manuals on "good leadership", but what does it take to lead effective collaborations? According to the Collaborative Framework (Kippin, 2015) good leadership within the collaborative public services:

- is adaptive for complex challenges,
- puts community first,
- has the critical skills of mediation,
- has skills, networks and mind-set to bring together public, private and social actors,
- is able to give up control,
- can motivate teams,
- is trustable as trust is the glue in cooperation.



Related to collaborative public services agility basically means sustainability of innovation. "Agility in this context is about

being adaptive to change, capable of communicating across a range of organizational cultures, and sustaining a strategic focus

on long-term outcomes over short term returns or targets. It is a "cycle of continuous improvement", reflecting the cycle of "direction setting, planning, implementation and delivery and review" (Kippin, 2015). Agility is about "solutionism" - being constantly open for creative problem solving. There is an interesting research on the decline of trust in the political class made by The Young Foundation, whose findings indicate that "the public values of emotional intelligence, honesty, integrity and humility were the most admired leadership attributes for young people".

The literature on leadership is indeed long, but Keith Grint's piece of work on "Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions: the Role of Leadership" is worth mentioning here as the topic the tackling of complex societal challenges. "We know a lot about organisational change but despite - or perhaps because - the numbers of change models around most change initiatives fail. In his study Grint suggest that this failure might be to do with our framing of the problem and consequent approach to resolving it. It suggests that differentiating between Tame, Wicked and Critical problems, and associating these with Management, Leadership and Command, might be a way forward. It then considers the role of default cultures and how these persuade us to engage 'elegant' - that is internally coherent - responses. These may be fine for Tame or Critical problems but Wicked problems need us to go beyond internally coherent approaches and adopt so called 'Clumsy Solutions' that use the skills of "bricoleurs" to pragmatically engage whatever comes to hand to address these most complex problems" – see the above chart.



In Aarhus a rather simple tool intends to embed clumsy solutions from the bottom-up. Under the Local Government Act the city established a Citizenship Committee that consisted of 8 politicians and 8 citizens whose job was to "challenge the municipal practice and inspire a new practice of citizenship". Volunteer citizens were selected through a long process in which different stakeholders organised innovative meetings (dinner parties) outside of the city hall to get new voices on board. Committee members were tasked with things such as: rethinking the roles and responsibilities of politicians, administrators and citizens; and imagining new cooperation models related to welfare and public services to revolutionise communication between politicians and citizens.

The Committee worked as an advisory committee for the council, but the fact that a citizen had been selected as chair and not a politician highlights local politicians' commitment towards the Committee and its work to set up new visions and generate new ideas. The final result of the committee was the creation of the <u>Active Citizenship Policy</u>, a political manifesto, co-created by citizens, businesses, associations, volunteers, municipal employees, educational institutions and politicians in 2014-15 (more than 700 people contributed to the policy). The ambition behind the development of the active citizenship policy was to create:

- A broad and open-minded process of involvement which gave all involved parties an opportunity to discuss the active citizenship themes which matter to them, and to contribute topics and formulations to be included in the policy.
- A synthesis of the many contributions from the involved parties followed by an open consultation process with plenty of time for the submission of consultation responses and their consideration.
- An accessible, relevant, ambitious and durable policy which can serve as a framework and direction for active citizenship in Aarhus.
- While the City Council is formally responsible for the policy, making it live is a shared responsibility for all Aarhus citizens.
- The active citizenship policy will constitute the foundation for the future development of Aarhus and the municipality's welfare services and tasks.

4. New narratives for community participation: Everyday Activism

and the Warm Welcome Society

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4.1. Let's rethink volunteering!

Strongly in line with the Active Citizenship policy, it seems that Aarhus can even say something new related to community engagement, and in Aarhus, which will be the European Capital of Volunteering in 2018, this question is about rethinking volunteerism. "*If the administration' behaviour is not fully supportive and does not see residents and their initiatives as completely equal, the engagement loses its potential. But public agencies and services really need new paths, inspired by residents. So how can we scale-up due grass-root initiatives, since the question itself is from a headquarter mind-set that kills the initiative" – asks Paul Natorp co-founder of a local NGO <u>Sager der Samler</u> (whose slogan is 'everyday activism') during its <u>Rethink Activism Festival</u>, the people' festival, organised within the European Capital of Culture programme.*

Sager der Samler is an NGO dealing with "social fantasy". Its aim is to empower people to take action. Besides having innovative local social actions (e.g. dumpster-diving café, where people with different backgrounds cook together in a park using 'food-waste'; the mentorship programme Social Health, in which local university students work as bridge builders and help socially disadvantaged people access health services; or Anaobaba TV, an innovation from local migrants enabling refugee parents living in Denmark to teach their remote family about Danish culture), the operation of this NGO (and especially the festival) highlights some core questions relevant to people-powered services and public service innovation: the need to redefine volunteering in the 21st Century. Volunteering, of course, is also the subject of 'Rethink' in Aarhus.

The UN General Assembly's concept of volunteerism insists on: activities undertaken of free will, for the general public good, and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor. The UN Volunteer Programme outlines four types of volunteerism: mutual aid/self-help; philanthropy and service to others; civic participation; and advocacy and campaigning. Indeed, the word "volunteering" can conjure up

negative connotations for some in civil society because they think that volunteering, whilst nice, is not sufficiently drastic a measure for coping with today's unprecedented societal challenges. But this question is also seen from the other side: the strong need for open governance, participation methods and co-creation opens new ways of collaboration between public agencies and social activists. This phenomena is expressed in the term "everyday activist".

So, what is the "problem" with volunteering? Instead of addressing the root causes of societal problems, volunteering is often seen as a humanitarian action which ameliorates a variety of problems, and which can even improve services, but it does not create real change. "Activism on the other hand is associated with advocacy, campaigning and social disobedience undertaken with the explicit aim of systemic social, economic and political change. It is increasingly being recognized that a key question facing civil society is how to foster greater respect and dialogue between these two worlds so that they might find new ways of engagement around shared goals of development and justice. Volunteering involving advocacy to bring about change in governance and that which promotes civic engagement naturally merges with social activism in purpose and strategy. In this era of technological advancements especially in social media, these avenues have been expanded and people have been voicing out their cries and concerns whilst providing help through these channels. Online activism and online volunteering have become powerful weapons of change in various communities" (Nina Eliasoph, 2013).

Social activism starts at the same point as volunteering – people want to make a change in their community. By its nature volunteering potentially promotes democracy, but activisms claims democracy. Societal challenges are so visible now all around the world that instead of treating symptoms, more and more volunteers start to wonder about causes, so they become social activists and active citizens. Volunteers today are challenged in several ways, including social media: they realise that they might help more people more effectively if they spend the same number of hours as activists, pressuring politicians to change policies. They might feel less good about doing volunteer work but it can work better.

In Aarhus there is space for active citizenship provided by the Active Citizenship Policy, and Rethink Activism has the potential to fill that space. Aarhus is also about rethinking citizenship, and Rethink Activism is about redefining the ethos that civic organisation shall and can do "good" only. As the Rethink Activist Festival states: "*significant enthusiasts in business, cultural and socially disadvantaged groups come together to create an 'Experimentarium', to explore the future of democratic, ethical, creative and sustainable cities. The aim is to highlight contemporary activism that makes up for passivity and replaces confrontation with creativity and vigour - and to bring activism into play as a force that renews society from the bottom, creating a new democratic culture. These activists turn their surroundings into cultural, environmental, social and economic community-learning labs that rethink a small part of the world at eye level with all interested participants. The knowledge and vision of the actors involved will be made tangible, and citizens are invited to experience, co-create and debate". Paul Natorp's vision regarding his own question raised at the festival is to make activists heroes and transform the city as a place for social movements through everyday activism.*

4.2. The Warm Welcome Society

VANEBRUDSPALÆET



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Due to its university and high number of innovative companies, Aarhus has a large number of foreign residents, thus it has a great and untapped potential — like many other cities in Europe. The passionate founder of The Warm Welcome Society, Thomas Vovemod, introduces new citizens to diverse communities in Aarhus and the city council fully supports this action. No magic, as simple as that. The Warm Welcome Society was not a subject of the study visit due to a lack of time, but participants of a previous staff exchange had a chance to get to know it, and there are articles published on the CHANGE! mini-site dealing with this topic. Below we highlight the initiative's most important factors in terms of citizenship and engagement, based on the article published by Mari-Louise Olsson Hattesen.

The Warm Welcome Society is an initiative developed by the non-profit organization Givisme that strives to vitalize and strengthen citizenship in Aarhus. The Warm Welcome Society seeks to give new citizens the best possible start when establishing a life in Aarhus. This unique concept recognizes the importance of creating a social foundation that enables new citizens to practise and share interests, communities and everyday life. Through this (cheap) approach new citizens in Aarhus can become acquainted with a wide range of communities that match their interests and hobbies. Through no less than 88 meetings with 11 themes of interests, the Warm Welcome Society connects people and local communities. It points to the fact that there is a need for activities that take place outside the environment of education or the workplace. Therefore, the Warm Welcome Society strives to create positive interpersonal meetings by introducing and connecting individuals to different communities. The activities take place at Vanebrudspalæet, which can be translated into the habit-breaking palace. This odd and inspiring place is a former car repair shop revamped into a magical suitcase that houses all kinds of habit-breaking activities. Vanebrudspalæet has a vibrant and quirky feel that serves as an effective icebreaker and makes the atmosphere warm and welcoming.

The outcome of these habit-breaking sessions is that, instead of just inviting the attendants to the respective local societies, they are required to take ownership by creating the event on Facebook and inviting the other attendants. This underpins the shared responsibility between the new citizens and the communities of Aarhus. Finally, the attendants are incentivised to wrap up an invitation to The Warm Welcome Society and pass it on to a friend, colleague or fellow student. The evening ended with a group photo that was posted on the joint Facebook group.

In line with the Active Citizenship Policy, a joint community requires joint contribution. The Warm Welcome Society is strongly supported within the City of Aarhus, the business community, institutions of higher education, and of course the local communities. By supporting the Warm Welcome Society, the City of Aarhus contributes to carrying the policy on citizenship into action. In Aarhus, The Warm Welcome Society is an example for others to follow and leads the way for rethinking and strengthening citizenship with its passionate initiative. The Warm Welcome Society rethinks the way we are welcoming new citizens to a city and becomes the stepping stone to building and activating social networks across different communities in Aarhus. Additionally, it motivates active citizenship and inspires further collaboration and people-powered public services.

Further info: Blog article on URBACT Blog, Mari-Louise Olsson Hattesen' article with some videos, TED Talk by Thomas Vovemod.

5. Moving forward: some examples how Aarhus sets up its Integrated Action Plan

Aarhus's integrated action plan (IAP) aims to bridge the new citizenship policy as an umbrella with some local, community-led initiatives and specify some further actions how these actions can be "up-scaled" or maintained together with the municipality. The IAP will hopefully result in creating an environment where people-powered public services can flourish, both regarding local and even national level. The action plan should reflect on learnings and become a relevant tool for further improvements toward a more collaborative city.

Rethink Activism asks everyone to rethink democracy and inspires citizens to take action. Through co-operation with the Nordic City Network, this initiative benefits now political commitment from 18 Nordic Cities. The Nordic City Network will use the project as a platform to bring together politicians, city developers and citizens from throughout the Nordic region, presenting ground-breaking initiatives of the theme 'The City We Want'. The public meeting was a part of the official Aarhus European Capital of Culture 2017 programme. Regarding Rethink Activism the action plan focuses on citizens, city developers and politicians collaborating to invent new services/approaches (scale: City of Aarhus).

The initiative 'Long term employment take the lead' is also tackled by the IAP. If the ongoing initiative delivers good results (which is expected based on the first interim results), the action plan on one hand will be about influencing the national employment policies since there is an increased attention to this pilot project, on the other hand it will set actions how this social innovation process can be sustainable within the city (scale: City of Aarhus as well as national).

The action plan also tackles the initiative 'Good life in the Aarhus Neighbourhood Rundhøj'. In this case the original story is about some committed citizens proposing a different model for urban development. The initiative has contacted a number of key-players, including the Citizenship Committee of Aarhus. So, how does the City of Aarhus deal with this offer coming from citizens? How does the city administration support such citizen-initiated urban development projects? The action plan will partly focus on how the City of Aarhus should support such citizen-driven urban development initiatives, but also how the process leads to service design, co-creation and new learnings in a close cooperation between citizens, businesses and the municipality (scale: neighbourhood).



At the same time when CHANGE! had the study visit in Aarhus, Nordic City Network organised a Nordic city conference in Aarhus for about 150 city politicians and professional urban developers focused on creating a new Nordic model of urban development on the basis of "urban communities" that grow 'from the bottom up'. In addition to this, Academy of Urbanism brought up to 200 professional urban developers from all over Europe to Aarhus at the same time under the theme 'Urban Democracy'.

There was a masterclass organised by these major networks and CHANGE! partnership could participate. It was made by Helle Søholt, founding partner and CEO of Gehl Architects, which is 'making cities for people'. Thinking about who is the most known Danish person on the world, we found that Andersen, Lars von trier or Mads Mikkelsen is perhaps better known, but most likely Jan Gehl left the most significant mark on hundreds of cities, thus we all face these marks day by day, but perhaps this fact is less known.

Helle talked about the recent projects of Gehl Architects, in which they identify "vacant asphalts" and create outdoor "plazas" with people. She talked about that municipalities should act as a Complex Adoptive System based on the chaos theory to be able to engage with citizens and have a collective impact instead of a connected impact. This is the same what URBACT talks about: cities should act as matchmakers, "enabling all stakeholders to play to their strengths. Within this function, the municipality will be instrumental in stimulating innovation and contribution from all city players" (URBACT capitalisation paper). To achieve this, cities shall also detect internal innovation capacities and create framework conditions in which co-creation might flourish. Aarhus is an important piece of learning as they already created many interesting spaces and places for co-creation and sharing ownership.

7. Credits

- Dr Henry Kippin: Collaborative capacity in public service delivery Towards a framework for practice, UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence, Singapore, 2015
- Aarhus for European Volunteering Capital in 2018).
- <u>www.cfiaarhus.dk</u> and the presentation done by Johanne Mose Entwistle during the study visit
- Powering European Public Sector Innovation: Towards a New Architecture (DG Research and Innovation, EC, 2013)
- Keith Grint: Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions: the Role of Leadership, BAMM, 2008
- Active Citizenship Policy and the presentation done by Hans Skok during the study visit
- Rethink Activism Festival
- Nina Eliasoph: The politics of volunteering, 2013, Polity Press
- Mari-Louise Olsson Hattesen: <u>The Warm Welcome Society greeting new citizens to Aarhus</u>

