



STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR VILLAGES

A new approach to planning practice in rural districts?

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Abstract:

Since 2019, municipalities have been required to carry out strategic planning for villages. However, the strategic approach to planning has traditionally been applied to the urban context, and therefore it is necessary to explore how strategic planning can be conceptualised and adopted to rural district planning practice. This is the objective of this thesis. By means of a qualitative research approach, the study bridges theory on strategic planning and rural districts in order to conceptualise what a strategic approach to planning can be like in the context of rural districts. An empirical case-study of rural district planning practice in Skive Municipality in the years 2009-2020 clarifies the theoretical findings. By combining theory and practice, the research suggests how current planning practice can adopt the new requirements as an attempt to enhance viability of villages.

Preface

This Master's Thesis has been prepared in Spring 2020 as a completion of the Master's program in Urban Planning and Management at Aalborg University. When I started the project work in February, I expected the Spring to be a very special time with room for professional immersion in a topic that I have been interested in for several years. However, I did not expect the everyday environment to change due to a global outbreak of a virus. After all, in isolation at the desk, I have found the tranquility to delve into strategic planning, rural districts and the municipal context for planning.

In the thesis, I explore how strategic planning as a concept can be incorporated into the field of planning for rural districts. As a part of the empirical work, I have interviewed a number of practitioners who shared their knowledge, experience and reflections about their work. A big thank you to Berit Brunsgaard, Ditte Staun and Sille Christiane Linnet from the consultancy Pro-vins – and a big thank you to Tonie Kristensen, Peter E. Steens and Thomas Olesen from the Department of Communication, Development and Business, Skive Municipality.

Throughout the process, I have been provided with constructive feedback and encouraging support from my supervisor, Kristian Olesen. Thank you for good discussions and competent supervision.

Disclaimer from Head of Studies and Head of Study Boards

COVID19 and the consequences of the lock-down of society and the university since March 13, 2020 have had influence on which activities that have been possible to stage and carry out as part of the project work. More specifically, this means that activities have been limited to online activities, and that activities such as Lab activities; surveying activities; on-site ethnographic studies and on-site involvement activities have not been possible.

When assessing this project, please bear this in mind.

The lock-down of society has caused the empirical data collection to be done virtually. In chapter 3, I consider how the circumstances have affected the research and results.

Style of referencing

This Master's Thesis uses the Harvard method as the style of referencing. If the author's name is mentioned in the text, the reference will include the year of publication: (year). If the author's name does not appear in the text, the reference will include the author's surname as well: (Surname, year).

Literature and publications of several Danish institutions have been used as sources for the work. The names of the institutions have been translated:

- Committee for Viable Villages (*Udvalget for levedygtige landsbyer*)
- The National Association of Municipalities (*Kommunernes Landsforening, KL*)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Integration and Housing (*Udlændinge-, Integrations- og Boligministeriet*)
- Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs (*Erhvervsministeriet*)
- Ministry of Interior and Health (*Indenrigs og Sundhedsministeriet*)
- Skive Municipality (*Skive Kommune*)
- Statistics Denmark (*Danmarks Statistik*)

The empirical data includes interviews that have been transcribed and attached to the digital hand in of the thesis. When utilised in the thesis, I refer to the respondent and the interview number. For example (Brunsgaard, 2020, Interview 3). Attached into this document are the interview guides made prior to the interviews.

The thesis includes figures and tables. These are numbered according to the chapter and section that they appear within. Please notice that figures and tables are numbered independently, causing that there are both a Table 2.1 and a Figure 2.1. Unless the graphics are provided a reference, I have drawn up the elements myself.

Enjoy the reading.

Regitze Majgaard Andersen
June 4, 2020
Aalborg

Dansk resume

I gennem det seneste årti har landdistrikterne vundet større opmærksomhed – både i medie billedet og som genstand for politikdannelse. Hvor landdistriktet tidligere var forbundet med landbrug, naturidyl og højt til himlen, så leder termer som 'Udkantsdanmark' og 'Den Rådne Banan' tankerne hen på forfald, skolelukninger og butiksdød. Fra politisk side er opstået et øget fokus på at skabe muligheder for vækst og levedygtighed i hele Danmark – også i områder, der ligger fjernt fra de største vækstcentre.

Som et led i planen om at skabe et '*Danmark i balance*' vedtog Folketinget i 2018 'Lov om ændring af lov om planlægning', hvori der stilles krav om, at kommunerne skal planlægge strategisk for landsbyer. Dette skal ske som en del af kommuneplanlægningen. Loven stiller krav om, at den strategiske planlægning skal understøtte en differentieret landsbyudvikling og angive mål og virkemidler for udviklingen.

Traditionelt set er strategisk planlægning dog ikke anvendt i landdistriktssammenhæng. I stedet har den strategiske tilgang været anvendt inden for byplanlægning til at planlægge i en kontekst præget af urbanisering, vækst og investering. Det er derfor relevant at undersøge, hvordan rammerne for planlægning i landdistriktet adskiller sig fra den urbane kontekst, og hvordan den strategiske tilgang således kan tilpasses de nye rammer. Nærværende speciale beskæftiger sig med spørgsmålet:

Hvordan har landdistriktsplanlægningen været strategisk i Skive Kommune, og hvordan kan de nye krav om strategisk planlægning for landsbyer indarbejdes i praksis?

I rapportens første del undersøges det, hvordan strategisk planlægning kan operationaliseres og forstås i landdistriktplanlægningens øjemed. Her konkluderes det, at strategisk planlægning er et bredt koncept, der kan forstås som et analytisk og systematisk greb inden for planlægning, hvor målet er implementering eller målopfyldelse. Ligeledes kan strategisk planlægning forstås som en lærende tilgang med fokus på at skabe visioner og fælles forståelser, eller som middel til at mobilisere aktører omkring en kreativ samarbejdsproces. Landdistriktet adskiller sig fra byerne ved at ambitionerne om vækst og tilflytning er skiftet ud med befolkningstilbagegang og et behov for at omstille snarere end at udvikle. Til gengæld byder landdistrikterne på fællesskaber, foreningsliv og ildsjæle, der ønsker at skabe liv i landsbyerne. Strategisk planlægning i landdistrikter handler således om at tage højde for denne anderledes kontekst.

På baggrund af fire parametre analyseres landdistriktsplanlægningen i Skive Kommune

i perioden 2009-2020 med henblik på at vurdere, hvordan planlægningen har været strategisk. De fire parametre er:

- Den strategisk tilgang i planlægningen – varierende mellem analytisk og lærende
- Tilgang til befolkningstilbagegang i planlægningen – varierende mellem at afvise udviklingen eller acceptere/omstille til den
- Målsætninger med planlægningen – varierende mellem kvantitativ og kvalitativ
- Perspektivet i planlægning – varierende mellem intern og ekstern

Analysen baseres på dokumentanalyser og empiri indsamlet i to gruppeinterviews med nuværende og tidligere medarbejdere i Skive Kommune inden for landdistriktsplanlægning og -udvikling. Heraf kan det konkluderes, at udviklingen sker, hvor der er et lokalt engagement og initiativ. Planlægningen er strategisk i den analytiske forstand, da planlæggerne er fokuserede på at tænke de enkelte projekter ind i større rammer af økonomisk, organisatorisk og administrativ karakter. Den lærende tilgang kommer til udtryk i ambitioner om at inddrage og mobilisere borgerne, og fremadrettet skal planlægningen bruges til at afprøve nogle nye tilgange til borgerinddragelse samt nye muligheder som følge af planlovsændringerne i 2017. De overordnede målsætninger er kvalitative – det tilstræbes at støtte op om lokalsamfundene, det lokale initiativ og levedygtige landsbyer. Det er ikke et decideret mål at skabe tilflytning, men der gives ligeledes heller ikke et klart udtryk for, at planlægningen skal omstille til befolkningstilbagegang.

Realdania udgav i maj 2020 publikationen *Længe leve landsbyer*, der indeholder et forslag til, hvordan kommuner kan efterleve de nye krav. Metoden baseres på en systematisk kortlægning af den enkelte kommunes landsbyer på udvalgte parametre såsom demografisk udvikling, adgang til service og udvikling i huspriser. Formålet med kortlægningen er at gøre det muligt for kommuner at identificere, hvor der er udfordringer, og hvor der er basis for at skabe synergi og kobling mellem områder. Realdanias tilgang tilstræber langsigtethed og stillingtagen til landsbyernes udvikling.

Kommunerne har metodefrihed til at imødekomme de nye krav. Det betyder, at kommunerne kan tilpasse deres nuværende planlægning til at opfylde kravene, og resultaterne kan derfor forventes at spænde bredt. På den ene side kan den strategiske planlægning løses overfladisk som en skrivebordsøvelse, der ikke leder til implementering, og på den anden side kan kravene give anledning til store, holistiske og langsigtede planer med stor grad af borgerinddragelse. Med udgangspunkt i erfaringer fra Skive Kommune og Realdanias metode-forslag foreslås, at den strategiske planlægning tager afsæt i en analytisk kortlægning for at vurdere, hvor der skal sættes ressourcer af til udvikling, og for at tage stilling til den langsigtede planlægning, herunder tage stilling til den demografiske udvikling. Strategidannelsen skal inddrage og på størst mulig vis engagere og motivere borgerne til at tage ansvar for at sikre lokal forankring.

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1 Introduction

While urban areas continuously grow, a different development takes place in the rural districts where many villages and smaller built environments in the open country experience depopulation (Andersen et al., 2018). Still, many people desire a life away from the bigger cities where they can enjoy being close to nature, admire the wide scenery, and take part in the special communities, which are characteristic to many rural districts. But how can a viable life in the open country continue if the basis for a high level of public and social services is crumbling away? What can be done in order to sustain a good life in the rural districts, and is strategic planning an appropriate solution?

Depopulation of the rural districts has numerous different reasons which are complex and interrelated. Among other, the demographic changes can be explained by means of urbanisation, modernisation, the composition of the demography and political decisions in a simplified manner.

Urbanisation is a global tendency that also in some degree exists in Denmark. The urban areas continuously grow because more people move towards the cities and the close proximity of opportunities, jobs, education and activities which attract people. At the same time, not as many people consider settling in the rural districts. In Denmark, the movement towards the bigger urban areas takes place on a national scale where especially Copenhagen and the central/eastern part of Jutland experience the most massive growth. Also, the the movement towards the cities takes place within the municipal borders where the biggest cities tend to grow at the expense of the surrounding smaller cities and rural districts. This causes a double urbanisation (Andersen et al., 2018; The National Association of Municipalities, 2014).

Another significant reason is related to the way the structure of employment has developed. A comprehensive modernisation of the agriculture has expanded the production but reduced the size of the labour force related to farming. Likewise, a great number of industrial jobs have vanished which especially has reduced the job opportunities in smaller cities in the rural districts. New job opportunities have gained ground in the service sector and most of these are located within the urban areas. The cities offer a number of benefits to businesses and companies such as a greater access to skilled labour and collaborators as well as a bigger demand for goods and services. At this point, the rural districts cannot really compete against the urban locations. Thereby, a great basis for employment has moved towards the urban areas – as well as a great part of the population has done (Lyck, 2014).

Besides urbanisation and the transformation of the job structure, several demographic

trends are explanatory to the depopulation of the rural districts. An indicator is the distribution of the younger and older generations. In Denmark, the group of 20-29-year-old makes up 20% of the population in the capital area and the cities with a population bigger than 100.000¹. The same age group composes 8% in the rural districts² and cities with up to 20.000 inhabitants. Reversely, the share of citizens at the age above 60 is smallest in the capital area and bigger cities (20%) but makes up almost 30% of the population in villages of 1.000-20.000 citizens like displayed in figure 1.1 below (Andersen et al., 2018). This distribution implies that the birth rate is lower than the mortality in many municipalities in the outskirts, causing a decrease in the population as well (The National Association of Municipalities, 2014).

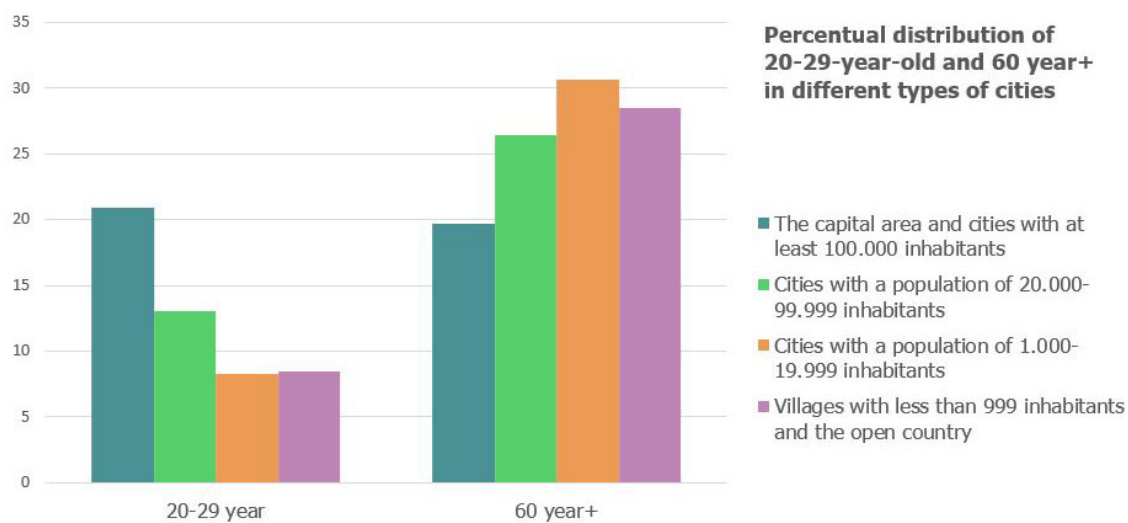


Figure 1.1: Distribution of two different age groups in varying sizes of cities. The figure takes inspiration from Andersen et al. (2018) and is based on the statistical data set BY2 (Statistics Denmark, 2019b)

Also, several changes have happened due to governmental policy-making. During the 2000s, a series of reforms were carried out and implemented in order to obtain synergy, strengthen the quality of the public service, and ensure that many tasks could continuously take place decentralised in Denmark (Ministry of Interior and Health, 2005). Andersen (2008) considers the results of the structural reform a *decentralised centralisation* because the central government remained an influential position while the new municipal structures found themselves responsible for the administrative work and delivery of the public services. Thereby, many jobs of the former municipal structure vanished as the new administrative map of Denmark were drawn by 98 municipalities in which many facilities were consolidated (Andersen, 2008; Schroll and Søgaaard, 2013).

¹Aarhus, Odense and Aalborg.

²In this regard defined as the open country and built environments with less than 1.000 inhabitants.

All things considered, there are certain challenges to many rural districts. The basis for maintaining a high level of service fades away as areas become more and more sparsely populated and the tax base dwindles. The development has been covered widely in media, and here, the reputation of the rural districts may have influenced the perception of the problem. *The Rotten Banana (Den Rådne Banan)* and *Peripheral Denmark (Udkantsdanmark)* are among others the terms which have painted an unfavourable picture of the rural districts, thereby constructing the understanding of the issues discursively and socially (Dybvad, 2015; Svendsen, 2013).

The political interest for villages and rural districts has grown with the demographic changes and emerging challenges. This has been the case in various levels. On a national level, the objective of several political proposals has been to ensure development in all of Denmark and to *bring Denmark into balance (Danmark i Balance)* (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2015, 2016) which contrasts former proposals that were more concerned with growth without considering where the growth should take place. Arrangements of economic compensation amongst Danish municipalities and deliberate relocation of national places of employment are examples of efforts aligned with the political proposals. In 2017, a modernisation of The Planning Act was announced and entailed a more liberal approach to planning practice bringing new opportunities for development outside cities (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2018). This caused an adjusted practice of planning in coastal areas and rural districts, for example in terms of new opportunities for settlement and business. Every four years, municipalities can now select two villages for *transformation* which means that new opportunities for development and expansion is possible in contrast to the former and more restrictive legal framework for the rural districts (Erhvervsstyrelsen, 2020).

The modernisation of The Planning Act is introduced in order to enable development outside the bigger urban areas. The modernisation also implies an addition which states that municipalities must plan *strategically* for villages in order to enhance the viability of the villages (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2018). This decision is based on the work of the Committee for Viable Villages textit(Udvalget for levedygtige landsbyer) that has developed 17 recommendations to support viable villages in Denmark (Committee for Viable Villages, 2018). The new requirements of the legislation are the following:

§ 5 c. *Municipal planning must contain strategic planning which coherently considers the opportunities for development of villages with respect of local circumstances.*

§ 5 d. *The municipal planning for villages must*

1. *Support a development of viable local communities in villages*
2. *Encourage a differentiated and focused development of villages and*
3. *Give overall objectives and means for development of villages* (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2018, Author's translation).

In a smaller scale, many local projects take place in villages and the rural districts. Some are locally initiated, and some are facilitated by external actors such as funds, consultants or philanthropic foundations such as Realdania. For many years, different projects have taken place to test different types of projects, collaborations, and constellations. Research in the field of the rural districts has emerged, especially in bigger collaborative projects. Research points out that local commitment and engagement are essential to create successful development, for instance by activating local communities and sustain local networks (Svendsen and Tanvig, 2007; Svendsen, 2007, 2013). In general, development in rural districts does not per se mean population increase or economic growth – instead, qualitative aspects are considered important in recent research (Tanvig, 2012; Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016), and several projects are formed around special identities of the local areas and place-based resources such as local attractions, local brands, or cultural sites.

Municipalities have been an important link between the national intentions and the local needs and desires, but the additional legal framework has clarified the position of the municipalities: Now, it is a clear task of the municipalities to support local development and enhance viability by means of strategic planning. But what does it mean to plan strategically for villages? Is this a new approach to the work of municipalities, and what can an approach like this bring? Will the new legislation change planning practice, and how will strategic planning meet the challenges of the rural districts?

This Master’s Thesis explores the potential of the concept of strategic planning for rural districts and villages. It addresses how strategic planning can be carried out in practice by the exploration of practical examples and experiences by means of a case study. Taking the recent additional legal framework into consideration, the thesis will raise a discussion about the opportunities and limitations associated with strategic planning in the context of rural districts.

The empirical research is organised around a selected case: Planning practice for rural districts in Skive Municipality in the years 2009-2020. In Skive Municipality, there is a tradition for supporting local projects, strengthening villages, and activating the resources of the rural districts. Since municipalities tend to learn from one another and from practical experiences, there is a potential in learning from Skive Municipality because of the long-term experience. It is relevant to explore how planning for rural districts has been and is strategic in order to learn from practice, and to explore what the new requirements are likely to bring to planning.

1.1 Research question

The project aims to bring answer to the following research question:

Learning from the case of Skive Municipality, how has rural district planning been strategic, and how are the new requirements likely to be adopted into planning practice?

In order to structure the research, the report will address three sub questions which will be processed in three different chapters. The sub questions are as follows:

1. How can strategic planning for villages and rural districts be conceptualised?
2. How has Skive Municipality planned strategically for villages and rural districts, and what are the experiences of the practitioners?
3. How can the new requirements be adopted to planning practice of rural districts, and which changes are the new requirements likely to bring?

1.2 Structure of the report

- Chapter 2 responds to the first sub question. Here, strategic planning is conceptualised into the context of planning in the rural districts, and an analytical framework for the empirical analysis is built.
- Chapter 3 presents the research design, the scientific approach, and reflections about the methods used to collect empirical data.
- Chapter 4 contains the analysis responding to the second sub question. Here, the analytical framework is applied to the case of planning for rural districts in Skive Municipality in the years 2009-2020. The chapter explores how former and current practice have been strategic and what the experiences are.
- Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the analysis and explores how the new requirements can be adopted to planning practice, thereby responding to sub question three.
- Chapter 6 brings reflections about the research in retrospective.
- Chapter 7 presents the findings of the research.

2 Conceptualising strategic planning

The understanding of strategy-making and the use of strategies in planning have changed throughout time, and today, different approaches to strategic planning co-exist. In order to understand the strategic approaches to planning, this review explores the published literature related to questions like *what is strategic planning and what should it do?* This implies the historical contexts in which the strategic approaches have evolved, the driving forces behind strategy-making, and the diverse understandings of strategic planning. The review is based on international literature with contributions from acknowledged writers within the field.

So far, strategic approaches have primarily emerged in urban and regional contexts, but yet, a strategic approach is now expected to emerge in planning for the rural districts in Denmark due to the extension of the Danish Planning Act (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2018). Therefore, it seems relevant to conceptualise strategy-making to a different context: The rural districts. To do so, I delve into Danish and international literature on the rural districts in order to understand the special circumstances and challenges that appear in the rural districts, and to draw out the differences between the rural and urban contexts. By conceptualising strategy-making into a rural context, I will create a vocabulary for the further research, but more important, the conceptualisation will help creating an analytical framework which will be applied to the empirical case of planning in Skive Municipality in order to examine how strategy-making takes place in the rural districts and by which objectives. The preparation of an analytical framework implies a process of "translating" the strategic planning concepts into a new context – the rural districts – thereby addressing how approaches to strategic planning in a rural context can take its shape.

2.1 Strategy evolves as a concept

The understanding of strategies has not remained a uniform thing throughout time. Events and historical periods have influenced the understanding and use of strategies, and thereby, there are several understandings of what strategy-making is, what it is supposed to do, and how it should be done (Sehested, 2008; Albrechts, 2004; Sartorio, 2005).

The term *strategy* origins from warfare and a military context (Sartorio, 2005;

Albrechts, 2004). In this regard, strategy-making served to create an understanding of the situation, the different (often clashing) rationales and antagonists, and as a way to choose certain means to achieve chosen goals.

During the 1950s and 60s, strategy-making slowly gained popularity within the private sector where it was considered a useful tool in times of rapid economic growth, societal changes and growing populations. At this point, strategies served to shape a framework for the emerging corporations and for the notable spatial transformations taking place after the wartime. In other words, strategies helped creating an overview and as a means to tackle the rapid development, numerous stakeholders, and investments taking place (Albrechts, 2004; Sartorio, 2005).

The following decades, the 1970s and 80s, were marked by a continuing urbanisation and a general uncertainty due to the economic crisis. This situation made strategy-making a noticed approach within the public sector - for instance among government leaders in the USA since strategy-making helped to tackle uncertainty by addressing the possible outcomes (Albrechts, 2004). At this point, the planning discipline was expected to respond to the rapid urbanisation and growing population as well as the financial crisis. The field of planning was in general expected to manage the physical development of the cities by land use planning. Strategies emerged as a way to balance and structure the new private investors and stakeholders who entered the discipline. Also, strategies strengthened an emerging tendency of competition among cities and city-regions due to the many projects and investments. The new stakeholders had their own deliberations and interests that needed to be integrated in the work of the public domain, and at this point, the use of strategies helped to tackle the new situation and stakeholders entering the field of land use planning (Sartorio, 2005).

In recent times, new expectations to the field of planning have emerged. Planning is now expected to solve both physical and social challenges, and the field has met an increasing expectancy from society in terms of inclusiveness, transparency and involvement (Albrechts, 2004; Healey, 2007; Sartorio, 2005). Thereby, new understandings of strategy-making have been explored and are still evolving. Today, there are more examples of approaches to strategies which are more concerned with the process and social aspects more than the output or the physical aspects only (Albrechts et al., 2003; Healey, 2009; Sehested, 2008).

This development indicates that strategy-making has played different roles in planning throughout time and by different incentives. Strategies have been utilised:

- in times of war to set goals and actions,

-
- in times of rapid development to manage multiple actors and attend an international competition among cities,
 - in times of crises to deal with uncertainty, and
 - in times marked by a completely different expectancy to planning in terms of inclusiveness and collaboration which strategy-making responds by the potential of bringing people together, mobilising resources, and creating common visions.

Still, some writers argue that nowadays, the future is even more uncertain than back in history, and the world has become more complex as well (Albretchs et al., 2003; Bryson, 2018). This is due to factors such as technological development, climate changes, and movement of people and working forces. Also, a reorganisation of decision-makers and decision-making processes have resulted in a transition from governmental sovereignty towards governance and the empowering of several actors in multiple levels. This is due to decentralisation and new formations of alliances. This increasing uncertainty and complexity leads to different opinions – in one perspective, strategy-making needs to be less oriented at the long-term development and instead focus on the overall setting and present situation (Albretchs et al., 2003). In a different perspective, the need for thinking strategically and daring to think forward seems more relevant than ever before (Bryson, 2018).

2.2 Analytical and learning strategies

The previous section pictured how the use of strategies has evolved, but still, there is no exact definition of what a strategy is. Instead, multiple different understandings seem to co-exist, such as perceiving strategy-making as a management-tool to ensure comprehensiveness, investments or collaboration, or as a means to mobilise various actors. Several writers have sought to define or categorise the different approaches to strategic planning in today's planning practice, for instance Francesca S. Sartorio (2005) and Karina Sehested (2008).

Francesca S. Sartorio has identified two "*souls*" of strategic planning (Sartorio, 2005, p. 27). Strategies of the first soul are meant to help making rational decisions in order to steer the development towards a framed vision or achieve a goal. Strategies of the second soul are more related to the present moment – in this understanding, strategies are meant to construct a common vision and story, bring together different actors who often represent different and diverging objectives, or in other cases, strategies are expected to mobilise resources such as time, money or social capital (Sartorio, 2005; Sehested, 2008).

Karina Sehested (2008) finds inspiration in Sartorio's categorisation, and she has examined different understandings of strategy-making in Danish municipal planning which has led to a division of two generic types of strategies: *analytical strategies* and *learning strategies*. These categories are the subjects of the following sections.

2.2.1 Analytical strategies

The analytical approach to strategy-making is related to the understanding of John M. Bryson (2018). To him, strategic planning is: "*A deliberative, disciplined approach to producing fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why*" (Bryson, 2018, p. 8). Here, the focus is to *think* and *act* strategically to achieve a desired action more than doing strategic planning per se. This understanding is illustrated in Bryson's ABC model (see figure 2.1 below) in which A expresses where you are, B where you want to go, and C how to get there. This illustrates the action-oriented focus of Bryson. Strategy-making is about identifying the desired ends and suitable means that are expected to be implemented according to the strategy. Notice that the arrows symbolise the formulation of strategies (from A to C) and the implementation of the strategies in order to accomplish the actions (from C to B) (Bryson, 2018).

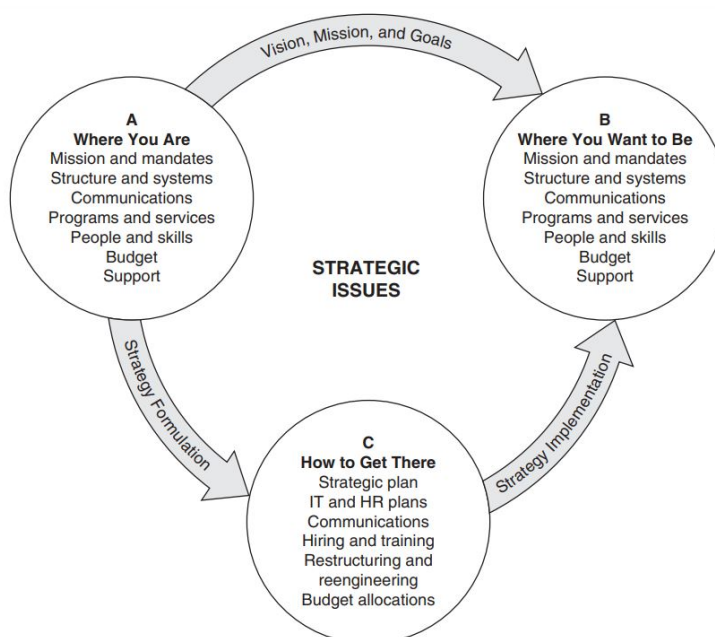


Figure 2.1: John M. Bryson's ABC of strategic planning (Bryson, 2018, p. 10)

This understanding builds on rationality and predictability. In Sehested's categorisation, there are three different types of analytical strategies (see table 2.1 on page 11). The first type is structural planning which implies a long-term perspective of the various structures within the municipality. Strategies are expected to bring

certainty and overview of the many activities, plans, and projects taking place by ensuring comprehensiveness and structure. The second type is about achieving rational goals. Here, the aim is to ensure a strong link between policies and actions by means of strategies and visions, thereby representing a management perspective. The third type of analytical strategies aims to legitimise and ensure implementation of decisions. This implies a focus on identifying objectives in the work and legitimising the chosen actions, as well as finding out how to implement policies (Sehested, 2008).

Analytical strategies			
	Structural planning	Rational goal achievement	Legitimising and implementation
Purpose	Long term management of the municipal structures	Increase political capacity to act, deduce strategy to action	Make objectives clear and ensure implementation
Process	Top-down, intern, and driven by specialists	Top-down, intern, political and professional	Top-down and negotiation
Participants	Professionals, politicians, affected parts	Professionals, politicians, corporate involvement, affected parts	Professionals, politicians, "implementators", affected parts
Means	Technical analyses, plans/maps, comprehensive strategies	Technical analyses, short political documents	Technical analyses, contracts, plans of actions

Table 2.1: Karina Sehested's analytical strategies (Sehested, 2008, p. 13, Author's translation).

A common feature of the three types of strategies is that they are developed top-down, typically by professionals, central politicians or key persons in the decision-making processes, and the basis of the strategies is technical analyses and maps – thereby, the focus on social and democratic aspects in the process itself is rather absent (Sehested, 2008).

At first glance, the analytical approach holds an opportunity to set goals, follow guidelines or plans of action, get things done and achieve objectives (Sehested, 2008). Still, the understanding has met critique – for example by the argument that development cannot be planned this rationally since changes and unexpected events will occur, and because people's actions will unlikely be as rational and manageable as the analytical approach prescribes. Another point of critique is the lack of democracy since only a selected few are involved in the decision-making and

the strategy-making process (Albrechts, 2004; Healey, 1996; Sehested, 2008). On the basis of the criticism, several alternative approaches have emerged, especially in terms of a more collaborative influence. This is reflected in the *learning* strategies (Sartorio, 2005; Sehested, 2008).

2.2.2 Learning strategies

The learning strategies are linked to a different mindset compared to the analytical strategies. Here, the collaborative turn in planning shines through and has shaped a pluralist understanding of strategy-making with a broader focus on collaboration, inclusiveness, democracy, transparency, and creativity (Sehested, 2008). This is expressed in the broad variety of means and objectives since there is no specific process or recipe to follow, and in some cases, the process can be an objective itself. Learning strategies requires reflection and a *learning* process (Healey, 1996; Sehested, 2008).

Sehested has identified three types of learning strategies. These are strategies as rhetoric and symbols, strategies as common frames of references, and strategies as means to mobilising (Sehested, 2008). These are shown in table 2.2 below.

Learning strategies			
	Rhetoric and symbolic	Frames of reference	Mobilising
Purpose	Document efforts, protect one's organisation	Create meaningful change to the many involved actors	Mobilising and establish connections between various actors to facilitate the production of knowledge and potential scenarios
Process	Compressed and efficient process	Wide and including process based on dialogue	Wide and including process based on dialogue and process of actions
Participants	A selection of professionals and politicians – a limited involvement	Involvement of everybody affected and representatives	Involvement of everybody affected and representatives
Means	Technical analyses and symbolic documents	Collective learning processes, political debates, temporary meeting places	Collective learning processes, collective negotiation and concrete problem solving

Table 2.2: Karina Sehested's learning strategies (Sehested, 2008, p. 19, Author's translation).

Somehow, strategies as rhetoric and symbols compose a link between the analytical and learning strategies. It serves to meet expectations from the outside, e.g. to meet expectations about getting things done or proving that pronounced expectations are met. This type of strategy is often formed on the basis of a compressed and efficient process with a minimum of involvement but it distinguishes from the analytical strategies in terms of the absent focus on actions and rationality. Instead, the symbolic strategies should document that an organisation follows the required directions (Sehested, 2008).

The collaborative turn is expressed in the second type of learning strategies, frames of references, since it is concerned with citizen involvement and the creation of a common frame of reference. In this regard, strategy-making is about gathering communities and representatives in order to find a common ground or to formulate a common vision. The output is not necessarily a document – it can be a imaginative picture of the future or a mutual understanding of core values in a community (Sehested, 2008). Having a common frame of references can make objectives more tangible in terms of words, images, metaphors, and stories (Healey, 2007, 2009). This emphasises the power of strategies. By means of a collective process where the common frames are developed, the strategies are more likely to make sense to the involved people and thereby ensure a sense of ownership and affiliation (Sehested, 2008).

A common frame of reference can take the shape of a spatial strategy understood as a future scenario of an area or region. The use of spatial strategies on a regional scale has been examined by Patsy Healey (2009). Section 2.3 on page 16 elaborates further on spatial strategies.

The third type of learning strategies focuses on mobilising and connecting actors in order to facilitate collective and creative dialogues (Sehested, 2008). The potential of using strategy-making as a means to mobilise actors derives from John Friedmann (2004). Through a series of studies of strategy-making in Vancouver, Hong Kong and Chinese cities, he found that it is very difficult to create long-term strategies due to rapid change and unpredictable events taking place (Friedmann et al., 2004). From this point of view, the idea of creating long-term strategies is shelved. Still, the process of making strategies has a potential of bringing people, stakeholders and resources together in a collaborative network, making up a good basis for planning. Thereby, the approach can generate a culture, a sense of community or visual ideas which should not be taken for granted in practice (Friedmann et al., 2004; Sehested, 2008). Healey (2007) argues that processes of strategy-making require that actors are mobilised into social networks in which knowledge and resources can be shared.

Here, the planner should be focused at bringing together all implied actors and establish an arena where interests and values can be discussed, local knowledge and expert knowledge can be bridged, and a creative process can lead to a mutual understanding – for example a perception of the future.

2.2.3 The role of planners

Strategies, strategy-making and strategic planning are not just one concept but cover a wide range of approaches and focus points. The approaches presented above represent a selected variety of perspectives. Still, these approaches are difficult to separate completely, and instead, it makes sense to accept that the types will appear in practice as hybrids, as overlapping, and somehow interconnected despite their differences (Healey, 2009; Sehested, 2008).

Sehested's categorisation defines two main approaches that especially distinguish in terms of the role of the planner. Dealing with analytical strategies, planners are expected to act as specialists and professionals aiming to achieve an expected output, however that is to formulate a document of a long-term strategy or to plan an implementation-oriented plan of actions. In the case of learning strategies, the role of the planner can seem a bit more blurred. In Louis Albrechts' reexamination of strategy-making (2004), he formulates his perception of planners taking action within the collaborative turn of planning:

"(...) the planners are not only instrumental, and their implicit responsibility can no longer simply be to 'be efficient', to function smoothly as neutral means to given (and presumably well-defined) ends. Planners must be more than navigators who keep their ship on course" (Albrechts, 2004, p. 750).

In this perception, planners must deal with their surroundings in order to fulfil their motivations and desires. This implies the planners' perceptions of active involvement of various actors such as politicians, citizens, entrepreneurs, associations etc., and calls for planners to facilitate an open dialogue with the opportunity to address differences and diverging viewpoints in order to build trust and understanding (Albrechts, 2004).

Still, it is not enough for planners to create an open and involving process and invite people to participate. It is necessary to actively include people and ensure representativeness. The collaborative turn of planning calls for planning to manage conflicts and build mutual understandings of interests and values. This implies that citizens become part of the process through a deliberate involvement. In this perception, planning should be an arena with room for discussion and disagreement but also a breeding ground for new concepts and ideas to sprout (Healey, 2007;

Svendsen, 2013). Healey asks planners to be reflective about the planning process in order to ensure inclusiveness which implies putting questions such as: *Where can discussions take place? How can all communities get access to the debate? Which format can facilitate the discussions and provide openness best as possible? How can the different perspectives be combined into a new discourse and potentially a strategy?* (Healey, 1996)

In contrast to the presented types of strategies, Henry Mintzberg (1994) brings a different perspective. He claims that strategies not necessarily have to be planned. Strategies can either be intended or emerge from practice over time, and the latter can happen to emerge from a pattern of behaviour or due to a consistency of decisions over time. This entails that strategies can *form* rather than be *formulated* like the intended – often analytical – strategies are (Mintzberg, 1994). This idea is illustrated in figure 2.2 below. The small arrows symbolise a consistency in actions, behaviour, and decisions during a period of time. In Mintzberg’s perspective, planners do not necessarily have to formulate the strategies, but instead, planners should facilitate a creative process of strategy-forming in which new strategies can emerge (Mintzberg, 1994). This implies asking the right questions, bringing together the right people, and supporting the unpredictable outcome.

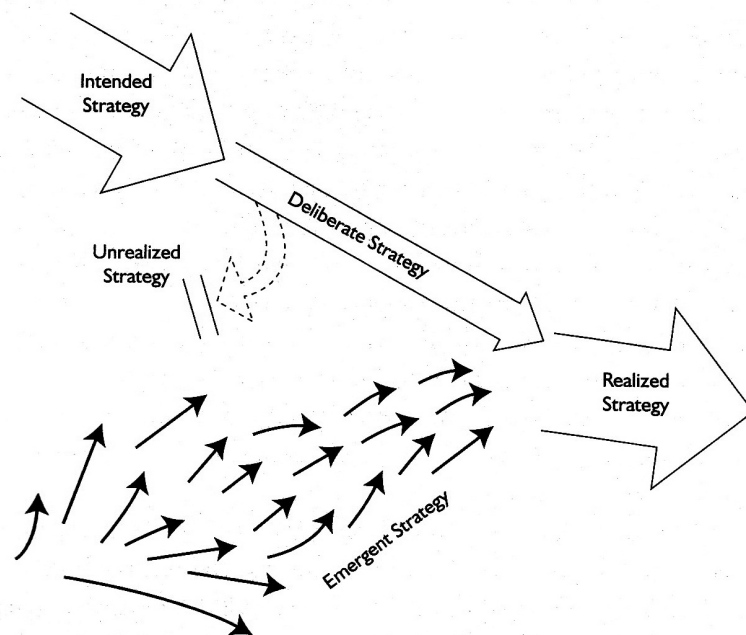


Figure 2.2: Mintzberg's deliberate and emergent strategies (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 24).

To sum up, the role of planners is more flexible the approaches of the learning strategies. Planners are assumed to be reflective about their practice and strive to enhance inclusiveness. The processes are more creative with room for different understanding and attitudes, and the focus on data-based analyses is rather absent.

2.3 Strategies in an urban context and scale

A great part of the published literature on strategic planning has a common feature: An urban or regional context. Several writers have identified the use of strategies in practice such as Patsy Healey (1996; 2007), John Friedmann (2004) and Albrechts et al. (2003). They have found that strategies have helped to tackle an increasing urban complexity and to envision the development of a city region, for instance to meet the emerging competition between city regions.

Like with strategies, there is no clear answer to the question *what is a city or a city region?* In fact, planners and scholars of urban planning have struggled to reach a definition. However, one can argue that cities and city regions are socially constructed phenomena used to describe the accumulation of activities and relations taking place in a geographically defined area (Healey, 2009). Numerous complex dynamics take place in the centres of business, commerce, culture, politics, recreation etc. The analogy of a container "*within which coexist a diversity of social and economic relations*" (Healey, 1996, p. 217) is often used to describe the urban areas.

Healey emphasises that the comprehension of space has changed along with the introduction of more collaboration-oriented strategies. Whereas the analytical strategies are concerned with an absolute understanding of space (physical spaces/areas defined by limits and borders), the learning strategies relates to the relative and relational perceptions of space. This implies that every space is connected to multiple other places and people – a space exists due to the people who perceives and uses it (Healey, 2009; Sehested, 2008).

To manage the complexity of cities, spatial strategies have been a tool in fashion for decades. Partly to exercise land use planning and partly to enter the competition among cities. According to Healey, spatial strategy-making requires an understanding of the specific spatial context. Healey states that "*it is not just any kind of knowledge that is drawn into the processes of spatial strategy-making. A strategy with a place focus draws on and draws out conceptions of places, their qualities and their positioning as regards other places and their dynamics*" (Healey, 2007, p. 27). This underpins that planning needs to pay attention to the specific place where the planning is aimed at (Healey, 2007).

This understanding underpins that the literature on strategy-making concerned with an urban context and scale cannot be duplicated into a different context without paying attention to the *new* space and its specifications. In other words, the transformation or conceptualisation of strategy-making to a rural context requires

knowledge about the new context and the processes taking place in there. How does the rural context stand out from the urban context? In which way do the differences in scale affect strategy-making? What are the special challenges and possibilities in the rural districts? This is the subject of the following section.

2.4 Research on rural districts and development

Earlier, planning literature about the rural districts focused on agriculture, environment and land use. This has changed along with the modernisation and efficiency improvement of farming entailing that fewer people are now employed in the agriculture sector like presented in the introduction (chapter 1). Still, many people live in the rural districts, and the local communities exist. Thereby, the focus has shifted towards the special dynamics of communities and life in the rural districts as well as the opportunities for development in circumstances of shrinkage, urbanisation and globalisation (Svendsen and Tanvig, 2007; Tanvig, 2007).

2.4.1 Towards a definition of rural districts and villages

In research, there is hardly a definition of the rural districts which causes a general issue in research dealing with these areas (Svendsen and Tanvig, 2007). One can argue that the rural areas contrast the urban areas but where is the exact distinction or boundary between the urban and the rural? And by which characteristics do these concepts differ?

Hanne Tanvig describes what characterises the rural districts and emphasises that there are many similarities to other districts as well:

"If rural districts as a term should make sense, there still needs to be something that distinguishes the rural districts from other districts. That is presumed to be the special rural space with its special resources and barriers but it is the same type of processes that steer the development there like in every other place" (Tanvig, 2007, p. 218, Author's translation).

Tanvig's understanding links to the fact that, in the past, a live in the city clearly distinguished from a live in the country side. Somehow, these differences have become a bit more vague and blurred since the process of urbanisation has not only brought a movement of people *towards* the cities. There has also been a movement of an urban mentality and lifestyle *outwards* from the cities to the hinterland. This implies that the lifestyle in the rural districts is not old fashioned or rural per se, and over time, people have become more mobile. The potential for having a modern, recreational and urban lifestyle is therefore not strictly reserved for the urban dwellers but can take place everywhere. This is for instance due to the

blurred boundaries derived from technological development, increased mobility, and labour marked (Hansen et al., 2014; Svendsen, 2013).

Despite the blurred differences, there is still a discursively constructed difference. Like the introduction of chapter 1 touched upon, the language has been used to describe the rural districts, especially in media. More neutral terminologies such as *rural districts* or *the countryside* were supplemented by several negatively loaded terms in the early 2000s and most extensively in 2010 (Svendsen, 2013). *The Rotten Banana (Den Rådne Banan)* and *Peripheral Denmark (Udkantsdanmark)* exemplifies the negatively loaded terms.

Looking for at more perceptible or quantifiable definition of the rural districts, Gunnar Lind Haase Svendsen has attempted to create three categories of rural districts which can possibly qualify the concept:

- Rural districts in close proximity to urban areas which are thriving
- Peripheral rural districts in which an acceptable development takes place
- Outer peripheral rural districts in which the risk of depopulation and derived effects lie in wait (Svendsen and Tanvig, 2007, p. 306)

In this regard, the geographical scope of this research is the peripheral rural districts. This includes both areas experiencing development and those facing challenges. Thereby, the close hinterland of the urban areas is of less interest in this regard since other dynamics, activities, and premises for development are characterising these areas. Instead, the areas of interest are rural districts facing some of the challenges in terms of depopulation or stagnation, and areas being sparsely populated in comparison to the populous cities.

Within the rural districts, there are areas with higher concentrations of people which can be categorised as *villages*. Again, there are several definitions and understandings of the concept. Statistics Denmark operates by a definition of urban areas as contiguously built environments with at least 200 inhabitants and no distances of more than 200 meters between houses (except from public facilities and cemeteries) (Statistics Denmark, 2020). Villages are defined as a category of urban areas by populations of 200-999 inhabitants (Statistics Denmark, 2019c).

As a part of the preparatory work leading to the additional legal framework for strategic planning and viable villages (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2018), the Committee for Viable Villages (*Udvalget for levedygtige landsbyer*) focused its work on built environments and local communities with a maximum of 1.000 inhabitants. This distinction was backed up by arguments of common definitions in statistical work, and that villages of this size often struggle with issues

related to the demographic development (Committee for Viable Villages, 2018). Subscribing to this definition, about 1 million or almost one fifth of the Danish population find themselves living in a village in 2019 (Statistics Denmark, 2019b).

Since this research has a qualitative focus and is concerned with planning embracing the rural districts and the villages located in the rural districts, an exact quantitative definition of villages is of minor interest. Instead, the special circumstances, activities, and present challenges in the villages shape my perception of a village. It is secondary if an area has 50 or 1.500 inhabitants and thereby falls out of the statistically defined category. The areas between the smaller urban areas compose places that people may feel a sense of belonging to, thereby making up an "uncountable" audience for the activities and services located in villages. Still, the statistical definition can be perceived as a guideline for an approximate size of villages, thereby, ensuring that the research does not intentionally revolve around built environments being populated by for example 5.000 inhabitants.

In an absolute understanding of space, villages compose a physical entity with more or less defined borders, built on solid ground, and can be registered and visualised on a map (Svendsen, 2013). But the people living in the villages also live in a relational space where the boundaries are blurred. Here, economic and social capital are exchanged, people know places and other people outside the village, and the inhabitants will go to work, school and leisure activities outside their local villages. All sort of goods and information cross the physical borders of the villages and are expanding the village both horizontally and vertically (Svendsen and Tanvig, 2007; Svendsen, 2013). This understanding states a reason for the research to operate with both villages and the rural context in a relational and relative understanding of space. The concepts are simply interlinked and overlapping in many perspectives.

2.4.2 Demographic shrinkage and growth

Population decline is a popular topic in literature on the rural districts. The demographic tendencies seem to be very important to the rural districts and the development taking place there. The literature includes research on the field, for instance political responses to the trends and how shrinkage complements an overall desire for growth in society (Hospers and Reverda, 2015).

First, it is relevant to define where the rural distinguishes from the urban. Gunnar Lind Haase Svendsen and Hanne Wittorff Tanvig (2007) address that the rural districts in Denmark are often considered as a rest. This is for instance due to the Danish definition of urban areas that states that a contiguously built

environment with at least 200 inhabitants and a maximum distance between houses of 200 meters (public facilities and cemeteries excluded) makes up an urban area. Hence, the rural districts are considered as the remaining area surrounding the urban centres – *the rest* (Statistics Denmark, 2020; Svendsen and Tanvig, 2007).

In 2019, the rural districts accounted for 11,9% of the Danish population (690,776 inhabitants) and if the smaller urban areas with 200-999 inhabitants are counted in, the number is 18,8% (Statistics Denmark, 2019c). Urban areas with up to 999 inhabitants account for many of the smaller villages in the rural landscape.

In a European scale, the rural regions account for 28% of the population. Whereas the urban population in Europe is projected to increase by 24 million inhabitants by 2050, the rural population is projected to decline by almost 8 million throughout the same period (Raugze et al., 2017). Population decline, demographic shrinkage and depopulation are all synonyms. The global population continuously grows but the increasing number of inhabitants is not evenly spread all over the globe. Neither is it the case in Europe like the numbers show – the majority of urban areas grow and the rural districts experience decline (Hospers and Reverda, 2015).

Demographic shrinkage has several implications. If the population shrinks over a period of time, a mismatch between the demand and supply of public services will occur. This becomes evident in examples like a shrinking number of pupils in the public schools, a smaller basis for tax revenues and public facilities like libraries, health care etc. Shrinkage has also proven to have implications for the private sector in terms of fewer working places and a lack of skilled labour due to a lower level of education. Overall, shrinkage is considered to carry several vicious implications (Raugze et al., 2017; Hospers and Syssner, 2019). In other words, the basis for sustaining public services and a private sector dwindles with demographic shrinkage. One of the causes to shrinkage is a strong urbanisation. Throughout the last centuries, cities have proven to be "*magnets for people*" (Hospers and Syssner, 2019, p. 9) and the urban areas continue to grow at the expense of the non-urban areas. People leave the rural districts for education and work. The rural districts are left with a smaller basis for sustaining public services, attracting investments and maintaining the physical structures (Hospers and Syssner, 2019; Hospers and Reverda, 2015).

Even though it is argued, that there is more to the rural areas than shrinkage and downturn, it seems relevant to further examine how to deal with shrinkage as a fundamental condition in cases of planning for the rural districts.

2.4.3 Identifying risk indicators of shrinkage

Trine Segers et al. (2020) have conceptualised shrinkage in the article *Conceptualizing demographic shrinkage in a growing region – Creating opportunities for spatial practice*. Here, existing demographic shrinkage is studied in Flanders, Belgium as an attempt to adopt the concept of shrinkage into the spatial planning practice. This is done by use of three methodological lenses: Study of actual demographics, exploration of typical indicators for the risk of shrinkage, and study of the spatial policies and public debate taking place within the studied region of Flanders.

According to Segers et al. the risk indicators of shrinkage are:

- **Current shrinkage** can be understood as an indicator since current demographic development can be an indicator of the tendencies in a period of 20-30 years. This is because shrinkage has proven to be more persistent than growth.
- **Ageing population** is a risk indicator of future shrinkage since the mortality rate will be higher than the birth rate. If there is no external immigration, the population will shrink.
- **House prices** of an area can be compared to the national average in order to evaluate house prices as a risk indicator. This indicates the attractiveness of an area in terms of movement of people and investment among others (Segers et al., 2020).

Such indicators can be considered in strategy-making for rural areas since the indicators hold a potential for pointing out the demographic development tendencies in order to deal with them, thereby an opportunity for taking demographic shrinkage into account while planning. For instance in order to identify the locations where it makes sense to apply for public resources and funds to demolish vacant and ramshackle buildings as means of beautifying an area or to develop new projects. Like Segers et al. argue: "*Indicators for the risk of shrinkage should be able to point out the opportunities and strategic value for demolition, as well as indicate the negative impact of future population decline*" (Segers et al., 2020, p. 8).

Literature has shown several different perspectives on shrinkage and its relation to growth. This is the subject of the following section.

2.4.4 Different perspectives on shrinkage

In 1957, Gunnar Myrdal developed the *cumulative causation theory*. The theory states that there are certain cumulative tendencies related to both growth and

decline, and a causal relation exists between a process of growth in one place and a process of decline in another place. If an area experiences growth, it will attract new investments and cause immigration and thereby extra tax revenues etc. The opposite will happen if an area experiences decline – it will cause less investments, emigration, less tax revenues etc. Myrdal argues that these different responses are interlinked in the sense that the labour force moving away from the area marked by decline will move towards the area that experiences growth – and the other way around. Growth in one place causes decline in another place which composes the causality. According to Myrdal this is what we often see in a center-periphery relationship in which the core gets overcrowded and motivate some people to move outside the core to obtain a cheaper and more quiet life. Thereby, the periphery depends on the spread effects of the core (Lindkvist, 2002; Hospers and Reverda, 2015).

A strength of Myrdal's theory is the relation between growth and decline (Hospers and Reverda, 2015). Still, his understanding has met critique. One point of criticism is that his theory may be considered outdated due to the development of technology which has blurred out boundaries and created new opportunities for development (Castells, 1996 in Tanvig, 2007). Whereas goods and information have flowed in a horizontal axis, the flow is now extended vertically by telecommunication, accessible opportunities for transportation and a more global division of labour. Thereby, the local space is not that local anymore since there are numerous relations to the surrounding, global world today which have created new opportunities for communication, interaction and development (Tanvig, 2007).

Myrdal's theory may also be considered a bit too simplified. This view is processed by Gert-Jan Hospers and Nol Reverda who are critical of the isolated understanding of a local area. They ask: "*Can an area really only develop itself by the settling of companies and inhabitants from the outside?*" (Hospers and Reverda, 2015, p. 35). There are more answers to that question. For instance that both internal and external factors are important to the local development opportunities – this will be elaborated further in section 2.4.6.

2.4.5 Responses to shrinkage

Hospers and Reverda (2015; 2014) have identified four different policy responses to shrinkage in Europe which represents four ways of addressing shrinkage in both urban and rural contexts:

1. **Trivialising shrinkage** implies that demographic trends such as shrinkage are of no relevance. Statistics and numbers are refused. Turning the back to

-
- decline is risky since the consequences show with delay. Only birth, mortality and migration have a say in demographic changes – to exemplify this, the potential mothers of the next generations are born already, and thereby, seeing the downturns too late will make it more difficult to change the circumstances.
2. **Countering shrinkage** is a frequently used approach. This implies a desire to fight the shrinkage, for instance by creating settlement campaigns, branding areas and attempting to make areas more attractive. This response is not sustainable according to Hospers and Reverda since the all campaigns and efforts are aimed at people who can only live in one place.
 3. **Managing shrinkage** is a response based on acceptance. Instead of considering strategies for attracting settlement, this response focuses on the current residents and existing qualities. Here, the key is to reinforce and support the existing rather than planning for new development as an example.
 4. **Utilising shrinkage** builds on the perception that shrinkage creates new opportunities – in fact that a shrinking area is an area of new opportunities. Here, we see a break with the growth paradigm – instead, the focus is on creating new opportunities, new experiments and new communities (Hospers and Reverda, 2015; Hospers, 2014).

The four policy responses to shrinkage express a developing comprehension of shrinkage – also, the interest and awareness to the subject have increased. Nowadays, shrinkage has become a term of great importance (Hospers and Reverda, 2015). The four responses are found in both urban and rural areas experiencing shrinkage which indicates that the policy approaches to shrinkage are not necessarily related to the context but is to a greater extent about the mentality to the issues of shrinkage.

To elaborate a bit further of the fourth policy response, an alternative understanding of growth and decline follows: "*With growth there are too many people in an excessively small area; with decline, there are too few people in an excessively large space. Thus, the most important distinction between growth and decline has been made. In situations of growth, we speak of shortages, too little, scarcity. In the case of decline, we speak of excess, too much, surplus*" (Hospers and Reverda, 2015, p. 24). Instead of perceiving the downsides, there is an opportunity of identifying the *surplus* as a means to create new possibilities. For instance, a surplus of vacant public buildings can be used in new ways which can bring something different to the community (Hospers and Reverda, 2015). This can be exemplified by utilising the buildings of a former school that has been closed due to centralisation in new ways.

Since 2002, a pan-European team funded by the European Union has researched the demographic development in Europe in order to provide and transfer knowledge on regional change and development. The team is called ESPON EGTC, and one of the team's publications *Shrinking Rural Regions in Europe* presents tendencies of rural shrinkage and identifies recent approaches to solve current issues. In brief, three different policy responses have been identified (Raugze et al., 2017). These are:

1. **Do nothing** – deny or avoid responding to the problem
2. **Try to reverse the trend** – focus on stimulating growth
3. **Accept decline** – manage its consequences proactively (Raugze et al., 2017)

The ESPON research thereby confirms that the essence of Hospers and Reverda's four policy responses are to be identified empirically in European rural planning. Still, accepting decline and adopting the approach into rural planning has not been widely considered. Instead, there still seems to be a strong desire for growth-stimulation to which an acceptance of decline seems counterintuitive – both to politicians and the civil society (Raugze et al., 2017).

2.4.6 Quantity or quality?

So far, literature on demographic shrinkage has indicated a shift towards a broader acceptance of shrinkage. A new paradigm marked by a smaller focus on growth and a bigger orientation towards enhancing the existing citizens, human capital, grounded resources, and potentials (Raugze et al., 2017). Thereby, Hospers and Reverda's wondering becomes relevant: "*Can an area really only develop itself by the settling of companies and inhabitants from the outside?*" (Hospers and Reverda, 2015, p. 35).

Responding this wonder, it is worth looking into the values and potentials of the rural districts. The local resources includes both place-based and non place-based resources. Gunnar Lind Haase Svendsen (2007) defines the place-based resources as unique and thereby difficult to replace or move to somewhere else. These are for example the local culture, the history of a place, local traditions, local (tacit) knowledge, and local networks (Svendsen, 2007). The place-based resources are sometimes considered comparative advantages due to the uniqueness which cannot be found or created everywhere – this also includes territorial resources such as natural capital, trademarks and cultural heritage (Svendsen and Tanvig, 2007; Raugze et al., 2017). The non place-based resources, then, are typically mobile, possible to create and break down, and often, the place-based resources are quantifiable. Examples are citizens, infrastructures, political and economic

structures. The interplay and relation between the place-based and non place-based resources are considered vital for the development of rural districts (Svendsen, 2007).

Another set of terms used in literature is *endogenous* and *exogenous* resources or development. *Endogenous* resources can be the local capacity to initiate activity and development, for instance by citizens, local communities and local entrepreneurs – or in many circumstances, by local, passionate grassroots. It represents a bottom-up approach to development and requires that the local potential is addressed and the local resources are mobilised in order to create development from the endogenous resources. Reversely, the exogenous resources are defined by a top-down approach. These are outside factors affecting the local scale such as policies on moving public agencies to the rural districts, or policies on relocating resources. These are examples of exogenous forces having an impact on the endogenous scale (Tanvig, 2012; Hospers and Syssner, 2019).

In literature, it is argued that the endogenous development deserves greater attention and holds a valuable potential for creating development (Raugze et al., 2017; Svendsen and Tanvig, 2007; Tanvig, 2012; Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016). To strengthen the endogenous development, the local potentials can be supplemented and strengthened by means of exogenous development (Tanvig, 2012; Raugze et al., 2017). Interrelating the endogenous and exogenous drives are sometimes defined as *neo-endogenous relations* (Tanvig, 2012).

It is argued, that bringing actors of multiple levels together helps strengthening the efforts. The ESPON research group claims that efforts made at the municipal level will not create sustainable changes. Instead, "*(...) more consolidated and collective efforts at national/regional levels are essential, including for prioritising and allocating appropriate resources and funds and formulating strategies*" (Raugze et al., 2017, p. 11) This calls for collaboration between the national, regional and municipal levels in order to allocate and support the endogenous initiatives.

Combining the place-based resources and unique characteristics with social capital is argued to be the recipe for strong, rural development (Svendsen, 2007). But how can this be done? And will a strategic approach come in handy?

2.5 Strategy-making in a rural context – a wicked problem

In a research project examining a strategic and collaborative Danish planning process in a rural district, Anne Tietjen and Gertrud Jørgensen (2016) found that planners had several important functions in terms of managing the strategic projects. The research is based on a case study of a planning project in Thisted Municipality

which was part of the initiative *Land of Opportunities (Mulighedernes Land)* – a partnership-based project including the charitable trust, Realdania, and three Danish municipalities in 2006-2012. The aim of the specific project in Thisted Municipality was to "(...) *increase the attractiveness of coastal villages and develop a brand with a focus on cultural heritage, surfing and other water-related activities*" (Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016, p. 38). Besides creating changes to the physical environment, the project succeeded to create corporation networks, engage local communities, increase commitment and stimulate new activities engaging both citizens, surfers, fishermen, and tourists. Thereby, the project took its point of departure in the physical structures but emerged to build social capital, a sense of community and social cohesion by means of a collaborative and strategic planning approach (Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016).

The planners served to integrate the project ideas of local communities and citizens into the broader strategic visions and policies of the municipality. Also, they fitted the ideas into other projects in order to optimise the use of resources. Also, in this case, the planners had a major task in raising finances and funds for the projects. Lastly, being responsible for the collaboration and communication between the numerous stakeholders was an important task of the planners as part of a collaborative process. Especially the latter function as a communicative facilitator was considered very valuable and important to the results of the project: "*The fact that an effort was made in the project to identify and engage local communities and other actors to increase their commitment to the formulated tasks was a deciding factor with regards to the successful results*" (Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016, p. 40).

Even though the challenges of the rural districts are well-described, each place has its unique circumstances and characteristics that need to be considered in every case. Also, activities and changes take place in multiple levels which create a new organisational structure in each case. This makes rural shrinkage a *wicked problem* according to Tietjen and Jørgensen (2016). In 1973, Melvin M. Webber and Horst W. J. Rittel challenged the scientific approach to planning by addressing that most planning problems are wicked by nature (1973). This implies that planning problems cannot be simplified and solved by a simple solution. Instead, planning problems are all unique and require unique attention and actions. Planning problems rarely have one cause. Instead, the problems are often related to other problems, thereby being symptoms of other problems. Therefore, planners are left with the opportunity to create solutions that either can be good or bad, since every move will leave traces – in other words, the only way to test a solution is to test it in reality (Webber and Rittel, 1973). In order to respond to wicked planning problems, the planning approach should involve "*collective learning, exploration, and experimentation*" (Xiang, 2013

in Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016) and be transdisciplinary in terms of collaboration and inclusion.

Tietjen and Jørgensen lean towards Healey and Albrechts' recent perception of strategic planning in which there is a need for engaging with the local citizens and constructing human networks as well as mobilising both human and non-human actors and resources (Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016; Healey, 2007; Albrechts, 2004).

Activating the local resources can be done strategically. In fact, the ESPON research group claims that: "*Holistic, proactive and place-based strategies consistent with 21st Century realities are important prerequisite for stimulating the endogenous potential of rural areas*" (Raugze et al., 2017, p. 7). The strategic choices must reflect the desires of the citizens, and reflect the place-based potentials. The need for holistic strategies implies that more factors must be taken into account rather than creating a strategy as a solution to one specific problem like Tietjen and Jørgensen (2016) also underlined. The holistic approach asks for a broader perspective bringing in multiple levels and thinking both horizontally and vertically. Endogenous and exogenous drivers must be engaged, different issues such as shrinkage and employment must be addressed, and creative solutions to the problems must be tested and evaluated in practice (Raugze et al., 2017; Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016).

2.6 Analytical framework for strategy-making in rural district planning

On the basis of the reviews of strategic planning and literature on rural districts, I will in the following section conceptualise how strategic planning in the rural districts can take shape. The aim is to develop a vocabulary and an analytical framework that can be applied to an empirical case in order to research how strategic planning in a rural district is done and by which objectives, and to examine if this is done in consistency with the ideals appearing in the literature.

Conceptualising a strategic approach to planning for rural districts requires attention to the context and conditions which are very different to the urban setting. It needs to be modified, and elements need to be extracted to fit into a rural setting (Humer, 2018; Healey, 2009).

2.6.1 A different context and new objectives

At this point, it can be stated that the context in which strategies have evolved is to a great extent marked by an urban setting. Here, a desire for growth, development, and competition has dominated the motivation for strategic planning,

and strategies have served as a means to facilitate multiple actors, investments and to find a direction among the numerous possibilities. In comparison, the planning context in the rural districts may be considered significantly different: Words such as shrinkage, decline, and stagnation are used to describe the development - especially in terms of the demographic development but also as physical decay, a fading basis of tax revenues, and a decreasing numbers of jobs. Villages in the rural districts have a smaller scale in comparison to most urban areas. Also, the way people organise themselves in communities is typical to the rural districts and makes up a difference from urban areas as well. This means that planning in rural a rural context is expected to be less concerned with economic growth, and the local communities are an important aspect to consider in planning.

One can argue that the urban areas and regions are still focused on growth, competition, and investments. Similarly, strategies have been used in times of growth or as a means to stimulate growth throughout time. Shrinkage and decline contrast this setting. Literature about shrinkage in rural districts underlines that these development trends should rather be accepted or even utilised instead of facing the challenges by a growth-oriented objective. This makes up an alternative motivation for planning and strategy-making than usually. Instead of focusing on growth, competition, and investments, a different motivation is present in the rural districts. This is expressed partly in literature in terms of the focus on accepting or even utilising shrinkage, or in the focus on activating the local resources such as the place-based potentials and the endogenous drivers. Also partly in practice, like it is expressed in the addition to the Danish Planning Act (*Lov om ændring af lov om planlægning*) where strategic planning in the rural districts is expected to: "(...) support a development of viable local communities in villages" (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2018, § 5 d) which indicates a more qualitative-based objective. Here, the aim is to ensure that the rural districts provide its citizens with the basis for a good life – that the rural districts are viable, just like the urban districts. In this regard, planning can help to discover and activate the potentials of the rural districts such as nature, communities, place-based resources etc. to increase viability of the areas. This is a contrast to a rather quantitative aim expressed in a desire for growth and increased settlement which seems to have been the dominating objective for rural districts in present times and still today, in cities. Strategy-making in a rural context thereby requires attention to the differences in terms of objectives and context – especially if planning is supposed to move beyond the growth focus.

2.6.2 Applicable elements of analytical and learning strategies

Like in the urban or regional context, it is difficult to conclude that one approach to strategy-making fits all cases in the rural context. Still, the different approaches can be converted into the new context by considering the surrounding circumstances. Elements of both analytical and learning strategies may be considered valuable.

The analytical strategies call for an understanding of the present situation in order to select a path to follow – an objective. Here, technical analyses serve to bring light to the issues that the strategies need to address. Analyses of the demographic development and demographic projections can provide knowledge about how the demography has changed and is expected to develop. This may be considered helpful in terms of the selection of projects, initiatives, and strategic approaches. This is also what Segers et al. (2020) call for – the importance of knowing the demographic situation in order to act upon it. Analyses can help identifying places or villages in which the foundation for livability crumbles away due to the demographic development and its triggers, or it can identify places from which lessons can be learned. Thereby, using the analytical approach as a starting point can help planners to gain knowledge about the present situation and to make qualified decisions.

Among **the learning strategies**, the rhetoric and symbolic strategies are likely to appear in practice as well. For instance to prove that planning meets the expectations of the legislative framework despite a need for prioritising the tasks locally.

In a rural context, one can expect that strategies as frames of references will be a useful approach as well. In comparison to the urban context, the common visions or perceptions of the future may have a different operational sign – instead of a growth-oriented vision, the common imaginations of the future will most likely be about utilising the existing resources, enhancing the possibilities for creating viability or sustaining communities and networks in local projects. Thereby, strategies as frames of references in a rural context has a different objective. It has the potential of bringing citizens of the rural districts together to openly discuss how they picture the area and what they want it to become – also in the perspective that the residents need to comprehend shrinkage and adapt to it. From a planner's perspective, this is an opportunity to get to know an area and its citizens better throughout a collaborative process that equips the planners with a basis for formulating a vision in company with the locals.

Overall, the learning strategies seem valuable as a means to discover the local qualities and activating the local communities. In order to identify these local potentials such as place-based resources and endogenous driving forces, the local actors hold a great capacity themselves. In this regard, using strategies in terms of mobilising local communities to sustain existing networks and establish new networks must be considered important, as well as learning from the locals in order to meet the need for understanding the local context into details like Healey (2009) calls for.

Obviously, **the scale** is a rather important aspect to consider in this regard. The population in a rural village with detached housing, smallholdings, and space is both smaller in number and density than a bigger city or urban area with high-rise buildings and compact living. Despite these differences, a wide range of activities, daily practices, and processes are the same. Healey argues that spatial strategy-making in cities and urban regions is a difficult task to do in consistency with the collaborative planning ideals because of the big scale, the numerous implicated actors and high complexity (Healey, 1996). Whether it is the aim to specifically create *spatial* strategies or other types of strategies, a smaller scale and number of actors may undoubtedly make the process less complicated and confusing, and instead enable a democratic and inclusive process to a greater extent.

Strategies as a means to mobilise the local actors are likely to bring together people to compose creative, open processes where potentials and resources can be identified and activated. Bringing together the local communities and citizens also taps into the literature on creating a sense of ownership and anchoring like Tietjen and Jørgensen (2016) among others find important in order to plant a seed which will continue to sprout and sustain the activities. This may be considered as a condition for planning in the rural districts – the finances are not inexhaustibly in declining areas, and thereby, the local people are a very valuable and important resource themselves. A similar collaborative approach in an urban context will more likely be to ensure democracy and transparency, but in the rural context, there is basis for more than that.

2.6.3 Analytical framework

At this point, the chapter has explored what the strategic planning approach implies, and how it can be utilised in the context of rural district planning. The theory presents several different ideals that has evolved. For instance:

- The learning strategies that have gained attention along with the emergence of the collaborative planning tradition as an alternative to the data-based and

analytical strategies.

- The idea of accepting or utilising the demographic tendencies in terms of shrinkage as a means to adapt to the development instead of ignoring or denying that shrinkage exists.
- Attempting to strive for qualitative objectives instead of focusing on quantitative objectives such as growth in planning.
- Accepting and appreciating the local resources, skills and identities as a supplement to the top-down approach to planning.

Even though it is possible to spot ideals within the presented theory, there is no '*right*' or '*wrong*', and one may expect that practice can reflect ideals as well as the alternative. Since practice is likely to reflect a such diversity, it is interesting to explore which role strategic planning plays in planning for rural districts – not only theoretically but also empirically. For instance to examine if the "ideals" are reflected in today's practice, and whether the former and the more recent approaches co-exist. Accompanied with practitioners' reflections about their work and experience, it can be considered how a strategic approach to planning in rural districts can take shape. It is relevant to explore what the strategies are expected to do in practice, and if these objectives are met by the planners' efforts.

In order to explore planning practice by means of a case study, an analytical framework is constructed to guide the analysis. It consists of four dimensions featuring both the former approaches and the more recent, "idealistic" approaches. The dimensions are formed as spans in order to provide an opportunity to identify what practice is like – ideals, the alternative, or something in between. On the basis of the four dimensions, I can examine how strategic planning is done by analysing practice according to the four dimensions. The four dimensions are illustrated in figure 2.3 on page 32.

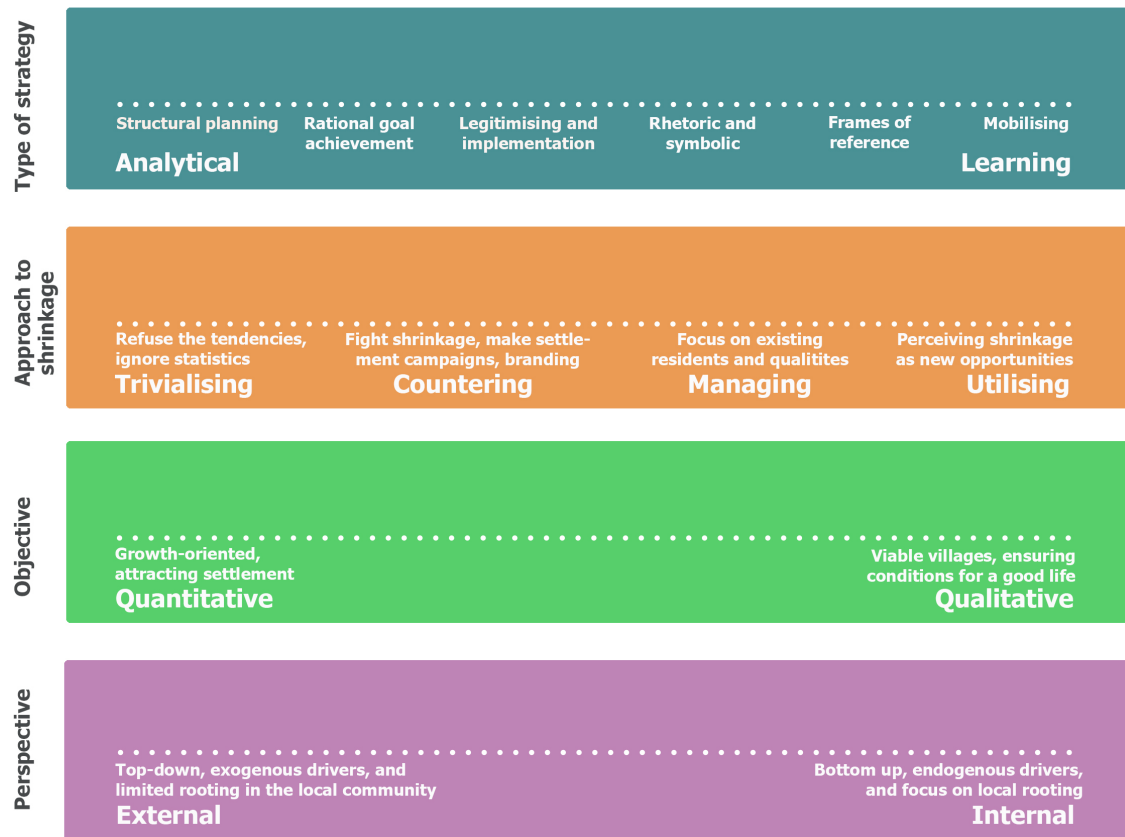


Figure 2.3: The four dimensions compose the analytical framework which will be applied on the empirical case of the research.

The first dimension, **type of strategy**, reflects the different perceptions of "strategic" and subscribes to Sehested's (2008) understanding. Since strategies are likely to appear as mixes, the intention is to place more marks in the figure if the empirical case happens to reflect more strategy-approaches.

The second dimension of the framework, **approach to shrinkage** is linked to the attitude to the demographic changes of Hospers and Reverda (2015). The dimension is included because the attitude to shrinkage seems to be crucial to planning in areas marked by shrinkage. The attitude to population decline might be reflected in the general approach to development and planning in rural areas.

The third dimension, **objective**, implies the practitioners' overall objectives in their work. This implies whether they focus on attracting new settlement, business, or to strengthen the economy. Reversely, a qualitative approach can be traced in focus on relations, communities and the physical surroundings. The dimension is included to explore if the empirical case of strategic planning succeeds to focus on more qualitative aspects such as creating viable villages, sustaining communities, and ensuring a basis for people to live a good life in the rural districts.

The fourth dimension is **perspective**. Here, the scope is to explore whether practice is initiated top-down and focuses on the exogenous drivers, or whether it is rooted to the local communities, is initiated bottom-up and succeeds to activate endogenous drivers of the local area.

In section 3.4 on page 49, I will elaborate further on the analytical framework and explain how it is applied to the empirical case of the research. Chapter 4 *Strategic planning for rural districts in Skive Municipality* presents the findings.

2.7 Partial conclusion

This chapter has explored how strategic planning can be conceptualised to the field of planning in rural districts. It was found that "strategy" and "strategy-making" are wide concepts that in a planning context traditionally are applied to an urban context and often concerned with objectives such as growth and investments. Applying the strategic approach to a different context requires a conceptualisation (Healey, 2007).

Along with the shifting turns in planning tradition, a new approach to strategy-making has emerged. Here, a more collaboration-inspired and inclusive perspective has got wind. Karina Sehested (2008) has among several other writers attempted to categorise the many approaches to strategy-making, acknowledging that the different types may appear both individually and in combinations in practice. In her perception, two main categories define the approaches: Analytical strategies and the more recent learning strategies. In a way, the categories reflect a development in practice, moving towards a greater attention to the learning strategies.

There has likewise been a normative development in the way shrinkage has been responded. Shrinkage covers the trend of decreasing populations causing challenges to many rural districts. The challenges can be responded in different ways, differing from trivialising to utilising (Hospers and Reverda, 2015), and research argues that accepting and utilising shrinkage can respond to some of the societal challenges in the long run (Raugze et al., 2017). In connection to that, planning in rural districts can have different objectives. For example a growth-orientated desire to attract settlement and expand tourism, or a more qualitative objective of enhancing viability of places in order to provide the existing residents with a strong basis for a good life in the rural districts. Planning can seek to activate the local and place-based resources in order to the meet different objectives. In recent times, a focus on local rooting and engagement has grown, as a contrast to the top-down initiated approach (Svendsen and Tanvig, 2007; Svendsen, 2013; Tanvig, 2007). In this regard, both the external and internal perspectives are considered important to

sustain local development (Tanvig, 2007).

Altogether, transforming strategic planning into the context of rural districts requires conceptualisation. The context is for instance defined by a general development trend marked by shrinkage which causes that the economy needs to be considered differently, e.g. by means of subsidies provided by external drivers. Another way that the context is marked, is due to the local scale, small communities, associational life, and local identities and qualities that are considered a local potential.

One can argue that all planning to some degree is strategic. The question is then, how it is strategic and by which objectives. The analytical framework (see figure 2.3) is expected to structure the analysis of the rural district planning practice in Skive Municipality in the years 2009-2020 in chapter 4. The analytical framework includes four dimensions that are expected to help bringing light to how strategic planning has been done in practice.

3 Research design and methodology

In this chapter, I will outline how the research is planned and carried out. Firstly, I will elaborate on the research question and present the design of the research. Secondly, I will present a series of reflections on my scientific stance in the project including how ontological and epistemological assumptions influence the research approach. Lastly, I will turn to the methodological approach of the research by presenting how the empirical data collection is planned and carried out and how data is processed. This also implies considerations about the selected case and how the analytical framework will be applied in order to link theory to practice and extract empirical findings.

3.1 Research design

The starting point for this research is a wonder about what strategy-making can bring to planning in the context of rural districts and whether a strategic planning approach is the answer to the present challenges in the rural districts. This composes an empirical problem in which it seems relevant to question whether the new requirements to the municipalities (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2018) will cause a change in the way the rural districts are treated in planning. If so, what can such a change possibly bring to rural districts and the villages located in these areas? This evokes a curiosity about what strategic planning is. Whether it is one specific take on planning or a broader concept, and whether strategic planning as a concept fits into the special circumstances and tendencies that are characteristic to the rural districts. This makes up a conceptual wonder.

In order to explore these wonders, I have created a research design to illustrate how I expect to research this specific field. The design of the research is presented in figure 3.1 on page 36.

The research is based on a qualitative approach. The scope is to explore what strategic planning as a concept can bring to planning in the rural setting by combining theory on strategic planning and practical experiences of planners who have dealt with rural district planning. This leads to a discussion about how the requirements can be adopted to practice and whether it will change practice and respond to the challenges of the rural districts. The idea of learning from practitioners is a frequently used research approach in the field of planning, and

writers within the field claim that practitioners know way more than they can even tell (Schön, 1983). This underlines the potential of learning from practice since we can learn far more from stories of practitioners compared to what we can learn from research and scientific work (Forester, 1999; Flyvbjerg, 2009).

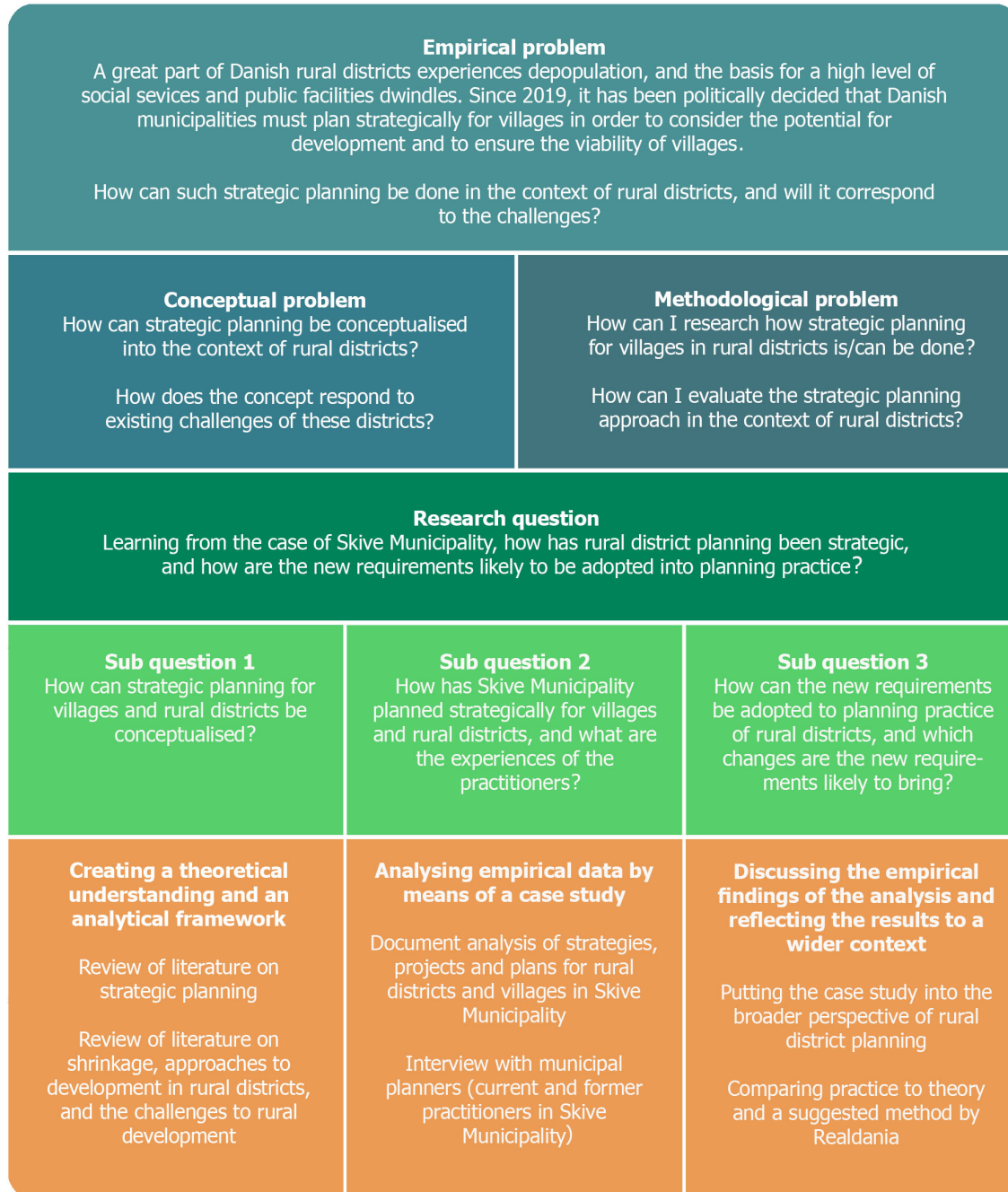


Figure 3.1: The research design including the preliminary framing of the problem, the research question and sub questions, and the methodological approach.

Like it is shown in figure 3.1, the research is concerned with the main research question:

Learning from the case of Skive Municipality, how has rural district planning been strategic, and how are the new requirements likely to be adopted into planning practice?

In order to answer this question, I have divided the research into three partial sub questions which are processed within different chapters of the report. The preceding chapter 2 *Conceptualising strategic planning* already responded to the first sub question related to theory and existing literature on the field of strategic planning, and from that, I have conceptualised strategic planning into the context of rural districts. As elaborated in chapter 2, strategic planning is typically concerned with an urban context or a regional scale, and since municipalities must plan strategically for villages of the rural districts, it is relevant to question how such strategic approach can look in a rural context. The attempt has thereby been to combine the theoretical knowledge on strategic planning with theory on the rural districts and villages in order to build an analytical framework that can be applied to the selected empirical case of Skive Municipality.

The second sub question is concerned with the empirical case. Here, I explore how planning for villages and rural districts has been carried out in Skive Municipality throughout the last decade. This leads to the analysis of the chosen empirical data source which is the experiences of planners who deal with or have dealt with planning in the rural districts. Their expressions and reflections about their practice are supplemented by analyses of a selection of planning documents in which strategic considerations on the rural districts are expressed, e.g. local development projects. The second sub questions is processes in chapter 4 *Strategic planning for rural districts in Skive Municipality*.

Lastly, the third sub question leads to a discussion of the empirical findings and reflects how the new requirements are likely to be adopted into practice. Here, I will compare the empirical findings to a recently published method for applying strategic planning to villages that has been developed by Realdania and published in May 2020. Lastly, the discussion will include reflections about how the new requirements possibly will bring changes to the practice of rural district planning. This is the content of chapter 5 *New requirements - new practice?*

Altogether, the three sub questions will guide the research and provide a basis for exploring the case of rural district planning in a municipal context both empirically and theoretically. It should enable me to reflect how a strategic approach fits

planning in a rural context including both potentials and limitations, and bring light to the potential causes and effects of the new requirements to planning.

3.2 Scientific stand (social constructivism)

The research has a qualitative focus and aims to learn from both theory and practice. The deconstruction of strategic planning in rural district (chapter 2 *Conceptualising strategic planning*) compose a basis for the empirical data collection that provides me with practical experience in order to develop new perspectives and understandings of the topic. From this, I will obtain an insight in what a strategic approach to planning in rural districts can do and cannot do (Juul and Pedersen, 2012).

The scientific stand of the research is closely linked to social constructivism. From this view, the ontological understanding is that the world or the 'truth' is subjective – it depends on the subject's beliefs, values, and perspectives. Thereby, there are multiple understandings of the world and several different 'truths' to explore. Somehow, it does not make sense to talk about one specific ontological realisation but rather acknowledge that there are multiple comprehensions which are constructed through our own perception and affected by discourses and ideologies of the society (Juul and Pedersen, 2012). This causes that the findings of the research will only reflect a part of the truth, my own understanding and interpretation, and respondents' social constructions.

Kirsten Bransholm Pedersen (2012) states that "*(...) our preconditions for producing knowledge are based on a series of pre-understandings which are historically and spatially constructed and are embedded in societal discourses*" (2012, p. 206, Author's translation). This understanding underlines that we grasp knowledge and phenomena in a context that is affected by culture, history, society, and social processes. An understanding of a phenomena can change over time - this can be exemplified by the role of planning which has changed along with events, history, and the state of the market. Likewise, different cultures and geographies have formed the way planning is understood and performed.

One can expect that strategies as a concept can be interpreted differently according to the circumstances and contexts in which the interpretation takes place. This means that, as a researcher, I must consider the context in which knowledge is constructed, and I must be aware of the pre-understandings which the respondents and I are likely to bring into the research. Being reflective is therefore a fundamental principle of research, especially in the light of social constructivism (Juul and Pedersen, 2012).

My pre-understandings of the research are partly shaped by the theoretical foundation that I have obtained while writing the theoretical foundation of the project, but personal interests, education, experience, personal history and the like have also shaped my orientation. While I consider that I have developed a theoretical foundation, the respondents are expected to have a more practical foundation, which is a difference I need to bear in mind. To blur these contrasts a bit, I attempt to share my perspectives and understanding as well while collecting the empirical data. This means that the theoretical basis has been carried out prior to the empirical data collection.

Since the included respondents work within the organisation of Skive Municipality, I expect that they carry around tacit knowledge that they have obtained through experience, and this knowledge is somehow inaccessible for most outside parties. I acknowledge that I cannot get to understand every little part of the practitioners work and experience, but the aim of the research is to move beyond the obvious practice. This implies that the data is collected from a qualitative approach where different topics can be elaborated. At this point, I can benefit from my experience and insight in Skive Municipality – both as and organisation since I did my 9th semester internship in the organisation, and because the district around Skive is my native county. This means that for long, I have paid attention to the development of the area, and this attention has been shaped by my interest in local communities, rural district development and the field of planning. Altogether, this provides me with an understanding of the area which somehow composes a common ground for the interviews.

Like stated on page 38 social processes also help shaping the realities. This creation of social processes happens in different levels. People negotiate on a micro level which helps creating the understanding of a phenomena. This is often accompanied by ethical, political, and social considerations (Juul and Pedersen, 2012). One can imagine how these negotiations take place among colleagues who collaborate on a certain task or within a certain field of which a common understanding or language seems valuable. On a more general level, the macro level, our understandings are shaped by ideologies, media, and discourses (Juul and Pedersen, 2012). This can be exemplified by the way planning is covered in media, by the way the political debate proceeds, and according to perception of 'best practice' in the recent literature. A general discourse may affect the way we understand and comprehend the world we are acting in, and thereby, the language becomes important. The words we apply to a phenomena and the way we talk about a topic helps to construct our understanding. The way we address the development trends of the rural districts may become important to the way we understand what

we see – do we think of the development trends as challenges, problems, trivialities or opportunities? The language becomes a representation of the existing world, and as a researcher, I must pay attention to that fact (Juul and Pedersen, 2012).

In fact, it has been discussed whether the challenges of the rural districts have been discursively constructed or intensified by means of the language (Dybvad, 2015; Lyck, 2014; Svendsen, 2013). Several different terminologies have been used to describe the areas marked by depopulation and from that derived results. Different pictures of the areas are drawn up depending on the words applied. Are the areas problematic, far away from everything, or even like a *rotten banana*? Or are the areas *places of opportunities* (*Mulighedernes Land*) with resources and qualities? The use of negative terminologies are likely to paint a negative understanding, possibly worsening the situation (Svendsen, 2013). Nothing indicates that Denmark is more urbanised than many other countries in Europe. In fact, countries such as Germany and the Netherlands are more urbanised than Denmark (Andersen, 2018; Andersen et al., 2018), and in a way, it makes bigger sense to talk about a rural periphery in countries such as Bulgaria and Poland where statistics indicate clear differences between living conditions in the urban areas and the rural peripheries (Haldrup, 2013). Still, the differences and tendencies are worth addressing – also in a Danish context, but it illustrates that the scope of the problem can happen to be reinforced by the way we address it.

Subscribing to the scientific stand of social constructivism, it implies that the generated knowledge cannot be objective or neutral. The researcher will simply bring in his or her pre-understandings, deliberately or not. Research will always be affected by some kind of interpretation or reflect certain interests (Juul and Pedersen, 2012).

In this regard, the purpose of the research is not to consider when a village is viable or to decide what the development ideally should be like. Instead, the research is expected to explore the presumptions and arguments behind the different approaches, ambitions and motivations, and examine what the various approaches can possibly bring to planning and to the local areas. This is somehow consistent with my understanding of the field of planning - that planning does rarely take place on the basis of positivist objective analyses in isolated, limited surroundings. Instead, planning takes place in a context shrouded by political interests and social relations, and thereby, the basis cannot be strictly objective. This is also the case in my analyses that reflect my interpretations and focus. Still, I can strive towards presenting different understandings and process the empirical data in respect to the respondents' statements. In order to do so, all quotations that are actively

used in the project have been approved by the respondents. This includes the transcribed expressions, my translation of the expressions from Danish to English, and the meaning that I extract from the statements. Thereby, the respondents are provided with the opportunity to correct or add considerations to my interpretations of their expressions causing that the research is more likely to reflect the individual understandings.

These considerations are manifested in the research design. Both in terms of the aim of the research and in terms of the methodology. Aligned with the scientific stand, I do not expect to discover a ultimate, clear and one-sided answer. Instead, the research provides an understanding of the incentives and rationales of the practitioners in order to move beyond the visible actions, and to obtain a broad understanding of strategy-making as a concept as well as the potential effects and consequences of a such approach. The scientific stand is also expressed in the methodology – the way I collect data and knowledge about the subject. That is the content of the following section.

3.3 Methodology and empirical data collection

In order to move beyond the visible actions and written words, it seems necessary to ask questions and search for comprehensive, qualitative knowledge. To do so, a case study serves as the basis of the empirical part of the research. Here, the aim is to choose an informative case with a great amount of data to discover and learn from. To extract the data, a thorough data collection is planned by means of interviews and document analyses.

3.3.1 Case study

Choosing a case study approach as a basis for the empirical data collection enables me to collect in-depth and qualitative information. The aim is to examine a case carefully rather than having a broad scope of cases. This is linked to the case selection. The case has been selected strategically by the focus of choosing a case which can provide me with a great amount of information (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Since strategic planning in rural districts has a geographic scope in terms of the rural areas, and a set of stakeholders – for instance planners or development consultants – it makes sense to select the case on the basis of a few selected criteria:

1. The case must be geographically rooted in a rural district in which some of the characteristic tendencies of depopulation is a basic condition.
2. The case must contain experiences with strategy-making which can be researched in order to provide a fruitful basis for the data collection.

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3. The case must be defined by a geographic area in which planning takes place and where practitioners have operated or operate.

I have chosen Skive Municipality as the empirical case for the research since it meets the three criteria, and because of my prior knowledge about the organisation and location. Skive Municipality is located in the northernmost part of the Region of Central Jutland and forms a peninsula surrounded by Limfjorden. In 2019, the municipality had 46.224 citizens of which 45% of the population resides in the major city Skive. The remaining 55% of the population lives in the municipality's 19 villages with more than 200 inhabitants, in the smaller built environments or in the open country. The biggest village is Højslev Stationsby in which almost 3.000 residents live. In the period 2010-2020, there has only been an increase in population in one village – Balling (Statistics Denmark, 2019a). The remaining villages have shrunk by 0,8-22,7% since 2010. The rural district (areas with less than 200 citizens in statistical terms) have shrunk by 10,2% from 11.641 to 10.456 citizens in the same time frame. Thereby, depopulation is a fundamental condition in Skive Municipality (Statistics Denmark, 2019a), and the municipality meets the first criteria. Figure 3.2 on page 43 displays Skive Municipality and the population size of the villages.

According to the second criteria, Skive Municipality has planned for the rural districts, villages and rural development for long time. The work can be traced to the time of the Structural Reform in 2007 where the former Sallingsund Municipality, Skive Municipality, Spøttrup Municipality, and Sundsøre Municipality became unified into the recent Skive Municipality. Skive Municipality has conducted many different projects related to rural development, and two winners of the prize 'Village of the year in the Region of Central Jutland' (*Region Midtjyllands landsbypris*) are to be found in Skive Municipality, namely Rødding in 2012 and Glyngøre in 2015 (Skive Municipality, 2009b, 2019b). In practice, municipalities often learn from each other in order to improve their skills and approaches. This underlines the motive for selecting a municipality with wide experience in the field of rural district planning.

The third criteria is met because Skive Municipality makes up an entity in which practitioners have planned and plan for the rural districts of the area. This composes a geographically defined area which I can analyse. Current and former practitioners occupied by rural district planning in Skive Municipality within the years 2009-2020 can provide me with valuable data. These are the ones who can tell stories and share reflections about their practice. By exploring their practice, I can become familiar with their experiences, values, concerns, and effects related to their use of strategy-making in rural districts. In order to cover the time frame, I have sought to include both former and current practitioners in the data collection.

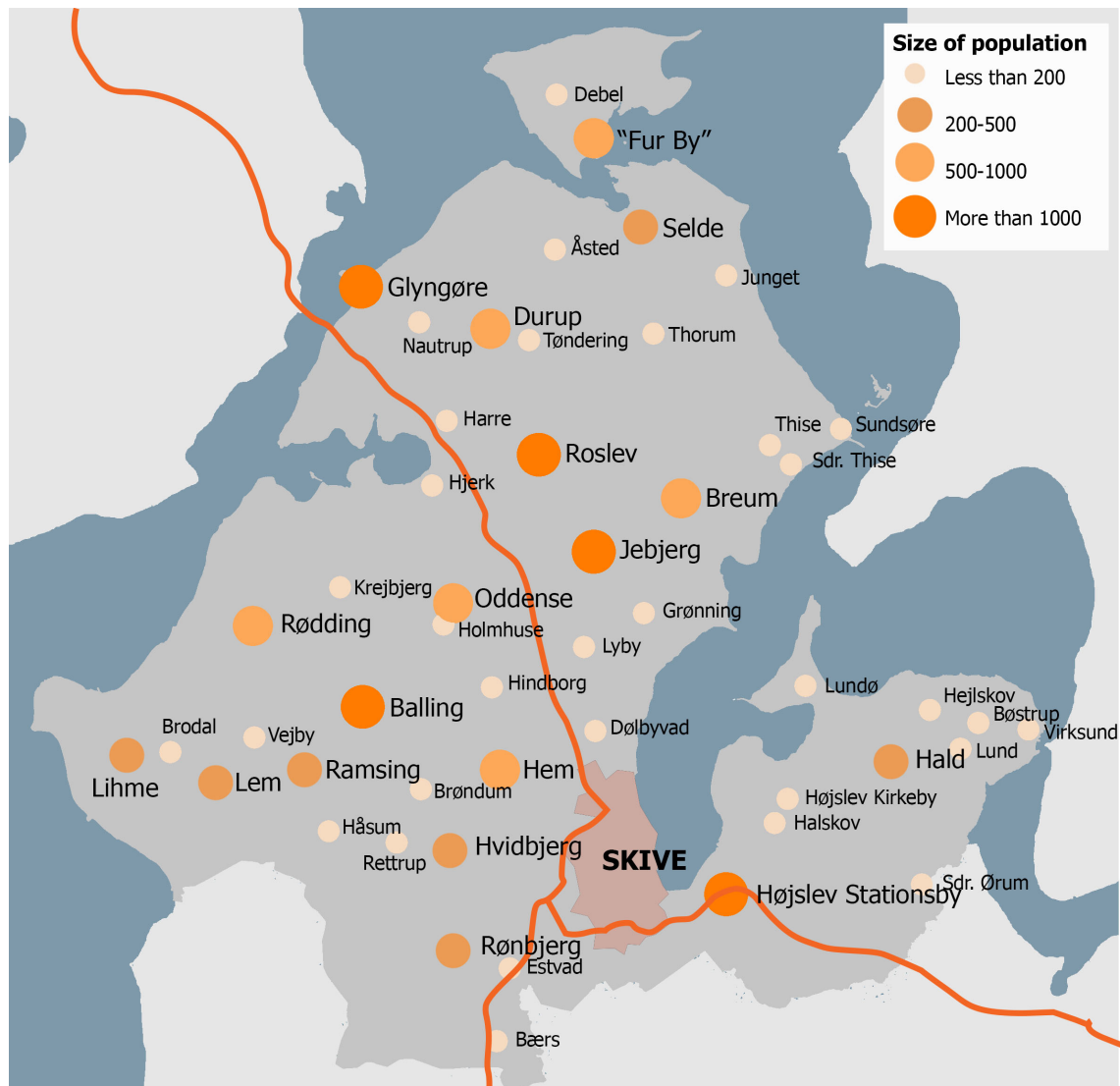


Figure 3.2: Population of villages in Skive Municipality.

3.3.2 Extracting data by means of interviews

To obtain qualitative in-depth knowledge about the former and current planning practice, the selected methods are interviews and document analysis. By means of interviews, I can move beyond the physical documents, but the analysis of planning documents may contain information and express the work of the planners which contains information as well. These methods are chosen in accordance with the scientific stand of the research since interviewing enables the researcher to gain an insight into the way the respondents understand certain phenomena, and the documents are to be understood in a greater context and serve as a basis for a part of the intended interviews (Juul and Pedersen, 2012).

In Skive Municipality, the task of planning for the rural districts and rural development is today located in the Department of Communication, Development

and Business (*Kommunikation, Udvikling & Erhverv*). Here, a small team of three employees and a team leader are responsible for projects in the rural districts and to that related strategy-making and policies. The three employees are working as development consultants. A common feature for them is that they have been employed in Skive Municipality for 4-6 years. Thereby, they are well informed about how planning for the rural districts has taken place in recent times and are involved in current development projects. They can reflect on their present practice related to the rural districts of Skive Municipality and express their considerations about the coming projects. Since a lot of their work has been layering on top of former projects, it makes sense to look a bit further back in time to extract more data from the case.

Three former employees who were responsible for development in the rural district in the years between the Structural Reform in 2007 until approximately 2015 are today composing a consultancy. The consultancy is named Pro-vins and centres around Danish development projects and guidance. The projects are primarily concerned with collaboration, fundraising and project development, often in local scale and rooted to the context of the rural districts and villages.

Together, the recent and former employees form two different groups who can share information and reflection on their former and current practice related to planning and development of rural districts.

The interviews were planned to be conducted group-wise – an interview with three current employees in the Department of Communication, Development and Business, and another interview with the three former municipal employees, now making up the consultancy Pro-vins. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the interview were planned to be carried out virtually. The interview with the current practitioners was marked by technical issues, and therefore, the interview was divided into two: A group-interview with two of the practitioners, and another interview with the remaining practitioner. The respondents of the two groups are presented in Table 3.1 on page 45.

The reason for conducting the interviews in groups and not individually is that the work of the respondents is overlapping, and I assume that they may be able to supplement each other during the interviews as well. Participants in a group interview may qualify or modify the answers of each other, or they may even challenge each other's standpoints and views. The approach may motivate the respondents to generate a variety of perspectives on particular concepts or issues (Bryman, 2012). John Bryman argues that "*This process of arguing means that the researcher may stand a chance of ending up with more realistic accounts of*

Interview respondents		
Peter E. Steens	Development consultant, Department of Communication, Development and Business, Skive Municipality	Is educated in political science. Administers several funds for villages and fundraising. Part of the recent work revolving a comprehensive planning process and policies for the rural district in Skive Municipality.
Thomas Olesen	Development consultant, Department of Communication, Development and Business, Skive Municipality	Is educated as a geographer. Experienced in rural district development and tourism. Part of the recent work revolving a comprehensive planning process and policies for the rural district in Skive Municipality.
Tonie Holmberg Kristensen	Development consultant, Department of Communication, Development and Business, Skive Municipality	In educated in social science and psychology. Primarily responsible for area renewal programs. Experienced in public involvement. Part of the recent work revolving a comprehensive planning process.
Berit Brunsgaard	Consultant, Pro-vins	Is educated in Danish and history of art, and trained as an organic agriculturalist. Experienced in rural district development processes, cultural projects and partnerships.
Ditte Staun	Consultant, Pro-vins	Is educated in political science, and certified manager of projects and boards. Experienced in development projects, fundraising, management and strategic communication. Former board member of the City Council in Skive Municipality and chair person for selected committees.
Sille Christiane Linnet	Consultant, Pro-vins	Urban designer and Master in design and management of creative processes. Experienced in fundraising, creative process management, development projects. Board member of Nordjyske Planlæggere among other boards.

Table 3.1: Overview of the respondents participating in the interviews.

what people think, because they are forced to think about and possibly revise their views" (Bryman, 2012, p. 503). Aligned with the scientific stance of the research, this approach also provides a chance to study how the co-workers make sense of a phenomenon together like they potentially do on a daily basis (Bryman, 2012). These are some of the potential benefits from the research approach and the selected

method. A downside of the approach is that group-dynamics can happen to influence the interview, and this is difficult to predict beforehand as a researcher (Farthing, 2016). To comply with that risk, I attempt increase the chance that everybody get oneself heard throughout the interview by actively inviting people to talk. This will not eliminate a negative group dynamic but help to increase comfort in the situation. Another downside from the format is that more people tend to speak at the same time, thereby making it difficult to process the interview transcriptions (Bryman, 2012).

The interviews are conducted in a semi-structured manner. This implies that I manage the interviews by defining the topics, by guiding the conversation, and by asking follow up questions, but overall, the respondents are intended to talk as free as possible in order to explore their views and reflections. It is the nature of semi-structured interviews that the respondents get to reflect along the way and feel free to express their considerations (Bryman, 2012; Farthing, 2016). The interviews are guided by a list of questions which serves as an interview guide or checklist to ensure that the desired topics get covered and explored in the interviews. Two interview guides are tailored to the different interviews and are carried out in accordance with the analytical framework developed in section 2.6 *Analytical framework for strategy-making in rural district planning*. The interview guides are attached as appendices (Appendix A and B).

I am aware that the interviews partly deal with reflections on former projects and practice dating 5-10 years back in time. This implies that many of the respondents' statements are based on post-rationalisation and may happen to be affected by more recent rationales, experiences, and fundamental perception of their practice. This may especially be the case of the former municipal practitioners since they are asked to think 5-10 years back in time. This may influence the respondents' statements in terms of the level of details, and in the end, it may affect the validity of the analysis. Still, the respondents are asked to share their knowledge, and since the interviews are conducted in groups, they can support each other's statements, thereby increasing the validity. Also, the former municipal practitioners are currently running many projects linked to villages, local communities, and development in a local scale, resulting in a wide experience within the field. It is thereby likely that they can provide additional reflections since they are now representing the other side of the desk as consultants.

To process the interviews, the interviews are recorded, transcribed and coded in order to organise and analyse the findings. All respondents have approved that the interviews are being recorded. All interviews are conducted in Danish in order to

provide the respondents with the widest opportunity of expressing themselves. This means that the quotations are being translated into English with respect to the said words.

Special circumstances due to the COVID19 outbreak

The interviews were intentionally planned to be conducted face to face in reality, but due to the restrictions related to the COVID19 outbreak, the interviews are organised as virtual meetings instead. Theoretically, a virtual meeting should not be very different to a meeting in reality since the participants and the interviewee can still see and hear one another, and thereby, the visual element remains. Still, attaining online meetings is a new reality to many people, and becoming comfortable with the new format and getting familiar with technical facilities and equipment are key to successful virtual meetings. Technological issues such as weak internet connections, breakdowns, bad equipment and such can affect the way the interviews proceed as well as the recordings of the interview for further data processing. Virtual meetings are thus convenient in terms of the absent need for transportation – it is flexible and still offers the personal contact (Bryman, 2016).

Due to issues with the technological equipment, the two planned interviews ended up as three interviews. During the first interview with the current development consultants of Skive Municipality, one respondent experienced issues with the microphone, and therefore, the interview continued without her inputs. Instead, I made a separate interview with her on the same day to get her perspectives and experiences covered as well. During all interviews, I experienced minor disconnections causing small, unintended breaks in the interviews. In chapter 6 *Methodological reflections*, I will reflect how these circumstances have affected the research and my conclusions.

3.3.3 Document analysis

In advance for the interviews, I analysed a variety of planning documents in order to understand the previous work related to the rural districts of Skive Municipality prior to the interviews. The selected documents imply sets of local development projects, rural district policies, municipal planning strategies, municipal plans and a settlement strategy (see table 3.2 on page 48). These documents express some of the considerations and opinions, but in the light of social constructivism, a document is not a source to explain the truth in itself (Juul and Pedersen, 2012). This is because the documents cannot be extracted from the situation in which they were made and neither from the context in which they are being used. Thereby, the interviews are a valuable way to get to know about the surrounding situations, the

context, the former and recent discourses, and considerations of the authors. The interesting part is to understand the process and context in which the documents were produced and understand the under-laying thoughts and perspectives. Still, the documents contain valuable knowledge and indications – somehow, the documents represent the time of which these are dated and, thereby, makes up picture of the past which cannot be distorted. Thereby, document analysis is an applied method in the empirical data collection in combination with the interviews.

Documents for analysis		
Policy for villages and rural districts (<i>Landsby- og landdistriktspolitik</i>)	2009	A policy document created in the wake of the Structural Reform of 2007 to ensure a common basis in terms of a policy.
Rural District Policy 2016-2019 (<i>Landdistriktspolitik 2016-2019</i>)	2016-2019	Revised policy.
Local Development Projects (<i>Lokale Udviklingsprojekter</i>)	Composed during 2010-2012, implemented 2012-2016	A set of six strategic programmes created for six chosen villages: Lihme, Glyngøre, Roslev, Rødding, Rønbjerg, and Selde.
Planning Strategies (<i>Planstrategier</i>)	2009, 2013, 2015 and 2019	Focussing on the sections related to planning for rural districts and villages. Planning strategies within the examined period (2009-2020).
Municipal plan (<i>Kommuneplaner</i>)	2016-2028, 2020-2032	The municipal plans that are carried out every fourth year and presents the overall planning and development of the municipality.
Settlement strategy (<i>Bosætningsstrategi</i>)	2020	Strategy for settlement.

Table 3.2: The section of documents utilised for the analysis.

In order to obtain knowledge about the status of the scientific work on the selected field, I have carried out a literature review as part of chapter 2 *Conceptualising strategic planning*. Here, a selection of different literary sources in terms scientific work were processed, including both national and international literature on strategic planning, planning for rural districts, development trends of the rural districts, villages etc. I bear in mind how the selected sources influence the findings – for instance by considering if a certain piece of literature matches

the reality I study, namely planning in the rural district within a Danish context in the municipal scale. In order to increase the scientific quality, I attempt to select peer-reviewed articles and publications as much as possible, and among Danish published literature on rural district development, I have focused on the work of the researchers Hanne Wittorff Tanvig and Gunner Lind Haase Svendsen who are the authors of numerous publications and books on the field.

Another document used in the thesis, is a publication by Realdania. In May 2020, the philanthropic foundation launched a publication named Long live the villages (*Længe leve landsbyerne*). The publication presents a method suggested for municipalities to carry out strategic planning for villages. The method is developed on the basis of a collaboration between Realdania and three municipalities. This suggested method is considered in the discussion of chapter 5 where the third sub question of the research is processed.

3.4 Applying the analytical framework to the empirical data

In order to apply the analytical framework and extract meaning from the empirical data, it is relevant to consider how the four dimensions can be operationalised. At this point, my own interpretation will reflect the findings of the analysis. To increase transparency, I will briefly explain how I extract data and construct understanding from it by means of the analytical framework.

The dimensions are used as categories for the coding of the transcribed interviews and documents. The list below exemplifies how expressions about certain topics can be interpreted in accordance to the analytical framework, thereby composing the operationalisation.

- An **analytical** approach to strategy-making can be expressed by a use of action plans, a desire to achieve political objectives, or by use of a data-based foundation for planning.
- A **learning** approach to planning can be identified in expressions about a desire to include citizens into strategy-making, use of creative processes, and a minor focus on the output.
- A **trivialising** or **countering** approach to shrinkage can be manifested in the use of settlement campaigns or the like, thereby ignoring or refusing the negative development trends to be present.
- A **managing** or **utilising** approach to shrinkage can be expressed in terms of a pronounced acceptance of and acknowledging the decreasing populations, and in statements about how the trends are actively considered in practice.

-
- **Quantitative** objectives can be found in desires for attracting settlement, expanding tourism or stimulating growth in the shrinking areas.
 - **Qualitative** objectives can for example be traces in expressions about desires for providing the existing residents a good basis for a good life and desires to enhance viability.
 - An **external** perspective can be identified in expressions about external collaborations, subsidies and top-down approaches to development.
 - An **internal** perspective manifests itself in bottom-up initiatives and striving for projects to become locally rooted.

The following chapter is about the empirical case. Here, I analyse how practice of the explored case has been strategic, and how the current and former practitioners perceive the strategic work.

4 Strategic planning for rural districts in Skive Municipality

In this chapter, the analytical framework is applied to the empirical case of strategic planning for rural districts in Skive Municipality in the period of 2009-2020. In this period, different policies and projects related to the rural districts have been carried out. The work has been documented in several publications that showcase a product of the practitioners' practice. The intention of this analysis is to move beyond the written words of the documents and learn from the practitioners' experience and reflections. In this regard, the analytical framework helps to dismantle, analyse and evaluate the practice of strategic planning in a rural context.

The aim of the chapter is to find answers to the second sub question: *How has Skive Municipality planned strategically for villages and rural districts, and what are the experiences of the practitioners?*

The empirical case is divided into three parts due to differences and special characteristics. These three parts are presented in the following section. After that, the analytical framework will be applied to each of the three parts in order to explore how planning practice has been strategic in the three parts. The chapter will form a basis for further discussion in chapter 5 *New requirements - new practice?*.

4.1 Case introduction

The map of figure 3.2 on page 43 in the previous chapter displays multiple villages in Skive Municipality. Throughout the years, several projects, policies, and strategies have been made to address how the development of the villages has been and is expected to take place.

Since 2007, Skive Municipality has received subsidies to renew and renovate physical surroundings and to initiate cultural and social activities by means of area renewals (Skive Municipality, 2016c). These projects can be characterised by the fixed program that the projects must follow in order to obtain the national subsidies to partly fund the renewals. The area renewals comprise the first part of the analysis. Here, Tonie Kristensen who is in charge of the recent areal renewal programs has shared her reflections about the programs which will form the empirical basis for

the part about area renewals along with guides for area renewals and concrete area renewal projects in villages of Skive Municipality.

Two official policies for the rural districts have been made throughout the years. The first policy, Policy for Villages and Rural Districts (*Landsby- og Landdistriktspolitik*), was announced in 2009 in the wake of the structural reform of 2007 as an attempt to create a common basis for the effort in the rural districts around Skive, and to demonstrate the political desires for rural development (Skive Municipality, 2009b). Afterwards, six local development projects were made in collaboration with six selected villages in the years 2010-2012. The aim was to discover desires and objectives of the local communities (Skive Municipality, 2012b). The local development projects have led to the realisation of several concrete projects, primarily in the years 2012-2016 (Skive Municipality, 2014). The local development projects are the scope of the second part of the analysis. To bring light to the practice related to the years 2010-2016, the experiences and reflections of the three former municipal practitioners will be explored along with the documents for each of the six local development projects.

In 2016, a new policy was announced: Rural District Policy 2016-2019 (*Landdistriktspolitik 2016-2019*). The policy was valid until 2019 (Skive Municipality, 2019b). Recently, a new strategic project for the villages Thise, Sdr. Thise and Sundsøre has been initiated. The intention is to create a comprehensive plan and test out new approaches to local development for the coming four years. The findings are expected to create a basis for another comprehensive project on the island of Fur (Skive Municipality, 2019a). The practitioners of the current team have shared their reflections about the current practice that compose the third part of the analysis.

The timeline in figure 4.1 on page 53 illustrates the three parts that the empirical data has been divided into. The orange box indicates the continuous use of area renewal programs forming the object of the first part. The green boxes illustrate the second part in which the six local development projects are examined. Here, the rural district policy of that time is included. The purple boxes indicate the third part in which the recent practice makes up the scope of analysis. The planning strategies and to them related municipal plans are to be understood as context, thereby included in the figure.

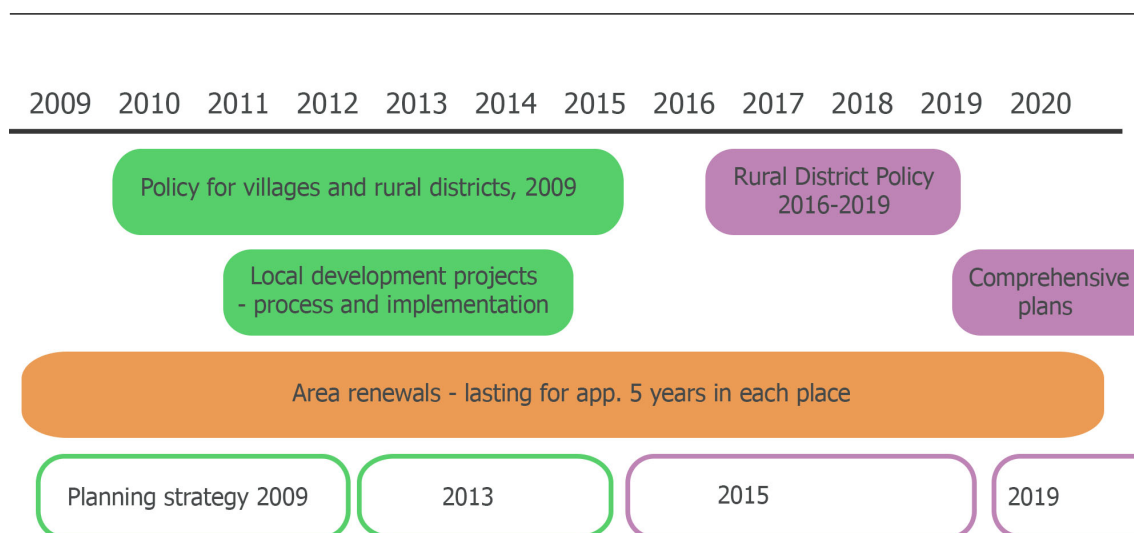


Figure 4.1: Timeline visualising the three parts of the analysis including policies and concrete planning projects in the rural districts of Skive Municipality since 2009. The orange color relates to the first part. The green color relates to the second part. The purple color relates to the third part.

4.2 Part 1 – Area renewals since 2007

Area renewals are meant to improve physical and social conditions in challenged areas. According to the guide to area renewals by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Integration and Housing, the overall objective is to: "(...) *initiate development and transformation of problematic cities and residential areas in order to make them attractive for settlement and strengthen the basis for private investment*" (2016, p. 3, Author's translation).

Since 2004, Danish municipalities have had the opportunity to apply for national subsidies to partly fund area renewals. The resources are provided to different types of projects – one type is projects for challenged villages with less than 3.000 residents, and the other types relate to urban contexts (Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Integration and Housing, 2016). Skive Municipality has completed four area renewals and seven are running (Skive Municipality, 2016c). These projects are primarily concerned with renewal and construction of squares, pathways, playgrounds, activity areas, planting, and traffic related facilities. Figure 4.2 on page 54 pictures some of the results of the area renewals taking place in the village Lihme.

4.2.1 A deliberate and rational process

The area renewals are based on a rational process consisting of three fixed phases (Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Integration and Housing, 2016). In the first phase, the municipality selects one or more places which are considered being in a need for a physical or social lift. From a round of applications, the accountable ministry



Figure 4.2: The results of the area renewals in Lihme were among others a renewal of a square and planting out of new trees (Skive Municipality, 2016b).

selects and earmarks national subsidies for area renewals. In the second phase, the municipality develops a concrete program for the selected project(s) in cooperation with the local communities. This is done in order to identify the local needs and aims, and to increase the local sense of ownership and responsibility. The program describes the project in terms of objectives, context, organisation, time frames, economy, and investments. The third phase is concerned with the implementation which must occur within five years. Within this phase, the municipality must evaluate and conduct status reports (Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Integration and Housing, 2016).

The area renewals are thereby based on formal partnerships between actors on the national, municipal, and local level. The process is expected to follow this fixed, scheduled pattern towards the implementation, and the implementation can be considered the objective of the process. This fixed schedule and clear objectives underline the analytical approach in Sehested's (2008) perspective. The stakeholders are apparent, and the expectations are clear. The room for creativity and learning processes is limited to take place within this fixed framework, but still, numerous different types of projects can fit into the frames, and the citizen involvement can take place in different ways within the second phase (Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Integration and Housing, 2016).

4.2.2 A strong external focus and economic objectives

Not only the determined processes of area renewals can be considered rational. The economic focus can be understood as rational too. Like argued in section 2.6.1 on page 27, the rural districts make up a different context than the urban areas where planning is often concerned with growth and investments. The basis for funding and investment is different – the opportunity to attract external funding is therefore crucial. Since area renewals account for a large financial support to carry out development projects in the rural districts, it is an opportunity which rationally should be considered by practitioners. The guide for area renewals states that the economic aspects are important in area renewals: "*The economy and financing of*

the project is obviously important to the respective area renewal project. Partly, it is substantial resources which should last for a period of five years, and partly, it is both governmental, municipal and private resources which are coordinated and should be used as good as possible" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Integration and Housing, 2016, p. 26, Author's translation). This underlines the external focus of area renewals since a clear objective is to achieve the subsidies to implement the projects successfully.

Tonie Kristensen who is the practitioner being in charge of several of the recent area renewals in Skive Municipality somehow subscribes to the economic objective but in a wider perspective. She refers to the fact that the area renewals are followed up by big investments among privates in the villages who improve their properties (Kristensen, 2020, Interview 2). This was researched by Jensen et al. (2015) who found that the public subsidies being invested in area renewals led to private investment times 3,5-5,4. At this point, the area renewals cause ripple effects which results in a greater lift of the surroundings and not only to the public square. Tonie Kristensen admires the local engagement and willingness to support the local projects: *"If you renovate something in a village, then the citizens support it themselves. I think they are good at it – yes, they really commit to it and give something to their local community. Both in terms of manpower and commitment – fantastic to witness"* (Kristensen, 2020, Interview 2). Despite the fixed frames and external economic drivers, this indicates that the area renewals can succeed to engage the locals in terms of engagement and support. The local financial support can sometimes be significant to the outcome of the projects. To exemplify, in 2008-2015 an area renewal was realised in the village Durup. Here, the fund of the local savings bank *Durups Sparekasse Fond* put 9,22 million kr. into the project of which the total budget was 20,46 million kr. Thereby, the local fund provided almost half of the expenses (Skive Kommune, 2015).

4.2.3 A different context – a different objective

The rural districts and villages not only make up a different context in term of economic incentives. The context also affects scope of the desired projects. Planning here is rarely about designating areas for big businesses, big constructions, new institutions and the like. The contrast becomes clear, and the typical area renewals underline the differences: The projects typically aim to beautify public areas, lay out new pathways and create new facilities such as playgrounds or sport facilities (Skive Municipality, 2016c). Compared to planning in urban contexts, the area renewals are concerned with a smaller scale, a different objective and other incentives – it is not about economic growth, but about the aesthetic look of the village or the access

to facilities and common places.

4.2.4 Expanding the objectives of area renewals

The objectives of area renewals are quantifiable in terms of the governmental co-funding and the identifiable economic spin-offs, whereas there are several qualitative effects as well. Like stated previously, the locals typically showcase a great interest in the projects, and the results can be considered qualitative as well since the renewals add quality to the physical surroundings. This can be expanded further by the perspectives of the practitioners. It is a clear objective of Tonie Kristensen to generate a sense of community and unity when planning for area renewals. She argues that improvements to the physical environment are simply not enough to sustain the villages: *"It is simply not enough that it looks nice. It cannot stand alone. Therefore, I consider that I have upgraded the work with the communities of the locals, and it is not to say that it wasn't prioritised before, but I guess that I make more of it than previously"* (Kristensen, 2020, Interview 2). This indicates that the practitioners have room to manoeuvre within the set frames to incorporate qualitative objectives as well.

4.2.5 Sustaining the internal perspective

The fixed frames of the area renewals compose a pitfall which can be avoided by a deliberate practice. Tonie Kristensen has experienced that the fixed time frames have caused that the projects have ended a bit abruptly when the phase of implementation was finished. Thereby, the potential of equipping the communities with the skills and motivation to continue on their own by running new projects has not been met sufficiently. She explains: *"We have not worked sufficiently on rooting. We need to – certainly strategically – work by longer time perspectives because five years pass so fast, and what will happen after the five years? They cannot just stand in line for another area renewal. We must ensure that we form a basis – which is also about voluntariness and local engagement and the sense of community – which can carry it along"* (Kristensen, 2020, Interview 2). This calls for awareness about how to exit a collaboration. Creating an exit strategy requires attention to the specific areas since people and places are very different. Tonie Kristensen explains that some villages have the mentality like *"We're finally done!"* and other places just perceive it as a stepping stone for new projects to begin (Kristensen, 2020, Interview 2).

Tonie Kristensen emphasises that the involvement and rooting of the projects are essential: *"The more responsibility they take, the better – in terms of creating the solutions and have a say about how the design is going to be, which needs they have"*

– to get this mapped. Everything they can do themselves, I let them do. (...) I think that creates the biggest sense of ownership – in my perspective" (2020, Interview 2). This indicates a focus on the internal resources and reflects that rooting is important to the projects.

4.2.6 Preliminary findings

From the practice related to area renewals it can be stated, that the frames are quite fixed in terms of scheduled phases, collaborations, and requirements, but these actions have a strong potential in order to realise projects and improving the local areas. In the light of the analytical framework, the work is strategically organised in an analytical manner since the processes are based on clear means and ends in order ensure implementation. Even the more creative and inclusive elements are planned to be a part of the processes, and this is when the practitioners are free to design the process as desired. The objectives of area renewals are from the "outside" quite quantitative – this is evident in the focus on funding and the expected derived investments among privates. The qualitative objectives are thus present in the perspective of the practitioners and the overall aim about enhancing the local qualities, both physical surroundings and social life. They have room to deliberately sustain the qualitative aspects as well by focusing on community building and continuous engagement. In this case, indicators on the perception of shrinkage has not been evident and are thereby left out from the analysis. The findings are visualised in figure 4.3 on page 58.

The *policy for villages and rural districts* was announced the same year (Skive Municipality, 2009b). In this, the main objective was to ensure that: "*(...) the villages are continuously developing in order for*

- *Villages to remain well-functioning places for living, settlement and work.*
- *The population to be maintained or increase" (Skive Municipality, 2009b, p. 2, Author's translation).*

The policy was expected to be put into practice by means of concrete projects and action plans, thereby forming the basis for the six local development projects to emerge (Skive Municipality, 2009b). The work was initiated in 2010, developed in the years 2010-2012, and partly implemented in the years after 2012. The projects were based on a strong dialogue with the locals and aimed to collect and describe their desires for future development to clarify the wished to the politicians (Skive Municipality, 2013, 2012b).

Six documents were created for both citizens and authorities (Brunsgaard, 2020, Interview 3). Figure 4.4 on page 60 shows an extract of the documents that more or less follow the same template which is presented in the following:

- **Introduction:** Facts about the village, a simple demographic description, and the history of the area.
- **Sociocultural aspects:** Description of the social life in the village, e.g. associational life, facilities for meetings and events, and type of communities. Wishes and aims for the sociocultural life, e.g. to enhance social life or initiate a specific social project.
- **The village today:** Description of physical facilities, settlement, and appearance of the village. Wishes and aims related to the surroundings such as expanding the local marina, designating new areas for development or applying for a comprehensive area renewal.
- **Business:** Description of industry, commerce, and employment opportunities of the village including the current retail and opportunities for sustaining the basis for tourism. Wishes and aims to sustain the development of new businesses, facilitating entrepreneurship or new branding strategies.
- **Traffic:** Description of the infrastructures and access to public transportation. Wishes and aims for new connections, new pathways and cycle tracks, test of small ferry connections and improvement of traffic safety near schools.
- **Scenery:** Description of the surroundings and the access to recreation. Wishes and aims of new woods in close proximity of the village, reestablishing lakes, and sustaining recreational areas and beaches.

- [illegible]

60

The local development projects have resulted in various concrete projects – both on a small scale and in terms of more comprehensive projects, for instance in cases where the local wishes have been compiled into an area renewal program. On the other hand, some of the projects have barely led to any change due to internal circumstances which I will return in section 4.3.7.

4.3.1 Different objectives

Both the policy and the planning strategy of 2009 indicate a political desire to enable development, and to maintain or increase the population of the villages (Skive Municipality, 2009b,a). The local development projects serve as a response to this desire since the projects can be understood strategically as a link between policy and implementation. The projects identify the local objectives by giving the local residents a voice as requested in the policy (Skive Municipality, 2009b) in order to initiate development where and like it is desired.

The objectives of the practitioners are linked to the specific work and to the local communities. Berit Brunsgaard explains how she perceived the work related to the local development projects: *"I will say that I understood it (...) as the manager's and the department's important attempt to create some documents which could be used in both worlds – in the local area and in the political and administrative world. More than it was to start up something or to sustain a self-help and the like. Of course, it was a part of it, but I understood it like this helping tool on various levels"* (Brunsgaard, 2020, Interview 3). The documents should thereby be understood as a qualitative product which could guide the future work of the municipality and politicians, and the documents should support the local desire for development. The practitioners express that the residents' interest and effort in local development are caused by a strong desire to sustain the area which they enjoy and relate to, and as practitioners they want to support this work of the local residents (Linnet, 2020; Staun, 2020, Interview 3).

4.3.2 A comprehensive understanding of the context

Asking the former municipal practitioners what made the local development projects strategic, different considerations were expressed. Here, a comprehensive understanding of the context has been highlighted since the ability to incorporate the projects into the overall planning and to that related processes such as political processing, national projects, and distribution of subsidies are considered important. Berit Brunsgaard exemplifies what they were aware of: *"Were there any ventures nationally or by the bigger foundations, or in the municipality causing that we should see this in a perspective of three or five years? Can it possibly fit into an area*

renewal or is there a venture by Realdania where the project would fit in well? Some citizens would think that it is really long-range but it becomes a bit more logical in these processes" (Brunsgaard, 2020, Interview 3). Considering the broader external context would in some cases increase the chances of implementation due to financial or organisational support. The local development project in Lihme showcased a local desire for a quite comprehensive renewal of the physical surroundings. A such project required great financial support to succeed, and therefore, the wishes became implemented as part of a comprehensive area renewal. The area renewal in Lihme took place in the years 2013-2017 based on funding by Skive Municipality, national foundation grants for area renewals and resources provided via the LAG-agreements (Local Action Groups) by EU (Skive Municipality, 2012c). This exemplifies how the local development projects helped to identify the local wishes, and how the practitioners used their ability and experience to attract subsidies and carry out a comprehensive projects (Brunsgaard, 2020, Interview 3). Considering this in a strategic perspective, the comprehensive understanding of the process seem to support the realisation of the locals' desires, and such approach grow from experience.

A similar point was to incorporate the projects and wishes into the overall planning in order to make the work more efficient and to save waiting time in the processes. The local development projects were made simultaneously with other strategies and the overall municipal plan which made it possible for the practitioners to fit the projects into the work along the way when it made sense (Linnet, 2020, Interview 3). Thereby, it became a strategic approach to consider the local projects into a longer time frame and a greater context within the administrative work of the municipality.

Somehow, this also illustrates a strategic way of thinking and a rational way to achieve the goals in a management-perspective. One can argue that this approach bears the mark of the analytical strategies in Sehested's (2008) categorisation since it is about deliberately incorporating the local projects into the bigger perspective and increase the chance of implementation. Still, this approach seems to grow from experience and cooperation rather than technical analyses and analytical work behind the desk. At some point, it is about having a strategic *mindset* and deliberation about one's practice. Here, the practitioners express an understanding of strategy-making which is closely linked to Mintzberg's (1994) understanding of strategies as something that forms in practice and over time rather than something which becomes formulated in specific terms, goals, and actions. Sille Christiane Linnet explains: *"I guess, to me it (strategy-making) is maybe something that is always on its way. And maybe something you can write on in order to create some*

common words, or something to relate to, but it is always changing" (Linnet, 2020, Interview 3).

Several deliberate actions shaped the work related to the local development projects, and somehow, the political goals and the strategic elements of the final documents become secondary. This underlines that the context is rather important – that the practitioners learn from experience and seek to benefit from different processes in multiple levels and from appropriate timing.

4.3.3 The local drive is essential

The six villages are selected on the basis of a local engagement and a demand for the municipal support – thereby not on the basis of analyses (Linnet, 2020, Interview 3). This means that the development takes place where the locals already have a drive and desire for it. Sometimes, the media brought news about the projects which were supported by big sums of money which caused that some areas and villages felt disregarded. This encouraged residents to call the municipality questioning if they could have a local development project as well. Often, this gave rise to a dialogue from which the residents realised that the municipality can only facilitate a project if it has a local support, engagement, and a qualitative potential (Staun, 2020, Interview 3). The municipality therefore support sprouting local initiatives. At one point, it can be considered a deliberate strategy to support initiatives that have grown from local engagement, since it fits the experiences of the practitioners – projects can simply not be accomplished without the local support and interest. Otherwise, the projects would not be rooted in the local communities.

Since the internal drive in villages is very important to the local development, another strategic aspect has been to deliberately sustain the local energy throughout the processes. Waiting for political processing, budgeting and similar can be very tiring to the locals. To comply with this, the practitioners divided the local ideas into projects that the citizens could start up right away, and projects which required further planning, political processing or public budgeting. It sustained the residents' enthusiasm and energy not being left in a waiting position without an acting space (Linnet, 2020, Interview 3). Sile Christiane Linnet explains that "*(...) there were certain things that just took time, but it did not really matter since there were the other projects that could continue. Thereby, there would still be energy on the long run which made the work strategic and long-term*" (Linnet, 2020, Interview 3). This indicates that the work was planned to strategically sustain the internal drive of the locals, thereby emphasising the importance of involving the locals and maintain their commitment.

In the long run, there is a strategic aspect related to the capacity building of the locals. Ditte Staun explains that projects in local communities are processes of learning, especially for the local residents. But often, when they first become mobilised and get to realise that they can manage a small project, their appetite for more projects rises: "*(...) I remember we used the term 'flower bed projects' – that in some places, people get to know each other in the local area by means of a smaller project which is simple and maybe quite visible. 'We managed to create a flower bed', and then, everybody can point at it and say 'we did this together', and then their appetite will be whet*" (Staun, 2020, Interview 3). This indicates, that such projects can mobilise actors in new networks, and they can learn to collaborate from the work of small projects and find motivation for new projects.

Given that the external factors are considered important to increase the chances for implementation, the local level and the internal driving forces cannot be left out of perspective. The local development projects can be understood as a link between the internal and external perspectives based on an interplay between different levels and organisational structures (Staun, 2020, Interview 3).

4.3.4 Attitude to shrinkage

The policy for villages and rural districts of 2009 indicates a political desire for attracting settlement. The policy categorises people into four groups which illustrate a discursively constructed understanding:

1. **Core residents:** People living in the rural districts and villages already. The policy states that it is important to work with their needs and desires.
2. **Rural residents in risk:** The group of residents in the rural districts who consider moving towards a bigger city.
3. **Winning residents:** The group of people who can and possibly will move towards the rural districts. The policy address a need for considering how to attract this group.
4. **The inaccessible urban residents:** The group of residents who do not consider to settle in the rural districts (Skive Municipality, 2009b).

The political aim is expressed by the discursively loaded words which illustrate that the municipality wants to attract the positively mentioned "winning residents", and that it is desired to avoid loosing the residents being in a zone of "risk" for moving elsewhere, thereby indicating an undesirable situation. This illustrates the political desire to fight shrinkage.

At some point, there is a disagreement between the political desire for attracting settlement and the practitioners' acceptance of the demographic trends. Among the

practitioners, the desire to attract newcomers is less pronounced. Sille Christiane Linnet explains: *"I remember that we often said 'as long there is no more people moving away' – if we can just keep up the status quo, then it's alright. There wasn't really focus on attracting a lot of people to the villages"* (Linnet, 2020, Interview 3). Ditte Staun adds that she thinks that most people are aware that the areas need to develop somehow, but it is not per se about *"..attracting four new big companies and 3.000 new residents"* (Staun, 2020, Interview 3). Instead, it is about ensuring that the place will continue to exist due to the residents' connection and affection to the areas (Staun, 2020, Interview 3).

The practitioners' attitude to shrinkage in the local development projects is linked to Hospers and Reverda's category of managing the trends. This is expressed in the way the projects were concerned with the existing residents who were involved in the debate and process related to the projects. Of course, the wishes and aims identified by the locals represent *their* understandings and desires, and in some of the villages, a desire for zoning areas for new development is present and thereby indicates a local wish to render possible new settlement within their local area.

4.3.5 Every place is different

A consideration which has been addressed multiple times in the interview is related to the differences between villages. The work revolving local development cannot be generalised since the places are different and the residents have different desires, ambitions, and engagement. In some villages, the desire is to sustain business development and participate in national projects, and in other places, the desire can be to ensure that the local school will continue to exist or to maintain the playgrounds of the village (Staun, 2020, Interview 3). Still, a common feature for almost every place is a desire to support and sustain the places that the residents love (Brunsgaard, 2020; Staun, 2020, Interview 3).

4.3.6 Post-rationalising the practice

Rationalising the work retrospectively, the practitioners realise what they could have done differently. Here, they agree that the documents became too extensive. Sille Christiane Linnet expresses that the documents would somehow be better if they only took up one page and if people *"(...) just by some headlines could relate to it and know what the content was because it was in the community and collaboration to figure it out – I guess that would have been much better"* (Linnet, 2020, Interview 3). Berit Brunsgaard and Sille Christiane Linnet emphasise that the local residents were very proud and fond of the documents because they contained much information about the villages, the history of the areas, and represented the

locals' desires (Brunsgaard, 2020; Linnet, 2020, Interview 3), but as a strategic tool, the documents were simply too heavy. Ditte Staun adds that a strategy need to be integrated in the way people think and act to make a difference: *"I think that a strategy is trivial if it is put on a shelf and one need to go and take it down to remember the content. It needs to be under the skin of the people, whether it is inside or outside the municipality"* (Staun, 2020, Interview 3). This indicates that the process and the participants' commitment are somehow more important than formulating a big strategic document – it is about being involved in the strategy-making and getting familiar with the strategy. Still, formulating a document and developing a common vocabulary can be considered valuable, but should not be the primary objective.

4.3.7 Internal circumstances in the organisation

Even though several of the wishes and aims have resulted in concrete projects, there are still a lot of projects which have not been realised yet. At one point, it has not been the intention to accomplish all the desired ideas of the long lists – instead, the prioritisation indicated where to begin, and then the strategy was to take it from there due to an acceptance of the context in which planning takes place: *"(...) such processes, they are so iterative – well, the world changes, the context we are navigating within changes all the time, so it is a here and now picture of 'we sat here on that day and we prioritised these things and that was what we wanted – we'll begin of the first three on the huge list, and then we will continue thereafter'"* (Linnet, 2020, Interview 3).

At another point, there are other reasons to the fact that many projects have not been realised. A series of intern circumstances in the years 2015-2016 caused that many projects were wrapped up unfinished. Intern disagreement within the municipality happened to suspend many projects and activities which left many of the projects a bit *"sabotaged"* (Brunsgaard, 2020, Interview 3). At this time, a lot of projects were launched, and many of these projects were based on external funding. It is the impression of the current municipal planners that the former manager of the team was very skilled at launching projects, seeing opportunities and applying for external funding, but at one point, too many projects were started up and the overview was lacking (Steens, 2020; Olesen, 2020, Interview 1). The situation became so critical that almost half of the initiated projects were stopped, and in the aftermath, a process of tidying up characterised the work for a few years which left the overall development in a standstill (Steens, 2020; Olesen, 2020, Interview 1). Also, the changes caused that the role of the municipality shifted from being the initiator of many projects towards having an arm's length to many projects

in the sense that the municipality does not start up something actively but sticks to providing support to the local initiatives sprouting on their own (Steens, 2020; Olesen, 2020, Interview 1).

4.3.8 Preliminary findings

In order to sum up the findings of this period and projects, the findings are linked to the four dimensions of the analytical framework in figure 4.5 on page 68. In the policy, the local development projects were initiated to discover the local objectives for development. Thereby, the projects are partly about achieving the political goals, but in reality, the projects also served to mobilise the local actors and provide them with a desire and willingness to invest time and resources in the local projects. In order to enhance the changes of realisation, the practitioners had a strategic eye for seeing the local projects in a bigger perspective, whether the focus was administrative, time-wise, economic, or about maintaining the energy among the locals. The practitioners experience that a mutual understanding and comprehension about where to go is more important than the creation of thorough strategic documents.

The objective of the projects was according to the policy and planning strategy to initiate development and possibly increase the population or maintain the existing size of the population. Hence, the practitioners seem to have a wider acceptance of the demographic development trends.

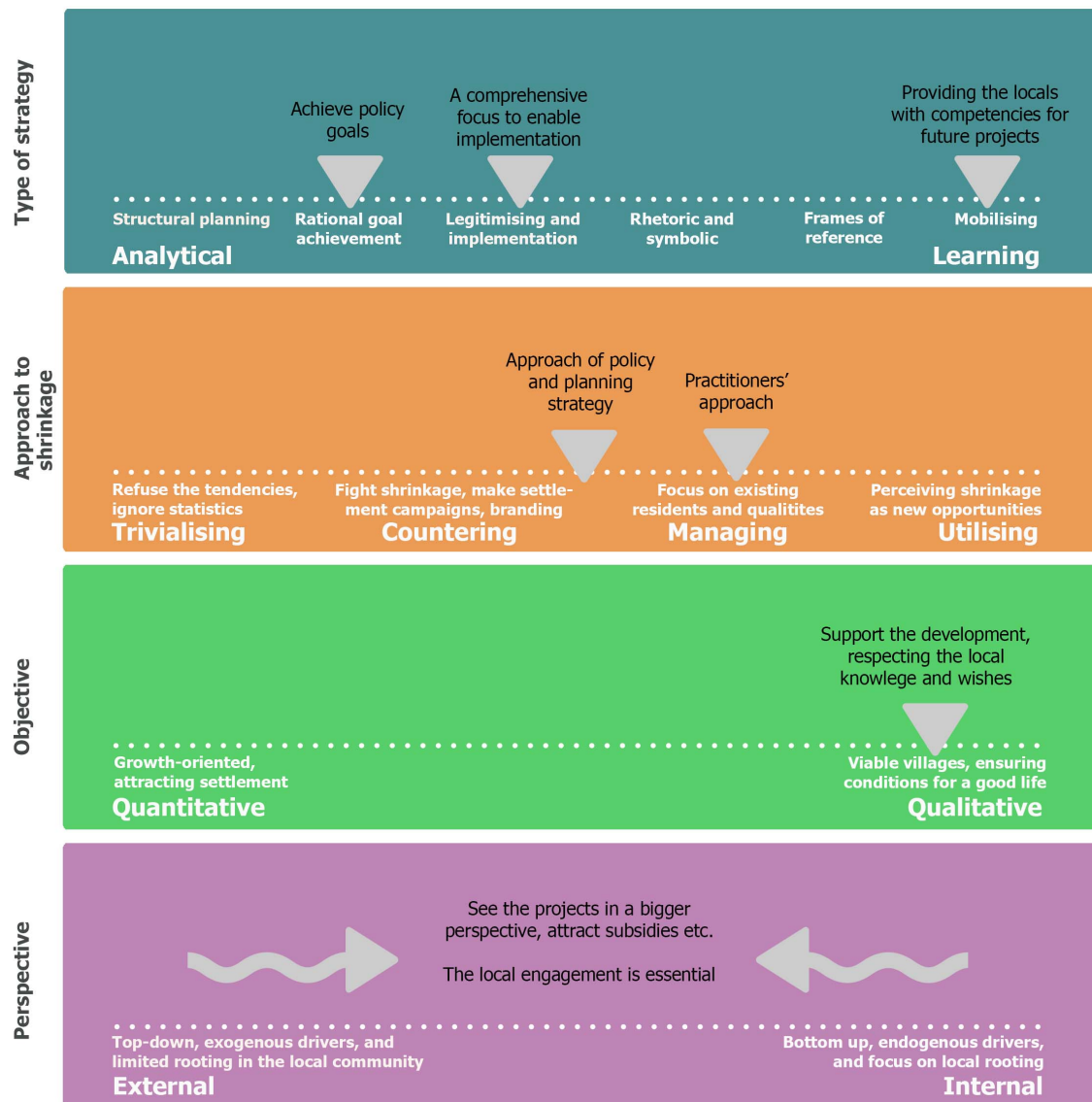


Figure 4.5: Visualisation of the findings of part 2.

4.4 A new, comprehensive approach: 2020

The work related to the rural districts of Skive Municipality has been less progressive in the past years since many projects were to be executed. Not as many new projects have been initiated lately, and the current municipal practitioners report that they have had an *arm's length* to new projects (Olesen, 2020, Interview 1). In fact, the support has mostly been apparent in terms of distributing the municipal funds for villages (Steens, 2020, Interview 1). Recently, a new project has been launched, and now, the three current practitioners are occupied by the initial phase of a comprehensive development project for the villages Thise, Sdr. Thise and Sundsøre – three villages that are closely located (see figure 4.6 on page 69).

The project is expected to last for the next four years, and the practitioners aim to create a comprehensive development plan for the areas and test out new approaches. Afterwards, the experiences are expected to form the basis for a similar project on the island of Fur in the northernmost part of the municipality.



Figure 4.6: The three small villages Thise, Sdr. Thise and Sundsøre comprise the area of the current work.

It is stated in the planning strategy of 2018, that the area of Thise, Sdr. Thise and Sundsøre has a potential for sustaining a brand for these parts of the region by means of Thise Mejeri which is a local dairy in Thise which has expanded to produce to the national scale. It is also expressed in the planning strategy that a comprehensive plan can possibly benefit from the strong local community of the area, and the location nearby the fjord (Skive Municipality, 2019a). In the case of Fur, the island is already the biggest attraction of the municipality and is a magnet for tourists. For long, the residents have requested a comprehensive plan for the development of the island. Thomas Olesen explains: *"For several years, Fur has requested a comprehensive development plan. Fur has about 200.000 visitors a year. Most are one-day visitors. They have run many development projects on Fur – they are very good at making different thing up there, and generally, they do it independently"* (Olesen, 2020, Interview 1).

4.4.1 A wider understanding of comprehensiveness

Like in the phase of the local development projects, there is an agreement among the current practitioners that it is fundamental to a strategic approach to understand the context and comprehend how the projects fit into the bigger perspective. This

requires an understanding of the administrative and economic context, and being strategic in this sense is about considering "(...) *how a part of the projects interact, and you have an idea about where the money should come from and in which order things should be done*", according to Peter E. Steens (2020, Interview 1). This is about looking ahead and comprehend how the projects can possibly be affected by other structures and political decisions. An illustrative example is whether the island of Fur will be received as a UNESCO World Heritage site which will have an impact on the future development of Fur and to that related strategy-making (Olesen, 2020, Interview 1).

Yet, the recent approach is comprehensive in a broader sense. The coming projects are expected to meet different objectives and combine different projects, places, and stakeholders into a comprehensive framework, as well as testing new opportunities related to the alteration of The Planning Act in 2017: "*With the new Planning Act you now have the coast-near development areas (udvikling i kystnære områder) and the 'transforming villages' (omdannelseslandsbyer) – so all of sudden, there are two new instruments which can possibly be applied in such place*" Thomas Olesen explains (2020, Interview 1). The alteration has partly provided municipalities with the ability to select two villages for *transformation* every four years in the municipal plan which creates new opportunities for local development, and partly, the legislation has become more relaxed in terms of new opportunities for development in coast-near areas (Erhvervsstyrelsen, 2017, 2020). The three villages Thise, Sdr. Thise and Sundsøre are all located by or near the coast, and the new opportunities can thereby come in handy. Thomas Olesen explains that for several years, the residents have requested a development in terms of enabling new settlement but the location had made such development different until now (Olesen, 2020, Interview 1). The project is thereby expected to comprehensively combine new opportunities for housing and settlement, strengthening the link between the three villages, improving the local marina in Sundsøre, and support the existing qualities. Furthermore, it is the impression of the practitioners, that there is something to sustain and build on. Tonie Kristensen considers: "*That it is not only about a local community which we consider being in a need for protection and renewal. There is both a potential for tourism, business, and there is a strong brand of the area*" (2020, Interview 2). Peter E. Steens also considers that the choice of places is a "*(...) concrete example of the fact that resources are spent where one considers that there is something to win*" (2020, Interview 1).

The geographic delineation of the project also emphasises a comprehensiveness. In this case, the boundaries are more indistinct, and the project relates to an area of more villages including the space in between rather than an exact village defined by

the absolute borders. The location of the three villages are shown in figure 4.6 on page 69. In the map, the circles mark the location of the three villages but should not be perceived as absolute borders.

Altogether, this indicates that the aim to enhance the chances of realisation has remained due to attention to the surrounding framework, financial rationality, and the time perspective. Still, the overall strategic approach seems to change towards the learning strategies since new instruments and a new approach are about to be tested.

4.4.2 A deliberate selection of places

Even though many local communities desire local development and request municipal facilitation, the practitioners have this time deliberately selected the places for the coming projects. Previously, the projects have been somehow more ad hoc (Kristensen, 2020). Likewise, it has been decided to test the new approaches before initiating the work on Fur. Thomas Olesen explains that "*We're not going to test something brand new which we're not even sure about up there. There, we need to be certain about what we're doing when we begin*" (2020, Interview 1). This showcases a deliberate decision based on the knowledge about Fur – that the island makes up a more complex context of many different activities, desires, and potentially diverging opinions.

4.4.3 Learning laboratories

The learning types of strategies are very pronounced in the new projects. It is about testing the new instruments of The Planning Act and try out new approaches to citizen involvement. Tonie Kristensen explains: "*The next four years will be a sort of laboratory (...) where we want to work with development of new approaches to citizen involvement and partly to develop a new sort of planning which is more comprehensive than the area renewal programs we have*" (Kristensen, 2020, Interview 1). Thomas Olesen also emphasises that it is about testing the new approach to experience if it is applicable (Olesen, 2020, Interview 1).

The process has not been planned in details yet, and it this will probably not be the case. Tonie Kristensen explains how the office which is shared by the three practitioners are decorated with a lot of Post-it labels with words and questions which they consider asking the residents. Somehow, the new strategy is not being formulated but seems to form among the practitioners similar to Mintzberg's (1994) perspective on emerging strategies like presented in chapter 2.2.3 on page 15. Tonie Kristensen explains: "*I guess we're in a process, and in a sense, we're pressing the*

path while we're walking because we're on unknown territory. Now, we're testing something new, and then we evaluate along the way" (2020, Interview 2). In Mintzberg's perspective (1994), planners should support the unpredictable outcome, and this seems to be the case in the analysed practice.

The *new* approach encompasses a desire to approach the residents in a new way which is linked to a collaborative planning approach. The process should address new questions and build a foundation for new relations. *"Instead of asking 'what would you like to create here?', we will rather ask about 'what matters to you?'"* Tonie Kristensen exemplifies (Kristensen, 2020, Interview 2).

4.4.4 Qualitative objectives

Since the current work is taking place within the context of the current Settlement Strategy of 2020, it makes sense to identify the objectives in it. One of the focus areas is to sustain the communities: *"Like we are affected by the built environment and the nature we move in, we also get affected by the intimacy and community we experience in the everyday life. Skive Municipality is gifted by a rich associational life and numerous committed volunteers. We must cherish it because communities and networks are a precondition to develop a sense of belonging to the district, like it contributes to retaining the residents in a settlement perspective"* (Skive Kommune, 2020, p. 22, Author's translation). This indicates that it does not make sense to distinguish strictly between the quantitative objectives and qualitative objectives. Somehow, this shows an acceptance of the qualities of the local communities which should be sustained and thereby, the qualities are expected to retain the residents or possibly have the effect of attracting settlement.

The objectives of the practitioners are likewise leaning towards the qualitative objectives. For example, Tonie Kristensen has a desire to actively construct a mutual understanding among the residents and to create new relations as part of work related to the coming projects (Kristensen, 2020, Interview 2). Thomas Olesen and Peter E. Steens also emphasise that qualities like an exceptional nature or a cultural landmark are somehow secondary compared to the value of a good sense of community in a village which can be present regardless the location and nearby attractions (Olesen, 2020; Steens, 2020, Interview 1).

In a way, it is also an objective of the work to mobilise the local residents. Thomas Olesen acknowledged that the residents have numerous skills which can be mobilised by means of the municipal facilitation. Throughout an involvement process, new residents can find their way to the projects and figure out that they can bring something as well, and from the process, the residents can experience that

they are capable to do something themselves (Olesen, 2020, Interview 1). This can be perceived as an objective as well.

Considering the approach to shrinkage among the practitioners, there seems to be an acceptance of the development trends even though an increasing settlement is desired. Tonie Kristensen expresses: "*The best of all worlds, we would like our villages to grow. (...) And we would also like to have more visitors. No doubt about that, but considering it down-to-earth, we cannot make every village grow. But we can create the best conditions for a good life in our villages*" (2020, Interview 2). This attitude is likewise shared in the current work that is related to Thise, Sdr. Thise and Sundsøre. Thomas Olesen explains that the municipality considers potential of the area to attract settlement, especially due to the many workplaces at Thise Mejeri, and due to a continuously local request for preparing sites for new development (Olesen, 2020, Interview 1). In the end, sustaining the local initiatives and providing good frames for a good life seem to be the key objective without disclaiming the ability to grow and develop.

4.4.5 Contextual impact

There are some limitations to the projects given the context. The workload of different departments within the municipality has proven to decrease the flexibility to carry out different projects without adding extra work to some of the busy departments (Olesen, 2020, Interview 1). Likewise, it has been the case after the internal circumstances around 2015-2016 that not as many new projects have been initiated. This indicates that practice and experiences forming the approach to planning. Peter E. Steens explains how the internal circumstances affected the work afterwards "*(...) it affected the development work for at least some years, and maybe, it is not until now that we are back and are a bit more courageous and dare to initiate something again*" (2020, Interview 1).

4.4.6 Preliminary findings

The current and coming practice related to the comprehensive project for the area of Thise, Sdr. Thise and Sundsøre is characterised by a desire to test out new approaches and instruments. In Sehested's (2008) perspective, this is related to the learning strategies from which the practitioners can test, evaluate and learn in practice, and this objective is not necessarily very distinct. Still, there is a contextual framework that the practitioners must consider in order to enable that the projects succeed to be realised. This seems to be an inevitable part of the development work within the municipal context – the projects must simply fit into the overall political line, there must be financial support to the projects, and the projects must

be processed administratively in order to succeed. Somehow, elements of Bryson's (2018) comprehension of a strategic mindset shines through in this case since the planners seem to know where they are and where they are going but they are not sure about how to get there yet. This "route" will form along the way by means of creative involvement processes and trial of new instruments.

In the practitioners' view, the overall objective of the work is to sustain the conditions for a good life in the villages. They accept and manage the situation but still, the selection of areas for the current projects has also been made on the basis of an assumption that the areas hold a potential for new settlement and increasing tourism, thereby indicating a small desire for a more quantitative objective. It has been deliberately and strategically decided not to test out the new comprehensive approach on Fur since it is the "lighthouse" of the municipality in terms of tourism and settlement, and the island is considered more complex in terms of different (diverging) interests and numerous activities. Thereby, the island is considered having a great development potential which is not suitable for the "trial and error" approach.

The coming work is expected to involve the locals to a great extent. The practitioners want to test new approaches to involvement, and it is a desire to sustain relations within the communities. This indicates a focus on the internal perspective which is expected to provide the residents with a desire to participate. Also, the project has been requested by the locals for several years emphasising the local initiative and bottom-up approach. One can argue that the external perspective can happen to become more important as the concrete projects will form and become more tangible, thereby requiring funding for realisation. These findings are illustrated in figure 4.7 on page 75.



Figure 4.7: Visualisation of the findings of part 3.

4.5 A comprehensive mapping in the municipal plan

Besides the explored work related to area renewals, local development projects, and the current comprehensive projects related to Thise, Sdr. Thise and Sundsøre there happens to be a mapping of many villages in Skive Municipality that has not been addressed. 20 villages in Skive Municipality have been analysed in the work related to the municipal plan of 2016-2028 (Skive Municipality, 2016a). A municipal plan is a comprehensive plan that outlines land use and expected development for a municipality on a 12-year-basis, and all municipalities must prepare a new municipal plan every fourth year (Post, 2018).

Skive Municipality's municipal plan of 2016-2028 contains a digital page for

each village located within the urban zoning (*byzonebyer*), counting for 20 villages (Skive Municipality, 2016a). Each village is presented in terms of facilities, location, demographic development, and the identified wishes for future development among the locals. The work leading to the approval of the municipal plan in 2016, implied a comprehensive involvement process. Residents of all villages were invited to contribute to the debate about their local areas by expressing their ideas, giving suggestions for the plan, and take part in public meetings in multiple villages of the municipality (Skive Municipality, 2016a). Figure 4.8 exemplifies the output of the work – here, it is the mapping of the village Glyngøre. The comprehensive mapping was updated and transferred to the recently launched municipal plan of 2020-2032 but without repeating the involvement processes (Skive Municipality, 2020).



Figure 4.8: Collage of extracts of the Municipal Plan 2016-2028 (Skive Municipality, 2016a).

The mapping is only concisely mentioned in the interviews with the practitioners. They speak about the municipal plan as a surrounding framework which the concrete projects must fit into, indicating that the mapping has not been actively utilised as a basis for the practitioners' work. Bearing the analytical strategies in mind, the mapping of the villages in the municipal plan composes a data-based foundation for the practitioners' work which does not seem to have been utilised as such. In this regard, it should be mentioned that the three former municipal practitioners left the team about the time when the municipal plan of 2016-2028 was approved, and only one of the current interviewed practitioners was employed in Skive Municipality at that time. Also, the work revolving the municipal plan is placed in the Department of Planning & Support while the planning strategy is developed by the Department

of Communication, Development & Business where the interviewed respondents are employed. This intern division of labour is thereby likely to explain why the work related to the municipal plan not necessarily forms a basis for the strategic work. The fact that the mapping has not been mentioned as an important basis for decision-making or for selecting where to allocate resources can, however, be interpreted as a sign that the work has not been used as it potentially could.

4.6 Partial conclusion

In order to sum up the findings of the analysis, the four dimensions will guide the following partial conclusion.

Type of strategy

Different approaches to strategy-making can be identified in the explored practice. The area renewals represent an implementation-oriented focus due to the scheduled framework and the formal collaboration between multiple levels (national, municipal and local). The local development projects systematically identified the desires of the local residents in order to initiate some specific projects in the following years, to meet political objectives and to mobilise and encourage the locals. The current project represents a learning-oriented approach with a wider focus at testing. Like it is argued in the theory of chapter 2, strategies are often in practice a mix of different approaches. This seems to be the case in this regard as well since the identified types of strategies do not stand isolated.

In general, the analytical types of strategies are present in terms of the need for understanding the surrounding framework. This implies that the practitioners must consider how the specific projects can be realised by comprehending the economic, organisational and administrative framework. The analytical strategy-approach is likewise expressed in the pronounced need for holistically considering how multiple levels can be combined – from international and national subsidies, to the municipal framework, and to the local residents.

The learning type of strategies are present in the growing focus on collaboration, testing new approaches and instruments, and accepting that the strategy is likely to form along the way.

An important experience to emphasise is that a strategy must be integrated in practice and the mindset of the practitioners, citizens, politicians etc. If a strategy is not activated as such, there is a big risk that a thorough piece of work will end up taking space on a shelf, and the quality of the output will not match the amount of work that has been put into the strategy-making.

Approach to shrinkage

The written policies and strategies express a quantitative objective due to a desire to attract settlement and expand tourism. Thus, the documents emphasise the importance of promoting the existing residents with an opportunity for living a good life in the villages and rural districts.

The practitioners are not very distinct in their expressions about shrinkage. They seem to accept the tendencies, but the practice does not take a long-term decision about how the villages are expected to adapt to the tendencies of shrinkage, and practice does not take a point of departure in the demographic statistics. This indicates that there has not been made a clear decision about shrinkage – neither is it distinctively accepted, nor denied as a fundamental condition.

Objective

The practitioners' objectives are in a broad wording qualitative. These objectives desire to sustain the qualities and communities of the villages, and help to strengthen the basic conditions for the citizens to live a good life in the rural districts. In the current project, the practitioners want to work actively with relations between the locals, and the desire is likewise expressed in the idea of mobilising the residents in networks from which the locals can continue to work and gather around projects. Despite the qualitative objective, the practitioners do not refuse to attract settlement, thereby vaguely expressing a somehow quantitative objective. They want to provide the villages with the opportunity to attract settlement, especially if the locals desire it.

Perspective

The practice acknowledges that planning must consider both external and internal perspectives. The external perspective is necessary in the rural context in order to get to realise projects. This is due to the need for financing, for instance in terms of national subsidies. The internal perspective is emphasised as fundamental to rural district planning in Skive Municipality. Without the local engagement, there is simply no project. The locals provide energy, identity, engagement and resources to the specific projects and strategy-making which is of great value.

5 New requirements - new practice?

The previous chapter explored how rural district planning in Skive Municipality has been strategic, and explored the practitioners' experiences of strategy-making in practice. Now, it is relevant to bring the findings into the current context that is affected by the new requirements given the addition to The Planning Act (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2018). This chapter revolves around the third sub question: *How can the new requirements be adopted to planning practice of rural districts, and which changes are the new requirements likely to bring?*

To sum up, the new requirements cause that municipalities must plan strategically for villages: "*Municipal planning must contain strategic planning which coherently considers the opportunities for development of villages in respect of local circumstances*" (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2018, § 5 c), and "*give overall objectives and means for development of villages*" (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2018, § 5 d section 3). Municipalities have a freedom of method to respond to the new requirements which implies that municipalities can decide how they want to solve the task. This evokes a need for reflection about how the new requirements can be adopted to practice as good as possible.

5.1 Realdania – Long live the villages

The 25th of May 2020, Realdania launched the publication *Long live the villages* (*Længe leve landsbyerne*) that presents a method for municipalities to implement strategic planning for villages to meet the new requirements. In the light of the analysis carried out in the previous chapter, it is relevant to consider how the suggested method of Realdania matches the findings of the empirical case-study, and to consider if there are obvious paths to follow.

Realdania's method has been developed in collaboration with three municipalities: Holstebro, Vejen and Norddjurs. Reviewing the method, I found that there are both differences and similarities between the suggested method of the publication and the identified practice in Skive Municipality. In the light of Sehested's (2008) categorisation of strategies, the method of Realdania is marked by an analytical approach to form a basis for decision-making and long-term strategy-making, but the method also implies citizen involvement. The publication perceives strategic plan-

ning for villages as "*a long-term and comprehensive planning in which the municipality determines realistic and differentiated goals, partial aims, and means taking a starting point in involvement of the civil society and a data- and knowledge-based analysis of the opportunities, challenges, and resources of the individual village*" (Hjortkjær and Realdania, 2020, p. 12, Author's translation).

The analytical part of the strategy-making in Realdania's suggested method is about systematically analysing and considering all villages in a municipality by means of:

- Geographic aspects: E.g. facilities and distances to facilities, house prices
- Demographic aspects: E.g. population, demography, demographic development
- Sociocultural aspects: E.g. associations, sense of community, passionate citizens (Hjortkjær and Realdania, 2020)

The analysis should provide a basis for the municipality to geographically categorise areas according to challenges and potentials. Figure 5.1 on page 81 exemplifies the type of maps that is expected to be generated from the analysis. This implies a mapping of access to basic facilities such as schools and grocery shops, development of house prices, demographics, and the strength of civil societies. The last-mentioned mapping builds on questionnaire surveys about local communities, associational life, voluntariness etc., which is intended to indicate how prepared a village is to run a local development process (Hjortkjær and Realdania, 2020). Being well-informed about the civil societies should prepare the municipalities to work deliberately with development in the villages and indicate which role the practitioners need to take throughout a project. The analytical basis is generally expected to provide an overview and enable the practitioners to identify how multiple areas or projects can be linked, and to plan long-term.

Realdania's method suggests that citizen involvement should be a part of the entire process. Both along the mapping-period and afterwards. This is considered in order to ensure that projects get rooted in the local communities, and to sustain a sense of ownership among the residents (Hjortkjær and Realdania, 2020).

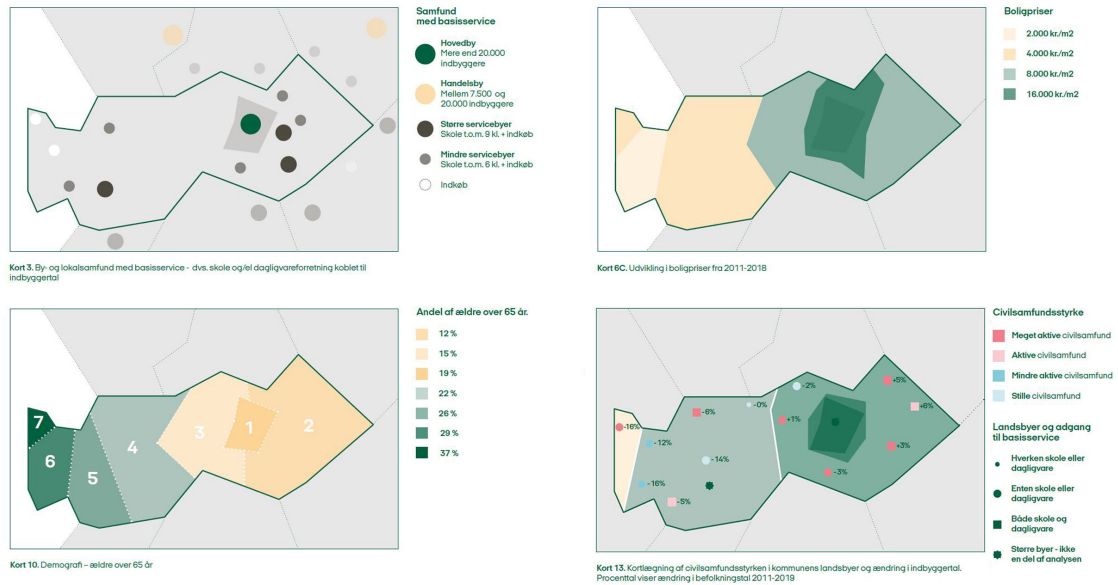


Figure 5.1: Four maps extracted from Realdania's publication *Long live the villages*. The maps display how the method is expected to map a municipality according to several parameters. Here, the maps display access to services, development of house prices, demography, and the strenght of the civil societies in the municipality (Hjortkjær and Realdania, 2020, p. 21, 25, 29 and 42).

5.2 Comparing practitioners' experience to Realdania's method

In the analysis of the previous chapter, I found that rural district planning in Skive Municipality to a great extent is concerned with the local drive and engagement since development takes place where the residents have a pronounced desire for it. The framework in terms of the municipal plan, planning strategies, and policies are naturally setting a course for the practitioners' work, but the local demand and initiative is important in order to decide where the development should take place.

Also, it is important to the practitioners to consider the surroundings strategically. Both the former and current municipal practitioners emphasise that strategic planning implies a need for having a comprehensive understanding of the surrounding structures, an ability to identify how external resources can support the projects, and an understanding of the planning instruments. In contrast to the suggested method of Realdania, the strategic work in Skive Municipality does not take a starting point in data-based and technical analyses. Instead, the development projects have been carried out where there has been a certain motivation, and where practitioners and politicians consider a broader potential or apparent opportunity to combine several aspects like it is the case in the current project for Thise, Sdr. Thise and Sundsøre as examined in section 4.4 on page 68.

The experiences of the practitioners in Skive Municipality differ from Realdania's suggested method on several parameters such as the use of public resources, the perception of comprehensiveness, democratic/inclusive aspects, and differentiation in planning. These parameters will guide the following discussion.

5.2.1 Efficient use of public resources

The first parameter is linked to a central responsibility of public employees: To manage public resources in a responsible and deliberate way. In this regard, it seems relevant to reflect how the two approaches meet this expectation.

In **Skive Municipality**, the resources are in a broad wording used where the projects and support are actively requested. This can be perceived as efficient because the effort is put where the local residents are willing to take part in the work and have a local drive. The procedure is potentially minimising the risk that work, effort, and resources are allocated for projects which potentially cannot take roots in the local community because the internal drive is rather absent. The reviewed literature in chapter 2 found that projects that are run top-down are more likely to fail in terms of local rooting. In Skive Municipality, the bottom-up perspective is the primary approach, which causes that the local drive gets rewarded – but it also implies that projects are not selected on a factual basis. Instead, the practitioners and politicians decide which initiatives the municipality should support, thereby, to consider where the resources can generate most viability, new settlement or tourism depending on the objectives. The approach of Skive Municipality is somehow flexible and provides the practitioners an ability to strike when and where the iron is hot, and potentially save resources by putting an effort in villages and local communities demanding it.

Like stated in the analysis of chapter 4, the practitioners emphasise the importance of considering the options for financing including the opportunity to attract external subsidies for area renewals and various other external funds. This indicates a desire to bring changes and supplement the budget of the municipality. Also, it is the impression of Tonie Kristensen that many local communities surrounding Skive are well-off in the sense that they have proven to find economic support to local projects that matter to them. She exemplifies that the village Oddense managed to collect 900.000 DKK to sustain the local grocery store – a tidy sum considering that the village has a population of 538 residents (Kristensen, 2020, Interview 2).

Realdania's method is different. A thorough analysis forms a basis for the work that is likely to compose an overview and a data-based foundation for

decision-making and long-term planning (Hjortkjær and Realdania, 2020). From the mapping, practitioners should be able to identify whether multiple areas experience the same specific challenges, or identify the potential for several villages to participate in one, comprehensive process by the same objective, potentially in clusters – thereby, strategically saving public resources. One can argue that such analytical work is time-consuming and takes large resources. The question is therefore if the comprehensive basis can justify the spent resources.

The analytical basis composes a potential for efficient work and ability to spend public resources responsibly – at least in theory. Thus, there is a pitfall in this argumentation because the practitioners express that all villages and rural areas are special and different, thereby causing that generalising and "merging" multiple places into one unit can be difficult in practice (Kristensen, 2020, Interview 1; Berit Brunsgaard, 2020, Interview 3). The analytical approach can be perceived as a too simplified interpretation of reality.

Somehow, the analytical approach that Realdania suggests can be perceived as a means to take well-considered decisions on a well-informed basis, and related to this parameter, it has the ability to manage the public sources responsibly on the long-term. On the other hand, the more initiative-based practice in Skive Municipality has the ability to allocate support, where it is actively demanded. This implies that the resources are to a great extent used according to a civic culture and the residents' ability to mobilise themselves and to seek interaction with the municipality, thereby rising a question about the democratic aspects of the approach which I will return to in the third parameter.

5.2.2 Comprehensiveness

The second parameter is included due to the practitioners' focus on comprehensiveness in their practice like it appeared in the analysis of chapter 4. All practitioners share the opinion that a strategic take on planning implies that the surrounding framework, external and internal resources, and time-perspectives are taken into consideration. Thus, there is a different perception of comprehensiveness in Realdania's suggested method which is interesting to address in this regard.

In **Skive Municipality**, the practitioners aim to enhance comprehensiveness in the current work by combining different approaches, instruments and types of projects, and by expanding the geographic scope of the project to include a bigger area of three villages. Of course, the projects are expected to be carried out in accordance to the overall planning including the municipal plan and political interests. The practitioners aim to plan comprehensively by taking the surrounding

framework, opportunities for external funding etc. into consideration when carrying out strategic planning. This is perceived as a necessity if a project should succeed to become realised, and if the process should run easily. Comprehensiveness is thereby perceived in relation to the concrete projects and in an, overall, limited time frame.

Realdania's method strives for comprehensiveness as well, but in this regard, comprehensiveness is perceived differently. The perspective is wider and to a greater extent concerned with the long-term. The analytical basis is expected to provide practitioners with the ability to comprehend the situation in terms of the current conditions and development trends of villages, the individual opportunities and challenges of villages etc. (Hjortkjær and Realdania, 2020). The mapping should enable the practitioners to make decisions on a well-informed basis – primarily to face the future development. The suggested mapping of Realdania's method contains elements that are similar to the identified indicators for the risk of shrinkage developed by Segers et al. (2020) as presented in chapter 2 on page 21. The indicators for risk of shrinkage are perceived as 1) a current tendency of shrinkage, 2) an ageing population, and 3) decreasing house prices (Segers et al., 2020). The mapping of Realdania's suggested method can possibly prepare the ground for practitioners to consider the demographic development as a basis for their work.

Carrying out a thorough mapping gives the practitioners an opportunity to adopt to the "new" situation marked by shrinkage and to actively accept it as a fundamental basis to their work. From the analysis in chapter 4, shrinkage does not seem to be denied, not yet distinctively accepted among the practitioners. I argue that there is an opportunity that a thorough mapping of the villages can lead to a greater acceptance of shrinkage among practitioners. The mapping can provide a basis for the practitioners and politicians to consider long-term solutions and seek for solutions on a bigger scale, for instance by considering how villages can collaborate, share facilities and support each other in the long run, thereby adapting to the situation.

It may seem counter-intuitive, especially to politicians, to accept shrinkage as a condition since it can be received as a capitulation. Still, demographic shifts are not occurring over night – the processes are slow, and thereby, the risk indicators should be taken seriously in order to adapt and set a solid course in time (Segers et al., 2020; Raugze et al., 2017). In this regard, adapting to shrinkage and working comprehensibly can possibly enhance the viability of villages in the long run. For instance by considering the residents' access to facilities within a longer time frame, seek opportunities for collaborations and sharing of facilities.

The analysis found that strategies can likewise become *too* comprehensive. It is the impression of the former municipal practitioners that the comprehensive work of the local developments projects happened to be too extensive, especially the format of the documents that displayed the results of the work. There is a risk that too many hours are spent to create a comprehensive strategy, but in the end, it is the outcome that matters to people. Berit Brunsgaard explains that it can be difficult to move from a comprehensive strategy to reality: "*... it (a strategy) may not become something that just takes up space on the shelf – how (...) can one implement it and carry it out? Or bring it to life so it isn't just these written words? That is often the very very difficult part – a big challenge to the municipalities that put a lot of energy in the development of good strategies, and then it just fades*" (Brunsgaard, 2020, Interview 3). In a way, this quote emphasises that a strategy is less useful if it is difficult to integrate in practice. One can argue that it should be easy to follow a plan of actions but reality is rarely as rational as the simplified analyses and documents prescribe. This is important to bear in mind if a comprehensive analysis is carried out as the foundation for planning.

It thereby seems preferable that a strategy relates to the long-term time frame and has a holistic view on the conditions for development in order to adapt to the "new" situation and demography. It is desired that a strategy considers multiple levels in order to ensure that the concrete projects can be realised. This implies comprehensibly considering external funding (national and international), considering the municipal framework and budgets, and likewise considering the local scale in terms of local funds, support and sustaining the internal drive.

5.2.3 Democratic management

The third parameter partly derives from the practitioners' desire to carry out collaborative and inclusive planning, and partly from the theoretical framework in which it was emphasised that local rooting and involvement is essential to rural district planning.

A recent turn in planning calls for planning to be just, inclusive, and democratic. Advocates for these objectives are Patsy Healey (1996), Judith E. Innes (1996), and John Forester (1999) among others. They subscribe to the desire for enabling everybody to participate and for providing everybody with a voice in decision-making, and to challenge the existing power relations (Allmendinger, 2017). In this regard, one can argue that an analytical approach to strategy-making risks to lack the inclusive and democratic objectives if the focus on data, knowledge and comprehensiveness becomes too dominant. Thereby, it is worth considering how the two approaches meet the expectations to ensure accessibility, involvement and

democracy in planning.

In **Skive Municipality**, it is expected that the citizens and local communities call for support if they desire development or have an idea for a development project. If the practitioners find the project solid, the politicians can approve it, and the necessary funding can be provided, then, there is a good chance that it will succeed (Olesen, 2020, Interview 1). In a way, this approach meets the expectations of local co-determination since the citizens will have access to the practitioners and potentially get to influence the work. One can argue, that the approach lacks "planning" in the long-term sense since it is difficult to forecast bottom-up initiatives. It can be questioned whether it is possible for everybody to bring forward a solid, comprehensible and realistic project, or whether it is a skill that is reserved to socioeconomic advantaged groups. Thereby, the support will be provided to development in villages where the advantaged groups are present, while other villages potentially are degrading without further notice. One can question whether all citizens are aware that this is the procedure – if everybody knows that they need to bring forward an idea in order to bring change.

Somehow, this is a distorted access to influence practice. This is not only the case on the overall, municipal scale. It is also the case on a local scale where people are organised in different social groups and relations (Staun, 2020, Interview 3). The local communities compose their own power structures and alliances that can cause distortion and in-equal access to the debates. Thus, the practitioners can design the processes to enable most people to participate, and the current practice in Skive Municipality is expected to do so. For example, the current projects should help sustaining relations by asking other types of questions, and the work should include more people and provide everybody with a voice (Kristensen, 2020, Interview 2). Another means to enhance the inclusiveness is to reconsider the format of involvement – for instance to consider how families, young people, the elderly etc. are able to and motivated to participate in local projects. This implies considering when to schedule the public involvement processes, the opportunity to use different platforms including the digital ones and other type of activities such as sport events, communal eating etc. in order to attract different groups to participate.

The **Realdania's** method suggests that the analysis is expected to provide a basis for deciding where the development is going to take place. Practitioners can thereby on a well-informed basis consider where the development is most needed and how a project fits the overall planning. In a way, this indicates a top-down approach to development, which is not considered suitable according to the theoretical framework. In order to meet the expectations in terms of involvement,

the analytical work is therefore expected to be supplemented with dialogues to the local communities and an overall involvement process. This is not specified in details in the method of Realdania, but the method suggests that municipalities maintain a continuous dialogue to the local communities. On the one hand, one can argue that running a such dialogue with numerous villages can be very time-consuming. On the other hand, there is a potential that such a dialogue can provide the communities with an entrance to the public administration, thereby, possibly providing more communities with courage to actively bring forward their ideas and concerns which are likely to sustain the bottom-up perspective. The dialogues are somehow planned to be a part of the approach of Realdania, thereby strategically considering a matter of accessibility and inclusiveness. Still, the approach can seem to be more concerned with a top-down approach rather than the bottom-up drive. One can argue that it is, if not impossible, difficult to plan for bottom-up initiatives without having a more ad hoc-inspired approach like it has been the case for a while in Skive Municipality.

Another approach is to provide the politicians with a thorough basis for decision-making in order to enhance democracy through the elected politicians. Ditte Staun expresses how local development "*... can never be democratic,*" and she adds "*well, it cannot be a representative section of the population, so in a sense, it is important to emphasise that it's not illegitimate if the politicians elected by the people say 'in the end, we're elected to make the decisions'*" (2020, Interview 3). After all, the practitioners perform the work decided by the politicians, but in reality, one can argue that practitioners are not left without the ability to shape their work and the political decisions by giving suggestions and share their experiences. Still, the politicians represent the citizens and, thereby, the democracy can be performed in this sense.

5.2.4 Enhance differentiation and avoid stigmatisation

The fourth parameter is chosen due to Realdania's method that attempts to categorise areas according to the analysis, thereby adding a label to the areas. The new requirements ask for municipalities to promote a differentiated development for villages. How is that met in Realdania's method? What can the categorising and labeling possibly do, and does the practice of Skive Municipality do something similar?

Skive Municipality's municipal plan (both the plan of 2016-2028 and the recently launched of 2020-2032) includes an evaluation of 20 villages which have been considered individually. Thus, the mapping has not been used actively as a foundation for practice. Peter E. Steens explains that the villages in Skive Municipality have not been systematically examined or considered in terms of

viability: "... we haven't considered whether the one and the other village is viable or not. Well, I guess we by default consider them to be – since they continuously exist" (Steens, 2020, Interview 1). The three current practitioners of the team agree that the villages in Skive Municipality are on a general level thriving. Most villages have ambitions and wishes, and the local drive is generally considered strong (Kristensen; Steens; Olesen, 2020, Interview 1 and 2). It may be the case that the practitioners are right about their perception of the villages in Skive Municipality but the situation may be different in other municipalities. Other places can happen to be more challenged in terms of engagement, social cohesion, sociocultural capital etc., thereby, it would make more sense to comprehensively consider all villages.

The method of **Realdania** aims to divide municipalities into different categories due to different parameters. One parameter is the strength of the civil societies, referring to the local engagement, associational life, and the local ability to run a project with or without great municipal support. The four categories in this regard are:

- Still civil societies
- Less active civil societies
- Active civil societies
- Very active civil societies (Hjortkjær and Realdania, 2020, p. 56-57, Author's translation)

This distinction is partly made to identify the current situation of the villages in order to inform and prepare the practitioners to select a suitable approach for their work and the following strategy-making. The publication states: "*It is important to emphasise that the categorisation of the civil societies only expresses the strength to lift a development of the village. It does not express whether the village is a good or bad place to live and settle. It is about, in a municipal perspective, to be clear about which resources the village has in order to lift a future development*" (Hjortkjær and Realdania, 2020, p. 36, Author's translation).

From the analysis of the practice in **Skive Municipality**, it seems like the practitioners are deliberate about the local differences. Even though most villages are expressing a desire and motivation, the communities are still different in terms of skills and degree of self-sufficiency. These differences are considered in each project, and the collaboration between the municipality and local communities becomes tailored to the needs along the way. The practitioners bring in their own judgement, deliberation and experience to meet the locals in a proper, supporting way. Still, a comprehensive analysis could potentially provide an overview and certainty about the local, social resources and competencies, and maybe such an analysis would

uncover something new.

In a way, an analysis expresses a snapshot of the situation at a specific time. In terms of the demographic development, there is a risk that a minor change in the small population will insinuate distinct changes in percentages. This, and the defined categories used in **Realdania**'s method, are likely to apply a label of the different areas, even though it is not the intention. Is such a label likely to reinforce the trends and tendencies? Or will it potentially bring focus to the challenges being present in many villages and thereby allocate interest and change?

In a sense, this procedure of categorising and adding a label is similar to the labels that have been applied to the peripheral Denmark as explained in the introduction (chapter 1). In that regard, it has been discussed how these explanatory terms that have been used and what they have caused. Some would argue that the terms have reinforced the challenges (who wants to settle in The Rotten Banana?), and others would argue that the labels have led to dialogue and political attention to the challenges (Svendsen, 2013; Dybvad, 2015). It can be considered if the analysis should be available to the public, or whether it should be carried out as an intern procedure. On the other hand, public access increases transparency and openness, and the analyses can potentially communicate that a municipality works actively with rural district development and considers the local areas.

In **Skive Municipality**, the mapping related to the municipal plan of 2016-2028 was carried out in close relation to the local communities. The mapping reflects the local objectives, and thereby, it can be considered an advantage that the local desires have now been put down. This enables the local communities to put document if they have had the same wishes of development for a long time, thereby potentially strengthening their arguments.

To sum up the findings in this parameter, there seems to be both pros and cons by carrying out an analysis or thorough mapping in order to divide the villages into categories like in Realdania's method. But can reality really be fitted into categories? Does it make sense to zone areas like this? In fact, this depends on the eyes of the beholder. There is a risk that the categorisation will simplify the situation and reality, and that the mapping is based on an absolute understanding of space not considering that people are able to move around, cross borders of villages and participate in communities crosswise the zoning. Also, it is a risk that the practitioners and politicians are likely to interpret and adopt the understandings of the labels, thereby stigmatising the areas. On the other hand, the procedure provides the practitioners an overview. In a way, it communicates an opinion if such an analysis is left out as well – can it be perceived as a reluctance to deal with

the challenges if a municipality does not take a stand or fear to acknowledge that some areas are challenged? Somehow, it can be considered a stronger statement to emphasise that some areas are challenged, rather than avoiding taking a stand, deliberately or not.

5.3 Adopting the new requirements to practice

In the following, I will sum up the findings of the comparison in order to identify which elements of the analysed practice in Skive Municipality and the suggested method by Realdania are likely to compose an ideal way to adopt the new requirements to practice. After considering the pros and cons, I will present an adjusted approach combining the findings from Skive Municipality and Realdania.

The pros and cons are summed up in table 5.1 on page 91. Rural district planning practice in **Skive Municipality** is flexible in the sense that practice to a great extent relies on the residents' motivation and ability to address development in a bottom-up perspective. Of course, the practitioners cannot shift between projects on a daily basis, but the approach is flexible in the sense, that the practitioners can support the bottom-up initiatives that emerge. The attitude is somehow based on an expectation to a civic culture for participation among the residents. Since the projects take place where the local residents desire it, there is an overall local support and interest in the specific projects. A downside from this practice is that the planners cannot guarantee that all citizens are aware about the expectancy, and not everybody is capable of bringing forward a suggestion for a specific project. It seems to be the case that rural district planning practice in Skive Municipality is to a big extent concerned with the current projects at a local scale and implementation of projects – this is likely to sustain the chances for realisation of the projects, but there is a risk that comprehensiveness in a wider scale and long-term planning are absent. The municipal plan provides a basis for mapping and for considering an analytical approach but in a way, it does not seem to align to the current practice.

The method presented by **Realdania** contains both valuable aspects and questionable aspects as well. The idea of mapping out the areas of a municipality in order to identify how the different areas can be approached strategically. This provides a solid basis to form strategies, identify collaborations, and to consider the risk indicators for shrinkage by means of long-term strategies. The analytical basis especially seems to be suitable to municipalities with sparse experience in the field since it takes the shape of a step-by-step guide. It tells which parameters the mapping should include, and it expresses the need for involvement in order to ensure local rooting to take place. Still, it may cause that reality becomes too simplified –

and in a way, the deliberation of the practitioners is being questioned. The analysis and categorisation can potentially cause stigmatisation, but it is likewise possible that the categorisation will communicate that the strategic planning initiates change.

Pros and cons		
	Practice in Skive Municipality	Realdania's suggested method
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible use of resources • Attracting external resources • Sustaining and reward local engagement • Comprehensive approach on project-level • Practitioners can act upon their experiences • Local motivation and engagement to chosen projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A thorough basis for decision-making • Potential to act upon risk indicators for shrinkage • Well-informed about local capacities, strengths and challenges • Knowledge about how to approach the local communities
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacking long-term perspective and deliberation about shrinkage • Risking that some communities cannot manage to attract development and support • Municipal plan contains an analysis which is not actively used • Bottom-up initiatives are difficult to forecast • Risking to avoid communicating about the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource demanding to carry out mapping and analyses • Potentially too rational and fixed • Risking to allocate resources to unrealisable projects (in terms of lacking local engagement) • Risking to stigmatise by means of labeling

Table 5.1: Summing up pros and cons from the practice of Skive Municipality and the suggested method by Realdania.

The freedom of method to incorporate the strategic approach enables municipalities to tailor practice according to the new requirements. In Skive Municipality, there is already a foundation of experience to consider while choosing a pathway. The experience is an advantage since the practitioners do not have to start from scratch in order to meet the new requirements. Thomas Olesen explains that Skive Municipality for long has been deliberate about the overall objectives related to the rural districts due to the Policy for Rural Districts (Skive Municipality, 2019b). He tells: "*I think, in relation to the municipal plan, one can argue that we're in a way, not necessarily in the lead, but we had the rural district policy that was quite comprehensive, so in way we had a plan for what we should do. Thereby, I guess we had a strategic sight on the rural districts and how they could be considered*" (Olesen, 2020, Interview 1). This emphasises the experiences that Skive Municipality will build upon.

5.3.1 Towards an adjusted suggestion

With a point of departure in the experiences from the practice of Skive Municipality and Realdania's method, I attempt to suggest how municipalities with sparse experience and tradition in the field can approach strategic planning for villages. Again, due to the freedom of method, this suggestion should only be perceived as a source of inspiration – in the end, the approach must be tailored to the current state of the work of each municipality. The suggestion is illustrated in figure 5.2 below.

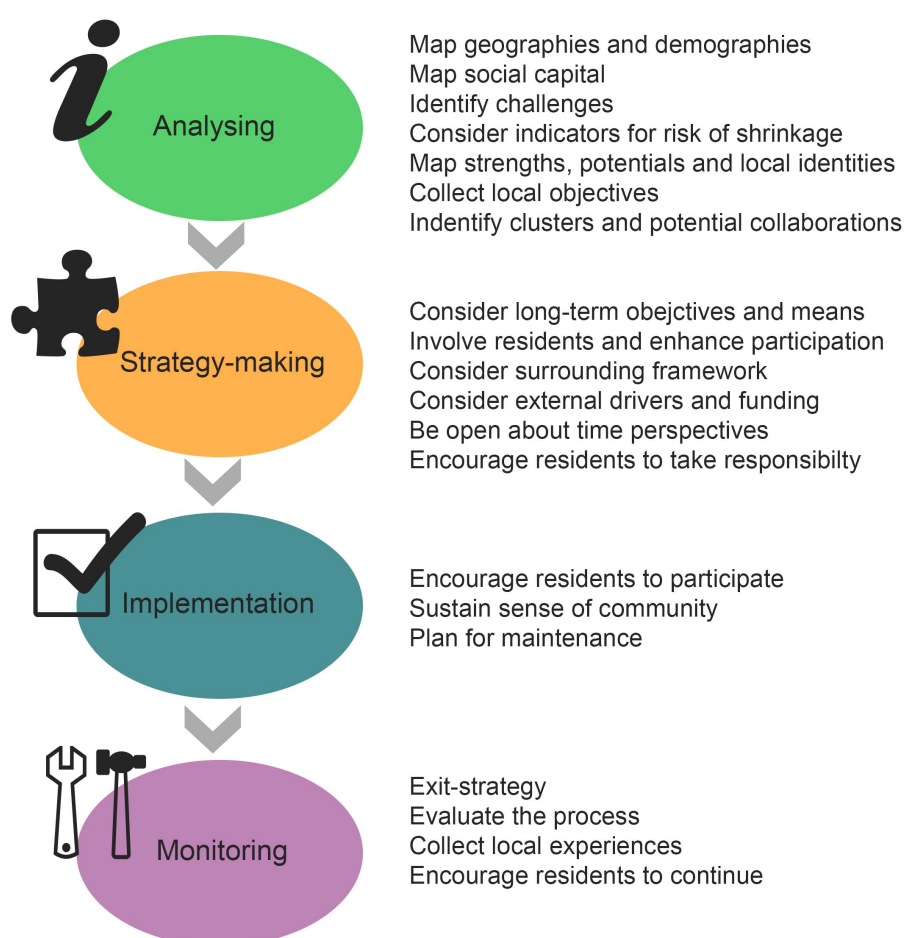


Figure 5.2: A suggested path to adopt the new legal requirements to practice with inspiration from the practice of Skive Municipality and Realdania's method in the publication Long live the villages (Hjortkjær and Realdania, 2020).

Analysing

As a starting point, it makes sense for municipalities with sparse experience in rural district planning to obtain an overview of the state and challenges of the villages. In this regard, Realdania's mapping method can provide a solid basis for the further strategy-making. Achieving an understanding about the demographic

changes provides practitioners and politicians with an ability to consider long-term objectives, and if the indicators for risk of shrinkage is present, this is an opportunity to start adapting to the possible future situations. At this point, the politicians should be informed about the development tendencies and the need for adapting to shrinkage in order to develop a long-term strategy that slowly adapts to the new circumstances.

Mapping the local areas should be done in respect to the local knowledge. This can be done by looking for the perceptions of the locals rather than applying one's own perception to the areas and, thereby, risking to stigmatise. Also, it is important to communicate why the mapping is carried out to tell residents that the potential labeling is carried out in order to promote change and enhance viability of the villages. Analysing the civil society strengths can be considered, but this is also a step that can be left out. On the one hand, it makes sense for practitioners to prepare themselves to approach a local community by knowing what they should expect – but on the other hand, the local communities are changeable, and one can expect the practitioners to carry deliberation and humanity when they approach a local community, thereby considering their approach in action.

The mapping/analysis should not be understood as a closed document – instead, it should be open for changes and modifications since they local desires are likely to change, new ideas can emerge, and new collaborations can form along the way. Overall, the analysis should enable practitioners to identify options for collaborations, share of facilities and to decide where to allocate resources. Analysing the areas likewise helps to ensure that no places are disregarded.

Strategy-making

Moving on to the part of strategy-making, it is an important task of the practitioners to be informed and deliberate about the surrounding framework. At this point, they represent the authorities and should manage to fit the local projects into the greater perspective – and likewise, the greater objectives should be reflected in concrete projects that get the municipal support. Obviously, there are limits to the number of projects that can be run at a time, for example economically – which resources are allocated to the work? This is a contextual condition which must be considered in the strategy-making. In this regard, it makes sense to distinguish between different types of projects. If a bottom-up initiated project emerges and proves to be fully operational there are no need for stopping it since it is likely to generate activity and viability. Of course, it must be considered in the greater perspective. Less operational projects that need more professional support, and projects initiated top-down will need a different amount of work and attention from

the practitioners.

In the strategy-making process, it is also important to deliberately consider how the local motivation can be maintained or strengthened. This can be done by means of providing the locals with responsibility, by communicating the time perspectives clearly, or by providing the locals with smaller projects that they can carry out themselves immediately while waiting for the administrative work to progress.

In this part, it is possible for practitioners to consider if there are new approaches or instruments that can be incorporated into the specific projects. It can be external or local funding, external collaborations, new planning instruments (such as transforming villages or coast-near development), new approaches to citizen participation or experiences drawn in other municipalities. In a way, many aspects in this part is about having a strategic mindset and to pay attention to the experiences drawn.

Implementation

The implementation can seem trivial, but in fact, the practitioners can strategically work to harvest the fruit of the former work at this point. Now, when concrete projects are forming, it will likely evoke the interest and engagement of the locals. At this point, it is important to plan how the new physical facilities or social activities are likely to be maintained, and consider how the local communities that emerges around the projects, are likely to continue working in order to enhance viability of the villages.

Monitoring

The last part is about monitoring. Here, the practitioners need to consider how to exit a certain project. This implies that local experiences are collected in order improve and adjust the process of coming projects, and to pass on knowledge to other communities, collaborations and projects. The mapping of the first part will now imply the changes that the concrete projects have entailed.

5.4 What are the new requirements likely to entail?

From a bird's point of view, the new requirements illustrate how the expectations to planning practice become wider. In a sense, planning is now expected to help defeating a complex problem that has many causes such as urbanisation, depopulation, distorted geographies and a dwindling basis for a high level of public services. Planning in the rural districts and villages is not only about fixing up the physical decay of some places. It is also concerned with enhancing viability,

sustaining local communities, adapting to shrinkage, collaboration with locals and much more. Planning is expected to help sustaining the basis for people to live a good life in the rural districts, to nourish the local communities, and to render development and settlement possible. The question is whether new requirements of strategic planning can help doing so.

The new requirements can be interpreted as a result of an increasing political attention to the challenges to the rural districts – as an attempt to *bring Denmark into balance* (Ministry of Industry; Business and Financial Affairs, 2016). The requirements are likely to increase the focus on planning as a means to solve some of the challenges. Municipalities that have not planned strategically for villages so far, will face a new task to explore and solve, thereby increase the attention to the rural areas.

In the light of Realdania's publication, the demanded strategic approach can be interpreted as a need for systematically analysing the current state of the villages in order to entail long-term and comprehensive strategies. If the municipalities decide to find inspiration in the analytical approach, one can assume that more municipalities will become aware of the demographic development, evolving challenges and local initiatives. The analyses are likely to provide politicians an overview as well, thereby enabling politicians to consider a path. Thus, there is no exact definition of strategic planning, and because of the freedom of method, the requirements are likely to be adopted to practice in many, diverse ways. The different perceptions of strategic planning may be expected to entail different practices and lead to different solutions. The new requirements are thereby not necessarily leading to a uniform practice among municipalities despite the defined approach to planning. No matter which understanding or interpretation of strategic planning the numerous municipalities adopt, the new requirements are likely to increase the attention to the villages and rural districts.

In the case of Skive Municipality, the new requirements do not seem to change practice substantially. At least not within the coming four years since the municipal plan already meets the formal expectations, and the work of the practitioners has already been scheduled to revolve around the projects of Thise, Sdr. Thise and Sundsøre as well as the island of Fur.

Because of the freedom of method, the task can be solved in multiple ways in terms of the size of the effort. On the one hand, the requirements can be met by a simple, perfunctory process that satisfies the demanded practice but has an insignificant impact on the villages and surrounding areas – thereby taking the shape of strategies as rhetoric and symbolic in Sehested's (2008) categorisation. If it is

not desired to carry out the strategies in practice, it will not cause any change. On the other hand, the new requirements are an opportunity to increase the focus on villages and rural districts in planning, and to consider how the areas can become more viable in terms of local development, or as an opportunity to face the challenges and explore how planning can help the challenges areas to adapt to the situation. Thereby, the requirements can be met by a thorough and comprehensive process leading to changes.

Thus, ignoring the present challenges of many rural districts and refusing the negative demographic development will not cut the vicious circle. In order to adapt to shrinkage, practitioners and politicians must be deliberate and explore the opportunities of the broad strategic approach. In the end, it will be a decision for local politicians and practitioners to make.

Due to the pronounced focus on funding and financing among the interviewed practitioners, it is relevant to consider the economic aspects in relation to the new requirements. Like stated in the analytical framework on p. 27, the rural context composes a different context to development projects than urban areas, especially in terms of funding. Carrying out projects in the rural districts therefore relies on the on national subsidies, municipal budgets and local resources because the incentives to invest in development in shrinking areas is limited. In this regard, it is striking that the national subsidies have been changed as part of the National Budget (*Finansloven*) which has caused that the sum for area renewals is decreasing, and the allocated budgets are expected to entail more items (Carstensen et al., 2018). In the light of the analysis, it seems unlikely that the requirements for strategic planning can cause significant changes without prioritising it economically on a national level. This emphasises that a strategy is unlikely to bring changes in itself – it takes deliberation, action and a supportive framework.

In the end, the residents and communities of the rural districts are provided the opportunity to envision and declare their desires about the future of villages and the areas in between. Regardless of whether municipalities choose the easy or thorough path to meet the new requirements, a part of the responsibility is placed right in front the feet of the locals: Mobilise, socialise and create viability. They are in the center of it, themselves.

6 Reflections

The aim of this chapter is to retrospectively evaluate the research by considering the applied methods for empirical data collection, the processing of the data, and the theoretical approach. Thereby, this chapter reflects the presented approach of chapter 3 *Research design and methodology*. The research is based on a qualitative approach. Interviews and document analyses have been applied to bring light to the case of rural district planning in Skive Municipality in the years 2009-2020. The research bridges the theoretical knowledge derived in chapter 2 to the practical experiences of strategic planning in practice, composing the empirical part of the research.

The interviews have provided the research with informative data about planning practice. The two groups of respondents represent two different periods of time which has caused that the data reflects a longer time span indicating how practice has been since 2009. Interviewing more respondents within the same official structure in terms of the municipality has provided the research with thorough knowledge within the given framework. If the research had included more municipalities, the surrounding structures would have been different in every case which would demand further considerations. Considering one municipality only makes it possible to comprehend the context, understand how internal circumstances have affected practice, and to explore the different procedures in practice.

The scope of the research has not been influenced by the lock-down of society due to the COVID-19 outbreak because it is concerned with practice throughout the last 10 years. Thus, data has been collected differently than expected. The interviews were intended to be conducted by physical presence of the respondents – instead, the interviews were carried out virtually. It happened to generate a fruitful amount of data despite technical issues and minor outbreaks. The scheduled interview with the three current practitioners in Skive Municipality ended up being two interviews due to technical issues. I consider this to be of minor importance because the three interviews now, in broad terms, reflect the three different parts of the analysis.

The scientific approach of the research has been characterised by social constructivism. Taking this approach into account, I am aware that the research reflects my interpretation, and that it simplifies reality. To challenge my interpretation, I have strived towards including as many aspects in the analysis

as possible and attempted not to over-interpret data, thereby minimising the risk for misrepresent reality. To do so, the respondents have been asked to approve the utilised quotations, my translations and interpretations of the said words in order to align my interpretation to their perceptions. The semi-structured format of the interviews enabled the respondents to talk freely and include what they desired, and I thereby affected the data collection to a lesser extent.

Subscribing to social constructivism as the scientific approach, the research accepts that everybody is formed by the societal structures surrounding us, our backgrounds, histories, relations etc (Juul and Pedersen, 2012). In this regard, the research could to a greater extent explore the respondents' backgrounds and pre-understandings, and reflect how this affects the result. The respondents have different professional backgrounds such as political science, psychology, and politics. Exploring how these different backgrounds align to their expressions would add another dimension to the research, thus, it would demand another analysis and move focus away from the primary objectives.

To consider the quality of the research, it is relevant to discuss the validity and reliability of the research. Validity covers whether the research succeeds to answer the posed questions – whether it investigates what it anticipates to research. The research explores theory and practice in order to consider how strategic planning is likely to be incorporated into rural district planning practice. Leaving out the empirical study would cause the results not to be easily applicable, and counter-wise, limiting the research to focus on the empirical data only would not bring in a reflective discussion about rural district planning practice. Conceptualising strategic planning to the rural context likewise included deliberation about how the rural context makes up a different field for planning. Altogether, I argue that the research explores and concludes what it is expected to do according to the posed research question.

Considering the reliability of the research, it is relevant to assess whether the research is replicable – if the same results could be generated again, using the same approach. In this regard, the context shaping the selected case is important. Another municipality would likely be organised in a similar way, but the villages, practitioners, politicians, experiences etc. would likely be different. I acknowledge that repeating the research by means of a different case would generate different results, presumably overlapping to the findings of this research. Still, the collection and processing of data have been carried out with deliberation, attempting not to over-interpret and to minimise error by addressing the research by means of different methods and multiple respondents.

7 Conclusion

This Master's Thesis aims to respond to the research question

Learning from the case of Skive Municipality, how has rural district planning been strategic, and how are the new requirements likely to be adopted into planning practice?

The main findings of the research will be presented in the following.

For long, strategic planning has been concerned with urban areas. Here, it has been used as an approach to manage rapid growth, urbanisation and multiple stakeholders. Multiple takes on strategy-making have emerged, and now, the strategic approach is expected to be applied to the context of rural district planning practice in order to plan strategically for villages. To deliberately do so, strategic planning needs to be conceptualised to the new context of rural districts.

In the sense that the rural districts make up a different context to planning, population growth and big investments are generally replaced by shrinking populations, physical decay and a need for adapting to a dwindling basis for public and social services. The rural districts are also characterised by the presence of local communities, the widespread associational life, and the access to resources such as nature, scenery and other place-based types of resources. These characteristics must be considered when conceptualising strategic planning into the rural context. Since there is no formula for doing so, it makes sense to identify *how* rural district planning practice potentially can be. This is expressed by the four dimensions composing the analytical framework. Each dimension provides a span that is expected to compose the variation of approaches to strategic planning in rural districts. The four dimensions are:

- An analytical and/or learning approach to strategy-making
- An overall rejection and/or acceptance of shrinkage
- Quantitative and/or qualitative objectives
- External and/or internal perspectives

The four dimensions of the analytical framework have been applied to the empirical case of rural district planning in Skive Municipality in the years 2009-2020. Skive Municipality has planned for rural districts and supported local initiatives since the Structural Reform, and the municipality is thereby considered to be

case from which experiences can be extracted. Exploring the practice related to area renewals since 2007, local development projects of 2010-2016, and a current comprehensive project, the research has identified how practice has been strategic and explored the experiences of the practitioners by means of the four dimensions.

The case study confirms that in practice, strategy-making is a mix of different approaches. The analysis found that practice has been concerned with both analytical and learning strategies. The analytical approach is profound in the need for practitioners to comprehensively consider economic, administrative and organisational frames for practice. This is especially necessary in the rural context in order to increase the chances of realising the specific projects. The learning strategies are expressed in the practitioners' focus on citizen involvement and their desire to test out new approaches to planning, thereby accepting that they are not necessarily certain about where the work will take them.

Practice has not taken a point of departure in analyses and mapping on a data-basis such as demographic statistics, access to facilities etc. This entails that strategy-making does not decide on long-term perspectives or actively respond to potential indicators for risk of shrinkage. In general, the attitude to shrinkage is not distinctively pronounced in the empirical case – the practitioners find themselves somewhere in between accepting the circumstances and desiring to enable settlement.

The overall objectives of the practitioners are qualitative. They acknowledge that relations and communities must be sustained in order to enhance viability. This is likewise reflected in the practitioners emphasis on the internal perspective – there simply needs to be a local engagement and motivation in order to attract the municipal support to projects or development. Thus, the planning relies on the external perspective as well in order to attract the necessary financing and support to realise projects.

Learning from the practitioners, it is possible to suggest how strategic planning can be adopted to rural district planning practice, for instance in municipalities that are less experienced in the field. Realdania has developed a method for doing so, but since this suggested method at some points differs from the identified practice in Skive Municipality, it makes sense to consider Realdania's method in the light of the practitioners' experiences.

Realdania's method relies on a very analytical data-based approach that calls for holistic, long-term planning. Having such an analytical basis provides an opportunity to act upon potential indicators for risk of shrinkage and adapt to

the anticipated future demography. A systematic analysis likewise ensures that no places are left unseen. Skive Municipality's approach is thus more flexible and relies on an expectation to a civic culture and the residents' ability to put forward a project.

Since the new requirements are accompanied by a freedom of method, it is important to consider the point of departure in each municipality. In the case of Skive Municipality, it can possibly improve the ability to consider the long-term planning if a data-based foundation is considered. Still, practitioners and politicians are those to decide whether such analysis will measure up to the potential outcome from it.

Strategic planning is not a *one size fits all* concept. Thus, considering theory, practical experience and Realdania's suggested method, it is possible to suggest how strategic planning can be adopted to planning practice concerned with rural districts. The suggested path is therefore a set of phases that a municipality can consider according to the present state. In a compressed format, these phases are:

- **Analysing:** Map demographics, geographies, challenges and local objectives. Identify possible strategic collaborations, clusters and opportunities for sharing public facilities.
- **Strategy-making:** Consider long-term planning perspectives, formulate strategies in company with residents, encourage and motivate the residents.
- **Implementation:** Sustain communities and plan maintenance.
- **Monitoring:** Evaluate, share knowledge and encourage locals to continuously collaborate on projects.

The strategic planning approach is likely to entail changes to villages and rural districts if municipalities actively adapt the new requirements to practice. This will potentially bring attention to the challenges and potentials of many places, likewise generate new projects if the municipalities allocate resources to local development. The method of freedom offers a flexibility to choose a suitable path for the individual municipality which can be perceived as an advantage, but likewise, the flexibility has the risk of causing that the new requirements are satisfied by a minimal effort in some places, thereby not succeeding to bring changes and increase viability.

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A Interview guide - Current practitioners in Skive Municipality

Interview med tre planlæggere i Erhverv & Udvikling, Skive Kommune (16/4/2020)

Introduktion

Må jeg få lov til at optage samtalen?

Kort introduktion til projektet:

Speciale om hvordan strategier anvendes i planlægning for landsbyer/landdistrikter. Undersøgelsesspørgsmål som hvad vil det sige at arbejde strategisk, og hvad kan det egentlig bruges til? Hvilke problemer forventer man, at den strategiske tilgang kan løse?

Ny lovgivning om brug af strategier for landsbyer i kommunalt regi. Et felt, som Skive Kommune har arbejdet med i flere år -hvad er erfaringerne? Hvad kan man lære af de seneste års arbejde med strategiske udviklingsprojekter?

Det handler om at forstå, hvordan planlægningen bliver strategisk, og hvad det er den strategiske tilgang kan bidrage med. Derfor må I meget gerne reflektere lidt over, hvad der var/er strategisk i den måde, I arbejder med landsbyerne og landdistrikterne på.

Hvad er jeres baggrund, og hvad beskæftiger I jer med i deres job som planlæggere i Udvikling & Erhverv?

Arbejdsopgaver? Baggrund? Erfaring?

Vil I fremgå med navn eller være anonyme i min projektrapport?

Lokale Udviklingsprojekter 2010-2016

I 2010 blev der igangsat et arbejde omkring seks af Skive Kommunes landsbyer hhv. Glyngøre, Lihme, Roslev, Rødding, Rønbjerg og Selde (300-1600 indbyggere i byerne). Arbejdet er mundet ud i et dokument for hver by, der rummer ideer og ønsker for den fremtidige udvikling af det lokale område. Disse ideer og ønsker er politisk behandlet – flere ideer er blevet virkeliggjort, andre er ikke. Ideerne og ønskerne spænder vidt – fra ønske om styrket infrastruktur (fysisk og teknologisk), bosætning, rekreation, turisme og forbedring af de fysiske omgivelser eller decideret

etablering af nye projekter mv.

Vil i fortælle lidt om de lokale udviklingsprojekter, der har forløbet tilbage i 2012-2016?

Fremgangsmåde?

Udvælgelsen af netop disse byer – hvordan?

Grad af inddragelse af borgerne?

Styring oppefra eller nedefra?

Hvad var målet med planerne?

Hvordan blev de seks landsbyer valgt ud?

På baggrund af en forudgående analyse?

Bottom up – efterspurgt?

Pga. udfordringer med demografi, erhverv eller lign.?

Pga. nogle særlige potentialer eller etablerede fællesskaber?

Grad af inddragelse af borgere (både før, under, efter)?

Metoder til inddragelse under opstart? Workshops? Enkeltpersoner, repræsentanter, hele grupper eller offentlige arrangementer?

Refleksioner om repræsentativitet?

Hvordan modtages kommunens engagement?

Er foreningerne robuste og aktive uden kommunens involvering?

Hvad var kommunens ambitioner/målsætning med LUP?

Hvordan fandt man/I frem til disse?

Relateret til bosætning og demografi?

At skabe nogle stærke, levedygtige landsbyer?

At inddrage lokale aktører og sætte nogle aktiviteter i gang?

Top-down eller bottom-up?

Er ambitionerne/målsætningerne blevet indfriet?

Eksempler på når det lykkes? Lokalt engagement?

Eksempler på når det ikke lykkes?

Hvornår lykkes det? Hvad skal det til, før sådanne strategier bliver til virkelighed? Kræver det noget særligt?

Er der nogle tendenser her? Er det graden af inddragelse/samarbejde med borgerne?

Afhænger det af særlige kvaliteter, tilstedeværelse af ildsjæle eller ekstern hjælp?

Hvordan var LUP relateret til anden planlægning eller politiske ønsker?

F.eks. den tidligere bosætningsstrategi

Hvad har det betydet for LUP, at borgere/foreninger har været med i processen (hvid det er tilfældet)?

Er det positivt?

Er det risikabelt for projekternes stabilitet?

Giver det følelsen af ejerskab?

Styrker det fællesskabet?

I hvilken grad er mål og ønsker blevet indfriet? Har i evalueret resultaterne?

Igangværende landsbyudvikling i Sdr. Thise og omegn samt på Fur

De tre planlæggere arbejder for tiden på udviklingsprojekter i to af kommunens områder hhv. Sdr. Thise/ Thise og Fur. Projekterne lader til at være lidt mere lokalt initierede og holistiske af karakter. Jeg er ikke klar over, hvor langt de er med deres indsats – jeg tænker, at det er relevant at finde ud af, hvorvidt disse projekter er af strategisk karakter og hvordan indsatsen er tilrettelagt.

Vil i kort fortælle om de to projekter, i har gang i for tiden? Bruger i en strategisk tilgang her? Hvordan?

På hvilke områder adskiller disse igangværende projekter sig fra LUP?

Skala?

Ambition?

Fremgangsmåde?

Engagement?

Fremgangsmåde? Udvalgelsen af netop disse byer – hvordan?

Grad af inddragelse af borgerne?

Styring oppefra eller nedefra?

Hvad var målet med planerne?

Hvad forventer i, at jeres indsats gør?

Skaber liv?

Levedygtighed?

Skaber grundlag for mere turisme, erhverv og lign.?

Generelt

Hvad forventer i, at jeres arbejde med landsbyerne resulterer i?

Hvilken effekt? Levedygtighed? (Og hvad vil det sige?)

Foreningsliv?

Fællesskab?

Bosætning i tråd med bosætningsstrategien?

Erhvervsudvikling?

Hvad tænker i, at den strategiske tilgang bidrager med?

Er det jeres indtryk, at der er sket en ændring i, hvordan befolkningstilbagegang håndteres i Skive Kommune? Fremgår det i jeres afdelings indsatser og måde at arbejde på?

Hvad forstår i ved en "strategisk" tilgang eller brug af "strategi"?
Et nedskrevet dokument?

Noget mindre håndgribeligt/fysisk?

Noget, der er udarbejdet fra skrivebordet?

Noget, der er skabt i samarbejde med lokalsamfundet?

Noget med konkrete målsætninger og handlinger?

Noget, der bringer lokale aktører og borgere sammen?

Noget, der sætter retning på forskellige initiativer?

Ser i som planlæggere nogle særlige udfordringer i jeres arbejde med landsbyerne og landområderne?

De mange idrætsfaciliteter i kommunen

B Former practitioners of Skive Municipality, now Pro-vins

Interview med Pro-vins bestående af tre tidligere planlæggere i Udvikling & Strategisk Planlægning, Skive Kommune (22/4/2020)

Introduktion

Må jeg få lov til at optage samtalen?

Kort introduktion til projektet og baggrunden for projektet
Studerende på Urban Planning & Management – speciale om hvordan strategier anvendes i planlægning for landsbyer/landdistrikter. Undersøgelsesspørgsmål som hvad vil det sige at arbejde strategisk, og hvad kan det egentlig bruges til? Hvilke problemer forventer man, at den strategiske tilgang kan løse?

Ny lovgivning om brug af strategier for landsbyer i kommunalt regi. Et felt, som Skive Kommune har arbejdet med i flere år - hvad er erfaringerne? Hvad kan man lære af de seneste års arbejde med strategiske udviklingsprojekter?

Det handler om at forstå, hvordan planlægningen bliver strategisk, og hvad det er den strategiske tilgang kan bidrage med. Derfor må I meget gerne undervejs reflektere lidt over, hvad der var/er strategisk i den måde, i arbejdede/arbejder med landsbyerne og landdistrikterne på – gerne både i dag og da i var ansat i Skive Kommune.

Hvad er jeres baggrund, og hvad beskæftiger i jer med i deres job?

Arbejdsopgaver? Baggrund? Erfaring?

Baggrund for at starte Pro-vins op sammen?

Hvad laver i nu?

Vil i fremgå med navn eller være anonyme i min projektrapport?

Lokale Udviklingsprojekter 2012-2016

I 2012 blev der igangsat et arbejde omkring seks af Skive Kommunes landsbyer hhv. Glyngøre, Lihme, Roslev, Rødding, Rønbjerg og Selde (300-1600 indbyggere i byerne). Arbejdet er mundet ud i et dokument for hver by, der rummer ideer og ønsker for den fremtidige udvikling af det lokale område. Disse ideer og ønsker

er politisk behandlet – flere ideer er blevet virkeliggjort, andre er ikke. Ideerne og ønskerne spænder vidt – fra ønske om styrket infrastruktur (fysisk og teknologisk), bosætning, rekreation, turisme og forbedring af de fysiske omgivelser eller decideret etablering af nye projekter mv.

Vil i fortælle lidt om de lokale udviklingsprojekter, der har forløbet tilbage i 2012-2016?

Fremgangsmåde?

Udvælgelsen af netop disse byer – hvordan?

Grad af inddragelse af borgerne?

Styring oppefra eller nedefra?

Hvad var målet med planerne?

Hvordan blev de seks landsbyer valgt ud?

På baggrund af en forudgående analyse?

Bottom up – efterspurgt?

Pga. udfordringer med demografi, erhverv eller lign.?

Pga. nogle særlige potentialer eller etablerede fællesskaber?

Grad af inddragelse af borgere (både før, under, efter)?

Metoder til inddragelse under opstart? Workshops? Enkeltpersoner, repræsentanter, hele grupper eller offentlige arrangementer?

Refleksioner om repræsentativitet?

Hvordan modtages kommunens engagement?

Er foreningerne robuste og aktive uden kommunens involvering?

Hvad var kommunens ambitioner/målsætning med LUP? Hvordan fandt man/I frem til disse?

Relateret til bosætning og demografi?

At skabe nogle stærke, levedygtige landsbyer?

At inddrage lokale aktører og sætte nogle aktiviteter i gang?

Top-down eller bottom-up?

Er ambitionerne/målsætningerne blevet indfriet?

Eksempler på når det lykkes? Lokalt engagement?

Eksempler på når det ikke lykkes?

Hvornår lykkes det? Hvad skal det til, før sådanne strategier bliver til virkelighed? Kræver det noget særligt?

Er der nogle tendenser her? Er det graden af inddragelse/samarbejde med borgerne?

Afhænger det af særlige kvaliteter, tilstedeværelse af ildsjæle eller ekstern hjælp?

Hvordan var LUP relateret til anden planlægning eller politiske ønsker?
F.eks. den tidligere bosætningsstrategi

Hvad har det betydet for LUP, at borgere/foreninger har været med i processen
(hvis det er tilfældet)?

Er det positivt?

Er det risikabelt for projekternes stabilitet?

Giver det følelsen af ejerskab?

Styrker det fællesskabet?

I hvilken grad er mål og ønsker blevet indfriet? Har i evalueret resultaterne?
Hvordan var det strategisk?

Fremgangsmåder og strategi-anvendelser i Pro-Vins' arbejde

Vil i introducere, hvad det er for projekter i arbejder med i ProVins?

Hvordan adskiller jeres rolle sig fra da i var ansat i kommunen/som myndighed?

På hvilke områder adskiller det nuværende arbejde sig fra de projekter, i havde
i Skive Kommune, f.eks. LUP?

Grad af indflydelse?

Rolle?

Skala?

Ambition?

Værktøjer til rådighed? Fremgangsmåder?

Engagement?

Er der noget strategisk i jeres måde at tilgå projekter i dag?

Hvad forventer i, at jeres indsats gør?

Skaber liv? Levedygtighed?

Skaber grundlag for mere turisme, erhverv og lign.?

Professionaliserer det lokale? Løfter?

Generelt

Hvad forventer i, at jeres arbejde med landsbyerne resulterer i? Hvilken effekt?
Levedygtighed? (Og hvad vil det sige?)

Foreningsliv?

Fællesskab?

Erhvervsudvikling?

Hvad tænker i, at den strategiske tilgang bidrager med?

Er det jeres indtryk, at der er sket en ændring i, hvordan befolkningstilbagegang håndteres – f.eks. i Skive Kommune? Fremgår det i jeres afdelings indsatser og måde at arbejde på?

Hvad forstår i ved en "strategisk" tilgang eller brug af "strategi"?

Et nedskrevet dokument?

Noget mindre håndgribeligt/fysisk?

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Noget med konkrete målsætninger og handlinger?

Noget, der bringer lokale aktører og borgere sammen?

Noget, der sætter retning på forskellige initiativer?

Ser i som planlæggere nogle særlige udfordringer i jeres arbejde med landsbyerne og landområderne?



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