

Developing Rural Mobility

A CASE STUDY OF ALSELV

By Mia Lodberg Vibe-Hansen, 20191883



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DENMARK

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I Abstract

Today there is an imbalance between the cities and the rural areas in Denmark. Many of the municipalities placed in rural Denmark are struggling with an increasing opt-out of their cities, which affects many areas within the municipality. The challenges of shrinking cities in rural areas are often seen in a generalizing and overall perspective, making it difficult to see the potentials within the individual city. Approached by a cross disciplinary mobilities perspective that is included in the new mobilities paradigm (Urry 2000), this project aims to explore the city of Alslev in Varde Municipality, in relation to the challenges of shrinking cities in rural Denmark. To see, if by adding a mobilities perspective, could unfold the city in a new perspective, which could give rise to new potentials and extend the knowledge upon which urban planners explore a city, and hopefully bring something new to the discussion of developing the rural areas within the municipality.

By analysing the rural mobilities of Alslev, it will be studied how Alslev performs as a 'place' to identify what are the strengths of Alslev, and what could have potential for improvement. With a focus on everyday life, the citizens of Alslev's everyday activities are used as a focal point for the mobilities perspective.

This thesis is a part of the 4th semester at Aalborg University MSc in Mobilities and Urban studies 2021. This thesis will direct a special thanks to the department of Plan og Vækst in Varde municipality and the citizens of Alslev to participate in this thesis, and to Claus Lassen being the supervisor.

II Preface

During my studies in mobilities and urban studies from Aalborg University, I started working in the planning department of Varde municipality. The municipality mainly consists of smaller cities, and I quickly got familiar with their challenges of shrinking cities, and their current strategies and projects for attracting newcomers.

There are many ways of planning attractive cities and many different factors can have an influence in how the development turns out. One of the smaller cities that in the past years has experienced an increase in its population is Alslev, although the basis for the city consists mainly of a residential area, and from the municipality there has not been a remarkable political interest in the city. For years Alslev wanted to develop in the northwest direction, towards the stream (Varde Å) which is 3km from the city. But due to environmental limitations it turned out not to be an option. With the new direction to the southeast, the physical settings of Alslev are growing towards the train racks 2km away, going between the two largest cities in the area Varde and Esbjerg. To make a train stop on this route has for the civic association turned out to be an important element in their city's potential for development, which has been brought up to the judgement of the municipality.

This knowledge formed the basis of the foundation to this project, and questions arose; What does actually create an attractive environment for the citizens in Alslev? and what has caused this increase in the population the past years? What are their challenges? and how can a cross-disciplinary mobilities perspective that is included in the new mobilities paradigm (Urry, 2000) apply new methods and perspectives to see the potentials and challenges of Alslev with the purpose of attracting newcomers.

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1. Introduction

Urbanization is a longtime known global phenomenon that has created a movement from land to city. In Denmark the movement started in the 1800 century, along with the industrialisation, where especially the creation of jobs and opportunities worked as an attraction towards the cities (Andersen, 2018). With the development around the cities a further centralisation of jobs and public services followed. This created an inequality to the rural areas, which over the years instead experienced a general cut e.g. in education, municipal budgets, green transition etc. (Samson, 2019). making the possibility of development there even more difficult. In 2007 the number of the population within the cities exceeded the number of the populations living in the rural areas, and futurist predicts the number will increase. The opt-out of the rural areas challenges the cities¹ located in the areas. It is therefore important to look at the opportunities and potentials the rural cities have, to be able to create a positive development and attract new citizens. The struggle of the rural areas is often to see the potentials within the individual city, and the development is therefore often generally seen in a larger area, which also sometimes leaves the cities to develop in the wake of larger cities development. In the new mobilities paradigm (Urry, 2000) it is argued that mobilities should be seen as multiple and is essential in the foundation of place. "...mobilities in many ways can be the frame for how we understand places and that it is one of the central constituent elements of the place ontology" (Lassen and Holst eds. 2020 :212) "Place management is challenged in its ability to approach mobilities as an essential component of the place ontology. Individuals, goods, information and money are moved through networks and between places, and people are increasingly dwelling in mobilities" (Lassen and Holst eds. 2020 :25)

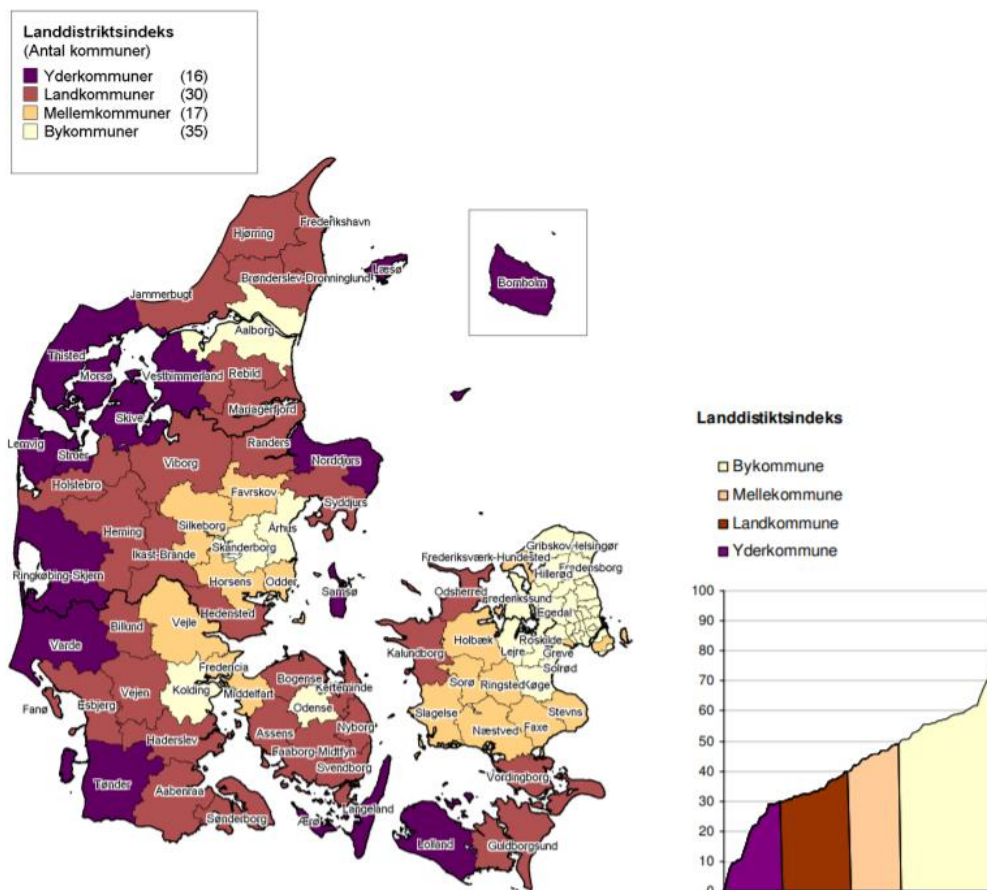
By applying a mobilities perspective to the current challenge of developing rural cities with the purpose of attracting new citizens, this project aims to see if new potentials arise, and to extend the knowledge upon which urban planners explore a city.

To address the challenges of the rural areas, a definition of the rural areas in Denmark has been made to subsequently zoom in on a selected research area which will be examined.

¹ A city in Denmark is designated as an area with more than 200 citizens, Andersen 2018

1.1 Rural areas in Denmark

Denmark consists of 98 municipalities. These are composed of different environments and land use, and do often contain both rural areas and larger cities. Each municipality has its own city council and thereby priorities and strategies for the policies that influence the development of the individual municipalities at different levels. To be seen as a “rural municipality” in Denmark there are different indicators such as; settlement, workplaces, level of education, demography, area use, infrastructural network, economy etc. that takes part in the designation as “the rural Denmark” – a definition from Denmark's agricultural research, (Kristensen et.al. 2007). Based on statistical description and key numbers from the different indicators, the danish municipalities are categorised in four groups; “Yderkommuner” [outlying-municipalities] “Landkommuner” [land-municipalities], “Mellemkommuner” [intermediate municipalities] and “Bykommuner” [urban municipalities] see the division in figure 1.



Figur 1. Opdeling på kommunetyper efter landdistriktsindeks

Figure 1 Division of municipalities in Denmark, Kristensen et.al 2007

The index numbers for each of the indicators, can vary in the different municipalities. However, the challenges and patterns of the 'rural areas' relates both to the outlying- and land municipalities, whose division mainly is caused by whether the municipality contains a larger city or not. The intermediate municipalities can be seen as a link between the urban and rural. These are typically not facing the same challenges as the outlying -and land municipalities, often because of their position and network to the urban-municipalities (Kristensen et.al. 2007). By looking at some of the characteristics in the different categories, such as total land use, population, education level and tax base, see figure 2, it reveals a pattern related to urbanization. The highest proportion of inhabitants lives on the smallest proportion of the land area. At the same time this group has the highest share of people with a medium or higher education level and contributes the highest share of the total taxes.

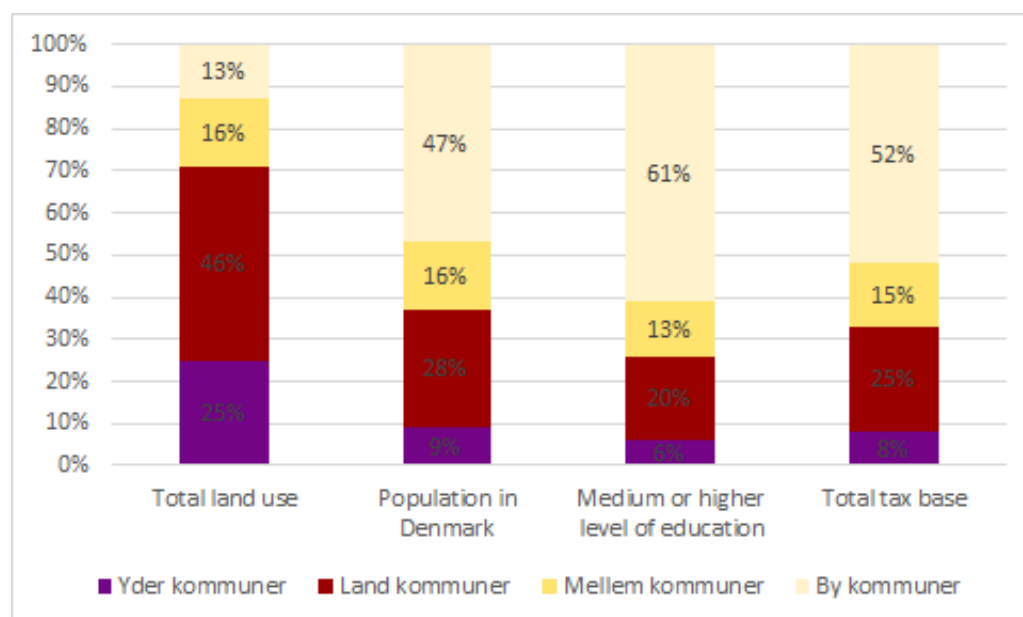


Figure 2 Index numbers dividing the municipalities, Own production based on Kristensen et.al. 2007

Having this clear division only strengthens the urbanization and contributes to an unequal development in the municipalities of Denmark, since the different indicators often strengthen each other causing either a positive or negative development in an area e.g. the network of infrastructure attracts jobs and thereby the educated workforce and settlement.

Work is one of the biggest reasons why people move, and it can attract people to settle down near an area. Figure 3 shows the numbers of workplaces that are reachable within 30min drive in the different areas in Denmark (Region Syddanmark 2014). The red areas can reach the most workplaces.

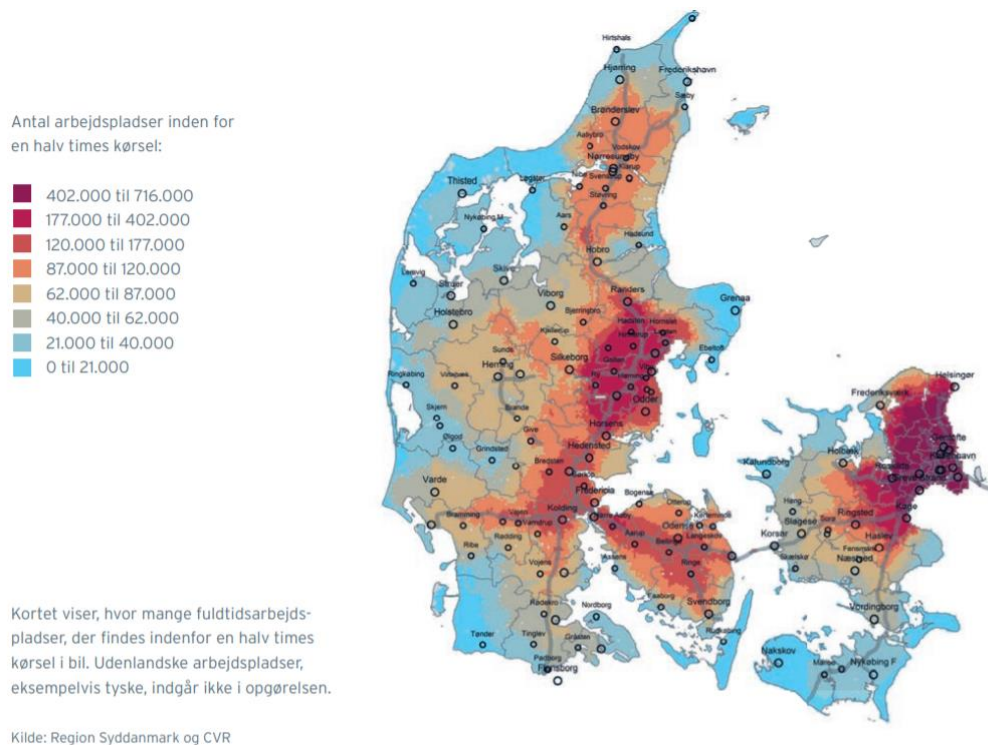


Figure 3 Access to workplaces in 2012, Region Syddanmark 2014

By looking at figure 3, there is a pattern showing the highest accessible numbers of workplaces are located near the highways in Denmark, but it also relates to the designation of the urban and intermediate municipalities in figure 1 leaving the “rural Denmark” with less possibilities and value. A professor in future living Jesper Bo Jensen, sees four phases in people's lives where they are most likely to relocate. First phase is the young people attending an education, second phase is the young adults wanting to settle down, third phase is the families that need a reorganization e.g. need of space or separation and fourth phase is the elderly (Varde kommune 2019). As stated the global urbanisation attracts people to the larger cities, and it is often seen that the largest group of relocators are young people moving to some of the four largest cities (also university cities) in Denmark, to attend an education (Sjöberg 2020). Afterwards many of the ‘rural’ municipalities try to attract the young and educated workforce, but with a lower accessibility to workplaces and everyday needs, they are in an unequal competition. By looking at the relocators from the period from 2010 to 2019, see figure 4 there is a clear connection to the categorisation of the municipalities and contribution to the definition of ‘rural areas in Denmark’.

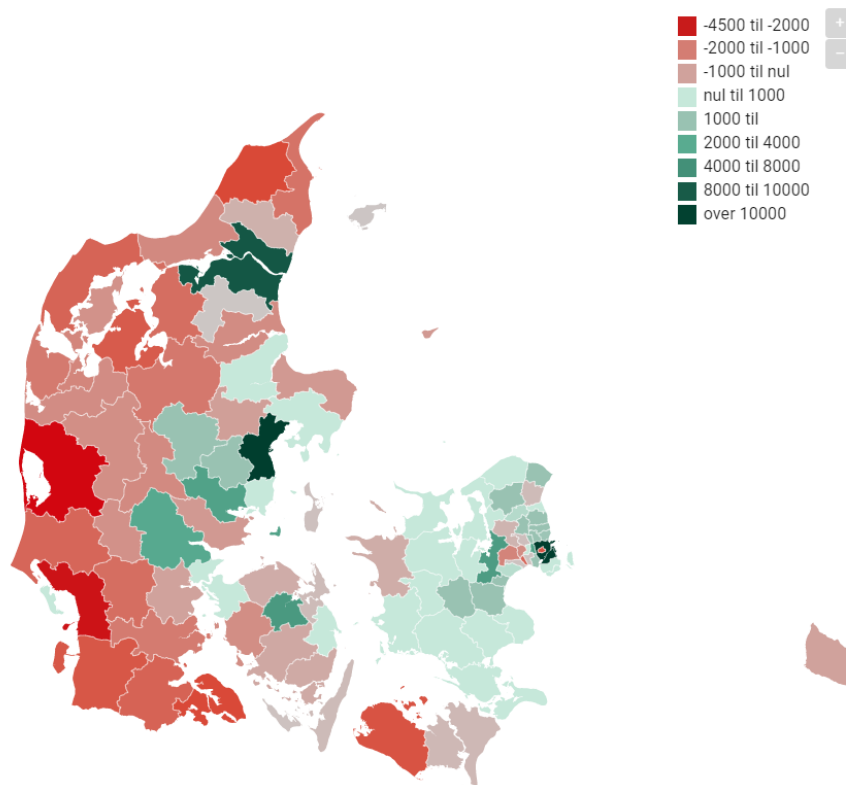


Figure 4 Relocations in the period from 2010 to 2019, Sjöberg 2020

Many of the municipalities with a negative development in their population, are also categorized as an outlying-municipality or land-municipality. The concentration of “red” areas marked on figure 4 has in many years been referred to as “The rotten banana” as a common reference to the negative development in rural Denmark. The expression has a very negative association and has often been criticized by the municipalities within the area. When and by whom the term the “rotten banana” began is uncertain. However, a reference to the European “blue banana” by the geographer Roger Brunet in 1989 can be found. Roger Brunet (1989) used the term to illustrate the European center of growth. Since then more ‘bananas’ has arrived, but it is only in Denmark the banana is rotten. “We coined the term because there was so much talk about, that the areas that lay within the bananas were the growth area. We would focus on the opposite, namely the rural areas” (Hanne W. Tanvig, cited in Karkov, 2010, translated). By zooming in at different municipalities in the ‘rural Denmark’ cities can be found where positive indications of development can be seen. Therefore, is it necessary to further investigate a specific area to find out which indicators could provide a positive turn and find the potentials and challenges for developing the area.

1.2 Varde municipality: Alslev

Varde municipality is located in the southwest of Jutland, Denmark. The municipality is categorized as an outlying-municipality and is included in the designation of the described rural Denmark. The municipality is size wise the fifth largest in Denmark covering an area of 1.240km². (Varde kommune n.d. (a)) Varde municipality mainly consists of smaller cities and rural areas. Inside the municipality Varde is the largest city, where approximately 14.117 of the total 49.628 inhabitants' lives. The municipality contains a large land area, with unique landscapes that benefits and strengthens their largest business areas, which is; tourism, military use, agriculture and food production (Varde kommune n.d. (a)). But it also means a valuable environment and contains many protected areas to take in consideration while planning. The challenges of shrinking cities and attracting newcomers is a big part of the municipality's work. The municipality is divided into twenty-five districts as a way of scoping the municipal focus. At figure 5 is shown the main cities of each district and the index for the development in the population from 2015 to 2020 (Region Syddanmark, 2021).

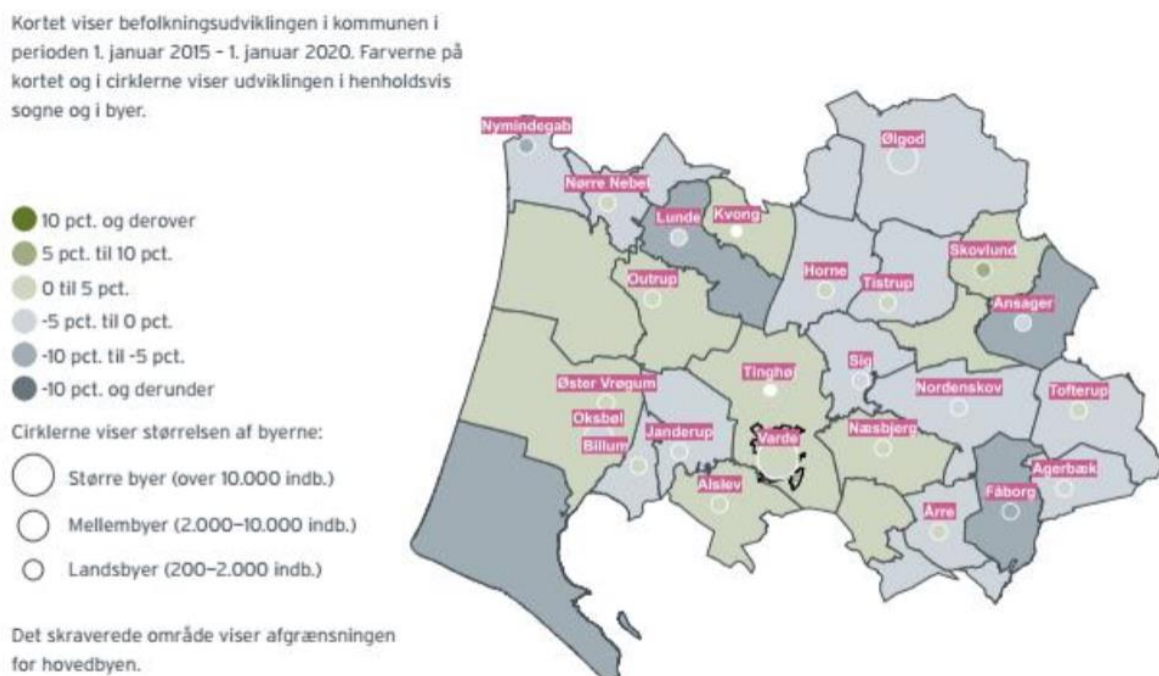


Figure 5 Population development in Varde municipality, Region Syddanmark 2021

Although some districts have had a smaller increase of the population [light green areas], the development is still unstable, and the municipality has in this period experienced a total decrease of 0,5%. Furthermore, Varde municipality is as many other rural areas challenged by its demography, since there will be an increasing number of elderly when passing on to the next generation (Region Syddanmark 2021).

As the main city, Varde covers some central activities within the municipality, e.g. they have the only highschool in the municipality, and it contains the most workplaces, 14.000 out of

22.200 in total. This also means that many of the smaller cities within the municipality are closely related in their everyday activities to both Varde but also the neighbouring municipalities, which makes these connections a create value to have (Varde kommune, 2020). Approximately 20km south from Varde, is Esbjerg, which is the largest city on the west coast and the fifth largest in Denmark (Boliu 2021 (a)). To have a larger city nearby has a great influence in the development of Varde municipality, although Esbjerg is also facing some challenges regarding settlement and creating jobs, due to its location in rural Denmark, see paragraph 1.1. In the very south of Varde municipality, and close to Esbjerg, the small city Alslev is located. Alslev has over the past years had a small increase in its population, see Table 1, and is now the seventh largest city in Varde municipality (Boliu 2021 (b)).

Alslev	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Population	1241	1239	1254	1256	1272	1272	1270

Table 1 Population development in Alslev, 2015 - 2021, Own production based on Boliu 2021 (b)

When talking about development, Varde municipality has determined four areas of developing potentials; settlement, business, culture and tourism (Varde kommune 2021, hovedstruktur :ch2). Alslev mainly consists of a residential area, and Varde municipality is struggling embracing its development other than lay out areas for housing. Approached by the new mobilities paradigm (Urry 2000) this project will try to focus on developing Alslev in terms of attracting new citizens, from a mobilities perspective. By investigating the everyday mobilities in Alslev, to see if this could provide new knowledge in developing a place like Alslev, and hopefully add new perspectives to guide the focus of developing the municipality.

2. Research question

Today there is an imbalance between the city and the rural areas in Denmark. Places can be challenged in different ways, although a common challenge in the rural areas of Denmark is often related to a low attraction and shrinking cities. The negative development in the rural areas has long been discussed and there are many strategies and visions for how the development can be accustomed.

By approaching the challenges and potentials from the cross disciplinary mobilities perspective that is included in the new mobilities paradigm (Urry, 2000), new potentials and perspectives will be revealed of mobilities in Alslev which hopefully could bring something new to the discussion of developing the rural areas in Varde municipality. Therefore, this project will focus on the following research question:

How does the city of Alslev perform in a mobility perspective, and how can this knowledge be used to develop Alslev?

By analysing the rural mobilities of Alslev, it will be studied how Alslev performs as a 'place' to identify what are the strengths of Alslev and what could have potential for improvement. With a focus on everyday life, the citizens of Alslev's everyday activities are used as a focal point for the mobilities perspective.

This thesis is a part of the 4th semester at Aalborg University MSc in Mobilities and Urban studies 2021.

3. Research design

Working to answer the research question the structure of this project is presented in figure 6.

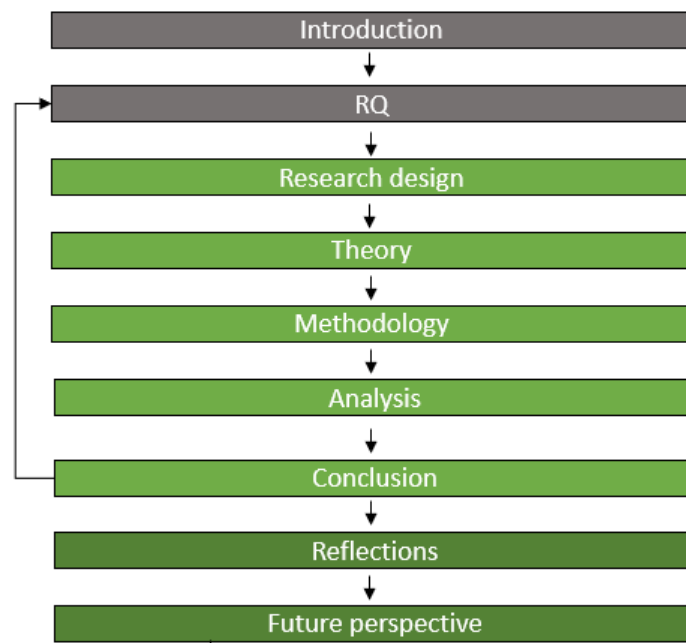


Figure 6 Thesis structure, Own production

3.1 Theory

The theory is used to define 'place' from a joint approach of defining 'place' from a cross disciplinary mobilities perspective presented in the new mobilities paradigm (Urry 2000) by studying which elements a 'place' is built upon, such as locality, meaning, materiality, sense of place, mobility and network. It enlightens how place management can be mobilised, by looking at the mobilities range and perspectives, and describe how central actors can affect development of a place. Finally, it has been investigated which criteria's needs to be fulfilled to ensure a viable city.

3.2 Methodology

This chapter will present the general research strategy and philosophical approach that has been used in this thesis. It reveals an explanation of the chosen quantitative and qualitative methods and choices prior to the case study and data collection.

3.3 Analysis

The analysis aims to gather all the knowledge and data provided in primary, the theory and methodology in order to answer the research question. The analysis works around four paragraphs 1) The staging from above – covering the political interest 2) A descriptive introduction

of the city of Alslev 3) The staging from below – regarding the citizens point of view 4) Alslev as a relational place, where the most important relations are investigating based on the citizens everyday activities, along with the mode of transportation. In relation to this a discussion of a cultural influence at the relations has been made when talking about potentials for future development.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter aim to answer the research question based on the analysis

3.5 Reflections

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect upon the decisions made in this thesis, and to consider what other perspectives than the 'everyday perspective' could add to the challenges of Alslev.

3.6 Future directions

This chapter aims to put this thesis into relevance, by describing how and to whom this knowledge founded can be used.

4. Theory

The foundation of the research question “How does the city of Alslev perform in a mobility perspective, and how can this knowledge be used to develop Alslev?” is based on the pragmatic approach of studying theory as more practical orientated. It works around the definition of place in order to see places as relational and understand the elements that creates ‘place’, and to gain knowledge about development related to mobility. This chapter collects theoretical knowledge about ‘place’ and ‘place management’ in order to form some reflective background knowledge for the later empirical research in order to answer the research question.

4.1 Definition of ‘Place’

One of the most common definitions of “place” is John Agnew’s (1987) “a meaningful location”. However, the understanding of this varies in nuances from different professions, but also in the same professional fields by the applied philosophy. (Lassen & Holst Laursen (eds) 2020:72). In “mobilising place management” Lassen and Holst Laursen (2020) are working around the understanding of place in one of the classical ways by using Tim Cresswell (2015) interpretation of John Agnew’s (1987) definition “a meaningful location” that involves three components: Location (where a place is located), locale (material setting of a place) and sense of place (the meaning attached to a place) (Lassen & Holst Laursen (eds) 2020:29). However they add to the understanding of John Urry’s new mobilities paradigm (2000) where Urry in relation to this makes two significant points; First, that mobility is and must always be considered socially embedded and second, to understand mobility as something more than just physical movement of objects (Lassen 2011).

The definition of place unfolds the elements that turn space into place, and is important in truly understanding a certain place. Places can be temporary such as a festival or the Olympic, but can also be “one the move” such as cars, trains etc. The understanding of seeing places differently is important “..places are ‘not fixed, given or unchanging’ (Urry 2007: 254), but rather are dynamic, relational and do not necessarily mean staying in one location (Cresswell 2015:13)” (Lassen & Holst Laursen (eds) 2020:4). Often people engage in more “places” in their everyday lives and different people can have a different ‘sense of place’ e.g. the homeless might have a different sense from the mayor, to the local store manager or to the commuter. By the new mobilities paradigm Urry (2000) emphasis “that all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an “island” (Lassen & Holst Laursen (eds) 2020:209). The definition of place is therefore also defined by the surrounding network “‘places’ are composed of various mobilities, networks and relationships (Larsen, Axhausen and Urry 2006, in Lassen & Holst Laursen (eds)

2020:29) which makes 'places' meaningful and differentiated. In Jensen (2013) staging mobilities, he points out the relevance of "place making" in relation to understanding 'place' and its challenges and potentials.

"Places are designed, planned and managed 'from above' (Jensen 2013) by authorities and investors through growth and investment plans that involve some people and exclude others. Places are also influenced 'from below' through selection processes made by travellers, visitors and settlers. Together, this means that 'management of place' and the problems and possibilities related to 'place making' are highly relevant topics." - Lassen & Holst Laursen (eds) 2020:3, based on Jensen 2013



Figure 7 Staging mobilities, Place in situ, Jensen 2013

4.2 Mobilising place management

By saying places are not given, fixed or unchanging highlights how important place management is. The challenges of places can vary. Some places might for example struggle with shrinking cities, while others have troubles with mass tourism or reorganizing etc. which also draws on references in the mobilities perspective "Place managers' face challenges with being disconnected from mobilities flows, having too many mobilities or the wrong sort of mobilities (Urry 2007:6)" (Lassen & Holst Laursen (eds) 2020:26).

In the new mobilities paradigm by Urry (2000) he describes how there is a social relation to mobility and that the development in the physical mobility needs to be seen in relation to other forms of mobility such as virtual or social etc. for example building houses or a transit road in rural areas does not by itself mean people starts moving there (Lassen 2011). "Movement

should be understood not as singular mobility, but rather as various forms of mobilities” (Lassen & Holst Laursen (eds) 2020:29) Therefore, does mobility management thinking build on several types of mobilities and their range, see figure 8

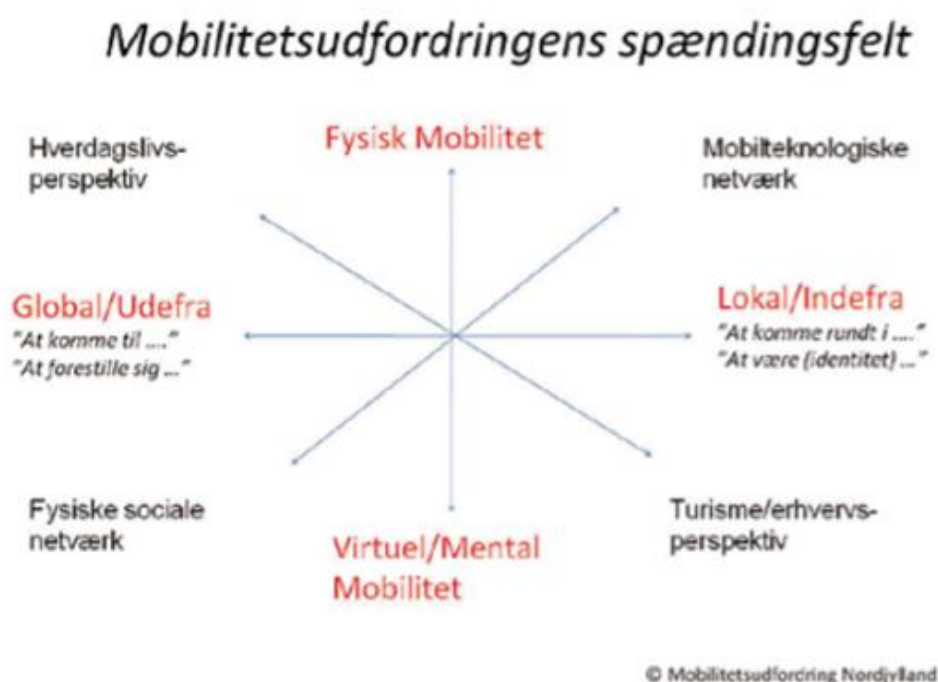


Figure 8 The mobilities range, Lassen 2011

The different mobilities presented in figure 8 visualize some of the different ranges of the mobility challenges. These are often relational and changes in one direction will often cause a change in some of the others. Some of the central mobilities are the physical mobilities vs. virtual/mental mobilities e.g. it could be two different ways of positioning people, for example seen in a social relation that both can be physical, but also virtual. But it can also be seen in relation to the phenomenon of physical being in a place, without mentally being there. Another central range is the global [outside] mobilities vs. the local [inside] mobilities. An example could be how different people interpret a place e.g. by entering as a stranger or a local. Or it could be talking about the mobilities created by the global urbanization from an outer or inner perspective in a city.

In relation to this there are different actors who can affect the needs of mobility. “Places are shaped by human actions (Ringgard 2010) but are also shaping action” (Lassen & Holst Laursen (eds) 2020:246) To navigate in the different forms of mobilities and find the right priorities in its ranges it is necessary to clarify the central actors such as politicians, local associations, citizens, businesses, tourists and many other individuals or groups of people, acting either from e.g. a local, municipal or business perspective. Furthermore, it is important to understand their power relations and meaning to ensure the development turns out positive. An example could be prioritising the accessibility to a larger industrial area instead of the main

transit in the nearby city if the industrial area, actually is the one causing the interest and foundation of the place (Lassen 2011).

Inside each of the 98 municipalities in Denmark, there are different priorities and politics in handling and planning their rural areas. There are numerous examples of viable cities with increasing populations due to its own characteristics such as; proximity to nearby larger cities, a strong local commitment, investment in infrastructure, strengthen of the local potentials, new employment and businesses or by an improvement of the public -or private services (Møller et.al. 2018:15). A committee (Møller et.al. 2018) formed by central stakeholders in urban planning in Denmark stated in 2018 that the diverse picture of the cities is important for keeping them attractive “Although some characteristics are repeated, there is a need for a development of the individual smaller cities based on the potential and challenges of each” (Møller et.al. 2018:17, translated).

4.3 Criteria for viable villages

The challenges of rural areas vary in different countries, since lifestyle, level of welfare system, demographic development, creation of jobs and industries, geography, city structure etc. all affect which challenges and potentials can be found. Therefore, it makes it more valuable to study each place individually although knowledge sharing and inspiration from other places can be found. With inspiration from similar European countries (Germany and Sweden) and historically seen patterns within Denmark Møller et.al. (2018) formed four criteria for viable villages in Denmark, to be used as a guidance in the municipalities strategies for developing their rural areas (Møller et.al. 2018: ch:6). The four criteria are listed:

1) An attractive local environment with contemporary housing, an adapted building stock and access to landscape and nature

To have a contemporary built environment is important for keeping a place interesting and attractive for the citizens and potential relocators and businesses. Empty buildings and unused areas fall into derelict when they are not maintained, and thereby lower the attraction and value of the village. It is therefore important to keep the buildings up to date and create a varied environment e.g. by having rental apartments, smaller houses, rethink the empty houses etc to fulfill the requests. A common value for villages is the connectivity and proximity to nature, a well-maintained local environment is therefore essential for a village's retention and attractiveness in relation to inhabitants and viability.

2) Proximity to public and private service

In 2007 ‘Strukturreformen’ [the structural reform] was introduced. The reform meant a unification of several smaller municipalities (271 to 98 municipalities today) to centralize some of the public services in order to gain a more efficient tender. The tendency of having less but greater

offers, has affected the smaller villages, and it is therefore important to keep an acceptable access to public services e.g. school, elderly homes, doctors, leisure activities etc. Also, the proximity to a nearby supermarket is important for a viable village, and in some villages, it is seen that the local supermarket is run and paid for by the locals. Since it is often not profitable to have good mobility provided by public transport in these areas, it could be an idea of investigating alternative forms of mobility as for example 'mobility as a service' or virtual mobility.

3) Accessibility to employment and good opportunities for starting a business

How far people are willing to commute is an individual choice, although it is important to have job opportunities in rural Denmark to keep it attractive for the people within the areas. An important investment is therefore also to keep the areas attractive for businesses, with digital infrastructure, road network and land use.

4) Social and cultural connectivity

Rural areas are often associated with good relations and local commitment. The social and cultural connectivity creates a local identity, mutual trust, security and good neighborhood which is a power that erases the standard of living in the area. This criteria can be difficult to affect from the outside, but it is important to invest in the local engagement and create places and projects the citizens can rally around (Møller et.al. 2018: ch:6).

To have a viable village, not all criteria need to be fulfilled equally. Viable villages can have a strong presence in some of the criteria which outweighs the fact that the village does not stand so strongly on one or more of the others. Furthermore, the assessment must not only relate to the individual village, but also the city's interaction with nearby communities as well as regional labor markets and center towns (Møller et.al. 2018).

5. Methodology

With the focus on understanding rural development opportunities in relation to individual cities' potentials and challenges, it was found appropriate to take a philosophical view that was both adapted in an ever-changing context, and also encourages the use of mixed methods with both quantitative and qualitative methods. In pragmatism the theory of science is based on these and it focuses on basing methodological and theoretical decisions on their practical productivity. The pragmatic thinking occurred in the 1870ies by the American polytheistic C.S. Peirce as a theory of practice (Løgstrup 2020). "Peirce saw the traditional search for true knowledge as misleading since there is no such thing as infallible knowledge. Pierce acknowledges that there is a need for a more practical conception of what knowledge and reality is, meaning that this knowledge and reality should be determined by inquiry and scientific research." (Schulz et.al.:33). In Pragmatism a reflective empirical methodological approach is used to gather experiences and new knowledge about the investigated object. By taking a case study as a starting point this project is working problem oriented, to define potentials and challenges in order to be able to move forward.

5.1 Case study: Alslev

This project is built up upon Alslev as a case study. Alslev is a small city in the rural municipality of Varde. As many other comparable smaller cities in rural Denmark, Alslev are facing the challenges of attracting newcomers and developing as a smaller city. Often the development of smaller cities like Alslev are planned with a non-relational vision within its own city limits, in an overall strategy by the municipality, due to resources. Although many reports are encouraging to seek the potential for the cities individually. "Even Though some characteriza are repeated, there is a need for developing the individual smaller cities based on the individual cities' potentials and challenges." (Møller et.al. 2018 :17, translated) Alslev is one of the cities in Varde municipality which have had a smaller increase in its population over the past years. Therefore, a case study about Alslev is used to investigate Alslev as a 'place' and defining Alslev approached from a holistic mobility perspective, in order to understand what has caused the positive development, and detect its challenges and potentials to use for further development. The case study is performed as a single in-depth study, which is based on a larger issue of rural Denmark, to see how Alslev works in the perspective of this. By using a case study, it directs the scope of the other applied methods and puts them in relation to each other with the case as the area of focus (Martin, 2021).

Case studies can be limited by not being able to make generalizable statements. But even though the findings can not one to one, be related to other comparable cities, the theory and

methods can still be used as a new way of approaching the challenges which many villages in rural Denmark are facing.

5.2 Desktop research

Desktop research has been used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. First to clarify the political agenda and actions for developing Alslev. Secondly, it has been used to find statistics information and knowledge about local projects in Alslev, which have provided knowledge about the citizens, such as demographic, commuters, houses and workplaces etc. and the local projects to gain knowledge about the citizens' visions for Alslev. Most of this data has been used to provide some background knowledge, for further analysis and validation of the data collection.

5.3 Questionnaire

For this project a questionnaire for the citizens in Alslev was made. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect knowledge about the citizens' opinions and point of view of living in a rural area, to understand their needs, their priorities and patterns, in their everyday lives. The questionnaire consisted of both quantitative and qualitative questions about seeking potentials about their city, by asking them **about their relation to Alslev, why it was attractive for them to live in Alslev, what could make it better and rethink why Alslev could be more attractive than the nearby villages**. Furthermore, they were asked about their everyday mobility to have an index for **how often they were outside Alslev, related with their everyday activities** and **what their primary mode of transportation** was. In relation to this they were also asked about **if they ever had been limited in their everyday activities due to mobility** and **what activities they needed a better access to**, and **if virtual mobility could be seen as a solution to this**. Finally, they were asked about a potential train stop which Varde municipality is working on, and to map out their interfaces in connection with their everyday activities. It was explained that their answers should be related to their everyday activities before covid-19, since its influence in human behavior still is unclear. Each "topic" in the questionnaire was introduced with a small text, explaining the usefulness of the questions asked, for them to see how it was relevant for this study what they answered, to hopefully get more elaborated answers, when asking many qualitative questions, and to avoid misunderstandings. The questionnaire was formulated in danish, since language should not be a barrier to answer the questions. See the full questionnaire in appendix 1.



Figure 9 Distribution of questionnaires in Alslev, Own production

The questionnaires were distributed physically in random selected persons' mailboxes in the different neighborhoods of Alslev, see the distribution in figure 9, the route is marked with red. Advised by the owner of the local supermarket about 50 questionnaires were distributed in the two southern areas, which is the oldest part of the city and 50 in the northern areas which is the newest area of the city. The distribution took place on some sunny days, on Monday April 12, from 11am to 4pm and Tuesday April 13 from 6pm to 8pm. By an agreement with the local supermarket, the questionnaires could be handed in here before the deadline, which was Sunday April 18 2021. Due to Covid-19 the physical meetings have been limited and people have started a natural distance to people not being in their group of contact. By distributing the questionnaire physically, I experienced a more personal engagement, storytelling and vision at the city's structure and citizens. That could not have been experienced by sending the questionnaire out as an online survey. During my internship period in Varde municipality (autumn period 2020) I participated in virtual meetings with the municipality's contact persons from Alslev civic association, which has a clear vision for the future of Alslev. To avoid only activating the same citizens the physical distribution was a hope to also activate other citizens. In total 100 questionnaires were handed out and within one week 16 was answered. For a further investigation in Alslev it could be necessary to collect more data about the citizens, but it can still be representative for investigating patterns in potentials and challenges of Alslev.

Data Processing: Finally, a total of 16 participated. The average age was 59,3 years old, where the youngest participant was 31 and the oldest 79. Additionally, the participants were

represented by 8 males and 8 females. 8 were retired and 8 were still working. 8 had 1 car and 8 had 2. Most had kids, they were not asked if they were living at home or not. By processing the data, it has not been possible to make any generalisations based on the background information given in the questionnaire. This could insinuate the participants have been good at including other perspectives than their own, the development of their city is an already known topic or the number of participants is not enough to reveal an actual pattern based on the participants background, or a mix of all.

To process the data from the questionnaire the answers to the questions were added to an excel schedule, from which graphs were made. Since the questionnaire contained qualitative questions the different answers have been categorized with relational answers and given an overall headline. By doing this it is worth noting that there can be an unintentional influence in the outcome, since the choice of the divisions can make a difference if the data is not presented correctly. e.g. when asking "what is the best thing about living in Alslev" the distance to the nearby cities Varde and Esbjerg was the second most answered reason, but when categorizing it the nearby recreational areas and local services, these seems to have just as much value, although it contains different answers. This has been an area of focus when using the answers in the further analysis. see figure 10.

Det bedste ved at bo i Alslev	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Score	Total	Procent
Sociale relationer																		10	25
Naboskabet	(x)	x	x	x	x					x				x		(x)	8		
Relation til andre forældre									x								1		
Familie og venner															x		1		
Rekreative områder																		8	20
De grønne områder														x			1		
Tæt på Natur	x				x					x						x	4		
Landlige omgivelser													x				1		
Vandrestier					x	x											2		
Distance til de nærliggende områder																		8	20
Kort afstand mellem Varde og Esbjerg	x	x									x	x	x	x		x	7		
Tæt på arbejdsplads										x							1		
Byens funktioner																		9	22.5
Gode fritidsmuligheder						x			x		x		x			x	5		
God skole og institutioner						x			x		x						3		
Indkøbsmuligheder									x								1		
Følelse af området																		4	10
Roligt område (trygt)							x	x								x	3		
En hyggelig by			x														1		
En by i udvikling																		1	2.5
En by i udvikling				x													1		
																		40	100

Figure 10 Questionnaire processing, Appendix 2

Working with qualitative questions can make it more difficult to do comparings in the data processing, but it also opens up the questions, since people have to reflect more about their answers and highlight different things the questionnaire might not have contained from the beginning. The full data processing of the questionnaire is presented in appendix 2.

5.4 Citizens interviews

Within the questionnaire the participating citizens had the opportunity to provide their name and phone number for a further talk and elaboration of their answers. 11 out of 16 were willing to participate. Three were chosen for a smaller interview. The selection of these was based on the range of their answers, capability to reflect from different perspectives, and if some

answers gave rise to questions when reading it. Furthermore, the selection was based on their profiles, so different age groups, work position and activities were represented.

The three profiles were:

- Person no. 11: Female, 67years, married, retired, 2 kids (not living at home), 2 cars
- Person no. 09: Female, 36 years, married, working, 3 kids (living at home), 2 cars
- Person no. 12: Male, 49 years, cohabitant, working, 2 kids (not living at home), 2 cars

The interviews were all conducted the 27th of april 2021, and were between ~5:30min to ~18:30min. The interviews were performed in danish, to avoid language barriers. Some of the answers from the interviews will be used as quotes in the further analysis, the answers has therefore been translated to English.

Before the interview the participants' questionnaires were read through, and questions were prepared to elaborate on not answered questions or short/ambiguous answers. Furthermore, some follow-up questions were made as an outline for the interview. Such as **did you ever consider other places before moving to Alslev?** along with a general talk about their relation to Alslev, and questions of their mobility **Have your kids experienced any challenges with physical mobility? What about you if you someday could not drive a car?** and asking about their needs for a more **mobile connectivity to either Esbjerg or Varde** and **what could make the public transport interesting for them?** The full outline can be seen in appendix 3. The interviews were conducted as a semi structured interview as an informal conversation between the interviewer and interviewee. By this the conversation was open to bring in other relevant perspectives than the outline proposed, which mostly worked as draft. The interview was performed by phone calls since it still was not acceptable to meet in person due to covid-19. The interviews have been used to clarify how Alslev is a relational place and to get a deeper insight in the citizens point of view. The citizens of Alslev are a great influence of developing Alslev since they are staging from below (Jensen 2013) which by their selections, social relation and embodied performances are defining Alslev.

5.5 Mapping

Within the questionnaire mapping has been used to make a 'relational map' where the participants were asked to map out their destinations for their everyday activities. The intention of this method was to find out which areas the citizens of Alslev were using in order to fulfill their everyday needs, and thereby the relation of Alslev according to these. "All places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such lance and mean that nowhere can be an "island" (Urry 2000 cited in Lassen & Holst Laursen (eds) 2020:209). Furthermore, mapping has been used to map out the functions and design of the city to locate patterns and behavior connected with the structure of the city.

6. Analysis

This analysis aims to answer the research question How does the city of Alslev perform in a mobility perspective, and how can this knowledge be used to develop Alslev? by investigating Alslev as a case study with the theoretical given knowledge about definition of place, mobilizing place management and criterias for variable villages. The analysis first examines the political interest in Alslev, as the political priorities have a great influence on the framework for Alslev's development and the life and develop the potentials that the city contains. Subsequently, Alslev is introduced from an objective perspective, where the city's design, functions and development are briefly described. Then the citizens' point of views by living in Alslev is investigated, and which areas they think is a potential or challenge since they are one of the main actors in Alslev. Next, Alslev is seen as a relational place, as Urry (2000) says to investigate which other places are important for defining Alslev. In relation to this, these relationships have been further explored by looking at the mode of transport and the culture to see how the relations perform as a potentials or challenge to Alslev.

6.1 Staging from above - the political interest

Area planning and place making is a part of developing our society. Depending on the place and scale of the project it can be influenced by many actors of interest. As Jensen (2013) points out in staging mobilities there is a staging from 'above' of 'authorities and investors through growth and investment plans that involve some people and exclude others" But also a staging from 'from below' through selection processes made by travelers, visitors, and settlers, see paragraph 4.1. A central actor for developing Alslev is the politicians, whose influence can be performed in a governmental, regional, municipal, and local level, and which can act directly or indirectly to a place.

The government has a significant role to play as a composer for the municipalities' work, and through the establishment of rules etc. which has an impact on the opportunities of rural development (Møller et.al. 2018:55). The development of places like Alslev are from a governmental level often seen in the perspective of the area it is placed in. This is often related to the whole area's potential which in Varde has relation to the largest business areas; tourism, military use, agriculture and food production, or the job creation and urbanization that comes from the nearby larger city, Esbjerg, see paragraph 1.2. In this context Alslev is not playing any powerful role in strengthening the potential of the area, and the political action for development at this level, leaves Alslev to develop in the wake of the actions performed in the larger cities. An example of this perspective could be the strategy "Bedre balance 1 and 2" which presented a governmental strategy to move government jobs and education out of the area of Copenha-

gen and politically designated areas of education, with the intention of creating jobs and interest in other places with the intention of reducing the urban inequality. In the two plans, none of the workplaces were moved to Alslev or even Varde municipality. The nearest area was Esbjerg (Ministry of Finance, 2018).

By zooming in at the area surrounding Alslev, the municipality of Esbjerg, Fanø and Varde has made a cooperation “Storbyregion Esbjerg”. The aim of this is to; strengthen the area’s overall urban qualities, ensure good transport connections that closely connect the “storbyregion”, and increase the population through settlement. “Storbyregionen” is bounded by the areas with most urban environment in the area and with the largest concentration of citizens in southwest of Jutland, see the boundary in figure 11 (Esbjerg kommune, n.d.).

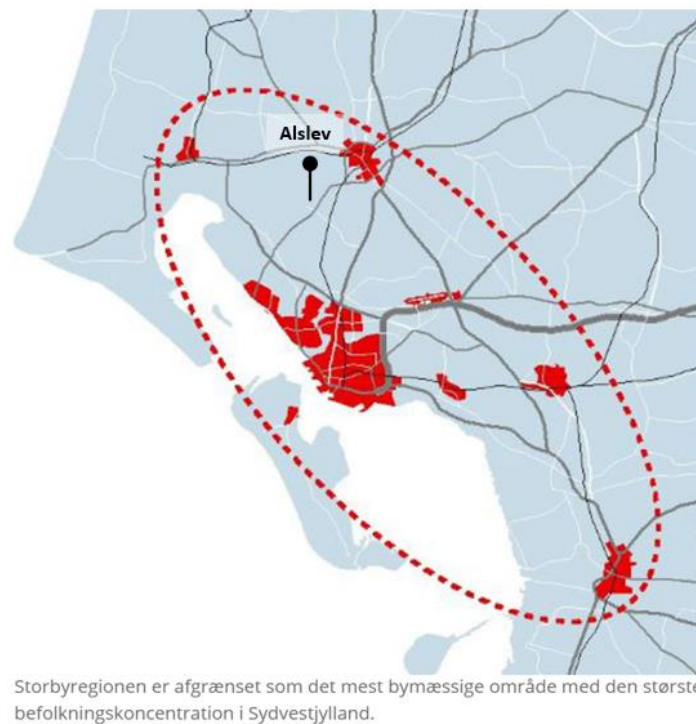


Figure 11 Delimitation of "Storbyregionen Esbjerg", Esbjerg kommune n.d.

Within this designation Alslev is located. The locality of Alslev is a great potential for the city, since the proximity to the nearby larger cities creates some interest, that it probably would not have if it was placed elsewhere in the municipality. By looking at the area of actions for “Storbyregion” Alslev is along with a “neighbor city” Hostrup (placed in Esbjerg municipality) described as a common area for development. Yet there is a focus area for Alslev, the bearing cities are described as Esbjerg, Ribe, Bramming (Esbjerg municipality), Varde, Oksbøl (Varde municipality) and Nordby (Fanø municipality) (Esbjerg kommune, n.d.). Although no exact projects regarding Alslev have been formulated, the cooperation could have an influence on Alslev, since smaller residential areas could be seen as a way of improving the connection between Varde and Esbjerg, and thereby giving Alslev a role of interest.

Nevertheless, when it comes to focusing directly at the development of Alslev, Varde municipality is the most central actor for fulfilling this.

“In some rural districts it has been possible for citizens and local ‘fiery souls’ to fulfill a strategic development working from below, without a collaboration with the municipality. However, in practice it will be difficult to create long-term sustainable solutions, as the municipality is a provider of services, planning authority, etc. and thus considerably affects many of the criteria of a viable village. As a local administrative unit the municipalities thus have the resources and competencies to be a significant player in the implementation of rural policy and a central role in the work to develop viable villages.”
(Møller et.al. 2018 :55).

Therefore, it has been chosen to further investigate the municipality’s plans regarding Alslev and explore how they work around differentiating the cities and how they act as a power relation to the users of the area, as Jensen (2013) described as the staging from below.

6.1.3 Varde municipality

Varde municipality mainly consists of smaller cities, and the challenges of shrinking cities and attracting people is a big part of the municipality's work. Varde municipality has a great focus on the different cities located in the municipality and is focusing on strengthening them by having close contact with the locals and encouraging local engagement (Varde kommune, 2021, hovedstruktur). Each municipality has a municipality plan. This plan contains the overall visions and goals for the municipality and is a legally binding document in which other plans and actions arise. The municipality plan is built up upon twenty-nine themes, which together covers the political agenda (Varde kommune 2021, hovedstruktur). The municipality plan is rewritten every fourth year, which means the version 2021 remains to be finally adopted, but for this project it has been chosen to refer to this vision, since it still represents the latest initiatives, and the final adoption will most likely not deviate much from this draft which is soon to be finally adopted (Varde kommune 2021).

Theme two “Roles of the cities”

Theme two in the municipality plan is about categorizing the cities, to differentiate them and emphasize their potentials which will guide the further planning and development of the cities. The city council's goal, see figure 12, works towards focusing on the city's special potentials, and local engagement (Varde kommune 2021, hovedstruktur:ch2). In this way the municipality goals are trying to reach out for the surrounding factors in the staging mobilities, which by the municipality plan and political agenda has the staging from above, but also tries to embrace and recognize the staging from below since the citizens, volunteers, visitors and tourist also

has a great influence when developing and creating place (Jensen, 2013), and is important for the municipality since the local communities and local development often are built on the power of volunteers.

“The City Council will push for a sustainable development of communities by working closely with volunteers and citizens. A focus on volunteering, unity and association life contributes to making local communities robust for future economic conditions.” (Varde kommune, 2021, hovedstruktur:10).

With the political goals they try to “support the work of developing the various cities”. In relation to this the statements from Møller et.al. (2018) says that “the diverse picture of the villages is important for keeping them attractive” see paragraph 4.3.

City Councils goal

It is the City Council's goal that everyone in Varde Municipality works together to strengthen the local communities and the attraction of the whole municipality.

The City Council will push for a sustainable development of communities by working closely with volunteers and citizens. A focus on volunteering, unity and association life contributes to making local communities robust for future economic conditions.

Varde Municipality must cooperate across knowledge sharing, learning from each other's experiences and utilize each other's strengths to lift the individual local communities and the municipality as a whole.

With a focus on the cities' special potentials, the City Council will support the work of developing the various cities.

The City Council will support the local initiatives and the active zealots to strengthen communities.

Figure 12 City Councils goal - Theme two, Varde municipality 2021, translated

To categorize the cities, the cities has been divided by size related to functions, since the city's size must be considered when working with their potentials seen from above, at a municipality level. The functions are used to differentiate and scope the potentials upon which the municipality will direct and prioritize the political focus and funds, in terms of development. Varde municipality is working around four potentials for development; “settlement”, “profession”, “tourism” and “culture”, each potential has some index criteria's written in the municipality plan the city needs to fulfill in order for the municipality to have it as a focus (Varde kommune 2021, hovedstruktur). Alslev is categorized as a “lokalby” [local city, translated], which refers to the size of the city - a further subdivision of the cities within the municipality, which by size is ranged; ‘Main city’, ‘area city’, ‘local city’ and ‘coast city’ and ‘smaller village and rural areas’ - common for most of the cities designated as a “lokalby” is that they have below 1000 inhabitants, except Alslev which has 1270, why it could be argued a designation as a “area city” is more suitable. Along with that Alslev only has a potential in “settlement” which index criteria requires the city to have at least three of the following criteria's: a school, a kindergarten, a grocery store, proximity to at least 40.000 workplaces within a 30min drive. Right now, there are twelve cities categorized as ‘lokalbyer’ and twenty cities/smaller villages (out of forty-one) to have settlement as a potential (Varde kommune 2021, redegørelse).

For cities with the potential of “settlement” appointed in theme two in the municipality plan, it is relevant to look at the strategy for settlement in the municipality plan’s theme six and related municipality “settlement strategy” to see which political initiatives is included in their potential for development.

Theme six “settlement”

Theme six is about Varde municipalities visions and strategies about “settlement”. The city council will work to ensure an increasing settlement, by focusing on creating connectivity in relation to people's everyday life. The argument is that people do not move for a monument of attraction but move towards a good everyday life (Varde kommune 2019). Statistics show the relocations primarily come from and go to the neighbouring municipalities and larger university cities in Denmark (Varde kommune 2019). As Urry (2000) states in the new mobilities paradigm, mobility needs to be seen in a cross disciplinary mobilities perspective, and Varde municipality is also aware that their strategy for settlement needs to be related with other strategies such as business, leisure, sports and culture, infrastructure etc. (Varde kommune 2021, hovedstruktur:ch6).

In the settlement strategy Varde municipality is working around three areas of actions:

1. **Housing:** A good everyday life is often related to housing that suits one’s needs. A diverse housing that fits all is a materiality as Cresswell also uses to define a place and is for Varde municipality important for keeping and attracting people. Furthermore, housing is also one of the powers of Varde municipality since the house prices are below the regional and national average.
2. **Visibility:** Varde municipality wants to be known for settlement, therefore, this should be the brand in -and outside the municipality. New in this strategy is to direct the marketing to the wanted newcomers and do not market the municipality as one but direct a focus to the cities with potential for settlement.
3. **Social relations:** As Tim Cresswell (2015) argues a sense of place is a part of defining a place. By focusing on the social relations through an attractive association life and local development committee, Varde municipality wants to strengthen the relation and sense of place by the social engagement in the different cities (Varde kommune 2019)

Some of the activities regarding the areas of action in the settlement strategy is briefly mentioned; To revise the locals development plan². To focus on the marketing of the ‘largest’ cities in the municipality (cities with more than 1000 inhabitants) through profiling sites, this includes Alslev along with nine other designated cities. To find new methods to help the volunteering

² A development plan is a plan made by the civic association. It contains urban projects formulated by the citizens. The project described can apply municipal funding, Alslev udviklingsplan 2021 (expiring date).

in the local communities. To revise the city role model upon which theme two is written (Varde kommune 2019). As Urry (2000) points out, mobility must be seen in context. Besides offering suitable housing, the municipality is focusing on the visibility by profiling prioritized cities for newcomers and trying to strengthen the social mobility within the cities by the development plans which are drawn up by the inhabitants (Lassen 2011).

The municipality plan theme six also contains an area account to see which villages there previously had the most newcomers, and to ensure there is enough area laid out for new housing for the next period. The account is based on the knowledge from 2008 to 2019, which is used to estimate the period 2021 to 2033. A prioritized selection of the list is shown in table 2, showing the top five cities regarding new areas for housing in the municipality (Varde kommune 2021, redegørelse:ch6).

Cities	New housing 2008 - 2019	Expected new housing 2021 - 2033
Varde	469	600
Ølgod	109	90
Oksbøl	74	66
Alslev	71	60
Blåvand	56	42

Table 2 Area account, Own production based on Varde kommune 2021:ch6

When looking at this it is worth to notice that Alslev is one of the top four cities in the municipality in attracting newcomers. Compared with Varde, Ølgod and Oksbøl, Alslev is the only city with only “settlement” as a potential regarding theme two, where the others have at least two other areas of potential and together Varde, Ølgod and Oksbøl make 3 out of the 5 cities with business as a potential (Varde kommune 2021, redegørelse). This could indicate Alslev is an attractive city to live in, and it could be worth strengthening these factors which makes it attractive.

6.2 Introducing Alslev:

This introduction aims to give a descriptive approach of the 'surface' of Alslev, before going deeper into some of the elements that extend the definition of Alslev.

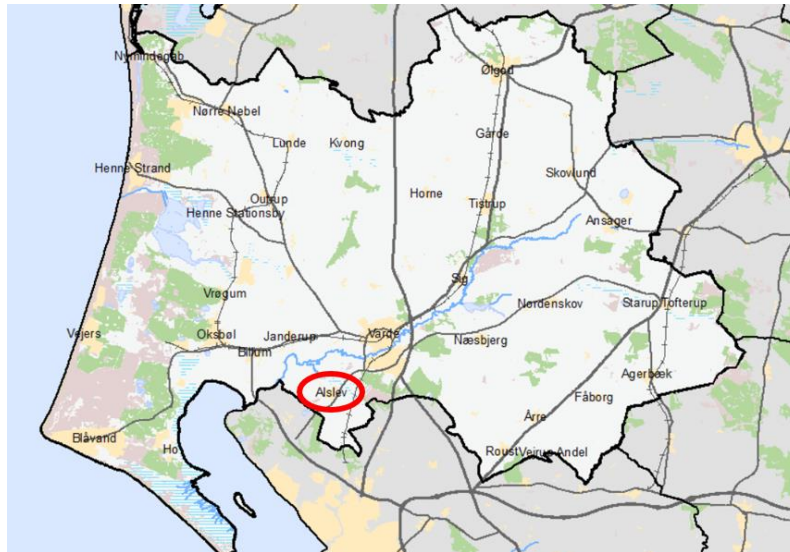


Figure 13 Location of Alslev, Own production

Alslev is a small village located in the south of Varde municipality, in the southwest of Jutland, Denmark, see figure 13. The village was founded in the early 1300 century and was, as many villages in the rural outskirts of Denmark, built up upon the church and next to the thoroughfare. Alslev is located between the two largest cities in the area, with only 6 km to Varde and 15 km to Esbjerg, in the in between rural area, with primary rural fields and crops surrounding the city (Varde kommune 2021, planhæfte). The primary growth of the village happened around the 1960ies and the city structure is therefore characterized by detached houses. The city has along with its growth been redesigned; the thoroughfare has been relocated from the central road Bredgade to outside the city at the new thoroughfare Hjerting Landevej, which have guided the traffic around the city (Varde kommune 2021, planhæfte), causing less heavy traffic in the city, but also a limited visibility for the activities placed in the main street. The design of the city is relevant, as a further development may affect the existing 'city center' and use of the city. Today, most streets are connected by road access to the old thoroughfare "Bredgade" which naturally leads the citizens to the 'city center'. But as the city has developed the perpendicular road "Forum vej" works more as the main street, and with the new residential areas coming there will be more development around Forumvej instead of Bredgade. Figure 14 shows the city before it expanded in 1954, and figure 15 the design of the city today.



Figure 14 Alslev 1954, Own production



Figure 15 Alslev 2020, Own production

Today there are some smaller businesses located in the city, which covers the local supermarket, hairdresser, some smaller private professions, and a church. Furthermore, Alslev has some public services such as a nursery, kindergarten, gym hall and school up to sixth grade, and two recreational areas 'Toms bro' and 'Dinnsens skovpark'. However, Alslev mainly consists of residents, and over the past years more new houses have been built. Having such a

large new residential area also characterizes the visual look of the city, which, along with its surrounding environment, seems bare. The numbers of the pictures in figure 16 are related with numbered cameras in figure 15, where 1 and 2 represent the “oldest” parts of Alslev, which beside Bredgade mainly is south from Forumvej, and 3 and 4 are the newest areas, mainly north of Forumvej.

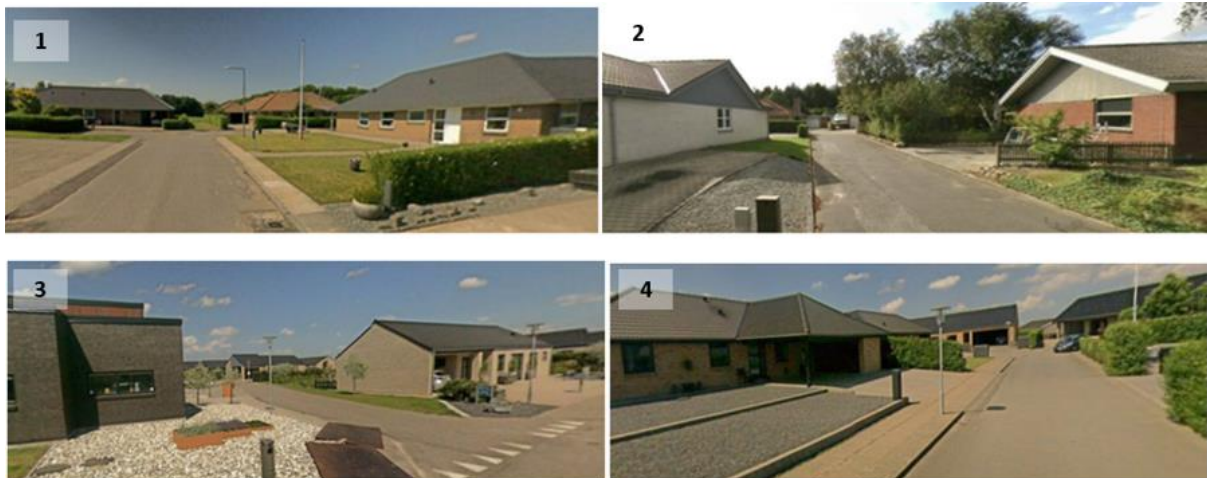


Figure 16 Residential areas in Alslev 2021, COWI foto

Today Alslev parish has approximately 1640 inhabitants (2020) and 1270 citizens in the city of Alslev, which has been an increase of 64 people since 2012 (Varde kommune 2021, planhæfte). The city has, due to the positive development and functions, been pointed out as a city for settlement, due to the criteria in the municipality plan, see also paragraph 6.1. Furthermore, Alslev itself has a vision of being “more than just a city for settlement, but a viable city” cf. the development plan the city has prepared (Alslev udviklingsplan).

Recently, a new area has been laid out for housing (see the striped area in figure 15) in relation to the area account in paragraph 6.1. As stated in paragraph 4.2 “mobilising place management” creating new areas for housing is not the only reason people move there. In the new mobilities paradigm Urry (2000) describes how there is a social relation to mobility and that the development in physical mobility needs to be seen in relation to other forms of mobility such as virtual or social etc. As it is now, Alslev has managed to evolve and increase their number of citizens. However, Alslev and the surrounding areas still suffer from a general lack of attraction towards the area, and the small development could therefore easily turn. By diving further into the definition of Alslev in a mobility perspective it can help to understand what makes Alslev an attractive city by focusing on the potentials and challenges for the city, to keep having a positive development in Alslev.

6.3 Staging from below - Citizens of Alslev

The citizens of Alslev primarily constitute the staging from below, since they are the ones causing the main activities in the city. Therefore, this paragraph aims to investigate who the citizens of Alslev are, and how they reflect upon their city, to find out what, for them, makes Alslev an attractive city, and what could be improved.

Alslev has had a great success of attracting families, which also can be seen in the demographic in figure 17, which is showing a larger concentration of people under 70 than elderly.

Alder	0-9 år	10-19 år	20-29 år	30-39 år	40-49 år	50-59 år	60-69 år	70-79 år	80-89 år	90-99 år
I alt	16,9%	12,7%	6,0%	15,0%	13,3%	13,0%	10,5%	9,4%	2,8%	0,5%

Figure 17 Demographic in Alslev 2020, Varde kommune online meeting

To be able to attract families and younger residents is important to keep a positive development. This has also been noticed by the citizens by the questionnaire, see also appendix 1.

“In Alslev there is a great ‘atmosphere’, with a good mix of elderly and younger citizens”

– person no. 2

“There are a lot of kids here” - person no. 9

“Many families with children. When an old person moves out, a family with children moves in from Esbjerg” - person no. 12

Through the questionnaire the citizens were first asked about their relation to Alslev and which factors that have had an influence in the choice of moving there, to know what was crucial to them. 8 out of 16 answered that they had a social relation to Alslev, either they or their partner was raised in Alslev or they had family and friends in town. 7 out of 16 answered “job in the nearby area” as a reason, 6 of those did not have a social relation to Alslev beforehand. Third most answered question was “attractive house prices” which 4 out of 16 gave as a factor of influence, 2 of those had a social relation and 2 did not (see appendix 2). To know what the citizens moved for is interesting even though a beforehand social relation and job creation is not something Alslev and the citizens directly can change. But, to know that social mobility is important, makes it valuable to highlight and improve the elements that create the social interactions for the citizens. And to focus on the physical mobility by looking at the accessibility to and from Alslev, regarding jobs in the nearby area. Both contribute to a good reputation which person no.11 also mentions as a reasons for choosing Alslev in the first place when she was asked about her relation in the interview no1, see appendix 3.

“...it was my husband who got a job in the local area, in Varde. At that time, we actually lived in a rented house in Varde when we then started looking around for a house. I had a job that made me have some contact with the different area’s schools in some of the smaller cities. We were determined that it should not be Varde. It should be an environment where children could grow up safely and even run to school, scout and sports. and it was possible out here.” - Interviewee no.1, appendix 3

As Møller et.al. (2018) states it is important to see places differently in order to develop the city. Varde municipality is also working with the characteristic of the different cities, to use it as a way of branding the city cf. the settlement strategy’s (Varde kommune 2019) project ‘profillerings site’.

By doing the questionnaire the citizens were asked three relatable questions about their city: **what is the best thing about living in Alslev?**, **What do you think is characteristic for Alslev, which differentiates it from other smaller cities?** and **Why do you think some, who were not born and raised in Alslev are choosing the city instead of other nearby smaller cities?** The idea of asking these questions was to open up perspectives in their city. The development of Alslev is highly related to people moving there, therefore is it important to know what makes the citizens stay and what makes the city stand out from the others. The risk of asking comparable questions is that some have not answered all three questions, which could be caused by the feeling of repetitions. Therefore, the answers have been looked at simultaneously. The answers are presented in figure 18.

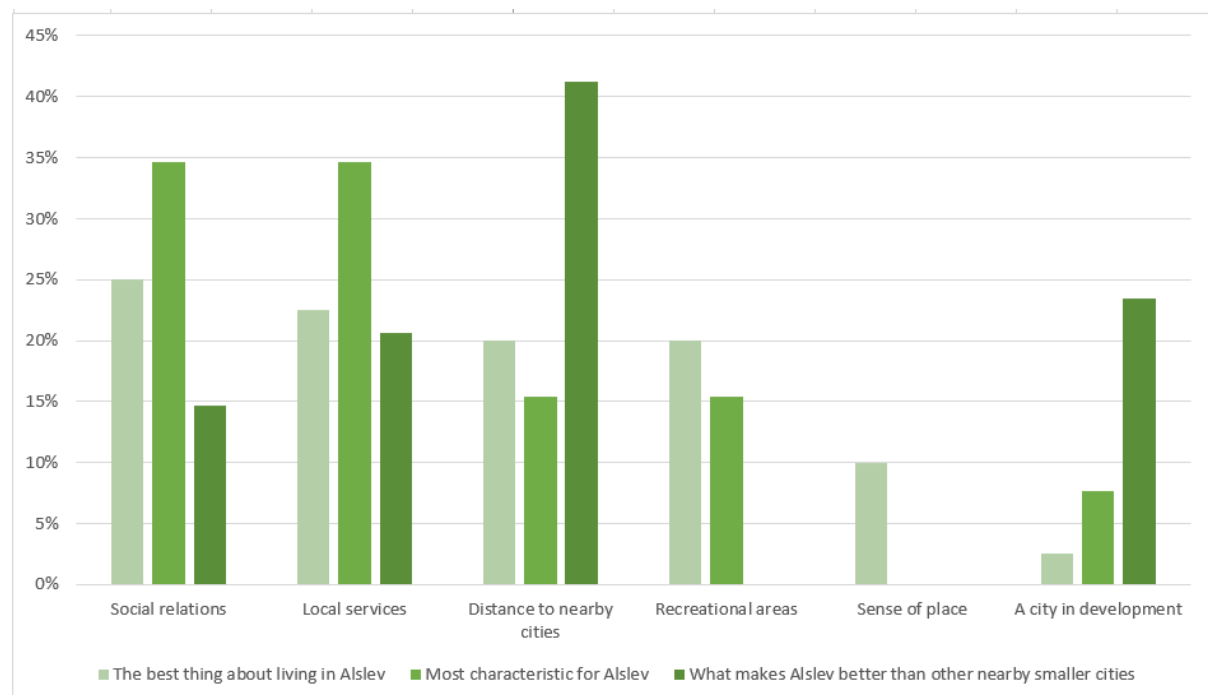


Figure 18 Results, questionnaire ‘Alslev by’, Appendix 2

When looking at the answers the social relations which are covering answers such as; good neighbourship, social relations, associations and togetherness and many families with children is mentioned. The local services, which are mainly related to the possibility of sport activities, supermarket and school and daycare. And the distance to nearby cities which is referring to Esbjerg and Varde, is the most common answer in the three questions (see appendix 2).

Regarding developing Alslev it has been chosen to focus on two perspectives at the answers, one thinking about the mobility within the city and one thinking about mobility around the city.

Within the city: When looking at both the participants' relation to Alslev and the answers from the questionnaire, the social relation is a central theme. The social relation can be created based on several parameters; it could be living in the same neighborhood, having children of roughly the same age, pets, sports, or other common interests in general. It could also be by often being seen in the same places (natural meeting places) or the sense of community belonging to a smaller community like Alslev. When looking at the answers in the 'local functions', many of the functions near the 'city center' are highlighted. There is often a social relation linked to most of the functions mentioned. It could be the local function as an activity, where especially the associations, school and sports are mentioned. But there can also be a social relation in the function which creates a 'natural meeting place' such as the supermarket and the recreational areas which were also mentioned. Having some of these functions also covers some of the everyday activities that are attractive to live close by in relation to everyday life, this will also be addressed later. The functions and social relations of the city are also important seen from the perspective of being a viable village cf. in paragraph 4.3 highlighted criteria no. 2 proximity to public and private services and 4. social and cultural connectivity.

Around the city: For those who did not have a beforehand relation in Alslev, 'job in the nearby area' was the most answered reason for choosing Alslev. With only a few functions and workplaces within the city, Alslev is very dependent on other places, which makes Alslev a very relational place. This was also one of the most answered in the questionnaire 'distance to the nearby cities'. By looking from the outside many smaller cities like Alslev can be seen as one, which makes it difficult to stand out. By looking critically at the answers from a settlement perspective, it could be argued that some of the answers such as 'social relations' and 'local services' are not very distinctive when compared to similar cities. It is therefore also worth noting the answers in question 3 "what makes Alslev better than other nearby smaller cities" where 'distance to the nearby cities' and 'a city in development' is more often mentioned than the social relations and local services. When looking at the criteria for a viable village in paragraph 4.3, the network of Alslev and proximity to the nearby larger cities, has an important role

in fulfilling criteria no. 2 proximity to public and private services and 3. Accessibility to employment and good opportunities for starting a business.

In relation to find out what the characteristics of Alslev are, the citizens were also asked “**what could make it even better to live in Alslev**”. The intention of this question was to find out which areas that challenged the citizens, which also is an important perspective when talking about Alslev, the answers are presented in figure 19.

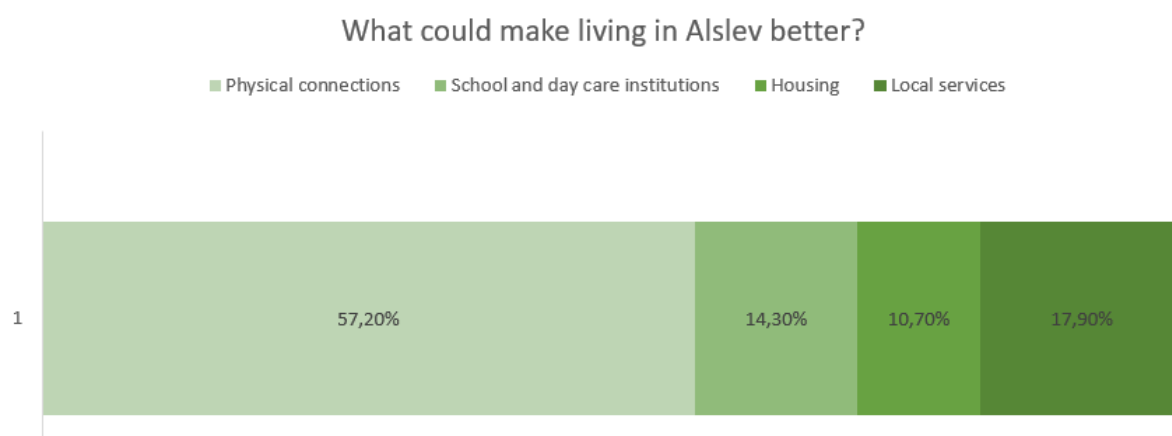


Figure 19 Results, questionnaire 'Alslev by', Appendix 2

When looking at the answers, it is worth to notice the answers could all fit into four categories and 3 out of 4 are repeaters from the questions processed above considering the best things about living in Alslev. 57,2% of the answers were about improving the physical connections which also was aimed at the destinations of Esbjerg and Varde. This again strengthens the idea of seeing places as relational, which will be further investigated in the next paragraph.

Besides this, 14,3% of the answers were improving the possibilities for school and day care institutions, which could indicate there is a larger demand than supply in Alslev. Since Alslev has had a success of attracting families with kids, it could be worthwhile for the municipality to investigate if there could be a potential for e.g. expanding the school or revise the offers for daycare institutions, to maintain this attention. Creating more activities for the kids inside the city could also have an influence in the need for physical connection outside of the city.

10,7% of the answers were about being able to offer more different options for housing, such as rental housing, terraced houses, apartments, etc. Alslev mainly consist of detached family housing, which can be challenging for singles, elderly or others who might not need the same kinds of space. “... at some point you do not want to keep the garden anymore and find a small home in Varde. Because there is not much of it out here.” (interview no. 1, appendix 3). In the draft of the new local plan for the striped area in figure 15. minor plots of land and the possibility of alternative options of housing have been prioritized (Lokalplan 02.01.L03, 2020).

Finally, 17,9 % of the answers were about getting more retail and local services such as a restaurant, doctor, stores and public facilities to the city. These are activities the citizens now commute to the nearby cities to participate in. A question could arise of who could create a profitable service function to open in Alslev, when the relational places also seem to be a part of the identity of living in Alslev.

6.4 Alslev as a relational place

With only a few leisure activities, workplaces, and school up to 6th grade the citizens of Alslev need to spread their everyday activities to a larger area. This paragraph aims to detect which other places are relational to Alslev and to what purpose, since this thesis argues the relations are what makes Alslev variable, and therefore highly important in seeing potentials and challenges of Alslev. So far it has been clarified that especially Esbjerg and Varde are seen as the most important relations, in both causing the development of Alslev and in the everyday activities for the citizens in Alslev. However, there has not been a balancing of the two cities, to see if they are potentially equally important, and to what extent they make a difference for the citizens in Alslev.

The citizens were in the questionnaire asked, **“How often do you need to visit other places than Alslev, in relation to your everyday activities?”** 12 of the participants answered ‘daily’, 3 answered ‘weekly’, and only 1 person answered that she could do most of her everyday activities in Alslev. To see which areas that for them were important, the participants were asked to map in their everyday activities such as 1. work, 2. leisure activities, 3. grocery shopping and 4. others, where some mentioned; going to restaurant, cinema, theater, and nature areas. The answers are shown in figure 20.

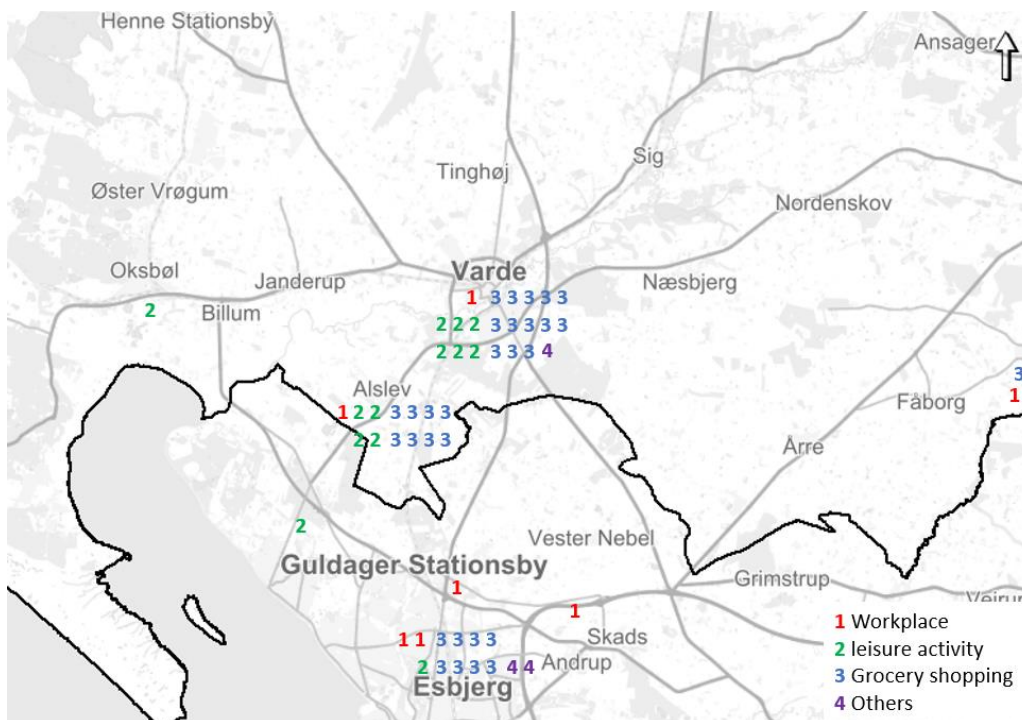


Figure 20 Results, questionnaire 'relational map', based on Appendix 1

Not surprising, many of the participants that were still working had jobs outside Alslev. Statistics show most of the citizens in Alslev commute to Esbjerg and secondly Varde for work. For this questionnaire 8 participants were retired and 8 were still working. Yet the questionnaire showed that four of these are still commuting to Esbjerg for work and one to Varde, the answers are not representative for doing a conclusion based on data other than the statistics presented in figure 21 (Region Syddanmark 2014).

IND- OG UDPENDLING FORDELT PÅ BYER – ALSLEV

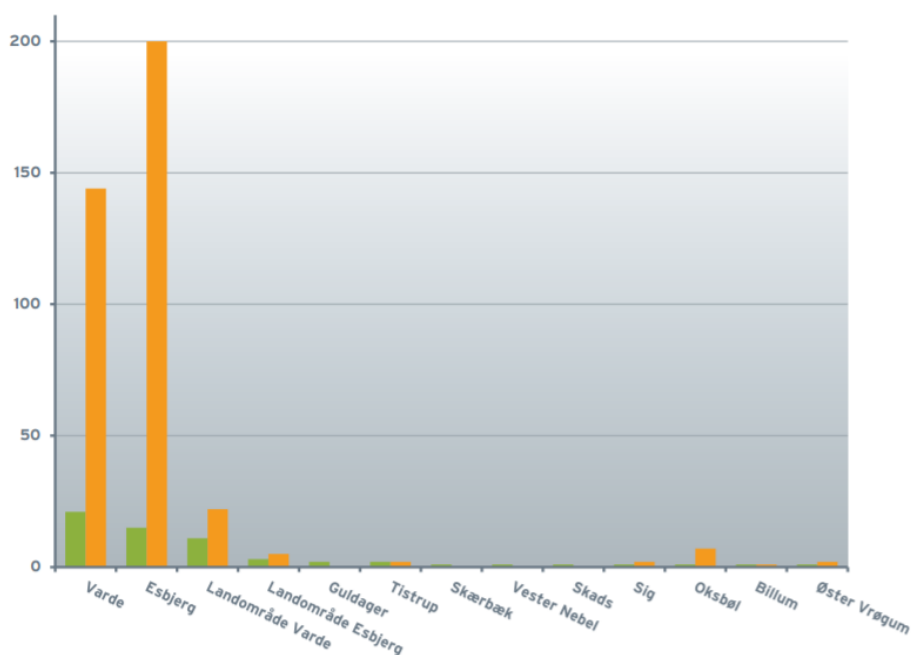


Figure 21 Commuting in Alslev, Region Syddanmark 2014

Figure 21 shows the number of daily commuters going to (green) and from (orange) Alslev. This also argues that Esbjerg and Varde are important relations to Alslev regarding work, this could also indicate that there daily is a strong relation out of the city in the morning and into the city at afternoon, if assuming normal working hours.

When focusing on the leisure activities from the questionnaire it seems like the relation between Alslev and Varde is especially relevant. When looking at the associations in Alslev, there is a decent representation of different leisure activities, but with a limited number of teams to attend (Alslev.dk, nd.). There is therefore a great chance that many kids, teens, adults and elderly at some point would use the range of leisure activities that can be found outside the city. In relation to this the interviewees were asked whenever it was most relevant for them to be more connected with Varde or Esbjerg and what considerations they had of their use of the two cities, to this the interviewee answered:

“No, it is primary Varde. Also for the young people who go out. It is also Varde we would draw to and do shopping in. My husband works in Esbjerg now, but other than that we never go to Esbjerg” (Interview no. 1, appendix 3)

“For us I think it would be Esbjerg because I work in Esbjerg. Although our doctor is in Varde, but a lot of things are happening for us in Esbjerg. But of course, the kids will go to school in Varde” (Interview no. 2, appendix 3)

“If you live in Alslev, then I would say it would be better to improve the connections to Varde. But it would only be because of the children. They should have some better opportunities to get back and forth. I really don’t think that you, as a citizen of Alslev, use Esbjerg that much. Then it may just be the north of Esbjerg you would drive to” (Interview no. 3, appendix 3)

It is interesting to know how the citizens reflect upon their relations and investigate how these are incorporated in their everyday life. It was expected that some of the participants with kids would mention ‘bringing children to e.g. school and leisure activities’ as an everyday activity. Yet nobody had a focus on this. Although the follow-up interviews indicated the need of transportation in a family with different activities outside the city can be a challenge

“They did [bike eds.], but well, we’ve been driving them for really many years. In that way they [the kids eds.] are challenged and either a bus or train stop there would have been really good. We as parents also feel challenged, because we have to be the ones who drive them and put the time aside” (interview no. 3, appendix 3).

It could therefore be relevant to further investigate the kids/teens' use of the city and their relations, to see if they are actually challenged in their everyday activities and how. Furthermore, the citizens' answers were compared with the results in the relational map and the statistics, to see the validity of the data, and find potential mistakes in the assumptions and understanding of the city. This comparison can help understanding the everyday life of the citizens in Alslev, since knowing what activities are related to which places, can help clarify their everyday patterns and help improve the accessibility to the activities who need it. It could be interesting to do a further study in this, and implement tracking as a method, to see if the assumptions and statistics agree.

In the mobilities strategy from Region Syddanmark (2020) a study has been made, about the Dane's opinion about the maximum temporal distance to various everyday activities, distributed on the different modes of transportation, see figure 22.

Pasning, skole og indkøb inden for 15 minutter

Antal minutter, som en ny bolig må ligge fra udvalgte aktiviteter ifølge syddanskerne i de 30 største byer.

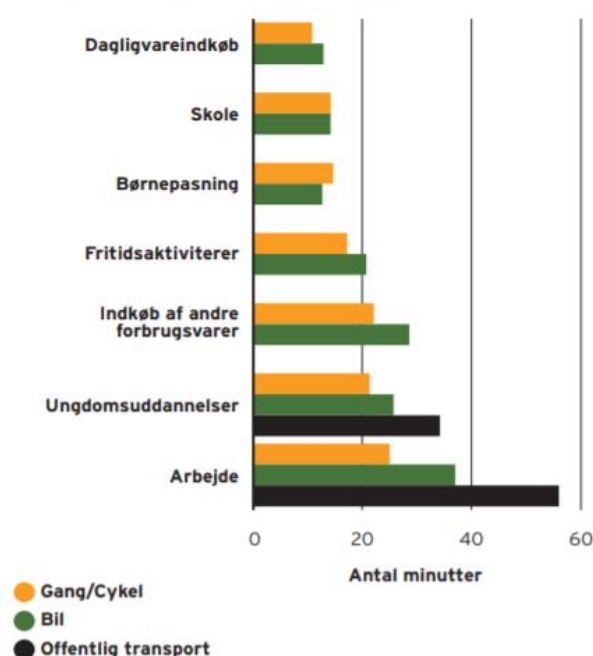


Figure 22 Temporal distance to everyday activities, Region Syddanmark 2020

Looking at the study it shows that grocery shopping and activities related to kids, such as school and childcare as well as leisure activities are some of the activities the Danes prioritize to live closest to. One of the most noticeable results is when looking at the leisure activities which must be a maximum 20min drive away, and workplaces which is the one activity we are most likely to commute the longest to with approximately 25min walk, 35min drive and 55min in public transport (Region Syddanmark 2020).

By focusing on the answers from the citizens of Alslev, along with the statistics showing what we want to have closest, there could be evidence of saying Varde, due to its distance from Alslev, is most relevant when looking at the leisure activities that can not be found in Alslev. This could argue that it could be worth focusing more on the connection to Varde rather than Esbjerg, since Varde covers many of the activities that have a high value to live closest to. Being placed close to the two largest cities in the area, has seemed to be a great benefit of the development in Alslev. But the relational map also reveals how it can challenge the possibilities of accommodating the great wish of improving the local functions. By looking at the results from the questionnaire 'local functions' such as restaurants, supermarkets and retail was answered in the question '**what could make living in Alslev better**' and many answered the local supermarket as one of the good functions for living in Alslev, as the statistic also reveals. Although by looking at the relation map figure 20, it shows that there are just as many doing their daily grocery shopping in Varde and Esbjerg. By being so closely related to nearby larger cities is great for creating opportunities, but it can also challenge the potential for developing retail in Alslev, since it would enter a market of competition with the retail shops in Varde and Esbjerg, also due to the relations.

Nevertheless, the citizens of Alslev broadened the understanding of Alslev by having daily activities outside the city. Most of the citizens commute on a daily basis, whenever the purpose is of going to work, leisure activities, doing the grocery shopping or others. In relation to this it is interesting to investigate which mode of transportation that is used, in order to discuss the potentials of developing the connections outside of the city.

6.4.1 Mode of transportation in Alslev

By living in a small city like Alslev a car seems like a necessity. Driving is for many people in rural Denmark the preferred mode of transportation. Statistics show that in smaller cities below 2000 inhabitants, approximately 80% owns a car (dst. 2019). When asking the citizens of Alslev **how many cars do they have?** 8 people answered 2 cars and the other 8 answered 1, common for those who answered '1 car' is that they are all retired and have no kids living at home, except person no. 7 who is 38 years old, single and have no kids, and person 10 who is 59, married and has 2 kids (most likely not living at home).

The citizens were asked what their primary mode of transportation is. 15 of the 16 participants mentioned the car, 5 of those did also answer 'bicycling', where 1 had the bicycle as their primary, and 1 person answered 'public transportation' additionally to the car.

When looking at the options of going to and from Alslev, the options are showed in figure 23.

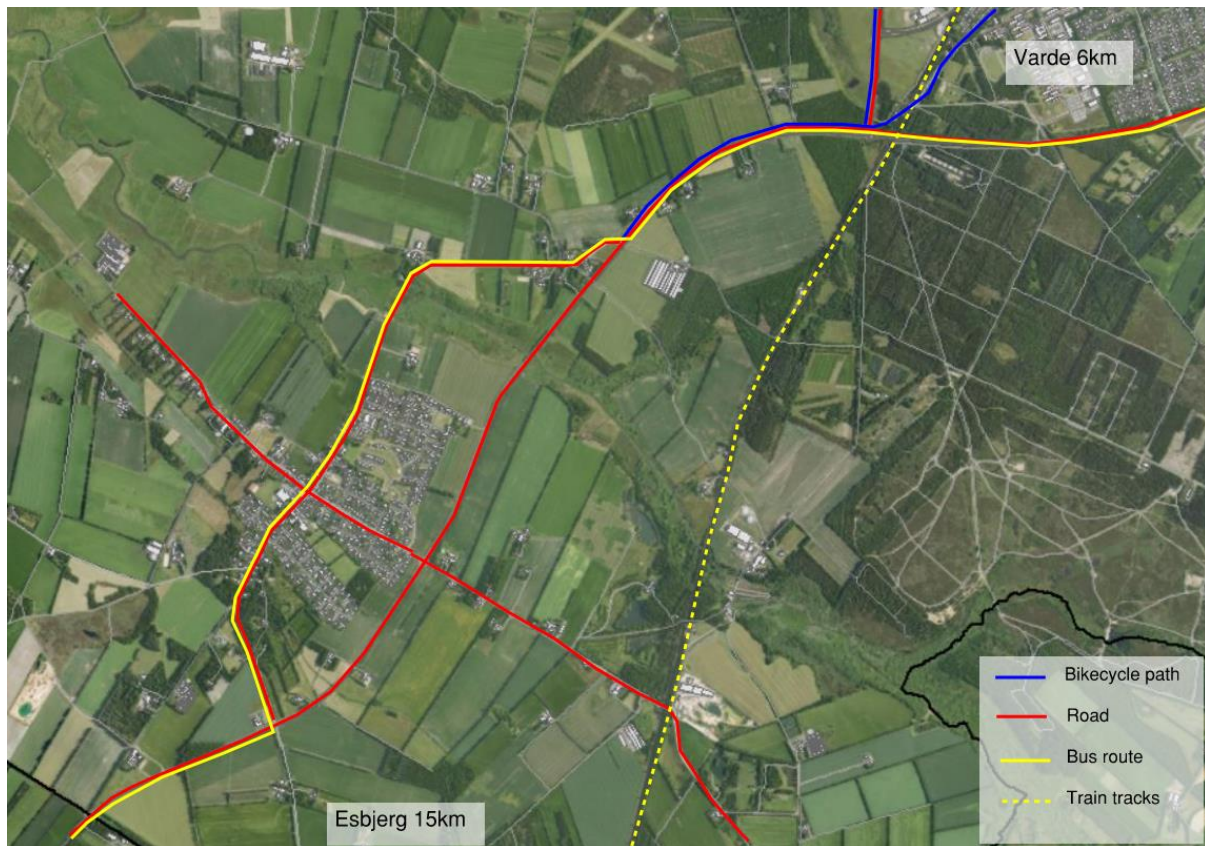


Figure 23 Different modes of transportation in Alslev, Own production

Car: When looking at the connecting roads around Alslev, the citizens have good opportunities when driving, to reach many central roads in both Esbjerg and Varde municipality. Driving towards Esbjerg you reach one of the crossing roads are Vestkystvejen which is a central road in the area. The road is towards west going to the attractive destination for vacationers - Blåvand, and east connects to the motorway towards both Ribe and Kolding. Driving towards Varde, the main city in the municipality is easily reached, and from there, there are also many central road systems to cities within the municipality.

Bicycling: Bicycling (to Varde) was the second most answered question, which 5 has answered as an option instead of the car, when asking about the citizens primary mode of transportation. It is possible to go by bike between Varde and Alslev, with a distance of 6km, and could be a good potential for strengthening the relational connectivity to Varde. When visiting the area, the bike path is nicely separated from the thoroughfare (Hjerting Landevej), but it was also noticed that there is no light installed at the path. As Karen Lucas (2012) states there can be a deselection associated with fear, which for some could influence if bicycling could be an option, when it is dark, due to the design of the bicycling path, see figure 24.



Figure 24 Hjerting Landevej, Google maps

Public transport: Regarding public transport, there is a bus route going to and from Esbjerg and Varde through Alslev. Only one person in the questionnaire mentioned public transport as prioritized mode of transportation. By looking at the bus schedule there are six departures from Alslev going to Varde, a 6min bus drive and six to Esbjerg a 50min bus drive, all distributed in a timeframe between 06 - 10 and 13:30 to 15:30 (Sydtrafik 2018). With only a few departures it is almost a matter of luck to make it suit one's everyday schedule. An alternative to the bus is the local train, which also connects Varde and Esbjerg. From Alslev it is then possible to take one of the six busses going to Varde (6min drive) and then enter the train.

“Right now, it would not do much for me (using public transport ed.) No.

It is also mainly because I work late... so first going to a train and everything to be able to get home, it would not be an option for me at all. I need to get home relatively quickly when I have free time.” (interview 2)

In general, public transportation is lacking in the rural areas of Denmark. A study from Region Syddanmark shows how far it is possible to get from Alslev respectively by car or public transport, see figure 25.

SÅ LANGT KAN MAN KOMME FRA ALSLEV

Så langt kan man komme fra Alslev i bil på:

0-30 minutter

30-60 minutter

Med bopæl i Alslev kan man i bil, inden for:

• 30 min. nå 50.200 arbejdspladser

• 60 min. nå 174.100 arbejdspladser

Så langt kan man komme fra Alslev med kollektiv trafik på:

0-30 minutter

30-60 minutter

60-90 minutter

Kilde: Region Syddanmark og CVR



Figure 25 This far can one get from Alslev, Region Syddanmark 2014

By looking at the distance which one can reach, the car gives many more opportunities (green areas) than using public transport (blue areas). Figure 25 also indicates using public transport to and from Alslev, besides increasing the opportunities of reaching different destinations, also easily gets more time consuming than using a car e.g. very tellingly it shows how one using public transport, roughly can use the same time going to Ølgod or some places of Esbjerg, as one using a car could reach Kolding.

As stated, earlier work is one of the biggest reasons people move (see paragraph 1.1) and as mentioned many of the participants in the questionnaire mentioned “working in the nearby area” as a reason for moving to Alslev. By looking at how many workplaces that are possible to reach, within a certain time, the car also gives remarkably more opportunities in relation to jobs, when compared with the time spent in public transport, see figure 26.

SÅ MANGE FULDTIDSARBEJDSPLADSER KAN MAN NÅ

	Bil		Kollektiv trafik		
	Inden for 30 minutter	30-60 minutter	Inden for 30 minutter	30-60 minutter	60-90 minutter
Alslev	50.181	174.124	10.739	38.518	57.444

Figure 26 This many workplaces can one reach from Alslev, Region Syddanmark 2014

During the questionnaire, the participants were asked if they ever had challenges doing their everyday activities due to mobility, 14 out of 16 answered ‘no’, yet three left a comment saying, “Not as long as I have a car/not yet” (see persons no. 4,5 and 13, appendix 1). Only 2 of the 16 participants answered ‘yes’ mostly related to the activities of visiting the doctor or shopping (person no. 2 and 15, see appendix 1). The three interviewees were some of the participants

who answered “No” to the question. They were therefore asked to see themselves in a perspective where driving was not an option, e.g. their kids or if they someday were not capable of driving a car e.g. due to old age and put that in the perspective of living in Alslev.

“If you are by bus, there is still a long way to everything... if the kids [eds] did not make the bus in the morning when they had to go to school, we thought “Well, then you cannot go to school today “... In the evening/nights [eds.] They [the kids] always called home. Then we picked them up. We have got up endless times to pick them up, and then we always had the car filled with other young people who wanted to go to Alslev”. (interview no.1, appendix 3)

“I can not see myself living in Alslev when I grow old ... I think maybe the connections are really too bad, plus that if I suddenly could not drive, I would feel locked. Because then I would not really be able to get away from the city.” (interview no. 3, appendix 3)

By investigating the potential modes of transportation, the car seems to be the one making most sense for the citizens in Alslev. A potential could be found in redesigning the existing bicycling paths from Alslev to Varde, since it could perform as a better alternative to the car than it does now. The existing public transport does not seem to be an alternative to the car. As mentioned earlier the civic association has proposed making a train stop as a way to enable some public transport in the area, although the stop is placed 2km outside the city of Alslev. In the municipality alternative modes of transportation can be found, such as Flex Taxa. The municipality could consider rebranding this option for the cities in the rural areas, to see if this also could be a potential alternative to the public transport.

6.4.2 Driving culture

“In many Western nations there is a deep rooted acceptance and dependence on the automobile as an integral part of making one’s way within a community and between communities, which has created a community structure that is dependent upon the ability to drive a car” (Urry 2007, cited in Fisker, 2011:1).

To see Alslev as a variable city the relations are essential. By investigating the current possibilities of physical movement to and from Alslev it is seen how it, from the perspective of the citizens, can be challenging without a car. Therefore, this paragraph aims to discuss if there is a cultural influence in which solutions would actually work in improving the relations in Alslev. Often, an everyday life without a car becomes a reality as we age or is a reality when being too young to drive. By seeing the demographic and clarifying the relations of Alslev meaning and modes of transportation, indicate the design of Alslev is not attractive for those without a car. In relation to this, the future development of Alslev is focusing on the area across Hjerting Landevej as the direction, when the striped area in figure 15 is built (Varde kommune 2021,

planhæfte). This has led to a suggestion from the civic association in Alslev to add a train stop at the intersection 2km southeast from Alslev (see figure 23) as a way of improving the possibilities for public transport as a tool to develop Alslev (Alslev udviklingsplan).

Although 17,9% of participants in the questionnaire wanted to improve the physical connections to Esbjerg and Varde, it could indicate that the solution is not found in public transport, which could be caused by the driving culture.

“The individual has to be able to get from one place to another fast, to be flexible and ready to move in a second, and most importantly have the possibility of mobility so that the idea of all the potentials embedded in everyday life does not get clouded.”
(Freudendal-Pedersen 2005, cited in Fisker 2011:36)

In the questionnaire the citizens were asked about the idea of a train stop, see figure 27.

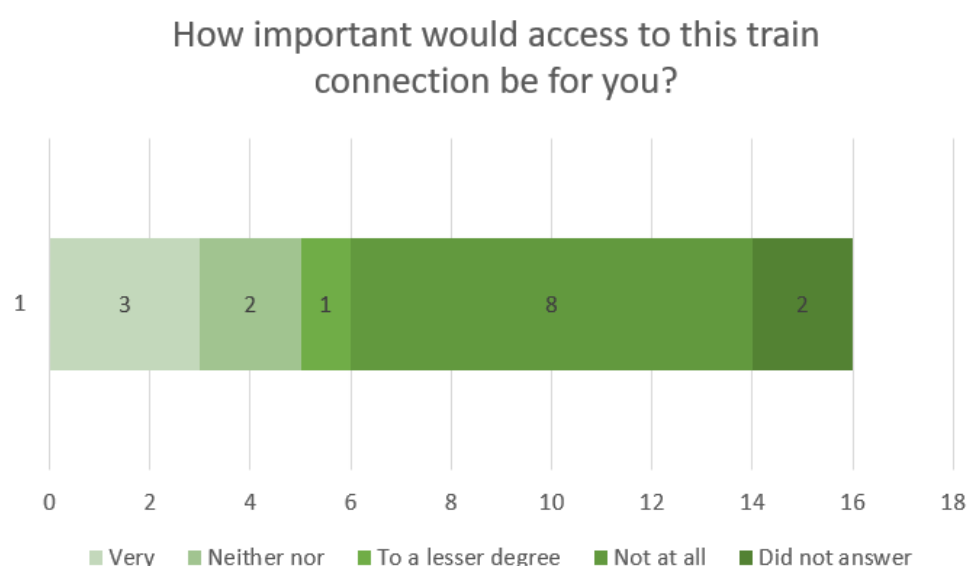


Figure 27 Results questionnaire "The train stop", Appendix 2

When asking **“How important would access to this train connection be for you?”** 3 out of 16 saw the solution as an importance and answered the question with “very”, two of those were also representing some of the elderly answering the questionnaire with 72 and 79 years. As stated in Lassen & Holst Laursen (eds 2020) “different people can have a different ‘sense of place’” which could indicate seeing the value of this train stop, could have a higher value to those who might need it first. The third person is interviewee no.3 who is 49. He has been a part of the civic association in Alslev, and has due to his involvement in this topic, a good objection of reflecting on the topic. He where therefore asked about his way of answering the question during the interview (see interview 3, Appendix 3).

“It's really because if I think about where we want to direct our country. Where will the government prioritize its spending? I will probably think a little further ahead. We want to create solar parks, we want to reduce CO2 emissions. We will drive in electric cars

if possible, and so on ... So, with that angle, I kind of think it could have a high significance. Because we can never get around by public transport if they [the public mode of transportation eds.] are not there. We do not have the offer, not the opportunity to say, "you know what, we'll take the train today"...I also think our culture here in West Jutland is a bit built on the fact that it has not been an option, you could say ..." (interview 3, translated) Although he continues "...if you have to be honest, how many people actually drove the bus at the time when there were a lot more departures than there are today. At that time, we had many more departures in Alslev, from Alslev to Varde by bus. It was still empty, you could say. After all, not many people used it. I also doubt if anyone will actually use the train to Esbjerg" - Interviewee no.3, appendix 3.

In relation to this the participants were also asked the question "How often would you use the train, if there was a stop in the intersection", the answers are presented in figure 28.

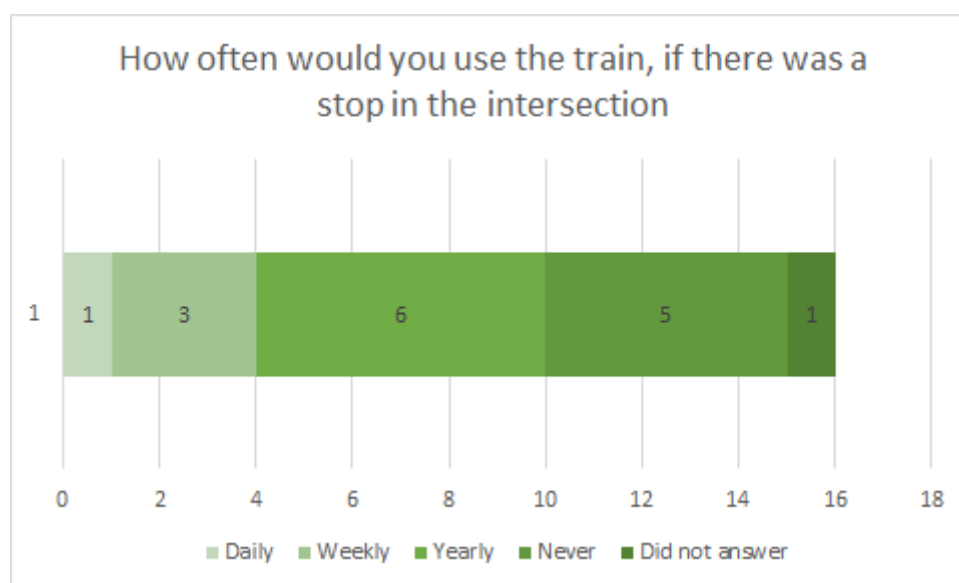


Figure 28 Results questionnaire 'The train stop', Appendix 2

Here the same three were the ones answering 'daily' and 'weekly', where 6 answered 'yearly' and 5 'never'. "if I can not drive anymore, it would be a problem for me to get to the train stop" (person no. 5, appendix 1)

Sometimes the idea of having the option can seem important, but the reality can be different. "Sperling and Gordon (2009) describe a high dependence on automobility as a monoculture where automobility is a hindrance to the establishment and acceptance of other forms of mobility and where citizens no longer easily reflect on their mode of choice and simply get into their cars. Full automobility can be maintained as long as there is an ability to drive" (Fisker 2011:1) Although there could be an argument as interviewee no. 3 also mentions, that if the possibility of using public transport is not there, then it will never change the culture.

Another perspective of arguing for an improvement of the public transport, is that some might see it as a potential before moving to Alslev, and simply just making the possibility of having the access a great value. In relation to this the interviewee no 3. could add

“...recently when we had our house for sale, we actually had a family from Esbjerg who wanted to buy our house. First, they were allowed to buy the house, right until the bank found out that it was in Alslev, then the bank argued they needed to have one more car. Because they could not make their everyday life stick together otherwise. The bank ended up saying 'no'. But if you have had the train stop, you can now just say, 'well we have a connection to Esbjerg', where one of them worked, and they would have had a better chance of being allowed to buy a house with only one car available.”

– Interviewee no.3, appendix 3.

Another alternative to improve the connectivity from Alslev to the relational places, is to include the virtual perspective. By doing the questionnaire it was experienced how seeing the potential in more virtual connectivity could be challenged, since nobody of the participants really answered the question given. In relation to this, culture could also have an influence in seeing the potential. One could argue that if the virtual perspective has been investigated in the same way as the potential of the train stop, some of the same underlying thoughts in the arguments discussed in the section above would be repeated. Although the virtual perspective has an increasing adoption to our everyday life, this could argue that the potential of the virtual aspect could be increasing in the future.

7. Conclusion

Based on the challenge of shrinking cities in rural Denmark, this thesis has investigated the city of Alslev as a case study. The claim is that smaller cities in rural areas are often seen from a generalizing perspective, which can make it challenging to see some of the city's potentials or rethink solutions that could lead to development. This thesis has therefore examined how the city of Alslev has performed in an cross disciplinary mobility perspective, and discussed whether this knowledge could be used for development, by working around the research question: How does the city of Alslev perform in a mobility perspective, and how can this knowledge be used to develop Alslev?

To make a development in Alslev, Varde municipality has an important role to play, by being the staging from above (Jensen, 2013).

“...it will be difficult to create long-term sustainable solutions [without the municipality eds.], as the municipality is a provider of services, planning authority, etc. and thus considerably affects many of the criteria of a viable village. As a local administrative unit, the municipalities thus have the resources and competencies to be a significant player in the implementation of rural policy and a central role in the work to develop viable villages.” (Møller et.al. 2018 :55).

It was therefore investigated how Alslev was seen in the political perspective, to study the relevance of increasing the political interest in the area. By doing this It was seen how the political interest could be larger in Alslev, than it is today. By being the seventh largest city within the municipality, with 1270 citizens and demanding the fourth largest area for new housing, it could be valuable for the municipality to revise the categorizations of Alslev, and prioritize the development of Alslev higher than it is seen today, since Alslev are one of the cities creating a noticeable movement in to the municipality. Furthermore, it could also be valuable to increase the interest in Alslev, seen in relation to the work cooperation in “Storbyregionen” by seeing Alslev as a way of connecting the two largest cities Varde and Esbjerg.

The mobilities perspective has a broad range, with different perspectives to attend. The theory was therefore used to break down what elements creates a ‘place’ such as locality, meaning, materiality, sense of place, mobility and network, and investigate these from an everyday perspective. First Alslev was seen objectively from above, noticing the structure of the city, which mainly used the old thoroughfare as the main street and ‘city center’. Where also most of the residential areas was connected to by road access. With more residential areas coming, the area will no longer extend around the existing ‘main street’ but rather turn the transverse road ‘Forum vej’ into a ‘main street’. It could therefore be relevant to rethink the position of this road, to ensure a visible main street as a gathering place.

Alslev has had a good success in attracting families with kids, which forms a good basis to sustain the continued development. With precaution in the citizen group representing the data in the questionnaire, it was found that the social relations, local functions, and distance to the nearby larger cities was some of the central potentials in the ontology of Alslev. By further studying the given answers in the different categories and comparing this to the statistical data and theory different areas of potential was seen.

The kids seemed to be a central actor in many contexts. Both when looking at the social relations, local functions, demographic and reputations of the city. It was found out some of the most valuable activities to live closest by was also concerning the kids. In relation to this, the youngest part of the citizens also represents one of the groups which particularly is limited in participating in activities outside the city. It could therefore be valuable to the city, to invest in activities concerning the youngest citizens. Examples could be public playgrounds, public areas, leisure activities or an investment in the local school and daycare. The social relations were furthermore the most given reason for moving to Alslev. Creating good relations to the city is therefore important influencing the next generation.

One of the most central outputs by adding the mobility perspective to Alslev, was to embrace the understanding of seeing Alslev as relational. Where specially the two largest cities in the area, Varde and Esbjerg was a central focus. This thesis would argue that the relations is what makes Alslev a viable city. The relations were therefore investigated to find out to what purposes they were used, and study the place between the destinations, by looking at the mode of transportation. The accessibility to both Esbjerg and Varde seemed equally important to the citizens, the two cities where therefore offset against each other. By focusing on the everyday perspective, the proximity, and functions in Varde seemed to have a greater value for the citizens than focusing on the accessibility to Esbjerg which main purpose was jobs. However, the relation to Esbjerg must not be underestimated, as it seems to have a great value of attraction due to its proximity.

By investigating the modes of transportation, not surprisingly the car was dominating. However, potentials in alternatives modes of transportation were seen, e.g. the existing bicycling path to Varde which could appear more attractive with light, or a rebrand of some of the existing offers such as Flex taxa. In relation to this a propose from the civic association has been made, regarding connecting Alslev to the nearby train route, by making a stop in the intersection nearest Alslev. To see this solution as an alternative to the car has been discussed in a cultural perspective. The results indicated the train stop probably would not be experienced as an alternative to the car for the citizens. But it could cause a value of attracting new citizens, and in the perspective of promoting a mental mobility of the mindset of a 'car driving city' to a more sustainable development in the area, and as a way of embracing the group of non-car users in Alslev.

To further developing Alslev it is relevant to look at the challenges included in the dependence of being a relational place. Besides leading to an inequality between the car and non-car users, it was also argued how the use of other cities could challenge the possibility of creating activities such as retails within the city, which also works a unattractive to those without a car. “humans need to pay much more attention to the kind of extensions that are created, not only for those that may easily use them, but also for others for whom these extensions are ill suited” (Hall 1966, cited in Fisker 2011:2).

8. Reflections

Current project has been working around the challenge of shrinking cities in the rural Denmark. The issue is very complex, and choices has therefore been made in order to scope the project. The aim of this chapter is to reflect upon the choices made during the process and to illuminate alternatives which also is working towards the research area.

- Early in the process it became clear that the physical connections to Esbjerg and Varde were important relations to Alslev, and potentials regarding this relation has been discussed. Being so focused on the two cities, could limit the potentials of alternative relations, which could bring something else to the development of Alslev. It was found out that Varde and Esbjerg were collaborating in creating a “Storbyregion” where one of the areas of focus was to strengthen the areas physical connections. In the area between the two cities several other smaller cities, mainly consisting of residential areas, is placed. Some of the largest is ‘Hjerting’ or ‘Guldager’ both placed in Esbjerg municipality. Both cities are way larger than Alslev and contains a larger selection of local services. An argument could be that instead of focusing on the relation directly to Esbjerg, it could be valuable to cultivate the local cities on the way to Esbjerg and thereby strengthen the local community between Esbjerg and Varde.
- Another area of focus has been the scope of studying Alslev from an everyday perspective. This perspective has also been chosen by the municipality when developing rural areas. Alslev is mainly consisting of a residential area, and the main activity in the city is provided by the citizens and their everyday life. Another way of approaching the city could be from a tourist perspective. The city already contains some paths system for wandering and bicyclists (Alslev.dk). A further extension e.g. visualize the path or creating a reason to make a stop, simply to use the bathroom or grab something to eat, or a ‘reward’ for finishing the path could be used to make more people visiting the city of Alslev, and thereby create some attraction to the area.
- For this thesis ‘development’ has mainly been use in a context of attracting new citizens. Since the existing of many rural areas highly depend on the capability of attracting newcomers. However other aspects of ‘development’ can also be illuminated e.g. developing the existing nature and biodiversity, beautify the urban areas, lower the emission of transport by doing a biking campaign etc.
- The findings made is highly based on the answers from the citizens participating in the questionnaire and the three interviews. It could have been interesting to include other

methods to extend the knowledge of the citizens since they are essential for seeking potentials for development. Other methods of interest could be tracking to map out the areas used within and outside of the city, as a further way of scoping the focus and use the results to analyze what makes these areas attractive to the citizens. Another method could be group interviews, since new ideas and potentials could arise if the citizens could be able to also take and give in inputs from others.

- Another method which had been relevant for this project to apply, was to include and expert interview from the municipality, since they represent a great importance of ensuring development in Alslev. Due to time it has not been possible to include an interview from the municipality. Although this thesis in the process has had a close contact with the municipality and the results will be further discussed.
- By reflecting on potential solutions, it could be worth to include the development of the society. By doing this thesis a virtual perspective did not seem attractive to the citizens, although it could be argued that virtual solutions will not be so foreign when looking at the future generations.

9. Future directions

This chapter aims to discuss the future directions for the study done by this thesis.

The thesis has been prepared based on Varde municipality's challenges of shrinking cities and declining population. Alslev is a city that may have experienced a limitation in its development due to the politically presented potentials and selected prioritization in the many smaller cities in the area. The intention of the outcome has been to find and open up new perspectives of defining Alslev and look at its potentials and challenges. A central direction for this thesis is then to be presented for the municipality as one of the central actors to this topic, to add a very important political and professional planning perspective. To bring in the municipality's perspective it could be interesting to investigate how they see the challenges of Alslev, and discuss from their perspective, what for them could be done in Alslev and compare it to the findings done in this thesis.

Furthermore, it could be interesting to see if some methods applied or theoretical contribution could be added in their future work in terms of settlement or general planning. Although there is an economic perspective to take into account when turning this into practice by investing in the resources for doing a study like this which has now been done in Alslev.

The other central actor in this thesis has been the citizens of Alslev. The outcome of this study is therefore also relevant for them in order to open their perspective of seeing their city. Since the citizens in this thesis have been represented by 16 participants, it could be relevant to further investigate the citizens' reaction to the final thesis. For them, this knowledge could be relevant in order to consider whenever the train stop should be their main focus in developing their city. In relation to this the development plan of the city will soon have to be revised, and the knowledge could therefore also be relevant for them in order to develop new projects upon which, from the citizens engagement will guide the future of their city.

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