# The power of planners in municipal rural planning

*A case study of planners' acting space in strategic planning for villages*

MASTER'S THESIS
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# Preface

This thesis is made by two master students in Urban Planning and Management from Aalborg University. This is the final desertion of the master program, and devised in the period of February 2021 to June 2021.

First of all, we would like to thank our supervisor, Rasmus Nedergård Steffansen for thorough, competent and helpful supervision. Further, we would also like to thank all the planners who participated in out interviews, which provided this thesis with important and valuable insight in the danish planning practice anno 2021:

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- Peter Sepstrup, planner in Vejle municipality
- Søren Nellemann, planner in Vejle municipality
- Helen Carter, planner in Norddjurs municipality
- Kisa Lindgaard, team leader in Norddjurs municipality

All of the interviews has been conducted in danish and can be found attached as a sound-file. English translation of the key points and quotes will occur throughout the analysis.

References will follow the Harvard method, meaning that they appear with [Surname, year] throughout the thesis, and are listed alphabetically in the bibliography by the end of the thesis. Different sources with same author and year will additionally appear with a letter differentiating them. Sources with no reference year will a appear with 'n.d.' for *no date*.

Figures and tables will be numerated in relation to the chapter and the order in which they are presented in the given chapter.

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Clara Dybdal                              Emilie Mignon

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# Abstract

Shrinking villages are getting increasingly more attention in planning, as one of the major challenges in planning today is the growing demographic changes, which is creating a distortion between the rural and the urban. Denmark is no exception to these changes, and in 2019, a new addition was integrated into the Danish Planning Act requiring all municipalities to start planning strategically for the development of villages and rural districts as a part of their municipal planning. To help the municipalities, a method was suggested by the association Realdania, with a focus on quantitative mapping and measuring civil strength through extensive and continuous involvement, though with a lack of guidance on more specifically how to do it. There are many arguments for doing participation in planning processes, but deciding on the right process for the specific situation is difficult because it revolves around people and their preferences, relations, actions and social reality. The planners' choice of involvement in the process of strategic planning for villages is investigated in this thesis in the light of the possible field of actions the planner is equipped with, with the aim of answering the following research question: *How does the acting space of the planner lead to different barriers when involving the local communities in the strategic planning process of a village?*

The problem is approached from the point of critical realism through a comparative case study of five planners in five different municipalities who have been working on their strategies for the development of villages. The main theory will be Grange's theory of acting space. The planner's acting space consists of three elements: authority, ability and identity, and these elements will form the basic elements in the analytical framework for the case study. Further, Kühn's theory on dealing with conflict in planning processes will be used to understand the approach the planners take to the planning process and their own role in it to contextualise their acting space. Through the analysis, it is clear that the five planners have chosen quite different approaches to working with the new legislation with varying efforts towards meeting the new demands and different choices for involvement throughout the process. The planners face different barriers in their authority and ability mainly through the political and financial situation of their municipality, but these barriers mostly restrict the product, not the planners' choice of involvement. The findings point towards the planners' identity being determining for their choice of involvement, as there is a very clear link between the planners' motivation and identity and the planners choice of process and involvement. What seems to determined their choice of involvement is not the methods of Realdania, but a mix of the planners' own identity and the available resources. The planners mainly facilitate the involvement from the point of their own identity and motivation, but the available resources is considered when choosing the type and amount of involvement.

# Contents

# Introduction 1

Shrinkage is getting increasingly more attention in planning, as its current state is unsustainable and calls for a rethinking of how villages should develop towards a viable future (UN-Habitat, 2008; Rieniets, 2009; Raugze et al., 2017; Hospers and Reverda, 2019; Coppola, 2019). The reasons for the occurrence of shrinkage are multifaceted and happens on a global plan as a result of urbanisation and neoliberal politics, which challenges the existence of many villages (UN-Habitat, 2008). Shrinkage is not a new phenomenon but is the other side of urbanisation. Migration to the cities started with the industrial age creating jobs, mostly in the urban areas, and this movement has seemingly not stopped since. This has led to the so-called urban millennium we are in today, where more than 50 % of the world's population lives in the cities.

> "*Because industrialisation has triggered an accelerated expansion of cities, which has exceeded all our historical experience, we have almost forgotten about the opposite side of urbanization*" (Rieniets, 2009)

Shrinkage is largely seen as a failure and an indicator of bad life quality since people move away, which challenges the change of this development. This is somewhat true since most cities shrink due to a lack of those services and jobs which are in demand, and planning strategies for shrinking villages mainly focus on sustaining the population, without an actual consideration of why they are leaving (UN-Habitat, 2008). Urban planners have tried to control, plan and affect this urban growth, but shrinkage has not received as much attention as urbanisation by planners and politicians (Rieniets, 2009). A current theme in planning is to plan smartly for growth to accommodate the increased need for housing more residents in especially the cities, whereas there is less focus on how to plan smartly for the contraction which is inevitably happening in the rural villages, despite an overall growth in population. (UN-Habitat, 2008) Planning for contraction is still a quite new task for planners and is affected by a continuous political focus on growth. However, the EU have in their publication from Raugze et al. (2017) put a focus on the problem, and studies are starting to address the question of the 'right' size of a village and how to actually manage the decline in the villages (Coppola, 2019; Hospers and Reverda, 2019). For planners dealing with the development in the villages, this means that they are working towards a new way of thinking in planning in a political setting that is still mainly growth-oriented.

This thesis aims for a deeper understanding and knowledge of the planner's role in this development and how it is dealt with by municipal planners in a Danish planning context. Therefore, the following chapter will first clarify the need for increased attention to shrinkage and the current situation of approaching the problem in Denmark. From here, this research aims to investigate the planner's power and barriers when involving the local communities in planning for villages. The thesis is structured with first an explanation of the design of the research, which will be shaped as a case study, and its methodology.

This is followed by a presentation of the theory of acting space by Grange (2012) and the theory of the planner's handling of conflict by Kühn (2020), which will form a frame for the analysis. This will lead to an analysis of five municipal planners and their barriers in involving the local communities in the planning process. This will be followed by a discussion of the findings, and lastly, a conclusion.

# Strategical planning for villages  2

*This chapter will present the current work with shrinkage in Denmark and how it is being addressed through new legislation for strategical planning for villages. The chapter will look into the proposed approach to deal with this new requirements and dive into the challenge of involvement being idealised, yet not prioritised in practice as a result of the often limited acting space of planners.*

## 2.1  Growing understanding of shrinkage

One of the major challenges in planning today is the increasing demographic changes, which is creating a distortion between the rural and the urban. This imbalance is problematic because many rural districts now struggle with unwanted shrinkage and population decay which challenge the villages' viability (Raugze et al., 2017; Udvalget for levedygtige landsbyer, 2018b). Meanwhile, urban districts experience growth in both population, businesses, and industries. This growth affects the price of living in the city, which has its backlashes such as urban sprawl and increased gentrification (Sager, 2011; Zhang, 2016). This unequal development is unsustainable and can partially be explained through the political focus on growth, which has dominated strategical spatial planning through the last decades.

The growth-oriented mindset has its origin in neoliberal policies, which has become a dominant policy paradigm in many countries around the world since the 1970s (Allmendinger, 2017). The neoliberal paradigm started out as what is called the roll-back neoliberalism with the wish of a minimised state that would not interfere with the market unless necessary. Throughout the '80s and '90s, a change in focus led to the roll-out of the state, viewing the state as an important actor in overcoming market-failures with an active role in the market through large investments such as urban and infrastructural projects (Olesen, 2014; Allmendinger, 2017). These projects were often placed close to larger cities or near highways in order to supply easy access and high availability of an educated workforce. What slowly but surely happened, was an outsourcing of jobs and services in the rural districts at the same time as one of the main industries in these areas, agriculture, restructured and became more efficient, requiring fewer hands for the same work (Udvalget for levedygtige landsbyer, 2018b; Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016). Especially the young and well-educated workforce migrated to the larger cities together with the jobs, leaving the villages with an ageing population (Raugze et al., 2017).

Denmark has been no exception to this neoliberal turn and demographic inequality. The peripheral regions here has been called "the rotten banana"(Brodersen et al., 2011), referring to the large part of Denmark mainly containing smaller villages and towns and thereby separating them from the larger urban cities. Figure 2.1 on page 4 shows how the growth in population of the municipalities in Denmark is mostly centred around the four largest cities, whereas large parts of especially the northern, western and southern municipalities verge on decline in population shaping the so-called "Outer Denmark" (Olesen and Carter, 2018). But the movement does not only happen on a national scale.

It also happens on a regional and municipal level in Denmark, where there is a movement within the municipalities from the smaller villages to the local towns and main cities of the region (Institut for Fremtidsforskning, 2018). This double urbanism is e.g. formed by people who moved to the larger cities for education and now move back to start family, but they do often not move back to their hometown, but to a larger town nearby (Andersen and Nørgaard, 2018).
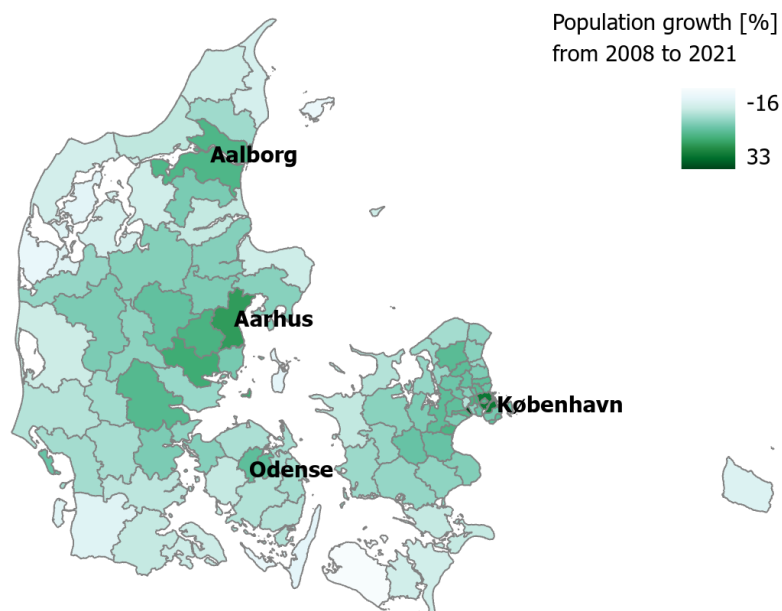


**Figure 2.1.** Population growth in Denmark, divided into municipalities. Own figure.

What can generally be detected up through the 2000s, is a normalisation of neoliberalism in the planning practice. Further, competitiveness and economic growth seem to be expected in spatial development projects (Olesen, 2014). Examples of how neoliberal politics has set its mark in the planning are highlighted by Sager (2011), where he amongst other examples points to the planning for attracting the creative class, public-private partnerships, city marketing and competitive bidding. This marketing-minded development is a challenge when working with shrinkage, because growth is not the answer for all shrinking villages and towns. The aim for growth in the traditional way, where it is viewed as a linear process, is changing. Rather, it is to be approached with a more circular view, where the planning focus is to manage the transition and cope with decline in a sustainable way (Raugze et al., 2017). A part of this change is a switch in the political approach which mainly have been to subsidise the agricultural sector, and see farmers as the key actors. In 2006 OCED presented the new rural paradigm, which presents a shift in the political approach to focus on the places individually instead of only focusing on the agriculture. This opens op for a broader set of actors, especially local stakeholders and a focus on other sectors such as tourism. The paradigm shift also contains a change in focus on investments rather than subsidies (OECD, 2006). Therefore, the first step towards working with the issue of shrinkage is to accept that it will need a different political agenda than the one that has led the development so far. Changing the understanding of how to plan for shrinkage demands a conceptual change of view. A place to start is to reassess the common use

of depopulation as the primary indicator, and instead see it as a "symptom of shrinkage" (Raugze et al., 2017):

> "a declining population results in a growing mismatch between the supply and demand of services, creating difficulties for both the public and private sectors. As a result of weak local markets, services become underutilised, poorly maintained and often become unviable and have to be withdrawn. Local living conditions and quality of life deteriorate, unemployment rises and skilled labour becomes scarce, causing the emergence of abandonment and obsolescence."
> (Raugze et al., 2017, p. 6)

So, rather than seeing shrinkage as a process of declining population, it is the symptom of a village that does not meet the demands for maintaining its viability. These demands are for instance the need for proper housing, access to jobs and primary education as well as basic services such as health care. Outsourcing of services and jobs and lack of investments and maintenance are all factors that contribute to the downward spiral of a shrinking city. (Hospers and Reverda, 2019) According to Raugze et al. (2017), the phenomenon of shrinkage does not have a commonly agreed definition. The issue of shrinkage is complex, and cannot be explained simply by growth and decline, but also by the innovation capacity. Villages tend to have more small and medium-sized enterprises, but when the skills and talents move away, these businesses have tougher conditions.

Shrinkage is also tied up to economic struggle: "*Shrinkage places substantial pressure on public budgets, which are simultaneously burdened with reduced fiscal income, rising costs and higher social expenditure.*", which emphasises the need for changing the traditional growth-minded politics with the agenda of how to cope with shrinkage (Raugze et al., 2017). Further, societal changes such as the change in family structures and sizes also counts as a factor of shrinkage. Shrinking household sizes are accountable for a lot of the declining population in shrinking cities, and this change in society must also be taken into account, especially when discussing the future of villages in rural districts. Hartt and Hackworth (2020) further emphasises that the goal of planning for shrinking villages cannot be to restore a nostalgic vision of idyllic farmland and to restore the villages in quantity. Rather, it is to focus on the quality of the village and to support it in transition to a more viable state (Hartt and Hackworth, 2020).

The danish urban planning institution, *Dansk Byplanlaboratorium*, has made a scenario study of how to deal with this transition with four scenarios of different scales of controlled shrinkage for villages (Øhlenschlæger et al., 2014). From this study they argue for a need to do more than just a few incremental steps, such as tearing down ghost houses, to make the village appear more attractive. If the village should shrink towards higher quality, it requires long-term planning and strategies with a realistic view of the village's potentials and challenges. So, instead of just focusing on fixing what is, such as getting new tenants in the empty houses and shops, planning should help with what could be, through a focus on utilising the strengths that the village possess. This might very well not be to revive the old town centre in a traditional way, but to make room for innovation and place based qualities (Øhlenschlæger et al., 2014). This is an approach some rural districts are already using today to turn the development around. This has been the case in Thisted, where the municipality made the strategic project "Good life by the sea" in an attempt to re-

sprout the village life by focusing on the local qualities in a time of school closing and depopulation. The project was a great success and today a very used example of how focus on the quality of a place (good life by the sea) instead of function (a village with a school) can be used to turn the development around (Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016).

## 2.2   Shifting the political agenda

The focus on place-based and local development was supported by the EU in 2014. The European commission encouraged a focus on community-led local development in order to work with area-based strategies (Sisto et al., 2018). In 2016 the danish government also made this a political focus with the agreement "*Denmark in better balance – better frames for municipalities, citizens and companies in the whole country*" (Liv og Land, 2018, own translation) addressing the issues of centralisation. The purpose of the initiative was to make up with the trend of growth and development centring around the larger cities, with the ambition of development in all of the country (Erhvervsministeriet, 2016). In this policy a focus was given to the rural districts with two specific outcomes: the appointment of the *Committee for Viable Villages* (Udvalget for levedygtige landsbyer), and the minister of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs pointing out a need for a modernisation of the Planning Act aiming for a desirable development in all of the country – also in the rural districts (Liv og Land, 2018).

The committee concluded their work in 2018 with a reporting to the government and an additional paper elaborating on the background of their findings. As a basis for their work, they have developed following definition of a viable village:

> "*The committee considers a village to be viable if it alone or as a result of its interplay with other villages or towns can offer the inhabitants modern housing of variating forms, social cohesion, proximity to public and private service, sports- and leisure activities, and traffic and digital infrastructure to an extent that will not be a barrier for the village to attract and sustain new inhabitants.*"
> (Udvalget for levedygtige landsbyer, 2018a, p. 7, own translation)

Using this definition, the viability of a village is assessed by factors of attractiveness that can to some degree be measured, and not by its change in population or move patterns. This matches the points of Hartt and Hackworth (2020) that the goal in planning for shrinking villages should not be to restore them in quantity but focus on the qualities of them. There is, therefore, no simple assessment of a viable village, as it depends on a long list of factors and elements that need to be considered to determine its attractiveness. Each village must be assessed individually based on their qualities and subjective challenges. To concentrate the focus of challenges the villages face, the committee define villages to be up to 1000 inhabitants, which covers around 20% of the danish population to live in villages. (Udvalget for levedygtige landsbyer, 2018a) This is broken down into the four criteria, the committee has set for viable villages:

- "*An attractive immediate environment with up-to-date housing, an adjusted building stock and access to landscape and nature,*
- *Proximity to public and private service,*

- *Good employment opportunities and possibilities for establishing companies, and*
- *Social and cultural cohesion"* (Udvalget for levedygtige landsbyer, 2018a, p. 19)

A vision is presented for the rural districts of Denmark in 2030 being rich with villages around the country, which are viable and set the framework for active and substantial lives for people of all ages. But at the same time, they also acknowledge the need to be realistic and accept, that not all villages will endure in their existing form but might contain less housing and instead be enriched by natural values. A set of 17 recommendations were developed to help municipalities meet these criteria and for the government to make municipalities obligated to do strategical planning for the villages and rural districts by integrating it into the Planning Act. Recommendations were to base this on an assessment of each village and it's conditions, challenges and possibilities (Erhvervsministeriet, 2018), much like the points Byplanlab presented as necessary to increase the quality of the shrinking villages. (Øhlenschlæger et al., 2014)

These strategic recommendations became the stepping-stone for the modernisation of the Planning Act, which became effective in 2019. Based on these, the following was added to the Planning Act:

> *§ 5 c. The municipal planning must contain a strategical planning that coherently considers possibilities for development of villages with regards to local conditions,*
> *§ 5 d. The municipal planning for villages must*
>
> 1. *Support development of viable communities in villages*
> 2. *Promote a differentiated and targeted development of villages, and*
> 3. *State overall aims and means for the development of villages*

(Erhvervsministeriet, 2020, own translation)

By these new additions, it has become a requirement for all municipalities to plan strategically for the development of villages and rural districts as a part of their municipal planning. This planning must be both differentiated to target the different challenges and possibilities in different communities and specify means to achieve them.

To understand what this new addition means for planning, it is important to know what is meant by strategical planning. The concept of a strategy have historically moved from being a tool used by the military, to up through the mid 1900's being adopted by the private sector to build framework for growth and management of development. After the economic crisis in the 70's strategies made their way into planning to control the uncertainty of rapid urbanisation. As of today, strategies addresses both a physical challenge of controlling development as well as a social aspects. The growing focus on participation has led to strategies with increasingly more concerned with the process and less on the physical output. (Albrechts, 2004; Sartorio, 2004; Albrechts, 2012; Mäntysalo et al., 2015). This change in purpose of the strategies from being a tool to achieve goals to also being a tool for the process, is described by Sehested (2009) as being two categories of strategies: analytical and learning strategies. An analytical strategy focus on rationality and setting goals and guidelines. Learning strategies focus on e.g. collaboration, inclusiveness and a pluralistic understanding and facilitate a learning process. (Sehested, 2009). Depending on

the type of planner given the task of forming this strategy, the outcome and purpose may vary. The addition to the Planning Act comprise both an element of being an analytical strategy, such as "*State overall aims and means for the development of villages*", but also of being a leaning process such as "*Support development of viable communities in villages*". (Erhvervsministeriet, 2020). This makes the strategy possibly quite extensive, and with a lot of freedom to fulfill these new requirements.

## 2.3   The Realdania Method

The task of planning strategically for differentiated and targeted development of villages and rural districts is a comprehensive task for municipalities, but it comes with a freedom of method to do it. That makes it possible for municipalities to choose their own approach to solve the task that fits with their existing planning. However, outer region municipalities with few resources can also find this a challenge as they have to invent a process themselves. To help make the task easier, the association Realdania developed a guide suggesting a method that municipalities could use for the work with guidelines and steps to follow. This method was developed in corporation with three danish municipalities and published in may 2020 (Realdania, 2020b). It is also developed in parallel with an official guide from the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs, presenting an overview and inspiration for working with strategical planning (The guide from the ministry is during this project in hearing, with an expected publication in may 2021) (Bolig- og planstyrelsen, 2021). The method from Realdania is, therefore, given an official status as the suggested place to seek inspiration for working with strategical planning for villages. The guide is currently the only thorough approach published for municipalities to follow in their strategical planning for villages. As the suggested method by the ministry, it can be expected that the method of Realdania will be the starting point for many planners with the task of developing the strategy.

In the publication strategical planning for villages and rural districts is understood as: *"a long-term and holistic planning, where the municipality establish realistic and differentiated aims, sub-aims and means for the villages with a take-off in the involvement of the civil society and a data- and knowledge-based analysis of each village's possibilities, challenges and resources."* (Realdania, 2020b, p. 12, own translation)

The method consists of 5 steps:

1. Mapping of geographic and demographic conditions,
2. Mapping of the strength of the civil society,
3. Grouping the villages – a combined analysis of the mappings,
4. Identifying aims, partial aims and means, and
5. Involvement of civil society

Going through the guide, the quantitative element generally seems to be a main focus. The quantitative analysis of step 1 is based on a list of measurable, quantitative factors (Realdania, 2020b) and the guide for this is thoroughly described and takes up twice as many pages than the guide for the qualitative analysis.

The purpose of the qualitative analysis of step 2 is to get an understanding of the strengths of each village and their own potential to contribute to the future development. This can

help the municipality to understand how the community can take part in and contribute to the development and thereby what kind of collaboration can be organised (Realdania, 2020b). It covers the social capital of the village, the empowerment of the villagers, their social cohesion, and relations within the neighbourhood. The social and cultural strength is decisive for the will to be involved and volunteer in the local community (Udvalget for levedygtige landsbyer, 2018a; Realdania, 2020b). Opposite the quantitative step, the guide is less thorough here. The quantitative element is so thoroughly described, probably because it is the easiest to just replicate directly from context to context. Thus, reading through the guide, this make the quantitative data seem like the most important element, especially as supplementary ways to understand the local community are barely mentioned, just as a few remarks in the beginning and the end of describing the step.

By the end of the guide, the last step suggests involvement of the local communities throughout the whole process and presents a selection of ways to do it. It stresses the importance of this involvement to ensure that the local community can take ownership of the development. (Realdania, 2020b) But even so, this section is not integrated in the steps, but instead summed up in the end, and there are only made few references throughout the first steps to include involvement processes in them, which makes it less obvious for the user of the guide to remember it throughout the process. This is due to the need to differentiate the involvement depending on the civil society in the village. (Realdania, 2020b)

## 2.4   Involvement of the civil society

Arguments for doing participation in planning processes are many in the academic discussion: it qualifies the decision-making process, contributes local knowledge to the process, increases democracy, can create a stronger sense of ownership and commitment to the project in the local community and mobilise local voluntary resources. (Agger and Hoffmann, 2008; Arnstein, 1969; Forester, 1982; Wilson and Tewdwr-Jones, 2019) But just as participation can contribute with many positive elements to the process, the wrong choice of participation can lead to lacking support in the local community or even resistance where the local community tries to prevent a project from happening. According to Agger and Hoffmann (2008), participatory processes gone wrong are often due to misunderstandings, when it is not clarified what each part understands by participation and what kind of process is expected. Different perspectives on the format of the process, the influence or the purpose of the participation can lead to barriers for the process and cause conflicts between the involved and the planner (Kotus and Sowada, 2016; Agger and Hoffmann, 2008).

According to the Realdania guide, the strength of a civil society is decisive for their capacity of taking part in the process of making the strategy and implementing it. Therefore, they present different types of involvement depending on the type of society and different roles the local communities and the municipality play in this. (Realdania, 2020b) The different types of involvement are inspired by Arnstein's Ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969), and looking through their categorisations it is obvious, that the higher the strength of a civil society is, the higher rungs of the ladder should be used for the participation process.

Even though Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of participation is more than 50 years old, it is still a very used work, or at least elements of it, on participation. It forms the groundwork for many academic discussions on public participation today, but the ladder is also criticised by many for lacking nuances. A particularly discussed point is the assumption that citizen control should always be praised as the goal or desired way, and thus the higher up the ladder, the better the participation process. (Kotus and Sowada, 2016; Collins and Ison, 2009) Other points of criticism comprise the assumption that a shift in power is the only factor influencing a change in the role of participants, and the lack of considering other factors of the context. (Kotus and Sowada, 2016; Collins and Ison, 2009; Hurlbert and Gupta, 2015)

There are clearly some lacks in this model, but Kotus and Sowada (2016) still argue, that it is useful for discussing participation, because involvement of stakeholders and public participation is still a difficult matter, both in theory and practice. Participation is globally a universal phenomenon, and it is an ongoing dilemma for planners around the world to decide whether to involve the local community in planning processes and to what extent. (Lane, 2005; Kotus and Sowada, 2016) And probably for that reason it is also a very popular subject to study. There is a lot of literature on different methods for doing participation processes, but Hurlbert and Gupta (2015) argue that there is a lack of sufficient literature on how to decide on when to do participation and what level of or type of participation is appropriate in a specific context: *"Deciding on when and at what level participation is appropriate in which context is an inadequately developed puzzle"* (Hurlbert and Gupta, 2015, p. 101) Several authors have taken up the points of criticism of Arnstein's ladder and point to additional factors to consider in deciding on appropriate involvement methods, such as type and scale of the problem, trust, attitude of planners and citizens towards the project and each other, or the desired outcome (Kotus and Sowada, 2016; Hurlbert and Gupta, 2015; Collins and Ison, 2009). But no universal model covers it all, and with all these factors the decision-making becomes even more complicated when both social aspects as well as processual context is to be taken into account. And when adding the risk of misunderstandings and a process filled with conflicts over interests or intentions many planners avoid or minimise their involvement of local communities (Vigar et al., 2017).

Participation is a difficult concept to work with, theoretically as well as in practice. Finding the right process is difficult, because it revolves around people and their preferences, relations, actions and social reality. (Realdania, 2020b; Agger and Hoffmann, 2008) Realdania (2020b) has prioritised the social aspect to let the process depend on the civil societies' strengths. The challenge of Realdanias approach is that this focus on the strength of a civil society is used as a measure of later involvement, and is determined through a mapping, where involvement of the villages is dependable on the planners choice. This open choice of participation has a great influence on the later work with the strategy. Therefore, the approach the planner takes on participation can be crucial for the process and the outcome, as the guide still requires a lot of reflection and decision-making by the planner to shape the process. This is especially relevant when dealing with the local communities, understanding their needs, challenges, wishes, and capacity to take part in the shaping of the strategy as well as implementing it. Realdania's guide for continuous involvement has a significant lack of specific methods. This leaves the planner with little

guidance on participation in the planning processes, despite Realdania highlighting the involvement of civil society as an important part of the process.

The lack of knowledge on appropriate participatory methods and the potential need for dealing with conflicts can cause the planner to minimise the participation (Vigar et al., 2017). This lack makes it difficult for the planner to raise the participation to a higher level than their general practice, where purposeful participation is often criticised for missing (Wilson and Tewdwr-Jones, 2019). This mismatch between expectations and tools leaves a gap for the planner to fill out by themselves. Their choice of actions both depends on how the planner approaches the strategical planning process, how they perceive their own role in it, but also on the barriers the planner's face. Barriers can occur in different parts of the process and shapes the "acting space" of the planner. This paper will investigate which barriers the planner faces with a focus on how they affect the involvement of the local communities and the planning process. This will be done with the planner's acting space in focus and how the planner's perception of their own role shape the planning process.

## 2.5   Research question

With the new law requiring strategical planning for villages in 2019, the majority of Danish municipalities are either in the midst of or just finished forming their strategies. The only formalised approach published so far is the one presented by Realdania. However, there seems to be quite a gap between Realdania's vision for how much citizen involvement the planner should facilitate in the process, and how much help and attention the guide provides. This mismatch between expectations and tools leaves a gap for the planner to fill out by themselves. This paper will investigate how planners choose to approach the strategical planning process in regards to their acting space, and which barriers they face in involving the local community. The purpose of this is to understand how the planners handle these barriers and how this affects the process. This has led to the following research question:

**Research question:**

*How does the acting space of the planner lead to different barriers when involving the local communities in the strategic planning process of a village?*

This will be investigated through the following sub-questions:

1. How have the planners involved the local community in the strategic planning process?
2. Which barriers have the planners faced in this planning process as a result of their acting space?
3. How have the acting space of the planners affected the involvement of local communities in the planning process?

# Research design 3

*This chapter will present the way the research will be approached with a presentation of the selected theory of science and the methodology used to answer the research question and the three sub-questions.*

## 3.1 Approach to problem

The aim of this research is to understand which barriers planners face when planning strategically for villages and how this affects the involvement of the local communities throughout the process. This will be done by investigating the approach the planners have taken to the planning process and to involvement, and how their acting space have caused the planners to face barriers throughout the process. Barriers will in this context be defined as obstacles for the planner to act the way it was intended or planned. Therefore, barriers and the origin of them will be investigated through the limits to the acting space of the planner. Thus, the research will investigate, first, how the planner wants to approach the planning process and involvement of the local communities, and then, how the acting space of the planners shape or affect the way it is done.

To understand the acting space of the planners and to uncover what have led to barriers occurring in the planning processes, the study will be taking a critical realist approach to understand the mechanisms that have triggered them to occur.

### 3.1.1 Critical realism

Critical realism is a scientific theory with the basic ontological understanding that the world exists independently of our knowledge of it (Archer et al., 2016). There are aspects of the world we know about and aspects we still have no knowledge of, but they still exist. Therefore, the world does not change just because we learn something new about it, we have just expanded our own understanding of it. (Archer et al., 2016; Juul and Pedersen, 2012) Critical realists distinguish between two dimensions of reality: the *transitive dimension*, which makes up our knowledge and understanding of the world through theories, concepts, descriptions etc.; and the *intransitive dimension* consisting of the objects and elements of reality which the scientific research aims to understand (Juul and Pedersen, 2012; Fuglsang and Olsen, 2009). This intransitive dimension also consists of invisible entities as structures, mechanisms, and power (Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2017). It is this intransitive dimension and the objects, structures and mechanisms that are still unknown, which the critical realist research aims to study and understand.

The intransitive dimension refers to the physical reality of the world, which is divided into three distinct domains:

1. **The empirical domain** consisting of our experiences and observations,
2. **The actual domain** consisting of all phenomena and occurrences, whether they are experienced or not, and

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3. **The real domain** consisting of all the underlying non-observable structures and mechanisms, which can cause or affect what happens in the actual domain, but not be observed directly (Juul and Pedersen, 2012; Fuglsang and Olsen, 2009).

When a phenomenon occurs in the actual domain it is caused by hidden mechanisms in the real domain. This division into three domains helps to form a basis for understanding a phenomenon in regards to *what* happens through a given experience and *why* it happens through understanding the underlying structures and mechanisms. Critical realism seeks to understand the world by uncovering the mechanisms and structures in the real domain to explain the phenomena experienced in the empirical and actual domain. As the real domain is non-observable, it is studied through changes in the actual domain as the explanations behind the phenomena observed (Archer et al., 2016; Juul and Pedersen, 2012).

A key understanding in critical realism is that the world consists of entities which makes a difference in some way. They can be material objects, immaterial concepts or both. An immaterial entity can be real and make a difference in the real world even though it does not physically exist, if it exists ideationally in our minds and affect the way we act (Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2017). Entities have *causal power* which make them capable of functioning and reacting in in certain ways (Juul and Pedersen, 2012). When an entity interacts with another this causal power might cause a change to occur. The change is dependent on the entity's relation and interaction with other entities, and the power will only be triggered by certain interactions and they might trigger differently in different relations (Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2017). This is what critical realism explains as mechanisms triggering a change to occur. This power is, of course, not possible to confirm empirically, as it is invisible. Critical realists therefore use empirical studies to find partial regularities or occurrences that can be used to understand the non-observable structures and mechanisms that have caused the empirical findings. The world is full of entities and power relations affecting each other. When entities exercise their possessed power, it might not turn out to be actualised. This can be due to other mechanisms counteracting the exercised power and causing a different outcome to occur. Therefore, the mechanisms can be difficult to study and cannot be described fully through theories.

In this research the invisible object or structure of investigation is the acting space of planners and the way this acting space affects the planning process. This acting space is a non-observable structure, and therefore, it must be studied through occurrences that can be observed through the actual domain by investigating the actions the planners have taken in the planning processes and the reasons for these actions. When viewing barriers faced by the planner as obstacles for the planner to act as intended, these barriers are experiences indicating a limit to the acting space of the planners that can occur in the real domain as well as in the actual. These barriers are triggered by mechanisms in the intransitive dimension which are made observable through the experiences of the planners. Not all barriers will be non-observable structures, but they can also be experiences in the actual domain. Acting space concerns both what the planner is actually able to do and what the planner experiences that he can do, as it will be explained in chapter 4. Therefore, the barriers experienced by the planner can be actual limits to what the planner is able to do but also be entities that exist only in the mind of the planner as a perceived barrier. The need to study the acting space empirically to understand how it triggers barriers to cause

certain actions by the planner, provides a need to investigate it through planners provided with this task of planning strategically for villages. This will allow us to understand their first-hand experiences to uncover their acting space and the barriers the planners face in the real domain.

### 3.1.2   Case study

The study will take shape as a case study, to be able to investigate this hidden structure that is the acting space of the planner.  The case study will have two specific aims: to understand the approach planners have taken to involving local communities in the planning process, and to uncover barriers faced by the planner throughout the planning process as a result of the planner's acting space.

A case study is according to Robert Yin (2014) "*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context*" (Yin, 2014, p. 13).  The context in this case study is the strategical planning process for rural district planning, where municipalities plan for villages, and the investigated phenomenon is the acting space of the planner and the barriers this leads to throughout the planning process. Approaching the research through a case study will enable a practical investigation of the acting space, which according to Flyvbjerg (2006) is needed when addressing social challenges, because theory alone cannot fully provide an understanding of a social problem. Fully predictive theories do not exist in the social world, and can therefore not be used to obtain knowledge of social science (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The study will be conducted as a comparative case study investigating the acting space of different planners with the task of strategical planning for rural districts of the municipality.  A comparative case study enables the research to investigate and compare the phenomenon in different contexts and compare the findings and identify differences and similarities between the contexts (Yin, 2014).

The case study will take point of departure in municipalities that already have been doing strategical planning for their villages or is quite far in the process at the point of this research. The study will compare the different approaches taken by the planners to design the planning process and investigate how the acting space of the planners have varied and led to different barriers to the process for the planner throughout the strategic planning process. This study is time limited to approximately four months and the research require a quite deep analysis of each case. To be able to balance time and depth of the analysis the case study will consist of five municipalities. This will allow the desired diversity in cases and possibility of going in depth with the planning process and the acting space of each planner.

The municipalities have been chosen through an information-oriented selection (Flyvbjerg, 2006) striving towards a critical case selection in regards to both their geographical differences, such as the size and number of larger cities.  Planning traditions for rural district planning has also been a part of the considerations.  This way of selecting the cases only ensured diversity in the municipalities, but not in the type of planner handling the strategy. However, every planner's acting space is affected by the different conditions of the municipality.  The aim has been to get somewhat of a maximised variation, but it is a requirement that the municipalities have started their strategical planning process and preferably been working on it for some time.  Thereby, it is avoided to only gain

the intention of the process, but rather what actually happened and how it affected the planner's decisions. This will help to gain a wide aspect of how the strategical planning for villages is approached differently in different situations.

The case studies will provide knowledge about how the individual planners act within the limitations and possibilities in each municipal setting, enabling the research to understand each planners acting space. Further, the case study will also provide knowledge about how planners' own approaches to strategical planning, thereby offering an understanding about the general planning practise in Denmark. The same goes for the planners' interpretation of the new legislation and how they work with translating national goals into a local context.

## 3.2 Methodology

To answer the research question, three sub-questions have been posed. Answering the sub-questions will provide the answer to the main research question. On figure 3.2 page 16, the structure of the paper is outlined. This structure will be explained in the following, which will explain the methodology of answering the questions.

Before going into the case study, it is necessary to shape an understanding of the planner's role in dealing with involvement in planning processes and of acting space from a theoretical view. A theoretical framework will be built in the chapter *The role of the planner* with its starting point in Manfred Kühn's three ideal types of dealing with conflict. This is formed around different planning approaches dealing differently with involving other actors in the planning process. It will be used to form an understanding of the approach the planners take to involvement and to the planning process in general. It will provide an understanding of how the planners view their own role in the planning process, and how their personal approach to planning affect the way involvement is planned for and handled throughout the process. On top of this, the theory of acting space by Kristina Grange will be presented to shape an understanding of what planners' acting space is, what makes up the acting space and what it means for the planners work. It will be a theoretically based framework providing the concepts used to form the analysis but it will also draw on real contexts in history to understand how the acting space of planners has changed over time. The chapter will be wrapped up with an analytical frame explaining how this theoretical framework will be translated to fit the context of planning for involvement in strategical planning for villages. It will elaborate on how the theories will be applied and how the concepts will be investigated in the empirical analysis.

After having established an analytical frame for translating the theoretical concepts to the empirical context, the cases selected for the empirical analysis will be presented. This will be followed by a methods chapter explaining the different methods used and how they are carried out.

With the analytical frame and case selection in place, the thesis will turn to the empirical analysis of the cases to answer the first sub-question: *How have the planners involved the local community in the strategical planning process?* This will go into the cases to investigate how the planners have approached and designed the planning process and involved the local communities in the work. It will centre around the planners' role and their approach to the process through the use of Kühn's presented types of dealing with conflict. This will be used to understand how they view their own position and
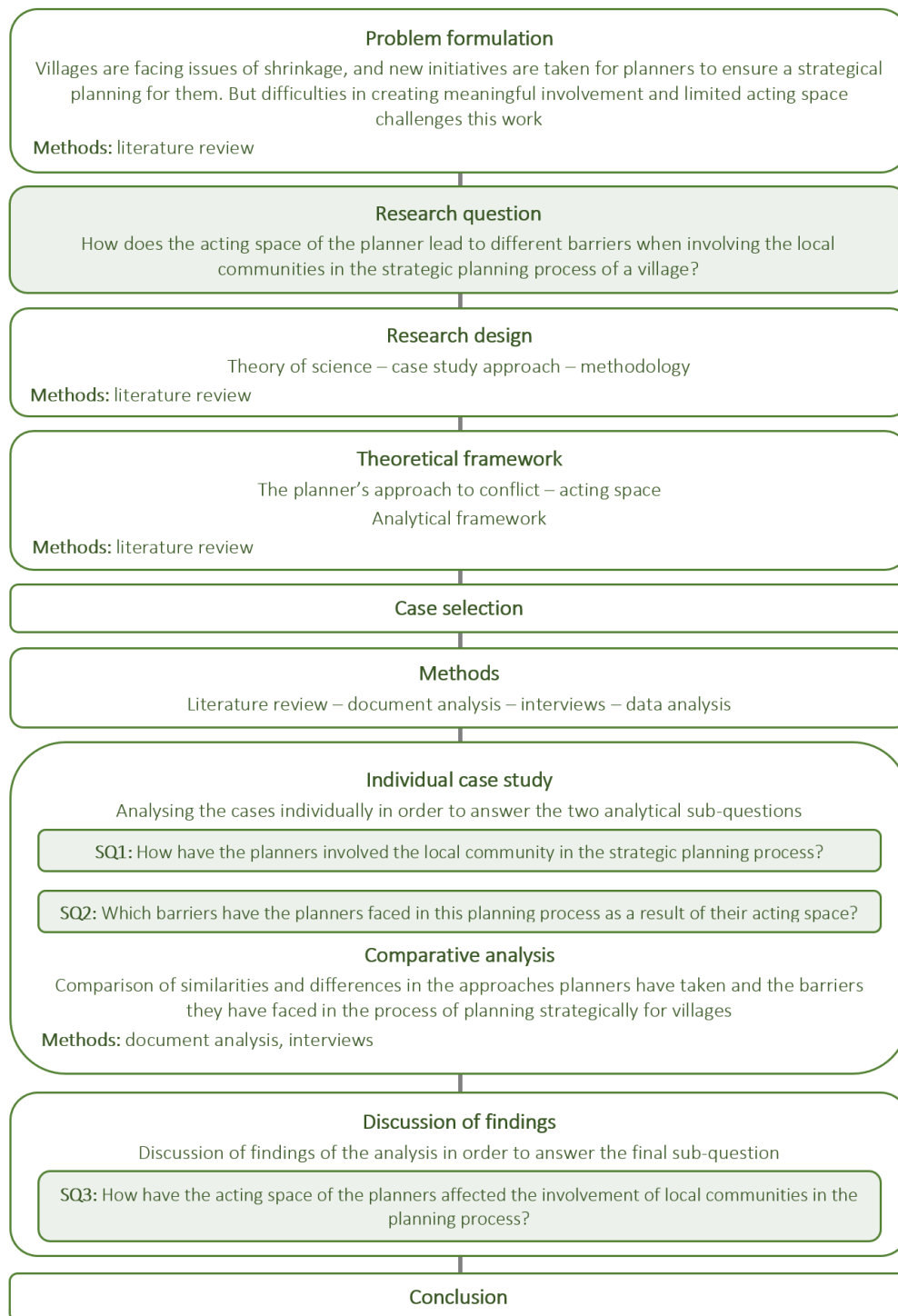
**Figure 3.1.** Structure of the thesis.

what they expect from involvement of local communities. It will be investigated through interviews with the planners responsible for the strategical planning processes in the selected municipalities. In the cases, where written material from the planning process is published, this will be analysed and used to support the interviews for understanding the work they have done or previous work it is based on. The purpose is partly to understand the planning process as a context for the second sub-question and partly to understand

the planners' own approach to involvement.

From here, the analysis will turn to the second sub-question: *Which barriers have the planners faced as a result of their acting space?* Barriers will be understood as obstacles for the planners to act the way it was intended or planned. Grange's theory of acting space will be used to analyse how the invisible structure, the planners' acting space, is constructed and what creates the limits to their acting space when planning strategically for villages. These limits to the acting space of the planners will be identified as barriers for the planner to act as intended, and therefore, this acting space will be the frame for identifying barriers and understanding the origin of them.

The case study consists of five cases. To ease the reading and the understanding of each case, the five cases will be analysed individually according to both the first and the second sub-question before taking them all up in a comparative analysis of the different planning processes and the acting space of the different planners. This comparative analysis will sum up the final answers to the two sub-questions.

The understanding of the barriers faced by the planners throughout the planning processes will form the basis for discussing the way the acting space of the planners have affected the planning process and what this has meant for the involvement of local communities in the process. This will answer the third sub-question: *How have the planners' acting space affected the involvement of local communities in the planning process?* Finally, the discussion will lead to the overall conclusion, which forms the final chapter of the project answering the main research question.

# The role of the planner 4

*This chapter will provide the theoretical framework for the project. It will be based on an understanding of different approaches to conflict provided by Manfred Kühn and the theory of acting space by Kristina Grange. These theories combined will form the framework for the analysis, which will be presented by the end of this chapter.*

## 4.1 The planner's approach to involvement

Our first sub-question investigates how the planners choose to involve the local community in the planning process. When it comes to involving the local community, planners can take several different approaches. Many factors can be relevant to consider in deciding on a type of involvement, but one of significance for the outcome is the preferences of the planner and how the planner addresses conflict. When involving local communities there is always a potential for conflicts to occur in the planning process (Vigar et al., 2017). Therefore, the way the planner views conflict and how this is approached impacts the planner's overall approach to involvement in planning processes. To understand the planner's approach to involvement, an understanding of the view on conflict can therefore be helpful. Kühn (2020) presents three different planning approaches depending on the planner's view on conflict reflected in the overall approaches to involvement in the planning process. These comprise the planning paradigms rational-comprehensive planning, communicative planning, and agonistic planning. Kühn (2020) presents them through their way of dealing with the potential conflicts as:

1. Avoidance of conflict,
2. Consensual resolution of conflict, and
3. Acceptance of conflict.

This will form the basis for understanding the planners' overall approach to involvement in the planning process.

**Avoidance of conflict**
Avoidance of conflict is reflected in the rational planning paradigm, where the planners identify themselves as experts who knows what is best for the public interest (Allmendinger, 2017). It is practised as a "master-role" with very little involvement and democratic participation, as their opinion is not needed because the planner knows the balance between the public interest and the possibilities of planning. Conflict is avoided or suppressed if it occurs (Kühn, 2020). The paradigm dominated planning in the post-war period, where planners used their role to keep control over both government and private actors through large-scale planning (Allmendinger, 2017). Inevitably, conflict occurred, which lead to a focus on the need for more communication and consensus in the planning process (Kühn, 2020).

**Consensual resolution of conflict**
The planner's relationship with conflict changed from passive to reactive and the role of

the planner changed from master to a consensus-seeking mediator (Kühn, 2020). This consensual resolution of conflict is reflected by the communicative planning paradigm, where conflict is to be dealt with through dialogue. Involvement of local communities is wanted to secure the common best solution. Conflicting interests and opinions are an opportunity for discussions, where the aim is consensus between all actors, as this will be the collective most rational decision and increases acceptance of the decision (Innes, 1996). The role of the planner is to mediate the debate towards this consensus and the power of decision-making is given to the actors collectively (Kühn, 2020).

**Acceptance of conflict**
Acceptance of conflict reflects the agonistic planning paradigm. It has emerged from a critique of the search for consensus in the communicative planning paradigm. Just as communicative planning, agonistic planning is based on dialogue, but conflict is viewed as a catalyst for change, and therefore, it is approached proactively (Pløger, 2004). In agonistic planning involvement is also wanted, because it qualifies the decision-making by bringing more knowledge and viewpoints to the process. Agonistic planning challenges the planner to leave the consensus-seeking role of the mediator behind and instead focus on creating arenas for conflict and view strife as a productive force. The role of the planner is to bring all the opposing opinions to the table and let everyone be heard without a search for consensus between all actors involved. A conceptual difference from communicative planning is *plural knowledge*, which accepts multiple alternative ideas for the future within society rather than seeking the one truth of a good solution, and therefore view conflict as inherent (Kühn, 2020). Unlike antagonism, which approaches conflicts as a strive between enemies, agonistic conflict is a struggle between adversaries (Pløger, 2004; Kühn, 2020).

In practice, these different ways of dealing with conflict occur in various mixed forms of the three. Agonistic planning is sometimes highlighted as the better, as it reflects some of the challenges faced in society of conflicting interests in its acceptance of plural knowledge, but like communicative planning and rational planning, it has also been subject to several points of criticism such as lack of decision-making (Kühn, 2020).

The way a planner deals with conflict affects, the overall approach to involvement. Therefore, it can have an impact on the way planners decide to involve the local communities of the villages in the planning processes. The approach planners take to conflict also indicates how planners view their own role in the decision-making and how they view other actors and their ability to constructively contribute to the process. This is reflected in the way the planners show trust in other actors to delegate responsibility or to believe that their contribution will benefit the process. The way planners perceive their own role varies from planner to planner, from process to process, but it has also been generally changed significantly over time.

## 4.2   Shaping the role of the planner

The majority of planners take on the profession to make a difference, but over time the acting space of planners have changed significantly, and therefore so has the planner's ability to make a difference (Grange, 2012). Structural changes have shifted the role of the planner. As neoliberalism has become a strong influence on the planning practice,

planning has been redirected to accommodate and to be a means for growth, rather than dealing with development caused by growth. The consequence of this is questioning if planning is still needed. There is an increasing concern about the fading trust in planning, especially in the Northern European welfare states, in which planning has started to be addressed as a barrier to growth. Grange (2017) states that: "*the planning profession has been described as a 'demoralized' profession, with an outdated ideological attitude and lack of ability to understand contemporary society's needs, blocking development and economic prosperity*" (Grange, 2017, p. 276). This questioning of the need for planning is rooted in the normalisation of growth first, where the value of planning is measured in progressive development. In Denmark, the discourse 'planning as a barrier for growth' has since 2010 become structured and institutionalised in political and public discourse (Olesen and Carter, 2018).

Along with the neo-liberalisation and questioning of the need for planning, the role of the deliberative planner has further been challenged by an increased political interest in planning. In the case of danish planning practice, the agenda of the early '00s was to rethink the planning system in Denmark and to deal with the lack of political interest by increasing the politicians' influence on planning. This focus on increased political ownership was accompanied by a critique of the planning profession being too focused on the individual planner's ambition. Planning was to be a profession not solemnly reserved for planners (Grange, 2014).

What this has brought to the role of the planner, is a decreased authority and influence and an increased seeking for consensus with the politicians (Grange, 2012). Within this change in the role of the planner, there is an increased politicisation of the profession, which makes it difficult for planners to challenge the political agenda because their acting space has been tied up to political goodwill (Berglund-Snodgrass, 2017). This acting space, which Berglund-Snodgrass (2017) refers to, describes the possible actions of the planner in a given situation. Several terms have been used for the concept, such as 'action area', 'action space' and 'room of manoeuvre' (Grange, 2012). Grange (2012) works with the term acting space to emphasise that both time and space are important for what possible action the planner can take in a given situation. Current limits of the acting space include the need for political acceptance and growth-oriented planning. This can be nothing but problematic when dealing with shrinkage, which is a delicate political subject and planning-wise a problem that cannot be solemnly dealt with through growth (Udvalget for levedygtige landsbyer, 2018b). Acting space is in this research understood as the planner's own perception of her or his possible actions, and not outer institutional barrier's. Institutional structures provide a frame for the planner to work within, but will only be included if it affects the planner's acting space seen from their own point of view. This focus will allow the research to dive into how the planner's experience and act around some of the invisible structures which affect their choice of planning process.

## 4.3   Grange's theory of acting space

Grange (2012) takes up the concept of acting space to discuss the need for political awareness amongst planners. The acting space is made up of the field of possible actions the planner can take in a given situation. To Grange, acting space is determined by what

the planner can do through the limits and possibilities of the profession and their individual awareness of their own power. She argues that planning is political and therefore, so is the acting space of the planner. She refers to the understanding of 'the political' by Mouffe (2005), who in her book *On the political* approaches the concept as a place of power and conflicts. She distinguishes between the concepts 'the political', being the sphere where value-based conflicts and debate take place and different meanings and views are created, and 'politics', which she defines as "*the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political*" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 9). So, while the political refers to the active practices of everyday value-based struggles taking place, politics is the formal institutional frame in which the formalised political decision-making is taking place. Berglund-Snodgrass (2017) draws on the works of Mouffe and defines the political as "*a space of agonistic conflicts and choice-making*" (Berglund-Snodgrass, 2017, p. 33) referring to the political as a space, where agonistic conflicts can take place deliberately.

This builds on the ontology of a relational character of reality, which is the basic understanding that the meanings, values and interests of a person are discursively created (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). A person does not have any essential meaning in its core, this meaning is created through "*the articulation of the relation between different subjects*" (Grange, 2012, p. 228). This means that our meanings, values and interests are created through conversations and discussions when an issue is articulated in certain ways. These articulations are translated into meanings and values through constant identification processes, where the individual person puts oneself in relation to the issue being articulated (Grange, 2012). This is a circular discursive process in what the critical realists call the transitive dimension, where the individual constantly reflects on previous experience, conversations and articulations to form ones own identity. Thereby, the identification process expands the individuals intransitive dimension with a wider understanding of the world and oneself in it. As it is a constant circular process, the identification process will never be complete (Grange, 2012). Therefore, the way we identify ourselves is constantly changing and created by the relation to other subjects.

When subjects are articulated with disagreements over understandings it creates room for debate and new understandings. There will always be subjects that are not fully articulated or that are debated with disagreement over understandings. Therefore, the reality will always be a space of debate and conflicting interests, understandings and meanings. Thus, taking part in discussions and articulating understandings of certain subjects is the way we give meaning to things and create our understandings, and this will inevitably mean to be political following the definition of Mouffe - but it is not the same as engaging in politics.

Grange (2012) calls for a need for planners to be aware of how planning is political because it plays into this space, where agonistic conflicts of planning should take place. Many planners today refer to their role as neutral and accepts the "*discrepancy between values that planners 'espouse' and seek to identify with and values they are 'obliged to work towards in practice'*" (Grange, 2012, p. 226) as a result of the changing role of the planner and their decreased authority. She urges planners and engage in the political, not as politicians but speaking from their profession through an understanding of how their actions have a political dimension. This is important because it affects the acting space of the planners.

Grange (2012) uses Dyrberg's (1997) theory of power-analysis to shape her own concept of the acting space of planners. According to Grange (2012) the acting space is determined by the planner's capacities, which refers to the planner's individual ability, authority and identity. This is partly shaped by the structural settings surrounding the planner and by the planner's understanding of his own capacities.

**Ability** refers to the planner's power or ability to 'make a difference'. Dyrberg (1997) understands power as 'non-derivative', meaning that it is not something the planner possesses and chooses to use, but rather something that occurs at a certain point. The power in making a difference happens at the limit between the action of 'making' and when a difference has occurred. It is important to stress that ability does not refer to everything the planner is able to do. Making a difference requires a change or something new to have happened as a result of the process of 'making'. Through the identification processes the planner will only identify the ability in retrospect, when the difference has occurred. This ability to make a difference is dependent on the authority to do so (Grange, 2012).

**Authority** is needed to be able to make a difference. The moment a difference can happen is what Dyrberg (1997) calls 'the political moment', where the planner possesses the authority to decide on a future direction. Here, Grange (2012) distinguishes between having the political authority to make a decision and having legitimate authority by acting according to an interest from a part of society (Grange, 2012). Political authority refers to the individual's possibility of making a decision about the future. This is necessary for the ability to make a difference. Legitimate authority refers to having support from a part of society backing the decision (Grange, 2012). Legitimate authority is not needed to be able to make a difference, but it legitimises the decision and can make it more accepted and tolerant to conflicting interests. Legitimacy can come from interests or opinions from citizens, politicians or other parts of society.
In local authority planning a certain amount of legitimacy is, though, needed to be able to make a difference with the decision, because political support is needed for the decision to be accepted politically and in the end go through. If a decision will be turned down politically the decision will in the end not have made a real difference, and therefore not be identified as ability. Therefore, the planner's ability to make a difference also hinges on the understanding that planning is political. To be able to make a difference, the planner must assure that there is a political will to support the decision, which may require the planner to engage in the debate and articulate the subject (Grange, 2012).

**Identity** is the way planners perceive themselves and their own understanding of their ability and authority. It is constructed through the constant identification processes where the planner retroactively identifies with articulations to create new meanings of subjects and understandings of her/his ability, authority and identity. It changes according to changes in authority, legitimacy and discourses surrounding the planner (Grange, 2012). Dyrberg (1997, p. 171) states that "*it is in these processes of interpretation and identification that the subject becomes what it is*". This identity is ever-changing as a result of the constant identification processes. Planners identify the direction to go and their own role from these identification processes based on the authority and ability they identify themselves to possess (Dyrberg, 1997; Grange, 2012).

Grange sums up that "*a subjects acting space ought to be understood as defined by*

*discursively constructed processes of identification*" (Grange, 2012, p. 232). Therefore, the self-identification of the planner is important because it affects how they understand their power and fill in their acting space. The planner is to some extent able to influence these capacities, given that the planner is aware of them, by accepting that the role of the planner is political.

In an analysis of the change in acting space of English local planners, Grange (2012) uses this theory and deduces a problematisation of how "*many planners today avoid engaging in value discussions, prefer to refer to their role as neutral, and seldom make any claims for greater professional autonomy*" (Grange, 2012, p. 226). When planners identify themselves in an overall neutral position, it inhibits their perceived power. She identifies that planners have become an overall powerless figure with doubts about both identity and role. It concerns her that planners seem ready to accept that their professional values have less significance, while she observed that they were generally uncomfortable with not being able to demonstrate their abilities (Grange, 2012).

> "*The perception among many planners that neutrality is their main tool in dealing with the inherently political nature of their field of possible actions appears in many respects to have led planning into a dead end. Likewise, perceptions of deliberative planning as a means to transform planning seem to partly overlook the fact that planners are governed to seek their legitimate authority within certain political structure.*" (Grange, 2012, p. 240).

The value of planning and the planner has been discussed, changed, and challenged through the last decade to such a degree that the planning profession, in general, suffers from a lack of power as a local authority. One of the issues is that planners seek within the system for the legitimate authority, not from society. Berglund-Snodgrass (2017) raises a concern of 'the political' becoming a tool for achieving political goals in spatial planning, with too little acting space for the planner to be critical and challenge the agenda of politics. Since the political generally is still tied up to an antagonistic view on conflicts, the justness and fairness of the political process seems overruled (Berglund-Snodgrass, 2017). Grange (2012) wants to debate how planners can regain their acting space through the political dimension of planning, not by taking the role of a politician but by understanding their position as political. She seeks a new political awareness amongst planners, and the concepts of acting space is to help increase this awareness. To reinforce power within the acting space, the planners must accept that planning essentially is political (Grange, 2017).

## 4.4   Analytical framework

The presented theoretical frame will be used to a create an analytical frame, which will be used to investigate the posed sub-questions. This analytical frame will cover the way both the first and the second sub-questions will be answered through the use of Kühn's categorisation of the three ideal types of dealing with conflicts and Grange's theory of acting space.

The first part of the analysis will centre around the first sub-question: *How have the planners involved the local community in the strategic planning process?* It will investigate

how the planner has designed the planning process and chosen to involve the local communities. This is supposed to provide an understanding of the context to the acting space of the planner, which will be investigated in the second sub-question. Therefore, it will focus on the thoughts behind the planner's decisions in the planning process and investigate how this has been approached by the planner rather than looking into different ways of involving the local community.

To investigate the planning processes and the approach the planners have taken to shape them the following interview questions have been formulated:

- Can you describe your planning for villages, how has the process been so far?
- Which considerations did you have about the process before you began?
- What are your key focus points in the process?
- What do you think about this new requirement for strategical planning for villages?
- How have you involved the local communities?

As a part of understanding the approach the planners have taken to involving the local communities in the strategic planning processes, Kühn's categorisation of ideal types of dealing with conflicts will be used. Knowing the decisions behind the design of the process reflects how the planners make use of the three types of dealing with conflict. This will provide an understanding of how they see their own role in the planning process and how they see the local community's role. The involvement is a place of many (potential) conflicts, and how planners address conflicts tells a lot about how they understand their role and the acting space they have. The potential occurrence of conflict and past experiences is expected to affect how the involvement process is planned and approach. This will build on top of the first interview questions about involving the local communities and add the following questions:

- Why have you chosen (not) to involve the local communities?
- How have you handled the different interests?
- How have these interests affected your planning process?

It is not expected that the individual planner will be drawing on only one of the planning models in their handling of conflicts, but will draw on possibly all of them differently for different parts of the process depending on their own preferences and outer circumstances. This will provide knowledge about why the planner has involved the local community in a certain way and how it has formed the strategic planning process.

From here, the analysis will turn to the second sub-question: *Which barriers have the planners faced as a result of their acting space?* To analyse which barriers the planners have faced in the planning process and to understand how the acting space of the planners have caused or affected these barriers, this analysis will be conducted using Grange's theory of acting space. The barriers will be identified as obstacles for the planner to act the way it was intended or planned, and therefore, acting space will be a frame for understanding the origin of the barriers. The three components of acting space will the provide frame of analysis. Since the planners' ability is depending on the authority they possess, the authority will be addressed first in the analysis.

**Ability:** The planner's ability will be investigated in regard to who has made the difference: how much the individual planner has decided and how much has been decided

politically or as a result of the context. The planner's ability will be investigated by uncovering who has made the decisions throughout the process. The barriers faced by the planners as a result of their ability will be identified as a lack of ability to make decisions. The analysis will focus on what "sayings" and influence the planner have on the process and in the decision-making. Understanding the context will further help understand the outer frame of the planners acting space. This will provide an understanding of which outer circumstances has formed the process and choices and thereby the planner's ability. The context will therefore also be used to understand how the planner's choices have been affected by the overall power in the organisation, which in this case covers both the municipality as an organisation and the power of the politicians. In the interviews it will be covered with the following questions:

- Who has decided on the form of the process?
- What have you done to affect the process?

**Authority:** The planner's authority will be investigated in regards to how the political dialogue has been during the process and how the local community have reacted in order to understand the legitimacy to the planner's decisions. To understand the political legitimacy, the analysis will focus on where the planner has received support, and where political legitimacy has been a barrier. As this political legitimacy can be a barrier for the planner's ability the analysis of these two factors will inevitably happen in co-relation to one another.

For the legitimacy from local communities, the analysis will focus on how the local communities have reacted in the involvement. Have they supported the planner and the presented ideas and thereby provided the planner and the plan with legitimate authority or have they opposed the planning? A part of this is also to analyse how the planners have gained legitimacy if they have made no involvement or only symbolic public participation. Have the planners made a guess or drawn on previous experience about what the villages' wish and support and do the project thereby have legitimate authority from the villages? To investigate the planner's authority the following interview questions will be used:

- How has the interest of the politicians been?
- How has the interest of the local communities been?
- How has the interests affected the process?

**Identity:** The planner's identity will be investigated in regards to how the planners perceive their own ability and authority and thereby how they understand their acting space. This analysis will continue on the previous findings but in regards to how they interpret their role as a planner. This will also draw on the first part of the analysis, where the planner's understanding of their own role in shaping the planning process was of focus. There will be a focus on how the planner experiences the different elements of the planning process and what options of actions and barriers they experience. This part of the analysis will go into the planners' perspective on being political or neutral based on Grange's basic understanding of planning being political. Unlike ability and authority, where the aim is to search for what actually is the planner's ability and authority, identity searches for the planners own perception of the same concepts and their own role in the planning process. This will be covered by the following questions:

- How do you see your own possibility to make a difference through you work?
- What motivates you in your daily work?
- Which values do you work from?
- Why do we need planners today?

The findings of the two first sub-questions will be analysed individually for each case first, and afterwards, they will be compared in order to look for commons and differences in the barriers faced by the planners as a result of their acting space. This will be taken up in a discussion of the findings of the analysis to answer the third sub–question: *How have the planners' acting space affected the involvement of local communities in the planning process?*

*This chapter will introduce the selected case municipalities and their current work with strategic planning for villages.*

## 5.1 Hjørring Municipality

Hjørring Municipality is a rural municipality located in Northern Jutland with the main city, Hjørring. It is a geographically large municipality covering 926 km$^2$ and the population has over the last 20 years declined with 4.000 residents (Indenrigs- og Boligministeriet, 2021). Hjørring Municipality is known for their ambitious planning for rural districts, and especially their projekt "Løkkensvej - lev godt, lad det gro" (*Løkkensvej - live well, let it grow*) about strategical shrinkage of the many villages along the road Løkkensvej (Bolig- og planstyrelsen, 2021). The municipality was also a part of and received founds from the Realdania project "På Forkant" (*Ahead*) from 2014-2017 about future development in rural districts (Realdania et al., n.d.). Their planning tradition has been a determining factor in choosing them as a case, and their planning practice is expected to reflect their work with shrinkage.

Hjørring Municipality made their first strategy for villages in 2009 and their latest is from 2017 called "Samling og Sammenhold" (*Assembling and Unity*) (Hjørring Kommune, 2017). In this strategy, there is a dominating focus on volunteer work and on seeing the municipality as a whole, having the urban and the rural as two sides of the same coin. In January 2021, Hjørring Municipality revisited the municipal plan and added a strategy for planning for villages as a continuation of their existing work. Here, a focus is to point out two 'conversion villages' (*omdannelseslandsbyer*) for which the law allows certain relaxations in order to support the development (Hjørring kommune, 2021).

## 5.2 Hedensted Municipality

The municipality of Hedensted is located between the two larger cities of Horsens and Vejle, but do not have any larger cities themselves, making them a catchment municipality (*oplandskommune*). The municipality covers 551 km$^2$ and is a relatively small municipality in terms of population, but the population has over the last 20 years grown with 2.000 residents (Indenrigs- og Boligministeriet, 2021). They initiated their strategical planning for villages in November 2020 with an online meeting indicating a preparation of a larger participation process for the 15 selected villages, which the strategy will put in focus (Hedensted Municipality, 2020). Hedensted Municipality is selected as a case in order to investigate a municipality with no larger city, and a municipality which seems ambitious with their participation process.

In 2019, the municipality published a short strategy for development of the rural districts as a framework for the onward planning for villages and the rural district (Hedensted kommune, 2019b). The municipality works with LUP's - local development projects (*lokale udviklingsprojekter*) which are local projects focusing on the development of a village (Hedensted Kommune, 2020). They have a fund for the LUP's, where the citizens can

apply for financial support to a project, and to help the citizens make this process easier, they have also developed a guide for this process (Hedensted kommune, 2019a).

## 5.3    Viborg Municipality

The municipality of Viborg is a provincial municipality located more or less in the middle of Jutland, with the provincial town Viborg as the main city and several villages and towns around it. It is geographically the second largest municipality in Denmark and covers 1.400 km$^2$ and the population has over the last 20 years grown with 9.000 residents (Indenrigs- og Boligministeriet, 2021). Viborg Municipality have been selected as a case municipality because they are a large municipality with one larger central city and quite a lot of rural district with many villages. Further, they have experienced a significant growth in population, especially in the city of Viborg. Their balancing of growth and development of Viborg and the rural districts are expected to be insightful in regard to the politicians prioritisation.

In Viborg Municipality there is no strategy for rural district development, but the it is, like most other strategies, integrated in their administration model "Sammenhængsmodellen", which sets the overall goals for the municipal administration's work. Viborg Municipality, Like Hedensted Municipality, has worked with LUP's since 2018 and also has a fund which the citizens can apply for (Viborg Kommune, n.d.b). In January 2021 Viborg Municipality's committee for rural development have decided, that they will start to take measure of the civil society in their local communities based on the method of Realdania (Landdistriktsudvalget, n.d.). This is taken to indicate that the municipality is working with the strategy, even through general information on their website is scarce.

## 5.4    Vejle Municipality

Vejle is a neighbouring municipality to Hedensted, and much like Viborg, it is a larger provincial municipality with a large city, Vejle. The municipality covers 1.060 km$^2$ and in terms of population it is the 5th largest in Denmark with a population that has grown with about 16.400 residents over the last 20 years (Indenrigs- og Boligministeriet, 2021). This is by far the one of the selected municipalities which have grown the most, which is partly why is has been selected, but also because Vejle seem to be very active when it comes to involving their citizens. Vejle Municipality uses the online community-technology *CitizenLab* as their platform for communication with the citizens (Vejle Kommune, n.d.). Through this platform, Vejle shares information and asks for feedback, which generally seems to be used actively. Lately, they have asked all local councils to send in their annual report for 2021, which generally seem to indicate a consistent dialogue. Posts on the platform from the municipal administration are sent by Peter Sepstrup from the planning department.

Vejle have their strategy for rural districts in public hearing (Vejle Kommune, n.d.) and though CitizenLab, they have raised the question "Are we the same?" to open up for a discussion about how to address differentiated planning of the villages. They have conducted a mapping, dividing the municipality into four areas with each their characteristics (Vejle Kommune, 2020). Vejle Municipality had the day before the interview send their municipal plan into hearing, where strategic planning for villages is to be

included, but there does not seem to be an inclusion of strategical planning for villages (Kommune, n.d.).

## 5.5  Norddjurs Municipality

Norddjurs Municipality is located on the tip of the eastern coast of central Jutland and covers 721 km$^2$. The largest city is Grenå with about 14.000 residents, and the population has over the last 20 year decreased with about 1.300 residents (Indenrigs- og Boligministeriet, 2021). Realdania's method was developed in collaboration with three municipalities, Norddjurs being one of them (Realdania, 2020b). They are therefore expected to be further in the process than the other cases and have given quite some thought into the planning process through this collaboration. Like Hjørring Municipality, this decrease in population and collaboration with Realdania might cause the politicians and planners to be more aware of handling shrinkage. Their collaboration with Realdania is the main reason for choosing them as a case.

As a result of the collaboration, Realdania have developed a report with an analysis of all their villages and suggestions for the strategical planning for them, which is developed through the method of Realdania (Realdania, 2020a). The report suggests dividing the rural districts of Norddjurs Municipality into three areas in future planning and groups the villages into eight groups based on their location and activity. The activity of the civil society is to be used for treating the villages differently through the use of Arnstein's Ladder of Participation depending on their civil strength (Realdania, 2020a).

# Methods  6

*This chapter will present the methods used to gather empirical data and to analyse it afterwards. The methods are all qualitative, and the main method used is interviews with planners in the case municipalities.*

## 6.1  Literature review

Literature review has been used as the main method for understanding the problem and for the theoretical framework. It has been used to uncover past and present problematics within the field of shrinkage, neoliberalism, planning for villages in Denmark, participation and, especially, the role of the planner. The following search processes has been used to discover relevant literature:

1. A search of the keywords listed above, often parred with words like "urban" or "planning" in order to filter the search result, and
2. For key articles a search for other literature which uses the same article has been made, to discover other articles which use the same source.

These steps help uncover related articles and discussion about the content and concepts presented in the different literature. The literature is used both in the problematisation in the first chapter of the paper and again in the theory chapter. The literature helps to form a relevant context for the project and provide the knowledge needed to proceed with useful research. some of the reviewed literature has been used for a deeper analysis of the documents.

## 6.2  Document analysis

To gain a deeper insight into the case municipalities independent of the interview respondents, key documents have been analysed in order to systematically gather information. The document analysis will not be used as a standalone method in the analysis, as it is often insufficient for standing alone in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Rather, it will provide another angle of knowledge as a supplement to the interviews, where it allows the researcher to gain empirical knowledge without interfering or receiving biased answers. The aim is to get input for the analysis from written sources about the way the municipalities addresses their planning for villages. These documents have been politically accepted and therefore affects the authority of the planner. The documents will be analysed with a focus on how they address shrinkage and the challenges present in their villages. Clear communication about challenges reflects an awareness among politicians in the municipality, whereas an unspecific communication of possibilities of development in the villages might reflect a lack of political interest. The analysis of how these documents contribute to the planner's authority, but also ability, will not be understood as a stand-alone source, but in relation to the planner's own understanding of the documents, and the documents will not be analysed to their full extent, but just for

the parts relevant for their strategical planning for villages. The following documents will be analysed:

- Strategy for villages in Hjørring municipality: *Samling og sammenhold*
- Strategy for development of rural districts in Hedensted municipality: *Strategi for landdistriktsudvikling*
- Policy containing the administration model and objectives for Viborg municipality: *Sammenhængsmodellen*
- Minutes of meeting in the Rural District Committee in Viborg Municipality
- Strategy for rural districts in Vejle Municipality: *Beskrivelser og karateristik af landområder og de tilhørende landsbyer i Vejle Kommune,*
- The CitizenLab platform of Vejle Municipality
- Analysis of villages in Norddjurs Municipality: *Landsbyanalyse - til grundlag for strategisk planlægning for landsbyer i Norddjurs Kommune*

In addition to the documents published by the case municipalities, the publication by Realdania *Long Live the Villages* (Længe leve landsbyerne) containing their suggested method for planning strategically for villages, will has also been analysed in order to understand the ideas behind the approach many municipalities take their starting point in. This document differs from the rest of the analysed documents, as it is made *for* municipalities rather than *by* a municipality.

With inspiration in the approach of Hammond and Wellington (2012) the selected documents will be analysed through the frame of knowing: (1) the author of the document, (2) the audience the document is written for, (3) time of production, and mainly (4) the content of the document. To understand the intentions of the document, it is important to know the context it is written in, and who the receiver of the document is, to understand why it is written the way it is. This approach is used for all the documents, and it will be used in the analysis as a supplement to understand the strategic planning processes of the municipalities and the outcome of their process.

## 6.3   Interviews

Interviews are the main method used for collecting empirical information for the analysis of this research and they will be used to gain knowledge for all three sub-questions. The interviews aim to get an understanding of the planning processes in each of the municipalities and the way they have involved the local communities in it, and to go in-depth with the role the responsible planner(s) have in the process.

The interviews are conducted as semi-structured interviews with the use of a prepared interview guide to make sure the interview will discuss the subjects wanted for the analysis while still leaving room for other questions and reflections which may occur during the session (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014). All interviews use the same interview guide to make sure they are comparable. The interviews will be conducted online, both as a necessity due to the Covid-19 situation and because of the distance between the interviewer and the interviewee. To make it easier for the interviewees to speak freely and not feel limited by linguistic barriers the interviews are conducted and recorded in danish.

Since the interview will touch upon the planner's own identity and actions, the aim is to make an informal setting, and facilitate the possibility of a conversation-like situation, for the planner to maybe let their guard down about defending their work and rather reflecting upon it (Farthing, 2016). In order to do so, the interviewers have tried to be open and casual in the preliminary correspondence as well as an insurance that the goal of the interview is not to find the right or wrong way of doing this planning but to uncover the diversity. During the interview, the intention of reflection is put forward at the beginning of the session. Nevertheless, even with an informal conversation setting, it might still be an intensive presentation-like situation for the interviewee (Farthing, 2016). Therefore, it is not expected that the planners will reach a point of true reflection about their actions and identity, but rather a mix of a more positive angle of what they intended to do and what they actually experienced.

The analytical framework builds on a theoretical language with terms less common in everyday language. In order not to bring this more theoretical language into the interview, the wordings of the questions have been well considered. Some of the main words which were considered are:

- "Barrier", rather we use "challenges", which is a more everyday language,
- "Ability", rather we use "influence", which is expected to be better understood and sound less hard,
- "Authority" will be addressed as "interest" and "support" or "challenge" to avoid misunderstandings, especially regarding legitimate authority.

Further, the build-up of the interview has been considered with regards to the desired output. The first part of the interview will focus on understanding the process and the way involvement is dealt with and uncovering the considerations behind it. It is expected that the interviewee will have much to tell for this part of the interview, where they can set the frame for presenting their work. Therefore, the questions are shaped quite broadly to give time and room to tell about their work but still give a direction for the interview. It is expected that the interviewee will focus on the more positive aspects of their work and their planning process in this first part, before going into the more reflective and critical elements in the second part of the interview. This also serves the purpose of letting the interviewees "talk themselves warm" and feel more comfortable when moving to the reflective part.

The second part will investigate the planner's acting space. To open up for reflections about the planners' identity the planners are asked to reflect upon how they see their own possibility to make a difference and why planning is needed today. It is expected to let them open more up for reflecting on their own role as planners and what the planner can do when first reflecting on their own abilities.

Interviews do not provide objective data about the planning process, which is important to be aware of during the analysis (Farthing, 2016). Therefore, a great amount of consideration has been put into the questions and conversation during the interviews. However, important knowledge to the analysis is the thoughts and reasons behind the decisions in the planning process to understand their own perception of their role and their identity. As this is not objective information, interviews are the best possible way to obtain the desired information.

Further, it differs from case to case if we interview one or two planners, and that surely affect the depth of the interview as well as which topics we can dive into, e.g. the planner's identity and ability to make a change. The amount of people in the interview differs accordingly to the interest in from the given municipality. We have chosen not to demand one-on-one interview, rather, depending on the output of these interviews, some of the planners might be sought out for a follow-up interview, either to clarify or to dive into some topics which was hindered due to time or the amount of people participating in the interviews.

Table 6.3 lists the interviews in regards to interview, participants and date. In the following, the interviewees will be presented briefly in order to understand their background and relation to the work of planning strategically for villages. Throughout the analysis the planners will be referred to neither by name or municipality they represent. Since the acting space and preferred approach to planning is individual to the specific planner, they will not be referred to in terms of municipality. Instead, whey will be presented as Planner A, Planner B, etc. rather than personally by name in the analytical work, in order to later discuss the general trails and role of the planner.

| Municipality | Interviewees | Date |
|---|---|---|
| Hjørring | Line Hesselholt Hansen | 15th April 2021 |
| Hedensted | Mette W. Georgakatos | 19th April 2021 |
| Viborg | Helle Lorentsen and Karl Johan Legaard | 21st April 2021 |
| Viborg | Helle Lorentsen | 22nd April 2021 |
| Vejle | Peter Sepstrup og Søren Nellemann | 5th May 2021 |
| Norddjurs | Helen Carter and Kisa Lindgaard | 19th Maj 2021 |

*Table 6.1.* List of interviews conducted.

**Planner A** from Hjørring: Line Hesselholt, trained Urban Design, has worked as an urban planner for 16 years, where she first worked in Løkken-Vrå Municipality, which became a part of Hjørring municipality in 2007. She is one of the responsible planners in the municipality's planning for rural districts. She has lately been working on a new way of working with exiting and future settlements, which happened in collaboration with residents, experts and the municipality.

**Planner B** from Hedensted: Mette W.Georgakatos, trained architect, has been working as an architect and planner for three years, where she has been working with strategic planning in Hedensted. She has lately been working on the strategical planning for villages and is in charge of the project.

**Planner C** from Viborg: Helle Lorenzen, trained architect, has been working for about 25 years and been at Viborg Municipality for two years. Here, she works with local development projects in villages. Her superior, Karl Johan Legaard also participated in the first interview.

**Planner D** from Vejle: Peter Sepstrup, trained in political science, has been working with planning for villages in the planning department in Vejle for 15 years, where he first worked in Egtved municpality, which became a part of Vejle municipality in 2007. His college, Søren Nellemann, trained architect, also participated in the interview. He has worked with municipal planning since 2007 and is today resposible for the municipal plan.

**Planner E** from Norddjurs: Helen Carter, urban planner, has been working in the planning department for almost two years. She is working with the municipal plan, which has just been send into hearing. As a part of working with the municipal plan she has worked with the strategical planning for villages. Her team leader, Kisa Lindgaard, also participated in the interview and she has been in Norddjurs for one year.

## 6.3.1 Data analysis

The choice of a qualitative data collection reflects the the rather open research question of this thesis. The overall aim is to understand the acting space of the planners and the barriers it leads to, which will be answered through a deep analysis of the conducted interviews and accompanied by a document analysis.

To manage the collected data, the posed questions of inquiry presented in the interview guide will provide a frame for the analysis, and the order of these questions will also be followed in the analysis. To manage the "raw" data, it has been organised accordingly the subject of inquiry (Farthing, 2016). This is to first understand their strategical planning process so far, including their approach to involvement and conflicts. This is followed by a focus on the specific barriers the planners face in regard to their ability, authority and identity, which makes up their acting space. The process of analysing the data is listening through the interviews with an open mind and noting down all aspects which might fall within interest of the research. This is followed by a grouping of these reflections according to the question of inquiry. Even through the interview has been conducted with the question being asked in the chosen order, the planners' answers and reflections to one question might actually provide an answer for another. The interviews has been conducted with great freedom, were the planners has been able to add in subjects and issues which detours from the posed question, and therefore, the analysis of this data have to follow the same process.

To make sense of the collected data in regards to the aim of this research, the answers needed to be interpreted for their meaning in relation to the analytical framework (Farthing, 2016). The interviewee might describe a situation, which can be interpreted as an influence of their acting space, without the interviewee addressing it directly. Here the search for an understanding of the invisible structure of the acting space require interpretation of the answers in order to find the data we are looking for. Quotes are used directly in the text, to present the planners unique description when interpreting it. When grouping the data according to the questions of inquiry, it causes some aspects of the findings to be sorted out due to irrelevance. When understanding what the interview have contributed with, the documents relevant to each case is analysed and added to the analysis. The data is continuously addressed and turned until an understanding and answering of the question of inquiry has been reached.

The cases will all be analysed individually without comparison to each other. This will provide the knowledge of the way the planners approach the planning process differently and the barriers faced by each planner as result of their acting space affecting the process. After analysing all the five cases individually, they will all be compared by collecting the key findings of each case to compare similarities and differences in the acting space, the barriers faced and the general approach the planners have taken. Here, the answers will

again be grouped according to the questions of inquiry in order to be able to sum up the overall answers to these questions across cases. This comprehensive data analysis also reflect the general choice of limiting the number of cases in the case study to five.

# The choice of involvement and acting space of the planners 7

*This chapter will contain the analysis, which answers both the first sub-question: "How have the planners involved the local community in the strategic planning process?" and the second: "Which barriers have the planners faced in this planning process as a result of their acting space?" for each of the selected cases. Finally, a comparison across all cases will analyse the planners' approach to the strategic planning process, their handling of conflicts and the barriers in their acting space across the cases.*

## 7.1 The set-up of the analysis

The analysis will be structured around the analytical frame presented by the end of chapter 4. It will cover both the first and the second question and be divided into two parts. The first part will be an individual case study of each of the five cases with the aim of answering both the first and the second sub-question for each case individually. When both of the sub-questions are answered for each case, the planning approaches and the identified barriers and acting spaces of each planner will be taken to the the second part of the analysis, which will be a comparison of the findings. In this comparative analysis the focus will be on finding similarities and differences between the planners' barriers in regards to how it affects their acting space and the process of making the strategy.

Throughout the analysis quotes from the interviews will be presented. Since the interview are all conducted in Danish, the quotes will all be translated with the authors own translation from Danish to English.

## 7.2 Planner A from Hjørring municipality

Hjørring Municipality have taken point of departure in the strategy already developed in 2017 as it has been a process of generally speaking the same purpose.

**The planning process**

The planning process in Hjørring Municipality mainly happened back in 2017, when the municipality developed the strategy "Assembling and Unity" (*Samling og sammenhold*), which is their strategy for developing the rural districts and villages. This strategy forms the foundation for the strategy added to the Municipal Plan in 2021 because the principles for how to develop the villages today are still the same (Planner A, 2021). It was formed through a process of extensive participation in a collaboration with the board of villages (*landsbyforum*), which was formed as a part of making the strategy (Planner A, 2021). The board was intended to consist of a representative from each of the 44 villages, though not all villages are represented.

It is a strategy for the way the municipality and the local communities should work together. Collaboration is a great focus, and citizens are highlighted as the main driver in the development of villages:

> "*It is central that initiatives have their basis in local potentials and in a local engagement*" (Hjørring Kommune, 2017, p. 4)

The strategy addresses the situation of shrinkage and double urbanism, which can be identified as a clear awareness from both planners and politicians about thinking beyond the common agenda of growth. The strategy also states a need to exploit the differences of the villages (Hjørring Kommune, 2017), which two years later, in 2019, was a part of the new addition to the Planning Act. Hjørring Municipality, therefore, seems to be very aware of how they realistically deal with their shrinkage.

Since the strategy was already finished, most of the work in this process has been about selecting two conversion villages (Planner A, 2021). The vision was to make a large-scale process involving the board of villages in deciding how to select the villages and what the requirements for becoming a conversion village should be. Unfortunately, this vision was disrupted by the Covid-19 situation and lockdown (Planner A, 2021). The process was continuously postponed due to a belief that the original plan could be carried out as planned. They ended up being pressed for time because of the deadline on the revision of the municipal plan, and therefore, it was reduced to an initial online meeting with the board to discuss the opportunities and requirements for conversion villages:

> "*I do not know what I thought I would achieve, but I must admit it was very hard for them [the representatives] to understand it. It was all about law and it is hard for the villagers - they are just ordinary people*" (Planner A, 2021, 3:38)

The criteria for becoming a conversion village was decided, but the selection of two villages and the process of how to choose them are postponed.

The municipality was faced with a job cut in the middle of the process, losing one of the planners in charge of the rural district development. This left the planners with fewer resources to help the villages. Resources are already scarce in rural district planning, which can also be detected in the strategy, as it clearly states that all initiative must come from the villages when planning for development in a village (Hjørring Kommune, 2017). The villagers have to agree on and make the plan themselves. The municipality will help throughout the process, but it is mainly up to the villagers to make the decisions about what it should contain and to find the funds to realise the plan (Planner A, 2021).

**Involving local communities**

There is clearly a wish to involve the local communities in the development of the villages and hand over responsibility to make it happen to the locals. But the planners are limited in their possibilities to do it from the lack of resources prioritised for rural district development. The board of villages makes it easier to involve local communities on a larger scale because representatives from many villages are now organised. But still, a challenge when collaborating with the board is that not all representatives can draw on their own village because not all villages are organised (Planner A, 2021). Therefore, they do not necessarily represent the rest of the village.
Planner A and her colleagues want the local communities to be involved in the decision-making, for example to get their input on how they should select conversion villages

(Planner A, 2021). When the Covid-19 situation interrupted the process, they decided to postpone it until after the municipal plan is adopted rather than deciding it themselves. This reflects that they are working to get the local communities to understand that the responsibility for creating development in the villages is theirs – it will not come from the municipality. Rather, it is the task of the planner to help them figure out what they can do themselves. This clearly states the expected relation between the municipality and the villages.

> "*There is this outdated way of thinking, that it is the municipality must do everything*" (Planner A, 2021, 19:20)

It also reflects a consensus-seeking approach, where the Planner A will not make a decision without the support of the villages. She explains that she does not know how to choose such a conversion village anymore than they do (Planner A, 2021). The lack of resources induces a need for the local communities to take the initiative to make a plan for the village if they want development. Planner A describes how the citizens must make the plan themselves and that it has to be supported by the whole village, and not just represent the wishes of a few citizens before the planners want to support it (Planner A, 2021). This is due to the fact that the villagers have to realise the plan themselves. From the planner's side, this shows a consensus-seeking approach to the planning process, though it is not the planner taking the role of the consensus-seeking mediator, but rather demanding the citizens to collaborate themselves to seek consensus within the villages before the municipality will provide support to the planning process. It almost tends towards avoidance of conflict by the planner by staying out of the conflict, though still giving the citizens the responsibility of decision-making. Mostly, it seems to be a result of the lack of resources and the planners not wanting to use municipal resources on a plan for a village, which will never be realised. This is challenging in villages where citizens have different and conflicting interests. This is the case in one village with lots of potential for tourism, where three groups of conflicting interests have a hard time finding consensus. Planner A and her colleagues do not want to favorise one group against the interest of the others unless it is of a professional assessment to support a political wish (Planner A, 2021). She finds it necessary to handle the disagreements from project to project to decide whether it should be prioritised, avoiding the conflict of finding consensus between the groups. However, opening up for an already divided village might require a lot of time and resources from the municipality - two things which they have tried to minimise through their strategy. Trying to have consensus within the village might, therefore, not be as desirable for the municipality, as it would be to avoid the conflict and influence the development of the village from project to project. Planner A's involvement of the local communities and her handling of conflicts, therefore, seem to be very influenced by her shortness of time and finances. There generally seems to be an overall consensus-seeking approach, but when slightly pressured, avoidance of conflict seems to dominate.

## Authority

Generally, Planner A is provided with the authority to take action from both politicians and the local community. The politicians want to support the development of rural districts and villages and define them as important for Hjørring Municipality, where villages make up a great share of the total. The politicians have praised the work they have done with the

strategy (Planner A, 2021). Though, when cutting the job of one of the planners in charge of rural district planning the legitimacy to prioritise this task seems to be weakened. When it comes to the more specific development projects, Planner A is sometimes challenged by politicians who want to support too many things:

> "*To put it briefly; they want it all. And this is also contradicting things: they want sustainability, they want green, they want cultural heritage, and they want to support the developers. They always say yes. This is challenging because they do not always go hand in hand*" (Planner A, 2021, 47:30)

This makes the legitimacy from the politicians less firm and can be a barrier for the planner when wanting to adjust a wish from a developer to make it more sustainable or accommodate better to the surroundings.

When developing the strategy for planning for villages legitimacy from the local communities were sought by involving representatives through the board of villages and let them be a part of deciding on its form and content. A barrier to this legitimacy Planner A gets from the board of villages is the fact that some of the representatives do not actually represent their village because some of the villages are not organised in any way that enables the representative to represent them. Instead, they represent only a smaller part or perhaps just themselves (Planner A, 2021). And in some villages, this seems to limit the authority the planner can get from the board, as is the case in the before mentioned village, where three groups of citizens disagree on interests in future development. Therefore, the chosen involvement of the villages should have provided legitimate authority from the local communities, but in reality, it only does to a limited extent.

And when it comes to legitimising the specific development plans for a village, legitimacy from the citizens is in the case of Planner A seemingly unavoidable, as it according to their strategy is the first step needed to even begin a process. The requirement of finding consensus within the village and letting the villagers form the plan themselves ensures Planner A that no planning process for villages can start without already having legitimacy from the village. The planners, therefore, does theoretically not need to be concerned about having their acting spaced limited because of missing legitimate authority. But the form they have decided to follow as a consequence of the limited resources only legitimises Planner A to do what the citizens ask for. It provides her with the authority to act according to the wish of the local community, and not necessarily as she intended. Therefore, this legitimacy will instead affect Planner A's ability to decide on a future direction.

The legitimacy to act the way Planner A does also mainly comes to the actions they decide to do - but some citizens think that the planners should do more. Planner A and her colleagues still struggle to make the local communities understand that times have changed and that the initiative and responsibility is not mainly with the planners anymore.

All in all, Planner A is not met with a lack of authority from neither politicians nor local communities to her decisions in general. However, in practice the legitimate authority does not seem to be fully achieved, and she does face minor barriers, causing Planner A's authority to be limited, which directly affects her ability.

## Ability

The format where the local communities form their own goals for future development and form the strategy themselves directly affects Planner A's ability to make a decision about a future direction. This is a barrier for Planner A's ability because it means that she can only guide initiatives from the villages, and not directly influence the development of the villages with their own ideas. The process around the policy seem to have attributed to a change in understanding the municipality as a collaborator rather than as the responsible authority. Therefore, the work done by Planner A is not necessarily what truly makes a difference when it is being implemented, as this part of the work lies with the local communities. She is, however, contributing to making it happen by assisting the villages. She describes her ability to really make a difference as limited, not just when planning strategically for villages, but also in other planning tasks, which are usually initiated by private actors who want to do something and not necessarily matching the ideas of the municipality to how development should happen.

> "*It can be difficult to really make a difference, but it is a part our job to guide and motivate the private developers in a desirable direction for the town [...] but my possibilities are not always great*" (Planner A, 2021, 42:42)

Planner A's influence on the planning for villages has been directly affected through the job cuts and financial resources to support the local communities. Since there is no longer a planner with the task of developing the villages, it is now shared among the planners to assist when a village or other actors want to do development on their own initiative. It seems, though, that the planners had the overall ability to decide on the way the strategical planning process have been designed and that it has been the wish of the planners to involve the local communities in the decision-making and provide them with responsibility, probably as a consequence of the situation and to make it clear to the local community that it is dependent on them.

Therefore, Planner A's ability to truly make a difference in the rural district development of Hjørring Municipality seems to be limited to assisting the local communities to do it themselves.

## Identity

The lack of resources in rural district development and the job cut has clearly led to Planner A feeling that her work and the development of villages is less prioritised by the politicians, even though they seem to appreciate her work:

> "*[...] also politically it is a priority. But I just think it rings hollow when there is then a cut in employees to work with it.*" (Planner A, 2021, 27:44)

Despite describing herself as result oriented, Planner A does not focus on getting direct influence on the results and decisions, but rather to influence the decision-makers during the process (Planner A, 2021). She therefore focus on motivating those in power to make a difference, but unfortunately often without success.

> "*You are always a kind of motivator [...] I never think about getting it my way, but it is a victory when people listen to you [...] We try where we can, but it is often that we lose the battles*" (Planner A, 2021, 44:40)

She explains how the future is never set in stone after making a plan, because there are so many interests. There will always be new things happening, and planners need to be able to handle that. The job of the planner is to coordinate all the different interests, and she describes this as being the most important task - to find common ground and ask people to think twice in order to find the best consensus and to considerate to do things better. So, while she on one hand do not see herself as being able to influence the planning in regard to affect what is developed, she sees her role as a mediator during the decision-making process as being of major influence.

> "*Our role is more important than ever*" (Planner A, 2021, 57:07)

Planner A's description of her own identity generally seems to be split between not being able to make a difference, while still having a very important role in seeking consensus and mediating the process. She sees herself as a mediator, influencing the decision of those in power. She experiences her own power as indirect, and the same goes for her ability to make a difference. The way Hjørring Municipality have chosen to operate generally facilitate seeking consensus, but pressure on resources seems to lead to an avoidance of conflict. Further, handing over the responsibility for development to the local communities and her lack in direct power result in Planner A's acting space being quite limited in regards to ability. This seems to affect her interpretation of her role and pose a barrier for her identity meaning that she takes up the role of a more or less neutral planner. Planner A seems to identify her role as being a piece in the puzzle of the planning process - a piece that is necessary to make it all come together, but unable to make it happen alone.

## 7.3   Planner B from Hedensted Municipality

The strategy for villages in Hedensted Municipality is about the be finished in order to send it into hearing in august and let it become a part of the municipal plan in 2021.

**The planning process**

Hedensted Municipality uses Realdania's guide as inspiration to guide their process, but it is not followed completely, because not all is found relevant in their own situation (Planner B, 2021). Like the first step in the guide, they have collected quantitative data for 15 villages and it is presented through maps. Afterwards, they have turned to the local councils in the villages in order to gather knowledge about the civil strength and to understand their local conditions. This was done by looking at the local associations and the activities happening in the villages as returning events in order to understand the support of the local community and the traditions in the village. These mappings form the basis for indicating which goals are relevant for the villages, and Planner B and her colleagues are currently working on developing these goals (Planner B, 2021).
This is the first time that Hedensted Municipality makes a strategy for their villages, and they build it upon their strategy for rural district development from 2019. In this strategy there is a strong focus on collaboration between the municipality and the local communities, especially with the local councils. Like in Hjørring Municipality's strategy a decisive factor in this strategy seems to be local initiative, and to make the locally driven projects possible there is also a focus on how the municipality can financially support the projects. (Hedensted kommune, 2019b). This strategy points a direction for the intentions

to the new strategy. Planner B explains that their aim with developing this new strategy is to start thinking more strategically when developing the villages, because it sometimes tends to be the villages 'shouting the loudest' that are being heard. In the future they hope to be able to use this strategy to see the planning in a bigger picture (Planner B, 2021):

> "*But that we as a municipality are working on setting a strategical direction for what makes sense out there in the individual local communities – that have been our intention.*" (Planner B, 2021, 11:17)

The plan forward is to finish formulating the overall goals which will be integrated into the municipal plan, but they have not yet come to an agreement on the final formulation of these with the politicians. When the goals are set and included in the municipal plan, Hedensted Municipality will continue to follow Realdania's guide to implement the strategy in each of the villages. They will look into selecting strategical means to achieve the goal, which they plan to do in collaboration with the villages. It is a wish from the municipality to select these means together with the citizens when it is possible to meet again physically. After selecting focus points for the strategical means, concrete actions to realise the strategical means will be decided.

**Involving the local community**

It was the original plan that the strategy for villages would be made in close collaboration with the villages. In November 2020, the ambition was to visit all the villages, because of the values of 'looking them in the eyes' (Hedensted Municipality, 2020). However, the Covid-19 situation made this impossible and the municipality chose to drop all participation and instead keep the villages informed (Planner B, 2021).

> "*We do not want to say that we involve, when we do not actually do it*" (Planner B, 2021, 17:40)

To still provide the villages with a bit of ownership, pictures taken by the villagers has been included in the strategy. Planner B explains that they have been aware of not saying that they have been doing any involvement yet, when they have not, to make sure that local communities will not feel like they have been tricked (Planner B, 2021).
Planner B also finds it more relevant to involve the local community later in the process, when the planning becomes more concrete. The process of deciding on a strategical direction can seem slow and too vague for citizens to relate to (Planner B, 2021). A challenge that Planner B experience in involving the local communities in the strategy is that they want to have influence on the goals, but when they are involved, they are too specific:

> "*Many of the local councils do not seem to understand that it is a strategical overall goal [...] and they seem to be afraid of getting a goal which they do not want*" (Planner B, 2021, 26:28)

Planner B have difficulties balancing between involving the local communities and ensuring that it is, in fact, a strategy. The citizens are quite good when it gets more specific and physical, but are a hindrance when working strategically and deciding on goals which covers all 15 villages (Planner B, 2021). The result of this and the postponing of the involvement

due to the Covid-19 situation is that a set of overall goals will be made in a collaboration between Planner B and the politicians, and the citizens will be involved afterwards when the planning gets more specific. It is Planner B's ambition to make an intense involvement process with each village with meetings where they can discuss the mappings and the goals that have been set for them and the challenges and potentials the village have (Planner B, 2021). This will form the basis for the dialogue of how to realise this in the future. It has not been decided who exactly will be involved, if it will be only the local councils or if it will also be with the rest of the villagers, but the aim is that the villages should start to take ownership over the actions to realise the goals themselves. The municipality does not have a lot of resources, so an aim of the involvement is to motivate the citizens to take charge of the development in their own village themselves (Planner B, 2021). The planned involvement seems to indicate a wish to follow a consensus-seeking approach to planning, but it is difficult to really say before it has happened. The desired outcome of the whole process and the strategy is to make the villages more independent and able to collaborate within the villages in working with local projects.

### Authority

Planner B explains that the politicians generally support the strategy and shown a lot of interest in it. They like the pre-work done with the mappings, but they are not as supportive of Planner B and her colleagues' formulation of the goals (Planner B, 2021). Planner B sees a great potential in using this new national political legitimacy to differentiate the planning for villages. Therefore, the villages have been divided into categories of different potentials and local conditions, and Planner B wants to formulate different goals for each category and use this new suggestion of the Planning Act to differentiate the planning. But she is challenged by the political wish to do otherwise:

> "*To treat everyone equally is a big [political] ambition*" (Planner B, 2021, 3:32)

Therefore, Planner B is not fully supported by the politicians in formulating the goals, and she experiences that the fact that it is election year affects it even more, because they are afraid of losing support in some of the villages:

> "*The politicians are very concerned about their voters in this election year*" (Planner B, 2021, 12:38)

This affects Planner B's legitimate authority from the politicians, because the politicians do not support differentiation and they address the goals from a point of re-election rather than long-term strategical planning for villages, which poses a barrier to Planner B's authority. Planner B's political moment seems to be negatively affected by this combination of circumstances with forming a strategy and having election-year.

As for legitimacy from the citizens, the lack of participation leaves this a bit uncertain. However, Planner B mentions that some of the villages that are not included (not between 200-1000 inhabitants), feels left out and wish to be a part of it too (Planner B, 2021). There also seems to be quite some lack of comprehension from the villages, that are a part of it, of why they are not being involved in formulating the goals for their own village and a fear that they will end up with goals they do not agree with. This could indicate a need for more communication to ensure they understand what is happening and really ensure

legitimacy from their side. Planner B explain that she is still quite new in the municipality, but she already experiences a certain culture:

> "*Its a bit 'the wild west' where the local councils that shout the loudest are the ones who get what they want*" (Planner B, 2021, 11:14)

The strategy opposes this culture, by actually setting a direction for the villages and how they are to be developed. This culture also poses a barrier for Planner B, however, a quite minor barrier which planner B generally can handle through dialogue. Here, she also explains that she benefits from the flat structure in the administration and being a smaller municipality where politicians and administration are close.

## Ability

Planner B has absolute free choice regarding the form of the process. In collaboration with a few colleagues she has decided to use Realdania's method, since she finds that it make great sense for them. Realdania's method was also the only hands-on method as the time, so she found it a natural choice (Planner B, 2021). The method has been modified to the needs of Hedensted Municipality and Planner B has made the drafts for everything, so she experiences a great freedom and ability to influence the process. Through, when it comes to formulating the goals and when it gets more concrete on differentiating the villages the lack of authority from the politicians poses a challenge to her ability at this point of the process. Planner B explains that the politicians want to have influence on the wording of the goals. Planner B and the politicians have a lot of dialogue about the formulation and the intentions of the goals, trying to agree about which goals can be accepted and written into the municipal plan. The flat structure of the municipality with very short distance between the planners and the politicians, gives Planner B an easy access to dialogue with the politicians (Planner B, 2021). But this certainly poses a barrier to Planner B's ability in this part of the process, and Planner B describes how the goals do not turn out to be what she thinks is best, but rather a consensus between her and the politicians.

> "*It is a challenge that we should not plan differently and then there is this word 'differentiated' planning in the new legislation [...] while at the same time treating everyone equally is a big political ambition [...] right now, we are working with the formulation of goals which is both politically approved, and which we can use later*" (Planner B, 2021, 3:38)

Planner B find the new legislation a good and sensible initiative, and sees great potential in differentiating the planning for villages in Hedensted Municipality. She finds it beneficial for her work that legislation now states the need to differentiate, which so far has not meet political goodwill. With this new legal support to push this political desire for equal development she hopes to be able to push it in the future and thereby to increase her ability, but for now, the political ambition for equal planning poses a barrier. This barrier is rooted in a political culture and is therefore not easy for Planner B to overcome, but might need gradually adjustment and discussions which this strategy helps facilitate.

## Identity

Planner B is motivated in her work by making the best results to create value for the citizens with the resources available in the municipality. She values to do her work in

collaboration with the citizens and to be at eye level with them (Planner B, 2021). This can be challenging to see when working strategically, because the citizens are often best at contributing when it becomes more concrete. It reflects her tendency to lean towards collaborative and communicative planning and seeking consensus, even though it is not really reflected in this planning process, since it was dropped quite quickly due to the lockdown situation. Strategical development can be long in the making, but she does not experience any other challenges than time to actually make difference through her work. She is aware that there are things she does not have influence on and aspects she is not able to affect, but she relates her own ability to make a difference to how her profession can contribute the the planning process and distinguishes how different professions in the municipality can contribute differently to a good process which a lot of knowledge.

> "*The things I do not have influence on are things I should not have influence on*" (Planner B, 2021, 49:09)

She values the holistic solutions which is the result of this collaboration between different professions, and sees a great need for planners:

> "*We have a profession which is really needed - otherwise it will just be the wild west [...] It is a collaboration between everyone and everything and our role as planners is significant*" (Planner B, 2021, 53:04)

It is very clear that the great freedom Planner B sees in her work is reflected in her trust in her colleagues and experience of her ability to make a difference. She sees her role as both important and able to have an influence. It might be a reflection of her relatively few years as a planner and lack of conflicts in the process, but Planner B generally have a lot of acting space and seeks for consensus when meeting conflict.

## 7.4 Planner C from Viborg municipality

Viborg Municipality have not started working with strategical planning for villages the way it is intended through the new legislation. They work with their local development plans, which focus on one village at a time, but expect that they might lead to an actual strategy eventually (Planner C, 2021).
Viborg Municipality has previously operated 'citizen plans', where the local communities have access to a guide to follow in making their own plan for the development of their village, which could then be delivered to the municipality. This has been the planning-tradition and the local development plans builds upon these citizen plans.

**The planning process**

When working with villages Planner C follows the same approach every time. In collaboration with her superior and other involved colleagues she has developed a formalised approach which is always used to create the local development plans. (Planner C and superior, 2021) It revolves around involving the local community through an intro evening, forming a group of villagers to be responsible for the planning process and a workshop where the whole village is invited to discuss the wishes for future planning. Locals take notes from the workshop, and Planner C collects all the notes, group and

digitalise them and hand them over to the representative group to continue working with it in collaboration with Planner C (Planner C, 2021).

They do not have any strategy for how the villages should be developed but they see their formalised approach as a strategical approach in itself – a strategy for how the process should happen, rather than for what should happen with the villages (Planner C, 2021). It comes from a wish not to treat the villages differently, which is also evident in their general administration model, Sammenhængsmodellen. In here, overall goals are set for future development, and only one is set for villages: a wish for growth in all local communities with more than 200 inhabitants (Viborg Kommune, n.d.a), which seems to be a very neoliberal focused wish for development which is not at all nuanced to the potentials of each village. Planner C's superior explains:

> "*The political opinion is that we do not want to prioritise between the villages [...] I can have a professional opinion about that, but I will not respond to whether this is a good idea or not*" (Planner C and superior, 2021, 11:00) and "*We do not have a complete strategy for what we want besides wanting growth [...] and whether we will get it, I don't know. Maybe it is something we will work on up to the next revision of the municipal plan. [...] But whether it is wanted politically, I don't know*" (Planner C and superior, 2021, 17:40)

The goal of growth is set by the politicians, but Planner C agrees with not setting differentiated goals for different types of villages and do not want to group the villages depending on their potentials:

> "*We are not going to give the villages red, yellow or green colour. That is also politically a difficult exercise*" (Planner C and superior, 2021, 6:50)

But she still agrees that they have to differentiate the planning to some degree depending on their potentials and needs. But this comes naturally as a result of their planning approach, she says, because it starts the same way and ends with same type of outcome but what happens in between depends on the village (Planner C, 2021). And for that reason, she also disagrees with making a strategy the way it is suggested by Realdania, where villages are grouped based on their potentials and current situations:

> "*I have a wonder about lumping them all together and sort them into categories. I simply don't get the point of it. I cannot understand at all why that is interesting.*" (Planner C and superior, 2021, 21:19)

Reflecting on their own approach Planner C does, though, see potential in developing their own formalised approach to an 'updated version', a version 2.0, as she calls it, where they could draw more on elements from Realdanias guide. And her superior also sees a potential in seeing the development plans for the villages in relation to each other and potentially make them for more than one village at a time in the future, if the villages would be willing to collaborate in the process (Planner C and superior, 2021).

**Involving the local community**

The local community is involved throughout the whole process. They have to initiate it by applying for a local development plan, and they have to form a group that can represent

the village in the planning process which is representative for different interest groups in the village, so all aspects can be thought of (Planner C and superior, 2021). At the workshops, the locals also have to be activated in making it happen. Planner C facilitates the workshop, but the local community have to organise it and be active throughout the workshop in making it happen. Different themes are on the table, to be discussed in smaller groups, where the locals can bring their ideas and wishes for future development. At the workshop the locals have to prioritise their wishes. This opens up for discussions about which things the municipalities can work to realise, and what are things the local community can do themselves. This is especially important, because the local communities need to realise that they have a part in all of the development, if it needs maintenance afterwards (Planner C, 2021).

This can only happen because Planner C makes quite an effort in keeping a dialogue with the local communities. It is important for her to make them understand what role she plays and what their role is. To make the local communities realise that the initiative and the main role in making a development happen and keeping it maintained is theirs, dialogue is essential. And it helps make the citizens aware of what is possible and think more realistically about both their own responsibility and the possibilities of the municipality:

> "*Dialogue, I think, has been our biggest result*" (Planner C and superior, 2021, 20:30)

The local community is to mobilise themselves and get the work started, but Planner C helps them within reason if they need help to make it happen. Some villages are very independent and well-organised while others need help on how to do it. But the process demands quite some volunteer work, and therefore, they have to be able to lift the task themselves. Otherwise, Planner C prioritise other tasks (Planner C, 2021).

Planner C generally do not experience any conflict among the local communities within the villages. They rarely disagree on the more overall interests in the development, but sometimes they do not agree on how to carry it out when it gets concrete. But generally she explains:

> "*I don't think we have any real experience in meeting it [disagreements]. It has mostly been towards us*" (Planner C and superior, 2021, 32:38)

But through the dialogue the discontent towards the municipality fades and the atmosphere improves with time. She does not seem to be intimidated by the discontent they are often met with in the beginning, as many of her colleagues are, and when meeting a village she is very aware of trying to understand it from their perspective to meet them in the dialogue (Planner C, 2021).

Planner C values this type of participation as it provides a lot of new angles and new things to consider. She sees the local community as able to bring a lot of commitment and different perspectives to the process which the planners will not be able to see on their own (Planner C, 2021). The whole process also shows that Planner C focuses on dialogue and collaboration with the villages. Planner C seems to be rather accepting of conflict and she explains how she understands very well the frustrations the citizens can have over the municipality. Her efforts towards ensuring representatives from multiple groups of the

local community in the planning process is an indicator that she has a focus on having the plan anchored broadly and that she accepts that villagers will not have the same view on what the good village life is and what it takes to get it. This effort reflect the values of agonism, purposefully seeking the pluralistic knowledge, accepting strife in uncovering the different knowledge.

## Authority

Viborg Municipality has a very divided political landscape, almost 50/50 in representatives from rural and urban, and there has been a general experience that development is primarily happening in the main city, Viborg, with the rest of the municipality given too little attention (Planner C and superior, 2021). This is also very clear in the political decisions and in the legitimacy given to Planner C's action. She sometimes experiences politicians less supportive of their work and of planning in general as they see it as a barrier that hinders development. Her superior explains:

> "*There are so many prejudices everywhere. And that is how it is [...] There are some believes that nothing can be done, and if we [citizens, developers or politicians] get some ideas, then you [the municipality] will make sure to work against it. [. . .] Some of it is probably true, but there are some good reasons for it, but there is also a political responsibility for it. There are still some national politicians who say that the Planning Act is hindrance for everything, nothing can happen*" (Planner C and superior, 2021, 23:35)

This, he believes, limits the trust in planners and it affects the way the local communities view planners. There seems to be a strife with some politicians, where planning is seen as a barrier, rather than a collaborator. This, and the divided political landscape, pose as barriers for Planner C's legitimised authority. But Planner C also experiences quite some support from politicians to her work with planning for villages (Planner C and superior, 2021).

With a recently formed political committee with the sole focus of developing the rural districts, there has clearly been a wish to politically prioritise villages, and over the last years more financial resources have also been prioritised for supporting the local development projects in villages (Planner C, 2021). She experiences the politicians in the Rural District Committee as being very committed to the work she does for rural district development and supportive of Planner C's work (Planner C, 2021). The committee prioritises which villages to make plans for. But since a main part of the planning process is depending on the local community, she is not obliged to keep pressing a village if they do not provide sufficient effort:

> "*. . . we have a political decision that a collaboration with a local community make demands on the volunteer effort. So, we also have authority to leave it if they do not return to us with anything*" (Planner C, 2021, 51:34)

This generally gives Planner C quite some authority from the politicians to act as she sees fit in the situation. So generally, Planner C seems to get authority from the politicians to her work with villages, and to approach the work the way she does.

Planner C does, though, have a different view on how the villages should be developed than the politicians, which is evident in her view on the politically decided goal to have growth in all local communities with more than 200 inhabitants. Her own understanding of how to develop villages contradicts that of the politicians, who measure this goal for growth by the number of residents. Planner C does not find the goal realistic and her aim is, therefore, to approach that goal differently than the intention of the politically decided goal.

> "*We have talked about the possibility of making a positive approach to growth not necessarily is in the number of citizens, but growth in something else [...] in the civil strength [...] We can strengthen out local communities without a growth in population.*" (Planner C and superior, 2021, 12:12)

She is aware of the fact that it is not possible to have growth everywhere, so her approach to meeting the political wish is to work a different way around it. With the mixed political view on planning and a political wish that Planner C is not not supportive of, she seems to be in a position of varying legitimacy in some of her tasks, and she might have to be aware about when she gains a political moment to turn her action into change. But generally she seems to be supported in her daily work with local development plans for villages.

To gain legitimacy from the citizens, her choice of process seems to provide her with an increasing authority. The approach she takes when working with villages to focus on dialogue to make the local communities understand what she is able to help them with and why the municipality is limited in its actions the way it is, helps her to find common ground with them and break down some barriers in their collaboration. Planner C explains that this have helped "give the municipality a face" and not seem too much like an uncooperative organ far away from the villages (Planner C and superior, 2021). This has especially been important, because she is often met with a discontent over the lack of planning initiated by the planners:

> "*That time where it is the municipality which must take care of everything, has ended*" (Planner C and superior, 2021,29:00)

Therefore, the dialogue has been important in breaking down prejudices which she experience to be a reflection of that of the politicians. This dialogue provides Planner C with legitimacy to continue with a very dialogue-dominated planning approach.

### Ability

As a result of her authority Planner C generally have a high ability, as she is generally supported by both politicians and local communities in her work. She experiences that her position gives her the ability to facilitate positive planning processes with the villages and that this actually helps the villages and makes a difference to them (Planner C, 2021). Sometimes, she says, her biggest challenge in figuring out her role is to find the balance in how much she should interfere in the work of the local community (Planner C and superior, 2021). The politicians have only wanted to interfere and directly affect the planning process one time, where some citizens, who stayed out of the planning process, made complaints about the plan after it was published. Other than that, the politicians do not interfere in the decision-making (Planner C, 2021). Though her ability to facilitate

a lot of participation seems to be without any barriers, the structural settings of the municipality seem to create barriers to her ability sometimes.

First of all, her ability to affect the development is sometimes limited, because of the way rural district planning is organised in the municipality. Planner C works with planning for villages in the department 'Planning and development', but the head of rural district development is employed in a different department, 'Culture and development', which can sometimes lead to difficulties:

> "*One of the 'sore toes' we have in this process is in the internal structure [...] there are two directors who sometimes work independent of each other [...] there is not a bad collaboration, but sometimes it is a busy day...*" (Planner C, 2021, 00:12)

This can lead to confusion about who is responsible for doing what and require a lot of collaboration. The head of rural district development is very active in the tasks and they work together on most of Planner C's tasks with the villages. Together they have decided on the formalised approach she uses when planning for villages. But a part of the planning process, where the villages are analysed and a description of it is made before starting the planning process, is not with her, but in the other department (Planner C, 2021). It makes it difficult for her to change the way of making the plan in the future and can potentially be a barrier for her to make the decisions or can lead to changes in her work which she has not been involved in deciding. Generally, she seems to find working with other departments a struggle at times:

> "*It is great with that citizen involvement, but the involvement of departments in the administration is my real problem [...]*" (Planner C, 2021, 1:28:03)

Another challenge to Planner C's ability is the political Rural District Committee, which is affiliated to the department of culture and development, where the head of rural district development is located, instead of the department of planning. The committee has of 2021 decided to use Realdania's method of mapping the civil strength (Landdistriktsudvalget, n.d.), but has done this without the planning departments and Planner C. She also experiences that the political committee is very committed and that they sometimes want to work quite independently from the municipal administration and do things themselves (Planner C, 2021). This makes it difficult for her to figure out what is her task and what is done elsewhere (Planner C and superior, 2021). Planner C seems to think of the committee as a barrier or at least a potential one. She views the placement of the committee in the organisation as a misplacement, which she hopes will be changed. When talking about her ability to make a difference and where her influence is most limited, she returns to the committee:

> "*I have not been involved in how the committee have strategically approached their work. [...] It is very central for the committee's work that they work with these local developments plans [...] and everything with description and analyses of the villages [...] I am not involved in that*" (Planner C, 2021, 53:16)

Not being involved in the strategical approach to planning for villages is also a potential barrier for Planner C. Both Planner C and her superior addressed strategical planning as

something they were uncertain of if they wanted to do, and with the decision placed in another department, she may not be able to influence it.

The fact that the committee and the department of culture use their resources on data collection and analysis might work against her advocating for individual assessment, but it mainly provides her with free data and more time to focus on the villages. Therefore, Planner C might experience her work more restricted by the municipal administration, especially by the structural placement of this committee, than it actually happens to be. This might be reasoned in her own dialogue-based working style, and therefore a lack of information and dialogue about a topic which concerns her field of work is experienced as problematic.

### Identity

Planner C finds great value in dialogue and gets motivated when she experiences what she can do through dialogue. She experiences that dialogue can be used to de-escalate conflicts and to focus on collaboration rather than an unsolvable strife.

> "*You can turn people around from opposition to cooperation through dialogue*"
> (Planner C, 2021, 1:08:30)

She likes to talk to the citizens about what frame they want to for the life they are living and thinks that she might even understand the citizens more than the planners. Her motivation for dialogue is also reflected in her key value, which is trust (Planner C, 2021). If she feels pressured, it is because the trust is at stake. She understands the perspective of the citizens and why it can be difficult for them to collaborate with the municipality, and she wants to help the citizens even more and make that function more professionally. Not that the planners should do the job for the citizen, but to help them to make it even easier to participate. The fact that she wants to help the villages even more, might be a reflection of that she experiences that she can truly make a difference. About her own ability to make a difference, she states:

> "*Well, it is huge!*" (Planner C, 2021, 1:11:28)

When describing her own experience of her ability to make a difference she says that she feels like Santa Claus. When involving the citizens she can help them to be able to get much more than they might have expected, and for that reason, the participation also becomes easy. She takes a very positive view on her position with a focus on what she can do, rather than all her limits, though she would like to work even more with the villages' mobilisation and help them with the realisation of their plans. When reflecting on the need for planners today, Planner C circulates around the different aspects of ensuring a fairness in planning through long term planning which citizens can count on when choosing where to live. This is in clear connection to her value of trust and she generally seems to identify herself as "being on the citizens side". That might also be why her barriers are mostly in the system of municipal administration and with the politicians. Her focus on breaking down the barriers between the citizens and municipality have made her much aware of what challenges the citizens opposes, and thereby she seems to take up the role as the citizens voice within the municipality in the non-political way. And at the same time she also sees the need for planners to be aware of what we can actually do and be open to

what limits we face by legislation and where things can actually happen even though it may not seem like it:

> "*There are a lot of things we can affect with planning […] the perspective that there are things we just can't do anything about … sometimes that is a lie.*"
> (Planner C, 2021, 1:22:11)

This reflects her general approach of being more aware of what her possibilities are, and what she is able to do than focusing on what limitis her possibilities. It is obvious that Planner C is aware of how her position is political in her way of dealing with both politicians and colleagues. She is aware of what decisions she can make in the political organisation and how she can deal with political aims that she does not fully agree with. And she mentioned multiple times how she is considering new additions or changes in their formalised approach, which she has not yet brought to the table, because time is not right yet (Planner C, 2021; Planner C and superior, 2021).

## 7.5   Planner D from Vejle Municipality

The strategical planning for villages in Vejle Municipality has been approached from a point of minimum effort, as the municipality already felt they meet the requirements in the new legislation.

**The planning process**

Planner D describes how he looked towards their neighbouring municipality, Vejen, for inspiration, because they were one of the case municipalities in developing Realdania's method. However, he did did not feel that Vejle's situation reflected the challenges of shrinkage in the rural districts which were the purpose described in the report from the Committee for Viable Villages (Planner D and colleague, 2021). Planner D indirectly talks about the villages as generally not having any problems with shrinkage. Not that he ever describes them as growing, but rather as thriving. This is also reflected in his choice of process for the strategy, in which he put the minimum efforts and resources to make it, but aims to still benefit from the process.

> "*How can we the easiest give the state what they want? Because we do not feel like there is a need for it, but what can we use of these demands to continue this development in Vejle Municipality*" (Planner D and colleague, 2021, 5:40)

As a result of his position, Planner D has a close contact with the municipality's 33 local councils and meet up with them at least once a year. Planner D wanted to save these councils time, because they perform volunteer work (Planner D and colleague, 2021). Therefore, he decided to divide the municipality into four areas that share similarities in their physical conditions and in their social and cultural life and described their characteristics. Planner D made a description of the four areas by using both "hard facts" like mappings of infrastructure, and drawing on his experience from his 15 years of working with the villages (Planner D and colleague, 2021). Vejle Municipality's strategy is not as much of a strategy, as it is a description of the areas and their qualities (Vejle Kommune, 2020). Planner D reasons this to be because this kind of strategical work already is present in other plans and because they are not challenged by shrinkage, they do not need

a strategy to solve any problems (Planner D and colleague, 2021). The document has an introduction and then continue to a general description of the four areas. In comparison with the strategies of other municipalities, the "minimum" effort is also reflected in the layout of the plan, which is a standard setting in Microsoft Words with continuous pages of small paragraphs (Vejle Kommune, 2020), which also indicates that this is a document for discussion rather than a publication. The elements of setting goals for the future development is planned to happen continuously after the municipal plan is finished and the development is to happen (Planner D and colleague, 2021).

**Involving the local community**

Planner D delivered a more or less finished product about how the he sees the structure and characteristics of the four areas without involving the local communities, and then he asked for feedback on through a hearing on the platform CitizenLab. In this approach Planner D seems to be open to the possibility of conflict over the proposed descriptions:

> "*What I tried to do was to deliver something and say 'this is how we see you - do you agree?' Then it is easier to react to something others have made and say 'oh yes, that is exactly us' or 'that is completely wrong'*" (Planner D and colleague, 2021, 9:00)

It was announced under the title: *Are we alike?*, and the hearing received 7 answers. Mostly, the question of what the meaning with the strategy was appeared in the answers from the hearing, because the villages already felt like they had a good collaboration in their existing clusters (Vejle Kommune, n.d.). It also received some concerns about the wording of the labels which according to planner D was very easy to accommodate, because it does not cost anything to change the words. The responses were integrated and used to accommodate the plan.

Generally, the strategy have been made purposefully with little participation, which is argued for as a respect of the time of the citizens, but also to avoid involving them in a process which does not have their interest and where they cannot contribute with a lot. Planner D's colleague explains:

> "*Sometimes, the collaboration with the local communities are characterised by them being very practical and quickly turn towards finding a solution*" (Planner D and colleague, 2021,12:00)

It is a choice based on experience and a consciousness about how resources are used, which have shaped the involvement process of this strategy to be close to a minimum (Planner D and colleague, 2021). What seems to be the deciding factor for this to still be an inclusive process and not a case of a rational planner taking on the master role, is Planner D's close contact to the 33 local councils. Planner D describes how it was due to his close contact and many years of experience, that he suggested the chosen process, where he made a strategy with minimum involvement (Planner D and colleague, 2021). The hearing via CitizenLab indicates that it was successful due to the low number of answers. The activity on CitizenLab, when addressing more specific planning such as a plan for a village, gains over a hundred responses (Vejle Kommune, n.d.). So it is not because the platform is not known and used, but probably rather a correct judgement of a low interest from the villages. On the other hand, the strategy is merely a description of the four areas, and

does not pose any goals for the development of the areas. The response might, therefore, also be low because the plan generally does not have an impact on the development of the villages.

Overall, Vejle Municipality have made a description rather that a strategy, with minimum involvement during the process. As for handling conflict, there has not been any. However, Planner D's openness with the plan regarding response and asking for inputs indicates that he he is open for meeting potential conflicts and ready to deal with them. The regular communication with the councils also indicate that he might seek to understand the different perspectives and knowledge of the villages and citizens.

## Authority

Planner D has a lot of legitimacy providing him with authority, especially in regard to the citizens. His close contact with the villages enables him to provide a description of their situations and common features without involvement, and the hearing via CitizenLab generally confirms planner D's own beliefs in his authority. But as he explains himself, the citizens generally do not care to involve themselves too much in matters that have no significance to them. And that is the case in Planner D's decision as he has developed a set of descriptions rather than an actual strategy. It contains no goals or intentions for future development, and therefore, in practice it changes nothing for the citizens. Chances are that he would have received more response and more objection or discontent from citizens if his strategy had indicated intentions for future development or priority of the villages.

As for authority from the politicians, Planner D does not experience any barriers either. He did not find it necessary to make a comprehensive strategy for villages, and the politicians have not found it important either, but accepted the descriptions he made and found it more important then to return to their daily work (Planner D and colleague, 2021). One of the benefits of planner D's work is that some of the informal collaboration between the villages has been made formal, which has been received positively by the politicians (Planner D and colleague, 2021). An interesting result of the strategy was to have the politicians and the citizens to accept these stereotypes for each of the four areas, and instead of just talking about the individual village, it is now discussed on a more strategical level. Theoretically, it should enable the municipality to do something for an area instead of for a village. Before, these characteristics only existed as verbal description, but now it is written and accepted and can be used in the planning (Planner D and colleague, 2021). As for political engagement in the process, it has mainly been the Committee for Local Communities and Local Democracy that have been involved. Planner D explains that since this strategy is not a solution to any problems, the politicians do not engage and that is why he has been able to steer the task so freely (Planner D and colleague, 2021). Planner D seems to face no barriers in his authority, which gives him a great ability to influence the planning process.

## Ability

Planner D clearly demonstrates his ability to determine the process. He was invited by his colleague, who was responsible for the municipal plan, to decide on how to make this

strategy for the municipal plan and asked to take the task (Planner D and colleague, 2021). He explains how he argued for the choice of process for his colleagues:

> "*I had another approach and we [Planner D and his colleagues] do not fully agree about how we should do it [...] I suggested that we did not do it [involved the villages], but that we more or less delivered a finish document, because this it not something I believes the villages think is super important. It does not interest them a lot and I do not wanna waste their time by involving them in something the do not want to be involved in.*" (Planner D and colleague, 2021, 09:13)

Planner D speaks here of the norm of doing involvement, at least at a symbolic level, in such a process, which is what he opposes because he does not see what good it would do to either the strategy or the citizens. Planner D's ability is demonstrated by the fact they they came to him and went with his suggestion for the planning process and involvement. This lack of barriers in his ability is potentially also due to the fact that it is quite limited how much of a difference the strategy he has developed actually makes, and therefore, to what extent this is actually a demonstration of having the ability to make a decision about future direction. It is, therefore, difficult to say whether he would possess the same ability to make the decisions for future direction if the strategy would set goals and priorities for the villages.

### Identity

The lack of barriers in his authority and ability is also reflected in his own view of the restrictions within his acting space. He does not feel like he experiences any barriers to make a difference, and much like Planner C he sees his role as being in the positive processes, where he can help citizens realise their local wishes rather than dealing with citizens with larger problems. The biggest challenge he can point out is when the citizens start to expect too much of the municipality:

> "*The biggest challenge is that expectations change over time, where the citizens [...] to a greater extent start to expect that the municipality does the things for them. So even through there are many [villages] who can do a lot of things themselves, there is still an increasingly larger group who gets grumpy when they can have what they want*" (Planner D and colleague, 2021, 39:05)

Planner D here addresses the backside of his work with inclusion and guidance of the citizens in planning. He values the time they take to participation and it is important for him to establish a good relation between the citizens he meet and himself as a representative from the municipality:

> "*Every time we have a meeting, I try to ensure that the citizens thinks that was a good meeting [...] so they leave the meeting thinking it was good they came*" (Planner D and colleague, 2021, 35:40)

What therefore actually seems to be his main barrier is the balancing between involving the citizens meaningfully, guiding them and keeping them motivated, but still making it clear that they must want to be a part of the development:

> "*The challenge is to keep trying not to take the responsibility away from them*"
> (Planner D and colleague, 2021, 39:56)

This challenge seems to be a reflection of Planner D's own identity as a mediator between the institutional frame of the municipality and the citizens who are rarely in contacts with the municipality. Planner D has a large focus on fairness and to give the citizens the best service while treating everyone fairly. It is for him a value that the citizens feel like they where treated fairly, and planners are needed to to ensure this fairness and to preserve the common goods of the community (Planner D and colleague, 2021). Planner D sees the Planning Act as a community-agreement that planners must ensure is kept. The law can surely be changed, and all planning can be changed, but the law provides guidelines which are needed because we are together in a community.

> "*Municipality means community*" (Planner D and colleague, 2021, 40:05)

This view on the municipality also resonates with his close contact and visits to the local councils and his need for providing a good experiences for the citizens when they are in contact with the municipality. Planner D's action also reflects his experiences of that he can make a difference through his work.

> "*You wonder, if somebody else had your place, would it have been different or not? I mean, how big of a difference do you actually make? I tell myself that, after 15 year, I have a big influence. I help write the budgets and to realise them afterwards*" (Planner D and colleague, 2021, 35:14)

Throughout the whole interview, Planner D seems so find himself in a position of both ability and authority to take action and his identity reflect that these action are rooted in a general care for the communities. But it is also clear that he is not afraid of making decisions on his own of what he finds to be the best solution. He is clearly aware of how his position is political. He knows that it is not accepted that the officials in the administration have different opinions than the politicians, but he is still aware of using his acting space to push his intentions forward.

## 7.6   Planner E from Norddjurs Municipality

Norddjurs has made a strategy for villages as a part of the revision of their municipal plan, which is currently in hearing. The strategy has been made based on previous work and material developed by Realdania with no involvement of citizens.

**The planning process**

Before Planner E worked in Norddjurs, Realdania began the process of testing the method they have developed on the municipality. Planner E was, therefore, only a part of the final part of the process of Realdania's work and she has then afterwards formed a strategy from this work (Planner E and team leader, 2021). What Realdania did, was to use the steps of their method on Norddjurs Municipality and two other municipalities, as a test of the guide they were developing. The final form of this method is the one that is published in *Længe leve landsbyerne* (Realdania, 2020b). For Norddjurs, this resulted in a report presenting the work that had been done and the results of Realdania's test (Realdania,

2020a). The report contains a detailed mapping through quantitative data which resulted in a categorisation of their villages into four groups and suggestions to future actions for each of these four groups. What the mapping and the actions of Realdania's work lacks is involvement of the citizens, which Realdania write has to be done by the municipality:

> "*Involvement has not been a part of the commission for the mapping, beside if the municipality have chosen to send a questionnaire to the local councils. It is of cause central to involve the village in the further work to get a more nuanced mapping*" (Realdania, 2020a, p. 7)

However, no involvement of citizens has happened, neither during nor after Realdania's test of the method. Planner E explains how the focus of Realdania have mostly been on testing their method, and her team leader explains how lack of time was the reason for not having any involvement. Additionally, being a part of this project with Realdania put them in a special situation:

> "*It is quite special that we have been a part of this test project because if we had not, then it was us who would use the method in Realdania's publication and then I think it would have been much different. Then we had taken the method and thought that it would have been natural to involve the villages in the process. But it has not been natural for us because we were a part of the test project so now, the work is already done to some extent*" (Planner E and team leader, 2021, 14:46)

To make Norddjurs' strategy for villages Planner E used the report from Realdania and their own Plan and Development Strategy from 2019, which, like Realdania, points out a division and categorisation of the villages and areas of the municipality (Realdania, 2020a). Combined these formed the basis for the strategy (Planner E and team leader, 2021). A part of the process was to have workshops with the politicians, so there has been some involvement, not of citizens, but of politicians. Through the workshops, Planner E has discussed with the politicians how to differentiate between the villages and there has generally been focused a lot on building up a political consensus. The final strategy presents a division of the villages into four categories, and planner E describes it a being quite 'spacious' since it does not go deeper than to present different ways of planning for the four categories. This leaves space for change if the citizens wants to push for another development than assigned in the strategy. The strategy is currently in hearing as a part of the municipal plan.

**Involving the local community**

As mentioned, there has only been involvement of the politicians during the process, while there has been no involvement of the local communities during the process.

> "*We have not had any involvement of citizens*" (Planner E and team leader, 2021, 10:04)

The first chance for the citizens to get involved was, therefore, at a public meeting about the municipal plan with the citizens which was held a few weeks before the interview. Planner E explains how they where to discuss three different subject, but the main discussion ended up being about the strategy:

> "*We had a public meeting [about the municipal plan] where this strategy for villages actually was of quite a strong presence. It was almost the only discussion at this meeting [...] what it meant to be in the different categories and things like that. So, I expect that we will get some hearing answers about it [the strategy]*" (Planner E and team leader, 2021, 10:25)

The citizens were critical towards the categorisation and worried about not having the possibilities for future development if it would become relevant. They were also critical about the lack of involvement, which could have resulted in them feeling a sense of ownership with it, which they do not at this point. The lack of involvement during the process, therefore, seems to result in opposition from the citizens.

A critical thought to this is how the lack of time really was a barrier for making involvement since Realdania saved the municipality time with the mapping by making most of it for them. It rather seems to have been convenient to continue with the knowledge gathered without participation. Planner E's team leader also reflect about this during the interview, but it is clear that it is not something they have seriously discussed:

> "*You could be critical towards if we should have involved the citizens a bit more, but it just* [How do you plan to involve them in the future process?] *We do not really have any plan for that*" (Planner E and team leader, 2021, 15:40)

Continuing on this thought her team leader reflects on their challenges of being a small municipality involvement is always is a result of the available resources:

> "*If you ask us now, then I think is would have been obvious [to involve] - but with that reservation that it takes a lot of resources*" (Planner E and team leader, 2021, 16:11)

Planner E and her team leader do see the point in doing involvement in the future process, but it they also have to think of their resources available. The choice of involvement seems to be determined by a financial aspect, even through both Planner E and her team leader is very aware of why involvement is needed. But they see grand participation processes as something rather happening in the ideal world but not always in the real world:

> "*In the ideal world, it would have been nice. It is very obvious that you get some involvement, because the things do not turn into anything is you no not get the local anchoring, that is at least how we see it*" (Planner E and team leader, 2021, 17:05)

It is a bit contradicting to both argue for how 'things do not turn into anything' without participation and still choose not to do it because Realdania did not do it. It sends a signal of that this strategy is not expected to have a real influence in Norddjurs municipality. It seems like involvement of the citizens has not been assessed as an available option and action to take during the process, but that what was needed is a political consensus, so that the planner can pin the politicians up on this commitment later if conflict occurs. Planner E's team leader also describe the strategy as a tool for administration, rather that a strategy to achieve a goal (Planner E and team leader, 2021). As for handling for conflict, Planner E seem to have taken an approach of avoidance of conflict with the citizens and consensus seeking with the politicians, because it for her the dialogue with the politicians which truly matters.

**Authority**

The new legislation has provided Norddjurs with a push towards looking more at the villages, and Planner E explains how it has given them some good discussions about daring to make prioritisation in the rural districts. The politicians have been very interested in the strategy and been engaged in the discussion and not really been critical towards the final product (Planner E and team leader, 2021). Planner E's team leader sees quite some positive political results from this new legislation:

> "*It is great that we now dare to make this prioritisation because it does take quite some courage as a politician to say 'we have all these villages, but these five we would like to especially help'*" (Planner E and team leader, 2021, 20:40)

At the public meeting about the municipal plan with the citizens, a politician said that it was good that they have finally started looking at the villages (Planner E and team leader, 2021). Despite this engagement from the politicians, they have asked the planners to start on other tasks and postpone further work with the strategy until later. Election year was not mentioned in the interview, but the clear prioritisation of other tasks before the strategy, might be because the politicians want other things to be handled and finished before the election in the fall of 2021. Planner E's legitimacy from the politicians to work strategically is not removed, but is postponed due to other tasks being of priority for the politicians.

The lack of participation in the whole process leaves Planner E with a lack of legitimacy to her actions of developing the strategy in the villages which now seem to result in a lot of hearing answers questioning and opposing the strategy. Therefore, the lack of legitimacy from the local communities pose a barrier to Planner E's authority. However, the need for legitimacy from the citizens does not seem to be of most importance for Planner E and her team leader, as they explain how they answer to the politicians, who is elected by the citizens and thereby should represent their interest (Planner E and team leader, 2021). It seems that Planner E and her team leader expects this to be less of a problem when the citizens get to understand the intentions of the strategy, and that it will not limit their possibilities if they want to do something in the future. Therefore, this does not seem to affect Planner E's actions and therefore, not in practice pose a barrier to her acting space.

**Ability**

The politicians have shown a lot of interest in developing the strategy, but they have not been interfering too much in how it was formed and how the villages have been categorised. Only when it came to selecting two conversion villages (Planner E and team leader, 2021). Planner E has decided on the approach to the process through dialogue with the politicians, where they all found it natural to base it on the work done by Realdania and tie it up to their existing development strategy. But it seems that her ability to make a difference through her work is tied to her dialogue with the politicians. Her team leader explains:

> "*It is the politicians who decide. But we come up with suggestions on how to do it. Perhaps we make two alternatives for the process and present to the politicians. Then they can choose between them.*" (Planner E and team leader, 2021, 28:24)

Planner E explains that the politicians have been true to what have been suggested for the strategy when it came to making a decision. She seems to be very aware of how she gains the support of the politicians to he work through argumentation and keeping an ongoing process with workshops and dialogue with the politicians.

Realdania, Planner E explains, have not been a part of deciding on the process for developing the strategy. The pre-work they have done have been in collaboration with the planners of Norddjurs, but they have not been involved in the further work in forming the strategy.

She does not feel any real barriers to her ability other than a lack of resources to have enough time to do the tasks properly:

> "*In regard the the municipal plan I felt that we are a small municipality and still need to do the same things and themes like any other municipality [...] we have some good competences, but there are also some things where we are not experts and that is a challenge sometimes*" (Planner E and team leader, 2021, 50:37)

The main barrier in Planner E's ability is the municipality's lack of resources, and a potential barrier could be the politicians' lack of consensus to support her work, but so far it does not seem to limit her ability.

## Identity

Planner E's is especially motivated by playing into the political aspect of the process (Planner E and team leader, 2021), which also highly reflects her approach to the planning process. It has been a natural focus to involve the politicians through lots of dialogue and workshops but less of a focus to involve the citizens. The professional aspect of planning is motivating her, and she finds the political process of suggesting actions and convincing politicians exciting even though it will not always be a success:

> "*I find the political process and the relation between the political process and our work and suggestions very exciting. I like to part where we have to explain why something should be done in a certain way and convince someone else that this is a good idea.*" (Planner E and team leader, 2021, 49:32)

Planner E has a personal value of orderliness and being thorough in her work and her recommendations no matter if it is supported or rejected by the politicians.

It is a great motivation for her to know that her work can improve people's everyday lives, but she is less focused on the part where planning gets more concrete, which could explain why involvement of local communities comes less natural to her, as they have the more concrete wishes for what should happen in the villages.

She does not feel restricted in her acting space neither in regards to her ability or authority, and clearly, she is highly aware of how her position as a planner is political and how she can play into the political aspect of her role. She sees a need for planners today, because planning affects the development happening everywhere in the cities and villages, even through it might not be to obvious for most people, who might just experience that planners are here to say no. But it is actually an important job of protecting and developing the

physical space (Planner E and team leader, 2021). Planner E does not see herself as a facilitator of democracy or her role being in the minor details as it is to affect the decision-making in the physical development, which is clear in her approach to the strategic planning process, where consensus seeking with the politicians was prioritised over involving the local communities. It shows a tendency towards a rational planning approach, where the planner is highly aware of the values of her own profession, but sill with an eye to the importance of keeping politicians supportive and interested. In that regard, she seem to view herself as able to affect the planning process with her professional values, but still being aware of the decisions being with the politicians and not the administration.

## 7.7 Comparison of cases

The aim of this second part of the analysis is to compare the findings of each of the presented cases. The comparison will sum up the answers to each of the two sub-questions. The first section will be a comparative analysis of the approach the planners have taken to the planning process and what this has meant for the involvement, which will answer the first sub-question: *How have the planners involved the local community in the strategic planning process?*
The following sections will turn to the second sub-question *Which barriers have the planners faced in this planning process as a result of their acting space?* This will focus on similarities and differences in the barriers the planners have faced in their work and how these barriers have affected their acting space and the process of making the strategy.

### 7.7.1 Choice of involvement and handling of conflict

When it comes to designing the planning process it seems that many different approaches have been taken - and following the approach suggested by Realdania is not the general case. Planner B is the only one who has used it to guide the process, and of course, Planner E who has been a part of their work has taken point of departure in their work as well. But in the case of Planners A, C and D they find the work they already do appropriate in their situation and do therefore not find the need to change it. This goes especially for Planners C and D who do not even find the motivation to do this strategic planning relevant for them and their situation.

What most of the Planners have in common in regards to their choice of involvement is that none of them have made extensive participation processes in order to involve the citizens in making the strategy. Only Planner B seems to have have planned extensive participation, but like several of the other planners, it has been postponed due to Covid-19 situation. The global pandemic has been posing a barrier for the original plans for involvement for all of the planners, as they generally seem to value to do physical participation with the villages, and this was postponed rather than digitised.
Another barrier faced by several planners in involving the local communities in the strategy seem to be the difficulties with not having the citizens contribute with relevant input. They experience that citizens tend to turn to specifics and bring concrete suggestions, but in this work they want it to stay strategical. This is the case of both Planner A, who did not have success with her one digital meeting about goals for the strategy, Planner B who find it a general difficulty in involvement, and Planner D, who chose not to do involvement

because it would not be of the interest to them and seemingly turned out successful with his assessment. This has meant that the strategies and their goals mainly has been made by the planners and politicians.

The way the planners have decided to involve local communities reflects both their general approach to the planning process and the effort they find it relevant to put into this part of the process. When dealing with conflict, all the planners work from a consensus-seeking approach to some degree. However, in the case of Planner E, this consensus is only sought with the politicians, whereas with the citizens it is rather an avoidance of conflicts. It is clear that she does not find this part as relevant a focus for the work as the consensus with the politicians. Planner A also seems to tend towards avoidance when she is under pressure, which is often the case due to lack of resources to do otherwise. It seems, that Planner A values involving the local communities to the extent that seems relevant for them to take the ownership, but the lack of resources limits this. The Planners C and D, on the other hand, both seem to accept that dealing with conflict is a part of their involvement, and they are not afraid of having to deal with it. It is also these two planners who focus more on the representatives of their participation, which supports the theoretical co-relation between accepting conflict and an active choice of trying to facilitate a more democratic process where all views are being heard. The choice of involvement is an accept of uncovering different opinions and thereby conflicts. They vary a bit, where Planner C want to involve them to be involved in the whole planning process to be taking the ownership and Planner D rather wants to spare them from meetings not completely relevant to them to respect their time in voluntary positions. Planner B stands a little bit out due to the lack on knowledge about how she handles conflict, both in regard to her postponing of ambitious planning for participation and her relatively few years as a planning practitioner.

The involvement of the local communities has for all planners been approached by contacting the local councils. These councils are voluntary associations, who work on behalf of the local interest. It is therefore a natural choice for the municipality to contact these councils as representatives of the villages. The representativity of these councils naturally varies, and so does the planners' approach to ensure representativity in the process. Planners A and B see the good intentions in involving the whole community, but they see the collaboration with local councils as a good balance between involvement of the local communities and the time and resources they have available for doing participation. Planner C and Planner D has a closer contact to the villages, but Planner C is the only one who has actively tried to articulate the need for representatives from different interests. This also reflect her approach to involvement and the strategy which differs from the others by not making a strategy, but to keep working with one villages at the time.

### 7.7.2   Barriers in authority

The authority of the planners' actions has been investigated in regards to how the politicians have supported the planners' work and how the planners have ensured legitimacy from the citizens.
In regards to the citizens, the legitimacy the planners seem to have gained is generally reflected in their choice of involvement. Here, especially Planner D stands out as having quite a lot of legitimacy as a result of the amount of contact he generally has with the local

councils, even though they are not directly involved in this work at all. The same goes for Planner C, who also has quite a lot of contact with her local communities when working for their development. Planner A and B have only had little contact with the local councils in this work, but Planner A is though expected to have legitimacy from the local communities to the strategy that is integrated into the municipal plan, as it is a condensed version of the strategy they have developed in collaboration with their board of villages a few years back. Planner B, on the other side, is assumed to have less legitimacy from the citizens, but with the planned participation, which has now been postponed, it is still uncertain. Planner E is the only one who has not gained any legitimacy from the local communities, which now starts to form a clear barrier for her, as the citizens oppose the strategy in the hearing period. It has been a general barrier for some of the planners in gaining legitimacy from the citizens that it is difficult for them to really understand what this strategical work is, what it is to be used for and how it will affect them. Therefore, in the case of all of the planners except Planner C, it has been difficult for the local communities to really accept and support the work the planners have done.

The political legitimacy varies a lot for each of the planners. Planner D stands out by seemingly having no barriers, but rather experience great support from the politicians to the work he has presented. Planner A, on the other hand, has a mixed legitimacy. She is generally supported, but her authority is limited by the lack of resources to do what she finds best and by politicians who can sometimes be too focused on pleasing the developers. Planner B lacks political legitimacy due to planning traditions where all villages are treated equally and Planner C has a barrier in that some politicians see her role as a hindrance, even though she is generally supported in her work for villages. Planner E has worked to gain support from the politicians, but at the same time, they have postponed the future part of the work, which leaves her, like Planner A, in an overall neutral position. These barriers in gaining legitimacy from the politicians for Planner A, B, C and E, vary in regard to their ability to seize their political moment. This can for Planner B be to oppose the planning tradition for equal planning in the right political moment which enables her to cause a change in the way they plan for villages. An event affecting the planners' possibilities for seizing a political moment and especially their authority this year is the fact that it is an election year. Several planners mentioned how the politicians are focusing on being reelected in the fall of 2021 and it affects their decision. Especially for Planner B, this is a hindrance in making differentiated planning for villages, because the politicians will not make any excluding decisions this close to reelection.The election is happening in all municipalities, and inevitably affects all the planners' authority, but probably to varying degrees, depending on how much change the planner is trying to get through with. If the strategy does not really change anything, the election year does not seem to be a barrier in the same way as it is for Planners A and B, who are trying to affect the political agenda through their strategies.
Besides these different political barriers for the authority, the planners overall seem to have a good dialogue and collaboration with the politicians.

### 7.7.3 Barriers in ability

The planners experience different barriers in their ability, but they all have some sort of political character. Both Planner A and E experience financial limitations to affect their

ability.  Cut downs in the administration and few resources to do this task forces them to make prioritisations which means a deprioritisation of involvement. And in the case of Planner E, it still leaves her feeling too limited in her resources to do the task properly. For Planner B and C, it is especially the political structure and tradition, which poses as barriers.  They work under an unrealistic political agenda of either growth in all villages or equal planning for all villages, however, the new legislation provides them with more ability to advocate for differentiated planning. In the case of Planner C, it is not only the political structure but also the split of the task into two different departments to work with the development of villages, which poses a barrier to her ability, as she is not able to affect all the decisions. Planner D seems to be experiencing the greatest ability of all, as he seems to have no barriers in his ability.  He does not have any financial restrictions and the politicians seem to appreciate his work, theoretically leaving him with great ability, however, the amount of actual difference that he causes might be less significant.

The planners' ability to make a difference must in this study also be investigated through the planners' aim for changing anything with the strategy.  The actual change that the strategies are preparing the ground for is very different, which is also why Planner D seems to have such a great ability. His 'strategy' is rather a description and does not really have any impact on either the citizens or the politicians.  This is unlike Planner B, who is opposing a political agenda and planning tradition by pushing for differentiated planning, which will cause an actual change. Planner C also stands out since she does not want to make a strategy, but rather continue her current approach to planning for villages, but at the same time she tries indirectly to affect the political goal of growth in all villages by suggesting a broader understands of the concept. Planner A has through the strategy limited her own ability to initiate development in villages, but she does not seem to view it as her role to push for development, but more like Planner E, to focus on collaboration between the citizens and the politicians, and they therefore also understand their limitation in making a change through their understanding of their role and their financial ties.

### 7.7.4   The identity of the planners

All the planners have different individual identities in their work, but still, they have things in common and in several aspects some of them are alike. When it comes to the way they view their own role, both Planner B, C and D touches upon their role as being to ensure fairness in the physical development.  They have the perspective of the citizens in mind and their experience of being treated fairly no matter if they have gotten the results they wanted or not. What Planner B, C and D also have in common is that they believe that they can make a difference through their work and they all focus a lot on the citizens in the planning process. When talking about their ability and the way they have formed the planning process they tend to focus more on their possibilities rather than what limits them in their work.

Oppositely, Planner A and E focus more on the political process, not really seeing themselves being capable of making a difference themselves, but as having an important role in affecting those in power, and thereby indirectly making a difference.  Planner A directly states that she cannot make a difference herself and Planner E does not seem to aim for being the one to make a change as much as to provide the politicians with the proper information to make the best decision.  This also causes Planner A and E to

experience other barriers, which mainly concerns the political process, since they focus on changing the opinions, advocating for the choice of planning they think is best. In their own view, their role is to contribute to change in a decision-making process that is larger than just themselves. This is also the case of Planner B, who is aware of not being able to influence everything, but also states that she should not be able to, rather it should be others, whom she can collaborate with. Planners A and E do not prioritise involvement the same ways as Planners B, C and D, and therefore, their power mainly comes from their skills in persuasion and presentation of ideas when in dialogue with the politicians. This seems to place them in a more neutral and antagonistic position. When reflecting on their ability to make a difference, they relate it to how they can affect the physical landscape, opposite the others who reflect it in how they play into the democratic aspect of planning. This is very interesting in regard to these two being the planners who mostly experience resources as a barrier in their ability. They reason this lack of resources to cause their lack of focus on involvement, but they also generally seem more focused on contributing to the political process with the politicians. Oppositely, Planner B and C also focus on resources, but from the point of view of making the most value of the resources available for the citizens.

From Planner C's many years of experience, she has gained quite an understanding of the perspective of the citizens. Planner D has quite some similarities with Planner C's identification. He also seems to relate himself a lot to citizens, and they both share the feeling of having a role of granting smaller wishes of the local communities – what Planner C describes as being like Santa Claus. Both Planner C and D seem to act with an aim of democracy, activating and empowering the citizens and both of them facilitate the space to take up discussion and understand the different needs. They both prioritise communication and dialogue as important tools in succeeding with their work and they are not afraid to make decisions on their own. Like Planner E, they act from an understanding of their own role as political, but unlike Planner E they take the more agnostic approach to the whole planning practice and identity.

# Have the acting space affected the involvement? 8

*In this chapter, the findings of the analysis will be discussed in regards to how the planners' acting space have affected their involvement of the local community and thereby provide an answer for the third sub-question.*

## 8.1 The planners approach to the legislation

Throughout the analysis, it is clear that the five planners have chosen quite different approaches to working with the new legislation and have made different choices for involvement and varying efforts towards meeting the new demands. The legislation is a part of the national aim towards a political goal for "A Denmark in better balance", which, in regards to planning, means more focus outside the main cities and an increased focus on planning for villages. The planners have all made their own interpretations of the legislation in relation to their municipality's existing effort towards planning for villages.

The method Realdania has developed and suggested is also an interpretation of the task and poses their contribution to help municipalities how to deal with this task, if it is their first time. It takes a quite rational approach to it. By extensive data collection and maps presenting the structures and circumstances of the villages, the method approaches differentiated planning through labelling the villages. This labelling is the element that will separate the villages and what will be done for them, depending on whether they are "active", "quiet" or somewhere in between. The labels may in planning seem like a quite innocent and practical way to describe the civil strength of the villages or the type of situation a village is in planning wise. But for the local community a label can mean a lot for their own perception and be of great importance, and the wrong label may be found offensive or taken as a misunderstanding of them. This is especially seen in Planner D's process, where he gave an area the label nature-villages, but other villages also saw themselves as having nature and felt unfairly judged. When villages are given labels in the investigated cases, it is always with positive wording, even though they might fall into the category of being a "quiet village", according to Realdania. To be a quiet village, is not a positive description, and is in the method given to the villages with low civil strength, and will receive a very non-active strategy, almost pointing them out as villages that might not exist in the future. It is therefore very understandable, why none of the planners has used Realdania's labelling.

Planner D explains how the benefit of his description is generally the acceptance of these labels and the way of grouping the villages, and that this can be a steppingstone for more differentiated planning later. On the other side there is Planner C, who tries her best to avoid any labelling, making it clear that she assesses the villages individually, and tries to seek out their individual potential. Giving different labels is a part of differentiating and this is exactly what seems to be the most difficult decision to make and to get through with for most planners. It might, therefore, be difficult for the planners to work with the civil strength from the method, as it is meant to result in a categorisation which probably

will not be received positively by politicians and citizens. Realdania's categorisation of the villages seems to be the methods largest gap between theory and practice, and neither does it follow the recommendations from the Committee for Viable Villages of having focus on the unique quality of a villages, rather than their generic function.

The legislation gives the planners quite a free choice of method to approach the task, and the way the planners have chosen to translate the demands of the legislation to fit their own local context seems to affect their choice of involvement and depend on the effort there is put into utilising the possibilities presented in the legislation, namely differentiated planning and the possibility of pointing out conversion villages. On the one side, there are the Planners D and C who do not see the need to make this kind of strategy and do not really find that it would benefit their work, and therefore have chosen not to make it. Where Planner D has limited it to a description, Planner C has decided to continue her existing work and find it sufficient. Common to their interpretations of the new legislation is that they do not see it as being targeted for them, because they do not have any severe struggles with their villages, but rather as a tool that is needed in the rural municipalities. Therefore, they do not let the legislation affect their practise particularly.

On the other side, there are the municipalities who, according to Planner C and D, actually need the focus which this new legislation requires: the catchment and rural municipalities. In these municipalities, the planners want to use the new legislation to change or affect some existing practices in their municipality. This is Planner B, who aims for a full strategy with differentiation and goals since this is the first time Hedensted Municipality makes a strategy for villages despite being a municipality with almost only villages. The same goes somewhat for Planner A who states that to treat the villages fairly, they must be treated differently. Planner E also works towards a strategy, using the new legislation and their project with Realdania to discuss future planning for the villages. Both Planner A, B and E have found that their municipalities can benefit from having such a strategy, contrary to Planner C and D. With an overall purpose of the legislation to feed into a better balance between the urban and the rural districts, it is interesting how the municipalities with the largest provincial cities seem to find it least relevant to make a strategy for their development even though there in the case of Planner C has been a critique of most urban development happening in the two largest cities and not enough elsewhere. It does not seem, though, that they find planning for villages in their municipality to be of low priority in general.

Planners A, B and E are the ones to meet the most barriers in their processes as a result of being the ones who aim to actually change their planning. The more influence the strategy aims for, the more significant barriers it brings to the planner. They meet barriers that directly affect the output of the plan, such as financial restrictions and political involvement, where the Planners C and D, whose work has only had little influence and consequence for future work, have only met very few barriers which have affected the product. The way the planners have interpreted the legislation and the choices they have made to meet it must, therefore, be taken into consideration when discussing the barriers they have faced in regards to answering the final sub-question: *How have the acting space of the planners affected the involvement of local communities in the planning process?* To answer this question, the following section will discuss the barriers found in the analysis in regard to how much influence they have had on the planners' choice of involvement.

## 8.2   Barriers in the involvement

When looking at the barriers the planners have faced in their authority, they mostly centre around a lack of political support to get through with decisions about differentiation because they are afraid of stepping on anyone's toes when prioritising some villages higher than others. This barrier is magnified by the fact that it is an election year, where reelection is a main focus point for the politicians, which also affect the planners ability seize the political moment. At the same time, a general barrier the planners face in gaining legitimacy from the local communities is the citizens' lack of understanding the purpose of the work. This has led to citizens being dissatisfied with decisions being made for them without them being involved in it and a worry about goals for development they disagree with. However, even though the barriers have affected the form of the strategy and its final output, they have not affected the planners' choice of involvement. Though, it could be expected that involving the local communities more and making sure they would not oppose the strategy could minimise the barrier they pose, and the legitimacy from the local communities could be used to argue for their choices with the politicians and make it less difficult for them to accept it. If anything, the support from the local communities could help the future development, where several of the planners have a strong focus on the local community taking ownership to carry out the planning themselves.

Turning to the barriers in the planners' ability, the main barrier have turned out to be the Covid-19 situation. The pandemic has been an outer restriction and has meant that some of the participation has been dropped, changed and postponed, which also have affected the data collection of this research, as some of the planners have made less participation than planned. This barrier has been equal to all of the planners, but they have chosen to handle it differently, which reflects their individual approach to planning. The Covid-19 situation has affected the involvement process, especially in the case of Planner B, who planned an extensive involvement, but also in the case of Planner A, who dropped further involvement, as the online meeting was no success. In addition to the pandemic lack of resources to spend on the planning process has been a barrier for two of the planners, but it has affected them differently. Planner A seems to find it an actual barrier that has limited the involvement she has done in this process, while Planner E does not indicate that involvement would have been a priority even with more resources, as her main focus is the political aspect.

These two barriers have definitely affected the planners' choice of involvement, but going more into the wishes they have had for involvement, it does not seem to be the only deciding factor in the relatively minimised amount of involvement. Both Planner B and D find it difficult to involve the local communities in the strategic work and therefore find their contributions of limited use and these are not just assessments from these planning processes but also on previous work. Planner A also found the use limited after the one meeting she held. Generally, the planners do not seem to necessarily have wanted to plan an extensive involvement in this strategical part of the work, but perhaps rather let them take over when it gets more concrete. Therefore, in practice the Covid-19 situation, and the lack of resources in the case of Planner A and E, do not seem to necessarily have been major hindrances in following the original choice of process, which arguably is a reflection of their own personal motivation. This poses the question of whether it is mainly the planners' identity that affected the choice of involvement?

The planners' identity is both a reflection of how they view their own ability and authority and themselves as individuals. This means that the identity of the planner is made up of both their own understanding of and stance toward the barriers they face, their personal preferences reflected in their approach to the planning process, and view on the role they play in it.

Planner A and E seem to be the ones most restricted by their barriers. The two planners work for municipalities that have had a decrease in the population over the last 20 years and the scarcity of resources affects their practice. However, they have approached involvement differently. Planner A has tried to facilitate involvement through the local councils, whereas Planner E has not even considered it, but rather focused on the politicians. Their different decisions seem not to be rooted in their barriers but in their motivations and their general approach to conflict, which are both very different from one another and directly support their choice of involvement. Planner E is motivated by the political game and it is the involvement and dialogue with the politicians which Planner E has given most attention during the process, whereas the involvement of local communities is avoided so far. Meanwhile, Planner A aims to motivate different interests, where she also describes her role as a mediator during the decision-making process between the villages and those in power to make a decision, being the politicians and developers. This motivation is also reflected in the strategy, where the municipality will help coordinate and support the work if someone wants to initiate and fulfil it. She is motivated by helping the local communities, and she also approaches the planning process with a wish to involve from a consensus-seeking point of view to the extent her resources allow it.

This seems to indicate that the planners' own motivation for their work has been the most direct influence on their choice of involvement. As for Planners B, C and D, they all seem to experience a lot of freedom which enables them to practice their personal motivation. Planner B is motivated by making the best results to create value for the citizens with the resources available in the municipality and she planned extensive involvement and aims to push the political agenda with consensus with the local communities. Planner C is motivated by what can be achieved by dialogue and she practises a very extensive dialogue-based involvement with the villages with an open approach to meeting conflicts with the villages. Planner D is motivated by providing good experiences for the citizens when they are in contact with the municipality and he has chosen not to involve, as it would not be experienced as meaningful by the local councils. There overall seem to be a very strong link between the planners' motivation and their choice of planning process. It seems to indicate that it is the invisible structure of the planners' identity, which is made up of their motivation and their general approach to the planning process, which is the most important part of their acting space in regards to their choice of involvement and forming the process.

What this means for the involvement of the citizens is that it is mainly determined by the planners' personal preferences and their judgement of the need for and benefit of involving. Their choices directly reflect how they understand their own role and in that regard how they see themselves as acting "political". Returning to the problematisation of the involvement of the civil society introduced on page 9, the planners' lack of involvement was suggested to be a mismatch between expectation and tools. Expectations are often that more involvement results in better planning, whereas the apparent missing tool to

practise involvement might rather be missing acting space and planners who are motivated by involvement and empowerment of the citizens. Perhaps it is therefore not the most optimal version of Arnstein (1969) Ladder of Participation, that is needed, or a model for how to do involve citizens in different situations, but rather planners who identify themselves with democratic process of participation.

## 8.3   The planners' political awareness

Grange (2012) calls for a need for planners to be aware of their role being political and accept that they inevitably play into the political aspect of their organisation if they are to regain a greater ability to make a difference, because political neutrality is leading them into a dead-end professionally.

In regards to their ability, several of the planners describe a "shift" in the role of the municipality from being responsible for all development to becoming a supporter and collaborator for those who want to do development. This is both an indicator of the neoliberalisation of the planning practice, leaving the development up to the private market, and of an increased need for the citizens to be activated in the local development. Several of the planners mention that development in the villages requires not just initiative from the local community but also that the citizens will do parts of the work. This goes explicitly for Planners A, C and E, but most likely also for Planner E and D, as this seems to be a general tendency in the municipal planning practice for the villages and also what Realdania's suggestions are based on. This change in the role of the municipality affects the planners' ability. Still, the planners' experience of their possibility to make a difference seems to be of great importance for their practice. The planners' understanding of their ability is according to Grange (2012) shaped through their self-identification when viewing their work in retrospect. This means that if the planner has experienced having the ability to make a difference when assessing a decision in hindsight, it will have a positive effect on the planners' own understanding of their ability to make a change in the present. This also goes the other way around, as a previous experience of not being able to make a difference can give a present identification as still not being able. In the cases of the planners, both Planner E and B only seek their legitimacy through the politicians, where they according to Grange (2012) risk being led into a dead-end professionally.

Planner E has the ability to make a difference through gaining political legitimacy, however, as her team leader highlight, the challenge occurs when they have to keep the politicians committed to the decision. The risk of only having a political commitment, and having based the strategy only on their goodwill, is that they also possess the power to deviate from the strategy. This is especially a risk for Planner E, as the citizens are questioning and opposing the strategy. The politicians are only elected for four years at a time, limiting the time where this is of "their concern", and is directly affected by their wish to be reelected. Legitimacy from the citizens can help anchor the decision and keep the politicians committed, as it might be their voters, which obligates them to follow the strategy. Anchoring a decision amongst the citizens might be difficult, but can also provide stability to the politicians' commitment to the strategy. Planner C experienced a very old decision about not appointing new building sites i a village as still being strongly anchored in the villages decades later when starting the dialogue with the village, even though it had been dropped years ago, and in the case of Planner B, the lack of political will to

make a decision about differentiation is grounded in a fear of stepping a local community on their toes. A planner can surely experience an ability to make a difference by only having legitimacy from the politicians, at least in the short run, but a long-term strategy surely would benefit from a broader anchoring. How planners become aware of the political aspect of their role seems to be strongly linked to the success the planners have in making decisions for the future that makes a difference. If the planners experience that they can influence the decision, it will shape the planners' own understanding of their role and how they identify themselves as planners with the power to affect the political decisions. The planners' ability to make a difference, therefore, seem to be fundamental for their political awareness and choice to act politically.

On one hand, the political awareness seems to be somewhat linked to the planners' understanding of their own role, but on the other hand, it is the planners' experience of actually making a difference that seems to divide them. Therefore, Planner B only appear to act somewhat political, because she is still unsure of the power which her role carries, while Planner C and D, with many years of experience, appears more outspoken about how they are working to cause a change. However, years of experience does not seem to be the determining factor in the case of Planner A, whose political awareness still appear to be restricted by her experience of lacking the ability to really make a difference. The planners' political awareness might therefore be something gained over time but also through the experience of having the ability to make a difference.

In her work on 'the political', (Mouffe, 2005) calls for planning to take a more agonistic turn and accept conflict as a part of all processes as a natural result of accepting plural knowledge in society. Generally, the more accepting the planners seem to be of facing conflicts throughout the process, the more they seem to accept their role as being political. Where Planner C and D are taking the most agonistic approaches, they are also actively playing into the political aspect of their role, both in their involvement and the way they deal with political decisions. Planner B is with her consensus-seeking approach also playing into the political agenda by trying to change the practice, though, with less experience in how to do it yet, and likewise, Planner A wants to affect the political decisions, though to a lesser extent, because her lack of ability sometimes restricts her, just as it induces her to turn to avoidance of conflict when under pressure. Planner E is to some extent an outlier here, as she generally avoids conflict, but seems to be quite aware of the political aspect of her role. Conflicts are in her case only accepted in the political landscape leaving her with a more splitted role than the others.

When considering the circumstances the planners work in politically, it is understandable that they are careful when taking up conflicts, as political goodwill is needed to succeed with their work. Conflicts that will harm this political goodwill are therefore naturally avoided to a greater extent, as this will affect the work they do. Their choice of handling conflict is thereby a reflection of how they work politically, both directly through how they involve the citizens, but especially in how they interact in the political game. The planning system limits how much ability the planner can have, because the planners always need acceptance from the politicians, no matter how great ability or legitimacy from the citizens they have.

## 8.4    What determined the choice of involvement?

When presenting Realdania's method back in chapter 2, it was with a focus on the way it addresses participation by stating that involvement is important without proper guidance on how to do it.  However, the original intention of the method has not, offhand, been to increase and improve involvement but rather to help planners on how to get started on the politically difficult matters of shrinkage and differentiation through decisions based on factual conditions and support from the local communities.  Realdania describes that the result, if using their method, is to "*show the villages in different groups, where each group have some of the same challenges and possibilities*" (Hjortkær, n.d., own translation), which can be used as a basis for forming goals and defining means to meet them for each group.  The intention of the method, therefore, seems to be to provide an overview that can be used as a starting point for discussing and making decisions on how to do differentiated planning both with the politicians and the citizens.

The need for this discussion about differentiation origins from the need to address shrinkage actively and through another agenda that just aiming for growth.  The planners' ability to address shrinkage seems to be very tied up to their political awareness, as differentiated planning is opposing the typical planning tradition, especially the case of Planner B.  Planning for viable village is not something which happens through just one strategy, but will take many years to turn around in order to change a development which has been deeply rooted through decades of urbanisation and neoliberalisation.  Successfully flipping the development depends both on the villages' engagement, the politicians' understanding and prioritisation as well as the how much the planner is aware of and motivated to for such a development.  However, several examples of success can be found, such as the example of "Good life by the sea" in Thisted, Denmark, used in the beginning of this thesis.  Focus on the unique quality of place, rather than the replaceable function of a place, seems like a prosperous approach, but strongly require both local anchoring and engagement, making good involvement mandatory.

The planners generally seem to struggle with making purposeful involvement that will also benefit the planning process.  In the Realdania method, it is suggested that the local communities are involved throughout the entire process.  Nevertheless, in these cases, the planners who have actually made goals for the strategy have done it without.  Realdania's guide is in theory a method for all municipalities, but in practice, it seems to be used by those struggling most with their villages and with shrinkage, and perhaps also lack resources to come up with a thorough plan for making the strategy.  But there are no reflections in the method that these municipalities also struggle with resources.  Involving all the local communities throughout the whole process is quite extensive and time-consuming.  Planner E explains, that even though Realdania did most of the mapping for them, they still did not have the resources to do participation.  This can surely be a question of prioritisation, however, it seems like a very relevant struggle as Planner A also explains how their lack of resources is reflected in their involvement.  Involvement of the citizens might also be a challenge in regard to choosing the right kind and amount of involvement.  This raises a question of the actual value of involvement in regards to both the planners' resources and their own experience of how beneficial the involvement is.  Both Planner D's, E's and A's processes are examples of how involvement was not seen as a beneficial use of resources as opposed to Planner B, who wanted to involve them and

Planner C who does it in her local development plans. The benefit of involving the local communities early can be that they can describe and agree on how they experience their situations. They might even be able to relate themselves to the other villages and choose how they want to be categorised. This can prevent the villages from feeling unfairly treated, and their agreement to their categorisation can be a strong argument for the planner to present the politicians with how they will do differentiated planning for the villages, which could have benefitted Planner B in arguing for her suggestion to do differentiated planning for the politicians. Planner C describes how she has used a lot of time on meetings with the local communities in order to 'put a face on the municipality' to the citizens, since there seems to be a strong discourse of 'we' and 'them' between the municipality as being a faraway institution and the citizens. This kind of involvement takes quite some extra energy and resources, but helps her deal with barriers from the citizens' side that harm the collaboration, for example that the planners are only here to say no and will never help. The resources she uses on 'giving the municipality a face' surely will help her and her colleagues in the long run, but it can turn into an extensive effort.

So, will more involvement necessarily make a better strategy? What seems to be an important part of this discussion is the overall discourse of involvement being mandatory for good planning, which we have put forward at the beginning of this report. What is seen among the planners is very different prioritisation of resources, from Planner C's extensive process with dialogue to Planner E's total lack of involvement in order to prioritise the political collaboration. However, what they all reflect is the planners' own understanding of how they, in their situation on behalf of the citizens, get "most value for money". Sometimes, this is to spare them the time and decision making and in others, it is to make them aware that the development must origin from them, and that the municipality can only provide support. That does not necessarily mean that little or no involvement will result in a bad strategy. As mentioned by Planner B, D and E, involvement and making the citizens participate have a great value when the process moves from a strategical to a more practical level. This is the level at which Planner C mainly operates, where she is able to make the resources stretch by involving the citizens in the maintenance of facilities.

What can generally be detected amongst the planners is that involvement of the local communities is more challenging when it gets to the strategic level, and the greatest success in involvement and handing over the responsibility is found in the more concrete participation processes. Therefore, involving the local communities in the strategical part of the process is perhaps not the biggest priority and might seem like a waste of (scarce) resources, as the contributions they make are limited, and it is rather the political support that is found important. However, a certain amount of support from the local community might be found to be needed to create commitment to a political decision, that will actually make a difference in the planning practice, and perhaps state a differentiation between the way villages are treated. Therefore, there seems to be a hidden balance of resources used to involve the citizens where the citizens are able to contribute to what they find interesting and relevant for them in order to make a strategy they can identify themselves with without necessarily having to involve them in every step of the way. This is to some degree taken up by Planner D, who talks to the local communities about what they find relevant, and then he makes his own translation of this into his suggested work - and then he takes it up with them. That way, he can make the process backwards by turning their concrete wishes into

a strategy. Here, Planner D has, though, in practice skipped the part of actually forming the goals as he find it irrelevant. This is, of course, only possible because of his familiarity with the local communities, opposite Planner B and E who are both new in their positions and still have had very limited contact with the local communities of their municipalities. Through the findings it is clear that this balance is individual to each planner and the approach he takes, but also that the planners' own motivation and the way he identifies his own role as a planner are of major importance for the practice and involvement of citizens.

# Conclusion 9

*This the final chapter of the thesis will conclude on the three posed sub-questions and the main research question of the thesis: "How does the acting space of the planner lead to different barriers when involving the local communities in the strategic planning process of a village?"*

The way planners decide to involve local communities in their strategic planning processes varies a lot from planner to planner - and so does the extent of the involvement. Where some have aimed for involvement in all decisions, others have only used it for minor contributions, approvement or not used it at all. The planners' choice of involvement has been a result of several factors. First of all, the Covid-19 situation has caused planners to postpone some of the intended involvement or to complete parts of the strategy with less involvement than planned. But it is also to a great extent a result of what the planners expect the citizens to be able to contribute with. A challenge, which the planners experience with the citizens, is that they are very good at a practical level, but it is harder to involve them on a strategical level.

The barriers the planners face in the strategic planning process are to a great extent of a political character. The authority the planners have to their choices is mainly restricted by the political disinterest in differentiated planning and not giving all villages the same conditions for growth. Shrinkage and the need to deal with it differently than from a point of neoliberalism is not yet accepted politically in many municipalities. Here, the election year has appeared to be an amplifier of this barrier for all the planners, because the politicians have an increased focus on reelection. This makes them less willing to approve a strategy that might not be well received by their voters. As for the planners' ability, the main barriers are found in the financial restrictions and political structure. This causes them to struggle with either defining and accepting the limitations of their role as a municipal planner or a lack of resources which causes a prioritisation that affects the planners' ambition for involvement. Combined with the planners' personal approach to planning this all affects the way the planners identify themselves in their role.
When it comes to how the planners' acting space affects their choice of involvement, the strongest link does, though, seem to be found in the planners' personal motivation and the way they identify themselves in relation to the citizens. Where the barriers the planners have faced in their ability and authority may have been of significance for the final product of the strategy, they have had less effect on the choice of involvement. Since the involvement process is up to the planners themselves, the process they facilitate is largely a reflection of their personal preferences, what motivates them in their work and how they relate to the citizens. The planners' understanding of the need for involvement is reflected in the their political awareness. This understanding can both be of a democratic and political character, which reflects where the planner finds it important to gain legitimacy for the strategy. As the acting space of the planners is to some degree tied up to political legitimacy to get through with a decision, many planners seem to find legitimacy from the politicians more important than the legitimacy from the citizens. Therefore, involving the local communities in the strategic part of the process is perhaps not the biggest priority for planners and might seem like a waste of (perhaps scarce) resources, as the contributions

they make are limited, and it is rather the political support that is found important. However, a certain amount of support from the local community might be found to be needed to create a commitment to a political decision, that will actually make a difference in the planning practice. The amount of involvement needed to gain this legitimacy is a balance of the changes the planner is trying to push through, the reactions met from the local community and the resources available. Through the findings, it is clear that this balance is individual to each planner and the approach that is taken, but also that the planner's own motivation and identification of its own role as a planner are of major importance for the practice and involvement of citizens.

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# Interview guide  A

*This appendix contains the interview guide for the interviews conducted with the municipal planners.*

| The subject of inquiry | Interview questions | Supplementary questions |
|---|---|---|
| *SQ1: How have the planners involved the local community in the strategic planning process?* | | |
| 1A. How has the strategic planning process been so far? | 1A: Can you describe your planning for villages, how has the planning process been so far? | 1A: When did you start planning strategically for villages? |
| | | 1A: Do you pull on previous work? |
| | 1A. Which considerations did you have about the process before you began? | 1A: Which methodological considerations did you have about this choice of process? |
| | 1A: What are your key focus points in the process? | 1A: What are your success criteria? |
| | 1A. What do you think about this new requirement for strategical planning for villages? | |
| 1B. How has the involvement process been? | 1B. How have you involved the local communities? | 1B. How do you plan on involving the local community for the rest of the process? |
| | 1B. Why have you (not) chosen to involve the local communities? | 1B. Which values do the local communities bring to the strategy? |
| | | 1B. Which challenges do the local communities bring to the strategy? |
| 1C. How have the planner approached and handled conflicts? | 1C. How have you handled the different interest? | 1C. Have there been any opposite interests that you needed to handle? |
| | 1C. How have these interests affected your planning process? | 1.C This could be political interest, public interest, or interest internally in the municipality. |
| *SQ2: Which barriers have the planners faced and how have they affected the process?* | | |
| 2A. What has been the planners' authority in the process and what barriers have affected it? | 2A. How has the interest of the politicians been? | 2A. Have the local politicians either supported or challenged the planning process? |
| | 2A. How has the interest of the local communities been? | 2A. Have the local communities either supported or challenged the planning process? |

| | | 2A. If little involvement: How do you make sure that you plan for something, which is also wanted by the local communities? |
|---|---|---|
| | 2A. How has the interest affected the process? | |
| 2B. What has been the planners' ability in the process and what barriers have affected it? | 2B: Who has decided on the form of the process? | 2B: In which areas have you had the greatest influence on the process? |
| | | 2B: In which areas have you had the least influence on the process? |
| | 2B. What have you done to affect the process? | 2B. What have affected your influence? |
| 2C. What has been the planners' identity in the process and what barriers have affected it? | 2C: How do you see your own possibility to make a difference through your work? | 2C: When do you have the most influence on things that you believe actually make a difference? |
| | | 2C: What do you see as your greatest challenges (in making a difference)? |
| | 2C: What motivates you in your daily work? | |
| | 2C: Which values do you work from? | 2C: On a scale from value neutral to very politically aware about you own values, where are you in your daily work? |
| | | 2C: How do you see the need for planner to be either neutral or having an agenda? |
| | 2C: Why do we need planners today? | |