

AALBORG UNIVERSITY

MASTER'S THESIS

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# **Sustainable citizen participation - Aalborg Vestby**

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Aalborg University  
Cities and Sustainability





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STUDENT REPORT

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**Abstract:**

The global population is increasing, and more people are moving to the cities. By 2050, 68 per cent of the world's population is estimated to live in an urban settlement. New Urban Agenda envisages cities to be more participatory, encourage civic engagement and create the feeling of ownership. Hereby, a need for a more sustainable development process. Aalborg municipality has in the last couple of decades transformed from heavy industry to a knowledge based city, and in 2019 the municipality started the process of compiling a development plan for Aalborg Vestby.

To investigate how to create a sustainable transformation, the theories of *sustainability* and *citizen participation* are described. The data was collected from selected citizens of Vestbyen, in order to get a better understanding of Aalborg Vestby itself, where two observations, an interview and participatory data collection were conducted.

The citizens of Vestbyen are primarily involved in the aspects of *local value* and *social sustainability* in the sustainability flower. The citizens of Vestbyen are primarily involved by *information and feedback* methods, which are not always adequate, hence a more participatory approach is needed. The municipality should furthermore employ the role as mediator, to listen not just to "*what*" questions but focus more on "*why*" the question is asked.

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First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor Enza Lissandrello, for guidance and counsel throughout the process of writing my master thesis, with sparring and a kind nudging when needed. Furthermore, I would like to thank Enza Lissandrello and her research colleagues, Janni Sørensen and Lasse Schytt Nørgaard, for giving me the opportunity to participate in the course module “the Deliberative Planner” for the master’s programs Urban Planning and Management, in which I collaborated with fellow researchers and collected thorough data about Aalborg Vestby and its citizens I would also like to thank the participating citizens of Vestbyen, whose knowledge and expertise I could not have been without. Lastly, I want to thank family and friends who have supported me throughout this process and their continuous support, advice, and encouragement.

## Preface

This master thesis has been conducted through the Master programme ‘*Urban, Energy and Environmental Planning*’, with the specialisation in ‘*Cities and Sustainability*’. The thesis has been conducted from February 1<sup>st</sup> to June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022. The author holds a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Urban, Energy and Environmental Planning.

### Reading guide

In the present thesis, references are made to chapters, sections, subsections, pictures, figures, and tables, after numbering; subsection a.b.c, where a refers to chapters, b refers to sections and c refers to subsections. Pictures, tables, and figures are numbered equivalently by chapter and order. References to references are stated in accordance with the Harvard method, with a full bibliography at the end of the thesis. Followed by the bibliography, the appendix can be found, with figures defining Aalborg Vestby with different details. The front page picture is taken by the author during a public hearing about the transformation of Vestbyen.

## Executive summary

The global population is growing, and particularly in urban settlements [Marans, 2015], where over half of the global population lived inside an urban settlement in 2007 [George, 2007]. This increase in urban population is influencing the urban transformation process, which requires coordination between various stakeholders [Ki-moon, 2014]. To ensure future development, sustainable developments are required, where sustainability can be described as "Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." [United Nations, NY]

In 2019, the municipality of Aalborg started a transformation process of Aalborg Vestby [By- og Landskabsforvaltningen, 2019b]. To investigate the city district, the municipality used different public participation processes, such as public hearings, workshops, and unstaffed exhibitions [By- og Landskabsudvalget, 2019a]. Certain disputes between the citizens and the municipality have been investigated in this thesis, where the overall objective of this thesis was to investigate: *How can Aalborg municipality undertake a participatory approach to ensure the citizens' involvement in a sustainable planning process for Aalborg Vestby.*

In this context, this thesis wants to examine the practice of public participation processes and sustainability. In order to answer the research question, three subquestions were composed, where each subquestion is linked to a chapter in the thesis. Subquestion 1 addresses the underlying theory of this thesis and the use of the theory in a practical setting. The theory chapter is based on literature review. Subquestion 2 guides the analysis of the citizens participation process in Aalborg Vestby, and how the citizens have been involved in the sustainable development process. The analysis is based on empirical data collected through three separate methods. Subquestion 3 guides the discussion, where information and results from the analysis are discussed and compared to existing literature.

The results of the analysis revealed that the citizens of Vestbyen have a vast knowledge of the two sustainability aspects *local value* and *social* sustainability. Further results show that there are an absence of participation when dealing with the aspects of sustainability, *nature*, *environment* and a more noticeable absence regarding the sustainability aspect of *economic*.

In conclusion, to create a participatory process and to focus on creating a positive synergy between the sustainability pillars the citizens must be included in all five aspects of sustainability. The municipality should furthermore secure a transparent participation process to increase the trust between the municipality and the citizens. Moreover, it is imperative to understand who the citizens are in the pursuance of designing a participation process which investigates the needs and desires of the citizens. Finally, planners should embrace the role as a mediator when conducting the participation process, to listen for commonalities to create mutual respect and understanding between the two parties.

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Around the world, the population is growing at an increasing rate, and most of the growth occurs inside our cities [Marans, 2015]. However, this is not a new phenomenon since the urban population rapidly increased throughout the twentieth century from 220 million to 2.8 billion [George, 2007]. The United Nations (UN) recognises the year 2007 as an important milestone since half of the global population lived in an urban environment for the first time in history [Ritchie and Roser, 2018].

According to the UN, this trend is expected to increase even further to a point where approximately 68 percent of the global population live in an urban environment by 2050 [Ritchie and Roser, 2018]. With already half of the world's population living within urban borders, the future is predominantly an urban future. Therefore, it is important to ensure that future urbanisation is sustainable, where keywords such as reduced greenhouse gas emissions, resilience, safe public spaces, and public space for all are important in the planning and designing process. The increase in urban settlement has already had a big impact on the urban transformation process, where the political process requires coordination with a wide range of actors and stakeholders [Ki-moon, 2014]. To ensure sustainable progress, the UN developed a shared set of blueprints for all to follow, which was developed in 2015 with the construction of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) [United Nations, 2022]. The SDGs are built upon decades of work [United Nations, 2022], and are intended to ensure and enable sustainable measurement, peace, and prosperity on a global level [United Nations, 2022]. Another important driver for a sustainable urban future was the outcome of the Habitat III conference, which led to the design of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) [United Nations, 2017]. Among others, the NUA recognises that culture plays an important role in diversity [United Nations, 2017]. Therefore, it is recommended that culture should be considered when promoting new sustainable solutions and ideas. The NUA further envisages cities to be more participatory, encourage civic engagement, and promote the feeling of belonging and ownership, yet there should also be a focus on prioritising inclusive green and blue elements, qualitative public spaces that are family-friendly, and incorporate the needs of all inhabitants [United Nations, 2017]. However, there is not just one way to look at sustainability as demonstrated in the following.

## 1.1 Sustainability

The term sustainability can be contextualised as *"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."* [United Nations, NY], and is usually described as having three fundamental pillars: *environmental*, *economic* and *social* [University of Alberta, NY]. Environmental sustainability focuses on ensuring that natural resources are not consumed at a rate that cannot be replenished, and that the systems of the environment are in balance. Economic sustainability intends to ensure that humans are able to maintain their independence and livelihood. Lastly, social sustainability is based on human necessities and rights to keep communities safe and to ensure that personal and cultural rights are

protected [University of Alberta, NY]. However, there is not just one definition of the term sustainability, where Moore et al. [2017] identified 24 different definitions of sustainability based on 200 articles. Not only does the term sustainability differ, but some municipalities have also added to the term by using extra pillars as a foundation, in the interest to widening and being more descriptive of what sustainability is [Rødovre kommune, 2020] [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013].

Aalborg municipality is one of the Danish municipalities that has added to the definition of sustainability. The two pillars *local value* and *nature* are added to Aalborg municipality's ideology [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013], to have a more broad and descriptive definition of the term sustainability, as planning is a multifaceted organ that does not have a single answer [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. The combined five pillars; 1) *local value*, 2) *nature*, 3) *environment*, 4) *economics*, and 5) *social*, are used as a scale to weight each aspect when making an overall assessment of an area when designing new plans [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. The pillar local value deals with the identity of an area and the area's soul [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. In addition, the pillar describes the cultural heritage including historical buildings, the local life, and the interaction amongst them [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. Nature sustainability is about ensuring biodiversity by preserving existing green elements, planning for additional green elements in the cities, and creating recreational spaces. Furthermore, the term focuses on climate change preventing strategies and risk assessments [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. In addition, the municipality has widened the original pillars, where environmental sustainability is not only concerned with the rate of resource consumption but is also focusing on creating a better local environment, by reducing smoke and noise pollution and creating more green elements throughout the city [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. There is an additional focus on sustainable transportation with the idea of minimising the need for cars and ensuring better conditions for cyclists [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. The pillar economic is about ensuring the best value of a given project by weighing different aspects such as climate change prevention strategies and flexible multi-functional solutions, with a long-term time horizon [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. The pillar also defines the economic aspect to prioritise urban densification in Aalborg city's growth axis. Aalborg municipality's definition of social sustainability focuses on health, recreation, and citizens' involvement, which emphasises the need for citizens' co-determination and co-ownership [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. Moreover, social sustainability is also concerned with creating space for the citizens by creating recreational spaces with multifunctional urban spaces and buildings [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. Especially the social aspect has been considered in the renewal of Aalborg Vestby (also known as Vestbyen), where the planners are concerned with the citizens' point of view.

### 1.1.1 Aalborg Vestby

In 2019, the municipality of Aalborg started the process of compiling an urban development plan for Aalborg Vestby, with a holistic perspective to investigate the important aspects of the city district, both physical and personal expressions [By- og Landskabsforvaltningen, 2019a]. The new plans for a transformation give the possibility to adapt Vestbyen to future needs, and work with the citizens to secure an affiliation from the citizens towards Vestbyen, where identity and historical values can be kept [By- og Landskabsforvaltningen, 2019b], which are some of the important factors for the citizens [By- og Landskabsudvalget, 2019a]. This transformation of Vestbyen includes several projects, some that have already been decided and some are still being discussed [By- og Landskabsforvaltningen, 2019b]. For the already decided projects, the citizens of Vestbyen have the opportunity to express their opinion on the development of the project and how it should be implemented. However, for projects that are not yet decided, the municipality will have the opportunity to include the citizens from the beginning. To

include the citizens in the decision-making and get an insight into Vestbyen, Aalborg municipality has used different citizen participation methods including a workshop for students in the area and a meeting for the citizens at Haraldslund [By- og Landskabsudvalget, 2019a]. Furthermore, a suggestion box was available in Haraldslund for the citizens to contribute ideas [By- og Landskabsudvalget, 2019a]. The results were divided into six general themes; 1) identity, 2) housing, 3) parking, 4) traffic, 5) green and blue elements, and 6) gathering- and urban space, as these were the most prominent factors [By- og Landskabsudvalget, 2019a]. However, it has been observed that there are still disagreements between the municipality and the citizens regarding the transformation process of Vestbyen. An example thereon is the harbour front where plans for climate change prevention solutions were discussed. For this area, the municipality has organised an architectural competition to determine the best approach to secure the area from getting flooded by rising sea level [Aalborg kommune, 2022a]. However, the citizens have expressed their concerns regarding this competition, due to; a fear of buildings being built higher than the surrounding buildings in the area, the loss of access to Limfjorden, and due to the fact that the area where the old Limfjordsværft is located, is not included in the architectural competition [By- og Landskabsudvalget, 2021] (see appendix A, figure A.4). This conflict was brought up at a meeting held by Vestbyens council (Vestbyen samråd) and joined by a lead planner from the municipality, where the council expressed their concerns about the plan. The conflict was also brought up during the public meeting held the 5th of May 2022, where the citizens again raised their concerns and frustration over the exclusion of the old Limfjordsværft in the architect competition. It is therefore important to investigate how to conduct a citizen participation process in the pursuance of building trust between the citizens and the municipality [Petts and Leach, 2000], and without respect for each other, it is unlikely parties will work effectively together [Forester, 2007]

## 1.2 Problem statement

As UN predicts, there is going to be a world-wide population increase in urban settlements. By 2050, 68 pct. of the world's population is going to live inside urban settlements [Ritchie and Roser, 2018]. When considered that cities are envisaged to be inclusive and promote feelings of belonging [United Nations, 2017], city planning needs to be planned strategic to develop sustainable solutions [By- og Landskabsforvaltningen, 2019a]. However, rapid decision making and development may result in undesired and unsustainable solutions [Rosenzweig et al., 2018]. As shown in figure 1.1, the global trends are ever present in the outer circles with the city development strategies in the middle, such as the national implementation. In the middle, the interplay between the public and the government and their understanding of the term sustainability can be found. The arrow between these two symbolises the interaction and discussion that are present when contemplating sustainability, since the citizens and municipality may not have the same understanding of sustainability.



**Figure 1.1.** Core of sustainable development

If future cities are envisaged to be inclusive, participatory, and sustainable, there must be a focus on the citizens when designing and planning for city development [United Nations, 2017], in other words, sustainable planning for cities must include citizen participation in planning. This also applies to the transformation of Vestbyen, which is undergoing a city district transformation, where the citizens have been included, yet there is still a need for improvement since there seems to be disunity between the public and the municipality. If planners have not considered how both present and future citizens would like their cities designed - cities may end up with no citizens. The aim of this thesis is therefore to investigate the following research question:

*How can Aalborg municipality undertake a participatory approach to ensure the citizens' involvement in a sustainable planning process for Aalborg Vestby?*

To support and guide the research question, the following three subquestions (SQ) are proposed.

**SQ1:** *What is the coherence between sustainability and citizen participation*

Subquestion 1 seeks to investigate the use of the theory of sustainability in a practical setting, and to get a deeper understanding of the dynamics behind the five pillars of sustainability. Furthermore, it seeks to create a deeper understanding of what is conceived as the best citizen participation practice. This insight is necessary to understand how and if the involvement can be claimed as sustainable.

**SQ2:** *How is the current citizen participation in Aalborg Vestby in regard to the sustainable development process?*

Subquestion 2 is posed to analyse the current citizen participation in Aalborg Vestby, and how the citizens are involved in the sustainable development. This understanding is necessary to obtain in order to further

investigate the citizens participation.

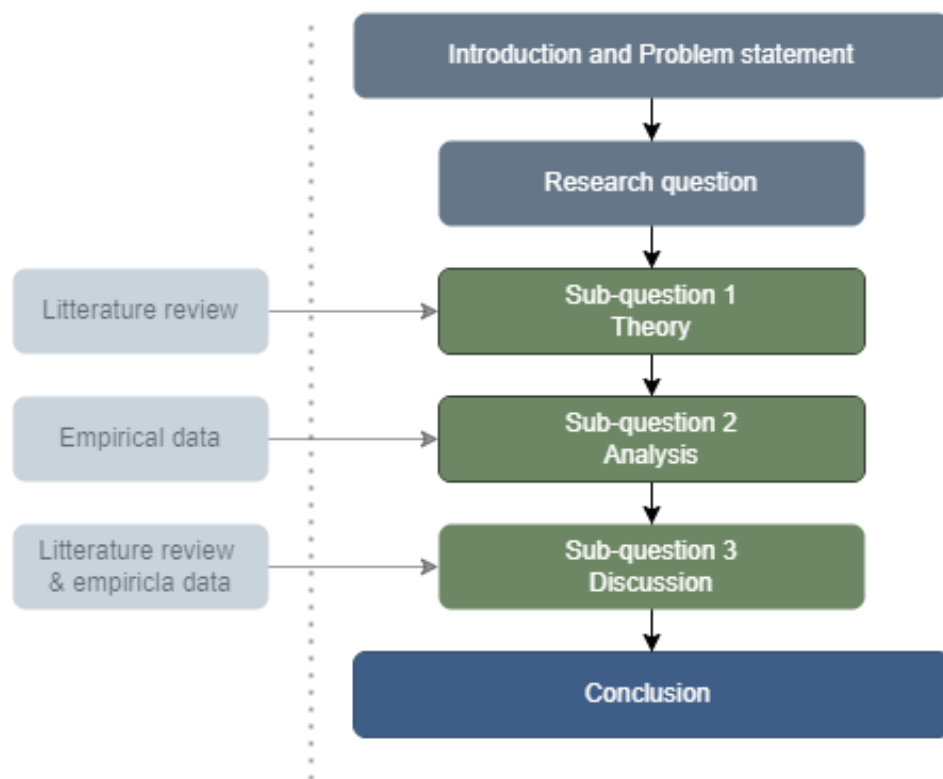
***SQ3:*** *How can current citizens participation influence future sustainable development in Aalborg Vestby?*

Subquestion 3 is posed to investigate and discuss the effects of citizen involvement and the outcomes hereby. This knowledge is necessary in order to understand how citizen participation can influence a sustainable development.

# Research design 2

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The following chapter describes the structure of this thesis and the theory of science. Lastly, the case study design of this thesis will be outlined. Figure 2.1 illustrates the structure of this thesis, and how the three sub-questions are each linked to a chapter, where subquestion 1 relates to the chapter of theory, subquestion 2 relates to the chapter of analysis and finally subquestion 3 relates to the chapter of discussion.



*Figure 2.1.* Project struture

## 2.1 Scientific theory

This section outlines the theory of science used in this project. Throughout the section, the methods conducted will be mentioned, yet they will be described more thoroughly in chapter 4. This project has a hermeneutic approach to the field, as hermeneutics is concerned with the understanding and interpretation of phenomena to determine the terms of human existence [Jacobsen et al., 2007]. Hermeneutics emphasises that one can only understand a phenomenon depending on the basis of existing knowledge, and that it is essential to interpret the phenomenon to understand it [Fuglsang et al., 2013]. Furthermore, prejudices and pre-understandings are utilised in the interpretation of a phenomenon to obtain a profound understanding [Fuglsang et al., 2013]. By using a hermeneutic approach in this project, existing prejudices

and pre-understandings were made explicit and used in the methods, where for instance the interview guide was based on already acquired knowledge of Vestbyen and the citizens' participation. Moreover, experiences are best understood through narratives [Kafle, 2013], which was intended to be obtained during the interview. A fundamental element in hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle, which describes the interaction and connection between a holistic and part comprehension, making it possible to further understand and interpret a given phenomenon [Fuglsang et al., 2013]. To create a meaningful understanding, an interaction between the whole and the part is essential [Fuglsang et al., 2013]. Each method conducted in this project constituted a new part-understanding, contributing to a more profound holistic understanding. How the world is understood and perceived is based on our own horizon of understanding, which is developed through pre-understandings [Fuglsang et al., 2013]. Pre-understandings are always part of who we are, and are necessary as they constitute our cultural heritage, thereby contributing to a meaningful understanding [Laverty, 2003]. The horizon is individual and changeable, as it can be challenged by others and thereby cause a fusion of horizons [Fuglsang et al., 2013], which can result in new opportunities for mutual understanding between individuals [Hein and Austin, 2001]. In this project, the horizon of understanding was challenged by the conducted data collection methods, given that the pre-understandings of the citizens' participation were questioned. Furthermore, it is also important to recognise that there exist different perspectives of a phenomenon, as our own pre-understandings only enlighten one aspect of the given phenomenon [Kafle, 2013]. During the observations, it was evident that the citizens and the people from the municipality had different horizons of understanding, thus an interaction between those parties can contribute to a clarification of a phenomenon.

## 2.2 Case method

A case study is an empirical study method to investigate a specific phenomenon [Neergaard, 2007]. The case of this project is Vestbyen and is a holistic single-case study [Yin, 2018], where the focus was to study the citizens' participation when planning for the development of Vestbyen. When conducting a case study, it is important to contextualise the phenomenon given its environment and history [Gratton and Jones, 2010]. Therefore, the methods chosen for this project will attempt to get an insight in the citizens' participation, while simultaneously considering the sustainable impact of the development of Vestbyen.

Even though case studies are suitable to investigate a specific phenomenon [Neergaard, 2007], there are often misunderstandings regarding the use of case studies as a research method [Flyvbjerg, 2010]. These misunderstandings are:

- 1) Theoretical general knowledge is more valuable than specific practical knowledge,
- 2) Case studies cannot contribute to scientific development, as it is not possible to generalise based on single cases,
- 3) Other methods are more suitable to test hypotheses and develop theory than the case study, whereas the case study is more suitable to development hypothesis,
- 4) There is a tendency that the case study confirms specific preconceived opinions,
- 5) it is problematic to develop general tendencies and theories through case studies given that it is difficult to create specific studies [Flyvbjerg, 2010].

These misunderstandings are in regard to the case study's validity, reliability, and theory as a scientific method. Although a case study is used to investigate a specific phenomenon, it is still applicable to provide

more general knowledge. Furthermore, the case study provides knowledge related to a specific context, which is necessary for development in the given context, as it is typically concerned with human behaviour. The case study is consequently a comprehensive and necessary method in social science, as it is comparable with similar studies [Flyvbjerg, 2010]. Therefore, the case study is deemed appropriate in order to investigate the citizens participation in the sustainable development of Vestbyen

# Theory 3

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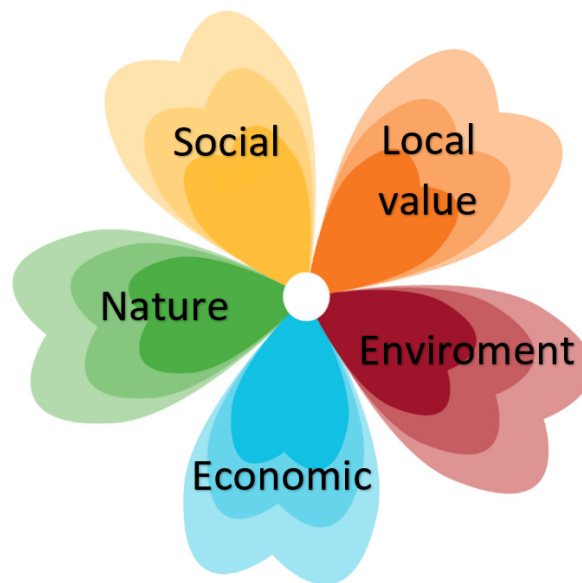
The following chapter aims to answer subquestion 1: *What is the coherence between sustainability and citizen participation?*. In this project two main theories are applied: the concept of sustainability and citizen participation. The concept of sustainability has briefly been described in the first chapter of the project; therefore an elaboration of the concept will be conducted. The concept of citizen participation will be described to get an understanding of how citizens can be involved in planning processes.

## 3.1 Sustainability

Sustainability has been recognised as a normative regulation parameter for our society for present and future generations [Hansmann et al., 2012]. The term sustainability as described in chapter 1.1, consists of three fundamental pillars, reflecting that development requires consideration of not just a single aspect but consolidates the dimensions of each pillar to achieve sustainable development [Hansmann et al., 2012]. However, attempts to combine the pillars have received criticism, since the values of each pillar are not always interchangeable, e.g., cost, profit, vs. perceived beauty of nature, climate adaptation vs. identity, and historical value [Hansmann et al., 2012]. Furthermore, conflicts between different stakeholders within one pillar can occur since each stakeholder has their own interest in a given project [Hansmann et al., 2012], e.g., the citizen who wants more green urban space vs. the entrepreneur who wants to maximise the profit by building apartments.

The reality is, however a more complex multifaceted organ, which makes it difficult to focus on one pillar at a time, and therefore planning must account for the different aspects in order to strive for positive synergies between the pillars as well as the stakeholders [Hansmann et al., 2012]. The sustainable development process should therefore not focus on a *trade off* between the three pillars; however, it should focus on creating a *win-win* scenario [Hansmann et al., 2012].

Aalborg municipality has previously illustrated sustainable urban planning as a flower with five flower petals, see figure 3.1, instead of pillars, yet it fits the same purpose; to describe the dimensions of the term sustainability [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013].



**Figure 3.1.** Aalborg sustainable flower [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]

Furthermore, each petals have three underlying goals to support the sustainable process:

- Social sustainability
  - Room for all
  - Health
  - The good life
- Local values
  - Identity
  - Develop architecture
  - Secure cultural heritage
- Environment
  - Resource and energy optimization
  - Better local environment
  - Sustainable transport
- Economics
  - Aalborg's basis of life
  - Most value for the money
  - Long-term durability
- Nature
  - Biodiversity
  - Recreation
  - Climate adaptation

The municipal plan, planning strategies and local plans are all important for the city, as well as for the city districts and the locals, since all plans and strategies must fit together in a holistic approach [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. The planning process is a deliberately choice between the five dimensions and should be the focus point for the sustainable development [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. The weighing process of each petal should be made in collaboration with the involved stakeholders, to design

a process that suits each stakeholder while incorporating the basic ideology of sustainability [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. The sustainable flower in itself, can help illustrate how each aspect is weighed in a given planning process, to convey the planning process to the public and other relevant stakeholders [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013]. When implementing a plan, strategy or redeveloping a city, it is important to balance the five pillars, given that it is impossible to plan for all of the pillars equally [Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, 2013].

## 3.2 Citizen participation

In this thesis, the term citizen is used to describe an individual citizen or a group of citizens related to Vestbyen. Petts and Leach [2000] use the term 'public' to describe a broader group of people, and 'public participation' to describe the involvement of a broader group. Therefore, throughout this thesis, a distinguishing between the terms *citizen* and *public* are made, where *citizen* refers to the citizens of Vestbyen, and *public* is used to describe a general population. Public participation is not a new practise; it has existed for years as a passive consultation, although in the last decade this practise has seen an increase in intensity and application [Petts and Leach, 2000]. Sustainable development policies have been an impact factor for the increase in public participation in decision making, such as the agenda 21 of the Rio de Janiro conference in 1992 [Petts and Leach, 2000]. In Denmark, public participation is secured by law, where it is implemented in the Danish planning law [Erhvervsministeriet, 2022]. One of the basic elements in the law is making sure that the public and stakeholders must be involved in the planning process before a plan is approved [Jensen et al., 2006]. The motive for involving the public is not exact, yet the arguments are that public participation can help secure the democratic rights, it can help legitimatise the implementation process, and thus be part of creating public ownership [Jensen et al., 2006]. The law is not explicit in how the public should be involved, and it is therefore up to each individual government agency to determine the best approach [Jensen et al., 2006].

### 3.2.1 Definition

The term *public* does not describe a single group; yet it describes all who have an interest in a given project [Petts and Leach, 2000]. The public is often described as a single uniform entity, and in order to design a public participation process it requires knowledge of who the public is and what their interests are [Petts and Leach, 2000]. Moreover, there are different degrees of *participation*, from one side of the spectrum which is "provide information" to the other side of the spectrum which is "delegation of power". Petts and Leach [2000] however, use four terms, which is in between these two extremes: 1) education and information provision, 2) information feedback, 3) involvement and consultation, and 4) extended involvement [Petts and Leach, 2000]. Besides the public, there are the *stakeholders* which is defined as someone (individual, industries, governmental agencies, or non-governmental organisations), whom has a stake or interest in the project or process [Petts and Leach, 2000].

### 3.2.2 Applicability

Public participation can bring about technical and local knowledge from locals, which is not necessarily known to the planners [Petts and Leach, 2000]. It can also inspire different perspectives and include public enthusiasm to rethink the problem or solution. Public participation can also help to build trust between the public and the government if implemented correctly, and further help minimise conflicts, if the public

is involved in the initial stages of a project. Communication between the government and the public relies among other on trust, which is recognised as one of the most essential conditions. The cognitive elements the condition trust is related to are: fairness, empathy, consistency, competence, objectivity, and transparency [Petts and Leach, 2000]. However, public participation can be weakened by a lack of resources, such as time and money, and by a lack of attention to the output public participation can cultivate. The public participation process can be further threatened by vocal minorities that overshadow the rest of the participants. Lastly, the public participation process is also threatened if the public considers the process for a formality, where the planners have already decided the plans. In a democratic process, the public has the right to be included and consulted; public participation can further support institutional legitimacy and the bottom-up approach [Petts and Leach, 2000]. Public involvement is not granting a better decision making, and by involving the public, the planning process can become chaotic due to control being lost. In some instances, experts may make more rational long-term decisions, unlike the public, where the experts are able to overlook all aspects of the project [Petts and Leach, 2000].

The aim of public participation is therefore important to know beforehand, to design a public participation that fits the process [Petts and Leach, 2000]. There are different aims and reasons to involve the public, such as increasing transparency, empowering the public, or resolving conflicting views. For each individual aim, there are different degrees of participation, which is fit for the purpose. To resolve conflicting views, an extended involvement is necessary, whereas to increase transparency, all four degrees of participation can be used, individual or together [Petts and Leach, 2000].

Throughout the planning process, the aim of public participation may change, and a different degree of participation may therefore be needed. For instance, in the beginning of a planning process, where the aim is to determine needs and desires, an *extended involvement* is needed, or if the need is to increase transparency, the degree of *education and information provision* is sufficient [Petts and Leach, 2000].

Once the aim of public participation is determined, a suitable participation method can be chosen. Each method has a different purpose, where some method is angled towards empowering communities and some is used to gather information. For the purpose of this thesis, only relevant public participation methods will be mentioned [Petts and Leach, 2000].

### **Level 1 - Education and information provision**

*Unstaffed exhibits/displays* provides an arrangement of presenting information to the public which can help increase transparency. However, the information being displayed may be misunderstood, and with no one to clarify the misunderstanding it can be seen as a disadvantage [Petts and Leach, 2000].

### **Level 2 - Information feedback**

*Public meetings* are a traditional form of public involvement, in which the different interest are gathered to receive information, and express opinions. If successful, public meetings can be useful to provide information and meet other stakeholders. It can on the other hand be a difficult and unpredictable method, if a vocal group undermines the process. The method can increase transparency, help change the public's view on the process and help gather needs and desire [Petts and Leach, 2000].

*Surveys, interviews and questionnaires* have the advantages of gathering information from the public that may not attend public hearings, and if administered properly it can target an relevant segment of the public, for example individuals from a specific neighbourhood. It is however, when done properly costly and time consuming [Petts and Leach, 2000].

**Level 3 - Involvement and consultation**

*Workshop* is limited in number, compared to public meetings, since often only selected individuals are invited to participate. The method can be useful in gathering inside information, go into details about the process and the selected individuals can be part of designing the solutions. However, by default, the limited number of participants is a disadvantage since the method may not represent the entirety of the community [Petts and Leach, 2000].

Lastly, there is the *Open house* method, where the public or otherwise interested stakeholders can visit a given site and review materials, meet the people behind the process and get answers to their questions. It is a practical approach in informing the public, however it is also highly costly and require preparation and available staff [Petts and Leach, 2000].

**3.3 Sustainability and public participation**

As described in section 3.1, the five pillars are not interchangeable since they each have different values [Hansmann et al., 2012], thus each pillar must be explored individually [Hansmann et al., 2012]. The planning processes must therefore still account for each pillar and strive for a positive synergy between the pillars as well as the stakeholders [Hansmann et al., 2012]. When planning for economic- or environmental sustainability, experts may be better at solutions, based on an appreciation of the technical aspects, and the long-term effects of the given solutions [Petts and Leach, 2000]. However, to investigate social sustainability and local values, the public can be seen as experts of the field [Camponovo et al., 2021], where they can be used to gain local knowledge not known to the planners [Petts and Leach, 2000], thus it is important to ensure public participation. To create a sustainable transformation, experts, as well as public knowledge must be included to weigh each pillar in the pursuance of creating a synergy between the pillars.

# Methods 4

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This chapter outlines this thesis's methods, where initially, the theory of science forms the basis of how the methods are implemented and understood with a hermeneutic approach, see chapter 2 section 2.1. The methods are more thoroughly explained, where: a) participatory data collection, b) quantitative observations, and c) a qualitative expert interview was conducted.

## 4.1 Participatory data collection

As part of the course *The deliberative planner* from the master program Urban Planning and Management (UPM) of Aalborg University, the researcher of this thesis was asked to collaborate and help design a participatory mapping session, which involved the second semester students of UPM, four local citizens of Vestbyen, and researchers from Aalborg University. The data collected during the course module were noted, analysed and later the students as part of the course, presented the analysed data. The data collection consisted of four local citizens and 11 students, which were divided into four groups. Each group consisted of two to three students and one local citizen, who were assigned one of the four areas of Vestbyen, see appendix A figure A.1. Each group was equipped with a semi-structured interview guide, a sheet, and a map to note important points of interest which was discussed during the walk-and-talk.

For the thesis, a hybrid method tool will be described since the data from the course module share elements from both participatory mapping and the walk-and-talk interview, which is adapted to a single data collection method. To promote and support public engagement in the decision making, participatory methods can be used to gather and analyse information from the public [Corbett, 2009]. Participatory mapping can be used to identify important areas in various settings such as regional-, urban or rural planning, in which the public and the community can identify problems or bring solutions to unknown issues [Brown and Kyttä, 2018] and is increasingly employed as a social research tool [Brown et al., 2018a]. Participatory mapping and public participation share several aims, such as: reducing disputes, increasing trust, informing, and educating the public, and one of the most important points, incorporating the public's values in the development process [Brown et al., 2018b]. Through this method, the obtained data are more likely to be linked to experienced events rather than memories or accounts of events that have happened previously to the participants [Camponovo et al., 2021].

By 'walk and talk' with the interviewed, it can unlock temporal and situational events, which is significant for the individual. The data generated by walking and talking can be rich, abundant, and multisensory [Camponovo et al., 2021]. This method can be used to investigate the individuals' actions in relation to their surroundings [Camponovo et al., 2021]. It can be difficult to understand and analyse individuals' behaviour if they are only observed [Camponovo et al., 2021], and therefore by merging walk-and-talk and participatory mapping, it is possible to investigate the citizens of Vestbyen and their interactions with their surroundings.

Moving through the urban space with the citizen can generate otherwise hard to get data, about the everyday life. Walking and talking in the situated area can become a driving force of information, which can emphasise the problems or bring about solutions [Camponovo et al., 2021].

## 4.2 Observation

To gain knowledge of the citizens' participation, unstructured participant observations were conducted twice, first at "vestbyens samråd" meeting, which was an ordinary general meeting, where architect Thomas Birket-Smith from Aalborg municipality was invited, along with citizens who wanted to join the meeting. Second observation was conducted at Vestbyen's "borgermøde", where the locals of Vestbyen could participate in meetings with other stakeholders and people from the municipality. Each meeting lasted for approximately two hours, during which a dialog between those present arose concerning the development of Vestbyen.

Observations are normally used to get a descriptive illustration of a phenomenon, yet participant observation has the potential of establishing tendencies not directly observable as the researcher is a part of the experience [Gratton and Jones, 2010]. During participant observation, the researcher can develop a relationship with the participants, and it is therefore important not to harm the participants, by using sensitive information acquired through observation [Kristiansen and Krogstrup, 2015]. Therefore, none of the participants will be mentioned by name, but referred to anonymously. When conducting unstructured participant observations, it is possible to observe human behaviour in natural settings [Kristiansen and Krogstrup, 2015]. Furthermore, it allows the researcher to engage in informal conversations with the participants [Saltofte, 2016], and hereby attempt to understand the participants point of view [Kristiansen and Krogstrup, 2015]. It can, however, be difficult to create a completely natural setting, as the researcher's presence can influence the social context, and it is therefore important to be as uninvolved as possible [Gratton and Jones, 2010]. When observing the meetings, it was tried to maintain distance to the participants, to foster as natural setting as possible. Moreover, during conversations with the citizens, a listening approach was utilised to get the citizens' objective point of view. In order to not draw attention, notes were written down on a smartphone, so it would be less obvious that the participants were observed [Gratton and Jones, 2010], and comprehensive notes were written down after the meeting. Given that the observations were conducted as unstructured, an open and investigating approach was chosen with no prior structure of what to observe [Kristiansen and Krogstrup, 2015]. However, before the observations were conducted, reflection of which patterns of behaviour could be relevant to focus on was considered. These considerations were based on pre-understandings obtained through prior knowledge, for instance, the different citizen participation methods.

A disadvantage of observation is that the researcher may misinterpret the situation [Gratton and Jones, 2010]. As this thesis had a hermeneutic approach to the field, prejudices and pre-understandings were utilised throughout the collection of the empirical data, creating an already existing subjective basis of the phenomenon studied. Therefore, an interview with one of the citizens was conducted to get a local perspective of the situation.

## 4.3 Interview

In addition to the observations, a semi-structured key informant interview was conducted [Gratton and Jones, 2010], with one of Vestbyen's residents, who is also a member of "Vestbyens samråd", to acquire

general knowledge of Vestbyen and the citizens' participation in the planning process. A key informant is a person with a specialised knowledge of a given phenomenon [Gratton and Jones, 2010], in this case Vestbyen. The interview was held after the first observation, as it contributed to knowledge regarding the planning of Vestbyen, and the disagreement between the locals and the municipality. Therefore, the interview was used to get a more in-depth knowledge of these subjects, and to understand it from another point of view [Gratton and Jones, 2010]. When conducting an interview, it is important to be aware of body language, as the interviewer unconsciously can emit notions of whether an answer is correct, for instance by nodding, which can influence the respondent's answers [Gratton and Jones, 2010]. To ensure the most honest answers, the respondent should feel comfortable [Gratton and Jones, 2010], thus the interview was held in an informal setting, by walking around Vestbyen, in the area where the respondent lives. Furthermore, it was made sure in the beginning of the interview, that the respondent only should answer questions the respondent was comfortable with [Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009], and besides, to ensure a comfortable setting, the initial questions were simple and related to everyday events [Gratton and Jones, 2010]. Given the informal surrounding of the interview, significant notes were written down on a smartphone.

The semi-structured interview was chosen, as it focuses on a specific topic, while giving the respondent the opportunity to answer freely and detailed, to which the interviewer can ask additional questions [Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009]. In this thesis, the focus of the interview was the transformations of Vestbyen and the opportunity for the citizens to participate in the planning process. Therefore, an interview guide was made to ensure the questions were related to the subject of the interview, focusing on the different flower petals in the sustainable flower. By using the sustainable flower as the basis for the interview guide, knowledge of the citizens' participation in the transformation of Vestbyen in the different dimensions of sustainability was somewhat obtained. The interview guide was composed of open questions, with the intention of making the respondent talk about own experiences and actions [Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009]. As the interview was semi-structured, the respondent had the opportunity to talk about subjects besides the questions in the interview guide [Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009], which can result in the conversation being different from the relevant subject [Gratton and Jones, 2010]. Therefore, it is important that the interviewer steers the interview back to the relevant subject [Gratton and Jones, 2010].

Before conducting an interview there are some ethical considerations that need to be considered, such as: 1) informed consent, 2) confidence, 3) consequences, 4) the role of the researcher [Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009]. Informed consent relates to the willingness of the respondent to participate, and to which degree the respondent should be informed of the purpose of the study [Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009]. In this thesis, the purpose of the study was not withheld from the respondent, as the respondent knowingly participated. Confidence refers to the trust between the researcher and the respondent, and how the respondent's information is managed [Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009], which in this thesis is complied with by making the respondent anonymous, thus limiting the negative potential consequences of participating in an interview. However, a positive consequence of participating in an interview is that the respondent may reflect on the subject, and hereby make the respondent's thoughts explicit [Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009]. Lastly, the role of the researcher can have a crucial impact on the outcome of the interview, as the interviewer needs to make sure that the conversation stays relevant while remaining professional [Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009]. Regardless of the informal setting of the interview, focus was always on keeping a high level of professionalism during the interview, to ensure a high quality. Furthermore, an attempt to not ask leading questions was made, so the respondent had the opportunity to answer honestly.

## **4.4 Analysis of empirical knowledge**

To compare the notes from the observations and the interview, the data were colour coded in regard to the sustainable flower petals [Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009]. The analysis will therefore be divided into the following sections: Social, local value, environment, economics, and nature. To ensure all relevant observations or statements were included in the analysis, an additional category was considered to represent relevant data not necessarily related to the five petals [Gratton and Jones, 2010]. This division of the data formed the basis for the analysis with the purpose of answering the research question.

# Case description 5

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In order to analyse and discuss the dynamics in Aalborg Vestby, a description of Aalborg Vestby will be presented. Firstly, a short historical review will be presented, followed by a spatial presentation of Aalborg Vestby, and lastly the demographic of Vestbyen will be investigated.

## 5.1 Historical perspective

Aalborg city has undergone a transformation over the last 30-40 years [By- og Landskabsforvaltningen, 2019a], from heavy industry to a more knowledge-based industry, where Aalborg was once known as "The city with the smoking chimneys" [Nielsen et al., 2017]. Common industry in Aalborg was of a maritime character such as the production of pumps, kettles, fibreglass, and ship radios, consequently making Aalborg a host for global industries focusing on maritime professions and trade. The city district of Vestbyen also harboured several larger industries from the late 19th century throughout the 20th century (see appendix A figure A.2), such as *C.W. Obels tobakfabrik* which had a peak of 2000 employees and *Aalborg dampvaskeri* with almost 250 employees. The workforce was primarily citizens of Aalborg, who lived close to the workplace, and with an increase in the population a need for build new housing and apartments was present [Vestbyens Erindringsværksted, 2021]. In Vestbyen classic block style apartments at 4-5 storeys were constructed for the increasing workforce, and in the 1940s the building style changed to free-standing blocks with green areas, managed by housing associations [Bender, W.Y]. Around late 1860, approximately 250 people were living in Vestbyen, and with the increase in industry and production, the population increased to approximately 1000 in 1895, and five years later almost 6300 people were living in Vestbyen [Bender, W.Y]. When Vestbyen were fully developed in the mid-1950s, approximately 20.000 people were living inside the city district [Bender, W.Y]. In the 1960s, there was a decrease in both the number of industries as well as the population [Vestbyens Erindringsværksted, 2021]. The ordinary family was able to afford a car and could therefore move out of the city, and the small apartments were no longer attractive [Vestbyens Erindringsværksted, 2021]. Furthermore, many of the industries were closed down between the sixties and eighties, and some closed down in the recent decades such as *Limfjordsværftet* in 2002 and *De danske spritfabrikker* in 2015 [Vestbyens Erindringsværksted, 2021]. Other companies and industries were forced to move out of the city district to industrial areas or merged with other companies [Vestbyens Erindringsværksted, 2021]. The empty industry buildings have later been transformed to accommodate new purposes, were, for example the university used the buildings of *C. W. Obel* and *De forenende tekstilfabrikker*.

## 5.2 Geographical delimitation

The city district Vestbyen, which is delimited by Limfjorden to the north, the railway to the east, Vestre Fjordvej to the west, and Kong Christians Allé to the south [Aalborg kommune, 2017], outlined by the red

line see figure 5.1.



**Figure 5.1.** Figure shows Aalborg municipalities geographically delimited area of Vestbyen, marked in red, and the development plan area for Vestsbyen marked in blue

However, for the urban development plan of Vestbyen, a new delimitation is presented, where the planning framework for both Vestbyen and Mølholm are included, which is marked in blue, see figure 5.1. The urban development plan must integrate ongoing processes and plans, where the goal is to create a framework that supports synergy for urban beautification and urban development [By- og Landskabsudvalget, 2019b]. Vestbyen is further divided into different zoning frameworks, as shown in A figure A.3, where each colour corresponds to a different type of legal framework. The most predominate areas are "Bolig område" marked in red, "Område til offentlige service" marked in yellow, "Mixed housing and industry" marked in light purple. Then there are two smaller areas, "Center" marked in dark purple, "Let erhversområde" marked in light blue, and lastly "Rekreativt område" marked in green.

### 5.3 Vestbyen today

There have not been a notably development in Vestbyen in the last decades and the physical expressions of Vestbyen has therefore not changed particularly and some parts of Vestbyen are therefore in need of renovating. However, the street scenery in Vestbyen has changed from small, specialised businesses such as butchers, bakeries, tailors, etc. to fastfood restaurant and big supermarkets [Vestbyens Erindringsværksted, 2021], where some of the businesses have moved into the old existing buildings. One of Vestbyens qualities

and part of the identity, is attributable to the geographical location itself with Limfjorden and the maritime environment, green recreational areas, and the proximity to the city centre [By- og Landskabsforvaltningen, 2019b]. Vestbyen, the city in the city's identity can further be described in the physical design of the buildings with an even level of floors, facades towards the streets and small green recreational areas [Fich and Pauli, 2021], further a large part of the buildings also have a conservation value and must be tried to incorporate in new plans [Aalborg kommune, 2017]. One of the noticeably changes in Vestbyen are the change in the demographics, with an increase in younger people who are primarily enrolled at a higher education system [By- og Landskabsforvaltningen, 2019b].

### 5.3.1 Demographic

To understand the composition of the citizens of Vestbyen, a demographical description will be conducted.

Population development 2008 - 2022															
Citydistrict	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Vestbyen	12.619	12.516	12.711	12.927	13.145	13.499	13.643	13.907	14.054	14.135	14.005	9.373	9.083	9.006	8.811

**Table 5.1.** Population development from 2008 to 2022, for the city district Vestbyen [Aalborg kommune, 2022b]

Table 5.1 shows the population development from the year 2008 to the year 2022. From 2008 to 2018, a graduate increase can be seen, from 12.619 citizens to 14.005 citizens, and between 2018 and 2019 there were a large decrease to 9.373 citizens, which is a total decrease of 4.632 citizens. From 2019 and 2022, a further decrease can be seen from 9.373 citizens to 8.811 citizens.

Population movements:2021										
	Population start year	Newborns	Deaths	Moved to Aalborg	Moved away from aalborg	Immigrants	Emigrated	Moved internally in Aalborg	Relocated internally in Aalborg	Population end year
Vestbyen Men	7.207	40	38	407	406	95	67	973	1.105	4.524
Vestbyen Women	6.825	37	34	420	400	89	55	970	1.121	4.287
Vestbyen Total	14.032	77	72	827	806	184	122	1.943	2.226	8.811

**Table 5.2.** Population movements for the city district of Vestbyen in 2021. The column *Moved to and from Aalborg* is movements between municipalities. *Immigrants and emigrants* are movement between countries. *Moved and relocated internally*, is the movements of Aalborgs population internally between districts. [Aalborg kommune, 2022b]

Table 5.2 shows the populations movements in Vestbyen divided by gender and total. A noteworthy phenomenon is the large number of internally movements in Vestbyen, where around a quarter of the citizens move between the city districts. Furthermore, there are a surplus of people relocating from Vestbyen with a different of 283 citizens.

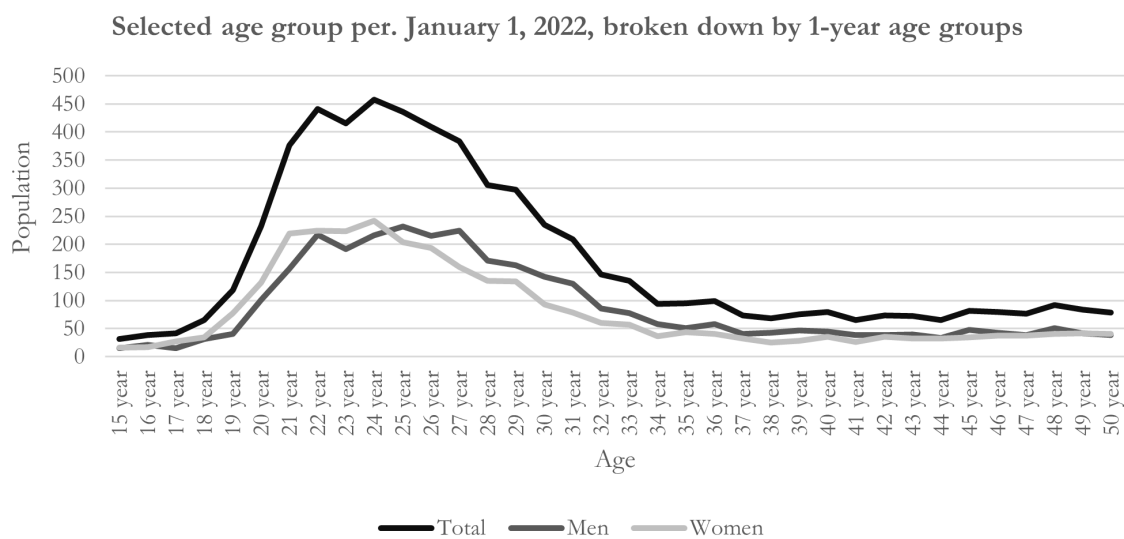
Table 5.3 show the population divide in 5 years age group. There is a substantial increase from the age group 15-19 years to the 20-24 years age group, and then a large decrease from the age group 25-29 to 30-34 years. This substantial increase and sudden decrease can be part of explaining the movements internally in Aalborg.

The population per. January 1, 2022 by 5-year age groups - Total										
	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-34 years	35-39 years	40-44 years	45-49 years
Vestbyen Men	120	85	87	123	883	1.005	494	240	195	223
Vestbyen Women	112	77	90	172	1.040	827	325	170	160	191
Vestbyen Total	232	162	177	295	1.923	1.832	819	410	355	414

	50-54 years	55-59 years	60-64 years	65-69 years	70-74 years	75-79 years	80-84 years	85-89 years	90-94 years	95 years+
Vestbyen Men	190	217	177	168	137	100	46	24	9	1
Vestbyen Women	201	226	148	158	126	103	79	51	24	7
Vestbyen Total	391	443	325	326	263	203	125	75	33	8

**Table 5.3.** Vestbyens population divided into 5-year age groups by men, women and total, by January 1, 2022 [Aalborg kommune, 2022b]



**Figure 5.2.** Selected 1-year age groups, to illustrate the biggest different in movements [Aalborg kommune, 2022b]

By looking further in detail, figure 5.2 shows the age groups between 15 and 50. Here is illustrated the incline from the age group '19 years' with a population of 119 to the highest group '24 years' with a population of 458. From the age group '24' there is a graduate decline towards the age group '34 years' with a population of 94. It can be expected that this prolonged increase in young people are students, which can also explain the big movements in the population. Aalborg municipality has made prognoses that describes that Aalborg in general will have an increase in the population, which also relates to Vestbyen as well.

# Analysis 6

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The purpose of the following chapter is to answer subquestion 2: *How is the current citizen participation in Aalborg Vestby in regard to the sustainable development process?* The analysis will be conducted on the basis of the aforementioned methods described in mythology; participatory data collection, observations, and interview. The information will be processed according to the five sustainability pillars and focus on how the citizens of Vestbyen can contribute to a sustainable transformation of Vestbyen.

## 6.1 Social

During the first observation, the municipality presented the date and time for the upcoming public meeting about the architectural competition. The citizens who were present at the city district council meeting, argued that the time for the meeting was too early in the day, and that it would only be elderly people who could attend since people who are working, or people with smaller children would not be able to make it. Other people argued that it was perhaps done purposely to decrease the number of participants. As observed during the public meeting, only a few young people were attending, while the majority were elderly. When involving the citizens in a transformation process, it is important to ensure a wide demographic, as it can be a weakening factor for the citizen participation if only a small sample of the total demographic is represented. Therefore, by conducting a meeting at a time of the day where people may not be able to show up diminishes the citizens participation, as the municipality will potentially only get a small sample of the total demographic of the area.

As Petts and Leach [2000] describes public participation will have the opportunity to build trust and improve openness. When asked by a citizen, if the citizens had real influence, the municipality answered that they have influence at the public meetings. This statement was met with general unpleasantness from the citizens, as the citizens do not feel that they have any influence. This may increase distrust due to the lack of empathy, in which the citizens feel that the municipality does not recognise the validity of their concerns.

During the meeting, the municipality asked the council and the citizens who were present, if they could imagine the erection of more buildings in the area by the sea sport clubs, where a woman promptly said no, and the rest of the participants nodded in agreement. The citizens may not see the long-term effect of global area use and a need for densification where experts may be better at long-term solutions, since they may be unbiased and can appreciate the technical aspect of the proposed dilemma. However, it seems that the citizen, is not opposed to additionally buildings, but they want the area alongside Limfjorden as open as possible with as few new buildings in front. This conflict seems to arise due to two different points of view between the municipality and the citizens, where the municipality wants to concentrate the city development, and the citizens want to have more open spaces and green areas.

During the interview, several topics were brought up in regard to social sustainability. One of the major

topics during the interview was the lack of mixed housing, and the citizens, or at least members of the citizens council, wished Vestbyen could be more inclusive, thus keeping the young people in Vestbyen. This reflects the willingness of the citizens to help a social sustainable process in making Vestbyen more inclusive and rethinking the problems in order to create solutions. Furthermore, in the interview the citizen mentioned the lack of gathering places and that the pump station located near the fjord and the train bridge was closing and could be repurposed as a space for various purposes for the citizens, but mostly as a gathering space. This was also mentioned at the participatory meeting when the group of students, joined by a local citizen, talked about how to utilise the building. This can indicate that the citizens are a resource in regard to rethinking problems and utilise what they have in their local area. They are moreover able to help in the sustainable process, and not only in social sustainability but also environmental sustainability by suggesting reuse of buildings in the local area.

Social sustainability also includes everyday stories on how citizens interact with their surroundings and each other. During the participatory mapping, one of the elderly citizens explained how one of the benches is their preferred bench to *"catch up"* and share stories, and how when the weather is enjoyable, there is almost always someone sitting on the bench. Furthermore, she explained that it was possible to get a cup of coffee in the building behind the bench, which is also the starting point for the local walking club. These stories can in a social sustainable aspect be seen as more than just stories, they can be guidelines for how to plan and design a transformation process, for which objects should be replicated or preserved. During the participatory mapping, one of the citizens mentioned that she was afraid of walking in specific places during evenings and nights due to the absence of proper streetlight. If not corrected, it can diminish the feeling of security, which may also reflect to other citizens and can be part of creating an undesired city district.

At the citizen meeting, a retired kindergarten teacher, highlighted her concern with the transformation of the three parks, as there may not be enough open space for the children to play football or other activities. The municipality and the presenting architectural firm tried to explain that they had thought about it, and there was still space at Fjordmarken. She kept her statement and still argued that if the municipality and the architectural firms had spent time at the parks, they should know, there should be more open space. An earlier citizen involvement could potentially have prevented misunderstandings or contributed to the local knowledge of the area. A different citizen participation method could also have been deployed in order to gain a deeper knowledge of the area, instead of citizen participation method which allows only for minimal feedback.

## 6.2 Local value

One of the main points throughout all the collected data, was the identity and qualities of Vestbyen, and what should be done to preserve it. One of the underlying areas is the old Limfjordsværft which is a major topic for the citizens as well as the municipality. The old limfjordsværft and the surrounding area as mentioned in chapter 5, has a historic value and the citizens recognise the importance of the area. However, this area is left out of the architectural competition, which the citizens found unusually and wrong. This led to a discussion between the citizens and the municipality, which ended by the municipality saying the discussion could be continued at another time. This can be interpreted as diminished transparency between the municipality and the citizens, and further when the municipality ended the discussion seemed to decrease the transparency even further. At the citizen meeting about the architectural competition, when the area of the old Limfjordsværftet was discussed and how to transform it, one of the present citizens

asked if the municipality knew what the owner plans to do with the area. A couple of citizens said, of course, they wanted to build luxury apartments, which another citizen named "*another rich man ghetto*". The municipality did not seem to defend this statement; however, they continued with the presentation, which seemed to annoy the citizens who expressed their opinions. This statement can be interpreted as a decline in trust and transparency between the municipality and the citizens. It can further weaken the citizen participation process if the public thinks that the plans have already been approved and the meetings are just a formality.

Later in the meeting, parking was discussed and how it affects house owners, where some have been forced or chosen to convert their front gardens into parking spaces. One citizen talked about how this affected the local value, in her opinion, as Vestbyens single-family houses have front lawns which also contributes to the overall green elements in the city. For her, it was a shame that these laws are being destroyed in order to accommodate more parking. This statement can contribute to uncover some of the elements that makes Vestbyen special and contribute to the overall local value aspect of sustainable development, and why it is important to include the citizens early in the process to gain this local knowledge.

During the interview, the citizen showed a picture of an arbitrary city district and asked to name what city the picture was taken in, when no answer was given, he explained that all new developments are the same and in his opinion, more cities lose their identity due to uniform building design and materials. This situation was originated by a discussion about the new apartment buildings located in the area east of the train bridge "*Spritten*", since these buildings are visible when walking at the two parks: Fjordmarken and Søheltenes have. He mentioned that these buildings did not contribute to the identity, and they could be placed in any city. He further expressed concern for the future transformation of Vestbyen, that new buildings will be constructed in the same design and material, which will be a loss to Vestbyen. This experience highlights how important it is to include the citizens if ownership and belongingness should endure.

In addition, during the participatory mapping, one of the citizens had a small story for almost each building, describing what it used to be, and how people walked around getting from one place to the other. This information is not necessarily useful for the holistic transformation; however, it can be helpful in understanding the everyday life of the citizens, to promote and understand the uniqueness of the area.

One of the more discussed areas is the boat parking area near the sea sport clubs. During the participatory mapping, the citizens stated that most people want the boat parking removed, however, she explains how it is part of the harbour and the maritime characteristics and the overall identity of the harbour. However, she could also see how the space could be utilised more efficiently, for example, in the summer when it is primarily empty. At the public meeting, different citizens suggested using the *buts* that are used at the Christmas fair at C.W. Obels square, for vendors to sell various food and drink items. This shows how involving the citizens can contribute to diverse perspectives and solutions to a problem and encourage the citizens enthusiasm and passion for the process.

### 6.3 Environment

During the first observation, the city district council presented an idea to make changes in the current municipal planning framework to exclude housing from mixed housing and industry from the area of Limfjordsværftet (see appendix A). This can be interpreted as the citizens trying to ensure that it is not allowed to build apartments in the area around Limfjordsværftet, which can also increase the environmental

sustainability by minimising noise polluted housing and increase the local environment. This idea can further be interpreted as a weakened citizen participation from the municipality side, if the citizens think the transformation of Limfjordsværftet is already decided and future plans are just a formality.

During the interview, the citizen mentioned how the paths and roads are no longer sufficient, and there should be a focus on making it more safe and easier to use. During the participatory mapping, additionally opinions about the mobility in Vestbyen was uncovered, where the citizen expressed, that the mobility plan was not planned holistic; parking spaces are lacking and there is not enough focus on bicycle infrastructure. By utilising local knowledge about soft mobility use, in the area, a mobility plan could be made which takes into account how the citizens actually use the paths and roads and how they move in the city district. This issue about lacking local knowledge was brought up during the public meeting, where one of the architectural firms stated that soft mobility users, use Peder Skrams Gade as the main road. Which they use to legitimise the conversion of the roads into green areas. To this statement, one of the citizens laughs scornful and mentioned that most of the soft mobility users do not use Peder Skrams Gade and instead use the roads close to the fjord. This instance can help illustrate the need for the citizens knowledge, and if used correct, it can help build ownership among the citizens.

While walking around the city during the participatory mapping, the citizen pointed at an empathy lot, and explained it used to be a gas station, and how it was torn down to construct a new building, however the construction was shot down before they even started on the construction. The citizen explained how the citizens discussed among themselves about they wanted to make temporary solutions or a small flower park. This could increase a better local environment by reusing the materials and earth that are available at the site. It could also strengthen the citizen participation process by encouraging the public's passion and enthusiasm to improve their city district.

## 6.4 Nature

During the observations and interview, it seemed that the citizens of Vestbyen feared or was annoyed by, the impacts of the implementation of climate prevention as several citizens saw the solution as a nuisance or as a hindering for their day to day life. However, some citizens were open to different solutions and could see the potential to adapt to a changing climate.

During the city district council meeting, one citizen asked about how the municipality are planning to manage increasing extreme precipitation events. The municipality could not explain how they are planning to do so at the given time but promised that information would be available in the nearest future. It shows initiative from the citizens and could have been an ideal situation to bring in the citizens early in the planning to increase transparency. When this was not possible, a promise of future information can help build trust by being consistent and keep to the promise, otherwise if failed can decrease the feeling of consistency and thereby the trust.

During the participatory mapping, one of the citizens explained how she enjoys the "*small nature*" that can be found in the streets, such as the pedestrian refuge, or the chicanes with small trees and bushes. If this is true for more citizens, it could be included in the transformation process to increase the green element in the city. This example may be perceived as arbitrary, but it can be part of encouraging the citizens in diverse thinking and identify solutions not thought of. Moreover, in the participatory mapping, one of the citizen mentioned, she thought the municipalities climate adaptation solution could pose a nuisance for the

users of the sea sport clubs. She expressed that the municipality wants to build a dike in front of the clubs, where she is afraid some of the members of the sea sports clubs may not be able to drag the boat up over the dike. However, during the public meeting, the municipality and the architectural firms talked about how it was possible to design and implement different solutions to accommodate the needs of the citizens and minimise nuisances which may be caused by the climate adaption solution. If the municipality had been more transparent earlier in the process and explained this concept of adjusting the solutions in accordance with the citizens, a possible decline in trust could have been handled and corrected.

## 6.5 Economic

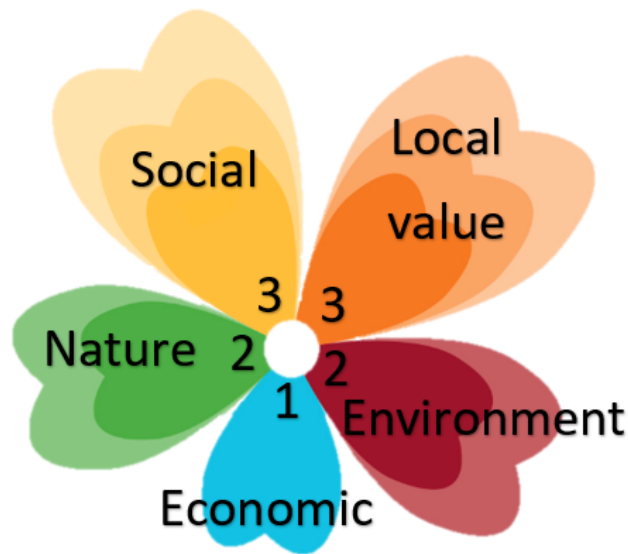
Aalborg municipality has implemented economic sustainability into their plan documents as well as the four other sustainability definitions. As described in section 3.1, economic sustainability contains three focus points: securing Aalborgs livelihood, most environment for the money and long-term lasting solutions.

During the observations, the municipality and the architectural firms presented plans for the transformation of Vestbyen. These plans contained elements of all five pillars of sustainability including economic sustainability, such as densification, ensuring sustainable mobility, and long-term solutions. During the presentations, it was not explicit that the five elements of sustainability was part of the presentation, so when the citizens reacted or discussed the elements under the economic sustainability pillar they reacted by relating the topics to a social or local sustainability. This was made clear during the first observation when city council expressed a dislike to the densification of *Spitten*, since it is against their local values. This can indicate that the citizens are not as concerned about economic aspects as they are for the rest of the aspects of sustainability. However, since the dimensions of sustainability are closely connected, it is sometimes difficult to separate them completely, for example, during the interview where the solution of densification, which can be linked to economic sustainability, was brought up. In this instance, the citizen responded accordingly to the sustainability dimension of local values, since he said that densification was not part of the identity of Vestbyen and therefore he did not think it was a good idea. Although there were no direct observations of economic sustainability, it can be interpreted as a result in itself. By not having data related to economic sustainability, it can indicate how the citizens act and what their focus points are, and in some cases explain their attitude and expressions towards a given project. If the citizens do not understand the underlying aspects of economic sustainability, it may explain why some citizens are against, among other topics, densification.

# Discussion 7

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The focus of the following chapter will be to answer subquestion 3: *How can current citizens participation influence future sustainable development in Aalborg Vestby?*. Firstly, the result of the analysis will be presented, followed by a discussion based on the results of the analysis. Based on the analysis, it is quite evident that the involved citizens in this thesis are active in their local city district, especially about *local value* and *social* sustainability, of which they have great local knowledge. On the other hand, there is a noticeable absence of participation from the citizens when dealing with *nature-* and *environmental* sustainability, and also an insignificant participation regarding *economic* sustainability, compared to the *local value-* and the *social* sustainability aspects. Therefore, the following weighing of the sustainability pillars are as follows: 1 is low participation, 2 is medium participation, and 3 is high participation, see figure 7.1.



**Figure 7.1.** Sustainability flower based on the results, illustrating the weighing from the citizen participation perspective.

As illustrated in figure 7.1, the citizens are primarily participation in consultation and feedback methods concerning the local value and social sustainability, which can help the municipality obtain local knowledge. However, this may be undesired if a positive synergy between the pillars is to be achieved, given that there is little focus on involving the citizens in the remaining three aspects of sustainability. According to Hansmann et al. [2012], a positive synergy between the sustainability pillars is crucial to ensure decision making regarding sustainability [Hansmann et al., 2012]. When involving the citizens in decision making, new ideas and solutions may arise [Petts and Leach, 2000], hence involving the citizens in all five sustainability aspects

may strengthen the outcome. However, given the reduced citizen participation in three out of five pillars, it may suggest that additional approaches need to be considered. Regarding the nature-, environmental- and economic sustainability, the municipality may be superior in the decision making [Petts and Leach, 2000], whereas the citizens may be experts in the field regarding social- and local sustainability [Camponovo et al., 2021]. Even though the citizens may not be experts in all of the sustainable pillars, it may help increase the trust between the municipality and the citizens if the citizens are further included. Moreover, when involving the citizens properly, it can facilitate ownership and responsibility [Dola and Mohd Noor, 2012]. It is therefore especially important that the municipality is transparent when informing the citizens of the nature-, environmental- and economic sustainability aspects, to better include them in the process and thus create a synergy between all pillars.

In order to include the citizens and make their participation more efficient, it is important for the municipality to ensure transparency and open communication, thereby building trust between them and the citizens [Petts and Leach, 2000; Dola and Mijan, 2006]. However, in various situations, the municipality neglected to discuss the transformation process of the old Limfjordsværft, which was of interest to the citizens. This situation may diminish the trust of the citizens, as the municipality did not acknowledge their interests and concerns. When citizens are not acknowledged, it can be a barrier to citizens' participation [Dola and Mijan, 2006], thus consequently weakening the decision making process. Still, the municipality did utilise several participation processes during the transformation to gather different citizens' points of views, including public meetings, surveys and methods associated with involvement such as consultation and workshops. The municipality did hereby attempt to include and acknowledge the citizens. However, if planners are not able to properly conduct meetings, workshops, etc. the outcome may not be desirable [Forester, 2007]. During the meetings there was a general dissatisfaction among the citizens, as they did not feel that they had an influence in the planning process, which may have created an undesirable situation. To achieve a greater implementation process, it is essential that both planners and citizens listen to each other and can be mediators at times Forester [2007]. A dialog between the municipality and the citizens is therefore crucial in the planning process. However, planners may not always function as mediators, since their position often requires them to control a given situation rather than understand and investigate possible strategic actions yet listening for commonalities can help planners establish common ground and achieve mutual understanding [Forester, 2007]. Planners must therefore be able to listen to not only *what* is being said, but *why* in order to clarify the deeper meaning of a given statement [Forester, 2007]. The municipality therefore needs to undertake a listening approach, in order to achieve an agreement with the citizens. Moreover, in order to achieve a successful participation process, planners also need to distinguish between appropriate methods of involvement and clarify the purpose of participation [Forester, 2007]. The meetings and workshops organised by the municipality were conducted in a manner that were mainly desirable for specific people of Vestbyen, due to time of day or as it was held for a certain group of people. This may indicate that the municipality did not create desirable conditions for citizens participation for the general population of Vestbyen. As described by Petts and Leach [2000] traditional information and feedback methods are inadequate regarding complex and controversial issues if a vocal minority is predominant [Petts and Leach, 2000]. As observed during the meetings, there were a majority of elderly people, which may influence the outcome of the decision making regarding the transformation of Vestbyen, and thus limiting the citizens' participation. Therefore, to increase and strengthen the citizens' participation, it is important to ensure a wide attendance of different citizens, to get as many points of view as possible.

## 7.1 Who are the citizens of Vestbyen?

The demographic section 5.3.1, shows that 40 pct. of Vestbyens population is between the age of 20-29 [Aalborg kommune, 2022b], whereas the members of the city council are estimated to be between 50-79 years old, which correlates to 22 pct. of the population. Furthermore, the citizens who participated at the public meeting are also estimated to be in the age group 50-79, except for two younger people who were present but not actively participating in the discussions. It is therefore uncertain whether the municipality is getting a representative sample of the population of Vestbyen, since the involved citizens represent 22 pct. of the total population of Vestbyen [Aalborg kommune, 2022b]. On the other hand, when investigating the internally movements in Vestbyen, approximately 25 pct. of the population moves either out of Vestbyen or to Vestbyen, pr year [Aalborg kommune, 2022b]. This movement can be addressed by the number of new students admitted at Aalborg University, with approximately 20.000 new students each year [Aalborg universitet, 2022], where Vestbyen is described as a popular city district to live while studying [By- og Landskabsforvaltningen, 2019b], hence it can be expected a certain amount of the internally movements originate from admitted students. Furthermore, the internally relocation may arise from graduated students who move out of Vestbyen, which can also explain the decline in the population from the age group 25-26. It can therefore be speculated who the citizens of Vestbyen are. The large group who may only stay a couple of years, or a smaller group who may stay for a longer period of time. It is not only imperative to have a clear understanding of who the citizens are, but also their interest in order to design specific activities and to appreciate the benefits of participation [Petts and Leach, 2000].

As Petts and Leach [2000] describes, there is no single group or interest that can be defined as *the public* [Petts and Leach, 2000]. However, the term *public*, referees to all who have an interest in a given project, process, or decisions, and are not the responsible authority [Petts and Leach, 2000]. Additionally, the identity of citizenship emerges, as an individual possesses a sense of ownership, and that the individual see itself as a part of a group [Haste, 2004]. Local knowledge is not enough, given that this knowledge has to be obtained from the experience of participation in significant relations to relevant action [Haste, 2004]. Therefore, the citizens of Vestbyen may not be described by the number of a specific age group, or how long a certain group has lived in the district, instead the feeling of ownership and citizenship must come from within. Moreover, the feeling of ownership and citizenship also comes from the experience the citizen obtain about the local knowledge. There is no immediately definition of how long this takes, however it may be that not all students who only live in Vestbyen for a short period of time obtain this feeling of citizenship, yet it is not certain that people who have lived in Vestbyen for a longer period of time obtain this feeling either.

Denmark is a democratic society where public participation is secured by law [Jensen et al., 2006], and everyone has therefore the right to be heard, nonetheless based on the observations, not all use this right. It is assessed that the participating citizens were people who felt a sense of ownership and with a certain degree of citizenship. The citizens who did not participate may not have the same sense of citizenship, however, it may be assumed that these citizens still use the city districts, facilities, recreational areas, the mobility infrastructure, etc. hence their opinions may still matter and should therefore be included. Community profiling can be useful to collect extensive data when investigating the citizens opinion on a given project and what they find important, which can be conducted through surveys [Petts and Leach, 2000]. Still, as described in the New Urban Agenda, cities are in the future envisaged to encourage civic engagement, be more participatory, and to promote a feeling of belonging and ownership [United Nations, 2017]. Efforts to achieve this goal could be to utilise the participating citizens to further increase the feeling of ownership and

belonging by going from involvement to engagement. Involving the citizens implies that they participate because they were asked to, whereas engagement implies that they actively participate because they truly want to and are interested in achieving a desired goal.

The current citizen participation in Vestbyen is estimated to contain levels of *information and feedback* e.g. public meetings, and small use of *involvement and consultation* e.g. workshops. For future citizen participation, to archive participatory cities and increase the feeling of ownership, the citizens should be included in all aspects of sustainability, to increase the trust between the municipality and the citizens, and further to increase the feeling of ownership and belonging.

## **7.2 Outline of recommendations**

In the discussion several focus points for future recommendations for Aalborg municipality were clarified. The four main findings of this thesis will therefore be outlined in the following as significant recommendations:

- Ensuring an inclusive participation process, where the citizens are involved in all five aspects of sustainability; local value, social, nature-, environmental- and economic sustainability, in the interest of creating a synergy between the five aspects of sustainability
- Securing an open and transparent participation process, to increase the feeling of trust between the citizens and the municipality.
- Understanding 'who' the citizens are, is imperative in the designing of a citizen participation process, with the interest to investigate the needs and desires of the citizens.
- Embracing the role as a mediator during citizen participation processes, to investigate disputes with the purpose of attaining mutual understanding

# Conclusion 8

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The world's population is increasing, and people are moving to the cities at an increasing rate [Marans, 2015]. For upcoming and future developments, our cities are envisaged to be more participatory, promoting ownership and feeling of belonging [United Nations, 2017]. It is therefore important to ensure that future urbanisation is sustainable [Ki-moon, 2014]. With new development plans in Aalborg Vestby, it is essential to investigate how the citizens can be part of, and contribute to the development process, hence the following research question was investigated:

*How can Aalborg municipality undertake a participatory approach to ensure the citizens' involvement in a sustainable planning process for Aalborg Vestby?*

To conclude the research question, the three sub-questions will coherently be answered.

The results of this thesis show that the value of each sustainability pillar is not interchangeable, hence a variety of experts must be included, comprising the citizens, since they can be described as experts of their local district. By involving the citizens in sustainability aspects, specialised local knowledge can be obtained. Furthermore, transparency and objectivity between the municipality and the citizens are important to increase trust, in order to achieve ownership and a feeling of belonging amongst the citizens. The citizens of Vestbyen are mainly involved by information and feedback methods, including public meetings, yet the municipality has also used workshops, which are included in the level of involvement and consultation. According to the present results, the citizens are primarily participating in the two sustainability pillars local value and social sustainability, which based on the analysis are inherent since the citizens have a vast knowledge of the city district and are engaged in their local community. Although the citizens may not be experts in all aspects of sustainability, the municipality should still focus on involving the citizens in all five pillars, to increase the trust between the citizens and the municipality, and hereby facilitate a feeling of ownership and belonging. Furthermore, the planners of the municipality may employ the role as mediator, to increase the outcome of the participation process, by listening for commonalities to reach a mutual understanding.

The four recommendations outline how Aalborg municipality can undertake a participatory approach, with a focus on citizens participation. Aalborg municipality may secure a more participatory sustainable process, if the citizens of Aalborg Vestby are included in all five aspects of sustainability, with an open and transparent access to information.

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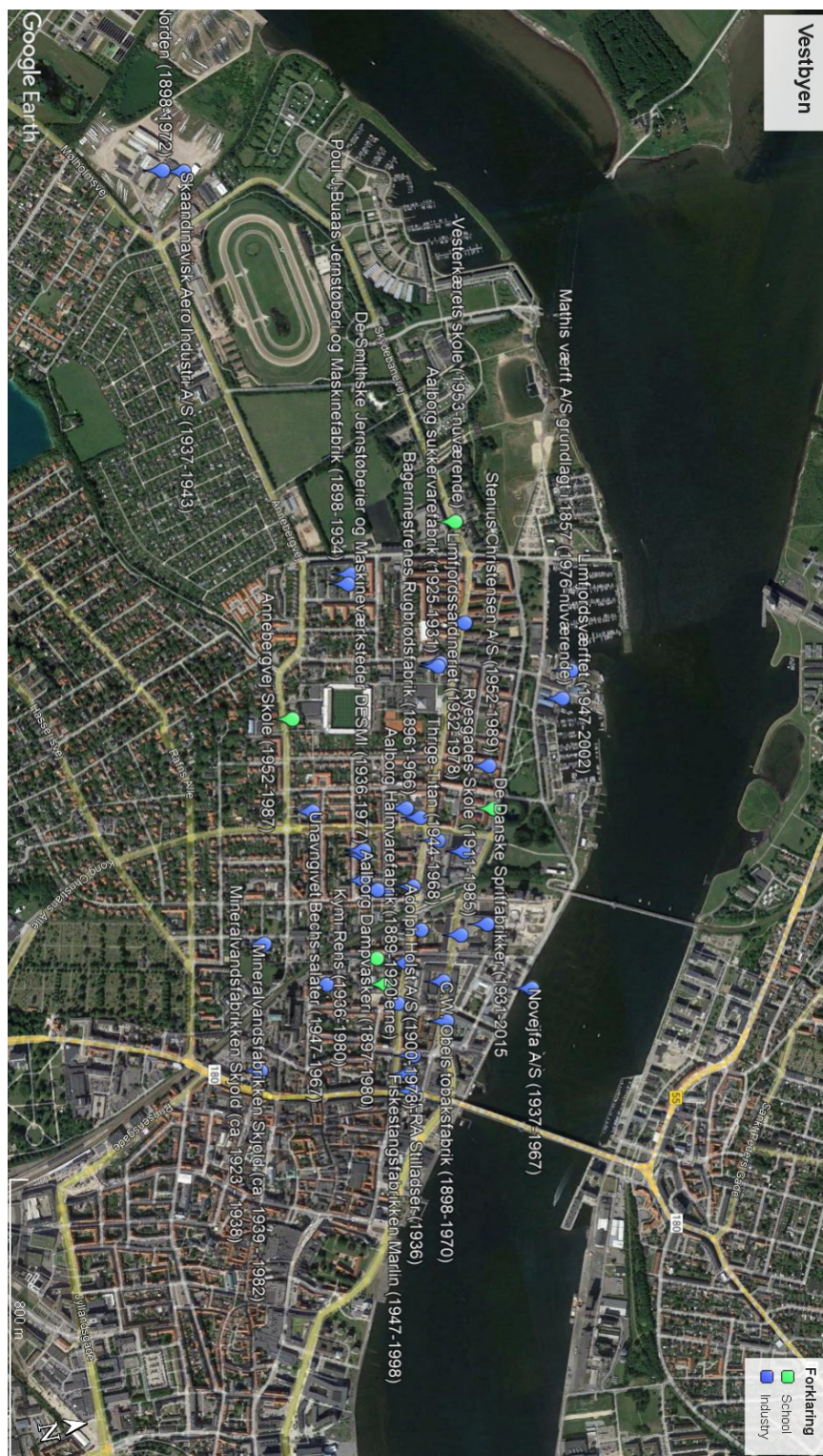
# Appendix A

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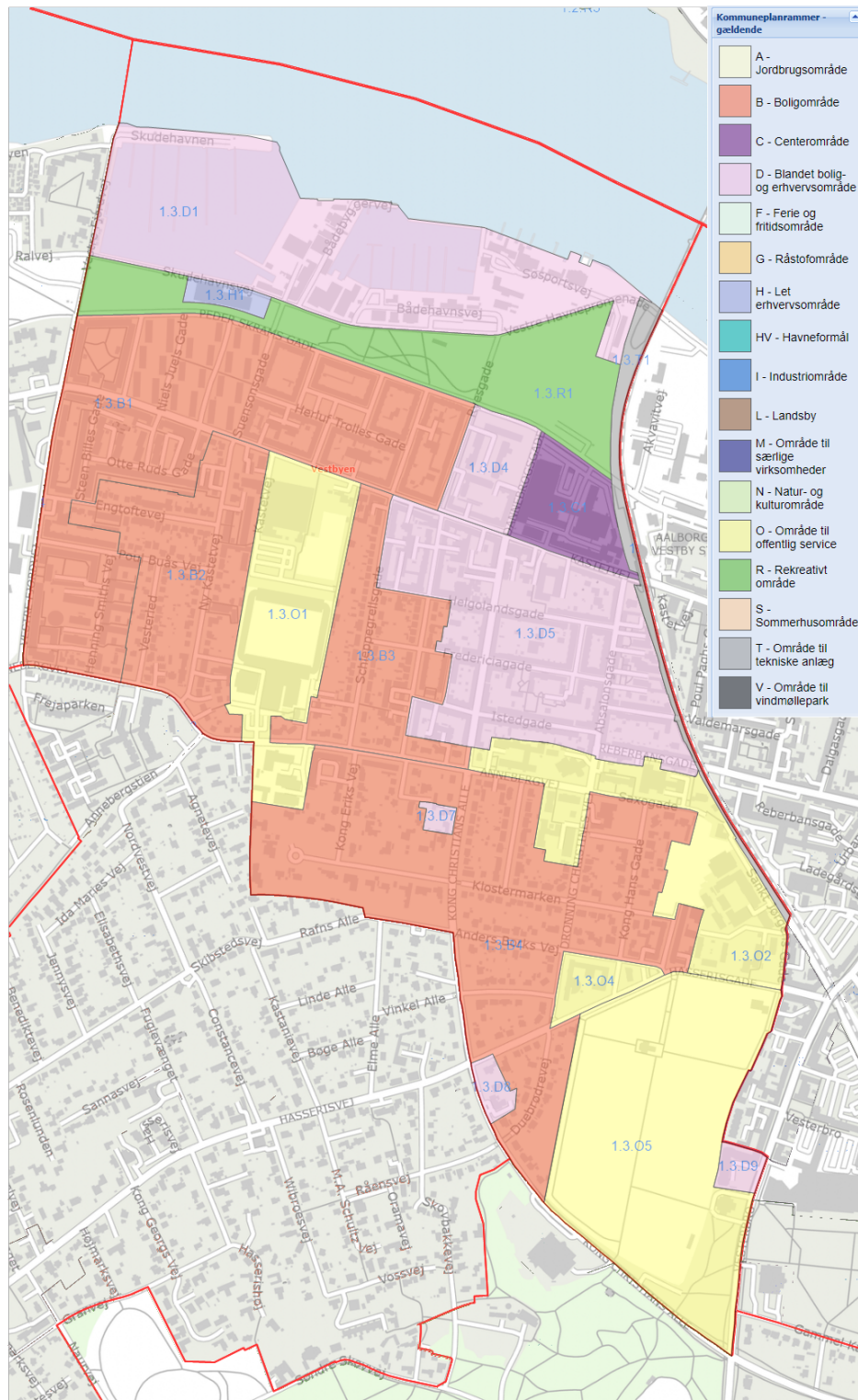
Appendix A is directed at illustrate different maps and delimitation's of Aalborg Vestby.



**Figure A.1.** Figure shows the division of Aalborg Vestby for the participatory mapping walk-and-talk



**Figure A.2.** Figure shows the many industries which was located in Vestbyen, throughout the years



**Figure A.3.** Aalborg municipality's municipal planning framework for Vestbyen

