Breaking Down Barriers in Rural Public Participation

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In the context of rural planning to mitigate challenges of shrinkage, participation and activating citizens, is deemed necessary for creating ownership, local anchoring, and local continuation of projects. However rural planning practice relies heavily on active citizens risking exclusion. As such attention to is needed onto how to ensure broad and inclusive participation, and the research aims to answer how inclusive and engaging participation can be shaped in declining rural villages. The study conceptualizes five key components within Danish rural planning participation – legislation, municipal practice, the individual planner, participatory methods, and civil society - and investigates the how these components influence, enable and constrain public participation. Through a qualitative case study of Randers Municipality's planning of a village area renewal in Ålum and Omegn, this study explores the influence of the five components in enabling and constraining inclusive and engaging participation. Among the used participatory methods, the app 'Snapshot Ålum and Omegn' was launched to investigate how citizens perceived using images and an app as a method of participation, and how it compared to other citizen engagement methods. The study discusses key barriers in participation from the empirical findings and aims to highlight key learnings and suggestions for improvement to lower these barriers in participation. The study concludes that the components, alone and in conjunction with each other influence participation, and are all embedded within contextual structures. As such, inclusive and engaging public participation in rural villages can be shaped by recognizing and addressing the various barriers and by focusing on the enabling qualities in each of the five components.

Preface

This report has been prepared by Maria Møller Jensen during the period from September 1st, 2023, to June 7th, 2024, as an extended final thesis of the master program of Urban Planning and Management at Aalborg University.

For their valuable contributions to this thesis, I would very much like to thank:

- My supervisor, Rasmus Nedergård Steffansen, for constructive feedback and support throughout the thesis period.
- The Planning Department at Randers Municipality for a highly rewarding collaboration, who provided me with the opportunity to seek out various approaches, always being available with great advice and support.
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- Jesper Dalgas Zachariassen for developing the app, Snapshot Ålum og Omegn, used as a valuable tool in my thesis analysis.
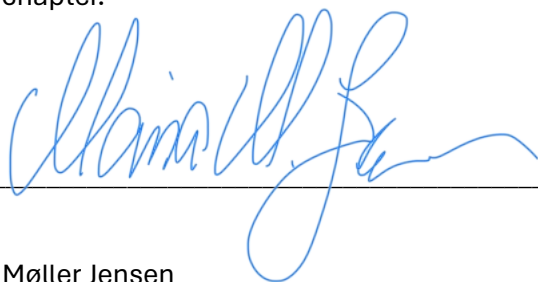
The thesis consists of six chapters, a table of content, and a reference list. Furthermore, several appendices are submitted as external appendices along with the report. Appendices (A-H) include among other interview transcripts, field notes, and app submissions. The thesis includes an app designed for this thesis, named *Snapshot Ålum and Omegn*, which has been used for data gathering (photovoice and questionnaire). The app is available for download on App Store and Google Play until the end of examination.

Several data gathering methods, such as interviews, have been conducted in Danish (see transcripts) and later translated to English when used in the report. Interviewees have been anonymized and their names replaced by a pseudonym, such as 'Planner A', which is included in their reference.

References follow Harvard style, meaning that authors appear as (Last Name, Year) in the text. Multiple sources by the same author and year appear with a letter to differentiate them. Sources with no reference year will appear with 'n.d.' for no date.

Photos included in the report, produced by me, are referenced as (Private Photo + Year). Photos produced by participating citizens as part of the photovoice exercise are referenced in the appendix.

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

Maria Møller Jensen
07.06.2024
Aalborg

Dansk Resumé

Både på den internationale bane og nationalt kendetegnes landområderne ofte af en lang række udfordringer. Betegnelsen, som går under navnet shrinkage karakteriserer et område med gennemgående affolkning, lokale økonomiske vanskeligheder, lukning af offentlige institutioner, mangel på infrastruktur mv. For at imødekomme og vende den negative udvikling i landområderne, fokuserer landdistriktsplanlægning bl.a. på udnyttelsen af stedsbestemte ressourcer og bottom-up tilgange, hvormed lokalsamfund og borgerne får en indflydelsesrig rolle. Her er nøgleord ofte ejerskab og lokal forankring, og borgere tilskyndes til at have en aktiv og medbestemmende rolle, mens planlægningen fokuserer på samarbejde, samskabelse og bibeholdelse af ildsjæles frivillige kræfter og ressourcer i den lokale udvikling. Dog er denne praksis med risiko for dominering af særinteresser fra ressourcestærke borger, hvilket kan medføre eksklusion af andre perspektiver i planlægningen. Der er derfor behov for opmærksomhed på sikringen af bred og inkluderende inddragelse.

Ved at gennemgå litteratur og ved selv at være en del af en planlægningsproces i Randers Kommune konceptualiserer denne afhandling fem nøglekomponenter indenfor dansk landdistriktsplanlægning og deltagelse – lovgivning, kommunal praksis, den enkelte planlægger, deltagelsesmetoder og civilsamfundet – og undersøger, hvordan disse komponenter påvirker, muliggør og begrænser borgerinddragelse. Gennem en kvalitativ casestudie af Randers Kommunes planlægning af en områdefornyelse i landsbyområdet Ålum og Omegn udforsker denne afhandling, hvordan de fem komponenter muliggør og begrænser inkluderende og engagerende deltagelse. Afhandlingens problemformulering lyder: *Hvordan kan inkluderende og engagerende offentlige deltagelsesprocesser udformes i landsbyer, der står over for affolkning?*

Afhandlingens første del tager udgangspunkt i borgerinddragelse i planlægning og undersøger desuden hvordan litteraturen forstår de fem komponenter i inddragelse. Her fremlægges det, at den kontekst og de strukturer som komponenterne er indlejret i, har stor betydning for om inkluderende og engagerende borgerinddragelse kan muliggøres eller begrænses. Teorikapitlet fremsætter også en kritik af at den bredere litteratur om borgerinddragelse generelt fokuserer på at forfine inddragelsesprocesser for allerede deltagende aktører, hvorimod den indledende og opsøgende indsats er underbehandlet.

Gennem et samarbejde med Randers Kommune, følger denne afhandling en områdefornyelse i landsbyområdet Ålum og Omegn. Her har det været muligt at følge planlægningen tæt og opnå indsigt fra både planlæggernes og borgernes perspektiv på deltagelse. Analysen tager ligeledes også udgangspunkt i de fem komponenter og undersøger deres indflydelse på borgerinddragelse gennem denne dybdegående case. Afhandlingsperioden gav også plads til at afprøve egen udvikling af deltagelsesmetoder - appen 'Snapshot Ålum og Omegn', som blev lanceret for at undersøge, hvordan borgerne opfattede brugen af billeder og en app som deltagelsesmetode, og hvordan denne metode sammenlignes med andre former for borgerinddragelse. Baseret på den empiriske undersøgelse af de fem komponenter, fremlægges deres indflydelse på inkluderende og engagerende inddragelse i slutningen af kapitel. Baseret på analysens konklusioner, diskuteres centrale barrierer for deltagelse og der sigtes mod at fremhæve vigtige læringen og forslag til forbedringer for at reducere disse barrierer i deltagelsen.

Resultaterne viser, at hver komponent, alene og i samspil med hinanden, påvirker deltagelsen og alle er indlejret i kontekstuelle strukturer. Lovgivningen muliggør en fleksibel deltagelsesproces, men der er samtidigt en risiko for, at deltagelsen bliver overfladisk. Den kommunal praksis kan fremme

inkluderende deltagelse gennem en tilpasset tilgang, men begrænsede ressourcer og en bias mod ressourcestærke borgere kan hindre bred deltagelse og styre mod eksklusion.

Planlæggere spiller en væsentlig rolle som projektledere og facilitatorer af deltagelse. Deres evne til at engagere borgere afhænger bl.a. af deres erfaringer, kreativitet, men kan til tider blive begrænsede af konteksten såsom begrænsede ressourcer. Desuden giver planlæggere udtryk for besvær med at mobilisere borgere til deltagelse. Metoder til borgerinddragelse, som samtalecaféer og brug af fotos, giver fleksibilitet og inkluderer forskellige typer borgere med forskellige måder at udtrykke sig på. Særligt en kombination af flere metoder og 'leg med rammerne' for deltagelse viser sig som en styrke i at fremme vidensproduktion og motivation til deltagelse trods barrierer. Civilsamfundet og især aktive borgere har stor værdi i deltagelsen, men der er en risiko for bias og dominans, som kan udelukke andre aktører. Desuden viser de empiriske fund, at samfundsstrukturer som former travle hverdage, familiedynamikker og mentale barrierer kan begrænse deltagelsen hos nogle borgere.

I forhold til borgerinddragelsens værdi, kommer afhandlingen ind på de 'bløde', kvalitative værdier i deltagelsen. Her fremhæves det, at en inkluderende og samarbejdsskabende borgerinddragelse, som er målet fra Randers Kommune, udover at skabe ejerskab og fremme lokal forankring, også kan fremme social kapital, tillid og fælles læring og kapacitet til at videredrive projekter og modstå udfordringer.

Afhandlingen konkluderer, at en inkluderende og engagerende offentlig deltagelse i landdistrikter kan formes ved at anerkende og adressere de forskellige barrierer, og have fokus på de underliggende og usynlige barrierer, og ved at fokusere på de muligheder, som de fem komponenter tilbyder. Derudover kan en kombination af forskellige deltagelsesmetoder, intern kommunal kommunikation og samarbejde for at fremme mobiliseringen styrke inddragelsen, hvilket kan have en positiv lokal effekt mod udfordringerne fra shrinkage.

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1 Introduction

In the context of village planning in rural Denmark, this thesis examines how to shape and enhance inclusive and engaging participation. This is based on an understanding that civil society plays a significant role in rural development, within which many areas are faced with challenges of rural shrinkage.

In Denmark, about one fifth of the population currently live in rural areas and villages, with up to one thousand inhabitants. While some villages experience growth, the overall trend in Danish villages and rural communities is population decline (Authority of Housing and Planning, 2021; Statistics Denmark, 2024a). Like many other countries, Danish rural areas face a complex set of interrelated challenges. Caused by an interplay of political, economic, and demographic macro-processes, shrinkage leads to challenges at the local scale, such as population decline, out-migration of the young generation, an aging population, limited opportunities for jobs and public services, physical deterioration, infrastructure issues, and stigmatization (Committee for Viable Villages, 2018; Copus et al., 2020, 2021; Hospers, 2014; Møller, 2009; Rink et al., 2009).

Møller (2009) highlights these challenges of Danish rural areas, referring to them as a 'distortion' of Denmark, in which socio-economical differences continuously widen the urban-rural divide. While urban areas have been favorized in monetary investments and as knowledge-based growth centers, rural regions are characterized by relocation of industrial businesses and structural changes to primary sectors, such as agriculture and fishing, resulting in a loss of labor market and a weakening of associated businesses in the affected regions (Committee for Viable Villages, 2018; Møller, 2009). As the challenges of shrinkage are interrelated, Hospers (2014) refers to economist Myrdal's concept of 'cumulative causation', in which one negative development leads to the next and creates a downward spiral that causes further negative impacts (Hospers, 2014; Rieniets, 2009).

Nationally and internationally, perception on rural areas is changing and policies are introduced that change how planning is conducted, aiming to break the downward spiral of rural challenges. Based on the new rural paradigm, as introduced by OECD, Copus et al. (2020, 2021) emphasize a shift in EU policy approaches for the rural economy and development that addresses the context and conditions in which shrinkage-related challenges are embedded. This means moving away from previous policies that favor exogenous approaches, such as agricultural subsidies and economic redistribution from urban growth areas, towards endogenous approaches that seek to invest in and utilize local strengths and opportunities. Here, effective responses to shrinkage should entail a focus on place-based, holistic strategies with attention to local qualities, potentials, and well-being (Copus et al., 2020; OECD, 2006; Tietjen & Jørgensen, 2016).

These implementations are also visible in Denmark, where several policies and legislative changes have aimed towards planning for rural development. Recent examples include the 2019 adoption of Strategic Planning for Villages and Rural Areas in the Planning Act, based on recommendations from the Committee of Viable Villages (further elaborated in Chapter 4) (Authority of Housing and Planning, 2021; Committee for Viable Villages, 2018; Olesen & Carter, 2018). To promote village viability and development, municipalities must assess the conditions of rural areas and determine, objectives, strategies and planning initiatives accordingly. This strategic planning aims to foster growth and place-based development across Denmark, to mitigate further rural-urban division (Authority of Housing and

Planning, 2021; Committee for Viable Villages, 2018). Furthermore, to promote planning and to support development in rural areas and villages, municipalities that undertake area renewals in villages with fewer than 4000 residents receive an increased government reimbursement of up to 60% (Danish Authority of Social Services and Housing, 2023; Retsinformation, 2020b). Such a planning initiative forms the basis of the case study in this thesis.

The Role of Citizens

Literature on shrinkage and rural development suggests that response to shrinkage and its impacts requires coordinated governance involving a diverse range of actors, both vertically and horizontally. The place-based endogenous approach emphasizes bottom-up methods and local governance, to ensure solutions are relevant and effective for local communities (Copus et al., 2020, 2021; Hospers, 2014; Tanvig, 2008). However, Tanvig (2008) comments that, while bottom-up approaches open for local participation and decision-making influence, it requires local capacities and competences to handle responsibilities regarding rural challenges. This may lead to a bias towards resourceful communities and citizens, with the risk of exclusion of the less resourceful (Tanvig, 2008).

Within literature on shrinkage, the active role of citizens is emphasized as significant in facing the challenges at the local level and contributing to local development. Hospers (2014) argues that inclusion and a shift in power, from government to empowerment of citizens, is necessary in areas experiencing shrinkage, as the civil society can be seen as a "*valuable and unexploited source of action*" (Hospers, 2014, p. 1516). Having civil society engaged in collaboration and the organization of local development and public services can prove valuable in areas with limited public budgets (Hospers, 2014; Raugze et al., 2017). In addition to the financial benefit, Hospers (2014) highlights local knowledge sharing, legitimacy of plans, and place-attachment as further advantages of public involvement.

Also emphasizing the activation of citizens in finding placed-based solutions for local challenges, Schlappa (2017) points out the benefits of co-production. Here, citizens are co-producers of their local environments in collaboration with organizations and government actors. The author describes the concept as: "*co-production conceives of the provision of public services as being a process that brings citizens together with public sector organisations to jointly create desired services and service outcomes*" (Schlappa, 2017, p. 165). However, Meijer (2016) highlights implications of co-production for power dynamics and equality among stakeholders in participation: "*some citizens may be able – and willing – to coproduce whereas others may not. . . This results in a more differentiated relation between citizens and government. Some citizens may be able to influence government while others may not have this opportunity*" (Meijer, 2016, p. 604). Like the points made from Tanvig (2008), this also raises questions about whether everyone is equally empowered to participate and has an equal say in decisions.

Hospers (2014) stresses that for the public to engage in participation, planning authorities, including planners, must be willing to engage and empower citizens to enable their participation and action. In their article, Hollander and Németh (2011) argue for bottom-up, inclusive, and deliberative processes empowering the public to influence decision-making in shrinking environments. Aligned with collaborative planning and communicative rationality, elaborated in Chapter 2, they stress the importance of inclusion of diverse voices and a strive for consensus. They emphasize planners, as facilitators of collaboration among actors and inclusive dialogue, as well as multiple participatory methods contributing to knowledge production and mutual learning (Hollander & Németh, 2011).

While Hollander and Németh (2011) focus on the importance of establishing inclusive and socially just engagement of civil society in shrinking areas, they emphasize that perspectives of certain citizen groups may be missing from the planning process: *"When jobs are scarce and city services meager, the poorest segment of a community often need to struggle to meet their very basic needs and are less likely to be able to focus on urban planning processes"* (Hollander & Németh, 2011, p. 363). This indicates that, while efforts can be made towards enhancing participatory processes, barriers that impede participation are still present for some actors. While acknowledging these barriers, the authors seem focused on enhancing the participation processes for those already engaged, with less focus on lowering barriers to participation regardless of resources

Active Participation in Planning

Similarly, in a Danish planning context, emphasis is on active participation, bottom-up, and collaborative processes in rural planning. Citizens contribute through knowledge consulting, by implementing and driving projects, and by taking on local ownership (Agger & Lund, 2011). As an example, Tietjen and Jørgensen (2016) investigated the planning process of projects in Thisted Municipality that experience impacts from shrinkage. The authors emphasize the importance of public involvement and collaboration among local community members, such as citizens, as decisive factors for achieving successful results and enabling subsequent local projects, thereby ensuring positive development on local and regional levels despite facing shrinkage (Tietjen & Jørgensen, 2016).

These learnings are visible in official planning guidance, influencing rural planning and participation processes aiming at mobilizing local resources for local development. This is emphasized as particularly important in rural contexts, as a lack of economic growth and interest – compared to urban areas – makes villages and rural areas dependent on capacities and willingness of civil society to partake in rural local development (Realdania, 2020). Several official guidelines for rural planning, strategic planning for villages, and area renewal emphasize the importance of engagement, local anchoring, and local ownership for planning initiatives to become successful. When inquiring within Danish rural planning practice, it is abundantly clear that the decisive factors being highlighted for success are citizen collaboration – especially the engagement of 'active citizens' (ildsjæle) – and strong civil communities with capacity to cooperate, organize, and drive development projects (Authority of Housing and Planning, 2021; Ministry of Domestic and Health Affairs, 2016; Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing, 2016)

However, the reliance on civil society and active citizens may also present challenges, as highlighted by Tietjen and Jørgensen: *"Active participation was a condition for obtaining local investments, although it risked excluding less resourceful local communities, and shifted the responsibility for local development from public actors to private volunteers."* (Tietjen & Jørgensen, 2016, p. 41). The authors emphasize that active participation was necessary, not only to establish monetary investment, but to obtain local support, legitimization, and resources for project realization. However, the planning approach may have excluded some actors due to financial barriers or lack of capabilities to participate. The shift in responsibility towards private volunteers further indicates how the planning approach and rural development is reliant on the willingness and capabilities of civil society and resourceful actors. Agger and Lund (2011) confirm the experiences by Tietjen and Jørgensen by highlighting that:

> *"Empirical findings on citizen participation processes tend to be dominated by active, assertive*

citizens [Tordenskjolds soldater], leading to the exclusion of the knowledge of weaker actors, despite its potential value in fostering innovation "(Agger & Lund, 2011, p. 186, own translation).

While the case from Thisted Municipality highlights advantages of public involvement, in which planners facilitated dialogue and networking among engaged actors, the above quote serves as an example of how planning practice influences engagement, inclusion, and the power dynamics between actors. The case exemplifies the point made by Tanvig (2008) as well as Schlappa (2017) on power, domination, and influence of resourceful citizens risking exclusion of other stakeholders.

In summary, this introduction highlights the role of civil society as a valuable source of action in local development facing challenges. (Hospers, 2014; Meijer, 2016; Schlappa, 2017). However, inclusive engagement and collaboration do not come about on its own but must be facilitated and citizens empowered to partake (Hollander & Németh, 2011; Hospers, 2014). While benefits and potentials of public participation are manifold, this introduction also highlights that not all citizens are able to partake and thereby risk being excluded from influence. The introduction further highlights a general lack of attention within literature on how to actively engage the public, mitigate participation barriers, and 'bring them to the table'. The introduction also highlights the significant role of resourceful active citizens, in planning and rural development, to carry responsibilities with significant impact on success and lasting results in planning projects. As a result of the attention to the benefits and capabilities of active citizens, a risk of exclusion of other perspectives exists (Agger & Lund, 2011; Hollander & Németh, 2011; Tanvig, 2008; Tietjen & Jørgensen, 2016).

1.1 Problem Framing

Based on the introduction - given the challenges of rural shrinkage, legislative changes for Danish rural development, and the recognized significance of public involvement, notable focus is on harnessing place-based potentials and strengths to break the vicious cycle of shrinkage related impacts. Particularly, this includes the roles and resources of rural civil society. Public participation, in terms of local knowledge consultancy, collaboration, dialogue, local anchoring, and ownership, is deemed to ensure success and lasting results. Especially resourceful and active citizens are highlighted for their actions and abilities to cooperate and drive development.

As mentioned within the previous section, literature on public participation within shrinking environments seems to have enhanced focus on the benefits and significance of public engagement, rather than on how to engage the public. Within Danish planning context, participation practice emphasizes active participation and a dependency on the role of active citizens with capabilities and resources to partake and drive project development. As such, with limited attention within participation practice towards broad engagement of the public and a potential bias on already active participants, there is a risk of exclusion, power-inequality, and loss of broad perspectives and innovative ideas. With only a narrow set of active stakeholders, risks increase for lack of community ownership and local anchoring for projects.

To understand how barriers to participation can be lowered and how citizens can become actively engaged in participation, it is essential to examine factors currently influencing participation practices. By reviewing literature, conducting fieldwork of municipal practices, and participating as part of a planning team during the thesis period, five key components have been identified as overarching determinants for municipal rural planning and related public participation. Through a thesis

collaboration with Randers Municipality, this thesis investigates these five on participation through a case study of area renewal in the village area of Ålum and Omegn, which faces challenges related to shrinkage. It is acknowledged that, in reality, more factors may influence public participation.

The five components recognized in this study are conceptualized as follows:

1. *Legislation*: Sets the framework and requirements for public engagement in planning.

2. *Municipal Practice:* Planning institutions, guided by legislation, can enable and constrain participation and implement planning initiatives, such as area renewals.

3. *Individual Planner*: The extension of the municipal practice, functions as a facilitator of participation.

4. *Participatory methods:* Approaches and procedures designed to involve the public in planning processes and decision-making.

5. *Civil Society:* Plays a significant role in local development, planning, and realization of projects through involvement, legitimization, collaboration, ownership, and local anchoring.

Through the case study, focus will be given to explore how the five components influence, enable and constrain engaging and inclusive public participation. As such, depending on the dynamics of the components, deliberate or unintentional exclusion of community members may exist, potentially harming citizen representation, local anchoring, and sense of ownership.

Insights into the dynamics and influence of the five components can help understand how participation can promote inclusivity as well as hold barriers, such as exclusion. By reviewing these components through a case study in real-life planning of an area renewal, the aim is to contribute practical insights and considerations to lowering barriers for participation.

This leads to the research question, which delves into the extent to which the broader framework for public participation is inclusive and engaging towards civil society in shrinking villages. Furthermore, identifying and discussing barriers that potentially hinder active public involvement provides an understanding of the involvement process, how it may be obstructed, and if potential improvements can be identified.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the above introduction, this thesis aims to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

How can inclusive and engaging public participation processes be shaped in rural villages facing shrinkage?

1. *How do the five components – Legislation, Municipal Practice, Individual Planner, Participatory Methods, and Civil Society – influence public participation, and what barriers impede inclusive and engaging participation?*

2. *How do the five components influence inclusive and engaging public participation in Ålum and Omegn, and why is public participation significant in the area renewal planning?*

3. How can barriers to engaging and inclusive participation in villages be lowered?

1.3 Definitions

Inclusive

According to Merriam-Webster, *inclusive* has the following meanings:

1. *"Broad in orientation or scope"*
2. *"Including everyone. Especially: allowing and accommodating people who have historically been excluded (as because of their race, gender, sexuality, or ability)"* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b)

In the context of this thesis, inclusive participation is therefore understood as being broad in scope towards civil society and lowering barriers for exclusion.

Engaging

According to Merriam-Webster, *engaging* have the following meanings:

1. "Tending to draw favorable attention or interest" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a)

In the context of this thesis, engaging participation is understood as encouraging and motivating citizens into active and genuine participation.

Rural villages

This thesis looks at the determination of villages by the Committee of Viable Villages, who made the recommendations that led to Strategic Planning for Villages being implemented in the Planning Act. Here, villages are defined as: "*Settlements and rural communities with up to 1.000 inhabitants*" (Committee for Viable Villages, 2018, p. 6, own translation).

1.4 Structure of the Report

The remainder of this report is divided into the following chapters:

- The second chapter covers the theoretical framework that delves into public participation in planning, and how the five components influence, enable, and constrain participation.
- The third chapter covers research design and data gathering methods.
- The fourth chapter covers analysis of results gathered from the case study.
- The fifth chapter discusses analysis results in relation to the theoretical framework, to uncover key learnings.
- The sixth chapter concludes the study and aims to answer the research question.

2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework and aims to answer the following sub-question: *How do the five components – Legislation, Municipal Practice, Individual Planner, Participatory Methods, and Civil Society – influence public participation, and what barriers impede inclusive and engaging participation?*

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first Section 2.1 presents public participation in urban planning, including a definition of participation and how participation has evolved from advocating social justice and equality to focusing on inclusivity, consensus-based approaches, and discursive democracy within what Healey (1996) calls the communicative turn. This section emphasizes the ideals and theories of communicative and collaborative planning, which are central throughout the chapter. The section ends with a focus on the diverse purposes, dilemmas, and uncertainties that may arise in planning participation.

The second Section 2.2 focuses on the five components in participation, highlighted in the introduction. The aim is to understand how, within planning participation literature, these components influence participation as well as the barriers that can impede participation. This section looks briefly towards institutional theory and the dualism between institutional structures and agents in participation, to help recognize the components' influence and potential barriers and opportunities for inclusive and engaging public participation.

The third Section 3.1 concludes the chapter and aims to answer the sub-question as well as highlight key insights. Furthermore, this section includes a framework that highlights how the five components influence participation within planning literature.

2.1 Public Participation

This section explores the definitions and development of public participation. It discusses Arnstein's participation typology and highlights the ideals of the communicative turn in planning. Additionally, the section elaborates on the various purposes of planning participation and address dilemmas and questions related to the role of participation.

2.1.1 A Definition of Participation

Public participation and how it can be organized and conducted through different methods, is a broad and contested subject within planning research (Innes & Booher, 2004). Definitions of public involvement in planning include multiple interpretations, such as viewing participation merely as "*democracy at the simplest level*" (Hanna, 2000, p. 399), or more elaborate as:

(Brown & Eckold, 2020, p. 85)"*Public participation are forums organised for the purposes of*

facilitating communication between government, citizens, stakeholders, and interest groups for a decision or problem" (Brown & Eckold, 2020, p. 85).

According to Palmy and Buchanan (2020), public participation in planning has had a challenging historical journey and is affected by multiple challenges and barriers highlighted throughout this chapter.

2.1.2 Participation Evolved

The contemporary ideal of public involvement emerged during the 1950s and 1960s as requirements of participation became relevant in both literature and practice (Arnstein, 1969; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Lowry et al., 1997). Looking towards the United States in a time of social movements, the conversation of public involvement in planning research became influenced by writers, such as Davidoff and Arnstein. In their literary work, they shifted focus on planning away from the technical rational planning ideals and top-down governance, by calling for equality, social justice, citizen power, and pluralism in planning (Allmendinger, 2017a; Arnstein, 1969; Davidoff, 1965; Lowry et al., 1997). In practice, during the same period, citizens gained a role in public policies and programs, such as antipoverty programs and urban planning issues, based on the belief that participation ensured legitimacy as well as democratic and effective governance (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Lowry et al., 1997). However, critics, including Arnstein (1969), contended that efforts to involve the public lacked genuine citizen participation and excluded marginalized population groups (Arnstein, 1969; Lowry et al., 1997).

A Ladder of Participation

In the prominent article, A Ladder of Participation, Arnstein (1969) express strong criticism of the political and planning establishment structures that inhibits the voice and control of community groups seeking participation in decision-making regarding their daily lives and local neighborhoods. The eight-rung ladder of participation, see Figure 2.1, presented by Arnstein, functions

Figure 2.1: Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1969)

as a simplistic framework to illustrate a rather complicated relationship between 'the powerholders' and 'the powerless' in public participation and decision-making. Here, Arnstein (1969, p. 216) defines public participation as a *"redistribution of power"*, which suggests an exchange of power and influence

between authorities and the public, thereby promoting equity, inclusiveness, and empowerment of citizens in decision-making. As such, Arnstein's typology inspires consideration and reflection on the level of public participation, the role of citizens, and their level of influence. The redistribution of power, inclusiveness, and transparency play a crucial role in ensuring that citizens are empowered to participate and have a voice in decision-making processes, and thereby avoid participation as merely symbolic.

Critics of Arnstein highlight the need for a more nuanced and context-specific understanding of participation. The ladder's simple and linear structure is criticized for not considering participation as a dynamic and context-dependent process, and for overlooking participation methods and objectives as well as complex relationships, roles, and responsibilities between involved actors (Collins & Ison, 2009; Fung, 2006; Rosen & Painter, 2019). Furthermore, Fung (2006) argues that participation depends on the specific planning context and why the top rung may not be the appropriate level of participation in all circumstances.

The Communicative Turn

Following Arnstein's ideals in participation and decision-making, Healey (1996) points to *the communicative turn* in planning to overcome conflicts fostered by diversity and differences of a fragmented society towards shared understanding, agreement, and collaboration through inclusionary argumentation (Healey, 1996).

By challenging the dominance of the instrumental rationality in planning, Habermas introduces the term communicative rationality, which encompasses: "*breaking down the dominance of scientific objectivism and building instead a different kind objectivity based on agreement between individuals reached through free and open discourse*" (Allmendinger, 2017b, p. 243) Provided with the conditions of Habermas' ideal speech situation, described by Innes (1996, p. 461) as "*statements are comprehensible, scientifically true, and offered by those who can legitimately speak and who speak sincerely,*" decisions can be regarded as communicatively rational when reached consensually through open discussion. This involves stakeholders being equally informed and having neutralized power dynamics, as well as a shared acceptance of the authority of 'the better argument' (Allmendinger, 2017b; Healey, 1996; Innes, 1996).

Building on the ideas by Habermas, researchers of collaborative planning emphasize the importance of dialogue and transparent interaction among stakeholders, acknowledging the value of knowledge from all contributing members, and striving for consensus in decision-making (Allmendinger, 2017b; Healey, 1996; Innes, 1996). By joining together equally empowered and informed participants, such as citizens, interest groups, organizations, and planners that listen to each other respectfully, Innes and Booher (2004) contend that the nature of authentic dialogue will result in new mutual learning, shared meanings, trust, and built-up of social capital. As participants may come to acknowledge each other's perspectives and knowledge, a potential for shared problem-solving and joint action over issues exists (Innes & Booher, 2004). The authors further point to networking following the collaboration process, as participants form new networks for working on multiple issues through collaborative experiences. As
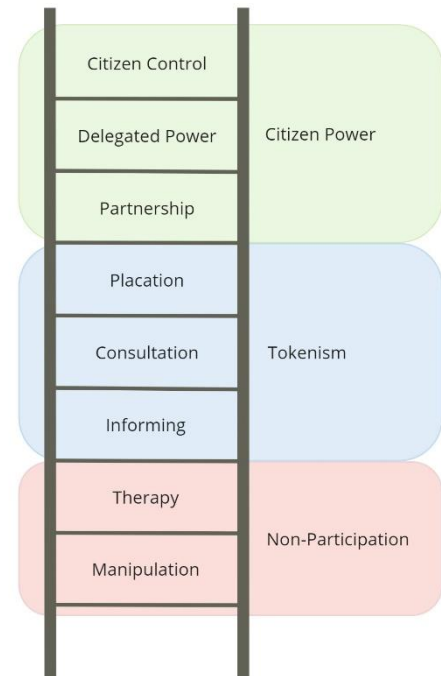
more participants develop collaborative experiences and networks, Innes and Booher point out how collaborative participation processes build civic capacity. They highlight citizens becoming more knowledgeable and empowered to engage, instead of being passive and reactive recipients, which may produce a society more capable in adapting to change and addressing difficulties (Innes & Booher, 2004).

However, ideals of collaborative planning and consensus-building face criticism for being utopian in practice, and arguments are made against the feasibility of agreement, especially regarding ingrained power dynamics (Allmendinger, 2017b; Sager, 2009). Sager (2009) argues that it would be impossible to gain power-neutrality among participants in a politicized arena, such as planning, as stakeholders would have to ignore their political position, interests, or commitments. Despite the criticism, collaborative planning approaches and ideals are still highly visible in literature on participation and management, including in relation to areas facing shrinkage.

2.1.3 Purposes for Participation

In planning literature, various purposes for public participation have been identified. Regarding the role and purpose of participation, David and Buchanan (2020) highlight:

> (David & Buchanan, 2020, p. 9)"*Today there is an overwhelming consensus that public participation is not only central to any participatory democracy, but also fundamental to creating inclusive planning processes and ensuring just planning outcomes*" (David & Buchanan, 2020, p. 9)

In a similar vein, Irvin and Stansbury (2004) argue that participation leads to outcomes that align with public preferences, generate trust in public administration, and enhance community mindset among citizens. Table 2.1 highlights some of the most identified purposes for public participation in literature.

Table 2.1: Overview of diverse purposes of participation in literature

Purpose	
To produce effective and enhanced plans and policies.	Participation is considered to enforce effective, well-informed, and just outcomes as the product of public support and knowledge (David & Buchanan, 2020; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).
To share information.	This includes information and knowledge being shared. Literature often highlights the difference in communication and information flow between one-way communication, which often puts citizens in the role as passive recipients, and two-way/multi-way communication, in which actors can engage in deliberation (Hanna, 2000; Innes & Booher, 2004; Rowe & Frewer, 2000).

To inform decision-makers on public preferences and local knowledge.	Incorporating local knowledge into decisions fosters effective and well-informed policymaking as officials may not be in touch with the realities of the daily lives of citizens (Innes & Booher, 2004; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).
To embody inclusion and democratic participation and promote equity, fairness, and social justice.	Bryson et al (2013) point to inclusiveness in participation promoting the possibility for diverse stakeholders to influence decision-making as well as improve their own abilities for engaging in democratic citizenship. An open and inclusive participation process may highlight the needs of, especially disadvantaged, community groups who might otherwise be excluded from participation (Bryson et al., 2013; Innes & Booher, 2004).
To establish legitimacy for decisions.	Participation efforts typically aim to secure public acceptance of those decisions and their implementation. This approach fosters better public understanding and helps mitigate conflict when faced with challenging choices (Bryson et al., 2013; Innes & Booher, 2004; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).
To manage uncertainty among actors.	Participation may help establish trust, reduce misunderstandings, and build or stabilize relationships between involved actors (Bryson et al., 2013).
To establish adaptive capacity, resilience, and problem-solving.	Bryson et al (2013) suggest that deliberative and consensus building participation approaches can broaden the perspectives of involved stakeholders and promote shared understanding, build relationships, and foster collaborative problem solving.
To fulfill legal obligations of participation.	Legal obligations set a framework for the participation to ensure legitimate, democratic, and effective governance (Innes & Booher, 2004; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Lowry et al., 1997).

2.1.4 Dilemmas and Uncertainties

Several of the described purposes and objectives of participation are ambiguous and uncertain, which may lead to multiple interpretations and approaches to participation. For example, the legal obligations for participation in decision-making ensures public representation, however, lack of requirements for levels of participation leaves approaches to participation open to different interpretations and vulnerable to exploitation from specific interest. The same ambiguity and concern for exploitation is present when it comes to information sharing and generating public acceptance of decisions (Hanna, 2000; Innes & Booher, 2004; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

Hanna (2000) also asserts that the conflicting nature of participation may result in uncertainties of the practicalities of participation, such as the role and form participation should have in planning, including the role and influence of citizens. He argues that, while participation ideally is considered transparent, accessible, and capable of involving diverse stakeholders and their concerns,

participation can also be limiting: "*Where formal processes or other opportunities for participation exist, the problems of who participates, what interests do they represent, and to what extent do they reflect plurality become practical issues for planners or other policy practitioners*" (Hanna, 2000, p. 400). As such, the author contends that participation can be structurally excluding in practice. The role of constraints and exclusion in participation is further elaborated in Subsection 2.2.2.

(Irvin & Stansbury, 2004)(Irvin & Stansbury, 2004)(Innes & Booher, 2004)Innes and Booher (2004) stress that public participation is dominated by dilemmas and ambivalence that affect all participating parties. In addition to dilemmas of who to include and how, planners question if public participation is valuable in planning considering the delays it may cause. (Innes & Booher, 2004). The question of the role of participation in planning is further emphasized by Irvin & Stansbury (2004), who examine the effectiveness and value of participation, as opposed to the effectiveness of the conventional top-down approach to planning. Their research highlights several disadvantages of participation, such as being expensive, time consuming, and flawed representation of stakeholder interests due to structural inequality and exclusion (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). They conclude that the effectiveness and role of participation are context dependent as well as dependent on the individual planner that must examine advantages and disadvantages of participation before moving forward (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

Section Summary

This section looked into public participation in planning processes, including its definitions, how it has evolved, various purposes, dilemmas, and uncertainties.
Within literature, public participation in planning is complex and multifaceted, being defined as forums of facilitated communication among stakeholders regarding decision-making (Brown & Eckold, 2020). The concept of participation has evolved in response to social movements in which influential figures, such as Arnstein, have advocated for equality, inclusiveness, and empowerment in planning. Her typology has influenced participation literature by promoting reflection to the level of public participation, the role of citizens and their level of influence, as well as the risk of tokenism in participation (Arnstein, 1969). However, critics argue that the ladder oversimplifies participation and neglects its dynamic nature and context-specific complexities (Collins & Ison, 2009; Fung, 2006; Rosen & Painter, 2019)

Building on Arnstein's ideals, the communicative turn in planning emphasizes dialogue, transparency, and consensus-building among stakeholders, fostering capacity building among participants. Decisions are believed to be reached through open and genuine discourse among equally empowered stakeholders and the legitimization of different knowledge perspectives. However, the communicative ideal is criticized for its practical limitations, including a lack of acknowledgement of the role of power dynamics among stakeholders.

Various purposes of participation have been identified that affect how participation is organized as well as the role and influence of citizens. Lastly, the section looked into how participation faces dilemmas and uncertainties, including ambiguity and uncertainty about the level and form of participation, structural exclusion of stakeholders, as well as effectiveness and role in planning.

2.2 Five Components of Participation

This section explores the five components: Legislation, Municipal Practice, The Individual Planner, Participatory Methods, and Civil Society. The section looks into how the components influence, enable, and constrain inclusive and engaging participation within planning participation literature, focusing mainly on collaborative and communicative planning ideals. The literature includes perspectives from a Danish planning context, where the communicative and collaborative theories are recognized with emphasis on participation and collaboration with local actors, including citizens, in the planning of what Agger and Jensen (2015) call area-based initiatives. To understand how inclusive and engaging participation can be enabled as well as constrained - thereby imposed by barriers - institutional theory and the dualism of structures and agency is briefly explored.

Institutional Structures in Participation

To understand how participation influences actors and their actions, as well as how participation itself is influenced by involved actors, we need to look into the role of institutions and their embedded structures. This understanding may shed light on how participation can enable and empower citizens to partake in collaborative processes, but also reveals how participation can be excluding, depending on how it is facilitated. Within new institutionalism, Olsson (2016) describes institutions as producing and reproducing stable and continual behavioral patterns. He further defines institutions as:

> "...*structural features in society with formal status, such as legislature and organizations and informal characters like networks and norms. The structural nature of institutions means that they constrain individual behavior in different ways, through rules, norms, practices, and incentives.*" (Olsson, 2016, p. 12)

As the quote highlights, institutions encompass both formal groups, such as governmental entities, and informal groups, such as citizen- and interest groups and networks. Furthermore, institutions determine the formalities, practices, behaviors, and belief systems in which agents operate (David & Buchanan, 2020; Olsson, 2016; Turnpenny et al., 2008). Within participation, institutional structures can enable or constrain inclusive participation through factors that influence the decisions made by individual planners, including formal and legislative requirements of public participation, organizational practices, the selection of participatory methods, and norms and traditions (Olsson, 2016).

Outside the formal organization, institutional structures can influence and constrain the behaviors of actors in participation. As an example, cultural norms and societal structures can constrain actors from participating, due to apathy, competing interests, or other commitments. Identifying both formal and informal institutionalized practices, norms, and behaviors towards participation can contribute to understanding barriers for participation in planning.

Within institutional theory, the relationship and continuous interaction between structure and agency as shaping the institutional dynamics are often highlighted (Healey, 1999; Olsson, 2016). Healey (1999) points to Giddens' structuration theory when expressing that agents are influenced by the surrounding structures, while at the same time actively shaping these structures by either rejecting or reproducing them.

'While institutional structures influence the behaviors of agents, agents can influence said structures by reproducing or pushing them gradually over time (Healey, 1999; Mahoney & Thelen, 2009). In relation to planning and participation, Healey (1999) points to the possibility of new practices shaping

and transforming surrounding forces. As an example, Healey points towards Krumholz' efforts and success with enforcing new practices, despite resistance, as an advocacy planning practitioner in Cleveland (Healey, 1999; Krumholz, 1982). In summary, introduced changes in practices, values, and meanings may lead to institutional transformations and better conditions for active and engaging planning participation.

The following subsections delve into the five components.

2.2.1 Legislation

Legislation sets the framework and requirements for public engagement in planning. Innes and Booher (2004) contend in a U.S. perspective that, while participation often is legally mandated in public decision-making, a gap exists between the obligation for participation and how effective this obligation fulfills broader goals of participation, such as securing local knowledge, legitimacy, fairness, and justice for participants. This implies a risk of participation being viewed as a legal checkbox in which practitioners and officials may follow legal requirements, but only to legitimize their actions and decisions rather than engage with the public (Innes & Booher, 2004). This notion is supported by David and Buchanan, arguing that: "*State planning enabling laws, which provide the framework and requirements for local planning, typically contain very minimal requirements in the area of public engagement in planning*" (David & Buchanan, 2020, p. 9).

This view is also recognized in a Danish context by Sehested (2009), who points out a lack of mandated level requirements of participation within Danish planning legislation. Sehested stresses that the: "... *Danish Planning Act of today encourages municipalities to pursue a broad and pluralistic involvement, but it is not mandatory*" (Sehested, 2009, p. 248). Agger and Jensen (2022) highlight that legislation on the ABIs require municipalities' engagement with local actors, whose participation is viewed as vital for the planning process and anchoring. However, there is no mention of the requirements of the level of engagement. This suggests that, while municipal planning includes mandatory public involvement, there is no obligation for the level of involvement to be broad and inclusive, despite strong encouragement (Sehested, 2009).

(David & Buchanan, 2020; Innes & Booher, 2004; Lowry et al., 1997; Sehested, 2009)While the legislative obligations enable the public to participate in planning and decision-making, dependent on planning practice, these mandated obligations may also constrain inclusive and engaging participation through limited requirements on the level of participation (David & Buchanan, 2020; Innes & Booher, 2004; Lowry et al., 1997; Sehested, 2009). As such, legislation alone does not determine how participation is practiced. Instead, how legislation on participation is interpreted and fulfilled is influenced by institutionalized practices, the values and norms of agents including individual planners, and formal planning governments.

Subsection Summary

Legislation establishes a framework for public engagement in planning, however, literature highlights a gap between legal requirements and effective participation. While incorporating participation is legally required, few requirements for the level of involvement exist. As such, legislation may enable and constrain participation, dependent on interpretation, institutional practices, and individual planners.

2.2.2 Structuring Participation: Municipal Approaches and Barriers

This subsection explores how municipalities, as planning institutions, can enable and constrain engaging and inclusive participation. Within a Danish planning context, area-based initiatives (ABIs) provide an example of municipal practices enabling public participation and collaboration with local actors. The subsection also highlights potential barriers for participation, in terms of exclusion (Agger & Larsen, 2009).

Area-Based Initiatives Promoting Participation

Area-based initiatives (ABIs) exemplify how institutional structures shape public participation within a planning system. According to Jensen and Agger (2022), ABIs function as municipal planning initiative focusing on improving areas facing physical, social, and economic decline. As such, ABIs can be implemented to address decline and deterioration issues in villages and rural areas.

Agger and Larsen (2009) point out that the ABI approach is inspired by collaborative planning, due to "*its focus on creating institutional settings for open inclusive public dialogues among affected stakeholders*" (Agger & Larsen, 2009, p. 1092). ABIs build on a participatory approach, focusing on bottom-up, collaborative, and consensus-based processes with local actors, such as associations, organizations, public institutions, and citizens. The ingrained premise in this planning approach is that involvement and collaboration with local actors are crucial in depicting sustainable solutions and creating ownership, thereby anchoring the initiatives (Agger & Larsen, 2009; Jensen & Agger, 2022). In the context of ABIs, institutional structures shape the participation process and determine how actors are involved.

Looking into the promotion of social capital further highlights how these structures facilitate public involvement and connections between local areas and public administration.

Social Capital and Voluntarism

Based on empirical findings on ABIs in Denmark, Agger and Jensen (2015) explain that focusing on types of social capital (social relations, norms, and shared capacity to act) can promote participation as well as strengthen the bond between public administrations and the local areas.

Discussing the impacts and level of success of ABIs, Agger and Jensen (2015) highlight that the intangible and softer outcomes from collaboration with citizens and local stakeholders can be difficult to measure and assess. As a result, they conceptualize these softer qualities of collaboration by investigating network building and social capital (Agger & Jensen, 2015). The authors refer to the contact established through the ABIs between local communities and the municipality as 'linking' social capital, described as vertical "*ties connecting individuals or groups to people in positions of political or financial power*" (Agger & Jensen, 2015, p. 2048). They explain that linking social capital has the potential to foster engaging participation by promoting citizen influence, promoting information and communication lines, providing municipal resources, and establishing trust. Examples from empirical findings showed that linking social capital made local areas, such as peripheral villages, feel seen and heard by the administration, and that planners functioned as mediators, information providers, and trusted contact persons (Agger & Jensen, 2015).

In relation to establishing social capital and engagement with local actors, findings from Danish ABIs

highlight the importance of voluntarism and partnering with voluntary organizations and associations. Planners view these organizations and associations as 'anchoring institutions' that play a role in mobilizing resources, engaging actors including vulnerable and marginalized citizens, gathering local knowledge, and the continuation of project implementations after the ABI process.

While collaborating with outreaching voluntary organizations can promote inclusive participation, Jensen and Agger (2022) emphasize that participation in ABIs, especially when partnering with interest-based organizations, often results in resourceful participants dominating the conversation and potentially overshadowing other voices. The next PART looks into how participation may become exclusive.

Barriers to Participation

While a planning system can enable participation through engaging with multiple actors, striving for consensus, and promoting social capital, institutional structures may also constrain participation and set barriers. This PART looks into different risks of barriers within a planning system.

Exclusion

Looking towards exclusion in participation, Agger and Larsen (2009) emphasize that planners must anticipate exclusion as a certainty in any participation process, rather than denying its existence. Being aware of exclusion and how it takes place in participation can help planners ensure that affected actors such as citizens and their insights are represented. The uneven distribution of involved actors is described by Agger and Larsen (2009) as 'structural exclusion' and refers to: "*structural inequalities that make it more difficult for certain groups to participate in participatory processes and that favour citizens and representatives with resources*" (Agger & Larsen, 2009, pp. 1087-1088). Exclusion often affects racial and ethnic minorities, women, people with low-income, people of a certain age, as well as people with disabilities (Agger & Larsen, 2009).

While it may be possible to gather multiple community groups for a participatory meeting, the authors emphasize that exclusion can still be an issue in terms of domination of certain individuals' ideas, perspectives, and abilities to dominate discussions. As some participants have political know-how, knowledge of the style of participation, and time and resources at hand, they can dominate the discussion and drown out other perspectives from individuals not familiar with the style of participation (Agger & Larsen, 2009). Through empirical findings on Danish ABIs, Agger and Larsen (2009) highlight that, due to the institutional setting of the participation, including meetings, some citizens would be excluded from the deliberation process:

> "*Those citizens or stakeholders that are not used to talking and even less used to talking in front of an audience are often marginalized in the debates and discussions. Thus, our study illustrates that there was a tendency that the active resourceful citizens dominated discussions*" (Agger & Larsen, 2009, p. 1093).

The example provided by Tietjen and Jørgensen (2016) mentioned in Chapter 2 exemplifies how the planning and participation approach was designed towards active participation in which resourceful actors, who could help mobilize monetary investment, were included in the planning and implementation process, with the risk of excluding other actors. As such, powerful actors can drown out other individuals and groups, highlighting why power relations require awareness, including the

planner's own power to act in participation, as highlighted in 2.2.3 (Agger & Larsen, 2009; Forester, 1982).

Expertise and Knowledge Perspectives

Agger and Larsen (2009) also comment on 'discursive exclusion', which involves how communication styles affect planning practice, public participation, and dialogue among involved actors. How plans, programs, perspectives, and insights are framed, and by whom, can influence participation, decision-making, and perceptions of 'valid knowledge' (Agger & Larsen, 2009; Davies, 2001). As an example, planners' expertise and usage of technical language may exclude other actors, such as citizens, from the conversation. Davies (2001) highlights that when expertise discourse becomes the dominating form of knowledge and is institutionalized, a risk exists of excluding participants with limited knowledge and ability to critically question and challenge established power relations and the status quo. Furthermore, Agger and Larsen (2009) and Davies (2001) argue that relying on a dominant knowledge perspective risks marginalizing other knowledge perspectives and types of communication, such as emotional expressions or 'the elusive' and 'the intangibles' – the values and meanings that can be difficult to articulate and capture. This exclusion of certain meanings and knowledge types from the public debate risks negatively affecting participation, including the willingness of people to participate (Agger & Larsen, 2009; Davies, 2001).

Limited Resources and Organizational Barriers

Setting up frameworks for inclusive and deliberative participation requires resources. In a study of Danish municipal planners and employees, it is highlighted that a lack of resources, such as time and money, can be a barrier to participation and collaboration, and thereby not achieving mutual understanding between planners and citizens (Sehested & Lund, 2012). A planner comments that being busy with work tasks makes it "*easier to talk to those who have the same language and background as oneself*" (Sehested & Lund, 2012, p. 16, own translation). This demonstrates how an institutional setting creates constraints for inclusive participation that can result in the selection of partners and as such the exclusion of others with a different background.

Subsection Summary

This subsection investigated how planning institutions, such as municipalities, influence and enable public participation by fostering collaboration and social capital with local actors through ABIs. Structures within the municipal planning system enable inclusive and engaging participation by setting the framework and establishing the norms and tradition within which participation occurs. ABIs focus on improving areas facing decline through a collaborative, bottom-up, and consensus-based approach. By focusing on social capital and partnering with volunteer organizations and associations, participation can be more outreaching, resulting in a more representative and inclusive participation process (Agger & Jensen, 2015; Agger & Larsen, 2009; Jensen & Agger, 2022).

Institutional structures also constrain inclusive and engaging participation causing exclusion. Structural inequalities can inhibit participants to partake, with the risk of excluding less resourceful participants and those unfamiliar with the style and format of formal participation processes. Communication styles, domination of technical language, and expertise knowledge can also exclude citizens with limited knowledge and other knowledge perspectives. Furthermore, limited resources

can impede inclusive participation, as planners are led to favor participants and partners with similar backgrounds, excluding other perspectives (Agger & Larsen, 2009; Davies, 2001; Sehested & Lund, 2012).

2.2.3 The Individual Planner

This subsection looks into the individual planner, who is often the 'frontline' person in direct contact with the public, managing participation and collaboration processes (Agger & Lund, 2017). In addition to institutional practices and norms, the individual planner brings personal knowledge, capabilities, and qualities influencing participation. Similarly, Forester (1989) points out that the planner has power to influence participation, in terms of how it is conducted, and the role of engaged participants in decision-making.

Roles and Responsibilities

The role of the planner has been vigorously discussed in literature as evolving over time and changing societal and governance structures. The planner's role has undergone changes from being neutral, instrumental rational experts, towards becoming advocates for plural and marginalized voices in planning (Allmendinger, 2017b; Davidoff, 1965; Healey, 1996). With the communicative turn and attention on collaboration, planners have been positioned as mediators and facilitators of inclusive dialogue, collaboration, and deliberative decision-making among participating stakeholders. This includes the acknowledgement and legitimization of multiple languages, knowledge types, values, and rights expressed within participation (Healey, 1996).

Planners that promote collaborative planning are described by Agger and Sørensen (2018) as 'frontline planners', as they play a key role in the daily interaction with various stakeholders. They are the extension of the planning system involved in the planning context, such as the previously mentioned ABIs, in which they manage and facilitate collaboration among multiple stakeholders and their interests. Here the planner role includes a collaborative role of managing stakeholders, aiming to democratize and establish consensus as well as ownership for the planning process (Agger & Lund, 2017; Jensen & Agger, 2022; Sehested, 2009). However, in a study on planners' roles, Sehested (2009) points out barriers to public outreach, participation, and collaboration. She finds that the participation process can be impeded by planners finding the collaborative and communicative planning ideal difficult to realize in practice, lacking specific techniques and awareness to ensure interests are balanced and equalized (Sehested, 2009; Sehested & Leonardsen, 2011).

Planner and Context

As mentioned in the introduction, planners do not operate as isolated actors. Sehested (2009) comments that planners' practices are embedded in a larger institutional framework, resulting in an interdependence between planner and context. This includes the planners' meaning system, meaning how institutionalized structures enable, constrain, or rationalize planners' actions, routines, norms, and values (Sehested, 2009). To understand planners' actions and encourage reflection, Wilson (2021) introduces a visual representation of the complex and dynamic framework in which planners make judgements (see Figure 2.2). Here, planners' considerations and judgement on participation, public outreach, and

Figure 2.2: Inspired by Willson's reflective framework, the figure illustrate how participation can be shaped by both the planner and the context (Willson, 2021, p. 5)

inclusiveness exist within a dynamic and interactive framework of the individual planner (planner-as-person), as well as a broader institutionalized setting (context). The individual planner brings in their expertise, experiences, assumptions, and values, while the context involves politics and legislation, organizations, agency procedures, and social dynamics. The context and existing structures may shape outcomes, however, the planner does not act passively and may influence context through their actions and refusal to reproduce existing structures. Included in context is the local knowledge, lived experiences, and various interests and roles of stakeholders, including citizens. As the planner engages and listens to participants' stories and insights, Wilson (2021) encourages planners to be aware of stakeholder positions and power dynamics.

Power Dynamics

Forester (1982) emphasizes the significance of power in planning, - both in terms of power dynamics among stakeholders as well as the role planners play in shaping participation. Consequently, planners influence participation in terms of who participates and in what way, how trust is shaped, and how collaboration is organized. In an example from a Danish planning case, Agger (2012) highlights that planners can balance the domination/exclusion of participants by working to empower less resourceful participants in the participation process. As such, within a communicative planning ideal, the planner can facilitate participation and empower citizens to have influence on planning outcomes. Forester (1982, p. 70) further emphasizes, that power dynamics of "*systemic, structural, and institutional*" forces impose barriers to informed, transparent, and democratized planning outcomes. Misinformation and distortion of communication benefitting certain stakeholders may influence citizen participation and decision-making ability. As such, Forester encourages planners to be aware of power dynamics influencing participation, as for why planners must be aware of such systemic barriers and learn to anticipate them (Forester, 1982).

Human Qualities and Uncertainties

As facilitators of communicative public involvement, ensuring inclusive and empowering participation processes, literature suggests that planners encompass and develop personal skills in terms of listening and being reflective towards their own practices.

When engaging in collaboration and working to establish trust and collectively solve problems, Forester emphasizes the importance of learning through listening (Forester, 2012, 2020; Willson, 2021). Within what Forester calls 'deliberative practice', he emphasizes that learning does not come about from debating, but from listening to one another's stories, which can enable planners to better understand and connect with participants (Forester, 2012, 2020). Forester describes listening as an interpretive practice in which the listener not only listens to the spoken words, but also pays attention to the sender and surrounding context when assessing the meaning. As such, by being critical and paying attention when listening, planners can become aware of potentially hidden biases, assumptions, and interests from involved parties (Forester, 2012, 2020). Based on an experiment, Forester describes that listening made respondents feel more respected, acknowledged, included, and empowered (Forester, 2020).

Wilson (2021) argues for the importance of reflection in planning practices. Reflecting on their influence within the context that planners can enhance collaboration capacities. Wilson (2021) encourages personal self-reflection, which involves vulnerability, acknowledging mistakes, recognizing values, ethical reasoning, one's positioning, as well as attempting to learn from the approaches taken. As such, planners make choices and act based on their identity, personal values, and conscious as well as unconscious factors (Willson, 2021).

As planners engage in participation processes, Wilson (2021) acknowledges the inevitable ambiguity and uncertainty in planning. Questions arise about planners' own actions, if the process is inclusive, and representation of citizen groups and interests. Wilson (2021) advises planners to accept uncertainty and recognize that not everything can be planned, and to anticipate that unforeseen challenges may emerge. As such, planners must "*proceed with knowledge that any understanding is partial and dynamic*" (Willson, 2021, p. 66), and as such be flexible and adapt to changes as they go along and when navigating uncertainties.

Subsection Summary

This subsection explores the role of the individual planner in planning participation, which has changed from a neutral expert towards being facilitators of inclusive collaborative participation, dialogue and deliberative decision-making (Agger & Lund, 2017; Sehested, 2009). The individual planner is situated within an institutional framework in which context can both enable and constrain actions of the planner to facilitate inclusive participation. However, the planner also brings personal values, reflections, and knowledge to the planning context, and as such the planner can challenge existing structures (Sehested, 2009; Willson, 2021).

The individual planner can enable participation by serving as mediators and facilitators of inclusive dialogue among stakeholders. By engaging in dialogue and being able to listen, planners can empower citizens to voice their needs. However, planners may face barriers to inclusive participation due to difficulties with realizing collaborative planning in practice (Agger & Lund, 2017; Sehested, 2009).

The individual planner can enable participation through their power to shape inclusive participation and empower people to participate. Their influence on balance power dynamics among stakeholders can mitigate domination and exclusion. However, this requires that the planner is aware of power imbalances and structural inequalities in participation that impose barriers (Agger, 2012; Forester, 2020). By reflecting on personal practices, learning from experiences, and clarifying personal values, planners may enhance their skills and collaboration capabilities (Willson, 2021).

2.2.4 Participatory Methods

This subsection looks into various methods of participation and how participation is enabled and constrained through such methods. The subsection highlights barriers to participation with familiar, so-called 'traditional' participation methods. The subsection delves further into mobile-participation and engagement through high-touch methods, such as photovoice, to investigate if such engagement approaches may lower barriers to participation.

The Role of Methods

Rowe and Frewer (2000, p. 6) describe participation as a "*a group of procedures designed to consult, involve, and inform the public to allow those affected by a decision to have an input into that decision*". As such, participatory methods aim to fulfill multiple purposes, which are also highlighted in Subsection 2.1.3. To fulfill these purposes, a long range of participatory methods have been developed from traditional types (e.g. public meetings, hearings, surveys, committees) to more recently developed types (e.g. mobile participation forms). Some methods seek individual responses while others look for interaction and deliberation among several stakeholders (Ertiö, 2015; Innes, 1998; King et al., 1998; Rowe & Frewer, 2004).

Within planning participation literature, discussions on participatory methods often include debates on the role of the public and the levels of participation. Agger and Larsen (2009, p. 1097) point out: "*the choices of techniques and involvement methods are part of shaping the nature of the participatory process and their overall inclusiveness and representativeness*". As previously mentioned, Arnstein's ladder of participation illustrates how participation can take multiple forms, from being passively informed to having complete or delegated power over decision-making (Arnstein, 1969).

The effectiveness of participatory methods, especially on their barriers in participation, are vigorously debated in literature, and multiple barriers are emphasized as impeding these participatory methods (Davies, 2001; Innes & Booher, 2004; King et al., 1998). Traditional or conventional participation methods oftentimes require participants to be physically present at a specific time and place (Ertiö, 2015). As mentioned in PART EXCLUSION, structural inequalities may result in certain individuals or groups being excluded from participating. Even if they were to be present, a lack of expertise knowledge, or know-how to the style of meetings and communication can result in some voices being dominated by more resourceful and experienced participants (Agger & Larsen, 2009; Jensen & Agger, 2022). Innes and Booher (2004) emphasize that these barriers not only impact citizens, who may be discouraged to participate, but also planners and decision-makers in terms of confusion and ambivalence as to the advantage of public input in decision making. Moreover, public involvement risks becoming a ritual rather than a meaningful part of decision making (Arnstein, 1969; Innes &

Booher, 2004).

Despite criticism and intensive focus on barriers within participatory methods, Ertiö (2015) highlights that traditional participatory methods continuously underpin contemporary engagement with citizens. Looking towards fulfilling purposes of participation, Fung (2006) and Rowe and Frewer (2000) emphasize that the choice of participatory methods should be guided by their purpose and tailored to the specific planning context. This suggests that the appropriate role of citizens, their level of influence, and the methods applied should be context dependent.

Lyhne et al. (2016) argues that literature on public participation seems overly focused on participatory methods, which may neglect other conditions affecting participation, including barriers for open and engaging processes. Similarly, Innes and Boother (2004) note that planning literature often assumes that issues regarding participation lie with being unable to utilize methods appropriately. Instead Lyhne et al. stress that "*Public participation practices do not take place in a vacuum, but in a context of politics, institutions, resources, etc.*" (Lyhne et al., 2016, p. 314). Here, embedded practices, norms, and traditions in planning cultures affect how administrations such as a municipality may approach participation in planning. In addition, the authors highlight socio-economic status, culture, and educational level among citizens as contributing factors to participation in planning. The authors highlight that contextual conditions and participation methods are deeply interrelated as: "*institutional settings or socio-demographic characteristics are part of the considerations of what types of tools are relevant*" (Lyhne et al., 2016, p. 316), and suggest that contextual considerations come before considerations for methods. Agger and Larsen (2009) further point out that to understand which methods and approaches appeal to different types of citizens, it is crucial to inquire into who the citizens are and what types of inequalities and exclusion they may face in participation and deliberations.

The next subsubsection looks further into how participatory methods are being developed with the aim of reducing the barriers to participation, such as exclusion, and thereby increase inclusiveness and representation. It also aims to show how participation can be more mobile – 'on-the-go' – and attentive towards creative, interactive, and alternative ways of expressing needs and wants and participating in dialogue.

E-Participation

To overcome barriers and broadening citizen participation, as well as to support citizen-planner dialogue, various electronic, web-based participatory solutions (e-participation) have been introduced and implemented in urban planning within the last couple of decades (Ertiö, 2015; Lybeck, 2018). Various online services have appeared, including participation via handheld devices, usually smartphones, under the term mobile participation (m-participation). M-participation, often through apps, enables crowdsourcing to obtain local knowledge and the meaning of places for the people who use them (Ertiö, 2015; Lybeck, 2018). Furthermore, within Danish planning practices the usage of apps in participation is recognized as a way of increasing the segment of participants, informing and creating dialog between authorities and citizens (Søren Præstholm, 2012).

Ertiö (2015) explains that the advantage of m-participation lies with the mobility and thereby situated engagement, meaning that participants engage in-situ, at the time and place they chose. Furthermore, features of phones, such as cameras and GPS, enable participants to share several types of data that

enable participatory mapping (Ertiö, 2015; McCall, 2021).

In an empirical study on a participatory app for planning proposals, Wilson et al. (2019) highlight that participants responded positively to easily participate on location. Participants were able to quickly leave a comment and bypass the formal traditional style of participation. The participants reported that they began to think more critically about their areas and possibilities for change and expressed a desire for further participation to engage in discussion. As such, this method of engagement can be supplemented with a range of tools oriented towards quick participant interactions and in-depth deliberations with stakeholders and planners (Wilson et al., 2019).

While m-participation can contribute to overcoming barriers in participation, digital approaches can impose others. Ertiö (2015) points out that m-participation has received criticism for being excluding, especially towards people with limited technical abilities. Furthermore, data protection, technical limitations, time, and monetary resources to train personnel may also be drawbacks to these types of participation tools (Ertiö, 2015). Literature suggests that so far electronic and mobile participation often function as supplements to traditional participatory methods (Lybeck, 2018; Søren Præstholm, 2012; Wilson et al., 2019).

As m-participation does not necessarily include the usage of photos and mapping, the next part looks into how the approach of photovoice utilizes photos to understand how citizens perceive their surroundings, and how planners may utilize this knowledge.

High-touch Participation and Photovoice

This part focuses on photovoice, which falls under what Meenar and Mandarano (2021) call 'high-touch' community engagement tools that include "*study circles, neighborhood coffees, potluck dinners, photovoice, mental mapping*" (Meenar & Mandarano, 2021, p. 2). These tools are typically highly interactive and contribute to an in-depth and personalized understanding of the everyday lives of participants in their local environment (Meenar & Mandarano, 2021). Combined with other methods, photovoice is highlighted as an approach that contributes to the understanding of how people interact with their surroundings through images, follow-up discussions, and deliberations among participants and planners (Hergenrather et al., 2009; Meenar & Mandarano, 2021).

In their article, Meenar and Mandarano (2021) describe their research study in which they conducted a combination of photovoice, mapping, interviews, and surveys with participants in a shrinking urban area. Participants were instructed to photograph areas they liked, disliked, as well as things they would like more of in their community. In follow-up interviews, participants expressed emotions to each photographed locality, enabling researchers to make 'emotional maps' to visualize emotions attached to specific areas in the community. The authors found that participants:

"*deepened their understanding of their own neighborhoods by participating in photovoice activities and discussing their photo subjects. In addition, by taking photos of what they would like to see in the neighborhood, our participants gained knowledge on how the community could change, which enhances their capacity to contribute to this ongoing dialogue.*" (Meenar & Mandarano, 2021, p. 9)

The emotional maps contributed to the connection between residents' emotions and places in their local area. Emotions, such as joy, anger, and fear, identified spatial patterns and emotional hotspots

that deepened the researchers' understanding of the area. This knowledge is significant for planners to understand which areas need preservation and which need intervention (Meenar & Mandarano, 2021).

As such, not only does the approach enhance awareness for the participants of their own significance in planning, it also enhances planner insights into how participants experience their everyday lives in their local environment (Meenar & Mandarano, 2021; Schuch et al., 2014). Meenar and Mandarano (2021) point out that photovoice can contribute to legitimization of local knowledge and build trust among authorities and participants. In terms of overcoming barriers to participation, the authors point out that the approach has contributed to including voices that had otherwise been 'silent' and marginalized, thereby enhancing public representation (Meenar & Mandarano, 2021). This could be due to the style of participation, which does not rely solely on verbal and written communication and formalized style of public meetings and discussion, which may require expertise knowledge. Here, participants, no matter their knowledge or expertise, are being empowered to express themselves via personal photos in a creative way that may be overlooked in traditional participatory methods (Hergenrather et al., 2009; Meenar & Mandarano, 2021; Schuch et al., 2014).

While the conducted study provided in-depth knowledge of the local area of residents, Meenar and Mandarano (2021) also conclude that this participation approach was highly time consuming for researchers and participants and experienced a dropout of participants during the research period. As such, there are limitations that can present as barriers for this approach to be a widespread participant tool with large representation.

Subsection Summary

The subsection looks into the different types, purposes, and roles of participatory methods and how they shape participatory processes. Here, participatory methods allow actors to be involved in planning through a range of procedures.

The subsection includes discussions about the effectiveness and barriers of participatory methods. The so-called traditional methods, while relevant in contemporary public participation, are criticized for being structurally excluding and favoring resourceful actors, due to factors such as time and place requirements and know-how to the style of meetings and communication. Furthermore, a lack of effectiveness in methods can impose barriers, such as uncertainties and discouragement to participate for local actors as well as planning authorities.

To overcome and address barriers in participation, literature suggests understanding the interrelation between context and methods. As such, understanding the socio-economic context, types of citizens, and nature of possible exclusions, when designing the participatory approach, may overcome barriers.

The subsection further looks into the usage of m-participation, which aims to lower barriers in participation in terms of representation as well as by allowing flexibility to partake 'in situ'. However, this approach may exclude those with limited technical abilities and, as such, the approach may function well along with other participatory methods. The subsection also looks into high-touch methods, including photovoice, as a participatory approach fostering an in-depth and personalized understanding of the everyday lives of participants in their local environment. The use of photos as communication style, along with other approaches, provides insights into how participants experience their everyday lives in their local environment and engage participants through a personalized and creative communication style.

As such, the overall understanding of participatory methods' influence, potentials, and limits to inclusive and engaging participation is found in the interrelation between methods and context. This means that how participatory methods shape, enable, and constrain participation is influenced by the type of actors and their context, as well as structural practices, norms, and traditions that govern which methods are used, how they are used, and for what purpose.

2.2.5 Civil Society

This subsection delves into the fifth component of participation – civil society – which is also the component that participation is directed towards. Here, the roles and types of citizens are presented, as well as their motivation for engagement. The subsection ends with a focus on societal structures and patterns that shape and often limit citizen participation.

Citizen Roles in Participation

Due to changes in governance modes, the role of citizens in participation and collaborative processes has in the past fifty years undergone change, from being primarily passive recipients of a traditional top-down governed administration system towards being co-creators of public services (Agger & Lund, 2011, 2017; Meijer, 2016). With the new public governance (NPG) and its horizontal network characteristics, citizens take on a more active role:

> "*In this perspective, citizens actively engage in public policies and are conceptualized as coproducers that work with government in a more or less horizontal relationship. Trust, relational capital and relational contracts act are regarded as the core governance mechanisms*" (Meijer, 2016, p. 599).

Here, citizens influence decision-making as well as implementation and contribute with their competences and knowledge (Agger & Lund, 2017). Area based initiatives serve as examples in which active co-producing participation and collaboration with citizens are significant:

> "*partnerships with local actors are often highlighted as core components for facilitating and encouraging local engagement, responsibility and sense of ownership . . . Public participation in urban regeneration programmes is often considered by many governments to be a precondition for achieving effective solutions to local projects, as well as for shaping sustainable political solutions*" (Agger & Larsen, 2009, p. 1085)

As such, enabling citizens to be active and important contributors and co-producers is significant for the effectiveness in planning, such as area-based initiatives. However, the role as co-producers requires citizens to invest resources, such as time an energy, into participation, resulting in the process being dominated by a small segment of citizens, thereby risking excluding other community members and their insights. Therein lies a recognition that citizens are different, with different needs and different ways of participating. As such, participation should not only be tailored to the role of citizens (as co-producers), but also to the types of citizens (Agger, 2012; Agger & Lund, 2017; Sehested & Leonardsen, 2011).

Citizen Types in Participation

This subsubsection aims to characterize different types of citizens in participation, to illustrate that citizens perceive participation differently and, as such, participate in multiple ways. Agger (2012) explains that careful design of participatory processes may reduce the risk of overrepresentation of certain citizen groups and their interests, and power inequality. Being aware of different citizen types may assist in tailoring the participation process to its context (Agger, 2012).

Active Citizens

When it comes to active citizens, Agger (2012) highlights that this citizen type is often characterized by having multiple types of resources at hand, making active participation possible. This includes social capital and capacities to act based on knowledge, resources, and experience, both in their professional and volunteer lives: "*Active citizens are able to use the institutional settings for participation to promote their interests and to use and develop their resources for participation*" (Agger, 2012, p. 32). Another prime asset contributing to their participation is time. Agger (2012) highlights that active and expert citizens often participate on a full-time basis, and that their knowledge and social capital is derived from being representatives in local organizations and associations. While some active citizens participate to have political influence, others are motivated by personal causes or community needs and have the ability to motivate others to participate as well (Agger, 2012).

'Everyday Makers'

The everyday maker is characterized by being less active in participation, as they typically participate part-time, ad hoc, and are project oriented. Usually, the everyday maker is not a member of an association and participates in activities close to their everyday lives, such as projects in their neighborhoods. This citizen type usually participates out of fun or as a felt necessity, and they avoid being held accountable (Agger, 2012).

Inactive Citizens

Agger (2012) characterizes inactive – or monitorial citizens – as citizens who often have participatory skills but choose not to engage, due to apathy, competing interests, or "*being satisfied that political representatives or planners guard their interests*" (Agger, 2012, p. 33). While some citizens within this type are highly educated and have the resources to participate, it does not apply to all. In terms of participation, the inactive citizen is highly selective and usually only participates in situations when they feel it is crucial. Agger (2012) also highlights young people to this citizen type (usually between the age of 14-24). Instead of 'conventional' forms of participation, these groups are attracted towards informal and spontaneous modes of participation and are usually driven by ethical motivation (Agger, 2012).

Based on the above categorizations, citizens in participation are not homogenous in their ways, and their motivations for participation are also very different from each other (Agger, 2012). Based on empirical findings from Danish urban renewal projects, Agger (2012) highlights challenges with domination of active citizens resulting in the exclusion of other types of citizens. While active citizens were considered valuable resources in terms of local knowledge and their prioritization to participate, they could exclude citizens with less experience with the style and norms of participation through dominating the agenda. As such, Agger (2012) emphasizes a difficult balance of enabling active citizens, as they are valued for their resources in the participation process, whilst constraining their influence to avoid domination and thereby exclusion of other citizens. Here, Agger (2012) points out

that less active citizens often are the ones that lose interest in participation, due to the domination of active citizens and boredom from long processes with no visible outcomes. The primary focus must be finding participatory methods that capture their interests, as well as maintaining their interest and motivation throughout the process. In terms of inactive citizens, Agger (2012) suggests broadening the inclusion through information on relevant and accessible platforms.

To accommodate different citizen types and their participation patterns, Agger suggests that public authorities tailor the participation process towards the different types of citizens by applying multiple participatory methods.

Societal Structures Influencing Participation

While Agger (2012) mainly focuses on how citizen roles and types influence participation, Davies (2001) and King et al. (1998) bring attention to how societal structures affect and, especially, how it constrains citizens in participation. Both Davies and King et al. argue that competing pressures on individuals and cultural patterns are relevant in terms of participation (Davies, 2001; King et al., 1998). Within Davies' research, community group members recognize the struggle in voluntary participation, as they emphasize the pressures of daily life, including work, parenting, and household activities, leaving less room for community engagement.

Similarly, respondents in King et al.'s research highlight busy schedules and socio-economic structures as barriers for participation, including factors such as: *"transportation, time constraints, family structure, number of family members in the labor force, child care, and economic disadvantages"* (King et al., 1998, p. 322). The authors emphasize that these barriers for participation are rooted in structural inequality, resulting in exclusion, as some community members are restricted from participation due to socio-economic circumstances, resulting in a lack of representation:

> *"Some people express a desire to participate more fully in their communities, but the demands of day-to-day life get in the way. As one citizen said, "A lot of people are holding down two jobs and both people work in the family and are too tired... [from] trying to survive a day at a time.""*(King et al., 1998, p. 322)

Davies also points out that personal or cultural factors hindering participation share similarities with environmental behavior in terms of 'value-action gaps'. As such, people's attitudes and values influence their level of participation, as for why Davies suggests that people are more likely to prioritize personal, family, and friendship matters over engaging in planning participation (Davies, 2001). Respondents within the research of King et al. show a noticeable change in attitude towards participation. In addition to lack of spare time to prioritize community engagement, a respondent highlights a lack of formal and informal learning and internalization about socialization and community engagement that prepares citizens to participate:

> *"When I was a kid we would meet at the dinner table... and that was the place that almost without fail we'd get around to political and neighborhood and church goings on... that would be the basis for learning about and socializing into broader issues in the community....* " (Planning administrator in King et al., 1998)

Subsection Summary

This subsection looked into the types and roles of citizens in planning participation. The role of citizens and their influence in planning has evolved from being passive recipients towards being co-creators- and producers. Now, citizens influence participation with their local knowledge and resources, and are viewed as essential for finding effective solutions and anchoring planning projects. (Agger & Larsen, 2009; Agger & Lund, 2017; Meijer, 2016).

However, citizens are not a homogenous group and may as such be categorized based on their differences in engagement and motivation. Some types of citizens have more resources and are more prone to participate than others, leading to risks of domination. Participants with less experience with the style and norms of participation may be restricted from taking an active part. Literature suggests that, to enable inclusive participation, the process should be tailored towards different citizen types. This includes awareness of balancing enablement and constraint of the influence of active citizens, to reduce domination and exclusion (Agger, 2012; Agger & Larsen, 2009).

Societal structures and patterns as well as structural inequalities influence participation. Household responsibilities, competing interests, and a lack of learning about community engagement can hinder participation. Furthermore, socio-economic disparities constrain some citizen groups from active participation (Davies, 2001; King et al., 1998).

2.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter concludes by answering the sub-question: *How do the five components – Legislation, Municipal Practice, Individual Planner, Participatory Methods, and Civil Society – influence public participation, and what barriers impede inclusive and engaging participation?*

The preliminary Section introduced public participation in planning as a heavily contested and multifaceted field in planning, and a definition describes participation as forums of facilitated communication among stakeholders regarding decision-making (Brown & Eckold, 2020). The section further introduced the evolution of participation, in which Arnstein and Davidoff called out structural exclusion of marginalized groups and argued for empowerment and inclusivity in participation and decision-making (Arnstein, 1969; Davidoff, 1965). Building on these ideals, collaborative and communicative theories emphasize decision-making based on dialogue, transparency, and consensus-building among stakeholders to reduce power inequality in planning (Healey, 1996; Innes, 1996). However, despite these ideals, barriers in terms of power dynamics and structural exclusion are still relevant.

The five components, introduced in the introduction, and their influence, as depicted in public participation literature, is highlighted in TABLE 2.2 Looking briefly at institutional theory and their embedded structures provided a framework to understand how the components play a role in inclusive and engaging participation, including the barriers they impose.

Literature related to the five components shows that inclusive and engaging participation is highly influenced by embedded institutional structures, and reveals enabling qualities as well as barriers, see Table 2.2 The literature shows that each component alone as well as in conjunction can influence inclusive and engaging participation. As an example, legislation without requirements risks participation becoming a mere symbol rather than engaging and inclusive (David & Buchanan, 2020; Innes & Booher, 2004; Sehested, 2009). In conjunction with municipal traditions, vague legal

requirements can lead to minimal engagement efforts, thereby imposing barriers (Sehested, 2009). In continuation of the constraints by legislation and municipal traditions, barriers may be imposed by constraints, such as planners facing challenges in realizing collaborative planning in practice, the exclusion through certain participatory methods, and citizens being constrained by structural inequality, societal structures, and lack of interest (Agger, 2012; Agger & Larsen, 2009; Davies, 2001; Ertiö, 2015; Innes & Booher, 2004; Sehested, 2009). The need to tailor participation to its context is emphasized within several of the five components to enable inclusive participation as well as mitigate exclusion, which is mentioned as a barrier throughout most of the chapter (Agger, 2012; Lyhne et al., 2016).

In addition to the discussion on how the five components influence participation, it is worth mentioning the criticism of participation in literature that was emphasized in the introduction. One of the main arguments leading to the research question was the general lack of attention in literature on how to actively engage the public in participation, specifically in terms of 'bringing them to the table'. While some literature addresses the initial stages of participation and suggests how to lower barriers, such as tailoring approaches and methods to specific contexts by identifying citizen types, these examples are relatively few (Agger, 2012; Lyhne et al., 2016). However, Agger and Jensen (2022) highlight the practical approach of outreach and mobilizing participation through voluntary organizations. Despite these examples, the broader literature on participation tends to concentrate more on enhancing processes and refining methods for those already engaged. For example, the literature on communicative and collaborative theory, which promote open dialogue, mutual learning, and consensus-based decision-making, lack the strategies for mobilizing citizens into deliberations (Allmendinger, 2017b; Healey, 1996; Innes, 1996; Innes & Booher, 2004). This may result in overlooking the initial outreach and mobilization stage, risking a bias towards already engaged citizens. As such, inclusive, engaging, and representative participation need attention to strategies for outreach and mobilization of participants.

Table 1.2: An overview of how the five components influence, enable, and constrain participation

Component	Influence on Participation	Enabling inclusive and engaging participation	Constrain inclusive and engaging participation (Barriers)
Legislation	Influence on participation depends on interpretation and implementation by institutions and individual planners.	Enablement through mandated requirement for public engagement in planning.	Open legislation, without minimal level requirements, risks minimal participation effort and participation becoming a formality.
Municipal Practice	Influence participation through institutionalized rules, practices, norms, traditions, and values.	Enablement through practices and traditions, fostering collaboration, promoting social capital, inclusive engagement, and	Exclusion of actors in participation due to: - Structural inequality - Lack of time and

		anchoring with local actors, volunteers, and organizations.	resources - Domination and power dynamics - Favor towards resourceful participants - Lack of participatory know-how - Favoring technical language over other knowledge perspectives Resource limitations.
The Individual Planner	Situated within an institutional framework, in which context can both enable and constrain the actions of the planner to facilitate inclusive participation.	Enablement through facilitating inclusive dialogue, collaboration, experience, and expertise. Balancing power dynamics, mitigate domination, listening, and empowering citizens in participation.	Difficulties realizing collaborative planning in practice. Lack of awareness of institutionalized habits, power imbalances, and structural inequalities in participation that impose barriers, such as exclusion.
Participatory Methods	Designed procedures that enable public involvement and vary widely on approach and effectiveness, depending on context, implementation, practice, norms, and traditions.	Enablement through understanding the interrelation between context and methods. Enablement by combining multiple participation methods and styles of communication, such as m-participation, photovoice, and traditional methods.	Risk of exclusion, depending on practice: Traditional methods are criticized for being structurally exclusive (time, place, resources, know-how), and innovative methods may exclude actors with limited technical abilities.
Civil Society	Civil society has different roles that influence participation, as well as citizen types, based on differences in engagement and motivation.	Enablement through change in citizen role towards active contributors and co-producers in collaborative processes. Enablement through	Structural exclusion and inequality, dominant power dynamics, societal structures, and competing interests.

awareness of context:
Tailoring the
participation process to
identified citizen types,
motivations, and risk of
exclusion.

3 Methodology and Research Design

This chapter dives into how this study has been planned and conducted. The chapter begins by describing how critical realism, as a scientific framework, shapes this study's inquiry and how to obtain knowledge. From here, the study's methodology is presented. The third Section, 3.3, reviews the multiple data gathering methods along with ethical considerations. The chapter ends with an illustration and description of the research design.

3.1 Philosophy of Science – Critical Realism

Critical realism arose in the 1970s as a critique of the earlier dominating positivist approach. Here, critical realism claims that the object of study is situated in a world comprised of multiple levels and criticizes the positivist approach for reducing reality to merely what we can observe. By claiming that the world encompasses multiple levels and dimensions - in which the empirical, observable level is supplemented by deeper levels of underlying structures and mechanisms - critical realism contend that there exists a reality which is not directly observable to us (Danermark et al., 2005; Egholm, 2014). Roy Bhaskar is considered a significant figure in developing the critical realist approach and both Egholm (2014) and Danermark et al. (2015, p. 20) refer to Bhaskar's "*ontological map*" when defining the multiple levels, illustrated in Figure 3.1 below.

3.1.1 The World Comprised of Levels

The ontological map encompasses three levels – the empirical, the actual, and the real – within two dimensions: the transitive and the intransitive dimension.

- **The intransitive dimension** is described by Egholm (2014, p. 123) as: "the ontological part – the world as it actually is, when it is not analyzed or discussed". As such, this reality consists of objects or phenomena that exist independent of our knowledge. Within this dimension we find two levels:

    o The deepest level consisting of structures and mechanisms which can produce events, phenomena, and actions (Danermark et al., 2005; Egholm, 2014).

    o The actual level – the level on which we find events, phenomena and actions created by the structures and mechanisms from the real level. What separates this level from the empirical level is that these events happen even if we do not observe or know about them (Danermark et al., 2005; Egholm, 2014).

- **The transitive dimension** includes the empirical level in which we make observations on events, phenomena, actions, and from which we develop theories and assumptions (Egholm, 2014).

    The empirical level – This level consists of the events, phenomena, and actions that we

observe and experience whether it is directly or indirectly. As part of the transitive dimension, we make theories and analyze the world (Danermark et al., 2005; Egholm, 2014).

Figure 3.1: The ontological map explained and illustrated in Egolm (2014, p. 126)

The 'Ontological Map' - The world comprised in multiple levels

Empirical Level   Events actually percieved (observed/experienced)

Actual Level   Events (and non-events) that are generated by the mechanisms

Real Level   Underlying, invisible, generative structures and mechanisms
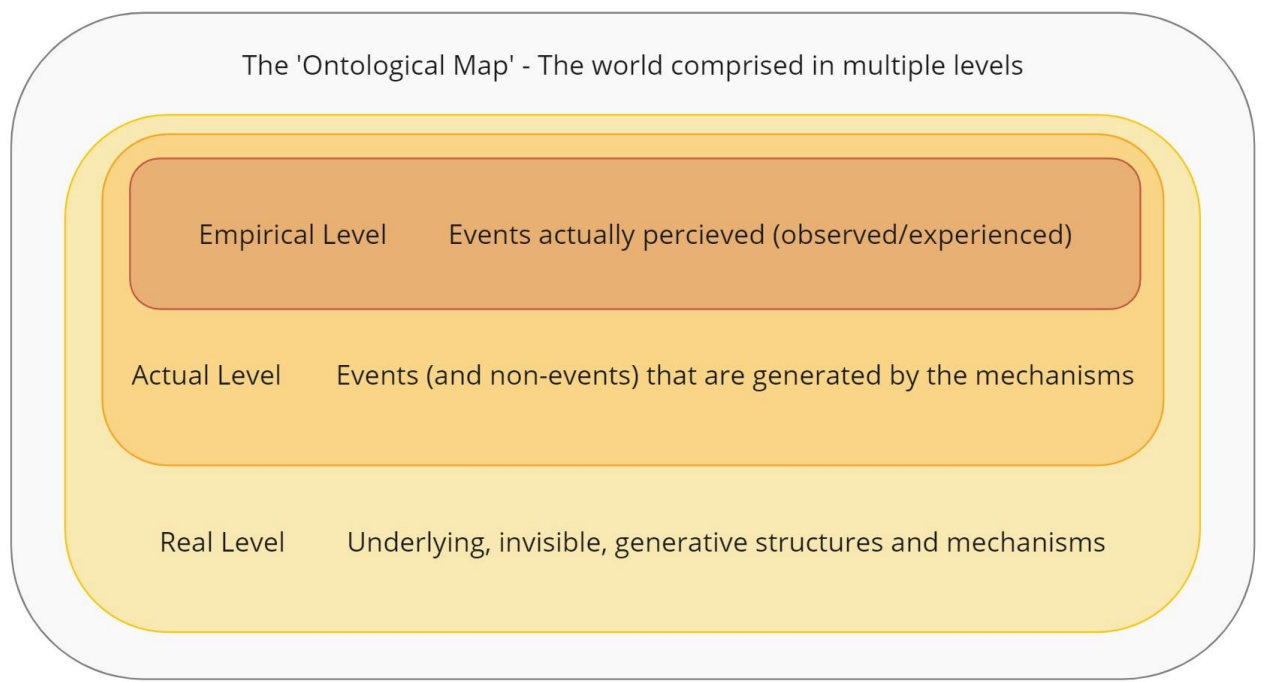
From this map, critical realism maintains that there exists a reality independent from our knowledge. Danermark et al. (2015) explain, that to obtain knowledge, the epistemological view, we must acknowledge that reality is not reduced merely to what we can observe, hence, we must perceive observable events as a product of underlying and often invisible mechanisms. As such Danermark et al. (2015, p. 21) argue:

> "*Scientific work is instead to investigate and identify relationships and non-relationships, respectively, between what we experience, what actually happens, and the underlying mechanisms that produce the events in the world.*"

When doing research on public participation, the 'ontological map' contends that there exist underlying and seemingly invisible structures and mechanisms influencing how society recognizes and facilitates public participation. The study investigates factors influencing public participation and focuses on five main components recognized from the initial fieldwork on the case study – these are: legislation, municipal practices, the individual planner, participatory methods, and civil society. Knowing that these components all play a role in public participation, they are all interrelated, and the study aims to understand how they shape and influence engaging and inclusive participation. Within the empirical level, these components can be observed such as legislation, public meetings, public attendance, and more. Looking into the actual and real levels, means uncovering the seemingly invisible mechanisms and structures that influence how legislation is implemented, how the public

meeting is conducted, and the attitudes and barriers that may impede public attendance. As such, based on the findings in the empirical level, the five components may reveal social, political, and institutional explanations for how participation is conducted and possible barriers for attendance.

Egholm (2014, p. 124) explains that: "*the relationship between the depth and surface also affects how critical realism looks at the relationship between structure and individual*". This perspective on the interaction between agent and structures is also highlighted in Chapter 2. Here, structures enable or constrain the actions and behaviors of agents, while agents simultaneously shape or reproduce structures through their actions (Egholm, 2014). As an example, institutionalized planning and participation practices may enable or constrain how planners conduct participatory methods and aim at involving citizens in conversations and decision-making. At the same time, planners have the capacity to either reproduce these routinized practices or make efforts to challenge them.

3.1.2 Gathering Knowledge and Forming Conceptions

To obtain knowledge within the divided reality of critical realism involves gaining access to a deep level that: "*cannot be directly observed*" (Egholm, 2014, p. 125). As such, Egholm (2014) emphasizes the use of the abductive approach, which is elaborated within this study in Subsection 3.2.3, and the need for methodological pluralism to make nuanced studies that transcend the empirical level. Egholm (2014) explains that the abductive approach makes assumptions and hypotheses which are subsequently tested on the empirical findings to see if they offer plausible explanations, and thereby reveal underlying structures to the events and phenomena within the empirical findings. While the underlying structures that influence participation cannot be visibly observed, conclusions about how the interactions of factors and underlying structures and mechanisms can be evaluated for their plausibility in relation to the empirical findings. As such, Egholm (2014) explains that conclusions on factors influencing engaging participation are perceived as true if: "*they make it probable that the structures that have been identified actually exist independently of the researcher's interpretation*" (Egholm, 2014, 129).

Danermark et al. (2015) emphasize that when conceptualizing or seeking explanations within social science means, the researcher cannot be detached from the studied object but is instead situated within the studied setting and interacts with subjects. This comes to play in what Danermark et al. (2015) call 'double hermeneutics', in which researchers within social science interpret people's understandings, notions, and interpretations about the object of study. This interaction of interpretations requires awareness and reflection from the researcher, especially as the researcher brings their own understandings, prior knowledge, and possible bias in their interpretation. Danermark et al. (2015) contend that within critical realism, everyday knowledge and meanings must be included in research as they contribute to explanations of underlying mechanisms:

> "*Social worlds are inherently meaningful. It is necessary to understand the meaning people assign to their actions in order to understand the actions. The actions in their turn mediate everyday social phenomena as well as deeper underlying structural relations, which are constitutive of the society under study.*" (Danermark et al., 2005, p. 36)

For example, conducting interviews with planners and citizens on their experiences of participation

and what barriers may hinder encouragement to participate, invites interviewees to share their own everyday knowledge and interpretations on participation. However, Danermark et al. (2015) warn that explanations about 'deeper underlying structural relations' cannot be made alone from people's everyday notions and interpretations. Rather, researchers must consider how people's meanings and interpretations align with their practices - what Danermark et al (2015) call the 'material dimension'. For example, planners may describe their roles and practices one way during interviews, but observations might reveal a different reality of municipal participatory practices, uncovering underlying mechanisms like institutional constraints or power relations that influence participation. In order to seek explanations, make knowledge claims, and generalizations, Danermark et al. (2015) contend that the empirical, every day, knowledge within the studied setting must be reviewed in relation to the theoretical framework. As such, grounded in the everyday knowledge of citizens that express various barriers, such as busy lifestyles or lack of accessibility to partake, preventing participation must be reviewed through a theoretical lens to uncover underlying mechanism that form the actions behind public participation. As such, new knowledge from these everyday insights can be added to the field, as they are incorporated into broader theoretical frameworks (Danermark et al., 2005)

While aiming for knowledge of reality, both Danermark et al. (2015) and Egholm (2014) stress, that we cannot know if the knowledge we acquire, and our theories hold the truth about reality. Danermark et al. (2015, p. 23) adds that knowledge is always fallible as it is conditioned by factors such as time and existing knowledge. They maintain, that "*theories in science can only be regarded as the best truth about reality we have for the moment*." While doing research, both Egholm (2014) and Danermark et al (2015) highlight, that the researcher cannot take a completely neutral stance to their studied object, and Egholm (2014) argue that the theories and analyses researchers make, are influenced by their perceptions and beliefs. This is because social phenomena under study are socially produced and thereby situated in a value-charged setting which are open to human interpretations. As such, the concept of double hermeneutics encompasses the interpretations of e.g. interviewed planners and citizens as well as mine as researcher. This means that studied phenomena, such as inclusive and engaging public participation and barriers to participation, are vulnerable to the influence perceptions and beliefs in the interpretations. This is why we cannot be certain if our theories represent the truth about reality.

3.2 Methodology

This section describes the methodological approaches and considerations within this thesis. The section briefly introduces the nature of qualitative research followed by an elaboration of how the study adopts elements of an autoethnographic approach due to the close and intertwined collaboration with Randers Municipality. The study's abductive approach for gathering knowledge is described as well as the choice of a single-case study for obtaining detailed real-world knowledge.

3.2.1 Qualitative Research

This study adopts a qualitative approach to understanding the nature of public participation and the

factors that influence, enable, and constrain inclusive and engaging participation. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) describe the nature of qualitative research as: *"Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences"* (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 15) Rather than focusing on outcomes or products, qualitative research focuses on the process of sensemaking as an end in itself, and strives to understand situations within their embedded context:

> (Patton, 1985 cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, pp. 15-16)*"…it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting — what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting…"* (Patton, 1985 cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, pp. 15-16)

This study aims to understand factors shaping inclusive and engaging participation by focusing on a case study of the village area of Ålum and Omegn, which undergo a municipal area renewal. This involves understanding the municipal rural planning- and participation practices and understanding the thoughts, reflections, and actions of planners when planning for an area renewal and participation strategy. The study also dives into understanding how citizens respond and feel about area renewal, how they view their local neighborhood, and how they view different participation methods and barriers for participating.

While this study mainly focuses on obtaining qualitative data to understand how participants make sense of participation, the study also includes some quantitative data, which is why there may be referred to mixed methods in data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Within this study, the collected quantitative data includes the number of participants in the conversation cafés and their age. Conducting the questionnaire within the app, collected quantitative data include location data from photos in the app. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) highlight, that studies that include both qualitative and quantitative data often have one form as the primary data. Within this study the primary data is qualitative, and the inclusion of quantitative elements supports the understanding and knowledge generation of the study.

3.2.2 An Ethnographic Approach

Multiple approaches exist within qualitative research, in which we find ethnographic research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). While multiple forms exist within ethnography, such as autoethnography elaborated below, Merriam and Tisdell (2015, p. 29) highlight that common for all ethnographic studies is a focus on "*human society and culture*". While being broadly defined, Merriam and Tisdell (2015, p. 29) refer to culture, as: "…*the beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of a specific group of people*". To be able to understand and describe such culture, the authors highlight, that ethnographic studies come about from lengthy and intimate studies in which researcher must be present and observant in the studied setting, taking part in local spoken language and activities, and work closely with key informants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The study focuses on a case study to understand how cultural and social elements such as behavior, practices, beliefs, and norms within the municipal planning department or among citizens in Ålum and Omegn influences how public

participation can be conducted as well as identify barriers which impede inclusive and engaging participation. Further down, when describing the thesis collaboration with Randers Municipality, it is highlighted how this study was carried out while being present, as well as playing an active role within Randers Municipality's planning department.

Multiple methods can be utilized when generating and obtaining data within an ethnographic study. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) highlight both formal and informal interviews as well as analysis of documents, records, and artifacts. Furthermore, being an observer engaged within the studied setting, data collection also includes observations on the studied culture and personal notes: "…*fieldworker's diary of each day's happenings, personal feelings, ideas, impressions, or insights*" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 30). The utilized data gathering methods and analysis are elaborated in Section 3.3.

Autoethnography

The ethnographic approach within this study includes elements of autoethnography, which is known to emphasize and allow room for the researcher's positioning within the studied setting. Instead of viewing the researcher as a neutral and distant observer, the researcher's subjectivity such as personal feelings and values, work experiences, and prior knowledge is seen as an asset for understanding complex social and cultural settings (Svensson & Brandt, 2023). This view on conducting research has resulted in criticism emphasizing objectivity and reliability issues due to personal bias influencing data analysis and results. Furthermore, critics argue that this style of research risks losing sight of the studied object, in which the researcher becomes self-absorbed in both focus and writing (Svensson & Brandt, 2023).

Svensson and Brandt (2023) explain how the terms 'insider' and 'outsider' roles help explain the researcher's position within the studied setting. Here, the insider is situated within the studied setting and its culture, meaning that this role can contribute with relevant insights, perspectives, and experiences. The outsider brings an external perspective as for why this role can identify patterns and dynamics that are otherwise invisible to the insider. The authors explain that the roles are often fluid, meaning that the researcher often carries a double-role that switches between the insider and outsider or takes both roles simultaneously (Svensson & Brandt, 2023).

Within this study, looking towards autoethnography becomes relevant being situated as a thesis researcher within my studied setting rather than observing from a distance. As such, the approach helps to reflect on my double-role of being both a thesis researcher studying public participation in Ålum and Omegn, as well as being a hired student helper carrying out the area renewal planning in Ålum and Omegn – and thereby influencing the participation process. Within this study, the approach takes a less personal narrative of activities, but rather looks at norms, structures, and dynamics that influence public participation. This is done through a dual role perspective as both an insider and outsider within Randers Municipality's planning department and their practices. The double role offers insights that perhaps could not otherwise have been gained from being an outside observer and as such being within the setting leads to personal experiences and reflections for my research process.

As a result of the researcher's self-involvement, Svensson and Brandt (2023) emphasize awareness of how personal actions, assumptions, and role as a researcher influence the studied field, choice of

methods, and results. As such, autoethnographic studies call for reflection and transparency in terms of the researcher's role within the studied field and with regards to data gathering and analysis. Understanding personal role(s) and how they influence the research, Svensson and Brandt (2023, p. 55) recommend continuously asking "*how am I situated within the field?*"

Consequently, methods such as interviews and their following analysis can be influenced by the double-role, which highlights how interviews cannot be seen as a neutral practice. As an example, I conducted several interviews with citizens from Ålum and Omegn for the purpose of this study. However, the double-role meant, that while the 'outsider' role conducted the interviews, I simultaneously carried the 'insider' role as a municipal representative, which may be the role most visible from the citizens' perspectives. As such, asking citizens their opinions on the participation process and whether they felt included and informed, my double-role may deliberatively (or not) have influenced how they answered. While conducting the interviews, I am aware that I cannot ignore the personal information I carried with the insider role, which may also influence the interview questions, response interpretations, and interaction. Here, planning a citizen meeting in the same period as conducting interviews, asking questions about how citizens felt included in the participation process, resulted in insights to citizen sentiments about the participation process.

The following text further elaborates on the thesis collaboration with Randers Municipality's planning department and the change in roles and participation.

Collaboration with Randers Municipality

To get a sense of the real-life nature of planning including obtaining an in-dept understanding of the issues of public involvement, this study has been conducted in collaboration with Randers Municipality's Planning department. As the extended thesis lasts over a period of about nine months (from September 2023 to the beginning of June 2024), the time period allowed room for exploring and becoming part of a real-life setting as well as utilizing multiple methods of data generation.

After agreeing on the collaboration in June 2023, the first on-site meeting in Randers Municipality took place on August 30th. During the summer, planners from the municipality provided multiple documents and information about their strategic planning for villages and village area renewals, and it was decided, that Ålum and Omegn would be the chosen case area to focus on. The reasons for choosing Ålum and Omegn as case area is elaborated in Subsection 3.2.4. During the study period, I visited the Randers Municipality's planning department up to twice a week with frequent visits to Ålum and Omegn as well. The environment in the planning department was welcoming and supportive in which all personnel were willing to help, share knowledge and ideas, as well as agreeing to be interviewed. Furthermore, as the study progressed, relationships and bonds were established between me and the citizens of Ålum and Omegn. I met a welcoming atmosphere as well as curiosity and excitement towards my study and how their village area played a role in it. This was expressed through their openness and willingness to talk about their lives and their local area, as well as participating in the app and interviews.

As the area renewal at Ålum and Omegn was allocated one specific planner, identified within this report as Planner A, Planner A and I formed a collaboration from the beginning. I found Planner A to be

very experienced as well as open-minded to new ideas and suggestions and included me in her thoughts and decisions. Informal meetings and conversations with Planner A and colleagues were often noted and saved as field notes, (Appendix F, 2024). While Planner A worked to fulfil her job-objective and I worked on my study, we collaborated on designing a participation strategy, which could fulfil both our purposes. As such, we worked on the initial information brochure to the citizens, the conversations cafés, how we should inform citizens, get to know them, establish dialogue, and retrieve their local knowledge, needs, and wants.

However, the collaboration changed four months into the thesis period, as Planner A had to temporarily leave the project. To maintain the process that had been initiated in Ålum and Omegn, I was offered to assist in the planning process to continue the work on the area renewal. Consequently, my role changed from being mainly an observer, observing Planner A make decisions and engaging with the public, I became a participant in my own study as part of the planning team. This observer/participant relationship is elaborated in Subsection 3.3.1. Furthermore, as explained in the subsection on autoethnography, this change in role can be explained as a change in perspective from being an outsider towards an insider, and thereby introducing the double-role as the thesis went along. As such, I had to balance working on my study in which I explore how the public are engaged in participation, while simultaneously being more involved with decision making of how the citizens should be engaged. Furthermore, I had to take on a new role with participating citizens and be part of the planning decisions affecting the area renewal. This also changed the outside citizen perspective of me from being more of a neutral wholly observer to now being a planner and a municipal representative.

3.2.3 Abduction

This study adopts an abductive research approach, which looks for plausible answers to phenomena within a specific context. Egholm (2014, pp. 174) refers to Peirce's notion about abduction as a "qualified guess" in which the meeting with the world combined with prior knowledge and experiences lead to plausible ('qualified') hypotheses ('guesses'). As such, the abductive approach acknowledges uncertainty and enables plausible explanations through creative thinking. Egholm (2014) describes the abductive approach as being: "...*a less formal and more immediate approach to the world that focuses on obtaining new knowledge of specific situations and phenomena*" (Egholm, 2014 p. 174).

According to Egholm (2014) abduction can be understood as a combination and extension of both inductive and deductive approaches. Aligning with the inductive element, abduction departs from reality in which we make assumptions or theories about the world and the phenomena we experience. Egholm (2014) explains that these hypotheses about the world do not come about in a linear progression but are established bit by bit based on observed clues and past experiences with the world.

This study takes its departure with the inductive open-ended meeting with the world, as I began my inquiry through the collaboration with Randers Municipality and becoming familiar with the study's case context including the municipal planning practices about area renewal and public involvement. Furthermore, being in a real-world setting included meeting and observing citizens. Being already

familiar with citizen involvement from past semester projects as well as from previous interviews with multiple municipal planners prior to this study, I had already acquired knowledge and experience, which contributed to assumptions and hypotheses about issues with citizens feeling overlooked as well as difficulties in motivating citizens to participate. The initial thesis inquiry from a real-world planning setting also led to assumptions about issues and barriers impeding public involvement such as participation being mainly oriented towards active citizens resulting in exclusion. Hence, the five components within the planning system were identified (legislation, municipal practice, methods, the individual planner, and civil society) as influencers of how public involvement is conducted and the level of engagement and inclusivity. Afterwards, these assumptions became the focus of the literature review to gather a theoretical and conceptual understanding and establish a framework providing an overview of how the five components influence, enable, and constrain inclusive and engaging participation, see Section 2.3.

According to Egholm (2014), the deductive element comes into play as these hypotheses are subsequently tested in the real world to establish the probability in which truth is considered. Within this study, the subsequent analysis revisits reality and examines, through data collection methods such as observations, interviews, and the app, to see if the assumptions on components and their influence on participation offer plausible explanations in a real-world setting. As such, the analysis does not complete a deductive falsification of hypotheses through 'experiments', but rather seeks to offer explanations and further insights from the real world. As the abductive approach focuses on specific contexts and situations, Egholm (2014) comments that truth is not considered universal, but rather embedded within a given specific situation.

3.2.4 Case Study

To gain detailed insights and understanding of municipal public participation within a real-world context, a single-case study was chosen as a research method. Yin (2018, p. 15) explains how case studies "*investigate a contemporary phenomenon (the "case")) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context may not be clearly evident*". Being able to follow municipal public participation initiatives in Ålum and Omegn in its embedded context, enabled detailed insights to the nuances and complexities of public participation, such as municipal practices, participatory methods, and civil society, which influence, and sometimes impede, participation. Yin's argument about the blurred boundaries between phenomena (municipal public participation in Ålum and Omegn) and context (factors that shape participation) implies an interrelationship, which the case study seeks to understand and explain. Seeking explanations aligns with Yin's (2018) notion of case studies being a relevant research method for studies seeking to answer 'how' and 'why' questions. Yin (2018, p. 10) explains, that explanatory case studies built from such questions investigates "*the tracing of operational processes over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence*". While case studies can also be descriptive and explorative in nature, explanatory cases seek to understand how and why something occurs, such as understanding how and why inclusive and engaging participation is enabled and constrained from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2018).

The decision to follow the area renewal at Ålum and Omegn as a case study was made as it offered in-

depth insights to the nuances in municipal planning and participation practices in rural areas. Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that the detailed, nuanced, and context-dependent knowledge and insights produced by case studies are beneficial to researchers' learning, skills, and competence building. As close collaboration with citizens was emphasized as important for the area renewal, choosing to follow Ålum and Omegn could provide a closer relationship with citizens and hopefully a willingness to provide this study with useful and detailed insights to citizens' experiences with public participation. Lastly, Ålum and Omegn was also chosen for practical reasons, as the area renewal start-up began in early fall 2023, which aligned with the schedule of this study. As such, I was able to follow the municipal planning work in Ålum and Omegn and get to know the citizens from the very beginning of a planning process rather than relying solely on past experiences of planners and citizens.

Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 223) argues for the relevance of case studies as producers of context-dependent knowledge, as he claims that "*social science has not succeeded in producing general, context-independent theory and, thus, has in the final instance nothing else to offer than concrete, context-dependent knowledge*." However, this does not mean, that nothing can be learned from case studies, as he continues to argue, case studies can add to the knowledge accumulation within a specific field, or one can generalize by choosing cases strategically such as critical cases for falsification of hypotheses (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Rather than looking to make statistical generalizations from findings, Yin (2018) emphasizes making analytical generalizations based on theoretical propositions, which are also highlighted in Section 3.1. As such, Yin (2018, p. 38) explains, that the case study provides an "*opportunity to shed empirical light on theoretical concepts or principles*". Within this study, the case then offers empirical light about what influences, enables, and constrains public participation from the theoretical understandings gained from the literature review. Here, analytical generalizations may be "*corroborating, modifying, rejecting, or otherwise advancing theoretical concepts…*" (Yin, 2018, p. 38). As mentioned in the above subsection 3.2.3, this study does not seek to test experiments, but rather seek explanations and insights to the real-world if and how factors influence inclusive and engaging participation and how barriers, if present, impede participation. When looking to generalize and thereby extend the insights from a case study, Farthing (2016) argues, that while universal claims cannot be made about social life due to its context-dependence, generalizations can be made within the scope of similar cases. He argues that knowledge can be extended to cases and situations facing similar conditions such as municipals and villages facing similar conditions and looking to involve citizens through planning initiatives (Farthing, 2016).

3.2.5 Literature Review

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015, p. 89), conducting literature review is a way "*to identify and establish the theoretical framework*". In this context, reviewing literature within a certain field provides the researcher with an overview, or framework, of existing knowledge and reveals gaps in knowledge (Farthing, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2015, p. 90) highlight, that "*designing a study is not a linear process of reading the literature, identifying the theoretical framework, and then writing the problem statement. Rather, the process is highly interactive*". As such, reviewing literature is an iterative process in which the researcher goes back and forth between problem framing, asking questions, and understanding phenomena of interest within literature and thereby establishing the

theoretical framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). By becoming familiar with the existing literature, researchers can reveal gaps in knowledge and enable researchers to situate and thereby justify their research's contribution to the existing knowledge base (Farthing, 2016).

When searching for various key words on public participation as the overarching and preliminary topic of interest, it quickly became clear, as predicted, that public participation within planning is a contested literary topic. As the initial topic of interest related to failure of inclusion in participation, the literature review was helpful in gaining insights to the evolution of participation within planning and its multiple facets, multiple theoretical lenses, purposes, and dilemmas relating to participation. The problem framing in the initial stage of the research maintained a focus on the five components influencing public participation: legislation, municipal practice, the individual planner, participatory methods, and civil society. As such, reviewing the literature on these topics helped to form a theoretical framework and to understand how these components influence participation. Being a contested topic, the scope needed to be narrowed down and literature reviewed for relevance. This included attention on collaborative and communicative planning theory as well as bringing in perspectives on the five components from international and Danish planning literature focusing on how planning initiatives can enable and constrain participation. As this study includes a case study of public participation within a Danish village experiencing shrinkage-related challenges, the review also included literature on public participation within the context of urban/rural shrinkage to gain insights to the role of civil society and why inclusive participation is significant. Going back and forth between problem framing and literature helped narrow the scope of theoretical framework, reveal gaps in knowledge, and adjust the problem framing and research questions accordingly.

3.3 Data Collection

This section explains the various data gathering methods used within this study. This includes observations, semi-structured and informal interviews, document analysis, as well as a presentation of the app Snapshot Ålum and Omegn, which includes a questionnaire. The section concludes with some ethical considerations made underway.

3.3.1 Observations

Within ethnographic qualitative research, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) describe observations as being one of the most common and important sources of data. Observations can take place within the natural location of the studied phenomena, such as places, people, and cultural patterns and behaviors. Within this study, observations have been one of the primary research tools due to the collaboration with Randers Municipality and the case study of the municipal planning and public participation in Ålum and Omegn. Reasons for conducting observations within this study include:

- Gaining insights and understanding into the context of the studied settings and phenomena. When discussing what to observe, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) highlight multiple observable elements relevant for this study such as the physical setting, participants and their roles, activities and interactions including conversations, subtle (invisible) factors, and lastly the

observer's own behavior. The table in Appendix A lists and elaborates the observations conducted during visits to Randers Municipality and Ålum and Omegn. Observations included insights on the physical locations in Ålum as well as observed behaviors, values, and routines during planner-citizens meetings and meetings among planners.

- Providing an outside perspective which made it possible to observe critically and formulate questions on practices, behavior, and sentiments among planners that may be otherwise routinized and invisible. As such, observations provided a different perspective on participants and their behaviors, including things which they were not able, or willing, to express in an interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

- Gathering firsthand experiences with the studied setting as a supplement to other data gathering methods such as interviews and documents. Being present in meetings and on locations provided the opportunity to record elements of interest while it happened without relying on secondhand information and thereby the interpretations of others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

- In continuation of the above point, observations made in conjunction with other methods of data gathering to compare and confirm results (triangulation) as well as to add further detail to existing data. Observations were useful in confirming data gathered from documents such as information about public involvement in municipal rural strategic planning which in turn inspired interview questions to planners. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) highlight, that while observations differ from interviews as a research tool, informal interviews and conversations can also be understood as observations, as for why activities in which I had a participating role, are also included as observations.

The details of the observations conducted in this study are elaborated in the table in (Appendix A, 2024).

Conducting the observations was time-consuming in terms of the number of visits as well as time spent afterwards on writing additional field notes. However, the time spent on observations over an extended period allowed in-depth insights into practices and to build-up of relationships with both planners and citizens, which then provided opportunity for more insights and interviews.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) present an observer-participant range of roles the observer can take: "*The researcher can assume one of several stances while collecting information as an observer; stances range from being a full participant — the investigator is a member of the group being observed — to being a spectator*" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 144). The authors argue that the role of the observer is often fluid and shifting between being mainly an observer or participant. During the study period, I noticed how my role changed from being mainly an observer with an outside perspective towards becoming an active participant in meetings while also observing. This change in role was particularly noticeable as I went from being an outside student working exclusively on this study, towards becoming a hired student helper performing tasks related to the area renewal in Ålum and Omegn.

As a consequence, I not only had to observe others, but as mentioned before, I started to observe and

reflect on my own behavior within the studied setting. This resulted in constantly balancing between being involved as participant and being detached to observe and reflect (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). During the study, my role as an observer was open (overt observation), meaning that planners and citizens were aware of my role and intentions. As such, it is important to consider the extent to which the overt observations might have affected the studied setting. Examples include that awareness of my presence and intentions may have prompted planners or citizens to behave in a certain way to either highlight or conceal sentiments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Furthermore, observations receive criticism for being subjective and risk being too dependent on the selective nature of human perception (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This became especially relevant when I accepted the role of student helper with the planning of Ålum and Omegn, as I would come to observe myself and my own actions in relation to citizen engagement. Hence, personal bias and influence, especially when being a participant while observing, must be considered.

During and after observations, field notes were written, and photos were taken as observational data. Field notes are included in Appendix F. Field notes included descriptions of the observations such as time, place, participants, activities, conversations, interactions, and more. Furthermore, notes included more reflective and interpretative thoughts on conversations, atmosphere, feelings, and ideas for interview questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To provide a structured overview for the analysis, fieldnotes and photos are organized into categories such as 'conversation cafés, 'meeting with citizens', and 'meeting with planners'.

3.3.2 Document Analysis

As the table in (Appendix B, 2024) shows, documents have been used to gather background information on Ålum and Omegn prior to the area renewal process and information on the municipal strategic planning process within Randers Municipality. The documents have provided historical, demographic, geographic, and political context to the studied setting (Bowen, 2009). The gathered data gave insights to the potentials and challenges of Ålum and Omegn, to understand the prioritization of strategic rural planning within Randers Municipality, the municipal planning practices, and how the practice of area renewals, strategic planning, and public participation are described in the municipal and state planning guidance.

As mentioned in Subsection 3.3.1, multiple methods are used in combination in this study to triangulate and thereby establish reliability of gathered data. Bowen (2009) comments that methods are able to complement each other. For example, documents related to area renewal practices inspired questions about participation approaches. Later, through observations, conversations, and interviews with planners, it was possible to validate and obtain further information. Unlike observations and interviews, Bowen (2009) highlights that documents are non-responsive to the researcher and thereby remain unaffected while being studied. However, awareness must be made to one's role, as personal assumptions, and agenda as researcher can influence document analysis through bias selectivity when selecting documents. Also, how attention is given to data within the material may be influenced by personal assumptions (Bowen, 2009; Farthing, 2016). Consequently, considerations have been made of authenticity, credibility, purpose, target audience, and potential biases through the analysis – both from the document creators as well as me as researcher (Bowen,

2009).

The listed documents have been reviewed for relevance to the study's problem framing and later revisited multiple times to gain insights on multiple themes. At the beginning of the study, the documents were reviewed and read with an inductive and open-minded approach as the purpose was to gather as much information as possible, especially on the municipal planning practices, strategic village planning, and the case area. The documents were reviewed for relevance and categorized by subject. Attention was given to historical background and contextual information related to the case setting of Ålum and Omegn to provide a thorough case description. However, the main focus was on the role of public participation as an overarching theme. I recognized five themes, or components, (legislation, municipal practice, the individual planner, participatory methods, and civil society) central to public participation within the documents which became central to my analysis. This was done by highlighting and as such code areas of interest within the texts such as 'collaboration' or 'public meetings' as these could provide knowledge on municipal practices and participatory methods. The aforementioned components have been central to my analysis in which I interpreted the documents to see how inclusive and engaging public participation is influenced.

3.3.3 Interviews

To gain in-depth perspectives on the participation process in Ålum and Omegn, five semi-structured interviews were conducted in addition to four conversation cafés and multiple informal interviews/conversations, which are listed in the table in (Appendix C, 2024). Following this method of inquiry, the aim was to gather information on interviewees' everyday knowledge and interpretations of their lived world and own actions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Danermark et al., 2005).

The five semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather understandings of both planners and citizens meanings and experiences with public participation from different perspectives. To guide the interviews, overall themes and main questions were prepared in an interview guide, and interviewees were asked if they wanted to receive the questions beforehand (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). As the order of questions are not fixed, the interviewee can speak freely to describe experiences, sentiments, and meanings from their everyday world, to which the interviewer could ask follow-up questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Farthing, 2016). The interview guides resembled each other between planners and citizens respectively, however, some alterations were made with regards to the interviewees' expertise and perspectives, as I knew that some could bring detailed insights to specific areas of interest.

All five semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face. As all interviewees were of Danish nationality, the interviews were conducted in Danish to prevent language barriers. Two of the semi-structured interviews were held with two interviewees. This not only had practical advantages, but as their work and roles aligned, such as the chair- and vice chairperson in the local residents' association, they could supplement each other. However, interviewing more than one individual may also entail a risk of interviewees holding back on personal views and opinions as for why the advantages must surpass any risks of limitations (Farthing, 2016).

Identifying how to shape inclusive and engaging participation, as well as uncovering barriers impeding

participation, can be a difficult task. Getting planners to reflect on their practice, actions, and considerations for participatory methods and inclusion can not only be difficult to articulate but may be interpreted as an accusation against their practices. Prior to the interviews, and to mitigate any nervousness or tension, I focused on establishing a relaxed atmosphere by engaging in conversation and small talk over coffee, as well as being transparent about my study, the purpose of the interview, and explaining why and how their insights were valuable (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Furthermore, the interviews were guided to open with factual and contextual themes and questions in the beginning and then build towards being more reflective at the end. Hopefully, interviewees may have felt more prepared to share their experiences, even from a personal point of view.

With consent from interviewees, the interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and transcribed using an AI transcription tool (Whisper Transcription). The transcriptions were subsequently read and corrected in terms of spelling mistakes, and personal data was removed. All transcriptions are included in (Appendix E, 2024). To structure the transcripts and facilitate the analysis, the transcripts were coded, and categorized using qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo. Reading through the transcript, codes were made ad hoc at interesting passages or sentences. After coding the material, categories and sub-categories were made by comparing the codes and the data within (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As mentioned in Subsection 3.3.2, several categories or themes from various methods correlated. The analysis looks to interpret the meanings and understandings of the subject's everyday world and knowledge of public participation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Brinkmann and Kvale (2018, 2015) highlight, that by engaging in interviews, knowledge is constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee, and through their interaction they influence each other. As mentioned previously in Section 3.2.2 I am aware that my double role as both thesis researcher and hired student helper may have influenced interviewees responses, which affects the validity and reliability of the study (Svensson & Brandt, 2023). The awareness of me investigating municipal- and planners' practices may, consciously or unconsciously, have impacted planners' interpretations and responses. Similarly, citizens may have experienced the same impact, by having to critically evaluate and respond to questions about the participation process to one of the planners involved. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) point out, that, while it may not be intentional, power asymmetries between interviewer and subject and how the interview is conducted may also affect answers. This could restrict interviewees speaking freely, which might have had a different outcome with a more neutral and distanced researcher stance. However, having an insider role, this perspective brought me closer to the interviewees in terms of trust and know-how on planning practice (Svensson & Brandt, 2023). As I had established a sense of relationship with both planners and citizens during the research period, interviewees might be more prone to share their experiences, feelings, beliefs, and everyday knowledge. This helps me in seeking explanations for the rationale behind their actions, and to reveal underlying structures and mechanisms that influence these actions (Danermark et al., 2005).

Having to touch upon interviewees' routines, norms, and personal reflections are difficult, as they are not always tangible and can occur unconsciously. As such, leading questions did sometimes occur, as the conversation would at times reveal underlying structures generating certain actions and events familiar to the interviewee. Leading questions are not without concern and considerations to the validity and reliability of this study, however Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) argue, that leading questions

does not automatically reduce reliability. The purpose of leading questions was often to clarify and confirm the meanings and interpretations of the interviewees, especially when contradictions arose. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) offer the perspective of seeing interviews as knowledge being constructed mutually between the interviewer and the interviewee, rather than knowledge lying around waiting to be objectively found and collected. They emphasize, that "*The crucial aspect is not whether the interview questions are leading or non-leading, but rather where they lead and whether they lead to new, credible, and valuable knowledge*" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 232, Own translation).

Informal interviews and conversations

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, informal interviews and conversations were also conducted with both planners and citizens. Examples of informal interviews and conversations with citizens include both random and planned meetings with citizens regarding the area renewal as well as the four conversations cafés during November and December in the community hall in Ålum. Citizens were invited for coffee and a casual and relaxed conversation about the area renewal. Additionally, the conversation cafés provided opportunities to hear citizens' perspectives on public participation including their perception of the conversation cafés. To guide and support the conversations on both area renewal planning and for this study, two interview guides were prepared. The interview guides for the conversation cafés are found in Appendix D. Merriam and Tisdell (2015), explain that methods within fieldwork tend to be interwoven explaining why these informal interviews and conversations appear both within Subsection 3.3.1 and within this subsection.

The informal interviews with planners were usually unstructured. Often, they occurred spontaneously over coffee, right after a meeting, or from a specific question. At times, I made observations that puzzled me hence, requesting a conversation with a planner. The unstructured nature of these conversations allowed follow-up questions, and the conversation would often continue and touch upon multiple themes, in which the planners often used various planning experiences to illustrate the answer and make their points before moving on to other themes (Farthing, 2016).

3.3.4 App

The app Snapshot Ålum og Omegn was developed to look into how photos and apps can enhance communication and participation in planning processes. It was used in the area renewal process in Ålum and Omegn, where citizens participated in a photovoice activity. Citizens submitted photos of their local area along with descriptions, ratings, and location data. This activity provided a holistic understanding of the area's potentials and challenges. An in-app questionnaire allowed participants to evaluate the use of photos and the app in the participation process and compare it to other methods like citizen meetings. As such, the main focus of the app was to gather data to explore how an app and photos function as inclusive and engaging participatory methods.

As a primarily qualitative data-gathering method, the app focused on the lived experiences of citizens in their home and local environment and how they could communicate this through photos. Furthermore, the app generated data relevant to the area renewal process, which was shared with Randers Municipality.

The reason to opt for an app for data collection within this study was the idea of creating a communication tool, which was easy to access and intuitive in usability and thereby establishing an incentive for citizens using it in situ to communicate about their local environment. In terms of creating a user incentive for using the app was, that it could trigger a resemblance to the app Giv et Praj (elaborated below) or social media such as Snapchat or Instagram. As such, when users recognize the usability of the app with something they already know, they could be more likely to adopt the app as a communication tool. For users who are not familiar with social media, the design was meant for user experience to be intuitive and thereby easy to use.

In practice, multiple apps and website services already provide similar solutions for map-based communication between public administrations, organizations, and citizens, (PGIS). Examples such as Maptionnaire, offers map- and photo-based surveys, gamifications, polls, and communication between users to engage public participation. Barriers for using this service within this study includes, that the Maptionnaire platform only exists as a web-based service, the services are far too expensive (Maptionnaire, n.d.). The app and website 'Giv et Praj' [Give a Hint] by the Danish Road Directorate [Vejdirektoratet] enables citizens to communicate issues on Danish highways and main roads such as potholes, vandalism, faulty lighting and more (the Danish Road Directorate, 2023).

Mobile Methods and Photovoice

Using an app as a method for inquiry in the social world, can be understood under the term 'mobile methods', which in literature often is related to the mobilities paradigm. Mobilities are not only understood as the movement of objects and people, but also virtual and communicative travel of information. Mobile methods encompass a large and growing array of data generating methods, both qualitative and quantitative, generating data about the social and contemporary world (Büscher et al., 2011). Boase and Humphreys delimit their scope and definition on mobile methods to focus on: *"how mobile communication technologies are used to study social phenomena. Most prominently this involves various smartphone apps such as texting, cameras, and maps, but also custom-made apps for data collection"* (Boase & Humphreys, 2018, p. 154). The authors explain that mobile methods can be used to conduct multiple types of data collection, which for this app includes data from the photovoice exercise (photos, comments, positive/negative rating, location data), and questionnaire responses. As such, the app gathers both qualitative and quantitative data for a comprehensive understanding.

Boase and Humphreys (2018, p. 154) explain that: *"The mobility of communication technology enables researchers to go out into the world of their participants"*. Following the idea that app-participants carry their device with them, participants can share their knowledge and experiences within their local environment at any time (within the time allocated for app-activity) Boase and Humphreys (2018) emphasize the need for ethical considerations to ensure that the usage of mobile methods to gather data does not compromise participants. Considerations must be made in terms of transparency, collection of personal and sensitive information, data protection, and consent, which will be further elaborated (Boase & Humphreys, 2018).

The inspiration for the in-app participatory activity draws on the concept of photovoice and emotional mapping, also mentioned in Subsection 2.2.4. The usage of photovoice in urban planning contributes to the understanding of how people interact with their surroundings. This includes how people see,

feel, and use their local environment, which is significant when planning sustainable spaces that foster well-being to the people who use it (Meenar & Mandarano, 2021). Furthermore, creating emotional maps based on participants' positive/negative rating of photos are based on emotional mapping described in Chapter 2, introduces a spatial visualization of citizens' sentiments of their local environment: "*By mapping emotions, planners can better understand urban processes contributing to more effective planning and design decisions catering to the emotions—negative or positive—that people feel in certain urban environments*" (Meenar & Mandarano, 2021, p. 3). Therefore, emotional maps help identify hotspots – areas with dominant sentiments which suggests either safeguarding or intervention in planning (Meenar & Mandarano, 2021).

Snapshot Ålum og Omegn

The app, Snapshot Ålum og Omegn, was developed for this specific thesis study, and was available on both Play Store and App Store to increase the potential reach of users. The app was developed by a professional software developer, (with whom I have a personal relationship) which allowed for a thorough and well-crafted app developed to the intended context. The specialized app allowed for designing and shaping data collection for this specific purpose, such as determining the quantity and type of data needed. Examples of this include decisions on user requirements for how photos should be taken, the number of photos that could be submitted, qualitative comments on the photos, and questions for users to answer. For a full list of questions and submissions, see Appendix H.

App Flow

Upon opening the app for the first time, users were met with the following app flow:

Table 3.1: Table describing app flow.

Tabs within the app	Content
About the App [Om Appen]	The first tab welcomes and introduces the user to the app and the intended purpose of this study and the app, including the photovoice exercise.
Consent Declaration [Samtykke]	The second tab informs users of the purpose of the app, the intended collection and processing of their personal data, as well as their rights. Included in the consent declaration is that participants give their consent for the collected material to be shared with Randers Municipality, anonymously, and used in relation to the area renewal in Ålum and Omegn. Users are always able to withdraw their consent within this tab.
Guidance [Vejledning]	The third tab informs users through a step-by-step guide on how to submit up to eight pictures with accompanying comments and rating as well as submit

questionnaire answers.

Users are encouraged to submit pictures that are of particular interest to their everyday lives within Ålum and Omegn, whether it be something positive or negative. Participants are encouraged to include ideas and potentials with their submitted pictures and comments. Furthermore, the participants are made aware that the submitted pictures do not have to be divided equally between something positive and negative.

Finally, the guidance stresses that participants think carefully about the subject of their photos, especially if photos include other individuals and private areas.

Participation [Deltag]

In the fourth tab, participants can upload up to eight pictures in total from their phone gallery, which automatically includes each picture's geographical location. In addition to describing each picture in their own words, users were asked to determine their sentiment towards the picture's motive.

Furthermore, in this tab, participants are introduced to a questionnaire which evaluates participants' experiences using the app and photos as a participation method.
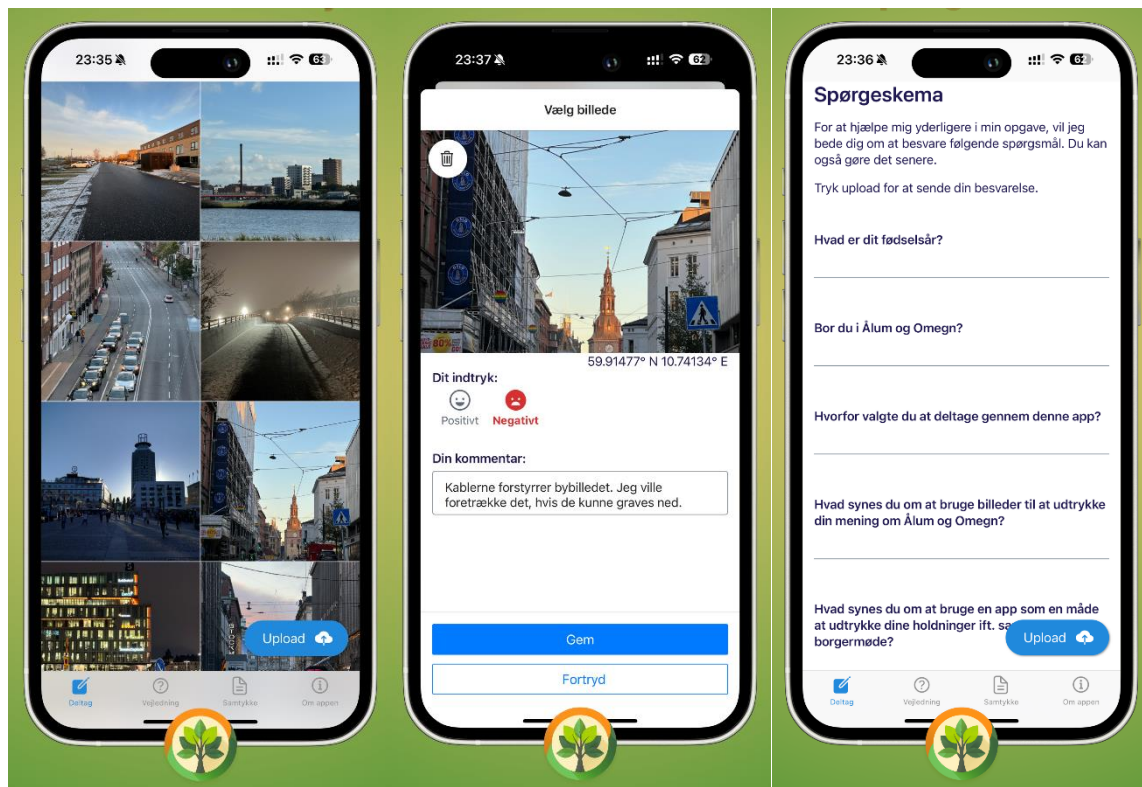

Figure 3.2: App screenshots illustrating photovoice exercise and questionnaire (Private photos, 2024).

Data Collection

The app had a total of 15 users. 5 participants answered only the questionnaire, while 8 participants participated in the photovoice exercise as well as answered the questionnaire. 2 participants did not upload any data.

The app was launched on both App Store and Play Store. Participants were able to submit data from February 6th until March 10th. The sample frame was identified to be the population of Ålum and Omegn, which is between 500-600 inhabitants (estimations based on Statistics Denmark and Chairperson of the Residents' Association) (Clifford et al., 2010; Statistics Denmark, 2024b). To increase interest and response, citizens were made aware of the app through several Facebook posts, including a guidance video, in Ålum and Omegn's local Facebook group. However, a platform like Facebook may not be fully inclusive, as for why I made a visit to the weekly coffee meeting at the community hall to share information, answer questions, and provide guidance. The rationale was, that elderly may be missing from Facebook, yet present in the community center for the visit. However, these efforts did not improve the response rate. The low participant rate may be due to lack of push notifications, promotion on Facebook alone, and a visit to Ålum on a weekday from 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM. A delay in the app launch, due to technical issues and prolonged app launch approval, limited the app-participation time for citizens including time to spread the information about the app as widely as possible. Furthermore, lack of technical- and photographic interest or abilities may have prevented some citizens from participating (García et al., 2016). As such, considerations of sampling- and non-response bias must be made as the data may not be representative of the studied population, which can affect the study's validity and reliability (Clifford et al., 2010). The submitted data and consent declarations from participants were collected and safely stored using Google Firebase, an online cloud service. From here, I extracted the data for analysis, including coding pictures and their descriptions, mapping the locational data, and processing questionnaire responses.

Questionnaire

In addition to the image collection, users were asked to participate in a questionnaire (see questionnaire in Table 3.2). The questionnaire functioned as a participant evaluation of their experiences and perceptions with usage of app and pictures as a participatory method. The reason for conducting the questionnaire evaluation in-app, was due to the accessibility as the questionnaire was visible when uploading pictures.

Questions were formulated to generate both an understanding of the respondent as well as their opinions on the app. As such, the first two questions were factual, fixed questions asking about participants' year of birth and whether they live in Ålum and Omegn. This was to get an understanding of the age distribution, and to make certain that participants were within the sampling frame, as the app was published openly and could be downloaded without restrictions (Clifford et al., 2010). Open-ended questions were formulated to give insight to citizens' experience with using an app and using pictures in public participation. The questions also aimed to understand citizens' opinion on using this type of participation method, compared to other methods during this study, such as conversation cafés and traditional citizen meetings. As such, the open-ended nature of the questions was to add

qualitative elements to the questionnaire response in which participants could provide answers in their own words (Clifford et al., 2010).

The questions also inspired interview questions with citizens and planners, and the option for in-depth follow-up qualitative interviews was provided by the last question, as participants were asked (voluntarily) to provide their contact information (Clifford et al., 2010). Despite the questions being open-ended, some participants gave only one-word answers such as "good" to question four and five. This could be an indicator of the questions not being adequately clear and understandable, which could have been prevented with more testing and modification of the questions before launch and perhaps keeping the questions simpler (Clifford et al., 2010). As the questionnaire had open-ended questions, answers were coded in Nvivo and word-clouds were formed based on the codes, which are illustrated in the Subsection 4.3.4.4 – App. All questionnaire answers including a diagram over the age distribution are visible in (Appendix H, 2024).

Table 3.2: In-app questionnaire for evaluating app and photovoice exercise as participatory tools.

Questions for App Users (Danish)	English translation
Hvad er dit fødselsår?	In which year were you born?
Bor du i Ålum og Omegn	Do you live in Ålum and Omegn
Hvorfor valgte du at deltage gennem denne app?	Why did you participate through this app?
Hvad synes du om at bruge billeder som en måde at udtrykke din mening om Ålum og Omegn?	What are your thoughts on using images to express your opinions about Ålum and Omegn?
Hvad synes du om at bruge en app til at udtrykke dine holdninger ift. Samtalecaféer og borgermøder?	What do you think about using an app as a means to voice your opinions compared to, for example, a citizen meeting?
Må jeg kontakte dig med henblik på et anonymt interview til min studierapport? Mail eller tlf.:	May I contact you for the purpose of an anonymous interview for my study report? Email: Phone:

Analysis of In-app Citizen Participation: Photovoice and Mapping

While the main purpose of the app in this study is to investigate how an app and use of images serve as participatory methods, evaluated through the questionnaire, considerations and analysis of the data collected from citizens from Ålum and Omegn have also been conducted.

The 8 participants engaged in the photovoice exercise uploaded 37 photos in total along with 30 photo descriptions. In terms of positive/negative rating, 3 photos were negative, 14 were positive, and 20 had no rating. The high amount of 'no ratings' can partly be explained by being related to pictures (11 in

total) that illustrated project proposals for the photographed location and not a sentiment towards the specific place. Only 3 participants, representing 11 pictures, contributed to locational data for mapping. Technical issues of not being able to extract locational data from Android phones can explain this low occurrence.

The pictures, their location, user descriptions, and ratings provided information on citizens' needs and wants as well as positive and negative elements and possible potentials of the local area. To elaborate the meanings and intentions behind the photos, participants were asked to write a short description to the pictures. The pictures were categorized and coded in Nvivo from the sentiments behind the pictures (positive/negative rating), their motive and descriptions. These descriptions and ratings accompanied the submitted pictures in Nvivo as notes and were coded along with the pictures. All pictures, descriptions, and ratings are visible in (Appendix H, 2024).

Figure 3.3 Map based on location data and ranking from submitted photos (own data, 2024).

As mentioned, only 11 of the submitted photos contained individual location information, meaning that it was possible to map only about 30 percent of the total submitted photos. Based on the emotional maps described in Chapter 2, mapping the photo locations meant visualizing the locations, which participants showed either positive or negative sentiments towards or proposed projects in relation to the area renewal. The geodata extracted from the app was implemented in QGIS, in which, as mentioned, there was only x-y data from some of the location points. The data is visualized based on the attribute, 'positive', 'negative', or 'no rating' (based on citizens' sentiments), and geographically delimited to Ålum. A single map was produced illustrating the accessible location points and their ratings, see Figure 3.3.
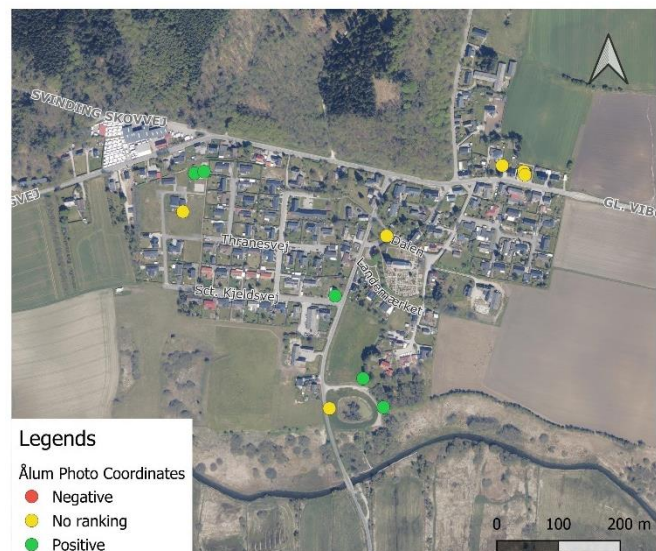
The images, descriptions, project proposals, and maps were shared with Randers Municipality in accordance with the citizens' consent to contribute to the work in the area renewal and participation process.

Strengths and Limitations

Garcia et al. (2016) emphasize in their work on app usage in qualitative research, that using smartphones and apps comes with both strengths and limitations. In their work, they describe that the usage of apps in research has benefits in being mobile, however, it has an excluding nature when it comes to participant demographics (García et al., 2016). In the same way, Snapshot Ålum og Omegn also has its advantages and limitations which are important to consider as they influence the quality and amount of data:

Advantages:

- *Flexibility:* As mentioned above, this app provided flexibility to the participants, as they could use it on the go. As such, it was not necessary to make arrangements for physical meetings with participants to gather information.
- *New app:* Developing a new app offered design choices and opportunities to create the app specifically to the target group of Ålum and Omegn. The opportunity to make decisions on design and activities within the app impacted the type and quality of data.
- *Easy storage and management:* Making use of Firebase as an online storage provider made it easy to store and systemize (potentially large) sets of data.
- *Access and insights to participants everyday life + simultaneous evaluation of method:* In addition to citizens' everyday knowledge of their local environment (photovoice exercise), they could also provide their sentiments on the app as a participatory method (questionnaire). Hence, the app provided the opportunity to conduct a participatory method in action, while evaluating its potentials and limitations.
- *Relevance to area renewal*: Information within the app relevant to the area renewal could be shared with Randers Municipality (only with user-consent). This relevance made more participants willing to participate as it could influence their local environment.

Limitations:

- *Time:* The app design, app development, legal considerations on data protection management, preparation of consent declaration, app testing, uploading and approval, and guidance in app usage was very time consuming for the research process.
- *Data protection management (GDPR) and consent declaration:* As the app includes pictures, considerations on GDPR and consent was needed. It was difficult and time consuming to obtain the needed information and guidance.
- *Technical limitations:* Despite many trials, it was not possible to extract locational data from Android devices. Furthermore, the app did not include any push notifications, which potentially could have increased the amount of data.
- *Low participation rate - Exclusion:* The app may have excluded some citizens in the usage, as the app necessitated a smartphone or tablet. Even with guidance description, a video, and my visit to Ålum to inform of the app, some may not have had the interest or the technical skills to participate. As the promotion of the app was mostly done on Facebook, citizens who are not active on Facebook, may not have had any knowledge of the app. Furthermore, the visit to Ålum to guide participants was done on a weekly social gathering during a weekday in the daytime. Although the visit was during a local holiday, the timing may very well have excluded some potential participants.

Personal Data, GDPR and Consent

When utilizing an app in which citizens submit pictures of their local neighborhood, as well as other personal data, considerations must be made in terms of data protection, legal obligations, consent, and processing personal data, for which the EU GDPR rules apply (Legal Desk, 2022). Furthermore, ethical considerations must also be included, which are elaborated in Subsection 3.3.5. As the app

has raised the need for many new considerations, specifically in relation to collection and sharing of photos, this subsection mostly includes considerations in relation to photos and personal data within the app. I have followed university- and public guidance and information about legal obligations and understanding my roles and responsibilities. However, it is important to notice, that these considerations on collecting and processing personal information naturally entail all data collection methods within this study such as observations, documents, records as well as information about interviewees.

Processing Personal Data

According to The Danish Data Protection Agency (DDPA) [Datatilsynet], personal data is "*any kind of information that can be related to an identifiable person*" (The Danish Data Protection Agency, n.d.-a). Personal data in relation to this app include year of birth and contact information, but can also include pictures and written descriptions as well as answers to questions in the app - all depending on their content (The Danish Data Protection Agency, n.d.-a).

The concept of *processing* personal data is broadly defined and can be understood to be any activity conducted with personal data (GDPR.DK, n.d.; The Danish Data Protection Agency, n.d.-c). For this purpose, the processing of personal data includes collection, registration, storage, organization, and sharing of data with Randers Municipality. Moreover, if app-users complain or retrieve their consent, this requires altering or deleting personal data. As the mentioned activities take place in relation to personal data, data protection rules must be obliged, and several obligations follow (The Danish Data Protection Agency, n.d.-c).

Consent

In order to process personal data, a legal basis is required, which can be obtained in a number of ways. For this purpose, legal basis was obtained through a consent agreement (The Danish Data Protection Agency, n.d.-b). The consent agreement for this app was made from a universal template published by AAU, with inputs from a published guidance from Datatilsynet on valid consent agreements as well as by the Data Protection Officer (DPO) at Randers Municipality. As the data would be beneficial in the collaboration with Randers Municipality on the area renewal, app users were also asked to consent to a disclosure of their personal data to Randers Municipality. The consent declaration provided the data subjects with details of the data being collected and processed and information of how the data was relevant and used within this study and in relation to the area renewal if shared with Randers Municipality. Furthermore, the consent declaration included information on the subjects' rights such as how they could reclaim consent (The Danish Data Protection Agency, 2021). Overall, the consent declaration had the purpose of providing me with the legal basis for handling submitted data while providing full transparency to data subjects.

3.3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethics in research is described by Farthing (2016, p. 179) as being about: "*the basis, the values, on which decisions are made about the courses of action to adopt in any piece of research. They are moral decisions about the right and wrong things to do in any situation.*" As such, ethical decisions can

be said to be present in all stages and elements of the research in which decisions are made from problem framing, asking questions, making assumptions, as well as how data is gathered, analyzed, and presented.

Danermark et al. (2005, p. 24) describe social sciences as a "*practical social activity*". Within social sciences, the authors highlight that the researcher's inquiry leads to an interaction with the studied setting (Danermark et al., 2005). In this chapter, reflections and considerations have been made about my roles and the level at which I influence the objects of my research. Not only could my double role as researcher and student helper influence data gathering and analysis meaning considerations regarding reliability and credibility – but I have considered, how my double role could cause participants to be uncomfortable expressing their opinions. To mitigate such unpleasantries, I have attempted to be candid and overt in my approach and chosen to articulate my roles in a way that would make sense to participants in the given situation such as in the beginning of an interview.

In relation to data generation, considerations have been made which are in alignment with recommendations by Farthing (2016, p. 187), who emphasize transparency towards participants in relation to "*purpose, methods, and intended use of the research*". Within the study, participants remained anonymous and participated voluntarily. Also, considerations have been made regarding collecting and processing, especially personal data (Farthing, 2016).

Ethical considerations were made in relation to the app Snapshot Ålum og Omegn, in which attention was given to transparency and consent for app users. In addition to fulfilling legal obligations, requiring consent and being transparent on the app's purpose, how information was used, and role for the area renewal and thereby Randers Municipality, was meant to make use of the app a safe experience for participants. As such, information about the app and the meaning of consent was always accessible in-app. It was clear that app users participated anonymously and were in full control of their consent and uploaded information. To limit the risk of inappropriate pictures, the app contained guidance on 'responsible photography', emphasizing that recognizable pictures of people, especially minors, and private property should be avoided. In the consent declaration it was made clear that no recognizable pictures of people would be shared with Randers Municipality or in this report.

3.4 Research Design

The structure of this thesis is illustrated in Figure 3.4 which includes the data gathering methods used to reach a conclusion to the research question of how inclusive and engaging public participation processes can be shaped in rural villages facing shrinkage. The initial problem framing emerged from reviewing relevant literature and official and municipal planning- and participation guidelines as well as conducting inquiries in the real world through an established collaboration with Randers Municipality planning department. It became clear that public participation often attracts active citizens, risking the exclusion of other knowledge and perspectives (Agger & Larsen, 2009; Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing, 2016; Sehested & Lund, 2012). Furthermore, literature on planning participation often does not include how to engage and motivate citizens to participation. As such, a conceptualization of public participation within planning for Danish rural areas was developed, identifying five key components: legislation, municipal practices, the individual planner,

participatory methods, and civil society. The components each – and in conjunction – play a role in public participation and, as such, exploring influence could identify how inclusive and engaging planning participation can be shaped in villages. With this focus as the research question, three following sub-questions were formulated relating respectively towards the chapters of the theoretical framework, analysis, and discussion.

Building on the key components from the problem framing, the theoretical framework delves deeper into how the five components influence, enable, and constrain inclusive and engaging participation which includes barriers impeding participation. The chapter concludes with an overview of the five components' influence and barriers in participation, leading to the analysis. In the analysis, the five components are explored within the case study of the area renewal in Ålum and Omegn. Furthermore, the analysis explores the planning- and participation process at the start-up of the area renewal, including how the five components influence participation. The chapter concludes with an empirical overview of how the five components have influenced, enabled, and constrained inclusive and engaging participation from the case study. The discussion reviews the empirical findings in relation to the literature. The focus is on the main identified barriers for participation from the analysis, and the key learnings for how these barriers can be lowered in participation during rural planning. By identifying how components of participation influence inclusive and engaging participation in both literature and within an empirical context, including identifying barriers and focusing on how these can be lowered, the three sub-questions lead to the conclusion of the research question.

Figure 3.4: Illustration of research design

Problem framing

In the context of rural planning to mitigate challenges of shrinkage, the role of citizens is emphasized. Public participation in terms of local knowledge consultancy, collaboration, dialogue, local anchoring, and ownership is deemed to ensure success and lasting results. However rural planning practice relies heaventely on active citizens risking exclusion of other community groups. Existing literature on public participation seem to have an enhanced focus on the benefits and significance of public engagement rather than focusing on how to engage the public. Attention to is needed onto how to ensure broad and inclusive participation by focusing on five key components' influence on public participation.

Methods

Literature review and field work: Observations, interviews, and document analysis

Research Question

How can inclusive and engaging public participation processes be shaped in rural villages facing shrinkage?

Sub-Question 1

How do the five components - Legislation, Municipal practice, Individual Planner, Participatory Methods, and Civil Society - influence public participation, and what barriers impede inclusive and engaging participation?

Theoretical Framework

Definition and purposes of public participation

Evolution of planning participation with attention to collaborative and communicative planning theory.

How the five components influence - enable and constrain - inclusive and engaging participation.

Table overview over findings in literature.

Methods

Literature review

Sub-Question 2

How do the five components influence inclusive and engaging public participation in Ålum and Omegn, and why is public participation significant in the area renewal planning?

Analysis

Case Description of Ålum and Omegn

Planning context leading to the area renewal

How the five components, influence, enable and constrain inclusive and engaging participation in Ålum and Omegn

Table overview over empirical findings

Methods

Case Study of Randers Municipality and Ålum

Autoethnographic approach

Observations
Interviews, informal conversations, and meetings
App (survey)
Document analysis

Sub-Question 3

How can barriers to engaging and inclusive participation in villages be lowered?

Discussion

Underlying Bias Towards Active Citizens

Outreach and Communication to Citizens

Societal Structures and Individual Exclusion

The Role of Methods

Long Term Inclusive and Engaging Participation

The Added Value of Participation

Discussion of empirical findings in relation to the literature and reflecting on key learnings

Conclusion

4 Analysis

This chapter entails the results of the empirical findings, and aims to answer the following sub-question: *How do the five components influence inclusive and engaging public participation in Ålum and Omegn, and why is public participation significant in the area renewal planning?*

To address the sub-question, the analysis is divided into four Sections. The first Section 4.1 provides the case description of Ålum and Omegn, including a description of the area's advantages, potentials, and challenges that made Ålum and Omegn relevant for area renewal.

The following Section 4.2 outlines the planning processes that have led to the current area renewal process in Ålum and Omegn, which began in autumn 2023. Specifically, this section examines how the planning administration conducted strategic planning for villages that resulted in the selection of Ålum and Omegn - among other villages - for area renewal.

The third Section 4.3 explores how the five components - legislation, municipal practice, the individual planner, participatory methods, and civil society - influence, enable, and constrain inclusive and engaging participation. The findings are based on the gathered data, as described in Chapter 3, and include documents, conversations, and interviews with citizens and planners, as well as my experiences and observations, both as observer and as part of the planning team during the thesis period.

Finally, the fourth and final Section 4.4 concludes the chapter by highlighting the main conclusions and continues the framework from Chapter 2, highlighting how the five components influence participation from an in-depth case perspective.

4.1 Case Description: Ålum and Omegn

Located in Randers Municipality, Ålum and Omegn is a village community, locally recognized for its scenic natural surroundings, local history, and strong community spirit (Appendix F, 2024, (Field Note D)). Ålum and Omegn encompasses six villages in total with Ålum as the 'main' village and five smaller surrounding villages: Nr. Ålum, Venning, Svinding, Gjandrup, and Volstrup (Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022). The village community has an estimated population of about 600 inhabitants, of which about approximately 272 inhabitants (as of 2024) reside in Ålum (Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022; Statistics Denmark, 2024a). Here, Ålum often functions as a meeting place for the locals and is also the attention point for most of the area renewal work.

4.1.1 Nature and Recreative Potentials

Placed in a hilly landscape surrounded by forests, a stream (Nørreå), and the nearby Fussing Lake (Fussing Sø), the village area provides multiple local recreative possibilities. Here, both locals and visitors enjoy nature and outdoor activities, such as hiking, mountain biking, camping in shelters, and water-related activities. These activities have potential to increase tourism (Appendix F, 2024, (Field Note D); Randers Municipality, 2021d; Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022).

An example of recreative implementation is the local shelter site called Brostedet, see Figure 4.1, which is located on both sides of the Nørreå stream, featuring shelters, benches, a fire pit, and a kayak launch site, making it a popular recreational destination frequently utilized by locals for walks, overnight stays, and as a meeting point for young people during summer months (Randers Municipality, n.d.-a; Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022). According to Randers Municipality, there is significant synergy potential for the area in connection with surrounding natural recreational opportunities, such as Fussing Lake, which made Ålum and Omegn relevant for area renewal (Appendix F, 2024, (Field Note D); Randers Municipality, 2021a).

Figure 4.1: "Brostedet" a multi-funtional recreational site in the outskirts of Ålum (Private photo, 2023)

For the younger residents, Ålum also has a large playground, which active members of the residents' association have developed by seeking funding from various foundations (Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024). During fieldwork observations and interviews, the value of the surrounding nature was often emphasized by locals. A survey conducted by Randers Municipality in spring 2020, gathering citizen information about life in rural areas and villages, found that inhabitants in Ålum generally considered the surrounding nature and the accessibility to nature as one of the most positive aspects of Ålum and a reason for settlement (Appendix F, 2024, (Field Note D); Randers Municipality, 2020a).

4.1.2 Community Strength and Activities

The social life and community spirit are vital for the residents of Ålum and Omegn. Through a wide range of social activities and volunteer work, the residents seek to embrace the needs and interests across generations. The citizens mainly organize through the residents' association known as [Ålum og Omegns Beboerforening]. Internal communication and organization are facilitated through the residents' association, social media, and Ålum's own website (www.aalum.dk) (Appendix F, 2024, (Field Note C, D); Resident Association of Ålum and Omegn, n.d.-b).

The recently renovated community hall serves as an epicenter for activities and events. Examples of social initiatives include 'Our City Hall' [Vores Rådhus], the youth club [Klub'n], and training and yoga sessions. After the closure of the local grocery store, residents expressed missing a meeting place. This led to the formation of the weekly social event 'Our City Hall' in the community hall (see Figure 4.2), with an open invitation to join for coffee, homemade baking, and catching up with each other (Appendix F (Field Note C, D), 2024; Resident Association of Ålum and Omegn, n.d.-a). Since the meetings are arranged during weekday mornings, the gatherings mostly attract pensioners. Many of these social activities and other functions are organized and driven by volunteers within the community. The commitment to volunteer work, shared responsibility, and the desire for engagement and social interaction are emphasized as strong forces of the community, and conversations with citizens show great appreciation and desire for the community (Appendix F, 2024, (Field Note D); Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024; Citizen C, 2024; Citizen D, 2024). When asked about their attendance

in social activities and involvement in the local community, Citizen C expressed:

"*I believe that we all have a feeling of having one big community. . . . So, many activities are happening, and I usually attend most of them because I think it's important to support them, but also because there are a lot of exciting things going on. . . . If something needs to happen, we can contribute and help, and we do so to the best of our ability. And I try to be a part of that too*" (Citizen C, 2024, 00:02:25, own translation).

Placed next to the characteristic red lime-washed church, four runestones dating back to the Viking Age mark Ålum and Omegn as a historical landmark. The area around the village community also holds traces of prehistoric activity, including areas with a higher concentration of burial mounds (Danish Heritage Association, n.d.; Randers Municipality, n.d.-b, 2021d). The historical consciousness and local pride are also apparent in the local community. Here, the community gathers to cherish shared memories, collect old local records and local artwork, and celebrate milestones such as the city hall's 100th year anniversary, as well as

Table 2Figure 4.2: The community hall welcomes residents to the weekly 'Vores Rådhus' (Appendix H, 2024 (Participant 4))

establish new traditions and embrace change (Appendix F (Field Note D), 2024; Randers Municipality, 2023a; Resident Association of Ålum and Omegn, 2023).

4.1.3 Rural Challenges

While Ålum and Omegn holds place-based advantages, the area also faces challenges. A municipal analysis of village conditions conducted in 2020, based on demographic and geographic data and a citizen survey, concluded that Ålum and Omegn was faced with a multitude of challenges. The demographic analysis found population decline in the period 2014-2018 and a population projection for 2021-2031 at zero, meaning no expected population growth. Furthermore, the age distribution indicates that the area is inhabited by an aging population (Randers Municipality, 2021c, 2021d). For Ålum alone, the age distribution shows that more than 26 % of inhabitants are over the age of 65 (Statistics Denmark, 2024a).

Another challenge highlighted by both planners and citizens is the lack of public services and functions, including school, daycare, and the closure of the local grocery store in 2015 (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D); Citizen B, 2024; Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022). This necessitates citizens to be mobile in their everyday lives, such as taking the car to buy groceries. Buses, both the public and the school bus, make stops in Ålum. However, during citizen conversations, elderly citizens expressed worry about isolation if the bus services are to disappear in the future. In conversation with a group of women living in Ålum, one expressed understanding for why especially young people opt out of Ålum and choose to settle in other cities with services and proximity to, for example, Randers (Appendix F, 2024, (Field Note D)).
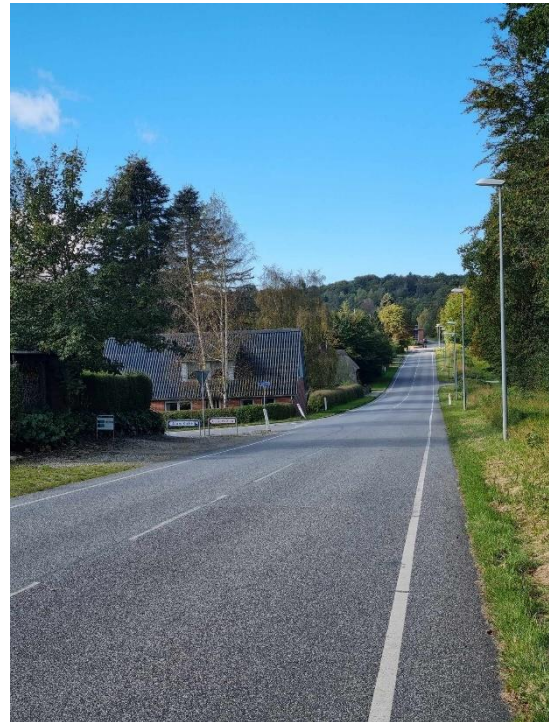
Both Randers Municipality and citizens of Ålum and Omegn emphasize challenges in relation to traffic affecting everyday life, with attention mostly centered on Ålum. In their development plan, citizens have expressed a wish for a bike path between Ålum and the nearby village Tånum, and municipal traffic monitoring concluded excessive speeding through the village (Appendix F, 2024; Citizen B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2020a, 2021d). During conversations, citizens expressed concerns over traffic safety, especially regarding cyclists and children playing in the streets, and worry that the lack of traffic safety could result in people opting out of settling in Ålum. The recognized challenges and need for traffic adjustments regarding speed were one of the reasons for the planning department to propose area renewal in Ålum and Omegn (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D); Citizen B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2020a, 2021d)

Figure 4.3: The main road through Ålum is characterized by excessive speeding and growing concern about traffic safety (Own Photo, 2023).

In the development plan, citizens also express a desire for diverse housing options in Ålum, which includes housing for elderly citizens as they do not wish to move away from Ålum and Omegn:

"*A greater supply [of housing options] would enable residents who no longer have the capacity to maintain a large house and garden to move into another residence while retaining their existing social networks. This is important for their quality of life and sense of security*" (Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022, p. 16)

In addition to the desire for diverse housing, citizens express the hope that available parcel houses can attract young families (Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022).

Section Summary

This section examines the case area of Ålum and Omegn, highlighting both local strengths, potentials, and challenges that led to its selection for area renewal. The case area is known for its natural beauty, recreational opportunities, and a strong village community spirit, including social activities and cohesion. Despite these advantages, Ålum and Omegn faces shrinkage related challenges, such as population decline, an aging demographic, and a lack of public services. In the context of area renewal, the area's traffic safety issues and recreational synergy potential have influenced been factors influencing the area renewal selection (Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021a, 2021c; Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022).
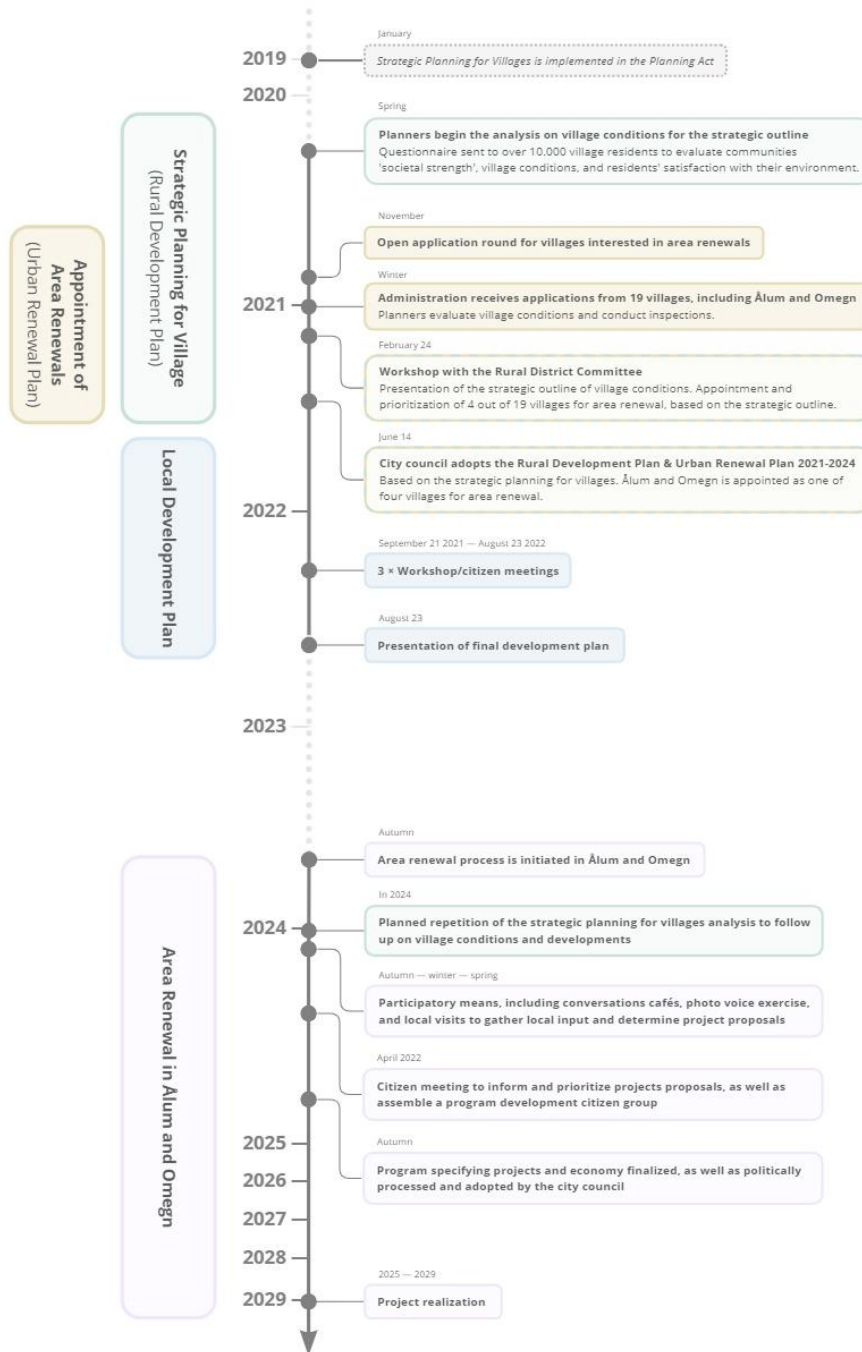
4.2 Planning Context

In 2021, Ålum and Omegn was among four villages appointed for an area renewal in Randers Municipality. The area renewal process in Ålum and Omegn had its start-up in autumn 2023, and this planning process is the main focus of this study.

To provide context for the area renewal in Ålum and Omegn, this section examines the preliminary planning process that led to the selection of area renewal in Ålum and Omegn. This process includes the municipal strategic planning for villages, which provided planners and politicians in Randers Municipality with knowledge about the conditions of villages, including Ålum and Omegn. Furthermore, the section brings insights into area renewals as a planning initiative and explains how Ålum and Omegn was selected. The section concludes by briefly exploring the development plan for Ålum and Omegn. This process took place prior to the area renewal and was useful for identifying projects further on in the area renewal process.

In summary, this section highlights three key processes: The strategic planning for villages, the selection of area renewals, including Ålum and Omegn, and the development plan process. The timeline in Figure 4.4 provides an overview of these processes, along with the area renewal in Ålum and Omegn, which began in autumn 2023.

Figure 4.4: Timeline illustrating the planning processes leading to the area renewal in Ålum and Omegn (Appendix F, 2024; Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021d, 2021c, 2023a, 2020b, 2021e, 2022; Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022; Randers Municipality Council, 2021; Randers Municipality Rural District Committee, 2021).

Timeline illustrating the strategic planning for villages, appointment of area renewals, and planning processes for Ålum and Omegn

Strategic Planning for Village (Rural Development Plan)

Appointment of Area Renewals (Urban Renewal Plan)

Local Development Plan

Area Renewal in Ålum and Omegn

2019

January
Strategic Planning for Villages is implemented in the Planning Act

2020

Spring
Planners begin the analysis on village conditions for the strategic outline
Questionnaire sent to over 10.000 village residents to evaluate communities 'societal strength', village conditions, and residents' satisfaction with their environment.

November
Open application round for villages interested in area renewals

2021

Winter
Administration receives applications from 19 villages, including Ålum and Omegn
Planners evaluate village conditions and conduct inspections.

February 24
Workshop with the Rural District Committee
Presentation of the strategic outline of village conditions. Appointment and prioritization of 4 out of 19 villages for area renewal, based on the strategic outline.

June 14
City council adopts the Rural Development Plan & Urban Renewal Plan 2021-2024
Based on the strategic planning for villages. Ålum and Omegn is appointed as one of four villages for area renewal.

2022

September 21 2021 — August 23 2022
3 × Workshop/citizen meetings

August 23
Presentation of final development plan

2023

Autumn
Area renewal process is initiated in Ålum and Omegn

In 2024
Planned repetition of the strategic planning for villages analysis to follow up on village conditions and developments

2024

Autumn — winter — spring
Participatory means, including conversations cafés, photo voice exercise, and local visits to gather local input and determine project proposals

April 2022
Citizen meeting to inform and prioritize projects proposals, as well as assemble a program development citizen group

2025

Autumn
Program specifying projects and economy finalized, as well as politically processed and adopted by the city council

2026

2027

2028

2029

2025 — 2029
Project realization

4.2.1 Strategic Planning for Villages

While the case study focuses on the area renewal in Ålum and Omegn, the background knowledge about Ålum and Omegn influencing the area renewal, comes from the demographic, geographic, and social analysis conducted by planners during the strategic planning for villages in 2020-2021 (Randers Municipality Council, 2021). This means that Randers Municipality's planning for villages, such as area renewals, is related to the strategic planning for villages. As such, we begin by looking into the strategic planning for villages.

Legislation and Approach

The implementation in 2019 of Strategic Planning for Villages in the Planning Act is a political effort to mitigate urban-rural distortion and symptoms of rural shrinkage by promoting rural development and village viability (Authority of Housing and Planning, 2021; Committee for Viable Villages, 2018).

The definition of viability is also not clearly defined but based on a set of indicators focusing on attractive settlement:

> "*If it [the village], alone or in interaction with other villages or larger towns can offer residents contemporary housing in various forms, access to employment, opportunities for establishing businesses, social cohesion, proximity to public and private services, sports and leisure activities, as well as traffic and digital infrastructure to an extent that does not pose a barrier to attracting and retaining new residents*" (Committee for Viable Villages, 2018, p. 7, own translation).

Here, municipalities assess the number of indicators and their extend as well as other significant conditions to consider viability (Committee for Viable Villages, 2018; Randers Municipality, 2021b).

Here, the change in legislation requires municipal planning to include coherent considerations on village development and viability, as well as outline overarching guidelines and objectives for the development of rural areas. Guided by the chosen set of objectives for village development, municipalities are to assess and prioritize areas that will benefit from differentiated development and planning initiatives, such as area renewals. The legislation grants municipalities autonomy to tailor the extent of the strategic planning of villages and analytical framework to fit their specific municipal context and previous rural planning efforts. While there is an overall encouragement and expectation of public participation within national planning guidelines for the strategic planning for villages, the municipal planning autonomy also extends to the level of public participation (Authority of Housing and Planning, 2021; Realdania, 2020; Retsinformation, 2020a).

To assist municipalities, the philanthropic association Realdania, has published a five-step approach for analysis and strategic planning of rural areas and villages:

1. Collect and map geographic and demographic information revealing zones with patterns of similarities, potentials, strengths, and challenges.
2. Collect information on social strengths and challenges within the local community, including assessing the level of the so-called 'civil societal strength'. This step considers local social strength, the potential for community participation, and local capacity to drive future village development.
3. Gathers the aforementioned data and categorize villages into groups based on shared characteristics.

4. Set overall and coherent objectives, partial goals and identifying development initiatives for the municipal rural planning. Afterwards municipals can identify concrete planning and development tools for use in chosen villages, such as area renewal which will be elaborated in the next subsection (Realdania, 2020).
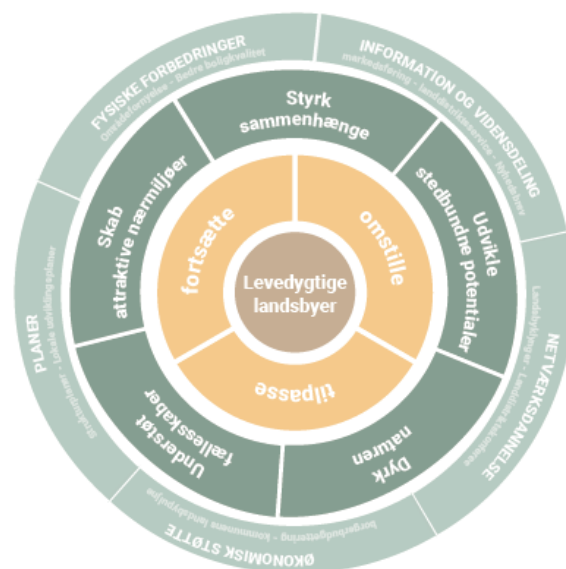
The Realdania guideline also emphasizes the involvement of local actors as crucial for obtaining local knowledge, ensuring plan quality, and for how the plans will be received by the local community. The civil societal strength (step two) within each community is decisive in how municipalities design their participation strategy for each village, such as participatory methods, and in determining the role and level of public involvement (Realdania, 2020). As municipalities have autonomy and flexibility to tailor their analytical framework and strategic planning to their specific municipal context, the level of public participation can vary and may be limited. The approach taken by planners in Randers Municipality regarding village participation based on this analysis will be further highlighted in Subsection 4.3.2 and 4.3.3.

Randers Municipality

As a result of the change in the Planning Act, Randers Municipality initiated the strategic planning for villages in 2020 (see Figure 4.4). Inspired by the Realdania method, planners gathered demographic and geographic information, as well as information on civil society communities and capabilities, which provided an overview of on village strengths, challenges, and potentials. In addition to the demographic and geographic analysis, information was also based on a questionnaire send out to more than 10,000 citizens who live in rural and village areas. All this information was gathered in a strategic outline and were used to create an overview over municipal village conditions and to assess which villages should be appointed for the new round of area renewals in 2021-2024 (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note B); Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021c, 2020b, 2021e; Randers Municipality Council, 2021)

Figure 4.5: Viable villages are positioned at the core of the strategy framework, surrounded by various approaches and planning tools such as area renewals (Randers Municipality, 2021b)

The 2021 adopted municipal strategic planning for villages introduced a framework (see Figure 4.5) that illustrates and identifies differentiated development approaches for village viability. The framework in Figure 4.5 is based on the rationale that villages differ in terms of population, development, challenges, and potentials, which influence the needed approach and planning initiative such as an area renewal (Randers Municipality, 2021b, 2020b, 2022). Planner B (2024) elaborates that with the knowledge from the strategic outline in mind, working on the circular framework from the inside-out can help identify needed objectives, approaches, and specific planning initiatives to obtain viability in areas such as Ålum and Omegn. To follow and evaluate village development, the analysis for the strategic planning for villages is to be repeated in 2024 (Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021e).

4.2.2 Area Renewal

Area renewal is an example of a temporary planning initiative with the purpose to "*strengthen or initiate a development and transformation process to make the area attractive for settlement and investment*" (Ministry of Immigration, 2016, p. 88, own translation). Regulations state that urban areas or villages appointed for area renewals must show "*a multitude of significant issues*" and "*a substantial need for urban development*" (Retsinformation, 2020b, own translation) As such, area renewals can function as a planning tool in urban areas as well as villages affected by shrinkage-related challenges, such as population decline and physical detoriation.

Within the strategic planning for villages in Randers Municipality, area renewals are part of several means for village development and contribute to holistic improvement and viability of villages. In area renewals, civil society plays a significant role, which is highlighted by official guidelines and Randers Municipality's approach emphasizing the importance of involvement, collaboration, and local anchoring within the community are premises for the success of area renewal (Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing, 2016; Randers Municipality, 2021b, 2021d, 2020b).

During the same period as the work on strategic planning for villages, Randers Municipality council and the planning administration initiated a new round of area renewal selection for the 2021-2024 period (see timeline on Figure 4.4). The open application process for villages applying for area renewal resulted in 19 applications in total, including Ålum and Omegn. Planners utilized knowledge and analysis from the strategic outline to assess the conditions, challenges, potentials, and needs of the villages for urban renewal (Randers Municipality, 2021c, 2020b, 2021e, 2022; Randers Municipality Council, 2021). Notably, the planning team identified traffic issues and demographic challenges in Ålum og Omegn as significant issues (Appendix F, 2024; Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021a; Randers Municipality Rural District Committee, 2021). Planner B (2024) also commented on the lack of public service functions, such as the closure of the local grocery store.

In addition to addressing a multitude of issues, the area renewal regulation emphasizes the necessity of place-based resources (Retsinformation, 2020b). This includes highlighting the societal strength of the village community and potential synergies with surrounding natural and recreational areas (Randers Municipality, 2021a; Randers Municipality Rural District Committee, 2021). The information was presented to local politicians who appointed villages for area renewal, leading to the finalization and adoption of the Urban Renewal Plan 2021-2024 in summer 2021 (Randers Municipality, 2021a, 2021e, 2022; Randers Municipality Council, 2021; Randers Municipality Rural District Committee, 2021). An overview of this process is visualized on the timeline in Figure 4.4.

The area renewal covered in this case is still in an early stage of the process, focusing on identifying needs, challenges, and projects for the program, based on the participation process and the development plan described briefly below. The timeline in Figure 4.4 illustrates the planning process.

4.2.3 Development Plan

Prior to the area renewal process, Randers Municipality and active citizens in Ålum and Omegn initiated a local development plan process in 2021 and presented the finalized development plan almost a year later in august 2022 (Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022). The purpose of the development plan was for the citizens to voice, identify, and organize their joint visions, objectives, and ideas for the area. These inputs have been useful for identifying projects in the later area renewal process (Appendix F, 2024; Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2022). Furthermore, the development plan also had practical reasons. As four villages had been appointed for area renewal between 2021 and 2024, some villages had to wait. As such, Planner B explains that a development plan at the start of the planning process could free up release resources from the planning team while activating citizens in Ålum and Omegn (Planner B, 2024).

As illustrated on the timeline in Figure 4.4, the development plan process involved multiple citizen workshops. Citizen working groups identified project ideas relevant and necessary for the area's development and improvement, which were then elaborated and incorporated into the finalized development plan (Appendix F, 2024; Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022).

Section Summary

This section looked into the preliminary planning processes that led to the area renewal in Ålum and Omegn, starting with the strategic planning for villages. Based on an implementation in the Planning Act, strategic planning for villages promotes rural development and village viability. This planning for villages allows municipal autonomy to tailor their analysis and planning approaches to their specific municipal context, including existing planning practices and traditions for rural and village planning. While public participation is encouraged, the flexibility within strategic planning also extends to participation. In a critical view, the involvement and participation of citizens in strategic planning for villages may be limited depending on municipal practices, prioritization, and available resources (Authority of Housing and Planning, 2021; Realdania, 2020).

The section also touched upon area renewals and how villages, including Ålum and Omegn, were selected based on knowledge from the strategic planning for villages. The selection of Ålum and Omegn was based on challenges, such as population decline and traffic issues, as well as potentials such as community strengths and potential synergies with surrounding natural and recreational areas (Randers Municipality, 2021a, 2020b; Randers Municipality Rural District Committee, 2021). Lastly, the section touched upon how the local development plan process was initiated to gather citizen input, visions, and identify project ideas to support the area renewal process. This process entailed multiple citizen workshops and meetings (Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022).

4.3 The Five Components in Area Renewal in Ålum and Omegn

This section looks into the five components: legislation, municipal practice, the individual planner, participatory methods, and civil society, and how they influence, enable and impede inclusive and engaging participation within the case area. Furthermore, the section looks into the second part of the

sub-question regarding why public engagement is needed in declining villages.

4.3.1 Legislation

The legislation establishes the framework for planning that municipalities must follow. The regulations on area renewals, including village renewal (mentioned in subsection 4.2.2), are found within the Law on Urban Renewal (Byfornyelsesloven), where area renewal functions as one of several planning tools for development and optimization of areas facing challenges (Authority of Housing and Planning, 2021; Retsinformation, 2020b, 2020a). Regarding public participation, the legislation on area renewals requires "*binding collaboration*" with affected actors (Retsinformation, 2020a). National guidelines for municipalities on area renewal suggest that municipalities consider the organization of collaboration, including which actors to involve, their role, and their influence (Retsinformation, 2020b). However, the municipalities have autonomy to organize collaboration and to set the level of involvement: "*There are, however, no requirements for how the collaboration is organized, as this will depend on the characteristics of the area and the municipality's tradition for cooperation*" (Retsinformation, 2020b).

In relation to Ålum and Omegn, the participation process is oriented towards the citizens through the resident association as a collaborative partner. This is expressed through knowledge sharing, communication, and meetings with the leaders of the association, who convey information to citizens via social media and newsletters (Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024).

When asked how planners view this open legislation in relation to their planning practice, Planner B explained:

> "*I see it as something that can be a disadvantage. And can be an advantage. It depends... there are many ways to do area renewal as well. . . . So I definitely don't think that citizen involvement should necessarily be approached in the same way - in the city, when doing area renewal there, and in the village, when doing area renewal there. The legislation should be able to accommodate both*" (Planner B, 2024, part 2, 00:22, own translation).

Planner B elaborates further by stressing that making requirements to the level of participation may result in public participation being considered merely as a legal checkbox meeting demands, without genuinely assessing the exact need for participation:

> "*If you were to establish a requirement that four meetings must be held, there would be a strong tendency for many to just hold those four meetings and then sort of check off, saying 'we've done it', regardless of whether we actually needed four or if we needed ten. . . . I think there are some advantages and disadvantages to it [open legislation], but if I had to choose, I think it's right that it's open, because the benefits of it are greater than the disadvantages*" (Planner B, 2024, part 2, 00:24, own translation).

Planner B also highlights that the location of the area renewal is not the only factor that benefits from the openness of the legislation. The various planning projects also affect the level and approach of participation. For example, a larger involvement process with workgroups, work weekends, and celebration and unveilings events may seem out of place in a technical project, such as traffic and rainwater management, but could be the correct participation strategy in another type of project (Planner B, 2024).

Planners C and D agree that public involvement is context-dependent, for which the legislation

provides flexibility. Planner D elaborates that this flexibility can be beneficial when resources such as time are limited: "*It may be an advantage if one doesn't have the time that is needed. . . . But on the other hand, if there were a fixed framework to do it within, then one couldn't force it*" (Planner D, 2024, 00:49, own translation).

Subsection Summary

Public participation in area renewals, as one of the most significant elements in official planning practice guidelines, seems to be left as a municipal responsibility without a fixed legal model or framework for its scope and depth. This less formalized yet important and decisive element of planning success seems to be based on local conditions, resources, municipal planning practices and priorities, as well as the competences, reflections, and power distribution of the individual planner.

While the literature on participation legislation often takes a critical stance towards open and interpretative legislation as a possible constraint on public participation (Innes & Booher, 2004), the interviewed planners highlight its positive aspects. They emphasize that open legislation offers flexibility to the specific planning context, granting autonomy to plan the participation process as they deem necessary and with whom. Interestingly, while the literature warns of the risk of participation becoming a checkbox to meet legal requirements (Innes & Booher, 2004), Planner B (2024) argues the opposite. She argues that fixed requirements would lead to a more checkbox-oriented approach, in which planners prioritize meeting the required standards without evaluating what they deem necessary in the given context.

However, Planner D (2024) remarks that a fixed framework could inhibit planning practices that allow for implementing the participation process, risking the quality of public engagement and participation. A fixed legal framework could enable more inclusive and engaging participation by ensuring that the lack of resources cannot be hidden behind flexibility.

4.3.2 Municipal Practice

This subsection looks into Randers Municipality's participation practices regarding area renewal and how they influence engaging and inclusive citizen participation. The subsection highlights the municipality's emphasis on collaboration and local anchoring in participation, recognizing that village communities need tailored approaches to match their differences. Additionally, the role of active communities and citizens in participation is explored along with how allocated resources align with political ambitions for participation.

Local anchoring

Planner B (2024) explains that municipal participation practices take multiple forms depending on the purpose of participation and include informing, hearings, and citizen meetings to equal co-production and citizen-led projects (Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024).

The aim of participation in area renewals is to legitimatize and ensure that projects are anchored within the community. This fosters ownership and ensures project continuity when the area renewal process is completed, where citizens often play an active role (Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024). The emphasis on citizen participation and collaboration is based on the municipality recognizing that local

rural development often is driven by local actors and citizens:

> "*In rural areas, citizen engagement is important for development, as local development is often driven by local strengths. Therefore, Randers Municipality carries out area renewals in collaboration with citizens and local stakeholders, to create anchoring and support social cohesion*" (Randers Municipality, 2021b, p. 3, own translation)

As such, public involvement and collaboration between municipality and local community in area renewals are considered crucial for ensuring quality and lasting results. (Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021b, 2020b).

A common recognition exists of how villages, including their residents, are diverse. For example, Ålum and Omegn, with active citizens and a strong residents' association, have a tradition for managing citizen-led projects, while other villages may not initiate projects on their own. As such, national guidelines and planners in Randers Municipality emphasize that village planning and participatory approaches need to be tailored to the specific context to promote local anchoring and lasting results (Authority of Housing and Planning, 2021; Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021b; Realdania, 2020).

A Tailored Approach

To understand village context, Randers Municipality utilizes knowledge obtained through the Realdania approach to village analysis, as mentioned in Subsection 4.2.1. This tool, known as 'civil societal strength', evaluates social activity, community capacity, and guides the participation process. Based on the analyses, villages are categorized from 'quiet' to 'very active' (see Figure 4.6), which influences participation approaches and methods as well as the respective roles of the community and the municipality (Randers Municipality, 2021b; Realdania, 2020). Active villages, such as Ålum and Omegn, are identified based on their community strength through the residents' association as well as the presence of active citizens (Randers Municipality, 2021b; Realdania, 2020)

Planner B (2024) explains that categorizing villages provides planners with an underlying understanding of the community. However, she emphasizes that relying solely on analysis is insufficient and that planners must engage with the local community:

> "*When you are conducting a [participation]process in a place like Ålum,. . . I believe that when you go down to work with the individual village and the individual person, you should. . . consider whether the overall picture you have obtained from this method aligns with what you experience when you meet people*" (Planner B, 2024, part 1, 18:39, own translation)

When asked how planners use this knowledge about villages in their participation strategies, Planner B (2024) explains that her approaches differ between 'active' and 'quiet' villages. In active villages, information can be shared through local associations or social events with high attendance. In quieter villages, communication might occur through personal mail (E-boks) to ensure citizens receive information and are invited to participate. Furthermore, village diversity influences her expectations, requiring tailored involvement based on the types of citizens she meets:

"*In some of the communities where they have carried out many citizen-led projects on their own, I might focus on trying to develop their understanding of - when they are working on projects - how to create a good urban space? . . . whereas in a less active community, the success criterion will be that people have participated and they felt they were part of the process*" (Planner B, 2024, part 1, 24:25, own translation).

Planners are also to consider not to impose too heavy participation processes, tasks, and responsibilities on citizens, as this can

Figure 4.6: The societal strength categorizes village communities from 'quiet' to 'very active'. Based on community resources, roles and approaches are established between community and Randers Municipality (Randers Municipality, 2021b).

Civilsamfund	Civilsamfundets ressourcer	Kommunens rolle
Stille/mindre aktive	De lokale vil ofte være modtager og informant. Byer med lav civilsamfundsstyrke vil ofte ikke henvende sig uopfordret og får ikke igangsat projekter på egen hånd.	Kommunen kan med være initiativtager og projektejer. Kommunen kan gennemføre initiativer, men løbende informere og sikre at de lokale kvalificerer konkrete tiltag.
Aktive	De aktive samfund har et rigt foreningsliv. Der vil ofte være lokal ildsjæle der bidrager til udvikling af projekter.	Kommunen er uddelegerende og projektledende. Kommunens rolle vil være projektbaseret. Kommunen kan facilitere processer og udarbejde planer.
Meget aktive	De meget aktive samfund igangsætter initiativer og udviklingsprojekter på egen hånd. Projekterne udvikles selvstyrende eller i partnerskaber.	Kommunens faciliterende rolle er rådgivende. Det skal være tydeligt hvem lokalsamfundet kan henvende sig til.

discourage further participation and collaboration (Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021b). The approach in Ålum and Omegn was partly inspired by knowledge from the community strength analysis and the development plan, which indicated community strength, especially regarding the residents' association. Collaboration with the association and its active volunteers had significant value for participation and the planning process.

Orientation Towards Active Communities

While flexible and tailored approaches to participation is practiced within Randers Municipality, Planner B highlights that establishing local anchoring is easier in areas with already existing citizen initiative and engagement. The formality of the application process for area renewal, which active citizens in Ålum and Omegn completed, serves as an example of how the municipality ensures that some level of local engagement and resources exist within the applying villages (Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2020b).

Planner B (2024) acknowledges that this approach has the consequence that quiet communities may be excluded from the process and fail to apply or communicate their needs to the municipality. Such villages are therefore dependent on the recognition and outreach efforts of the municipality, e.g. in the form of a rural district coordinator who can function as a communicator between villages and municipality and assist with applications for area renewals and other planning initiatives.

Despite municipal support for quiet communities, being an active community with engaged citizens can be seen as an advantage from the municipal resource perspective. Planner B (2024) highlights that "*It requires more from us as a municipality to undertake projects with citizen involvement in passive communities than in active communities*" (Planner B, 2024, part 1, 00:26, own translation). As such, the emphasis of rural development often being driven by local strengths, the significance of collaboration, local anchoring and continuation of projects, and the application process that

forces local initiative all suggest an underlying orientation towards active communities, including the risk of excluding less active communities.

The Role of Active Citizens

The orientation toward active communities and collaborative processes in area renewals includes active citizens playing a crucial role in collaboration and anchoring. Planners highlight that realized area renewals projects often require post-implementation management. This is why the projects need to be socially anchored and demand continuous involvement of actors. As such, it is encouraged to attract and provide active citizens a co-producing role (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note A, B); Ministry of Immigration, 2016). Planner B (2024) comments that dedicated active citizens are usually more visible in area renewal processes and perceived as valuable as they take on responsibilities for their local community:

> "*There are some types of citizens who are highly motivated to take initiative and be actively involved, and they almost cannot help it, and it's important that we nurture their engagement. They maintain their engagement by being constantly involved in the process and always lending a helping hand. And it [project work] can hardly stand still, as it only goes too slowly*" (Planner B, 2024, part 1, 21:08, own translation).

Even in quiet communities, Planner B (2024) explains that as a planner, she usually only has meetings and collaborative processes with active citizens. They take an interest and are committed to local development, even when the community as a whole is quieter. As such, area renewals and their format attract active citizens. In Ålum and Omegn, active citizens are also visible and valuable for the area renewal process, as further highlighted in Subsection 4.3.5.

However, a participation practice focusing on active citizens also has drawbacks in terms of inclusive participation. Planner B (2024) remarks that some active citizen circles can be a barrier for achieving inclusive engagement and broad anchoring:

> "*Many of the active citizens have been so for many years. And it can be difficult for newcomers to join in because there is a lot of 'this is how we usually do it.'. . . So they can be quick to say, 'we'll make sure to ask people what they would like here'. Then they go out and ask those they think are interested. . . But they don't ask everyone*" (Planner B, 2024, part 2, 00:37, own translation)

As such, while active citizens add value to the planning and participation process, planners need to balance inputs and ensure broad engagement to avoid exclusion of other actors. Furthermore, community dynamics can change and active citizens may, for various reasons, become inhibited in participation. Planner B explains that there is vulnerability in relying solely on the engagement of a few active citizens within a village. This may result in difficulties related to ownership, local anchoring, and the community's ability to manage project development (Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024). This is elaborated further in DISCUSSION.

Political Ambitions and Municipal Resources

Municipal influence on public participation within Randers Municipality is also shaped by politics and allocated resources.

Planner B (2024) notes a high political ambition of public involvement, and that the municipality must be available for citizens. The collaboration and ambition for local anchoring and ownership within the community also highlights this priority. Furthermore, upon the adoption of the Urban Renewal Plan, which included area renewal for four villages of 19 applicants, led to a political decision to support the remaining 15 villages and engage in dialogue about their development (Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality Council, 2021; Randers Municipality, 2022).

However, while the municipality has a political ambition of participation and rural development, Planner B (2024) comments on the balance and prioritization in terms of resources, especially regarding accessibility and proximity within the local areas and participation processes.

> "*So there's something that does not quite align with the political desires for how the municipality should conduct citizen involvement and be present, and the amount of resources that can be allocated to it*" (Planner B, 2024, Part 2, 00:53, own translation)

Planner B (2024) highlights that it is more challenging and takes more resources to engage citizens who are not actively participating in community initiatives. This requires the municipality to proactively approach these individuals and communities, by making site visits and engaging in conversations, sometimes with only one or few citizens. Planner B emphasizes that this approach demands more effort and resources from the municipality. Particularly passive communities takes up resources and demands from the municipality, as more responsibilities cannot be allocated to the community (Planner B, 2024).

Subsection Summary

The subsection highlights the municipal participation practice regarding area renewals in Randers Municipality. Here, the municipality shapes the framework and objectives for participation. The findings support the literature on ABIs and how practices, norms, and the planning format of a planning system enables inclusive participation by facilitating collaboration with citizens, focusing on local anchoring, establishing ownership, and project realization and management through citizen involvement (Agger & Jensen, 2015; Agger & Larsen, 2009). The findings from Randers Municipality showcase how the municipality enables inclusive participation by having practices that recognize and tailor participation approaches to different village communities (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note A, B); Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021b).

However, constraints such as systemic exclusion is visible from the findings as well. The format and style of area renewals and collaborative participation are oriented toward active communities and individuals who demonstrate resources. Furthermore, an unbalanced resource allocation can potentially exacerbate the orientation towards the active communities. While the findings show that the municipality is aware of quiet and resource-demanding communities, the format and practice of area renewals risk excluding entire communities or individuals with limited opportunities to participate, as well as limited linking social capital with the municipality and their resources (Planner B, 2024).

As such, while the municipality's practices enable inclusive participation through local anchoring and tailored approaches, constraints are seen through resource limitations and potential exclusion of less active communities.

4.3.3 The Individual Planner

Based on interviews with four planners, this subsection looks into the role of the individual planner as a municipal representative, their roles as project manager in area renewals, as well as their choices and experiences in public participation. In many ways, municipal practice and the individual planner are interconnected as two components, as the planner is responsible for carrying out the

Figure 4.7: Illustration of the project organization with the planner positioned in the center (Ministry of Immigration and Housing, 2016)
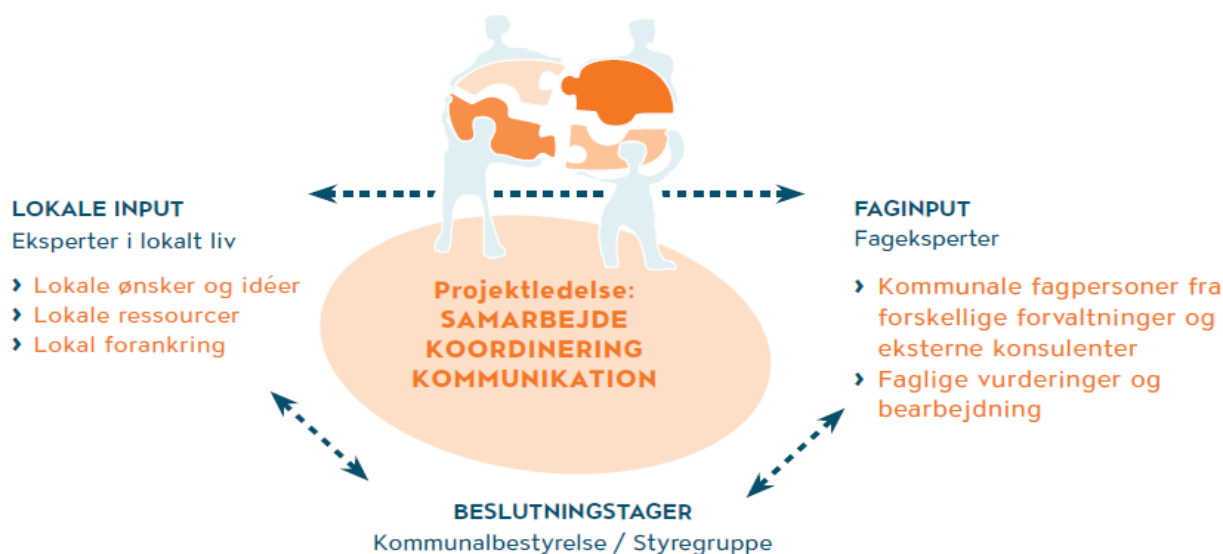
municipality's tasks. As such, this subsection focuses on the individual planner as a component and can be seen as a continuation of the previous subsection, but looks further into the planner's roles, position, power, and values.

The Role as Project Manager

According to an official area renewal guidance (called "Sammen Skaber Vi Udvikling" by Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing) on collaborative processes in villages, project organization in area renewals positions the planner as a project or process manager (Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing, 2016). This is a dynamic role that contributes with professional expertise and oversees project realization, as well as facilitates collaboration, coordination, and communication among stakeholders. Figure 4.7, illustrating the project organization from the aforementioned guidance', the planner can be found positioned at the center, where various inputs and collaborations take form. In area renewals, the municipality – city council – is the final and formal decision-maker, however, decisions should be made in collaboration with local stakeholders, with the planner playing a crucial and binding role (Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing, 2016; Planner A, 2023).

In their role as project manager, planners have the power to shape the participation and collaborative process by deciding on participatory methods, considering who to establish collaborations with, and

how inputs are to be evaluated and become part of project development. Furthermore, planners bring their experiences, expertise, personal ambitions, and values to the planning process. This is exemplified by Planner A, who has a personal and professional ambition to include citizens in the planning process, empower them to participate, and ensure local anchoring. Furthermore, Planner A also relies on her expertise as planner to assess whether planning proposals could function in their specific context and as a sustainable choice when the area renewal process has concluded (Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing, 2016; Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021b; Retsinformation, 2020b).

At the beginning of the area renewal process in Ålum and Omegn, Planner A demonstrated her role as project manager, by establishing contact with the residents' association, communicating the upcoming planning process, and aligning expectations regarding roles and decision-making. When it comes to identifying projects for the area renewal, Planner A (2023) emphasizes that her "primary task" is to ensure that projects have broad support and that she, during the process in Ålum and Omegn, engages with the village community as a whole and does not proceed with project proposals that benefit only a few loud voices. Planner A pointed out that, to engage with the local community, she must establish a relationship and make herself available to the community (Planner A, 2023), which is why the conversation cafés mentioned in Subsection 4.3.4 were conducted.

Shaping Participation, Outreach, and Mobilization

During interviews, planners expressed awareness of their influence on participation through their roles as project managers. They emphasize establishing a relationship with the local community, fostering trust, and gathering local knowledge. To do so, multiple participatory activities are held, often in the format of workshops and citizen meetings, in which planners make use of different tools to facilitate discussions, gather knowledge and perspectives, and arrive at decision-making. A self-developed handbook consisting of different tools suitable for workshops, meetings, and other activities is highlighted among planners as a valuable tool to facilitate participation (Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024). As Planner C (2024, 01:14, own translation) comments, facilitating participation and gathering new relevant knowledge takes time, consideration, and creativity as: "*new knowledge is not just something that arises. It is something that must be provoked*". While these tools are useful for facilitating communication, gathering knowledge, and conducting collaborative exercises, they focus mainly on those who are already inside the door, in the sense that those who are not participating or feel they can be part of the conversation may risk being excluded (Appendix F, 2024; Randers Municipality, n.d.-c)

Planners acknowledge that the format of participatory initiatives often attract the same participants, resulting in uniform expressions and observations from the citizens (Planner C, 2024; Planner D, 2024). Furthermore, while approaches such as actor screenings may identify relevant local actors, planners express difficulties in finding the right methods for outreach and to motivate citizens to participate. Working often individually on planning projects, planners express that shaping participation requires creativity and thinking outside the box of the individual planner, as well as collaboration amongst municipal divisions in terms of communication and branding. Planners emphasize that despite best intentions, outreach and motivation of participants are difficult tasks that sometimes are neglected, and barriers can be imposed by limitations in resources and creativity of individual planners (Appendix F, 2024; Appendix G, 2024; Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024).

To a varying degree, multiple approaches work, such as inviting through local associations, educational systems, personal mail, social media, and posters. While some approaches motivate some citizens, others do not (Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024). Planner C emphasizes that contacting and partnering with local associations typically becomes the default method for engaging with the local community as associations, due to being locally anchored:

> "*They have local knowledge. They are organized. And they already have a voluntary desire and drive to do something good for the city. Or they have an interest in the city thriving. . . And they are typically more representative. More representative than if I call Jens, who lives down on… Jens Street 2. If Jens is in an association with four others, then you can talk to them all at once. So, it's also a question of resources. Instead of visiting everyone, you can visit a single association*" (Planner C, 2024, 01:33, own translation).

As an example, the residents' association in Ålum and Omegn quickly became the main channel for outreach and engagement with the community. As the only anchored organization representing a large part of the residents in the area, the planning team relied on the association's ability for outreach, as well as on local volunteers to spread information and post invitations, both in mailboxes and on their website. Planners also engaged via social media and by being visible through multiple visits in the area (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note C)). However, outreach outside the help of the residents' association and social media would have proved very difficult. Citizen C (2004) highlights that some citizens rely on others to participate, such as members of an association, which challenges personalized motivation.

Planners further highlight organizational barriers in terms of 'silo-thinking', meaning that the sectoral division and being overly focused with ones own projects, limit internal municipal collaboration. As a result, this can limit internal collaboration on cross-department planning projects, such as area renewals, as well as communication and shared insights on citizen outreach and mobilization strategies (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note B); Appendix G, 2024; Planner C, 2024).

Navigating Interests

To manage their role in practice as collaborative project managers, planners emphasize that skills in listening and communication are vital, especially when making oneself available to the community and establishing relationships and trust. Planner B (2024) explains that by listening to citizens who trust her with their thoughts, concerns, and experiences, she finds herself being a spokesperson for citizens who are not comfortable speaking up in public or generally do not engage in participation.

Balancing inputs from public conversation and knowing how to recognize personal agendas are also part of the listening and dialogue phase. Planner C emphasizes that she considers it important to listen broadly to citizens, including those who may be more quietly involved in participation. She expresses a critical stance towards stakeholders who dominate discussions and promote their own personal agendas. She attempts to ease their influence, in order to create a more balanced participation process and to make space for other voices to be heard (Planner C, 2024). Engaging and listening to citizens and their perspectives brings multiple viewpoints and knowledge to their shared understanding of challenges, needs, and project development. Planner B explains that, while she tends to think about the village development in a long-term perspective of 20-50 years, citizens usually focus more on short-term needs and concerns that currently affect their village lives. The insights of multiple stakeholders and her expertise contribute to the planning process and outcome both in the short and long run.

While planners have the power and influence to shape participation, by being positioned in the center of the area renewal organization, they also encounter competing interests, power dynamics, and differences in expectations, which leaves challenges and uncertainties. Their role includes navigating and balancing diverse interests from various stakeholders, such as citizens, local politicians, and municipal administration personnel. Navigating these stakeholders and their interests includes balancing empowerment, exclusion, and domination while finding common ground in the planning process. As such, planners are aware that they are in the middle of multiple interests and power dynamics, which they must carefully manage. They also express that their central position leaves uncertainties and, as such, decisions must be made through continuous assessment.

Subsection Summary

The findings from the case study generally support literature on planners' role as frontline planners and influencers on participation, such as demonstrating power to balance and shaping participation (Forester, 1982; Sehested, 2009). Within the findings, planners influence inclusive and engaging participation, primarily through their role as project manager, where they decide on the participatory approach, methods collaboration partners, and evaluate how inputs are integrated into project development. Being positioned in the middle of the area renewal organization, planners have the power to shape the participation and collaborative process, ensuring that diverse voices are heard and considered in decision-making. However, planners find themselves in the middle of multiple interests and power dynamics that they must navigate and balance (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note A, B); Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024; Planner D, 2024). Following the framework by Willson, elaborated in Subsection 2.2.3, these frontline planners in area renewals navigate within their embedded context, steered by certain regulations and municipal practices, while simultaneously influencing participation based on own experiences, expertise, and values (Willson, 2021).

As such, planners enable inclusive and engaging participation by establishing relationships with the local community, fostering trust, and gathering local knowledge. They utilize their means, such as a handbook of tools to facilitate discussions, gather perspectives, and arrive at decisions and work closely with local institutions to engage the community and anchor planning projects. Furthermore, planners utilize their power to balance inputs, mitigate exclusion and domination, and empower citizens to voice their concerns through listening (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note A, B); Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024).

However, barriers in their practice are also present. Findings showed that focusing the participation on tools that mainly engage those already involved, can potentially exclude those who are not as active or feel they cannot partake in the style of participation. Planners highlight that the formats of participatory initiatives often attract the same participants, leading to uniform expressions and observations, excluding other perspectives. Furthermore, findings show challenges in outreach and motivating broad citizen participation, as some approaches may not work for everyone. Limited resources and the need for creative approaches to mobilize participants can further constrain participation (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note A, B); Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024).

4.3.4 Participatory Methods

This subsection looks into the various participation methods that have been conducted throughout

this case study and delves into the way the methods have influenced participation. The subsection begins with a timeline illustrating the participation process. Afterwards, the subsection looks into a distributed informational brochure, four conducted conversation cafés, the participation app Snapshot Ålum and Omegn, and lastly the citizen meeting.

4.3.4.1 Timeline

Before elaborating on the participatory methods initiated in Ålum and Omegn, a timeline (see Figure 4.8) provides an overview of the participation process. The timeline starts in the autumn of 2023 and describes the public participation process throughout duration of this thesis.

As illustrated on the timeline, the participation process was kickstarted with an informational brochure (subsubsection 4.3.4.2) that, in addition to sharing information on the area renewal, also invited to conversation cafés. The four conversations cafés (subsubsection 4.3.4.3) were conducted during November and the beginning of December in the community hall. The photo voice exercise in the app Snapshot Ålum and Omegn (Subsubsection 4.3.4.4) was conducted during February and March, leading to a citizen meeting in April in which the proposed projects were presented and voted for by citizens.
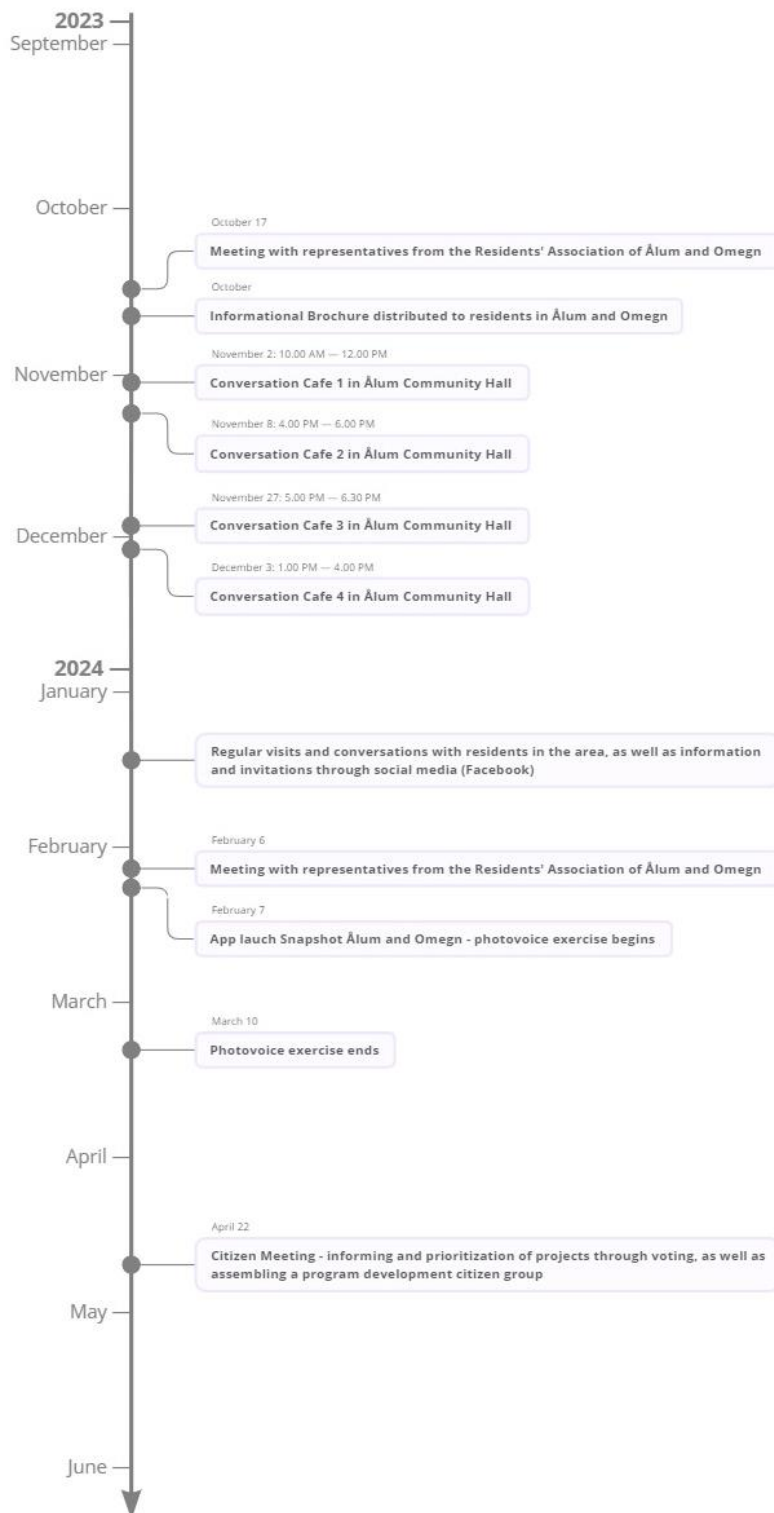
Area renewal participation process in Ålum and Omegn

2023
September

October

> October 17
> **Meeting with representatives from the Residents' Association of Ålum and Omegn**

> October
> **Informational Brochure distributed to residents in Ålum and Omegn**

November

> November 2: 10.00 AM — 12.00 PM
> **Conversation Cafe 1 in Ålum Community Hall**

> November 8: 4.00 PM — 6.00 PM
> **Conversation Cafe 2 in Ålum Community Hall**

> November 27: 5.00 PM — 6.30 PM
> **Conversation Cafe 3 in Ålum Community Hall**

December

> December 3: 1.00 PM — 4.00 PM
> **Conversation Cafe 4 in Ålum Community Hall**

2024
January

> **Regular visits and conversations with residents in the area, as well as information and invitations through social media (Facebook)**

February

> February 6
> **Meeting with representatives from the Residents' Association of Ålum and Omegn**

> February 7
> **App lauch Snapshot Ålum and Omegn - photovoice exercise begins**

March

> March 10
> **Photovoice exercise ends**

April

> April 22
> **Citizen Meeting - informing and prioritization of projects through voting, as well as assembling a program development citizen group**

May

June

Figure 4.8: Timeline illustrating the participation process in Ålum and Omegn from the beginning og the area renewal process in autumn 2023 to towards the end of the thesis (Appendix A, 2024; Appendix F, 2024; Appendix H, 2024; Appendix I, 2024;
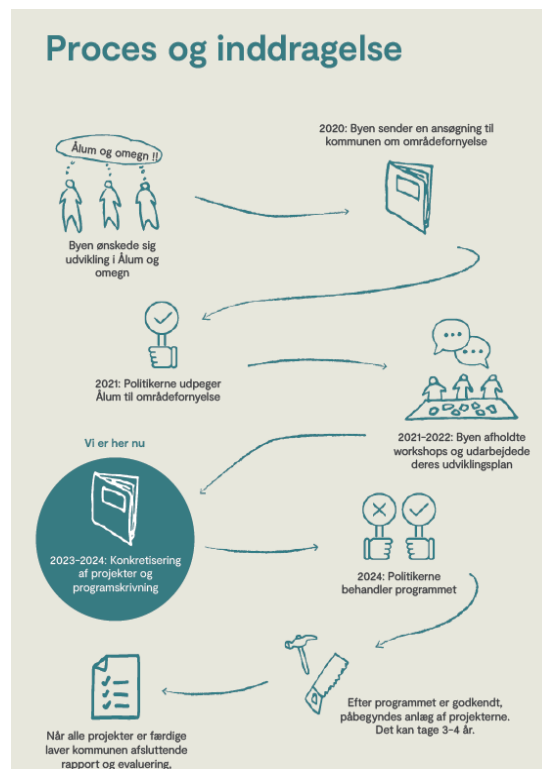
Randers Municipality, 2023b).

4.3.4.2 Informational Brochure

To kickstart the area renewal process with the citizens of Ålum and Omegn, an informational brochure was formulated and distributed to the residents' mailboxes in collaboration with the residents' association. The brochure acted as one-way communication with the citizens, with the intention to inform that the area renewal for Ålum and Omegn was now a reality, briefly explain what an area renewal entails, and ultimately invite the citizens to participate in the process (Randers Municipality, 2023b). The brochure aimed at illustrating the planning and participation process in the area renewal (see Figure 4.9, and Appendix I). The green circle marks the beginning, in the autumn of 2023, when the area renewal process officially began(Appendix I, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2023b).

The brochure held an invite to the citizens for further participation through dialogue and deliberation through the conversation cafés, elaborated in the subsection below, and to be part of the program writing group (Randers Municipality, 2023b).

Figure 4.9: The planning and participation process for area renewal explained in the brochure (Randers Municipality, 2023)

The citizen response to the brochure was generally positive, with some citizens expressing that it felt personal, relevant, and informative (Citizen C, 2024). However, as the waiting period for the area renewal had been long, other citizens expressed that this type of information could have been communicated earlier, to be more transparent on the planning process and expectations on the extended waiting period between the development plan process and the area renewal (Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024). The entire brochure is visible in (Appendix I, 2024)

4.3.4.3 Conversation Café

Four conversation cafés were held at the community hall during November and the beginning of December. The intention was to create a series of informal meetings in which citizens could drop in, get to know the planners, and engage in deliberations with each other and with planners about the area renewal. The casual, yet more intimate, format of engagement was appealing to Planner A, who wanted to create a 'safe place' for discussion in which citizens would be empowered to voice their thoughts. She hoped the cafés could provide this, in contrast to large citizen meetings that, while good at informing, has a distance to the citizens in its format: "*Citizen meetings are informational meetings, that's not where you get close to people* (Planner A, 2023)."

As such, one of the main purposes of the conversation cafés was to engage more directly through dialogue with citizens to establish trust, obtain local knowledge, and understand their wishes and needs for the local area. Furthermore, the aim was to get an understanding of the community's capacity to drive and manage projects, both during and after the area renewal. In addition to voicing

new project ideas, citizens were asked to prioritize existing project proposals from the development plan into a top 5 order, to establish a sense of public prioritization (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D)). However, as few citizens took part in the conversation cafés, a selection of projects should be determined at a citizen meeting.

Table 4.1: The four conversation cafés, timing, participants, and outcomes (Appendix F, 2024, (Field Note D))

Date and Time	Context and Participants	Outcomes
02.11.23 10:00-12:00 AM	Open to all. Aligned with the weekly Vores Rådhus gathering, thereby mainly targeting elderly/pensioners and others who had time to be present. Ca. 25 participants, mainly elderly/pensioners.	Cafes resulted in nearly 20 project proposals. Among the many topics and project proposals, citizens highlighted: - Traffic: The need for speed limiting initiatives, bike path, safer roads for children, electric vehicle charging station, parking at the community hall, and more.
08.11.23 04:00-06:00 PM	Open to all. Aimed at being accessible after regular working hours. 3 working participants around 60 years, and pensioners.	- Diverse housing options, including housing for seniors. - Better quality of village walking paths.
27.11.23 05:00-6:30 PM	The conversation café (pizza night) was planned to align with a youth club gathering night. The target was mainly children, teenagers, and their parents. 11 participants - 4 adults, 7 children/teenagers.	- Records of local trails between the villages in Ålum and Omegn, outdoor training facilities. - Multi-purpose house for social gatherings, workshops, and creativity.
03.12.24 01:00-4:00 PM	Planned on a Sunday afternoon, the conversation aimed at everyone who had an interest in participating. 4 participants in total – all had attended earlier conversation cafés.	- 'Beautification' of urban areas, such as planting wildflowers and installing benches. - Training and sport facilities.

Generally, the participating citizens of all ages showed a great interest in the projects and the development of the village community. Some citizens immediately engaged with us and began to discuss the project proposals, challenges, and potentials within the area. Examples include elderly citizens expressing concerns over traffic issues, and young teenage boys attending pizza night with a prepared list of necessities that, in their perspective, could improve their daily lives in the village. Others did not engage to the same extent but showed curiosity and interest in listening and being informed about the planning process. In addition to citizen-planner conversations, citizens began to deliberate planning proposals and community development internally (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D)). This included the top-5 prioritization exercise (see Figure 4.10) that citizens collaborated on spontaneously. When asked how citizens viewed the conversation cafés, they generally expressed that

it felt easier to voice their opinions and to be heard, in contrast to citizen meetings:

> "*It was much more engaging. You know, . . . you had more eye contact, face to face, so to speak, instead of sitting further away at tables thinking, while someone stands up there. It was not the same at all. It is always nice when you have the conversation going. I think that is where you get more out of it. And you can express your personal opinion on something. Because if you're in a large hall, there are many who don't really want to raise their hand and say, 'I think this way'* (Citizen C, 2024, 15:32, own translation)"

In addition to establishing dialogue, citizens put words to the linking social capital, mentioned in Subsection 2.2.2, when expressing how the cafés established a sense of relationship between the community and municipality. Citizens express motivation to participate due to the municipality being present and outreaching towards the local community, as it makes the community feel heard (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D); Citizen C, 2024; Citizen D, 2024).

While the cafés motivate engagement through presence and two-way dialogue, Table 4.1 reveals that the cafés generally had a low attendance. This was despite the intention of reducing barriers by planning four cafés, both on workdays, on a Sunday afternoon, at different time points, and in alignment with two existing social events (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D)).

Planner A points out that the low attendance could indicate that citizens are content with the way things are and either trust the process or trust others will attend (Planner A, 2023). However, this could also be an indication that the cafés did not succeed in lowering barriers, impeding participation. The days and time slots scheduled could be a barrier excluding citizens working late or having to attend other activities in the afternoon, early evening, and the weekend. Citizen A remarked that the invitation to the cafés in the information brochure came a bit late, which may have affected the availability of some citizens (Citizen A, 2024). In conversation with mothers at the third café, they explain that in their everyday lives with jobs, children, housework, and more, it can be difficult to also find the time and energy to attend public participation (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D)).

However, the third café which led to conversation with local parents, also disclosed how barriers to participation can be reduced. When asked what enabled the mothers to attend the third café with their children, they explained that the meetings alignment with the youth club-night, and that we brought dinner. As the café suited their family routine, it provided the parents with mental surplus and released resources for participation, because a task, such as dinner, had been taken care off (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D)).

To summarize, the conversation cafés were the first meetings between most citizens in Ålum and Omegn, and the planners. The conversation cafés had the purpose of establishing dialogue and deliberation between citizens and planners, as well as collectively, through different knowledge perspectives to find solutions for local challenges in the form of project proposals. Four cafés were
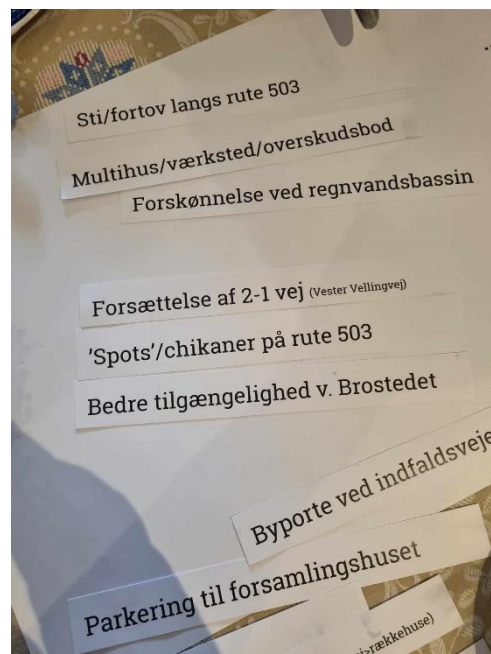
held with rather low attendance, however, participating citizens showed engagement, curiosity, and enthusiasm. The intimate format of the cafés, based on dialogue, lowered barriers and empowered citizens to voice their opinion more freely than they would have at larger meetings, and citizens express feeling seen and heard by the municipality. Furthermore, choosing the right timing and serving dinner enabled conversations with participants who otherwise would be too busy to participate. However, the general low attendance reveals that barriers still impede participation. Here, possible exclusion could have taken place, due to the timing or format of cafés. Here, and following reflections can be made into if the cafés were the right engagement form (Appendix F, 2024, (Field Note A, D)).

4.3.4.4 App – Snapshot Ålum and Omegn

The app, Snapshot Ålum og Omegn, was developed to investigate how the use of photos and apps may enhance communication and participation in planning processes. To examine this in practice, the app was implemented in the area renewal process in Ålum and Omegn, in which citizens participated in a photovoice activity. In this activity, citizens submitted photos from their local area that had special significance or needed improvement. Along with photo descriptions and location data, the photovoice activity provided a comprehensive understanding of the potentials and challenges in Ålum and Omegn. To gain insights of how participants perceived the app and photos in participation, an in-app questionnaire was included. This questionnaire allowed citizens to evaluate the use of both photos and the app in the participation process and compare it to other participatory methods, such as citizen meetings.

Using the photovoice exercise was meant as a way to implement both photos and an app as participatory engagement methods in action. Instead of merely asking participants in interviews how they view the use of apps and photos in participation, developing the app and applying it in practice directly provided insights into the potential of photos and apps in enhancing participation. As part of the thesis collaboration with Randers Municipality, the app was included as a means for generating citizen knowledge and information relevant to the area renewal. The results from the photo voice exercise are presented in the following PART.

4.3.4.5 Photovoice

The photovoice exercise included citizen submitted pictures, each with positive or negative rating, a description, and location data, which are included in Appendix H.

The participants took photos of significant everyday places and project proposals for the area renewal. The written descriptions and ratings provided important follow-up information for the pictures, as they gave an account in the participants' own words of the motive and rationale behind the submitted pictures, as exemplified in Figure 4.11 . As such, the data provided information on citizens' needs and wants, as well as their sentiments about their local area.

Figure 4.11: Photos submitted to Snapshot Ålum and Omegn with following descriptions:

Left: "One really has to move carefully, and as such, many chooses to walk on the roads..." (Appendix H, 2024, Participant 4)

Middle: "We have a super great playground in an enclosed area in Ålum" (Appendix H, 2024, Participant 15)

Right: "I dream about one or more 'sunset-benches' at the water harvesting lake, where from there is a nice view to the west" (Appendix H, 2024, Participant 5)

The submitted photos suggest a general positivity and satisfaction among the participants towards their local environment, with particular focus on nature, social activities, and cohesion. The positive images portray the local area in the same way as the residents have described Ålum and Omegn on other occasions, and thereby confirming the locals' sentiments of living in the area.

However, a few images also illustrated negative aspects. Such pictures included road flooding and uneven sidewalks, which Participant 4 in Appendix H highlights causes safety concerns for pedestrians. The negatively rated images and project proposals indicate that the participants are able to think critically about their local area and assess where there is room for improvements and ideas.

None of the negatively rated images depict previously articulated negative aspects of Ålum and Omegn, such as the traffic challenges that many citizens have voiced concerns about in conversation cafés. As an example, Figure 4.11, depicting poor sidewalk conditions, emerged as new information through the app. This highlights the flexibility provided by the app as a situated engagement tool. Thoughts about the condition of the sidewalk and its consequences may have spontaneously arisen with the citizen, who could then communicate their observations in situ by sharing a photo of the issue for planners to assess. The app's flexibility also means that citizens do not have to wait until a later citizen meeting to express their needs and preferences. This style of communication further reduces barriers, as citizens do not need to speak at a large meeting but can express their wants and needs quietly.

Other participants used the photo exercise to focus more on identifying potentials and proposing ideas for projects. For instance, pictures identified multiple hike paths and proposed placement of facilities, such as benches and a charging station. The project proposals showed creativity and engagement for improvement, and the ideas contributed valuable input to the area renewal process.

The available location data provided the opportunity of mapping the geographical location of submitted photos and thereby visualize positive/negative rated areas of citizen interest. However, technical issues with extration of location data limited the scope of the mapping analysis to only a few pictures. Despite the difficulties with location data, Figure 4.12 illustrates some of the positive locations in Ålum as well as pictures with 'no rating'. These pictures often contained project proposals or were positive, indicating that some citizens forgot or decided not to rate their photos. The map shows an increased photographic interest at the rainwater facility, the playground area, and the community hall. If more location data had been available, it may have showcased local hotspots of sentiments, providing a geographic understanding of spaces where citizens are satisfied and places where intervention is needed. In relation to the area renewal, the geographical

Figure 4.12: Visualization of locations in which citizens have taken pictures. The rankings illustrate the sentiments of the submitted photos (Own app data, 2024).

Styrelsen for Dataforsyning og Infrastruktur, 2024; Own app data, 2024.

visualization, along with the submitted picture of the area and the written description, provides planners with a holistic understanding of the citizens' sentiments, the challenges, and the potentials in Ålum and Omegn.

It is important to emphasize that due to the low number of participants, no general conclusions can be drawn about overall attitudes and opinions about Ålum and Omegn. A larger number of participants would potentially also shed light on more challenges in the area and any project proposals.

4.3.4.6 Citizen Participation through App and Photos

The citizens of Ålum and Omegn were introduced to the app and informed that, with their consent, their contributions could be shared with Randers Municipality, enabling them to influence the area renewal. The gathered data provided deeper understanding of the local area and the sites that citizens considered challenged. Citizens' photos and descriptions were relevant in project proposals and were shown at the public meeting to better communicate the visions of the project proposals and how they could be implemented.

Through conversations, the in-app survey, and follow-up interviews, citizens expressed general positivity about the app, showing curiosity and especially excitement about having influence on the area renewal. Particularly, those interested in photography were excited to 'take up the challenge'. Furthermore, participating citizens also expressed that the app was intuitive and easy to download

and use (Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024; Citizen C, 2024; Citizen D, 2024).

To evaluate the app as a participation method, both in terms of an app and the usage of pictures, an in-app survey was presented to the participants. The word clouds on Figures 4.13, 4.14, and 4.15 illustrate the coded responses to the qualitative survey questions, as well as the quantity of individual responses. All survey responses are available in Appendix H. Figure 4.13, illustrates answers to the question of why respondents chose to participate through the app. Most respondents expressed the willingness to participate, and to provide information on their locale area, and that the app was meaningful to them (Appendix H, 2024).

Figure 4.14 looks further into the usage of photos as a method for communicating with the municipality. Participants expressed that the usage of photos lower participation barriers due to having a different communication style: "*As they say, all tricks are fair. Some are best at oral communication, while others prefer visualizing*" (Appendix H, 2024, (Participant 4)). Citizen C elaborated by emphasizing that using images for communication can clarify a need and helps make oneself understood by the municipality, especially if one struggles to articulate verbally or in writing (Citizen C, 2024).

The third and final qualitative survey question, see Figure 4.15, looks into how respondents viewed using an app as method of participation, including how it compares to other participatory methods, such as a citizen meeting. A survey respondent comments: "*It's comforting to sit quietly and convey what needs to be communicated without having to speak up at a meeting if one is not comfortable doing so*" (Appendix H, 2024, (Participant 5))

Figure 4.14: Word cloud based on the answers to survey question "What are your thoughts on using images to express your opinions about Ålum and Omegn? (Appendix H, 2024)

Survey respondents highlight the opportunity to be heard through a different channel of communication which can support other participatory methods (Appendix H, 2024). Citizen D emphasizes that the app's participation form offers accessibility and flexibility that fits within her everyday live:

"You caught me where I was last night. When you're exhausted on the couch after a long day . . . it doesn't matter to me that I have to download this app real quick..." ... *"then I'll just scroll through my camera roll. Oh, there was a funny picture. I'll just upload that, right? . . . I mean, it's a clear example of catching me where I am."* (Citizen D, 2024, 00:32: and 00:34:, own translation)

Figure 4.15: Word cloud based on the answers to survey question "What do you think about using an app as a means to voice your opinions compared to, for example, a citizen meeting?" (Appendix H, 2024)

The app provides flexibility for Citizen D to participate on her own terms and within her daily routine, unlike a citizen meeting, for example, which she describes as being more binding and may be more difficult to attend after a long day along with the routines of daily life (Citizen D, 2024).

According to Citizen C, another advantage of the app is that it creates a connection between citizens and the municipality, thereby enforcing the linking social capital. By allowing citizens to influence the area renewal through the app and providing a gateway to Randers Municipality, Citizen C's motivation for participation was strengthened (Citizen C, 2024).

While the app and photos offer flexibility and accessibility for some, others may find it limiting or even excluding in participation. Both Citizen B and Citizen D commented on potential exclusion of the elderly and their capabilities to participate digitally.

Like the conversation cafés, the app and photovoice exercise proved to have a low number of participants, which is a major barrier for this method's contribution to the participation process. Several reasons can explain the low participation. Lack of resources, such as time limitation, influenced the broader outreach of the app within the local community. The main channels for outreach were through social media (a local Facebook group) and the weekly coffee meetings, resulting in app downloads primarily from elderly citizen (see age distribution diagram in Appendix H). The choice of outreach channels may have risked the app not reaching many potential contributing participants. Furthermore, as the app was promoted as a thesis study contribution and not developed in collaboration with Randers Municipality, there is a risk that citizens did not deem the participation relevant. As such, in Subsection 4.3.3, Planner C makes an argument that outreach and motivation to participate becomes neglected for various reasons, which I personally experienced with the promotion of this app.

To summarize, the app Snapshot Ålum and Omegn allowed multiple perspectives on both mobile-participation and the usage of photos and mapping in participation. The photovoice exercise, along with locational data, provided a holistic understanding of citizens' sentiments, their needs, ideas, as well as local context to the area renewal. Building on this knowledge, along with an in-app survey evaluation, participants expressed how the usage of photos empowered them to express themselves in a way that felt less constrained compared to other participation forms, such as citizen meetings. The app enabled citizens to communicate their needs in situ, as well as in their own time and rhythm which reduced barriers in terms of participation limited to a specific time and place. In terms of relationship and communication with the municipality, the app functioned as a

gateway to be heard by planners regarding the area renewals, thereby confirming the linking social capital. While the app reduced barriers for some, it impeded participation for others. Especially some elderly found the app difficult to use, and as such there is a risk of exclusion. As the app and photovoice demonstrate a different communication style between municipality and citizens, it may be relevant to use supplementally with traditional methods of participation (Appendix H, 2024).

4.3.4.7 Citizen Meeting

This part looks into the citizen meeting that was conducted in April (see timeline on Figure 4.8). Citizens in Ålum and Omegn were invited through social media and by invitations distributed in their mailbox. The meeting took place on a Monday evening (April 22) at 5:00-7:00 PM and to boost motivation for participation, the Municipality offered dinner and coffee. The meeting attracted approximately 65 participants, far exceeding the number of participants in previous engagement methods (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note E)).

The purpose of the meeting was to present the project proposals we had received and discussed with citizens during various meetings, conversation cafés, through the app, as well as from the development plan. In total, 14 project proposals were presented during the meeting. At the citizen meeting, participants could ask questions and discuss concerns. An important purpose was for the citizens to vote for their favorite projects, see Figure 4.16 and to gather a 'program group' of interested citizens. In the program groups the most popular projects are to be further deliberated and evaluated by the interested citizens in greater detail in terms of implementation and budget, with the intention of landing the final projects for the written area renewal program. In total, 12 citizens of different age groups (from teenagers to elderly) volunteered for the program groups (Appendix F, 2024, (Field Note E)).

As such, the format of the citizen meeting entailed both informing, decision-making, and forming a group of citizens for collaborative deliberation. As the meeting entailed a lot of presenting, the information flow was mainly one-way with the planners setting the overall agenda and the citizens as recipient listeners. However, the proposed projects were influenced by the citizens, and as such, the presentation served to present the proposals back to the citizens. While citizens were able to ask questions and raise concerns, only 20 minutes were allocated for this session. Furthermore, citizens who wanted to ask for further details during the presentation of the projects were asked to wait until discussion time. As a result, citizens might feel constrained by the limited time available and by being rejected during the presentation. A few citizens had questions and concerns about the projects and other citizens presented criticism over the participation process, which will be elaborated in Subsection 4.3.5. The citizens were part of decision-making through the voting process. Furthermore, all interested citizens could volunteer to be part of a program group that would provide further decision-making influence in collaboration with other citizens at meetings facilitated by the planner. It is unknown, however, how much influence the limited time for discussion and questions had on the

citizen votes and the willingness to participate in the program group (Appendix F, 2024, (Field Note E)).

As mentioned above, the number of participants at the citizen meeting far exceeds the number of participants at conversation cafés and participation through Snapshot Ålum and Omegn. While most participants were seniors, younger groups were present, including a few teenagers who took active part in voicing their wishes. Compared to conversation cafés, the citizen meeting did not provide the framework for dialogue, presence, and allowing citizens to voice their opinions. The meeting also did not offer the same flexibility as the app. While the app allowed flexibility in terms of both time and location for participation, the meeting the meeting had a strict agenda with limited opportunities for input.

Figures 4.16 (Left) and 4.17 (Right): Citizen meeting with decision-making process over project proposals (Photos by Citizen A, 2024; Private photo, 2024)
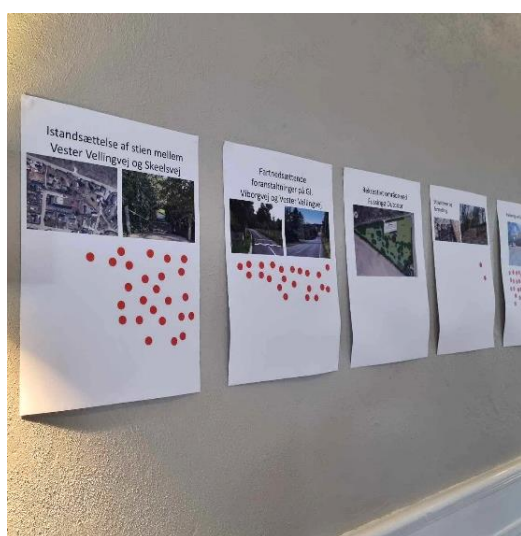
However, one explanation for the high meeting attendance could be that decisions were to be made, as indicated in the invitation. Therefore, citizens may have been motivated by an expectation to be involved in decision-making, whereas previous methods were more consultative. Furthermore, citizens may also have been motivated by curiosity and a desire to be informed about local development. As mentioned in the subsection about conversation cafés, in terms of daily practicalities, as dinner was provided, this may have lowered barriers for some who would not otherwise attend due to conflicting household activities.

Subsection Summary

This subsection highlighted multiple participation methods engaging citizens in Ålum and Omegn in the area renewal process. The purposes of the methods were to inform citizens, consult and obtain local knowledge, achieve a better understanding of the community, deliberate project proposals, and arrive at decision-making. The level of engagement and roles of citizens ranged from between being recipients of one-way communication to acting as local experts, as well as playing an active role in decision-making through voting for projects and formation of program groups. Planners have acted as facilitators and technical experts (Appendix F, 2024).

Findings showed that active citizens tend to be more visible and present at engagement methods, which aligns with literature, suggesting that active citizens are highly motivated and have the

resources necessary to participate (Agger, 2012; Planner B, 2024), However, findings revealed that the cafés and the app lowered barriers through increased flexibility for citizens, who did not typically have the time and energy to participate or felt uneasy voicing their opinions at formal meetings. As such, findings revealed that the cafés, as well as the app and photovoice promoted linking social capital and made participating citizens feel seen and heard (Appendix F, 2024; Appendix H, 2024). In alignment with literature, this suggests that these participation methods, by offering flexibility and safe space for communication, can result in a more inclusive representation and an empowerment to partake. The findings also revealed that app-participation and photovoice offered spatial insights relevant for area analysis and an understanding of local needs and proposals (Appendix F, 2024; Appendix H, 2024; Citizen C, 2024; Citizen D, 2024; Ertiö, 2015; Wilson et al., 2019)..

However, these methods are not without limitations. Findings showed that, while conversation cafés and the app had lowering effects on barriers, the general participation rate was low. This could indicate barriers such as lack of citizen interest and motivation, structural exclusion, or a lack of considerations of these methods within the community context (Agger & Larsen, 2009; Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note C, D); Lyhne et al., 2016). Introducing four cafés after a development plan process that entailed four citizen meetings may have been perceived tiring and discouraging, as well as introducing an app in a community characterized by many elderly citizens, could affect how these methods were received by citizens and their motivation for participation (Appendix F, 2024; Appendix G, 2024; Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024).

In comparison, findings showed that the citizen meeting had a high attendance rate, indicating higher interest and lower barriers for participation. This supports literature that suggests that traditional methods underpin contemporary planning participation (Ertiö, 2015). Here, citizens had decision-making influence however less ability to discuss local development (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note E)).

Overall, the findings showed how each method has potentials and limitations for inclusive and engaging participation. The theoretical insights emphasize that combining multiple participatory methods, tailored to the community context, can overcome barriers and enhance engagement (Agger, 2012; Ertiö, 2015; Lyhne et al., 2016). The findings show that combining different types of methods of participation, to incorporate diverse styles of communication and participation, can lead to approaches that are more inclusive and engaging (Appendix F, 2024).

4.3.5 Civil Society

As mentioned in Subsection 4.3.2, participation with citizens plays a crucial role in anchoring and establishing ownership in area renewal processes, and Subsection 4.3.4 highlighted how citizens were fundamental in providing local knowledge and project proposals. Interviews and meetings with citizens highlight that civil society in Ålum and Omegn is characterized by both active, less active, and non-participants. These different participation types all have different motivations and barriers for participation, which will be elaborated in this Subsection.

Active Citizens

Both planners at Randers Municipality and citizens of Ålum and Omegn emphasize that the area's strong sense of community spirit and social activities is largely made possible through active citizens and volunteers who manage the residents' association (Appendix F, 2024; Planner B, 2024; Randers

Municipality, 2020a; Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022).

Among the active volunteer citizens, their motivation is driven by being community-minded, active in associations and volunteer work, creativity, and making a difference (Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024). After experiencing success with fundraising for the local playground, Citizen A found that they were more motivated to continue the active work in the area (Citizen A, 2024). The residents' association of Ålum and Omegn and its leadership are acknowledged locally for their significance in the community, cohesion, welcoming atmosphere, and social activities (Citizen C, 2024; Citizen D, 2024; Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022). In addition to encouraging others to participate, active citizens have been helpful in the area renewal process in organizing for participation initiatives, connecting the planning team with other contacts, distributing invitations for citizen meetings, providing local insights, and more.

While Citizen A and Citizen B express that they find their roles as active citizens rewarding, they also point out some drawbacks in their roles, with potential consequences for their involvement. They emphasize that their role as active citizens requires time and resources (Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024). Furthermore, concerns were expressed about the level of responsibilities and maximum capacity for core volunteers, and that more tasks would be overwhelming and possibly lead to a decline in core volunteers (Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024; Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022). In relation to their role as citizen volunteers partaking in a municipal process, Citizen A highlights that the process and writing of the development plan had been overwhelming: "*I never want to go through that process again, because I think it's a really big task to impose on volunteers*" (Citizen A, 2024, 00:38, own translation). As such, while active citizens add value to the planning process, a risk of overburdening them underscores the need for their engagement and role to be balanced and for expectations to be settled. This is further elaborated in DISCUSSION.

Less Active Citizens

The less active citizens in Ålum and Omegn can be characterized as engaged and interested in their community, but less inclined to participate. Citizens describe their motivation to participate as being driven by curiosity, a sense of presence by the municipality, and relevance to their lives and daily routines (Appendix F (Field Note D), 2024; Citizen C, 2024). As an example, Citizen C points out that the informational brochure increased their motivation and curiosity because she felt it spoke directly to her as a citizen in Ålum and Omegn, and that the area renewal is relevant to her everyday life in the village (Citizen C, 2024). Furthermore, in relation to the communication with Randers Municipality, Citizen C emphasized that using the app was motivating, as it gave her a means for being in contact with Randers Municipality regarding her wants and needs and, as such, she found it motivating to feel the linking social capital with the municipality and that her participation makes a difference (Citizen C, 2024).

While this citizen type can be enabled and motivated to participate, citizens also point out multiple constraints. Social patterns and societal structures can impede participation, as citizens express that the timing of the participatory events can conflict with competing interests, plans, and daily routines (Citizen C, 2024; Citizen D, 2024; Planner B, 2024). This was brought up during the third conversation café with mothers in the local community, as they explain that everyday life with work, daily tasks, and parenting drain their energy and mental surplus to participate in citizen engagement (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D)).

In relation to being overwhelmed in their daily lives, the concept of commitment is also highlighted as a barrier to participation. Planner C and D point out that the obligation to sign up for a citizen meeting can lead citizens to opt out of participation, as a mental barrier or concern may exist around how committing to participation could entail an expectation to take on tasks. Planner C and D further explain that asking citizens not to sign up but to just show up, if they feel like it, may provide some peace and alleviate any potential expectations of pressure from citizens (Planner C, 2024; Planner D, 2024). Citizen D (2024) recognizes the issue with commitment, as she expresses that participating in a citizen meeting can be overwhelming after a long day. As such, the flexibility of the app became an appealing participation method, as downloading and using the app was easy and required little effort and commitment (Citizen D, 2024).

Inactive Citizens

While some citizens are willing to participate, others choose not to. In addition to the barriers mentioned above, public apathy towards participation can also be explained by satisfaction or disinterest with current circumstances, and trust that others will highlight their point of view (Citizen D, 2024; Planner A, 2023). Citizen D comments that participation and local development planning may not be for everyone, which should be respected: "*You never know other people's backgrounds to say 'no thank you, I cannot participate', and one should refrain from wanting an explanation for that*" (Citizen D, 2024, 00:37, own translation).

Planner B (2024) agrees with this notion of respecting non-participating members of society, but emphasizes that it is challenging to plan and establish anchoring and ownership for projects within a community as an entity, when it is the same small group of citizens who participate every time. Motivation for participation among non-participants and those who participate to a small extent, Planner B and official area renewal guidelines highlight quick, easy results with small, fast victories (Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing, 2016; Planner B, 2024). As such, citizens may find that the efforts put into participation can be rewarding, and that their motivation to trust the planning process remains when challenges or uncertainties arise, or when things move slowly.

Uncertainties as Barrier for Participation

During conversations with citizens as well as in the citizen meeting, concerns and criticism over the participation process surfaced. A prolonged planning process period, lack of concrete plans and actions, change in personnel structure, and a lack of initial local knowledge of the development plan had sparked uncertainties in citizens.

With the development plan start-up in 2021 and subsequent waiting period before the area renewal, several citizens expressed impatience. Citizens claimed that the process had been very long already, that they are drenched with citizen meetings, and that they are concerned about more undefined 'talk without action'. However, some citizens also pointed out that the low attendance at conversation cafés should have led to adopting a different participation approach, such as a citizen meeting, to avoid potential exclusion. This provided us as planners with the dilemma of how to establish a thorough and outreaching participation process, in which citizens could discuss project proposals, while at the same time avoid tiring and discouraging citizens through more meetings without concrete actions. Furthermore, citizens criticized the transition between the development plan and the area renewal process, in which valuable knowledge had been lost, and that former working groups had not

continued in the area renewal process due to miscommunication and change in personnel (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note E); Appendix G, 2024).

Citizens A and B expressed concern that challenges could cause a loss of interest from fellow active and volunteer citizens through impatience and uncertainties. They emphasize the need for trust, transparency, and knowledge regarding their roles in the planning process (Appendix G, 2024; Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024).

Subsection Summary

The subsection looked at different types of participants in Ålum and Omegn along with their motivations and barriers for engagement. Findings from active citizens in Ålum and Omegn support the literature on active and dedicated citizens being enabled to participate due to having resources, knowledge, experience, and time to partake actively (Agger, 2012). Active citizens are perceived as valuable and significant, not only for the social cohesion and societal strength in Ålum and Omegn, but also for their contributions to the area renewal with their time and effort (Appendix F, 2024; Citizen C, 2024). Furthermore, they influence participation by assisting the planning team in organizing participation initiatives and by encouraging others to participate.

The findings on active citizens reveals a risk of becoming constrained in their participation due to an overload of demands, tasks, responsibilities, and feelings of being overwhelmed, and that the municipal bias and focus on rural development being driven by local strengths may create or exacerbate this risk (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note C); Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024).

The citizens who are less active, are enabled to participate when they feel relevance in the municipal initiatives, when participation suits their daily routines and energy levels, and when methods, such as the app, offers flexibility and low commitment. Societal structures impose barriers due to competing interests and daily tasks (Citizen C, 2024; Citizen D, 2024). These constraints need to be considered in participation to establish inclusivity. Both for active and less active citizens, uncertainties about roles and responsibilities, lack of transparency, and impatience also influence their willingness to participate (Appendix F, 2024; Appendix G, 2024; Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024).

While empirical findings generally support the literature on citizen types, their motivation, and their significance in participation and area renewals, the discovered barriers provide new insights. Interviewees uncovered the effects of busy lifestyles and mental barriers in participation, such as feelings of being overwhelmed, low energy levels, and stress. The need to avoid commitment and feel safe in the planning process had significant importance to some participants (Appendix G, 2024; Planner C, 2024; Planner D, 2024).

4.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter provided an in-depth analysis, addressing the following sub-question: *How do the five components influence inclusive and engaging public participation in Ålum and Omegn, and why is public participation significant in the area renewal planning?*

The first part of this chapter looked into the case area of Ålum and Omegn and highlighted local strengths, such as natural and recreative potentials, community strengths, and local challenges and

characteristics aligning with difficulties of shrinkage, making the area relevant for area renewal. This was followed by a Section that provided background knowledge on contemporary rural and village planning as well as the initial processes leading to the area renewal in Ålum and Omegn (Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021a, 2021c, 2021b; Randers Municipality & Ålum and Omegn, 2022).

Through the analysis, the roles of legislation, municipal practice, individual planners, participatory methods, and civil society have been studied in the area renewal process of Ålum and Omegn. The analysis has showed that each component, alone and collectively, influences inclusive and engaging participation, and that the effect depends on their interrelation, implementation, and their embedded context. As an example, while legislation influences participation through the requirement of binding collaboration, it is apparent that the level of inclusiveness is further shaped by other components such as municipal traditions and resources as well as planners' abilities in facilitating participatory processes. As such, the analysis highlights the significant roles of the five components in shaping inclusive and engaging participation in a village area like Ålum and Omegn. The following Table 4.1 shows the influence of the components on inclusive and engaging participation in greater detail.

The second part of the sub-question addresses why inclusive and engaging participation is needed in villages like Ålum and Omegn. As mentioned in Subsection 4.3.2 Randers Municipality emphasizes the importance of citizens and local strengths in driving local development (Randers Municipality, 2021d). In villages, greater responsibility is placed on citizens to drive development because other actors, such as businesses and banks, are less involved compared to urban areas (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note B))

As such, the active participation of citizens in these villages is crucial, as it aims to ensure that citizens partake in the local development. Due to this, the main purposes of participation in the area renewal in Ålum and Omegn include legitimization, ownership, and local anchoring. This is to ensure that implemented projects have broad and inclusive support in the community as well as foster local management of projects, also after the area renewal. Furthermore, the participation aimed towards obtaining local knowledge and project proposals based on citizen insights (Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024).

Furthermore, Randers Municipality emphasizes that collaborative processes in area renewals are conducted to support social cohesion (Randers Municipality, 2021d). As mentioned in Subsection 4.3.2, the vulnerability of relying on only a segment of citizens for participation. Fostering inclusive and engaging participation can be argued as necessary to ensure that too much responsibility of rural development does not fall on a few active citizens, who may become overwhelmed (Appendix F, 2024). Furthermore, aligning with the theoretical framework on collaborative and communicative planning, encouraging inclusive and collaborative participation can promote social capital and mutual resources, needed to create or maintain resilience when facing challenges (Innes & Booher, 2004). This will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

Table 4.1: Empirical findings on the components influence on participation in Ålum and Omegn

Empirical Findings

Component	Influence on Participation	Enabling inclusive and engaging participation	Constraining inclusive and engaging participation (Barriers)

Legislation	Legislation on area renewal sets an overall framework and requires binding collaboration with affected actors, but with undefined model or requirements for scope. Open legislation grants autonomy to planning actors to approach participation based on their interpretation.	Open legislation enables inclusive and engaging participation through flexibility to planning context and provides autonomy for planners to assess relevant participation approaches.	A lack of fixed requirements in legislation constrains inclusive and engaging participation by risking shallow participation to be implemented and accepted under terms like 'flexibility'.
Municipal Practice	The municipality shapes area renewal participation based on legislation, political priorities, traditions, practices, and available resources.	The municipality's practices and tradition for area renewal enable inclusive participation through fostering local anchoring, collaboration, acknowledging citizens in locally driven development and utilizing tailored approaches to participation.	Constraints are seen through resource limitations and potential exclusion of less active communities, through a structural orientation towards active communities and active citizens who bring resources to the style and format of participation in area renewal.
The Individual Planner	Individual planners are positioned in the middle of the area renewal organization, as project managers. They navigate within their embedded context while influencing participation through their own experiences, expertise, and values.	Planners enable inclusive and engaging participation by: - Promoting linking social capital with local communities, fostering trust, ownership, and local anchoring. - Facilitating meetings, dialogue, deliberation, and room for multiple knowledge perspectives. - Balancing inputs and power dynamics, mitigating exclusion, and empowering citizens.	Planners risk overly focusing on participation tools and processes that mainly engage those already involved, potentially excluding less active individuals to be engaged, leading to uniform and unrepresentative knowledge. Difficulties in community outreach and motivation of participants can constrain inclusive and engaging participation. Power dynamics, dominant voices, and different interests and expectations can

			constrain inclusive participation.
Participatory Methods	The methods conducted influence participation through varied levels of engagement and participation styles: informing, consulting, establishing dialogue and discussions, and engaging citizens in decision-making. All methods showed strengths and barriers in inclusive and engaging participation.	Methods, such as cafés, app, and photovoice, enable inclusive and engaging participation through flexibility and safe spaces for communicating ideas and sentiments. The traditional citizen meeting had the highest attendance, thereby being more representative of the community. Combining different types of participatory methods and styles of communication can enable inclusive and engaging participation.	Methods, such as cafés, app, and photovoice, had low participation rates, indicating several barriers to inclusive and engaging participation, such as structural exclusion, lack of interest and motivation, or lack of contextual considerations. The format of the citizen meeting, with limited time for citizen discussions also constrained citizen engagement.
Civil Society	Civil society influences participation and area renewal planning through different ways of engaging, contributing, and assisting in the process, as well as the roles they have in the community, local development, and collaboration with the municipality. Their engagement is often influenced by own resources, motivation, and the collaboration and planning process with the municipality.	Active citizens are enabled to participate through having resources, knowledge, experiences, and contribute insights and efforts to the planning process. Less active citizens are enabled when experiencing relevancy and connectivity with the municipality, and when the participation suits their daily lives and energy levels.	Societal structures, daily routines, busy lifestyles, stress, and fear of commitment impose barriers for inclusive and engaging participation. Active citizens feeling overwhelmed by community and area renewal tasks may put constraints on their participation. Uncertainties in the planning process, lack of transparency, lack of trust, and impatience impose barriers for inclusive and engaging participation.

5 Discussion

This chapter aims to address the third sub-question: *How can barriers to engaging and inclusive participation in villages be lowered?*

This chapter builds on the key barriers to participation discussed in the previous chapter, highlighting learnings and offering suggestions for further improvements based on practical experiences and literature findings.

The chapter begins with Section 5.1 by addressing the underlying bias towards active citizens, and the implications that follow. Afterwards, Section 5.2 looks into the efforts and challenges of outreach and mobilization of especially less active citizens in participation. This is followed by Section 5.3 highlighting the mental and societal barriers in participation, and how they can be lowered with flexible approaches. The next Section 5.4 highlights the role of methods and how a multiple-methods approach can enhance participation. The following Section 5.5 looks into the long-term perspective of inclusive and engaging participation in area renewals, followed by Section 5.6 that highlights the purposes and the added values of inclusive and engaging participation. The final Section 5.7 concludes the chapter.

5.1 Underlying Bias Towards Active Citizens

Both literature and the empirical findings emphasize the importance of civil society in rural planning. The changed role of citizens in planning defines citizens as active co-creators, significant to ensure local anchoring, identifying relevant solutions through local insights, and continuous management of implemented projects after the area renewal process (Agger, 2012; Jensen & Agger, 2022; Meijer, 2016) The empirical findings in Subsection 4.3.2 highlight the importance of involved citizens, and the structure of area renewals reflects an orientation toward active communities, valuing citizens who actively contribute their efforts and resources (Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing, 2016; Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021d). Subsection 4.3.1 highlights that the open legislation, without restricted requirements to the level and organization of binding collaboration in participation, does not address how planners and municipalities can ensure inclusive and engaging participation (Planner B, 2024; Retsinformation, 2020b). In a critical view, the legal requirement of 'binding collaboration' can instead be interpreted as underscoring the orientation towards active, available actors.

At the same time, active citizens in Ålum and Omegn express a sense of reward in having an active role in their local community in which they see their efforts making a difference. Seeking funding for the local playground and renovating the community hall are both examples of how active citizens in Ålum and Omegn manage citizen-led projects and leverage their resources to the community (Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024). Given Randers Municipality's and planners' emphasis on local engagement in area renewals, this bias towards active citizens and their resources and contributions is not surprising.

However, the findings also revealed drawbacks in terms of orienting the planning process towards one segment of civil society. Both planners and active citizens highlight the requirements of voluntary, active citizens. Findings showed how active citizens feared being burdened by responsibilities in the local community and highlight tasks such as writing the development plan as overwhelming, see

Subsection 4.3.5 (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note C); Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024; Planner B, 2024). Planner B (2024) points out, that it can be a disadvantage if the collaboration and anchoring rely on individual active citizens, as they may, for various reasons, be forced to end their participation or find it overwhelming: "*It can be very demanding to be a volunteer if it requires, for example, three days a week of voluntary work. It is difficult for many people who have family, work, or studies to fit in*" (Planner B, 2024, part 2, 00:41, own translation). As such, relying on the efforts of a specific type of citizen, which in some communities entails only a few people, places a vulnerability on the planning process and local anchoring of projects. As citizens may, for various reasons, be inhibited in participation, an overreliance on active participants may risk projects no longer having local support and resources to be continued after the planning process.

To address this issue, there is a need for awareness and an approach that balances roles and responsibilities. This can be achieved by setting clear expectations, preventing active citizens feeling overwhelmed by excessive reliance, and minimizing uncertainties. During the first conversations between Planner A, the chair, the vice-chair of the residents' association, and myself, roles and expectations were addressed (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note C)). However, following up on roles and expectations could have induced more certainty when a different planner had to take over for Planner A. Being aware of dynamics and changes in the planning process, checking in on key actors, and continuously confirming or redefining expectations can mitigate uncertainties as well as help balancing the roles and responsibilities of citizens.

Another implication of an overreliance on active citizens is the risk of exclusion of other interests and perspectives in the planning process. As active citizens take on leading roles, their interests and ideas may risk dominating other voices and, as such, risk that projects do not get broad support and anchoring in the community. This has the implications that projects will not be received, used, and possibly maintained as planned (Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024). As such, a lack of broad community involvement and relying on few members of society may not only create vulnerabilities in terms of local anchoring, and the sustainability of projects after the area renewals, but it may also have implications for the collaborative ideal of the planning practice. It can influence power dynamics between local actors and their interests while other interests may not have the same impact. These risks of exclusion and domination of certain interests due to structural bias towards certain segments of citizens can be difficult to see. However, awareness to the broader interests can be enhanced by balancing inputs and expanding the participation towards less active citizens. However, planners describe difficulties in outreach and mobilization, which will be further elaborated in the next section.

5.2 Outreach and Mobilization

To address the orientation towards active citizens, and thereby mitigating exclusion of other citizen types, this section looks into how barriers of broad involvement can be addressed.

In the introduction, Hospers (2014) contends that for citizens to be engaged and actively involved in local development, planning authorities must enable this engagement and empower citizens to partake. According to this argument, the responsibility of engagement is placed with planning authorities. However, planners emphasize difficulties with outreach and mobilization – reaching the citizens where they are - and motivating them to participate.

Drawing on Willson's framework in the Subsection 2.2.3 section planners find themselves situated in a

framework in which the participation process is influenced by their individual abilities and the surrounding context (Willson, 2021). Within findings, planners express that they, often alone, are responsible creators of the participation process through their own creativity, habits, and experience. In this way, outreaching approaches towards citizens risk becoming repeated default approaches, such as outreach through personal mail, social media, and associations. While such approaches can function as effective gateways towards local citizens, having default approaches and habits can limit thinking outside the box. Furthermore, creativity and opportunities for citizen outreach, project branding, communicating participation opportunities, and motivating public involvement are often constrained by contextual factors such as limited resources, and insufficient communication between municipal colleagues and departments. Particularly, internal municipal communication is highlighted by several planners, who describe that restricted 'silo- division' between tasks and departments limits communication and opportunities to achieve various approaches to citizen outreach (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note B); Appendix G, 2024; Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024).

To enhance outreach in participation and lower barriers, considerations can be made towards internal municipal collaboration working horizontally between departments on strategies for outreach. Since every municipal department has citizen contact, engaging in internal networking can help planners enhance their strategies and toolbox based on colleagues' experiences and skills. This includes outreach, communication, branding, and approaches towards citizens through specific events and associations otherwise unknown to planners (Appendix F, 2024; Appendix G, 2024). Planner C (2024) highlights experiences working with colleagues in the communication department on communicating events and participation, which sparked creativity and opportunities for reaching out to more citizens. Planner B (2024) highlights, that especially area renewals often touch upon more than one municipal department, as to why networking and enhancing the scope of municipal representation and knowledge seems highly relevant.

Furthermore, considerations can be made towards opportunities related to local democracy and outreach, through networks and social capital such as local village committees and rural district committees. Planner B explains that such networking initiatives exist in Randers Municipality between administrational and political committees as well as local associations and involves networking through meetings and newsletters (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note B)). While such networks and committees of local interests can act as spokespersons in the local community, Planner B points out that they are often dominated by active citizens, which means that such initiatives cannot guarantee that they lower barriers for less active citizens (Appendix G, 2024). As such, looking towards inclusive and flexible approaches, Planner C (2024) emphasizes opportunities in digital platforms, allowing citizens to participate on their own terms.

"They Had the Opportunity"

While Hospers (2014) emphasizes planning authorities' responsibilities of enabling participation, participation is not only a one-sided social activity. To have a voice and influence in local development, one could contend that citizens also share responsibility for their involvement. As such, citizens can seek information, for example, on municipal websites, and through various sources used by planners for outreach and invitations to participation such as social media, local associations, or personal mail.

Emphasizing citizens' personal responsibility in participation, Citizen B stated when asked if citizens in

Ålum and Omegn feel unheard in the process: "*Then it is their own fault. . . Everyone has been given an opportunity, so it is about people not daring to step up. And those individuals are always hard to reach*" (Citizen B, 2024, 01:45, own translation). As such, it could be argued that in planning participation, the individual has a responsibility to engage to be influential.

Finding the balance between outreach and lowering barriers for participation and leaving the rest to citizens' own motivation can be difficult, as we found in Ålum and Omegn. Here, low attendance at the cafés made it difficult to know if citizens felt informed and enabled to participate, or if they were excluded or simply chose not to participate due to various reasons. However, when talking to residents during site visits and interviews, it was clear that citizens overall knew about the area renewal, knew us as planners, and how to get in touch with us, and also seemed to have made decisions about their own level of involvement (Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024; Citizen C, 2024; Citizen D, 2024). Placing the responsibility of outreach and motivation onto citizens can seem rightful, as planners cannot force participation onto citizens (Planner B, 2024). However, this statement can also risk becoming a blameful hiding of planners' own limitations in outreach as well as an unnuanced reason for invisible barriers that hinder citizen participation. The next section delves deeper into how social structures and mental barriers impede participation.

Theory and Practice in Outreach and Mobilization

The introduction and conclusion of the theoretical framework highlight that the broader literature on participation is overly focused on enhancing processes and refining methods for those already engaged, thereby overlooking outreach and mobilization, especially among less active citizens. This critique is also relevant and echoed in the empirical findings, which suggests that there is alignment between the lack of attention in outreach and mobilization in literature as well as in planning practice. Planners in Randers Municipality have competences and tools for facilitating collaboration and knowledge production with citizens through initiatives such as workshops (Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024). However, as mentioned in Subsection 4.3.3, these tools mainly shape participation for those already motivated to partake and involved in the collaboration process, which often led to uniform outputs by recurring active citizens (Planner C, 2024). While these tools may result in knowledge production, however they risk a lack of broad and inclusive knowledge perspectives. As such, there needs to be attention on the initial stages of participation such as communication and outreach, and motivating citizens who are less inclined to participate.

As mentioned in the theoretical conclusion, literature on participation that includes ideals from communicative and collaborative theories promotes dialogue, mutual learning, and consensus-based decision-making. However, the literature often lacks strategies for mobilizing less active citizens. This can result in a focus on enhancing participation processes for those already engaged, rather than developing approaches to actively engage less active citizens. At the same time, as mentioned above, planners explain difficulties in practice, such as resource limitations and 'silo-thinking'. This suggests that the lack of theoretical focus on the initial stages of participation may contribute to planners' difficulties in outreach and mobilization.

5.3 Mental and Societal Barriers to Participation

While the previous section focuses on lowering barriers for participation through municipal outreach

and mobilization of citizens, this section explores the citizen perspective. From the perspectives of especially less active citizens, participation can be impeded by societal structures and mental barriers affecting motivation and energy levels.

The theoretical framework highlights societal structures, patterns, and norms that pose barriers to participation, particularly for less active and inactive citizens. Lack of time, resources, knowledge, and interests to participate were often highlighted due to socio-economic inequalities, household activities, and competing interests (Agger, 2012; Davies, 2001; King et al., 1998). Empirical findings showed that broader societal structures and patterns are among the main reasons for non-participation. Planners and citizens emphasized that mental barriers especially impeded participation, as mentioned in section 4.3.5, while interviewees often mentioned feelings of being overwhelmed and occupied by other responsibilities, family dynamics, exhaustion from daily life, fear of commitment, and stress impacting their lives or their work on facilitating participation. (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D); Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024; Citizen D, 2024; Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024; Planner D, 2024). As Citizen D elaborates in the interview about her experiences of lacking energy to participate due to daily tasks, work/life balance, and parenting:

> "*One has this battery, which gets filled up during the day, and then it gets drained and drained and drained, and eventually, there's not much left, and then you really have to economize with the last percentages of energy, and yeah... That's where the citizen meeting falls off*" (Citizen D, 2024, 34:57, own translation)

As such, the busyness of everyday life and the lack of energy or mental surplus impose barriers to participation by removing motivation to participate, unless there is an immediate 'threat' or dissatisfaction that forces their participation (Appendix F, 2024). Societal structures, which influence demands and work-life balance, as well as norms about family dynamics, influence individual participation barriers and may create inequalities between participants based on resources and motivation.

Identifying these barriers for participation may also lead to possible solutions that accommodate the mental energy and time constraints of busy participants. As mentioned in Subsubsection 4.3.4.3, local parents explained that participation in the conversation café was enabled by right timing and dinner being served (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D); Citizen D, 2024). Here, lowering barriers means creating room for energy to participate and to 'fit into' participants' rhythms, routines, energy levels, and family dynamics. The conversation café proved that when daily tasks such as dinner preparation is taken off busy participants' shoulders in their everyday lives, it creates room for focus on other things – in this instance local development and project proposals (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D)).

Furthermore, bringing flexibility into the rhythms of busy lifestyles, the app as a participation method enabled participants to partake and have a voice in the area renewal planning process, while not having to commit to a certain meeting time and format unsuited to busy household dynamics. Citizen D (2024, 00:34) notably comments on the outreach potential of the app and digital solutions in general, as it "*caught me where I was last night*", highlighting how the method can proactively be outreaching and motivating by reducing the effort and barriers for participation.

Planning the third café in the local youth club had the purpose of involving children and teenagers in participation. A positive side effect proved to be that after the children had participated by answering questions, the parents had the opportunity to engage while the children were occupied by games. A single mother commented that her participation was realized because of the opportunity to bring her

daughter to the event (Appendix F, 2024). As such, implementing a participation approach that welcomes children may lower barriers for families, especially single parents.

5.4 The Role of Methods

Discussing participation and how to lower barriers without considering the role of participatory methods is unavoidable. The findings in literature concluded that the approach and effectiveness of participatory methods vary depending on the context in which they are implemented, as well as the structural practices and traditions that determine which methods are used, their purposes, and how they are implemented (Agger, 2012; Innes & Booher, 2004; Lyhne et al., 2016). The empirical findings showed that each participatory method has its potentials and limitations for inclusive and engaging participation in Ålum and Omegn.

Capturing the daily rhythm and existing local social activities was crucial for the value of the conversation cafés as an inclusive method, as they highlighted how aligning meeting frameworks with the rhythms of families with children could achieve participation, even when participants had low energy levels (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D)). This reflects the literature's emphasis on the importance of context-specific methods. Designed to foster an informal and relaxing atmosphere, the cafés aimed to establish dialogue and deliberation on local development. Despite low attendance, those who participated were deeply engaged and provided local knowledge, suggesting that such methods can complement more formal approaches (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D)).

As mentioned in Section 5.3, the app demonstrated flexibility and low commitment, which some citizens perceived as an advantage. Consequently, they did not need to commit to other participation formats and styles (Citizen C, 2024; Citizen D, 2024). For instance, for citizens with busy lifestyles, providing flexible participatory solutions may enable participation. Planner B highlighted the app's potentials, and elaborated how the covid-19 pandemic provided testing grounds for planners to test digital solutions within municipal participatory practice, such as online citizen meetings. Here, planners found new opportunities in terms of flexibility and accessibility for participants such as families with children who would participate in citizen meetings during dinner (Planner B, 2024). While Planner A (2023) noted that online meetings could increase the distance between planners and citizens, the flexibility can also lower barriers for those unable to attend in person, allowing them to be informed and to participate through online voting solutions. As such, considerations must be made in terms of purpose, style of communication and need for local presence and then weigh whether the possibilities for inclusiveness and quality of participation are best strengthened through digital solutions, despite distance, or through physical presence, despite the risk of lower participation rate.

Additionally, some participants expressed that communication through photovoice enabled visual ways to articulate needs and opinions, which some found engaging. The photovoice exercise with pictures, descriptions, and locations provided a holistic picture of Ålum and Omegn's potentials and challenges (Appendix H, 2024; Citizen D, 2024). That their submitted contributions were included at public meeting presentations showed how visual methods can complement traditional ones. This aligns with the literature suggestion that a mix of diverse methods can enhance knowledge production and inclusivity (Ertiö, 2015; Meenar & Mandarano, 2021).

The traditional citizen meetings attracted the highest number of participants, confirming the literature's notion that traditional practices still play a crucial role in community engagement (Ertiö,

2015). The high turnout can be explained due to decision-making related to project proposals. However, it remains uncertain if a public meeting held at a different stage in the process would attract the same number of participants, given some participation fatigue after the development plan process.

Looking at the methods utilized in Ålum and Omegn, incorporating flexibility and a combination of various methods seemed to have lowered participation barriers for different types of citizens, making the process more inclusive and engaging. Furthermore, the multi-method approach also ensured a more in-depth understanding of the citizens than just relying on single methods, such as a citizen meeting. Here, combining multiple participatory methods which can complement each other in style, flexibility, purpose, and level of engagement tailored to the community context can be considered an effective approach. Furthermore, requesting feedback from participants to understand their needs and barriers, and as such adapt methods accordingly can ensure context-embedded and ongoing relevance and inclusivity.

5.5 Long Term Inclusive and Engaging Participation

This study sheds light on the initial stages of participation and follows the start-up process of the area renewal in Ålum and Omegn. However, considerations must also be made regarding long-term inclusive and engaging participation. This is particularly relevant as the continuation of projects oftentimes are dependent on citizen management, and as such projects need to be socially anchored on a long-term basis (Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing, 2016; Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024).

As area renewal processes typically last up to five years in total, there is a risk of dropout of engaged citizens due to the lengthy planning process (Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing, 2016; Retsinformation, 2020b). This risk is especially present if no attention is paid to keeping participation engaging and relatable for citizens. Additionally, concerning inclusive participation, there is a risk that only the most active citizens are involved at the end. As a result, the planning process may be shaped by only a small segment of interests (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note B)). This underscores the importance of addressing barriers to involvement in the initial stage and continuously considering how participation can remain inclusive.

This can be done in collaboration with the citizens, similarly as with the parents at the third conversations café, by inquiring about the conditions that enable their participation, citizens can contribute to shape the framework for inclusive participation taking into account the barriers that impede their participation (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D)).

Furthermore, ensuring long-term participation can be achieved through project working groups. Planning processes should be designed to include working groups for individual projects, in addition to a cross-cutting steering group that also includes citizens, as a way of ensuring continued participation. While working groups may tend to attract recurring active citizens and dominant interests, planners emphasize that they also open opportunities for more participants who may not necessarily see themselves in the steering group but have a specific interest in a particular project and therefore follow it closely. To avoid fatigue and dropout, it is recommended that projects are divided into smaller phases throughout the five-year period, with the addition of ongoing "quick wins" so that citizens can see tangible results and remain motivated in their participation (Appendix F, 2024 (Field

Note B); Appendix G, 2024; Ministry of Immigration, 2016; Planner B, 2024).

Both the literature and the analysis found that the choice and formats of methods can influence the involvement of less active citizens in planning. While quiet communities and less active citizens may not alter their engagement throughout the area renewal process, providing opportunities that let them have influence on their own terms can make them feel more involved and perhaps empowered to voice their opinion if needed. In addition to digital solutions, which offer flexibility in involvement, temporary installations over an extended period supplemented with clear information can make citizens feel that progress is being made. This approach also allows for testing of solutions in practice and contributes to citizens providing knowledge on their own terms, and thereby involving citizens throughout the development process (Appendix F, 2024).

5.6 The Added Value of Participation

While the previous sections include several ways to lower barriers for inclusive and engaging participation, this section brings some considerations towards the values and outcomes of participation, which also influence village communities' capacity to drive local development and remain resilient when facing challenges.

Within the theoretical framework, Agger and Jensen (2015) highlight that the intangible and softer outcomes from collaborative processes with citizens and local stakeholders can be difficult to measure and thereby assess. The outcomes of the collaborative process in Ålum and Omegn may result in tangible outcomes from the projects, however inclusive and engaging participation can also lead to more invisible and social outcomes benefitting local development (Innes & Booher, 2004).

As mentioned, the main identified purposes for participation in Ålum and Omegn included obtaining local knowledge, the legitimization and local anchoring of project, as well as ensure that the implementations live on after the area renewal (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note A, B); Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024). Furthermore, as mentioned in the analysis, Randers Municipality emphasizes that collaboration with citizens in area renewals is meant to support social cohesion in communities (Randers Municipality, 2021d).

With these purposes and objectives in mind, the participation helped us planners to identify needed improvements in the community, which can lead to tangible outcomes. However, participation also serves as especially valuable for the local communities' feeling of being involved and having ownership. Planner B (2024) elaborates on the value of participation:

> "*My opinion is that it is more valuable for the citizens than it is for me. Often, the projects I create would look almost exactly the same whether or not I had citizen participation. But for the life that is to be lived around the projects afterwards, it is certainly not insignificant. It is almost crucial. So, in that way, it is indeed worth the time*" (Planner B, 2024, Part 1, 01:10, own translation)

As such, Planner B confirms the value of participation – mainly towards citizens. While Planner B (2024) contends that the physical outcomes of projects may not differ considerably with or without the inputs from citizens, the citizens' sense of ownership and the long-term success of projects are enabled by citizen involvement.

The analysis further concluded a potential added value of inclusive participation process, such as enhancing social capital and thereby relieving the responsibilities of active citizens. As mentioned,

relying only on few members of civil society may compromise local support for projects, anchoring, and continuation of project management (Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024). As such, lowering barriers towards inclusive and engaging participation can empower more citizens to be involved, bringing in their insights and resources, potentially sharing the responsibilities of local development – thereby meeting the municipal objective of social cohesion and capital, in communities.

This perspective aligns with the literature of communicative and collaborative planning in Chapter 2. Here, lowering barriers for inclusive and engaging participation can enhance place-based resources through strengthened social capital, mutual learning, and increased capacity to implement and manage projects (Healey, 1996; Innes & Booher, 2004). The literature on ABIs is often related to these planning ideals due to the focus on gathering insights and collaboration among diverse local actors (Agger, 2012; Agger & Jensen, 2015; Jensen & Agger, 2022). In Ålum and Omegn, facilitating dialogue and deliberation among actors, such as the conversation cafés and the citizen program group, fostered mutual learning among citizens and planners. Both citizens and planners gained insights into local challenges and potential solutions, and citizens expressed feeling heard in the process and empowered to voice their opinions. Furthermore, the usage of multiple methods in the participation process enhanced inclusivity and empowered citizens to contribute to the participation process (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note C, D); Citizen C, 2024; Citizen D, 2024). The literature emphasizes that building participation on these communicative and collaborative ideals can enhance civil capacity (Innes & Booher, 2004). This is crucial not only for managing projects after the area renewal but also for engaging in mutual problem-solving and responding to difficulties. This approach is particularly relevant in rural areas, where local citizens are encouraged to continuously drive development while often facing shrinkage-related challenges (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note B)).

However, the findings also revealed several barriers which have implications for these theoretical ideals, underscoring the nuanced and complex challenges in planning participation. Examples include the bias towards active citizens, and thereby potential dominance of these perspectives and interests, can dominate other voices and as such limiting the diversity of perspectives. Relating to this, planners express the need to balance interests and expectations from diverse actors (Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024). Here, the practical realities of power dynamics can influence equality in participation, where more dominant voices overshadow others. This challenges the ideals of communicative and collaborative theories by failing to ensure that all community members have equal opportunity to contribute and influence decisions (Innes, 1996).

Furthermore, tailoring planning and participation processes to each specific context, engaging the community, facilitating participatory methods and deliberations takes a lot of effort and resources. As Planner B (2024) mentioned in the above quote, participation is worth the time due to its effect on the local community and the continued lived lives around implemented projects. However, effective participation that meets the objectives of Randers Municipality requires not only competent planners and political ambitions but also the allocation of sufficient resources to ensure that local communities are supported and empowered, not only during area renewals, but also afterwards (Ministry of Immigration Integration and Housing, 2016; Planner B, 2024). While some villages, like Ålum and Omegn, are already active and organize citizen-led projects, other quieter villages may need further support. While an underlying bias towards active communities is unsurprising, awareness of the quiet communities and their challenges and potentials is needed to face impacts of rural shrinkage. As such, prioritizing investment in inclusive and engaging participation is needed when aiming for the values and objectives brought by participation, such as successful planning initiatives,

citizen-led local development, and social cohesion in rural areas.

5.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter addressed the third sub-question: *How can barriers to engaging and inclusive participation in villages be lowered?* The discussion chapter addresses some of the key barriers to participation, made visible through the case study of the participatory process in Ålum and Omegn.

Section 5.1 addresses the underlying bias towards active citizens and the implications that may follow in terms of exclusion, risk of burn-out, and compromise to the broad support and anchoring of projects. The section highlights the importance of awareness to this bias leading to domination of certain interests, but also acknowledges the value of active citizens. The section highlights balancing and continuously setting expectations for the roles of engaged citizens, and their responsibilities to reduce overburdening active citizens, uncertainties, and maintain a healthy collaboration. Engaging a broader segment of the community can distribute the responsibilities as well as mitigate domination of few interests (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note C, D, E); Citizen A, 2024; Citizen B, 2024; Planner B, 2024). However, section 5.2 highlights that outreach and motivating citizens to participate is described as challenging for planners due to the oftentimes individual and 'silo-thinking' approach to outreach. To overcome these barriers, the section highlights internal municipal collaboration between departments as well as considerations for collaboration and networks of local committees. Furthermore, the section highlights an alignment between literature and empirical findings in their lack of attention to outreach and mobilization of less engaged citizens, which suggests that this gap in literature may contribute to planner's practical difficulties (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note B); Appendix G, 2024; Planner B, 2024; Planner C, 2024).

Societal structures and mental barriers significantly influence participation motivation, especially for the less active citizens, which is elaborated in section 5.3. Recognizing and accommodating these barriers by providing flexible participation opportunities can help engage these citizens. Methods such as conversation cafés and the app, that align with participants' daily rhythms and responsibilities have proven effective in lowering barriers (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D); Citizen B, 2024; Citizen C, 2024; Citizen D, 2024). Section 5.4 highlights that including a multi-method approach is crucial for inclusive participation. Different methods accommodate different needs and can lead to a more inclusive engagement process. Combining formal and informal methods, as well as different communication styles, such as visual and dialogue can enhance knowledge gathering and inclusivity (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note D); Appendix H, 2024; Ertiö, 2015; Meenar & Mandarano, 2021).

Section 5.5 brings perspective towards how the area renewal participation process can be inclusive and engaging long term to avoid dropout, ensure long term social anchoring of projects, and mitigate domination of few remaining interests (Appendix F, 2024 (Field Note B); Ministry of Immigration, 2016). Section 5.6 highlights the purposes and added values of inclusive and engaging participation processes such as enhancing local ownership, and supporting social capital, cohesion, and capacities which is important for the long-term success of projects and development in village communities. While the ideals of collaborative and communicative planning help illuminate ways to enhance inclusive and engaging participation, and as such potentially enhance local civil resources, the practical implications from empirical findings show that the nuanced realities can challenge these ideals, underscoring the complexity of participation. The section highlights that fulfilling these values of participation requires allocating resources, as an investment, to support effective and sustained

citizen involvement in local development (Healey, 1996; Innes & Booher, 2004; Planner A, 2023; Planner B, 2024; Randers Municipality, 2021d).

6 Conclusion

By emphasizing the role and activation of citizens as co-creators of rural project planning and development, this thesis aims to answer following research question: ***How can inclusive and engaging public participation processes be shaped in rural villages facing shrinkage?***

To answer the research question, the thesis focuses on the case study of municipal area renewal in village area of Ålum and Omegn in Randers Municipality experiencing shrinkage-related challenges.

To understand how inclusive and engaging public participation is influenced and impeded, the thesis examined five key components to participation, namely Legislation, Municipal Practice, Individual Planners, Participatory Methods, and Civil Society.

Findings in literature and within the case study reveal that each component, based on contextual structures, both enables and constrains inclusive and engaging participation. The thesis demonstrates how the components influence participation, alone and in conjunction with each other, shaping and being shaped by others. As such, inclusive and engaging public participation in rural villages can be shaped by recognizing and addressing the various barriers and by focusing on the enabling qualities in each of the five components.

Legislation
While legislation with minimal requirements regarding participation enables a flexible participation process, tailored to each context, there is a risk of participation being shallow and becoming a legal checkbox. Implementing more requirements may ensure inclusive and engaging participation, however, planners are concerned about losing flexibility in practice.

Municipal Practice
The institutionalized practices and traditions within municipalities enable and constrain inclusive and engaging participation. Findings show that Randers Municipality enables inclusive and engaging participation by implementing a tailored analytical approach to rural planning and area renewals, prioritize collaboration, local knowledge, and local anchoring for projects. However, limitations in resources and bias towards resourceful and active communities and citizens can be constraining for inclusive and engaging participation, due to exclusion.

Individual Planner
The role of planners as project managers, and thereby facilitators and navigators of participation, leads them to enable and constrain inclusive and engaging participation – dependent on context and personal experiences. Planners enable participation by facilitating open and inclusive meetings and room for involvement, and by balancing inputs and power dynamics, mitigating exclusion, and empowering citizens. However, inclusive and engaging participation can be constrained by resource limitations, focusing on participation tools and processes that mainly engage those already involved, and difficulties in community outreach and motivation of participants.

Participatory Methods
How methods are conducted, and their format, can enable and constrain participation. Methods like conversation cafés, apps, and photovoice exercises provide flexibility as well as differing styles of participation, allowing different types of citizens experiencing different types of barriers to be included

and engaged in participation. As such, a combination of different methods in a multi-method approach can cater to different needs.

Civil Society

The role and value of active citizens in participation is indisputable. However, risk of bias and implications in terms of dominance means that planners need to carefully balance their influence to ensure broad engagement to avoid exclusion of other actors. Furthermore, active citizens are enabled by settling expectations and distributing responsibilities to avoid burnout and dropout. Mental barriers and societal structures also significantly impact and impede participation, especially for less active citizens. Solutions to participation that allow flexibility, especially to the rhythm and routines of everyday life, can enhance participation.

Throughout the thesis, emphasis has been given to a lack of attention in literature and practical difficulties in outreach and mobilization that brings participants to the table. Analyzing village conditions provides a good starting point to understand the context and potentially to screen actors for participation. However, engaging people where they are through mobilization and motivation is perceived difficult by planners and should receive more attention. Default outreach strategies risk involving only recurring participants and producing uniform knowledge, leading to only a few uniform interests to gain influence. To address these challenges, the thesis suggests strengthening internal collaboration within municipal departments and forming strategies through mutual learning of different experiences, creativity and skills. Furthermore, implementing digital solutions can be proactively outreaching while providing the flexibility needed for their participation.

Looking towards the need for and value of participation, inclusive and engaging participation not only produces tangible outcomes in terms of concrete project implementations but potentially enhances intangible and softer outcomes, such as a sense of ownership, anchoring of projects, social capital, and capacity to manage projects after the area renewal. The thesis suggests that aiming for collaborative and communicative ideals and maintaining a municipal objective of fostering collaboration and social cohesion can enhance local communities' capacity to collectively manage projects and responsibilities and face shrinkage-related challenges. As such, prioritizing investment in inclusive and engaging participation is needed when aiming for the values and objectives brought by participation.

In conclusion, creating inclusive and engaging public participation processes in declining rural villages requires a comprehensive approach that includes awareness to underlying and sometimes invisible mechanisms impeding participation. This approach should tackle the structural barriers, identified through the five components, with awareness that more may exist. Barriers for less active citizens can be lowered by incorporating flexibility through using various participatory methods that allow room for everyday rhythms and routines. By prioritizing these strategies, municipalities can foster stronger, more resilient communities capable of driving local development sustainably.

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Appendix A. (2024). *Appendix A - Observations*.

Appendix B. (2024). *Appendix B - Document Analysis*.

Appendix C. (2024). *Appendix C - Interviews*.

Appendix E. (2024). *Appendix E - Interview Transcripts* .

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Appendix H. (2024). *Appendix H – App, Snapshot Ålum and Omegn*.

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