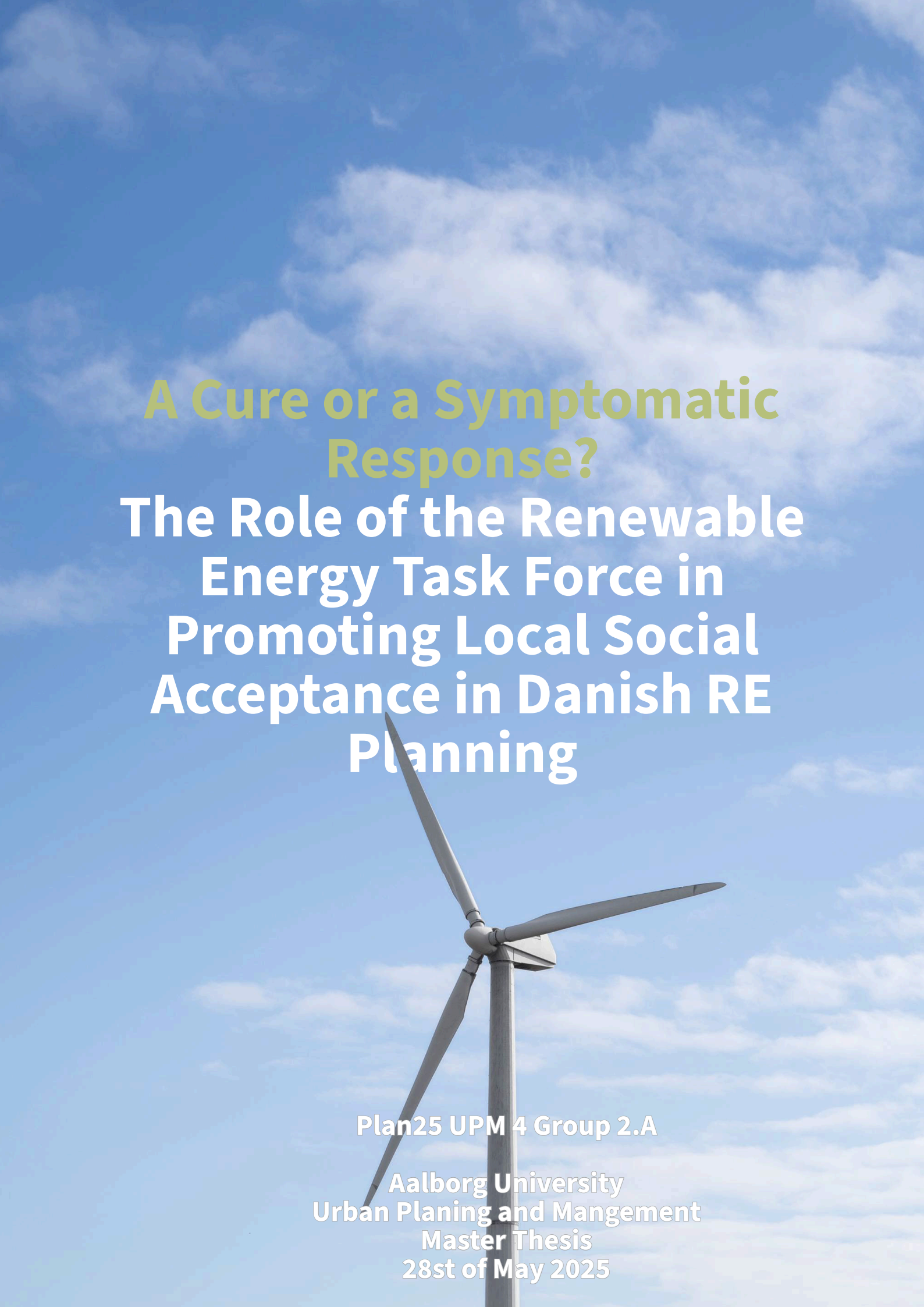


A Cure or a Symptomatic Response?

The Role of the Renewable Energy Task Force in Promoting Local Social Acceptance in Danish RE Planning

Plan25 UPM 4 Group 2.A

Aalborg University
Urban Planing and Mangement

Master Thesis
28st of May 2025

TITLE: ***A Cure or a Symptomatic Response? The Role of the Renewable Energy Task Force in Promoting Local Social Acceptance in Danish RE Planning***

Assignment
Master Theises

4th Semester at Urban Planning and Management (UPM)
Rendsburggade 14, 9000 Aalborg

Project period
1st. February - 28st. May 2025

Project group
Plan 25, UPM4 Group 2.A

Student members

Emilia I. H. Bailey

Emilia Imogen Holm Bailey

Lara Haji Mohammed

Supervisor
Kristian Borch

Publication: Digital upload
Number of pages: 62
Number of Appendices: 4
Published: 28.05.2025

Synopsis

This thesis investigates the role of the Danish Renewable Energy Task Force in supporting municipalities in achieving local social acceptance in the development of land-based renewable energy projects. The study is motivated by Denmark's ambitious climate goals, which depend heavily on municipal implementation capacity. However, municipalities often face challenges such as limited resources, complex regulatory frameworks, and local citizen opposition.

The thesis seeks to answer the following main research question:
How does the Renewable Energy Task Force support municipalities in engaging citizens in renewable energy planning, and what impact does this support have on local social acceptance?

To answer this, a case study of the Renewable Energy Task Force is conducted, following a qualitative, abductive methodology that combines semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and literature review. The theoretical framework integrates policy implementation theory, social acceptance theory, justice theories, and concepts of public participation. Together, these analytical tools provide a foundation for examining institutional dynamics and relational conditions at the municipal level.

The findings indicate that the task force plays an important role as a facilitator and knowledge broker, but that its impact is limited by a narrow mandate and a lack of embeddedness in local planning practice. Municipalities express a need for more concrete, context-specific, and capacity-building support, particularly in complex or conflict-prone cases.

The thesis concludes with a set of recommendations for rethinking the role of the Renewable Energy Task Force, to better address the structural, political, and practical needs that municipalities face in delivering locally grounded and socially accepted renewable energy projects.

AALBORG UNIVERSITY

Author's declaration in connection with the split-up of group *2* in study programme *Urban planning and management*, semester *4*, campus *Aalborg*, year *2025*

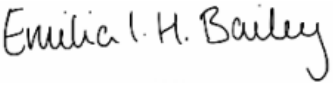
As per 09.05.2025 a split-up of the project group is carried out. The group is divided, so that the following students stay in the group: Nanna Kristensen. The following students: Lara Haji Mohammad and Emilia Imogen Holm Bailey work together from now on.

We hereby give consent to all parties to use the mentioned material after splitting up the group. The material developed together is as mentioned:

Nanna Kristensen	
Section	***Joint material***
Introduction	All material has been rewritten since the group split; however, this section ***may*** contain overlapping content with Lara & Emilia's project.
Theoretical framework	All material has been rewritten since the group split; however, this section ***may*** contain overlapping content with Lara & Emilia's project.
Appendix - Interview Guide - Annika Agger	This section contains overlapping content with Lara & Emilia's project.

Lara Haji Mohammad and Emilia Imogen Holm Bailey	
Section	***Joint material***
Introduction	All material has been rewritten since the group split; however, this section ***may*** contain overlapping content with Nanna Kristensen's project.
Theoretical framework	All material has been rewritten since the group split; however, this section ***may*** contain overlapping content with Nanna Kristensen's project.
Appendix - Interview Guide - Annika Agger	This section contains overlapping content with Nanna Kristensen's project.

The split-up is approved and signed by all parties, after which the split-up is final. The author's declaration is inserted in the beginning of the respective project reports.

Nanna Kristensen
Lara Haji Mohammad
Emilia Imogen Holm Bailey


A Cure or a Symptomatic Response? The Role of the Renewable Energy Task Force in Promoting Local Social Acceptance in Danish RE Planning

Project Summary

This thesis investigates how the Danish Renewable Energy Task Force (VE-rejseholdet) supports municipalities in fostering local social acceptance in the planning and implementation of land-based renewable energy projects. The study is motivated by the increasing need for renewable energy expansion in Denmark and a growing recognition that local opposition and procedural shortcomings can hinder the achievement of national climate goals.

Grounded in a qualitative, abductive research design and a pragmatic philosophy of science, the thesis analyses the interplay between national support structures and local planning practices. Based on interviews with municipal planners, representatives from the Renewable Energy Task Force, and relevant experts, combined with document analysis, the study examines how municipalities approach citizen participation and how the task force supports, or fails to support, these efforts.

The analysis is based on a multi-dimensional theoretical framework that includes social acceptance theory, policy implementation theory, procedural and distributive justice, landscape democracy, and the tech-reg - appropriate collaboration distinction. The findings show that while the task force contributes valuable knowledge-sharing and inspiration, its current mandate and model do not sufficiently address the structural and capacity-related needs municipalities face in promoting meaningful citizen participation and local legitimacy.

The thesis concludes by identifying the conditions under which national support mechanisms can more effectively assist municipalities in fostering socially accepted energy transitions, and offers recommendations for strengthening the role of the Renewable Energy Task Force.

Preface

This thesis has been written as the final project of the Master's Programme in Urban Planning and Management at Aalborg University, during the 4th semester. The work was carried out during the period February-May 2025.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the representatives of the four participating municipalities, Ringkøbing-Skjern, Lemvig, Jammerbugt, and Vordingborg, for their time and valuable insights. We also thank the Renewable Energy Task Force (VE-rejseholdet) for contributing important perspectives to the analysis. Special thanks are due to Annika Agger and Søren Hermansen for their reflections and critical input, which inspired important considerations throughout the process.

We would also like to express our deep gratitude to our supervisor, Kristian Borch, for his constructive feedback and invaluable academic support throughout the entire project.

The interviews conducted during this study were carried out in Danish and have therefore been transcribed in Danish. This thesis uses the IEEE reference style, in which references appear as numbered citations in the text ([1], [2], ...) and are listed chronologically in the bibliography. Tables and figures are numbered according to the chapter in which they appear and are referenced accordingly in the text.

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Introduction

The climate crisis poses an urgent global challenge, requiring coordinated action across all levels of governance. Following the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, 196 countries committed to limiting global temperature rise to well below 2°C, and preferably below 1.5°C, through fair and transparent reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions [1], [2]. Meeting these goals demands significant investments in renewable energy infrastructure to replace fossil fuels, which still dominate global energy consumption [1]. Following the Paris Agreement and the growing urgency of the climate crisis, the European Union has pledged to reduce collective greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030. In line with this, national governments have adopted corresponding targets to meet their share of the EU-wide commitment [3], [4]. Denmark has committed to reducing GHG emissions by 70% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, and to becoming climate neutral by 2045, with an even more ambitious goal of 110% net reductions by 2050. These targets are underpinned by guiding principles stating that Denmark must act as a global frontrunner due to its historical and moral responsibility [5]. To support this, the 2022 political agreement “More Green Electricity” outlines a plan to quadruple the country’s production of land-based solar and wind energy by 2030 [6]. These targets reflect a growing political consensus that effective climate action requires not only long-term goals, but immediate and substantial investments in renewable energy [7].

With the high priority given to the green transition both nationally and internationally, it is essential that local authorities contribute to realising the shared agenda, particularly in areas with favourable conditions for establishing renewable energy (RE) installations [1]. In this context, municipalities play a central role in meeting national climate targets. They are responsible for integrating renewable energy strategies into municipal development plans, developing local spatial plans, and ensuring local support through citizen engagement. At the same time, they are tasked with demonstrating leadership through local actions that reduce climate impact and promote sustainable communities [7], [8]. As the fulfilment of national climate goals largely depends on locally anchored efforts, municipalities are increasingly required to support the expansion of renewable energy towards 2030. The local responsibilities that municipalities carry out collectively contribute to the realisation of national ambitions [9]. As a result, municipal action has gained increased strategic importance in the effort to reach international climate objectives, leading, among other things, to the development of climate action plans under the DK2020 initiative [2]. In practice, however, the implementation of these goals is proving difficult for many municipalities. Several struggle with complex regulations, limited resources, and insufficient capacity to manage conflict situations, leaving them ill-equipped for the task. This reflects the complexity of addressing climate challenges, often referred to as "wicked problems". Effectively tackling these issues requires the development of strategies and their implementation in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, as the involved parties are mutually dependent [3].

Although the expansion of renewable energy in Denmark has been largely driven by local actors, this development continues to be obstructed by complex implementation conditions and administrative barriers at the municipal level. At the same time, the expansion of RE installations has increasingly affected both landscapes and local communities. As these installations grow in number and size, noise impacts, visual alterations, and physical interventions intensifies, potentially

contributing to local resistance. It is important, however, to acknowledge that public perceptions of RE installations are mixed and exist on a spectrum. For some, they appear as disruptive or unknown elements in a familiar landscape, for others, they evoke pride, inspiration, and a sense of participation in the urgent green transition. Thus, RE installations may be perceived as both a burden and an opportunity, depending on perspective and local context. This is why legislation requires that "extensive consideration" be given to neighbours, landscape, nature, cultural heritage, and agricultural interests. One of the most significant challenges in the transition to renewable energy is therefore the issue of social acceptance. Even though the majority of Danes support renewable energy, research shows that local opposition can act as a major barrier to implementation. This barrier is particularly evident in the field of spatial planning, where municipalities are responsible for integrating RE installations into local land-use strategies. Here, the lack of social acceptance can delay or derail planning processes, complicating the fulfilment of national climate targets at the local level. Wind turbines and solar parks represent a substantial socio-technical changes, which may provoke conflict in local communities, especially when residents feel that their interests are being neglected. In such cases, constructive dialogue, deliberation, and learning become central mechanisms for understanding and reducing conflict levels at the local level [7], [10]. However, even in countries with strong democratic traditions, incorporating local input into environmental decision-making processes, such as RE-projects, has proven challenging [11, p. 126]. This underscores the need for institutional support structures that can enable municipalities to facilitate inclusive and meaningful participation beyond formal requirements. Municipalities are thus placed at the forefront of ensuring local acceptance of renewable energy projects, precisely because they hold the formal responsibility for planning, public participation, and project approval. To support them in this demanding role, the Danish Energy Agency has established a Renewable Energy Task Force, (VE-rejseholdet), as a support function, specifically aimed at alleviating the complex administrative and practical burdens faced by municipalities [6], [12], [1]. The Renewable Energy Task Force is also a financially prioritised element of the Danish national Climate Agreement (2022), with an allocated budget of DKK 39.3 million, amounting to 21% of the total funding distributed through the state's policy instrument catalogue to support land-based renewable energy expansion from 2022 through 2026. This positions the task force as a centrally designated actor in the implementation of climate policy, with a key role in promoting local anchoring and accelerating planning processes at the municipal level [6]. As social acceptance can constitute a significant barrier in municipal planning processes for the expansion of renewable energy, there is a need for support functions that can help promote local acceptance and support. In this context, the Renewable Energy Task Force assumes responsibility by providing recommendations and methods aimed at strengthening citizen engagement and increasing public acceptance of RE projects [13]. By allocating a significant share of resources to the Renewable Energy Task Force, the Danish state signals that it is not merely one among many support tools, but rather a strategically embedded instrument within national climate policy aimed at accelerating the expansion of land-based renewable energy. This raises a critical question as to whether the task force fulfils its mandate, and whether it can effectively support municipalities in fostering social acceptance among local citizens, particularly in complex planning contexts marked by resistance and regulatory uncertainty. This study therefore investigates how the Renewable Energy Task Force supports municipalities in their efforts to engage the public, and to what extent

its activities address the practical and structural conditions necessary to promote social acceptance of renewable energy projects.

Research design

This study is structured around the following main research question, which is further explored through three sub-questions:
How does the Renewable Energy Task Force (VE-rejseholdet) support municipalities in engaging citizens in renewable energy planning, and what impact does this support have on local social acceptance?

1) *How do Danish municipalities typically approach the planning of renewable energy development, and how does the Renewable Energy Task Force currently support this planning process with a focus on public participation?*
2) *What preconditions must be in place at the municipal level to promote social acceptance in renewable energy planning, and to what extent does the current practice of the Renewable Energy Task Force address these preconditions?*
3) *How can the approach of the Renewable Energy Task Force be improved in order to more effectively support municipalities in promoting social acceptance through meaningful public participation in renewable energy planning?*

Philosophy of science: Pragmatism

This project is grounded in a pragmatic approach, where knowledge is viewed as a practical tool for action. The purpose of the study is to generate contextually informed knowledge that can contribute to improving how the Renewable Energy Task Force supports municipalities in promoting social acceptance through citizen engagement in RE development. In this perspective, knowledge is evaluated based on its capacity to inform actionable solutions. From a pragmatic ontological standpoint, reality is seen as being shaped through actions, relations, and context. Social phenomena are thus considered dynamic, context-dependent, and subject to change. This aligns with the project's focus on the practical workings of the Renewable Energy Task Force across varying municipal contexts. The pragmatic view of human nature regards individuals, such as citizens and municipal planners, as reflective and acting agents, not purely rational beings. These actors navigate complex, relational situations based on their context, prior experiences, and practical reasoning. Epistemologically, the project applies an abductive logic of inquiry. Theory is used as an analytical tool to interpret empirical patterns and challenges emerging from practice. However, theoretical explanations are not viewed as absolute truths. Rather, truth is conceptualised as that which is useful, meaningful, and operational in a given context. An explanation is "true" to the extent that it contributes to positive change in practice. In this project, truth is understood as the capacity to inform improvements in the practices of the Renewable Energy Task Force, ultimately supporting municipalities in promoting social acceptance of the local expansion of renewable energy [14].

Analytical Structure

The main research question will be addressed through a qualitative and abductive research design, which allows for an iterative movement between empirical data and theory. The study aims to understand how the Renewable Energy Task Force supports municipalities in planning for renewable energy with a focus on public participation, and how this affects local social acceptance. The analysis is structured in three interconnected levels:

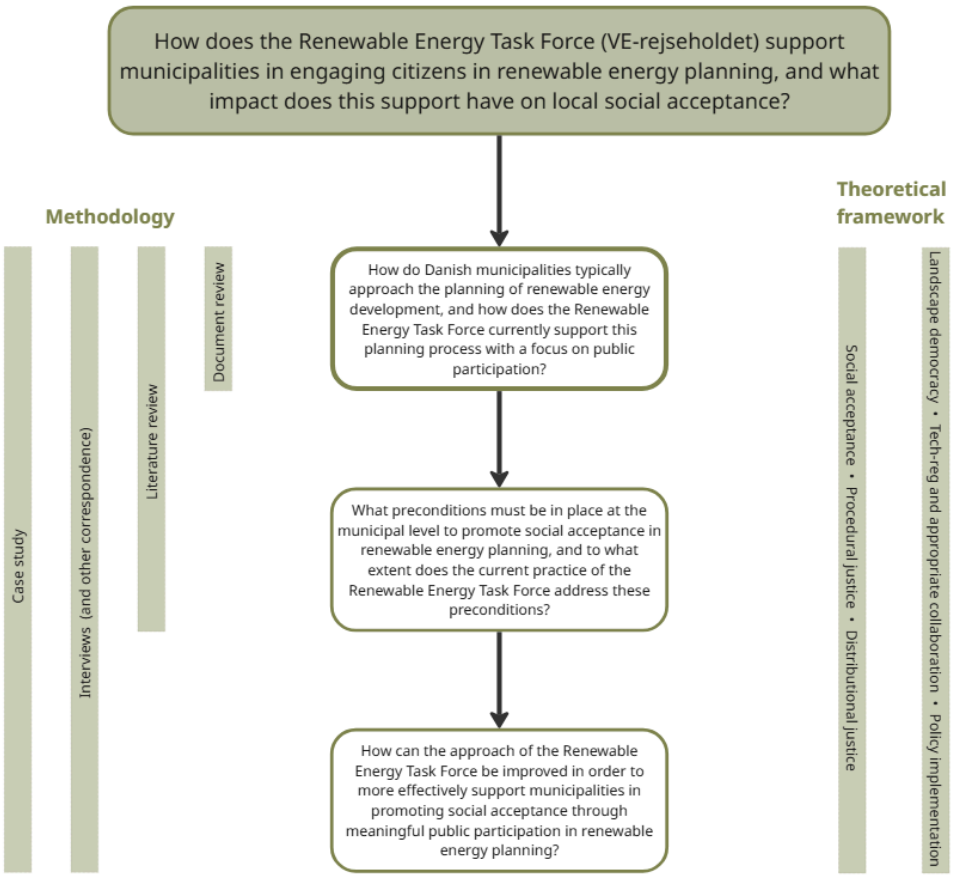

Figure 1: *Overview of the study's research design, showing the connection between sub-questions, methods, and theoretical framework.*

Descriptive analysis

This part of the study investigates how Danish municipalities typically approach the planning of renewable energy expansion, with particular attention to how citizen participation is embedded in these processes. It further examines the formal mandate and institutional self-perception of the Renewable Energy Task Force, as outlined in national policy frameworks and the task force's own materials. The analysis explores how the Renewable Energy Task Force presents its role in supporting municipal planning, especially in relation to facilitation, knowledge sharing, and responsiveness to local contexts.

To conduct this analysis, the study combines a review of national planning legislation and strategic energy policy with a document analysis of the Renewable Energy Task Force's official communications. This is complemented by semi-structured interviews with key actors, including municipal planners, representatives from the Renewable Energy Task Force, and external experts, along with a review of research on the topic of municipal tendencies and challenges in RE-planning and citizen involvement. These data sources are used to map both the formal planning structures and practices across selected municipalities, as well as to assess how the Renewable Energy Task Force's support function is understood and experienced in practice.

Explanatory analysis

This project applies a multi-dimensional theoretical framework to analyse how the Renewable Energy Task Force supports municipalities in engaging citizens and promoting social acceptance in the planning of renewable energy. The selected theories provide conceptual and analytical tools that guide both the explanatory, and discussion and solution stages of the analysis.

Policy implementation theory serves as the central analytical framework. It is used to investigate how the state-initiated support of the Renewable Energy Task Force is translated into municipal planning practice. The theory allows for analysis of both municipalities' capacity and willingness to act, as well as the organisational and institutional conditions that affect their ability to adopt and apply external support. It further provides a framework to assess the task force's role as an intermediary actor within the implementation chain and to examine the degree of alignment between its formal role, the practical realities of municipal planning, and the specific needs experienced by local authorities in implementation processes.

Social acceptance theory is applied to conceptualise the nature of local acceptance and the conditions under which it emerges, with particular attention to *community acceptance*. In combination with procedural and distributional justice theory, which are used as normative frameworks for assessing the fairness, transparency, and perceived legitimacy of citizen engagement, these perspectives help identify the preconditions that must be in place at the municipal level to promote acceptance. These frameworks are then applied analytically to assess the extent to which the current practices of the Renewable Energy Task Force address such preconditions and support municipalities in promoting socially accepted renewable energy projects.

Landscape democracy theory is included as a supplementary perspective, highlighting how citizens' emotional connection to place, identity, and landscape values shapes their response to spatial interventions. It is used to explore whether the practices of municipalities and the task force reflect a planning model that acknowledges and respects local ownership and place-based knowledge.

Tech-reg and appropriate collaboration serve as an analytical distinction between two ideal types of public engagement. These concepts are used to position and evaluate current practices along a spectrum from pro forma to collaborative engagement.

Together, these theoretical frameworks, combined with empirical interview data and literature study, form a multi-dimensional basis for assessing the preconditions that shape municipalities' ability to promote social acceptance. This analytical stage builds on the same interview material used in the descriptive analysis, focusing specifically on how municipalities perceive their own

capacity to manage citizen engagement and how well they are supported by the task force in doing so.

Discussion and solution

Finally, the study identifies potential ways to strengthen the Renewable Energy Task Force's support function based on empirical findings and theoretical perspectives, supplemented by perspectives from Søren Hermansen. This reflection draws on insights from the document analysis and interview data, particularly with regard to the tension between the Renewable Energy Task Force's current role and the municipalities' expressed needs.

Theoretical framework

To analyse how municipalities can promote socially accepted renewable energy development, and how the Renewable Energy Task Force supports this, the following theoretical framework brings together key perspectives on social acceptance, justice, landscape democracy, and policy implementation. Together, these approaches provide a multi-dimensional lens through which we examine the institutional and relational conditions for local acceptance.

Social acceptance

The concept of social acceptance is a central framework for understanding both opposition and support for RE projects. It carries a normative dimension, as it acknowledges that the transition to a sustainable energy system will unavoidably provoke concerns, opposition, and potential conflicts caused, for example, by changes to landscapes, policy frameworks, or market structures. In this context, social acceptance becomes a necessary precondition for a just and stable energy transition, because opposition and uncertainty are natural responses to change. Social acceptance is therefore a key factor in explaining why some local communities embrace renewable energy, while others reject it. It can be defined as the response of members of a given community toward new technologies or socio-technical systems. As defined by Upham et al. (2015), acceptance refers to *"'a favourable or positive response (including attitude, intention, behaviour and — where appropriate — use) relating to proposed or in situ technology or social technical system by members of a given social unit (country or region, community or town and household, organisation)"* [15]. This response may take the form of support, acceptance, or even the active use of the technology, and encompasses people's feelings, attitudes, and concrete behaviours [16].

To understand this phenomenon, social acceptance can be articulated through three dimensions, as introduced by Wüstenhagen et al. (2007): **Socio-political acceptance, market acceptance, and community acceptance** (as presented in Figure 2.2) [17]. **Socio-political acceptance** refers to support at the political level, including government decisions, legislation, and strategic planning. **Market acceptance** relates to how new technologies are received by market actors and consumers, for instance, through investment behaviours or the adoption of the technology. Finally, **community**

acceptance concerns the perceptions and responses of local citizens and communities who live near renewable energy projects and are directly affected by them. Of the three dimensions outlined by Wüstenhagen et al., community acceptance is the primary concern of this study, as this is where issues of public participation, trust and justice most clearly occur. In that the three dimensions are presented without fixed assumptions, the model maintains a conceptual simplicity that makes it useful for exploring complex socio-technical dynamics within the energy transition. Wüstenhagen's model functions in this context as a heuristic tool that enables the analysis of intricate relationships between actors, context, and energy policy. The model enables different actors to collaborate and engage in dialogue, even if they hold opposing understandings or interests. With this conceptualisation, social acceptance becomes open and flexible and can therefore serve as a shared reference point in complex discussions about the energy transition. Although the concept of social acceptance is a widely used analytical tool, recent research has questioned whether "acceptance" is the most accurate term, as it may imply a mutual exclusivity between acceptance and opposition, as in either for or against a project [16].
However, local responses are often far more complex and nuanced. They can vary widely, spanning a broad spectrum from active opposition to full support as illustrated in figure 2.1. Between these two ends, there are a range of more nuanced reactions, such as uncertainty, apathy/neutrality, and resistance. It is important to acknowledge that acceptance does not necessarily mean active support, some local communities may accept a project without actively engaging in or supporting it [18], [19], [20] .

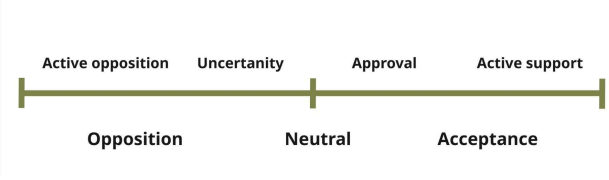

Figure 2.1: *Spectrum of community responses to renewable energy projects from active opposition to proactive support [18], [19], [20].*

Another limitation of the concept of social acceptance is that, over time, various actors such as authorities or energy companies have attempted to lock in its meaning through standards, guidelines, and legislation. The legislated requirements for local co-ownership in Denmark are an example of this. When the concept is fixed in such a way, it risks being reduced to a technical solution that overlooks the social complexity and relational processes that characterise energy projects in practice [16].
Furthermore, recent research has built upon Wüstenhagen's original model by highlighting that social acceptance is not a fixed state but a dynamic process, shaped by time, power dynamics, and governance scales, influenced by local experiences, trust in actors, compensation schemes, and perceptions of fairness [16]. Accordingly, social acceptance is framed as a dynamic process formed by three key components: ***Time dynamics*****, *power dynamics*****, and *dynamics across different scales of governance*** (see Figure 2.2). This dynamic framing allows for a more situated and processual understanding of community responses to renewable energy projects [16].

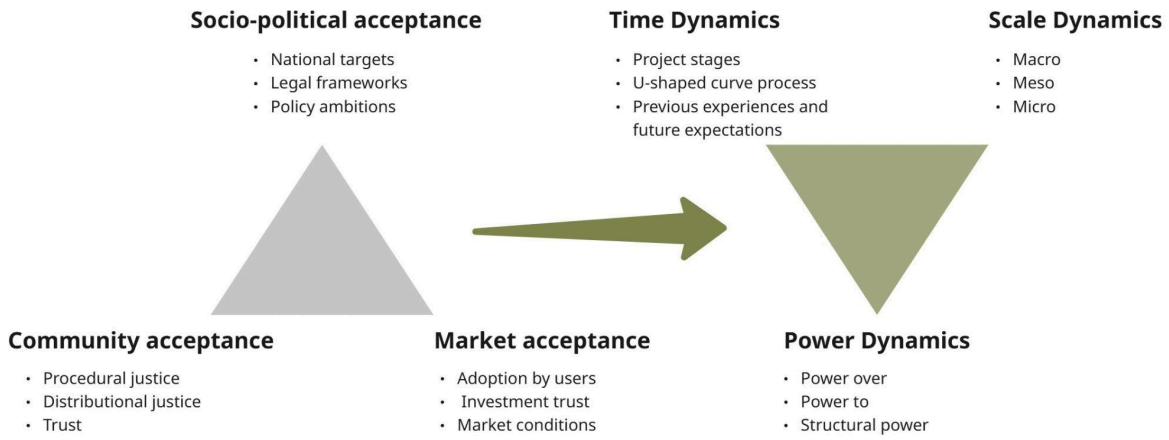

Figure 2.2: *Dynamics of social acceptance adapted from Ellis et al. (2023) [16].*

Dynamics of social acceptance over time refers to how citizens' support for or opposition to a project can change throughout the different phases of the project, from its planning to the construction and operation. This process can, according to Wolsink (2007) and Bidwell (2023), be described as a U-shaped curve, where acceptance typically drops during the implementation of the project but may rise again once the project is completed and the technology becomes normalised. However, further research shows that this is not guaranteed. Previous conflicts, lack of transparency and trust can lead to lasting resistance and therefore to a project that does not achieve local acceptance. Previous experiences and future expectations can be both positive and negative and thus play a crucial role in shaping how the local community responds to new projects in the same area [16], [21], [22].

In relation to **power dynamics**, power can in this context be understood on several levels. As the article highlights, *"if we accept power shapes social acceptance, it cannot be understood without an appreciation of the dynamics of power, as power will be exerted by, or over, certain stakeholders, ideas, institutions etc., and will be met with resistance or compliance"* [16]. Power in this context can be understood, as "power over" that is, dominance, control, and decision-making authority and as "power to", referring to the capacity or agency to act and influence outcomes. This includes the ability of local communities to mobilise opposition, influence investor confidence, or demand changes to project design. Furthermore, there is structural power, which is embedded in institutions and discourse. This refers to how certain ideas become so dominant that they appear natural or unquestioned. For example, specific perceptions of what constitutes a "natural" landscape may become normalised, or the continued power of fossil fuel sectors may be upheld [16]. These power dynamics have a direct influence on citizens' perceptions of justice, including procedural and distributional justice, which will be explored in depth in the following subsections.
About dynamics across different scales of governance, recent research points out that social responses to energy projects are not limited to one scale e.g. the local experiences of a single project, but also by the scales of national strategies, economic structures, and institutional

decisions. Therefore, social acceptance must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, where both scale and scale conflicts play a crucial role [16]. Research shows that the size and organisation of energy projects influence the degree of local acceptance. The larger and more industrialised the projects are, and the more they are governed by market forces, the greater the risk that they affect local perceptions and potentially reduce support. It is about how the technology is embedded in larger systems and decision-making processes. Fournis og Fortin (2017) argue that social acceptability should be seen as a result of dynamics between three scale levels: Micro, that is individual attitudes and experiences; meso, that is political governance and institutional processes; and macro, that is market structures and economic conditions. These levels are closely connected, and conflicts between them may arise, for example, when local concerns clash with national energy goals. Even though scale plays a significant role in the understanding of social acceptance, it is often an underexposed aspect in research. This means that one overlooks how interests, problem definitions and proposed solutions vary depending on the level of analysis. Local interests often collide with national energy ambitions, but there are only a few processes to manage and balance these conflicts. For that reason, social acceptance often remains a complex and problematic issue in both research and practice [16], [23].

Procedural justice

Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of decision-making processes [2, pp. 61–62], [10], [24], [25], [26], [27, p. 10], [28]. It plays a significant role in community acceptance of RE projects [2, pp. 60–61], [16], [26]. Studies show that the NIMBY-narrative is not as prevalent a facet when it comes to opposition or acceptance as previously thought, and, in Denmark in particular, the planning process itself and the perception of fairness thereof often acts as a significantly more notable determining factor [2, pp. 57, 61–62].

Various factors can influence whether citizens perceive decision-making processes as procedurally fair. Particularly, citizens' perception of procedural justice is closely related to their experience of being able to or having the opportunity to participate [2, p. 62], [10], [16], [24], [25], [26], [27], [28], as evidence suggests that their attitudes towards the introduction of RE facilities into their local environment or landscape strongly depends on their involvement in the process [1]. Other factors include whether the way decisions are made is consistent over time, whether decisions are modifiable in the case of emergent knowledge or opinions, and whether the process as a whole is perceived as ethical. Furthermore, the same citizens should be allowed to participate throughout the entire process [29].

However, this alone does not guarantee the perception of procedural justice, as the perception of exclusion from the early planning stages of projects can lead to mistrust of decision-makers among local citizens, meaning that it is vital for municipal authorities to take measures to examine the early stages of planning and provide citizens the opportunity to meaningfully participate as early as possible [16], [26]. When the invitation for involvement comes too late in the process, citizens' input has a reduced possibility to influence decisions [1]. This is especially crucial, as a key principle is not only for citizens to have the opportunity to express their opinions, but additionally for these opinions to influence decision-making [2, p. 62], [26]. The opportunity to express opinions is thus alone not enough to guarantee that citizens will perceive a decision-making process as fair. A

common reaction by citizens who's concerns are not listened to is that they then feel compelled to utilise arguments that are seen as more legitimate by decision-makers than their actual concerns, giving name to the term MAWANA; My Actual Worries Are Not Assessed [30].
Another reaction to this lack of "power to" is actively resisting the project in protest, even if this resistance does not reflect the citizen's genuine stance [2, p. 62]. Efforts should thus be made to involve citizens early in the process to allow for ideas and suggestions for, inter alia, suitable project sites to both arise and possibly influence decisions [1]. For example, influence on the siting of projects prevents citizens from feeling as though a project has been forced upon them, leading to an increased perception of fairness [26]. If citizens involved in participatory processes are under the impression that their involvement is pro forma, and thus see no evidence of consideration of their contributions in decision-making, this may lead to opposition of projects [11, p. 125].
In addition, for citizens to form opinions and contribute, adequate, accurate information must be provided to them [2, p. 62], [26]. Measures should be taken by municipal authorities to provide easily accessible information to participating citizens, both in terms of acquiring material and its intelligibility and transparency [2, p. 62].
The last factor contributing to the perception of the presence of procedural justice is in relation to decision-makers, which ultimately relates to power dynamics in decision-making processes, as these individuals, in relation to citizens, possess some degree of "power over" [16]. Decision-makers must be impartial and must not allow personal bias to influence how they make decisions [2, p. 62], [16], [26], [29].
Generally, the above understanding of procedural justice and its principles should be understood by municipal authorities, along with the underlying power structures that shape citizens' perceived fairness and influence in decision-making processes, for them to be able to work actively towards community acceptance [16].
However, whether procedural justice is present is largely up to subjective perception, meaning none of these factors or measures necessarily guarantee that citizens will perceive a decision-making process as procedurally fair, but instead act as preventative actions to promote trust and thus counteract resistance.

Distributional justice

Procedural justice is inherently intangible because, unlike tangible concerns such as material disputes, procedural concerns revolve around social and democratic values. This differentiation makes it necessary to distinguish between tangible and intangible concerns, as they cannot be addressed in the same way [10]. However, addressing these intangible, procedural concerns can serve as a prerequisite for handling concerns of a more tangible matter [27]. For example, a study by Wüstenhagen et al. (2023) suggests implicitly that procedural justice serves as a prerequisite for distributional justice [16].
Distributional justice refers to the perception of how equitable the distribution of benefits and burdens of an RE project is [2], [24], [25], [26], [27], [28], [31]. This perception can affect both the individual citizen and the community [25], [26], [31], and, as is the case with procedural justice, is a major factor in community acceptance [16], [26], [27], [31]. An inequitable distribution can create

tension within the community and also put strain on the relationship between the local community and developers [26], [31], additionally allowing mistrust of developers and municipal authorities to arise [16].
An example of an inequitable distribution of benefits and burdens can be seen when a geographical misalignment is present between the spatial concentration of RE projects, and where electricity is consumed. In this case, a rural community experiences a disruption to their local landscape, while primarily urban populations experience the benefits of increased national energy independence and a reduction of GHG emissions [26].
The way local citizens experience and perceive distributional justice in renewable energy planning is, however, more complex. Several studies on distributional justice have questioned whether the sole focus on the equal economic distribution of benefits and burdens is sufficient to understand the underlying dynamics shaping these perceptions [2], [16], [26], [28], [32], [33].
To promote distributional justice among citizens and local communities, several countries, including Denmark, use financial compensation schemes for renewable energy projects [2], [16], [26], [32]. However, prioritising financial incentives may limit the emphasis on actively engaging local communities in the planning process of renewable energy projects [32].
As these compensation schemes are formulated as an attempt to address the perceived distributional imbalances caused by renewable energy projects in hopes of fostering local acceptance [26], they remain insufficient to achieve and enhance the perception of distributional justice [2]. This approach rests on the assumption of exchanging social and environmental values for monetary compensation, which results in a fundamental inadequacy in addressing values beyond the financial aspect of distributional justice. Particularly, the lack of equal access to adequate local benefits, including their distribution, can lead to the experience of bribery and a lack of recognition. This diminishes the locals' perception of distributional justice and, consequently, the degree of acceptance of renewable energy projects [26].
The context of the community is another determining factor in the perception of distributional justice. This makes it crucial to consider institutional, social and cultural conditions when attempting to determine what constitutes a just distribution of benefits in the pertinent context [16], [27], [28], [33]. Social and cultural differences between the community, developers and municipal authorities, along with differences between communities across different projects, must be acknowledged and considered, as these differences cause contrasts in what is locally perceived as distributionally just [16], [33]. In particular, developers who are not locally based should invest resources into building a rapport with local communities to not only create trust, but also to understand the communities' needs and thus promote the perception of distributional justice [16].

Landscape Democracy

Landscape democracy is a democratic concept concerned with citizens' right to participate in decisions about changes to the landscapes they inhabit and are emotionally connected to. The theory draws on the definition of landscape as a perceived area with a character that is formed as the result of action and interaction from human and/or natural factors. The landscape is thus understood as both a space, a physical, measurable area, and a place: An experienced location with meaning. On the one hand, a landscape can be seen as a resource reservoir, subject to regulation and

technical use, but on the other hand also as a framework for everyday life, memories, identity, and aesthetic values. As Arler et al. (2023) describe, the landscape is *"the backdrop of generations of people's dreams and ambitions"* [1]. It is this landscape that people, both locals and visitors, form emotional attachments to and wish to protect. When renewable energy installations are established, they make use of natural resources such as wind and solar power, but at the same time they influence the character, atmosphere, and meaning of the landscape for the people living in and around it. If the landscape is perceived solely as an area for energy production, one risks overlooking the emotional and symbolic dimensions that many citizens associate with the place. When this attachment is not acknowledged, it can lead to local resistance and entrenched conflicts. This is further reinforced when citizens experience that RE projects are carried out under market conditions without local anchoring. As Arler et al. emphasise, many citizens feel that their *"concerns are ignored or run over,"* which challenges both trust in the process and the legitimacy of the decisions made [1]. Therefore, it is essential to include diverse experiences and perspectives when the landscape is to be transformed. This is especially relevant in cases involving large and highly visible installations such as RE facilities. Landscape democracy emphasises that all citizens should have the opportunity to participate in decisions about the landscape they are part of, especially when the changes are substantial. It is about ensuring that rights and opportunities for influence are distributed fairly and that local voices are taken seriously. In this way, landscape democracy becomes a bridge between citizens' sense of justice and the actual practice of RE planning. Although landscape democracy is fundamentally about citizens' right to influence their surroundings, democracy itself does not rest on a single principle. Rather, it consists of multiple, and at times conflicting, values and levels that must be balanced in practice. This means that landscape democracy is not only about having the right to participate, but also about navigating tensions between individual and collective interests, between local autonomy and national governance, and between technical and symbolic considerations in the landscape [1].

The theory is therefore built on three core democratic principles. The first principle, **personal freedom and self-determination,** concerns the individual's right to make decisions about their own life and property. A fundamental point in many understandings of democracy is that the development of independent individuals requires freedom and safe conditions. Citizens' integrity and freedom of action must be protected, since democracy cannot function if people feel intimidated. However, if this principle stands alone, there is a risk that decisions about landscape development are based solely on the interests of private landowners. Instead, a balance must be struck between individual freedom and collective values. While the right to self-determination is central, it must sometimes yield when essential collective goods are at stake. The landscape holds significance for the identity of the community and should therefore not be regarded solely as private property, but also as a collective responsibility. The second principle, **co-determination and participation**, concerns citizens' ability to take part in collective decision-making processes. This principle highlights the right to active participation in decisions that affect the community. It is not only about submitting comments in hearings, but about being taken seriously in planning processes. Public involvement strengthens democratic legitimacy and helps foster ownership, mutual learning, and responsibility. The third principle, **objectivity and impartiality**, concerns how decisions should be made, through open and reasoned argumentation. Democratic processes must be based on transparency and justification, not on power, money, or property rights. Deliberation requires

that everyone has the right to present viewpoints and an obligation to listen to the arguments of others. These three democratic principles unfold not only as abstract ideals but also through concrete institutional choices and tools in planning practice. The choice of method thus reflects the forms of legitimacy and influence that municipalities prioritise. This means that public participation depends on which democratic principles are emphasised in practice. If citizens are only compensated financially, it does not constitute equal participation. In contrast, early and dialogue-based participatory approaches can help anchor decisions and create local legitimacy.
At the same time, Arler et al. emphasise that landscape-democratic decisions are not made solely at the local level. In practice, spatial planning and energy policy operate within a multi-level structure where individuals, local communities, national governments, and international institutions all play a role. At the local level, the focus is often on identity, belonging, and landscape quality, whereas national and international levels prioritise climate targets, biodiversity, and economic growth. These levels may conflict, for example, when municipalities are pressured to establish renewable energy facilities in order to meet national goals, without sufficiently addressing local opposition. As the authors note, the selection of institutions and procedures for landscape governance often reflects which of the three value sets is prioritised. Whether emphasis is placed on private property rights, participatory equality, or deliberative argumentation will shape the legitimacy and acceptance of outcomes In this regard, the theory highlights that democracy holds a temporal and moral horizon extending beyond present-day citizens. Based on both the Landscape Convention and the concept of sustainability, Arler et al. argue that future generations, species, and ecosystems should also be considered in decision-making processes [1].

Tech-reg and appropriate collaboration

Public participation is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone for legitimacy, learning, and socially acceptable decision-making. Yet, it can also be seen as somewhat of a paradox, embedded within a complex decision-making landscape where citizen expectations, decision space, and regulatory and technical constraints, which are seemingly at odds [11, pp. 113–114].
Participation practices vary significantly in their nature and impact. Walker, Daniels, and Emborg (2017) outline two main trajectories in public participation: The *technical-regulatory* (tech-reg) approach and the *appropriate collaboration* (AC) approach. Examining these trajectories can aid in the decision of when and when not to collaborate [11, p. 114].

The *tech-reg* approach prioritises expert-driven, legally compliant procedures where citizen involvement is largely consultative or informational. "*Tech*" refers to the assumption of an objectively correct, technical solution, and "*reg*" indicates the regulatory context that institutionalises these solutions into standard practice. Scientific knowledge and legal mandates are highly valued in the process, often leaving minimal space for citizen influence or deliberation. This form of participation typically occurs through methods used conventionally in planning, such as public hearings or online information, and aims to ensure the implementation of science-based decisions. Power remains centralised and negotiation is unlikely. As with conventional public participation methods, *tech-reg* participation offers a mode of communication to and/or from the

public, intending to inform and educate and invite feedback. There is, however, no guarantee that such feedback will be held to any value, and there is often a lack of transparency regarding how public input is used, which, relating to the concept of procedural justice, risks reinforcing citizen disengagement and mistrust, negatively impacting social acceptance. For this reason, it must be used at the right time and place in the decision-making process to avoid negative reactions [11, pp. 114–116].

In contrast, *AC* implies inclusive, dialogic, and deliberative participation. It is characterised by mutual learning, shared decision space, and the pursuit of consensus. This model encourages creativity and the open articulation of differing values, aiming for outcomes grounded in shared understanding. Participation typically occurs through collaborative processes such as workshops, facilitated or unfacilitated dialogue, and public forums. Communication is regarded as a relational practice, meaning that it must be adapted to the context and participants. While science continues to inform decisions, such as biological knowledge, *AC* values civic science, such as local and traditional knowledge, and community interests and values [11, pp. 115–116, 123–124]. This highlights the fact that *AC* is not entirely oppositional to *tech-reg*, however value and authority is distributed over a wider knowledge base. Negotiation is fostered, and power is shared in a way where the deciding agency retains the authority to make decisions legally, while also allowing citizens to actively participate in the construction of those decisions [11, pp. 116, 118, 120]. Moreover, *AC* public participation can benefit from employing a "systems view," which encourages shared understanding of the complex, interrelated, and uncertain factors at play. Systems thinking allows citizens and officials to reframe issues collaboratively, moving beyond agency-centric formulations typical of the *tech-reg* approach and instead considering processes in a strategic manner rather than as isolated activities [11, pp. 122–123] .

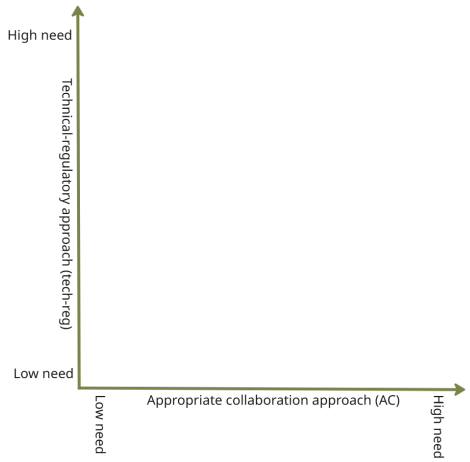

Figure 3: *The spectrum of tech-reg and AC integration, adapted from Walker, Daniels, and Emborg (2017) [11, p. 114].*

Although the *AC* approach offers greater potential for legitimacy and acceptance, not all situations are suited to, or require collaboration. In contexts constrained by legal mandates, time, or limited scope for negotiation, the *tech-reg* model may be more appropriate. In practice, the two approaches often exist on a spectrum, see figure 3, and some cases may require hybrid solutions [11, pp. 114, 119–120].

An important final note is that enacting *AC* methods poses greater challenges than conventional, *tech-reg* approaches due to the increased complexity and the need for capacity, e.g. in the form of resources. As the authors note; "*collaboration is not everything and everything is not collaboration*" [11, p. 114]. This underscores the importance of making the right choice between the two trajectories, and choosing the approach most suited to the context and situation at hand, thereby optimising both the legitimacy and effectiveness of public involvement [11, pp. 114, 126].

Policy implementation

Policy implementation theory concerns the enactment of public policy as a political process, often involving interaction among multiple actors, where the final stage is the delivery of the policy to citizens by frontline staff [34, p. 5].
The integrated implementation model, see figure 4, as described in *Implementering af politik* (Implementation of policy) by Winter and Nielsen (2008), synthesises the key theoretical contributions in implementation research. The model focuses on the outcomes of policy implementation and the dependent factors and elements that influence the process [34, p. 17].

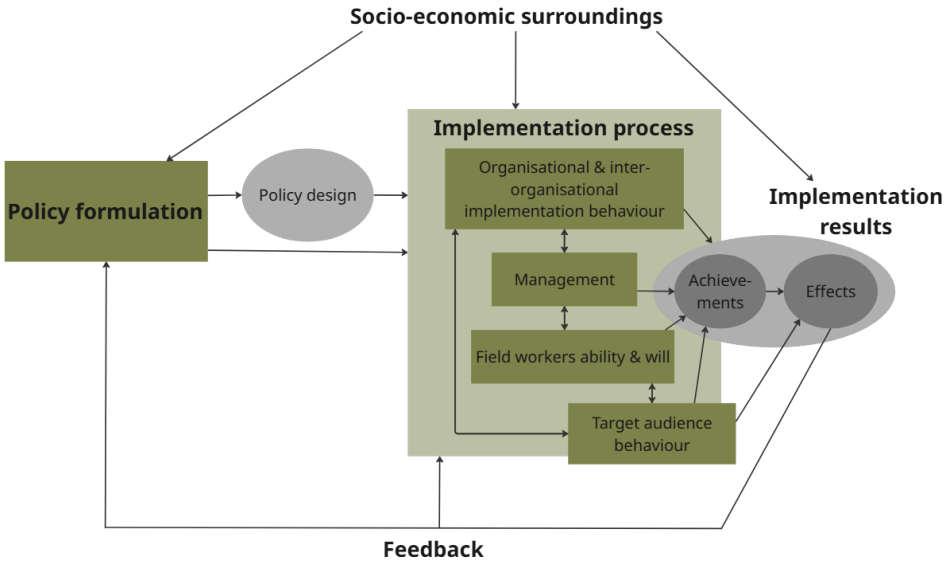

Figure 4: *The integrated implementation model, adapted from Winter and Nielsen (2008) [34, p. 18].*

The model illustrates the interactions between individual elements and how, collectively, they influence the outcomes of policy implementation [34, pp. 19–20]. It highlights that the implementation process is not linear, and that the combination of one-way and reciprocal influences between these elements adds complexity, which underscores the importance of a carefully considered policy that accounts for all these dimensions.

Socio-economic surroundings

The socio-economic context is the only element in the model not affected by other factors. It defines the overarching environment in which policy is formulated and implemented, and directly impacts both the implementation process and its outcomes, which in turn shape future policy development. The effectiveness of policy instruments and organisational design in influencing implementation performance and outcomes largely depends on both the social problem context and the broader political landscape. In a municipal setting, socioeconomic conditions include the municipality's demographic profile, such as the population's social composition, economic situation, educational level, and cultural norms and traditions. Consequently, the characteristics of the problem and the

target group affect the implementation's performance and outcomes, making it essential to adapt instruments and strategies to the specific, local context [34, pp. 47–48, 51, 210].
In addition to socioeconomic factors, institutional and physical conditions also play a significant role. While institutional frameworks, such as legislation, are uniform across municipalities, local variations in organisational culture and available resources mean that implementation conditions may differ significantly between municipalities. Additionally, physical conditions, such as environmental characteristics and land use, are especially relevant in policy areas like spatial planning. Differences in landscape and environmental features create varying preconditions and challenges across municipalities. The interplay of these socioeconomic, institutional, and physical factors is complex, making it difficult to separate them distinctly or to predict their precise effects based on theory alone [34, pp. 142–211].

Policy

Policy formulation

To understand why a specific policy design appears as it does, it is necessary to take a step back and examine the political formulation process that precedes the design itself. Policy formulation refers to the process in which political decision-makers establish the overarching goals and guidelines of a policy. These goals and decisions form the foundation for the subsequent policy design [34, p. 19].

Policy Design

Once a policy has been formulated, it must be operationalised through a concrete policy design. Policy design refers to how a policy is structured for implementation. It typically consists of one or more objectives, accompanied by a set of instruments intended to achieve these goals. The design also outlines who is responsible for implementation and allocates the resources necessary to carry out the prescribed tasks. While the provision of resources is a key precondition for implementation performance, research shows that outcomes are not always clearly correlated with resource levels. Furthermore, policy design influences the implementation process, its performance, and its overall impact. Research suggests that many implementation challenges can be reduced or partially avoided through an appropriate design that clearly signals the policy's objectives and rationale. Such design helps foster both commitment and capacity among implementers and target groups [34, pp. 41, 57].
When policy goals are unclear, ambiguous, or inconsistent, they can negatively impact both implementation success and the implementers themselves, who may struggle to perform their tasks effectively. Research shows that policies containing unrealistic requirements are rarely fully realised, whether at the time of adoption or during later revisions. Policies may also contain contradictory or competing objectives, which can impede implementers' efforts to fulfil them. Nevertheless, positive implementation outcomes can sometimes still be achieved. This may involve reaching a reasonably acceptable fulfilment of the various policy goals. Additionally, strong results can be realised by supporting implementers through the provision of resources, appropriate tools, relevant knowledge, and through capacity-building and commitment-oriented measures that help

compensate for unclear goals in the policy design [34, p. 42].
To actualise the stated goals, policy design also involves selecting the appropriate instruments. These may include information tools, economic incentives, or other governance mechanisms. Moreover, the organisational structure of implementation is crucial. This may be arranged hierarchically, where a single unit holds political responsibility and oversees implementation, or via a network-based model, where multiple actors collaborate to pool capacities and competences. A lack of understanding among policymakers regarding the relationship between goals and means is another factor that can hinder the achievement of stated objectives [34, pp. 43, 46–47, 56].

Implementation Process

Organisational and Inter-Organisational Implementation Behaviour

Beyond the choices made in policy design, instruments, and organisational setup, attention must be paid to the organisations and actors responsible for implementation. The interests of implementing actors can significantly influence how policy is carried out in practice, often turning the process into a strategic game between stakeholders. These actors do not always act solely according to legislative intent, but are also guided by substantive, institutional, and individual interests. These interests may either support or hinder implementation, depending on how well they align with the policy's goals [34, pp. 73–75]
The involvement of multiple actors in implementation does not necessarily lead to problems; it depends on the nature of their interdependence and the quality of their collaboration. Collaboration typically arises when actors need each other’s resources to improve task performance. In this context, trust plays a crucial role in the strength of cooperation. Trust and collaboration tend to develop dynamically and mutually over time. To build trust and mutual dependency, research recommends a gradual approach, starting with modest, low-risk goals, or "low-hanging fruit", that generate early successes. Conversely, large imbalances in influence and capacity between stakeholders can undermine collaboration, as weaker actors may become marginalised or seek alternative means of influence [34, pp. 93, 98–99].

Leadership

Although collaboration is essential in implementation, research shows that the actual effect of collaboration on implementation outcomes is far from consistently documented. Leadership has an independent impact when organisational-level goals are to be translated into action by frontline personnel. This transformation is likely to be shaped by the degree of information asymmetry between leadership and staff, as well as the types of leadership tools deployed by political-administrative management. Furthermore, leadership behaviour and the level of conflict within collaborative networks significantly influence whether such cooperation produces the intended results [34, pp. 20, 100].
Frontline staff are defined as public employees who interact directly with the target group. Not all aspects of these interactions are strictly regulated by law, meaning they are largely governed by policy frameworks and their own discretion. This discretion may lead to deviations from its original

intent. While management can attempt to steer frontline behaviour, doing so is inherently difficult. Some measures may be taken, but their effect is not guaranteed. An ex-ante strategy is to recruit employees whom management trusts to act in alignment with policy goals. However, this is not always feasible in a municipal setting, making ex-post strategies more applicable. In such cases, leadership can clearly define the framework, responsibilities, and expectations associated with policy implementation, and attempt to establish incentive structures that motivate frontline workers to act accordingly to fulfil policy objectives. Still, it is inherently challenging for leadership to exert substantial influence after staff have been hired, since street-level employees are often guided by their own knowledge, values, and context, which are factors that lie beyond managerial control. Consequently, as leadership cannot exert strong control post-recruitment, their role then becomes one of responding to frontline behaviour and selecting appropriate interventions to guide actions in a direction consistent with the intended policy outcomes [34, pp. 103–204, 114–15, 163–164].

The Ability and Motivation of Frontline Staff

Frontline staff often play an independent and critical role in determining the outcomes delivered to citizens. In their direct interactions with residents and businesses, these staff members frequently exercise significant discretion, shaped by both their knowledge and their willingness to act, which are factors influenced by their own interests and values. This makes frontline staff key actors in the political process, with substantial influence over the success of policy implementation [34, p. 20]. Issues involving climate policy and citizen engagement are often characterised as *wicked problems*. Frontline staff addressing such issues face particular challenges, as wicked problems lack clear solutions, and attempts to resolve them can produce new conflicts. This is especially difficult when municipalities operating with limited resources must navigate diverging priorities and contested methods. Frontline staff cannot satisfy all parties and are often caught between conflicting values from both leadership and the public. Further difficulties arise when frontline staff do not share the values underpinning the policy they are tasked with implementing. Although they remain accountable for delivering results, these value misalignments can intensify the pressure they experience from both above and below [34, pp. 112–114].
At the core, implementation by frontline staff is shaped by both **ability** and **motivation**, which includes their available capacity and resources [34, p. 132].

- **Ability** involves more than knowing which methods to use. It includes understanding the underlying cause-effect relationships, the conditions for successful implementation, and the capacity to apply this knowledge in practice with systematic reasoning [34, p. 134].
- **Motivation** reflects the staff member's personal commitment to the work, including whether they identify with or care about the policy goals and tasks at hand [34, pp. 132–134, 142].

Target group behaviour

The behaviour of the target group also plays a significant role in the implementation of policy. The behaviour of the target group not only affects the outcomes but often involves a process of joint production with frontline staff, which can influence the performance of the public sector [34, p. 20].

Like frontline staff, members of the target group are individuals with their own interests and attitudes, which may not necessarily align with the intentions behind the policy. They are essential contributors to the policy outcome, which is the final stage of implementation. Their interaction with frontline staff can naturally affect staff behaviour and vice versa, thereby influencing implementation results. Furthermore, the target group may also seek to affect the policy output itself, not just the outcomes, through active engagement. Such influence may be desirable, particularly when the target group consists of citizens and there is a political desire to enhance democratic involvement. Increased influence of citizens in the interplay between public service provision and policy implementation can be seen as a form of empowerment. This dynamic creates mutual influence between target group behaviour, the actions of frontline staff, and the implementation process itself [34, pp. 166–167, 175]. The role of the target group in implementation depends on the degree of mutual dependence between them and the frontline staff. The greater the demand for behavioural change among citizens, the more interest divergence and norm disruption exists, making implementation more difficult. However, if joint production is present, which is where behaviour is co-produced by citizens, frontline staff, and other relevant actors, this more balanced interdependence can make implementation easier [34, pp. 106, 170–171].

In general, target group actors demonstrate varying levels of motivation to participate in implementation. Similar to frontline staff, this behaviour can be explained by their ability and willingness, where ability refers to knowledge and capacity, and willingness concerns interest in participating in implementation efforts [34, p. 178].

Target group actors may be encouraged to engage more fully through mechanisms such as economic incentives [34, p. 204], which closely relates to principles of distributional justice and comes with its own challenges, as previously discussed.

Finally, the institutional set-up, which includes the frequency, format, and voluntary nature of interactions, plays a crucial role in determining how effectively the target group can influence implementation. These factors are significant in shaping interactions and their outcomes, but they must be calibrated to fit both the socioeconomic context and the capacity of the implementing body. As such, there is no single “best practice” that can universally apply. Willingness, in particular, is shaped by economic, social, and normative factors. Social and normative motivations may be influenced by *framing*, while economic motivations can be affected by available financial incentives. Target group actors must weigh these competing factors in order to determine their actual behaviour [34, pp. 182–183, 191–198].

Feedback

Finally, feedback processes may emerge, where lessons learned during implementation or from outcomes can lead to adjustments in the policy formulation process, potentially prompting political revisions. Feedback and learning processes also apply to implementation actors, who may choose to revise their organisational structures, collaboration models, leadership tools, or frontline staff practices based on experience [34, p. 20].

An important consideration when designing a policy and determining its implementation approach is the fact that all actors involved are individuals who may not always perform their roles in the

most optimal way for the sake of the policy. It is extremely difficult to predict in advance where, who, or what in the process will deviate from the intended plan before it is tested in practice. This uncertainty highlights the importance of incorporating feedback and adjusting the process accordingly. Moreover, actor attitudes are influenced by time, as mentioned previously. Both capacity, competences and motivation are likely to change as time progresses. This reinforces the relevance of building feedback loops into the implementation process, as dynamic shifts in behaviour can create new challenges, even after initial successes have been achieved [34, pp. 175, 177].

In practice, implementation outcomes vary significantly, both between municipalities and even between individual frontline staff within the same agency. These variations are not only geographical, but also temporal. Numerous studies highlight that implementation rarely functions optimally from the outset. On the contrary, it typically improves over time, as municipalities become more aware of early issues, learn from initial mistakes, and gradually stabilise their implementation capacity. Once early mistakes have been addressed and learning has occurred, authorities often become better equipped to meet requirements and deliver consistent performance.

These variations in implementation practices affect not only internal performance, but also outcomes for the target group, resulting in inequities in how policy-induced changes impact their social situations [34, pp. 25–28].

Methodology

To understand how municipalities work with public participation in renewable energy planning, and how the Renewable Energy Task Force supports this work, a range of qualitative methods have been drawn upon. The following sections outline the case selection, and the tools used to collect and analyse data. The study combines interviews, document analysis, and literature review to capture both the formal frameworks and practices that shape this field.

Generative AI has been used for sparring and the checking of text, along with translation, for this paper. Microsoft Teams' AI transcription function has additionally been used for the transcription of interviews.

Case study: The Renewable Energy Task Force

This study applies an information-oriented case selection strategy, with the Renewable Energy Task Force as a critical case. As the main state-supported mechanism for promoting renewable energy planning with citizen involvement, the task force represents a particularly relevant case for assessing the implementation of national ambitions at the municipal level [35]. To explore how the task force's support functions in practice, the study includes empirical data from a selected group of municipalities. These municipalities are not treated as individual cases but rather as analytical contexts that vary in terms of capacity, experience, and approach to citizen engagement. This variation follows the logic of maximum variation sampling, enabling the analysis of how different local conditions shape the task force's relevance and effectiveness across settings.

The selection of participating municipalities was based on an overview of the Renewable Energy Task Force's past activities. From this list, municipalities that had taken part in the task force's workshops or initiatives were identified. A total of 16 relevant municipalities were subsequently contacted with the aim of conducting qualitative interviews. The four municipalities included in this study, Vordingborg, Ringkøbing-Skjern, Lemvig, and Jammerbugt, are those that had both participated in the task force's activities and were available and willing to take part in the interviews. The selection is therefore both strategic, based on the municipalities' prior involvement with the task force, and pragmatic, based on access and responsiveness. An overview can be seen in table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Overview of the selected municipalities

Municipality	Ringkøbing-Skjern	Lemvig	Jammerbugt	Vordingborg
Geographical location	The largest municipality in Denmark by area. Located in the Central Denmark Region along the west coast of Jutland with a total coastline of 244 km [36].	Located in the Central Denmark Region and situated along the west coast of Jutland with a 148 km coastline [37].	Located in the northern part of Jutland along the west coast,with 136 km of coastline [38].	Located in southern Zealand and comprises both mainland and several islands with 375 km coastline [39].
Area (km²)	1.470 km² [36]	508,8 km² [37]	864,1 km² [38]	619,5 km² [39]
Population (1st Jan 2025) [40]	55.582	18.800	37.954	45.057
Population density (pers./km²)	39 citizens/ km² (2019) [36]	40 citizens/ km² (2018) [37]	45 citizens/ km² (2017) [38]	73 citizens/ km² (2021) [39]
Total RE production in 2023 (MWh) [41]	1.470.473,82	587.328,09	532.472,88	128.694,74
Solar PV 2023 (MWh) [41]	134.477,59	115.462,20	35.325,55	97.484,36
Onshore wind 2023 (MWh) [41]	1.335.996,22	471.865,89	497.147,33	31.210,38
Gram CO_2/kWh [42]	28	16	35	27

Table 1.1: *The latest data on key geographical, demographic, and energy production characteristics of the selected municipalities. The information, when compared across municipalities, provides an indication of each municipality's relative progress in renewable energy production. It serves to illustrate the contextual variation between municipalities, which is essential for understanding how local conditions shape the implementation of RE projects.*

Document analysis

A document analysis was carried out with a focus on the legal and strategic frameworks that shape municipalities' work with renewable energy planning and citizen participation. The analysis

included key national documents such as the Planning Act, the Environmental Assessment Act, and the Renewable Energy Act, which are regarded as objective descriptions of the minimum legal requirements in planning, as well as state strategies for Strategic Energy Planning (SEP) [43]. The aim of the analysis is to clarify the formal expectations, roles, and constraints that municipalities must navigate when planning and implementing land-based renewable energy projects. Furthermore, the analysis provides a basis for assessing the institutional scope of action within which the Renewable Energy Task Force operates. Documents directly related to the role and self-perception of the Renewable Energy Task Force were also included. These include annual reports, content from the official website, *www.ve-rejseholdet.dk*, and political agreements such as the Climate Agreement on Green Electricity and Heat (2022) [6]. The purpose of this part of the analysis is to examine how the mandate, tasks, and support functions of the task force are formulated and legitimised within the national context. The documents were identified through a combination of targeted keyword searches in national legal databases, e.g. retsinformation.dk, review of official publications from relevant ministries and agencies, and of the Renewable Energy Task Force's website and communication materials. Selection was based on the relevance of the documents to municipal RE planning, public participation, and the task force's function as a state-level support actor. The documents are used empirically as contextual background for the explanatory stage of the analysis [44].

Documents produced by state actors often reflect an official or normative position and may therefore be selective in their representation of reality. This points to certain methodological limitations, and for that reason, documents are regarded as social constructions rather than neutral sources of data. Their content is interpreted in light of the political and organisational context in which they were produced. Accordingly, the analysis acknowledges that the documents primarily illuminate institutional intentions and self-perceptions, and that they do not necessarily reflect how policy is experienced or enacted in municipal practice. For this reason, the document analysis is complemented by interview data, and academic studies which provide experience-based perspectives from the field [44].

Literature review

A literature review was conducted with the aim of mapping existing research on social acceptance and citizen participation in renewable energy planning. It is based on a structured selection of literature, including peer-reviewed publications, and identifies key conceptual frameworks and theoretical perspectives, including policy implementation theory, social acceptance theory, as well as normative approaches such as procedural and distributional justice, landscape democracy, and the distinction between technical-regulatory and collaborative participation models. The literature was obtained through databases accessed through the Aalborg University Library (AUB), including ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, and Routledge, by using search terms relating to social acceptance, citizen involvement, and RE planning [45]. The review serves a dual purpose. On one hand, it provides an analytical foundation that informs the study's problem formulation and research questions. On the other hand, it constitutes a conceptual framework that is actively applied in the

analysis of municipal planning practices, the conditions for social acceptance, and the support function of the Renewable Energy Task Force.

Interviews and additional communications

This study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary qualitative method to explore the role of municipalities and the Renewable Energy Task Force in supporting citizen involvement and social acceptance in RE planning. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a flexible but focused dialogue, where key questions were prepared in advance but adjusted during the conversation in response to emerging insights. This format enables both comparability across cases and openness to local context [43].

The Renewable Energy Task Force

Due to the Renewable Energy Task Force's limited availability and initial reluctance to participate, insights were collected through a written response format. Following a phone conversation with the team leader, Peter Andreas Fournais, to clarify the scope of our inquiry, a set of written questions was submitted, see appendix A, which were answered by the organisation in writing. The questions focused on the task force's role in supporting municipalities with citizen participation in renewable energy planning, the methods they recommend for promoting local acceptance, how their support is adapted to different municipal contexts, and what insights they have gained regarding the promotion of social acceptance. In addition, the inquiry addressed how the task force monitors its impact and whether they themselves see areas for strengthening future collaboration with municipalities. While less interactive, this format still provided relevant insights into how the task force supports municipalities, particularly in relation to public involvement.
Furthermore, since the answers were provided by the organisation itself, there is a potential risk of self-representation bias, as respondents may emphasise positive aspects while omitting challenges or uncertainties. This is especially relevant considering the initial reluctance to participate. These methodological limitations are recognised and taken into account in the analysis [46].

Municipalities

Representatives from the four municipalities, as described before, were interviewed. The interviewees were selected internally by the municipalities based on their relevance and ability to answer the research questions. The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, and were all structured around the same predefined question guide, see appendix B, but adapted to the natural flow of the conversation, characteristic of semi-structured interviews [43]. The interviews focused on how municipalities plan RE development in relation to citizens, and what strategies they employ to promote social acceptance of RE projects. Furthermore, interviewees were asked about their experiences with the Renewable Energy Task Force, including how they have interacted with it and whether they perceive its support as beneficial.
It is important to note that such interviews may be subject to self-reporting bias. Respondents might present their own practices in a more favourable light or downplay challenges. It is vital to

acknowledge the potential for bias in these interviews, as interviewees are discussing their own work and institutional practices. This includes the risk of overemphasising positive elements or underreporting challenges. Awareness of such bias is essential in the analysis and interpretation of qualitative interview data, and critical reflection was applied throughout the evaluation of findings [46].

Annika Agger

An interview was conducted with *Annika Agger*, an expert in collaborative citizen involvement, to gain insight into how she presents citizen engagement methods to municipalities on behalf of the Renewable Energy Task Force, and how municipalities typically participate in these presentations. This interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams, using the same semi-structured format as the municipal interviews.

Søren Hermansen

A semi-structured interview was also conducted with *Søren Hermansen,* director of the Samsø Energy Academy, to gain a critical, external perspective on the role and effectiveness of the Renewable Energy Task Force. The interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams, with only a few questions prepared in advance to encourage open reflection.

Municipal Practices and National Support in Danish Renewable Energy Planning

To understand how the Renewable Energy Task Force contributes to local social acceptance of RE development, it is crucial to first examine how Danish municipalities typically approach RE planning and public participation. While national goals set the overall direction, the practical responsibility for land-based RE deployment rests with municipalities, who must interpret and operationalise these ambitions in specific local contexts. This section therefore begins by outlining the legal and institutional frameworks that shape municipal RE planning, before turning to empirical tendencies in planning practices and citizen involvement. By analysing both formal structures and real-world dynamics, including municipal capacity, participation cultures, and planning styles, it becomes possible to assess the relevance and limitations of the support currently offered by the Renewable Energy Task Force. Only by understanding the planning conditions at the municipal level can a meaningful evaluation of whether and how such state-led initiatives can help promote more socially accepted RE transitions take place.

Legal Frameworks and Strategic Energy Planning in Danish RE Development

The planning and approval of RE installations in Denmark, is governed by a number of national laws. These include the Planning Act (Lov om planlægning, LBK nr. 1157 af 01/07/2020), the Environmental Assessment Act (Miljøvurderingsloven, LBK nr 973 af 25/06/2020), and the Renewable Energy Act (VE-loven, LBK nr 356 af 04/04/2019). Together, they establish the formal framework municipalities must follow when facilitating RE development. The Planning Act outlines the need for coherent and sustainable spatial planning, taking into account environmental protection, public health, and local development. Municipalities are required to prepare municipal and local plans, which include public consultation procedures. According to Secs 24 and 26, all new planning proposals must undergo a public hearing period of at least four weeks, and written notifications must be sent to affected property owners and associations. These requirements aim to ensure that citizens have access to information and an opportunity to respond to proposed developments [47, Secs 1, 24, 26]. The Renewable Energy Act supplements these planning procedures with provisions aimed at increasing local support. These include compensation schemes for property devaluation near RE installations, sales options for neighbours, and annual RE bonuses for households situated near specific types of RE infrastructure. The Act also mandates that developers hold public information meetings, where project impacts and compensation mechanisms are presented, and government authorities explain legal rights and options. The deadlines for these meetings vary depending on project type and whether an environmental impact assessment (EIA) is required [48, Secs 6, 6a, 13, 9]. Under the Environmental Assessment Act, municipalities are responsible for conducting EIAs for projects or plans expected to have significant environmental effects. The public must be informed early in the process and given the opportunity to comment on environmental reports and draft plans. The EIA process is designed to ensure a high level of environmental protection and integrate environmental considerations into decision-making [49, Secs 1, 32–35]. While these laws provide an important legal foundation for citizen involvement, they primarily specify minimum requirements. Most forms of participation occur late in the planning process, after major project decisions have been made, and are often limited to consultation or information-sharing. In this way, the legal framework promotes what has been described in the literature as a tech-reg approach to public participation, meaning a process centred on compliance, expert knowledge, and procedural legitimacy rather than inclusive deliberation or shared decision-making. Citizens are typically invited to participate through public hearings, comment periods, or informational meetings, methods that, while legally sufficient, offer limited influence over the project's core features. These types of engagement often fall short of enabling procedural justice, particularly when public input is perceived as symbolic or inconsequential. As such, the legal framework supports a form of participation that is reactive and formal, but does not necessarily guarantee meaningful influence, transparency, or trust [11].

Strategic energy planning (SEP) is the approach recommended by the Danish government for municipal energy-related planning [50]. According to the Danish Energy Agency (Energistyrelsen),

SEP is intended to enable municipalities to plan for a more flexible and energy-efficient energy system by coordinating locale RE development with all possible municipal strategies such as spatial plans. SEP is thus defined as an integrative tool, which additionally encompasses the entire energy chain from supply to demand, and aims to optimise local energy systems in line with national and municipal goals [8]. While legislation sets the mandatory minimum requirements for municipal energy planning in a tech-reg manner, SEP offers a voluntary framework that enables a more integrated approach to energy system development. SEP focuses on long-term strategic decisions and coordinated efforts, requiring collaboration between authorities and relevant stakeholders. This more AC-oriented approach allows municipalities to consider a wider range of factors, including citizen involvement, which can help strengthen local ownership and public support for renewable energy planning [51].

While SEP is promoted as a municipal responsibility by the Danish government, it remains a voluntary task. No permanent state funding is allocated to support its development or implementation, meaning it is up to municipalities to choose whether to prioritise SEP in their local budgets. Another central limitation in the current SEP framework is the lack of implementation strategies. While national goals are clearly articulated, they are not systematically translated into local planning tools or mandates at the municipal level [50], meaning that municipalities are left without clear guidance on how to operationalise national ambitions, leaving them to develop their own individual RE targets [52] and utilise varying methods to promote social acceptance.

Empirical tendencies in RE-planning

Research finds considerable variation in both the targets and quality of local energy plans [53], [54]. The voluntary nature of SEP, combined with the absence of permanent state funding means that each municipal council must independently prioritise energy planning against competing policy areas [54]. Furthermore, there is little cross-municipal coordination, which results in municipalities often working in isolation, unaware of parallel efforts, or the lack thereof, taking place in neighbouring areas [53]. These differences are not only present in policy documents, but become particularly visible when examining how individual municipalities approach renewable energy development and local engagement in practice. Several studies emphasise that local coordination, either between municipalities in a given region or through energy forums involving citizens, interest groups, and local businesses, is essential for successful RE planning [53]. At the same time, municipalities face persistent challenges related to limited capacity, lack of qualified, competent planners, and insufficient institutional support to facilitate inclusive and trust-building processes. While Denmark has a long tradition of strong local government, which according to the EU and the Council of Europe should support legitimacy and effectiveness in land-use and energy planning, many municipalities struggle to meet the practical demands of increasingly complex RE planning processes [1]. Although public participation is a legal requirement in several key laws, such as the Planning Act and the Environmental Assessment Act, the way it is implemented in practice often falls short of its democratic potential. This is clearly illustrated by the typical planning timeline for RE projects in Denmark (see Figure 5), where formal democratic elements such as public hearings only occur after core project decisions have already been made [55]. Early dialogue typically takes

place between developers and landowners, excluding the wider public. As a result, citizens often gain formal access to the process at a stage where the scope for genuine influence is very limited [11], [56].

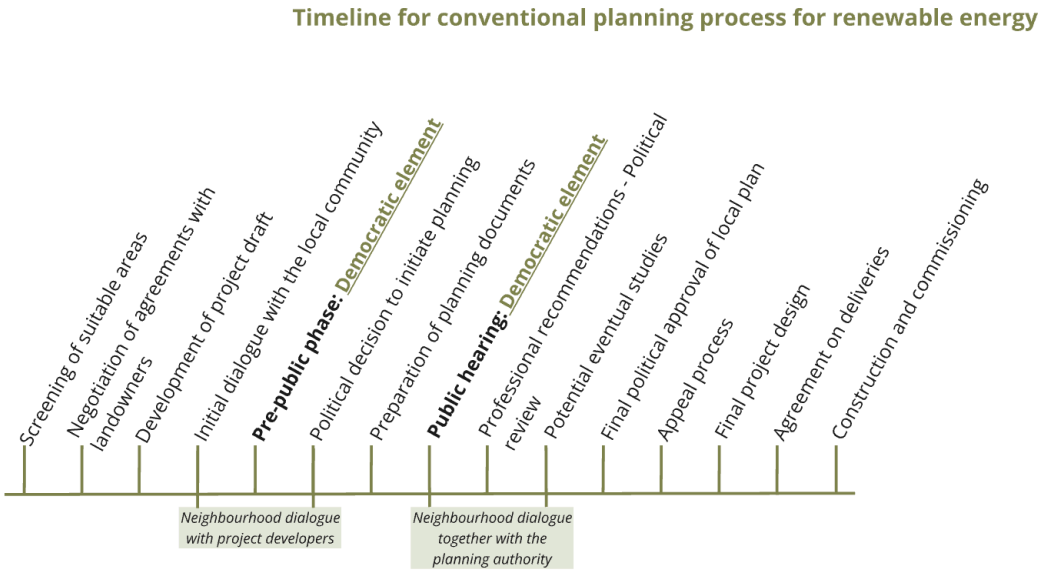

Figure 5: *Timeline of the typical planning process for renewable energy projects [55].*

Such practices reflect a predominantly tech-reg approach to planning, where authorities or developers define the problems and propose technical solutions, while citizens are only invited to comment on already established plans. This contrasts with more AC-leaning models, which involve early, inclusive, and deliberative engagement with affected communities. In Denmark, most municipalities operate closer to the tech-reg end of the spectrum. This reliance on procedural compliance over meaningful engagement has been shown to contribute to a widespread sense of marginalisation and disempowerment among citizens, as highlighted in existing research. In practice, citizen involvement is often limited to the legal minimum, confined to "invited spaces", such as tech-reg oriented hearings or consultation phases, without room to question project design or raise context-specific concerns like landscape changes, place identity, or everyday life disruptions. Research shows, however, that citizen often experience these invited spaces as pro forma with a lack of transparency. Additionally, when citizen concerns fall outside the technical and legal parameters of the planning process, e.g. noise thresholds or setback distances, they are often dismissed as irrelevant. This framing leads many citizens to either disengage, adapt silently, or organise resistance outside the formal system [53], [56], [57]. Another consistent challenge is the delegation of public dialogue to developers. In many municipalities, developers are responsible for communicating with the public, often before the municipality has formally engaged with the project. This blurs the lines of responsibility, weakens municipal ownership, and fuels mistrust, as developers are not expected to facilitate broad democratic dialogue, but rather to secure acceptance for already defined projects [57]. These tendencies point to a deeper implementation gap, not just in terms of strategy, but in municipal capacity and structural incentives to change planning practices. According to policy implementation theory, knowledge or good intentions alone are insufficient. Effective implementation requires clearly defined goals, organisational capacity, and

sufficient resources. Without these preconditions, the intentions of national policies fail to materialise at the local level, explaining why many municipalities still rely on defensive, tech-reg planning despite growing awareness of the need for early and meaningful citizen participation [34].

Municipal approaches

As the responsibility for implementing national renewable energy ambitions is increasingly placed at the local level, Danish municipalities must translate broad policy goals into concrete planning practices. This translation does not occur independently of context, but is shaped by local institutional conditions, planning traditions, and understandings of public participation. To explore how such dynamics play out in practice, this section examines how selected municipalities approach RE planning and citizen involvement. The cases reflect diverse interpretations of the municipal role, highlighting the varying degrees to which municipalities engage with participatory ideals, distribute responsibilities, and balance procedural requirements with local legitimacy-building.

Ringkøbing-Skjern Municipality

Ringkøbing-Skjern Municipality primarily takes a reactive approach to RE planning, with private actors such as energy companies driving the development. The municipality does not proactively designate areas for RE but instead receives project proposals from developers and agricultural stakeholders. This creates an inequality in participation opportunities, as non-landowners are involved late in the process and often feel they have no real influence, undermining procedural justice and, by extension, social acceptance. However, it is a positive development that the municipality is experimenting with involving independent third parties selected by local residents to facilitate local dialogue. This approach has the potential to promote AC and procedural justice by creating a neutral platform for mutual understanding and trust. It potentially enhances citizens' perception of fairness and transparency. Ringkøbing-Skjern is also experimenting with longer, dialogue-based processes to ensure that local concerns are addressed during the project design phase, which aligns with the temporal dimension of social acceptance, as the level of acceptance may change over the course of the process [58].

Lemvig Municipality

Lemvig Municipality has a long history with wind energy, and its planning approach is characterised by flexible, trust-based practices rooted in long-term local knowledge and relationships. The municipality consistently uses the same mapping methods and planning tools, which creates familiarity and stability, thereby promoting procedural justice. This consistency contributes to procedural justice, as stable and predictable decision-making processes are essential for citizens' perceptions of fairness. Although formal citizen participation is initially limited and largely delegated to project developers, the municipality supplements this with occasional local dialogue meetings, particularly in relation to larger projects. This practice enables direct contact between citizens and authorities and can contribute to enhancing community acceptance, all depending on the format and timing of the meetings. However, developers are still expected to secure local

support, which creates uncertainty around the quality and consistency of participation efforts. The municipality acknowledges that existing compensation schemes rarely benefit the local community directly and wishes to promote more local value creation. This demonstrates an awareness of distributional justice, though there are no clear mechanisms for realising this in practice. In terms of capacity, the municipality lacks sufficient resources and systematic structures to implement a more participatory approach, which limits its ability to act [59].

Vordingborg Municipality

Vordingborg Municipality actively works to strengthen informational transparency. Their digital platform, which provides updated information on RE projects, improves citizens' ability to follow the planning process and reduces the need for individual inquiries. This initiative promotes transparency and fulfills some of the criteria for procedural justice, particularly by ensuring equal access to information. However, the role of citizens in the process remains limited, as public participation occurs within frameworks where their influence on the actual design of projects is minimal. This means the municipality operates within the boundaries of "invited spaces" without necessarily enabling genuine collaboration. Since their participation approach is primarily informational or consultative in nature, it aligns more closely with an instrumental form of participation rather than a normative ideal of joint problem-solving and collaborative governance. Vordingborg has taken steps to clarify roles and responsibilities in the planning process, which may help demystify power relations and build trust. Nonetheless, a gap remains between intention and practice, which challenges both community acceptance and implementation capacity [60].

Jammerbugt Municipality

Jammerbugt Municipality stands out positively with a proactive approach to public participation. The municipality prioritizes early engagement with citizens and holds open meetings during the initial stages of projects often before local plans are drafted. This aligns with the principles of appropriate collaboration and demonstrates a strong understanding of procedural justice, giving citizens a genuine opportunity to influence the process from the outset. Particularly noteworthy is the municipality's willingness to take the lead in citizen dialogue instead of delegating this role to developers. This signals political ownership, supporting landscape democracy and reinforcing citizens' sense that decisions are made locally and with accountability. This approach distinguishes Jammerbugt from the other municipalities [61].

Summary

Together, these four cases demonstrate that Danish municipalities adopt highly varied approaches to RE planning and citizen involvement, proving that there is no one-size-fits all approach. While all recognise the necessity of local support, the means of achieving it range from reactive facilitation to proactive, municipality-led dialogue. This variation reflects the absence of a unified planning framework. Despite the differences, all four municipalities have seen progress in their renewable energy deployment, albeit at different paces and scales. The fact that three of the municipalities,

Ringkøbing-Skjern, Lemvig, and Jammerbugt, are located along Denmark's west coast may, however, explain their momentum. Jutland municipalities have installed the majority of Denmark's new onshore wind capacity in the past six years, particularly along the west coast, where favorable wind conditions and larger available land areas make such development more feasible. In contrast, PV installations are more evenly distributed across the country [62].

Although public participation is a legal requirement, its practical implementation in municipalities generally remains limited. The legal framework encourages a minimum, procedural form of involvement (tech-reg), however, more proactive municipalities begin to experiment with early, deliberative, and collaborative methods (AC). This gradual shift indicates growing awareness of the value of participatory legitimacy, but also reveals persistent structural and capacity-related barriers [11], [63]. Despite the progress of the four case municipalities, not all municipalities are as successful with their RE development, and recent research highlights four key barriers that together represent critical preconditions for municipal renewable energy planning. The first is capacity, in the form of financial resources where insufficient or unstable funding makes planning difficult. The second is competence, referring to a lack of technical knowledge and understanding of the issue. Third, cultural norms can act as a barrier, where resistance to new approaches persists within municipal organisations. The fourth barrier is political will, which is often dependent on individual actors within the municipal council [54]. This is where the Renewable Energy Task Force plays a potentially critical role. By offering facilitation, knowledge-sharing, and examples from other municipalities, it can help bridge the gap between national policy requirements and local practice. However, its effectiveness depends on how well its efforts support municipalities not only in meeting the minimum legal requirements, but also in encouraging more meaningful and collaboratively oriented participatory processes (AC).

The Renewable Energy Task Force

The Renewable Energy Task Force was established in 2023 by the Danish Energy Agency as an inter-ministerial initiative in collaboration with the Danish Planning and Rural Development Agency (Plan- og Landdistriktsstyrelsen) and the Agency for Green Land Use and Water Environment (Styrelsen for Grøn Arealomlægning og Vandmiljø). It was launched as part of the *Climate Agreement on Green Electricity and Heating* from the 25th of June 2022. With the political ambition to quadruple electricity production from solar and wind energy by 2030, there arose a need for stronger state support, and the Renewable Energy Task Force was therefore created to assist municipalities in their role in scaling up land-based RE [6], [12]. Funding has been allocated to allow the task force to operate from 2023 through 2026, after which the initiative will be evaluated [13]. According to the task force itself, its purpose is to act as a central point of contact for municipalities working with land-based RE expansion. It describes its role as a proactive and practice-oriented support function that provides direct value in day-to-day case handling, for example by offering expert advice on planning, environmental assessments, habitat regulations, and public engagement [64]. The task force emphasises that it works from an "outside-in" approach, meaning its guidance is shaped by the needs expressed by the municipalities themselves. Furthermore, it highlights its aim to support citizen-oriented dialogue and ensure the sharing of best practices related to the implementation of RE projects [12]. A key part of the RE Task Force's

mission is to create frameworks for knowledge-sharing, both between municipalities and between the state and municipalities, and to make interdisciplinary expert knowledge accessible to local caseworkers. This includes activities such as workshops, thematic presentations, the development of an online communication platform, and the organisation of knowledge-sharing days focused on key topics in RE expansion across municipalities [12], [64]. The task force also emphasises its awareness of the differences between municipalities in terms of size, geography, experience, resources, and approaches. It aims to maintain a nationwide presence and contribute to broader knowledge-building across municipalities [64]. This effort is framed by a recognition that local acceptance and well-functioning administrative processes are essential for successfully expanding land-based renewable energy [12]. In addition to the role and function presented in its public material, internal reflections from the Renewable Energy Task Force provide further insight into how it understands and approaches the task of supporting municipalities. It highlights that it offers support across a broad range of areas, although its main focus is not specifically on citizen participation or social acceptance. The task force acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to involving citizens in RE planning, demonstrating a clear implicit understanding of policy implementation theory in this regard. It stresses the importance of presenting a variety of approaches, leaving it to municipalities to assess their relevance in context. It also acknowledges that early and meaningful engagement is known from research to support social acceptance, but insists that local conditions are decisive in determining which methods work best. This not only reflects an understanding of policy implementation but also an awareness of procedural justice as a potential prerequisite for social acceptance. The task force's practice-oriented character is further evident in its ongoing work to promote cross-cutting knowledge exchange, for example through conferences and workshops [65]. Here, researchers and experts are invited to present to municipal participants, typically caseworkers and staff from technical and environmental departments. Among the speakers was researcher Annika Agger, who spoke on co-creation as a collaborative form of public participation. However, Agger herself notes that she was invited not because of the task force's specific interest in co-creation, but rather due to her general expertise in public engagement [63]. This reflects an approach in which the task force consciously avoids promoting any single method, instead aiming to support municipalities by offering diverse professional input and fostering cross-municipal learning without prescribing a particular model. While the Renewable Energy Task Force itself highlights a practice-oriented and demand-driven approach to supporting municipalities, and seeks to inspire rather than prescribe methods, municipal experiences paint a more nuanced picture of its actual impact in practice.

The role of the Renewable Energy Task Force in Municipal Citizen Engagement

Ringkøbing-Skjern Municipality

According to Ringkøbing-Skjern Municipality, the Renewable Energy Task Force's role is to address systemic and recurring issues that challenge municipalities in their RE development efforts. The task force functions as an information channel and as an actor that can step in when specific issues

affect both the municipality and its citizens. One such example was the public concern over PFAS related to solar installations, where the task force took the initiative to involve the Technical University of Denmark, which confirmed that there was no cause for concern. This clarification helped deescalate a local conflict, which, according to Ringkøbing-Skjern, was a significant gain in the process. In this way, the task force acts as a translator and communicator of technical knowledge, potentially reducing public resistance and supporting municipalities' citizen engagement efforts. The task force organises thematic events and workshops for municipalities, providing concrete examples, methods, and experiences from other municipalities where public involvement has been successful. Ringkøbing-Skjern notes that although they had their own model involving a RE facilitator, they were unsure about how to structure good involvement practices. Therefore, they requested more examples of successful citizen engagement processes from across the country. The aim is to identify transferable insights that municipalities, developers, and communities can draw on in their own processes. They also requested examples of initially unsuccessful processes that nevertheless yielded successful outcomes, hoping to learn from those as well [58].

Vordingborg Municipality

Vordingborg Municipality describes the Renewable Energy Task Force as a facilitative actor whose primary value lies in enabling municipalities to gain inspiration and insights into how other municipalities manage RE planning. The Renewable Energy Task Force does not provide direct consultancy but facilitates inter-municipal knowledge exchange and presentations by researchers, which the municipality notes is often lacking in the current system. Another key function identified is the Renewable Energy Task Force's role as a liaison to the national government. The municipality highlighted the ability to submit legal questions to the task force, who then coordinate a consolidated response. This has, according to the municipality, improved administrative clarity and efficiency, though they note that overly specific questions tend to result in vague or unusable answers. They also noted that they have not used this function in relation to citizen engagement and expressed scepticism about the task force's role in this area. The municipality argues that the task force staff do not have hands-on experience with RE planning and should not be directly involved in citizen processes. Rather, they view the task force's role as relaying successful cases and methods from other municipalities or advisors. The inputs Vordingborg has received through these workshops have been used as a foundation for internal reflection and adapted to their own local context. These discussions have informed both administrative and political considerations in the municipality [60].

Jammerbugt Municipality

According to Jammerbugt Municipality, the Renewable Energy Task Force primarily functions as a provider of general information and updates, such as on new regulations or policy changes,often shared through online meetings. The municipality finds this function helpful, as it gives them easy access to current knowledge and case examples from across the country, including examples of planning practices and use of RE schemes to generate community value. However, they also pointed to limitations. They believe the task force lacks both the competence and the willingness to engage

with concrete planning cases. This, they argue, stems partly from the staff's limited practical experience with RE planning. As such, they consider the task force unsuitable for providing hands-on support in complex municipal planning contexts. Furthermore, they described the guidance received as often too generic, lacking the specificity needed for tailored support. Regarding citizen engagement, Jammerbugt is particularly critical of the idea that the Renewable Energy Task Force should play a visible role in public dialogue. They stressed that citizens need to meet local decision-makers, not state actors from outside, since external involvement risks undermining local legitimacy. If the task force is perceived as an external buffer receiving citizen dissatisfaction on behalf of the municipality, it may erode trust and weaken local anchoring. Despite this scepticism, the municipality would welcome more concrete legal and professional guidance, particularly in grey areas where clear interpretations of regulations are needed. They call for support that goes beyond general information and instead offers direct, applicable insights and clarifications, something they believe the task force is not currently equipped to provide [61].

Lemvig Municipality

Lemvig Municipality states that the Renewable Energy Task Force has had no real impact on their citizen engagement efforts in RE planning. The municipality is often invited to speak at the task force's events about their own approach, rather than drawing value from the task force's input. They perceive the task force's support as mostly targeting less experienced municipalities, and their participation in activities is driven more by a sense of obligation than actual need. Lemvig does not engage in the kind of broad citizen engagement processes the task force typically promotes and has therefore found little relevance in its tools or suggestions. Having worked strategically with RE for over 20 years, the municipality feels that the task force's input is not applicable to their practice. While they acknowledge that the task force produces guidance materials, they have not found these to improve case processing times or project progress. Nor have they received tools that meaningfully promote RE deployment. While Lemvig recognises that the task force is doing what it was set up to do, they simultaneously express frustration with the overall national approach to RE planning. The task force is perceived as an extended arm of the state, without real influence over the structures and regulatory changes that shape public participation processes in RE planning [59].

Synthesis

When comparing the formal mandate and self-understanding of the Renewable Energy Task Force with how municipalities perceive and experience its support, it becomes clear that the task force's role is interpreted and valued differently depending on each municipality's local conditions, experience, and specific needs. Municipalities such as Ringkøbing-Skjern and Vordingborg recognise the task force as a facilitator and knowledge intermediary, particularly appreciating its efforts to share inspiration, facilitate dialogue across professional domains, and foster coordination between state and local levels. They especially highlight the value of the knowledge-sharing forums and case examples offered by the task force, including in relation to citizen engagement. However, others such as Jammerbugt and Lemvig point to clear limitations. These municipalities call for more practical, hands-on, and legally grounded support, something the Renewable Energy Task Force

neither provides nor is formally mandated to deliver. The task force's current function is perceived as too generic and not sufficiently tailored to address the complex and often contested planning situations that many municipalities face. Thus, the Renewable Energy Task Force primarily operates as an indirect support mechanism with a focus on competence development through knowledge exchange, inspiration, and network building, rather than on capacity building. According to implementation theory, implementation outcomes depend not only on knowledge and intention, but on the actual "ability and will" of frontline staff to act. This includes access to time, legal clarity, organisational resources, and political support [34, p. 178]. In practice, the task force's efforts to enhance municipal competences may not match the structural limitations and capacity constraints that municipalities operate under. The mismatch becomes particularly evident in more experienced municipalities or those dealing with highly complex or conflict-prone cases. Many call for more operational and legally anchored support, especially in situations marked by local resistance, unclear regulatory frameworks, or the need for strategic prioritisation. This suggests a gap between the task force's current mandate and the implementation capacity required at the local level to realise national energy goals. Moreover, multiple studies stress that local coordination and planning competencies are essential for successful RE deployment. While Denmark has a strong tradition of local self-governance, many municipalities lack the capacity to carry out the kinds of participatory and trust-building processes that are increasingly needed [53]. The task force addresses competence gaps, but not the structural capacity gaps that municipalities point to as key obstacles in realising more meaningful public engagement and collaborative planning, such as lack of time, funding, or decision-making autonomy. Viewed through the lens of implementation theory, the Renewable Energy Task Force finds itself in a tension field: It is designed to be supportive and facilitative, but is increasingly met with municipal expectations for more direct, actionable support, which is a role that stretches beyond its official mandate. This highlights that the task force's effectiveness depends not only on the quality of its content but also on how well its support matches the practical, structural conditions faced by municipalities in their day-to-day planning practices.

Municipal Preconditions for Social Acceptance: Assessing the Role of the Renewable Energy Task Force

The preceding analysis has made clear how Danish municipalities operate within a complex legal and institutional framework, where public participation often takes place late in the planning process and in forms that rarely allow for genuine influence. This points to a range of structural and practical challenges that can significantly affect citizens' perception of fairness and their willingness to accept new renewable energy projects. It thus calls for a deeper problematisation of municipal RE planning and its implications for social acceptance. In order to assess the extent to which the Renewable Energy Task Force's efforts address the actual needs municipalities face in promoting social acceptance, it is first necessary to examine which preconditions are considered central to this work.

Capacity-Related Preconditions

In order to discuss the preconditions for municipalities' work with public participation and social acceptance in RE planning, it is first necessary to define what is meant by the term preconditions. In this analysis, preconditions are divided into two categories: capacity-related and competence-related. Capacity refers to the organisational, institutional, and resource-related frameworks and opportunities within which municipalities and their employees operate. Competence, on the other hand, refers to the concrete skills and professional knowledge held by individual staff members. Before it makes sense to discuss which competencies are necessary, it must first be determined whether there is even sufficient capacity to bring those competencies into play. As Annika Agger puts it, planners, being both administrative- and frontline workers who carry out participation processes in practice, must act within the boundaries that exist, and thus it is the available capacity that sets the stage for the competencies that can be expressed [63]. This analytical order, capacity before competence, is also supported by policy implementation theory, which highlights that a policy can only be effectively realised if there is alignment between goals, means, and organisation [34, p. 71]. It should be noted, however, that several preconditions cut across both capacity and competence, resulting in some degree of overlap and unavoidable repetition.

Internal Organisational Capacity and Resource Allocation

Competent employees cannot compensate for a lack of autonomy, unclear procedures, or underfunding. As highlighted in policy implementation theory, large variations in organisational culture and resources across the country can help explain why the conditions for implementation, and thus outcomes, often vary between municipalities [34, p. 142], as municipalities typically lack sufficient time, knowledge, and financial resources [34, pp. 15–17], [66].
A key precondition is therefore the allocation of clear and realistic resources for citizen participation. This is not only about funding, but also about understanding one's room for autonomy and planning accordingly. Resources alone are no guarantee of success, but clarity about one's own constraints is crucial for selecting appropriate methods and ensuring progress towards goals [34, p. 57]. Municipalities with internal coordination across departments, and thus professional disciplines, tend to be more successful in local RE planning. This confirms that the capacity for cross-departmental collaboration can be a necessary condition for achieving social acceptance in RE planning [67]. Finally, it is a precondition that planners at the frontline are given an organisational mandate and room to act, as participatory processes require genuine institutional support to avoid becoming mere formalities. If frontline staff are expected to work in a collaborative and inclusive manner, leadership must ensure that this is prioritised both in terms of resources and organisational culture, through, for example, clear goals and visible leadership signals [68]. Without such prioritisation, planners cannot fully utilise their competencies.

Leadership Guidance and Support

According to policy implementation theory, leadership plays a central role in designing and guiding the process. Where possible, leaders should hire planners whom they trust to have the necessary competencies and to carry out participatory processes in the desired manner. Although their ability to control the behaviour of planners who are already part of the organisation is limited, they can, through clear frameworks (addressing planners' abilities) and incentive structures (addressing planners' willingness), create organisational conditions that support both the development of competencies and successful implementation [34, pp. 114–115]. A key capacity requirement concerning the interaction between leadership and planners is the ability to manage information asymmetry. If leadership lacks sufficient insight into the everyday reality and practices of staff, implementation may evolve in a direction that does not align with the original political intentions [34, pp. 163–164]. This calls for capacity to foster dialogue between these two levels, reducing the gap between strategic leadership and practical implementation. Agger likewise emphasises that both political and administrative top leadership play a crucial role in taking citizen input seriously and ensuring it is handled respectfully and responded to meaningfully. Without leadership engagement and accountability, citizen participation risks being treated as a pro forma task and perceived by citizens as pseudo-participation, thereby undermining both legitimacy and trust. This negatively impacts procedural justice and thus social acceptance, and ultimately wastes the time and efforts of all involved actors [11], [63, p. 125].

Participation Design and Managing Wicked Problems

A distinctive feature of renewable energy planning is that it takes place under conditions characterised by complex and conflicting considerations, such as institutional frameworks and legal requirements, political agendas, resource capacity, and socio-economic contexts. This makes RE planning a so-called wicked problem. To handle this, a capacity-related precondition is that the municipality possesses organisational flexibility to design a participation process that can be adapted over several phases and that balances different, sometimes conflicting, concerns [69]. According to policy implementation theory, this means that the design of both policy and participation processes must take such trade-offs into account, in light of the municipality’s own organisational capabilities and limitations [34, pp. 112–113, 182–183].

A fundamental principle found in procedural justice theory is that it is not enough to merely let citizens voice their opinions, their input must also be able to influence the decision-making process [2, p. 62], [26]. Furthermore, it is emphasised that citizens can only participate in an informed manner if they have access to timely, understandable, and sufficient information about the specific project [2, p. 62]. This also includes the frequency and timing of citizen involvement, as well as the degree of voluntariness in the participation process [34, pp. 182–183].

Organisational structures must be able to accommodate iteration and adaptation, rather than rely on a fixed, linear process. The municipality must have systems and resources in place to collect and respond to feedback, so that both the implementation method and the policy itself can be improved in line with inevitable changes in context and in citizen and planner behaviour over time. This also requires institutional recognition and reflexivity within the municipal organisation [34, pp. 25–28,

177]. As the policy implementation theory points out, implementation rarely functions optimally from the outset, and results vary both geographically and over time. The same implementation process can have different outcomes at different times, which underlines the importance of an iterative approach. Municipalities that are able to learn from their mistakes and adjust course continuously increase their chances of success. According to the theory, experience from practice can lead to changes in organisation, collaboration, leadership tools, and frontline worker practices [34, pp. 20, 25–28]. This capacity-related precondition is supported by Agger, who emphasises that municipalities working on citizen involvement and social acceptance must demonstrate a degree of attentiveness and willingness to experiment, adjust, and improve throughout the process. Municipalities do not operate in a zero-error culture but within constrained conditions, and it is precisely the ability to learn and adapt that separates successful municipalities from those that fail [63]. Several studies point out that the lack of capacity for continuous adjustment is a key reason why participation aimed at collaboration often fails. It is emphasised that municipalities typically lack systems for ongoing monitoring and revision of their efforts, which limits their ability to respond to citizen input and adjust course accordingly. Thus, in order to manage uncertainty and be able to adapt processes to promote social acceptance, municipalities need organisational leeway to change direction, systems capable of translating feedback into action, and political and managerial support to do so [66], [69].

Institutional Frameworks and Anchoring in Local Context

A fundamental capacity-related precondition for promoting social acceptance in RE planning is that municipalities possess the organisational and analytical capacity to understand and act upon the specific social and physical context in which projects are to be implemented. According to policy implementation theory, the characteristics of both the problem and the target group have a direct impact on the outcome of implementation [34, pp. 47–51]. Therefore, participation and the planning of it must be adapted to the social, cultural, and economic conditions of the local community [57]. However, this understanding requires more than knowledge alone, as it also presupposes that the municipality has systems, resources, and organisational capacity to collect and use this knowledge.

Experiences from wind energy planning show that economic imbalances in the distribution of benefits and burdens can create ambivalence, division, and resistance within local communities. Projects with local anchoring and collective benefit-sharing tend to have a higher likelihood of gaining social acceptance [57]. This highlights the necessity for municipalities to have the capacity to strategically address justice in their planning.

Even when the intention of local anchoring is present, the very frameworks for participation can act as a barrier. A key capacity-related challenge lies in the ability of participation design to accommodate and acknowledge the diversity of local experiences and perspectives. If participation formats become too uniform, inaccessible, or simply meet the legal minimum requirements, municipalities risk excluding valuable input and marginalising citizens with fewer resources for engagement [56]. This requires organisational flexibility and a proactive approach, rather than merely adhering to legal obligations [63].

Moreover, the legal framework limits which types of input are typically considered valid. When only formally grounded objections, for example, related to environmental impact assessments or species protection, are treated as legitimate, a structural gap arises between what citizens truly care about and what they feel compelled to say. This can lead to strategic framing of concerns, where citizens adjust their input to fit what they perceive as 'valid', thereby increasing the risk of the MAWANA phenomenon in which participation feels technocratic and closed [30], [56].
Criticism of "invited participation", where participation is offered strictly on the inviter's terms without real influence, further underscores that it is not enough to merely open the door to citizens. Municipalities must also ensure that participation can actually lead to change. Otherwise, the process risks becoming tokenistic and losing its legitimising function [56]. Furthermore, collaborative participation often fails in practice, partly because it tends to involve only the most active individuals or those perceived to have high status, and thus failing to produce genuine democratic participation [69]. A core precondition for meaningful participation design is that the process is fundamentally framed as *bottom-up* rather than *top-down*. If citizens do not see their input reflected in the outcomes, their willingness to engage may decline. This requires that, beyond aiming for social acceptance as an end goal, concrete objectives should not be pre-determined or imposed. If decisions are already made, the collaborative nature of the process is undermined, and citizens may struggle to see the value in their participation [68].
Finally, a capacity-related precondition concerns how the political level of the municipality communicates its values and priorities in the green transition. If climate and energy policies are perceived as disconnected from local development, it becomes difficult to engage citizens and give meaning to their involvement. The municipality must therefore be able to articulate and convey a coherent narrative in which citizens see themselves as co-creators of the solutions [34, p. 41], [67].

Building Trust and Mutual Dependence

Trust is not merely a desirable outcome of public participation. It is a capacity-related precondition for effective collaboration between municipalities and citizens. According to policy implementation theory, implementation becomes easier and more effective when mutual dependence arises between the target group and the implementing body. This, in itself, is a condition for genuine collaboration. However, such dependence and trust do not emerge spontaneously. They require continuous organisational investment in relationships. Therefore, the municipality must have the capacity to engage in long-term and dynamic interaction in which citizens are viewed as co-creators, not clients. This requires not only organisational goodwill but also the ability to create structures that allow these relationships to flourish, while preventing power dynamics from undermining trust between citizens and the municipality [34, pp. 98–99, 106].
An essential capacity precondition is the ability to ensure continuity in citizen participation. Procedural justice theory points out that the same citizens should have the opportunity to participate throughout the entire process both for the sake of coherence and because exclusion at later stages may be perceived as strategic and thus undermine trust [29]. This requires organisational oversight and resources to maintain and facilitate continuous participation over time, including ongoing communication and the capacity to manage the process effectively.

Another capacity-related requirement is that participation must not demand disproportionately high levels of proactivity from citizens. Citizens may be caught off guard by projects if essential information is only available digitally and they were not made aware of it, due to the requirement of significant effort to stay informed. This creates a lack of transparency and creates distrust, underlining the need for municipalities to have resources and systems for more proactive and accessible communication [56].

Closely related to this is the importance of early involvement. Agger points out, and is supported by both procedural justice theory and landscape democracy theory, that early participation is a crucial aspect of citizens' sense of fairness [1], [16], [26], [63]. However, meaningful and early participation requires both political will and organisational resources to structure processes that can accommodate input in the initial, more open phases. If citizens are only invited to participate after key decisions have already been made, it is often too late for meaningful influence. This increases the risk of perceived symbolic participation, which weakens both legitimacy and engagement [1]. Citizens may become frustrated if they enter a process where decisions have already been taken without their input, which can affect their trust in the municipality. However, structural constraints do not always allow for early involvement to be done meaningfully [63].

Coordination and Oversight of External Actors

A particular structural issue in RE planning is the significant head start and informal influence held by developers, which often undermines the municipality's role as a facilitator of public participation. When developers make agreements with citizens or hold meetings before the municipality has initiated a formal planning process, confusion and mistrust can arise among citizens, where questions about the municipality's capacity to manage the planning process effectively are raised. This highlights the need for increased capacity for coordination and clear role delineation between the municipality and the developer [56], [57].

Competence-related Preconditions

The knowledge, skills, and mindset of municipal workers play a crucial role in their ability to ensure social acceptance in the green transition. Social acceptance theory emphasises that competencies are not only about technical expertise, but also about the ability to understand and navigate social, cultural, and political dynamics. This is especially important because social acceptance is a dynamic process that evolves throughout the different phases of a project, from planning to operation. Past conflicts, low levels of trust, and lack of transparency can lead to persistent resistance and thus prevent local acceptance. Therefore, it is a competence-related precondition that staff understand acceptance as something dynamic, shaped by experiences, relationships, and expectations. In this context, it is also essential that planners understand that social acceptance is not solely shaped at the local level. Acceptance is also influenced by national strategies, market mechanisms, and institutional decisions. Large-scale and industrialised projects, mainly driven by external actors or market logics, can feel alienating to local communities and thereby reduce public support. Power is exercised by and over different actors, ideas, and institutions, and these dynamics shape how

citizens perceive fairness, both in terms of the process itself and the distribution of benefits and burdens [16].

Strategic and Normative Competencies

In order to understand which competencies are necessary in practice, it is useful to begin with the strategic and normative understandings that should inform and guide municipal planning. These include foundational principles such as justice, temporality, co-creation, and reflexive learning. Only then does it become meaningful to examine more concrete methodological competencies and, finally, the planner's professional role and mindset.

Procedural Justice as a Guiding Principle

Agger emphasises that both politicians and municipal staff must hold a fundamental belief that citizens' perspectives and everyday knowledge are valuable and should interact with professional and political expertise. This contributes to more grounded solutions and enhances citizens' experience of a fair and legitimate process [63]. In this context, many citizens do not perceive the planning process as democratic. A qualitative study of public participation in Danish wind turbine planning shows that the decision on turbine placement is often perceived as predetermined, and that there is no real openness to citizen input. This creates a sense of lacking transparency and symbolic participation, which undermines both trust and influence. Citizens also report that the process itself can generate opposition when their participation is perceived as symbolic and without real impact [57]. Procedural justice theory supports the notion that it is not only the outcome of a plan, but the process itself, and the possibility for meaningful participation, that shapes public acceptance. It concerns, among other things, consistency in decision-making, flexibility toward new knowledge and input, whether the process is experienced as ethical and legitimate, and whether power is distributed fairly and decisions are made impartially. Citizens must be able to trust that decision-makers act transparently and without bias, otherwise, the experience of justice, and thereby acceptance, is undermined [2, pp. 57, 61–62].

Distributional justice as a guiding principle

The municipality's focus on financial compensation as the primary tool for achieving social acceptance of RE projects risks overlooking more fundamental needs among citizens. Distributional justice theory emphasises that justice is not only about how benefits and burdens are actually distributed, but also about how this distribution is perceived by citizens. If citizens feel ignored during the process and are only financially compensated afterward, it may lead to mistrust and resistance. This is supported by procedural justice theory, which shows that the legitimacy of the process is a prerequisite for experiencing the outcome as fair. As landscape democracy theory highlights, the municipality must recognise that the landscape is not merely a "space", an empty area for energy production, but a "place" for citizens, shaped by emotion, identity, and a sense of belonging. Financial compensation cannot replace the feeling of being acknowledged and included. Therefore, it is a competence-related precondition that planners are able to work with intangible values such as recognition, transparency, and perceived fairness if the municipality is to ensure

long-term social acceptance. Research also points out that geographical inequalities, for example, when rural municipalities bear the burden while urban areas reap the benefits, can lead to mistrust and perceptions of injustice. As the theory suggests, distributional justice also has a temporal dimension, citizens typically experience the burdens immediately (e.g., noise, visual impact, loss), while the benefits, such as climate gains, materialise only in the distant future. Acceptance, therefore, cannot be presumed, it must be built over time through trust, transparency, and meaningful engagement [1], [2], [16], [26], [27], [28], [31], [32], [33], [70]. Moreover, justice arises when the context of citizens' lives, including their social, economic, and cultural conditions, is taken into account. It is not enough to apply participatory methods as a means to achieve acceptance. Planning must structurally generate collective benefits for the local community if citizens are to perceive RE projects as meaningful and just [57]. Engaging citizens is not merely a matter of informing or consulting them, it requires the ability to design, facilitate, and adapt participatory processes that foster legitimacy, ownership, and learning. This demands knowledge of different forms of participation, an understanding of its purpose, and the ability to handle disagreement and complexity in practice.

Temporal Understanding and Anticipatory Thinking

Planners must understand that social acceptance is dynamic and changes over time. The widespread assumption that citizens will simply "get used to" energy projects, often described by the so-called U-curve, is criticised for being overly simplistic and misleading. Acceptance must therefore be seen as something that must be built and sustained over time, even after a project has been implemented. This requires that planners have the competence to engage with social reactions before, during, and after a project, and to understand how the timing of burdens and benefits, for example, local nuisances versus long-term climate gains, shapes citizens' perceptions of fairness and acceptance [70]. At the same time, planners must recognise that the meaning of time varies across local contexts. Each municipality must therefore develop its own approach based on local conditions and continuous adaptation [71].

Prefigurative Planning and Collaboration as a Goal

Instead of using public participation merely as a tool to achieve acceptance, municipalities should approach planning as a collaborative process for shaping the future with citizens. It is about planning with, not just for the people, and about incorporating local visions of what the green transition should be [70]. This approach, referred to as a prefigurative planning approach, suggests an approach where planning processes and practices deliberately seek to reflect the values, relationships, and societal forms that are envisioned for the future. It requires that planners have both the courage and the ability to fundamentally rethink traditional planning logic and instead ground their efforts in citizens' lives, ideas, and potentials, to contribute to the green transition together with the public [70], [72]. This demands that citizens are seen as competent collaborators, and that planners take on facilitative rather than top-down roles [57].

Methodological and Process-Related Competencies

Understanding Participation Models

Planners must understand the difference between the tech-reg approach and the AC approach. According to theory, participation practices vary both in form and in impact. While the tech-reg approach often limits itself to formal hearings with a narrow decision-making scope, AC allows for genuine dialogue and negotiation. However, this requires contextual insight, AC is most relevant when there is openness in the decision space, local conflict of interest, or a need for value clarification. In many cases, hybrid models are necessary, and the choice of method should be based on a conscious assessment of what best serves both the process and citizen trust [11].
Several studies show that the technocratic approach in RE planning can undermine acceptance, as dialogue revolves around narrow technical themes, excluding citizens' everyday knowledge. It is therefore not merely a matter of structure but of methodological and democratic process understanding. This requires both knowledge and planning capacity to ensure that public participation begins early and provides real opportunities for influence throughout the entire process, preferably from the initial mapping to concrete project development, so that all actors have a chance to be heard through the decision-making processes [56]. Moreover, the purpose of participation should be clarified from the outset. Is public engagement a means to better solutions, or a democratic value in itself? A clear understanding of the goal of participation, both internally within the municipality and in communication with citizens, is a crucial part of the competency foundation [71].

The Ability to Design Legitimate and Meaningful Processes

A legitimate and meaningful process requires that planners have the tools and understanding necessary to handle citizens' diverse expectations and needs. Agger points out that citizens are just as diverse as politicians, and therefore collaborative processes must be able to accommodate variation and complexity. This demands not only the right methods but also the ability to align expectations, integrate citizens' input into substantive decisions, and create trust that the process will actually make a difference [63]. Here, timing and communication are also central competencies. Many citizens only become engaged when a project becomes concrete and directly affects their daily lives, which places demands on planners' ability to make processes understandable and relevant at the right time [57].
At the same time, legitimate participation requires that involvement begins early, ideally already in the initial phases where projects are shaped, not just explained. Facilitating both early and meaningful participation involves two distinct but interdependent competencies. One is about timing and process design, the other about the ability to create actual spaces of influence. A competence-based ideal assumes that planners understand that participation is something actively created, not merely a formal obligation. Experience shows that participation processes lose their legitimacy when they are perceived as predetermined or when they offer only limited room for citizens' own perspectives. When participation is reduced to a formality with no real opportunity for influence, both trust and learning are undermined. To achieve a meaningful and legitimate

process, what is required is openness, the ability to integrate citizen input, and a genuine willingness to let participation shape both the process and its outcomes [1], [56].

Competencies for Handling Disagreement and Complexity

Collaborative citizen participation does not take place in a neutral or uncontested setting. On the contrary, it is often characterised by conflicts, power shifts, and disagreements, which must not be ignored but actively managed. According to Agger, succeeding with participation in the green transition requires competencies in communication, conflict mediation, and professional translation [63]. Collaborative processes often fail because of a tendency to avoid controversy and a lack of knowledge about how these processes can be effectively facilitated. Therefore, it is not enough to merely talk about collaboration, there must be competencies to design and lead processes that enable genuine influence, not just symbolic participation. When citizens perceive that their involvement has no real impact on decision-making, participation becomes an "illusion of decision space", which undermines both trust and legitimacy [11, pp. 114, 119–120], [71].
Precisely for this reason, collaborative processes require the following core competencies [71]:

- Alignment of expectations and goals between actors
- Social and experiential learning, both how a goal is achieved (*first-order learning*) and what the goal should be (*second-order learning*)
- Ongoing monitoring and feedback to enable adjustments and foster shared ownership

Therefore, collaborative processes demand both social and methodological know-how, the ability to distinguish between symbolic and real participation and to foster transformative processes in which new institutional and collaborative practices can emerge. These competencies are also critical in light of policy implementation theory, which emphasises the importance of frontline staff's ability and willingness to act within complex interactions between target groups and system requirements. It is not just about formal roles, but about reflexive situational awareness, professional judgement, and strategic navigation of power dynamics [34, pp. 58–59, 114, 132], [71]. Finally, both Agger and research highlight the need for network-based and relational approaches, in which participation is not only organised from above but is built through partnerships with civil society. Such an approach can reduce mistrust and provide fertile ground for new forms of cooperation in planning processes [57], [63].

Professional Role, Mindset, and Organisational Task Understanding

To operationalise these competence-related preconditions, frontline planners play a crucial role in implementing the green transition. Their function goes far beyond technical administration. They must be able to analyse complex social and political dynamics, act reflectively and legitimately in interactions with citizens, while balancing professional responsibilities with democratic principles [67], [68]. In this context, Poul Thøis describes the most successful employees in green transition efforts as individuals that are characterised by their proactive approach, creativity, professional judgement, and ability to build connections between the municipality and the local community,

often going beyond what is formally expected of them. According to Thøis, these engaged frontline planners can act as key drivers in both strategic planning and local anchoring [67].
Policy implementation theory underscores that it is not formal structures alone, but rather employees' ability and willingness to act reflectively in complex environments, that determines whether political goals are achieved. This requires, among other things, facilitation skills, an understanding of democracy, and strong relational abilities, often referred to as soft skills. These are essential for activating citizen engagement and for transitioning from an authority role to that of dialogue partner and facilitator [34, pp. 91–92], [72]. This form of engagement is not enforced, it stems from personal motivation, values, and a sense of responsibility. Agger highlights the importance of attitude and courage: *"We make an effort. We take it seriously […] it's better that we at least do it democratically and together"* [63]. This reflects how planning requires both professional and normative grounded collaboration and democratic understanding.
A new mindset is therefore essential, where planners are not just experts, but also facilitators for citizen-driven initiatives, recognising citizens as active partners in shaping outcomes [72]. Because effective RE projects require collaboration between municipalities and local communities, those engaged frontline planners have proven to be bridge-builders, compensating for citizens' lack of time, knowledge, and networks. This shows that the role of the planner increasingly centres on being relational and supportive, not just administrative. However, this also requires organisational backing. Flat hierarchies, direct access to decision-makers, and trust in employees' professional judgement are key preconditions. As Thøis notes, those engaged frontline planners often have direct access to mayors, and therefore influence [67]. This supports the need for network-based and citizen-driven approaches [57], which challenge traditional planning models. As research points out, frontline planners are no longer merely implementers, but carriers of values and democracy. They must be able to:

- Build trust
- Facilitate collaboration
- Translate expert knowledge into citizens' language
- Navigate political and organisational tensions

This demands a new skill set, including communication, conflict resolution, team-building, systems thinking, and democratic reflection. In a time of public distrust in experts and institutions, it is frontline planners' ability to build bridges and foster trust that will determine whether the green transition becomes a reality [68].

Municipalities' Understanding of the Preconditions for Social Acceptance

The identified capacity- and competence-related preconditions for promoting social acceptance have in this section been analysed in relation to the perspectives of the four interviewed municipalities. The analysis shows that the four municipalities, Vordingborg, Ringkøbing-Skjern, Lemvig, and Jammerbugt, engage with these preconditions to varying degrees. However, the

findings also reveal clear alignments, significant discrepancies, and areas marked by a lack of recognition or knowledge.

Alignments in Understanding and Practice

Across the four municipalities, there is a general recognition of key preconditions such as early citizen engagement, transparency, and the emotional and social dimensions of acceptance. Vordingborg and Jammerbugt Municipality stress early and clear communication, while Ringkøbing-Skjern and Lemvig Municipality see local support as a prerequisite for project approval. Some municipalities demonstrate capacity-awareness. Lemvig Municipality aligns project selection with available resources and local support, while Ringkøbing-Skjern Municipality uses neutral VE-facilitators to build trust and perceived fairness in their citizen involvement processes as a way to prevent bias or power dynamics from affecting integrity. On the competence side, several municipalities, especially Lemvig and Ringkøbing-Skjern, show understanding of the social and symbolic dynamics that shape opposition, and recognise the need for flexibility and ongoing dialogue. Jammerbugt Municipality highlights the importance of timing and clear influence early on, and both they and Lemvig Municipality acknowledge the role of conflict and emotional concerns [58], [59], [60], [61].

Discrepancies and Gaps in Practice

Despite shared recognition of key preconditions, significant gaps remain in how municipalities implement them. Vordingborg and Ringkøbing-Skjern Municipality limit the scope of citizen influence by framing projects as already decided, making participation largely appear symbolic. Lemvig and Jammerbugt Municipality delegate much of the engagement process to developers, weakening the municipality's role as a facilitator and risking inconsistent quality and possibly fostering mistrust. Lemvig and Ringkøbing-Skjern Municipality acknowledge groups affected by RE-projects but left out of formal compensation schemes, yet they do not clearly assume responsibility for addressing this justice-related concern. While Jammerbugt and Lemvig Municipality promote a culture where planners and developers act autonomously, this also reflects a lack of clear leadership frameworks. Only Vordingborg Municipality shows structured, proactive communication with citizens, e.g. through subscription-based project updates from their website. Jammerbugt Municipality demonstrates a temporal understanding of acceptance as something built over time, but Vordingborg Municipality's framing of citizen input as limited to questions of "how" of projects, rather than "whether", which reflects a lack of clarity around the actual purpose of meaningful participation that can promote social acceptance [58], [59], [60], [61].

Lack of Understanding and Organisational Blind Spots

Despite well-meaning efforts, several critical preconditions remain unaddressed by the interviewed municipalities. None of the four demonstrate a clear awareness of the need to align ambitions with appropriate and sufficient resources, nor do they reflect on the importance of cross-departmental coordination within the municipal organisation. Similarly, no municipality mentions the need for information symmetry between leadership and planners or emphasises the importance of taking

citizen input seriously and providing meaningful feedback, which is essential for maintaining trust and ensuring that participation is perceived as genuine. Strategic planning for justice and fair benefit distribution is largely delegated to developers, with limited municipal oversight. The responsibility to proactively inform citizens is inconsistently addressed, and municipalities often fail to establish clear role divisions with developers, allowing early developer-led citizen engagement that can lead to confusion and mistrust. On the competence side, there is little indication that municipalities recognise how citizen acceptance is shaped by national strategies, market dynamics, and institutional factors. Nor do they exhibit a foundational attitude that values everyday citizen knowledge alongside expert and political perspectives. While some municipalities design participatory processes, these are rarely framed around flexibility, consistency, or legitimacy. Early-stage, genuinely influential citizen engagement is also not consistently prioritised, and although some municipalities acknowledge citizen resistance, they do not appear to approach conflict or complexity as something that must be actively managed through trained facilitation [58], [59], [60], [61].

Summary

In assessing the municipalities' understanding of the identified preconditions for promoting social acceptance, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of interpretation. The absence of an explicit or implicit reference to a specific precondition does not definitively indicate that a municipality is unaware of it or fails to address it in practice. Conversely, the presence of a precondition in discourse does not necessarily confirm that it is understood or operationalised effectively. Nevertheless, the analysis reveals a substantial number of preconditions that were not evident in the interviews, which may reflect gaps in focus or attention. Notably, a significant amount of these relate to capacity-related preconditions, suggesting a particular weakness in structural, strategic, or organisational conditions needed to support fair and collaborative planning processes.

To what extent does the RE task force address the necessary preconditions?

A comparison of empirical tendencies in the municipalities and the interview with Søren Hermansen reveals the Renewable Energy Task Force's role as significant, yet fundamentally limited in promoting social acceptance in RE planning. The core function of the Renewable Energy Task Force primarily consists of conveying technical knowledge, facilitating networks, and presenting cases and examples from other municipalities, contributions which, in several instances, are considered relevant for professional reflection. Vordingborg Municipality, for example, highlights the task force as a knowledge facilitator and bridge-builder between professional domains and between the state and municipalities. The Renewable Energy Task Force itself confirms that its role mainly consists of sharing knowledge, facilitating networks, and inspiring professional reflection. They acknowledge the municipalities' different starting points when facilitating workshops by collaborating with host municipalities and continuously evaluating their events [65]. However, their function is limited to what their competencies allow. Several municipalities and Hermansen point

out that the task force addresses, to a lesser extent, the capacity-related needs that arise in specific planning situations [73].

Hermansen problematises the efforts of the Renewable Energy Task Force: "*They are not physically part of the change they themselves speak of*" [73], meaning that their efforts take place at a distance from the actual processes of change. The task force thus offers knowledge but lacks the mandate or opportunity to act as a lasting player in the social, organisational, and political processes that local RE planning requires. This is underlined by Jammerbugt and Lemvig Municipality, who emphasise that the task force's efforts are often perceived as too general and disconnected from the practical needs of the field. At the same time, Agger points out that competence development alone, without a connection to the strategic level, risks losing its effect, as acquired skills cannot necessarily be translated into action without the necessary capacity [59], [61], [63]. Furthermore, Hermansen stresses that beyond knowledge, local change requires presence, collaboration, and responsibility. He highlights an imbalance between competence development and capacity building, with the RE task force delivering only the former [73]. Jammerbugt notes that the task force lacks both the competencies and the willingness to engage in specific cases, while Lemvig has not seen a need for the task force's tools and views its efforts as more symbolic than practically relevant [59], [61].

The task force believes that it, to some extent, accommodates the diverse needs of municipalities by involving host municipalities in the planning process and continuously self-evaluating its events. However, its work remains constrained by state frameworks and legislation [65], which, as both Lemvig and Jammerbugt Municipality point out, often becomes an obstacle when municipalities are caught in the cross-pressure between citizens and developers [59], [61], [73]. This reflects that the Renewable Energy Task Force does not address the practical and implementation-oriented conditions that municipalities require. When compared with the municipalities' and Hermansen's demand for local action and support in concrete planning situations, a paradox emerges that illustrates the gap between strategic knowledge sharing and the real need for local agency. It also becomes clear that the Renewable Energy Task Force neither develops nor implements specific public engagement strategies. They do not prescribe particular methods but rather present various approaches from researchers and municipal experiences. The task force itself acknowledges that its role is limited to inspiration and information, and that it is up to the municipalities to translate this knowledge into practice [65]. This again underscores the gap between competence and capacity, with the task force providing only the former.

Hermansen takes it a step further by characterising the task force's efforts as symptomatic treatment, emphasising that real change requires continuous presence and the building of trust-based relationships within local communities, something the task force's current function does not allow for. He instead describes its efforts as short-term and isolated in relation to the social and political change processes prompted by RE projects. This highlights a fundamental challenge, the task force is neither equipped nor mandated to address the social and organisational consequences of renewable energy expansion in local contexts. Hermansen points out that although the task force provides knowledge, municipalities often lack the resources, time, and organisational frameworks needed to translate that knowledge into meaningful change. As a result, local communities risk becoming hosts for RE projects where the benefits, such as electricity, are exported to urban areas, while the locals are left with the consequences, such as landscape changes, depreciation of property values, and depopulation. Hermansen makes clear the existence of a

development paradox, in which local citizens feel that rejecting a project also means rejecting progress, underscoring the complexity of the issue of social acceptance. This aligns with policy implementation theory, which highlights the importance of frontline workers' ability and will, depending both on their competencies and the capacities available to them [34, pp. 132–134, 142], [73]. Hermansen concludes that, in practice, the task force reinforces the bureaucratic layer rather than breaking it down, despite its intended purpose [73]. Agger further points out that the Renewable Energy Task Force's events typically attract staff from technical and environmental departments, those who are responsible for practical implementation [63]. Although these efforts primarily focus on skill-building, it is crucial that strategic and political levels also understand and engage with them. Without this connection, the competencies acquired by frontline staff risk remaining unutilised, as the structural frameworks and decision-making arenas remain unchanged. This reflection emphasises that capacity is not only about resources and organisational conditions but also about the ability to design policies that account for how competencies are activated in practice. When the task force's efforts fail to reach the strategic level, competence distribution becomes isolated and risks lacking impact. This makes it even more evident that social acceptance and sustainable implementation require a vertical anchoring of both knowledge and responsibility. Viewed in context, both Hermansen's and the municipalities' statements show that the Renewable Energy Task Force only partially addresses the conditions necessary to promote local acceptance in RE planning. They contribute technical knowledge and inspiration, but not the organisational and relational capacity required to root RE projects locally. This creates a fundamental discrepancy between the Renewable Energy Task Force's intended role as a state-supported instrument, designed to assist municipalities with guidance, the sharing of good practices, and the reduction of planning-related barriers [6], and the complex structural and social conditions that municipalities actually navigate. Municipalities are left with a responsibility they are often not organisationally equipped to shoulder alone. If the task force's role is to meet the actual challenges of RE planning, it must evolve from an informative function to a collaborative actor, and from general inspiration to implementation-oriented support, where both knowledge and the capacity to act are brought into play.

Rethinking the Role of the Renewable Energy Task Force

Based on the analysis of the Renewable Energy Task Force's role and the municipalities' experiences with citizen participation, the overall picture suggests that the task force serves as an important professional and methodological source of inspiration, but remains only one piece of the puzzle. The task force contributes competencies, but not capacity. If social acceptance and sustainable local RE planning are to succeed, a stronger link must be established between general inspiration and concrete support for local implementation. Considering that 21% of the state's total RE support funds are allocated to the Renewable Energy Task Force [6], a function primarily focused on competence development, it becomes essential to critically assess whether this investment aligns with the actual support needs of municipalities. The analysis shows that the task force currently

plays a facilitating and knowledge sharing role. They provide inspiration, case examples, and general methods through workshops and presentations but deliberately avoid recommending specific approaches to citizen engagement. This restrained approach reflects an awareness of local autonomy, but also risks reinforcing what Ellis et al. (2023) describe as a fixed conceptualisation of social acceptance. By treating acceptance as a matter of method selection or procedural compliance, the task force implicitly frames a complex, relational process to a technical problem with standardised solutions. Such concept fixations can obscure deeper issues of power, trust, and justice, and undermine efforts to build long-term legitimacy at the community level [16]. The interviews, particularly with Jammerbugt and Lemvig Municipality, highlight that municipalities are calling for concrete, case-specific, and legal support to manage resistance and conflict in planning situations [59], [61]. This underscores the relevance of policy implementation theory, which argues that there must be alignment between political objectives and the organisational conditions necessary to achieve them. This includes both competencies and capacity, of which the latter is often lacking [34, p. 42]. While the task force contributes to strengthening municipal competencies, it offers only limited support in developing the time, resources, and operational space required in practice. At the same time, theories of procedural justice and landscape democracy show that local acceptance depends on processes characterised by transparency, genuine influence, and perceived fairness. To support this, the Renewable Energy Task Force must not only inspire but actively assist municipalities in designing and facilitating interactive, fair, and locally adapted processes.

Municipalities' starting points for promoting social acceptance vary significantly. Some have experience and strong internal resources, while others struggle with limited capacity. According to policy implementation theory, support strategies should therefore be differentiated based on local capacity and organisational maturity. At the same time, successful citizen engagement does not necessarily depend on the application of theoretically sound methods, but can emerge through local habits, relationships, and gradual adaptation over time. This underscores the need for flexible and context-sensitive support rather than a standardised model. Less experienced municipalities require concrete process support, while more experienced ones may benefit from strategic sparring to further develop their existing practices [34, pp. 25–28]. In this context, it becomes clear that the Renewable Energy Task Force's current "roadshow model" can be perceived as too distant. As Hermansen puts it, it does not work to simply "drop by" with general messages, when the actual need arises acutely and within a specific local reality. If the task force does not sufficiently understand the local context, it risks providing support that is not perceived as relevant, and thereby fails to promote the kind of social acceptance that depends on local legitimacy and trust. It is therefore recommended that the Renewable Energy Task Force allocate more of its resources toward supporting local facilitators, individuals who have trust and knowledge within the community and can foster meaningful citizen dialogue and anchoring. This would strengthen implementation-level support and help transform the task force from a knowledge provider into a capacity builder. Hermansen emphasises that truly engaging participatory processes require trusted individuals with social capital within the local community [73].
Given that many municipal barriers stem from a mismatch between national requirements and local conditions, the Renewable Energy Task Force should take on a more explicit role as a feedback channel to the state. As recent literature highlights, social acceptance is shaped not only locally, but

across multiple governance scales. Conflicts often emerge when local values, practices, and constraints collide with national policy goals and frameworks, a dynamic referred to as governance scale conflict [16]. In this context, the RE task force occupies a critical intermediary role. However, without a formal mandate to translate local concerns into state-level feedback, its current function does little to mitigate these scale tensions. Strengthening this feedback role could help align governance levels and reduce local resistance by ensuring policy instruments are grounded in pragmatic planning conditions. Positioned uniquely between central and local government, the RE task force holds significant potential to act as a policy translator, an intermediary actor that gathers local experiences, challenges, and needs and communicates them upward in the political system. By systematically activating this role, the task force could contribute to the development of future governance instruments that are more context-sensitive and practically implementable. This would enable national policy to be shaped more directly by the realities municipalities operate within, ultimately strengthening cross-level learning and support. Recent research highlights that social acceptance is shaped not only at the local level but across multiple governance scales. Conflicts often arise when local values, practices, and constraints collide with national energy policy frameworks, a dynamic known as governance scale conflict [16]. In this context, the Renewable Energy Task Force is well-positioned to identify and help reconcile such tensions. However, without a formal mandate to channel local concerns into state-level feedback, its current role remains underutilised. Strengthening this function could help align governance levels and reduce local resistance by ensuring that policy instruments are grounded in the practical conditions municipalities face in planning processes.

Conclusion

This study is structured around the following main research question, which is further explored through three sub-questions:
How does the Renewable Energy Task Force (VE-rejseholdet) support municipalities in engaging citizens in renewable energy planning, and what impact does this support have on local social acceptance?

1) *How do Danish municipalities typically approach the planning of renewable energy development, and how does the Renewable Energy Task Force currently support this planning process with a focus on public participation?*
2) *What preconditions must be in place at the municipal level to promote social acceptance in renewable energy planning, and to what extent does the current practice of the Renewable Energy Task Force address these preconditions?*
3) *How can the approach of the Renewable Energy Task Force be improved in order to more effectively support municipalities in fostering social acceptance through meaningful public participation in renewable energy planning?*

These questions were examined through a combination of interviews, document analysis, and a literature review. The findings indicate that the task force plays a valuable role as a facilitator of

knowledge and methodological inspiration, primarily through workshops, presentations, and general guidance. However, the support offered remains superficial, method-neutral, and largely detached from the specific political and social dynamics that shape planning processes at the municipal level. The Renewable Energy Task Force contributes to building professional competencies but does not provide municipalities with means or methods necessary to develop or adjust their approaches to match their available capacity, such as time and institutional flexibility. The task force also does not provide municipalities with case-specific guidance to manage resistance, navigate conflicts, or build trust with local communities. As a result, the support has limited practical impact on promoting local social acceptance. Furthermore, municipalities differ significantly in terms of capacity, internal resources, and experience. A uniform support model is therefore insufficient. Successful citizen engagement often emerges from ongoing local relationships, procedural fairness, and contextual sensitivity rather than the application of standardised best practices. The current "roadshow model" employed by the task force is perceived as too general and ill-timed, particularly in situations where citizen opposition arises suddenly and requires tailored, hands-on responses. The analysis also highlights that the task force holds underutilised potential to function as a feedback channel between local and national governance levels. Positioned between municipalities and the state, the task force could help bridge governance scale conflicts by communicating municipal needs and limitations upward into national policy-making. However, its influence on structural alignment remains limited without a formalised mandate to fulfil this role. In conclusion, the Renewable Energy Task Force currently supports municipalities in a facilitative and competence-focused way, but this support does not significantly influence local social acceptance. To have a greater impact, the task force's mandate and operational model must evolve toward differentiated, capacity-building support and stronger integration with local planning practices. This includes rethinking its function as not only a knowledge provider, but a strategic actor embedded in the relational and procedural challenges that define social acceptance in practice. Further research is needed to validate and expand these findings. In particular, a broader investigation involving a larger number of municipalities, varying in geographic location, economic structure, and administrative experience, would support more generalisable conclusions. In addition, the legal and institutional conditions that frame the task force's activities should be further examined. This includes assessing whether current legislation allows for an expanded mandate, such as involvement in case-specific planning processes, capacity-building at the municipal level, or acting as a formal intermediary between local and national governance. Clarifying these structural constraints is essential to determine whether the envisioned repositioning of the task force's role in national policy implementation, particularly in supporting municipalities in their RE development, with a specific focus on promoting local, social acceptance, is realistically feasible within existing policy frameworks. If existing legislation proves to be a structural barrier, further attention must be directed towards identifying the legal or policy reforms necessary to enable a more embedded and responsive support model.

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Appendix

A. Renewable Energy Task Force - written questions

1. Hvad ser I som VE-rejseholdets vigtigste rolle i forhold til at støtte kommunerne med borgerinddragelse i VE-udvikling?
2. Hvilke metoder anbefaler I til kommunerne for at understøtte lokal accept for VE-projekter
3. Hvordan tilpasser I jeres støtte til kommuner med forskellige behov og forudsætninger?
4. Er der nogle erfaringer eller indsigter, I særligt har gjort jer om, hvad der kan fremme social accept i kommunerne?
5. Er der noget, I selv oplever kunne styrke VE-rejseholdets indsats i arbejdet med kommunerne fremover?
6. Hvordan moniterer I effekten af jeres indsats, og giver feedback til det politiske niveau?

B. Interview Guide – Municipalities

Formelt:

- Kan du starte med kort at præsentere dig selv?

Spørgsmål:

1. Hvordan arbejder I med borgerinddragelse i VE-planlægning, og hvad har I oplevet i forhold til borgernes reaktioner og sociale accept?
2. Hvordan vurderer I, om borgerne har reelt haft mulighed for indflydelse, og hvilke temaer har de haft indflydelse på?
3. Er der forskellige syn på landskabet blandt borgere, kommune og udviklere, og hvordan håndterer I disse forskelle?
4. Hvordan balancerer I tekniske/planfaglige krav med borgernes input og lokale hensyn?
5. Hvilken rolle har VE-rejseholdet ellers spillet i jeres arbejde, og hvordan har det påvirket jeres måde at tænke borgerinddragelse og VE-planlægning på?
6. Hvad mener du kunne VE-rejseholdet evt. gøre mere eller anderledes for at støtte jeres arbejde bedre?
7. Hvad mener I er vigtige faktorer eller betingelser for at sikre effektiv borgerinddragelse og opnå social accept?
8. Må vi have lov til at sende en mail efter vores interview med eventuelle opfølgende spørgsmål?

C. Interview Guide - Annika Agger

Formelt:

- Kan du starte med kort at præsentere dig selv, og især også din rolle i og samarbejdet med VE rejseholdet? Hvordan startede samarbejdet med dem?

VE-rejseholdet:

- Nu hvor du har indgået et samarbejde med VE-rejseholdet, hvor du blandt andet holder oplæg om samskabelse, kan du kort sige noget om, hvordan VE-rejseholdet arbejder med at fremme social accept i forbindelse med vedvarende energi-projekter?
- Når du holder oplæg sammen med VE-rejseholdet, hvem deltager typisk?

VE og samskabelse i kommuner:

- Hvilke forudsætninger skal være på plads hos en kommune inden planlægningen af en samskabelsesproces, for at samskabelse faktisk virker ifm. VE-projekter i praksis?
- Hvornår er samskabelse aktuelt at bruge frem for andre metoder, og hvornår i planlægningsprocessen er det bedst at introducere samskabelse?
- Er der noget, du mener, som kan forbedres ved VE-rejseholdets tiltag for bedre at kunne bidrage til kommunernes arbejde med social accept i forbindelse med VE planlægning?
- Hvis du kunne give et råd til en kommune, der ønsker at arbejde mere samskabende og tillidsbaseret med borgerne i udviklingen af VE-projekter - hvad skulle det så være?

D. Søren Hermansen - Questions

- Dit kendskab til og indtryk af VE-rejseholdet. Hvordan ville du beskrive deres opgave?
- Hvordan mener du, at VE-rejseholdets tilgang til understøttelse af kommunernes VE-planlægning kan styrkes, så anbefalingerne i højere grad fremmer social accept gennem meningsfuld borgerinddragelse? Udover det mandat som de opererer indenfor på nuværende tidspunkt

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