

# **Abstract: Rethinking the Village – An Analysis of How Small-town Values Play a Part in Late Modern Society.**

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In the context of Aarhus being the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2017, this thesis examines how the two projects Rethink the Village and its subproject *Landsbyklynger* (Village Clusters), contribute to the shaping of community and active citizenship. Rethink The village is one of the major strategic projects in Aarhus 2017. Based on one of the major challenges, the depopulation of rural areas on national as well as European level, the project focuses on the village's opportunities to rethink itself. By creating platforms for sharing knowledge, collaborations and dialogues, the project aims - through networking regionally - to inspire villages to develop a process that works with the visions of a future village life in Denmark. The thesis argues that a bottom-up approach to community relations and active citizenship is one of the main factors in making the project Rethink Villages a success, as a joint collaborative effort between Aarhus 2017 and the local population.

The first part of the thesis lays out my understanding of the projects including the particular approach to bottom-up engagement. It then proceeds to set out the analytical framework combining theories from Zygmunt Bauman, Sherry Arnstein and Anthony Giddens, explaining the concepts of community, active citizenship and detraditionalization in the late modern society, respectively. This framework will be applied in order to investigate the terms of creating new communities in a de-traditionalized society.

The empirical data draws broadly from my field-studies of how Rethink the Village works, the ongoing village-project *landsbyklyngen* "Favrskov4ren", and specifically through six semi-structured qualitative interviews. I conducted the interviews with key persons working in and around these projects. The analysis of the interviews combines the dual perspectives of the bottom-up methodology of Aarhus 2017 and the abovementioned theoretical framework together underscore my point being that the villages in Denmark, and the rural districts in general, are in need of this rethinking. My analysis focuses on how Aarhus 2017 and Rethink the Village provides a work process to create communities through local, active citizenship.

I find it interesting that communities and active citizenship are such inevitably subjects in the project of Rethink the Village because also concepts are subjects of general myth-making and utopian categorization of the small town values. By that I mean that most people often quickly encounter the romantic belief, that life in villages is more meaningful because the social community is present all the time, and that the connection between neighbors is so powerful that it

can raise a whole village. However, because it is not necessarily so, Rethink the Village can be an important factor in creating these strong communities through the bottom-up method and in the various municipalities to create projects that a new attractive society should be built upon by the year 2017.

Situations where the social communities links to a specific geographical location can easily be misunderstood as the remains of a long gone and uncivilized past, but the fact is, that in the villages, it must be a part of a modern society. The thesis concludes that Rethink the Village has indeed been successful in creating new communities due to the process of making the projects happen. The course of finding new solutions to everyday problems through creating and testing these communities is up to debate, though. It shows that the “new” solutions actually contain the values of a traditional society.