

Futures of rural and peripheral areas

-Challenges, strategies and policies

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Abstract

Regional processes have transformed rural and peripheral areas throughout Europe through spatial, functional and social changes and in terms of stagnating economies as well as population decline. In response to this, the so-called 'new rural paradigm' was developed where key elements are a focus on places rather than sectors and on investments rather than subsidies, stressing the need for building on local strengths and qualities. An overall goal within the EU is to pursue economic, social and territorial cohesion and although Danish policies aim for balanced regional growth and development various reforms seem to pull in a different direction. More specifically, a range of reforms has been consolidating functions and institutions and thereby centralizing growth and development. This article discusses challenges, futures and possibilities on rural and peripheral areas in Denmark and identifies a potential mismatch between different policies, reforms and strategies in relation to challenges of these areas.

Keywords

Restructuring processes, regional development, rural areas.

Introduction

Rural and peripheral areas in many parts of the EU are presently challenged by various restructuring processes; functionally and economically by closing down local production industry as well as by rationalisation of the farming industry. Rural areas are also challenged socially and culturally by long-time loss of inhabitants and by in-migration representing different lifestyles. In addition these areas face challenges due to deterioration of housing, of building structures redundant from enlargement of the farming industry along with lack of investment in other parts of the physical environment. However, restructuring processes vary throughout Europe where in some countries development in rural and peripheral areas has been balanced and some areas even appear to be undergoing a process of counter-urbanization. The overall trend within the EU where population growth is measured on the basis of the statistical regions; the so-called NUTS 2 regions is that some regions are growing – mainly in the West - while others experience population decline forming a general East-West divide. This also applies to Denmark where polarization between growing and stagnating regions is clear and where rural and peripheral areas have lost inhabitants over the past decades and continue to depopulate.

Danish rural areas not only suffer from population loss but also by low income and low educational levels, limited employment and work potential coinciding with ageing populations and populations in poor health in comparison with national averages (Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd 2010 & 2011; Madsen et al. 2010).

Challenges of peripheral regions have been recognized at the European level where a key element in EU policies since 2000 has been restructuring of regions with an overall goal to pursue economic, social and territorial cohesion. With respect to regional policies, the year 2007 marks important changes by emphasising regional competitiveness, employment and growth and thereby making a shift from overall considerations for equality to a focus on economic growth. Another significant change in policy for rural areas was the so-called 'the New Rural Paradigm' (OECD 2006) stressing a place-based approach to rural policy that aims to identify and exploit the varied development potential of rural areas. This is also a clear priority expressed in national strategies and policies in Denmark.

While targeted rural policies have been absent in Denmark during the past decades of change, deregulation of existing planning law was recently passed in Parliament, which, along with other policies and reforms, affects rural areas. This makes it relevant to address first of all the potential effect or consequence of such deregulation for local planning and development. Secondly, it could be questioned whether the recent administrative reform and its setup of national, regional and municipal tasks and responsibilities serve as a strategic tool for rural municipalities. Last it should be queried whether recent Danish reforms and policies serve the common European goal of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Regional development: Denmark in a European context

Patterns of regional development can be described in terms of phases of urbanisation, des-urbanisation, counter-urbanisation, re-urbanisation and metropolisation. Urbanisation phases and urban system change is mainly based on changing regional patterns in terms of growth of investments, employment and population which have been documented within Western Europe and in the United States as explained by e.g. Berry (1976), Champion (1998), Fielding (1992), Harvey (1985), Illeris (1988), Kontuly (1998). Definitions, time periods and explanations for phases of urbanisation and urban system change continue to be a subject for discussion where some emphasise economic cyclical and structural forces, technological innovations or government policies as the main driver of change. Others point to a complex set of explanations e.g. Boyle & Halfacree (1998) and Bærenholdt (2009) who stress spatial, environmental, socio-economic and socio-cultural factors as key to understanding changes. The sum of this is a whole complex of factors - including government policies - influencing broad processes of restructuring and regional patterns of development over the past half century. Also in a Danish context major changes in terms of regional development have taken place within this time period as described in the following section.

Regional development trends in Denmark since the late 1960s

Until the late 1960s, the capital of Copenhagen as well as in other larger cities around the country, dominated as the main location for industrial production; iron and metal, food, chemical and clothing. However, a structural shift with the closing down of and relocation of these industries

along with the emergence of new industries had major impacts on regional development. More specifically, since the late 1960s Danish industry and jobs went through a process of being dispersed around the country (Illeris 2010; Madsen & Andersen 2003; Matthiessen 1985; Nielsen 2000). From having a leading position as major industrial centres, Copenhagen and other larger cities had major losses in both employment base and number of inhabitants.

Instead, development took place in other, less urbanised regions aided by the continued expansion of the public sector and the transfer of money between municipalities, which from the 1970s led to numerous and small regional centres scattered around the country (Nielsen 2000). The 1970s was a period when Denmark went through major changes such as entering the Single Market of the European Union in 1972 and it was a period characterised by rapid development of transport- and communication technologies facilitating and cheapening export of goods and generally increasing mobility. At the same time as industrial restructuring took place there was a strong growth in the public sector which reinforced the diffusion of activities as there was general political support for spreading jobs, activities and investments evenly across the country. National policy was based on the idea of a countrywide hierarchal urban system with regional and local centres that could offer public services equally to inhabitants no matter where they lived (Gaardmand 1993).

The period from 1970 to 1980 was one of decentralised growth and dispersal of economic activity with the spreading of small, specialised businesses in smaller towns, and in what used to be the countryside. Thus, in the course of two decades, from 1960s to 1980s, regional development in Denmark went through phases of centralised to decentralised growth and again a shift towards centralisation of growth and development from the late 1980s. This was not only the case in Denmark but also in other Northern European countries as well as in most other parts of Western Europe (Cheshire 1995).

The early 1990s was a time of economic prosperity for the entire country with major investments in infrastructure, cultural institutions etc. By the latter part of the 1990s Copenhagen had established a position as the centre of growth within the country, transforming the employment base into knowledge intensive jobs, attracting well educated populations and competing with other European cities (Andersen & Jørgensen 1995). This was part of the political agenda and planning policies where focus in the 1990s was on Copenhagen and other big cities as a locomotive of growth for the whole country contrary to earlier policies, which had emphasised equal development (Gaardmand 1993).

Recent trends in regional development – centralisation and metropolisation

In most parts of the Western world there has since the early 1990s been a strong centralising development. The current phase of urbanisation or new form of urbanity is described by using different terms and concepts such as metapolis and metropolisation (Ascher 2002), *zwischenstadt*, urbanised landscape or landscape city (Sieverts 2003) in which both processes of decentralisation and the interconnectedness and functional linkages between growing regions are key elements. The current development has been characterised by the interaction and connectedness between different economic, social and political landscapes and the introduction of new flows, processes and relations (e.g. Andersen & Engelstoft 2004, Ascher 2002). A contributing element is overall

improvements in infrastructure and ability to travel long distances enabling less dependency of residence in relation to workplace. Studies have shown increased ability and willingness to commute long distances with labour market growing in geographical terms and increasing the size of functional landscapes e.g. Andersen (2000), Christoffersen (2003), Christoffersen & Blix (1998) and Dedig & Filges (2004). Much research also in a Danish context demonstrate these developments (e.g. Andersen 2009, Andersen & Engelstoft 2004, Andersen et al. 2011, Nielsen & Harder 2008) pointing to the functional linkages between urban and those rural areas near the cities; peri-urban landscapes.

A recent analysis (Illeris 2010) stresses that urbanisation phases may follow a less clear pattern than previously understood and questions the general understanding of concentration of growth in the big cities. Instead regional development is described as an ever-changing mosaic of growth and stagnation in large cities as well as in small towns and villages (p. 247).

Nevertheless, the general understanding is that the present stage of regional development increasingly displays concentration of growth and development in large, functional regions in and around the big cities whereas other parts of the country – areas in the periphery of the growth regions - are stagnating or declining in terms of inhabitants, functions and economy.

Although the ability and willingness to commute long distances has grown, limits for homework travel also reduce possibilities for peripheral areas to become part of a growing and large-scale urban economy. Thus, some regions appear to be disconnected due to their geography and are challenged by limited potential for development. This is considered a challenge at the national as well as European level and reflected in regional EU policies.

Danish and European policies on regional development

An overall goal within the EU is to pursue economic, social and territorial cohesion where in relation to EU regional policy the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund are intended to narrow the development disparities among regions and Member States. A key element in EU regional policies since 2000 has been restructuring of regions with focus on education, research, innovation and environment. This has been supported and subsidized through Structural Funds and Cohesion policies in the period from 2000-2006 and continued through 2007-2013.

At the European level, the year 2007 marks important changes in regional policies and in terms of considerations on equality vs. economic growth where recent regional policies emphasise competitiveness, employment and growth. Part of this change was a number of studies and reports and where the so-called 'the New Rural Paradigm' was formulated (OECD 2006). This new approach to rural policy emphasises investments rather than subsidies and aims at integrating different sectorial policies and improve the coherence and effectiveness of public expenditure. The new rural paradigm also stresses a place-based approach that aims to identify and exploit the varied development potential of rural areas. This focus is also a clear priority expressed through various official government documents and within national strategies and policies in Denmark.

Danish policies on rural and peripheral areas

Danish rural and peripheral areas are subject to policy intervention primarily on the part of the Ministry of the Environment (Miljøministeriet), Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs (Økonomi- og Erhvervsministeriet), Ministry of Interior and Health (Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet) as well as the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries (Ministeriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri) where different criteria for identifying rural and peripheral areas are applied. In the Ministry of the Environment focus is on geographical criteria and commuting distances to large cities, the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs considers different elements but mainly low per capita income and population decline or stagnation whereas both the Ministry of Interior and Health and Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries apply all together 14 factors but most importantly population density, share of employment in agriculture and employment/population development. Despite differences in criteria for rural and peripheral areas they generally overlap. Figure 1 shows peripheral areas following the criteria developed by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries (Ministeriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri) and Ministry of Interior and Health (Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet) with peripheral areas marked in purple

Landdistrikter

Fig. 1

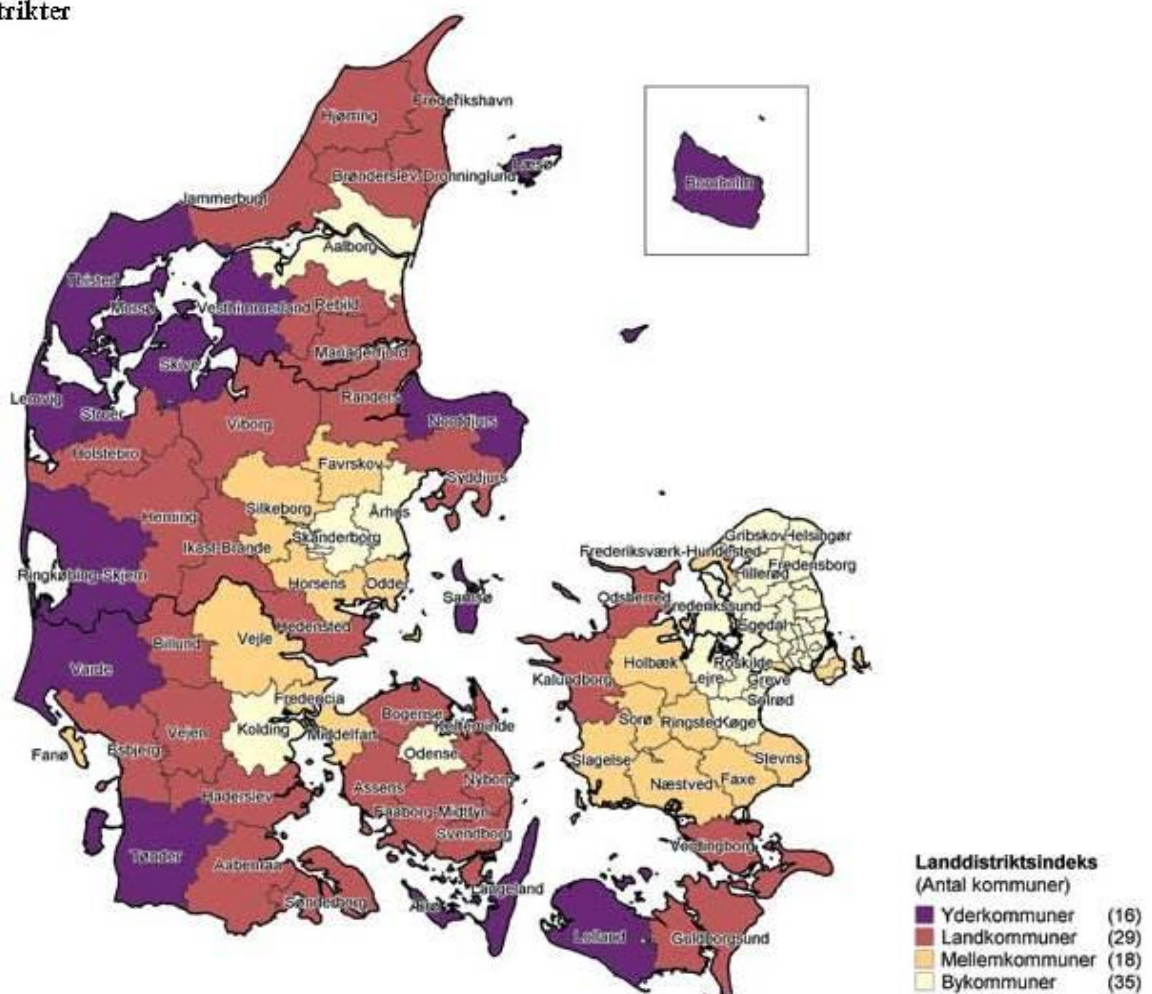


Figure 1: Geography of regions (peripheral areas in purple). Source: Ministeriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri & Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet (2006).

As described earlier, the 1990s onwards show a regional pattern with growing problems in stagnating areas, which to varying degrees have been addressed in terms of policies over the past decade. At the same time the existing planning law takes a new direction by aspiring for suitable regional development as opposed to previous policy for balanced regional development. From that time onwards planning documents reflect marked changes in problems identified, priorities and policies for regional development as described in the following.

The national planning report for Denmark titled 'Lokal identitet og nye udfordringer' (Local Identity and New Challenges), stressed the need for balanced regional growth and development with populations and jobs spread evenly across the country was (Miljø- og Energiministeriet, 2000). In 2003 the national planning report titled 'Balanced development in Denmark – what needs to be done?' the goal of regional and local balance was strengthened with special attention given to challenges of peripheral areas (Danish Ministry of the Environment, 2003). Similar goals were expressed in the so-called regional growth strategy and in official statements on regional development (Økonomi- og Erhvervsministeriet, 2005 and Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet, 2004). All documents state that there are major challenges in terms of regional balance and development but also that things were going in the right direction namely greater equalization between different parts of the country. The planning report from 2006 however signals a new direction.

A new direction in planning and policy

In the national planning report for spatial development titled 'The new map of Denmark – spatial planning under new conditions' discourses were fundamentally altered. First of all, it is stated that the nature of economic growth differs in different part of the country and that each area should develop based on the prerequisites of that area (Danish Ministry of the Environment, 2006). The planning document further identifies a strong and competitive capital and city regions as prerequisites for Denmark's spatial development in order to ensure development and attract companies, jobs and employees in the global competition. In the document it is recognised that peripheral areas or small-town regions may have more difficulty than other parts of the country in attracting investment and generating economic development but points to leisure and experience economy, tourism and settlement as potential for future development (p. 20).

In continuation of the national planning report from 2006, a working group in the Ministry of the Environment was established with an aim to identify strengths and weaknesses in relation to future development in peripheral areas. This resulted in a report (Miljøministeriet, By- og Landskabsstyrelsen, 2007), which stressed that some places are in a difficult situation with deteriorating housing, few or no services and an ageing population and limited potential for development. In the report it is stressed that municipalities should identify strengths and potentials and make priority of where to direct efforts.

It is clear that Danish policies follow the 'new rural paradigm' stressing local strengths and qualities with focus on places rather than sectors; and on investments rather than subsidies (Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet, 2007). Furthermore, the most recent official document on regional planning and development (Miljøministeriet, By- og Landskabsstyrelsen, 2009 & 2010) stands out by lacking a title and by being very brief. This along with the content signals a lack of

direction and goal for regional development clearly expressed by stating that ‘the geography of solutions must adjust to the geography of problems’ (p. 3). However, the national planning report is closely related to a government report titled ‘Danmark i balance i en global verden’ (A balanced Denmark in a global world), (Regeringen, 2010), in which challenges of rural and peripheral areas have become a key feature stating balanced growth as an explicit goal.

Along with new goals for regional development expressed in planning documents recent reforms have affected conditions for planning and development at both the regional and municipal level.

Administrative reforms and new conditions for planning

A new structural and administrative reform was passed by Parliament in 2007 as part of whole complex of reforms consolidating and centralizing functions and institutions. The key element in the administrative reform was to reduce the number of municipalities and authorities at the regional level. In figure 2 is shown the current, five administrative regions: 1) Northern, 2) Mid- and 3) Southern Jutland, 4) Seeland and Lolland Falster and 5) the Copenhagen Metropolitan region. The figure further displays major transport corridors as well as cities with more than 100,000 respectively 20,000 inhabitants. Peripheral areas are marked with a horizontal signature and termed small town regions and located in the periphery of large and growing city regions of Copenhagen and Århus.

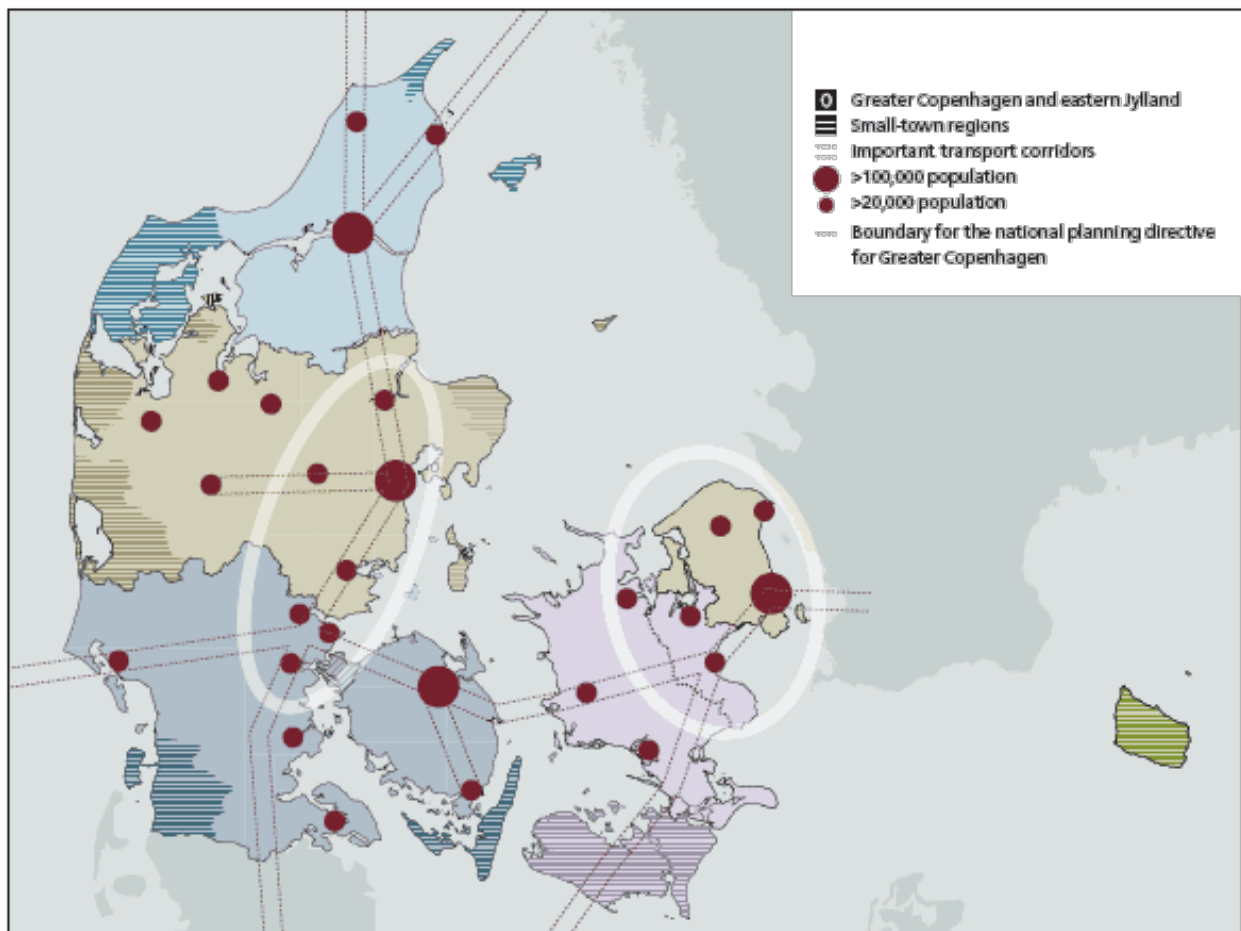


Figure 2: The new map of Denmark. Source: Danish Ministry of the Environment (2006).

The reform was implemented in January 2007 and changed responsibilities between the three levels of government: state, counties and municipalities. The reform reduced the number of municipalities from 275 to 98 and at the same time abolished the existing 14 counties, which were replaced by five regions. The structural and administrative reform is part of a complex of reforms which have been unfolded during the past five years namely restructuring of the police force and enlarging police districts, re-organizing hospital services and closing local hospitals.

The intention of the structural reform has been to enlarge municipalities to a minimum of 30,000 inhabitants and to transfer functions and responsibility from counties to the enlarged municipalities thereby allowing them to develop coherent and co-ordinated policies and strategies. The planning system after the reform is shown in figure 3.

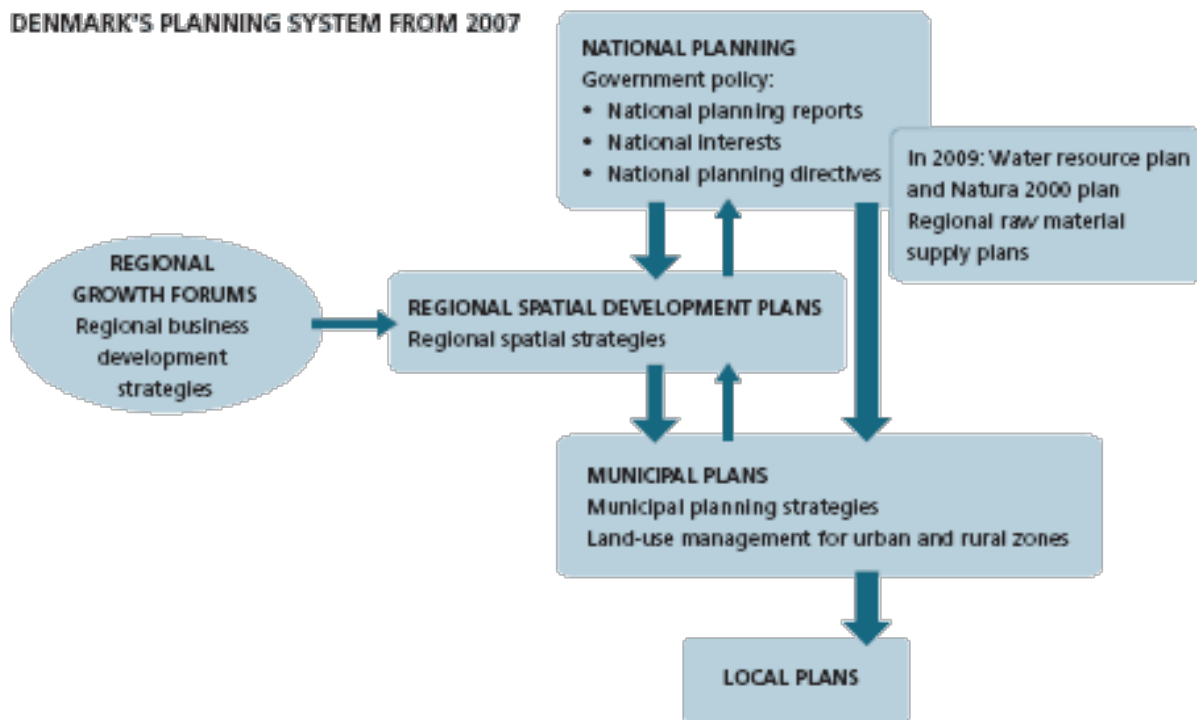


Figure 3: Planning system after the reform of local government structure. Source: Danish Ministry of the Environment, 2006.

The recent reform has similarities with an administrative reform that was passed during the 1970s, which reduced the number of municipalities and parishes from around 1,400 to 275 as well as reducing the county level of administration from 25 to 14. The municipal reform was followed by a series of planning reforms and the overall aim of the 1970s reforms was to provide sustainable administrative competence at the regional and municipal level for providing welfare.

The rationale behind the 2007 reform is comparable but regional challenges are very different compared to the 1970s. The 1970s were characterized by a polycentric structure with many regional centres and development spread across the country. Furthermore, focus during that period of time was on strengthening 'weak areas' and providing equal service and opportunities throughout the country. This was also the case in other Nordic countries, which at the time

followed a welfare model based on equal opportunity for development (Ærø & Jørgensen 2005). In general policies throughout Western Europe in the decades following the Second World War were, as pointed out by Illeris (2010), aimed at reducing regional differences (p. 197).

The present time is rather characterised by strengthening metropolitan areas and it is characterised by the lack of national programmes on regional development and all the while regional challenges have grown. Whereas the Danish Parliament in 1958 addressed regional conditions and challenges for economic development and consequently passed a law, currently neither legislation nor strategies addressing regional development exist (Halkier 2010; Illeris 2010). The 1958 law on regional development was effective until the beginning of the 1990s at which time national programs on regional development discontinued without being replaced by other national programmes (Halkier 2008 & 2009).

The absence of a national regional strategy along with the new reform has fundamentally widened the scope and geography of municipal planning responsibility and land-use for both urban and rural areas. A key element in the reform was to transfer regional functions to local government and others to central government, which has been interpreted as an increasing number of balance checks and benchmarking (Andersen 2008, p.11).

Regional growth forums

The overall responsibility for regional development is placed within each of the five regions and more specifically within regional growth forums. The task of growth forums is to develop regional, strategic plans for economic development with particular attention given areas in the periphery. Growth forums are composed of representatives from both public and private sectors however members are appointed rather than elected but nevertheless administer large sums of money from the Regional Council for economic development as well as EU structural funds in support of competitive regions.

Competitive regions is a focal point with both EU regional policy, part of the national Danish framework and thereby a key element for the five regional growth forums. However, the absence of a coherent strategic plan for regional development in Denmark stands out in a European context (Halkier 2010). And although recent government documents state regional balance as an explicit goal a national policy in support of this is still missing. Furthermore, it could be questioned whether regional strategic plans adequately address the interconnected challenges of rural and peripheral areas or rather have a narrow focus on economic development.

Futures of rural and peripheral areas

Government documents stress the need to focus on place bound resources and qualities emphasising cultural heritage, tourism and new uses for rural areas (Regeringen 2010 & Miljøministeriet, By- og Landskabsstyrelsen, 2009 & 2010). New settlement and attracting new inhabitants is pointed out as another potential for development due to increased mobility and increasing house prices in the growth regions. In terms of job possibilities focus is on development of niche production such as quality foods as well as tourism and leisure economy building on local strengths, qualities and distinctive features.

Currently the challenges of rural and peripheral areas are addressed and balanced growth is once again expressed as an explicit political goal. In pursuit of this, a differentiation of the existing planning law is suggested thereby providing possibilities for deregulation of land use. Specifically, it is suggested and debated to make way for designating and zoning for new housing on the edge of existing villages, to develop large scale retail stores outside existing centres, to allow for the physical expansion of existing businesses located in land zone and extended possibilities to plan within a 300 m coastal zone.

While some rural organizations generally welcome regulation and restrictions to be revoked (Landdistrikternes Fællesråd 2010), municipal and planning organizations (Dansk Byplanlaboratorium, 2010 and Kommunernes Landsforening 2010) express concern and first of all stress that this does not provide tools for addressing problems and challenges in relation to future development of rural and peripheral areas.

Concerns expressed in relation to deregulation of the existing planning law are directed at the risk for undermining municipal strategy and planning for future development, in terms of service provision etc. as deregulation allows for unplanned and dispersed settlements. Concerns are also expressed in relation to potential conflicts between neighbours if new settlement impairs the view or other qualities of existing housing. Furthermore, it is questioned if there is a need for developing land for new housing when overall population is declining for which reason existing housing stock is in excess. It is further stressed that large scale retail would undermine local stores already threatened as well as eliminating other functions of local stores such as post office, library and local meeting places. Despite differences in views on current planning deregulation there is agreement that the recent deregulation of planning is unlikely to solve existing problems in rural and peripheral areas.

Over the past years various efforts to local development have been initiated by municipalities, local action groups etc. These projects are receiving financing from a variety of sources; one source of financing is based on EU means and allocated through the so-called Landdistriktpulje (Rural Districts Aid). Eligibility to apply for aid from Landdistriktpuljen is based on local action groups (LAGs) developing proposals for local projects, which require skills and competencies present in some but far from all local communities. In addition to these initiatives, other projects are being implemented through a private foundation Realdania and a time limited government initiative; Plan09 all based on identifying and building upon local potential and qualities.

One potential for development in rural areas is to attract new settlement but in consequence of reduced income from taxes, growing welfare expenses etc. municipalities typically cut local services such as public transportation, libraries, cultural and sport facilities etc. which impairs the quality of life for inhabitants in rural areas and further undermine the potential for attracting new residents (Nørgaard et al. 2010).

Overall, individual projects aimed at utilizing local potential for development lack coordination with each other as well as with other local initiatives for development. They also lack coordination with agricultural policy, which – as opposed to rural development policy - continues to be based on a subsidy principle but without direct links to overall development in rural areas. Other types of

economic development policy are managed by the regional growth forums but they also appear uncoordinated with the overall development in rural areas. It is thus unclear how individual projects and efforts contribute to future development in rural and peripheral areas and it is uncertain whether current funding for rural development supports the overall goal within the EU of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Discussion

During the last few decades, rural areas of Western Europe have been influenced by developments that have caused serious changes to the spatial, functional and social characteristics. Also in Denmark, rural areas are undergoing major changes with losses in population, ageing of inhabitants, job loss and high unemployment rates, reduction in service as well as deterioration of facilities and general economic decline. Overall, influences on regional development can be described as restructuring processes with the outsourcing of industrial and manufacturing jobs, a reorganization of the agricultural sector, growth of the knowledge based industry and jobs which have predominantly been located in and around the big cities. These are considered the main elements contributing to the current landscape of regional development, growth and decline, and they pose a major challenge to the future development of rural areas in Denmark and elsewhere in Europe.

Policies have a major impact on regional development and despite common overall changes there are differences in the regional landscape between individual European countries. In Denmark regional policies have changed direction and focus over the past 10-15 years, which have impacted on regional development patterns. Until the early 1990s regional policy goals were balanced growth throughout the country based on a polycentric structure but the direction changed from that time onwards. Instead focus was on strengthening development and growth in and around the capital of Copenhagen where major infrastructure investments: cultural, physical and traffic in Copenhagen have resulted in centralization of activities and aimed at promoting and assisting further investments in the metropolitan areas. In this process and time period, rural and peripheral parts of the country have continued to stagnate or decline.

Over the years there has been efforts and subsidies directed towards the development of peripheral areas through traditional sectorial policies. However, from around 2006 there has been a reorientation of Danish policy, which in line with other OECD governments favours a place-based approach emphasising investment rather than subsidies and a shift from sectorial to territorial policies. This shift and new direction is also apparent in Danish planning documents where focus on place bound resources and qualities emphasising cultural heritage, tourism and new uses for rural areas and attract new residents as potential for development.

Another important change is the Danish administrative reform implemented in 2007, which reduced the number of municipalities thereby enlarging number of inhabitants, and widened planning responsibility. The merge of existing municipalities has a number of challenges both in terms of consolidating different administrations and at the same time building competence in order to managing new tasks and responsibilities assigned the enlarged municipalities namely to plan for both urban and rural development.

The administrative reform also changed planning structure at the regional level by reducing the existing 14 counties and replacing them by five regions. Regional development plans along with government policy and national planning goals serve as framework for municipal planning. But since national framework and regional strategies are based on 'the new rural paradigm' responsibility for identifying new potential for development is placed at the municipal level.

In this light rural and peripheral municipalities are challenged both structurally and strategically due to the administrative reform but also due to long-term losses in inhabitants and job opportunities, growing expenses for care of the elderly and aging population along with reduced income from taxes due to more out-movers than in-movers. Rural and peripheral municipalities also have additional expenses in consequence of deteriorating physical environments, derelict housing etc., which, despite state subsidies, also require municipal financing.

Conclusion

Government documents and reforms stress that regions and municipalities each have distinct and important roles to play in the new municipal structure and further stresses the role of central government to be one of ensuring the 'best possible' conditions for development. However, it is questionable whether the most recent proposals to deregulate land use and planning provide tools for addressing problems and challenges. It appears more likely that they will undermine municipal planning and strategies for future development or make no difference at all.

While rural and peripheral areas in Denmark have recreational qualities and development potential within experience economy, tourism and new settlement it is also clear these areas are challenged as a result of economic restructuring and change as well as located in the periphery of the metropolitan knowledge based growth regions. Furthermore, due to reduced income from taxes and growing welfare expenses municipalities typically have to cut local services, which undermine one of the potentials for development namely attracting new residents.

It is concluded that Danish government reforms implemented over the past five years have eroded and undermined rather than strengthened the potential for development within rural and peripheral areas contrary to other Nordic countries where regional balance continues to be an explicit goal and aided by a structural framework, planning and subsidies for development.

It is also concluded that although the 'new rural paradigm' may be a necessary and useful approach to local development and change it does not adequately address problems in rural and peripheral areas - at least when it is isolated from coherent national policies and programs. The overall conclusion thus is that there is an obvious mismatch between different policies, reforms and strategies in relation to challenges of rural and peripheral areas in Denmark.

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