



Portugal 2005

Niels Rasmussen

Support for social and community development

Comment Paper, Denmark



on behalf of



European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities





Part I: The possible relevance

In common with several other countries, Denmark has local areas struggling with severe social problems in the form of many unemployed people, a concentration of people with social problems and a concentration of people from non-Danish ethnic backgrounds. In spite of highly positive economic development, the gravity of the problems in these areas seems to grow. Besides, it appears that the number of areas hit by severe social problems is steadily rising. In this connection, the Danish Government has drawn up a special plan for the action to be taken to address the problems of social ghettos.

Therefore, the Portuguese experience is also of interest and relevance to Denmark.

Part II: Transferability

Denmark has extensive experience in projects attempting to involve local players in the solution of social problems in broad terms. Below follows a summary of the Danish experience in the field. In Denmark we have to a wide extent encountered the same problems as Portugal. It is difficult to point to specific Portuguese experience we can use in Denmark, but there is a strong platform for knowledge-sharing.

Social Development Funds (SDF)

The SDF programme was launched in 1985 with a total appropriation of DKK 350 million (EUR 47 million), running for three and a half years. Although it was not phrased directly, it was really a programme under the heading "Let a thousand flowers bloom".

As in the Portuguese programme, financial support could be granted to all types of target groups and all forms of activities as long as they were locally based. The local authority was required to participate in the work as a partner. But it was not necessary for the local authority to have a determining influence. The projects could be run by a non-governmental organisation or a civic group or user group. Financial assistance was provided to more than 1200 projects.



Experience:

1. important for the assessment of project applications to be able to decode the specific phrases, see the ideas and the commitment, opportunity to award reserved grants
2. need for someone to assist in the formulation of projects
3. ensure the collation and dissemination of experience
4. financial support for the individual project was modest, and the project was a stand-alone project that did not gain synergies from other projects
5. problems involved in raising funds for project continuation, despite the requirement of cooperation with the local authority
6. companies and the social partners were largely absent, and the employment dimension was practically not taken into account
7. the needs of disadvantaged groups are met only to a limited degree
8. weakening political interest in the programme at the national level in response to a change of government

The programme served the purpose of mobilising many players, but it is difficult to assess whether it actually paved the way for an improvement in conditions for the users.

We learned the lesson that programmes have to be narrower in relation to the population groups at which the initiatives should be directed as well as more targeted in geographical terms. At the same time, however, we observed a need for broader action directed at various living conditions such as housing, employment, networks, crime and education.

The programme was a contributory factor in the decision to establish a number of central government information centres, which could provide help in formulating projects and disseminating experience and assist in performing evaluation work.

Urban Committee

The Urban Committee was set up in 1993 as a consequence of concrete problems in certain neighbourhoods with many residents from minority ethnic backgrounds. Financial assistance was provided to more than 96 projects in total. A very strong focus was on building improvements and rent reductions in connection with refinancing, but also on a social dimension, for instance in the form of the establishment of resident advisory councils manned by social workers. The labour market dimension was weak.



Neighbourhood improvement 1997

The experience gained from the Urban Committee work was that a concentration on fewer areas was called for. The neighbourhood improvement programme therefore concentrates action on the largest and most deprived areas and on increased participation of the social partners and companies. This coincides with steps to clarify the working relations by establishing partnerships with a clear description of responsibilities.

In the period from 1997 to 2004, an amount of DKK 1.3 billion (EUR 180 million) was set aside in seven urban areas, duration four to nine years (some projects were a continuation of projects earlier initiated under the Urban Committee).

Activities:

- a. Housing initiatives comprising refinancing, rent reductions and building improvements
- b. green areas
- c. urban facilities
- d. employment, including local jobcentres and special activation and job training offers linked to the neighbourhood
- e. social conditions
- f. culture
- g. social networking
- h. urban ecology

Process

Citizen participation from planning to implementation

Experience:

1. initiatives should be of a certain magnitude to be effective; small-scale initiatives only result in labelling of residents
2. initiatives should be broadly based; physical and social improvements, all else being equal, have a poor effect. An occupational and job-promoting effort is needed
3. important to create local jobs as the geographical mobility of residents is often modest
4. initiatives should be of a long-term nature
5. Preconditions of citizen participation
 - a. knowledge of the possibilities of participation

The most disadvantaged groups will often have no knowledge of such possibilities



b. motivation

The most disadvantaged and marginalised groups will often be very sceptical in regard to the possibilities of acquiring influence, will often be distrustful of public authorities and cooperation bodies

c. resources

In some cases the marginalised groups will lack necessary resources, such as experience of studying written material, language problems and network resources for gaining influence. Insufficient time resources for people in employment, the parent task

Pool for Marginalised People 2002

This pool comprised an amount of DKK 590 million (EUR 80 million). Here the focus was on special offers to socially marginalised people, treatment for misuse, establishment of special types of housing and support to user organisations.

Establishment of the Council for Socially Marginalised People

Particularly long time frame, in reality permanent, central-government funding of projects in the biggest urban communities.

Concrete infrastructure improvement initiatives for the mobilisation of local players

- a. support to projects planned by local groups of users (SDF 1985)
- b. support for the social policy activities of non-governmental organisations (1989)
- c. establishment of a duty for local authorities to provide financial support for NGO initiatives (1998)
- d. development of a framework for partnerships (Neighbourhood improvement 1997)
- e. support for establishing national organisations of socially marginalised groups: SAND (homeless people), SVID (users of shelters) with local departments (extended in 2002)
- f. establishment of a national council to promote the interests of the marginalised groups (Council for Socially Marginalised People 2002)
- g. local volunteer bureaus in deprived areas (under planning)



Various forms of user involvement

	Local level	Central government level
Filling in existing framework	User councils Neighbourhood improvement	
Framework extension	Development projects (SDF)	
Redefinition of problems		Council for Socially Marginalised People User organisations at national level

Part III: Questions

1. How do we avoid user involvement only for the sake of involvement itself and as justification of the initiatives from a democratic perspective instead of applying user involvement only where it adds value and is experienced by the users as an improvement of living conditions and a help for empowerment?
2. How do we ensure that participation is easy for the users to relate to in terms of scope and time frame while the initiatives are sufficiently complex and long-standing to tackle the problems?
3. How can local community initiatives interact with national initiatives in relation to the fight against poverty and social exclusion?