

# VILLAGE CLUSTER CAMPAIGN - PARTIAL EVALUATION 1

## Process evaluation of village clusters as a methodology

### SUMMARY

This report evaluates the applicability of the methodology that all participating village clusters have had to apply, making it possible to examine whether the method has been able to support the intentions of forming sustainable village cluster networks.

### The overall method with phases and milestones

The village cluster method is conceived as a linear process where the phases are temporally and functionally dependent on each other. This evaluation shows that there has been general satisfaction with the method, which introduces a clear and manageable structure. However, there have been challenges in the implementation itself, where it is not necessarily possible to follow the the linear, detailed method, which is why some clusters have worked more in parallel with things in parallel.

The analysis shows that it is crucial to find a fine balance between following the method exactly and leaving room for the volunteer steering committee members to explore what works explore what works best for them. In other words, it's important to adapt the method to the human and social resources available so that the necessary energy is brought into play, and the participants find meaning in the project.

This evaluation shows that there has been a big difference in whether the participating village clusters have found the method too difficult or too easy. For some steering groups, the Campaign method has been somewhat inflexible and academic, while others have had the opposite experience and found the method very useful.

The analysis shows that the steering group members understood that it was essential to use the to use the method to develop the cluster, but several of the interviewed steering groups interviewed did not feel that they had worked specifically with the method's phases and milestones and therefore find it difficult to talk about these. Here it can be argued that the phases and milestones have mainly been a tool for the process consultants to steer by, but this lack of awareness highlights awareness nevertheless highlights a weakness in the method. It illustrates that the method's ambitious and extensive content has led some steering

committee members to navigate around key elements of the method and left this exclusively to the process consultant.

### **The role of the process consultant**

This evaluation shows that a committed process consultant is crucial for the participating villages to get through the process and ultimately become established. The process consultant plays a number of different roles during the project. The most important roles can be described as follows: facilitator, whip, a person who gets things done and knowledge and experience sharer.

### **Focus areas**

In the process, the participating village clusters had to work with six focus areas: organization, communication, involvement, municipal cooperation, meeting places and activities.

In terms of organization, it varies how the village clusters have chosen to organize themselves, but regardless of the form of organization, this partial evaluation shows that there are two aspects of organization that are important to consider when establishing a village cluster:

- 1) the cluster's organization towards the local area and
- 2) the steering group's internal cooperation and organization.

The participating clusters have learned that good communication creates the foundation for collaboration, but that good communication also requires many, often almost professional resources that the clusters do not necessarily have at their disposal. For this reason, the majority of the steering groups reflect that the communication aspect is time-consuming and difficult, and many express that it has been the most underestimated focus area. It can thus be concluded that the expectations for the use of certain communication platforms, as described in the methodology and the competencies present in the village clusters have meant that the communication has drawn a lot of resources.

## **Another focus area that challenged the village clusters was the focus area of involvement.**

The majority of respondents in the endpoint survey reported that it was extremely difficult to get more people involved in the project. The partial evaluation shows that a decisive aspect for the lack of involvement was that it is a time-consuming process for citizens to participate in, with many steering group members describing the cluster work as a piece of regular, unpaid work that citizens only get involved in if it is fun, enjoyable, rewarding and something they are enthusiastic about.

In terms of municipal cooperation, many village clusters have experienced very engaged municipalities. The evaluation shows that the municipality's primary role is to be a partner and it cannot be too controlling, as ownership of the project must ultimately rest with the participating villages. However, it is important that the municipality does not withdraw completely and leave the cluster without any support.

In relation to the last two focus areas - meeting places and activities - this evaluation indicates that the extent to which the clusters have worked with these focus areas varies greatly.

Some have worked very consciously with venues and activities, while others have limited themselves to simply mapping the existing meeting places.

## **Specific prerequisites**

This partial evaluation has identified that there are some specific prerequisites that are decisive for how the village cluster manages the process.

One particular prerequisite that is important for good cluster collaboration is the willingness to do voluntary work and get involved in the local area. The evaluation also shows that a well-functioning associations favors the establishment of a successful village cluster and finally it is important to have previous experience with long-term, strategic work, which means that resources are available to carry out strategic work.

Another important prerequisite is that there is a municipality that is supportive and willing to use the village cluster approach to develop the municipality's rural areas, and thus take their part of the ownership of the project.

An additional factor that in many cases can strengthen the basis for cluster collaboration is a burning platform that is common to all villages. Here, a burning platform is defined very broadly to be the common cause that provides the basis for collaboration. If there was a lack of a cause and a willingness to collaborate, village cluster collaboration would not succeed.

Finally, the geographical location of the villages involved plays a role. This means not only how close they are to each other, but also the distance to the nearest major city.

Preliminary experience suggests that the more self-reliant the village is, the more willingness there is to overcome obstacles and the more support for the local initiative.

## **The report's conclusions**

The evaluation shows that 73% of participating steering committee members believe that the Campaign has strengthened cooperation between villages (endpoint survey), and there is a general willingness among participating village clusters to recommend the process, with 85% of respondents in the endpoint survey recommending the project to other communities, while 81% said that it has increased their ability to work long-term. This suggests that the method has the potential to strengthen the good everyday life in rural areas through a citizen-centered strategic and collaborative approach.

This partial evaluation also states that it is important to emphasize that village clusters are a place-specific strategy that builds (further) on the existing conditions present in the villages. Why it is concluded that where the process succeeds and a village cluster is established is where the method merges with the local resources present in the cluster.

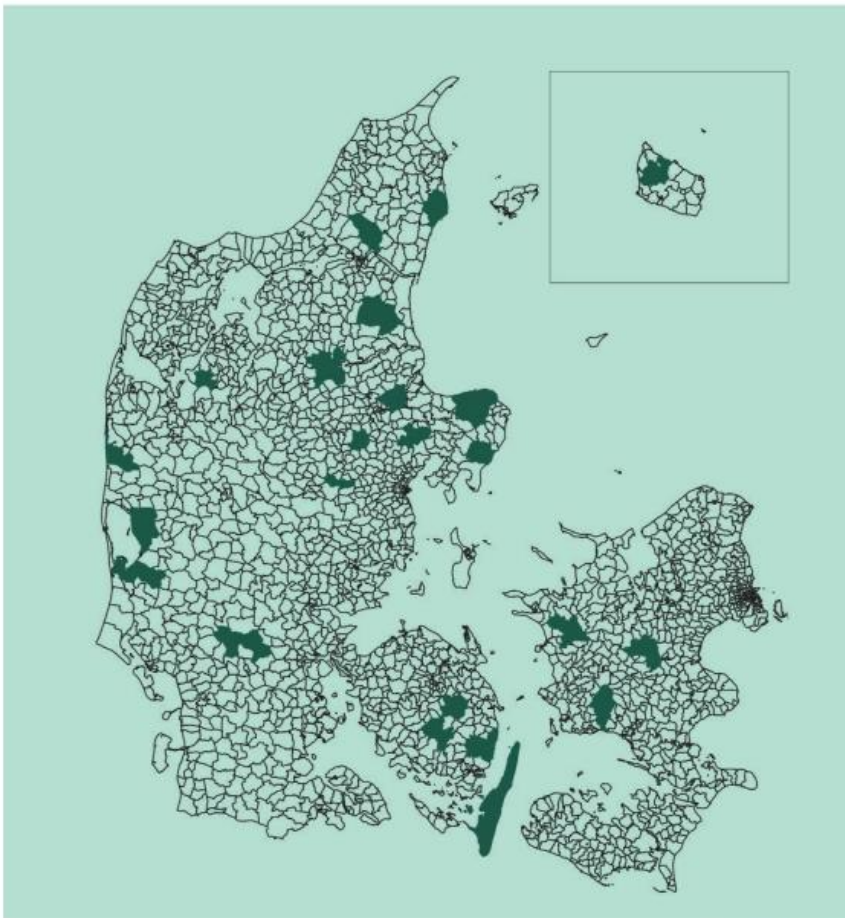
The analysis also shows that there were initially very high expectations for the campaign among the participating citizens and that these expectations may have been difficult to fulfill throughout the process, with the proportion of respondents in the endpoint survey who agree or strongly agree with the basic premise of the method decreasing compared to the baseline survey by 22 percentage points, from 98% to 76%. This may indicate that the basic premise was challenged during the implementation of the campaign, but also that the level of ambition and expectations at the beginning of the campaign were high and that the process itself may have been more demanding than the

participating citizens expected beforehand.

In general, the village cluster method has many good points, where the method has proven to be a strong strategic tool that gives the villages a volume that makes them more robust.

However, launching a cluster is extremely demanding for the participating actors - the volunteers, the consultant and the municipality - and several of the clusters have been challenged by the method's primary focus on administrative and long-term work.

## **LANDSBYKLYNGE KAMPAGNEN - DELEVALUERING 1** *Procesevaluering af landsbyklynger som metode*



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