



**VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE
(VDP & LG)**

**Exchange Visit to Branderup, Municipality of Tønder,
Denmark**

November 22-23, 2007

General feedback report

Colofon/Project coordination

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Website of the project (this document is published on this website)
www.villagedevelopment.eu

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1. Composition of VDP-feedback team

Feedback team	
<i>Ireland</i>	
Cllr Tomás Mannion	Councillor Galway County Council
Cllr Michael Mullins	Councillor Galway County Council
Kieran Coyne	Galway County Council
Dermot Mahon	Galway County Council
Catherine Corcoran	Tipperary Institute
Matti Twomey	Kinvara Community council
Delia Colahan	Manager Galway Rural Development Ltd.
Norrie O'Grady	LAG member
<i>Sweden</i>	
Irene Karlsson	Elected representative Vara Council
Ann-Britt Martinsson	Vara Municipality
Maria Eriksson	Vara Municipality
Hans Jörgen Lund	Member local development group
Michael Albanson	Member of Kvanum Local Development Group
<i>The Netherlands</i>	
Saskia Croes	Project advisor
Ans Mekking	Member LAG Zuid-Twente
Henk Nikkels	Municipality Hof van Twente
<i>Project Coordination</i>	
Gaston Remmers	Bureau Buitenkans, The Netherlands
Marije Pouw	ETC Adviesgroep Nederland / Leader Network the Netherlands
<i>Danish hosts</i>	
Bodil Bertelsen	Rural District Advisor, Municipality of Tønder
Ole Post	Villager of Branderup, volunteer
Kirsten Willadsen	Villager of Branderup, volunteer
Bo Westerbye	Villager of Branderup, volunteer
Mie Thomsen	Villager of Branderup, volunteer
Margrethe Stenger	Villager of Branderup, volunteer
Valdemar Schutz	Villager of Branderup, volunteer
Bente Nielsen	Villager of Branderup, volunteer

2. Key Questions of the Danish partner

General theme:

Upscaling of local plans and regional learning

Background

Branderup is one of many villages in the municipality of Tønder. Early november, Branderup has just concluded a series of meetings to finalize their Village development plan. The immediate offspring thereof is formulated as questions number 3a to 3c. In order to pay respect to the general interest of the transnational network, specifically the theme of upscaling and regional learning, and to contextualize the Branderup questions, project coordination suggested to reflect also on questions no 1 and 2.

1. General feedback on the VDP as conducted in Branderup

What comments could you give us on the way we undertook our VDP?

- A) Do you see any weaknesses? How could the process of conducting the VDP be improved a next time?
- B) What do you see as our next challenge? How do we move on?

→ Owner of the question: project coordination

2. Vital regional collaboration

You will see that some villages in the municipality of Tønder (like Branderup, Ballum) are very vital, with a lot of initiative. That is great. Yet, we won't be able to reach some of our goals unless we operate at a regional level. How can we achieve a similar level of vital collaboration at the regional / municipal level? What can we do as villages about that? What can the municipality do? In short: how can we strengthen regional learning?

→ Owner of the question: project coordination

Thematic questions: the future of Branderup

We have 3 thematic questions that we need to answer for the development of Branderup. They are, to some extent, also relevant for the larger region. Please give us some feedback on the following:

- 3) What does it take for Branderup to attract tourists?
- 4) How do we as a village attract entrepreneurs and niche productions?
- 5) How to integrate local traditions and expectations of the villagers?

Ad 3) What does it take for Branderup to attract tourists?

In the process of the VDP has developed some interesting ideas about making a B&B and the plans for a central area in town. Those plans contain activities, that tourists may benefit from as well as villagers. In spite of the village of Branderup is situated in rather uniform landscape dominated by fields. Only a few small lakes, meadows and woods.

The question is if it is a matter of getting aware of the local potentials and how to use that in tourism as well as towards potential newcomers.

Branderup is geographically placed so only 30 minutes by car is needed to reach a number of attractions:

- The Waddensea presenting wide beaches and unique marsh areas.
- Shopping along the German border offering a variety of goods with competitive prices and lesser VAT compared to Denmark.
- The larger commercial cities on the east coast with large shopping centers.

Question:

- How can we compete attracting modern tourism?.
- Do we have values for tourists, we are not aware of - without acting like custodians of past historic times?
- How do we brand Branderup?

Ad 4) How do we, as a village, support and attract entrepreneurs and niche productions?

Apart from a division of the by far most dominating dairy chain, Branderup is only the host of local small enterprises like carpenters, horse riding center, construction entrepreneurs, transportation company and an enterprise renting all necessary for parties indoor or outdoor.

In light of competition from large national organizations, distant industrial centers and the growing internet trade, how does Branderup create a platform supporting new enterprises?

Ad 5) How to integrate local traditions and the expectations of new citizens?

It is a goal for Branderup to attract new citizens – preferably families with children.

A prognosis points at the risk of losing more residents.

Seen in the light of the recent amalgamation of municipalities it became apparent the local school would be closed. A direct threat to the village.

A threat which was met by hard work to establish a private school in the same buildings.

Further on, a development project for Branderup with a long range scope looking at year 2020 has been set on trails.

New citizens are visited by representatives of our village and welcomed with a bottle of wine, good advice and written information.

But the question still remains:

How do we integrate new comers to Branderup?

The prices for housing is attractive compared to most of the country, and as such open for newcomers with quite different traditions and background.

This may well be beneficial for all parties.

Question:

- How do we improve the long term basic life values for newcomers?

- How do we at the same time preserve our own historic self esteem and well being – without rejecting the values the newcomers may bring along?

3. Feedback of the VDP-feedback team on the questions posed by Denmark

3A. General observations and problem analysis

Before answering the Danish key questions in detail, we would like to express our general perception of the challenges faced by the village of Branderup regarding village development plans and local governance.

The village of Branderup has achieved really impressive results. The establishment of the multifunctional Aktiv centre is an exemplary example of civic action, in which visionary strength goes together with hand-on commitment by the villagers¹. And also the recently elaborated VDP breaths ambition. And you expect them to be funded by different sources, only with respect to the acquisition of the a central piece of land in the middle of the town, and the establishment of a safe road crossing you would need active (and financial) collaboration of the municipality of Tønder. So far we have no doubt that the future of Branderup is bright.

Yet, during our stay we observed a few issues that worry us a bit, and that go beyond the qualities of the village development plan of Branderup. A major challenge, in our view, is *creating an increased coherence between village development plans and plans of the Authorities at higher scale levels*.

We were a bit shocked to notice that the plans of Branderup could not be matched by similar visionary plans at the municipal and regional level. There seems to be little policy as regards the development of the municipality of Tønder or the wider region of South Jutland, and we heard very little about the role of the small villages in regional development. Instead, villages were suggested to compete with each other for the best plans, providing good arguments, municipal / regional authorities would then be able to select and support a few of them. As a feedback team, we think that this is a waste of human resources. One of the best forms of support to villages is making clear the general framework at regional level. Avoid having villages work in vein.

Let us put it differently. Danish songwriter Maria Franke has a song called *I am a symptom of my time*. We would like to raise the question: *Is Branderup the symptom of its region?* We have two answers.

Yes it is. Branderup can be seen as a symptom of the region where it is situated: South Jutland. That means that it experiences and expresses the same issues that quality the region as a whole: a region remote from the centre of power, facing depopulation, low income. The consequence of this observation is that whatever

¹ Almost completely build by Branderup villagers themselves (2600 voluntary hours), total budget for materials about € 650.000,- of which a sixth generated by the villagers, a third by the municipality and the rest by miscellaneous funds.(see powerpoint by Kirsten Willadsen on the website www.villagedevelopment.eu for more details).

plans are made to strengthen Branderup, they are embedded in a regional context. For the village plans to take effect, supportive regional policies need to be formulated, e.g. regarding tourism development, housing, employment, public relations etcetera

No it is not. Branderup's civic capacities are not so common. In this sense it is an exceptional village, able to work as a light at sea to illuminate its surroundings. Whatever happens in the region, Branderup will have more potential than other villages, and the action formulated in the local action plans underline this. But we do also observe that Branderup is not playing out loudly enough its capacities and achievements. It has the potential to trigger municipal debate about the necessity of solid and supportive municipal plans. It has the potential to attract tourism, and to invigorate life in other villages, just by showing what it does. Tell proudly of what you are and what you do; not to show off, but to inspire. At this point in time, this is exactly what is needed to dynamise and strengthen regions under socio-economic pressure such as South Jutland. Some younger and recently settled villagers we spoke to suggest that Branderup may renew the social code of *jantelov*, and that it indeed may speak up for the region. As far as we could observe it, it seems that Branderup is at points too accommodating and loyal with respect to its Authorities and 'the-way-things-go'.

As an example we take the housing policy. It seems that creating new opportunities for housing in rural villages is not easy, there is a tendency to concentrate all on the bigger town of Tønder, that has already difficulties enough to sustain in itself. We learned about a couple that wished but could not settle in the village of Ballum and was more or less forced to move to Tønder. So, the couple can't contribute to the local village economy. This seems to be at odds by the enormous investments that the municipality allows in both Ballum and Branderup, to create Aktiv Centres. What then is the message that is conveyed? Does government want or not villages to maintain their service levels and population? And it seems that too little effort is made to focus on resources and measures.

Another example: we were told that the elaboration of statutory Regional and Local Plans is foreseen for 2008 and 2009 respectively. But why wait so long? Is it possible, based on the experience and drive in villages as Branderup, to generate a chain of village development plans that in themselves contain important elements of the regional plan? See our observation under key question 2 for more ideas.

Some recommendations for local government:

1. support the exchange of experiences between the villages of Tønder
2. use the village development plans as important building stones for the Local and Regional Spatial Plans – it will save government money
3. create as soon as possible supportive regional policy in various domains: tourism, entrepreneurship, housing etc
4. intensify the search for additional financial resources (e.g. through European collaboration)

Some recommendations for Branderup:

1. claim more with more intensity regional support and vision
2. visualize more your achievements – they will bring you rewards

3B. Answers to the key questions

1. General feedback on the VDP as conducted in Branderup

What comments could you give us on the way we undertook our VDP?

- a) *Do you see any weaknesses? How could the process of conducting the VDP be improved a next time?*
- b) *What do you see as our next challenge? How do we move on?*

Sell your achievements

First of all, let us start by saying that our reaction is very positive, overall, the plan (VDP) process is good. You have achieved much already in Branderup! It is time to **sell this!** What you have achieved together is great; share this with more people than the rather obvious ones! All kinds of people, for example fellow villagers from Denmark or even abroad, civil servants, politicians etc., would like to learn from each other and get inspired by other people, share this with them. When selling your experiences, include the achievements until now in the Village Development Plan, use Kirsten Willadsen her presentation on the establishment of the Activ Centre for example.

Media relations are vital

You have achieved a lot of attention already, but you need to maintain this! Launch the VDP and set clear targets for PR activities together. Keep all media involved and updated.

State clearly your problems and their impact

When finishing the plan, do not hesitate about naming the problems you face as well. Every village faces some problems, it should not be a problem naming these problems and making a clearer statement about them. Include impact statements for example: if we act this way, X will happen. If we fail to act, the Y will happen, make it insightful.

Broaden your core group

The people in Branderup may be very proud on the high level of participation of the villagers in the VDP process. This is something that should be sustained! Avoid the formation of only a small core group that takes the majority of the decisions, other villagers might feel left out. Keep in mind that over time enthusiasm dies out. Therefore, consider broadening the core group, with interested people and maybe newcomers. Make sure that the ideas and actions of the core group are shared with other interest groups within the village and consult with them about these ideas and actions. Stay open for new views and ideas. Also, consider distributing the complete VDP to all houses in the village of Branderup and the surrounding countryside, so that all are aware and feel a sense of belonging to Branderup and the VDP. Consider rewarding participation, for example by free usage of the Activ Centre.

Clarify decision making

Who makes final decisions? Do you always need a majority vote? What do you do when conflicts arise? Do you have a conflict resolution process? If not, consider making one and consider writing down the decision making process in a document that can be consulted by everyone.

Reach out to the big local stakeholders.

Develop the relationships with the key stakeholders more. For example, Arla milk is located in Branderup, one of the largest dairy manufacturers in Denmark, use them more! You may also think of involving stronger relations with employers, the school principal and others. Also think about developing new partnerships, are there for example, new service providers that wish to establish an enterprise in Branderup? Involve them from the beginning in the VDP and in the other village activities.

Develop an action plan

Develop an action plan, based on the VDP. Write down which focus group is responsible for each action listed. Question yourself at every question, do we need other partners, or can we do this with the focus group?

Develop key selling points for the municipalities.

Branderup is here to stay! Make sure your messages are clear as well as your negotiation points. Make clear how Branderup will contribute to solving municipal problems. Also make sure that you know what you can negotiate about, and what is non-negotiable with the municipality. Ensure that the municipality knows what you are talking about and what you are doing, invite them to important meeting, send them the village newsletter etc. The process in Branderup can be repeated in other villages and can help the municipality developing policy and actions towards small villages in the municipality.

Political support for your VDP and for Branderup is vital.

Without political support, achievements in Branderup will be a lot more difficult to achieve. Make sure to get some politicians on board and keep them hooked!

Broaden the affiliation to outside the village,

Broaden the affiliation to outside the village, to e.g. Bovlund, other villages and the region. The success of Branderup should not be limited to its village borders. Other small villagers can learn and exchange their ideas. Do not forget to participate with other villages within the region, some issues you face are issues that are faced by the entire region, try to find a mutual solution or try to attract mutual attention.

2. Vital regional collaboration / upscaling of the Branderup experience

You will see that some villages in the municipality of Tønder (like Branderup, Ballum) are very vital, with a lot of initiative. That is great. Yet, we won't be able to reach some of our goals unless we operate at a regional level. How can we achieve a similar level of vital collaboration at the regional / municipal level? What can we do as

villages about that? What can the municipality do? In short: how can we strengthen regional learning?

Use existing political structures

Make use of the structures that are already in place, use your politicians. They are chosen by you! And do not only use the politician coming from Branderup, also use other politicians that are interested in your issues and willing to take a stand.

Collaborate with other villages

Try to let villages work together / collaborate on certain issues, you do not have to collaborate on all issues, start with something small and tangible. Or collaborate on similar issues like attracting new inhabitants and new housing in Ballum and Branderup. Search for other villages with strategic goals, strengthen the links with them. Establish a case/profile together; make sure everybody has heard of your village and your efforts and mutual efforts in the region.

Integrate facilities, entrepreneurs in business centres

In order to stimulate vital economic prospects, try to integrate entrepreneurs in business centres, you may build a new facility but you can also consider using an existing building, for example an abandoned farm building, or the old community centre. If you integrate facilities in one building, you will be more effective with less money.

Integrating facilities (either economic or social, like the Activ Centre) keeps people in the villages as long as possible. Once people are moving out (either voluntary or because they are forced to) the 'soul' of the village disappears and Branderup is destined to become a 'dying' village.

Make a SWOT analysis at village level, and match it with a SWOT at regional level

One of the things Branderup as well as Ballum can do is to develop a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. Make a SWOT for each of the villages, and one for the municipality / region. Once the analysis is made, one should build on this: where do the two villages complement each other? What regional issues can the villages contribute to or solve?

This way of working could serve as a blue print for other villages in South Jutland or even in Denmark. Start your activities (with money from municipality, private, EU etc.) and show your results, others will follow. But please be aware to take into account that during this process it is very important to start an early dialogue, you cannot bypass regional policy or the municipal policy. You need to try to convince them to change if necessary, but this will only be done after you ask for it, it will not happen naturally. Take also into account that politicians sometimes have their own agenda as well. They can be very supportive but they can also support other projects or villages, try to get them on board.

Two upscaling perspectives: South-Jutland and rural-urban

Please be aware that there are 2 perspectives related to upscaling and vitalising regional collaboration: the South Jutland perspective and the perspective of urban-rural relations.

South Jutland should be put on the national map: all the villages face the same problem. This is not something small, but this has an enormous impact on your entire region which cannot and should not be taken for granted neither by the regional nor by the national government. The region should develop a coherent regional plan and this should be done very quickly.

Then there is the perspective of the balance between cities and countryside in Denmark. Attention seems to go only to the cities and only cities are allowed to develop. Please make sure that politicians and planners are starting to realise that problems of congestion will eventually cost more money than when you upgrade the countryside!

Increase entrepreneurship

Bring money into the countryside by supporting/stimulating small enterprises -> they and the farmers are the basis for rural village growth -> often bring in a multiplier effect of 2.5, this means for each invested € a return of 2.5€ is realised! But sure you do you realize this; it is one of your key questions...

Thematic questions: the future of Branderup

We have 3 thematic questions that we need to answer for the development of Branderup. They are, to some extent, also relevant for the larger region. Please give us some feedback on the following:

- 3) What does it take for Branderup to attract tourists?*
- 4) How do we as a village attract entrepreneurs and niche productions?*
- 5) How to integrate local traditions and expectations of the villagers?*

3 What does it take for Branderup to attract tourists?

You have to exploit what is already there, what you have naturally. So think about exploiting the natural countryside, you have a great asset there. You may develop nature trails, organise pony trekking or offer bird watching opportunities. Market these opportunities through the Activ Centre or through the municipality offices. Use the mill, open more walking paths, put in hard work (man hours) but then you certainly have something to offer.

You definitely can exploit the Activ Centre. Think big! Organise regional sports tournaments in the centre for example. You have great facilities to do this.

Develop farmhouse holidays, either take in guests in your own homes (B&B) or develop chalet / outside buildings – self catered accommodation on available land.

Attract people from urban areas, not only by offering a quite and attractive rural countryside, but also for example by developing a pet farm, this will also attract school tours from urban areas.

4 How do we as a village attract entrepreneurs and niche productions?

You have a fantastic asset in your village: the old “Kommunhaus”, the former village meeting centre. This centre has enormous potential! Develop your own community enterprise centre in this facility. This facility is like the old family silver, the old family silver should never be sold!

Therefore, develop the community enterprise centre to house local crafts and local crafts makers, lace making, this is an art that needs to be preserved. Moreover, you can establish a market area in which the crafts and lace can be purchased. Organise your own Christmas market in the community centre, aiming at the region, not only your own village. You may also think of starting a local cooperative shop in this centre, staffed by the community, you can do this even if the opening hours are limited. Another enterprise opportunity might be secretarial services, there are quite some small businesses in the area that might want to use a joint secretary. This is cheaper and more efficient. You may also develop IT services in this centre, IT services can be delivered from anywhere as long as there is an internet connection. Lastly, one could think of developing social services, e.g. for the elderly: Meals on Wheels. This facility delivers cooked meals to elderly people who are not very mobile anymore or not well enough to cook themselves. However, by providing a meal at home, enable them to stay in their own place longer.

5 How to integrate local traditions and expectations of the villagers?

Research the needs of the new families and involve them in the activities and services available, make them feel welcome and appreciated. Invite them for special activities like Christmas celebration and take them on an introductory walk through the village for example to make them feel at home. Make sure to welcome their views and ideas, do not give newcomers the feeling that they do not have to contribute as the ‘older’ people already know how to deal with certain things. Try to remain open for new ideas and views, do not fall into: *we have done it like this for many years now, why change??*

Prepare a newsletter which can be distributed to new arrivals, e.g. monthly or quarterly. Include little *Did you know*s to get newcomers acquainted with village history for example.