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## **Danish rural areas' readiness for joint action as a proxy for the potential for co-production**

*"We can only treat all the same by treating them differently"*

Authors: Annette Aagaard Thuesen & Hanna Barbara Rasmussen

Citation: Thuesen, A. A., & Rasmussen, H. B. (2015). Danish rural areas' readiness for joint action as a proxy for the potential for co-production. *The Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 10(1), 32-55.

### **Abstract**

This paper assesses and locates five Danish rural parishes' general readiness and capacity for internal joint action and uses this as a proxy in a discussion of the opportunities of increased use of volunteers in welfare co-production in rural Denmark. The literature describes the importance of maintaining active communities that have the ability to take over or co-produce where government assistance leaves off ensuring that all citizens, not only the strongest, can access services in the future. Co-production is dependent on capacity outside the government, capacity within the government as well as effective coordination. By use of mixed-methods the paper shows that readiness for joint action varies among the five parishes and depends on very different organisations. Some parishes' readiness for joint actions is simply much higher than others. This result offers an important lesson for planners and politicians, who - for a co-production strategy to be successful and equal - must obtain concrete knowledge about the rural areas they serve. Their knowledge must cover not only socioeconomic and demographic characteristics but also traditions of knowledge-sharing, participation and mobilisation.

**Keywords:** Communities' readiness for joint action, participation patterns, rural areas, co-production.

**Word count:** 8153 (excluding abstract, acknowledgements, notes and references)

## 1.0 Introduction

The public sector withdraws as service provider in many rural areas in Europe, including parts of Denmark, where public school closures have accelerated (TI, 2008). Danish municipalities are important providers of public services and have large financial responsibilities compared to municipalities in many other countries, and they undertake most citizen-related tasks (ISM, 2006, pp. 22-34). One reason for school closures is that the municipal economy is under pressure, particularly because of the recent financial crisis. Another reason for the reduction in public service provision in rural areas is the changing demography that is leading to the ageing of the population and the decreasing willingness among the rest of the population to provide subsidies for rural services (OECD, 2010, p. 30). The Danish local government reform, which was implemented in 2007 and reduced the number of municipalities from 271 to 98, also led to a reduction in the number of municipal politicians (a reduction from approximately 4700 to approximately 2500 politicians) and thus a greater distance between the politicians and the citizens (Hansen, 2010, p. 12-13; Sørensen, 2009). In relation to school closures, Buch describes this situation in a way that underlines the increased tendency to make service cuts after the local government reform occurred: *“The proportion of people the politicians confront when they want to close a school or library has (...) been reduced, and therefore, they dare more and let themselves press less”* (Buch, in Sørensen, 2009, own translation).

Traditionally, Danish rural areas have been known for their rich civic life stemming from the cooperative movements that occurred more than 100 years ago (Clemmensen, 1987; Svendsen & Svendsen, 2004). With the development of the Danish welfare state in the 1900s, many former voluntary cooperatives or insurance-based services were taken over by the public sector (via the parish councils and later the local municipalities). The services were universalised in accordance with the Scandinavian welfare model (Ploug et al., 2007; Kromann, 2013). Twenty years ago, all rural parishes had a school (public service) and a grocer (cooperative service), and these services became an important part of rural identity, given the importance of these service locations as meeting places and for the local sense of community. The current economic crisis, however, means that there is little money to sustain services in rural areas despite the rather universalised and

decentralised Danish welfare state model. At the same time, many rural areas are experiencing population decline. Despite these trends, there are still many voluntary associations in rural areas. Most of the associations' activities are leisure-related, and associations are instrumental in maintaining the social life of local communities, which may indirectly affect other activities (XX, 2002). Recent quantitative research has shown that association membership, social trust, and institutional trust are equally high in Danish rural and urban areas. Voluntary work in associations, however, is considerably higher in rural areas than in urban areas, and the high level of voluntary association work provides an indication that there is greater social capital in rural areas (Sørensen, 2012).

The high level of voluntary work in Danish rural areas could prove important if more volunteers are to be involved in service production. The decline in local economic activity and public resources means that discussions have appeared in Denmark (Vrangbæk and Olsen, 2013, p. 51) on the need to reconsider volunteering in relation to future service provision; this article contributes to this new discussion by demonstrating that neighbourhoods and communities are diverse and that it is important not to lump all rural areas together if co-production strategies are to become a success. Percy (1984, p. 440) writes, when reviewing literature on neighbourhood organisation and co-production, that social interaction and organization in neighbourhoods could influence preparedness to participate in collective forms of co-production. Also Bovaird (2007) uses the amount of voluntary work performed as a proxy for successful co-production.

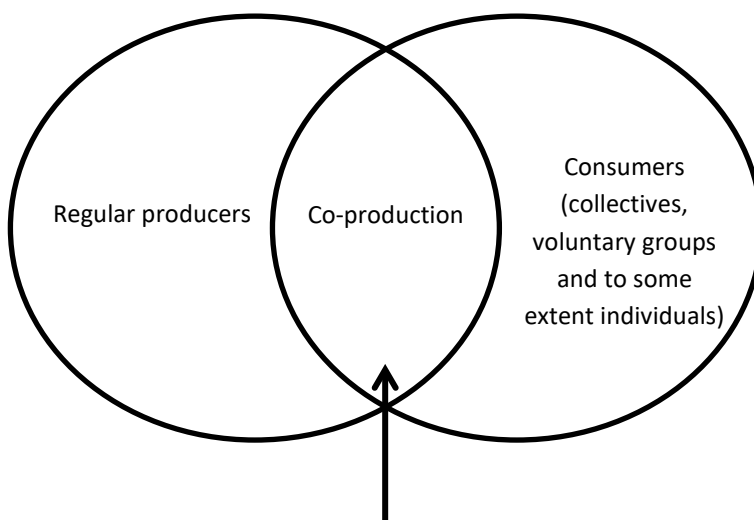
Since public-voluntary co-production is a very recent discussion in Denmark we base our discussion of the topic on a proxy – to be exact an investigation of five rural parishes' general collective readiness for internal joint action inspired by Healey et al.'s (1999) institutional capacity concept, which includes information sharing, participation and mobilisation. By use of quantitative and qualitative methods, this article thus analyses readiness for joint action in five rural parishes and subsequently discusses the results in relation to the general potential for co-production. The article answers the following question:

What is the readiness for internal joint action in five specific rural areas in Denmark and from where does the readiness arise?

For the discussion of the potential for co-production, the article adopts the co-production definition developed by Brudney and England (1983, p. 63), who place a high emphasis on voluntary citizen cooperation and participation. Their definition emphasises the following:

- there is an overlap between regular producers and consumers in co-production (see Figure 1)
- there is citizen involvement or participation in service delivery resulting in positive outcomes
- co-production involves active voluntary cooperation on the part of the citizens
- both individuals and groups can be involved in co-production, even though collectives are the most important participants from an equity perspective

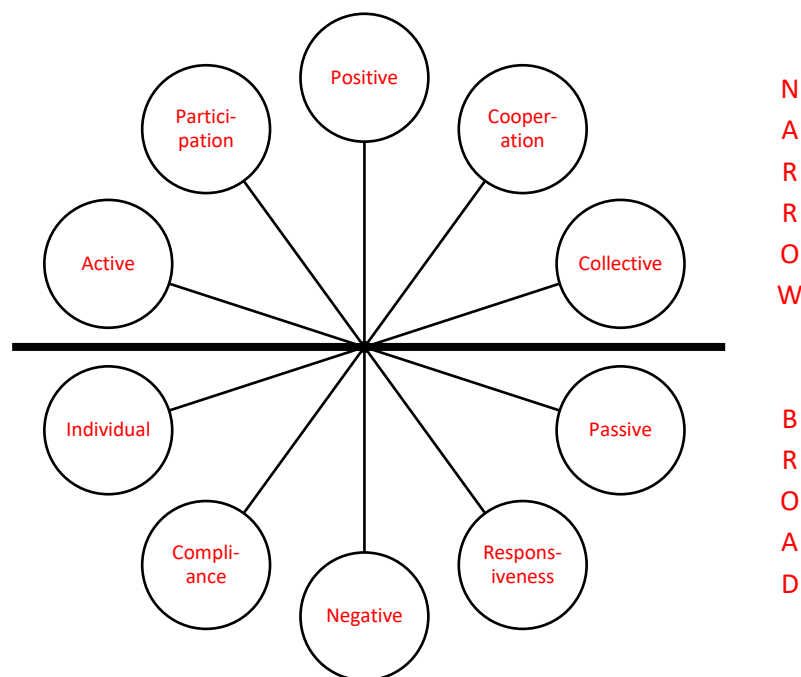
*Figure 1: Co-production as the critical mix and the degree to which the regular producer and consumer spheres overlap (Brudney & England, 1983, p. 61).*



On the basis of Brudney and England's review of the co-production literature (Brudney and England, 1983, pp. 62-63) we have derived the model below, which illustrates the dimensions underlying the process of co-

production. The participatory dimensions above the stippled line are included in Brudney and England’s narrow grouping of co-production processes. However, they acknowledge that others have a more broad approach to the co-production of services and include action based on compliance (for example obedience to rules, laws and programs), mere individual response to service initiatives as well as negative co-production (vandalism, littering, youth gangs). Still, it is the emphasis on the participatory elements in Brudney and England’s co-production definition that justifies our discussion of local readiness in a public-voluntary co-production framework.

Figure 2: Dimensions underlying the process of co-production (on the basis of Brudney and England, 1983).



The article proceeds as follows: Section 2 relates the research to the existing literature on rural service provision opportunities, including volunteers in co-production and the capacity to make changes in rural areas by Healey et al.’s focus on institutional capacity (1999). Section 3 presents the questionnaire and interview methods used to address the research question on readiness. Section 4 introduces the demographic and socioeconomic results, and Section 5 includes the results on the parishes’ average level of readiness, further statistical tests and quantitative and qualitative data on where readiness stems from.

Finally, Section 6 discusses the findings in relation to the opportunity for increased use of volunteers in co-production in rural areas of Denmark.

## **2.0 Literature**

### ***2.1 What are rural service provision opportunities today?***

Service provision is important for business and quality of life issues. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) includes both dimensions but remains particularly committed to the economic dimension of service provision, seeking to unlock the economic potential of all regions (OECD, 2010). In contrast, authors such as Moseley and Owen (2008), Moseley et al. (2004) and Moral et al. (2007) mainly consider services in terms of quality of life for rural residents. Moseley and Owen consider ten services in relation to rural service provision: retail, education and training, postal and delivery services, financial services, healthcare, social care, passenger transport, provision of information and advice, leisure and recreation services and emergency services (Moseley & Owen 2008, p. 98). Lacking these services has differing consequences for people's quality of life from one area to another depending on the presence of alternatives in neighbouring areas and on the age, education or wealth of the population.

According to the literature (Moseley & Owen, 2008; Moseley et al., 2004; OECD, 2010, pp. 38-48), there are various strategies for rural service provision: 1) multi-service outlets, 2) cross-sector collaboration and 3) the use of information and communication technology (ICT). This article focuses on the opportunity for cross-sector collaboration. Ostrom (1996, p. 1075) emphasises by referring to Tandler (1995) that for co-production to succeed it requires social capital *outside* the government and social capital *within* the government as well as effective coordination. This paper looks at the capacity outside the government and thus the community side of the topic. This is important because the public sector has increasingly withdrawn from being a direct service supplier, instead facilitating services and monitoring them through 'arm's-length involvement' (Moseley & Owen, 2008). The OECD states, '*In rural areas with fewer choices of service providers,*

*governments need to seek partners for the delivery of public services. Investor-owned firms are less likely to engage in rural service provision, so that the role of provider is likely to fall largely to the government or the voluntary sector'* (OECD, 2010, p. 114). In the English context, there has been growing involvement of volunteers in community enterprises, which is positive for client groups neglected by the market. However, the increasing involvement of the voluntary sector in service production requires that the government play a specific role in capacity building (OECD, 2010) in order to have motivated citizens and not *'incapacitated'* citizens (Ostrom, 1996, p. 1078). The involvement of volunteers in co-production also necessitates the concrete establishment of positive-sum processes of collective dialogue and deliberation among co-producers (Needham, 2007). In the Danish context, for many years, a large proportion of the population has been involved in voluntary work. Nevertheless, there is not a strong tradition of volunteering in co-production because the public sector has been able to manage service production on its own. Sørensen and Torfing (2012, pp. 2-4) provide several reasons for why volunteering in co-production has gained renewed interest, including in the Danish context:

- the economic crisis and the resulting slow economy,
- a lack of faith that more outsourcing can solve the problem,
- the hope that the mobilisation of voluntary resources can lead to cheaper and better welfare,
- the hope that social cohesion will increase if volunteers take charge of delivering more services in cooperation with the public sector,
- people's desire to be actively involved as citizens,
- the increasing acceptance of volunteerism as part of a career plan and
- the viewpoint that volunteers can make a positive contribution for vulnerable groups (e.g., as mentors).

Generally, the advantages of co-production are that the frontline staff are recognised for their competences, that it results in more engaged and responsible users and that it improves allocative efficiency and is more



sensitive to users' needs and preferences (Needham, 2007, pp. 222-223). Its disadvantages stem from incentives that are incompatible for different co-producers, unclear role responsibilities, the dilution of public accountability (Bovaird, 2007, p. 856) and resistance from public-service agencies (Bovaird, 2007, p. 857; Percy, 1984, p. 14).

## **2.2 What is the role of local capacity to enact changes?**

The removal of services from rural areas often occurs as a result of political decisions that are made rather quickly. Thus, rural areas' ability to cope with 'crisis' (i.e., their level of resilience) is relevant. Resilience refers to '*a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity*' (Luthar et al., 2000, cited in Peters et al., 2005). In rural governance studies, resilience is related to communities' ability to bounce back when facing adversity and to having policies and plans in place that make positive rather than negative outcomes possible (McIntosh et al., 2008). Thus, resilience is a matter of readiness.

It is important to focus on participation patterns because of the strong emphasis placed on volunteering in relation to future service provision in rural areas and in relation to co-production. Shucksmith (2010) points to the centrality of institutional capacity for rural development to occur, which stresses the importance of broad participation and mobilisation in planning (Healey et al., 1999, p 134). The concept of institutional capacity is built on three sources of capital:

- 1) Intellectual capital in the form of knowledge resources,
- 2) Social capital (i.e., the sense of trust and understanding built through face-to-face meetings) and
- 3) Political capital in the form of the ability to act to develop local qualities and to seize external attention and resources.

Other studies have investigated the importance of people's willingness to provide unpaid work and participate in voluntary associations and thus support the focus of the participation and mobilisation part of

the institutional capacity concept. For example, Putnam's work on social capital (1993) shows that high level of interaction in football clubs and choirs and the related social capital lead to better economic performance. Cecchi (2009) takes another view and shows that public and private services are indicators that depend on the presence of social capital and contribute to the development of local development processes. Local involvement and participation is also part of an endogenous approach to rural development according to authors such as Ray (2000).

In the present paper on readiness and the opportunity for co-production, we have mainly been inspired by the institutional capacity concept and bring the concept into a village based local rural development setting. This originates in Shucksmith's focus on the centrality of the concept (Shucksmith, 2010) but also in a general response from people engaged in practical village development on the concepts ability to direct attention towards the importance of local areas' lifting capacity and drive. It is thus the propositions in the concept of institutional capacity that in a slightly reshaped form are explored in the empirical work to measure the readiness for joint action within the five parishes. In the methods section, the concept of institutional capacity will be operationalised in parameters for each of the three types of capital.

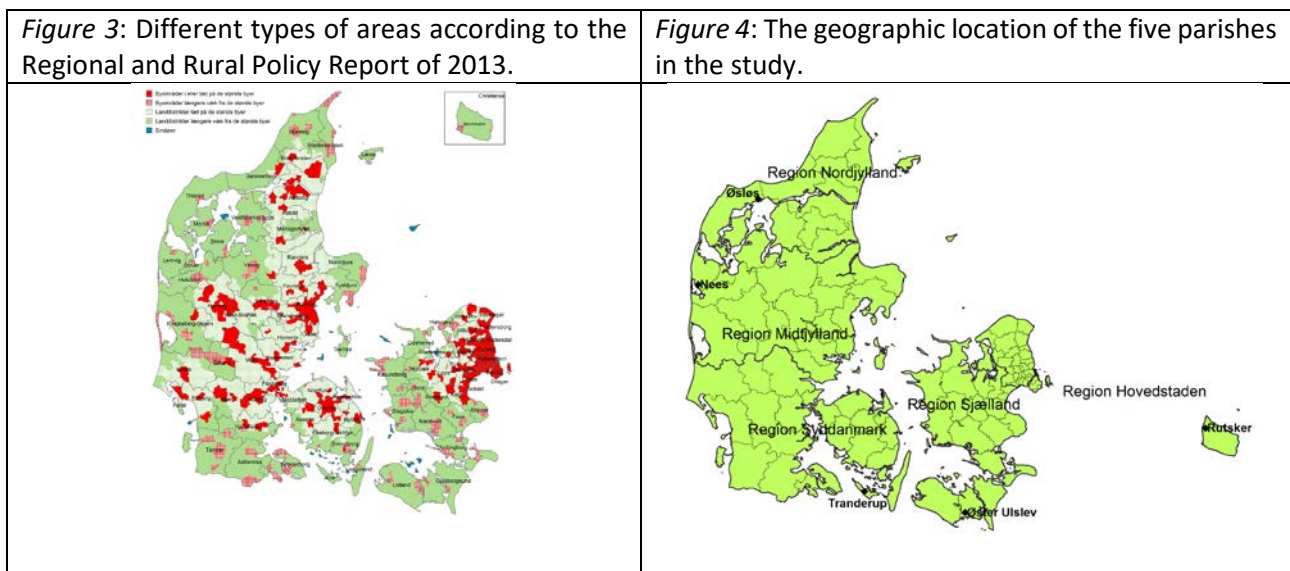
### **3.0 Methods**

#### ***3.1 Background details about the study***

The results presented in this paper were part of a wider study on the conditions that support rural development in outlying areas (YY, 2011). The overall study used mixed methods (Creswell & Clarks, 2007) in five rural parishes; a paper-based questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire included five themes, and Theme 4 addressed institutional capacity (constituted by the three above-listed types of capital).

#### ***3.2 Parish selection***

The five parishes are located in areas classified as ‘remote’ in relation to the Danish Rural Development Program of 2007-2013 (MFLF, 2008) and the National Planning Report of 2009 (MIM, 2010, p. 5). In addition, the parishes belong to the group of rural areas located relatively far from the large cities, as indicated in dark green in Figure 3 (MBBL, 2013, p. 8).



To provide a balanced picture of the investigated problems, one parish from each of the five Danish regions was chosen (Figure 4). All five parishes are situated at a great enough distance from a large city that at least one other country parish has to be crossed (Johansen and Nielsen, 2012). The parishes are almost identical in size (i.e., home to approximately 400 inhabitants). However, an exception was made for Bornholm, where the parish population was 664 persons. The selected parishes were Næves, Øslø, Tranderup, Øster Ulslev and Rutsker.

The five parishes were quite lacking in the ten services described by Moseley and Owen (2008) at the time of the data collection. Only one parish had a bank, two parishes had a grocer, and two parishes had a school, although it was threatened with closure at the time of the data collection. Later, both schools were closed by the municipality. However, the school in Øslø soon re-opened as a free school. To obtain public services

in addition to these scattered services, the citizens in the parishes were obliged to travel, use outreach services or seek internet-based service solutions.

### **3.3 The questionnaire: Sample, response rates**

A paper version of the questionnaire was distributed in September 2010 to each household in the parishes, and the three oldest persons in each household were asked to complete it. A total of 1,038 households received the questionnaire, and we received responses from 35 % of these households (n = 366). In total, 2,448 people lived in the five parishes. Considering all 2,448 persons in the parishes, the individual response rate was 26 % (n = 647). If people under 21 were omitted (an age group that accounted for only a small proportion of the responses because only the three oldest persons in the households were surveyed), the response rate was 32 % (n = 589). The responses were manually entered into SPSS.

### **3.4 Rural Institutional Capacity**

The formulation of a part of the questions in the questionnaire was inspired by the theory of institutional capacity, and the aim was to measure readiness in the chosen parishes by looking at knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilisation capacity. The questionnaire thus included 14 questions, which represented these three forms of capital/resources behind the institutional capacity concept (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Rural Institutional Capacity.*

1. Local knowledge sharing through local folder (local publications like newsletters, small newspapers etc.)	Knowledge resources
2. Local knowledge sharing through local notes (posted at central locations)	Knowledge resources
3. Local knowledge sharing through neighbours and acquaintances	Knowledge resources
4. Local knowledge sharing through participation in events/activities	Knowledge resources
5. The perception of the ability to become a part of the local community	Relational resources
6. The perception of how newcomers are accommodated	Relational resources
7. The actual participation in joint community activities organised with or by neighbours	Relational resources
8. The actual participation in joint community activities organised by associations	Relational resources
9. The actual participation in joint community activities by helping to organise activities	Relational resources
10. The perception that many are involved in joint community activities	Relational resources
11. The perception that the parish is especially active compared to other countryside communities	Mobilisation capacity
12. The perception that a few individuals initiate activities in the parishes	Mobilisation capacity
13. The perception that companies initiate activities in the parishes	Mobilisation capacity
14. The perception that associations initiate activities in the parishes	Mobilisation capacity

The respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of the situation in their parish on a five-point scale (1 - not at all, 5 - to a very high degree). The level of readiness of the five parishes was assessed by calculating descriptive statistics (the mean scores). To demonstrate a certain readiness, it was determined that the parish must score at least 3. The data were supplemented with demographic and socio-economic information about the parishes as well as qualitative interview data. In addition, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the parishes. To determine which groups differ from each other, a post hoc test (Tukey HSD) was conducted. The post hoc test was only computed for groups with significant results on the ANOVA test, and in this paper, we only present the results of the post hoc test.

### **3.5 The interviews**

The interview respondents were selected because they had indicated on the questionnaire that they would like to participate in an interview and because they were active in community development. In total, 21 individuals were interviewed. The questions asked during the interviews addressed the interviewees' perceptions of rural potential and rural challenges, how they cooperated and collected knowledge, how they mobilised local people, how they were connected politically and how they viewed their parish's capacity or power to act.

### **3.6 Demographic and socio-economic results**

Table 2 shows the five parishes' regional and municipal location, their population and population growth. In comparison, the total group of Danish rural areas located relatively far from the large cities (see Figure 3) experienced a 3 % decline in population from 2007-2013 (MBBL, p. 12).

Table 2. *The five parishes in the investigation.*

Parish and 2010 Parish population	Nees 442	Øsløs 431	Tranderup 372	Øster Ulslev 499	Rutsker 664
Regional location	The Central Denmark Region	The North Denmark Region	The Region of Southern Denmark	Zealand Region	The Capital Region of Denmark
Municipality (2011 population)	Lemvig (22,300)	Thisted (45,145)	Ærø (6,666)	Guldborgsund (62,197)	Bornholm (41,802)

Parish population growth 2000-2005 / 2005-2010 (%)	-10.1 / 1.6	-9 / 3.9	-9.5 / 3	-3 / 3.5	-9.9 / -6.5
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Source: Statistics Denmark and KMD, Sept. 2010

With regard to age distribution, the five parishes' demographic development appears less stable than at the national level (Statistics Denmark, 2013). With regard to the sex distribution of the population, the five parishes exhibit the following general trend: there are fewer female inhabitants in these parishes (from 45.5 % to 47.8 %) than in the total group of identical parishes located farther from cities (48.8 %).

Taken together, the populations of the five parishes generally have the same education level as similar Danish rural parishes: many people in the population have primary and lower secondary school as their highest level of education, a small proportion have attended upper secondary school, a large proportion have vocational training, and a small proportion have received higher education (see Table 3). Especially the island parish Rutsker but also Tranderup do, however, have a higher educational level than the other three parishes.

Table 3. *Highest completed education as of 1 January 2012.*

Parish	Primary and lower secondary school (%)	Upper secondary school (%)	Vocational training (%)	Higher education (%)	Other/unknown (%)
Nees	40.4	3.3	40.7	13.1	2.5
Øsløs	43.0	5.8	31.4	16.6	3.2
Tranderup	29.7	3.9	43.7	18.3	4.4
Øster Ulslev	43.3	2.5	39.4	12.4	2.5
Rutsker	28.4	4.6	39.9	25.5	1.5
Total in the parishes	36.5	4.1	38.9	17.8	2.7
Total in similar parishes	34.4	4.2	40.0	18.3	3.2
Total in Denmark	30.4	8.8	30.5	25.5	4.7

Source: Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs, based on data from Statistics Denmark

The employment rate shows the proportion of people in the working age population who are employed. Among the five case study areas, Øsløs and Tranderup are the parishes with the highest proportion of the working age population employed.

With regard to income, Table 4 shows that Rutsker has an income level that is similar to that of the other parishes located farther from the large cities. All five case study parishes have incomes below the national

average. Nees, Øsløs and Øster Ulslev have the lowest incomes, despite fluctuations over the years. The income results seem to correspond with the educational level of the population in these three parishes.

Table 4. *Employment rate 2011 and average disposable income 2007-2011 (current prices, per person, DKK).*

Parish	Employment rate, 2011	Average disposable income, 1 January 2007-2011 (current prices, per person and DKK)				
		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Nees	70.9	147,995	110,339	146,641	139,606	166,780
Øsløs	72.3	158,305	146,523	156,428	165,171	158,683
Tranderup	74.9	163,044	156,549	162,915	171,851	174,873
Øster Ulslev	60.6	127,225	125,242	144,194	178,284	146,814
Rutsker	65.8	157,226	157,731	160,463	179,191	184,180
Total in the parishes	68.3	150,566	140,501	154,456	168,240	167,605
Total in similar parishes	72.4	183,100	172,809	173,028	182,687	181,648
Total in Denmark	71.4	199,556	191,532	191,271	202,122	200,416

Source: Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs, based on data from Statistics Denmark

#### 4.0 Presence and location of readiness

##### 4.1 What is the readiness for joint action? - Calculation of scores

To assess the readiness for joint action in the five case study parishes, we calculated the mean score for each of the 14 parameters and the total mean score for each parish. Table 5 shows that Øsløs, Nees and Øster Ulslev have average scores on or above 3 (3.3, 3.1 and 3.0, respectively), whereas Rutsker and Tranderup have scores below 3 (2.7 and 2.6, respectively). This result indicates that the readiness for joint action is higher in Øsløs, Nees and Øster Ulslev than in Rutsker and Tranderup despite the fact that Tranderup and Rutsker have greater proportions of the population with higher education and slightly higher than average disposable income.

Table 5. *Results on questions relating to readiness in the five parishes.*

Parameters of institutional capacity	Nees (n = 88)	Øsløs (n = 103)	Tranderup (n = 75)	Øster Ulslev (n = 100)	Rutsker (n = 96)
1. How do you get information about local activities? – From a local folder	2.7	3.1	2.0	2.3	3.0

2. How do you get information about local activities? – From local notes	2.6	3.0	1.8	2.8	2.3
3. How do you get information about local activities? – From neighbours and acquaintances	3.6	3.6	3.2	3.4	2.8
4. How do you get information about local activities? – From participation in events/activities	2.8	2.9	2.4	2.8	2.2
5. In your opinion, is it easy to become part of the community if you want to?	4.1	4.1	3.6	3.9	3.8
6. Is your community good at integrating newcomers?	3.6	3.8	3.3	3.4	3.3
7. I participate in activities organised with or by neighbours.	3.2	3.5	2.8	2.7	2.7
8. I participate in activities organised by associations.	2.9	3.1	2.5	3.3	2.4
9. I help organise activities.	2.8	3.0	2.3	2.7	2.2
10. Is it your impression that a lot of people participate in joint activities?	3.4	3.7	2.9	3.4	3.1
11. Is it your impression that your parish is especially active compared to other countryside communities?	3.1	3.0	2.3	2.9	2.7
12. Who starts activities locally? – A few individuals	3.8	3.5	3.2	3.2	3.2
13. Who starts activities locally? – Companies	1.9	2.2	1.9	2.4	1.6
14. Who starts activities locally? – Associations	3.0	3.7	2.4	3.4	2.9
Mean score	3.1	3.3	2.6	3.0	2.7

#### **4.2 Substantiation of the scores using the results of the post hoc test**

The scores are further substantiated by the post hoc test results computed for the significant results from the ANOVA test. Table 6 illustrates how the respondents obtain information about activities (parameters 1-4) and the parish's ability to integrate both inhabitants and newcomers (parameters 5 and 6). The results show that in Nees and Øslø, the respondents obtain more information from a *local folder* compared with the respondents in Tranderup. The same tendency can be observed for Rutsker compared with Tranderup and Øster Ulslev. Tranderup is the parish where the fewest respondents obtain information from *local notes*. The respondents in Rutsker obtain less information from *local notes* than the respondents from Øslø and Øster Ulslev. With regard to *neighbours and acquaintances* as a source of information, the respondents in Rutsker obtain their information from this source less often than the respondents from the other parishes. In Tranderup, the respondents obtain their information from *neighbours and acquaintances* less often than the respondents in Nees and Øslø. The last way to obtain information is by *participating in events and activities*; respondents from Rutsker obtain information in this way less often than the respondents from Nees, Øslø and Øster Ulslev, and the respondents in Tranderup obtain information this way less often than those in Øslø.



Regarding the *integration of inhabitants*, in Nees and Øsløs, the respondents perceive that it is easier for an inhabitant to become part of the community than in Tranderup. With regard to the *integration of newcomers*, Øsløs is perceived to be better at integrating newcomers than Tranderup, Øster Ulslev and Rutsker.

Table 6. Results of the post hoc test (Tukey HSD) in relation to parameters 1-6.

(I) parish	(J) parish	1. How do you get information about local activities? – From a local folder	2. How do you get information about local activities? – From local notes	3. How do you get information about local activities? – From neighbours and acquaintances	4. How do you get information about local activities? – From participation in events/activities	5. In your opinion, is it easy to become part of the community if you want to?	6. Is your community good at integrating newcomers?
Nees	Øsløs	-0.399	-0.425	0.026	-0.138	-0.024	-0.238
	Tranderup	0.692*	0.788*	0.469*	0.385	0.434*	0.242
	Øster Ulslev	0.381	-0.242	0.208	0.002	0.215	0.192
	Rutsker	-0.271	0.295	0.885*	0.532*	0.241	0.241
Øsløs	Tranderup	1.091*	1.213*	0.443*	0.524*	0.458*	0.480*
	Øster Ulslev	0.780*	0.183	-0.182	0.141	0.239	0.430*
	Rutsker	0.128	0.719*	0.860*	0.670*	0.265	0.479*
Tranderup	Øster Ulslev	-0.311	-1.030*	-0.261	-0.383	-0.219	-0.050
	Rutsker	-0.963*	-0.494*	0.416*	0.147	-0.193	-0.001
Øster Ulslev	Rutsker	-0.652*	0.537*	0.678*	0.529*	0.026	0.049

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

*Participation in activities organised with or by neighbours* (Table 7, parameter 7) is lower in Øster Ulslev and Rutsker than in Nees. Øsløs has more participation in activities organised by neighbours compared with Tranderup, Øster Ulslev and Rutsker. The respondents from Rutsker *participate in activities organised by associations* (parameter 8) less often than the respondents from Nees, Øsløs and Øster Ulslev. The same tendency was observed in Tranderup, where the respondents participate less in such activities than the respondents from Øsløs and Øster Ulslev. The respondents from Rutsker *help to organise activities* (parameter 9) to a lower degree than the respondents from Nees, Øsløs and Øster Ulslev. The respondents from Tranderup *help to organise activities* to a lower degree than the respondents from Øsløs. Finally, with regard to the respondents' perception of whether *people generally participate in the activities organised* in the parishes in Table 7, parameter 10, the results are not very different from the results described above. In

Tranderup, the respondents are less likely to believe that people participate in activities compared with the respondents in Ness, Øsløs and Øster Ulslev, and Rutsker differs significantly from Øsløs and Øster Ulslev.

There are no significant differences among Nees, Øster Ulslev and Øsløs.

Table 7. Results of the post hoc test (Tukey HSD) in relation to parameters 7-14.

(I) parish	(J) parish	7. I participate in activities organised with or by neighbours	8. I participate in activities organised by associations	9. I help organise activities	10. Is it your impression that a lot of people participate in joint activities?	11. Is it your impression that your parish is especially active compared to other countryside communities	12. Who starts activities locally? – A few individuals	13. Who starts activities locally? – Companies	14. Who starts activities locally? – Associations
Nees	Øsløs	-0.259	-0.267	-0.164	-0.302	0.151	0.311	-0.309	-0.628*
	Tranderup	0.433	0.356	0.503	0.528*	0.863*	0.669*	-0.088	0.622*
	Øster Ulslev	0.503*	-0.433	0.077	-0.571	0.239	0.643*	-0.510*	-0.310
	Rutsker	0.509*	0.450*	0.624*	0.263	0.454*	0.608*	0.283	0.157
Øsløs	Tranderup	0.693*	0.623*	0.667*	0.829*	0.712*	0.358	0.221	1.251*
	Øster Ulslev	0.763*	-0.165	0.242	0.245	0.088	0.332	-0.201	0.318
	Rutsker	0.769*	0.717*	0.788*	0.565*	0.303	0.296	0.592*	0.785*
Tranderup	Øster Ulslev	0.070	-0.788*	-0.425	-0.585*	-0.624*	-0.026	-0.422*	-0.933*
	Rutsker	0.076	0.094	0.121	-0.264	-0.409*	-0.062	0.371*	-0.466*
Øster Ulslev	Rutsker	0.006	0.883*	0.547*	0.321*	0.215	-0.035	0.793*	0.467*

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

With regard to the perception of *whether the parish is especially active compared to other countryside communities*, Tranderup gives this impression to a lesser degree compared with Nees and Øsløs. The *perception of who starts activities* also differs in the parishes, as shown in Table 7, which presents the results for parameters 12-14. In Nees, it is perceived that *a few individuals start activities* to a higher degree than in Tranderup, Øster Ulslev and Rutsker. In Øster Ulslev, there is a greater perception that *companies start activities* compared with Nees, Tranderup and Rutsker. In contrast, in Rutsker, the perception that *companies start activities* is lower than in Øsløs, Tranderup and Øster Ulslev. In Øsløs, it is perceived that the *associations organise activities* to a higher degree than in all other parishes. In Tranderup, however, there is less of a

perception that associations organise activities compared with all other parishes. In Øster Ulslev, *associations organise activities* to a higher degree than in Rutsker. In summary, to answer the first part of the research question about what the parishes' levels of readiness for joint action is, the calculation of mean scores of readiness showed that the readiness for joint action ranges from 2.6 to 3.3 on a five-point scale (1 - not at all, 5 - to a very high degree) and that the readiness is highest in Øslø, Nees and Øster Ulslev. The post hoc test substantiates these results.

#### 4.3 Perceptions of who starts activities – From where does readiness arise?

A review of the quantitative responses about the particular associations that initiate activities in the parishes shows that several associations are included in every parish. There are, however, quite many statements about certain associations (see the numbers after each association in Table 8).

Table 8. *Associations that initiate activities (the most commonly mentioned associations are in bold).*

Nees (n=49)	Øslø (n=67)	Tranderup (n=27)	Øster Ulslev (n=89)	Rutsker (n=87)
Nees Skalstrup Parish Association 20	Øslø Parish and Cultural Association 46	Parochial Church Council 11	Ø.U.B. Øster Ulslev Football Club 69	Vang Tenant and Residents Association 26
Skalstrup Village House (and Flea Market) 13	Øslø Youth Association (gymnastics) 8	B.T.U. Bregninge Tranderup Youth Association 8	Pensioners' Association 7	Rutsker Parish Association 25
The Japanese Garden 5	Relief Association Perlen AKO 4	Voderup Village Guild 3	Øster Ulslev Village House 5	FDF Rutsker-Hasle Scouts association 13
Nees Bingo Club 2	School and Kindergarten / School Board 3	Arts Association 2	Gymnastics Club South East Lolland 3	Port 6
TFS Tangsøe Hall 2	FHIF Viking Football 2	Playground Association 1	Shooting Association 1	Church 3
Sports Club 2	Agape Childcare Relief Association 1	Residential School 1	Friends of Ø.U.B. 1	City Garden 3
ET4U Contemporary Visual Art Projects 1	Common Association Rainbow 1	Ecological Association 1	Kettinge Sports Hall 1	Town Parliament in Hasle 2
Loch Nees Put and Take 1	Frøstrup Local Association 1		Thor Wrestling Club 1	Pensioners' Association 3
Chorus 1	Parochial Church Council 1		L.O.F. Liberal Education Association Guldborgsund 1	Sports Club 2
Nees Bøvling hunting association 1	Socialdemocrats on Hannæs 1			Local History Association 2
Møborg Nees Churches 1	Pensioner's Association on Hannæs 1			Hasle IF Sports Club 1
	Youth Council Thy (URT) 1			Vang Fishing Village 1

The qualitative interview data provide detailed information about the characteristics of the highlighted initiators. In Nees, the Skalstrup Flea Market was identified as an active player together with Nees Skalstrup Parish Association, and individuals associated with the Japanese Garden and art initiatives. Nees residents had the strongest indications in the quantitatively based scores that a few individuals were the initiators. These initiators were active in decorating the main street of the city with art, creating a Japanese garden, planting Japanese cherry trees and other activities.

The Skalstrup Flea Market draws 7,000 people to Skalstrup once a year and is one of the important activities that creates unity and provides a resource for the village house. The flea market is described as follows: *"We always have 40 stores. There are always some that we must say no to. And the village hall has stands where the locals serve coffee and tea, homemade cake and warm waffles. There are also free coffee and rolls in the morning both days. And then we have a stall with ice cream (...) and popcorn and a stall with an American lottery, with all the prizes from local sponsors (...). And then we always have a communal meal on Saturday night, which is a huge attraction..."*

Another person gave the following characterisation of life in Nees parish, where she indicates that the associations offer potential readiness for the area but not continuous action: *"There is peace and quiet and not a whole lot that one must consider. There are the parish association and the village house, and they just run. And then there are some initiatives in the parish association from time to time if there is something with new wind turbines or, many years ago, when they were trying to get the dump located. But otherwise, there is not that much happening. And the advantage of staying here, it's just that there is (...) peace and quiet, you have some nice neighbours, and people live here because they want to stay here".*

From Table 8 it appears that for Øsløs, the parish association was mentioned most frequently. One interviewee said, *"I think it was the parish association in Øsløs that pushed through, that the X-bus could stop down there. It has actually been very active in different things".* The charity associations in Øsløs were also

mentioned. The importance of these associations is explained by one interviewee: *"It involves more and more people, and yesterday a person came with clothes and said: 'just tell me what you need'. (...) It moves us all that we have something and do something together. And I would like to see in how many places it is like this. You can have it maybe about bingo or entertainment, but really to reach out! (...) It's really special. And it's Øsløs. We are so special"*.

In Øster Ulslev, it is very clear according to Table 8 that Øster Ulslev FC is the most important association in the city. Regarding the football club's importance (and attractiveness), one interviewee said, *"Well, we're playing in the highest range. (...) And it means that we have players who come from outside... I have some, they are studying in Copenhagen, but they happily come to Øster Ulslev three times a week to play some football. That is impressive. It must be because there is something very special. It cannot be the ride that makes it"*.

In Øster Ulslev, it is interesting that there is no parish association that handles wider development issues. The city's institutional force seems centred on the football club, and it is through this club that progress in the area takes place. The football club creates a sense of community among the people, which is likely a contributing factor to the trend of young people moving back, as expressed by the interviewee. Furthermore, it is the team that makes the village known in Lolland and Falster, despite its otherwise small size. The village has, according to the interviewees, a great deal to be proud of because of the football club.

On the questionnaire, the largest number of respondents from Tranderup indicated that the Parochial Church Council initiates activities in the parish. One interviewee said, *"The church is a focal point (...) There are really things going on, and if they were not there, it would also be a quiet place up there. I think it is they who have some fantastic lectures sometimes. [The chairwoman of the church council] has the nursery for... and she is also such a focal point, with good initiatives and good ideas. She can draw people to participate. And those meetings they have with lecturers, it is always with coffee, and it is fun, too"*.

For Rutsker parish, the Vang Tenant and Residents Association and the Rutsker Parish Association were mentioned most often in the questionnaire, together with FDF Hasle Rutsker, based in the old school in Rutsker. Regarding the social importance of Rutsker Parish Association's City Garden, one interviewee said, *"A few years ago, the parish association was revived, and they wanted some kind of gathering. So we have established Rutsker City Garden, (...) where I've been a "gardener" (...) We are 5-6, who meet every 14 days throughout the summer and tend the garden. And then we have had some summer barbecues, a play day for children and a mid-summer night with barbeque and a mid-summer bonfire. It is to bring people together, because it is a very scattered parish and we do not get together terribly often"*.

FDF Rutsker Hasle initiates activities for children and has successfully renovated an old school as a meeting place. As one interviewee said, *"The municipality said it was much cheaper to buy a house in Hasle. But it was not in Hasle we needed to be, it was in Rutsker. And we were lucky that we got a million from AP Moller and other funds too. And they enjoy it up there, and there are new kids every week because now the facilities are good and up to date. So it is really working"*.

Vang Tenant and Residents Association, which plans activities in the coastal town of Vang, is referred to as an association that welcomes new acquaintances: *"Here in Vang, we have a homeowners' association that is reasonably active and tries to do something for the local residents. (...) The main reason why I joined the board when my wife and I came in 2003 was that I felt that it was a simple way to get to know the locals (...). What I mainly got involved in (...) was helping Vang continue to remain a place where people want to live, not only in summer but throughout the year"*. The homeowners' association also organises activities at the harbour and mid-summer gatherings and publishes a magazine that introduces new citizens in Vang, which is why Rutsker performs well on the first parameters that reflect information sharing through local folders.

In summary, the free text answers from the questionnaire summarized in Table 8 on which specific association is the local initiator, show that the quantitative scores on readiness in Section 4.1 reflects different types of associations in the parishes. Thus, to answer the second part of the research question about

from where the readiness arise, the role as initiator is not placed in one specific type of associations but in very different types of associations and this is important knowledge if municipalities are to approach rural parishes in relation to co-production tasks. The interview data further elucidate the main activities of the most active associations and shortly unravel their local importance. The activities of Nees Skalstrup Parish Association and the village hall association in Skalstrup; the parish association and the aid organisations in Øsløs; the church parish council in Tranderup; the football club in Øster Ulslev; and the scouts, parish and residents' associations in Rutsker all contribute to the development of the areas supported by a range of other associational activities, which are, however, more diffused. Below, we discuss the results of this study on local readiness for a possible increase in the use of volunteers in co-production in the future.

## **5.0 Discussion and conclusion**

This article aimed to investigate the readiness for joint action in five specific rural areas in Denmark and their primary sources of readiness. There was no specific focus on co-production in the research question, except in the assumption – which is also implied in the definition of co-production – that co-production requires citizen involvement or participation and active voluntary cooperation. We approached the investigation of readiness by asking questions inspired by Healey's theory of institutional capacity, which exactly entails dimensions of participation and voluntary cooperation. It is relevant to study readiness in rural parishes in order to be able to discuss the potential and limitations of co-production in a Danish rural context. For planners, it is important to understand the level of readiness in the areas they manage and which associations or people have the greatest degree of readiness to successfully introduce more co-production. Without this understanding, potential solutions might create inequality, as stated by Bovaird (2007, p. 856).

As shown in the quantitative results, there are differences in readiness among the five investigated parishes, according to their average scores on the 14 parameters. Three parishes have overall average scores of 3 or more, which we have set as the limit for readiness, and two parishes have lower average scores. The post

hoc test substantiates the result that Øslø, Øster Ulslev and Nees have a higher readiness for joint action than Rutsker and Tranderup. In addition, the free response answers from the questionnaire, supplemented by the interview data, showed that readiness stems from very different associations that participate in everyday activities in the parishes. Although we did not ask directly about willingness to participate in co-production, the results indicate that the parishes are interested in participation, knowledge sharing and voluntary cooperation to varying degrees. If we take as point of departure Bovaird (2007) who says that the amount of volunteer work performed can be used as a proxy for whether co-production could be successful and Percy (2004) who states that social interaction and organization in neighbourhoods could influence preparedness to participate in collective forms of co-production, the results indicate that the communities are not equally 'ready' to take on new tasks in relation to their own development, and if the trend towards more cross-sector collaboration and co-production continues, it will be important for municipalities to assist with local capacity building in some parishes. Education is thus required not only for individuals but also for communities and capacity building is not only for the less educated and the less well-off but also for communities with higher scores on socio-economic variables. In other words, *'one can only treat all the rural parishes the same by treating them differently'*.

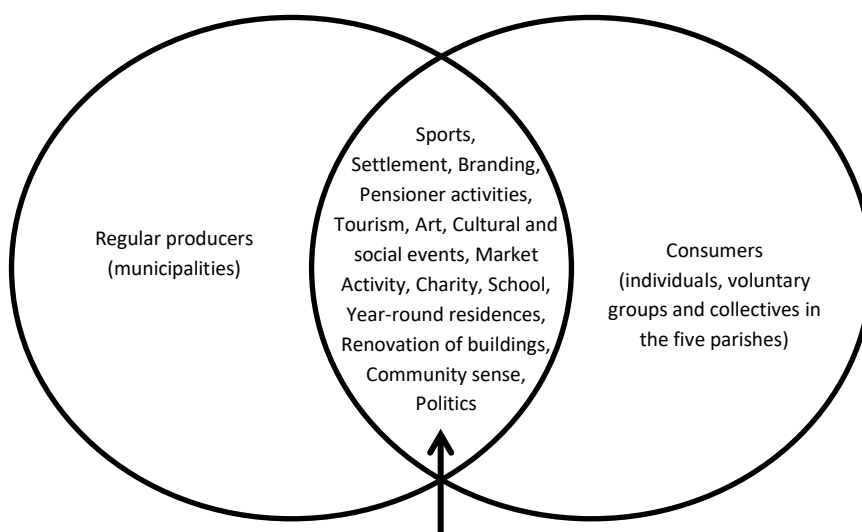
Internationally, service-related tasks are being increasingly transferred to volunteer organisations. Brudney and England (1983, p. 59) mention adopt-a-park programmes and citizen-based police reserves as US examples. Bovaird (2007) mentions participatory budgeting in Brazil and the revitalisation of old public buildings in the UK, among other examples. Today, the same tendencies are slowly emerging in Denmark because of the economic crisis; former tasks of the welfare state are being transferred back to communities to tackle. Still, in Denmark, this process has not progressed substantially and faces various difficulties (due to disciplinary boundaries, insurance questions and traditions). A review of municipal rural plans shows, however, that local rural communities are expected to perform a substantially greater amount of work themselves to secure services (MBBL, 2013). Examples of co-production discussed in the media recently have included mowing lawns on municipal land, clearing snow on municipal roads, helping with summer care in



kindergartens, walking with older people, adding sidewalks and building trails along municipal roads, renovating/building playgrounds, building sports halls with municipal subsidies and other activities (JV, 2011). Thus, readiness is central to activities and services in rural parishes.

The five parishes exhibited examples of co-production to varying degrees. Figure 5 summarises some of the areas where uncoordinated co-production takes place between municipalities and parishes. The municipalities have settlement policies, and the parishes concurrently initiate activities directed towards increased settlement. Municipalities are responsible for health promotion and disease prevention, and the parishes initiate sports activities. In addition, the municipalities have tourism strategies, and the parishes initiate tourism-related activities. The municipalities are also responsible for elder care and schools, and some of the parishes have active pensioners' associations; one parish even runs its own school. Finally, the municipalities are local democracies with elections every four years, and the parishes can be seen as local arenas for experimentation with societal commitments and community spirit, which was emphasised by Pestoff (2006, p. 516), referring to Hirst (1994) and Barber (2003). These activities shows, that there are arenas with potential for more intentional co-production involving municipalities and local communities.

Figure 5: Co-production activities in the five case study parishes (inspired by Brudney and England, 1983).



Because of the strong welfare state, there has not been a tradition in Denmark of dividing public service provision among suppliers or allowing an overlap between producers and consumers. This means, for example, that public school closures occur without much testing of alternative models, resulting in negative attitudes towards the municipality. The result is that free schools are established by the locals in the same buildings. There are even examples of library services (Kromann, 2013) that have been taken over by the public sector from the local areas but are now being closed and therefore taken up again by the local areas. The question is whether an increased focus on co-production as a replacement for traditional silo thinking could be a positive-sum situation. In other words, could the public sector gain from the locals' willingness to contribute while the locals gain from retaining services in the locality? A recently revised Danish charter for interaction between the voluntary sector and the public sector (Frivillighedscharteret, 2013) is intended to promote this type of arrangement. In this article we have started the discussion of the topic by investigating five rural parishes' scores on readiness for internal joint action. However, more specific research on co-production is needed to determine whether locals are motivated to redirect their local participation towards traditionally public tasks and engage in more co-production. The qualitative data reveal potential motivating factors for what makes people participate in the parishes such as 'place', 'helping one's neighbour' and 'protecting one's area'. These motivating factors can be considered as entry points for future research on the topic in a Danish context and also, more practically, as entry points for public planners who focus on small rural parishes.

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Obscured self-references to be added after the review process:

XX 2002=

YY, 2011=

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<sup>i</sup> This quote on rural communities in Denmark was said by the President of the Danish Organization of Rural Districts, Steffen Damsgaard, at a conference in Branderup, September 2013. Beside this, the quotations origin is unknown.