



Political Traditions in Ribe County¹

The “Wild west” atmosphere and period of growth, which was described in the input on cultural traditions in Ribe county, meant that it is not until recently that the politicians in Ribe County have started focusing on concepts like competence centres, learning regions and generally a better cooperation between companies, knowledge centres and politicians. Not that the politicians didn’t want this, but things were going so well, that they saw no reason to change! Though, Ribe County was the last county in Denmark to create a science park!

Traditionally the Danish political system is very transparent. Open meetings, access to all documents and a very open dialogue between politicians, staff and people ensure a well functioning democracy.

Moreover, the political system in Denmark is build on the principle of decentralisation and autonomy, meaning that the municipalities have a high degree of control over many things, such as; taxation, social inclusion, primary school education and business development. Other areas are put at the responsibility of the County, such as further education, labour market development and health, but it is still decentralised from the state. This does surely increase the engagement among local and regional politicians.

The politicians in Ribe County have for decades been used to talk about big issues to change, but as the county is rather small – compared to our European partners – they were used to deal with things in a more informal way. Solutions have been found in common, and money to carry through different kinds of projects, were found among local sponsors. The political traditions are based on local engagement, concrete actions and a feeling of we can do this ourselves – we do not need help from others!

For this reason it can sometimes be hard to talk about and be directly and whole hearted involved in for what for them seem more like futuristic, academic and theoretical debates about learning processes, pro-activity, clusters and new dialogue systems.

But what for 5-6 years ago would have been described as academic nonsense is today accepted as necessary debates.

In Ribe County this change has happened little by little, and has specially been created through the co-operation within EU Vest, where the mayors have had a discussion forum, where they could be inspired by the reports from EU Vest focusing on local / regional needs and activities, but especially national, European and global trends.

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¹ This input is not based on academic facts, but on EU Vest’s experiences with the regional development work.

