



Cultural Tradition in Ribe County¹

The creation of a new harbour on the west coast of Denmark in the beginning of the century created within a couple of decades a completely new but now the fifth largest city in Denmark, Esbjerg. New cities, new people and a lot of new companies especially in the fishery and shipping sector created the atmosphere of the "Wild West", which still today is a popular nick name for Ribe county.

With the industrial growth during especially the 60's, Ribe County further developed. The young generation in the county was proved of having created things themselves, and their identity was characterised by individualism and that new ideas could be realised only through hard work, so Ribe county experienced strong growth.

This guaranteed for a few generations that Ribe County was changing, adapting and developing, and actually was the county in Denmark, which realised the strongest growth, but the lack of companies in the ICT and knowledge based sectors, and a general lack of academics in the mainly industrialized companies has slowed down the changes and development in the business sector of Ribe county. With most of today's innovation based on research and technical development, it was thus more a question of the capacity to change rather than readiness to change.

Companies, institutions and people of Ribe County are not afraid of changes – that's simply not in their nature – but the structures, processes and some of the people needed for changes just do not exist. *Changes are no longer depending on hard work but more on "smart work".*

With the historical background the strongest need in Ribe County is to see and feel that these new structures and processes is not only academic talk, and theoretical debates, but that it actually can make a difference.

The biggest challenge for Ribe County's work with pro-active regional development, e.g. creation of clusters, competence centres and learning concepts is to get it out to get the message out to companies and citizens, so that they by themselves will begin to use the modern concepts that can create new methods for production, new products, new technologies, new companies and new jobs.

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

