

Cultural Village of Europe

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Contribution from T o m m e r u p



Municipal reform / merging of municipalities

The Danish Government has decided on a municipality reform which entails the moving of many assignments especially from the county areas to the municipalities.

The 14 existing counties, will on 1 st January 2007 become 7 regions, which will be responsible for the running of the hospitals.

The municipalities will take over responsibility for:

- All of the handicap sector, with perhaps just a few highly specialised institutions which would be run by the regions or the state.
- Social psychiatry
- Social assignments concerning children and young people
- Education of children with special educational needs, including children with handicaps
- Environmental control, with perhaps some special areas controlled by regions
- Physical planning. More competence for the municipalities, but with regional planning still in the regions.
- Part of the area dealing with employment.

In the 6 municipalities which will constitute the new large municipality, of which Tommerup will be a part, work on planning the merger has been going on for some time.

The result of this work is to be a proposal for new joint distribution models and budget procedures for all the areas which the municipal council for the new large municipality must decide upon after the local election on 15th November 2005.

In Denmark there is a tradition of self government for municipalities. We are very satisfied with this and will try to preserve it. For example, the municipalities set the tax percent. This means they have various possibilities (within a set framework) for giving priority to the level of service they each may require. However, the municipalities have certain set commissions which they all must implement, for example in the social area. The main tasks for municipalities in Denmark include education, day-care for children, care of the elderly and infirm, social help, roads, refuse disposal etc. Most municipalities also have activities in other areas such as sport and culture.

Most Danish municipalities fulfil their tasks competently and most citizens are satisfied with the municipality in which they live.

The government has passed a reform law which makes the Danish municipalities much larger, because they want to abolish counties and thus give the commissions the counties would carry out to the municipalities. The size of the municipalities will have to be rouch larger to enable them to cope with the new responsibilities. For some time the point has been raised that the municipalities were very vulnerable because certain tasks were performed by just a few persons. This makes them vulnerable in the case of illness, or if a staff member leaves. By having larger units, the hope is that expertise and the technical environment will be improved. This may well result in the retention of staff and attract more qualified manpower.

In many ways, I believe that it will be good to have larger units to solve the problems of the future. However, at the moment I am very nervous that the reform will lead to increased state

centralisation. There is a tendency for everything to be done in the same way. Everything has to be controlled and evaluated and more and more central aims are laid out.

I feel it will be very difficult for the municipalities to keep the high degree of self government they have had. I hope it will be possible, but believe we will have to fight for this in the municipalities.

The legislation work in connection with the reform is being done in parliament. It is the liberal government and its coalition party, the Danish Peoples Party who have brought in this reform and the other political parties are trying, without much luck, to have influence in the terms of the legislation. This can perhaps give grounds for concern because there is a tradition in Denmark for compromise between several parties, when things which will have influence on society for years to come are decided. This could mean that if the political majority changes, there could also be changes in reform. This could result in a de-stabilising effect.

The reform which should ensure a high level of service in the future will mean great expenditure for the municipalities. Computer systems alone will cost millions of kroner. The state will not give compensation for the expenses the municipalities incur. It is the municipalities themselves who have to find the funds, and this could have an effect on other areas.

As far as the relationship between State and municipality is concerned, the municipalities feel that they are forced to accept responsibilities without receiving resources. The State/parliament promise citizens things on behalf of the municipalities, so the municipalities sometimes find it hard to live up to these expectations. The state can then criticise the municipality for their inefficiency or inability to observe legislation.

However, parliament usually has great confidence in the municipalities' ability to solve problems and if one is positive, the new reform must also be seen as a gesture of confidence in the municipalities as they are given more tasks.

I hope we can keep self government in the municipalities.

My explanations here are quite short, but a great deal of time is spent in political discussions within the municipalities and not only politicians are greatly interested in the reform. Staff members are working hard to prepare the mergers which take place on 1 st January 2007. Many members of staff are also uncertain about their future employment.