



Welcome to Sønderborg. We love having guests and usually welcome them with a cup of coffee; but when guests from Japan visit us, we make the effort to put together a hopefully exciting programme that can meet expectations and ensure exchange of experiences between our countries and cultures.

Our world is becoming more and more connected - but also under pressure from many sides such as globalisation, climate changes and the energy crisis. We recognise that we live in a fragmented, complex and uncertain world that we have to manage.

For example, in Denmark we see

- a higher proportion of elderly people and a lower average age, which means that more people will live longer with chronic illness or mental disorders, draining society of resources.
- Our Scandinavian model of democracy is built on trust. But we are experiencing crises of trust between citizens and politicians.
- We are witnessing a generational shift in traditional community life.
- Crises around biodiversity, energy and climate are others we are facing.

Here, we must keep in mind that sharing experiences and networking are important for finding solutions in a coordinated and concerted co-operation.

For us, part of the solution is to create a better balance between decision-makers and citizens. You will experience today how we in Sønderborg work to involve citizens in co-creative processes in areas such as rural areas to strengthen local democracy and mobilise citizens' resources in the development of our society, thereby jointly finding better ways to solve complex challenges.

But first, let's get the geography right.

Denmark has an area of approximately 42,952 square kilometres and a population of approximately 6 million. Sønderborg has about 74.000 inhabitants. The villages has between 200 – 1000 inhabitants.



In Sønderborg, we have all of Europe within our reach. Here Scandinavia meets continental Europe, and in our backyard we have Flensburg, Hamburg and Kiel, while Berlin and Copenhagen are also within easy reach thanks to the well-developed infrastructure.

Our special location as a natural hub in the borderland has given us a unique ability to collaborate across borders, cultures and boundaries, and today 110 different nationalities live and work in Sønderborg. We have some of Denmark's largest global industrial groups, and the area is an international leader in cleantech and energy efficiency. The university has students from over 50 countries, and the city's many restaurants and cafés are buzzing with chatter in languages from all over the world.

We are also a city in the middle of nature, with forests, beaches, 250 kilometres of winding coastline, hills and lakes, where there is room for exercise, tranquillity and contemplation. That's some of what we want to show you today.

Sønderborg Municipality became a reality on 1 January 2007, when the local government reform came into force. This meant significant changes to the organisational structure and division of tasks in the public sector in Denmark. 271 municipalities became 98 large municipalities, and 14 counties were abolished and 5 regions were created instead.

The Local Government Reform has created a framework for a strong public sector that can meet the challenges of the future. One of the goals of the local government reform was to create municipalities that are characterised by high professional and financial sustainability. This meant that the new large municipalities could take on new and important tasks. The new large municipalities became the citizen's gateway to the public sector. The local government reform brought public services closer to the citizens.

I am the chairman of the political committee where sustainability and rural areas are in focus. We co-produce with 37 village councils and the Association of Village councils. Our coordinator of rural areas will go into details with the “Sønderborg-model” later today.

The development of the entire municipality is very important to me - we must create a municipality in balance, where citizens can live, work and live the good life everywhere.

Over the next hours, you'll hear how we're working on solutions to resist the pressure on the welfare society by citizens joining together to do something in the neighbourhood, while the municipality provides opportunities and space for citizens to be involved in creating the good life.

We're not there yet - we're on our way and we're going further.

Once again, welcome.

Now I'll pass the floor to an introduction of our host in Kværns, Tørsbøl, Snurom: Michael Beck