

STRATEGY FORMATION IN EASTERN JUTLAND

STRATEGIC SPATIAL PLANNING OR LOBBYISM FOR INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS?

BY

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ABSTRACT

In Eastern Jutland a strategy formation process has been initiated with the aim of developing a strategic spatial plan for the city region. An organisation has been set up to deal with the first phase of the process, which is to carry out three functional analyses and prepare a common vision for Eastern Jutland. This process relies on the municipalities in Eastern Jutland reaching consensus on a common vision for the city region.

The key issue in spatial planning in Eastern Jutland is a conflict between preserving the high quality of landscape and maintaining the divide between the countryside and urban areas on one hand, and on the other hand taking the shortcomings of the infrastructure into consideration and maintaining economic development. The question is whether the Ministry of the Environment and the municipalities, and the municipalities among themselves, have the same interests in and same opinions about what kind of spatial planning and regulation is needed, or whether the differences are too big to be overcome.

The Ministry of the Environment acknowledges that Eastern Jutland is developing towards a functional city region, which raises new challenges for the spatial planning in the area. The municipalities acknowledge the articulation of the city region and the initiated planning process. However, the municipalities might see the arena as means to lobby for infrastructure investments in Eastern Jutland, as it is doubtful whether the municipalities will feel encouraged to enter a process, which is aiming at increasing the national regulation within their territory.

The result might very well be that the discussion about future infrastructure investments is not linked to discussions about future urban development in Eastern Jutland. These aspects raises serious questions about on which level a serious strategy formation process can take place. There is a danger that a common strategic spatial plan is more an expression of the lowest common denominator and the municipalities request for infrastructure investments rather than being a spatial strategy with transformative power.

1. INTRODUCTION

“The world is opening up – spatial planning should take part in preparing us for changes.”
(Ministry of the Environment 2006b, p. 10 – own translation)

Society is changing as a consequence of increased globalisation and mobility, which means we have to revise our perception of society in order to deal with the challenges we are to face in the future. We are in Denmark in a period of adjustment, trying to adjust the way we have structured our society, so it becomes more flexible and able to respond to the changes happening around us.

Globalisation means increased demands for spatial planning. The technological development, liberalisation of trade and financial flows, market economics in China and Eastern Europe, rapid and inexpensive communication, and lower transport costs all raises challenges for spatial planning in Denmark, see Figure 1. The challenges are to promote urban growth and infrastructure investments in larger urban regions, which will benefit the entire country. In addition, the urban growth should respect the landscape, the demarcation between the urban and rural, and ensure the local identity and distinctiveness. (Ministry of the Environment 2006a)



Figure 1: How globalisation affects and changes the terms for spatial planning in Denmark (Ministry of the Environment 2006a, p.9)

The national planning report from 2006 is a response to the new challenges for spatial planning in Denmark. Denmark is right now in a period of spatial restructuring. The national planning act and the administrative boundaries have been adjusted in the structural reform in 2007, which led to an abolishment of the counties and merging of municipalities, which became authority for spatial planning in both urban and rural areas.

The merging of Danish municipalities can be seen as another attempt to make the municipality boundaries fit the commuter areas or labour markets. The structural reform and merging of municipalities were built on voluntary arrangements, which meant that the municipality boundaries are more based on politics than being functional reasoning. This has led to a new understanding of spatial planning, as something that is not only limited to administrative boundaries, but something that might exceed the defined boundaries in order to be effective and meaningful. As a consequence a new arena has been established in Eastern Jutland, where strategy-making can take place.

The 'new map of Denmark' published in the national planning report from 2006 stresses that Denmark contains two metropolitan regions, see Figure 2. Initiatives have been taken to strengthen the spatial planning in these two areas. The Ministry of the Environment has issued a national planning directive in the Copenhagen Area, which can be seen as an update of the Fingerplan from 1947 (Ministry of the Environment 2007). The spatial planning in Eastern Jutland has not an existing plan to build on as in the Copenhagen Area. A whole new planning process involving the Ministry of the Environment and the 17 municipalities in Eastern Jutland has therefore been initiated. Both parties have agreed to work together to develop a common strategic spatial plan for the city region. The strategy formation planning process relies on the actors reaching consensus on a future plan for infrastructure investments and urban development in the city region.

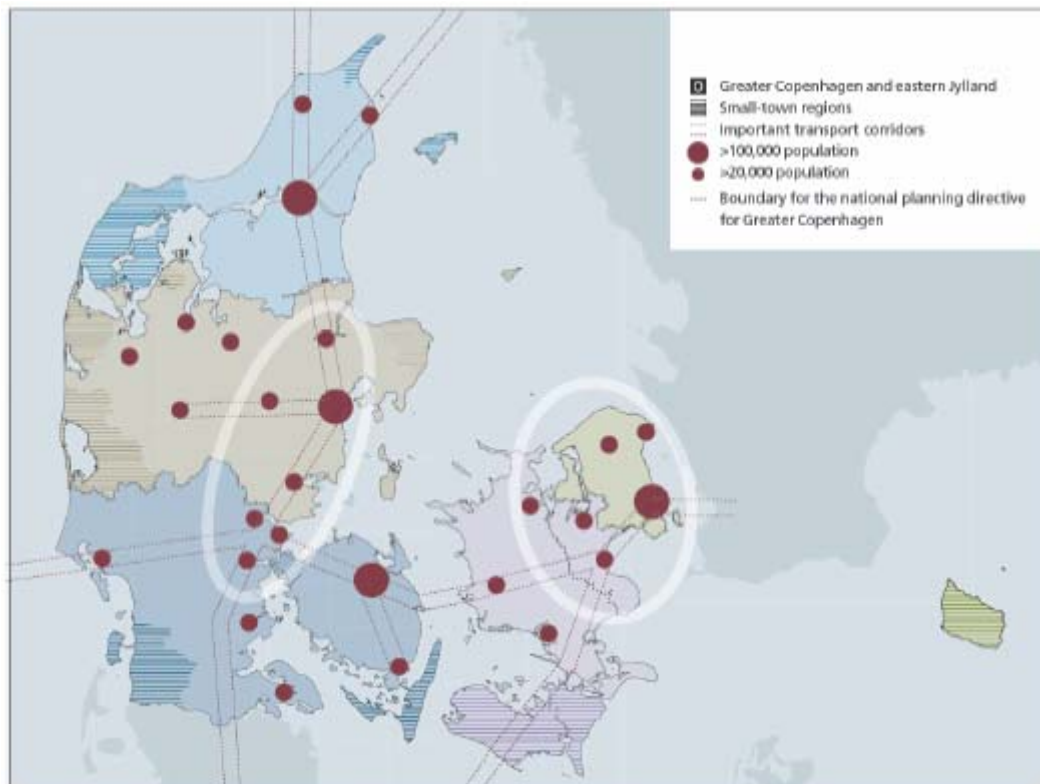


Figure 2: The new map of Denmark highlighting the new state spaces in the Copenhagen Area and Eastern Jutland (Ministry of the Environment 2006a, p.15)

2. THEORETICAL & METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Healey (1997a, 1997b, 2007) argues that strategic spatial planning is carried out differently today than 50 years ago. Today the strategy formation process has been undermined by governance activity, which means that strategy-making can no longer be seen as a linear process, but has become much more complex and much more focused on the process rather than the content of the spatial strategy.

Healey (2007) suggests a framework for evaluating and designing strategy formation processes consisting of four key dimensions. Firstly, an initial filtering process is carried out to prioritise between different issues, which action needs to be addressed towards. Secondly, focusing and framing is carried out to organise the ideas and claims, which have made it through the filtering process, into a strategic frame,

which supportive storylines are created around. Thirdly, mobilising force needs to be generated supporting the strategic frame and spreading the message of a need for a change. Fourthly, transformative force needs to be generated in order for the strategic frame to travel from one arena to another and eventually be able to shape spatial structures in society. The framework for analysing the strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland is illustrated in Figure 3.

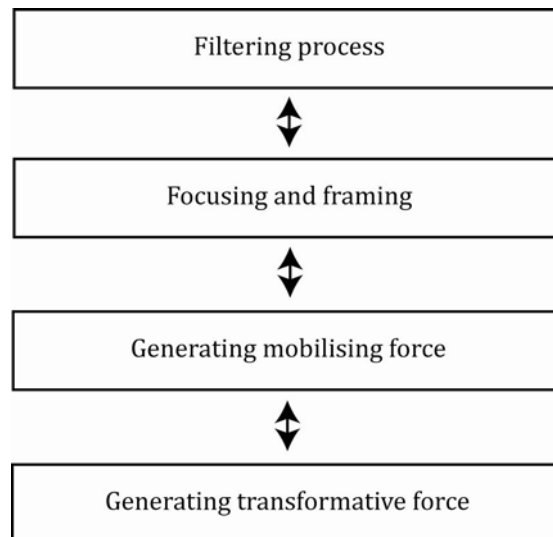


Figure 3: Framework for designing and evaluating a strategy formation process

Healey's (2007) framework for evaluating and designing a strategy formation process is used as a guideline for researching the strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland, as it offers a way to split the complex activity of strategy formation into four key dimensions, which can structure the research. The four elements in the framework are quite broad, as they have been developed from various case studies of strategy formation process (Healey 2007). They therefore need to be more operational, if they are to be used for analysing the strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland. The background knowledge created in the first month of research about the strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland has been used to interpret Healey's (2007) four key dimensions in terms of the case of Eastern Jutland. Healey's (2007) key dimensions are thus used as a structure for the analysis, but each key dimension is interpreted in relation to the case study of the strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland, see Figure 4.

The strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland was analysed through interviews with the Agency of Spatial and Environmental Planning and the municipal directors or planning officers from Kolding, Horsens, Århus and Randers Municipalities. Århus and its surrounding municipalities and the Triangle Area represent two strong coalitions in Eastern Jutland, and as these coalitions might affect the strategy formation process it was decided to select representatives from each coalition for analysis. Kolding Municipality was chosen as a representative for the Triangle Area, while Århus Municipality was selected to represent Århus and the surrounding municipalities.

In addition, Horsens and Randers Municipalities were included in the analysis, as these were expected to be major actors in the strategy formation process. Horsens Municipality especially is an interesting case, as it is situated between the two strong coalitions. Furthermore, an interview was carried out with the Agency

for Spatial and Environmental Planning as a representative from the Ministry of the Environment. The aim of the interview was to explore the Ministry's motives and interests in a future strategic spatial plan for Eastern Jutland in more depth. All interviews were semi-structured, and the interview guides were structured after Figure 3 and Figure 4. The analysis and the paper conclusions have built on the information collected in these interviews.

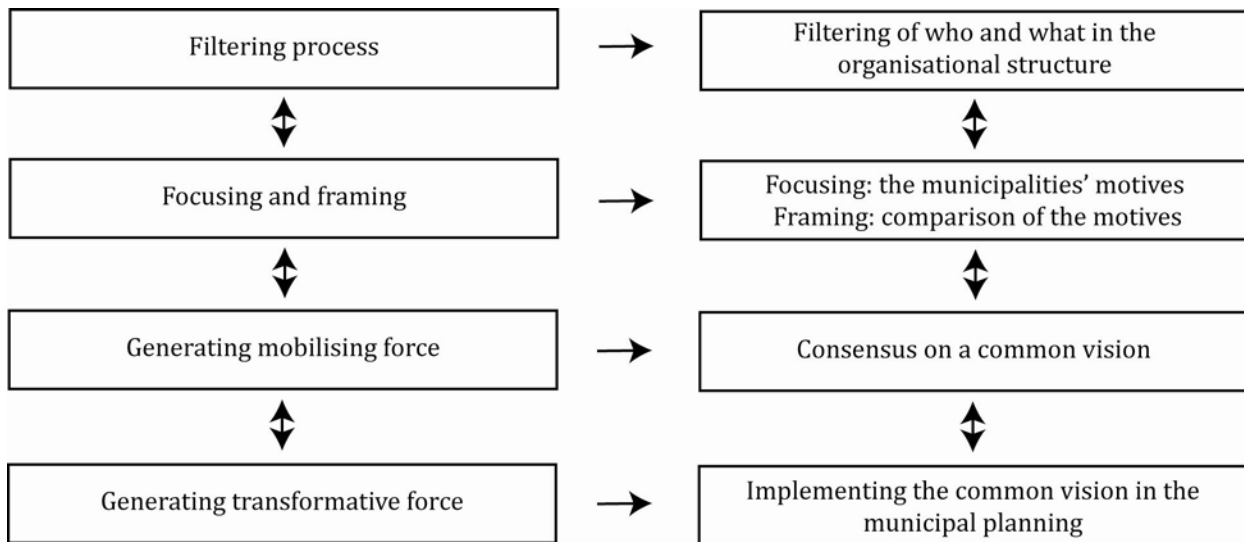


Figure 4: Reinterpretation of the framework in the context of the strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland

3. STRATEGY FORMATION IN EASTERN JUTLAND

The strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland has been researched through the framework illustrated in Figure 3. This section summarises the analysis results.

Filtering

The first element in the analysis of the strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland is filtering. In the case of Eastern Jutland, filtering is understood as the initial filtering carried out in connection to the setup of the organisational structure.

The organisational structure of the strategy formation process can be seen as a filtering of 'who' and 'what' to include in the process. In the first phase of the strategy formation process, a new organisational structure has been created, see Figure 5. Here consultants have been hired to carry out three functional analyses investigating the business and population, interaction and infrastructure, and the landscape in Eastern Jutland. The results from the three analyses create the foundation for the steering group's task of preparing a common vision for Eastern Jutland. The three functional analyses are thus a filtering of 'what' to include in the process and 'what' the common vision should focus on. Filtering of 'what' is closely linked to focusing in the next element of the framework, and is therefore discussed under here.

Filtering, carried out through the organisational structure, is also a filtering of 'who' to include in the strategy formation process. Firstly, filtering is carried out through the nomination of the city region in Eastern Jutland. The municipalities find the demarcation of the city region in Eastern Jutland reasonable, as

Focusing & Framing

The second element in the framework is to research focusing and framing of the spatial strategy for Eastern Jutland. In the case of Eastern Jutland, focusing is understood as the municipalities' motives and reasons for participating in the strategy formation process, whilst framing is explored through a comparison of the municipalities' different stories with the aim of identifying key elements, which can constitute a strategic frame for Eastern Jutland. As mentioned earlier, the filtering of 'what' through the three functional analyses can be perceived as an attempt to focus the strategy formation process around specific issues. It is also these issues, which the municipalities have highlighted as their motives for entering the strategy formation process.

By comparing the four stories from the selected municipalities, it is obvious that a strategic framing mainly can be developed around future infrastructure investments. The municipalities all agree that new infrastructure investments are needed in Eastern Jutland. Infrastructure is therefore also going to play a huge role in the framing of the common vision. Especially, as one of the aims of the common vision is to influence the national investment plan. This also raises serious doubts about the municipalities' commitment to the process, if the national infrastructure investments until 2030 were not to be decided in a few months time.

In general, the municipalities acknowledge a need to preserve the landscape. As an analysis of the landscape in Eastern Jutland is carried out, it is likely that preservation of the landscape to some extent will play a role in framing the future common vision for Eastern Jutland. However, the municipalities are afraid of increased regulation and centralisation, and highlight that they to a large extent are able to take care of landscape related interests themselves.

It is highly doubtful whether it is possible to frame considerations about future urban development in the common vision for Eastern Jutland. The municipalities seem to have too different approaches to their future urban development. Some municipalities locate new urban districts in close proximity to the motorway, whilst others highlight concepts such as revitalisation and dense cities as key. There is therefore a real danger that the discussion about future infrastructure is not linked to the discussion about future urban development in Eastern Jutland, which is the main reason, the Ministry of the Environment initiated the strategy formation process in the first place.

The municipalities highlight that framing a common vision for Eastern Jutland is not as important as creation of an arena, at which future framing can take place. The important element is thus not the actual framing of the common vision, but more creation of an arena at which strategic thinking can take place and spatial strategies can be framed in the future.

Generating Mobilising & Transformative Force

The third and fourth element in the framework is to generate mobilising and transformative force for the strategic frame created. In the case of strategy formation in Eastern Jutland, mobilising force for the spatial strategy can be generated, if the municipalities are able to reach consensus on a common vision for Eastern Jutland. Transformative force can be generated by implementing the strategic spatial plan for Eastern Jutland into the municipal planning.

The municipalities have a lot to gain from reaching consensus on a common vision for Eastern Jutland. They stand much stronger in their attempt to attract future infrastructure investments if they are able to unite and speak with a common voice. Consensus on a common vision for Eastern Jutland would also be a manifestation of Eastern Jutland as a city region, and an important step towards creating a platform where future spatial strategies can be formed.

The municipalities are therefore under a lot of pressure to reach consensus, both from themselves, but also from the Ministry of the Environment, which has an option of issuing a national planning directive, if the municipalities are not able to reach consensus. The municipalities have highlighted that the pressure is there, although the Ministry of the Environment has stated that a national planning directive is not an option at the moment.

It is therefore highly likely that the municipalities will be able to reach a consensus. The question is just what they are able to reach consensus on. The huge competition between the municipalities in Eastern Jutland sets limitations for the strategy formation process and the content of a common vision. There is a danger that the municipalities are only able to reach consensus on the lowest common denominator, which very well might be on infrastructure, as described above. There is also a danger that the common vision in its wording is going to be so broadly formulated that it would not have any consequences for the municipal planning.

The municipalities are aware of that a cooperative process is about compromises, and they highlight that it is important not to aim at the ideal in the process, because this might not be possible. The municipalities underline that consensus on something less than ideal might as well be an acceptable starting point for cooperation in Eastern Jutland. The steering group has been emphasised as having an important role in building consensus, as they prepare the common vision for Eastern Jutland, and then have to convince the 17 mayors to 'accept' the prepared common vision for Eastern Jutland. This underlines how important the organisational structure is for generating mobilising force.

Two ways have been highlighted in which transformative force for the strategic spatial plan can be generated. The Ministry of the Environment can turn the strategic spatial plan into a national planning directive, which then gets the character of a binding 'consensus paper'. This has been highlighted as an option in the national planning report from 2006, although the Ministry of the Environment highlights that this is not the intention at the moment. Ministry of the Environment highlights that it is not necessary to issue a national planning directive, if the municipalities all agree on a common vision for their city region.

The other way to generate transformative force is that the municipalities sign a planning document and commit themselves to follow the strategic spatial plan for the city region. The municipalities believe that this is the best solution to secure transformative force. The national environment centres play an important part in this model, because they have to decide whether the municipal plans live up to the municipalities' commitments in the strategic spatial plan for Eastern Jutland. In each case the national scale has to keep an eye on the municipal planning in Eastern Jutland, because the heavy competition in the city region might tempt the municipalities to disregard their commitments. The results of the analysis of the strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland are summarised in Figure 6.

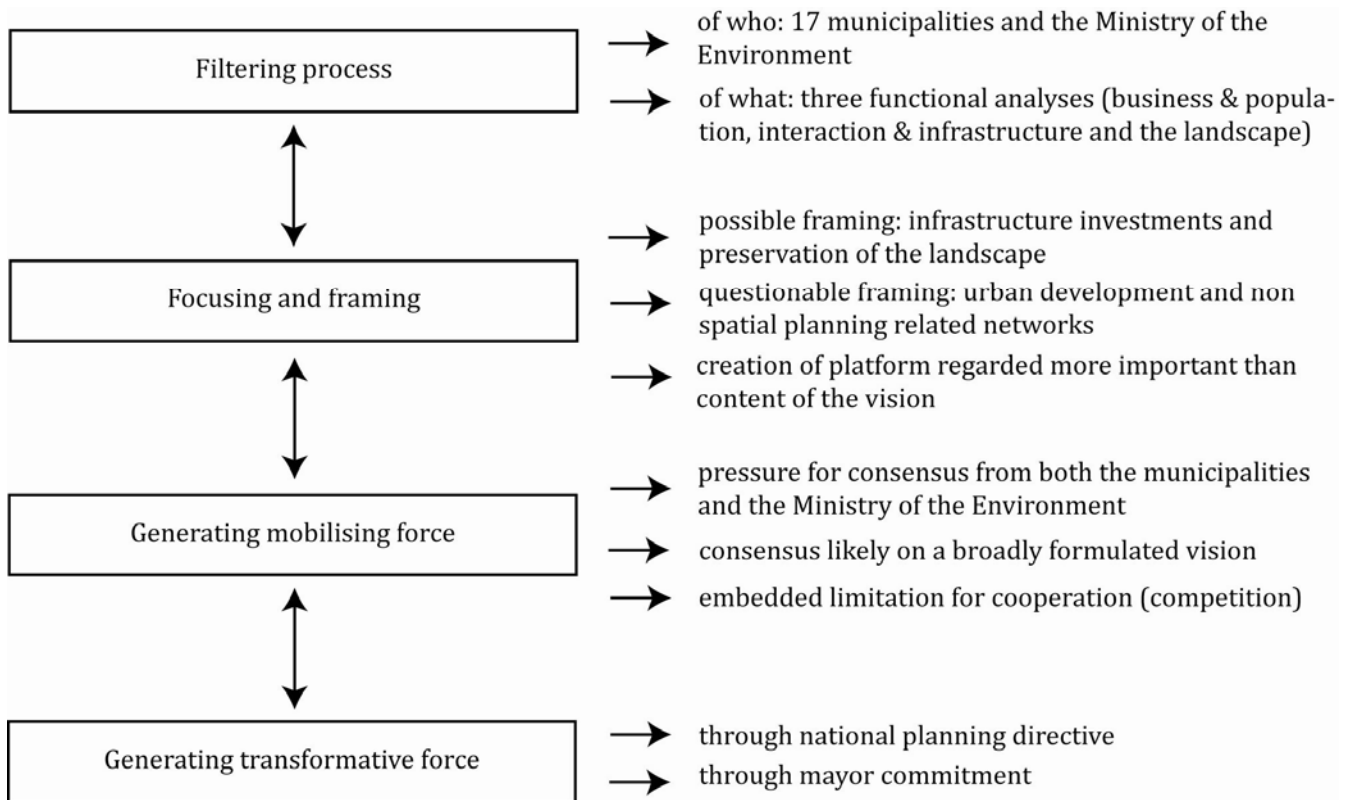


Figure 6: Summary of the research results of the strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland

4. CONCLUSION

The strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland is a very complex matter, because Eastern Jutland has never been articulated as a functional city region before. Healey's (2007) four key dimensions offer a way to navigate this complexity and understand the crucial steps in a strategy formation process. In Eastern Jutland, an organisational structure has to be created to carry the strategic formation process through the steps in the proposed framework.

It seems likely that the municipalities are able to reach consensus on a common vision for Eastern Jutland, although the vision might have to be rather broadly formulated. The municipalities have especially highlighted future infrastructure investments and preservation of the landscape as important elements to include in the common vision. Strategic spatial planning across the municipalities in Eastern Jutland is in the beginning phase, the strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland is therefore just as much about creating a platform and manifesting the city region in Eastern Jutland, as about formulating a spatial strategy for the city region.

The element which carries the process through and gives hope of future strategy-making in Eastern Jutland, is the prospect of the municipalities being able to influence the National Government's future infrastructure investments and thereby maintain Eastern Jutland's role as Denmark's second metropolitan area. This is the point of departure for strategy-making in Eastern Jutland. Whether it is possible to link strategic thinking about future infrastructure investments to strategic thinking about urban development

remains inconclusive. From the interviewed municipalities and this research the prospects of this are not so bright.

5. SPATIAL PLANNING OR INFRASTRUCTURE LOBBYISM?

In general, the municipalities believe it is a good idea to create a common vision for the city region, because they see some obvious advantages from such a vision. At the same time, the municipalities stress that they are capable of carrying out spatial planning themselves, and they raise concerns that the process might lead to increased centralisation and restriction of the municipalities' self-government.

The municipalities and the Ministry of the Environment both have an ambivalent approach to the strategy formation process in Eastern Jutland. The municipalities highlight the opportunity to influence future infrastructure investments as the main reason for participating in the strategy formation process. It is, however, not sufficient only to discuss future infrastructure investments, if the spatial problems in Eastern Jutland are to be solved. There is a need to link urban development to infrastructure investments. It is therefore absolutely essential that the strategic spatial plan for Eastern Jutland deals with how to coordinate urban development in Eastern Jutland, even though the municipalities might feel restricted in their self-government.

The Ministry of the Environment and the municipalities agree that there are some problems to be solved. The Ministry of the Environment has initiated a process which has more the character of being help to self-help for the municipalities. The Ministry of the Environment has started the process, but has left the initiative to the municipalities. The municipalities acknowledge the need for a common vision for Eastern Jutland, but would rather talk about future infrastructure investments than regulation of urban development. Investments in infrastructure thus look like the easy solution to the problems in Eastern Jutland. There is therefore a danger that the discussion about a common vision for Eastern Jutland, which links infrastructure to urban development, is turned into a discussion about which future infrastructures are needed in Eastern Jutland.

The ambivalent approach to the strategy formation process might have consequences for the process. It is, however, also important to remember that this is a new approach to strategic spatial planning in Denmark, so there will naturally be difficulties which have to be overcome for the process to really get started. The process is still in its first phase, and a lot of things can happen when the steering group discusses the common vision for Eastern Jutland over the summer of 2008.

It is, however, questionable how much a common vision is able to change the development patterns in Eastern Jutland, as there is a strong path dependency attached to spatial planning in Denmark. The strong tradition for decentralisation and the municipalities' self-government make it very difficult to enter a discussion about how to solve the spatial problems in Eastern Jutland. Without the institutional power to change the path dependency in Danish spatial planning, the consequence must be that we are moving towards a more and more motorway-based society, as investments in infrastructure seems to be the only legitimate solution to the spatial problems in Eastern Jutland. In this perspective, strategy-making in Eastern Jutland merely turns into lobbyism for infrastructure investments.

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