

Roads and Parks – Urban Renewal and Co-Creation

Introduction

As part of an urban renewal project, Tønder Municipality decides to involve the citizens in the process. They know this will require additional time investment but believe it is worthwhile. The municipality is also aware that genuine citizen involvement means they cannot predict exactly what the outcome of the process will be. To involve the citizens, the rural district coordinator is initially engaged, but it is agreed that a representative from the department, *Roads and Parks* should also be part of the process from start to finish.

Curiosity about the Case

The rural district coordinator invites citizens to a series of meetings to understand their starting point. All residents of the town are invited, with special emphasis on raising awareness about the urban renewal for those living in the district at the center of the renewal. Additionally, representatives from organizations like the Chamber of Commerce, local council, and the elderly council are invited to join the citizen group. The meetings are organized in such a way that all citizens have the opportunity to voice their opinions about the upcoming urban renewal. The Roads and Parks employee attends primarily to listen to what the citizens have to say but also to provide expertise in the conversation.

During the meeting, it is suggested that a one-way street be changed to one-way in the opposite direction. Initially, this idea comes from a local business owner who believes it would be easier for people to access his and other businesses if the one-way traffic is reversed. A few other citizens agree and support the change. The majority of citizens at the meeting are initially undecided, but over the course of the meeting, they are persuaded to support the proposal. It is important that the facilitators of the meeting do not jump to conclusions based on the first suggestion, but instead continue to explore the issue – what do the citizens hope to achieve with this change? Is the solution addressing the interests of the majority, or are there more voices yet to be heard? Since some participants have strong opinions about the one-way system, it is particularly important that all relevant perspectives are heard. It is the collection of perspectives that will provide an accurate picture to move forward to the next phase – exploring potential solutions. Additionally, the Roads and Parks employee asks questions that may influence the possible solutions. What are the typical traffic patterns? When is the road most often used? Is it primarily used for shopping, or by others as well? The Roads and Parks employee has already gathered data on who uses the road and when, to support the discussion. It is also clear that the participants at the meeting may not represent the entire town. Those attending often already have a strong opinion on things they want changed, while many residents who do not attend may think the current town planning is fine. Based on the feedback from the first meeting, the Roads and Parks employee creates a survey, randomly distributed to 20% of the town's residents, allowing more voices to be included. A specific question about the one-way street change is included. The employee and the rural district coordinator then facilitate another meeting based on the survey results to explore possible solutions.

Exploration of solutions

As part of exploring solutions, the Roads and Parks employee shares insights that may influence the citizen group's decision on the best solution.

If the one-way system is changed, an exit point from the area will be closed, which everyone at the meeting must be aware of. Changing the direction will also have significant consequences for the street. It will not be enough to just switch the one-way signs, as some believe; instead, the entire street's angled parking will need to be redone, which is costly. If the funds for urban planning are

used here, they will not be available for other potential projects in the town. The Roads and Parks employee also presents the survey results, showing that 80% do not want the one-way system changed. Additionally, many survey respondents have expressed concerns about traffic safety due to frequent accidents in the area.

Initially, the urban planning project seems to have two options: change the one-way system or leave it as is. Since the majority does not want to change the one-way direction, while a strong minority does, the citizen group is challenged to find more solutions than just the two available ones. Through discussion, it is proposed to remove the one-way system entirely, allowing traffic in both directions. This solution, like changing the direction, is more expensive than keeping the current system. However, it has advantages: removing the one-way system would mean removing parking spaces in both directions. The Roads and Parks employee explains that while the solution is expensive to implement, it would likely be cheaper to maintain. This is because many accidents related to parking have damaged signs and curbs, and these would be reduced or eliminated by the new system. Furthermore, removing the one-way system could improve traffic safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and scooter riders, which was strongly requested in the survey responses. It would be easier to distinguish between the sidewalk, bike lane, and road.

The Roads and Parks employee also notes that this solution could support broader urban planning for the area, as a new large daycare is soon to be built next to the current sports hall, requiring a larger traffic artery leading to the new daycare. Since the road leads directly to the new daycare, the road change could improve traffic safety for families using the road to access the daycare.

Co-determination

The citizens agree to remove the one-way system in both directions. Tønder Municipality could not have predicted this solution at the start of the process, underscoring an important aspect of co-creation – we do not know the solution in advance.

Co-responsibility

This solution includes elements of shared responsibility. Removing the one-way system means citizens will need to find alternative parking to shop in the area. Additionally, a working group is formed based on representatives from the citizen meetings to ensure communication about the solution reaches different groups. As a result, representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, local council, and the elderly council are included in the citizen group, with the responsibility of communicating the process of the urban planning decision.

The citizens feel their voices have been heard, which gives them a strong sense of ownership over the changes made in the urban renewal process. Both the participation in the survey and the citizen group meetings have shown significant engagement. The project has created momentum for citizens to actively participate in future urban planning.