Case study summary report - Aalborg

1.1 History and context

Aalborg is the fourth largest city in Denmark with a population of 114,000 in 2018. Together with its twin city, NrSundby, north of the Limfjord, the total urban population is 137,000. The rate of population growth has been slightly higher than in Denmark as a whole and considerably higher that in the Region of North Jutland, where Aalborg is the main city. Since 1970, Nr.Sundby and Aalborg have both been part of Aalborg municipality. The two cities are connected with a railroad bridge, a road bridge, and a highway tunnel.

Aalborg started as a Viking settlement along the Limfjord more than 1,000 years ago, and the location close to the water and with an easy access to the sea made it an attractive and hence growing city during the middle ages, where Aalborg controlled the trade in all the Limfjord area. Fishery of herring, the export of cattle to Germany, and of grain to Norway were important factors for the wealth of the city during the 16th and 17th centuries, where Aalborg was the largest Danish city outside Copenhagen.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Aalborg has been primarily known as a manufacturing city, dominated by the shipyard, the production of cement and other heavy industry. Aalborg still served as an agroindustrial center with slaughterhouses and unloading of agricultural inputs in the harbor. During the last half of the 20th century, energy production has also been a dominant industry in Aalborg with power generation, heating and household gas production. Since the mid-1990s high-tech electronic industries with a rather consolidated production of Information Technology appliances and associated services has increasingly been a dominant business activity in Aalborg.

The port of Aalborg, which was owned by the City of Aalborg, established for the Greenland trade in the 1970’s a new port at the southern shore of the Limfjord about 10 km to the East of the central port and hence closer to the Sea. This gave the advantages of deep water and plenty of space in the port and in the hinterland for further development. At the same time and over the coming years, the activities at the central port were influenced by a general industrial decline, which made room for alternative structures and functions along the waterfront. Only a very few activities were actually relocated to the new Aalborg East Port.

1.2 Vision, goals and plans

The vision for the waterfront and the goals of the regeneration of the urban areas along the fjord were formulated in “Fjordkataloget” that was submitted in 1998. They included general goals concerning the waterfront to the fjord as well as specific visions and goals for the central port area.

The general visions and goals were:

- A more visible fjord.
- A beautiful and characteristic façade facing the fjord.
Attractive and exciting urban spaces in interaction with the fjord.

Preserving characteristic and valuable buildings.

Strengthening the City as a regional center for culture, trade, business and tourism.

A sustainable urban development through concentration.

Creation of a new modern business profile of Aalborg.

A substantial part of the areas along the fjord should be reserved for recreational functions.

Easier access between the city and the fjord.

Visions and goals concerning the central port areas:

There shall be room for new regional facilities in the fields of culture, education, and service.

There shall be room for environmentally friendly businesses.

There shall be room for housing, local services and cultural activities.

The new functions shall support the retail trade in the city center.

The former port area should act as a natural extension of the city center.

After 20 years of planning and regeneration, these visions and goals are still the same, and many of them have been referred to in the discussions with stakeholders.

1.3 laws and regulations

The regeneration takes place within the frames of the general Danish laws and regulations concerning urban planning, environment, and city/municipal finance.

Local development plans are the foundation of the spatial planning system in Denmark. The Planning Act allocates the responsibility for planning to the 98 municipal councils, who prepare municipality plans for 12 year periods within the overall state and regional guidelines. Aalborg, Fjordkataloget was an important part of the part of the Municipality plan that addressed the waterfront.

Apart from the Planning Act and the general regulations of the finances of municipalities, no particular law has had any significant impacts on the transformation process.

1.4 Stakeholders involved

The key stakeholders in the regeneration process have been:

Port of Aalborg that owned and operated the port and moved its activities to a new port 10 km. East of the city.

Aalborg City as the owner of large areas along the waterfront.
• The Mayor of Aalborg, who was at the same time the chairman for the Port of Aalborg (owned by the City of Aalborg)

• Aalborg City Technical Department as the planning authority

• Developers, construction enterprises, major funds and other investors that have been involved in projects along the waterfront

• The new cultural and educational institutions that have been established at the waterfront.

• Mainly national ministries and institutions regulating the physical planning and establishing the general environmental framework and monitoring the plans and activities of the cities and municipalities.

• Citizens and companies residing or having activities in the port area, who have been heard in the planning process or who have participated in pilot projects at the waterfront.

1.5 From visions to realization

The first steps of the regeneration of the port of Aalborg were taken in the 1990’s, when the transformation of the waterfront “between the bridges” in Aalborg was initiated, and the Lindholm Beachpark in NrSundby was established. This was followed by the transformation of a former industrial area in NrSundby to a mixed area of office and accommodation. At that time, the plans for the regeneration of the waterfront in Aalborg and NrSundby were formulated in “Fjordkataloget” in 1998. Fjordkataloget was a part of the Municipality Plan focusing on the planning and development of areas along the Limfjord. The regeneration of the port of Aalborg continued on the basis of the thoughts in the Fjordkataloget and is foreseen over the coming years to continue with the steps as indicated below for NrSundby and Aalborg.

NrSundby

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>The port section</th>
<th>Type of use after regeneration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988 - 1992</td>
<td>Lindholm Beachpark</td>
<td>Recreational area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Lindholm (DAC)</td>
<td>Residential area with business functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 - 2017</td>
<td>NrSundby Waterfront</td>
<td>Residential area with commercial and welfare functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 - (2021)</td>
<td>North Harbour</td>
<td>Residential and commercial area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018 - (2043)</td>
<td>Stigsborg I, II, and III</td>
<td>Residential area with mixed uses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Aalborg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>The port section</th>
<th>Type of use after regeneration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990 - 2005:</td>
<td>Between the bridges</td>
<td>Mixed office and residential area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 - 2011</td>
<td>Central waterfront</td>
<td>Recreational area with cultural functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 - 2014</td>
<td>House of Music</td>
<td>Cultural functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 - (2025)</td>
<td>Eastern Harbour</td>
<td>Residential area with business and commercial functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 - 2017</td>
<td>Western Fjord park</td>
<td>Recreational area with public bathing park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 - (2025)</td>
<td>Spriten</td>
<td>Area with cultural and some residential functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 - (2025)</td>
<td>Western harbour</td>
<td>Residential area with business activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different implementation models have been used during the process of regeneration, but they have all been based on broad cooperation model with various degrees of local participation in planning and implementation and on combinations of local plans for the development of the areas and a flexible approach to the concrete implementation of the plans.

Three major cultural institutions (Nordkraft, House of Music, and the Utzon Centre) have been established along the central waterfront, all based on local initiatives, funding from the City and from local and national charitable funds, and on a defined demand for the various facilities and premises from local actors in the fields of culture, sport and education. These processes have been managed and supported by the City, the City Mayor and by a Steering Group with participation from various parts of the City administration.

Green and recreational areas have been made in various places both at the NrSundby and the Aalborg side of the Limfjord. One of them is at the central waterfront where the City has established an open park area with facilities for sport and a bathing place just next to the city centre. These areas have been financed by the City, who owned the land after taking over from Port of Aalborg.

Housing and mixed areas have been developed according to the plans with participation of architects, developers and construction companies after tendering processes. Pilot project and intermediate activities have in many cases been used to open up the port areas for the public.
1.6 Overall results and outcomes

After the regeneration of the waterfront, until now, it may be argued that the results are already and will be rather close to the vision and the goals as described in Fjordkataloget. After having conducted and compared 15 interviews with representatives of key stakeholders, the dominating view has been that the goals, mentioned above, have been achieved to a high and at least to a very satisfactory extent.

This doesn’t mean that all goals are perfectly achieved and that there are no critical voices, but the overall impression is very positive. There seems to be a consensus that the first built up area (Between the bridges in Aalborg) was not a success. This area was planned as a lively, dense quarter with café’s and shops, but according to many interviewees, the density became too high with little space left along the fjord and with very little outdoor life. Probably as a reaction to this, there has been a strengthened focus on keeping space open for recreational purposes, particularly in the neighboring area to the East (Central harborfront in Aalborg).

No important deviations from the vision and overall goals have been identified through the desk study or by interviewees, but some have pointed to the risk of getting an undesirably high density in the Eastern Harbour that is presently still under construction and in the planned Stigsborg area in NrSundby. Still this does not conflict with the visions and the goals that were formulated 20 years ago in Fjordkataloget.

There have of course been changes in concrete plans underway, both to the worse and the better, but on balance, it has been the assessment of the overwhelming majority of the contacted stakeholders that the net result is better than expected and originally planned.

1.7 Social and identity impacts

No enterprise nor any economic activities have been forced to close or move out of the Port of Aalborg to give space for the regeneration. One single company, a cold store moved to the new port 10 km East of Aalborg (not to be confused with Eastern Harbour of the former Port of Aalborg), because this location was better for them. Thus, there has not been any losses of jobs and economic activity because of relocation and regeneration of the port.

On the other hand, the new activities along the waterfront has had a significant impact in terms of both new activities and jobs, but also impacts in line with all the formulated goals and visions. An improved visual appearance, common urban spaces and recreational facilities have been established at the harbor front, and the access from the city to the waterfront has considerably improved. Together with the establishment of significant cultural institutions, this has improved urban qualities and the image of Aalborg. According to interviewees, it has had a clear impact on the identity of the city and its citizens and strengthened the City as a regional center for culture, trade, business and tourism. The Music House, the Nordkraft, and the Utzon Centre have all significantly contributed to this, and great expectations are attached to a major cultural project at the former distillery, Spritten, (West of “Between the Bridges” in Aalborg).
In addition, the establishment of a university campus and a large amount of student accommodation at the central waterfront in Aalborg improves the attractiveness of Aalborg as a university city and contributed to a more lively waterfront. This is considered of significant importance for the strengthening of the image of Aalborg as an attractive city for knowledge-based industries.

1.8 Main barriers and drivers

A main challenge in the process of regeneration was the barrier between the city and the central port area in terms of a four-lane road, Nyhavnsgade. After discussions at all levels, this was solved by following and adjusting original plans of replacing the existing four lane road with a two-lane road with a carriageway. This restricted the road traffic, but it made it easy for pedestrians to cross the road, which is not considered a barrier today. The final decision of this radical and controversial change was taken after the city council election 2005 where this road was extensively discussed in the election campaigns.

Funding has also been an important barrier, particularly for the major cultural projects that were considered beyond the capacity of the city. The funding challenges were in many cases resolved by a combination of identifying long term leases as a guarantee for private and institutional investors and by involving large charitable funds with a focus on architecture and local development.

The main driver of the transformation process has been a strong common will among planners, politicians and stakeholders in general to transform the city and its old-fashioned and heavy industrial image and to make the city attractive for citizens, students and businesses. In spite of some disagreements, there has been a broad consensus about and support to this development direction.

Other drivers that have been mentioned by several stakeholders were the strong and stable team of planners, a high confidence by the politicians to the planners, a good culture of cooperation between the various city departments, but also between the city and the private stakeholders. A strong political leadership of the city during the regeneration period has also been mentioned by many interviewees as a strong and important driver, particularly in critical phases of the regeneration.

The improved economic conditions and a period of population growth in Aalborg has also contributed to a successful regeneration. There has been a growing demand for housing, which has reduced the risk of decreasing investment activities and deteriorating quality levels of new constructions.

The following examples of positive synergies and catalysts have also been identified:

- Public involvement and funding from the city encourages private investors and may serve as a bridge builder between various private investors.

- Public-private cooperation has been a catalyst for the development. This has been applied in many different versions, and a new model involving a closer cooperation with the formation of a “development company” owned by the city planning authority (49%) an investors and a contracting group (together 51%), has been developed and is applied in the new residential area, Stigsborg, in NrSundby.
• A phased approach to regeneration and the use of pilot projects to open port areas up for the public have contributed to a successful process.

• The first success is important for a continued, positive development (The good examples are Nordkraft and the House of Music).

1.9 Status of data collections and analysis
Fifteen personal interviews with key stakeholders including representatives of architects, investors and construction companies have been conducted and many articles and documents have been collected and screened. We are now in the process of analysis, final interviews, and reporting according to the time plan.