

# Case: Volunteer Center Middelfart and [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk)

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## Introduction

In the following, the Middelfart Volunteer Center and one of the Volunteer Center's newest initiatives: [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) is presented. The article starts with a short introduction to Middelfart Municipality and volunteering in general in Denmark and specifically in Middelfart to give an insight into which *Mikropolis* the project takes place. The description also contains a definition of voluntary social work, which is the area within the Volunteer Center works. The concept of the Volunteer Center concept is described. The Volunteer Center concept itself contains many aspects of activities that promote Micropolis, as the Volunteer Center was created to promote associations and volunteering. The Volunteer Center has just launched the project [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) which supports active citizenship and helps to make the identity of the local association even more visible.

## Middelfart Municipality

Volunteer Center Middelfart is located in Middelfart Municipality. Middelfart Municipality is a municipality located in the western part of Funen in Denmark and extends over an area of approx. 297 square kilometres and includes both urban and rural areas. Middelfart Municipality is strategically located on the Little Belt, which separates Funen and Jutland. The municipality's largest city is Middelfart, which serves as the administrative centre. In the municipality, there is a varied business community that spans different sectors such as e.g. trade, tourism, production and maritime activities. With its location on the Little Belt, the municipality has a strong maritime tradition and houses several maritime companies and port facilities. Middelfart Municipality offers a combined environment of urban life and natural surroundings and gives its inhabitants the opportunity to enjoy both cultural and recreational activities. According to data from Statistics Denmark, Middelfart Municipality had a population of 38,133 inhabitants per 1 January 2021.

## Volunteering in Middelfart Municipality

Volunteering and civil society organisations have a long tradition related to the development of the welfare state in Denmark and today there are approximately 100,000 local and national organisations and foundations. 41% of Danes do volunteer work at any given time, spending 336 million hours volunteering every year. 63 % of Danes have at some point been active in volunteer work within the last five years<sup>1</sup>.

In Middelfart there are almost 100 voluntary social associations - in addition to this there are other types of associations within sports, culture and leisure. The majority of the voluntary social associations are members of the local Volunteer Center: Frivilligcenter Middelfart (Volunteer Center Middelfart)..

Voluntary Center Middelfart's primary members are voluntary social associations. Voluntary social work is defined in this article as: *voluntary work (often in the voluntary sector) that aims to provide individuals or groups with increased welfare and care and to alleviate social and health problems* (Jørgensen et al., 2018).

The voluntary social area can include both voluntary associations and organisations whose purpose is to increase the welfare of vulnerable citizens, and voluntary associations and organisations with a social aim which, in addition to having general communities for all citizens, also take social responsibility to include a vulnerable target group in their activities. General communities are understood as communities that are for all citizens, whereas limited communities are typically for a specific group of citizens (Rambøll, 2020). The voluntary social area usually covers activities within the social area, e.g. activities targeted at vulnerable children, young people and adults and people in vulnerable positions. In addition, the voluntary social area covers certain activities within the elderly area, the health area and the integration area (Jørgensen et al., 2018; Rambøll, 2017).

### **Volunteer Center Middelfart**

Volunteer Center Middelfart is a Danish non-profit and non-governmental association founded in 2009 and located in the municipality of Middelfart. The Volunteer Center's top management consists of a democratically elected board of, made up of representatives from the voluntary social associations and a representative appointed by the municipality. There are 80 volunteer centres in Denmark. The Volunteer Centers receive a basic annual funding of 47,000 Euros from the Danish state and an equivalent (or higher amount) from the municipality they are located in. The Volunteer Center in Middelfart has one employee (30 hours) and a flexible job employee (7 hours). In addition, a handful of volunteers work with e.g. IT, janitor and accounting.

The purpose of the Volunteer Center is to serve as a centralised hub that connects individuals who are interested in volunteering with organisations and opportunities that align with their interests and skills thereby playing a vital role in facilitating volunteerism and community engagement. The Volunteer Center provides a range of services and resources to support both volunteers and organisations seeking volunteers.

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<sup>1</sup> VIVE, The volunteer survey 2020, <https://www.vive.dk/da/udgivelser/frivillighedsundersogelsen-2020-16186/>

Some of the key purposes of the Volunteer Center:

1. Volunteer Matching: gathering of information about individuals interested in volunteering and connecting them with organisations that need their assistance. They assess volunteers' skills, interests, availability, and preferences to find suitable opportunities.
2. Resource and Referral: providing a wealth of information and resources about volunteer opportunities, nonprofit organisations, and community initiatives - hereby acting as a central repository of information, helping individuals navigate the volunteering landscape and find relevant opportunities.
3. Volunteer Training and Support: offering training programs to equip volunteers with the necessary skills and knowledge for their chosen roles e.g. providing workshops, webinars, or orientation sessions to enhance volunteers' effectiveness and ensure a positive volunteering experience.
4. Volunteer Management: assisting nonprofit organisations in managing their volunteer programs effectively. Providing guidance on volunteer recruitment, screening, training, and retention strategies.
5. Community Engagement and Advocacy: playing a broader role in promoting volunteerism and community engagement. Raising awareness about the importance of volunteering, advocating for volunteer-friendly policies, and collaborating with local organisations, government agencies, and businesses to address community needs.
6. Disaster Response and Emergency Support: In times of disasters or emergencies, the Volunteer Center serves as critical coordination hubs - mobilising and deploying volunteers to assist with relief efforts, ensuring an organised and efficient response to crises e.g. COVID and Ukrainian refugees..
7. Impact Measurement and Recognition: tracking and measuring the impact of volunteer activities and initiatives. Assessing the outcomes and benefits of volunteering for both individuals and the community. Additionally, recognizing and celebrating volunteers for their contributions, highlighting their achievements and inspiring others to get involved.
8. Counselling and sparring conversations with citizens who: a) seek help in the voluntary social association world, b) wish to participate in the associations' activities and c) citizens who want to start new projects.

Overall, the Volunteer Center acts as catalyst for social change by connecting volunteers with meaningful opportunities, supporting organisations in their volunteer management efforts, and fostering a culture of civic engagement and community service through:

- Knowledge building & knowledge sharing
- Capacity building & consultancy
- Partnerships and Networking with key stakeholders
- Visibility & dissemination of social volunteer work
- Matchmaking between citizens and activities/help
- Interest Safeguarding & advocacy

**Project Socialkompass.dk**

**Project goal**

The Volunteer Centers in Denmark have for many years lacked a tool which quickly gives an overview over the many activities and offers from the voluntary social associations and from the municipality (unvisited municipal offers). Not having the overview of opportunities made it difficult to provide good help to people who wanted to participate in activities or needed the associations' services in connection with illnesses or life challenges. Likewise, it was difficult for the Volunteer Center to quickly form an overview of which associations were looking for volunteers and for what purpose.

The project's aim was therefore to create a digital platform which could:

- provide an overall overview of offers in the voluntary association
- be used via keywords such as: community, loneliness, specific illness, etc.
- provide an overall overview of unvisited municipal opportunities for help - such as smoking cessation courses, weight loss courses, brain injury coordinator, etc.
- provide an overall overview of which associations lack volunteers and for which tasks they lack volunteers

All with the higher purpose of promoting *inclusion, promoting access to offers and supporting active citizenship and volunteering.*

In Aarhus, one of the largest cities in Denmark, the first prototype was developed [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) - and after testing and operating it for a year, the Danish government decided that they would like to have the platform spread throughout Denmark - and initially 20 selected volunteer centres. Middelfart Volunteer Center signed up as one of the first to implement the new digital platform.

### **What is socialkompas.dk?**

Socialkompas is a digital platform that brings together social services for the benefit of citizens, civil society and municipalities. The portal is aimed at relatives, associations or municipal employees and other professionals who need to refer citizens to voluntary social services, but also to citizens who themselves seek help and support. All voluntary, social and health-related offers as well as open and free municipal offers in Middelfart Municipality are brought together in the new portal.

On the digital platform, the local voluntary association can also look for new volunteers, parents can find offers and help for their children and relatives can seek advice and guidance. You can search by subject words such as e.g. loneliness, overweight, anxiety, suicide, communities or exercise - and you can search by geography to see what is on offer in your local area.

### **Results that have been achieved and the benefits the project gave to the participants and to the local community**

So far, more than 2,000 offers and communities can be found on Socialkompas.dk nationwide. In Middelfart Municipality, the number approaches 100 local offers - a number that grows day by day. In addition to the 100 local offers - the many national virtual and online offers that citizens of Middelfart Municipality can make use of are also listed. This is useful if you, as a person, for example, have a challenge or need help in an area where there is no local offer - it could be, for example, a special genetic disease, transvestism or are affected by infant mortality. Then there is an opportunity to find help in some of the

national virtual online offers and communities - or see if there is an offer in one of the surrounding municipalities.

### **Participants and partners**

Before [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) could go into the air, the following had to be carried out:

- Application to Middelfart Municipality for financial support (it was a requirement from the government that there was co-financing of at least 2700 Euro from the local municipality - this would trigger a grant from the government also of 2700 Euro)
- Preparation of cooperation agreement between Middelfart Municipality and Volunteer Center Middelfart. This was essential because: a) all unvisited municipal offers had to be put into the platform, b) employees in the municipality had to be informed that there was a platform that they could use in their work with citizens who needed help.
- Preparation of cooperation agreement between FRISE and The Volunteer Center in order to get the platform free of charge.

The city council decided to support the project with 2700 Euro in 2023 as well with 2700 Euro in 2024. At the same time The volunteer Center began to cooperate with the municipality's volunteer consultant<sup>2</sup>. In cooperation, a plan was prepared for how the voluntary social associations should be involved and how the municipal employees should be involved - both with regard to entering offers but also in connection with using the platform. A joint plan for PR of the platform was also made.

### **When and how was it organised?**

In December 2022, the Volunteer Center began contacting all the associations systematically - all associations were invited individually to be taught how to put their offers on the website. In addition, workshops were held where the associations could come and hear more about the platform in plenary. Both the municipal volunteer consultant and the managers of the Volunteer Center offered to come and give a presentation of [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) to both municipal bodies and voluntary social associations.

### **Activities that were successfully accomplished:**

- Cooperation with Middelfart Municipality and the municipal volunteer consultant
- Financial grant from Middelfart Municipality and the Danish state
- The associations' and municipal employees' interest in participating in the project and entering their offers in the database
- Individual training for each association/municipal employee
- Holding a joint workshop in relation to the use of the platform
- The associations' interest in the Volunteer Center's presentation about the platform
- Continuous deployment, operation, updating and marketing of the platform

### **Future plans**

Already now, associations can search for volunteers at [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk). However, the plan is that [www.frivilligjob.dk](http://www.frivilligjob.dk) becomes an integral part of [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk).

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<sup>2</sup> Volunteer consultants are employed in Danish municipalities to build bridges between municipal actors and the world of voluntary associations.

[www.frivilligjob.dk](http://www.frivilligjob.dk) is the preferred internet tool for finding volunteer opportunities in Denmark. The vision behind [www.frivilligjob.dk](http://www.frivilligjob.dk) is to strengthen communities by making it easier for people and good causes to connect. By showing the almost unlimited volunteer possibilities, it inspires people to find the volunteer opportunity that matches their interests and skills.

Every day you will find more than 2.000 volunteer opportunities from all over the country, as Frivilligjob.dk is the preferred online recruitment tool for hundreds of different Danish organisations. Side by side with entries from traditional organisations like the Red Cross and the Danish Scouts you will find entries from grassroots organisations, social enterprises and projects undertaken by public institutions. [www.frivilligjob.dk](http://www.frivilligjob.dk) is free to use, as it is important to us that everyone has the opportunity to use Frivilligjob.dk - including small and emerging associations that don't have the means to advertise elsewhere.

### **How is the Voluntary Center and [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) connected with the idea of Micropolis?**

Definition of Micropolis in the Erasmus project:

*:" a city district or a town that has successfully created it's strong, inclusive local identity and an active participation and cooperation of inhabitants, so that they can function as ancient „polis” – the fully democratic, local community where everybody is involved”*

Middelfart Volunteer Center and [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) is all about Micropolis because both activities promote voluntarism. Both activities make it easier for citizens to find and get help from the voluntary social associations.

Volunteer involvement is fundamental to a healthy and democratic society. It promotes civic engagement and active participation in shaping the society we want. It gives everyone a voice and the space to contribute to the quality of life in communities. Volunteers along a wide spectrum of engagement play a key role in building community - their efforts are collectively creating the community they want to live in. Volunteerism identifies and supports local strengths and assets to respond to community challenges while strengthening the social fabric.

Volunteering is believed to be about engagement in and taking responsibility for activities in the local community, and it is seen as relational in the sense that it builds relations between people (between collaborating volunteers, and between the volunteer and the beneficiary).

As a result, volunteering promotes democracy and social/community cohesion, as it involves arbitration between potentially conflicting interests, concern for the common good and decision making. Furthermore both the activities related to Volunteer Center Middelfart and [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) supports more inclusion for those citizens who have limited resources.

The Volunteer Center also supports and develops the voluntary associations, including a large number of disease and patient associations. These associations work in different ways

to strengthen physical and mental health and well-being. In addition, participation in voluntary work in itself provides increased health and well-being, because you become part of a community and feel the meaningfulness of contributing.

Open, inclusive, local communities are also essential for social sustainability. Such communities strengthen trust between people and increase "social capital". The purpose of Frivilligcenter Middelfart and [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) is precisely to support, promote and make visible open, inclusive, local initiatives, communities and associations in Middelfart.

The Volunteer Center and [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) works specifically to promote and spread the "association" as a form of organisation in order to thereby support open communities and thereby reduce the risk of the development of parallel societies, local conflicts, loneliness and isolation. Volunteer Center Middelfart works to create an active associational life. An active associational life has a great democratic value. Association as a form of organisation supports open, inclusive, representative decision-making processes at all levels in society.

The Volunteer Center and [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) establish and support partnerships for action across sectors, but particularly across actors within one sector – civil society. This happens i.a. through our targeted work to establish cooperation and networks between the associations. This is so that experiences, ideas and knowledge can be exchanged and shared, and joint projects and initiatives can be established. In this way, the associations can collectively lift the pack and contribute to sustainable development.

### **What inspiring/innovative conclusions and ideas can we take from this project?**

#### **Volunteer Center Middelfart**

Creating a visible centre for volunteering - where both individuals, associations, municipalities, businesses and other actors can get help to initiate initiatives and network activities for people who need help - helps to *create a strong, inclusive local identity and promote active participation and cooperation of inhabitants*. A Volunteer Center - where citizens can see the possibilities to participate in voluntary work and get advice and guidance on how they can get involved, supports the local community and promotes the opportunity for local involvement.

#### **[www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk)**

With the help of a relatively simple digital platform, it is possible to form an overview of both physical and virtual offers within the volunteer area and unvisited municipal offers. The digital platform gives, for the first time ever, the opportunity to collect all offers for citizens in one place and to make visible the voluntary jobs associated with the voluntary social associations. Suddenly, a large map with endless possibilities emerges and active citizenship and participation in the local community is promoted.

#### **Link to the websites**

[www.frivilligcentermiddelfart.dk](http://www.frivilligcentermiddelfart.dk) [www.socialkompas.dk](http://www.socialkompas.dk) and [www.frivilligjob.dk](http://www.frivilligjob.dk)

**Sources:**

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