

### PROACTIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE

Senior Citizens' Councils are proactive and invite citizens to debate events and make suggestions directly to the politicians. This helps increase citizens' engagement in local decision-making on elderly policy by ensuring that dialogue and cooperation between the elderly and the local council are promoted, maintained and expanded.

The SCC members are critical of any deterioration of conditions for senior citizens, but also view every issue as a whole and respect that it may be necessary for politicians to prioritise and make tough choices. SCCs are not interest groups working unilaterally to promote the immediate interests of their immediate constituents; rather the decisions which the SCCs influence can reach many years into the future and are thus also important for future generations of elderly people. Likewise, the SCCs are aware of latent conflicts between the generations and seek to avoid this through dialogue with youth organisations.

### REAL IMPACT

A national survey among SCCs chairmen, civil servants and local politicians show that all three parties generally agree that hearing statements from SCCs are taken seriously by city councils and that SCCs have a real impact on local politicians' decisions. Most importantly, the SCCs have proven their worth, merit, and legitimacy. Inspired by the work and success of the SCCs, the Danish Parliament has subsequently passed legislation on Councils of the Disabled and Integration Councils in municipalities, respectively.

### MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about statutory, elected Senior Citizens' Councils in Denmark visit the website of the National Association of Senior Citizens Councils or contact the secretariat:

[danske-aeldreraad.dk/english/](http://danske-aeldreraad.dk/english/)  
[info@danske-aeldreraad.dk](mailto:info@danske-aeldreraad.dk)  
tel. +45 38770160

## STATUTORY ELECTED SENIOR CITIZENS' COUNCILS



Denmark is recognised as a country that contributes to the development and dissemination of **participatory democracy**. The statutory, elected Senior Citizens' Councils in local government are one **successful and well-integrated example** of this.



## **PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY**

Mutual understanding and respect across generations is crucial for the cohesive force of any society. However, the status and role of elderly people vary across cultures - in Western culture, the elderly are often at risk of being left out of the decision-making process because people of working age are regarded as 'more valuable' and more 'useful'. In Denmark, only few 70+ year-old citizens are elected for decision-making bodies in government and municipalities and thus the elderly have gone without representation.

Approximately 20% of the Danish population is elderly and the number is increasing; in 2030 it will be about 27%. Senior citizens today are physical well-functioning until high up in age and many of them want to contribute to society. With a diverse elderly population, it is important to ensure that society's systems and services are developed in collaboration with representatives of the elderly.



## **GRASSROOTS INITIATIVE TO LEGISLATION**

In the 1990s, as a protest against the lack of involvement in local decision-making processes, senior citizens organisations established by voluntary means local cooperation forums in municipalities and named these forums Senior Citizens' Councils (SCCs). In 1990, citizen involvement was a completely new mode of collaboration for politicians and civil servants. But since then, it has developed into a legitimate form of cooperation between government and civil society.

The Danish government has passed legislation to make SCCs a statutory requirement in all municipalities, and today there are SCCs in all municipalities in Denmark, and the NGO National Association of Senior Citizens' Councils, although politically independent, is supported by the Danish Government.

## **DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED**

The 98 SCCs in Denmark, one in each municipality, comprise around 1000 members, all of whom have a broad knowledge of elderly people's way of living - their needs, dreams, and potentials. Some other countries have somewhat similar initiatives but only in Denmark are SCC members elected by, and among, the local senior citizens in a democratic and transparent process.

All 60+ year-old citizens are eligible to run and to vote for a seat in the local SCC. The candidates elected are in their 60s, 70s and 80s and equally split between men and women. Being a member of a SCC is a much-coveted position: Often there is a contested election and on average turnout for SCCs elections is 50 %. Many of the members of the SCCs have a large network and deep roots in the local community through a long working life or as active members in local associations and clubs.



## **OBLIGATION TO CONSULT**

According to Danish law, city government councils are obliged to consult the local SCC before a final decision is made on any issue relevant to the elderly population. Typical matters would be primary health care, traffic planning, infrastructure, cultural policy, and the standard of public service for the elderly and for disabled people. Most important, however, is the SCC's potential influence on the city council's proposal of the municipal budget for the following year.

In addition to consulting the local SCC in formal decision-making processes, many local city councils involve the SCC earlier in the process, such as in the planning phase of the construction of new care housing, relocation of bus stops, developing special measures for people with Alzheimer's, etc. The SCCs are a well-established statutory mechanism of participatory democracy which contributes constructively to promoting and supporting politicians' and administrations' focus on elderly citizens' needs, wishes, and resources.