

IFHP On the Road: Social Sustainability in practice, Aalborg, April 11th, 2019

Social sustainability in practice was the headline, when on April 11th, 70 participants met in Aalborg, Denmark's 4th largest city (140.000 inhabitants). Participants, representing city departments, private social organizations and housing entrepreneurs, discussed how cities can provide the basis for a good life for all citizens, including socially marginalized and other vulnerable people.

To do so, participants first had to reflect on the complex nature of social sustainability. Marie Stender from the [Danish Building Research Institute](#) noted, that understanding what makes a city a socially sustainable city is difficult, as it changes over time and has varying characteristics in different places and scales of the city. She also pointed out the risk of "social washing", but ultimately argued that we must deal more systematically with the social dimension when building and renewing cities.

Ensuring an ever-improving degree of liveability and inclusivity is one of several central aspects that are common to all places. At the same time, however, social sustainability is highly contextual and dependent on the social fabric of a given city. In the case of Aalborg, participants reflected on how it would be possible to make the city liveable and inclusive for all, when living expenses are rising and the availability of low-income housing and unskilled jobs are declining, as the city renews.



Above: IFHP CEO, Morten Nielsen, presents the Social Cities Index and its relation to the UN SDG #11



Above: During a city walk, the participants of the conference visited the neighborhood Vestbyen.

Aalborg Municipality participates in IFHP's flagship programme Social Cities ([link](#)) and is developing an index that provides insight on the facts that make up social sustainability in Aalborg. The insights are being used in Aalborg to set the baseline for a more systematic and strategic way of working on this often slightly overlooked dimension of urban sustainable development. The participants stressed, with different perspectives, that social sustainability is, in its abstract sense, a combination of the single individual's quality of life and the common quality of life within the housing buildings, the neighbourhood and the city as a whole.

The conference showed how important cross-sectoral collaboration is to the improvement of social sustainability. Several concrete examples were presented, which showcased multi-stakeholder initiatives aimed at the betterment of Aalborg's social fabric. For example, private initiatives like Raw & Good, which offers young people a place to meet and learn a craft while finding out what they want to do with their lives in the future. General housing associations shared several initiatives taken to create platforms, where residents, voluntary organizations and associations, as well as the municipality, solve challenges together, e.g. in the form of health houses, sharing schemes, and common eating.

The debates showed that collaboration among the city's stakeholders is alpha and omega to creating concrete results. But to achieve even greater results, there is an increasing need for evaluation that can strengthen the focus of the strategic direction. There is a growing need to take time for common pit stops and learn together along the way. Here, the local IFHP Social City Index for Aalborg provided a good starting point, as it provides the individual-oriented approach laid down in social legislation, the general housing organizations and private associations and companies with a holistic, collaborative and strategic action orientated view of Aalborg city. Thereby, it sets a clear framework and baseline for dialogue and cross-sectoral action towards creating a more inclusive and socially sustainable city.

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Above: In the neighborhood Østre Havn, participants visited an open study room created to give space to young professionals and students as a part of the new multi-functional area.