

**Associationalism for A Hundred and Fifty Years - and still  
alive and kicking: Some reflections on the Danish civil society**

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## **Associationalism for A Hundred and Fifty Years - and still alive and kicking: Some reflections on the Danish civil society \***

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Associationalism is an old doctrine with roots in various strings of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century European social and political theory. It has its origins in the works of, among others, Tocqueville, Proudhon, Durkheim, and Duguit in France, the English pluralists (Cole, Figgis, Laski, Barker, and Maitland), and von Gierke in Germany. In other words, it is a genuine European social theory. Associationalism has been revitalised in recent years, mainly in a British context and most notably by Paul Hirst (1994; 1997a; 1997b) but also in some important contributions in the USA. (Cohen and Rogers 1995). This history of the theoretical development of associationalism is probably quite familiar to most scholars interested in this area of social and political theory. It is far less known that associationalism as a model of governance has been developed and implemented as a political practice in Denmark for more than a hundred years. This is the central concern in this article.

The purpose of the article is twofold: First we shall demonstrate that associationalism is not an old-fashioned idea or pure utopia. As already indicated, associationalism is a model of governance, which has a long tradition in Danish society. It contributes to a strengthening of the democratic aspect in education, social and cultural life and other welfare areas. The second purpose concerns the state-civil society relationship. By examining some associational features of the Danish society we seek to point out that civil society did not emerge from nothing. Civil society is not an autonomous sphere clearly separated from the state, on the contrary, it is a sphere of social life dependent on the state. The state is the precondition of the development of civil society. Thus we reject the conception of civil society which can be found in much of the work on civil society (e.g. Cohen & Arato 1992; Habermas 1996).

The structure of the article is the following: First we outline the history of the rise of associational principles in Denmark going back to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the time of absolutism. We proceed with an overview of the development of associationalism and see how Denmark becomes a

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representative democracy supplemented with some associational features. It is beyond the scope of this article to outline the quite complex model of governance we find in Denmark. Rather we shall limit ourselves to illustrating the associative dimension by examining more closely two areas in particular: First we briefly look into primary and secondary education which, surprising to many, has an element of associationalism. Secondly, and more extended, we examine social and cultural activities such as sport, youth political organizations, religious organizations, various cultural organizations, disability organizations and others - social activities which from the point-of-view of the state can be called cultural political activities. Finally, we shall discuss the problems and prospect of associationalism in the future in the Danish society. Will associationalism be a path to help out the Danes with their problems with immigrants and asylum seekers?

### ***The emergence of civil society and voluntary associations in a Danish context***

Civil society is not a given; nor did it exist as an entity prior to the state. Civil society is a modern phenomenon created by the modern state (Hegel 1991[1821]). Before the modern state Europe contained a number of different state forms coexisting and competing with each other. None of these state forms such as the feudal state, the stände-staat, the church, the city-states or the city-leagues contained a civil society in the modern sense of the word. Civil society is a sphere separated from, but conditioned by the state. This sphere developed with the transition to the modern territorial state in late-renaissance Europe. One important element in this development was the restructuring of the defences of the states. New types of military technologies, fortifications, tactics, siege techniques were adapted to existing technologies, but this process required capital. This stimulated the emergence of a money economy and a capitalist market. Kings stimulated this development by extending the use of a currency to a territory so that they could extract resources from (civil-) society in order to strengthen the state. In order to tax people, surveillance and control are necessary. This required developing an administration, civil servants and a codified law. Consequently, the development of the modern state created conditions of a sphere in which the individual becomes a person with some rights and obligations based upon a law, which is given and guaranteed by the state. In civil society each individual can seek to fulfil his needs and satisfaction, but this cannot be accomplished to a full extent without reference to others. And, as Hegel adds, 'these others are therefore means to the end of the particular ... and through its reference to others, the particular end takes on the form of universality, and gains satisfaction by simultaneously satisfying the welfare of others' (Hegel 1991 [1821]: 220-21). Hegel's civil society is placed

between the family and the state, and for Hegel civil society is mainly the market economy. Civil society is the realm in which individuals exist as persons. They own private property, and they can decide their own life-activities according to needs and interests. There is, however, more to civil society than the market also in a Hegelian sense. In Hegel's work civil society also expresses genuine social relationships between people and gives rise to a 'principle of universality' within civil society. Later in European thinking we see a development towards the distinction between state, market and civil society where civil society is separated from the market. Civil society is now social relations determined neither by the state, nor by the utilitarian exchange relations of the market. This is seen in various corners of sociological theory by, for instance, Durkheim, Tönnies, Gramsci, and also by more modern thinkers like Habermas, Cohen and Arato. This article operates with the distinction between state and civil society and consequently, the market is here contained in the notion of civil society. In this context, civil society is not what is left after we have defined the state and the market. On the contrary, civil society includes individuals, corporate bodies, associations, and large and complex organizations.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the changes that gradually led to the rise of the modern state and civil society in Denmark go back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the advent of absolutism in 1660 is a crucial event. Absolutism in Denmark occurred as an unintended consequence of the War against Sweden. The king had outmanoeuvred the nobility and forced through absolutism as a response to the defeat and as a way of reconstructing the defence and cohesion of Denmark. With the introduction of absolutism the external and internal sovereignty fused into one subject - the king's person. The various estates were deprived of their privileges; even the old nobility was deprived of most privileges. The king was now the sovereign active subject and society/the people had become a passive object. In practice the mediating link between king and subject was the government official and the civil servants. This was codified in the Royal Law.<sup>2</sup> This strict separation of king (state) and people (society) mediated by the civil servants and the bureaucracy created a more transparent society and transformed the existing structure of closed feudal spheres into one public social sphere. Here we find the germ to the civil society, which only became full-grown when the modern nation-state developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

During the years of absolutist rule, we see a further development and extension of the civil society. An indicator is the emergence of voluntary associations, which took place already from the late 18<sup>th</sup>

century. No associations could develop without some acceptance from the state. Censorship still existed but the state remained silent as long as it found the associations useful for its own purposes, or as long as they did not undermine the absolutist rule.

The state had an interest in this development not at least because many of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century associations united people from different professions and estates and different parts of the country in common patriotism. This patriotism as a common ideological denominator generated a stronger cohesion, which was crucial for keeping together the Danish unitary state which consisted of the present Denmark, Norway, Iceland, the Faroes, Greenland, Schleswig, and Holstein. It strengthened the country against external enemies. An example is the 'Farm household society' (Landhusholdningsselskabet) founded in 1769 with the purpose of propagating knowledge and know-how to peasants. The members were mainly civil servants in the upper part of the state bureaucracy and the businessmen in Copenhagen. Also the members' background indicates a clear relationship between the state and the association.

A number of associations were created with direct support from the government. Thus the 'Farm household society' was supported with direct subsidies and free postage. Also the state provided buildings for its meetings and office. Apart from the patriotic element the state had a great interest in motivating the conservative peasants to use more modern technologies. The entire economic foundation of the Danish state was the agricultural sector. Consequently, it was vital to the state to encourage and educate the peasants by supporting all local initiatives aiming at strengthening the agriculture of the country. During the first half of the 19th century the state and the king supported many other associations with the aim to reduce and prevent poverty or to generate better conditions for businesses.

The smaller associations or 'clubs' did not have the same direct relationship to the state. They were social, scientific or aesthetic in purpose, and did not as such oppose or support the state. They were, however, in a longer perspective important in developing public opinion (Clemmensen 1987:31).

Gradually, by involvement in societal matters, these associations became more politicized and more anti-aristocratic, and this created more self-consciousness among the new classes – the bourgeoisie

and the petit bourgeoisie including the new farmers. The increasing politicization was stopped by a setback in the otherwise liberal situation in the country in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In the period between 1800 and 1840 a large number of political and religious associations saw the light of the day. King Frederik VI decided in 1831 to introduce the Consultative Provincial Assemblies in Holstein, Schleswig, Jutland and the islands. Only three groups were allowed to vote: Landowners, landlords in the towns and property-owners in the country, i.e. those who owned the larger farms. Together with the government, these assemblies introduced a system of local self-government in Copenhagen (1837), in the market towns (1840) and the rural municipalities (1841). These reforms provided the institutional preconditions of a public sphere with a political content. New associations such as the 'Society for Appropriate Use of the Freedom of the Press' (Selskabet for trykkefrihedens rette brug) and the 'Reading Society 1835' (Læseselskabet 1835) are examples of more politicized associations. They were still mainly dominated by conservative and liberal civil servants and people from the liberal bourgeoisie and academic circles.

In contrast to these political associations the religious movements and associations which opposed the 'national' church succeeded in engaging a broader public. Various puritan and pietistic movements challenged the foundation of the official absolutist church ideology,<sup>3</sup> and the state made no attempt to prevent this development. The 1849 Constitution introduced freedom of religion, and the radical character of the movement was gradually reduced.

A strong politicization of the associations took place in the 1840s. The conflicts inherent in the state and society led to a political mobilization of the peasantry in alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie. In other words, the politicization must be seen as a result of the state and its hesitation to remove the last obstacles to a complete freeholder society of peasants. In particular, the peasants struggled to become recognized as equal members of the Danish State. Consequently, they protested against being the only class subject to conscription and demanded conscription for all men, citizenship rights and a smoother transition to become freeholder. The 'Rural District Associations (landkommunalforeningerne) and the 'Society of the Friends of the Peasants' (Bondevennernes selskab) were crucial in strengthening the self-consciousness of the peasantry. These associations were the political forums created for the political and social demands of the peasantry. The key agenda was general conscription and a removal of the feudal manorial system by the 'compulsory

transformation of the remaining leasehold farms to freehold ownership' (Bjørn 1990:285; Clemmensen 1987:127). The peasant and farmer organizations were far more effective than the liberal bourgeois associations as a channel for a social movement because the former had a stronger hierarchical organization with local committees.

Not only the peasants and the national liberal bourgeoisie organized in associations as instruments for political pressure. The old ruling class – the landowners – formed associations and so did the craftsmen and workers in towns. With the abolishment of the guild structure they had to counterbalance the increasing liberalism and the expansion of the free market which was a threat to their conditions of existence.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many associations developed as an aid to self-help. Small local banks and credit unions were established as voluntary associations. From 1810 and onwards, a number of local saving banks (sparekasser) emerged in most towns all over the country. Their only activity was savings, and these banks offered private solutions to social problems caused by the transition away from an agrarian society based upon a closed system with the copyholders tied to the landowners. Society moved towards a new agrarian structure with freeholders – an emerging new farming class. The very process of transformation brought about severe problems because many servants, orphans or single parents no longer had a security net. The old, almost feudal structure with strong communities protected the poor to some extent. This was no longer the case, and poor relief was very limited. The banks attempted to 'teach' and 'educate' the peasants and the poor good morals, a protestant ethic, and individualism. By hard work and saving they could buy land and become free. The members of these savings banks (sparekasser) and the executive committee were recruited among civil servants of the Absolutist State and the big landed proprietors. The members reflected the interest of the state which strongly supported these banks and accepted their establishment as voluntary associations, because from the point-of-view of the state they relieved the pressure on poor relief, and they contributed to making peasants, servants, etc., independent and self-reliant. After the abandonment of absolutism the development continued. Between 1865 and 1874, more than 250 local saving banks were created, and farmers and local primary school teachers now took over as the key persons in this process. Also co-operative stores and sick-benefit associations started as help to self-help organizations. The sick-benefit organizations emerged in the 1830s, formed by craftsmen who needed a replacement for the guild, which for centuries had

guaranteed the craftsman some social security and sick-benefit. The principle of voluntary sick-benefit associations spread to other groups in society, and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became crucial to most of the population. The liberal state found an advantage to this principle and supported it warmly. In order to improve the situation, the state issued the sick-benefit associational law in 1892. The associations were now officially recognized by the state, and the state contributed to the associations partly by paying a fixed amount per person supplemented with one fifth of the total member contributions. The associations paid when a member needed a doctor, a hospital or sick payment.

### ***The Constitution of 1849 and the 'Age of Associations'***

The Constitution of 1849 is crucial to the development of the associative structure of the Danish society. Here are two clauses of vital importance:

§92: Citizens shall, without previous permission, be free to form associations for any lawful purpose.

§93: Citizens shall, without previous permission, be at liberty to assemble unarmed. The police shall be entitled to be present at public meetings. Open-air meetings may be prohibited when it is feared that they may constitute a danger to the public peace.<sup>4</sup>

As demonstrated above, a number of voluntary associations developed before the 1849 Constitution. They contributed to the creation of a public sphere and some of them were important as channels for a critique of the absolutist regime. In general, however, most of these associations formed in the pre-constitutional period existed with a silent approval from the state because they took care of specific problems or functions which needed to be solved, e.g., education of the peasantry, poverty relief, etc. Moreover, in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most of them furnished the general feeling of patriotism in the country. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this patriotism turned into nationalism, and also here many of the associations helped to strengthen the country in this respect (Damsholt 1995).

Between 1866 and 1915, the role of the voluntary associations became even more important because the political life changed character. The big landowners gained greater power through



amendments to the 1849 Constitution. The government and power of the country was now in the hands of conservative forces – the big landowners and the civil servants. The revision of the Constitution in 1866 led to some democratic restrictions, which gave the voluntary associations considerable democratic importance (Gundelach & Torpe 1999:74). They functioned partly as pressure groups against the government, aiming at redemocratising the Constitution, and partly they were important because the very associations contained democratic structures and practices.

Thus the voluntary associations had an important role in sustaining the democratic structures, practices and ideals in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After their emergence in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, associations gradually developed more and more democratic structures. Each association was based upon certain democratic principles. The members were a ‘demos’ and a set of clauses and principles (a miniature constitution) was decided and passed by the members in a constituting meeting. Each association had an annual general meeting at which the old executive committee reported on the activities and accounts and a new executive committee was elected. This structure has survived, and even today it is an important pillar of the Danish democratic structure.

The history of the development of the associations in 19<sup>th</sup> century in Denmark cannot be completed without a look to the religious movements and their related associations. Many people living in the eastern part of Denmark took part in a religious revival in the 1820s, which through lay preaching urged personal acceptance of the Christian principles. However, in the 1850s and 1860s, facilitated by the 1849 Constitution, this revival became more widespread, and it divided into two variants. The Home Mission, originally established as a layman’s association in 1853, became a strong revival movement within the Danish National Church in the 1860s. Its popularity continued throughout the century and peaked in the 1890s. The Home Mission had its roots in Evangelicalism and was characterized by the demand for personal conversion. The other movement, Grundtvigianism, also developed during the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was based upon the priest N.F.S. Grundtvig’s belief that baptism, Holy Communion and Profession of Faith were the most important element of the concept of Christianity, and it became one of the most comprehensive popular movements in Danish history (only matched by the labour movement). As it spread, free schools and folk high school were established. Also a number of elective congregations as well as independent congregations began to appear. In contrast to the religious movements emerging in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these two groups did not oppose the Danish National Church as such.

They were both contained within it and had lasting effects on Danish society. They were more than religious movements: they established schools and youth clubs and were involved in the economic sphere as well. They took part in the foundation of the saving banks, dairy production and other economic activities (Clemmensen 1987:56-60). They were an important part of the 'great transformation' of the Danish society in the last three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has often been characterized as the 'age of associations'. The peasant movement with its involvement in political, cultural, religious and economic matters contributed to a transformation of the peasantry into a more self-conscious class of farmers. Combined with the emerging labour movement's growing size and strength in the breakthrough of industrialism in Denmark (Hyldtoft et al 1981; Hyldtoft 1984), this indicates a transformation of the country in terms of modes of production, financial structures, and class, organizational and democratic structures. From the 1870s, the working class began to organize, and within few decades became a force to be reckoned by the other classes.

The fundamental structure of the Danish society changed considerably during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from a feudal economy at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to a small-holder economy with farmers in particular but also craftsmen in a key role. After the abolishment of the law of adscription in 1788, which had tied the peasant to the estate, the small-holder economy with freeholders purchasing land developed. The flourishing grain trade made them quite wealthy, and more money meant more land to the freeholders. The many saving banks benefited from this economic boom, and many new freeholds were established (Hull Kristensen & Sabel 1997:357-58). When the Danish farmers were hit by a decrease in grain prices due to cheap grain from America, Australia and Russia, a deep reorganization of the Danish agrarian sector took place. A class and a sector of society embedded in a strong associational structure responded better to these changing external conditions than many others in Europe. The associational tradition was one crucial reason for the fast and efficient transition and reorganization of the Danish agricultural sector. The change from cultivation of plants to livestock farming saved the economy. Agricultural products accounted for 85-90% of the country's export and the new farming practices saved the export trade by this transition. The co-operative movement (dairies, slaughterhouses, bacon factories, saving banks, free schools, free congregations, folk high schools) was one of the most obvious signs of the successful restructuring with a point of departure in a special Danish variant of associationalism which took place in the

second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The principles of associationalism were found not only in the co-operatives, but also in the Church, the education system and in social and cultural areas. The old peasant culture was replaced by a more self-conscious and self-sufficient class of farmers with family farms in the centre.

What role did the state play in this whole transition period? The state as such did not intervene much, but provided the general conditions of existence for the farmers and their project. The Act of Freedom in 1857, property rights, the right to form associations were guaranteed by the state. In general, again, the state upheld the principle of self-help. The state generated some specific conditions for the development of civil society (including the market), to a large extent in interaction with the various actors and interests in civil society. Of course, as always, the state's rationale was higher than the individual interests in society: to be a strong and coherent state and society in order to maintain independence and sovereignty as a state. The state did not oppose the development of the farmers as a new and independent class. On the contrary, the state had for almost a century had an interest in this development, partly for military reasons (the free peasant could be conscripted) and partly for economic reasons (they could be taxed directly). The farmers were far more productive and efficient than the big landowners, and the wealth creation of the country depended on the farmers. Consequently, even during the years governed by the conservative land owner Estrup, the state did not set up severe obstacles to the farmers and their associations because, in the last instance, most politicians knew it was crucial to the development of the country. On the contrary, Estrup sowed the seeds of the welfare state by introducing social aid on the state budget to help the farmers who otherwise had to pay for the old and the poor who were left in the rural areas after the migration to towns and cities.

After this overview of the emergence and development of associationalism, we shall focus on two areas with strong associational features – the education system and the cultural and social area.

### *Associationalism in the Education System*

In 1814, Denmark had its first school law which gave all children, including those living in the rural areas, the right to receive teaching. With the democratic constitution in 1849, some of the educational reformers, most notably N.F.S. Grundtvig and C. Kold, influenced the clause of the

constitution related to education. According to the clause 'all children of school age shall be entitled to free instruction ... (§76 in the Constitution). Thus the clause stipulates general compulsory education, but not compulsory school attendance. This is a crucial clause, since it gave the two education reformers the opportunity to develop other types of schools as alternatives to the state school. The first 'friskole' (free school) ('private' independent school) was founded in 1852,<sup>5</sup> and it was meant to serve children from rural areas. Today the 'free schools' still exist, and they are more popular than ever. About 12% of all children at basic school level attend 'free schools'. They are privately established and run by teachers and parents but the state subsidises them. In 1995 68,000 children attended the 415 'free schools', while 515,000 pupils between 7 and 16 attended the 1700 municipal schools.<sup>6</sup>

There are roughly seven categories of 'free schools':

- small 'Grundtvigian' independent schools in rural districts
- academically oriented lower secondary schools
- religious or congregational schools such as Catholic or Danish Mission schools.
- progressive free schools
- schools with a particular pedagogical aim, such as Steiner schools
- German minority schools
- immigrant schools

Regardless of the ideological, political, religious or ethnic motivation behind their establishment, these free schools are recognized by the state and receive public funding. As long as they do not violate the Constitution, they are free to provide the sort of teaching and education the persons involved find pertinent. Since the free school system was established in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, a consensus has prevailed in the parliament to ensure the legislation and public funding for these schools. Even today the free schools are seen as important, partly because the opportunity to create and attend these schools is seen as important, and partly because the municipal schools benefit from the competition offered by the free schools.

The relationship between the free schools and the state is quite simple. The government has made detailed rules about public funding. The Ministry of Education does not exercise strict control when it comes to the content of the education itself. Here there are only very general rules: The free school has to provide an education which measures up to that of the municipal schools. However, in

principle, it is not up to the government, but to the parents of each free school to check that its performance measures up to the demands of the municipal schools. The parents have to choose their own supervisor to check the pupil's level of achievement in basic subjects. Parents who are dissatisfied with the free school may move their child to the local municipal school. In principle, the local municipal school must always admit the child.

In 1991, Parliament passed a new free school act which changed the public grant system. Now the public funding follows the pupil, but the parents still have to pay a modest tuition (approximately £650 a year) while the government pays in average £2300 per pupil a year. It depends on the size of the school. Small schools receive more. Special grants are given to pupils with learning disabilities or other special difficulties. Other grants are allocated to each free school, for instance for rent, maintenance, construction etc.

The free school system as it developed from the 1850s and as it exists today expresses an attempt to solve the minority problem in the Danish democracy. Within certain areas, the Danish constitution and the legislation based upon the spirit of the constitution attempt to provide minority protection. In the Act on free schools, minority protection becomes a minority right, which is visible in other areas as well. The minority does not have to beg the majority for permission to exist. On the contrary, the law provides civil, political and economic rights to oppose the opinion of the majority. Protection of a minority by permitting the minority to establish its own schools is found in several other countries, but we rarely find legislation or a practice in which the state actually subsidises the minorities exercising their rights. The state provides conditions of existence which enable the minorities to fight back against the majority (Balle & Balle-Petersen 1996:11).

Over the years, the Danish state has had a clear interest in this system. Among other things, this school structure reflects the socially liberal character of the Danish society. The Constitution and its amendments indicate this social liberalism. The small social liberal party (det Radikale Venstre), which has shared power with the Social Democrats several times throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has put strong finger prints on the development of the Danish state and society in a period otherwise dominated by the Social Democrats. The Social Democratic Party itself has seen it as an advantage to keep a more pluralistic education system because it also provided opportunities for the working class to develop their own voluntary associations, including schools. Also the free school system

was a continuation of the liberal state which emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, stressing the help to self-help principle. The state benefited from this system because any pluralistic tendency could be contained within the state by allocating these sets of rights and opportunities for self-governing. As long as no one attempted to undermine the state, it was a fruitful way to develop schools and education for everybody. Lastly, it is important to stress that this institutional structure did not emerge as a 'result of spontaneous and natural will to associate' (Hirst 1994:45). The state clearly provided the conditions of existence of these schools, of course in interplay with various social movements, not least Grundtvig and his followers. The state, however, did not just give in to the pressure from people and movement. The state only accepted the demands from Grundtvig and his supporters because it was no major threat to the existence of the state. On the contrary, the Grundtvigian movement generated a strong Danish nationalism which strengthened the state and the cohesion of the society.

Some of the fundamental associational principles can be found in the Danish free school system. The associative principles outlined by Hirst (1997:149-150) are easy to detect in the Danish school model:

- Education is provided by free schools which are voluntary self-governing associations 'that are partnerships between the recipients and the providers of the service: such associations will be at least formally democratic and recipients will have the annual right to exit' (Hirst 1997:149). The free schools in Denmark contain the double democratic principle expressed in the right to stand for and vote for the executive committee in the association and the right to leave the school and move to another. Thus the schools are internally accountable to their members.
- These associations/organizations are funded from public sources. The parents contribute with a small amount as well, and the schools are free, within certain limits, to earn their own money.
- The free schools are subject to public inspection and standard setting. No school can violate the constitution. Public funding will automatically be reclaimed and then terminated. The Danish free schools are obliged to provide an education which measures up to the standard of the municipal schools, and most free schools use the final examination of the municipal schools in order to demonstrate their level and standard.

In the next section, we shall see how some of these principles are also found in another area.

***Voluntary associations, associationalism and social and cultural activities in a Danish context: development, continuity and changes***

In the previous description of the historical development of civil society, a public sphere and the voluntary associations, we saw how the establishment of these associations in one area is often closely linked to the development in other areas. We saw how farmers and freeholders created a network of co-operative dairies, slaughterhouses, saving banks, folk high schools and other associations. A similar development can be found in the labour movement. In this section we will examine the associations developed in relation to social and cultural activities, such as evening and adult education, youth and leisure clubs and, not least, sports. As indicated, the development of these associations cannot be seen as an isolated phenomenon, but must be situated in a wider context of associationalism.

These associations have been and still are extremely important in Denmark, partly as places for learning basic democratic skills, and partly because the majority of the population is involved in these organizations. Most people spend many hours of their life in these associations and consequently, these associations are an important part of public life and the public sphere.

There is a consensus in Denmark that a wide scope of cultural activities organized by voluntary associations are the best way to learn basic democratic principles and thus prevent crime and delinquency among young people. Also these associations are regarded as important means to educate and reskill the adult population and at the same time provide the basis for a meaningful leisure time. Consequently, it is an area which also politicians have found important to support and develop.

***The origin of shooting and sports associations***

In retrospect, the formation of the shooting associations was important to the development in this area. The shooting associations were mainly established as a response to the defence problems after the defeat by Germany in 1864. A strong nationalism prevailed and most people, despite class differences, realized the necessity of a stronger defence. A conflict emerged between the left

(mainly farmers) and the right (big landowners and civil servants) about the character of defence forces. The right argued for a preservation and extension of the standing army, while the farmers – representing the people/the general public – preferred a militia, a people's army. The disagreement led to a division in the shooting movements. The conservatives saw the voluntary shooting clubs as a pre-school to the army, while the farmers wanted them to be the core of a national militia. The conflict between the left and the right was not only about defence; it was a more comprehensive cultural struggle which had its material side as well – the struggle between the small freeholder economy versus the big landowners, the emerging capitalist and large-scale industrial production. The cultural struggle also manifested itself in the debates on education (free schools, adult education, folk high schools), religious matters, and education of the body (gymnastics). It also contained a constitutional conflict, which worsened after the revision of the Constitution in 1866. This revision implied a restriction of democracy and strengthened the position of the big landowners.

The cultural battle reflected in the shooting movements was extended into other areas. The clubs put gymnastics on the programme from the 1860s. For several decades, gymnastics became a battleground for farmers versus conservative forces. From the 1870s, people formed independent associations with gymnastics and other get-together activities. Also rowing, various ball games, sailing, tennis and horse racing became activities which led to clubs and associations. Whereas the shooting associations and later the rifle associations were directly supervised and subsidized by the state, the other associations did not at this point rely on financial aid from the state. It was, of course, the 1849 Constitution which had provided the legislative foundation of the voluntary associations but direct financial support did not occur until the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Korsgaard 1997).

The state had a clear interest in the formation of sports clubs. From the point of view of the state, a better system of physical education would benefit the country. A healthier and stronger population would contribute to a stronger defence and would also be a more productive and efficient population in the work force. Officers, philanthropic landowners and schoolteachers all tried to encourage peasants to do gymnastics or sport to improve their fitness and the national defence. Later, the strong interest in the physical education of peasants led to a strong governmental support of sport and leisure activities.



### ***Adult education and evening schools***

Many attempts were made to encourage peasants to learn to write, read and reckon. This brought about a considerable number of evening schools. Various types of adult education for the peasants and the general public go back to 1856 when the state permitted local parishes (small municipalities) to support evening classes financially in order to improve the reading and writing skills of the peasants. Mainly voluntary associations organized evening classes. From 1895, adult education was supported directly from the state without approval from the local parishes. The support increased considerably in financial terms from 1895 to 1920. Adult education and folk high schools developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, primarily in the countryside driven by the farmers' movements. Subsequently, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we find a similar development in towns, but here the labour movement was the driving force. Despite their differences and disagreements, the two important political parties – Venstre (the farmers' party) and the Social Democrats (the workers' party) - maintained a policy guaranteeing financial support to associations offering adult education. They competed (and still do) under almost equal conditions. In 1930, an act was passed which gave adult education (evening schools) the same conditions in towns and countryside. The act had the consequence that a number of subjects previously not regarded as education acceptable for governmental financial support now became legitimate subjects, for example, cooking, sewing, knitting, and later on, gymnastics, dance, and singing. During the following decades, a continuous redefinition of adult education and pertinent subjects has taken place. Almost every activity defined as meaningful for a group of interested persons has been able to obtain government support, either as membership support or as free rooms for organizing meetings.

Today, evening and adult education is also organized by voluntary associations, which compete with each other about members. In principle, all types of associations can offer adult education regardless of their religious, ethnic, political and pedagogical foundation, as long as they stick to the legislation based upon the Constitution. Today, the associations offer education without constant control from the government, and they obtain a contribution from the government corresponding to their number of members. The state and the municipal government govern this area in a similar way to the free school area. Also the evening school associations have democratically elected executive committees, and consequently the voice-exit aspect is also a key dimension to this area.

### *Sport and leisure associations*

As the last example of associationalism, we turn to the organization of sport and leisure activities. This area is another example of how the state influenced and, in some respects, created a strong civil society. As indicated above, sport has been organized by voluntary associations since the 1860s. Again, the constitution with the associative and assembly clauses facilitated the establishment of sports associations. Gradually during the next 150 years, the state and governments based upon different ideologies have all had an increasing interest in encouraging the population to take part in sport activities. The various governments have also preferred that the organization of sport took place in voluntary organizations with a democratic structure. Again the principle of aid to self-help has been maintained. Partly it reduces the burden on the state, and partly the state, by decentralizing power to other levels, contributes to local democracy and a variant of associational democracy. The latter has the effect that members are brought up with democratic processes which they can influence themselves. Moreover, the activity only exists as long as members find it interesting and useful.

After the Second World War, the new generation – youth – became the focus of the state in its attempt to reconstruct and develop the country. The government established a Youth Commission, which had to come up with proposals for examining and improving living conditions for the future generation in terms of work, accommodation, education and leisure opportunities. The Commission suggested direct public support to youth- and sports associations, scout clubs and political youth associations in two ways: financial support should be given partly to education of leaders/coaches and partly to physical facilities (fields, courts, meeting rooms, assembly halls and sports halls). In the same period, the government passed the Football Pool Act (1948) which permitted football pools. However, it was under government control, and the surplus was allocated to the central sports federations and other voluntary associations targeting youth. The sports federations mainly allocated the money to educate leaders and coaches in the local clubs. The Government passed an act in 1954 which decided that local municipalities were under obligation to provide rooms, halls, fields, sports courts and financially contribute to the rent or mortgage any local club/association may have.

The report from the Youth Commission and the Football Pool Act clearly demonstrate a Danish solution to the problems of governance in these areas: The state is responsible for allocating

resources to youth activities, but the criteria of allocation and the actual allocation are undertaken by the nationwide sports or youth federations. This is an example of self-governance developed partly as a result of a social-liberal state tradition and partly because the government found that the organizations themselves would always know best how to allocate the financial means and the criteria used. As long as the federations and local associations stick to the rules, the state has no intention to intervene or control. Also the Youth Commission stresses the importance of providing reasonable and healthy leisure opportunities as a compensation for the uniform and repetitive work most people do in the industrial society. Moreover, the Youth Commission found the principle of help to self-help of major importance because it contained an element of democratic education: the state provides the physical facilities, but the youth must learn how to create the content themselves in a democratic way. They have to contribute by doing voluntary work in the association and by paying a membership fee.

### ***The Leisure-Time Act of 1968***

At the end of the 1960s, we find the peak of the welfare state in terms of extending legislation on leisure. The "Leisure-time Act" (Fritidsloven) passed in 1968 was called the 'best legislation on leisure in the world'. The Act intended a horizontal (geographical) and a vertical (social) support to leisure and cultural activities, mainly adult education.

The Act was developed in order to improve facilities and conditions of adult education, but included provisions making it possible to subsidize children and youth organizations. Apart from subsidizing evening classes for the adult population, the local municipalities now had to provide facilities for the adult sports, something which proved especially significant for the sport and sports associations.

Most municipalities found it too difficult to administer the Act, and the many associations involved argued that it was too bureaucratic. Consequently, most towns and municipalities in the countryside developed within the framework of the Act their own set of rules. These rules were inspired by an existing practice in other towns. The essence of this practice corresponds closely to some associative democratic principles. Financial support from the public authorities is only given to voluntary associations based upon democratic principles according to the Constitution. The associations, whether they offer sports, scout activities or adult education, must be open for all to join. Their financial means come from membership fees and contributions from the

state/municipalities. The state/municipalities offer a certain amount per member, and if a member leaves to join another club or evening school, the financial means follow the member to the other club/association. S/he can shift association etc. as often as s/he wants, but the contribution from the state will stay with the association for a year where the membership fee was paid. In order to reduce administration, each club reports annually to the municipality how many members have paid the membership fee. This number determines a certain contribution to the associations from the municipality, which also contributes in other ways to associations offering leisure activities (including sports, scout, political youth organizations and evening education). They can by estimation offer financial support according to the actual expenses of each association, and they cover expenses for the education of leaders and coaches. The actual size of the contribution from the municipalities to the associations could vary. Due to the decentralised structure of the Danish society, the municipalities have considerable power to raise taxes and decide the level of services they offer. The Leisure-time Act imposed on the municipalities to contribute financially, but again they alone can decide how much.

The Leisure-time Act supports not only sports and evening education, but all associations with a more general purpose defined as being of general interest for the public and the democracy including scientific associations, theatre associations, consumer and production associations, housing associations, architectural associations, associations for improvement of the physical environment, political youth organizations, temperance movements and sports associations (but not professional sports).

The Leisure-time Act was an important piece of legislation for the development of civil society. A number of principles embedded in this legislation were a continuation of principles going back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, again the principle of aid to self-help was sustained, but the Government and Parliament found it important to further strengthen civil society and thus enable the voluntary associations within the leisure area to provide better services for their members, but still also with the intention that members must give something back to the club or association in the form of voluntary work, participation in the democratic procedures and, if nothing else, a membership fee. From the preparation of the Act, it is evident how important most political parties found this act as a general initiative with a higher purpose: to enable the whole population to create a meaningful leisure time in a society in which less work and more leisure was seen as imminent.

The Act demonstrates that the state and the municipalities regarded people's leisure time as important for both state and the people.

### ***The Act of 'Folkeoplysning'***

Participation in sports has always been the most popular leisure activity in Denmark; it has been a tradition for most people to join clubs and associations to do sports. This pattern has changed during the 1980s and 1990s. More people began to do sports, but in addition to voluntary clubs, they also joined activities offered by commercial institutes or clubs.

These changes in the participation pattern combined with an increasing focus on sports as a health-creating factor (this is strengthened after Denmark signed the WHO's declaration on 'Health for all in year 2000') led to a critique of the traditional strong support to sports organized in voluntary associations. Since a part of the population participates in sports activities outside the traditional sports clubs, critics suggested that some of the resources should be allocated to them also. This critique fused with a critique of the Leisure Time Act arguing that the Act was too bureaucratic and too state-centralized with too little competence to the municipalities. This led to the introduction of a new act in 1990, 'The Act of Folkeoplysning' (literally the Enlightenment of the People'). The purpose of the act is an 'empowerment of people', to educate them as citizens and enable each individual to become independent and capable of deciding and choosing. The act guarantees public financial support and room for the free general education (enlightenment of people) respecting the peculiarity of the participants and originator of the activity. The Act of Folkeoplysning is a framework law, which gives a lot of freedom to the municipalities. They receive money from the state, but they decide how and where to spend them. This makes it easier to adapt the Act to local structures and needs. Two types of activities need to be subsidized: 1) adult education and 2) other activities including sports, political and religious organizations, scout movements, and other associations with the purpose of offering activities aimed at 'empowering' the people and educating the general population. In principle, it is up to the municipality to define 'folkeoplysning'. However, only voluntary associations can be recognized as recipients of public support.

A red line can be found in acts and legislation running from the early post-war period to the Leisure Time act in 1968 and later acts such as the 'Act of Folkeoplysning' in 1990. The constitutional

rights to assemble and to form associations are still closely linked to Danish policy within sports, political and religious associations.

Another red line can be found in the division of labour between state and municipalities. Also the 'Act of Folkeoplysning' (1990) is a very decentralizing law with room for each municipal government to govern according to local traditions and needs. Another continuous aspect concerns the principle of voluntarism, activation of users and membership contributions.

The picture of the development of voluntary associations within adult education, leisure and sport illustrates how the Danish state over the years has kept a strong interest in developing this aspect of civil society. A flourishing life of voluntary associations with sports, cultural activities and adult education did not just grow up from below. Throughout the period the state stimulated the growth and responded to ideas and suggestions from civil society. Consequently, the state generated a set of conditions of existence for the voluntary association, which offers social and cultural activities. Moreover, as the development clearly demonstrates, the principle of governance within some areas has been a variant of associationalism.

### ***Problems and prospects: the future of associationalism in the Danish context***

The history of the emergence of the civil society is a story about how the state has preconditioned and shaped civil society. At crucial moments – during 'states of exceptions' - due to external pressure and in order to survive as a sovereign state, the state has been forced to reorganize its own society and change the conditions of existence of the people. Consequently, the very structure of the Danish civil society has been conditioned by the Danish state.

The history of the development of the Danish civil society reveals strong elements of associationalism at least from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The two areas examined in this article demonstrate that the state by new legislation over the years has accepted and even encouraged strong associational features in the Danish society. The organization of sport and other cultural activities is a clear example of an area in which we find a strengthening of the associative democratic principles over the 150 years. Also the primary and secondary school system with room for the 'free schools' illustrates how associative principles have been deeply embedded in the Danish social structure despite the general conception that the Danish welfare state is a top-down

system where all schools are uniform state schools. Consequently, the Danish case reveals the presence of associationalism as a model of governance supplementing the liberal representative democracy. Historically, the two models of governance developed hand in hand and have, to some extent, been interdependent.

This article is not an attempt to idealize the Danish ‘model’ or to claim that it can be replicated by other societies. Specific historical conditions have paved the way for this development, and just because it works in Denmark (and, of course, not without problems) it might not work in another socio-economic, political and cultural context.

However, we can conclude that it has contributed to the governance of first a specialized agricultural society based upon small freeholders and later a highly specialized, differentiated, industrialized society with an economy based upon small and middle sized companies utilizing advanced technologies. Moreover, this complex democratic structure has worked as a means to develop a welfare state with a high degree of decentralization, but still based upon some universal principles. Compared to the other Scandinavian welfare states, Denmark is more social liberal and more decentralized and less social democratic and centralized. The structure of the Danish welfare state and the structure of governance have been important at a time where welfare states in Europe have been under pressure from recession, geo-political and economic changes. So far, the model has proved to be fairly adaptable to these new external conditions, and so far, the Danish welfare state has not run into a severe legitimation crisis (Goul Andersen 1997(a); (b)). We claim that this very decentralized structure of governance based upon representative and associative democratic principles is the key to understanding this readiness to meet changes. The present situation is not unique: Denmark has faced serious challenges several times during the last hundred years: The deep recession after the grain period in 1870s, the situation after the two wars (especially after the Second World War which led to abandonment of neutrality and a close alliance with USA) and again in the 1970s and 1980s. The ability to change and adapt is related to the structure of governance, but whether this structure will prove successful in the future is, of course, difficult to predict.

Today, Denmark is facing other challenges which might test the ‘Danish model’ in other respects. The last thirty years Denmark has become a more pluralistic society in terms of life-styles, life

forms and sub-cultures. After the first wave of guest workers in the 1960s and later refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East, and the Balkans in particular, but also from the East and Africa a multicultural society has emerged. Denmark no longer has, as usually claimed, the most homogeneous population in the world with the same ethnic, religious, linguistic background. The increasing pluralism and multiculturalism challenge a society which during the last 150 years has developed a strong nationalism, a strong belief in the 'people', in the 'folk'. The Danish self-consciousness of being Danish, belonging to the Danish Folk developed as a response to the threat from the expanding Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the last two centuries, Danish politicians have supported any strategy which strengthened the feeling of belonging to the Danish 'folk', to the Danish nation. It has been seen as a necessity because in case of war Denmark would lose its independence and sovereignty. Denmark, it was argued during the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, will never be able to resist the German military power, but we can survive as a nation and a people if we develop strong national welfare institutions, such as a national health or a national education system.

This strong belief in the concept of 'Folk' and the Danish national identity has now become an obstacle, because multiculturalism requires a rethinking of identity, including the political identity. Here the associational feature can prove to be either a strength or a weakness. It is still an open question if the existing civil society with its large number of associations will be able to absorb new cultures, or if the system will be flexible enough to allow the variety in cultures and life styles forming their own associations. Some critics argue that the voluntary associations in Denmark have functioned as a means to transcend class segregation in society. Associations, whether 'free schools' or sports clubs, recruited members from all social strata – the wealthy lawyer played football with the unskilled worker (Gundelach & Torpe 1999:76ff). Implicitly these critics reject associationalism as a help to integrate the 'foreign' part of the populations. A more extended associationalism is seen as a way of fragmentizing and disintegrating a society which until recently possessed a strong social cohesion. To transfer more power to associations and support Islamic organizations which offer day nurseries, schools, hospitals or to accept that specific groups more or less can build up their own small communities based upon certain ideals and ideologies which do not correspond to a more general set of norms is regarded as segregation rather than integration by many Danes.



We claim that it is a myth that voluntary associations assembled people across social and cultural barriers. Moreover, we claim that the key aspect of the Danish version of associative democracy is the democratic structure and function of the associations. The educational aspect of participating in an association where each member to some degree had to relate to democratic procedures is far more important than the cross-cultural or cross-class aspect. Consequently, we do not see it as a problem for democracy that many different and contrasting cultures and life styles organize themselves and receive public support as long as basic principles, e.g., the Constitution, admittance for, and the voice-exit principle are not violated. The only consensus necessary in this society is some minimum rules which, in the case of Denmark, are mainly codified in the Constitution. As long as the very associational structure of society is democratic, it is not too serious a problem that social and cultural differences are sustained. Such differences are impossible to remove anyway. If people, regardless of cultural or social background, are brought up with democracy, are learning democracy in practise, it will be easier for them to respect the Danish model of governance and contribute to a consolidation of the representative democracy as well. The key problem is not democracy, but the way democracy has developed in a Danish context. Since the development of democracy closely corresponded to the emergence of the nation-state, the Danish version of democracy became closely embedded in a nationalistic veil in which democracy equalled the Danish 'folk' (people). Also the associationalism in Denmark is closely linked to the national project, and this is the real challenge for Danish society: Can the concept of a Danish folk be reinterpreted to include everybody living in the country? Can our structure of governance based upon representative and associational democracy change into a new structure relieved from the nation-building and nationalistic framework? The presence of the associational structure today has already led to Jewish, German and Islamic schools. Ethnic minorities dominate several sports clubs. A strengthened associational democracy might prove to be one accessible road to reach a new platform for defining identity. It is important, however, to rethink the Danish associational model. In the modern world with a highly international economy screaming for more regulation and with a membership of regional organization such as EU, Denmark must think associationalism on a larger scale. Associational democracy can no longer be a Danish national project only. This is a key challenge to the Danish model.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Hegel's own configuration of the state implies that the state is constructed from 'within' and from 'below'. First we have the individual and family, civil society and then the state, but the state is still seen as the precondition of the development of the others. We conceptualize the state as an entity conditioned by external recognition from other states as well as internal recognition by the key estates, classes.

<sup>2</sup> See the Royal Law of 1665, for example §4 and §5. See Danske Forfatningslove, 1958, pp.17.

<sup>3</sup> It has to be mentioned that the first voluntary associations in Denmark developed shortly after the Reformation. It was religious groups, which as a consequence of the Reformation and Luther's message took the bible in their own hand and sought to escape the local priests' interpretation.

<sup>4</sup> In the revised Constitution these clauses are now § 78 and §79.

<sup>5</sup> 'Free schools' are often translated into English as 'private schools', but this is misleading. The free school is the perfect example of the removal of the private-public distinction, which only naive liberal thinkers are struggling to maintain.

<sup>6</sup> Figures from the Minister of Education 1995 – see homepage [www.uvm.dk](http://www.uvm.dk).

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