The Region of Southern Denmark, Denmark: THE SDGs AS A TOOL TO SHAPE THE NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Key highlights

- Southern Denmark has aligned its new Regional Development Strategy (2020-2023) with the SDGs.
- Municipalities are working with the 2030 Agenda in specific projects, albeit not always seizing its full potential as a planning and prioritization tool.
- Moving forward, developing indicators at regional and municipal levels and mapping and engaging the key agents for change in formulating a regional strategy will help with the localisation of the SDGs.

The concepts of quality of life, well-being and sustainability have been part of the regional narrative in Southern Denmark since the adoption of the Regional Development and Growth Strategy (2016-2019) “The Good Life” (Det Gode Liv). Although the SDGs were not formally included in the current Regional Development and Growth Strategy (2016-2019), the six priority areas and the policy themes covered are linked to the SDGs framework. Particular areas of strengths for the region include renewable energies and energy efficiency, with over 40% of employment in the Danish offshore wind energy sector located in Southern Denmark. Moreover, competences in health and welfare innovation, including automation, intelligent aids, IT and telemedicine add to the region’s strategic advantages, as well as the fact that Southern Denmark is the largest Danish tourism region. The region also collaborates with municipalities to enhance energy efficiency of public buildings and to address climate change mitigation and adaptation through urban regeneration and development projects.

“Knowledge in motion” has been at the core of the strategy and aims to improve evidence-based policies and information provided to citizens and other actors in the region. It includes various measures, such as an online portal, detgodeliv.regionsyddanmark.dk, where the region of Southern Denmark publishes studies about regional well-being and growth in the region as a whole and in each of the municipalities.

Moving forward, the region of Southern Denmark has been incorporating the SDGs in the new Regional Development Strategy (2020-2023) (Figure 1). The overall concept of well-being and quality of life, the six strategy tracks, the specific regional goals as well as the actions of the region are linked to specific SDGs and are designed to contribute to their achievement. In particular, the region has decided to focus on 11 goals that are mostly relevant for its work: SDG3 on health, SDG4 on education, SDG5 on gender, SDG6 on water, SDG7 on clean energy, SDG9 on industry and infrastructure, SDG10 on inequalities, SDG11 on SDGs, SDG12 on sustainable consumption, SDG13 on climate and SDG14 on life below water.

Figure 1. The regional development strategy 2020-23 and SDG

More data and statistics will be used to track the implementation of the new strategy, and ultimately the SDGs, in Southern Denmark. An annual publication will monitor the status and development of each of the six strategy tracks. The publication will include a range of indicators that can be updated yearly depending on the developments achieved. Some of the indicators will come from the UN framework, while others will be context specific to Southern Denmark. When developing the set of indicators, the region of Southern Denmark hopes to get inspiration from the OECD indicator framework, work by Statistics Denmark and local initiatives by municipalities (e.g. Haderslev).
Development of the new strategy is following a participatory process to engage local stakeholders. This includes: i) A consultation process with local municipalities, education institutions, museums, and other interested parties prior to the drafting of the regional development strategy (February-March 2019) ii) a public consultation (between 9th of October 2019 and 17th of January 2020), iii) a public "Consultation Conference" on 27 November 2019 in Vejle; iv) ad-hoc consultations with local municipalities, v) a dedicated consultation process with partners on the German side of the Danish-German border, and vi) a "Kick-off-conference" in May 2020.

Some municipalities are addressing the SDGs, albeit not always using the framework as a planning tool. Yet, the municipality of Haderslev will fully integrate the SDGs in the new strategic plan for 2020, seeing the 2030 Agenda as appealing to its holistic, interdisciplinary development agenda, as well as for promoting "public service motivation". Other municipalities, like Vejle and Kolding, have used the SDGs to engage with their local citizens to inform them about the 2030 Agenda, while others (e.g. Middelfart and Haderslev) are linking their climate adaptation projects to the SDGs.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and an active civil society are prominent features of SDGs implementation in Southern Denmark. For example, a network of 12 secondary schools called Global High Schools (Globale Gymnasier) is spreading awareness, knowledge and fostering action for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Another project led by the foundation Chora 2030 in Southern Denmark is the creation of two urban farms, one in a disadvantaged “ghetto” area Finlandsparken in Vejle and one at the Jelling refugee centre. The farms will provide internship and employment opportunities for asylum seekers and long-term unemployed women, and are designed as a common framework for education and training, increased quality of life, and for fostering local involvement and inclusion, while showcasing contribution towards the 17 SDGs on local scale.

Danish companies are increasingly considering the SDGs as a business opportunity. The perception exists that failing to incorporate the SDGs may leave companies lagging behind. As such, many companies are starting to use the SDGs to strengthen their core business, beyond focussing on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In the short term, key challenges to leveraging the potential of the private sector to contribute to the 2030 Agenda relate to public procurement frameworks and consumer preferences, which are not always conducive to sustainable practices. A recent national reform of the law on business promotion (1 January 2019) transferred the administration of business development support from the regions to the Danish Business Authority.

FORWARD LOOKING POLICY RESPONSES

Use the SDGs as a tool to move forward with the well-being and quality of life agenda of the region. The SDGs should be the tool to formally include these dimensions (economic, social and environmental sustainability) in all regional development activities and can be used to communicate about these efforts in order to raise awareness about the 2030 Agenda among both institutions and citizens at large. For example, the current regional strategy has an online portal that can be used to publish updates on how the region is contributing to the SDGs.

Develop evidence base to track the implementation of the next Regional Development Strategy (2020-2023) and the SDGs in Southern Denmark, and adjust where need be. The current regional development and growth strategy is well connected to the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs indicators could be used to track the implementation next strategy, and adjust the strategy to ensure objectives are met over time. Local indicators and other sources of national data should also be used to ensure that the territorial specificities of Southern Denmark are taken into account during implementation.

Use the SDGs to engage all the key regional actors in the design, development and implementation of the Regional Development Strategy, from the private sector to the municipalities, civil society and schools. This engagement should go beyond ad hoc consultations, involving key stakeholders in co-creating the different aspects of the strategy.

Support both municipalities that are already quite active on the SDGs, as well as those that still have to start working on the 2030 Agenda, including through awareness-raising activities. The stakeholder engagement process launched by the region with the first OECD mission should continue and allow involving municipalities in the design of the strategy through the lens of the SDGs.

Scale up initiatives that involve schools and civil society in a more systemic way, like the Global High Schools, to inform and engage students with the SDGs. Civil society organisations can provide useful and practical insights to teaching and learning about the 2030 Agenda.

Map of all the agents of change for the private sector to be more engaged in the regional activities on the SDGs. Some key aspects to be analysed are: i) Citizens’ willingness to pay for sustainability and ii) The role of the government to promote sustainability through for example legislation and procurement.