

Local pioneer communities

Local pioneer communities and personal leadership in an anthropological perspective

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Søren and Samsø's social capital

The anthropologists from Antropologerne's article is based on a study of 34 interviews conducted in the fall of 2015 with three of Samsø's many torchbearers and 27 other islanders. The anthropologists met these Samsø citizens in supermarkets in Mårup on the northern part of the island, and in Samsø's largest town, Tranbjerg, on the southern part of the island. Four of these islanders subsequently participated in follow-up visits and more thorough interviews.

Taking its starting point in participant observation on Samsø and in seven thorough interviews with islanders, the article analyses the cohesive force of the local pioneer community and the component parts of the leadership required to change a local community. The local pioneer community which the guide describes is inhabited by about 3,700 permanent residents, including unique and diverse islanders who are all a part of the story we portray. The four islanders who have a larger role in this article we met on their home turf, in their local environments, at work or in their homes. The three torchbearers that the anthropologists met were identified by Samsø Energy Academy, and they were also interviewed in their homes or workplaces. With their respective personalities, their leadership and their contributions, they have been a part of creating the support in the local community that was necessary in order to make renewable energy a generator of survival and development on Samsø.

We have investigated whether the typical islander sees himself or herself as a part of "the Energy Island" and of a local pioneer community, and how they perceive personal leadership and the roles they fill in the community.

The data underlying the article are qualitative. The anthropologists have aspired to representativity. Of the seven people interviewed, four are men and three are women. Their ages range from the thirties until the late sixties. Five of the seven persons were born on the island and have lived there almost all their lives (one had a period away from the island in his youth, and one moved back to the island after many years elsewhere in Denmark and abroad). Two are

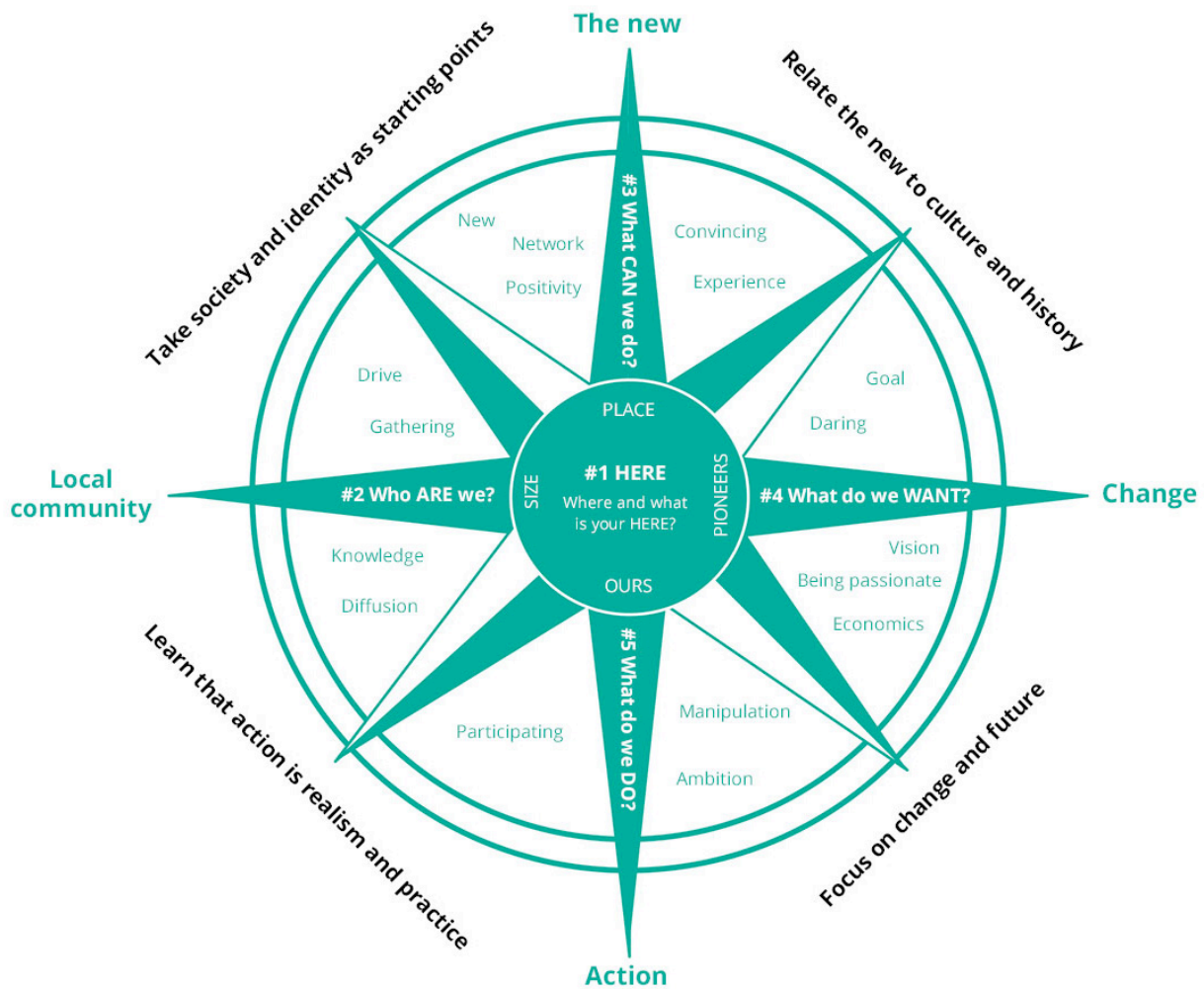
not from the island, but nevertheless have lived on Samsø more than half of their lives.

The anthropologists approached people in the two supermarkets through an exercise where passers-by were invited to place a small round chip with the inscription "Renewable Energy Island" on a large circle divided into the fields 'market/business', 'state/municipality', 'civil society/common'. 85-90% placed their chip in the 'civil society/common' field. A third of these chips were placed close to the 'municipality', which ranged far higher than 'market/business' in the final percentage (some of the respondents also pointed to grants from the state).

The islanders we met took pride in the fact that people from their local community – farmers, tradespeople, business people, people you know relatively well and at least by name – pushed Samsø's green development forward. One name was known and mentioned by everyone: Søren Hermansen. He is an islander and a former farmer, and he created and directs Samsø Energy Academy. He is a person people know from soccer, from hunting, from debates and events, as Samsø's representative in the media, as host to numerous national and international visitors, and he is a person the 27 people we talked to have met in their everyday lives on the island.

The name Søren (with or without indication of his surname Hermansen) was added to another chip, which was attached to a timeline from 1997 until today. People were asked to choose an event and/or person who has been central to their knowledge about or their own participation in turning Samsø into a renewable energy island.

About 45-50% of the impact points were in the late 1990's and early 2000's. They tend to concern the installation of wind turbines and the Energy Office (the NGO representing the citizens in the project). In this regard, Svend Auken, Aage Johnsen, Ingvar Jørgensen and Jørgen Hald were mentioned as central figures. About 35% of the chips were spread over the 2000's; they concern the district heating associations, Samsø Energy Academy, electric cars, and solar panels. The remaining 15-20% mainly concern the ferry which sails



on biofuel. 'The municipality' has gradually taken on a larger role in the 'common' as part of the local or civil community. The ferry company is local, and in a physical and automatic sense it gives all the islanders a share in the Energy Island.

When there are many connections and areas of contact of personal, practical and social character, and when there is a great deal of interaction among people in a group or a local community, that which we with a theoretical term call 'social capital' can be said to be high. Social capital is understood as the value of relations in a society, the cohesive force of the community, and, with that, the community's potential for change (Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, 1986). Social capital connects people – on Samsø the islanders tend to know who everyone is. "For better or worse," said the wife of one of the islanders the anthropologists visited. One of the torchbearers who was selected by the Energy Academy characterises her faith in Søren Hermansen as the reason why she decided to join the project: "It sort of works like this: If this or that person thinks that this project is worth fighting for, I'm willing to join, too." Yet in practice, it was a different central person who got her engaged: "Aage waved me down when they were developing the offshore windfarm. He yelled at me from the other side of the post office and asked if I wouldn't join the meeting at Flinchs Hotel."

The more people in a local community interact, the stronger the social capital becomes – that which binds people together in a community, creates trust among people and faith in what they can achieve together. The Renewable Energy Island project has proven to be a strong adhesive both socially and in regards to strengthening the community and creating positive change. In this way, the project has at once been a measure and a goal in itself.

Taking responsibility and saving even the smallest seed

Energy Island, local pioneer communities and personal leadership. Let us now pay closer attention to these concepts before we turn to the analysis of varying degrees of participation.

Energy Island. No man is an island. No community is an island. We are connected, and the world is connected. Samsø is an island. A piece of land surrounded by water. An island which is now called an 'energy island,' because the island and its inhabitants have spent the past 20 years working on developing and using renewable energy solutions. An island which is now called a 'local pioneer community,' because local community pioneers have gathered the



community around them and have led the way in creating energy solutions, jobs, financial gains, investments and local support for the project that revolves around introducing wind turbines and other green solutions to the island. This has been for the benefit of the islanders and the island – and for the benefit of other islands and people around the world if we can understand and reuse what the islanders and Samsø have done right. A special Samsø identity is linked to the story about the island community as survivors and to the island's reputation today. The energy accomplishments have placed Samsø on the Danish map as well as on the world map, and all the people we surveyed take pride in that. One of them, who has no solar cells, district heating or wind turbine shares, expresses it in these terms: "I stayed on the side-line. But I'm proud that some individuals managed to get far with it. That the island's reputation is so good. This strengthens our local identity."

Local pioneer communities. Local refers to local communities. Local communities are local, often small communities, but a local community is never just a local community. It consists of people, places, everyday activities, history, of intentions and a lot of interaction between people from the community and from outside. People in a local community often belong to groups and are quite different from one another, but as a minimum they share the fact that they live in the same place, because the local community is a delimited entity. Local communities, however, are never just local – they never were. Because even if the local community is to be found in a place, places are connected in time and space by people, transportation, trade, exchanges, culture, politics, language, by rules and regulations, and by various personal and professional activities. Local communities exist. Here, in a place.

Local pioneer communities. A local pioneer community is a local community which is not just found in a place, but which also finds its own way. Because a pioneer is someone who does something first and walks ahead. Someone who sets someone or something in motion. Someone who wants something and who does something. In the pioneer community, it is the community that is the pioneer, rather than individual people within the community. Samsø is a local pioneer community, because a group of people living in the same place (in space) did something first – they chose a course and started following it, and they walked ahead (in time). Samsø is the first island in the world to set a goal of becoming 100% fossil-free by 2030. But an island cannot set goals. People can. This is why community (people having a commons they administer in common) and personal leadership play important roles.

Personal leadership. Leadership does not equal management and manager. Leadership is dynamic, a kind of leadership in formation. Leadership is when someone walks ahead and others follow. Leadership is something a person can do, can exercise, and it arises when he or she starts to act and influence and signifies something to others. The saying 'to take leadership' is actually wrong. You can take responsibility. Those who exhibit personal leadership do that. But leadership is not something you take, it is something you are given by the group. "It's about taking responsibility and seeing 'what you can do'," says Søren Hermansen, who in all our interviews was identified as a leader, chief, front figure, pioneer. "If it hadn't been for Søren, it never would have happened. By virtue of his personality, as a local islander, as a farmer, and because he is liked and respected in many different environments, he has been able to gather the island around him," expressed one of the torchbearers.

Personal leadership. "It's about saving your local community. Down to the smallest seed. This is why you must take responsibility and find your role," says Søren Hermansen. A local community has the power which is bestowed upon it by the local citizens and by history. In our interviews, we can clearly see that the Renewable Energy Island is not just about energy and wind turbines. It is also about Samsø's circumstances and fate; about survival. Becoming a Renewable Energy Island was a means of survival. It is also apparent that people experience leadership and the development of the Renewable Energy Island from their own point of departure, whether as regular islanders or pioneers, team leaders, torchbearers, or whatever you call those people who lead Samsø forward.

To begin with, it actually wasn't about saving the world. It was about saving oneself and the place you live and care about. The common focus on renewable energy brings with it survival, a strong cohesive force, island confidence and local development. One of the decisive factors for the project's success is not financial grants, political goodwill or technical solutions, but personal leadership and local support and a desire for change.

Development that comes from within and from the bottom up will gain stronger acceptance and diffusion

Our small anthropological study of the Renewable Energy Island and the personal leadership among torchbearers and regular islanders has shown that the person who exercises personal leadership must 1) know the place; 2) know his or her group; 3) stand on the shoulders of earlier developments and key players; 4) be able to time initiatives and put people together; and 5) understand and relate to his or her own motive as well as to the motives of others.

The study has also shown that there are many degrees of participation. When we asked about personal participation, the islanders we met in the supermarkets all voiced the opinion that they are not participants until, and if, they do something active. There is a difference between being a member of the board of the offshore wind association, being an inventor, planning the annual energy fair – and then simply visiting the fair, insulating one's own house, or taking the biofuel-powered ferry to and from Aarhus.

The fact that participation has several levels is underlined by the third torchbearer we talked to, who observed the following dynamics: "It infects people from person to person and from house to house. It's certainly something you talk about when you visit people or if you've installed something new yourself. Maybe you simply start by visiting the energy fair to look at radiators." The ferry stimulates the islanders' feeling of responsibility for and pride in the Renewable Energy Island. This is a development everyone can appreciate, even if they did not manage to buy shares in wind turbines and even if they still haven't replaced their old oil furnace.

Development must come from within and from the bottom up, torchbearers and regular islanders seem to agree. "Nothing should be imposed on people. And you shouldn't be forced to confess your faith either. You must do it of your own free will, and because you can afford it and it is advantageous for you," one of the eldest local islanders we met, whose family name is registered in the very first parish registers many years ago, stated.