Local Party Organizations in Denmark

Crisis or Adaptation?

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Editors’ note: Several factors in this chapter illustrate the workings of the theoretical framework. First, Jensen observes a political pattern similar to that in Switzerland and Germany, where parties strive for compromise and look for policies supported by all political groupings in the community. As expected, this is especially true in smaller communities, where inhabitants tend to suppress political conflict or believe that community problems are non-political and not to be solved by professional expertise according to the criterion of “technical efficiency.”

The traditional political culture of small towns initially made it difficult for national parties to colonize the countryside because these communities stressed values of personalized trust and community reputation (see also Schmitter, Chapter 9). As in Great Britain and Germany, the spread of local parties and contested parties elections since the 1970s was preconditioned by territorial reforms that resulted in diminishing the numbers and raising the average size of communities all over the country. Although municipal reorganization, proportional representation, and public financing have strengthened local branches of national parties, other events, such as the movement to unranked party lists and the decentralization of formal authority to administrative units have weakened them.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, it was widespread among political commentators, politicians, political scientists, and others to talk about party decay and the crisis of parties and party systems. A much-quoted book was The Party’s Over, written by the American journalist David Broder (1971). And there were many developments that could be interpreted as signs of a crisis. The increase in volatility could be interpreted as a breakdown of the link between specific parties and specific social or class segments of the electorate (Petersen 1983). From the beginning of the 1960s, party membership declined dramatically. In 1947, 27 percent of the Danish voters were organized in political parties; in 1994, only about 7 percent were party members (Ilkä 1991a, 93). Research into interest groups and corporatism demonstrated the power of interest groups and the bureaucracy and, with this, the relative lack of power of politicians and political parties. Many saw interest groups, corporative arrangements, and new social movements as institutions that could replace the political parties.

This chapter will discuss—critically—the claims of party crisis in relation to the Danish case, but it will also provide a historical and current comprehensive view of local party organizations in Denmark. The chapter proceeds by describing (1) the growth and development of local party organizations since the 1800s, (2) the links between local party organizations and supraregional party levels, and (3) the actual behavior of local party organizations in local politics. Finally, the question of crisis and the possible future course of local party organizations is discussed.
Studies of local party organizations in Denmark are limited to two ways, because studies are restricted both in number and by sites. Only one major study has been conducted, in 1982. This study focused on economic questions in a central-local perspective, and the parties were primarily studied only as far as they were relevant to these problems. Two small publications presented the most important results from a survey mailed to all local party organizations in a representative sample of forty municipalities (Villanne 1985; Madsen, Schou, and Villadsen 1989). This chapter will be based on this survey, historical accounts, party history, and various studies that, directly or indirectly, have used or accumulated data about local party organizations in Denmark.

The Growth and Development of Local Party Organizations
The difficulty of finding an acceptable and usable definition of political parties—indeed, one that is able to demarcate parties from fractions or movements—has been debated for decades. The number of proposed definitions seems to be equal to or even higher than the number of scholars studying parties. One recurrent feature among the countless definitions is represented by the following definitions:

The role of all these institutions is to win political power and exercise it. (Duverger 1964, xxiii)

A party is any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office. (Barlow 1906, 64)

Parties as political organizations oriented to elections and aiming to hold office. (von Beyme 1985, 13)

None of these definitions is unproblematic, and they can be criticized for various reasons. A combination, clarification, and further miniaturization of the minimal definitions given by Maurice Duverger, Giovanni Sartori, and Klaus von Beyme could lead to the following: "A party is any group that nominates candidates at elections." This definition can also be criticized. The perfect definition of parties probably does not exist, but a rough definition is useful at the starting point. It becomes obvious that elections are the goal of modern political parties. The emergence of local party organizations in Denmark must be sought for during or around the first national or local elections—but first, a few words about local politics in premodern Denmark.

In the Middle Ages, there was a high degree of self-government in the Danish provincial towns. This self-government disappeared with the abolition of local monarchical power in the 1660s. Indeed, in the 1660s, the only remaining vestiges of local monarchical power were the city, the mayor and the aldermen; in the countryside, the priests and different kinds of peasants and peasants. It was a centrally governed system without democratic elements, but with some local consultative functions. The primary function of the local political system was to implement decisions made by the king, decisions about military preparations and maintenance of roads but also about matters concerning the health, the church, and, later on, the providing of basic education (Christensen 1991, 13-15).

In the 1820s and 1830s, the absolute monarchy came under pressure because of, among other things, the democratic developments in Germany and France and capacity problems with handling the growing number of tasks. Local politics were also affected. A number of laws from 1833-1841 increased local autonomy. Local self-government was part of the first democratic Danish Constitution in 1849. With the constitution, the first local and national elections were established. This was, of course, not democratic elections in a modern sense—the young, women, and the poor had no right to vote, and property qualifications secured wealthy citizens the majority in the new democratic institutions. Only in 1915 was universal suffrage adopted.

The Development of the Local Party Organization
It is characteristic that the many laws establishing democracy did not mention the political parties at all. The first local and national elections were to a high degree elections of individuals—well-known individuals from the local community, in whom the voters had confidence. In the Constituent Assembly, informal groups of like-minded people often voted together as a unit of well-known individuals. The popularly elected assemblies should be assemblies of trusted individuals—the"best men in the kingdom"—and not assemblies of parties. The chairman of the Parliament even interfered and reprimanded the members of Parliament if they used the phrases "my party" or your party. Thus, members of Parliament instead used phrases like "me and my friends" or "me and like-minded colleagues."(Thuesen 1955, 30).

Political parties only existed as loose networks of popularly elected members of Parliament and local councils, and there was a total lack of the bureaucratic organization that is characteristic of parties today. Today, there were loose networks of notables—in the words of Duverger, "caucus parties" (1964, 17).
Many organizations, interest groups, industrial organizations, trade unions, and newspapers supported individual politicians and groups of politicians and were in this way important for the outcome of elections. And because many of the networks came from such associations and newspapers, they were important for the formation of the largest parties (Thorson 1973, 244).

In the early 1870s, organizing the rapidly growing worker class began. In October 1871, the International Working Association in Denmark was founded, as a combined party and trade union, and in 1872, a health insurance society was added (Windblad and Andersen, 1921, 96; Hansen 1974, 258). In 1878, the movement was subdivided, and a separate Social Democratic Party was founded, followed outside Parliament and local councils, in Copenhagen's suburbs. It was an extraparliamentary, originated party (1984, 300 ff.). The Social Democratic Party gained strength and succeeded in getting candidates elected to Parliament (1884) and local councils (the first time in 1888; the first city in 1892). The two dominant parties in Parliament also started organizing national networks of local organizations, especially the Conservative Party (Holds), whereas the Liberal Party was more oriented on the other organizations mentioned above. For a long period, the organizations in all parties were small and weak. Even the Social Democratic Party, on its twentieth anniversary in 1896, could only claim 20,000 members organized in 259 local branches, compared to the 52,000 members and 713 branches of the trade unions (Windblad and Andersen 1921, 119).

The Development of the Party System

After a number of party formations, splits, and amalgamations in the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the party structure stabilized into a four-party system, in which the four parties, today called the "four old parties," represented the basic social cleavage in Danish society: the Social Democratic Party representing the workers, the Liberal Party, the farmers, the Conservative Party, the world of commerce and higher-level civil servants, and the Social Liberal Party, agricultural laborers, smallholders, and a group of active social liberal intellectuals.

In the September election of 1926, the four parties— or the four great, modern Danish political groups, as one scholar has called them—pooled 98 percent of the vote, an electoral dominance that was maintained for the next fifty years, with a slight decline to 96 percent for the few elections during the period 1969-1971 (see Table 1a.1). This four-party system was modified to a five-party system in 1968 when the Socialist People's Party entered Parliament.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number of Elections</th>
<th>Total Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920-1924</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-1945</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946-1957</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>86.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-1964</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>86.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-1984</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1994</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This solid system was dramatically changed by the "black bloc" elections, or the "electoral earthquake," of December 4, 1973, an election with one of the highest aggregated electoral volatilities in Western Europe since World War II (Pedersen, 1985). Five new parties entered Parliament. Three of them—the Christian People's Party, the Centre Democratic, and the Progress Party—were completely new, and two older parties, the Communist Party and the Justice Party, which had both left Parliament with the election in 1964, returned (Pedersen 1980). Explanations of the 1973 election have been debated ever since. Mogensen Pedersen (1988) reviewed the many explanations and concluded that four sets of factors were of vital importance. First, a fundamental structural change was evident in the legal frameworks: in electoral law, the barriers for nomination (a number of signatures equivalent to 1/3 of the vote in the last parliamentary election and getting representation (2 percent of the vote) are low, and the system gives almost exactly proportional representation to the parties. Another important factor was the legal regulations that gave all parties the same amount of time on Danish Radio, the national TV and radio station, which at that time had a monopoly on radio and TV in Denmark. Second, television, which was becoming increas-ingly important in the election campaigns and which was used very skillfully by some of the new party leaders, was a catalyst for the change. Third, two fundamental long-term factors were (1) the deterioration of the bands between parties and the social cleavage and (2) rising political distrust, or, in the words of Pedersen, the "loss of support for the governments and for the politicians as political leaders" (1988, 266). Towards, there were important short-term factors, including a large vote of laws passed in the years before 1973 on tax reform, municipal reform, liberalization of pornography, liberalization of the right to have an abortion, economic support for the creative arts, and government of the universities. All those
municipality. A single list for the whole municipality would often be impossible because of the conflicting interest of the old parishes. And even if electoral acts or a single list were established, there was still the problem of how the local list could convince its voters to vote for a candidate from their old parish if the vote, because of an electoral pact or single list, could ultimately get a candidate from the neighboring parish elected. Furthermore, it was difficult to claim that the local list’s raison d’être was the amalgamation or incorporation of small communities or the local list’s raison d’être. Another aspect of this dilemma was that after the reform, the national parties gained a strong argument against the local lists because these lists could be accused of representing the special interest of the old parishes and neglecting the common interest of the new municipality (see Figure 10.1).

The other reason for the defeat of the local lists stems from the electoral earthquake of 1973. The higher level of competition among the national parties, which was one of the effects of the electoral earthquake, has encouraged the central party headquarters to make it their strategic goal to secure candidates at local elections in as many municipalities as possible—if for no other reason than to “wave the flag” at the local election—with the next parliamentary election as the real goal. With only 275 municipalities, the desire to wave the flag everywhere was made more manageable. This strategy of having candidates in as many municipalities as possible during local elections, and even in those municipalities where there is no chance of getting any candidates elected, is a national strategy because of the proportional representation system used in parliamentary elections in Denmark. Every vote counts and can be decisive for the composition of the Parliament, and this makes it sensible to use local elections as part of the strategy for the parliamentary elections. To sum up, the strength of the local lists has clearly been weakened, while the local branches of the national parties have become stronger. This phenomenon can be explained by the municipal reform of 1971 (the strategic dilemma for the local lists) and the electoral earthquake (the strategic goal of the national party headquarters).

A third trend that has developed since the 1970s is that the traditional local lists have lost ground not only to the national parties but also to so-called alternative lists, which are issue oriented and raise questions about, for example, the environment, women’s rights, and participatory democracy (Bentzen 1985, 145ff.).

The Number of Nominating Parties and Candidates

The electoral earthquake in 1973 and the new national parties have led to an increase in the number of nominating lists (including both the branches of national parties and local lists). From 1970 to 1974, the number increased 45 percent to about 1,380 lists, and since then, the number was stable around this level until the latest election in 1995, when the number increased further to almost 2,100 nominating lists.

The many new nominating parties in 1974 also led to an increase in the number of nominated candidates. But the number of candidates did not increase as much as the number of lists. This resulted in a sharp cut in the average length of each candidate list. In the 1980s, the average number of candidates per list declined even more, from an average of twelve persons per list in 1981 to only eight persons at the election in 1993. From 1970 to 1993, the average number of candidates per candidate list has been reduced by 50 percent. The number of candidates has declined by about one-fifth, dropping from 21,612 candidates in 1970 to 17,688 candidates in 1995 (see Table 10.2).

The reduced number of candidates has attracted intensive public attention. In a survey taken in 1995, almost two-thirds of the local chairmen in five national parties agreed that the decline in party membership had made it more difficult to recruit candidates (Bach Jensen 1996, 12).
TABLE 10.3: Number of Nomination Lists, Number of Local Councils, and Average Number of Candidates Per Party at Westerholt, 1933-1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Nomination Lists</th>
<th>Number of Local Councils</th>
<th>Average Number of Candidates Per Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>1,853</td>
<td>21,872</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>1,890</td>
<td>21,872</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>1,895</td>
<td>21,872</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>1,972</td>
<td>21,872</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>2,158</td>
<td>21,872</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1,787</td>
<td>21,872</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1,758</td>
<td>17,808</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Various Statistical Yearbooks.

10.3 documents that the complaints about the difficulty of recruiting candidates raised by the local party chairmen were well-founded. The length of the candidate lists has declined dramatically. But Table 10.2 also documents that the declines in lists do not stem from the perspective of the political system as a whole. The 50 percent decline in the average length of the candidate lists is only equivalent to an 18 percent decline in the number of candidates. This should at least encourage caution before accepting the claim, raised by the parties themselves, that they and the local democracy are in a crisis that need to be counteracted. Regardless of how the decline should properly be interpreted, it is a fact that (1) the complaints of the local parties have been heard in public and in Parliament and (2) the decline has been acknowledged and interpreted in a crisis for the local parties and for the local democracy. Recently, this has led to a report from a committee of state and local representatives. The report suggests that better financial remuneration for the local politicians and better organisation of the work in local councils is necessary (October 1984). These suggestions were presented in Parliament in 1985 and were adopted as law.

Despite the increase in the number of nominating parties and the ensuing higher competition and democratization one could expect, the general picture of Danish local politics is dominated by consensus. Denmark is still a good example of what Michael Goldsmith calls the Scandinavian or North European model, which is the "product of a broadly based political consensus across party lines" (1992:18).

To summarize Danish local party organizations have grown out of the early national and local elections. The development started with the almost simultaneous extra-parliamentary formation of the Social Democratic Party and extra-parliamentary formation of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party at the beginning of the 1870s. The development of regular party organizations with branches in all parts of the country was slow, but by the beginning of the twentieth century, the party organiza-

**The Local Political System**

The local party organizations function within an environment with a number of socioeconomic an political structures. This section examines the tasks and organizational system of the most important structure of the local party organization's environment: the local political system.

Danish municipalities have an average 18,000 inhabitants, compared to English and Swedish municipalities that have averages of 120,000 and 30,000 inhabitants, respectively. There are also a number of countries with smaller municipalities, for instance Norway, with an average of 8,000, and Sweden, with an average of only 1,350 inhabitants (Goldsmith 1992:8). At the size of the municipalities is middle-range, their tasks and authorities are not negligible. Denmark has a comparatively large public sector and the municipalities are almost 30 percent of the public expenditures (Lassen and Oliffert 1991:19). They also employ about 70 percent of the public employees (Goldsmith 1992:22). The Danish and other Scandinavia municipalities are "self-governing multipurpose service-providing agencies" (Goldsmith 1992:10). The municipalities have a high level of autonomy in relation to regional and national levels, but with variation between different policy areas. Specialized political agencies found in many other countries are very seldom used in Denmark. Almost all functions are concentrated in the unitary municipal administration.

Each municipality is headed by the local council, which has between nine and forty-one members and full authority to decide all questions within the legal framework. Of course, many smaller decisions are delegated to the administration, but each member in the council can demand that his/her decision be debated and decided by the council. The mayor, who occupies a full-time and salaried position, is elected by the council at the first meeting after elections, which are held every fourth year. At this
Local and National Party Organizations

The organizational structure of the Danish national parties reflects the political administrative and electoral systems in Denmark. The chart in Figure 10.2 shows the structure of the Liberal Party, which is representative of the other national parties.

The Danish political system is divided into three tiers: local, regional, and national. These three levels are reflected in the three-party organic local branches, regional organizations, and national committees.

In the majority parties, the local branches often cover a whole municipality. Some of the large parties (the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party) have more than one branch—up to around ten—in each municipality. The boundaries of the municipality are an administrative border, as well as a border in terms of the election law. All parties have regional organizations, which follow the political and administrative boundaries of the county. The county is an administrative unit governed by the elected County Council.

The constituency organization in the sense of an unorganized branch, compared to the local and regional branches, which mostly follow the administrative boundaries. The constituency is only a technical division established by parliamentary election law—and the constituency consists of one to three municipalities, except in the case of some of the larger municipalities, which are divided into several constituencies.48 The organizational structure of the national parties is thus mainly a reflection of the political and administrative divisions and the division of the electorate.

After the municipal reform, a clear tendency was seen: The parties were adapting to the new political-administrative structure through amalgamations of local branches to larger units corresponding to the new municipalities. This concentration was also made necessary by the large decline in party membership. The autonomy of the local branches in relation to the higher levels of the parties has never been studied systematically, but the impression is clearly one of high autonomy. For this discussion will be reviewed here.

First, all Danish governments have been fighting to keep the activities (and taxes) of the municipalities down. The municipalities have the right to impose taxes, and the local parties have used this right. One reason for this taxation could be the many minority governments in Denmark—in fact, all governments from 1973 to 1991 have been minority governments (Damgaard 1992, 30). The increasing local activities and taxes could then...
be interpreted as a sabotage of the minority governments' economic policies by the majority in Parliament. But the suspension of the expression of local activities and taxes has been supported by a large majority in Parliament, so this explanation does not hold. The national party leaders have been unable to retit the local branches — and have probably not even tried to.

Second, in a comprehensive study of the development in the municipalities' expression Paul Erik Moebrtz reached this conclusion (1990:351): "The ideologically conditioned differences in the preferences of the politicians ... are not leaving any traces in the (economic) behavior of the municipalities" (my translation). Clearly, the national party leaders and organizations do not have enough control over the local branches to form a unified political line in the municipalities.

Third, many examples can be given of "unholy" alliances. For instance, after the local elections of 1993, the first-ever mayor from the Socialism People's Party was appointed with the support of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, at the expense of the Social Democratic Party. A county mayor from the Social Liberal Party was appointed and was supported by all the parties of the right wing, at the expense of the Social Democratic Party, despite the fact that the Social Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party were partners in the national government. Many such alliances can also be found in the electoral maps of local elections.

Fourth, Table 10.3 clearly shows the low ranking of the national executive. It is perceived as more important to communicate from the bottom to the top, from members to the party's national executive, than it is to use the channel from top to bottom, from the party's national executive to the municipal administration and the local public. Other tasks, includ-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tried to some way to influence the local politicians</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had contact with the mayor</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had contact with members of the local council</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a meeting in the local council</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had contact with the local administration</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was active in a local party organization</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was active in other associations or organizations</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a public meeting</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed a petition</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote a letter to the editor</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>(1,002)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Inside the Black Box: Activities in Local Party Organizations

Thus far in this chapter, the local party organizations have been treated as black boxes. This section and the following briefly move inside the black boxes and review the internal activities of the organizations. The functions or tasks of the local organizations are primarily managing recruitment, selection, education, and training; estimating candidates to all these political levies; agitating for the party's goals campaigning at elections; arranging political activities for and educating the members; engaging in contact with politicians; and sending delegates to the higher levels of the party. However, social activities are also important: Christmas meetings, meetings on Constitution Day, and visits to local public or private business or cultural activities.

Although the local party organizations give high priority to tasks connected with elections, they also emphasize communication between the members and the parties' local politicians and between these politicians and the public. Fifty-seven percent of the party organizations have working committees on local issues, especially on high-cost issues (Madsen, Schoo and Villadsen 1985:13, 180), that is, the same welfare issues over which the parties try to exert their influence in the budget process, a subject dealt with more fully below.

The members of members and active members are difficult to measure because of the problems already mentioned by Duvenger: the problem of parties being unwilling or unable to publish membership figures and the unreliability of the published figures (1964:796). Because in the Danish context all parties are today both able and willing to publish figures, the primary problem is those of unreliability. Parties usually want to present the largest possible figures both for members and active members.
so the figures must be viewed as maximums. In 1982, the share of members who participate in the party's member meetings was calculated at about 17 percent, with slightly lower figures in the big cities and with almost 30 percent active in the small municipalities (MadSEN, SOH, and VALLAASSEN 1985, 5-6). In a 1993 survey of all local party chairmen in five parties, 60 percent of the chairmen stated that the percentage of active members in their local branch ranged from 1 to 30 percent. Including all chairmen, the average was 31 percent. The question asked was only about participation in meetings but also, for instance, about committee work, participation in local arrangements, and in campaign activities (RECH JENSEN 1994, 17). These results are supported by representative voter surveys. Thus, in a survey from 1979, 16 percent of the party members indicated that they often participated in the party's arrangements, whereas in a survey from 1996, this figure had increased to 26 percent (GOUL ANDERSEN 1993, 53). These figures seem to indicate that there was an increase in activity and active members, but because during the same period the total number of party members declined, the higher percentages are probably due to a small denominator and not a larger numerator. Keeping in mind the tendency of parties (and voters) to exaggerate membership and activity, it is safe to say that only about 20-25 percent of party members are active members.

The Behavior of Local Party Organizations in Local Politics

As I mentioned earlier, Danish municipalities are characterized by both the depth and extent of their municipal tasks and by their autonomy in the definition and conduct of their tasks. This produces the expectation that Danish local parties are active and engaged in local politics. This expectation can be treated in two ways.

First, the local parties can be viewed as a channel for the voters and other actors and as an instrument for other political actors. Participation in local politics declined from a total share of 20 percent active citizens in 1978 to only 12.5 percent in 1981 (Mortensen 1990, 206). A survey taken in 1993 shows that the level of active citizens has increased again. Nineteen percent of the voters are active in one or more categories of activity (see Table 10.3).

The local party organizations are clearly not the channel preferred by voters when they want to influence local political decisions. This could be a sign of low interest in local politics. This interpretation is supported by developments in voter turnout. Before 1950, the turnout at local elections was just above the turnout at parliamentary elections, but after 1950, the local turnout declined, whereas the national turnout increased. In recent elections, the figures have converged, but the overall course of development during the last fifty years suggests that interest in local politics is slightly lower than national politics. By contrast, the turnout at any of the European Parliament elections is much lower than the turnout at local elections.

The fact that only a small proportion of the voters are using the parties as a channel for influence does not preclude the parties' being active and influential, because the parties can also be viewed as independent actors. The parties are more active than other associations and organizations. Thus, almost 60 percent of the other associations and organizations are passive, sleeping "participants," whereas only 30 percent of the parties are passive in relation to the budgets and the budget process in the municipalities. Although the local party organizations' attempts to exert their influence are primarily associated with expenses, they also involve themselves with the income side, whereas other organizations direct their attempts almost entirely toward influencing the budget against increasing expenditures. Furthermore, the parties direct their pressure at the most expensive sectors-schools, child care, the care of the old and infirm-whereas other organizations direct their pressure against the less expensive sectors, among them unemployment policies, the maintenance of roads, planning and administration, and water, electricity, and heat supply (Mortensen 1990, 212f; see Figure 10.3).

The limited number of active voters and the fact that one-third of the local party organizations are passive are surprising in the light of the
The Future of Local Party Organisations in Denmark

The description of local party organisations so far has indicated progress but has also pointed to ongoing challenges. It is now time to reflect on what the future of local party organisations might look like.

With this in mind, it is essential to understand that studies of electoral campaigns in Denmark have traditionally focused on larger parties and their national or international activities. However, local party organisations play a significant role in shaping public opinion and decision-making processes. Local elections, described here as powergrabs, are crucial for determining the political landscape at the grassroots level.

The local party organisation is the bedrock of the Danish political system, and it is essential to consider how these organisations adapt to changing political landscapes. One of the key challenges facing local party organisations is the decline in voter participation. According to recent studies, voter turnout in local elections has been declining over the past decade, which has implications for the funding and sustainability of local party organisations.

Another significant issue is the fragmentation of the political landscape. The number of political parties has increased, making it more challenging for local party organisations to maintain their influence. This fragmentation can be attributed to the rise of third parties and the declining support for traditional parties.

Despite these challenges, local party organisations remain critical players in the political landscape. They are responsible for recruiting candidates, managing campaigns, and ensuring that local issues are prioritised. With the decline in voter turnout, local party organisations must find new ways to engage with the electorate.

In conclusion, local party organisations in Denmark continue to play a vital role in shaping the political landscape. While they face significant challenges, these organisations are adapting and finding new ways to engage with the electorate.

Roger B. Jensen

Large local electoral areas and the expansion of municipal elections are among the critical factors for the future of local party organisations. While these developments are important, it is crucial to consider how they will impact the ability of local party organisations to function effectively.
It is difficult to measure the quality of the activities and the offers given by the parties to their members, but the parties' competition has no doubt become more intense and qualified with the advent of professional producers of leisure time offers over the last few decades. The activities the parties offer to their members primarily seem to be "business as usual." It looks as though the parties have done very little to develop the "product" since the membership peak in the 1950s.

Another indication that the parties themselves influence declining party membership can be found in their recruitment activities. Twenty-six percent of the local party organizations do nothing at all to recruit members. The 74 percent of organizations that are active generally implement one or two recruitment activities, as Table 10.4 shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 10.4</th>
<th>Local Party Organizations Active in Recruitment, 1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Implemented Recruitment Activities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Percent Active in Recruitment (N = 588)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Table 10.5 shows that the most common recruitment activity is personal contacts, in the sense that the local chairmen or members of the local branch board try to recruit family, friends, colleagues, and others with whom they are in contact. The next most common activity is the active/visible branch, which includes political meetings, writing letters to the editor, and so on. It is surprising that many chairmen report these activities as recruitment activities—reporting the active/visible branch as a recruitment activity is almost the same as saying that having an organization with activities is a recruitment strategy. Eleven percent of the local chairmen only mentioned personal contacts or the active/visible branch. This means that only 63 percent, not 74 percent, of the local branches have implemented proper recruitment activities. But even this must be viewed as a high level of activity. Also noteworthy is that the activities are all very traditional; distributing pamphlets to people in some or all parts of the geographical area of the branches, engaging in street activities, putting advertisements in the local newspapers or weekly magazines, and participating in local or national campaigns of different kinds.

On the one hand, the parties have a high level of activity with recruitment activities being undertaken by more than 60 percent of the local organizations. On the other hand, much more could be done—by activating those branches that do not try to recruit members at all, through more activities in each branch, and by using more modern methods of recruitment. The conclusion of the facts indicate that it is very difficult to ascertain unambiguously whether the parties are in crisis or not. But how do the parties themselves see the situation?

The party secretaries all rejected the view that declining party membership is a sign of crisis because decisions are taken on various policies, the parties are nominating candidates, and so forth, and because high turnovers, for instance, indicate that the voters clearly support the system (Buch Jensen 1994, 9). The local party chairmen were less optimistic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 10.5</th>
<th>Local Party Chairmen Active in Recruitment, 1993 (in percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal contacts</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active/visible branch</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of leaflets</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements in newspapers</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street activities</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telemarketing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigns</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A change in the local election law in 1983 made it possible for such party groups to operate independently of the national party organisation. The introduction of public financial support, and the broadening of party membership requirements and the like, came at a time when developments were made to further decentralise the system. The new nomination rules have been an important factor in this trend.

More than 40% of the seats in the local council are now occupied by members of the local party groups, which has led to a greater degree of local autonomy and a clearer division of responsibilities. The local party groups are responsible for the organisation of the election campaign, and they have the right to nominate candidates for the local council. The national party organisation now plays a more advisory role, and it is not required to nominate candidates for local elections.

Because of the varied nature of the local council, the national party organisation has become more involved in the local elections. The local party groups are now more independent, and they are responsible for the organisation of the election campaign. The national party organisation now plays a more advisory role, and it is not required to nominate candidates for local elections.

The new nomination rules have been an important factor in this trend. The local party groups are now responsible for the organisation of the election campaign, and they have the right to nominate candidates for the local council. The national party organisation now plays a more advisory role, and it is not required to nominate candidates for local elections.
Financial Support for the Parties

In 1985, the parties in Parliament unanimously passed an act on public financial support for parties. Until then, only each member of Par-
liament and the party groups in Parliament were supported (Pedersen and Huile 1991). After 1987, the party organizations also received money. The support is based on the electoral results, and with some minor exceptions, each year the national party organization is given about $3.00 per vote at parliamentary elections, the regional party organization receives about $0.40 per vote at regional elections, and the local organizations get about $0.60 per vote at local elections. From a cost-benefit perspective, the public financing is of benefit to the parties, because it allows them to adopt a strictly vote-maximizing strategy. Until 1987, it was very difficult to run party organizations without a large number of members. For instance, the Centre Democrats, who entered Parliament after the electoral landslide in 1972, have had a very fragile economy, with less than 2,000 members, but the new subsidy markedly improved the economy of that party. In 1985, the Centre Democrats had 1,463 members, and 80 percent of the national party organization's budget was financed by the public subsidy. With the 1986 law, it became easier for a party to survive with very few members. But it must be stressed that the financial support is limited, compared, for instance, to the Swedish or Norwegian party subsidy. It is impossible to find anything near the professionalism of local parties, with hired staff, as exists, for instance, in Norway.

The Decentralization Wave Within the Municipalities

The Danish municipalities have changed considerably since the municipal reform in 1970, especially since the mid-1980s. The number of coun-
ers and the number of administrative units within the local adminis-
tration has declined, a new public management has been introduced, national government now tries to control the economic activities in the municipalities—and the European Union will bring new challenges to the municipalities.

Of special interest to the local party organizations is the decentraliza-
tion of competence from municipal politicians and the central municipal administration to the boards of municipal institutions: schools, kindergartens, and so on. In 1989–1990, no less than 61 percent of the munic-
ipalities decentralized economic competence to institutions (Larsen 1991; see also Larsen 1991). The result is a weakening of the politicians (Larsen 1993, 14, 20) and thereby also a weakening of the local party or-
ganizations, which are very active in trying to influence political deci-
sions made in the municipal councils. The logical response from the par-
ties would be to try and place their members on the boards of the institu-
tions. No systematic studies have been completed of the many new in-
stitution boards and councils, but the impression is that the parties have done very little to try to get their members elected. This wave of decon-
centration brings decisions closer to those who are affected by the decisions, but it also raises many problems: institutional squabbling, the problems of trying to run unpopular decisions when facing well-
organized user boards, and the problems of the power of the leaders of the institutions and the staff, who are also represented on the boards, compared to the laypersons members. In short, is this democracy for the users, or isn't democracy for the professionals? In relation to the parties, another problem is the creation of a new competitor. The crucial question for each voter is this: Why bother to be a member of a party or to be ac-
tive within your party if you can get elected to the boards of the municip-
il institutions that are relevant to you and the cares you get services from? A more positive interpretation of the way of decentralization would argue that the boards will give the citizens a new interest in poli-
tics and operate almost as political schools.

The most recent developments that affect the local party organizations may lead to fundamental changes for the local organizations. In par-
cular, party membership can be expected to continue to decline. An-
other important incentive to join parties—their degree of influence on who gets elected to politicians—has been weakened by the new nomination rules, and the public financing based on election results has created an added incentive, increasing the already strong centrifugal tendency toward the weakening of the local party organizations. The norms must stand against these incentives in order to arrest the decline in party membership.

If public financial support is increased, it is most likely to result in pro-
fessional publicly funded organizations, with a small staff of profes-
sional employees. The local parties can survive being abandoned by the volunteers, who are still today the core of the organizations. The wave of decentralization can move political decisions away from local politicians and parties and can also create a new competitor for the political participation and activism of the citizens—adding to the many new movements that appeared in the 1960s and that still attract many voters.

Criminal and death sentences over the parties have been pronounced much too often and will not be repeated here. On the contrary, it is strik-
ing to see that the parties and their local organizations, in a totally 
changed environment, with new social, educational, demographic, and media structures, have survived and still monopolize a large part of the 
political power in Denmark. This endurance must be recognized, irrespec-
tive of how one evaluates it in relation to democratic ideals.
The first Danish local party organizations were established in the 17th century, typically founded by the old aristocratic families. In the 18th century, local party organizations were dominated by the four largest parties, the Liberal, the Conservative, the Social Democratic, and the Communist. The Liberal party had a large number of local branches, and they were able to attract many voters. The Conservative party had a smaller number of local branches, but they were able to attract many voters. The Social Democratic party had a large number of local branches, and they were able to attract many voters. The Communist party had a small number of local branches, but they were able to attract many voters.

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The Local Party System in Poland

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Editors' note: The shift from authoritarian Communist regimes to more decentralized forms of democratic governance is highly instructive, as local parties will be critically important in conveying political information and socializing the population into the new framework of democratic values, norms, and institutions. This case and the case of Russia show the daunting challenges ahead. In these societies, the very term "party" (usually applied to competing political groups) was stretched to cover monopolistic institutions and provided the entire political system with basic forms of legitimacy and ideological orientations. This has surely been the case in Socialist Poland, where the party created the Parliament, government, and all other authorities. Consequently, the dissolution of such monopole parties was sufficient to cause the decay of the whole governmental system erected on them. No "bottom-up" parties were readily available to replace the legitimacy of a national regime. In addition, the erosion of the national party leads to the political decay of all international party organizations (like local sections), because all these subunits have never been conceived to function without centralized guidance and support. Because communities in Poland never got the opportunity to develop endogenous parties, they have quickly become "colonized" by the newly founded national parties, which are easier to establish local mobilization agencies in order to gain a maximum number of voters. Thus, the relevance of local parties for political legitimation is actually illustrated by post-Communist Poland, where the breakdown of the national regime left many particularly smaller communities without organized groupings able to control the processes of political recruitment (see also Schneider, Chapter 5).

Communal Poland

The question of the participation of parties in many aspects of communal life is, first of all, the question of the functioning of the commune itself, or