



# ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP POLICY



# INTRODUCTION

## Creating a united society takes a united effort

In order to maintain and develop a robust social and economic welfare society, politicians, citizens, businesses, associations and municipal employees (referred to in the following as 'we' or Aarhus citizens) must rethink how we work together for Aarhus.

Promoting active citizenship is one of the Aarhus City Council's concrete goals for the development of Aarhus and a method for realizing the vision of making Aarhus a good city for everyone.

## The purpose of the active citizenship policy is to:

- Provide a shared frame of reference and direction for working together for Aarhus
- Clarify roles and responsibilities when we work together for Aarhus
- Inspire and create space and desire for getting involved
- Help enable us to turn words into action
- Promote fellowship and acceptance
- Contribute to making everyone feel at home and secure
- Contribute to creating a diverse society in which we meet across boundaries of age, neighborhoods, ethnicity and ways of life

The active citizenship policy is an umbrella policy which applies along with the municipality's additional policies and builds on the Aarhus model for citizen involvement formulated in 2004.

The active citizenship policy is both a gesture of recognition of the active citizenship already being exercised and a recipe for how we can work together for Aarhus.

## Active citizenship means all of us – from the mayor to the youngest preschoolers

As citizens of Aarhus, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. Everyone matters, and we are all citizens. But individuals can exercise active citizenship to greater or lesser degrees.

The active citizenship policy is addressed to all citizens of Aarhus, and it concerns the collaboration between citizens and all of the municipality's departments. The ambition is for everyone who lives, works or studies in Aarhus to embrace active citizenship.



## DEFINING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

### Active citizenship is important

When we create something together, we feel a sense of co-ownership. And experiencing co-ownership makes us want to participate in the community. When we participate in the community, we see ourselves as citizens. When we see ourselves as citizens, we strengthen equality, which is a prerequisite for our participation in society on a free and equal footing.

### Active citizenship in Aarhus is about:

- Using your abilities and opportunities in the best possible way, to the benefit of society
- Participating in and creating inclusive activities
- Translating valuable knowledge into valuable practice
- Building bridges between generations, gender, ethnicity, income, occupations, neighborhoods, and so on.
- That all Aarhus citizens feel that they are part of the community
- Joining together in both informal and formalized forms of community
- Helping each other find the right balance between financial, social, health and environmental considerations

Active citizenship arises from ideas, interests, commitment, needs and consideration for others. In order for active citizenship to flourish, the citizens of Aarhus must invest their time and energy in each other or a cause. The more successful we are at creating a close-knit, well-functioning society, the better conditions we will have for active citizenship.

“ If each of us thinks in terms of positive cooperation between citizens and the municipality, active citizenship will help make things a little more fun. ” (quote: citizen group)



# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

## Finding new solutions together

Together, we must practice finding new solutions to develop our welfare society. To do so, we must loosen up traditional roles and rethink how we interact with each other.

## The citizen of Aarhus

As citizens of Aarhus, we want to see the municipality, businesses and educational institutions as good potential partners. But we do not always need to involve the municipality directly. Instead, we must carefully consider what we expect from the community and the municipality. We must take personal responsibility for our neighborhoods and for each other. We must participate with the resources we have. If we want something to happen, sometimes we have to lead the way.

People cannot be forced to be active citizens. But everyone has a right to participate, and you can actively enjoy taking responsibility and getting involved with your fellow citizens, your neighborhood or a cause. It is a question of being willing to make an effort because it makes sense and creates value, for the individual citizen and for Aarhus.

## The City Council

As politicians, we must create a framework and direction for the development of Aarhus, while at the same time making room for active citizenship. We must give our citizens responsibility. We must place budgets and responsibility in the hands of our local communities, while at the same time calling on our citizens to demonstrate a higher degree of involvement and responsibility in order to live up to the intentions of the active citizenship policy.

On the City Council, we must be prepared to use unconventional new methods in order to renew and transform our collaboration with each other and with citizens. We must dare to take a chance on the experimental and the unconventional, and to support managers, employees and citizens who do the same. We must dare to be daring.

If this means that we must relax rules and rethink the municipality's objectives, we must be prepared to work on this. The City Council always has final responsibility for municipal services.

## The workplace

As workplaces and businesses, we must take responsibility for strengthening the community. Both the special community that is created at the individual company, in the individual workplace and in the community found in our neighborhoods and in Aarhus as a whole.

Because large companies and organisations have special resources, they are in a special position to contribute to creating solutions and opportunities.



## Aarhus Municipality

As managers and employees of the municipality, we must be prepared to rethink how we perform our work. There must be a greater focus on relationships and on the benefit for citizens than on the service provided. Citizens and the municipality must make their mutual expectations clear. We must prioritize our resources so that they create the greatest possible benefit for the citizens. Managers and employees cannot do this unless they collaborate with the world around them.

We must be prepared to work outside normal working hours when citizens are expected to exercise active citizenship at these times.

As municipal employees, we must demonstrate openness to new initiatives, help citizens help one another, and be prepared to accept the consequences of the new expectations regarding our cooperation with citizens.

## Balancing mutual expectations

The municipality performs a wide range of services and tasks. The scope for collaboration with citizens depends on the type of service or task. Some services and tasks are regulated by legislation which forms a framework for how they are to be performed. Other services and tasks are performed in accordance with other strategies, policies and agreements.

Examples of services and tasks performed by the municipality:

- Development of policies and strategies
- Executive tasks performed by the municipality in its capacity as public authority which typically affect individual citizens and businesses
- Services and activities of which all citizens are potential users

But no matter the task or service, it must always be possible to justify and explain bureaucracy and rules. If they cannot be explained and justified, they must be challenged.

The City Council has overall responsibility for meeting the political objectives set for Aarhus as whole. But the City Council, municipal managers and employees, and citizens all share responsibility for defining the core task concretely and reaching a shared understanding of how best to perform it to the benefit of the target group.



## INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

### Diversity must create value

In order to promote active citizenship in Aarhus, acceptance, equality, recognition and inclusion are important ingredients.

As citizens of Aarhus, we must combat discrimination and prejudices about each other. Difference must be a strength. It is important that those who are able take the lead and demonstrate openness. Understanding and a warm welcome promote inclusion.

*“ If we all see each other as equal partners, and the municipality gives citizens insight and influence, active citizenship will become a permanent success to the benefit of all. ” (quote: citizen group)*

### Reaching out to each other

There is a need for all citizens of Aarhus to reach out and to invite one another to participate, including those who rarely or never get involved. We participate with the resources we have.

We must be open to the different ways in which it makes sense for different individuals to embrace active citizenship, to how we can come together and what we can accomplish across boundaries of age, neighborhood, ethnicity, ability and lifestyle.

We must refuse apathy in Aarhus and share our resources and energy with those who have less. Because it promotes inclusion, getting a chance to put the resources they have to use is also important for newcomers to the city.

*“ If each and every one of us has an influence, active citizenship will get more of us to participate actively. ” (quote: citizen group)*

*“ If each of us takes responsibility, active citizenship in Aarhus will mean good relationships for everyone and a good city to live in. ” (quote: citizen group)*



# COMMUNITIES

## Different communities

There is not just one community. There are many communities, large and small, which are active in neighborhoods, locally and across Aarhus as a whole.

## Strengthen the role of local communities

Draw on the experiences of small local communities and build on what already exists. Neighborhoods are good places to practice active citizenship. Here, it is easier to plan things and to see what brings people together rather than what divides them.

This is particularly important to keep in mind in relation to inclusion and integration.

Strengthen informal communities and local structures. Avoid unnecessary restrictions and micromanagement. The districts of the city should be allowed to develop in different directions.

Create space for the growth and expression of active citizenship both indoors and outdoors. Create flexible, inclusive frameworks for municipal institutions, so that active citizenship can be exercised here. The point of departure is that because municipal institutions belong to the citizens of Aarhus, they are a common project for all of us.

When we get involved, we should think the perspectives of our fellow citizens into our actions. Demonstrate goodwill towards each other and each other's ideas. Together, we must make sure that those who are unable to speak for themselves have a voice, and that those who have difficulty seeking out opportunities get help.

## Share, grow and connect

We must experiment with rewarding formalized communities.

When we cultivate our opportunities for sharing resources such as gardens, workshops, kitchens, classrooms, cars, ideas, dreams and plans, we strengthen active citizenship, build relationships and get the most out of our potential

“ If each of us spends ten minutes a week talking to someone different from ourselves, active citizenship in Aarhus will slowly but surely grow. ” (quote: citizen group)



# VOLUNTEERING

## Volunteering must be easy

Volunteers and associations play an important role in our welfare society. Both in relation to structuring concrete initiatives and to making sure everyone is a part of the community. This work should be recognised and developed further.

Developing volunteerism is the shared responsibility of the City Council, the municipality, associations, businesses, educational institutions and citizens.

The better we are at sharing our knowledge, resources, experience and expertise, the better job we will do of developing Aarhus.

All citizens of Aarhus must have the opportunity to get involved and contribute their passion, knowledge and expertise. Participation is a value in itself. The barriers to participating must be broken down.

*“ It has to be easy and simple to be an active citizen, and there’s no reason it shouldn’t also be fun. ” (quote: citizen group)*

## The efforts of volunteers must supplement the municipality’s core services and tasks

The efforts of volunteers are an important supplement to the municipality’s core services and professional efforts. For this reason, the municipality must welcome volunteers and involve them as much as possible.

Volunteers must be able to participate in a broad, diverse range of functions and services. The municipality must draw inspiration from local initiative and engagement.

The municipality is responsible for clarifying what functions and services cannot be performed by volunteers. It must always be possible to justify and explain bureaucracy and rules which stand in the way of volunteer engagement. If they cannot be explained and justified, they must be challenged.

Formulating the local rules of the game for cooperation is a joint responsibility.

Organisational habits and cultures in the municipality must not stand in the way of active citizenship and volunteering.

*“ If each of us gets involved in practical communities, active citizenships will grow spontaneously. ” (quote: citizen group)*



# CO-CREATION AND BRIDGE-BUILDING

## Co-creation

There must be room for co-creation in the development of Aarhus. Fundamentally, all relevant parties should have a say in defining what we want to achieve and how to go about it in relation to a particular case. With cocreation, the right to take the initiative and the right to participate are expanded, as well as awareness of the important role all citizens of Aarhus play in the development of the city.

## Education and entrepreneurship

The knowledge and values, skills and competences which are linked to active citizenship should be an integrated aspect of all formal education in Aarhus, no matter the subject. But this alone is not enough. We are all role models.

Valuable life experience, knowledge, learning and theory must be acknowledged and translated into concrete actions and solutions in Aarhus. The municipality, businesses and associations can strengthen their cooperation with young people and students, among other groups.

We must rethink the way we create jobs and include one another on the job market. Businesses can stimulate volunteerism, talent development and job creation. New partnerships can intensify the collaboration on Aarhus.

## Shared activities as bridge-builders

We must use activities, art and culture as bridge-builders and to bring people together in new ways. Activities create shared experiences which promote active citizenship. The milieus which are thriving or under development must be supported.

## From consultation to early dialogue in urban development

Citizens' participation and genuine influence are indispensable in the architectural planning and development of Aarhus. Which is why Aarhus Municipality is moving from public consultation to early dialogue. We must experiment with temporary uses for urban spaces, buildings and lots. Citizens and politicians, as well as municipal managers and employees, must have opportunities to learn from their experiences along the way.

Urban planning must make room for active citizenship.

“ If each of us participates with ideas and debate, active citizenship in Aarhus will generate good ideas to build on – to everyone's advantage. ” (quote: citizen group)



# COMMUNICATION

## Communication is the key

Communication is the key to co-creation and active citizenship. Good communication builds on respectful and equal information and dialogue.

Communication is about how we treat each other. To become citizens, we must be treated like citizens. Genuine dialogue helps us discover what we can accomplish together

## The city is growing

It is not possible for anyone to have an overview over everything that happens or over what is good for all districts and neighborhoods in the city center, outside the Ringgaden ring road and in the surrounding towns. This makes it a shared responsibility for everyone who lives, works or studies in Aarhus Municipality to tell each other about their wishes, ideas, needs, challenges and opportunities. Communication platforms, relationships and network must contribute to spreading ideas, messages and shared knowledge about what is happening in our local communities

*“ If each and every one of us listens, active citizenship will be an asset for Aarhus Municipality and provide better, faster solutions. ”  
(quote: citizen group)*

## Communicating with each other must be easy

The lines of communication between the municipality and citizens must be short, and it has to be clear what is being communicated and why we are communicating in the concrete situation

When the municipality wishes to carry out initiatives that affect citizens, citizens must be involved at such an early stage that there is a genuine possibility of influencing processes and results. It must be possible to involve all groups. It is the municipality's responsibility to explain the possibilities for influencing a particular case. This service includes professional and wellfounded responses to citizens regarding decisions and rulings

## Adapt communication to the target group

Because the municipality must enter into dialogue with many different target groups, communication should always be accessible and understandable. The form of communication must be adapted to the recipient's level of knowledge and background. There must be some mobile communication platforms which can be 'outsourced' to our citizens.



## DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP POLICY

The active citizenship policy was developed by citizens, businesses, associations, volunteers, municipal employees, educational institutions and politicians working together in Aarhus in 2014-15. There were over 700 participants in the formulation of the active citizenship policy, which is the first of its kind in Aarhus Municipality.

The ambition behind the development of the active citizenship policy was to create:

- A broad, open and openminded process of involvement which gave all involved parties an opportunity to discuss the active citizenship themes which matter to them, and to contribute topics and formulations to be included in the policy.
- A synthesis of the many contributions from the involved parties followed by an open consultation process with plenty of time for submitting consultation responses and considering them.
- An accessible, relevant, ambitious and durable policy which can serve as a framework and direction for active citizenship in Aarhus.

While the City Council is formally responsible for the policy, making it live is a shared responsibility for all Aarhus citizens.

The active citizenship policy will constitute the foundation for the future development of Aarhus and the municipality's welfare services and tasks.

“ We hope that Aarhus can lead the way and work to promote fellowship. ” ((quote: citizen group))