



## Territorial Social Innovation in the Nordic Countries and Scotland



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### **CYCLING WITHOUT AGE: The right to wind in your hair**

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Cycling Without Age (CWA) is an association connecting people across generations through bicycle rides. The association encourages community involvement and active citizenship by providing a platform through which volunteers can offer a ride to older people who live in care centres. Both the volunteer cycle pilots and the older generation experience improved physical and mental well-being through involvement in the association. It is growing rapidly, with 450 bicycle rickshaws across 65 Danish municipalities currently promoting the older generation's right to wind in their hair.

## Preconditions, Inspiration, Nurture

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Many elderly people living in nursing homes today belong to a generation where it was common to bicycle up to 25 km a day to go to work. In fact, from the 1920s until the 1950s, cycling was one of the most common mean of transportation in cities such as Copenhagen, Rome and even Los Angeles.

The idea behind Cycling Without Age (CWA) was born when Ole Kassow, the founder, saw Thorkild, a 97 year old nursing resident, sitting on a bench outside the nursing home. Ole could see from Thorkild's tan that he had spent much time outside.

After reflecting upon the difficulties of becoming older and less mobile, Ole decided to visit his local nursing home with a rented bicycle rickshaw and offer a ride to one of the residents. He proposed the idea to one of the nurses, who thought it sounded like a great idea. Shortly after, this nurse, together with Gertrud, a resident at the old people's home, went on a trip with Ole in the bicycle rickshaw enjoying the fresh air and wind in the hair.

The next day the manager of the nursing home called Ole and asked what he had done to Gertrud to make her so much happier and livelier than usual. This prompted Ole to return with the bicycle rickshaw and take other nursing home residents on trips.

Ole learned many things about life, society and history from the people he bicycled with and he decided that these stories were too good not to be shared. He wrote a letter to the Copenhagen municipality, explaining what he was doing and attaching a few photos.

The day after Ole got a phone call from Copenhagen municipality offering him 5 auto rickshaws for 5 nursing homes. This was exactly the type of active citizenship they wanted to encourage.

With these bikes Ole gathered friends and local people. One of their first trips inspired reports on two Danish TV stations and in the national newspaper. Following this publicity, 30 volunteers signed up to work with Ole and CWA was born.

# Implementation

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## Resources

In the beginning, the initiative occupied Ole's free time while he ran his own consultancy company on the side. Meanwhile, news about the unexpected and positive results of CWA's work continued travel and the volunteer network quickly grew, together with the number of nursing homes participating in the initiative.

After one year, the project leader at Copenhagen municipality, Dorthe proposed employing Ole on a full-time basis to implement the initiative in more nursing homes. Together they developed a model for municipal participation in the initiatives. In the process of looking for funding opportunities they realised that they would have better opportunities to apply for financial support if they registered as an association.

At the same time they quickly learned that many municipalities have difficulties relating to an informal network of people engaged in a 'different' idea that doesn't fit in to the municipal legislative framework. Often they ran into comments such as 'Are you just a Facebook group?'. As they grew as an association it became easier to address this issue and national media coverage supported broader recognition of the association in all corners of Denmark.

Employees in the public administration in the municipalities are an important resource for the association. Despite some variation in levels of engagement among the public sector more than 65 (out of 98) municipalities are now members of the association.

Throughout the development of CWA there was a core group of heavily engaged volunteers who were a crucial resource in the early stages. From this group a core team of 12 heavily engaged volunteers sat down with the founder and the project leader from Copenhagen Municipality and developed the principles behind CWA. Guiding this process has been a desire to find new perspectives on how to cooperate with others offering opportunities for the elders on the nursing homes.

The approach by CWA in terms of engaging with volunteers differs from the traditional municipal approach. Rather than seeing the main task as recruiting volunteers purely for the purpose of performing a task the focus is on inspiring active citizenship and creating bonds within the community. The chairman of CWA is also very active as a volunteer pilot.

This is also something they included in the terminology relating to people participating in CWA. There are three main groups taking part in the activities around the bicycle rides. This is the passengers (the elderly), the pilots (those riding the bicycles) and the personnel (working at the nursing homes).

Part of the process of developing CWA has also included dialogue with Social+ (a publicly financed advisory organisation for social innovations and social experiments). This partnership has been useful in identifying funding opportunities, giving feedback on the business model behind Cycling with elders, and developing a three year vision for CWA. This cooperation has resulted in two successful applications to CWA private funds in Denmark. This funding has allowed CWA to employ people and thereby scale up activities.

Currently, CWA has 5 full time employees and several student assistants and freelancers. Funding has also been allocated to experiment with and explore the health effects for pilots as well as elders during longer bicycle trips.

## **The Network / Co-operation**

Dorthe from Copenhagen municipality began to engage more and more in the initiative, reducing her workload to half time in order to concentrate on establishing partnerships with nursing homes.

An important networking milestone for CWA was a presentation given by the founder of CWA to over 1600 people at the annual meeting of municipal representatives. The short presentation included 10-15 pictures and explained the effectiveness of CWA in generating new relationships within communities. Ten municipalities' immediately came and asked how they could get started with this initiative locally.

Another important factor for the success of the association has been the establishment of the board consisting of people with solid competences relating to start-ups of organisations and businesses. The regulations furthermore state that the board is constituted in accordance to current needs and can be changed so it corresponds with the association's need and development.

The board has been a helpful resource in the process of developing a model which we hoped would function for the association. Back then we would not have thought – even in our wildest dreams – that so many people are interested in joining and supporting CWA.

A big task has been to coordinate all the people wishing to become involved. The founder continues to receive emails daily – many of them with long personal stories about why they would like to become involved. To accommodate all the passionate people wanting to contribute, CWA has set up a clear division of labour regarding welcoming, connecting with others in the association and managing the administrative elements of getting started.

Last year, the association developed a model so that people from all over the world could apply for authorisation to work professionally with this concept. The application is rather extensive including questions about why you wanted to be part of CWA, what motivated

you to apply, what inspired you in the interaction with the older generation etc. As a result, the team mainly receives applications from highly committed people willing to prepare this extensive application. Today the organisation has more than 100 authorised operators around the world.

## **Enablers and Barriers**

Among the important enablers were:

- The drive and professional capacity of the founder, Ole Kassow.
- The involvement of Copenhagen municipality
- Media attention from the beginning
- Engaged volunteer pilots
- Employees at the municipalities and nursing homes

There have also been many barriers along the way, all of which CWA have managed to overcome.

One challenge in the beginning of the project was managing membership in the association. Initially, some municipal staff did not believe it was possible to become members of an association. Fortunately, once several municipalities enrolled as members of CWA the resistant municipalities reconsidered their concerns and signed up as members as well.

A crucial enabler for CWA has been two oral presentations. The first has already been mentioned and were at the annual meeting for all municipal representatives organised by Kommunernes Landsforening. The second was a Ted talk that, as of today, has been played 42.812 on youtube. This led to the initiative began scaling internationally. The first country to become interested in Cycling Without Age was Norway. Today more than 27 countries have a webpage representing the CWA activities taking place in the country. Some of the pages, for example Switzerland, are very comprehensive whereas others are more minimal. Each country web page is set up by the team in Denmark and then webpages are developed and maintained by local people.

The process of scaling up has involved quite a lot of cooperation with national, regional and local cyclist unions which have shown much interest in the initiative. This has been the case both in Denmark and other countries, where many volunteer pilots are engaged in

cyclist associations. In some countries there is a more formalised cooperation with the cyclist unions whereas in other it is more on an ad hoc basis.

Regarding scaling up internationally there has been a lot of challenges relating to getting the bicycle rickshaws to the local unions in e.g. USA and the only reason why the number isn't 10 times higher for CWA activities is because of this. The lack of bicycles due to the long distances and high prices for transport is something we are doing everything we can to mitigate. Now it seems like we have so many involved so we are getting more manufacturer involved which want to be part of solving this.

Although discussions of financing employees in the "kindness industry" can be taboo, the employment of dedicated in full-time paid positions within CWA has been crucial for the association's advancement and growth.

## **Interaction with Municipalities and other levels of governance**

The initial phase of CWA was highly dependent on the interest and support from Copenhagen municipality. This led to investment in bicycle rickshaws for more nursing homes and furthermore support for the founder, Ole Kassow, to work full time with the initiative from an early stage.

Since the presentation at the annual meeting for all municipalities, organised by Kommunernes Landsforening, with more than 1600 municipal representatives further outreach work has not been necessary. CWA Today more than 65 municipalities (of 98) are members of the association and have bicycle rickshaws available at their nursing homes.

To keep the enrolment procedure simple for municipalities CWA has set up a booking system to enable communication between pilots and nursing homes. Having many engaged pilots in the community to provide bicycle rides on an ongoing basis is important in ensuring continuity.

## Social Innovation Effects

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### Outcomes, Impact and “Scaling”

CWA provides easy access to active citizenship. The association supports the well-being of the older generation, giving them an opportunity to become more integrated in the community. The association promotes the right to wind in the hair and, in doing so, builds bridges between the generations and supports social cohesion in society.

This initiative enhances cooperation and trust in local communities by creating social bonds across generations. Some volunteers report back that they got a ‘new set of grandparents’ by participating in the program. The meetings provide an opportunity for the old generation to share their stories and life-experiences while also having a positive impact on life both for the old people and the pilots.

The initial feedback in terms of health and well-being was also impressive. People who usually never spoke started speaking, people who had previously exhibited aggressive behaviour started contributing to a good atmosphere at the nursing home. Some blind residents talked about the sensations of being able to smell the flowers and feel the wind in the hair. This inspired the social movement’s sub-title “everyone has right to wind in the hair”.

The association’s five guiding principles provide insight into the individual outcomes around the bicycle rides.

- 1) It starts with the simple act of **generosity**. Giving time to the old people showing gratitude for their generation and all of their lessons learned through life.
- 2) There are a lot of stories to be shared through **storytelling** from our elders, but also from us.
- 3) They want to listen to us too and through this bridge we form **relationships**.
- 4) We take our time, and the act of **cycling slowly** helps us take in the experience and appreciate it.
- 5) **Without age** is the principle of how life does not end at a given age, but instead we can embrace what each generation has to offer through something as simple as cycling.

The initiative promotes active citizenship and exercise while spreading joy among the old people living in the neighbourhood.

## Lessons Learned

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- Be a good example yourself to inspire others to participate rather than try to recruit volunteers.
- A broad outreach through media attention can be an important enabler and an easy way to connect with other engaged people wanting to participate.
- Scaling up is easy if the message of the initiative is delivered in the right way to the right group of interested people e.g. municipal representative.
- Ted talks are a good way to get any initiative going internationally.
- Make an effort connecting the people locally to keep the initiative scaling out.