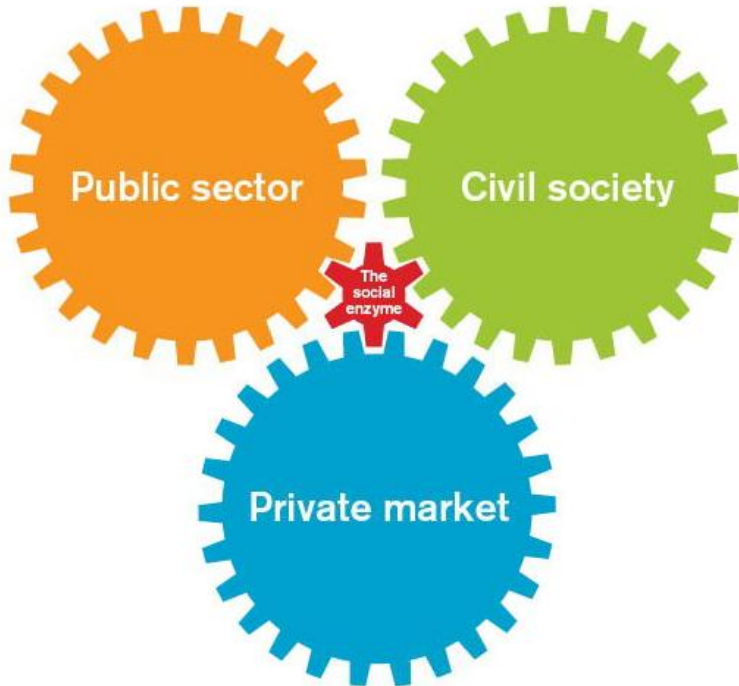




The social enzyme

- A declaration of love to the welfare state

By
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<p>Content</p>	<p>This article is about my concern for our welfare society in Denmark.</p> <p>I believe that things are going to go wrong if we don't channel the voluntarism from the civil society, the drive from the private sector and the academic, professional weight of the public sector to work together and support one another to a much greater extent than at present.</p> <p>We need to locate the social enzymes!</p>  <p>Neglect, problems with loneliness and substance abuse are rarely much more than a stone's throw away in a country like Denmark. But we have shielded ourselves from these problems, packed them away and paid others to solve them. But these problems are by definition unsolvable. If there is a solution, it is in a more involved approach to other people, and it will largely be your own approach and your own choice as to whether you are going to make a difference for others.</p>
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It is about making a difference for other people

<p>More want more</p>	<p>The question has both economic and perceptive dimensions. There is a lack of balance between the givers and takers of the common goods in society between the employed and unemployed. We cannot finance the calls for public service with more taxes. At the same time, the strain on public services is increasing considerably. <i>'More want more'</i>, as the saying goes in Danish, in the sense that an ever-greater number of people demand more from the public services available to society.</p>
<p>What is welfare?</p>	<p>A provocative number of people I meet do not see public service as a gesture or positive action. This assistance is taken for granted—and at the same time given a failing grade. Many people think of welfare as 'a grumpy person in city hall'. Nobody feels stigmatized for receiving social welfare payments. To the contrary. Everyone makes sure they receive the public benefits that they are entitled to and see them as reasonable repayment—a right.</p> <p><i>It is somewhat paradoxical that those who are contributing are not happy, but those who are receiving are often not happy, either.</i></p> <p>A few years ago there was a rather controversial and high-profile debate about 'Carina', a single Danish mother on social welfare who was presented by a politician to the press as an example of a "poor" person, but in reality had almost as much income in welfare as an ordinary working person in Denmark. Think for a moment about how the debate about Carina would have been received if all of the 'Carinas' in Denmark had announced how grateful they were for how the Danish welfare state provided them with proper living conditions, that they regretted not being able to work and that they instead spent their time doing volunteer work, perhaps in a local care center or in the resident democracy in a public housing association.</p> <p>Is it utopian to imagine a welfare society in which everyone contributes with what they can? With money, with time, with care, with involvement or just by making coffee?</p>
<p>A moral statement</p>	<p>Yes, I want to make a moral statement. We must return to a situation in which those who contribute are proud to do so. And those, who are receiving, are both satisfied with their situation and to a much greater extent than at present reciprocate by contributing with what they can.</p> <p>Should we fail to do something, we will look back in 10–20 years and ascertain that we missed an historic opportunity to maintain the good—the fantastic—Danish model.</p> <p>The finger is pointing at all of us as individuals. We must 'live' the values that our welfare society is built upon. And we have far more opportunities than we think—in our private and personal lives alike. We can remodel</p>

'Advice on debt at the kitchen table' (Gældsrådgivning ved køkkenbordet)

'Advice on debt at the kitchen table' (Gældsrådgivning ved køkkenbordet) is the name of a project in which KAB contacts residents who are behind on their rent payments and offers them help with getting their finances under control and avoiding eviction.

Many of them prove eligible for rent subsidies, reduced debt repayment or simply help with their budget. But they have not gotten in touch with their municipality or bank themselves, and many of them are foreign to the social system. In other words, KAB is able to get in contact with people who otherwise would not necessarily receive or seek help. These people's crisis can typically be solved with rather straightforward knowledge, because in the midst of a strained life situation, there are many who are simply not aware of the options available to them. Many are undoubtedly able to make it by using their own personal network – but for people without such support, isn't fantastic that the housing organization is able to halt an individual's personal deroute before there are more serious consequences?

New partnerships

The project is financed by the state via the rate adjustment pool scheme (satspuljen); a small investment with a massive return. The most recent development is that private market partners have become involved in the project. Ernst & Young, an accounting firm, and Lett, a legal firm, provide free assistance for particularly complicated cases, such as CSR-related activities. In doing so, KAB can refer residents in special situations to highly qualified assistance from a lawyer or accountant free of charge.



I can think of dozens of other corresponding examples in the intersection of the three sectors.

<p>A dating site for volunteers?</p>	<p>Many companies would like to provide free work for a good cause. As citizens, managers and politicians, we ought to accept this assistance. And the public sector should welcome this help with open arms. When is someone going to develop a 'Handbook for Municipalities in Capitalizing on Corporate Good Will'? Or some kind of an equivalent to a dating site, but 'translated' to the meeting between unresolved social work and capable volunteers. Or what about an app for smartphones that could 'geo-catch' volunteers for projects in local communities?</p>
<p>Facilitating the best meeting between citizens and the producers of welfare</p>	<p>We must consciously fertilize the soil and promote the development of the social enzyme, because it creates welfare-related results in the interaction between sectors. Insisting that the good must come from the public sector alone is a dead end. It's not that I believe that the 'marketization' of the public sector in and of itself will solve these problems. Not at all. But I am open to market-like mechanisms in a politically regulated process being able to facilitate the best meeting between citizens and the producers of welfare.</p> <p>The absence of 'social enzyme' in the public sector is possibly also a symptom of a managerial crisis, and management is the decisive key to creating the breeding ground for passionate volunteers with a big heart. A strong commitment to the interaction between the sectors can emerge for the very reason that the new constellation defines itself directly in relation to such work. This constellation is less bound by decades-old rules, systems and methods. To the contrary, in concrete terms, it can – in the present – choose its tools and drive directly towards the destination.</p> <p><i>Be careful when giving an exciting problem and meaningful work to capable people – you might get a solution! 😊</i></p>
<p>Politicians should think in long-term strategies</p>	<p>I think that politicians and their communication overlook the fact that we have a population, which listens to long-term arguments —possibly to a much greater degree than in other countries. We generally remember, respect and acknowledge politicians who dare to assume positions with perspectives that stretch further out into the future than the next election. A new sense of legitimacy emerges when politicians show and explain the long-term perspective. In the welfare area, there is a need for strong leadership capable of involving good forces from multiple sides. It's about bringing the values of the welfare state—but not necessarily its institutions—into the future!</p>
<p>Let's swallow some ideological camels</p>	<p>Yes, it will be necessary to 'swallow ideological camels', as we say in Danish. In Danish, there is a saying, 'everyone makes their own happiness', which could be re-phrased, 'everyone makes our common welfare'. Many company owners, entrepreneurs and top managers have a personal drive which I would really like to see more of in the service of welfare and the community.</p>

We can't just lean back and think that others are going to do it for us.

The fundamental values

The will to act is entirely decisive.

The operational enthusiasm and fighting spirit to think and act for ourselves rather than merely accepting that anything less is 'good enough'. We can't just lean back and think that others are going to do it for us. I am inspired by equal parts private enterprise, grassroots-oriented drive and professional consideration. Summed up, we are able to accomplish much more within the social sphere—in the broad sense. Finding barriers is easy, but they must never become insurmountable truths that we are unable to do anything about.

We need a sense of wildness and edgy thinking and some untamed determination if we are going to be able to break through the complexity and realize something that extends beyond the optimization of short-sighted sector interests.

I am and 100% loyal towards the ideas behind the welfare society due to its social perspective and humanistic foundation. Danish society builds on fundamental values concerning the distribution of wealth so that nobody is forced to live in poverty and everyone enjoys good and equal opportunities for social mobility, health, education etc. But I see a considerable need to re-think the institutional manifestation of the good intentions.

I don't think that it is an 'either-or' choice between market, political regulation or civil society. I think it is 'both-and'—we need all three sectors to contribute actively and work together!



Our institutional packaging of a number of social problems contributes to alienating us from the problems. We struggle to understand the total system of benefits and payments. But we also build up a culture with significant challenges. When a case about incest, for example, hits the news, the media react instinctively by accusing the authorities of neglect. The premise would appear to be that we live in a flawless society in a perfectly normal state. A flawless culture that in many ways forgets to reflect on realistic actions and possibilities. The angles in the media come to represent a collective denial of reality and tend to place us all in a dependent, paralyzed and helpless position as the passive receivers of the protection of the public sector.

This is a declaration of love to the welfare state in its modern form.

Let us focus on finding and developing the social enzyme.

Let's debate it. And let's try it out.



	<p>There are many possibilities for realizing a dream about a better society with reinforced cohesion.</p> <p><i>And if you want a dream to come true, then you have to wake up, rub your eyes and act!</i></p> <p>Let's work together and set the social enzyme free!!</p>
<p>Website</p>	<p>I have described how this can be achieved in a lengthier debate paper (Unfortunately only in Danish at this point in time).</p> <p>It can be found at www.detsocialeenzym.dk or www.facebook.com/detsocialeenzym</p>
<p>The author</p> 	<p>Jesper Nygård is presently CEO of KAB, a large Danish non-profit public housing association. From August 1st 2013 Jesper Nygård will start his new job as CEO of Realdania, a strategic philanthropic association supporting projects in the built environment in Denmark.</p> <p>Jesper Nygård is former chairman of the Board at Realdania and Landsbyggefonden (The national building foundation), former board member at BL - Danmarks Almene Boliger (The national federation for non-profit social housing associations), BRF Kredit A/S and the Center for Social Responsibility, and presently member of the advisory board at Danske Bank (the largest commercial bank in Denmark).</p> <p>For more than 30 years, Jesper Nygård has been active in various capacities and worked in the intersection between state, market and civil society. The observations described in this article build on, among other things, 16 years as the CEO of a large public housing association and almost 10 years as a board member and chairman of the board for Realdania.</p>