



Senior housing on Venø Island: enabling generational renewal through adapted housing solutions in rural Denmark

SUMMARY

On Venø Island, some older residents lived in large family homes that no longer matched their needs. The local community association VenøBoen worked with Struer Municipality and a private investor to develop five barrier-friendly rental homes for seniors, built as modular units, with shared facilities and a communal garden. Seven residents moved in to the new development, freeing up their former homes for incoming families and supporting generational renewal on the island.



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Themes: Housing, social inclusion, demography, democracy and participation

Country: Denmark

Organisations:

- > Gender Equality Research Institute – IPES (Inštitut za proučevanje enakosti spolov), non-governmental / civil society organisation
- > VenøBoen local community association – non-governmental / civil society organisation

Start & end date: 01/2020 - 06/2025

Budget: EUR 3 000 000

Funding sources:

- > Private investment (building society / housing company)
- > Supported by local community initiative

Website: <https://venoe.dk/foreninger/venoeboen/>

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CONTEXT

Venø is a small island in the Limfjord, in Struer Municipality, reached by a short ferry crossing. Like many such communities, it faces a high average age and most homes are now occupied by just one or two people. Older residents typically live in large houses that are difficult to maintain, but would rather stay on the island than move elsewhere. For years, residents and local associations discussed how to keep ageing islanders on Venø while also attracting younger people. The shortage of small, senior-friendly homes was the missing link: without somewhere to downsize to, seniors could not free up the houses that incoming families would need, and the year-round community and the island's ferry service risked gradual decline.



OBJECTIVES

- > Enable older residents to remain on Venø by providing smaller, low-maintenance, senior-friendly homes;
- > Free up larger homes for incoming residents, preferably families with children, to lower the average age and increase the island's population;
- > Preserve a vibrant, sustainable year-round community and financial viability of the island's ferry service.



ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The **initiative grew out of the island community** and was driven by the local association VenøBoen, working with Struer Municipality and, ultimately, a private investor. From the outset, the project had **access to a suitable building plot**, owned by a local landowner who supported the initiative. The plot was already designated for residential development by the municipality, removing one of the usual obstacles for housing projects.

VenøBoen began by convening a **residents' meeting** in January 2020, where 16 people signed a declaration of interest and a three-person working group was elected to take the project forward. Over the following four years, the working group contacted non-profit housing associations, local craftsmen and potential investors, while **maintaining dialogue with Struer Municipality** to keep its support.

In autumn 2024, a **private investor with ties to the island** committed to the project and the investor's housing company Mejdalbo ApS reached an **agreement with a developer to deliver the homes**. These were built as modular units at the developer's factory and shipped to Venø on heavy goods vehicles via a chartered ferry, while the houses' foundations, infrastructure, parking facilities and outdoor areas were constructed on site on the island. By the end of May 2025, the homes and shared facilities were completed and seven residents had moved in.



RESULTS

- > **Five senior rental homes** of about 100 m² each were built, with shared facilities (workshop/tool store, five storage units, bicycle shed, barbecue and terrace), a large communal garden maintained by residents and access to a community hall on the neighbouring property.
- > **Seven older islanders**, all long-term residents of Venø, **downsized into the new homes**.
- > Their former homes were sold to people moving to the island, resulting in a **net increase of seven permanent residents**.
- > The senior residents reported being very satisfied with their new homes and having a **strong sense of community**, supporting each other and aiming to reduce the risk of loneliness in old age.
- > By rebalancing the island's population structure, the initiative supports the longer-term **sustainability of the year-round community** and its ferry service, and helps to improve Venø's attractiveness.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > The project **originated with the islanders** themselves and was carried out by a **trusted local association**, which built broad support and momentum from the start.
- > The initiative used a small number of homes to **unlock a chain reaction**: seniors downsize, family houses are freed up and new households move in, addressing ageing and repopulation at the same time.
- > **Securing an investor was the greatest challenge**, especially during the COVID-19 years when building contacts and dialogue was difficult; a personal connection to the island ultimately made the difference.
- > Having a **designated building plot** from the outset, and a municipality that remained positive thanks to **continuous dialogue**, removed the obstacles that often stall rural housing projects.
- > A **clear written statement** of values and objectives, the purpose, project description and facts about the location helped when approaching housing associations, craftsmen, investors and the municipality.



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