

THE MURMUR

COPENHAGEN
EDITION

Medicinal
cannabis is
finally le-
galised but
epileptics
miss out

Why has a
Norwegian
teen drama
developed
a cult fol-
lowing in
Denmark?

Special
8-page
gymnasium
supplement
inside!

NEWS

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COMMENTARY

DECEMBER 2016 VOL. 3 ISSUE 11



Being Danish on your own terms

Niddal El-Jabri wants to help minority youth bridge the gap to mainstream society

THE MURMUR is a Danish newspaper, which just happens to use the English language. Through original reporting and photography, we tell stories about what it's like to live in Denmark.

THE MURMUR



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DO YOU KNOW why you believe what you believe in?

I realised recently that I don't. I had come across an op-ed in Jyllands-Posten newspaper by professor emeritus Helmuth

Nyborg, entitled *Fear for Denmark's future*. It was barely concealed racism, suggesting that immigrants posed a threat to Denmark because of their alleged low IQ.

"Immigrants from the south with low IQs will unknowingly undermine the existence of European people," he writes.

Pointing to so-called Cold Winter theory, he argues that northern European people had to be intelligent to survive the cold winters after leaving Africa. He says this demonstrates why democracy arose in the north, and not in Africa.

I was appalled. When I searched his name I then came across another op-ed from April in which he suggests that the low intelligence of immigrants from the Middle East explains why they have difficulty integrating and finding work.

His ideas were outrageous, but he quoted lots of facts and studies. I spent some time online and couldn't really find anything conclusive to refute him. Intuitively I knew he was wrong, but I didn't have the facts, or the time to find them.

Jyllands-Posten eventually published two replies to Nyborg's pieces. They were co-authored by 14 different academics who laid waste to Nyborg's ideas. Democracy, the Bronze Age and Mediterranean, which are rather warm. Living in a warm climate isn't always easy – there is drought and predators to contend with. And while they acknowledge that there are studies that show differences in IQ between ethnic groups, there is far more evidence to suggest that IQ is primarily influenced by our environment and not our genetics.

While it was distressing to read Nyborg's op-eds, I was gratified that he

had been so resolutely shot down by other experts with clear and nuanced arguments. And now I had the evidence I need, if this subject ever does raise its head again.

Because there is no reason to believe that racism won't return or that any of our other hard fought liberal values won't be threatened in the future. People support illiberal values not necessarily because they are evil, but often because they don't have all the information. Very rarely to people justify their position by saying, "just because." We are compelled to seek truth and the most logical answer.

Given the same facts, people can still disagree. But that's because we aren't perfect logic machines who share the same biases, inferences and facts. Not because we aren't compelled to understand the world and societies we live in.

At any rate, I think we could all do with brushing up on our arguments for preserving the liberal democracies we live in. Because according to Yascha Mounk, a lecturer in government at Harvard, liberal democracies may be at risk of decline. His research found that the percentage of young people in the West who say it is essential to live in a democracy, has plummeted. Around 75% of Britons born in the 1930s say it is essential, compared to only around 30% of Britons born in the 1980s. The same trend was mirrored in the Netherlands, New Zealand and the USA.

I find it hard to believe that millennials are inherently illiberal. I would prefer to believe that they simply don't understand how incredible Western democracies are compared to the alternatives. And this must be because we haven't given them the arguments, without which the prospect of a military dictatorship doesn't seem so awful (the same study found 80% of Americans think the military could legitimately take power).

So my request to you, dear reader – on the occasion of The Murmur's 30th issue – is to start paying attention to your beliefs. Ask yourself whether you have the evidence to support those beliefs. And when you come across someone who believes something different, listen, ask questions and discuss. The future of Western civilisation depends on it. **M**

Our politicians are being humiliated to an unreasonable degree every time they take a stance, and they are too ashamed to stand up for their own beliefs.

NOA REDINGTON,
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SPROG

MONTH IN REVIEW

GMOS are ethical

By 17 votes to 10, the Ethical Council approved the use of genetically modified organisms in food production. They based their decision on research proving GMOs aren't harmful, while highlighting the opportunities they offer.

Fighter jets withdrawn from fight against ISIS

The Danish Airforce has suspended its participation in the fight against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. In April parliament decided to send seven F16 jets to join the international coalition that is fighting in the region. After they return in December the Danish Military will instead supply around 150 troops to join the coalition forces. "The fight against ISIS is one of the government's most important foreign policy positions," said foreign minister Anders Samuelsen.



NEW KU REKTOR
Henrik C. Wegener will take over as rector of University of Copenhagen, succeeding Ralf Hemmingsen. Wegener is currently pro-rector at DTU and will start in March next year.

NO MORE PANT

Poor immigrants should no longer be able to make a living from collecting empty bottles and cans in Denmark, according Frank Jensen, Copenhagen's Lord Mayor. He wants to reform the 'pant' refund system so that they can no longer be exchanged for cash. Instead, the receipts should only be able to pay for goods in the shop and in a limited time span. The pant system was invented to encourage recycling and limit pollution. "It was never meant as a way of supporting Europe's poor immigrants and the miserable street life they live in Denmark," Jensen said in a press release.

Sophie Frahm

Copenhagen Zoo



Copenhagen zoo vaccinates against bird flu
Bird flu (H5N8) has been found in Danish poultry in North Zealand, leading the Ministry of Environment and Food to demand that all poultry be kept fenced and indoors until further notice. The injunction is impossible for Denmark's Zoos to follow, however. Copenhagen Zoo has instead been granted dispensation to vaccinate their birds so they can move freely outdoors. The Zoo's vet has vaccinated 400 flamingos, pelicans and pelicans.

SCHOOLS SPREAD MINORITY STUDENTS

In the last few years increasing numbers of schools have started to spread minority students more equally among class rooms. Municipalities and experts argue it can improve integration.

Out of 98 municipalities, 29 actively tried to distribute minority students across the different schools according to a DR poll, in which 69 municipalities responded.

Langkær Gymnasium came under scrutiny for the practice earlier this year. Rektor Yago Bundgaard argued that only by balancing the classes could real integration take place.

No more refugee minors in Langeland

Langeland Municipality will no longer receive unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Denmark, says the Immigration Service. They pulled the plug on the last three children's centres the municipality was still running. Langeland has been subject to intensive supervision following the closure of the children's centre Tullebølle a month ago, due to suspicion of sexual abuse. Langeland Municipality contends that the centres were well functioning, but this was refuted by former employee Mette Giversen, who told Radio24syv that children received varying degrees of care: some were shaken in their bunk beds, others woken with a hug. "There was just no culture for what care really was," she said.



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CITY

A stairway to heaven

The first church to be built in Copenhagen for 30 years will be erected in the southern district Sydhavn.

JAJA Architect' eye catching design envisions a light and stratified pyramid – reminiscent of a ziggurat. The façade is a promenade that spirals around the building from the water's edge to the cross on top.

Sydhavn is undergoing rapid gentrification, with new high-end residential areas Teglholmen and Sluseholmen drawing wealthy residents to the former industrial landscape.

The church will service these areas, whose populations are expected to grow from around 6,000 residents today, to 21,000 in 2030.

The church will cost 140 million kroner and paid for by the Church of Denmark through church taxes – around 80 percent of Danes are members of the church and pay church tax. It will be completed in 2019.

The Diocese of Copenhagen is also planning to build new churches in the districts Nordhavn and Ørestad, which are also expecting a boom in residents.



JAJA Architects

The new church in Sydhavn will have an upwards spiralling ramp – inviting people to take a walk to the view above the Copenhagen skyline.

New inner city beach planned for Islands Brygge

A new sandy beach is coming to Islands Brygge in the newly built Havnene area. The beach will be built on one side of a newly-dug inlet to the harbour, around which 400 new homes are being built.

The new properties in the neighbourhood are almost completely sold out, attracting residents keen to live near the waterfront.

Historic Slaughterhouses might be preserved

The fate of the historical former slaughterhouses on Enghavevej in Vesterbro still hangs in the balance. Despite being earmarked for demolition and redevelopment, the Special Building Supervisory Authority (Det Særlige Bygningssyn) have now recommended that the Agency for Culture and Palaces preserve the buildings.

Det Særlige Bygningssyn argues

We worry that these small villages end up excluding people with dementia from the rest of society.

NIS PETER NISSEN,
CHAIRMAN OF
ALZHEIMERSFORE-
NINGEN

Sophie Frahm

that the slaughterhouses worthy of preservation because they are architecturally unique and culturally significant landmarks of Copenhagen's early industrialisation.

Initially, it was the National Union for Buildings and Landscape Culture (Landsforeningen for Bygningssyn – og Landskabskultur) that proposed preserving the buildings. Chairman Karen Margrethe Olsen says she is pleased that the Særlige Bygningssyn agrees.

"The three buildings with their unique backyards make up a historically iconic environment. It is the only place in Copenhagen where you sense that part of history like that," Olsen told Politiken.

"The purpose of the preservation is to secure an authentic and well kept building complex, with buildings that date back to the early expansion of Vesterbro in the 1860s and with a characteristic combination of houses and production buildings from the second half of the 18th century," a spokesperson for Det Særlige Bygningssyn told Politiken.

The recommendation from Det Særlige Bygningssyn is only consultative and the Agency for Culture and Palaces has the final say. The agency has three months to make a decision.

Svendborg launches dementia village

A village for people suffering from dementia has opened in Svendborg on Funen. Svendborg Demensby is the first of its kind in Denmark and houses 225 residents, who have access to a music library, a restaurant as well as a wellness salon where residents can have their nails fixed while getting a massage.

The unique building – a former brewery complex – creates a safe and interesting environment for people with dementia, says Hanne Ringgard Møller, chief of the social and health committee in Svendborg municipality.

"A very large effort has been made to stimulate the dementia patients," Møller told DR.

The ready-made meals have for

example been replaced with home cooked food, which the residents can make in a so-called 'senses-kitchen'. There is also a gym, a study and a large closed off garden.

The village was established in response to a large number of requests from relatives of dementia patients in Svendborg. Several similar villages are on the drawing board in Aalborg, Odense and Herning.

The Danish Alzheimer's Association (Alzheimersforeningen) is pleased that municipalities are taking into consideration the well-being of people with dementia when planning new housing estates. They fear, however, that these small villages perhaps aren't the best solution.

"We worry that these small villages end up excluding people with dementia from the rest of society," chairman of Alzheimersforeningen, Nis Peter Nissen, told DR, adding that all nursing homes should be equipped to take care of people with dementia, as a majority of nursing home residents have dementia. **M**

GET STUCK IN

VeVe Voom

There was once a time when vegetarian diners would have to settle for the one meat-free offering on the menu. But no more, as a slew of restaurants serving high quality vegetarian foods finally do away with Danish dining's fetishisation of flesh

WHEN THE GUARDIAN assessed the options for vegetarian travellers three years ago, Denmark scored poorly. "Any bustling city with a diverse population, cultural leanings and a university or two can generally be relied upon to offer a few exclusively vegetarian cafes, but often the food on offer is disappointingly divorced from the national cuisine," the paper lamented. "Visitors to Denmark tend to rely on curry houses and Turkish kebab shops that offer falafels, tabbouleh and salad-filled pittas."

Little has changed. "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants," the American food writer Michael Pollan once advised. Good luck with that in Denmark, where it's still a challenge finding restaurants that cater for vegetarians, especially at the

top end of the market. True, Copenhagen has plenty of cafés serving soups, salads and aubergine burgers. But fancier options have long been thin on the ground.

Until now. In the face of Denmark's fetishisation of flesh, restaurants are increasingly unafraid of putting vegetables front and centre. A devotion to local, seasonal produce – the hallmarks of new Nordic cuisine – and the popularity of plant-based diets means vegetarians are no longer restricted to bland nut roasts.

Some tips: if you're planning a night out in Copenhagen and have vegetarians in your party, consider **Spisehuset**. It's in the meatpacking district – but don't let that deter you. The kitchen does wonderful things with greens (specify your preference, though). Or head to **Manfreds**, which describes itself as "probably the world's only veggie-focused restaurant famous for its raw meat" (their tartare is indeed excellent, if you're into that sort of thing). A more casual option is **The Corner at 108**, whose two evening dishes always include a vegetarian option. Then there's 108's big brother, **Noma**, which intends to be solely vegetarian for at least a season when it relocates next year.

Still, there's nothing quite like **VeVe**, the latest in a string of restaurants launched this autumn by

Two mushrooms seem to sprout from the soil. They're not fungi, but salted soya meringues.

James Clasper



VeVe's minimal and subdued interior.

chef Henrik Yde Andersen. In addition to his flagship restaurant **Kiin Kiin** – the Michelin-starred Thai restaurant in Nørrebro – his stable also includes **Kiin Kiin Bao Bao**, on Vesterbrogade, which specialises in Asian steamed buns.

VeVe stands for vegetarian world cuisine (vegetarisk verdenskøkken), which is perhaps a nod to Noma whose name is derived from 'nordisk mad', or Nordic food. Its website also says it specialises in lacto-vegetarian cuisine. In plain English: the kitchen eschews meat, fish and eggs. "We are very conscious that there isn't much below the soil during the cold months," it explains. "We take as much

out of the world as we give back. We buy and use milk from a happy cow."

You'll find VeVe on Dampfærgevej, a pedal push north of Østerport station, in a beautiful old bread factory. The space is spare yet elegant. Think: soft grey furnishings, black pendant lights, stone floor, white-washed walls. Four pillars split the restaurant into two areas – a dining room and a lounge where you start your evening. And no sooner are you settled into grey armchairs than waiters start bringing snacks.

The first is a "slurp of the ocean" (*en slurk af vesterhaven*), which comes in two parts. Perched on some rocks is an 'oyster' – a leaf bearing two pearls, one made with black olives, the other with coconut



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Sunday 25 December at 10.30

Saint Alban's Anglican / Episcopal Church, Churchillparken 11, 1263 Copenhagen. www.st-albans.dk



cream. A bewitching bite, it boasts a bivalve's cool saline creaminess. Part two involves using a straw to suck up cold seaweed-infused broth below the rocks. Slurp of the ocean? It's more like snogging a mermaid – and I'm fast won over.

Moments later and a waiter brings what appears to be a bowl of dirt and starts to shake it. Two mushrooms seem to sprout from the soil. They're not fungi, but salted soya meringues, and made with chickpea water not egg whites.

The five mains are equally playful. First up is a salad with Grandma's dressing ("as if grandma came from Morocco") a medley of romaine lettuce, mint, rose petals and pomegranate seeds, topped with a rubble of frozen sugar-and-lime sauce. It's intended as an homage to the sickly-sweet dressed salads favoured by Danish grandmothers from here to Horsens. Delicious as it is, the dish is doubtless wittier if you're a Dane, or married to one.

Far better is the salt-baked celeriac that a waiter delivers on a trolley and dissects in front of us. He slices it in half, removing the knobbly outer layer, and serving segments alongside a chilled slab of olive butter. It's a triumph, and the occasion seems appropriately ceremonial, as if to say: "Winter may be coming, but so is salt-baked celeriac season." Also dazzling is a three-part mushroom dish: First a truffle ball. Then a broth 24-hours in the making, into which you squirt a syringe of tofu that coils up like a noodle. And finally smoky "mushrooms on toast". Rich and earthy, it's a superlative dish – and a million miles from mushroom risotto.

Pudding is excellent, too – a kind of frozen 'flødebolle' containing lemon cream and a compote made with a quartet of citrusy Asian herbs. Light and fresh, it's a perfect palate-cleanser. But don't end the meal yet: skip the cheese course and order the petit fours instead. They're served in the lounge and are even more fun

than the snacks, not only because you may be tipsy by now – cocktails and Champagne are served with the snacks, and a wine pairing is recommended – but also because they come camouflaged on the plate. A chocolate-coated grape hides in a bowl of rocks. A chocolate swirl blends into a scattering of cinnamon sticks. And is that a pistachio chew lurking in the Lego set?

VeVe isn't perfect. One or two dishes miss the mark. Service could be smoother (dessert-wine glasses appear unsolicited, suggesting a complimentary drop, only to be withdrawn). But these are quibbles, which can be easily rectified. And the point is this: VeVe shows that vegetarian food doesn't have to mean gloopy stews, stodgy risottos or a choice between curry and falafel. It demonstrates that a plant-based diet can be refined, elegant, inventive and fun. And it solves a problem for a great many people in Copenhagen – vegetarians who want to go out and celebrate, who want to dine somewhere special when their friends or family are in town, but who don't want to be lumbered with the sole vegetarian option, if it exists at all.

Nor is this a restaurant that rams its ethos down your throat. No need. It makes its point on the plate, leaving diners to become its ambassadors. Indeed, with cooking this good, every vegetarian in town needs to know about VeVe – and to drag their carnivore chums along with them. Oh, and someone should tell The Guardian their story's a little out of date, too. **M**

VeVe
Dampfærgevej 7, 2100
veve.dk



Henrik Yde Andersen, VeVe head chef, in the restaurant's kitchen.

POLITICS

NEW RIGHT WING COALITION GOVERNMENT FORMED

The new coalition of 'blue bloc' parties have agreed on a broad conservative and liberal mandate. But they remain heavily dependent on the populist Danish People's Party to implement its policies

DENMARK has a new government. On Monday, November 28, the minority Liberal Party (Venstre) government gave way to a three-party coalition government with Liberal Alliance (LA) and the Conservative People's Party (Konservative) – or VLAK for short.

The new government released a policy platform (*regeringsgrundlag*) and presented its ministers. In total, the Venstre retains 13 ministers, Liberal Alliance gets six ministers, while Konservative gets three ministers.

POLITICAL IMPASSE

The new government follows a dramatic and inefficient year in Danish politics. Holding only 20 percent of the seats in Parliament, the former minority Venstre government needed to gather the support of two to four other parties to pass new legislation – a task that proved difficult and resulted in a largely impotent government.

Most notably, they had to give up on its ambitious 2025 economic plan in the autumn. LA was demanding a cut to the rate of the top tax bracket, *topskat*, from 15 to 10 percent. The Danish People's Party (DF) – the largest party in the right wing blue bloc – refused to support the measure, however.

This put the government in an impossible position because LA had threatened to initiate a vote of no confidence and spark an election unless their demand was met.

Unable to find a compromise, the minority Venstre government gave up, and invited LA and Konservative to join them in a coalition government where they would have a larger say in forming policy.

AVOIDING AN EARLY ELECTION

For all parties in the right wing 'blue bloc', the new coalition government is largely an attempt to avoid an early election that – according to the polls – would most likely tip the parliamentary balance in favour

of a left-wing Social Democrat (Socialdemokraterne) government.

"Right now we are heading towards an election that might mean that [Socialdemokraterne leader] Mette Frederiksen becomes prime minister. That isn't an ambition for the Konservative. Therefore we must see what we can contribute with," Conservative leader, Søren Pape, told DR following the government formation.

The new minority government is also expected to be more stable and efficient as they will need just one political partner to secure a majority. On the right, the government can reach out to the populist DF. On the left, a deal with the Socialdemokraterne – the largest party in parliament – can also secure the government a majority.

Passing laws without either of these two major parties will, however, prove a difficult task as it would require the government to reach an agreement with parliament's four smaller parties – the far-left Red-Green Party (Enhedslisten), the Socialist People's Party (SF), green party the Alternative (Alternativet) and the Social Liberals (Radikale).

LOWER TAXES, LOWER CARBON

The new government platform – which is mainly a declaration of intent – is almost twice as long as the previous platform and attempts to accommodate central elements of the new partners' political manifestos.

For example, the new government wants to reduce the number of people who pay *topskat* – a clear nod to LA who otherwise gave up on their earlier ultimatum to cut the rate of *topskat*.

The government's smallest party, Konservative, has also gotten several of their key issues written into the platform. Firstly, the platform freezes the tax for Denmark's homeowners. Secondly, the platform commits the government to work towards ensuring that 50 per cent of the Danish energy consumption is derived from sustainable sources by 2030. Thirdly, the platform commits the government to work towards increasing its military spending.

Meanwhile, several elements from the failed 2025-plan are also present in the new platform. Among these is the aim to reform SU and increase the retirement age.

MIXED RECEPTION

The new government has received mixed



The new government presented itself to the press on November 28.

reactions from the nation's major newspapers

Right wing Jyllands-Posten calls the government's platform "pragmatic" and "free of empty phrases/clichés". The newspaper believes that the inclusion of Konservative and LA will make new government more effective since it has to cater to fewer parties during political negotiations.

"Now that all three parties have to handle the responsibility of government, the opportunities to undertake political work are greater," J-P wrote.

In the social-liberal newspaper Politiken, the editorial describes the new government as better than expected.

"Roaring neo-liberalism is kept on a shorter leash than expected in the new *regeringsgrundlag*," Politiken wrote.

Nonetheless, the ambitious and highly detailed policy platform hides the fact that the new government is still in a weak position.

"The government's chances of pursuing its policies are still entirely dependent on DF. That was the harsh reality for the previous Venstre government and that hasn't changed for the new three-party government. The intentions in the *regeringsgrundlag* can very well turn out to be irreconcilable with the parliamentary realities," Politiken wrote.

In left-leaning newspaper Information, editor-in-chief, Rune Lykkeberg, targets the PM for handing the most influential cabinet positions to men. While 40 percent of the new government is women – just like parliament – Lykkeberg points out, that women are relegated to the less important ministries.

"It's remarkable that the traditional gender roles are recreated on the highest level of government: The men handle the roles of prime minister, minister of finance, justice, foreign affairs and defense; while the women handle the ministries of culture, the elderly, social affairs and equality. Daddy handles the money and guns, while mommy plays the piano and raises the kids," Lykkeberg writes

Lykkeberg points out that not only have no women gotten any of the most important ministries, but there are no female members either on the powerful government coordination committee, or in the economical committee, where the central government reforms are planned.

"How would the politicians react, if they were told about an association of immigrants, where the women handled raising the kids, while the men handled the money. And where there were no women in the central committees where the real decisions were made?" asked Lykkeberg. **M**

THE VLAK GOVERNMENT

The Liberal Party (Venstre)

As the leader of the previous single-party minority government, Venstre has made the most concessions in forming the new coalition government.

Besides integrating several aspects of the other parties' platforms into the government's policy platform, the party has gone from having 17 to 13 ministers. While leader Lars Løkke Rasmussen held on to the role of PM, he had to demote and fire a number of high-ranking cabinet members. Among them are 72-year-old MP Bertel Haarder, who lost his position as minister of Culture. Haarder just barely managed to earn the status of longest sitting minister in Danish history, serving a combined 22 years in government. Haarder has since been appointed consul general in the Danish consulate in Flensburg, a German town by the border to Denmark. The move is unusual, since such positions are not usually politically appointed.

Venstre also had to hand over the Ministry of Justice to Konservativer, thereby demoting MP Søren Pind from the powerful position. He is now minister for education and science.

The cabinet reshuffle also affects the internal power balance of Venstre, which is divided into two camps. Promoting deputy chairman MP Kristian Jensen from foreign minister, to finance minister, cements his position as Løkke's political heir. At the same time, several of Jensen's competitors – such as MP Peter Christensen – have been removed or demoted.



Leader:
LARS LØKKE RASMUSSEN,
PRIME MINISTER

Seats in parliament: 34 / 179

Number of ministers: 13 / 22



Leader:
ANDERS SAMUELSEN, MINIS-
TER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Seats in parliament: 13

Number of ministers: 6

Liberal Alliance

As the second largest government party, Liberal Alliance secured six ministerial positions, but had to give up on key policies. Most notably, the party's ultimatum of lowering the rate of the top tax bracket from 15 to 10 percent is completely absent in the new policy platform.

Despite not having an official foreign policy just five years ago, Liberal Alliance leader MP Anders Samuelsen secured the position of foreign minister. Deputy chairman, MP Simon Emil Ammitzbøll, was awarded a central position as minister of economic affairs and the interior.

MP Ole Birk Olesen is now minister of transport, building, and housing. Olesen has already announced that he will attempt to make Denmark a more attractive place for sharing platforms such as the controversial transport-service provider, Uber. Additionally, Olesen will also lead the new government's effort to privatise more of the Danish rail services.

In one of the more curious appointments, former Liberal Alliance MP Thyra Frank will take up the newly-created position as minister for the elderly. Frank – who failed to get re-elected for Parliament in 2015 – is a former nursing home director and her primary role seems to be managing the two billion kroner that got earmarked for elder care in the 2017 budget.

Conservative People's Party (Konservative)

As the smallest party in parliament, Konservativer had the most to lose by entering government. Which perhaps explains why Konservativer got three relatively heavy ministries.

With his appointment as justice minister, head of the Konservativer, MP Søren Pape Poulsen, retook the key ministry that has been controlled by the party for 20 out of the last 40 years. In this key position, Pape will have to manage the Danish police, which has come under criticism in recent years for not doing enough to investigate violent crimes and burglaries.

At the same time, Konservativer veteran, MP Brian Mikkelsen became minister for business while MP-Mai Mercado has taken the position as minister for social affairs.



Leader:
SØREN PAPE POULSEN,
MINISTER OF JUSTICE

Seats in parliament: 6

Number of ministers: 3

IN BRIEF

Spontaneous asylum could end

It should no longer be possible to request asylum at the Danish border says the new government. Instead, asylum seekers should only be able to request asylum while residing in a third country outside of Europe, where the casework would also be handled.

"It's the governments clear ambition that the pressure on Europe's outer borders must be calmed, while simultaneously making life as difficult as possible for human traffickers. We have therefore entered into dialogue with the European nations that share our ambition," integration minister Inger Støjberg, from the Liberal Party (Venstre) told Berlingske.

The government argues that the current system favours wealthy refugees with the resources to travel long distances. Stopping spontaneous asylum, they argue, equalises refugees regardless of their resources, while also undermining the trafficking industry.

Denmark's asylum policies are based on their international obligations, so the government is seeking support for an overhaul of the asylum model from like-minded European partners. It seems plausible, given that Germany and Austria have considered a similar model to the government's proposal.

Some opposition parties also support the idea, including the Social Liberal Party (Radikale) and the Social Democrats (Social Demokrater).

"It shouldn't be the case that the only refugees who have the opportunity for asylum in Denmark, are those brave enough to cross the Mediterranean in tiny unsafe boats," Dan Jørgensen, Socialdemokraterne immigration spokesperson, told Berlingske.

Radikale immigration spokesperson Sofie Carsten Nielsen also supports the government's proposal.

"Its sounds like a step in the right direction towards a common European solution, based on cooperation between member states to secure proper reception conditions and asylum to those that need it, as well as the ability to return the ones that don't," Nielsen told Berlingske.

No more double degrees

Danes will no longer be allowed to study two separate state-financed Bachelor's degrees, after the government struck a deal with the Venstre, Social Demokraterne and the Danish People's Party (DF).

"It's about spending tax money smarter," explained then-education and research minister Ulla Tørnæs in a press release.

The money that is saved will cover the deficit in the unemployment benefit system, which is currently lacking around 300 million kroner a year.

The proposal doesn't stop students from continuing their education. They are, however, only able to build on their Bachelors degree within the same stream.

That means that students who complete their Bachelor's degree, but have decided they want a Master's degree in a different field, are unable to start anew.

One recent case is that of Sara Persson, who told Berlingske newspaper that she has been stopped from pursuing a career as a doctor. A qualified nurse, she had planned to apply for medical school next

summer, but the new law proposal means she won't be able to.

The professional bachelor's degree she completed to become a nurse, has been given the same weight as a bachelor's degree under the new law. As a result, she won't be able to attend medical school – even if she pays for the degree herself.

2017 budget in place

The former minority Venstre government reached an agreement on the 2017 budget last month, together with the DF, Liberal Alliance (LA) and The Conservative Peoples Party (Konservative).

The original draft of the budget was published in late August, on the same day as the former government announced their ambitious and comprehensive 2025 economic plan. Negotiations over the plan broke down over the ensuing months, however, as their supporting parties in the 'blue bloc' could not agree on how to reform the upper income tax bracket, *topskat*. LA wanted to reduce the rate from 15 to 10 percent, while DF – the bloc's biggest party – refused to support the measure.

The government ultimately dropped the reform in favour of passing next year's budget, before inviting Konservativer and LA to join them in a coalition government – which they agreed to.

Key elements of the budget include freezing property taxes, lowering taxes on new cars, and increasing the budget for elder care. They also agreed to implement a so-called 'emergency brake' that allows authorities to turn away asylum seekers at the border, if the Danish borders come under soon and immense pressure.

220 million kroner has been earmarked for border control, while an additional 120 students will be admitted to policing education in 2017. So-called police cadets, who go through a shorter education, will be used to manage border control and alleviate the stress on the police force.

Immigrants will now have to have lived in Denmark for eight years, instead of six, to be eligible for permanent residency. They can also not have claimed unemployment benefits in the last four years, instead of the last three, to qualify.

Here are a selection of the major costs in the 2017 budget:

- Improved elder care, including better food and the ability to buy extra services – two billion kroner between 2017-2020
- 345 additional police cadets – 632 million kroner between 2017-2020
- Tighter immigration laws – 52 million kroner between 2017-2020
- Lower registration tax on cars – 200 million kroner a year
- Subsidy for free basic schools to increase from 73 to 75 percent of student cost – 134 million kroner a year
- Freezing land tax in 2017 – 550 million kroner a year
- Investment in the tax authority (Skat) – Five billion kroner between 2017-2020

Medicinal cannabis finally approved

In 2018, Danes suffering from a number of illnesses will be able to receive prescriptions for cannabis as a last resort medication. The Conservative People's Party is opposed, citing the Danish Medical Association's concerns that no cannabis products have so far been approved as medicines



Garry Knight / Flickr

In 2018 doctors will be able to prescribe cannabis plant products to patients to treat a number of illnesses.

CANNABIS will soon be available to sufferers of cancer and multiple sclerosis after the government agreed to allow a four-year trial starting in 2018.

The deal was struck by a broad coalition in parliament, who set aside 22 million kroner over the period to run a trial and carry out research into cannabis' efficacy as a medicine.

Some synthetic cannabis products and extracts are currently legal. But the trial will enable doctors to prescribe the actual cannabis plant – ordinarily the flowering "buds" – to patients suffering from a select list of illnesses.

"Some of the patients who currently self medicate with illegal products will now have a legal alternative, while also providing them with a safer framework for its consumption," the parties state in a press release.

NOT A MEDICINE

The only party to refuse to back the proposal is the Conservative

Peoples Party (Konservativer) who emphasised the fact that no cannabis products have been approved as medicines by the Danish Medicines Agency (Lægemedelstyrelsen).

"I am worried that this will start a slippery slope in which politicians start approving medicines based on referendums," MP Rasmus Jarlov stated in a press release. "We should take expert knowledge seriously and wait to accept cannabis until we know we can support it."

Jarlov's hesitation follows similar concerns voiced by Danish Medical Association (Lægeforening) chairman Andreas Rudkjøbing.

"It is problematic that we are in a situation where politicians have legislated their way to declaring cannabis a medicine. They have thereby circumvented the normal medicine approval model, which is based on documented effects," Rudkjøbing told DR.

"It's an extremely problemat-

We should take expert knowledge seriously and wait to accept cannabis until we know we can support it.

RASMUS JARLOV

Sophie Frahm & Peter Stanners

ic situation to be in as a doctor, that they have to take responsibility for something even though they don't know how it works," he said, adding that it is vital that cannabis is properly tested before it is prescribed as a medicine.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES FROM ABROAD

Liberal Alliance (LA) health spokesperson MP May-Britt Katstrup acknowledges the lack of scientific evidence that proves cannabis is an effective medicine. Katstrup argues, however, that there is enough anecdotal evidence to justify the trial.

"In the Netherlands, for example, medicinal cannabis has been legal for more than 10 years. Experiences have been positive and show no sign of side-effects or other problems. Had there been any negative experiences I bet they wouldn't have continued for so long," she said.

According to Katstrup, the

Danish Health Authority (Sundhedsstyrelsen) is creating guidelines for doctors based on the experiences of countries such as the Netherlands, Canada and Israel. She adds that many doctors have supported the trial.

Alternativet (The Alternative) is also a strong supporter of the law change, and in March even proposed legalising recreational use, with the state serving as the sole legal supplier.

MP Carolina Magdalene Maier argues that even though cannabis has not been approved as a medicine, enough trials have demonstrated its potential.

"It is often smaller research projects or projects that don't satisfy the normal criteria for medical evidence. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't have more research, because we think that we should. But it is sufficient evidence to back the pilot scheme in Denmark, in which we can measure the effect," Maier explained.

"So even though the Lægeforen-

Fact box – Medicinal cannabis

A trial of medicinal cannabis will start in January 2018. The ambition is to decriminalise users who currently have to turn to the illegal market to purchase cannabis to treat their symptoms. It will also give them a safer treatment framework.

Doctors must first have exhausted all other conventional treatment options for patients before prescribing cannabis. While patients must be actively involved in the discussion over cannabis as a treatment option, the doctor has the final say.

Cannabis can only be prescribed to patients suffering from a select list of illnesses and conditions.

- Multiple sclerosis: spasticity, nervous pain, painful spasms.
- Damaged spinal cord: spasticity, nervous pain, painful spasms.
- Chronic pain treatment: where other treatment is insufficient or is not tolerated by the body, ie. Neuropathic pain or pains caused by cancer in joints, bones or muscles.
- Nausea and vomiting after chemotherapy: only when other treatments have failed.

The government recognises the need for more knowledge in the field, and has set aside five million kroner to gather scientific data about the trial

Source: "Aftale om forsøgsordning med medicinsk cannabis"

ing isn't a fan of medicinal cannabis, we shouldn't ignore the good results from abroad."

FARMERS SPOT OPPORTUNITY

Danish farmers could potentially supply patients with domestically grown cannabis, according to the Danish Agriculture and Food Council (Landbrug & Fødevarer).

"We need to analyse all possible risks and assess whether we in Denmark should have a cannabis industry as we see in countries such as Canada, Israel and the USA," Landbrug & Fødevarer vice president Lars Hvidtfeldt stated in a press release.

He points out that there is no need to import products that Denmark could produce.

"It is the only way to secure proper amounts of cannabis of the right quality," Hvidtfeldt said, adding that a commission should be established to look at the opportunities for a Danish cannabis market.

EPILEPTICS MISS OUT

In addition to cancer and MS sufferers, doctors may only prescribe cannabis to patients with spinal chord injuries and chronic pain. Epileptics will miss out, much to the disappointment of the Danish Epilepsy Association (Epilepsiforeningen).

"I have a hard time understanding why epilepsy is not included," chairman Lone Nørager Kristensen said, adding that epileptics – like MS sufferers – are known to source cannabis illegally to self medicate.

"I understand that the Lægemiddelstyrelsen is playing an important role here, and they think there is little to no evidence [to support prescribing cannabis] in our field. But I think it's unbelievable that they wouldn't want to provide a

better and safer framework for our patient group when we know they are forced to interact with an unregulated market where there is no type of independent control with the producers – especially when leading practitioners recommend that epileptics ought to be included in the trial."

DOCTORS COULD CURB IT

Rikke Jacobsen, chairman of the medical cannabis association (Medicinsk Cannabis Forening Danmark) is concerned that doctors might not be eager to prescribe cannabis, even though it is an option.

"As it is formulated, doctors have to take full responsibility for prescribing medicinal cannabis. Which might potentially prevent them from doing so," she told Berlingske, adding that it should be patients that accept the responsibility instead.

"They've done so when buying illegal cannabis, so it shouldn't be a problem" she said.

According to Politiken, the government is likely to purchase the cannabis from Dutch firm Bedrocan BV. They currently supply cannabis products to around 1,500 patients, none of which have reported side effects.

According to the Dutch Ministry of Health, however, consuming cannabis products can bring about a number of side effects that include mood-altering effects, insomnia and heart palpitations.

"Other effects are: relaxation, fits of laughter, feeling hungry, heightened sensitivity to the perception of e.g. colour and music, lethargy and distorted temporal and spatial awareness. Your reaction time may also be slower, especially during the first hours after use." **M**

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Cutting away at the unemployment safety net

A new 'benefits cap' has been introduced by the government to encourage more Danes to work. Critics are concerned that it will further impoverish many who are unable to enter the labour market

'IT MUST PAY TO WORK,' has been the mantra of the Liberal Party (Venstre) since taking office in June 2015.

Concerned that generous unemployment benefits discourages Danes from working, the government implemented an unemployment benefits reform in October. It estimated that at least 700 Danes would find employment as a result, but there is widespread concern that the changes will just cause vulnerable individuals, who are unable to work, to make do with even less. This could have far reaching consequences, especially for struggling families with children.

The reforms target recipients of

the least generous unemployment benefit *kontanthjælp*, which is the final safety net in the multi-layered Danish welfare system. To qualify for *kontanthjælp*, applicants must have less than 10,000 kroner on hand and must sell any other valuable assets, such as their car, before being eligible.

Kontanthjælp recipients may also qualify for other benefits such as child support (*børnepenge*) and rent allowance (*boligstøtte*). This means that some recipients may receive a total that is comparable to a low paying job – excluding holiday allowance and employer paid pension.

The reform consists of two parts. Firstly, it places a cap on

the total amount of government assistance a recipient can receive each month. Secondly, it penalises unemployment recipients who have worked less than 225 hours the previous year – more than half of the 175,000 *kontanthjælp* recipients are exempt from the latter requirement as they have been deemed unfit to work.

The reform is expected to affect more than 33,000 people, of which the vast majority are families with children. After tax income will be capped at between 11,000 and 15,575 kroner per person, based on the number of children and relationship status. This corresponds to a full time job with a 70 to 97 kroner an hour salary.

A SOCIO-ECONOMIC RAGBAG

Jørn Neergaard Larsen – who lost his position as employment minister after the formation of the new coalition government in late November – argued that the reform was needed to get more people into the labour market.

"We have a baffling number of people of working age, who are being supported by the government. That isn't sustainable," he told Altinget.dk while still acting as minister.

Larsen pointed out that the number of *kontanthjælp* recipients has risen from 145,000 to 175,000 people since 2012, despite the fact that unemployment has fallen during the period.

Jon David Finsen



Benjamin Lund Nielsen

A pig, raised to satisfy the state's organic requirements, from the Aarhus farm Troldegården.

What is good animal welfare?

A new animal welfare label is meant to get Danes to think more about the meat they buy. But critics are worried the label doesn't significantly improve animal welfare, potentially misleading consumers

CONSUMERS have become increasingly concerned about animal welfare in recent years, especially in regards to pigs. One of Denmark's most important exports, and a staple on Danish dinner plates, pigs are often kept in poor conditions by farmers under pressure to keep costs as low as possible.

In response, a new government-sanctioned animal welfare label is being introduced to get Danes to choose higher standards of animal welfare. The three-tiered Better Animal Welfare (*Bedre Dyrevelfærd*) label gives one 'heart' for animals that are given greater care than the legal minimum requirements and three when an "extraordinary" effort is

made. The label will at first only be applied to pork products, but will eventually cover a range of agricultural animals.

"We know that a lot of Danes want to pay a little extra to support better animal welfare," environment and agriculture minister Esben Lunde Larsen said after the launch of the label.

"The animal welfare label will make it more attractive for farmers to invest in animal welfare improvements on their farms, while retailers get the opportunity to address consumer demands for better animal welfare."

CONFUSING CONSUMERS

While the label will improve trans-

The label simply does too little, when it could do much more.

**BRITTA RIIS,
DYRENES BESKYTTELSE**

Sophie Frahm

parency by giving consumers a greater insight into the welfare of conventionally produced animals, it has its critics, including the Danish Animal Welfare Society (Dyrenes Beskyttelse), which has its own animal welfare label – Recommended By (*Anbefalet Af*).

Director Britta Riis is concerned that the label rewards animal products that only marginally improve on minimum legal welfare standards – which are especially low in the pork industry.

"With this new label the government risks approving bad pig farming," she says, adding that consumers might think the animals live much better lives than they really do.

"The label simply does too little, when it could do much more," she says.

The introduction of a new label might also confuse consumers further, argues the Danish Consumer Council (Forbrugerrådet Tænk).

"We don't think there is a need for another label that is less restrictive than the already existing ones," Tænk's senior advisor of food policy, Camilla Udsen, told Altinget.

The agriculture minister dismissed the criticism that the new government plan is unambitious, but he does admit that it's important not to have too many different labels.

"We must be careful not to cre-

ate a 'label jungle', which is why I'm very pleased that so many retailers and producers support the government authorised brand," Larsen told Jyllands-Posten.

PIG SUMMIT MEETING

The new label was developed following the 2014 Pig Summit. Then-agriculture minister Dan Jørgensen invited representatives from the retail and agriculture sector, along with welfare organisations, to discuss ways to improve conditions for pigs. One of the nine proposals resulting from the conference was to give consumers a wider selection of high animal welfare products to choose from. After inviting a range of stakeholders to discuss how to accomplish this goal, the government ultimately launched the Bedre Dyrevelfærd label.

Among the stakeholders is Dansk Supermarked Group, which owns some of Denmark's largest supermarket chains, including Føtex, Netto and Bilka, which have a total of 1,467 stores across Denmark.

Mads Grand, head of communications for Dansk Supermarked Group, is disappointed that the label isn't supported by the entire supermarket sector. Coop – their main competitor – chose not to support the label, arguing the bar was set too low.

"We could have developed a common label. Instead, today we see companies developing individual labels, which can end up confusing consumers," he says, adding that he is still confident that the label will prove to be a success when it launches in early 2017.

"Two thirds of Danish retailers support the label. I think as soon as it gets a proper foothold in the market, and when it will expand to include more animals, the last third will join too."

DEMOCRATISATION OF ANIMAL WELFARE

According to Grand, consumers are increasingly demanding meat produced with higher levels of animal welfare. High welfare animal products remain prohibitively expensive for most consumers, however.

"Only a minority of consumers will automatically go from paying 69 kroner for a conventional pork fillet to 169 kroner for an organic one."

Bedre Dyrevelfærd's tiered system means that consumers can in-



The animal-welfare label imposes strict requirements on pig farmers. In order for pork to be labelled with the animal-welfare label, the conditions for pigs on farms must live up to a number of basic requirements. These requirements are considerably stricter than the current statutory requirements in Denmark and in the EU, and thereby stricter than the requirements in standard or conventional production.

The label is a voluntary scheme with three levels ranging from one to three hearts. The more hearts the better the welfare. One heart indicates that the basic requirements of the label have been met. Two and three hearts indicate that supplementary requirements for more space and outdoor area have been met.

Source: The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration.

vest in small, but noticeable, improvements to animal welfare, without it costing them much more than they are used to.

"We want to democratise animal welfare and make it available to everyone," says Grand.

"We think that milder changes, but on a larger scale, will affect many more animals."

MARKET SHARE NOT ETHICS

Animal ethicist, Professor Peter Sandøe from the University of Copenhagen, supports the new labeling system, which he thinks has the potential to bring about a major increase in welfare for conventionally-farmed animals.

"Even the label with one heart does a great deal to improve the standards of conventional pig production," he says.

The label is important because of its focus on conventional farming, he argues, as neither outdoor nor organic production is likely to ever become the main method of pig production in Denmark.

"When only focusing on improving animal welfare in organic or outdoor production, you disregard the vast majority of pigs in Danish production who live indoors. This means that their life will continue to be ridden with severe welfare problems unless initiatives such as the government's new label are integrated, which lifts the bottom significantly and improves animal welfare for the largest group of pigs," he says.

He points out that two of the worst practices in pig production – fixating sows while they give birth and lactate, and keeping growing pigs without access

to straw – are both banned under the government's label, among other things.

Sandøe says he was disappointed by the debate that followed the launch of the new label, especially the position of Dyrenes Beskyttelse.

"The real motive behind the negative debate does not seem to be a concern for animal welfare but seems to be about power and market share," Sandøe argues.

"Dyrenes Beskyttelse are, as far as I can see, trying to protect the market share of products with their label, rather than fighting for better welfare for the larger group of pigs. It's a real shame."

Riis from Dyrenes Beskyttelse dismisses the accusation, however.

"We are fighting for better animal welfare, and we think the level could and should be higher than the government's suggested lowest level. The bar has simply been set too low," she says.

"We do appreciate the competition, because that means that welfare has been improved for more animals as more products are included. It's just aggravating when more could have been done."

TOO FEW PRODUCERS

Dyrenes Beskyttelse commissioned a report by Analyse Danmark, which found that more than two thirds of Danes want their supermarket to supply more high animal welfare products. This year, the organisation started a separate project with Dansk Supermarked Group to increase the sales of high welfare animal products in its supermarkets.

"The sale of free range and or-

ganic meat, milk, egg and dairy products is growing," Jeppe Dahl Jeppesen, head of Fresh Food at Dansk Supermarked Group said in a press release. "Together with Dyrenes Beskyttelse, we have set a goal to increase the sales of these products by 500 million kroner by 2020, compared to 2015."

The increased demand for these products is actually outstripping supply, so Dyrenes Beskyttelse has teamed up with agriculture lobby group the Agriculture and Food Council (Landbrug og Fødevarer) and Dansk Supermarked Group to encourage and help more producers adapt their products to meet the demand.

The number of higher welfare animal products on the market is steadily growing, according to a study by the Environment and Food Ministry. This is primarily due to an increasing number of farmers who are transferring from conventional to organic production.

Dyrenes Beskyttelse says they are frequently contacted by producers who are interested in qualifying for their welfare label.

"The problem today is that there is a shortage of products, which means that Danish farmers have to conform and change production in order to match demand," Riis says, adding that producers are both willing and confident to make the transition due to the high demand.

"Organic farmers are actually making money today, whereas conventional farmers are pressed financially. Both at home and abroad, the demand has changed towards more animal welfare." **M**



Danes are increasingly unhappy with the treatment of pigs in conventional farms.

Former editor convicted for deal to buy stolen credit card data about celebs and royals

Tabloid Se og Hør used stolen data to write articles about the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Seven people have now been sentenced for illegal hacking in a case that sent shockwaves through the journalism industry when it was exposed in 2014

FOR FOUR YEARS, Danish gossip magazine Se og Hør published stories about celebrities and Royalty based on stolen credit card information from the payment processing company NETS, which handles all Danish credit card transactions.

But on November 24, the Glostrup City Court decided that the practice was illegal – both for the source and the journalists. In total, seven people have been convicted in what is the biggest tabloid hacking scandal in Danish history.

The harshest sentences were handed out to former NETS employee Bo Henriksen and the former editor-in-chief of Se og Hør, Henrik Qvortrup. Qvortrup initiated the agreement with Henriksen in June 2008 before leaving the editorial staff six months later.

Qvortrup received a 15-month sentence of which three months must be served in jail. Henriksen received an 18-month jail sentence, while the rest of the editorial staff received suspended sentences ranging from four to twelve months.

TRACKED ROYALS' AND CELEBRITIES' CREDIT CARDS

The case began in 2014, when former Se og Hør journalist Ken B. Rasmussen published a fictionalised book about his time at Se og Hør, where he described how the weekly gossip magazine uncovered stories about celebrities and Royals through their credit card transactions.

Several journalists at the tabloid subsequently confirmed that the NETS leak was not fiction, leading the police to open an investigation. As the case unravelled in the media, Henriksen decided to turn himself in.

The ensuing police investigation revealed that over a four year period, the 47-year-old passed on the confidential credit card information of 135 Danish celebrities and members of the Royal family to Se og Hør on 662 occasions – Prince Joachim, politician Morten Helveg Petersen and comedian



Henrik Qvortrup, who will serve three months in prison for his role in the case. Illustration: Aleksander Weis Klinke

Casper Christen were all targeted.

Henriksen did not have direct access to the credit card database. Instead, he would reset the passwords of other NETS employees and access the databases using their profiles. Henriksen was convicted of using the passwords of at least 31 colleagues 67 times to make at least 523 searches in the databases.

For his trouble, Henriksen was paid around 10,000 cash every month. During his four years as a source, this deal netted Henriksen at least 430,000 kroner.

JOURNALISTS COMPLICIT IN HACKING

Though there was no doubt as to whether or not the Se og Hør had bought the illegally-acquired information, the case against the editorial staff hinged on whether or not they knew about – and were hence

complicit in – the illegal practice performed by Henriksen.

The editorial staff claimed that they believed that Henriksen had access to the information as a normal part of his job. The court ruled, however, that correspondence between the editorial staff suggested they knew he must have been committing a crime to access the information.

According, Peter Lind Nielsen – media lawyer and partner at the law firm Bird & Bird – the reason the journalists are complicit is the fact that they've been encouraging the illicit practice.

"It isn't new that the press get and use information that has been acquired illegally. What makes this case special is that the source hasn't just sold a few pieces of information on a single occasion. Instead, the media – and particularly the editor-in-chief – orchestrated

and systemized the practice over a long period of time. This means that they are not just handling stolen goods, they're complicit in the act," he explains.

"As a journalist, you can't just stick your head in the sand and claim ignorance. Especially not if you are proactively paying and encouraging people to commit crimes. In essence, Henriksen wouldn't have committed the crimes if Se og Hør hadn't prompted him to do it."

He added that journalists have been acquitted of committing crimes to uncover their stories. In those cases, however, the stories had much greater public interest than the gossip that Se og Hør published.

NO APPEAL

The case might get an epilogue. After the sentencing it was revealed that one of the two lay judges, Sahar Aslani, may have held prejudiced views toward both Qvortrup and gossip magazines more generally.

In an interview on Radio 27syv she stated that she believed gossip magazine, "should die out".

Digging through Aslani's facebook feed, Radio24syv found an old status from 2014, from when the hacking was originally revealed. Back then, Aslani expressed enthusiasm that former editor-in-chief Henrik Qvortrup was to be charged for being complicit in the hacking.

"What goes around comes around, huh, Henrik Qvortrup," she wrote followed by a smiley.

On Facebook, Qvortrup drew attention to Radio24Syv's revelations, which suggested he might appeal the verdict. But early in December he announced he would accept the verdict – despite protesting his innocence.

"Out of consideration for my family and the time and effort it would take, I have decided not to appeal and continue a case that has burdened me now for three years – and which relies on events which happened almost nine years ago," Qvortrup wrote on Facebook. **M**

Jon David Finsen

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A DANISH proverb goes: "He who is ashamed of asking, is ashamed of learning."

It is in the tradition of this proverb that more than two thirds of Danish primary school graduates choose to ask tough questions, broaden their minds and horizons and embark on a uniquely Danish upper secondary schooling experience – the gymnasium.

So just what is gymnasium? English teacher at Knord Business College, Jonas Rasmussen sums it up nicely: "gymnasium provides students with an academic foundation that enables them to think creatively, be inno-

vative and work collaboratively – giving them the opportunity to go on and obtain a degree at university."

Whether you are a parent concerned about the future of your child's education, or a soon-to-be lower-secondary graduate interested in the prospect of a higher education, The Murmur Gymnasium Supplement will critically guide you through all aspects of the gymnasium. From the programmes on offer and schools to look out for, to teaching approaches and expert advice, this is your guide to a Danish upper secondary education.

AN UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Increasing numbers of students aged 16 to 19 are taking on the challenge of upper secondary school, according to 2015 research by the upper secondary school association Danske Gymnasier.

Gymnasium is one of the most popular choices of upper secondary education. There are four main programmes to choose from: STX (Gymnasium), HHX (Higher Commercial Examination), HTX (Higher Technical Examination) and HF (higher preparatory examination).

Yes, it's a little confusing that gymnasium can refer to the broader upper secondary education and one of the specific programmes. Simply put, a gymnasium (institution) can offer any of the four upper secondary exam-

inations, including the 'gymnasium' (STX) examination.

To enrol in STX, HTX or HHX, students have to have completed nine years of primary and lower-secondary education, known in Denmark as folkeskole. Students who aren't prepared for upper secondary after folkeskole often take the voluntary 10th grade. They then qualify to take HF. While HF and STX are more academic in nature, the HHX and HTX programmes are designed to prepare students for vocational and technical higher education respectively. Some internationally-orientated gymnasiums may also choose to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) examination.

As of 2015, a total of 170 educational institutions provide STX, HF and IB examinations. Not all schools offer all of these programmes, but rather are selective in terms of both the examination they offer and their educational orientation. The vast majority of these schools are publicly owned and state-funded, which ensures a high quality of gymnasiums across the country. Only a small percentage of gymnasiums are privately owned.

Whichever type of upper secondary education students choose, they can be confident it will provide them with the skills, knowledge and qualifications to open up their future to a world of possibilities. **M**

"He who is ashamed of asking, is ashamed of learning" – Danish proverb.

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GYMNASIUM: YOUR GATEWAY TO THE WORLD

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What can I use upper secondary school for?" This is the question on the lips of all lower-secondary graduates considering the possibility of a gymnasium education. The answer is that a diploma from a gymnasium allows students to apply to higher education institutions in Denmark and, in some cases, anywhere in the world.

Before choosing a programme, it's important that students have an idea about what they want to study at university – or what type of work they want to do later. This will help them to both choose the best programme for them, as well as which electives are suited to their future plans.

STX

In the three-year STX programme there are a number of compulsory subjects: Danish, English, a foreign language, history, classical studies, physics, physical education, an artistic subject, mathematics, religion, social science, and at least two of the subjects biology, chemistry and geography.

Students can also choose electives, depending on their chosen field of study and the individual gymnasium, many of which are

geared towards a specific educational niche. These may include, for example, the arts or business. It is up to each school to decide how these additional courses are structured into the various programmes and examinations. Each student also writes a specialised study project in the third year that touches upon two or three subjects of their choice.

HF

HF, or the higher preparatory examination, is a two-year general education and university preparatory programme. In addition to an introductory course, a workshop course and project periods, HF has a number of compulsory courses: Danish, English, mathematics, physical education, practical or musical subject, a natural science and a culture or social science subject.

As well as the compulsory subjects, students must choose two to four electives, and each student must also complete a major written assignment during the second year within one to three subjects of their choice.

HTX AND HHF

While the STX and HF are better suited for students who want to pursue an academic higher education, particularly in the social sciences, HTX and HHF are more fo-



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INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE

Some private or international gymnasiums offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) examination, a two-year international upper secondary education programme. The programme is specifically designed for children who live abroad and want an education that is transferrable between countries. In Denmark, the IB is taught in English, and is a highly respected upper secondary diploma education, which is recognised around the world. The programme encourages both personal and academic achievement, challenging students to excel in their studies as well as in their personal development.

Jeanette Svan Sørensen is the IB Coordinator at EUC Syd, a gymnasium that offers an international alternative to the Danish STX or HF. "We offer an IB Diploma, which is a more direct admission to universities all over the world, than a Danish upper secondary exam. With international grading and a demanding academic programme, the IB makes it easier for students to move within the IB programme anywhere in the world," she explains.

Choosing an upper secondary school is therefore all about a student's future perspective and the direction they want to take their education and career – so choose wisely. **M**

In Denmark, the IB is taught in English, and is a highly respected upper secondary diploma

cussed on technical and vocational perspectives, respectively.

Both have Danish, English, Mathematics and a social science as compulsory subjects, and require students to select electives and complete a specialised study project. In addition, the HTX programme requires students to study chemistry, biology, physics, communications and IT, and technology.

HHX has as compulsory subjects business economics, marketing, international economics, history, and commercial law. In both cases, students must have completed nine years of compulsory primary and lower secondary education. Completing HTX or HHX qualifies students to apply to university.

A LESSON IN LIFE

EXAMINING THE STATE OF UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION IN DENMARK

What is the significance of gymnasium and problem-based learning?



EUC Syd



originally created for an elite few who were headed for university, today gymnasium is a common option for young people who want to secure the education and skills they need later in life.

Over the past ten years, the number of enrolled STX students has increased from around 61,000 to 90,000, while the less popular HF, HHX and HTX have increased their total enrolment around 30 percent to 57,000 students.

Ivar Lykke Ørnby of Knord Business College says that the increasing popularity is due to the broad curriculum offered at gymnasium compared to equivalent schools in other countries.

"The formation of well rounded human beings with broad general knowledge is an integrated part of subjects and curriculum in Denmark, which makes it quite unique," he explains.

Mia Meklenborg Steenholt, a teacher at EUC Syd, adds: "Students who are academically minded and are willing to dedicate many hours to reading and studying, are 'gymnasium' students."

WHY STUDENTS CHOOSE GYMNASIUM

The programmes on offer at gymnasium are designed to challenge students and are at stages quite intensive. All students complete a basic programme, half a year, with a number of compulsory subjects and levels. They then move on to a more specialised two-and-a-half year programme comprised of electives and specialised project-based work. In general, full-time students at gymnasium receive instruction in approximately 13 subjects.

The subjects on offer and curriculum require that students engage critically with their studies. Problem-based learning (PBL) is a key feature of education in Danish upper secondary level, and promotes a student's innovative abilities through problem-based group projects with the teacher as a consultant.

These projects sometimes include collaboration with a company to work with on real-world problems. Students from Lyngby Gymnasium, for example, have written children's books and tested them in kindergarten as a project in Danish literature. "They have also solved problems for

the international company Haldor Topsoe," explains Ørnby.

SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES AND REFORMS

Gymnasiums ensure that all young people with the right abilities and motivation have the opportunity to take a quality upper secondary education. The original goal was to appeal broadly, even to students who might not necessarily have been academically minded from the beginning of their education.

Martin Thing, student and President of The Danish High School Student Association (Danske Gymnasieelevers Sammenslutning) argues that this is a positive development that has improved social mobility in Denmark, but says that new reforms are needed.

"We believe there are a lot of problems, most of which we ascribe to a lack of funds in the schools. The last couple of years have brought massive budget cuts in our schools leading to fewer teachers, less feedback on our written assignments and an increase in student fees. The lack of funds means there is not enough room to experiment with new meth-





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ods of teaching and new text books, and we fear that it will make our schools less fit to educate the workforce of the future," says Thing.

Thing's argument is backed up by a 2016 report from Danske Gymnasier that argues it is a myth that gymnasia are well funded – they are actually challenged by savings measures.

A reform is currently underway in parliament, which Ørnby says will implement some major changes.

"The new gymnasium will set higher standards for entry and prescribe more compulsory subjects and higher levels for all new students," he explains. The aim of these new reforms is to produce self-confident adults who are prepared to study at university or university colleges. However, it is too early to say what impact these new reforms will have on the institution and the future prospects of students in the system.

Regardless of the challenges that may come about, or the impending reforms, the completion rate of programmes such as STX remains high. In 2012 for example, the completion rate was 87 percent, with about 49 percent of STX students choosing to take a Bachelor's Degree at university. **M**



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Gymnasiums ensure that all young people with the right abilities and motivation have the opportunity to take a quality upper secondary education. The goal is to appeal broadly, even to students who might not necessarily have been academically minded from the beginning of their education.

LEARNING BY DOING

Presenting gymnasium students with open-ended problems and letting them find their own solutions prepares them for both the real world and university



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"Have fun while you learn and make the most of the gymnasium experience" - Jonas Rasmussen

It's fair to say that the Danish national education system is an inclusive, world-class system that prepares students for their future in a constantly changing world. The teaching principles and curriculum have been developed around the values of curiosity, participation and reflection, with the goal of instilling in students a desire to learn more. Essentially, Danish education aims to ensure that all young people acquire the knowledge and competitiveness that will qualify them to actively participate in the knowledge society and contribute to its further development.

PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

To this end, the gymnasium uses problem-based learning, or PBL. While there is no standard method of integrating the PBL approach across all subjects, the ultimate goal is to get students to think critically and develop their own methods for solving problems, rather than teaching prescribed methods for finding solutions.

Many of the schools employ a rich variety of teaching and learning styles, ranging from group work and individual presentations to handwritten essays and multimedia e-learning tools as well as practical real-world experiences.

Jonas Rasmussen, an English and Market Communication teacher at Knord Business College, explains that the PBL approach strengthens the interdisciplinary potential of different subjects.

"It provides teachers with an opportunity and forces us to make our subjects relevant to the students in a new way. As result, PBL provides us with a framework that incorporates key learning competences and effective and complex student skills development," he elaborates.

"The teacher will select the appropriate approach for any given situation – it all depends on the subjects, the topics, and the students in the classes," explains Mia Meklenborg Steenholt, teacher at EUC Syd.

PBL also allows teachers to facilitate student projects, where they carry out research to identify their own issues and questions. This is important, as it matches more closely the type of problem solving students will experience in the labour market, or in higher education.



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EXCEL AT SCHOOL WITH THESE TOP LEARNING TIPS

We asked gymnasium teachers to share their study and learning advice for students who are either in gymnasium, or just thinking about an upper secondary education. Here are some of the best pieces of advice:

- ▶ Firstly, accept the fact that you may not be the only smart person in the classroom.
- ▶ Be curious and do everything you can to stay motivated at school.
- ▶ Find a good group of students you work well with – these people don't necessarily have to be your best friends, but can help you excel at your studies.
- ▶ Find something to do when you are not in school. A job in a local supermarket, coach badminton, or whatever makes you happy – school isn't everything.
- ▶ Be open-minded and ask questions.
- ▶ Be a good friend and listen – you might learn something.
- ▶ Attend all classes, do your homework, come to class prepared, be active in class, and engage in learning processes with the peers.

Most importantly, have fun while you learn and make the most of the gymnasium experience. **M**

Sponsored content

SUCCESS IS NOT JUST ABOUT GETTING THE BEST GRADES

We chat to past and present students, as they share their experiences at gymnasium.

MARVIN VAN ZON, a 19-year-old student at EUC Syd, says that he decided to attend gymnasium because he wanted to go on and study at university.

"Gymnasium opens up a lot of opportunities for further education. But it is also important to choose the gymnasium that best suits you, because if it doesn't give you what you really want, you will quickly lose your motivation," says Marvin.

He hopes that by putting in the work he will go on to university and enter the labour market as prepared and qualified as possible.

It is this hard-working determination that is required at gymnasium, argues Martin Thing, student president of The Danish High School Student Association (Danske Gymnasieelevers Sammenslutning), which represents gymnasium students in Denmark.

But Thing urges students to embrace the whole gymnasium experience, and not just focus on the hard work.

"We have had to adapt to the political ambitions that we finish school more quickly and more successfully than ever before. This is positive overall, but it also means that we are a generation under a lot of pressure. A lot of young people, especially students, are getting stressed, anxious and depressed. This is a result of a system that sometimes pushes too hard. Students must also learn to deal with these real-life pressures at this level of study," says Thing.

Marvin van Zon also feels the pressures of the gymnasium experience, but balances it by immersing himself in his gymnasium's social opportunities.

"The social life, as well as the friendly and constructive atmosphere in class, is what gets me through my studies," he says.

He is currently doing his second year of International Baccalaureate and intends to study either history, or international relations at a foreign university. While the workload is heavy, he manages it by carefully planning his time.

"I spread my work out over the week, and then make time for so-



EUC Syd

cial activities with my classmates when I have free time."

AN EMPOWERED STUDENT

From his interaction with students across the country, Thing has found that while they are motivated to do well, the authorities and policy-makers need to be mindful of the pressures they place students under.

"We, as youths, are more engaged in political organisations and voluntary work than ever, but we're being pushed faster and faster through the educational system," he says, adding that students need to be more empowered.

"We have to create a gymnasium which is not teaching pupils to get good grades, but teaching them to learn more. We have seen a rise in the importance of grades, because universities are taking in fewer students, which is increasing the grade averages that are needed to secure a place at university. This causes stress and unhealthy competition in our classrooms. Learning and cooperation in class must win against competition and memorisation of the curriculum," he implores.

In order to tackle these challenges head on, Thing's advice to students wanting to excel in school is simple; "focus on your school work and do the best that you can". He also says that students should take time to internalise their career aspirations and plan an education path accordingly.

"Success is not just about getting the best grades, it's also about being self-secure, independent and ready to get the best result out of any situation. School can't teach that by itself, you have to live life as well, no matter how cheesy it sounds," he concludes. **M**

KNORD
HHX - STX - EUX - EUD
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COPENHAGEN NORTH BUSINESS COLLEGE - KNORD

HIGHER COMMERCIAL EXAMINATION PROGRAMME

Our Higher Commercial Examination Programme (HHX) is offered in English at the campuses in Hillerød and Lyngby, including two A-level subjects - marketing and business economics. The rest of the programme is taught in Danish.

The programme includes a short stay in a European country in the first year, a homestay and intensive language course in Edinburgh, Scotland, in the second year, and a one-month homestay and study in Seattle, USA, at the University of Washington, in the third year. The programme qualifies students for the European Business Baccalaureate Diploma (EBBD).

LYNGBY GYMNASIUM

At our campus in Lyngby, we also offer Gymnasium (STX) with two subjects taught in content and language integrated learning (CLIL). Students at the gymnasium have the opportunity of joining their HHX schoolmates during their homestay and studies in Seattle.

Lyngby Gymnasium places a special focus on innovation and entrepreneurship, and is a national winner of The Entrepreneurial School Award, a national and European recognition of the best schools in entrepreneurship education.

The campus in Lyngby also offers boarding in the form of the Johannes Fog Residence Hall. The residence is located on campus just a short walk from the classrooms, and has shared bathrooms and kitchens as well as a warden who takes care of our students and the building maintenance.

Copenhagen North Business College is situated north of Copenhagen, in northern Zealand, with campuses in Lyngby, Hillerød and Frederikssund. We are an educational institution offering business-oriented upper secondary schools, including:

- ▶ Vocational education (EUX and EUD Business)
- ▶ The Higher Commercial Examination Programme (HHX)
- ▶ Gymnasium (STX)

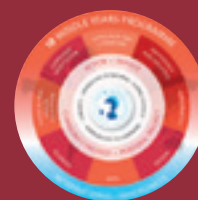
Our Business College employs approximately 325 people, and educates around 3,000 students between the ages of 16 and 21 across the three campuses.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.KNORD.DK



Alvya, Daniel and Josephine started in 2015. They have recently enjoyed homestay and language school in Scotland and are looking forward to their trip to the USA next year.

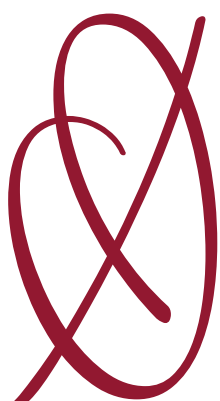
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ABOUT US

ØIS welcomed 19 universities from all over the world to meet with MYP5 and Diploma students. This was an exciting afternoon for our students to engage with representatives from various institutions around the world. ØIS hopes that the students were inspired by their conversations with these universities and walked away feeling more confident and informed about worldwide higher education. Offering large university fairs is something we hope to continue in the future to give our students every opportunity in navigating the multitude of course offerings for higher education.



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"We need to stop talking so much about ethnicity"

A generation of Danish youth with non-Western parents are coming of age. But while their grades have never been better, they continue to be talked about as a problem in the political debate. To help minority youth succeed despite social prejudices, Niddal El-Jabri has launched a 'think and do' tank to help them join mainstream society and live up to their potential

To some Danes, being born in Denmark isn't enough to make you Danish. High school student Jens Philip Yazdani discovered that during a debate with MP Martin Henriksen from the Danish People's Party (DF) in September.

"You cannot conclude that just because you are born and raised in Denmark, speak Danish and go to a Danish school that you are Danish," Henriksen said during the primetime TV debate.

His comments were widely condemned, but they speak to a sense of suspicion among some Danes towards a generation of young people who were born in the country, but whose parents were not.

It's a generation that is often discussed, but rarely speaks for itself. And when they are talked about in the media – and classified as "second generation immigrants" – it is often in relation to issues such as poor school performance, lacking labour market participation and social control by their family.

"For more than 20 years we have talked about them as a community and as a problem, which to some extent has just served to exclude and push them away," says El-Jabri.

BORN DANISH

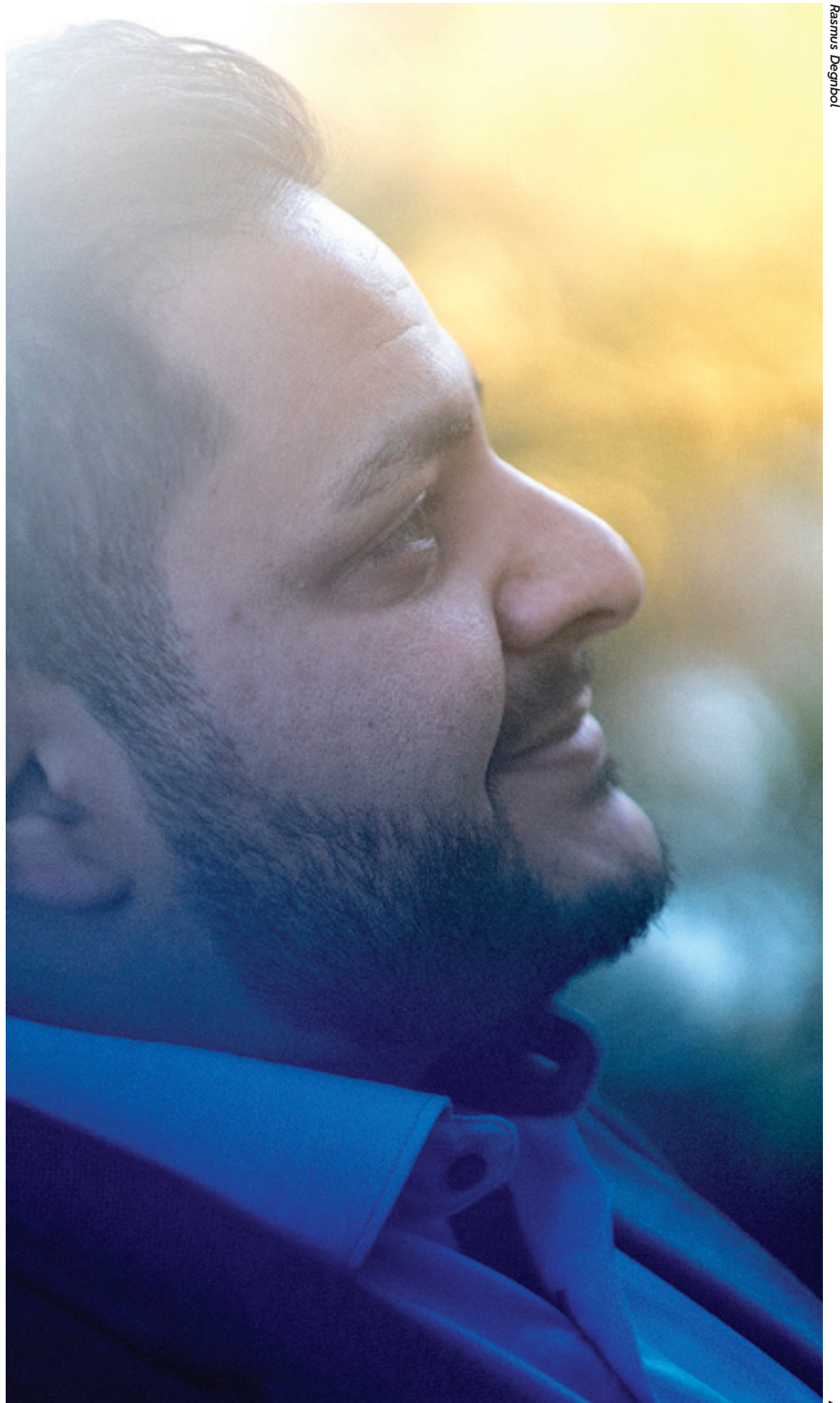
El-Jabri launched the organisation Mino this autumn, with the goal of creating a secular platform and community for minorities in Denmark. This could then bridge the gap to – what El-Jabri calls – "official" Denmark. By collecting data and facilitating debates and meet ups, from a minority perspective, he hopes to create what he calls a "think and do" tank.

Mino has already made an impact with its Danish Since (Dansk Siden) poster campaign, which depicts minority Danes along with how long they have been Danish. The campaign's point is straightforward: they became Danish the moment they were born in Denmark, regardless of where their parents are from.

El-Jabri argues it has never been more important to ensure that ethnic minority Danes form a strong connection to mainstream society and decision makers. Around 82 percent of Danes with non-western parents are under the age of 25. This is a group that is entering the labour market and society, and El-Jabri hopes Mino can help them take that step.

Every kid with non-western parents will experience going home and challenging their parents identity and view on life.

Peter Stanners



Niddal El-Jabri.

Rasmus Degnbøl

"The educational performance of minority boys is still below average, but every year it improves – the curve is only going up. For the girls, it is above average, and they are the top-performing group. And while in the past minorities typically educated their way into the health industry, they are increasingly studying law and social sciences. Over the next ten years we are going to see a massive increase in minority Danes doing journalism, policy-making, and NGO work. With so many minority children getting a good education, we need to stop projecting the problems of the first generation on to this group. We need to stop talking so much about ethnicity, and instead focus on society and tackling the problems we face."

TAKING THE FIGHT

32-year-old El-Jabri grew up in Aarhus and belonged to the only minority family on his block. He enjoyed school and had Danish friends, but his Palestinian parents didn't always approve of his assimilated values.

"The first conflict we had was because of my first girlfriend. Perhaps I was naïve, but I thought my parents would be excited for me. But when I told my mum she replied that I wasn't going to have a girlfriend. She said: 'Niddal, we don't do things like that'. And I said: 'Mom, I'm not like you'. I took that battle, and it went well. After that, they knew what was going on, they just didn't want me showing her off."

After finishing school, El-Jabri studied engineering and value chain management, before working as a basketball coach and starting his first company during the last semester of university. He has also worked as a volunteer dialogue ambassador for the Danish Youth Council (DUF) to promote intercultural dialogue with countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

It was through his work at DUF that he gained a more nuanced appreciation for the diversity within the minority community in Denmark. While he saw himself as a minority Dane, he didn't think he had much in common with his more pious muslim peers. Falling in love with a woman who wore a headscarf seemed out of the question.

But that changed when he met

Natasha Al-Hariri at a DUF conference. She wore a headscarf against her parents' wishes, as a symbol of agency, not oppression.

"We started talking at that conference, and that conversation just never ended," he said dreamily of his now-wife.

So it struck a nerve when in 2014, DF MP Pia Kjærsgaard said that Muslim women shouldn't be surprised if people were provoked by headscarves. He wrote Kjærsgaard an open letter in the newspaper Information, in which he argued that while there were young women who felt pressured to wear a headscarf, such generalisations were wrong. He also pointed out that social pressure and control are not issues that exclusively affect Denmark's muslim minority – white Danish children also feel this pressure, even if it isn't as widely discussed.

El-Jabri argues that the public debate too often singles out minority groups for scrutiny, when the issues they face are universal in nature. All children have conflicts with their parents, and treating it as a normal part of growing up – rather than as a shameful minority issue – is less likely to make children feel alienated.

"Every kid with non-western parents will experience coming home to challenge their parents identity and view on life. But these conflicts are not something that we talk about as a society, so we need to encourage youth to open up and realise that this is a normal phenomenon that most of us have gone through at some point. The challenges are greater for some than others. But it's only through dialogue that we can connect, rather than putting up fences, or banning headscarves."

El-Jabri is keen for Mino to play a role for discussion about social control, among other issues. But Mino will put its focus on more common everyday and universal experiences, and let the specialised treatment institutions, handle the worst case or extreme situations.

"We want to talk about the cultural meeting that the youth experiences both at home and on the street," El-Jabri says.

El-Jabri believes that cultural and social conflicts that arise in the public sphere are as important to discuss as those that take place at home. He

My mum told me I wasn't going to have a girlfriend. She said: 'Niddal, we don't do things like that'. And I said: 'Mom, I'm not like you'.

first came to that realisation after his marriage to Al-Hariri..

"Natasha and I were walking down the street together as a couple on a hot summer day and I realised that people were looking at us. I was in the fashion industry, and was wearing stylish clothes – shorts and a baseball cap – but Natasha was wearing a headscarf, long trousers and a shirt. I realised that people must think I was a douchebag because they thought I could wear what I wanted, but she couldn't – that she was dressed like that for me when really it was her choice."

ALTERNATIVE TO POLITICAL ISLAM

Creating a forum for all minorities to discuss their experiences is central to Mino's mission. It is the first professional representative organisation for minority groups in Denmark. Among its its board members are the founder of the Somali Diaspora Organisation (SDO) and the chairman of the minority LG-BT organisation Sabaah.

El-Jabri argues that the only other group trying to represent Danish minorities is the Islamic organisation Hizb-ut Tahrir. Their message is anti-democratic, and at their meetings they call for Muslims to turn their back on Western society and instead peacefully work towards establishing a global caliphate.

"They offer a utopia. But as much as Islam is a part of it, people don't buy into it because of the religious message. They buy into it because of the social belonging, identity, acceptance, and recognition. So if those are its central values, then we should be able to create something counter to it. We have the same values, we just talk about dialogue, participation, and the importance of being a part of society."

Encouraging minority Danes to participate in mainstream society is difficult when there are so few role models to look up to, says El-Jabri. And often when they are included in debates, they are placed opposite older and far more experienced debaters – the Martin Henriksen and Jens Philip Yazdani debate was a typical example.

"Martin Henriksen can say whatever he wants and get away with it, whereas the student has to be really careful with his words. That's why we want to qualify the debate. We have an analytics team that will carry out research about minorities in Denmark, and make sure that influencers have this information when they need it."

HAPPY AND CONFIDENT YOUTH

Mino represents both El-Jabri's concerns and optimism for the next generation. On the one hand, minority Danes are getting better educated and are increasingly joining mainstream society. But many will get left behind if an extra effort is not made to reach out to those unsure of their place in society – young people concerned that embracing mainstream society could be interpreted by their family as turning their back on their heritage.

Getting young people to realise that it doesn't have to be mutually exclusive is vital, says El-Jabri. Mino's values of equality, freedom and responsibility aren't uniquely Danish after all.

"When you are born here and have lived your whole life here, you will consider yourself Danish in your own way. But the way that politicians insist on making us prove our affection for Denmark is an impossible task. It's not right that they take away the ownership of being Danish from the youth," he says.

Hundreds of Danes – and a few MPs – participated in the Danish Since campaign, and changed their profile photo to include the Mino logo and the date they became Danish. The positive reception to the campaign suggests to El-Jabri that Danes are ready for a more nuanced and inclusive definition of Danishness – for majority and minority Danes alike.

"I really believe we can create some good changes in society by strengthening coexistence. I really believe we can play an important role in moulding youth who feel a coherent sense of belonging, who are self confident, and believe they can have a long and happy life in Denmark. At least, that's the ambition." **M**

A smiling man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a white t-shirt, stands next to a woman with long brown hair, wearing a striped shirt and denim overalls. They are both looking towards the camera. The background is a solid grey color.

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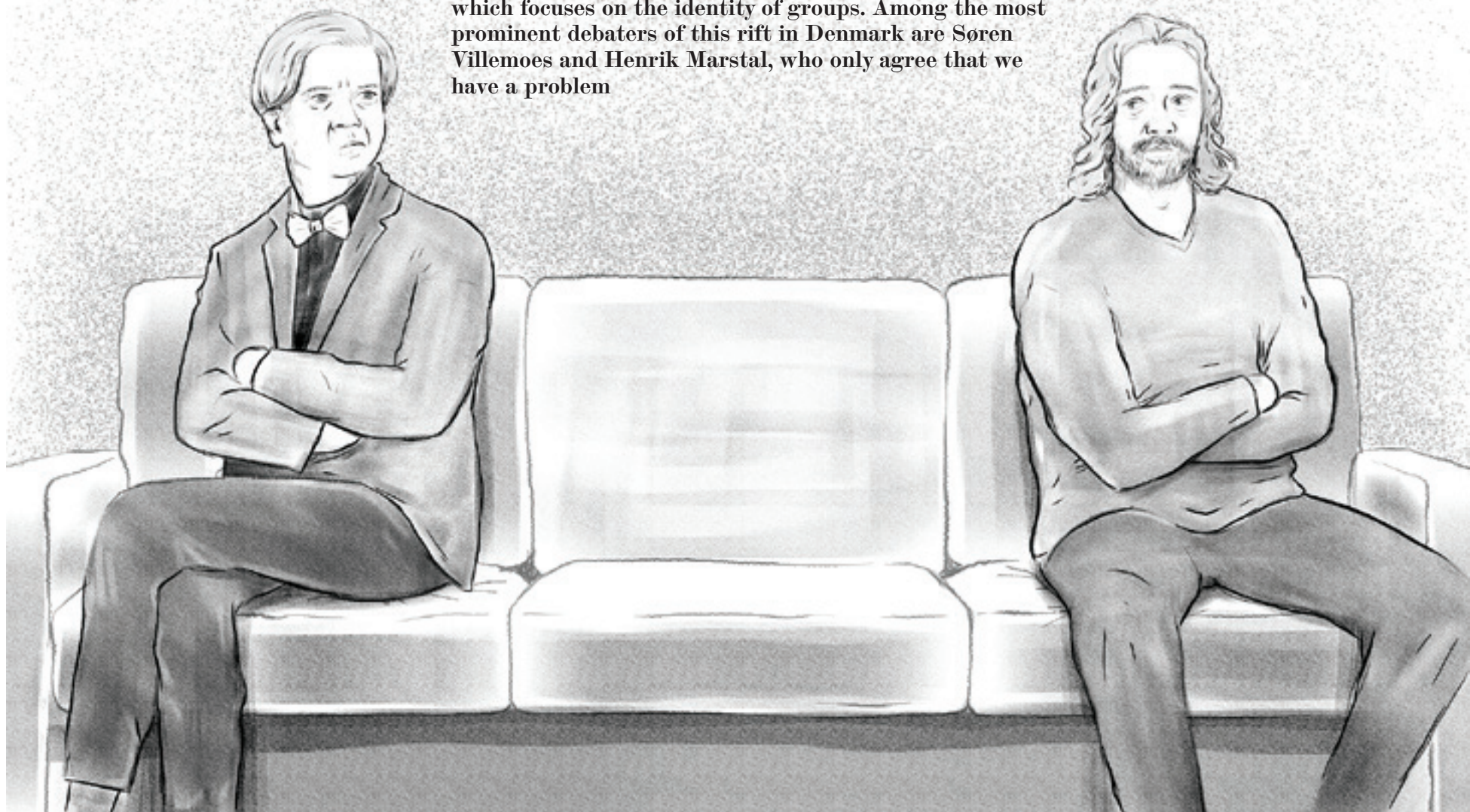


STUDIESKOLEN

studieskolen.dk

Identity Denmark: The debate tearing the Left apart

In recent years a fight has broken out within the Left for the heart of its mainstream. A split has emerged that pitches traditional class analysis, against an analysis which focuses on the identity of groups. Among the most prominent debaters of this rift in Denmark are Søren Villemoes and Henrik Marstal, who only agree that we have a problem



Peter Berke

Henrik Marstal, left, and Søren Villemoes are central figures in the cultural debate about identity politics.

"A GOOD WAY TO START is by counting the number of dead white men," two girls inform a nearly full class room in the old Nokia headquarters on Sydhavn, which now houses the Copenhagen campus of Aalborg University. They are leading a workshop on how to make Danish university curricula more inclusive for minority groups and the underprivileged. The group seems to primarily consist of highly-educated young people from around the world, and topics such as privilege and whiteness are discussed at length.

The workshop is hosted by the recently-formed student organisation FRONT, whose purpose is to "identify and reform discriminatory structures" within higher education in Denmark. The group belongs to a growing strand of left-wing thinking that is often called 'identity politics', due to its focus on the identities and struggles of

minority groups against the dominant majority culture – diverging from the Left's traditional focus on class struggle and economic redistribution.

After rising to prominence on US college campuses, FRONT demonstrates that the approach is also developing a following in Europe. With it, however, has come a polarisation of views on the left wing of politics.

On one side are those who argue the time has come to challenge the explicit and implicit structural inequalities of Western society – from overt racism to micro aggression embedded in language – that oppress minorities and maintain the dominance of a majority white culture.

On the other are those who are concerned that identity politics is doing more harm than good, by alienating groups who are too slow

to catch up with the new language and terminology used to describe the different types of people they share society with.

UNDERSTANDING MINORITIES

Henrik Marstal is a political candidate for the Alternative (Alternativet) and a prominent commentator on issues such as minority rights and the power hegemony of the white patriarchy. While he has debated issues relating to identity politics, he feels the term has a derogatory connotation.

"The people who often use the term 'identity politics' are those who don't believe we need to understand how minorities see the world, and how different our experiences are," he says.

"It's often the same people who use the term 'political correctness'. For a long time, I have been a part of the feminist and gender debate.

But I realised that I had to think wider and see how feminism was related to the whiteness debate and cultural appropriation – how minority groups exist within the dominant culture."

As the topics of whiteness and cultural appropriation entered the mainstream political debate, a backlash has emerged. After appearing on DR's news programme Deadline to discuss the issues, Marstal says he received a barrage of abuse.

"It is usually people on the right who criticise people who think about gender and racial issues. These people use the term 'PC' to shut down debates. They out and shame people because they dare to see the world through the eyes of others."

OFFENCE EPIDEMIC

Few are as vocally critical of iden-

Elias Thorsson

tity politics as Weekendavisen journalist and commentator Søren K. Villemoes who has, at times, mocked 'PC culture'. He was even barred from DJing at the left wing culture house Bolsjefabrikken earlier this year after the organisers took issue with an article he had written under the headline 'Offence culture'.

"I don't really use the term 'offence culture' I prefer 'offence epidemic' because it spreads. If one group demands that something is wrong, and if it works, then other groups do the same. If they succeed in getting the university curriculum changed, or how we talk, or something you don't like. Then other groups can do the same."

Villemoes regards identity politics as a form of American cultural imperialism that is best avoided. On issues of race, he argues against following the American approach, which he says has created nothing but "suspicion and fear". The essential problem is that it serves the interests of people who propagate it – those who call for changes to curriculum or terminology – rather than the people they claim the changes will benefit.

"In reality these people don't care about minorities, they care about minorities who can be used to bash the right wing," he says.

"Whenever a Muslim steps out of line and criticises power relations within the Muslim community they are no longer useful. For instance my friend Geeti Amiri has been called a 'house Muslim', for not conforming," he says, referring to the Afghan-born debater, whose recent autobiography details her struggle to break free from her family's conservative codex.

"When it comes to these people, we also have to ask ourselves, who voted for them? When was the last general assembly of 'Afro Americans', where they voted for their spokespeople? Just think about the Afro Empowerment Center Denmark – where do they get their mandate from to speak on behalf of all black people?"

CHANGING MORALS

Marstal wholeheartedly disagrees that there is an "offence epidemic" and argues that Villemoes – being a white, heterosexual, and a highly educated cis man – needs to understand that he belongs to the most privileged group in Denmark.

He sees Villemoes's reaction as

an attempt to fight for his "territory" in society and hold on to the privileges it has given him – privileges that are threatened by a power shift that is taking place, which means white men no longer have the power to dominate society.

"The shift can be bitter and hard, and some people, like Villemoes react with sarcasm. For example, people have said that I am an 'offence enthusiast', and that anyone who feels offended should just talk to me. But while we have a lot in common – we are white, heterosexual men with a space in the media – I believe that the more privileged you are, the more you need use your position, and I am not going to back down."

The values a society regards as progressive are constantly changing – what was progressive 30-years-ago can seem regressive and conservative today. Marstal believes that we are now witnessing new lines being drawn and that the emergence of the next wave of progressivism.

"I can already see a change happening. For more than 100 years we didn't discuss our history with slavery, but now white ethnic Danes are starting to look themselves in the mirror and face that fact. I think young boys and teenagers are being influenced by this change, and that they will grow up to become men in a very different way, than for instance their grandfathers. There are always first movers, and they will face a pushback – that is where I see myself. I have been told to see a shrink and that I suffer from a bad case of Oedipus complex, but this will change."

Villemoes is concerned that Marstal's approach is actually shutting out dissent by forcing ideological conformity on people, rather than reaching out and trying to find common ground.

"In reality this is authoritarianism – if people don't fit in they need to be dealt with. The Left used to be about celebrating people who swam against the stream, but now it demands absolute conformity. There is only a false sense of diversity – we are diverse in how we dress and our skin colour, but not our opinions," he says, adding that it takes no effort to tolerate views you agree with.

"Many of these people are just lazy. They would much rather shut down a debate then have it. They can tell people they are 'mansplain-

I can already see a change happening. For more than 100 years we didn't discuss our history with slavery, but now white ethnic Danes are starting to look themselves in the mirror and face that fact.

HENRIK MARSTAL

ing' or being racist and then we don't need to have a discussion."

ALIENATION OF THE WHITE WORKING CLASS

The election of Trump has brought the discussion of the white working class into the forefront. The debate on the left has centred on whether their concerns should be taken more seriously, or whether they should be condemned for having racist and sexist views.

Marstal argues that while a white working class man can feel underprivileged in his personal and professional life, he still needs to recognise the structural benefits of his identity.

"We need to be good in taking the debate, but that man also needs to understand that it goes both ways. A working class man in Lolland, who doesn't have education and has never had a high salary, can feel underprivileged. But structurally, he is the one who can say, 'bitch' and 'cunt'. He can build on a tradition of men talking down to women and holding them away from power. He can go with his friends to see a football match, where they can meet and talk badly about women. He can go to a prostitute and he can use rape culture as a joke."

Villemoes agrees that white men do sit on most seats of power, but the discussion of privilege in this context simply silences and talks down to the working class.

"It seem we've finally found a group that we don't have to hold back in demeaning and belittling. So we propagate all these crazy theories and talk condescendingly about them, and we can feel safe in channelling all our anger and hatred towards them. But the logical conclusion of this identity struggle is that the white man starts thinking the same thing. If he feels excluded and talked down to then he will go where he is wanted and that is with people like Trump and DF."

Villemoes points out that the same logic applies in the radicalisation of Muslims – that when they feel excluded from society, they migrate towards groups like ISIS, where they feel accepted.

ELITISM

Central to Villemoes' discomfort with identity politics is that it is propagated by people who occupy positions of power in the media and the universities, and who are ignorant of people whose circumstances are very different to theirs.

"I think there is an understanding among the population that on the Left there are big city elites, like Henrik Marstal, who look down on them. Who don't take them seriously, and probably sees them as part of the problem," he says.

He points to the 2015 general election, which saw a surge of support for the anti-immigration Danish People's Party, particularly in rural and less affluent parts of the country. When TV reporters went to the multicultural Copenhagen district Nørrebro to ask residents why they thought DF had become more popular, many acted dismissively, arguing it was because they were prejudiced toward Muslims or immigrants.

Villemoes believes that this view not only represents a complete lack of empathy, it's even a celebration of apathy for the "heterosexual white man".

"These people are the old communists who just want to rule over others. Thankfully we are not like Sweden, which is a lot more authoritarian and perfect for the PC culture. We need to push against this development, and if I am to be a bit pompous, then I see myself as occupying that position."

Marstal isn't too worried that the debate is alienating some parts of the Danish society – it's a debate that's too important not to be had.

"It may well be that people in Funen see me on TV and think 'what the hell is he talking about,' but that doesn't make it's less important. Not that long ago we started the sexism debate and we got the same reaction. People thought it was stupid and silly, but now workplaces have started to take sexual harassment seriously, and we discuss how women are presented in the media. And I think we will see the same development."

Unsurprisingly, Marstal and Villemoes disagree about where this debate will lead us. They remain convinced by their own ideas, and both believe the other's approach will eventually die out, and with it a better society can be established.

They represents two poles in a debate about power and society. Both of their analyses are based on structural hierarchy, but their approach is radically different. The identity politics, versus the classic materialistic approach, has become the main point of argument on the left, and it is a fight for the heart of its mainstream. A fight that is far from resolved. **M**

"Politicians have become a poor excuse for themselves"

We are being too tough on our politicians – at least according to political pundit Noa Redington. He laments that we have created apologetic and timid politicians who don't have the courage to speak without a filter

THERE ARE FEW JOBS seemingly as cynical as that of a spin doctor – those who guide politicians through the Machiavellian power struggles that play out between and within political parties. They help decide what politicians should say, and when and how they should say it, to maximise the impact of their message, and prepare their defences from counterattack.

While some hide in the shadows, others are almost as well known as those who they advise. This is certainly the case for Noa Redington, the special advisor to Helle Thorning Schmidt when she was leader of the Social Democrats (Socialdemokraterne) between 2008 and 2015, and prime minister from 2011 to 2015.

Redington continues to participate to the political debate, albeit now through the pages of Politiken newspaper as a contributing writer.

Freed from any association to a political party, Redington could be forgiven if he turned on his former employers – the 'elite' political class that seems to be almost universally reviled in this post-Trump and Brexit landscape.

But no, Redington is on the side of the politicians.

"Our politicians are being humiliated to an unreasonable degree every time they take a stance, and they are too ashamed to stand up for their own beliefs. We have a political class, which needs to take care of itself some more," Redington says.

POPULARITY CONTESTS

To him, this is most evident whenever the topic of the EU rears its head in the political debate, and politicians hesitantly justify their support for the much-maligned union.

"It's absurd to me that the politicians have to make so many excuses in regards to the EU. There are too many 'buts' and not enough 'because's'."

We often forget to recognize that we actually live in a perfectly well-functioning society. And this is not just despite the politicians, but actually to a large extent because of them.

Words: Hana Hasanbegovic

Photos: Rasmus Degnbol

Redington argues that politicians face two major problems at the moment. The first, is the decreasing trust of the public in political institutions. The second is the lack of economic growth.

"We see this crisis of trust surrounding the political class, not just in Denmark, but all over the world. And the problem is that the politicians don't have the tools to address what ought to be done," he says.

"Politicians need to acknowledge that we are living in difficult times and that there are no easy solutions. They need to stop being ashamed of sometimes having to shift positions on things. Sometimes you have to turn to untraditional means, and politicians need to insist that it is done to ensure the very best for Denmark."

In Redington's eyes, insisting on your political opinion will result in more respect from the public – regardless of whether that opinion changes over time or not. The persistence and determination that you're doing something for a greater good, is always the strategically better way to go in politics.

But instead, politicians today focus too much on the public's waning trust and it makes for self-conscious politicians. Rather than finding solutions to this distrust, the discourse among politicians has shifted towards the difference

between the elite and the people.

"Politicians are afraid of losing the popularity game, so they spend a lot of time talking about class differences. It's almost like they think you need to be an anti-politician. Uffe Elbæk [leader of Alternativet] has had success with this strategy, because he's not like the rest – but politics is a tricky and complicated business and requires knowledge. We cannot live in a society ruled by anti-politicians – God forbid!"

While Redington admits that both Brexit and the Trump presidency can at least be partially blamed on anti-establishment sentiment, he does not subscribe to the backlash against the elite.

"What does it mean to be elitist? I've never met a single person, who's been able to explain this to me properly. Is Lars Løkke elitist? I don't think so. Mette Frederiksen? Not to me."

According to a survey by Kristeligt Dagblad in October, only 12 percent of respondents thought that politicians belonged to the elite. This is worrisome, argues Redington. Why does the public not want the very best in society – the elite – to represent us?

"Our politicians are better than their reputation. We often forget to recognize that we actually live in a perfectly well-functioning society. And this is not just despite the politicians, but actually to a large

extent because of them. A series of good decisions have been made over a long period of time – whether during a left or right wing government. We have a strong economy, a strong welfare state, and a functioning democracy. We wouldn't be able to have all of this if our politicians constantly made the wrong decisions."

NEW TIMES FOR THE OPPOSITION

A new right wing coalition government took office in November after the Liberal Party (Venstre) conceded that its minority government was finding it too difficult to reach a consensus with its supporting 'blue bloc' parties, particularly on taxation.

But while the three-party government (Venstre, Liberal Alliance, Konservative, or VLAKE for short) released an 80-page platform outlining its approach in all areas of government responsibility, the newspapers spent as much time speculating on what inner power dynamics were responsible for the various cabinet appointments. Was the new government more stable or insecure than its predecessor? Had the PM ensured his own survival?

Redington is critical of this meta debate, arguing that it detracts from the actual policies the government has set out to pursue by creating an atmosphere of insecurity.

Still, he thinks the VLAKE gov-

Noa Redington – Facts

- > Born in 1971, in Stockholm, Sweden. Holds a MA in political science from Columbia University in New York.
- > Redington has worked as an analyst at Ugebrevet A4 and as an editor at Ugebrevet Mandag Morgen and Weekendavisen. He currently writes for Politiken Newspaper.
- > Redington was hired by Helle Thorning Schmidt as her personal spin doctor in 2008 when she was an MP and leader of the Social Democrats. They parted ways in 2015 when, after four years as PM, she lost the general election.





Noa Redington.

ernment is likely to survive, and usher in a period of stability after Venstre's less than stellar solo run.

"The opposition must be annoyed by this new constellation because they have been pretty solid in the polls lately. They've really been riding the blue bloc's wave of misfortune," he jokes.

Redington argues that the key issues of the coalition government will be the economy, tax cuts, growth initiatives and of course immigration policy. And it is now up to the opposition – led by the Socialdemokraterne – to present their ideas for both stimulating growth and protecting the welfare state.

"Socialdemokraterne have accepted all of the new right wing restrictions to immigration, but they have yet to present their thoughts on stimulating growth. How will they react to the new government now? Will they deny that Denmark needs these initiatives?" Redington asks.

Since Socialdemokraterne lost power to Venstre in 2015, they have made two strategically inescapable transformations says Redington.

There is nothing original in simply lowering the taxes until they're as low as Luxembourg's.

First, they have communicated clearly that they don't need to collaborate with their traditional centrist partners, the Danish Social-Liberal Party (Radikale Venstre). Second, is that they have joined the right wing to pass immigration reform that the Radikale and the rest of the left wing oppose.

"But Socialdemokraterne need to be vary of the balance between their goals for growth and their goals for immigration. If their immigration policies start to affect the economic growth – which is likely, if they accomplish getting rid of the green card program – then they'll be going nowhere", he argues, pointing to the visa programmes that could be scrapped by the right wing coalition.

DELUDED DENMARK

Last December, Danes voted in a referendum not to swap its opt-out on cooperating in EU justice and legal affairs, with an opt-in

procedure. It means that when the European police cooperation Europol transforms into a full EU agency, Denmark will have to withdraw, which will be a major blow to Danish crime fighting capabilities.

Several parties urged a 'no' vote, and argued the EU would easily make a deal to let Denmark participate anyways. The deal never materialised.

This approach reflects the deluded view that Denmark is a core country in the Union, Redington argues.

"We are living in a parallel reality in which we act like we are a core country, but we're not. That was made clear in the referendum last December – and now we're not even sure we can be a part of Europol!" he says.

"Personally, I find the current situation really frustrating, because to me it's obvious that the challenges that we're presented with, such as tax evasion, the environment, migration, all call for

a European cooperation. But it's flat out wrong to say that Denmark is at the heart of it and now we won't take part in some of the biggest decisions in years to come – all due to the referendum", Redington says.

While Denmark undermines its own interests by failing to fully commit to European cooperation, no political parties have yet to present a sound economic strategy to address the stagnating economy. This is problematic, Redington argues, because without this strategy Denmark risks losing its unique balance of welfare and growth, and security and freedom.

"There is nothing original in simply lowering the taxes until they're as low as Luxembourg's. And there's nothing original in just focusing a lot on education, so we end up being a nation of Einsteins, who live on big ideas, hopefully. Denmark's originality is staying as close to the Danish model as possible, and evolving it. That to me is truly original." **M**

No cold war in the warming Arctic

The 28th Russia Conference delved into how the opaque super power is balancing its security interests, need for economic development, and respect for indigenous people's rights, in a region under rapid transformation

FROM THE ANNEXATION of the Crimea, to the ongoing conflict in the Syria, the West and Russia are increasingly at odds with each other. The breakdown in relations, has affected the balance of power and increased the likelihood for further conflict. The election of Donald Trump as President of the US has caused further uncertainty. Trump has declared that the US cannot guarantee the safety of other NATO members unless they increase their investment in the military alliance.

All these question marks hung over the 28th Russia Conference in Copenhagen last month. Organised by the Danish-Russian Society (Dansk Russisk Forening), this year the focus was on the Arctic region's energy and security interests. Denmark plays an important role in the region due to its autonomous territory Greenland.

The Arctic is undergoing a rapid transformation due to climate change. Diminishing sea ice is opening up new trade routes and possibilities for resource exploitation. Unresolved territorial claims also increase the risk of military confrontation.

But Kristian Soby Kristensen, senior researcher at the Danish Center for Military studies, said at the conference that despite Russian sabre rattling around the world, Russia's Arctic policy has been characterised by diplomacy.

"Between 2007 and 2008 Russia rediscovered its Arctic interests and the expectation of increased economic activity has since driven cooperation forwards. There has been willingness to submit to binding agreements through the Arctic Council," Kristensen said, referring to agreements on oil spill response and search and rescue cooperation.

"This demonstrates the potential of the Arctic Council. Conflicts that have lingered for years have been solved through cooperation. In 2010, for example, Norway and Russia settled a dispute about how to divide the Barents Sea," he says, adding that if there is a conflict in the Arctic, it is more likely to be a spillover from another

95 per cent of the estimated resources in the Arctic are on legally settled land. There is nothing to fight about.

NILS WANG, REAR ADMIRAL AND COMMANDANT OF THE ROYAL DANISH DEFENSE COLLEGE

Jon Stubbe Wissing



Russian icebreaker Kapitan Dranitsyn moored in the Arctic Ocean, north of western Russia.

NOAA Climate Program Office, NABOS 2006 Expedition.

region, rather than a conflict over Arctic interests.

THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

With rapidly escalating climate change, the Arctic Council is likely to become even more important in the future. Established in 1996, it facilitates cooperation between the eight Arctic countries – Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Russia, USA and Canada. The council deals with potential disagreements but importantly, its founding charter prohibits it from addressing military or security issues.

Nils Wang, Rear Admiral and Commandant of The Royal Danish Defense College, said Russia cannot afford to deviate from its strategy of cooperation and compliance with international regulations in the Arctic. He expects Danish-US relations and Arctic cooperation to remain strong, even if Russia's relationship with the US changes un-

der the incoming Trump administration.

"I don't think the overall strategy of the United States will change. Perhaps it will become more inward-looking for a time, but I cannot see the fundamentals of American foreign and security policies changing," he said.

Trump has been critical of the US's role as global policeman. He argues it's a costly role, and has berated NATO members for not spending two percent of GDP on defense – NATO's contractual minimum. Wang, however, is not concerned that changes to NATO strategy could open the door to military confrontation in the Arctic.

"95 per cent of the estimated resources in the Arctic are on legally settled land. There is nothing to fight about."

RUSSIAN ARCTIC POLICIES

Rather than a potential conflict

zone, Professor Aleksander Segunin from Moscow State University argued that Russia's Arctic strategy is to maintain peace and stability in the region by fighting climate change and through promoting sustainable industry. Segunin, however, claims that it is not just climate change that occupies Russian interests in the Arctic.

"As much as we would like for it to be different, a military presence is still important in the region," he said.

The Arctic remains a key strategic location as Russia's northern fleet's home dock is located there, and Soby Kristensen points out that it is vital for the country's interest to maintain a force in the region.

"The Kola Peninsula [In the far Northwest of Russia] is the basis on which Russia can act as a major power. Russia needs to be able to defend its political potential in that region," he said.

OP-ED

Law against taking two educations is a colossal dirty trick

With the new law against double degrees, the Liberal Party, the Danish People's Party and the Social Democrats are taking a gamble on education

NEXUS OF ENVIRONMENTAL, SECURITY AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

While Russia and the West carefully size each other up in the Arctic, respect for the rights of indigenous people in the Arctic hasn't always been a high priority for the Arctic nations, according to Associate Professor in Arctic Studies, Frank Sejersen from the University of Copenhagen. He said states have often viewed the Arctic as either a vast natural wilderness or a frontier to be developed, rather than as the homeland of its indigenous populations.

Sejersen adds that the Arctic region is increasingly being regarded as "territory that belongs to the nation-states". This approach is reflected in the government's comprehensive foreign policy report from May, which depicts Denmark as an Arctic power rather than merely head of The Danish Realm that happens to include Arctic territories.

Aleksej Kolesnikov, from the Embassy of Russia in Copenhagen, said Russia was also committed to increasing their funding in Arctic research, and improving the livelihoods of indigenous peoples of the region. But when asked on whether the Russian government had consulted indigenous peoples about resettling them in modern homes, he said: "a balance always needs to be struck in such matters".

According to Sejersen the indigenous Arctic peoples, such as the Sami and Inuits, often struggle to have their rights recognised because they aren't integrated into political institutions. Amid the talk of security and military strategy, indigenous people have been reduced to an afterthought, rather than a key consideration.

Their rights and standard of living needs more attention now than ever. For while climate change might open up the Arctic to trade and military conquest, the loss of sea ice and warming seas are already directly affecting the lives of those who live off the bounty the Arctic supplies. And maybe addressing that issue is something the West and Russia can come together on. **M**

STARTING NEXT YEAR, it will no longer matter if we as students have made a thorough plan for our studies. It doesn't matter if we followed the advice of our student councillor, or if we have taken supplementary courses. Whether or not we have worked our butts off to make a great application.

On paper, we could have done all the right things and still not be allowed to begin a new study, if we've previously completed an education on the same or higher level.

This is because of the so-called educational cap (uddannelsesloft) that the Social Democrats (S), Danish People's Party (DF) and the Liberal Party (V) snuck into the passing of the unemployment benefit agreement that was passed in June 2016. The new law was presented to parliament on November 24.

It took less than three hours between being presented to being passed. And there was a good reason that the law was rushed through parliament without any debate. Both democratically and in substance, the parties behind the law have, in fact, played a major, dirty trick.

There are no good arguments against letting students who have completed one Bachelor's degree not start a new one – on the contrary. Also, there is no consistent logic as to which courses and students the law affects.

But it doesn't matter. The law isn't aimed at creating better degrees – it's about saving money on education.

And if we have to grant exemptions from the new rules every time they miss the mark, or ruin a student's

There are no good arguments against letting students who have completed one Bachelor's degree not start a new one – on the contrary.

course of study, then they're not going to save any of the money that the deal is meant to save.

In this way, V, DF and S are cynically disregarding all academic and personal considerations, and are instead gambling with the future of thousands of young people.

The result will be an education system where it is impossible to change your mind and where students risk ending up with half an education if, after completing a Bachelor's degree, they don't want to continue on to the relevant Master's degree. They can't start a new Bachelor degree, so they're stuck. We're creating an education system filled with dead ends.

With the new law, V, DF and S have made a political deal that is comparable to an educational policy version of Russian roulette.

The law will, in fact, hit thousands of students who – on paper – did all the right things, but had no chance of knowing that their course of study would come to a grinding halt, without them having any chance to do anything about it.

And it does matter that we can change the direction of our education mid-way. The choice of education is one of the most defining choices in our lives – both while we're studying, but also afterwards. When we lose the right to choose the direction of our studies, we lose the right to define our own lives.

It's an important decision when we choose to either be a biologist or a social worker – both for ourselves and for society. Innovation, excitement and hard work come from people, who are passionate about their trade. It doesn't come from people who have realised that their chosen education isn't the one that is going to define the rest of their working lives.

It doesn't make the situation any less tragic, that now-former Minister of Education and Research, Ulla Tørnæs (V) tried to deflect the criticism by pointing out that 120 of the 428 million kroner that the law will save the state, will stay within the educational sector.

V and the rest of blue bloc have just agreed on a budget that will cut no less than 10.2 billion kroner until 2020. 85 times more than the so-called "quality funds" of 120 million kroner.

But according to Tørnæs, we should be happy about the 120 million kroner that she could have cut, but most graciously let stay in the education sector. Tørnæs' comments demonstrate a striking lack of insight or knowledge into the day-to-day work in the education sector; if she thinks that 120 million kroner can function as anything but a plaster on an open fracture.

It also emphasises that Venstre doesn't have any ambition to prioritise education. No, we should be thankful after these historically big cutbacks.

Education is pivotal in giving people life opportunities. Therefore, it is extremely alarming when it is, apparently, no longer taken for granted that we as a society should do our utmost to give young people the best basis for taking an education. Not just so they will get the opportunity to define their own lives, but also so they get the best opportunities to contribute to the rest of society.

Instead, we now have politicians who would rather close doors for students than help open them. **M**

Yasmin Davali is head of the Union of Danish Students.

This op-ed was originally published in Politiken newspaper.

Yasmin Davali



The latest season of *Skam* sees Isak, left, face his feelings for Even.

Jeg er SKAM

Norwegian youth drama SKAM has developed a cult following in Denmark because of its realistic story lines and characters. This season's subtle coming out story of a 16-year-old boy has especially resonated among Copenhagen's gay community

Words:
Gabriele Dellisanti

Photos:
Aleksander Klug

Apprehensive and shy, Isak opens up about his feelings for a guy for the very first time. He is sitting on his bed with a gay friend, Eskild, who seems overjoyed to be witnessing Isak's coming out moment. Then Isak seems to hesitate. "But I'm not a gay guy. Like you," he tells Eskild, whose character embodies many homosexual stereotypes. Eskild listens calmly, and then explains that the homosexuals Isak is distancing himself from aren't just trying to be different. They know that being openly gay was and is dangerous, but they would rather risk their lives than live a lie.

It's a watershed moment in the Norwegian youth series SKAM – meaning 'shame' in both Danish and Norwegian – which follows a group of friends at a high school in Oslo. The focus of the third season is 16-year-old Isak, who is slowly coming to terms with his sexuality.

Much to the surprise of Norwegian broadcaster NRK, SKAM has established a cult following beyond the target audience of Norwegian teenagers – a third of the online au-

I haven't seen any show in mainstream TV broadcasting where gay love stories are portrayed in such a subtle and truthful way

**KRISTOFFER HEGNSVAD, EDITOR
F POLITIKEN'S FILM
& TV SECTION**

dience is Danish, and many are in their 20s and 30s.

The reason could be SKAM's unique success in faithfully portraying the difficult moments in our tender teenage years – moments that resonate with us for many years after.

"I experienced Isak's same internalised homophobia when I came out," explains Mattias Lysgaard, a 29 year old from Kvistgård who now lives and studies in Copenhagen.

"I figured that if I talked in a homophobic tone, I might not come under suspicion. I went through years of not wanting to be seen as a gay person that would attend a Pride parade, or just simply be proud. Even though I came out, I was still afraid of how people would see me."

Kristoffer Hegnsvad, editor of Politiken's Film & TV section, argues that the show is the world's best youth series, and that its success rests in representing the feelings and experiences of its characters in a relatable and realistic way.

"In this season, they mastered Isak's story in the same way they did straight stories before. There were no unrealistic conflicts and no stereo-

typically tormented young gay guys. Instead, it follows Isak's own problems and his sense of shame in coming out. It seems truthful and realistic because everyone can relate to it somehow. I haven't seen any show in mainstream TV broadcasting where gay love stories are portrayed in such a subtle and truthful way."

A STORY ABOUT PREJUDICE

SKAM's portrayal of coming out is rather unique, by focussing on prejudice rather than homosexuality itself. From paradoxical homophobic sentiments, to living a secret life, Isak shows that the personal and emotional fight to come out is not solely dependent on societal issues.

"This season shows exactly what me and my friends went through when coming out of the closet, step by step," says Troels Hede-gaard Mortensen, 30, who works in the communications department at Copenhagen Central Library.

"The whole internal struggle is portrayed

incredibly well – you always have to come to terms with who you are first before reaching out to others. And this is exactly what SKAM is so accurately portraying," Mortensen says, adding that he related to Isak's thoughtfulness.

"I was a difficult teenager and people around me were wondering what was wrong with me, and I just couldn't put things into words. I feel like with Isak it's the same thing."

UNIVERSAL GAY CHARACTERS

Eskild, Isak and his love interest Even, are not the first gay characters to appear on a popular TV show. Glee featured the love story of Kurt and Blaine that was intertwined with their passion for music, while Carrie's friend Stanford in Sex and the City was often portrayed as a wise and positive character.

SKAM does things differently, however. Glee and Sex in the City never directly focused on the struggles and thoughts of their homosexual characters, and they also perpetuated



Mattias Lysgaard, 29, said he also experienced Isak's same internalised homophobia when he came out.

the stereotype of gay men as fun and "feminine" companions.

Not all gay men nurture a passion for Dior bags and cocktail bars that are typical of mass media representations, which limits the extent to which the gay audience can relate to the characters.

But by focussing on Isak’s thoughts and struggles, rather than on specific gay personality traits, anyone can identify with his predicament.

"I came out when I was 20 and I was struggling with the exact same feelings as Isak’s," says Mads Laurids Petersen who, together with his colleague Naja Helene Hertzum, publishes a blog about SKAM for lifestyle magazine Soundvenue.

"So many scenes in SKAM seem to be taken directly out of my youth, which is really special to see on TV. In the 90s, when I grew up, there were some gay characters but they were normally tragic supporting characters that were killed off. Everyone’s been a teenager struggling with their identity, relationships and friends, so everyone can relate to SKAM because it’s so realistically made."

Petersen and Hertzum dicussed back and forth the success of the Norwegian series, and agree that much of it rests on its relatability. Both are openly gay, and although their coming out experiences differ substantially, they both feel that Isak’s thoughts and struggles represent them both.

"You get drawn so much into Isak’s feelings, it makes you remember that a big part of coming out was actually staying in the closet as long as it takes for you to be ready," says Hertzum.

REIGNITING TEENAGE MEMORIES

30-year-old student Jeppe Berrig is more than a decade older than SKAM’s intended audience, but it still made him reflect.

"I am definitely not in Isak’s same place right now, but it brings back feelings that I had not felt in years".

A gay man, he remembers how it felt to grow up in the Copenhagen district Vesterbro during the 1990s – before it became hip.

"When I found out that I was gay, I was in a very homophobic environment. I lived in Vesterbro before its gentrification, in a dominantly working class environment. 'Gay' and 'faggot' were regular bad words, and I used them as well. If I heard some music that I felt was a little gay I wouldn’t listen to it because I was afraid of being associated with being gay or the idea of it. I was trying to hide, and this is exactly what happens to Isak," he says, adding that SKAM is one of the first popular series to take gay people seriously.

"I feel that all the small steps Isak takes are incredibly realistic. You see his fight and so many different moments where he is clearly ashamed of himself and feeling different from everyone else," he says.

NOT FEELING ALONE

Mattias Lysgaard also experienced that SKAM



Mads Laurids Petersen and Naja Helene Hertzum write a blog about SKAM for lifestyle magazine Soundvenue.

I went through years of not wanting to be seen as a gay person.

MATTIAS LYSGAARD

took him back to when he came out when he was 21 and still living in his hometown Kvistgård. The memories are bittersweet – he is happy to have let go of his shame, but sad at not having lived those years of his life to the fullest.

"It makes me think, could I have done things differently? Yes, probably, but I also know that I did what I could with what was available to me at the time. That was my way, and Isak did it his way. SKAM bittersweetly reminded me of what I never got to have, to experience these feelings at 16. I wish I would have been able to," he says, before reflecting on SKAM’s potential to help young people today.

"The most precious thing about SKAM is that it preaches that people need people, and that when you’re courageous enough to involve your friends in your problems, life will go on, and there will be someone to catch

you. It shows that it’s not easy but you’ll get through it".

Lysgaard adds that SKAM could be a useful medium for teenagers to help facilitate their experiences. Troels Hedegaard Mortensen also reflected on this point, and hopes SKAM could help his family and friends better understand what he was going through during his teen years.

"I wanted people to understand me when it came to being different. It’s a struggle when nobody understands, and that is the biggest issue. There is prejudice, but it’s more about making people understand where you are coming from and what you’re going through. And SKAM truly nails this," he says.

"I hope that people like me can use SKAM to tell their parents, 'watch this, this is why I was weird and distant. This is why I’ve been reacting in certain ways'." **M**

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WHAT'S ON • DECEMBER



TARYN SIMON
Fascinated with the rare and the curious, Simon depicts the American society through a collection of photos from places inaccessible to the public.

Lousiana
GI Strandvej 13, 3050
Lousiana.dk
All month

ALL MONTH

J. F. WILLUMSEN
The later works of the Danish painter, associated to symbolism and expressionism, shows that Willumsen was in many ways ahead of its time.

ARoS
Aros Allé 2, Aarhus
Aros.dk



NORDISK JUL CHOIR
Apart from gløgg and æbleskiver, nothing says Jul like a choir singing Scandinavian carols. This a cappella group kicks off the holiday season appropriately.

Christians Kirke
Strandgade 1 KBH
bit.ly/nordicacappella

7

WILLIAM SINGE
Famous for his YouTube videos and covers, the Australian singer made his debut on X-Factor in 2012 as rapper in the band The Collective.

VEGA
Enghavevej 40, KBH
Vega.dk

10

BOB DYLAN WEEKEND
This cozy cafe in the heart of Copenhagen is having a weekend-long tribute to this year's winner of the Literature Nobel Prize.

Cafe Retro
Knabrostræde 26, KBH
cafe-retro.dk



KØDBYEN XMAS MARKET
Copenhagen's meatpacking district hosts a Christmas market with great seasonal food to spice up the long, dark days.

Flæsketorvet, KBH
Kødbyen.dk
December 10-11

10

CHRISTMAS AT KRONBORG
Hamlet's castle in Helsingør will turn Christmassy during the first two weekends in December. Indulge in mulled wine and æbleskiver for a proper treat.

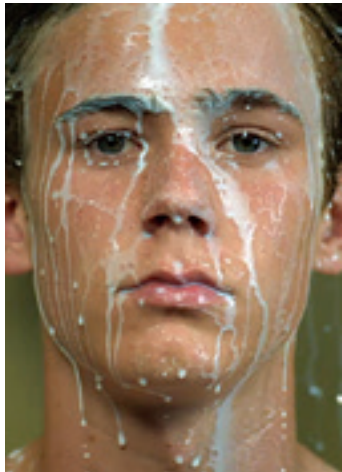
Kronborg Castle
Kronborg 2C, Helsingør
kongeligeslotte.dk
December 10-11, 17-18



LUCIA PROCESSION
On December 13 young girls traditionally dress up in white and carry a candle in a parade known as Luciaoptog.

Tivoli
Vesterbrogade 3, KBH
Tivoli.dk
December 13

EVENT OF THE MONTH



16

SKAM FRIDAY BAR
On the day of the third season's finale, Politiken is inviting all SKAM fans to drown their sorrows and discuss Isak and Even's love story over a few beers.

Pressen – Politikens Hus
Vester Voldgade 33, porten, KBH
bit.ly/skambar



DAFT PUNK TRIBUTE
The Nørrebro nightclub will be paying tribute to the French electronic duo for an unmissable night this December. Time to be up all night to get lucky.

Rust
Guldborgsgade 8, 2200
Rust.dk
December 16

31

NEW YEARS PARTY
This culture venue in Copenhagen is organising a massive NYE party. As New Year's comes once a year, you might not want to miss this opportunity and join.

KBH Volume
Enghavevej 80
2450 København

Gabriele Dellisanti

WHAT'S ON • JANUARY

1

NEW YEAR PARADE

To kick off the new year, all current and former guards will be marching for the annual new year's parade starting in Kongens Nytorv.

Kongens Nytorv, KBH
Starts 11:40



P6 BEAT ROCKER

Radio station P6 is organising its annual music event, inviting the Danish national symphony orchestra to perform alongside Norwegian duo Smerz and Danish electronic producer Sekuoia.

DR Koncerthuset
Ørestads Blvd. 13, 2300
bit.ly/p6beat2017

6

HELLO VINTAGE KBH

The big vintage sale is back for those who feel like they want to avoid post-Christmas depression and treat themselves to some stylish clothes.

KBH Volume
Enghavevej 80, 2450



BEER PONG FESTIVAL

If you're a big fan of the American party tradition, and don't mind a drink, you might want to challenge others in this huge beer pong competition.

University of Copenhagen
Nørregade 10, KBH
bit.ly/BPfestival
January 12

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