Trust and Distrust – New Challenges and Dilemmas in Danish Social movements

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1. Introduction

1.1 Social movements' scene in contemporary Denmark

In this introductory paragraph, we will present some of the most visible and vocal social movements in contemporary Denmark. Lindekilde & Olesen (2015:31) recommend four core concepts to describe social movements: Social movements (SM), social movements' organisations (SMO), activism, and political protest. SMs are characterised by their collective political protests, and their development of solidarity and collective identity. SMOs are organised with a clear organisational structure and use political protest as part of their repertoire. Activism is a more individualised form of social movement. Activists participate in political protest but are driven by reflections on what the activists themselves can gain from being part of the movement. Political protest can be performed either collectively, or individually. Usually, political protest is a public articulation directed towards the 'system of authorities', and a demand for political change. "Voluntariness" is another form of participation in democracy, and it has certain overlaps with how people participate in Danish social movements (Brinderkrantz 2020). Further, voluntary associations, interest associations, and cooperative movements have played a major role in building democracy in Denmark and the rest of Scandinavia (see Denmark WP2 report for further information), but they are not recognised as a social movement if we use Lindekilde & Olesens (2015) definitions as a starting point. This report will not discuss the consequences of the different typologies and definitions but will focus instead on the challenges that have been raised, through an investigation into two cases. The point is that many of the social movements in Denmark cannot be distinguished along these typologies since they combine rather different features. The field of social movement studies is also not clearly demarcated in Danish academia but is shared between different areas of research.

Since the late 1960s and until now, the Danish environmental social movements have had a long tradition of mobilising people for the protection of the environment and protesting climate changes. According to Linda Sonerud and Åsa Wettergren (2015), the environmental movements in Denmark have undergone an early institutionalisation, with a high degree of specialisation and professionalisation. From the very beginning, the environmental discussions have been widely supported by the Danish people, as well as the state and industry that have incorporated the environmental questions into their policy. One result of this mainstreaming process is that many of the environmental

movements seek dialogue, rather than confrontation, to achieve their aims (Sonerud & Wettergren, 2015). Over the years, numerous environmental movements in Denmark have seen the light, and many of them are still active, for example NOAH, the first environmental movement (founded in 1969), Danmarks Naturforening (the Danish society for Nature Conservation), the internationally oriented Verdensnaturfonden (Worldwide Fund for Nature), and Greenpeace Nordic, among many others. One of the newest actors is the global youth movement, Friday for Future. The Danish section[6] has organised school strikes, information meetings, and climate strikes to show their dissatisfaction with the government's climate policy regarding, for example, CO_2 emissions.

The Danish refugee social movements are also important actors on the social movement scene in Denmark. The latest so-called "September mobilisation" (Toubøl 2015) was activated in connection with the influx of refugees from the Middle east and Northern Africa at the beginning of 2015. On the one hand, the Venstre (Liberal-Democratic Party) government pursued a policy with the national conservative and immigrant critical Dansk Folkeparti (the Danish People's Party) where one of the shared goals was to reduce the number of immigrants entering Denmark; on the other hand, a growing number of Danes were mobilising in local groups to meet the refugees and immigrants with kindness (Toubøl 2015). It is important to mention that some refugee movements already existed before 2015 (see 1.2. for more information). That fact may have affected the September mobilisation protest because the social movements already had experi- ence in organising social activities, handling linguistic barriers, and offering legal help to asylum seekers and refugees. But other activities, such as civil disobedience, were ar- ranged. For example, some Danes helped the refugees without legal residence with transport, medical help, money, and shelter (Toubøl 2015). Other examples of refugee solidarity movements are Venligboerne (the Friendly Neighbours), Venligboerne Flyt-ningehjælp (the Friendly Neighbours – Aid to Refugees) and Trampolinhuset (the Trampoline House). Venligboerne is one of two cases that will be discussed. The Trampoline House (TH) is situated in the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen, and is described as a 'political civic based' empowerment project, based on a political open and inclusive atmosphere where everyone is invited to express themselves as they wish (Carlsen, Doeer, & Toubøl 2021).

An interesting social movement development is the new potential to activate and mobilise people on the Internet and via social media, thereafter, turning the mobilisation into physical protest meetings and demonstrations (Jørgensen & Olesen 2022). As will be described, one of our cases uses Facebook to organise all their activities and communication. Another change is a more individualised form of political activism that has not been seen before. Jørgensen & Olesen (2022) mention, for example, the feminist activist, Emma Holten, who was made a victim of revenge porn on the Internet. Her experiences have motivated her to engage in feminist activism on her own. She describes her

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[6] https://www.klimastrejke.dk/

activism as designed "... *to make people change their minds*" (Jørgensen & Olesen, 2022).

1.2   Case studies and organisation of research[7]

Our two cases represent the first environmental movement in Denmark – NOAH[8], and the refugee solidarity movement – the Friendly Neighbours – Aid to Refugees (VbF) which will be presented forthwith. If we follow the typologies of a social movement, NOAH's intentions, from the very beginning and up to today, have been a protest for change directed towards the established system, both at national and global levels. For example, NOAH represents Denmark in the global movement, Friends of the Earth. The purpose of NOAH has been to work on improving *'... the living environment by actively fighting environmental degradation and its causes, and suggesting alternatives',* as is formulated in their clause from 1969. The clause is still a central point of departure for NOAH. As of today, they formulate their purpose as '...*all current and future generations* ought ... *to have equal access to the Earth's resources - without the environment being overloaded'.* NOAH calls it '*environmental justice'.* NOAH is also a well-organised SMO. For example, NOAH differs from other environmental movements, such as Greenpeace or the WWF, by having a flat structure in which all activists have a say in the decisions. All communication in NOAH takes place via a monthly electronic magazine, 'NOAH Internal'. Here, any local group, or the board, can make a proposal. The activists either accept or react and propose alternatives to the proposal. Twice a year during one weekend, the activists gather to talk about the organisation, economic issues, and ways for further development. Time is also accorded to the different topic groups, so that they can exchange experiences about their actions, thus contributing to better communication and cohesion within NOAH. Another characteristic is related to the typology of a social movement. Since 1988, NOAH has represented Denmark internationally in the social movements, Friends of the Earth International, Friends of the Earth Europe, and Young Friends of the Earth. The internationalisation of the social movement can be seen as a coordinated political protest. The purpose is to challenge globalisation and to support solutions towards sustainable societies with social justice. Like many other environmental social movements in Denmark, NOAH receives financial support from various governmental and non-governmental sources. According to NOAH's website, they receive money from the European Board pool B, DG AGRI, DUF, ERASMUS, Global Focus, the GAIA Foundation, and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

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[7] In this paragraph, the information is based on two social movements' websites, www.noah.dk and http://www.venligboerne.org/

[8] NOAH is an acronym for Naturhistoriske OnsdagsAftenener (Wednesday Evenings of Natural History). The H is a 'misunderstanding', written in an invitation to the first meeting by one of the organisers, but NOAH has chosen to keep it (www.noah.dk).

Using the presented typology on the second case, Venligboerne Flytningehjælp (VbF) can be described using the concept, a social movement. On the VbF website[9], the movement also identifies itself as a movement, or a 'concept'. Established in 2013, the Venligboerne is based on experiences from a health project in Hjørring Municipality. One of the results of the health project is the idea that a mutual show of human kindness raises people's sense of well-being. In continuation of this, an idea of training people to be friendly is also raised. The training is based on three principles: 1. Be friendly in encounters with others. 2: Be curious when you meet people who are different from you, and 3: Meet differences with respect. In 2014, Hjørring received around 500 asylum applications. Further, the founder of Venligboerne, Merete Bonde Pilgaard, underscores the idea that Venligboerne's principles can contribute to a friendly acceptance of asylum seekers. As we have described in the introductory part of this report, the political landscape was divided into two parts: very roughly speaking, some were pro giving the refugees asylum, while some were against. Pilgaard declared that she was not interested in taking a political stance, but from a humanitarian point of view, she thought that the Venligboerne, in the very least, could meet the asylum seekers with friendship while they waited for a decision from the Refugee Board. Thereafter, Venligboerne Flytningehjælp (VbF) was established as a subdivision of the original group. Rapidly, the VbF became a national-wide movement with around 150,000 volunteers in 90 cities[10]. In addition, the movement mobilises friendly groups in other European countries, e.g., Norway, Sweden, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, France. The mobilisation to other countries is feasible because everyone, in principle, can establish a Venligboerne group. The only requirement from Pilgaard is that the groups respect the original idea of meeting other people with kindness.

VbF is an offshoot of Pilgaard's experiences with a preventative healthcare initiative in Hjørring municipality. After the idea of VbF became established, the movement promptly and successfully mobilised volunteers from all over Denmark. VbF does not see itself as a political protest group, but rather a movement with a humanitarian-motivated agenda.

1.3 Recruitment

Focus group participants have been recruited via their contact information on the two social movements' websites (NOAH.dk), as well as on the VbF's Facebook site. From the very beginning, both movements showed interest in participating in the research and have been helpful in the process of getting in contact with potential focus group participants. Our contacts in the social movements have helped us with the recruitment of participants to the four focus groups through a snowball sampling. On the day of the

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[9] http://www.venligboerne.org/venligboernes-organisation/flygtningehjaelp/

[10] Numbers from the website, presumably around 2015/2016

respective focus group interviews, we received three sincere apologies. All focus group interviews lasted a little over two hours and were conducted online in April, May, and June 2021. All the preliminary contact, online pre-test interviews, and the online focus group interviews are conducted by postdoc, Anne Brus. The transcription of the online interviews was carried out by two student assistants. Anne Brus was responsible for the coding, analysis and writing process. The other member of the Danish team, Hans-Jörg Trenz, participated in all three processes and has contributed with his knowledge and expertise, especially during the last period of the writing process.

2. Analysis of focus groups

2.1 Introductory note

Before the focus group interviews were conducted, the participants were asked to fill out a socio demographic questionnaire. In the table below, some of the respondents' demographics are presented.

Table 1: Sample characteristics of Danish case study

	Number of participants	Average age	Gender	Level of education	Employment
NOAH core members	6	30-45	3 males, 3 females	Master's degree	precarious, free-lance, full time
NOAH followers	6	45+	5 males, 1 female	Master's degree, bachelor, student, high school, other	precarious, part time, retired, full time
VbF core members	5	45+	1 male, 4 females	Master's degree, bachelor, other	full time, part time, freelance
VbF followers	4	45+	1 male, 3 females	Bachelor, other	retired

The participants predominantly represent the 45+ age group; the average age of the VbF-followers is higher; they are all retired from the labour market. Regarding gender, NOAH is represented by more men than women; VbF, the opposite. There is also a tendency for the followers' level of education to be lower than that of the core members.

DK NOAH: On the date of the pre-test interview, and according to one of the core members of the movement, NOAH has around 100 activists; 20 activists are described as core members. They are engaged in different environmental topics, e.g., they are against new constructions of unnecessary motorways. One of the respondents is from Greenland, a

former Danish colony, and now an autonomous part of Denmark. During the last election in Greenland in the spring of 2021, NOAH was engaged in information campaigns about risks of uranium mining in Greenland. One central part of the activists' work has been to translate many documents from Danish and English into Greenlandic. Other activists are working with the development of sustainable food, and others still are developing training material to educate people in green manners. NOAH uses a broad spectrum of activities to show their dissatisfaction with environmental policy. They write letters, carry out signature collection campaigns, hold demonstrations, are on social media, etc. In addition, one of the core members emphasises the movement's tradition of creative and innovative activism. For example, they demonstrate against the trend towards over-consumption at Christmas, by singing songs that critically address the issue.

Only a few of the youngest activists describe themselves as followers. All the other participants in the focus group interviews see themselves as core activists. No matter how long the activists have been part of the movement, they highlight NOAH's values and goals as a motivation factor for joining the movement. Further, some of them emphasise NOAH's group-based working methods. NOAH is based on participation and basic democracy. Every initiative is discussed with everyone, but both the local and theme-based working groups in NOAH decide what to work on, and how they will practise their environmental activism.

DK VbF: The VbF pre-test responses estimates that there are over 100,000 actives in the movement. This means that the number has dropped by 50,000 citizens since 2014/2015. In the socio democratic questionnaire, the core members identify themselves as members of a management group. The followers describe their role as volunteers. Several times during the pre-test interview, it is underlined that anyone in principle can establish a VbF group. The only claim is to comply with the basic core principles and values of the Venligboerne, as they are described above. According to the pre-test responses, all the VbF communication takes place on Facebook. During the last couple of years, the VbF group has experienced an increased number of negative statements about asylum seekers, as well as about the volunteers themselves. Every VbF group works independently of the others. The focus of work depends on individual group's priorities, time, and interests, and the asylum seekers' needs in the local communities. Some of them describe themselves as mentors and coaches. Some groups organise dinners, others arrange coffee mornings, homework help, job applications, etc. There are also groups with specific, nonlocal purposes such as placement communication, needlework, translation, legal assistance, etc. These groups appoint their own administrators and are managed in many ways. To meet society's requirements for registering, reporting, and handling financial resources, many friendly neighbourhood groups have created support associations. Many of the VbF are active daily. One of the core members describes participation in the movement as 'a lifestyle'.

2.2   Structure of the movements

The formal structure of DK VbF is described as de-centralised, or '*flat*' as the volunteers prefer to call it:

> *Our movement has a very, very flat structure; we are characterised as having no leadership … and we try not to interfere. If one has an engagement and a spirit to do something, then they do it* (DK VbF C).

But both the DK VbF Cs and the DK VbF Fs talk about a **functional structure, where the assignment of roles is practice based.** The movement has chosen to gather what they call a management group. Up to a point, it means that membership of the movement can be described as **conditionally inclusive**. It is the management group that handles the unpleasant comments on Facebook and holds onto the movement's original value on being un-political. The management group was met with a major discussion at the beginning of the movement's lifetime. Because of the arrangement, the movement has been divided into two groups: The DK VbF and the Venligboerne København (the Friendly Neighbours, Copenhagen). The Friendly Neighbours, Copenhagen criticised the VbF management group for holding onto movement values that did not tally with the delicate situation that some of the refugees were in:

> *Well, we are not the same movement [nation-wide movement] anymore. It slipped out at some point because there were some disagreements about the values … The idea was that you should only talk about everything that is positive and you should not criticise something because it should be good. But it did not keep up with the situations some of the families were in. So, there were some who stood out in different fractions* (DK VbF F).

According to DK VbF C, the conflict about how and on what basis to make decisions ended up in court, and a long and exhaustive battle about the right of the movement's name, Venligboerne, was fought. They have since put the controversies behind them. The DK VbF management group has still the overall responsibility to hold onto the original idea about friendliness, but in practice, they try to avoid interfering with the local groups' practises. **Anyone** can start a local Venligboerne group:

> *We [the management group] try to keep our management to a minimum, to what is necessary, e.g., legal stuff and who has the right to call their group 'Venligboerne'. We characterise ourselves as someone who is there to support the groups, stepping forward when it is necessary and otherwise, we try to interfere as little as possible, and set out as few guidelines as possible for what people [the volunteers] may and may not and should and should not do …* (DK VbF C).

From an overall perspective, the DK VbCs highlight that **everyone is allowed to initiate actions** in the movement. Action is, for example, evenings at the group's café, or a

group's second-hand shop, sorting through a collection of clothes, computers or furniture, excursions with children, a communal dinner with Danish, Syrian or Iranian food, or preparations for a demonstration[11]. In addition, a more specialised kind of action involves helping families to communicate with the police, social workers, advocates, doctors, and hospitals.

Both the DK NOAH Cs and DK NOAH Fs give a clear indication that NOAH's **formal structure is horizontal,** for example, by using concepts such as "*flat*", like the DK VbF does. But NOAH also describes its formal structure as a "*consensus democracy*" and an "*active democracy*". The movement is **open for everyone**. They describe their functional structure as **dynamic.** The roles in the movement are changeable and fluid. They relate the dynamic structure to the **levels of decision-making.** When they say something, they always express themselves on behalf of the theme group they are part of:

> *That is, every time you have to say something as a NOAH actor, or what you have to say, you say it again in principle as a group, and then it is clear enough that there is someone within the groups who are spokespersons, and all that. But everything is initiated on a group basis and becomes … hmm …and becomes, how to put it, also verified on a group basis. So, it is the group that is the guarantor; what you say as a group… fits under NOAH's purpose clause. It is basic to being part of NOAH* (DK NOAH C).

Although the flat structure is highlighted as the movement's strength, a few of the DK NOAH C and DK NOAH F members mention that it pressures the decision-making process:

> *The diversity [the fast development in new technology solutions in the environmental area] pressures a social movement like NOAH … and our flat structure. When knowledge is new, then we have problems in understanding what is up and down in the story telling… I am really worried about our flat structure when the solutions become more and more technologically oriented… because the worst paradoxical decisions must be taken very quickly… and I think that the structure we have, we must become better and better at finding some tools, where we can talk about things quietly and help each other* (DK NOAH F).

This openness has had consequences. The openness does sometimes lead to … *'total chaos. In our local group, we have had the most remarkable members, but it has also been fun'* (DK NOAH C). Although most of the activists agree on the openness for everyone, many of them also highlight that there is a kind of *'filtration process'* (DK NOAH F) that takes place during the initial period after joining. Some leave the movement quickly

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[11] At the time of the interview, the Danish government started to strip some Syrian refugees of their provisional residence permits, and to expel them to Syria.

afterwards. Still, all the respondents insist on describing the movement as **fully inclusive**.

Regarding DK NOAH's actions, **any member can initiate an action**:

> It is not something you have to seek special permission for, but of course we expect it to take place within the political message that NOAH stands for, and of course within the framework of the law (DK NOAH F).

As examples of actions, they mention teaching activities with children and young people about environmental issues and promotion via different digital channels.

When the DK NOAH activists are asked about how they react to **disagreements**, both focus groups refer to the social movement's flat structure that sometimes creates problems:

> In other words, the thing about being in a position of having to decide, about having to be part of something, or not wanting to be part of something … hmm … There is a time pressure which means that you can't come to a decision … And then the decision becomes a non-decision! It means that some in the group are forced to say, 'we do it this way'. And the other part must go with the others, so to speak… we have not had the time and space and profit and space to make a democratic decision. It has happened once, but it is really, it was really a big, a big thing. So, time pressure, especially time pressure combined with having to completely agree on everything, may well be a problem (DK NOAH C).

Summing up, the structure of both social movements is de-centralised and dynamic. DK VbF has been challenged because of disagreements on the movement's values, but after a politically oriented group of people left the movement, both the DK VbF Cs and DK VbF Fs now agree on how to organise the movement. Regarding DK NOAH, the movement is challenged because their consensus democracy takes time.

2.3 Attitudes towards and relations of (dis)trust

All the participants in the four focus groups see **general trust as a significant factor** in Danish society. People in general have a high level of trust towards each other:

> It plays a huge role in relation to how you organise yourself and how you behave towards your fellow humans. This is something you know from your own life; if there is mutual trust between people and between groups and between people, then it is possible to make a lot of things that are impossible without trust, right? I think that it is crucial for social cohesion that there is a high level of trust (DK NOAH C).

Some of DK NOAHs even describe their movement as a microcosm of how general trust in society should look. DK NOAH is a movement that is based on mutual trust. The social movement has no hidden agenda. The same applies to many of the VbFs. The values of friendliness are one of the reasons why they joined the movement.

However, most of the respondents in both social movements emphasise general trust as **conditionally positive.** On an individual level**,** you might have less trust even though you agree on the importance of general trust:

> *Basically, I have confidence in the system; that it works, but the system is not perfect, and it is not always true that I am satisfied with what the system does, or the scope of action the system has… For example, integration. It's something that occurs between people. Our system is not geared towards that. I think it is fine that the system works in this way. But when civil society does not engage with the problem to a greater degree than is the case, then the system needs someone to solve the problem* (DK VbF C).

Further, some of the respondents in both social movements pass comment on the democratic development in Denmark which they find is going in the wrong direction. Because of this, their trust has decreased. For example, this is how the DK VbF Fs refer to the refugee situation:

> *You ask about trust in society. I think it is probably general for all of us who work in the movement that we have had great trust in Danish society. And when I emphasise it, it's because it's faltering colossally right now. I had never dreamed of Denmark as it is now. I would not have believed it if you had asked me about trust in society 20 years ago. Never!* (DK VbF F).

Regarding **general distrust in society**, and the possibilities of understanding distrust as something useful, we have observed small differences in the level of understanding across the movements. Some of the DK VbFs, and a few from DK NOAH, agree on general distrust as a **negative** factor for society. Distrust is viewed as negative and destructive. On the other hand, most of the respondents see general distrust as **positive.** For example, it can be used as a form of wake-up call on an individual level: *"One can get so angry … when you don't trust those who have the power, then you must act! It is why I joined NOAH"* (DK NOAH C).

Many of NOAH's participants underline that NOAH started as a movement because of distrust in society:

> *We started our work like that. Someone distrusted something, and it [the distrust] was our starting point… Now, we use it as a work tool. In the beginning, we are often very much alone [with our statement]. Sometimes, we can use this seemingly insignificant distrust to promote our own views* (DK NOAH F).

Or as some in the VbF F discuss, distrust activates people:

> *If you have the energy to take an interest in a subject, and I have experienced that many people have, then distrust may activate them. I can also see that people get engaged and arrange demonstrations and meetings and seek information and such. Distrust has pushed them to act [on the Syrian refugee situation] and now with the insecurity [they are about to be sent out of Denmark] … It must be stopped … Now, it is purely political. We must act in relation to getting the decisions changed. So, I also think there is someone who can work with distrust* (DK VbF F).

Both the DK NOAHs and the DK VbF Fs say that their **perception of trust in institutions** from an overall perspective is **conditionally positive and trusting**. DK NOAH C states a more general reflection on governmental institutions:

> *They [the think tanks] are quite good…Because if a think tank must be valid, and credible, their work must be of high quality… The older and bigger think tanks are doing a good job, although you can disagree enormously with them. That's fair enough, but you can use their results also as scare examples. I have always strongly disagreed with the Rockwool Foundation, but no matter what, they do a hell of a good job, and yes, there are also some others who do some good, okay work* (DK NOAH C).

Both the DK NOAHs and the DK VbF Fs say that their movements' **perception of trust in institutions** from an overall perspective is **conditionally positive.** An interesting perspective on perceived positive trust in institutions is stated by the VbF F. As volunteers, they are working to improve refugees' trust in the Danish institutions by helping refugees with their many daily problems with the Danish authorities. It means that many institutions are interested in cooperating with the movements' representatives. They give several examples of how they have started up a cooperation with the church, the police, the Immigration Service, the Job Centres, and Kriminalforsorgens Udrejsecentre (the Outward Journey Centre under the Prison Service). In addition, they give examples of municipalities that support their work to build more trusting relationships.

On the question of distrust **of institutions**, the DK VbFs continue their argument about general trust as a positive factor. As a matter of fact, they see the raised question about distrust as problematic:

> *Anne, the thing about distrust you are angling for, I can't feel it, and I don't want to join the discussion [that the DK VbF movement may be a distrustful reaction towards the way Danish society treats refugees]. I do not think about it as distrust of the system… It is the way we treat people.* (DK VbF C).

The DK VbF Fs are not criticising the question of distrust. But the authorities' treatment of the refugees is something that the DK VbF Fs are occupied with, as well. They have changed their perspective on their social movement's unpolitical starting point. As one

of the respondent's remarks, it is different now when they have become friends with the refugees. For example, the DK VbFs Fs are now engaged in arranging demonstrations towards the political decision about sending the refugees back to Syria because that country is now considered safe to stay in. The new situation requires a political statement.

Many of the **functions of trust and distrust** have already been mentioned in the analysis. For example, that **distrust can mobilise citizens to act** (DK NOAH and DK VbF), that **distrust in institutions created the movement** (DK NOAH), that **distrust is raised because of distrustful politicians and a distrustful political system** (DK NOAH and DK VbF). In addition, some of the DK VbF Fs mention that an important function of trust **is about explaining and enlightening citizens about the complexity of the Danish society:**

> At least I use a lot of time explaining to them [the refugees] or at least trying to explain to them that some of the things that happen, they are statutory, and it is not the individual case worker who sits on the municipality who has power over those decisions. So, in that way, our function is also to have a smoothing role between the public authorities and the individuals… I can feel the distrust arise until they [the refugees] find out, well, it is difficult to understand Danish legislation (DK VbF F…).

Another function of **trust is the foundation of both movements in that what they highlight is fundamentally based on confidence in all that are active:**

> It is a really difficult thing for some of the new Danish citizens to believe in, and have confidence to trust, so it is a very central concept in this context. But I think much of our work is carried by our trust. So we have a basic trust partly in the message we bring, but also in the people we work with, and I think we do not have much control between us, or we have no control between us, but we have trust in the fact that the other one wants the right thing; also, if some want something that is a little different from what I want, then I have confidence that we want the same destination; it may be we have to go two different routes, so I think trust fills very much of this (DK VbF C).

Regarding **the social movements' trust and distrust towards governmental institutions**, both movements mention Røde Kors (the Red Cross) as a governmental institution they trust in. DK NOAH F explains it as something related to the fact that the organisation is trusted by both sides of the political spectrum. Further, a few of the NOAH activists and the VBF volunteers are/have been members of a political party, and as one of the respondent's comments, it means that there is at least one political party that the respondent trusts the most. Again, there is some critical feedback on the question asked by the interviewer. The question of trust and distrust depends on the situation and the context in which trust is raised:

> *I think this is a very difficult question you are asking, and it is probably in fact impossible to answer because sometimes you have trust and sometimes you do not. But to put up something that all people trust, it is not possible* (DK NOAH F).

The predominant attitude is a **critical and conditional trust and distrust** targeted towards **the politicians and political parties** in Denmark, both at the local and national levels. They show distrust to political parties because of their stances on refugees (DK VbF), or because they do not keep electoral promises (DK NOAH C):

> *Well … we have tried to punk our local politicians. And among other things, we wrote a letter, two of us wrote it, and then there were 42 who signed it, and then we sent it to all our politicians, and then it also appeared in the newspaper, and so on. And I know there are some of our local politicians who do NOT agree with the foreign policy that is being pursued now. They do NOT agree that the Syrians should be sent home. But then I say to them that they must go out and say it in public. If not, it's no use* (DK VbF F).

But is depends on where you live in Denmark:

> *We had a demonstration in my town last Saturday. And there were various humanitarian organisations involved, also nationwide. Plus, we had the Radical Liberal, we had the Socialist People's Party, the Unity List, the Alternative, and the Greens with us as co-organisers, and we had a Social Democratic speaker, and we had a few of the Social Democratic city council members with us as well* (DK VbF F).

After the question of the social movements' opinion on trust and distrust towards institutions, they are asked how they consider citizens' take a stand on the question. DK NOAH F focus group says that people will always tend to have trust in institutions in Denmark. Of course, a few institutions may follow private interests, or have bad intentions, but this is not something that DK NOAH F speculate a great deal about. Looking at the flow of speech in the focus group interviews, it seems somehow easier for all the respondents to offer their thoughts on **citizens' distrust**. According to almost all the respondents, many of the citizens distrust **Danish politicians and Parliament**. They mention several examples to describe citizens' distrust. The politicians only think of themselves, not the citizens that have voted for them. In addition, politicians are seen as being engaged in promoting their own career and using populist attitudes to attract more voters.:

> *… because we cannot trust the politicians. Their knowledge is based on power struggles and selfish career-promoting measures, etc. and populist attitudes* (DK VbF C).

Some political parties, for example, the Social Democrats, use their power to control and threaten researchers' knowledge because it is critical towards their policy:

> *It's important that public employees feel safe in speaking professionally, critically, and publicly without any reprimands, and I think there is a tendency that the government wants to control everything, e.g., with the Social Democrats. They wrote to different researchers, and almost threatened them … for example, because the researchers had commented critically on their pol- icy. Such a thing is bad!* (DK NOAH C).

They take foolish decisions and change their position on important subjects:

> *There have been a lot of 180-degree turns in the announcements they have made. It is, of course, mainly corona-related, but it is very often that it is reversed. So, one day they say something and 7 days later they say something else. And there, you see a trend in conspiracy theories that I think is growing out of distrust because they have made so many reversals* (DK NOAH F).

Yet, all the focus groups underline that in comparison to other countries, **citizens' trust in governmental institutions and politicians** is high:

> *I think most people, if you compare Denmark with other countries, will say that we have a society that is very well connected in many ways, and where we can, with good reason, show public institutions, and politicians, and push trust a long way along the way* (DK NOAH F).

Sometimes, citizens are even too trustful:

> *Then I think, there is too much trust in those who have the power in Denmark. And that's one of the main reasons why we cannot motivate people to act …to defend their democratic rights* (DK NOAH C).

Both movements **cooperate with governmental institutions and NGOs that share the same goals as the movement.** Most of the DK VbFs see this cooperation as a **positive and constructive** part of their help towards the refugees. The DK VbFs' mention Røde Kors (the Red Cross), and Dansk Flytningehjælp (the Danish Refugee Council) as their primary partners. In particular, the DK VbF Cs discuss how important it is for their movement that they have cooperation with different governmental institutions. DK VbF C highlights the importance of Facebook as a communication tool. During the corona pandemic, DK VbF announced information material in different languages prepared by the health authorities to their members on Facebook. DK NOAH refers to their cooperation with other NGOs in the environmental field, for example Friends of Earth, Greenpeace, the Danish Society for Nature Conservation, the Organisation for Renewable Energy.

On the question of **cooperation with political parties,** all in the DK VbF C focus group react with a '*no*'. Instead, they stress that they '*… cooperate with people'.* The remark corresponds with the VbFs' values and with the movement's non-political starting point. But they mention that they give speeches to many political parties which they consider

as a form of information service that puts a spotlight on the movement's work. The DK VbF F is not that categoric in their discussion. They talk about their experiences with local politicians that stay silent in the public debates about refugees, which the DK VbF Fs' find is a major problem.

DK NOAH has a completely different approach towards cooperation. A few at DK NOAH indicate that the movement cooperates with all interested political parties. Others talk about having an informal cooperation with the two left-wing parties, the Red Green Party, and the Alternative Party, but the Conservative Party is also mentioned:

> *I have collaborated with the Conservatives by virtue of being both forest owners and landowners. So, true conservatism is good, that is, if it is genuine. But then, they can do something bigger than that, right? They are not the ones destroying it all, they are not. They even have that growth problem. So, they do not mind zero growth because they know they will survive anyway* (DK NOAH F).

Both the DK VbF and the NOAH focus groups highlight that they **restore trust at the local level by using dialogue and discussions.** They find dialogue and discussions as the most important tool to promote the movement's ideas and values. In addition, we have seen both movements' engagement with enlightenment as a way of **educating young people** (NOAH) and **the new Danish citizens** (VbC):

> *It is the same with many of the refugees who came to Denmark. A part of this is to tell what democracy is, and what is the parliament… Yes. Enlighten-ment* (DK VbF C).

At **the national level,** the DK VbFs mention two former politicians' (Öslem Cekic and the deceased Bent Melchior) project, Dialogue Coffee. Dialogue Coffee is about building bridges across political and religious divides:

> *So, I think it is difficult with democracy because there are fewer and fewer members of a party, and that means that there are fewer and fewer to choose from. Um, of course, yes, I know this, why it's something known in advance. So, for example, I feel pretty outside the parties now. I have no idea who to vote for because I had never dreamed it would go wrong and I have lost … I have lost the trust of quite a few of our politicians. Someone men-tioned Öslem? I am crazy about her project. I am a member, but it is some-thing else* (DK VbF C).

Additionally, DK NOAH discusses the EU. The progressive left and social movements in Denmark traditionally take an anti-EU stance. This is also reflected in our respondents' attitude. They cannot understand why their own generation are pro EU and have so much trust in the Union. They explain it with people's lack of knowledge about the EU; that the complexity of the Union frightens people away from learning more.

DK NOAH has a high level of confidence in the movement's capacity to enhance trust in society. They also highlight themselves as societal trust builders. First, they always come well prepared for the meetings and when they make a statement about the environment:

> I would say that for a movement like NOAH, trust is a capital that must be managed with care. It will be destructive if we come out with a message that turns out to be very wrong. So, it can take years to rebuild the population's confidence in what we bring, so I would say that it is one dimension of it. In terms of our confidence in our work, then it is based on information. We are good at reading reports, and we are good at finding some heavy arguments. So, it's cool… It's nice that we can always refer to some solid things (DK NOAH F).

Secondly, DK NOAH highlights **their cooperation with other NGOs**. The cooperation strengthens the movement's credibility within the population. The NGOs stand together and unite the interests from the different movements:

> Some of the noble things about NOAH is that we cooperate with many different organisations… depending on which subject we are working on … I think it increases the citizens' trust in us; it makes our movement more trustworthy (DK NOAH C).

And thirdly, they work with trust as part of their internal strategy:

> The other thing where I see trust as a potential to enhance trust in relation to NOAH, is our internal work, the relationships we have with each other which are based on trust that we do our things as we should, that we fill out the roles we have. Yes, so it is also something that the network builds a lot on (DK NOAH F).

The VbF movement has had an overwhelming success in trust building on a local level. Many Syrians are now an integrated part of Danish society. But they also underline that it is not all people who appreciate their trust building. Some people have negative reactions on their trust building work with refugees.

All in all, we have seen a rather high conditionally positive perception of general trust and perceived trust in institutions. The most remarkable is that the level of scepticism in both movements towards politicians and political parties has increased the last couple of years. This is explained by describing politicians as populists because of disagreements between politicians at a local and a national level, and a decline in the freedom of speech for public employment and researchers.

2.4   Expertise

As a starting point**,** DK VbF and DK NOAH have an overall positive approach to expert knowledge in the decision-making process in society, and in the role of using experts in the movements**.** Almost all are concise, and answer with a short yes when they are asked about their **reliance on expert knowledge as an authority voice in democratic debates:**

> *In my view, the only way we can deal with these challenges we face is by tackling it scientifically with a methodical approach, right! Because if we must discuss (…) climate change with emotions, or something like that: 'I do not feel that the climate is changing because yesterday it was raining out-side', then we have a problem. As a starting point, we must make big deci-sions based on methodological studies and scientific methods* (DK NOAH F).

Some from the DK VbF movement highlight the movement's scientific foundations:

> *The experts are wildly important; they are also the ones we must lean on in relation to our own movement* (VbF C).

But almost all the respondents in both movements also express a **critical perception of experts and expert knowledge.** Not all experts can be trusted, and not all expert knowledge is trustworthy. The DK VbF focus groups raise a criticism about the dilution of the concept; that everyone can call oneself an expert. They also think that experts are sometimes distrustful because they express themselves on behalf of what the politicians have told them to say:

> *I think the word 'expert' requires a much clearer definition. We just need to find out what the expert really represents and what the expertise consists of. For example, Nasar Khadar12. For example, he is referred to as an expert on the Middle East, but he is not! He is not a professional! I think this expert term is also violently abused* (DK VbF C).

In the NOAH focus groups, they have academic discussions about experts and science. For example, there ought to be more focus on the epistemology of science; that the scientists disagree between themselves because of different epistemology. They also criticise the universities in Denmark for being in the hands of the private sector, and raise the question of whether science is as free and independent as it should be:

> *Science is not necessarily objective or the absolute truth. Science is also in-fluenced by all sorts of interests. E.g., there is a huge number of funds that come from outside. They are not neutral funds. It is companies, large com-panies, huge companies, or interest organisations. For example, Dansk En-ergi [Danish Energy13]. They order science that can help to substantiate and*

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[12] Khader is an independent politician of the Danish parliament. He has been excluded from the Con-servative party because of accusations of several sexual harassment cases.

[13] Danish energy is a lobby organisation for Danish energy companies.

justify their opinions … And companies are moving into the universities, get-
ting their own institutes, etc. I think it is Novo Science14 that has its own
department at Aarhus University, and I think it is very critical in terms of how
research should be carried out, and what kind of science we should trust (DK
NOAH C).

Summing up, both movements rely on experts. They take a point of departure in scientific knowledge and highlight the importance of this as fundamental to the movements' existence, but they also raise criticism of the experts' role in society, as well the scientific knowledge that is produced. It is sometimes hard to trust in experts because of some experts' hidden political and/or lobbying.

2.5   Democracy and engagement

Democracy and engagement are topics that both movements and all the respondents have a say about. Some of the respondents agree that **voting is important:**

If it is in relation to which government we should have in Denmark, then the
most democratic way is probably to vote. It is where we have our free right
to put our cross [on the ballot paper] where we want (DK VbF F).

But most of the respondents find that **other forms of participation are of great significance, too, sometimes even more important than voting.** Democracy is not the ultimate objective but needs to be developed further in a direction where participation will be more direct in its form. In continuation of this, DK VbF C and DK NOAH F highlight two new forms of participation in democracy called "citizens' assemblies"[15] and "proposals from citizens" [16]. They find the new initiatives ground-breaking and important. But a few in the VbF C, and especially the DK NOAH F, raise a critical voice towards the new initiatives:

On the surface, it sounds like a very fine idea, but it becomes a kind of pseudo
involvement. There are very few places in the world where you … I think Bar-
celona is an example of how citizens can be involved, but there are very few

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[14] Novo Nordick is a Danish pharmaceutical company. NOVO has its own research centre.

[15] *A citizens' assembly is a representative group of citizens who are selected at random from the population to learn about, deliberate on, and make recommendations in relation to a particular issue or set of issues* (cited from the English website https://citizensassembly.co.uk/). See the Danish website: https://borgersamling.dk/

[16] The citizens' proposal scheme means that all persons with the right to vote in parliamentary elections can submit a citizens' proposal if at least three people want to be co-sponsors of the proposal and it complies with the rules of the scheme. If 50,000 citizens with the right to vote in parliamentary elections then support the citizens' proposal, it can be presented as a resolution and treated and voted on in the Danish Parliament (Folketinget), see https://www.borgerforslag.dk/

> *places in the world where you intend to let your political doings and negoti-*
> *ations be influenced by something like that …* (DK NOAH F).

Regarding the question about **citizens' capability to make political decisions**, almost all the respondents find that citizens are capable**.** In both VbF focus groups, they bring up the question about the possibility for citizens to **take a political decision on an informed basis.** Once again, the discussion is turned towards (some) politicians who are destroying the debate, but the criticism is more pronounced than earlier on in the focus group interviews. As something new, the DK VbF focus groups mention misinformation on social media and alternative news media. They refer to "Den korte avis" (the Briefly Newspaper) and Rasmus Paludan, a radical Danish politician and lawyer who is known for his Islam critical events and demonstrations. The alternative news media and the social media are spreading lies, taking the debate to an unpleasant level with a shrill rhetoric:

> *I think the press is helping to add firewood to that bonfire, you could say. Everything is reduced to one-liners because the political discussion takes place on social media. And therefore, we are not enlightened enough to make any decisions, we are not enlightened enough to vote. I think that the press has a basic responsibility for this. I miss the conversation on television where a politician was allowed to speak without being interrupted all the time. And where you were allowed to come up with some professionally based messages, that were backed up with academic scientific arguments* (DK VbF C).

In the DK NOAH focus groups, they discuss the complexity of society. The development in scientific knowledge, lobbyism, the thought of economic growth as a principle of developing democracy somehow complicates the case for citizens to take a stand on an informed basis. Further, they discuss whether the age limit ought to be lowered[17] without coming to an agreement in the focus group. In addition, **other** issues, such as a lack of time and energy to take an interest in politics and democracy are mentioned as issues that prevent citizens from participation.

Regarding the citizens' possible **empowerment** paths in the political decision-making process, the DK VbF focus groups continue to discuss the negative conversation tone that hinders citizens from participating in the public debates. Many of the VbFs' statements are based on their own experiences as volunteers, who have been exposed to threats in their inbox from people they do not know. But they also mention politicians from det Radikale Venstre (the Danish Social-Liberal Party), Zenia Stampe and Kristian Heegaard, who have been exposed to anonymous threats as well. DK VbF C says that it is difficult to empower citizens when the atmosphere is built on fundamental distrust between the citizens themselves. But there is a solution. **Citizens needs more information and knowledge**:

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[17] It is currently18 years old.

> *It is a question of general education. We need to focus on good manners in democratic discussions; where we can disagree, but still talk to each other despite the disagreement* (DK VbF C).

Many in the NOAH F focus group comment on the topic on a more general basis. For example, they call attention to the well-known Danish institutions, such as the Danish højskole (folk high school) and the public schools, where there is **a tradition of involving citizens in the decision-making process.**

When the focus groups are asked about the need for institutional change towards citizens' participation, only a few of the respondents have a say on the subject. It may be because of a feeling of general fatigue after a long discussion in front of the screen, as some of the respondents are mentioning. The few active on this question recommend **a more local and decentralised approach,** where it is easier for institutions to handle the citizens' interests:

> *I work in a municipality where we are working with co-operation [In Danish "samskabelse"] …In other words, where citizens produce new solutions in the welfare area, at any rate. I have to say that it is a mega difficult discipline. That's what we must do, and civil society must be activated much more because we can't solve the welfare task without any help from civil society… We need to involve each other much more in the task performance, also in the way we approach things in the public sector. So, I think that's something we just must do because there's no way around it* (DK VbF C).

The fatigue in the focus groups is still noticeable when the last question is posed about the social movements own success in bringing more citizens' voices to the institutions, and the possibility of that increasing. Most of the focus groups' participants find **that social movements' impact on citizens' participation is partially successful or success- ful.** When the respondents talk about their own movement, they are more positive than they are when considering social movements, in general. In particular, the two VbF focus groups take a point of departure in their own movement. Many people express their sympathy for their work in the cafés, as VbF F1 remarks. Their work is also successful because of the impact it has had on the refugees. The refugees have learned a great deal of information about Denmark because of their movements' kind meetings with them. In addition, they highlight the many civil resources that are hidden, and just need to be brought to life.

In the DK NOAH focus groups, they point out that success depends on the citizens' involvement in a case. If the citizens are motivated for personal reasons, and they spend time on the matter, then the likelihood for success is great. DK NOAH F thinks the social movements play a role, but how big a role they play is hard to say:

> *I don't know. I think that Denmark is – there are so many associations and there are so many people who express themselves in the debate. Therefore,*

it is not always possible to set an agenda right away, but after all, you can get things going in the long term and correct me if NOAH has not been part of setting an agenda in important places around food irradiation, genetic engineering, nuclear power. There are some front runners … their agenda may seem utopian at the beginning, but still, it helps to push in a direction (DK NOAH F).

DK NOAH C brings up a challenge for all social movements' success, in general. After a while, some of the social movements' ideas are incorporated in the political parties, but without reflecting the movements' ideals on the matter. Consequently, the central ideas from the movements are at risk of being devalued:

I think that the biggest challenge is how the social movements succeed in changing discussion to action; what they as social movements would like to focus on. Then the established parties could incorporate the discussions, but the messages will not necessarily reflect the ideals in the movement. Maybe, they will use the same language to appeal to the same target groups. For example, the EU is now using the word solidarity, but in the EU, solidarity does not mean what it originally meant, but it may be that it can appeal to voters that the EU has not been able to reach before. Many major movements have tried to make the EU more socially responsible. But when the EU takes these initiatives seriously, they will often just be addressed rhetorically because it is difficult to communicate to so many people. So, I think the challenge is how to get the concept introduced in a way that the movement originally imagined (DK NOAH C).

Summing up, democracy and engagement are themes that the four focus groups devote themselves to, although the energy of the conversation appears to have fallen a little during the last section of the interviews. The respondents see voting as important, but other forms of participation have a high position in the discussions, as well. A new form of civil participation – "proposals from citizens" – is critically discussed as an interesting renewal of participation, even though some indicate that there is a risk of "pseudo involvement". Citizens are only partially capable of making political decisions, and could be more empowered to participate e.g., on more science-based information.

3. Conclusion

We can conclude that social movements in Denmark, as in other countries, are agents of critical trust (della Porta, 2012). In Denmark, this means that they are part of local civil society and promote forms of civic engagement in support of local community and society. Our two cases are both organised after a decentralised structure. We have covered how this traditional left-wing organisation is challenged when the social move-

ments are organised on the Internet, as we see in the case of DK VbF and in the acceleration of expert knowledge, as we see in the DK NOAH case. In fact, the two cases mirror some advantages and challenges to contemporary social movements. On a positive note, we can see how very short a period it is from critical individual reflections on the government's policy and decisions in a specific area to an explosive engagement and mobilisation of citizens via social media. Another key theme is the importance of physi- cal meetings, both in relation to the internal decision-making process, and in meeting with potential new activists (Jørgensen & Olesen, 2022). There is a better basis to agree and to disagree when people are in the same physical room, especially in a small move- ment where the engagement is not only focused on the cause, but also on democratic processes themselves. Thus, we can argue that the flat organisation structure still functions as an important identification marker and gives the activists a feeling of solidarity and belonging. The flat structure is a practice that constitutes the movements' shared goals and interconnectedness. On the negative side, the open and flat structure is challenged by the same acceleration of interconnectedness on the Internet that makes them able to mobilise citizens in no time. For example, the social movements have less control over their communication and their shared values when they rely on social media as their preferred organisation tool. The point is that online communication opens for digital stalking, unwanted contact, and harassment. We can also note that a movement's flat structure, based on consensus, is challenged by the complexity of new specialised knowledge, for example, as is required for a global and environmentally oriented movement as we have seen in our DK NOAH case.

In both cases analysed, social trust is promoted in a form that also encompasses minorities (like refugees) and global concerns (like human rights and environmental sustainability). As agents of critical trust, social movements thus contribute to questioning the trust base of Danish society as an exclusive political community. Apart from social trust, social movements are also important mediators of political trust towards Danish political parties and government. In this function, the two movements analysed find themselves increasingly in opposition to the government. This experience of opposition is partly new in Danish democracy, where civil society has always played a supportive role in government functioning. Political opposition is also paired with experiences of alienation of social movement activists, who feel that their causes are not supported by political parties and a feeling of betrayal by the government, which follows a political line in sharp opposition to the movements' objectives.

Despite this process of disillusionment, it is interesting to note that Danish social movements are rather reluctant to embrace 'distrust'. Denmark remains a country where the level of general trust is high, but this is paired with a low threshold of tolerance for mistrust. To show mistrust is not socially acceptable and seen as harmful for social cohesion. There is, in other words, a normative expectation that as a good citizen you should be trustful. Being truthful is part of constructive citizenship and a contribution to the com-

munity. This high expectation in trust puts social movements in a dilemma. Social movements are traditionally distinguished by their distrust in institutional actors and procedures. In Denmark, such attitudes of distrust would, however, risk marginalising them, or make their mobilisation strategies less effective. In addition, many social movement activists are politically socialised in a political culture that values trust, and thus they feel unconfident in their role of undermining trust. This high trust culture, however, has been shattered by recent scandals and controversies, meaning that social movements might find support more readily for their confrontational strategies against government. Social movement actors have thus grown into their new role as non-parliamentary opposition and a catalyst for the indignation of the minority of the Danish people against their government, and in support of humanitarian causes and the defence of the global public good. This form of spontaneous and non/institutionalised distrust is relatively new in Danish politics and is variously linked to new forms of protest action, often with global reach, and fighting for global concerns such as human rights and environmental sustainability, as in the two cases examined in this study. A series of political scandals over the last decade have contributed to this alienation process. Indicators for a more structured distrust relationship between citizens, social movements, political parties, and governments are the increase of street protests (e.g., in support of refugees or the environment), the decline of partisanship, and a sharper contrast between the capital and the countryside. Therefore, the civil society-government relationship becomes 'less friendly' and 'more adversary'. The government and political parties are not (yet) the enemy, but a political opponent which stands for fundamentally opposed principles and interests.

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