

1 Rector Holm-Nielsen's 2010 Annual Celebration Speech

Honoured Minister - honoured guests - ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to the 2010 Aarhus University Annual Celebration.

Hilary Clinton, the American Secretary of State, wrote a book about what it takes for children to develop into well-rounded human beings almost fifteen years ago. The book is called *It takes a village*. The title refers to African societies; the 'village' is the local community which provides the framework for a child's development.

The good common sense of *It takes a village* doesn't just apply to raising children in African villages. No one can make it alone - not even in the strongest family. This is a good metaphor which also applies to the development of our small society – and to that of our universities.

Doing anything alone is difficult. But together - we can do almost anything we can imagine, if we dare.

Imagine.

Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen has a goal for Danish higher education: to see a Danish university among the top ten in Europe by 2020. Aarhus University ranks in the global top 100 on the most respected university rankings - and even higher within Europe. The parameters these lists measure are not exhaustive; universities engage in a broad spectrum of activities. However you choose to evaluate our performance, we - and several other Danish universities - are doing extremely well.

To highlight just a handful of indicators, I might point out that only Japan can boast a higher proportion of students who complete an advanced degree than Denmark - and that only Switzerland can boast higher publication impact factor!

In fact, according to the Centre for Science and Technology Studies at Leiden University, Aarhus University ranks number 55 in the world when evaluated in terms of the international impact of

published research results when evaluated in terms of the international impact of published research results

But we can do even better - together. Not for the university's sake, but for society's sake - for everyone's sake.

Over 23,000 young people applied for admission to Aarhus University this year, more than ever before. 6,277 new Bachelor's students have just embarked on their studies. Also a new record. A particularly positive development is the marked increase in the number of applications to degree programmes in the sciences, an increase brought about in part by an active collaboration with the country's upper secondary schools. Applications to traditional fields of study such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, geology and biology have increased markedly, along with new fields such as nanotechnology, molecular medicine and new Bachelor's programmes in education science and public health science – which are off to a flying start.

We have also admitted 4,972 students to our Master's degree programmes, of whom 1,959 are first-time students at Aarhus University. So on 1 September, 8,236 young people started exploring and shaping the knowledge their futures will be based on.

This is promising, especially considering that we have just under 1,700 PhD students from all corners of the world.

It's now clearer than ever before that knowledge is the path to growth and welfare. The research, teaching and knowledge exchange contributed by our universities will play a crucial role in ensuring the continued prosperity of Danish society over the coming decades. Aarhus University is prepared to assume this role - and the responsibility it entails. The mergers of 2007 brought the university the breadth it possesses today, which means that we are able to make room for the specialised and the 'nerdy' - the 'narrow subjects' which other universities can't accommodate. While it might not be very Danish to say so, in this context, I feel compelled to admit that 'big is beautiful'.

Our size is a necessary condition for realising our visions and ambitions. But questions of length and breadth aside, what is crucial is that everything we do be based on world-class research. This is what the excellence we strive for must be founded on.

And we've only just begun. The next logical step is the process we're engaged in right now: the most sweeping reform in the university's history. Nine main academic areas will become four:

Aarhus Faculty of Arts

Aarhus Faculty of Science and Technology

Aarhus Faculty of Health Sciences

and Aarhus School of Business and Social Sciences.

The new main academic areas will have broad competences in the areas of both teaching and research. Over the coming years, the reform will lead to major improvements: the internal barriers to the university's development will be reduced - hopefully to disappear completely.

Many of the university's 38,000 students and 11,000 employees will not experience any direct effects of the changes which are being made. For others, particularly within the university's administration and management, the change process is already making its demands felt. I would therefore like to thank the Aarhus University community for its contributions to the open, comprehensive development process we are engaged in - first and foremost university employees, but also students and external experts.

These structural reforms are essential for us to continue our development away from the classically organised university model, with its inward focus on basic science and teaching, towards a more open model which, while based on strong academic traditions, anchors the creation and dissemination of knowledge in our interdependency with all aspects of the society we belong to. Aarhus University is transforming itself from the classical English Oxford university model to the more extroverted American model represented by Stanford University. Just as Stanford has done since its establishment, Aarhus University is now closely interwoven with society – and not least with innovative research and development environments. We will continue along this path.

It's not something that's happening automatically; it's the result of a decision we've made. And it's only possible because we share our visions and ambitions with others. *Imagine.*

It takes a village.

Aarhus University will celebrate its 100th anniversary in the year 2028.

Though I'm no seer, I can assure you of one thing at least - the rector giving a speech on that occasion won't be me. And I sincerely doubt that we'll have the same minister of science.

However, others of you will be present on that day, eighteen years from now. And just as we today stand on the shoulders of those who made wise decisions twenty years ago, we have a responsibility to ensure that the decisions we make today are just as meaningful in 2028.

Our physical environment invites visions and ambitions on behalf of that future 100th anniversary. Our University Park campus is an extraordinary setting for our work. While others write entire volumes on how one might go about creating a campus environment, we already are blessed with one of Europe's best. Just imagine the resources it will take for other places to achieve what's been created here over the course of the university's 82 year-life span through the cooperation of visionaries: the city of Aarhus, visionaries, government, architects, and university administration. We have here an environment for work and study which is the envy of many other universities. The possibilities for expansion contained in the university's vision plan for its physical development up to 2028 are similarly enviable.

The plan is ambitious - but at the same time both concrete and necessary. We just don't have enough room, and the problem will become worse in the years to come. This is why we've already started to build - this kind of expansion takes time.

According to the vision plan, Aarhus University will consist of a main campus in Århus centred on the University Park, a major campus in Emdrup in Copenhagen, and a teaching campus in Herning, as well as research stations and facilities in strategic locations in Denmark and Greenland.

The also plan involves taking over the Aarhus Hospital's red brick buildings on Nørrebrogade across from the University Park once the hospital is vacated in favour of the new university hospital in Skejby. The plan calls for new construction on the University Park campus, renovation and

expansion of IT City Katrinebjerg, the construction of a large multi-storey facility on the *Lille Barnow* property and much, more more. We have clearly demonstrated that Aarhus University will be able to double its current area (over 600,000 km²) without compromising its unique campus environment. We will thus preserve and extend one of Europe's best study environments.

Imagine. Imagine most of our activities gathered in one place.

Think of the unique opportunities this presents. Coming generations will, in cooperation with the city and the region, give life and energy to the new axis of knowledge that will stretch from the harbour to Skejby, linked by a light rail line - with the university as a natural centre. It's not certain that the entire plan will be realised in the course of the next ten to twenty years. New local development plans will have to be drawn up, and the university's remarkable architectural heritage must naturally be respected. Our expansion and development of the University Park is aimed at creating an organic connection between the Aarhus Hospital area and the Vennelyst Park, the Nobel Park and of course the University Park. I wonder what this fourth park will be called?

We have recently experienced public debate on the maintenance of the unique architecture of the University Park. We have the greatest respect for the deep love for the university's buildings on the part of architects, employees and the inhabitants revealed by this debate. But there should be no doubt in anyone's mind that we at Aarhus University share this respect and admiration for C.F. Møller's architecture. I bicycle through the park every morning and evening, and I encourage everyone to take a walk through the University Park and experience how well over eighty years of development have succeeded in preserving the spirit of the place – and perhaps enjoy the signs of lively activity and the many construction projects in progress, which are designed by the same architects and carried out by the same skilled craftsmen.

While we will experience changes both in and outside the park in coming years, I want to emphasise that these changes will be made with the most sincere respect for the park's unique character, just like the changes that have been made in previous years. After all, it's no accident that Danish architecture canon describes the University Park as 'a unique, robust witness to the beauty and humanity with which a larger structure in an urban context can develop over the course of more than seventy years'. These words attest to our ability to develop with care and consideration. When

we change, we do so with care - as we did last year, when a generous donation from the Carlsberg Foundation and the Aarhus University Anniversary Foundation enabled us to enrich our visual environment with work by one of Denmark's leading artists, Erik A. Frandsen. We are extremely proud of this work, and we have therefore decided to present our guests today with a book which describes Frandsen's works, in cooperation with the Aarhus University Press. I hope you will enjoy your copy of *Refleksioner* ('Reflections') by Dr Maria Fabricius Hansen of the Faculty of Humanities, which we have placed on your chair.

But - *it takes a village*.

The world's best universities enjoy a large degree of freedom; in fact, the universities with the greatest degree of freedom are best at producing results which benefit the rest of society.

The University Act of 2003 made the universities autonomous institutions with external boards, which should have led to a quantum leap in our freedom.

So how have things been going?

Last year, the ministry asked us to contribute to an evaluation of the university sector carried out by an international panel. The issue of degrees of freedom was among the aspects of the university sector evaluated by the panel. In our view, the University Act is a fine framework law. But if the university - and Danish society - are to derive the full benefit of the framework set out by the Act, a greater degree of freedom is necessary. The Act is a framework law which grants the minister authority to lay down more specific regulations. But despite all of the good intentions and declarations of mutual trust, the actual result has been bureaucracy and control. We can live with that in some aspects of our operations; but the degree of bureaucracy, control and centralisation has gone off the charts in many areas. These demands take up entirely too many of our resources, resources we would rather devote to research, teaching, public-sector consultancy and knowledge exchange with the business sector and society at large.

I think this is something we all agree on.

But we're impatient to move on, which is why we are so pleased that the minister has elected to fasttrack the evaluation of ACE Denmark, which is now scheduled for this autumn. The accreditation system has developed into a colossal paper tiger; international experts shake their heads in disbelief when confronted with this system. It is a plague we've inflicted on ourselves. We have experienced this ourselves; Aarhus University have been refused accreditation of new innovative degree programmes in areas in which the university itself is best positioned to take responsibility.

In addition, our research activities are burdened by problematic restrictions, limitations and conditions, in part because a reasonable balance between funding for basic research and competitive government research funding has not yet been established. For example, it's hard to believe that no basic funding whatsoever has been allocated to the former sector research institutions DJF and NERI - three and a half years after the merger. We are here concerned with activities amounting to close to one billion Danish kroner. The insecurity this creates cannot be justified by economics or common sense.

But after a period characterised by centralisation, bureaucracy and control, the pendulum appears to be swinging in the other direction - back to the decentralisation and mutual trust which are characteristic of Danish society and culture as a whole.

I would like to briefly touch on the economic reconstruction plan adopted by the government before the summer holiday. The Danish Parliament's broad bipartisan agreement on investments in the university system and research has been called into question. This is unfortunate; in this sector, it is necessary to work with long-term perspectives and planning. A student who is admitted this year will complete her studies at least two parliamentary elections into the future, and a highly specialised young researcher will reach the international climax of her career some time around the university's 100th anniversary in 2028. We need to be brave enough to take the long view if Denmark is to build its future among the knowledge societies of the world. For this reason, it is crucial that our political leaders again work together on the globalisation strategy. We believe in the future at Aarhus University. The university exists because the Danish people - our entire society in fact - has a need for it. Therefore, we will continue the development process, no matter how

uncertain the times. We will increase admissions to our graduate schools. We will realise our ambitions.

.We must be rational and cautious, something we have always been at Aarhus University. But to be honest, we do find the uncertainty that has been created around the financial foundations of our work rather surprising, given our politicians' frequent reiteration of the idea that knowledge is the path to growth, most recently in connection with the government's ten point plan to bring Denmark through the current economic crisis. But we believe that balance can be restored. The universities aren't here for their own sakes, but because society can't do without them. The times are on our side.

Imagine.

It takes a village.

The village has become smaller over the course of the last decades. It will become smaller still in the decades to come. We are therefore all dependent on one another; and as a university, we must be generous with our knowledge. This is the only way in which we ourselves can learn.

This is why we advocate the establishment of an international upper secondary school in Aarhus, which would help us attract international employees.

This is why we are offering more subjects and degree programmes in English, which is taking place in collaboration with society and the business community.

This is why we are developing new, research-based Master's degree programmes together with foreign universities.

This is why Aarhus University will host the European University Association Spring Conference in April, which will be attended by José Manuel Barosso, President of the European Commission.

And this is why an independent jury was asked to select the winner of the Global Dialogue Prize - even in the face of intense debate and critique. If we aren't willing to engage in dialogue with those we disagree with, then who?

And through our engagement in the new Danish University Centre in Beijing, which will create links between Danish researchers and the best Chinese research cultures, we will also be generous with our knowledge - and learn ourselves.

This will also be true in May, when we put democracy on the agenda, and Aarhus becomes the meeting place for the greatest thinkers in this area.

In short, we will make Denmark larger than it is. Doing anything alone is difficult. But together - we can do almost anything we can imagine, if we dare.

But – it takes a village.

Honoured Minister - honoured guests - ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the heart of the village. Welcome to the 82nd anniversary of Aarhus University.
