

The SPACES Conference in Copenhagen, Spring 2025

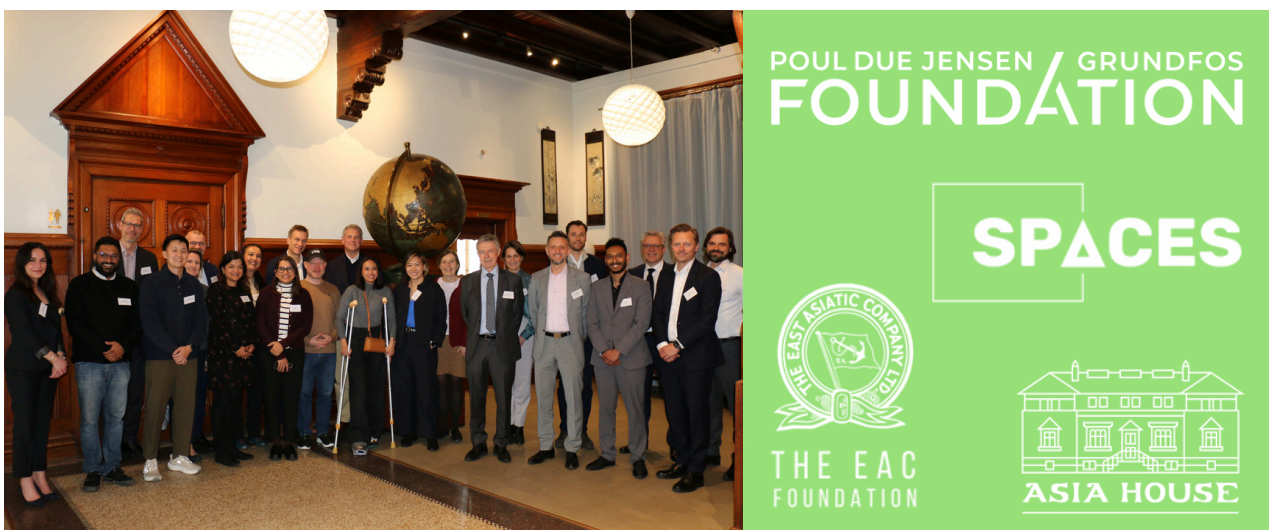
Executive Summary

The SPACES Conference, held on March 27, 2025, at Asia House in Copenhagen, marked the beginning of a new era in Danish-Asian philanthropic collaboration. Organized by the EAC Foundation and the Grundfos Foundation, the event brought together leading foundations from Denmark and Asia to explore opportunities for strategic international partnerships.

The conference made it clear: the time to act is now. While challenges exist, none are too great to overcome through a shared commitment to coordination, knowledge, and partnership. Ultimately, it comes down to Danish foundations recognizing the strategic value of engaging internationally and understanding that Asia—and its philanthropic ecosystem—represents a vital and compelling region for collaboration.

There was strong consensus at the SPACES Conference that the format offers a valuable platform for fostering dialogue and building partnerships between Danish and Asian philanthropic sectors. To build on this momentum, future efforts should broaden stakeholder engagement and focus on the creation of mission-driven working groups that move beyond dialogue and into concrete collaboration.

As a next step, SPACES will initiate a mapping exercise to gather insights from selected Danish and Asian foundations, focusing on mandates, thematic priorities, geographic interests, international experience, and partnership aspirations. The findings will help shape the next SPACES Conference, planned for Q3 2025 in Singapore, which will aim to deepen strategic engagement and lay the groundwork for actionable, cross-border philanthropic initiatives.





The SPACES Conference in Copenhagen, Spring 2025

The **SPACES Conference**, held on **27 March 2025**, marked a significant milestone as the first event of its kind in Denmark. It brought together Danish and Asian philanthropic foundations to explore new pathways for strengthening international collaboration.

Launched by the **EAC Foundation** and the **Grundfos Foundation**, **SPACES** is a Denmark-based platform designed to foster dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and partnership-building between philanthropic actors across Denmark and Asia. The conference served as a pivotal first step in developing a strategic and ongoing framework to deepen engagement and advance mission-driven partnerships.

With participation from **22 representatives** across the Danish and Asian philanthropic sectors, the event aimed to identify the overarching challenges currently hindering stronger collaboration—and to define concrete next steps toward building more robust and impactful partnerships.

Conference format

The one-day workshop was held at **Asia House in Copenhagen**, featuring a dynamic mix of keynote presentations, panel discussions, and group debates designed to encourage both critical reflection and practical dialogue.

Keynote presentations were delivered by:

- **Naina Subberwal Batra**, CEO, Asian Venture Philanthropy Network
- **Kristian Jensen**, former Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Finance, and current CEO of GreenPower Denmark
- **Christian Bason**, former CEO of the Danish Design Center, and Co-founder and CEO of Transition Collective
- **Five students from Niels Brock Business School**, who offered youth and education perspectives on the future of collaborative philanthropy between Denmark and Asia

Pre-Conference Program

On **26 March**, participants from Asian foundations were invited to a full-day introduction to the Danish philanthropic ecosystem, with a focus on Denmark's public-private partnership model. Hosted in collaboration with **BLOXHUB**, **the program included:**

- A deep dive into **Realdania's BLOX model**, showcasing the intersection of philanthropy and urban innovation
- A lecture by **Professor Steen Thomsen** (Copenhagen Business School), outlining the **Danish private enterprise foundation model** and its governance structure

SPACES: Key Takeaways and Proposed Actions for the Next Steps

The SPACES Conference, held on **27 March 2025 at Asia House, Copenhagen**, provided a pivotal platform for exploring the challenges and opportunities inherent in Danish-Asian philanthropic collaborations. The discussions centered around several key themes, including partnerships, mandate constraints, due diligence, and institutional capacity. These themes are crucial for understanding the complexities and potential of international collaborative philanthropy.



Partnerships

Challenges in International Partnerships:

Danish foundations face significant hurdles in establishing international partnerships due to limitations imposed by their national mandates. While they are experienced in domestic collaborations, they are often cautious about engaging in cross-border philanthropy, which requires more flexible and innovative partnership structures. This caution stems from the fact that many Danish foundations have traditionally focused on domestic issues, little attention to international cooperation or to giving donations abroad.

Institutional Pride and Innovation:

Adherence to traditional structures and a sense of institutional pride can hinder Danish foundations from exploring novel forms of partnership that involve shared ownership and cross-border decision-making. This resistance to change is rooted in a strong sense of identity and a preference for maintaining control over their philanthropic efforts.

Collaboration with the Private Sector:

To catalyze systemic change, philanthropy must collaborate more effectively with the private sector. By aligning philanthropic capital with private sector innovation and capacity, impact can be scaled more broadly and sustainably. Such collaboration can leverage the private sector's resources and expertise to enhance the reach and effectiveness of philanthropic initiatives.

Blended Finance Models:

There is a notable gap in the adoption of blended finance models, which combine public, private, and philanthropic capital to amplify sustainable impact. These models are becoming increasingly important in international collaborative philanthropy as they offer a powerful mechanism for scaling impact by pooling diverse resources.

Shared Ownership Dynamics:

Managing shared ownership of purpose and impact is a nuanced challenge in global partnerships, as these can become arenas for symbolic competition rather than genuine collaboration. Effectively navigating these dynamics requires building trust and ensuring that all partners are aligned on shared goals and outcomes.

Synergy and Collaboration:

International collaborative philanthropy involves not only creating new projects but also identifying synergies among shared purposes, institutional capacities, and proven models. This approach enables more effective collaboration by leveraging existing strengths and expertise.

Scaling Local Challenges:

To meaningfully engage with Asian foundations, Danish philanthropy should demonstrate the ability to scale localized challenges into broader, mission-driven frameworks. This requires understanding local contexts and adapting strategies to address global issues from a regional perspective.

Dialogue and Relationship-Building:

Establishing a well-facilitated forum for dialogue and relationship-building between Danish and Asian philanthropic actors is essential for initiating successful collaborations. Strong relationships and open communication form the foundation for building trust and aligning goals among partners.



Mandate

National Mandates:

The constraints of national mandates pose significant challenges for Danish foundations seeking to establish international partnerships. These mandates often restrict the scope of philanthropic activity to domestic issues, limiting engagement in global initiatives.

Innovation Funding:

To amplify their impact on the green transition and global development, Danish foundations may prioritize investments in high-risk, early-stage sustainable innovations. This strategic approach can catalyze groundbreaking solutions, positioning Danish philanthropy as a vanguard in tackling global challenges. In the context of evolving international alliances and partnerships, Denmark can further leverage a soft power strategy by harnessing philanthropic engagements to build ecosystems that integrate innovation and business interests. This approach not only fosters sustainable development but also enhances Denmark's global influence through collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships.

Diverse Strengths:

The true value of international collaborative philanthropy lies in aligning diverse strengths around shared missions to drive systemic impact, rather than striving for uniformity. This diversity fosters a richer exchange of ideas and strategies, leading to more robust and sustainable outcomes.



Due Diligence

Unified Reporting Framework:

For a mission-driven platform to effectively generate impact and support knowledge-sharing, participating foundations should commit to a unified documentation and reporting framework. This alignment streamlines administrative efforts and enhances transparency, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and that all stakeholders are kept informed about progress and challenges.

Efficiency and Learning:

Without a unified approach, the platform may waste resources on individual reporting requirements, undermining efficiency and shared learning. A standardized framework facilitates the sharing of best practices and lessons learned, which are essential for continuous improvement and adaptation in collaborative philanthropy.

“Ear to the ground” approach:

By collaborating with Asian foundations and engaging relevant stakeholders, Danish foundations can gain invaluable insights into local realities, ecosystem complexities, and the feasibility of solutions and innovations. Asian foundations, with their extensive on-the-ground presence and broad localized networks, provide unmatched knowledge and due diligence capabilities, enabling Danish foundations to make informed decisions and tailor their strategies to effectively address regional challenges.



Institutional Capacity

Early-Stage Funding:

·Providing early-stage, trust-based funding is indispensable for testing pilot projects, engaging local stakeholders, and generating essential insights within a mission-driven framework. This funding model facilitates experimentation and innovation, which are vital for tackling complex global challenges. Notably, Asian foundations highlighted the importance of micro- funding rather than large-scale investments, as this approach enables the experimentation of a broader range of ideas on the ground. *(Continued on next page).*

By supporting a diverse array of small-scale initiatives, foundations can foster a more dynamic and inclusive innovation ecosystem, allowing for the exploration of multiple solutions and increasing the likelihood of impactful breakthroughs.

Institutional Workload:

However, this approach is often perceived as carrying a disproportionately large institutional workload relative to its scale, causing many foundations to hesitate unless they can commit substantial funding from the outset. This hesitation highlights broader issues of institutional capacity and internal resourcing that must be addressed to enable broader and more strategic international engagement.

Addressing Capacity Gaps:

To overcome these challenges, Danish foundations may invest in building their institutional capacity. This includes developing internal expertise, enhancing operational efficiency, and fostering a culture that supports innovative and collaborative philanthropy. By addressing these capacity gaps, foundations can engage more effectively in international collaborations and contribute meaningfully to global development efforts. An alternative and complementary strategy is to adopt a collaborative model for resource and knowledge sharing. By working in tandem, Asian and Danish foundations can leverage joint research initiatives, innovation, and resource-sharing to offset capacity gaps. This collaborative approach not only enhances the efficiency of existing resources but also fosters a dynamic exchange of expertise and ideas, ultimately strengthening the collective impact of philanthropic efforts.

Next Step SPACES: Mission and Partnerships

There was broad consensus at the conference that the SPACES format provided a valuable framework for initiating dialogue between Danish and Asian foundations, focusing on strengthening the engagement of the Danish philanthropic sector with its Asian counterpart. This dialogue should continue to expand, involving a broader range of stakeholders from Asia and Denmark.

While the SPACES conference served as an important starting point—mapping out key challenges for future engagement—the next gathering should focus on organizing mission-driven working groups. These groups would enable foundations to define specific partnerships and explore concrete ways to collaborate, moving from discussion to actionable outcomes.

Before organizing the next conference...

...a mapping exercise should be conducted to gather insights from a selected group of Danish and Asian foundations.

This mapping should focus on the following key areas:

- **Profile:** What is the foundation's profile and mandate?
- **Purpose:** What are the primary themes and focus areas that the foundation is engaged in?
- **Geography:** Which countries or regions is the foundation interested in engaging with?
- **International Experience:** What examples of international collaborative philanthropy has the foundation been involved in?
- **Partnerships:** What types of international philanthropic partnerships is the foundation initially interested in pursuing?

SPACES will reach out to its core partners and establish a framework for the next steps outlined above. This effort will kick off with the goal of organizing a new SPACES conference in Singapore in Q3, 2025.

The upcoming conference will aim to further deepen the dialogue between philanthropic actors, facilitate the formation of mission-driven working groups, and help lay the groundwork for concrete collaborations between Danish and Asian foundations.

Participating organizations

POUL DUE JENSEN
GRUNDFOS
FOUNDATION

better
purpose

goto
impact
foundation

The
LEGO
Foundation

Realdania

2150

SPACES

* seedstars

THE EAST ASIATIC COMPANY LTD.
THE EAC
FOUNDATION

brac

HEMPEL
FONDEN

avpn

CIP

ASIA HOUSE

LAURITS ANDERSENS FOND

ECCA FAMILY
FOUNDATION

INDUSTRIENS
FOND
FREMME
DANSK
KONKURRENCEVNE
The Danish Industry Foundation

ELAINE AND EDUARDO SAVERIN FOUNDATION LIMITED