

The End Of One Danish Windmill Co-Operative

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The new direction is for windmills to be owned by individuals. This is a very unfortunate and unfair development.

In January 1988, 49 people decided to come together to purchase and install a 200kW windmill in Kallerup in the Thy region of Denmark. The members of this co-op gathered once a year in small local restaurants to socialize, receive an annual report for their windmill and listen to speeches about wind energy and other renewable energy technologies.

This chapter is over. The windmill has been sold. It was able to produce enough electricity for 100 families but the government wants to have even larger windmills. They are giving subsidies to those putting up bigger windmills and decommissioning smaller ones. Because of these subsidies, the cooperative was offered such a large amount of money for their windmill that in 2005 at the annual meeting they voted to sell it and end the cooperative.

When wind energy started in Denmark it was very exciting and the people were behind it. It was a very popular topic of discussion between neighbours, colleagues, family and friends. They felt good about finding ways to tackle environmental issues. Small and medium sized companies in Jutland jumped quickly at the opportunity to produce windmills and gradually became leading producers in Denmark and internationally.

More than 150,000 families throughout Denmark invested in windmill cooperatives. The national and local governments did their part by ensuring that cooperative-owned windmills had the right to be

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connected to the grid, the utilities would buy their clean energy, and by guaranteeing the price per kWh.

Now it seems the future is for individual owners of windmills. Because of the ownership moving away from cooperatives to investors, who are making profits in the millions, more people are starting to protest wind power. What were once beloved windmills are now seen as money machines.

One of the reasons for this is government wind energy planning. These plans dictate specific coordinates where windmills can be placed.

The right for rural farmers and their neighbours to decide where to put up a windmill no longer exists. The owner of the field where these specific coordinates lie is a very lucky person. They are quick to take advantage by putting up large, MW sized windmills and sit back to watch the wind blow millions directly into their pocket.

Meanwhile, their neighbour has to see, hear and even feel the presence of the windmill. They live with the change it brings to the landscape but without being an owner they continue to pay for electricity while getting no benefit from what's being produced next door. The windmill owner's bank account continues to grow with the over 5 million kWh of electricity per year being sold. This is enough for 1200 families. Due to the windmill owner's good fortune, maybe soon he can also buy the neighbour's house, farm and who knows what else?

The politicians have to act to change this situation. The ownership of windmills, in my opinion, should only be by cooperatives or communities unless, of course, an individual wants a small windmill to cover their own electricity needs. Cooperative and community owned power ensures that the benefits are shared equally. This needs to happen for wind energy to regain the acceptance it once had.

Afterword

This great loss of active community involvement was caused by government policy. In the meantime liberalization and market principles became the new paradigm with the consequence that 2003 to 2007 installation of new wind power in Denmark was almost zero MW. It is ridiculous too, that for the right to take down a 17 year old windmill the cooperative received the same amount of money they paid for it brand new. It was sold October 1, 2005 for 950,000 DKK (130 000 Euro). On top of this, the windmill was perfectly operational and could have gone on producing electricity for many more years.