

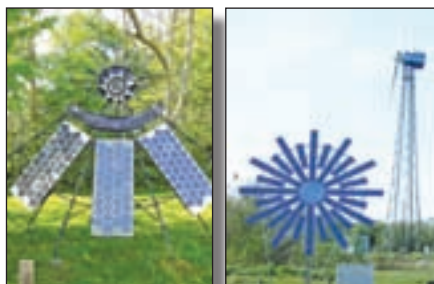
One Week at the Folkecenter in Denmark

Featuring INFORSE member organisations

“The days were passing quickly in the centre, which seemed to me to be teeming with life and bustling with activity”



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Last Sunday I grabbed my backpack and took the train to Ydby (Thy) in the northwest of Denmark. I was ready to take the one-week course organized at the Nordic Folkecenter for Renewable Energy. The way through Thy's countryside looked like a big patchwork of yellow rapeseed fields and green meadows blended with windmills in the background. I wondered about the things I was about to see. The course turned out to be more practical than I had thought it would. During the previous months, I had read about renewable energy, and now I had it at hand. All the different types of technologies and models that I found in theory in the books were standing there, enclosed in 8 hectares of land and surrounded by the scenic view of the Skibsted fjord!

Once I arrived there, my first contact was with the trainees at the centre, Katie from Canada and Ben and Maxime from France. The Folkecenter is a research-oriented institution and welcomes trainees, who experiment and work on different topics. They explained to me their current projects on H₂ production, biogas, and cataloguing small-scale wind turbines. On the first day of the course, we joined the rest of participants. The group mainly consisted of people coming from various states in the USA. The U.S. group was on a study trip coordinated by Youth For Understanding (YFU).

Jane Kruse, the information & training manager, welcomed and guided us through the installations, where we could examine, among others, an array of different solar water-heating collector types, as well as various solar architecture styles ranging from stand-alone PV modules to PV cells integrated into windows and blinds. Two laboratories obtain plant oil and H₂ to be used as fuel for transportation, and of course the exhibition cars were there. We also saw a greenhouse, which they called Biodome, where water, heat and nutrients

are recycled. Later on we attended to a lecture on wind power given by the director of the centre, Preben Maegaard.

During the next days we went on a trip through Thy, evaluating various renewables-based installations. Thus, we had the chance to talk directly with the workers and owners of the facilities (biogas farm, straw bale and woodchip-based district-heating plants, wave energy and wind-power testing sites, etc). I had always wanted to go up onto a wind turbine and, out of the blue, I was climbing up the 40-meter tower of the windmill that Folkecenter owns in Hanstholm. We also went up Tvind's impressive windmill, but this one was the easygoing version, with a lift!

The days were passing quickly in the centre, which seemed to me to be teeming with life and bustling with activity. Apparently, though, it is just a shadow of what it was in the years before the current government cancelled the funding for research and development of renewable energies. Despite the difficulties, Jane and Preben keep up hope in the project and run the Folkecenter with other income sources, mainly coming from the electricity levy given to inform the public about energy savings. They disseminate information and provide advice to those interested in an alternative energy future. Thus, the Folkecenter combines theory with practice and is a perfect way showing tools how sustainable societies can be built up.



The U.S. group on a study trip at the Folkecenter coordinated by Youth For Understanding

What is Folkecenter?
 Training, demonstration, testing and development centre for renewable energy and other environmental technologies. The Folkecenter was established in 1983 and is member of INFORSE. The Folkecenter spreads information and offers courses to concerned citizens, trainees, and political decision-makers.

What Can Visitors Find?
 Testing facility and exhibition of different technologies:

- wind turbines and windmill blades.
- solar water heating,
- plant oil to supply cars running on pure plant oil (i.e. rapeseed).
- hydrogen plant and filling station.
- greenhouse with aquaculture, green wastewater treatment based on biological systems.
- wave energy,
- small-scale biogas plant
- passive solar architecture, straw bale house, different insulation materials, PV cells in windows.

Practical Courses: “Do-it-yourself” solar heating systems, car conversion to run on plant oil.
Conference Facility: Octagonal assembly hall seating up to 200 people.

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