

# CPH REPORT

MICHELLE CHRISTENSEN AND  
FLORIAN CONRADI

## REFLECTIONS ON CARBON NEUTRALITY

When entering Copenhagen by airplane, the first image one is confronted with is the windmill park that covers the sea before the coast, a park producing natural energy for hundreds of Copenhagen citizens. The second confrontation is the sparkling inside of Kastrup airport, which contains equally many products to the amount of natural energy-producing windmills. Perhaps there is a relation.

Since the United Nations Climate Change Conference, which was hosted in Copenhagen in the end of 2009, the image of climate awareness and interest amongst the Danish population seems to have grown more rapidly than global warming itself. What started as an honour, or perhaps even a pride, of a small country hosting an important event, grew beyond what any environmentalist could have foreseen. From an international conference grew an explosion of carbon neutral political agendas, think tanks, and a new topic of bar conversations. The term *ecological*, which had grown to be an outdated lifestyle of the nineties, was replaced with the term *carbon neutral*, and the focus was quickly shifted from the environment to the climate. What is special to the cosmos of Copenhagen however, is that carbon neutrality can be framed, sold and bought as quickly as silkscreen t-shirts and linen bags. Trend drives this very fast moving city, perhaps in this case even for the best. It was remarkable to see how the idea has manifested itself within the mentality and discourse of the country within one year, and not least how it is applied not only to buses and school agendas, but also to carbon neutral hotels, restaurants, shopping, and even beer. Before leaving for the city, we checked the popular portal [www.aok.dk](http://www.aok.dk), a much used website that documents events and happenings in the Copenhagen, only to find a complete guide to how to live, eat, drink and shop carbon neutral.

While this at first sight seems highly inspirational and admirable, one might wonder whether this idea is embedded in a sustainable way for large part of the population. In regards to the former, perhaps the institutionalization of the idea into policy and public transport can counter the dangers of a passing trend. However, in regards to the latter, it seemed that the trend is mainly accessible to a certain range of the population – hence the relation to the airport. If one wishes to drink carbon neutral, it is at an expensive and highly fashionable brew house. If one wishes to live carbon neutral, it is at a designer hotel, not the local hostel. And if one wishes to shop carbon neutral, it seems to be somewhat a reflection of privileged designers abilities to promote a sense of social corporate responsibility. So while only time will show whether climate values will become normalized as a basic concern and mentality of the wider population, there currently seems to be an interrelation of climate neutral values with trend, youth, and upper/middle-class citizens.

In regards to the hotel Fox though, we must shortly show a certain appreciation for the second-glance carbon neutral subtleties. At first glance, the hotel seemed to be more of a designer facility with a carbon neutral stamp on their website. However, as one looks deeper under the guise of shimmer and prettiness, one might notice the traces of ideology. This can be found in aspects such as the choice to have no parking places, thereby encouraging the use of public transport, the alternative snack bags rather than having a fridge in each room, the climate related information scattered naturally around the lobby, or even the tagged elevator that seemed to encourage agency and intervention.

## **REFLECTIONS ON CHRISTIANIA**

Although there are several ecological villages around the area of Copenhagen, Christiania is territorially by far the largest in the region, and hosts the largest amount of citizens. From being a car free zone, to solely applying alternative heating through the use of a large wood pellet furnace and solar panels, as well as hosting a large recycling station, they are clearly practicing an alternative way of life-style and consumption. All of this has contributed to putting Christiania on the world map as a strong image, especially for leftwing eco-tourists, and they do have over one million tourists visiting the 'free state' every year. However, it is not until you enter the territory in person that it becomes clear that perhaps you are indeed leaving the EU.

The 'free state' thrives on a revolutionary seventies ideology, which makes you feel almost like being transferred instantly by a time machine. Nevertheless, they have managed to react to a contemporary changing world at their doorstep, making the place feel strangely temporary and expiring in its rare and seemingly honest nostalgia, yet outdated and annoying in its simplistic naivety. This is Christiania's perpetual ambiguity. For as long as the state will last, it will always be surrounded by a strong sense of the in-between, both in its relation to the private person, the surrounding community, and not least the state and general population.

This 'temporarity' and ambiguity is though simultaneously the greatest strength of the territory. It allows for surprise, discussion, love, hate and positioning. It encourages opinion, but leaves you with no clear one. It manifests itself in seemingly planned untidiness and unofficial 'add-on architecture'. It claims un-hierarchical non-authority, but has more signs and public instructions than any other part of the city.

While the free-state clings to notions of autonomy for reasons of social and cultural identity, it seems to be more as a parallel system than a free state in practice. However, as a parallel system, it is still way beyond the rest of the population when it comes to applying a social, environmental or climate-aware mentality to everyday life. And this is nothing less than an inspiring irony when one acknowledges that all of this is taking place on the regions most toxic soil.

## **LINKS**

The Copenhagen Consensus / Think tank working on climate from a critical perspective:  
<http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/Projects/Copenhagen%20Consensus%20on%20Climate.aspx>

Trailer of new film / Bjorn Lomborg critiques 'scaring' people into climate change:  
<http://trailers.apple.com/trailers/independent/coolit/>

Example of AOK.DK article / the Copenhagen portal of events and happenings often writes about the new trend of carbon neutral eating, drinking, shopping, concerts etc:  
<http://www.aok.dk/restauranter-cafeer/artikel/5-climate-friendly-restaurants>









