

Energy island

The island of Samsø runs entirely on renewable energy and is one of Denmark's flagship green projects, writes **Søren Hermansen**

The world is facing temperatures rising like never before. Energy is needed for more and more people and sharing is difficult – a tough nut to crack for policymakers and diplomats around the world. The European Union is caught in the middle of a situation where EU member states have committed to an ambition of 20 per cent CO2 reduction and 20 per cent renewable energy by 2020. These targets are generally accepted but how are we going to do it?

In 1998 Denmark announced that Samsø was to be the official Danish renewable energy island. The project was meant to demonstrate that it was possible to change from fossil fuel to renewable energy in just 10 years. Based on proven technology and progressive and green Danish policy, feed in tariffs and relevant planning, the island succeeded. Today, Samsø is more than self supplied by renewable energy.

The most important lesson learnt is that including citizens in ownership and action is vital for a successful development. A wind turbine looks so much better when you are part owner.

The money saved from investments in better buildings, energy savings and renewable energy technology feels so much better when it returns to your own pockets.

While Denmark holds the presidency of EU for the next six months, there is a chance to bring focus on the fact that visions are not the same as practical actions. Setting targets means business and realisation of energy planning and policy that works. Binding targets and realistic budgets, including feed in tariffs, are ways to include society in the transformation the world needs. Denmark has a history of positive development based on a green growth policy, with focus on the side effects of a green policy followed by a subsidy scheme that directs investments into business, providing jobs and innovation. The EU needs growth and jobs. Energy policy has to be based on long-term agreements. The COP 17 meeting in Durban did not bring an agreement from world leaders. Maybe it is just too big a decision to make. The EU is a cooperation of many nations with long and strong traditions for business relations. The new paradigm should be based on binding political agreements focusing on a more pragmatic attitude that allows a 'what's in it for me' attitude. Consumers will be punished for not committing to energy efficiency and saving programmes, but they will be rewarded if they act in line with the green policy. 'What's in it for me' is far more relevant for a greater number of actors.

Denmark has a long tradition of cooperative ownership and rational planning that includes citizens in possible actions and investments. The Danish presidency will hopefully bring the involvement of citizens back into focus. Climate change is everybody's responsibility. But how does policy work seen from a private citizen's point of view? Since Rio, the world has seen 17 COP meetings with very few, or very invisible, results. It is time for people to react and not just sit back, letting government take care of such vital decisions. There is no time to wait for a global agreement but time for green growth and positive stories of realised and successful green projects. ★

Søren Hermansen is founder of the Samsø energy academy

