

# Afforestation in General and in Denmark Specifically

## Danish decision on doubling the forest cover

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12 years ago it was decided by the Danish parliament to double the forest cover of the country. The target was to afforest 4 – 5,000 hectares of agricultural land per year. Half of it should be done within the framework of the state forest service (Danish Forest and Nature Agency) and the other half by private landowners. Before the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Danish forest cover should have reached at least 20%.

Good reasons for the decision was at that time *inter alia*:

- Denmark having to import about 2/3 of its consumption of wooden products;
- Surplus in the agricultural production;
- EU-policies encouraging setting aside agricultural land;
- Environmental benefits in form of securing e.g. clean ground water and CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration;
- Landscape aesthetics'; and
- Creation of more "wild" nature.

The production aspects were mostly focused on at the beginning. Later the environmental benefits became dominating, in the ongoing debate for or against afforestation. Recently the option of trading CO<sub>2</sub> is becoming more and more interesting.

### General aspects of afforestation

Before rushing into a political decision about afforestation it is important to make sure that a proper description of the context for this is made – what reality looks like.

The objectives, represented by the cloud and dreamed by the politician riding the landowner, must to be simple, easy to communicate and generally accepted by the public opinion represented by the sun.

It should be made clear to decision makers that changing of the land use pattern over a well-defined period of time into one specific alternative, which is complicated and costly to regret, is a very big challenge. It requires either

executive power followed by law enforcement or a very big wallet, unless the idea is generally accepted and in it self carries obvious advantages for the landowner both in the short and longer run. Each owner has his own objectives for the property and tends to choose the land use leading to fulfilment of these nearly no matter what. Trying to influence other peoples perception of what is beneficial might prove to be much more effective than many other means. Advancement of the knowledge, communication and marketing of the policy and the ambitions are in many cases the right instruments to use, rather than detailed legal regulations.

### Some means for the decision makers

Mean	Danish solution	Comments
Spatial planning	The country was divided into three different zones. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Afforestation prohibited</li><li>• Afforestation wanted</li><li>• Afforestation allowed</li></ul>	Focus was both by the planners and in the public debate much too much on the zone where afforestation especially was wanted. The landowners saw this rather as a threat than an opportunity. They feared later to be forced to do afforestation of the land or to hand it over to the state. From an environmental point of view it is important to pay the maximum attention to appointing zones where afforestation is prohibited.
Incentives	Grants are given to afforestation projects carried out by private landowners. Initially only for establishment of the forest. Later also as a 20 years long income compensation. The size of the grants is dependent on design of the afforestation project and is general much higher in the zone where afforestation is wanted than where it is just allowed.	Initially grants were not attractive to private owners, when the income generation was added to the scheme, funds was far from enough. In order to be able to prioritise regulations and scoring systems for the applications became to <b>detailed leading to uniformity in the projects.</b> To frequent changes in criteria's has lead to frustration amongst landowners.
Force	No legal actions have been taken to force through afforestation. Besides the target for state forest service to accomplish half of the planned afforestation.	The fact that the state have to buy land for the afforestation have lead to the feeling by some landowners that they indirectly were forced to sell their properties.
Marketing	No coordinated marketing of the afforestation policy and ambitions have taken place.	Initially the publicity targeting the landowners focused more on constraints and potential threats, than opportunities.

### Danish experiences

In the first 6 - 7 years after the decision subsidies were not attractive enough to private landowners and conditions attached to the grants were not considered compensated for. Today grants are attractive but not sufficient. Since the decision there have never been budget to fulfil the target for public afforestation (approx. 2,500 hectares per year). Often the state has to purchase the land first, which makes the afforestation very costly.

A substantial amount of the afforestation actually taking place is driven by other forces than the grants, namely which enable wealthy people to create an attractive real estate where you are fully in charge of most of the decisions about shaping the environment. The conditions attached to the grants are simply considered conflicting with such an objective and many are not willing to compromise in this field.

The division of the work between the state and the private landowners was never questioned seriously by the politicians. If it will not be changed the forest area hold by the state forest service will be tripled by the end of the programme, hence rising the public owned share to represent approx. 40% of the country's forest cover. 12 years ago it was less than 30%.

### Conclusions in the Danish perspective

So far we are behind schedule in Denmark. But quite a few lessons have been learned when it comes to the use of incentives targeting the private landowners, not very much experience has been gained when it comes to simplifying rules, regulations and public administration. Legislation used as a tool to make it easier for privates to invest in afforestation has not yet been seriously considered.

Following the relatively detailed guidelines for afforestation as a precondition for obtaining subsidies has a built-in risk of making new Danish forests uniform rather than showing great diversity (biodiversity?). Along the fact that it is unlikely that two landowners have exactly the same dreams and goal for their properties will secure the variations.

Success of the afforestation scheme will in the end be based on whether private investors consider it a sound investment. Tools as taxes, easier access to purchase agricultural land, settlement obligations etc. has not yet been tested as incentives. It might be worse when one sets to work.

### Recommendations in general

- Less detailed guidelines as a precondition for grants;
- A smother (quick) administration of permits, rejections and release of grants;
- Use of other incentives than cash – make it easy for investors;
- Consider carefully the share between state and private. Public afforestation is not necessarily a guarantee for e.g. biodiversity; and
- Pay attention to marketing of policies and ambitions. Advance knowledge on the benefits for both individuals and the society in general.

Big enterprises tend to standardize in order to be more cost efficient, trendy and able to monitor effects easier of actions taken. Mistakes duplicated on a large scale may lead to serious troubles later. Be aware of this when operators are looked for or given attractive opportunities to be engaged in afforestation, also in the case of public enterprises.