

Students from the U.S. tour the Hvidovre coastline



Former municipal mayor and member of parliament Per Kaalund served as guide

Students from the U.S. recently visited a number of notable sights along the Hvidovre coastline and Køge Bay, including the windmill at Avedøre Holme; Brøndby Harbor, including a luncheon at the Albatross restaurant; the Brøndby Strand housing development; and Brøndby Beach Park.

There were thirteen young women and four young men, all 20 or 21 years old, and all third-year bachelor's students, most from a variety of large public state universities, such as the University of Michigan, the University of Virginia, the University of Colorado, the University of Illinois, the University of Kansas, and the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Three of the young people attend smaller private universities or colleges, including the all-female Sarah Lawrence College and George Washington University close to the White House. Only very few of them come from the large cities on the East Coast. Most are from the Midwest, the Rocky Mountains region, or the West Coast. Many grew up in small towns, or in villages close to nature; and many of them have been involved in environmental activism from a young age. These young people are studying to become psychologists, architects, philosophers, political scientists, and pharmacists, as well as environmental science and sustainability.

They are visiting for about a month, via DIS—Danish International Study Abroad. And they live with Danish families and in *kollegier*. Their teacher, Prof. David Possen, is also from the U.S., but has lived in Denmark for more than six years.

The young people and their teacher, David Possen, chose an exciting approach for their visit to the Hvidovre windmill, as they wished to visit the Brøndby Strand housing development—one of the most futuristic planned cities of the past—in order to get a sense of how such a large neighborhood housing 17,000 people, and including tall apartment buildings, shops, and an S-train station, functions today.

Visit to Brøndby Beach Park

From here the tour continued to Brøndby Beach Park. And after walking for a few kilometers in bright sunshine to get a sense of this beautiful beachfront park—along the beach, among the dunes, and past the inlet waters—the group made a “pit stop” at Brøndby Havn for a bite at the Albatross. Here former Social Democratic mayor and chairman of the Køge Bay Beach Park Association (1974–1993), Per Kaalund, readily made himself available to tell the story of how the Beach Park came to be. It was a stimulating talk that the students listened to closely, and interrupted with good questions along the way. During his talk, Kaalund showed pictures and sketches of the grand project, including a shot of a giant dredging ship that was towed up here from Holland. Kaalund also recounted that the project originally dated back to 1933, but was shelved for decades, along with other possible future projects, in part for economic reasons and because of World War II.

In 1975, Per Kaalund and a number of visionary politicians raised the funds necessary for the project from the former Districts of Copenhagen and Roskilde, along with Copenhagen and Frederiksberg municipalities, as well as the adjacent municipalities of Hvidovre, Brøndby, Ishøj, Vallensbæk, and Greve. Following this, planning and execution of the project could begin. The damming involved in this giant project, which stretched from Avedøre to Hundige, was no doubt the largest such damming effort in Northern Europe, along a stretch eight kilometers long. And five years later, in 1979, the Køge Bay Beach Park had become a reality. The dunes are planted with 2.6 million *Ammophila* beachgrass plants from the west coast of Jutland, and the remaining areas with 190,000 bushes and trees. This entire unique area, with its dunes and inlets, also serves as a buffer against flooding by the sea of the low-lying urban areas close to the coast.

The crowning moment in the creation of this fantastic natural area came on June 8, 1980, a day of beautiful, sunny weather, when the Beach Park was formally opened by then-Prime Minister Anker Jørgensen. In its 37-year history, the Beach Park, a man-made beach, nature, and recreation area, has long since proven its worth as a quite essential and natural breathing space for thousands of summer visitors and polar swimmers from throughout Copenhagen’s western suburbs and the entire metropolitan area. After an inspiring talk and debate, the group thanked Per Kaalund and said goodbye.

A stimulating day

From here the tour continued on to the Hvidovre windmills, where the students listened with great interest to a talk on how we in Denmark find collective solutions to the grave problems of climate change, by phasing out the fossil fuels oil, coal, and gas and generating sustainable energy production by making use of wind and the sun, which are CO₂ neutral. The association’s windmill produces approximately 12 million kilowatt-hours per year, covering the average electricity consumption of approximately 10,000 people. The total energy coverage in Hvidovre from wind energy, solar energy, and district heating is approximately 63%.

“From the outset in 2009, there has been great interest in the Hvidovre Windmill Association project, as can be seen from the fact that 2,230 private individuals and a number of companies have bought shares in it. We are also greatly fortunate in that the windmill project has garnered interest out in the wider world, where we have shareholders from as far away as the U.S. and Japan,” said chairman Erik Frølund-Thomsen, who also took part in the tour.

“It was a good day, a stimulating day in the sunshine and light breeze, to spend together with the young American students, who ended their tour at Hvidovre’s pretty skyline. It was heartening to see how, after having had the variety of experiences they had throughout the day—learning how vast social challenges can be solved in partnership with visionary politicians and private individuals—the students retained their curiosity, good spirits, and interest in social progress.

“I believe that the many different impressions they have gained have given them an impulse that will motivate them in their further studies. And one can hope that, as energetic as they are today, they will

also have influence later on along their paths in adult life, where they surely will become part of the future makers of opinions, initiatives, and decisions in the U.S.," said Frølund-Thomsen in closing.