

HOW TO BE DANISH

A JOURNEY TO THE CULTURAL HEART OF DENMARK

PATRICK KINGSLEY





Marble Arch Press
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

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First Marble Arch Press trade paperback edition February 2014

Marble Arch Press is a publishing collaboration between Short Books, UK, and Atria Books, US.

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Illustrations © Karoline Kirchhübel Andersen

All photographs except those on page 37 by Patrick Kingsley

Cover design by www.asmithcompany.co.uk

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-1-4767-5548-9
ISBN 978-1-4767-5549-6 (ebook)

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INTRODUCTION

There was a point early in 2012 when it felt as if you couldn't open a British newspaper or magazine without reading something about Denmark. We read that the Danes are the happiest people in the world – the UN said so. There were paeans to BBC4's cult Danish dramas – not just *The Killing*, but *Borgen* and *The Bridge*, which was watched by over a million people in Britain. There were interviews with Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Denmark's first female prime minister, and reams of writing about Noma, named the world's best restaurant for the third year in a row. For the first half of 2012, the Danes were the presidents of the EU, which gave them even greater exposure. We heard eulogies to their utopian welfare state, their unrivalled cycling culture and their commitment to environmentalism. Some of us remembered Denmark for the Muhammed cartoons crisis of 2006. The rest of us donned as many layers as we could of Danish knitwear. In short, Scandi fever – or perhaps more accu-

rately, Danish delirium – gripped the nation. Or parts of it, anyway.

In one sense, *How to be Danish* is yet another drop in the deluge. In another, it's an attempt to connect the dots between some of the different puddles. Part reportage, part travelogue, it can't be the definitive book about Danish life. But using shows like *The Killing* as a starting point, it will hopefully provide a wider context to the bits of Denmark that over the past few years have intrigued some of us in Britain – an accessible panorama of contemporary Danish life, written from an English perspective. In spring 2012, I spent a month in Denmark, travelling from the cycling lanes of Copenhagen to the windmills of west Jutland. I visited the set of *The Killing*, the test labs of the New Nordic kitchen and the place that's said to be the happiest town in the world. I poked around mosques and schools, churches and farms – and a remote little island where some grizzled farmers have created the world's most unlikely eco-haven. I interviewed over 70 Danes – most of them fascinating, a few of them dull; many of them in the public eye, but some not. I bounced from actors to designers, chefs to architects, journalists, politicians, students, imams, refugees – feeling my way as I went. I met the people who created Sarah Lund, the man who founded Noma, and the woman who knitted *that* jumper. This book is a stab at creating a narrative from some of those encounters. It is not – in case anyone has read too much into the title – a serious tutorial on how, actually, to be Danish. Most countries are impenetrable to outsiders,

but some – like, perhaps, America – have a national identity that is at least semi-permeable to newcomers. Denmark is not yet one of them.

Four per cent of Danes are called Hansen. According to some estimates, just 3% are Muslim: it is still a fairly homogenous country. For reasons that will hopefully become clear in later chapters, Danishness is still something that can only really be achieved through a Danish upbringing – and definitely not from a short book like this. It's a small place, Denmark. Many Danish micro-worlds bleed into others, and as a result it is hard to construct a thread about the country within clearly compartmentalised chapters. I've written eight. While each one is rooted in a single theme – respectively: education, food, design, politics, identity, Copenhagen, television, Jutland – they all often meander into other realms. The politics chapter begins with a discussion about the Danish language, but stick with it. The section on Copenhagen is also the story of Danish bicycles and architecture. Knitting creeps into the strand about television. The last chapter kicks off in Jutland, with some teenagers pissing against a wall, but ends up talking about windmills. All of them, though, can be read on their own. *God fornøjelse!*

1. WORK WELL, PLAY WELL: a Scandinavian education

"Everyone has to take part" – Else Mathiasen

It could be any old school disco. In the sports hall, the cool kids bounce around to loud music. In the playground, the shy ones look at their shoes, shivering. At some point, a young woman wrapped in an inflatable orange tube bursts from the sports hall and pinballs across the playground, aiming a large yellow water gun at all those who cross her path. This is the end-of-year party at Ingrid Jespersen High School – theme: "beach"; weather: Danish – but not all of those present share their classmate's exuberance. It's a cold night, and perhaps they regret obeying the Hawaiian dress code with quite such diligence.

Some feet away in the sports hall, a few hundred other sixth-formers are having a better time of it. Ringed with garlands of fake flowers, they bump to Rihanna, and Danish

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artists like Kidd and Malk de Koijn. Every so often they'll thrust their way towards the makeshift bar where their teachers – known, like all Danish teachers, by their first names – happily hand out pints of beer. In the corners, couples make out. People are merry, but not blotto. In a last hurrah before next week's exams, most of them are having fun. Still, something makes me anxious. First up, I feel like I've been here before. Second: I keep thinking that something unspeakably evil is about to happen.

In a way, I'm partly right. I have been here before – at least, I've seen this place on screen. It's the playground where they filmed the school scenes from the first season of *The Killing*. Much of the plot of the first few episodes revolves around what happens one night at a school disco – a disco, slightly disconcertingly, that is rather like this one. At first, you think a girl's been kidnapped at the party. Then you think she's been murdered in the basement. Finally, you suspect someone else has been raped – or, at the very least, filmed having group sex. I look around. Where's the camera? Where's the basement? Who's the killer? But these aren't the only questions I'm wrestling with. I came here tonight fascinated mostly by the school's connections to Danish television. I've ended up just as intrigued by what the school says about the Danish education system, and, in fact, Denmark itself.

In a way, Ingrid Jespersen is not very representative of Denmark at all. It's quite elitist, in fact. It's a private school, it's in a posh bit of Copenhagen and the offspring of three

very different, very high-profile politicians all go here – the daughter of the social democratic prime minister; the daughter of the leader of the Danish Lib Dems; and the grandchild of Pia Kjaersgaard, the one-time leader of – for want of a better comparison – the Danish equivalent of the BNP.

But as Rihanna throbs away in the background, one thing fascinates me. If this is a private school, why does the government subsidise around 80% of the school fees?

It's sometimes claimed that Denmark is a classless society. While this is obviously a sizeable exaggeration – as the fictional prime minister in *Borgen* says, "It's a myth that we're all equal" – a lot of the state apparatus is nevertheless tilted towards lessening social divisions. The subsidy for private education is a good example of this. It's given to all those who want to study privately in Denmark, and accordingly it shows you both how large the Danish state is – and how committed that state is to creating equality. True, the students at Ingrid Jespersen come, on the whole, from wealthier backgrounds than their counterparts at Danish state schools. But they also represent a far wider social range than those at an equivalent private school in Britain. Twelve hours before the disco got going, I spent the morning interviewing a class that was at the end of their second year of three at Ingrid Jespersen. Put your hands up, I said, if you would struggle to come here without the subsidy. Around half the class did – which tells its own story. "If my parents

had to pay for everything at this school, I couldn't afford to come," says one, an 18-year-old called Rasmus. Like many youngsters in Denmark, he speaks very precise, almost flawless English. "We don't have that money. The state covers most of the expenses." Naturally, places like this are still seen as elitist – but they don't have quite the same stigma that they do in Britain, and they're much more mixed.

The knock-on effect is that as a group the students are more grounded and more socially conscious than you'd expect their British equivalents to be. A while back, Class 2B went on an exchange to a private school in Scotland, which shall remain nameless. Put simply, they were shocked at the social divisions they came across there. "In Scotland, they mentioned 'working class'," remembers Rasmus, sitting next to a shelf of test tubes. "In Denmark, of course we have that, but the difference is not very great. You can go from working class to upper class if you get a good job. And if you get an education you should be able to get a good job." It also helps that the wage disparity between different jobs is not particularly large, which means that Danes are less snooty about what jobs people do. "I don't look down upon any specific jobs," says Rasmus. "If you left school at 16 and became a garbage man, it might pay almost as good as a doctor. It's not easy, but you can do it." Again, this is an exaggeration – but the broad gist is correct. Thanks to the strength of the Danish trade unions, a doctor earns on average only twice as much as a refuse collector, a judge only two and a half times more than a cleaner. According to the

Gini index, which measures income disparity, the gap between rich and poor in Denmark is currently the lowest in the world.

It's important not to read too much into what one class of Danes thought of one class of Scots (and it would be amusing to hear what the Scots thought of the Danes) but their thoughts are useful in that they hint at what's different about Danish education, and, by extension, Danish society.

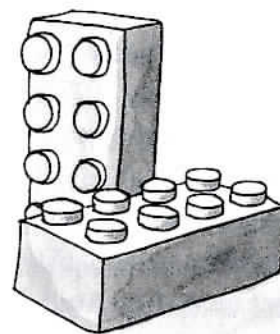
"When you compare us to other EU countries, our education is very badly rated," says 17-year-old Augusta. "We're not brought up to learn things by heart. But if you ask Danish students and Danish children about politics, we're more reflective. We have more of our own views. We think more about our society. We sensed in Scotland that they are taught in a more old-fashioned way."

You could argue that this approach starts from the age of six months. At this point in a Danish child's life, state-subsidised childcare kicks in – which means that parents pay no more than 25% of the cost of sending their child to nursery (around £300 a month). If they're low earners, they pay far less – and in turn this means that everyone can and does put their children in childcare from an early age. This has two main effects. It encourages the vast majority of women to go back to work. Over 70% of Danish mothers are in work – in Britain, that figure falls to 55%. Second, it means that children from the age of six months are a) separated from their parents for large parts of the day; and b) surrounded by kids of all backgrounds.

There are many criticisms of these nurseries; one common view is that the education they provide is not structured enough. But their many supporters argue that they teach Danish children to be more independent, and, by introducing them to other people from all walks of life, they also make them aware of the importance of society, and of cooperating with your equals – a recurrent theme in Denmark, and, in fact, this book. Only in Denmark could there be a board game – *Konsensus* – based around the concept of collaboration. It's no coincidence that the name of the Danes' most famous export – Lego toys – is derived from the Danish words "leg godt". Play well.

This focus on independence extends outside the school gates, too. Since cycling and cycling infrastructure are so widespread, children are often allowed to roam around town at a younger age than they might do abroad. "Our parents don't have to drive us," says Søren, a chap with the beginnings of some lengthy dreadlocks. "We take care of our

own transportation from an early age. We don't have to have a driving licence to get around. At ten or 11, you can go to a lot of places yourself on your bike. It's normal to do it at nine." A quarter of children aged between seven and 14 have part-time jobs.



Teenagers can also get their hands on alcohol much more easily – and in fact they drink more alcohol per capita than youngsters in any other country. You can buy booze as early as 16, and people aren't prompted for their ID as often as they are in other countries. Meanwhile parents often give their 14-year-olds cans of beer to take to a party – an attempt to moderate their drinking without banning it completely. Opinion is divided as to the effect this all has. Predictably some think it encourages bingeing; others argue the opposite – that it makes alcohol less of an issue. "I think we drink differently to how they do in the UK," argues Benedicte, 17. "The people going out there – they were drunk. They were REALLY drunk. We tend to just get tipsy." Some of her classmates argue that the class's attitude to bingeing is unusual. But most of them claim it's standard for Danes their age – that while Danish teens drink more often, they usually do it in moderation, and in less pressurised circumstances.

In a year or two, this class will start to think about university. The decision they face is different from that faced by students in Britain. Here, there has been a fierce debate about whether the rise in university fees from £9000 to £27,000 will prove off-putting to those from poorer backgrounds. In Denmark, that premise seems farcical. University education is entirely free. In fact, Danish students are in a sense paid to go to university: they receive around £500 a month in living expenses. It's a different mentality. Students aren't seen as a burden on the state, but as people whose

skills will one day support it. They're future participants in Danish life, and they're treated as such. Every effort is made to make them better able to participate.

In Denmark, a well-rounded personality is seen as a key component of this ability to participate, which helps explain the existence of two very Danish institutions that have few overseas equivalents: the continuation school, and the folk high school. The former is the state-subsidised boarding school where many 16-year-olds go to study in the year before they leave for sixth form. They follow a basic academic curriculum, but the main focus is on creativity. Some continuation schools specialise in sport, others centre on drama and art, and some are essentially music schools. Their sole goals are to develop the students' extra-curricular interests, and to help them – at a pivotal moment in their lives – mature as human beings. The folk high school is a very similar concept, but it's aimed at those who have already left school – adults of any age, in fact – and there are no exams.

"It's part of this Danish tradition that everyone has to take part in political life, or in life in general," says Else Mathiassen, who runs the West Jutland folk high school. "Each individual should be developed in his or her own way – but also know how to function within a group. And to do that, you need to be enlightened! You have to be personally enlightened in order to know about society today. To enable you to be part of the democracy that we have."

It's easy to be cynical about such idealism. As the

fictional leader of the Social Democrats admits in *Borgen*: “People don’t run anything.” But walking around the grounds of the high school, you can see why Else’s so inspired. We’re halfway up the coast of the North Sea – as far from Copenhagen as you can really get in Denmark – and the place is dreamy. At its centre is an airy hub of bedrooms and workshops that open out onto acres of gardens and woodland. A blue tit flutters about the art studio, and the vegetable patches are stuffed with potatoes and lemon balm. In the woods in the distance, sculptures made by recent students poke from the trees. The whole estate smells of spring.

There are 70 of these places in Denmark, and one in ten Danish adults – with half of their fees paid for by the state – will spend a spell at one at some point in their lives. Most people tend to come in their twenties, but parents and pensioners often enrol too. In fact, the schools hold such a special place in the Danish identity that Else thinks that the very elderly sometimes come here to pass away. “Sometimes older people die here, and I have to ring up the family to break them the news,” she explains. “Often they’ll say: ‘Oh, that’s nice, he obviously wanted to die in a folk high school.’” Each school has its own specialism – West Jutland is particularly known for its focus on eco-living – but all of them will teach dancing, writing, ceramics, painting, acting, cooking, gardening, debating and philosophy. The last two are particularly important because the ability to articulate an argument is a key part of being an active citizen.

This highly democratic approach to education is not a recent Danish phenomenon. It can be seen in the context of a wider drive towards social democracy that began in Denmark around 150 years ago. The roots of Danish educational ideology, like many Danish concepts, can be traced to the mid-1800s, when the country was in the process of losing much of its southern (and historically German) territory to a newly belligerent Prussia. In 1864, Denmark finally surrendered its two southernmost provinces, Schleswig and Holstein, to Prussia, a defeat which saw the country lose 40% of its population. It was a moment of huge national trauma. Until that point, Denmark still rather optimistically saw itself as a relatively powerful, multinational



Nikolai Grundtvig

commonwealth, despite having regularly lost large parts of its empire since the 1500s. But in 1864, with the loss of their last significant annex, the Danes had finally to accept that their once-vast medieval empire – a Baltic sprawl that had housed several states and a babble of languages – was in fact now just one single, tiny monoculture. This prompted a national identity crisis, and forced Danes to reassess the values that united them.

The debate was heavily influenced by the ideas of a man called Nikolai Grundtvig, who is now considered a Danish national hero. By the late 1840s, Denmark had finally made the transition from absolute monarchy to parliamentary monarchy. In very simplistic terms, Grundtvig – a priest, thinker, and sometime politician active from the 1830s onwards – felt that the new democratic system would work only if every Dane was able to participate in political life, and if, by extension, Danish society was made more egalitarian. From 1838, as the campaign for democracy gathered pace, he gave a series of lectures promoting the concept of what he coined *folkelighed*, or what the historian Knud Jespersen translates as a “mutually committed community”. Grundtvig, writes Jespersen in his highly recommended *A History of Denmark*, “was particularly concerned with the question of how to transform the hitherto inarticulate general public into responsible citizens in the coming democracy – in other words, to turn the humble subjects of the king into good democrats”.

His arguments had a huge effect. “In virtually every area

imaginable,” says Jespersen, “the ideas developed by Grundtvig and his circle at a particular historical point in the middle of the nineteenth century have left a deep and long-lasting impression on the Danish psyche and on the way in which Danish society operates today. This is not necessarily because any of these ideas were in themselves especially original, but because at a critical crossroads in the history of Denmark, he was able to formulate his thoughts in such ways as to create a great impact and a comprehensive programme of action able to change the humble subjects or an absolute monarch into more mature members of a democratic society and at the same time unite the inhabitants of the remains of the Oldenburg state [the once mighty Danish empire] as one people, a Danish nation. The key concepts in this were *folkelighed*, tolerance, openness and liberal-mindedness: the means were enlightenment and committed dialogue.”

Indeed, Grundtvig was (and is) so revered in Denmark that when he died, a whole new suburb of Copenhagen, with a gargantuan church at its centre, was designed in his honour. The church (built, as it happens, by the father of Kaare Klint, whom we will meet in two chapters’ time, and filled with chairs by Klint himself) is quite a shock at first sight. You reach it by winding through several quiet residential terraces before – bam! – you’re hit by this vast jukebox of a building, a triangular man-made cliff-face that is three or four times the height of its po-faced neighbours.

Grundtvig’s first practical aim was to give all Danes

access to a thorough, humanist education, particularly in isolated areas traditionally ignored by the Copenhagen elite. Thus Grundtvig set about founding what became known as folk high schools – liberal arts colleges for the rural poor that now survive in the more arts-focussed form described above.

“The goal,” writes Jespersen, “was to offer young people the chance to stay in a school during the winter, where inspirational teachers and the living word could awaken their dormant spirit and sharpen their perceptions. In short the intent was no less than to transform the inarticulate masses into responsible and articulate citizens in the new democratic society which was slowly taking shape.”

The first folk high school was built in 1844 in a village in south Jutland. By 1864, there were 14 – and in 1874 there were 50. Now there are 70.

As Denmark sought to redefine itself in the years following 1864, concepts like the folk high schools and *folkelighed* began to take root in the Danish psyche. Danish farmers and dairymen – many of whom went to a folk high school and had consequently been imbued with a sense of both their own worth and their responsibility to society – clubbed together to form agrarian cooperatives that shared expensive materials, machinery and profits. For the first time in Danish history, these co-ops – inspired by a system pioneered by some weavers in Rochdale, Yorkshire – enabled the farmers to create meat and dairy products that were of a standard consistent enough to be exported. In time,

Denmark’s farming community became not only one of the world’s most prolific producers of bacon and butter (think: Lurpak), but also the foundation stone for the massive welfare state that gradually emerged in Denmark from the late 19th century onwards.

The folk high schools moved towards a more arts-based curriculum during the 60s, but their presence is testament to the enduring legacy of Grundtvig. Today, 75 students are enrolled at West Jutland – the school’s biggest cohort ever. Else puts this down to the fact that the financial crisis has turned people from consumerism towards more wholesome activities. “People are starting to think in a more old-fashioned way,” she explains. “They realise there are other ways of living, that it’s not all about making money.” But the crisis has also had a more negative effect. The government has cut some of its funding for the folk high schools, which means that students receive a slightly smaller subsidy. In turn, this makes it harder for poorer Danes to attend – it still costs around £120 a week – and so reduces the school’s role as a social leveler.

Another problem is that folk high schools attract very few immigrants. The relationship between so-called



The Højskole (folk high school) logo

indigenous Danes and those whose families arrived only in the last three decades is often vexed. It reached its nadir during the Muhammed cartoons crisis of 2006, when a Danish newspaper published pictures that portrayed the Muslim prophet as a terrorist – sparking protests across the Arab world. How to foster integration is a constant source of debate in Denmark – and for her part, Else thinks it could be partly achieved if more so-called New Danes studied at schools like hers.

“Unfortunately, there are almost no immigrants here,” she says. “It’s a shame. It’s a pity. I have been trying to get some to come. I think immigrants are brought up in this tradition that if you go to a school, you should end up with a paper so you can become a lawyer or a doctor. Here you end up with nothing! But I would love them to come here because they would know much more about Danish culture. If they came here, where you live together and eat together, they would so quickly learn how Danish people think.”

But how *do* Danes think? They’re a people deeply committed to cooperation and equality – and yet their third largest political party is from the far right. Their national hero preached tolerance – and yet it is the country that spawned the Muhammed cartoons. They’re sometimes called the Latinos of Scandinavia – but drunk pedestrians will still wait patiently for a green man at four in the morning. Danes certainly aren’t the warlike Viking progeny some Britons vaguely imagine them to be. But their values – and their character – are more complex than they first appear.

3. MORE THAN JUST CHAIRS: the Danish design DNA

"We've had our share of chairs now... We've had our share of furniture." – Jacob Fruensgaard Øe

"I am Mr Egg," smiles a chap who turns out to be called Mr Hans Mannerhagen. You can see where he's coming from, though. The man is surrounded by dozens of cone-shaped chairs, most of which he helped build, and each one looks like half a hollowed-out hard-boiled egg. It's a slightly unworldly scene. A warm fug of leather hugs the air, while dozens of upturned domes are heaped on the ground. Some are beige, some brown, and some checked – and they're all splattered at jaunty angles across a factory floor.

The floor belongs to Fritz Hansen, one of Denmark's oldest and most famous furniture-makers, and at its centre stands Mannerhagen, the firm's master upholsterer. It's his job to fix a coat of leather to each chair's foam shell – a job

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that might take three days and more than 1200 stitches. Mannerhagen is almost teary at the thought. He points at a chair. "When you work on these kinds of things," he says, "you put so much of yourself in it. Your whole heart, and your whole soul. It becomes a part of me. The design. The handicraft. The history."

For these are not just any egg-shaped chairs. These are the Egg chairs, and they have been built here continuously by Fritz Hansen for the past 50 years. Along with a lot of Danish furniture from the middle of the last century, you can argue that they have almost as firm a place in Denmark's



The Egg chair – a late, lauded example of Danish Modern

recent identity as they do in the man who stitches them together. Dreamt up by the Danish architect and semi-deity Arne Jacobsen, the Eggs are a late, lauded example of Danish Modern, a school of furniture design that gripped the creative world in the 40s, 50s and 60s, and which still casts a long shadow over contemporary Danish culture. In 1951, when the UN wanted an extra debating chamber, they chose the great Danish Modernist Finn Juhl to design its interior. In 1960, when Kennedy and Nixon clashed in America's first televised presidential debate, JFK was sitting on a chair – The Chair, to give it its usual title – designed by Juhl's contemporary, Hans Wegner. In 1963, when Lewis Morley photographed a nude Christine Keeler, he asked her to sit astride a copy of another Jacobsen creation – the 7 Chair. And in 1968, when Stanley Kubrick wanted to stock the spaceship in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, he chose some of Jacobsen's cutlery.

You would recognise Danish Modern if you saw it in a sitting room. Most Danish Modern chairs are wooden ones – rich and wholesome in colour; clean and functional in their design. "In Danish and Scandinavian design," says Nille Juul-Sørensen, designer of the Copenhagen metro stations, and now head of the Danish Design Centre, "if it's not functional, we think: why the hell should we have it?"

In this respect, the leather-clad Egg is almost frivolous in comparison with its wooden, straight-faced forebears. The Egg would not have been out of place on Kubrick's spacecraft, but Wegner's The Chair – with its thin, gently

rounded back and its four functional legs – is more at home at a kitchen table, or even in a classroom. But Danish Modern was about more than specific chairs – and about more than just furniture, in fact. At its most idealistic, it aimed to make Danish homes better places to live in – and the chairs were just one means of doing that.

"Last Sunday a Danish paper wrote about this 'world-famous Danish furniture designer Arne Jacobsen'," says an irritated Juul-Sørensen, a bulky man with thick 50s-style glasses. "I thought: should I take the phone and call this stupid journalist? Because Arne Jacobsen was not a furniture designer. He was an architect. And he used architecture to influence a new family life." In the fifth-storey window behind Juul-Sørensen, you can see the Tivoli Gardens, the world's most tasteful theme park. As he talks, a rollercoaster plunges groundwards. "At the time, the furniture we had was from a different decade. It was not for modern life. So Jacobsen just redesigned things to fit the new architecture, to fit the new lifestyle. And he needed some chairs [to do that]. He was not a furniture designer; he changed architecture, he changed the way we live."

Jacobsen was not the father of the movement, however; if anything, he was considered something of a rebel. Kaare Klint, the founder of the furniture department at the Danish Royal Academy, was the man who pioneered Danish Modernism in the 20s. Klint and his contemporaries were inspired by the humanist aims of the Bauhaus movement in Germany, but they felt that Bauhaus buildings and Bauhaus

furniture designs were in practice not particularly humanising. Danish Modern was partly an attempt to do what the Bauhaus hadn't.

Like most of his contemporaries, Klint had a keen eye for detail. In the 30s, goes the myth, Klint was introduced to the Swedish architect Gunnar Asplund. They talked shop. "What are you working on?" Klint asked.

"Oh, just a school, a hotel and a few houses. What about you?"

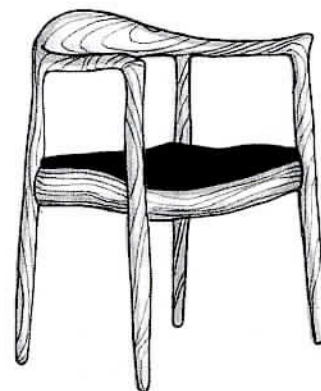
"I am working on a chair," said Klint.

A few years went by before Klint and Asplund ran into each other again. "What are you working on?" Klint asked for the second time. "Oh, a town hall or two," replied Asplund. "And a couple of villas. What about you?"

"I told you last time," said Klint. "I am working on a chair."

This anecdote, told best by Andrew Hollingsworth in his book, *Danish Modern*, highlights another of the movement's tropes: painstaking craftsmanship. Their furniture was planned in excruciating detail, and was designed to last. Jill, the Fritz Hansen PR, has another way of demonstrating this. Taking a 7 Chair from its display, she places it upside down on the floor, takes off her heels and carefully steps onto the chair's back. Then she bounces, gingerly. Nothing snaps. "See!" she says, in triumph. "That's how you know it's not a fake."

Ironically, it was this emphasis on quality that killed the movement. By the end of the 60s, says Hollingsworth, con-

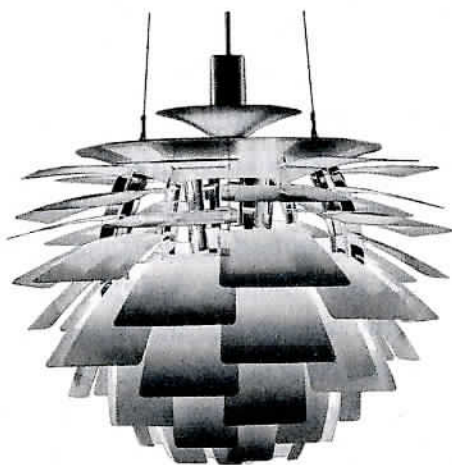


Hans Wegner's The Chair

sumers increasingly preferred the brash colours of pop art to the understated Danish aesthetic. Meanwhile, the Danes' careful craftsmanship could not compete with the mass-produced and mass-marketed pieces made overseas, and in 1966 the Annual Exhibition of Cabinetmakers – for decades a showcase of the best Danish design – folded. In some respects, the decline was partly due to the success of the Danish welfare state. New social legislation – including the introduction of the minimum wage – meant that the cost of labour rose dramatically, which in turn made labour-intensive industries like manufacturing increasingly unprofitable. The manufacturers that remained – like Fritz Hansen and Rud Rasmussen – had to up their prices tenfold, and started

to stick to the designers they knew and trusted, rather than develop younger ones.

If you entered many Danes' homes today, you would not necessarily realise all this. To put it very glibly, if an Englishman's home is his castle, the Dane's home is her temple to the descendants of Kaare Klint. The icons of the 50s and 60s still form the centrepieces of many Danish living rooms, which helps explain why *The Bridge's* Martin Rohde has a house full of so many design classics. I lost count of the number of houses that have a Poul Henningsen artichoke lamp hanging from the ceiling – something that regular viewers of the political drama *Borgen* (which fea-



Poul Henningsen's ubiquitous artichoke lamp

tures several Henningsens) may recognise. After an interview, a university professor proudly shows me his two prized Børge Mogensen armchairs. At a party in Vesterbro, a geography student in his late twenties says he has just saved up the equivalent of £500 to buy a Jacobsen original.

"A very high percentage of the Danes know about Arne Jacobsen," says Kristian Byrge, who runs Muuto, a thrusting new furniture company aimed at promoting younger designers. "That's one of the differences between Denmark and a lot of other countries. We are proud of our design heritage. A lot of people will own his 7 Chair. They might have bought it reduced and repainted it or reworked it, but most people buy an original. It's something we like our country to be associated with. Design is in our cultural DNA."

Speaking of Danish DNA, it is hard to continue this discussion about people's homes without mentioning the very Danish concept of *hygge*. Pronounced roughly "hoo-guh", *hygge* does not have a direct equivalent in English. It refers to the warm state of relaxation in which Danes find themselves when they're sitting around a fire with friends, or having a beer in their beach house (another Danish mainstay) on the North Sea in the summer. It is often loosely translated as "cosiness", but this seems both too broad and yet too specific a translation. When I first arrived in Denmark, I was surprised to hear many people describe all sorts of things as "cosy". My bike was cosy, their table was cosy, and so too was a walk through Vesterbro. It was

slightly perplexing – until I realised my friends were substituting the adjectival form of *hygge* (*hyggelig*, or “hoogalee”) for the English word “cosy”. Obviously, it doesn’t translate particularly well, rendering the concept less intelligible to an English ear.

Still, it’s safe to say that the attainment of this homely *hygge* (whatever it is exactly) is a constant goal for Danes. In turn, this might help explain both why Denmark has the second-largest homes in Europe (in terms of square metres per capita), and why the Danes are so concerned with making those homes look nice. Since restaurants are so expensive (thanks to a 25% tax on food), many Danes prefer to spend their evenings at home. Interior design is therefore incredibly important, and so too is Arne Jacobsen.

But therein lies a problem. A fixation on past masters is stifling the designers of today. “When you talk Danish design outside Denmark, people believe it’s an old chair,” says Juul-Sørensen, who says he took on his new job in order to challenge that perception. He has an uphill battle, if the exhibits at the Danish Design Museum, a few kilometres north-east of Juul-Sørensen’s Danish Design Centre, are anything to go by. The fixation with chairs reaches almost comical levels here. As if in a furniture mausoleum, visitors to the museum process past a serpentine line of chairs that never seems to end. Chair after chair after chair; it is like an eery, empty, hyper-extended doctor’s waiting room. “We call it Danish Modern,” laments Juul-Sørensen, “but Danish Modern was actually designed in the 50s and 60s. People

don’t realise that we are now doing a lot of other stuff.”

Thing is, much of that other stuff struggles to get made. Fritz Hansen only release one new piece of furniture a year, and even these ranges tend to be – by their own admission – influenced by the dead designers already in their collection.

“If you were a designer ten years ago,” claims Juul-Sørensen, “you didn’t have a future. A lot of these young designers could not get a job as a chair designer because when they went to Fritz Hansen and said, “Look I have designed this new funky chair,” [Fritz Hansen] would say: “It looks cool, but we have a chair designed in the 50s which sells nine million pieces [a year], so no, not interested.” So these companies squeezed out a whole generation.”

Thomas Bentzen, one of the few designers from that era who did make it, remembers the frustration well. “It was like: ‘I’ve got this table and it’s made completely out of metal and it has this handle so you can move it around. Which Danish company do I want to approach with this? Who would see the good design potential in this table?’ And I’m not sure any of the classic Danish companies would have seen that.”

In Denmark, people are finally making new furniture, but in the main it is produced by young firms like Hay, Gubi, Mater and the aforementioned Muuto – companies set up in the last few years to promote young Danish designers, and to challenge the creative hegemony established by the likes of Fritz Hansen. In fact, some of their most well-

known work is a very obvious piss-take of the classics. Hay's Nobody Chair is made entirely from fabric, which is a dig at Danish Modern's obsession with wood – while its very name mocks how the Danish tradition has become so focussed on the identity of individual designers, rather than the ideas they originally stood for. Meanwhile, Muuto's Rest – a sofa without a strongly defined shape – is a deliberate contrast to the more rigid structures you might find at Fritz Hansen.

This isn't a criticism of the old furniture firms. The direction they have taken is simply sound business sense, and the work they make is still beautiful. It's just that they no longer have the same innovative spark that made them so important and exciting in the middle of the last century. This isn't only because they don't promote many new designers; they also lack the same democratic values they had in the 50s.

Most of the Danish Modernists did not just want to make good furniture; they wanted to make good furniture that everyone could enjoy. They aspired to make better homes for the masses – and they could do this only if their furniture was both well-made and affordable. This meant that many of the pieces now sold as expensive classics were, 50 years ago, well within the reach of the average Dane. Today, Jacobsen's 7 Chair costs around £250. When it was first released, the chair cost ten times less. Hans Wegner's Children's Chair is now priced at around £70; once it was a tenner. Wegner was one of several designers who made

furniture for FDB, a large chain of cooperative supermarkets. Headed by another Danish Modern icon, Børge Mogensen, FDB's design department was like a proto-IKEA – except that, unlike the contemporary Swedish firm, the furniture FDB made was not only affordable; it was of an unparalleled quality.

The Danish Modernists also wanted their furniture to change the way people lived at home. This meant that most were less interested in their furniture as a set-piece, and more concerned with the context in which it was placed and the domestic problems it could help solve. Mogensen spent a decade analysing how Danes used shelves and storage space. He worked out the kinds of objects the average Dane possessed and then calculated how much space each object required. The result was the Øresund shelf range, developed between 1955 and 1967, which had the commendable, if lofty, ambition of solving every domestic storage problem with which Danes might be presented.

Like many democratic concepts in Denmark, this progressive design culture was not a sudden invention. "It came out of that whole folk high school, co-op way of thinking," explains Thomas Dickson, author of a large tome with a fairly self-explanatory title: *Dansk Design*. "A lot of architects joined something called the Architect Help. They designed blueprints for farmhouses, schools, tenement buildings – and they gave them away for free. Anyone could get a copy. If you needed to build a farmhouse, you could get a blueprint for just the cost of the print."

Schools were designed by respected architects; old people's homes were furnished by designers. "And that process of giving stuff away for free," adds Dickson, whose office chair is incidentally a version of *The Chair* by Hans Wegner, "came out of the concept of sharing farm resources." This meant that by the time the 30s arrived, a generation of Danes had grown up surrounded by – and with an appreciation for – good design, while a generation of designers had grown up understanding the need to make that design available to all.

It is this egalitarian legacy that Denmark's old-school furniture-makers have now partly lost. While researching this book, I became obsessed with finding where that legacy might now be. At first, it made sense to look for it in the offices of young furniture firms like Muuto, Mater and Hay. Of these, Muuto have made the most visible attempt to position themselves as a new direction in Danish design – their slogan is "New Nordic Design" – and so it was there that I headed first.

Once I arrive, what surprises me is how this tagline is in fact more a branding exercise than a manifesto for a new design movement. They are new Nordic, rather than new Danish, for a reason: they don't want to be tied down to one country, one set of values, or for their pieces to have a recognisable aesthetic. Tellingly, Muuto represent designers not just from Denmark, but from across Scandinavia – and even then they would prefer to be seen as international players, rather than from a particular region. The triple concepts

of affordability, simplicity, and attention to detail – standard throughout Scandinavian design – are still central to them, but in aesthetic terms, they'd rather not be seen as simply Scandinavian, or even simply Muuto.

"At Muuto, we try to make stuff that is not all the same kind of design," says the firm's co-founder Kristian Byrge, who perhaps unsurprisingly, given his nose for a good slogan, has a background in business rather than furniture. "It has a variation in materials, and in looks. So you can actually put our work together in a home and you don't feel like it's a Muuto home."

One of Muuto's most prominent pieces is the *Around*, a coffee table by Thomas Bentzen. You can see it on sale at big museums like Humlebaek's Louisiana Gallery – a simple, squat, three-legged disc, coated in block colours and ringed with a tall rim that does not quite stretch around the table's entire circumference. Trying to work out what it is to be a furniture designer in the post-Jacobsen era, I ask Bentzen to take me through the process that led him to create it.

It emerges that the table's only distinctive feature – the rim with the gap in it – is both inspired by the rimmed coffee tables of the Danish Modern period, and necessitated by the flaws of contemporary manufacturing.

"Looking back at my childhood," says Bentzen, a tall, bald, softly spoken Dane, "the coffee tables I used to love often had an edge, and so I knew that I wanted to work with one."

In the old days, though, that edge would have been

carved by hand from a solid block of wood. Today, this process would be too costly and too lengthy – so Bentzen's rim actually comes from a separate piece of wood, and is stuck to the rest of the table with glue. And the difficulty with this method is that the glued rim cannot stretch all the way around the table – hence the gap.

I like the table, and Bentzen's explanation makes it clear how a contemporary furniture designer might be inspired by Danish Modern, and yet diverge from it. But something doesn't quite add up – and eventually I realise it's because we've spent ten minutes talking about what a table looks like, rather than how that table might help shape people's behaviour. In aesthetic terms, I understand how the table relates to Danish Modern – but, like the beautiful work at Fritz Hansen, I can't work out how it channels the movement's sense of democratic design. Sure, it's affordable – but it's not as cheap as IKEA. Sure, it's good quality, and good-looking, and it's even made by the same cooperative – FDB – who made Danish Modern ranges for the masses in the 50s. But there's the rub: it's not solving domestic problems like Børge Mogensen's shelves aimed to. It's being sold to tourists at Denmark's biggest art galleries. I like Muuto, and I like their work. But I came here in search of Danish Modernism's spiritual successors, and I am not sure these are them.

Again, this isn't a criticism. It's just an acknowledgement that furniture design can no longer have the same social impact that it at least aimed to have in the 50s. Of course,

design doesn't have to change the world to be beautiful. As Peter Bundgaard Rützou – the co-creator of another contemporary classic: the stool you can find in one of Denmark's largest bakery chains – points out: "This whole discussion about the role of the designer, it's great. But you still need a chair to sit on. And I like the fact a chair is THERE. I like the fact it's physically there. So even though I like the ideas behind, say, interaction design, and the way it addresses what kind of society we live in, I find more personal pleasure in this stuff."

You can't really argue with that. But at the same time, it's interesting that Bundgaard Rützou implicitly acknowledges that furniture design no longer "addresses what kind of society we live in". To find the people who today best channel the democratic values of Danish Modern, you probably need to look elsewhere.

It turns out that this is also one of Dickson's biggest bugbears. "A lot of the design made today is made in a tradition that is 40 years old," he argues. "A lot of these young furniture and lightning designers still live in this dream of being the new Hans Wegner or Arne Jacobsen. And I think they're barking up the wrong tree. If they want to design furniture they need to understand that we don't need the same kind of furniture and objects that we used to need. We have different lives than our parents and grandparents had. But I see a lot of young designers designing what are basically sculptures, large heavy chairs that you walk around like you'd walk around a Henry Moore sculpture. But most

of us don't need this at home. We want to easily convert a piece of furniture into a bed, so that if we have guests, they can have a place to sleep."

Dickson says his view is unpopular with traditional designers – but he has a lively ally in Juul-Sørensen, who praises firms like Muuto and Hay, but thinks there's more to design than furniture.

"If Arne Jacobsen was around today, he would not design chairs," claims Juul-Sørensen. "We don't want any more chairs. Why the hell should we produce more chairs? I mean, there are enough chairs, everyone is pumping out chairs. These things which have no meaning in the society we are moving into."

Like Dickson, Juul-Sørensen thinks the future of interior design is in creating things that have more than one use – but his ideas are slightly more zany. "Could we actually design a dishwasher that is also an oven?" he asks. "Why isn't a washing machine a games console?" It's not such a far-fetched idea, Juul-Sørensen argues. A Playstation that only worked if you filled it with clothes might encourage children to wash more.

He may sound slightly flippant – but Juul-Sørensen has a serious point. The most progressive designers working in Denmark today are the ones who recognise that the world faces different problems from the ones it did in the 50s. They're the people creating wind turbines for Vestas, the world's leading windmill company. They're the architects at 3XN researching how to build offices out of biomass, or the

NovoNordisk engineers who revolutionised the treatment of diabetics with the pre-filled insulin syringe. Nowadays, says Dickson, they might not even be designing physical objects. "They might be more problem-orientated than object-orientated," he says. "They recognise that solving a problem might not lead to designing an object, but a solution. A service or communication or procedure."

One such group is Hatch and Bloom, founded five years ago by four young designers in Aarhus. They're not nearly as big as Denmark's most famous solutions-based firm, DesignIt, but their work is just as interesting: much of it centres on trying to solve problems within the infrastructure of Denmark's welfare state. Most recently, they were asked to help Randers Hospital improve its care of what were then called "complex" patients – people who suffered from both a medical problem, and a surgical one, like a diabetic with a broken leg. Their treatment was considered too costly and lengthy, and so Hatch and Bloom spent time analysing the hospital to find out what processes could be made better. "Eventually we realised: this is not about the patients," remembers Jacob Fruensgaard Øe, one of the firm's founders. "It's about the hospital. The patient isn't complex. The hospital is."

Hatch and Bloom discovered that though many surgical specialists were at the top of their game, they seemed to have forgotten over the course of their career how to deal with medical issues – and vice versa. So the designers worked out ways to integrate the different disciplines, most

of them conceptual rather than physical. Some suggestions focussed on changing the way doctors perceived complex patients.

"One night we snuck into the hospital," says Fruensgaard Øe. "We had these little posters. And we posted them on everything, from toilet paper to uniforms to parking lots and water glasses. The posters said: 'only for medical staff'; 'only for surgical staff'. We did it as a stunt. To make them look at their culture and realise that this hospital apartheid is not good for anyone."

Other ideas were more practical. Hatch and Bloom suggested that rather than splitting the care of a complex patient between different departments, they should be placed in a special ward devoted to complex treatment, where specific doctors and nurses should coordinate all aspects of their recovery. Ideas-based consultancy like this is often mocked, but in this case, it had results: treatment times for complex patients (now called cross-patients after another Hatch and Bloom suggestion) is down by a fifth. Though they barely work with physical objects, Fruensgaard Øe thinks his firm is among the worthiest inheritors of the Danish design tradition. "Fifty years ago, these chairs changed something. But we can't do that again. We've had our share of chairs now. We've had our share of furniture. What we're doing – the immaterial, service part – is what, when people look back in 50, 70 years, will be talked about."

Whether this is true remains to be seen, but it's certainly the way things are going at the moment. Traditionally,

Denmark's top design school has been at the Royal Academy in Copenhagen – but the one most people are talking about these days is in a small provincial town in Jutland. With no furniture department and a focus on industrial and interactive design, you could argue the rise of Kolding Design school mirrors that of Denmark. Even ten years ago, Kolding was still very focussed on what things looked like.

"Aesthetics, aesthetics, aesthetics," says the eccentric Barnabas Wetton, an expat Brit, a former BBC reporter, and now a director of studies in interaction design at Kolding. "Aesthetics. We were very good at aesthetics. All around us, society was changing so rapidly – yet I could only see students who could make nice things, but weren't very effective." In 2003, the school made its first trip to China – and it was there that he says they realised "that people became better and fuller and happier designers when they understood they were working for others and not just for themselves, and that they were able to provide real value to society."

It sparked a sea change at Kolding, and a decade later they have an international reputation for interaction design. Their approach is not exactly unique, but it is more successful than many. According to Wetton, the school and its affiliates have exhibited six times at New York's Museum of Modern Art – more than any other education institution in Europe.

At Kolding, design is now taught "as a social practice; design as a way of organising the way that we act in

societies." One of his PhD students, Eva Knutz, is analysing how to use computer games to get hospitalised children to express their feelings – emotional design, she calls it – while another unionised the Danish modelling industry.

These projects may sound slightly vague, or at least very removed from conventional perceptions of design. But Wetton's is the most convincing explanation I've heard of how traditional Danish design ideals can be applied to the modern world.

"We have a serious problem in Europe and in the Western world. We have to reorganise our societies for the post-industrial age and for the green age. This means we have to take our societies apart and rebuild them and remake them into something else."

Kolding wants to be at the forefront of this reorganisation. To do this, the school has had to rethink exactly which practical skills it should teach its students. Their work is now as much about researching how people behave as it is about making things for them, and so the course has been restructured accordingly.

"There's a whole series of techniques our students learn regardless of what field they're in," says Wetton. "Working with people, the way it is you ask questions, the way it is you glean knowledge from the situation we're designing for."

Sometimes this process takes the form of "body-storming" – like a brainstorm, but using physical rather than mental experiences to stimulate ideas. Recently, robotics researchers at the University of Southern Denmark asked a

group of Kolding students to design the interface for a robot that could be used to take blood samples in Danish hospitals instead of human nurses. As part of the project's body-storm phase, every single student had to learn to take blood from real patients. "We had to understand that fear of having blood taken, to understand the process of it." What they soon realised was that patients would only stand for their arm being injected with a syringe by a robot if a) they couldn't see the injection taking place; and b) the robot looked nothing like a robot. So what they came up with instead was a cosy, dolphin-shaped armrest into which a patient would slot her arm. A hidden infrared ray would then identify the right vein, an unseen syringe would pop out momentarily, prick the skin and then shoot back into the armrest, ready for testing.

Quite why such an extraordinary robot was designed in the first place – and the implications it has for Denmark's massive welfare state – will be explored in the next chapter.

4. POOR CARINA: the problem with the welfare state

"The welfare state we have is excellent in most ways. We only have this little problem. We can't afford it."
– Gunnar Viby Mogensen

There is a well-known sketch by a pair of Norwegian comedians in which a Dane tries to buy a bike tyre from a hardware store. Things begin badly. The man behind the counter can't understand his compatriot's accent – but is too embarrassed to say so. Instead, he just takes a wild guess at what the cyclist wants and hands over a long file. Then things get worse. It turns out the cyclist can't understand the vendor either, but is similarly too polite to admit it. So he pretends the file is what he wanted all along and asks how much it costs. The vendor tells him, but again the cyclist can't work out what was said, so he ends up holding out a fistful of Danish kroner and allows the hardware man to pluck the

Patrick Kingsley

appropriate amount from his hands. To round off the farce, a cunning milkman enters to ask if the store needs 1000 milk bottles. Again, the vendor can't understand a word of the milkman's question, says yes simply to make things easier and is landed with one of the largest domestic grocery bills ever known in Scandinavia.

The sketch's popularity on YouTube shows how successfully it riffs on traditional Scandinavian stereotypes. The Swedes and the Norwegians think the Danes are loud, brash and unintelligible – even to each other. The Danes think the Swedes (their medieval rivals) are uptight control freaks. Both joke that the Norwegians are mere provincial bumpkins (Norway was once a colony of both Denmark and Sweden), while everyone thinks the Finns are weird. You can see a tongue-in-cheek exaggeration of these hackneyed tropes in the first episode of *The Bridge*, when a Danish detective (played by Kim Bodnia) is paired with a Swedish one (Sofia Helin) after a dead body is found draped over the two countries' mutual border. When a woman needs to drive through a crime scene to get to her husband's hospital, Bodnia – the laid-back Dane – gives her the go-ahead before Helin – the pedantic Swede – slaps him down. Later, Bodnia tries to make a joke to a group of Swedish coppers. Cue: tumbleweed. Like in the Norwegian skit, no one understands him.

These stereotypes are of course just that: stereotypes. But some of them have distant roots in truth – and in the case of the Danes, it's in the fact that their language, once

very similar to Norwegian and Swedish, has developed an increasing number of blurred word endings and glottal stops. When I first tried to learn Danish, I was amazed that a language could carry as many silent consonants as English. One of the first phrases I came across was the Danish for "what about you?" Written down, it is "*Hvad med dig?*" Out loud, it sounds like more of a mush: "vamedye?" Of its seven consonants, only three are pronounced. In other phrases, "*ikke*" (the Danish word for "not") should technically be pronounced "ee-ker", but in fact sounds more like the English word "air"; the Danish "d" is often softened into a kind of "l"-sound; while the "g" is sometimes lost altogether. In a famous example, the Danish word for cake was once the same as it still is in Swedish: "*kaka*". But while the Swedish version remained fairly static, the Danish word has been eroded from "*kaka*" to "*kage*", and its pronunciation has drifted from "ka-ka" to "kay-ger", and from "kay-ger" to "kay-er", and from "kay-er" to something that sounds a bit like the English name "Kay".

This swallowing of unstressed syllables is nothing new – it was first documented in the 15th century by a touring Swedish bishop – and nor does it mean that Danish is any less sophisticated than languages like German and Russian, which are still fully inflected. (Word endings may have been strangled in Danish, but subtleties in meaning are instead conveyed by complex variations in word order.) However, harmless as it is, the process has sped up markedly in the last three decades, during which time the Norwegians and

Swedes have found Danish increasingly hard to understand. In part, this is because Scandinavians have been watching less of their neighbours' television and more of its English-language equivalents, and are therefore less exposed to the nuances of each other's languages.

But a group of linguistic researchers I meet at the University of Copenhagen have another intriguing theory: that this exponential increase is a by-product of the introduction in the 60s of state-subsidised childcare. The policy, which sees the state pay for around three-quarters of the cost of childcare for every toddler over one, has made it much easier for mothers to go back to work. Today, 74% of Danish mothers return to their jobs after having children, compared to just 55% in Britain.

According to the researchers, this progression may have had a harmless yet fascinating side effect. Icelandic, says Professor Marie Maegaard, is still the most conservative of the Nordic languages, because in Iceland many children grow up on isolated farms and talk a lot with their grandparents. But in Denmark, she points out, "Almost every Danish child goes to kindergarten from the age of one. And that will speed up any development because they don't talk so much with the older generations, who have more conservative diction."

Maegaard and her colleagues are still fleshing out the theory, but regardless of its accuracy, it still gives an intriguing insight into the impact of the thing that may define Denmark above all else: the welfare state.

The state is huge in Denmark. It spends more money, as a percentage of GDP, than any other country in Europe. It employs around 900,000 Danes – about a third of the Danish workforce – and unsurprisingly therefore provides a raft of free services to its citizens. Childcare, healthcare and state education are naturally three of them – but more surprisingly, so is university education and most of its living costs. Over-65s receive a basic state pension worth twice the UK version. Despite recent rule changes, they can still retire up to three years early (receiving £19,000 every year in the process). The unemployed receive up to 90% of what they earned when they were last in work. As described in Chapter one, the vast majority of private school fees are subsidised by the state. The minimum wage is over £11 an hour – the highest in the world – which in turn means that the gap between rich and poor, though larger than it was 20 years ago, is still the world's smallest. In fact, the state looks after its citizens so well that many people (usually right-wing politicians) claim that it is nearly impossible to find poverty in Denmark – much to the consternation of those on the left, including one MP in particular: Özlem Cekic. Who's right is still a moot point in the Danish media, largely thanks to Cekic's own cack-handed research. When challenged by her critics to find one Danish resident who was genuinely in poverty, Cekic presented a 36-year-old woman called Carina. Now sarcastically known in Danish tabloids as "Fattig Carina", or Poor Carina, she turned out to be receiving monthly benefits worth over £1600, which, once her bills

were paid, left her with a disposable income of around £600.

Needless to say, this level of state subsidy can only really be supported by an immensely high tax bill. Danes pay high levels of income, council, church and healthcare tax – and can end up owing between 50 and 60 per cent of their income. There are also high levies on commodities like cars (180%), which is one reason you see few four-by-fours on the streets, while VAT is at 25%, and is applied to payments for food – which is why eating out is a rare luxury for most Danes. High taxes are still seen as a reasonably fair trade-off for the services received in return (fittingly, the Danish word for tax – "*skat*" – is also a term of affection) but the amount of tax people should pay, and the exact size of the state itself, are subjects of increasing debate. Nevertheless, almost all political parties – right and left – are supportive of at least the premise of a large, social democratic state, not least because the public views it with such sentiment and would not vote in large numbers for a party that worked against it.

When he was elected prime minister in 2001, Anders Fogh Rasmussen – the then leader of Venstre, the main centre-right party in Denmark – made his first speech as PM a rallying call for the welfare state. Earlier in his career, he had written a book trumpeting the virtues of neoliberalism and a shrunken government. But by 2001, he was elected with a manifesto that merely called for an end to tax increases, rather than tax cuts, and barely suggested trimming the

state itself. "The difference between Venstre and the Social Democrats [Denmark's two main parties] has always been in foreign policy – how close should we be with NATO and the United States? – and in integration and immigration," explains Mads Brandstrup, a political correspondent for *Politiken*, Denmark's leading centre-left broadsheet. "It's been on other issues than the economy."

This is partly because the spectrum of Danish politics is, in economic terms at least, further to the left than it is in Britain. The far-right Danish People's Party – which ranks somewhere between Britain's UKIP and the BNP – may be Denmark's third-largest party, but only one party – the small and newly established Liberal Alliance – actively opposes the welfare state. And while Britain's Labour Party is as left-wing as mainstream parties get in the Commons, the Danish Folketinget houses two fairly large groups that lie to the left of the Social Democrats, Denmark's main left-wing party. First, there's the Socialist People's Party and then – even further to the left – Enhedslisten, a ragtag collection of communist, anarchist and green groups.

The media takes them seriously, too. Enhedslisten's de facto leader, Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen, regularly makes the headlines – and even Danish Rail once made her their in-train magazine's cover star. It was the Danish equivalent of plastering Salma Yaqoob – leader of Respect, Britain's only sizeable hard-left party – all over First Capital Connect. To understand why there is such consensus for a social democratic model, we need first to rewind several generations,

not just to the late 19th century, and to the cooperatives and folk high schools mentioned in previous chapters, but to the late 1780s, when revolutionary fervour was sweeping most of Europe. Most, but not all. In Denmark, political change did not arrive until 1848, even though the country was subject, like France, to an absolute monarchy: the house of Oldenburg, a line of kings stretching back to the Middle Ages who were almost always called Christian or Frederick. The reason why Denmark did not yet go the way of France was that the Danish king at the end of the 18th century – Christian VII – recognised the need, out of self-preservation if nothing else, to grant his citizens greater freedom. Previously, peasants had been forbidden to leave the farms where they grew up, and instead had to work in a quasi-feudal relationship for the local landowner – a system known as adscription. In the summer of 1788, Christian VII abolished adscription, a move which paved the way for peasants to set up their own smallholdings.

The short-term impact was clear. There was no revolution, and a group of grateful farmers even erected a monument to the king on one of the approaches to Copenhagen. The long-term impact was larger. First, the state began to be seen as an enabler of freedom – as a social good rather than the authoritarian creature it is considered in many countries, perhaps even in Britain. According to the historian Daniel Levine, by the early 1900s many Danes talked about the state, society, the public and the public sector as if they were talking about the same thing. Second: the abolition of

adscription turned the rural underclass into a newly aspirational breed of farmers – the very same people whose descendants would be educated in Grundtvig's folk high schools, and would then go on to found the thousands of farming cooperatives described in earlier chapters.

By the late-19th century, this new class of entrepreneurial farmers had even formed a new political party in opposition to Højre, the group of conservatives who represented the interests of the larger landowners and the urban elite. By the 1890s, this party was not just championing the cooperative movement, but also campaigning for Denmark's first pieces of social legislation: a primitive pension scheme for labourers that was introduced in 1891; social insurance (1892); and accident insurance (1898).

In the pages of the *Danish Journal of Agriculture* from the period, you can see this party's politicians make a parallel argument for both the furthering of the cooperative movement and state support of the elderly and the sick. That party's name? Venstre. Over the years, Venstre has become a party of business, and though a version of Højre still exists as the Danish Conservatives, Venstre – through its sheer size – could be described as Denmark's nearest equivalent to the Conservative party in Britain. But it is significant that Venstre, unlike the Tories, has its roots in the premise of the collective and in the battle for social equality, something which helps to explain why much of the Danish right, with their distant roots in the agrarian community, is still reluctant to take an axe to the welfare state.



Borgen: the Danish parliament

"There is a way in which the Danish welfare state," writes Knud Jespersen in his *History of Denmark*, "with its comprehensive social safety net and high level of collective responsibility, can be perceived as a modern, national version of the old village collectives from before the time of agrarian reform. These created a secure framework for the everyday life of the Danes over centuries and shaped their behaviour and norms to the point of defining what it meant to be Danish. The welfare state, with its innate security and collective protection against threats from both within and without, touched on something very deep in the heart of the Danish sense of nationality."

Indeed, when Denmark initially voted against joining the EU in 1992, it was not simply because of a knee-jerk reaction from right-wingers. A great deal of the Euroscepticism came from Danes who feared that diktats from Brussels could eventually undermine the independence of Denmark's welfare model.

Venstre is a funny name. Often translated as "the Liberal Party", it literally means "Left", which is amusing given the conservative role they now play in Danish politics. It's a hangover from the 19th century, when they were created in opposition to Højre, a party that literally meant "Right". Nor is Venstre the only odd feature of Danish political nomenclature. In the political drama *Borgen*, the fictional prime minister Birgitte Nyborg is the leader of the Moderates, a party based on the real-life Radikale Venstre. Literally translated as "the Radical Left", Radikale Venstre is in fact neither left nor radical. The result of a schism in Venstre during the early 1900s, the mild-mannered group sits slap bang in the centre of Danish politics – more socially liberal than Venstre, but too economically liberal for the Social Democrats.

The latter were the defining force of Danish politics in the 20th century, though they were locked out of power for the first decade of the 21st. Founded not long after Venstre in 1871, the Social Democrats rose to prominence in the turbulent 20s, as Denmark's finances collapsed, and the electorate grew frightened of Venstre's by now ardently capitalist approach. As in much of Europe, unemployment

had rocketed, the farming industry was close to ruin, and extremist political parties were gathering momentum. Once in power, the Social Democrats attempted to fight these problems with what is now known as the Kanslergade Agreement, a huge raft of reforms agreed after much debate with the three other main parties. Signed the day Hitler took power in Germany in 1933, it formalised labour rights, introduced state support for the economy, and gave large subsidies to the farmers. It was a seismic moment, not just because it was another large step towards the Danish welfare state that was finally realised in the 70s, but because it helped solidify a nascent model for consensus-based politics in Denmark – the kind which is dramatised to such acclaim in *Borgen* and the first series of *The Killing*.

It required the agreement of the four major parties of the time, and so all four had to compromise. Conscious that a failure to reach an agreement might undermine the legitimacy of parliament and lead – eventually – to fascism, Venstre backtracked on its previous opposition to social reforms. The Social Democrats retreated from some of their more Marxist policies, and so created a politics of compromise that has been a central part of the Danish parliament ever since. No party has held absolute power for a century now, while each of the four oldest parties has, with the exception of the Conservatives and the Social Democrats, been in coalition with each of the others. This is to a large extent also due to the Danish system of proportional representation, which guarantees at least one seat to any party

that wins more than 2% of the national vote, and which therefore makes it almost impossible for any party to win an overall majority. But it is also testament to the importance the Danes place on working together.

The wrangling you see in *Borgen* is apparently not that great a departure from the machinations of most recent real-life elections – with one key difference. In the real world, all the parties approach the election in two broad coalitions – one on the left and one on the right – and whichever bloc wins more than half of the Folketing's 179 seats forms a government. The decisions about which parties will be allied to whom, who will be prime minister, and which politicians would hold which cabinet positions were their coalition to win, are all announced before the election so that the public can have the clearest idea of who they're voting for. In *Borgen*, by contrast, Birgitte Nyborg's party enters the election as the junior party in the left-wing bloc – but then performs unexpectedly well in the polls, allowing her to start new negotiations and form a new coalition after the election has taken place.

Reality followed fiction in 2011 when – a year after Nyborg was first sighted on Danish television screens – Helle Thorning-Schmidt, the leader of the Social Democrats and daughter-in-law of Labour's Neil Kinnock, was elected as Denmark's first female prime minister. It was a curious election. Unlike Nyborg, Thorning-Schmidt's left bloc does not quite have an absolute majority. Meanwhile, the Social Democrats themselves actually emerged with fewer seats

than they had in opposition, something that highlighted a quirk of the Danish electoral system: a party can technically lose the election, but still form a government if their coalition partners perform strongly enough. In 2011, the parties on the extremes of the red bloc – the Radikale Venstre (RV) in the centre and Enhedslisten on the left – did unexpectedly well, which makes Thorning-Schmidt problematically reliant on the support of both. In a way, the Social Democrats were victims of their own success. The electorate knew the left bloc would probably win, so they tried to influence the direction it would take after the election by voting strongly for the parties at its fringes. A strong showing for RV would keep the coalition from going too far left, and vice versa for Enhedslisten. Unfortunately for the Social Democrats, both parties did well, which leaves Thorning-Schmidt in the political equivalent of the splits.

The tube I'm blowing into is unlike anything I've seen. It's connected to an iPad, and on that iPad plays a cartoon featuring an angry man who looks a little bit like Alan Sugar. Then something even stranger happens. When I stop blowing, the film stops too – and so does Sugar. Only when I start again does Sugar spring back to life. Thinking it's a coincidence, I try it all again – but then the same thing occurs. When I stop, Sugar stops. When I start, Sugar starts. Weird. And then it hits me. The iPad only works when I blow into the tube.

As unlikely as it sounds, this bizarre contraption is

actually the result of a welfare state in crisis. I'm in the robotics wing of the University of Southern Denmark in Odense — the home, incidentally, of Hans Christian Andersen. A false limb lies on a table, and all around me are prototypes for robots that could one day perform some of the tasks currently completed by humans working in state healthcare. They're all part of a project spearheaded by the university called Patient@Home — a response to the healthcare challenges faced by all European countries, but which, given the size of the country's state apparatus, are particularly pronounced in Denmark. On the one hand, because the health service has fewer funds to play with, and because the population is getting older, more health professionals are retiring than can be replaced. At the same time, precisely because the population is ageing, there are more elderly people suffering from chronic disease. So there are more people to treat and fewer people to treat them — and for a country like Denmark, which prides itself on its welfare state, this is a serious problem. "In Denmark, you have the right to equal access to services no matter where you live," says Professor Anders Sørensen, one of the engineers leading the project. "That is what we as a society have decided to provide. And to be able to do that in the future, we need to make some structural changes."

According to Sørensen, some of these changes will include replacing the treatment previously provided by humans in hospitals with treatment carried out at home by robots. At first, this conjures frightening images of C-3PO

running around a bathroom stabbing grannies with a syringe. But the robots Sørensen is creating are more subtle than that. As it happens, they include not just the blood-samplers whose interface was designed by the students at Kolding, but the Sugar-themed iPad described above.

At present, chronic asthma sufferers need to be treated in person, not least because the treatment is boring. If left to their own devices, a patient will often fail to complete it. But it's hoped that they could eventually treat themselves on their own at home, with the help of something incentive-based like this iPad. Since the iPad only plays movies when it is used properly, the idea is that it could coax a patient through their asthma treatment by itself, without the need for a doctor's involvement — while still allowing doctors and nurses to keep abreast of the patient's progress remotely via a digital database. This would save the patient from having to visit a hospital so often and free up hospital space for more urgent cases — particularly important in an area where nine hospitals have closed in recent years and 30% of hospital beds have been lost.

But this is about more than just healthcare. It's a symptom of a wider anxiety across Denmark; just one of many ways in which people are wondering whether, in these rocky economic times, the welfare state itself can be maintained — and if so, how.

Many people are not optimistic. When I write to the great Knud Jespersen, asking for an interview about the future of welfare, he replies mainly to explain that this will

not be possible, because he is away for the spring in Switzerland. But he adds a postscript that offers some insight into what his dispirited position might have been. "I wish you a pleasant and rewarding stay in Denmark," he writes, "hopefully enjoying the setting sun over the Danish welfare state as we have known it over the last 30 years."

Few people have known that state better over the last 30 years than a venerable gentleman called Dr Gunnar Viby Mogensen. For much of his career, he was a senior researcher at the Social Research Institute, a national organ that investigates how best to improve the welfare system. More recently, he wrote one of the most comprehensive books on the subject – *The History of the Danish Welfare State since 1970* – and his conclusion about its future is, like Jespersen's, vexed. "The welfare state we have is excellent in most ways," he says, over cake and coffee in his house in Lyngby, north of Copenhagen. "We only have this little problem. We can't afford it."

Viby Mogensen cites the fact that Denmark is running a deficit worth around 3% of GDP. In global terms, particularly during a recession, this is not that high – but Viby Mogensen's concern is that it will only get bigger. Taxes cannot be raised beyond their already astronomic levels, he argues, for fear of putting off foreign business, while more Danes are emigrating for good than in previous decades, which has stunted existing tax revenues.

"This is a situation that cannot go on for ever," he claims. "We will not end up in a situation like Greece, I am sure. But

we are going small steps in this direction. Which means that there is no doubt that we will have heavy welfare reforms. The only question for me is who will make these reforms. Will it be Schäuble, the German finance minister? Or will it be the Danish politicians?"

Viby Mogensen's argument is the kind that will divide opinion, and he himself is – rather modestly – at pains to emphasise that he is no expert on economic policy. But as an economic and social historian, he is more confident in his assessment of how the welfare system grew so dangerously big in the first place. He puts the problem down to three main issues. The first was the complete reorganisation of the welfare system in 1970, which dramatically increased the level of the welfare benefits relative to wages. The second was the introduction in 1979 of the early retirement scheme, which allowed Danes to retire up to five years early. And the third was the loosening of the borders in 1983, which, for the first time in Danish history, saw thousands of immigrants from the Arab world and the Indian subcontinent move to Denmark. Since many of them neither spoke Danish, nor had university degrees, they tragically – and it is nothing short of a national tragedy for Denmark – found it hard to break into what is a highly skilled labour market. As a result, many ended up on benefits. In 2011, only 52% of foreign-born men and 43% of foreign-born women were in work, around 20 percentage points below their Danish-born counterparts. All three of these issues, says Viby, have resulted in an ever-increasing number of people on welfare

being paid for by an ever-dwindling number of taxpayers – a fiasco in a system maintained mainly through high taxation. He points at the covers of the two volumes of his book. On the first are some women in a fish factory; on the second are some early-retirees on a golf course. “I can’t get it,” he says. “These women working in a fish factory are paying taxes to finance the people on the golf courses.”

They are also financing a large number of people on unemployment benefits, something which increasingly sticks in the craw of some Danes. Previously, the number of people on benefits was a symbol of pride, at least for those on the left – the sign of a social democracy in good working order. But the media climate has changed, and in certain quarters those in unemployment are today seen less as the responsibility of the state and more as a drain on it. Even though it’s Denmark, you come across the same arguments you see in most countries during a downturn – they’re benefit-scroungers; they don’t deserve it – and you hear exaggerated rumours of youngsters hosting parties to celebrate their admission to benefit schemes.

At the University of Southern Denmark’s Centre for Welfare Research, down the road from Sørensen and his robots, Professors Jørn Henrik Petersen and Klaus Petersen explain the numbers. Out of a population of 5.5m, they point out, 1.8m Danes are removed from the labour market – 850,000 on some form of benefits (unemployment; sickness; early retirement; parental leave) and 950,000 more in retirement. But in actual fact, that first group of benefit

recipients is not a problem in itself; it is just rendered more significant because the second group, the number of retirees, is likely to grow greatly in size in the coming years.

“The very centre of the problem is obvious if you look to the public sector,” says Jørn. “More than half the present labour force working in home-help for the elderly has passed the age of 50. This means that they will retire within the next five to eight years. And that means you have to find their replacements in a declining labour force. And that becomes a hell of a problem.”

But where Sørensen sees robots as the answer, the Petersens see young immigrants. In years gone by, many Danes felt that the reason so many so-called “New Danes” remained unemployed was that they were not truly Danish – that they were not culturally wedded to the concept of the collective. It has often even been argued that the Danish welfare state can exist only in a monoculture inhabited by indigenous Danes, and no one else. But really the problem was social, rather than racial. Immigrants found it hard to break into the job market not because they were lazy, but because their skills weren’t yet suited to Denmark. They couldn’t speak the language, they couldn’t get into university, and consequently, in the absence of many manual jobs, couldn’t find unemployment. But the Petersens argue that if these “New Danes” were encouraged and trained to work in the social sector, it would kill three birds with one stone. Unemployment among immigrant communities would fall; tax revenues would rise; and there would be enough workers

to staff the health service. "A lot of Danes have come to the conclusion that immigrants might from some point of view be a problem," says Jørn. "But equally they might be the answer to another problem. If these immigrants could be integrated into the labour market so that their supply corresponded to the demand, it looks as though they will be part of the solution."

Mainstream debate centres on not just expanding the labour market, but also increasing its productivity, through changes to early retirement, increasing working hours and also reducing the time people can spend on unemployment benefits – it's gone from four years to two, after which you receive a slightly smaller payment. There are now financial incentives for students to finish university earlier and so enter the job market sooner, and moves to tighten the qualification rules for a controversial scheme that allows people to retire long before 60 due to illness.

In general, though, Jørn Henrik Petersen admits the threat to the welfare state is not yet as large as it is in, say, Britain. Cuts to actual services and benefits have been small, and the only major reforms have so far been limited to extending working hours or restricting early retirement. "These are minor problems compared to what's being discussed in other countries. And that is linked to this emphasis on social cohesion, to the belief in a reasonable degree of social equality. Despite all the differences, there is some kind of solidarity in the Danish population. The only group excluded from that? That would be the immigrants."

6. WONDERFUL, WONDERFUL COPENHAGEN

"Copenhageners cycle to live, but they don't live to cycle"
– Mikael Colvile-Andersen

One November day in 2006, a journalist called Mikael Colvile-Andersen was cycling to his office at Danish Broadcasting. At some point, he got out his camera and took a picture. "It was this woman on a bike, very elegantly dressed," remembers Colvile-Andersen. "The lights had turned green but she hadn't moved yet. There are ladies cycling past on the right, guys roaring past on the left. But she hadn't moved yet. And I just thought, oh, that's nice. Click. It wasn't the girl. It wasn't the bike. It was my morning commute."

Colvile-Andersen put the photo up on his Flickr page, where he has a large following, and thought no more about it. "But then the comments started coming in. 'Hey, dude!

Patrick Kingsley

How does she ride a bike in a skirt? And boots?!' And I was like: what the fuck are these guys talking about? It was a completely alien concept to me, these questions."

Cycling is normal in Copenhagen. In *Borgen*, the prime minister cycles to work – and it's not particularly hard to imagine Helle Thorning-Schmidt doing the same in real life. When I visit parliament, the forecourt outside is stuffed with as many bikes as the quad of an Oxbridge college. Elsewhere in the city, at least a third of Copenhageners cycle to work or school – and they don't wear lycra. They don't need to. The city is built for cycling. It's flat, for a start – but it also has the infrastructure. In greater Copenhagen, there are 1000 kilometres of bike lanes – and you get them all over Denmark. Last Christmas Eve, Colvile-Andersen cycled – laden with presents – all the way to Roskilde, 30 kilometres to the west of Copenhagen, and never left a bike lane. There's one on every busy street – sometimes two lanes deep, and always protected from the road by a kerb.

Cyclists have their own traffic lights, which let them set off a few seconds before the cars. On some new routes, if you cycle at a steady 20 kilometres per hour, the lights will automatically stay green for miles. And as you cruise through the city, you'll see a staggering number of bike shops. On several streets, every fourth shop is a "cykel vaerksted". Each sells bikes that are made for the city – bikes with a kick-stand and a mechanism that locks the bike to itself so that you don't waste time searching for a lamppost to padlock your wheels to. Many Copenhagen families don't

own a car – but one in five has a cargo bike that fits two or three kids. Few cyclists jump the lights – the system works so well that they don't need to.

All of this helps explain why a woman cycling to work one day in 2006 wouldn't think twice about wearing a skirt and boots. In Copenhagen, that's what you do. You don't ride a mountain bike, and you don't wear lycra. There is a campaign to make helmets compulsory, but you most likely won't wear one either. You dress as you would normally, and, this being Copenhagen, you look pretty stylish. "Do I wear special clothes when I get on the bus?" asks Colville-Andersen. "No. We dress for our destination, not our journey."

But judging from the reception he received on Flickr, Colville-Andersen quickly realised that this wasn't the case in most other places. "I became curious," he says. "I thought, wow, the whole world thinks it's pretty wild here. So I started taking more pictures of these elegantly dressed Copenhageners on their bikes that month, and continued to put them up on Flickr. Then in 2007, I started a blog." That blog was called Copenhagen Cycle Chic, and it soon developed a cult following. "It just poured in. A hundred people a day on the blog, within two weeks. I was like: woah. What's up with that stuff? I don't understand it. I'll just take more photos. And that's when it really took off."

Nearly six years on, the blog and its social media pages get over 20,000 hits every day. It has spawned around 200 copy-cat sites worldwide, a spin-off book, and, in

Copenhagen, a team of contributing photographers who include the former Danish ambassador to Afghanistan. Most Danes are still a bit non-plussed – "A guy with a blog about bikes," explains Colville-Andersen, "is like a guy in Greenland with a blog about snow" – but he says that some Copenhageners now actively try to get photographed. "I've heard there's a game. 'Oh, I put my best dress on today and cycled down the streets they usually photograph for Cycle Chic. And, damn! I didn't get snapped.'"

For Colville-Andersen, the blog has sparked a career swerve. "After the blog started running, people would email me saying: 'I'm from the department of transport in, I dunno, Shitsville, Arkansas. What is that blue paint in the cycling lane in your picture? Literally, what is it made of?'"



Around a third of Copenhageners cycle to work

Through answering these questions, Colville-Andersen developed a greater understanding of how urban planning works – and then realised he could do a better job of it than most. He now runs a cycling consultancy – Copenhagenize – that advises politicians around the world about how to make their cycling infrastructure more like Copenhagen's. And wherever he goes, a Cycle Chic fan is always on hand to lend him a bike.

He thinks that part of the problem in other countries is that cycling is promoted using eco-arguments, or through the creation of a geeky cycling subculture. "The bicycle advocates, the avid cyclists," he says, "they're a sub-culture. And the nature of subcultures is that you want other people to share your hobby. Whether you're a bowler or a synchronised swimmer, you've got to understand my love of it, and you've got to copy it. If you don't, then you're not really a cyclist. You can't just ride the old Raleigh that you found in your grandmother's old house in Bournemouth. You've got to have the right bike – otherwise it's not real." Copenhageners, on the other hand, just use bikes to get around town. According to government surveys, half of them say they cycle simply because it's fast. Only a third cycle because it's healthy. They cycle to live, but they don't live to cycle.

Not so long ago, though, most of them didn't do either. In the economic boom following the Second World War, everyone bought cars, and there were plans to eliminate cycling as a mode of transport, and to make the roads as

suitable as possible for motoring. The last tram in Copenhagen went out of service in 1972, and only one in ten commuters went by bike. There's a famous picture from 1980 of Nyhavn, the pastel-coloured wharf in central Copenhagen that is now one of the most popular spots in the city. Today, it is pedestrianised and lined with cafés and boats. In 1980, it was essentially one big car park.

"Why not?" says a man called Jan Gehl, dripping with sarcasm. "It's the perfect parking space. The cars have a great view from there."

Gehl is the godfather of Copenhagen's open-plan streets, and perhaps the patron saint of cyclists worldwide. Throughout 1962, Gehl – then a young architecture student – spent one day every week sitting on a street called Strøget. It's pronounced a bit like "stroll" – fittingly so, because it was the first pedestrianised high street in Europe. At 3.2 kilometres long, it remains the longest. Gehl was concerned at the way Copenhagen's Modernist urban planners were eating away at cycling lanes, and at public space. He was convinced that public spaces that encouraged interaction were the secret to both a happy city and the Danish concept of cooperation – but he needed some data to back him up. At the time, there was none.

"Nothing was known," Gehl says in this magical voice that has the same reassuring effect on cyclists that Dumbledore has on Hogwarts. "People had never been the subject of study in cities, ever. It was taken for granted that people moved about in public spaces. It was only when the

traffic started to pressurise life, and when the Modernist planners started to discourage the use of space between buildings that we realised there was a need for research."

And that was why Gehl, notepad in hand, could be found every week in 1962, strolling up and down Strøget. "This was some of the pioneering stuff," Gehl says, proudly tapping *Life Between Buildings*, one of the many books that came out of the research. "Sitting there, watching people. Finding out: what is a day like? What is a week like? What is a year like? What is the difference between summer, autumn, winter? What happens when there is a festival? A fire? The queen's birthday? We had to collect all the basics about human behaviour in public spaces. How you kiss and how you walk, dance – whatever you do in cities, where you do it, how you do it."

Over time, Gehl's research – which soon spread to other cities – became more and more influential. "We have been able to show that the more square metres you pedestrianise, the more people will use the city. It's good for democracy and good for inclusion that we mingle in the public space. It's good for your health, and good for the environment."

In Copenhagen, more and more cycle lanes were reintroduced, and pedestrianisation spread to the streets around Strøget – to the extent that today, Copenhagen's centre is one of the most relaxing city centres I've been to. It makes you wish that someone would do something similar to the cesspit around Leicester Square.

Across one whole wall in Gehl's office is a vast streetmap

of San Francisco, one of the cities he is currently advising. Along one long strip of road, he has drawn a box and labelled it "living room". It sums up his ideology, and, in fact, the ethos of Copenhagen: the city as one big sofa.

But the transition wasn't all down to Gehl. "I have done nothing in the city," he says, very modestly. "There's a widespread rumour that the pedestrianisation is because of me. No. I used the pedestrianisation as a laboratory for my studies. But then we can see a very interesting dialogue between university and town hall. Our studies encouraged them enormously to do more projects. The mayor even wrote to me to say: 'If you hadn't done those studies, we politicians would not have dared to make Copenhagen what it is today.'" Gehl's eyes twinkle. "I like that."

Gehl admits the mentality is born as much from necessity as idealism. On a white sheet of paper, he draws me a timeline which is now stuck up on my wall at home, and on it he underlines the year 1973 several times. "The oil crisis," he says, referring to the year that the petrol producers in the Arab world stopped exporting oil in protest at the West's support of Israel during the Yom Kippur War. Denmark was particularly badly hit, and even though they later found oil in the North Sea, it made Danes fearful of ever being so reliant on fossil fuel and, by extension, cars. It helps explain why Denmark now makes just under half the world's wind turbines, and why Copenhagen turned, once again, to cycling.

"We started to have car-free days. Not because of a love

of mankind, but because of a lack of petroleum. Everybody rejoiced because it was wonderful having car-free Sundays. And they realised it would be clever to go back to bicycles."

The mentality stuck. By 2025 it aims to be the world's first carbon-neutral capital. Along with a third of his fellow Copenhageners, Jan Gehl – 76 years young – still cycles to work. And year after year, Copenhagen is named as one of the world's most livable cities.

There's a reason for that – lots of them, in fact. Copenhagen's big enough to house several distinct districts (Indre By, the shopping district in the middle; suburban Amager to the east; hip Vesterbro in the south-west, nestling below multicultural Nørrebro; and then Østerbro, Denmark's answer to Notting Hill) but small enough to cross it in 20 minutes – on a bike, naturally. The streets are wide and lined with graceful rococo houses and there's rarely a crap building in site. There's a beach within striking distance, a huge outdoor swimming pool in the middle of the harbour, or if you just want to sit, rather than take a dip, you can pop along to Christiania, the 40-year-old anarchist commune that jostles against the lake in Christianshavn.

Culturally, the city is buzzing. As explored in Chapter two, Copenhagen is where the world's foodies currently go to eat. Its television studios are the home of Danish noir. In Bjarke Ingels, it has spawned the starchitect of the moment. In Distortion – essentially a mobile rave that tours the city's districts each year in June – it has one of northern Europe's

most unusual music festivals. Vesterbro is a sort of Shoreditch-lite, with new bars and galleries sprouting all the time. Copenhagen has the second-biggest homes in Europe – and they're almost all heated and cooled from a central hub (rather than on an individual basis), which has resulted in a 70% reduction in carbon emissions.

Twenty-five years ago, this would have been hard to imagine. "Copenhagen was nearly bankrupt," remembers the city's head of planning, Anne Skovbro, whose offices are in the same city hall that features prominently in the first series of *The Killing*. (Skovbro's claim to fame: her leg features in one of the shots.) "We were an old industrial harbour city that had lost most of its industry to Jutland and China."

Unemployment was high, infrastructure was failing, the housing system was in crisis, and welfare costs had spiralled. Urban renewal was urgently needed – and there was a consensus at government level that if it was to be done at all, it needed to be done properly. So the state bailed out the city – and it was then, in the late 80s and early 90s, that Copenhagen really got going.

"We had to ensure this change from an old industrial city, with a lot of brown-field sites," says Skovbro, "to an efficient, knowledge-based city with new housing development and a sustainable infrastructure."

The beginnings of a subway system were set in motion. New neighbourhoods to the north and south of the city were planned – and they're now reaching completion.

Further investment was put into cycling lanes, and more green spaces were created. Flats were knocked together to create bigger living spaces, and three new architectural jewels were built at strategic intervals along the waterfront – a new opera house, a national library and a theatre. And to pay for all this, the city sold off large tracts of land to the south of the city at Ørestad, in a Faustian pact that has seen the emergence of a very un-Danish, neo-Ballardian development on the city's southern fringes. But more on that later.

The urban revival came hand in hand with a cultural one. Most obviously, there were the Dogme film-makers – Lars von Trier and Thomas Winterberg are the most successful – and then there were the art dealers. Copenhagen's National Gallery and Humlebaek's Louisiana Gallery had long housed impressive collections, but there were very few commercial galleries. In the late 80s, Mikael Andersen was one of the first Copenhageners to establish one.

"It was difficult. Copenhagen was very provincial 25 years ago," he remembers. "We didn't have a gallery system. At the time, artists would show their work at an institution every year, as a group. We live in a very social democratic society, and people were suspicious of commercial art. They thought commercial galleries were just trying to get money out of artists."

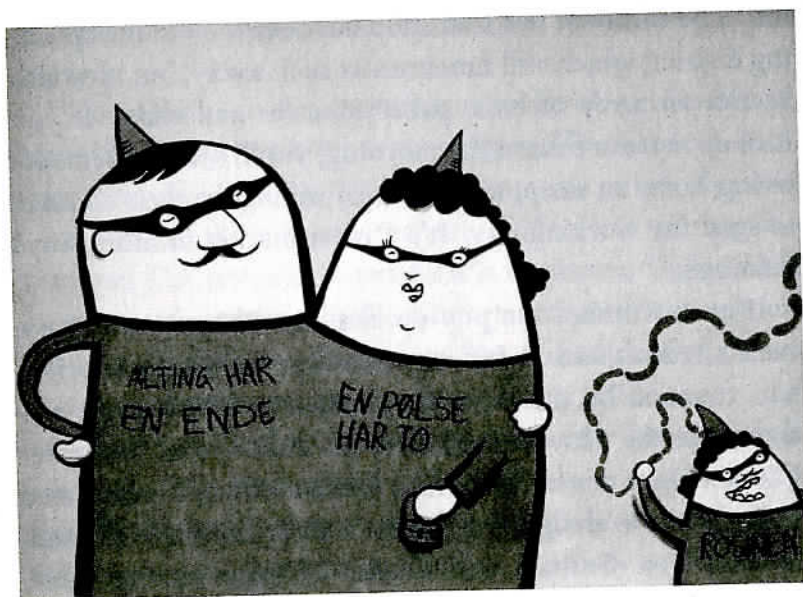
And when he opened his space in Bredgade, only a mile from Strøget, people scoffed at him for straying so far – as they saw it – from the centre. But Andersen had the last

laugh. There are now ten galleries within 100 metres of his, and at the private view I attend, there are collectors from all over the world. These days, though, the trendiest galleries are on the other side of town, not far from the former red-light district in Vesterbro. What's happened here mirrors what's happened in Copenhagen over the past two decades: Vesterbro has been transformed from a gritty, working-class neighbourhood into the place where all the cool crowd hang out. The centre of this transition has been the old meatpacking district, which still functions as such today, but now also houses an array of bars, galleries, cafes and clubs. If you turn up there at four in the morning, you'll see clubbers tottering home to sleep, and butchers rolling up their shutters to start the working day. It's a meat market in more ways than one.

I'm A Kombo, the pop-up chefs in Chapter two, have their kitchen there. A few metres away, there's the Karriere bar, founded by the artist Jeppe Hein – whose work was shown at the Hayward Gallery in 2012 – and his sister Laerke. Once one of the hottest joints in town, it's crammed with furniture designed by Hein's artist friends – Carsten Holler, Dan Graham and Olafur Eliasson among them. Hein built the bar itself, which drifts very slowly sideways as the night goes on. If you don't keep an eye out, your drink will end up half a metre north of where you left it.

Coming to a place like Karriere, you realise how Copenhagen could have become so hip, so quick: everyone knows each other, and many of them share a camaraderie

that helps speed up change. Next door to the bar is the V1 Gallery, run by the Heins' friend Jesper Elg. Tonight, Elg's holding a party for a new show. If he's in town, the architect Bjarke Ingels will probably be there. As the night wears on, Trentemøller, the DJ whose work can be heard in the latest Almodóvar film, will spin a few tracks. When Trentemøller goes on tour, he'll be joined on the drums by the fashion



A mural by Kissmama in Vesterbro

designer Henrik Vibskov, who – wait for it – knows Elg from their art school days in London in the late 90s. To round off the set, there's Thomas Fleurquin, busily finalising preparations for this year's Distortion festival, a week

that'll see 130,000 ravers engage in activities that – in a blog titled "Distortion and the Decline of Civilisation" – the right-wing broadsheet *Jyllands-Posten* will later label: "infernal noise, senseless drinking, vomit, piss, fornication, and – above all – destruction."

It's an article that neatly encapsulates Denmark's contradictions. Denmark is at once a deeply conservative place and a very tolerant one. It spawned the Muhammed cartoons in 2006 – and yet in 1989 it was the first country to legalise same-sex partnerships. It's a dichotomy further illustrated by two demonstrations that snaked past city hall on consecutive weeks in May. The first highlighted Denmark's darker side – a protest at Denmark's harsh treatment of asylum seekers. The second was a march in celebration of marijuana that followed a float of dreadlocked reggae singers all the way to Christiania, the military base turned semi-autonomous anarchist commune. Home to 850 Christianites, as well as several bars, shops and meditation rooms, Christiania has long housed an open drugs trade to which the authorities turn a blind eye. It's a place of great symbolic importance to the hippies of Europe. If the government ever did seriously try to smash it, one local claims, every stoner on the continent would come to defend it.

As the march dissipates outside the gates of Christiania, I take a look around. Lots of Copenhageners come here to relax by the lake, or find cheap food – but before long I find the thing that the place is most famous for: the Green Light District, a market filled with stalls that sell rocks of hash for

a tenner. A shirtless man lies vomiting on the floor, and as I follow the puke I see its cause – a wheelbarrow full of weed that teenagers are gulping down with the help of a fat glass bong. Dizzy and bloodshot, they then slope to the floor – but only the topless chap is particularly worse for wear. At some point, someone somewhere calls for an ambulance, and after a few minutes the paramedics arrive. Mainstream Denmark has a strained relationship with the Christianites (a reporter who recently tried to film a drug deal was stripped naked and unceremoniously ejected) and so they won't enter the Green Light District unless it's absolutely necessary. As a result, there's an awkward few moments while the medics linger on its perimeter, tentatively gauging whether their presence is really needed. It's fraught – but it also somehow feels very cooperative, very Danish. The foot soldiers of the welfare state on the one side, the hippies on the other – and both of them trying to resolve the stand off through silent diplomacy.

This delicate relationship between state and counter-culture hasn't always been so carefully managed. In 2011, the site was temporarily closed to visitors after a disagreement between the Christianites and the government about its future. In December 2006, the biggest riots in Danish history broke out in Nørrebro after the authorities announced plans to evict another non-hierarchical community: the Ungdomshuset (or 'Youth House'). Thousands of protesters set up burning barricades and threw fireworks at the police, who shot back – to much outrage – with tear gas.

Nearly 300 rioters were arrested, but it wasn't until the following March that the Youth House was finally evicted. Special Forces stormed the building with a military helicopter, and then coated it in foam to protect it from Molotov cocktails. It didn't help. The barricades returned, rioting resumed, a school was ransacked and 690 people were arrested inside three days in what *Le Monde Diplomatique* called "a laboratory experience in police repression".

Copenhagen's smallness is the secret to its creativity. But on the flipside, it has also forced Danes to look overseas for their inspiration. "Because this is a small country, we are focussed on what's going on outside," says Vibskov, sitting in his studio, hunched over a dust-coated MacBook Pro as interns rush to and fro carrying blocks of wood. They're putting the finishing touches to an art installation that will shortly be transported to Mallorca. "If something is popular outside Denmark, music-wise, people accept it *inside* Denmark. And it's such a small society that if one thing gets accepted, everyone does it." It's an attitude that can be constraining, he says. "If something is wild or crazy, it has to be accepted by others before it is accepted here. Some of the stuff I do is not particularly Scandinavian, maybe a little strange. But if I show it in Paris, people here go: 'Ohhh, I see. It's really good.' The Raveonettes were a Danish band living in New York. And when they got picked up by *Rolling Stone* magazine as the best new band, suddenly everyone here went: 'Oh yeah! Cool.'"

But Elg thinks this international outlook has also had a

positive effect: it's given his generation wider horizons, and in doing so has made them much more ambitious than their forebears. They've thrown off the constraints of the Jante Law – a traditional Danish mindset that is critical of anyone who has ideas above their station – and instead they've tried to compete with what's going on elsewhere in Europe. "It's this experience of seeing things happening in other parts of the world and realising: 'Okay, we can actually do this in Copenhagen.' There's this wish to change Copenhagen and make it more interesting for those of us who live here."

Danish self-confidence is improving, says Søren Sveistrup, the man who created *The Killing*. "Now, young people think they can conquer the world. It wasn't like that 20 years ago."

No one represents this newfound swagger better than the architect Bjarke Ingels. In the space of just six years, the 38-year-old and his firm BIG (pronounced like the adjective) have become the most talked about young architects in the world. In New York, he's building a pyramid-shaped skyscraper, while in Copenhagen he tried (unsuccessfully) to plonk a large ski-slope on top of a power station. He's building a new museum in Mexico, a national library in Kazakhstan, a new city hall for the capital of Estonia, and at some point, Ingels has found the time to draw a comic book about his architectural ideals.

He does all this with a brash confidence that can wind people up the wrong way. "He's rude, he's loud, and he builds skyscrapers," one prominent London-based architec-

ture critic tells me. "He's breaking all the rules. It's a case of killing the father."

Traditionally, the fathers of Danish architecture were obsessed by the context of their work – the role buildings play in their surroundings. They all read Jan Gehl at architecture school, and so they were brought up to make their buildings blend into their environment, and to create nicer public spaces. That's why you didn't see many tall buildings in Denmark till recently – they weren't considered to work very well in context.

In the past, Danish architects also exercised unusual control over a building's internal 'detailing'. When Arne



Bjarke Ingels' VM Building

Jacobsen built the Royal Hotel in Copenhagen, he also designed everything from the doorhandles to the cutlery.

"Danes are totally nuts about detailing," says Nille Juul-Sørensen, the head of the Danish Design Centre and the man who designed Copenhagen's metro stations. "We have this idea that God will see everything, even when the lights are out, behind the wall."

Bjarke Ingels changed all that. In the late 90s, Ingels worked for Rem Koolhaas, an enormously influential Dutch architect who – in very simplistic terms – believes in concept rather than context; how buildings look, rather than how they fit into their surroundings. "The street is dead," wrote Koolhaas in his 1995 book, *S, M, L, XL*. "Planning makes no difference whatsoever."

When Ingels returned to Denmark, he found that the Danish architecture scene was quite a closed shop. Big firms like CF Møller and Henning Larsen got much of the work, and it was very hard for newcomers to win contracts. Ingels and his generation realised that in order to attract business, they would have to do things differently. As a result, they followed two routes: they focussed on green, sustainable designs – and they drew significantly on the very un-Danish ideas of Koolhaas, creating buildings that are exciting in their own right, but don't sit well together.

"The first thing I read at architecture school was *Life Between Buildings*," says Dorte Mandrup, another rising star whose offices sit directly below BIG's. "But everyone was quite tired of it – this romantic, quite boring, not-so-flashy

view of city life. So I think a lot of people were reacting against Jan Gehl and his sensible studies."

Ingels and his contemporaries are most famous for their work at Ørestad, the controversial new development far to the south of Copenhagen's old town. It's basically one five-kilometre-long highway, lined with humungous, eccentric, hypermodern offices and residential blocks. There's a hotel built by 3XN that looks like a massive V-sign sprouting from the ground. Two kilometres down the road, there's a giant blue box that doubles as the new home of Danish Broadcasting, and which cost so much that it sparked 300 redundancies. Further on is another futuristic cube, Ørestad High School – a sixth form without any classrooms.

Ingels has built three things here. There are the Mountain Dwellings, a sloped development that resembles a hillside made from residential flats. Next door is the VM Building, a block of flats – each stabbed by a jaunty series of knife-like balconies – that sits upon a carpark. Finally, right at the far end of Ørestad, stands the 8 Building – another high-rise that looks like a gentle rollercoaster.

You can see why they're the talk of the architectural world. There's no denying it – these are bold, fascinating sculptures. But that's also their problem: they're sculptures. They're one-offs. They look good by themselves – in a photograph or on a Powerpoint presentation – but they don't really relate to each other. In fact, they needle each other. Each feels like a stylish Porsche that someone's parked awkwardly on a kerb, and then reversed into the

Ferrari behind. Walking among them, I can't work out what they look like, or where best to view them from. It's a bit like swimming in the New York's Hudson River. You can glimpse the Empire State Building, and you can just about see the Statue of Liberty. But you can't get a good look at either, and all the while you're gulping down water – or, in Ørestad's case, car fumes. It's like drowning in architecture.

"People should definitely go out there and look at it when they come to Copenhagen," says Thomas Dickson, the author of *Dansk Design*. "But if you're thinking about it as a place to go to school or have an apartment, I don't think it's up to the best of Danish and Scandinavian traditions of how to build a neighbourhood."

It probably hasn't helped that the whole area was financed by a series of different private developers. In order to pay for the construction of a new metro system, the local government sold off bits of Ørestad to different people, all of whom wanted a unique design, but weren't so concerned about how that design related to its surroundings.

"Private clients are usually more interested in building and selling as quickly as possible, because that's where the profit is," says Mandrup. "So it's extremely market-orientated, and the market-orientated scene in architecture will always be very focussed on making it as visible as possible, and not necessarily so focussed on long-term urban life."

Ingels turned down a couple of requests for an interview. But judging from his previous statements, he would argue

that Ørestad strikes exactly the right balance between concept and context.

"Architecture seems to be entrenched in two equally unfertile fronts: either naively utopian or petrifyingly pragmatic," Ingels writes in his comic, *Yes is More*. "We believe that there is a third way wedged in the no-man's-land between the diametrical opposites... A pragmatic utopian architecture that takes on the creation of socially, economically and environmentally perfect places as a practical objective."

He has his fans, too. First off, 6000 people have their homes there, a figure that looks set to triple. I can't imagine that it's the most sociable place to live – there are few shops or places to hang out – but people seem to manage. Bigwig critics have also praised the buildings. For a start, says Nille Juul-Sørensen, they're fun. "The detailing is not so good – but who cares?" he asks. "Look at the 8 Building, the VM Building. They involve you. You have to walk in funny ways to get to your flat. You can bike around, you can have your morning run inside your block. They didn't revolutionise architecture, but they changed the whole paradigm for what architecture could be."

8. JUTLAND: happiness country?

"We're not hippies... This is a business like any other business" – Søren Hermansen

Denmark looks quite odd on a map. Its capital is on an island called Sjælland that is so far east, it's almost in Sweden. Further west lies Fyn, a smallish blob that houses Odense, and the childhood home of Hans Christian Andersen. To the left of Fyn, there's Jylland, or Jutland – the biggest bit of Denmark, and the only part attached to mainland Europe. It lives up to its anglicised name, jutting like a mohawk from Germany's northern border. Halfway up Jutland's western coast – about as far from Copenhagen as you can possibly travel in Denmark – is a little town called Ringkøbing. It's a pretty town, too. Small, pretty buildings squashed between a lagoon and a quaint town square – and all 15 minutes from the sand dunes and summer houses that skirt the North Sea.

Patrick Kingsley

According to a no doubt unerringly accurate survey of residents by Cambridge University, Ringkøbing is the happiest town in Denmark. And given that Denmark is consistently named by the UN as the world's happiest country, this technically makes Ringkøbing – pop: 9000 – the happiest town on earth. In pursuit of happiness, and hoping for a taste of Jutland, I head to Ringkøbing for the weekend. The journey takes three train legs, and so by the time I arrive, it's nearly midnight. The streets are dark, the air is silent, and there is no one in sight. It's deserted. If this is happiness, I feel very short-changed. But suddenly a noise flies over the rooftops. It's the sound of shouting and, thinking it might just also be the sound of happiness, I head in its general direction. Following my ear, I weave through the backstreets of Ringkøbing, and with every step the sounds get louder. At last, I'm almost there. Just one more turning, and I'll have reached nirvana itself.

I round the corner. I look up.

Screaming at the top of their lungs, three drunk teenagers are pissing against a wall.

•

I could be in any small town on a Friday night – and for their part, my new friends are keen to dispel any myths about the place. Excited to meet someone new, they invite me back to their den, a shed that sits at the bottom of their friend's nearby garden. Sobering up, they tell me a tale of provincial teenage angst. There's only one bar in town, they say – not that there's anyone they want to see there. "We're in a

minority in this town," says Oscar, 17 last month, and "still very, very excited about it." He and his friends Klaus, Alexander and Asbjørn are creative types, he says. They write poetry. They play music. Unlike their sporty neighbours, they go to a continuation school that focuses on drama and art. "We're very rare in Ringkøbing," he sighs. "It's not that usual for people in Jylland to write and be creative. There are a lot of people who just ride about and drink alcohol." And with that, he pops out for another piss.

The next day, I visit the town's local newspaper, the *Ringkøbing-Skjern Dagbladet*. The staff there are not nearly as down on the town, but back in 2007, they too were surprised to find it was the happiest place on earth.

"We really were astonished," says the paper's jovial chief reporter, a small middle-aged man called Poul Osmundsen. "Later, we tried to find out on what statistical basis they had reached their conclusion. The material was rather skimpy. Statistically speaking, it was totally invalid. But it went totally viral. Before we knew it, we were being visited by television crews from all over the world. I have to say, the townspeople were rather bemused by it. Most of us have had many good laughs about it. One of the local traits is modesty. We do not regard ourselves as something special. So all this exposure was something quite unfamiliar."

But it got the townsfolk thinking, Poul remembers. "It made us reflect. If we are the happiest town in the world, why would that be? And I don't think it's totally faulty. I do

think people here are... well, happy is the wrong word. That means giddy, or exultant, or a rather fleeting emotion. The right term would be 'contented'. We are a contented society."

The gap between the richest and poorest is very small in Ringkøbing, says Osmundsen – even by Danish standards. "We all attend the same schools, the same sports clubs, the same shops. We live, more or less, in the same neighbourhood." In other words, no one has it much better than anyone else.

As a result, the people of Ringkøbing are happy with what they've got – a quality which, people constantly tell me, puts them at odds with snobbish Copenhageners.

"We see ourselves as very different to Copenhageners," says Peter Donslund, a senior civil servant at the town hall. "In Copenhagen they spend much more money, but here people are much more satisfied. Our attitude is not so much for complaining here." Perhaps that's why the area votes en masse for Venstre, whose business-friendly policies appeal to an entrepreneurial local population used to doing things by themselves.

"We think that we work harder," says Osmundsen. "We think that we are better, that we are more frugal. We are country mice and they are city mice. They talk much faster – too much in some cases."

It's a tension that the anthropologist Richard Jenkins explores (and to some extent debunks) in his book, *Being Danish*. To illustrate the Jutland reserve, Jenkins retells a

well-known joke about a Jutland farmer interviewing a new labourer. The farmer looks at the young man and says, "I suppose you'll do. But there's one thing you should know. We don't do too much talking here. We just get on with the work." The young man nods, and starts work immediately. A year later, the farmer approaches the man again and tells him that he's thinking of buying a new bicycle. The labourer nods, and goes back to work. Six months on, the farmer mentions to him that he's just bought the bike he was talking about half a year previously. Again, the labourer nods, and gets on with what he was doing. Yet another six months go by, and this time it's the labourer's turn to approach the farmer. "I'm sorry," he says, "but I'm going to have to leave." The farmer's surprised. "What's up?" he asks. "Don't I pay you enough?" "No, it's not that," says the young man. "But I can't stand any more of this bicycle talk."

It's an exaggeration, of course – but the joke highlights the difference between the hard-working, taciturn Jutlanders and the chatty, lazy Copenhageners. "How can you find the Jutlander in Copenhagen?" begins another Jutland joke. "Just ask to see the boss."

Yet for all their superiority, the people I meet in Ringkøbing feel a profound sense of inferiority, or at least abandonment. "Copenhagen people think this is a backwater," says a doleful Oscar. "They stereotype us as fishermen. They think we're peasants and rednecks. But they're people who just think about how they look."

The abandonment has physical manifestations, too. Everyone claims that state funding has been siphoned away from west Jutland and towards Copenhagen, or even Aarhus, Jutland's eastern capital. Under the last government, political decision-making also became more centralised. Ringkøbing was stripped of its position as the seat of the regional government, while decisions about local housing construction were made from Copenhagen – a move which made west Jutlanders feel angry and helpless. Meanwhile, Ringkøbing sits in the centre of a (relatively) deprived area of Denmark known back in Copenhagen as the "rotten banana". A strip that runs from north-west Jutland, down its western flank, and then east along the south of Fyn, the banana is home to rising unemployment and lacks centres of higher education.

It's a situation at odds with the role Jutland has played in Denmark's history. In a way, you could argue that Jutland represents Denmark's soul. It was here that the first cooperatives took off, where the first folk high schools were built, and it was the farmers from here who, in the 1890s, pushed through parliament the first steps towards a Danish welfare state. And though Copenhageners are said to be snobby about Jutland, everyone likes to claim their family was originally from here. We're a nation of farmers, Copenhageners will proudly tell you – and this helps to explain why Ringkøbing might still be so contented. Whatever else has happened since, locals know that their part of the world is the source of Denmark's founding

myths. "Jutland," as Richard Jenkins summarises so neatly in his book, "is both centre and periphery within the Danish historical narrative, a place of backward obscurity and the wellspring of enlightenment."

Danes often talk about how much they trust each other, and how, whatever *The Killing* might suggest, their country has a relatively low crime rate. In practice, it's difficult to estimate how trusting Denmark is – but there's certainly a lot of it in Ringkøbing. "It's a secure community," says Bent Brodersen, a local councillor for Venstre, and a man once named by French TV as the world's happiest man. "We don't fear for crime, terror, wild animals, monsoon."

"People usually don't cheat each other," says Else Mathiassen, headteacher at the West Jutland folk high school, down the road from Ringkøbing. "For instance, my daughter lost her purse. She was sure it would come back to her. She didn't even get nervous. And it did get back to her! She knew it would be delivered to the police station. And it was! She didn't know where she lost it. She's done it several times. Once in a taxi. Another time by a bus stop. And it always got back to her."

It doesn't really need to be said, but the town has a strong sense of community. Everyone is part of a club – at a funding meeting at the town hall recently, representatives from 60 clubs turned up. That's at least 60 clubs for a town of only 9000 citizens. The old-fashioned local bank – Ringkøbing Landbobank – is one of the country's most stable. "Stinginess is traditionally a local trait," says

Osmundsen. "And well, some people say the bank has this same trait."

Meanwhile the continued success of Osmundsen's own employers – the *Ringkøbing-Skjern Dagbladet* – speaks of a community that cares about its local institutions. Unlike local newspapers in Britain, the *Dagbladet* hasn't been decimated by redundancies, their advertising revenues have held up well, and, most indicatively, their circulation remains a steady 8500 – not bad for a county with less than 60,000 residents. "Our readers are very loyal," says Lars Kryger, the paper's chief subeditor, munching on a very sugary slice of cake. "They feel that if we were not here, something would be missing. They know we're a cornerstone in this town's life."

Another secret to Ringkøbing's contentedness lies in its relative lack of racial tension. "There is no talk of immigration or integration," claims Donslund. "People don't talk about foreigners as part of a group, but more like every other citizen. It's a special thing about this area." This is partly because there aren't many immigrants. In the 70s, when many people arrived from Turkey and Pakistan, they moved to areas where there was a large textile industry – something not present in Ringkøbing.

There are nevertheless two groups of foreign communities – one Iraqi, the other Bosnian. But unlike many other immigrants I meet in Denmark, the ones in Ringkøbing seem genuinely at home. At the Danish-Bosnian Community Centre, behind a petrol station on the outskirts of town, I

chat to a Bosnian Muslim called Damir Zvirkić, whom we met briefly in Chapter five. He loves Denmark, perhaps because the 400 Bosnians in Ringkøbing were – by his account – part of a group granted asylum in 1993 after a personal intervention from Margrethe, the Danish queen. Zvirkić feels Danish now, even – as he mentions earlier – when he goes back to Bosnia on holiday. He says that it helps that Bosnians aren't particularly fervent Muslims, and so find it easier to become part of the community.

"People from Yugoslavia and Bosnia generally want to integrate. And Danish people like it when they see people trying to integrate. If you're trying, there's no problem. I'm trying – and I think sometimes it is enough to try."

Certainly, the attendance at the Danish-Bosnian Community Centre suggests he's right. It's bingo night, and it's not just Bosnians writing down numbers – around a third of the club's members are ethnic Danes.

Ringkøbing has one further secret. Jobs. It may lie at the core of the rotten banana, but the town hasn't been hit by the banana's worst problem: spiralling unemployment. Before the financial crisis, unemployment here was at 1%, one of the lowest rates in Denmark. Post-2008, it's still only at 3.5% – one reason why immigrants are still absorbed into the community without a grumble. It's all down to the area's surprisingly wide economic base, which creates a lot of jobs for skilled and non-skilled workers alike. First, there's the cattle industry, still one of the country's largest. Then there's the metalworks – per capita, this is Denmark's most

industrial area. The tourist trade is also booming – the summer houses on the dunes of the North Sea have long been a favourite summer haunt for both Germans and Danes. And finally, there's Ringkøbing's most famous son: Vestas, the world's biggest windmill-maker. They've now moved their headquarters east to Aarhus and cut their workforce here from 2500 to 2200, but their presence is still felt economically – and visually. Wherever you turn, in the distance you can always see a long line of rotating turbines – a constant reminder that you're in one of the greenest countries in the world.

Erik Andersen does not look like a man of the future. His hair is white, he's 66, and his cheeks are grooved by crows' feet. Hair mushrooms from his ears. His cat sleeps on the window-sill, and in the corner a grandfather clock – handed down from his parents – ticks the tock of decades past.

But looks deceive. If you step outside Andersen's farmhouse and squint towards the southern horizon – south of the mill-pond, south of his herd of rare Red Danish cows – you will see a slim line of windmills. When the wind's up, they cartwheel across the fields like ballet dancers in slow motion. When the breeze stops, they stand like Greek heroes resting on their shields.

We're on the tiny island of Samsø, a few kilometres east of Jutland, and these windmills – which belong in part to Andersen – have made Samsø one of the largest carbon-neutral settlements on the planet, and the doyen of the green

world. Søren Hermansen, the local teacher who spearheaded the island's green movement, remembers visiting New York for the first time a few years ago. He was eating out with his wife. The waiter – realising they were Danish – said he'd just read an article about Danish windmills in the *New Yorker*. "He said the writer had been to this little island called Samsø. Had we heard of it?"

Fifteen years ago, Samsø's 4000 elderly farmers were known best for their early crop of new potatoes. Their farms were all powered by fossil fuels, which had to be shipped over from the mainland, and between them they created 45,000 tons of carbon dioxide each year. Then, in 1998, all that changed. These conservative islanders were the unlikely winners of a competition to become Denmark's first carbon-neutral community. Government funding followed – an investment matched by the islanders themselves – and a decade and a half later, 10 offshore windmills line the coast of Samsø, while 11 stud its fields.

Many farmers – Andersen included – have layered their roofs with solar panels. Their heating, once organised on an individual basis, now comes from a central supplier – which cuts down on waste – and is created from burning straw. Some of their plumbing – at the island's Energy Academy, for instance – even runs on rainwater. "The water may look brown," warns a sign next to their toilets.

The upshot is that Samsø isn't just carbon neutral – it's technically carbon negative. The energy Samsingers can't use is fed back into the Danish national grid, which means

that their net output of carbon dioxide stands at -15,000 tons. And they're not stopping there. By 2030, they don't just want to offset their tractors' use of petrol: they want to stop using fossil fuels altogether. To do this, they want everyone to trade in their cars for electric ones. But they've got a long way to go. A jungle of rentable bicycles may greet you when you step off the ferry, but they're not particularly useful on an island that still takes half an hour to cross by car. Meanwhile, electric cars are unaffordable to many, and – if my taxi driver's pained expression was anything to go by – most Samsingers still need to be persuaded of their appeal.

Historically, they've been won over by arguments of an economic bent. Five of the turbines are owned by the council, 12 by individual farmers, but, most significantly, four are managed cooperatively by hundreds of locals. Erik Andersen is one of them. Back in the late 90s, he invested £6000 of his own savings in the cooperative turbines. Six years later, he'd made it back, and now he turns a healthy profit every year. "There's money in it," he smiles. "It's a good investment."

Samsø isn't an anomaly in Denmark. In general, the country has made one of the sincerest attempts to tackle climate change. Since 1980, their economy has grown by 70%, while, staggering, their electricity usage has stayed the same. Copenhagen wants to become the world's first carbon-neutral capital by 2025, and they'll probably get there – if Aarhus doesn't beat them to it. To smooth the

way, the state government has introduced a 180% tax on car sales. An integrated public transport system also helps, as does a lot that cycling infrastructure. Then there's the district heating system, which heats around 60% of Danish houses centrally.

The Danes are good at recycling too. Denmark produces proportionally more waste than any other country in Europe, but just five per cent of it ends up in landfill. In the US, that figure rises to 54%. Meanwhile, Danish law demands that buildings be much better insulated than they are in other countries. As a result, Danish architects invest heavily in finding new ways of keeping buildings warm. When I visit the offices of 3XN, I see boxes of maize, cotton, cork and flax – mushrooms, even – the residue of a quest to find the perfect way to insulate a house. "It's really funny when you go abroad and British architects talk about sustainability," says Dorte Mandrup, one of the rising stars of Danish architecture. "It means something completely different."

But the biggest thing is wind power. Look out of almost any window in Denmark and you'll see a flat countryside flecked with white turbines. They're the world's largest producers of windmills. Twenty per cent of Danish energy comes from wind, and by 2020, they hope it'll be 50%. By 2030, they want to be rid of fossil fuels altogether, replacing them with both biomass plants, and yet more bigger, better wind turbines. British criticism of wind power centres on its

ugliness and its inefficiency. But when I get talking to one of Vestas's lead engineers I chance upon in a bar in Aarhus, he rubbishes both claims. Vestas, he claims, are developing a kind of gargantuan, floating wind farm that will be a) so far out to sea that you won't be able to see it (thus placating those who don't like the look of a sleek white windmill); and b) so windy that it'll be able to power half the world. In the meantime, he says, Vestas are about to release their largest turbine yet. With a wingspan of 172m, it'll be effective even in countries that aren't as flat as Denmark, and don't have as much wind.

Accurate or not, his passion shows how seriously Denmark takes green energy. But contrary to popular belief, this isn't because Danes are eco-warriors. "We're not hippies," says Søren Hermansen. As explained in Chapter six, Danish environmentalism is pragmatic rather than idealistic. In the 70s, Denmark was particularly hard hit by the oil crisis, which made Danes anxious to find a long-term replacement for fossil fuel. With all their flat land, wind



power seemed a sensible option.

First of all, it makes sense from an economic perspective. "This is business like any other business," says Hermansen, who I chat to on the ferry over from the mainland. "If we can provide cheap energy to compete with fossil fuel, then even the most conservative local citizen will say green energy is good. It is more reliable and cheaper, because we can see our prices going up all the time. When we started in 1998, oil was \$30 per barrel. Ten years later, it was \$130. So the people who invested between 1998 and 2001 saved so much money in the next ten years. We could show that this was a real business project, not just a hippy project."

A change in the way that government subsidies are structured has also helped speed up the process. A few decades ago, the government wanted to encourage turbine construction, so they gave grants to the factories themselves. "But they found this didn't improve the quality of turbines," says Hermansen. "Manufacturers produced rubbish wind turbines and still survived." During the 90s, the government took away this subsidy and gave it to the people who bought the turbines instead. They agreed to buy back any unused wind energy from the turbine owners at a price that never dropped below a fixed minimum. This encouraged communities to invest in turbines that created the most power – and in turn prompted the manufacturers themselves to create better turbines.

Wind's success is also down, once again, to the cooperative system that is so engrained in the Danish way of life. In

Britain, local communities have often been opposed to windmills because they see them as thrust upon a particular area by external forces. In Denmark, it's usually the locals who have built and paid for them, and who have decided where they're sited. There are around 6000 turbines in Denmark (nearly double the number in Britain, a country 6 times its size) and around 75% of them are co-owned by around 150,000 Danes. It's these people, not the large energy companies, who most profit from the lowered energy bills, and from the sales of excess energy back to the national grid. As a result, even the most conservative locals have invested, both financially and emotionally, in the turbines – even a bunch of elderly, grizzled farmers in the middle of the North Sea.

It's a very Danish situation. "In England, you are a coal nation," says Hermansen, as the ferry pulls towards Samsø. "The British empire was fuelled by coal. But in Denmark, we are a farming nation, and so everything has historically been decided by co-ops. The co-op structure has been around for 150 years, and it's still going strong."

A line of turbines glide past our ferry window.

"This isn't a coincidence," says Hermansen. "It couldn't have happened in any other place."

EPILOGUE

In May 2011, a sociologist called Ulla Holm wrote an article for *Politiken* about the New Nordic kitchen. It was an explosive piece. Holm claimed that chefs like Rene Redzepi – with their focus on local produce and their desire to create a regional culinary identity – were closet nationalists. Nordic supremacists, even. “It is hardly a coincidence,” she wrote, “that the waiters were dressed in brown shirts when I last visited Noma.”

Her argument was bonkers. As Claus Meyer explains earlier in this book, the New Nordic mission is utterly innocent. It’s simply about making people more interested in good, sustainable food. And it’s a global aim, he points out, not just a Scandinavian one.

“Look at my family. My father’s a Muslim immigrant. My wife, Nadine, is Jewish,” Redzepi told the *New Yorker*. “If the supremacists took over, we’d be out of here.”

Yet in a funny, roundabout way, Holm’s article touches on something fundamental to contemporary Denmark. She’s wrong about Noma, but the tension she erroneously sees between the restaurant’s ambition and its parochialism is one that is nevertheless very present within wider Danish life. For the last 150 years, Denmark has – with several notable exceptions – hidden itself away. But in the past two decades, the country has increasingly found that this coping mechanism no longer works in a globalised world. Denmark is and can no longer be a monoculture.

Danes have reacted to this challenge in ways that contradict each other – some parochial, others ambitious. And as Richard Jenkins notes in his book, *Being Danish*, the direction they will ultimately take remains to be seen.

One direction is inwards and backwards. Many Danes can see the world on their doorstep, and they’re trying to keep it out. They want to preserve the Danish identity, but in the process of doing so, they have ironically eroded it. By virtually ending immigration, and by attempting to stamp out the individuality of immigrant communities, groups like the Dansk Folkeparti have forgone the tolerant and democratic values that supposedly form the backbone of Danishness.

Another direction is outwards. Some Danes have seen the world outside – and want to conquer it. Some have done this aggressively: for the first time since 1864, Danish soldiers have been in action abroad, as part of the peacekeeping force in Iraq and Afghanistan. Others are trying to take over

the world in a more creative sense. As this book has shown, Danes like Søren Sveistrup, Rene Redzepi and Bjarke Ingels are some of the best in the world in their respective fields. Through their success, they have reinforced Danish culture – Redzepi, for instance, has helped to revitalise Danish food – but, like their isolationist countrymen, they too have also changed what it is to be Danish. Increasingly their influences are international – Sveistrup looked to the US, Ingels to Holland – and their heightened ambition is at odds with the traditional image of a contented, laid-back Dane.

It's hard to say which of these directions Denmark will eventually settle on. Perhaps it'll be all of them. But whichever it is, one thing is fairly certain: the concept of Danishness is changing. How to be Danish is hard enough to explain in 2014. How to be Danish in two decades' time is anyone's guess.