

011130 Randomness

Hello. This week I have decided to compile a collection of random thoughts or events from Denmark. One day of classes left and the stress levels are getting higher. I just found out today that the finals are not just graded by the professor. There is also a second neutral person called the censor who also reviews the tests to insure that the grading is impartial. This does sound like a good idea, but it can lead to problems. For example, my Vibrations professor spoke today about a simple sign error that every member of the class had made on one of our lab projects that was handed in on Tuesday. If we were to do that on the exam, my professor explained that he would understand that it was a simple error. However, the censor would most likely point out that as engineers we should have caught that error and therefore we had not shown “engineering intent” and we would fail the question. I am used to getting slack on exams where during the stress you make a stupid mistake, but you clearly show intent. All-be-it, in the real world, a lot of money could ride on such a stupid mistake and so we should be held accountable. But, in the real world, you don’t have only four hours to determine the outcome of a semester of work.

On to the randomness:

There is new legislation in the government that would approve cooperation between Singapore and Denmark. Singapore will give the Danish government a boat load of money in exchange for educating 1000 university students from Singapore in biotechnology. Singapore apparently does not have an established biotechnology program in place and so the bill would be a win-win situation for both groups. The professors at the Danish university would get a lot of cheap graduate students and Singapore would increase its ability to perform in the biotechnology sector.

A second bill in the Danish government awaiting approval is a continuation of the scholarships such as the one that I have to pay my living expenses. I am grandfathered so it doesn’t affect me. But, hopefully, the program will continue because the funding is the only way that many of the foreign students can afford to study in Denmark. Of course, the end goal is the hope that once the students receive their education they will be lured by the vienerbrød and the blonds and will stay. In my program, three of the four students accepted last year got funding. That is the highest percentage of any of the departments. Other areas that receive a lot of funding are anything having to do with mobile communication and biotechnology.

Speaking of bills, how do you pay bills in Denmark when there are not checking accounts? The answer is electronically. For example, I pay my mobile bill by taking the bill to the post office. The bill lists the account into which the money will go when I pay the post office in cash. Why not the bank, you ask? Because the bank does not want to be in the bill paying business. A postal worker explained to me that the bank will transfer money from your account for you, but they charge more than the post office because they don’t want to do it.

On the subject of banks, there are fees for everything. Withdraw from the ATM machine anytime other than when the bank is open, fee. Make more than 25 transactions per quarter, fee. Want a statement? Fee. You get the idea.

The statements would be sent by post and delivered to your door by a mailman on a bicycle. Yes, the postmen deliver by bicycle.

You could invite the postman in to get warm by your radiator. All the buildings in Denmark are heated by radiators. The use of electricity for heat is banned in the country. Instead, the fossil fuel power plants use the waste heat from the production of the electricity to boil water for central heating. Or, in complexes such as the one that I live in, there is one central boiler from which all of the steam is delivered. There is a meter on each radiator that records how much steam you use and it is checked like a gas meter would be so that they know how much to bill you. The radiators are very quiet and each has its own control.

The law may have to be reassessed as more wind turbines come on line and replace the fossil fuel plants. There is a huge offshore wind farm coming on line next year with another in 2004. These are not wind mills. The 2004 wind farm will have almost one hundred wind turbines located several kilometers offshore. Each wind turbine will be a mega watt power plant in itself with a diameter of 80 meters. Think about that, each wind turbine is taller than a twenty-six story building, not including the base on which it stands. The energy that will be simply pulled out of the wind will be staggering. If only the US energy companies would catch on to this concept.

I might be biased because I am studying them, but I find wind turbines to be sleek and graceful. I am always captivated by the WTs that I see as I take the train into Copenhagen or when I travel in the country. I know not everyone shares this view and some people see the WTs as a blight. But, I would argue that they are a lot less of a blight than a fossil fuel power plant.

Speaking of blowing wind, the lecturers during my orientation week were full of it when they warned the foreign students to always be on time for class. The professors to start on time, but the Danish students seem to be perpetually late. Since the classes are four hours long, you even have people unabashedly straying in three hours late.

Such lateness is certainly not shown by the bicyclists in the morning. When I greet my friends in the morning, I usually ask how the races were because it seems that everyone pedals as quickly as they can. Despite the race, I really enjoy riding my bike into school each morning. The 15 minute ride is along a pleasant bike path that takes me past fields and horses as I near the university. I am actually catching myself scoffing at friends who drive to school since most everyone else bikes.

Well, back to the books. Have a great week,

Jeff

 **Previous** | **Next**  | **Return to Main Page**

Copyright © 2001 Jeffrey Mahn. All rights reserved. This or any other written materials from this web site may not be used in part or in whole without the prior permission from Jeffrey Mahn.