



Sustainable Welfare Society Denmark – A Role Model for Environmental Policy

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of a sustainable welfare society, drawing on Denmark as an example, where social quality and distributive justice are achieved through sustainable practices that respect the finite nature of natural resources and the environment. This study highlights how a nation can successfully balance economic development and environmental sustainability by adopting renewable energy sources, particularly wind energy and biofuels, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve absolute decoupling of economic growth from environmental harm. Despite significant advancement, this paper also explores the broader global implications of climate change and the challenges in aligning social policy with sustainability goals, particularly in the context of ASEAN nations, where financial, geographical, and regulatory barriers restrict the transition to cleaner, greener energy systems. The paper emphasizes the importance of public-private partnerships, policy frameworks, and innovative governance models in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring a long-term, sustainable welfare state. Finally, it addresses the importance of reforms and global cooperation in overcoming the multifaceted challenges of energy transition, underscoring the need for a coordinated effort to foster green growth and tackle climate change on a global scale.

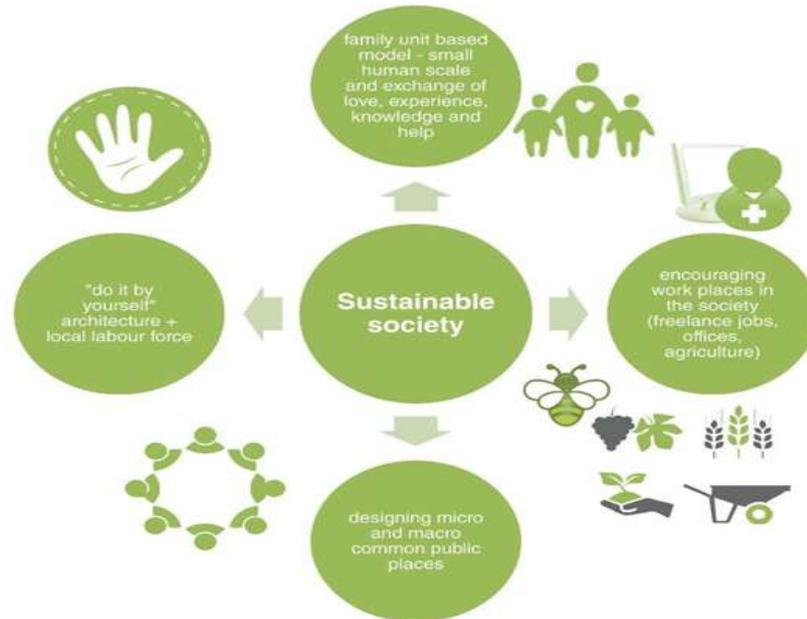


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Introduction

Sustainable Welfare Society

The idea of the 'sustainable welfare society' is described as a society where a high level of social quality within social structures and distributional justice is achieved in a sustainable manner, given finite natural resources and environments. (JSTOR n.d.)



Significance of the Study

Environmental concerns, which were raised as early as the 1970s, keep getting ignored in the present world that we have created, where resource consumption is far more than is actually available. While research increasingly demonstrates the ecological unsuitability of applying Western production and consumption standards worldwide, environmental sustainability remains a neglected consideration in social policy and welfare theory. (Koch 2019). The issue of climate change and global warming is largely being ignored by societies as a whole and governments and this issue keeps on escalating while the climate worsens each year. The reason for choosing Denmark is because it outshines more developed nations like the US and China when it comes to sustainable development and proves that technological advancement and economic development can be achieved by using sustainable and renewable sources of energy without damaging the environment.

Applicable Development Theories

Modernization Theory

Sustainable development theory refers to meeting human needs while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems and availability of natural resources. In this regard, Denmark has been quite successful in creating an energy model that is efficient, innovative, and sustainable by devising climate policies that are focused on sustainable and renewable sources of energy.

Sustainable Development Theory

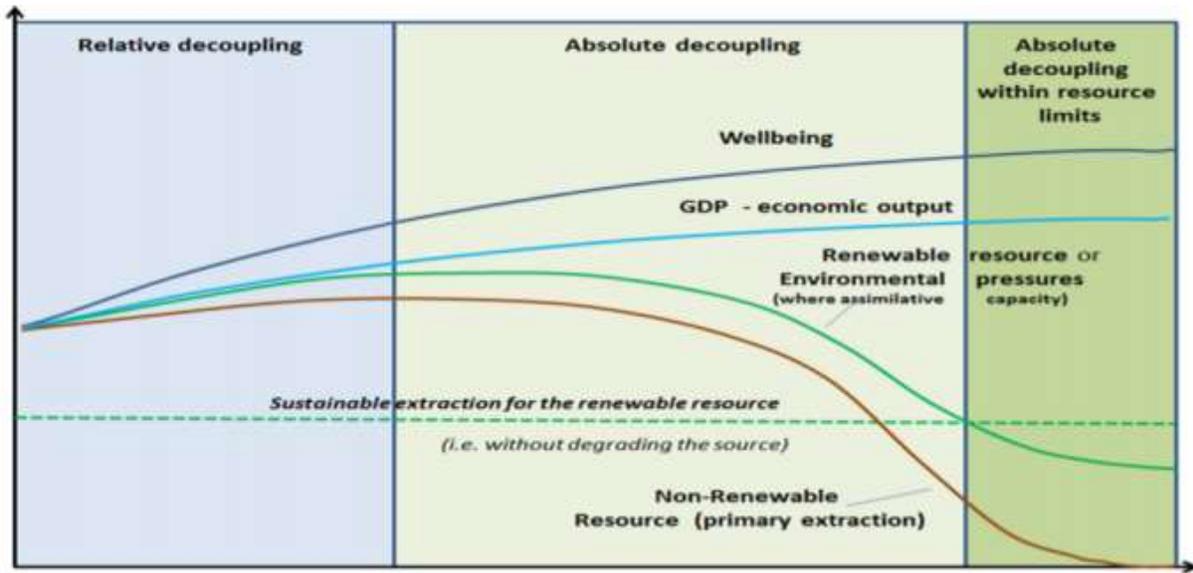
Modernization theory depicts the process or transition of pre-modern/traditional societies to modernized societies by the influence of technology. In this case, Denmark is a true depiction of

adopting this theory not just in terms of technological advancement but in the way of their democratic nationalism, being a homogenous nation in terms of cultural codes and ethics, their pro-modern movements which always favored science, new innovative technology, education, and a progressive public sphere which ensures social security. (Skirbekk 2018)

Denmark: A Sustainable Welfare State

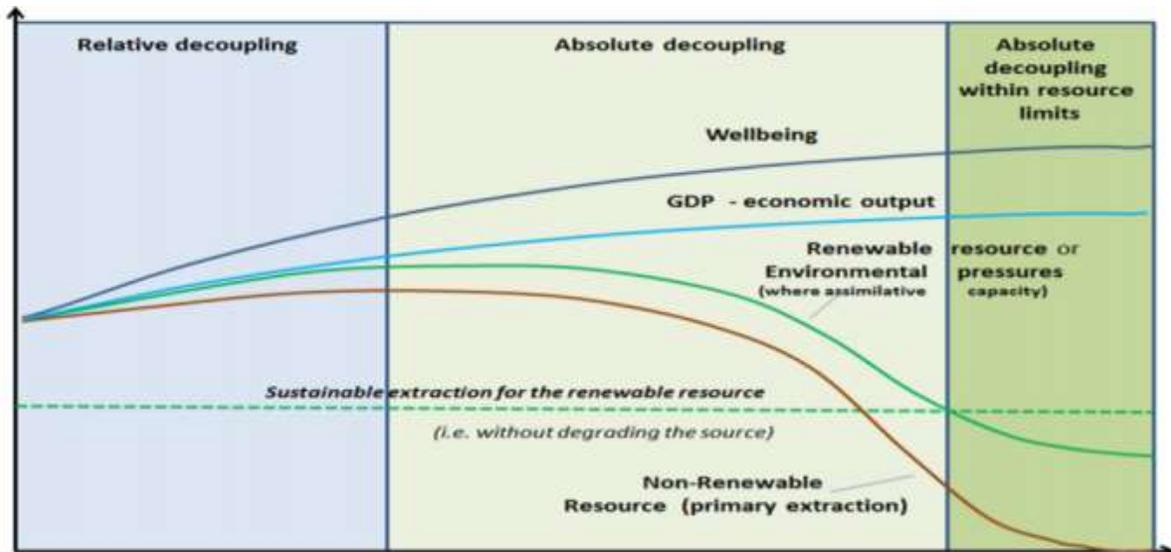
Despite being a small country, Denmark is one of the richest nations in the world in terms of GDP per capita. The Danish Energy Model has proven to be efficient, cost-effective, and innovative and has shown that economic growth can be achieved with limited use of fossil fuels and sustaining the environment. Denmark’s energy consumption is the lowest in the world as compared to its gross national output.

Denmark has achieved its target of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as mentioned under the Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).



The country has also managed to achieve “Absolute Decoupling” – a term which means breaking the link between environmental impacts and economic prosperity where economic growth or development does not occur at the expense of damaging the environment. (Green n.d.)

Denmark's Achievements and Its Social Impact



There has been an 8% decline in the gross energy consumption in Denmark between 1990 and 2015. It was due to a 28% drop in fossil fuel consumption which included a 6% increase from wind energy and 14% from biofuels and other renewable energy sources.

As for CO₂ emissions related to energy, there has been a 36% drop in which the main contributors since 1990 is energy conversion (electricity and heat generation) by 56% since tripled the energy generated from renewable energy sources, plant efficiency and CHP plants.

Denmark’s Climate Policies

Policy framework	Relevance to climate envelope
Danida Green Growth Guidance (2014)	It guides Danida staff on integrating green growth principles into strategic planning and policy design.
A Greener World for All (2013)	This strategy outlines Danida's approach to natural resources, energy, and climate change, emphasizing rights-based framework, engaging multilaterally, climate action, and sustainable resource management.
Danish Climate Policy Plan (2013)	It presents the national strategy on low carbon development, articulating core policy objectives and sector-based emission reduction targets.
Strategic Framework for Priority Area Growth and Employment 2011 -2015	Supports International economic development strategy by focusing on sustainable development, focuses on energy and water technologies, and commits Denmark to green growth and climate action."

Challenges in Policy Implementation

A policy can be fool-proof in its initiation, have a clear vision, and all the required resources to be carried out yet it still might fail at the implementation stage. In the case of the Danish Climate change policy the main problem was that of the absence of a clear strategy which created early challenges in the agreeing priorities, as a consequence led to a complicated dialogue between the Ministry of Climate Change and Energy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their approach lacked focus, and had excessive flexibility in program orientation, which made it challenging to develop a unified strategy. It resulted in decreased potential for synergies, and limited the opportunities to maximize mitigation, adaptation, and development. Furthermore, Danish international climate policy has not delivered significant value or leadership to its international donors. (Evaluation of Denmark’s Climate Change Funding to Developing Countries 2015).

ASEAN’s Renewable Energy Challenges

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) aims to generate 23% of its primary energy from renewable sources by 2025 because their energy demand in the region is expected to rise by 50%. (Team 2019)

However, adopting the same action plan as Denmark may not be feasible for countries in Southeast Asia due to economical and geographical conditions since Denmark is a small country, with plenty of financial resources available to them. Despite this, the falling cost of wind and biofuels (primarily used by Denmark as the main renewable source of energy), and solar photovoltaic, the ASEAN region might be able to find cost-effective and sustainable energy solutions.

Many Southeast Asian countries are already taking steps to achieve sustainable growth through local manufacturing industries. For instance, Malaysia's position as the world's third-largest producer of photovoltaic cells, and Thailand's growing solar manufacturing industry for global markets, demonstrate their potential. These countries could accelerate growth by increasing renewable energy deployment within Southeast Asia. However, policymakers face significant challenges due to rising energy demands and volatile supply-demand dynamics.

- **Lack of financial support:** The development of renewable energy projects in the region is quite an expensive burden for the ASEAN countries. The lack of financial support, mainly through public funding as there is far less interest in investing in the energy sector as compared to the other sectors. There is also a lack of expertise with respect to evaluating the risk of renewable energy investment particularly in countries like Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia.
- **Geographical and technical conditions:** The renewable energy project developers in Southeast Asia face the challenge of regulating the proper use of land and the subsequent environmental impact. For example, in Indonesia and Philippines their archipelagic nature restricts efficient deployment of effective renewable energy and consistent electricity distribution.
- **Lack of regulatory framework:** It is another major challenge when it comes to introducing and developing renewable energy projects. Brunei, for example, lacks sufficient policy support and regulatory framework for the deployment of sustainable energy solutions.
- **Lack of coordination:** In many developing countries, there is also less unity and transparency between the private sector and government entities which leads to delays and inefficiencies in implementing energy-related initiatives.
- **Complex bureaucracy:** Complex bureaucratic regulations in the energy sector further complicates investment in renewable energy solutions. For instance, Indonesia's State Electricity Company controls electricity transmission, distribution, and system operations, limiting opportunities for new investors.
- **Lack of public support:** This further adds to the numerous challenges faced by member states as promoting renewable energy awareness for environmental conservation and a sustainable future is often overlooked and is frequently considered a secondary concern. Unfortunately, there is a certain level of ignorance when it comes to global warming and climate change. (Team 2019).

Recommendations

- Green Investment - Policy makers and other development actors should prioritize investment in clean, reliable, and affordable energy as a pillar of development across the region. State actors need to allocate sufficient budgets to carry out projects to minimize energy consumption without affecting their economic growth. Public funding is one way in which ambitious energy projects can be executed.
- Public Awareness - In order to achieve sustainable development, nations and societies as a whole need to take the issue of climate change seriously. It is the state's responsibility to take action and develop and implement policies which are in the best interest of the citizens. For instance, Pakistan's prime minister Imran Khan envisioned a "clean green Pakistan" for which he introduced a reforestation project which aimed to plant 10 billion trees across Pakistan by 2030. Due to his "Billion Tree Tsunami" vision, Pakistan has achieved its UN Sustainable Development Goal for protecting the environment and holding off climate change a decade before the deadline. (Environment 2020)
- Public-Private Partnerships - Collaboration between the public and private sector is imperative and these models have proved a highly successful way of devising solutions to many of the sustainable development challenges. This sort of partnerships in the political and economic domains work in a way as the government is the direct link to the citizens while devising policies which are more suitable to their needs whereas, the private entities have the vision and resources to execute such policies. These effective partnerships have been utilized when developing Danish legislation for the green transition. They allow governments to enact regulations and programs with the support of the industry, while they ensure successful implementation and compliance.
- Reforms - Reforms tend to lead to a Sustainable Welfare State which not only maintains social services but also accounts for the sustainability of economic development. For example, The Danish Government has been quite successful in influencing the policy objectives of its multilateral partners and institutions. Their Energy Sector Management Assistance Programme (ESMAP) has successfully developed sustainable energy and fossil fuel reform. This program has been identified as a strategic focus in 'A Greener World for All'. (Evaluation of Denmark's Climate Change Funding to Developing Countries 2015).

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