

When mountains come to town. Alpine skiing in Denmark c. 1880–2018

By Christian Tolstrup Jensen

Abstract

This study shows how the historical development of facilities for alpine skiing in Denmark and their relation to nature can be divided into three phases. In all phases, nature in various forms served as an important foundation for the facilities' seductive appeal. In the first phase, c. 1880-1970, the facilities were based on what unaltered nature could offer and the relation to nature unquestioned. During this period skiing as a social activity in nature was established, which continued as a foundation in the second phase from the 1970s to the 1980s. However, in this second phase, a new interest in alpine skiing spurred by the ski tourism also led to construction of several hills with lifts in Denmark. The impacts of humans became obvious, but the hills' resemblance to real alpine nature also made even the Danish hills seductive. As the winters became warmer in 1990s, alpine facilities became artificial constructions, whose connection to nature, the stakeholders were nevertheless eager to preserve. The study thus confirms the importance of nature for alpine skiing stated in previous research on alpine skiing in e.g. Sweden and Switzerland with the nuance that it is possible to construct a version of this nature.

Keywords: alpine skiing, Denmark, facilities, nature, climate change

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Introduction

In 1889, a newspaper reported on Danes skiing in Ulvebakkerne north of Copenhagen. It went, according to the journalist, all right considering the sport's recent emergence. No one had been hurt and still more people took part. However, as it was "a bit small and monotonous", it would "be good if one could make some reasonably accessible point at which skiing could be carried out on a larger scale".¹ But how does one develop downhill skiing in a country without mountains?

In this paper, newspaper coverage, club publications, and archival sources show that local engagement in tandem with tourism, modern leisure and deindustrialisation were important for alpine skiing in Denmark marked by constructed facilities. Facilities on whose relation to nature, stakeholders have insisted even when having to be creative in defining what counts as nature.

Given the necessity usually ascribed to nature and national identity in historical research on alpine, insights from alternative cases such as Denmark are highly relevant for our understanding of these features.² In Denmark's neighbouring countries, Sweden and Norway, research has clearly shown the importance of skiing for the development of a national identity at the end of the 19th century. In Norway skiing became a national symbol after Fritjof Nansen crossed Greenland on skies in 1888. His feat contributed significantly to skiing as a symbol of pride for the nation still then in union with Sweden, where skiing too became a national symbol with connotations of freedom, nature and masculinity.³ Denmark however cannot be considered a part of this national winter culture. Here, skiing primarily was a leisure activity at the time carried out at home, or if possible, in Sweden, Norway and the Alps, where alpine skiing too was a matter of national identities as well as tourism. Among the visitors were also Danes,⁴ both in the resorts' exclusive era at start of the 20th

1 "Skiløb i Ulvebakkerne", *Randers Amtsavis Og Adressecontoirs Efterretninger*, 7/3–1889.

2 Mark Christopher John Stoddart, "Skiing Naturecultures and the Mountainous Sublime", in *Making Meaning out of Mountains* (Vancouver 2012), pp. 32–37.

3 Tor Bomann-Larsen, *Den evige sne: En skihistorie om Norge* (Oslo 1993), p. 29; Jan Samuelson, "Skidåkningen, mannen och det nationella", *Idrott, Historia och Samhälle: Svenska Idrotthistoriska Föreningens Årsskrift* 2001 (2002), pp. 68–84.

4 Cf. Kevin Krein, "Sport, Nature and Worldmaking" *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 2008:2 (vol. 3), pp. 285–301; Vlado Kotnik, "Sport, Landscape, and the National Identity: Representations of an Idealized Vision of Nationhood in Slovenian Skiing Telecasts", *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe*, 2007:2 (vol. 7), pp. 19–35; Bernard Cretaz, "Nouveaux Bricolages d'altitude: Fin, Recommençement et Épuisement Des Alpes", in Guy P. Marchal & Aram Mattioli (eds.), *Erfundene Schweiz: Konstruktionen Nationaler Identität* (Zürich 1992), pp. 60–61; Marchal, "Das 'Schweizeralpenland': Eine Imagologische Bastelei", in Guy P. Marchal, & Aram Mattioli (eds.), *Erfundene Schweiz: Konstruktionen Nationaler Identität*

century and as the number of visitors increased in the 1950s attracted by accessible slopes in the sun powered by lifts and other technological solutions.⁵ The investments not only democratised skiing. They also changed – and even harmed – the landscapes and the experience of skiing.⁶ Skiing on artificial snow was different from skiing on natural snow and the construction of roads, hotels and other additional infrastructure changed the landscapes surrounding the slopes dramatically.⁷ Some visitors even began to feel detached from the nature they saw as a crucial part of the alpine experience.⁸

In the end, research suggest that alpine skiing and the required facilities depend on a combination of investments in technology, a market, national traditions and an attractive alpine nature.⁹ By investigating the history of alpine facilities in Denmark, the present study tests the relevance of these requirements for alpine facilities. Can one construct not only an attractive infrastructure but also a seductive nature?

The seductive slope

The paper's theoretical assumption is based on the balancing of attraction and distance, which the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard termed seduction and defined as a game in which two parties become excited by a play of hints and promises.¹⁰ In the present case, the skiers at Danish facilities should be excited by their seductive qualities rather than the facilities' exact, lacking natural features, which would be revealed if a distance is not upheld.¹¹ The stakeholders should thus not try to compete with the Alps, but still provide a (seemingly) natural, aesthetic experience associated with the freedom and play in skiing.¹² In the words of geographer John Bale the stakeholders have to combine "dom-

(Zürich 1992), pp. 42–43.

- 5 mik., "Mekaniseret Skiløb" *Berlingske Tidende*, 1/3–1954. Andrew Denning, "From Sublime Landscapes to 'White Gold': How Skiing Transformed the Alps after 1930", *Environmental History*, 2014:1 (vol. 19), pp. 101–102; Robert Groß, "Uphill and Downhill Histories. How Winter Tourism Transformed Alpine Regions in Vorarlberg, Austria – 1930 to 1970", *Zeitschrift Für Tourismuswissenschaft*, 2017:1 (vol. 9), pp. 115–139; Robert Groß, "How Tourism Transformed an Alpine Valley", in Helmut Haberl et al. (eds.) *Social Ecology: Society-Nature Relations across Time and Space* (2016).
- 6 François Walter et al., *Bedrohliche und bedrohte Natur: Umweltgeschichte der Schweiz seit 1800* (Zürich 1996), pp. 73, 83, 142.
- 7 Blake Harrison, "Tracks across Vermont: Vermont Life and the Landscape of Downhill Skiing, 1946–1970" *Journal of Sport History* 2001:2 (vol. 28), p. 253–270; Jesse H. Ritner, "White Gold: Snowmaking, Resort Growth, and Skier Experience in the U.S. East, 1945–1971", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 2022:1 (vol. 29), pp. 111–225.
- 8 Denning, "From Sublime Landscapes to 'White Gold'", p. 103.
- 9 Thomas Busset and Marco Marcacci, "Comment Les Sports d'hiver Conquirent Les Alpes", in ed. Thomas Busset & Marco Marcacci (eds.), *Pour Une Histoire Des Sports Hiver* (Lausanne 2004), pp. 9–10; Susan Barton, *Healthy Living in the Alps: The Origins of Winter Tourism in Switzerland, 1860–1914* (Manchester 2008), chap. 7.
- 10 Rex Butler, *Jean Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real* (London 1999), pp. 86, 97.
- 11 Butler, *Jean Baudrillard*, p. 102.
- 12 Stoddart, "Skiing Naturecultures and the Mountainous Sublime", pp. 42–43.

inance with affection". Although constructing the slopes requires dominance of nature, they still have to signal an affection for the landscape.¹³ To their help, however, comes that playing with the contradictions of dominance and affection in itself can contribute to the seduction.¹⁴

The analysis follows in three parts each telling the story of alpine facilities in Denmark from the start in the 1880s to the 1970s, from the 1970s to the 1980s and from the 1990s until the present day. Thereby it shows how the facilities have become more attached to the cities, more dependent on artificial constructions but also more outspoken about their natural qualities.

Facilities in unaltered nature (1880s–1970s)

The first attempts in Denmark of alpine skiing in the 1880s attracted mainly the sport enthusiasts and left little lasting traces.¹⁵ Skiing only really took off in the early decades of the 20th century among in the upper echelons of the Danish society.¹⁶ Starting in Copenhagen around 1900, reports told of "fashionable" skiers from the "bourgeoisie" visiting Ulvebakkerne and Højnæsbjerg, two hills just outside of Copenhagen, which became the centrum of Danish ski sport.¹⁷ The class aspect was clear and manifested itself both in the lack of reports on competitions and in the reports on the skiers, who were nevertheless of interest to readers. Access to the hills, it seems, depended not on sportive talent but on the status of the persons, their class;¹⁸ a class, which also had the means to practice in real mountains in the exclusive winter resorts in Switzerland "preferred by members of the high society in Scandinavia" as an advert claimed.¹⁹ After all, the chances to ski in Denmark were rare as the newspapers carefully noted.²⁰

The exclusive status held sway as the trend spread to the rest of the country. A journalist in *Aalborg Stiftstidende* for instance in 1941 made the effort of

13 Sarah Pilgrim & Jules Pretty, "Nature and Culture: An Introduction", in *Nature and Culture* (London 2010), p. 4; Marcia Muelder Eaton, "The Beauty That Requires Health", in Joan Nassauer (ed.) *Placing Nature* (Washington 1997), pp. 100–101; John Bale, "Parks And Gardens: Metaphors for the Modern Places of Sport", in *Leisure/Tourism Geographies* (London 1999), pp. 50, 56.

14 Andrew Denning, "Alpine Modern: Central European Skiing and the Vernacularization of Cultural Modernism, 1900–1939", *Central European History* 2013:4 (vol. 46), pp. 850–90; Mark Christopher John Stoddart, *Making Meaning out of Mountains: Skiing, the Environment and Eco-Politics* (Vancouver 2008).

15 *Randers Amtsavis Og Adressecontours Efterretninger*, "Skiløb i Ulvebakkerne".

16 En., "En Stor Vinter-Sportsdag i Skoven", *B.T.*, 24/12–1923; Andr. H., 'Skiløb', *Nationaltidende*, 22/2–1901.

17 S., "Vintersport", *Jyllands-Posten*, 11/3–1909; Sp., "Kælkningen i Haeskoven", *Berlingske Tidende*, 3/2 1910; "Dagens Vintersport", *Riget*, 28/1–1912.

18 Hr. O., "En Kunstsøjterløberske", *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, 20/1–1922.

19 "Vinter i Schweiz", *Berlingske Tidende*, 13/12–1924.

20 m., "En Svanesang", sect. 2, *Slagelse-Posten*, 23/5–1898; "Med Kælle Og Ski", *Social-Demokraten*, 7/3–1915; S., "Vintersport"; Hr. O., "En Kunstsøjterløberske".

listing all the members of society who took part in this "social sport" of skiing.²¹ The spread however did not lead to a national skiing culture.²² The sport was very much kept local as reports referred to hills simply as the "ski hills" and pinpointed their location using nearby local landmarks or nicknames like "St. Moritz" near Tommerup on Funen.²³

Those without the means for skies or travels could instead practice the traditional activities of ice skating or sledging, attend the popular ski jumps as spectators or enjoy skiing through the media.²⁴ Cinemas all over the country offered plenty of short films featuring "dangerous downhill skiing" from Switzerland, Sweden and Norway or pictures from the competitions in Holmenkollen in Oslo.²⁵ Those in Copenhagen could also try themselves without the need to travel at least in 1937–38, when an indoor slope was built in the leisure park Tivoli in Copenhagen paid for by the mall Crome & Goldschmidt. Based on matting rather than real snow, just as it had been done in Berlin the year before, skiing was transferred to the city and made available for the masses and explicit consumption.²⁶

Outspoken commercial initiatives however were exceptional. Instead, the Danish slopes, based as they were on natural descents rather than permanent installations, were in principle open for all. That said, they required time and equipment, which made the pristine, snowy landscapes mainly accessible by the upper-class seeking access to a romantic nature meant for socialising rather than domination. Yet, the period also shows the first attempts to improve the natural conditions. In some cases, skiers simply marked the slopes and reserved them for skiing and sledges, in others, such as in 1910 at Højnæsbakken, some went further and wanted to cut down some trees to make the slope better.²⁷ The local authorities however were strictly opposed.²⁸ Then, a landscape for skiing was less worth than the value of the timber; a fact

21 "Stor Sportssøndag i Reblid", *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, 3/2–1941.

22 In 1940 the Danish Ski Federation had 2.000 members, of which a third was in Copenhagen; possibly explaining the limited interest in provincial hills. Fritzen, *Glimt fra skisportens verden*, pp. 9–10.

23 "Stor Sportssøndag i Reblid", *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, 3/2–1941; "Fint Skiføre i Rold Skov – Men Markerne Bare", *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, 2/3–1947; "Hirtshals har ikke mere nogen Skibakke", *Vendsyssel Tidende*, 10/1–1944; "Sne-Sporten Ved Tommerup", *Fyns Stiftstidende*, 24/3–1924; Brøch-, "Kolding Og Omegn", *Kolding Folkeblad*, 27/12–1923.

24 Henrik Fritzen, *Glimt fra skisportens verden*, pp. 11–12.

25 "Panorama Hafnia", *Dannebrog* (København), 11/2–1900; "Kosmorama", *Holstebro Dagblad*, 23/1–1920; "Kosmorama", *Fredericia Social-Demokrat*, 15/4–1910.

26 "Saa Står vi På Ski i Arenal", *Berlingske Tidende*, 7/12–1937; Annette R. Hofmann, "Bringing the Alps to the City: Early Indoor Winter Sports Events in the Modern City of the Twentieth Century", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 2012:14 (vol. 29), pp. 2050–66. The mall only made a hill once more, in 1966, which the Danish Ski Federation took over afterwards (prip), "Nu kommer skibakken ved Københavns Idrætspark", *Berlingske Tidende*, 12/12–1968; Rang, "Nylon afløser sne paa kunstig skibakke i Danmark", *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, 11/10–1966.

27 Sp., "Kælkningen i Hareskoven"; *Social-Demokraten*, "Med Kælle Og Ski".

28 Sp., "Kælkningen i Hareskoven".

than would change as alpine skiing underwent a democratisation in the 1970s.

Facilities in an adapted nature (1970s–1980s)

In the 1970s and 1980s, increased affluence democratised the access to winter holidays in Norway, Sweden and especially the Alps, which the newspapers highlighted as a popular winter holiday destination. The Danish ski clubs also started to arrange the Danish alpine championships there,²⁹ and the many visits to professional resorts created a new generation of alpine skiers. Instead of low-quality skiing, these were used to social leisure and skiing in an adapted nature. The snowy winters in Denmark in the late 1970s and 1980 only increased interest further (cf. Figure 1),³⁰ and gave Danish ski clubs the means and motivation to emulate the real mountains by investing in lifts for their local hills.³¹

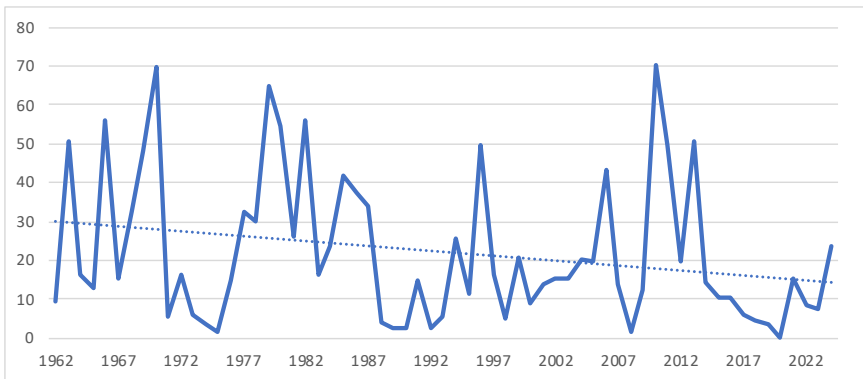


Figure 1: Days with snow cover in Denmark and a trendline. Source: The Danish Meteorological Institute.

When local politicians supported the facilities in hopes of increasing the prestige of the area³², new "creative" recreational areas, local development,³³ improved public health, job opportunities, and attractive use of former landfills,³⁴ skiing became a national topic. These arguments not only emphasized the im-

29 "Sneferien Giver Udbytte for Både Legeme Og Sjæl", *Svendborg Avis*, 2/3–1968; "Schweiz Venter Dansk Skivinter", *Sjællands Tidende*, 28/1–1970; "12 Danskere Glæder Sig Til at Løbe Ud i Den Kolde Sne – i Val d'Isere", *Aktuelt*, 8/1–1969; 'DM i Skiløb', *Aktuelt*, 3/1–1967.

30 Henrik Fritzen, *Glimt fra skisportens verden*, pp. 67, 74–75; Sten Rudi Thomsen, "Klar til skiløb – han venter på sne", *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*, 11/1–1981.

31 Jensen, "Skiklub Venter På Grønt Lys Til Skisport-Center", *Midtjyllands Avis*, 29/3–1984; svenn, "Stilling som et skicenter", *Aarhus Stifts-Tidende*, 25/8 1982; Andrew Denning, *Skiing into Modernity: A Cultural and Environmental History* (Berkeley 2014), pp. 129–31; VN, "Vi får nok sne til det", *Aktuelt*, 12/12–1971.

32 Mette Richardt, "Skibakke i Randers?", *Amtsavisen Randers*, 19/10–1996; "– Jeg har altid været imod et skiprojekt ved Lien", *Løgstør Avis*, 29/1–1999.

33 swol, 'Er det ikke noget for Bornholm?', *Dagbladet Bornholmeren*, 8/2 1991; joc, "Kommunen vil lave en skiløkke", *Dagbladet*, 12/3–1985; "Penge Til Tvebjerg", *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, 25/6 1984; Richardt, "Skibakke i Randers?"

34 Richardt, "Skibakke i Randers?"

portance of skiing for local life. They also made the facilities part of a national competition between municipalities for attention and eventually between facilities for the best terrain in Denmark. First out was a hill on Funen, which in 1970 claimed "Denmark's best terrain"; a title a hill on the island of Møn then claimed in 1972 before another hill on Funen in 1984 found that they had the best hill although it was neither "Garmisch, Chamoni or Kitzbühel".³⁵ In the same vein, everyone knew that the name, "The Gug Alps", given to the hills near the village of Gug in Northern Denmark, was just for fun and a continuation of tradition for local hills dating back to the early 20th century.³⁶

The references to the Alps combined with improved infrastructure and attention gave alpine facilities in Denmark an international and more professional touch. Yet, the claim for the best terrain never developed into a formal contest and no one suggested that the nature in Denmark could compete with the real mountains. Lifts did not change the fact that the Danish slopes were done in 14–15 seconds. To do serious slalom and national competitions one had to go abroad.³⁷ And finally, none of the hills were declared to be exclusively for alpine skiing at the cost of traditional activities such as sledding. The seductive quality of the slopes lay in the hints expressed in the subtle humour and the tongue-in-cheek competitions among the facilities and a social – but not too serious – skiing experience in the Danish nature.

The constructed nature

Adapting nature for facilities reached its pinnacle in 1986 when Hedeland Ski Centre, approximately 35 kilometres west of Copenhagen, opened to the public.³⁸ Compared to previous facilities, the new centre with its lift, snow cannons and a slope with a drop of 45 meters and a length of 242 meters was of a standard unheard of in Denmark.³⁹ Furthermore building the centre had not just meant buying the equipment but constructing the entire hill – an undertaking far beyond the capacity of the Danish ski milieu despite the increased interest.

35 "Skihejs På Møn – Eneste i Landet", *Ny Dag*, 4/2-1972; "Fynsk skiklub bygger Danmarks første lift", *Langelands Folkeblad*, 14/11-1970; -lot, "Nu åbner ski-liften", *Aarhus Stifts-Tidende*, 3/1-1987; Niels Abildtrup, "Håb om vinter. Odense Skiklub klar med skilift – be'r om sne", *Fyns Stiftstidende*, 16/12-1984.

36 wingo, 'På Ski i Gug Alper', *Aalborg Stiftstidende* (Aalen), 21 January 1984.

37 Cjr, 'Skiforbundet Nyder Godt Af de Seneste Års Vintervej'r', sec. 12, *Aktuelt*, 21/12-1981; *Langelands Folkeblad*, 'Fynsk skiklub'.

38 Eva Tønnesen & Jeppe Tønsberg, *Hedeland Naturpark*, (København 2017), p. 33; kim, "Ikke en Concorde", *Dagbladet Roskilde*, 9/1-1987.

39 Roskilde Skiklub Hedeland, "Om Hedeland Skicenter", <https://www.holdsport.net/klub/roskilde-skiklub-hedeland/sider/om-hedeland-skicenter-abningstider-og-priser>, 10/6-2025.



Figure 2: Hedeland Ski Centre with Flintesø in the front. By David162se – Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=67226101>.

The story of the hill began around 1970 with a debate on the use of gravel pits emptied by the construction boom following the Second World War. All over Denmark such pits were now used as illegal landfills and local populations and municipalities required national action. The answer came when the Ministry of Agriculture in 1974 suggested that gravel pits should be turned into "cultural landscapes",⁴⁰ and pointed the pit in Hedeland out for the pilot project. The plan was to provide a much-needed recreational area for the expanding suburbs around Copenhagen,⁴¹ improve the aesthetic and biological quality of the pit's bare and scarred "moon landscape" and eventually prevent the area from being used as landfill.⁴² Especially the prospect of getting areas for leisure caught the attention of the local municipalities and sport clubs.⁴³ The former feared an outright "overcrowding" of sport if no precautions were taken. In order to be admitted, sports therefore had to fit into the space's "recreational quality (...) achieved through nature and landscape planning" based on steppes and big forests, which was planned and planted, but no one would be able to tell in "50 years" as Claudio Pannicelli, head of Hedeland IS, put it.⁴⁴

Among the eager clubs was the ski club in Roskilde, which saw a chance to get a hill,⁴⁵ and luckily for the ski club, the planners believed that a ski hill

40 Tønnesen & Tønsberg, *Hedeland Naturpark*, p. 15.

41 Landbrugsministeriet, *Hedeland: rapport om og forslag til arealdisponering af et rekreativt område på de sammenhængende grusgravarealer i Greve, Høje-Taastrup og Roskilde kommuner* (København 1974), para. 1.2–1.3, 2.1.

42 Tønnesen & Tønsberg, *Hedeland Naturpark*, pp. 5, 8.

43 Anders Gilbro Nielsen et al., *Hedeland – Kulturligvis* (Roskilde 1985), p. B-29; Tønnesen and Tønsberg, *Hedeland Naturpark*, p. 5, 12–13.

44 Nielsen et al., *Hedeland – Kulturligvis*, p. B-13.

45 Claudio Pannicelli, "Hedeland – Intentioner og resultater", *Stads & Havneingeniøren: Fagblad for Teknik og Miljø*, 1984:1 (vol. 75), pp. 5–6; Johannes Bach Rasmussen, *I/S Hedeland*

could support both nature and sport. In the eyes of the architect, a hill fitted perfectly with the idea of a leisure landscape as it was a "momentous work" rather than a sports facility,⁴⁶ and as skiing as such was a "common" activity that did not exclude other uses in the same way as a football with its pitch or go-kart with its track.⁴⁷ The club also helped the fit by accepting that the hill would not get a slope comparable to a blue grade with a steep drop at the end.⁴⁸ Instead, the hill received a less steep, gradual slope. This form was not perfect for skiing but fitted the landscape and prevented landslides.⁴⁹ Resistance would probably have been futile anyway. A suggestion from the club to make the hill bigger and better for competitions in 1991 was promptly rejected on the grounds that such a change would distort the balance between the hill and the surrounding landscape.⁵⁰

In the years after its construction, the centre became known as the "ski hill" (Skibakken) in line with the naming tradition used in the 1940s. The setting, too, was more about the feeling than the challenge. As a journalist reported in 1997: "the snow almost looked like the real deal and the feeling of sitting in the lift with one's new skis was just as real on this hill as it would have been in the French Alps".⁵¹ The new hill came closer to the real deal, but its focus on beginners and warming up people going on holiday also fit with the tradition for skiing as a form social activity. News reports on Hedeland underlined the social aspect further by embedding skiing in a range of activities on offer for the surrounding communities.⁵² Similarly, the ski club has focused on making the hill more accessible to casual visitors rather than developing its competitive qualities.⁵³ Although important as a ski facility, the ski centre in Hedeland is just as much a carefully designed "natural" space that, like a park, can be used for all sorts of activities.⁵⁴ The motivation for the centre should thus be

25 år (Høje Tåstrup 2003), pp. 28–29; Landbrugsministeriet, *Hedeland*, fig. 18, 19.

46 Rasmussen, *I/S Hedeland 25 år*, p. 28.

47 Nielsen et al., *Hedeland – Kulturligvis*, pp. B-12, B-15.

48 Tønnesen & Tønsberg, *Hedeland Naturpark*, pp. 33–34; Roskilde Skiklub Hedeland, 'Om Hedeland Skicenter'.

49 Klaus Truesen, *Roskilde Skiklub Hedeland, 25 år* (Roskilde 2001), p. 9; Tønnesen and Tønsberg, *Hedeland Naturpark*, p. 33.

50 Hop, "Utopi med udvidelse af skibakken" *Roskilde Dagblad*, 18/6 1991.

51 Emilie Normann, "Skifolket Giver Den En På Bakken" *Det Fri Aktuelt*, 8/1 1997.

52 pan, "Ny villaby med mange kvaliteter", *Dagbladet Roskilde*, 4/7 1985; Martin Hartung, 'Et nyt fristed til københavnere', sec. 3, *Berlingske Tidende*, 1/3 1982; Rasmussen, *I/S Hedeland 25 år*, p. 28.

53 Pauli Andersen, *Roskilde Skiklub 40 år: jubilæumsskrift i anledningen af Roskilde Skiklubs 40 års jubilæum fra 1976–2016* (Roskilde, 2016).

54 Bale, "Parks And Gardens", p. 56; John Bale, *Sports Geography* (London 2008), fig. 7.2; Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (Berkeley 2012), tbl. 2; John Lauermaann, "Sports and the American Landscape", in Chris W. Post, Alyson L. Greiner & Geoffrey L. Buckley (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the American Landscape* (London 2023).

seen, not least, in the tradition of parks instrumentalised by Western businesses and public authorities since the early 20th century to sustain the well-being of employees and inhabitants rather than the ideal sport performance.⁵⁵

Interestingly, the only serious attempt to make a slope of international significance based on a natural hill came in 1986, the year Hedeland also opened. The proponent was a ski club in Silkeborg that proposed the construction of slopes, a lift and facilities for artificial snow at Himmelbjerget, the only natural slope in Denmark that could compete with facilities in Sweden and Germany. As the plans for Himmelbjerget came into conflict with existing protected nature, they never materialised. The increased interest in alpine skiing was not sufficient to seduce the Danish conservation authorities.⁵⁶ Naturally steep slopes in Denmark were few and considered more valuable than the planned facilities. The only way forward for alpine facilities was as constructed hills.

Summing up, the main seductive quality of the Danish alpine facilities in the 1970s and 1980s amounted to no less but also no more than their resemblance to the mountains, which the skiers met on their vacations; a fact that the stakeholders acknowledged both explicitly and through humour, which allowed them to maintain an affection, playfulness, and social character in the facilities' relation to nature. These qualities were also expressed in Hedeland, although its impressive landmark was a further seductive quality. Hedeland's nature was far from untouched and much smaller than real mountains, but its impressive character imbued the hill with a seductive sense of awe. As the final section shows, such quality can exist even in completely artificial structures; a type of facility that became increasingly common as the Danish winters became warmer during the 1990s (cf. Figure 1).

Artificial facilities (1990s–)

In the 1990s, the Danes continued going to the Alps, but despite the warm winters, those who stayed at home still could ski thanks to new artificial facilities without the need of snow and freezing temperatures. These were much bigger than the one built in the 1937 and although they did not come near the Alps in size, they were equal to most other Danish hills.

The first of the new facilities opened in 1994 in the amusement park Søhøjlandet near Silkeborg. The location within an amusement park, a com-

55 Helena Chance, "Mobilising the Modern Industrial Landscape for Sports and Leisure in the Early Twentieth Century", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 2012:11 (vol. 29), p. 1600–1625; Helena Chance, "Happy Healthy Workers Are the World's Best': Factory Landscapes, Leisure and the Model Employee", in *The Factory in a Garden* (Manchester 2017); Hasan Doğan, "Modern Life-Building as a Biopower Strategy: Developing Sports Spaces in Urban, Rural and Industrial Areas in Turkey", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 2024:7 (vol. 41), pp. 616–52.

56 Brian Jensen, "Skisports-center på Himmelbjerget", *Midtjyllands Avis*, 13/12–1986; Terje Nordberg, "Danmarks falske bakke", *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*, 31/10–1992.

mercial entity, was a novelty in the history of Danish alpine facilities, but fitted well with the increased number of amusement parks in Europe in the 1990s and the inclusion of skiing as an activity.⁵⁷ Søhøjlandet for instance in addition to skiing offered bowling, indoor swimming, and billiards.⁵⁸ The tradition for seeing skiing as a social activity for all thus lived on successfully in this new commercial setting, which seemed necessary for success.⁵⁹ After all, the slope in Søhøjlandet was not the only attempt to make an artificial hill in the 1990s and early 2000s, but it was the only one combined with other activities and the only success.⁶⁰

Still, a relation to nature was an important seductive point in the news reports. Although one had to "imagine the snow", the surface was "close to the natural one",⁶¹ and according to a journalist the guests could "for 20 seconds (...) sense Gross Glochner and hear the angels sing about the coming happy winter holidays."⁶² Similarly, another reporter overcame her initial scepticism and "surrendered" to the illusions and the wind biting her cheeks.⁶³

The slope in Søhøjlandet closed in 2018 and based on market demand, it was replaced by a BMX-trail. Elsewhere, the interest in alpine skiing persisted as Amager Hill (Amager bakke) in Copenhagen opened the same year. Instead of combining amusement parks and skiing, this hill was the outcome of a merger of industrial productions with informal, self-organised activities in spectacularly designed facilities in a "post-industrial" city.⁶⁴

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- 57 S. Anton Clavé, "Globalization of the Theme Park Industry", in *The Global Theme Park Industry* (2007), p. 70; S. Anton Clavé, "The Social Origins of the Theme Park Concept", in *The Global Theme Park Industry* (2007), p. 5; Karen Hyldgaard, "På ski hele året i Jylland", sec. 3, *Århus Stiftstidende*, 21/5-1994.
- 58 'Det alpine Søhøjland', *Midtjyllands Avis*, 18/5-1995.
- 59 RB, 'Alpint skicenter i Midtjylland på vej', *Århus Stiftstidende*, 5/2-1994; Hyldgaard, 'På ski hele året i Jylland'.
- 60 A project for an artificial hill in Frederikshavn in Northern Jutland around 2002-2003 came far in the planning but never materialised and neither did a project in Aalborg in the early 1990s (Hans Christensen, "Svenske og norske investorer slås om skicenter", sec. 2, *Nordjyske Stiftstidende*, 11/2 2003; "På ski i Aalborg", sec. 2, *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, 5/12-1992.) In 2016, Roskilde Skiklub presented various ideas for the future of its alpine centre in Hedeland including adding a layer that would make the hill useful even in the summer (Andersen, *Roskilde Skiklub 40 år*).
- 61 'Skitur til Silkeborg', *Fjerritslev Avis*, 5/2-1994; Hyldgaard, 'På ski hele året i Jylland'.
- 62 Bent Attrup, '20 sekunder med englesang', sec. 3, *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, 19/11-1994; 'pi, '- Det er bare sjovt', *Midtjyllands Avis*, 2/10-1994.
- 63 Louise Kjærgaard, "Slalom på opvaskeborsten", sec. 3, *Morgenposten Fyens Stiftstidende*, 15/10-1994.
- 64 Michael T. Friedman et al., "Sport and the Façade of Redevelopment in the Postindustrial City", *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 2004:2 (vol. 21), pp. 119-39; Jeremy Howell, "Manufacturing Experiences: Urban Development, Sport and Recreation", *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 2005:1-2 (vol. 1), pp. 56-68; Karolina Taraszkiwicz & Lucyna Nyka, "Role of Sports Facilities in the Process of Revitalization of Brownfields", *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 2017:4 (vol. 245); Peter Clark et al., eds., *Sport, Recreation and Green Space in the European City* (Helsinki, 2009); Pierre-Olaf Schut, "Outdoor Activities and Urbanization: A Constant Bridging Throughout the Twentieth Century in France", *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 2017:14 (vol. 34), p. 1536; Franz Konstantin Fuss, "Design of Sports Facilities", in *Routledge Handbook of Sports Technology*

The planning for Amager Hill had begun in 2009, when the publicly owned renovation company for the Copenhagen area, Amager Ressource Center (ARC), started planning for a new incineration plant. In addition to the incineration facilities, the new plant would also include a ski slope and hiking paths on top of the mountain-shaped construction designed by the renowned architect firm Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG).⁶⁵ Eight years later the plant was finished and the following year, 2018, the recreational facilities were completed too and opened to the public.

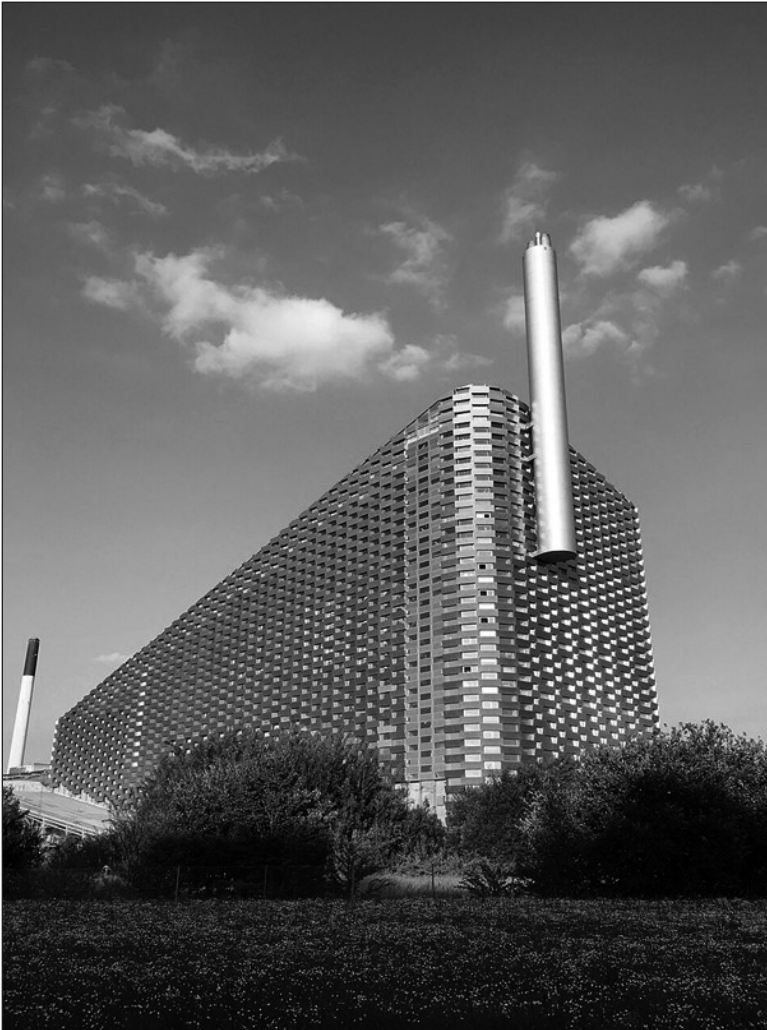


Figure 3: Amager Hill. The slope starts at the top and its end is visible in the lower left corner. By Orfjus – Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=60126844>

and *Engineering* (London 2013), p. 480.
 65 Magnus Bredsdorff & Sanne Wittrup, "Sådan blev Amager Bakke alligevel gigantisk", *Ingeniøren*, <https://ing.dk/artikel/saadan-blev-amager-bakke-alligevel-gigantisk>, 29/8–2025

One thing remained unchanged, however: the importance of nature. From the start nature was a seductive quality of the building, whose shape "should appear as a mountain with its top covered in snow".⁶⁶ Indeed, the plant should not just look like a mountain but be a "new mountain";⁶⁷ "the mountain [Copenhagen] never got" – as if Copenhagen at some point had unfairly missed a chance to get a mountain and ARC would now rectify this with its "architectonic landmark".⁶⁸ The references to snow and mountains made skiing an obvious association, but whereas the sport in the research is usually depicted as a contrast to nature, the addition of a ski slope in this case reinforced the seductive natural quality of the hill's environment.⁶⁹

Specifically, the "nature" was a hybrid of green grass and green trees, with the slope in the middle made out of a green plastic material. This ran counter to the typically white slope but linked the slope well to the "exciting green landscape with a high degree of biodiversity" on the roof.⁷⁰ In this urban city park, a whole new natural environment was created, optimized for biodiversity and activities. In addition to skiing, visitors could climb or hike in the green landscape.⁷¹ In short: the visitors should be seduced by the exciting new, unknown, seemingly natural landscapes. The aim was to make a facility marked by a "hedonistic sustainability",⁷² after all according the architect: "a sustainable city is not only better for the environment – it is also more enjoyable for the lives of its citizens."⁷³ Similar ideas have previously been articulated in e.g. Disney Land and other amusement parks, which have used technology to present themselves as pleasurable, generic utopias based on technological advances.⁷⁴

66 Københavns Kommune, *Kraftværkshalvøen: Lokalplan Nr. 464 Med Tillæg Nr. 1*, (København 2016), p. 9.

67 Patrik Gustavsson, *Rekreative arealer på Amager bakke* (København 2013), p. 9.

68 Gustavsson, *Rekreative arealer*, p. 19; Københavns Kommune, *Kraftværkshalvøen*, p. 9.

69 Denning, "From Sublime Landscapes to 'White Gold'", p. 103.

70 Nothing depends on the addition of real snow, which would only add "an additional dimension to the experience" (Gustavsson, *Rekreative arealer*, p. 13; "Tagpark", ARC, <https://a-r-c.dk/amager-bakke/groen-rekreativ-tagpark/>, 1/6–2025).

71 And in the case that visitors could not find their own way, ten predefined paths were available. "Tagpark" 1/6–2025.

72 Ashwini Ramesh Kumar, "The CopenHill Energy Plant by BIG: Bedrock for Social Life", RTF | Rethinking The Future, <https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com/case-studies/a6451-the-copenhill-energy-plant-by-big-bedrock-for-social-life/>, 18/3–2022.

73 'CopenHill: The Story of BIG's Iconic Waste-to-Energy Plant', ArchDaily, <https://www.archdaily.com/925966/copenhill-the-story-of-bigs-iconic-waste-to-energy-plant>, 29/8–2025

74 *Inside A Sustainable Power Plant With A Ski Slope On Its Roof*, Architectural Digest, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRr6_bORSMs, 29/8–2025; Michèle Mattelart and Edward Ball, "World's Fairs and Theme Parks", in Alexander Wilson (ed.), *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* (Ontario 1991); Harry S Truman, "Nuclear Plants and Other Environmental Architectures", in Alexander Wilson (ed.), *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* (Ontario 1991).



Figure 4: Skiing at Amager Hill. By Kallerna – Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amager_Bakke_1.jpg

But even a hedonistic utopia needed to attract “customers” to be economically sustainable.⁷⁵ Here too the nature played a central role in the seduction of tourists and locals promising a skiing experience, which should be casual but “as a minimum (...) equal to the one, they would get at another ski hill”.⁷⁶ The requirement that an artificial slope should be equivalent to its natural counterparts was a radically different view of the quality of artificial nature compared to previous facilities in Denmark. The commercial, professional approach at Amager Hill meant that visitors were not just informed about the degrees of the descents and how these corresponded to green, blue and red slopes in the colour grading system used at traditional facilities.⁷⁷ They were also informed about how the “world’s leading ski centre designers” had been part of the design process using their experience from nature-based facilities in e.g. Åre in Sweden and Beaver Creek in Colorado, USA. The building in short was “optimised” for skiing to a degree which even led the Danish Skiing Federation to dream about elite events.⁷⁸ Hosting international events meant that the

75 Gustavsson, *Rekreative arealer*, p. 62; Københavns Kommune, *Kraftværkshalvøen*, p. 9. Along the same line both HK, a Danish white-collar union, and Wonderful Copenhagen, the local tourist association, support the project due to the possibility for increased tourism and more jobs in Copenhagen (Kim Simonsen, “Vedr. Amager Bakke” (København, 25/1–2012; Peter R. Hansen & Lone Alletorp Callard, “Vedrørende Skicenter Amager Bakke” (København, 15/3–2012.)

76 Københavns Kommune, *Kraftværkshalvøen*, p. 9; Gustavsson, *Rekreative arealer*, p. 4, 9.

77 Gustavsson, *Rekreative arealer*, p. 11.

78 ‘Tagpark’ 1/6 2025; Gustavsson, *Rekreative arealer*, p. 19.

facility's "nature" had to seduce international stakeholders and convince them of giving up slopes based on a traditional landscape in favour of the alternative nature of Amager Hill. Danish hills had never claimed to be equal to the real mountains and for the leisure skiers they only wanted to be just as good. But for elite events, Amager Hill would have to be better.⁷⁹

As of 2025, Amager Hill has yet to host an international sport event. The international attention has so far mainly come from architects, energy planners and media. The alpine facility has featured heavily in their reports too, albeit with a focus more often on the experience of skiing on an incineration plant than the quality of the slope.⁸⁰ In the end, alpine facilities in Denmark do support the national image of Denmark if also more as an environmental frontrunner through technology than a winter sport nation.⁸¹

Summing up, the most recent period of alpine facilities in Denmark is marked by a commercialisation and professionalisation of the alpine facilities. This process changed the seductive quality of the facilities radically by making skiing one of several leisure activities on offer for the customers.

Nevertheless, nature had a central, albeit unclear, relationship to the slopes. On the one hand, the artificial base was a huge economic advantage. After all, the absence of nature enabled skiing all year round. On the other hand, skiers sought an experience characterized by nature – even if it required them to close their eyes and rely on their tactile senses or the fantastic, extraordinarily artificial nature of Amager Hill, where skiing was the natural element in an unnatural construction.⁸²

Conclusion

The history of alpine facilities in Denmark has developed in three main phases: the simple slope with no infrastructure (1880s–1970s), the adapted nature based on snow produced naturally or with snow cannons (1970s–1980s), and, since the 1990s, the completely artificial facility. Interestingly, the shifts between the phases can mainly be explained by larger trends and developments in society, such as the development of winter tourism in the 1970s and the post-industrial city in the 2000s rather than efforts within the ski milieu. Finally, it is

79 The federation therefore also saw the hill as a training and educational facility. Kenneth Bøggild, "Vedrørende Rekreative Aktiviteter På Amager Bakke" (København, 2013).

80 e.g. Kumar, "The CopenHill Energy Plant by BIG"; The Tim Traveller, *Why Copenhagen Put A Ski Slope On A Power Plant*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21ijLduWonw>, 29/8 2025; City Beautiful, *An Introduction to District Heating Systems*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8KhznsoKIk>, 29/8 2025; WIRED UK, *Inside CopenHill: The Clean Energy Plant with Its Own Ski Slope*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOqocjzh6EM>, 29/8 2025; ArchDaily, "CopenHill"; MW, "CopenHill – The Sustainable Model For Future Waste Projects?", Sustainable Waste Management, <https://viablealternativenenergy.com/copenhill-sustainable-waste-to-energy/>, 12/12–2020.

81 Bo Fritzbøger, *Sustainable Development of Denmark in the World, 1970–2020: A Critical Introduction* (London 2022), p. 283–84.

82 Stoddart, "Skiing Naturecultures and the Mountainous Sublime", p. 62.

noteworthy that the facilities in the whole period have been marked by two steady seductive traits: the social character of skiing and its relation to nature.

To be specific, the initial phase of alpine facilities in Denmark (c. 1880s – 1970s) was based on hills with no manmade infrastructure, but it is nevertheless important for a history of facilities, as it shows the long social history of alpine skiing in Denmark – if also mainly for the upper echelons of society. Skiing was not, as in the case of e.g. Norway, Sweden and Switzerland,⁸³ a matter of national identity but limited to those with the means and time for leisure. This lack of cultural and national elements makes Denmark a case rather different from the development of alpine skiing and skiing in general. Nature, too, however was important in Denmark as the rare heavy snowfalls were required for altering well-known local landscapes into seductive ski facilities.

The second phase occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, when winter tourism became a mass phenomenon, and families and friends became interested in either maintaining their skills or training at home before the vacation. The interest in skiing opened for investments in skiing facilities in Denmark, especially in lifts and – if not to optimise, then at least to make nature more accessible in line with the aim of skiing as a social activity. The new facilities were never meant as a replacement for the mountains but rather as spaces for preparing together before going on holiday. In this period, however, we also see an increase in comparisons between Danish nature and real mountains. The aim was never to compete with these, but tongue-in-cheek references show an attempt to project the sensations of the real mountains onto the Danish conditions in a playful, affectionate manner. Importantly, the most lasting investment – the ski hill in Hedeland – was not made possible by the increased interest alone but because skiing fitted with the aim of constructing a new ‘natural’ landscape in a former gravel pit. The decision-makers were not mainly interested in skiing as a sport but as an asset in the construction of new landscapes in areas that had formerly been used for the extraction of natural resources.

The role of nature as a projection or illusion of the Alps continued into the 1990s, when international trends related to the construction of amusement parks with artificial skiing inspired the construction of artificial facilities. Now skiing no longer provided an experience of Danish nature, and what was left was the imagination of the Alps – or the experience of a new form of man-made nature in the case of the incineration plant Amager Hill. Whereas skiing had usually been an alien element in nature despite the discourse of proximity between it and nature, skiing there became an integral part of the plant’s seductive, but also artificial, nature. Drawing on the correlation between na-

⁸³ Crettaz, "Nouveaux Bricolages d'altitude. Fin, Recommencement et Épuisement Des Alpes", pp. 60–61; Marchal, "Das 'Schweizeralpenland'", pp. 42–43.

ture and skiing suggested in previous research on alpine skiing,⁸⁴ the logic of Amager Hill seems to be that what one experiences while skiing is a form of nature.

As with Hedeland, the construction of facilities based completely on artificial materials in the most recent history was neither controlled nor initiated by ski organisations. Instead, alpine skiing was seen as an economic asset and, further, in the case of Amager Hill, a tool for presenting an incineration plant as a green, natural cityscape. Thus, in the Danish case, technology has been driving the development of alpine facilities.⁸⁵ The aim of making skiing social, however, remained – even if the users were now framed as customers in the new commercially driven facilities. The stability of the new facilities came at a price higher than the simple, natural facilities which they replaced.

Summing up, alpine facilities in Denmark, on the one hand, run counter to most of the trends in research on alpine facilities and sport facilities in general. The facilities are usually small, unprofessional, and their sportive value is limited. Unusually for a sport facility, alpine facilities in Denmark have historically not been made to host competitions and find winners.⁸⁶ Thereby, the facilities have been exempted from all forms of sportification processes, attempts to reach the sublime skiing experience, and matters of national identity.⁸⁷ On the other hand, the facilities are there and tell the story of a development of sport facilities dependent on sport for all, leisure, landscape development, and not least the intertwining of sport with the trends in wider society.

The future of (manmade) alpine facilities

From the perspective of alpine skiers in Denmark, artificial nature is necessary for facilities in Denmark to function, and although Denmark loses freezing temperatures quicker than most countries,⁸⁸ the trend is global, and Denmark maybe just the frontrunner.

From the perspective of nature, the study shows that we still want to be seduced by it even when living in cities.⁸⁹ Especially the most recent history of Danish alpine facilities shows how the facilities have become more advanced in their attempt to retain both easy access to skiing and an experience of nature. Easy access has required the inclusion of more manmade infrastructure and, in turn, an increased effort to maintain a link to nature. In the end the

84 Denning, "From Sublime Landscapes to 'White Gold'", p. 103.

85 Denning, "From Sublime Landscapes to 'White Gold'", pp. 101–2.

86 Jan Ove Tangen, "Økologiske Omgivelser Som Problem" in *Hvordan Er Idrett Mulig? Skisse Til En Idrettsosologi* (Oslo 2004), p. 196. At least it is only most recently that the federation has discussed the possibility of hosting international competitions in Denmark.

87 Bent Flyvbjerg, "What You Should Know about Megaprojects and Why: An Overview", *Project Management Journal* 2014:2 (vol. 45), pp. 6–19.

88 Damsbo, "Vinteren er helt forandret".

89 Cf. seduction as a process accompanied by an impossibility of determining "whether it is we who lead the other or the other who leads us" (Butler, *Jean Baudrillard*, p. 73.)

Alps and Amager Hill are not that different. Both are heavily impacted by humans and take on a cyborg character mixing natural elements with man-made technology.⁹⁰

But mixing a nature-dependent sport with urban technology requires compromises and for centuries it has been *comme il faut* to see humanity as leading nature, forming it according to our needs including sport activities.⁹¹ The stakeholders' efforts to make their facilities appear natural in the case of Denmark however indicate the opposite. We want, although in a warped way, to maintain this seductive image of nature as something awesome – even when it is us who construct the 'nature.'

On the bright side, keeping up the seductive nature would allow us to maintain a relationship with nature even in urban settings and help us understand the position of human beings as part of nature. Also, the development in Denmark has not been marked by protests due to fears of destroyed nature as in other cases.⁹² Yet, Baudrillard would probably be sceptical of the qualities of a seductive manmade nature. After all, seduction in contemporary society is "no more than an empty declaration formed of simulated concept".⁹³ Time spent in nature is good for health,⁹⁴ but what if the nature is based on the designed nature of Amager Hill?

Seduced by nature, we might not recognise that nature is genuinely indifferent, as seduction requires that "the secret [of pretended indifference] must not be broken on pain of falling back into a banal history".⁹⁵ In the end, as much as we want to strike a balance between control and being seduced by nature, it is always nature that leads us.⁹⁶

90 Mark Christopher & John Stoddart, "Cyborg Skiers and Snowy Collectives", in *Making Meaning out of Mountains* (Vancouver 2012), pp. 100–103.

91 Tangen, "Økologiske Omgivelser Som Problem" p. 198–202; Jan Ove Tangen, "Forholdet mellem sosiale rom, tause budskap og skjult læring", in Jan Ove Tangen & Kolbjørn Rafoss (eds.), *Kampen om idrettsanleggene: Planlegging, politikk og bruk* (Oslo 2009), p. 189.

92 Qi Chen & Pearl Ann Reichwein, "The Village Lake Louise Controversy: Ski Resort Planning, Civil Activism, and the Environmental Politics of Banff National Park, 1964–1979", *Sport History Review* 2016:1 (vol. 47), pp. 90–110.

93 Butler, *Jean Baudrillard*, pp. 106, 173–174.

94 Jules Pretty and Sarah Pilgrim, "Nature and Culture: Looking to the Future for Human-Environment Systems", in *Nature and Culture* (London 2010), pp. 257–62.

95 Butler, *Jean Baudrillard*, p. 114.

96 Butler, *Jean Baudrillard*, p. 111.