

REPORT

PROFILE 2017 DEPARTMENT OF ENGINEERING

RESEARCH
TECHNOLOGY
IMPACT

DAILY MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION 2017

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Engineering Deep Tech Innovations



As engineers, we strive to build problem-solving technology that benefits not only individuals and businesses, but also society in general. And just like last year, deep tech innovations continue to be of very high priority for us. It is almost as highly prioritised as the two core pillars of any elite university – education and research.

During the short history of engineering at Aarhus University, we have aspired to a standard of excellence that has required a strong innovation culture. This has been essential to the development of research activities within technological fields that address some of the global grand challenges the world is facing today. Our early multidisciplinary focus, anchored in deep engineering disciplines, has enabled us to continue the rapidly increasing number of new research and innovation activities at both national and European levels.

In the past year, we have involved ourselves in a record-breaking 11 new EU-funded projects and 11 new national Innovation Fund Denmark projects. And we have produced 349 peer-reviewed publications.

In 2017, we will keep increasing our effort to get to the next level. We are continuously starting up new activities e.g. within the strategic growth technology domains currently frequently referred to as the fourth industrial revolution or Industry 4.0: machine intelligence and Big Data analytics, hyper-connectivity and Internet

of Things, cyber-physical systems, cloud computing, next-generation computing hardware, robotics and nanomaterials, building smart products and even facilitating smart industries. We anticipate that these technologies will keep growing and radically impact business sectors like manufacturing, energy, healthcare and agriculture, including food and water.

Such disruptive changes pose challenges for engineering universities too and, in our attempt to break new ground, we are working hard to solve these challenges. We are investing quite aggressively in new research staff, new facilities and new engineering educational programmes. We continue to strive for increased commercial impact of our research and for general economically viable knowledge transfer to industry.

Above all, however, we continue the dream of actively driving the foundation for a better world where technology equals positive impact.

I am proud to highlight some of our latest engineering projects. They are all examples of innovation at the heart of the global megatrends that drive the transformation of society.

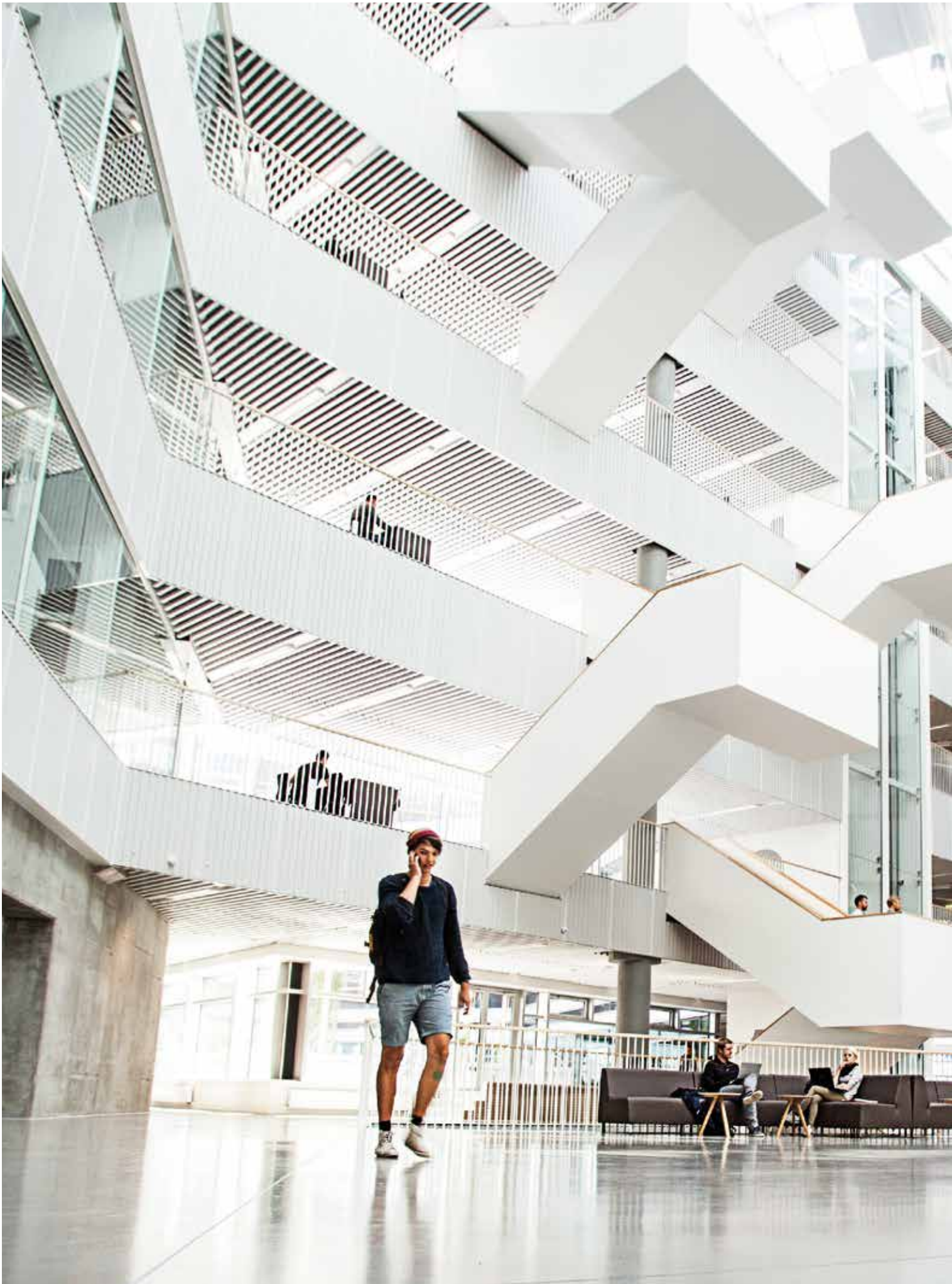
Thomas S. Toftegaard,
Head of Department of Engineering
Aarhus University

”The Department of Engineering at Aarhus University creates innovative and sustainable solutions to some of the major problems facing humanity. We keep a strong focus on technology’s impact throughout all our engineering activities – in deep research, applied and strategic research, partnerships with industry, education, development of PhD programmes, and in our public sector consultancy services.”

Thomas S. Toftegaard,
Head of Department of Engineering

ENGINEERING DISCIPLINES

- **Biological** Engineering
- **Chemical** Engineering
- **Civil** Engineering
- **Architectural** Engineering
- **Electrical** Engineering
- **Computer** Engineering
- **Mechanical** Engineering



AU Engineering, Campus Navitas, Aarhus

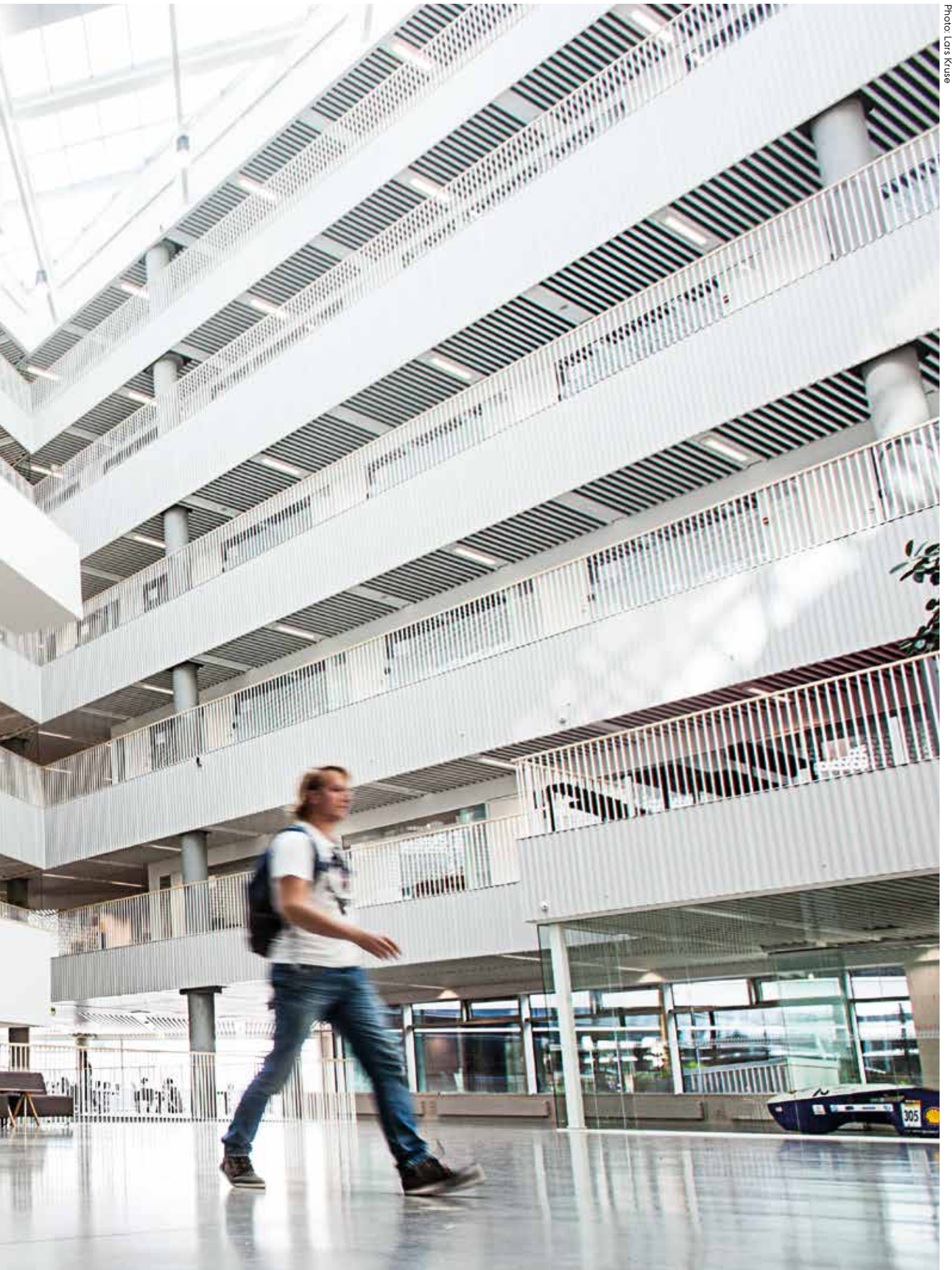


Photo: Lars Kruse

MACHINE INTELLIGENCE

project facts

TITLE

Spintronic-Photonic Integrated Circuit Platform for Novel Electronics

SCHEDULE

2016–2019

PARTNERS

Radboud University
SpinTEC
imec
QuantumWise

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 25 million
Horizon 2020, FET OPEN

CONTACT

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Magnetic memory in electronics of the future

Aarhus University researchers are starting a major European research project. The aim is to develop new technology for the electronics of the future.

With a European Union (EU) grant of more than DKK 25 million, researchers will develop a completely new technology for the computer chips of the future.

The technology is expected to lead to radical new opportunities for storing data and thereby designing computers with very efficient and fast memories in magnetic layers.

"Today, we already have magnetic memory on a chip. This is very promising for energy efficient computing, as no power is

required to retain the data. However, writing the data electronically still requires a high energy. Recent research shows that short laser pulses can be used to write data in magnetic layers at much lower energy and much higher speed. Our aim is to use this idea to create a novel optically switched magnetic memory on chip," says Associate Professor Martijn Heck.

Pioneer research in computer technology

The grant is the prestigious Future and Emerging Technologies (FET) actions

under Horizon 2020 – the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. FET actions only support pioneer research in ground-breaking new lines of technology that can boost Europe's global competitive advantage.

"The grant helps to put the seal of approval on Aarhus University as an important player in the elite engineering universities. We hope to create new knowledge that can benefit the technological advancement in Europe," says Martijn Heck.

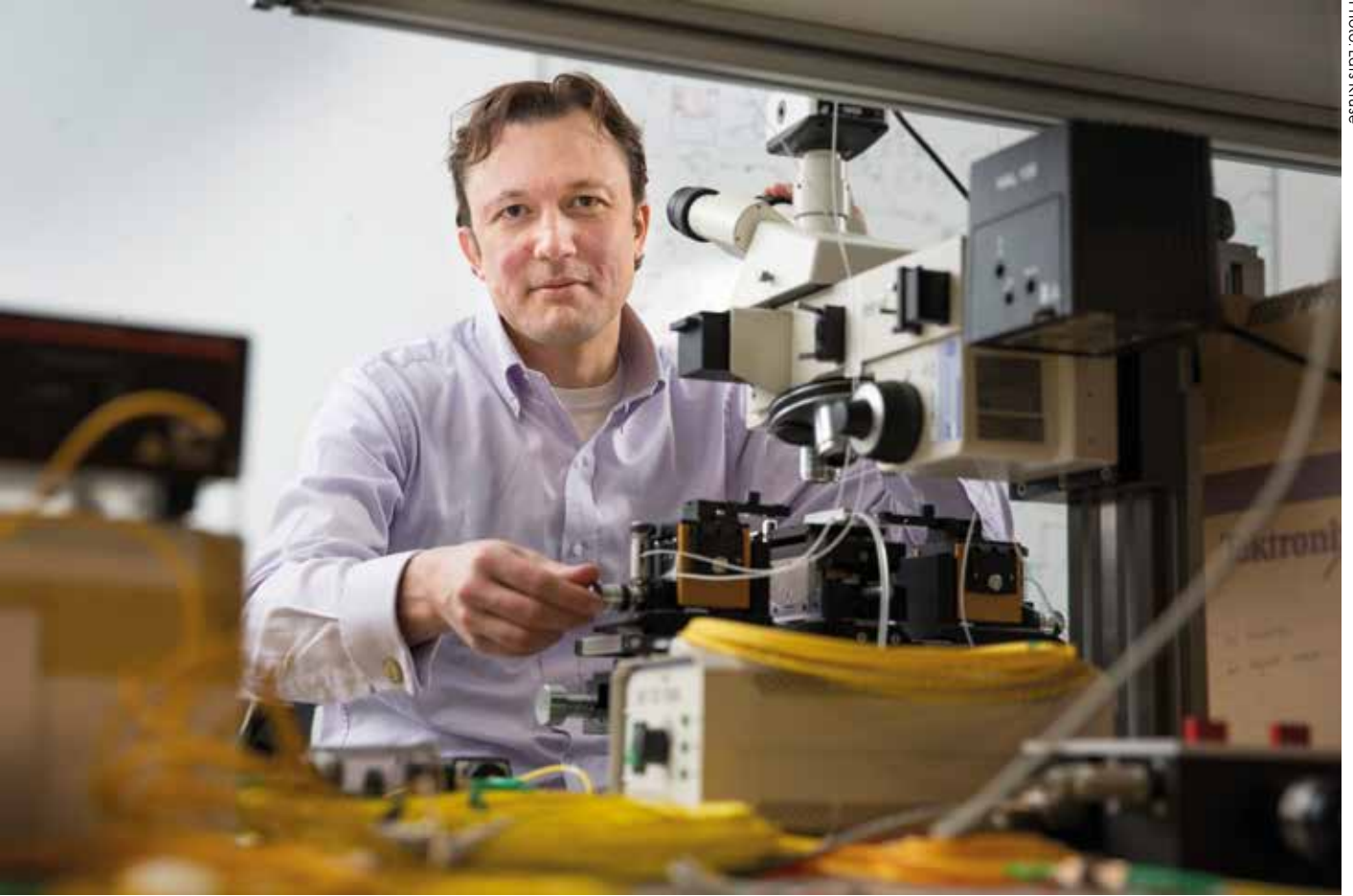


Photo: Lars Kruse

In the coming years, researchers will develop new technology that can accommodate the world's growing need for computers that are even smaller, faster and more energy-efficient. With a prestigious research grant, they will establish a completely new technological foundation for the electronics of the future. Photo: Associate Professor Martijn Heck

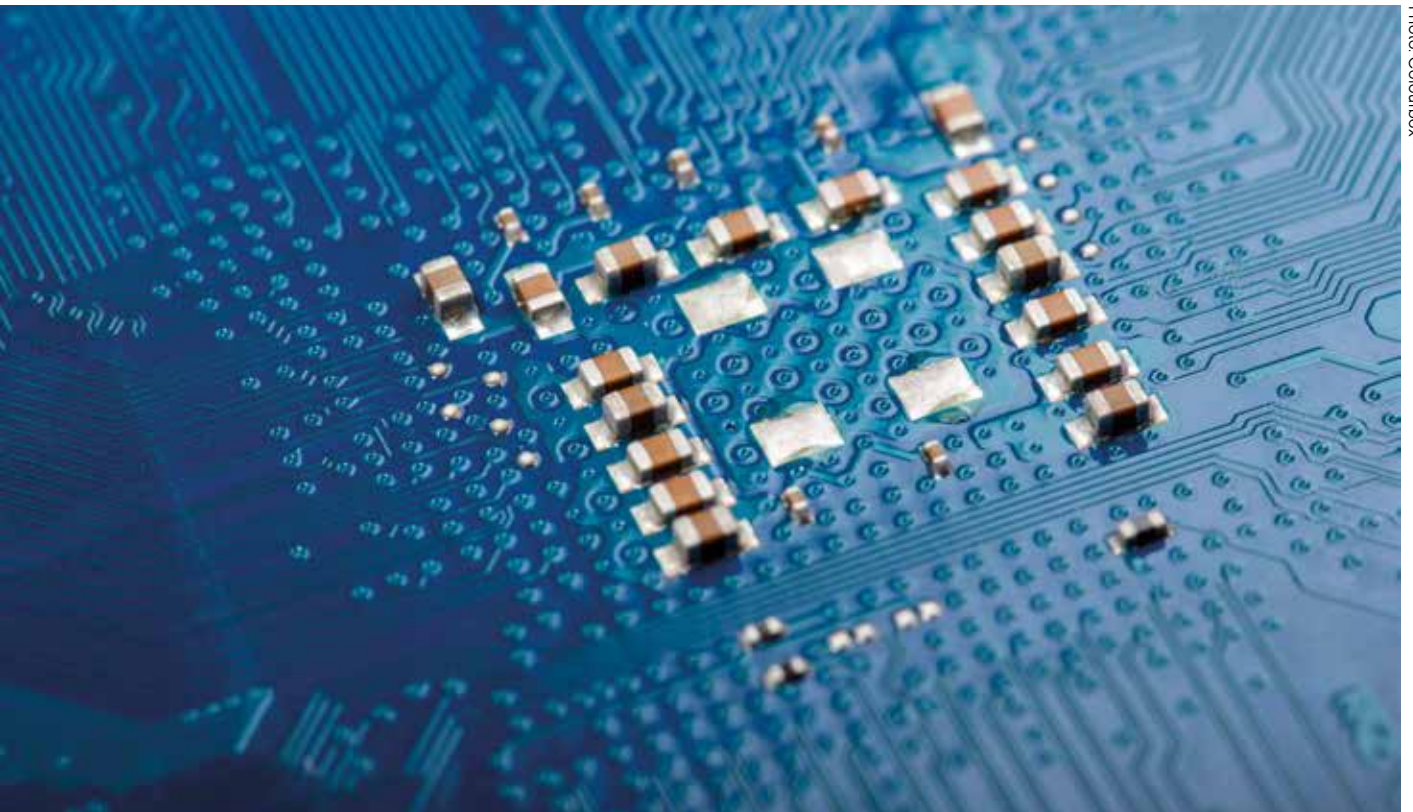


Photo: Colourbox

Gearing up wireless technology

With a new university laboratory, researchers can boost their experimental work with wireless technologies for future networks that effectively and rapidly communicate large amounts of data.

Aarhus University has established one of the world's most advanced wireless transceiver laboratories, which will help researchers to create new knowledge about future wireless technologies operating at extremely high frequencies in both microwave and millimeter-wave spectra.

One of their most notable research objectives is to develop new radio technologies and thereby devices and methods to transfer large amounts of mobile data

at significantly higher speeds than is possible today.

The laboratory is equipped with state-of-the-art technology that includes vector network analysers, signal spectrum analysers, micro-probing stations, noise figure meters, and a noise signal source – all of which can help investigating and solving major scientific challenges regarding future wireless connectivity and contactless sensing applications.

project facts

TITLE

Wireless Transceivers Lab

SCHEDULE

2016–2018

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 2.5 million

Grundfos support grant

CONTACT

Professor Domenico Zito

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“Working with high frequencies requires specialised and expensive equipment, and it is absolutely crucial for being at the forefront of developing the technologies that can unfold the full potential of the Internet of Things in the time ahead. Our greatest innovation challenge is to create high-capacity, energy-efficient wireless transceivers that can enable data transmissions from several devices at a magnitude we can't do today. We're heading towards a future Internet with high-volume data traffic where machines sense phys-



Photo: Lars Kruse

Professor Domenico Zito will head the research activities of the new Wireless Transceiver Laboratory at Aarhus University. He is an expert in wireless technologies and has international experience both in academic and industrial research and developments. This includes being part of teams behind the first industrial developments of modern short-range wireless systems.

ical parameters of the surrounding environment, communicate with each other and exchange data, thereby making an unprecedented amount of distributed intelligence and automation possible," says Professor Domenico Zito.

Playground for the IT talent of the future

Professor Zito is in charge of the laboratory which came about as a result of financial support from Grundfos Holding and the American multinational company Keysight Technologies. Both of these are important industrial partners, and they share the university's interest in supporting talented researchers and innovators to create a leading international knowledge environment in wireless technology and its applications to ad-

dress real-world problems and emerging industrial needs.

"We have received an outstanding support from our industrial partners. It is absolutely crucial for our future research that we have access to the most advanced experimental facilities. This is also very important for our ability to educate next-generation engineers in this strategic area for society and economy," says Professor Zito.

The new laboratory will ensure that the engineering graduates of the future have experience with radio technology development for emerging wireless networks and communications.

NEW AU WIRELESS TRANSCIVER LABORATORY

Wireless technology makes it possible to connect people and machines with each other so that they can exchange data, act and make decisions with a degree of intelligence that would have been unimaginable a few years ago.

In the coming years, researchers at Aarhus University will create new knowledge about radio frequency (RF) transceiver technology and connectivity for emerging wireless communications.

The researchers are among the best in the world at building wireless transceivers into a single silicon chip. This is a key step toward future smart consumer products with unprecedented performance for a considerable number of purposes, and thereby a key element in the digitisation agenda of modern society.

In the coming years, the researchers will use the experimental laboratory facilities to create new knowledge about wireless transceivers for data communication, networking, contactless sensing and imaging in multi-disciplinary fields such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Health, Security, Transport, Environment and Space.

Wireless technology monitors babies' breathing

One of the wireless transceiver technology's many application areas is contactless sensing, and the Aarhus University researchers already have a number of interesting projects behind them.

These include the development of a contactless sensor that can detect and monitor people's breathing rhythms. With a prototype size corresponding to a grain of sand, it is now ready for commercialisation.

The researchers developed the sensor within the European research project ProeTEX, and it is based on a pulse radar built on a single silicon chip. The sensor is capable of detecting tiny movements with

a high degree of accuracy, making the physiological data available remotely via a wireless connection with very low energy consumption.

"The sensor detects respiration rate by tracking the chest movements while the person is breathing. We've carried out both in vitro and in vivo tests on children and adults, and we have got the proof of concept that we can manufacture efficient sensors for contactless body monitoring," says Professor Domenico Zito.

The sensor can be used for many purposes such as monitoring the breathing patterns of premature babies in hospitals, classifying the level of consciousness of

car drivers in order to prevent sudden falling asleep, but to mention a few.

Within the same European project, the researchers have developed radiometric sensor technology for contactless temperature detection, which was recently expanded for spaceborne detection of solar flares above the terrestrial atmosphere in another European project.

The research and development of contactless sensors such as system-on-a-chip pulse radar and radiometer was acknowledged by the European Commission as the successful research project model in ICT for Health across the entire previous European Framework Programme.



Robotic productivity to be boosted by dynamic modelling

The world's leading manufacturer of collaborative robot arms has joined forces with Aarhus University to dampen the vibrations that occur when the robot arms move.

Imagine a row of robot arms that carry out pre-programmed work with super-human speed and precision – assemble a car, take laboratory samples, or something else completely. Industry has made significant progress since the time when everything was assembled by hand, and it can be hard to imagine that the robots

do not accomplish the job as quickly as possible.

But they actually do not. This is because the robot arms generate energy when they move from A to B, and when the arms stop, the energy triggers mechanical vibrations. In other words, if the work

requires a high level of precision, the robot has to stop vibrating before it can do what it is meant to.

This can mean delays of a few seconds for each operation, which ultimately makes production more expensive.



Associate Professor Xuping Zhang (right) and PhD student Dan Kielsholm Thomsen (left) are working on reducing vibrations in a collaborative robot arm from Universal Robots.

Universal Robots in Odense is the world's leading manufacturer of collaborative robot arms – robot arms that do not require shielding, but which can work closely alongside humans.

The company has now teamed up with AU Engineering, Aarhus University, to reduce the amount of vibration during movement. This will mean robots with increased productivity, precision and versatility.

Extremely small margin of error

Precise dynamic modelling will be used to optimise the robots.

"Based on the robot's dynamic properties, we can determine the best way possible to move from A to B, so we avoid introducing vibrations in the system," says PhD student Dan Kielsholm Thomsen, who is researching the problem.

Robot arms that mount elements on a circuit board, for example, have an extremely small margin of error. Here it is no good having a robot arm that vibrates, even though the amplitude of the movement is less than one millimetre.

Using active vibration suppression, Dan Kielsholm Thomsen hopes to reduce the vibrations to a tenth. This can significantly speed up production at the same time as increasing the service life of the arm as the vibrations can be hard on gears and joints in the long run.

"If there are endless ways of moving from A to B, which movement is the best? We need to be able to determine this in a fraction of a second, so calculations are necessary," says Dan Kielsholm Thomsen.

project facts

TITLE

Vibration analysis and control of UR robot manipulators with the consideration of link and joint flexibility

SCHEDULE

2016-2019

PROJECT PARTNERS

Universal Robots

CONTACT

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PhD student Dan Kielsholm Thomsen
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project facts

TITLE

Ear EEG-based Hypoglycaemia Alarm

SCHEDULE

2013-2017

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 20 million
Innovation Fund Denmark

PROJECT PARTNERS

Widex, Odense University Hospital

CONTACT

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Professor (Docent) Preben Kidmose believes that in-the-ear EEG measurements have great prospects for passive monitoring of factors such as the brain's cognitive state.

A look through the keyhole of the brain

How do you get information out of the brain? Researchers at Aarhus University are carrying out research into taking passive measurements of the brain's electrical signals and piecing them together into a larger image of the brain's cognitive state.

Ever since the German psychiatrist Hans Berger first measured the electrical activity of the brain on a human in 1924, electroencephalography or EEG has been widely used as a non-invasive diagnostic tool for different brain conditions such as epilepsy and sleep disturbances.

The method involves placing electrodes on the patient's head, and has been hailed as one of the most surprising, remarkable and significant developments in clinical neurology. The electrodes measure electrical signals related to brain activity.

However, electroencephalography can be used for much more than diagnosing. Coupling it with computer technology and Big Data, researchers have now developed an opportunity for a simple form of mind control and mind reading, and it does not require much imagination to picture the endless opportunities that are thereby opened up.

A narrow bandwidth

Researchers at Aarhus University have developed what they call an Ear-EEG – a small appliance that can be placed in the ear to perform a simple type of EEG. This means that the researchers can collect data over longer periods because patients do not need to go around with several hundred electrodes on their heads.

Such passive measurements of brain activity are interesting in relation to activities such as monitoring circadian rhythms and cognitive states, particularly regarding psychiatric disorders – a world that is crying out for objective information about patient conditions, according to Professor (Docent) Preben Kidmose who is one of the world's leading experts in taking in-the-ear EEG measurements.

However, there are far greater prospects ahead.

“How do you get information out of the brain? Normally, the only way we can do it is by moving – i.e. talking, gesticulating, etc. But, in principle, this is a very slow form of communication. The bandwidth, if you can call it that, is very narrow. Just think how many thoughts you can generate in your head in the same time it takes to utter just ten words. It would be very interesting if you could open the floodgates. That's what's interesting – how to get bits and information out of the brain,” he says.

This is not just something you do. Particularly if the technology has to be non-invasive.

We can only see the massive torrents

There are approximately 80 billion neurons in the human brain – special types of cells that can emit electrical signals, and which combined form the key elements in the brain and central nervous system. Each individual neuron is a small calculator that can join up with other neurons and form neural networks running through the brain.

If you really want to open the floodgates, you should therefore be able to draw out information from each individual neuron, but this is impossible. You can only see the entirety, according to Professor (Docent) Kidmose.

“Imagine it's raining in a huge mountain landscape. The raindrops that fall on each individual stone and mountain peak slowly run together in small streams that, in turn, merge with others and eventually form large rivers and torrents in the valleys. With the technology we've got today, with electrodes placed on the head,

it's these huge torrents we can see. Nothing else,” he explains.

Previous knowledge can open the door

This is why the 'bandwidth' in thought-controlled technology today is even slower than normally operated technology. For example, it is possible to use electroencephalography to write words by thinking of the letters you use.

“But doing so occupies your entire cognitive capacity. You have to focus very hard on one single letter at a time to be able to read it on the brainwaves using external electrodes on the head. You can steer a wheelchair the same way, but it's easier to do so with your tongue because the technology requires you to focus so much on the one action you want,” says Professor (Docent) Kidmose.

“As long as we have to measure outside the brain, the bandwidth is low,” he continues.

However, there is a great potential for in-the-ear EEG measurements. After all, it is the turbulent rivers that cut through the rocks and form the landscape. And in the same way, it is possible that familiarity with the overall electrical thought flow can work out what is going on in detail.

“If 200 electrodes on the head are an open door, then Ear-EEG is a look through the keyhole. But if you have previous knowledge of what's going on in the room, it could be that you can form an impression of what's happening in the entire room simply by taking a look through the keyhole,” he says.

Drop the silo mentality and get smart

The Internet of Things, Big Data and Artificial Intelligence are paving the way for completely new opportunities and business models for companies. However, they need to create smart products and do away with conventional thinking.

The world is changing.

A telephone is no longer simply a piece of equipment used to make a call, and a car is no longer just something used to transport oneself from A to B.

In a world in which computer technology is constantly making new breakthroughs, where hardware is constantly becoming faster and smaller, and where computer chips are no longer just something soldered to a motherboard, it is no longer sufficient to be good at things one has always done.

Technology changes the products that have always been taken for granted, and the glorious production companies of the past now see themselves in competition with companies they could never in their wildest dreams have imagined just a decade ago. Intelligent thermostats from Nest, for example, use Google algorithms to teach themselves how they should be adjusted, making them a serious competitor to Danfoss today.

To survive in the current and future global market, it can therefore be necessary for production companies to completely rethink their business model. If not, it could mean that they become swallowed up by development. This happened to Nokia, for example, the Finnish telecommunications giant that completely lost its leading global position when Apple introduced the iPhone.

Climbing the ladder

A considerable number of production

companies have therefore joined forces with institutions including Aarhus University, which will help the companies to make their products smart in collaboration with a number of partners. The project is called MADE Digital, and it is funded by Innovation Fund Denmark. The project contains nine work packages and the one that addresses smart industrial products is called WP1. Professor Peter Gorm Larsen heads the work in this work package.

“To be smart, companies and their products need to climb a ladder. In addition to the basic product, there are four steps on the ladder leading to a completely autonomic solution – in cases where this is desirable. What’s essential for the companies is to determine where they want to end up on the ladder,” he says.

The first step is concerned with monitoring. This typically involves building a sensor into a product to monitor whether the product requires service, for example. Here the Internet of Things (IoT) is one of the technologies that makes it possible to communicate data out. The next step is to be capable of checking the product with integrated software that can take action based on sensor data. A cyber-physical system (CPS) is the name of the technology that is necessary when there is a close correlation between the physical part of the product and the software used to control it.

The third step is about automatic product optimisation – how to do things better by using technologies such as Big Data anal-

ysis or machine learning to break down large amounts of information about the product’s behaviour. The last step on the ladder is full autonomy, where the computer is in complete control of the product with no human interaction so that it makes its own diagnosis and takes possible errors into consideration, and can even optimise and coordinate with other products and systems.

Enable dialogue between professions

Disregarding the last step, which according to Professor Larsen is clearly the most exciting from a technological point of

project facts

TITLE

MADE Digital Smart industrial products

SCHEDULE

2017-2019

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

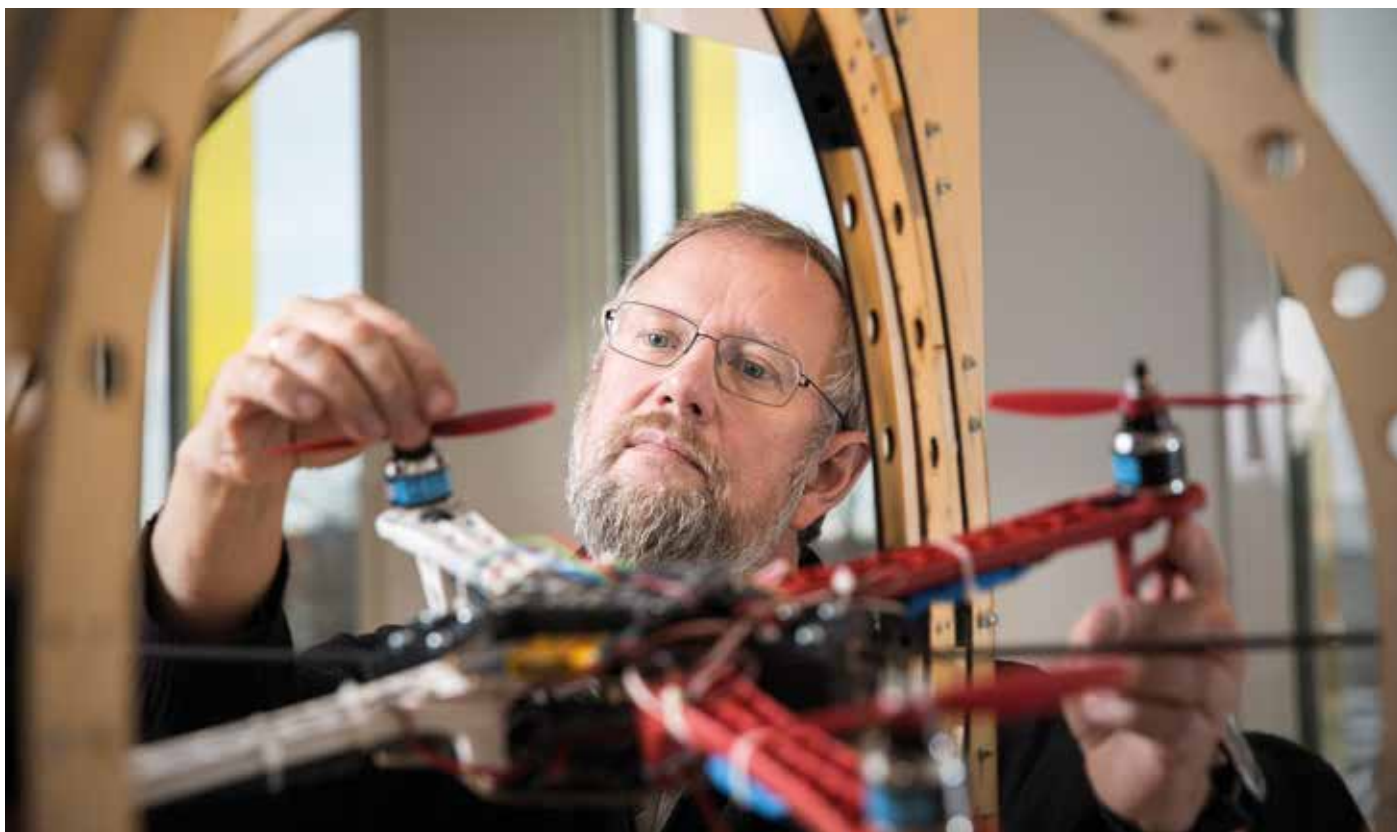
DKK 196 million.
Innovation Fund Denmark

PROJECT PARTNERS

There are 59 partners in MADE Digital.

CONTACT

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The Internet of Things and Big Data are changing the world and turning the retail industry upside down. Who could have expected that an online bookstore such as Amazon – which is currently in full swing implementing automatic drone delivery – could become a serious competitor to everything from supermarkets to electronics dealers?

view but also the most difficult and challenging, it could be tempting to think that the engineering challenges are right up our street. However, the real problem with making products smart is, in fact, not exclusively optimising the physical product, according to Professor Larsen.

“The major challenge for companies is typically to do away with silo mentality. To break down barriers internally. To do things smarter requires a multidisciplinary understanding of the disciplines that must be used to achieve the physical transformation of the product. It’s not enough to have a mechanics department, a software department, and an electronics department, where each one only focuses on its own field. We need instead to do something that makes close dialogue possible between the professions so they can understand each other and not delay the development of a new product. In my opinion, this is a problem that goes right back to our education system, and it’s really something we need to work on,” he says.

It is thus the internal processes in development and production that must be reconsidered. When developing something in the old days that had a mechanical part controlled by software, the mechanical part was built first. When that was finished, a start could be made on developing the software.

“But this is much too slow in relation to the world today. Sharply dividing the stages into development and production doesn’t work,” says Professor Larsen.

“Today you simulate the products before you build them. Before you have the finished mechanics, you’ve made a model of it, used differential equations to model how it will behave physically, made the control part as a model based on discrete mathematics, and run the whole thing through. By simulating the thing first, you can very easily find out what’s right and what’s wrong to do before you build it,” he continues.

Helping the industry

This is where Aarhus University can help the production companies. The university’s researchers have developed software that can help companies simulate a smart upgrading of their product. This makes them a good sounding board for industry in Denmark because the software makes it possible to help companies clarify the best way to turn when there are many options. The university also helps companies to find the most sensible technologies to use to reach the step they want on the ladder with a view to the future.

Professor Larsen provides the following example. A large Danish company called C.C. Jensen is a market leader in oil filter-

ing systems. To put it plainly, they manufacture oil filters for applications such as marine engines. The company has now produced a sensor that can measure the oil when it runs through the filter, and this is smart because the filter can thereby provide information about the condition of the engine. The next step in the chain is to make use of the data produced by the sensor, but how can information be communicated from an oil filter located in another part of the world? And how much ‘power’ should the filter have if the sensor’s measurements are to be exploited? Should it be able to stop the motor, for example, if it registers a fault? These are some of the issues that the Aarhus University researchers are now helping to solve.

There are many technical challenges involved in making products smarter than they already were. This also means that the upgraded product can end up becoming more expensive than it was initially. However, the extra cost can mean that the customer gets an extra service that makes it worth the price. A new marine engine is expensive, so a smart oil filter that can alert the user before the engine breaks down is no doubt worth the price. In the same way, people all over the world found that the extra services provided by a smartphone were worth the higher price tag.

ADVANCED MATERIALS

New materials with properties that we hardly dare dream of today will see the light of day in the near future. We are on the threshold of yet another industrial revolution where technology will pave the way for completely new inventions and advances in a considerable number of areas. Examples are space, health care and manufacturing through e.g. 3D printing.

The most advanced biorefinery in the world

In the new Centre for Biorefining Technologies at Aarhus University, researchers will create knowledge and technology that can contribute to the exploitation of biomass for high-value products.

The activities at the centre aim to create the knowledge required to strengthen the preconditions for producing a range of new green products that are currently either imported or extracted from fossil fuels.

These products include new sources of protein for animal feed and raw materials for many different industrial purposes – all produced in a refining process

based on biomass extracted from crop residue, straw, grasses and other plant matters that do not compete with food production.

“We’re working on creating a highly efficient biorefinery and providing leading examples of how to kick-start a bio-based economy with sustainable high-value products such as proteins, polymers, and

new chemical or biological components for industry,” says Associate Professor Ib Johansen.

He is responsible for the centre’s engineering research and development activities regarding production systems and technologies for refining green biomass.



Photo: Anders Trærup

Non-food plants and residue can be used for fuel, high-value chemicals, and animal feed. But how do you cultivate new, optimised types of green biomass? How are they harvested? And how do you make the most efficient use of them for new products? Associate Professor Ib Jonansen (left) is spearheading a new research centre that will create novel sustainable solutions for biorefining technologies for upgrading plant material into products.

High-protein animal feed from grass

Sustainable feed produced from grass can eventually provide a replacement for the large amounts of imported soya that European pigs consume every day.

Green juice in a freeze-dried variant. This is what it looks like – the product produced by Aarhus University researchers in some of the most extensive pilot experiments to date in extracting protein from biomass. The juice is a concentrate of selected grass species and contains proteins that can meet the amino acid needs of most large mammals.

With this juice, the researchers have solved one of the major challenges in a refining process that has been under way since the Second World War.

They can now optimise the separation of the biomass into various components and remove those parts of the plants that are indigestible and which inhibit the absorption of protein.

“Our aim has been to design a refining process so that we can convert green

biomass to highly absorbable protein concentrate for pigs at the same time as utilising the residual components in feed for ruminants. This will enable us to create a locally produced alternative to soya,” says Postdoctoral Fellow Morten Ambye-Jensen.

An attractive alternative to soya

The researchers are now working on more methods to extract protein from different types of crops. They have good experience with both heating and fermenting, and have already completed the first major test production at the university’s pilot plant.

Subsequently, they used the resulting green protein in a feed experiment with pigs, aimed at studying amino acid absorbability.

“The major engineering challenge is now

project facts

TITLE

BioValue

SCHEDULE

2013–2018

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 160 million

SPIR, Innovation Fund Denmark

PROJECT PARTNERS

Aalborg University

University of Copenhagen

Technical University of Denmark

Arla Foods

Hamlet Protein

KMC

Kongskilde

DELG

Haldor Topsoe

Novozymes

Rockwool

Borregaard

Danish Agriculture & Food Council

Agrotech

Imbiom

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to create a production process that is both financially viable and environmentally sustainable, and which provides a product with high protein absorption,” says Morten Ambye-Jensen.

Aarhus University has unique facilities for biomass production as well as world-class research in animal nutrition. The researchers expect that the technology for producing green protein will be ready for commercial use in the course of five years.

EU countries currently import more than 45 million tons of soya per year for animal feed with an enormous impact on the climate from both production and transport. The considerable environmental benefit of using grass for feed is that it can be grown locally with low use of pesticides and minimal leaching of fertilisers.

New knowledge about the powerful forces of the sea

Experiments in the open sea create new knowledge about how waves originate, develop and affect the surroundings with their strength. This will make it possible to maintain facilities such as oil platforms in the North Sea for a longer period of time.

Using mathematical and physical theory and advanced computer simulation, researchers all over the world have been working for decades on describing waves and wave loading. They have become adept at analysing how the sea absorbs energy from the wind and converts it to waves that break and interact with each other, ocean currents and the format of the sea bed.

However, there is a certain amount of uncertainty associated with the existing theoretical, numerical and analytical descriptions of wave loading. Reality is often far more stochastic than can be accounted for, even using advanced simulations. Danish wave researchers will therefore now start using full-scale measurements.

"We'll create new knowledge about wave loading with a focus on how it affects offshore structures. It's very difficult to upscale experimental results of the way fluids flow around an object, and we therefore need studies at sea. With new full-scale tests, we can gain more reliable and accurate insight into how waves interact and fatigue our oil platforms in the North Sea," says Professor Christos Thom- as Georgakis.

Until recently, he was responsible for the scientific activities regarding wave load- ing at the Danish Hydrocarbon Research and Technology Centre, the overall aim of which is to identify new technological solutions that boost oil and gas extraction in the Danish sector of the North Sea.

Improved safety on large platforms

One of the main objectives of the wave research at Aarhus University is to reduce the expenses that are currently associat- ed with repair, retrofit and maintenance of the existing oil platforms. It actually requires detailed familiarity with the way ocean movements continuously wear down the constructions through corrosion and fatigue.

"North Sea oil is a valuable energy re- source for Denmark, and it will unfortu- nately not last forever. It's therefore crucial that we get as much as possible out of it – with the least possible resource consump- tion. The sea causes enormous wear on offshore constructions, and the engineer- ing challenge is to more accurately iden- tify how much they can withstand. Today we have to shut down the oil platforms in some cases because we don't know whether they can withstand the wave loading," says Professor Georgakis.

He expects that more accurate knowl- edge about the interaction between loading and wave structure will make it possible to take decisions on an informed basis and extend the service life of the platforms in the North Sea until such time as Denmark is ready for a complete green transition.

"We'll develop a reliable method to char- acterise waves and predict the conse- quences of their loading. The oil and gas industry needs new knowledge for mak- ing decisions about which platforms they should shut down or keep running, and

what maintenance and retrofit measures they should invest in," he continues.

Studies in the laboratory and at sea

In order to understand the mechanisms underlying the wear and tear of the waves, the researchers will also start us- ing large areas of the North Sea for near full-scale experiments. Using laser tech- nology, they are studying conditions such as the form and distribution of the waves as well as the undercurrent conditions in natural surroundings.

They are also planning to equip an un- manned oil platform with different sen- sors and scanners that measure the direct response of the construction to the waves in the form of vibrations.

The researchers are comparing all of this with the results of extensive experiments in one of the world's most advanced wave tanks at Newcastle University which can combine waves, wind and current. In this way, they can systematically identify the computational uncertainties connected with simulating real sea conditions.

"By comparing tests at sea with tank ex- periments, we hope to create a better load model and thereby more accu- rate assessments of the impact of wave loading on offshore constructions," says Professor Georgakis. The researchers will eventually use the test results to develop offshore constructions that are capable of reducing the wear and tear of the sea based on the design alone.

project facts

TITLE

Extreme Waves – Direct and Indirect Load Estimation

SCHEDULE

2016-2020

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 8.5 MILLION

Danish Hydrocarbon Research and Technology Centre (DHRTC)

PROJECT PARTNERS

DHRTC

DTU

Maersk Oil & Gas

Newcastle University

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NEW TECHNOLOGY TO EXTEND THE DANISH OIL JOURNEY

Denmark has produced oil for more than forty years, but now there is an acute need for innovation and new technology insight in order to continue extraction from the underground.

The Danish Underground Consortium (DUC) has initiated the establishment of the Danish Hydrocarbon Research and Technology Centre (DHRTC) in collaboration with Aarhus University, other leading Danish and foreign universities and industry. The centre's efforts are directly aimed at improving oil and gas production from the Danish sector of the North Sea.



Professor Georgakis is a structural dynamicist and expert on fluid-structure interaction. He studies how waves put a strain on offshore structures, and he thereby creates valuable knowledge about how to get as much as possible out of oil and gas resources in the North Sea.

Danish researchers unleash Darwin to change plastic forever

Imagine a future where plastic is sustainable, green, biodegradable and manufactured without chemistry. A team of researchers is hoping to achieve exactly this by means of a 'green soup' of microalgae.

Natural rubber was used for centuries by indigenous populations around the world, but it was not until the industrial revolution in the 19th century that plastic as we know it today was introduced by Alexander Parkes in 1862. Ever since, and particularly after World War II, plastic has spread to engulf every aspect of our lives.

Particularly as of late, this has also spread to our oceans, where heaps of photodegraded plastic form gigantic 'garbage patches' – diffuse soups of floating plastic that is not biodegradable but enters the food chain via ingestion by aquatic organisms.

Ever since concerns about adverse health effects from plastics and plasticisers – the latter of which, since their discovery in the wake of World War II, have been derived from petroleum-based chemicals – scientists have struggled to find a viable bio and ecosustainable substitute that is suitable for industrial use, i.e. cheap to produce in large quantities.

From lipids to bio-polymers

Researchers at Aarhus University, in collaboration with colleagues at the Technical University of Denmark, the University of Cambridge and Kyoto University, have now come up with a possible solution – polymers produced from microalgae.

"Most chemicals today are made from petroleum, but that won't be around forever and it isn't sustainable. We need technology that doesn't harm the environment," says Associate Professor Zheng Guo.

The idea is to extract oil from the algae and subject the fatty acids in the oil to the right enzymes. This way the researchers can transform the lipids into polymers. Polymers that are sustainable, manufactured using green biotechnology, without chemistry, and that are biodegradable and harmless to the environment. Polymers that, in principle, can be used to create any kind of plastic.

"They basically resemble LEGO® blocks that originate from microalgae. The

blocks can be assembled to create any design. These are harmless and only contain biological molecules. That's what we hope to develop," says Associate Professor Peter Kristensen.

Improving nature by natural evolution

The process requires protein engineering. To convert the lipids extracted from microalgae into polymers, the lipids need to be chemically modified. This can be done by enzymes, but the enzymes that exist are not optimal for the process. Instead, the researchers engineer the right enzymes for the job via natural mutational evolution. This is where Charles Darwin is unleashed.

"Nature has already created enzymes that can do the job but not very efficiently. We'll improve the enzymes so we can use their green properties in industry," says Associate Professor Zheng Guo, whose colleague Associate Professor Kristensen elaborates:

"We take an existing enzyme and optimise it via mutations. These are random



Photo: Lars Kruse

Plastic surrounds us everywhere and is of fundamental importance for our lives as they are today. However, the non-biodegradability of plastics is harming nature all over the world. Associate Professor Zheng Guo (left) and Associate Professor Peter Kristensen (right) therefore hope to be able to use microalgae to create organic plastic in the future.

processes that constantly occur in biological systems. Most have no beneficial effect and are ignored but, once in a while, a mutation can cause a positive effect. This effect is then implemented in the biological system. Thus the system evolves.”

Thanks to Kyoto University, the researchers already know which enzyme to begin with. Here project collaborators have isolated a specific enzyme that can catalyse the first step in producing plastic from microalgae.

This enzyme can change the properties of lipids by attaching a hydroxyl group to the lipid molecular chain at a specific point. However, in order to create the wanted polymers, a second step needs to be taken, converting the hydroxyl group into a carboxylic acid. This second step will also be catalysed by an enzyme, which will be the next step the researchers will address.

Creating a library of enzymes

“Enzymes are proteins in the biological system. Each and every one is created

from the information stored in the DNA of the system. You can say that the DNA is the recipe for the enzymes, so we change a bit of text here and there to create an entire library of different enzymes. Then we look at the entire pool of mutated enzymes and choose the best one for the task through selection,” says Associate Professor Kristensen.

Nature has evolved this way since the dawn of time. Because of mutations and natural selection, life is able to survive in the most incredible places on earth: at the bottom of the ocean where no light ever reaches, to the highest peak of the Himalayas, and the coldest tip of the Antarctic.

“Nature sometimes goes beyond your imagination. Enzymes can survive at unbelievable places and have the most amazing properties,” says Associate Professor Zheng Guo.

project facts

TITLE

Aquaculturing biochemicals for the future: enable production of hydroxyl fatty acids by microbial hydratase

SCHEDULE

2017-2020

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 2.2 million
Novo Nordisk Foundation

PROJECT PARTNERS

Kyoto University
Technical University of Denmark

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Nano-adhesives to create near-unbreakable metal and rubber bonding

Adhesives are used throughout industry, but many contain toxics and others are not reliable or durable. But what if you could merge two materials together using clean molecular bonding? That is exactly what scientists are working on right now.

Have you ever hassled with tearing off a glass bottle label, getting more and more agitated as the label just shreds when you try to peel it off and its remains seem moulded onto the bottle – impossible to get off?

Adhesives are used for a great many purposes in our world (from an annoying fly sticking to the window to the space industry) and can sometimes lead to frustration when they adhere too well – or not well enough.

But sometimes it is desirable to 'glue' two things together intending the materials to remain linked forever – no matter what conditions the bond is exposed to. Imagine bonding metal plates together instead of bolting or welding them. That is not an easy job though, particularly if the binder should not be toxic.

The solution could very well be a molecular nano-adhesive which binds two materials together with an almost unbreakable chemical adhesion.

"Rubber is usually bonded to metal via a standard kind of adhesive that's quite toxic, not very reliable, and not very durable. That's a big issue, first of all because of the toxicity – we want clean products. So the idea is to develop a new kind of adhesive on a molecular level using covalent bonding – without any third material. In essence, we're trying to bond the rubber directly to the metal by means of chemistry in an effort to develop a clean,

reliable product without any toxicity issues. From our mechanical engineering perspective, the challenge comes from another fact: rubber and metals lie on opposite sides in terms of elastic properties. Once they are bonded together, such a material mismatch leads to severe stress gradients," says Assistant Professor Michal Kazimierz Budzik.

Developing special molecules

Molecules have different electrical charges in their chemical structure. This leads to van der Waal forces – relatively weak repulsive or attractive forces that occur between atoms of different materials. Ordinary adhesives stick to materials using weak attractive forces and can then bind the materials together when they have cured.

In comparison, covalent bonds are considerably stronger, and do not have the problem normal adhesives have when they come in contact with water.

"Think of the situation when the rubber and metal interface is subjected to high stress. In addition, water is one of the most aggressive environments for polymers and interfaces. Water is polar in nature, which means that hydrogen bonds can form between it and the adhesive, thereby breaking up the bond. This leads to situations such as the rubber coating in the valve becoming loose so that it gradually loses its function and provides access to bacterial growth. This is definitely not the easiest situation to deal with in mechan-

ics," says Assistant Professor Budzik. And as if that is not enough, cleaning processes involving steam and high temperatures in industries where adhesives are used can easily destroy the bond line between 'glued' materials.

Aarhus University researchers therefore aim to develop special molecules that form chemical bonds with a metal surface and then adhere to rubber using surface-grafted polymer brushes – a recent nanotechnology breakthrough in binders.

Considerable potential

Through an electrochemical process and polymerisation on the metal surface, this surface-bound polymer layer is combined with the rubber. The combination creates chemical bonds criss-crossing among the polymer chains in the mixture, including the surface-bound polymer layer, which thus acts as the adhesive between the metal and the rubber. It ensures an incredibly strong bond and a variety of desirable effects.

For example, scientists forecast that material/adhesive consumption can be reduced by a factor of 1,000, and that food industry safety will be significantly increased.

So far, the researchers have managed to bond rubber to metal using the novel formulation. A big milestone. However, there is still a way to go before such a molecular adhesive is validated and ready for use.



project facts

TITLE

Molecular Adhesive for Strong and Durable Bonding of Rubber to Metal

SCHEDULE

2016-2019

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 11.9 million
Innovation Fund Denmark

PROJECT PARTNERS

AVK Gummi A/S
RadiSurf ApS

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A super glue that could create an unbreakable bond between rubber and metal would have huge potential in the food and water distribution industries. Assistant Professor Michal Kazimierz Budzik (right) is working here with PhD student Simon Heide-Jørgensen (left) on discovering stress properties of just such a potential super glue.

ENERGY

Green power for Apple's new data centre

Researchers will help Apple to create a stable supply of sustainable energy for the first stage of the 250,000-square-metre data centre opening in Denmark in 2017.

Beginning in 2017, Apple's new data centre will store enormous amounts of information from some of the large online services we know, including iTunes, iCloud and App Store. Once completed, the centre is therefore expected to have an energy consumption of approximately 2000 gigawatt hours, which is the equivalent of more than half a million Danish households.

The decision to locate the data centre's activities in Central Jutland is largely because Danish researchers have internationally competitive technology insight and expertise in developing and implementing green power that is 100 per cent reliable round the clock.

In addition, Aarhus University can offer a location that is a hub for electricity transmission in the Nordic countries, and this makes it possible to balance the power supply between Danish and German wind turbines and Norwegian hydropower.

App Store, iTunes and iCloud round the clock

Associate Professor Lars Ditlev Mørck Ottosen is the research director for Aarhus University's collaboration with Apple, and he estimates that the American in-

vestment in Danish knowledge can be a boost for market maturation and the capitalisation of many new technology projects in the biomass and sustainable energy industry.

"Our job is to develop concepts that can ensure a stable supply of electricity for Apple based on fluctuating energy sources, and this means that we have to find new methods to store power. It's a huge research-related challenge for us and also a unique opportunity to create new knowledge and even more business collaboration, thereby boosting our national expertise in energy technology," says Associate Professor Ottosen.

Fossil fuels or nuclear power are currently the only alternatives available for a completely stable supply of power in the amounts required for round-the-clock operations for App Store, iTunes and iCloud. In recent years, however, Aarhus University researchers have achieved a number of interesting results in their work with storing surplus power from wind turbines, and one of the solutions to this is biotechnology.

"Science has been trying for several years to find appropriate solutions to how to store volatile solar and wind energy. We

now have very positive experimental experience with microbial methanation, and we therefore estimate that biotechnology can play a significantly more far-reaching role in the transition to a sustainable energy society," says Associate Professor Ottosen.

Natural gas grid – a gigantic battery

Researchers fed a certain type of bacteria in the laboratory with water, electricity and carbon dioxide, and got them to produce methane gas – a stable energy carrier that can be integrated in the natural gas grid. According to Associate Professor Ottosen, the method can play a key role in Apple's energy supply.

"Now that we've demonstrated how to use microbiological techniques to convert surplus power from wind turbines to methane gas, it's also likely that we can create the necessary storage capacity that Apple wants. In the coming years, we'll study in much greater detail how we can use the natural gas grid as a gigantic battery," he says.

The researchers expect that the new method for producing methane gas can be put into practice within a few years. They have also carried out the first suc-



The iTunes, iCloud and App Store servers will eventually run on supplementary power produced by Aarhus University researchers. They will use the surplus power from wind turbines to produce large amounts of methane gas. They will store the gas in the natural gas grid and convert it to electricity as required to run Apple's new data centre in Denmark. Photo: Associate Professor Lars Ditlev Mørck Ottosen.

Successful full-scale experiments with methanation of biogas at the university's large research facility at AU Foulum. They are concurrently working with modifications to the living conditions of the hydrogen-eating bacteria in tanks, in the hope of turning them into super-efficient producers of stable energy carriers.

The researchers are now about to reveal precisely how the microbiological system works and how they can get them to produce methane in an economically viable way.

New fuel cells convert gas to electricity

The researchers have been awarded a grant of DKK 21.5 million for the first four stages of the university's collaboration with Apple. In addition, Apple is contributing with new knowledge about fuel cell technology, which can benefit the entire Danish biogas industry.

"The plan is that the large amounts of methane from wind turbine surplus power should be converted to electricity as required," explains Associate Professor Ottosen.

"In recent years, Apple has invested heavily in research into fuel cells, and therefore has very detailed knowledge about how we can convert biogas to power. We can therefore work together to provide Apple with a sustainable energy supply that is not only technologically innovative, but also financially beneficial. In principle, it's a case study that can provide Danish know-how with a boost in biogas and storage technologies," he says.

The researchers' plan to convert gas to electricity will provide superior storage capacity, while it is still a challenge to achieve an efficiency that can match the existing battery technology.

Today it is not yet possible to store energy from wind turbines. Whenever there is a surplus, it is therefore sold to the electricity companies at a low price.

project facts

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Danes use less energy on heating

Researchers have surveyed the district heating consumption of as many as 28,000 Danish single-family houses. They can thus for the first time document development in the actual energy consumption for heating private homes in Denmark, and conclude that new cost-cutting measures in the current building regulations do work.

With extensive data visualisation of the district heating consumption of single-family houses, researchers can now for the first time document Denmark's real energy demand for heating homes.

"We can see a clear correlation between the age of the buildings and the actual energy consumption with a very significant decline starting with houses built in the 1950s. This means that we now have an empirical overview that makes it possible to document the impact of historical energy-saving requirements in the building regulations," says Associate Professor Steffen Petersen.

The researchers closely studied district heating consumption in the last three years for a total of 28,000 single-family houses built in the period from 1900 and up to 2012. Using information from the national Building and Housing Register (BBR) and smart meter data for the individual households, they succeeded in showing average consumption in time-related development.

It has not previously been possible to document the real effect of legislative energy requirements for houses.

Energy requirements in the building regulations do work

The Aarhus University researchers worked closely on the extensive data analysis with AffaldVarme Aarhus (Waste and District Heating Aarhus) – one of Denmark's largest district heating providers. Based on the results, they can conclude that the increased energy requirements in the 2006 building regulations have had a particularly positive effect.

During the period from 2006 to 2011 alone, heating consumption in single-family houses fell by 25 per cent, which corresponds to the political ambition of the specific requirements.

"Our study provides solid documentation for the increased energy requirements having an impact on the actual household energy consumption. It's clearly shown in the data that one of the most ambitious initiatives ever undertaken to tighten energy requirements in the building industry has had the desired relative effect on the actual energy consumption of single-family houses," says Associate Professor Petersen.

In research circles, the increased energy requirements in the building regulations

project facts

TITLE

Data visualisation of the district heating consumption of the Danes. Part of Resource Efficient cities implementing ADvanced smart city solutions (READY)

SCHEDULE

2016–2017

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

EUR 33 million
EU's 7th Framework Programme for Research

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have been a topic of great discussion since they were introduced.

Even though the comprehensive analysis of district heating data shows that the average energy consumption for heating homes depends on the specific energy requirements in the year of construction, the researchers can nevertheless ascertain that there is significant diversion in each construction year.

"When we consider the average district heating consumption in the building stock, it appears as a clear function of the year of construction. If we take a slightly more detailed approach, however, we can see that there are very large variations in the energy consumption in otherwise comparable single-family houses," says Associate Professor Petersen.

Considerable difference in heating consumption in houses with the same energy label

Part of the explanation of this large diversion can be variations in the number of household occupants and different preferences regarding comfortable room temperatures. According to Associate Professor Petersen, however, high energy consumption can also be due

to faults and defects in the construction work.

"In newer houses, energy consumption at the high end of the scale can possibly be caused by an insufficient building envelope, poorly regulated ventilation and heating systems – and even shoddy work and negligence," he says.

The difference between the estimated and the measured energy consumption is most pronounced in newer single-family houses, and this gives rise to checking the existing calculation methods in the building trade.

"It's a big problem. We have to take a closer look at the methods and standards used by engineers when they're calculating a household's energy consumption while the building is still on the drawing board. It should be such that both homeowners and utility companies experience that theory matches reality," says Associate Professor Petersen.

In the time ahead, the researchers will collaborate with AffaldVarme Aarhus to identify the exact causes of the large diversion in the household energy consumption. This will also provide new knowledge about opportunities for optimising district heating operations.

"We're in the process of analysing household energy consumption for heating on a weekly, hourly and minute-by-minute basis, and then it's likely that we can point out how we can optimise district heating operations and the pipeline network. We'll also take a closer look at how we can make the energy calculations in the current building regulations more accurate for the actual operations. Our aim is to create an evidence-based foundation for decisions about future investments," says Business Developer Adam Brun, AffaldVarme Aarhus.



Photo: Lars Kruse

With energy data from 28,000 single-family houses in Denmark, Danish researchers document that the current energy requirements for new houses have a significant and positive impact on heat consumption. Shown here are Associate Professor Steffen Petersen (right) and PhD student Martin Heine Kristensen (left) who are responsible for the study.



Overloaded: How to save the green energy network of tomorrow

The energy network of the future will be much more decentralised than at present, where large heat and power plants provide the coverage. This can potentially overload local grids that are not designed for the modern form of energy production. Flow batteries can be the solution.

By 2050, Denmark will be 100 per cent independent of fossil fuels. This is a political decision and changes have already been implemented in the energy system to embrace a more decentralised structure. Total independence from fossil fuels means that citizens will become more and more dependent on electricity in the society of the future – electric cars, for example, are gradually taking over an ever-larger share of the market, and they require a connection to the electricity grid in order to run.

The future is electric so to speak, and more and more people recognise the value of producing their own power by means of sources such as solar cells on the roof. Previous subsidy schemes made this economically viable, but the regulations have been changed, and owners of solar cell panels can therefore no longer receive payment for the power they deliver to the grid. At the same time, they are only exempt from energy charges during the hours their own production is in progress.

“The reason is that solar cells have become so cheap. And this is where the

need for a battery comes into the picture,” says Associate Professor Anders Bentien. He is taking part in the Grid Connected Flow Batteries project which is basically about storing the power produced and releasing it at a later date as cheaply as possible.

A good alternative

Associate Professor Bentien is an expert in flow batteries, a type of battery where energy is stored in liquids that are pumped into a flow cell when it is being charged or discharged. Such batteries are typically extremely large and are often used for storing electricity from power plants. In their project, however, the researchers have scaled down the size to dimensions that are suitable for apartment buildings or housing associations, for example. The project is already prepared for the experimental stage.

And it may turn out that flow batteries are a valuable alternative for utility companies which are often equipped with old cables that are in no way designed for the fluctuating power production for today's households. In fact, many older

suburban neighbourhoods from the 60s and 70s have no power line or transformer capacity at all for the large amounts of power produced by the many new solar cell panels during daylight hours when the sun is shining and people are at work.

“The plants are undersized, and we're dealing with transformer stations that are possibly totally unsuitable for transforming power the other way. This is where battery storage could be a really good alternative to digging down new cables and building new transformer stations. This is what we'll be testing in the project,” says Associate Professor Bentien.

Flow vs. lithium-ion

There is nothing new in household batteries. Most people have heard of Tesla which is on the way to producing a household battery with functions that include talking to the electric car. The difference lies in the type of battery, where flow batteries differ significantly from lithium-ion batteries, for example, which are otherwise very widespread in all forms of electronics.



What do you do when the electricity grid has not been updated to cover the boost in power consumption to run both cars and heating pumps in the future? Batteries can be the way forward, according to Associate Professor Anders Bentien.

“What has been the driving force behind battery development for many years is the pursuit of higher energy density. We wanted batteries for mobile phones or laptops to be smaller and last longer. There’s no doubt here that the lithium-ion batteries are leading, but the problem is the price. In terms of mobile phones, this doesn’t matter so much, but when it comes to storing energy from energy production, it’s another matter altogether,” says Associate Professor Bentien.

Here price can actually be more important than energy density, especially when it comes to large-scale storage – i.e. storing energy from large stationary applications such as solar cells or wind turbines.

“The energy density of flow batteries can be a factor of 3–5 times less than lithium-ion batteries. So they take up somewhat more space, but the price is significantly lower in return,” says Associate Professor Bentien.

“What’s interesting for an end-user is something known as the levelised cost of electricity storage. This means the price

you pay to store one kWh and get it back again, where the service life of the battery is one of the factors taken into account. In this way, lead batteries score relatively high because they don’t withstand very many discharges,” he continues.

Lithium-ion batteries also have a relatively high levelised cost of electricity storage because they are so expensive to buy. Flow batteries, on the other hand, are relatively cheap to buy and are very durable because, in principle, the liquid used has an endless lifespan and can be recycled.

project facts

TITLE

Grid Connected Flow Batteries

SCHEDULE

2017-2019

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

EUR 1.2 million

Energy technological development and Demonstration Program (EUDP)

PROJECT PARTNERS

Eniig (Energi Midt)

VisBlue

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Developing the bio-boilers of the future

Straw-fired boilers are used all over Denmark to provide heating for homes and farm buildings, but they create much more pollution than comparable wood pellet boilers. A new project will try to amend this because straw is a very inexpensive form of fuel, and the prospects are therefore considerable for farming and small heating plants.



Photo: Anders Trøstrup

Straw-fired bio-boilers have undergone tremendous development since they took over much of the heat production in farming during the 1970s. But there is still a long way to go to catch up with ultra-modern wood pellet boilers. Shown here are Erik Fløjgaard Kristensen (left) and Jens Kristian Kristensen (right), a technician in the biomass heating laboratory. They are both working on optimising the straw-fired boilers of the future.

The annual harvest is a recurring sign of the arrival of autumn in Denmark, where heavy combine harvesters slowly transform the golden-brown landscape into stubble fields dotted with large rectangular bales of straw. This is nature taking its course, and is just as certain as the leaves beginning to fade at this time of the year. But what actually happens to the bales of straw?

In the old days, straw was used as feed and bedding – for filling in beds and for thatching roofs. Nowadays, there are new application options such as straw insulation in experimental concrete buildings. In connection with the oil crisis in the 1970s, straw was also gradually used for fuel on many farms in simple straw-fired boilers. Just like wood, straw is regarded as a carbon dioxide-neutral fuel. And all over Denmark, especially in farming and small decentralised combined heat and power (CHP) plants, straw-fired boilers are used today to provide hot water in taps and radiators.

However, such boilers have developed significantly since the early 1970s. From being simple ovens that most of the time spewed out black and foul-smelling smoke from the chimneys, straw-fired boilers today are ultra-modern fuel boilers with a degree of efficiency close to 90 per cent, where it is hard to see by looking at the chimney whether the boiler is turned on or off.

Minimising emissions

However, this does not mean that the combustion cannot be improved and emissions reduced even more. It is actually a really good idea because low environmental impact from burning has become a very important competitive parameter since green energy and sustainability became buzzwords. In addition, strict emission requirements for solid fuel boilers, as described in the Executive Order on wood-burning stoves, will apply to all new straw-fired boilers after January 2018.

Alcon – a company in Central Jutland that develops, manufactures and sells straw-fired boilers – is therefore collaborating on a project with researchers at the Foulum Research Centre, Aarhus University, to make the company's most efficient straw-fired boiler even better.

"The idea is to develop the most environmentally responsible portion-fired straw boiler on the market. With a starting point in the market's best degree of efficiency, we now want to see how we can combine this with the lowest possible emission of environmentally hazardous substances such as carbon monoxide (CO), hydrocarbons and dust particles," says Erik Fløjgaard Kristensen.

And there is good use for this. Product development of the smaller, portion-fired straw boilers has actually been at a standstill ever since 2001 when the Danish Energy Agency abolished the subsidy scheme for small biofuel boilers that had been introduced in 1995 to ensure improved efficiency and lower emissions from precisely this type of boiler.

This generally means today that portion-fired straw boilers still pollute with more CO and other unburned flue gases than automatic straw stokers, and even more compared to wood pellet stokers. And because these emissions can contain carcinogenic hydrocarbons (PAHs), there is a need to improve combustion in these types of boilers.

The right temperature is critical

An important parameter as regards reducing CO emissions and unburned hydrocarbons is the temperature in the boiler's combustion chamber. If the temperature is too low, the hydrocarbons in the flue gases are not burned well enough. However, if the temperature is too high, it can exceed the melting point of the ash, which can result in problems such as increased emissions of fly ash. Straw normally contains some salts and minerals that can evaporate from the melting ash

and condense into a very fine-grained dust – fly ash – when the smoke is cooled on its way out of the boiler.

The temperature must therefore be highest at the top of the combustion chamber, where the flue gases accumulate, and lowest at the bottom, where the ash is deposited. There must also be the right mixing ratio between the amount of flue gases and the amount of combustion air supplied, which is achieved by an electronic control box automatically regulating the amount of primary and secondary air by increasing or decreasing it in relation to the oxygen content in the flue gas.

A standard boiler from Alcon was used in the first stage of the project and, based on experience with this boiler, a new one has been built with a number of improvements. The researchers expect that the new boiler will be able to reduce CO emissions so much that the boiler can comply with future limit values.

project facts

TITLE

Optimising combustion in a portion-fired straw boiler

SCHEDULE

2016-2017

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 1.4 million
Innovation Fund Denmark

PROJECT PARTNERS

Alcon A/S
ChimneyLab Europe ApS
Eurofins Danmark A/S

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How do you distinguish renewable energy?

Are you buying certified green power? Then perhaps you have wondered whether you are actually getting what you are paying extra for. Because how do you tell electricity apart?

Green, sustainable and renewable energy is in and has been for years. Land-based and offshore wind farms are popping up everywhere, and house owners across the globe are looking to invest in solar power, where deployment has soared since the early 2000s. The worldwide growth of solar cell power, for instance, has averaged 40 per cent per year since 2000 and reached a total capacity of 253 terawatt hours (TWh) in 2015.

That is a lot of green power from a considerable number of different places flowing into a grid infrastructure designed and optimised for centralised power generation – the fossil-fuel based system that the European power grid relied on in the past. So how do you distinguish where the power is coming from?

Postdoctoral Fellow Mirko Schäfer is working on exactly that problem in a project funded by the Carlsberg Foundation.

“Think of it as a big pool that everyone is putting power into and taking it from again. Once you put power into the pool or take power out, there’s no telling where it came from. You can’t put a stamp on the power to show you where it originated and who profits from it. It’s very hard

to distinguish who’s actually using certain parts of the grid infrastructure,” he says.

Complicating the complicated

The ever-increasing number of micro-contributors – such as a single family house with solar cells or a single wind turbine – makes an already complex grid system even more complicated. And it becomes still more complex because, even though the pool analogy may sound simple, it is actually far from reality.

“You have a specific grid infrastructure and there are limits on it. Only a certain amount of power can be transmitted because, otherwise, the infrastructure might break down. An example is the grid between northern and southern Germany, where the infrastructure is not large enough to accommodate the flow of power required,” explains Mirko Schäfer.

So in a world in which an increasing number of private individuals, companies and publicly owned energy farms contribute to a failing grid, who is paying? And how can you be sure that you are actually getting the ‘certified green power’ that you might be paying for explicitly if energy cannot be marked?

The solution is flow tracing and, if we re-

turn to the pool analogy, it is just like adding colour to the water.

“You can’t distinguish one drop of water from the next. But what you can do is ‘colour’ it at its origin. You can trace the energy through the grid by looking at its origin, the origin’s data and flow pattern. That way you can tell who’s injecting how much at what place and what time. The result is a pool of different colours, and that way you can distinguish the flow algorithmically,” says Mirko Schäfer.

Ensuring the right price

An example could be offshore wind farms, where a large percentage of the generated energy is not used by the country that creates it – the country where the wind farm is located. Flow tracing can then be used to allocate some of the investment cost and the cost of producing the energy to the countries that are actually buying the energy from the particular farm.

This way the cost of the future power grid – which is dependent on long-range power transmission, storage, back-up power generation units, etc. – can be more fairly distributed between those who actually use the power and the general public, who up until now have usually borne the cost of grid inefficiencies.



Flow tracing is becoming more and more necessary as a means of control in a decentralised energy grid such as the one we are heading towards as a society.
Photo: Postdoctoral Fellow Mirko Schäfer

project facts

TITLE

Tracing the power flow in complex renewable energy networks

SCHEDULE

2016-2018

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 1.1 million
The Carlsberg Foundation

CONTACT

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Smart transition will ensure green energy by 2050

Denmark will be 100 per cent independent of fossil fuels by the year 2050. Already now, we must rethink the transformation of our energy system, and link electricity, heating and transport in a smart way. Not only Danish but also European energy companies must be involved. A major new project will pave the way.

In a few years, Denmark will be at a turning point where new methods are required to continue the green transition. Approximately 50 per cent of all Danish electricity will soon come from wind, and Denmark has solved the enormous challenge of getting power plants to increase or decrease electricity production in response to changing wind conditions. The next problem is to exploit wind, solar and biomass energy for heating production, and especially to keep the wheels turning in the transport sector which is heavily dependent on fossil petrol and diesel. A political decision has been taken that Denmark should manage with no fossil fuels at all by 2050 – and we will have reached 30 per cent of this target by 2020.

To reach the final target, a complete reorganisation of the entire energy grid is nec-

essary, so this must already be incorporated into the future strategy. The decisions and investments we make now regarding energy, heating and transport services can be crucially important for when the political finishing line is reached.

“If we build a new power plant today, we’re locked into this technology for 40 years. That’s about as long as such a plant can last. The new things we build today must therefore fit into both the present and the future, so that the transition to clean renewable energy in 2050 can take place as smartly and cheaply as possible. It’s really a matter of converting to what is right without forgetting the whole energy infrastructure we’ve got today,” says Assistant Professor Gorm Bruun Andresen.

project facts

TITLE

RE-Invest – Renewable Energy Investments Strategies – A two-dimensional interconnectivity approach

SCHEDULE

2017-2021

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 27 million
Innovation Fund Denmark

PROJECT PARTNERS

Aalborg University
Stanford University (USA)
Frankfurt Institute for Advanced Studies (Germany)
Østfoldforskning (Norway)
DONG Energy
Energinet.dk
Danish Energy Agency
HMN Naturgas
Haldor Topsoe
EMD International
Statkraft
Danish District Heating Association
Danfoss
Kamstrup
Aalborg CSP
MP Pension.

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More dependent on electricity than ever
Gorm Bruun Andresen is participating in the RE-Invest project which gathers some of the major players in the energy market that are joined by researchers from some of the leading universities in the world. This is because it involves much more than simply replacing coal-fired power plants with wind turbines.

The energy system of the future will actually be far more decentralised than it is today. Wind turbines and solar cells are making greater and greater inroads, and this means that the system must be able to handle varying energy production. At the same time, our everyday activities are becoming significantly more dependent on electricity for basics such as heating and transport, which means that the system must be capable of dealing with and



Solar and wind energy will cover an ever-greater share of Denmark's power supply, and this means that the network must be able to handle a decentralised energy structure with fluctuating production. Pictured here are Assistant Professor Gorm Bruun Andresen (left) and Professor Martin Greiner (right), who will both help steer Denmark towards the right investment strategy that will make the country free of fossil fuels by 2050.

benefiting from an overall energy infrastructure rather than the traditional silos of electricity, heating and transport.

In addition, as we all know, wind turbines and solar cells work best when weather conditions permit. Denmark's electricity system of the future will therefore become dependent on our neighbouring countries, which means we must look beyond our borders when we talk about energy production in the future.

"We must keep Europe in mind. Denmark has one strategy, but how does that fit in with the rest of Europe? How do the decisions taken in other countries influence the Danish model with lots of wind, for example? The electricity grid must match so that when we have excess wind, and thereby produce surplus energy, it's no

use that all the other surrounding countries are also producing too much wind energy. It involves coordinating our strategy with all the others," says Professor Martin Greiner, who is also taking part in the project.

Getting a technological head start

Green conversion and phasing out fossil fuels are not cheap. They actually require an annual investment of approximately DKK 100 billion because the transition involves not only energy and heating but also the entire transport sector, including cars that run on diesel and petrol. However, if Denmark leads the way with the development, the players in the Danish energy sector can make use of the technological head start resulting from such a green transition.

"If Denmark takes the lead, this is where the solutions will be developed and tried out, and our companies will learn from it. It's not so many years ago that half of all the wind turbines in the world were situated in Denmark. In other words, the experience gained in building such constructions is located in Denmark. This is one of the things we get by taking the lead. It might be expensive but, on the other hand, we acquire experience we can sell to the rest of the world," explains Assistant Professor Andresen.



Navitas Campus, Aarhus



HEALTH

Mathematical models behind new cancer images

By combining two different scanning technologies, researchers have succeeded in creating completely new and detailed images of cancer tumours in mice. This could eventually pave the way for the development of more effective drugs.

A Danish research team is behind a new method for studying how a tracer is distributed in a cancer tumour via its extensive vascular network.

The method can be used for purposes such as closely studying the effect of medical treatment using cancer inhibitors.

By means of mathematical modelling, the researchers combined two previously known scanning technologies – magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT) – and used these to study tumours in laboratory animals.

This resulted in completely new images at very high resolution, which provide detailed mapping of the branching of tumour blood vessels.

“We can lay two images of the same cancer tumour on top of each other so to speak, so we get a more geometrically complex understanding of the individual tumour’s blood vessels, and thereby an opportunity to very precisely study the way drugs are distributed,” says Associate Professor Jens Vinge Nygaard.

He is responsible for the mathematical modelling work for the imaging, and he expects that the method could ultimately be used to develop new drugs and optimise dosing for the individual patient.

15,000 blood vessels under the microscope

An MR image can show how a tracer used as a cancer-inhibiting drug is distributed

inside the tumour, but only in a relatively coarse resolution.

An image from a micro-CT scanner, on the other hand, can show an extensive network of blood vessels in the tumour at very high resolution, but it is unable to identify how the drug is transported locally.

The combination of the two imaging technologies can thereby provide significantly improved scanning images of cancer, which can play an important role in developing new drugs.

“The new images give us an opportunity to follow the way a tracer travels through the blood vessels in the tumour and into the surrounding tissue to the cancer cells. As scientists, we’re interested in mapping the size and branching of the blood vessels, and understanding what goes on between the blood vessels over time. This can provide us with more detailed insight into specific treatment needs,” says Thomas Rea Wittenborn, who is a cancer researcher at the Department of Experimental Clinical Oncology, Department of Clinical Medicine, Aarhus University Hospital.

The tumours they studied measure approximately 200–300 cubic millimetres and typically contain 15,000–20,000 branches of blood vessels.

Computer models replace experimental animals

The researchers followed a total of ten mice with tumours on their feet, and used

the two scanning technologies to develop a computer model for each of these.

In principle, the models form the foundation for a completely unique experimental platform.

“Using the computer models, we’ve created a virtual experimental platform so to speak, and can thereby considerably extend our experiments because we’re not dependent on experimental animals. In practice, we can sit in front of our computer screens and study what happens to the tumour if we use drugs that stay in the tissue for longer or shorter periods, or are adapted for small or large blood vessels,” says Associate Professor Nygaard.

In the time ahead, the researchers will expand their experiment with more mice and follow the cancer tumours over a period of time. This will provide them with an opportunity to develop computer models that not only describe drug distribution in a static stage of the cancer process, but also generate precise growth scenarios for cancer tumours.

“Using the new imaging method, we’ll be capable in purely mathematical terms of predicting tumour development in connection with different drug strategies,” says Associate Professor Nygaard.



project facts

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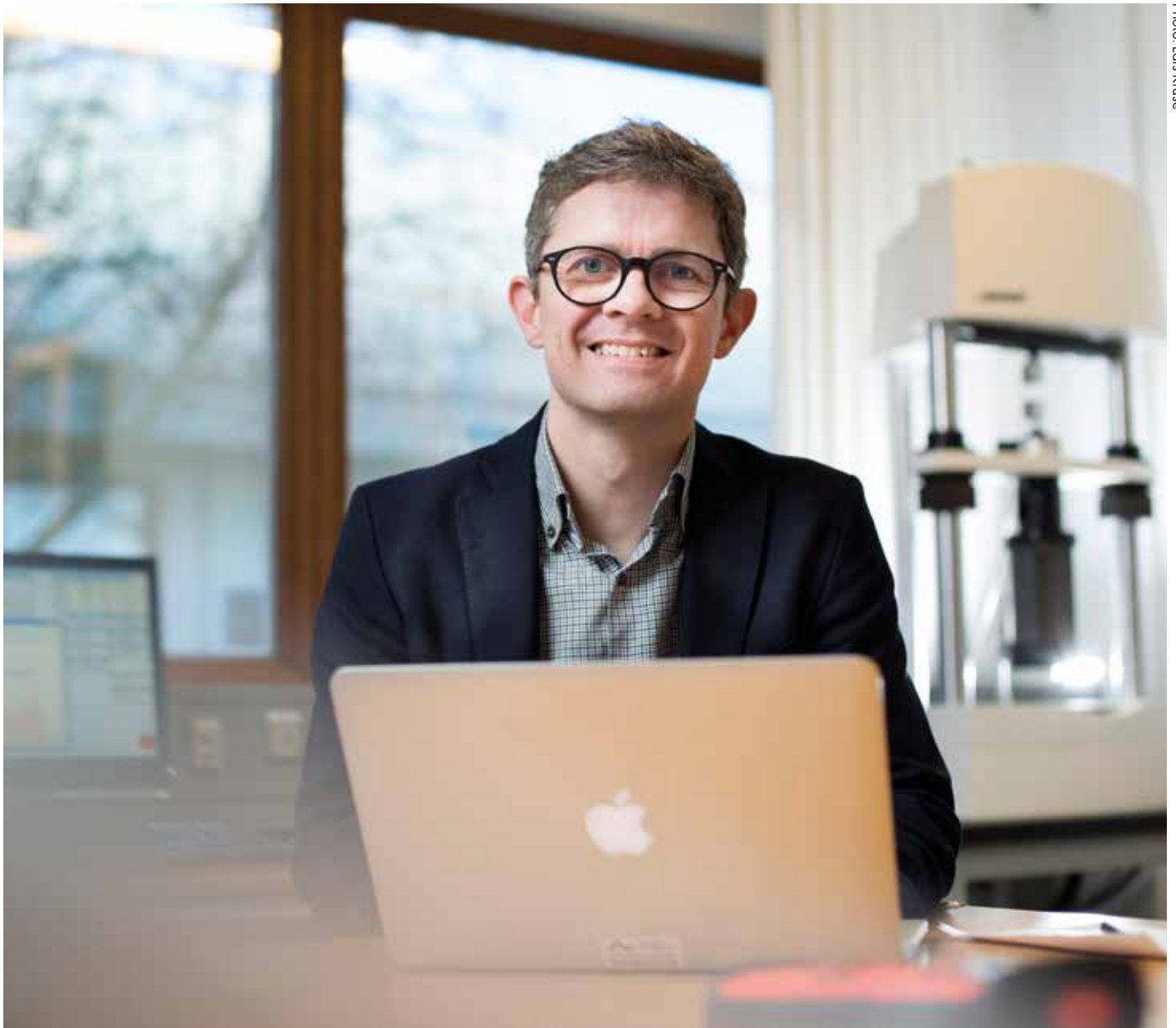


Photo: Lars Kruse

Associate Professor Jens Vinge Nygaard specialises in classical mechanics. Using mathematical models, he can predict the development of a cancer tumour.

project facts

TITLE

Prometheus

SCHEDULE

2016–2018

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 9.5 million

EU Interreg

PROJECT PARTNERS

University of Southern Denmark (SDU)

Little Belt Hospital

Kiel University Hospital

CONTACT

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Design provides better patient care

A new design tool will make it easier to individualise technology for self-monitoring and thereby motivate patients to take a far more active role in their own treatment. Researchers are carrying out the first pilot studies on Danish patients in a urology ward.

Chronically ill patients are now, to a large extent, co-responsible for maintaining a lifestyle and regulating behaviour that has a positive impact on their own symptom development. Examples of this could be following a plan for medication intake, complying with dietary recommendations, maintaining a sleep pattern, and increasing the level of physical activity.

The hospital sector is to an increasing degree implementing technology-based self-monitoring with a view to helping patients maintain health-improving activities and habits.

No complete documentation is yet available for the effect of a patient's technolo-

gy-based self-monitoring, and researchers are therefore taking a closer look at the correlation between measuring devices and symptom development.

In an international project, they are studying the design of the actual measuring devices as well as the importance of the design regarding how patients record their activity, how they experience their state of health, and the interpretation of data by health personnel.

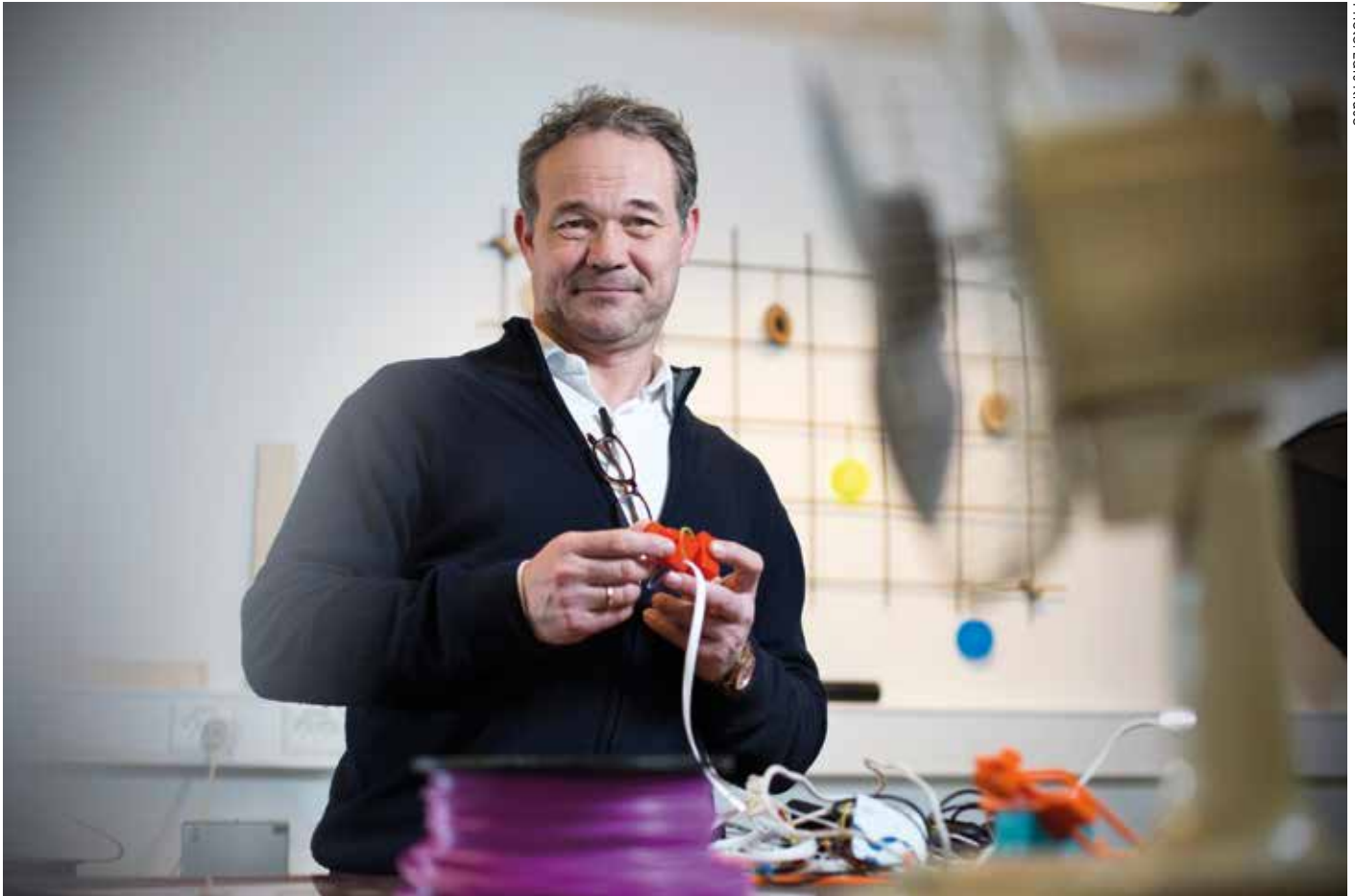
"People used to be sent home from hospital with a pamphlet on how to deal with their illness. Practitioners now have far more focus on teaching individual patients to master their illness by means of appro-

priate habits. Preliminary studies here show that self-monitoring can be crucial for lifestyle changes. The challenge is that patients are different, and the self-monitoring devices should therefore optimally be designed based on individual needs and preferences in terms of both technological interaction and physical design," says Professor Peter Gall Krogh.

The researchers are also studying areas such as how the design of the self-monitoring devices can address the physical condition and technological insight of the patients.

Stronger motivation for self-monitoring

To meet individual preferences regard-



Design can prove to be considerably more important than previously thought for the self-care of chronically ill patients. Professor Peter Gall Krogh is developing new sensor-based prototypes of self-monitoring devices that will help urology patients.

ing self-monitoring, the researchers in the project are working on developing a design tool and a number of sensor-based prototypes that can communicate in different ways with external wireless units and networks.

"Doctors would like their patients to regularly record any pain they experience or their fluid intake, etc. But how does this work best? For one patient, it could be entering a numeric value on a smartphone. However, it could be something completely different for another. Hospitals today use more or less randomly selected standard electronic devices. Our hypothesis is that we can achieve far better results with self-monitoring if the

selection of the measuring units is based on the individual patient's preferences, prerequisites and user context. It's a matter of integrating technology development, patient care, and design thinking," says Professor Krogh.

Increased fluid intake among renal patients

In the first stage of the pilot project, the researchers' sensor-based prototypes will be tested by practitioners and kidney stone patients at the Department of Urology, Little Belt Hospital. The project will specifically demonstrate aspects such as the effect of custom-designed sensors and healthcare wearables as regards increasing fluid intake in patients.

A patient with kidney stones must drink at least six litres of fluid per day to reduce pain in connection with urination.

"The question is how to get a self-monitoring device to work that can motivate individual patients to drink so much water and remember to record their fluid intake? Should it be a wristband, a handle, an iPad or a stone in their pocket? It's a question of designing prototypes based on a deep understanding of the individual person's relation to technology," says Professor Krogh.

There is much more to lighting than flicking a switch

More and more building owners and designers are trying to adopt circadian lighting concepts for both new and retrofitted buildings. This has the potential to positively affect human behaviour, sleep and productivity.

Light – one of the most important aspects of human life and the reason for every living creature on Earth.

Ever since the invention of the incandescent light bulb in the 19th century, the lighting of building interiors has often been taken for granted as a quintessential part of our private and professional lives. But lighting today is much more than flicking a switch when you enter your office on Monday mornings.

Today scientists aim to use lighting to curb and affect the circadian rhythm – the ‘built-in clock’ that the human brain and body use to regulate biological processes and behaviour. There is clear evidence that particular lighting solutions with specifically targeted spectral properties can enhance the quality of sleep, while others can improve alertness and thereby perhaps human productivity. When exposed to a light stimulus, the human body reacts in different ways, for example by suppressing the sleep hormone melatonin. Similarly, lighting can be used to affect our feelings, our perception of our surroundings and our overall well-being.

Daylight, the light under which humanity has evolved, provides the most effective circadian lighting. Many of the electric

lighting systems sold as circadian lighting today try to mimic daylight, but usually without its full variability.

That is why many new hospitals, homes for the elderly, office buildings and even schools that are currently being developed throughout Denmark try to adapt some form of circadian or biologically effective lighting.

Tuning the light to match the research

One of these is the Risskov Psychiatric Hospital, where scientists from Aarhus University and engineers from DEM-Esbensen are working with the medical staff to develop and test suitable lighting systems aimed at reducing the use of medication and physical restraints in the treatment of patients with bipolar disorders. With the upcoming move of the psychiatric unit to Skejby, the old Risskov hospital serves as a test bed to ensure that effective and appropriate lighting systems can be installed in the new hospital environment at Skejby.

“In collaboration with DEM-Esbensen and Moto Muto, we have created a lighting system that allows us to tune the spectral composition of the light in various ways, so that we can connect it with medical research on how lighting affects psychiatric

project facts

TITLE

Lighting Solutions for Treatment of Bipolar Disorders in Psychiatric Health Care Environments

SCHEDULE

2015-2017

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 250,000
Innovation Fund Denmark

PROJECT PARTNERS

Dansk Energi Management & Esbensen,
Moto Muto

CONTACT

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patients. We have simultaneously studied the impact of lighting on other things than health,” says Professor Werner Osterhaus.

For instance, the researchers have examined how different spectral distributions in lighting affect people’s perception of space and colours in the room. Does the room feel big or small, is it comfortable to be in, or is the lighting somehow disturbing because of its spectral distribution? Can you even see things properly?

“If medical experts then find out that a specific spectrum works better than another at a specific time of day or during a particular phase in the treatment, the lighting system can be adapted to the new settings,” says Professor Osterhaus.

Still no agreed-upon definition

Research in circadian lighting is still fairly new, although vigorous research since the early 1970s has shown correlations between light exposure and human emotion and productivity. In the past 15 years, medical research has developed a basic understanding of the recently discovered non-visual photoreceptors in the human eye and their functions for human health and well-being, and an understanding of how and why we react to the different spectral components in light. But there is



Incandescence – the heating of a wire filament with electricity to such a high temperature that it glows with visible light. The invention, which has been attributed to Thomas Edison, sparked a revolution fundamental to our society and way of life today.

still a long way to go, as some research suggests conflicting theories. This is why the Aarhus University researchers use adaptive systems.

“There is currently no agreed-upon definition of a circadian lighting system. And such a definition might, in fact, change depending on the situation for which it is employed. Circadian lighting is proposed in a lot of settings and with varied approaches. So it is perhaps too early to give clear recommendations for an adoption in building codes and standards. That is something we need to look at very carefully. But this does not mean that we should avoid installing lighting systems moving in this direction,” says Professor Osterhaus.

“We just need to clearly state what is used in any given situation, so that we and others can assess the critical parameters and their likely impact and compare different systems. We also need multidisciplinary approaches for designing the right kind of research to further investigate circadian lighting and its impact,” he continues.

Great potential for human health and well-being

Despite the increasing research evidence on the impact of appropriate lighting technology on the human circadian rhythm, it also takes time to understand the consequences and change the existing paradigms. Compared with other consumer goods, buildings have a long service life, and substantial lighting system retrofits are still rare in existing buildings. And even in new building constructions, where attempts are made to adopt new lighting technology, the result is still mostly installations with fluorescent lamps to provide the required minimum lighting levels.

“Most of the lighting systems employed in buildings today are still rather static, but some kinds of flexible systems are slowly being adopted in more and more new buildings. Systems with one correlated colour temperature, but with a dimming feature responding to the available daylight and perhaps with a control system allowing for different lighting scenarios and uses in the same room, are becom-

ing fairly common in new buildings now,” Professor Osterhaus points out.

“Well-considered lighting has a very large potential for both human health and well-being, and for reducing the environmental impact of buildings, especially when the starting point is an effective use of daylight to provide appropriate lighting levels for most of the daylight hours,” he adds.

The lighting industry likes to refer to the latest technology, especially circadian lighting, as Human Centric Lighting. “But doesn’t most lighting target humans?” asks Professor Osterhaus rhetorically.

“In general, engineers and architects are concerned with providing sheltered, comfortable and healthy environments for people. That is and always has been the premise we work with. Until we can make definite recommendations, however, we need to be careful not to install systems that are too rigid, but systems that are flexible enough to move with new research and adapt to it,” he adds.

PRECISION AGRICULTURE

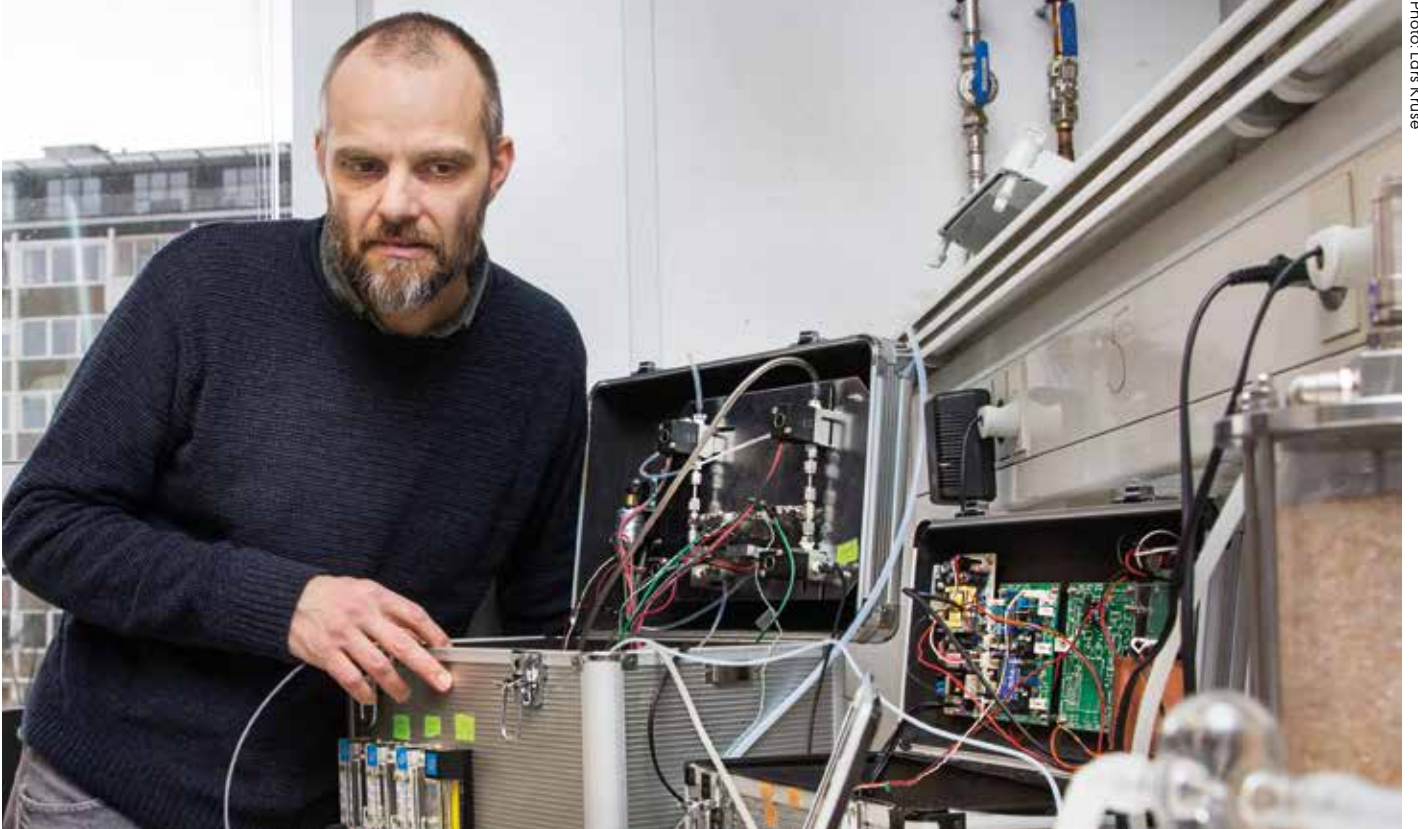


Photo: Lars Kruse

Researchers are close to a solution that provides an opportunity to monitor and limit ammonia emissions from animal housing, thereby significantly reducing the environmental impact of the farming industry. Photo: Associate Professor Anders Feilberg

New technology for reduction of air pollution from farms

Chemical technology and new sensors for purifying the air will make it possible for farmers to control ammonia emission at the same time as remediating odour from livestock production. This can contribute to a significant reduction of the total air pollution in the Western world.

Researchers will develop new technology that can very accurately measure airborne emissions of ammonia and odours from animal production facilities at the same time as retaining the pollutants.

They are focusing on ammonia in particular because it is converted in the atmosphere to particles that are harmful for humans to breathe.

"Ammonia and odours are some of the major environmental problems in agriculture, but ammonia is also a useful fertiliser if we can retain the gas. Our aim is

therefore to develop technology-based methods to monitor air pollution in animal housing and limit emissions into the atmosphere," says Associate Professor Anders Feilberg.

Livestock production is currently responsible for a substantial part of air pollution in Denmark.

Chemical cleaning with great potential

In collaboration with leading Danish technology companies, the university researchers have been working on chemistry-based air purification for a number

of years. On this basis, they will now develop a new technology and a finished prototype of a purification plant that can remove odours and ammonia in livestock production.

"We know that acid-base processes are effective in reducing ammonia emissions from animal housing, and we expect that a new oxidation process can also be used to remove odorous substances. We'll therefore integrate two different technologies in a chemical purification plant that can deal with large amounts of ventilation air," says Associate Professor Feilberg.

project facts

TITLE

ECOMETA (Emission Control: Methods and Technologies for Agriculture)

SCHEDULE

2017-2020

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 17.4 million
Innovation Fund Denmark, Grand solutions

PROJECT PARTNERS

SEGES, Agrifarm Innovation Aps
Infuser Aps
Wageningen Livestock Research (Netherlands)

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Photo: Lars Kruse

Several years of basic research in photonics will now benefit the farming industry. Associate Professor Martijn Heck is an expert in sensor technology, and he will develop an optical sensor that can measure the amount of ammonia by illuminating the gas with laser beams.

The new chemical technologies will work via a filter tower with different kinds of packing materials that can retain ammonia gas from the ventilation air by continuously irrigating it with different chemical liquids.

The researchers are already well advanced with their research in the laboratory. Their major engineering challenge now is to make the purification plant both reliable and economically viable.

If they succeed, this can be very important for the technology's commercialisation opportunities, according to Associate Professor Feilberg.

"We're going after an advanced chemical technology solution that can work efficiently and economically on a full scale outside the laboratory. If it works, we can expect considerable global demand," he says.

New sensors will monitor ammonia vapours and odours

In addition to designing methods for cleaning the air, the researchers will de-

velop new sensors that can very accurately measure ammonia emissions from animal housing.

"We're working on different types of sensors, which can each in their own way record the level of air pollution with a high degree of detail. We'll also make the measuring instruments significantly smaller and cheaper in terms of design, production and operation," says Associate Professor Feilberg.

One of the sensors is optical and it will measure the amount of ammonia in the air by illuminating the gas with laser beams. The technology is based on basic engineering research in photonics that can be integrated into very small computers.

This provides farmers with an opportunity to monitor continuously, and thereby produce a time-resolved image of the pollution situation.

Another sensor is based on NMR spectroscopy. It works by recording the rela-

tionship between nitrogen and potassium atoms in the slurry, and can eventually be an inexpensive and accurate instrument for measuring ammonia emissions.

The researchers also have a number of other ideas in the pipeline, and the project's total number of monitoring and cleaning technologies will provide the farming industry with better opportunities to adapt to current environmental legislation.

"If farmers can carry out accurate monitoring of ammonia emissions from animal housing, they can also make their operations more efficient. And if they can clear the air of ammonia at the same time and collect it for fertilising purposes, they'll also be able to significantly reduce the environmental impact," says Associate Professor Feilberg.



Photo: Rasmus Nyholm Jørgensen

Researchers can already take high-resolution images of weeds, even when driving at 50 km/h in the field. The aim is to make the entire spraying process as autonomous as possible.

How deep learning can help farmers get rid of weeds

By using a number of digital technologies, it is possible today to produce an overview of the type of weeds farmers are struggling with, and show exactly where they are located in the fields. This can mean a significant reduction in the amount of herbicides used.

To combat weeds, farmers have been spraying their fields with herbicides for decades. Until now, however, they have used a standard mixture of sprays which are spread over the entire field. This is not particularly smart from either a financial point of view or an environmental or biological perspective because herbicides are expensive, can have implications for the water quality in streams and groundwater, and lead to resistance in the weeds. Not to mention that a standard mixture of herbicides may have a good effect on some species of weeds, but a

less effective impact on others. And with a new EU directive stating that farmers should not spray before first inspecting the fields and determining the type of weeds in accordance with the principles of integrated plant protection, there is an extremely great need for a smart solution.

But is it at all possible to make the spraying process smart? This is what Aarhus University researchers have been studying since 2012, and they have actually achieved success via a combination of

cameras, Big Data and machine learning, in interaction with an existing decision support system (PlanteVærn Online).

“Currently, farmers don’t know what sort of weeds they have in their fields, and this knowledge is necessary. Not only regarding the use of the right herbicide, but also in relation to the regulations stipulated by the EU. But the farmers don’t have time to go round the fields and find out which weeds are growing there. This is where we can help with our technique which can outline the problem and thereby pro-

project facts

TITLE

RoboWeedMaPS - Automated Weed detection, Mapping and Variable Precision Control of Weeds

SCHEDULE

2017-2020

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

DKK 34.6 million
Innovation Fund Denmark

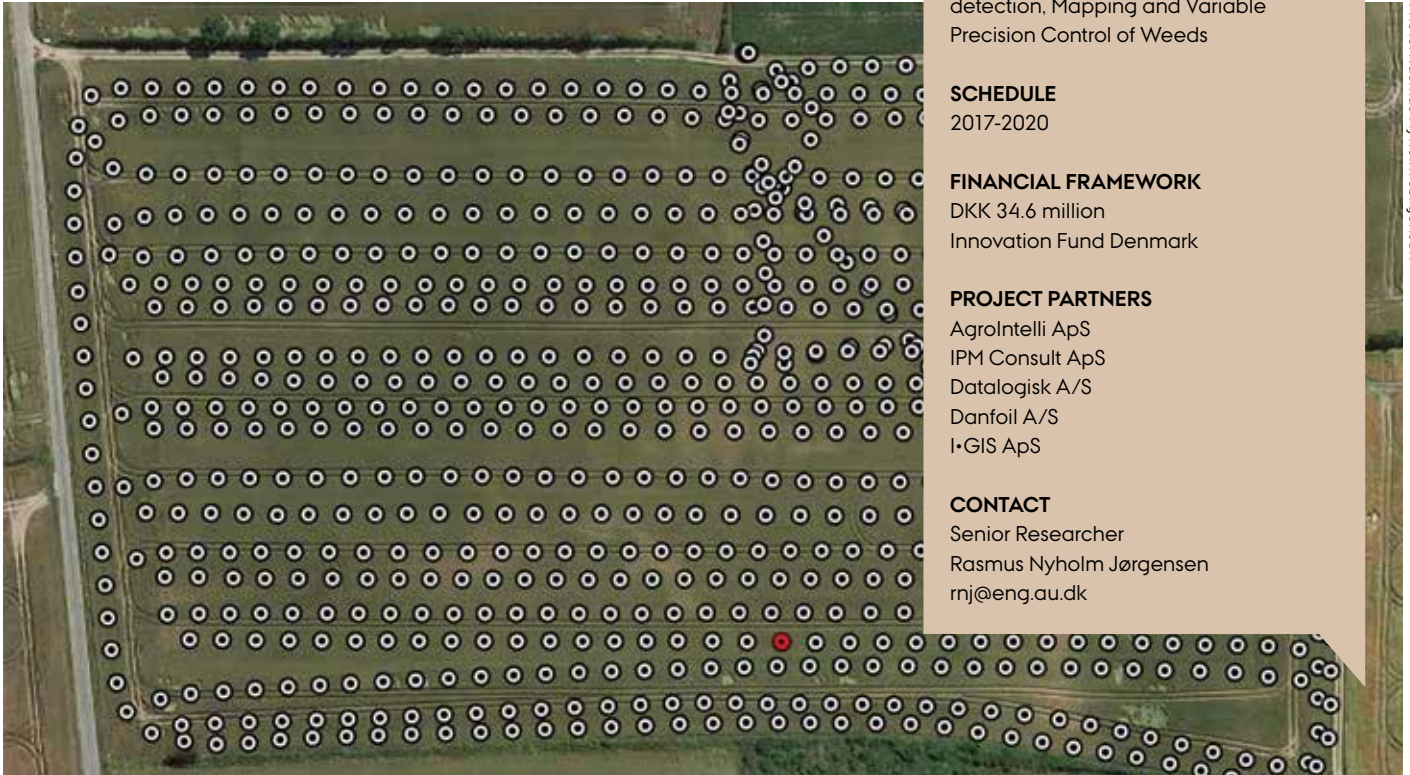
PROJECT PARTNERS

Agrolntelli ApS
IPM Consult ApS
Datalogisk A/S
Danfoil A/S
I-GIS ApS

CONTACT

Senior Researcher
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Photo: Rasmus Nyholm Jørgensen



This image shows a survey of weeds in a field. Each individual dot represents an image. Put together, this provides a very precise indication of the type of weeds causing havoc at particular parts of the field.

vide the basis for saving a considerable amount of spray,” says Senior Researcher Rasmus Nyholm Jørgensen.

Purple or green weeds

The technique involves attaching a row of high-resolution cameras to a wide bar on a tractor or directly on the farmer’s tools in the field. Alternatively a consumer drone may also be used. When the farmer drives through the vehicle tracks in the field, each camera takes lots of photos. Via the image positions, it is possible to piece the images together and create a comprehensive map of the crops and weeds in the field.

The images are automatically uploaded in the cloud, where they are analysed by several specialised algorithms for the composition of the weeds compared with the competitive ability of the crops. This is where Big Data come into the picture because the whole system relies on an enormous ‘weed data base’, where the researchers use deep learning to teach the computer to recognise different types of weeds.

Although it might sound simple, it is actually quite difficult to automate the pro-

cess, particularly because weeds in the fields hardly ever resemble those in the weed botanical books.

“The problem with recognising weeds is that they change shape. It only takes a small beetle to eat a leaf and the plant doesn’t look like the one in the image at all. Or the stems can be so thin that – in the image – it looks as though the leaves aren’t connected. And if it’s cold in spring, some weeds turn completely purple even though they’re normally green,” says Senior Researcher Jørgensen, pointing out that the computer therefore has to chew through a considerable amount of data in order to distinguish each individual type of weed from the other.

He compares this with driving a car. “Using pedals and gears doesn’t come automatically and sub-conscious, so until you’ve been out driving a lot, you feel uncertain. But if you’ve tried out a car simulator beforehand, these basic things become automatic and sub-conscious. Just like pilots. And that’s what we’re doing in our project. We train the neural network with artificial images in the simulator prior to releasing it into the real world,” he says.

Making life easier

The project has now reached the stage where the cameras can take high-resolution images with an accuracy of 4 pixels per millimetre, even when driving at 50 km/h in the field, and where the computer has satisfactorily learned to recognise 27 types of weeds from a data base with thousands of images. The computer is trained with far more species of weeds, but the number of training images is still too small to achieve strong recognition.

The aim is to make everyday life easier for farmers, so that the computer itself finds where the weeds are located, what type they are, and which type of herbicide should be used at precisely that spot in the field. The computer will thus control the dosage when farmers are spraying their fields, and even regulate different types of herbicides and dosages depending on the type of weed – an important part of the future smart farming.

Huge project to demonstrate how the Internet will fundamentally change farming

The EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation is investing a two-figure million amount in a major demonstration project that will show how farming can make use of smart IT solutions such as Big Data, Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things (IoT).

Although it may not always occur to you when you see farmers painstakingly trundling their tractors up and down the fields casting long shadows in the red glow of sunrise, many technologies have been developed in recent decades that aim to streamline and automate agricultural production once they have been fully implemented.

These include optimised route planning for farming machines, automatic steering and web-based monitoring of soil humidity.

However, even though the agri-food sector has generally been willing to adopt technologies such as Big Data, Artificial Intelligence and IoT, their use is currently still fragmented and the technologies are mainly used by early adopters.

This inadequate use of new technologies has an impact on both productivity and sustainability. The challenge is to nurture a development where farmers embrace these technologies – which are precisely tailored to farming.

A major new EU project will speed up this development.

“This is a paradigm shift. It’s a new way of going about farming, which will be transformed into a web of connected objects that can be identified, measured, controlled and remotely operated. There are so many advanced technologies that aren’t really being used. This project will show the world how to go about using them,” says Senior Researcher Claus Grøn Sørensen.

What is in it for me

The project is called the Internet of Food & Farm 2020, and it aims to demonstrate via 19 different case studies how IoT can drastically improve productivity and sustainability in European farming as we know it today.

The case studies will present concepts such as data exchange between machines, smart crop management and intelligent logistics.

The project will also demonstrate business models for the relevant technologies.

Both machines and farms have become significantly larger (and continue to grow) as a result of the ongoing structural development in the industry. Labour costs have

gone up, and product prices are being squeezed all the time, which means there is an ever-increasing need for efficient production management. If farmers are to be sure of making a profit, this includes ensuring farm machines that work seamlessly with each other.

It is possible that new technologies have therefore been welcome but, in most cases, this has also involved a considerable investment, making it difficult to spot the benefits.

“A typical farmer will ask what he’s going to get out of it. And for many years, this has been hard for researchers to actually demonstrate. The problem has often been that technologically advanced systems have been developed, but that they’ve simply been too complicated. If there’s too much user interaction – i.e. if the farmers themselves have to spend a lot of time keeping track of the systems – it just doesn’t work. They don’t have time for that. But if we can demonstrate that the systems are easy to use, and that there’s an advantage – a sensible business model – the farmers will take it to heart,” says Senior Researcher Sørensen.



Farmers will hardly need to keep their hands on the steering wheel when they are ploughing the fields in the future. Senior Researcher Claus Grøn Sørensen is shown here behind the wheel. He is working on fully automated and autonomous farming in the future.

A glorious story of autonomy

In other words, there has been a lack of completeness. What has been lacking is the impression of how machines that work together smoothly can create coherence, quality and profit in production. However, this is now possible with the breakthroughs provided by information technology.

There are many countries in which farming has had a glorious history for millennia as the most predominant industry and as the guarantor of economic progress. This is no longer the case, but farming is still very important for the food industry and export.

And it will no doubt continue this way. However, farmers of the future are unlikely to sit behind the steering wheel of the tractor when it trundles up and down the fields. It will drive itself as part of fully automated and autonomous farming when IoT seriously catches on in the industry.



project facts

TITLE

Internet of Food & Farm 2020

SCHEDULE

2017-2020

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

EUR 35 million
EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation

PROJECT PARTNERS

There are 73 partners in the Internet of Food & Farm 2020 project.

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AU Engineering Peer Reviewed Publications 2016

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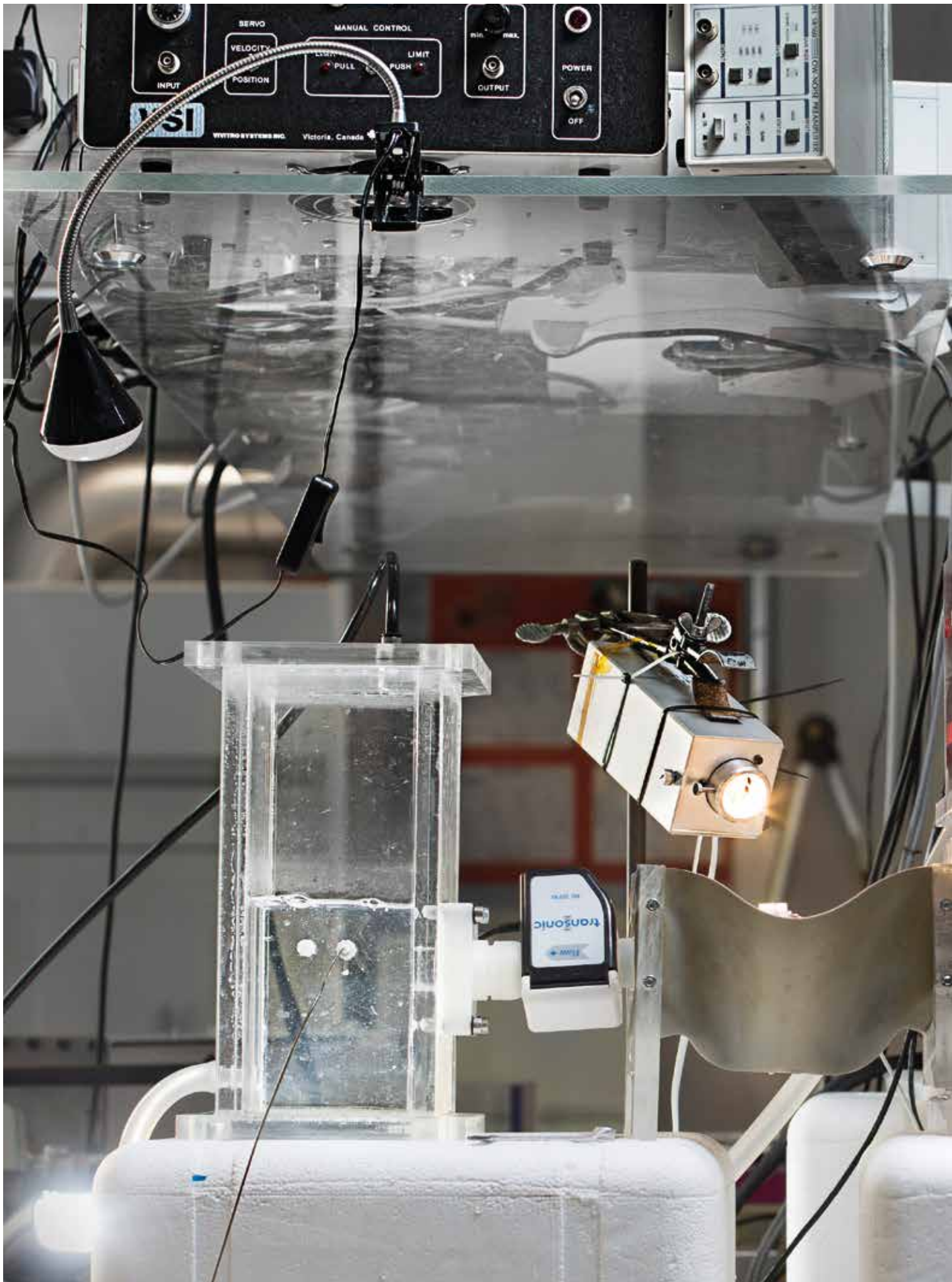
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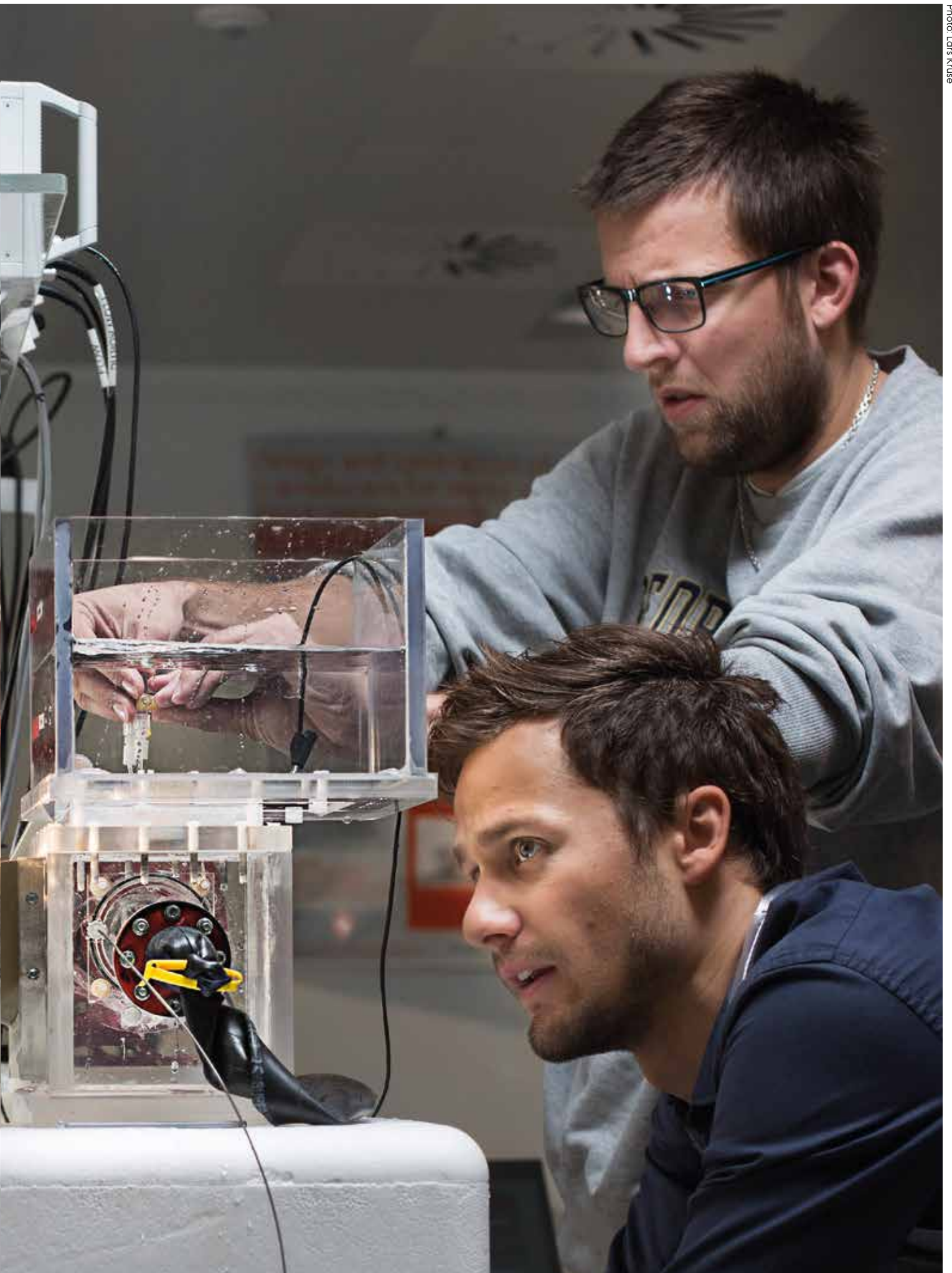
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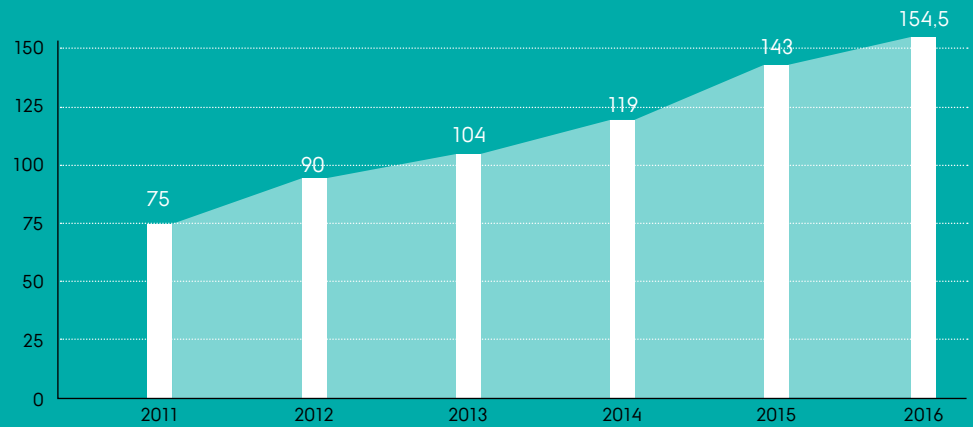
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KEY FIGURES

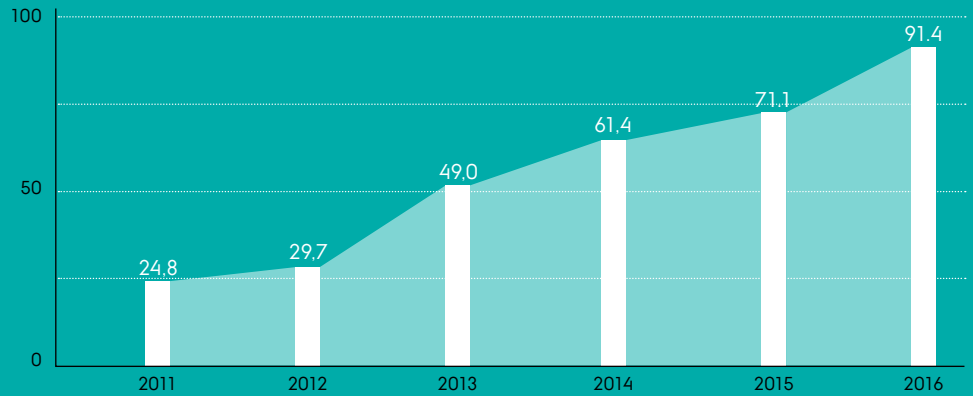
TOTAL ENG TURNOVER (M DKK)

Based on annual FC3 budget

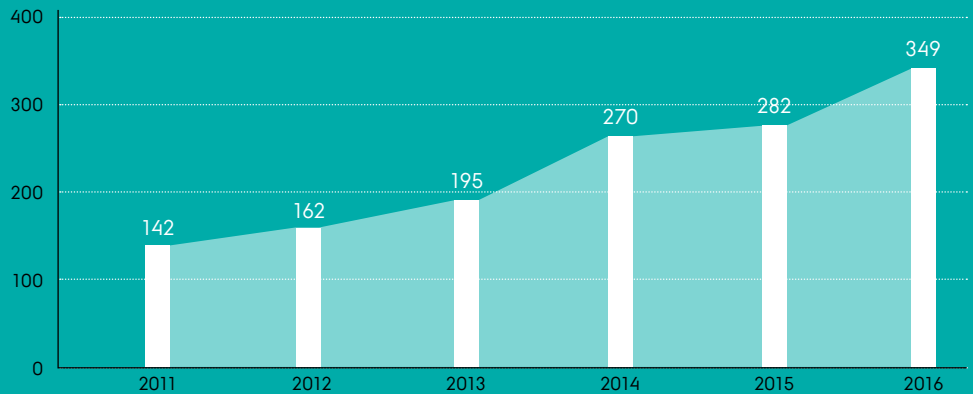


EXTERNAL FUNDING TOTAL (M DKK)

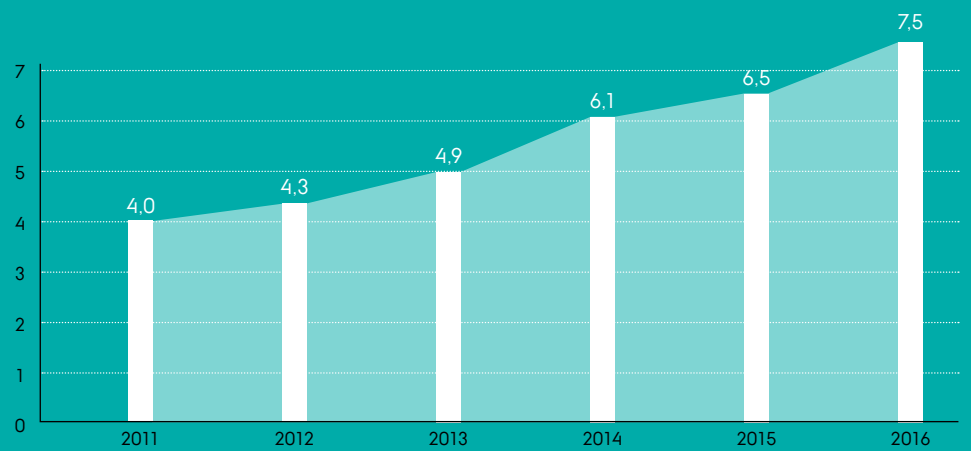
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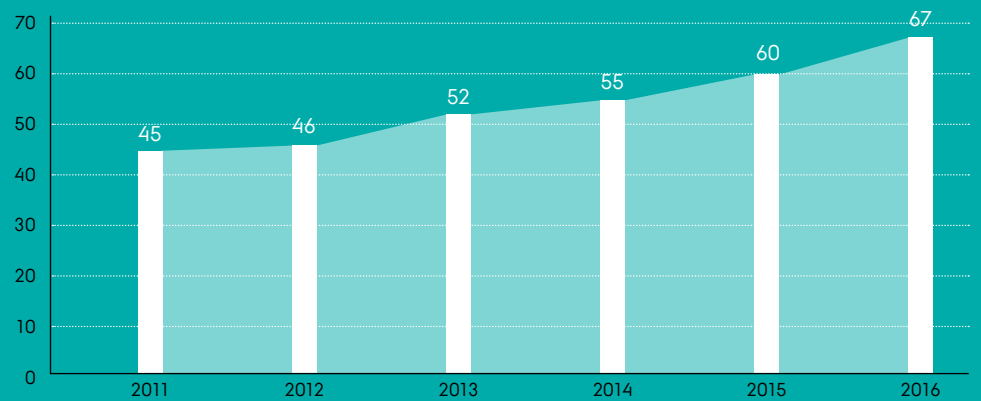
PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS



PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS PER VIP

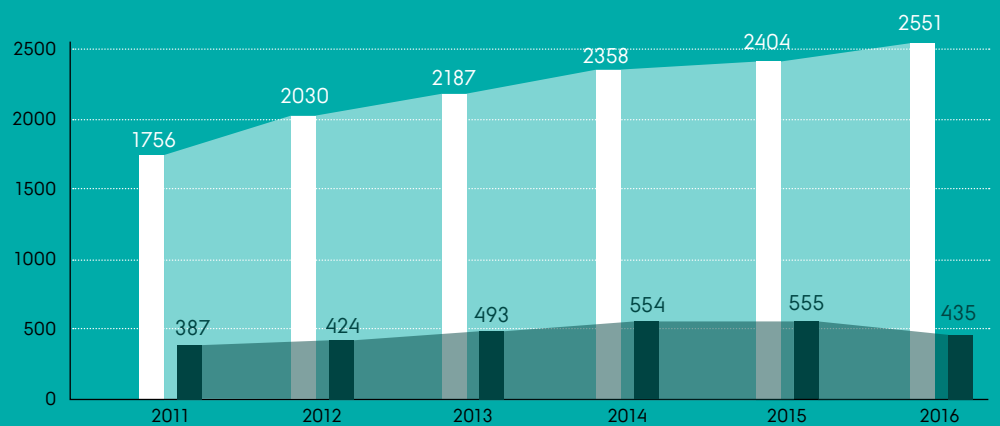


ENGINEERING PHD STUDENTS



ENROLLED ENGINEERING STUDENTS

■ BACHELOR
■ MASTER









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