

Collaboration on climate change adaptation on open land



Recommendation

It is commonly accepted that effective climate change adaptation in Danish summerhouse areas requires engagement and dialogue between local government administration, homeowners' associations, and summerhouse owners. Especially engagement of homeowners are crucial for achieving consensus and garnering support for adaptation and flood risk management efforts.

It is recommended that these engagement processes not only facilitate dialogue on the technical feasibility of flood prevention measures, but also explore what climate change might mean for the social and cultural values embedded in the local area. Such discussions could focus on homeowners' sense of place and what they value about their local area and what they deem important to preserve. This approach to citizen engagement might help to ensure, that adaptation strategies are not only technically sound but also culturally and socially acceptable.

Photo: Ingrid Riis

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Climate change adaptation planning often assumes that citizens can be motivated to participate in local mitigation measures.

However, in practice, engaging citizens often proves challenging. This is particularly evident when climate adaptation measures are perceived as disruptions to the idyllic character of specific locations, such as Danish summerhouse areas. It is beneficial to integrate these considerations during the planning stages of climate change adaptation projects.

For most municipalities in Denmark summerhouse areas hold both significant economic and cultural value. These areas are often situated in scenic coastal and rural landscapes. Historically, Danish summerhouse areas have been developed on low-lying and reclaimed lands that were not deemed suitable for agriculture. Due to their location, these areas are among the most vulnerable to flooding from prolonged rainfall and other climate related hazards. Approximately 20 percent of Danish summerhouses are expected to face at least one flood-related risk in the future due to climate change.

In Denmark, as in most European countries, local and national policies and planning for flood risk management and climate change adaptation are based on the premise that effective adaptation measures require citizen engagement. There are several reasons for this. One reason is that when it comes to pluvial flooding, citizens may not be able to address the issues solely on their own property—the solution often lies on 'someone else's property.' Therefore, local governments often take an initiating and facilitating role in finding collective solutions, despite property owners in Denmark being primarily responsible for securing their own homes against flooding and managing rainwater on their own property.

However, the efforts of local authorities to motivate landowners and homeowners to participate in voluntary collective adaptation

measures have yielded varying results. Positive experiences exist with stakeholder collaboration on climate change adaptation, but there remains a need for substantiated approaches to involve and engage summerhouse owners. When local governments choose to use citizen involvement in climate change adaptation initiatives, it is favorable to understand what motivates citizens to engage in collective efforts.

Dilemmas in Climate Change Adaptation on Open Land

- Handling rainwater and flood risks on their own property is the responsibility of landowners. However, many landowners perceive flood risk management as the responsibility of the local government.
- Authorities must therefore appeal to landowners to take responsibility for managing rainwater themselves. Yet very few of the issues related to flooding from prolonged rainfall can be effectively resolved by landowners on their own property.
- Homeowners' associations and local governments can thus attempt to facilitate collective solutions. However, landowners seldom agree on what is worth protecting and what interventions can be accepted. New summerhouse owners may not always have a strong awareness of the local area's vulnerability to flooding. Meanwhile, older summerhouse owners might be reluctant to accept changes that they do not control or see the value in.
- Dialogue and thorough engagement processes are therefore crucial for finding common solutions. Additionally, the opportunity to engage landowners and other stakeholders in collective solutions is greatest immediately after an event. However, engagement processes take time, and it can be challenging to maintain momentum.

Common Solutions and Different Values

The research project examined the attitudes of summerhouse owners towards engaging in climate change adaptation measures aimed at preventing flooding from prolonged rainfall. The research focused on a summerhouse area that had experienced a major flooding event due to a combination of prolonged rainfall and cloudbursts.

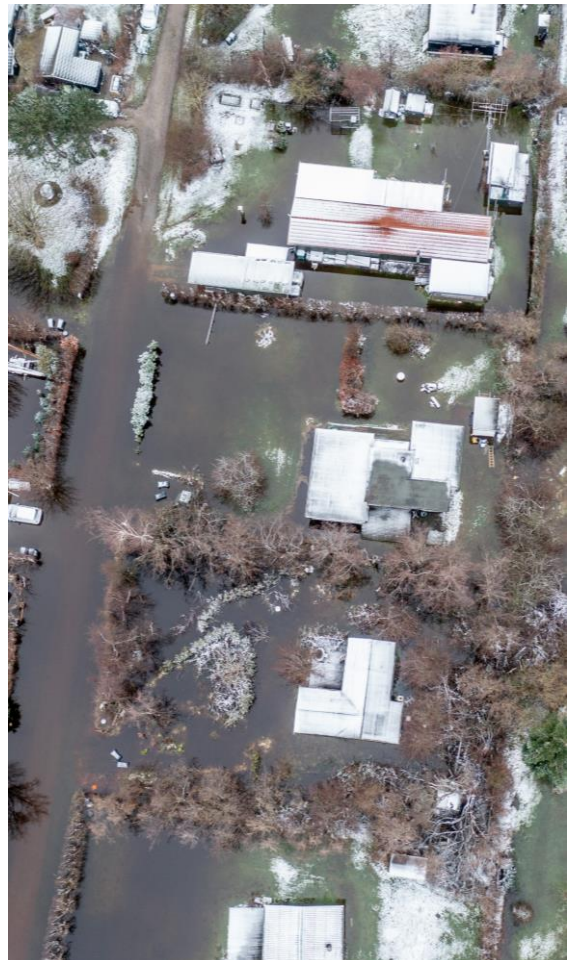
The results of the research project indicate that even within a very small summerhouse area, there can be significant differences in landowners' sense of place, what they value about their local area, and how they perceive its vulnerability to climate change. Therefore, there can be differences in which activities are perceived as relevant to engage in locally.

However, the motivation to engage in prevention, particularly in collective solutions, dwindles as time passes after an event. Few of the landowners interviewed ten years after the incident expressed a desire or saw a need for collective initiatives such as establishing surface drains or maintaining drainage ditches, even though they perceived that their area could be at risk of flooding again.

When initiatives are taken well after major events, it is therefore worth reconsidering whether the most motivation and support for area-based solutions necessarily come from the landowners with the most vulnerable houses. There may be other motivations for choosing to engage—or not engage—in collective solutions beyond the assessment of flood risks on their own property.

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A classic assumption regarding citizen involvement and flood prevention is that those most at risk are the most motivated to take action. This research project also found evidence supporting this assumption. The landowners who had experienced standing knee-deep in flood water responded very actively to limit damages and remove water not only from their own properties but also from common roads—both during and immediately after the event.





The CliCNord Research Project

The research for this policy brief is part of the Nordic project Climate Change Resilience in Small Communities in the Nordic Countries (CliCNord). The project studies how places far from major urban areas in the Nordic countries can adapt to and withstand upcoming climate change challenges.

In this context, the study has examined how the sense of place of Danish summer house owners is shaped by and shapes their experience of a climate change related flooding event.

<https://www.clicnord.org>

This means that especially local government planners, process consultants, and also homeowners' associations should consider what informs the homeowners' sense of place when planning and executing climate change adaptation projects using citizen involvement and volunteerism.

Litteratur:

Nedergaard, M. & Baron, N. (2023) Water under the bridge: how place meanings shape second homeowners' engagement in flood risk management in southern Denmark. *Reg Environ Change* 23, 162.

Hjalager, A. M., Steffansen, R. M., Sørensen, M. T., & Staunstrup, J. K. (2022). *Sommerhuse og verdensmål – beskyttelse, benyttelse og planlægning*. Syddansk Universitet, Aalborg Universitet og Realdania.

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