

Social struggles of responsibility in transition from response to recovery – comparison of two Danish cases

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The questions dealt with in this presentation is 1) how responsibility for recovery is debated and negotiated following larger disasters 2) how citizens engage in the debates and if their engagement has the potential to influence social and legal changes which might affect the disaster management of future events.

These issues are discussed on the background of two Danish case studies. The first of an industrial accident and the second of a flood. In both cases disagreement around responsibility emerged in the transition from the response to the recovery phase. As the affected people did not feel they got the help and support they were entitled to, they protested publicly and tried to raise awareness of their situation among the broader audience, politicians, and professionals. Following the industrial accident, the affected peoples' engagement did not have any effects, but in the case of the flood the local community engagement resulted in a public debate, which resulted in a law change improving the situation of the flood struck people.

On the background of Berke et. al. (1993) concept of vertical and horizontal integration and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power (1977), this study argues that those different outcomes might be explained by a difference in power in form of networks, resources, and competences in the two communities.

It further concludes that a reason for the disagreement around responsibility is that recovery from the public view is seen and treated as a private responsibility in Denmark – and many other countries. The protests from the affected people did not manage to change this neither after the industrial disaster, nor the flood. The social engagement managed to create a smaller improvement for the affected people in one of the cases, but did not manage to fundamentally change the logic of the disaster management: The response phase of disasters is treated as a responsibility for the society as a whole, recovery is however the responsibility of the people affected themselves.

Rethinking disasters and social change: Beyond hope and despair