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Title

Public-private co-management zones - unlocking residents' creativity and commitment in urban woodland management.

Abstract

Residents' self-initiated, creative care-taking and use of edge zones in a public woodland bordering their houses in Sletten, Holstebro is a notable Danish example of a bottom-up and partly autonomous civic engagement in urban woodland management. The woodland was planted in parallel with the housing development between 2000-04. Soon after moving in individual families started to weed between the young trees, prune and thin them, plant own ornamental herbs, shrubs and trees, grow vegetables, buckle up a hammock or garden furniture, make trails or huts as part of children's play etc. The municipality found these initiatives positive for the long-term success of the close combination of private housing and public woodland. Over the years the idea of a public-private 'co-management zone' was developed and conceptualised to further encourage more residents to engage, while at the same time define possibilities and restrictions in agreement with the residents. In 2010 we evaluated the co-management zones, using a mixed-method design where mapping of all woodland-housing transitions (n=200) were combined with focus group interviews. The mapping revealed a rich diversity of garden-woodland interface types and characters, each shaped along the preferences of the individual families. Group interviews revealed deep relationships to the woodland where respondents thought of the co-management zone as "my woodland". It is thus fair to claim that the co-management zones have unlocked the residents' alternative forms of knowledge and ideas for sensible care-taking and development related to their way of using and appreciating the wood. We conclude that the whole process has supported the development of a deep sense of ownership to and affinity for the living environment; to day the woodland at Sletten is a true 'neighbourWood'.

Author

Anders Busse Nielsen*, Hanna Fors

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Faculty of Landscape Planning, Horticulture and Agricultural Science
Department of Landscape Management, Design and Construction
Slottsvägen 5
Box 66, 23053 Alnarp

* Corresponding author.
e-mail: Anders.Busse.Nielsen@ltj.slu.se