Denmark seen from above: communicating landscape change

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About the project: “Denmark seen from the above”

The Royal Library of Denmark holds a large collection of more than 5 million aerial photographs, covering Denmark from 1890 to 2010. The collection contains both vertical and oblique photos, the latter of which originated from companies specialized in aerial photos of agricultural holdings, which were sold to farmers as a commodity from the 1930s until app. 1992. The photos have later been used for numerous purposes, primarily by environmental consultants and other landscape management professionals to locate potential areas of soil pollution from unregistered petrol stations – as has been the case in other countries (Christensen 2013). The collection has only to a very limited degree been accessible to the broader public however due to the time consuming work of manual retrieval of the meta-data amounts only to the name of an owner and an approximate location. If the millions of aerial photographs are to be assigned precise geo-coordinates and additional meta-data, it has to be done manually. A project like this could never have been realized without the mobilization of volunteers with extensive knowledge of the local areas. The project went online in September 2012. After only 10 months online 141,500 photos have been locally placed by app. 500 enthusiastic local citizens. If this work was to have been carried out by the employees of The Danish Royal Library, it would have cost more than 6 full years of work. The work effort and commitment shown by our users has exceeded all expectations!

An example of the insights into landscape change in a local area

The landscape of the case area Kværndrup has undergone significant changes in relation to agricultural intensification, urbanization and development of infrastructure. These changes are visible on maps and in land use statistics, but can be difficult to grasp for the local citizen, with limited access to and training in the use of historical cartographic material. Local residents may also have a relative short time perspective as reference to hold changes against.

Conclusion:

Geo-referenced historical material has a huge potential to be used in participatory landscape planning at the local level. Photographs as good resolution from different time periods from the local context, is easier for people to relate to, than abstract land use statistic or land change maps. In this poster we have presented Denmark from above, but it is only one example on such portals might contribute with data for communication of landscape related issues at local level. The Danish project related here illustrates a more general point; it is worthwhile to involve the public in participatory processes as early as possible – even in the processes involving data production!

References: