

Bathrooms as context for daily water practices

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Purpose and outline

- Purpose of the presentation
 - Understand why some types of water consumption resist change while others more easily decrease
 - What meanings are ascribed to water practices in the bathroom?
 - What drives the way water practices evolve?
- Outline
 - The Danish case
 - Water consumption in Denmark (shortly)
 - What can we learn from Danish successes and failures?
 - Characterise different types of bathroom practices
 - The daily ritual of getting ready
 - The bathing treat
 - Playtime
 - Drivers of changing water practices
 - Important points

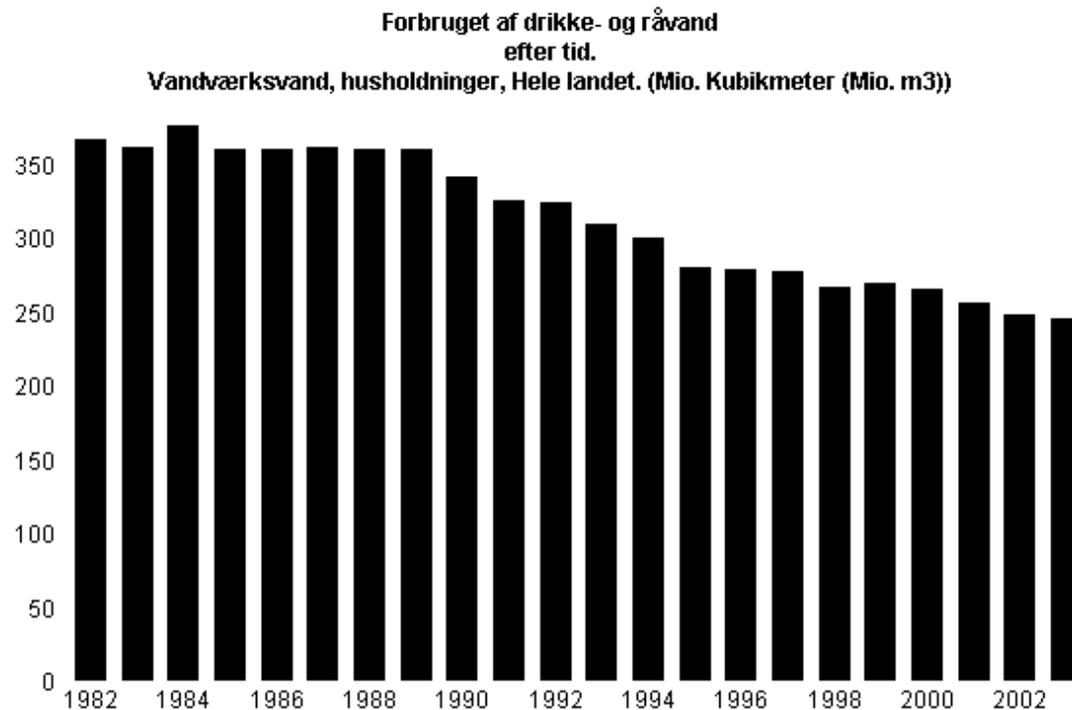


The Danish case



Overall decreased water consumption

- From 168 l/capita/day in the 80s to 125 l/capita/day in 2002 (Copenhagen region)



Successes

- Initiatives in the Copenhagen Region
 - Increased pricing (about 300% from the 80's, green taxes)
 - Increased information (making users aware of their consumption)
 - Consultation (housing associations, institutions, etc.)
 - Experiments (individual water metering)
- Successful impacts on behaviour and attitudes (decrease)
 - Technological optimisations sell
 - Water saving fixtures (double-flushing toilets, water saving fittings)
 - Minimising 'unnecessary' water consumption
 - Turning off water when brushing teeth and shampooing
 - Improved maintenance (avoiding leakage and spills)

Failures

- Failures (dead angles with no impact)
 - Increased awareness, but no radical shifts in daily routines (e.g. influencing length or number of baths, kind of usage)
 - No impact on activities deemed central in daily life (e.g. relaxing bath)
 - Increases may lie in wait in the future
 - Copenhagen Region: increase of 2 litre per capita per day from 2001 to 2002
 - Changed attitude to ‘water comfort’? (bathroom boom in Denmark)

How can we make sense of this?

- More elaborate approach than focus on behaviour and attitudes
 - The broader context that envelops water consumption
 - Routine patterns (composition and interactions)
 - ‘Structural’ conditions of the usage (conventions, norms, technologies...)
- Go beyond the functionalities of bathrooms
 - The (social and cultural) significance of bathrooms in daily life
 - Meanings ascribed to bathroom usage
- Explore what drives the changing water practices
 - Production and reproduction of routine patterns



Characterising different types of bathroom practices



Daily ritual of getting ready

“If I came to the office without having taken a shower and without having shaved, for example, then I would feel like I was untidy” (Henrik)

- The daily shower is part of our preparation for going out
 - Running water connected to the idea of clean and respectable bodies
 - Symbolic importance of daily shower (home/world outside)
- Characteristics
 - Get it over with/efficiency
 - Short - often morning showers
 - Increased bodily focus
 - More demanding body care (more products)
 - Teenagers and their practices



The bathing treat

”It (a bath) is a luxury-thing. In order to do it, like, even more obvious, or no... more cosy by turning the lights off and lighting candles and... pour out a good cup of coffee or something else... and pour something nice in the water and then just have a little meditation time out there.” (Betina)

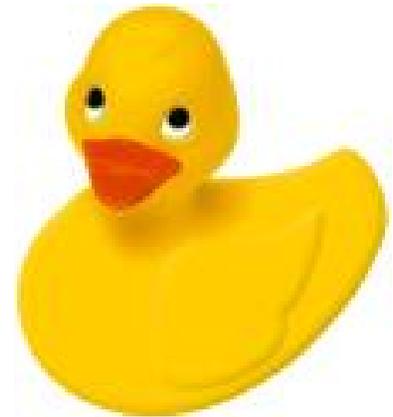
- The bath is a time of relaxation and self-pampering
 - Hot water connected to the image of well-being
- Characteristics
 - Long time frame, often involves accessories
 - Relaxation and withdrawal (taking time)
 - New technologies (e.g. spas and massage showers)
 - Aesthetic concerns (design and atmosphere)



Playtime

”And then (when her son showers) he fills the wash basin with water, and then he has animals and all kinds of stuff. Action Man, Lego, everything, and then he stands and splashes and plays, while the water in the shower sprays. It costs a fortune and is a waste of water, but he really thinks it’s nice and then we sing ’bop, bop, bop’...But it is also... water is nice, it is delightful. I also remember that from my childhood.” (Katrine)

- Playtime in the bath tub or shower with the children
 - Water connected to the idea of playing
- Characteristics
 - Being together
 - Enjoy taking a shower



Drivers of changing water practices



What drives shifts in water practices?

- Shifts in conventions and standards
 - E.g. more demanding body care, showers in stead of baths
- Reaction to everyday life conditions
 - The hectic life (dream of comfort and quality time)
- Social setting
 - Individualisation and status symbols
- New possibilities
 - Economical surplus, new technologies and greater selection

Important points

- Water consumption not only coupled to functionality but also to:
 - Different ‘expectations’ (both inner and outer)
 - Conventions and norms (e.g. respectable bodies)
 - Aesthetics
 - Well-being, pleasure and enjoyment
- People do not think of water consumption as such
 - Fundamentally, it is about other issues (e.g. respectability, relaxation, having a good time)
 - They do not directly connect the restrictions in water consumption to the social and cultural significance of water practices