Reflecting on the 'unusual': climate change narratives in decision-making about the future

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UNUSUAL?

How do we relate to climate change?

- Evidence indicates that belief in climate change increases among those who perceive to have experienced climate change manifestations (converse also seems to hold)

- What happens when climate change comes home?

Evolving Context

- Extreme events: with climate change, more frequent, intense, unpredictable (Defra 2012, Slingo et al. 2014)

- Societal and institutional responses to climate related threats:

  Mainly as incremental adaptation

  "actions where the central aim is to maintain the essence and integrity of a system or process at a given scale" (IPCC (2014) WGII report – Glossary)

New proposition?

Climate change as an adaptive challenge: examination of assumptions, beliefs and values underpinning understandings of climate change

Adaptation requires transformation of systems (Pelling 2011; Kates et al. 2012; O'Brien and Selboe 2015)

May this be possible? Desirable? Acceptable?
And if so, how?

Let me tell you a story

- Perception of current, past and future landscapes and their change
- Reflection about links with climate change
- Relationship to long-term management

Blakeney – Cley
(North Norfolk, UK)

Research during 2014-15, response to the Dec 2013 surge: 12 in-depth interviews with decision makers; 4 focus groups with publics, 2 surveys

Lorenzoni et al. (in prep)

Tidal Surge

- 5-6 December 2013 North Sea storm: “the most serious tidal surge in over 60 years” (English Environment Agency).
- Flood water reached higher levels along parts of the Norfolk coastline than the floods of 1953.
- Loss of life due to flooding was avoided - due to improved defences and responses.
- Extensive change to the coastline, flooding, damage to sea defences and property.

Historical events

A true report of certain wonderful overflowing of waters in Summerset-shire, Norfolk, and other places in England, 1607

Slide: A. Minns

Historical and recent surges

Year	Event	Source
1897 (Nov)	High tide and surge	SMP
1949	High tide and surge	SMP
1953 (Jan-Feb)	Exceptionally high spring tide , surge and NW winds	SMP
1976 (Jan)	High tide and surge	SMP
1978 (Jan)	High tide, floods	SMP
1991 (Dec)	Tidal surge	SMP
1993 (Feb)	Tidal surge	SMP
1996 (Feb)	Tidal event	SMP
2003 (Dec)	Tidal surge	SMP
2006 (Nov)	Tidal surge	SMP
2007 (March)	Tidal surge and strong winds	SMP
2007 (Nov)	Tidal surge	Interviews, media
2013 (Dec)	Exceptionally high tidal surge	Interviews, media

Coast at Blakeney – Cley – Salthouse

Imagery ©2014 DigitalGlobe, Getmapping plc, Infoterrra Ltd & Bluesky, Landsat, Map data ©2014 Google

Blakeney harbour the night of the storm

The next morning

T Tolhurst

Blakeney Quay

Cley Marshes and Blakeney Freshes (9th Dec 2013)

Narrative	Community	Nature conservation	Balancing futures
Geographical focus	Local / regional	Local / regional	Local / regional (national)
CC links to event	Questioned (feeling secure, protected)	Questioned	Understood; related to policy
Place attachment	Strong (village cohesion, survival)	Strong (importance of habitat cons.)	Understood and appreciated
Future management	Permanency? (multiple benefits, coordination)	Limited change	Necessary change, flexibility

Event and climate change

Diverging views among Blakeney residents

“There is every likelihood that a lot of the coastline will disappear. We may well disappear, you know talking ahead hundreds, I don't know how many years.”

(01, public focus group 2, July 2014)

“I think that some politicians would use climate change as an excuse for not doing something, not spending money, because it’s too expensive, too difficult.”

(04, public focus group 1, July 2014)

Nature conservation enthusiasts: considerations about climate change links

"the storm surge had nothing to do with climate change"

(04, conservation focus group 1)

"I think it would be very hard to make the link (to climate change), the '53 event was much more serious and this event was a similar magnitude, just the wind direction was different. We don't blame climate change for the 53 event. "

(05, conservation focus group 2)

Role of unusual events

“a special event makes everybody interested. It made people think, ‘actually this unusual’.

[…] So, it became a talking point and we found that quite useful because we could say: ‘Nobody can say it’s climate change, but it’s these types of events that are predicted to become more frequent and learning to cope with it is important for us and pre-planning for it’. I think everybody likes a near disaster – that sounds terrible, but in a sense, there wasn’t a great deal of loss.”

(Interviewee 6, 07/07/14)

Future management

Living with change

“People like, you know we’ve got this lower walk out now from the quay, than used to be. It used to be higher up, and now it’s lower down. I must admit that when I go up there, I think, ‘oh I wonder if there’s going to be a high tide? Is this safe?’ You know it’s funny there is that feel of sudden insecurity.”

(01, public focus group 1, July 2014)

Investment in nature

"… There'll always be a reserve here. It may change – the habitat may change…

But in the short term, we will continue as we are now. If weren't going to do that, we wouldn't be investing what we are now, with the new [centre], and we've just bought this area at Salthouse."

(Interviewee 1, 20/05/14)

Adapting for wildlife

“We've recognised that climate change is something which we really need to take account of. And we build climate change adaption into most of our management plans now …

whether we do enough is a different - because if you look at some of the modelling and listen to some of the predictions for the next 50 to 80 years … there'll be such a huge change over that period of time, that maybe our climate change adaption doesn't go far enough”

(Interviewee 11, 12/12/14)

Effect of the surge on policy

“I think the shoreline management plan approach is about flexibility and adaptation, and it needs to be. […]. What you really want is specific trigger points; if you say: ‘at certain point in time, if sea-level-rise reaches this point’, then I think it’s easier to justify that to people. “

(Interviewee 5, 30/06/14)

Opportunities

"There is an opportunity to build something at Blakeney and Cley and elsewhere that is future-proofed, adaptive, resilient, ecologically robust, but which builds coastal process function and change into your solution – rather than simply rebuilding a wall and denying that your parcel of embanked land has anything to do with coastal processes at all."

(Interviewee 10, 25/07/14)

Skilful conversations

“one of the really positive things for us as a result of the storm surge is the partnerships. […] it’s about keeping the momentum there, keeping it in people’s minds and then starting to keeping the conversation so it’s real for people.”

(Interviewee 12, 25/03/15)

Prospects for the future?

- Was the surge a game changer?
  - Did not alter the overall plans in place or existing views
  - Provided a unique opportunity to discuss longer-term change and immediate alterations
- Creative initiatives underway
- Fears, concerns, different communities and questions persist

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Thank you

Comments and questions welcome

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