



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Cleaner Production

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jclepro

Cool or hot Greenland? Exhibiting and enacting sustainable Arctic futures

Carina Ren*

Aalborg University, A. C. Meyers vænge 15, DK-2450 Copenhagen, SV, Denmark

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 December 2013

Received in revised form

27 October 2014

Accepted 6 December 2014

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Sustainability

Nation branding

Future scenarios

Performativity Greenland

ABSTRACT

In a current stage of 'Arctic fever', former representations of Greenland as 'cool' are increasingly joined by 'hot' scenarios based on an assumption of the nation as a 'climate winner'. Using examples from the exhibition 'Possible Greenland' at the Venice Architectural Biennale of 2012, this paper shows how a Greenland of the future is portrayed and branded as a sustainable nation and destination through future scenarios. The performative approach to the exhibition and its scenarios displays how issues related to all three sides of sustainability – people, planet and profit – are enrolled in an attempt to brand Greenland, but also to motivate and carry out decisions. Two scenarios from the exhibition are used to show how diverging strategies are deployed in order to envision Greenland as sustainable. Where one seeks to embrace disagreement and complexity in its inclusive approach, the other strives to cut across locally grounded controversies. The two strategies are discussed and their potential as 'sustainability brokers' are critically evaluated. The strategic application of the sustainability concept to the exhibition displays the multiple ways by which the concept of sustainability is deployed to exhibit and enact a sustainable future Greenland and shows the difficulty of uniting the various visions propagated through the exhibition. However, it also points to the performative and interventionist potential of scenario building for a sustainable future, which is ultimately discussed.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

'Unless we take it upon ourselves purposefully to grapple with the future, there won't be one'. (Röling 2000: 34)

Recently, authors have pointed to how climate changes in combination with rising global pressure on natural resources have led to a shifting geo-political landscape in the Arctic and to what some have coined a state of 'Arctic fever'. In Greenland, rising temperatures and melting ice have made seaways and bedrock more easily accessible, rendering mineral excavation and oil drilling less hazardous and more profitable. So far, mining and mass tourism are identified next to traditional fishery as viable directions for Greenlandic society but as a consequence of these rising climate-related prospects, some difficult decisions are emerging concerning the direction and the scale of the industrial, societal and environmental development in Greenland. Using a specific case of

nation branding, this article describes how Greenland is exhibited and enacted as a sustainable place and tourist destination. More specifically, it is discussed how scenario enactments work to perform places and practices through an architectural exhibition on future scenarios entitled Possible Greenland.

The underlying foundation for studying how places, in this case Greenland, are represented and imagined is that places and related practices do not just exist or 'happen', but are constantly made and remade as they are enrolled into specific discourses, cultural images and representations of place (see also [Stocker and Kennedy, 2013](#); [Cosgrove, 2008](#)). According to [Antrop \(2006\)](#), place and landscape related changes are closely connected to how these are perceived as they become induced with new meaning and significance and seeing and understanding a place closely links to how one envisions and plans for its future and future use. Following such an approach, and relating to the present special issue of tourism and sustainability, branding initiatives such as Possible Greenland are seen as an important step in securing – or challenging – sustainable action in and towards the future. In the present article, this connection is vital since, as also noted by Antrop, the representations and (re)configurations of places impact on how places may – or may not, be developed.

* Tel.: +45 30282797.

E-mail address: ren@cgs.aau.dk.

Using the exhibition of Possible Greenland as a case, this article describes how the future of Greenland is exhibited through a number of architectural scenarios. The article describes how Greenland is put forward as a sustainable nation of global value in the light of current climate changes. The exhibition is seen as a site where discourses and images are strategically reworked in order to perform Greenland in new ways. Following a new global agenda, which by many of the involved stakeholders is said to involve a repositioning of the Arctic from the periphery to the center of global attention, the proposed representations of Greenland are altered from cool to hot.

Focusing on and discussing the performative capacities of future scenarios, and drawing on insights from Actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), I argue that although presented primarily as a nation branding exercise and a contribution to an open debate about sustainable development in Greenland, the exhibition scenarios are also part of performing *very specific* Greenlandic futures. In these visions, different versions of sustainability were brought to the fore (Mol, 2002), while others were made absent (Law and Singleton, 2005). An explicit wish of the organizers was to develop sustainable visions of the future through a number of scenarios. As shown, the specific sustainable futures of the exhibition, two of which are scrutinized in more detail in the analysis, draw on very different representations and visions of the place, its value and (future) use.

In the following, I introduce my ethnographic approach to study the coming together of the exhibition and the ways in which place and sustainability were negotiated and debated during that process. Also, the analytical resources which I draw on are clarified in order to describe the ways by which sustainability is connected to Greenland and to specific versions of Greenlandic futures. I introduce the concept of multiple versions of reality (Mol, 2002) as a grip to unfold how sustainability comes about as *multiple* (for a discussion about sustainabilities, see also Ren et al., 2014). The concept of the absent present (Law and Singleton, 2005) is deployed to describe the (envisioned) implementation of the scenarios, where some things are brought to the fore, while others are made invisible.

Second, the background for Possible Greenland as Greenland's largest branding endeavor to this day is sketched out, showing how Greenland is presented as a globally valuable and sustainable nation, where nature, society and innovation go hand in hand. As argued, the presentation of Greenland's future at the exhibition and in particular in the scenarios highlighted here is an attempt to brand the island nation as an attractive place to travel to and invest in and is rooted in a celebratory discourse of the nation as a 'climate winner' repositioning it from the periphery to a global center stage. As an example of how absents and presents not only impact the perception of place but also enact it, I direct my attention to the current state of 'Arctic fever' to which, I argue, the exhibition is closely related and which has created a shift in seeing Greenland not only as cool but also as hot. I suggest that these parallel visions of Greenland (and the Arctic at large) have opened up for new ways of envisioning and ultimately developing Greenland.

This argument is pursued in the analysis of two exhibited future scenarios on societal development and transportation, which serve to illustrate how diverging strategies are deployed to showcase Greenland as sustainable. Where one strives to embrace disagreement and complexity in its inclusive approach, the other wishes to cut across locally grounded controversies. The two strategies of *debating* and *doing* sustainability are examined and their sustainable potentials are discussed. In spite of the difficulty in directing the various visions propagated through the exhibition into one 'future avenue', it is argued that the strategic alliances between different versions of sustainability may work as a way to enable viable Greenlandic futures.

2. On methodology – or how to trace sustainable visions

Through my research on Danish national branding endeavors at major international events I have on previous occasions worked with destination marketing organizations, branding and planning agencies and architectural and design firms working within the field. I first became aware about the Possible Greenland project in September 2011 when an urban planning company, which I had previously collaborated with, announced on their Facebook page that they had been invited by Danish Architecture Centre (DAC) to participate in the exhibition of Possible Greenland in Venice in 2012. Having formerly lived in Greenland, where environmental changes are felt and in some places visible to the naked eye, and now researching on the connections between climate change and tourism, I was intrigued to see how tourism would be included in the work with projecting a future Greenlandic society.

My interest in the project gradually increased as I followed the early stages of the exhibition planning and workshops from the sideline and after a few months I decided to initiate research into the exhibition. Through DAC, the exhibition commissioners, I was invited to participate in the ongoing planning activities and talk to involved stakeholders. This gave me the opportunity to follow discussions and the work in progress as participant observer. As my ethnographic assemblage slowly developed, I took part in conversations with the various people engaged with the exhibition. Also, I was asked to contribute to the exhibition catalog with a short article (Ren, 2012). When time came to open the exhibition, I traveled to Venice and followed the debates, talks and speeches that were given. My presence here allowed me to conduct further interviews and engage in informal talks with a number of different stakeholders: architects, organizers, curators, Danish politicians and administrators. All along the planning process and after the opening, I monitored media coverage in Denmark and Greenland and collected information from websites and online forums.

This work enabled me to discern how initial ideas, models and scenarios 'stabilized' into four visions presented at the Biennale and how these scenarios engaged with the press, politicians, policy makers and the public (Ren, 2015). It also pointed to how different and competing versions of sustainability were enacted into being (Mol, 2002) in a number of ways through the different exhibition parts. In the following, I will introduce this performative understanding of sustainability as enacted in more detail.

3. Analyzing scenarios as performative

The present account of Possible Greenland draws inspiration from a larger body of work from Science and Technology Studies seeing the exhibition as a conglomerate of heterogeneous and partially connected discourses, practices and material entities, whose 'bits and pieces' are deployed by different actors as strategic resources to set or impact the agenda in relation to political and economic development. By tending to the exhibition as an actor-network (Latour, 2005) I interrogate the affordances of this particular assemblage. What was negotiated? What was included and authorized and what was rejected and omitted? How was this done. In order to answer such questions, special attention is given to the semiotics and discourses related to the exhibition, to various exhibitions practices and to the sorting of attachments between multiple stakeholders (Jensen, 2007). In short, the ethnographic practice seeks to capture the multiple accomplishments which shape and enable the exhibiting and thereby also contributes to performing the future through scenarios in particular ways.

In this present analysis of how and in what ways sustainability is brought to the fore as part of envisioning Greenlandic futures, I show how the concept is enrolled and materialized in the different

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10688124>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10688124>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)