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In the Eye of the Beholder: On Using Photography in Research on Sustainability

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Abstract: This study of perspectives and opinions on a Swedish nuclear power plant and an old building in a Swedish city center employed an ethnographic approach. Such methods are found to be applicable to research situations when it is of crucial importance to establish trustworthy relationships with the informants. The use of ethnographic research methods, especially photography, enabled the researchers in the project to collect a wide range of narratives about different matters regarding the role of the sites and buildings in the past, future prospects of the power plant and the old building and their location. By employing qualitative methods, the project aimed at gaining insight into the meaning-building processes of the actors involved and how they made sense of a place that was turned into a locality of energy production and city planning. This paper elaborates on photography as part of an ethnographic approach and the authors argue that photography helps the researchers to extract the seen and unseen as well as values connected to sustainability in the daily life of local actors.

Keywords: Ethnographic Methods, Photography

Introduction

In a globalized world, ideas and models on how to act and think spread rapidly among both public and private spheres of society (e.g. Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006). These ideas need to be translated locally in order to integrate with local practices (e.g. Czarniawska and Sevón 2005). One such idea is that of sustainability, often associated with the Brundtland commission (1987), which views sustainability as a three pillar concept consisting of economy, ecology and social and historical dimensions. In this study we will highlight the importance of understanding the construction of meaning at the local scale when discussing and aiming for sustainable development. The reason for this emerges from how planning decisions may entail a process of restructuring of places and sites. Such proposed alterations of use and access to sites and localities typically lead to an accumulation of the meanings attached to the object or area of interest (Appadurai 1986; Hornborg 1994; Kopytoff 1986; Mairal Buil 2004). This occurs because places, as “politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions” (Rodman 2003, p. 203), unfold as ‘containers’ of or ‘scenes’ for the physical, emotional and experiential realities of everyday community life (Casey 1996). Sometimes the authorities implementing planning decisions are viewed as ignoring local perspectives. As a consequence, the matters at issue may change and become “matters of high principle” for those potentially impacted locally (Rappaport 1996:71). As such, place-based associations may grow or even be invented so as to resist planned changes (Appadurai 1986; Hornborg 1994; Kopytoff 1986; Mairal Buil 2004).

Since community activity embeds various meanings, aspirations, and intensions, community actors are continually situated in webs of significance that tie them to their local environments (Geertz 1973). The present paper’s aim is to discuss how researchers can use photography in order to enhance our understanding of the meaning of place and landscape at the local scale. Earlier studies suggest that photography and interviews can be successfully combined (e.g. Moore et al. 2008; Packard 2008) in ethnographic work. Based on our empirical findings, we agree and argue that photography and interviews together can generate information on social and cultural values that are connected to

sustainability, and should be considered an important complement to empirically generated data on sustainability. Photography and interviews allows respondents to elaborate on actions, materiality and values that might be contradictory and complex in everyday situations. Our findings also suggest that firstly, interviews of both groups and individuals can be used for such purpose; and secondly, that photography enhances the possibilities of collecting stories of issues and dimensions of sustainable local life that otherwise might not be revealed: such as the complexity of the history, the present and the future in these processes of (re)creation of meaning.

Earlier Studies

Different methods can be employed in describing and interpreting the ways in which people encounter places, perceive them and invest them with meaning. In exploring the diverse beliefs, norms and values of local actors underlying and informing a sense of community and the understandings of place, visual methods can complement other qualitative methods such as participant observations and interviews in order to grasp way different ways of thinking, feeling, believing and acting, thus providing what Geertz refers to as 'thick description' (Geertz 1973.).

Photographic surveys, produced either by the researcher or in cooperation with informants, have a long history in the social sciences and have variously been used since the turn of the last century in ethnographic work (Banks and Morphy 1997; Pink 2001). The German-American anthropologist Franz Boas for example, began using still photography when doing fieldwork among the Kwakiutl on the western coast of British Columbia in Canada in 1894. In 1898, Alfred Cort Haddon studied the indigenous people of the Torres Strait separating Australia and New Guinea. Haddon collected over 7,000 feet of film and this is the earliest ethnographic footage known. The American anthropologist Margaret Mead - a student of Boas - and the English anthropologist Gregory Bateson, were both advocates of visual anthropology. In the early 1940s they used still and moving pictures in order to obtain a record of Balinese social and cultural behavior (Bateson and Mead 1942). They were pioneers in the systematic use of film in ethnographic research and argued that visual methods could help in describing the "ethos" of people, thus documenting cultural modes of social life and uncovering the meaningful structures that are embedded in people's everyday activities and other community contexts.

These early scientific-realistic works exemplify contemporary attempts to discern cultural traits and practices through documentation and registration. The efforts were however criticized for being subjective, not representative of the culture studied and stripping objects from their systems of meaning (Pink 2001). The debate questioned whether it was possible to use picture- and film-making objectively and systematically, and thus if such methods could be considered a valid method for data gathering (El Guindi 2004). The role of the researcher and the informant and their relationship in the field added to the debate because in picture- and film-making the ethnographer took the role as the director of events, while the subject assumed a passive role (Pink 2001).

Starting from the 1950s and the 1960s however, a shift took place in visual anthropology. Ethnographers engaged in visual research methods started making the upholders of culture more visible in the research. Instead of documenting more concrete aspects of a culture such as craftsmanship or kinship systems, visual research methods began a more empirical phase through an emic perspective and more reflexive approaches. John Collier, using photography since the 1930s, noted that pictures could help elicit responses from informants, thus assisting the ethnographer in seeking local views and indigenous interpretations of cultural life (Collier 1967). Reflexive approaches to visual anthropological research grew further. Ethnographies increasingly were seen as constructed narratives and ethnographic film-making as a form of ethnographic representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986). This led to an expanded cooperation between the ethnographer and the informant and reduced the distance between the researcher and the 'subject' (ibid.). As Warren (2005) suggest, participatory visual methods can be used

with the intention of giving voice to participants and opening the door for them to have a better control of the research agenda; nevertheless, the power dynamics must still be considered in such situations (Packard 2008).

Today, visual methods in ethnographic undertakings build on the assumption that photographs and films may capture specific symbolic meanings situated in social, political, economic and historic contexts and can explore the complexities of the local community and of social actions and social life (e.g. Pink 2001, Moore et al. 2008). Kokk and Jönsson (2013) in a study of recurrent project meetings in a company, show that when combined with follow-up interviews, videos of meetings can help the researcher to understand the meaning of the meetings and the discussions taking place. The authors consequently claim that visual methods are important in creating analytic tools to uncover the meaning-building process. As pointed out by Moore et al. (2008) and Packard (2008), participatory visual methods where the participants generate the photographs or videos themselves can reveal stories and events otherwise unapparent to the researcher. Moore et al. (2008) use photography in what they call a self-directed photography where the interviewees take their own photos of their daily city life. An informant in this way becomes a co-producer in the research process (cf. Clifford et al 1986; Warren 2005).

Taking photos of daily life also highlights the connection between photography and the ecologies of place. In her study of amateur photography, Pink (2011) discuss how it can be conceived as a practice contributing, enacting, shaping and confirming place and locality (cf. Casey 1996). For example, when photographing white silage balls in a field, the informant photographer contributes to the constitution of a landscape defined by rural activity. Or, in taking pictures of community festivities, the photographer co-defines community life. The image then operates as an objectification that enables and channels cultural positioning. It is a practice relative to human experience and knowledge, and is both a kind of action and an expression of belonging that symbolizes who we are and how we interpret what we do (Sjölander-Lindqvist 2004b).

All of this helps us learn how visual methods, in documenting cultural modes of life, can help us elucidate local meanings, values and traditional knowledge. Visual methods therefore are of help in exploring the implications of proposals to build on, modify, or preserve places (Sjölander-Lindqvist 2004a, b). And it is in this that we find an important connection to the different pillars of the sustainability discourse. As have been suggested within the field of Social Impact Assessments (SIA), the social and cultural impacts of centrally planned interventions must be recognized in order for them to be sustainable (Freudenburg 1986; Goldman 2000). With the help of images and the sentiments they invoke, the researcher can gain access to what local communities regard as significant assets and values (Adams et al. 2007). For reasons of sustainability it is important to know about the cultural value of a certain resource or place, in which not only its absolute cultural value must be emphasized but also its role on sustaining society and ecology (Stoffle et al. 2013). The arguments for and against a proposal that will have impact on a local environment must also be considered in the light of intergenerational impacts and equity (Gibson 2013).

Methodological Considerations

As pointed out by Meyer et al. (2013), visual dimensions have in general many roles to play in social sciences. Utilizing their categorization of studies using visual dimensions, our study belongs to the category of dialogical studies in which the data, often photography, is produced by the researcher or informant in order to “elicit richer information” (ibid 2013:505). To reveal how images can be used to stimulate interactive discussion and conversation about taken for granted and collectively shared dimensions of the everyday, we have chosen the cases of the Barsebäck nuclear-power plant and the now defunct Ferry Terminal in Helsingborg, both located in southern Sweden. Each site represents a particular set of historical experiences and at the time for the investigation, the national authorities had advanced new proposals regarding the future of each area. Both cases

were found to provide a good opportunity to explore the uses of particular sites and to reflect on the inherent complexity found in the processes underlying planning decisions. In both case studies, first-stage interviews were employed with informants reflecting a broad range of interests, including residents, politicians, local associations, business and municipality decision makers. Such informants were selected through snowball-sampling. First-stage interviews were followed by visual methods in order to unveil and explore local perspectives and different meanings associated with the sites. Visual methods allowed us to explore more deeply how the implementation of planning policies and projects collided with existing symbolic frameworks and infrastructures (cultural, social, economic, political and legal) and how a 'journey of associations' (Löfgren 1997) took place when perceptions of place became interwoven into the cultural complexity of visions about these two particular locations and establishments (Scott 1998). Employing visual methods helped the research team explore all three dimensions of sustainable development at a local scale.

In a study of people's depictions, understandings and meanings of place and landscape and the monuments and buildings therein, the researcher must solve how best to capture local interpretations and views of daily life and the surrounding environment. Getting close to people and establishing trusting relationships so that the researcher can elicit information about their lives, experiences and understandings of certain matters is a vital part of the investigation. Through the medium of photographs, the researcher and the informant can engage in a discussion building upon local experiences and local knowledge about historical, social, environmental and economic activities. Not only can visual methods help the researcher find out about social actions and gain access to peoples' meaning-building activities and local knowledge but they also help establish a rapport with the informant. By focusing on the photographs and the different stories they generate, builds trust as the informant perceives the researcher as interested in their insights and knowledge of local events. In this sense, photographs become an associative tool for the researcher to employ both from an empirical as well as trust-building point of view (Sjölander-Lindqvist 2004, Sjölander-Lindqvist et al. 2010). In achieving this, the researchers benefitted greatly from being new to the local areas which meant that the informant experienced a purposeful sharing of their concerns and ideas with the researchers.

In our study we conducted two types of interviews that included photography in order to grasp the importance of place and residents' understandings of sustainable life in areas with proposed changes to the built environment. Since a photo conveys not only its material content but also a context we used collaborative photography, follow-up interviews of residents' photography of the local environment and photo focus groups in exploring the social and cultural impacts of landscape change (Sjölander-Lindqvist et al. 2010). To a neutral observer, a photograph might be of a tractor in a field whereas for the photographer the image may invoke the lives and labor of five generations of farm residents. Similarly, a photo of marine based wind-turbines may symbolize the post-industrial environmental movement as *well* as represent an intrusion on local-scale worlds. Consequently, a photographic image, if discussed in follow-up interviews, can disclose, challenge and question the taken-for-granted conceptualizations of, as in the case here, the landscape and the meanings of the physical appearance of buildings within a landscape. It is therefore crucial that photographs are discussed in interviews so that the motif (the content) can be incorporated into its own and the photographers' context. The photograph thus is both a material object, and a visual form, that is socially and culturally embedded (see also e.g. Warren 2005; Moore et al. 2008; Packard 2008).

Given the value of photographs, we employed collaborative photography – via the distribution of disposable cameras to nearby residents - and follow-up interviews on the images in the power plant case study. . In the ferry terminal case study, earlier interviews by the research team had revealed postcards depicting historic motifs and milieus. Simultaneously, the researchers had taken photos of the berth and surroundings. The team decided to use these postcards and photos as a basis for individual and group interviews since preliminary results from previous fieldwork disclosed local history as a

major dimension of how residents conceived of the berth's presence in the city center. The idea behind this choice of method was that the photos would serve as associative tools during the interviews. These variations of visual methods were complemented with individual interviews in both locations with residents, politicians, and municipality administrative staff, local journalists, business representatives and local NGOs. In addition, the research team explored archives, and contemporary media coverage and records of political decisions in order to contextualize and gain an understanding of the different voices raised around the two cases (Sjölander-Lindqvist et al. 2010, 2013).

Findings

The implementation and results of the two case-studies are presented in two sections: one on the nuclear power plant that includes pictures taken by respondents of their daily lives and individual follow-up interviews; the other on the group interviews about the ferry terminal and that included existing photos selected by the researchers.

The Barsebäck Nuclear Plant

Our first case study emerged from the debates about the future of the decommissioned Barsebäck nuclear power plant located in the south of Sweden. The cultural heritage sector advanced the opinion that parts of the plant should be made a heritage site since it invoked a particular set of historical experiences of 'high modernism' (Giddens 1991). Proponents argued that Barsebäck served as a symbol for the interweaving of environmental issues, political dynamics and advanced technology.

Barsebäck power plant consisted of two nuclear reactors sited next to the sea and close to two small fishing villages, and was put into service a few years prior to the "Three Mile Island" accident in 1979. As a result of this accident, opposition to nuclear power grew in Sweden, resulting in intense political debate. The parliamentary parties agreed to a referendum regarding the future of nuclear power in Sweden. After a popular vote in 1980, the parliament decided that all nuclear reactors should be phased-out by the year 2010. These plans were later cancelled and the Reactor 1 at Barsebäck was closed down in 1991, whilst the second reactor remained in operation until 2005 by way of parliamentary decision.

Naturally, the closing-down of the plant attracted much media attention. As did a local media statement by the county custodian of antiquities arguing that the Barsebäck nuclear power plant should be preserved at its present location, a report picked up many newspapers - locally, regionally and even nationally. Local residents raised their voices in response, saying they did not want the plant to be preserved as a cultural heritage. The municipality suggested that the plant instead should be dismantled to make way for new activities and site usage; local residents on the other hand, wanted the removal of the plant and the land returned to the local community. This contestation over a relatively recent past took place within a context saturated with heritage remains. For example, Barsebäck Manor is situated in the Barsebäck village, dates back to the 1680s and is still in use; and in the vicinity lie burials from the Late Neolithic..

As a place created for the production of a commodity, the Barsebäck nuclear power plant offered a good opportunity to study the relationship between Industrialism, landscape and tangible heritage remains. Technological installations such as industrial plants not only have a strong visual impact, but can also stimulate the rise of identity-formation processes in unexpected ways (Sjölander-Lindqvist 2004; Zonabend 1993).

In our study of the Barsebäck nuclear power plant, six informants were each given a one-time-use camera in order to photograph their 'local environment' and brief instructions asking them to consider what they experienced as important or had positive or negative meaning in their local environment including perspectives on the presence of the decommissioned power plant. All six were long-term residents of the local community and occupied privately-owned houses. All spent time in their local surroundings on a daily

basis, for example walking their dogs or taking evening walks after work but also they were engaged in the social life of the community, which often took place outdoors such as Midsummer festivities or harbor life. Five out of six informants were married and they engaged with the whole family in choosing images. Doing this, eventual gender-based or age-based considerations became part of their motivations for depicting a certain motif.

Informant photographers were instructed to return the cameras within one month. The research team brought the developed photos back to the photographers to discuss the imagery directly as well as to explore more hidden aspects invoked by the subject matter.

Disclosing residents' views and understandings of the power plant site through the method of collaborative photography revealed how images can generate information about the photographers' 'reality' (Sontag 1973). In this case, through follow-up discussions, we could explore not only the informant's experiences but also family-, age- and gender-based influences on the perspectives and use of the local environment. The follow-ups thus demonstrated how this reality was related to people's experiences and way of life, and thus had to be understood as a representation of collectively shared perceptions of moments, objects and situations in the local environment (Johnson and Griffith 1998; Pink 2001, 2011).

From the photograph-based interviews it soon emerged that the six informants' photos covered more than one item or topic. The photos fell into two categories: 1) inter-personal relations, and 2) the individual's place *in* and *relationship* with the environment and the landscape.

The landscape as a venue for intra-personal meetings

All six photographers took pictures of their families and family activities in the area, including visits to the local pub, the little harbor and a nearby small beach. All these places were all brought up as important for local life and for inter-residential relationships; families with children meeting at the beach, boaters meeting in the harbor, sauna-bathers meeting when using the village sauna, or when taking walks along what is referred to as the recreational area of the sea front. Through these photograph interviews we also learned about other non-visual aspects and moments of local life, including communal seasonal celebrations at Easter-, Midsummer- and Christmas-times in the fishing villages. The villages and village life unify and build a sense of community, in which neighbors hold a prominent position as they stand for companionship and the existence of social networks.

An open landscape and the sea front

The surroundings of Barsebäck is characterized by a flat and open landscape with largely unobstructed views and where the villages serve as points of departures for and mediators of the villagers' relationship with the landscape. Here, local history is fundamental; the villages are located right upon the sea front and in the past played an important function in the fishing industry. The sea is conceived as part of their local environment, and several of the informants tell through their photographs of a personal connection with it and a varied landscape.

The sea is calming me. It becomes like a person, 'how do feel today?' If the sea is very calm, 'well, you have a resting day.'

The wind, the waves, everything together... One day is never the same as another. Suddenly, you notice a change because of low water and then you see some stones you have never seen before. There is always something to discover.

As noted, many images and discussions of the photographs relate to the livelihoods of people, making for a fluid boundary between the building interiors and the outside. This is particularly evident during the spring and the summer when the informants spend much of their individual and collective time outside, when taking walks, barbecuing, having meals in

their gardens and taking their children to the beach. There is also a connection between indoors and outdoors in the fall and in the winter, when household members look out of windows to, in their words, “grasp the beauty of the landscape” and the “sense of freedom” they associate with the sea. It is a question about not only about being *in* the countryside but also a matter of *seeing* the landscape and certain features of the landscape, and feeling close to the different aspects of life that takes place outside their house.

One rather intriguing dimension refers to the way the photographers relate to the power plant. The power plant holds diverse symbolic meanings for the local community. One of the photographers captured the plant at sunset, and tells in the follow-up interview of having several pictures of the plant in his personal photo album. For him, the plant is a symbol of something good: it provided clean energy and employment opportunities for people in the region. This perception, together with the presence of the plant requiring good infrastructure, was supported in the interviews prior to the informants’ taking photographs. In a similar vein, another photographer discusses how the plant symbolizes security, development and technological know-how in combination with the ability to provide for livelihoods. This symbolism was actively supported by the power plant: the plant owner communicated their management and how they dealt with the risks associated with running the plant through newsletters and open-house activities.

We also sense ambivalence towards the plant: whereas for some it was acceptable when providing energy and supporting local livelihoods when closed-down, other photographers tended to view it as a disturbance that interrupts the open landscape. Such informants chose not to take a photograph of the plant; instead, both in image and in narrative, they pictured their surrounding local environment in terms of an openness location next to the sea. For them, the power plant limited access to the surrounding landscape and restricted opportunities to walk along the shoreline, to view open sea or just embrace their local environment’s diverse landscapes. A local resident talks about how their way of life in the presence of the power plant is part normal, part limited and strange:

Thus, it is a true closed world, even for us who live here. I sometimes drive down to get some flowers in the fields. So it's like, I was about to say, you do not see it. You do not notice it as much. It is just there, and when approaching the area, it's far behind the fences, so in some sense you are not affected so much of it. The only thing is after all, like when you are out walking in the fields, passing the high voltage lines ... it's a little uncomfortable because then you can hear how it, like sssss... It is a bit creepy, then I say to my children and my dog, 'come on, let's leave this place.'

The Helsingborg Ferry Station

Our second case study examines the contestation taking place when in 2005 the leading political party in the local council Helsingborg city suggested that a wooden berth built in 1898, be demolished to make room for a conference center. Like in Barsebäck, local interest groups objected to the plans and proposed that the site and the old berth to be preserved. The future of the property, with its exceptional and exclusive location in the central parts of Helsingborg, brought about political turmoil, and resulted in heated debates and political defections.

Besides housing the ferry terminal – closed in the early 1990s with the completion of a new and much larger bus and railway station - the site also included a car park. Politicians, entrepreneurs and residents all agreed that the site had an exclusive spot in central part Helsingborg as it is located close to Denmark on the sea-front, near the main shopping area and many cultural attractions such as museums and theatres and the new and spacious travel center.

The topic of the future of the site resulted in public debates. In 2005, the majority political parties suggested launching an architectural competition on how to renew the site. Instead of serving as inspiration for further discussions, some sketches drawn by a well-known architectural company triggered a conflict. Residents were indignant since plans for

a conference center proposed by the sketches would result in the destruction of the ferry station and its associated historical value. As one of the informants put it:

When I think of the station, it's when you left for Denmark with mother and father, or when grandmother was to arrive by train from the north of Sweden, or when you were to take the train by yourself when called up for military service... if one refers to Helsingborg as the gate to the European continent, one must see the ferry terminal as the key.

Our study undertook two group interviews in Helsingborg: firstly, with a group of three business persons engaged in the marketing of the city and secondly, with a group of five members of an association focusing on historical issues regarding the city. Both groups contained men and women. In the business group, all participants worked in different businesses and were of middle-age. Two were female. In the second group, a majority of the participants were retired men and had lived in the area for a long time. Each interview lasted for around 1.5 hours.

The following description aims to highlight the role of the photos in the data collection process. The participants were informed of our interest in understanding the debate concerning the ferry and city planning in general as well as their own associations and their role in city planning. By selecting two rather diametrically opposed groups for the photo-based interviews, the research team garnered more diverse stories of local experiences. Thus, even with the limited sample size, various local voices were included. In addition, document analysis of media and archives supported the results.

To see or not to see

Pictures of the old city interview became the focus of the interview with the city history group. Also, placing pictures from different time epochs side by side allows a more detailed discussion of the development of the center as temporal similarities and differences are apparent. The photos are used to give a particular thread to the interviews by discussing them more or less in the temporal sequence. This triggers many stories about buildings and their creators as well as historical events in the city. However, they also seem to guide the discussion from the manner that the photographs create implicit expectations on the interviewees. For example, a woman makes a comment when the interviewer starts to talk about a photograph: "Okay, now I see, I was actually wondering what you wanted out of that picture." In other words the choice of photos and the imagery they present to the interview setting are considered by the participants. They try to make sense of the setting, the interviewees, the interviewer's objectives, as well as the role of the photos.

Photos are not used as much in the case of the business group, neither as a natural thread for the conversation nor as the main trigger of new discussion themes. Instead they are used as resources for pointing out specific places such as where the participants work. Photos also can also draw hidden background elements to the front of discussions: for example, such as when interviewees pointed out the most important place in the city, some city stairs, that were more or less hidden by the foreground of the picture. Photos in this way support the possibility of going into details or explanations in detail, both in the conversation between the interviewees as well as between the interviewees and the interviewees. However, the photos also support the possibility to associate very freely with future possible developments. The business group did not recognize the historical images to the same extent as the historical group. Instead they discussed the possible future of the places on the photos and made associations to rather recent events and political initiatives as well as their own activities associated with these places and events.

Evaluate the value?

Some of the narratives from the interviews can be seen as reasoning about the three dimensions often associated with the sustainability concept: economy, ecology and social

dimensions. None of the groups state that city development is just about preserving; both groups instead claim that it is important to keep some established buildings and places as well as building new structures. Both give as an example, the decisions made in the 1990s that initially were criticized but in fact resulted in a huge regeneration project, which generated many various functions for the city and outdoor recreation for the residents.

Deciding what is worth keeping and what is replacing is not however, an easy task. Both groups elaborate on this subject and it turns out to be a complex mix of values. For example, economic value is not necessarily connected to for-profit solutions in a simple way. The claim by politicians that the destruction of the ferry station was required because space was needed for a new conference venue is therefore not seen as a fully acceptable statement. Instead, the groups say that a conference venue can be placed elsewhere in the city and does not necessarily make the best use of the old berth space. And for the business group in particular, the current function of ferry station as a rock club raises the distinct possibility of attracting more visitors to the city, thus providing other entrepreneurs with business opportunities. Innovation and creativity in the case of the rock club business are therefore highlighted by the business representatives as an important supporting argument for retaining the ferry station structures. The financial issue is not just a question of a profit for the municipality but also a perceived need to provide outdoor amenities for its citizens and the possibility for entrepreneurs to continue their activities which are seen as highly connected to the atmosphere of the ferry station. As such the identity of the place and the identity of the businesses are interrelated and thus economic values are associated with social values. The possibilities of socializing at the club and it being a place that attracts musicians, mostly but not exclusively for younger citizens, are seen as important dimensions in considering a solution for the ferry station.

When the city history group discusses the ferry station, it is the many historical dimensions of the ferry, rather than the current club activities, that are brought up and examined. The building and the place are discussed as representative of the transport oriented city and some participants have personal stories that witness this. However, even though the ferry station is associated with these important features of the city, the group participants do not think necessarily that it should remain in its present place. Historically, the building was a makeshift solution and this fact is advanced as one argument for not retaining it as part of the modern city. Instead, the group discusses other values associated with the place that must be considered as well. History is therefore outplayed by other social dimensions such as the possibility to socialize among citizens as well as economic values such as the efficiency in use of the place. For example, an informant discusses the value of the place being part of the very city center as well as being part of the seaside including a beautiful view. The informants thus see possibilities other than the existing parking lot and the berth as a way of transforming the place into better values for the city and its citizens that these may out-compete the historical values of the berth.

Discussion

In this study the photos serve as co-producers of the interviews. They bring additional dimensions as they represent objects and actions of the city and the landscape. They also give the participants the opportunity to associate and tell detailed stories that otherwise might not have been told. One dimension that can be introduced readily by photography is the temporal dimension, as discussed by for example Kokk and Jönsson (2013). Visual devices can help the conversation between researcher and interviewee to highlight how history might influence the perception of present and the future as well as the reciprocal. This became evident in our interviews in the case of the local residents of the nuclear plant. The plant could be explained as something belonging to a piece of land that had been lent to the nation and during its running was an important part of daily life but when closed-down became an intruder. This became even more evident when the photos were related to the future; the residents saw no place there for the plant, only a restored landscape and buildings for the use and enjoyment of local residents.

In the ferry terminal case-study, the business group more or less excluded themselves from the pictures, especially those from of the past, and focused on describing possible futures for the city and city life. The historical group in contrast, associated the historical photos to stories of experiences from their childhood as well as historical events of the city. The history of the city and the guardianship of the materials of that history in the form of photos, films and postcards are vital to the historical group's identity and their perception of their role. As shown by Pink (2011) such storage and categorizing of photography are important parts of the constitution of place.

In co-producing the interview, photographs not only can enable but can also hinder a smooth conversation, as seen in the example of the women who wondered what the interviewer expected the interviewees to talk about regarding one photo. For her, the photos did not raise any associations that she felt were of interest to the interviewer. Such hesitation, if not recognized by the researcher, might hinder rather than encourage stories important to the respondent. Equally, as discussed by e.g. Packard (2008) and Warren (2005), the photos can have a negative impact on the power dynamics between the respondent and the researcher. Photos used in interviews should emanate from local perspectives and understandings of place. Photographs should be produced either by the informants, as in the Barsebäck case, or be subjects chosen on the basis of local understandings identified in personal interviews or in local documents, as was the case in Helsingborg. Without such awareness, the use of photos in empirical work can generate similar limitations in the conduct of interview as do pre-formulated questions in traditional surveys.

One of the main advantages of using qualitative instead of quantitative methods for grasping and understanding the dimensions of daily life is the possibility for the informant to reason from various perspectives. This reasoning does not need to be consistent; instead the interviewer can reveal a complex story which may include contradictions and different values. Our study shows how the economic dimension can be associated with and discussed on the basis of for-profit solutions as well as in terms of entrepreneurship and creativity. Such elaboration on various dimensions on sustainability might be difficult to grasp when using surveys from a positivistic tradition of research alone. To further develop applicability, visual research methods could be combined with surveys in empirical work. Visual research methods, with their capability to grasp and reveal stories of different dimensions of sustainability for different groups in a local community setting, can provide support for survey design.

The social dimensions of sustainability are not straight forward, as the perceived functions of buildings are created and recreated in a complex interrelationship between the present, the past and the future. This affects the meaning of restoration, remaking and reformulation when applied to not only the physical place but also its meaning in daily life. This illuminates the importance of recognizing place as both a material and symbolic phenomenon if we are to achieve a trustworthy formal decision-making processes. This is evident in both of our cases. It is also evident for personal and professional settings. For example, our results should be of interest for studies that want to highlight the materiality of daily organizational life such as information technology and management studies (cf. Orlikowski 2010). Based on the results of these studies and the experiences gained by using interviews in combination with photographs, we suggest that future studies can elaborate further on the usefulness of photography-based (group) interviews in enhancing our understanding of the personal and professional experiences of sustainability policy. Thus, visual methods are, used either alone or in combination with other research methods, highly useful in addressing the interrelationships between the different dimensions of sustainability. This makes visual methods relevant for research in both disciplinary and multidisciplinary projects. Collaborative photography and photo-based interviews also can be resource efficient in cases where observations are not possible or where the phenomena of research interest is not very frequently discussed or dealt with.

Conclusion

In the collection of narratives about the future prospects of the power plant and the demolition of the ferry terminal, visual methods disclose the fluidity, invisibility, materiality and symbolism of the photographs contents. They encompass both the intentions of the researcher and the informants' perceptions of the landscape, place and locality and their concerns associated with environmental change. This study pointed out the possibility to use photography as a helpful visual device in interviews on sustainability. The focus has been on the meaning of place for residents in times of change. As suggested by Moore et al. (2008), the results indicate that photography can be useful in both individual and group interviews in order to enhance our understanding of community life. A combination of photography and interviews enables the researcher to grasp various meanings of place in daily life and thereby can illustrate how various dimensions of values and actions connected to sustainability can be understood. Visual devices are useful tools in research on how sustainability can be understood in different local settings where complexity and contradictions are part of daily life and not to be reduced to a simple, unambiguous concept.

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