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Management through hope: an ethnography of Denmark's Renewable Energy Island

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyse the process of social and technical change that took place between 1997 and 2007 through which Samsø, a rural island of 4,000 inhabitants, became Denmark's Renewable Energy Island (REI).

Design/methodology/approach – Building on ethnographic fieldwork conducted on Samsø in 2013 and 2014, the paper takes as its starting point a citizens' meeting in which a new renewable energy project is proposed by a municipal coordinator. This meeting, in which the municipal coordinator exhibits a "change management" attitude, fails to win the citizens' support and becomes an entry point into an investigation of how the REI project developers managed to get the island community to actively support the project. A gateway to the past, the meeting allows the author to ethnographically describe the unobserved events of 1997-2007.

Findings – The argument is that the REI project developers practised management through hope or "hope management", in contrast to "change management", creating a project that succeeded in accomplishing its goals of changing the island due to its openness, its rootedness in the island community's past, and the project developers' ability to speak to a down-to-earth variety of hope.

Originality/value – The paper makes use of an ethnographic study of the present to investigate an unobserved past in which a REI was built. Taking up the "hope debate" in anthropology and Science and Technology Studies (Stengers, 2002; Miyazaki, 2004; Jensen, 2014), the paper contributes with an empirical analysis of the role of hope in the management of change processes.

Keywords Change management, Climate change, Ethnography, Hope, Renewable energy

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

> [H]ope is the difference between probability and possibility. If we follow probability there is no hope, just a calculated anticipation authorised by the world as it is. But to "think" is to create possibility against probability. It doesn't mean hope for one or another thing or as a calculated attitude, but to try and feel and put into words a possibility for becoming (Stengers, 2002, p. 245).

This paper is about processes of change and how they are handled. Our departure point is Samsø, Denmark's Renewable Energy Island (REI) since 1997. On this island I recently did fieldwork, and as part of my fieldwork I observed how a citizens' meeting convened by the municipal energy and climate coordinator brought into view and reactualized the dynamics which several years ago led the islanders to accept the REI project, a major project posing great challenges and bringing drastic change to the community. The meeting allowed me to observe the failure of the "change management" attitude of the municipal energy coordinator who had convened the meeting to propose a new wind project, bringing to the fore, instead, the role of hope in guiding processes of change. It is this clash between "hope management" and "change management" in the case of Samsø, Denmark's REI, which is discussed in this paper.

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Samsø's energy transition has been called a "green revolution" (Burger and Weinmann, 2013; Turner, 2007, p. 29; Höges, 2009): upon winning a government-initiated competition between five islands to become Denmark's "REI" demonstrating Danish renewable energy (RE) solutions and (what is understood to be) the strong Danish tradition for public involvement to the world, Samsø embarked on a journey and a community-building process revitalizing the local community through the installation of four primarily straw-fired district heating plants, ten land-based and 11 offshore wind turbines and a large number of solar systems and privately owned RE technologies. Through processes of local cooperation, over a ten-year period from 1997 to 2007, Samsø accomplished its down-to-earth energy revolution and became CO_2 neutral, inspiring observers all over the world and welcoming five to six thousand "energy tourists" each year.

But is "revolution" a fitting expression for this accomplishment? Samsø's energy transition was a slow one. The first years saw the patient construction of technical plans and the mobilization of the island public into working groups, volunteers and customers willing to work towards what became a common goal: energy self-sufficiency. The first new wind turbines were not erected until 2000, three-four years into the project. The ten-year project period allowed time for the project to grow and for the island collective to change accordingly.

Is this what a "green revolution" looks like? Philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers offers a two-piece warning against the word revolution. For one, revolution implies a detachment "from the past for a new tomorrow" (Stengers, 2002, p. 266). An abstracting move, revolutions are not situated in the here-now where lived life originates; they represent breaks, disruptions in life and custom. Second, the swift change implied by the word "revolution", the orientation towards tomorrow, goes against Stengers' call to "slow down". In a context of change, slowing down allows necessary time for new practices and modes of co-existence to form and settle; necessary "because new habits also mean new feelings, new interests, new possibilities" (Stengers, 2002, p. 266; see also Stengers, 2005). Samsø did not strive for detachment from its past. Contrarily, the REI project, where possible, built on existing village-based working groups, and both the wind and heating technologies and the organizational structure of the cooperative society or co-op frequently employed in the project were familiar constructions, traditional forms on Samsø. "On Samsø", a project manager from Samsø Energy Academy, the organization heading most RE initiatives on the island, told me, "we rediscover methods from the past, ways of doing things which worked at earlier times and still work today".

If "revolution" implies a rupture with the past, maybe "hope" is a more fitting characterization of the drive of the project. Hope, as in the quote at the top, referring to "possibility for becoming".

The Energy Island through its example and its methods of becoming also inspires hope. Following debates in anthropology and Science and Technology Studies (STS) about the capacity, even the necessity, for our methods to "nourish hope" (Miyazaki, 2004; Stengers, 2002), I treat the hopeful position not as a naive one, but as a position that urges the researcher to base the analysis in a "pragmatic and experimental engagement" with the empirical material (Jensen, 2014, p. 361), leading away from simplifications and definitive conclusions onto a path which creates room for hope in the present. Following Stengers, "hope is not for a future in the name of which we should sacrifice ourselves. No, it must be born from the very collective process as it happens" (Stengers, 2002, p. 257). Hope is what Samsø inspires in its spectators, and

hope, I will argue, in this empirically grounded variation, was the engine of the REI project. My own motivation for writing this is captured mainly in the first part of that sentence: Samsø's potential for inspiring, for sparking hope. I find Samsø's accomplishment, its practical staging of a real alternative to fossil fuel-intensive ways of living, not just compelling but also necessary; therein lies my hopefulness as a researcher.

While hope intuitively implies an orientation towards the future, in the case of Samsø we must project not forward but back in time to localize the hope which, I argue, made the REI project possible and to mobilize and equip this hope to, in anthropologist Miyazaki's (2004) words, generate new hopeful moments (p. 25). I argue for an empirical sensibility towards the past as something that carries with it the potential to guide us in the present towards the future; thus echoing a concern for the role of temporality found not only in STS but also in organizational studies (e.g. Hernes *et al.*, 2013; Dawson, 2014a). To understand present hopes we need to know the past; a logic reflected in Nietzsche's (1874/1996) notion that knowing our history is one way of preparing ourselves for the present and the future. The windmill meeting fails, I will show, in part due to the failure of the organizer of the meeting to relate the new project to Samsø's past. This failure of linking up with the past leaves no room for hope in a new project, and it mirrors my own methodological difficulty of getting empirically close to the hard work and practices that made up the REI project ten years ago. As the central concept of this paper I treat hope as a theoretical-methodological problem and an empirical-analytical object of study, without making any hard distinctions between these categories. Employing hope as method implicates researcher and research object in a complex, even messy relationship, which should not be cleaned up or ignored but instead appreciated as "nothing else than the irreducible and always embedded interplay of processes, practices, experiences, ways of knowledge and values that make up our common world" (Stengers, 2011, p. 10; see also Yanow, 2014, p. 13). The connections that arise between these entities – method, theory, analysis – are part and parcel of a method of hope.

Methods and methodological challenges

The paper builds on an extensive fieldwork conducted on Samsø where I lived for five-six months during fall and summer 2013-2014. From my office space at Samsø Energy Academy (the project organization with ten employees welcoming visitors, giving presentations about the REI project and initiating new RE projects on Samsø) I did participant observation, had informal conversations and engaged in the activity of "shadowing" my colleagues in their daily work (Czarniawska, 2007) while frequently taking part in this work. I carried out some thirty interviews with central island actors and Academy employees and ploughed through old and new reports, newspaper articles and books about Samsø and the REI project. For this paper, I draw on all these data, but most explicitly on fieldnotes from one specific meeting and the conversations that followed. An analytical focus on events resonates not only with STS (see, e.g. Gomart and Hajer, 2003) but also with organizational ethnography and especially process studies, which understands dynamically evolving activities such as events as important instances of organized action (Langley *et al.*, 2013).

In line with current developments in organizational ethnography, which introduce non-human entanglements into a field traditionally more concerned with symbols, language and sensemaking (e.g. Wels, 2015; Van den Ende *et al.*, 2015), drawing on STS in the analysis of the data makes the case study not meaning-centred

(Yanow *et al.*, 2009) but ontology-centred (see e.g. Woolgar and Lezaun, 2013). "The ontological turn" in STS and anthropology, to paraphrase Winthereik, describes studies concerned with the coming into existence, stabilization and co-existence of realities especially focused on how theory participates in the process of worldmaking and how theory is, in turn, changed through the analysis (Winthereik, 2015, pp. 12-13). The method of hope does exactly this, connects method, theory and analysis, and this new orientation I wish to bring into contact with organizational ethnography through my case study of Samsø.

Writing about Samsø invariably raises the question of how to make the past visible. The events that led to the realization of the island's ambitious goals of energy self-sufficiency and CO_2 neutrality are far away by now, dimmed not only by the passing of time but by the many stories told about the island. Stories, neatly constructed to be fit for near-global circulation, have turned Samsø into an almost mythological place (see, e.g. Lyman, 2014; Biello, 2010) and have arguably played an important part in the island's success at becoming a widely recognized figure in the green transition. A small farming and tourism island in the centre of the Kattegat between the Danish mainland and Zealand, home to four thousand islanders, Samsø is easily reached from Copenhagen by train and ferry. But getting to know the processes that led to change on the island without relying heavily on handed down stories by reminiscing islanders or impressionable observers who have narrated their Samsøs in books, newspaper articles and personal accounts, proved complicated for the researcher arriving to the scene almost ten years late. Nevertheless, my interest in that crucial time when an island community accepted a drastic change in the face of a threatening future urged me to find a way to ethnographically account for this process.

Employing hope as method requires empirical closeness and groundedness. But achievements inspected after the fact have been shown to take on the stability of accomplished facts, while the circumstances that went into their production have become invisible (see, e.g. Latour and Woolgar, 1979). Those circumstances are what we are after. My reliance on documents and personal accounts inserts a distance between Samsø's becoming and I that is not just due to the decade that has passed but also to the quality of the documents and accounts available. There was, for instance, no systematic production or filing of documents during the REI project. The documents and accounts I have had access to constitute a comprehensive but unfocused data material lacking in detail and consistency. However, during my fieldwork I participated in a meeting which so contrasted what I will describe as the methods of the REI project as to bring these back into the light through their contrast, thus endowing my data with a new clarity and allowing me to craft this account.

With temporality arguably a challenge in this study, time also figures as an analytical resource. The ability of Samsø project managers to draw on the past in some circumstances and on the future in other is crucial to project success (and failure, if not done aptly), as we will see, and relates strongly to the concept and method of hope. As Langley *et al.* (2013) note, underlining the agency of managers to draw consciously on different temporalities, "how the past is drawn upon and made relevant to the present is not an atomistic or random exercise but crucially depends on the social practices in which actors are embedded" (p. 5). The implication is that "managers caught up in these temporal flows are continuously engaged in the reconstruction of both pasts and futures" (Hernes *et al.*, 2013), leading to a "relational-temporal perspective" (Dawson, 2014b) suitable for both STS and organizational ethnography. This perspective allows the researcher to appreciate the temporal as well as the social

and material aspects of the data. Viewed in this light, the perhaps limited accessibility of the past becomes less of an issue, as this past is a malleable entity under reconstruction, constantly woven into the observable present, as this or that aspect of the past becomes relevant, reactualized through the prism of the windmill meeting. The meeting exploded like a bomb in the heart of my field. The meeting itself and the discussions in its aftermath opened up and made visible practices, relations and negotiations of the past. In what follows, after accounting for the meeting, I will explore the avenues opened up by the event; I will follow them into the past, back to the REI project, to seek an understanding of what was done differently back then. Following these paths will allow me to answer what I believe to be a central question when it comes to Samsø's ability to inspire hope and foster further change in the world, namely, through which practices and methods were the processes of change involved in the REI project handled? How was the RE Island created?

Upon my account of the windmill meeting I will contrast the method employed by the municipal energy coordinator convening the meeting with the methods of the REI project developers. If the municipal coordinator embodies one method, that of a specific caricature of corporate "change management", the REI project developers, still active at Samsø Energy Academy today, represent another, which has become widely, even internationally known as the "Samsø way" or, as I will call it, "hope management". It is the Samsø method that I will attempt to track down. This analytical distinction regarding the opposition of the methods "hope management" and "change management" is, of course, a simplification made for the sake of the clarity of the argument.

2. The meeting

From my desk at Samsø Energy Academy – the non-governmental project organization heading the RE initiatives on the island and my base during my fieldwork – in the open-plan office in a building dominated by large windows generously putting the surrounding grass fields and the sea on display, I saw the meeting participants approaching. It was morning on a weekday, and the participants had agreed to start their workday with a meeting. The Academy was not involved in the new project to be proposed, but Samsø Municipality's energy and climate coordinator behind the initiative, Rob, found it natural to borrow the Academy's spacious kitchen for the meeting since the Energy Academy was naturally associated with energy-related initiatives on Samsø, and the meeting participants were used to stopping by the Academy for meetings. The Energy Academy and Samsø Municipality take turns initiating "green" projects on the island with no rigid division of labour between them, and the two institutions often collaborate. Strengthening the partnership between the two institutions, in fact, was a priority for the Academy during that time. Unrelated to the Academy as the meeting was, allowing Rob to have his meeting there was a vote of confidence.

This was just weeks into my fieldwork, and the meeting offered me a chance to meet a range of the men who had been central actors in the REI days. Around ten people showed up; invitations had gone out for a select few: three farmers, including the chairman of the farmers' association; representatives from Samsø Havvind, the local organization behind Samsø's offshore wind farm; three municipal workers; the island electrician; the chairman of one of the villages' civic associations; a left-wing local politician and one Academy employee.

Until now I had encountered the men (very few women were actively engaged in the REI project) only as characters in the stories about the project: I had heard about how they had been won over by Hermansen (the protagonist in many stories, the energy

consultant handling "the communication side" of the REI project, now director of the Energy Academy) and how they had accepted great changes to the island and their lives (workers were trained to maintain windmills; farmers reorganized their farms and invested great sums to produce wind power on their lands; the island landscape changed to give way to district heating plants, solar systems and wind turbines in the fields).

For the meeting, the characters had escaped the books and articles and entered the Energy Academy with a familiarity I envied them in those early days of fieldwork. The farmers slipped out of their clogs and walked around in their socks and workclothes, and in the kitchen Rob, the energy coordinator, was setting up his Powerpoint show while I helped arrange the chairs and get breakfast and coffee ready. The atmosphere was laid-back, the participants chatting; everyone used to meeting at various occasions in the local community, now awaiting Rob's new proposal.

Since the conclusion of the REI project in 2007, Samsø, led by the Energy Academy in collaboration with the municipality and other island actors, has been at work on a new project, "Samsø 2.0", concerned with becoming a fossil-free community by 2030. The project still finding its form, it was not surprising that the municipality's energy coordinator had a new energy project to present. Still, it was customary for the municipality to run its initiatives by the Energy Academy to set up a partnership before initiating new projects, so Rob's convening a meeting with central stakeholders before discussing the project with the Academy was unorthodox, the Academy employee present let me know. He suggested that it may have to do with the fact that Rob is not a local; he lives on the mainland and comes to Samsø a few days a week, and he has not worked long at the municipality, which, furthermore, is his first or second job after finishing university. This young man from the mainland now attempted to sell a project idea to the group of seasoned islanders.

The starting point for Rob's presentation is Samsø municipal council's recent field trip to the town of Hvide Sande in Western Jutland. On the harbour in Hvide Sande offshore mills have been erected on land. With the industrial activity on the harbour, the noise generated by the wind turbines does not bother anyone, allowing each turbine to produce 15 GwH, a Danish record. Rob jokingly mentions that Hvide Sande Municipality welcomed the islanders with surprise: "We usually come to you – why are you coming to learn from us?". But the municipal delegates returned to Samsø inspired. Rob explains that the Hvide Sande business model is different from Samsø's in that the money is raised through a foundation. This model involves a long payback period of seven to nine years, longer than the payback time on the wind investments on Samsø. The money generated by the wind electricity would, due to the requirements of the foundation model, have to be invested locally and communally and not benefit private investors as has previously been the case on Samsø. This business model, less dependent on private investment, holds great potential for benefitting the island community in the long run. Following the introduction, Rob poses a number of questions in his Powerpoint slides: could we be interested in a similar project on Samsø? Would this model be suitable for Samsø? If so, how might we want to invest the money in ten years' time? Is there a burning platform for Samsø?

The concept of "the burning platform", Rob tells me in an interview following the meeting, was coined by management professor John Kotter who works in the field of "change management[1]". The term is used to highlight that the existence of a "sense of urgency" plays an important role in processes of change: "With a strong sense of urgency, people quickly identify critical issues and form teams that are strong enough,

and that feel enough commitment, to guide an ambitious change initiative" (Kotter, 2008, p. 14). The identification of a common "burning platform" is a central first step in Kotter's eight-step process for change management. A bestselling management author, Kotter provides leaders with a set of basic tools for their change efforts. While criticized as over-simplified, atheoretical "teleological models establishing normative step-by-step guides" by theorists focusing on process-based understandings of change (Langley *et al.*, 2013, p. 9; Hernes *et al.*, 2013), Rob finds Kotter's guidelines inspirational. As an aspirational change manager, Rob employs Kotter's tools and structures in his own work. Like myself, however, I doubt the meeting participants had read much Kotter, and their response to Rob's project pitch is less than enthusiastic.

Hesitant at first, they start pitching in: "Maybe the buses could be a burning platform […]" someone begins (the buses run infrequently on Samsø and are subject to much complaint). A farmer adds, more sceptically: "The Hvide Sande model is unique; it can't be replicated here". The conversation quickly turns to the location of new Samsø turbines, an issue not raised by Rob. Some are quick to reject the possibility of identifying new sites: "The northern island is untouchable because of the preserved natural landscape. The only part of southern Samsø where we can put up new mills according to the district plan is on the estate owner's land". The estate owner, central to the REI project due to the fact that he, word has it, "owns half of Samsø", though invited, has not shown up today. The electrician chips in: "There are still possible windmill sites on the island". "But is the willingness there?" someone replies. "Look at Mejlflak!" (a controversial projected offshore wind farm near northern Samsø proposed and developed by mainland actors and heavily contested on Samsø).

The discussion is slipping out of Rob's control, and he makes an attempt to redirect the participants' attention to his "burning platform": "Of course there is a burning platform. Just look at the municipal budgets: there is no more money", he appeals. "I realize that we can't simply copy the Hvide Sande model, but there must be a 'Samsø way' of doing this […]". Rob tells me afterwards that the role of project instigator does not sit well with him. He had thought the islanders felt the burning platform as much as he does and would immediately support a new ambitious wind project. The participants' awareness of the hard-pressed municipal budgets ought to have been sufficient to spark a desire to embark on something new. And besides, as Denmark's RE Island it should not be difficult to spark interest in an RE project. Rob had pictured his role as someone who puts together a slideshow and presses a button, moving the Powerpoint presentation from one slide to the next while a project working group assembles around him as the participants start feeling the inspiration from Hvide Sande. Instead, the meeting seems to be dissolving in scattered critical comments and arguing among the participants.

A farmer sceptically inserts that the state has refused many new windmill applications nationally recently. Himself a part of the aforementioned Mejlflak project which has already been approved by the state, the farmer takes the stance that Samsø should simply invest in the Mejlflak turbines; something Samsø Municipality has decided against due to the controversy surrounding the project. Another debate arising is that of how the money generated by the proposed turbines should be spent in ten years' time. A participant posits that the money ought to benefit the local community as a whole, not the island's tourists or farmers. The farmers who invested in the REI turbines still reap the benefits from selling electricity to the grid, and this cumulation of wealth in the hands of a few sits uneasily with some islanders, although it is a criticism rarely articulated. The chairman of the farmers' union cuts in: "It's tourism and farming that we have to live off; that's where the jobs are". The quarrelling continues: other areas could benefit from the money; it might

sponsor a new public swimming facility; and "by the way", a participant adds, "if we support the farming industry and create new jobs in that sector they will soon be snatched by 'eastern workers' [immigrants from Eastern Europe]". The atmosphere is getting heated. The discussion still more diffuse, Rob's hope of starting a project working group dwindles with each new contribution to the debate. The Energy Academy employee, who has kept a low profile until now, attempts to calm the parties: "Let's talk about how we can raise the money for the foundation before we discuss spending it!"

After this interruption, the discussion once again turns to the location of the wind turbines, and the participants come to the conclusion that the estate owner's approval is crucial to the project. He not only owns large land areas which constitute potential windmill sites, he is also a member of the Samsø Foundation which could be crucial in raising the money required.

Suddenly, as the participants are converging on the point that they cannot move forward without the participation of the estate owner, he enters, one hour late. He has been outside smoking, supposedly unaware that the meeting started at nine. All eyes on the newcomer, the meeting that was coming to an inconclusive end changes character. The participants try to give the estate owner the full report, but the local farmer who wants Samsø to invest in the Mejlflak project interrupts: "The only possible site for new windmills is on your land south of the landfill". The estate owner, hesitant, directs his attention at Rob who has fallen silent: "Is there money in the project?" Rob shuffles out of his chair and pointlessly finds the slide in his presentation that says "Where will the money come from?", feeding the estate owner's question back to him.

The estate owner is visibly displeased with being brought into the process at such an early stage, but the discussion picks up again and moves back and forth until the estate owner unexpectedly gets out of his chair and stands up. While the other participants are in their workclothes, he is elegantly dressed as if on his way to go hunting. "I'm leaving!" he proclaims. "I don't see why you have to erect more windmills in my backyard; I have enough as it is. And it seems like the Mejlflak project is an obvious investment opportunity. Let's invest there instead". Rob, inserting that investing in that project would be highly controversial, grudgingly agrees to look into it again. The meeting is over, the estate owner already out the door.

3. "We've been bombed back to the stone age!"

In the aftermath of the meeting, Rob came to represent in the discussions of the Energy Academy staff the counterpoint to what now stood out more clearly to me as "the Samsø method". Hermansen, the Academy director and coordinator of the REI project, put this plainly in a later interview: "Rob's doing things now that we did ten years ago, presenting them as if they were brand new. I mean, a foundation! We experimented with that back then – it didn't work out. And he brings everyone to Hvide Sande only to be welcomed by confused people saying: 'What is Samsø doing over here? It used to be the other way around!' " Hermansen continues, "If I hadn't been there, the REI project would never have been realized. I don't mean to sound self-satisfied, but I was able to gather together the projects so they didn't end up detached from each other without direction. Rural communities are ruled by fear because we're always under threat of extinction, and I have at numerous occasions managed to raise people's hopes again, due to my local knowledge and our reliable project plans".

If Rob practices one method, imbued with a Kotter-inspired "change management" attitude, the director represents another, which has become widely known as the "Samsø way". It is this "Samsø way" or method that we are attempting to track down.

From Hermansen's quote, some elements can be identified: the importance of creating a common direction, of "local knowledge" and "reliable project plans". Furthermore, raising people's hopes is central. I will return to each in the remainder of this analysis.

What are people's hopes and fears on Samsø? Island life is precarious; jobs are few, vital public institutions such as health care and schools exist under the perpetual threat of closure, and demographics look bleak with young families leaving rather than moving to the island (Hermansen *et al.*, 2007). The islanders hope for a less uncertain existence. The municipal energy coordinator has been hired to build wind turbines to aid the hard-pressed municipal budgets, and he simply hopes to fulfil his job, he expresses to me in a tense interview following the meeting. But he does not manage to bring his own and the meeting participants' hopes together.

"We've been bombed back to the Stone Age!", the Academy employee present at the meeting later tells the travelling director on a Skype connection, worrying that Rob has destroyed in one meeting the relations the REI project developers have spent close to two decades building, and drawing my attention to the care with which these relations had to be built, the time and effort it had demanded.

Rob's method, his way of approaching the islanders at the windmill meeting, goes against this "Samsø way". He goes ahead quickly, proposing a project which is supposedly very open ("Where will the money come from?"), but which builds on a fixed business model (the foundation), a Powerpoint show presenting the project in an already solidified form and calculations and budgets from the Hvide Sande project, a municipality with no relevance for the islanders. When the change management concept of "the burning platform" fails to gain resonance, he half threatens them to support the project: "there is no more money" in the municipal budget. The most accommodating among the participants are brought to think about improving the island's public transportation system. There are no great visions, as Rob fails to ignite the assembly's hopes. In the Skype conference the Academy employee tells Hermansen: "It's a misunderstanding. You need to present positive ideas to people which they can actively select and be enthusiastic about", expressing something of a parallel to Stengers' attitude to hope as a slow, collective process of becoming – even if the idea of presenting people with "positive ideas" sets the stage for a slightly more practical and bounded engagement than Stengers' open-ended process of becoming.

When Rob neglects to make the islanders' own experiences the starting point of a conversation about a new RE project, and instead presents Hvide Sande as the new pioneer, he implies that Samsø is no longer on the forefront. In signalling that Samsø needs to look elsewhere for inspiration, Rob unwittingly displays a lack of appreciation for Samsø's renown and history and for the work the islanders put into the REI project; a project, ever-present in the island landscape, which continues to generate activity and profit for the wind turbine owners and shareholders as well as interest from the outside world. Remember the Academy's daily manager's words: "On Samsø we rediscover methods from the past, ways of doing things which have worked at earlier times […]". Rob's failure to connect his project proposal to the island's past and the islanders' self-image as front runners is fatal to his project proposal. He fails to establish a common direction for the future. When Hermansen emphasizes the value of his "local knowledge" to the realization of the REI project, this knowledge did not simply allow him to engage the relevant stakeholders in the project. His local knowledge allowed him to connect past and future with the present, thereby raising the islanders' hopes and setting change in motion, not through "change management", but through "hope management", as the following section will show.

4. Pragmatic lessons of the REI project

> Hope is not about miracles. It is about trying to feel what lurks in the interstices (Stengers, 2002, p. 245).

There was nothing idyllic or easy about the REI project; it was hard work. If hope played a role, it was not a hope for "miracles"; it was hope as a sense of possibility, a feeling that the hard work might come to fruition. In this and the following section I will attempt to draw out some of the messiness that characterized the REI project, and with this move show how the gap between the REI past and the meeting just described may not be as wide as the outraged comments of the Energy Academy employees signal. The islanders were likely no less sceptically inclined in the nineties, but their scepticism was known, managed and turned into a productive force in the REI project.

As I told an Academy employee about the meeting, she probably sensed my surprise that these men, the key players in the REI project, showed such resistance towards a new RE project. She somewhat gleefully noted, "I'm glad you've experienced your first citizens' meeting on Samsø". She went on to tell me how there was, in fact, no big difference between the meeting I had just witnessed and the participants' scepticism and folded arms at the REI project meetings. The islanders have always been reserved, reluctant, a bit conservative when introduced to new ideas. My surprise, she said, probably had to do with the "version of the story" that was transmitted to me at the Energy Academy. The Academy specializes in telling the story about the REI project in concise terms. The stories are kept short and have been refined over the years to achieve the desired effect: to inspire the visitors. There is little room for communicating messy details and sceptical atmospheres.

I tend to believe, however, that the messiness and the challenges of the process can also be part of an inspiring story. The hope nourished by a pragmatic attitude open to the problems involved in creating change is not of the easy come easy go variety communicated in the stereotypical REI narrative: many meetings, lots of coffee, people coming together to help out with the projects, making them great successes for others to replicate. Instead, embracing the messiness of the processes and the problems involved fosters a kind of "hope against hope" (Miyazaki, 2004, p. 13); a propensity to work towards building a less precarious future, despite the fact that it is highly unlikely that any number of wind turbines can change Samsø's position as a rural island with a steadily declining population. It is a variety of hope that calls for hard work and cautious visions, but one that, through its pragmatism, might actually resonate with Samsø's diverse audiences around the world.

While Rob seemed as stunned by the islanders' sceptical attitude towards his project proposal as I initially was – causing him to lose his nerve and simply drop the project – the REI project developers learned early on that taking the conservative attitude of the stakeholders into account in the planning of the projects was a precondition for success. When the islanders were first presented with the plans to change the island's heating system from individual solutions based on electricity or oil to straw-based district heating, the project faced strong resistance. The Academy director (then a young farmer and teacher hired as the "energy counsellor" of the REI project by the group of locals heading the project; his role was to handle the "communication side" while an engineer was brought in to develop the technical plans and see the practical implementation of the RE technologies through) initially thought the green project plans would "sell themselves". "The resistance surprised us. We hadn't seen the risks involved in the project or anticipated that the smiths would

come to us and ask: 'Now that you're dismantling people's oil-fired burners, what will my job be?' To us, the possibilities of the project lay in the green perspective itself, in our opportunity to make the world a greener place. But most citizens don't think like that, their reaction is: 'What about my job?' So we started to turn risk into opportunity; we started to think about job creation. That was a learning process, finding the right template; it was like inventing a manual".

What was introduced into the REI project at that point was a pragmatic "what's in it for me?" or "will it pay off?" (pronounced in the characteristic rural Samsø dialect) attitude, a test of the practical viability of the projects. The islanders were not willing to take risks and jeopardize their livelihoods for a hopeful "green" project, but they were willing to believe in the down-to-earth potentials of the same project for improving their livelihoods and local community[2]. The focus on local job creation necessitated additional activities which became part of the RE projects, such as providing further training to equip Samsø's workers to handle the tasks involved in servicing wind turbines and district heating plants, and introducing solar panels and heat pumps to be sold in local stores to keep the activity generated by the REI project on the island.

When Hermansen in the previous section talks about his ability to "gather together the projects", this ability is related to the increased complexity of the projects caused by the change in the framing of the REI project from a green to a pragmatic project. The project developers had to accept that the REI project was not simply a technical challenge of installing RE technologies. Neither was it an idealistic project concerned with making the world a greener place. It was these things and more; the REI project had to accommodate all the islanders' concerns and interests in order to succeed. It became a democratic and social exercise rather than a political, "green" one. It thereby became more modest, but no less challenging. The challenge became how to meet citizens' needs and interests in a way that allows everyone to recognize themselves in a project, while simultaneously getting everyone to work towards a common goal of energy self-sufficiency. In a way, the REI project became radically unactivist and thus to an extent reflects Stengers' notion of hope as grounded in the process of becoming rather than in a far-removed result for which one might hope in some diffuse way. This prioritization of process over outcome, of means over ends, strongly at odds with Kotter's step-wise change management logic, demanded an openness and adjustability of the REI project and its developers, but not the kind of openness suggested in Rob's questions of "Where will the money come from?" and "What is Samsø's burning platform?" The openness of the REI project was anchored, first, in Hermansen's person (his "local knowledge") and, second, in "the reliable project plans" (relating, once again, to the director's quote about the success of the REI project in the previous section). Stengers' notion of becoming does, however, tend towards greater open-endedness than the islanders' who remain somewhat focused on how the REI project will affect their livelihoods in a pragmatic socioeconomic sense.

5. The dream factory

Himself a farmer and a local, Hermansen did not have to work hard to make the islanders trust him and, with him, the project he represented. When Hermansen proposes a project, he is expected to have the island community's best interests in mind. Rob, by contrast, an outsider from the mainland and a technical expert whose sole reason to be on Samsø is to carry out RE projects, has to work hard to gain legitimacy in the islanders' eyes. Hermansen's ability to "turn risk into possibility" (interview, November 2013) inspired confidence in the islanders who soon started to propose their

own projects under the REI umbrella. When, for instance, three organic farmers started experimenting with extracting natural gas from a landfill and powering their tractors with rapeseed oil from their fields, the REI project managers invited experts from the mainland to prepare the farmers for the challenges involved in their "modest innovations" (Watts, 2014, p. 26), although such experiments were not part of the official "masterplan" for the REI project.

This masterplan outlined the number and possible location of the major RE technologies to be established within the ten-year time frame but was not widely shared with the islanders, who were led to believe that the REI project was more open-ended than it looked from the planners' perspective. This openness allowed the islanders to recognize themselves in the project, no matter their interests and occupation, which fostered great activity and creativity. In the words of an Academy employee, "it was a dream factory". Island life, as noted, is characterized by a significant amount of defeatism. As the former principal of Samsø's closed folk high school tells me, his and Hermansen's fathers, both farmers, did some calculations in the seventies of the island's demographic trend and future development. According to their calculations the island population will be down to 3,700 today, which is correct. Their calculations further predict that ten years from now the population will be only 2,500. A concern already in the seventies and with no solution in sight, "Samsø is a decaying culture", the principal concludes (interview, November 2013).

The concept of the "dream factory" seems particularly well-suited to describe the span of the REI project from hard work, personal risk and pragmatism to the sense of possibility, openness and community also contained in the project. This may also remind us of Miyazaki's Pauline notion of "hope against hope[3]", echoed in the figure of Foucault's "hyperactivist" who acts because of, not despite, his pessimism, "'insisting properly' in the face of expected futility", thus preventing despair (Jensen, 2014, p. 361). This island community acts and creates results "in the absence of an agreed purpose", each with his own agenda, whether it is to secure his job, make money on RE investments or reduce CO_2 emissions, "shorn of the belief that what they do will come to matter" (p. 361). But the pessimism of the islanders is a productive one, causing them to act in defiance of the facts, which they know very well, enacting a down-to-earth variety of hope realised in small projects in which each participant can believe. The RE Island was created by bringing together all the small projects. Rob, naively promising change by presenting one large and diffuse project which will supposedly address an equally diffuse "burning platform", awakens the islanders' scepticism by proposing a project that is not constructively pessimist enough. The mere expectation expressed by the energy coordinator that Samsø's problems may be solved goes against the islanders' attitudes; their pessimism a built-in element in their hope.

With the carefully prepared masterplan doing the work of coordination behind the scenes during the REI project, it (along with budgets and other "reliable project plans") allowed the project managers to go to citizens' meetings, propose ideas for projects and answer the islanders' questions on the spot. While the engineer took care of the technical inquiries, Hermansen concentrated on getting people to believe in the projects and getting the right people involved (Hermansen and Nørretranders, 2013). As a local, Hermansen knew who to involve in what, and he knew people's standpoints, interests and standing in the local community. The then mayor, deeply involved in the REI project, explained to me how this worked in practice: "I knew there were maybe twenty dynamic farmers and ten good business people, so when there were problems I would

go and talk to them just like we are talking now, you and me, over a cup of coffee, and I would know that they would come up with ideas, and I practically knew in advance what we'd be able to find support for" (interview, November 2013). With the key players engaged, more would follow, and for the most part projects that were likely to meet resistance never left the drawing table. This approach of strategically targeting key players rather than the island community as a whole might not sound as democratic as the romantically inclined reader would hope, but the project developers found it a necessary pragmatic attitude: some of the people, many of them the same men who were present at the windmill meeting, were asked to invest millions of Danish kroner and fundamentally reorient their livelihoods (farmers becoming wind investors, workers becoming RE technical experts). "They are not Mr. and Mrs. Jensen", as Hermansen puts it.

Getting "the right people" involved at the early stages of the process was key, and this is, indeed, one of the REI dogmas Rob followed when he selected participants for the meeting. But he lacked the participants' trust. An Academy employee, who is also Hermansen's wife, told me about the meetings they held when planning the offshore wind farm in 2002: "There were no women, only men. I'm allowed to come there because I'm Hermansen's wife, so sometimes they listen to me. They sit there like chiefs […] But Hermansen has the authority it takes; he's good at creating a safe space so people who are investing a lot of money believe themselves in safe hands. Trust and safety are so important". When the trust in the relation between the islanders and the project planners was not sufficient for the estate owner worrying about the risks involved in his large investment in the offshore wind farm, the project planners found the money to pay an expensive lawyer to appease him. The estate owner, according to Hermansen, needed someone to go to with his questions, someone who was "above" Hermansen in the "hierarchy", as the estate owner would not accept a subordinate position to the project planners. The lawyer made him feel secure in a precarious situation where personal trust was not enough but had to be formally instituted.

In 2002, the offshore wind turbines were for a brief period the world's strongest wind turbines: the ten locally owned 2.3 MW mills cost DDK 10.4 million (£1.4 million) per MW, amounting to nearly DDK 250 million (Hermansen *et al.*, 2007). The lion's share of the money was raised on Samsø. The farmer who chaired the local association building the wind farm vividly remembers the planning period: "If it was financially risky building the offshore mills? You bet it was! I had red wine running in my veins, I suffered from stress, I couldn't remember names, it was horrific! In the end, we hired a lawyer and got him to write up a list of all the risks involved in the project. The document was two pages long. I'm not sure anyone had the guts to read it all, they just signed. Everyone in the association had to sign it. That lifted the burden off my shoulders. We really couldn't take it all in. But we sat down and had a beer, and everything worked out in the end. But we ended up spending a lot of money on lawyers". When Rob proposes a new wind project and expects the islanders to join him in creating fast results, he unknowingly disregards the personal costs of the REI project still vivid in the actors' memories.

It is obvious simply from looking at a timeline of the REI project that during that period projects took time. Networks had to be built and tools for handling the participants' insecurities (the lawyer, the "reliable project plans") constructed. The slow pace of the project at times caused public resentment (e.g. *Samsø Posten*, 1998). A long time passed between Samsø's nomination as Denmark's REI in 1997 and the erection of the first land-based wind turbines in 2000. But time was needed to prepare the projects,

and slowly the REI project materialised, echoing Stengers' (2005) call to slow down, to let time do its work; "to feel what lurks in the interstices". The agitated discussions between the Academy staff members following Rob's project meeting and the statement that "We've been bombed back to the Stone Age!" reveals something about the care with which networks are built and how easily they are destabilized. Hermansen's job was to coordinate a "dream factory", a canvas upon which the islanders could project their hopes and act accordingly; he facilitated minor projects that caught the islanders' interests, and he negotiated trust, risks and stakes in the major projects. With everyone engaged, the ambitious goals of the REI project could be met, and hope was nourished in the process through the practical work involved. Rob's project, his fast, outcome-oriented "change management" attitude, negated all this and became a threat to the management style developed on Samsø and still practised today, that which we might call "hope management".

The discussions I witnessed at and after the meeting opened up a more nuanced and compelling version of the "REI story". This kind of hard and at times messy work may not lend itself well to commonplace inspirational storytelling and is downplayed and simplified in most accounts of the project. But I have attempted to show how, through a more empirically engaged understanding of the techniques and methods employed in the REI project, it may be possible to raise a different kind of hope, one that is more modest, pragmatic, locally grounded and aware of the past.

6. Conclusion

When central local stakeholders of the REI project reject a new RE project their resistance may at first glance be puzzling. If we look closer, the past, reactualized by present events, opens up to investigation and allows us to appreciate how differences in management styles between the two projects may have played a crucial role in causing the proposed new project to fail having hardly left the drawing table, while the REI project has become a world renowned success story. This paper has focused on elements of the REI project which the failed wind project meeting brought into view; elements not least revealed by outraged reactions of Energy Academy employees such as "We've been bombed back to the Stone Age!" How can a one hour-long meeting be feared to cause so much damage? This points to a much more messy and laborious process than the one revealed in the many popular accounts of the REI project. By following the threads of these comments back in time, I have attempted to draw out some of this hard work, the methods behind it and capture some of the life of the processes part of the REI project.

The variations in management styles can be defined through a contrast between "change management" and "hope management". By "change management" I understand a Kotterian outcome- and solution-oriented attitude towards processes of change building on the identification of a "sense of urgency" and a common "burning platform" necessitating action in the face of a threatening future.

A "hope management" approach as practised, I have argued, by the REI project developers, focuses, by contrast, on the careful building of a process taking individual or group stakeholders' interests and worries as a starting point of situated negotiations. While adding specificity and empirical concreteness to Stengers' thoughts, this management practice can be understood in the light of Stengers (2002) notion of hope as a "possibility for becoming". The smiths needed tertiary training and promises of increased job security, the estate owner demanded a lawyer; some farmers joined because the project offered space for innovation and idealism, others to become wind investors and

earn money. All desires could be contained in the "dream factory" of the REI project, and through the project developers' ability to build on well-tried practices of the past, such as co-ops rather than foundations, the project did not break with the culture and self-perception of the island community. "Insisting properly" (Jensen, 2014, p. 361), despite the bleak outlook for the peripheral island, speaks to this notion of hope, which is not hope in a grand project promising to set everything right, but a situated, modest hope; it is the hope evoked by taking an active stand when in a seemingly hopeless position.

This identification of two opposing methods is of course a simplification, and my aim is not to romanticize, praise or scold the involved actors. Rob can hardly be said to bear the sole responsibility for the failure of the meeting. Rob, the disobliging participants and the Academy actors allowing Rob to go through with the meeting and hold the meeting at the Academy form a network the dynamics of which led to the failure of the meeting to generate hope and engage the participants. The analytical distinction is made for the sake of the clarity of the argument.

The version of change management inspired by Kotter and encountered in the analysis, while providing project managers with concrete tools and thus of empirical relevance, is also a theory. This theory stands in contrast to processual approaches to the analysis of change, such as the ones put to work in this paper. The researcher thus aligns herself and her theoretical interests with the actors in her field, the REI project developers, illustrating the entanglements between theory, method and analysis central, exactly, to the method of hope (Stengers, 2011, p. 10). This approach, furthermore, is inextricable from "the ontological turn" in STS and anthropology discussed above. By highlighting the affinities between ethnographic process studies and STS and introducing this "ontological turn" to organizational ethnography, the paper points to how a more radically constructivist analytical attitude focused on worldmaking can be employed in the study of organizational change. The result will not be high-flying abstractions but analyses grounded in practice, recognizable by the field actors investigated.

Bringing details of the past to the surface is in accordance with a logic, furthermore, of hope as a "method for knowledge formation" (Miyazaki, 2004). Just as hope, according to Stengers, lies somewhere between what can be thought and felt and what is possible and calculable, I have tried to think and feel and reason my way back to the time when an island community accepted a drastic change in the face of a threatening future. Through the case of Samsø I have approached hope as an analytical tool and as an engine for change in the past. To echo Nietzsche (1874/1996), studying history should be done not for its own sake, but for the sake of the present; to prepare ourselves for the present and the future. Entering through my fieldwork, I have dug into Samsø's REI history, seeking out hopeful messages and tools for managing today's challenges. Treating ethnographic observations of the present as a gateway to a more in-depth understanding of the past may enable us to refine not only our looking back (by becoming able to construct a version of the past that is less idealized and more empirically engaged than prevailing accounts) but also our looking forward, equipping us for action and change.

Notes

1. I bring in Kotter here not as a theoretical resource but as an empirical one. When the concept of 'the burning platform' is evoked by Rob at the meeting, Kotter's concept becomes part of the network under investigation and endowed with agency in this context.
2. A similar point has recently been published in *Nature Climate Change* as a significant finding for the field of climate change research. The study concludes that in order to motivate climate

change action the potential co-benefits of such action, especially co-benefits regarding the functioning of the local community, should be stressed as these tend to motivate more broadly than the climate change agenda manages to on its own (Bain *et al.*, 2015).

3. "Hope against hope" is an expression borrowed from St Paul, Romans 4:18.

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