

You Cannot Buy Lost Cities: The Arctic, the Next Atlantis

The story, The Lost City of Atlantis is a popular one, a great utopian kingdom that one day just—vanished. Or, that is how the story goes; perhaps Atlantis was home to great things, things people thought could be sold. Maybe Atlantis escaped underwater to be saved from the men that turned green with greed when they heard the word “money,” and never seemed to bother with following regulations. Could it be that history is repeating itself, but in a way that the whole world will be watching, and everyone will know that it is not just a myth? Now, people look to the Arctic—home to flora and fauna alike not found anywhere else on the globe, home to communities of people who had ancestors that taught them their ways on these lands—and all watch it melt. Business people encourage it, while others see their home vanishing before their eyes. This fragile ecosystem is much more than the potential economic profit. Because this one-of-a-kind territory faces the impact of climate change, John Elkington’s “triple bottom line” should be utilized, to ensure profit is not the only bottom line, because people and the planet are already facing the results of climate change (Kenton). By utilizing the triple bottom line, society and Earth itself would come before economic profit, which would slow the worsening effects of climate change by preventing new negative environmental changes before they are in effect. Communities of Indigenous people are being forced into new ways of life, irreversible environmental damage worsens by the day, but the only thing on the minds of the people in control—is money.

The cost of doing business is a frequently discussed topic when speaking in economic terms. Be that as it may, currency transactions should not be the only cost taken into

consideration. Negatively impacting society or the earth for a profit is not acknowledging the inevitable, a complete climate emergency that cannot be repaired (Leahy). By disregarding the first two concerns of the triple bottom line, the short-term profit cannot outweigh the long-term effects. The North and South Poles of the planet are warming at a faster rate than the average global temperature, this is known as polar amplification. This process occurs when there is an increase in concentrated greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which prevents heat from escaping, therefore melting ice. The albedo, or reflectivity of water, is much different from that of ice. The radiation from the sun is absorbed by the newly open water, in turn causing the Earth's temperature to increase. This is known as the ice-albedo feedback loop (Leigh). The global temperature is averaged out between how much radiation from the sun the planet receives and how much the Earth reflects into the atmosphere. Once these feedback loops are put in motion, the environment suffers drastic changes, which no amount of money can repair.

Since 1880, the average global temperature has risen a little above 1° Celsius (2°F). 2/3 of this temperature rise has occurred between 1975 and the present day, at a much faster rate (Merzdorf). Now to factor in polar amplification to the already rising temperatures, the Arctic is warming at a rate two to three times faster than the rest of the globe. 13% of the total 25 million square kilometers of ice melt per decade (Duggan). This process has the potential to cost the planet the Arctic and life there as people know it, and the actions that are taken now ensure the future. Atlantis may not be the only lost city by 2050, when multiple heavily populated areas are predicted to be completely submerged by water because of the rising sea levels. Those included are sections of the United States, including Florida, California, and Hawaii (Moore) as well as Thailand, India, Egypt, China, Mexico, and many more (Lu, Flavelle). It seems as though there is no concern for the planet at all as the Arctic disappears, taking some of the most populated

places in the world along with it. Plausibly, melting and ocean level rise may not be the end of the consequences at all. As permafrost continues to abruptly thaw, billions of tons of methane and other greenhouse gases threaten to escape from inside. Methane traps 28 times the amount of heat carbon dioxide traps, and if this were to be released, the percentage of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would double, causing alarming acceleration in global heating (Duggan).

This region undoubtedly has an unbalanced effect on all topics related to the triple bottom line; the fight for jurisdiction over this area has caused international strife and civil unrest, especially throughout Indigenous communities which experience climate change directly. The threat to the Indigenous peoples is very pronounced; the loss of homeland and culture. Some Indigenous groups are already experiencing the effects of climate change in their region. In Sweden, the Sami reindeer herders' way of life has already changed. "It can rain in January, it can snow in May, there's no logic to it anymore," Margret Fjellstrom, a 39-year-old Sami reindeer herder reported to the Bangkok Post. Because of the fluctuating weather, the temperatures spike and drop in a matter of days, causing the ice to thaw and then freeze repeatedly, forming a thick layer denser than normal ice. The ice can become so dense that the reindeer hooves cannot break through. Reindeers' main food source during the winter months is lichen, and without the ability to break through the ice to get to it underneath, herders now must allot time out of the season to map new migration paths to ensure there will be a food source along the way. For herders like Fjellstrom and her husband, the hike now takes twice as long as it has in the past when taking traditional routes (Limited). People are beginning to directly experience climate change, and have therefore begun a shift into a Green movement of cleaner energy and reduced pollution. Inuit people have voiced the struggle they are enduring and demand a solution that does not put them at a disadvantage. It is an obvious injustice for those

who have used the most fossil fuels to put the burden on Indigenous peoples while in the Green shift movement (Retter). The Sami people are not the only inhabitants of the Arctic that are being affected. In Canada, the largest territory known as Nunavut is home to a community that has a 90% Inuit population. Iqaluit, the capital of the Nunavut territory is being faced with a housing emergency. The ground underneath them is changing as the permafrost melts, roads and foundations are cracking, and houses are sinking into the ground. Melting permafrost means it is dangerous to build on the thawed ground, and housing is already extremely expensive in this area. The permafrost melting may not seem like an emergency, as the active top layer thaws and freezes between seasons, but the layer underneath has stayed at 0° Celsius for thousands of years. As this layer melts for the first time in human recorded history it is causing extreme changes in the Arctic, and “the landscape of the Arctic is changing more than it has since the end of the last Ice Age,” (Schreiber). Indigenous peoples feel the direct impact of climate change in this region, but it will not be long before a domino effect reaches the rest of the world.

Climate change is the largest international emergency being faced today other than the Covid-19 pandemic. The international system is in a constant state of anarchy, with the absence of a global government; therefore, states rely on science and their citizens to make reasonable goals and new agreements that can be achieved. In 2019, the European Union formed a new Green Deal with the intent to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The goals of this deal are to reduce pollution and maximize the use of clean resources. The action plan outlines detailed steps regarding how to produce more environmentally friendly forms of transport, decarbonizing energy, investing in non-harmful technologies, working to improve international standards with global partners, and more (Leyen). This plan could later become a solution and a model for other countries to The divide in the world today between preventing

further melting and taking advantage of the resources in this area is apparent. But the global bottom line is that visions for the future of the Arctic also reflect the future of the planet. Differences aside, global and regional values should be honored before political or economic profit. As Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, the former President of Iceland once said, “The ice is neither a Democrat nor Republican, it is simply melting.”

To have a bad credit score is to wear a red flag, and you can no longer take out a loan or get new credit cards. For the case of the Arctic, maybe we can apply the same logic. Exploitation in this region is not unheard of; in fact, many countries’ involvement in economic and political affairs in the Arctic has been based on exploitation. During the Cold War, the Arctic was a space for military experiments and new designs. Military equipment was stored there, and nuclear devices were tested. Similar to Project Iceworm, which operated on the assumption it may be possible to hide a network of nuclear missiles underneath the Greenland ice sheet (Dodds, Nuttall). This is a dangerous history of exploitation and it is all for political or profitable gain. With no real concern for the environment around them, actions that have previously been taken in this region could have ruined the land especially with nuclear power involved. There are already new military Arctic strategies being formed as countries stand by and hope they will get a chance to take advantage of this area. “Regaining Arctic Dominance,” the name of the U.S. Army strategy should cause concern as the U.S. is not an empire actively dominating land. The strategy promises to “promote quality of life for our Soldiers, civilians, and families who live and work in installations and facilities in the Arctic region,” (Public Affairs). Contradicting this statement, the strategy also promises to build Multi-Domain headquarters and combat brigades, which also promises the destruction of the land, destruction of native land which they already have plans to develop. There is no option in which Arctic land is not left in ruins, and no

description of the ways the lives of the civilians who live there will be improved. Possibly the biggest process of exploitation for profit is currently being planned—the development of the Northwest Passage. The loss of sea ice has made it possible for ships to pass through the Arctic Ocean on a shipping route, past the 53 Inuit communities who live along the shores (Highleyman). If the ice continues to melt along the shore their homes will be destroyed. Development in this part of the world has never been so advanced before and Indigenous communities want to be a part of the conversation. It is unfair to economically develop a community without any consultation or inclusion with the people residing there. As this area continues to melt, we have marked it as a lost cause instead of preventing it, and continue to move forward with plans for the open waters before they are fully open.

While cities face the threat of major flooding and evacuations, businesses tell us of a shorter shipping route. Generations of Inuit communities are losing their homes and livelihoods, but there is a promise of improved life once militaries move in, because the military specializes in hospitality. Polar amplification and major melting in the Arctic are causing the global temperature to rise, and people are told that there is no need to panic. The entire world is changing, and all for the benefit of somebody's wallet. By putting the triple bottom line into effect, the impact of climate change may be able to be slowed in the Arctic region before the damage is irreversible. If countries set goals similar to the EU Green Deal, it can be the beginning of a solution to the current Arctic emergency. Will the Arctic be the next Atlantis? A great utopian kingdom on the brink of disappearance, as the planet and the people on it, plead for escape from the ones that turn green when they hear the word “money.”

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