

The International Branding of Iceland's Gender Equality Model

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In the international media, Iceland is often presented as a gender equality utopia, because it has topped the list of the World Economic Forum's (WEC) "Global Gender Gap Index" every year since 2009. Such a positive image echoes its branding, which seeks to stimulate a desire to own the "product" by way of consumption. Iceland's reputation has capitalized on a broader representation of the Nordic societal model, mixing a market economy with a strong welfare state based on gender equality. I argue that Icelandic efforts to put into effect a strong gender equality model has been a key factor in reversing its negative image after the 2008 financial collapse—together with other important factors, such as the quick economic recovery, the defiance of powerful foreign financial and political interests, and the decision to bring those responsible for the financial crisis to justice. The rebranding was largely made possible by activists who used the opportunity to advance a societal critique—ranging from the moderate to the radical—which paved the way for the adoption of concrete gender equality policies as a crisis response mechanism. It reflected more than anything else an acute need to escape what many saw as a stigma—an image centering on a nation willing to sacrifice itself to the highest bidder.