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Social Sustainability in a Period of Rapid Tourism Growth: A Study of Six Communities Across Iceland

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Abstract

Following the 2007-08 financial crisis, an economic vacuum existed in Iceland, from which tourism emerged as a vital industry for the Icelandic economy. It has experienced rapid growth in the ten years since, with visitor numbers reaching 2.5million for the first time. However, in a nation with a population of just 350,000 this presents significant challenges. Among the most significant of these is the degree to which tourism disrupts the communities in which it operates. Through the lens of social sustainability, which looks at the extent to which development impacts the present and future wellbeing of local people, it is possible to gain an understanding of the effect of rapid tourism growth on local communities. Using the concept of social tourism capacity, the level of development an area can support before it is rejected by local people, aids this understanding.

Research was conducted using qualitative methods during a month spent with local residents in various locations across Iceland. Data collected from six different communities demonstrates that tourism's positive economic impacts, particularly in the wake of large-scale unemployment and economic decline, outweigh many of the negative aspects of the tourism boom, most prominently the behaviour of tourists. In addition, tourism is far from a secure industry in Iceland, being easily affected by climatic events and global travel trends, and as a result the dependence of many smaller communities on tourism is a risk to social sustainability. Emerging strongly from the data was how much power was held by the communities of Iceland, partly due to shared values and partly due to the level of engagement in the tourism industry. This helps to understand one way in which social sustainable tourism development is achieved from within destination communities.

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Introduction

As the number of global tourists continues to rise, the overall impact of tourism is also increasing. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), global tourism increased by six per cent in 2018, led by a continued competitive environment in international aviation and economic development in Asia (UNWTO 2019). The growing number of people travelling has led to both the heightened popularity of established tourist destinations and the establishment of new destinations. In some cases, a location can become an established, and very popular, tourist destination in the space of a relatively short time period. The emergence of such a situation requires the alignment of various factors, from having an attractive internet presence and a broad-based appeal to the right air routes and enough hotel beds. These vary from place to place, but increased tourism brings with it a wide range of challenges that require structures in place to cope with the different aspects of tourism. Without effective structures, the long-term success of a tourism destination can be cast into doubt.

This is the broad blueprint for what has taken place in Iceland over the past 10 years. Since 2010 there has been an exponential increase in the number of tourists visiting the country, a figure which exceeded 2.5million in 2018 (Icelandic Tourist Board 2019). As Iceland is a nation of just 350,000 people, this means the number of tourists exceed that of locals in various locations (Prince & Ioannides 2017: 350). Moreover, Iceland's attraction as a tourism destination is based largely on nature and wilderness that has developed through a lack of human interaction (Saporsdottir 2014: 65). As a result, Iceland has undergone a series of changes in the last decade that present challenges to all stakeholder groups. These challenges could potentially affect Iceland's long-term sustainability as a tourism destination.

Via the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, at state level sustainability is now at the core of the tourism management agenda, following increased focus from the United Nations (UN), who are encouraging a more considered, long term view of development in all quarters (UN 2018). As tourism grows, so does its ability to impact the areas in which it operates, both positively and negatively. This can be on various levels, usually regarded from economic, environmental, cultural and social perspectives. Of these, economic and environmental sustainability have had a greater degree of focus for much of the previous three decades, partly due to changes being easier to recognise and measure (Elkington 2013: 23). Yet over the past five years more attention has been paid to social sustainability, which looks at the strength and wellbeing of communities, and is vital for the successful operation of tourism within the community (Timur & Getz 2009: 221). Closely linked to this is the notion of tourism carrying capacity, which looks at the number of tourists a destination can support before it starts to damage the area in a way that renders tourism unsustainable (Mathieson & Wall 1992). From a social point of view, this means the point at which tourism's negative impacts reach a level where tourism is rejected by the local community (McCool & Lime 2001: 379).

Such a situation has emerged where tourism takes place at a rapid rate in an environment either not suited or not prepared for a large influx of tourists. The exponential rise in tourism in Iceland could potentially lead to this situation, leading to the problem statement outlined in the next section.

Problem Statement

The rapid rise in Icelandic tourism, to thinly populated areas unused to large numbers of visitors, raises the possibility of an uncertain future for tourism across the country. The industry's dependence on local people means that local perceptions of tourism could have a significant effect on the sustainability of the industry.

Based on a desire to better understand the impact of tourism's rise on local Icelandic communities, and the actions needed to manage this, responding to the following central research question will provide the main focus of this thesis:

How is a rapidly-growing tourism industry affecting social sustainability in six communities across Iceland?

This research will be conducted within the confines of a theoretical framework that provides the conceptual basis for study in this area.

This thesis is primarily rooted in **sustainability**, which will be outlined from the origins of the concept to its current use, understanding and some of its different approaches, focusing on social sustainability. This then leads to a natural progression into **sustainable tourism**, through which tourism development can take on the lessons of sustainability, particularly socially sustainable tourism. From here greater attention will be paid to the concept of **tourism carrying capacity**, more specifically social tourism capacity, which will be used to aid understanding of tourism's impacts in Iceland.

These different aspects of theory give a basis for data collection, which will be guided by three research sub-questions:

1. What are the impacts of tourism on local communities?
2. To what extent is Iceland nearing its social tourism capacity?
3. What steps are being taken to manage tourism's social impacts?

The process of data collection will be explained in the methodology section.

The analysis section will respond to the research questions, and therefore outline the how close Icelandic tourism is to becoming unsustainable and ways in which this is being managed. The discussion section that follows will further explore this.

Personal Motivation

My own interest in Iceland began over a decade ago, when I personally felt the impacts of the country's banking crisis. Since then I have followed with interest the country's re-emergence and successful diversification into tourism. I have been particularly interested in how one of the least densely-populated countries in the world can cope with millions of overseas visitors each year. Focus is regularly given to how the tourism industry and authorities are managing this, but very rarely on how the communities themselves are dealing with this rapid change in their country. It is this area I would like to shine a spotlight on.

Spending an extended period in Iceland staying with local residents gives a unique opportunity to see the country's tourism from their point of view. Moreover, the extent of research into carrying capacity from a social sustainability point of view is limited. Having seen the impacts of tourism development on communities it is particularly significant that this thesis allows me to make a contribution to the discourse in this area. My aim is to fill in the gap in tourism scholarly literature that exists between social sustainability on one hand and local communities in the other – it is my intention to bridge the gap between the two.

Spatial Context

Iceland, an island nation in the North Atlantic Ocean, is Europe's least-densely populated country (Saporsdottir 2014: 65). Following centuries of subsistence fishing and agriculture dominating the economy, Iceland enjoyed a period of rapid economic growth following the Second World War. This allowed it to achieve a high level of development, both socially and economically, with a diversified economy. Internationalisation of society continued with the formation of a banking system that relied heavily on credit from overseas, until the global financial crash of 2008 plunged Iceland into recession and depression (Johannesson & Huijbens 2013 2013: 138). Public opinion turned strongly against financial services, requiring diversification of the economy. This came in the form of a focus on tourism, with collaboration between the state, airlines and tourism operators generating a unified tourism strategy (Gil-Alan & Huijbens 2018: 22). This hinged around a projection of the uniqueness of Icelandic culture and nature, and an opening of new air routes that also included an innovative approach to transit passengers (Johannesson & Huijbens 2013 2013: 139). Iceland was also aided by the devaluation of the currency, and the eruption of the volcano Eyjafjallajökull in 2010 which put the global spotlight on Iceland due a huge ash cloud creating widespread airline disruption. This gave the best possible profile boost to 'Inspired by Iceland', the joint marketing effort put together by the collaborating agencies (Gil-Alan & Huijbens 2018: 22).

The result has been rapid development of Iceland as a tourism destination with global appeal, with seven years of exponential increases in tourism arrivals from 2010, and will exceed 2.5 million for the first time in 2019 (Icelandic Tourist Board 2019). This is significant for a nation of just 350,000 people, where the number of tourist arrivals has exceeded the number of inhabitants every year since 2008 (Prince & Ioannides 2017: 350). Tourism now has a significant role to play in the country's economy, contributing over 10 per cent of GDP and employing over 30,000 people year round, and even more during peak season (Icelandic Tourist Board 2018). Though the majority of tourism activities are concentrated, like the resident population, in the south-west around the capital Reykjavik, tourism has also provided a significant economic boost to other areas of the country (Icelandic Tourist Board 2019). The focus of tourism marketing and of activities is the spectacular nature throughout the country. This includes active volcanoes, Europe's largest glaciers, spectacular waterfalls, long black sand beaches, spouting hot springs and regular sightings of the northern lights (Saporsdottir 2014: 65). With a non-existent public transport system outside major population centres most visitors travel to different attractions as part of larger tour groups or using rental cars. Residents are heavily involved in tourism in Iceland. With the exception of a few large operators, the tourism infrastructure is upheld by a large number of family-run SMEs offering accommodation and activities (Johannesson & Huijbens 2013 2013: 139).

Due to the costs associated with travelling to and staying in Iceland (Iceland is consistently in the top five most expensive countries to live in the world), it is mainly a destination for wealthier tourists, with visitors from the USA, UK and France being the biggest groups, along with a growing contingent from China. The average length of stay is usually over 5 days (Icelandic Tourist Board 2019). Though tourism growth remains strong, the rate of increase has slowed in the past two years, with numbers increasing by 5.5 per cent in 2018, down from 24.2 per cent the previous year, and in 2019 this is expected to slow further (Icelandic Tourist Board 2019). Nevertheless, the tourism industry continues to prosper throughout Iceland.

Delimitations

This thesis concentrates on six communities spanning the breadth of Iceland, with the aim of understanding the impacts of tourism on a variety of levels, from very small communities to larger cities. The six communities are Reykjavik, Hafnafjordur, Laugarbakki & Hvamstangi, Akureyri, Egilsstaðir, Hallormsstaður. Research was primarily concentrated in these areas, and data collected outside these areas consisted solely of participant observation on the part of the author.

Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical basis for this paper. First, the roots of sustainability are explained, and contemporary understandings of the term explained. The different aspects of sustainability are then outlined, with a focus on social sustainability due to the emphasis of this paper. Second, sustainable tourism is introduced as a concept, and how this relates to sustainability overall, along with coverage of the socially-sustainable tourism debate. Third, tourism carrying capacity is introduced, alongside a discussion of its use and the surrounding discourse, including criticisms and alternatives. Its relevance to this paper will also be explained.

Sustainability

The act of ensuring that our actions in the present day do not compromise the future is intrinsic to humanity and has been labelled as sustainability. Early use dates back to the 18th century, being attributed to the German mining engineer Hans von Carlowitz. When working mines in Saxony, von Carlowitz recognised that there needed to be a managed policy of deforestation in order to provide a steady, long term supply of wood to fuel the regional mining industry (Zifkos 2015: 7). In 1983 this idea was formalised by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), set up by the United Nations (UN). Its formation stemmed from mounting concern on a global level that human activity and development was leading to irreversible environmental deterioration, following pressure from a range of US- and European-based NGOs. In 1987 the Commission produced the Brundtland report, which set out to produce a definition that incorporated sustainability into the UN's wider development objectives. This was:

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987: 41).

Sustainability is divided into three categories, or “interlocking crises” as suggested by the WCED (WCED 1987: 13). This refers to the challenges of development in environmental, economic and social areas, highlighted by the WCED through demonstrating damage caused in each of these areas (WCED 1987: 13). However, despite the WCED giving equal focus to all three areas, it was environmental sustainability that captured imagination at the time. The ease with which environmental degradation can be demonstrated is far greater than economic or social, and for a number of years after the WCED reported, conversations were dominated by environmental concerns (Zifkos 2015: 8). However, the sustainability discourse has been criticised for having an anthropocentric focus, in which heed is given to non-human actors only as far as their presence or activity affects human wellbeing (Higgins-Desboilles 2017: 157). This criticism is found alongside criticism of the notion of sustainable development, which states that development itself is inherently unsustainable. Therefore, either an alternative definition should be found, or the concept should be abandoned in favour of something more practical (McCool et al. 2013: 216). Having contrasting definitions of sustainability has presented significant challenges. Definitions of sustainability guide approaches to it, so disagreement between neighbouring countries or communities can result in contrasting policies which undermine each other and render the process counter-productive; an example being failure to reach international consensus

on combatting the effects of climate change (Dodds & Butler 2009: 39). At the same time, sustainability has been viewed as less scientific and more of a moral issue. At its core are ideas of social justice and equity, where communities have a responsibility to think not only about themselves, but about the impact of their actions on others. Therefore, this idea of fairness should also guide approaches to sustainability (Smith 2009: 110). Nevertheless, the UN remains roundly committed to the pursuit of sustainable development, having in 2018 settled on 17 broad-ranging goals which aim to combat a range of global challenges, such as “poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice” (UN 2018). With a target completion date of 2030, it is these objectives that are likely to fuel the sustainability debate in the immediate future.

Categories of Sustainability

The UN has 17 goals for sustainable development across categories ranging from gender equality to the health of the world’s oceans, under which there are 169 distinct targets (UN 2018). This reflects the degree to which the scale and scope of sustainability has grown from the initial WCED report, in which sustainability was put into three distinct boxes: economic, environmental and social sustainability (WCED 1987: 11). The primary focus of research during this thesis will be on social sustainability, as this most closely aligns with the community-centric examination of the impacts of increased tourism in Iceland.

Nevertheless, economic and environmental sustainability cannot be completely ignored, due to the interconnected nature of the three aspects of sustainability. As the WCED outlined in its initial report, they “can and should be mutually reinforcing” (WCED 1987: 49). This is more easily understood using Elkington’s ‘Triple Bottom Line’ approach, which is developed from an understanding that environmental sustainability could not be achieved without an integrated approach that takes into account economic and social concerns (Elkington 2013: 23). This is due to the most powerful state and non-state actors having a requirement first to remain financially stable, in order to put resources towards other aspects. In this sense the sustainability consensus among larger commercial organisations is still governed somewhat by a neoliberal consensus, which prioritises economic sustainability. Further, economic sustainability usually takes precedence because of the timeframes involved; whereas environmental sustainability, for example, is more of a long-term concern, economic changes can be measured and noticed on a much more short term basis. This is particularly important within the tourism industry, for “without economically viable businesses, there is no tourism” (Saarinen 2013: 7). For an organisation to focus more on environmental or social issues, there needs to be a softening of values and a more long-term outlook, whilst still maintaining the organisation’s core activities (Elkington 2013: 26). The below ‘Concentric Rings’ diagram illustrates this, with economy at an organisation’s core, surrounded by society and then environment being more peripheral (McKenzie 2014: 5).

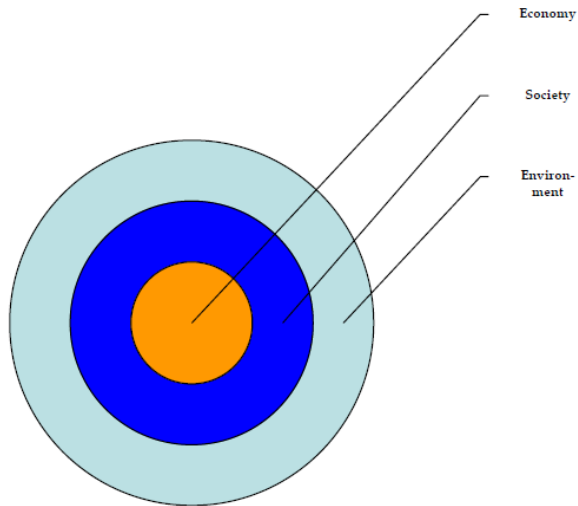


Figure 1: The sustainability 'Concentric Rings' model. (McKenzie 2014: 5).

Yet as this thesis focuses on Icelandic tourism, environmental sustainability takes on elevated significance, owing to the importance of the environment to the local industry. As 90% of tourists go to Iceland for the nature, environmental sustainability is a key aspect of the sustainability of the tourism economy (Saparsdottir 2014: 67). This thesis will also argue that social sustainability is vital to the future of Icelandic tourism, not least because ultimately it is the local communities to whom decision makers are democratically accountable to (Andereck & Vogt 2000: 27), which will be expanded on throughout this thesis. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, despite a primary focus on social sustainability, the three categories of sustainability will be viewed as having equal importance. Therefore McKenzie's (2014: 5) second model of sustainability, the 'Overlapping Circles' model (see fig. 2) is preferred in this instance. It demonstrates the equal significance of economic, social and environmental sustainability, whilst also showing them as being interconnected.

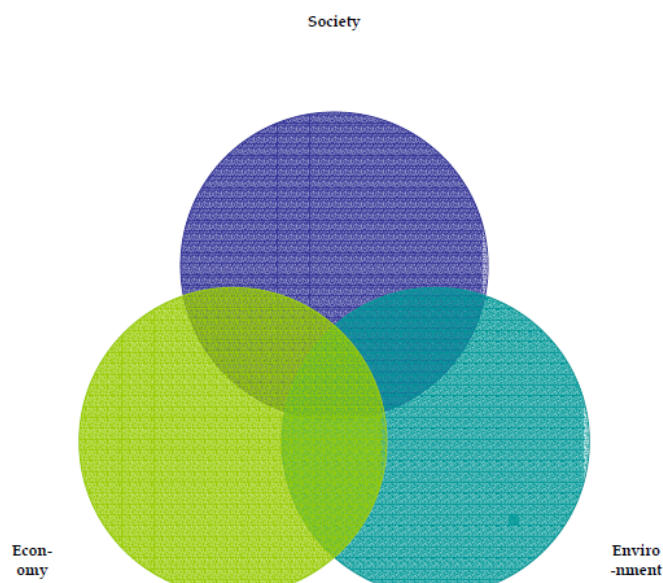


Figure 2: The sustainability 'Overlapping Circles' model. (McKenzie 2014: 5).

This connected nature of sustainability is important to stress in the context of this paper. For though it is primarily a study into Tourism Carrying Capacity from a social perspective, elements of economic and environmental sustainability will also be drawn upon at points. Social sustainability will now be explored in more detail.

Social Sustainability

Social sustainability is the least well-researched aspect of sustainability and a consensus on a definition has not yet been reached (McClinchley 2017: 395). However, at the core of sustainability is quality of life and wellbeing, often broken down into improvements in lifestyles and opportunities (Moscardo et al. 2017: 287). It is also closely linked to the relationship between the rights and responsibilities of community members, which makes social sustainability a delicate balancing act (Black 2016: 172). Socially sustainable development should strengthen community identity, which enhances both rights and responsibilities in equal measure (Timur & Getz 2009: 222). This is usually based around key pillars of social life such as employment, education and skills, along with access to healthcare, transport, housing and recreation (McClinchey 2017: 395). Yet a society can possess all of these things in abundance and still be socially unsustainable, due to the fact that it is a much more abstract concept, with its roots in social capital (Colantonio 2010: 82).

Social capital is the intrinsic currency or credit within communities that is built up by productive encounters and relationships (Bourdieu 1986). This is effectively a stock of good will, potential assistance and access to resources that certain groups within a community may have (Moscardo 2014: 361). There is no precise mechanism for generating this, but the most commonly associated themes are collective action, networks, cooperation, relationships, shared norms and values, social interaction and trust (Moscardo et al. 2017: 287). For development to be socially sustainable it must either enhance or have no negative impact on social capital (p. 287). The concept of social capital is therefore useful in understanding the sustainability of developments within tourism, such as the creation of touristic infrastructure or an increase in visitor numbers (Andereck & Vogt 2000: 29). Putnam (2000) expresses strong concern at the demise of the networks at the heart of social capital in modern societies, due to changing lifestyles and a decline in importance of certain institutions. Tourism can have a role in countering this development, by rebuilding these networks. It can either provide the means for community infrastructure to bring local people together, or alternatively local residents may feel an enhanced sense of community through uniting against tourism in their area (Moscardo et al. 2017: 290). Putnam also points to civic engagement being at the heart of social capital, and involvement of locals in tourism development is one possible way to foster this (Putnam 2000: 233). As will be explained later in this section, social capital is strongly linked to understanding Tourism Carrying Capacity from a social perspective. First, a brief outline of sustainable tourism will be given.

Sustainable tourism

Following the emergence of the sustainability agenda in the 1980s, questions quickly began to be asked of the tourism industry. A pursuit of citizens of wealthy, developed nations, tourism was identified as an activity primarily economic in nature, that was both damaging to the communities in which it operated, and exploitative to natural resources (McCool et al. 2013: 215). There was therefore a clamour to improve the effects of tourism, which led to tourism policy in the 1990s and 2000s revolving heavily around sustainability (Jóhannesson & Huijbens 2013: 141). The consequent development of sustainable tourism focused in the first instance on building awareness, in which the level of tourism to certain communities was not reduced, but attempts were made to increase awareness of the need to sustain the community (Quinn 2006: 290). There was a realisation that tourism could be a force for real change, particularly in less developed communities, where it would act as a resource used to improve the quality of life of residents (McCool et al. 2013: 217). Tourism would be a vehicle for improved economic opportunities and better access to facilities and services (Andereck & Vogt 2000: 28), particularly in areas facing economic challenges (Allen et al. 1993: 27), as with Iceland following the 2008 financial crisis. However, a clear agenda for sustainable tourism development still does not exist, due to a number of conflicting definitions confusing the issue (Prince & Ioannides 2017: 350).

Instead of looking at what sustainable tourism may be able to achieve, some have chosen to address first what it should not do. The primary aim of a sustainable tourism development strategy should be to avoid overuse and over development (Dodds & Butler 2009: 37). During this thesis, over development should be regarded as development that exceeds the tolerance levels of the community in which it takes place, thus meeting the area's social tourism capacity, which is further explained later in this section (McCool & Lime 2001: 379). The recognisable individual elements of over development are the loss of heritage and cultural values; damage to the social fabric and negative impacts on quality of life (Timur & Getz 2009: 221). For a long while, sustainable tourism was not part of the mainstream industry, being regarded as the preserve of small businesses, often operating ecotourism ventures, instead of the larger, mass tourism operators (McCool et al. 2013: 216). Nevertheless, the growth of the tourism industry is taking place at such a rate that a focus on sustainability is needed from all parts of the industry (Saarinen 2013: 4). In order to drive the sustainability agenda forwards, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has produced the following definition of sustainable tourism:

"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO 2019)

Socially Sustainable Tourism

One of the key elements of this definition is that it recognises the need to have all interests represented in the quest for sustainability, as collaboration between stakeholders is vital for a socially sustainable tourist destination (Timur & Getz 2009: 221). In the early stages of a destination's life cycle there is a risk of development being too tourist-centric, where the needs of tourists are put ahead of

those of local residents (Williams & Gill 2005: 209). This can severely impact the long-term viability of a tourist destination, because failing to take the needs of host communities into account risks diminishing the stock of social capital held by tourism operators and thus turning locals against the industry as a whole (Granquist & Nilsson 2016: 476; Moscardo 2014: 287). Therefore, the necessity to include local communities in tourism decision making has been consistently put forward as integral to the social sustainability of a tourism destination (McCool et al. 2013: 216). However, this in itself has significant challenges, not least because a host community is not one single entity; there are a range of requirements made from different stakeholders, and attempts to appease them all can lead to policy which is not in the best interests of the community as a whole (Dodds & Butler 2009: 44). From a policymaking point of view, there is a major challenge in producing a tourism policy that takes into account all of the necessary mechanics of a tourism destination, whilst also constantly being aware of the demands of the local communities (Johannesson & Huijbens 2013: 141), but this in itself is challenged by the fact that the most successful examples of sustainable tourism development emerge from paying attention to the different needs of different interest groups (Andereck & Vogt 2000: 29). Therefore, socially sustainable tourism development requires policymakers and managers to successfully understand the impacts of tourism on a community (McCool et al. 2013: 217). The ultimate goal of this kind of management is to balance the present and future needs of the tourism industry with those of the host community (Timur & Getz 2009: 223). However, there are numerous challenges involved with this approach, not least the imbalance in power relations between tourism operators and local residents. As a result of the effort required to achieve socially sustainable societies, commercial interests are regularly prioritised over community interests.

Due to the fact that successful implementation of socially sustainable tourism initiatives has largely taken place on a smaller scale, it has been argued that achieving sustainable tourism requires a large-scale decentralisation of the tourism industry (Saarinen 2013: 11). However, because the likelihood of this happening is slim, achieving sustainable tourism requires leadership and involvement from the tourism industry, particularly larger operators, but this is difficult because of their focus on shorter-term economic initiatives (Dodds & Butler 2009: 37). Firms must make compromises in order to achieve sustainability, and will need to put the desire to conform to a certain ideology on an equal footing with making a profit (Prince & Ionnides 2017: 348). Where larger organisations have put forward a more sustainable agenda, this has been criticised as an attempt at ‘sustaining tourism’ rather than ‘sustainable tourism’ (Higgins-Desboilles 2017: 159). This means that the focus of these organisations is on ensuring the continued viability of their business without meeting certain standards of sustainability. The idea of sustainable tourism, therefore, could be seen “utopian” as described by McCool et al. (2013) because of the myriad challenges facing successful sustainable tourism development. However, numerous approaches to sustainable tourism have been put forward, and some of these will be discussed in the next section.

Tourism Carrying Capacity

Of course, it is not simply possible to say that *tourism* within an area is either sustainable or unsustainable. Tourism is a huge field that encompasses a wide variety of activities, and it is carried out on a range of different levels. The idea of Tourism Carrying Capacity (TCC) emerged when researchers attempted to determine how much tourism an area can support without having a detrimental effect on resources (Saarinen 2013: 5). The original understanding meant calculating this 'magic' number of tourists visiting a destination, which ideally would be a scientifically-produced figure (Williams & Gill 2005: 194). Once the maximum number has been calculated, this will be used to impose a limit on the number of tourists who may visit a destination within a certain time frame (McCool & Lime 2001: 372). TCC would ensure the sustainability of a destination by ensuring that tourist numbers would never reach unsustainable levels. Succinctly put, TCC is:

"The maximum number of visitors that can be in an area without unacceptable alteration in the physical environment and without unacceptable decline in the quality of the experience gained by visitors" (Mathieson & Wall 1982).

First emerging in the 1920s and 1930s, carrying capacity's first associations were ecological, as a means for determining the maximum number of plants that a field could support, in an attempt to boost agricultural productivity (Saporsdottir 2014: 66). It was then applied to global population, there being an idea that the planet could only support a certain number of people, and steps should be taken to deal with this (McCool & Lime 2001: 375). However, with developments in agricultural technologies and the global population double its pre-war total, its application in these areas is no longer deemed credible. In many respects a similar story can be told of carrying capacity within tourism. In the 1960s and 1970s there was a wide range of research into TCC, especially as part of emergent research into the negative impacts of tourism (Andereck & Vogt 2000: 27). There was particular concern that as tourism to areas of natural beauty increased, there needed to be some degree of limit on visitor numbers in order to preserve these spaces. This refers to ecological carrying capacity, the number of visitors an area can support without producing a detectable or irreversible impact on the natural environment (Buckley 1999: 706). During this period popularity for TCC, a great deal of energy was put into trying to find the 'magic' number of tourists that an area can support (Saarinen 2013: 5). This was calculated in a variety of ways, from an absolute number, to the number of tourists per capita of local population (McCool & Lime 2001: 379), to the percentage of local revenue originating from tourists (Allen et al. 1993: 28). At this point, one of two courses of action could take place. First, demand remains constant and restrictions will be placed on the number of tourists entering the area, through mechanisms like reservations, waiting lists and price increases (McCool & Lime 2001: 378). Second, as the number of tourists increases, the destination becomes less attractive and the number of visitors either remains constant without intervention, known as the Recreational Capacity of a destination (Williams & Gill 2005: 196). The second course may seem more desirable, but it can lead to the overall decline of a destination. This process is best outlined by the Tourism Area Life Cycle, outlined next.

Tourism Area Life Cycle

The increase in criticism for TCC coincided with the formation of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), which quickly became a very popular way of analysing the development of tourism destinations. It can be summarised as:

“A process describing how a destination starts off slowly with visitor numbers limited by the facilities and access. As the destination attracts more visitors, amenities are improved, and visitor numbers grow rapidly towards and sometimes beyond the carrying capacity of the destination.” (Butler 2006)

The TALC emerged as the development of affordable international aviation led to places being accessible to mass tourism that were previously unavailable or connected only by railway routes that were prohibitively long in duration (Butler 2006: 6). The concept attempts to highlight the need for intervention in destinations experiencing a rapid increase in tourism numbers, which would be focused on maintaining the supply of resources throughout a destination’s development. Meanwhile there is a point in the life cycle at which number of tourists would be so high that the consumption of resources would reach unsustainable levels, with supply unable to keep up with demand, and the destination would then go into decline (Butler 1980). This is the destination’s carrying capacity, and is shown by the area within the two horizontal lines in figure 3, below:

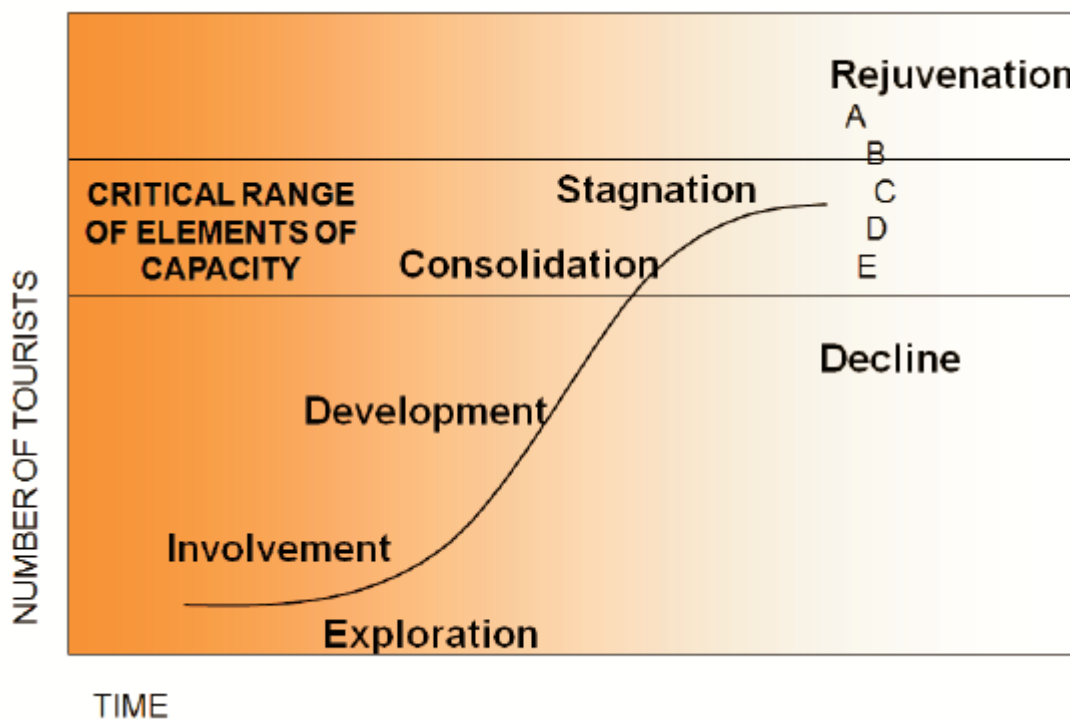


Figure 3: The Tourism Area Life Cycle (Butler 2006)

Yet from a TCC point of view, the TALC perhaps raised more questions than it answered. For the model suggested that though some destinations would go into decline after reaching their carrying capacity, others could be rejuvenated by the right intervention (Butler 2006: 6). Much of this intervention would be based around an examination of tourist behaviour, to enable the better use of resources. This suggests that by altering tourist behaviour, TCC can be avoided, and that it is not, therefore, possible to put a number on TCC because it is linked more to behaviour than to the number of tourists

(Granquist & Nilsson 2016: 472). It has been suggested that resource depletion and degradation take place as soon as tourism is introduced to an area, so the number of tourists is less important than how they are behaving (McCool & Lime 2001: 378).

Criticisms of Tourism Carrying Capacity

There have been attempts to produce a magic number of maximum tourists since the 1980s, such as Saveriades' limit of 6.18 tourists per local in the Maldives (Saveriades 2000). However, the consensus is now largely that TCC is appealing only because it recognises the potential impacts of unmanaged tourism in a destination; it is not a management strategy in itself (Williams & Gill 2005: 194). This is because it is based on "unrealistic expectations, untenable assumptions, inappropriate value judgements and insufficient legal support." (p. 197). There is widespread agreement that the enforcement of a numerical capacity is prohibitively complicated (McCool & Lime 2001: 377). There have been a range of criticisms of TCC, but among the most powerful is that provided by the Purist Scale Model, particularly where Iceland, a nature tourism destination, is concerned. This endorses the idea that tourist behaviour is more important than overall number, by challenging the Recreational Capacity assumption that tourist numbers will naturally decrease as perceived overcrowding in a destination lessens the quality of experience. The Purist Scale Model instead demonstrates that tourists can see the same situation with completely different perspectives, based on differing tolerance levels towards the same environment (Saporsdottir 2014: 66). For example, some tourists – the 'purists' – may be deterred by the increase in level of built infrastructure required to support higher tourist numbers, while other 'urbanists' – tourists from cities who are less sensitive to such developments – will continue to visit. The result is a homogenisation of the type of tourist visiting a destination, and will not affect the overall number of tourists (Saporsdottir 2010: 31). This is particularly problematic in areas like Iceland that rely on nature tourism, where increased infrastructure and facilities may actually attract more tourists. Therefore TCC is neither self-limiting, nor is it practical to attempt to enforce arbitrary limits (p. 27).

Alternatives have therefore been produced, two of the most prominent being Limits of Acceptable Change and Recreational Opportunity Spectrum. Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) are tolerance limits built into certain areas where the tourist industry operates, based on alterations to the landscape and environment (Buckley 1999: 707). By setting the limits on change to an area, it does not assign causation to tourists, nor does it grapple with having to set a maximum number of tourists allowed in an area. This shows awareness of the fact that changes to tourist destinations are not always down to the tourists themselves, and therefore it is difficult to measure the precise impact of a single tourist (Saarinen 2013: 5). LAC take into account other factors like natural phenomena, such as weather or disease, and wider societal events like recession (Buckley 1999: 707). The Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is based on matching tourist expectations and behaviour with particular areas, which are separated according to three determinants (Saporsdottir 2010: 32):

1. Biophysical attributes (from built-up to complete wilderness)
2. Number of encounters with other tourists
3. Number of rules and regulations in the area (which is determined by local stakeholders).

By matching the expectations of the tourist with the realities of the area, the behavioural suitability of tourists can be more closely aligned with the area, which can actually boost the number of tourists

an area can support before showing signs of degradation (Saarinen 2013: 5). Along with the Purist Scale Model, ROS looks to provide better management approaches by developing a better understanding of tourist behaviour, rather than simply putting a limit on the total number of tourists allowed in a particular area.

Social Tourism Capacity

TCC's appeal stems from its recognition of the potential negative effects of increased tourism within an area. This is also true of one development of TCC, social tourism capacity, which recognises the fact that local populations will only support a certain level of tourism, beyond which it will be rejected by residents (McCool & Lime 2001: 379). This effectively leads to a destination becoming socially unsustainable (Prince & Ioannides 2017: 349). Social tourism capacity is potentially problematic for a destination because, unlike environmental or economic impacts, it is extremely difficult to predict (Saporsdottir 2014: 67). It is determined by limits that are socially constructed by stakeholders with a wide variety of perspectives on the industry (Saarinen 2013: 6). It is therefore closely linked to more abstract concepts like social capital, which relies on tourism making a contribution to a majority of society in order to have built up a large enough stock of goodwill to be socially sustainable (Andereck & Vogt 2000: 29). Social tourism capacity is therefore the point at which social capital diminishes to the point where tourism in that area becomes socially unsustainable.

Social tourism capacity is affected by a number of elements beyond just the number of tourists, which is a constantly changing consensus within each community (Williams & Gill 2005: 196). However, the most common detrimental factors are: not having equal access to the benefits of tourism; competition for tourist attention; development of types of tourism that are inconsistent with community values (Moscardo et al. 2017: 289). These can all impact social tourism capacity by undermining the community cohesion at the heart of a socially sustainable society (Timur & Getz 2009: 222). The two themes linking these factors together are the involvement of the community in tourism development and equality across the community. Both of these are essential for increasing an area's social tourism capacity (Prince & Ioannides 2017: 349). Community involvement allows local people to be better informed when interacting with tourists, and can help positively alter tourist behaviour through education of the impacts of certain types of behaviour (Granquist & Nilsson 2016: 473). Stakeholder perceptions of local tourism can be altered by involvement in generating the values, attitudes, knowledge and priorities of tourism development (Saarinen 2013: 6). When local consultation takes place, this should be as wide as possible and beyond just major stakeholders, to ensure equal access to the industry (Dodds & Butler 2009: 45). If objectives can be agreed across the community then tourism development stands a much better chance of not coming close to its social tourism capacity (Williams & Gill 2005: 198).

This paper will look at social tourism capacity in Iceland, in a climate of rapid tourism development. It will explore the impacts of tourism at a local level, and what effect they are having on social tourism capacity, before examining whether suitable steps are being taken to manage this and the effects of this action on social sustainability.

Summary

Sustainability as a mainstream concept has only truly emerged in the past 30 years, focusing more on the long-term future of our society, mostly from an economic, environmental and social perspective. Social sustainability is that which focuses on quality of life and wellbeing in communities, and achieved with, among other things, an ample stock of social capital. Sustainable tourism has come to the fore more recently, and concerns the impacts of tourism on a destination's economy, environment and community. One way of looking at sustainable tourism is using tourism carrying capacity, the maximum number of tourists a destination can support. Though largely undermined by the fact that it is near impossible to calculate the exact number of tourists a destination can support, social tourism capacity, the level of tourism development an area can support before it is rejected by the community, is a useful way of looking at social sustainability. Providing a threshold at which tourism becomes socially unsustainable helps to gain an understanding of the level of social sustainability in tourist destinations.

Methodology

This section outlines the research design, academic approach and data collection methods used in this thesis. It also covers the research questions, informants, data analysis and research limitations.

Introduction to Methodological Approach

The choice of Iceland as the physical location for research was based on its rapidly evolving status as a tourism destination, which meant that the theoretical notions of tourism carrying capacity from a wider social sustainability point of view could be highly relevant for study here. There are very few countries that have experienced such a rise in tourism over the past decade, and none with such a small population. Iceland therefore provides a unique opportunity to research the effects of rapidly expanding tourism on a collection of small communities.

Though described as 'Iceland' throughout this thesis, research was actually conducted across six different communities in Iceland, covering the major population centres and stretching the length and breadth of the country. These areas were Reykjavik, Hafnafjordur, Laugarbakki & Hvamstangi, Akureyri, Egilsstaðir, Hallormsstadur, which are all established locations on the tourism map. Their populations range from under 50 in Hallormsstadur to 120,000 in Reykjavik. The collective understanding generated by research in these areas will be referred to as 'Icelandic communities', though with the obvious caveat that research has not been conducted in every community in the country. It is not possible to come to general conclusions on the situation in a whole country, even one as small as Iceland, from researching six communities. However, the aim of conducting research across multiple areas with varied characteristics, is in an attempt to generate a broader understanding of social sustainability in Iceland than could be achieved by just concentrating solely on one community.

These locations provided useful empirical tourism grounds because they have active local communities that existed long before the birth of tourism in Iceland and have all experienced a significant influx of tourists since 2010. Access to these communities therefore gave significant insight into the social sustainability of tourism in these areas. This involved primary research looking into the encounters of local people with the tourism industry in these areas, which was based around qualitative data collection methods that would generate an understanding of the experience of local residents with tourism in their communities, its impact on social sustainability and the possibility of social tourism capacity being reached. Moreover, attempts were made to understand tourism management practices as seen from a local perspective.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, above, social sustainability is not a concept that is easy to measure or quantify, and tourism carrying capacity perhaps even less so. However, in an attempt to generate an understanding of tourism's effects on these phenomena, key themes have been drawn out, which allow certain conclusions to be reached.

The section that follows outlines the research design and analytical approach used in this thesis.

Research Approach

The fundamental objective of this thesis is to gain an understanding of six communities across Iceland, taking into account a wide range of social perspectives which together will provide the data to respond to the overall research question. Therefore, data collection and the subsequent analysis is shaped by a social constructivist approach. This acknowledges that the interaction between people and their social conventions are the basis for the construction of social reality, as stated by Detel (2015), “things are produced (and in this way constructed) by social actions, i.e., by actions that we carry out by interacting with other people” (p. 228). As social sustainability is so heavily dependent on relationships between people, a social constructivist approach is the most appropriate.

Underneath this sits a phronetic approach to research. Analysis that stems from such a tradition is based around values, rather than adopting a strict epistemic approach. At the core of phronesis is taking established theories, concepts and laws and overlaying them onto a particular situation (Flyvebjerg 2006: 39). In this instance, this involves social sustainability and social tourism capacity being introduced to a range of Icelandic tourism destinations. There are two aspects of phronetic social science which most strongly impact the angle of this thesis. The first is that research should understand “how values and interests affect different groups in society” (Flyvebjerg 2006: 39). There have been numerous studies onto the impact of tourism on Iceland from a top-down perspective. This thesis now looks to understand this from a community perspective, via groups whose concerns have not hitherto been articulated. The second important aspect of the phronetic approach to this thesis is that “such analyses are fed into the process of public deliberation and decision making” (p. 39). Through collating and articulating the views of different interest groups this thesis has an opportunity to outline current attitudes towards tourism in a single place. This will act as “food for thought” as well as providing “input for public deliberation and decision making” (p. 39) for tourism planners looking to the future.

However, the phronetic approach also recognises that “there exists no general principle by which all differences can be resolved” (Flyvebjerg 2006: 40), which is also appropriate for this area of study. Social sustainability is a subjective notion which struggles with a singular definition. The theoretical framework has already demonstrated that there is no single magic number of tourists at which a limit should be set, and this thesis will make no attempt to do this. Instead it will look to identify potential impacts and then analyse those against the values and interests of the subject groups (p. 40). This, in turn, may generate input to the social sustainability discourse (p.41).

Such an approach is used to respond to the following main research question:

How is a rapidly growing tourism industry affecting social sustainability in six communities across Iceland?

The response to such a question can be broken down into three parts. First, an appreciation needs to be generated of what effect tourism is having on local communities in Iceland. Second, through identifying these effects, an understanding can be gained into how far these are taking Iceland towards its social tourism capacity. Finally, factors preventing Iceland reaching its social tourism

capacity and promoting socially sustainable tourism should be discussed. Therefore, the following research questions emerge:

1. What are the impacts of tourism on local communities?
2. To what extent is Iceland at risk of reaching its social tourism capacity?
3. What steps are being taken to manage tourism's social impacts?

Research Design

Tribe (2004: 47) describes tourism not as an individual academic discipline, but instead as a field that uses elements from a range of other disciplines. For the research in this thesis, tourism will be seen as a lens through which the subject phenomena can be analysed, and will borrow aspects of other disciplines like sociology, economics and anthropology in order to provide an approach to research. This also extends to sustainability and carrying capacity, which both have their roots in biology and ecology and have since been used for tourism research purposes. As tourism does not have its own criteria for testing statements, the analysis of these aspects also borrows aspects from other disciplines, though framed within a tourism perspective (Tribe 2004: 48). This thesis's research is focused on seeing tourism activity alongside other everyday activities, which renders a multidisciplinary approach the most useful.

Qualitative Research

This thesis is almost entirely rooted in qualitative research. This is because the focus of this thesis is to understand the "complex motivations, desires, feelings and opinions" of stakeholders within the tourism environment in Iceland (Hannam & Knox 2011: 175). Qualitative research was deemed to be the only way to collect detailed data "about activities, events, occurrences and behaviours and to seek an understanding of actions, problems and processes in their social context" (Phillimore & Goodson 2004: 3). Such an approach requires the researcher to be situated in context (p.3). This is one of the reasons why qualitative methods are deemed to be central to tourism research (Tribe 2004: 57). The fact that this thesis is intended to present an understanding of tourism's impacts from a community perspective makes qualitative research essential. Developing a connection with the societies under review is the only way to properly understand the various social and cultural dimensions central to tourism's social sustainability within these communities. Through this it is possible to fulfil the main role of the qualitative researcher, which is to see what is important from the participants' points of view (Rossetto 2014: 483). Conversely, quantitative methods regularly do not allow the researcher this opportunity, relying instead on empirical or numerical data to reach conclusions (Hannam & Knox 2011: 176). Further, given that this thesis aims not to provide one single explanation or solution, qualitative methods provide a much more useful vehicle for searching for a broader understanding of the issues at hand (Pedersen & Nielsen 2001: 17).

This thesis also draws on elements of ethnographic research, in the way that it explores social issues that have not been studied before and therefore relies upon the researcher to both participate in dialogue and carry out observation in order to unearth knowledge (Svensson 2017: 2). For this thesis a month was spent conducting data collection in Iceland, visiting and spending time in each of the chosen tourism locations, where a range of research methods were used, most saliently interviews and participant observation, which mirrors strongly the recommended ethnographic approach (Adams 2012: 339). This took the form of staying in six separate locations during the course of the fieldwork, always with local people, during which time every attempt was made to interact and hear the views of others within the community. It was within these settings that seven semi-structured interviews were conducted. At the same time constant efforts were made to take part in a wide variety of tourism related activities. This was essential for contextualising the opinions of local residents, and also gave an opportunity to see first-hand a range of management strategies in action.

Deductive & Inductive Research

This thesis is primarily deductive in its approach, given that it is based around the testing of established theories within a particular context. It looks to test the extent to which the notion of social tourism capacity is applicable to tourism in Iceland, and how that corresponds with ideas of social sustainability. However, there also needs to be an element of inductive reasoning applied, due to the constantly evolving understanding of social sustainability and the different methods of applying carrying capacity within a tourism context. Consequently, although the theoretical elements being tested are established, the context and way of applying them are not established. Through taking a dual inductive and deductive approach the aim will be to increase the validity, reliability and accuracy of the research (Hannam & Knox 2010: 179).

Structure & Purpose of the Research

The research was carried out in two parts, with the interviews conducted first, which would then provide the context and detail that would inform the participant observation element of the research. This sequential approach was aimed to maximise the accuracy and relevance of the participant observation. Interviews and observations were carried out until a series of patterns emerged from the material that could inform responses to the research questions.

Data Collection Techniques

The following section introduces the data collection techniques used during research for this project. It introduces the informants and interview techniques, as well as setting the context for the interviews and participant observation.

Informants

At the heart of the research for this thesis were the interview informants. Interviews were conducted until enough empirical data was collected to respond to the thesis's central topic without overburdening the analysis (Kvale 1997: 18). The informants were chosen along a set of defined criteria. These criteria were designed in order to give as wide a range of values and perspectives as possible. This is why finding informants from a mix of professions was vital, as well as from a range of locations. All, however, needed to have enough of an interest in the tourism industry to have the ability to respond to interview questions. The criteria for informants were:

1. They should be permanent local residents of their community, with links with others that would allow them to highlight others' experiences in addition to their own. This was necessary to allow the informant to be able to comment on changes in their community since the start of the tourism boom in 2010. Long-standing residency in a community gave a higher probability of being able to offer the opinions of others in the community than, for example, someone who had recently moved to that place.
2. There should be a mix of professions among informants, between those who depend on the tourism industry for their livelihoods, and those who do not. This was based on a desire to not just hear from those who are entrenched in the tourism industry and may therefore have a certain degree of bias in their responses. Of course, those not involved in the tourism industry could be biased against the industry because they may not feel like they directly benefit from it. A mix of occupations, therefore, was deemed to be the best way of tackling this.
3. Those informants who do not work in the tourism industry or have a related occupation should have enough of an interest in tourism to allow them to respond to questions on the subject with some knowledge. Informants needed to express an opinion on the tourism industry – whether this was factually correct or not – for the interviews to produce relevant material. An interest in tourism enabled this. This level of interest was determined by preliminary discussions prior to the interviews being conducted.
4. They should reside in a range of locations across Iceland, so that a general picture could be constructed using data from a wide variety of locations. This was to ensure that data was collected across multiple communities, to avoid drawing too many conclusions from just one area. A detailed plan was drawn up, including a route, that would allow research to be conducted in the homes of informants in this range of locations throughout the country.

The full list of informants is as follows, along with the initials that will be used to represent them in the following sections (numbers correspond to their position in the Appendices):

1. **Sigurdur (SR)** A guide for Reykjavik Excursions, Iceland's largest tour company. SR resides in Reykjavik, Iceland's capital city, where the interview took place. He ran one of the tours (the Golden Circle) that formed part of the participant observation, after which the interview took place.
2. **Gudlaug (GB) & Daniel (DR)** Residents of Reykjavik. GB is retired and has been active in the couchsurfing community for a number of years. Daniel works in construction in Reykjavik. The two are friends of one of the author's friends.
3. **Kolbrun (KB) & Steini (SS)** Residents of Hafnafjordur, Iceland's third largest city and immediately south of Reykjavik. KB is a student councillor in a local school and SS is a guitar teacher. KB is part of the extended family of a friend of the author, and SS is her partner.

4. **Myrra (MT) & Ymir (YJ)** Residents of Hallormsstadur, a small village in the east of Iceland, popular among tourists and close to a number of key attractions. MT is a teacher and YJ is a chef. Both live in the same village as the grandparents of a friend of the author.
5. **Thorán (TS) & Gunni (GE)** Residents of Akureyri, Iceland's largest city outside the capital region. TS is retired, though knits garments to be sold to tourists. GE is a former ship's pilot in Akureyri port. TS is the grandmother of one of the author's friends, and GE is her husband.
6. **Kristín (KB)** A resident of Egilsstaðir, the largest city in the east of Iceland. KB works for a trade union whose remit includes workers in the tourism industry. KB is the aunt of a friend of the author.
7. **Paula (PS)** A resident of Laugarbakki, a town in the popular north-west Iceland area. PS is a yoga instructor and music teacher who also runs a small guesthouse attached to her home. PS is a friend of a friend of the author.



Fig 4: Map showing interview locations (Google Maps/Dominic Wood-Hill 2019)

Interviews were arranged using the author's own network, through friend and family ties in various locations throughout the country. Having a personal network in the country was extremely valuable, as it made it possible to find a range of willing participants within the time and resource constraints of a master thesis. Nevertheless, engaging with one's own contacts as research subjects can restrict research outcomes, particularly because there is a danger of the same values being shared across informants, and also with the author. Consequently there could be entire sections of Icelandic society that hold completely contrary views, that have not been identified by this research. In an attempt to combat this, the informants are from a wide range of social backgrounds and demographic groups, with the youngest being 23 years old, and the oldest being 84. Moreover, interview questions asked the interviewees to consider not only their own perspectives, but wider views in the community. All informants are ethnically Icelandic.

Interview Techniques

The vast majority of the data for this thesis came from interviews. Before these were carried out, a number of factors were taken into consideration, such as the role of the interviewer, interview structure, location and language.

In order to ensure they yielded a wide range of data, the aim was to make interviews a collaborative effort between the two parties (Holstein & Gubrium 1995). Though discussions were held prior to the interviews, both by phone, email and face to face, these do not feature in the data collection. In this way there is a reduced risk of having unanswered questions or responses being misunderstood (Andersen et. al 2011: 278). All interviews were carried out face to face in order to further aid understanding between participants. This also helped to ensure that the interview acted as a period of knowledge co-creation, instead of just knowledge transfer from one participant to the other (Holstein & Gubrium 1995: 141). For this reason, interviews were conducted using an informal tone and in a relaxed environment, with the interviewer progressing the interview through encouraging interviewees to be reflexive and telling personal stories (p. 144, 152). This worked particularly well in the interviews with multiple interviewees, who would stimulate discussion through interacting with each other (Hannam & Knox 2010: 182).

The 'Semi-Structured' Interview

As a result of this less formal, active and interactive interview approach, the interviews should be described as 'semi-structured'. Questions were prepared in advance of the interview, but these were regularly left behind as participants pursued a line of conversation that was either equally relevant to the topic, or provided valuable context. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) emphasise the value of such a flexible approach based around asking open questions that are then followed up in a way directly related to the response given. This approach creates an informal atmosphere that encourages participants to bring forward other relevant information that benefits the data collection (Hannam & Knox 2010: 182). Moreover, the overall research approach aims to take into account the values and perspectives of community members, and ascertain what is deemed important to them. An informal interview environment is essential for discovering this.

Surroundings

In order to create a relaxed and informal environment, the surroundings and locations of the interviews were important. In order to achieve this, it was ensured that there were no unintended listeners, informants were as comfortable as possible and the interview was undisturbed (Trost & Jeremiassen 2010: 68). This was achieved by conducting all of the interviews in the homes of the interviewees, where they felt most comfortable, the room was private, and the interviewees would feel as comfortable as possible.

Language

All of the interviews took place predominantly in English, to avoid any misinterpretation when quoted in this thesis. Though none of the informants were native speakers, their command of English was excellent, and more than adequate for communicating their responses. The occasional Icelandic word entered the interviews where place names were concerned, or where an equivalent word does not exist in English. For example, the Icelandic word *hraun*, which refers to vast expanses of flat land filled with encrusted, centuries-old lava. However, this was rare and did not prohibit understanding of responses in any way.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was used in order to explore the issues and phenomena raised during the interviews. It took place at scores of different locations throughout Iceland during the month of March, at both overtly touristic and more local settings. Successful attempts were made to visit all of the places of interest mentioned by informants, to observe tourist behaviour in these locations. Where observations were made of relevance to the research, they were recorded in written and photographic form. The method was chosen because, having been framed by interview responses, it gave the opportunity of seeing the touristic landscape in Iceland through the eyes of the local community (Adams 2012: 340). This involved being a 'complete participant' in touristic activities in Iceland, in which the author was almost inseparable from those being studied. This gave the possibility of observing entirely natural tourist behaviour. This was particularly important during guided tours, where the advice and guidance given to tourists was of particular interest. Through complete immersion it was possible to examine the effect of various techniques of affecting touristic behaviour, which is central to ideas of carrying capacity. Moreover, it was important to act as naturally as possible to understand why tourists act in certain ways in certain situations, and what can be done to affect this. However, it is important to point out that approaching tourist attractions following a period spent with local people meant it was difficult to observe tourist behaviour without thinking of the concerns of local people. For example, it gave a certain sense of hypersensitivity each time tourists were seen leaving marked paths, putting themselves in possibly dangerous situations.

Participant observation was particularly important in collecting data to respond to the third research question regarding the steps taken to manage the social impacts of tourism in Iceland.

Data Analysis

In order to make best use of the data, it was first compiled in a format that makes it easier to interact with. This primarily involved the transcription of interviews, which allows the researcher to engage more thoroughly with the interviews (Kvale 1997: 160). As well as allowing for quotations to be taken and references to be made to the interviews, it also improves their quality through recording audio during the interview. This means the interviewer can devote all attention to the interview rather than having to take notes (p. 161). The transcriptions are as verbatim as possible, whilst also presenting a transcript that is easily understandable, in an attempt to give all readers the opportunity to become familiar with the interviews without having been present.

Participant observations were made in a research diary, which involved photos accompanied by personal notes. These have been sifted for relevance and only included where appropriate.

Data Analysis Structure

The data analysis will be structured along the key themes that emerged from the research. These themes will be used to examine the impacts of tourism on locals, whether these impacts are taking them towards Iceland's tourism capacity, and will draw out the methods being employed to manage these impacts in a socially sustainable fashion.

Limitations

Every attempt was made to collect data from as wide a selection of locations within Iceland as possible, with the aim of presenting a general picture of Icelandic tourism as a whole. However, despite attempts, it was not possible to arrange an interview with anyone in the south coast region, around the town of Vik, one of the most popular tourism areas in Iceland. Nevertheless, participant observation was conducted in this area.

It was decided that qualitative methods were most suitable given the core subjects of this thesis. However, this required a significant amount of time spent in selected places and contexts (Hannam & Knox 2010: 181). This meant that there was insufficient time for further research that may have increased the number of touch points within the communities under discussion. However, informants were selected partly because of their ability to speak on behalf of their communities as a whole. In this way, the narratives that emerged from the interviews can be used as a source of data that can be used to support other hypotheses (Flybjerg 2005: 249).

Going from three hours of daylight at Christmas to just three hours of darkness in the middle of summer, Iceland is a country that changes dramatically from season to season, with the majority of tourists visiting from May – September (Icelandic Tourist Board 2019). The research for this thesis was carried out in March, and due to scheduling it was not possible to conduct this in-country research during peak periods. As a result, it is highly possible that tourist behaviour is different at the height of summer to that observed in March. There is also a possibility that informants' responses to questions about the level of touristic activity may have been affected by their experiences in the immediate past, where tourism numbers were lower. In an attempt to counter this, attempts were made to question interviewees about their year-round experiences with tourism, not just those at the time of the interviews.

Analysis

The following analysis section is in four parts, based on the key themes that emerged from data collection. Each is strongly rooted in the primary data collected for this thesis, but makes regular references to the theoretical framework. It was not possible to align this analysis along the categories of sustainability, because the picture that emerged from the data showed these intertwining regularly, particularly with social sustainability having some dependence on both economic and environmental sustainability, as outlined in the theoretical framework.

The **'Tourism Miracle'** looks into how every informant referred to tourism as reinvigorating the country's economy on a national level, and how this feeling has significantly boosted the industry's social capital. **Tourism as a Force for Rejuvenation** explores the impacts that a booming tourism industry has had on a more local level, and the subsequent effect on social sustainability. **'They don't know how to drive in Iceland'** covers the way tourists drive in Iceland, one aspect of tourism behaviour that was mentioned by locals above all, and could significantly impact social sustainability. Finally, **A Vulnerable Industry** discusses the biggest threat to social sustainability of all: that the industry itself is fragile, and if it falls into decline, this could have a significant impact on the communities in which it operates.

The 'Tourism Miracle'

Where once it was fishing, then financial services, it is now tourism that is seen as providing the fuel for the Icelandic economy. The fact that tourism is seen as such a strong part of the Iceland's national finances means it comes as no surprise that tourism's economic effects were repeatedly mentioned by informants. Within this, the theme that came across most strongly was tourism as a top-down intervention that impacted the state of the country as a whole.

Iceland's national narrative over the past fifteen years describes a booming financial services industry that was then the first to implode as the financial crisis struck in 2007/2008. There were then a few wilderness years as the government struggled to provide financial support for bankrupt companies and jobless citizens. But in 2010 the eruption of the volcano Eyjafjallajökull in southern Iceland catapulted the nation back into the international spotlight. This opportunity was seized upon by government, tourism operators and policymakers and the tourists began to arrive first in their tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands, and now millions each year. Prior to 2010 there were fewer than 400,000 annual visitors to Iceland, a figure which exceeded 2.5million in 2018 (Icelandic Tourist Board 2019). This burgeoning industry began to fill the hole left by the banking sector, and the gaps in the employment market. This is shown by figure 5, below, showing unemployment spiking during the crisis, and returning to pre-crisis levels by 2016. This rebalanced the economy using the beauty and culture of the country in a way that involved a large cross section of the population, rather than risky financial practices in a few offices in the capital city. As a result, the general feeling towards tourism from Icelandic locals is a positive one.

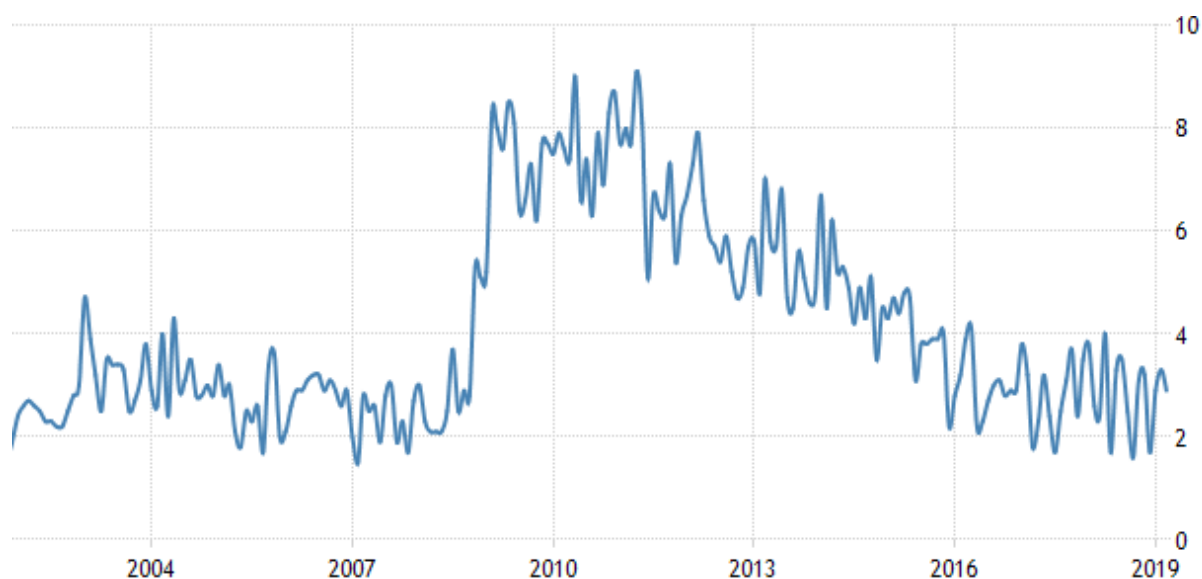


Figure 5: Percentage unemployment rate in Iceland 2000-2019. (Statistics Iceland 2019)

GB's statement that "when tourism came it was like a miracle" is easier to understand within this context (Appendix 2: 7). She describes the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull being the tipping point between Iceland being a little-known destination, and then becoming a fixture on the tourist map (p. 8). Of course, tourism didn't just arrive spontaneously, but the fact that it was an unplanned natural disaster that brought much of the attention suggests that the tourism boom was perceived as some kind of spiritual gift to the nation. This is significant because the appearance of tourism as Iceland's saviour gives it a special place in the sentiments of locals, which is obvious when discussing the phenomenon. KB talks of how tourism being the reason everyone has jobs after the crisis, yet she works as a school counsellor, and SS, her partner, as a guitar teacher (Appendix 3: 13). Her impression is that if there was no tourism, it would not just be tourism jobs that didn't exist, but many others too – as was the case during the financial crisis. This is supported by DR, who recounts the difficulties of finding work during the crisis, compared to the comparative ease of doing so in the present day (Appendix 2: 8). MT also points to the negative economic situation in the capital before "the tourists brought new life to Reykjavik" (Appendix 4: 18).

The positive feeling surrounding the tourism miracle is so strong that in some places people are willing to dismiss contemporary criticism of the tourism industry because of the positive impacts it has had in the past. Like others, RE describes the fact that many blame high housing costs on tourism, but continues to say that these people "forget that many people nearly lost their houses" during the crisis and "that it's tourism that's helped us get back on our feet" (Appendix 1: 3). This sentiment is echoed by KRB, who, when asked about the conditions for workers in the tourism industry, merely responds that ten years ago the same people would not have had a job (Appendix 6: 27). This wide range of responses promoting the tourism miracle would suggest that in 2010 and the years after, the tourism industry experienced a huge surge in social capital, receiving such credit that some of the negative aspects of the industry would be overlooked. Data collected in 2019 for this thesis would suggest that the industry is still benefitting from this bounce, which also gives a significant boost to the social sustainability of tourism activities.

Within theory, strong networks and relationships are commonly seen as the most important sources of social capital (Moscardo et al. 2017; Putnam 2000) and this can be seen clearly in the Icelandic example. All informants firmly believe that tourism had a positive impact after the difficulties of the financial crisis, but not everyone was directly affected by the crisis. However, due to the tight-knit communities throughout Iceland everyone knew someone who was hard hit by the economic downturn. The surge in social capital for the tourism industry can be explained by tourism activities strengthening the network or community as a whole. Many community members therefore felt the positive effects of tourism through their network, with the touristic activities themselves often being secondary to the wellbeing of the community as a whole. This supports the notion of networks, relationships and communities being central to social capital (Putnam 2000), which, in the event of tourism having a positive effect on these, can also positively impact social sustainability (Andereck & Vogt 2000).

Yet all of this masks what was a meticulously organised co-ordinated tourism strategy from the Icelandic government, DMO (Destination Management Organisation) and tourism operators. This was a clear attempt to use sustainable tourism as a 'force for change' where it would improve the quality of lives of citizens (McCool et al 2013). Before the volcanic eruption made headlines throughout the northern hemisphere a new branding effort was being developed, entitled 'Inspired by Iceland', which cast the country's culture and natural beauty in a much more accessible light (Inspired by Iceland, 2019). This was not particularly innovative or unique, but the collaboration that facilitated it was. Led by the government, it was recognised that an effective and sustainable tourism strategy required a unified direction from the multiple agencies. The government deregulated airlines and put in place financial support to offer subsidised air travel to Iceland through Icelandair, the national flag carrier, as well as devaluing the currency and introducing new standards in accommodation and activities even before 2010 (Gil-Alana & Huijbens 2018). This meant that when Iceland began to receive tourist interest following the 2010 eruption, the structures were in place to take advantage of this. The fact that this collaboration has, so far, had a number of positive effects on social sustainability demonstrates that the notion that stakeholder collaboration is crucial to socially-sustainable tourism (Timur & Getz 2009) can be seen as true in this instance. However, there is a key stakeholder missing in this instance: the local residents themselves, and their inclusion in decisions is deemed to be just as important in ensuring the future success of the destination (McCool et al. 2013). During conversations with locals it was clear that there was a lack of detailed knowledge about the country's national tourism strategy, or if there was it was less important than actions on a local level. It was instructive that the only informants who referred to national tourism initiatives were SR and PS, who work directly in the industry, as a tourist guide and guesthouse owner respectively (Appendix 1: 5; Appendix 7: 30). The fact that the strategy has succeeded without widespread local involvement in decision making could suggest that it is not always necessary to have such a wide range of stakeholders involved. This has been achieved by the collaboration between government, DMO and large operators simply because it has been so successful. It is this success that has generated the 'tourism miracle' narrative, which shows little sign of waning.

Andereck & Vogt (2000) note that a good stock of social capital is essential for being able to effectively introduce new tourism infrastructure to a destination. Though an improved economic situation was the main source of social capital for the tourism industry, there were a range of other contributory factors; these will be explored in detail in the section 'Tourism as a force for rejuvenation' below. In

Iceland, the social capital earned by the positive impacts of tourism is being used to pursue an aggressive construction strategy observed throughout the country. This was most obvious in Reykjavik, and cited by DR, a construction worker in the city, who says, “We’re building things all over the city,” directly as a result of the tourism industry (Appendix 2: 9). This construction work is disruptive to normal life in the city. Next to one of the Reykjavik locations stayed in during fieldwork there was a new hotel complex being constructed close to the city’s largest shopping mall, Kringlan. Even during weekends, construction began in the early morning and continued into the evening, with the noise disruption, interrupted transport routes and accompanying eyesores that this entailed. Conversations with residents revealed this was far from a unique situation, and indeed many such sites were seen throughout the city. Policy was shown not only by the scale of building work but the category of buildings under construction. Every construction project observed in the city centre was either tourism accommodation or other tourism infrastructure, something reflected by SR and KB, who note the change in land use to tourism activities (Appendix 1: 2; Appendix 3: 13). This is not just the case in Reykjavik, with MT noting the change in her village of just 50 people, and KRB noting the “many” new hotels in her town of Egilsstaðir, population 2,500 (Appendix 4: 16; Appendix 6: 25). In order to ensure tourism development is sustainable both over use and over development should be avoided (Dodds & Butler 2009). Perhaps, though the aforementioned disruption was significant, this proves that there is still room for further expansion in these communities. Alternatively, it may disprove the notion entirely, because despite significant disruption to their communities, locals continue to support the tourism industry, partly due to the stock of social capital built up by the tourism miracle. Tourism researchers (McClinchey 2017; Colantonio 2010) have pointed out that a lack of social capital can undermine the success of development designed to improve social sustainability. This case furthers this point but from the opposite perspective. It demonstrates that though there are aspects of the tourism industry, such as exploitative development that takes place without local consultation (McCool et al. 2013), that can present challenges to social sustainability, with enough social capital, the effects of these can be negated.

The tourism boom arrived in Iceland when there was little to no investment in communities from elsewhere. Therefore, the building of a large hotel in a small town was not treated with the hostility it might have received in other situations, as confirmed by KRB in Egilsstaðir, which has seen numerous new hotels since 2010 (Appendix 6: 25). Local people have already seen the positive economic impacts of tourism, so will tolerate a certain degree of disruption in order to sustain this. Tourism operators have little trouble selling the future benefits of tourism investment, because the effects of previous investment being so apparent. Consequently, communities are able to absorb much more interference in their daily lives before coming anywhere near their tourism capacity, due to the overwhelmingly positive way in which the tourism phenomenon is depicted. This draws a clear line between economic and social sustainability, where economic success earns social capital, which can lead to social sustainability. This is in alignment with Elkington’s (2013) Triple Bottom Line approach, where social sustainability is dependent on economic sustainability, and vice versa. Moreover, the situation follows Elkington’s argument in that economic sustainability was given top priority due to the short-term goals of state actors. However, the fast economic success of their actions also provided a strong boost to social sustainability.

As a final point, it is worth considering the situation of ordinary Icelanders had the tourism boom not taken place, for this was a detectable undercurrent during conversations on the subject. In the wake

of the 2007-08 financial crisis, only two companies in Iceland did not require financial support from the government in order to continue operation (Appendix 1: 5). One was a drugs company and the other produced prosthetics for export. Rebuilding a nation's economy in these industries would have had significantly fewer opportunities than tourism. The banking industry incurred such disdain and mistrust that it now operates under one of the world's tightest regulatory systems, preventing sharp losses but also restricting profits. Iceland is a major aluminium exporter, but revenue has been hit by falling global commodity prices. The nation's other traditional industries, agriculture and fishing, have been in long term decline due to declining stocks and increased international competition (Jóhannesson & Huijbens 2013: 138). As a result, there seem to be few other industries that could have provided the same economic stimulus as tourism, at precisely the right time. Perhaps it comes as little surprise, therefore, that tourism overall is regarded with such fondness, with a timely volcanic eruption only adding to its aura. From a theoretical standpoint, this 'fondness' is translated into increased social capital for industry operators, the stock of which has greatly aided the social sustainability of tourism activities.

Tourism as a force for rejuvenation

While the tourism miracle sees a boost in economic development from a national point of view, it is also important to explore the effects of tourism on individual communities in recent years. At the heart of social tourism capacity are local concerns, such as not being involved in the decision-making process and development that is inconsistent with community values (Prince & Ioannides 2017: 349). From an economic perspective, a thriving labour market is at the heart of sustainability, and sustainable tourism looks to facilitate this. Although it should be noted that a reliance on growth for sustainability is not always sustainable, because growth in tourism destinations in the majority of cases slows down eventually (Butler 1980). To investigate this further, tourism's effects at a local level should also be taken into account.

A number of informants discussed how the tourism industry has brought employment into areas in need of rejuvenation. Of these, the description from PS of the change tourism has brought to the town of Hvammstangi in north west Iceland was most striking. Hvammstangi bears the hallmarks of many other settlements built around the fishing industry in western Europe. Set in an attractive location on the picturesque Midfjordur, the town was built around the income from the fishing industry – which originally also included whaling - but larger scale competition from overseas has led to just two fishing boats lying in the town's once-full harbour. Those employed in the industry either moved elsewhere to work or fell into unemployment (Appendix 7: 30). However, this situation has clearly now changed, for PS states that, "the whole town is employed by tourism now" due to successful regeneration over the past ten years (Appendix 7: 29). The towns of Hvammstangi and neighbouring Laugarbakki lie at a convenient halfway point between Reykjavik and Akureyri, Iceland's second city. It is therefore a natural stopping place, and the addition of tourist infrastructure has allowed local residents to take advantage of this. Visiting one of Hvammstangi's restaurants on a dark Tuesday night in March with profoundly inclement weather, it was surprising to find the restaurant almost full. Judging by their use of the English language, the vast majority of clientele were tourists and the staff, it was later discovered, were all Icelanders from the local area, who revealed that such a situation was a frequent occurrence. PS also mentions this phenomenon, finding a different restaurant, "full of tourists on a Wednesday night in February." (Appendix 7: 29). The hospitality industry is clearly providing a major employment boost for residents of Hvammstangi, and importantly, this is not just during the busy summer months, but out of peak season too. PS also mentions that the quality of restaurants has improved since the development of the tourism industry (Appendix 7: 29). This is significant because it enables those not directly employed in the tourism industry to benefit from its development. This is also mentioned by GB as having taken place in Reykjavik, something she attributes to increased competition due to the tourism industry (Appendix 2: 8), while YJ explains how his restaurant in Reykjavik could not have been a success without patronage from tourism (Appendix 4: 18). These examples of tourism having wider benefits than just those directly involved in the industry align well with ideas of avoiding a destination's social tourism capacity. Not reaching the carrying capacity threshold requires tourism to make a positive contribution to a majority of society (Andereck & Vogt 2000: 29). It therefore follows that these instances cited by informants are socially sustainable through contributing to community wellbeing as a whole.

This gives rise to another element of rejuvenation through tourism, which is local entrepreneurship. This is absolutely critical to understanding attitudes towards the tourism because it combines the notions of economic development and community involvement, through local people being directly responsible for the economic development in their area. As discussed, local perceptions of tourism's influence on a national level are broadly positive, building up a powerful stock of social capital that has boosted the social sustainability of tourism activities. This has largely taken place without extensive contact between local people and the DMO, tourism authorities and larger operators, with decisions of overarching policy largely made on behalf of local communities. Moscardo (2017) argues that involvement of locals in tourism enterprise is crucial for sustainable development, through state-level organisations (such as DMOs and government) ensuring locals are informed, gain equal benefit from the industry and that development is in line with community values (p. 289). However, community-level development in smaller communities in Iceland shows that engagement with state-level actors is not necessary for local people to feel involved in the tourism activity in their community. Indeed, it can be more powerful from a social sustainability standpoint. This is because entrepreneurial activity from within the community gives local people more than involvement, it gives them control over the direction of development, provides employment for community members, and keeps the money within the community so it can be reinvested. This ensures it is more than just the major stakeholders who benefit, necessary for keeping the community on-side, and vital for social sustainability (Dodds & Butler 2009: 45). One example of this is given by KRB, who discusses how many of the tourism businesses in Egilsstaðir are owned by one family, who were previously farmers who also owned a fuel station with a shop. When this began to thrive, the family invested more and more in the tourism industry in successive years, using their influence as landowners and employers, as well as wealth, to unlock the potential of Egilsstaðir as a destination by community-level development (Appendix 6: 25). This is an example of how locally-owned enterprises will re-invest in their community, further boosting its development.

On a smaller scale, TS reveals how she earns money by knitting items that are sold in a souvenir shop in Akureyri (Appendix 5: 20). She is just one member of the community who contributes to the goods being sold in the shop, which is owned by another local lady. This is an important example because it shows products being locally sourced via a community network, rather than imported from a far-away country. The local production model is more sustainable than long-distance imports on a number of levels. Firstly, it provides an additional source of income for residents that did not exist before the tourism industry. Second, it allows Icelandic people some control of the depiction of their culture in tourism goods. One of the items regularly knitted by TS are traditional Icelandic wool sweaters, which have had a specific design for centuries. Though they have had to be updated to be made from more resilient materials, their cultural integrity remains solid. Overseas factory production of these items could undermine their cultural credentials. Finally, it is far more environmentally friendly not to import goods from another continent, particularly given how far Iceland is from other countries. TS is a local producer using wool she buys from a local farmer, so the entire process is kept within the community (Appendix 5: 20). This is another example of successful sustainable tourism.

Farmers diversifying into the tourism industry is a wider trend in Iceland than just the north of the country. Due to harsh winters, unreliable summers and difficulties matching the scale of international competitors due to most farms being family owned, farming in Iceland has always been challenging and tourism presents a more reliable income source (Appendix 1: 4). As a result, many farm owners

are deriving more of their income from tourism than traditional farming methods. SR states that tour operators have to “come to an agreement” with the farmers, which in effect means the farmers charge money for people visiting sights of natural beauty on their land (Appendix 1: 2). But he also mentions farmers starting their own enterprises, in this instance referring to “salmon fishing tours”, where tourists pay the farmers money to be taken to prime fishing spots on rivers running through these farms (Appendix 1: 4). In addition to this, there are a vast number of farms throughout the whole country where visitors can hire horses and ride set trails through the landscape. Currently this use of farmland is providing a much more stable and lucrative income than traditional approaches, which, for the most part, goes directly to the local landowners and stays within the community. This is central to the avoidance of social tourism capacity, because it shares the benefits of tourism among the community, enabling widespread improvements in lifestyle and opportunities: the central indicator of social sustainability (Moscardo et al. 2017: 287).

PS herself is an example of a tourism entrepreneur, who realised the potential of her location in Laugarbakki, so started a guesthouse just renting rooms in her home (Appendix 7: 28). More important from a community wellbeing perspective is that the money earned the guesthouse was used by PS to develop her career as a yoga instructor. Her studio is the only location for yoga classes in the sparsely-populated area, and are well-attended by locals from a range of demographic groups. This is an example of tourism revenue staying in the community and being invested in another community business, which also enriches the lives of local residents.

PS also points to another intriguing example of tourism entrepreneurship in the community, with former fishermen in Hvammstangi now running tours by boat to see whales and seals (Appendix 7:28). This is the epitome of tourism within the community, for it is these former fishermen with the best knowledge of the surrounding waters, and would have ready access to the equipment and infrastructure required to build such a business. Moreover, following the decline in earnings from the fishing industry, it was this section of the community that needed new employment most, and this line of work requires little retraining for those previously employed in marine professions. From an environmental perspective it is interesting to observe how the community of Hvammstangi, which once regularly caught seals and whales for food, fuel and export, are now dependent on the continued abundance of these species for their own livelihoods. This is, however, a risk because there is then a smaller economic mix, as a result of prioritising the short-term goals of economic sustainability over the more long-term thinking surrounding social sustainability (Saarinen 2013). Nevertheless, there is a strong social element to the final point made by PS regarding the fishermen-turned-tour guides which is of particular relevance: “they can actually get home in the evening to their family,” she says (Appendix 7: 29). Fishing is something most people are familiar with in Iceland, and it is understood that it is dangerous work taking those involved in it away from their families for extended periods. This can present challenges for family units and communities as a whole. The fact that running day tours by definition mean those running them will not be away overnight, and will not be engaging in dangerous work, results in a far more stable platform for families. Without doubt PS believes that a move from the fishing industry to tourism has improved the quality of life of those involved, and this is echoed by conversations held with others whose family members previously worked in fishing. Quality of life and wellbeing are at the heart of social sustainability, and every aspect of the tourism industry that improves the wellbeing of residents raises the threshold at which social tourism capacity could be reached in these communities (Moscardo et al. 2017).

Also at the core of sustainability is ensuring that development also enhances the prospects of future generations, and numerous examples of this were cited during conversations in these Icelandic communities. Above all, this was concerned with keeping younger generations in the communities in which they grew up. During the 1990s and 2000s it was commonly thought that there were few jobs for younger people outside Reykjavik, so as soon as they completed their education, many would leave their communities and move to the capital. The financial services boom, entirely concentrated in Reykjavik, exacerbated this trend. The effect on communities outside the capital region was to leave them in a state of stagnation, with a declining ageing population and a workforce decreasing in size (Appendix 1; Appendix 6). This meant fewer services, slower economic development and little diversity of ideas, which KB notes has a particularly significant impact on older people who traditionally relied on their families as they grew old (Appendix 3: 14). However, as SR notes, the rise of tourism, has led to younger people being able to find work in their home towns without having to move to the capital (Appendix 1: 4). KRB states that this is “helping to keep our community together more,” which is particularly poignant given her town of Egilsstaðir in east Iceland is a 12 hour drive from Reykjavik – having younger generations stay in the east of the country certainly helps family unity (Appendix 6: 26). Moreover, PS describes how having more young people, who can now get jobs in tourism, living in the area strengthens the sense of community (Appendix 7: 30). In this way it is possible to see how the economic development from tourism has rejuvenated not just the economic composition of many communities in Iceland, but their demographic composition too. By ensuring families are not split up by economic necessity, cohesion and togetherness are enhanced. The strength of networks and relationships within communities allow for the greater production of social capital (Putnam 2000). The fact that tourism bears some responsibility for this allows it to build up a credit with the locals, which contributes positively to social sustainability (Moscardo 2014).

However, one should be slightly hesitant to rush to give too much credit to tourism policy makers and the large operators, because the ‘tourism industry’ in Iceland has two distinct levels. On a national level are the larger operators, the airlines, the government and DMO, responsible for the destination marketing and bringing tourists to the country. However, in the vast majority of the country the main tourism activities are conducted by SMEs (Jóhannesson, & Huijbens 2013: 139). In fact, it is only in Reykjavik and to a lesser extent Akureyri where the larger operators are working. In the smaller communities, like Hallormstaðir, Egilsstaðir, Hvammstangi and Laugarbakki the tourism industry is made up of an entrepreneurship bricolage (Garud & Karnøe 2003). The tourism entrepreneurship that has helped the rejuvenation of these places and given opportunities to more people in their home communities is largely organic, coming from within the communities themselves. To a certain extent the success of these endeavours has been dependent on tourists flying into Reykjavik on subsidised flights through the overall tourism strategy, but this is far from always the case. GE and KRB, for example, both discuss how significant a role cruise tourism has to play during the busy summer months (Appendix 5: 20; Appendix 6: 24). These are arrangements made directly with the authorities in Akureyri and Egilsstaðir, with infrastructural commitments fulfilled by local operators. This tourism infrastructure point is also an important one, because the tourists would not travel to these smaller communities if there were not, among other things, hotels, restaurants and activities on offer, so the local people have as much responsibility for bringing in tourism as larger operators.

Therefore, the manner with which credit is given to the tourism industry from regular local people is misplaced. Tourism is not a supernatural phenomenon that is by chance conferred upon particular destinations at special moments. The rejuvenation and regeneration that has taken place in Iceland since 2010 is due to agency on national, regional and community levels (Gil-Alana & Huijbens 2018: 22). Certainly, overall tourism strategy has played a role, but the contributions of individual members of communities spread around the whole country cannot be underestimated. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this thesis what is instructive is that there is a strong feeling of goodwill towards the industry as a whole, whether large operator or small enterprise. Goodwill is the basis for the creation of social capital, a stock of which prevents a destination from reaching its social tourism capacity (Andereck & Vogt 2000: 29). Enough of this in Iceland is providing a strong boost to the social sustainability of tourism activities in the areas researched.

‘They don’t know how to drive in Iceland’

This analysis has hitherto concentrated on the general effects of tourism, rather than the day to day impacts of increased visitor numbers. However, examining the behaviour of tourists unlocks some different viewpoints, which have an effect on the overall debate. This section will now look at the salient experience of tourism on an everyday basis, as seen from the perspective of both locals and a tourism researcher: the way tourists drive when visiting Iceland.

In all interviews there was one theme that emerged repeatedly, often without questioning. This was the perceived difference in driving abilities between Icelandic residents and visitors from overseas. SR comments on the narrative, saying that those complaining about tourists “mostly complain about the driving” (Appendix 1: 3), while DR says it is the only thing that would make him want to see less tourism (Appendix 2: 10). GB recounts seeing tourists “driving too fast in big cars that they can only just keep on the road,” (Appendix 2: 10). SS says sometimes the tourists “look like they have never driven a car before” (Appendix 3: 14), while KB is certain that tourists are involved in more accidents than Icelandic people (Appendix 3: 14). TS describes it as a “big problem”, which GE adds to with his own experience of perceived poor driving by tourists (Appendix 5: 22). KRB, meanwhile expresses concern that tourists do not drive appropriately for the conditions (Appendix 6: 25), which is echoed by PS, who says that the tourists often “act stupid on the roads” (Appendix 7: 29).

The point of listing these very similar comments from almost every informant is to demonstrate that there is a definite narrative within various Icelandic communities which stereotypes the way tourists drive. This is important because it was the key aspect of negative tourist behaviour cited by informants. The view is that bad driving endangers themselves and others – often local residents - on the roads. Furthermore, endangering themselves also puts others in harm’s way because it is local people who have to rescue them (Appendix 1: 3). This is seen as a considerable human and economic cost to Iceland that would not be there without tourism. Whether the claim that tourist drivers are worse than locals is true will be investigated below, but regardless of the veracity of the claim, the claim itself creates a local pain point attributed directly to tourism. This is a problem where social sustainability is concerned, because it undermines the position of tourism within the community by having a negative effect on social capital. Given that one of the prerequisites of social sustainability is that development should have no negative effect on social capital (Moscardo et al. 2017: 287), local views on tourist driving behaviours could have an overall impact on the sustainability of the tourism industry as a whole.

However, we should explore how this narrative emerged, and what continues to fuel it, to understand the strength of this feeling. Individual instances of bad driving from tourists are not hard to spot when driving around the country. There is one main ring road which is the only way from region to region, so all traffic follows the same route. Despite this, with Iceland being such a sparsely populated country, outside Reykjavik traffic is limited, which leads to more attention being paid to other cars on the road. Tourists are recognisable for their rental cars – which regularly have stickers on them advertising the company they belong to – as well as their appearance. Iceland is an almost entirely caucasian country, and locals can well recognise non-Icelandic people when they see them. There is particular focus given to the driving of tourists from Asia, who form a growing proportion of tourists to Iceland (Icelandic

Tourist Board 2019). For example, both GB and KRB, who claim that visitors from Asia have only driven on a simulator before arriving in Iceland and renting a car (Appendix 2: 10; Appendix 6: 25). Aside from this being a sweeping generalisation of visitors from a continent of over 40 countries and four billion people, this view must originate from somewhere. Part of this is that because Asian people are different in appearance to Icelanders, they are easier to identify. If, for example, a Chinese person is seen driving erratically then one can quickly make the assumption that they are a tourist. Such an instance was observed on the mountain road between Egilsstaðir and Akureyri in the north east of the country, where a 4x4 vehicle containing a family with east-Asian appearance sped past at a speed well over the speed limit, in a fashion that looked far from safe. A few kilometres further on, the same car had been stopped by the police and was, presumably, receiving a fine. Most residents can report seeing similar things, but in no way does this enable one to draw conclusions about visitors from an entire continent. This is important because it leads to a rising notion of ‘otherness’ where one’s own identity is formed by comparing oneself to those with different cultural identities (Hale & Street 2013). Such a feeling, if allowed to develop, can damage relationships between tourists and locals by fostering resentment towards the visitors. This has the possibility to disrupt relationships between the tourism industry and local people not involved in the industry, and consequently could fracture social cohesion. This risks undermining social sustainability because socially sustainable tourism relies upon an integrated, collaborative relationship between all stakeholders in a destination, and a fracture between the two groups undermines this (Timur & Getz 2009: 221).

This risk has been identified, and attempts are being made on a national level to give tourists the information and education they need to not get into trouble when driving around Iceland. GB and DR discuss this in its most obvious form, which is a board in the arrivals hall of Keflavik airport with a wide variety of information about staying safe in Iceland, one part of which concerns driving - see figure 6, below (Appendix 2: 10).



Figure 6: Travel information board at Keflavik airport. (Dominic Wood-Hill 2019)

Information boards of this kind are found near all major tourist attractions, along with all of these materials being available on the internet – in a wide range of languages. The highways website has a clear colour coding system warning travellers of the severity of any potentially hazardous conditions. There is also close co-operation between the Icelandic Highways Agency and the car rental companies, requiring the rental companies to provide guidance materials with every car rented. This comes in the form of a large flyer attached to the steering wheel of each car at the start of the rental, so each driver is forced to read important advice like where it is safe to stop and hazards to look out for, such as one-way bridges. Furthermore, all car rental companies provide cars with spikes for snow during winter month. Driving safely also constitutes a section of the Iceland Academy, a series of educational materials available on the DMO's Inspired by Iceland website which aims to prepare tourists well for their trip to Iceland, by educating them in what Icelandic people view as appropriate behaviour (Inspired by Iceland 2019). Further, the police regularly close roads if conditions are not suitable. All of these measures are designed to keep tourists safer on the roads when they visit Iceland. Improving tourist driving behaviour should not only reduce negative experiences for the tourists themselves, but could improve the opinion of locals towards these tourists. This would go some way to removing the biggest complaint that locals have about tourists in Iceland, and consequently improve social sustainability.

However, this narrative of the dangerous tourist driver is fuelled by more than isolated observations and local conversations, to the extent to which the strategies just mentioned may have little impact on altering local attitudes towards tourist drivers. Responsibility for this developing into a national narrative rests with the Icelandic news media. After making her comments about Asian drivers, GB adds that, "we also read it in the news," as if to validate her own views (Appendix 2: 10). SS says that it is "very common" to see tourists being involved in car accidents in the news while YJ cannot point to any of his own experiences with bad tourist driving, but does mention seeing it "in the news" (Appendix 3: 14; Appendix 4: 19). This is echoed by TS who says that these stories appear "often" in the news (Appendix 5: 22). However, when asked whether car accidents involving Icelandic people are reported on the news, KB answers that, "we hear about many more accidents involving tourists." (Appendix 3: 14).

This is how accidents happen: Video shows rental car repeatedly swerve into wrong lane

BY STAFF | MAR 22 2018



DANGEROUS DRIVING The driver made repeated attempts to kill himself and other drivers by swerving onto the wrong side of the road. Photo/Screenshot from video, see below

In recent weeks two people foreign travelers have died and three seriously injured in head-on collisions caused by a driver either driving in the wrong lane or swerving onto the wrong side of the road. Driving conditions in both cases were ideal, with no ice or snow on the road and perfect visibility.

Read those TripAdvisor reviews when you stop the car

While we do not know the cause of these accidents, and await the findings of the investigation of the Transportation Safety Board, many have pointed out that foreign travelers are all too often distracted by the scenery while they are driving. Rather than

Figure 7: Media reporting of 'dangerous tourist driver' narrative (Iceland Mag 2018)

This could mean one of two things. Either that Icelandic people are not involved in as many car accidents as tourists, or the media chooses to report those involving tourists more frequently. The fact that locals accounted for half of road accident deaths in the previous year, suggests that it is the latter that is true (Iceland Monitor 2019). Just 0.013 per cent of tourists were involved in a road accident last year (Icelandic Transportation Authority 2018). This practice of over-reporting tourist road accidents compared to those involving locals can be questioned on a number of levels. SS is of the opinion that "not much happens in Iceland that's interesting," so incidents involving tourists make headlines because there is little competition from other stories (Appendix 3: 15). However, one can read a little more into the promotion of the 'dangerous tourist driver' narrative. History has shown how compelling messaging can be when it presents a clear divide between the self and the other, and whether this is an intentional technique employed by Icelandic news outlets or not, it is definitely present. The above example (figure 7) of an article from Icelandic media is typical of the reporting of these stories. At best, it is speculative and at worst it is riddled with conscious bias. By regularly reporting this manner of stories an impression of tourist behaviour is built up in the minds of locals without having to have any direct experience of this behaviour. As a result, this has become a somewhat poisonous narrative in Iceland, especially given that the scale of the issue is significantly smaller than presented. Clearly this can have an effect on social sustainability by undermining the good news stories emerging from the tourism industry, but it also presents an interesting perspective when exploring social tourism capacity.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, social tourism capacity is the maximum amount of tourism activity an area can support before the industry is rejected by the local community. However, it is almost impossible to put an exact figure on the number of tourists that would meet this threshold. Consequently, alternative models like Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) have been shown to be more useful, because they take into account the fact that some aspects of tourist behaviour may have a greater impact on community tolerance than others. In this case, strategies can be adopted to change tourist behaviour, to avoid incurring the negative feelings of local residents. For example, the range of measures aimed at avoiding road accidents discussed above, in this instance. However, where local people have an idea of tourist behaviour that differs from the reality of the situation (for example, believing that all visitors from Asia have a lower level of driving skill than Icelandic people), changing tourist behaviour will have a limited effect on attitudes of locals. An intriguing, and somewhat worrying, situation could emerge if local people were to decide that the number of road incidents involving tourists is getting too high and action should be taken. This could lead to the prohibition of rental cars for certain visitors, or in certain areas. This, in turn, could completely destroy the tourism industry in large swathes of the country only accessible by car. In this scenario, therefore, social tourism capacity could be reached based on a perception of tourism that is not wholly reflected in reality. This risk is high enough to demand a response from a wide range of tourism stakeholders, either to combat the existing narrative or to project an alternative narrative.

Such an example demonstrates that social tourism capacity can be fickle in the factors that impact it, and calls into question the ease with which social tourism capacity can be intentionally altered. Therefore, approaches concentrating on tourist behaviour still do not provide a perfect alternative to numerical carrying capacity because perception of behaviour can have a greater impact on attitudes than the behaviour itself. In addition, this calls into doubt a wide range of management practices aimed at improving social sustainability, from fostering community connections to attempts to improve the quality of life of residents, because this can be undermined by narratives built on anecdotes, that have no direct relation to the true situation. More useful is the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) approach, which looks at changes in the tourism environment, rather than just tourist behaviour, therefore acknowledging that carrying capacity can be affected by factors beyond how tourists are behaving (Buckley 1999: 707). In this instance, tourism could be functioning in a perfectly sustainable fashion, but if certain practices develop a negative perception, they could quickly be rejected by the local community. Tackling this from an LAC perspective would remove causation from the tourists and look at other factors, such as a negative narrative, impacting social sustainability in the area (Saarinen 2013: 5). This could lead to a more sustainable approach which both tries to manage tourist behaviour whilst also effectively communicating with locals.

There is, perhaps, one saving grace for this. The locals who repeated this narrative did so because they were directly asked to think of negative aspects of the tourism industry. The interview situation creates opinionated people who otherwise may be quite apathetic to the subject, and certainly this was the case during informal conversations before and after the interviews. A few such comments crept into the interviews themselves. SS comments that “the tourists don’t affect our lives,” (Appendix 3: 14) while YJ says, “it’s still possible to completely ignore the tourists if you want to,” (Appendix 4:19), suggesting that there is far from an obsession with the actions of tourists among Icelandic locals. Recounting these sentiments is in no way intended to undermine the previous point about the danger of false or embellished narratives, but it is always useful to have a sense of perspective. SS is a guitar

teacher and YJ is a chef currently training high school apprentices; tourism has had an impact on their lives but it is not their most important concern.

A Vulnerable Industry

The final part of this analysis looks to explore the perspectives and views of the informants, in order to unpick what is one of the most significant threats to tourism's social sustainability in Iceland: the vulnerability of the industry itself. This is necessary because up until 2019, when the research for this project was carried out, tourism has been in a period of growth. Many of the findings discussed so far certainly indicate a positive disposition towards tourism among locals, however, all have been interviewed in the context of a booming tourism industry. Tourism is widely regarded as making a positive contribution to society, and as a result, local residents are willing to overlook some aspects that might otherwise be damaging to the industry's future. For example, though all respondents mentioned tourists getting into trouble on the roads, none said this would change their overall positive view of tourism (Appendices 1-7). However, should the situation change, and tourism stop providing the perceived benefits, tourism's positive social capital could be significantly diminished and these anti-tourism narratives could have a much stronger effect on social sustainability.

The Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) provides a useful framework to research Icelandic tourism, especially at this time where tourism growth appears to be starting to slow down (Appendix 1: 5). In Butler's original model, this slowdown takes place because a destination's visitor total begins to exceed the appropriate number.

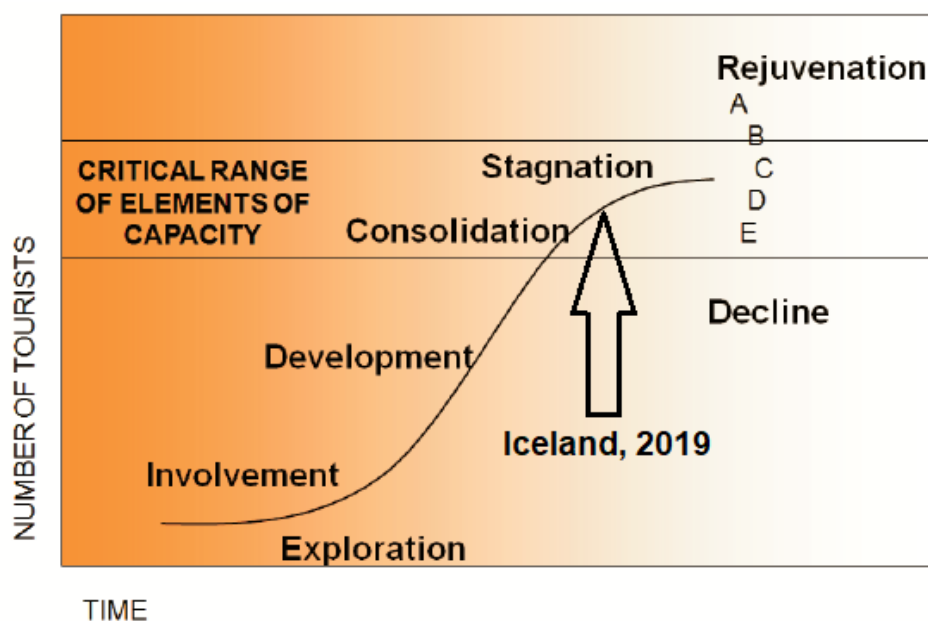


Figure 8: Tourism Area Lifecycle Model showing Iceland's current position (adapted from Butler 2006).

This thesis has hitherto looked at this from the perspective of non-tourists, with social tourism capacity deemed to be the threshold struck first by the Icelandic tourism industry. However, given that there are few signs of this within the data collected, it could instead be that the destination is nearing its recreational tourism capacity, where the experience of tourists becomes diminished to the extent to which number of visitors begins to decrease. Literature on this subject regularly cites the number of other tourists within the destination, particularly overcrowding, as having an impact on recreational tourism capacity (Williams & Gill 2005: 196). However, this has not been identified in any of the areas

researched in Iceland, either through interviews or by participant observation. As DR put it, so simply, “We have loads of space here for everyone.” (Appendix 2: 8). However, the number of tourists is having an effect in other ways. SR attributes the slowdown in tourism to the strengthening of the Icelandic Kronor, making trips more expensive for tourists (Appendix 1: 5). This is a direct result of the influx of foreign money into the country as a result of tourism. The question then becomes more about value, with the experiences acquired being compared with the money spent. Travel to Iceland is not cheap, and this can have an effect on expectations. Therefore, although overcrowding is not the same as in many other popular European destinations, it is certainly significantly harder to have a wilderness experience since the explosion in tourism. YJ and MT, the two respondents living closest to the uninhabited central Inner Highlands area, explained how areas previously regarded as wilderness no longer have these characteristics (Appendix 4: 17). If this perceived lessening of experience is correct, it presents a series of challenges to Icelandic tourism, not least social sustainability. If the country reaches its recreational tourism capacity then social tourism capacity will quickly follow. This is because a fall in tourism numbers would mean less investment in communities and less custom for local businesses, as well as fewer jobs and opportunities. All of these are items that have added to the tourism industry’s social capital, making it more socially sustainable. This link between the satisfaction of tourists and the tolerance of locals shows a clear vulnerability that, due to the dependence of entire communities on the tourism industry, could have much wider effects on Icelandic society as a whole.

One of the key reasons for this is the short peak tourism season in Iceland. Due to inclement weather conditions, it is not possible to visit many of the country’s attractions in winter months, so the vast majority of tourists visit from June – August. This is not an unusual phenomenon in a tourist destination, but in Iceland the situation is more pronounced. Each year, arrivals during these three months account for close to half of the total annual number (Icelandic Tourist Board 2018). From an everyday social sustainability point of view at ground level, this can present a significant positive for the industry. Multiple informants pointed out that it was easier to tolerate the surge in tourism because it was only over a few short months. KRB, for example, mentions how “it’s a very short busy season here”, which prevents tourists from outnumbering the community for the whole year round (Appendix 6: 24) – although it does create reliance on summer income, as discussed below. Meanwhile, when asked how Akureyri is responding to tourism’s pressures, TS answers that, “it’s very quiet for eight months of the year.” (Appendix 5: 23). One of the starting points for this thesis was that so few people live in many of the communities that local people may feel so strongly affected by the weight of disruption caused by overwhelming tourist numbers that they reject the industry outright. This referred specifically to communities like Hallormsstadir, with under 50 people, or Laugarbakki with under 100. However, this did not emerge as an issue during interviews, partly because of the short tourism season, meaning that the smaller communities would be less affected for large parts of the year.

While ostensibly an asset from a social sustainability point of view, the fact that so many tourist arrivals, and therefore so much tourism revenue, is tied up in a few months is a significant risk. There are a wide variety of circumstances in which tourists could be prevented from visiting the country during the summer. Take, for example, the event that was the great stimulus for Icelandic tourism expansion, the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in 2010. The reason why this captured international headlines was because it effectively imposed a no-fly zone over the north Atlantic Ocean and much of Europe. The 2010 eruptions took place at the end of April, the very start of the tourism season, and

caused major disruption throughout the month of May. The volcano continued erupting until October that year. Eyjafjallajökull remains an active volcano, and is one of multiple such volcanoes in Iceland. Similar events to those could be catastrophic for Icelandic tourism, particularly as, due to the country's island location, the vast majority of tourists arrive by air. Such events need not be as dramatic as a volcanic eruption. KRB describes the strikes that taking place among hospitality workers at the time of the interview, due to claims of poor pay and working conditions (Appendix 6: 26). When quizzed informally about the industrial action, KRB revealed that the vast majority of hospitality workers in Iceland come from overseas, most being part of Iceland's large Polish population. This would present an intriguing angle for further research, because the Polish community appears to be a sub-community within Icelandic society, which has different values to the majority Icelandic population. This has not received much focus in this thesis because this community is mainly concentrated around the urban capital region. However, it is of interest because from a social sustainability point of view, this industrial action could herald the start of a greater rift in community relations as fractures appear between immigrant workers and local residents. At the heart of this is the fact that the benefits of tourism development have not been shared equally, which is crucial for social sustainability (Moscardo et al. 2017: 289).

KRB, however, claims that the industrial action will improve the tourism industry in the long term by improving the working conditions and pay of these workers. Nevertheless, a strike in an essential sector of the tourism industry during peak months could severely harm the welfare of the industry. By preventing hotels from functioning, these hospitality workers could well plunge the industry into crisis, as with those working in the airline industry. An air traffic controllers' strike, of the kind that has taken place regularly in continental Europe in recent years, for example, could have a crippling effect on tourism receipts if it took place in peak season. All of these factors could create a situation in which tourism stops providing the revenue so many Icelandic people have begun to rely on. In smaller communities, it would lead to potential strife as the tourism-fuelled rejuvenation stalls and existing businesses have to share a smaller pot between them. Meanwhile, members of these communities would have less of a reason to overlook certain disruptive elements of the tourism industry, culminating in a rapid arrival at their social tourism capacity. The social sustainability that exists currently, therefore, is built on a level of productivity from the tourism industry that is far from secure.

A further worry for the Icelandic tourism industry is the dependence on air travel in the long term. As arguments for environmental sustainability continue to gather strength, it is only a matter of time before attention turns to air travel, and its impact on the environment – particularly climate change. Icelandic tourism is particularly vulnerable in this area because it relies so heavily on aviation for its tourist arrivals. The only tourists not flying in visit the country as part of a cruise, but the cruise industry also faces considerable environmental challenges. It also takes two days to reach Iceland by boat from Europe, and longer from the USA. Consequently, with pressure applied to tourists to journey less by air and holiday more in their own countries, Iceland is likely to lose out significantly, especially as it does not have a domestic market to make up for the shortfall like other nations (Icelandic Tourist Board 2019). What is further striking about the environmental argument is that Iceland cannot ignore it, nor be apathetic towards it, because large parts of the country's tourism are being affected by climate change. Glaciers, for example, form a huge attraction in the south of the country, but these are retreating year on year, making it more difficult to provide the same experience for tourists. The Icelandic tourism industry champions environmentally-sustainable tourism, but it is hard to argue that

a trip is environmentally sustainable if it starts and ends with a long-haul flight. Therefore, in the medium to long term Iceland needs to find a solution to the inevitable increase in pressure on the aviation industry. As mentioned previously, the different categories of sustainability are inextricably linked. A focus on environmental sustainability has the potential to undermine the economic success of a destination, and without an industry that is functioning economically, it is hard to achieve social sustainability.

Summary

It is clear that the benefits of tourism are known, and well regarded across a range of communities in Iceland. Its surge at a time of economic depression for Iceland elevated its impact and gave rise to an idea of a 'tourism miracle'. This also had tangible effects at grass roots community level, with real changes that even those not directly employed by the tourism industry could detect. This has significantly added to the tourism industry's social capital, and means that some of the negative aspects can be overlooked. An oft-cited example of this is touristic driving behaviour. Though perhaps trivial on the surface, the narratives that underpin this can have much wider and far-reaching effects on the sustainability of the tourism industry. The largest threat of all, however, is posed by the fragility of the industry itself. A range of factors mean that it could collapse just as quickly as it grew, and this would be catastrophic for community wellbeing, and therefore social sustainability, in a range of communities across Iceland.

Discussion

Social sustainability theory is still a growing area of tourism research, with limited consensus on the subject. The research conducted for this thesis exposed one area in which more attention is definitely required. This is in explaining how and why a local community within a tourism destination has the ability to reject tourism if they so choose, or indeed to influence the long-term success of tourism. Alternatively, it is in explaining how some communities may be unable to successfully oppose tourism activities. What has emerged carrying out the research and analysis for this thesis is that power is a central component to social sustainability in tourism destinations.

The focus of this thesis thus far has been on determining how close some of Iceland's communities are to their social tourism capacity, and consequently how socially sustainable tourism activities are in these communities. But perhaps this has been the wrong question to ask, for it just assumes that if these communities decided to reject tourism, they would have the ability to do so. This is taken from tourism literature, which argues that social tourism capacity is a threshold at which tourism is so socially unsustainable that it can no longer operate in an area (McCool & Lime 2001: 379). Yet little consideration is given to the mechanisms by which a community may cast out tourism, or indeed if it is actually possible for communities to do so. One can look at popular destinations like Barcelona and Venice, where it appears that the threshold of social tourism capacity has been reached, but actions of local people have not been able to thwart tourism activity entirely (Goodwin 2017: 7). Models of destination development, like the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) note that destinations will go into decline once reaching their carrying capacity, but the surrounding commentary concentrates far more on the touristic experience than that of local people (Butler 2006). This would suggest that the TALC is more appropriate when exploring recreational tourism capacity, where it is tourists who determine the longevity of tourism in a destination (Williams & Gill 2005: 196). The implication of this is that local people have less influence over the future role of tourism in their community. If this is the case, the local community would not be able to reject tourism if they wanted. However, research conducted for this thesis indicates that community members in Iceland's tourist destinations would indeed be able to put a halt to tourism in their local area, should they wish to. Furthermore, they also hold the key to ensuring the social sustainability of tourism in their community. The explanation for this lies in understanding the role of power in achieving – and preventing – social sustainability. This section therefore seeks to understand power as a component of sustainability in Icelandic tourism.

Origins of Power in Icelandic Communities

This thesis will not seek to unpack the wealth of literature on power, particularly its different types and uses. Instead, the aim of this section is to discuss power purely as it relates to sustainability in the context of Icelandic tourism. More specifically, the degree to which the same elements that are necessary for social sustainability are at the heart of building powerful communities that can have real control over the future of tourism in their surroundings. As has been outlined, there is no precise mechanism for guaranteeing social sustainability, especially as it may be strongly affected by

uncontrollable factors. However, there it is most likely to be achieved when there are examples of the following eight elements (Moscardo et al. 2017: 287):

1. **Collective action**
2. **Networks**
3. **Co-operation**
4. **Relationships**
5. **Shared norms**
6. **Shared values**
7. **Social interaction**
8. **Trust**

When successfully combined, these can be more simply defined as community cohesion, which is essential for social sustainability (Timur & Getz 2009: 222). However, what became apparent during research for this thesis was that it was also this cohesion that gave the Icelandic communities the power to influence tourism in their area. Of the above eight elements of social sustainability, it was the **shared norms** and **shared values** of Icelandic locals that underpinned cohesion within their communities. These values differ from country to country and continent to continent, but there was a consistency of values and priorities in all of the places visited during the research phase of this project.

The dominant attitude detected was one of stoic confidence, in which there were no particularly emotional reactions to the role of tourism because they were confident that they had the support system and relationships to manage any hardships that the tourism industry might throw at them. One on hand this meant coping with the potential demise of tourism in their area, and the subsequent economic effects, whilst on the other hand there was a feeling among locals that they would have the ability to influence future tourism decision making in their community, if it continued to thrive. An ingrained ability to tolerate hardship is perhaps not difficult to understand in such a harsh and inhospitable country as Iceland. Its ascent to a developed nation only took place following the Second World War, right up to which it was the least-wealthy country in Europe (Jóhannesson & Huijbens 2013: 138). Therefore, a period in which regular crop failures, devastating natural disasters were common, alongside limited access to education, healthcare or a varied diet are well within living memory. As a result, there is a widespread sense of managed expectations, in which limited emotion is poured into day to day activities, because this makes disappointment easier to tolerate. A frequently observed example of this is in terms of planning ahead. The research and interview schedule for this thesis was roundly ridiculed by all informants, who simply assumed that a day-by-day, month-long itinerary for travel throughout Iceland would be so off course by the second day that it was a waste of time even making such a plan in the first place. A direct quote from KRB (see Appendix 6) outside of the interview environment was, “Icelandic people don’t make plans, because we would always be disappointed when they didn’t work out.” The resulting situation is one in which people regularly turn up unannounced at each other’s doorsteps, which the uninformed host appears completely relaxed about. The reasoning behind this stems from the weather so frequently prohibiting travel, but this has led to a fluidity of social relations that is at the core of this stoicism. However, this tolerance should not be overestimated, as it only extends as far as matters outside residents’ control, such as the weather. An outwardly relaxed attitude can, at first glance, conceal deeply entrenched views about

the structure and purpose of society. There is, for example, a consistent view of the environment, in that nature should be respected and protected. Meanwhile, there is a deep focus on family connections, which, due to the size of some of the towns and villages studied, often extends to large part of the community. The focus here is on the welfare of younger members of society, especially on ensuring they have opportunities for future development. Should the introduction of any activity in their communities oppose these values, then there is power within the community to influence development (Appendix 6: 25). Alternatively, should development align with local values, such as tourism bringing jobs for young people, thus enabling them to stay in the community, then this development will receive local support (Appendices 1; 6). However, perhaps it is not the individual values themselves that are most important, but the fact that these values are shared. One of the difficulties of achieving social sustainability is the range of interest groups clamouring to have their voices heard, often creating a situation that is in no one's best interests (Dodds & Butler 2009: 44). This is made infinitely simpler when the majority within a community hold the same values and interests. By acting as a homogenous entity, the community has the power to give support to tourism activities, dramatically improving the chances of social sustainability. Alternatively, it has the power to potentially halt all tourism development by actively opposing it.

Necessary Components of Power Creation

It is not enough to simply say that power comes from shared values. Returning to the eight most important elements of social sustainability (Moscardo et al. 2017), **shared values and norms** give a platform for the development of other elements of community action, particularly the foundation for strong **relationships**. As discussed, Icelandic attitudes to social interaction appear, on the surface at least, extremely relaxed. Yet far from demonstrating weakness in the social structure, this is an example of quite the opposite; the reason why plans can be altered at a moment's notice without fear of offending the affected party is because of the strength of relationship that exists within these communities. These relationships are developed and enhanced through fluid and regular **social interaction**. These strong relationships are the foundation for four of the other key elements of social sustainability, namely, **networks, collective action, co-operation and trust**. The **network** is the means by which local residents are connected, and the simplest way to understand how the community is able to unite to support or oppose activities within their area. There is no formal membership of the network, but membership relies upon other strong connections, such as long-term residence in the same location, family ties or very closely-shared views. This network is the means by which **collective action** takes place, for it is the way in which different members of the community are joined together, providing a means for communication and an assumption of similar values. The strength of the collective action is largely determined by the degree of **co-operation** between members of the network. It is necessary for members of the network to work together in order to set, and achieve their goals; without this unity of thought and action, the network has significantly less power to exert on the wider community. Finally, **trust** is absolutely essential to ensuring this co-operation. Without trust, the whole endeavour can be undermined, as community members are unwilling to commit to or work towards their goals for fear of others impeding their success.

What then emerges, if all of these elements are aligned, is a community acting as a unified entity towards a series of shared goals that stems from their shared values, and through this united approach they acquire the power to strongly influence tourism within their communities. Such was the case in the smaller communities researched in Iceland, where it was difficult to detect significant differences in opinion among locals in the same community. This manifested itself in the way local residents were confident that decisions about tourism made by those in the community in decision-making positions such as politicians, members of public institutions or employees of larger tourism operators, would correspond with the views of the wider community, because it was the community who actually held the power. Therefore in this case, community power to enable or reject tourism is not given or conferred from above, or from outside. Instead it emerges from within, a product of long-nurtured relationships and values, that form the basis for the powerful community group.

Linking Community Cohesion and Social Sustainability

From this explanation, unity emerges as the key component of power within communities, and in this context, unity is synonymous with cohesion. Cohesion is cited as one of the most important, if not the most important element of social sustainability (Timur & Getz 2009: 222). Yet it has hitherto been difficult to draw a direct line between cohesion and social sustainability. However, introducing power to this situation makes it much easier to understand the route via which social sustainability is achieved in a tourism destination. This is because it is not enough to just have community cohesion; unifying the community does not instantly bring social sustainability. Cohesion allows for the creation of a powerful entity, which uses this power to allow residents to determine the outcome of tourism activities so they correspond to locally-held values. Within the Icelandic communities researched, this power partly emerged from, and was partly responsible for strong links between community and responsible stakeholders within the tourism industry, for example, the family in Egilsstadir mentioned by KRB who own multiple tourism business in the town (Appendix 6: 25). Most commonly, these stakeholders would also be part of the community and would therefore share the values that underpin the relationships within it. In other instances, tourism industry figures recognise the power of the community and seek to build relationships in order to enable their own activities. The strength of this power is such that tourism decision making effectively comes from the local residents themselves, thus ensuring that tourism development corresponds to the wishes of vast majority of the community. This leads to tourism that meets the needs of the local population both in the present and future, which is almost the definition of social sustainability. This power does not always need to be exercised. It is often enough to know that the community has the ability to alter the situation, and as a result, decisions can also be made on behalf of residents without their direct involvement, but which correspond to their wishes. Put succinctly, community cohesion produces a strong, homogenous body with the power to influence decision making within the community, which results in socially-sustainable tourism activities. Thus, power is the missing link between community cohesion and social sustainability.

However, this approach can be criticised when taken away from the small communities of Iceland. There is often an assumption when looking into social sustainability that there is just one network or body of people within a community. In fact, there are regularly many networks founded on different

values or connections, the number of which increases as population grows. In Iceland many of the communities are so small and homogenous that this does not take place, but in larger destinations it can be a real challenge for social sustainability (Johanneson & Huijbens 2013: 141). In these instances, power has just as important a role to play, as different networks or interest groups compete to gain the power required to determine decisions. This power struggle either leads to development taking place completely in line with the desires of one interest group, potentially to the detriment of other groups, or it leads to a tourism approach intending to appease all groups but that in fact satisfies none of them entirely. These different groups still have the power to enable social sustainability, but it relies on them sharing values in order to do so.

Another aspect that can be called into question is if this power is actually best placed in the hands of local people. In Iceland, fewer than 20 per cent of the population works in the tourism industry, so among the majority of the populace, the knowledge of the systems and phenomena that govern tourism is limited. It is doubtful that they will always make the right decisions for the good of tourism itself. As discussed, social sustainability cannot be achieved without economic sustainability, and achieving social sustainability requires economic compromise (Saarinen 2013: 7). If the needs of the local people are prioritised so highly that the tourism industry becomes economically unsustainable, then it cannot be the force for good in the community that social sustainability demands. Therefore, social sustainability would usually require either an educated community that can consider the needs of the industry alongside their own, or a balance of power between the tourism industry and local people. However, the Icelandic example presents a third option: that tourism comes from the community. If the key tourism industry stakeholders are an integral part of the community, like PS in Laugarbakki (see Appendix 7), then the needs of the community are also the needs of the tourism industry. Therefore, as long as the power resides with a group that has interests in the wellbeing of the community and the tourism industry, decisions made should have a more sustainable outcome.

This thesis started with the hypothesis that because Iceland's population is so small, especially outside the capital, it would be unable to cope with the sheer weight of tourism. The ever-increasing visitor numbers would have such a disruptive effect to communities in small destinations that the local people would reject it. Yet what emerged was quite the opposite. It is precisely because the communities are so small that they have a greater resilience to the effects of tourism. Small, cohesive communities are able to come together and thus give themselves the power to determine the course of tourism, along lines that satisfy the vast majority of the community. Far from Iceland's small population hindering social sustainability, it is actually one of the strongest enablers for it.

Summary

Power has an important, yet hitherto unexplored role in social sustainability. The Icelandic examples in this thesis show that power resides, and can be generated from, within the communities of tourism destinations. There are a series of essential components for this, but a united, cohesive community rests fundamentally on the shared values of community members. This leads to the creation of a group within the destination that has shared aims for tourism, and has the power and influence to affect decision making in their area. By using this power the community ensures that tourism development

occurs in line with their needs, which, if functioning properly, should create a socially sustainable tourism environment. There are potential pitfalls in this approach, such as having competing interest groups within the same community, and an inability to represent the needs of the tourism industry. However, research in Iceland demonstrated that these potential issues can be avoided if tourism comes from the community itself, resulting in the needs of the tourism industry are also the needs of the tourism industry itself.

Conclusion

This section reflects on the overall aims of the thesis, and seeks to respond to the research question. It touches upon points raised in the previous discussion section and looks at areas for further research. Finally, it includes the author's own personal reflections.

The main research question aimed to stimulate research that would give some indication into how a tourism industry that has been growing rapidly for each of the last ten years might impact on the social sustainability of communities across Iceland.

How is a rapidly-growing tourism industry affecting social sustainability in six communities across Iceland?

The initial hypothesis was that such large tourism numbers – 2.5million this year – in a country of just 350,000 people with little ethnic diversity, most arriving in four months over the summer, would seriously impact the ability of destination communities to achieve social sustainability. Whether just through preventing local people from going about their usual lives on a day to day basis or leading to full structural changes in society, the level of upheaval and disruption would just be too much for the locals to tolerate. This would lead to social tourism capacity being reached, where the amount of tourism activity meets a threshold at which the local people wholly reject the industry.

However, having now explored this in detail, it appears the picture is much more mixed. Tourism has certainly had an impact on all of the communities researched, but for the most part, local people were positive about the changes it has brought. As discussed previously, Iceland was coming out of a deep recession when the tourism boom began to take shape, and this may have helped to cast the introduction of tourism in a much better light. Yet in 2010 there was a vacuum in the country's economy left by the demise of the financial sector, and there were no other flagship industries available to take its place. Consequently, tourism bore the flag for Icelandic economic progress in a very public fashion, and people attributed the country's economic recovery overwhelmingly to tourism. This has led to largely positive attitudes to the industry. Whether on a national level these are more perceptions than the reality is perhaps a research topic for another paper, but it is certainly true that on a local level, tourism is having a real positive economic impact. Multiple informants cited increased employment prospects and earning potential, which is also having positive social effects, through allowing communities to remain together without losing younger members to larger towns and cities, and also avoiding the wider problems that unemployment brings.

On the other hand, in certain aspects the increase in tourism is leading to a hardening of opinion towards non-Icelandic people. The 'bad driver' narrative is the most obvious, and it is a concern from a social sustainability standpoint. Measures are being taken to alter tourist behaviour so this kind of othering will not take place, but it is clearly an established narrative in the Icelandic media, who are determined to propel this image even though its statistical correctness is far from proven. One other area that emerged where cultural integration could prove to be a problem was in the treatment of foreign workers in the tourism industry. The fact that their pay and conditions are different from

Icelandic workers raises questions about the level of social cohesion in society, and the possibility of fractures in the future.

Having said these things, Iceland appears to be some way away from its social tourism capacity. The social capital generated by the positive economic effects of tourism far outweighs the damage done by inappropriate behaviour by tourists. Yet care should be taken in assuming that this will remain the case in the long term. As laid out in detail in the analysis section, tourism in Iceland is vulnerable. A major global event or local natural disaster could seriously damage the productivity of the industry, and expose its lack of resilience in the wake of a significant challenge like the 2010 volcanic eruptions. Support for the tourism industry could be quickly eroded in a situation like this, accelerating these communities towards their social tourism capacity. The economic success of tourism, therefore, also presents a key challenge in avoiding social tourism capacity, because it now forms such a large part of the economy in some smaller communities that its demise would be catastrophic for residents.

Steps to manage the social impacts of tourism on a local level were not always easy to uncover. Tourism development planning within the smaller Icelandic communities comes much more from informal relationships and long-standing networks than established management structures producing official policies. For the most part, this is a huge advantage from a social sustainability standpoint. It means that development takes place according to a locally-generated consensus that is aligned with shared values and goals. Policies and approaches vary from destination to destination, as it reflects the broad needs of the resident groups within each separate area. Therefore, although there is no overarching management framework attempting to ensure that tourism development is socially sustainable, this example shows that such a structure is not always necessary. Despite being informal and on a smaller scale, tourism development that directly involves the local population can indeed be socially sustainable. This way, social capital is created by tourism adhering to local needs, to the extent to which tourism is rendered socially sustainable.

Where there is concern, however, is that awareness of potential risks to the tourism industry seems to be fairly low, and indeed management approaches designed to decrease the vulnerability of the industry were difficult to detect. Key weaknesses like the short tourism season, which could easily be ruined by a major weather or geological event, were celebrated by informants because it meant that disruption from the tourism industry was confined to a limited period of the year. When viewed through the lens of social sustainability, localised tourism decision making should be celebrated for the degree to which it ensures tourism activities meet the needs of locals. However, a balance always needs to be struck between the needs of the present and those of the future, and reducing the industry's vulnerabilities should be a key concern for long-term management. On a national level there are attempts to diversify the country's economy, but this process also requires local buy-in if it is to succeed.

The process through which this would take place would rely heavily on active engagement with the communities directly. As discussed in the previous section, much of the power to influence community development resides in the communities themselves, and there is a definite trend towards expansion of tourism infrastructure over the past decade. However, given that the rate of tourism growth is slowing down it may not be so hard to convince local people of the need to diversify. Though far from everybody works in the tourism industry in Iceland, everyone who was interviewed for this thesis had

an educated opinion on the subject, and were aware of the situation in their own area. Through active local engagement and coherent national strategies, it is possible that the vulnerability of the tourism industry could be mitigated by diversification, borrowing heavily from the example of diversifying into tourism in the late 2000s.

Social sustainability depends heavily on economic and environmental sustainability. As has been mentioned several times, social sustainability relies on economic sustainability. Companies need to be financially stable in order to not always take the most commercial approach to a market. Moreover, environmental sustainability is also vital for Icelandic tourism, because this is the main attraction for tourists. If the environment is destroyed, then so will be the industry. In this situation, tourism would be unable to provide the range of benefits it does right now, that so add to its social capital. Moreover, there is a deep-rooted connection to the environment among local people that comes to the fore of social sustainability. Tourism is supported now because the damage being done to the environment in general is at manageable levels. Should this get out of hand, local people would quickly turn against tourists and the tourism industry. Therefore, it has been established that social sustainability relies on sound economic and environmental management, and though one can research one individual aspect, the three are so closely intertwined as to be co-dependent.

Overall, strong progress is being made towards a sustainable development model in Iceland's touristic communities. This thesis has focused on shedding light on social sustainability, the least-researched aspect of sustainability in tourism. Research in six of these communities has revealed that due to powerful, cohesive communities who are actively engaged in the tourism industry, social sustainability looks achievable. However, it is important to recognise that this model would not be easy to transport to other areas, owing to the fact that current attitudes and perspectives in Iceland are heavily influenced by the events of recent Icelandic history, most significantly the sudden economic decline during the global financial crisis. Moreover, there are a range of threats to the sustainability of Icelandic tourism, not least the dependence of certain communities on the tourism industry as the rate of tourism growth continues to slow.

The challenge, therefore, is to continue the successful approaches and maintain the positive attitudes that emerged from the tourism boom period, into the next, slightly slower-paced, phase of the industry's development in Iceland.

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