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## CHALLENGING THE METAPHOR

A critical assessment of tourist traps in Iceland

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this project is to nuance the embodiment of tourist traps by examining the perspective of locals rather than tourists, using the Golden Circle attractions in Iceland as a case in point. As such, this project will attempt to suggest an updated version of the tourist trap metaphor, one which offers a more nuanced and precise metaphor to that of a tourist trap. Accordingly, this project contends that metaphors, such as tourist traps, reduces places to 'simple versions of reality'. In terms of popular tourism areas, tourist traps can be viewed as a one-sided representation of how these areas are experienced. In other words, tourist traps represent a tourist-centric understanding of how destinations are affected by tourism. Applying the theoretical approach of the local gaze, derived from John Urry's original notion the tourist gaze, this project will analysis the local experience of the Golden Circle attractions through both a mediatized representation and the lived experience of locals. The overall findings of the analysis suggest that the Golden Circle attractions are largely characterized by an underlying power struggle between the hosts i.e. the dominating tourism industry and the tourists. However, while locals are not actively engaged in these popular tourism areas, these places still pertain value and cultural sentiment for the locals. The sentiments that locals carry towards these places become lost in the overshadowing relationship between the hosts and the tourists. As such, while locals are not necessarily visible features of tourist traps, they are still impacted by the monopolizing effects of such enclaves of tourism, leading to resistance towards wider tourism development for non-industry actors such as locals. Accordingly, while the locals do not experience a physical barrier to the Golden Circle attractions, the findings showed that there can be identified a symbolic barrier as the locals do not see a place for themselves within a perpetuating landscape of host and guest dynamics.*

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## Introduction

Metaphors have been a staple in the realm of academic tourism and have played an essential role in how tourism scholars have attempted to make sense of the world. Rhetorical tools such as narratives, metaphors or general discourse surrounding a given area of tourism has been argued to have the power to shape our understanding of a given social setting. In the classic work by Lakoff and Johnson, *the metaphors we live by* (1980), rhetorical tools such as conceptual metaphors can be observed everywhere. From informal everyday language use to intentional strategies as can be observed in marketing, our social reality and the way we navigate through it can be shaped through the way it is framed and subsequently perceived (Adu-Ampong, 2016). Yet, while metaphors can be useful tools to understand certain social realities, there is always a risk of generating a somewhat simplified version of an otherwise complex and dynamic tourism landscape. Accordingly, this calls for the development of new metaphors to capture a more nuanced understanding of certain issues in tourism (Coleman & Crang, 2001, p. 195). The following project seeks to explore the notion of popular areas of tourism through a metaphorical lens. Accordingly, this project will critically approach the metaphor of a *tourist trap*.

Due to the informal nature of the phrase, there can be identified several definitions of what constitutes a ‘tourist trap’. Having examined various definitions some common features can be identified. According to the Oxford dictionary of Tourism and Travel, the definition of a ‘tourist trap’ is a “*Deprecatory description of shop, site, area, or resort that has lost or is losing its appeal because of its popularity*” (Beaver, 2012). Other definitions of the concept include “*a place that attracts and exploits tourists*” (Merriam-Webster, 2019) and “*a crowded place that provides entertainment and things to buy for tourists, often at high prices*” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). As mentioned, while there are several definitions of the term, there are several commonalities that can be identified. Additionally, the various definitions highlight various concepts that have been explored in the academic realm of tourism research. Central to each individual definition is the concept of commodification and consumption reflected through the mention of for instance shops as well as through the emphasized aim of providing entertainment and merchandise for tourists. While the definitions portray this to be in relation to tangible goods and traditional tourism services, there is also an emphasis on the concept of place. Accordingly, one could argue that not only does the tourism consumption occur at a specific place, the place itself is being consumed by large quantities of tourists and businesses. Accordingly, the various definitions refer to these places as overcrowded. This can

also be argued to reflect certain tendencies in popular tourism areas or areas of mass tourism as this form of tourism continues to reshape and homogenize certain destinations and attractions.

Besides the underlying definitions of the term, the blatant linguistic structuring of a ‘tourist trap’ also reveals certain issues. Firstly, looking at the traditional understanding of the binaries of tourism, the term ‘tourist trap’ suggests that there is a divide between a tourist and a local in these places. By referring to it as a *tourist* trap, it can be argued that the term implies the absence of locals in these ‘traps’. Some of the key aspects of mass and over-tourism is the decrease in value of an experience due to the presence of too many visitors. This applies to both locals and visitors alike, yet over-tourism in particular, has been known to create animosity amongst locals towards visitors as well as enforcing the relocation of recreational places for locals (Tourism Recreation Research, 2018). Secondly, the word ‘trap’ implies that tourists are unaware of the inner workings of a place before entering, and it is rather through their consumption of the place that there is a realization of having been misled in some way. Based on this deconstruction of the tourist trap metaphor, there can be identified three main actors within a tourist trap, namely the tourist, the tourism industry and the local. However, the latter can be argued to be placed on the periphery of these popular areas of tourism. Accordingly, this can be argued to highlight that there is a neglected side to tourist traps in terms of the local experience of these places. As such, the metaphor of a tourist trap only captures one side of the social reality of these places, which calls for further exploration. In summation, based on the abovementioned deconstruction, tourist traps can be argued to have four main characteristics as presented below:

Tourist Traps			
Decreasing in value	Increased commodification	Overcrowded by tourists	Dominated by the marketplace

Figure 1 – Visual representation of Tourist Traps

Tourism areas in constant motion. Changes in tourism trends, rising environmental concerns, political instability or homogenization of what once was considered a unique attraction are just some of factors that can initiate changes to the nature of a tourism area. Awareness of the journey of a tourism area has been conceptualized and made famous by Butler’s classic theory of the tourism area life cycle (TALC). Through the TALC model, Butler describes the stages that a tourism area can go through before reaching either a stage of rejuvenation or decline (Butler, 2006, p. 3). All tourism

areas start from a place of exploration. According to Butler, the *exploration* stage means that a place has a point of attraction, considered unique for its cultural or natural distinctive features. At this stage, such an area will be open and available to all, without facilities designed to accommodate visitors. As the area increases in popularity among visitors, it moves to the next stage of the TALC model, namely *involvement* stage. As the word implies, this stage involves low-scale involvement from both residents and governmental actors who acknowledge the potential of increased tourism. Local businesses will also attempt to capitalize on the new-found popularity and the area will slowly start to form after the growing needs of tourists. After gaining the initial popularity, a tourism area enters the *development* stage. This is where the tourism area is peaking, as local involvement declines, marketing efforts increase and visitor facilities become revitalized into bigger and better accommodations, physically making a significant alteration to the original space (pp.5-6). The last stages before a tourism area is faced with rejuvenation or decline is *consolidation* and subsequently *stagnation*. At the consolidation stage, an area has reached its limit in terms of popularity among visitors. These areas will mainly be characterized by tourism facilities, dominated by large industry players. As such, any sense of local engagement will be difficult to spot. Despite this, these areas will continue to be marketed as unique attractions to not face the stage of decline. Before reaching a point of decline, these areas must go through stagnation. Popularity slowly begins to drop and the visitor numbers have reached its maximum level. In this stage, areas will often be faced with issues related to the high number of visitors, the economy infrastructure build around one area or irreversible environmental impacts (p.7).

On the TALC models, tourist traps are most accurately represented between the consolidation and the stagnation stage. As such, tourist traps represent places at peak popularity, developed into areas that are mainly designed for tourists and largely dominated by large industry players. Considering the TALC model, it can be argued to be important to understand this placement for tourist traps as it indicates that tourist traps are on the tipping point of facing either decline or rejuvenation. Accordingly, this can be an essential consideration for destination managers. While the TALC model mainly tackles issues relating to how the tourists will be affected by each stage of the process, Butler briefly addresses issues concerning possible resentment and lack of engagement from locals. The same can be observed in the definition of a tourist trap, as locals are only represented as being in the periphery. However, this notion of marginalization and resentment from locals implies a somewhat one-sided preconception of how locals are impacted by these tourism areas and can be

argued to not capture the nuances of the experiences of a somewhat extensive group of actors within these popular areas and attractions.

Based on the above presented considerations, this project contends that metaphors, such as tourist traps, reduces places to ‘simple versions of reality’. In terms of popular tourism areas, tourist traps can be viewed as a one-sided representation of how these areas are experienced. In other words, tourist traps represent a tourist-centric understanding of how destinations are affected by tourism. Accordingly, this project sets out to nuance the embodiment of tourist traps by examining the perspective of locals rather than tourists in the hopes of generating a more holistic as well as nuanced understanding of what a tourist trap is. Using the Golden Circle attractions in Iceland as a case in point, this project will engage in an empirical investigation on how locals understand these popular tourism places. After analyzing the empirical evidence in relation to the chosen theoretical framework, this project will engage in a discussion about the overall findings and subsequently attempt to understand the local experience of tourist traps. Subsequently, this project will attempt to suggest an updated version of the tourist trap metaphor, one which offers a more nuanced and precise metaphor to that of a tourist trap. The advantage of evolving the metaphor of a ‘tourist trap’ into a more precise representation of these areas is that it can possibly assist in uncovering less visible aspects of the phenomenon. This not only contributes to the overall understanding of popular tourism areas and metaphorical representations but can also be viewed as important from a managerial perspective, as it can assist in improving the balance between the lived experience of both tourists and locals in popular tourism destinations. By suggesting an updated version of the tourist trap metaphor, this project hopes to provide a rhetorical tool that can capture the dynamic nature of tourism as well as a tool that could assist in generating awareness about some of the less visible problematics that surround these popular tourism areas. Based on the TALC model, a managerial consideration of these places is also of importance as tourist traps are placed at the tipping point of either decline or rejuvenation. Accordingly, this project contends that this positioning could possibly become more noticeable and subsequently managed more efficiently by capturing some complex issues in one usable term. Consequently, the following project will examine the above-presented problem areas through the following research question and sub questions:

*What new metaphor could capture a more nuanced understanding of ‘tourist traps’ based on the local’s perspective of the phenomenon?*



- *How are the Golden Circle attractions portrayed through national online news platforms in Iceland?*
- *How do locals experience 'tourist traps' as represented by the Golden Circle attractions in Iceland?*

## Theoretical Framework

As previously mentioned, the overall aim of this project is to nuance the understanding of tourist traps from the perspective of the locals and subsequently attempt to provide an updated version of the tourist trap metaphor, one which can capture a more holistic and nuanced picture of the complexities surrounding popular areas of tourism such as tourist traps. In order to achieve this aim and investigate the previously presented research questions, a theoretical framework has been devised based on an overall review of some of the existing academic literature relating to the chosen area of interest. Accordingly, the following section will present three main theoretical areas that were deemed appropriate for the study at hand, namely: 1): *Metaphors in tourism*, 2): *Host & Guest in Tourism* and 3): *The local gaze*.

### Metaphors in tourism

Metaphors have for a long time been used in our understanding of the social world. While there has been a long-standing theoretical debate on the validity of metaphors as representations of social phenomenon's, the use of metaphors can be found everywhere in contemporary society. Metaphors can be said to be particularly present in the realm of tourism. From informal language use to marketing strategies, metaphors are often applied in order to give meaning to people, places and cultures. This can for instance be observed in the use of the expression '*off the beaten track*' to portray authentic experiences or the semiotic use of picturesque landscapes in marketing to evoke certain narratives pertaining to the destination, such as being a place of adventure or an escape from the everyday environment (Dann, 2002, pp. 3-4).

The use of metaphors is particularly present in the areas of marketing and branding. The rationale behind the use of metaphors in these areas is often linked to the persuasive power of association. If consumers associate with a certain image, it becomes easier to distinguish the image from other competing brands or destinations. This is especially useful as a tool to bridge the gap

between cultures by promoting a destination using a metaphor that resonates with a larger variety of people as something familiar. One of the consequences of employing this form of metaphors as a marketing and branding strategy, is that it often highlights one specific version of a place or product. As a result, other realities become demoted in the process and the lived experience can become simplified or even misrepresented (Jaworska, 2017). This point has been further examined by Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) who argue that DMOs and other tourism actors place their attention on developing a set destination brand identity in order to make sure that the destination is perceived in a specific way. As such, communication through for instance metaphors becomes a powerful tool to draw attention away from any other possible identity that a destination or attraction might have (p.417). Ren and Blichfeldt go on to argue the importance of acknowledging that each destination or attraction comes in various ‘versions’ of both perceived and lived experience and by highlighting one version, other realities become demoted. While a tourist might enter a place with a projected image, such as being in *the city of love* (often applied in the marketing to the city of Paris), the locals might not experience the same romanticized view on their city. As mass tourism increases and the world grows smaller through advances in technology and infrastructure, the contemporary tourist (and local) can be argued to be quite familiar with encountering different ‘versions’ of the same area, making it essential for marketers to consider all possibilities when considering a brand identity. While metaphors and other rhetorical tools can assist in framing some of these versions, one also needs to take other empirical elements into account such as the interaction between people and their surroundings (Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011). The importance of empirical consideration will be further elaborated below.

The concept of society is wide and difficult to define. As such, the complexities of social reality have often been summarized by scholars through the use of metaphors, expressions or similes. At its core, metaphors can be observed as rhetorical tools used to symbolize something that cannot be literally understood. Sociologist John Urry (2000) goes as far as to say that in a poststructuralist world, social reality itself cannot be fully understood without the use of metaphors, and that ultimately all language is metaphorical in nature (p. 21). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), this point is further emphasized as they argue that human comprehension of the social world as well the everyday is entirely structure through the use of metaphors. As such, applying new or different metaphors to a specific place or situation can lead to the construction of new realities and can influence the way people perform and think in a given situation (pp. 4-6). Another important element of this use of metaphors is their ability to generate a sense-based understanding as well. Metaphors can assist in

capturing the somewhat intangible nature of sense-based experiences that can be difficult to describe. In the realm of tourism, this becomes increasingly noticeable in the areas of tourism consumption and performativity, where tourism practices are somewhat intangible and fluid and can thus be difficult to transfer into a literal sense (Jaworska, 2017).

There are both advantages and disadvantages to applying theoretical merit to the use of metaphors in tourism. On one hand, metaphors can be said to capture the paradoxical nature of a tourism in a more comprehensive manner. This is particularly important today, as the world is encountering rapid transformations in every area of life. The constant development of technology, growing environmental concerns and socioeconomic influences of tourism are just some of the areas that need to be readdressed in an inclusive and comprehensive way. This is where metaphors are useful, as they can provide common ground with people and across places, and give meaning to emerging realities that can be difficult to adequately describe (Dann, 2002, pp. 3-4). On the other hand, the use of metaphors to depict larger issues is only feasible if the recipients understand and identify with the metaphor. Some scholars have argued that metaphors are dependent on a certain cultural understanding of the issue being referred to. Additionally, while metaphors can be useful in capturing the transformations of the contemporary world, this also means that metaphors that have previously been used to describe a certain concept need to be constantly reevaluated to make sure it still appropriately grasps the core idea of the concept. In the realm of tourism this can be observed through several theoretical contributions where metaphors have been utilized as headlines to conceptualize several notions. Two notable examples are McCannells ideas of *staged authenticity* from 1973 as well as Urry's notion of *the tourist gaze* from 1990 (and later 2002 and 2011) where metaphors are used to describe two somewhat extensive theoretical notions regarding the social reality of tourism in relation to for example sightseeing and tourist attractions (Dann, 2002, pp. 6-7). Particularly McCannells initial rhetorical conceptualization has generated a multitude of metaphorical distinctions applied by scholars, such as the notion of a 'front' and 'back' stage of an attraction or the use of words such staged and scripted when referring to the social processes of a tourism area (Coleman & Crang, 2001, p. 195).

In more recent times, the field of tourism can be argued to have cemented certain metaphors into the academic vocabulary such as the notion of 'host and guest' when referring to locals and tourists, and the 'front vs back' distinction of tourism attractions, as previously mentioned. The abovementioned examples highlight how the intended and the subconscious use of metaphors in tourism is used consistently as a tool to frame theoretical ideas. Despite the high use of these rhetorical

tools, some argue that the classic metaphors themselves are not being sufficiently examined or challenged in order to assess whether the chosen metaphor still applies to the issue at hand (Adu-Ampong, 2016). One of the reasons for this apparent lack of challenging existing metaphors and their accompanied theoretical basis, is the somewhat subjective nature of these concepts. While the imagery that a metaphor produces can be used as a rhetorical tool to uncover and exemplify specific social realities and provide a foundation for theory, the risk of different interpretations and sensemaking is always present. Accordingly, the need for empirical basis is essential in order to provide metaphors with theoretical reliability. According to Urry (2000), a successful interplay between a metaphor and a theory is highly dependent on how well it is reflected in the empirical grounding. As such, the challenging of one metaphor and the theory behind it, usually leads to the creation of a new metaphor in some form. While it is not impossible to build a theory based on a rhetorical framework such as a metaphor, the empirical foundation is often grounded in findings of an everchanging world. Accordingly, it can be argued that all three elements must be continuously reassessed (p.22).

Throughout this literature review it becomes evident that despite the consistent use of metaphors in tourism, research on matter has seemingly come to a standstill in the field of tourism. While some touched upon the subject of metaphors as a tool in marketing and branding of tourism, the use of metaphors in the academic realm of tourism seems to have gotten little attention since the early 2000s. In particular, the metaphors used in the everyday language of tourism and the possible underlying controversies these metaphors could reflect is a seemingly unexplored area (Adu-Ampong, 2016). As mentioned, one of the aims of this project is to examine what metaphor could possibly capture a more holistic understanding of ‘tourist traps’ based on the local’s perspective. As such, the theoretical framework of metaphors in tourism will be taken into consideration by grounding any new metaphorical suggestions in line with the empirical evidence. Additionally, the theoretical considerations of metaphors can be argued to highlight the need for a critical assessment of current metaphors being applied in tourism. As such, the next section of the theoretical chapter will somewhat challenge the classic metaphorical understanding of host and guests. In relation to tourist traps, this project contends that the traditional binary understanding of host and guest does not adequately describe the roles of the various actors involved in these popular areas of tourism. This notion will be explored in the following section of this project.

## Host & Guest in Tourism

The binary of host and guest has been a fundamental aspect of all social life throughout history. An elementary perspective on the relationship between hosts and guests can be said highlight a form of exchange through for instance hospitality and gifts or more symbolic humanitarian or relational gestures to enrich the life of the 'other'. However, host and guests' relationships can also be observed in terms of conflict, war and power struggles. As such, any encounters between hosts and guests present a landscape of social, political or economic complexities (Jafari & Honggen, 2016, p. 437). Due to the inherent complexities of host and guests' relations, there can be many ways to define what characterizes a host depending on the context. These complexities have been continuously debated within the realm of tourism. In tourism, the traditional understanding of what constitutes a host has developed into various directions. Some scholars have implied an underlying divide between locals and the various institutions that host tourists in the area of hospitality. This notion can be linked back to the growing consumer society after the Second World War and the overarching power of capitalism in contemporary society (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). In relation to tourist traps, it can be argued that the notion of a host becomes separated from the notion of locals through an increased commoditization of hospitality. In the enclaves of tourism such as tourist traps, the tourist's main engagement with hosts becomes represented through their contact with hotels, restaurants and other facilities designed specifically to meet their needs. As such, the guests relationship with hosts becomes formed by the marketplace in the form of commoditized institutions such as hotels and restaurants rather than through an organic connection formed with locals on the basis of meaningful and symbolic encounters such as an exchange of ideas, gifts or cultural understandings (Valerio, 2017).

Two examples of how this divide has been put into perspective are through Ritzers notion of McDonaldization and Bryman's accompanying notion of Disneyization (Bryman, 1999). Overall, these theoretical contributions refer to the commercialization of the consumer society rather than the proliferation of theme parks and fast food restaurants. Both theories emphasize some key concepts that reflect the process of places becoming more standardized, tangible and simple for tourists to consume. According to Bryman and Ritzer, one of the areas where these processes become apparent is through emotional labor and control. Emotional labor is a common aspect of the life of front-line service employees. It refers to the enforced portrayal of certain emotions such as happiness and excitement to enhance the service encounter which does not always correlate to the actual

emotions of the employees (Bryman, 1999, pp. 38-40). Additionally, Ritzer's notion on control highlights that consumers are being subtly controlled by the material set-up of a place such as signs and seating locations, to enable people to consume the product in a certain way. Similarly, employees are controlled through uniform guidelines and behavioral restrictions which enforces the previous notion of emotional labor (Ritzer G. , 2001, pp. 176-177). Alongside this enforced relationship between hosts in the form of hospitality workers, Bryman also portrays the commodification of culture through merchandising and souvenirs as influencing how a host society might be perceived by guests (Bryman, 1999).

The theories on McDonaldization and Disneyization both offer a somewhat pessimistic view on consumption and which can subsequently be linked to a commoditization of the host and guest relationship represented by governing industry players and standardized hospitality practices (Valerio, 2017). Accordingly, scholarly critics have noted that these theories are somewhat simplistic as they don't reflect the growing notion of personalized consumption and subsequently demote the power of the consumer in shaping trends and spaces. While there are many aspects of these theories that can be contended as they were developed in the early nineties, there are still recognizable elements. These elements become evident in Bryman and Ritzer's emphasis on the process of adding overly commodified cultural objects or otherwise personalized goods and experiences in order to attract large numbers of visitors or consumers (Bryman, 2011). In relation to tourist traps, it can be argued that the theories capture the basic characteristics of such enclaves of tourism through e.g. notions of commodification of culture and hospitality. However, as mentioned the theories somewhat fail to acknowledge the impact of consumers engagement with a place of consumption. In other words, the abovementioned theories view the consumers as somewhat passive entities. Another element that these theories fail to consider are the non-consumers who might be influenced by these 'cathedrals of consumption' (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010, p. 15). A local in Paris might never have been to Disneyland or inside the Eiffel tower, yet these attractions are an integrated part of their social reality but might carry a different meaning to them than for the consumer (or tourist). Returning to the previous point, this can be argued to highlight the underlying divide between hosts and locals in tourist traps. Accordingly, for this project, the emphasis will be on examining tourist traps from the perspective of locals who are not an actively 'hosting' tourists as observed in the hospitality industry or overall governing actors in popular tourism areas.

Assuming this distinction between what constitutes a host and what characterizes a local, research on locals outside the hospitality sector and marketplace in tourism is often shaped by

a focus on theoretical concepts such as the impact of cultural commodification, othering or the notion of resentment due to mass tourism (Boissevain, 1996, p. 3). Locals (i.e. the local population placed outside the tourism industry) are often assumed to stay away from popular touristic spots and have become predisposed to assumptions of resentment towards overly touristic places. While tourist's motivation for visiting a place undoubtedly varies, there has been a growing trend in examining tourists growing desire to experience places 'off the beaten track', that is places outside the realm of the standardized hospitality packages (pp. 3-4). Additionally, Crang and Coleman (2001) argue that much tourism research is predisposed to assume that the development of enclaves of tourism as described above reflect a loss of power and control for the local and are thus seen as places devoid of local engagement (pp. 1-2). Other scholars have noted that this view of locals can be somewhat limiting, and that there should be placed a focus on the value of tourism in relation to local communities as well. According to Higgins-Desbiolles (2006), tourism can also be viewed as "*a force promoting peace and understanding between peoples*" (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006, p. 1192). While these various theoretical approaches can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of the relationship between tourists and locals, it can be argued that they ultimately share the same starting point, namely how locals perceive tourists. Accordingly, this project will place its theoretical focus on 'the local gaze', as it aims to generate an understanding of how locals perceive 'tourist traps', using the Golden Circle as a case in point. Drawing on John Urry's notion of *the tourist gaze*, the following section will attempt to assess some of the main points of the theoretical concept with the local perspective of tourist traps in mind.

### The Tourist Gaze & The Local

It becomes apparent that the tourism landscape is filled with shifting meaning and underlying controversies that are not always visible at first glance. Accordingly, there are always multiple sides to the same stories when it comes to tourism. Despite the complex nature of the tourism landscape, scholars in the field have tended to place much of their emphasis on understanding the tourists. For decades, scholars have attempted to understand tourists and their motivations for traveling in terms of metaphorical categorizations. As such, both tourists and tourism itself has been continuously categorized into various types. Pierre Bourdieu's distinction between the elite and the mass and John Urry's notion of the romantic and the mass tourist highlights a common distinction made between tourists search for something authentic, unique and untouched in contrast to a longing for familiarity and simplicity when on holiday (Coleman & Crang, 2001, pp. 2-3). This similar trend of categorizing

tourists can be observed in the emergence of various types of tourism such as adventure tourism, voluntary tourism, sustainable tourism, health tourism etc. According to Vainikka (2013), this increase in tourism categorizations reflects that “*the tourism demand and supply are becoming more independent, active, individual and flexible*” (p. 269). Accordingly, these categorizations of tourism indicate a step away from the common understanding of tourism as characterized by the masses. However, given the global increase in wealth and the rise in low-cost air travel, it is perhaps naïve to downplay the presence of areas of mass tourism in contemporary society (Vilhelmiina, 2013). Destinations and attractions continue to face issues relating to tourism. Locals in popular tourism areas continuously deal with the proliferation of large interfering tourism infrastructures such as hotels and restaurants. Additionally, there is often growing social and environmental concerns due to the detrimental effects of continuous overcrowding in the same attraction points (Chapman & Speake, 2011). Accordingly, it becomes apparent that only understanding the tourist does not provide a sufficient insight into the dynamics of tourism.

One of the most popular examples of examining the tourists is the original version of ‘the tourist gaze’ by John Urry (1990) which attempts to conceptualize the tourists experience. In the initial version of the tourist gaze, Urry argues that tourism is inherently a visual experience for both tourists and the larger tourism industry. As such, tourism is structured around what can be visually presented and consumed. As mentioned, there are many ‘types’ of tourism. In a similar vein, Urry argues that there are various types of *gazes* shaped by discourse such as business, pleasure, health, adventure etc. These discourses are subsequently framed, often through photography or other semiotic features in order to make them consumable. As such, the tourist gaze becomes a mixture of representations and lived experiences characterized by the postmodern tendency of blurring the lines between traditional binary understandings such as home and away (Larsen, 2014, p. 305).

In relation to the notion of postmodern gazing, Urry argues that tourism and subsequently gazing has become an everyday activity. Tourism is not limited to physical boundaries as tourists are visually subjected to tourism imagery from the comfort of their own home. Appropriately described as the mediatized gaze, Urry argues that people can engage in tourism activities by gazing on extraordinary places through tv screens or other devices (Larsen, 2014, pp. 305-306). According to Maoz (2006), the initial theory on the tourist gaze also carries a presumption that Western tourists are in a position of power over the local population, objectifying them through their gaze (p.222). This point has been often been made in early tourism theorizing where emphasis is placed on the tourists, often leaving the locals as passive entities who either cater to or hide from



tourism, rather than being acknowledged as an active element in the tourism landscape (Maoz, 2006). According to Maoz (2006), this view of locals deters from the fact that locals are not blind to the activities of tourists. As much as the tourists shape the locals through their gaze, the locals are in an equal position of power through their gaze. Accordingly, any tourism landscape is characterized by both a local and a tourist gaze. Both tourists and locals have a preset image of each other which all influences their gazing. Accordingly, this enables what Maoz terms *the mutual gaze* (p.225).

As reflected in the argument made by Maoz, the theory of ‘the tourist gaze’ has been continuously challenged and reassessed in tourism, even by Urry himself. After the nineties, during which time the original theory was developed, Urry reassessed the tourist gaze in relation to the changes that had gradually occurred with the new century as well as some of the critical responses to the first version. In the second version of the tourist gaze, Urry acknowledges that travel is no longer as socially or geographically limiting, due to the increase in low-cost airlines, increased globalization and the growing wealth in developing nations. As such, travel became increasingly ‘democratized’. Additionally, Urry argues that despite the rapid technological development, the mediatized and virtual gaze will not be replacing actual travel, due to the physicality of gazing. Within this, Urry acknowledges that the tourist gaze is not only visual, but includes a multitude of sensuous experiences that are equally important in the overall tourist experience (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 195).

More recently, Urry and Larsen (2011) have examined the tourist gaze through a more *relational* perspective. As such, this relational perspective highlights the tourist gaze as a multimodal experience, where the interaction between places, people and senses all shapes the way tourists gaze. In addition to this aspect, the relational perspective addresses a previously criticized notion of the tourist gaze, namely the role of the local within the tourist gaze (p.308). As previously mentioned, in the initial version of the tourist gaze Urry implied that Western tourists are in a position of power over the local population, objectifying them through their gaze, leaving locals as caged animals subjected to the gaze of tourists (Maoz, 2006). However, this notion is also reassessed by Urry and Larsen through the relational perspective. Drawing on the notion of the local and the mutual gaze as described by Maoz, Urry and Larsen argue that locals also have the power to objectify tourists through the local gaze. Furthermore, the local gaze can also become one of resentment and objection to the presence of tourists and their countering gazes. Another feature of the relational gaze is that gazing is often done in a social environment. Tourists gaze with their families and other tourists when going on holiday. However, this can be argued to also apply to locals as they can also gaze on tourists and

tourism areas with family and friends. Ultimately, gazing in tourism is not a one-sided activity and always includes multiple perspectives (Larsen, 2014, pp. 308-309).

Having examined some of the main points in the tourist gaze, it becomes apparent that many of these are transferable to the 'other side' as well, namely the local gaze. Firstly, one element that Urry does not reflect in his accounts of the tourist gaze, is that locals are also exposed to a mediatized gaze of these places. While this might not be in terms of projected marketing material, locals are subjected to certain representations of these areas through other media platforms such as local news platforms or social media. Based on Maoz notion of the mutual gaze, it is important to note that locals are not unaware nor powerless to the presence of tourists in areas such as tourist traps. Rather, locals have their own projected image of tourists and tourism which can be argued to be partly grounded in the mediatized representation as well as shared stories with other locals in relation to their experiences with these places. Similarly, locals are also not unaware of the physical elements that places such as tourist traps bring with them such as increased tourism facilities provided by industry actors. As described in the latest version of the tourist gaze, gazing is a sensuous and relational experience. This can be argued to highlight that gazing is always two-sided, therefore locals are always part of the equation. Urry and Larsen describe how one element of relational gazing is gazing upon the attraction with fellow travelers (Larsen, 2014, p. 309). Accordingly, it stands to reason to assume that locals also share relational gazes with other locals. Based on the above presented points, the analytical part of this project will examine the local perspective of tourist traps by considering *the local gaze* as a somewhat complimentary term to that of *the tourist gaze* by assessing the local gaze as mediatized, relational and sensuous. These three notions will also be used to guide the empirical data collection, which will be elaborated in the following section.

## Research Methodology

The following section of this project will present the choice of research methods and empirical data collections techniques. Subsequently, this section will engage in a brief discussion of the research strategy as well as some of the methodological considerations which will frame the project. As mentioned, the aim of this project is to nuance the embodiment of tourist traps from the perspective of locals rather than tourists in the hopes of generating an updated and more nuanced tourist trap metaphor. Using the Golden Circle attractions as a case in point, this project will place its focus on how these popular areas of tourism are mediatized and subsequently perceived by locals.

Additionally, for this project, locals are defined as actors who are not actively ‘hosting’ tourists in these areas as observed in the hospitality and tourism industry. To examine these areas of interest, two types of empirical data collection techniques have been employed, namely qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews which will be elaborated further in this section.

Due to the complexities of the researched phenomenon of ‘tourist traps’, the nature of the research is exploratory. As the main objective is to gain an understanding of a certain social reality while also acknowledging other social perspectives, the project takes on an interpretivist and social constructivist approach to shape the empirical data collection and subsequent analysis. In its most fundamental sense, the social constructivist approach involves the acknowledgement that social reality is constructed through the interaction between people and their social conventions. According to Detel (2015), this means that “*some 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 such, the researcher will take an ontological positioning to social constructivism by understanding social reality as being constantly up for revision and one that requires the acknowledgement of the researcher's own positioning within the social equation. In the same line of thinking, Bryman (2016) argues that phrases, metaphors and categorizations are socially constituted, and the meaning of language is thus dependent on time, place and people. As such, the social constructivist ontology places an emphasis on the subjective nature of the researched reality (pp. 33-34). This is further reflected in the theoretical framework, where the notion of *metaphors* and *the local gaze* are examined. Accordingly, the aim of the theoretical framework is not to generate any conclusive knowledge in relation to these complex social phenomena, but rather to give context to the overall research area.

Having chosen to take on a social constructivist ontology for the research project at hand, the empirical data collection is qualitative in nature. By using qualitative data, this project does not set out to find conclusive answers to the topic at hand but rather inductively attempt to understand the relationship between the overall theories and the empirical data. Bryman (2016) argues that researchers utilizing qualitative data attempt to view “*events and the social world through the eyes of the people that they study*” (p.399). Accordingly, this project will take an emic approach to the empirical research as the aim is to understand the area of research from within (Wahyuni, 2012). In line with the social constructivist ontology, the aim is not to understand the notion of metaphors per se, but rather to investigate how possible controversies can gradually emerge through metaphors in tourism, in the context of the local perspective of ‘tourist traps’. By adopting an epistemological

position of interpretivism, the author acknowledges that that any knowledge generated through the theoretical framework of this project does not reflect a static understanding of the topic at hand and can consequently be subject to further investigation. As such, the theoretical framework will rather be used to guide the empirical data collection and subsequent analysis. Due to the interpretivist and social constructivist approach to this project, the overall analysis will be characterized by a narrative form, which will be utilized to present a encompassing account of the researched social reality (Wahyuni, 2012). The following section will present the two types of data collection techniques, namely qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews.

### Qualitative Content Analysis

In order to understand how tourist traps can carry different meaning for locals, the first empirical data collection technique will focus on the mediatized gaze, as discussed in the theoretical framework. Through a qualitative content analysis, this project sets out to examine 5 major news outlets in Iceland in order to understand how locals are subjected to certain representations of the Golden Circle areas through popular online news platforms. There are both advantages and challenges by only focusing on internet-based sources of information. On one hand, the accessibility of the internet allows for a wider range of documents for analysis, as well as having the power to reach a significantly wider audience. On the other hand, when using online documents as the basis for analysis, one must be mindful of several aspects. Firstly, one must be mindful of the whether the source of information is a reliable one, as most people have access to the internet. Similarly, one must consider whether the source of information has any underlying interest in portraying the material in a certain way for personal gain. Lastly, due to the rapid speed in which sources can be altered on the internet, there is always the risk of misrepresentation of a given topic of interest (Bryman, 2016, p. 554)

While this project only utilizes online articles extracted directly from the original source, the author is aware of the growing importance of news sharing on social media and the general role of social media within the mediatized gaze. Social media has become a powerful tool for the diffusion of information and events, as well as an effective platform to create awareness of political, social and economic events around the world. On the other hand, social media content is often highly subjective, and many of the users are motivated by sharing content for entertainment purposes and as a means of gaining attention (Lee & Ma, 2012). According to Lee & Ma (2012), news articles are however generally viewed as more neutral. They argue that within the large amount of online content that circulates, news articles are generally viewed as more reliable since news articles evidently do

not reflect biased opinions in comparison to the general content found on social media. Accordingly, Lee & Ma argue that “*news content has much more impact on civic agenda, public opinion as well as individual perception of social reality than other forms of content in social media*” (p. 332). As mentioned, the aim of the qualitative content analysis is to understand how locals are subjected to certain mediatized representations of the Golden Circle areas. Based on the abovementioned quote, the author has decided to only focus on online news articles as the aim is to capture the overall public perception of social reality in relation to the Golden Circle areas rather than specific opinion-based sources. However, the author acknowledges that many utilize social media platforms such as Facebook to access the news content (Lee & Ma, 2012).

Keeping the previously mentioned considerations in mind, there is an array of both national and regional news outlets in Iceland. However, this project will place its focus on the national context, as it will capture a more holistic image of how locals in Iceland are subjected to information on the Golden Circle attractions. Additionally, a mix of both independent, state owned, and one tabloid news outlet has been chosen as this can be argued to reflect a wider demographic of readers. Accordingly, 5 online news outlets have been chosen as the foundation for analysis. Firstly, the free paper *Fréttablaðið* was chosen as it is deemed the most read newspaper on a national scale. However, for this analysis, the online version *frettabladid.is* was chosen. Following in second place as one of the most read news outlets is the online media *vísir.is*. The third choice for analysis was the online channel for the public broadcasting service *rív.is* which is also considered to dominate much of the media market. The fourth choice reflects the privately-owned media sector, with Iceland’s oldest newspaper *Morgunblaðið* through their online version *mbl.is*. Lastly, the tabloid paper *dv.is* has been chosen as it is also considered a significant actor in the media landscape of Iceland (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018). In order to capture a contemporary representation of the Golden Circle attractions, the scope of articles was narrowed down to articles posted between 2015 and 2019 as to focus on the most recent and relevant data in relation to the topic at hand.

In its most novel form, qualitative content analysis consists of a “*searching-out of underlying themes in the materials being analysed*” (Bryman, 2016, p. 557). In contrast to quantitative content analysis, the qualitative version involves a less systematic approach to uncovering emerging themes in the given material. While quantitative content analysis utilizes a preset list of defined categories and codes, qualitative content analysis allows for a more reflexive and interpretive understanding of the material at hand. Accordingly, qualitative content analysis is

carried out by going back and forth through the collected material as to make sense of the findings in relation to the problem. In this regard, this method of data collection is highly flexible (pp.557-559). Despite the difference between quantitative and qualitative content analysis, the latter is not devoid of structure. According to Margrit Schreier (2013), when applying qualitative content analysis, one needs to “*focus on selected aspects of meaning, namely those aspects that relate to the overall research question*” (p. 170). Additionally, this form of data collection requires the author to examine an extensive amount of material relating to the overall research question in order to limit possible biases and subsequently narrow the scope in terms of relevance (p.170).

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, tourists are exposed to places of tourism activity through the mediatized gaze. The mediatized gaze can be argued to also apply to locals, but where tourists are often exposed to polished marketing material relating to these places, locals can be argued to also experience a different constructed reality in the form of news outlets. Accordingly, the overall research question for the this qualitative content analysis is:

- *How are the Golden Circle areas portrayed through national online news platforms in Iceland?*

Based on this overall research question, the analysis of the empirical data will attempt to define recurring themes generated throughout the chosen news articles. The findings generated through this empirical data collection will then be analyzed in relation to overall theoretical framework.

### Semi-structured interviews

Having examined how the Golden Circle attractions are portrayed through national news platforms in Iceland, the next empirical data collection method will focus on how locals experience enclaves of tourism such as ‘tourist traps’ as represented by the Golden Circle attractions in Iceland. In line with the social constructivist perspective, and the corresponding focus on qualitative data, this project found semi-structured interviews most suitable as the second data collection technique. While there are many methods of interviewing, semi-structured interviews were deemed most suitable as they can be argued to capture a more nuanced understanding of how participant experience the researched phenomenon (Bryman, 2016, p. 471). In contrast to structured interviews where questions are designed to generate somewhat conclusive and standardized results, semi-structured interviews are more flexible in nature. While structured interviews operate with preset questions, semi-structured interviews are characterized by a more open-ended method, in which the aim is not to gain a concrete

answer but rather attempt to understand and evaluate the interviewer’s point of view (p.470). Accordingly, semi-structured interviews are guided by overarching themes related to the researched phenomenon. While the themes can generate similar questions for each interviewee, the semi-structured interview method allows for spontaneous follow-up questions (or probes), in order to create a more natural flow in the conversation which subsequently allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the interviewees point of view (Roulston & Choi , 2018, p. 233).

For this project 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with locals. The aim of these interviews was to gain an understanding of how the Golden Circle attractions are being perceived and experienced by locals. Based on the theoretical framework of *the local gaze*, three overall themes (or *gazes*) were chosen to guide the interview questions as to capture the overall experience of the locals, namely the mediatized, the relational and the sensuous gaze. Besides the three guiding themes, any recurring patterns or ideas that might emerge through the analysis of the empirical data will also be considered. According to Aronson (1995), being able to identify themes that emerge from the participant narratives can help “*form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience*” (p. 1). Having collected 12 different interviews, the author is able to add a certain degree of validity to the findings as any recurring perceptions can be examined as a representation of the interviewees collective understanding of the researched phenomenon. Additionally, by using the theoretical framework as a guiding point for the empirical data collection and subsequent analysis, the author is able to give context to any possible findings (Aronson, 1995).

<i>The Local Gaze</i>		
Mediatized	Relational	Sensuous

*Figure 2 – Visual representation of guiding themes*

Most of the interviews were carried throughout a three-week duration, where the author traveled around Iceland. However, the author did some follow-up interviews over the phone after returning home. The participants all ranged in age, gender and location in the country as the aim was to gain a more nuanced representation of the general public. However, actors who worked within the tourism industry were excluded, as it can be argued that these actors represent a different category in terms of tourist traps, namely the role of the ‘host’ as described in the theoretical framework. The interviews conducted in Iceland were carried out in a face-to-face setting, in locations that the

participant felt comfortable and familiar with. However, in order to generate a similar sense of comfort with the phone interviews, the questions were sent to the participants beforehand. Additionally, while approximately half of the interviews were carried out in English, the other half was conducted in the native language of the participants (Icelandic), as these participants did not feel that they were able to adequately express their opinions in English. Accordingly, the author took the approach of the active interview, as described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995), where both parties are active participants in the interviewing process. Through this method, the author was able to examine a wider range of perspectives and identify any emerging ideas through a collaborative process with the interviewees (pp. 8-10). In order to make the data more tangible and useful for analysis, all interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed (see appendix). Through this process, the author emphasized the relevant parts in the transcribe in order to keep the data coherent. By recording and transcribing the interviews, the author is also able to identify recurring patterns in the overall experience of the locals (Aronson, 1995). Additionally, as some of the interviews were carried out in Icelandic, the author also took the role of a translator. While the authors ability to act as a translator can be beneficial as it offers a wider range of data, the process also carries some methodological limitations which will be discussed further in the following section.

### Methodological Limitations

There are always limitations to any research project. Accordingly, it is important to acknowledge these limitations in order to circumvent some of the possible issues such as subjective biases or a decrease in the validity of the overall findings. Firstly, as this project uses the Golden Circle attractions as a case in point, this project can be argued to be highly contextual. As such, any findings generated through this project will carry a low generalizability as the findings only capture a moment in time in relation to the case at hand. Additionally, the subjective nature of metaphors as discussed in the theoretical framework allows for different interpretations of the term 'tourist trap'. However, due to the social constructivist and interpretivist nature of this project as discussed in the previous section, the author acknowledges that there are multiple 'realities' and that any knowledge produced in this project can be challenged. Additionally, by engaging in the use of more than one empirical data collection technique, the author is able to add to the reliability and validity of the findings.

While the subjective nature of a qualitative research project has its benefits such as being able to place yourself in the world of the studied phenomenon, it also comes with certain limitations. This can for instance be seen in relation to the authors own role in the researched



landscape. According to Ratner (2002), the researchers own subjective view on the issue at hand is present throughout the whole research process, from beginning to end. Ratner argues that in qualitative research projects, “*one never really sees or talks about the world, per se. One only sees and talks about what one's values dictate*” (p. 2). Additionally, as the chosen data collection techniques both involve translations by the author from Icelandic to English, there is a risk of loss of meaning, biases and misunderstandings in relation to the overall context. According to Squires (2009), when someone engages in the translation process of qualitative data, the person “*becomes a producer of research data who shapes the analysis through their identity and experiences*” (p. 279). According to Bryman (2016), translation in qualitative data is not just about understanding the language but the culture as well, as this allows for a better contextualization of the findings (p.494). As such, while on one hand the translation process can enable certain biases or misunderstandings, the authors familiarity with the culture and language can on the other hand be argued to circumvent the possibility of loss of meaning in the translation process (Squires, 2009). Additionally, the authors subjective positioning as a native speaker can be argued to enable the author to get fully immersed into the research context and gain an in-depth relationship to the topic at hand. At the same time, the author acknowledges that there are various understandings and realities in relation to the same topic.

## Analysis

Having assessed some of the methodological considerations for this project, the following section of this project will engage in an analysis of the empirical findings in relation to previously presented theoretical framework. As such, the aim of this chapter is to discuss how the Golden Circle areas are portrayed through national online news platforms in Iceland as well as to investigate how locals experience enclaves of tourism such as ‘tourist traps’ as represented by the Golden Circle attractions. In order to increase the coherence of this chapter, the chapter will be divided into four main sections. Firstly, in order to add context to the case at hand, a brief overview of tourism in Iceland will be presented accompanied by a short description of the Golden Circle attractions in relation to the notion of tourist traps. The third section will examine the findings of the qualitative content analysis of 5 major national online news platforms in Iceland, in relation to the Golden Circle attractions. Lastly, the semi-structured interviews will be discussed with the aim of uncovering how locals experience ‘tourist traps’ as represented by the Golden Circle attractions. Following this chapter, a discussion of the entirety of the generated findings will be presented to link the voice of the locals with a more

holistic and nuanced metaphor to that of a tourist trap. Subsequently, the aim is to enrich the understanding of how destinations develop with popular areas of tourism.

## Tourism in Iceland

Tourism in Iceland is not a new phenomenon. Going back to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, the destination has maintained a reputation as a place of adventure with its vast natural and distinct landscape and as such the visitor numbers have been steadily growing for the last couple of decades. Besides the natural wonders of Iceland, the local culture has sparked fascination amongst visitors as a point of attraction as well (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2016). With a modest population of just over 300.000, the steady increase in tourism has made its mark on the island (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2016). The influx of visitors has exploded since 2010, from approximately 500.000 yearly visitors in 2010 to 2.5 million in 2017 (Gil-Alanaa & Huijbens, 2018). As a result, tourism has become a central component of Iceland's economic development, making a significant proportion of the population dependent on the employment provided by the tourism sector of the island. While seasonality is somewhat noticeable in the number of tourists visiting Iceland, there has been a steady increase in visitors during all seasons, rather than only during the summer months. Accordingly, tourism in Iceland can be argued to be decreasing in seasonality, thus emphasizing the increasing economic dependence on tourism services for the local population (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2016).

Since the 1930s, tourism in Iceland has been loosely regulated and mainly driven by both large and small businesses monopolizing on visitors, while policy makers and official government initiatives mainly focus on improving the infrastructure on the island as well as working towards more sustainable solutions to preserve the main attraction of Iceland, its landscape (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2016). In the last two decades, there have been two major events in the history of Iceland, namely the financial crisis of 2008 and the eruption of the volcano Eyjafjallajökull. Both events played important roles in the development of the tourism sector of Iceland. The former can be argued to have sparked an interest from government officials to increase tourism to restore economic balance in the country. While this somewhat increased the promotional efforts of Iceland as a destination, the significant shift came as a result of the volcanic eruption of Eyjafjallajökull (Benediktsson, Lund, & Huijbens, 2011). In 2010, the volcano Eyjafjallajökull erupted on two occasions. The first and smaller eruption happened in March, producing visible flows of lava and some ash without significantly compromising the safety of locals as well as visitors. Due to the low safety implications of the eruption, the natural phenomenon quickly became an attraction for not only

visitors but locals as well. It didn't take long for people to realize the opportunity to capitalize on the eruption, with local tour operators offering various modes of transportation, from busses to helicopters, to gain closer access to the sight. The growing popularity also increased options for accommodation in the vicinity. The eruption quickly gained increased media attention, with several tv-shows including the lava flow as a prop for various media stunts. With tour operators and the media capitalizing on the natural phenomenon and reinforcing a mythical image of Iceland as being 'The land of fire and Ice', it gave way for companies to expand on their selection of daytrips and activities while discursively framing them with buzzwords reflecting uniqueness of the natural experiences to be found in Iceland (pp.78-79).

Shortly after the first eruption, a second and much more impactful eruption occurred. The second eruption produced a significant amount of ash into the air, which disrupted much of the international air traffic, subsequently gaining notoriety all around the globe through the media. The newfound opportunities for expansion for the tour operators in Iceland was now under threat, due to the negative impacts to the Icelandic image that the media had generated. However, the Icelandic government as well as the national tourism board were quick to generate a countermove in order to circumvent any possible apprehensions from future visitors. Accordingly, the campaign 'Inspired by Iceland' was launched in 2010, with the government and big industry players collectively spending 700 million ISK on the campaign. The substantial campaign covered almost every platform, from social media marketing to billboard advertisement and celebrity endorsements. The main image that the campaign attempted to convey was the Icelandic landscape as active and playful yet also peaceful and captivating, perpetuating the previous discursive framing and marketing image of Iceland as a land of natural wonders (p.80).

As previously mentioned, natural attractions, the uniqueness of the landscape and the longing to interact and experience nature has for centuries has been the main motivation for international visitors when visiting Iceland. Unsurprisingly, the distinct nature has served as the core of many of the marketing strategies as well as tourism businesses of the destination. As with other large industries in Iceland such as geothermal power and fishing, the tourism industry equally utilizes the land in order to provide a space that accommodates the tourists needs for adventure and sightseeing (Sæþórsdóttir, 2010). While the discourse in the marketing of Iceland as a tourist destination has mostly been centered on the 'untouched' and the 'natural beauty' of the landscape, the increase in tourism can be argued to have presented somewhat contradicting issues to these marketing claims. Firstly, the geographical layout of the island can be somewhat restrictive for

visitors as many of the attractions are spread around the country and therefore not always easily accessible as presented in the marketing material. Additionally, issues such as seasonality, weather conditions, short-term visits and lack of transportation opportunities are highly restrictive elements to the access of much of the landscape. Accordingly, the attractions least affected by these restrictive factors quickly became the most visited. As the tourism numbers rapidly began to grow in certain natural attractions, the need for facilities such as toilets, parking spaces, manmade walking paths and warning signs became increasingly present. Due to the economic value of tourism, the government and large industry players started slowly implementing several of these features and more, in order to accommodate the many visitors (Ibid.). This development, along with the expansion of tour operators can be argued to be particularly evident in three main attractions, combined into a tour known as the Golden Circle.

### The Golden Circle as 'Tourist Traps'

Today, the Golden Circle has become one of the most popular attractions of Iceland, proclaimed by tour operators to be a 'must-see' of any visit to Iceland (Reykjavik Excursions, 2019). The tour is in close proximity of Iceland's capital, Reykjavik, and consists of three main stops along the way, namely Þingvellir, Geysir and Gullfoss. The first attraction on the tour is Þingvellir national park. The significance of the national park can be argued to be both cultural, historical as well as geographical. In 2004, Þingvellir became a recognized UNESCO World Heritage site (Loftsdóttir & Lund, 2016, p. 118). This is due to its rich history and symbolic value as the foundation for the first Icelandic parliament founded in 930 which prevailed until the year 1798 before being moved to Reykjavik (Guide to Iceland, 2019). The national park has also been viewed as an important representation of the Icelandic nation as it combines the distinct nature and the history of the people. It has been a longstanding place for locals to visit during the summer and has been referred to as a symbolic gathering point for the Icelandic nation by several important figures in Iceland (Loftsdóttir & Lund, 2016, p. 127). Despite the park's symbolic value of national pride, it is mostly advertised by tourism operators for its geographical features such as a rift visibly separating the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates, which is often misrepresented as a meeting place of two continents, giving the place a more international meaning. This misunderstanding as well as the park's positioning on the Golden Circle tour has made it a key place for tourists and has been argued to symbolize the growing prospect of over tourism in Iceland (pp. 118, 133-134).

The second stop on the Golden Circle tour is *Geysir*. Namesake to the spouting hot springs known as geysers, this landmark portrays the geothermal power of the underground of Iceland. While Geysir itself has been inactive for over a century, the geyser named Strokkur draws the overall attention of visitors. Every few minutes, water spouts up over 30 meters into the air showcasing the geothermal power of the area. While the geyser is the main attraction on this sight, the surrounding area also showcases a distinct landscape, with steam rising from the ground from hot springs and bubbling muddy pits. Due to the popularity of this sightseeing spot, the area now also includes a hotel, several restaurants and a large retail center (Guide to Iceland, 2019). The last stop on the Golden Circle tour is the waterfall, *Gullfoss*. Gullfoss is known for its large and powerful waterfall and the deep canyon it surrounds (Reykjavik Excursions, 2019). However, Gullfoss also has historical value as British businessmen attempted to purchase the waterfall in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in order to harness the geothermal power. The sale was ultimately stopped by the daughter of the farmer who owned the land, who spent months taking legal action. Today she is considered to be an important figure in environmental activism in Iceland as she paved the way for the protection of all waterfalls in the country (Guide to Iceland, 2019).

What becomes evident is that these places have all had great historical and cultural value to the local population of Iceland. Each stop is argued to represent a national landmark in their own right, thus providing a brief but encompassing insight into Iceland and its history. However, in recent years the attractions have been subject to a significantly different discourse due to their popularity among tourists. Accordingly, the three attractions have gained notoriety among the local population of Iceland as being a symbol of the detrimental effects of the increased tourism (Loftsdóttir & Lund, 2016). Due to the popularity of the Golden Circle tour, it is perhaps unsurprising that the tour is offered by almost every tour operator in Reykjavik. While many offer a traditional sightseeing bus tour around the area, businesses are increasingly offering added activities such as snorkeling, snowmobiling and horseback riding or special edition trips such as northern lights hunting or seeing the sight from above by helicopter rides (Guide to Iceland, 2019). This significant commodification of the three attractions becomes particularly apparent when looking at two of the most dominant tourism actors in Iceland, namely Reykjavik Excursions and Greyline. Reykjavik Excursion offers 12 different tours of the Golden Circle, while Greyline offers 15 variations of the Golden Circle tour (Greyline Iceland, 2019) (Reykjavik Excursions, 2019). Accordingly, it can be argued that the Golden Circle tour is an appropriate exemplification of the development of tourism in Iceland in the last couple of decades and a representation of the changing way in which places of natural wonder are

being consumed. Additionally, the amount of tours can be argued to showcase how these areas experience a constant influx of foreign visitors as they are dominated by these large industry actors.

Returning to the TALC model, as discussed in the introduction, these areas of tourism can be argued to have gone through the various stages. While all these places presented value and uniqueness at the exploration stage, they have now moved to a stage between the consolidation and the stagnation stage characterized by the proliferation of tourists, tourism facilities and large industry actors. As previously mentioned, ‘tourist traps’ are characterized by losing its appeal because of its popularity, overcrowded areas and increased commodification. In a visitor survey conducted in the summer 2016, the Icelandic tourism board asked visitors to rate how they felt about the number of visitors at each of these places. Both Gullfoss and Geysir were deemed as too crowded, as 51 % of participants argued that there were too many visitors in Gullfoss, and 54 % arguing for the same at Geysir. However, Þingvellir was rated as too crowded by only 40 % of visitors (The Icelandic Tourist Board, 2016, p. 11). Accordingly, it can be argued that the results highlight one of the core features of ‘tourist traps’, as the places are deemed too crowded and thus decreasing in value. While Þingvellir was not rated as crowded as the other two attractions, it is important to note that tour operators include all three stops on the Golden Circle tours. As such, there will inevitably be observed a similar number of visitors in all three stops. While these features can be argued to highlight that the Golden Circle attractions can be considered ‘tourist traps’, the survey only portrayed this in relation to the perspective of the visitors. Accordingly, the perspective of the locals calls for further examination.

## Content Analysis

As previously mentioned, the aim of this project is to provide a more holistic metaphor to tourist traps, one that reflects the local dimension of the concept as well. Additionally, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, Maoz argues that both tourists and locals have a preset image of each other which all influences their gazing. Following this line of thinking, the mediatized portrayal of these popular tourism areas can be argued to shape the way the locals perceive the tourism industry as well as the tourists. Furthermore, where tourists are often exposed to polished marketing material relating to these places, locals can be argued to experience a different constructed reality in the form of representations shaped by news outlets. Accordingly, the following section will examine how locals are subjected to certain representations of the Golden Circle areas through popular online news platforms. Having reviewed the 5 major news outlets in Iceland chosen for the analysis, two main recurring themes can be identified, namely the tourist and the host.

## The Tourist

Given the status of the Golden Circle attractions as popular areas of tourism, it is perhaps not surprising that the tourists are a central component of most news articles related to these places. Accordingly, there are several recurring characteristics in the portrayal of tourists throughout the various media platforms. Firstly, the tourists are defined in terms of their functionalization, i.e. what they do. One of the most recurring notions relating to the tourists visiting the Golden Circle attractions is *recklessness*. Throughout several of the articles, the tourists are described as somewhat disrespectful, defying signs and safety measures to much frustration for the ‘hosts’ in the form of industry players and governing actors at the scene. According to a tour guide in these areas, the lack of engagement from ‘hosts’ and the absence of locals in these areas seemingly perpetuates the issues as tourists encourage each other to cross fences and closed paths without interference from external actors (Jónsson, 2016). Similarly, in a different article, a tour guide describes how he observed tourists cross marked fences and safety warnings to get a closer look at the attraction. He emphasizes that when the amount of reckless tourist has become this high, it is ultimately up to God whether they live or die (RÚV, 2015). Accordingly, this comment can be argued to highlight sense of powerlessness from the ‘hosts’ in relation to the tourists, portraying the tourists as a force that is somewhat unmanageable. On more than one occasion, tourists are described as ‘toying with life and death’ at these places, particularly at Gullfoss. Another article presents an incident in which a tourist crawled down the ledge of a cliff to capture the perfect photo. A local woman describing the incident said; *“No one seemed to care. But then again, there were only tourists there and no local authorities of any kind, so I think people just didn’t realize how dangerous this is”* (Egilsson, 2017). The quote indicates a clear distinction being made between tourists and locals. By implying that no one seemed to care because they were tourists, she also implies that if they had been Icelandic, this would not have happened. Accordingly, this perception of tourists being reckless becomes enforced.

Another way that tourists are characterized in these areas are as victims. However, this victimization is not in relation to the being victimized by the local population, but rather the tourists are portrayed as becoming victims to their own recklessness as well as other tourists. In a similar manner to the abovementioned examples, there are several articles noting accidents related to the carelessness in the Icelandic landscape outside of the designed enclaves surrounding these attractions. Many of the titles of the articles portray tourists as being in imminent danger due to their defiance towards safety warnings. One of the titles highlights this by stating; *“Tourists place themselves in between life and death to capture the perfect photo”* (Kristjánsson, 2018). As mentioned in the

previous section, the Iceland Tourist Board did a visitor survey in 2016. Through the survey results it became apparent that a majority of tourists deemed these places to be overcrowded with other tourists. In 2018, the news platform *visir.is* posted an article showcasing similar survey results with the Golden Circle attractions topping the list. These results were presented with the following headline: “*Tourists in Iceland are incessantly unhappy with large number of tourists*” (Tryggvason, 2018). As such, the tourists become victims of their own presence as the value of their experience decreases due to other tourists. In a similar manner, there have been reports of pickpocketing aimed at foreign tourists at the various attractions due to the large number of visitors. According to a tourism employee at Gullfoss who has been employed for over 20 years, pickpocketing has previously been unheard of in the area (Magnússon, 2019). This can be argued to again present an image of the tourists becoming victims of their own growing masses.

While the media places much attention on the common tourist, there can also be identified several articles highlighting celebrity visits to the Golden Circle (Þórarinnsson, 2018) (Sæmundsson, 2019). The celebrities range from NFL stars to popular musicians. However, they all share the feature of not being from Iceland. When describing the visit of the English musician, Billy Idol, to the Golden Circle, he was described as ending up in a *sea of tourists*. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, metaphors can be useful tools to understand certain social realities, but also have a risk of generating a somewhat simplified version of an otherwise complex and dynamic tourism landscape. This metaphorical description of the Golden Circle attractions can be argued to enforce a specific narrative pertaining to these popular areas of tourism such as overcrowding by tourists, as described in tourist traps. The use of the word *sea* to describe the number of tourists can be argued to portray these popular areas as uncontrollable and vast, and evoking that there is a certain possibility of ‘drowning’ in tourists. Additionally, throughout the article, a clear distinction was made between Idol and the ‘other’ tourists; “*He was very pleased with the visit, and he didn’t let himself get overwhelmed even though there were quite a lot of foreign tourists asking him to take selfies with them*” (Þórarinnsson, 2018) Despite the distinction made between the celebrities, in this case Billy Idol, and the rest of the visitors, the celebrities are also foreign visitors and can thus be argued to be in the same category as the other visitors. Accordingly, the media attention around their visits can be argued to emphasize that these places have slowly transformed into playing grounds aimed for foreign visitors rather than local engagement.

Lastly, another way that the tourists are characterized throughout the news articles is through identification of what they are. In the abovementioned articles as well as throughout the



reviewed articles, there is a frequent use of the word *foreign* (Egilsson, 2017) (Tryggvason, 2018). Throughout the overall review, it becomes apparent that the discourse surrounding tourists is often emphasized by describing them as foreign visitors, rather than just visitors. By consistently using the word foreign when referring to visitors and tourists, there is again an underlying separation between the behavior of tourists and how the behavior of locals would presumably be in these areas. As such, the tourists become presented as reckless, victimized and somewhat uncontrollable in relation to locals. Additionally, it can be argued that locals are seemingly only referred to as a point of differentiation in relation to the tourists and their overall behavior. As such, there seems to be little overlap between the two. Accordingly, both locals as well as tourists become portrayed in a somewhat simplistic manner in relation to the Golden Circle attractions.

### The Host

Another recurring theme in the articles is the role of the host, that is the main controlling forces in these areas, such as industry actors and people in governing roles, that have the power to shape the material design of these places. As mentioned, the tourists are seemingly presented as reckless, victimized and somewhat uncontrollable. While several of the abovementioned articles highlight a lack of local engagement, there are articles that showcase some of the initiatives taken by the ‘hosts’ as an attempt to manage the flow of foreign visitors. One of the attempts involved building more parking lots at Þingvellir to spread out the number of tourists at the attraction, while still maintaining the popularity of the attraction (Ólafsdóttir Kaaber, 2018). As previously mentioned, there is also continuously being put up a significant number of safety warnings and fences to control the tourists and preserve the surrounding landscape. Ásta Stefánsdóttir, the mayor of a nearby village, argues that these initiatives are necessary. However, she also worries about the number of foreign tourists who consistently defy the signs and pathways, *“How far should we go? How much should be done to prevent these incidents? We don’t want to ruin the experience for the common tourist by adding to many manmade fences. At the end we have to trust people’s common sense”* (Arnmundsson, 2018). It can be argued to presents a picture of the tourists being at responsible for the continuous added material infrastructure being put in place, as they cannot obey to the existing signs and manmade pathways. Accordingly, this seems to indicate a sense of frustration by having to implement more safety measures to ensure the well-being of the tourists. This point is further highlighted by one of the shop owners at Gullfoss, who feels that there should be consequences for the actions of the tourists such as fines for ignoring pathways and signs as he argues that this seems to be the only solution left to contain the tourists (Arnmundsson, 2018).

It becomes apparent that the mediatized representation of the ‘hosts’ in the Golden Circle attractions highlights them as being highly protective of the tourists and their safety. As presented, the news platforms showcase that several calls for action are made by industry actors, such as quicker response to accidents, more safety measures etc., with the aim of protecting the tourists at the attractions (mbl.is, 2018) (Arnmundsson, 2018). This is both in terms of their safety but also in terms of their overall experience. Throughout the overall review of the news articles, the ‘hosts’ also seem to portray a concern for the overall sustainability of these popular tourism places. However, as with the increase in signs and pathways, this concern seemingly relates back to the overall experience for the tourists. According to an article posted in *frettabladid.is*, the most read newspaper in Iceland, the Golden Circle attractions are reaching their capacity in terms of visitor numbers. The article titled, “*Ruined nature leads to a negative experience*” argues that the immense number of visitors is affecting the surrounding nature which is slowly deteriorating and ultimately being put in danger. In relation to this, the article highlights two main points Firstly, while the large number of visitors can be argued to have contributed to the deterioration of the surrounding nature and the continuous material alterations made to ensure a steady flow of visitors, the article highlights that these are the main elements that are increasing the dissatisfaction amongst foreign tourists. This can be argued to highlight the previous point as tourists become victims of their own presence. At the same time, the article argues that action should be taken in order to keep a steady flow of visitors (Sigurþórsdóttir, 2018).

While ensuring a good experience for the tourists has been a recurring theme throughout the news articles, this article includes a previously concealed perspective, namely the local opinion in relation to these popular tourism areas. Despite the previously described frustration felt by the hosts in relation to tourists and their engagement with the areas, the article highlights that the locals do not share the same assessment of the situation. Contrarily, the article reflects that locals ascribe the blame to the hosts, i.e. industry actors and people in governing roles within these popular tourism areas. The article highlights that according to locals, even issues such as disruptive and reckless behavior from tourists, messy surroundings, traffic congestion etc. are all linked backed to poor management and lack of engagement by industry actors (Sigurþórsdóttir, 2018).

This perspective on the local perception towards tourism in the Golden Circle areas is perpetuated by another article showcasing the experiences of a small village community in the area of Bláskógabyggðar. Titled ‘*The tourism industry takes over the community*’, the article presents some of the consequences that the local people have had to endure due to the increased tourism in the

area (Sævarsson, 2018). Guðrún Svanhvít Magnúsdóttir, a farmer and representative of the village of Bláskógabyggðar argues that the tourism industry is taking over the sense of community in the village. She goes on to say that the village is made up of several farmers and many of the local residents feel forced to adapt to the behavior of the tourists on their own land due to the constant foreign visitors brought in by the larger tourism actors from Reykjavik. According to Magnúsdóttir, the dominating tourism actors located in Reykjavik, such as large-scale tour operators are ‘*milking the village*’, leaving them with nothing but damaged infrastructure due to the constant traffic and difficulties performing jobs that are not centered around tourism (Sævarsson, 2018). By metaphorically portraying the tourism industry as ‘milking’ the village, the article portrays the hosts as taking full advantage of the situation while disregarding any possible consequences for the locals or ignoring the limits of the areas.

Having assessed some of the main themes that can be identified throughout the various news platforms, it can be argued that the mediatized representation of the Golden Circle attractions portrays several distinct notions that could possibly shape the perception of locals in relation to these popular tourism areas. The mediatized representation of the Golden Circle attractions can also be argued to reveal several underlying and somewhat conflicting power relations. Overall, there are three main recurring actors that make up the environment of the attractions, namely the tourists, the host and the local. Firstly, the attractions are presented as being overly consumed by the presence of tourists. Throughout there is an underlying separation between local and tourists, which becomes evident by the consistent use of the word *foreign* when describing the type of visitors at these attractions. Accordingly, the Golden Circle attractions are presented as a playground for tourists. In a similar vein, the discourse surrounding the tourists portrays them as somewhat reckless and unmanageable. Despite this representation of the tourists, based on the mediatized representation, the hosts seemingly place much emphasis on protecting the overall experience and well-being of the tourists. However, the hosts are also presented as somewhat powerless to an escalating situation. As such, the mediatized representation of the hosts becomes one of constant adaption to fit the needs of the tourists. Accordingly, as discussed in the theoretical framework, it can be argued that the locals are increasingly observed in the periphery in relation to the relationship between the host and the tourists while still being affected by this dynamic. Consequently, the mediatized representation of the Golden Circle can be argued to highlight that locals are seemingly subjected to a portrayal of an environment in which there are a range of different values, leading to a lack of engagement between the actors. Therefore, tourists, hosts and locals seem to be in a state of perpetual conflict.

As mentioned, the aim of this qualitative content analysis is to understand how locals are subjected to certain mediatized representations of the Golden Circle areas which can then assist in identifying a metaphor that could possibly capture a more holistic and nuanced understanding of 'tourist traps'. By focusing on online news articles, this data collection method allowed for a general overview of one representation of social reality in relation to the Golden Circle areas. Given that the target market for these national news platforms are locals rather than visitors, there are certain perceptions about the Golden Circle attractions that become enforced for the local through the news. However, as the findings of this analysis present a somewhat one-sided image of how locals experience the Golden Circle attractions, the following section will further explore the local experience by analyzing the empirical findings of 12 semi-structured interviews with locals.

## Interview Analysis

Based on 12 semi-structured conducted with locals, the following section will engage in an analysis of the findings extracted from the interview transcribes. As mentioned in the research methodology, this section will engage in a thematic analysis based on the theoretical framework. As such, this section is divided into three sub sections that explore the various gazes that locals engage with in relation to the Golden Circle attractions. As such, the three sections are as follow; 1) *mediatized gaze* 2) *relational gaze* and 3) *sensuous gaze*.

### The Mediatized Gaze

As mentioned in the theoretical section of this project, as with tourists, locals are also exposed to a mediatized gaze of popular tourism areas such as the Golden Circle attractions, which subsequently adds to their understanding of the social reality of these places. While the mediatized gaze might not be directly in terms of marketing material, locals are subjected to certain representations of these areas through multiple media platforms such as local news or social media. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Maoz notion of the mutual gaze highlights that it is important to acknowledge that locals are not unaware nor powerless to the presence of tourists in areas such as tourist traps. Rather, locals have their own projected image of tourism which can be argued to be grounded in the mediatized representation as well as through shared stories with other locals in relation to their experiences with these places.

Taking point of departure in the previous section, there are three actors highlighted in the mediatized portrayal of the Golden Circle attractions, namely the tourists, the host and the local. Based on the content analysis, it became apparent that through the mediatized gaze, tourists are presented as reckless, victimized and somewhat uncontrollable. This image of tourists in these popular attractions can be argued resonate with several of the interview participants. Participant 1 (P1) notes that there are often tourists in rental cars who stop in the middle of the road on the Golden Circle route to take pictures. According to P1, the tourists are putting others as well as themselves in danger by doing so (Appendix, p.1). This can be argued to enforce the view of tourists as being reckless and possible victims of their own behavior.

P5, P6, P9 and P12 also share the notion that the mediatized portrayal of the Golden Circle attractions mainly involves showcasing tourists in a somewhat negative manner. P5 says “*I rarely see anything about it in the news, except once in a while when there is some idiot who jumps the fences to get a good Instagram picture*” (Appendix, p.6). This point is further elaborated by P6 who argues that the media mainly highlights the detrimental effects of tourism in these areas. P6 also argues for the tourists being portrayed as reckless and unmanageable by being unable to follow rules. However, in alignment with the findings of the content analysis, P6 argues that this is a consequence of the continuous promotion and development of the attractions by hosts in order to keep a steady flow of tourists (Appendix, p.7). This claim is supported by P9 who says, “*from what I have seen in the news, they present the tourists as thoughtless towards the nature. I also feel like the news highlights that there is some favoritism in Iceland towards tourism companies in deciding how these places should operate, because there is so much economic gain from the tourists*” (Appendix, p.10). Returning to the TALC model as discussed in the introduction, this point can be argued to emphasize that these popular areas of tourism (i.e. tourist traps) are at a stage of consolidation and stagnation. While the areas have reached their limit in terms of visitors they are continuously being marketed as unique attractions to not face the stage of decline. Accordingly, despite assessing tourists in a somewhat unfavorable manner, the locals ultimately place the blame for this development on the hosts (in this case, the tourism industry). This point of view is shared by P4, who criticizes the media portrayal of the Golden Circle attractions for perpetuating a negative stereotype of the tourists, “*In my opinion, I think the news shows an accurate story in relation to the number of tourists and the effects that tourism has had on these places. But I also think the news tends to exaggerate a bit in relation to their carelessness since this doesn't apply to all of them*”. (Appendix, p.5). As with P6, P4 goes on to emphasize that the constant marketing of the Golden Circle as natural and *untouched*

sustain the high visitor numbers and thus argues that the reality of the attractions is much more affected by human interference than the tourists realize (Appendix, p.5).

The mention of marketing material in relation to the Golden Circle attractions is a recurring aspect of the interviews. When asked about how they experienced the Golden Circle attractions through the media, some of the participants indicate that they do not notice the news portrayal of these places, but some do become aware of articles posted through social media. However, a majority of the participants mention that they are aware of the marketing material in relation to these places through social media or tour operators advertising around town. Accordingly, while the findings indicate that most participants notice the marketing material more than news reports, several comment that they don't consider the marketing material relevant or memorable as it is not aimed at them but rather at foreign tourists. P1 exemplifies this when saying, "*The only thing I become aware of are the advertisements that aren't really for me anyway*" (Appendix, p.2). When asked about how the Golden Circle are presented in the media, P7 argues that locals are subjected to a somewhat fragmented mediatized representation of the Golden Circle attractions. According to P7, locals are exposed to polished marketing material aimed at tourists but are simultaneously aware of another social reality shaped by news portrayal and personal experience (Appendix, p.8). Both P8 and P12 share this feeling with P8 noting, "*I think the news tends to focus on the hordes of tourists at these places, while ads tend to leave them out completely. It doesn't really paint an accurate picture of these places*" (Appendix, p.9).

It can be argued that the abovementioned accounts of the fragmented media portrayal of the Golden Circle attractions that the local experience enforces a sense of disconnect from these places. On one hand, the news coverage perpetuates a negative portrayal of places that are dominated by tourists and the tourism industry, which can be argued to leave locals with little incentive to engage with the area. On the other hand, locals are simultaneously subjected to marketing material highlighting the supposed main points of uniqueness and value of the attractions. However, several of the interview participants indicate that while they are aware of the marketing material, it is often ignored as it is viewed as only being addressed to tourists. It can be argued that this sense of disconnect could indicate that locals are supposedly aware of the 'trap' whereas tourists are not, i.e. the locals are faced with two versions of the same place, which do not seem to coincide while tourists are mainly projected to a single polished version of the Golden Circle. P5 shares this fragmented perspective on the attractions. According to P5, the Golden Circle includes several valuable features for Icelandic culture worth experiencing for locals. On the other hand, P5 argues that there is little

incentive to go there due to the immense accommodation of tourists. P5 refers to this imbalance in relation in relation to the fragmented mediatized gaze, *“But I know that the tourists see lots of advertisements from the Golden Circle. Then it’s often presented as adventurous places, full of summer and sunshine which is not really the case at all. But as an Icelandic, you rarely see these places marketed in a way that includes you, only the tourists. I think it is really a shame, since I know that many of my friends have never been and they don’t really see any reason to go because they just think of it as a place for tourists”* (Appendix, p.6). Based on P5 statement, it can be argued that there is a lack of inclusion for locals in the overall mediatized portrayal of the Golden Circle attractions, which could be enforcing a notion amongst locals that these areas are merely designed to contain tourists.

### The Relational Gaze

Having examined some the representations of the Golden Circle attractions that locals experience through the mediatized gaze, it can be argued that there can be identified several actors within the landscape of these popular tourism areas such as the locals, the hosts and the tourists. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, an essential notion of the local gaze is that it is socially constructed. As tourists gaze with their families and other tourists when going on holiday, locals can also gaze on tourists and tourism areas with family and friends. Additionally, as also presented in the theoretical framework, Urry and Larsen argue that while tourists have previously been noted to be in a position of power through the tourist gaze, locals also have the power to objectify tourists through the local gaze. Accordingly, gazing in tourism is rarely a one-sided activity and always includes multiple perspectives.

When examining the relational gaze in terms of the interview findings, there are various relational dynamics that become apparent. Taking point of departure in one of the core features of the local gaze, namely how locals observe tourists, the interview findings indicate a somewhat complicated relationship between the tourists and the locals. As mentioned, in terms of the local gaze, locals can be argued to be in a position of power to objectify tourists and their interaction with the tourists also shapes their overall gazing. Throughout the interviews, it becomes apparent that there is a certain distance between locals and tourists. Tourists are observed in a somewhat a materialized way, as integrated objects of the attractions rather than a socially constituted part of the experience. The discourse surrounding tourists identified in the interviews can be argued to further exemplify this. As noted in the content analysis, one of the articles applied the word *sea* to describe the number

of tourists to portray these popular areas as overcrowded and vast, evoking the sense that there is a certain possibility of ‘drowning’ in tourists when going there. This analogy is also applied in the interview findings. When asked whether they would plan any future visits to the Golden Circle, P5 responded by saying, “*No, I wouldn’t plan a visit for myself. There are so many beautiful and unique places around the country and most of them are not drowning in tourism as with the Golden Circle*” (Appendix, p.6). It can be argued that the metaphor of drowning portrays a view of tourism and consequently tourists, as being all-consuming to the Golden Circle areas. P10 also comments on the all-consuming effect of tourism at the Golden Circle by comparing the tourists as farm animals, “*The places are beautiful, but they have lost so much of their charm after all the tourism services have been built there. Also, the constant convoy of tour busses takes away from the experience. The tour busses kind of make the tourists seem like farm animals, like sheep being herded*” (Appendix, p.11). By describing the tourists as sheep being herded by the tourism industry, the quote portrays this materialization of the tourists as a product of the tourism industry rather than active and relational individuals.

Another way that the tourists become objectified throughout the interviews is as part of the overall attraction. For P8, the tourists have become a key point of entertainment when visiting the Golden Circle. When asked what came to mind when thinking of the Golden Circle, P8 said “*Tourists. And fun! I like to go there and watch the people. For instance, I enjoy it when everyone is always so happy when Strókkur erupts. A visit to Geysir gives you faith in the small joys in life*” (Appendix, p.8). Several of the interview participants share this notion of observing tourists as a form of entertainment. When asked to describe the latest experience at the Golden Circle, P10 said “*I just remember it as being full of Japanese tourists with cameras on sticks. It was very fun to watch them try to capture the perfect moment*” (Appendix, p.10). It can be argued that this objectivization of tourists stresses that in relation to the Golden Circle, locals experience a clear distinction between themselves and the tourists, as the tourists are presented as passive observable entities.

While some of the interview participants experience tourists as passive parts of the overall attraction, and thus not as relational elements, the overall findings indicate a somewhat contradictory view on the tourist. A majority of participants indicated that their main purpose for visiting the Golden Circle was to show foreign visitors around. When asked about the purpose of their last visit to the Golden Circle, P3, P5, P6, P7, P10 and P11 all indicated that this was their sole reasoning for going. When asked to describe the visit P6 said, “*It was fine, I didn’t really go for my own enjoyment since I don’t enjoy the number of tourists and the amount of buildings and shops that*



*have been built around it, but I went there for my friends*” (Appendix, p.7). While the findings indicate that the presence of too many tourists is one of the main rationales for not wanting to engage with the areas, the interview participants seemingly do not place friends who are foreign visitors in the same unfavorable category as tourists. Accordingly, one could argue that this is due to a stronger relational connection. This distinction between tourists and foreign friend is emphasized by P8, who visited the Golden Circle to show a foreign friend the sights. When asked to describe the experience, P8 said *“I enjoyed it since I was in good company. And it was fun to watch the Chinese tourists take pictures of everything and listening to the Americans speak way too loudly about how everything is so expensive in here”* (Appendix, p.9). It can be argued that P8 indicates that the experience was defined by the good relationship with the accompanying friend, while still objectifying other tourists as part of the attraction. It thus becomes apparent that social bonds or lack thereof shape the overall nature of the experience in these popular tourism areas.

Another way the relational bonds shape the experience for the locals is through previous encounters with the Golden Circle attractions. Through the interview findings it becomes apparent that the people who didn't have previous relational memories of the place seemed to view it less negatively than the ones who already had a previous personal connection to the area. P2 and P5 both describe visiting the Golden Circle attractions for the first time in the last couple of years. While both P2 and P5 express concern towards the number of tourists, they also indicate that the experience was good. P5 says, *“It was interesting, I'm happy I went since I hadn't been before, and they are pretty important places in Icelandic culture. But it was very cold and crowded, which was not as nice”* (Appendix, p.6). In contrast, the participants who had some form of previous emotional attachment to the Golden Circle attractions expressed more negative views on the contemporary state of the areas. For instance, P1 describes how he used to go to the attractions with his family before the tourism started increasing in the area. Despite not having been at the sights for 15 years, P1 carries a negative preconception of the areas being overcrowded with tourists and dominated by tourism facilities, (Appendix, p.1). This can be argued to indicate that the previous emotional and relational attachment to the areas enforce a more negative perspective to contemporary tourism in these areas. P4 and P9 share this point. P4 last visited the sights 10 years ago and while P4 expressed that it had been a nice experience, argued that it would not be of interest to go again, *“I think the number of tourists and the changes that have been done to the areas have taken the enjoyment out of seeing these attractions”* (Appendix, p.5). While P1 had an emotional attachment to the place due to his relational experiences with his family, P4 displays an emotional attachment to the national significance of the place.

Furthermore, when describing the positive attributes of the attractions such as the cultural and historical value, P4 presents this in past tense (p.4). Accordingly, it can be argued to indicate that P4 no longer feels that these elements are applicable to the current environment.

### The Sensuous Gaze

The last element of the local gaze is the overall sensuous element of the experience. As described in the theoretical chapter of this project, the tourist gaze and thus the local gaze can be viewed as a multimodal experience where the interaction between places, people and senses all shapes the way people gaze in tourism. As such, the relational and the sensuous gaze can be argued to be intertwined in the way that they shape the overall gaze. As mentioned, while gazing mainly implies visual component, gazing also includes a multitude of sensuous experiences that are equally important in the overall experience. While Urry initially gained criticism for demoting other senses within the gaze, the visual component is still a core component when examining the gaze, as it is the organizing sense in terms of shaping and understanding all the other senses in a given situation (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 195). According to Urry (2011), “*The distinctiveness of the visual is crucial for giving all sorts of practices and performances a special or unique character*” (p.195). Taking point of departure in the visual components of the local gaze, the interviews portray that the visual experience for the locals in these places plays a significant role in their perception of the Golden Circle attractions.

Throughout the interviews, it becomes apparent that there are some main visual components that shape experience of the participants. Firstly, tourist shops and other tourism facilities become the dominant visual experience for many of the participants. For P11, some of the places have become transformed into a giant crowded souvenir shop rather than a unique point of attraction (Appendix, p.11). At the same time, several of the participants still place value in the original visual attraction points such as the waterfall and the remaining natural landscape. For instance, when asked to describe the Golden Circle, P5 mentions beauty, uniqueness and history as some of the characteristics (p.5). While the original features of the attractions such as waterfalls and the natural landscape are still part of the attractions, tourists are portrayed as being an overwhelming part of the current landscape. As previously mentioned, some participants argue that they would go to the attractions to watch the tourists rather than for the attraction point itself. As such, the overcrowding of tourists has also become a visual component of the experience, leading to other senses being activated. According to P8, part of the experience of being at these attractions involves “*listening to Americans speak way too loudly about how everything is so expensive in here*” (p.9). Accordingly,

the presence of tourists not only involves the visual overtaking of the experience but also add to other sensuous elements within the overall landscape.

Returning to the two visual components, namely the tourism landscape and the natural landscape in which it is placed, several of the participants seem to have a somewhat two-split and complex outlook on the Golden Circle areas. While they still place value in the original points of uniqueness, the participants also feel that these features are now being outshined by a dominating tourism industry. The latter also seems to evoke the most senses as a majority of the respondents described the congestion of people, shops and traffic as frustrating, overwhelming and a negative part of the experiences. When asked to describe the Golden Circle, P6 captures this point by presenting it as characterized by *“mass tourism, overflow of tourists and giftshops and damaged infrastructure. The landscape is pretty and powerful, but the amount of people ruins the experience. Þingvellir is like our version of Notre Dame”*. P7 further emphasizes this point when describing the Golden Circle attractions as *“Beautiful sights that are hopelessly overrun by tourists”* (Appendix, p.7). This sense of ambivalence towards the attractions can be argued to showcase an underlying emotional bond with these places for some of the participants. Accordingly, based on the examination of the relational and sensuous gaze, an emerging theme becomes apparent, namely the sentimental gaze.

As previously mentioned, despite not having visited the areas for 15 years, P1 carries negative connotations to the contemporary image of the Golden Circle. When asked to describe the latest experience at the Golden Circle areas, P1 says *“It was really nice, it has become a nice memory for me of my family and reminds me how great it is to grow up in Iceland, where you can play around in nature. But this was before these places became one giant giftshop”* (Appendix, p.1). It can be argued that P1 views the Golden Circle attractions through a sentimental gaze, as the place is no longer comparable to the memory of it and is thus perceived negatively. Similarly, P10 describes how the most recent experience of the Golden Circle brought conflicting feelings due to a previous emotional connection to the places, *“I was happy to be with my friend, but I didn’t get that same feeling of being in touch with nature as I had previously felt when coming to these places when I was younger. It’s not really the same place anymore”* (Appendix, p.11).

While having previous memories tied to the places add to their perception, the sentimental gaze also becomes apparent through other forms of attachment to the attractions. As previously mentioned, P4 last visited the sights 10 years ago and while P4 expressed that it had been a nice experience, argued that it would not be of interest to go again. When asked what feelings were

involved in the experience 10 years ago, P4 said *“It made me feel very proud of being Icelandic given the beautiful nature that we have and the interesting cultural history that are connected to these places”* (Appendix, p.5). In the case of P4, the Golden Circle attractions are not only viewed through the sentimental gaze in terms of previous memories, but also in terms of national and cultural pride. This notion is shared by P6 who feels split between sharing the place with foreign friends and visitors, *“It made me happy to see my friends enjoying Iceland, but it also made me sad in a way. I didn’t feel like the places represent the history, culture and natural beauty that it once did because of all the infrastructure build around it”* (p.7). As mentioned in the previous sections of the analysis, some of the participants seem to harbor a certain level of resentment towards the hosts, i.e. the controlling forces within the tourism industry for enforcing these continuous alterations to a previously untouched landscape. The sentimental gaze can also be argued to capture this view on the tourism. In the case of P6, the sentimental gaze portrayed a sense of sadness. P11 shares a similar point of view as P6. According to P11, the attractions points still carry national and cultural value for the Icelandic people. However, P11 expresses anger towards the dominating tourism industry at the Golden Circle arguing that these large industry actors fail to consider the long-term effects of their actions (p.12). This can also be argued to be linked to cultural and national pride for P11. While the number of tourists might decrease, this new tourism landscape remains, leaving locals with only the memory of what once was. Despite the sentimental attachment to the Golden Circle attractions, several of the participants seem to view the current state of the attractions as a point of no return. A majority of the participants argue that they would rather visit attraction points that are not dominated by tourists or the tourism industry. Accordingly, one can argue that while the attractions were once an integrated part of the national landscape, locals no longer experience it as a place for them.

## Discussion of Findings

As previously mentioned, the aim of this project is to provide an updated version of the tourist trap metaphor, one which captures a more nuanced picture of how tourist traps can be experienced. This aim is based around understanding the local perspective of tourist traps, a feature that is seemingly neglected in the current metaphorical representation. Accordingly, the aim of this project is not to provide concrete solutions but rather to shed light on some of the issues that are perhaps not as visible within the current understanding of the tourist trap metaphor. Having analyzed all the empirical data for this project, the following section will now engage in an assessment of the findings in relation to the overall research question and accompanying sub-questions.

As mentioned in the introduction, the tourist trap metaphor can be argued to represent a tourist-centric understanding of how destinations are affected by tourism. It can be argued that the findings show that the main characteristics of tourist traps, as defined in the introduction, can be identified at the Golden Circle attractions. Based on both the mediatized and the lived experience of locals, the Golden Circle areas are portrayed as overcrowded by tourists, dominated by the tourism industry and decreasing in value amongst tourists. However, having assessed the local experience of the Golden Circle attractions, it becomes apparent that these enclaves of tourism present an intricate landscape that encapsulates a more complex dynamic which can be argued to not become apparent by merely examining the experience of the tourists.

Taking point of departure in the first sub-question, this project examined how the Golden Circle areas were portrayed through national online news platforms in Iceland in order to gain an understanding of how locals experience these popular attractions through a mediatized gaze. Based on the findings of the content analysis, there are several important points that can be made. Firstly, in the media portrayal of the Golden Circle attractions tourists are portrayed as being reckless and somewhat uncontrollable. The findings of the content analysis indicate that the general lack of engagement from locals in the Golden Circle area seemingly perpetuates a certain behavior from tourists, unaware or indifferent to the consequences of defying warning signs and fences. On the other hand, this impression of tourists as reckless and uncontrollable simultaneously seems to be a point of apprehension for locals in terms of engaging with the Golden Circle areas. As such, the attractions remain in a perpetuated state of disconnect between locals and tourist. This disconnect is further emphasized as the media presents the attractions as playing grounds for foreign visitors. Additionally, throughout the analysis, the mediatized portrayal of the Golden Circle enforces a specific narrative pertaining to these popular areas of tourism such as overrun by foreign visitors.

Based on the overall examination of the local's experience of the Golden Circle attractions, it becomes apparent that both the tourists and the hosts have distinct roles within the local perception of these popular areas of tourism. Starting with the tourists, the findings of the content analysis indicated that locals were predisposed to an image of tourists as reckless, uncontrollable and a victim of their own masses. Additionally, the findings indicated that the media portrays these places as an environment shaped for foreign visitors rather than local engagement. While the interview findings showcased that the participants shared some level of agreement towards this image of tourists, others viewed tourists in a more objective manner. Several of the participants viewed the tourists as a material instalment of the contemporary environment of the Golden Circle attractions. A

majority of the interview participants indicated this to be a negative element of the development of tourism in Iceland, while other accepted it as an integrated part of the contemporary experience.

Throughout the analysis, it becomes apparent that the mediatized representation of the Golden Circle is very different for locals than it is for tourists. By comparing the findings of the content analysis with how the interview participants experience media representations of the Golden Circle attractions, it becomes evident that the news portrayal adds to a fragmented impression of the attractions for locals, leading to an increasingly negative perception of the places. While the marketing material relating to the Golden Circle attractions is primarily aimed at tourists, the findings show that locals are also subjected to this polished version of the attractions. However, as locals are presented with an inherently different mediatized version through the news, it can be argued that locals experience a gap between the representation of the places and their lived reality, whereas tourists might not be as aware of this. Accordingly, locals are faced with two versions of the same place, which do not seem to coincide or be relatable to them. Additionally, the mediatized portrayal of the Golden Circle attractions shows locals in the periphery of these areas in terms of involvement. This could also be enforcing the impression amongst locals that these areas are merely a space designed to contain tourists.

As mentioned, the findings showed that tourists are observed by locals in a somewhat materialized way, as integrated objects of the attractions rather than a socially constituted part of the experience. However, based on the findings through the relational gaze, it becomes apparent that the locals view tourists differently depending on their social connection. Accordingly, this shows that social bonds or lack thereof shape the overall nature of the experience in these popular tourism areas. Consequently, it could be argued that the disconnect between tourists and locals in 'tourist traps' generates a negative experience for both parties. As mentioned, survey findings suggest that tourists are increasingly unhappy with their experience at the Golden Circle attractions due to the immense presence of other tourists. Accordingly, one could argue that this negative perception of popular tourism areas could be improved by establishing a connection between the locals and the tourists within these places. However, given the current state of the Golden Circle based on the overall analysis, there is seemingly little incentive for locals to engage.

This lack of incentive can be argued to stem from the role of the hosts i.e. the tourism industry and other governing actors in the area. Within this issue, there also seems to be a complicated dynamic between the tourists, the locals and the hosts of these popular tourism areas. As discussed in

the analysis, locals are increasingly observed in the periphery to the relationship between the host and the tourists while still being affected by this dynamic. As mentioned in the introduction as well as the theoretical framework, the main characteristics of overly popular tourism areas, such as tourist traps, have been known to create animosity amongst locals towards visitors as well as enforcing the relocation of recreational places for locals. However, the empirical findings can be argued to highlight that the locals do not necessarily direct negative sentiments towards tourists. Rather, locals view the hosts as liable for decreasing the value of previously cherished areas through increased commodification and involvement aimed mainly at preserving the tourist-centric experience.

While the locals seem to place blame on the hosts for the development of the Golden Circle attractions into ‘tourist traps’, the content analysis can be argued to present a conflicting image in terms of the hosts. As mentioned in the host section of the content analysis, an underlying power struggle between the tourists and the hosts seems to be presented through the mediated portrayal of the attractions. As the tourists continue to defy designated pathways and ignore safety warnings, the hosts feel the need to continuously expand on these material elements at the attractions to ensure the well-being and overall experience for the tourists. Accordingly, this perpetuates the transformation of previously natural attractions points into manmade facilities designed to contain and cater to tourists. As the interview findings indicate, the manmade facilities overwhelming the areas are argued to be one of the main factors deterring locals from engaging. Consequently, this power struggle can also be viewed as keeping the attractions in a consistent state of disconnect from the locals as it portrays an environment in which there are a range of different values, leading to a lack of engagement between the actors.

Overall, the analysis presented the local experience as one of disengagement from the Golden Circle areas due to the all-encompassing relation between the hosts and the tourists, leaving locals as passive actors in the periphery of the dynamics of the landscape. On one hand, one can question the relevance for locals to engage in places that are inherently designed for tourists. As mentioned in the introduction, the linguistic structuring of the term tourist trap indicates that it is only tourists who are affected by the inner dynamics of these traps. Bearing this in mind, the absence of local engagement seems to not be of importance as the attraction points revolve around the host and guest relationship. However, based on the analysis, this exclusion can be argued to lay the foundation of the main issue not accounted for in the metaphor. As mentioned, the findings show that while locals might not wish to engage in these popular areas of tourism, the places can still carry sentimental value for locals. The sentiments that locals carry towards these places become lost in the

overshadowing relationship between the hosts and the tourists. As such, while locals are not necessarily visible features of tourist traps, they are still impacted by the monopolizing effects of such enclaves of tourism.

As mentioned in the introduction, according to the TALC model, all tourism areas start from a point of exploration, i.e. all tourism areas have an original point of attraction that sparked their journey on the life cycle. As such, before developing into a tourist trap, these places have had some form of value for the local society in which it is placed. This becomes highlighted through the sentimental gaze, as the Golden Circle attractions still seem to hold emotional, cultural and historical value for the locals. However, the findings also portray a standstill in the overall development of the area as the majority of locals feel that the places no longer represent what it once did and is thus not a desirable place to visit. In the initial part of the introduction, this project argued that tourist traps were placed between the consolidation and stagnation stage of the TALC model. Accordingly, a tourist trap will ultimately be faced with either rejuvenation or decline. However, the findings of this project seemingly indicate that there is little progress in these areas to suggest this development. As such, this raises questions of whether areas characterized as tourist traps will continue to develop into more than just designed tourism enclaves.

Based on this consideration, a tourist trap as represented by the Golden Circle can be viewed as an entity separated from the rest of the social environment of a destination. From a local's perspective, the inner dynamics of a tourist trap seems to be a vicious circle fueled by the dynamics of the host and guest relationship. According to Cambridge dictionary, a vicious circle can be described as "*A continuing unpleasant situation, created when one problem causes another problem that then makes the first problem worse*" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Based on the findings, the concept of a vicious circle can be argued to exemplify the dynamics of the host and tourist relationship within tourist traps. As reflected in the analysis, in the case of the Golden Circle attractions, the increase in tourists leads to a need for more tourism facilities, decreasing the original value of the attraction while maintaining a steady flow of visitors by increased marketing efforts directed at tourists, thus enforcing this state of tourism exclusivity. While this might be viewed as a natural development of tourism, the problem becomes apparent in the circle analogy. Accordingly, based on the local perspective, a more nuanced and precise metaphor to that of a tourist trap would be *The Host-Guest Attraction Circle*.



The circle can carry several rhetorical meanings. However, in this case of a tourist trap, the word circle can be viewed as to form a ring around something, thus enclosing it to others. For this project, the locals have been observed as being consistently placed on the periphery of the Golden Circle attractions social landscape. By examining the metaphor of a tourist trap from the local perspective, the findings showed that these popular tourism areas enabled a sense of exclusion, loss of power and alienation from a part of one's own society. Additionally, this representation of tourist traps highlighted a growing separation between certain areas of tourism and the local society. In a metaphorical sense, the *Host-Guest Attraction Circle* highlights the excluding element that these enclaves of tourism can have, as outsiders such as locals are unable to impact the development within the area. As such, it can be argued that the inside of the host-guest attraction circle solely reflects the tourist experience, whereas the outside of the circle reflects the local one. Accordingly, by applying a circle analogy, locals are presented as faced with a barrier to tourism. While this is not in terms of a physical barrier, the sentimental gaze can be argued to show that the contemporary dynamics of the Golden Circle attractions as tourist traps create emotional, symbolic and social barriers for the locals. At the same time, the new metaphor portrays how places that can be considered tourist traps are at a standstill in terms of development. The circle metaphor highlights that in terms of tourist traps, there is seemingly no end to the perpetuating cycle enabled by the relationship between tourists and hosts.

### Managerial Considerations

The aim of this project was to develop new metaphor to provide a rhetorical tool that could capture the dynamic nature of certain areas of tourism as well as a tool that could assist in generating awareness about some of the less visible problematics that surround these popular tourism attractions. In a more practical sense, the metaphor of a *host-guests attraction circle* can be argued to highlight that popular tourism areas present a monopolization of space creating a marginalizing effect amongst locals. As a result, this can be observed as leading to resistance towards wider tourism development by non-industry actors. Accordingly, while this project only contributed to a small example of some of the local experiences, the findings of the overall project suggest that tourism managers such as the Iceland Tourist Board should place an emphasis on understanding the local value of tourism areas in a more strategic manner. By focusing on including local engagement, the excluding barrier of the host-guest attraction circle could be broken. This can for instance be in terms of changing the marketing strategy to also include strategies aimed at getting locals to engage at these places, thus preserving the cultural and historical values of the places and simultaneously bridging the gap

between purposely designed tourist enclaves and local sentiment. This can also assist in mitigating any negative experiences for the tourists as the lack of local involvement enables the restructuring of attractions from unique attraction points to increasingly homogenized tourism enclaves. By focusing on attracting local engagement to such places, destination managers could possibly circumvent some of the marginalizing impacts that tourism can have. In the case of the Golden Circle attractions, not only could local engagement assist in regulating tourist behavior and experience, it could possibly soften the underlying conflict between locals and hosts i.e. governing actors within tourism. Furthermore, this project shows that destination managers should consider whether they want popular areas of tourism to be a separated entity of the overall society, monopolizing public spheres that have the possibility of providing value to a much larger segment of people or whether there the local perspective should become a stable consideration in attraction development.

## Conclusion

This project set out to evolve the metaphor of a ‘tourist trap’ into a more nuanced representation of popular tourism areas, as represented by the Golden Circle attractions. This project argued that the current understanding of the ‘tourist trap’ metaphor showcased that there was a neglected side to tourist traps in terms of the local experience of these places as the main emphasis is on the dynamics between the tourist and the hosts i.e. the marketplace and other dominating actors in popular tourism areas. Having examined the local side of the matter, it becomes evident that while locals are not actively engaged in these popular tourism areas, these places can still pertain value and cultural sentiment for the locals. However, the sentiments that locals carry towards these places become lost in the overshadowing relationship between the hosts and the tourists. As such, while locals are not necessarily visible features of tourist traps, they are still impacted by the monopolizing effects of such enclaves of tourism, leading to resistance towards wider tourism development for non-industry actors such as locals. Accordingly, while the locals do not experience a physical barrier to the Golden Circle attractions, the findings showed that there can be identified a symbolic barrier as the locals do not see a place for themselves within a perpetuating landscape of host and guest dynamics. Due to this symbolic exclusion, this project contends that the local representation of tourist’s traps can be metaphorically characterized as *a host and guest attraction circle*. Due to the closed nature of the circle, this project contends that the inner workings of type of tourism area is symbolically separated from wider societal structures.

A metaphor can be argued to evoke a wider narrative surrounding a specific issue. Additionally, metaphors can be observed as rhetorical tools used to symbolize social complexities that can be difficult to explain. Accordingly, applying new or different metaphors to a specific place or situation can lead to the construction of new realities and can influence the way people perform and think in a given situation. By reassessing the tourist trap metaphor from a local perspective, this project was able to shed light on some of the less visible problematics that surround these popular tourism areas, which is subsequently metaphorically portrayed through the *host and guest attraction circle*. While metaphors can be useful in capturing the transformations of the contemporary world, this also means that metaphors that have previously been used to describe a certain concept need to be constantly reevaluated to make sure it still appropriately grasps the reality of the situation. As this project only focused on the Golden Circle attractions, any research assessing other places through the metaphorical lens of a tourist trap could possibly showcase different results or versions of reality. However, this project can be argued to capture one version of social reality that came to light as a result of reevaluating and challenging the existing understanding of tourist traps.

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