



*Selasetur  
Íslands*

# ADVISORY REPORT: Resident Survey 2022

Presented by

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**WAGENINGEN**  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Literature Review	4
Method	6
Demographics	7
Results	9
Comparison to 2016 survey	21
Discussion & Conclusion	23
Summary & Recommendations	27
Next Steps	29
References	30

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this advisory report was to examine how residents perceive tourism development in Húnaþing vestra via a self-administered online survey. The research explored what tourism impacts residents perceive, what future tourism developments they favor and how they feel towards local involvement in tourism development. The survey findings show that residents of Húnaþing vestra have a positive perception of tourism overall. The majority of respondents are happy with tourism in general. They feel that tourism has improved the quality of life and perceive the municipality as a good tourist destination. More than half think that the benefits of tourism outweighed its costs. Residents recognize several positive impacts tourism development brings to the municipality, especially that tourism provides employment and increases the residents' pride in their home. Moreover, most residents feel that the current tourism occurring in their community does not have many negative impacts. However, comparing findings from a previous study, our study shows that the initial euphoria toward tourism is fading and turning into indifference. The survey produced several key insights into the needs and wants of residents for future tourism development:

- foster potential benefits of tourism: improving the local infrastructure, preserving and supporting local traditions, protecting natural resources
- monitor potential negative tourism impacts: housing problems, pollution, crowding, maintenance costs
- increase winter tourism slightly
- (re-)develop tourism products: local food experience, guided hikes, seal-watching boat
- work together with locals to decrease apathy

To develop sustainable and responsible tourism in Húnaþing vestra in the future, the Icelandic Seal Center (ISC) makes two recommendations. First, all stakeholders at the destination should come together to develop a holistic tourism management plan for the region and set agendas and management actions accordingly. Second, more research into resident attitudes is needed in the future. Here, the ISC suggests setting up focus groups with residents to investigate how to foster local involvement in tourism management. Next, the ISC supports periodically repeating the resident survey to monitor changes in the resident attitudes. This could deliver decisive insights for management.



"TOURISM [...] PERMEATES  
COMMUNITIES UNLIKE OTHER  
INDUSTRIES."

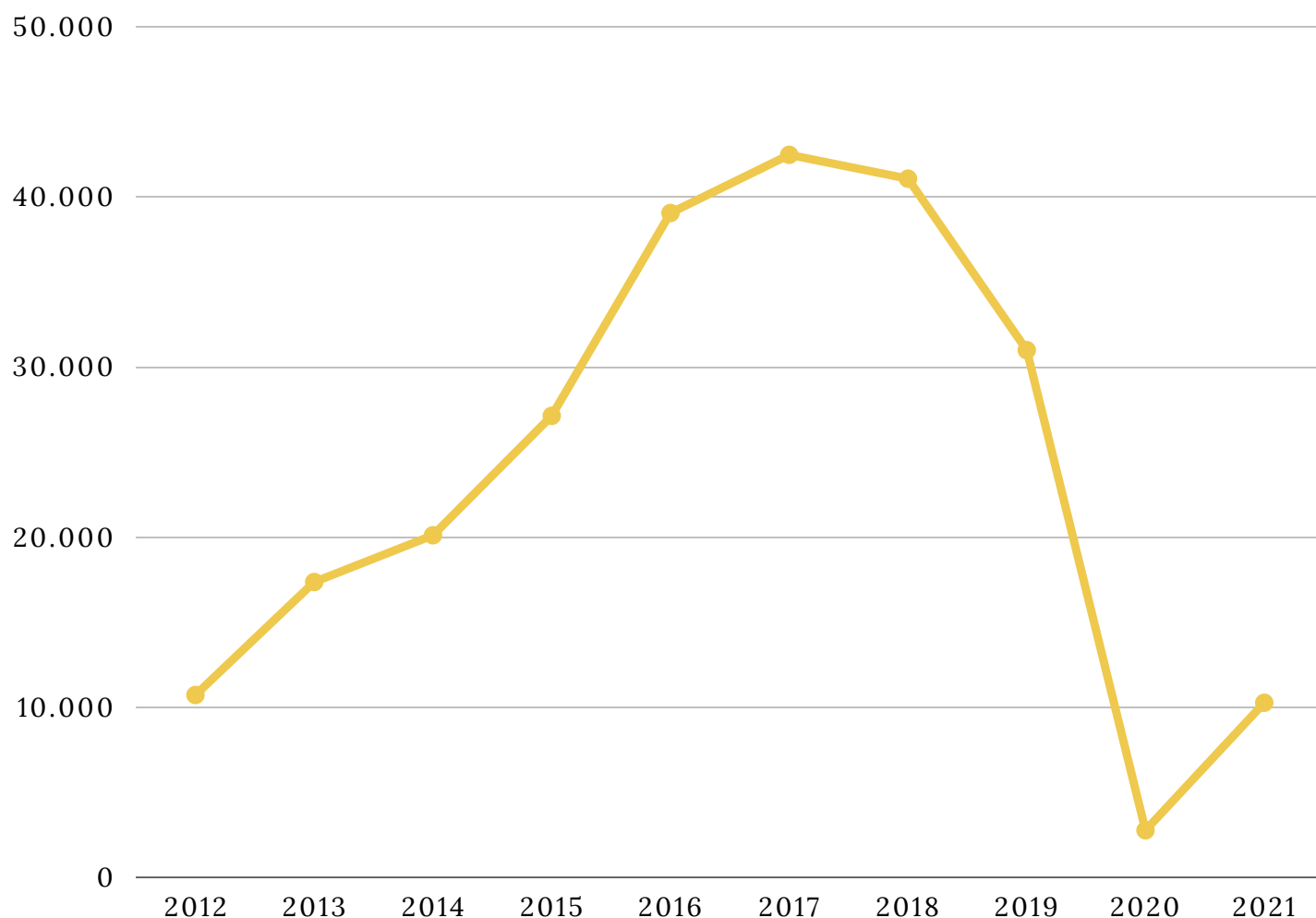
## *Introduction*

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What is the future of tourism in Húnaþing vestra and how can this future be as sustainable, enjoyable and livable as possible for everyone involved, including visitors, residents and wildlife?

This advisory report examines this question, starting with the local residents. "Tourism [...] permeates communities unlike other industries." (Harrill, 2004, p. 252) In most cases, it causes interventions in the *local* economy, *local* nature, and *local* community life altogether (Harrill, 2004). In that, the effects of tourism can be both positive, like the creation of new jobs, and negative, as tourists may increase pollution in an area and cause nature to deteriorate. It is the *local* community that is most likely to feel the effects, which may affect residents' lifestyles, opinions and attitudes (Sharpley, 2014, 2008). In light of this, residents and their opinions on tourism development should be critical components of tourism management to ensure a successful and sustainable destination development (Ap, 1992; Harrill, 2004; McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Schumann, 2021; Sharpley, 2014). Right now, the resurgence of tourism after the end of most Covid-19 restrictions in Iceland provides a unique opportunity to open a new chapter of tourism management in Húnaþing vestra. It is a critical moment to look at the future of tourism in the municipality, ask residents what they want that future to be and launch management actions directed at making tourism as sustainable, enjoyable and livable as it can be.

The objective of this advisory report was to gain insight into how the local community feels about tourism development in Húnaþing vestra through a self-administered online survey. The main research question was, "How do residents perceive tourism development in Húnaþing vestra?". Additionally, it looked at what tourism impacts residents perceive, what future tourism developments they favor and how they feel about local involvement in tourism development.



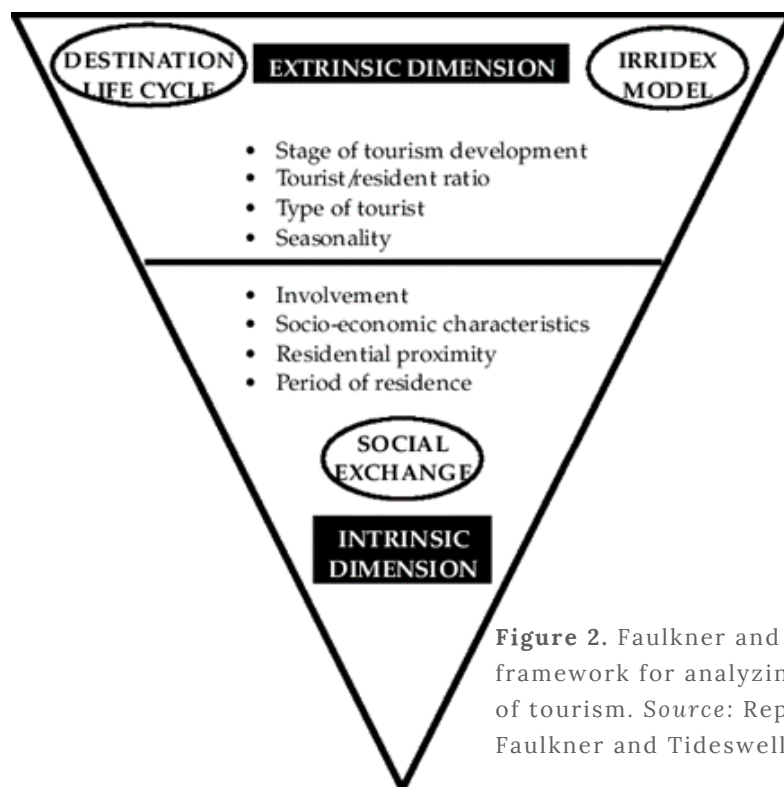
**Figure 1.** Visitor numbers at the Seal Museum in Húnaþing vestra between 2012 and 2022. Source: Selasetur Íslands (2022).

## TOURISM IN HÚNAÞING VESTRA

- 2006: first visitor count in Húnaþing vestra showed that approximately 2,500 guests had visited the Seal Museum and Visitor Center
- 2015: continuous growth in tourist numbers
- 2016: a survey shows that residents have a positive attitude towards tourism and recognize its benefits (Helgudóttir, 2016). Locals want to increase tourism further and would like more cooperation between themselves, the municipality and the tourism industry (Helgudóttir, 2016).
- 2017: most tourism-intensive year thus far, with roughly 42,481 tourists visiting the Seal Museum and Visitor Center
- 2018 - 2019: tourist numbers decrease slightly
- 2020: Covid-19 outbreak disrupts tourism in Húnaþing vestra
- 2021: Covid-19 restrictions remain in place; 10,298 tourists visit the Seal Museum and Visitor Center
- **2022:** Covid-19 restrictions are lifted; visitor numbers will be a first indicator for the future of tourism in Húnaþing vestra

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The next section presents the core concepts, themes, and theories discussed in resident perception literature. The terms perception and attitude are treated as synonyms to broadly refer to “a person’s experience of the world” (Deery et al., 2012, p. 65).



**Figure 2.** Faulkner and Tideswell's framework for analyzing the social impacts of tourism. *Source:* Reproduced from Faulkner and Tideswell (1997).

The first works on local perceptions and social impacts of tourism emerged in the 1970s (Sharpley, 2014; Woosnam & Ribeiro, 2022). Since then, research on this topic has maintained wide popularity in tourism literature, turning it into an established academic field (McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Nunkoo et al., 2013; Sharpley, 2014; Woosnam & Ribeiro, 2022).

Literature discusses three variables that influence how residents perceive tourism (Woosnam & Ribeiro, 2022). **Intrinsic factors** are particular to the person who forms the opinion – here, the resident – and include, for example, socio-demographic and psychological factors like gender, age, community attachment or income from tourism that influence a person’s attitude.

**Interactive factors** describe that the relationship and interaction between people affect their attitudes (Woosnam & Ribeiro, 2022). For example, the degree of interaction between residents and tourists influences how residents feel about tourism (Woosnam & Ribeiro, 2022). **Extrinsic factors** are place-bound, like the extent of tourism development, type of tourism, seasonality, or how far residents live from tourism centers.

In their framework, Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) limit themselves to intrinsic and extrinsic factors and position these opposite each other (Figure 2). The authors present the most frequently embraced theories per dimension.

# DESTINATION MODELS

Butler's (1980) TALC and Doxey's (1975) Irridex are popular models to sketch extrinsic factors. They plot the possible evolution of a tourism destination across different phases. While Butler focuses on tourism development, Doxey concentrates on resident attitude changes.

**Butler's (1980) TALC** has seven phases: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, decline and rejuvenation. During the exploration phase, tourism is new to a destination and develops slowly. In the involvement stage, a tourism industry starts to form to accommodate visitors. During development, the number of tourists and tourism facilities grow exponentially, and sizeable impacts on the environment, economy and social life start to show. From here on, tourism consolidates and becomes a natural part of life. Following a period of stagnation in visitor numbers and sector development, a destination may decline or rejuvenate. Over time, the face of the destination changes, and so do the impacts experienced, the type of visitor attracted, and the attitudes of locals (Butler, 1980; Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997; Huijbens & Bjarnadóttir, 2015).

**Doxey's (1975) Irridex** sketches the attitude changes of residents towards tourism. These may unfold alongside Butler's TALC (Figure 3) (see, Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997; Huijbens & Bjarnadóttir, 2015). In theory, residents feel happy (euphoria) about tourism during the exploration stage. Once they are accustomed to tourism, residents may start to feel indifferent (apathy) and do not show much interest. With many more tourists coming in the development stage, residents may feel increasingly annoyed (irritation) as their daily life changes. After some time, this can turn into actual hostility (antagonism) towards tourists and the industry. The speed at which a local community passes through these stages hinges on several factors, like the type of tourists, the intensity of tourism, or the quality of tourism management (Doxey, 1975; Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997; Huijbens & Bjarnadóttir, 2015).

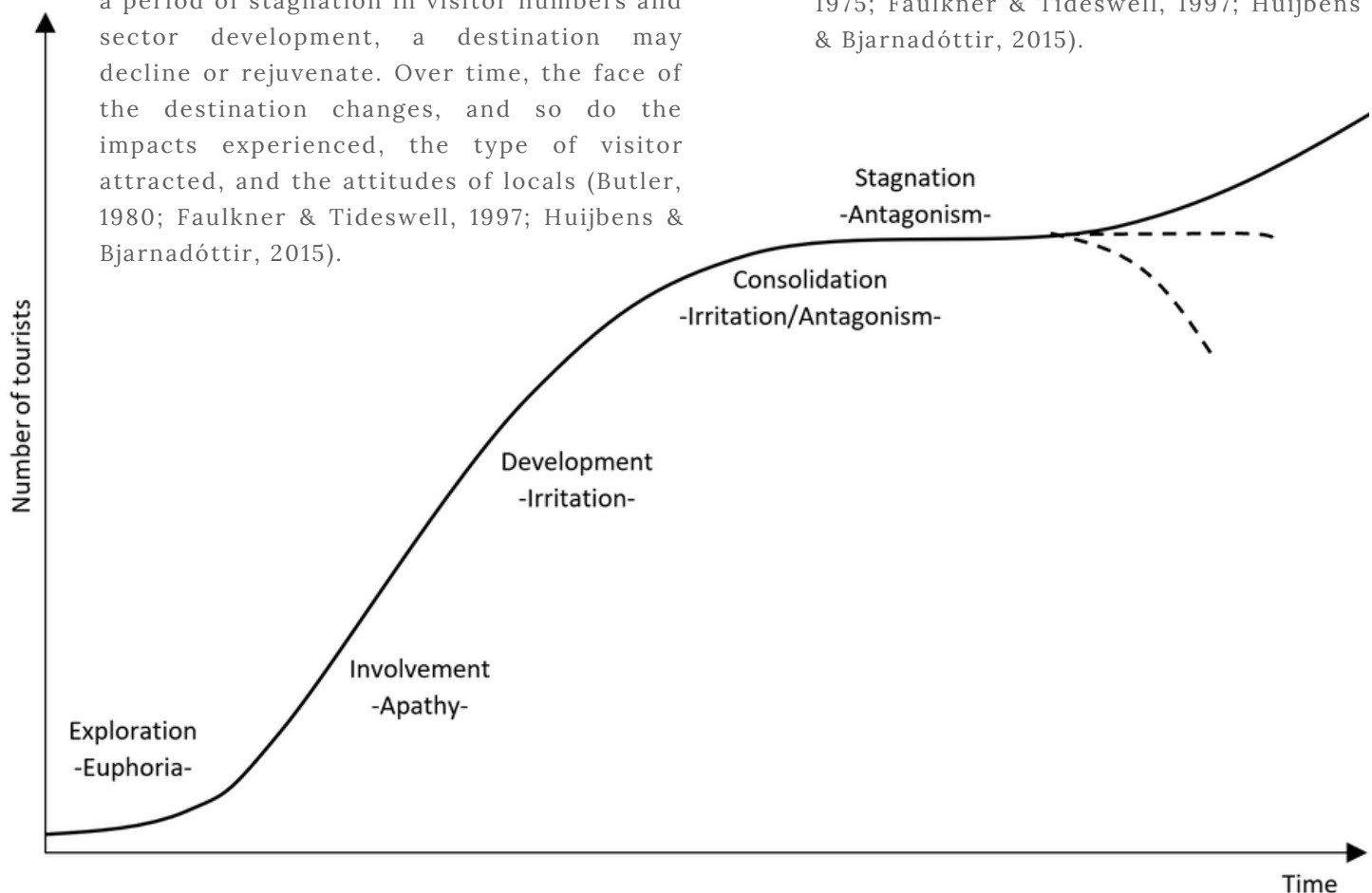


Figure 3. Integration of Butler's TALC and Doxey's Irridex. Source: Adapted and translated from Huijbens and Bjarnadóttir (2015, p. 19).



# METHOD

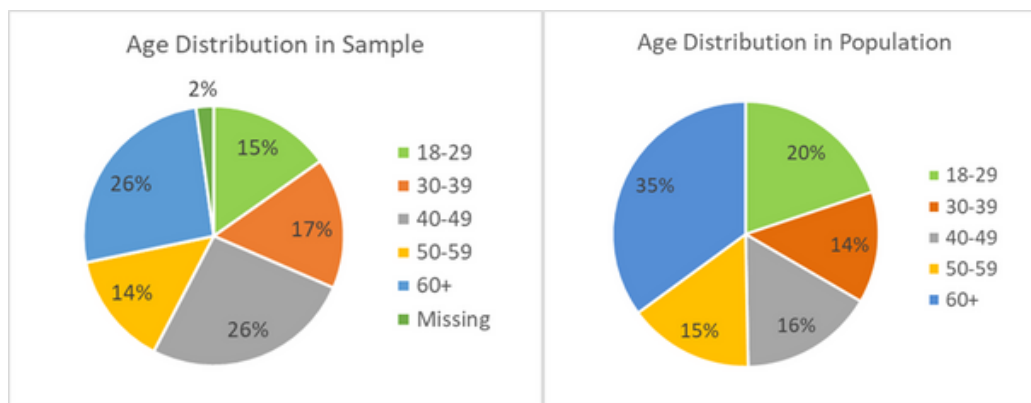


The research presents a case study in Húnaþing vestra, Northwestern Iceland. The ISC distributed a self-administered online survey between 14th June and 7th July 2022 to measure the resident perception of tourism. The survey was available in both English and Icelandic. It featured questions on the residents' overall attitude towards tourism, their perception of tourism impacts, their opinion on the current tourism infrastructure, their preferences for future tourism products, and their needs and wants regarding their involvement in tourism management. Residents had access to the survey via a link posted on Facebook groups and the official social media channels of the municipality and the ISC. In addition, posters were placed at four strategic locations - the grocery store, gas station, pool/gym, and Seal Museum and Visitor Center. These posters provided QR codes leading to the survey. An advert with the Icelandic QR code was available in the local newspaper.

In total, 92 respondents completed the questionnaire. The targeted population of the study were residents of Húnaþing vestra older than 18 years. With the size of the eligible population estimated at 972 (Statistics Iceland, 2022), the survey thus reached about 10% of the total population in Húnaþing vestra. The age distribution in the sample matches the distribution in the population, as shown on the next page (Statistics Iceland, 2022). This gives confidence that the survey is able to deliver insights for the total population despite its small sample size.

# DEMOGRAPHICS

Húnaþing vestra has a total population of 1226, of which 627 (or 51%) of the total population lives in Hvammstangi (Statistics Iceland, 2022). The socio-demographic distribution of the sample is displayed in Table 1. More females (61%) than males answered the survey. The biggest age group was 60 and older, and most respondents have completed upper secondary school. Equal shares were born elsewhere or were born in the municipality but have lived elsewhere. Over 40% of the sample have lived in Húnaþing vestra for 30+ years, and 64% live in Hvammstangi. Over 90% of the residents are reportedly always (40%) or most of the time (53%) satisfied with living in the municipality. The majority (71%) does not derive a household income from tourism.



**Figure 4.** Age distribution in the sample.  
Source: Authors.

**Figure 5.** Age distribution in the population.  
Source: Authors, adapted from Statistics Iceland (2022).

# DEMOGRAPHICS

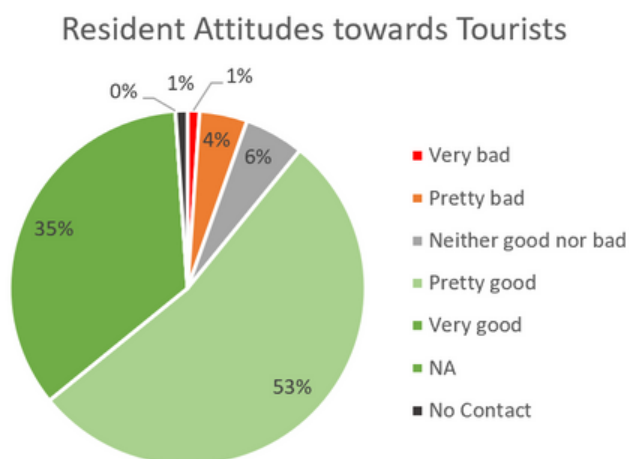
Table 1. Overview of the socio-demographic make-up of the sample respondents

Data	Description	%
Gender		
	Female	61
	Male	37
	Gender-neutral	2
Age		
	18-29	15
	30-39	17
	40-49	26
	50-59	14
	60 and older	26
	Missing	2
Education		
	Compulsory school education or less	22
	Upper secondary school diploma	39
	Bachelor's degree or vocational training	18
	Master's degree and higher	20
Missing	1	
Nativity		
	Born in and lived in HV all their life	24
	Born in HV and lived elsewhere as well	38
	Born elsewhere	38
Length of residency in HV		
	0-5 years	5
	6-11 years	13
	12-17 years	10
	18-23 years	20
	24-29 years	9
	30+ years	42
	Missing	1
Place of residence		
	Hvammstangi	64
	Vatnsnes	7
	Miðfjörður	12
	Vestur Hóp	2
	Heggstaðanes	3
	Hrútafjörður	8
	Viðidalur	4
Satisfaction with living in HV		
	No, never happy to live in HV	1
	No, almost never happy to live in HV	0
	Sometimes happy to live in HV	6
	Yes, most of the time happy to live in HV	53
	Yes, always happy to live in HV	40
Household income from tourism		
	No	71
	Yes, part of it (seasonal) part-time job	15
	Yes, part of it (seasonal) full-time job	3
	Yes, all-year round part-time	3
	Yes, all-year round full-time	8

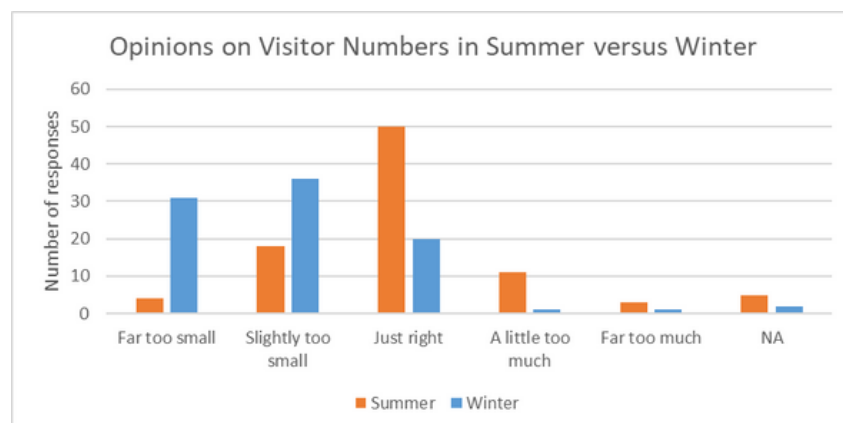
# RESULTS

## Attitudes towards tourists, frequency of tourist encounters and perception of visitor numbers

Overall, the respondents felt positively (total 88%) toward tourists coming to Húnáping vestra (Figure 6). For example, 53% of the sample felt “pretty good” and 35% “very good”. While 6% of respondents were neutral, and 4% felt “pretty bad”. Only one respondent felt “very bad” about tourists in the municipality. The largest share of respondents (73%) encounters tourists once or more daily or at least almost daily. The second largest group (21%) comes into contact with tourists one to three times a week, and three respondents meet tourists less than once a month. The results show that when residents come into contact with tourists, their experiences are positive.



**Figure 6.** Resident attitudes towards tourists. Source: Authors.



**Figure 7.** Resident opinions on visitor numbers in summer and winter. Source: Authors.

When asked about their perception of the number of tourists in Húnáping vestra during the summer (June, July and August), more than half of the respondents (54%) answered that the number is “just right”. For a combined total of 15%, tourism numbers should decrease. 12% answered the number of tourists was “slightly too much”, and 6% “far too much”. At the opposite end of the spectrum, 24% of respondents felt more tourists could come: 20% perceived visitor numbers as “slightly too small” (20%), and 4% as “far too small”. 6% of the sample did not know an answer to the question, and 1% skipped the question.

Looking at the same question but for the winter season (September until the end of May), the largest share (39%) of respondents perceived the number of tourists as “slightly too small” and the second largest share (34%) as “far too small”. 22% thought the number was “just right”. Only 2% of respondents wished for fewer tourists during the winter, with 1% feeling the amount is “slightly too much” and 1% “far too much”. Again, 2% did not know the answer, and 1% skipped. Figure 7 highlights the differences in the residents’ opinions on visitor numbers between seasons.



# ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM

## 96%

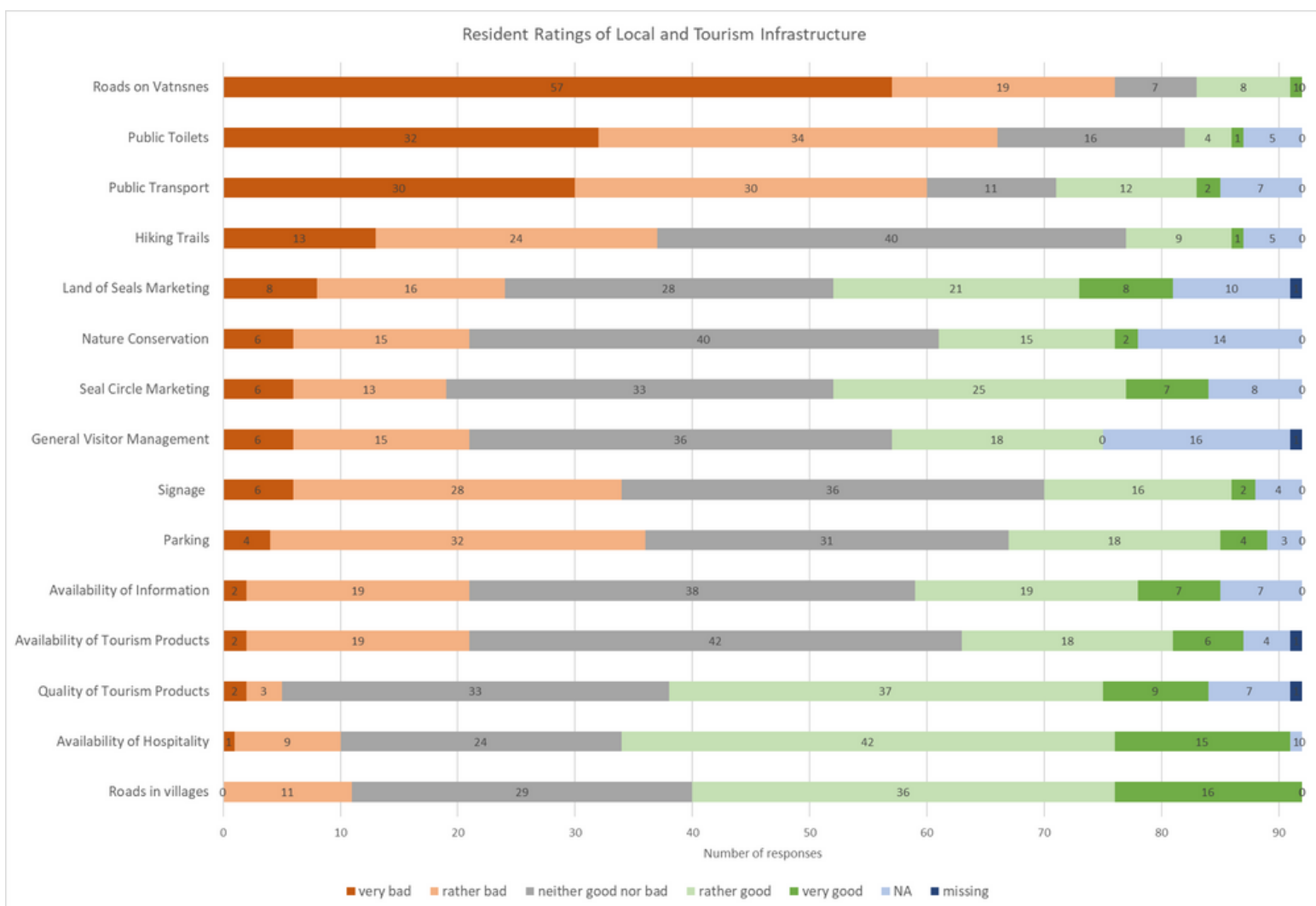
More than half of the respondents (62%) say tourism is very important and 34% “pretty important” for Húnaþing vestra. Only 1% indicate that tourism is “not important at all”.

## 58%

Over half think either “many” (38%) or “very many” (20%) people in Húnaþing vestra benefit from tourism economically. 26% indicate that “moderately” many people do so, and 8% feel that only “few” do. Less than 1% think that “very few” people benefit.

## 50%

Exactly half feel that “all of Húnaþing vestra” benefits equally. Hvammstangi is seen as the main benefactor (58%), followed by Víðidalur (23%), Vatnsnes (17%), Miðfjörður (14%), Hrutafjörður (10%), Vestur Hóp (7%) and Heggstaðanes (1%).



**Figure 8.** Resident ratings of local and tourism infrastructures. Source: Authors.

# INFRASTRUCTURE

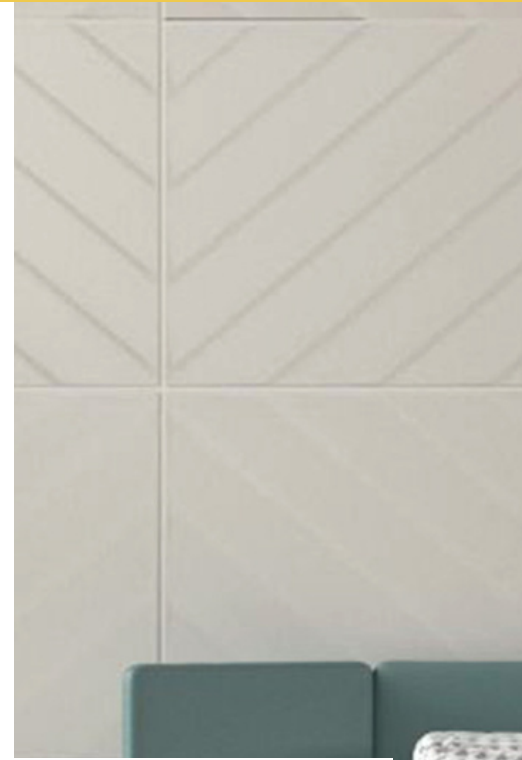
The respondents were asked to rate the status of a number of local and tourism infrastructures in Húnáþing vestra (Figure 8). Overall, the roads in the villages, availability of hospitality services, and the quality of tourism products were perceived rather positively. The availability of tourism products, hiking trails, nature conservation, availability of information, signage, general visitor management, the marketing of the Seal Circle and the marketing of the brand Land of Seals triggered a mostly neutral response. The parking at the attractions and public toilets received a somewhat negative response. Public transport and the roads on Vatnsnes peninsula obtained the worst ratings.

- Most residents (total 83%) perceived the Vatnsnes roads as “very bad” (62%) to “rather bad” (21%) indicated. However, 7% felt that it was “neither good nor bad”, 9% “rather good”, and one person “very good”.
- The paved roads were perceived more positively: 56% say “rather good” to “very good”, 32% had a neutral perception, and 12% rated them “rather bad”.
- Public transport was rated “very bad” to “rather bad” (65%), while 12% were neutral, and 13% thought of it as “rather good”. 2% indicated “very good”, and 7% did not know.

# INFRASTRUCTURE

- Parking at the attractions was judged as “very bad” by 4% and by 35% as “rather bad”. An almost equal share (34%) were neutral. In contrast, 24% said parking is “rather good” to “very good” while 3% did not know.
- Most respondents felt neutral about the signage in the area (39%). The rest of the sample split between 19% indicating signage is “rather good” to “very good”, and 38% “rather bad” to “very bad” while 4% did not know.
- Results showed that many residents’ perception of hiking trails is neutral 44%. While 11% believed them to be “rather good” to “very good”, 40% said they were “rather bad” to “very bad”. Again, 5% did not know. This indicates a push toward more negative than positive.
- Public toilets triggered stronger responses, with 72% thinking they are “rather bad” to “very bad”. While 17% indicated “neither good nor bad”, and only 5% rated them “rather good” to “very good”, 6% did not know.
- The availability of hospitality services received an overall positive response with 62% “rather good” to “very good”. While 26% were neutral, and 11% felt it was “rather bad” to “very bad”, 1% did not know.
- 46% felt neutral about the availability of tourism products. The rest of the sample skews toward a more positive perception, with 26% feeling it is “rather good” to “very good”, while 23% chose “rather bad” to “very bad”. On top, 4% did not know.
- For the quality of the tourism products, 36% answered “neither good nor bad”. The larger share (50%) thought of it as “rather good” to “very good”. While 5% answered “rather bad” to “very bad”. While 8% did not know.
- Most respondents (44%) saw local nature conservation as “neither good nor bad”. “Rather good” (16%) and “rather bad” (16%) were chosen while 15% did not know. With 2% indicating “very good” and 7% “very bad”, the overall opinion skews towards a more negative perception.
- Again, primarily neutral were the perceptions of the availability of information about the region (41%), the marketing efforts behind the Lands of Seals brand (30%), the marketing efforts behind the Seal Circle (36%) and the general visitor management (39%). The smaller shares were as follows:
  - Availability of information about the region: 21% “rather good”, 21% “rather bad”, 8% did not know, 7% “very good”, 2% “very bad”
  - Lands of Seals brand: 23% “rather good”, 17% “rather bad”, 11% did not know, 9% respectively “very good” and “very bad”
  - Seal Circle marketing: 27% “rather good”, 14% “rather bad”, 9% did not know, 8% “very good”, 6% “very bad”
  - General visitor management: 17% did not know, 20% “rather good”, 16% “rather bad”, and 7% “very bad”

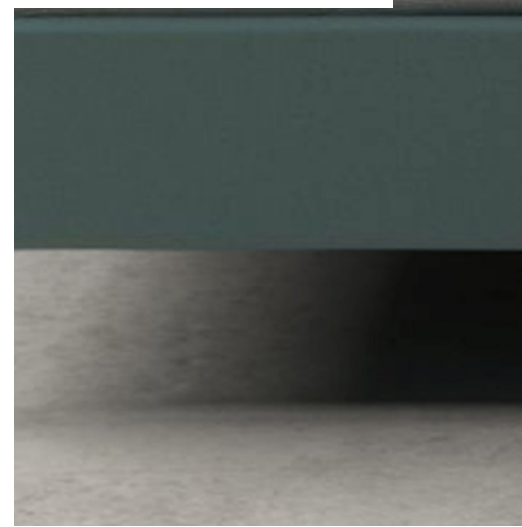




## TOURISM IMPACTS

The respondents had mixed perceptions towards tourism impacts in Húnaþing vestra. Mostly, the residents agreed that tourism brought certain socio-cultural, economic and environmental benefits to the community and did not perceive many negative consequences. Residents especially agreed that they are proud that tourists want to come and visit Húnaþing vestra and that tourism creates employment. On the other hand, residents currently do not see that the development of tourism improves transport and infrastructure, enhances the preservation and development of local traditions, and conserves natural resources.

Nonetheless, the residents also strongly disagreed that tourists are causing trouble to their daily lives and that tourism increased crime. Neither did they agree that they avoid tourists. In fact, their biggest concerns lie in tourism increasing crowding, pollution, maintenance costs and difficulties in acquiring housing. On the next pages, the report goes into more detail on the results for each tourism impact item sorted by socio-cultural, economic and environmental impacts.

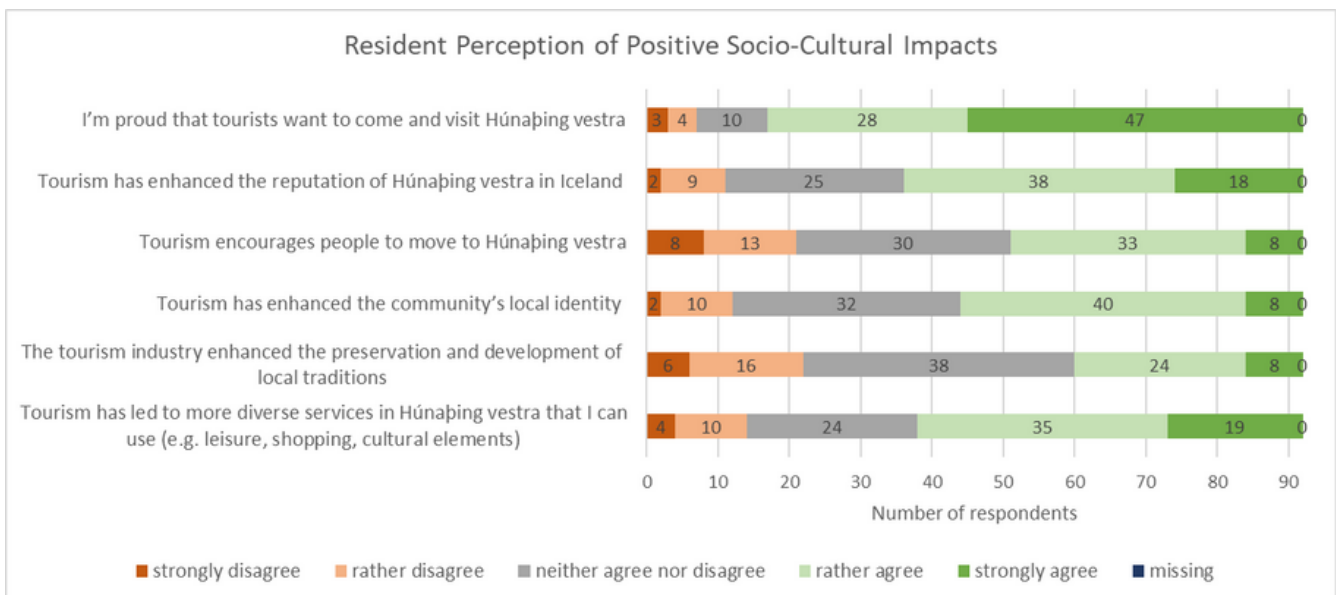




## Tourism Impacts

# SOCIO-CULTURAL

The residents see several positive socio-cultural impacts in the community (Figure 9). The impact perceived most strongly was that respondents are proud that tourists want to come and visit Húnaþing vestra. More than half (51%) strongly agree with this, 30% rather agree (total 81%). However, 11% remain neutral and only 7% rather to strongly disagree. Residents also think that tourism has enhanced the reputation of Húnaþing vestra in Iceland (61%) and feel that tourism encourages people to move to Húnaþing vestra (41%). Residents rather agree that tourism has enhanced the community's local identity (43%), and 59% feel that tourism has brought more diverse services to Húnaþing vestra; such as leisure, shopping or cultural elements. The only socio-cultural impact the respondents remained neutral towards was if the tourism industry enhanced the preservation and development of local traditions. Here, 41% of the sample stated that they “neither agree nor disagree” compared with 35% who agreed.

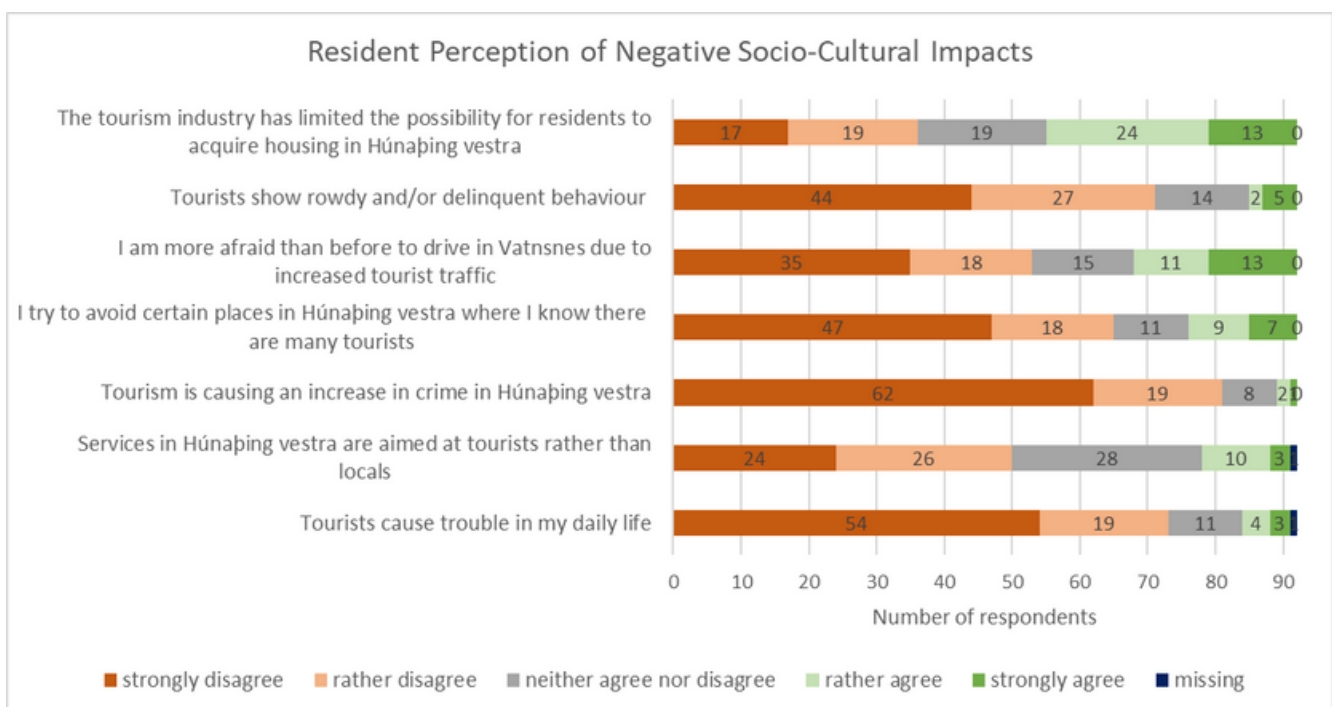


**Figure 9.** Resident perception of positive socio-cultural impacts. Source: Authors.

## Tourism Impacts

# SOCIO-CULTURAL

On the flip side, most respondents do not perceive negative socio-cultural impacts from tourism (Figure 10). For three of the seven given items, more than half of the sample strongly disagree, indicating that they do not think these impacts occur in Húnaþing vestra. In numbers, 88% disagree that tourism is causing more crime in Húnaþing vestra, and 79% disagree that tourists cause trouble in their daily life. Moreover, 71% disagree that they try to avoid certain places in Húnaþing vestra where they know there are many tourists. Residents (77%) strongly disagree to rather disagree that tourists show rowdy or delinquent behaviour. Yet, of the remaining views 15% neither agree nor disagree, 7% rather agree to 5% strongly agree. The majority of respondents (58%) strongly disagree to disagree that they are more afraid than before to drive in Vatnsnes due to increased tourist traffic, 16% neither agree nor disagree, however, 26% rather agree and strongly agree. It should be noted that the roads on Vatnsnes have been a great concern to residents who live on farms in this area. Residents are divided on whether the tourism industry has limited the possibility for residents to acquire housing in Húnaþing vestra. Most people said that they rather agree to strongly agree (40%), while 21% are neutral and 39% disagree to strongly disagree. Since accessibility to affordable housing impacts greatly a community, it is recommended that there should be a follow with residence on this subject.

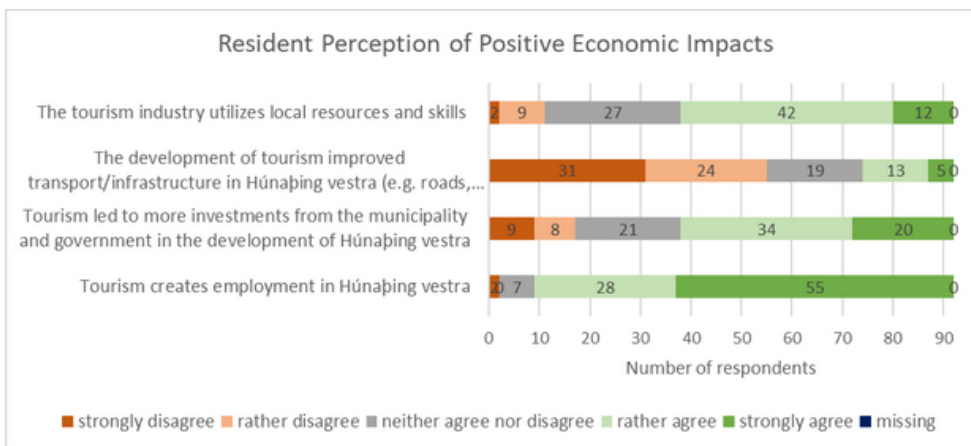


**Figure 10.** Resident perception of negative socio-cultural impacts. Source: Authors.

## Tourism Impacts

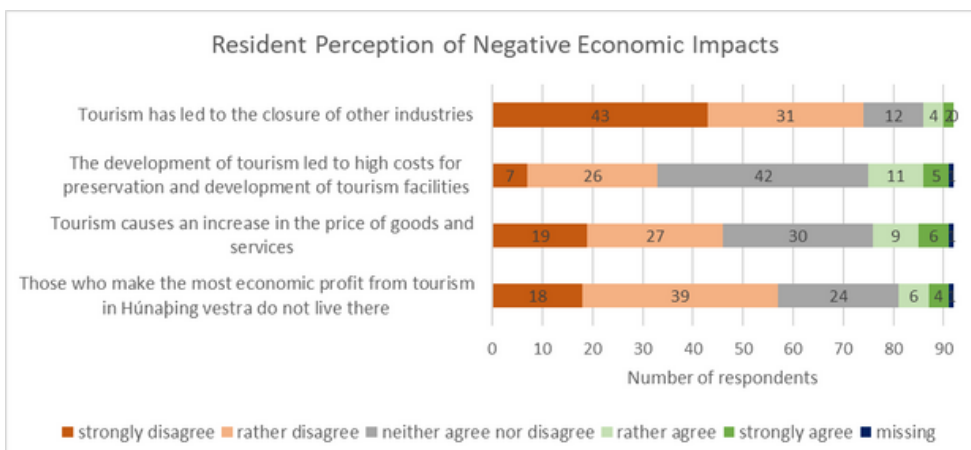
# ECONOMIC

The residents see various economic benefits from tourism (Figure 11). The majority of residents (90%) strongly agree to agree that tourism creates employment. Most locals (59%) also rather agree to strongly agree that tourism led to more investments from the municipality and government in the development of Húnaping vestra, and 59% rather agree to strongly agree that the tourism industry utilizes local resources and skills. The sole statement about positive economic impacts the respondents overall do not see was that the development of tourism improves transport and infrastructure in Húnaping vestra, such as roads and buses. In fact, 60% of the respondents strongly disagree to rather disagree, while 21% remain neutral, 19% rather agree to strongly agree.



**Figure 11.** Resident perception of positive economic impacts. *Source:* Authors.

The respondents generally do not see tourism causing negative economic impacts in the municipality (Figure 12). Residents do not think tourism caused the closure of other industries, with 81% strongly disagreeing to rather disagreeing. Respondents do not feel that tourism causes inflation with 50% strongly disagreeing to rather disagreeing, and 33% remaining neutral. Nor did they see leakage with 62% rather disagree to strongly disagreed. Only when asked whether tourism development led to high costs for preservation and development of tourism facilities many respondents (46%) neither agree nor disagree.



**Figure 12.** Resident perception of negative economic impacts. *Source:* Authors.

## Tourism Impacts

# ENVIRONMENTAL

The residents also see positive environmental impacts caused by tourism (Figure 13). Many respondents (54%) rather agree to strongly agree that tourists contribute to improved access to the country's nature, however 25% remained neutral. Similarly, 55% rather agree to strongly agree that tourists teach them to value their own country. The sample only feels neutral about the tourism industry conserving natural resources: 35% neither agree nor disagree, a total 35% agree (27% "rather agree", 8% "strongly agree"), and a total of 31% disagree (21% "rather disagree", 10% "strongly disagree").

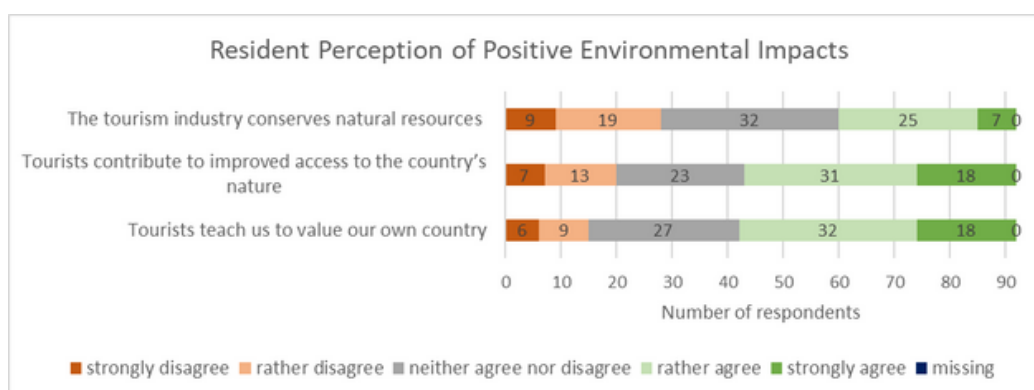


Figure 13. Resident perception of positive environmental impacts. Source: Authors.

Residents mostly do not perceive negative environmental impacts (Figure 14). The respondents disagree most to the statement "the tourism industry in Húnaþing vestra has had a negative impact on the environment and nature" (70% strongly disagree to rather disagree). Most respondents also rather disagree to strongly disagree that tourists increase noise (61%), spoil the experience of being in the country's nature (55%) or have a negative impact on wildlife (63%). Residents are neutral about tourism causing increasing pollution and crowding. For pollution, 32% are neutral, 37% strongly disagree to rather disagree, 31% rather agree to strongly agree. For crowding, 28% are neutral, 43% strongly to rather disagree, while 28% rather agree to strongly agree.

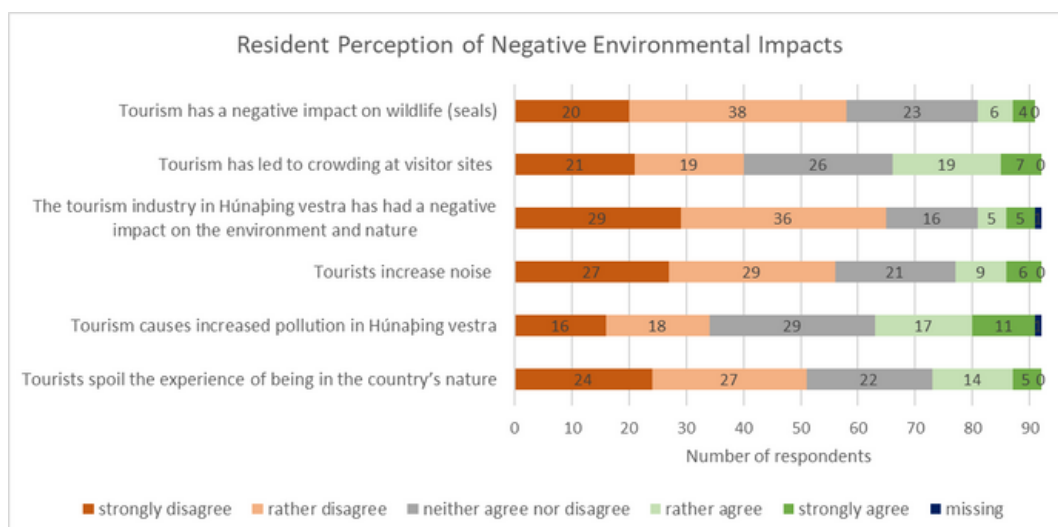


Figure 14. Resident perception of negative environmental impacts. Source: Authors.



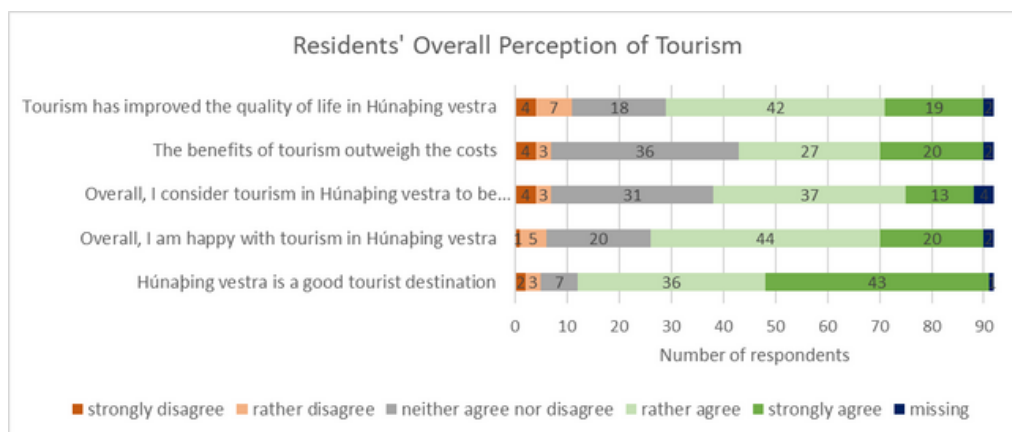
# OVERALL PERCEPTION OF TOURISM

Overall, the residents rather agree that they are happy with tourism in Húnapiing vestra and perceive it as a good, sustainable tourist destination in which benefits outweigh the costs of tourism and where tourism has improved the quality of life (Figure 15).

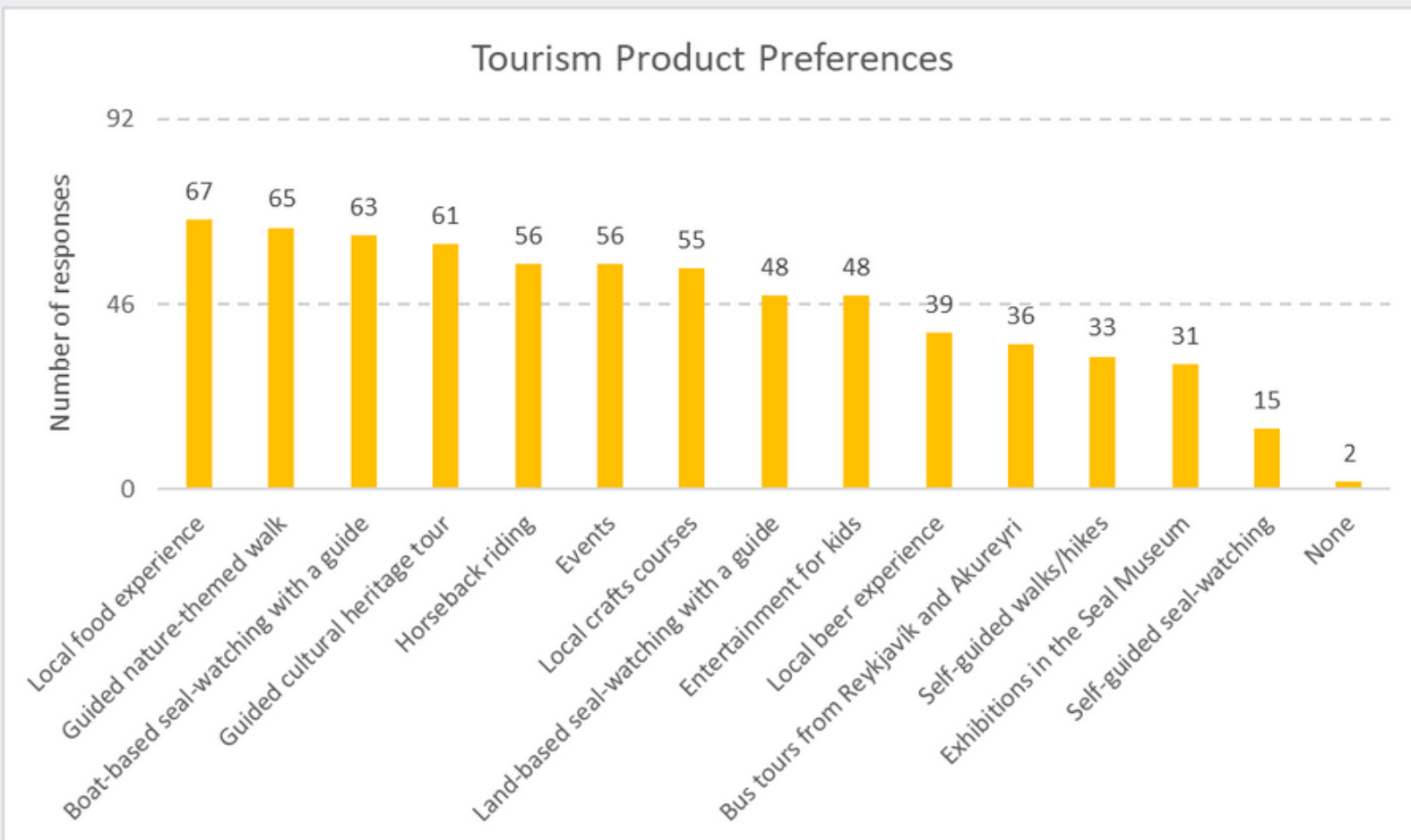
However, there are variations in the answers. For example, to the first statement - Húnapiing vestra is a good tourist destination - almost half of the respondents (47%) strongly agree, and 39% rather agree. In turn, only 5% of the sample disagree (3% “rather disagree”, 2% “strongly disagree”), and 8% stay neutral. Again, the majority (70%) indicate that they are happy overall with tourism in Húnapiing vestra

(48% “rather agree”, 22% “strongly agree”), to which 6% disagree to strongly disagree, while 22% are neutral. 67% agree that tourism has improved the quality of life in Húnapiing vestra while 20% neither agree nor disagree, and 12% rather disagree to strongly disagree.

Similarly, 54% think tourism in Húnapiing vestra is sustainable (40% “rather agree”, 14% “strongly agree”), while only 7% rather disagree to strongly disagree, and 34% - the second largest share - are neutral. Finally, most respondents (39%) neither agree nor disagree that the benefits of tourism outweigh its costs. However, residents generally agree to strongly agree (total 51%), while 7% rather disagree to strongly disagree.



**Figure 15.** Residents' overall perception of tourism in Húnapiing vestra. Source: Authors.



**Figure 16.** Residents' tourism product preferences. Source: Authors.

## FUTURE TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT PREFERENCES

The survey asked residents what tourism products they might be interested in and think Húnaþing vestra should develop in the future. The most popular suggestion with 67 responses of people is a local food experience. Guided nature-themed walks and boat-based seal-watching with a guide are the top three. Self-guided seal-watching (15 positive answers), new or more exhibitions in the seal museum (31 positive responses) and self-guided walks or hikes (33 positive responses) make up the least chosen products. In total, nine out of fourteen suggested products generated a positive response by more than half of the sample (>46), as indicated by the middle line in Figure 16. Out of all 92 respondents, only two answered that they do not want to see any of the tourism products.

# LOCAL INVOLVEMENT

The majority of respondents (71%) say it is very important for them to have a say about tourism development in Húnaþing vestra (39% somewhat agree, 32% strongly agree). The smaller share is not interested in this (21% neither agree nor disagree, 3% somewhat disagree, 4% strongly disagree). However, residents are rather divided on how well-informed they are about tourism development in Húnaþing vestra. For example, only 34% of residents agree to strongly agree that they are well informed while 28% neither agree nor disagree and 29% somewhat to strongly disagree. The respondents are also generally neutral about whether it is currently easy for locals to express their views on tourism development in Húnaþing vestra.

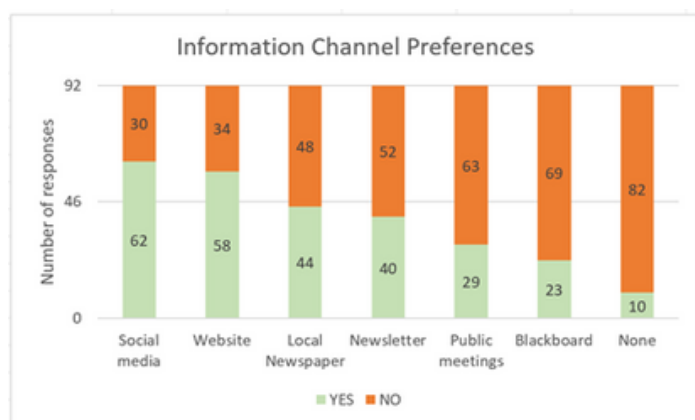


Figure 17. Residents' information channel preferences. Source: Authors.

The respondents prefer to receive information about tourism development in Húnaþing vestra via social media (62 positive responses, 30 negative responses) or a website (58 positive responses, 34 negative responses). All other provided information channel options receive less than 50% positive answers, as indicated but the mid-point line (46 responses) in Figure 17. Only 10 out of 92 respondents express that they do not want to receive information.

In terms of the preferred type of information of the sample, there are no clearly visible tendencies (Figure 18). All suggested information types – information on visitor numbers, events and exhibitions, number of tourism products, research projects and results, and number of tourism operators – received over 50% positive responses. The most popular information type with 64 positive responses is visitor numbers. However, the rest are similarly positive. – This indicates that residents would like more general information overall.

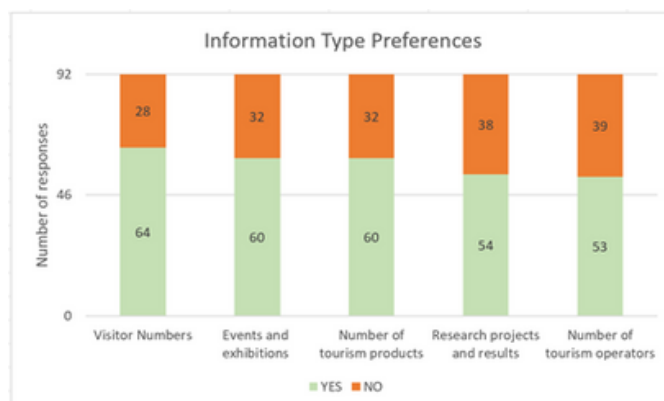


Figure 18. Residents' information type preferences. Source: Authors.

# COMPARISON TO 2016 SURVEY

A study conducted in 2016 explored what residents of Hvammstangi thought about tourism development. In the following, we compare the findings of the 2022 Húnaþing vestra study and the 2016 Hvammstangi study to show if and how the residents' opinions changed over time.

In both 2016 and 2022, 93% of respondents indicated that they were happy to live in the municipality / Hvammstangi. Both samples felt generally positive about tourism, even though the residents' perception seems to have become slightly more negative since the original survey in 2016. The 2016 survey reported a mean score of 1.5 on a scale from 1 strongly agree to 5 strongly disagree. In the present survey, 88% of respondents felt pretty good to very good which comes to a mean score of 4.18 on a scale from 1 strongly disagree to strongly agree. In essence, the perception thus roughly stayed the same while turning towards a marginally more critical perception.

In regard to the tourism impacts the respondents perceived, the attitudes stayed similar. There was a slight increase in people between the surveys that disagreed that tourism

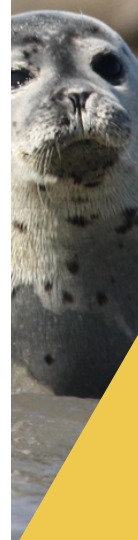
has a negative impact on their daily life. In the 2016 survey, 90% of the participants strongly disagreed to rather disagreed, while in the present survey 80% did so. In turn, this may hint at tourism having become slightly more disturbing to the residents' daily lives in the past six years.

In both surveys, respondents considered tourism to be an important local industry. The share even increased slightly compared to 2016, from 92% somewhat or strongly agreeing to 96% doing so in the present survey.

To the question whether services in the community are aimed at tourists rather than locals, 5% agreed or strongly agreed in the 2016 survey, whereas 14% did so in this study. Thus, there may have been a negative trend in recent years.

Leakage was not a problem to respondents in either surveys, with 70% disagreeing in 2016 and 62% disagreeing today. Yet, again the share of disagreement decreased over the past six years.

An inflation in the prices of goods and services, as well as local housing



was not perceived by the respondents in 2016, both items receiving a mean score of 3.8. Again, the respondents in this study overall still disagreed with both statements as well, however, the mean score (2.52 for inflation, 2.97 for difficulties in acquiring housing on a scale from 1-strongly disagree, to 5-strongly agree) indicates that already more people believed these impacts to occur in the community.

As in the 2016 survey, tourism did not have a strong negative environmental impact on the municipality in the eyes of the sample. Roughly 80% of the sample disagreed to the statement that the tourism industry has had a negative impact on the environment and nature going beyond its tolerance level. In the present study, the sample overall disagreed to the statement “the tourism industry in Húnaþing vestra has had a negative impact on the environment and nature”, with 31% strongly disagreeing and 39% rather disagreeing (70% disagreement total). As for the other compared impact items, thus, the negative impact was still not perceived by the respondents but the disagreement is wavering, indicating that the impact may become a problem in the future.

Lastly, the residents' attitudes towards local involvement remained comparable as well. The percentage of participants thinking it is important that local people can have a say in tourism development decreased marginally from 88% agreeing in 2016 to 71% in this study. The 2016 survey observed that while the majority of respondents wished to have a say in tourism development, only 54% wished to participate in public meetings on the topic. This survey showed the same trend with 63 respondents (68%) declining public meetings as a possible channel to participate in tourism development and receive information and only 29 (32%) accepting. Still, in both surveys, the sample felt neutral about whether locals are well-informed about tourism development. In the current study respondents felt more positive about the easiness for local people to express their views on tourism development in Húnaþing vestra. Whereas more respondents disagreed than agreed with this statement in 2016, the sample in this study recorded more agreement (35%) than disagreement (29%) even though the answers still leaned towards a neutral response overall.



# DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This advisory report examined how residents perceive tourism development in Húnaþing vestra. The sub-research questions were what tourism impacts residents perceive, what future tourism developments they favor and how they feel towards local involvement in tourism development. The following chapter answers these questions and situates the findings within larger debates on resident tourism perceptions.

## Resident's overall perception

Based on the survey, the resident perception of tourism development in Húnaþing vestra is overall positive. The majority feels either pretty good or very good about tourists, is generally happy with tourism and perceives Húnaþing vestra as a good destination. Most respondents find that tourism has improved the quality of life in the municipality and rather agree that the destination is sustainable and that benefits currently outweigh the costs of tourism. The findings therefore mirror the results of other Icelandic studies and show that locals regard tourism favorably and recognize its potential for the economy (Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Huijbens & Bjarnadóttir, 2015).

Tourism is seen as a very important economic driver that the entire municipality benefits from. Half of the respondents consider the financial benefits to be spread equally across the individual regions, even though Hvammstangi emerges as the main economic benefactor of tourism when in direct comparison to the other areas. Essentially, this can be interpreted as a positive sign that conflicts between the regions about tourists will not affect the destination in the near future. Nonetheless, this needs monitoring.

## Perception of Tourism Impacts

Residents perceive several positive socio-cultural, economic and environmental impacts. In other words, Húnaþing vestra benefits from tourism while most negative costs of tourism have not yet manifested in the eyes of the local community. The positive impacts residents seem to notice most strongly are that tourism to Húnaþing vestra evokes community pride and that the industry creates employment. Their biggest concerns lie in tourism increasing crowding, pollution, maintenance costs, and difficulties in acquiring housing. Most respondents were neutral towards these items.



Potential positive effects of tourism the sample overall did not recognize yet are the development of tourism improving the local infrastructure, preserving and supporting local traditions, and protecting natural resources. For the environment specifically, the residents seem to neither feel that tourism damages it, nor that it actively tries to conserve it.

#### **Future Development Preferences**

The residents' opinions on the number of tourists coming to Húnafing vestra differed between seasons. For summer (June, July and August), more than half of the participants think that the number of visitors is "just right". In the winter season (September until May), almost three-quarters (73%) of residents would like to see more tourists. 39% of residents want a slight increase and 34% would prefer a drastic increase. Since the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted tourist numbers, it is not yet known what number the respondents used as a reference point (for example, did the residents consider previous years before Covid or are they thinking about the current tourism numbers?). Repeated measurement of this question in the upcoming years is necessary to derive a clear threshold residents find ideal.

The community has mixed feelings about tourism infrastructure.

Residents ranked public transport and the gravel roads on Vatnsnes peninsula the worst out of all given infrastructure elements (1 out of 5 from very bad to very good). Parking at the attractions and public toilets scored rather negatively. Locals are overall content with the paved village roads, the availability of hospitality services like restaurants and hotels, and the quality of the local tourism products. The biggest number of given tourism infrastructures triggered a neutral response: the availability of tourism products, hiking trails, nature conservation, availability of information, signage, general visitor management, the marketing of the Seal Circle and the marketing of the brand Land of Seals. One reason for this could be that the residents do not specifically look for these items as they mostly relate to the interests and needs of visitors. In other words, locals may not have enough exposure to these elements to rate them as good or bad or they simply have no interest in them.

Future tourism products whose development residents would favor are a local food experience and guided nature-themed walks. The majority of respondents also want the seal-watching boat to take up its activities again. Self-guided seal-watching, new or more exhibitions in the Seal Museum, and self-guided

walks or hikes were the least interesting to residents. The ISC is currently conducting a visitor survey that will show if visitors preferences match those of residents.

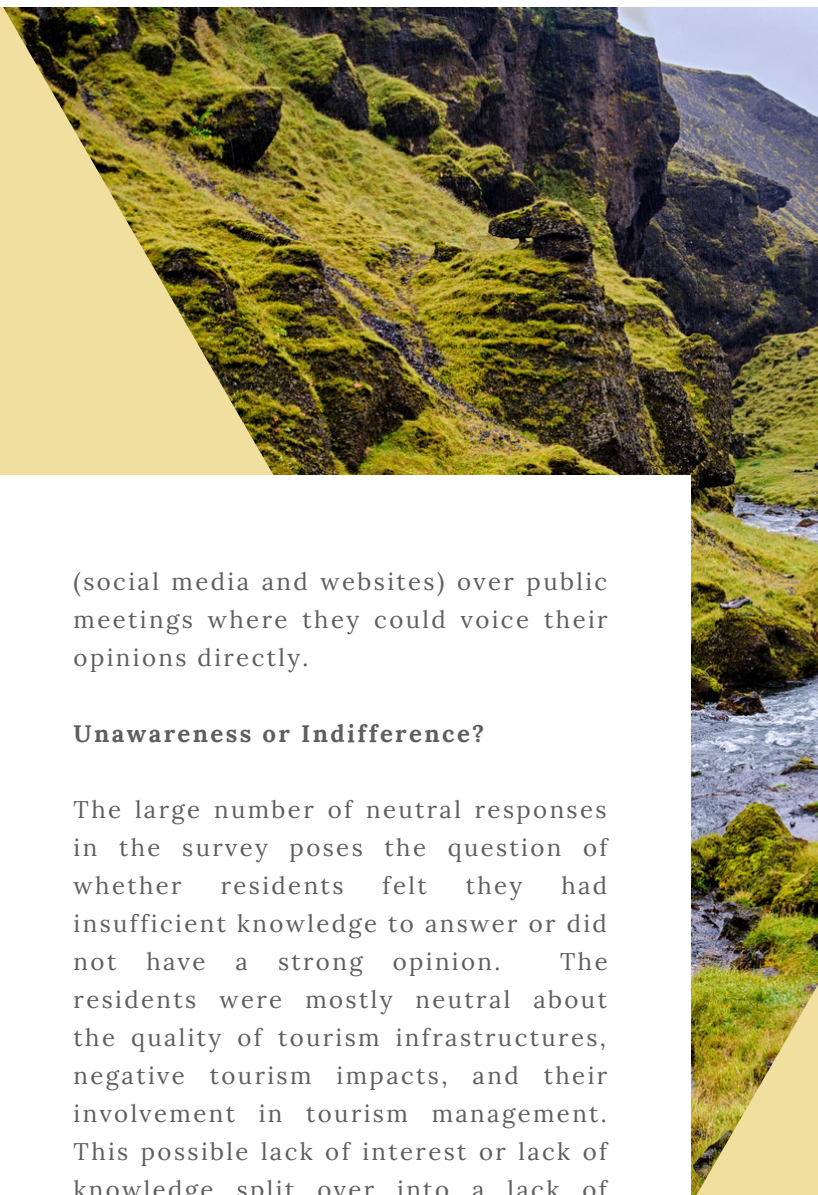
#### **Local Involvement**

To most residents having a say about how tourism development in Húnaþing vestra is very important. Residents neither agree nor disagree that they are well-informed about tourism development in Húnaþing vestra and whether it is easy for them to express their views. In conclusion, more participation opportunities should be created and communicated. However, looking at the residents' information and channel preferences indicates no clear need or want for certain information, nor the desire for active participation in tourism decision-making. All suggested information types – information on visitor numbers, events and exhibitions, number of tourism products, research projects and results, and number of tourism operators - received over 50% positive responses. For communication channels, respondents chose passive or impersonal information channels

(social media and websites) over public meetings where they could voice their opinions directly.

#### **Unawareness or Indifference?**

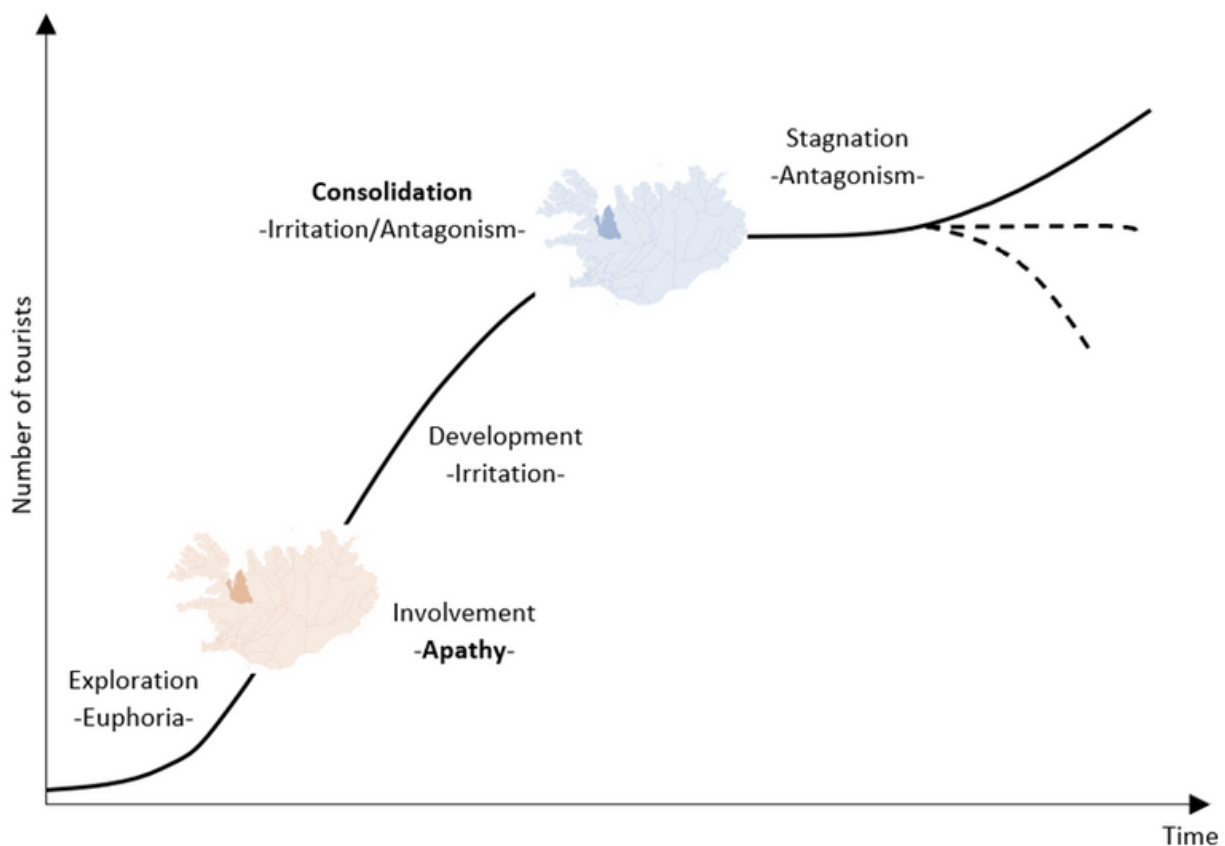
The large number of neutral responses in the survey poses the question of whether residents felt they had insufficient knowledge to answer or did not have a strong opinion. The residents were mostly neutral about the quality of tourism infrastructures, negative tourism impacts, and their involvement in tourism management. This possible lack of interest or lack of knowledge split over into a lack of initiative, as the residents' preferences for passive participation channels show. Or, they may feel that more active participation does not lead to local empowerment or local voices being heard. Environmental apathy could mean the residents lacked interest or knowledge in tourism's effect on nature. For example, they were neutral about negative environmental impacts, the extent to which the tourism industry conserves natural resources, and the quality of nature conservation. A large share of respondents (15%) also did not know about conservation efforts.



# HÚNAÞING VESTRA IN THE TALC AND IRRIDEX

Based on the survey, resident attitudes towards tourism in Húnaþing vestra are most likely in the apathy stage when mapped onto Doxey's (1975) Irridex (Figure 19, in red). The comparison of the findings from this survey to the 2016 study suggests that the community of Húnaþing vestra is no longer in the euphoria stage (Helgudóttir, 2016), but that residents show greater signs of indifference. The residents' overall perception of tourists is marginally less positive today than reported in the 2016 survey; and there was a slight increase in people who think that tourism disrupts their daily life. Moreover, locals are showing signs of indifference to tourism development.

Our study indicates that tourism development of Húnaþing vestra is in the consolidation phase (Butler, 1980). Based on literature we could predict that the attitudes towards tourism should therefore coincide with irritation/antagonism. However, the attitude within our study was shown to be in apathy which is more positive than the literature would expect (Figure 19, in blue). Tourism is an established industry in Húnaþing vestra and growth rates are slowing down. In that stage, the academic literature assumes that residents at least begin to feel irritated by tourists. However, residents of Húnaþing vestra neither felt that services are geared more toward tourists than themselves nor did they begin to avoid tourists. Many respondents even want more tourists, especially in winter. Still, long-term monitoring of resident attitudes and visitor numbers is needed to gain confidence about the TALC and Irridex stages the destination is in and devise appropriate management plans accordingly.



**Figure 19.** Current stages of tourism development of Húnaþing vestra mapped onto Butler's (1980) TALC and Doxey's (1975) Irridex. Red destination indicates the stage in Doxey's (1975) Irridex (apathy) based on the residents' perception. Blue destination indicates the TALC stage (consolidation) based on visitor numbers and tourism development indicators. Source: Author, adapted and translated from Huijbens and Bjarnadóttir (2015, p. 19).



# SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS



The picture that residents of Húnaþing vestra paint of tourism is positive overall. The majority of respondents were happy with tourism in Húnaþing vestra, felt that tourism has improved the quality of life, and perceived the municipality as a good tourist destination. More than half of the respondents thought that the benefits of tourism outweighed its costs. They recognized several positive impacts tourism development brings to the municipality, especially that tourism provides employment and increases community pride. Nonetheless, the initial euphoria about tourism is fading and turning into possible indifference. However, this could be an indication that residents are less knowledgeable of tourism development within their community. The survey produced several key insights into the needs and wants of residents for future tourism development:

- foster potential benefits of tourism:
  - improving the local infrastructure
  - preserving and supporting local traditions
  - protecting natural resources
- monitor potential negative tourism impacts:
  - housing problems
  - pollution
  - crowding
  - maintenance costs
  - degradation of the road along the Vatnsnes peninsula
- increase winter tourism slightly
- (re-)develop tourism products: local food experience, guided hikes, seal-watching boat
- work together with locals to decrease apathy and increase knowledge and capacity to make decisions (e.g., share news about tourism development via social media or websites)



Based on these findings, the ISC would like to make two recommendations for future tourism development in Húnaþing vestra:

### **I) Development of a holistic management plan for tourism development**

Following the Ethical Management Framework (EMF) for sustainable, responsible wildlife tourism management developed by Aquino, Burns and Granquist (2021), the destination needs to gain an awareness of the changing demands 2022 poses to tourism development in the community. The involvement of the community is necessary to create an agenda and implement goal-directed management actions accordingly. The survey findings can deliver a first awareness of the changing demands residents have for tourism development. To ensure that tourism development in Húnaþing vestra is as sustainable, liveable and enjoyable as possible for everyone involved – residents, visitors, and wildlife – all stakeholders at the destination must come together to plan how these insights can be used for a new tourism agenda.

The involvement of the local community and engagement can be somewhat challenging because residents indicated that they do not prefer to participate in more active meetings. However, actions are needed that work towards encouraging an interest in civic engagement with tourism development and initiative and (re-)ignite residents' excitement and initial euphoria for tourism development. A focus should be made on increasing the local awareness of environmental management practices and conservation in Húnaþing vestra. As a first step, management could follow the survey findings and disseminate more information via social media and websites.

### **II) Support of future research projects**

Húnaþing vestra needs additional research to explore avenues for stakeholder participation and track long-term attitude changes in the local community. The ISC would like to support this. To find out why locals may feel indifferent about tourism and explore how they can be motivated to participate in tourism management, the ISC would like to set up focus groups with residents and other stakeholder groups. We would also like to become more proactive in disseminating information about tourism development and wildlife research. In addition, the ISC would like to repeat the resident survey every three years to monitor how the community's attitude towards tourism changes. The insights of this study can be used by the destination to guide its tourism strategy in directions the residents support.

**“Responsible tourism is about everyone involved taking responsibility for making tourism more sustainable.” (Goodwin, 2016, p. 38)**

The ISC hopes that this report can spark excitement in its readers for developing sustainable tourism in Húnaþing vestra. We would like to continue this conversation with you.

# NEXT STEPS

- **Tourism Management Plan with the Involvement of Numerous Stakeholders.** We recommend that stakeholders from academic (both the social and natural sciences), government (local and national), industry, community (including youth) should come together to develop a general tourism development plan for Húnabing vestra. The tourism development plan should come from an understanding that "cool places to live are cool places to visit." Therefore, the focus should be on community well-being and resiliency.
- **Strengthen Local, Regional, and National Networks.** An implementation strategy with a focus on co-creation of the tourism development plan is needed to make sure that local voices are heard along with strengthening networks that help strengthen local capacity.
- **Marketing and Dissemination Strategy.** A focus on marketing the efforts local stakeholder groups are making toward sustainable development and resilient communities. Research of the local area should have a strategy for disseminating information in an accessible manner to the general public, both locally and nationally.
- **Focus on Tourism Development Through a Community Capitals Perspective.** From this perspective, managers can facilitate a better understanding of what types of actions may affect community development and the conservation of wildlife. We argue that making specific management actions based on an understanding of how they may affect community capitals would increase the likelihood of an effective management plan and community support.
- **Make Use of Research, Local Knowledge and Capacities That Already Exists.** For example, several researchers connected with the ISC have put forth an Ethical Management Framework (EMF) and have used a case study of seal-watching management in Iceland, which exemplifies how the EMF can be successfully implemented. The EMF can help managers predict potential conflicts, such as different levels of awareness of management actions needed among stakeholder groups; and that these stakeholders may have different types of agendas based on their understanding of the concepts of sustainability and responsibility. Therefore, it is important to utilize past interdisciplinary research, local knowledge and capacity to incorporate these into the tourism management plan.

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