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The Entangled Web

Tourism, Place and Identity

Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir

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Introduction

This report deals with progress made during the first year of my PhD project which at this stage is labelled *The Entangled Web: Tourism, Place and Identity* supported by the Icelandic Tourism Research Centre and Hólar University College. The report introduces a discussion of some of the theoretical ideas informing my research as well as outlining the research design and the structure of the PhD thesis.

Three Icelandic rural communities serve as the context and the material for this research. Those are Strandir (in particular the Northern part), Húnaþing vestra (with a focus on Vatnsnes peninsula) and Borgarfjörður eystri. Traditionally the economic backbone of those peripheral and scarcely populated communities has been sheep farming and coastal fisheries, but income from these has been rapidly declining in the last decades. These places thus all represent communities that have dealt with heavy outmigration and a negative place image associated with loss of jobs and depopulation. Around the globe, tourism development has been identified as an important move towards a more dynamic and attractive community (Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Georg, Mair and Reid, 2009) with the effect that rural areas, peripheral places and struggling communities are more than ever bought and sold as an experience, packaged and marketed to prospective tourists.

I have been involved with teaching tourism since 1996 when the Rural Tourism Department at Hólar University College was established and have participated in various tourism development projects in different rural communities around Iceland. Through this work, I have repeatedly experienced certain bewilderment amongst both tourism actors locally, as well as amongst those who are observing local tourism development from afar. Many seem to feel that tourism is a phenomenon that is on the one hand difficult to understand and evaluate and on the other hand tourism is seen as an empowering and energizing force that has the capacity to reinvigorate communities in decline. Hence, when it came to choosing a subject for my PhD research, I wanted to try to understand how people in a rural community embrace the ever increasing role of tourism in their community. In other words, the main goal is to explore what happens when a place enters the spotlight of the tourism industry and how people in a rural community observe, understand and participate in this change. Thus, I want to look at tourism ordering (Franklin, 2012) and what happens when tourism development or destigmatizing processes (Grånas, forthcoming) become the frame of reference in a particular place or region.

The Theoretical Framework

As to be expected from an early stage PhD the theoretical framework is still very much a work in progress. Currently the framework being developed is primarily situated within the unfurling theoretical debate on places and focuses on the relationship between place, tourism development and identity work. The following review introduces some of the broader strokes in the conceptual framework that anchors the research without any attempts at theory building or offering a comprehensive overview of previous research within the field (Maxwell, 2006). The focus is on identifying some concepts and ideas that are of relevance for this research. This is in line with Maxwell's (2006) recommendation of regarding the literature review as a tool to be used in the ongoing process of developing the research design.

The section starts with reflections on recent turns in theorizing tourism and following that the discussion will turn to the debate about place and its theoretical understanding. Finally, the discussion will centre on narratives and identity work.

Thinking of and through Tourism

[Tourism] soaks through the social structure, inducing cultural patterns of consumption. It presents itself as the sole "passport to development" for many communities and regions. It marks rhythms and impose [sic] new meanings and sense. In the end, tourism has the capability to spread all over the world producing new social actions, to name them, to create differences among them, to order them, and, most importantly, to manage those differences by means of distinctive politics (Nogués-Pedregal, 2012, p. xxiii).

Tourism certainly permeates the world we live in. It is at the same time the simple (in praxis though often tedious and complicated) act of going/travelling somewhere and to be served and hosted/entertained wherever you go. Tourism thus entails an inherently complex and multifarious phenomena that has become the emblem of modern times (Lew, Hall and Williams, 2004; Franklin, 2012), inseparable from our everyday experiences (Pernecky, 2010; Hannam, Butler and Paris, 2014) as well as being one of the fastest growing industry in the world. Adrian Franklin views tourism the following way:

...as something that had to be made to happen, that belongs to a story of becoming; that has quite explicit and often surprising twists and turns and unintended consequences; that once formed and unleashed on the world it took on a life of its own as an ordering, a way of making the world different, a way of ordering the objects of the world in a new way – and not just human objects” (Franklin, 2004, p. 279, italics in original).

To some extent, this description is reminiscent of Mary Shelley’s novel of Frankenstein and the monster he unleashed onto the world with unforeseen consequences. Frankenstein was appalled by his creature’s ugliness and later by its destructive and mischievous acts. While, Franklin cannot be accused of seeing tourism as a malicious force, many have been preoccupied with tourism’s destructive qualities so infamously captured by the saying “tourism destroys tourism”, attributed to the late tourism scholar Jost Krippendorf a pioneer in sustainable tourism studies. Krippendorf (1982) was worried about what he called “the tourist avalanche of the future” (p. 139) and “...the ruthless changing of countryside into tourist area, and of farmers into tourist servants...” (p. 143-4). It is interesting how Krippendorf’s bleak picture of the future is wrapped up in a metaphor of a natural catastrophe; the cascading avalanche destroying everything in its way and ruthlessly changing the countryside into a tourist area. Represented as an avalanche, tourism indicates changes of a rather devastating nature. The transformation of a farmer into a tourist servant, furthermore, indicates a process that is characterized by lack of power or agency. The word ‘servant’ easily evokes the connotations of a master/ slave relationship where the claim to power is, undeniably, of a very uneven nature. The host portrayed as a servant, thus pictures someone who lacks agency against the forces (the tourism avalanche) she is faced with.

This particular manifestation of the host/guest dualism has indeed been carefully portrayed by many tourism scholars working under the realm of social sciences. In particular, the focus has been on the uneven relationship between the immobile and indentured hosts and wealthy guests from the West, able and willing to travel. Nogués-Pedregal (2012) quoted in the opening of this section, points out that tourism scholars have either been very occupied with exploring ways to develop tourism in various places or busy studying the consequences of tourism development, calling the former approach the prospective perspective and the latter the acculturative perspective (p. x). This echoes Tribe’s (2010) categorization of tourism research as primarily falling into two main streams, that of business related matters on the one hand and of the social science on the other.

In the 21st Century the social science perspective has been influenced predominantly by two theoretical movements. On the one hand the critical turn in social sciences and on the other hand the mobility turn. These have directed the research gaze of tourism scholars to subjects like knowledge production, ethics and values (Tribe, 2008) as well as the role of materialities and technologies in making tourism happen (Hannam, Butler and Paris, 2014). Pernecky (2010) argues that those research turns are at once challenging and opening up new dimensions of our understanding of tourism:

By extending the ways we think of tourism (e.g. worldmaking, ordering, place-making) we begin exploring new linkages and start mapping the fine (and sometimes hidden) threads that interweave the multitude of meanings and inform our understandings (Pernecky, 2010, p. 9).

This is, for example, evident in Ren, Pritchard and Morgan's (2010) argument that tourism should be regarded as the "...effects of ongoing processes of aligning and ordering people, practices, discourses and technologies" (p. 886). This also chimes with the writings of Franklin (2012) who sets out to expand the conventional understanding of tourism as being seen primarily as a social phenomenon to a "...cybernetic structure that responds to its own changing environments, but also in a rhizomic manner, becoming an assemblage of different structures and entities – being able to detach itself and attach itself to other orderings" (pp. 44-45). Hence, tourism indicates change and through that, which gets embroiled in the process of change, landscapes alter, communities transform and new practices are established. The concept of movement is inherent in thinking about tourism this way (the constant alteration and transformation) and Franklin (2012) encourages tourism scholars to think about tourism like a dance. Dance, of course, is a series of movements that can be put together in an endless new fashion producing new and new dances depending on the order of the movements, their styles, the participants, the music, the dance environment such as for example the floor material, the shoe's condition or the size of the dance locale. Thus, the choreography is the matter of many other things beyond the human choreographer. Through dance we produce meanings, emotions, spaces and places that may alter us and thereby alter our dance style or movements. Mobility is indeed very much about meaning (Cresswell, 2010), and Nogués-Pedregal (2012) advises us to approach tourism first and foremost as a "...producer of senses and meanings both for outsiders and insiders" (p. 198). However, it is important to keep in mind that tourism (much like dance) is also constantly responding to and being altered by the environments it is occurring in or what Franklin (2012) labels as the process of co-institution.

This contingency is of an uttermost importance when we try to grasp the way in which tourism processes carve through and within specific locales or places.

Ploughing through Places

This is a notion of place where specificity (local uniqueness, a sense of place) derives not from some mythical internal roots nor from a history of relative isolation – not to be disrupted by globalization – but precisely from the absolute particularity of the mixture of influences found together there (Massey, 1999, 18).

Places have been the focus of theorizing within and amongst various disciplines such as geography, archaeology, anthropology, political science and tourism. The debate about the conceptualization of places has been in the wake of the critical turn earlier outlined characterized by a strong criticism of places as a static and the location for endogenous identity fostering. This has been seen as a limited approach to tackle the mobile conditions of contemporary living and ever changing places. Migration, new communication technologies, leisure, transport and travel, to name just a few types of movement that characterize modern life, have inspired a more mobile conception of places through the mobility turn in social sciences. The mobile conception of place (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Moscardo *et al.*, 2013) has emphasized the unfinished and constantly ongoing series of encounters that constitute place. Doreen Massey (2005), quoted in the opening of this section, has underlined the relationality of place, its multiplicity and mobile conditions.

Place to Massey is an event, a result of spatial and temporal processes. It is an event of what she calls ‘throwntogetherness’ (2005, p. 140) which means that a place is based on the accumulation of relationships or encounters, human as well as non-human. Hence, places are collectively and constantly produced through heterogeneous relations and practices. But whilst the ontology of flow and connectivity is important (Amin, 2004), a place’s throwntogetherness is not random. Places represent, yet cannot be held at a standstill. A place’s identity is manifest in and through the negotiations of relations (Massey, 2005; Granås, forthcoming). Ingold (2011) develops this idea further by talking about human existence as being place-binding not place-bound, that is places are like knots tied together of trails laid by each and every individual that cross paths. Ingold uses the concepts of ‘meshwork’ and ‘wayfaring’ to capture the way in which everything that is alive (humans included) continuously weaves a texture while inhabiting the world and the world inhabits everything alive. Everything is constantly interwoven in a tangle which Ingold carefully

stresses is not a network of connected points, but a meshwork of interwoven lines; the life-world. The lines of meshwork are the paths along which we live life. It is important, says Ingold, to recognize this primacy of movement because life is constantly unfolding, "...things do not so much exist as *occur*..." (p. 154). And it is through wayfaring that knowledge is passed on. Here stories play an important role; they are what Ingold calls alongly integrated knowledge. "To tell a story is to *relate*, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, bringing them to life in the vivid present of listeners as if they were going on here and now" (p. 161); hence place-binding.

To think about place as always unfinished and a constantly ongoing series of encounters or consisting of ever unfolding trajectories coming together build on relational ontologies that have a considerable pedigree in spatial theory. The key message for the purposes of the thesis here presented is that places are different and what matters, Massey argues, is the content of the relations through which space is constructed at each and every moment and at each and every place. Places are the moment through which the global is constituted and co-ordinated (Massey, 2005). This calls for a thorough examination of what goes on during these moments. What we are Massey claims, is what we do (2005, p. 194). More importantly, it is what we do (or do not) together in this state of throwntogetherness. It is through those relations that the place emerges or manifests itself. Thus, we need to ask questions about those relations, how they work and what they lead to before we conclude about their tentative outcome. And it is through those questions and negotiations that we define place. This underlines how place is constantly made and remade or as Cresswell (2007) suggests, how it is practiced:

To think of place as an intersection – a particular configuration of happenings – is to think of place in a constant sense of becoming through practice and practical knowledge. Place is both the context for practice – we act according to more or less stable schemes of perception – and product of practice – something that only makes sense as it is lived (Cresswell, 2007, p. 26).

By using the concept of practiced place Cresswell wants to find a way to highlight the importance of place without seeing it in an essentialist and exclusionary way e.g. confined to rootedness and authenticity. His view of place both as context for and as product of practice brings forward the specificity of the local (place as a context) and its mobile and relational nature (place as a product). This is maybe nowhere more explicit than in the context of tourism.

Not surprisingly, the notion of place has been and still is of utmost importance for tourism (Salazar, 2010). A reference to the geographical element of place is embedded in our understanding of destinations (Grånas, forthcoming). This “inherent spatial dimension of tourism” (Nogués-Pedregal, 2012, p. 194) has been further enhanced in recent years by the increasing importance of locality and the characteristics of place as a vital component of the tourism product. Thus many of the European Union programmes (in particular the LEADER program) have focused on projects that enhance and support regional heritage particularly in a tourism development context where the application of heritage and history as a place promotional tool is common. This also ties into recent consumption trends that put a value on traceable local products as opposed to mass produced products with sometimes obscure origins and content. Moreover, there is an increasing tendency to use tourism as part of community development (Carson and Macbeth, 2005) in order to combat endogenous changes such as ageing population and exogenous pressures (e.g. economic restructuring in a globalized world). In that context, tourism should not only be seen as an economic development device but also a strategy for local empowerment (Brouder, 2013). This echoes recent efforts to re-conceptualize rural development so that it centres more on what is called place-based community development through various economic sectors and with an emphasis on identifying local resources that can be enhanced for the greater good of the community (George, Mair and Reid, 2009; Neal, 2013). In praxis this has meant that rural areas have employed various strategies in creating a buzz or an interest for their tourism proposals. This has commonly been done by tying into the feeling of nostalgia and the longing for a simpler life. Hence, the issues being promoted have revolved around notions of local identity, authentic culture, remoteness, undisturbed nature, exclusivity, and hospitable residents (Frisvoll, 2013; Rofe, 2013). This image of a rural identity and something that is perceived as the ‘real countryside’ obviously reflects a static view of culture as rooted in a place. But as has been widely recognised and detailed in some of the theorizing here presented, people establish multiple attachments to places through living in them, remembering or simply imagining them as well as participating in the various place practices that occur (see for example Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Cresswell, 2007). The idea of any natural connection between people and places has been abandoned a long time ago. Instead it is the dynamicity that place encompasses that is of interest (Roe, 2013) and the interaction with daily life practice (Dumreicher and Kolb, 2008).

Evident in these studies is how tourism practices have the capacity to transform local sociality “...into a new social ground” (Picard, 2013, p. 114). Through various processes of ordering tourism actively shapes the contours of places in different and creative ways (Harrison, 2006; Bærenholdt and Granås 2008; Nyseth and Viken 2009; Salazar, 2010). This turns the attention to the concept of identity and the processes of identity work and “...how people imagine the world and how the world is imag(in)ed for them, for instance through tourism (Salazar, 2010, p. 176).

Interpretations of Identity

In local/global situations where displacement appears increasingly to be the norm, how is collective dwelling sustained and reinvented? (Clifford, 1997, p. 84).

How do people encounter places, perceive them, and endow them with significance? (Escobar, 2001, p. 151).

Identity studies gained momentum around the millennium in diverse disciplines. All kinds of issues were explored through the lens of the identity approach and it still continues to have a topical relevance in the social sciences (Taylor, 2010). These issues will be identified in this section. Much like place however, identity is a complex and contested concept or as Bauman (2001) puts it “The ‘era of identity’ is full of sound and fury” (p. 129).

Most commonly identity has been theorized as a social construction and as such never neutral. It has been connected with issues of power and control and thus a number of identity studies centre around identity building (Palmer, 2005), conflicting or competing identities (Pitchford, 2008), as well as oppressing identities and identity claims (Eisenberg, 2009). Discussing identity as a concept almost invariably evokes the notion of a ‘we-they’ dichotomy where differences (boundary making) between social groups of any size and character is the focus (Nogués-Pedregal, 2012). The rooted notion of place, furthermore, has commonly been perceived as the locus of identity. However, much like the relational theorising and the mobility turn have influenced our understanding of place, it has also done so in regard how identity is conceptualized (Massey, 2005). We are now living in the times of what Bauman calls liquid modernity (Bauman, 2001, p. 125), characterized by fragility, restlessness and the uprooting of places and a frantic search of identity.

The mobility turn inspires us to view identity as something composed through networks of various kinds (people, things, ideas, etc.) and constantly on the move rather than the result of

a rooted existence in a specific geographical entity (town, region, country) (Cresswell, 2010). Identity then is a relation effect rather than a possession (Hønneland, 2010). Furthermore, both feminism and post-colonial studies have been very influential in the re-evaluation of the way we conceptualize identity (Somers 1994; Yuval-Davis 2011). In particular, their focus on the way in which certain identities (women, blacks, gays, etc) have been formed has challenged the relations constituting those identities (Massey, 2005).

Giddens (1991) views a person's identity very much as a reflexive project which means that identity is continuously enacted but also conversed and claimed (Taylor, 2010). This on-going and open-ended work (the identity work) is about keeping a particular narrative going (Giddens, 1991, p. 54). People tell themselves and others stories about who and what they are (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Narratives are thus a constitutive base for identities (Somers, 1994; Viken, Granås and Nyseth, 2008; Taylor, 2010) and thus "...the identity project must be considered in discursive terms, as negotiation of multiple and conflicting versions, positions and projected possibilities" (Taylor, 2010, p. 129).

Bamberg (2012) argues that narratives or storytelling have a particular importance for identity practices in the context of changes, through them "...people point indexically to how they anchor their position from where they want to be understood" (Bamberg, 2012, p. 207). Massey (2005) encourages us to also pay attention to the geography of the relations through which an identity is created and reproduced. Thereby, she is underlining the importance of taking seriously the relational aspect of space and identity. It is in this assemblage of relations of both material and social nature that identity gets enacted and produced. An identity always in making, never sealed or closed totality (Veijola, 2006). It is in this sense that we can talk about identity work as an ongoing and open-ended project embedded in "...overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space" (Somers, 1994, p. 607). In her book *Narratives of Identity and Place*, Taylor (2010) demonstrates how narratives linked to place are a resource for identity work. They are the discursive resources people use to construct their reality and they also shape the way people reflect on their identity. Taylor stresses that this is an open-ended process and one that involves choices and actions albeit usually within some constraints. Essentially, it is a "...incomplete work in progress" (Taylor, 2010, p. 129).

People's interpretations of their lives are shaped by their cultural, socio-economic and spatial context but as Taylor (2010) points out this is not a one way process: "...an area takes its identity from who lives there but also gives that identity back to its residents, positioning

them (potentially) as a certain kind of person” (Taylor, 2010, p. 15). Again, narratives play a crucial role. They affect the way people see their place, their culture and themselves (Viken and Nyseth, 2009). In that way narratives are ordering and it is well established that repeated tourism representations (images and narratives) become very pervasive in establishing certain place narratives that may have the capacity to “...reinvent place creating new materialities, social conditions and images” (Nyseth, 2009, p. 13). Thus, tourism has been a venue for many populations to re-imagine themselves.

That complex set of sociotechnical practices and devices called “tourism” not only acts as a repressive agent that imposes itself, but also induces the appearances of new meanings and elements where to place the sense of identity (Nogués-Pedregal, 2012, p. 88).

McCabe and Marson, furthermore, point out that “...through language constructions we can gain access to how place, identity and the political and moral construction of place is ‘locally’ achieved” (2006, p. 104).

Research Design

The purpose of this PhD project is to explore the interaction of tourism and identity work in peripheral places. The research design is characterized by an attempt to gather information from a variety of sources not only to better ensure data triangulation and ultimately the validity of the findings but also to reflect the relational understanding of places and identity discussed earlier.

This is an exploratory research that takes both a narrative-discursive and an ordering approach. The narrative-discursive analysis involves looking for recurring features or patterns (repeated words and images, connections and relationships, etc) across as well as within the interviews that are to be undertaken during the research phase of this PhD (Taylor, 2010). The ordering approach is inspired by Franklin (2012) and Nougés-Pedrigal (2012) who both advocate the understanding of tourism as an ordering of modern existence. The conceptualization of ordering has gotten substantial attention in sociology and increasingly been applied in tourism studies, not the least to focus on how tourism “is assembled, enacted and ordered” (Jóhannesson, van der Duim and Ren, 2012, p. 4). Identity work is an entangled process and in the context of tourism and place, the messiness indeed swirls up. An inspiration will also be sought in the Actor-network theory (ANT) which Ren, Jóhannesson and van der Duim (2012) advise us to approach as “a methodological framework to describing (and hence creating) the realities of tourism, allowing us to discern the messy nature of its worldly constitution” (p. 22).

Data Collection

The data collection is divided into the following steps.

1. Interviews with tourism operators
2. Interviews with municipality leaders and institutional stakeholders
3. Focus group interviews among residents
4. Review of tourism policy documents, both on a local as well as national level
5. Participant observation

Interviews have been taken with registered tourism operators in each of the three communities this research focuses on. Information regarding the research was distributed via newsletters, on local websites as well as through key-informants. All interviewees were contacted directly

and they asked to participate in the research. Issues of confidentiality were raised in the beginning of all interviews and participants were briefed about the research. Interviews have also been taken with municipality leaders, regional development officers, and project directors.

Focus groups will be conducted in each community. Two regions have been identified within Strandir and Húnaþing from where participants in the focus group will be selected. Borgarfjörður eystri is not divided up into regions. The delimitation of the regions is based both on geographical boundaries and administrative boundaries. The participants will be selected based on the criteria that they have been living in Strandir, Húnaþing or Borgarfjörður eystri for least a decade. In both regions, tourism starts to develop in a more structured way during the second half of the nineties and during the last decade there has been a substantial increase in tourist arrivals in Iceland as well as in those regions. Further selection criteria for the group participants will be based on age, gender, and occupation (people are not to be involved in tourism or anyone in their immediate family).

Research Questions

As stated in the introduction, the main goal is to explore what happens when a place enters the spotlight of the tourism industry and how people in a rural community observe, understand and participate in this change. To further detail this main goal answers to the following tentative research questions will be sought:

- How do tourism practices unfold places?
- Does tourism open up a new possibility for the use of place to assert identity?
- What characterizes the relationship between place perceptions and narratives on the one hand and tourism development on the other?
- How do tourism entrepreneurs perceive the process of tourism in their region?
- How do residents experience the transformation of their region into a tourism destination?

The Study Areas

As already mentioned, this research takes place in three rural communities in Iceland that all are peripheral and very sparsely populated and have in recent years experienced, like most other regions in Iceland, substantial increase in tourism. They have, in other words, become places that are toured (Urry, 2006) and thereby new networks and associations are made and remade. The regions in question are show on figure 1. They are Strandir, in particular the Northern part and with an emphasis on the Museum of Sorcery and Witchcraft (figure 2), Húnaþing vestra with a focus on Vatnsnes peninsula and the Icelandic Seal Center (figure 3), and finally Borgarfjörður eystri with a particular focus on the music festival Bræðslan (figure 4).

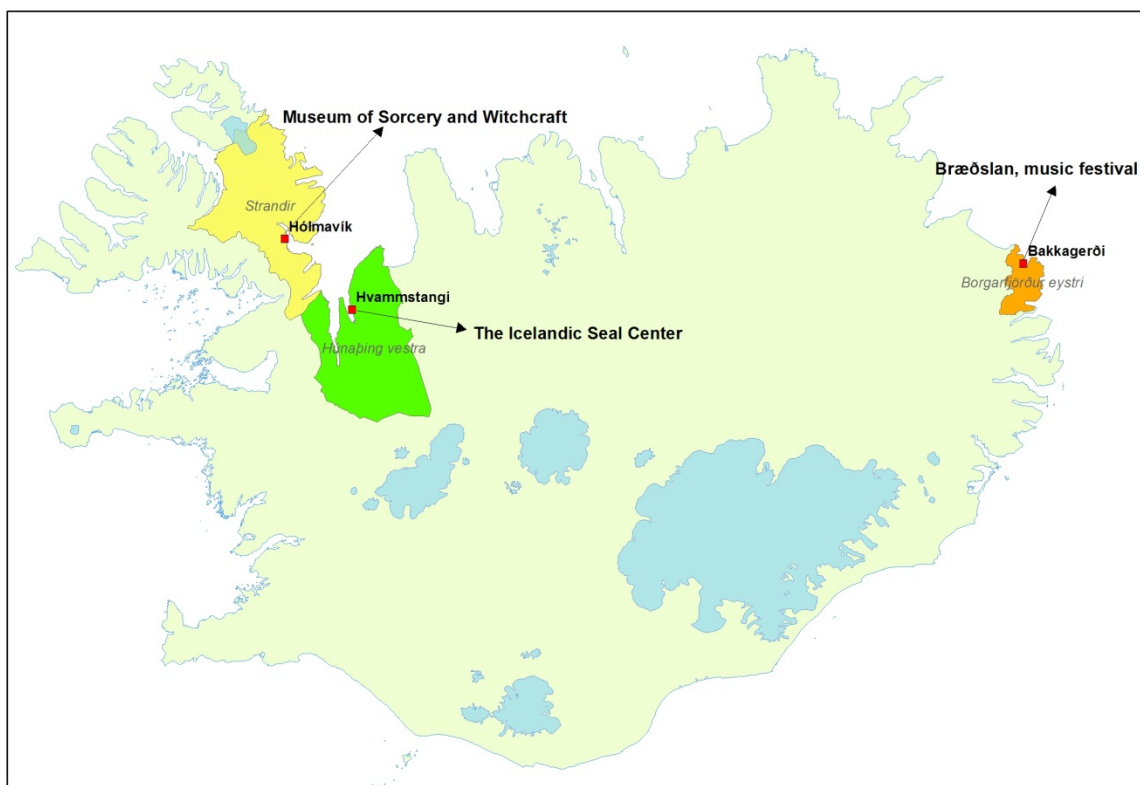


Figure 1: The study areas (map from the National Land Survey of Iceland).

Part of the data collection for this research is based on my participation in an international research project labelled ‘Arctic Chair in Tourism’ (Viken and Grånas, forthcoming) and dealt with the creation of tourism destinations in the Arctic. The project was carried out in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Canada as well as in Iceland where Strandir was the selected case researched by Katrín Anna Lund and Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson both at the University of Iceland and currently supervisors to this PhD project.

Furthermore, during the winter of 2012-13, I participated in a project on developing tourism policy in Húnaþing vestra steered by the Tourism Association of Húnaþing vestra. My role was to interview the tourism entrepreneurs in the region and that data will also contribute to my PhD research.



Figure 2: Strandir –The Museum of Sorcery and Witchcraft in Hólmavík (Photo GþJ).

Geographically, **Strandir** belongs to the Westfjord region that is a peninsula carved away from the mainland and serrated by long fjords connected with roads lain through often-difficult mountain passes. The Westfjord region is a member of a project promoting sustainable tourism called European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN). The population of Strandir is about 670 inhabitants split into three municipalities (Statistics Iceland, n.d.), with the main population centre being Hólmavík with just under 400 inhabitants. Despite the small number of inhabitants, the level of service is fairly good and various administrative, social and cultural institutions are located in Hólmavík. Furthermore, Hólmavík is the only spot in Strandir that has a good road connection to the rest of the country. The road north of

Hólmavík, however, is still in rather poor condition. The northernmost municipality, Árneshreppur, is rarely accessible by road during the winter time, and the rest of the year the bumpy and winding gravel road is regarded as a hindrance for many who seek to travel to the northern part of Strandir. The region of Strandir experienced a rapid boom in the 1930s and 1940s when herring fisheries blossomed in the area (Sigurðsson *et al.*, 2007). This period only lasted for about 20 years when the herring stock moved to other grounds. However, fisheries have continued to be the backbone of the economy together with sheep farming although both have been subject to intense restructuring, through e.g. the introduction of Individual Transferable Quota in the fisheries and strict regulation on meat production. The tourism landscape in Strandir is characterized by small local enterprises, just over 20 in total. Some operate their businesses only during the summertime and many have multiple operations such as accommodation, restaurant and a camping ground.

One of the earliest examples of a cultural tourism development project in Iceland is the establishment of the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft in the Strandir region. The idea for setting up such a museum originates in a report written for the municipal council of the Strandir region titled *Tourism and national culture* (Jónsson, 1996). The museum is now operated in two locations, firstly the exhibition in Hólmavík (opened 2000) and then secondly the Sorcerer's Cottage (opened 2005) in a fjord north from Hólmavík. Plans are ready for the third location in the northern most part of Strandir but financing has been difficult in the aftermath of the financial crisis in Iceland in 2008. The establishment of the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft has actively changed the landscape of tourism in Strandir and played a central role in a turn towards tourism in the region. It is an effort to put tourism into use as a tool for economic diversification and cultural enhancement.



Figure 3: Húnaþing vestra - Vatnsnes (Photo: GþG).

Unlike Strandir and Borgarfjörður eystri, **Húnaþing vestra** is centrally located in terms of road transport and distance from the capital region (less than two hour drive). Nevertheless, it has suffered from a constant outmigration in the last decades. The region is characterized by extended heathlands, wide valleys, rivers and numerous lakes. Sheep and horse farming still hold a great importance for the region and the rivers are renowned for salmon angling. In 2005, The Icelandic Seal Center was established in Hvammstangi, the biggest town in the region (pop. around 500) and an entrance to the Vatnsnes peninsula were some of the best seal watching places in Iceland are to be found. The centre focuses both on seal research as well as promoting sustainable tourism in the region with a particular focus on wildlife tourism and has initiated various tourism development projects since its inception amongst other the NPP funded wildlife tourism project The Wild North.

Borgarfjörður eystri is a small fishing community in the most northerly fjord in the East Fjords region of Iceland. The nearest town is about 70 km away and the, mostly unpaved, road to the village goes through a rather intimidating mountain passage and steep hills. This remote community has just over one hundred inhabitants and while fisheries are still the staple of the economy, tourism has been developing at a fast pace during the last decade. The community prides itself of a spectacular landscape with rare geological formations being of importance. In addition, Borgarfjörður is claimed to be the most populated elfin settlement in

Iceland. Since 2012, Borgarfjörður has been a member of a project promoting sustainable tourism called European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN).



Figure 4: Borgarfjörður eystri – Bræðslan 2013 (Photo GPG).

The music festival called Bræðslan (e. *Melting*) has been held the last weekend in July since 2005, more specifically on a Saturday night from 19:30 until midnight. The concert venue is a dilapidated smelting plant (herring) unused for decades when it was decided to use it as a concert place. No significant renovation work was carried out other than what was necessary to guarantee that the building was a safe venue; hence it is characterized by a rather rustic and rough interior. Both foreign and Icelandic musicians and bands have performed and the music can be described as folk, country and indie rock. In 2010, the two brothers who established and still run the music festival got recognition for an outstanding contribution to a cultural project in a rural area (*I. Eyrarrósinn*), a prize awarded by the Icelandic Regional Development Institute.

The Structure of the Thesis

The PhD thesis will consist of three peer reviewed articles, one book chapter, an introductory chapter and a concluding chapter. The framework of the thesis will be as follows:

Introductory chapter

Subject: Introduce the theoretical background of the research as well as the methodology. List the papers and their contribution to tourism scholarship

Submit: First version of the theoretical chapter is included in this report. Final version submitted spring 2015.

Article 1 (Book Chapter)

Subject: Tourism development, creativity and entrepreneurship processes

Title: *Weaving with Witchcraft: Tourism and Entrepreneurship in Strandir, Iceland*

Methods: Qualitative interviews

Status 2013: Done (see Appendix 1).

Theoretical background: Relational perspective on entrepreneurship

Authors: Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir and Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson

Article 2

Subject: How Bræðslan the music festival has facilitated a new place identity

Working title: *Melting into a place: Bræðslan the music festival as an identity project*

Methods: Interviews + participant observation

Status 2013: Data collection completed. Transcription not completed and lit review ongoing.

Theoretical background: Relational construction of identity, place and identity theories

Authors: Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir

Submit: Summer 2014

Article 3

Subject: Tourism development in Strandir, Húnaþing vestra and Borgarfjörður eystri. Tourism ordering. Identify processes and trajectories of tourism development and identity work involved.

Working title: *Destinizing Efforts – The Story of Three Rural Places in Iceland*

Methods: Interviews, Secondary data

Status 2013: Data collection mostly done, lit review ongoing

Theoretical background: Practiced places - Place as relational processes, as an event or a configuration of happenings.

Author: Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir

Submit: Winter 2014

Article 4

Subject: How is tourism understood and what is its power to tame and transform places? Place perceptions and narratives employed in the identity work.

Working title: *Embracing tourism tactics*

Methods: Focus group interviews, participant observations

Status 2013: Not begun

Theoretical background: place and identity theories

Author: Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir

Submit: Spring 2015

Concluding chapter

Findings

Discussions

Further research

Submit: Summer 2015

Project log – first year

The main achievements during the period September 2012 - December 2013 are listed below.

- Project presentation at the research seminars of the Icelandic Tourism Research Centre (ITRC) at Höfn on 20th and 21st September 2012 and in Húsavík 9th to 11th of October 2013.
- Paper and presentation (findings from Strandir) at Þjóðarspejillinn 2012, the annual social sciences conference at the University of Iceland in October 2012: Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir and Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson. *Sköpunarverkið Strandir*. Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/1946/13356> (Appendix 2).
- Presentation (findings from Strandir) at the conference North Atlantic Forum 2013 - Rural Tourism, Challenges in Changing Times at Hólar June 2013: Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir. *Who is going to do it? The question of tourism development in sparsely populated areas* (Appendix 3).
- Presentation at an open meeting held by the Tourism Association in Húnaþing vestra and the North Iceland Marketing Office, Hvammstangi March 2013. Introduction of the first findings from interviews with tourism operators in Húnaþing vestra.
- May 2013, the chapter *Weaving with Witchcraft: Tourism and Entrepreneurship in Strandir, Iceland* submitted to the editors of the book *Destination Development in Tourism: Turns and Tactics* (Appendix 1).
- Field work was carried out in Húnaþing vestra in the period November – February, in total 26 interviews. Preliminary results were published in the following report delivered to the Tourism Association in Húnaþing vestra: Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir. (2013). *Viðhorf og sýn ferðaþjónustuaðila í Húnaþingi vestra*. Hólar: Háskólinn á Hólum.
- In July 2013, field work was carried out in Borgarfjörður eystri in the days before the music festival Bræðslan. This included nine interviews and participant observation during the music event.

Conclusion

[The] new mobility position sees places as material, embodied, contingent, networked, and performed (Urry, 2006, p. viii).

The point of departure for this study, which deals with tourism occurrence in specific places and the complex entanglement of various trajectories it entails, sees human existence as place-binding (Ingold, 2011) and that through negotiations of relations a place's identity is manifested (Massey, 2005). It is popular to claim that the world has become smaller in contemporary time. Due to both advancements in communication technology, where places around the globe are only a mouse click away and the fact that more and more people have now the capacity and the opportunity to travel long and short distances to visit and experience new places, the global village seems a reality. Tourism is neither an external force that hits the local communities as a malicious ray from outer space nor the *deus ex machina* that solves all the problems of, for example, peripheral places. Rather, tourism is first and foremost about different encounters and practices transforming and being transformed by particular places and peoples. There is still much to be learned about the way in which tourism is occurring and the places that this study focuses upon provide an excellent opportunity to explore in detail the entangled web of tourism, places and identity.

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Appendix 1

Abstract for a book chapter in In Viken, A. and Grånas, B. (eds.) (forthcoming). *Destination Development in Tourism: Turns and Tactics*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir and Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson

Weaving with Witchcraft: Tourism and Entrepreneurship in Strandir, Iceland

Rural areas in Iceland have been going through vast changes the last decades. Tourism has increasingly been promoted with the effect that the countryside is more than ever before bought and sold as an experience, packaged and marketed to prospective tourists. The Strandir region, a scarcely populated coastal area in the North-west of Iceland is one of the regions that has steadily been taking on a touristic ‘flavor’ in recent years. Traditionally the economic backbone has been sheep farming and coastal fisheries, but income from these has declined rapidly. During the last ten years a continual development towards tourism has taken place in which the Museum of Witchcraft and Sorcery, established in 2000, has played a central role. The Museum brings together, and re-awakes, the period of witchcraft in the 17th century during which Strandir was one of the most notorious regions in Iceland for witch-hunt and burning. This chapter describes how the Museum of Witchcraft and Sorcery has catalyzed tourism development in Strandir. The history of the Museum is traced and situated in a broader discourse that relates to regional development and its emphasis on entrepreneurship as well as the emergence of cultural tourism in Iceland. It is argued that the Museum has created a venue for collective entrepreneurship in tourism that has enhanced the tourism development in the region as well as boosted the tourism providers’ self esteem without restricting tourism entrepreneurs to a particular framework or agenda. Hence, entrepreneurs have been able to capitalize on the network(ing) and experience of the museum’s organizers while finding their own ways about in evolving tourism services and products. Thus, although the theme of witchcraft and sorcery is very much related to Strandir it is only one thread in the weaving of the region as a tourism destination.

Appendix 2

Abstract for a paper at Þjóðarspejillinn 2012

Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir and Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson

Sköpunarverkið Strandir

Hér á landi hefur gjarnan verið litið til ferðaþjónustu sem nokkurs konar bjargvætts dreifðari byggða þar sem atvinnulíf hefur verið einhæft og þjónusta af skörum skammti. Segja má að ferðaþjónusta sé í senn afleiðing af breyttum atvinnuháttum í dreifbýli og viðbragð við nýjum neysluháttum. Hin vaxandi eftirspurn eftir dreifbýli sem vettvangi frítíma og ferðamennsku hefur kallað á mikla uppbyggingu í ferðaþjónustu á sama tíma og sífellt færri stunda landbúnað og sjávarútveg sem voru hefðbundnar undirstöðugreinar hinna dreifðari byggða. Markmið þessa erindis er að skoða tilurð og sköpun áfangastaðar útfrá þremur ólíkum sjónarhornum: Í fyrsta lagi viðhorf og sýn ferðaþjónustuaðila á Ströndum til uppbyggingar ferðaþjónustu, í öðru lagi ímynd svæðisins meðal hins almenna Íslendinga og í þriðja lagi hvað ferðamenn og heimafólk telur vera kjarna Stranda sem staðar. Tekin voru viðtöl við alla núverandi ferðaþjónustuaðila á Ströndum, spurningar um Strandir voru hluti af Þjóðmálakönnun Félagsvísindastofnunar Háskóla Íslands í desember 2011 og janúar 2012 og að síðustu var safnað ljósmyndum og ummælum ferðamanna og heimafólks sumarið 2011 um hvað það er sem „gerir Strandir að Ströndum“. Niðurstaðan leiddi í ljós að sköpunarverkið Strandir verður fyrst og fremst til með athöfnum fólks og tengslum þess við hluti og umhverfi; menningu og náttúru.

Appendix 3

Abstract for North Atlantic Forum 2013 - Rural Tourism, Challenges in Changing Times at Hólar June 2013

Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir

Who is going to do it?

The question of tourism development in sparsely populated areas

This paper tackles the issue of entrepreneurship and tourism development in rural areas. The study area is a scarcely populated area in the North-west of Iceland. Traditionally the economic backbone has been sheep farming and coastal fisheries, but income from these has been rapidly declining in the last decades. The communities within the study area have all experienced massive outmigration in the period 1994-2011, ranging from 23%-50% and tourism development, amongst other things, has been advocated in order to increase tourism jobs in the region.

Around forty tourism entrepreneurs as well as community leaders were interviewed for the purpose of this study. Furthermore, policy documents, both on a local as well as national level, were reviewed. The results demonstrate that tourism is, indeed, a sector tied with great expectations and for scarcely populated rural communities it can be tricky to transform those expectations into a real business opportunities and viable tourism products. It is not the least due to small populations and the fact that frequently only few individuals are active tourism players and many of them feel that they don't have the capacity to do more. Opportunities are clearly identified and ideas for product development are abundant, however the question who is going to do it, is not so easily answered



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