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Case study of Seyðisfjörður

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Intentionality

The authors of this report are students from Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, the United States, and the Netherlands. While two of the authors currently live and study in Iceland, none of them are local to east Iceland and Seyðisfjörður. Through a varied use of methodologies, such as narrative interviews, mapping of identified places within the community, media analysis, and participant observation, the following narrative and information have been picked up by the authors and finalized in this report. It is important to note that, with any small scale project, this narrative is heavily influenced by time constraints and potential researcher biases. This narrative is not a representative overview nor a full qualitative study, but rather shows a snippet of the narrative that was presented to and understood by us over the course of five days. While this primary data may provide some insights into the community resilience of Seyðisfjörður through analyzing the perceived narrative with already existing theories on community resilience, we are aware that no comprehensive conclusions can be drawn from the primary data that was collected. Subsequently, we are aware that no overarching conclusions can be drawn from this report either, yet are excited to share these findings in hopes to inspire conversations surrounding rural smart shrinkage and community resilience in the Icelandic context.

Acknowledgments

We wanted to thank everyone in Seyðisfjörður who welcomed us into their community and answered our questions, the Hafaldan HI Hostel for taking care of us, and Matthias Kokorsch who helped us initiate our research. We also want to acknowledge the land that nurtures us, the sea that provides for us, the mountains for teaching us respect.

1. Introduction

In light of increasing interest in global trends such as depopulation and the smart shrinkage of rural areas, this report focuses on the town of Seyðisfjörður as a case study site to this project on community resilience. This report will try to answer the following research question: In what way does tourism, arts, culture, and recreation play a role in the community resilience of Seyðisfjörður and what are potential recommendations to ensure its future resilience? This report will first provide background information on Iceland and Seyðisfjörður as a town before introducing the methodologies that were used. Afterwards this report will present the primary data collected of all three subcategories. These results will be discussed in combination with already existing literature on the topic of resilience, potential threats, future recommendations, and an overarching conclusion.

1.1 Iceland's History and Relations

Iceland was settled just over a thousand years ago in 870 by Norsemen, or more widely known as “The Vikings.” It reigned as a free state for a few hundred years until it became a Norwegian Province in the year of 1262. It eventually fell into Danish hands until it achieved independence when the ‘Althing’ was restored in 1845. This gave Iceland a national consultative assembly, and in 1874 the Althing gained legislative power through its own constitution. By 1918, Iceland became independent while still in union with Denmark, but dissolved in 1944 (Arnórsdóttir, 2019). Denmark and Iceland still have a close diplomatic relationship with each other, with representative consulates in even the smallest towns (Bilateral Relations, n.d.). The United States was the first country to recognize the independence of Iceland. Being a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but having no military of its own, the country signed a bilateral defense agreement with the US in 1951 that still stands to this day although the military forces left in 2006 (U.S. Relations With Iceland, 2020).

1.2 Industry Development

At the time of human settlement, forests covered up to 40% of the country (Skógræktin, n.d.). Walrus were also numerous along with migratory birds. The Norsemen started slashing and burning the forests to create fields for crops and grazing areas for sheep. The walrus disappeared as the settlers killed them for their ivory (Barras, 2019). As sheep were introduced to Iceland for their wool, they deteriorated everything by grazing, preventing forests from growing back, resulting in forests only covering 1% of the country (Skógræktin, n.d.). Without exports, Iceland was one of the poorest countries in Europe. The only natural resource that was exported was sulfur during the Middle Ages but was depleted by the end of the 16th century (European Route of Industrial Heritage, n.d.). Until the end of the 19th century when fishing was introduced, Islanders simply tried to survive due to scarce resources (Manea, 2021). The expansion of fisheries drove the economy forward, creating fishing towns, factories for processing, and new port facilities. From 1855 to the 1930s, salted cod was exported until the demand collapsed, sending the industry into a crisis until World War 2 when the protein became popular again (European Route of Industrial Heritage, n.d.). Herring also flourished until the stocks collapsed due to overfishing in the late 60s (Hannesson, 2022).

The second pillar of Iceland's economy has been renewable energy mainly from geothermal and hydroelectric sources, and some wind. The energy powers homes, data centers, aluminum smelters, and other smaller industries. It has been used since the early 20th century, allowing Iceland to lead the world in renewables (Ministry of the Environment, Energy and Climate, n.d.).

Lastly, Iceland is now known for its pristine nature and tourism opportunities. In 2008, the global recession hit Iceland and its fisheries and heavy industries. The unemployment rates skyrocketed and the country's economy was in a slump. In April 2010, the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano attracted worldwide attention, grounding flights across Europe for weeks due to its thick smoke. The country was cheap to visit due to the Icelandic Krona being weak during the recession, and Iceland became the poster child for natural beauty, attracting tourists and creating a completely new sector (Sheivachman, 2019).

1.3 Seyðisfjörður History

Seyðisfjörður is a small town on the East coast of Iceland that developed in 1848 due to the wealth in fishing until one fish factory closed in 2023 (Guide to Iceland, n.d.). Its recently recorded population was 648 people (Statistics Iceland, 2024). In 2020 it merged with the municipality of Múlaþing and three other municipalities: Borgarfjarðarrepp, Djúpavogrepp, Fljótsdalshérað, forming the county's largest municipality by land mass as seen in Fig. 1 (Múlaþing, 2022).

Other than the fishing industry, tourism has had an increasing importance to the vitality of the town, especially since the closing of the fish factory in September 2023 (Undercurrent news, 2023.). The tourism industry began in 1973, when the ferry between Denmark and Seyðisfjörður was introduced. Since then the Norröna ferry and other cruise ships have brought a significant number of tourists into the town and to Iceland. (Visit Austurland, n.d.)

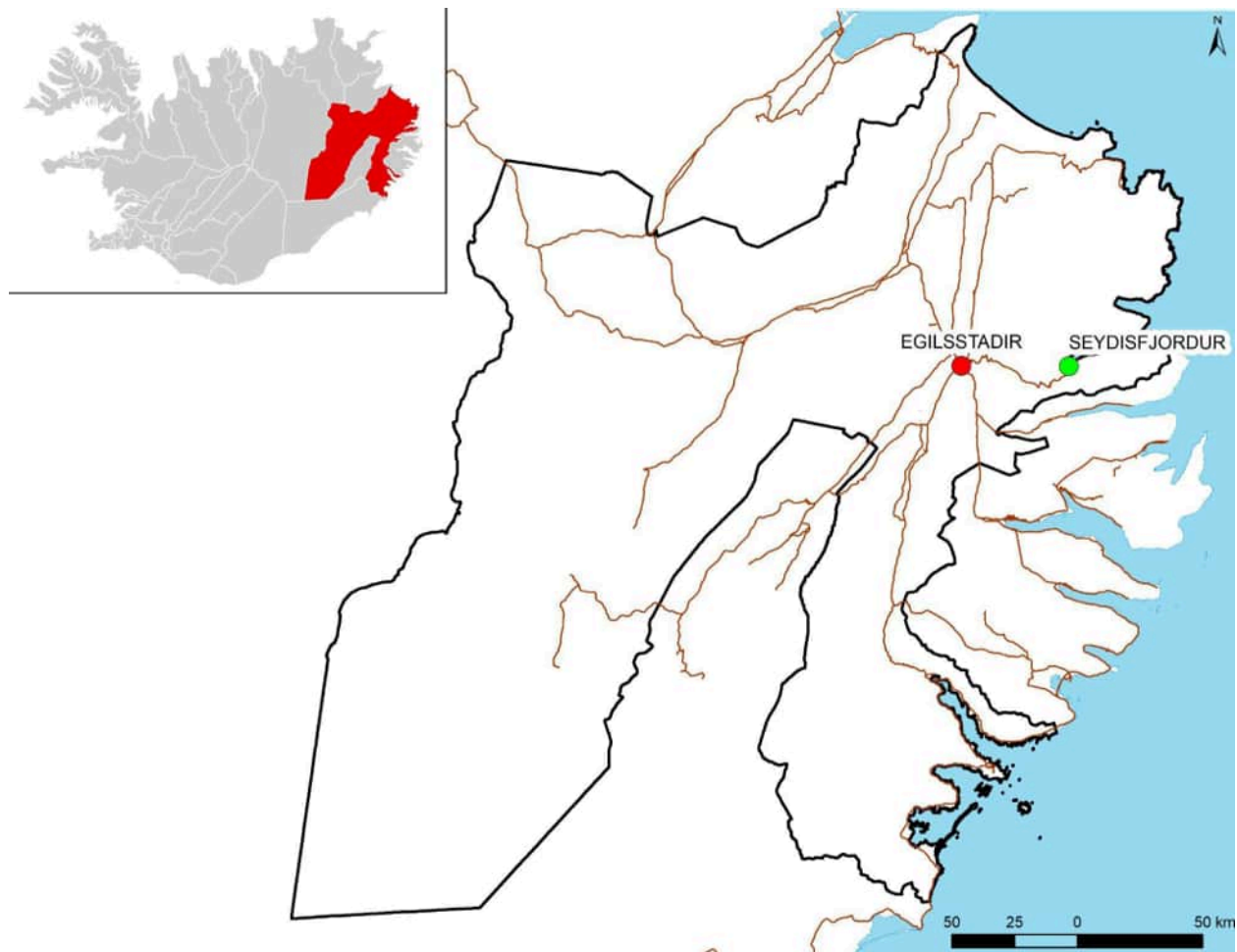


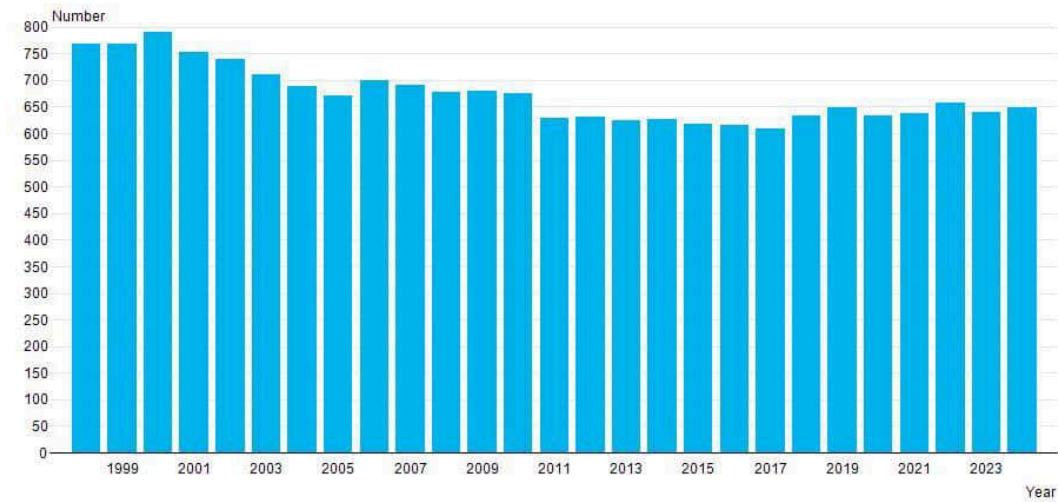
Fig. 1. Geographical location of Múlaping and Seyðisfjörður (Based on data from National Land Survey of Iceland)

Besides the closing of the fish factory, Seyðisfjörður has faced some other hardships in the form of the disastrous landslides of December 2020. The landslides were the largest to ever hit a town in Iceland and it created an enormous economic loss and destruction to the town (en.vedur.is, 2021). Fortunately, no casualties occurred but numerous houses were destroyed, and many companies and cultural heritage suffered from the disaster. Together with the decline of tourism due to COVID-19, the landslide had a massive negative impact on the town's economy and the community. Despite everything, the community stayed strong and started the recovery and reconstruction of the town. The government of Iceland and the municipality of Múlaping also launched a three-year program to develop the economy of the town. (Austurbrú, n.d.; Visit Seyðisfjörður, n.d.)

Today, the town and the community seem stable and thriving despite the recent hardships. The community seems to have adapted to the loss of the fish factory and increased tourism. Seyðisfjörður has basic services such as a health center, elementary school, kindergarten, grocery store, pharmacy, library, and sports hall. The town also has restaurants, café, gas station, community center, souvenir shops, hostels, art galleries, swimming pool, search and rescue unit, outdoor activities, church, and museums. Tourism plays a big part in the services of the town, but the community is keen on preserving the vitality of the town for the locals too. For example, The Herðubreið Community and Culture House hosts various performances, shows and events throughout the year and arranges cinema days twice a week. It is also the host for two art festivals and one film festival. (Visit Seyðisfjörður, n.d.)

The population of Seyðisfjörður has declined moderately in the last 28 years (Fig. 2.). Despite this, the population has remained almost the same from the beginning of the 2010s, and even some increase can be seen in some years. The local population is also aging, while some people are moving into the town as the number of young adults are fairly high (Fig. 3.).

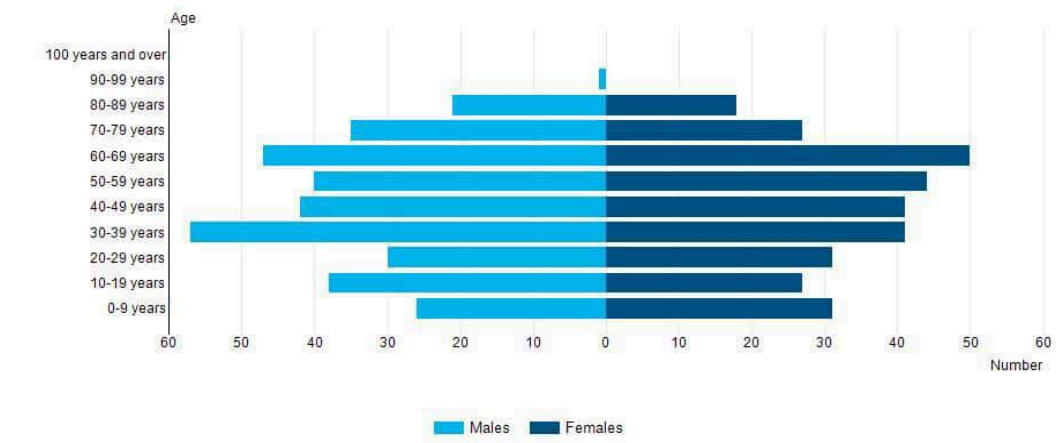
Population by localities, sex and age 1 January 1998-2024



Source: Statistics Sweden

Fig. 2. Seyðisfjörður population 1998-2024.

Population by localities, sex and age 1 January 1998-2024



Source: Statistics Sweden

Fig. 3. Seyðisfjörður population 2024.

1.4 An Overview of Smart Shrinkage

Depopulation is caused by a variety of reasons: varying from natural disasters to economic incentives to globalization and other structural changes. Most often, the global trend of urbanization, and all related challenges and opportunities, are mentioned as a main reason for

rural shrinkage (Makkonen & Inkinen, 2023). Additionally, general trends of decreasing birth rates influence the aging and depopulation of rural communities drastically. Shrinking communities often get stuck in a vicious cycle of depopulation due to a variety of self enforced decrease in regional vitality. Depopulation often leads to decrease in vital services and the social fabric of a community. Shrinking is therefore seen as a problem for those that remain in rural communities. Policies and strategies aimed at adapting to depopulation are often put together under the term ‘smart shrinkage’ as the ability to decrease in population yet remain one's vitality and regional attractiveness (Makkonen & Inkinen, 2023; Kahila et. al. 2022). While academic literature on smart shrinkage is widely available in relation to urban areas, including literature on so-called ‘right sizing’, applying the concept to rural areas is a rather recent phenomenon. Oftentimes, depopulation and shrinkage are topics of taboo in the political sphere, hindering planning accordingly (Makkonen & Inkinen, 2023). While shrinkage is often associated with loss of Quality of Life (QoL), this does not always have to be the case. In fact, in smaller communities, increased economic welfare may lead to this loss due to increases in pollution, traffic, cost of living, etc. Not all shrinking and/or small communities are deteriorating, and like our case study site, can be places with high QoL and a good place to live without a necessary focus on economic growth (Makkonen & Inkinen, 2023). Subsequently, smart shrinkage takes away the focus from (somewhat) ineffective growth strategies, to policy making focused on sustaining the well being of those who are currently living in these communities, rather than attracting newcomers (Leick & Lang, 2018; Makkonen & Inkinen, 2023). In the Icelandic context, smart shrinkage might be found to be of even more importance, due to the large number of remote and small communities in the more rural areas of the country, its loss of industry, and rather rapid urbanization.

1.5 An Overview of Community Resilience

An important aspect of smart shrinkage is how resilient and resourceful a community is in the face of adversity. Community resilience is a concept that is used across a variety of academic disciplines, social movements, and the political sphere (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). Community resilience is seen as an important indicator of social sustainability and the term refers to the ability of a community to adapt and transform through change over time (Magis,

2010). Even though widely used, the term has been criticized for being a continuation of making certain communities fit in within the capital system that brought shrinkage in the first place. The alternative term ‘community resourcefulness’, focuses more on autonomous bottom up approaches coming from within the community (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). While the authors recognise a significant difference between these two terms, they have decided to use the terms somewhat interchangeably, for reasons related to available resources.

1.6 An Overview of Place Attachment

Place attachment is depicted as a multifaceted concept that refers to bonds between people and places based on affection, cognition and practice (Low & Altman, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Place attachment depends on the individual and how they find meaning in a place; whether it’s personal experiences, cultural, or religious significance, or a combination of the two. Places gain personal meaning and significance when we attach them to our daily routines, social life, and memories (Scannell & Gifford 2017). In the case of Seyðisfjörður, people might for example find personal meaning with the town through its environment, community or memorable events that happened there. Individuals usually develop strong sentimental and personal attachments to places where they spend their lives (Shumaker and Taylor 1983; Cicognani, Menezes, Nata, 2010). A strong place attachment can also motivate people to move back to their hometown, as moving away can sometimes lead to a loss of belonging and self-identity (Scannell & Gifford, 2017). Recognizing patterns of place attachment in rural towns is important, because place attachment strongly predicts why people stay in the area and reduces people's desire to move away (Barreira et al., 2019; Clark et al., 2017; Guimaraes et al., 2016; Westin, 2016; van der Star & Hochstenbach, 2022).

2. Chosen methods

2.1 Narrative Interviews

To gather more in-depth information about our topics, we decided to interview local inhabitants. Interview methodologies typically aim for depth and detailed understanding rather than a wider perspective of matters (McDowell, 2010). The purpose of narrative interview is to produce narratives for further research sources. It is to be noted that narrative interviews are not objective

descriptions. Narratives focus on the important and unusual matters, and they are always told from the standpoint of the present situation. However, Hyvärinen (2017) points out that narrating and interpreting experiences are part of human life. The idea of the narrative interview is to ask fewer structured questions and to rely on flexible follow-up questions instead (Hyvärinen, 2017). For this report a total of six [n=6] interviews were conducted across the different sub topics.

Ethical perspectives have been taken into consideration, when making the interviews for this study. Consent for the interview has been asked from the participants and any personal information that might have appeared in the interview is confidential. The participants have also been informed of the usage of the information they give. Some interviewees have also given permission to use their names in the study.

2.2 Mapping

After our initial walk around town and a personal tour by a local who runs the nature reserve, we determined that it would be interesting to spatially map the two types of services in the community: art and recreational trails. Nature and culture seemed prominent from our initial perceptions, so to visualize where points of interest were, we used ArcMap 10.8.2 and a mapping app called Gaia GPS. These allowed us to track our physical walking path and take pictures along the way that were tagged with coordinates. Afterwards, we were able to go into the data by attaching notes and different icons, making it presentable and easily accessible for viewers with a shareable link. Some ethical considerations we took was making sure that no one's face, license plate numbers, or house numbers were in any photos. The mapping for cultural places was limited to the inner town's boundaries and did not go further into the more natural/outdoor recreational areas even though there are some art installations to be found there too. This decision was made due to time constraints and to assess the availability of art and culture within the town, not outside of it.

We approached the natural setting with what planners and researchers need to consider about perceptions of landscapes, specifically in natural areas, called "genetic vision" suggested by Lucas (1979). This two pronged approach allowed us to examine "(1) the perceived importance of impact conditions relative to all other aspects of the wildland recreation setting (such as scenic

appeal, fishing, solitude, freedom) and (2) the evaluation of any given physical-biological condition in desirable/undesirable terms” (C.E. Dorwart et al. 2009; Lucas, 1979). We decided it was important to map infrastructure, viewpoints, and trail conditions such as muddy terrain, as it was May and the snow was melting. In Dorwart’s (2009) paper, data was gathered over two months using Visitor Employed Photography (VEP) and photo logs for notes. With the time constraint of five days, we determined that it would be more efficient to focus on our personal perspective of trail conditions and infrastructure by simply documenting information and paths and then comparing it to the marketed trail maps that are in town (Fig. 4). To collect data for the arts and culture map, we decided to use the same method of personal VEP with “genetic vision” in mind but more in the scope of creativity, the urban environment, inspiration, or town appeal (Dorwart, 2009).



Fig. 4. Picture of the official hiking map of Seyðisfjörður on the street (Julia Anna Moore).

2.3 Participant Observation

To fulfill our knowledge of how tourists use places, we chose to do a naturalistic participant observation to collect additional data about how tourists use space without any intervention. This method has several advantages and lets us learn more about the natural activities of participants (Kawulich 2005) such as tourists from cruise ships in this case. Part of the team was divided

between cultural and natural main tourist attractions, such as the center of the town (Rainbow Street), Búðaráfoss waterfall (located near the harbor), Tvísöngur sound sculpture (situated behind the Búðaráfoss waterfall) and the disk golf park entrance (also entrance to the Waterfall Lane hiking path). During the observation, team members intended to collect field notes, recorded participant numbers and variabilities of activities in order to have data to analyze. The goal was to take a snapshot in time of the habits of people in the town (Jhangiani et al., 2022).

2.4 Qualitative Media Analysis

Various tourist guides present Seyðisfjörður as a place of art and culture that is the home to a few art residencies and hosts several festivals. Therefore we aimed to examine how these topics are reflected in the English-language Icelandic press, using content analysis (Matthes & Kohring, 2008), to identify recurring themes and patterns, what cultural events taking place in the town are presented, how art and culture contribute to the community of the town, what influence it has on its identity, and which people represent the field. The following sources of information were used for this purpose: a digital library timarit.is, icelandmag.is, grapevine.is and icelandreview.com. Before mapping the hiking infrastructure, we also looked at general widespread information about hiking trail conditions and user's comments about them from Google Maps and AllTrails. We used media content analysis to explore the average user impression of the trails and later compared this information with our own observations. Content analysis is useful to understand the context of an area based on how it is presented (Matthes & Kohring, 2008).

2.5 Limitations

Limited availability of time to gather primary data is a limitation of all of our methodological approaches. We were limited to only a few interviews, only one full day of participant observation, and no second round of mapping. It would prove useful to be able to gather a larger amount of primary data to be able to draw any confounding conclusions. A limitation that constrained our time even more for mapping purposes was a snowstorm, and the fact that we could not hike all of the marketed trails to map them because of snowy conditions on the harder trails. This can be valuable information for future planning if a project were to relaunch here. Another consideration would be to conduct research during the working week. We were in

Seyðisfjörður over a long weekend that included a bank holiday, which limited how many officials we could reach out to. Moreover, our inability to conduct research in Icelandic limited our resource availability as well as our ability to interview and talk to people in their native language.

3. Study topics

3.1 Tourism and Industry

3.1.1 General Overview

Seyðisfjörður has a long history in the fishing industry but for the last ten years, the town has been focusing more on the tourism industry (Seyðisfjörður Information Center, n.d.). Tourism has been rapidly growing in the town, but it's also been affected by the recent environmental and public health challenges in 2020 (en.vedur.is, Visit Seyðisfjörður n.d.). This raises questions about Seyðisfjörður's dependency on tourism, which is subject to different challenges and seasonality. During the winter months the town has accessibility issues. Roads to Seyðisfjörður are often closed or unreliable and the ferry services aren't running for three months (Seyðisfjörður Information Center, n.d.). The population also drops by about 100-200 people, which makes the town a lot less busy overall (Seyðisfjörður Information Center, n.d.). Tourism is still a very young industry in Seyðisfjörður and the municipality is trying to find solutions to these challenges to utilize the benefits of tourism while reducing the negative impacts.

3.1.2 Results

Based on the information from the local information center, Seyðisfjörður gets around 300,000-350,000 visitors annually. Around 200,000 of those visitors come by car, while the rest come by ferry or other vessels. Last year about 120 cruise ships visited the fjord, compared to the 50 before the pandemic. We also observed the Fred Olsen Cruise making an unscheduled stop in Seyðisfjörður because of the weather conditions, which passengers might not count in the official tourism statistics of the town.

To compile a list of potential tourism oriented places within Seyðisfjörður, field observations were used along with publicly available resources such as official tourism websites: Visit

Seyðisfjörður, Icelandic Tourist Board and online platforms such as AllTrails, Google Maps, and TripAdvisor. Once the list of tourism oriented places were compiled, it was reviewed and categorized based on its relevance to tourism. Categories include accommodation, food, gift shops, informative information, transportation, cultural attractions, and outdoor activities.

We mapped a total of 25 places that generally are tourism oriented (Fig. 5), starting from the ferry terminal and rainbow road leading to the Seyðisfjarðarkirkja church and ending with the disc golf park and campsite. These mainly are clustered around the historic town center and the main tourist attractions - the rainbow road and the Skaftfell art center.

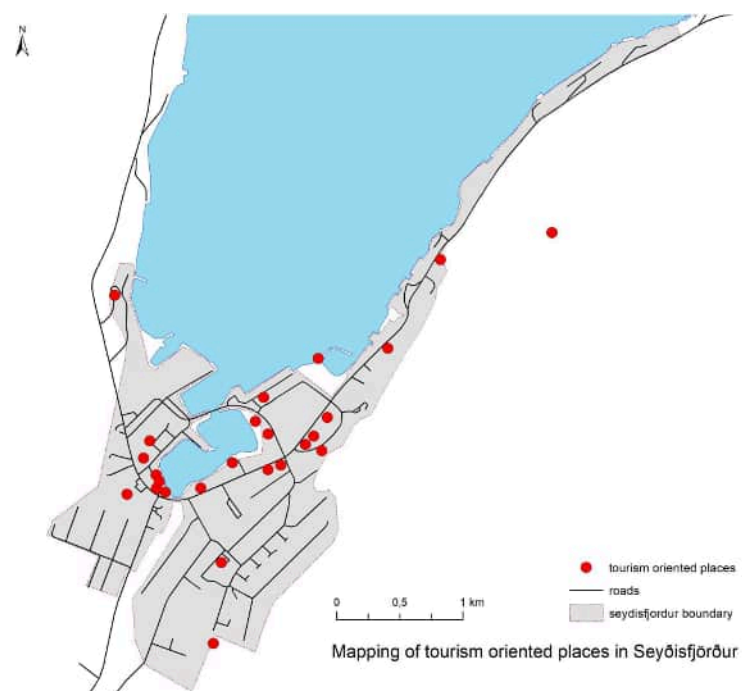


Fig. 5. Map of tourism oriented places in Seyðisfjörður (Basemap data from National Land Survey of Iceland)

The biggest amount of tourism oriented places is occupied by accommodation (Fig. 6). They are also mainly located near the main attractions and in the historic center. Most of the food options are located on the rainbow street itself as well as a gift shop, making it the main hub of activity in Seyðisfjörður. There is also an informative exhibition about the damages of the landslide near the ferry terminal. Other tourist attractions, like sculptures, are located closer to hiking areas, as well as the disc golf park.

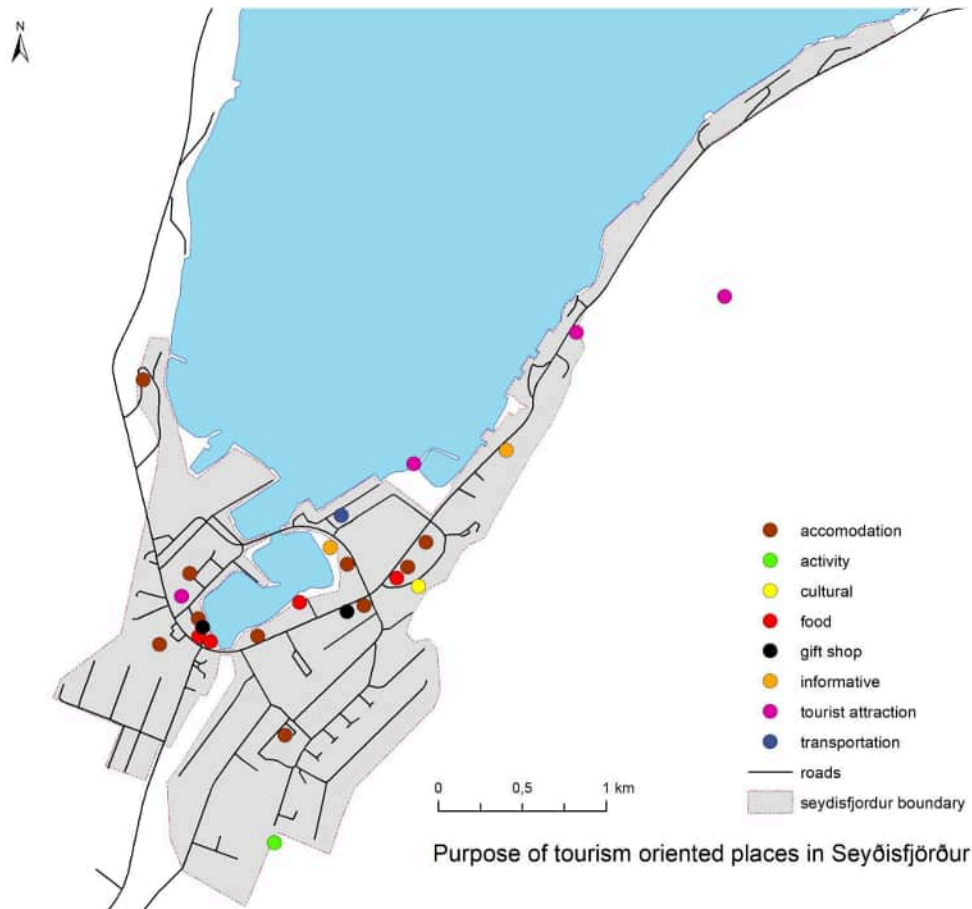


Fig. 6. Purpose of tourism oriented places in Seyðisfjörður (Basemap data from National Land Survey of Iceland)

3.1.3 Local Community Resilience in Changing Industries

According to the interviews we have conducted with the local information center, municipality office as well as a few other locals, it's apparent that tourism has overall had a very positive impact on the town. Most locals seem to be okay with the current environment, because tourism has brought in a lot of services and people into the town.

Some locals have a negative perception of tourism in moments when it gets busy during the summer and certain services like the only local grocery store are overcrowded. Another common issue that was brought up several times in the interviews was tourists not respecting the locals' private spaces by going into people's houses or taking pictures of the locals in their homes. As a

solution, some locals have put up signs, which say “private property” to deter tourists from trespassing.

We interviewed the municipality office about Seyðisfjörður’s plans and future sights for tourism as well. The current problem that the town faces is the seasonality of tourism and how it’s very concentrated on the summer season. The interviewees stated that having tourism all year around would possibly take some pressure off the summer season and overall increase the tourism and general service activity in the town. For example, restaurants are less open during the winter, even though they try to stay open, because having less people around makes it harder to keep the services running (Municipality Office of Seyðisfjörður, personal communication, May 22, 2024). One solution they mentioned would be to build bigger hotels to accommodate more tourists in the town.

Another big project for the municipality is the construction of the new road tunnel called Fjarðarheiðargöng (Fig. 7.), which would connect Seyðisfjörður and Egilsstaðir (Rúnar Snær Reynisson, 2020; ruv.is, n.d). It would replace the current mountain pass between the towns. In line with the municipality office's statement, the tunnel is important to the locals of both towns, because the mountain pass is often closed and impassable during the winter with severe snowstorms. Because of this, people have a hard time traveling between towns to work, school, and free-time activities (Municipality Office of Seyðisfjörður, personal communication, May 22, 2024), One of the locals also mentioned the tunnel being important in emergency situations when immediate access is needed to medical care, and air travel isn’t possible. According to the municipal office, the tunnel construction was scheduled to start last year, but it’s still in the planning phase. The research for the tunnel has also been completed, but the towns still need the approval and funding to get the project started. Following this tunnel project, other tunnel passes are also planned to connect more towns in the municipality as seen in Fig. 7 (Rúnar Snær Reynisson 2020, ruv.is).



Fig. 7. Map of the planned tunnel between Seyðisfjörður and Egilsstaðir (Rúnar Snær Reynisson 2020, ruv.is).

According to the information center, municipality office, and locals, there are talks about salmon farming being introduced to the industrial landscape of Seyðisfjörður. A company called Fiskeldi Austfjörður, which specializes in aquaculture, is very eager to expand its business there. There are plans to farm 10,000 tons of salmon in the fjord (skipulag.is, n.d). Most locals seem to be advocating against the fish farming and the town has run a poll on it, where 75 percent of the locals voted no for salmon farming (Visir, n.d.). Locals are afraid of the negative effects of the wild fish populations nearby and the overall image the aquaculture industry creates of the town. According to the company's own website, the salmon farming creates around 15-18 year-round jobs with two breeding areas being in use. Three breeding areas are planned for Seyðisfjörður by the company, each with one breeding station (Fish Farming in Seyðisfjörður, n.d.). A local news website, Austurfrétt, has an article about the situation which mentions the locals being unhappy about the salmon farming's possible effects on tourism, because the fishing pens would be visible from certain points. It also talks about the environmental agency saying that the effects of salmon farming aren't insignificant or to be underestimated.

3.1.4 Tourism's Effects on local identity and resilience

Tourism brings a lot of social and economic opportunities to Seyðisfjörður (Municipality office of Seyðisfjörður, personal communication, May 22, 2024). As a place, Seyðisfjörður has been adapting to new challenges and opportunities. From the interviews, we found that people are resilient to keep the town alive, and it's evident how beneficial tourism is for its well-being. Locals don't seem to see any other industry as viable as tourism (Seyðisfjörður Information Center, personal communication, May 22, 2024). Despite the opportunities that come from tourism, people still move away for education and work-related reasons (Óla, personal conversation, May 19, 2024). A common experience among the interviewees that were born and raised in Seyðisfjörður was that they had moved away from the town for some time and then returned later to settle down with children. These individuals have formed a strong place identity with Seyðisfjörður, which contributes to their feeling of belonging there (Elle Li & McKercher 2016). Other factors than the life stage people are in, which contribute to the feeling of belonging are for example togetherness, sense of community, nature, and memories (Óla, personal conversation, May 19, 2024). People can also have multiple place attachments to different places, making it a very fluid concept, which can evolve over time (Elle Li & McKercher 2016).

3.1.5 Tourism Impact on Housing

On the popular short-term accommodation website *booking.com* there are 20 postings of available accommodation in Seyðisfjörður. Furthermore, on *airbnb.com* there are at least 32 accommodation postings (Fig. 8) of which 18 are standalone homes or apartments, 6 are rooms in people's houses and 8 are guesthouses or hotel rooms. There is some overlap in postings on both websites but it is safe to say that there are at least 30 different buildings used for accommodating the incoming tourists.

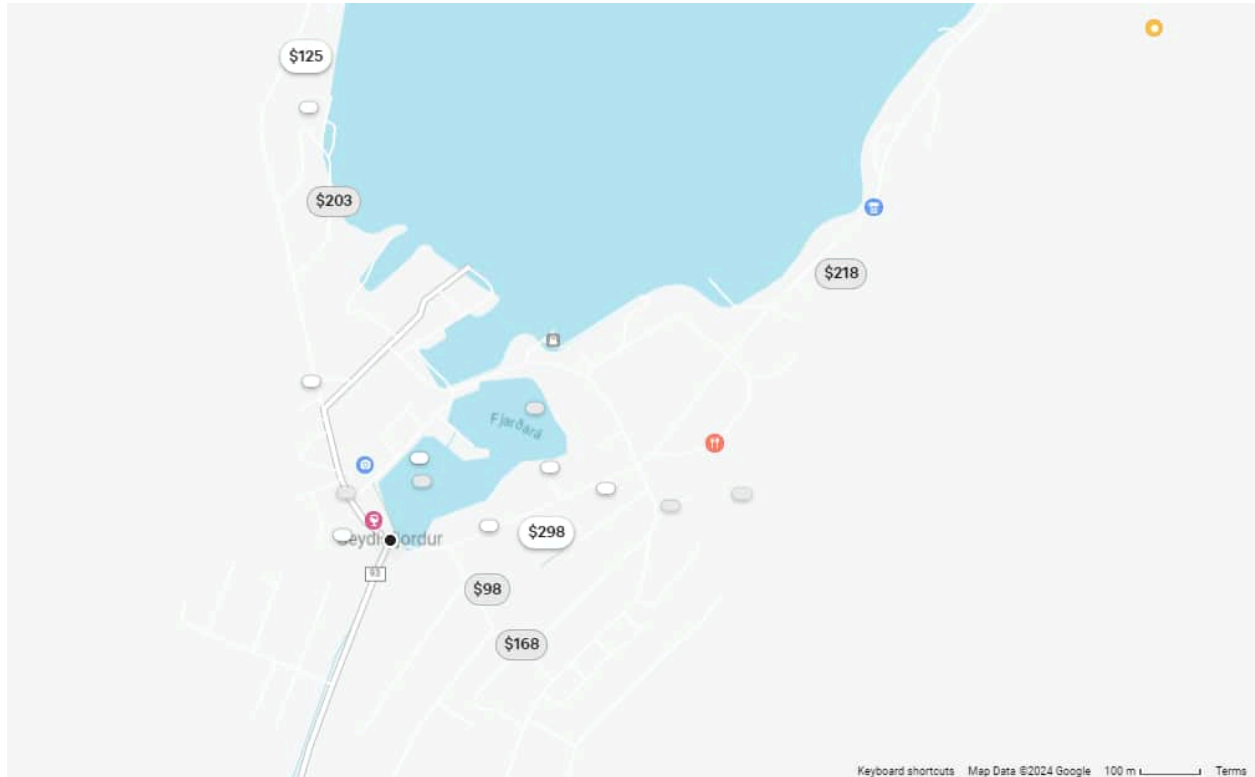


Fig. 8. Screenshot of available properties in Seyðisfjörður on *airbnb.com*

Our interviews with two key informants in Seyðisfjörður revealed a concern about the impact of AirBnB on the local housing market. Both informants indicated that the expansion of AirBnB rentals is driving up housing prices, making it difficult for locals and potential residents to find affordable housing in the area.

Another factor that affects the housing market are the seasonal staff that come in the summer from elsewhere to work in the tourism industry (mainly hotels and restaurants). During our interviews with key informants it was conducted that facilities are needed to accommodate these workers, in turn the housing markets for locals narrows even more. From an interview with a member from the tourism information center it was said that tourism seems to have a limited impact on housing prices and that the main limiting factor for people moving to Seyðisfjörður is the lack of housing (Seyðisfjörður Information Center, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

3.1.6 Use of Local Public Transportation

We found out that the bus from Seyðisfjörður to Egilsstaðir operates twice a day on weekdays: once in the morning (07:45 from Seyðisfjörður and 08:50 from Egilsstaðir) and once in the afternoon (14:30 from Seyðisfjörður and 16:00 from Egilsstaðir) (Visit Seyðisfjörður n.d.). On Tuesdays it operates an extra trip just after the passenger ferry arrives. On Saturdays it operates only once in the morning, however on Sundays and holidays the bus service is not active (Visit Seyðisfjörður n.d.).

From some of the interviews we concluded that some students go to the college in Egilsstaðir by public transportation. Additionally, this bus is used by the incoming tourists from ships that do not have a car. This is furthermore illustrated by the additional scheduled bus trip just when the passenger ferry arrives.

As part of our observation on the use of public transport, one of our group members took the local bus from Seyðisfjörður to Egilsstaðir on Wednesday, May 22 at 14:30. It was observed that no other people were using this option of public transportation. However, from a conversation with the bus driver, it was determined that this seemed to be an anomaly and at other times the bus is more actively used.

3.1.7 Discussion

Seyðisfjörður's shift from being a fishing-based industry to one heavily reliant on tourism has highlighted the challenges and benefits that the transition has brought to the town. The town has also endured an unexpected environmental crisis and COVID-19 in recent years, which has affected tourism heavily during those times. Town's endurance over hardships and changing industries highlights the local community's resilience. The growth of tourism in Seyðisfjörður shows both positive and negative sides in terms of availability of services, sense of community and place attachment. Locals also voice their concerns about overcrowding and invasion of privacy when it comes to tourism. Tourism development in a community such as Seyðisfjörður is not just about matching the tourists needs and demands. Local acceptability must also be taken into consideration (Menning 1995; Andereck & Vogt 2016).

One of the town's major problems when it comes to tourism is its seasonality and accessibility during the winter. Bad weather conditions often lead to roads closing and ferry services being

suspended. The municipality wants to improve their transportation infrastructure by building a 13,4 kilometer long tunnel between Seyðisfjörður and Egilsstaðir, which would also be useful for off-season tourism. Unfortunately this project seems to be stuck in a limbo state where all the preparation and research is ready, but the town isn't getting the funding and rights for it to get started.

Seyðisfjörður's shift from a fishing hub to a tourist destination has been a very significant change for the locals and it affects how they perceive and live in their own environment. Individuals develop cognitive-emotional bonds with certain places, which creates place attachments (Scannell & Gifford, 2014). Attachments to places also implicate social ties and networks (Cigognani et al., 2010). When those places, which hold great personal meaning are visited by hundreds of tourists, it can feel like their cherished environment is changing. This can challenge the locals' sense of place and belonging in Seyðisfjörður. Place attachment also plays a part in tourism marketing, by possibly attracting returning visitors or seasonal workers. It's influenced by the area's image, attractiveness, personal involvement and satisfaction (Vada, Prentice & Hsiao, 2018).

Large influxes of visitors can disrupt the connection that locals have to the town as well as their well-being. Well-being and place are closely interconnected, because the place we live in and who we live alongside profoundly impacts our opportunities, connections, creativity and environment (Atkinson, Fuller & Painter, 2012). These disruptions can be perceived as overcrowding of local services, intrusion of private homes, changes in the quality of the surrounding environment and nature, and concerns for the culture and history of the town. Sudden increases of visitors during the busy tourism season in the summer can strain the town's infrastructure. Streets can be crowded, local services have longer waiting times and there are less available parking spaces. This can really disturb the locals' daily routines, which was a topic that came up often in the interviews. Locals also tend to stay inside of their homes when cruise ships arrive at the harbor.

Tourism impacts the housing market greatly. There have been previous studies in Iceland (Gorlick, 2020) that show that people choosing to rent out properties on AirBnB increases rental and housing prices and provides a shortage of housing options for locals due to the fact that the

property owners simply get more money from short-term renting. Homeowners in Seyðisfjörður seem to prefer to rent out their houses in the short term on sites such as AirBnB for monetary reasons rather than long term to potential residents. In turn, the housing market prices increase to accommodate this. The seasonality of tourism in Seyðisfjörður is an issue. Seasonal workers come from outside the town and they need to be accommodated just for a few months. So also the availability of short-term housing in Seyðisfjörður is a factor in the housing market. One of the potential improvements for tourism would be building larger hotels to accommodate more tourists to take some strain out of the housing market and return homes to residents.

It was difficult to draw a proper conclusion about the local public bus from Seyðisfjörður to Egilsstaðir. It seems to be set up to provide people from Seyðisfjörður who want to work or study in Egilsstaðir access to public transportation, however we observed no one using the bus at the time.

3.2 Arts and Culture

3.2.1 General Overview

Upon arrival in Seyðisfjörður one immediately notices its artistic look. It is not for nothing that the town is often referred to as one of Iceland's most artistic places (Iceland Dream, October 30, 2022; Aquino & Burns, 2021). A variety of famous artists have been a part of the town's art history and its many artist residencies attract people from across the world. Art and culture has had a significant impact on the identity, image, and rebranding of the town, especially after the main fishing industry disappeared (Undercurrent News, 2023). The following sections present the results of the media analysis, mapping, and narrative interviews in relation to arts and culture and community resilience in Seyðisfjörður.

3.2.2 Media Analysis

Community

Iceland Review magazine's article published in 2013 presents Seyðisfjörður as a picturesque village in East Iceland which captivates many visitors, particularly artists who are often drawn to stay longer or settle. Historically a fishing hub, these days Seyðisfjörður thrives on tourism and arts, hosting festivals and attracting artists through the Skaftfell Center's residency programs. The article mentions a Swiss artist Dieter Roth and Danish artist Litten Nyström, who stayed in

the town after their residencies. It is also noted that the town has become a filming location for Ben Stiller's "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." The role of community is vital in Seyðisfjörður's growing reputation as a creative hub: community members have revitalized historic buildings into vibrant cultural spaces. Despite the harsh winters, the community remains active, embracing the darkness with cultural events and maintaining a unique micro-community that fosters creativity and collaboration. According to the article, the number of foreign artists in Seyðisfjörður triples during the summer and initiatives such as the LungA Art school and Heima residency program contribute to the town's growing reputation. Local and foreign artists work together, and community engagement is strong (Robert, 2013).

Seyðisfjörður's artists actively participated in rebuilding the town after the 2020 landslides. For example, Lama-sea Dear, a former resident, initiated "Saman fyrir Seyðisfjörður" ("Together for Seyðisfjörður") to raise awareness and support for the community. Partnering with musicians, local figures and the Heima Art Residency, they created social media platforms to showcase videos and art from the Icelandic creative scene, aiming to generate support and funds. Working with the Icelandic Red Cross, they established a fund to aid in the town's recovery. The project has gathered positive responses, highlighting the global affection for Seyðisfjörður and the community's resilience in the face of disaster (Fontaine, 2021; Einarsdóttir, 2021).

Festivals

In the 07 issue of The Reykjavik Grapevine (2022) LungA arts festival is presented as the one that grew from a small event in the year 2000 to a week-long gathering of thousands each year. Famous for exploring socially relevant themes, in 2022 it put focus on equality. LungA had always attracted a diverse audience, from emerging artists to seasoned professionals, celebrating differences and fostering cultural exchange. Despite a setback from a mudslide in 2020, the festival adapted utilizing Seyðisfjörður's natural beauty for smaller events spread throughout town (Zubenko, 2022). Unfortunately, the festival couldn't adapt to lack of funding and it was recently announced that the LungA Art Festival in Seyðisfjörður would host its final edition this summer due to limited funding and the heavy workload on volunteers. Þórhildur Tinna Sigurðardóttir, a LungA organizer, emphasized the need for more public funding to sustain these

cultural events, highlighting that current financial support has decreased in real terms. The 25th and last LungA aims to inspire new initiatives by younger generations (Jonsson, 2024).

In 2012, Seyðisfjörður saw the opening of the new international Sound Art Festival held at the former Norðursíld fish factory that was transformed into a hub for sound art and experimental music. In over three days, the festival featured more than 20 concerts and performances by Icelandic and international artists, including German performers Asmus Tietchens and Thomas Köner. Köner also performed in the recently unveiled *Tvísöngur* sound sculpture by Lukas Kühne, located on the mountainside overlooking the town (Robert, 2012). No information on later editions of the festival was found.

In February 2016, one more festival started in Seyðisfjörður: the festival of lights called *List í ljósi* (Art in Light), aiming to become an annual event. Organized by Celia Harrison, who previously created New Zealand's Art in the Dark festival, the event featured around 30 different activities involving both Icelandic and international participants. Inspired by the town's vibrant artistic community and the local residents' energy, Celia initiated this project during her artist residency in Seyðisfjörður. The festival coincides with the town's tradition of welcoming the sun's return, celebrated with a gathering known as 'sólarkaffi,' after being hidden by the surrounding mountains since November. In the February 19th issue of *Iceland Review* the fourth installment of the *List í ljósi* festival was announced, featuring up to 30 light sculptures. Highlights included lighting up the 30-meter bridge by the ferry and projecting 3D visuals onto the Herðubreið Community and Culture House. It was also made public that concurrently, Seyðisfjörður would host the Flat Earth Film Festival and artist residencies with the Heima art residency project. Recently, *List í ljósi* received the prestigious Eyrarrósinn award for outstanding cultural events in Iceland's countryside and continues to be organized (Jónsson, 2019).

Art Center

In his interview for *artzine.com* (Forsythe, 2019) Gavin Morrison, Skaftfwell director 2018-2020, pointed out that the curatorial role at Skaftfell in Seyðisfjörður was inherently tied to the town's cultural context, balancing local heritage with a global perspective. According to Morrison Skaftfell acts as a custodian of Seyðisfjörður's cultural history. This dynamic is reflected in its three unique buildings: the Skaftfell house, a traditional timber structure

transformed into a bistro, gallery, and residency by Björn Roth; Geirahús, the colorful home of outsider artist Ásgeir Jón Emilsson; and Tvísöngur, a concrete sound sculpture by Lukas Kühne. These buildings serve as artworks themselves, embodying creative potential and inspiring the curatorial strategy, which blends local specificity with an international outlook. This approach seeks to celebrate the area's heritage while encouraging contemporary artists to contribute to and expand upon it, engaging the local community as both audience and collaborators.

Technical museum

The landslide on December 18, 2020 destroyed the Seyðisfjörður's Technical Museum. Various institutions provided critical support during the recovery, which involved meticulous excavation and sorting of artifacts. Despite the hazards, such as asbestos and industrial chemicals, many valuable items were salvaged. The collection is now stored in temporary spaces, and further work is needed for organization and restoration. This experience has underscored the importance of inter-institutional coordination in crises and highlighted the psychological toll on the community. The museum is now working on establishing a new location and evolving its policies to address future challenges, aiming to contribute to both heritage preservation and community resilience (Akizu, 2021).

Nightclubs

An article in Iceland Review (2018) told about Seyðisfjörður's attempt to have a nightclub - a beloved Reykjavík nightclub and concert venue Sirkus, which closed in 2007, was going to be reborn in Seyðisfjörður, using nearly all its original fittings, including chairs, the bar top, and sound equipment. The club's owner Sigríður Guðlaugsdóttir, who recently moved to Seyðisfjörður, had stored Sirkus' remnants in a shipping container for eight years. Sigríður believed that Seyðisfjörður's rich cultural environment would be a perfect fit for Sirkus, contrasting with the changes she had observed in Reykjavík. However, in 2022 Sirkus traveled back to Reykjavík where it was reopened after 15 years (Kyzer, 2022).

Wheelhouse

A Czech artist Monika Fryčová initiated the project to transform a ship's wheelhouse from 1969 into a public art installation and snack stand called KIOSK 108 in Seyðisfjörður. She plans to convert the wheelhouse into a 'cultural kiosk' offering fish soup, hot dogs, coffee, and beer, with

a small bar inside made from old timber, a kid's corner, and a rooftop stage for performances. Monika is raising funds by selling KIOSK 108 stickers and t-shirts, and the project has received a grant from the East Iceland Development Fund (Kyzer, 2021).

Archeological excavation

Archaeologists in Seyðisfjörður, Iceland, uncovered jewelry dating back to 940 – 1100 AD, shortly after the initial settlement of Iceland. Among the discoveries was a bead bearing the colors of the Icelandic national flag, found in remarkably well-preserved structures in the region. Despite the challenges posed by landslides in the area, which had prompted plans for defensive barriers to protect the village, the natural occurrences had paradoxically aided in preserving archaeological sites. Ragnheiður Traustadóttir, the lead archaeologist, explained that several structures or houses were uncovered beneath this landslide, which had kept them intact (Rannveig, personal communication, May 18, 2024). The excavations, focusing on areas where defensive barriers would be erected, unearthed intact manmade structures and artifacts, including game pieces and pearls. Particularly significant was the discovery at the farmstead believed to have belonged to Bjólfur, a settler mentioned in Landnámabók, which yielded the remains of a man, a horse, a spear, and a boat. The discovery of the bead, with its resemblance to the Icelandic flag, sparked interest and discussions on social media, with archaeologists confirming its origin from the specified period based on its context beneath known tephra and landslide layers. The find presented a unique opportunity to delve into Seyðisfjörður's history from the tenth to eleventh centuries, adding depth to our understanding of the region's past. In 2022, around twenty archaeologists were engaged in excavations and were expected to continue until mid-August (Kyzer, 2022; Pomrenke, 2022). In 2024 the project is still running (Óli, personal communication, May 18, 2024)

3.2.3 Mapping Results

The following map (Fig. 9) shows places in town that we consider to be cultural and/or artistic. The criteria for these maps were that the 'hotspot' was accessible or visible from main roads in town and that there was a clear intention of 'creating art'. The map has 39 points and shows a widespread availability of art and culture throughout town, rather than being located only in certain areas or cultural houses. There are certain spaces that are mainly cultural institutions, such as the church, technical museum, community center and the new archaeological excavation.

There are also a considerable number of art-related institutions, for example Heima Collective, two galleries, LungA Art School and Skaftfell center for visual art.

However, the artistic nature of the town is prominent also in other ways than just from these institutions. Especially in the center of the town there are multiple statues, sculptures and monuments of the town's history and culture. Many houses have murals painted on them or on some other buildings in their yards. The town also has some artistic residents, since in many yards there were sculptures or other art. Also some street art could be found in some places. While these various forms of art and culture are widespread there are certain further parts of the town that have significantly less hotspots, for example residential areas with more ordinary houses.

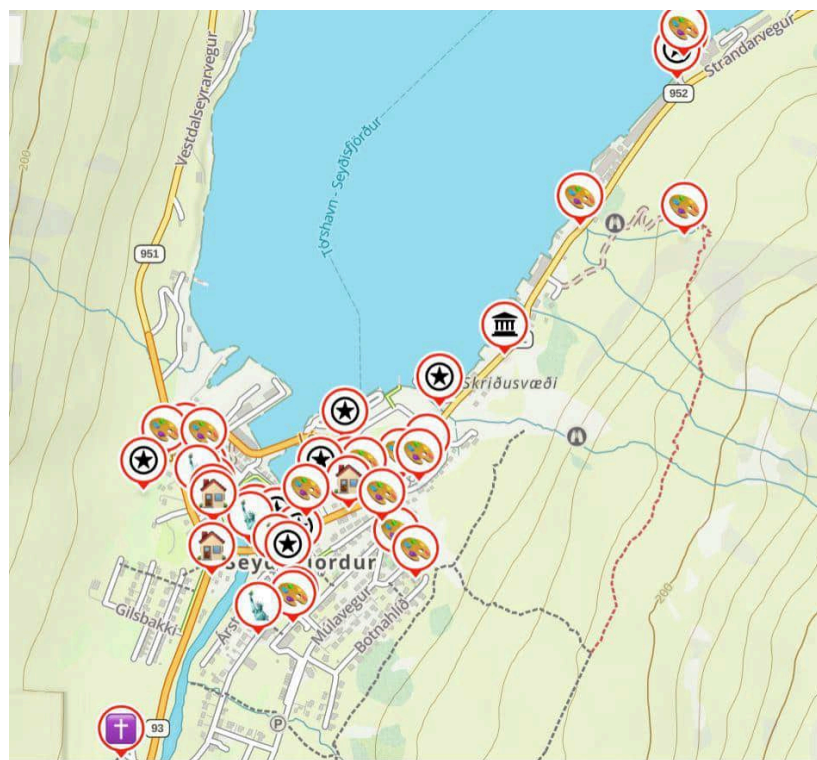


Fig. 9. Mapping of culture and art in the town of Seyðisfjörður, see living map here:

<https://www.gaiagps.com/map/?loc=12.7/-14.0246/65.2630&pubLink=38YGbdgaq2S3UKd37ioz8Etx&folderId=1017d8fb-e3ca-4078-84e9-85c4329a8567>

3.2.4 Narrative Interview Results

Throughout the narrative interviews that were conducted, it was noticed that the art and cultural spaces seem to attract young people to the town who either stay for longer periods of time or are there only seasonally or temporarily. The inward migration of young creatives was perceived to be a positive thing. The specific artistic image of the town is perceived to draw this certain demographic inwards. The art school in Seyðisfjörður emphasizes this with an average age of attendees being in the mid twenties, though age can vary significantly between participants.

All narrative interviews saw the town's flexible nature as one of its main driving factors, one participant mentioning “*flexibility is Seyðisfjörður identity.*” Interviewees tell stories about how spaces are used differently during tourist season as to the winter months and how this keeps the town alive, especially during off season. The usage of hostel rooms during winter for boarding school beds was an example of this phenomenon presented to us.

Most initiatives in town were perceived to be bottom-up approaches. Where people that have or had a connection to the town and its history took the initiative to erect cultural spaces and art in town. Examples of these are the cultural house, community center, the famous rainbow road, and the painting of houses across town. The interviewees emphasize an important aspect to these initiatives often to be a familial or historical connection to Seyðisfjörður that makes people feel connected to the story of the places that are being renovated.

The community center is heavily used and hosts weekly movie screenings and with that is the only cinema in the east of Iceland. This cinema project was created after the people in town were asked by the current owners what their fondest memories were of the community center, it having played various roles in town over time, and conversations about when it was a cinema kept popping up. The community center afterwards decided to bring this tradition back to life. The community center holds other important roles in the town as well, such as lunch opportunities for the school children as well as shared office spaces and other potential future plans.

Perceived threats by our participants for the community as a whole and its artistic and cultural spaces include potential plans for aquaculture drastically changing the town's dynamic and environment, lack of space for new startups and innovative projects, lack of housing, and an unhealthy balance with the tourism industry.

3.2.5 Discussion

The media analysis shows that Seyðisfjörður is perceived to be an artistic and creative place where people are allowed to try out new ideas. The place is presented as open, welcoming, and inspiring to people that come to town even for projects that only end up being temporary. This media presentation is mostly in line with the narrative presented throughout the interviews, where an open and welcoming environment was mentioned to be an important aspect of Seyðisfjörður's innovative and flexible spirit. The ever-changing circumstances of the town seem to have forced its population to become innovative and creative in its use of space and time, leading to a variety of widespread initiatives throughout the city. Art and culture provide mediums to erect alternative spaces and create room for grassroots activities (Gibson & Gordon, 2018). What these projects seem to have in common is that an individual or a small group of people came together to establish something new out of deteriorating or unused places in town. The bottom-up approaches that are being used in town, such as the cinema initiative portraying an incredible example of community engagement within decision making of communal spaces, show the foundations of endogenous development of the town. These sorts of approaches are fundamental to community resilience; fostering a sense of flexibility and adaptive strategies in communal decision making. These kinds of self-governance in relation to creativity, arts, and culture are key factors in rural vitality (Anwar McHenry, 2009)

Art and creativity seem to be an increasingly important strategy for rural revitalisation and community strengthening. Especially neo-endogenous development, the combination of exogenous and endogenous elements, triggers social innovation in rural communities (Qu & Zollet, 2023). Seyðisfjörður historically has welcomed inward migration to the town and has increasingly attracted creatives from all over the world, increasing the chances of exogenous influence. This inward migration, in combination with the town's flexible spirit, have created a boost in Seyðisfjörður's creative scene and image. Endogenous ideas, such as the various art

festivals, the reuse of the community center, and the opening of art schools, all contribute to neo-endogenous development in the area while being heavily influenced by exogenous factors. Both exogenous and endogenous elements are vital to community resilience, especially in rural areas (Qu & Zollet, 2023). This positive feedback loop of innovation and creativity attracts young people to the town. While some of these young people end up settling in Seyðisfjörður, the town also gains from other, more temporary, residents through increased labor force and general diversification of ideas. This shows that the artistic image of the town draws a certain demographic to the town that might naturally be missing in an aging population. Increased opportunities to work within the service industry provide young people with (seasonal) opportunities in the labor market, showing how art and culture play a vital role in the town's economy and tourism industry.

Art and culture related hotspots are widespread yet still are mainly located in the town center. Especially residential housing areas lack art. It is unclear what the reasoning behind this is, yet it can be speculated that this is related to either the presence of summer houses and effects of previous landslides. Also some of the locals living in the town are not that artistic, which shows in the image of these housing areas. One of our interviewees noted that the art scene is not necessarily rising from the local year-round community, but more from the tourism and new people coming into the town. Nevertheless, the widespread visibility of art and culture might help cultivate and protect the artistic image of Seyðisfjörður, further enforcing this positive creative feedback loop.

Art and culture seem to hold a primary role in the town's history, image, and identity. Acknowledging the importance it plays into the fabric of the community, it is important to emphasize the vital role creativity plays in the flexibility and adaptability of the community to change, further stabilizing the town's resilience and resourcefulness. Aside from art playing a vital role in the town's identity and spirit, it also provides very practical advantages such as tourism and work opportunities that have an important role in the town's economy and, subsequently, its resilience. While the town is perceived to be strong, resourceful, and adaptive, there are uncertainties and perceived threats that may influence this resilience negatively.

3.3 Recreation

3.3.1 Overview

Besides cultural activities, Seyðisfjörður offers everyone variable recreation opportunities located out of the town (eg. Hagavöllur Golf Course, Stafdalur Ski Area) and within the border (boat trips, the swimming hall, sports center, gym) (Visit Seyðisfjörður, n.d.). However, our observations confirm that the disk golf park, avalanche walls, sports fields, and local hiking trails are also used as part of the outdoor recreational space. Some of these services work all year, and some of them open only during the winter. We decided to focus on the hiking opportunities in the immediate area. There are several nature tourist attractions in the nearby area that we wanted to visit to see if it had potential for mapping and participant observation in our time frame. These included an art installation called *Tvísöngur*, a waterfall called *Búðaráfoss*, a point of interest called *Brimnes*, and hiking trails marketed as *Mountain Lady Lane*, *Waterfall Lane*, *Austdalur-Skalanes*, and *Seven Peaks*. Information on the tourist website includes a brief general description of the object and a link to Google Map coordinates information, and several maps were seen around town (see Fig. 4 above) that seemed to be geared towards tourist knowledge (Visit Seyðisfjörður, n.d.).

3.3.2 Initial Observation

Another layer that we decided to observe in addition to mapping infrastructure and trail conditions was to also take note of the actual lived space besides formal marked trails. We also wanted to look at comments online and in the trail guest books to see what people thought of the experience of hiking in Seyðisfjörður. On our initial walk on the first day, we noticed that there were multiple footpaths that were unmarked, that seemed like they were shortcuts between private homes and/or other official trails. According to previous knowledge of one of the authors, we also knew that some Icelanders create unofficial footpaths to reach blueberry and bilberry bushes. We also noticed that the avalanche barriers had their own footpaths on top and some had turned into viewpoints. We found it interesting that the new avalanche barriers that were being built on the north side of town seemed to have formal built-in view points with railings. They were unfinished so we were not able to take a closer look, but something that had been built for defense was now existing as a recreational area as well. There were many places where we perceived infrastructure to be very good for a small trail system with many bridges and benches,

and other places further from town where the trails had less maintenance. We mapped any recreational infrastructure within the town along with any physical maps that we found. We decided to focus on the most popular hiking trails near the town, considering proximity, promotions from the official tourist web page, and a list on the AllTrails app. So we decided to visit and observe Tvísöngur (a sound sculpture), Búðaráfoss Loop, and Waterfall Lane (until Gufufoss).

3.3.3 Mapping and Participant Observation Results

Our observation period was strictly limited by weather conditions. On Sunday, May 19th, a snowstorm continued all day which created snowy trail conditions the next day on Monday, May 20th which was a national holiday in Iceland. Since locals were not working, we thought that it would be a good opportunity to see some people out in these spaces. We mapped 125 points of interest on our 13.1 kilometer hike (Fig. 9). We hiked any trails within our observation area that seemed to be used by humans (formal and informal). These trails and points of interest can be viewed as a living map at this link:

<https://www.gaiagps.com/map/?loc=12.0/-14.0397/65.2531&pubLink=d7MSirLVbNKW0IV2UWtjGXdT&folderId=e6651e57-d936-43ce-8181-1964537d4e02>

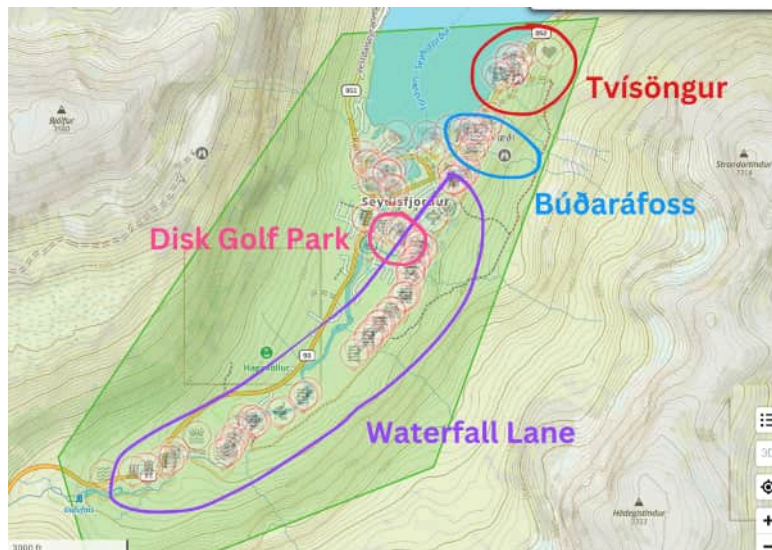


Fig. 9. An overview of the mapped area and where trails are generally located.

The points of interest include things such as muddy terrain, bridges, stairs, railings, waterfalls, picnic tables, sculptures, and water crossings. During our mapping hike, we also took part in some participant observation. We saw only two people near the Búðaráfoss waterfall. We were curious to understand if the area had changed over the years, so we looked online while at the waterfall to see if there was any information. Through some quick research, we learned that this trail looked very different before the landslide that hit this area in 2020, with limited accessibility and infrastructure (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. Búðaráfoss waterfall before and after the landslides (Source: icelandthebeautiful.com; Mariia Bochkova)

We saw that now it has a gravel path, handrails, and a bridge across the river. This development seems to be very recent, since the wood for the bridge and handrails looked brand new and comments from Summer 2023 on Google Map underlined that landslide's signs "*were clearly visible*" in this area (Google Map, 2023). There was no one at Tvísöngur when we visited but we saw one set of footprints in the snow which indicated that at least one person had been there that morning. The conditions were very muddy due to the snow. We observed a few dog walkers and casual hikers starting on at the disk golf park and walking along the beginning section of the Waterfall Lane. This section had new infrastructure and fresh mulch on the trail. It seemed to be only used by locals as it was at the end of a neighborhood. We also observed that there were many informal paths in this area around the river, with these paths being used by school children and dog walkers. Nobody was seen doing the Upper Waterfall Lane route (Fig. 12) after Fjarðarselsfoss, where the more maintained trail ends.

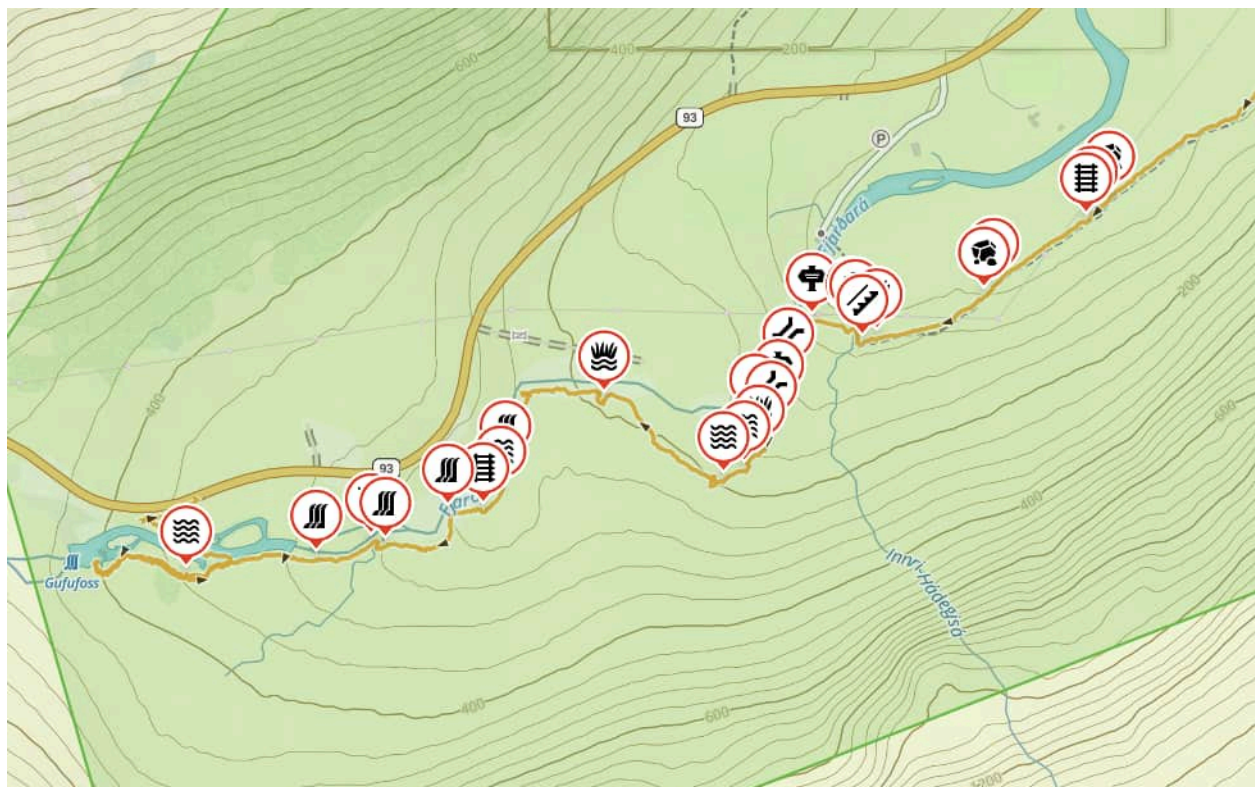


Fig. 11. Screenshot of our mapping in Gaia GPS: Upper Waterfall Lane, after trail infrastructure dwindles.

On Tuesday, May 21st, the ferry from Denmark and a small cruise ship came to the Seyðisfjörður. We had the opportunity to go to our mapped places and do more participant observation to see how the spaces were being used by tourists. Their habits indicated that tourists from the cruise ship who are over 50 years old like to go to the Búðaráfoss because it is the nearest natural attraction to the harbor, and it is hard to miss (Fig. 9, Fig.13).

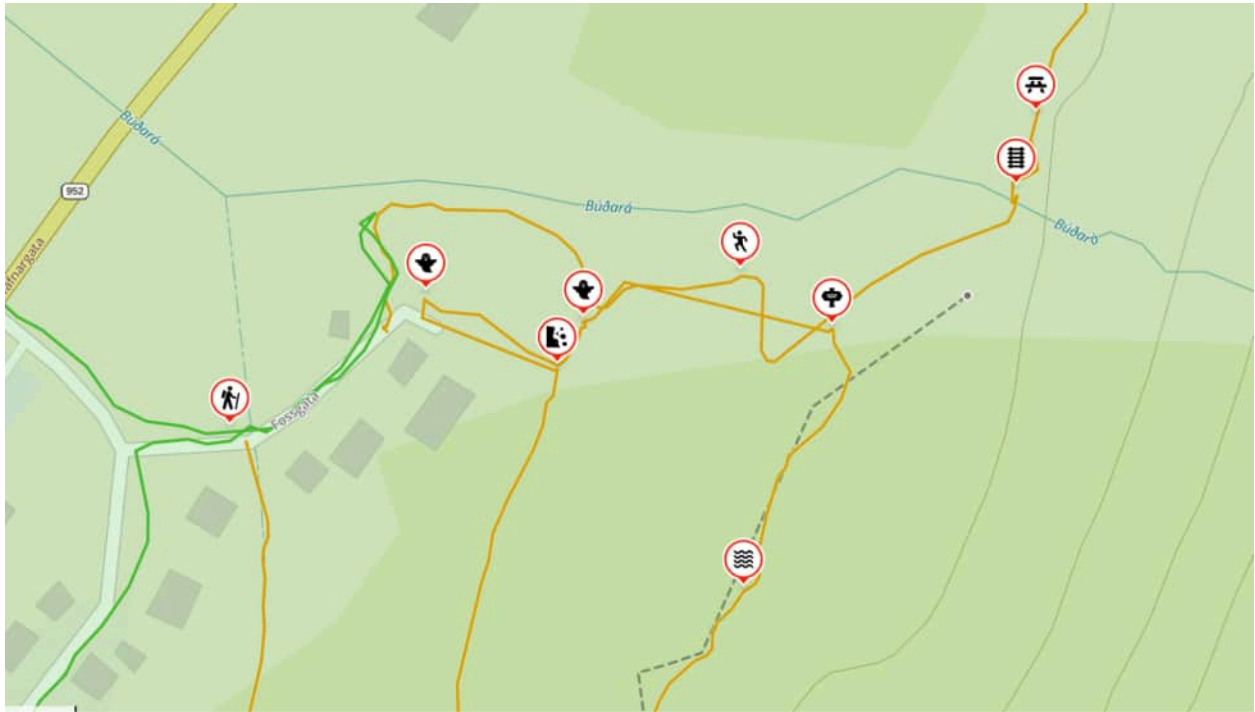


Fig. 12. Screenshot of our mapping in Gaia GPS: Búðaráfoss hiking area. A clear trailhead exists, signage, accessible paths, places to sit but also many informal “ghost paths.”

Tourists that seemed to have more accessibility issues only walked the first mild section. More ambitious visitors would hike the whole loop using the handrails to guide them, or to take breaks. The trail is quite steep even with the comfort of a well maintained trail. Only a few tourists went to Tvísöngur, which is a little more difficult to find. Signage is not clear and it is further from the center of town. We saw a few people turn around because they were elderly, or one person waiting at the bottom while the other went to hike the 700 meter path. The route to the sound sculpture is a 4x4 road that is steep and muddy, and arguably has no trail infrastructure other than signage (Fig 10). At least half of the hikers on this path were younger tourists coming by car. According to reviews on AllTrails, the lack of cruise tourists seems to be a plus and an additional

reason to choose "*hidden hike*" (AllTrails, 2022) or be "*off the beaten path*" (AllTrails, 2023) where they could "*avoid the crowd*" (AllTrails, 2022) from the ferry.

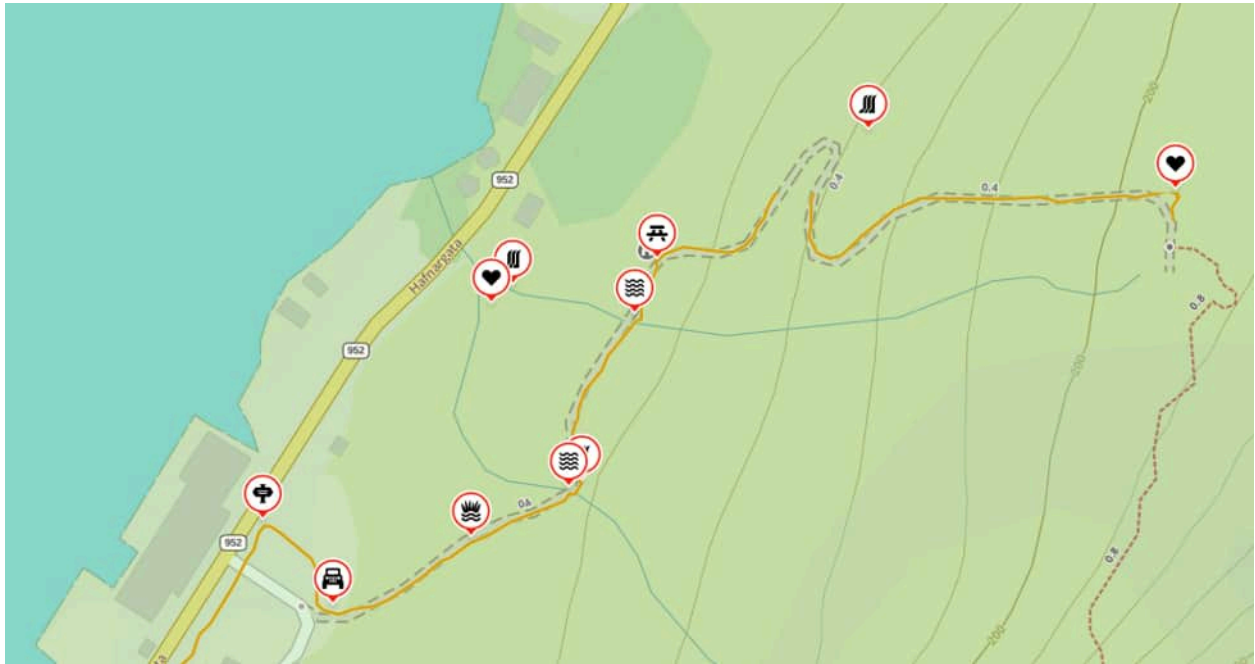


Fig. 13. Screenshot of our mapping in Gaia GPS: many muddy spots and water crossings on the road to Tvísöngur

We saw very few people on the Waterfall Lane again, about the same amount as the day before. Young, middle-aged, or active people with hiking equipment used this trail, while less prepared ones chose to take the informal path leading back to the town center along the river. However, according to the feedback from internet users, the Waterfall Lane trail is a well signed path, and the same confirmed several handwritten comments from the guest book that we explored during observation. It is interesting that this path is popular among cruise crew members (Fig 15). In addition to seeing the guestbook signed by crew members, we saw uniformed persons hiking along this path. We observed that no one was headed to the upper Waterfall Lane.



Fig. 14. Pictures from the Guest book from the Waterfall Lane (Mariia Bochkova)

In addition to the formal paths that we observed, there were many informal footpaths that had been created by visitors to all of the natural areas. We were not able to observe exactly the reasons for their existence due to time and season, but it was interesting to take note of these places and also map them.

3.3.4 Discussion

Firstly, this detailed live map information along with coordinates could be used for future trail planning in preparation for muddy spring conditions. We plan to add more notes to each coordinate, but the photos indicate a lot of information on their own. Through our research, we found it interesting that no maps of hiking paths are provided online by the local information center, and there are limited trails to be found on popular hiking apps like AllTrails. During our walk through town, we found tourist-centered hiking maps drawn by Ómar Smári Kristinsson which seem to only exist by digging deep in the internet or in paper form. As the data on the map is from 2017, we discovered many changes in the hiking trails, one potential reason being due to landslides in 2020 that caused a physical change in the environment. For example, the Búðaráfoss area was built up with better infrastructure, but kept its same general shape. It is also important to note that the way people use a landscape changes constantly. If we had more time to analyze all the maps we found, we would have liked to compare the data in QGIS.

The local hiking club 'Gönguklúbbur Seyðisfjarðar' volunteers along with the staff at Skalanes (the nature reserve) tackling other hiking routes like the beginning parts of the Waterfall Lane. These two organizations maintain the hiking trails together with some municipal money coming in for materials. According to a local conservationist that gave our group a tour on the first day we arrived, the reason behind the upkeep is mostly for pragmatic reasons, conservation, personal spirituality, and to encourage tourists who enjoy hiking to spread out. The perception is that Seyðisfjörður was always a place to hike and always will be, but has never been commercialized on a large scale (Óli, personal communication, May 21, 2024).

There are several future projects already in the works that will improve hiking areas in the future. The new avalanche wall that we observed to have railings was confirmed by personal communication that it will become part of the hiking system (Kris, personal communication, May 22, 2024). Another interesting project is called the Ring of Bjólfur (Fig. 16), a circular viewing platform that is planned to be constructed at 650 meters above sea level in Seyðisfjörður (Ring of Bjólfur n.d). Through chatting with locals, there seems to be a positive outlook on this project. A worker from the informational center said: "*At least they will build the road.*" This viewing platform could attract tourists for different reasons rather than only art and culture, creating a more resilient and controlled tourism industry for the town for those visitors who come to Seyðisfjörður on their own. The town may lose potential income on tourists who come by cruise or pre-booked bus tours if not managed well because tour operators could incentivize visitors to take an all-inclusive package with them, lowering potential spending in the town of Seyðisfjörður.



Fig. 15. Promotional materials from Ring of Bjölfur project (ESLA, 2021).

Apart from the ‘normal’ hiking trails and areas with good infrastructure, Seven Peaks Hike stands. If you managed to visit all the highest seven peaks surrounding Seyðisfjörður in 24 hours, you would gain the title of "Seyðisfjörður Mountain Viking." This hike is challenging; there is no obvious and marked trail to the tops of mountains, and it is possible to pass only during the summer after the snow has melted. Information about how to path this route is limited; the official web page for visitors contains only brief descriptions and coordinates, warnings, and no mapped trails. From the information center on the site, visitors should ask about the map specifically (Fig. 17). We observed that very few people know about this challenge, and locals try to hold this just as it is because "*We don't want to rescue somebody from the mountains in April*" (Kris, personal communication, May 22, 2024). Moreover, from the "List of Mountain Vikings," we know that from 2007, only 26 people managed to complete the challenge, and only five were tourists (Kris, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

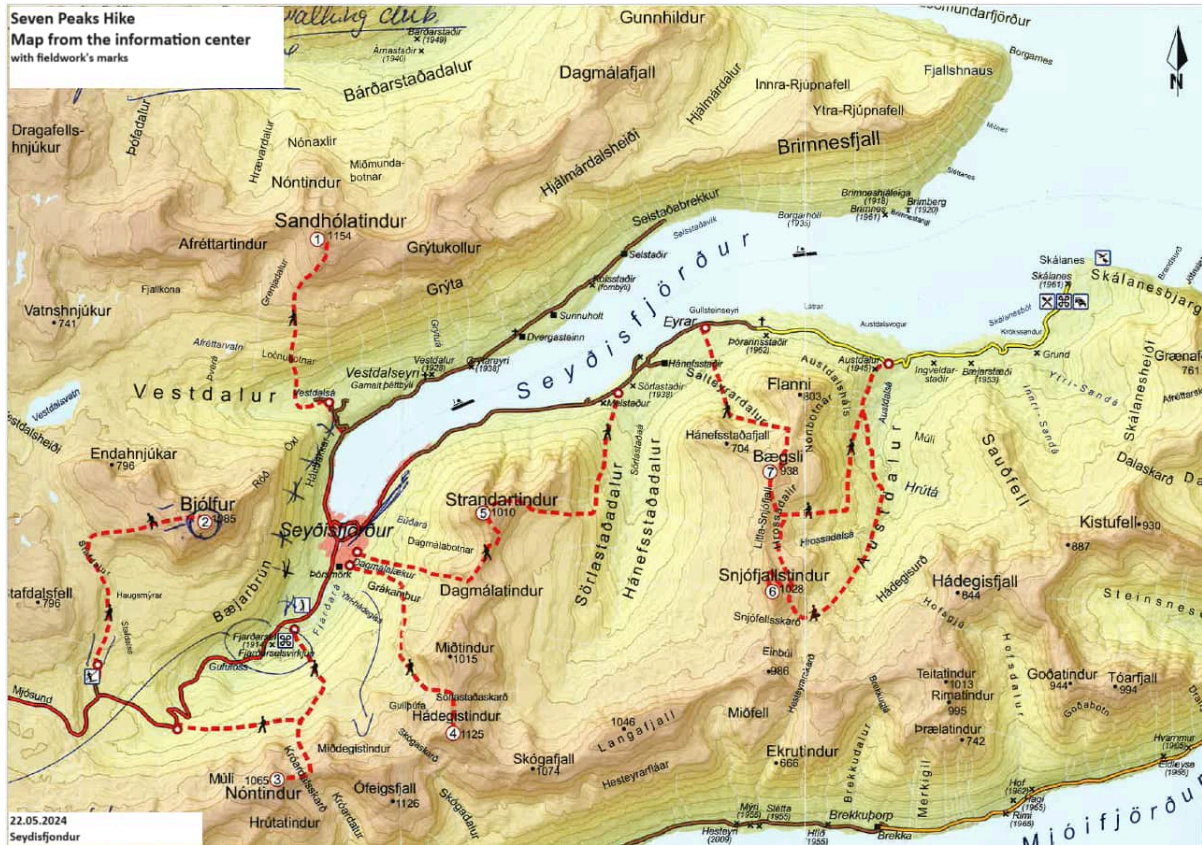


Fig. 16. Map of Seven Peaks Hike, with fieldwork's notes (Office of Tourism and Culture n.d.; Seyðisfjörður Hiking Club, 2015).

We perceived that the ‘best’ hiking in Seyðisfjörður needs to be found by the curious and overcome by the adventurous no matter if you are local or a visitor. Some places are meant to be easy to find and easy to access, some are meant to be searched for. Some areas simply do not have the funding and manpower to fix yet. The fact of the matter is that the hiking trails alone will not bring economic benefit to the town of Seyðisfjörður, but the hope is that maybe it will attract a different kind of tourist, creating longevity and variety of tourism. Something that we learned from a local accommodation owner was that the guest turnover rate is fast; people mostly staying only for one night. She stated that *“it is hard to change fifty beds in one hotel everyday,”* and the town needs to find ways to keep people in Seyðisfjörður for longer. If executed correctly, the town can certainly keep hikers in town. There are many ways that the community is already responding to changes in their environment and staying resilient. Although there are some projects that are coming from the municipality such as the avalanche walls and the new lookout

point at Bjólfur, the community is taking things into their own hands when it comes to making their space liveable and attractive. The avalanche walls become places to recreate, the hiking club volunteers their time to show environmental stewardship, local business owners recognize the approach they need to take to tourism in order to make their town economically resilient as well. These bottom up approaches exemplify a resilient and strong community.

4. Overarching Threats

Some of the perceived threats in the community are similar across our research topics, whereas others are not. While the tourism industry would benefit from a more all year round tourism approach, the art and culture aspect of the town highly benefits from the off season in terms of available space. The recreational areas seem to be highly used in the summer by tourists and locals, while in the winter, the tourism lacks. If tourism were to expand into the winter, it could threaten town identity with winter sports such as snowmobiling and skiing, and the time to rest from the tourism season.

Perceived threats across our research topic include potential aquaculture projects that could impact the natural environment, tourism, and the artistic essence of the town. Similarly, tourism highly impacts the availability of housing, influencing potential availability for inward migration and new creative spaces. Climate change and the ongoing thawing of permafrost is also a looming threat, as the Arctic has warmed four times faster than the rest of the world (Rantanen, 2022). There is a higher likelihood of avalanches, landslides, and more violent storm surges, threatening the livelihood of all people (Pierre-Louis, 2022).

5. Recommendations

5.1 Taxing Summer Homes and AirBnbs

Seyðisfjörður is a popular tourist destination, getting up to 350 000 visitors annually, while the permanent registered population has stayed under 1000 for many years. There are a lot of accommodation facilities developed for tourists in the town. However, there are some places used as Airbnb accommodations. This fact and the number of summer houses affect the housing affordability and availability for locals (Nieuwland & Melik 2018) and anybody who wants to

move there, creating difficulties in attracting permanent newcomers. Additionally, the lack of available spaces could limit new creative innovation. Developing a seasonal tax system on Airbnb could help redistribute tourism flows throughout the year (Dalir et al., 2021) and spread them more equally between accommodation facilities during the summer season. Same approach could be used for summer house owners.

5.2 Stop the Development of Salmon Aquaculture

Recent research has shown that serious conflict arises between stakeholders when the topic of potential fish farming in Seyðisfjörður is discussed (Kulczycki, 2023). More recently, 75% of the town had voted against aquaculture pens (Visir.is, n.d.), and the sentiment from our interviews is that it is bad for the environment and ruins the town's image that the community has worked so hard to build (Thóra, personal communication, May 20, 2024). Our recommendation is to listen to the vote of the people who live in the town. The strengths of this is that high morale would continue in the town, the image would prevail, marketing Seyðisfjörður as a place to stay and place would be in line with the image, and the townspeople would potentially gain some trust in their municipal government. Some weaknesses include the potential loss of jobs, income, and not diversifying the economy further. If aquaculture were to open in Seyðisfjörður, it would be difficult to say if the town would be able to accommodate more workers in the first place without some restructuring. An opportunity from saying 'no' to fish farming would be the solidarity of a town standing up to a known toxic industry (Wolff, n.d.) and continuing control over the town's future.

5.3 Market Seyðisfjörður As a Place to Stay and Play

There has been a recent demand for more authentic and slower experiences during travel to truly get people away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life (Klarin, 2023). Iceland markets itself as a great place to road trip and see lots of popular sites in a short amount of time (Iceland Trippers, 2023). Seyðisfjörður has already gone against the grain by becoming a hub for culture, art, and nature when the town was not doing well. We recommend that it should continue that radical trend by going against what the nation of Iceland is doing and market themselves as a place to slow travel. It is a lower carbon practice resulting in a longer stay in one place, less physical travel time, a deeper connection with a place resulting in higher place attachment and

more responsible consumer consumption (Klarin, 2023). This would only enhance Seyðisfjörður's current image and would reduce the labor that it takes to turnover many guests everyday. Promoting slow tourism is also a direct approach to acknowledge the impact of high movement travel on climate change, which directly impacts all Icelanders. Tourism degrowth meets Seyðisfjörður in the middle with the Smart Shrinkage theory; keeping the same relative size of the town whilst providing visitors with “a reflective absorption of the locale” (Klarin, 2023). A weakness of this recommendation is that it may take more time to attract these visitors and it's important to acknowledge that it does go against Iceland's overarching marketing campaign.

6. Conclusion

Seyðisfjörður has shown a remarkable sense of flexibility over time. The community's ability to adapt to a variety of challenges; ranging from loss of industry, natural disasters, and depopulation, shows a resilient and flexible spirit. Through the general boom in tourism the town has diversified its economy, further strengthening their regional vitality. While the town is at risk of becoming dependent on tourism, the other work opportunities (often related to art or remote work) seem to prevent a fully homogeneous economy from taking place. Art and culture have played a vital role in the creation of the town's spirit, fostering an environment that encourages grass roots initiatives and innovation ultimately strengthening adaptability, flexibility, and resilience. The importance of the natural environment around Seyðisfjörður not only strengthens place attachment, but also creates new opportunities for the tourism industry to more effectively disperse tourism over town in a regulated way. The natural environment provides inspiration and feeling of belonging, not only to the locals, but also to temporary residents and tourists. All three sub categories have strengthened and continue contributing to the town's resilience through various ways, such as innovation, emotional/spiritual relationships, conservation practices, economic stability, stewardship attitudes, and regional vitality.

While Seyðisfjörður has shown to be an example of a resilient community, there are threats that might potentially negatively impact the town. We recommend increasing taxes on summer houses and AirBnB's in a way to battle lack of housing and potential availability of creative spaces. We also strongly recommend to refrain from introducing salmon aquaculture to the

region to maintain a sense of self governance, community spirit, and to protect the cultural scene and tourism from being heavily affected. Lastly, we recommend Seyðisfjörður to promote itself as a slow tourist destination in an attempt to take pressure from the town while keeping one of the main sources of income. This also is in line with the community's efforts of conservation and presented "smart shrinkage" theories. All in all, Seyðisfjörður's flexible spirit is at the heart of its community resilience and shows to be the core of the town's ability to adapt to a variety of challenges, past and future.

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