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# NEGATIVE ATTITUDES OF ICELANDIC RESIDENTS TOWARDS TOURISM; A 'QUALITY OF LIFE' ISSUE?

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LAY REPORT

## Executive Summary

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- Overall, residents commonly have negative attitudes towards nature and quality of life.
- Residents who find that tourists spoil the nature, arguably find this because of the capacity issues rather than the accessibility of nature.
- Residents finding that tourism has no impact on the quality of life, do similarly not recognize any other benefits from tourism.
- Residents who have negative responses towards economy related questions, are similarly negative about the non-significance of the economy (besides nature and the quality of life) rather than about other themes.
- Residents who are negative about capacity issues, are likewise mostly negative about other capacity issues, although show a slight economy related underlying reason.
- Concludes with multiple recommendations on further questionnaires among this same sample. In order to improve the perceived quality of life, it is recommended to the Icelandic government to inform residents about the benefits of tourism.

## Introduction

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Iceland; widely known for its stunning scenery, glaciers, volcano eruptions, economic crisis, 'Game of Thrones' and the northern lights. It is fair to conclude that the country had an eventful past decade. Tourist arrivals have increased massively and after the economic crisis, the country had become highly economically dependent on the tourism industry (Icelandic Tourist Board, 2018; Central Bank of Iceland, 2018). In order to further establish and implement sustainable tourism development strategies, it is important to assess residents' attitudes towards tourism (Eusébio, Vieira, & Lima, 2018). Therefore, the Icelandic Tourism Research Centre conducted a telephone questionnaire among 2324 Icelandic residents in 2017, in order to identify the attitudes those residents have towards tourism. Results from this questionnaire have been analyzed and published accordingly. The outcomes of the questionnaire concluded that attitudes were positive overall, though negativity slightly occurred towards some themes. Especially the question regarding the quality of life stood out, since results uncovered that many residents do not find that tourism changes the perceived quality of life. Despite the fact that the negative attitudes do not account for the majority of the attitudes, negative attitudes could still be a threat to development and sustainability of the destination and understanding about those attitudes could result into accustomed policies that minimize the negative impacts of tourism (Almeida-García et al, 2016). This study further and thoroughly assessed the negative responses to tourism, expressed in the telephone questionnaire. The aim of this report is to uncover the characteristics of the negative attitudes and identify the role of the quality of life in these attitudes.

## Methodology

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SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to perform the data-analysis and conduct several methods. Firstly, a frequency report was retrieved to collect percentages of several answers to the questions. The questions receiving the highest number of negative responses were chosen for further evaluation. Secondly, Spearman's correlations test provided insights in any statistical relationships between all combinations of questions. This test provides a correlation coefficient and automatically flags any combinations that are statistically significant (0.01 and 0.05). If a coefficient is negative, this means that for example when the answer to question X was low, generally the answer to question Y was high, and the other way around (1=Strongly agree, 2= Agree, 3= Neither, 4= Disagree, 5=Strongly disagree). If the correlation is positive, this means that between both questions, both answers were either low or high.

## Key Findings

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### *Most negative answered questions: What are residents mainly negative about?*

This study has uncovered multiple aspects of resident's negative attitudes towards tourism in Iceland. Firstly, the general outcome of the questionnaire shows that residents generally have more positive attitudes than negative attitudes. However, as previously mentioned, it is important to identify the reasoning behind those negative attitudes in order to know what can be improved. The outcomes of the questionnaire show that the contribution of tourism to the national economy is recognized and appreciated among a large group of respondents. Similarly, the positive impacts on employment are recognized. On the other hand, the increased diversity in services and the individual benefit are less recognized. Additionally, questions regarding public toilets, road systems, road safety, public transport and parking lots received a fairly large amount of negative responses, implying that the residents would like to see these infrastructure aspects improved. Two of the main issues identified from the general outcome of the questionnaire are the impact of tourism on the nature and on the quality of life. Capacity related questions that received the most negative responses were "What do you think about the number of tourists in your community during the summer?", "I try to avoid certain places around the country that I know many tourists are to be encountered" and "My community cannot accommodate more tourists given the present circumstances". Furthermore, regarding the economy, the questions "Few individuals gain economically from tourism" and "Pricing of Icelandic tourism companies is fair" were both perceived most negatively. The question "Tourism has led to more diverse services that I have used" is similarly identified as one of the main issues.

### *Spearman correlations: Why do residents have a negative attitude towards a particular question?*

**NATURE** - The Spearman correlations of these key issues identifies the answering pattern of residents that answered a particular question negatively, and thereby uncovers potential reasoning behind those negative answers. Residents who hold a negative attitude towards nature, are mostly similarly negative about multiple capacity aspects. Secondly, those residents hold a more negative attitude towards economy aspects such as the individual gaining economically from tourism and tourism being significant to the Icelandic economy. Comparison between the three nature related questions uncovered that

residents who find that the nature and the experience of nature has been spoiled, do not necessarily find that tourism makes nature less accessible. The accessibility question correlates less with questions such as "Tourism disrupts my daily life more than before" and "I try to avoid certain places around the country that I know tourists can be encountered", which may indicate a less irritated attitude.

**CAPACITY-** Correlations with the capacity questions show that residents who have negative responses toward tourism numbers in summer and the community not being able to accommodate more tourists similarly dislike communicating with tourists. However, residents avoiding certain places because of tourism do not dislike this communication as much. This implies that residents do not necessarily avoid certain places because they dislike the communication with tourists. Moreover, residents who hold negative attitudes towards those three capacity questions are similarly negative about nature, which again identifies the relationship between nature and capacity. Strikingly, none of the three questions is correlated to questions regarding how often the residents becomes aware of tourists, which implies that residents do not have to daily encounter tourists to find that there are too many of them. All three questions have strong correlations with other capacity related questions (besides nature) and not as much with other themes. Some economy questions are correlated, however are not among the strongest correlations to all questions. This indicates that a negative attitude towards capacity might stand on its own and does not have an underlying reason.

**ECONOMY-** The economy related selected questions show correlations mainly towards other economy questions. Residents finding that few individuals benefit economically from tourism, similarly find that tourists and tourism companies should pay more for parking lots and protected areas. Furthermore, nature related questions are again related to those questions, implying that nature is important to many residents with negative attitudes towards other themes. Both questions are correlated towards the question "Do you work in tourism?", which implies that residents not employed in tourism hold a more negative attitude towards tourism in relation to the Icelandic economy. The final selected question "Tourism has led to more diverse services that I have used" is strongly correlated to economy related questions, which suggests that negativity towards diversity in services is part of the negative attitude towards economy. Again, the nature questions are strongly correlated to this question.

**QUALITY OF LIFE-** The question regarding the quality of life was strongly correlated to many questions related to all themes. The main pattern that can be uncovered is that residents finding that the quality of life decreases or not changes because of tourism, do not recognize any benefits resulting from tourism on a social, employment and economic level. It was uncovered that those residents especially do not recognize the economic benefits on the community level, rather than the individual level. Furthermore, these residents do recognize issues related to capacity, and are especially negative about the number of tourists during the summer months. Finally, similarly to previous discussed themes, these residents have negative attitudes towards nature related questions. The strong correlations with a high number of questions suggest that the quality of life is a constant factor in the negative attitude towards all themes.

## Recommendations: What to do with this information?

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**HOST-GUEST ENCOUNTERS-** Based on the results of this study, multiple recommendations regarding future research will be defined. The first recommendation relates to one of the findings in the literature review of the dissertation, which is related to this report. Several authors have mentioned that an interaction between 'hosts' and 'guests' is mainly commercial and therefore residents' attitudes towards interactions are based on their economic benefit rather than reflecting the residents' real perspective. The results of this dissertation do not show any significant findings related to this perspective. However, the finding that residents who find that tourism numbers in summer are too high and find that their community cannot accommodate more tourists both also dislike communicating with tourists, while residents do not seem to avoid tourism places because of this dislike of communication shows that there is some potential there. Similarly, the more positive economic attitude of residents who are employed in tourism confirm that this perspective might be realistic. *Future research could ask about the type of encounters residents have with tourists and see whether residents who do not have economic-based encounters show different perspectives.* Moreover, since avoiding tourists' places can be relatively concerning, future research could similarly cover reasonings behind this behavior.

**GROWTH STAGNATION-** Furthermore, as previously mentioned the number of tourism arrivals to Iceland has increased significantly over the past decade. In 2018 this growth seemed to stagnate for the first time. Since this questionnaire has been conducted in 2017, *it would be interesting to discover any changes in attitudes if growth continues to stagnate.*

**NATURE AND LITTERING-** Both 'quality of life' and 'nature' themes are important to residents who have negative attitudes towards the most negative answered questions regarding themes like economy, capacity and services. Therefore, both themes seem to be perceived as the largest issues in the Icelandic community. However, as mentioned in the literature, other studies have found that residents are mainly concerned about the nature because of the littering. The questions in this questionnaire do not specify why the residents are concerned about the nature and only access the experience and accessibility. Findings of this dissertation show that residents who hold negative attitudes towards capacity issues, are similarly the most concerned about the nature. This implies that the number of tourists visiting nature is the main concern of the residents. However, based on the findings of other studies, *it is recommended to explore via specific questions in a future questionnaire why residents are particularly negative towards nature related questions, and whether this is similarly related to littering.*

**QUALITY OF LIFE-** Finally, this study has shown that the quality of life is related to many other impacts. However, the main finding is that many residents who hold a negative attitude towards the quality of life do not recognize any benefits from tourism on the community. As discussed in the related dissertation to this report, tourism has led to large increases in tourism's contribution to the export revenue of Iceland and the growth in amount of jobs created. This concludes that Iceland is highly depended on tourism. Therefore, in order to potentially improve the perceptions of residents towards the quality of life, recommended to the Icelandic government is to spread awareness of the significance of tourism in Icelandic economy. Moreover, as concluded in the literature review of the dissertation, the quality of life is a highly inclusive term and might be interpreted differently among residents. *Therefore, a future questionnaire could adopt a short explanation about the themes this term includes. This can potentially lead to different outcomes.*

## Conclusion

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In conclusion, the negative attitudes of residents towards tourism in Iceland all have in common that they find that tourism generally has a negative effect on nature and that it does not (positively) impact the quality of life. Residents having negative attitudes towards the economy related questions commonly have similar negative attitudes towards other economy related questions. Residents with negative attitudes towards the capacity questions similarly have negative attitudes towards other capacity related questions, although do show a slightly economy related underlying reason. Residents who find that tourism negatively impacts nature, mainly similarly have a negative attitude towards capacity issues, and show a lesser correlation with the accessibility of nature. The residents who find that tourism does not (positively) impact the quality of life generally do not recognize any benefits of tourism. Therefore, the overall conclusion of this study is that the negative attitudes of Icelandic residents towards tourism are characterized by their negativity towards nature and the quality of life. Furthermore, separate negative attitudes consist of residents being negative towards either capacity or economy.

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