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# AIRBNB TOURISM IN RURAL NORDIC REGIONS

## IMPACTS AND STAKEHOLDER CHALLENGES

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## ABSTRACT

This report focuses on Airbnb tourism in rural Nordic regions, which has more recently been experiencing a strong upturn. Applying a stakeholder-oriented conceptual lens, the report firstly describes the ambiguous impacts of Airbnb tourism on traditional tourism stakeholders in rural Nordic tourism and secondly analyses emerging challenges for these stakeholders. Using an exploratory qualitative analysis in three Nordic case regions in Norway, Iceland, and Denmark, the report finds that lack of governance and poor connectivity of Airbnb stakeholders, notably Airbnb hosts, with traditional tourism stakeholders create important challenges for regional tourism governance, such as social disruption, feelings of alienation in neighbourhoods, excessive tourist inflows, and housing-market challenges. However, both the Airbnb stakeholders and tourism stakeholders in the rural regions show a willingness for greater collaboration to fill existing governance voids and reach higher levels of integration of Airbnb tourism.

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## INTRODUCTION

The extant literature acknowledges both the positive effects and downsides of Airbnb tourism on regions (Rabiei-Dastjerdi et al., 2022; Gurran et al., 2020; von der Heide et al., 2020). Such effects have mainly been documented for urban regions (e.g., Adamiak & Marjavaara, 2024; Amore et al., 2022; Balampanidis et al., 2021), while there is much less evidence on how Airbnb tourism affects rural regions (with the exceptions of, for instance, Adie & Amore, 2022; Strømme-Bakhtiar et al., 2020; Cors-Iglesias et al., 2020). The present report contributes to the latter research stream by exploring challenges with Airbnb tourism for traditional tourism stakeholders in Nordic rural regions through the lens of stakeholder theory (Freeman & Reed, 1983; cf., Cheng et al., 2020a). Stakeholders are defined as those individuals or groups of individuals who mutually affect each other through interactions and relationships (Freeman & Reed, 1983). In rural tourism research, stakeholder theory has widely been used to study, for instance, tourism-network governance (Nguyen et al., 2019; Presenza & Cipollina, 2010). This report applies stakeholder theory to the mainly informal, or indirect, interactions of regional tourism stakeholders, such as regional business development and governmental agencies, planning authorities, destination management organisations (DMOs), accommodation service providers and residents, with Airbnb stakeholders (i.e., Airbnb hosts who operate on the global Airbnb platform with local rentals).

The focus of this report is on Nordic rural tourism, which has more recently experienced rising levels of Airbnb bookings, driven by tourists' preferences for nature-based tourism since the Covid-19 years, on the one hand, and the abundance of second-home properties in these countries, on the other hand (cf., Bærenholdt et al., 2024; Tveteraas & Xie, 2021). Although the literature on Airbnb in Nordic tourism has grown substantially (e.g., Fischer & Roelofsen, 2022; Griggio & Oxenswärdh, 2021; Sagheim & Nilsen, 2021; Jokela & Minoia, 2020), questions of emerging stakeholder challenges due to rising Airbnb tourism activities in the Nordics have not yet received much attention. However, both the upsides and the downsides of Airbnb tourism for stakeholders, such as policymakers, residents and local businesses, have recently received, and are still receiving, abundant attention in the public debate in Nordic countries, for instance, in Norway's rural regions (KBNN, 2026; NRK, 2026). For example, the Lofoten Islands and the northern city of Tromsø represent two prominent examples from Norway that have received attention in Norwegian media, because international tourism, including Airbnb tourism, has been growing tremendously in these regions, producing important challenges for

residents and policymakers – which are comparable to Airbnb challenges in urban locations in the Nordic countries (see NRK, 2025; Adamiak & Marjavaara, 2024).

Considering the existing research gap, i.e. that these regional stakeholder challenges have not received much attention, the present report poses two inter-related research questions: (1) What impacts does Airbnb produce on Nordic rural regions? and (2) Based on these impacts, what are the main stakeholder challenges of Airbnb tourism in rural Nordic tourism regions?

An exploratory empirical study is presented based on a qualitative analysis of focus-group interviews with tourism stakeholders in three rural Nordic regions (Leick et al., 2024a; Leick et al., 2023): Northern Jutland in Denmark, North Iceland in Iceland and Nordland in Norway. The case regions share characteristics as rural Nordic areas, all offering rich and diverse tourism opportunities. Despite their common rural-tourism context, each case region exhibits a distinct tourism profile, shaped by differences in landscape, cultural heritage, and the types of experiences they offer. Additionally, the rules and regulations regarding Airbnb operations, notably for Airbnb hosts, are similar for the regions, guided by national regulations. Property owners are allowed to let property through Airbnb or similar platforms for up to a maximum of 70 days per year in Denmark, and 90 days in both Iceland and Norway. More frequent and substantial operations through such platforms is, however, classified as a business activity with different taxation and regulation.

The report contributes to Nordic tourism and hospitality research in two respects: firstly, it describes the missing integration of Airbnb stakeholders in rural Nordic tourism, confirming similar findings from other regions (Cheng et al., 2020b, p.7). Secondly, beyond replicating previous findings, the report describes concrete causes of negative externalities of the globalised peer-to-peer sharing economy on rural Nordic tourism through the lens of stakeholder theory by highlighting stakeholder challenges with Airbnb tourism, including emerging stakeholder conflicts (see Apostolidis & Brown, 2022). The findings point to the need to foster an integrated governance approach that internalises Airbnb's negative impacts on Nordic rural tourism (cf., Gurran, 2018; Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018; Gurran & Phibbs, 2017) but opens a wider conversation about what type and intensity of tourism rural Nordic regions want and need.

The report is organised as follows: following this introduction, the theoretical background and related literature are presented. Subsequent chapters describe the research design and empirical approach applied and then the empirical findings. The final chapters first discuss and subsequently both conclude on these findings and provide the implications of this research and future research avenues.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### Rural tourism in the age of Airbnb

Driven by natural amenities, rural tourism has turned into an important economic activity shaping rural development (Sharpley & Roberts, 2004; Lane et al., 1994). More recently, rural tourism has demonstrated a considerable resilience regarding the most recent crises (Vaishar & Šťastná, 2022). In many rural regions, tourism operations are, however, embedded in a challenging regional context, which is marked by population shrinking and ageing, the outmigration of youth, a lack of job opportunities for rural dwellers, and a lack of infrastructure and accessibility (Rosalina et al., 2021; Ryser & Halseth, 2010).

In the age of the peer-to-peer sharing economy, the presence of global platforms, notably Airbnb, may support a stable demand for accommodation services benefitting tourism development in rural areas with a sparse accommodation infrastructure (Leick et al., 2022). Indeed, research has demonstrated that Airbnb attracts new types of travellers to destinations (Paulauskaite et al., 2017) and provides guests with authentic experiences, based on personalised social interactions between local Airbnb hosts and guests (Guttentag, 2015). At the same time, research has pointed to manifold negative effects of Airbnb tourism on industries, communities, and regions: the presence of Airbnb tourism in highly competitive markets puts pressure on established accommodation providers, notably hotels (Dogru et al., 2019; Sainaghi & Baggio, 2020). Moreover, Airbnb tourism may crowd out regular rental contracts and be responsible for rental price increases for residents (von der Heidt et al., 2020; Barron et al., 2019). In some cases, these effects have even been associated with the displacement of residents from residential quarters (Forchuk et al., 2025; Hidalgo et al., 2023). The literature also reports an increasing transformation of established neighbourhoods into touristic places for visitors, instead of residential areas, due to Airbnb tourism (e.g., Cheung & Yiu, 2022; Amore et al., 2022; Stergiou & Farmaki, 2019; Mermet, 2019).

Such effects of Airbnb tourism have been documented for rural tourism, albeit scarce and fragmented empirical evidence available. Röslmaier & Ioannides (2023), for instance, point to a potential trade-off for small communities, such as rural islands: while these regions may reap benefits of the Airbnb platform (such as guests being pulled to the region due to the wish to experience local authenticity), local infrastructure and housing markets may be burdened. Other authors highlight concrete benefits, such as entrepreneurial opportunities for rural residents (Mahmuda et al., 2022). In the Nordic regions, Griggio & Oxenwärdh (2021) demonstrate how Airbnb tourism in rural Nordic regions is associated with opportunities for

lifestyle entrepreneurship for residents but burdened by human capital challenges which are typical for many rural areas. Furthermore, Airbnb rentals create opportunities for locals to restore and preserve traditional old buildings attracting visitors to rural regions, as Strømmen-Bakhtiar et al. (2020). Using Norwegian data, Leick et al. (2022) argue that Airbnb tourism supports a stable tourism demand by creating additional accommodation facilities in less visited tourist destinations in rural regions.

## Stakeholder challenges of Airbnb tourism for regional tourism stakeholders

### Interactions of Airbnb stakeholders with regional tourism stakeholders

For this report, stakeholder theory is used to understand the interaction of Airbnb stakeholders with regional tourism stakeholders in rural Nordic regions. The Airbnb platform represents a prototypical example of a digital platform ecosystem that involves multiple stakeholders (cf., Parker et al., 2017), including local Airbnb hosts (those individuals or companies offering temporary letting of housing space on the Airbnb platform in rural regions), Airbnb guests (the users of the Airbnb platform who rent accommodation services from hosts who may be both domestic and international tourists in rural regions), and the Airbnb platform. In this ecosystem, the Airbnb platform serves both as an IT-based algorithmic intermediary between Airbnb hosts and Airbnb users and a centralised, globally governed framework organising this intermediation (Hati et al., 2021; Leoni & Parker, 2019; Wirtz et al., 2019).

However, Airbnb stakeholders, notably hosts, also interact with various regional tourism stakeholders in the destinations, for instance, commercial accommodation providers (Dogru et al., 2019; Gunter & Önder, 2018), tourism-planning authorities and DMOs (Gurran, 2018; Gurran et al., 2018; Gurran & Phibbs, 2017). In addition, given the impact of Airbnb tourism on residents, social communities living in rural regions may also be considered as regional stakeholders with whom Airbnb stakeholders interact (Mody et al., 2023, 2019). Importantly, this interaction between Airbnb stakeholders and regional tourism stakeholders takes place informally or indirectly through relational impacts (Cheng et al., 2020a). This is because the governance of regional tourism stakeholders in the destinations is typically organised regionally or nationally through networked relationships (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2015; Gibson et al., 2005) – which strongly differs from the way that Airbnb algorithmically governs stakeholders in its global digital platform ecosystem.

## Governance voids and emerging stakeholder challenges with Airbnb

Hence, existing differences in governance results in a governance void at local-regional level, i.e., in the rural tourist destinations affected by Airbnb tourism (cf., Almeida-García et al., 2025). Regional planners and policymakers have typically no – or limited– regulatory mechanisms at hand to control globally-orchestrated Airbnb tourism (such as Airbnb host activities) in rural regions (Colomb & Moreira de Souza, 2023; Cheng et al., 2020a). Notwithstanding this, Airbnb regulation is increasingly enforced at sub-national level, for instance, as tourist taxes, zoning approaches to limit the spread of Airbnb rentals, or temporal limitations for rentals (Drapalova & Wegrich, 2025). However, these regulatory measures have hitherto focused mainly on large cities and urban-metropolitan regions (e.g., Robertson et al., 2024; Wessel et al., 2024).

Presumably, the differences in governance of Airbnb stakeholders versus regional tourism stakeholders are associated with some challenges for tourism development in rural regions. The co-ordination of collaborative planning among heterogeneous stakeholders might involve challenges and even conflicts due to several factors, such as a lack of trust (Kelliher et al., 2018), lack of agency on the part of individual stakeholders, or power asymmetries between stakeholders (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011; Timur & Getz, 2008; Gibson et al., 2005). In the Airbnb literature, power asymmetries and challenges regarding agency have been discussed within the digital platform ecosystem, for instance, for the Airbnb host-guest relationship (Farmaki & Kaniadakis, 2020) and the interaction of Airbnb hosts with the Airbnb platform (Christensen, 2022; Casamatta et al., 2022).

Tourism research further suggests that stakeholder relationships may be severely disrupted when stakeholders who are affected by decisions made by other stakeholders do not gain a voice in the decision-making process (Khazaei et al., 2015; Byrd, 2007). For Airbnb tourism, such disruptive effects on stakeholder relationships have been documented for both tourism planning authorities and residents (Balampanidis et al., 2021) who may lack a voice in privately driven upgrading and gentrification processes of residential quarters. In a similar vein, the absence or a low quality of stakeholder collaboration may pose challenges for rural communities (Canavan, 2017), notably when important stakeholders are not integrated in such collaboration (Van der Zee & Vaneste, 2015). For rural Airbnb tourism in the Nordics, such a challenge may exist regarding second-home properties (cf., Müller, 2021) used for Airbnb rentals because often the owners of such properties live outside the rural regions with their small, closed-up social communities (cf., Stoddart et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2013).

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative mixed-methodology empirical approach was used, organised as a two-stage fieldwork in 2023 (**Table 1**): firstly, focus-group interviews were conducted through online webinars in the case regions, one in each region, with various relevant tourism stakeholders, such as regional and municipal policy/planning bodies, DMOs, accommodation providers, tourism companies, such as tour operators, and Airbnb hosts. In all case regions, between five (5) and ten (10) relevant stakeholders from tourism networks were invited for a focus-group interview. In some cases, the author team had contacts to these networks; in other cases, snowballing techniques were used to get in contact with relevant stakeholders. This interview form was chosen with the aim to capture the participants' different views and experiences with Airbnb tourism in their regions through a guided, yet open discussion. The structure of focus-group interviews creates a forum for a group of individuals to discuss a pre-determined topic guided by the interviewers (Bender, 2021; McLafferty, 2004). Secondly, individual interviews were held, in most cases with new informants, to follow up on topics raised in the focus-group interviews, gain a broader perspective, and test if similar issues and topics would be mentioned. This mixed-method approach reflects a triangulation of focus-group interviews with individual interviews (*cf.*, Caillaud & Flick, 2017) to obtain a better overview of the subject matter being researched (Bender, 2021).

**Table 1. Triangulated interview-based research design**

<b>Interview type</b>	<b>Number of interviewees</b>	<b>Profile of interviewees</b>
<i>Focus-group interviews</i>	Iceland: 5 Denmark: 2 Norway: 7 <i>Total number of focus-group interviewees: N=14</i>	7 DMOs and "Visit" bureaus 5 policy makers/regional planners 1 Airbnb host 1 tourism business (non-Airbnb host)
<i>Individual follow-up interviews</i>	Iceland: 3 Denmark: 1 Norway: 2* <i>Total number of individual follow-up interviewees: N=6</i>	3 Airbnb hosts 1 tourism business (non-Airbnb host) 1 accommodation provider (hotel manager) 1 DMO
<b>In total:</b>	<b>N=19*</b>	

Source: Own compilation. \* one focus-group interviewee was also interviewed individually in a follow-up interview (Norwegian case region).

Both stages of this empirical fieldwork were based on the same structured interview guide with open-ended questions that covered four thematic areas (**Appendix A**). All three focus-group interviews were held over video calls due to geographical distances between participants. The individual interviews were a mix of video and telephone interviews, depending on the availability of the interviewees.

## Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed following a stepwise process: the transcripts from the three focus-group interviews were firstly coded jointly using QDA Miner Lite in an open and inductive coding approach (Saldaña, 2016; Miles *et al.*, 2014). Each transcript was subsequently reviewed carefully by the authors to identify and create categories and codes. Whenever necessary, transcripts in the original languages (Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic) were translated to English. Once all three documents had been coded, the main themes of the focus-group interviews were identified and further analysed in a comparative manner. Subsequently, the follow-up interviews were analysed using the same coding approach. The codes from these individual interviews mainly backed up or were aligned to codes generated from the focus-group interviews; in some cases, the codes from the individual interviews, however, refined codes from the focus-group interviews. With the QDA Miner programme, all instances of a certain code being used were able to be collated into one overview and thereby analysed. Where needed, codes were merged or reviewed jointly across the documents when they touched upon similar subject matters.

**Appendix B** provides an example how codes were generated based on the empirical material. Interview statements were rephrased by the authors in a neutral way, subsequently associated with certain categories which were then assigned to a code or several possible codes. Interviewees were anonymised and given code names that indicate the country of origin (DK for Denmark, ICE for Iceland, and NO for Norway), followed by a number based on the number of interviewees from each country and the letter *F* for focus-group interviews or *I* for individual interviews. Two main themes with several subthemes emerged during the coding process and the subsequent data analysis: a theme “regional development”, comprising the subthemes of Airbnb’s impact on the regional economy, including housing markets and social communities; and a theme “tourism networks/tourism industry and tourism development” with the sub-themes of Airbnb hosts as distinct stakeholders, the tourism-network or tourism-industry participation of Airbnb hosts, the role of Airbnb hosts for tourism development and conflicts and competition between Airbnb hosts and regional tourism stakeholders.

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

### Research question 1: “What impacts does Airbnb produce on Nordic rural regions?”

The interviewees agree across the board that Airbnb tourism plays an important role in tourism development for their regions. Airbnb tourism offers opportunities for the rural regions to increase their capacity of overnight stays, notably in smaller municipalities with few or no traditional accommodation providers. Local Airbnb hosts encourage tourists to visit places they might otherwise have driven straight through. As the interviewees further highlight, Airbnb tourism attracts tourists, who are looking for extraordinary accommodation experiences, something else besides the more traditional forms of tourist accommodation. Hence, the consensus among the interviewees was that Airbnb does not stand in direct competition with existing accommodation facilities in the case regions, since all these accommodations offer different types of services and fulfil different needs of tourists. Airbnb guests visiting the case regions are also known as individuals who often wish to experience local culture and lifestyles and interact with residents, as stated by the Danish focus-group interviewee. Moreover, by supporting longer stays of tourists in rural destinations, tourists using Airbnb in the case regions are more likely to consume local services, as highlighted by the Icelandic focus group. This consumption impact matters as more people use these services in the rural regions, which supports maintaining the services in rural municipalities. Another way how Airbnb tourism positively contributes tourism development, according to the interviewees, is by providing residents with the opportunity to generate extra incomes. In remote rural places, available job opportunities are limited, and Airbnb rentals can help some locals stay in these places and maintain a better quality of life:

In situations where settlements are even more spread out in the countryside, then the extra income could perhaps make it viable to continue living in these remote locations (ICE1-F).

Airbnb is a way to work with sustainability in tourism to get local economy to grow, to make sure that local living, the welfare is on the level the locals want, because they need the money the tourists come with (DK2-F).

Airbnb rentals may also imply the creation of new jobs, and the revenue generated by Airbnb rentals contributes to maintaining houses and even entire villages, as the Danish focus-group interviewee states.

However, according to the interviewees, Airbnb tourism does not automatically generate extra revenue for the municipalities involved. One important reason reported by the Icelandic focus group is that Airbnb hosts often reside outside the rural places where they own properties. The Airbnb properties are then used as second homes, either as investment properties or summerhouses. The interviewees also wonder if this practice will continue in the future and whether it will change the composition of the community as people *“don’t sell the housing unit but rent it out instead, move to Oslo, and eventually it will just be a region consisting of rental units”* (NO6-F).



**Picture 1. Lofoten, Norway © Birgit Leick**

Furthermore, an increase in tourism in smaller places may also put a strain on local services, such as healthcare services, or road infrastructure, and add extra expenses for the municipalities:

It’s very true what they say that it’s a burden on the municipality isn’t it, like with medical services and such, it’s a burden on us financially because they don’t live here so we don’t get anything (NO4-F).

there are suddenly many more cars on the streets [...] frictions can arise. Airbnb draws people into general residential areas in more ways than traditional accommodation such as guesthouses emphasises (ICE2-F).

Particularly in North Iceland and Nordland, Norway, the housing market was an important issue and notably related to a lack of available housing in small rural municipalities. This seems to manifest itself in two ways, according to the interviewees. On the one hand, tourism

companies, such as hotels and tour operators, have difficulties in finding accommodation for their seasonal workers during the high season, which renders it hard for them to attract workers:

I know some of the hotels ... have talked about that they simply don't have apartments or houses for the employees they need in the high season. Because the rent is turned up a lot because it is attractive to visit the area right then. But you also need a place for the employees to live (NO1-F).

One interviewee (NO3-F) reported that a hotel had even built accommodation for their employees in reaction to local housing-market shortages. A hotel manager (ICE7-1) from North Iceland also stated that they thankfully had their own accommodation for employees because they knew that many tourism companies in their town found it difficult to host employees during the high season.

On the other hand, the interviewees report that the lack of available housing can be a hindrance when it comes to attracting more residents to the regions, such as young return migrants wishing to move permanently to these smaller municipalities after having finished an education elsewhere. They often struggle to find housing, whether it is to buy or rent. In these cases, it becomes a question of a hierarchy of needs for the municipality, that is, accommodation for tourists must be outweighed *versus* the need for housing for permanent residents. The interviewees pointed out that permanent residents are often more vital to small rural places as many of the small municipalities are struggling to maintain their population, which is stressed by the Icelandic focus-group interviewees.



Picture 2. Hvammstangi, Iceland © Vera Vilhjálmsdóttir

Another argument related to the housing market is the effects that these holiday-based and short-term rental properties can have on the social cohesion for the members of small communities, notably when Airbnb properties are located within residential areas. The interviewees discussed that Airbnb tourism can be quite disruptive regarding the feeling of belonging to a social community and the sense of solidarity between locals when (too) many houses or apartments become short-term rentals, both through Airbnb and other platforms (such as booking.com). One aspect of such a disruption is about knowing one's neighbours and fellow residents, for instance, when residents are continuously confronted with new faces in their streets or shops in villages. The disruption to the social cohesion, which is experienced by residents, can take two different forms, at two ends of the scale. Firstly, the disruption is about the feeling of new people coming and going in the rental properties and "normal" tourism activities being drawn into regular residential areas and more intimate social spheres. This can create a stressor for residents as: *"...it can become wearisome for us that live here and are trying to go about our lives and work here, that the grocery store is always jam-packed with people we don't know (ICE3-F)"*.

This influx of tourists into residential areas is, moreover, difficult to regulate, as the Norwegian focus group stated. Secondly, the other disruption to the local social cohesion is that many of these short-term rental properties can lie empty during large parts of the year, especially during the dark winter months, as in some cases *"when no one lives in the houses, it can be less pleasant to live in the area. Both because there can be much more traffic in and out, but also that it can be empty at (other) times (NO1-F)"*. It can feel eerie for residents to drive around the towns or neighbourhoods and see one dark empty house after the other:

There are so many properties that are rented out on Airbnb or that are summer houses, and these are the darkest houses in the municipality in winter. [...] It is horrible to drive through town and there is one house after the other empty and dark (ICE3-F).

## Research question 2: “Based on these impacts, what are the main stakeholder challenges of Airbnb tourism in rural Nordic tourism regions?”

Related to these ambiguous impacts of Airbnb tourism, the interviewees highlight several key challenges regarding the interaction of Airbnb stakeholders and traditional tourism stakeholder in the case regions. Importantly, there were different opinions among the interviewees of whether Airbnb hosts could be considered as an active stakeholder in regional tourism networking – or more of an “unwanted” and “uninvited” supplement to existing stakeholder relationships. On the one hand, the Airbnb hosts see themselves as part of the regional tourism industry but find it sometimes difficult to connect with other tourism stakeholders and do not know how to work with them, as the Norwegian focus group stated *“what we are concerned about is getting a collaboration with the tourism industry”*. On the other hand, regional tourism organisations and planning authorities clearly stated that they neither consider Airbnb, including the Airbnb hosts, as active participants in tourism in the region, nor find Airbnb stakeholders currently relevant for tourism development, *“because Airbnb does not market destinations [...] they draw on the effects of the work and demand that already exists in the market”* (Norwegian focus group). In a similar vein, an Icelandic tourism business also stated that Airbnb hosts had more in common with landlords rather than local tourism:

It's just a rental. These are people renting out their house. They are not directly involved in tourism, but it is more about getting money for the accommodation you own (ICE6-I).

Notwithstanding this, the tourism planners point out that they would want to achieve a better connection with both local Airbnb hosts and the Airbnb platform to explore avenues for co-operation and dialogue. As it stands, the planners do not know how to reach the hosts as they fail in identifying them and contacting them directly: *“it's not deliberate on our part, but it's a bit difficult to get hold of the actors, we don't really know who [they are], it's difficult”* (Norwegian focus group). One challenge is that the local Airbnb hosts are neither attending planning or informational meetings that tourism planners and authorities hold for the tourism industry, nor are the hosts organised with local DMOs:

Is there something they could come to us for or could we foster a better relationship somehow? [...] How to communicate and get information to them, also so they can better inform their guests (ICE3-F).

One reason might be that many Airbnb hosts live outside of the region and might therefore lack contacts to regional tourism organisations. Besides this, another challenge for regional planners is that the Airbnb platform is a global business and not anchored in local or regional tourism activities:

(Airbnb) is not a local service. I know that their hosts are local, but the company is separate from the local hood. [...] it is difficult to both get data from Airbnb and to get in contact with the hosts (DK2-F).



Picture 3. Northern Jutland, Denmark © Steen Bo Fransen

Based on these challenges identified, the consensus among the tourism planners, especially those in Norway and Iceland, is that Airbnb hosts are in some ways reaping the benefits of investments made by regional tourism stakeholders into tourism development, without adopting a proactive role in shaping the future growth of regional tourism. One tourism planner stated that Airbnb hosts are not using services of DMOs and therefore their experience is that *“those that solely offer accommodation on Airbnb are not taking an active part in tourism development. In this regard they are completely passive actors”* (ICE1-F).

The interviewees also point out that Airbnb hosts are not subjected to the same legal rules and regulations as traditional accommodation providers. This is considered an unfair advantage as Airbnb is becoming both more prominent and more professionalised, without having to meet the same standards regarding, for instance, safety measures and hygiene to which regional tourism providers, such as hotels and other accommodation providers, must abide:

The main problem is not Airbnb, the main problem is, is it ok that we facilitate and accept that you run private, unregulated commercial activities when selling accommodation. It's there that the issues arise I believe (NO7-F).

Despite these challenges, however, greater collaboration of the regional tourism industry and Airbnb, including local Airbnb hosts, was a keyword often used in connection with the overall challenges of Airbnb tourism for all three Nordic case regions. Airbnb, as it stands, is an unknown variable for the interviewees but has the potential to be an important aspect of a growing rural tourism sector, for example, with its ability to combat seasonality and provide accommodation all year round as some hotels in the rural places close during winter. According to the interviewees, Airbnb absorbs an important part of the demand by travellers in their regions, especially during the summer months, and fills gaps of accommodation facilities that traditional accommodation providers cannot meet, as the Danish focus-group interviewee acknowledges.

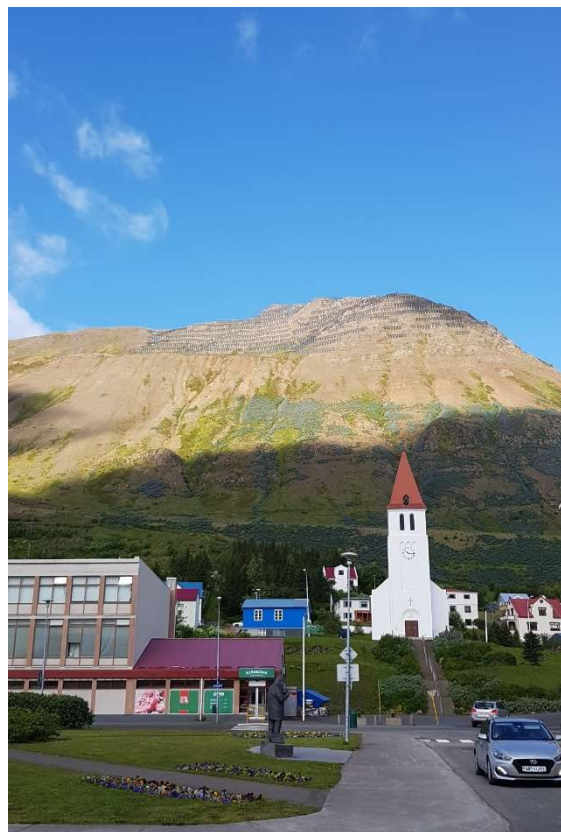
However, the interviewees also stress that Airbnb – which they view as an unconnected and freeriding stakeholder – cannot remain a long-term solution “*in isolation*” (ICE1-F). To be used as a sustainable and long-term element of rural tourism, the interviewees highlight that Airbnb tourism, including local Airbnb hosts, must be connected to what the regional tourism industry is doing and what tourists are seeking from the region as a tourism destination:

How can we make them (Airbnb hosts) understand that it is really important to partner up? For us, well to get them more business, but on the other hand to make sure that we locally do the tourism growth sustainable (DK1-F).

## DISCUSSION

The findings underline the importance of Airbnb stakeholders for rural Nordic tourism with their impacts on traditional tourism stakeholders and residents through both positive *and* negative effects. Some of the positive effects highlighted strongly resonate with arguments from earlier literature: through Airbnb bookings, Airbnb hosts operating in the rural case regions attract rising numbers of diverse types of travellers (Adie *et al.*, 2022; Paulauskaite *et al.*, 2017), including tourists interested in remote, inaccessible places in rural regions. Tourists booking with Airbnb hosts in the Nordic regions, instead of other accommodation providers, prefer experiencing local culture (Leick *et al.*, 2024a; Fischer *et al.*, 2019).

Thereby, Airbnb tourism increases the popularity of the case regions and supports tourism development even in less developed destinations (Leick *et al.*, 2022). Local Airbnb hosts benefit from extra income, which they, for example, invest in the maintenance of old buildings (Strømmen-Bakhtiar *et al.*, 2020). Airbnb tourism is also associated with a stable (or growing) demand for local services that would otherwise be likely to decline in rural places. Therefore, Airbnb tourism, in total, contributes to a stabilisation of rural tourism and economic regeneration of regions (Balampanidis *et al.*, 2021). In the case regions studied, such a regenerative effect matters for combatting seasonality effects, as Airbnb hosts in the case regions



Picture 4. Siglufjörður, Iceland © Vera Vilhjálmstöttir

maintain tourism activities throughout the year. Altogether, these findings confirm that Airbnb stakeholders may enhance regional tourism capacity (*cf.*, Leick *et al.*, 2022) and support regional resilience (Yeager *et al.*, 2023; *cf.*, Adie *et al.*, 2022; Jang & Kim, 2022).

At the same time, several negative effects of Airbnb tourism are highlighted in the interviews that are associated with challenges for rural Nordic tourism stakeholders, as, for instance, pointed out by Röslmaier & Ioannides (2023): Airbnb tourism creates shortages in local

housing markets which affects both residents and local employers (Forchuk *et al.*, 2025; Rabiei-Dastjerdi *et al.*, 2022; Amore *et al.*, 2022). Airbnb tourism is also associated with a excessive tourism in small places, such as picturesque villages (Röslmaier & Albarrán, 2022), putting a strain on local services. Airbnb tourism may also imply socially disruptive effects due to feelings of alienation of residents which may put the social cohesion in small closed-up communities at stake due to a changing meaning of places to the worse in small municipalities (McKercher *et al.*, 2015; Kim *et al.*, 2013).

The interviews underline that many of these challenges are associated with an existing governance void regarding Airbnb and a lack of regulation at hand for local-regional authorities. Although notably the Airbnb hosts are only indirectly visible as stakeholders in rural Nordic tourism, they are an important stakeholder group for the case regions based on their impact on regional tourism. Notwithstanding this, the interaction of Airbnb stakeholders, notably local Airbnb hosts, but also the global Airbnb platform, with tourism stakeholders remains informal and indirect. This, again, implies that local Airbnb hosts are neither well connected with nor integrated in existing tourism networks, burdening stakeholder relationships (*cf.*, Khazaei *et al.*, 2015; Byrd, 2007).

In the context of Nordic rural regions, another challenge in these stakeholder relationships is the physical distance of many Airbnb hosts from their second-home properties used for Airbnb rentals (*cf.*, Gibson *et al.*, 2005; Müller, 2021). This distance leaves such hosts poorly represented in social communities and appearing inactive for local tourism networking. The physical distance also creates a mental distance to traditional tourism stakeholders which renders it difficult, if not impossible, to communicate. On the one hand, regional tourism stakeholders face a knowledge gap regarding how to reach out to local hosts; on the other hand, Airbnb hosts lack knowledge about regular tourism networking activities in the regions. This setting of low connectivity and lack of formal co-ordination opportunities for Airbnb tourism may cause a lack of trust between stakeholders and imply issues of power and agency in their informal relationships (Nguyen *et al.*, 2019; Kelliher *et al.*, 2018; Beaumont & Dredge, 2010). Interestingly, only the interviewed Airbnb hosts consider themselves as part of the regional tourism sector (*cf.*, Leick *et al.*, 2024b), while, from the perspective of traditional tourism stakeholders, both the local Airbnb hosts and the Airbnb platform are not considered as an integral part of a changing rural Nordic tourism landscape.

These different perspectives on Airbnb tourism have their roots in a feeling on the part of the regional tourism stakeholders that Airbnb stakeholders are free riders who benefit from investments made by others (for example, hotels and other accommodation providers).

Hence, there exists a feeling of unfair competition due to the different legal rules and regulations for the accommodation providers and global digital platforms, such as Airbnb, booking.com, *etc.*, including their local hosts (Stergiou & Farmaki, 2019). This feeling is, again, grounded in a governance void with regard to the Airbnb platform and its local operations. In addition, in small social communities in rural regions (Canavan, 2017), local networking and stakeholder engagement in communal decisions are viewed somewhat differently than, for instance, in larger cities - for the case regions studied, there is an unspoken expectation by regional tourism stakeholders that all stakeholders should actively engage in and join decision-making processes about tourism development. However, both the Airbnb stakeholders and traditional tourism stakeholders emphasise a wish for greater co-operation for the sake of better tourism planning and more sustainable regional development.



Picture 5. Lofoten, Norway © Birgit Leick

## CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Airbnb tourism represents both a disruptor and facilitator of rural Nordic tourism, and this report exemplifies how Airbnb stakeholders adopt this ambiguous role through their mainly informal interactions with regional tourism stakeholders. The disruptive effects that Airbnb produces on the rural economies and their social communities (cf., Hardaker, 2024) implies that important governance challenges burden local stakeholder relationships. At the same time, the study highlights that there exists a willingness on the part of Airbnb stakeholders, but also regional tourism stakeholders to bridge the gap between them towards higher levels of co-operation and a better integration of local Airbnb hosts in regional tourism networking.

Based on this conclusion, a theoretical implication of this study is that conceptualising Airbnb tourism and its effects on rural regions through an analysis of stakeholder challenges allows a more fine-grained understanding of necessary regional governance realities; this report thus contributes to an emerging debate on governance challenges with Airbnb in the tourism and hospitality management literature (Cheng et al., 2020a; von der Heidt et al., 2020). While the study presented is mainly an application of stakeholder theory, it furthermore highlights the need to consider a planning dimension (Gurran, 2018; Gurran & Phibbs, 2017) to address such stakeholder challenges for rural Nordic tourism. The study underlines that notably the local Airbnb hosts are an important lever to achieve a better integration and higher connectivity of Airbnb stakeholders with regional tourism networks, which must, however, be flanked by improvements in the existing governance structures.

Hence, the findings point to two central practical implications: firstly, both regional tourism stakeholders and Airbnb hosts should try more effectively to connect with each other. While notably regional policy-makers – in collaboration with national policy-making – must implement an appropriate regulation for excessive tourism activities due to Airbnb to avoid frictions regarding residential areas and social communities, it is the Airbnb stakeholders, notably Airbnb hosts living outside rural Nordic tourism regions, who need to be more responsible for the impact they produce on regional economies and engage more actively in tourism networking. Thereby, local Airbnb hosts might become both more visible and more accepted contact points for tourism planners and residents alike. Secondly, the findings highlight the need for a more overarching discussion on what type of tourism is wanted and desired in rural Nordic regions. Such a discussion must carefully balance the needs of municipalities and residents who permanently live in rural tourist destinations versus the

needs of tourists visiting the region, including the perspective of Airbnb hosts operating in rural tourism.

As limitations, a limited number of Nordic case regions is explored in this report with cross-sectional data. Future research should expand this study by means of larger samples, utilising data material from more case regions and measuring tourism development over time. Moreover, the number of interviewees included in this study, including Airbnb hosts involved, was limited. As the study was part of a larger project that had focused on exploring Airbnb hosts (Leick et al., 2024a,b), this report does not place Airbnb hosts centre stage but rather embeds their activities into the broader analysis of their impact and challenges from the perspective of traditional tourism stakeholders. Finally, it was not possible to distinguish between developed and less developed tourist destinations within the rural regions studied (e.g., at municipal level) although such an approach deserves closer attention in future research and practice.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Semi-structured interview guide for data collection

<p><i>Q1. Positives: In your opinion, what are the benefits of Airbnb activities in your region?</i></p>	<p>Examples of possible benefits (if necessary to get the discussion started):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More income through taxation</li> <li>• More travellers</li> <li>• Attracting other travellers than the ones typically visiting the region</li> <li>• Lower unemployment</li> <li>• Better utilization of empty housing space</li> <li>• Higher attractiveness of the region</li> </ul>
<p><i>Q2. Drawbacks: In your opinion, what are the drawbacks of Airbnb activities in your region?</i></p>	<p>Examples of possible drawbacks (if necessary to get the discussion started):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substituting bookings with other (more traditional) accommodation providers</li> <li>• Risk of gentrification through rising rents for residents</li> <li>• Housing market changes (higher competition for free rental housing space)</li> <li>• Low or no redistribution of income earned through Airbnb to the region</li> <li>• Negative effects on the environment</li> <li>• Overtourism and over-crowdedness during high seasons</li> </ul>
<p><i>Follow-up questions for Q1. &amp; Q2 (if necessary)</i></p>	<p>How do you, in total, view the role of Airbnb tourism and Air hosts in your case region in relation to the regional economy and regional tourism development?</p> <p>Do Airbnb hosts have an impact on regional economic and tourism development at all according to your observations?</p> <p>If Airbnb hosts have an impact: do you view Airbnb hosts as playing a rather positive role, or negative role for regional economic and tourism development?</p> <p>The growth of Airbnb – is it a thread, or an opportunity for the local communities? And for whom is it a threat, or an opportunity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents (including the Airbnb hosts in the region)</li> <li>• Local/regional DMOs that promote tourism development</li> <li>• Local businesses</li> <li>• Local policymakers and regional or municipality-level planners</li> </ul>
<p><i>Q3. Part of tourism: Part of tourism: Do you consider Airbnb hosts as being part of the local/regional tourism networks?</i></p>	<p>Follow-up question: Please explain why.</p>
<p><i>Q4. Covid-19 (2020-22): Did your assessment of Airbnb tourism and Airbnb hosts with their activities change due to the Covid-19 times?</i></p>	<p>Follow-up questions: If so, please explain why. What about this assessment for the aftermath of Covid-19 (after 2022)?</p>

Note that the findings from Q4 were not used for the purpose this report.

## Appendix B: From statement to codes – Examples of the open and inductive coding approach

Interview statement	Interpretation	Category	Code
<p><i>“But as for the society for the residents, it can also be tiring for us who live here and are trying to live our lives and work. That the supermarkets are always full of people we don't know.” (ICE3-F)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Residents do not like to be surrounded by (too) many tourists.</li> <li>▪ Residents do not like to see (too) many unknown faces in local supermarkets.</li> </ul>	Disruption on social cohesion in communities.	Impact of Airbnb hosts on regional communities and development.
<p><i>“Airbnb tourism has led to a situation that old fishing huts and older houses in the villages have been renovated and refurbished but kept their authentic look. This gives a better impression for and within the local community. One example is the village of Vega, which has also received the status of UN World Heritage. This conveys many tourists part of the coastal history of the region and renders the place very attractive. When such houses are renovated, and let to tourists, it also has some repercussions in the place, for example, both public and private renovations are likely to take place, and places are tidied up. This also influences the experiences of local people with the place and may attract more locals to live in such villages. A kind of a higher awareness for local development and pride.” (NO8-l)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Traditional buildings are renovated and let to Airbnb tourists.</li> <li>▪ Residents benefit from the renovations because places become more attractive and neater(er).</li> <li>▪ The effect of Airbnb-driven renovations increases the awareness of residents for the value of the place.</li> </ul>	Maintenance of traditional buildings and places	Impact of Airbnb hosts on regional housing markets/Impact of Airbnb hosts on regional communities and development
<p><i>“I like to say in this area there have always been renting out cottages and/or flats. It is very common to rent out during the season to earn some additional money. It is a benefit for all the involved people.” (DK2-F)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There exists a tradition of letting housing space to tourists.</li> <li>▪ Residents use this as an opportunity to earn money during the tourism season.</li> <li>▪ A positive impact of tourism.</li> </ul>	A positive impact of tourism, in general, including Airbnb tourism.	Impact of Airbnb hosts on the regional economy/Impact of Airbnb hosts on regional communities and development

Source: Own compilation.



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