



Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund

Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

## CASE STUDY //

# Societal value of cultural heritage in Iceland

Spin-off project of “ESPON HERITAGE”

Report // March 2022

This case study is conducted within the framework of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme, partly financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

This delivery does not necessarily reflect the opinions of members of the ESPON 2020 Monitoring Committee.

#### **Authors**

Icelandic Tourism Research Centre: Vera Vilhjálmisdóttir

#### **Acknowledgements**

We want to thank all the participants who took the time to answer our questions. We would also like to thank Kristín Huld Sigurðardóttir, Sólrún Inga Traustadóttir and Sædís Gunnarsdóttir at the Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland for a great cooperation and also Sigríður Sigurðardóttir at the University of Hólar for the help with the design of the survey questionnaire.

#### **Information on ESPON and its projects can be found at [www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu).**

The website provides the possibility to download and examine the most recent documents produced by finalised and ongoing ESPON projects.

ISBN: 978-2-919795-62-8

© **ESPON, 2020**

Published in March 2022

Printing, reproduction or quotation is authorised provided the source is acknowledged and a copy is forwarded to the ESPON EGTC in Luxembourg.

Contact: [info@espon.eu](mailto:info@espon.eu)

**CASE STUDY //**

# **Societal value of cultural heritage in Iceland**

Spin-off project of “ESPON HERITAGE”

Report // March 2022

**Disclaimer**

This document is a final report.

The information contained herein is subject to change and does not commit the ESPON EGTC and the countries participating in the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme.

The final version of the report will be published as soon as approved.



# Table of contents

<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>9</b>
1.1 The case study in North Iceland.....	9
<b>2 Definitions and context</b> .....	<b>12</b>
2.1 Heritage, social values, and well-being.....	12
2.2 Stakeholder engagement.....	14
<b>3 Previous studies of relevance</b> .....	<b>15</b>
3.1 Travel and spending habits of international tourists in the Mývatn area.....	15
3.2 Attitudes towards Icelandic turf houses.....	15
3.3 Museum guests in North Iceland.....	16
<b>4 Methodology</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>5 Results</b> .....	<b>19</b>
5.1 Dissemination of knowledge .....	20
5.2 Employment opportunities .....	21
5.3 Utilisation and management .....	22
5.4 The Hofstaðir heritage site.....	25
<b>6 Discussion and suggestions</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>Appendixes</b> .....	<b>32</b>
Appendix A: Interview guide – Stakeholders.....	32
Appendix B: Interview guide – Focus Group.....	33
Appendix C: Online Survey Questionnaire.....	34

# List of maps, tables, and figures

## List of maps

Map 1: The location of the Þingeyjarsveit and Skútustaðahreppur municipalities and the Vatnajökull National Park in Iceland.....	10
--	----

## List of tables

Table 1: Benefits of cultural tourism to community well-being .....	13
Table 2: Interviews.....	17
Table 3: Focus group participants.....	17
Table 4: The demographic of respondents of online survey .....	18
Table 5: Statements regarding the historical and educational value of heritage sites.....	20
Table 6: Dissemination of information about heritage sites.....	21
Table 7: Aspects that people think are important to keep in mind when developing heritage sites.....	23
Table 8: Who should finance the development and operation of heritage sites? .....	24
Table 9: How familiar are respondents with the Hofstaðir heritage site? .....	25
Table 10: Positive impacts in relation to the Hofstaðir heritage site .....	26

## List of figures

Figure 1: Survey respondents' pride in local heritage sites.....	20
Figure 2: Heritage sites and rural development .....	22
Figure 3: Development of heritage sites .....	23

## List of pictures

Picture 1: The Hofstaðir heritage site and the immediate surrounding area .....	11
Picture 2: The first three words survey participants associated with heritage sites.....	19

# List of boxes

## List of suggestions

Create a heritage management strategy for the municipality .....	29
Introduce school children to local heritage sites .....	29
Bring heritage sites to life through dynamic dissemination strategies .....	29

## Abbreviations

CHAI	The Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland
ESPON	European Territorial Observatory Network
ITRC	The Icelandic Tourism Research Centre

# Introduction

The project presented in this report is a spin-off of the ESPON HERITAGE and ESPON HERIWELL projects.

The ESPON HERITAGE sought to find ways to define and measure the economic impact of material cultural heritage, identify to which sectors it contributes in a significant way, and evaluate how well those results compare across territories (ESPON, 2020). Some of the key results show that the construction and tourism industries are “the biggest contributors to the economic impact of material cultural heritage” (ESPON, 2020: 1). Measuring the impact can prove to be tricky as official statistics are not easily adapted to cultural heritage and its economic impact. Furthermore, a European Heritage Satellite Account could be beneficial to the heritage sector, especially as an instrument to make policy decisions (ESPON, 2020).

The ESPON HERIWELL project sought to develop a pan-European methodology and analysis on how cultural heritage impacts society, with aspects such as social inclusion, quality of life, equality, well-being, health and education taken into consideration (ESPON, 2021).

The main objectives of this study is to examine how residents view and evaluate heritages sites in their local environment and immediate surroundings. The Hofstaðir heritage site located in Skútustaðahreppur in North of Iceland was selected as a case study as well as the surrounding two municipalities.

Data were collected in three different ways: interviews with stakeholders, a focus group meeting with locals, and an online survey amongst residents.

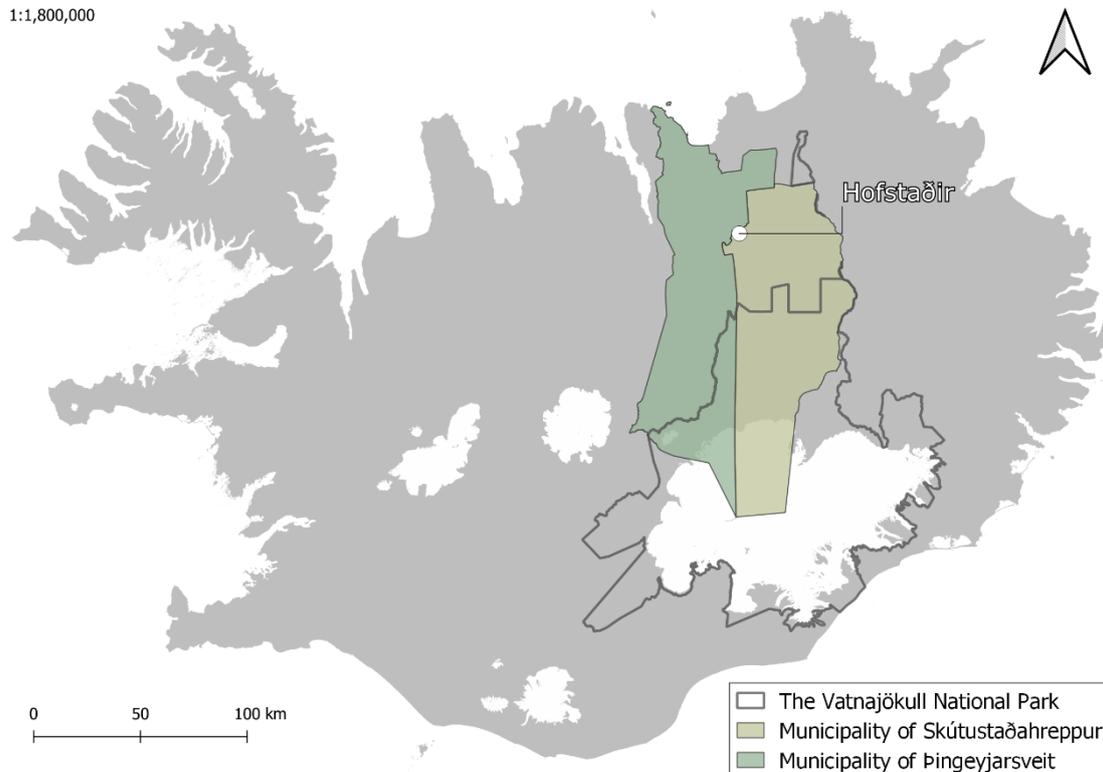
The main research questions are the following:

- What do residents consider important for the development and utilisation of the Hofstaðir heritage site from the perspective of local development?
- How and to what extent do heritage sites and/or other archaeological sites in the region contribute to the well-being and identity formation of local communities?
- How to make the best use of the Hofstaðir heritage site in order to reinforce its positive impact on local communities?

## 1.1 The case study in North Iceland

The area this study covers are the municipalities of Skútustaðahreppur and Þingeyjarsveit located in North-east Iceland. In a referendum in June 2021, the residents of the two municipalities voted for the merger of these two municipalities. Two third of the residents in both municipalities voted “yes” and they will officially merge in May 2022. The combined area of the municipalities covers around 12.000km<sup>2</sup> (Map 1) and the population of the whole area was 1349 in December, 2021 (Þjóðskrá, 2022). Registered heritage sites in Skútustaðahreppur are around 1250 sites (Vésteinsson, 1996).

**Map 1: The location of the Þingeyjarsveit and Skútustaðahreppur municipalities and the Vatnajökull National Park in Iceland**



Source: Minjastofnun, 2022

A substantial part of the Vatnajökull National Park falls within the municipalities of Skútustaðahreppur and Þingeyjarsveit (see map 2). The National Park was founded in 2008 and covers all of the Vatnajökull glacier and large areas surrounding it (area marked with pink in map 2). There are currently five visitor centres being operated by the park, additionally there are plans for a new visitor centre to open in the Mývatn area. The centre will be located at Skútustaðir, approx. 10km away from Hofstaðir.

The Hofstaðir heritage site is located in Skútustaðahreppur, on the north-west side of Lake Mývatn and east of the river Laxá. The site and surrounding land is owned by the Icelandic state and covers around 6,4 ha. The site is managed by the Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland (CHAI). The Mývatn area is a popular tourism destination and tourism is one of the main industries in the region, especially pre-Covid. The area is mostly known for its natural landscapes (Barðadóttir, 2020).

Besides the heritage site itself, the property has an old farmhouse and a barn, but otherwise it contains mostly fields and uncultivated land. Animal husbandry on the property stopped in 1984 (Skútustaðahreppur, 2017). Archaeological remains from Iceland's Settlement Era and up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been found on the Hofstaðir heritage site. Various archaeological excavations have revealed, for example, a large Viking age hall and a cemetery (Lucas, 2009).

Archaeology in Iceland has its early origins in scholarly interest with the old Icelandic sagas about the Settlement Era. The first research projects reflect that interest with their interpretations of the ruins found during archaeological excavations in the country. However, over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus shifted and became more critical (Lucas, 2009). The first large scale excavation in Iceland took place at Hofstaðir in 1908, led by the Daniel Bruun and Finnur Jónsson. During the excavation, two principal structures were revealed at Hofstaðir. A large hall-like building, oriented from north to south, measuring 45m long and 10m wide. It is one of the largest known structures in Iceland from the Viking Age. The other structure was a "small circular or orbital ruin, 6,7m long and 5,75m wide, situated about 9m south of the gable end of the

great hall” (Lucas, 2009: 5). Further research revealed that the structure was not a house but a pit filled with animal bones, ash and fire-cracked stones. Along the ruin was a low turf wall (Lucas; 2009).

The first theories about the hall were that it had been a pagan temple, partially derived from the sites name, as *hof* means temple in Icelandic. This theory has later been largely rejected by scholars, who have pointed out that the objects found at the site are mainly ordinary, every-day objects which would rather point towards it having been an ordinary farm, despite its size (Lucas, 2009). Between 1991 and 2002, further investigations were made, led by a private company, The Institute of Archaeology in Iceland, with the aim of definitively dating the ruins and understand their nature. In 2016 a new archaeological site was discovered north of the previous sites of research. In subsequent years, further exploratory research and trenching revealed a hall and other structures such as three outhouses, one of which was excavated in 2020 (Lucas, 2020).

Currently, there are four protected archaeological sites at Hofstaðir; 1) remains of the great hall, 2) a circular ruin, 3) an old turf wall, and 4) a horse fold by the old wall (see picture 1).

**Picture 1: The Hofstaðir heritage site and the immediate surrounding area**



Photo copyright/Aerial photo: Árni Einarsson

A land use plan for the heritage site from 2017 details the proposed development of the site. The main objective is to make the site more accessible to visitors, while making sure that both the heritage site and the surrounding nature will be protected. The development plans contains ideas for parking and toilet facilities, information signs with QR codes for visitors to get access to interactive knowledge about the site, areas to rest and sit down, and scenic viewpoints along walking paths that take visitors around the site (Minjastofnun, 2017). In 2021 CHAI got funding from the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources to revise the land use plan for Hofstaðir to include the new site found in 2016 and to finalise the designs for the entire Hofstaðir heritage site (Umhverfis- og auðlindaráðuneytið, 2021).

## 2 Definitions and context

The following chapter will give a theoretical background, definitions and context to the concepts that will be discussed in this report.

However, before going any further it is appropriate to explain the legal definition of a heritage site according to the Icelandic law:

Heritage sites are any kind of remains of human settlement on land, underground, in a glacier, in sea or water that are man-made and that are older than 100 years (Minjastofnun, e.d.).

Various sites or places are included in this definition, such as cultural landscapes, remains of buildings, churches or other places of worship, farming and industrial locations and traces of human dwelling in caves, as well as roads, paths, remains of bridges, harbours and other infrastructures. The official policy thereby gives a comprehensive overview of what constitutes as a heritage site in Iceland. It also states that all archaeological artefacts found underground are the property of the state (ibid).

It is the role of The Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland (CHAI) to oversee the preservation of cultural heritage in Iceland, both archaeological and built heritage.

### 2.1 Heritage, social values, and well-being

Heritage as a concept can embody a vast range of meanings and covers different forms of heritage such as places, objects, and practices. The relationship or approaches people or communities have to heritage do not occur organically but are cultivated. The present day has a heavy hand in forming our ideas about the past, as the forms heritage can take often reflect present concerns and interests in the past (Harrison, 2013; Ireland & Schofield, 2015; Lowenthal, 1985).

The Faro Convention, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2005 and entered into force on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage and how it relates to issues such as human rights and democracy. In the Convention, cultural heritage, and its social value to society, is defined as:

Cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection or expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places throughout time (Council of Europe, 2005).

David Lowenthal (1985) states that a connection to the past and remembering the past is an important part of understanding ourselves and crucial for our sense of identity, and that the loss of memory can thereby lead to a loss of identity. The most essential part of the past and one of its biggest benefits is to give meaning to places and make the present familiar: “Ability to recall and identify with our own past gives existence meaning, purpose, and value” (Lowenthal, 1985). The past can thereby be said to shape the present of individuals and/or communities. The links to the past can be maintained in various ways, through oral history, heritage sites and practices, direct engagement with artefacts or by using surrogate objects, such as mementos or photographs (Lowenthal, 1985).

When discussing identities, heritage discourse will often focus on identity politics on an official and national level, however, David Harvey (2008) argues that it is also important to focus on the importance of the relation between national heritage and local and/or personal heritage “In many ways, however, it is the recognition that we all have agency in the production of cultural memory that is most important (Harvey, 2008: 32). Thus, heritage management today is increasingly both about highlighting the large national narratives as well as the local and personal heritage and identity formations (Harvey, 2008).

How do connections to the past, heritage and identity formation affect social value and well-being? According to Lowenthal (1985: 185) “Awareness of the past is in myriad ways essential to our well-being”. The links between culture, heritage and well-being are not new concepts. However, well-being can be a difficult concept to define but in general terms it can be characterised by “good (mental) health, contentedness, happiness, an assured quality of life, and a sense of positivity” (Darvill et al, 2019: 4). Well-being can also be understood as multidimensional, and context based, as interconnected aspects of well-being such as eco-

conomic, social, spiritual, emotional, physical or mental (ibid). Darvill et al (2019) further argue that when people get to experience significant sites or historical landscapes in certain ways, such as by combining aspects of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, it can have positive benefits and enhance both health and mental well-being.

The value of heritage has in the past most often been linked with values relating to history and aesthetics. However, a shift has been occurring within the heritage field and there has been an increase in the association of social value in relation to historical environments (Jones, 2017). An integral aspect of the assigning value in regard to historic environments is the production of meaning. This can take various forms; oral history, genealogies and folktales are for example ways in which many communities value and understand local heritage sites or historical places. The associations communities have with heritage sites in their local environment can therefore be said to generate meaning that is specific and localised, and closely connected with the production of people's sense of place (ibid).

These concepts of well-being and identity politics can furthermore be linked to the social value of heritage.

[Social value] has been variously used to refer to some or all of the following: community identity; attachment to place; symbolic value; spiritual associations and social capital (Jones, 2017: 2)

Hence, it is increasingly important to consider the views of the local community when embarking on the development of a heritage site (Barile & Saviano, 2015; Jones, 2017).

This is due to the social and economic impact heritage sites and their development can have on communities. The ESPON HERITAGE project aimed at finding ways to measure the economic impact generated by material cultural heritage in 11 countries/regions in Europe. In their initial assessment, the tourism sector has been recorded as having the greatest impact, whether its evaluating the gross value added (tourism 63%), turnover (57%) or employment (73%), closely followed by the construction sector (ESPON, 2020).

Taking these results into consideration, it is pertinent to look further into the possible benefits of cultural tourism on community well-being. Heritage and cultural tourism are overlapping concepts (Boyd, 2001) that have the potential to have a positive impact on communities and enhance their quality of life, both in regards to communities in close proximity to the heritage sites as well as communities on a national or international level. However, both positive and negative impacts of cultural tourism, are more likely to be felt by neighbouring or local communities in a more personal and direct way rather than on national or international levels (du Cros & McKercher, 2015). McKercher & Ho (2012 in du Cros & McKercher, 2015) have identified five domains that benefit from cultural tourism as listed in table 1.

**Table 1: Benefits of cultural tourism to community well-being**

Domain	Benefits to neighbouring and/or local communities
Economic benefits	Job creation; income generation; economic development; training and capacity building
Conservation and adaptive reuse	Conservation; adaptive re-use; developing sense of personal guardianship of heritage; conserve, value ethnic areas; stop the illicit trade in artefacts
National building and national myth	National myth making; sharing history/living history; addressing, resolving or highlighting contested histories
Community well-being and connection to place	Partnerships; improved quality of life, developing/enhancing community pride and sense of community/belonging; build sense of nostalgia; social inclusivity and balance; maintain/revitalise traditions and local culture; enhance local identity/place attachment; enhance ethnic identity; highlight popular culture

Domain	Benefits to neighbouring and/or local communities
Provision of leisure and recreation opportunities	Rationale for cultural product development; produce authentic experience; serve multiple functions and multiple users

Source: du Cross & Kercher, 2015: 29-30

Scholars have pointed out that cultural tourism can provide an important venue to enhance residents' sense of pride and attachment to their community, history, identity and belonging (du Cross & McKercher, 2015). The knowledge created and transferred in connection to cultural tourism can help keep heritage and cultural practices alive within communities (ibid).

## 2.2 Stakeholder engagement

An important part of heritage management and the utilisation of heritage is defining who the stakeholders are. Key stakeholder such as local communities, heritage and planning authorities, landowners, educational institutions, and the tourism sector are all important to keep in mind when starting a project relating to the management of heritage sites. Identifying who they are and consulting them in matters of new development and utilisation can be difficult to navigate. The various stakeholders can have varying degrees of legitimacy and interest in the outcome of the projects, they can also hold opposite views on how the heritage should be managed (du Cros & McKercher, 2015). The stakeholders can also use different vernacular and assign different meaning to the objects or sites in questions (Richards, 2021).

Stakeholders can play a very important role in the success of a heritage project and strategies. It is therefore important to do the work and identify the stakeholders that need to be consulted and what they can bring to the table to make the project better and a success. Stakeholder can include locals, the tourism industry, landowners, other local businesses, the state and municipalities, and various official and independent institutions or associations who have an invested interest in the site (du Cross & Kercher, 2015). Creating a management strategy that takes differing opinions into account and works within the bounds of conservation and academic principles can be very challenging, but very rewarding when it succeeds. Getting locals involved in the project and letting them take partial ownership of it, can also determine the success (Richards, 2021).

The same heritage site or heritage entity can have a variety of cultural meanings, depending on different actors perspectives and intentions (Barile & Saviano, 2015). Sian Jones (2016) recommends using a dynamic approach to gathering data based on qualitative methods in order to fully grasp the social values of local communities in relation to heritage sites in their area. Those methods can for example be a mix of qualitative interviews, focus group meetings, and participant observations. Additionally, archival documents, photographs and oral histories can be very beneficial when trying to paint the fullest pictures possible of a site and its connections to the local community surrounding it (Jones, 2016). By getting a wider perspective that can offer a view that takes into account a variety of interpretations of cultural and social value, which in turn can be used for a more effective management plan of heritage sites (Barile & Saviano, 2015).

These sentiments are reflected in the HERIWELL analysis of cultural heritage as a source of societal well-being. The overall result shows that "citizens' participation as co-creators of heritage initiatives are particularly important for achieving societal well-being outcomes (e.g. improved skills, sense of belonging, community participation, trust)" (ESPON, 2021). Various NGOs and citizens' groups can also have an important role to play in both the development and engagement of communities and decentralisation of heritage initiatives. The HERIWELL project recommends developing heritage management strategies that engage with various actors across policy fields to ensure coordination and making cultural participation meaningful (ibid).

## 3 Previous studies of relevance

This chapter presents a short overview of previous studies that have been done relating to the attitudes of both locals and visitors to heritage sites or heritage museums in North Iceland.

### 3.1 Travel and spending habits of international tourists in the Mývatn area

ITRC conducted several surveys among international tourists in the Mývatn area the years 2013 to 2019 (Barðadóttir, 2020; Rögnvaldsdóttir, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018). Therefore, a good timeline has been established about the habits of international tourists visiting the area, what they are interested in seeing and what they are spending their money on.

Most tourists (84%) had decided to visit Mývatn before their trip to Iceland began. Nature and natural beauty are the main attraction for the tourists, with more than half of respondents saying that the nature was the main reason for their visit. Other reasons given for the visit were also nature related such as scenic landscape and birdlife. Majority of the respondents listed Mývatn's natural landscape as the highlight of their visit.

A few also mentioned the history of the area and its culture as a reason for the visit. However, in the 2019 survey, only around 5% said they had visited a museum, down from 13% in 2015. And while culture related expenses has slightly gone up over the years, it is still one of the smallest expenditures for tourists visiting the area (Barðadóttir, 2020).

Thus, culture and heritage do not seem to be a big draw for tourists in the Lake Mývatn area. No study has been carried out, however, whether a sufficient supply of cultural and heritage tourism products exists in the area or if a focus on cultural tourism and heritage sites might be an untapped opportunity for the local community.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of international tourist arrivals in Iceland dropped dramatically, just as in many other countries around the world. From 2 million arrivals in 2019 to 479.000 in 2020 and 688.000 in 2021 (Icelandic Tourist Board, n.d.). If circumstances are favourable, Statistics Iceland estimates that the number of international tourists to Iceland could reach pre-Covid levels as soon as the year 2024 (Alþingi, 2021).

Tourism is one of the main industry in the municipality of Skútustaðahreppur and the area felt the consequences of the pandemic and the decrease in arrivals of international tourists. According to a recent study into the attitudes of locals in Skútustaðahreppur towards tourism and the effects of Covid-19, around 50% said the pandemic had had a negative impact on their and their family's income. Furthermore, the pandemic had demonstrated the importance of the tourism industry to the municipality (Bjarnadóttir, 2021). The study also showed that locals in Skútustaðahreppur are still positive towards tourism and are in favour of rebuilding the industry up again. However, in rebuilding they think it's important to focus on making the industry more sustainable, building up infrastructures and finding ways to get visitors to stay longer in the area (ibid).

### 3.2 Attitudes towards Icelandic turf houses

Icelandic turf houses are an important part of Iceland's cultural heritage. Recent study examined the attitudes of locals and visitors to these heritage sites and their views regarding the usage of the turf houses for tourism purposes (Sigurðardóttir, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). The result show that both international and domestic tourists value these old buildings and the insight they provide into the everyday lives of Icelanders in the past (Sigurðardóttir, 2020c).

In an online survey, around 200 Icelanders were asked what turf houses represented to them and if their attitudes towards them were positive or negative. Almost all (94%) said that their attitude towards the house were positive. In the view of the respondents, various subjects were associated to the turf houses; Iceland's cultural heritage, architectural heritage, progress and craft; home, perseverance, self-preservation and hospitality; dissemination of Iceland's cultural heritage and history (ibid). Regarding the historical value of the turf houses, most respondents mentioned the architectural heritage, while other said they gave a glimpse into the living conditions of Icelanders in the past, that Iceland's history could not be told without them, as

well as the turf houses showing how close and dependent the Icelandic nation has always been to nature (ibid).

Similar responses were mentioned when asked about the value of turf houses to the tourism industry. When asked if the tourism industry was utilising the turf houses enough, most thought that they were being sufficiently utilised today (34%), however some thought more of them could be made accessible and used for tourists to come and visit (8%) (ibid). Finally, when it came to the conservation of turf houses, most respondents said they wanted all types of turf houses to be preserved (58%), and some wanted more houses to be preserved in order to maintain the knowledge of the craft and skills that are needed to keep them in a good condition (23%) (ibid).

The results of this extensive research project show that both Icelanders and foreign guests are interested in visiting and experiencing the cultural heritage that the Icelandic turf houses represent, as they have historical and educational value in relation to Iceland's past; how Icelanders lived and survived.

### 3.3 Museum guests in North Iceland

A visitor survey among museum guests in North Iceland was conducted by the ITRC for Visit North Iceland during the summer of 2019 in 14 museums, exhibitions and centres in the region, a majority of which have to do with Iceland's cultural heritage in one way or another, while one was the Whale Museum located in Húsavík.

Almost quarter (24%) of the respondents were domestic tourists, while 20% were American and 16% Germans. Of the domestic tourists, most were from the capital region (56%). The guests were generally interested in museums both in their own countries and while travelling abroad. In all, 39 museums in North Iceland were mentioned by respondents when asked what museums they had visited (ibid).

International guests mostly got information about the museums from travel books and brochures (48%), 18% had gotten the information from a travel website or blogs, while others were just driving past and decided spontaneously to stop and have a look (15%). Domestic guests said they had been recommended visiting the museum by family and friends (34%), while other had been there before (30%) or were just driving past and decided to stop for a visit (17%). Travel books or brochures seems to be one of the most effective ways for Icelandic museums to market themselves to international tourists, while local knowledge seems to be most effective when it comes to domestic tourists (ibid).

When asked about the main reason for their visit, most guests said they were interested in learning about the cultural and social history of the area, to learn about Icelandic culture, and experience times gone by. Most were very satisfied with their experiences at the museum (73%) and said they would recommend it to their family or friends (90%). The main reason for not recommending it was that there was not enough information given or they wanted the information to be available in more languages, while others thought they price of entrance was too high (ibid).

The main results of the study show that tourists who visit the museums, exhibitions and centres in North Iceland want to learn more about the culture and history of Iceland. Cultural and historical places attract a relatively large demographic of tourists, especially from North America and Central Europe. The ways in which international tourists learn about the museums shows that it is important for museums and heritage sites to get featured in travel books and website.

## 4 Methodology

This study into the societal values of heritage sites used a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Data gathering for the study took place in three rounds. In the first round, interviews with stakeholders in the area took place in May of 2021. The stakeholders were selected using purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2013), where interviewees were selected based on predetermined criteria which were determined in collaboration with The Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland. Seven stakeholders from the two municipalities, the Vatnajökull national park, and from the local tourism sector were contacted to participate in the study and five of them agreed to be interviewed for the study (see table 2), two from the municipalities, one from the national park and two from the tourism sector. The interviews were semi-structured (Crang & Cook, 2007) and interview guides were created for each profession, although a set of core questions were used for each interview, such as background information, their general notions and ideas about heritage sites and their views on the Hofstaðir heritage site. The interviews were between 15-30 minutes long and conducted in Icelandic. The interviews were all either telephone or video calls due to COVID-19 related issues.

**Table 2: Interviews**

Interviewee	Gender	Name/occupation
SH1	Male	The mayor of Skútustaðahreppur
SH2	Female	The mayor of Þingeyjarsveit
SH3	Female	Park ranger at Vatnajökull National park
SH4	Male	Hotel owner, resident of Skútustaðahreppur
SH5	Male	Tour guide, resident of Þingeyjarsveit

In round two, a focus group meeting on Zoom was conducted in June 2021 (see table 3). The main goal of the focus group was to bring together residents of the area to have an open discussion about their views on heritage sites, the value they saw in them, potential utilization, as well as specific discussion about the Hofstaðir heritage site, its meaning for locals and potential use value for the community. An interview guide, based on the interviews with stakeholders, was used for the focus group meeting to create a structure to the meeting, however care was taken to also create room for the participants to raise their own opinions and emphasis on the subject matter being discussed. Participants in the focus group were all residents of either Skútustaðahreppur or Þingeyjarsveit. All had lived in the area for most of their lives, except for participant number three who moved to the area in 2002.

**Table 3: Focus group participants**

Participant	Gender	Age	Residency
FG1	Female	30s	Skútustaðahreppur
FG2	Male	50s	Þingeyjarsveit
FG3	Male	60s	Þingeyjarsveit
FG4	Female	20s	Skútustaðahreppur
FG5	Female	50s	Þingeyjarsveit

The interviews and focus group meeting were recorded, transcribed and the transcripts analysed and coded to identify the main themes, ideas and concepts (Tayler et al., 2016).

In the third round, an online survey was sent out in September 2021 to residents of the area codes 640, 641, 645, 650 and 660. The mailing list was comprised of emails collected by the University of Akureyri Research

Centre, who sent out a link to the survey to participants with a short introduction letter. The area codes of 645, 650, 660 are located within the municipalities Skútustaðahreppur and Þingeyjarsveit. Due to low population in those municipalities, it was decided to extend the sample area to Húsavík (area codes 640/641), a neighbouring municipality and the closest urban area (population approx. 2300). The online survey was divided into five sections; background information (7), the value of heritage sites (6), the uses of heritage sites (12), about the Hofstaðir heritage site (8) and finally one open question if people had anything else they wanted to add (Appendix C). The results were analysed based on the dependant variables of gender, age and education (see table 4), however, with few exceptions mentioned in the results chapters, the variables did not statistically impact the results.

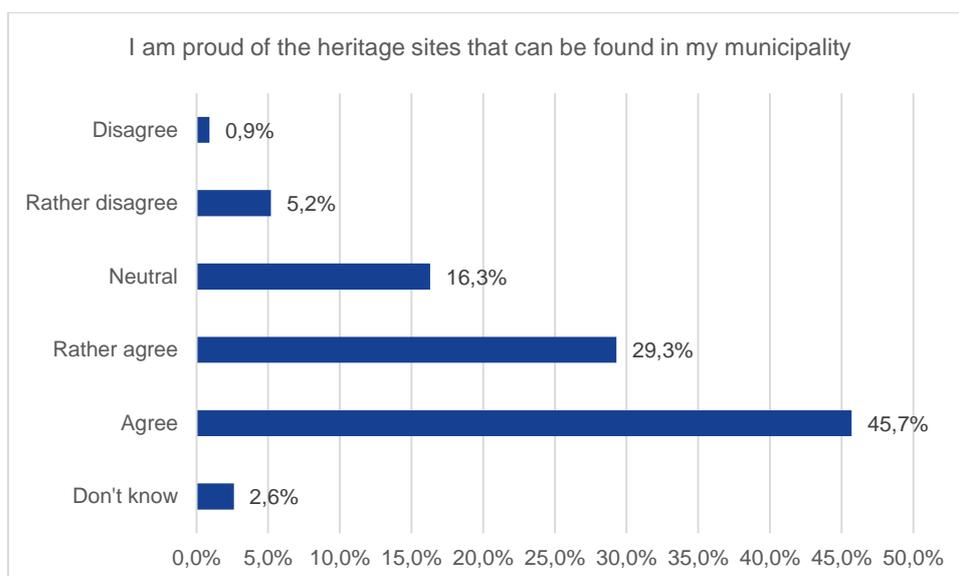
Interview guides for the interviews with stakeholders and the focus group meeting (see Appendixes A & B), as well as the survey questions for the third round of data gathering were developed in consultation with the Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland. Additionally, previous studies of relevance were also taken into account.

**Table 4: The demographic of respondents of online survey**

Sample	505	%
Answers	129	25,5%
Gender	Men	46,0%
	Women	54,0%
Age	18-29	1,7%
	30-44	17,1%%
	45-59	37,6%
	60+	43,6%%
Education	Primary school	28,0%
	High school, vocational training or equivalent	36,0%
	Bachelor degree	24,8%
	Master's degree or PhD	11,2%
Residence (area code)	640	58,4%
	641	24,8%
	645	2,4%
	650	5,6%
	660	8,8%
Length of residence	1-3 years	0,0%
	3-5 years	3,2%
	5-10 years	7,3%
	10+ years	89,5%
Do you work in tourism?	Yes	15,9%
	No	83,3%
	Don't want to answer	0,8%



**Figure 1: Survey respondents' pride in local heritage sites**



The idea of heritage and heritage sites as connections to the nation’s culture and history was prevalent amongst the interviewees and participants in the focus group, or as one person put it; “the sites tell us the history” (FG5).

Those interviewed did not only talk about the connections in a broad and national way, they also stated the importance of local heritage sites and local histories. As already mentioned, the Mývatn area, and the two municipalities in general, is mostly known for its unique nature and scenic landscapes. The locals have a long history of utilising the natural resources found in the area, such as farming, fishing and building dams to generate electricity. The interviewees clearly associate the cultural heritage in the area with this history:

[The value of heritage sites] is multifaceted. The obvious is the connection to the nation’s culture and history, but in my opinion, it goes deeper than that. Looking at the Lake Mývatn area, which is very interesting in light of the utilisation of natural resources, there are heritage sites and place names and so many things in the environment that gives us knowledge about how those resources were used and the localised opportunities needed in order to do so (SH1).

### 5.1 Dissemination of knowledge

Survey participants generally agreed that heritage sites had historical and educational value and that it was important for residents to know about the area’s history (Table 5). It is interesting to note how near unanimous people were about the importance of residents knowing about the history of the area, with 94% stating that they agreed or rather agreed with that statement. Participants also thought the heritage sites in their municipality had great (27%) or rather great (43%) value when it came to the self-identity of the area’s residents. Men (70%) were less likely to think heritage sites had great or rather great value for resident’s self-identity than women (84%).

**Table 5: Statements regarding the historical and educational value of heritage sites**

Statements	Agree	Rather agree	Neu-tral	Rather disagree	Disa-gree	Don't know
The heritage sites in my municipality have historical value	55,3%	32,5%	5,3%	0,9%	0,9%	5,3%
The heritage sites in my municipality have educational value	56,5%	33,9%	1,7%	0,9%	0,9%	6%

Statements	Agree	Rather agree	Neu-tral	Rather disagree	Disa-gree	Don't know
It is important for the residents of the municipality to know the area's history	64,4%	30%	5,2%	0,9%	0%	0%

However, a large part of respondents thought there was a lack of information available about the heritage sites in their municipality, with 73% agreeing or rather agreeing with the statement (see table 6).

**Table 6: Dissemination of information about heritage sites**

Statement	Agree	Rather agree	Neu-tral	Rather disagree	Disa-gree	Don't know
Dissemination of information about heritage sites in my municipality is lacking	24,8%	47,7%	15,6%	0,9%	2,8%	8,3%

The way in which heritage sites could serve as a venue for knowledge creation was an important theme in both the interviews and in the focus group. Many archaeological excavations have taken place in the region over the years and a lot of research carried out. However, similarly to the respondents of the online survey, interviewees felt that limited knowledge was disseminated to the locals, particularly once the excavations and research projects have ended. To some, this results in lost connections to the sites in question:

I can't remember anymore everything I thought was interesting while they were [digging]. So now, when you drive past the site or walk over it, you don't notice the site anymore, except maybe you think 'yes, here was Sveigakot and it has been researched a lot' (FG1).

"If no official product is produced or if you don't have a reason to visit the place, then [the knowledge] just fades away somehow. What you thought you had picked up, learnt or remembered just vanishes if you don't maintain the connection or if it is not made available" (FG3).

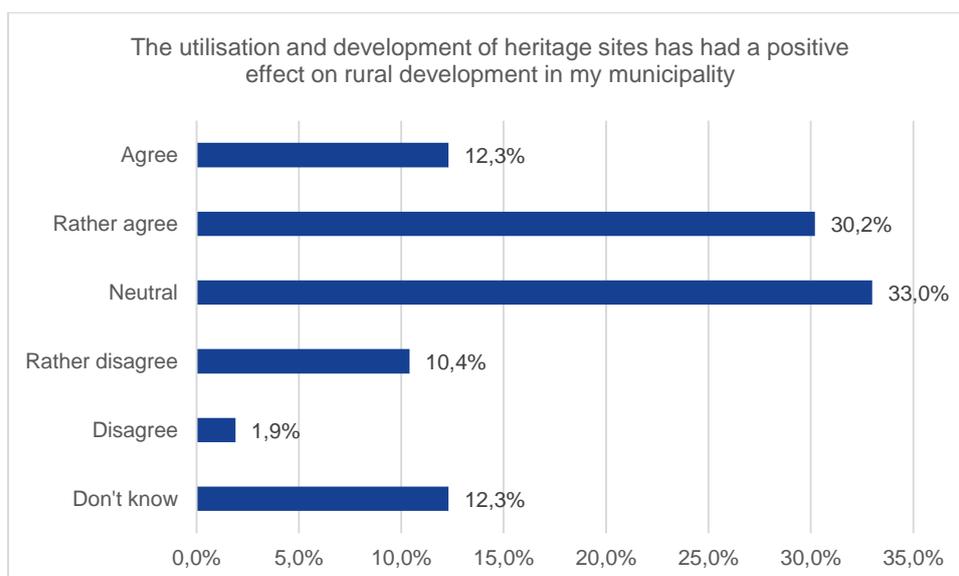
The participants also stated they thought it was important that the local schools would actively engage their students with local heritage and the heritage sites. By constantly integrating new knowledge and information gained in archaeological research to the curriculum it becomes alive within the community as well. Similarly, the interviewees thought it was important for the children to not only be told about the heritage sites in the class room but also through field visits and more active engagement with the heritage. A local initiative called The Children's Archaeological School ran for a while in one of the schools in Þingeyjarsveit. One of the focus group participants had been involved with it and said they felt like the children engaged with the material and brought the conversations into their homes as well:

Then [the heritage sites] come alive in the community and the conversations, and it becomes a natural way to understand your environment (FG3).

People's knowledge about their local environment and community can strengthen their sense of place and belonging. One interviewee claimed that there are few people left in the area who are born and bred there. And in order to be considered a local, you have to have some knowledge about the area's history, place names, heritage sites or ruins. "If you know none of that, then there is no difference between those who are born here or those who have moved to the area" (SH5).

## 5.2 Employment opportunities

The direct benefits of the development of heritage sites can be difficult to measure or realise their full impact. When asked if they thought the utilisation and development of heritage sites has had a positive effect on rural development in their municipality, almost half of the survey participants were either unsure (33%) or didn't know (12%) (see Fig 3).

**Figure 2: Heritage sites and rural development**

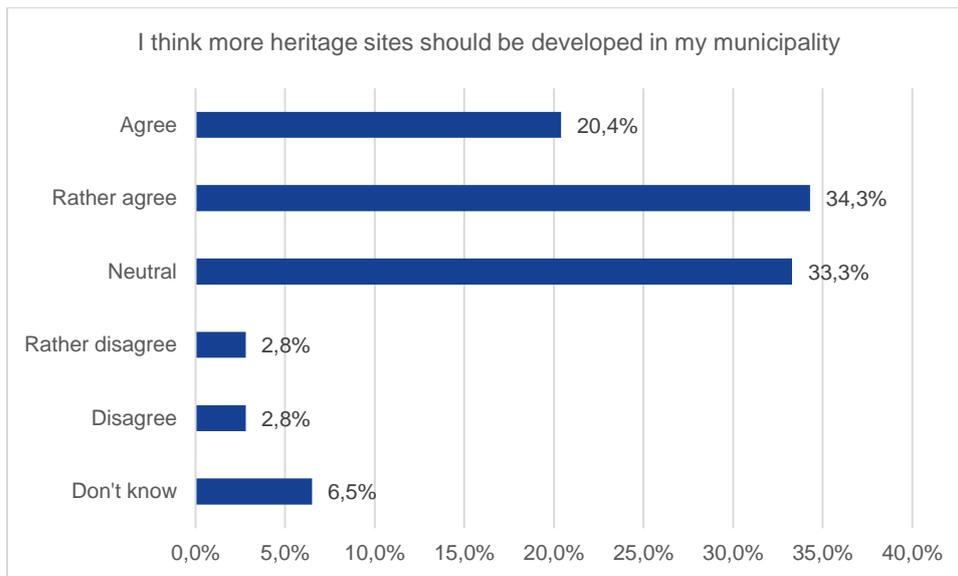
Most small communities are constantly aiming to create new and diversified employment opportunities that can have a positive and long-lasting impact on the community. The participants agreed that heritage sites had the potentiality to generate new job opportunities, not the least for people with higher education. That way, more possibilities would open up for those young people who had moved away to pursue higher education to move back home and have a job suited to their profession. Thus, by creating new job opportunities within the fields of archaeology, history, heritage and related disciplines, a new avenue for people to live and work in the community could open and pave the way for even more new opportunities in the future.

Because it is always good to get people, even if it is temporary, into the community to see things from a different perspective, increase the quality of daily life, and provide input. Then something might be created that someone else can take over and create something new, and so on and so forth (SH2).

According to the mayor of Þingeyjarsveit, the municipality's focus on job creation for the area has in recent years slowly been moving away from attracting big industry workplaces to the area to emphasising more the creation of many smaller and diverse businesses.

### 5.3 Utilisation and management

In the online survey, 55% of people agreed or rather agreed with the statement that more heritage sites should be developed and utilised in their municipality. It can therefore be said that the participants are in favour of more heritage sites being developed in the area, although a quarter of respondents were neutral about the idea (see figure 3).

**Figure 3: Development of heritage sites**

Participants were also asked a series of questions about their thoughts regarding the development and utilisation of heritage sites in their municipality. The first series of questions had to do with what they deemed important to keep in mind when developing utilising heritage sites in the categories of service provided, accessibility to the site and the dissemination of information at the site (see table 6).

When it came to services provided at the sites, toilets were deemed the most important as 73% of people put that in first place, followed by having fixed opening hours and designated picnic areas. Women ranked access to toilets and picnic areas a bit higher than men, while men ranked fixed opening hours and the sale of refreshments slightly higher than women.

In terms of accessibility to the heritage sites, parking was deemed the most important with 54% putting it in first place, followed by walking paths and wheelchair accessibility. Despite the equal ranking when the answers are weighted, more people put wheelchair accessibility in first place (26%) than put walking paths (19%), as decidedly more women (33%) than men (16%) ranked it in first place.

And finally, in terms of how people wanted the information about the site to be disseminated, most people put informational signs in first place (77%), followed by guided tours and education. Women were more likely to prioritise an exhibition about the site than men.

**Table 7: Aspects that people think are important to keep in mind when developing heritage sites**

Chose which aspects you think are important to keep in mind when developing and utilising heritage sites						
Ranking*	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Service provided</b>	Toilets	Fixed opening hours	Picnic areas	Sale of refreshments	Sale of souvenirs	N/A
<b>Access to the site</b>	Parking	Walking paths	Wheelchair accessibility	Rest areas with benches/chairs	Shelter (indoors)	N/A
<b>Dissemination</b>	Signs with information	Guided tours	Education (lectures, etc.)	Digital dissemination, e.g., with smartphones	Exhibition about the site	Audio guide

\* Participants were asked to rank the options from 1 (most important), 2 (second most important) and so forth. The answers are weighted and ranked accordingly.

When asked who should finance the costs of developing the heritage sites, most people or 47% said the state should fund the development, and 36% of respondents put the municipality in second place. Other suggestions were mixed funding from private and public entities (21% put it in first place), those who wanted to utilize the site, landowners to name a few. Similar ranking appeared when participants were asked who should bear the operational cost of the heritage sites, although the ranking was less decisive with 33% putting the state in first place and 30% 'whoever wants to utilise the site' (see table 7). Men were more likely to prioritise 'whoever want to utilise the site' and 'funding from private companies or individuals' than women, and women more likely to prioritise the municipality than men.

**Table 8: Who should finance the development and operation of heritage sites?**

Who should finance the cost of:							
Ranking*	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Developing heritage sites?</b>	The state	The municipality	Mixed funding (public private)	Whoever wants to utilise the site	Land owners	Funding from private companies or individuals	There should be a special fund available
<b>Operating heritage sites?</b>	The state	The municipality	Mixed funding (public/private)	Whoever wants to utilise the site	Land owners	Funding from private companies or individuals	There should be a special fund available

\* Participants were asked to rank the options from 1 (most important), 2 (second most important) and so. The answers are weighted and ranked accordingly.

Participants agreed that heritage sites were being underutilised within the area. Participants also spoke about the connections between nature conservation and the conservation and management of heritage sites, and how those two need to go hand in hand. In fact, the importance of the link between conservation of heritage sites and surrounding natural areas was a big theme regarding the utilisation and development of heritage sites. In fact, this was seen as an important foundation for the development of the community:

It's a question of what kind of society we want to build in the future [...] I think it's also beneficial for this to be a part of our vision for the future; to want to preserve heritage sites og educate people, both locals and visitors about them. I think it would be a good addition to our image and our society, to strengthen it even further (FG4).

In order to increase people's access to heritage sites and making them more visible to visitors, the interviewees said that it was important to make sure all necessary infrastructure were put in place before the sites were opened up to tourists and locals. They stressed the need to evaluate each site individually, explore its potentials and how to make it accessible without jeopardizing its value. People meant it should be a balancing act of assessing a site's needs, find ways to make it accessible or how its story could be communicated. It was also stressed that not all sites should be accessible or reconstructed.

I think it is important to evaluate the sites with the aim to assess what they can handle [in terms of traffic]. And the use of the sites are then somewhat as follows; are they going to be utilising it by physically going to the place, or can some form of virtual reality be used? (FG3).

It is okay if you can only access some places by going there with a guide, instead of visiting on your own. We should be able to control that. Because there are so many options in how visitation to different places is managed, depending on what they can handle and how they are developed (FG5).

Another point the participants made was the need to look at the big picture when choosing which heritage sites to develop or promote. What kind of stories do people want to tell, whose stories should be told and by which means? As it is not feasible to develop all heritage sites within the area, choosing which ones becomes important not just because of the reasons previously mentioned, but also decide there should be policies made about the places that are chosen for development on a regional level.

Something we need to consider before we start to market [the heritage sites], is how we plan to do it. Do we want to highlight certain places, have a certain policy or certain places, because you can't hype up all places [...] You can see this in places abroad, where there is maybe some old tradition where everything is built from wood, and that somehow becomes the theme of the place [...] So your experience is that you have arrived in a forested region that has based their livelihood on wood (SH2).

Additionally, the question further arose about whose history was being told. Popular heritage sites such as the turf houses at Grenjaðarstaður and Laufás<sup>2</sup> are examples of houses that were inhabited by the affluent people in society, "this shows a very skewed picture of how people lived" (FG5). Many of those interviewed mentioned the old small abandoned farms up on the heat in the highlands and the possibilities those ruins had for telling the story about common people, trying to get by in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Iceland. This does not only apply to those abandoned farms, but in general terms keeping alive the history of the people who inhabited the area. The history of the locals themselves.

In general, there was a consensus that new destinations in the area that would interest and attract tourists would be a positive thing, both for the local tourism industry and as an extension of that, the entire community.

If these sites become destinations that tourists will visit, then you have increased the destinations which will get tourists to stay longer in the area and therefore spend more and use more of the services provided (FG1).

As the focus of tourism in the area is very much directed towards the natural landscapes, the cultural heritage of the area falls somewhat by the wayside. According to the participants, a diversification of the tourism products could be a positive move, and by making heritage sites accessible for tourists, "then you are also making them accessible to the locals" (FG4).

A tour guide elaborated that although his customers were in general looking to see unique and untouched nature, it was important to not overlook the value of attaching stories about people and local cultural practices to the scenery, local stories about how people survived in difficult situations. The history of the Icelandic people is very interconnected to the nature they lived in. How they lived, used the resources at their disposal and the mark they left in the land, are also important stories to tell. Another interviewee also stated that if visitors see that the cultural and natural heritage of an area is being highlighted and celebrated, then guests will value it more and as a result learn to appreciate and respect the area to a greater extent.

## 5.4 The Hofstaðir heritage site

Few participants in this study had familiarized themselves well with the Hofstaðir heritage site. Most were aware of the site's history and the archaeological excavations undertaken there, but few knew about the current land use plan for the site. This was true, with a few exceptions, for both participants in the online survey (see table 8) and those interviewed.

**Table 9: How familiar are respondents with the Hofstaðir heritage site?**

	Yes	Only a little bit	No
Have you followed the archaeological research at Hofstaðir?	5,9%	55,4%	38,6%
Do you know the history of Hofstaðir?	7,9%	42,6%	49,5%
Have you familiarised yourself with the current land use plan for Hofstaðir?	1,9%	18,4%	79,6%

<sup>2</sup> Grenjaðarstaður and Laufás are museums and heritage sites located in North Iceland which showcase old turf houses. Grenjaðarstaður in Aðaldalur is located in Þingeyjarsveit while Laufás is located close to Akureyri in Eyjafjörður.

However, when asked if they thought the development of the Hofstaðir heritage site would have a positive impact on the residents of the area, 64% said yes. Likewise, most (57%) agreed that the development of the site could have a positive impact for the newly merged municipality of Skútustaðahreppur and Þingeyjarsveit, as well as for the local tourism businesses (82%).

**Table 10: Positive impacts in relation to the Hofstaðir heritage site**

	Yes	No	Do not know
Do you think the development of Hofstaðir could have a positive impact on the residents of the area?	63,7%	2,9%	33,3%
Do you think the development of Hofstaðir could have a positive impact on the newly merged municipality?	57,3%	4,9%	37,9%
Do you think the development of Hofstaðir could have a positive impact on local tourism?	81,6	1,9%	16,5%

When respondents of the online survey were asked what they would specifically like to see developed at the Hofstaðir site, most talked about better access to the site, more dissemination of information, walking paths, signs with information about the site, and an exhibition about the history of the Hofstaðir site. Others mentioned more research and for the onsite facilities to be used for research purposes.

A few also mentioned digital solutions for the dissemination of information:

Communicating the history and way of life of the past with digital solutions that can both be explored without being at the site, but that works to its fullest once you arrive. Hypothesis about the houses in a digital form that can be access through your phone when the camera is pointed around the environment (Online respondent, woman, 50s).

Interviewees and focus group participants were also positive about the future development of the Hofstaðir heritage sites. Many thought the site could have a great impact on the local community, especially if done well and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders. The addition of a new destination in the area could also be a great opportunity for the local tourism industry.

Interviewees from the tourism sector said they would gladly welcome a new heritage related destination for their customers. Although tourists mainly come to the Mývatn area to experience the nature, a site focusing on the cultural heritage of the area would be a good addition to diversify what is on offer in the area.

The most important factors for the tourism industry are accessibility and predictability.

If I speak just from the point of view of tourism, then there are two factors that are crucial. On one hand is the accessibility of the site, and the other is that there is a certain predictability in the operation of the site, when is it open and such. That it's not just open one day because there is someone who wants to hold an exhibition, but instead that we know that for the next two years this will be running. Open at these times and closed at these (SH4).

Other factors are similar to the preferences of the online survey in terms of what services were important for the development of heritage sites. Access to toilets, shelter, and the ability to grab a cup of coffee or sit down to eat your lunch.

The participants in the focus group had a lively discussion about the possibility of using digital solutions in order to properly convey information about the site to its visitors. They felt the site was perfect for this sort of dissemination, as while there are numerous ruins, they are not easily identifiable by the layman nor give a clear visual representation of the buildings and other structures that stood at the site. Being able to use digital solutions such as virtual reality or smart devices to get a better idea about the buildings and their environment, would be an interesting way for guests to interact with the site and be brought back in time. The development of the digital solutions is not something that needs to be done all at once, but could be incorporated into the long-term goals for the site. However, once implemented it could be an "ego-boost for the residents" (FG5). Additionally, they discussed how powerful storytelling can be as a tool for dissemination

of information and be very effective in getting people to engage and immerse themselves with the history they are being presented with.

The development of the site, once completed, could also increase the resident's pride in their area:

Once [the site] was completed, I could imagine we would feel more of a connection to the site and being able to be proud of the heritage site, and the fact that it was being preserved (FG1).

## 6 Discussion and suggestions

When discussing the social value and well-being inherent in heritage sites, participants agreed that heritage sites had the capacity to foster a sense of place and/or belonging, that they can act as a connection between the past and the present and if utilised provide the local community with benefits such as a more diverse community, job opportunities and knowledge about their environment. This is in line with what was discussed in chapter 2.1. where Du Cross & Kercher (2015), talk about the benefits of cultural tourism to community well-being and list similar factors such as job creation, capacity building, community pride, maintaining traditions and enhancing local identities (see also Jones, 2016).

The survey participants were generally positive towards the heritage sites found in their local environment. However, they feel there is a lack of accessibility to both the sites and information regarding them. The utilisation and development of the Hofstaðir heritage site, and other heritage sites of interest in the area, would therefore be welcomed by the locals. Both the residents and the stakeholders spoken to for this study, feel it is important to look at the big picture when choosing and developing heritage sites within the region. Factors such as accessibility, fragility of the heritage site and its natural surroundings, and relevance to the local community needs to be taken into account, as not every site is suitable for development. The involvement of e.g. local stakeholder, both residents and experts, can be beneficial in shaping heritage policies or strategies for the municipality, and deciding which sites or programs to allocate funds to.

Additionally, localised knowledge about the history and heritage of the area, the resources available and how they were used and what the outcomes were of those endeavours, is all important information to have when it comes to future planning and opportunities. Because it is not just about knowing the history and having the information, it is about putting it into practical use in the present.

The links between heritage sites, social value and the well-being of residents can be said to be interconnected through giving people a sense of place and belonging, a connection to the past which can guide them on the way forward, and the creation of new possibilities for the community. According to our participants, in order for heritage sites to benefit the local community, the following is important: involve the residents to a greater extent with the sites themselves; find ways to continue dissemination information about the sites after archaeological excavations and research have ended; consider the development of the heritage site as added value to the community through knowledge and job creation. It is also interesting to note, that the development of heritage sites and the jobs created from those projects align well with the municipalities' employment policies for the region.

There seems to be a clear consensus among respondents that it is the states and municipalities responsibility to develop, operate and manage heritage sites in the area. In practice, this would most likely fall under the purveyance of state and local public institutions within the field of culture and heritage, such as the CHAI and similar institutions. These results differ substantially from the results taken from the research project into turf houses in Iceland. Only 13% of respondents believed that the state or the municipalities should finance the cost of conserving turf houses, with 40% stating it should be a mix of public and private funding (Sigurðardóttir, 2020b).

Developing dynamic dissemination strategies to meet the needs of visitors can also be crucial for the success of the development of a heritage site. Supplementing on-site information signs with guided tours, lectures, exhibitions and audio-guides can be good ways to connect visitors with the site and its history. Participants also called for more immersive experiences, for example through virtual or augmented reality technology, QR-codes or story-telling. On sites such as the Hofstaðir heritage site, where it can be difficult for those not familiar with the place to understand what they are looking at, visual guides or immersive story-telling can help bring the site to life.

The social value of heritage and heritage sites differ between communities, residents may prioritise different things in their local environment and history. Therefore, it is important when analysing this issue in local communities to take the time to identify relevant stakeholders and listen to what factors or elements they prioritise before implementing standard policies or taking steps to start developing new heritage sites (Jones, 2016; Parga-Dans, Gonzáles & Enríques, 2020). With so many underutilised opportunities in the development and management of heritage sites in the area, it is important to choose well which sites are chosen for further development, what those sites represent for the area and the locals, and how they can further the development for the local environment they are a part of.

Moving forward, more research into the benefits of developing heritages sites within the region and/or creating dissemination strategies for the sites is needed. In many cases, the issues discussed and brought up by the participants require substantial funding to bring to fruition. Having the necessary data to back up the benefits of developing heritage sites can be crucial in acquiring the necessary funding.

Finally, we have highlighted the following suggestions for possible actions by local policy makers and heritage institutions such as CHAI.

---

#### **SUGGESTION**

### **Create a heritage management strategy for the municipality**

There are many underutilised opportunities relating to heritage sites in Skútustaðahreppur and Þingeyjarsveit. Therefore, a development of a heritage management strategy for the newly merged municipality could be beneficial. This should involve analysing the numerous heritage sites that have already been researched in the area and identifying which sites have the potential for further development.

---

#### **SUGGESTION**

### **Introduce school children to local heritage sites**

According to the results of this study, there is a lack of dissemination of heritage sites to the local community, as well as there being a disconnect between the heritage field, heritage sites and the residents. The municipality in cooperation with heritage institutions or associations should consider introducing local schools to a greater extent to the heritage sites in their area, as well as inviting the students on fieldtrips to the sites. The structure for this kind of activity has already been established within the area, it is therefore a matter of funding and making the program accessible for all local schools.

---

#### **SUGGESTION**

### **Bring heritage sites to life through dynamic dissemination strategies**

Grass covered mounds, low turf walls and indents in the soil can be difficult for the average layman to understand, especially when visiting sites where most of the ruins are still underground. Thus, new dynamic dissemination strategies, such as virtual and augmented realities, should be considered for the development of the Hofstaðir heritage site. Various digital solutions such as QR-codes and smart devices can also help in terms of bringing the site's history to life for both locals and visiting guests. Immersive story-telling and detailed illustrations can also be valuable tools to engage with visitors.

---

## References

- Alþingi. (2021). Fjármálaáætlun 2022-2026. Retrieved from <https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/02-Rit--skyrslur-og-skrar/Fj%c3%a1r%c3%a1la%c3%a1%c3%a6tlun%20222026.pdf>
- Barðadóttir, Þ. (2020). *Erlendir ferðamenn í Mývatnssveit sumarið 2019. Niðurstöður ferðavenjukönnunar*. Ferðamálastofa.
- Barile, S., & Saviano, M. (2015). From the Management of Cultural Heritage to the Governance of the Cultural Heritage System. In *Cultural Heritage and Value Creation. Towards New Pathways* (pp. 71–104). Springer.
- Bjarnadóttir, E.J. (2021). *Viðhorf heimamanna á tímum Covid-19 – Skútustaðahreppur*. Ferðamálastofa.
- Boyd, S. (2001). Cultural and heritage tourism in Canada: Opportunities, principles and challenges. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 3(3), 211–233.
- Council of Europe. (2005). *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*. Council of Europe.
- Crang, M., & Cook, I. (2007). *Doing Ethnographies*. SAGE Publications.
- Darvill, T., Barrass, K., Drysdale, L., Heaslip, V., & Staelens, Y. (2019). Introduction: Heritage and well-being. In *Historical Landscapes and Mental Well-being*. Archaeopress Publishing Ltd.
- du Cros, H., & McKercher, B. (2015). *Cultural Tourism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Dümcke, C., & Gnedovsky, M. (2013). *The Social and Economic Value of Cultural Heritage: Literature review*. European Expert Network on Culture (EENC).
- ESPON. (2020). *Measuring economic impact of cultural heritage at territorial level: Approaches and challenges* [Working paper]. ESPON. Retrieved from <https://www.espon.eu/working-paper-cultural-heritage>
- ESPON. (2021). *HERIWELL – Cultural Heritage as a Source of Societal Well-being in European Regions* [Final draft report]. ESPON. Retrieved from <https://www.espon.eu/HERIWELL>
- Harrison, R. (2013). Critical heritage studies and the discursive turn. In *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. Routledge.
- Harvey, D. (2008). The History of Heritage. In B. Graham & P. Howard (Eds.), *Heritage and Identity* (1st ed., pp. 20–36). Routledge.
- Icelandic Tourist Board. (n.d.). *Numbers of foreign visitors*. Retrieved from <https://www.ferdamalastofa.is/en/research-and-statistics/numbers-of-foreign-visitors>
- Ireland, T., & Schofield, J. (2015). The Ethics of Cultural Heritage. In *The Ethics of Cultural Heritage*. Springer.
- Jones, S. (2017). Wrestling with the Social Value of Heritage: Problems, Dilemmas and Opportunities. *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage*, 4(1), 21–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20518196.2016.1193996>
- Lowenthal, D. (1985). *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge University press.
- Lucas, G. (2009). *Hofstaðir. Excavations of a Viking Age Feasting Hall in North-Eastern Iceland*. Fornleifastofnun Íslands.
- Lucas, G. (2020, September 8). *Hofstaðir. Rannsóknir 1992-2020*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZleq4eqVIM>
- Minjastofnun. (n.d.). *Archaeological heritage*. Minjastofnun Íslands. Retrieved from <https://en.minjastofnun.is/cultural-heritage/archaeological-heritage/>
- Minjastofnun. (2017). *Hofstaðir í Mývatnssveit. Deiliskipulag* (Greinargerð). Minjastofnun Íslands.



# Appendixes

## Appendix A: Interview guide – Stakeholders

### Persónulegt

- Hver er þín tenging við svæðið? (Skútustaðahrepp/Mývatnssveit)
- Hvað er það fyrsta sem kemur upp í hugann þegar minnst er á minjastaði?
  - Hvað standa þeir fyrir í þínum huga?
  - Hvaða gildi hafa minjastaðir fyrir þig
- Hefur þú eitthvað fylgst með fornleifa uppgreftrum á þínu svæði
- Hvernig tengjast minjastaðir þínu starfi sem þjóðgarðsverði?

### Nýting

- Hvernig tengjast minjastaðir þínu starfi sem leiðsögumaður?
- eru einhverjir minjastaðir sem þú bendir þínum hópum sérstaklega á þegar þið eruð á ferðinni?
- Hver er þín sýn á nýtingu minjastaða / fornleifa á þínu svæði?
- eru einhver tækifæri sem ykkur finnst vera vannýtt? Sjáið þið einhverja möguleika í þróun og nýtingu minjastaða fyrir sveitarfélagið/þjóðgarðinn/ferðaþjónustuna?
- Gæti ferðaþjónustan á svæðinu nýtt sér möguleikana betur?
- Hvað finnst þér mikilvægt að hafa í huga þegar ráðist er í uppbyggingu og nýtingu minjastaða?

### Gildi

- Hvaða þýðingu/gildi finnst þér minjastaðir hafa fyrir íbúa svæðisins?
- Finnst þér minjastaðir hafa þýðingu/gildi fyrir sjálfsmynd íbúa?
- Geta minjastaðir haft gildi á sviðið stjórnmála á einhvern hátt? Og ef svo er, þá hvernig?
- Hafa minjastaðir gildi fyrir ferðaþjónustuna? Og ef svo er, þá hvernig?
- Hafa minjastaðir gildi innan þjóðgarðsins? Og ef svo er, þá hvernig?

### Hofstaðir

- Að lokum langar mig aðeins að tala um Hofstaði:
- Þekkir þú vel til þar? Hefur þú einhverja tengingu þangað?
- Nú eru upp ýmsar hugmyndir um uppbyggingu á Hofstaðasvæðinu, þekkir þú vel til þeirra og hvað finnst þér um þær?
- Hvaða þýðingu finnst þér Hofstaðir og þær uppbyggingarhugmyndir sem þar eru hafa fyrir sveitarfélagið?

Detur þér í hug einhverjir aðrir minjastaðir í Mývatnssveit sem þú myndir vilja sjá byggjast upp?

Er eitthvað annað sem þú myndir vilja koma á framfæri?

Við verðum með rýnihóp með heimamönnum í lok maí í tengslum við þetta verkefni. Ert þú með einhverjar hugmyndir um fólk í þínu sveitarfélagi sem við gætum haft samband við til þátttöku?

## Appendix B: Interview guide – Focus Group

Max 10 mín	<b>Fundur hefst</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kynning á verkefningu og farið yfir upplýst samþykki</li> <li>- Þátttakendur kynna sig með nafni og hversu lengi þeir hafi búið á svæðinu</li> </ul>
10 mín	<b>Gildi minjastaða</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hvað er það fyrsta sem kemur upp í hugann þegar minnst er á minjastaði?</li> <li>- Hvað standa minjastaðir fyrir í ykkar huga?</li> <li>- Hvaða gildi hafa minjastaðir fyrir ykkur?</li> <li>- Hvaða gildi hafa minjastaðir fyrir samfélagið?</li> </ul>
20 mín	<b>Nýting minjastaða</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hver er ykkar sýn á nýtingu minjastaða á svæðinu?</li> <li>- Hvað finnst ykkur mikilvægt að hafa í huga þegar ráðist er í uppbyggingu og nýtingu minjastaða?</li> <li>- Hvernig finnst ykkur ætti að haga nýtingu minjastaða svo það nýtist heimamönnum best?</li> <li>- Eru einhver tækifæri sem ykkur finnst vera vannaþýtt?</li> <li>- Sjáið þið einhverja möguleika í þróun og nýtingu minjastaða fyrir svæðið?</li> </ul>
15 mín	<b>Fornleifauppgreftrar</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hafið þið eitthvað fylgst með fornlifauppgreftrum í ykkar nærumhverfi?</li> <li>- Og hverja þá?</li> <li>- Finnst ykkur almennt fornlifauppgreftrar hafa gildi fyrir svæðið?</li> </ul> <b>Að lokum langar okkur aðeins að tala um Hofstaði</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Þekkið þið vel til þar? Hafið þið einhverjar tengingar þangað?</li> <li>- Nú eru uppi ýmstar hugmyndir um uppbyggingu á Hofstaðasvæðinu, þekkið þið til þeirra og hvað finnst ykkur um þær?</li> <li>- Hvaða þýðingu finnst ykkur að Hofstaðir og þær uppbyggingarhugmyndir sem þar eru hafa fyrir sveitarfélagið?</li> </ul>
5 mín	<b>Annað</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eitthvað annað sem þið viljið koma á framfæri að lokum?</li> </ul>

## Appendix C: Online Survey Questionnaire

### Bakgrunnur

- Fæðingarár
- Kyn
- Búseta
- Hversu lengi hefur þú búið í núverandi sveitarfélagi
- Hvað er hæsta menntunarstig sem þú hefur lokið?
- Starfar þú við ferðaþjónustu?
- Nefndu fyrstu þrjú orðin eða orðasamböndin sem þér dettur í hug þegar þú heyrir orðið minjastaður?

### Gildi minjastaða

- Ég er stolt(ur) af þeim minjastöðum sem finnast í mínu sveitarfélagi
- Það felast söguleg gildi í minjastöðum í mínu sveitarfélagi
- Það felast fræðslugildi í minjastöðum í mínu sveitarfélagi
- Það er mikilvægt fyrir íbúa sveitarfélagsins að þekkja sögu svæðisins
- Minjastaðir í mínu sveitarfélagi hafa gildi fyrir sjálfsmynd íbúa á svæðinu
- Nefndu fyrstu þrjú minjastaðina sem koma upp í hugann innan þíns sveitarfélags

### Nýting og uppbygging minjastaða

- Mér finnst það ætti að byggja upp og nýta fleiri minjastaði í mínu sveitarfélagi svo þeir verði aðgengilegri fyrir íbúa og ferðamenn
- Hversu mikilvægt telur þú að farið sé í uppbyggingu á minjastöðum í þínu sveitarfélagi?
- Veldu þá þætti sem þér finnst mikilvægt að hafa í huga þegar ráðist er í uppbyggingu og nýtingu minjastaða þegar kemur að:
  - Þjónustu
  - Aðgengi
  - Miðlun
- Nýting og uppbygging minjastaða hefur ekki haft nein áhrif á sjálfsmynd íbúa í mínu sveitarfélagi
- Nýting og uppbygging minjastaða hefur haft jákvæð áhrif á byggðapróun í mínu sveitarfélagi
- Mér finnst vanta upp á miðlun upplýsinga um minjastaði í mínu sveitarfélagi
- Minjastaðir í mínu sveitarfélagi eru mikilvægir fyrir ferðaþjónustuna á svæðinu
- Hver ætti að bera kostnað af uppbyggingu minjastaða? (Veldu 3 kosti)
- Hver ætti að bera kostnað af rekstri minjastaða? (Veldu 3 kosti)

### Hofstaðir

- Hefur þú fylgst með fornleifarannsóknum á Hofstöðum?
- Þekkir þú vel til sögu Hofstaða?
- Hefur þú kynnt þér gildandi deiliskipulag fyrir Hofstaði?
- Telur þú að uppbygging Hofstaða geti haft jákvæð áhrif fyrir:
  - íbúa svæðisins?
  - sveitarfélagið?
  - ferðaþjónustuna?

- Hvernig uppbyggingu myndir þú vilja sjá á Hofstöðum?
- Hvernig myndir þú vilja sjá nýtingu fornleifa og útisvæðis?
- Hvernig myndir þú vilja sjá húsin vera nýtt?

#### **Annað**

- Ef þú mættir velja, hvaða minjastað í þínu nærumhverfi eða sveitarfélagi myndir þú vilja sjá verða aðgengilegan fyrir íbúa svæðisins og ferðamenn?
- Eitthvað annað sem þú myndir vilja koma á framfæri?







Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund

Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

[espon.eu](http://espon.eu)



## **ESPON 2020**

ESPON EGTC  
4 rue Erasme, L-1468 Luxembourg  
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg  
Phone: +352 20 600 280  
Email: [info@espon.eu](mailto:info@espon.eu)  
[www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu)

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

### **Disclaimer**

This delivery does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the members of the ESPON 2020 Monitoring Committee.