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Tourism In Context: Place-Based Tourism Strategy Evaluation In The North Atlantic

Project Report



NORA

Executive Summary

Background

Tourism development in small coastal and island destinations presents both opportunities and challenges. While tourism can support local economies, services and communities, it can also create pressures on infrastructure, the environment and everyday life. Understanding how these benefits and impacts are experienced locally is essential for developing tourism that is both sustainable and supported by local communities.

This report applies the Place-based Strategy Evaluation Framework (PlaSE) across three North Atlantic case studies:

- Dalabyggð, Iceland
- Vágur, Suðuroy, Faroe Islands
- Åndalsnes (Rauma Municipality), Norway

The project focuses on Stage 1 of the framework, exploring five prerequisites for tourism strategy development:

P1 | Context
P2 | Sense of Place
P3 | Perceived Impacts
P4 | Perceived Benefits
P5 | Governance and Power

Project outcomes

- Applied the PlaSE framework across three North Atlantic destinations: Dalabyggð (Iceland), Vágur (Faroe Islands), and Åndalsnes, Rauma Municipality (Norway)
- Tested the framework beyond its original development context in the Orkney Islands
- Generated comparative insights into tourism development across different contexts
- Strengthened knowledge exchange between researchers, destination managers, and local stakeholders across the North Atlantic region
- Established a foundation for future strategy evaluation and action planning through Stages 2 and 3 of the framework

What the framework reveals

Despite significant differences between the three destinations, several common themes emerged.

Strong sense of place across all destinations

Participants in all three locations expressed a clear understanding of what they value about their communities.

- In Dalabyggð, this centred on peace, nature and community.
- In Vágur, participants emphasised authenticity, simplicity and social cohesion.
- In Åndalsnes/Rauma Municipality a nature-based lifestyle and strong connection to the outdoor environment were particularly important.

Across all cases, these values shaped expectations of what tourism should be and influenced how tourism development was perceived.

Tourism is judged by value, not volume

Communities were generally not seeking unrestricted tourism growth.
Instead, participants emphasised:

- Longer visitor stays
- Stronger local connections
- Year-round economic activity
- More locally retained benefits

Tourism was valued not simply for the number of visitors it attracts, but for its ability to contribute positively to community wellbeing and quality of life.

Local governance is important for sustainable tourism development

In all case studies local representation in tourism governance with dedicated responsibility for tourism is desirable and important for sustainable tourism development, aligned with the local sense of place.

Impacts differ across destinations

The nature of tourism impacts reflected the development stage of each destination.

- Dalabyggð is at an early stage of tourism development, with concerns focused on avoiding mistakes observed elsewhere in Iceland.
- Vágur experiences limited tourism pressure, but faces challenges relating to low local value capture and uneven development.
- Åndalsnes/Rauma Municipality experiences more immediate and visible pressures associated with high visitor numbers, cruise tourism and concentrated use of natural attractions.

While impacts differed across destinations, all communities expressed a desire to maintain the qualities that make their place distinctive.

Governance matters

The cases revealed important differences in governance capacity.

- Dalabyggð lacks structured tourism collaboration and there is limited involvement on the behalf of the municipality.
- Vágur faces challenges associated with fragmented governance structures and limited island-wide coordination.
- Åndalsnes/Rauma Municipality benefits from well-developed tourism strategies and governance mechanisms, although tensions between tourism development and community experience remain.

The findings demonstrate that tourism development is influenced not only by local assets and ambitions, but also by who has the capacity and influence to shape decisions.



Why this matters

The findings highlight that tourism development is fundamentally about alignment:

- alignment between tourism and sense of place
- alignment between impacts and benefits
- alignment between local values and decision-making

The PlaSE framework helps make these relationships visible, providing a foundation for more place-based and context-sensitive tourism development.

Next steps

This project applied Stage 1 of the PlaSE framework, developing an understanding of local context, values, perceptions and governance dynamics.

The findings provide a foundation for:

Stage 2 – Strategy Evaluation
assessing whether tourism strategies align with local priorities and experiences

Stage 3 – Action Planning
identifying practical actions to strengthen local benefits, address tensions and improve alignment

By moving beyond visitor numbers and economic performance alone, the framework helps destinations identify what needs to change in order to support tourism that is both locally valued and locally supported.

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Introduction

This report presents findings from the PlaSE pilot project, funded by the Nordic Atlantic Cooperation (NORA), and delivered in collaboration with research and regional partners across Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Norway and Scotland. It created a platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration between researchers, destination managers and stakeholders across these North Atlantic destinations.

The project applies the Place-based Strategy Evaluation Framework (PlaSE)[1], developed through doctoral research in the Orkney Islands[2], to explore tourism development in three case study locations: Dalabyggð (Iceland), Vágur (Faroe Islands) and Åndalsnes, Rauma Municipality (Norway).

As a pilot, the project focuses on applying the Stage 1 of the framework, examining local context, community perspectives, and governance structures that shape tourism development in each destination.

The report outlines key insights from this process and identifies shared challenges and opportunities to inform place-based approaches to tourism planning and provide foundation for the subsequent stages of the PlaSE framework for developing and evaluating local tourism development strategies.



[1] Roitershtein, A. (2025).
[2] Roitershtein, A. (2024).

Background

Tourism development in small coastal and island destinations presents both opportunities and challenges. While tourism can support local economies, services, and communities, it can also create pressures on infrastructure, the environment, and everyday life. In many cases, these dynamics are not experienced equally, which can lead to tensions within communities[3].

Place-based tourism development

A growing body of research highlights the need for place-based approaches to tourism planning. This means recognising that tourism development must be grounded in the specific characteristics of each destination, including its geography, community, culture, and governance structures[4].

Sustainable tourism challenges and opportunities are highly context-dependent and cannot be addressed through universal solutions alone[5]. Rather than applying universal models of "sustainable tourism", place-based approaches focus on understanding what matters locally and how tourism can support these priorities.



[3] See for example Guaita Martínez et al. (2019); Baldacchino (2015); Baldacchino & Ferreira, (2013).
[4] Horlings (2015); Renfors (2021).
[5] Pasgaard et al. (2021)

Sense of Place

Central to this is the concept of sense of place, i.e. how people experience, value and relate to the places they live in[6]. Sense of place influences how people perceive development and change, what they consider desirable for their community, and how they evaluate tourism development[7].

Where tourism development aligns with local meanings and values attached to place, it is more likely to be perceived positively; where it conflicts with them, negative perceptions and tensions are more likely to emerge.

Perception of benefits and impacts

Tourism creates both benefits, such as jobs, services, and economic activity, and impacts, such as environmental pressure, crowding or social change.

Importantly, these are not experienced equally. Research suggests that residents assess tourism through a balance of perceived benefits and costs[8], with support generally increasing when benefits are seen to outweigh negative impacts[9].

Where benefits are distributed unevenly, perceptions of tourism are also likely to differ between groups and communities. Understanding these perceptions is essential, as they influence local support for tourism development.

[6] See Tuan (1977); Tuan (1979)
[7] Moore (2021)
[8] Ap (1992); Woo, Kim & Uysal (2015)
[9] Nunkoo & Ramkissoon (2011)

Governance and power

Tourism development is shaped by who makes decisions and whose voices are heard. Even where formal strategies and consultation processes exist, they do not always capture the full range of community experiences. Differences in power between stakeholders, such as businesses, local authorities, and residents, can influence how tourism evolves in practice[10].

Why this matters

Together, these factors highlight an important challenge for tourism development:

tourism development is not always aligned with what local people value or perceive as important.

Even where tourism generates economic benefits, tensions can arise when these benefits are unevenly distributed, when impacts are experienced differently across communities, or when local sense of place is not reflected in decision-making.

Understanding these relationships is essential for developing tourism that supports both destinations and the communities that live within them. It requires moving beyond visitor numbers and economic performance alone, towards a deeper understanding of how tourism is experienced and valued locally.

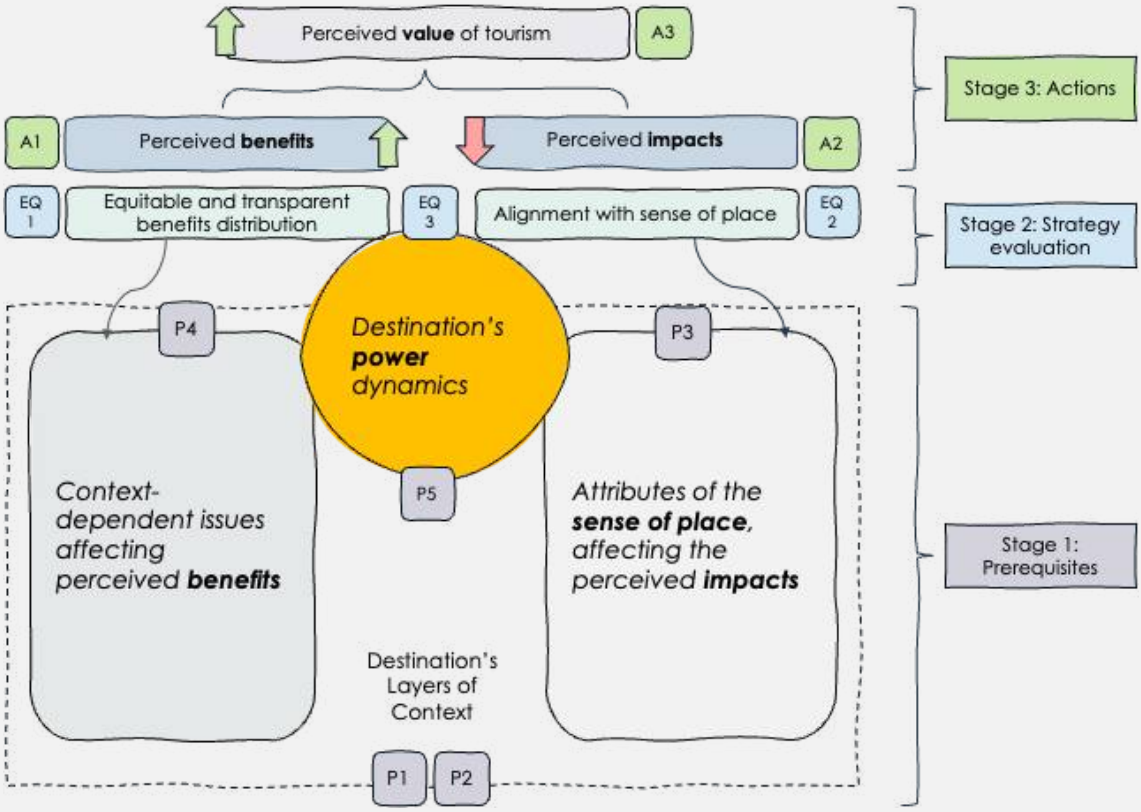
This report uses the PlaSE framework to explore these relationships, focusing on how context, sense of place, perceptions of benefits and impacts, and governance interact within each destination. By examining these elements together, the framework helps identify where tourism development is aligned with local values and where tensions or mismatches may exist.

[10] Tribe & Paddison (2023)

PlaSE Framework

Originally developed through doctoral research in the Orkney Islands[11], the **Pla**ce-based **S**trategy **E**valuation Framework (**PlaSE**) supports tourism planning by providing a way to understand relationship between people and place, and how local values and sense of place shape perceptions of tourism development.

It then proceeds to evaluating an existing tourism strategy and suggest actions for updating the strategy or developing a new one, aligned with place-based principles.



The PlaSE framework links context, sense of place, perceptions and governance to understand how tourism is valued locally and how strategies can be better aligned with community priorities.

The full PlaSE framework is available here: https://doi.org/10.48526/rgu-wt-3065032

[11] Report on the Orkney study can be found here: https://rgu-repository.worktribe.com/output/2418877



How it works

The PlaSE framework consists of three stages:

Stage 1

Prerequisites. Exploring context, sense of place, perceptions of tourism, and governance

Stage 2

Strategy Evaluation. Assessing how well tourism strategies align with these local conditions and priorities

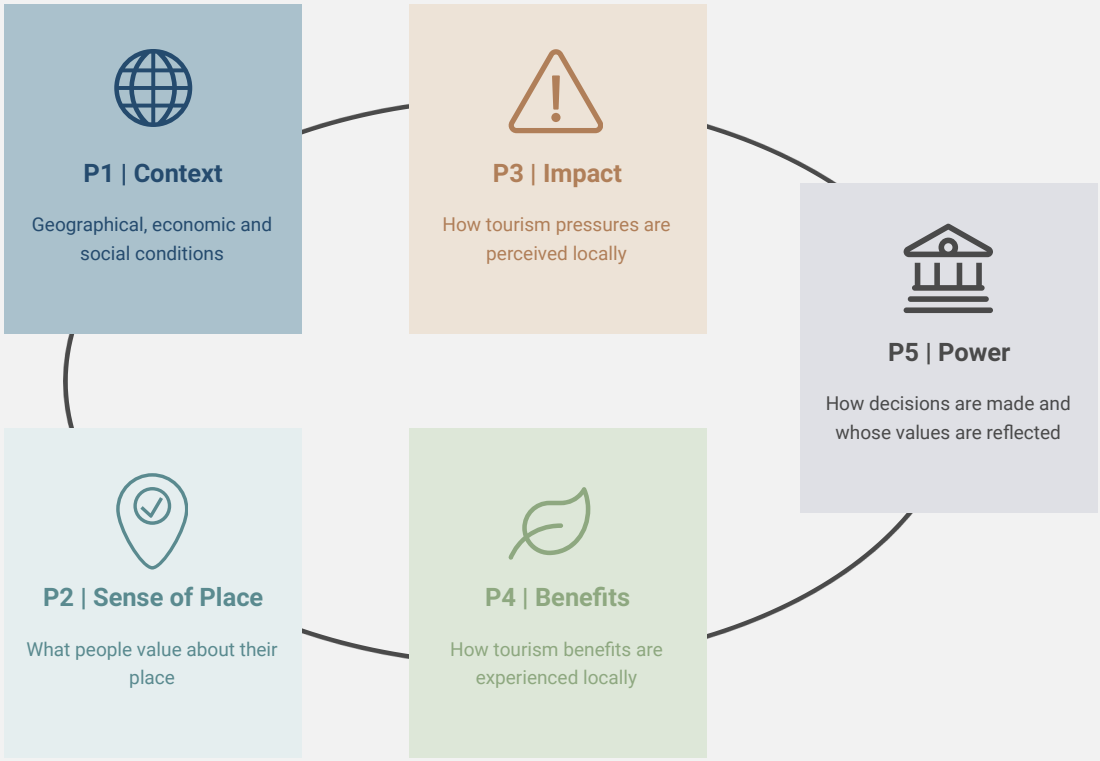
Stage 3

Actions. Identifying opportunities to improve alignment between tourism development and local values

This project focuses on **Stage 1**, using the framework to understand how tourism is experienced and valued across the three destinations.

Stage 1

Stage 1 of the framework is based on a simple connected process:



The "P" in P1-P5 stands for **Prerequisite**.

The framework is based on the principle that effective tourism strategies should be grounded in an understanding of the place in which they operate. Before evaluating a strategy or identifying actions for improvement, it is necessary to understand the context, values, perceptions and power dynamics that shape tourism within a destination.

These elements are linked. For example, where nature and community are strongly valued, environmental or social impacts of tourism may be perceived more strongly. Whether these concerns are addressed depends on how decisions are made.

Focus on Value

At the core of the framework is the concept of **value**.

The framework recognises that people evaluate tourism through the benefits and impacts they experience or perceive. Perceptions of impacts are influenced by how well tourism aligns with what people value about their place, while perceptions of benefits depend on whether benefits are visible, meaningful and fairly distributed.

As a result, tourism is perceived as more valuable when benefits are strongly felt and negative impacts are perceived as limited. Where impacts are experienced more strongly than benefits, perceptions of value are lower.

These perceptions of value influence how tourism development and tourism strategies are viewed and supported within local communities.

Why this matters

By bringing these elements together, the framework helps identify where tourism development aligns with local values and where tensions exist.

It recognises that tourism is not experienced in the same way by everyone. Different communities and stakeholder groups may experience different benefits, impacts and opportunities, leading to different perceptions of tourism and its value.



Methodology

This project is based on qualitative research carried out across three case study locations: Dalabyggð (Iceland), Vágur (Faroe Islands) and Åndalsnes, Rauma Municipality (Norway).

The aim was to explore how tourism is experienced and understood locally, using the Stage 1 of the PlaSE framework.

Data was collected through a combination of:

- stakeholder workshops
- informal discussions and engagement
- document and secondary data analysis

Workshops formed the core method in each case, providing space for stakeholders to reflect on their experiences of tourism and the future of development in their area. While a shared framework guided the research, the approach varied slightly between cases depending on context and data availability.



Case study methods

Dalabyggð

Workshops and local stakeholder engagement formed the primary source of data. A local working group was established at the outset of the project and met several times to support participant recruitment, local engagement, and the organisation of the workshops. All residents of Dalabyggð were invited to participate through community communication channels and social media.

Two focus group sessions were held at the Dalabyggð Innovation Centre, involving **14 participants** (6 men and 8 women) aged between 25 and 70. Participants represented both tourism and non-tourism perspectives, with most having lived in the area for many years. The discussions followed the common framework used across all case study locations to support comparability.

Vágur

The Vágur case study is based primarily on a **three-hour focus group** conducted with **8 stakeholders** involved in the tourism sector, six of whom were residents of Vágur and two from other parts of Suðuroy. The focus group was subsequently supplemented by individual follow-up conversations to clarify and elaborate on specific issues, although these did not constitute formal interviews.

The analysis also draws on the authors' previous research experience and long-term engagement with Vágur and Suðuroy, providing additional contextual understanding of local development dynamics.

Åndalsnes

Data on the Norwegian case study region Rauma Municipality (with its administrative centre Åndalsnes) was collected by using a multi-method approach and different data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the case. This qualitative research strategy allowed for data triangulation, strengthening the findings through convergence of information from different sources.

These included: **1) 13 semi-structured interviews** representing different stakeholder groups; **2)** audio-visual of psychosocial-geographic hubs through **16 videoclips** made be students about Åndalsnes/Rauma Municipality; **3)** collection of **30 short stories** of local residents by students on living in Rauma Municipality[12]; **4)** secondary analysis of statistical data[13] relating to Åndalsnes' and Rauma Municipality's accreditation as a sustainable destination, amongst others local residents survey, foreign tourists survey and Norwegian visitors survey.

[12] the data of items 2 and 3 have been presented and discussed in a workshop held at Molde University College on April, 9th, 2026, with the students and the local DMO managers.
[13] Nordveggen (2022, 2025); Rauma Kommune (2023); SPOR Natur og Reiseliv (2024)

Using the PlaSE framework

Across all three case studies, Stage 1 of the PlaSE framework was used to structure the analysis. The assessment focused on five prerequisites (P1–P5): context, sense of place, perceived impacts, perceived benefits, and governance and power.

Applying the same framework across all cases enabled a consistent comparative analysis while still capturing the specific characteristics of each destination. The pilot application also provided an opportunity to refine and adapt the original framework that originated in the Orkney Islands to different North Atlantic tourism contexts.

Limitations

This project applied Stage 1 of the PlaSE framework across three destinations to develop an understanding of local context, values, perceptions and governance dynamics.

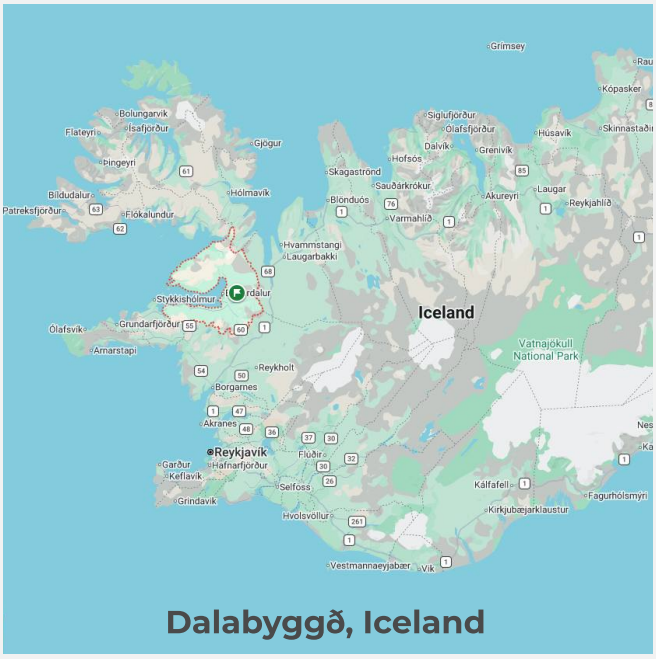
As a result, the findings should be viewed as a diagnostic rather than a full framework application. While they identify important themes, tensions and areas of alignment, they do not include the subsequent stages of strategy evaluation and action planning.

The findings therefore provide a foundation for future work rather than a comprehensive assessment of tourism development in each destination.

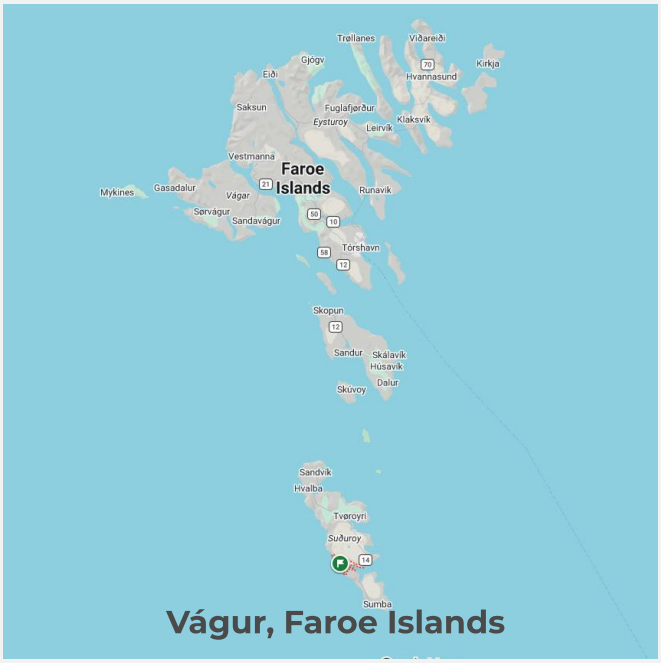


Case studies

In this section, findings from each case study are presented according to the P1-P5 elements of the PlaSE framework, providing a summary of each Prerequisite.



Dalabyggð, Iceland



Vágur, Faroe Islands



Rauma Municipality, Norway

P1 | Context

Dalabyggð, Iceland

Dalabyggð is a sparsely populated rural municipality in Iceland, home to 653 residents, the majority of whom live in dispersed settlements across the countryside.

The area is geographically well-positioned, situated at roughly equal distance from all nearby urban centres, though access is exclusively by land, as the two harbours within the municipality are not used for cargo or passenger transport. Mainly due to a lack of economic incentives and unfavourable geographic conditions. The local economy is rooted in agriculture, with a strong reputation for high-quality meat, dairy products, and vegetables. Traditional handicrafts and a growing wool industry further characterise the region's productive identity. However, in recent years the municipality has seen a decline in population, presenting a challenge that future development strategies will need to address.

Beyond its agricultural base, Dalabyggð has a rich Icelandic saga heritage, drawing visitors to its historic sites, and its natural landscape offers a wide range of outdoor activities suited to nature enthusiasts and those seeking peaceful coastal surroundings. Tourism is still relatively limited and the area currently functions mostly as a pass-through destination. This means that tourism development is still in its early stages, leaving room to shape it in a way that aligns with local values and the character of the place.

Taken together, Dalabyggð is a region anchored in agricultural tradition, endowed with natural and cultural assets, and well-placed geographically, yet facing demographic pressures that make thoughtful and strategic development all the more important.

> *This community is a good 30 years behind the South coast (main tourist area), at least, which I think is a positive thing, and I think that's the selling point of the area — the best thing about it as a tourism destination.*

P1



© Dalabyggð Municipality



P1

Vágur, Faroe Islands

Suðuroy is the southernmost island in the Faroe Islands, with approximately 4,600 inhabitants distributed across several villages and seven municipalities. The town of Vágur, with around 1,400 inhabitants, served as the primary focus of this case study. While Vágur is not representative of the entire island, many of the issues raised by participants reflect broader dynamics across Suðuroy.

Tourism development in Vágur takes place within a multi-scalar context shaped by geography, transport systems, governance arrangements, and market forces. Accessibility remains a key challenge. Suðuroy is connected to the capital region by ferry, making tourism highly dependent on transport schedules and external infrastructure. Participants repeatedly emphasised that tourism development is influenced by decisions and market structures located outside the island itself.

Tourism development here is strongly conditioned by its peripheral position within a broader tourism system. Local actors operate within structures largely shaped by external transport, marketing, and investment dynamics.

> *"We are up against market forces we simply can't compete with. The moment you book a trip to the Faroe Islands, you are shown advertisements for hotels in Tórshavn. That's not something I can compete with."*



P1

Rauma, Norway

Rauma Municipality is located in Møre og Romsdal, with Åndalsnes as the administrative centre. The municipality covers approximately 1,500 km². Large parts of the area are protected as a national park (Reinheimen). In 2022, the municipality was approved as a national park municipality by the Norwegian Environment Agency, recognizing that approximately 50% of its area are undisturbed nature.

Rauma has a long tradition as a nature-based destination, dating back to the 19th century, primarily linked to salmon fishing and mountaineering. There is also a long tradition of cruise tourism in Rauma; the first cruise ship docked at Åndalsnes as early as 1882. The Raumabanen Railway line terminating in Åndalsnes was opened in 1924, and is nowadays considered one of Norway's "most beautiful and wildest railway lines". The National Tourist Route over Trollstigen, established between 1928 and 1936, is a major national attraction, bringing many tourists by car, coach, RV or MC in the municipality. In addition Rauma attracts cruise passengers from the ports of Ålesund and Molde arriving by coaches. Opened in 2016, the neighbouring Norwegian Mountain Centre (Norsk Tindesenter) is located in the centre of Åndalsnes. It houses the Norwegian Mountaineering Museum and Norway's second-highest indoor climbing wall.

The municipality has a population of about 7,100. The largest town is Åndalsnes, with roughly 2,400 inhabitants. Historically, the main industries in Rauma were agriculture and textiles. In addition to tourism, the municipality's key industry sectors today are forestry, marine technology, hydro-powered electricity, metals and food production. Rauma as a tourism destination experiences significant seasonal fluctuations. Further a large proportion of visitors are day-trippers on round trips or just passing through, using the Trollstigen road. In total, around 1 million tourists visit Rauma municipality every year.

> *The municipality's mission statement is to be 'The world's best municipality for nature lovers' (Verdens beste kommune for naturglade mennesker)*

P1



Rauma Municipality's man-made attractions: 'World-class architecture in close harmony with nature'.

Harald Dolles, the researcher responsible for the Norwegian case study, and his wife Monika at Rampestreken, a viewpoint built in 2013–14. Perched 537 metres above the Romsdalsfjord on the Mount Nesaksla mountainside above Åndalsnes, the steel platform offers panoramic views of the town, fjord, valley and surrounding peaks.

© Harald Klaus Dolles

The viewpoints feature steel, glass and rust-coloured corten steel structures. The architectural approach adapts to the landscape, using materials that can withstand the harsh climate. Some parts of the structure are carved into the mountain, while others are constructed with stone walls and steps. (see: https://www.visitnorway.com/listings/trollstigen-viewpoint/274693/)



The Trollstigen Plateau viewpoint (852 metres above sea level) was built in 2012. The steel platform soars 200 metres above the Stigfossen waterfall and the eleven hairpin bends of the Trollstigen road, which winds up the steep mountainside at the end of the Isterdalen valley (see: https://www.fjordnorway.com/en/attractions/trollstigen).

P1

Summary

Tourism development across the three cases takes place in very different contexts, which shape both the opportunities available and the challenges faced.

 Dalabyggð Iceland	 Vágur Faroe Islands	 Rauma Norway
Stage of development		
early-stage, limited tourism	emerging destination, peripheral tourism system	mature, high-volume destination
Structural conditions		
small-scale, flexible but resource-limited	peripheral within a wider tourism system	established infrastructure and strong visitor flows
Types of challenge		
shaping future development	overcoming structural constraints	managing scale and intensity of tourism

Why this matters

Tourism development takes place within specific geographical, economic and institutional contexts. These conditions shape what opportunities exist, which challenges emerge, and what forms of tourism development are realistic or appropriate. Understanding context therefore provides an essential foundation for evaluating tourism and identifying suitable development pathways.

P2 | Sense of Place

Dalabyggð, Iceland

People in Dalabyggð describe a deep and personal connection to the place, rooted in its tranquillity, natural surroundings, and the warmth of the community. Peace and quiet are not merely appreciated features, they are central to why people choose to live there and how they experience daily life. Residents speak of escaping the pace of city life and finding something quieter and more grounded. Many describe a distinct feeling when driving back home, a sense of belonging that appears to take hold quickly regardless of one's origins.

The community itself is described as tight-knit, safe, and genuinely caring. People feel that they matter and that others are looking out for them. This strong social cohesion is a defining quality of the place.

As part of the research, participants were asked to bring an item that reminded them of, or connected them to, the place.

This photo shows some of the objects they brought, including driftwood, wool, vegetables, stones, a key, and locally made pottery from regional clay. These objects provide insight into how people relate to the place and the meanings they attach to it.



© Ása Marta Sveinsdóttir

> *People know what you're doing, they don't interfere, however, they make sure that if you go out for a walk, you return safely*

> *I feel home here. I think the most important thing is that it's quiet.*

> *We were looking for some peace and quiet, you know. Those of you who have lived in Reykjavík know that life moves faster there, and we were looking for a calmer pace.*

P2

Vágur, Faroe Islands

Participants described a strong sense of place rooted in community, nature, and everyday social relations. Identity remains strongly village-based, and many highlighted simplicity, tranquillity, and proximity to nature as defining qualities of life in Vágur.

Participants stressed that tourism development should build on existing local values and authenticity rather than imitate more commercialised destinations.

Participants also highlighted a strong culture of voluntary engagement, local festivals, sports initiatives, and community projects. At the same time, several pointed to tensions between traditional local attitudes and more entrepreneurial approaches to development.

A strong place identity centred on simplicity, authenticity, and community cohesion provides an important foundation for tourism development, but village-based identities and differing visions of development may also limit collective action.

> *What I find special about Vágur is the strong sense of community—the simplicity of life. It's all those things you find yourself longing for in a hectic everyday life. We should keep it simple. Nothing fancy - that's simply not who we are.*



P2

Rauma, Norway

The Norwegian Mountain Centre was officially opened in Åndalsnes in 2016. In his opening address, at that time, Crown Prince Haakon of Norway announced that “Åndalsnes is Norway’s Mountain Capital” (Norges Tindehovedstad), thanks to its spectacular and varied landscape of coastline, fjords, valleys, rivers and steep mountains. This diverse terrain provides an ideal setting for activities enjoyed by locals and tourists alike, including hiking, climbing, ski touring, fishing or kayaking. It is therefore not surprising that, in the short stories, the lifestyle of the residents of Åndalsnes is described as being close to nature, activity- and outdoor-oriented, as well as being adjusted to the seasons. This is also confirmed by the analysis of the audio-visual exploration of psychosocial-geographical hubs, which highlights the range of sports facilities available and, moreover, demonstrates how they are used by the local population. The indoor climbing wall at the Mountain Centre is not intended for tourists, but is mainly used by local climbers and mountain guides for training in winter.

While some residents describe in the interviews life in Åndalsnes as boring, most emphasise that it is less stressful compared with bigger cities. When it comes to local cultural offerings taking place in and around Åndalsnes, the Norwegian Mountain Festival is one of the country’s leading outdoor festivals. It features the Trollveggen Triathlon and over 100 smaller events. Spanning a whole week, it offers guided hikes and climbs of all difficulty levels, as well as courses, talks, cultural events and family activities. While visitors come from all over Norway, the majority of attendees are from the region. This is a similar approach to RaumaRock, one of Norway’s oldest rock music festivals, which is also staged in Åndalsnes in August every year. The festival’s focus is not on attracting foreign tourists, but on offering the people of the region festival experiences.

> *Promoting the city as 'Norges Tindehovedstad' was and still is a clever marketing idea. It is short, timeless, memorable and captures the essence of Rauma Municipality.*



© Harald Klaus Dolles

P2

Summary

Tourism development across the three cases is shaped by a strong sense of place in all locations, although the specific values and concerns differ.

 Dalabyggð Iceland	 Vágur Faroe Islands	 Rauma Norway
Strong and clearly articulated sense of place		
calm, quiet, close-knit rural life	identity, authenticity and simplicity	nature-based lifestyle and outdoor culture
Different relationships between people, place and tourism		
tourism is still emerging, peripheral to everyday life	tourism impacts representation and identity	tourism is embedded in everyday use of landscape
concern is anticipatory (protecting what exists)	concern about lack of unique place representation	concern is immediate (crowding and use of space)

Why this matters

Sense of place shapes how tourism is perceived and accepted. Where tourism aligns with local values, identities and ways of life, it is more likely to be supported. Where it challenges them, tensions can emerge. Understanding these local values helps ensure that tourism development builds on what communities care about, rather than unintentionally undermining it. Tourism strategies need to respond not only to the context of a destination, but also to what people value about it.

P3 | Impacts

Dalabyggð, Iceland

The area functions primarily as a stopover or drive-through between larger destinations, with most visitors stopping briefly for coffee or fuel before continuing their journey. The region lacks the iconic attractions commonly associated with Icelandic tourism, such as major waterfalls, geysers, glaciers, or dramatic mountain landscapes, which means it does not yet draw overnight visitors. At the same time, its central location along main tourist routes means a steady flow of passing traffic, representing an opportunity for increased tourism development in the area.

Tourism is also highly seasonal, with limited potential for stable, year-round employment. Rather than seeking to attract significantly more visitors, residents express a clear preference for extending the tourist season and deepening the quality of visits, that is, attracting visitors who value the peace and quiet and stay for longer periods of time. A more considered form of tourism that aligns with the character of the place.

There is a general awareness that Dalabyggð is at an earlier stage of tourism development than many other areas of Iceland, and this is widely seen as an advantage. Residents frequently compare the area to more heavily visited destinations, such as the South Coast and Snæfellsnes, and are firm in their wish to avoid similar levels of mass tourism. The prevailing sentiment is one of cautious openness, a desire to benefit from tourism without allowing it to erode what makes the place worth visiting in the first place.

> *This is very different from the South Coast or Snæfellsnes.*

> *This area is somewhat at an earlier stage and can learn from the missteps of other places.*

> *There is a concern that tourism may displace agriculture. If people can earn substantially more from tourism than from farming, it is understandable that they may choose to leave agriculture. That is the main concern.*

Such views highlight tensions between economic diversification and the maintenance of traditional livelihoods.

P3





© Dalabyggð Municipality

P3

Vágur, Faroe Islands

Tourism was generally viewed positively, but participants described tourism development as unstable and uneven. Several referred to a period of optimism before and during the COVID-19 years, followed by stagnation afterwards.

A central concern was the limited economic value retained locally. Many visitors arrive on the morning ferry and leave again later the same day, creating only modest spending in local businesses. Participants described a self-reinforcing cycle in which low demand leads to limited tourism services, which in turn constrains future demand.

Socially, tourism was associated with both opportunities and tensions. Some participants described local scepticism towards tourism entrepreneurs and concerns about people benefiting financially from tourism activities.

> *People often think, 'now they are going to get rich from tourism.' Instead of seeing it as something positive for the area, the focus shifts to the opposite."*

Environmental concerns were mainly related to pressure on popular hiking routes and sensitive landscapes, although participants generally agreed that Vágur remains far from experiencing overtourism.

The main challenge is not tourism pressure but limited local value capture. Economic, social, and institutional barriers constrain the ability of tourism to generate broader local benefits.



P3

Rauma, Norway

Rauma municipality faces the challenge of most visitors staying for only a relatively short time. Local and foreign investors reinforced this trend more recent with significant investments made in "new" man-made tourism products such as the Romsdal Gondola or The Golden Train. These specific offers are aimed at tourists and can be enjoyed within a limited time frame, but they also require a large volume of visitors.

It is therefore not surprising that the local population views the continued growth in tourism with concern. The town centre and its facilities are considered to be adequate for the population of Åndalsness. However, when a cruise ship carrying over 4,300 passengers docks, locals advise to avoid the town centre and to be prepared for traffic congestion.

The development of new tourist offerings also highlights tensions between tourism and nature conservation. Building on an idea developed in the 1960s, Romsdal's Gondola up to the summit of Mount Nesaksla was built at the start of this millennium. It began operating in 2021, allowing visitors to enjoy "an epic 360-degree view of majestic peaks and deep fjords".

In addition to the Gondola's summit station, situated 708 metres above sea level, a restaurant, an amphitheatre and a ramp up to the main summit, were build. Whilst some locals welcome this development, others feel that the summit of Nesakla and the spirit of mountaineering is ruined when an earlier two-hour climb is reduced to a five-minute cable car ride.

> *There are days, when you better avoid visiting the city center or being on the road*

> *I'm looking forward to autumn and winter coming round again, as that's when life in the city settles down and takes its usual course.*

> *Nobody visits the museum in the Tindesenter, but the queue to the public toilet at the entrance to the museum is nearly 100 m long*

> *The small tourism businesses are sustainable, but the Gondola requires large numbers of tourists, and so it is difficult to say, we are a sustainable destination.*

> *Tourism does not contribute to sustainable travel. Nature is being worn down too much and too little money is being left behind. There is too much traffic and pollution from both cars and, in particular, cruise ships.*

P3

Summary

Across the three cases, tourism impacts are perceived very differently, reflecting the stage of development and how tourism is embedded within each destination.

 Dalabyggð Iceland	 Vágur Faroe Islands	 Rauma Norway
Different stages of impact		
impacts are anticipated rather than experienced	impacts are uneven and unstable	impacts are concentrated and immediate
Key tensions		
Development vs preservation of local character and traditional livelihoods	Positive attitudes vs limited local value and uncertain outcomes	Tourism growth vs pressure on nature and everyday life

Why this matters

Within the PlaSE framework, perceptions of impacts are shaped by sense of place. How strongly the negative impacts are perceived depends on what people value about their place and whether tourism is seen to support or threaten those values. Where tourism aligns with local priorities, impacts may be viewed as more acceptable. Where it conflicts with them, the same impacts may be perceived more negatively. Understanding these perceptions is important because they influence the value people attach to tourism and, ultimately, the level of support for its development.

P4 | Benefits

Dalabyggð, Iceland

Tourism was seen as bringing increased diversity and vitality to the local community. The industry has drawn international workers, often younger people choosing to settle in the area, and has contributed to improved service availability, most notably a greater variety of restaurants compared to previous decades.

The region's distinctive identity is closely tied to its proximity to nature, offering visitors rare opportunities for solitude and quiet experiences without travelling far. This accessibility is a source of local pride and is seen as central to what the area has to offer.

These qualities are seen as attracting a particular type of visitor: one who seeks slower, more immersive experiences and is inclined to stay longer. This aligns with the vision participants expressed for tourism development in the area, even as a formal tourism strategy is still being developed.

When discussing success in tourism, participants emphasised the industry´s highly seasonal nature. Rather than measuring success by visitor numbers, they viewed year-round business viability and stable employment and income as key indicators of a tourism sector that can support long-term community development.

> *If we compare this to 20-30 years ago, if you wanted to go out to eat, you had to drive to Borgarfjörður. Now you can choose between 2, 3, 4 restaurants.*

> *I feel we are a 'Lonely Planet' type area, and there are not many like this left in Iceland, and none so close to the main tourist flows*


© Dalabyggð Municipality

P4

Vágur, Faroe Islands

Participants saw considerable potential for tourism, particularly within what was described as slow tourism. Rather than competing with high-volume destinations, Vágur was perceived as well positioned to attract visitors seeking peace, nature, authenticity, and meaningful encounters with local communities.

Some interviewees referred to Heimablídni, where visitors are welcomed into private homes for meals and social interaction, as an example of tourism that creates stronger local value while preserving cultural authenticity.

Participants also emphasised the importance of improving digital visibility and creating more integrated tourism products that encourage visitors to stay longer and engage more deeply with local life.

Tourism is valued less for its potential to generate visitor volume and more for its capacity to support locally embedded, experience-based development aligned with community values and quality of life.

> *The future is slow. Visitors come here to relax. They are drawn to the sheep, the traditions, and the peace. It develops gradually, but the future for tourism here in the south looks very promising.*



The western part of Vágur at the base of Vágsfjørður, Suðuroy City Tour

P4

Rauma, Norway

According to the local residents survey (2025) a majority of respondents agree that tourism is important for the local residents in terms of the retail offerings in Rauma Municipality (61.7%) and the development of Åndalsnes' town centre (62.4%). Around 60% agree that the tourism industry is important for building identity and pride in one's own community.

The local residents we interviewed, confirm those findings, nature and so-called "man-made" attractions place Åndalsnes and Rauma Municipality on the map - nationally and internationally. However locals do only indirectly benefit from those sites, as to happily show those to visiting private guests. Channelling volume tourism to those sites, is considered an appropriate measure and important for the management of the natural environment, saving hidden gems for local residents.

The constant stream of tourists is considered benefitting everyday life in town as it increases demand for goods, helps to maintain for example medical functions and a better service provision. Tourism is generally acknowledged as an important contributor to the local economy by creating jobs and tax payments, however its benefits are perceived as unevenly distributed – many are affected, only a few benefit.



Rauma Yarn © Harald Klaus Dolles

> *Our town has value beyond the local community*

> *Work to develop year-round tourism and niche offerings for tourists staying several consecutive days in the municipality, and do not cater further to short-stay tourists such as cruise passengers*

> *Year-round tourism is the most important thing. It provides year-round jobs and increases the population.*

P4



Local businesses in Åndalsnes promote the spectacular landscape and its suitability for sporting activities such as hiking, climbing, ski touring, etc. Others openly demonstrate their regional pride and actively use phrases such as 'Norway's Mountain Capital' (Norges Tindehovedstad) or 'The world's best municipality for nature lovers' (Verdens beste kommune for naturglade mennesker) in their advertising messages.



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P4

Summary

Across the three cases, tourism is recognised as bringing clear benefits, but these are understood differently depending on context and are often conditional.

 Dalabyggð Iceland	 Vágur Faroe Islands	 Rauma Norway
Different understandings of what "benefit" means		
value is linked to stability and year-round viability	value is linked to slow, locally embedded tourism	value is linked to economic contribution and services
Benefits depend on the type of tourism, not just its presence		
visitors who stay longer and integrate locally are preferred	emphasis on small-scale, experience-based tourism (e.g. Heimablídni)	shift needed from short stays (e.g. cruise/day trips) to longer, year-round visits
Uneven or limited benefit distribution across all cases		
seasonal nature limits consistent benefit	value often leaks outside the local area	economic benefits exist but are not equally experienced

Why this matters

Within the PlaSE framework, perceptions of benefits play an important role in shaping tourism value. Benefits are more likely to be viewed positively when they are visible, meaningful and shared across the community. Where benefits are concentrated among a small number of actors, remain seasonal, or are not clearly felt locally, tourism may be perceived as less valuable. Understanding how benefits are experienced therefore helps explain why tourism may be supported in some contexts and questioned in others.

P5 | Power

Dalabyggð, Iceland

The municipality was generally identified as the primary actor in place-making, particularly in relation to planning processes, but its capacity in tourism development is limited. There is currently no dedicated tourism officer, and tourism-related responsibilities form only a fraction of existing roles.

People of Dalabyggð expressed a desire for more structured collaboration between tourism operators and the municipality. Existing meetings were often perceived as unproductive and largely one-way exchanges of information rather than opportunities for meaningful dialogue and joint problem-solving.

A recurring theme was the perceived marginalisation of the area by the regional DMO, which participants felt had not adequately represented the destination in its marketing efforts. This frustration has led participants to feel that promoting the area falls largely on their own shoulders, though notably, this was not viewed entirely negatively, as the local community was described as resourceful and proactive.

> *If there were genuine interest from the DMO, they certainly have the capacity to help us with that, putting Dalabyggð on the map. However, of course, we also need to take some responsibility ourselves. It has been a very long time since a strategic planning meeting on tourism was held."*



P5

Vágur, Faroe Islands

Governance emerged as one of the most significant challenges. Participants frequently referred to fragmented institutional structures, weak cooperation between municipalities, and a lack of island-wide coordination.

Several interviewees argued that Suðuroy lacks a common tourism platform capable of integrating accommodation, activities, guides, transport, and local experiences. Existing initiatives were often described as fragmented and dependent on individual actors.
At the same time, discussions revealed a strong willingness to cooperate and develop more coordinated approaches. Participants proposed shared booking systems, joint marketing initiatives, and stronger collaboration across the island.

The central governance challenge is the gap between strong local aspirations for tourism development and fragmented institutional structures. Future development depends less on attracting additional visitors and more on strengthening coordination, collaboration, and collective destination governance across the island.

> *Perhaps the fact that Suðuroy is remote within the remote is actually quite a strong brand - if it's done properly.*



P5

Rauma, Norway

Rauma Municipality has been part of Innovation Norway's certification scheme for sustainable destinations since 2021, when it was first certified. It was recertified in 2024/25. As part of this certification process, a visitor strategy for the municipality was developed and approved by the municipal council in March 2023. This strategy document outlines the municipality as a tourist destination, highlighting its attractions and the associated opportunities and challenges. It covers areas outside the national parks/protected areas, as those have their own visitor strategies. The objectives of the visitor strategy are in line with those of the Norwegian National Tourism Strategy 2030: increased value creation, greater economic spillover effects, enhanced visitor satisfaction and attractive local communities with satisfied residents. The need to reduce the tourism sector's climate footprint is also emphasised.

The strategy has been developed jointly between Rauma Municipality, the local DMO Nordveggen AS and Visit Nordvest, the regional DMO, together with major local stakeholders. The strategy document and its accompanying action plan were developed following active and passive involvement with local residents. Active involvement took the form of village meetings, while passive involvement was achieved by providing the opportunity for input by means of public hearings. The purpose of this was to safeguard the various interests at the destination. It has been emphasized in the interviews, that local lead in this process was the key success factor for achievement. As a very well recognized and important follow-up the local DMO and major local stakeholder meet in Åndalsnes on a regular basis during the year for information exchange and check-ups on the action plan, which is open for amendments.

This highlights a context where formal governance structures, strategies and collaboration mechanisms are well established, providing a strong foundation for managing tourism development.

> *Nature is our most important asset. With proper management, we can cope with a large annual number of visitors spread across the seasons. The infrastructure must keep pace with the increase in visitors.*

> *We could do a bit more to promote local food and help showcase local producers*

> *Only locals understand, what locals want!*

P5

Summary

Governance structures differ significantly across the three cases, shaping how effectively tourism development can be coordinated and implemented.

	Dalabyggð Iceland	Vágur Faroe Islands	Rauma Norway
Different levels of governance capacity	limited capacity and reliance on local initiative	fragmented structures and weak coordination	well-developed strategies and formal governance systems
Different forms of coordination	collaboration exists but is informal and limited	strong willingness to collaborate but lack of integrated system	structured collaboration, formal strategies, DMOs and regular stakeholder engagement
Common gap between intention and implementation	ambitions constrained by limited resources and representation	ambitions constrained by fragmentation and lack of coordination	strong structures exist, but tensions persist elsewhere in the system

Why this matters

Within the PlaSE framework, governance and power influence how local values, experiences and priorities are translated into tourism development. They affect whose voices are heard, whose interests are represented, and which issues receive attention.

As a result, tourism strategies may not always reflect what communities value most, but rather the priorities of those with the capacity and influence to shape decisions. Understanding power dynamics therefore helps explain why tourism development can become misaligned with local experiences and why tensions persist, even where formal strategies and consultation processes exist.

Findings

Across the three case studies, the PlaSE framework highlights how tourism development is shaped by the interaction between context, sense of place, perceptions of tourism, and governance. Rather than operating independently, these elements influence one another, shaping how tourism is experienced and understood within each destination.

A common pattern across all cases is the presence of a strong local sense of place, with communities clearly articulating what they value - whether this is calm and community (Iceland), identity and authenticity (Faroe Islands), or a nature-based lifestyle (Norway). These values shape expectations of what tourism should be and influence how people interpret tourism development. In turn, perceptions of tourism impacts and benefits shape the value people attach to tourism and their level of support for future development.

However, tourism impacts and benefits are not experienced in the same way across cases. In early-stage contexts such as Dalabyggð, concerns are largely anticipatory, focused on protecting existing qualities. In Vágur, tourism is seen as uneven and unstable, with limited local value retained. In Rauma, impacts are more immediate and concentrated, reflecting the scale and intensity of tourism activity.

Across all cases, tourism is not evaluated simply in terms of growth, but in terms of how benefits are distributed and whether they align with local priorities. Stability, local embedding and fair distribution emerge as key conditions for tourism to be considered valuable. Importantly, communities were generally not seeking unrestricted tourism growth. Instead, the emphasis was on forms of tourism that generate greater local value through longer stays, stronger local connections, and more widely shared benefits.

Governance plays a critical role in shaping these outcomes, but differs significantly between cases. In Iceland, limited capacity constrains coordination. In the Faroe Islands, fragmented structures limit implementation despite strong local ambition. In Norway, governance structures are well developed, yet tensions between tourism growth, everyday life and environmental pressures remain. In all cases, local representation within tourism governance structure is seen as important to make sure the development is aligned with the sense of place of local communities, and therefore is deemed sustainable for the destination.

The Vágur case illustrates a key tension identified across the framework: a strong local understanding of what tourism should be, but limited capacity to translate this into coordinated development. While participants articulated a clear vision based on authenticity, community and slow travel, fragmented governance structures and external dependencies constrain implementation.

Taken together, these cases show that tourism development depends not only on local assets and identity, but on the ability to align these with how tourism is experienced and how decisions are made. Where this alignment is weak, tensions can emerge between community values, tourism development and governance priorities.

The findings also demonstrate that tourism strategies do not exist independently of power. In practice, strategies often reflect the values and priorities of those with the capacity and influence to shape them, rather than those of the wider community. Understanding these relationships is therefore essential for developing tourism that is both place-based and locally supported.

While applied to the three destinations in this pilot project, the framework is intended to support tourism planning across a wide range of North Atlantic communities.



Value of the PlaSE framework

The PlaSE framework provides a structured way to understand tourism development from a local perspective before moving into strategy and decision-making. By bringing together context, sense of place, perceptions and governance, it helps destinations identify where tourism development aligns with local priorities and where adjustments may be needed.

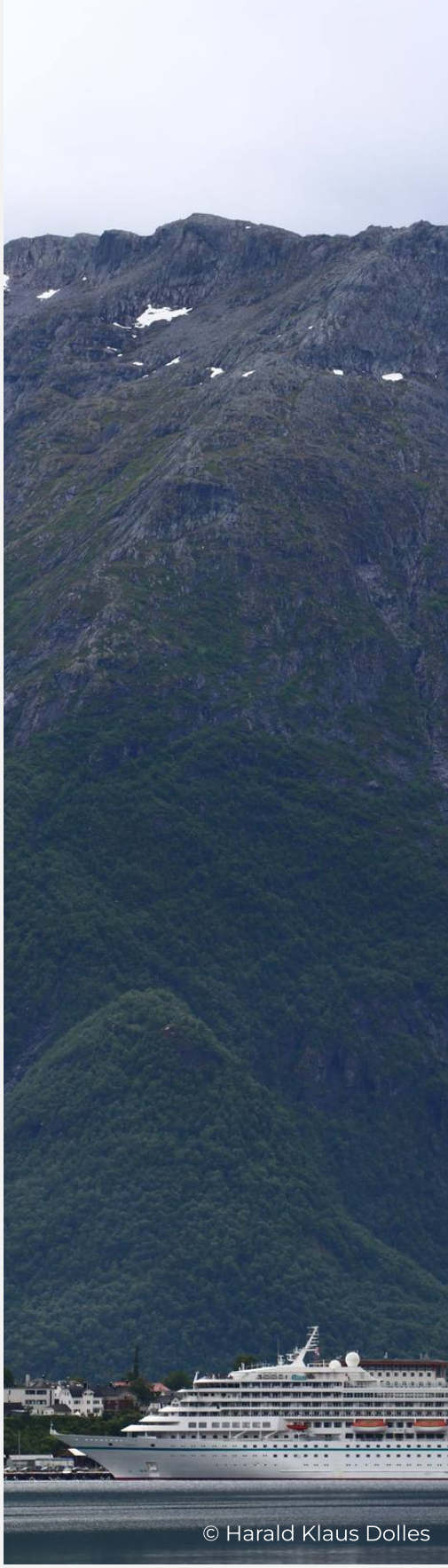
→ **Makes local values visible**
highlights what people care about in their place

→ **Reveals key tensions**
between tourism development, everyday life and local priorities

→ **Links experience to decision-making**
shows where tourism strategies align or fail to align with local realities

→ **Highlights the role of governance and power**
identifies whose values are shaping tourism development in practice

The framework, therefore, provides destination managers and tourism stakeholders with a practical structure for understanding local priorities, identifying tensions and informing future tourism planning.


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Why this matters

Across the case studies, the framework demonstrates that tourism challenges are not only about managing visitor numbers, but about alignment:

- between tourism and sense of place
- between perceived impacts and benefits
- between local values and decision-making

Many tourism strategies focus on growth, visitor numbers, or economic performance. The PlaSE framework instead focuses on how tourism is experienced locally and whether development aligns with what communities value.

By making these relationships visible, the framework provides a basis for:

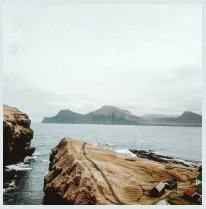
- evaluating existing tourism strategies
- identifying gaps and mismatches
- designing actions that better reflect local priorities
- supporting more locally accepted forms of tourism development

Because place identities evolve over time, understanding how residents experience tourism is essential for guiding future development in ways that remain meaningful and relevant locally.

In this way, the PlaSE framework shifts attention from measuring tourism growth to understanding tourism value, helping destinations identify what needs to change in order to better align tourism development with local values, priorities and experiences.

Next steps

This project applied Stage 1 of the PlaSE framework, focusing on understanding the prerequisites for tourism development: context, sense of place, perceived impacts and benefits, and governance dynamics.



Stage 2

assessing whether strategies align with local values and how impacts and benefits are distributed

Stage 3

identifying practical steps to strengthen alignment, increase perceived benefits, reduce perceived negative impacts and strengthen perceived tourism value



Importantly, the framework can be applied differently depending on context:

- In early-stage destinations, it can support shaping tourism development in line with local values
- In more mature destinations, it can be used to challenge and refine existing strategies

The findings from this project demonstrate the value of a place-based understanding of tourism development and provide a foundation for future collaborative research and implementation activities. Building on Stage 1, future work can support destinations in evaluating existing approaches, developing new strategies, and identifying actions that better reflect local priorities and experiences.

In this way, the full framework supports a shift from understanding tourism to identifying what needs to change in practice, helping ensure that tourism development is not only effective, but aligned with the values of the communities it affects.

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Thank you for reading

If you have any questions about this report or the wider project, please get in touch with the team on **rmf@rmf.is**

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The report prepared by

Alöna Roitershtein, Robert Gordon University
Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir, Icelandic Tourism Research Centre
Ása Marta Sveinsdóttir, Icelandic Tourism Research Centre
Laufey Haraldsdóttir, Hólar University
Harald Klaus Dolles, Molde University College
Firouz Gaini, University of the Faroe Islands
Gestur Hovgaard, Roskilde University
Gry Rustad Pettersen, Institute of Transport Economics (TØI)
Elsa Cox, Robert Gordon University

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