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Selection and Application of Control Instruments in the Sustainable
Tourism Development.

An Examination of the Golden Circle, Iceland

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1. Introduction

During the last decades more and more people have become aware that their actions have an effect on the worlds' unique resources. Especially tourism as a great producer of by-products has a high impact on ecological, economic and social sources. As tourism will grow even further in the future, more concepts and measures are needed to meet the needs of highly frequented destinations and the population that is part of it (UNWTO 2012).

This essay deals with control instruments in the sustainable tourism development. A selection and application of methods will be made for a more sustainable development in tourism at the Golden Circle in Iceland.

The target of this research paper is to make an approach to how a more sustainable development can be encouraged along the route of the Golden Circle. In order to do so, several control instruments will be analysed and applied on this area and recommendations of action will be drawn from that. To get to a reasonable conclusion, many different aspects have to be taken into account. However, not all could be considered as data is still missing. The reason is that research regarding aspects of a more sustainable development has only recently been started. It has to be mentioned that not many surveys in this field of research for this case have been carried out yet. Besides, it also has to be emphasized that all given recommendations are only an approach towards a solution for the existing problem. There is no chance of making tourism development a 100% sustainable as it is in the nature of tourism itself to produce by-products during the process of creating added value (McKercher 1993).

Consequently, the compilation of this essay is as follows: First, it will give an overview of Iceland as a destination, especially regarding recent developments in tourism and the Golden Circle as a tourism site. Here the author will go into further detail about the development after the economic crisis in 2008 and introduce the parts that create the famous route of sights.

Details of conflicts regarding social, ecological and economic dimensions will be explained further in the next part. After that, the terms of sustainable development, regional development and control instruments will be explained and a short introduction of this issue in Iceland will be given.

The focus of this essay is on a more sustainable development regarding tourism at the Golden Circle and means to deal with it. The characteristic features of the destination will be set into context to suitable control instruments for this area. It will be mentioned that a more sustainable development in all aspects is of high importance since tourism is one of the major columns of Iceland's economy nowadays.

After considering theoretical aspects, empiricism will explain in further detail how a more sustainable development at this destination can be encouraged. Expert interviews with seven professionals from the tourism sector have been carried out for that. The method and the target of the interviews will be shortly explained before those involved in tourism give their statement on whether a more sustainable tourism development for this destination is necessary and what each of them assumes it could look like. It also presents the difficulties that come along with it at the three main sights.

In the part after the author will sum up, compare and interpret theoretical results and approaches from empiricism before a conclusion will be drawn.

Last, but not least, this paper will present eligible recommendations of action both from theory and empiricism in order to find an approach towards a more sustainable tourism development for the destination Golden Circle.

2. Destination Iceland

The following part will give information on Iceland as a tourist destination and point out the importance of tourism for the country, especially after the economic crisis in 2008. After that, the Golden Circle as a destination will be introduced.

2.1. Iceland's development towards tourism

Iceland is an island located in northern Europe and the climate is fairly cool. The average temperature for the capital Reykjavik during July is in average about 13 °C, about 1 °C in December (Statice 2012a). Due to its close location to the Arctic Circle, the country only has four to five hours of daylight during the winter months (December to February). In comparison to that, the sun does not set until midnight during the summertime from June to August (Time and date 2012a/b).

Because of its peripheral location, cold temperatures and therefore rough living conditions, the island was isolated in terms of accessibility from the continent of Europe for centuries. As a result, the population did not expand as it did on the continent. Iceland was reigned by the Danish crown until June 17th 1944. On that day Iceland declared its independence while the rest of Europe was struggling with the Second World War (Iceland 2012a). This is a good example of the island's isolation.

Centuries ago, Iceland's economy was mostly based on self-supply. However, as times passed whaling and fishing gained vast importance since there have been many fish reserves in the coastal areas of Iceland. Thus the main branch of income was in the first sector, where fishing and whaling played the most important part in the country's economy (Heiðarsson/Sævaldsson 2012).

As travelling was a luxury good until times of modern mass tourism, first travellers preferred to go to hot spots of early tourism such as Italy and France in continental Europe, e.g. during the times of the Grand Tour (Towner 1985: 302ff). Iceland was only seldom approached as a destination. Reasons for that were probably the rough weather conditions and, as mentioned before its peripheral location without any neighbouring countries around. Also there were many myths and horror stories about the Vikings in North Europe that might have kept travellers away (Lindow 2002).

After the Second World War however, there was much progress in the country's economy. People gained a higher standard of living, not only in Iceland, but also in many parts of Europe (Baines et al. 2010). Due to that, people started to be able to afford more expensive consumer goods than before.

Progress in mobility has been made as well (UNEP 2007). For Iceland, this resulted in better accessibility. The island can be reached easily via aircraft since 1945 (Iceland 2012a). The U.S. base was opened in 1941 and it granted access to the island via aircraft for the very first time (Nordic Adventure Travel 2012). Before that, a journey to the island took about half a week by ship on a vigorous sea.

In general, it can be said that people have more time they can spend on leisure activities than ever before (UNEP 2007). Therefore, trips of greater distances, also to peripheral areas, are possible. At the same time, the duration of activities in the same place can be enlarged.

Another reason for Iceland's rising tourism numbers is that this country is not as well-known as other classical tourism destinations are. Travellers are always looking for a new place to explore and as Iceland has been isolated before, they now take the opportunity of entering the country easily in order to explore it (UNEP 2007).

The most important aspect however, is most likely Iceland's natural features: The geology of the country is very young and tells a lot about the earth's development. Besides that, Iceland contains more than thirty active volcano systems, of which many are dormant (Gudmundsson/Kjartansson 1996: 96). One volcano, called Eyjafjallajökull, erupted in the year 2010 and was responsible for chaos in aviation. It led to a vast number of flight delays and cancellation and gained broad attention world-wide (Vulkanausbrüche 2012). Not to mention are an uncountable number of mountains, glaciers and geothermal areas that can be found on this island as well (Gudmundsson/Kjartansson 1996). All these places are considered to be part of pristine nature.

Iceland has experienced a growth in tourism that does not seem to slow down, tourist numbers are even increasing. In 2011 there were more than 565.000 foreign visitors to Iceland, estimated numbers for 2012 approach even more. Especially the numbers of passengers visiting the country via cruise ship for one or two days is exploding. For the year 2012, 100.000 cruise ship tourists are estimated to make a stop-over (Table 1, altered by the author, according to The Icelandic Travel Industry Association (SAF) 2012a).

Year	Number of arrivals	Total number of passengers	Average number of passengers
1991	23	12,790	556
2001	49	27,574	563
2011	67	62,673	935
2012	77 (estimated)	100,000 (estimated)	

Table 1

Tourism mostly takes place during the summer months from June to August in Iceland (The Icelandic Tourist Board 2011: 9). A survey of 2011 says that ca. 50 percent of all foreigners enter the country during the summer months through the international airport in Keflavik (It is also possible to enter the country from smaller airports. The international airport Keflavik, however, is the main access to the country and hence the only one considered for this essay). These are about 283.000 travellers.

As stated above already, the number of passengers on cruises is also rising. The numbers might not seem to look huge, but if one considers the size and the population of the country, it surely is: Iceland's size is about 103.000 km² (Iceland 2012b), which is about one third more than the size of Ireland. On January 1st 2012, the population of Iceland was 319.575 (Statice 2012b), of which 2/3 live in the greater capital area. The remaining one third is spread in the countryside, mainly ashore. Hence, during the whole year, the number of tourists excels the amount of Iceland's population.

Most tourists visiting Iceland come for leisure purposes and their activities are usually connected to nature (almost 80 percent) (The Icelandic Tourist Board 2012: 16). In summer 2011, 72% of all tourists stated that they have made a visit to the Golden Circle (The Icelandic Tourist Board 2012a: 13).

2.2. Importance of tourism in Iceland after the economic crisis

After the economic crisis in 2008, Iceland's economy had a rough time. The value of the Króna, the national currency, plummeted and many of the former enterprises devastated. Tourism was the biggest hope as a source of income as it still granted a secure income. Due to solid tourist numbers, tourism was even declared as one of the three pillars of the nation's economy by the minister of industry and tourism in November 2008 (cp. appendix, Tourism Conference, Ministry of Industry Energy and Tourism 2008). After the crisis projects were introduced to

support the tourism economy, stabilize it and create new jobs in this branch (Johannesson/Huijbens 2010). In 2010, tourism contributed with 19% to the nation's major export and growth is not intended to be limited (The Icelandic Travel Industry Association (SAF) 2012b).

However, tourism has only been growing progressively since the 1990s (The Icelandic Tourist Board 2011a). As there has never been the need for a tourism policy before, there was only little done to develop the sector before the crisis. The tourism sector still is in an early stage of development. As Johannesson and Huijbens put it, "Private actors have not seen the policy as serious enough, not least because tourism has usually been the lowest in priority by public actors when it comes to structural support" (Johannesson/ Huijbens 2010: 428).

That tourism is still not a crucial factor in means of getting into action, can be seen at the fact that Iceland as number 14 on the human development index of the most developed countries in the world is not a member of the UNWTO yet (UNEP 2012; UNWTO 2012a).

2.3. The Golden Circle as a Destination

As mentioned above, most tourism in Iceland takes place during the summertime. The Golden Circle, however, can be visited all year round and is a sight that attracts travellers in summer and in winter. As 72% of all visitors make a trip during the summer to this destination, it is one of the most frequented sights (The Icelandic Tourist Board 2012). Besides that it is not only for visitors with a longer stay on the island, but also for stop-overs such as cruise-ship passengers for only one or two days. To get an idea, why this destination is so unique, it has to be introduced first: The Golden Circle is a route of about 220 km (starting from/ returning to the capital Reykjavik) and it consists of different sights at which stops are made during a tour. All parts of it are located in South-West Iceland (see Image 1).

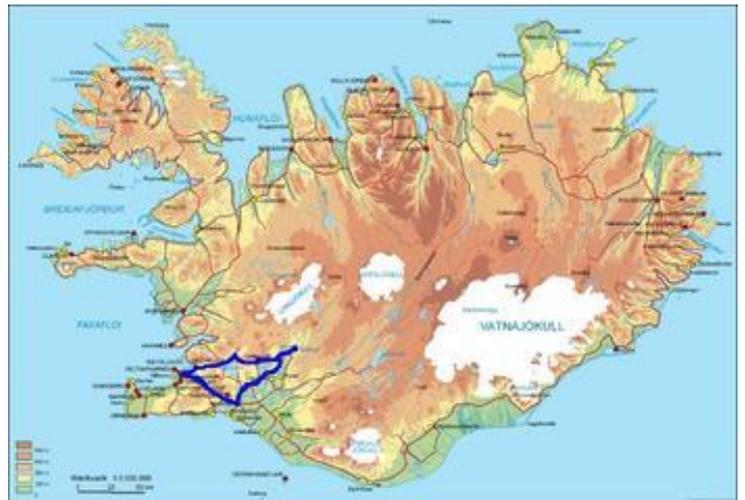


Image 1

It takes between 2.5 and 10 hours to do this tour and it can be combined in several ways. One important aspect of this destination is that no entrance fee has to be paid, it is free accessible for everyone at almost any time. The only cost in monetary means travellers have is the service

they are making use of. This will be explained in further detail later in this chapter. The Golden Circle consists of three main parts, which are the Geysers Strokkur and Geysir in the hot spring area Haukadalur, the waterfall Gullfoss and the national park Thingvellir. Depending on the tour a traveller decides to do, often other destinations along the route are visited as well. For this essay, however, the three named sights are of greatest importance as they are the decisive factor to make the so-called tour to the Golden Circle.

- **The Geysir area**

To begin with, there is the geyser Geysir. It has been eponymous for this phenomenon all around the world and is probably the best-known.

Geysir and Strokkur are located in Haukadalur. It is a hot-spring area of about 3km² in south-west Iceland and consists of numerous hot springs, of which the two named above are the best-known. Besides that, it is estimated that Geysir is also one of the oldest. One of the first reports on this area can be dated back until the year 1294 and the first report of travellers was written in 1793. During that time it still erupted on a regular basis. For now it expired, however. But if Geysir erupts, the fountain reaches a height of up to 70 meters (Hroarsson/Jonsson 1992).

More popular among tourists is the smaller geyser Strokkur, which is about 40 meters high and still erupts about every 2-5 Minutes (Picture 1). When it stopped erupting in the year 1963, the Geysir committee arranged its reincarnation by drilling a borehole of about 40 meters. Since then, Strokkur keeps on erupting and attracts thousands of tourists each month (Hroarsson/Jonsson 1992).



Picture 1



In addition to the two famous hot-springs, also less-known hot springs, such as Konungshver and Litli Geysir in this area can be visited (Torfason 2010). No entrance or parking fee has to be paid at this site, it is almost always accessible from 08:00 am to 22:00 pm (Picture 2).

Picture 2

What meets the eye immediately when arriving at the site is that rope and little signs on them are used to prevent visitors to get too close to the sensitive natural phenomenon (Picture 3, 4 and 5).



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5

As this site attracts many tourists, the demand for touristic infrastructure rose. Due to that, the so-called Geysir-Centre can be found next to the popular site. It consists of Hotel Geysir (Picture 6), with 24 rooms, a restaurant and swimming-pool. Furthermore, a camp site, established in 2011, a souvenir shop and a multimedia centre are also part of it (Hotel Geysir 2012). The centre is highly frequented by tourists and as numbers are rising steadily, also a golf-course nearby was opened in the year 2006 (Geysir Golf 2012).



Picture 6

The hot-spring area offers a great variety of products for several target groups. This shows that there is not one particular cluster of travellers that visits the area. Just to make an example, visitors with an estimated higher budget are a relevant target group (horse rental/golf course), just as low-budget customers that prefer to spend their vacation on a camping site.

As mentioned above already, the area has a long history regarding its development. This can also be seen in the ownership of the site. The first owner of the hot spring area is said to be a nearby farm. During the decades, ownership changed among private proprietary and finally, in the year 1935, it was given to the Icelandic Nation. It took around 20 years until the government took an active part and started to preserve the area. Since it belongs to the nation, responsibilities for the hot spring area changed quite often as well. Since 2003 it is run by the Environmental Agency of Iceland (Torfason 2010). However, the government, who the Environmental Agency belongs to, only owns 35% of the whole hot spring area Haukadalur. The remaining 65% are spread among several stake holders (Interview Sveinn 2012).

According to the Environmental Agency of Iceland, the geothermal area Haukadalur, including the hot springs, does not belong to the protected areas in Iceland (The Environmental Agency of Iceland 2012). Thus, no management plan of this area does exist, no specified measures give advice on how to develop the area as a whole or in particular regarding tourism. The businesses in the area are run privately, e.g. Hotel Geysir including two restaurants, is owned by the family of Már Sigurdsson (Hotel Geysir 2012)

- **Gullfoss Waterfall**

Picture 7

The second popular sight on the route of the Golden Circle is the waterfall Gullfoss (Picture 7). Translating the name, it means Golden Waterfall. It is not far located from the Geysir area (15 km). The waterfall runs down in two steps, the first is about 10 metres, the second about



20 metres. Since the waterfall has enormous powers, it was supposed to be used to produce

energy in the last century. As the records have it, it is thanks to a committed activist, Sigríður Tómasdóttir, who took care of preserving the waterfall from being devastated and turned into a power plant. Since the year 1976 it is protected (Leffmann/Proctor 2010) and now the Environmental Agency of Iceland manages the preservation of the waterfall. According to the agency, Gullfoss belongs to the protected nature reserves in Iceland (The Environmental Agency of Iceland 2012).

Around the waterfall visitor direction has been introduced. Wooden paths and stairs guide the way to the waterfall (Picture 8), however there is no sign to make visitors aware to not leave the paths. Also, it is possible to get very close to the waterfall. Here, once again, rope and small signs are supposed to prevent people from getting too close to the rapid waterfall (Picture 9 and 10) This, very often does not work: people cross it to take pictures (Picture 11). It is not only that the area around the waterfall is being devastated as people keep walking; it is also dangerous for visitors. Getting too close to the waterfall might result in trembling and falling in it as well.

Picture 8



Picture 9



Picture 10



Picture 11

Next to the water, Café Gullfoss can be found. Meals are served and it consists of a café, just as of a souvenir shop (Gullfoss Café 2012/Picture 12). A vast parking area in front is used by tour

operators and private persons to park vehicles (Picture 13). No fees are demanded for parking or entrance.

Picture 12



Picture 13



Even though Gullfoss belongs to the protected area and is under the management of the Environmental Agency that operates under the Ministry of the Environment, no management plan for the Gullfoss area has been compiled up to now (Interview Birna 2012)

- **Thingvellir National Park**

Picture 14

Thingvellir National Park (Picture 14) is the most important part of the Golden Circle as it is of highest historical, cultural and geological importance. Only the lake in the national park has a size of 83.7 km². It is called Thingvallavatn, meaning Lake of Thingvellir. Besides that one of the very first sites of a parliament, called Althing, can be found here.



Around the year 930 the Althing took place for the first time (Thorsteinsson 1986).

For Iceland's history this site is of great value as during the centuries it was used to resolve issues in politics and community life. Moreover it was also the area in which Iceland declared its independence from Denmark on June 17th 1944 (Thorsteinsson 1986).

Not to mention are also a huge variety of about 300 flora and fauna types in the national park (Jónasson/Hersteinsson 2010). Besides, there is the Great Atlantic Rift that runs through the country. As the North-American and European tectonic plates keep moving, the country is slowly being pulled apart. The gap that grows by centimetres each year is clearly visible in

several parts of the country. One spot to perceive a perfect view is the national park (Gudmundsson/Kjartansson 1996).

Those reasons attract a lot of visitors already. Moreover, they also make a stop in order to see the old church Thingvallakirkja which was proof of the religious conversion from pagan to Catholicism centuries ago (Thorsteinsson 1986).

The national park is run by the government. The prime ministry takes care of it in matters of administration but the Thingvellir Commission governs it. As the only part of all three sites, Thingvellir national park has a management plan, valid from 2004-2024 (Thingvellir national park 2004). It covers a vast scope of aspects that are supposed to preserve the national park. Tourism itself however, is only touched on in one aspect. There is no holistic management plan that also covers aspects of sustainable development regarding tourism. Eminent for this site is that it has been declared a UNESCO world heritage site in the year 2004 due to its historical and cultural importance. However, several discrepancies came along with the proposal.

In order to be nominated as a UNESCO world heritage site, several requirements regarding preservation have to be met. Until today, guidelines, such as buffer zones to protect the lake, have not been realized because of different interpretations of the conversation act. In the year 2002, a letter was sent by Francesco Bandarin, the director of UNESCO at that time, requesting a prompt implementation of the prerequisites. As it can be read in the book "Thingvellir- a unique world evolving" by Jónasson and Hersteinsson, it still has not been put into action until today (Jónasson/Hersteinsson 2010: 295)

During the negotiations a bigger area was supposed to be preserved than it is now. The committee of UNESCO demanded a full preservation of Thingvallavatn, the lake in the national park and the surroundings. However, it is not preserved as a whole as the Thingvellir Committee interpreted demands differently.

The Thingvellir committee decided to build a new road intersection the whole national park to meet the rising infrastructure demands as more and people visit the national park. It was built in the year 2010 (Jónasson/Hersteinsson 2010: 40). This led to tensions among locals and the UNESCO as tourism is being promoted on the one hand, but at the cost of nature on the other. As Thingvellir is an official UNESCO site, several acts on preserving the national park have passed, also before the nomination. The first one was passed by the Althing in the year 1928. In 2005, the "Act on the conversation of Lake Thingvallavatn and its catchment area" was passed by the Althing as well (Jónasson/Hersteinsson 2010: 260; 290). The names already attest that the area is preserved regarding environmental issues, as there was no demand for actions in

tourism in 1928. In 2005, the heritage nomination only dealt with cultural aspects and therefore also explains why there was such a big tolerance regarding the interpretation of environmental issues.

A camping site is located in the Thingvellir area and is also the only place for legal camping due to preservation acts of the UNESCO site in this area. According to Jónasson, “more than 600.000 guests visit the National park annually, and tourists taking the Golden Circle will soon increase to more than one million” (Jónasson/Hersteinsson 2010: 263)

Also here no entrance or parking fees have to be paid by visitors, the national park is accessible by car to anyone at any time. According to the interpretative officer of Thingvellir, paths and facilities are being repaired (interview Einar 2012).

2.4. Marketing and tour offers

In matters of marketing aspects it can be said that the Golden Circle is one of the oldest destinations in Iceland. It has been visited more than 200 years (Hroarsson/Jonsson 1992). Therefore the Golden Circle is an established tourist site in Iceland, which is marketed like other destinations in Iceland. Many guides and tourism magazines promote this route, for example Travel Weekly Australia (2011) or Cruise Travel (2006). It would be wrong to assume that mostly nature lovers make the Golden Circle. There is not a special target group. In general it can be said, that the destination tries to attract the whole range of visitors in Iceland. Due to the various offers described above, it is a combination of watching a spectacular phenomenon, experiencing adventure, culture and nature altogether. The Golden Circle attracts a mass market.

As mentioned in the introductory part of this chapter, there are several ways to make the Golden Circle. Travellers can decide to make the tour in a rental car or on a hike/bike on their own. They can stop on their way wherever they wish to and do not have to meet a certain schedule. For individual travel, however, most often a rental car is preferred. As there are no fees to get access to the sights, these visitors have no costs for entrance to the destination itself.

Another possibility is to go on a guided tour. These tours take place with a bus company such as Iceland Excursions or Reykjavik Excursions. Organised bus tours carry up to 50 people per bus and the tours cost range between 50 to 60 EUR per person. The producers offer various alternatives of the tour: They differ in the length of the tour (Golden Tour Classic- 8.5 hours versus Golden Tour Express- 5 hours) and daytime. During the summer it is possible to do the

tour during the day, but also during the night, as it does not darken. They also make a difference in the extra stops on the way. Some of them approach e.g. the well-known spa Bláa Lónið or Blue Lagoon (Iceland Excursions 2012). A tour of the Golden Circle always includes the three main destinations; otherwise it is not regarded as the Golden Circle.

The private guided tours as the last option mostly take part in combination of the product Golden Circle and adventure. Visitors get the chance to approach the sights in a Super-Jeep and stop on the way on the glacier Langjokull to go on a snowmobile-tour as well. These tours take up to 10 hours. The price starts at around 200 EUR per person for a drive in a super-jeep, additional activities are priced extra (Extreme Iceland 2012).

The luxury version of travelling to the Golden Circle is the approach in a helicopter. Tours vary in length and daytime, prices start at 100 EUR per person for 2.5 hours (Helicopter Iceland 2012).

Important to note for the following parts of this paper is that travellers have different ways in which they have impact on the destination. It depends on the way they wish to travel along the Golden Circle and also on the time they spend in the area. The best example for this are cruise ship passengers that make the tour in a super-jeep and only stay for a couple of hours and hikers that spend a couple of days to walk the whole route.

2.5. Short summary on the destination

The three main sights along the route of the Golden Circle had and still have unique developments also due their means of ownership during the decades. Therefore management focuses on each single sight and turns out to be complicated in dealing with the rising number of visitors nowadays as there is no concept. In marketing not a special target group is reached for because it is a phenomenon for the mass tourism market. The majority of those visiting Iceland will take the opportunity of seeing the three sights.

3. Conflicts regarding economic, ecological and socio-cultural aspects

As it could be read in the chapter before, many discrepancies occur when talking about the Golden Circle and its development regarding sustainable aspects in tourism. With a growing number of tourists, the situation cannot ease on its own, but might aggravate. As Tourism has a complex structure, many problems occur and they are all cross-linked. In the following the most important ones of them are extracted and explained in further detail:

Fact is that tourists do have a huge impact on this destination as the money they spend flows into the local economy. Whether it is the money spent on a booked bus tour to the Golden Circle or on a rental car, snacks or refreshments at the local facilities or just on Icelandic souvenirs. Next to those direct effects, also indirect effects occur (Stynes 1997): Sub-suppliers such as local food producers, car and bus workshops depend highly on tourists visiting the Golden Circle. Induced effects evolve when employees and actors involved in tourism in this area spend their earned money on the local economy.

As mentioned above, tourism does play an even more important role for Iceland's economy after the crash in 2008. Effects of the tourist share can only be estimated, since there are no quantitative measures. But by now the Icelandic Travel Industry Association (SAF) states that tourism makes almost a quarter of the whole economy's performance (The Icelandic Travel Industry Association (SAF) 2012b). Besides that, tourism creates employment and since the crash many Icelander's lost their jobs. The government's decision to enlarge and support growth in tourism led to new jobs. Many former unemployed have a safe source of income now.

However, at the same time as cash flows, other conflicts regarding ecological and socio-cultural aspects evolve: Due to the high tourist number, which is neither controlled nor limited, many locals do not feel comfortable at the sites anymore. As Archer et al. state, there "is a relationship between tourism density and the growth of local resentment toward tourism" (Archer et al 2005: 90).

Also tourists develop negative emotions when visiting this destination. On the one hand they perceive the dislike of locals; on the other hand, they realize that this destination is crowded to overflowing. The sites lose the value of pristine nature and authenticity (MacCannell 1973). Instead, tourists recognize themselves as tourists and as a part of staging.

The purpose of the visit is to make both sides profit from it. However, if tourists do not behave as wished, animosity towards them might get even bigger. Often, slight differences in cultural behaviour make a huge difference in intercultural communication. The Icelandic history has always been an important part of the nation's culture. Travellers from other parts of the world do not have this deep-rooted identification might not respect important places such as the national park, which is regarded as the nation's shrine. Travellers might just walk across the fields and the grass to take pictures of the beautiful surroundings. If the local population and visitors do not feel comfortable anymore, none of them can make a bargain (Snyder/Stonehouse 2007).

Regarding political issues it has to be mentioned that Iceland's government and its organisations are caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, they want their nation to reach the economy's value before the banking crash in 2008. Regarding that, tourism is a safe source of income to strive for (Tourism Conference, Ministry of Industry Energy and Tourism 2008). On the other hand, nature-complined Iceland realizes that the more tourists arrive at the Golden Circle, the more effect it will have on its environment (interview Birna 2012).

On top of that, the cognizance regarding tourism issues on the national level is an area of conflict: There is only one ministry for industry, energy and tourism (Ministry of Industry Energy and Tourism 2012). Until the year 2008 it belonged to the Ministry of Transport. As Johannesson et al. present, tourism is finally regarded as an industry. But especially the fishing industry still plays a more important part in the nation's economy. Due to that, very often subjects on the agenda support one part of the economy, but leave other interests behind or even restrain those (Johannesson et al. 2010a).

Besides that, conflicts on if and how to preserve a site arise as many different actors and organisations along the value chain are involved. One example of a conflict like this is the controversy of the Icelandic government and the UNESCO on how to preserve the site of the national park at Thingvellir (Jónasson/Hersteinsson 2010). Another example is the ownership issue that was mentioned before. A many stakeholders are involved tensions can arise on how to treat the sites.

In addition, the stress of a site plays an essential role. The more visitors are travelling in one area the more pressure the area has to bear up against (UNEP 2007: 18). Looking at the rising numbers of tourists during the last decades in Iceland and for the destination Golden Circle, this is also a conflict that has to be looked at. Especially the rising numbers of cruise ship

passengers leave their footprint and do have to be considered. This subject will be explained in further detail in chapter 5.

Another important fact is also that the infrastructure has to be perpetuated the whole year, even though tourism mostly takes place during the summer time (UNEP 2007). The costs for that are not to be underestimated and since there are no fees for entrance or parking at the Golden Circle, it is the tax payer who ensures preservation (Reynisdottir et al. 2008). Unfortunately taxes used for preserving aspects are too low to cover all the costs to sustain the whole infrastructure at this destination.

Altogether it has to be said, that even though the local population profits from development in economic means in tourism, locals and travellers become aware that ecological and socio-cultural aspects are neglected. Keeping the rising number of visitors and the significance of tourism for Iceland in mind, it becomes obvious that measures have to be taken in order to interfere in the current state of tourism development. On this account, the next section of this essay will give ideas which course in development tourism at the Golden Circle in Iceland could take.

4. Sustainable development and control instruments in tourism

This chapter will give information on what sustainable development is and how control instruments for a sustainable development in tourism can be used.

To realize what the problem is and how to cope with it, features and characteristics of the subject of tourism have to be known. Tourism itself is, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) “the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited” (UNWTO 1994).

This means, that tourism consists of non-permanent, short-lived periods in an exceptional place. Very often, travellers are not familiar with the area. Furthermore, the characteristics of tourism include that the service is not storable. It can only be produced when it is demanded and therefore it is also consumed simultaneously. Due to that, not only the supplier, but also the consumer is involved in the performance. Another important aspect is that in tourism services are not supplied by only one person, but a chain of producers is involved. Due to that, many different factors influence the service’s reception in a positive or negative way. On top of that, emotional and non-predictable factors, such as weather, have a large influence as well (Freyer 2006).

Tourism itself does not only provide the service that is demanded, but creates at the same time by-products, that cannot be turned to account. Examples of this are tangible products (e.g. waste, pollution) but also impacts on nature, society and culture, which cannot be proven as a by-product in quantitative measures right away (McKercher 1993).

However, in course of time and education, people have become more aware that their actions in fact do have consequences. As most major trends and changes in tourism are part of economic, ecological and socio-cultural developments on a bigger scale, also the discussion of a more sustainable development has been derived from here (Bramwell/Lane 2012). Decades ago, starting in the industrial branch, the demand for a more sustainable development grew and it finally hit the tourism branch as well.

Sustainable development is, according to the definition of the Brundtland report from 1987, “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”(Brundtland report 1987: 54).

Sustainable development therefore is a long-term development that considers the whole. It progresses with a focus on economic, ecological and socio-cultural matters that are referred to as the three pillars of sustainability as well (Image 2).



Image 2

So when talking about sustainable development in tourism, it means that not only the provided service and its economic effects are considered, but that also ecological and socio-cultural aspects and effects of tourism are respected to the same extent. In practise, stakeholders play an important part, too and the subject is not limited regarding other aspects than economic ones anymore. As the UNWTO says, sustainable development in tourism is “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (UNWTO).

To take a closer look at how to improve a destination in tourism, also the term regional development is of relevance. Essentially, this term is defined by OECD as “a general effort to reduce regional disparities by supporting (employment- and wealth-generating) economic activities in regions” (OECD 2012).

Combining the two terms of regional development, that is originally targeted on economic terms and of sustainable development, which also refers to ecology and socio-culture, a change can be distinguished. As the matter of sustainable development gained broad attention during the last two decades, the term of regional development includes nowadays ecologic and socio-cultural aspects when trying to minimize regional disparities.

There have been several ways to approximate what sustainable development in tourism is and what measuring could look like. Müller, for example, developed the magic pentagon pyramid of sustainable development in tourism (Image 3: altered by the author, according to Müller 1993).

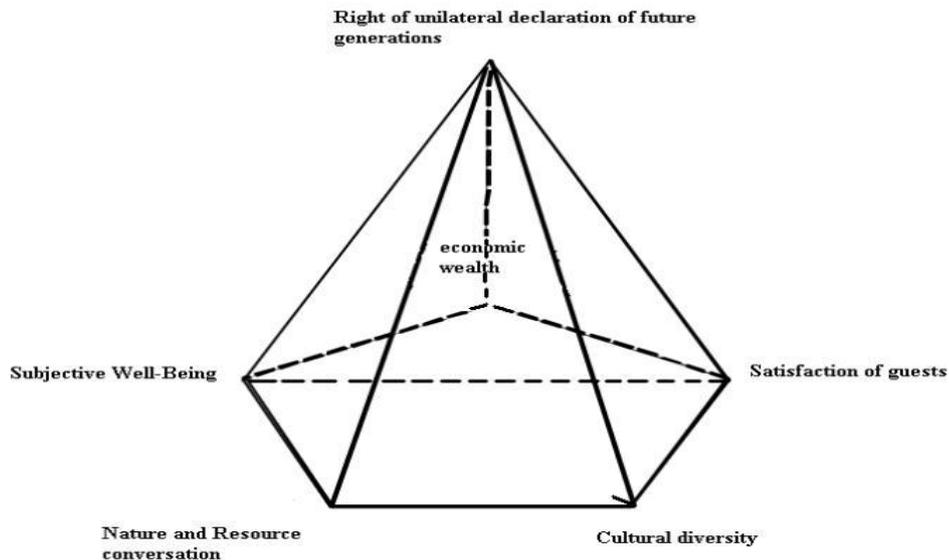


Image 3

Once more, the aspects of the three pillars are equally valued. Here, they form the basis for the top of the pyramid the main aim, the right of unilateral declaration of future generations. Two more aspects are mentioned on the basis, however: Subjective well-being and the satisfaction of guests. While they are part of the three pillars defined by UNWTO, they are emphasized here.

Even though the models and concepts of what sustainable development in tourism is differ, they have the same gist: sustainable development includes ecological, economic and socio-cultural parts to the same extent and as it refers to the involved people, it also takes places on a regional level. It shows once more how difficult it is to put the idea of sustainable development in tourism in specific words. Therefore it becomes obvious that if defining the term is tough, measuring, taking actions and making a change finally, is by far more challenging.

To sum it all up, it is striking that sustainable development in tourism is a part of the regional development of a destination including ecological, socio-cultural and economic aspects in equal measure, including its stakeholders. This is the aim that is endeavoured. This task,

however, cannot be completed thoroughly as there are a lot of conflicts within the three pillars of sustainable development that have been described in the previous chapter.

Now that the aim has been outlined, a short abstract presents how sustainable development moved into perspective in Iceland.

4.1. History of sustainable development in Iceland

Environmental aspects and sustainability development in tourism in Iceland have mattered in politics already more than one decade ago, for example in the Environmental Impact Assessment Act of 2000 (European Free Trade Association (EFTA) No. 106 2000). It is an agreement to keep environmental impacts in industry as low as possible. Also tourism is regarded there, however only as a minor remark. In course of time, sustainable development in tourism demanded more attention. In 2011 the Proposal for Parliamentary Resolution on a tourism strategy was published (The Icelandic Parliament 2011). To get an impression of the status quo of sustainable development in Iceland and for the destination Golden Circle, it is recommended to take a closer look at the proposal. The first aspect infrastructure says (The Icelandic Parliament 2011: 1):

“1. Infrastructure

Iceland’s natural surroundings are a natural resource for the tourism sector. It is important to develop, protect, and maintain tourist sites nationwide. The authorities and other stakeholders must join forces in finding the means to finance such improvements.

The development of tourism infrastructure shall aim at protecting nature, and the tourism strategy shall aim at incorporating the concepts of sustainability and responsibility for Iceland’s culture and natural surroundings.

The regulatory environment for tourism shall take account of the current strategy.”

It can be read that sustainable development regarding the pillars of sustainable development is an important aspect. Yet, strategy does not outline aims specifically and how these should be targeted. Without specified targets and organized structures, not many measures could have taken up to now. Johannesson et al. state that “The main problem has been that words do not translate easily into action” (Johannesson et al. 2010a: 293). So far, the sustainable development in the regional development in politics in Iceland is still in its fledgling stages.

As politics and policies create the frame requirements for a more sustainable development in tourism, Icelandic privately-run businesses in this branch are not much involved yet.

Nevertheless the vast impact of tourism on the country's economy is known. Furthermore, it has also been documented in several surveys and statistics by the Icelandic Tourist Board and the Icelandic Travel Industry Association (SAF) (e.g. The Icelandic Tourist Board 2011).

The next paragraph takes a look at the measures that enable a more sustainable development for a destination on a regional level. It gives hints why several control instruments in context to the history and the recent development at the destination Golden Circle have been chosen.

4.2. Control instruments in tourism

Keeping the previous chapters in mind, it falls into place that the destination Golden Circle is in a severe need for innovative concepts regarding a sustainable development. The three main sights along the route of the Golden Circle had and still have unique and varied developments. Therefore management has been made for each single sight and turns out to be complicated as the Golden Circle is regarded as one destination, even though there a lot of different owners for each sight. In order to cope with the rising numbers of tourists however, approaches to find better methods for a sustainable tourism development should be made. The measures ought to unite the three mini-destinations, but according to the needs of each single sight. One approach to a solution that supports a regional development including the three pillars could be control instruments.

Control instruments in tourism are tools that help to improve the long-term development of a site with a focus on economic, ecological and socio-cultural matters. At best, they enable measurement, monitoring, managing and checking whether targets, that have been defined before, have been achieved or not. They also give evidence for cause (UNEP/WTO 2005). Depending on the destination, selected control instruments are eligible. What might be the best case for the development of one area may be derogatory for another.

It depends thoroughly on the economic, socio-cultural and ecological features of a destination which control instruments are compiled.

Before going into details however, it has to be emphasized once again that it is hard to measure which impacts tourism has on the destination as consequences do not unveil themselves right away. Besides, miscellaneous groups of travellers have diverse impacts due to the way they travel, just as the example given about the hikers and the cruise ship passengers that decide to go on a tour to the Golden Circle.

There are several types of control instruments that can be used for a more sustainable development in tourism and they can be allocated in different ways. The previous chapter has pointed out that there are many different ways to approach the concept of sustainable development. As a result, there is a huge spectrum on how to classify control instruments. Freyer, as one example, distinguishes control instrument in tourism in different categories than the UNEP/WTO do (Freyer 2006; UNEP/WTO 2005). Another example of classifying control instruments can be seen in "Tourismus-und Umweltpolitik - Ein politisches Spannungsfeld" by Kahlenborn et al. (1999).

For this essay, the guide by UNEP and WTO: Making tourism more sustainable: A guide for policy makers in the year 2005 (UNEP/WTO 2005) has been a major pillar, as these two organisations are leaders in the development for sustainable tourism. Like the title of the guide reveals, it is addressed to policies and politics and not to enterprises or individuals predominantly. As tourism, however, is an industry in which all of kind of structures are cross-linked, this guide refers to several actors along the value added chain in tourism, too. No clear distinction can be made and very often, one idea of a concept of a control instrument can be found in others as well.

The decision to use the guide by UNEP/WTO as the main guide has been made due to several reasons: In general, governments can have impact of vital importance on the way tourism develops. Whereas in other countries there are untold instances of local, regional and national governance, it is by far less for a small community such as Iceland. Nevertheless or even because of that, Iceland's government has a paramount responsibility - not only regarding a change in the development of tourism on the national level, but also on the local government level. With a small population as Iceland has, there are shorter distances in all instances and streamlined processing is possible. Hence, decisions by the government should be easier implemented than elsewhere. This could be an advantage for regional development in tourism in Iceland as it is dependent on frame requirements and new policies. Furthermore, regional development has to adapt fast in order to minimize regional disparities and make new innovations (Landabaso 2001)

Another important aspect is that the three main sights of the Golden Circle are mostly governed by the state of Iceland: the national park Thingvellir is under the authority of the prime ministry, Gullfoss is governed by the ministry of the environment and parts of Geysir also governed by that ministry (Interview Birna 2012). As tourism policies on a national and local scale have not been fully developed yet, the author chose to put the main focus on control instruments that can be used by governments.

The following control instruments that will be explained in further detail and set into context to the destination Golden Circle are only a selection of the vast scope provided by UNEP/WTO. On the one hand, this is due to the broad range of control instruments, on the other hand, just the handiest and effective ones were chosen. Other control instruments, such as instruments for planning and eco-audits could not be considered for this section, as this would have gone beyond the scope of this essay. The control instruments are put into categories in a mix of the guide by UNEP/WTO and the above mentioned book by Kahlenborn et al (1999). The reason for this is that various control instruments have to suit the actual case of the Golden Circle.

5. Approach to a more sustainable development

This chapter specifies control instruments that might be eligible for the destination Golden Circle. First, they are introduced and then set into context to the region.

5.1. Rules and Regulations as a control instrument of command

The first example of a control instrument for this case is the concept of rules and regulations.

As stated before, there are no precise policies on how to improve the development of sustainable tourism in Iceland or the Golden Circle yet.

For this reason, the control instrument of rules and regulations could be suitable. According to the policy guide provided by the UNEP and WTO, it is said that they “are inter-related tools that can be used to strengthen sustainability by setting out requirements that are compulsory and enforceable, and which lead to sanctions and penalties if they are not met” (UNEP/WTO 2005: 78).

In relation to the Golden Circle, this means that the government has the chance to introduce new laws and restrictions of accessibility at the Golden Circle. To protect and preserve the area, several restrictions can be set up. One idea is the creation of an environmental area that covers the whole area of the Golden Circle. Within this area, only certain types of vehicles and means of transport are allowed. An idea would be that merely cars with newer technology and less pollution could enter the zone. According to Hansson, this idea would have already been taken into consideration and the area only be accessible if conditions were met, using a special pass for those who can enter (personal talk to Hansson 2012). Those who did not stick to the rules would have to face a penalty or a fine in return.

Furthermore, restrictions can support a more sustainable development regarding less pollution. If, for example, pollution is too high some days, the area can be closed on other days in return for vehicles.

However, disadvantages become obvious as well. The following is only a selection of aspects that have to be considered: What are the conditions of receiving access to the area or not? If this is a good development regarding ecological means, what about those people that do not meet the conditions? Can this be considered a sustainable development regarding socio-cultural means? How is it possible to restrict an area of this size and make sure, that every

visitor takes care of the pass? Also, locals, living and working in the area, have to be considered: Does it make sense to make them require the same pass as visitors?

As Hansson said, fears of local denial would be realistic and if living in the area was impeded, it would be questionable to introduce an environmental area with restrictions like this (personal talk to Hansson 2012).

Besides that, the ownership issue play in important part. Iceland's government does not have the authority for all places, so regarding this aspect all stakeholders have to agree on new regulations.

Another disadvantage of this control instrument is that the individual takes part in a more sustainable development because he is made to. The individual does not have the free will to decide if it matters to him or not. In conclusion, people will only do as much as they have to do. Very often this turns out to be just the minimum of requirements and the development towards sustainability is not as advanced as it could be.

5.2. Capacity building as a control instruments of support

Capacity building is "about developing the potential and ability of stakeholders to make and implement decisions that will lead to more sustainable tourism [...]" (UNEP/WTO 2005: 112). One way to use it is to form organisations and groups that look into sustainable tourism development (UNEP/WTO 2005: 116). Due to the fact, that the purpose of the organisation is tourism and its development, they have a lot of expertise on that topic. In Iceland, there is the Icelandic Tourist Board as an organization like this (The Icelandic Tourist Board 2012b). Basically, the tourist board takes care of tourism in the whole country. As many other issues are part of the work at the tourist board, they cannot satisfy the needs for a sustainable development at the Golden Circle all alone. Besides, it does not have authorization to take care of the sites in particular. For Thingvellir national park it is the prime ministry that is in charge, for the waterfall Gullfoss and partly for the Geysir area it is the environmental agency of Iceland. Both are primarily not involved in tourism issues. At Geysir authorization has to be shared with many other stakeholders (Interview Sveinn 2012).

Next to the fact that limited freedom of action prevents a special organisation to take care of this destination, it is common in tourism that there is only strictly limited capital to create new organisations or professional groups to work on issues like this. This leads to the next control instruments in this section:

5.3. Participatory control instruments based on voluntary participation

In cases like the above described, the participatory aspect of control instruments plays an important part. This instrument merges various actors in tourism and since they are all active parts of the tourism industry, chances are high that they bring the expertise as well (Kahlenborn et al 1999: 98f). In this case, the implication of a round table that e.g. deals with the organisation of management for the Golden Circle is one idea. On the one hand, experts that are involved with the subject can bring the process due to their knowledge forward, on the other hand, not much capital and facilities are needed. Moreover, it may foster willingness for voluntary cooperation, if actors realize that they are actually capable of making a change in their surroundings. Another aspect of a sustainable development in tourism is the involvement of the local population. With this instrument, many tensions might be easier to handle (Kahlenborn et al. 1999: 83). Having different opinions and perspectives about what is best for the region, might not make communication easier, but will contribute to the comprehension of other points of view.

Next to this aspect of participatory instruments, the fact that visitors can take an active part has to be taken into account as well. By creating a code of conduct for visitors, it can show them, the do's and don'ts in a place. With the right explanation, visitors will get an understanding for certain required behaviour. According to UNEP/WTO, this is an advantage when: "Regulations are difficult to disseminate and compliance cannot be controlled." (UNWTO/WTO 2005: 108). Moreover it helps to give more information on the cultural background. Taking the example of Thingvellir national park, it can explain, why visitors are asked to stay on the paths, even though they might not harm the environment by leaving the way. If this instrument is used, it simultaneously educates and also provides information. It helps understanding and learning on the history and culture of the destination as well.

5.4. Commitment / Agreements based on voluntary participation

Another control instrument that can be used by governments is the chance of commitments and agreements. It can have a huge impact as well, even though it might not look like it in the beginning. As described before, fiscal instruments, rules and regulations are instruments imposed on involved people. They actually can have a negative effect on the perception on the aim. This is where the control instrument of commitment and agreements comes in: Both are based on voluntary participation towards a more sustainable development (Kahlenborn et al 1999: 96). Hence, it can be concluded, that those deciding to take part in it, will probably show more commitment. Those agreements and commitments are either composed as Letters of

intent or as Memoranda of understanding and they differ in outline and participants (International Business Law adviser 2010).

An agreement on local scale regarding the destination Golden Circle can be that car rentals and tour operators commit themselves to reduce obsolete technology, e.g. the substitution of older cars with new ones of more eco-friendly standard in a period of time. In return, lower taxes on vehicles with improved technology can be given in return by the government.

Supplementary, local tour operators can make the commitment of forgoing certain tours, such as selling helicopter or super-jeep tours to the Golden Circle. Those two means of transport waste a lot of energy. Besides that, helicopter also often disturb the birdlife as they "cause panic flights and can lead to egg loss particularly in birds" (UNEP 2007: 15). Helicopter and Super-Jeeps are not necessary to reach all the sights along the route. In return, the government can agree to support local tour operators in finding and marketing new and innovative, but just as adventurous ways of travelling this destination.

An example for an agreement on a more holistic scale regarding sustainable development in all aspects is the global code of ethics by the UNWTO that was signed by all members of the organisation (UNWTO 2001). The agreement also refers to tourism as a factor of sustainable development and therefore addresses development on a broader scale. As Iceland is not a member of this organisation, there is no official statement of commitment regarding a development based on those principles.

5.5. Labelling as a control instrument based on voluntary participation

Another control instrument that can be inserted by the government, which encourages a voluntary participation for more sustainable development in tourism, is the concept of labelling. This control instrument, if done properly and professional, is a win-win situation not only for consumers, but also for suppliers.

As Kahlenborn et al. state, a label can influence the purchase decision. A good label does not only attract many customers. It is also of a gaugeable standard. In case of success, the more the label is recognized as a standard, the more actors will (have to) take part (Kahlenborn et al. 1999: 91). This kind of pressure is to be looked upon favourably as it will raise quality and in the long run a more sustainable development in the tourism sector.

On the contrary these two aspects of reaching many customers and the quality can be the greatest disadvantages of a label in sustainable development. As almost anyone is able to

create his or her own label and logo, the market is swamped with them. This leads to confusion among the customers and finally to distrust (WWF 2000). Moreover there are issues about the quality of a label. If it reaches a broad range of customers, it does not necessarily mean that it also represents a special standard. As there are “different shades of green” (WWF 2000: 20), there are also different levels of accomplishing quality. This leads to confusion among clients. The disadvantages have to be kept in mind, as a label has a strong influence on the image and credibility of the destination.

VAKINN is the attempt of the Icelandic tourism industry, instigated by the government, to reach a quality level on which enterprises can be labelled. According to The Icelandic Tourism Industry Association (SAF), it is based on Qualmark as best practice (personal talk to Hansson 2012). Qualmark is “New Zealand’s tourism’s official mark quality” (Qualmark 2012).

Various actors can join VAKINN and they have to meet a minimum standard of quality. Unique about this new quality system is that VAKINN does not only rate accommodation, called Stellar Classification, but also any other service in tourism, e.g. car rentals, tour operators and tours, such as hiking tours. Up to now, more than 20 different groups of services have the chance to be labelled, more will be compiled. In general, there are 7 features checked in terms of quality before receiving the label (Image 4):

- Sales and purchases of goods or services
- Service and satisfaction
- Facilities, equipment and local area
- Managers and staff
- Culture and History
- Safety, welfare and responsibility
- Company management and overall



Image 4

On top of that, for each group the demands for quality are adjusted and special criteria added.

Enterprises, interested in the new quality system, receive free information to what exactly is being expected for each level of rating in their field of service. They get information on how to start, benefits, other participants, etc. With the application for VAKINN, several documents are

required, just like an application fee and annual fee. After rating and checking, the enterprise will get the recognition in one of the group levels of quality:

Lágmark, gott, betra, best (Low, good, better and best). In order to receive a standard, 70% of the category's criteria have to be met. If not, the company gets two months to fix dissatisfactory conditions (VAKINN 2012).

As to be seen in the enumeration above, socio-cultural and economic aspects are included, but environmental matters are not mentioned. Regarding this subject, an extra program, on top of the basic labelling, can be chosen. It is not mandatory, but highly recommended by VAKINN as this issue gets more and more important. As described on the website,

“Environmental criteria are used to assess where a company's stand with regard to environmental issues, and connections with the community. Sustainability involves just the two of themselves, as well as economic factors” (VAKINN 2012).

Here the combination of the three pillars is considered for a sustainable development in tourism. Three categories are available in the environmental program. Depending on the level, it is bronze, silver or gold (Image 5).



Image 5

A checklist helps to measure the grade of environmental responsibility and it consists of 8 features:

- Policies and procedures
- Purchasing and resources
- Energy
- Waste
- Conservation
- Society
- Suppliers and marketers
- Information to customers

It is noticeable that there are not only environmental aspects included, but also continuative socio-cultural aspects. Participants are supplied with several checklists. One of them is about energy, waste and resource management and these features are the minimum standard to receive the bronze label for environmental management.

As VAKINN was started in February 2012 and the first tourism companies were certified in July 2012, development is still in the very beginning. New standards will be determined in January 2014 (VAKINN 2012).

Considering the Golden Circle, labelling is one way of raising quality in the tourism industry in the area. There are many facilities around the national park, the waterfall and the hot spring area: restaurants and cafés, such as Café Gullfoss, hotels, such as Hotel Geysir and other highly frequented places.

Besides that, the tours of the Golden Circle and the means of transport have to be regarded. As VAKINN ENVIRO offers the chance of labelling different kind of tours in means of sustainable tourism, tour operators can receive a label for different tours to the Golden Circle just for them as a tour operator as well. This applies as well for car rentals and travel agencies, they are cooperating with. Travellers can take an active decision of who to pick and where to go on their tour.

One disadvantage, however, is the fact that VAKINN ENVIRO is not obligatory if enterprises decide to take part in the process. But looking at it from a different view, it has to be mentioned that enterprises that choose to reach for the environmental labelling as well, will

probably support it to the fullest. If it was mandatory, it is likely that many participants only reach for the minimum standard, just as described above already.

5.6. Carrying capacity as a control instrument of measurement

Carrying capacity defines how many individuals can stay in an area before it is too crowded regarding the amount of visitors, the stress for the sight, etc. To measure this, indicators are used. As written, indicators

“make it possible to monitor changes over time in a constant and consistent manner. They can help to clarify goals and, most importantly, force them to be more precise. They can be very valuable in fostering greater accountability and in raising awareness of, and support for, actions.” (UNEP/WTO 2005: 72)

In other words, indicators help to find a basis for the evaluation of a progress. After all, they provide evidence on how individual parts of a destination might develop and they are easy to use for scenarios of future developments. In a mix with other control instruments, their assistance can contribute a great deal to which changes should be made. In order to get reliable results, indicators have to be defined exactly before using them. If chosen properly, they can give not only qualitative, but also quantitative results.

The WTO defined some 11 general, 3 composite and several supplementary core indicators of sustainable tourism (WTO 1995). In the following table the indicators are very striking, as they give quantitative results (Table 2, altered by the author, according to WTO 1995):

Indicator	Specific measures
Stress	Tourist numbers visiting site (annum/peak month)
Use Intensity	Intensity of use – peak period (persons/hectare)
Social Impact	Ratio of tourists to locals (peak period and over time)
Consumer satisfaction	Level of satisfaction by visitors (questionnaire based)
Local Satisfaction	Level of satisfaction by locals (questionnaire based)
Planning process	Existence of organized regional plan for tourist destination region (including tourism component)

Table 2

The first indicator, stress of a site, can be measured easily: By collecting data at the three main sights of the Golden Circle, it could be determined, how much stress each sight is exposed to.

The collected data gives an idea of how many visitors are in the area and if there is a significant deviation in visitor numbers.

Use intensity measures how many visitors per hectare stay on a site during the peak of the season. As an addition to the stress of a site, it gives an idea of how the amount of travellers affects the area.

To get more information on the proportion of visitors from abroad and locals/domestic travellers, the indicator of social impact is a good method. It is useful to get a view of how locals visit this destination in their country. Especially a site with high historical and cultural value as Thingvellir national park could be investigated by that and set in relation to visitors during high and low season. As stated in chapter 3, there is interdependence between tourist numbers and the growth of local dislike.

By combining these indicators, information is provided on how many visitors the Golden Circle can carry and where the limit is. Possible consequences on the development of this route can be derived from these indicators and they demonstrate the necessity for procedures.

To get even further details on socio-cultural aspects in sustainable tourism, satisfaction with tourism among travellers and locals can be measured. As the other three indicators mentioned before, this may help to see in how far visitors feel like tourists and/or warmly welcomed and can express the opinion of locals who can be domestic travellers.

Planning process (indicator 6), shows in how far a site's development is planned. Looking at the Golden Circle as one destination with three individual sights, it can be examined how the plans for a sustainable development correspond to the needs. Existing management plans can be compared and a new one compiled, suiting the needs for each single place of interest, but as a whole.

There are a couple of obstacles that have to be vanquished before the concept of carrying capacity can be used, though. As professionals are needed to create frame work requirements before indicators can be defined, monetary support is needed. Subsequently, this results in the introduction of another control instrument by governments.

5.7. Taxes and fees as control instruments of economics

Taxes and fees as instruments are economic instruments that "work through factors, namely cost, price and income, which have long proven to be major influences on the choices and decisions made by enterprises and consumers." (UNEP/WTO, 2005: 89).

These instruments stimulate a different behaviour among people, as this is a money issue. A simple example: Before the introduction of deposits on all bottles and cups containing sparkling liquids in Germany, many did not pay attention where their waste ended up. After the imposition by the German government, many people realised how much money they could lose, if they did not return the empty containers. In case of not returning the bottles, the deposit turned into a tax that the government receives. Even though someone might not care about sustainability and the environment in general, he will pay more attention as soon as the individual realises that he has to pay in monetary means.

Therefore, fiscal instruments, such as taxes, can be a useful instrument, if put to good use. One sample on how this instrument can be applied is a fee to preserve the sights at the Golden Circle. As stated in chapter 2, there is not a single fee for entrance or parking that visitors have to pay. Up to now, it is mostly the tax payer who ensures preservation of the area as this is the only fund which is used (Reynisdottir et al. 2008: 1076).

Iceland's answer to that is that a tax on accommodation in the country has been established at the beginning of 2012 (personal talk to Hansson, 2012). The money earned with this tax is spread among environmental organisations and projects in order to preserve destinations. The tax is forwarded to the customers staying overnight.

Another fiscal instrument is the use of entrance fees. As it could be read before, no entrance fees have to be paid to get access to the sights. In a study, carried out in the year 2004, titled the "Willingness to pay entrance fees to natural attractions- An Icelandic case study" (Reynisdottir et al. 2008), it was subject to find out if, and how much travellers would be willing to spend on a visit in the national park Skaftafell and the waterfall Gullfoss that is part of the Golden Circle. Results were obvious: After explaining the scenario (not enough money from taxes to preserve the national park and the waterfall the way they should be preserved) to respondents, almost all visitors at both sights (92%) were willing to pay an entrance fee. Fact is that the amounts differed on a broad range. The main point is, however, that travellers were willing to have a share in the preservation process of the natural sights.

Even though the survey only included the waterfall Gullfoss as a part of the Golden Circle, it can be assumed that an application of the result on the other two sights of the famous route is possible. What can be extracted from this is that in general people are willing to contribute.

Fees for parking lots are another fiscal instrument. Many visitors are individual travellers and up to now, they do not have to make any contribution for the use of the parking lots. A small

fee can bring in money not only for preserving matters, but also for educational and informational matters.

One more example of how fiscal instruments can be used to improve sustainable development at the Golden Circle is the subject of cruise ship passengers. The tour to the Golden Circle is part of almost all tours by cruise ship companies. (AIDA MAR; P&O cruises; Thomson; Hapag-Lloyd Cruises 2012.)

Their influence regarding environmental matters is much higher as they use the same facilities in the little time spend in a destination as they only stay between some hours and two days in the same destination before they head to the next. They have a bigger environmental footprint in comparison to overnight-tourists. There are also issues regarding socio-cultural and economic aspects in sustainable tourism development. Braun et al. present the reasons that the crew of the cruise liner is from abroad, so their income tax would be paid abroad as well. Also, the ownership of the cruise ship is abroad and for that reason profit would flow out of the country and be invested elsewhere. The third reason that is mentioned is that cruise ship passengers would not spend much money on the local economy (Braun et al. 2002, quoted after Seidl et al 2006).

In a study, carried out for the cruise ship destination in Belize, proof was found for these three theses. Cruise ship passengers merely contribute a fraction of the spending to the local economy in comparison to travellers that stay longer (CESD 2006). Even though the numbers might not be the same for cruise ship passengers approaching the cold water island, the gist of the study can be applied to cruise ship tourism in Iceland as well. Besides that, the study states that cruise ship tourism creates fewer jobs in the local tourism branch than expected. It is assumed that only one job out of ten in the local tourism economy in Belize is created by this form of travelling (CESD 2006). Again, the actual number might not be comparable. However, the main aspect is that cruise tourism does not contribute lots to the sustainable development on the local level regarding economic and social aspects. It can be said that cruise ship passengers consume more of the local environment in ecological and socio-cultural means and return less on the local economy in monetary terms.

One possibility to consider the passengers impact on the destination Golden Circle is the introduction of a cruise ship passenger tax, as done in Belize already (Honey 2009). There, cruise ship passengers pay for the access to the area. Finally, the money is spread by several organisations on the local level and supports them.

6. Empiricism

6.1. Description of the problem and target

The previous pages have outlined control instruments in theory that take course towards a more sustainable development. There are many solutions in theory, but no solution that suits all in practice. Therefore empiricism tries to give more detailed answers on what a more sustainable tourism development could look like in practise.

For this, a special type of half-structured interviews was chosen (Schnell et al. 2008): Expert interviews based upon a guideline. Participants involved are actors along the value added chain in this destination. The aim is to get statements on whether actors involved in tourism in this area think a more sustainable development in the region is needed. In addition, it is aimed for suggestions and creative proposals for a new direction in development.

6.2. Expert interviews based upon a guideline

To know what the term expert interviews based upon a guideline are, the word expert has to be defined first. According to Oxford Dictionary (2012) an expert is: "a person who is very knowledgeable about or skilful in a particular area"(Oxford Dictionary 2012). Other definitions state that an expert, too, is someone who is responsible for an approach towards a solution or its implementation (Meuser/Nagel 1991: 443). As a conclusion, it is not about the expert's personal background, but on what he is specified in.

As it is an interview, there is also an interviewer. To be successful and get as much viable information as possible, the interviewer has to have background information of the topic to conduct it. Besides that, the main aspect of the expert interview is that it is half-structured (Schnell et al. 2008: 322). It means that a regular, degage conversation as far as possible is approached. To reach this, the interviewer has to guide through the conversation as well.

For this kind of interview no standardized questionnaire is used but a guideline. It is prepared in advance and used as a leitmotif to provide the talk with structure, but leaves enough room for own input. Important is that the interviewer has enough background knowledge to know which course the interview should take. If carried out good, the interviewer is provided with information by the expert only insiders have. Because there is no standardized questionnaire, but a conversation, expert interviews belong to qualitative research and are the part of the least quantifiable methods. (Mayer 2006).

6.3. Sample

In order to get the greatest variety of ideas and innovative suggestions of what could be done to improve a more sustainable tourism development at the Golden Circle, the sample was chosen. For that, the participants along the local value added chain had to meet certain criteria to participate in this expert interview (Mayer 2006): They have to be experts involved in tourism along the value added line and know about trends and development at the destination Golden Circle. Most of them are taking part in daily business of tourism at this destination; others deal primarily with environmental issues and tourism on top. Because they are familiar with the field of activity, they can all contribute to the research of gathering new stimuli. As they work in different services in tourism they can state what would be useful from their point of view and what would not be. There might be some contrary opinions on approaches to a solution. But only if they are all looked at, a good essence can be drawn from that.

As this topic is a sensitive one, not as many experts were willing to give a statement on this. Therefore the sample is not as big as aimed for. Hence it covers involved actors along the whole value added chain.

Participants were:

Einar Á.E. Sæmundsen, interpretive officer at Thingvellir national park in a telephone interview

Sveinn R. Traustason, environmental manager for the Icelandic Tourist Board (Ferðamálastofa), in a personal interview

Ásþorg Arnþórsdóttir, director of tourism for the municipalities, including the Geysir area, in a personal interview

Thórir Garðarsson, sales and marketing manager, owner and founder of the bus tour operator Iceland Excursions/Grayline, in a personal interview

Mábil Másdóttir, hotel manager of Hotel Geysir and stakeholder of the Geysir area, in a personal interview

Aðalbjörg Birna Guttormsdóttir, divisional manager of nature conservation of the Environmental Agency Iceland (Umhverfisstofnun) that is in charge of Gullfoss, in a personal interview

Berglind Ósk Guttormsdóttir, guide and driver guide, also for the Golden Circle, in a personal interview

All participants appear with their first names in this essay. What is considered as the family name is in Iceland the combination of the father's name plus a suffix - dottir (if it is a daughter) or -son (for a son). Therefore it does not help to identify a person with the second name. As this way of addressing people by their first name is common in Iceland, the author decided to stick with this. The interviews took place at the places of work in order to create a familiar setting for each expert. After permission, each interview was voice recorded and no participant decided to stay anonymous (Mayer 2006).

6.4. The guideline

The guideline used for the interviews is based upon theoretical assumptions of possible measures. Because a regular conversation was approached, opened questions were asked as much as possible in order to receive reasons and explanations for answers (Schnell et al. 2008: 330). At the beginning of each interview an icebreaker questions based upon the guideline (cp. appendix) helped to start the conversation. It provided information on the job and tasks of the expert and led to the main part of the interview.

The first aspect was the development of the destination Golden Circle regarding tourism and challenges coming along with it. After getting deeper into what this destination and the involved actors have to face, the interview was lead towards approaches of which each expert thought they would be useful. In the beginning, no measures were suggested, the expert was supposed to state his/her main ideas regarding measures that could be taken.

Afterwards, certain control instruments, that had not been mentioned before, were asked for and the opinion of applying them. Regarding this aspect it has to be mentioned, that there is a disadvantage in this method of research. Asking questions this way, often leads to answers that are considered to be socially acceptable and it cannot be found out if the opinion the expert presents is actually what he thinks about it (Meuser/Nagel 1991). However, as all the participants chose to take part on a voluntary basis, it can be concluded that the majority of answers regarding the interview is not affected by that.

Furthermore, it is important to know that even though a guideline was used, it was not always easy to lead the interviews with it. On the one hand this was due to questions that came up during the interview and that could not have been foreseen before. On the other hand, there was a difference in the scope of the topic among all experts. As a result, some questions regarding useful measures were too self-evident for one specialist, but could not be answered by others.

Another challenge was to find the same level of language. According to Meuser and Nagel (1991:449), it is important to have the same codes in language. If the interviewer does not cater himself to the expert, the whole interview can be a failure. The interviewer had to adjust to the type of language of the expert in order to receive useful results. Therefore control instruments introduced in the previous section were translated in a different language for the interviews. One example for this: The instruments of regulations regarding cars and buses and the idea of indicators to state how many ideas a site can carry were put into the same category of limitations of cars and visitors. Even though a pre-test had been carried out before, not all situations could have been practised.

Advantages of this research method is the presentation of a broad range of ideas which a standardized questionnaire never could have carried out. Pro's and contra's are mentioned on a deeper level and from all different point of views. They directly point to the whole destination, instead of focusing on a special part of the value added chain in tourism. No quantitative results could be drawn, as no standardized questionnaire was used. Instead, the guideline was the leitmotif and lead into a conversation of depth. This enabled fewer interviews, but a broader range of ideas and innovative suggestions regarding a more sustainable development, as any standardized questionnaire could have achieved (Häder 2006).

After the interviews had been conducted, they were transliterated and put into categories that had been defined according to the guideline before. The sample was pre-determined regarding categories as one certain aim was approached since the beginning (Mayer 2006). The analysis was executed in six stages by Mühlberg's technique (1991, quoted after Mayer 2006).

7. Analysis and Results

In the following, the results of the interviews will be presented. The evaluation of which instruments could be useful is based upon the subjective views of involved actors in this area.

7.1. Destination Golden Circle

Iceland's economy has high shares in tourism and the Golden Circle is one of the most visited destinations in the country. What could be reasons for this?

According to Einar, the distance from Reykjavik is not so far, so it is useful for a good day tour. It would be only a short drive of around 40 minutes to reach the first site. Therefore it is also suitable for tourists that only stay a few hours, like cruise ship tourists. He also mentions that this site is due to its long history an established tourism destination. As Einar states, the whole region profits from mass tourism due to that and Sveinn points out that this destination is Iceland's signboard and what people associate with Iceland: "I think it's similar to...Let's say, if you go to Paris, you go to the Eifel tower, won't you? And I would say Geysir is our Eifel tower. If you come to Iceland, you go to Geysir. It seems to be very difficult to change."

How do you think this trend will develop? What does it mean for you?

All experts see a big development right in front of them. Birna states that the numbers in tourism is rising steadily and more and more people are coming in this area. According to her, estimations claim, that in the year 2020 about 1 million travellers will visit the Golden Circle. She calls this "an explosion in tourism" and points out that they have to get ready for this. Tourism in Iceland in general and especially at this site is growing with a lot of progress. Connected with it, are, according to the experts, several challenges that the tourism industry in this area is facing. Berglind emphasizes that "This is a big challenge [the rising tourist numbers, remark of the author] for those who taking care of these places." She reasons that 70% of all people coming to Iceland decide to go on this tour.

It is striking to see that all interviewed experts state a big change in the tourism development at this site. That this will have effects on the destination was pointed clearly. It is obvious that all actors are affected somehow, but regarding to their own specific service along the value added chain.

7.2. Future development

Are there any challenges this destination has to face in the future? What do you think they are?

All interviewed participants highlight that there are many challenges to come. Einar names the full parking lots they had this summer in the national park Thingvellir. According to him, they had problems to manage all the traffic with more tourists arriving. He is already considering several ways of coping best with the new situation. For Thorir, as an owner of a private business, the challenge can be seen in approaching the destination with tourists. For him, paths and security issues are a big barrier if they want to reach the destination during the wintertime. Birna instead highlights that as the environmental agency is in charge of the waterfall Gullfoss, there are problems regarding the creation of a nice site that at the same time has to be able to attract and carry all the visitors. A more balanced relationship for the two aspects has to be found. Another challenge that is stressed is the ownership of the three sights. Àsborg states that as there are so many stakeholders, no real decisions towards a more sustainable development could be made. Svein agrees and points out that especially the Geysir area is affected by that as the government is only one of many stakeholders in that place. Therefore, authorized organizations by the government only have a small scope of freedom when it comes to realizing changes in development. This issue affects all involved in tourism along the value added chain. It is a big issue for this destination and leads to many barriers when it comes to changes.

What do you think could be done to improve the situation regarding a more sustainable development at the Golden Circle?

When being asked how to face the challenge of more and more visitors it was interesting to see that all experts see the necessity of taking action, even though frame work requirements such as the ownership issue make it a challenge. As all actors are involved in different parts of tourism along the value added chain, suggestions differ a lot. Sveinn thinks that they have to be better prepared to cope with negative environmental effects. He regards planning and designing the sites as a vital step to guaranty a long-lasting, successful tourism in this area. This idea is supported by Einar as well. He reaches even further and proposes that creating a management plan on how to deal with tourism issues would be useful. Regarding him, the situation now “[...] is more like the Wild West in a way”. Àsborg emphasizes that there has been enough talk about what could be done. For her, it is more important to get into action than just thinking and debating about what could be done. Also experts from the private sector see the need for a change in development. Mábil, stakeholder of the Geysir area and hotel

manager of Hotel Geysir, considers regional marketing and remembering the local values and traditions as an important point to improve the situation. With the involvement of more local businesses and organisations, the destination can, in her opinion, make a big step forward.

The broad range of different ways to approach a solution of the problem already shows that this is a comprehensive issue that cannot be solved by applying one or two randomly chosen instruments in this area. There are many different actors along the value added chain included and as there is such a broad range, many overlapping and sometimes interfering proposals of what could be best can be found. Åsberg states this as “a [sic!] endless story of struggle here in this area.” According to her, the problem deals with all aspects of improving the area: Who is in charge, the time of implementing changes and what exactly is supposed to and for what reason.

The whole industry of tourism on all levels in this destination is faced with challenges in tourism. All experts point out that there are demands for new approaches that feature several aspects regarding questions of tourism development. It can be seen that the scope of the topic is huge; many varying ideas came up towards a change in general.

7.3. Measures

Limitations: What do you think about restricting the number of visitors? Do you think restricting the access for cars/buses makes sense if they do not meet certain conditions? Why? / Why not?

After it was unveiled that there is a broad range of ideas on all levels existing, the next step was to get them into order and to ask for what in particular could be done towards more long term development in tourism that considers not only economic aspects. The idea of limiting visitors and/or cars was brought up as an example of relieving the area. Here it became obvious that tourism does play a huge role in the nation's economy. The majority argues that limitations would not be useful as there are not too many visitors yet and Berglind's opinion on that is money at this stage of development is needed more than anything else. Only Sveinn regards this as a possibility, but only as a future scenario that is very unlikely to happen. "[...] This is not any kind of government policy at the moment. Let's just say the number would increase to a million tourists, than you would get 100,000- just to explain. 100.000 tourists a day would not go, would it? [...] There could be days, you would have to say: 'It's full.' [...]" Åsborg is of the same opinion. Besides stating that this is not necessary yet, she also does not want to exclude any visitors and tell them to visit other areas. "[...]I cannot imagine that happen. I wouldn't want them to say that to me [...]" Einar's reasons against this are that tourism only faces too many tourists during the high peaks in summer up to now. On the contrary, Thorir states that the tourism sector is trying to extent the season now and wants to reach visitors during the whole year. What becomes clear here is that the number of visitors will definitely rise. Extending the season will lead to more visitors on the whole. Limitations of visitors and/or cars are not taken into account as tourism contributes a lot to the local economy and should not be limited as long as can be prevented. From that it can be concluded that limitations, neither of visitors nor of ways of entering the area, are supported at this stage of tourism development for this area.

Many tourists doing this tour are cruise ship passengers. They only stay between a couple of hours until 2 days. How can be dealt with them?

The next aspect that was researched for potential application was the matter of cruise ship tourists. A lot of travellers at the destination Golden Circle are cruise ship passengers. Hence it was aimed to find out how they could be considered for a more sustainable tourism development. It was not specifically asked for head taxes as some experts came up with this idea themselves. The general idea of what should be done regarding cruise ship tourism is

looked at instead. There was a broad set of opinions experts had. Mabil as a private actor in the value added chains considers cruise ship passengers as regular tourists and not as more pressure for the region. Therefore she does not think of dealing with them in particular. Sveinn's suggestion is about the organisation of arrival time and choice of harbour to spread the big cruise liners. Berglind instead as a tourist guide sees the amount of cruise ship tourists coming to the Golden Circle several times a week. She has another point of view on that. Therefore, in her opinion, a head tax makes sense because "[...] The only thing they [cruise ship passengers, remark by the author] are doing is the Golden Circle and that's about it." From her point of view a contribution of cruise ship passengers for preserving the area makes sense, for other actors, cruise ship tourists guarantee a safe source of income in asking for services in the area. Putting extra charges on one group in particular could reduce income on the whole. It can be seen that economic measures are also very important and since this branch has a lot potential for recovering the economy to the fullest, this chance is looked upon.

Is there any way your government could be involved to preserve the famous sights?

Another question was in how far the government could be involved and support the development at the sites, locally and nationally. In the interviews participants were asked what exactly the government could do to take a new course. It turns out that there are strong opinions on the fact that measures should be taken; suggestions for which ones exactly are few. As Einar states is the government "[...] always trying, but it seems always there is much more talk...more talk than walk. [...]". According to him marketing campaigns are strongly supported with financial means, but there are none to develop the infrastructure. On the one hand it can be said that this is due to the fact that tourism is regarded as a main pillar in the economy. Therefore many new travellers are tried to reach. On the other hand, it has to be stated once again, that the government does not have authorization in means of command at the sites. Àsborg mentions that "For some years it was the wish of the people here that the state would just buy the place, just buy it, take it and be responsible. But then the negotiation about the price was hard and at some state they were almost there and then the crisis came [...]" As all branches were affected during the crisis, no progress towards a different ownership solution could be made. However, one project has been instigated by the environmental agency that is an organisation by the government: An architecture competition in the area of the waterfall Gullfoss is supposed to give new stimuli in how to design it well for its future needs. It is going to start in September of this year. For Birna and Àsborg this is a good way of making progress in development. What is tried in this project is to involve many to get a pool of ideas. It can be seen that even though limits of action exist, there are possibilities of

approaching a new course. Also Thorir emphasizes that it is important to have many people involved. For him, a cooperation of the private and the governmental sector is needed as Iceland is in a combat for travellers with other destinations worldwide. In terms of support he is not only talking about monetary means, but also to get understanding what this industry is about.

To sum it up, it can be concluded that the impact the government can take in implementing new rules are restricted. Actors have this in mind and would like to see other approaches on developing the sites. Since there are not many alternatives provided on a governmental level yet, it can be said that development in tourism regarding other means than regulations is still at an early stage.

Cooperation: Do you think that the management along the main sights on the route could work closer together? Would it make sense to you and what could it look like?

Having the previous statements in what the government can do to be involved in preserving the sights, the idea of cooperation regarding management at the three sites is assessed positively. According to Mábil and Sveinn, there is cooperation on diverse levels already, but all experts state that it could be improved and enlarged. Even though the use of this control instrument might not be less complicated, as several stakeholders are part of this, it was preferred on the overall. Birna implies “to watch the big picture”, meaning that all kinds of organisations, enterprises and private stakeholders should be considered when trying to take a step towards a holistic development, even though it is difficult. Also Àsborg takes the complications into account, but states that cooperation in a “formal association” has the chance to actively take decisions.

VAKINN is a new method to rate businesses in the Icelandic tourism industry. Do you think it would be useful for you?

Another control instrument that was checked for possible application was the use of labelling at the example of VAKINN. Participants were asked to state their opinion whether it is useful for the development of a more sustainable tourism in this area. Not all experts know about this new label, as it just started this year. Those experts, who are familiar with this method, already take part and/or support it strongly. Àsborg is of the opinion that “it was about time to have some quality criteria here.” Just like the introduction of the architecture project at Gullfoss, she thinks that this is a step into the right direction of development. Iceland excursions, of which Thorir is one owner, received the regular and the environmental label as one of the first companies. He states that it was not easy, but that they are reaching for even higher levels,

also on environmental standards. According to him, many aspects have to be regarded to get the label. Seeing that the company is aiming for a higher level leads to the assumption that VAKINN has the chance to introduce a new level of quality regarding all three pillars of sustainability. As the instrument has not been running for a long time, not all experts knew about it and questioned in how far it can make a change. Einar's main criticism is about the economic profit in this industry. For him it is more a point of "What is in for them [the tour companies, remark of the author]?" Regarding him, only if VAKINN is implied on a broad level and sufficient time, it can make a change.

On the overall it can be said that VAKINN is not known among the whole chain as it just started and it also is looked at critically. This is due to the fact that economic sustainability is of high importance. Those who know it strongly support it and think it can raise quality in means of all three pillars of sustainable development.

Entrance fees: In what way do you think a fee could help preserving the area?

What was mentioned a lot without a specific question was the issue of monetary means. Regarding to the actors, it is not only the ownership issue for the sights that makes a more sustainable development difficult, it is also the lack of financial means. Einar points out that "It is all about the money!" The idea of raising money to enable a more sustainable development at the sites is the strongest supported instrument. Tourists making a contribution in monetary matters are acclaimed by the majority, even though it is emphasized that it can be complicated to introduce them. Reasons for the introduction of fees are that tourists have to make some kind of contribution to the places they visit. Einar highlights that it has to be looked at "that all kind of tourists need to pay sometimes for admittance, the toilets, the restaurants we are having". As there are many possibilities to raise money it is specifically looked upon entrance fees and whether actors think they can be useful in this case. This way of receiving financial means however, is a clash of positions. Àsborg clarifies that entrance fees could inure the benefit of the area and that they would be also accepted by foreigners. This opinion is supported by Berglind, who also gives a proposal on how an entrance fee could look like. She suggests gates at the entrances that only those can pass, who have a special pass for it. Thorir and Sveinn also glance at other destinations and their need for financial means as well. According to them, it is somewhat difficult and "not a right solution (Thorir) as there are many places in Iceland that need monetary means to develop. Even though it might be possible for the Golden Circle (Sveinn), also costs of having a staff for the fees and a payment system have to be regarded (Thorir). As for this topic many factors are inter related and for the experts the destination Golden Circle is just one of many sites to be preserved, no distinctive tendency on

whether entrance fees for this destination are eligible or not could be seen. There are no precise classifications or indicators that state which destination has what kind of needs. Birna utters that there is no management plan for the Gullfoss area yet. The same applies to the Geysir area as there are many stakeholders. Only for Thingvellir a management plan has been compiled, but tourism issues are only marginal covered. Hence, it is very difficult to find an approach on what exactly should be done. The diverse opinions on the instrument of entrance fees represent this.

The UNWTO is an international tourism organization that “supports biodiversity conservation, social welfare and economic security in the host countries and communities”. What do you think about joining an organization like this? Could you- from your point of view- profit from it?

The last control instrument that was being considered specifically was the chance of joining tourism organizations, such as the UNWTO. Experts were asked in how far they think participation would be useful and how they could profit from it. Statements were clear: Most experts did not know about this organisation and their reaction if in general membership could support development regarding all aspects was retained.

Berglind states that she has a general idea about what they are doing, but she has never really gotten into details. The same applies for other experts as well. What can be concluded is that the importance regarding a holistic development on several levels is minimal up to now. Approaches are carried out on a local level, but do not reach a further level yet.

Is there other measure you think of? Did I forget something?

One extra instrument that has not been specifically asked for, but which has been mentioned by experts during the course of the conversations, is the control instrument of planning. Participants stated that planning the areas of the three sights has to be done. This encompasses management plans and thinking ahead of what is estimated to come during the next years. Looking at the aforementioned aspect that there are no clear statements on what has to be done, it gives a hint on why there are many ideas, but very little implementation. Àsborg explains it like this: “Until now, we have been just putting band aid always on the planning.” In other words, planning was just done on a short distanced level and not carried out for development in the long run. Regarding to that, Birna states that next to the architecture competition at Gullfoss also a management plan is to be compiled soon. Next to this issue, a simplification of some authorization issues might be introduced as well. According to Birna, there might be an institutional change for the national park Thingvellir. This would result in an easier implementation regarding planning aspects.

What is connected with planning the area is the development of infrastructure. Also this instrument is mentioned by experts as growth in tourism takes place. They state that infrastructure is not sufficient at the moment in comparison to tourist numbers and therefore experts are concerned about paths and facilities. Suggested tools to handle tourists are visitor direction and enlarging facilities that can carry more travellers. According to Birna, experts know “that the infrastructure in the area is not enough for all those people that are visiting”. Ways of enlarging facilities and introducing measures, such as one-way paths, are also recommended by Åsberg in order to cope with the rising traffic. Therefore, she recommends a holistic plan on planning and designing the area. Also safety manners are covered by that.

As a summary, none of those two possible instruments in preserving an area were specifically asked, but stated among all the experts. From that can be drawn that there is a vast demand regarding those two aspects of development. Especially the frame instrument of planning, that justifies the action for an idea, seems to be essential.

This section of measures pointed out that even though there is a scope put on the instruments asked for, there is still a lot of discussion within each instrument and how it could be applied best. As there are no numbers or indicators that provide scientific evidence for necessary development, measuring on what is really needed is possible. Impressions on what can be done are therefore only subjective and lead to a vast amount of proposals of what could be best for each site. The first of measuring has been implied with VAKINN.

8. Summary and interpretation

Several different and cross-linked control instruments in tourism for a more sustainable development were introduced. It could be seen that there are differences between measures in theory and in practise. This part now will sum up and interpret results that were achieved.

In the first part of this essay, control instruments were introduced and set into context to the destination Golden Circle. Rules and regulations that can be implemented by the government were presented in the beginning. The example was made at restricting the area. As empiricism has shown, this is not as easy as suggested because of ownership issues at the three sights. The authority of the government, not only on the local, but also on the national level, is limited. Many other stakeholders, especially in the Geysir area, have authority as well. Therefore implementations of new laws, rules and regulations are partial possible and only work if everyone agrees. Besides that, experts claimed that there is no necessity for any limitations as there are not too many visitors at the sites up to now.

After that, the supporting control instrument of capacity building at the example of governmental organizations was looked at. As stated, does Iceland already have an organization that covers tourism issues on the whole. The tourist board as a specialised organisation can take care of that as far as it has authorization. Non-specialised governmental institutions in tourism such as the prime ministry for the national park Thingvellir and the environmental agency for the waterfall Gullfoss and partly of the Geysir area are running those places as far as freedom of action allows. As all of them are tied up to the law and only have limited authorization, it is difficult to encourage another development in tourism for the sights. The interviews showed that there are many suggestions and ideas on how a more sustainable development could be supported, but as long as the sites are governed by several institutions and include many private stakeholders as well, there are limits on what these governmental organisations can realise.

To get yet another approach on how to make a change, control instruments based on voluntary participation, instigated by the government were introduced. In that context, experts were asked what cooperation regarding management issues could look like.

One example for that is the implication of a round table that deals with the organisation of management for the Golden Circle. This requires experts with a lot of knowledge, but not many financial means or facilities. The advantage of this instrument is also that if actors take part voluntary, they see the actual progress. The fact that more cooperation in management aspects

along the three sights is needed was clearly stated by the actors in the conversations is an advantage. In comparison to what can actually be achieved by using control instruments of command, this instrument does not seem to have strictly limited freedom of action and was also supported by participants.

Theory also took a closer look at the voluntary control instrument of commitment and agreement. It was not explicitly researched during the empirical part of the essay, but as interviewed actors stated that action is needed and cooperation can be enlarged, this control instrument suggests that it is also not as narrow in its possibilities as regulatory measures. Another example for commitment was shown on a holistic level, such as the UNWTO and the global code of ethics. Few experts knew the organisation and their principles. Hence, their opinion on it regarding profiting in means of sustainable tourism development was restrained because of that.

The last voluntary control instrument that was presented, was labelling at the example of VAKINN. Theory explained the way VAKINN works and how it tries to aim at all three pillars of sustainable development. Actors along the value added chain that are taking part or know about it in detail strongly supported this instrument as it seems to be able to raise the standard of quality in ecological, socio-cultural and economic means. What was mentioned, however, is that this might take time to be fully recognized, but could, if applied in combination with other instruments be successful.

Fiscal instruments are examples of how monetary means can lead towards a more sustainable development at this destination. The example of entrance fees in theory showed that a study carried out the willingness of visitors to contribute to the development. In practice fiscal instruments were strongly supported, but the type of instruments that is to be imposed differed among all experts. Whether it is a tax, like the accommodation or head tax, to be imposed on all visitors coming to Iceland or an entrance fee especially for the sites could not be decided on. Both types have their pro's and contra's. What was stated clearly was that economic instruments are needed to have the monetary means towards a start of a more sustainable development.

Also the issue of cruise ship tourists is considered in this essay. Theory explained the head tax on cruise ship passengers at the example of Belize. During the interviews, participants were asked for if they regarded cruise ship tourism as a special challenge at the Golden Circle. Opinions on this were varied on a broad range from seeing them as regular visitors to putting a special head tax on them. It could be seen that cruise ship tourists are frequent visitors of the

destination, but perceived divergently. A private business owner looks at them as a good chance for economic sustainability; an actor involved in environmental matters recognises effects on nature and its sustainability.

One control instrument that was not covered in theory, but mentioned by all actors, was the idea of planning the areas. The governmental organisations already take care of improving the infrastructure as far as limitations of the law enable them. All participants stated the need for facilities that can carry the amount of tourists. In order to know how many tourists a site can carry however, measurement is needed. This is what was covered in theory at the example of indicators. To be able to state what has to be done, it has to be checked first what can be reached within the scope of possibilities and what not. Indicators are a first impression of that and can lead to what planning regarding facilities and paths can look like.

Connected with these measures is a holistic management plan. Theory showed that only in Thingvellir a management plan exists and even there, it does not cover tourism as a special topic. As the interviews have shown, experts state that planning is connected to design and improve infrastructure at the sites. A holistic management plan requires governmental authorization that enables intervention. As this is not the status, good cooperation of governmental organizations and private actors is needed to get there.

What has been proven with no doubt in the interviews is that the destination Golden Circle is in a severe need for another course in development in tourism. It can be concluded that the demand for action has been realized. Actors along the value added chain are open minded and committed to several approaches. Many ideas and possible solutions towards a more sustainable development are existing. Nevertheless, control instruments that look suitable in theory, might not be eligible for this destination in practise. Reasons for this are frame requirements that the government cannot influence (yet), such as ownership of the site. As long as no change in the institutional framework requirements regarding authorization can be made, it is very difficult to not only find solutions towards a more sustainable development, but to also implement them. As many stakeholders are included, it is very difficult to find compromises all actors can live with as all have varying interests which do not cover all three aspects of sustainable development to the same extent.

Another important fact is that there are no measures or indicators yet, that give a scientific background on what demands and needs each site of the Golden Circle has. Therefore, suggestions can only be made on a subjective level and as there are many participants involved, the range of what could be done how and when is too vast to result in precise concepts. With the introduction of VAKINN, a first approach has been made to start measuring quality in tourism.

9. Recommendations of action

As now several control instruments have been balanced in theory and empiricism and conclusions made, recommendations of action can be drawn from that for this destination.

The ownership issue has a lot of influence on what can be achieved regarding a more sustainable development in this area and what cannot. Therefore recommendations of actions have to be made according to that.

What is recommended is the use of voluntary instruments. The control instrument of capacity building in combination with means of cooperation is proposed. What the government can do, is to encourage more actors and shareholders to take part for example in a round table that deals with development issues at the three sights.

This instrument is recommended, in particular to create basic frameworks. Missing management plans in tourism can be gathered and progress to a holistic plan according to each sites necessities' can be made. Involving as many participants as possible makes decisions not easier, but choices can be made and finally implemented. Therefore changes are possible.

Moreover it is possible to approach the demand for development on a new level. Taking the instrument of indicators as one example of measuring the limits of tourism into account as well, it declares specific needs and precise demands for each site of the Golden Circle regarding tourism development. Once this framework is set up, it is advised to get an idea of continuative instruments to get the whole picture in making progress in all means of a more sustainable development. Then it is sensible to state whether limitations on visitors and/or vehicles on a site are useful or not.

The second recommendation is the aspect of agreement and commitment. As no regulation can be put upon certain types of tours or treating a site, volunteer commitment of actors along the value added chain can be helpful. By signing a memorandum of understanding or letter of intent, there is no legal binding. Nevertheless, it is more than just a document of symbolic meaning and can actually help to make progress in sustainability means. Also the holistic approach of making a commitment regarding world-wide codes, such as the global code of ethics, is supportive. Stating that means of a long-term development regarding future generations is important, directs attention on broader aims.

The instrument of labelling, VAKINN, is the first approach to measure a standard of quality. It already includes some aspects of commitment regarding all three pillars of sustainability as well. This sign of commitment towards certain standards is recommended to be spread even more among the whole value added chain and try to involve as many actors in tourism as possible. On the condition that labelling for VAKINN continues to be performed professional and regarding the characteristics mentioned in the beginning, a new standard of quality for the whole tourism sector in Iceland can be approached. Therefore, also the destination Golden Circle, including all of its actors, can profit from it. It is suggested to stick to this new measure and enlarge it as far as possible on the tourism industry in Iceland.

Depending on the creation of framework requirements, instruments such as financial means are suggested to be considered to make a start in preparing the area regarding infrastructural aspects. A decision on how to introduce fees has to be made. Whether it is regarding cruise ship passengers in particular with a head tax or a tax on all travellers in Iceland has to be claimed. Since numbers of cruise ship tourists have been growing exceptionally high during the last 20 years (cp. 5.7), however, it is highly recommended to take a closer look at the issue of a head tax for cruise ship passengers. The example of Belize can be altered for this region. Having a round table or a comparable group for tourism management issues including sustainable aspects at this destination, the Golden Circle can profit from it as this tour is part of the program by many cruise ship companies.

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- Image 3: The magic pentagon pyramid of sustainable development in tourism, altered by the author, according to: Müller, Hansruedi, 1993: Nachhaltigkeit im Tourismus- Auf der Suche nach einer neuen Tourismusethik, presentation manuscript, Bern, extracted from: Müller, Hansruedi, 2007, Tourismus und Ökologie- Wechselwirkungen und Handlungsfelder, 3rd edition, Freyer, Walter (edt.): Lehr- und Handbücher zu Tourismus, Verkehr und Freizeit, R. Oldenbourg Verlag, Munich/Vienna
- Image 4: VAKINN endorsed travel service (access on August 15th 2012)
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Tables

- Table 1: altered by the author, according to: The Icelandic Travel Industry Association (SAF), 2012a: Numbers of cruise ships in Reykjavik harbour, Tourism Industry/Statistics 2012, brochure
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- Picture 1 to 14: taken by the author on July 18th 2012 at the sites

Others

- Hansson*, 2012: personal talk with a member of the Icelandic Travel Industry Association, May 2012, (*name changed as this person wished to be anonymous)

Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich an Eides Statt, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbstständig und ohne unerlaubte Hilfe angefertigt, andere als die angegebenen Quellen nicht benutzt und die den benutzten Quellen wörtlich oder inhaltlich entnommenen Stellen als solche kenntlich gemacht habe.

Reykjavik, 23. August 2012

(Unterschrift)

Appendix

Guideline

Name of Expert: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Position of the Expert in the enterprise: _____

Interviewer: _____ Transcript writer: _____

Icebreaker

1. What are your tasks at _____?
2. You are _____. Could you tell me more about your professional career?

Destination Golden Circle

3. Iceland's economy has high shares in tourism and the Golden Circle is one of the most visited destinations in the country. What could be reasons for this?
4. How do you think this trend will develop?
5. What does it mean for you?

Future development

6. Are there any challenges this destination has to face in the future? What do you think they are?
7. What do you think could be done to deal with/improve the situation? Are you satisfied with the current process? Why?/Why not?
8. Are there any measures that you think need to be introduced? What has to be done to keep the attraction, but to preserve the area at the same time?

Measures

There are several ways to think about preserving the area, but to still attract guests. Next to those mentioned already what do you think about these?

9. Limitations: What do you think about restricting the number of visitors?
10. Limitations: Do you think restricting the access for cars/buses makes sense if they don't meet certain conditions? Why?/Why not?
11. Many tourists doing this tour are cruise ship passengers. They only stay between a couple of hours until 2 days. How can be dealt with them?
12. Cooperation: Do you think that the management along the main sights on the route could work closer together? Would it make sense to you and what could it look like?
13. Entrance fees: In what way do you think a fee could help preserving the area?
14. Is there anyway your government could be involved to preserve the famous sights?
15. VAKINN is a new method to rate businesses in the Icelandic tourism industry. Do you think it would be useful for you?
16. Why would you support this? Why not? If you think this is a good idea, what could it look like in your enterprise?
17. The UNWTO is an international tourism organization that "supports biodiversity conservation, social welfare and economic security in the host countries and communities". What do you think about joining an organization like this? Could you- from your point of view- profit from it?
18. Is there other measure you think of? Did I forget something?

Interviews

Expert Interview with Einar (interpretive officer) from the national park Thingvellir

Saturday, August 11th 2012

Phone interview

K: For a start, I would like to get general knowledge about task at Thingvellir. What are you doing?

E: My task is, well my official title is interpretative planner or interpretive officer or something like that. But, we are quite few, we are only four on the fulltime stuff there, so we basically do anything that we need to, we basically do common simple tasks to more managerial/administration work and specialist work as well. We take care of the national park at all levels.

K: How did you get into this position? What did your career look like?

E: I applied to this post ten years ago. My background is that I am a geographer and landscape architect.

K: Iceland's economy now has high shares in tourism and the Golden is one of the most visited destinations in the country. What do you think are the reasons for this?

E: There are probably a number of reasons. The key is that is the first historical tourist route in Iceland that people would visit- Thingvellir, Geysir and Gullfoss. So these sites are very established. So, these sites have been visited for more than 200 years. One could first say that history, the time has helped to kind of cement these sites as tourist sites. But then, of course, the modern tourist wants to have a day tour out of Reykjavik. So this is a very good tourist route that you have really good kind of show things to people. You drive only forty minutes, then you are in Thingvellir, you have the scenic and splendid views of Thingvellir, and the historical sites and all of that. Then you drive 30-40 minute more and you drive to the Geysir hot spring and then you drive to Gullfoss. So, I think you have all the elements for a good tour for tourists, you have historical sites, splendid landscapes, you have hot springs, you have a waterfall. So I think on one tour a lot of what Iceland has to offer. So that is why the Golden Circle is so popular and also because all the tourists that come to Iceland, they usually come to the South coast. It is the number one area for tourists. All of Iceland is enjoying the mass tourist, the increasing tourism and it is the south and south-west of Iceland that enjoys it the most. That what most of the tourists visit. Therefore, it is so popular. It is located in a mass tourism area.

K: How do you think is this trend going to develop?

E: It seems like the tourist companies focus a lot on this on this Golden Circle. Now you can do this Circle in different ways, in a helicopter, with bike companies, you can do in super-jeeps. There is already development in explore and enjoy the Golden Circle. And that is just in the last five or ten years that they are making more use of the Golden Circle and things. I think, there is, if it goes, I mean, if it continues, there is the development that tourists are crowding at the Golden Circle. It is obvious that this is going to be. I mean, it is already overcrowded at times, both in terms of infrastructure and also in terms of what you are experiencing. I think, in many ways, if this is going to continue, all of this, the sites need to kind of make infrastructure better and more capable to cope with it.

K: Would you regard this as some kind of challenge that Thingvellir and the Golden Circle is facing?

E: I know Thingvellir very well and I know that this is a very big challenge for us because just this summer was a very big increase in tourism. We saw this summer for the first time that many of our parking lots were constantly full. And it was very hard for the buses to move around in the parking lot. That is a big challenge for us on how to stir all the traffic. Are we going to move the traffic away from the main site and get big buses to shuttle the people back and forth in the key period or are we going to just extend the parking lots? It is faced with some challenges already. And now, we are also working on the viewpoint Hakid. There is some work being done on enlarging facilities and some design work being done. So we are trying to face the challenge.

K: What else could be done to improve the development of tourism at this site?

E: So, for Thingvellir, one should look more into some larger tourist management plan and plans for Thingvellir. So we could kind of work towards it. But today, it is more like the Wild West in a way.

K: And next to the ways and solutions you already mentioned, do you think that also limitations of visitors could be useful?

E: Well, I don't think we have the...See, at Thingvellir we have the challenge of the peak in the summer time. It's many tourists in the summer time. But then there are less tourists in the winter. But there are tourists every day of the day. I think the challenge is to make all the accessible the whole year and so the tourists that come in winter can enjoy it as much as in the summer. But, I think, it is hard for the Thingvellir part to really step in and to stir a way. It is very hard, and not only a Thingvellir issue. It is more of a holistic issue in Iceland how you stir and manage tourists. It's like with the cruise line ships. I mean, there are 70,000 cruise line tourists who come to Reykjavik harbour every year or this year. Or 80,000. I don't know how many it

were. And almost all of them, most of them, they visit Thingvellir. So this is one sector of tourism and that needs to, for example, co-offer it better with all the sights they're visiting.

K: Do you think that in a way all the management along the main sights, like Gullfoss, Geysir and Thingvellir, could work closer together? Would it make sense to you?

E: In general, obviously, in a co-operation of all kinds. But it is everywhere a little different. Like in Geysir that is almost a private enterprise. They have basically built up the infrastructure in accordance with how many tourists they are getting. So they manage to do that. And at Gullfoss, they do not have the problems with parking lots or the shop. It is more like the trails in the area that needs to be worked there. For example, some of the trails at Gullfoss are the bottleneck of the flow of tourists because it is all about the tourists moving from one place to another. Not only from Reykjavik to Gullfoss, Geysir and Thingvellir. They also have to move within the sights. And sometimes it is very hard to change the pattern of the mass tourism. It is quite a challenge. The organization is just on its own. Just like when we had to close the rift just below the view point. It was closed this winter because of the construction of the bridge. The tourist companies they had a lot of problems in the beginning about altering the tours. And they were not happy and all of that. But you could also see that they could, they can change their pattern if they are...if they need to (laughs). But not unless they are almost forced to do it.

K: Money is also needed to preserve an area...

E: It is all about the money! This is maybe also not the challenge, but...the strange thing about this is we are supposed to accommodate more and more tourists, but we are not allowed to get any penny from them or anything. So we don't get values from the tourists that we are supposed to accommodate. By the tourists themselves and the tourist companies. They guarded very well, they will not pay for entrance fee or anything like that. I think the tourism industry in Iceland also needs to –in general- learn to respect that all kind of tourists need to pay sometimes for admittance, the toilets, the restaurants we are having. All kind of issues, the toilets: The tourists will refuse to use our bathrooms, but we want to extend our facilities. But then, it costs money and then it's the usual pace. It's a big hustle because it slows down the flow of traffic and tourists will just become mad and so.... It's a more of a holistic, tough challenge to approach this sector.

K: Is there any way you think the government could be involved to bring those developments forward?

E: Yes, they are always trying, but it seems always there is much more talk...more talk than walk. Also with the goal, there is 800 Million ISK put into a marketing campaign for Iceland, but there is zero money put into infrastructure. It doesn't make any sense sometimes. So, I think,

people are always more and more going how about bringing people to Iceland than caring for them and about the administration.

K: Now, another approach or solution that could maybe help a little: Have you heard of VAKINN already, the qualification for services in the tourism industry? Do you think it would make sense and be applied by facilities close to Thingvellir, like the camping site? Would it be useful for tours to be rated on the environmental level to keep track of preserving the area?

E: I mean, obviously, if it is the motive of VAKINN is to safe guard the quality of the services provided and also to safe guard the environment, it obviously makes sense to have people sign up for it. But it seems like, you know, many think that...I don't know how VAKINN works in terms of signing up and pay for being part of it. Is it like that?

K: Yes, it's like this. You apply and with the application you have to turn in a lot of documents, have to pay an application fee and an annual fee.

E: I mean all the tour companies they are always looking after money. That's what. Money talks and bullshit walks. That is: What is in for them? So, I'm sure that it's for them not be involved like that. I'm sure there is money involved. But, it can help, you know. Help to have the tourist companies distinguish, but also think about the environmental, etc. But for that, I haven't actually looked into VAKINN, so I can't answer it correctly. I just heard about that. But I'm sure if they get leading companies in tourism into it, they will others following up. It takes probably time.

K: Considering Thingvellir: Do you think that a higher restriction of zoning the area would be useful?

E: I think, just by putting good infrastructure, you can just tell by Thingvellir. If the infrastructure is okay and it's clear where they are supposed to go, they don't want to walk off too much the trails. I noticed that even though we saw more tourists, they stick to the trails. So, I think by having the pick-up and drop-off areas where people are crowding and then the lines between those sights, if they are proper and wide enough and accommodate people, less tourists wander off the trails. So then, maybe restrictions shouldn't come in or zoning, but we know that there are also areas like that. At Hakid that is showing signs of people wandering off the view point and they are going for example for some quieter ways to the South of the main view point and we've been trying to stop that now. This summer we have basically put no walking signs just to prevent this southern part of the view point to be trotted on. Because we see the necessities. We need to close of certain areas. But in general, you almost have to map out the areas where tourists are. There is kind of crowding, where they are pick-up and dropped-off. We need to make those areas proper and well, somewhat good. So they have space enough to crowd upon. You need to do almost both to make sure the infrastructure and the flow is okay, but then there are areas they are trotten upon are being locked up.

K: Do you also think that it would make sense to only allow access to the whole area, not only Thingvellir, if certain conditions regarding the technology of cars and buses, the year and the amount of pollution were met? Would it make sense to you?

E: (sighs) well, in theory, I think it is more beautiful that we could do something like that. But in practical sense I don't see it happen. I think smaller things would maybe help. Quite often, cars at Thingvellir, for example, they stop and drop people off, they keep the engines running, while they are there. Simple things like that would maybe help. That would maybe be the start, I would say. But I think it would be quite hard to enforce rigid measures that you can only do the Golden Circle in a hydrogen bus or whatever. I don't think this is possible.

K: The last question: Have you heard about the UNWTO, that...

E: I have heard of it, but I have not read much about it.

K: In general, Iceland is not a member yet, but do you think joining an organization like this, could be useful?

E: I'm not sure because this in a way...I cannot answer this, I am not an expert in this field. I don't know how it works, if it would have positive or negative effects. We are a national park and it does not necessarily address tourists, even though our key customers are tourists. We safeguard the national park at all levels and make it accessible to others, for science and make sure this is run in a sustainable way of management. I'm not a specialist for tourists at that level. I know how tourism affects us locally at Thingvellir, but I cannot answer if this would help at all in Iceland.

Expert Interview with Sveinn (environmental manager) at the Icelandic Tourist Board (Ferðamálastofa)

Monday, August 13th 2012

Personal interview

K: What are your tasks, what is the job you are doing?

S: We are trying to improve environmental quality, I would say in tourist destinations and with little means that we have (laughs). The problem has been there's been very little money and few people. So, I have the title environmental manager for the tourist board, I'm the only here that works on that. But that position was already established in 1994 or 95 which is unusual for tourist board in European countries. Normally, those tasks would be given to the environmental agency or something like that. But of course they are working as well. The environmental agency only works on those areas that are protected and of course those areas are the most important ones. So what we have been doing is we have been giving grants. We have a certain amount of money each year to give out grants.

K: And they are accessible for every destination here in Iceland?

S: Anybody can apply, but it's mostly for areas that are opened or managed by some sort of public authorities. But also, private can apply, but then the destination needs to be accessible for all. It's not just for the company, so to speak.

K: What is your career, what did you do before?

S: I'm a landscape architect. I used to work on designing some of the destinations before; I came from the other side, from designing destination to looking at other people's design, seeing if they are ok. So I have also worked a lot with planning. This has been my contribution since I got here. It is to try to bring up the quality of environmental planning and design. I think that's the most important thing.

K: What do you think are the reasons why the Golden Circle is the most popular destination in Iceland?

S: Obviously, it has Geysir, the national park Thingvellir. I think those two are the sort of iconic destinations for Iceland. And also it's been marketed for so long. Geysir has been a tourist destination for centuries. Also Thingvellir in a way, but of course it has a special meaning for us Icelanders more than I guess for foreigners because they are sort of sacred sights. But with Thingvellir becoming a UNESCO world heritage site, the profile of Thingvellir must have gone up. Gullfoss of course is also a very popular destination and has been for centuries as well. And I think it's similar to...Let's say, if you go to Paris, you go to the Eiffel tower, won't you? And I

would say Geysir is our Eifel tower (laughs). If you come to Iceland, you go to Geysir. It seems to be very difficult to change. One of our tasks here is to try to spread the tourists a bit more around the country and so what we are trying to do, is to bring up the quality on other destinations in order for tourists to go to those places. Maybe to decrease the sort of pressure we have on some of the current main destinations, such as Geysir. But then we have other problems with Geysir. Mostly, this has to do with ownership. Because Geysir is only 30% in ownership of the government und under the environment agency. The environment agency and us, there is a limit on what we can do, we always need to have the landowner approval for anything, any suggestions we make. This has been an ongoing debate for probably 50 years or so. Hopefully, we have been so close to solving it many times and hopefully, they will now.

K: How is the tourism going to develop at the Golden Circle? What will it look like?

S: Well, the trend seems to be that is goes with the percentage of tourists that come to Iceland. It stays the same percentage that goes to the Golden Circle. And probably for these or these reasons. Anyone that comes to Iceland wants to see Geysir, so I guess when we get tourists coming for the second or third time, and then we can direct them to other places (laughs). I think, at least at present time that will continues, it will probably grow and the number of tourists will increase with the number of tourists that come to Iceland. That is my feeling.

K: Which consequences could it have? What does it mean for the Golden Circle?

S: Obviously, we already see in many that it can have a negative environmental effect on those tourist destinations. So, what we need to do is to be better prepared and in my opinion, the best thing is to have good plans. And good design in order to cope with the number of tourist that come to these places. Then, maybe if it continues this way, we might have to consider some sort of limitations.

K: Limitations, in what way?

S: Well, you know, this is not any kind of government policy at the moment. Let's just say the number would increase to a million tourists, than you would get 100,000- just to explain. 100.000 tourists a day would not go, would it? 50,000 probably not, you know, just to get an idea. Then we need to think how many tourists can each site sustain per day or per year? Of course, it could come to the point when there are just too many. This is something we have discussed, both here and in the environment agency and also the Association of tourist operations. What do we do then? There could be days, you would have to say: "It's full." But of course, we hope, it does not come to that. We have examples, let's say from Yellowstone Park, which is a similar area to Geysir. The old faithful Geysir there. They have considerable more tourists coming there every year than we do here in Geysir. The way they solve that is of course with just good sign, good design, good management, good planning. If we follow that, then I think we hopefully can solve any problems that might come up.

K: Is there any other idea or thought how to cope with that in another way, except for just limitations regarding visitors? Such as making the area just accessible for special car or buses? Would it make sense?

S: That is a part of the planning procedure. Any ideas like this would be- to me- a part of the planning procedure. Planning and design. And also I like to have a one-way system of walking. That you only walk one way, so you're not getting the tourists coming back the same way. That is one way to manage the traffic through the signs and is one part of the planning and designing process really. So that is another thing that we are considering.

K: Regarding the cruise ship tourists: They are a huge percentage of all tourists doing the Golden Circle. They only stay between a couple of hours until 2 days. How can be dealt with them? Is there any way how you could deal with them in particular?

S: If was on the Golden Circle on the 18th of June, when we had all of these tourists, probably 10,000 tourists coming in and a big percentage of them went on the Golden Circle tour. They managed that day very well. I thought that there were no big problems. And for what I could see was that tourists seemed happy and also the staff. I couldn't see big problems on the sights themselves. So with good organization, making sure that not all the tourists come in on the same time that solves a lot. But another thing that we need to maybe ensure, is that we don't get so many boats on the same day to the same harbour. I know the harbour authorities are looking at a system where incoming cruise ships can see. It's like a red, yellow and green sort of system. They can see how the situation and condition is in each harbour and if it's red, it show that there's just so many boats already planned for that day that it might be better to pick another harbour first before they come to them. So with that sort of system, I know that has been used both in Norway and Greenland, I'm hoping they will pick that sort of system. And hopefully, then, we have less pressure.

K: In the beginning you said that money is a big issue. You are trying to get money in, but it does not really work yet. What about entrance fees for the sites? Do you think it could be use useful?

S: Well, if I can say my personal opinion, then I think there are a few main destinations that maybe could or should do that. But doesn't solve the problem for most of the other destinations because just having a system of payment would be more expensive than the money you get in most of the destinations. Because most destinations do not have that many tourists, but it costs almost as much to maintain them, even with less tourists. Especially if you take the East, the North and the West fjords. For the Golden Circle, I would say, it probably would solve their problems to have an entrance fee. (pauses) There have been so many committees working on that and coming up with what should be the policy. What we have now, is the result of all of that. We can debate if that is right or wrong. That's what we are

facing at the moment. But I think places like Geysir, Thingvellir and Gullfoss are all places that could easily have an entrance fee. How you would work that, is a different story: Whether it's, let's say one card with which you can access all of them or if you pay in each place or if you just pay for going to use the services such as toilets or parking areas or things like that. That is another issue. Thingvellir has started payments into toilets and I think parking areas. I know the other destinations have been considering it. But, in my opinion, this does not work in every destination. Then, we do not know what effect there will be. The Golden Circle I think, since we are just talking about that, is the easiest sort of tourist trip to do this. And then again, I think the buses could have a card, you know you pay a certain amount to access all of them. That might be the easiest way to be smooth and not cause some problems in the entrance of each location. So that's a debate that has to be taken. But I personally, I have always been for that possibility, so to speak. But of course, depending on how it's executed.

K: You also said that, regarding the entrance fees and the ownership of the three sites, that there are some issues. Do you think that a better cooperation between the three sights could enable a better development for a more holistic tourism?

S: In my experience, I think all of those sights, like Thingvellir, Gullfoss and Geysir, have good cooperation between them. I know they let each other know if they have some peaks. Of course, you can always improve on that and make that better. But with Geysir, it's a special issue because the government has been meaning to buy the land for a long, long time. And landowners have been willing to sell it, but only for a given price. And that price has always been too high for the government. When the government wants to do something since it owns 30%, it has problems because it cannot do anything without the approval of all the landowners and they will not do anything until the land has been sold, basically for the right price. So we have been stuck with a situation where we cannot plan or design or make the improvement that we would like to in the area. You probably need to send me this before I sign it. This is a very sensitive issue and something from me could even cause a stir (laughs).

K: Now a different approach: VAKINN. Do you think it would be useful for tours that are doing the Golden Circle or even for the facilities to take part in it in order to take a different course in tourism development?

S: That is what we want and we hope they will all take part in it. That is the objective. So, we hope that as many tourist operators will participate. Also the destinations. But at the moment, VAKINN has only just started, so the best for you is to talk to Àsborg. I think we had a good start with it and then we are optimistic that in not so long time, we will have the majority of tour operators using VAKINN. I know there have been discussions about certain places such as the national park that they have their own rules about who can operate within the national parks. One of the things that the operators might need to fulfil is to have VAKINN, the environmental

quality system in place for their own company. Just doing that, that little thing could mean a big change, especially in Vatnajökull national park. We might be able to get rid of those causing damage in the region.

K: Now the last question: The UNWTO is an international tourism organization that “supports biodiversity conservation, social welfare and economic security in the host countries and communities”. What do you think about joining an organization like this? Could you- from your point of view- profit from it?

S: I have always supported joining. This is probably something you need to ask my boss (laughs). I think the problem is cost or they feel they are not getting enough back. My gut feeling is that they feel that this is more for countries that are less developed. So I know that many of the Nordic countries are either, Denmark for example, is not a member. So, I am not exactly sure what the reasons are, but I think they are doing well without it or something like that. I do not know what the exact reason is. I did ask and I got the answer that this was not going to happen. At least not that year when I asked. Maybe this year (laughs).

K: Is there any other measure you could think of to make the tourism in the area of the Golden Circle more sustainable?

S: Well, you know, there is of course many things. When we talk about sustainability, we are talking about many things: We are talking about the environmental sustainability and also the social and the economic. I would think that at least when it comes to profit, they are economic sustainable but whether that profit is put in place in improving the environmental... I don't know. Then, how do I answer this? I think we could do with- like in Iceland in general, we could do with better public transport, we could do with better cycling facilities in order to get to places or between places. That is one of the things that we have been working on. And of course using cars that run on energy or methane and also for the sights themselves to consider. But that's a part of VAKINN, really. I would think that if both tour operators and the managers of the sites, if they take up VAKINN, then I think we've come a long way already because it's all included in that system. So that is our objective at the moment, to get as many as possible involved in that. And that goes also for car rental companies, taxi companies, and bus companies, those that are polluting the most. We already see a change, for example, this office is running on the same VAKINN principles and me for example, if I need to go anywhere and I call a taxi, I only call for an environmental friendly taxi. It has to run on methane or electricity or whatever. And I can see that many other institutions and companies are starting to do that. The environment agency, they have I think a ban on anything else, you have to use that. And then we see a change. The companies react to the demand. So you see more cars running on methane. So, I think this is only the beginning and we're gonna see, it always takes two or three years to really start running. So in about two or three years' time, I think we're gonna

already see a big change towards sustainability, both in companies and destinations and in general for the tourism in Iceland.

Expert Interview with Ásborg (director of tourism) in the Geysir area

Monday, August 13th 2012

Personal interview

K: In the beginning I would like to know what your tasks are here.

A: That's a complicated question. I have the title which is in English often translated as director of tourism or something like that for the area. I work for four communities. The things I do, they are of great variety, I have the businesses. If you have a new idea and you want to start a business, I come and help you. I advise the municipalities about how to build up the infrastructure and things like that. I apply for money, try to find money, like funds and grants. That's a lot of work in that. And for the companies, it's just what they need help with. It can be from just writing a letter or whatever. Good advice, especially for the new ones. If they need advice, I help regarding: what do I do? Where can I start? And so on. Of course the people here are always developing their products and always building up new things, so it continues. Because the area is one of the most popular in the country and so there are many people with ideas. There are so many people coming into the area, it's a lot of variety of things that we do here. I have been here for several years and the tourism is growing, the products are growing. I wished this would be a big office and many people doing this. Also events, lots of my work is helping out with events, both companies and municipalities and associations and stuff like that. Every year, there are more and more events. It's about everything. Also material-like: Brochures, maps, I have a website, facebook.

K: How did you get into this position? What was your career before?

A: I lived in Reykjavik for a long time. I have been in the business ...always. I don't remember when I was not. I was working in the Iceland tourist bureau, the bus terminal, I have been working in hotels, but most of the time, I was in the Iceland tourist bureau, in the congress department before I came here.

K: Now let's get to the Golden Circle: Iceland's economy has high shares in tourism at the Golden Circle. What do you think are reasons for its popularity?

A: It's all about nature of course. Those pearls, they have attracted tourists since the 13th century or something like that. We have saying about Geysir. It is mostly Geysir. We have waterfalls everywhere in the country, but the sprouting Geysir was the beginning of everything. So I think that was the greatest attraction. Somehow, like nowadays, it is of course many other destinations that have been building up and trying to attract, but I think it is also the closeness to their income in the country-closest to Keflavik, to Reykjavik, accessible all year, all this

matters. But of course, it's just nature. Just people want to see. Geysir is famous and has been for such a long time and gives his name to all the geysers.

K: How do you think this is going to develop in the future?

A: As it has been developing the last years now, I'm sure that tourist numbers will continue this way. That's why I think we have to plan. Because it's been growing, it is just as the people visit's to Iceland grow, the traffic in this area grows and I don't know why it should change. Sometimes people say one day it's too crowded, I want to see something else, but still. That's how it goes all over the world. If there is a nature phenomenon, people want to see it.

K: Do you think there are any challenges you have to face? Which are they?

A: A lot of challenges. Mostly, I think we have to of course prepare the area. We have to face it that those people are coming and they will be more and more. Until now, we have been just putting band aid always on the planning. But I think now we have to turn it around and do some advanced planning. We have to visualize right now what's it going to be in a few years and do something. But that's a endless story of struggle here in this area. And has been. About how, who and when and why to build up the areas.

K: In which way have there been struggles?

A: It's mostly about money of course. Who is going to pay? And also what to do. A couple of years ago, for example it was like in Gullfoss. Nothing was allowed. It's not that far away. Nothing was allowed. But you have to face it: They say it should be unspoiled and so on. Nothing is unspoiled if you get 600,000 visitors. And then of course, you have to build up some services and some facilities. Then it continued. Now it's paths and things like that and it's always looking just so short distanced. You do something small and next year it is too small and then you have to continue. You need to have the big look. It has been also a problem who owns what and who has the authorities. The municipalities don't have the authorities and then, they are privately owned places and then there are public places that have some rights, but not all. So the ball has been going between people- you do it, you do it, you do it.

K: Do you have any suggestion of what could be done, some specific measures to sustain the area more?

A: The Gullfoss area now: There is a architect competition about the area. I think that's a good thing and a thing that should also be done in Geysir. Through the years, there have been suggestions like the owners of the hotel, they had an architects doing suggestions about how it's gonna look. But then it stopped there because he owned just a small part. So he cannot do just whatever he likes. It has to be in a cooperation and I hope that we are in some negotiation phase in Geysir at the moment. It has been maybe harder there because there are more owners of the area. So it's been more complicated there. But that was the question of forming a formal association or something like that. So people could just decide what's in for all, what

are we going to do here? For some years it was the wish of the people here that the state would just buy the place, just buy it, take it and be responsible. But then the negotiation about the price was hard and at some state they were almost there and then the crisis came and it all... (hands going down). All plans disappeared. I think now, it's more like they will continue to have mixed ownership that they will have some platform to make decisions. I think that's a good start. Then of course, they would have to do this big vision thing about: how are we going to do this? Because what you see on the spot is the paths and everything you have to do to prevent the place from being destroyed. People will walk on the silica and it was breaking and also dangerous in the wintertime when people were just skating on the edge of the ridge in Thingvellir. It was amazing we didn't have any accident. So, the little band aids have been putting out there little strings and warnings and stuff like that. What I would like to see is one way paths. That's a trick you can do in places that are very crowded. Then you do not get the feeling. Like we are also talking about in Landmannalaugar and other places, you pick them because it's unspoiled and then you come and all the other hundreds of thousands are there and you don't feel like it's what you came for. And I think, tricks like that, if you plan the place and you plan the path, that it goes in some kind of circle, something like that, altogether, that sums up to a better place, I think.

K: Next to those measures you just mentioned, what would you say about the limitations of visitors? Could it be useful? Is it necessary?

A: I don't think any limitation if it's visitors or cars is necessary at this stage. And I don't think it would be a good idea. What we wish for is that the period will extent. We can see that now, people are coming now in the autumn, in the spring. It's expanding, hopefully more and more because we don't want all those masses of people coming just three months up there. And also they have the cruisers, like there and everywhere else in the world, it's a big debate about those masses of people that are poured into a place on the island.

K: Could you think of any solutions especially regarding those cruise ship passengers?

A: It's what you have. As I said before, if there is a natural phenomenon, you want to it. Should we say no, you cannot see it, I want you to see something else? I cannot imagine that happen (laughs). I wouldn't want them to say that to me. But it's just good planning, like we saw on the 18th of June. When everyone was worried what would happen 'cause it was the biggest cruise ship day ever. I was up there just looking and it was very smooth. It was very well planned, well done. So it's possible, you can do it. But it needs a lot of thinking and planning ahead. Those people living there have of course been doing this since they before they were born, so they have a lot of experience. I don't think limitations are a good thing.

K: What about entrance fees: Do think they might be useful?

A: That's another story. We've been talking about that possibility for a very long time and we did research and did the strategy planning here many years ago. Everyone was positive, especially foreigners. They thought it was absolutely natural and it was more the Icelanders that didn't like the idea of paying coming into a place, but I think in Geysir it would be very easy, actually. It's well marked, you have the gate, it's just always a question about how much it costs to put some equipment and stuff like that. But I prefer, if you can take the money through the service. I think it's not very fair as we have been doing it, like now putting in on the accommodation. I don't like that idea at all. I think it would be per person coming into the country. I think that's the way to do it. Definitely. Because if you are going to charge in this place, not this place, some places not, it is complicated and it costs to do it. So, I think the best thing is if you can squeeze it into something that everyone comes into the country just pays. And then again, the money must come back. That's the part! The hard part! We've been doing all kinds of things in Iceland through the years, all kinds of fees have been taken. But then they're just going to some other category in the pot. So it doesn't come back to the tourism. A head tax on all would be easy. I say it's easy to charge at Geysir, but then again, maybe not on a big day. It would be hard because it has to go like this (clicks fingers fast). I think that could be a good idea.

K: Regarding the government: In which way could they be involved?

A: Well, I think just some serious action and we've been talking about things for such a long time. It's about time to do something about it. It's been blinking red lights for a very long time and we've been screaming for some solutions and they even themselves said this is one of the places with the red lights. And then: What? Then nothing happens. Except, I shouldn't be ungrateful. This competition now at Gullfoss maybe that's a big step into the right direction. So now, we will see what happens there. Hopefully, we will get some good ideas.

K: What about VAKINN? In which way do you think it could encourage a healthier development in tourism?

A: VAKINN? I'm very glad to have that finally. I think it was about time to have some quality criteria here. We've been looking to other countries like we have been on study tours. I don't know how many tours the study groups here have been on to Scotland, etc. It's many, many years ago that we came back and they even handed out categories about tourist information centres and quality control and so on and so on. They were just put on someone's desk and nothing happened. So I think it's a great thing to have VAKINN. I just hope, the companies will appreciate it and take part. Because otherwise, of course, if it's just few, it doesn't work as well. But it takes time, I'm sure. It's an important step. We've been hearing some stories about bad tours. We know there are many people around doing good things, but one bad in between can do so much damage.

K: Now the last question: The UNWTO is an international tourism organization that “supports biodiversity conservation, social welfare and economic security in the host countries and communities”. What do you think about joining an organization like this? Could you- from your point of view- profit from it?

A: (thinks). Well, I don't know this thing in detail. As it sounds, of course. I think we should be part of bigger contexts in tourism and learn and gain from what going on. It's sounds sensible.

Expert Interview with Mábil (hotel manager and shareholder of the Geysir area) at Hotel Geysir

Monday, August 13th 2012

Personal interview

K: What are your tasks at Hotel Geysir?

M: Daily routines and have the overview of the employees, of the traffic that comes into the hotel. It is a big restaurant; it takes about 600 people at the same time. The Hotel is smaller, only about 60 rooms. This is a small family business, so we try to work all together, but everyone has its own responsibilities.

K: What was your professional career?

M: I'm the in family, this is a small family business. We are brother and sister and our family that runs it. Each of us has its own responsibilities and we think of this as a company. We are actually building a up place, a good business to get better and by listening and feeling what the customers are looking for, both Icelanders and foreigners. Then I think the experience and the expectations are coming when we are building for example the new restaurant next door. Hotel Geysir has been in the same family since 1927. You are standing in the reception from 1927. Where the drivers and the guides are having their lunch that was the school.

K: Are you also owner of the Geysir area itself?

M: It belonged to my grandfather and his sons...So parts of Geysir are in our family, yeah.

K: Regarding the Golden Circle: It is one of the most visited destinations in the country. What could be reasons for this?

M: I think the Golden Circle is well marketed and also it's a famous spot. Geysir and the waterfall, Gullfoss and I think. Hotel Geysir is working with other tourist places in and around us, so for example the tourist places around us are working more together. So we are making our tourist places more open, people are more welcome, etc., etc. And we are able to see many tourists at the same time. So well organized, I think.

K: What do you think, how is this going to develop?

M: We have like a future plan for this hotel. I think also others around us. Geysir area belongs to few others. So I am only talking about hotel Geysir, the restaurant and the other restaurant.

K: Are there any challenges you think, this destination has to face?

M: Yes, of course, we have never marketed our place. So of course the goal is to extend the winter season and also to show tourists the opportunity to stay here more than just one night.

And now we see that the customers are staying longer than just 2 nights, even 3 to 5 nights. So and also it is good to have the activities around us.

K: Are there any measures which you think that should be introduced to keep up tourism at the whole Golden Circle in the long run and satisfy people's needs?

M: With the new restaurant we use what we have around us. And us special with what we have. Because I think the best is that it is so close to us that in the past we couldn't see it. Now we have more open eyes to see what we have fantastic natures and also we are starting to read fresh strawberries, we can start to have fresh salads every day. We are marketing that if you come to the South, you will get everything from us. Something local, traditional. That we are special. In the North they have different attractions. Of course we are unique here in the South with our special trademark.

K: Could you picture your self being involved in a tourism development that takes care of other aspects, for example regarding environmental aspects or social aspects in this area? What could it look like?

M: Yes, absolutely. We are working well together in tourism in the South to increase that we are doing better things. We have our thoughts about what we need to do and our travel director here in this area, Ásborg, she is helping us a lot. A lot of good co-works. Do you remember the 18th of June? That day went really smoothly because of good cooperation between for example Geysir, the travel agencies and also experienced drivers and guides. So that day really went well because it was well organized, each place has their own entrance and their own parking. So you couldn't feel for example that we took 3,200 the whole day for lunch and coffee. No one felt the pressure. Not even the hot spring area because we also had people who were supervising this area. From 8 to 7 in went beautifully. But we should think more about this, plan more.

K: Many tourists doing this tour are cruise ship passengers. They only stay between a couple of hours until 2 days. How can be dealt with them?

M: I look at them as customers as when you are travelling individually. In rental cars, etc. They are not more pressure, so no extra charge on that. And the customers in the cruise ships are also changing. Few years ago, there were only old people travelling. And now it's more families and their expectations with the cruise ship are getting higher as well.

K: You already mentioned that the co-operation here in the area works quite well. Nevertheless, is there something that can be improved and what could it be?

M: Absolutely. There is always someone that needs to rule and keep us together. We here could do much, much better. We should use maybe off-season time to think ahead. We are always just thinking months ahead or a year ahead. We should have more and better and bigger plans.

K: In how far could the government be involved in that?

M: Oh, much more (laughs), but I rather keep what I expect to myself.

K: What about entrance fees: do you think they would make sense for this area?

M: There is a big discussion on that here as in many other places. Some of them agree, but absolutely, we need to do something for the area. For me, I can only speak about the Hotel Geysir and I am also in the family that owns the area and all the owners have made a bond. We all agree that we have to make the area better. And how it's going to be done. So there is also talk how we can do better. Entrance fees are one of the ideas. But no one has discussed if it's going to be or not.

K: When it is going to be decided?

M: No answer.

K: Do think VAKINN could help to support a more holistic development at the Golden Circle?

M: I know about it, but I haven't looked into it yet. We are not in VAKINN yet. I can't give you my answer on VAKINN at this moment.

K: Do you know what the UNWTO is? How could they help to encourage a development regarding economic, ecological and social aspects?

M: I have a slight idea, but have to learn more about it to give you a clear answer on that.

K: Did I forget something that you think is important to keep the area attractive, but to preserve it the long run?

M: Yes, we are always trying to make it better and it's very important that we welcome everyone here. Handicapped people, families. We are out of the box now, I think. We are welcoming more people-any kind of tourists.

Expert Interview with Berglind (guide) at Extreme Iceland (tour operator)

Tuesday, August 14th 2012

Personal interview

K: What are your tasks at the tour operator?

B: I'm a driver guide, a hiking guide, I do caving. Basically, I do all tours that we have here in Extreme Iceland.

K: How did you get there? What is your professional career?

B: I started as a hiking guide in the East fjords and decided to go and study this a bit more like being a guide and to know a little bit more about Iceland. So I went to school here in Reykjavik, it's called MK, it is a guiding school. We have two guiding schools in Iceland, this one is like a high school and then we have another one that is in the university. But they are both on the level of university. So I went there and I applied for a job here in Extreme Iceland and got it. I have been here since the summer 2011.

K: The Golden Circle is one of the most popular destinations here in Iceland and in your opinion, what are the reasons for that?

B: Advertising, I would say. And it's close to Reykjavik.

K: How do you think this destination is going to develop in the future?

B: Tourist numbers will increase a lot, I think because there's about 70% of people that come to Iceland, they all go to the Golden Circle. So it will increase a lot in the next couple of years.

K: What does it mean for this destination? Are there any challenges coming up and which are they?

B: It means that we need to have more facilities for the tourists, we need to take better care of the waterfall and the hot springs there because if we have too many tourists, then you know it will get ruined. This is a big challenge for those who taking care of these places. It costs a lot of money, also.

K: Especially regarding money issues: Is there anything that could help to preserve the area?

B: We should let people pay for going and looking at this, like the national park Thingvellir. They can pay through the agency if they are going with us on special trips and they should just pay a little extra. The company needed to pay for taking people inside the national park, just with a gate, something in the bus, like a little card and the company should get the bill. So the tourists won't have to notice it too much. Then we could do something with the money to make these places nicer and easier for people.

K: Is there anything else you could think of except for the money issue that could help? What about limitations if there are too many visitors or on car/buses that pollute the environment too much?

B: If we had enough money, then we could build bigger places. Then we will be able to take more people in. It's definitely the money. Also in other places in Iceland, like in the highlands we need to let people pay to get in there. If we get the money, we can maintain the area, we don't need limitations for that.

K: Many tourists doing this tour are cruise ship passengers. They only stay between a couple of hours until 2 days. How can be dealt with them?

B: I thought about that, I mean, they also have to pay to get in there. The only thing they are doing is the Golden Circle and that's about it (laughs). A head tax for them would make things simple for us. And no, it wouldn't prevent them from going on the tour. I travel a lot and everywhere else in the world we need to pay to get into countries or national parks or whatever.

K: There is also the cooperation between the three sights. From what you know about it, is there any way to improve it to have a better development for the people, nature and businesses in the long run?

B: I don't think the management at the sights will ever work together (laughs).

K: Why?

B: Because it's too much competition. It's two main companies, Icelanders, they need to work together, but they are not working together. That's the problem.

K: Is there any way the government could be involved?

B: I don't know in what way they could be involved.

K: Have you heard of VAKINN, the new introduced certificate of quality in tourism?

B: I haven't heard about it, regarding them. Also other organizations in tourism, I really haven't looked into any of it.

K: Did I forget any measure that could help to preserve the area, but to still attract people?

B: (thinks). No, I think, I already said anything that would be able to help. We don't have to market the Golden Circle anymore. It is advertising itself, everyone knows what it is. Like Everyone. People that are planning to come to Iceland, they know what the Golden Circle is. So we don't need attract more people to come, you know. And preserving it? We need to put more money in as a start. Definitely.

Expert Interview with Thórir (sales and marketing director/owner) from Iceland Excursions (bus tour operator)

Tuesday, August 14th 2012

Personal interview

K: What are your tasks here at Iceland Excursions?

T: Well, I'm sales and marketing director of Iceland Excursions/Grayland. I'm the manager of the department and I'm responsible for sales and marketing at the company. I'm also one of the founder of the company and I'm the general of board and one of the owners.

K: Regarding your professional career: What did you do before you got here?

T: I've been working for the tourist industry for most of my life. I have been a driver also, bus driver, taxi driver. I have been working with the tourists, travelling.

K: Tourism has a high share in Iceland's economy and the Golden Circle is one of the most popular destinations here. What in your opinion are the reasons for that?

T: I think the main reason is a long history. The Golden Circle has the longest history in the tourist industry in Iceland. The first official Golden Circle road was going during 1907. It's been for more than a hundred years. In the beginning of the tourism in Iceland, the highlight is the Geysir, Thingvellir, our national park and the golden waterfall. In most of the guiding books about Iceland you are getting, the Golden Circle is always mentioned. That is the main reason. Most people who are visiting Iceland are going on the Golden Circle.

K: How will this develop in the future?

T: It's going to be developed, I believe because for example: 1997, when we started our day tour program. It was another company being on the market for 30-40 years and during the wintertime they had a schedule going three times a week on the Golden Circle. We started a daily program on the Golden Circle 15 years ago and today we are driving three times a day during the summertime and two times a day during wintertime. And there is also many other companies who are driving the Golden Circle or offering trips there. So, it has been growing very well.

K: Are there any challenges that this destination has to face?

T: Well, of course we always have to be looking into the nature and take care of the nature because if we are getting more tourists, we have to be careful. I believe in the nearest future we are going to see a huge changing, we can see it on Thingvellir, we can see it on Geysir area and the whole Golden Circle area. There we need a better path and everything. Also because of the security. In the wintertime, especially, when we have snow and ice, we need to better clear

the ice and better paths to walk on. So that is something that we need to look more into in the future.

K: All the things you just mentioned that could help to improve the area, you need money for it. How do you think it could be captured?

T: Well, we in the tourist industry in cooperation with the government, we have been discussing and tried to find out: "How can we finance the so-called invest in public places?" We have now started this year this new law that puts on taxes for accommodation per night. That was not very well. It was very well figured when it was put into the congress, but it changed it a lot. So today it's does not give enough money. So we have to find a new solution how we can finance that.

K: Do you have any idea how this could be done?

T: Oh yes (laughs). It's a lot of ideas, but for me to talk about it now is not right because are working on it and that is it.

K: What do you mean by we are working on it?

T: The Icelandic Tourist Association and we have put up together. I'm the chairman of the board. We are now getting some information from other destinations in Europe: "How are you financing public places?" And hopefully we are going to come off with a good solution where everybody can live with.

K: What about the idea of entrance fees. Can you give your statement on that even though you are in the process involved?

T: I can talk about entrance fees because I think that entrance fees is not a right solution. We have a problem, if we put up entrance fees. There are many destinations that need money and we cannot put entrance fees on every destination. Then you have to move money from one destination to another. And some of those destinations are private owned, some of them are government owned. For example, Geysir area is private owned. You cannot take money from them to –let it be Landmannalaugar to rebuild there. That is one thing. And then is another thing: We have many places at which we don't have so many numbers of visitors but they definitely need something to do. How shall we do it? Shall we take money from Gullfoss, Geysir, Thingvellir who is a national park. You cannot bring money from a national park to another park that is not a national park. That's very difficult and also one of the main reasons is that it costs too much money to charge the entrance fees. You have to have a staff there. It costs you too much that way. We have to find another solution, some kind of highland pass or something that you are buying and then you can travel around. Or a fee for all visitors in Iceland.

K: The majority of cruise ship passengers are taking the tour to the Golden Circle route. They only stay between a couple of hours until 2 days. How can be dealt with them? From your point of view should or could there be a way of getting them involved?

T: Of course the cruise ship passengers have to be part of the agreement to pay some kind of fee. I believe it will not be a problem with them. It has to be for everybody, not only one group, also individual travellers. A head tax would make sense, if we are also going to have a head tax in Keflavik. We can set it in all our border. That is one of the ideas.

K: When I entered the building I saw the VAKINN certification, also the extended for the environmental level. You are already taking part in the program...

T: Now only four companies have joined VAKINN. We are one of them. We belonged to the first four groups, it is one month old or something like that. For the environment level we got the bronze. We are also aiming for the higher ones. For us it was very difficult to get higher in the first case because we haven't done it before. There is no measure to beat. The process took three months. We are building new houses here and a lot of changes were going on and so were ready in so many things. It was a huge step, but we had a solution for most of them during our building time of our house.

K: Did you also have to care of the buses? What the age, technology, etc considered?

T: Yes, that one of the things we have been doing for many years. We have the lowest average of buses in Iceland. We are buying lots of new buses every year and then they have the high euro-standard 18, for example.

K: You have been talking about the government already. You mentioned that there is some cooperation, but do you think that they could be more involved regarding a long term development? What could it look like?

T: Well, I think to get the tourist increase in Iceland, it has to be the cooperation with the government and the private sector because the private sector is working on the market. We are in big competition with other destinations in the world. We need to have support from the government. I'm not only talking about money support. We need to have understanding. What is tourism? What are people expecting? Not only speakers for the parliaments costing area. We are on big fighting on the international market to get tourists to come to Iceland. We have now put up the door that we have tourists coming also during the winter time. We have to have something in the winter time. We have to have some guaranty that we can go, for example on the Golden Circle in the winter time. The snow is not the problem, we have more problems with ice, the wind. The government can do better there to put money to clear the road of ice for example.

K: Now the last question: The UNWTO is an international tourism organization that "supports biodiversity conservation, social welfare and economic security in the host countries and

communities". What do you think about joining an organization like this? Could you- from your point of view- profit from it?

T: I don't know nothing about, so it's very hard for me to comment on that.

K: Is there any measure I forgot and which you think of it could enable a more holistic tourism development for the area of the Golden Circle?

T: No, I don't think so.

Expert Interview with Aðalbjörg Birna (divisional manager of the division of nature conservation) from the Environmental Agency (Umhverfisstofnun) (called Birna)

Tuesday, August 14th 2012

Personal interview

K: Just as a start, I would like to know what your tasks are here at the environmental agency?

B: My name is Aðalbjörg Birna and I am the divisional manager of the division of nature conservation of the Environmental Agency. So we have a quite vast task, the division of nature conservation is concerned with all the protected areas. So there are like 109 protected areas in Iceland today. And we oversee the major part of those areas, including Gullfoss which is in the Golden Circle. Geysir, on the other hand is not protected, but it's partly owned by the state and we have some responsibility within this area. Thingvellir is also a part of the Golden Circle, I don't know if you have spoken to someone there. That is a separate institute, it does not involve the environmental agency. And yes, we oversee those protected areas, we run them. We hire rangers during the summer times, we have staff all around Iceland to oversee those areas and then we have also other tasks that may be not directly connected to your thesis, but environmental impact assessments for example. We have planning and development plans for the municipalities and we follow up on regulations regarding nature conservation. So it's quite vast, there is a lot to do.

K: What was your professional career before you got here?

B: I am a biologist in my bachelor degree and environmental scientist. I finished my master's degree in, in English it would be, natural research management. And I started here in 2009 as a specialist and now I'm working as a divisional manager. 82 people are working here altogether, in my division we are 12.

K: Tourism in Iceland has a high share on the economy and the Golden Circle is one of the most popular sites. What are in your opinion reasons for that?

B: That's a tricky question. Well, I guess one of the reasons is that it is not that far from Reykjavik, from the capital. I guess the other reason is also that it has been looked after quite good, I would say. At least, for example Gullfoss. It has been protected more than 30 years now and it has always been quite a big attraction. Some historical value, you could say, it was kind of a savoir. People wanted to use the power for power supply. There is quite a strong story behind it and therefore it has somehow been connected to the history of Iceland. The same you could say about Thingvellir. It is a sacred place and Geysir of course is a phenomenon that is quite unique in the world. You can see that phenomenon in other areas in the world, geysers like

that, but I think when you connects all those sights you get quite a different perspective in both history and natural monuments I would say. And then again of course it has been put on the market, it has been publicized, people know about it. I guess there are many reasons: a combination of those natural monuments that are quite unique and then the historical value is has as well.

K: How do you think is this destination going to develop regarding tourism?

B: The numbers show us that tourism is going up and we were just talking about it today. 500,000 people are visiting those place and we have been estimating that in around 2020 we will have 1 million people visiting those areas. What we are seeing is an explosion in tourism. More and more people are visiting those areas. That is something that we are trying to prepare for. In the end we will we successful in doing that, at least I hope (laughs).

K: In which way are you trying to prepare? What do think are going to be the problems that you have to be prepared for?

B: Well, of course we are aware that the infrastructure in the area is not enough for all those people that are visiting, the paths. The infrastructure that is now in place was not thought of to be able to welcome 1 million people. That is pretty sure and we are pretty sure about that. What we are doing now is actually that we want to protect those areas and at the same time be able to show people and welcome people in those areas. Of course it is quite difficult for me to talk about all those areas, in the same sentence, but if we just take Gullfoss out of the picture and talk about Gullfoss as one of our protected areas that we oversee. We are now planning an architecture competition about how we will prepare this area to welcome all those people that we are expecting to see. We are making those ideas just as we speak, I just had a meeting now about that (laughs). We will launch that now in September and what we are thinking about is how we can protect the nature of Gullfoss and still make it a beautiful place to visit, even if we have 1 million people that are coming into the area. So that means that we have to distribute the people around the area and somehow try to manage that not all of the buses are coming at 10:00 o'clock or 12:00 o'clock. We have to have some kind of routes in the area, so the paths don't have to be 10 metres wide. We don't want that either. We want it to look good and in the nature and in the environment. This is our main concerns in that area.

K: Regarding the direction of visitors: Is it just an idea for Gullfoss or are trying to direct them in the whole area of the Golden Circle, so that you cooperate with the other sights?

B: Actually, we are just focusing on Gullfoss area. But of course, you have to take that up to the next level as it is all connected. When we are seeking out on ideas on how to design and how make this area prepared for all those people that are coming to visit, of course the people that are going to work on that, have to consider the whole picture. In that, we need to have many stakeholders just working with us. And then I'm talking about the Icelandic Board of Tourism

and we are talking about other stakeholders such as the community and so on. And the landowners. We have to watch the big picture of course. But it can be quite difficult to do because you don't always have just the buses. You also have private traffic and people that are just coming to Gullfoss on their own and you can't actually foresee which direction they are actually going. But it's a task and we are working on that.

K: Do you think the idea about restricting the area for certain vehicles, such as old and polluting cars and buses and for visitors would be useful? Why?

B: It has not been discussed concerning Gullfoss area for example. That is not something that has been in the picture. We have discussed those ideas within other protected areas that are perhaps more vulnerable. Gullfoss area for example is not the nature that is so vulnerable. You don't have species that need special protection. What you have in Gullfoss area is the waterfall. It is more the landscape you are trying to protect. I think that by managing the flow of tourism, we can keep in quite a good place. This is not something that has been discussed within that area.

K: If you want to take care of the infrastructure and develop the facilities, money is needed. How do you think this could work?

B: Of course the Environmental Agency makes plans every year for the next. That is sent to the government and they distribute money. That is one side of it. We just make plans for our protected areas and then we get them distributed. It's the tax money of Icelandic people of course. Then we also have this new funding through the Icelandic Tourist Board for overnight stays. That is money that is supposed to go into maintaining places such as Gullfoss and Geysir. We apply for that fund and then we will see if we get money.

K: What about involving the visitors themselves, e.g. by entrance fees?

B: It is not our decision to make with the Agency because it is a decision that is actually made within the ministry. So we work by the guidelines from the ministry and now it has actually been decided upon that accommodation fund is the funding that those places are supposed to seek money into. That has not been a direction that we have been guided towards to let the tourists pay for entrance. But it has been an idea, for example just to leave free donations. That we would have some kind of collection at site and just allow people to make free donations. That's an idea to do.

K: What about cruise ship passengers? Are they considered in some way as many of them are visiting the Golden Circle?

B: No we haven't divided the visitors down to certain categories. We just look at it as a whole. But of course this summer we have seen that there is a large increase in the cruise visitors. Those big ships that are coming. It was on June 18th I think when there were thousands of people coming. There were people from our division there and it was a chaos. So now we

haven't actually gone into dividing people by categories, but for Gullfoss for example, we need to do a management plan for the site. There is no management plan up to now. That is something we would like to do when we finished with this competition. It would have been preferable to have it before the competition because of course there you can have the guidelines of the protection of the area and then you have the competition and then you can go into the planning of the site. But it has not been made up to now and we are hoping to be able to do the management plan now in the next future. There we will tackle those issues, for example dividing people by categories and see how you can somehow manage by having those analyses.

K: If possible, would you try to work to try to carry out a cooperation for the whole Golden Circle or are there reasons against this?

B: I think it would be quite complicated because you would have lots of stakeholders. But of course, like I said before, it is always better to look at the big picture. But then again we are also tied up by the law. According to the law the Environmental Agency is supposed to make management plans for protected areas. Then again, Geysir is not protected. Therefore it is perhaps more difficult to get money for a management plan for that site, you also would have private owners involved and work with them. And then again, you have Thingvellir. That is under another ministry, under the prime ministry. They actually have their own plans that they are running. They are not really connected to us. Preferably, yes it would be good to make a holistic plan for all those three areas because it is all connected together. But I think in reality it would be quite difficult like the situation is now. But then again we are also looking at some institutional changes in Iceland next months because there has been this talk about one institution that is to oversee all the protected areas in the country and Thingvellir would then merge. Then perhaps one would be able to just work those things more holistically. I think we are in that point now that we are little bit curious about what's going to happen but while it's still like that we are focusing on our area and of course while doing that we are also watching the big picture. Because it is impossible to do it without.

K: Have you heard of VAKINN? Do you think it is useful for the services and facilities in the area to strive for?

B: Yes I have heard about, but I have to admit than I have not been that much into how it works. But of course I'm keen on certifications that lead to more sustainable development and environmental awareness and all of that. I'm guessing it's a good one. Here within the Agency we mostly cooperate with the Nordic SWAN, but of course there are a lot other certification like ISO and so on.

K: The last question deals with an organization for tourism, it is the UNWTO. Do you know what they are?

B: No, I don't what it's about, so I can't really answer questions on that.

K: Did I forget any measure of which you think it could be useful for a more holistic tourism development in the area of the Golden Circle?

B: As I told you, we really would like to keep working on this competition and then being able to go into the management plan. Within the management plan, I would like to include for example the trash collection and everything. That you are reusing and recycling because if there are 500,000 people visiting, they leave a lot of trash in the area. That could be in some kind certified or that we have some kind of certification that those areas are some kind of sustainable. Then of course, we are always looking into some methods, I don't know if you know the LACC-method. It means Limits of ACceptable Changes. That is something we have been looking into for this area, just to see how many people actually an area can sustain. It is related to the carrying capacity, but carrying capacity it just a fraction of the LACC method because then you know the carrying capacity and you set out the limits of acceptable change. How much are you willing to change the area in order to increase the carrying capacity? That is always some kind of estimation and how much infrastructure you want in an area for example. It depends on the area you are trying to treat. Like I said, Gullfoss is perhaps not that kind of vulnerable area like of we have a wetland or an important bird area or something like that. Those are the methods that we are actually focusing on and I'm guessing our vision for the future is just to make the infrastructure in order that the area can sustain it in all ways. You don't want to come into an area in which you have infrastructure that doesn't fit in the area. That is something that could happen if you are expecting 1 million people in such a small area as for example Gullfoss or Geysir. That just the area will not bear it.