



Research Paper

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Sustainable Tourism Challenges Arising from Stakeholders' Participation: Research Project in The Faroe Islands



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ABSTRACT: The Faroe Islands have become a trendy destination and tourist arrivals have rapidly risen in the past few years. The new unforeseen flows could negatively impact its unique, fragile landscape and the inhabitants' tranquil lifestyle. Understanding the complexities of tourism development becomes, therefore, necessary to grant high quality tourism, protect the environment and respect every stakeholder's needs and wants. Sustainability is crucial to prevent drastic changes and major exploitation of the land. The authors will examine tourism with a responsible development approach through stakeholders' interviews, fieldtrip observations and academic material. The research will provide a concise overview of the Faroese tourism industry and the issues it faces. On this matter, active and conscious involvement of the locals might be the way forward and lead towards a revolutionary and respectful development of the industry.

KEYWORDS: responsible tourism; sustainable tourism development; mass tourism; stakeholders; customer target; tourist behavior; co-creation

Introduction

Sustainable tourism development is something that many destinations are seeing a need for; to develop a sustainable strategy, tourism entities must consider everyone involved in and affected by it (Rodolfo Siles, 2021). Sustainable tourism strategy towards 2025 published by Visit Faroe Islands aims to re-establish and develop tourism in certain aspects where the natural and cultural heritage is preserved without any harm (Visit Faroe Islands, 2020a).

Overall, sustainable development covers domains such as economy, nature and society, where the subjects of study include a considerable amount of different attitudes towards a single issue (Sharpley, 2000). Sustainability will be analyzed with a focus on responsible tourism development. The environmental and socio-cultural factors will be the two spheres covered along the text.

To deeply examine the tourism status of the islands, the researchers relied on stakeholders' participation, which has shed light on diverging locals' opinions about tourism and tourists' behavior. By challenging the data acquired and exploiting all the stakeholders' thoughts, the authors will be able to present tourism challenges and address them towards a more engaging and responsible strategy for the Faroe Islands.

Destination

The Faroe Islands are an archipelago of 18 mountainous islands in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean. Fjords, waterfalls, cliffs, rivers and green fields characterize the astonishing natural landscape. The nation can be described as a self-governing entity within the Kingdom of Denmark. Nevertheless, it is not a member of the European Union. The population consists of 52,154 inhabitants (Statista Research Department, 2020a).

The majority of the population lives on Streymoy, the island home to the capital Torshavn. The other most populated islands are connected by a series of underwater tunnels meanwhile the least inhabited ones are characterized by small coastal settlements and can only be reached by ferry. Being the country a peripheral area with a marine barrier, the Faroe Islands are relatively challenging and face significant challenges in accessibility and connectivity (Agius et al., 2021).

Population of the Faroe Islands in 2020, by island

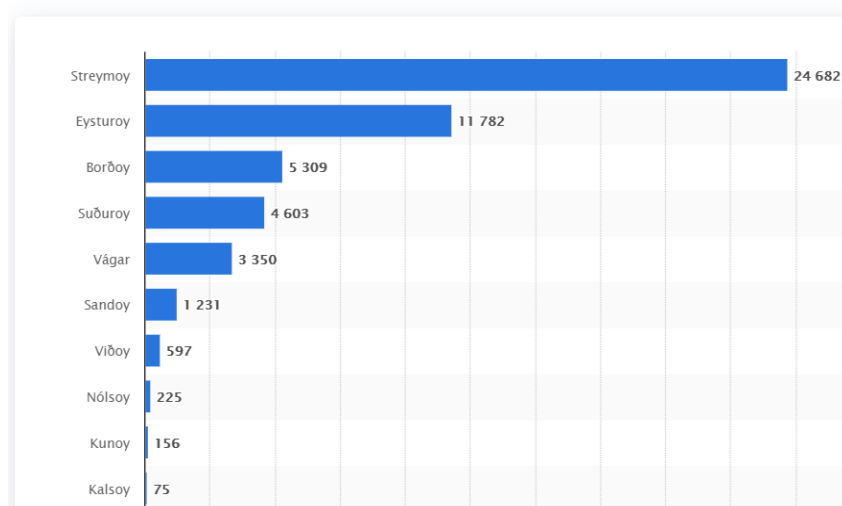


Figure 1: Population of the Faroe Islands in 2020, by island (Statista Research Department, 2020a)

Economy

Geographic isolation implies that small island societies have traditionally relied on local ecosystem services of the land and the sea (Plieninger et al., 2018). This is also valid for work placements. In such small communities, such as The Faroe Islands, isolation and dependence on local ecosystem services typically create high levels of place attachment and sense of community (Plieninger et al., 2018). It is no surprise that interviewees revealed almost every family raises cattle since the country has around 52.000 inhabitants and hosts 80.000 sheep. Families feed them to eat their meat or produce typical sweaters from their wool. Hunting is a prevalent practice during the winter, starting in November.

The fishing industry is, by far, the most relevant one as Faroese delicacies are considered to be some of the highest-quality products in the world (Cuttle, 2020). Marni, a fish entrepreneur of The Faroe Islands, conveyed the nation is situated at the convergence of four marine flows which maintain the temperature of the ocean at 8°C; this prevents the fish from being affected by significant climate variations. Fish and fish products - including farmed fish - represent

between 90 and 95 percent of total export value, and around 20 percent of the GDP (Faroe islands.fo., 2020a). The Faroe Islands are, therefore, heavily dependent on the fishing industry.

On their study on insular tourism development, Agius et al. (2021) state that islands & archipelagos have incremented their attractiveness and tourism value. Since the Faroe Islands suffered a severe fishery-related economic crisis in the 1990s (Cooke & Petersen, 2019), the authors claim that the development of the hospitality industry might boost economic diversification and constitute a relevant alternative to increase the portfolio of economic activities.

Tourism

Tourism is a rapidly growing sector, despite its current contribution of “around 3%” of the national GDP (Blanarikova et al., 2020). In 2007, National Geographic Traveller carried out a survey of 111 island communities worldwide. In the survey, a panel of 522 well-travelled experts in sustainable tourism were asked to rank these islands. The survey rated the Faroe Islands number one out of the 111 destinations with the verdict: “Authentic, unspoiled, and likely to remain so.” (Faroe islands.fo., 2020b).

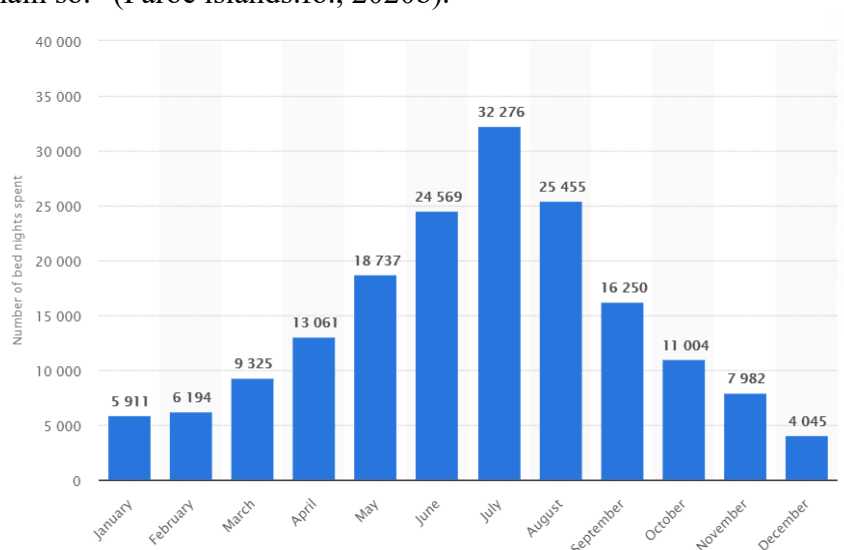


Figure 2: Travel number of bed nights spent in travel accommodation in the Faroe Islands in 2017 (Statista Research Department, 2020b)

Figure 2 (Statista Research Department, 2020b) demonstrates that tourism is mainly seasonal, with increasing flows from April/May to September. During this period, puffins are the main attractions as they rest in some specific islands, such as Mykines and Skuvoy, temperatures reach up to 20 degrees and the weather gets more mild.

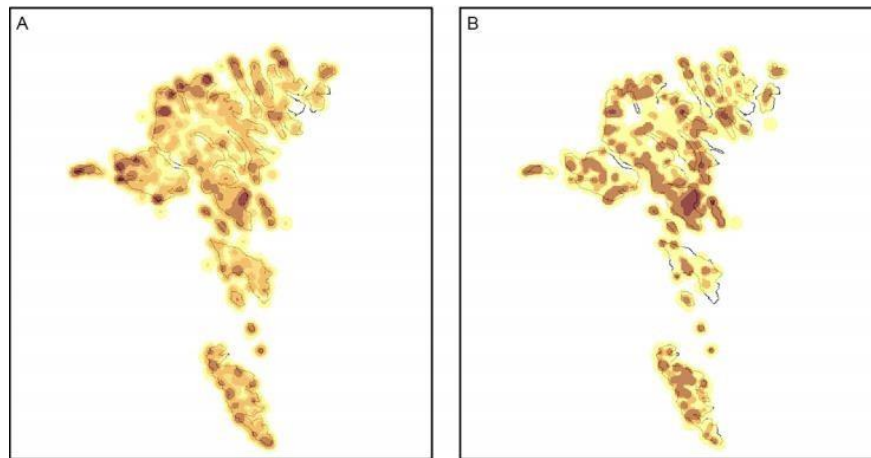


Figure 3 and 4: Kernel density heatmaps of A) Beautiful landscape/landmark; B) Recreation activities (Plieninger et al., 2018)

Plieninger et al. (2018) have paid particular attention to socio-cultural factors and tourism development in the Faroe Islands to investigate whether tourism is perceived as a problem or not. The above figure shows the destinations with landscapes/landmarks while picture B focuses on recreational activities. The Kernel density map was used to highlight high-density points, represented in brown. As supported by Plieninger et al. (2018), the authors found that the population of the Faroe Islands has a strong sense of community and is highly dependent on local resources and ecosystems for their livelihoods. Against this background, changes in tourism present both challenges and opportunities for locals.

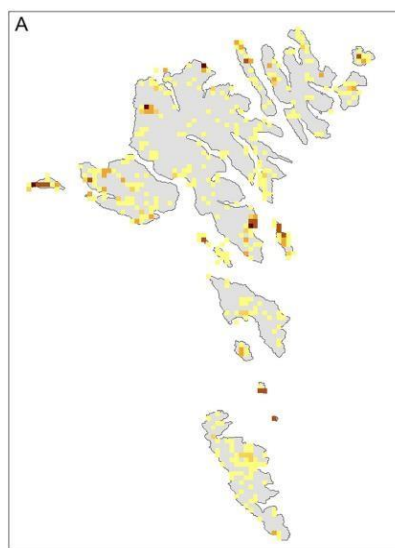


Figure 5: Areas with potential for land-use conflicts regarding Tourism development (Plieninger et al., 2018)

Figure 5 shows the degree of potential risk for territorial conflicts related to tourism development. The map, together with Figure 3 and 4, was developed thanks to a participatory mapping survey in the Faroe Islands. Respondents were asked about the spatial location of landscape values and development preferences (Plieninger et al., 2018), so maps were

obtained thanks to respondents claiming issues and setting them on a plot at the same time. If we combine the latter three Plieninger et al., (2018)'s figures, it is possible to see that the brightest areas in the first two Kernel density maps - the top tourism destinations - are the ones potentially related to socio-cultural issues. The areas at risk are mainly Mykines, the capital Torshavn, Gjogv and Saksun. The last two destinations are villages that are facing a surge in tourism arrivals. Many of these communities are scared of losing their privacy, their landscape and their lifestyle. During the field trip research, the authors of this analysis were invited by interviewees for a coffee, but also to celebrate special occasions. The authors describe the Faroese as highly welcoming, they are proud of their culture and traditions and they are willing to share them. Remoteness is playing a key role in attracting visitors, which leads to positive economic impacts for these sites (Agius et al., 2021). However, for the communities to benefit from the infrastructure's tourism, society has to be willing or interested in developing tourism. Blanarikova et al., (2020) highlights that the population primarily cares about their land and their quality of life. This fact outlines that the Faroe Islands are a cultural landscape where people and nature live together. People are part of nature and are entitled to its sustainable use (Plieninger et al., 2018). In this context, tourists are seen as a threat (Blanarikova et al., 2020) and this causes clashes between locals and visitors (Plieninger et al., 2018).

Mass Tourism vs Niche Tourism

Saksun is one of the few inland villages summoned around the lake and surrounded by steep mountains. Sonja, a farmer and one of the interlocutors, said only 8 adults and 2 children live in this tiny community. The majority of the houses are built traditionally, with grass rooftops and relies on a very traditional lifestyle. The tiny but captivating area has become one of the most popular tourism destinations with thousands of tourists visiting every year. Saksun has a museum managed by Sonja with the other locals, including Sonja's husband, herding and raising sheep. The thousands of visitors are totally disproportionate to the eight adults and two children residing in the village and the traditional lifestyle loved by locals has been threatened by the massive flows. As a consequence, tourism is causing antagonism and disquiet between locals and the government. Sonja said:

“When we were this few people, my boyfriend was the number one tourist hater. People just know him as the angry farmer...it has been difficult, it's easier now because as the tourism has expanded so much...a lot more people have been...affected a lot more, so people understand it much better now.” – Sonja

She also explained:

“We just have tourists blocking the sheep...and open gates and stepping down fences and looking in our windows, but we have a museum, so we are in the tourist industry.” – Sonja

The lack of privacy and bad tourist behavior are highly disturbing locals and shaping their tranquil daily lives. During the observational analysis in Saksun, the authors noticed a vast quantity of signs saying “No drones allowed” or inviting people not to walk off the path. Sonja said that she calls the police “all the time...I hate going out and hearing zzzzzzzzz (whirring Drone sound)”.

Disrespectful tourists are also causing issues in Gjogv, a coastal settlements far north in the Faroe Islands. Gjogv counts 20 inhabitants; unlike Saksun, it has a hotel and a café as well as plenty of summer houses, which are empty most part of the year. Fridrika, one of the 20 locals and a candidate in the upcoming election, when asked the number of visitors in Gjogv, states “Around 100 000 each year I think”. Tourism is threatening locals, who subsequently feel pressure from the government.

“The big Kommune, they think that we should have all the tourists in the small villages but nothing else. But we want to live here too also.” – Fridrika

There is a strong sense of belonging in both villages, but Gjogv is further from the big towns. Major tourism services are lacking and tourists come and go without generating profits. This causes further antagonism, and there is the idea that the government doesn’t listen to the residents because of the financial benefits derived from tourism (Blanarikova et al., 2020). According to Plieninger et. al., (2018) there is a lacking local capacity of small Faroese villages of governing tourism themselves. The preservation of antique habits and work placements maintains communities far from tourism interests despite the massive impact in their lives. The lack of services, proper tourism infrastructure and entrepreneurship cannot grant direct profits from tourism for locals.

However, the authors noticed that, despite these evident cases of mass tourism mentioned above, the majority of the land remains unspoiled and with few visitors per year. This assumption has been taken by pairing Figure 5 with the two Kernel density maps, which show that many places have high tourism potential but very little potential risk for land-use conflicts.

Butler’s Tourism Area Life Cycle

From the above data, the authors concluded that tourism has steeply risen in recent years, but is still of marginal importance from an economic point of view. The increase in tourism arrivals highlights the true potential of the destination in terms of tourism.

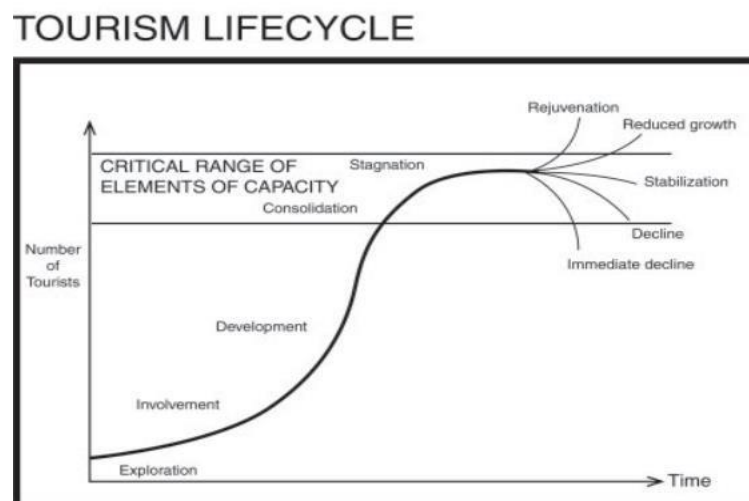


Figure 6: Butler’s Area Tourism Life Cycle (Butler, 2006)

The authors decided to offer the reader an overview of the Faroese tourism status by exploiting the Butler's Tourism Area Life cycle. Working as an analysis method/model, it takes into consideration several crucial factors of the destination - infrastructure, quality lifestyle obtained by tourists, general development of the destination and also the perceptions of the local community on tourism and incoming tourists (Butler, 2006).

If Agius et al. (2021)'s analysis on island tourism development proves to be accurate and the Tourism data of the Faroe Islands keep rising, trips to Saksun and Gjogv will increase. The lack of infrastructure to handle the projected traffic flows and the limited size of the country could entail exploitation of the land and subsequent clashes with the population (Plieninger et al., 2018). Since one of the main residents' concerns is the protection of the unique Faroese environment, the land cannot undergo further change. Cases of massive tourism and disrespectful tourists' behavior have already enraged the communities of Saksun and Gjogv. Considering the locals' perspectives and their sense of vulnerability, Blanarikova et al. (2020) conclude that there is an unsustainable situation. Given the fact that there are other areas depicted in brown, there is the possibility that this situation may be valid for other Faroese settlements apart from the ones mentioned in this work, but data that clarifies it is lacking.

The fact that the Faroe Islands received an award from the international journal 'Lonely Planet' as the number 1 destination in their "Best in Travel list 2021" (Visit Faroe Islands, 2020b) could lead to a further increase in tourism demand and scare Faroese stakeholders.

Literature Review

The above findings clarify that the country has high tourism potential. Hence, further attention to this topic is needed more than ever to develop the industry and overcome socio-cultural and environmental issues properly. Academic journals, magazines, and reports helped make comparisons and clarify the Faroe Islands' case study objectives. The material the team is going to present aligns with both field trip observations and interviews. This allows us to better understand the current tourism situation in the country.

Blanarikova et al. (2020) is the main literature article used along the text. The research gravitates around the complexities of sustainable tourism development in the Faroe Islands and is a wider multi-dimensional research made by the same authors of this manuscript. The research has been merged with empirical data arising from a survey made in the Nordic archipelago by Plieninger et al. (2018). The latter publication analyses the Faroese territory and society based on locals' opinions. The survey exposes communities' divergences for what concerns tourism development. Furthermore, it sets clear landscape values, shows travelers' preferences and depicts the areas with high or low tourism potential and related risk of clashes with inhabitants. The data are considered by the authors fundamental as they provide strong background for the analysis of potential challenges and the implementation of related feasible solutions.

The authors also focused on a recent manuscript written by Agius et al. (2021), entitled "So close yet so far: Island connectivity and ecotourism development in central Mediterranean islands". This study sheds light on the importance of infrastructure as well as the various opportunities for tourism development on remote small-scale islands. The publication is

based on a qualitative study where 105 interviews of stakeholders from the industry and the local population take part. This recent manuscript is directly linked with the Faroe Islands as it supports the hypothesis that insular remoteness might be an issue for what concerns connectivity but acquires tourism value and has potential for tourism development. The isolated position of the Faroe Islands might, therefore, be a challenge as well as a benefit at the same time.

Methodology

The team provides the reader with stakeholders' interviews and fieldtrip observations. Interpretivism research philosophy, hence an inductive approach, was used since the method allows to gain insights into the unique experiences of individuals and groups of residents from the Faroe Islands. The authors strongly believe that only by building empathy with the subjects it is possible to better understand perceptions and sentiments of the participants and find key initiatives for a sustainable tourism development. For this reason, inductive interviews become fundamental as they are meant to let more freedom of expression about crucial topics. For Finch-Race and Weber, (2017) interpretivism allows to look into individual thought that people have about their own social behavior and experiences. This method is recognised to supply the substantial meaning of contextual depth in qualitative research studies (Myers, 1997).

Even though the value of the technique is acknowledged, results are often criticised for lacking validity and reliability (Perry, 1998). The inductive approach can avoid this criticism. the authors decided to apply various methods used in narrative inquiry to create triangulation, ensuring the validity and reliability of this study. Triangulation entails the use of various data collection methods where the researcher looks at an issue, theme or concept from different perspectives.

Fieldwork Data Collection Methods

Primary data collection was carried out with a field trip to the Faroe Islands from October 28th to November 6th 2020. Before departure, the authors set up various interviews with stakeholders living on the Faroe Islands. The stay was spent in the capital Torshavn and the authors travelled around the islands gathering data in the form of semi-structured interviews, observational research and field notes. Semi-structured interviews follow Finch-Race and Weber (2017)'s literature as they rely on informal dialogues and aim to make the interviewees feel at ease so that they provide honest points of view. The authors used the technique to break the ice and understand their deep and genuine thoughts to extract what they believe is the truth.

By being physically present on site, the team managed to establish more interviews than expected, often through following the interviewees' networks. The researchers believe half of the interviews would not have been possible if it wasn't for the face-to-face meetings with the community. Interviews were 14 - three of which made during special occasions such as dinners or private meetings - and usually lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Half of the interviews were planned from home through the Facebook group "Færinger" or thanks to acquaintances. These stakeholders belong to the main national clusters, ranging from farmers

FAROE ISLANDS

- Tórshavn
- 1. Minister of Environment, Industry & Trade: Heini Abrahamsen
- 2. Vice Mayor: Hans Jacobs
- 3. Carlsen family
- 4. Marna
- 5. Jóni
- 6. Ljót
- Sandoy
- Vit Sandoy
- Klappan Sandoy
- Borðoy
- Klappan Borðoy
- Eysturoy
- Kalsoy
- Kunoy
- Víðoy
- Fugloy
- Svínoy
- Streymoy
- Saksun: Sanna
- Gægo: Póluska
- Kallsey: Jóhannes
- Mýkina: Páll
- Vágar
- Bær: Trondur
- Koltur
- Hestur
- Sandoy
- Skúvoy
- Stóra Dímun
- Litla Dímun
- Suðuroy

Observations

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Supported by Ministry of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts Sarawak

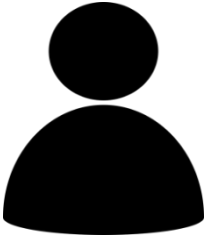
In detail, the authors conducted three hikes, where they observed and experienced the lack of signs on the hiking trails. The team admitted it was not easy to trek, in fact one of the authors went to a secondary path which was heading off the main route. Such gaps can lead to people walking in the wrong direction, putting themselves in danger. This could mean the country is still undeveloped in tourism terms and, therefore, offers a purely unspoilt environment. However, since most of the hiking trails are on private land, one must ask the question of whose responsibility is it to put up signs for tourists.

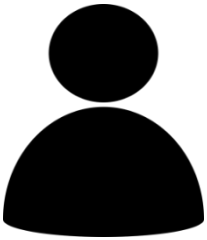
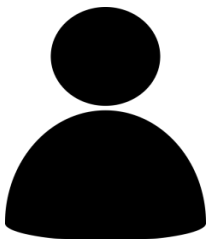
Persona Model

To begin with comparisons of opinions, the authors relied on a very interesting academic system: Persona model. This method is used to identify different types of people who play an important role in a certain service/industry - usually buyers (Blanarikova et al., 2020). In this research, the purpose of the model is to characterize different opinions among the same cluster of population in order to better identify possible implications.

Given the relevance and the impact of tourism in farmers' lifestyle, the particular criteria which was selected by the group was being a local farmer. It is important to state that in order for this model to be very accurate, all the people fulfilling the mentioned criteria would have to be included. Therefore, this model cannot be taken into account with total accuracy on a national level, but can give interesting insights about the differences and convergences of opinions on crucial tourism topics.

Table 1: Persona model (Blanarikova et al., 2020)

<u>Trondur</u>  <i>"I think it is very important for the island to have not so many guests but to deliver a higher quality."</i>	→ Works as an ambulance driver, carpenter and farmer → Married with three children → Produces traditional Faroese sweaters with wool from his sheep → Operates a homestay for visitors	• Wants tourism to remain exclusive, fewer visitors but higher spenders • Important for him to be involved in the community • Does not think tourists should have to pay to access certain sites • Thinks Faroes were not ready for tourism boom
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<u>Sonja</u>  <i>“It’s more difficult to see the possibilities when you think they are really annoying”</i>	→ Works at the museum, one of the eight residents of Saksun → In a relationship with Johan, the “angry farmer” → Ironically works in tourism but harbours negative feelings towards tourism and tourists, having experience it firsthand	• Initially collaborated with Visit Faroe Islands on marking the hiking trails but does not trust them anymore • Recounted how tourists are invading their privacy, • Believes that cruise passengers are good visitors as they are led by a guide and do not walk on the grass
<u>Johannes</u>  <i>“it’s a good opportunity and you have to take it”</i>	→ Works as a tour guide and as a farmer → Likes to include locals in tourism development by employing them as guides → Involved in the development of a trail → Foresees the benefits of tourism	• Thinks that it is mostly older people who have an issue with tourism • Believes Visit Faroe Islands is interested in quantity over quality • Says smaller visitor numbers lead to himself and visitors getting the most out of it.

Results

Trondur, Sonja and Johannes share similar views on the planning and development processes in the Faroe Islands but their opinions also diverge in interesting ways. The table was meant to give the readers a preliminary overview and gives evidence that all of them are participating in tourism whether they want to or not.

In detail, the positivists are Trondur and Johannes, both farmers and active participants in the tourism industry. While they do have some reservations about the direction of the tourism industry, they see it as a benefit and discuss how it is important to involve the locals in the development process.

“I think it’s very important that it be created by local people because they have more feeling about the area.” – Trondur

“We basically connect tourism and the farming and also involve some so people can see that it can also help them.” – Johannes

Considering that they have a positive view of tourism, one must ask whether this is due to them earning money directly from the tourists through their entrepreneurial activities such as sweaters (Trondur) and tours (Johannes).

A more negative view of tourism is espoused by Sonja, one of only 8 residents of Saksun, which before the pandemic was playing host to 100.000 visitors a year (Sonja). Even though Sonja operates a museum in the village, yet harbours a negative view of tourism in her community.

“We just have tourists blocking the sheep...and open gates and stepping down fences and looking in our windows but we have a museum so we are in the tourist industry so it is quite divided for us.” – Sonja

It is interesting to note the contrast between Sonja and other members of the same resident cluster considering that all ‘Personas’ make money from tourism enterprises yet their perceptions of visitors are disparate.

A view that is shared by Sonja and Johannes is that Visit Faroe Islands could be doing a lot better in terms of planning and stakeholder management.

“We just see red when we see Visit Faroe Islands, that’s also a problem...maybe I could but my boyfriend can’t have anything to do with them...we don’t trust them.” – Sonja

“Visit Faroe Islands, they have quite a different opinion than most of the people that work within tourism. I would rather have a smaller number but better service but basically they (Visit Faroe Islands) want a bigger number and less service, people just do whatever they want.” – Johannes

Despite diverging views on the benefits of tourism, the three stakeholders are united in their skepticism towards the Faroese DMO. They all believe there are too many visitors, whether this is locally (Sonja) or nationally (Trondur and Johannes). While Sonja would be in favor of a cap on visitors to Saksun, she made an interesting statement regarding cruise tourism.

“We earn a lot from cruise ships actually...they have for many years...they are the best tourists we have, they have a guide with them who tells them not to step on the grass. They come, they stay for half an hour and then they leave...” – Sonja

Considering the problems posed by cruise ships in destinations such as Barcelona or Venice, the fact that she regards cruise passengers as a model for carrying capacity astounded the authors. Yet one must consider whether this is a system that could be implemented in order to alleviate the problems faced by communities such as Saksun. Trondur and Johannes both expressed how they would rather see fewer visitors coming to the Faroe Islands.

“If people want to come to Faroe Islands, it’s a special island and if you want to come it should be a little higher price. I think it is very important for the island not to have so many guests but to deliver a higher quality.” – Trondur

“I’ve had a lot of groups that are really big, like forty to sixty people maybe, but when there are like ten people or less, that’s when I feel I get the most out of it, I can get in contact with everyone... and all of them get answers to their questions.” – Johannes

Looking to the future, it is clear all of them perceive tourist arrivals are growing in the Faroes. All three are very visionary and propose measures that, according to them, could alleviate the problems caused by overtourism. Unfortunately, we cannot say which is the right measure and it is more likely that there is no single solution to these issues. Sonja’s solution is novel but one must question if visitors were only to be admitted on a timed basis or booking system, how could it be realistically enforced? Are resources going to be utilised to ensure total compliance with this? Could this initiative have the unintended effect of increasing the profile of Saksun, leading to visitors disregarding the booking system and travelling there by private transport? (Blanarikova et al., 2020). The benefits of Sonja’s idea are obvious but the fact that Saksun could receive even more visitors than it had experienced before the pandemic could be alarming.

Trondur’s suggestion to restrict tourism to higher spenders is not without merit. The higher spending/lower impact idea could have the benefit of greater amounts of money entering the Faroese economy while reversing the projected risk of damage caused by tourism to the environment and the sanity of some local stakeholders. However, the authors must question whether this formula of limiting the destination to those with a rich bank balance would be the right move. There is unfortunately no proved direct relationship between foreigners being well-off and also more concerned about the environment and respecting locals’ privacy.

Perhaps a potential idea to alleviate the problems caused by tourism could lie somewhere in the middle of the suggestions made by Sonja, Trondur and Johannes. Restricting visitor numbers through the adoption of a booking system could have the impact that all of them are looking for. It may also deter those who are not truly interested in the destination and who were looking to just tick off a list of experiences. It is not clear how this could have the effect of drawing higher spending visitors or how it would discourage low impact budget travellers from coming to the Faroe Islands. What is clear is that there is no easy answer for how development should proceed but the positive aspect is that locals offer a multitude of opinions. Authorities don’t seem to take them into account but starting to rely on them could be a managerial advantage during the planning and decision-making process.

Future sustainable tourism development in the Faroe Islands may require a huge effort to achieve a consensus between large parts of the population. Bringing people like Sonja around to their way of thinking is not an easy task. If anything, Sonja is an emblem of the contradictions that exist in such a little country. Her approval of passengers coming on cruise ships and being accompanied by a guide flies in the face of the normative idea that cruise ship passengers are destructive of local communities (Blanarikova et al., 2020). It also challenges the notion that the right type of tourists is the one that seeks out authentic experiences through engagement with the locals.

In this context, where many points of view are present even in the same clusters of citizens, the authors thought about finding a disruptive and out of the ordinary form of tourism development that might better serve the concerns of the wide collection of Faroese stakeholders. In order to find a solution which could accommodate everyone, it could be

fundamental to focus on shared opinions. Thus, in the following section, the authors will analyse some key topics partaken by all or a vast majority of the interviewees.

Quality over quantity

When the authors looked over the other interviews, they found out that, despite many stakeholders with different interests were involved, all the interviewees agreed on: “Quality over quantity”. This sentence sums up two interrelated key concerns:

1. Local stakeholders wish to alleviate tourism-related problems by managing capacity and containing tourist arrivals
2. The community aims to welcome specific customer targets

Since islands and remoteness are “new trends in tourism” (Agius et al., 2021, p. 149), monitoring and welcoming an exclusive and limited share of guests may lead the Faroese to psychologically feel at ease and have a more positive attitude towards tourism. Furthermore, through the selection of specific profitable customers, tourism enterprises could enjoy a boost in revenue. Locals could consequently see the real potential of the industry and be happy to welcome respectful and trustworthy visitors who would love to experience their nature, traditions and values (Blanarikova et al, 2020). It becomes, then, fundamental to better understand which are the suitable tourism clusters that locals and politicians have in mind.

Customer target

To obtain a clear overview of customer targets, the authors relied on the literature and, most of all, interviews with local stakeholders. Important reliable data show that tourists visit the Faroe Islands primarily for their remarkable nature and have been categorised as “globetrotters” (22%), “nature lovers” (14%), “sightseers” (11%), and “culture lovers” (9%) (Plieninger et al., 2018).

The increasing tourism flows for insular destinations like the Faroe Islands are not only supported by academic publications (Agius et al., 2021) but also by locals. Pol, a very well-known tourist guide, discussed with the authors about this delicate issue and said that:

“Last year we had 135.000 tourists and our forecast says that in the following 3 years 300.000 and in 5 years 500.000 (tourists) will come and we are only 52.000 (citizens) in the Faroe Islands” – Pol

Massive tourism cannot be the answer for a proper development of the industry and has the potential to cause dramatic problems for the Faroese people. Pol likes Americans and says:

“It’s important for us to have rich and respectful tourists” - Pol

The previous sentence is crucial because it respects the requirements of the statement ‘Quality over quantity’, sets preferences for specific clusters of visitors and aligns with Trondur’s thoughts. The authors already discussed the theme of customer behavior with the controversies in Saksun and Gjogv. The estimated amount of around 100.000 visitors per year

in the tiny settlements is causing a lack of privacy and destruction of the traditional lifestyle. As we could see in the observations, tourists' transgressions have become countless. Peter, a Danish citizen who moved with his family to the Faroes a few months ago, conveyed that:

"If you live out there...you live in the middle of nowhere and you move there or you've been living there all of your life because you like it quiet and with no people... and the biggest problem is not you guys or the Danish people or Italian. That's the Chinese tourists. They are so rude! and they take photos in (Danish)... yeah, through the window and: "Look there he is! There he is!" (imitating Chinese tourists)." – Peter

To make a correlation, the Chinese misbehavior is in complete opposition to Pol's respectful and wealthy Americans, who come to visit the land and leave a decent amount of money to tourism guides and local entities during their stay. Lack of tourist morality generated clashes in Saksun, where one inhabitant who had already had enough of the tourists, decided to shoot a drone. To be precise:

"It was to some Chinese guys that he shot with the gun a few years ago. He was so tired that every time he walked out the house somebody was taking pictures of him... and it's understandable." – Peter

This unusual and serious event confirms the level of irritation and disappointment of the locals, who refuse to accept any more disrespectful acts and become tourism antagonists. Thanks to the interview with Johan Helgason, the member of the governmental tourism entity Visit Faroe Islands, we know that "More, and more Asians are coming" – Johan (Blanarikova et al., 2020), so the fact that similar situations could happen again and more frequently in the future is an issue to be prevented.

For what concerns the economic side, Trondur also explained that:

"In the Corona time we had 1300 kr. (referring to price per day at his facilities) but in the high season it's the same price if you are alone and if you are 4 people - 1900kr. Does include bed linen, towels, cleaning and internet" and justifies the price by adding that "it should not be a lower price, because if people want to come in Faroe Islands, it's a special island and if you want to come it should be a little higher price." – Trondur

He ends the discussion by saying that:

"I always try to spend some time with my guests. Every time they come here they have hundreds of questions I would try to answer and to give some good advice, and I also try to ask them, if I want to make this place better for my guests, what should I do?" – Trondur

What everyone can understand from these valuable thoughts is that tourists are more than welcome and can constitute a core asset to the wellbeing of the population, but they must understand the Faroese society, plunge into their culture and traditions and respect the few rules that the community asks of them. In the case of Trondur, tourists can even become a source of inspiration, increase the quality of service and contribute to the success of the industry. The entrepreneur gives us another important information:

“Number 1, the local people in the village are my family and I should get a tumble up to follow this. And number 2, the owner of this company should only be my wife and myself.” – Trondur

He is respectful of each Bour’s citizen and he explained that Bour’s inhabitants contributed to the creation of the properties. When asked about the current situation of the business and the perception of locals about tourism, he described how Bour’s inhabitants were skeptical and finally changed their mind and have a more positive perception of tourists after the creation of the houses and the positive interactions and profits coming from the business.

This final thought is expressed by Mr. Jørgen Niclasen, the Faroese Minister of Finance. He declares that:

"Areas outside of Torshavn have become hotspots for tourists and locals alike. Instead of places you leave owing to economic decline. In these places tourism is now appreciated as an alternative way to make a living and people take pride in settling down in their local community as an alternative to departure. We experience landscapes and townscapes that are thriving with a much larger choice of cultural offerings and where new concepts and interpretations of good old customs have been transformed into unique attractions. Attractions which give tourists and locals new incentives to discover the Faroe Islands in a new light" – Mr. Niclasen, (MENA Report, 2019)

Government customer target

When it comes to the government’s point of view, Mr. Niclasen is clear about the rising numbers of tourists and answers:

“We need to ask ourselves how do you stay sustainable? Because ultimately that is our single greatest ambition. Unless we manage tourism sustainably, we will gradually undermine its growth. Nature is our primary trademark and we must ensure that doesn't change. That is why we must strive to strike the right balance between the biological limits of nature. And our rights and duties to use our natural resources sustainably. And the need to create economic development. Getting this balance right will make us all much better prepared to cope with the inevitable ongoing changes.” – Mr. Niclasen, (MENA Report, 2019)

During a private interview with the authors, The Minister of Environment, Industry and Trade Helgi Abrahamsen is also short and clear:

“We want tourists who spend more money here. Because it is business and we need to look at income sources.” – Helgi Abrahamsen

There is, therefore, a convergence point on this topic among stakeholders.

The Minister kindly invited the authors to meet Visit Faroe Islands, the DMO, for further clarifications. The authors therefore had the pleasure to interview Johan Pauli Helgason, the development manager. In the name of the tourism body, he showed them an idea of tourism which mainly respects locals’ opinion. To be precise, he affirms that:

“We should not develop the Faroe Islands as a destination for everyone, it is a niche destination...not just staying for two days but for a longer time.” – Johan

He makes it clear that the company understands locals' interests and they also aim to achieve 'Quality over quantity'. Their economic target is “to grow income 10% and not number of tourists” – Johan (Blanarikova et al., 2020). However, they are not against an increase in visitors' arrivals since they “have had tourism for a really long time but it's been so small that you wouldn't really call it an industry” – Johan (Blanarikova et al., 2020). Numbers support his last statement, because he affirms that GDP is around 3%. He claims a boost of the industry is inevitable after the world has recovered from the pandemic and he expressed his will to see a higher degree of tourism dispersion. Better dispersion is likely to be more sustainable because the economic benefits are more spread out and because capacity constraints in popular destinations are mitigated. Hence, when a destination manages tourism dispersion, it is able to mitigate over tourism and share visitors in a more equitable manner all over the territory. Johan affirms that “People are staying everywhere but mostly here (Torshavn)”. It's evident from the material present in this study that Gjegv and Saksun are facing massive tourism related issues. In order to boost tourism dispersion, Mr. Helgason thus wishes:

“to spread tourists everywhere in the Faroe Islands” – Johan

Given the customer target analysis and the population and relevant entities' mutual interest towards well-off and long-sojourner nature & culture lovers, hiking paths are projected to remain the number 1 activity in the Faroe Islands. The government wishes freedom of movement, but the high concern for mass tourism, the threatening tourists' behavior and an outdated law are turning against the government's will. From explaining this diatribe, the authors will then be able to identify what the nation is lacking of and what could entail a sustainable tourism development of the destination.

Limitation: The Land Dispute

When the primary motivator for visiting the Faroe Islands is to spend time in nature, the land dispute has become a real challenge with the increasing number of tourists, since 50% of the land on the Faroe Islands is owned by sheep farmers. On many prominent hiking routes, during high season you will find a person charging you at the beginning of the hiking path. A visitor wrote on the blog 'The Outbound':

“I first visited the Faroe Islands back in the winter of 2017, I understand that the locals all want to see the benefits of increased tourism, and also raise money that allows them to keep their land and facilities in a good condition, but in just 18 months between my first visit and this recent one, it seems like a huge change.” – (Ekkelboom-white, 2019)

Since many of the sightseeing spots are to be found on private land, farmers themselves decide the price of the entrance fee. The prices usually range from 75 kr. up to 550 kr., the most expensive entrance fee including a guided tour. This raises a question from locals:

“We have walked for free in nature since we were born, and all of a sudden we have to pay? It just ain't right.” – Carlsson family

“In Saksun there’s a place where locals have to pay as well, they actually also take credit card.” – Peter

According to Minister of Environment, Industry and Trade, Helgi Abrahamsen, the challenge is rooted in the law:

“Our agricultural legislation is ancient. If you read the law, then it says that you’re not allowed to walk on a farmers’ land if you haven’t gotten permission from him. But we haven’t practiced this law for many years. The newest edition of the legislation is from 1937.” – Helgi Abrahamsen

Both the minister and the Carlsson family confirm that the law has not been applied for many years, and that nature has been for everyone to use. Due to the rise in tourist numbers and the increasing appeal of the nation due to its remote location (Agius et al., 2021), the farmers have chosen to use the law either as a means of income or to keep tourists off their land:

“So we have a law that says you’re not allowed to walk in nature, but we have a practice that says you are entitled. And now farmers are going back to the law using it, to keep people off their land and nature.” – Helgi Abrahamsen

“It’s because it’s all private land and they can make their own rules and it’s been quite a good business for some of them. They get 200kr every time. If you live out there, you live in the middle of nowhere and you move there or you’ve been living there all of your life because you like it quiet and with no people.” – Peter

When asking the farmers, there is a wide variety of opinions on tourism:

“When Visit Faroe Islands markets the free and wild nature, people don’t know that there is no wild nature in the Faroe Islands whatsoever. Everything is farmland in the law. I don’t think Visit Faroe Islands or the politicians knew that and now people say it is just an old law. It’s just so annoying! you don’t want people to think they can just walk everywhere. We used to have a lot of sheep around here, around the church but they just don’t like to be there anymore, there were too many people.” – Sonja

“I know a lot of the farmers because we all have the same problem. It’s really different from farmer to farmer. Some of them like tourists, some of them don’t. Some of them just want to be farming in peace and don’t want to see tourists and some of them see them as an opportunity, but I think there are more of them who want to do with tourists. And those that are not, probably next generation will. Because most of them who don’t want to see tourists are older guys.” – Johannes

Furthermore, on the land dispute minister Helgi Abrahamsen stated:

“What is interesting is that half of the Faroese land is owned by the state and half is private. Many of the farmers don’t own half of their lands. They rent it for a symbolic price:100 kr. a year for a whole mountain. But they are allowed to use it as if they owned it. So when they’re paying so little for it, how are they allowed to charge so much for others to walk there? That is something from an old time. And that is the issue.” – Helgi Abrahamsen

“We are trying to make new legislation where it says that everyone is allowed out in nature. And that is a severe struggle to pass this legislation, politically. We fear that if we compromise with the law, then we fear that we will take a step back from what we are practicing now. I firmly say and believe that everyone is allowed out in nature. A farmer owns a part of the land, meaning he owns the rights to have his animals on that land. But he’s, i.e. is not allowed to try and drill for oil on that land. So then comes the most crucial question: who owns nature on Faroe Islands? Just because you have your sheep on the land, doesn’t mean you own nature.” – Helgi Abrahamsen

The implementation of new legislation raises the question: Who is responsible for preserving nature and hiking trails? Looking at the Visit Faroe Islands 2025 strategy, one will find that an idea has already been considered:

“We will advocate for a democratization of the Faroese travel tax of DKK 65 to all types of tourists with no exceptions. Currently, only about half of visitors to the Faroe Islands are subject to the travel tax, with cruise passengers being exempt. The income should be earmarked for investment in tourism infrastructure.” – (Visit Faroe Islands, 2020a, p. 41)

A Feasible Strategy: Responsible Tourism

Considering the willingness of local stakeholders to protect the land and defend culture and traditions, the type of tourism development for this unique and fragile ecosystem requires something radical, with minimal impact on environmental and socio-cultural domains. The authors concentrated their attention on responsible tourism since it has the objective of "making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit" (Kakoti, 2018).

To better explain the term, the authors benefited from State & Bulin’s (2016) quantitative research about the meaning of responsible tourism. The study contains interviews of people from disparate backgrounds and reveals that “responsible tourism is mainly defined by the orientation of the natural preservation and minimizing the negative impact of tourist activity on the environment, but also education, knowledge and informing, promotion of local culture and ethical behavior of all parties involved” (State & Bulin, 2016). Given the previous characteristics, the authors define this type of tourism suitable to the Faroe Islands as it overcomes any significant exploitation of the land and protects cultural heritage. Along the text, the reader could notice the importance the Faroese attach to the territory and their habits. Hence, the authors ascertain responsible tourism could represent a turning point for the Faroe Islands.

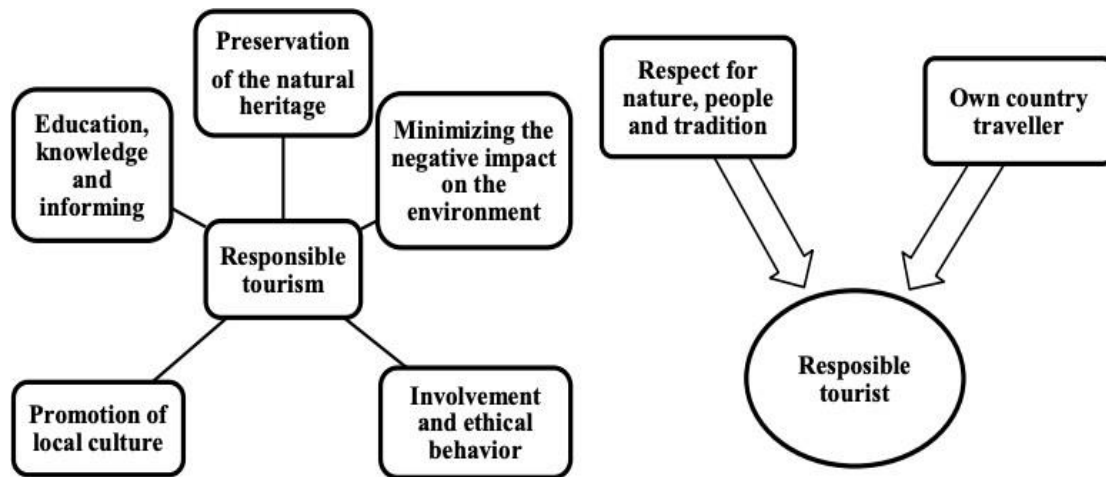


Figure 9 Responsible tourism and responsible tourist (State & Bulin, 2016)

The data collection shared along the research finds a match with Figure 9: The Faroe Islands already comply with the majority of State & Bulin's (2016) responsible tourism requirements. In detail:

- 'Local culture' is transmitted and promoted from generation to generation thanks to the high attachment of locals to their land and to their ancestors' practices
- Most of the inhabitants are farmers who love their land and protect it in order to raise sheep. The territory, as we mentioned in the introductory section, has already been described by 'National Geographic Traveler' as "Authentic, unspoiled, and likely to remain so." (Faroe islands.fo., 2020b). Therefore, we can say there is proper 'Preservation of the natural heritage'.
- By creating underwater tunnels, preserving the local ecosystem and respecting the fauna, the destination is successfully 'minimizing the negative impact on the environment'
- Faroese people are the second largest group of tourists (Statista Research Department, 2020b), so 'own country travels' are already practiced on a large scale

One could argue that the destination has to focus on a robust co-creation approach and, in order to do so, it must call for an extensive multi stakeholder partnership. This is followed by involving and informing stakeholders about the initial development steps. The authors state that, with just 'Involvement and ethical behavior' out of the seven criteria not being fulfilled, the route towards full responsible tourism following the State & Bulin, (2016) scheme is feasible.

Conclusion

To provide long-term economic benefits and preserve Faroese cultural heritage, everyone involved must take action. The necessity of a positive relationship between the local community and tourists is vital to ensure responsible tourism: a defined system that provides collaboration, mutual respect among parties and protection of the environment. The research provides the reader with many clashing views but also convergence points on important topics such as customer target and customer behavior. The 'involvement and ethical behavior' gap must be and can be tackled.

Ind & Coates (2012) state that the outcome of co-creation is engagement and ideas that can help a destination solve problems by looking at it from various perspectives. Co-creation is relevant for services that tourism offers, and it reduces clashes by involving suggestions from participants. A collaborative approach, in groups, can spark innovation and creativity. The authors strongly support this managerial approach since the population has demonstrated to have many ideas to tackle the types of tourists they don't desire. From the interviews, what arises is that locals privilege the preservation of the Faroese culture and territory and demand respect for the land. Co-creation among stakeholders could make it easier for the relevant tourism entities to understand locals' fundamental principles, plug existing gaps and advertise the country to appealing visitor clusters. A harmonious and welcoming attitude and the feeling of a hospitality industry well blended with the community could improve both visitor and host experience. By coming together on the idea and developing it in 'quality over quantity' terms, there is a potential bright future for the Faroes and its people. Among the first steps that should be made, selecting the right clusters of visitors and solving the land dispute should be prioritized.

The four writers conclude that the active and conscious involvement of the locals might be the way forward and lead towards a revolutionary and respectful development of the industry. However, the researchers also ascertain that there is still poor literature about these topics and about the little archipelago and, therefore, call for further research about tourism development and policy management in the destination.

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