

Iceland: the destination for wellbeing tourism?

*A follow-up case study on the development of wellbeing tourism in the
Mývatn region in Iceland*



by

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Cover image: the Mývatn Nature Baths near Reykjavík, Iceland. July 21, 2019.

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"Petta reddast"

A well-known saying in Iceland, meaning 'it will be fine'

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Eva Lisa Boorsma

Executive summary

Worldwide, tourism is booming, and together with trends as increasing stress levels, an aging population, escalating health costs and an increasing focus on preventative health care, this is leading to a growing demand for certain tourism products: holidays with a focus on health, wellness and wellbeing. Especially in Europe this growth is significant and experts predict this growth to continue in the future; especially in the Scandinavian countries. Iceland is one of these countries having the potential to be developed into a destination for wellbeing; not only due to its plenitude of geothermal resources, but also as a result of the medical acceptance with regard to their curative powers. This potential was also seen by Björk et al. (2011) who conducted a study on wellbeing tourism in the Nordic countries. However, as that study has been finished eight years ago and as literature with regard to wellbeing tourism in general and wellbeing tourism in Iceland is still limited, it seemed to be the right moment for this follow-up study to be carried out.

This explorative case study aimed to gain a better understanding of wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region in Iceland, to find out to what extent this sector has been developed over the last eight years, and to get insight in the future of this sector as perceived by the stakeholders in the region. The previous study of Björk et al. (2011) is considered as the starting point of this current study. For this study, a case study on the case of the Mývatn region in Iceland has been developed. After reviewing the existing literature, eight interviews were conducted with various stakeholders in the Mývatn region and in nearby cities. This study has led to interesting and valuable insights in the current and future status of the wellbeing tourism industry in the Mývatn region.

Results show that the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region did not change significantly since the previous research report was published eight years ago. Despite the small developments that took place, these did not intent to improve the wellbeing tourism sector specifically. Due to the unexpected tourism boom, the Mývatn region has just been occupied by answering the demands instead of developing the region towards a wellbeing destination. This results in the fact that the region is currently not seen as a wellbeing destination. Also with regard to the region's future, no clear and regional plan in terms of developing its wellbeing tourism sector is existing and a unanimous agreement on the region's potential in becoming a wellbeing destination is lacking. Numerous ingredients for becoming a wellbeing destination are available, however, essential elements as wellbeing products, collaboration and marketing are still limited. It can therefore be stated that the region is not unanimously seen as a potential wellbeing destination. The results of this study may serve as a first step for the companies in order to get together and start developing the Mývatn region into a destination for wellbeing tourism.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is booming nowadays, and there is no way to deny if we take a look at the numbers. In 2017, there were little over 1.3 billion international tourist arrivals (Statista, 2018); an enormous number of worldwide travellers. And although these tourists are travelling to various destinations, by different means of transport, their reason for travelling is highly similar. Present-day, an escape from everyday life is namely one of the main motivations for people to travel (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). This need for an escape, caused by the hectic pace of life and high stress levels at work, together with the aging population, escalating health costs, growing incomes and advanced medical technology (Lim, Kim, & Lee, 2016), has led to an increased popularity of two themes within the tourism industry: wellness and wellbeing (Boekstein, 2014b). The above mentioned factors have made people yearn for living a healthier and longer life (Lim et al., 2016), leading to the fact that present-day, health and wellness tourism is considered to be a fast growing tourism sector worldwide (Erfurt-Cooper, 2010).

Especially in Europe this growth in health and wellness tourism is significant. Worldwide, Europe is seen as the continent having the longest history in providing products and services that are focussing on people's health and wellbeing (Smith & Puczkó, 2010). It is therefore understandable that numerous wellness destinations can be found in Europe of which the most famous and popular ones are Baden in Switzerland, Wiesbaden in Germany, Budapest in Hungary and Bath in England (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). Resulting from this variety in wellness destinations, Europe also receives the highest number of tourists related to health and wellness tourism (Smith & Puczkó, 2010).

Iceland is one of the few highly appropriate European countries for offering health and wellness tourism. This is not only due to the country's plenitude of geothermal resources serving facilities as swimming pools, natural pools, therapeutic centres and spas (Haraldsson, 2014), but also a result of the fact that the curative effect of these geothermal waters is even medically accepted in this country (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). Although Iceland is considered to have the potential to develop itself towards a destination for health and wellness, Iceland is not new in the tourism industry in general. Its number of visitors started to increase significantly since the late nineteenth century (Jóhannesson, Huijbens, & Sharpley, 2010). Especially between 2010 and 2017 tourism in Iceland increased as a result of the financial market crash in 2008, the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in 2010, the marketing campaign called "Inspired by Iceland" (Karlisdóttir, 2013; PKF, 2013), and the start of low cost carriers flying to Iceland (Sutherland & Stacey, 2017). In this period of growth, Iceland's number of international tourists has even quadrupled; from around 488 thousand international visitors in 2010, to approximately 2.2 million international visitors in 2017, which is an excessive growth (Óladóttir, 2018). These statistics make Iceland an interesting case to study.

In addition to the fact that Iceland is an interesting case to study due to its booming tourism sector, the case of Iceland is highly interesting as its tourism industry is significantly young. This results in the fact that research on tourism in Iceland is limited and needs to be extended (Ólafsdóttir & Dowling, 2014). A study focussing on Iceland will therefore be highly valued. In addition to extending the literature on Iceland and its tourism sector, this study also adds value to already existing literature; namely to the earlier performed study of Björk et al. (2011) on the Nordic countries, including Iceland, and the driving forces for the development of the wellbeing tourism sector in these countries. Further details regarding this research project, will be discussed in the following section.

1.1 Background and context

This two-year research project of Björk et al. (2011) that was conducted earlier, from April 2009 until April 2011, was initiated by a group of seven researchers from the Nordic countries. Supported by the Nordic Innovation Centre (NICe), this research was specifically targeting the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The project aimed to achieve a clear understanding of the driving forces that may lead to a future development of the wellbeing tourism sector in these countries. In order to do so, the study provided a clear understanding of the concept of wellbeing in the context of the Nordic countries, unique selling points were proposed in order to brand the concept of Nordic wellbeing, and insight was given in the policies and driving forces for the development of wellbeing tourism in general which were applicable to the Nordic countries. In order to achieve this research aim, several 'laboratory areas' were assigned in which research was performed. In total, there were seven laboratory areas of which the Mývatn region was assigned as the only laboratory area of Iceland. In these areas, data regarding wellbeing products and suppliers was collected by the practice of literature studies, conducting surveys, visiting enterprises offering wellness products, and by having interviews and discussions with stakeholders and suppliers of tourism products and services in the segment of wellbeing tourism.

Resulting from this extensive research, eight recommendations were formulated. These are referred to as the eight pillars as these can be seen as the main drivers for a successful development of the Nordic wellbeing tourism sector, and are as follows:

1. Harvesting the benefits of the unique selling points
2. Developing new, adapted sports and leisure activities
3. Widening the food link by integrating food producers
4. Creating new markets through developing signature products of medicines & cosmeceuticals
5. Addressing lifestyle diseases with wellbeing
6. Spiritualising the experience by emphasising spirituality
7. Supporting the Nordic infrastructures
8. Creating international media attention

Since the research project was finished approximately eight years ago, it will be of academic relevance to investigate the recent developments and the current status of the wellbeing tourism sector in one of the countries that was included in the research project: Iceland.

1.2 Research objective and research questions

In this section, the knowledge problem this research project is dealing with is explained more in detail, followed by the formulated research aim of this study together with the research questions.

1.2.1 Problem statement

The earlier mentioned research project of Björk et al. (2011), which forms the starting point of this current study, started ten years ago and was finished approximately two years later. After all these years, no knowledge is existing yet on the extent to which the recommendations of the earlier performed study have been implemented by the different stakeholders on the case of Iceland. It makes it therefore relevant to perform a follow-up study on the case of Iceland as it is of interest for the tourism industry to find out how the wellbeing tourism sector has developed.

A study on the wellbeing tourism sector of Iceland is not only of interest with regard to the previous performed study, but also of interest to the tourism industry in general, and the wellbeing tourism industry in specific, as existing literature on the Icelandic wellbeing tourism industry is still limited. Currently, literature on wellbeing tourism in the majority of the European countries is existing, however, this is limited with regard to the Nordic European countries, including Iceland. Moreover, the wellbeing tourism industry in the Nordic countries differs from the other European countries, as in these countries wellbeing consists mainly of the abundance of the natural resources like geothermal water and the unique nature, while wellbeing in the other European countries is mainly represented by manmade wellness centres and resorts. This study therefore expands the academic knowledge on wellbeing tourism. Besides that, this study possibly serves as comparison material or as an example for the wellbeing tourism industries in the other Nordic countries that were included in the previous research project.

1.2.2 Research aim

The current study is proposed in order to get more insight in the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region in Iceland, as one of the countries that was involved in the previous research project. The aim of this research is twofold. On one side, the aim is to get insight in the current state of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region by focussing on the developments that took place during the last years in order to get to the current situation. With regard to these developments, an investigation is done on the extent to which the recommendations provided by the report of Björk et al. (2011) have actually been taken into action in the region. On the other side, this study aims to find out how the future of this tourism sector in the Mývatn region is seen by the involved parties, together with the role innovation and marketing are expected to play in this future development.

In short, the research aim can be formulated as following:

The research aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region in Iceland, to find out to what extent this sector has been developed over the last eight years, based on the recommendations provided by the report of Björk et al. (2011), and to get insight in the future of this sector as perceived by the stakeholders in the region.

1.2.3 Research questions

In order to provide an answer on the above-mentioned research aim, the following research question and sub questions are formulated:

- RQ: *To what extent has the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region in Iceland been developed over the last eight years, by keeping in mind the recommendations of Björk et al. (2011), and how is the future of this sector seen by the involved parties?*
- *What is the current state of the Mývatn wellbeing tourism sector?*
 - *Which significant developments took place in the Mývatn wellbeing tourism sector during the past eight years?*
 - *How is the future of the Mývatn wellbeing tourism sector seen by the parties involved in the region's tourism sector?*

1.3 Outline of the report

This thesis is organised in five chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic of this research project together with explaining its relevance, provides the reader with background information on the previous study that lies on the core of this study and concludes with the research aim and formulated research questions. The second chapter presents the literature review in which the theoretical concepts of wellness and wellbeing, innovation and peripheral regions are explained and discussed, as these concepts will guide the thesis. The literature review in this chapter is followed by the conceptual framework. The third chapter explains the methodological decisions that have been made regarding this study and covers the methods that are used for the research design, sampling, data collection and data analysing. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the aspects of this study that can be considered as limitations. The fourth chapter provides the reader with some background information on the Mývatn region as well as with the findings of the performed qualitative research. The fifth and final chapter concludes on the results of this study by answering the formulated research questions. In addition, a discussion on the findings is provided. The chapter concludes by examining the relevance of the results and the practical applicability, and by suggesting recommendations for future research on the topic of this research project.

2. Literature review

In order to answer the earlier mentioned research questions regarding the development of wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region and the role this sector is currently playing in the region, a theoretical framework has been developed. The chapter will start by discussing the concepts of health, wellness and (Nordic) wellbeing in the context of tourism in order to create an understanding of the main themes of this thesis. Moreover, the concept of innovation will be examined and lastly, the Mývatn region and its peripheral character will be further discussed. This chapter will conclude with a conceptualisation of the theories and concepts that will be used in this thesis.

2.1 Health, wellness and wellbeing in the context of tourism

The increasing role of health tourism

Health tourism, a form of tourism in which achieving a good health is the main focus, is a long existing phenomenon. Health in this sense is then considered as an individual's well-being in mind and body (Carrera & Bridges, 2006). Already since the early years, the Romans built and visited thermal health spas and the Greeks visited the sanctuary of Asklepios; the healing god. Centuries later, medicinal spas, hot springs and seaside destinations became popular for health purposes; with the focus on health improvement in leisure environments (Boekstein, 2014a; Cook, 2008). Nowadays, numerous spa centres and resorts are existing (Cook, 2008). Especially in countries in Europe, North America and Southeast Asia wellness facilities can be found (Kiss & Török, 2001; Rätz, 2004).

Recently, the sector of health tourism has been growing and started to play a larger role within the tourism industry. This growth especially saw a development in a sub sector of health tourism: wellness tourism (Csirmaz & Pető, 2015). Several trends have led to this growing demand for holidays that are health oriented. Among these trends are the shifting consumer values towards seeking a higher quality of life, an increased stress level due to work and the decreased leisure time, the increasing preference of the retirees for destinations offering active and healthy facilities, the rising health care costs, the increasing encouragement of the health and medical care providers towards the public to be proactive in preventive health care, more attention from the public for the mind and spirituality, and an increase in environmentalism due to which people are searching for a better balance between human and nature (Pollock & Williams, 2000). Friedl (2007) and Zsigmond (2007) add to these trends the desire for a healthy lifestyle and the increased individualisation. Also, the aging population and the advanced medical technologies have led to a growing demand for health tourism (Boekstein, 2014b; Lim et al., 2016). As these trends will continue in the coming years, experts expect a continuous growth for health tourism (Kiss & Török, 2001). Especially North America, Scandinavia and Western Europe seem to have the potential in becoming the future destination for these health seeking tourists (Csirmaz & Pető, 2015).

Defining health tourism

As discussed earlier, there are plenty of reasons for the growing demand for health tourism. However, how can health tourism be defined best? Van Spielen simply defined health tourism as: “*staying away from home, health as the most important motive, and done in a leisure setting*” (Smith & Puczkó, 2008, p. 4). According to Smith and Puczkó (2008), this definition of Van Spielen was supported by the fact that he stated that health tourism included the following five components: 1)

sun and fun activities, 2) healthy activities as sports, 3) health as the motive of travelling, 4) health treatments as spas and massages, and 5) medical treatments. A highly similar and slightly more extensive definition is given by Pollock and Williams (2000, p. 165). They define health tourism as:

“leisure, recreational and educational activities removed from the distractions of work and home that use tourism products and services that are designed to promote and enable customers to improve and maintain their health and well-being”.

These definitions show that the distance from home and work and the focus on health are essential aspects in the practice of health tourism. Moreover, both authors highlight the leisure environment in which this form of tourism takes place. Although both definitions mention health, it is notable that the concept of wellbeing was also pointed out in the second definition. Later in this chapter, this term will be discussed more extensively.

Wellness tourism and its relation to health tourism

Health tourism is a broad form of tourism and important to understand in order to get a clear understanding of wellness tourism, and eventually also wellbeing tourism. Health tourism can namely be considered as the umbrella under which wellness tourism is categorised (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001; Smith & Puczkó, 2014). Wellness can thus be seen as a smaller subgroup of the overarching health tourism sector.

According to Smith and Puczkó (2008) health tourism consists of medical tourism and wellness tourism. Medical tourism consists of surgical medical tourism (including cosmetic surgery, dentistry and operations) and therapeutic medical tourism (including illness related rehabilitation and healing). Wellness tourism can be divided into holistic tourism (including spirituality and yoga and meditation) and leisure and recreation (including pampering, beauty treatments and sport and fitness). Medical wellness tourism combines the two forms of tourism and includes therapeutic recreation, lifestyle related rehabilitation and occupational wellness (Smith & Puczkó, 2008). Facilities for wellness tourism are retreats, ashrams, festivals and leisure centres. Hospitals and clinics are the facilities for medical tourism. Facilities in which wellness tourism as well as medical tourism can be performed are spas, hotels and resorts, and cruises.

Although Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) and Smith and Puczkó (2014) already described the difference between health tourism and wellness tourism, these terms are often used interchangeably in existing literature. However, another clear difference between the terms is mentioned by Smith and Puczkó (2014). According to them, health tourism in general often contains curative elements, while wellness tourism is seen as preventative in the sense that this type of tourism encourages people to change his/her lifestyle on a temporary or permanent basis, by becoming more healthy for instance (Smith & Puczkó, 2014). This is supported by Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) who argue that only healthy people pursue wellness tourism.

Defining wellness

Although wellness tourism is concerned with being healthy, its main objective is larger; improving one's body as well as the mind and the soul (Huijbens, 2011). Halbert Dunn, the first author that came up with the concept of wellness in 1959, defined it as:

“a special state of health comprising an overall sense of well-being which sees man as consisting of body, spirit and mind and being dependent on his environment” (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001, p.6).

In other words, he argued that wellness contains more than only the aspect of being healthy (Huijbens, 2011). Later on, more authors referred to the term wellness in their articles and a lot of slightly different definitions were used (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Lutz Hertel of the German Wellness Association concludes that the definitions share *“the key importance of lifestyle, self-responsibility for health, the multi-factorial roots of health, and the exploitation of our potential for a better quality of life”* (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001, p.6). In order to extend this definition Smith and Puczkó (2008) identified the most essential elements within the concept of wellness. According to them, lifestyle, physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing, and the relationship of a person towards him/herself, the other people around him/her and the environment can be considered as the most essential elements within the concept of wellness. Except from the previously mentioned aspects, the aspect of consumption, in terms of luxury treatments and spas, is also considered as one of the essential aspects of wellness, especially in the domain of tourism (Hjalager et al., 2011).

Wellbeing in the context of tourism

The term wellbeing, which is often used as a synonym for wellness even though these highly differ in definition (Huijbens, 2011), is over the years occurring in the area of research of different disciplines as psychology, health science, philosophy and economics, and more recently also in research regarding the discipline of tourism (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). However, still no unanimous used definition of wellbeing exists (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Years ago, Bradburn (1969) did a first attempt in defining the concept of wellbeing by stating:

“an individual will be high in psychological well-being in the degree to which he has an excess of positive over negative affect and will be low in well-being in the degree to which negative affect predominates over positive” (Bradburn, 1969, p. 9)

This relatively simple definition has been rewritten by other authors countless times and became more extended over the years. In the article of Björk et al. (2011) another definition of wellbeing is used. The term wellbeing is in their research report defined as following:

“wellbeing is a multidimensional state of being describing the existence of positive health of body, mind and soul. Wellbeing is an individual issue, but is manifest only in congruence with the wellbeing of the surrounding environment and community” (Björk et al., 2011, p. 10).

The term wellbeing is currently widely used in the area of tourism (Smith & Diekmann, 2017), leading to a segment of specific wellbeing tourists seeking specific tourism experiences. Wellbeing tourists are, in the research of Konu (2010), being defined as *“people who are likely to become leisure tourists, and whose main travelling motivation is promoting or maintaining one’s health”* (Konu, 2010, p. 43). Within this definition it is clearly shown that the wellbeing tourists have a different motivation for travelling than the other types of tourists. Besides that, the tourism experience they seek also differs from the other types of tourists. In the article of Smith and Diekmann (2017) it is argued, and presented by a Figure, that the wellbeing tourism experience consists of three aspect: 1)

hedonism (i.e. pleasure) and relaxation, 2) meaningful experiences, and 3) altruistic (i.e. unselfish) activities and sustainability. Although it is the optimum wellbeing tourism experience when the above three dimensions are included in the experience, this is unlikely to happen. Only when trips are pre- or co-created, there is a possibility that the optimum wellbeing tourism experience is achieved (Smith & Diekmann, 2017).

In this context of tourism, Konu (2010) demonstrates how the Finnish Tourism Board defines the difference between wellbeing tourism and wellness tourism. The Finnish Tourism Board firstly defines health tourism as an umbrella under which medical tourism as well as wellbeing tourism falls. Medical tourism is then seen as tourism for the purpose of illness treatment, and wellbeing tourism with the purpose of achieving holistic wellbeing: wellbeing in body, mind and soul. Wellness is in this context defined as the product that holds one or more wellbeing services (Konu, 2010). In this sense, it can be concluded that wellness is considered as being a certain product or service, whereas wellbeing is a state of mind that can be achieved by the wellness products or services.

Nordic wellbeing

The term 'Nordic wellbeing' was developed by Björk et al. (2011) during their research project, referring to a geographically bounded form of wellbeing in the Nordic countries. The concept of Nordic wellbeing is simultaneously supposed to serve as a marketing tool in terms of branding, being associated with nature, outdoor experiences, healthy local gastronomy, local culture and cleanliness of air, nature and water (Björk et al., 2011). The results of the study done by Tuohino (2013) also show the main associated elements of the Nordic wellbeing concept based on the opinion of interviewees. According to this study, the resources connected to the environment and natural surroundings, the Nordic values and the human-nature relationship form the basis of the Nordic wellbeing products and services (Tuohino, 2013).

2.2 Innovations in wellbeing tourism

The tourism sector is a continuously changing sector, resulting from the highly heterogeneous actors and products that are existing in this sector. Innovation, or change, is especially becoming more important with regard to services. Therefore, innovation thus plays a major role in the tourism industry; also in the specific industry of wellbeing tourism (Aldebert, Dang, & Longhi, 2011). As this specific study focusses on the changes that have happened in the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region in Iceland during the past eight years, it is essential to create a certain understanding with regard to the concept of innovation. Therefore, this sector discusses the concept of innovation.

According to the article of Hjalager and Flagestad (2012), an innovative product or service is considered as something new to the consumer and/or service provider. However, innovations can also be defined by comparing them to inventions. Innovations can then be defined as further developments of previous inventions (Schumpeter, in Hjalager, 2002). However, both authors agree on the fact that an innovation is not related to any industry in specific, and that an innovation does not necessarily need to be completely new or a large transformation; small adaptations to existing products and services may already ensure a significant level of newness and can thus be considered as innovations (Schumpeter, in Hjalager, 2002; Hjalager & Flagestad, 2012). Although the earlier mentioned authors have done attempts in defining the term of innovation, the most broad and complete definition of innovation, formulated by Kanter (1983), is as follows:

“Innovation refers to the process of bringing any new, problem solving idea into use. Ideas for reorganizing, cutting costs, putting in new budgetary systems, improving communication or assembling products in teams are also innovations. Innovation is the generation, acceptance and implementation of new ideas, processes, products or services” (Kanter, 1983, 20-1).

Similar to the definition of the term innovation, there is also not one single method for classifying innovations. One method of classifying innovations, which is often used, is mentioned by Hjalager (2002) and is based on the level of focus of the innovation. According to the author, there are five categories or levels in which innovations can take place within businesses or industries in general:

1. product innovations consisting of adjusted or new products and/or services;
2. process innovations consisting of changes to, for example, technologies in order to improve the performance of the involved operations;
3. management innovations consisting of changes in, for example, authority systems, styles in management and collaboration systems;
4. logistics innovations consisting of changes in the external flows;
5. institutional innovations consisting of changes to the external and overall structures regarding collaborations and regulations (Hjalager, 2002).

An even broader classification is enabled by the transience model of Abernathy and Clark (1988) which includes the focus of the innovation, as well as the range of the innovation. This model is “based on the degree of conservation versus disruption in terms of technology-production and market-consumer linkages” (Hall & Williams, 2008, p. 7). According to this model, innovations can be classified into four different types:

1. niche (new market opportunities by using already existing technologies);
2. regular (no major breakthroughs in terms of markets or technologies are needed);
3. revolutionary (new technologies are involved, however, impact is not for entire industry);
4. architectural (can have a large effect on the entire industry) (Hall & Williams, 2008).

The previous classification methods for innovations are relatively broad. However, in the article of Hjalager and Flagestad (2012), four different, but interrelated, types of innovations focussing especially on the supply side of the concept of wellbeing tourism are discussed:

1. core product/service innovations related to wellness traditions by making adjustments to the existing consumption and production logic;
2. product diversifications expanding the wellness traditions by combining new elements with existing products or services in order to create something new or unexpected for tourists;
3. technological and service providing innovations;
4. institutional innovations by making adjustments to the governance mechanisms.

Although there are various ways to classify innovations, the reasons for them are limited. Innovations are generally the result of two types of drivers: 1) new technologies and methods that ensure efficiency within the business, and 2) by the demand of the customers. However, within the tourism sector, the majority of the innovations is driven by the customers as well as the market in general (Hjalager & Flagestad, 2012).

2.3 The Mývatn region and its peripheral character

As mentioned before, this study focusses specifically on the Mývatn region in Iceland. This region is located in the Northeast of Iceland and is renamed after the largest landmark of the region: Lake Mývatn (Aradóttir, 2005). Amongst tourists, this region is especially popular for one specific site: the Mývatn Nature Baths (Óladóttir, 2018).

This site, offering wellness products and services, was originally used by the locals for bathing as the water is heated by the steam coming from the ground. Especially the spot 'hot spring bathing hills' (Jarðbaðshólar) was popular amongst the locals. In 1996, a natural steam bath was created by putting a plastic hut above one of steam crevices resulting in a growing number of locals and regional tourists visiting the site. As a result of this growth, a facility was built by the Mývatn Bathing Company partly around the old nature steam bath, and since 2004, this facility is open for tourists. In 2005, 2006 and 2007, the region was even visited by one third of the number of international visitors arriving in Iceland, which led to the fact that the facilities were extended and reopened in 2009 (Huijbens, 2010, 2011). The Mývatn Nature Baths are not as heavily visited as the famous Blue Lagoon, located in the South of Iceland, currently is. However, this will not take long as the worldwide popularity of Iceland is increasing (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009).

Although the Mývatn Nature Baths are a popular tourist destination within this district, the district is, amongst the other northern districts of Iceland, known as a peripheral area. The following definition of Jonsson Kvist and Klefsjö (2006) clarifies the concept of a peripheral location:

"A peripheral location is a tourist destination that has a degree of geographical isolation and economic marginalisation – which is often associated with declining traditional industries. It is often situated at some distance from places of core economic activity, with poor access to and from markets. There is often a lack of infrastructure and a reliance on imports" (Jonsson Kvist & Klefsjö, 2006, p. 521)

This peripheral character in the case of the Mývatn region in the north of Iceland is highlighted by the number of migration, which is a frequently occurring phenomenon in the region (Ólafsdóttir & Runnström, 2009). In December 2004, the district counted 437 inhabitants, which was the result of an extreme decline of inhabitants of 26% compared to twenty years earlier (Aradóttir, 2005). This high number of migration may be partly due to the limited amount of resources in the region, shown by the fact that the two main businesses within the region are the geothermal energy and the tourism sector, of which the last one is mainly seasonal (Aradóttir, 2005).

Although there are only two main businesses in the region, tourism is often considered as possibility to boost the economy in these peripheral areas (Ólafsdóttir & Runnström, 2009). Especially reducing the seasonality of the tourism industry is often one of the main objectives of the tourism development policies of peripheral countries, as mentioned by Baum and Hagen (1999). In the case of the Mývatn region, and the northern area of Iceland in general, there are only a few touristic attractions to visit, resulting in a high number of tourist visits to this area as there are limited opportunities in spreading them. This has a large impact on the natural environment, and therefore, it is needed to properly manage the tourism sector in a sustainable way.

In the article of Morrison (1998) several strategies are mentioned that can be used by peripheral tourism destinations in order to emphasise the positive aspects and to develop the destination:

- differentiate the periphery from the centre in a positive way (Butler, 1994);
- offer innovative products that are in line with market trends (Boniface, 1997);
- ensure market diversification by offering different products/services with different prices per season in order to attract a more diverse public (Baum, in Morrison, 1998);
- offer a wide range of customised products to appropriate market segments (Wanhill, 1997);
- and co-operation between tourist product providers is needed (Butler, 1994).

2.4 Conceptual framework

The concepts that are discussed in the previous section are used in this conceptual framework and form the theoretical basis of this study. As the current study elaborates on the previous research project conducted by Björk et al. (2011), the concepts of (Nordic) wellbeing and innovation are therefore emphasised in this study. Besides that, the concept of periphery will be used in this study.

As the study of Björk et al. (2011) forms the basis of this study, the same definition of wellbeing is used. Wellbeing is defined as *“a multidimensional state of being describing the existence of positive health of body, mind and soul. Wellbeing is an individual issue, but is manifest only in congruence with the wellbeing of the surrounding environment and community”* (Björk et al., 2011, p. 10). The term wellbeing is in this study used to describe the positive health of body as well as the positive health of mind and soul. The focus of this study will also be on Nordic wellbeing. Developed by Björk et al. (2011) this term refers to the geographically bounded form of wellbeing in the Nordic countries, and simultaneously serves as a marketing tool within the field of tourism.

Besides the concept of wellbeing, the concept of innovation will be central in this thesis since innovations can be considered as developments. Models related to innovations can thus assist this study by identifying and classifying certain developments. Influenced by Kanter (1983), innovations are in this study defined as *“the generation, acceptance and implementation of new ideas, processes, products or services”* (Kanter, 1983, 20-1). In order to classify the different types of developments of the last eight years in the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region in Iceland, the classification method of Hjalager and Flagestad (2012) will be used which is especially developed for the wellbeing tourism industry and therefore highly relevant for this study. According to this model, four types of innovations can be identified: 1) core product/services innovations, 2) product diversifications, 3) technological and service providing innovations, and 4) institutional innovations. Besides classifying the developments in the Mývatn region in terms of focus, the developments will be classified in terms of impact. The transience model of Abernathy and Clark (1988) assists this study in evaluating the developments of the last eight years. Based on their impact, this model enables the past developments to be assigned to one of the four types of innovations: 1) niche innovation, 2) regular innovation, 3) revolutionary innovation, or 4) architectural innovation (Hall & Williams, 2008, p. 7).

Lastly, this thesis uses the concept of a peripheral area. In this thesis, a peripheral area is viewed as a *“tourist destination that has a degree of geographical isolation and economic marginalisation”* (Jonsson Kvist & Klefsjö, 2006, p. 521). This concept helps to provide a better understanding of the Mývatn region in Iceland, which is the focus of this case study and is, even though it is a popular destination amongst tourists, considered as a peripheral area.

3. Methods

For the purpose of getting a better understanding of the developments regarding wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region in the north of Iceland, a qualitative research design is employed. In this chapter, the methodological decisions concerning the research design, the sampling method, the data collection method and the method of data analysis are explained. In addition, the limitations of this research are discussed in the final paragraph of this chapter.

3.1 Research design and method

As explained in the first chapter of this report, the main objective of this study is to get insight in the developments of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region in Iceland over the past eight years. In order to achieve this research objective, qualitative research is performed by the approach of an exploratory case study. As the study focusses specifically on the area around the Mývatn lake in the northern part of Iceland, and thus involves a detailed analysis of a single case, a case study is considered to be the appropriate research approach for this research project (Bryman, 2012). In addition, the case study can be considered to be exploratory, due to the fact that currently, limited scientific literature is available on the specific topic of this study (Boeije, 2010).

In order to further explore the recent developments in the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region in Iceland, it is useful to perform qualitative research. Firstly, this is due to the fact that case studies often favour qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). In addition, the explorative nature of qualitative research makes this research approach especially suitable for studies with an explorative nature due to fact that its flexible approach enables continuous adjustments of data collection and analysis according to the obtained findings (Boeije, 2010). As this study on wellbeing tourism is considered as highly explorative of nature, as there is a lack of sufficient knowledge on the topic, qualitative research is regarded as the most suitable research approach for this specific study.

A research method which is often favoured when performing a case study with a qualitative research approach is the use of interviews. By conducting interviews, detailed information regarding a specific case can be generated (Bryman, 2012). For this study, it is decided that data is collected by the practice of semi-structured interviews, as this method focusses on the perspectives and experiences of the interviewees (Boeije, 2010) and ensures a certain structure by still leaving room for the interviewee to influence and steer the interview. By leaving room for the interviewee, the case this study focusses on can be explored most extensively. For this study, the interviews are conducted with stakeholders playing a significant role in the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region.

3.2 Sampling methods

Most of the interviewees have been selected due to their involvement in the previous research project of Björk et al. (2011) which was around eight years ago. Preferably, the exact same interviewees of the previous project would have participated in this research. The sampling method that was selected for this study was therefore the method of purposive sampling. This means that the interviewees are selected due to their relevance to the research project and the research questions (Bryman, 2012). In the end, the interviewees were chosen in three ways: 1) identified from

research documents, 2) following the suggestions of E. Huijbens who is one of the authors of the previous research project, and 3) chosen due to their relevance for the research project.

Besides the purposive sampling method, the method of snowball sampling can be identified in this study. During the mail contact with the companies that were invited for participation in this research project, the mail was in some cases redirected to another person from the company that would be more appropriate to interview in terms of function, location, knowledge or experience within the company and the tourism sector. This shows the use of the connectedness of people in networks (Bryman, 2012) within the companies of this case study.

3.3 Data collection method

The data collection took place between the 12th of July and the 2nd of August 2019 in Iceland. The data collection method that was used is semi-structured interviews. Preferably, at least 12 interviews were conducted, based on the claim of Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) who argue that this is a sufficient sample size for saturation by performing interviews. However, this was not possible, even though there have been 20 interviews during the previous research project. These 20 interviewees included multiple interviewees from one company, and some interviewees that were not relevant for this study. In addition, there were several companies who were not able and/or willing to participate. Therefore, eight interviews have been conducted for this research project, with a duration between 15 to 50 minutes per interview. A complete list of the interviewees can be found in Appendix 1.

The research for this study was performed in the Mývatn region in the north of Iceland. As this region is used before as the 'laboratory area' of Iceland during the study performed by Björk et al. (2011), this region was used for fieldwork during this study as well. By performing research in the same area, the developments that took place since the research project eight years ago can be clearly identified. In other words, focussing on the same region enables comparison with previous research. The interviews were therefore mainly conducted in the Mývatn region; in Reykjahlíd in specific. Three of the interviews were conducted in other towns: one interview was conducted in Húsavík and two interviews were conducted in Akureyri. The interviews were all conducted at the locations and enterprises of the interviewees that are offering services and/or products related to wellbeing tourism. These visits were done on purpose as this could help the interviewee to clarify certain answers given on the interview questions by providing concrete examples, for example by showing the offered services, or by showing the implementation of the unique Nordic selling points.

The interviews have been conducted in Iceland during a time span of approximately three weeks during the second half of the month July. This month was chosen based on the following two reasons: 1) a sufficient amount of time was needed in order to prepare and plan the eight interviews, and 2) July is, together with August, the high season in Iceland and therefore the chances that the preferred enterprises with regard to wellbeing tourism were open were highest (Óladóttir, 2018, p. 7). Moreover, during high season it is more likely for stakeholders of the enterprises to be present.

Before the interviews were conducted, two slightly different interview guides have been created for the different types of stakeholders. Separate interview guides have been created for the companies located in the Mývatn area on one hand, and the development agencies and the municipality of the Mývatn region on the other hand. This decision was based on the variety in the role that these

stakeholders play in relation to the wellbeing tourism sector in the area. The interview guides can be found in Appendix 2. The interview guides have been used for all interviews, ensuring that the interviews covered the same topics. Although the same topics were covered, the order of topics varied slightly. This was mainly due to the fact that the interviewees did not consider the same topics to be most important. The topics that were addressed during the interviews were related to the company's view on the concept of wellbeing, the use of the concept of wellbeing within the company, the current state of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region, the development of wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn area over the years focussing on innovation and marketing, and the interviewee's view on the future of wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region together with the potential challenges.

3.4 Data analysis method

During the interviews, a lot of data was collected. Audio recordings were made from all the interviews once the interviewees had given written permission. Afterwards, the recordings were transcribed word by word in order to be able to analyse them later. The emotions that were used by the interviewees when answering the questions were left out as these were not considered as relevant for this thesis. The transcription of the interviews was done by using Microsoft Word in which the act of coding was performed as well. The data was coded to segment, categorize and connect the data in order to get to the findings of this study (Boeije, 2010). Codes were given by keeping in mind the research questions resulting in a coding scheme. Eventually, this coding process resulted in the existence of several themes that were remarkable for the outcomes of this study.

In the results of this study, the interviewees were referred to by their function and the company they are working for. All interviewees were informed and have given written permission for the data to not be handled anonymously; therefore information about their function can be shared. A full list of the names, functions and companies of the participated interviewees can be found in Appendix 1. The coding scheme which was the result of the coding process can be found in Appendix 2, and an example of a transcribed interview can be found in Appendix 3.

3.5 Limitations

Similar to every research project, this study deals with certain limitations. The main limitation of this study is the restricted amount of time I was able to spend in Iceland. Due to the thesis planning, but also due to the high costs of staying in Iceland, I was able to stay in the country for three weeks. These three weeks also included preparation time, as most interviewees were not able to plan a day and time of the interview in advance, and travelling time. These restrictions have led to a limited number of interviewees that have been spoken to with regard to this study. If there would have been more time available for staying in Iceland, it may have been possible to talk to a larger number of stakeholders in order to explore the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region in an even more extensive way.

Another aspect that can be considered as a limitation of this study is related to the first limitation that was discussed, namely the period in which the data collection was performed. The data collection for this study was performed in July; together with August considered as the high season in Iceland. Although this was considered as an advantage before, as this would mean that all the

tourism related companies would be open in this period of the year and most employees and managers would be present as well, this was in the end considered as a limiting factor. It turned out that most of the managers of the tourism related companies were indeed present in the office, however, the majority of them was too busy with coping with the daily operations; meaning that they were not able and willing to participate in an interview. Although it would not have been possible to travel to Iceland in August, due to the planning, for a next study it may be better to go to Iceland in the end of August, when the high season is getting to the end. Most managers will then still be present in the company and may have some more time available to sit down for an interview. In the end, this will result in more interviewees, and in being able to draw more conclusions on the developments of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region.

The last limitation of this study is caused by the fact that this study builds on a previous research project that was finished around eight years ago. As this previous research took place several years ago, and as the results of the research project may not have been shared with all the involved parties back then, the existing knowledge amongst the interviewees regarding this previous research project was limited. The majority of the interviewees that was involved in the previous project switched jobs in the meantime and was therefore not involved in the current study. This caused some difficulties in terms of comparing the results of this study to the previous research study. In order to minimize this limitation, the interview questions have been formulated in an open way without specifically referring to the conclusions and recommendations of the previous research project.

4. Results

As this thesis focuses on the Mývatn region in the north of Iceland, and more specifically on its development regarding wellbeing tourism, it is important to have a basic understanding of the Mývatn region itself. Therefore, the first section of this chapter provides some background information of the Mývatn region. The other five sections of this chapter will provide the reader with the findings of this study. The second and the third section present the findings regarding the definition of wellbeing and the role of wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region. The fourth section elaborates on the recent developments in the region, while the fifth section elaborates on the aspect of accessibility and infrastructure. To conclude, the last section presents the findings regarding the marketing of and collaboration between the different parties within the Mývatn area.

4.1 The Mývatn region

The Mývatn region is located in the north of Iceland, on a 6 to 7 hours' drive from Reykjavik and only half an hour from Akureyri. The region is located along the ring road, which makes it accessible in the winter as well (Renyard, 2019). The Mývatn region, displayed in Image 1, refers to the area located around Lake Mývatn. This lake is the fourth largest lake of Iceland, covering a surface of 37 m², and got his name due to the midges that are existing around the lake (Renyard, 2019; Visit Mývatn, n.d.). The area is well-known for its volcanoes and geothermal activity. These two have always played a large role, especially in the formation of the landscape (Renyard, 2019; Visit Mývatn, n.d.). Nowadays, the entire lake Mývatn is a legally protected conservation area and is full of diverse ecology and a high variety of birdlife (Visit Mývatn, n.d.).



Image 1. The map of lake Mývatn (Quiggyt4, 2014)

Despite the uniqueness and beauty of the region, the area is sparsely populated. Besides that, most inhabitants live in the main town in the region: Reykjalíð. This is the only place offering basic necessities as a supermarket and a gas station (Renyard, 2019). Currently, the Skútustadahreppur municipality, covering the area around lake Mývatn, has around 520 inhabitants (Visit North Iceland, n.d.). However, this number is growing considerably due to the rise in tourism and therefore also in the number of jobs in this tourism sector. This growth of the tourism sector has resulted in one fourth of the inhabitants being of foreign origin (Iceland Review, 2018).

While this tourism industry used to be a seasonal industry in the region, it is nowadays offering year-round jobs for lots of people in the area (Iceland Review, 2018). During the years, Mývatn has become more popular as a tourist destination and the tourist traffic has highly increased (Fontaine, 2017). During the summer of 2019, which are the months June, July and August, the northern area of Iceland, in which lake Mývatn is located, was even visited by 42% of the international visitors arriving

in Iceland (Ferdamalastofa/Icelandic Tourist Board, 2019). In order to cope with the demands, the tourism facilities have increased as well. During the last few years, around 200 new hotel rooms have been built (Fontaine, 2017). This growth can partly be explained by the growth of tourism that Iceland as a whole is facing (Iceland Review, 2018). However, the fact that several famous movies as Star Wars and Game of Thrones were shot in the area played a role in this development. Furthermore, the lake Mývatn is part of the Diamond circle, the famous route in the north of Iceland which includes, besides the lake Mývatn, the Godafoss and Dettifoss waterfalls, the Namafjall hot springs and the glacial canyon Ásbyrgi (Renyard, 2019). Although the development in tourism is considered as positive for the region, there is also some scepticism existing as the protection of the lake is questioned (Fontaine, 2017).

As mentioned before, the region is known for its volcanoes and geothermal activity (Renyard, 2019; Visit Mývatn, n.d.). These also make up most of Lake Mývatn's touristic attractions. The most visited touristic attractions in the region, mentioned by Gunnarsdóttir (n.d.) and Renyard (2019), are:

- Ásbyrgi: a glacial canyon;
- Dimmuborgir: volcanic caves and rock formations, used for Game of Thrones;
- Hverfjall: volcano crater which is popular for hiking;
- Askja caldera and the Krafla Caldera;
- Skutustadagigar: pseudo craters formed by steaming lava covering the wetlands;
- Lofthellir Ice Cave: natural ice sculptures in an Icelandic lava cave;
- Namafjall: natural springs with boiling mud pots with temperatures over 200 degrees Celsius;
- Grjótagjá: a hot spring cave which was also used in the film Game of Thrones;
- Mývatn Nature Baths: naturally heated baths with health-giving and mineral-rich water. Average temperature between 36 and 40 degrees Celsius;
- Waterfalls Aldeyjarfoss, Godafoss, Dettifoss and Selfoss

4.2 Defining wellbeing experiences

When the interviewees were asked about their view on wellbeing tourism and how they would define it, multiple concepts were mentioned that could, according to them, be grouped under the broader concept of wellbeing tourism. As the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri described it, it *"is such a broad spectrum and you can decide on almost anything that it is wellbeing"*. The interpretations the interviewees had about wellbeing experiences vary from nature experiences to linkages to slow tourism, local food, high prices and to the concept of relaxation and pampering yourself. Although a clear and agreed definition of wellbeing is lacking, this high variety in interpretations may offer the sector the possibility to attach wellbeing to numerous offerings in the region. Below, the different interpretations will be discussed per subject.

Nature experiences

The main element that is connected to wellbeing by the majority of the interviewees is the nature in the north of Iceland. This nature itself is not directly connected to wellbeing experiences, however, it is being outdoor in the nature, the performance of walks and hikes in the Icelandic nature and the hot water that this nature has to offer in the north of Iceland, according to five interviewees including the managing director of the Northeast Development Agency, the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel, the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn, the

chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths, and the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri. The manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel is highly precise in describing to what extent he sees a connection between wellbeing and experiencing nature: *“you know the feeling always when you go upon the top of the mountain. That is something that I would think about of wellbeing”*. Another interviewee, the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri, mentioned about visiting the Icelandic nature: *“90% of what our visitors say that the reason to come in Iceland is regarding the Icelandic nature and that use to go hand in hand with hiking trip which is a part of wellness tourism”*. Except from the activities that are performed in the nature, the water is also considered as being linked to wellbeing. As the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn states: *“always you connect Mývatn side to warm water, it means basically wellbeing and health”*. However, according to the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency, this nature should be used even more in developing the region’s wellbeing tourism sector. He mentioned that *“the wellbeing tourism industry should be straight forward to meet the tool to open the scarcely populated nature that we have here [...] I think we are not in a straight way competing to some century’s old spas in Europe [...] We have to make our own special niche [...] So, I think you have to make this special connection to what is unique of the surroundings and connect it to that”*. These answers show that nature is, according to several interviewees, essential in wellbeing and wellbeing tourism.

Nordic wellbeing

Although the aspect of nature was frequently mentioned during the interviews, the term ‘Nordic wellbeing’, referring to the Icelandic nature, being outdoor and the cleanliness of water and air, is not often used in the Mývatn region. Although the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel mentioned that he thinks this term is used, the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths clearly stated: *“no we have not been using it as Nordic wellbeing, no, no, to be honest”*. Although it seems that the term is not that much used, the underlying thought of the term clearly resonates with what the Mývatn region has to offer according to several interviewees. The founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths namely mentions: *“We have all of that here actually. And the idea, the possibilities here are, of course, in this quietness, especially in winter time and off-season time”*. Also, the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri sees the aspects of Nordic wellbeing as being present in the region, as he says: *“It is, I think, it will be and it is a strong part and I think it is a great potential for us in the future”*.

Slow tourism

Another aspect that was mentioned by three interviewees in order to define wellbeing was the concept of slow tourism. According to them, wellbeing tourism can be seen as connected to travelling in a slow pace. The managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency describes it as: *“And I think that actually wellbeing [...] is related to things like slow tourism and something valuable for you as a person”*, while the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn links this aspect of slow tourism immediately to a different type of tourist, by mentioning: *“It is also maybe another part of wellbeing, just a different tourist, just to travel a little bit slow”*. Also, the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort sees slow tourism as an aspect of wellbeing tourism: *“In my mind, it is a little like slow travel, enjoy, the standard food, perfect food, good room [...]”*. It becomes clear that although all three interviewees connect slow tourism to wellbeing tourism, they consider slow tourism just as one of the main elements connected to wellbeing instead of the only element.

Local food

Next to slow tourism, two of the earlier mentioned interviewees, namely the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn and the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort, also connected the concept of wellbeing to food, and local food specifically. In this case, the local food refers to Icelandic food. Both mentioned that the local food they serve in their restaurant, in their minds, represents wellbeing. The manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn mentioned that he links wellbeing directly to his restaurant: *“I just connect wellbeing to my restaurant. Because here we buy the fish local, we buy the local lamb, buy the fruits that they use for the jam from one of the waiter’s grandmother”*. This is also what the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort considers as wellbeing as she mentions: *“I, a little bit, connect wellbeing and what we are doing with like high-quality food. All the products that we are using, they are for example high quality food and quality products. They are more expensive than if you prefer to buy the cheapest one. [...] during winter in Iceland, it is quite difficult to have Icelandic salad. [...] we are trying to think with the food, food is supposed to be Iceland”*.

High prices

Besides that, the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort even connected price to the concept of wellbeing. According to her *“wellbeing and price connect a little”* as *“wellbeing guests, they prefer sometimes price and very much price”*. She links wellbeing to tourists that are searching for a certain extent of luxury or just a higher standard than the average. In this way, she immediately linked the concept of wellbeing to paying a higher price.

Relaxation and pampering yourself

Lastly, relaxation and the act of pampering yourself are seen as aspects of wellbeing, according to a few interviewees. The chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths defines wellbeing as *“to have a hot bath, steam bath, massage, other treatments you know, but also part of wellbeing, in my point of view, is like walking and enjoying nature, relaxing from the hectic stress that is all around us”*. Also, the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri mentioned: *“one can say that wellness tourism is that something has to do with one to enjoy and build up yourself, whether it is like going to spas or anything like that, or just going out in nature and enjoying yourself and like nature”*. Spas, saunas, hot tubs and massages are the products and services that are perceived to serve this relaxation and act of pampering yourself as mentioned by the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn, the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths and the director of the Iceland Tourist Board Akureyri. The chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths even mentioned that these products and services are the main aspects of wellbeing, by mentioning: *“If I define wellbeing as a ground wellbeing and related areas, the ground wellbeing for me in wellbeing is relaxing in hot tubs, spa, sauna, having the possibility to have massage and things like that”*. In other words, wellbeing products and services as hot tubs, spa’s, sauna’s and massages are, according to him, considered as being the core of wellbeing.

4.3 The role of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region

When the interviewees were asked about their opinion on the role of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region, no unanimous answer was given. While several interviewees mentioned to see the area as a real wellbeing destination, or as a destination having the potential to become one, others were not convinced at all of the existence of wellbeing tourism in the region.

Mývatn as a wellbeing destination in which nature experiences are key

The majority of the interviewees that see the Mývatn region as a wellbeing destination mainly link this existence to the unique nature the area has to offer. For instance, the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel mentioned that nature plays such a large role in the area that, according to him, the area is just all about nature. The link between nature and wellbeing is emphasized when he defines wellbeing: *“you know the feeling always when you go upon the top of the mountain. That is something that I would think about of wellbeing”*. He thus defines the presence of wellbeing tourism by the form of experiencing nature. Also, according to the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri, nature and wellbeing are highly related. This is explained by him when he mentioned that the Mývatn region *“is and always have been a wellbeing destination”*, referring to the phenomenon of volcanic craters, the variety of birds and the geothermal water that the Mývatn region has to offer. Only the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency does not link the wellbeing aspect of the region directly to nature. With the purpose of defining the importance of the wellbeing sector in the region, he mentioned that he sees wellbeing as the third main concept being present in the area, without referring directly to the nature.

Scepticism towards the presence of wellbeing tourism

As illustrated above, a few interviewees are convinced of the presence of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region. However, others do not see the wellbeing tourism sector as currently being present in the area. The manager of the Vogafjós farm resort is one of the two interviewees who is quite sceptic about the Mývatn region as a wellbeing destination. She mentioned that there has never been a clear focus on wellbeing tourism specifically in the region by mentioning: *“our community has no like, they are not concentrating on wellbeing, it is like a little everything”*. Therefore, she is sceptic if the region will ever become a wellbeing destination. Although she mentioned that she sees quite some positive aspects of the area that have the potential, she is not sure that it will ever happen. In order to become such a destination she mentioned that firstly, the Mývatn region should be advertised as a wellbeing destination, and besides that, agreements need to be made on the type of tourist that will be welcomed in the area; specifically referring to the cruise ship passengers that in her eyes are far from wellbeing tourists. She explained: *“I think in a way, there are so different opinions. [...] For example, of course there are some hotel runners or restaurants who think that the cruise ships, the passengers, they are really good, but the cruise ships they put the prices down, so much, and the food they are offered is supposed to be the cheapest one. And there is no standard. [...] But of course, there are not all people agree, this is my opinion. So, no, I do not think we will manage to put the Mývatn area as we say a wellbeing area for tourists”*. Another interviewee who is not convinced of wellbeing being present in the Mývatn area is the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths. By mentioning that *“they are totally not in the wellbeing”*, he referred to the Mývatn Nature Baths specifically. He argued that when he started the company years ago, the purpose was to offer wellbeing. However, during the years, and with the change in ownership, he believes that the company did not do enough in the field of wellbeing. According to him this is mainly due to the fact that the Mývatn Nature Baths have been developed in a too commercial way by making it too big and by allowing too many guests.

The region’s potential in becoming a destination for wellbeing tourism

Except from these two extreme views on the wellbeing sector in the Mývatn region, there are also three interviewees who are in the middle by arguing that the area has the potential to be developed

as a wellbeing destination. This potential is illustrated by the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn who mentioned that although the guests that they receive are currently not necessarily looking for wellbeing; he sees the potential by mentioning: *“this place just screams wellness”*. According to him, some ingredients for a wellbeing destination are present, like the hot water, the local food offer, the companies in the region that are offering activities like hiking, and the Mývatn Nature Baths. The chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths agreed on the fact that there are many possibilities for the wellbeing sector to develop in the Mývatn region. When he was asked if he sees the Mývatn region as a future wellbeing tourism destination, he answered: *“Yes, it could be, I mean, we have the Nature Baths, we have the Sea Baths in Húsavík, and there are ideas about some baths here in the area, you have all kinds of activities around the area. [...] you have hiking, you have skiing, and alpine, cycling is very popular, climbing, ice climbing even nearby Húsavík, whale watching”*. He even compares the Mývatn region with Queenstown in New Zealand; a city which is known for its activities and outdoor sports. The director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri also referred to the high amount of businesses in the area that are offering products and services related to wellbeing. He believes that there will be a bright future for the wellbeing tourism sector in the area. Even though the region has been focussing on wellbeing tourism for some time, this has never been the main focus according to him. However, the area has always been associated with wellbeing. The role of wellbeing and wellness for the area is even more explained by the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri when he mentioned that *“wellness tourism has been growing considerably in Iceland. And one can even say that tourism in Iceland is all wellness tourism”*. The only aspect the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri mentioned to be worried about is the way the wellbeing tourism industry will be built up in the Mývatn region. He explained this by saying: *“I think it is a great potential for us in the future, but then you have to be very careful [...] truthful in how you will perceive that, because tourism in itself is a polluting industry, so we have to be very careful on how we build up tourism and what sort of means and access we are using to create tourism. For example, cruise industry, would that fit that image?”*.

The crucial role of the Mývatn Nature Baths

Although all three interviewees that are mentioned in the previous section consider the Mývatn region as a region having the potential to develop itself in order to become a wellbeing destination in Iceland due to its variety of activities, products and services, they consider one company as being crucial in the current wellbeing tourism sector: the Mývatn Nature Baths. This is illustrated by the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn who mentioned that the Mývatn Nature Baths *“are probably the biggest wellbeing, the heart in all of this”* and by the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri who explained that *“Mývatn has always been associated with wellbeing and wellbeing tourism. And especially today, they have built up the public baths up there”*. Also the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths fully agreed on the ‘key role’ of the Mývatn Nature Baths, by stating: *“I think, Mývatn Nature Baths is [...] playing a key role in wellbeing in the area”* and *“in my point of view, there are many possibilities in wellbeing in the area. Mývatn Nature Baths is one part of it and has increased it, I would say, tremendously”*. He definitely sees the baths as the key player.

Future development

Regarding the future of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region, there are several interviewees who have a certain view on this development. Firstly, the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency would like to see the wellbeing sector being developed by

linking this to the region's unique nature: *"I think the wellbeing concept in Mývatn in my view has to be related to this unique nature as we have that. So, the development should be on the basis of how you can enjoy the nature and further expand them than just being a stupid tourist by being informed, and how you can actually use the nature in a way that this ensures both physical and mental feeling good"*. The focus should, according to them, be on the basis of enjoying the nature. The founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths for instance would like to see it happen that more special products and experiences are being offered in the region which are a specialty, so that incoming tourists will stay for around a week in the Mývatn area just for wellbeing purposes. Some other interviewees, the employee of the municipality and the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths, would also prefer some more wellbeing products and services to be developed serving wellbeing tourism. The chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths for example refers to the offerings as massages. This view regarding the preferred development of wellbeing products and services is supported by the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn. However, he made his view on this preferred development more specific regarding his own business: hotel Reynihlíd. With regard to the wellbeing products, he is currently thinking about creating a special travel package for tourists which is completely focussing on wellbeing. According to him, this package should for example include a stay for a couple of nights including lunch and dinner, some workshops in the meeting rooms, several indoor and outdoor activities as snowmobiling and yoga, and aspects of relaxation by using the hot tubs in the hotel or by offering guests a free pass to the Mývatn Nature Baths. Although nothing is concrete yet, he is currently in contact with a tour operator in the area. Another interviewee who has a clear view on the future development of the wellbeing sector in the area is the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths. He mentioned that he is currently working on increasing and renovating the Baths. He mentioned that *"this will help us to even increase the facilities and the possibility for spa treatments etcetera, etcetera"*. The new facilities will be opened in 2022 (interviewee 7). Although the Mývatn Nature Baths will be renovated, several interviewees also have a clear view on how they should be improved. According to the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency, more relaxing areas should be created to make people slow down. According to the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths, yoga courses or healings could be added and a total experience should be created by making a kind of lava hut in order to inform people about the tradition, for example. However, the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn does not consider the products and services that are offered in the region as the biggest problem, as he argued: *"I think we are doing a lot of it, but maybe emphasising on it"*.

4.4 Recent developments and the tourism boom

Since the previous research project several years ago, the Mývatn region and its wellbeing tourism sector have been developing. Several developments have been mentioned by the interviewees; however, also some scepticism is existing amongst them.

Scepticism towards the region's development

As mentioned, a certain degree of scepticism is existing in the region about the degree to which the area has recently been developing. For instance, the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency mentioned: *"the general concept of what Mývatn, or the Mývatn area, is, that is more or less the same as it has been for these twenty years or something like that"*. Also, the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel, the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths, the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort, the employee of the municipality and the chairman

of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths argue that no big changes or developments took place in the area recently. This lack of developments is exactly what the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths considers as a problem by citing: *“nothing happened. Nothing is happening. And that is the problem”*. One reason for this lack of development that is pointed out by the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency and the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths is that there has not been a real development plan for the area. Besides that, these two interviewees and the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn pointed out that the companies in the region have mainly been occupied with coping with the high number of incoming tourists; just answering the demands. On the other hand, the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri is more positive about the developments in the tourism sector and argued that a lot has happened during the last ten years in the region; especially referring to the wellbeing sector. He mentioned: *“So, for the past ten years you see a lot of developments there in the wellness. Both in terms of what people are offering and also in this increasing numbers, so there is a lot of development going on”*.

Recent developments

Even though there are several interviewees who mentioned that there were no big changes in the area since the last research, at least some developments did take place according to them. Regarding the infrastructure, international flights started to bring tourists from England and the Netherlands to the airport of Akureyri, according to the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency, the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel and the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn. Moreover, the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths mentioned that a tunnel between Akureyri and the Mývatn area has been opened in 2019 making it easier to reach the Mývatn area; especially in winter. Another development related to the infrastructure is mentioned by the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn: *“There is also a development here, it is called the Diamond Circle, you go to Húsavík and make a circle to Dettifoss and come here [...] that will be definitely an attraction”*. In addition to the changes in the infrastructure, several tourism companies have been renovated, expanded or newly built. According to their owners or managers, slight renovation took place at the Mývatn Nature Baths, and besides that, this company has extended itself in terms of visitors and facilities; just like the Hlíd hostel, the Vogafjós farm resort and the Sel hotel did in terms of rooms and facilities. Also new hotels and other tourism companies have opened in the region, including the Laxa hotel in 2013, the Foss hotel in 2017 and the Reynihlíd hotel as part of the Icelandair group in 2019 according to the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths, the bird museum at lake Mývatn according to the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths, and the Geothermal Sea Baths in Húsavík according to the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency. Lastly, the amount of activities that are able to be performed in the region, like hiking tours, bike renting, bike tours, yoga lessons, sea tours and tours to the Askja volcano, have increased as mentioned by the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency, the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel and the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri.

The tourism boom

The developments that are discussed in the previous section have been mentioned by several interviewees; however, there is one development that has been mentioned by all the interviewees: the increase in the number of incoming tourists. According to several interviewees (the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency, the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the

Hlíd campsite and hostel, the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths and the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths) this increase in tourism can even be considered as the main development in the area since the previous research took place. The degree to which the tourism has increased is illustrated well by the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Bath, as he stated: *“ten years ago we were getting some 60,000 guests and now we are having more than 200,000. And the number of employees has more than tripled”*. Also, the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency illustrated this tourism boom well by pointing out: *“we are actually hearing numbers here this summer of as tourists being as many as in 2016, which was the record year”*. These examples show the extent to which the number of visitors has increased in the Mývatn area.

This tourism boom was, according to the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths, the result of being in the news regularly. Firstly, due to the financial crisis, and then once again after the volcanic eruption in Eyjafjallajökull; resulting in a tourism boom Iceland was not prepared for. The increase in tourism in the Mývatn region, which can be considered as a regular yearly increase according to the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths and in contrast to the real boom that was experienced in the southern region of Iceland, has led to several advantages for the area. While the director of the Iceland Tourist Board Akureyri mentioned *“We can see that the numbers are up here in bed nights”*, the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency mentioned that *“there are a lot of investments”* in the area due to the tourism. Furthermore, this tourism boom is considered to play a large role in the urban development according to the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn as he mentioned: *“it is also a big part of urban development to have good tourism, and strong structure for it. So, it is really sad to see people negative towards it, because it does not really need to be like that”*. On the other hand, several disadvantages are experienced by the interviewees. One of the disadvantages that is mentioned by the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel is the big hotels that are being built in the Mývatn area. In addition, it is impossible to relax in the Mývatn Nature Baths due to the high number of visitors and the locals are complaining that it is too crowded in the town according to the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn. Furthermore, the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths mentioned that it is too crowded during certain periods of the year, the employee of the municipality mentioned that long queues in the only supermarket in the town are the result, and there are tourists that are just driving through without leaving any value behind according to some interviewees (the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel, the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn and the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort). Regarding the last disadvantage, the interviewees (the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel, the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths, the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn and the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort) are mainly referring to the high numbers of tourists that are coming from the cruise ships in Akureyri to the area for a day with the preference to spend little money.

Preferred measures with regard to tourism

The opinions regarding the tourism boom are somewhat divided. Some of the interviewees notice the advantages while the majority mainly highlights the negative consequences. Regarding the future in the area's tourism sector, several preferences and advices are shared by the interviewees. The managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency and the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn would like to see the tourism increases to level off a bit. As argued by the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency: *“I think for a general development it would*

be better if the increases level off a little bit so that people would need to think more about quality and what is actually being offered". Other preferred measures that are proposed by the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths and the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort are steering the traffic, starting to focus on the sales instead of on the number of heads and starting with a clear segmentation of the preferred tourist. As mentioned by the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort: *"the problem is that Iceland has never [...] decided which kind of tourist we prefer. We are still looking for everyone, and inviting everyone, and marketing for everyone, which I think is a mistake [...] because we are not able to welcome thirty million. [...] we have to concentrate on special groups of people"*. Another measure that was often mentioned by the interviewees, in order to level off the tourism, is to start asking for fees in the form of entrance fees when tourists are entering Iceland in general or specifically when tourists are entering certain touristic attractions, or by the form of parking fees (the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel, the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths, the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn, the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort and the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri). According to the employee of the municipality tourism, asking for an entrance fee is not something that will happen in the near future, as she argues: *"it is not something they are going to do in the near future. But of course, if it is getting too much people then we probably have to do something, but now it is not a problem"*. This is supported by the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri who explained that although it has been discussed a lot, there is no willingness yet from the political parties and the powerful airlines.

4.5 The Mývatn region as a peripheral area

As illustrated above, the tourism boom is, according to the majority of the interviewees, seen as the biggest challenge the Mývatn region is currently facing. However, another aspect of the region that is currently considered as a challenge is the accessibility of the north of Iceland for the foreign tourists. The majority of the interviewees (the managing director of the Northern Icelandic Development Agency, the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel, the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths, the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn and the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths) namely argued that the northern region, and the Mývatn region in specific, is difficult to reach for the foreign tourist, especially in comparison to the southern region of Iceland. The managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency and the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn particularly consider the region's accessibility as problematic during winter.

Reasons for being difficult to access

The interviewees mentioned multiple reasons that, according to them, have led to the poor accessibility of the northern region of Iceland. One of the reasons is mentioned by the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency as he argued: *"the problem that we generally see here, far away from the southwest corner of Iceland is of course the access for foreign tourists to come to Iceland, because the only international airport is in Keflavik. So, it is far from us and it is expensive to travel around in Iceland"*. Foreign travellers thus need to spend quite some time in Iceland in order to be able to also travel to the north; while most of them do not spend more than a week in Iceland according to the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel, the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths and the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths. This is illustrated well by the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths: *"you need to drive a lot and you need to spend at least a week in Iceland to come over here. And these modern travellers, they do not have time to stay one week in Iceland"*. In combination with the fact that Iceland is considered to be

an expensive country, as argued earlier by the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency, it is less likely for foreign tourists to access the northern region.

Recent developments

Over the years, there have been several developments that have improved the accessibility of the Mývatn region according to the interviewees. One of these developments has been the start of several flights between Iceland and Europe, namely from and to the Netherlands and England. By making use of the airport of Akureyri for these flights, which is located in the north of Iceland, this resulted in more tourists coming directly into the north with Mývatn just being less than an hour away, according to the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency, the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel, the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths and the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri. Besides that, the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths mentioned that this year January, a tunnel on the road between Mývatn and Akureyri was opened as the Víkurskard mountain road was a big challenge in the winter. Now it only takes 50 minutes to drive from Akureyri to the Mývatn region.

Preferred future situation

Regarding the future developments on the field of infrastructure and accessibility, the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency mentioned that a ring road going along the Dettifoss waterfall and the Vatnajökull National Park will be created this year making it easier to access the Mývatn region. He explained: *“there are actually big infrastructure projects this year, which is a ring road by Dettifoss and part of Vatnajökull National Park. [...] so, it will open this year [...] it will be accessible more. At least almost all year round. Maybe for the two or three biggest winter months not, but on top of that all of the other ones, just as it has been last three to four months”*. Also, within the region there are development plans regarding the infrastructure. According to employee of the municipality, the road to touristic highlight Krafla will be improved. Besides that, she mentioned: *“we are going to start at the end of the summer to make this walking and bicycle road across the lake, all over the lake. That is something we have been wanted to do for many, many, many years [...] because we want people to be able to walk along all the lake without having to be on the streets. This is both for riding and also security”*. Except from the already planned future developments, several interviewees mentioned a preferred future development in order to reduce the northern peripheral status; the increase of direct international flights to the north of Iceland by using the airports of Akureyri and Húsavík, according to the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency, the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel and the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths.

The advantage of being difficult to reach

However, not all the interviewees agreed on the fact that the region has to be easier accessible. As the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths explained: *“We need to be easier accessible on the purposes of people coming to buy the products we are offering. We do not need to be easier accessible for the easy travellers [...] we need people to pay real money for their coming”*. According to several interviewees this difficult accessibility can namely also be considered as something positive. The managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency argued that being more difficult to reach can be considered as a plus as, due to this, the region tends to attract tourists that are looking for things outside of the mainstream and are generally willing to spend more money. He continued

to explain this plus as follows: *“I think, people who are willing to go that far, and it costs somewhat to just to come into the place, but then these people are willing to stay longer so they leave more behind in economic value for the area”*. The chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths agreed on this by mentioning that more people nowadays want to go to the less visited places, which is positive for the Mývatn region. Besides that, the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths and the employee of the municipality mentioned that the people who like to discover and want to see the nature will not be stopped by the distance; they will still visit this place. Lastly, also the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri agreed on this by mentioning: *“I think it is, it is positive. In the sense that it makes it curious so I think it is a plus for the region rather than a minus”*.

4.6 Marketing and collaboration

As outlined in the previous sections, several developments have taken place during the years regarding the number of incoming tourists, the infrastructure and the wellbeing products and services that are being offered in the area. However, during the interviews, another development became clear; the role that the marketing company Visit Mývatn started to play with regard to the promotion of and the collaboration between the tourism-related businesses in the Mývatn area.

The role of Visit Mývatn

When the interviewees were asked to what extent a collaboration with the other tourism-related businesses in the region is existing, the majority of the interviewees (the managing director of the Northeast Iceland Development Agency, the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel, the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths and the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort) immediately referred to Visit Mývatn as the party through which this collaboration is initiated and happening. However, not only the collaboration takes place via Visit Mývatn, also most companies are being marketed via Visit Mývatn, according to all the interviewees except for the director of the Icelandic Tourist Board Akureyri. As the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort explains: *“mostly the private owned companies are marketing together. But the chains, they have marketing offices in Reykjavik and they prefer not to be so much with us which is sad”*. According to the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel and the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn, a company will be promoted by Visit Mývatn, for instance via their website, in return for a monthly fee. This is mainly meant for the smaller companies. As the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths explains: *“The idea behind it is that a lot of small companies, they cannot afford to go to a kind of travel show or doing more marketing job. So, through Visit Mývatn they can do that”*. Next to the promotion, Visit Mývatn currently also takes care of the organisation of yearly meetings with the members. These meetings mostly take place during winter as the companies are just too busy with the daily operations during summer, according to the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort. Since two to three years, Visit Mývatn became more effective. The company was already existing, but since there is a new employee at the company, it started to become a real effective regional marketing organisation.

Collaboration between the companies

Although Visit Mývatn mainly is supposed to be the regional marketing organisation, it also seems to play a large role in terms of ensuring the collaboration between the businesses as mentioned before: just a few companies in the region are working together outside of Visit Mývatn according to the founder of the Mývatn Nature Baths. The chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths explains: *“companies try to work together like a lot of guesthouses are selling our services”*. Besides

that, the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn, the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort and the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths mentioned that they try to work together as much as possible with the smaller and more local farmers and companies for food supplies. As the chairman of the board of the Mývatn Nature Baths stated: *“I mean we try to work with local farmers for just buying the right salmons and the right bread and things like that”*.

Preferred future situation in terms of collaboration

Even though the tourism-related business in the Mývatn region are, to a certain extent, working together, a stronger collaboration is seen as a preferred future development by at least the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn and the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort. The manager of the Vogafjós would prefer a stronger collaboration with the larger companies and chains. According to the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn, an improved collaboration would especially be helpful with an eye on the winter period in order to guarantee the employee's hours: *“I would like to see, because, when we are nearing the winter season, we need to minimise the operations a little bit so it is always how you are using your employees. Maybe we can [...] make them move around”*. He also argued that this collaboration should not per definition be limited to companies in the tourism sector as collaborating with farms and schools would also be highly valuable for the region as well.

The marketing of the Mývatn region

Also, with regard to the marketing, interviewees are calling for improvement while, on the other hand, there have been developments that are worth mentioning. Two examples are the increasing effectiveness of Visit Mývatn due to an employee switch, mentioned by the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn, and the increased marketing activities of the Mývatn Nature Baths as its chairman of the board explained: *“We hired just two years ago probably [...] a special marketing manager for the Nature Baths. This position was not there before”*. However, according to the manager of the Eldá guesthouse and the Hlíd campsite and hostel, there did not change a lot in terms of marketing for his company, as he stated: *“we have been so busy the last years that we have not been doing much promotion”*. Regarding the future, the manager of the Icelandair Hotel Mývatn argued that the wellbeing products and services of the region should be promoted more. Besides that, the manager of the Vogafjós farm resort states that *“Mývatn area should advertise like a wellbeing area”*. According to her, it is important that they first decide on the preferred type of tourist before promoting the region. She further explains this: *“the problem is that Iceland has never [...] decided, which kind of tourist we prefer. We are still looking for everyone, and inviting everyone, and marketing for everyone [...]. I think it is a mistake, because we are not able to welcome thirty million. So, we have to decide what kind of guests do we prefer to have here”*.

5. Conclusion and discussion

In the first chapter of this thesis the growth of the health and wellness industry was emphasised, resulting from the increasing desire of people to live a healthier and longer life. Iceland is considered as a highly appropriate country for this sector due to its plenitude of geothermal resources. This has also been the reason for Björk et al. (2011) to publish a report in order to provide a better understanding of the driving forces of the development of the wellbeing tourism sector in five Nordic countries, including Iceland. However, existing literature regarding tourism in Iceland is limited, and no follow-up study on wellbeing tourism in Iceland has been performed. This triggered the curiosity of the researchers to get insight in the recent developments in the sector. Therefore, the aim of this study was to provide insight in wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region in Iceland by taking into account the recent development and the perceived future. This central research question, split in three sub questions, will be answered in the first paragraph of this chapter. In the other four paragraphs of this chapter the findings in relation to the theoretical framework will be discussed, the relevance of the findings of this study will be discussed as well as the practical applicability and the considered possibilities for future research.

5.1 Conclusion

In this section, an answer is provided on the central research question of this study. In order to provide this answer, the three sub questions will be answered first.

1) What is the current state of the Mývatn wellbeing tourism sector?

In this study, highly contradictory views on the current role of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region were identified. On one side, the region has always been associated with wellness and wellbeing and it seems like most of the ingredients for being a wellbeing destination are present. The region namely has a unique environment with unique nature, a lot of geothermal water, local food, a high variety in activities that are being offered in the region varying from yoga to hikes and bicycle tours, and the geothermal pools: the Mývatn Nature Baths. However, on the other hand, the Mývatn region is currently not considered as being a real wellbeing destination. There has never been a clear focus on wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn area, and currently, several other factors are playing a significant role in preventing the area from becoming a wellbeing destination. These factors include the lack of Mývatn being marketed as a wellbeing destination, the difficult accessibility of this northern area for the incoming tourists, and lastly, the lack of an agreement regarding tourist segmentation resulting in too many tourists and companies being developed in a too commercial way which is having a negative influence on the region's wellbeing aspect. Currently, only the Mývatn Nature Baths is considered to play a key role in the region's wellbeing sector; and even considered as the one strengthening the area's wellbeing sector.

2) Which significant developments took place in the Mývatn wellbeing tourism sector during the past eight years?

When looking at the developments that have taken place in the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region during the past eight years, it can be argued that no significant, big changes have

happened; the region stayed relatively the same. This lack of big developments is mainly caused by the high increase in tourists. Companies have been too occupied by just answering the demands. Adding, that there did not exist any kind of development plan for the region as this tourism boom started unexpectedly. One can even say that this tourism boom itself can be considered as the main development that has happened in the Mývatn region during the past eight years. This tourism boom has not only led to an increase in the number of bed nights and the investments that were done in the region, but it also had a positive impact on the urban development. Nonetheless, it seems that currently, the negative aspects are predominant in the view of the tourism companies towards the rise in tourism in the Mývatn region. Especially the boom with regard to the tourists arriving by cruise ships is argued to have a negative influence on the level of wellbeing in the region. This is primarily noticed by the big hotels being built near the lake, the overcrowded Mývatn Nature Baths and the complaints being received from locals. As a result, a discussion has started about introducing an entrance fee in Iceland in order to maintain the area and ensure its future tourism.

However, going back to the developments, over the years several developments did take place. Regarding wellbeing tourism in specific, the Mývatn Nature Baths were slightly renovated, the number of offered activities in the region increased and the Geothermal Sea Baths in Húsavík have opened; meaning there is a new competitor in terms of geothermal pools nearby lake Mývatn. Other developments in terms of tourism, marketing and infrastructure are: the opening of the Laxa hotel, Foss hotel and the Reynihlíd Icelandair hotel, the expansion of the Hlíd hostel, the Vogafjós farm resort and the Sel hotel, the increased activity of the regional marketing organisation Visit Mývatn through which the marketing of and the collaboration between the different parties in the area has increased significantly, the start of international flights between the Netherlands and England to and from Akureyri, the opening of a tunnel between Akureyri and lake Mývatn and the development and marketing of the Diamond Circle route in the north of Iceland including lake Mývatn.

3) How is the future of the Mývatn wellbeing tourism sector seen by the parties involved in the region's tourism sector?

Regarding the future of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region, no collective vision currently exists. Since a regional future development plan in terms of wellbeing tourism is lacking, each company is individually ensuring a development in wellbeing tourism by setting up plans in order to increase the products and/or services of their business. This is for instance done by several hotels in the region that are increasing the number of hotel rooms, and by the Mývatn Nature Baths which is starting with a complete renovation next year to create more relaxing areas to slow down the tourists. However, despite the concrete future developments that are planned by several companies, a certain degree of scepticism is existing amongst the businesses in terms of the potential of the Mývatn region in becoming a real wellbeing destination in the near future.

This scepticism regarding the potential of the Mývatn region being a future wellbeing destination is the result of a combination of factors. One reason is the existence of many parties in the region having different opinions in terms of the preferred future. Besides that, businesses in the area are simply too occupied with answering the demand by selling products instead of producing new products and services related to wellbeing. If the Mývatn region would desire to become a wellbeing destination, the wellbeing sector should be further developed by linking this to the unique nature

that is existing in the area. This will enable the region to differentiate its wellbeing sector from the competing, well-known wellbeing destinations that are existing in Europe. Moreover, the supply of wellbeing products and services should be expanded. Services as massage should be offered in the region, as well as products that are considered as a specialty in the region. This will make visitors stay in the region for a longer period of time just for wellbeing purposes. Other preferred developments that will increase the probability of becoming a wellbeing destination are the creation of wellbeing packages in which a combination of local food, activities and relaxation is offered through the collaboration of several stakeholders in the region, the number of incoming tourists should be lowered, incoming tourists should be informed more about the history of wellbeing in the region in order to provide them with a total wellbeing experience, the high variety in the already available products and services in the region should be marketed more, and lastly, the region needs to be more easily accessible. For example, by increasing the direct international flights between Akureyri and England and the Netherlands in order to reduce the northern peripheral status. So, although there is a lot of scepticism towards the future of the Mývatn region in the wellbeing tourism sector, the mentioned developments may be able to get the area on the map as a wellbeing destination.

As the three sub questions have been answered, it is possible to answer the main research question.

To what extent has the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region in Iceland been developed over the last eight years, by keeping in mind the recommendations of Björk et al. (2011), and how is the future of this sector seen by the involved parties?

Over the last eight years, and since the previous research report was published, the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region did not change significantly; not saying the region did not develop at all. The region has definitely changed, and several businesses within this region did either, however, no big changes have happened and besides that, the developments that have happened, did not per definition have the reason to improve the wellbeing tourism sector. This study shows that over the years, the number of incoming tourists has increased tremendously, resulting in companies being too occupied by answering the demands. Due to this unexpected tourism boom, businesses were lacking time to come up with any long-term future development plan for the region's tourism sector and so, the focus has not been on developing the Mývatn region as a wellbeing destination. Besides that, this tourism boom also explains why the recommendations of the previous research report were not yet put into action as the developments that took place in the meantime were just having the purpose to enable companies to deal with the constant increasing number of tourists.

Currently, the Mývatn region is still not seen as a wellbeing destination and regarding the region's future, it became clear that there is also no clear direction that is being followed in terms of developing its wellbeing tourism sector. Companies are individually trying to develop, but there is no regional development plan established. This is mainly due to the fact that a unanimous agreement on the region's potential in becoming a wellbeing destination is lacking. Notwithstanding that numerous ingredients for the development of such a region are available, like the natural environment, the facilities and the existing ideas and willingness of several businesses in the region. However, essential elements as wellbeing products, collaboration and marketing are still limited. It can therefore be stated that the region is not unanimously seen as a potential wellbeing destination.

5.2 Discussion

In this discussion section, a reflection will be given on the relation between the findings of this study and the theoretical framework. Besides that, the relevance of the findings will be illustrated and an explanation will be given in terms of the practical applicability of this study. This section will be concluded by providing the reader with suggestions for future research.

5.2.1 Comparison with theoretical framework

When comparing the findings of this study to the theoretical framework that was created prior to collecting the data, it became clear that the concept of wellbeing in the context of tourism was defined in somewhat different ways. As described by Dodge et al. (2012) and Smith and Diekmann (2017), no single and worldwide accepted definition of wellbeing, and wellbeing tourism, is currently existing. This point of view is supported by the findings of this study. Although Konu (2010) and Björk et al. (2011) argue that wellbeing is related to health and achieving this health in body, mind and soul; which is seen as a relative individual and internal process, the findings of this study show that wellbeing is not considered to be linked to health directly. This study shows that wellbeing is mainly linked to nature, being outdoor and to the act of exercising; aspects that can be seen as mainly external instead of internal. The companies that were involved in this study mainly defined wellbeing tourism by linking this to the tools or facilities that may be used in order to achieve a state of wellbeing, instead of defining this concept by linking this to a certain state of the body and mind. Björk et al. (2011) also link health to several external factors by connecting it to the importance of harmony with the environment and community. This idea shows more similarities with the findings of this study. However, the findings regarding the definition of wellbeing show most similarities with the definition of Nordic wellbeing that was provided by Björk et al. (2011) and which is mainly related to nature, outdoor experiences, healthy local gastronomy, local culture and cleanliness of air, nature and water. Thus, although it seems to be the case that the term Nordic wellbeing is not frequently used by the existing companies in the area, this term describes the region's wellbeing sector best.

The reasons for the growing demand for health, wellness and wellbeing tourism that were provided by Pollock and Williams (2000), Friedl (2007), Zsigmond (2007), Boekstein (2014a) and Lim et al. (2016) and discussed in the literature review, were not directly mentioned by the interviewees. They link the growth in this specific tourism sector to the overall growth of tourism in Iceland. However, there are existing reasons for this growth. For the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region in Iceland, these reasons are important to take into account when further developing the sector. By taking into account the driving factors, the sector can respond to this type of tourism more easily.

In the theoretical framework, three different classification methods for innovations were discussed of which the classification method of Hjalager and Flagestad (2012) was considered to be most relevant for the tourism, and wellbeing tourism in specific. Four types of innovation could take place in the wellbeing tourism sector according to this model, namely: 1) core product/service innovations, 2) product diversifications, 3) technological and service providing innovations, and 4) institutional innovations related to governance mechanisms. If we compare these innovations to the recent developments that have taken place in the Mývatn region, it can be argued that only the first type of innovations has happened frequently as new products and services have been developed in terms of the increase in activities and tours in the region. However, if the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region will develop in the future, the other two types of innovation may also start to happen.

When looking at the definition of a peripheral area, the definition of Jonsson Kvist and Klefsjö (2006, p. 521) largely matches the aspects of the Mývatn region that were mentioned as showing the peripheral character of the region. Regarding the definition, the findings of this study show that especially the lacking infrastructure was highly connected to the Mývatn region. The distance from places of core economic activity was also clearly shown, however, other aspects of the definition, as the declining traditional industries and the reliance of imports, were not significantly identified.

To conclude, when looking at the future of the wellbeing tourism sector, existing literature of Kiss and Török (2001) predicts a continuous growth in the demand for health tourism, and thus wellbeing tourism. Although the respondents were far from unanimously convinced of the potential of the Mývatn region in becoming a destination for wellbeing tourism, Csirmaz and Petó (2015) especially expect wellbeing tourism to growth in Scandinavia, together with two other regions. This should be a motivation for the Mývatn region to further develop itself within the field of wellbeing tourism.

5.2.2 Relevance of the findings

This study on wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region has contributed to existing knowledge as the existing literature regarding wellbeing tourism in general, and wellbeing tourism in Iceland specifically, is relatively limited. Besides that, until this study, no follow-up study has been done on the developments of the wellbeing tourism in Iceland since the previous research report of Björk et al. (2011) has been published. Therefore, this study adds knowledge in terms of the current state of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region in Iceland. Moreover, this study provides insight in the extent to which the recommendations from the previous report have been put into action in the region which will be of value for the publishers of that specific, previously published report.

5.2.3 Practical applicability

Even though the practical applicability of this study may not immediately be clear as a complete action plan is not the result of this study, this report may serve as a first step in the development of the Mývatn region in becoming a destination for wellbeing tourism. By exploring the recent developments in the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn area and the perception of the local businesses on the sectors' future, this report has created a better understanding about the region's wellbeing tourism sector itself, about its potential and about the opinion of the involved businesses in the region. Besides that, this study has identified what steps need to be taken and what challenges need to be overcome in order to develop the region into a wellbeing destination. Moreover, the results of this study may be a reason for the (involved) businesses in the region to start a conversation and discussion with each other in order to find out how each of them would like to see the region developing in terms of wellbeing. Organising a meeting with the purpose of setting up a strategic tourism development plan would be the first step in the development of the Mývatn region.

5.2.4 Future research

With regard to future research, it is suggested to perform further research on the topic of wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region whereby even more companies that are located in this region are taken into account. As there are quite some companies existing in the region of which only a few were included in this study, it is important to include the other businesses as well. Companies that are suggested to be included in further research are the marketing company Visit Mývatn, the tour

operators in the region and the remaining hotels and guesthouses. It is then important to also take into account the chain hotels in order to gain insight in their opinion on and contribution to the wellbeing tourism sector in the region.

In addition, it will be valuable to perform future research on the other side of wellbeing tourism: the supply side, or in other words, the tourists itself. In order to be able to develop the Mývatn region into a wellbeing destination, it is important to get insight in the tourists' perception of wellbeing and especially of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region. How do they perceive wellbeing? How do they perceive wellbeing being present in the Mývatn region? And what are they searching for when they are looking for wellbeing in Iceland? The answers to these questions will be highly relevant in order to further develop the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn area.

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Appendix 1: List of interviewees

<i>No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Location</i>
1	Reinhard Reynisson	Northeast Iceland Development Agency	Managing director	17/07/2019	10:30	Húsavík
2	Gísli Sverisson	Eldá guesthouse and Hlíð campsite & hostel	Manager	19/07/2019	11:30	Reykjahlíd
3	Pétur Snaebjörnsson	Mývatn Nature Baths	Founder	19/07/2019	15:00	Reykjahlíd
4	Adalgeir Asvaldsson	Icelandair Hotel Mývatn	Manager	21/07/2019	14:00	Reykjahlíd
5	Ólöf Hamgrímsdóttir	Vogafjós Farm Resort	Manager	22/07/2019	09:30	Reykjahlíd
6	Magret Halla Ludríksdóttir	Skútustadahreppur	Employee	22/07/2019	13:00	Reykjahlíd
7	Steingrímur Birgisson	Mývatn Nature Baths	Chairman of the board	23/07/2019	14:00	Akureyri
8	Éliás Gíslason	Icelandic Tourist Board	Director of Akureyri	24/07/2019	11:00	Akureyri

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Date:

Time:

Place:

Name interviewee:

Name interviewer:

To discuss before the start of the interview:

- Short summary on the purpose of this study
- Sign the consent form
- The interview will take around 45 minutes
- The contributions to the study will not be anonymous
- The interview will be recorded

→ *start recording.*

Opening questions

1. How do you experience this year's tourism season so far?
2. Can you tell me something about your role within this company?

Interview questions for the Mývatn Nature Baths and hotels and restaurants in the Mývatn region

Topic 1: The concept of wellbeing

3. How would you describe the importance of the concept of wellbeing for what you do/offer?
 - a. If this is important, how do you define wellbeing for your company's purposes?
4. According to the previous research project, the concept of wellbeing can be connected to unique Nordic selling points resulting in the concept of Nordic wellbeing. These unique selling points include 'nature, outdoor experience and enjoyment combined with healthy local gastronomy, local culture, and cleanliness of air, nature and water' (Björk et al., 2011, p. 10)¹. To what extent is this something that resonates with what you do/offer?
5. To what extent is the concept of wellbeing, and maybe Nordic wellbeing in specific, actually present in the branding and marketing of your company?

Topic 2: The wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region

6. What is your view on the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region?
7. How do you see the role of your company within this wellbeing tourism sector?
8. To what extent is a collaboration between stakeholders in the region existing?
9. The Mývatn region can be considered as a peripheral region of Iceland. To what extent is your company currently affected by being situated in this peripheral area?
10. In tourism, marketing plays an important role. Concerning the wellbeing tourism sector, and your company in specific, to what extent does marketing take place on a (inter)national level?

Topic 3: Development of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region

11. The previous study, which serves as the basis for this study, was finished eight years ago. Since then, what are the main changes within your company regarding wellbeing tourism?
12. How did innovation play a role in the development of your company?
 - a. To what extent are new markets or new products developed?
 - b. To what extent are innovations be made regarding links to region's stakeholders?
 - c. To what extent is the aspect of spirituality part of the offered products/services?
13. What role did the Mývatn region as a peripheral region play in this development?
 - a. What are the developments regarding the infrastructure in this area?

Topic 4: The future of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region

14. What are your thoughts on the future of wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region?
15. What role do you see your company playing in the future of the wellbeing tourism sector?
 - a. To what extent will innovation play a role in this future development?
 - b. To what extent will marketing play a role in this future development?
 - c. To what extent will collaboration between the stakeholders in the region play a role in this future development?
16. What do you foresee as potential challenges for the future?

¹ Björk, P., Flagestad, A., Hjalager, A.-M., Huijbens, E. H., Konu, H., Nordin, S., & Tuohino, A. (2011). *Innovating and re-branding Nordic wellbeing tourism*. Retrieved from <http://www.rmfi.is/en/reports/index/skyrslur-reports/innovating-and-re-branding-nordic-wellbeing-tourism>

Interview questions for the development agencies and the municipality in the Mývatn region

Topic 1: The concept of wellbeing

4. How do you define the importance of the wellbeing concept for the region's tourism strategy?
 - a. If this is important, how do you define wellbeing for the purpose of promoting the region to (potential) visitors?
5. According to the previous research project, the concept of wellbeing can be connected to unique Nordic selling points resulting in the concept of Nordic wellbeing. These unique selling points include 'nature, outdoor experience and enjoyment combined with healthy local gastronomy, local culture, and cleanliness of air, nature and water' (Björk et al., 2011, p. 10)². To what extent is this something that resonates with what the Mývatn region does/offers?
6. To what extent is the concept of wellbeing, and maybe Nordic wellbeing in specific, actually present in the branding and marketing of the Mývatn region?

Topic 2: The wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region

7. What is your view on the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region?
8. How do you see the role of your company within this wellbeing tourism sector?
9. To what extent is a collaboration between stakeholders in the region existing?
10. The Mývatn region can be considered as a peripheral region of Iceland. To what extent is the wellbeing tourism sector in this area affected by being situated in this peripheral area?
11. In tourism, marketing plays an important role. Concerning the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region, to what extent does marketing take place on a (inter)national level?

Topic 3: Development of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region

12. The previous study, which serves as the basis for this study, was finished around eight years ago. What are the main changes in the region's wellbeing tourism sector over the years?
13. To what extent have you been involved in these changes during the past years?
14. How did innovation play a role in the development of the wellbeing tourism sector?
 - a. To what extent are new markets or new products developed?
 - b. To what extent are innovations be made regarding links to region's stakeholders?
 - c. To what extent is the aspect of spirituality part of the offered products/services?
15. What role did the Mývatn region as a peripheral region play on the development?
 - a. What are the developments regarding the infrastructure around the region?

Topic 4: The future of the wellbeing tourism sector in the Mývatn region

16. Tourism destination are continuously developing; so does the Mývatn region I assume. What are your thoughts on the future of wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region?
 - a. To what extent will innovation play a role in this future development?
 - b. To what extent will marketing play a role in this future development?
 - c. To what extent will collaboration between the stakeholders in the region will play a role in this future development?

² Björk, P., Flagestad, A., Hjalager, A.-M., Huijbens, E. H., Konu, H., Nordin, S., & Tuohino, A. (2011). *Innovating and re-branding Nordic wellbeing tourism*. Retrieved from <http://www.rmfi.is/en/reports/index/skyrslur-reports/innovating-and-re-branding-nordic-wellbeing-tourism>

17. To what extent are you involved in developing wellbeing tourism in the Mývatn region?

18. What do you foresee as potential challenges for the future?

End/closing

- This was the last question from my side. Is there still something you would like to add?
- Thank you for your time and for participating in the interview. The information you have provided is of high value for my research project.
- May I contact you by mail in case there are additional questions that may come up?
- Are there any questions from your side?

→ *end recording*

Appendix 3: Transcription interview 1

Date: 17/07/2019

Time: 10:30

Place: Húsavík

Duration: 39:33 minutes

Company: Northeast Iceland Development Agency

Interviewee: Reinhard Reynisson (Managing Director)

Interviewer: Eva Boorsma

E: The whole research is mainly focussing on the Mývatn region and mainly on the concept of wellbeing. I do not know how you see the importance of this concept for the region and if this is a large thing? As you are mainly focussing on developing the whole place...

R: My view towards the wellbeing tourism actually is from the standpoint that that is an important part of tourism in general. You do not want the tourists that only drive through and leave nothing behind. So, we have to offer them something that is interesting for them; something that is rewarding and that gives them something. That they are willing to buy services and things like that and I think that wellbeing tourism is part of that. Tourism with some substance; not only the economy in the area, but also for tourists that come and leave.

E: So that they can take something home?

R: Yes, take some memory and experience with them back home. And I think that actually wellbeing, of course, in my view at least, is related to things like slow tourism and something valuable for you as a person. So, I think that wellbeing and experiencing open nature in Iceland and here in the North, that fits in my view of these concepts. And they strengthen each other so to say.

E: And you really use the concept of wellbeing in the regional strategy of tourism?

R: Well it has not be such a strategy, but certain companies they have gone into these fields in a way that the Mývatn Nature Baths do. They have, of course, been exploring these things, even though they are a bit of a mass tourism in their own standard at least. And then we have here, even though it is not Mývatn, it is the same area actually as this and Mývatn are more or less the same area, we have the Geo Sea Baths. They are smaller and they are more, maybe, towards this relaxing atmosphere and they are not so crowded and not so big and things. And of course, we have smaller companies here that are doing things like yoga things in nature, out on the bay here and also in the surroundings of Mývatn. And there are a couple of things, but not with a clear strategy in this area. I would not say that. At least, it is

not very visible. I do not know, do you intend to talk to the people in Mývatn, from Visit Mývatn and Visit Húsavík?

E: Yes.

R: There is a girl working here, she only started this year, for Visit Húsavík, so maybe they are more into exactly what the strategy in the tourism industry actually is now.

E: Yes, that is true. I will talk to the people from the Nature Baths for sure, so that is maybe a good one. And do you really have a say in the development of those Nature Baths and those geothermal pools? Or is it the companies who decide how to promote and make a strategy?

R: Yes, actually, maybe before all the companies were established, there was this discussion here about our specialities and our opportunities and that has been the case in Mývatn before the Mývatn Nature Baths were established. Because in Mývatn, it was a kind of an old tradition, a local tradition, to have baths, or at least steam in small huts over where the steam was coming from the ground, just from nature. And they were sitting in there, in their sauna's. This is geothermal steam actually. This is an old tradition. So, this is a kind of development out of that old tradition. And, although it has not been so old here in Húsavík as it has been here for a couple of decades, in a thing for making cheese, in the dairy industry, you now these big pots?

E: Yes.

R: One of the old ones was set out there and they could bore a borehole for water. Actually, it is 50% of salt water from the sea in this borehole. And people are bathing in there. Especially people with some kind of skin problem as psoriasis or something, as it is very good for that. Out of that developed the idea of geothermal heat baths that are now established in Húsavík. So, before it was actually established, all kinds of ideas were looked into and students and others have been doing all kinds of research, and this was the end of it. So, of course, all these things have no kind of a pre-history before the actual company starts to develop the final idea that is finalised.

E: Exactly. And you were part of developing this?

R: Yes, in this kind of pre-development. We are a development agency and we are not part of the development of this concept as it turned out. At a sudden point, companies were established and they take the idea and develop it to the end. So, they did it themselves so to say. In both cases actually.

E: And then you were only involved in the beginning phase?

R: Yes. So, we provide whatever has been studied and look into it before and then take it off.

E: And do you see wellbeing as a main concept in this area?

- R:* I would say, maybe one of the three main concepts. Actually, I think there is this nature, exploring the nature, is number one. And then maybe the interaction between the human society within this nature. And then wellbeing as the third one.
- E:* And do you see it as wellbeing? Or do you see it as wellness?
- R:* I am not sure if I understand this difference.
- E:* Well, in literature I found that wellbeing is mainly the general feeling good physically and mentally, and wellness is mainly used as a tool to achieve that. Wellness can for example be a spa or sauna or something. And wellbeing is more like the broader and overarching concept.
- R:* I am not sure. What is it when you go to the geothermal sea bath? It is a specific thing that you do, but the general for you to go there is to feel better overall. Physically and mentally. So, I am not sure if I can divide between those two.
- E:* So, it is not that a certain concept is mainly used?
- R:* I should say that it is more this wellness, or this general thing that you just feel better if you do these things in this area.
- E:* And do you have any role in the promotion of geothermal baths?
- R:* No, this agency is not a promotional agency. This agency is just looking into the development phase and then there are other agencies who do this more. These are more like Visit Mývatn or Visit Húsavík, and of course the companies themselves.
- E:* They have a major role probably. And about the role of the wellbeing in the Mývatn region, how do you see this? Do you see this as a major thing?
- R:* Well, actually, I think yes. I do not know. I think the wellbeing concept in Mývatn in my view has to be related to this unique nature as we have that. So, the development should be on the basis of how you can enjoy the nature and further expand them than just being a stupid tourist by being informed, and how you can actually use the nature in a way that this ensures both physical and mental feeling good.
- E:* And your company, does it now still play a role in the development of the wellbeing sector in the Mývatn region?
- R:* In that sense that we have been working with those agencies that are in the tourism industry in developing, and look into what are the possibilities for the developments. That is our role. But we are just partners among the others. We are not having a leading role, but it is more that these agencies, as Visit Mývatn, provide direct access to the companies as they are a common marketing and development agency; so, we work with them.
- E:* So, every region has kind of his own development company, and you are then the partner of all of them?

R: Yes. We have the overall; the whole area. We have six municipalities that are behind us, and then there are the smaller ones that are focussed mainly on tourism and services, but we have the general economy and exposure. We are in the agriculture, fishing, tourism industry and energy, and anything that can boost the economy in the area.

E: And which industry is now the biggest?

R: I think it is tourism in this area. This is going very rapidly for the past 10 years or something.

E: You really notice this in the region and the city itself?

R: Yes, really. There are a lot of investments and you just see that the area is actually crowded compared to what it was.

E: It is getting bigger and bigger in amounts?

R: For people that are coming from Europe it is not, but for us it is really crowded compared to what it was.

E: Yes, I read the numbers about how many tourists are visiting Iceland on a yearly basis, and I was like “wow, that is insane”. And how is the collaboration between the stakeholders, do you have a view on it, on the stakeholders in the Mývatn region? Is there a large collaboration between them or are they just doing this by themselves?

R: You mean between the stakeholders in Mývatn?

E: Yes.

R: Yes, I think they have quite a close corporation, through Visit Mývatn, and we actually are also partners in Visit Mývatn. And we attend their annual meeting, which was this spring. And it is clear that they are in many ways doing a good job, because they are boosting things like the Mývatn marathon, which is a common event for anybody so to say, because all kinds of services are needed by people when they come to an event like this. And they have been coping with these things and then all the companies are involved then. I think you really should meet Soffía. Soffía is the name of the manager in Visit Mývatn.

E: Okay, that is maybe a good one.

R: I can give you her contact details.

E: Oh yes, that will be great. That will be interesting.

R: Because there you are really a kind of on the edge of what is happening in the collaboration between them.

E: Yes exactly, that is good to get some more insight in the corporation then. That would be awesome. And the previous study that has been done is around eight years ago. I think they started around 9 years ago and they finished 8 years ago. And in your view, what are the main developments that the region has been through, and especially on the wellbeing tourism?

R: As I see, there has not been a program or an intended development, not exactly. I mean, the main change now for the last eight to ten years has been this huge increase in numbers. And actually, I think that many of the companies in tourism have been so occupied with how can we cope with this extra volume that is only getting more and more. So actually, I think it would be a kind of healthy situation if the expenses will go off a little bit so that people can start to kind of organise themselves better.

E: Did you note or maybe hear from other companies that they were overvisited?

R: They would never tell.

E: They will be happy with more and more visitors probably.

R: They always want more. That is of course when you are in business, you always want more, but I think for a general development it would be better if the increases level off a little bit so that people would need to think more about quality and what is actually being offered and things like that. In my mind comes only one, maybe two things, we can say that have been developed within this wellbeing industry in the area since the last research. The Mývatn Nature Baths have been renovating themselves, because they were just too small and the facilities did not cope with the numbers, so they are renovating themselves a bit. They started it now. And then of course, but this is in Húsavík, the geothermal Sea baths is new developed in this area. Actually, these are actually the only things that come to my mind now that are actual new developments in wellbeing especially. But of course, there are all kinds of activities more than there were ten years ago; more hiking tours, bike renting, and all kind of exploration tours on the sea here, not only whale watching but all kinds of sea tours. So, things like that. It is maybe more adventure or expedition than necessarily wellbeing.

E: Yes, the other tourism industries are also developing, like the other sectors. And in the Mývatn region, do you see large innovations going on or changes in marketing in the last years?

R: I do not think I am the right person to ask these questions. I am not sure, but I think then again, the Visit Mývatn organisation could give you better answers on that. Of course, one of the things that have been changing, not only in this region, but generally, is of course that marketing, or the ways that marketing goes, is through these news phones, and less paper and more on the Internet and Facebook and all of these new methods that they are using now.

E: New marketing channels to use.

R: But the general concept of what Mývatn, or the Mývatn area, is, that is more or less the same as it has been for these twenty years or something like that.

E: Mostly the Mývatn region, and this region as well, is seen as a peripheral area in the country. Do you see any problems in dealing with this? How is the tourism affected by that?

R: Well, the problem that we generally see here, far away from the southwest corner of Iceland is of course the access for foreign tourists to come to Iceland, because the only international airport is in Keflavik. So, it is far from us and it is expensive to travel around in Iceland, so one of the common things that we have been fighting for is to open a new international airport or route that is to Akureyri. That has been done a little bit. And it is a Dutch company started this winter. And they are going to fly from Rotterdam in the summer time and Amsterdam Schiphol in the winter time, because they do not get a slot on Schiphol in the summer time as it is too busy. And there have been some companies in Britain with a couple of flights in the winter time and that has changed a bit. And that is absolutely the biggest problem of being peripheral, but on the other hand, being peripheral is also an access. A plus in the tourism industry. Because of how big tourism is in general, the more numbers of tourists of we tend to say the best ones. They want more, they are willing to pay more, and live fully their life or something. They are more and more looking for things outside of the mainstream. This can be an access in that sense too.

E: So, you see this as something positive as well here?

R: Yes, at least it has opportunities. I think, people who are willing to go that far, and it costs somewhat to just to come into the place, but then these people are willing to stay longer so they leave more behind in economic value for the area. And just one thing, a mark of that, is because of the collapse of the WOW airliner. It was a low fare airliner bringing tourists to Iceland. There has been a decline in total numbers in Iceland in tourism this year compared to last year, but here in the area we are booming, we do not feel that. And that is of course, although I have not done a study here, but I have been in this business for quite a couple of years.

E: Yes, you have enough experience!

R: Yes, but that is not a surprise, because the tourists that came with WOW air were buying cheap flights to Iceland, a cheap trip to Iceland, not a long trip. They flew to Keflavik, stayed in Reykjavik, take day tours out of Reykjavik and these tourists never came here, only some of them. Most of them are just in the south-eastern area. Thus, the south-eastern area feels it, but we are not feeling it. We are actually hearing numbers here this summer of as tourists being as many as in 2016, which was the record year.

E: That is good. It is only getting better.

R: Yes, because all the tourists that are coming, they are staying longer and investing more in the Icelandic economy than the other ones.

E: And the flights from Rotterdam and Amsterdam, did these already start?

R: I think that has been starting for. I think so.

E: Okay, that may help as well to get some more visitors here as well.

R: Yes, or maybe have been doing only one or two flights this summer. I am not sure about this.

E: And are you involved with the whole development of the infrastructure in the region as well?

R: Yes, we take part of it. Really infrastructure as roads?

E: Yes, and busses for example.

R: Yes, we are actually only working with municipalities, because most of the infrastructure developments are under de state. The state delivers all of that, so it is a kind of a lobbyist for the municipalities in the area. So, the state decides to do this road, and this road, and we are just taking part in that. And of course, we take into consideration the needs or the interests of the area, because of the tourism industry. And there are actually big infrastructure projects this year, which is a ring road by Dettifoss and part of Vatnajökull National Park. So that will open a new possibility here in the area as we have been waiting for this for thirteen years, so it will open this year. So that is good yes.

E: Yes, to get it a bit more accessible for tourists.

R: Yes, it will be accessible more. At least almost all year round. Maybe for the two or three biggest winter months not, but on top of that all of the other ones, just as it has been last three to four months.

E: And for the coming years, what do you see as the major developments for the region that are hopefully going to happen?

R: In general, for this area? I would start with tourism, because tourism in this area has a lot of development opportunities. I have already mentioned this with that we could get a straight international flight to Akureyri. That would change mainly the winter season, because the winter season is a problem. There are low numbers, so the investment is not really doing well in the winter months. But in the summer time, at least parts of this region which we are covering, we are almost full in the summer time. But then other parts on the north-eastern part of our area... I will show you. We are here now, here Akureyri, and this is more or less the area that we are working with; this agency. And here to the east we do not have a lot of tourists, but the opening of the road there will make this a ring road and then you have another ring road here opened all year round. And this eastern part of the area has a lot to offer. Different things from what we have here. We tend to be a kind of Artic coast with sea cliffs and things like that. So, I think the tourism industry as a whole in the area has a lot of development possibilities. For the winter time for this part of it, for the southern part, and for the whole year round for the other parts. And then we have, well we could say, like three

other mayor interests in this area. Traditionally, of course, the fishing industry. And the development there, I am not sure, in new jobs due to technology as you always need fewer hands to make the same amount of fish then earlier. But there are possibilities in marketing, in local fisheries with smaller boats so that the customer know that this fish was caught at this time, and things like that. And that is an added value for that, and people are more willing to pay for it in restaurants or even in the shops. In many places in Europe you can say like “yes, this was caught right out there and two days ago, and it is fresh”. And I like this. And the same is the case with the agriculture we have here; mainly sheep. And there are also opportunities and these are related to the fishing industry and to tourism also. Tourists like it, when they go somewhere, to know what is the local dish here, and so there are opportunities in both the agriculture industry and in the fishing industry and in that case in relation to tourism. And then we have the third major interest, which is based on energy. This area is very rich of energy, geothermal energy, and you can use it to produce electricity, of course, and then you can use the steam straight into industrial processes and then you use the hot water for the tourism industry and wellbeing. So, these are, I would say, the main pillars. It is tourism, agriculture, the fishing industry, and the industry that uses the geothermal energy as a core input.

E: So somehow the industries can also strength each other.

R: Yes, of course. And always with communities, they are stronger and more flexible if they have more of diverse industries. If they only have one industry and something happens in that industry, which could be of some global development you cannot control, the community is down, but if it is one of four that you stand in. Then you are in a much better position.

E: For specifically the wellbeing tourism, do you see specific developments going on in that specific industry?

R: No, no other than that I have mentioned before. I think the wellbeing tourism industry should be straight forward to meet the tool to open the scarcely populated nature that we have here. So, I think that is the opportunity; it lies there. I think we are not in a straight way competing to some century’s old spas in Europe or something like that, not in these concepts. We have to make our own special niche, because you can go to wellbeing centres all over Europe or America or wherever. So, I think you have to make this special connection to what is unique of the surroundings and connect it to that.

E: So, you see that as something that they should do more for the coming years?

R: Yes, I think so.

E: And do you see certain challenges for the industry, and especially the wellbeing industry?

R: Yes, of course. The one that comes first to mind is that the professional wellbeing tourism needs skilled people in the fields. So, the general challenge for the rurally populated areas is to attract young people with special education or skills or things like that, because most of them want to live in the south and urban surroundings, and we cannot offer them this. And that is actually a challenge, the general challenge here in the area. To attract younger people. That would be one of the challenges. Even though we can offer the job, it is more complicated than that. Because it is something in the social surroundings that does not seem to attract young people. Or at least not enough of them. So, it is a challenge.

E: And other things that you see as challenges?

R: While of course it is always, maybe it is not such a big challenge as it was before, but of course it is always a challenge to attract investors in rural areas to invest. That is a challenge. However, it should have lowered, because of the number of tourists that are coming, so it should be more profitable to set up or invest in the tourism industry now than it was actually. But the main investment in tourism in Iceland for a couple of years has been in hotels and these kinds of infrastructures in tourism, and not actually in the service-related parts. I think that is the next thing we have to do, because no one comes to hotels to just stay in hotels. He stays in hotels because he wants something to do in the area. So, I think we have to develop more in the service part.

E: And for the Mývatn region? And maybe Mývatn Nature Baths as well, as you mentioned already that they changed their facilities already a bit, or make them better to cope with the tourists. Do you see other things that they may have to develop or change in the future?

R: Well, actually, I think, and I am not sure, I think they must be having part of the development now, to take more into the services that they offer is more of relaxing areas and things like that. What they should, is not only this crowded nature bath where you have to go in and go out, but they should slow down. And you can only do this with this thick number of people by making the facilities bigger, or more divided, so that you can change from one space to another, and feel more relaxed then when you are only in one overcrowded area.

E: Because it actually is already quite crowded right?

R: Yes, it is quite crowded. And especially in the summer time.

E: I also heard already some people from the Blue Lagoon and they also said that it was so crowded.

R: Yes, they are much bigger but they of course also get a much higher number of tourists.

E: And the one here in Húsavík, is it already getting crowded or not yet?

R: No, here it is also much smaller. But they actually also control the number. They have around 160 lockers, 80 for men and 80 for women. So that is the maximum each point of time.

E: So, they have a kind of quota.

R: Yes, something like that.

E: Yes, that may work.

R: Yes, I think so. Actually, it feels already a bit crowded when there are 160 people, because the facility is not really big, and people can get beers there and people get louder.

E: And then it feels like the number has doubled, due to the noise.

R: Yes, indeed, but it is different from time to time. Sometimes it is crowded and sometimes it is relaxing and actually in the winter time. Last winter it opened, and as locals we go there quite often. In the winter time it is less interesting than in the summer time. Then there is snow all around, so that is not fantastic.

E: But it is nice that this one is still used by locals then. Because I think that the Blue Lagoon and the Mývatn Nature Baths are not really still used by locals.

R: The Mývatn Nature Baths are still used by locals, to say the locals in Mývatn. Me and my wife used to go there regularly, but when this opened, we got there. Because as a loyal you can buy an annual pass and you pay one sum for the year and you can go as often as you want during the year, so it is not that expensive for us. So, we use it a lot here. And the locals in Mývatn can buy a similar pass there. And I could buy it too, and you could actually buy it too, but it would not make much sense for one- or two-weeks' time.

E: That is nice that locals are still using it. And I think that is it for now. Do you still have something to add?

R: No, as I said I do not think that you got all the solid information for me as my strong field is in what I do for day to day. Maybe a bit of an outside looking on it.

E: Yes, but that is good. This is the first interview, so it maybe is good to first have a bit of an outside view on it and then go into the area and get the more detailed interviews. So that is good. Thanks a lot!

Appendix 4: Coding scheme

Codes:

Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn

Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)

Nordic wellbeing

Wellbeing products/services

Unique features of Mývatn

Recent developments

Collaboration

Marketing

Infrastructure and accessibility

Opportunities

Future developments

Challenges

Interview 1:

Interview section	Code
<p>My view towards the wellbeing tourism actually is from the standpoint that that is an important part of tourism in general. You do not want the tourists that only drive through and leave nothing behind. So, we have to offer them something that is interesting for them; something that is rewarding and that gives them something. That they are willing to buy services and things like that and I think that wellbeing tourism is part of that.</p>	<p>Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)</p>
<p>And I think that actually wellbeing [...] is related to things like slow tourism and something valuable for you as a person.</p>	<p>Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)</p>
<p>So, I think that wellbeing and experiencing open nature in Iceland and here in the North, that fits in my view of these concepts.</p>	<p>Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)</p>
<p>certain companies they have gone into these fields in a way that the Mývatn Nature Baths do [...] they are a bit of a mass tourism in their own standard at least. And then we have here, [...] the Geo Sea Baths. They are smaller and they are more, maybe, towards this relaxing atmosphere and they are not so crowded and not so big and things. And of course, we have smaller companies here that are doing things like yoga things in nature, out on the bay here and also in the surroundings of Mývatn.</p>	<p>Wellbeing products/services</p>
<p>I think there is this nature, exploring the nature, is number one. And then maybe the interaction between the human society within this nature. And then wellbeing as the third one.</p>	<p>Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn</p>
<p>What is it when you go to the geothermal sea bath? It is a specific thing that you do, but the general for you to go there is to feel better overall. Physically and mentally. So, I am not sure if I can divide between those two.</p>	<p>Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)</p>
<p>I should say that it is more this wellness, or this general thing that you just feel better if you do these things in this area.</p>	<p>Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn</p>
<p>I think the wellbeing concept in Mývatn in my view has to be related to this unique nature as we have that. So, the development should be on the basis of how you can enjoy the nature and further expand them than just being a stupid tourist by being informed, and how you can actually use the nature in a way that this ensures both physical and mental feeling good.</p>	<p>Opportunities, unique features of Mývatn</p>
<p>In that sense that we have been working with those agencies that are in the tourism industry in developing, and look into what are the possibilities for the developments [...] as these agencies, as Visit Mývatn, provide direct access to the companies as they are a common marketing and development agency; so, we work with them.</p>	<p>Collaboration</p>
<p>I think it is tourism in this area. This is going very rapidly for the past 10 years or something.</p>	<p>Recent developments</p>
<p>There are a lot of investments and you just see that the area is actually crowded compared to what it was.</p>	<p>Recent developments</p>

<p>Yes, I think they have quite a close corporation, through Visit Mývatn, and we actually are also partners in Visit Mývatn.</p>	<p>Collaboration</p>
<p>As I see, there has not been a program or an intended development, not exactly. I mean, the main change now for the last eight to ten years has been this huge increase in numbers.</p>	<p>Recent developments</p>
<p>I think that many of the companies in tourism have been so occupied with how can we cope with this extra volume that is only getting more and more. So actually, I think it would be a kind of healthy situation if the expenses will go off a little bit so that people can start to kind of organise themselves better.</p>	<p>Challenges, opportunities</p>
<p>I think for a general development it would be better if the increases level off a little bit so that people would need to think more about quality and what is actually being offered and things like that.</p>	<p>Opportunities</p>
<p>In my mind comes only one, maybe two things, we can say that have been developed within this wellbeing industry in the area since the last research. The Mývatn Nature Baths have been renovating themselves, because they were just too small and the facilities did not cope with the numbers, so they are renovating themselves a bit. They started it now. And then of course, but this is in Húsavík, the geothermal Sea baths is new developed in this area.</p>	<p>Recent developments</p>
<p>there are all kinds of activities more than there were ten years ago; more hiking tours, bike renting, and all kind of exploration tours on the sea here, not only whale watching but all kinds of sea tours.</p>	<p>Recent developments, wellbeing products/services</p>
<p>marketing, or the ways that marketing goes, is through these news phones, and less paper and more on the Internet and Facebook and all of these new methods that they are using now.</p>	<p>Recent developments, marketing</p>
<p>the general concept of what Mývatn, or the Mývatn area, is, that is more or less the same as it has been for these twenty years or something like that.</p>	<p>Recent developments</p>
<p>the problem that we generally see here, far away from the southwest corner of Iceland is of course the access for foreign tourists to come to Iceland, because the only international airport is in Keflavík. So, it is far from us and it is expensive to travel around in Iceland</p>	<p>Infrastructure and accessibility, challenges</p>
<p>one of the common things that we have been fighting for is to open a new international airport or route that is to Akureyri. That has been done a little bit. And it is a Dutch company started this winter. And they are going to fly from Rotterdam in the summer time and Amsterdam Schiphol in the winter time [...] And there have been some companies in Britain with a couple of flights in the winter time and that has changed a bit.</p>	<p>Recent developments, Infrastructure and accessibility</p>
<p>on the other hand, being peripheral is also an access. A plus in the tourism industry. Because of how big tourism is in general, the more numbers of tourists of we tend to say the best ones. They want more, they are willing to pay more, and live fully their life or something. They</p>	<p>Infrastructure and accessibility</p>

are more and more looking for things outside of the mainstream. This can be an access in that sense too.	
I think, people who are willing to go that far, and it costs somewhat to just to come into the place, but then these people are willing to stay longer so they leave more behind in economic value for the area.	Infrastructure and accessibility
because of the collapse of the WOW airliner. It was a low fare airliner bringing tourists to Iceland. There has been a decline in total numbers in Iceland in tourism this year compared to last year, but here in the area we are booming, we do not feel that.	Recent developments
We are actually hearing numbers here this summer of as tourists being as many as in 2016, which was the record year.	Recent developments
And there are actually big infrastructure projects this year, which is a ring road by Dettifoss and part of Vatnajökull National Park. So that will open a new possibility here in the area as we have been waiting for this for thirteen years, so it will open this year [...] it will be accessible more. At least almost all year round. Maybe for the two or three biggest winter months not, but on top of that all of the other ones, just as it has been last three to four months.	Infrastructure and accessibility, future developments
that we could get a straight international flight to Akureyri. That would change mainly the winter season, because the winter season is a problem. There are low numbers, so the investment is not really doing well in the winter months.	Infrastructure and accessibility, opportunities
Tourists like it, when they go somewhere, to know what is the local dish here, and so there are opportunities in both the agriculture industry and in the fishing industry and in that case in relation to tourism.	Opportunities
I think the wellbeing tourism industry should be straight forward to meet the tool to open the scarcely populated nature that we have here ... I think we are not in a straight way competing to some century's old spas in Europe or something like that, not in these concepts. We have to make our own special niche, because you can go to wellbeing centres all over Europe or America or wherever. So, I think you have to make this special connection to what is unique of the surroundings and connect it to that.	Opportunities, unique features of Mývatn
the professional wellbeing tourism needs skilled people in the fields. So, the general challenge for the rurally populated areas is to attract young people with special education or skills or things like that, because most of them want to live in the south and urban surroundings, and we cannot offer them this.	Challenges
maybe it is not such a big challenge as it was before, but of course it is always a challenge to attract investors in rural areas to invest.	Challenges
I think they must be having part of the development now, to take more into the services that they offer is more of relaxing areas and things like that. What they should, is not only this crowded nature bath where you have to go in and go out, but they should slow down. And you can only do this with this thick number of people by making the facilities bigger, or	Opportunities

more divided, so that you can change from one space to another, and feel more relaxed then when you are only in one overcrowded area.	
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Interview 2:

Interview section	Code
Yes, it is really important.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
here it is mostly about nature. About seeing and walking in the nature. So maybe it is not so much about wellbeing.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn, definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
I think maybe wellbeing could be like walking in the nature or like walking. You know the feeling always when you go upon the top of the mountain. This is something that I would think about of wellbeing. I am not sure.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
You go somewhere and after the day you feel really relaxed.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
Yes, I think so. Also, I think one of the wellbeing is that you have a lot of hot water that you can use, just as you like. Like people are always talking about our showers and how good they are and warm. And they know that the water is cheap so that they can stand under the shower much longer than they could at home.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism), wellbeing products/services, Nordic wellbeing
Because we have been so busy the last years that we have not been doing much promotion.	Marketing
I think they are going their own path. Except for this Visit Mývatn. Then everybody is working together with Visit Mývatn. I think almost everybody pays to be in Visit Mývatn. So, they are doing this promotion.	Collaboration, marketing
In ten years, we got so many more tourists.	Recent developments
I think mainly the companies are just making more rooms and getting bigger. Very normal for them. It is not big changes at least.	Recent developments
we built nine small hotels with private baths [...] And we also had the cottages and there were always four people in these cottages for sleeping bag accommodation. And now we changed, so we have just the double beds there and it is always made up bed [...] We have much more made up bed. And we have also fourteen rooms for sleeping bag accommodation for people in these [...] Now we offer family rooms there so that is for made up bed. And sometimes, or many times, there are four people in made up bed. So that has definitely changed.	Recent developments
Our main activity is renting the bikes. So that is a bit the same. Except that we started in 1995 and then we had the bike renting. And if it was sunny, the bikes were all out. Every day [...] But now almost everybody has small cars. They can drive, so they just drive for activity or doing something different.	Recent developments, wellbeing products/services
it had changed a lot. Like with tours. Like tours to Askja, there was only one company doing that, definitely. And now we have many companies	Recent developments, wellbeing products/services

that do that.	
It has been crazy. Just this year, they are building 20 more rooms here and two years ago we got one new hotel with 100 rooms and like five years ago we got one hotel with 80 rooms.	Recent developments
It was a big mistake, because Mývatn is a nature area and it should not have big hotels, because it is so easy to have big hotels just outside Mývatn. And then everybody can drive into Mývatn and have a look.	Recent developments, challenges
Maybe not the area, but for this company we definitely have to concentrate on these small huts, because people like them very much. And we have the plan to rebuild them. So, get them with private toilet and things.	Future developments
not more guests at least. Maybe doing something more for the guest, I do not know.	Opportunities
it is of course, because it is so easy to be in the south.	Infrastructure and accessibility
Because now we are getting more straight flights to Akureyri. So that is for sure. A lot of possibilities to do that. And also, because it is strange, because we have a really good airport in Húsavík. So, it is an airport where you can almost always land on; in every weather or whatever, so we should use that more.	Infrastructure and accessibility, opportunities
Yes, and now especially in the winter. So now there is like from England I think once a week.	Infrastructure and accessibility
I do not think it will change very much.	Future developments
I would like to see it change, because like now we are getting a lot of tourists from Akureyri with a bus, from all the ships. And they are coming here, so it is really crowded on the places where to look. And I do not like, it is like mass tourism and they are coming and they do not pay anything in the area. So, I think somehow this will stop. So, they have to pay something to see the area.	Recent developments, future developments
It would have been really much better if you pay when you would come into the country and then you do not have to pay at every place you come to.	Opportunities

Interview 3:

Interview section	Code
we have seen the idea in the Blue Lagoon and how things did develop over there [...] And it is also because we have this tradition of steam baths here from old traditions, even from the Middle Age. Here people used to bath in these steam huts right in the area, close to the Nature Baths [...] This was old traditional bathing and the idea was kind of to getting this back and give the crowd here the opportunity to experience this.	Wellbeing products/services, unique features Mývatn
This is very special, because this is one of the few places in Iceland where you have geothermal steam without the sulphur. So, it is almost	Unique features Mývatn

clear water can you can be bathing in this. It is a whole natural system, and it is great.	
I believe now that they are not doing enough out of this steam baths experience, because you really have to tell people about it [...] People do not find it interesting, so they need to know everything about it. So, regular travellers that are not used to steam baths, they have not used that. So, they do not know what the experience is to getting into this. So that is, from my point of view, they are not doing good enough in here. They are only focussing in the baths.	Wellbeing products/services, opportunities
this area here, close to the Nature Baths, is the only place in Iceland where this is actually possible. Because there is something on the ground that kind of heats the sulphur from the steam.	unique features Mývatn
the plan now is to rebuild the whole thing [...] They are doing it all over again. And that is in a way fine, but I am afraid they will do it too commercial. Because when you are here up in the highlands of Iceland, you can get all the good facilities, you can get all the great things, but it is nicer to have it a bit rustic. So, if you do it too commercial, and I intent to say too touristic, they might lose some character.	Future developments, challenges
I feel they do not think enough about the quality and the total experience. People should do. Because people are visiting these kinds of places to get the experience, such a speciality. And if it is too commercial, they do not experience it. They just go in, pay the fee, pay the bath, go out again, and some of them may think why are we here? Why on earth did we pay all of this for?	Challenges, opportunities
They could make a facility out of it. They could take the water out of the cave up into an up-ground pool to give people an experience of having the water, but they do not do it.	Opportunities
they are afraid to do it, because everybody will go to the Nature Baths and not to the pool. But many people would like to bath in a simple way. We have geothermal water anyway, so I think they have to do a swimming pool as well because you do not need to force everybody to pay a lot, like 5000 Icelandic krona, for go bathing. There is no need for that. So that is the discussion here at the moment; should we build a swimming pool or not?	Opportunities, wellbeing products/services
I do not think they have done well enough on that field actually. Because that was one of the purposes for why we started in the beginning, to make this a relaxing bath in the highlands, with quietness and easiness. But now it is kind of a busy place and a lot of people are coming and go and they are drinking and... So, they are totally not in the wellbeing.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
they could add in something; even yoga courses or things like that, or healings.	Opportunities
it is one of the problems in Icelandic tourism that everybody is just coming and they are kind of ticking off all the boxes [...] and then they	Challenges

go.	
We need to change that. We need them to come, to experience special things, even here, make them stay for one week, just for wellbeing purposes. But as today, nobody is doing that. But that is the future, from my point.	Opportunities, future developments
they need to do it together. I think it is better for the baths to kind of just focus on their own project, and then go into corporation with hotels and guesthouses and other things and not to just built everything themselves.	Collaboration, opportunities
Visit Mývatn is only kind of the organisation of marketing. They are just drawing out those Northern Lights aspects, or what is here really. This Visit Mývatn has no facilities of selling or providing any services. They are just, the members can go through them for the marketing. The idea behind it is that a lot of small companies, they cannot afford to go to a kind of travel show or doing more marketing job. So, through Visit Mývatn they can do that.	Marketing, collaboration
Some companies work together without that, yes. And some are far too big to be part of that. It is more kind of for the smaller establishments to be in that.	Collaboration
We have all of that here actually. And the idea, the possibilities here are, of course, in this quietness, especially in winter time and off-season time	Nordic wellbeing
all time except from July and August [...] you can have and experience this quietness and clean air, different lights, a speciality for people coming from crowded areas. They might find it interesting to get out of it. And that is kind of just a product that people have to develop.	Wellbeing products/services, opportunities, unique features of Mývatn
Icelandic tourism is still that far behind. We are not producing a little. We are just kind of answering the demands all the time.	Challenges
Very few have a strategy plan. And if they have it is often not very well worked out, because they kind of just try to analyse the situation as it is, and how they can answer the demands. They are not thinking about what would we like to do and kind of work on the ideas behind it, and how can you attract people to come to do special things. So, we are very short on our way, so to say.	Challenges
The first thing happened was the financial crisis which made Iceland a lot more on the news, all over the world. And two years later, the volcanic eruption in Eyjafjallajökull. And then again, we were in the news, all over the world. And after that, it boomed. So, we did not do anything. So, people are coming here because they heard this and this going on in the news. And that is the problem we are dealing with now. We have a lot of people coming in, we do not know why they are coming, we only know that they are coming, because they have heard something about us; about the island in the middle of the Atlantic close to the Nordic Circle.	Recent developments, challenges

We have to kind of slow it down, so, you are welcome, but this is what we are offering and you have to buy it our way. It sounds arrogant, but all business in the world works that way. And you have to produce something, which is segmented to the market on a special way, and that segments come and buy here.	Opportunities
to make the experience good and the areas better survive and not be damaged you have to steer the traffic. You have to administrate is. From my point this can only be done through this kind of activities finding place in the area itself, starting with the parking fees.	Opportunities
I see it as a very beautiful and attractive area, but I see clearly what is happening. And I see clearly what will happen if you do not do anything about it. And the problem now is that nobody is doing anything about it.	Challenges
It is, of course, too crowded in certain periods of the year. Tomorrow you will see it, because tomorrow I think there are 5000 or more, there are at least 5 cruises in Akureyri tomorrow and some of them will come here and then there is a lot of traffic here.	Challenges
we are too occupied of numbers, well about heads, we have to be occupied by numbers of effectivities; of selling and of what people are buying, or what people are doing,	Challenges, opportunities,
In here, I think we have about 80 kilometres of marked walking paths. That is a one week walk. So, you can take a walking trip every day and you will not be repeating yourself. And you can do day trips by smaller or bigger courses every day for I think 10 days without repeating yourself. So, there is a lot to do.	Wellbeing products/services
So, the southern part of Iceland has experienced the boom, especially the capital area. We are just experiencing a regular increase. A kind of normal increase on the yearly demands.	Recent developments
this is not because it is forgotten, it is because it is different to access; you need to drive a lot and you need to spend at least a week in Iceland to come over here. And these modern travellers, they do not have time to stay one week in Iceland.	Infrastructure and accessibility, challenges
And the others, who really like to explore, they are coming here.	Infrastructure and accessibility
We need to be easier accessible on the purposes of people coming to buy the products we are offering. We do not need to be easier accessible for the easy travellers [...] we need people to pay real money for their coming.	Infrastructure and accessibility
It has not so much changed, except the traffic has doubled.	Recent developments
we are not making any effort on producing things that people can buy. So that is our main task as I said earlier	Opportunities
We have to produce something we know the market want to buy. And that is a speciality that you can only get here and not somewhere else.	Opportunities
They should when they make the new facilities, make a kind of lava	Opportunities

huts, to make it like a real bathing sweating room with geothermal steam. And people will pay for that.	
Nothing happened. Nothing is happening. And that is the problem. There is no kind of discussion on wellbeing or whatever it is in the field of producing speciality that cannot be done everywhere. We are just kind of following the stream	Recent developments, challenges
Yes, there are three hotels here recently built in last five years. It is hotel Laxa which is opened in 2013, Foss hotel Mývatn was opened in 2017 and this is this year.	Recent developments
And it is a special place, we are 300 meter over sea level, we are the only place in Iceland where people are technically staying in the highlands of Iceland within a habituated area with services and everything. So that is different from all other places.	Unique features of Mývatn
I hope it will change in a way that we manage to administrate the traffic better. Because if we do not manage to do that, we are in really bad change [...] from my point, it will only happen through the private sector and the municipality and people themselves here. They need to kind of be on the steering board of this area.	Challenges, opportunities

Interview 4:

Interview section	Code
the summers are a little bit difficult if you want to get some wellness or wellbeing tourism here.	Challenges
the summers here are just packed and it is usually one or two groups in house and then just individuals travelling not necessarily looking for wellness	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
I want people to come here, and my goal is to have people stay here maybe two, three, four nights. Coming here for annual balls, we have the dinner here and I can also offer them lunch. They have included, when they stay here, I do not know, before or after the main event, to go with a free pass to the Nature Baths to relax a little bit.	Wellbeing products/services, future developments
you know hot water, wellness, that is really big here.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
maybe also for the people who live here, they do not necessarily categorise this as wellness, it is just a way of living.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
the biggest potential I see for wellness for this place is to use the meeting room. We have the meeting room now, and now we take there 26 to 30 people sitting down, but we can move chairs and tables and maybe you can have bigger groups and have seminars, and teach, you know.	Opportunities
I have Anton, he is the tour operator here with Geotravel. I wanted to work with him for like snowmobiling, you can walk on ice here in the winter, you can make trips for the ski walks [...] And these things, you can go also to Krafla, to a lot of places for a hike trip of a day, you know,	Future developments

with him if you have booked with me, do some yoga, the hot tubs, and have some dinner. You know, something like this. Still nothing is concrete	
this place just screams wellness.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
healthy food, nurturing yourself, and maybe some exercise in something. I talk about yoga all the time, but it does not need to be yoga, but you know, something like this.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
I know Pétur had some kind of a detox package, and that was a very similar idea.	Wellbeing products/services
I know people are offering hikes and just the normal things, not necessarily connected to wellbeing, more connected just to being outdoors and something like this.	Wellbeing products/services
I see also, because we have around Mývatn, close to us, we have also healthy foods, growing food, if you want meat, we have that, of course, that is basic in Iceland	Unique features of Mývatn
And I see this mostly for, not local people, but maybe Icelandic travellers, or groups from smaller companies	Opportunities
it is really important for us to have a high quality and that has pulled some people in. But with wellness, and with some of a program, that is always better for sure.	Opportunities
it is a hustle to get here, definitely.	Infrastructure and accessibility
There is also a development here, it is called the Diamond Circle, you go to Húsavík and make a circle to Dettifoss and come here [...] that will be definitely an attraction	Recent developments
I know both from Icelandic people and travellers, that they feel that in the summer it is just too crowded. It is too much people. Here [...] I only experience it when we have the cruise liners coming to Akureyri, then we have like twenty busses coming in, that is a lot. And if you want to go to enjoy the Nature Baths, you know, it is just impossible.	Recent developments, challenges
people who live also in the village, they have been, at least I have heard them talk about that travellers they are more that they think they can just do anything. You know, they are here in naïve little Iceland, there are no rules, there is no cops, there are no fines, or something like this, and this is something we do not want to let go.	Challenges
So, it is also a big part of urban development to have good tourism, and strong structure for it. So, it is really sad to see people negative towards it, because it does not really need to be like that.	Opportunities
if you could charge a little entrance fee, you have the money to just make it last longer.	Opportunities
I am 100% for people to be charged at all these places. It is of course, we are losing, I spoke about this before, the image of Iceland that everybody can go everywhere, but we are having so many people that	Opportunities, future developments

we need it.	
I think we could do more of it. I think we are doing a lot of it, but maybe emphasising on it.	Opportunities
we do have the hot spring, we try to make everything from raw materials, like in Iceland we are not allowed to import any grilled meat as we need to use our meat, we do have a lot of things that we can offer	Wellbeing products/services, opportunities
foodwise is maybe the only thing that I can think of is wellbeing. Because that is maybe the tour operators for offering hikes and stuff like this. And the Nature Baths of course. They are probably the biggest wellbeing, the heart in all of this.	Wellbeing products/services, role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
I think we can do it better, do it more, as I say, we are offering a lot of it, but not advertising it or at least letting people know.	Opportunities, marketing
I just connect wellbeing to my restaurant. Because here we buy the fish local, we buy the local lamb, buy the fruits that they use for the jam from one of the waiter's grandmother. To be more local.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
always you connect Mývatn side to warm water, it means basically wellbeing and health. Because maybe we talk too much about only the hot water, but also the energy and you can feel it in the ground, there is something you can work with.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism), opportunities
And we have actually a woman here in the village, Asta Price, I think she is half Icelandic half South-African and she is a masseuse and she is all into spirituality and to give these massages.	Wellbeing products/services
I definitely see her coming with some kind of seminar or something like this. Maybe the older people in the area think she is a little bit strange, but it is strange. We do not know anything about spirituality and things like this for sure. I do not know if there is anybody else who do this here. There are plenty of opportunities.	Opportunities
In ten years, I think already we are seeing a little bit decreasing of the amount of tourism. I would like to see.	Future developments
I would see more corporation as well between the, because we are really strong and active in the area, no matter whether you are running a hotel or a farm or a tour operator or a school or whatever, it would be nice to get more corporation	Future developments, opportunities, collaboration
I think a place like this will always miss, you know, young people from like 20 to 25-28.	Challenges
More like outdoor scene and some kind of an exercise kind of wellbeing with relax, hot tubs, the baths. I know the Nature Baths have, I mean, everybody stops there [...] If you come here for wellbeing, everybody needs to stop there. And I know they have plans for the next years to expand and make it a little bit bigger. So, I see it more like this. And also exercise, I do not know, I do not really care if it is, you know, walking or yoga or hunting or whatever, it could be everything. Especially in the winter [...] the activities are endless.	Future developments, opportunities

All of these things, we can name it as wellbeing, because it is healthy to be outside, to have fresh air. So, this is what we want, some exercise or activities, relax and great food. And of course, a good bed for sleep so nobody is worried.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
In some cases, it is happening. Like I would like to see, because, when we are nearing the winter season, we need to minimise the operations a little bit so it is always how you are using your employees. Maybe we can [...] make them move around.	Collaboration, opportunities
I have sat down probably four or five times with both of the tour guides here just to try to create a package together, you know. Maybe somebody who comes to have a five-day activity trip with Anton for example, they can go to Dettifoss, the highlands, travel Mývatn, have fish, maybe you can have one relaxing day maybe with hunt, you know, whatever, and then always use this as a hub.	Opportunities, future developments
we have a lot of, how do you say, virtual minds here in the area, but we do not have the time to maybe sit together.	Challenges
Mývatnsstofa is a marketing tool for the country here, this has always been here and nobody have done anything. And she is here since two or three years and she has put a lot of power in it.	Recent developments, marketing
We pay her just a monthly fee and we are on the webpage	Marketing
It is really difficult to access this place in the middle of the winter. Sometimes we are just snowed in, because you cannot go anywhere to the East or North. And it can mess a lot with your plan.	Infrastructure and accessibility
That is the biggest challenge, just to get people here.	Infrastructure and accessibility, challenges
People who come here, they usually do not regret it, because they really come here for outdoor areas or just to see something new, because the area has a lot of, a lot of things to offer.	Wellbeing products/services, unique features of Mývatn
It is also maybe another part of wellbeing, just a different tourist, just to travel a little bit slow.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)

Interview 5:

Interview section	Code
wellbeing guests, they prefer sometimes price and very much price.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
But the problem is that Iceland has never, we have not decided, which kind of tourist we prefer. We are still looking for everyone, and inviting everyone, and marketing for everyone, which I think is a mistake. I think it is a mistake, because we are not able to welcome thirty million. So, we have to decide what kind of guests do we prefer to have here, I think so. And we have to concentrate on special groups of people.	Challenges, opportunities, marketing
I am trying, to have a little bit wellbeing, who are able to and enjoy, and a little, maybe not luxury, a little higher standard than the average.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
In my mind, it is a little like slow travel, enjoy, the standard food,	Definition of

perfect food, good room, I mean, yes, I think so. I do not know.	wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
I, a little bit, connect wellbeing and what we are doing with like high-quality food. All the products that we are using, they are for example, high quality food and quality products. They are more expensive than if you prefer to buy the cheapest one. So, we, for example, during winter in Iceland, it is quite difficult to have Icelandic salad. And because, we are, we are trying to think with the food, food is supposed to be Iceland.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism), wellbeing products/services
Our food is Icelandic as much as you possibly can. And we never use, for example, all our meat is Icelandic and most of it is from the farm or from the local farmers. And we do the food very much ourselves.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism), wellbeing products/services
I think wellbeing and price connect a little.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
We also have a folder in the guest house in the rooms where people can read about what we are doing. And this is also on the website and Facebook and whatever it is.	Marketing
No, not yet. But of course, I think Mývatn area should advertise like a wellbeing area.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn, opportunities, marketing
Because our nature, most of our guests are coming because of the nature.	Unique features of Mývatn
And nature, to protect the nature, we need to take care. So, it keeps beautiful. That costs money and well, in my mind, it is not the best for us to have a large number of guests. I prefer less guests and better payed guests. Guests who are very much thinking about the nature and the protection and yes. And people who are looking for... I a little bit connect in my mind that beautiful nature you see that is taken care of, infrastructure that is fine, which is not today.	Challenges, opportunities
in Mývatn area, we should not build up containers for accommodation. That is my opinion. I would like to see beautiful buildings, family companies.	Future developments
I do not know. I think in a way, there are so different opinions. So, I am not sure we will get. For example, of course there are some hotel runners or restaurants who think that the cruise ships, the passengers, they are really good, but the cruise ships they put the prices down, so much, and the food they are offered is supposed to be the cheapest one. And there is no standard. That is my opinion. But of course, there are not all people agree, this is my opinion. So, no, I do not think we will manage to put the Mývatn area as we say a wellbeing area for tourists. I am not sure if we will agree. I do not think so.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn, challenges
Yes, I see a lot of things that are very positive and that can be, yes, but I do not know. I wish, but, and maybe this will change, I do not know.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
there are areas which are very popular destinations, like the	Wellbeing products/services

geothermal area.	
And they were some food paths and some ladders and some wooden paths, and they are broken and no one is taking care of them. And that is not possible. If you are visiting an area and you notice that it is not in a good condition then you cannot feel like it is wellbeing, I think.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism), infrastructure and accessibility, opportunities
Yes, where you want to keep the parking, and where are you going to build some proper toilets. Because I think, when it is like this, you cannot say it is wellbeing. Or that is in my mind. It has to be done properly. Not like just temporary solutions.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism), opportunities
We are actually thinking of parking fees or something	Future developments
No, actually I think, because the tourism has been growing very fast last years, and we got more of like the campers. People that are trying to travel very cheap in Iceland [...] But the goal has not been wellbeing. It has not. No, I do not think so.	Recent developments, role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
our community has no like, they are not concentrating on wellbeing, it is like a little everything.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
we are always thinking, and maybe that is something in our head, because since old days, we welcome everyone. And we want to be so gentle and so polite, but I think it is time for us to think a little different.	Challenges
I would like to see, I do not know the word, but that we in the area make a decision how, and we are looking ahead more years and we have to accept that we have to think longer in the future. Like in 40 to 50 years, how would we like to see the area	Future developments
I prefer that we will concentrate on better paying guests instead of the backpackers or whatever. I know it is ugly, but I think we have to do it. Because we cannot welcome everyone. If we want the nature to be nice and protected.	Future developments
And of course, we need some, to invest in all these things, then we need some money. And that is not easy.	Challenges
And now I am participating in a project for students of architecture and they are planning, and there is a competition, of little luxury like guesthouse which will be a part of, so I will be able to take more wellbeing guests as well, I think.	Future developments
in 2008, our area was too small, so then we expanded the saloon for 2009 just after the financial crisis, and then little by little we have been expanding. More in the kitchen, made a new bakery, but everything little by little.	Recent developments
we built 20 rooms, and in 2011 we expended and now we have 26 rooms.	Recent developments
In general, just be open minded and have the courage to make decisions and although that is not easy, it is necessary.	Challenges, Future developments
mostly the private owned companies we are marketing together. But the chains, they have marketing offices in Reykjavik and they prefer not to be so much with us which is sad, really sad.	Collaboration, marketing

Yes, we have this common small marketing company, we meet each other. But of course, during summer everybody is very busy so we do it mostly during winter.	Collaboration, marketing, challenges
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Interview 6:

Interview section	Code
Something like health, caring and community.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
There is a lot of like marathon, now this summer, no last summer, we started this off-road marathon, because it is a beautiful country and you want people to be able to not just run on the street, and we support that, yes.	Recent developments, wellbeing products/services
Could be more. But yes, like the Nature Baths that is a wonderful place for them to go. And of course, they can go to, I think, everybody is welcome everywhere, but there is not much though.	Wellbeing products/services
we are going to start at the end of the summer to make this walking and bicycle road across the lake, all over the lake. That is something we have been wanted to do for many, many, many years and now we are actually starting. And we are just going to do a little bit at the time and now we are going to do from here to Dimmuborgir. And then the next years we go on, because we want people to be able to walk along all the lake without having to be on the streets. This is both for riding and also security, for both of this it is the reason to do this.	Future developments, infrastructure and accessibility
I think that the people who love nature and want to see the nature, they do not let anything stop them to come here.	Infrastructure and accessibility
We have a lot of tourists here and I think that it is because of this beautiful area. I have heard from the cruise ships arriving to Akureyri, that always most of the people want to go here instead of to other places, because this is just known as a beautiful nature place so.	Unique features of Mývatn
We have that one road and we are on that road. And we would rather try to make it a little bit easier just to, like it is just, seven years ago, it was easier to drive to Dimmuborgir. Now we want to make it easier to drive to Krafla. We have gravel roads there and it would be better to have better roads there.	Future developments, infrastructure and accessibility
I think the main development would be the bicycle roads along the lake.	Future developments, infrastructure and accessibility
I am not sure if there is anything more in the nearest future that we are going to do. Everything is expensive so we really have to use a lot of time.	Future developments, challenges
it is not something they are going to in the near future. But of course, if it is getting too much people then we probably have to do something, but now it is not a problem. But if it is going to be a problem, then of course we would think about it.	Future developments, challenges

Yes, there is, but it has changed a bit though. It used to be different when we had fewer tourists. Every year they maybe, especially in winter time, this hotel and this hotel decided to have open now and these are closed and so just everybody could take a vacation and not at the same, but now most of them are, are open all year round so they do not have to do this anymore. But I know all of the companies work at least together.	Recent developments, collaboration
I think the first change was to put toilets in Krafla. I know that there is a toilet there. They are renovating it, but still they can go there. And the last thing is we have done this basically tourist route and of course this connects this and of course everybody needs to be on this road to go from here to there, instead of being all over. There is not much more that we have done basically. These two, that is something.	Recent developments
Just it is harder to go to the store because there is always such a long queue and those stuff like that, of course we see that. But not a problem.	Recent developments

Interview 7:

Interview section	Code
in my point of view, there are many possibilities in wellbeing in the area. Mývatn Nature Baths is one part of it and has increased it, I would say, tremendously.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
The ideas which we are having is to increase and to build even more up the Nature Baths in a three-year plan or something [...] that will help us to even increase the facilities and the possibility for spa treatments etcetera, etcetera.	Future developments, opportunities, wellbeing products/services
But in general, I think, Mývatn Nature Baths is, how do you say, playing a key role in wellbeing in the area	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
the other things you have is more like, you know, things to do just like walking, hiking or relaxing, there is no other bathing or anything like that in the area.	Wellbeing products/services
I define wellbeing as not one, like to have a hot bath, steam bath, massage, other treatments you know, but also part of wellbeing, in my point of view, is like walking and enjoying nature, relaxing from the hectic stress that is all around us.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
So, for me, wellbeing is not only the spa thing, it is also the fact that this environment is, it is a very small population so you are almost on your own. There is no pollution of flight or any hectic traffic or whatsoever, so that is also part of wellbeing for me.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism), unique features of Mývatn
no we have not been using it as Nordic wellbeing, no, no, to be honest.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism), Nordic wellbeing
there have been companies going up like Sel hotel which is offering many kinds of activities which is part of wellbeing in my point of view.	Recent developments, Wellbeing products/services

Also, things like Hike & Bike and other small companies which are offering tours	
And then you have like in Dimmuborgir [...] and the service which is offered in Dimmuborgir today is a lot better than it was years ago [...] So, I think the area is, and we have the bird museum now, you have new hotels being build up, like Foss Hotel and others that are being rebuild, and of course Laxa Hotel which is a new one. So, if you go back ten years, there are two big new hotels like Foss Hotel and Laxa, Sel has been developing its facilities and Icelandair hotel, since they bought Reynihlíd, they have been increasing as well [...] they also increased the facilities regarding to going out for dinner or whatever and there are restaurants in all of these hotels for example	Recent developments
the possibilities to stay in the area and to enjoy wellbeing has increased dramatically. But there are not many; there is not like big development in any.	Recent developments, wellbeing products/services
if I define wellbeing as a ground wellbeing and related areas, the ground wellbeing for me in wellbeing is relaxing in hot tubs, spa, sauna, having the possibility to have massage and things like that; we are not having anything like that, apart from the Nature Baths.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism), wellbeing products/services
And at the Nature Baths, unfortunately, we are not having any massage for example. We tried it for some years, but there was very little demand for it.	Challenges, wellbeing products/services
think to offer massage probably it is better at a hotel or something. It looks like that at least.	Opportunities, wellbeing products/services
we have been postponing it now for over a year, because there are so many things which need to go through the environmental ministry etcetera, etcetera. And so many things which need to be taken care of, so this has postponed the project at least a year	Challenges
we are hopefully getting a final license from them at the end of this summer. Which means, if everything goes well, we might be able to start late this year or preferable next winter.	Future developments
we need to make it bigger. Today the square meters are around 1100, and it is way too small for both the number of guests and because of the staff. This is the same, we are using the same housing as we did when we had last year, or now we are having more than 200,000 guests and this is the same as we had when we had, in the summer we are having 40 employees almost	Recent developments, future developments
10 years ago, when we had maybe 70,000 guests and maybe 12 employees	Recent developments
for the restaurant, because we believe we have big possibilities in making this better.	Opportunities, wellbeing products/services
Now that we are working on it, which means that we will open the new facilities in 2022, but we have to see.	Future developments
I mean we try to work with local farmers for just buying the right	Collaboration, future

salmons and the right bread and things like that. And the idea is to use the restaurant as much as, in the restaurant to use as much local food as possible.	developments
And then companies try to work together like a lot of guesthouses are selling our services and also like Mývatnsstofa which we participate in and which is working on introducing the whole area, but it is not everybody of course participating there, but I think we have been trying to be one of the bigger ones at least.	Collaboration, marketing
We hired just two years ago probably, yes, around that, a special marketing manager for the Nature Baths. This position was not there before.	Recent developments, marketing
now we have three big roles in the company so, and this has of course increased the emphasis on marketing for the area and for us. And first, there was, I mean, years ago everything was paper and advertisements in magazines etcetera and now it is social media, social media, social media.	Recent developments, marketing
I mean, the company has changed a lot in the last ten years, ten years ago we were getting some 60,000 guests and now we are having more than 200,000. And the number of employees has more than tripled... But the core business is still the same; it is providing services to the customers who want to enjoy a warm bath out in the nature.	Recent developments
So probably you have seen at least, because what we did when we had to postpone the rebuilding, we were forced of course to put in some, lot of money, just to renovate the things as they are today, because things were getting done and worn out. So, like now we repainted everything in this grey colour which goes much better in to the nature.	Recent developments
now, having a tunnel to here, Víkurskard which is the mountain road to here could be big challenge in the winter when you have winter as well, but now with the tunnels to here it is fine [...] it opened just last January and now it takes you 50 minutes.	Recent developments, infrastructure and accessibility
I think it is growing and I think for the whole region I am quite positive. Despite the fact that we have a decreased number of passengers into Iceland at the moment, I think that with the increased number of tourists into Iceland, people want more to go to the places where there are less tourists. Plus, the fact that we get another channel into Iceland through Akureyri airport which means more direct flights, more visitors coming directly into Akureyri and Mývatn being just less than an hour away. So, I think, yes, for this region and for Mývatn, I am quite positive for the coming years. It is going to be tough this year because of the decreasing number of airlines flying to Iceland.	Future developments, infrastructure and accessibility
Yes, it could be, I mean, we have the Nature Baths we have the Sea Baths in Húsavík, and there are ideas about some baths here in the area, you have all kinds of activities around the area. I am talking about in numerous, I mean you have hiking, you have skiing, and alpine, cycling is very popular, climbing, ice climbing even nearby Húsavík,	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn, wellbeing products/services

whale watching of course, you have so.	
Well you have so many varieties of sports and activities, which is, in my point of view, this is a little bit similar to Queenstown in New Zealand, which is a city represented of activities and outdoor sports and this region is the same being in Iceland in my point of view, because you have all these opportunities like skiing, fishing, I mean, these all.	Wellbeing products/services, opportunities
I think the major challenge is to be able to get direct customers into Akureyri.	Challenges
I fear more because being here, I mean it is a four hours' drive or five hours from Reykjavik, and for one weekend you take the Reykjavik west part region and you do not go up north and add one extra flight or half a day drive. So, it is really important in my point of view that we have a direct flight to Akureyri.	Challenges
our biggest challenge now is to be able to get license to rebuild our facilities, because they are being worn out like I said. If that will not work, we are in big shit, so to say. So that is the big challenge, number one.	Challenges

Interview 8:

Interview section	Code
in Mývatn, they have been focussing on wellness tourism for some time. Even though that is not the main focus at the moment, meaning they are focussing on different activities, not only wellness activities, but different activities	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn
wellness tourism has been growing considerably in Iceland. And one can even say that tourism in Iceland is all wellness tourism	Recent developments
90% of what our visitors say that the reason to come to Iceland is regarding the Icelandic nature and that use to go hand in hand with hiking trip which is a part of wellness tourism.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
one can say that wellness tourism is that something has to do with one to enjoy and build up yourself, whether it is like going to spas or anything like that, or just going out in nature and enjoying yourself and like nature.	Definition of wellbeing/wellness (tourism)
It is, I think, it will be and it is a strong part and I think it is a great potential for us in the future, but then you have to be very careful and you have to be very truthful in how you will perceive that, because tourism in itself is a polluting industry, so we have to be very careful on how we build up tourism and what sort of means and access we are using to create tourism. For example, cruise industry, would that fit that image? So, there are a lot of questions.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn, opportunities, challenges, Nordic wellbeing
There has been a lot of talk about [...] some sort of entering or exit fee, in and out of the country, but that is a political decision and until now there has been no willingness from the political parties that are now ruling to do that. And one of the reasons for that is that [...] the airlines	Opportunities, recent developments, challenges

have talked against it.	
there is also being a talk about taking out not an exit or anything like that fee, but rather pay an environmental tax or something like that.	Future developments
It is and always has been a wellbeing destination. Because they have, for example, not only it is a spectacular area in regard of just, is a national phenomenon to some extent due to the craters and the variety of the birds that come there and nest there and things like that, but also due to the geothermal water and the hot pools and things like that.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn, unique features of Mývatn
So Mývatn has always been associated with wellbeing and wellbeing tourism. And especially today, they have built up the public baths up there, and now they opened up the similar baths in Húsavík.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn, wellbeing products/services
it has always been and will continue. And not only that, you now have new business gearing out into, for example, cycling, fast bike cycle tours, yoga and things like that. So, it is growing.	Role of wellbeing/wellness in Mývatn, wellbeing products/services, recent developments
So, for the past ten years you see a lot of developments there in the wellness. Both in terms of what people are offering and also in this increasing numbers, so there is a lot of development going on.	Recent developments
There seems to be both. There are more individuals offering different activities and things like that, and also the companies are growing.	Recent developments, wellbeing products/services
I think it is, it is positive. In the sense that it makes it curious so I think it is a plus for the region rather than a minus.	Infrastructure and accessibility
We can see that the numbers are up here in bed nights and things like that, yes. And because the UK flights have now been coming in for two years and the first year, they mainly stayed here in Akureyri and then they make day trips out, for example to Lake Mývatn. But today, they both stay here and they are also offered to stay at the Mývatn region. So, people combine that as well. So now they are staying longer there.	Recent developments, infrastructure and accessibility
The big question for tourism in Iceland, and island tourism in general, especially an island like Iceland which is located in the middle of the Atlantic is climate change, meaning we will, even though we will be affected by the climate change directly, but the question is, what will happen in regarding the airline?	Challenges, future developments
I think that, because now the Nature Baths is one of the biggest businesses there, and it is very profitable, and you have started to see new businesses to build up around it, whether it is yoga centres or whatever it is. I think that will continue to grow.	Opportunities, future developments
They have all the potential of doing so, yes.	Opportunities
wellness tourism is such a broad spectrum and you can decide on almost anything that it is wellbeing, so it is, they could do it, but the thing is, what will be the perception of the visitors. That has a lot to do with it. And you have to be very careful, because wellness tourism goes hand in hand in regarding of thinking about the environment and things like that. So as long as they continue on that path and they are truthful	Challenges

in that sense, then yes, they can focus on wellbeing.	
Well, other challenges might be just competition from other places, for example, as I said, they built up the Geo Sea Baths in Húsavík, they are opening up now, near Egilsstaðir, a new bath there, so I think that will probably be one of the main competition to come extent, main challenges. How can they, or is it going to have a great effect on that area that other places have started to build up similar products. So, competition.	Challenges