WP3 - Competence Report

Husavik
Academic Center

Husavik Academic Center
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Foreword

This report is a part of the Nordplus-project ”SPARK”. The aim of the report is to explain and clarify the core competences of successful culture volunteer-practice in sparsely populated areas in the North-east part of Iceland. Husavik Academic Center (HAC) is a partner in the project and the report is focused on regional circumstances in the rural places where the center operates in Iceland.

This report describes the formal and informal infrastructure and cites examples of cultural volunteers in the local region. The examples are chosen with regard to their importance and function as cultural partaker in rural regions in NE Iceland. HAC's staff has chosen these examples based on the experience of HAC's educational operation in the rural areas. The report is based on

- online data-collection
- processing of info in HAC's database
- Talks/interviews) with leaders of the voluntary associations chosen (informal, non-academic).

North-east Iceland

The region

Húsavík, with a population of about 2300, is the largest town in the area (Þingeyjarsýslur-county), a total population of about 5000. The perimeter of Þingeyjarsýslur is defined by the fjord of Eyjafjörður in the west and Langanes peninsula in the east, spanning the entire area from Vatnajökull glacier in the south down to the coast in the north.

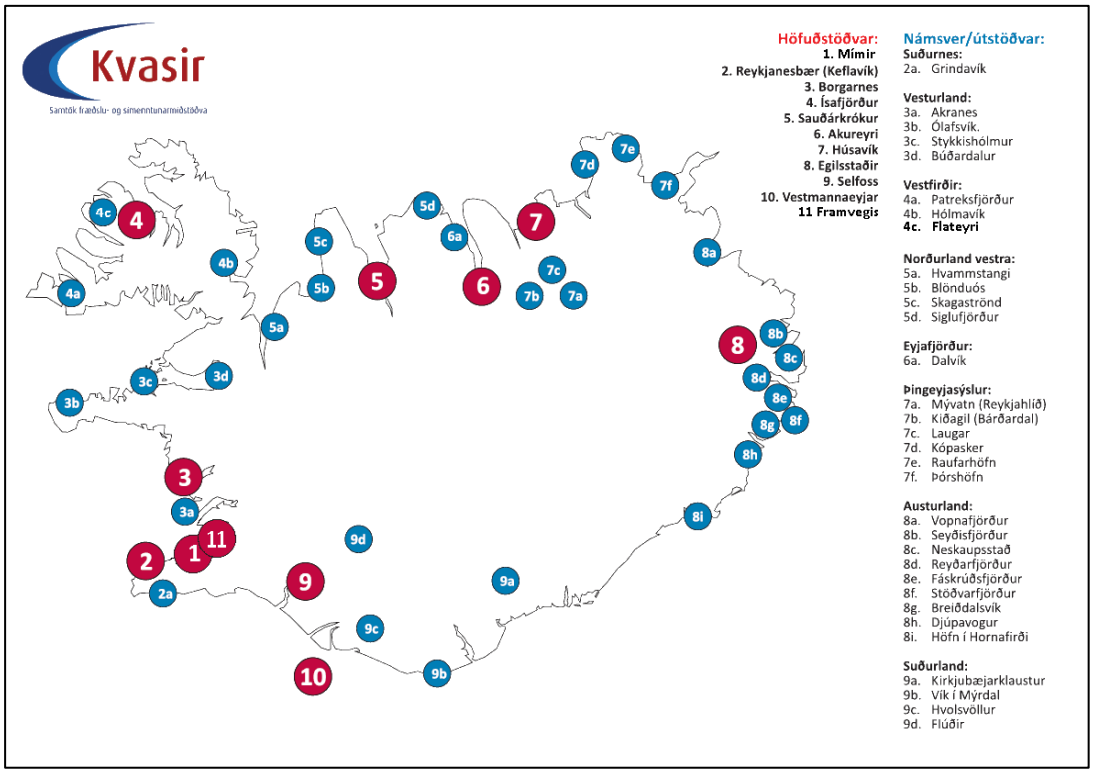
The region is rich with unique and interesting places. Of particular interest for scientists are its unique geological features and rich birdlife. The characteristics of the local societies are in many ways influenced by the seaside; originally fishing and fish-processing and the last decade's sea-based tourism (whale-watching). The region has also a rich tradition for conventional sheep- and cattle farming in the countryside. Húsavík has the last few years become one of the most popular whale watching port in Europe and a big name in tourism in Iceland. The sparsely populated communities is one of the elements that defines the characteristic of the culture in the area. Basically; a long history of few people living in a relatively large area. Small villages and towns and a sparsely populated coastline and countryside.

The town of Húsavík, Iceland in winter-time (November). Húsavík Academic Center's main-offices on the left. Photo: Sigfús Sigfússon

The Formal Infrastructure

Infrastructure in culture and education differs obviously between countries.

In Iceland there is *a network of learning centers* for continuous education for adults. Husavik Academic Center (www.hac.is) is a part of that national network and runs a few learning centers in the NE and provides various kind of education service for adults in the NE-region. HAC provides learning facilities, centers with video conference equipment, short-courses for adults and places to take exams from other educational institutes.



The network of education centers around Iceland. "Kvasir" is the name of the education centers' association. Husavik Academic Center's area is in the NE (upper right corner, nr. 7).

There is also a similar *network of cultural centers* around Iceland. These centers are mostly managed by the municipalities and are operated as regional museums as well as representing and stimulating cultural activity in each community. The District Cultural Center (www.husmus.is) is one of these regional culture centers in the NE-region, running museums and operating culture activities in the area.

The District Cultural Center (Museum House Húsavík).

The Icelandic government provides money for the local governments to manage cultural projects and/or funds entrusted to it. This is done through an association of the local municipalities in NE-Iceland; EyÞing (www.eything.is).

The Informal Infrastructure

Various kinds of spontaneous and/or volunteer cultural activity thrives parallel with the operation of the formal infrastructure, some of which cooperate with the cultural operation of the institutions. Some of this volunteer activity is driven by local clubs or associations that have been operated for many decades while some of the activity is more based on short-term individual initiative and therefore more dependent on these same individuals at the time.

Cultural volunteers - examples

Women's Association of Þistilfjörður (WAÞ – Women´s association of Þistilfjörður)

In Iceland there is a rich tradition for women's associations (WA) in rural areas around the country. Historically one WA operated in almost all rural communities, villages or towns. Above these, and in cooperation with the local associations, is a central federation of women's associations/societies. There have been some changes the last few decades and some of these smaller WA have joined and collaborated. At the same time their role has changed and somehow decreased in the urban areas or bigger towns/cities. However, in the rural areas the role of WA is still important and many of them play a big cultural role in their communities. (Women's Association of Iceland, 2016) WAÞ is one of these associations, founded in 1915, with quite many active members, and important activities for their community. They have managed to get the younger women to join in, which is one of the reasons why it is still active.

The Þistilfjörður area has the village Þórshöfn (400 inh.), where there is another WA, but WAÞ is mostly based on women from local farms in nearby area.

WAÞ's key cultural roles for their community:

- A fellowship/support society for women in the area
- A "get-together" and hobby for local women
- A social network for local women, and a way to involve and introduce new people
- Charity work and sponsorship for the community (funerals, gifts, sponsorship)

Photos from WAÞ's activity (meetings, conferences, visits etc.). Photos from municipality's web-page (www.svalbard-shreppur.is)

WAÞ in 2016

Efling Amateur Theatre (EAT-Leikfélagið Efling)

In many rural places, towns and villages in Iceland are to be found some kind of amateur theatres. Most of these groups/theatres are independent and some of them have a long history or tradition for annual shows/plays in their local community. Based on volunteer work of amateur actors and workers these groups are often important for the local cultural activity. Typically the local teacher, nurse and plumber join on stage once a year for the annual local-theatre, often held in the local community center. Lots of people at all ages are involved, not only the acting but in making costumes, selling tickets, building the stage etc.

Efling Amateur Theatre (EAT) is one of these local theatre-groups in the NE of Iceland. Located in the rural countryside of Reykjadalur-valley in the NE, the theatre group usually does one stage-show a year, involving many local volunteers. EAT's annual play/show is an important asset in the cultural activity in the local rural community and the group is usually most active in the darkest winter-time in Iceland.

EAT's key cultural roles for their community:

- An important annual culture event in it's local community,
- A "get-together" and hobby for many volunteers (at all ages) in the local community
- A platform to display and train local talent in stage arts

Photos from EAT's activity (stage shows/plays). Photos from municipality's web-page (www.thingeyjarsveit.is)

Kelduhverfi's Farmers Association (KFA-Búnaðarfélag Keldhverfinga)

Rural communities in Iceland that rely on agriculture usually form a local association of farmers. These associations deal with practical matters and local interests for the farmers, but also form an important social platform in each community. Kelduhverfis's Farmers Associations (KFA) is one of these local associations in a rural area in the NE of Iceland. Typically these farmers associations are dominated by men, but women nevertheless do participate in many of their activities. One important cultural

volunteer-work that KFA does annually is to prepare and organize a local winter-festival (”Þorrablót”) held in the local community center in January.

KFA’s key cultural roles for their community:

- Organizing of an important annual culture event in it’s local community
- A ”get-together” and hobby for many volunteers in the local community (mainly men)

Photo from annual local festival in KFA’s local community, organised by KFA. Photos from local newsweb (www.640.is)

Conclusions – needs and challenges

The rural areas in Iceland have been facing many challenges the last few years. Urbanization has been going on for the last decades in Iceland, with 2/3rd of Iceland’s population living in the capital, Reykjavík and surroundings. This has obvious effects on the economy and sociology of the rural places. Many aspects of rural culture have transformed or developed in new ways. Some parts of the formal social infrastructure in the rural areas have declined at the same time. A fast transformation of traditional agriculture in the rural areas to tourism-based living has changed the function of many of Iceland’s countryside communities. Nevertheless, quite a few of the rural social and cultural habits and customs in Iceland still thrive, e.g. groups and movements such as the examples above with their local cultural traditions. While some of the traditional cultural habits change or disappear, it can be argued that some of these traditions are even more important than ever, playing even bigger roles in their communities. After all, what these declining rural communities need desperately are ways to appeal to younger people and future inhabitants. And cultural activity is one of these vital factors for a modern community to thrive. (Coelho, 1997) (Hełpa-Liszkowska, 2012) (Howells, 2005) (Guðmundsson)

Core competences & recommendations (for the curricula)

Education and/or training; ”how to run a volunteer-based activity in rural areas”:

- Online- and web-based communication tools (social media) for internal communications
- Project funding; seeking grants
- Project management and human resource management
- Marketing, publicity for cultural projects and groups
- Small-business base-training (debit-kredit)
- Inform about formal infrastructure in local area (collaboration with regional educactional and cultural institutions)
- Inform/educate about population, rural development and state of local economy (where volunteer works)
- Cultural diversity / Living in a multicultural community

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