

**Layering Identities: What
we can learn about people
and communities from
cultural heritage
representation in rural
areas**

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Beyond Representation: Maritime Heritage as a Vessel for Ethical Engagement in the Westfjords of Iceland

- What is the nature of the relationship between MH and the identities of Westfjords residents?
- What are the motives and concerns do museum operators and decision-makers with regards to heritage representation?
- How do individuals outside the circle of museum operators and decision-makers perceive and experience cultural identity and heritage, and its representation by local museums?
- What evidence is there of ethical dispositions, practices, or shortcomings in the foundation, operations, visions, and public perceptions of local museums in light of selectively reviewed ethical theories?

Literature Review

- Rural Icelandic/ Westfjords Issues:
 - Fisheries, Culture, Tourism → Fisheries-dependency, ITQ, depopulation, tourism as the new economy; bearings on identity (Júlíusdóttir, 2010; Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Skaptadóttir, 2000, Magnusson, n.d.)
 - Political Climate for Cultural Heritage in Iceland (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013; Hafsteinsson, 2010; Bernharðsson, 2007; 2003)
- State of Knowledge & Contemporary Debates:
 - Heritage, identity, maritime culture, heritage representation & museology, cultural tourism, (tourism) ethics.

International Comparisons

Icelandic Literature

- NOVELTY
- INNOVATION
- DEMOCRATIZATION
- RE-VALORIZATION

International Literature

- POWER
- PREFERENCE
- PRIVILEGE
- EXCLUSION



Methodology & Limitations

- 2 Case Studies: SMM (Skrímslasetrið) & WHM (Byggðasafnið Vestfjarða)
 - 12 In-depth, semi-structured interviews (Avg. 35 minutes)
- 2 hour-long focus group discussion, 5 participants
- Data Analysis: Thematic Coding & Theoretical Reading of Findings (Ethics)

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- Population Sample: Homogeneous
- Focus Group: Participants all from Ísafjarðarbær

Findings

SMM (Skrímslasetrið)

- Individual and local identities
- Intent
- Lived experience
- Maritime heritage= elusive



Source: <http://skrimli.is/2013/01/batur-strandar-a-skrimli/>

Findings

WHM (Byggðasafnið Vestfjarða)

- Dual role/diffuse identities
- National identity
- Maritime heritage: tangible/intangible complex
- Material authenticity



Photo: Râna Campbell

Findings: Focus Group

- Culture: Historical phenomenon rooted in difference
- Identity related more to the tangible, SMM=disfavoured
- Dual role of museums
- Maritime heritage central, but not exclusive to Westfjords regional heritage and identity → farming, Viking heritage, history of struggles with difficult environmental conditions (avalanches, etc.), social dynamics & change, modern industrial and social developments.

Conclusions

- Views and sentiments of cultural identity are complex and vary by scale.
- There is a rift between cultural identity and cultural representation and evidence of a dominant discourse in heritage production.
- Maritime heritage is seen as primarily the tangible. The intangible is generally undervalued as heritage.



Discussion

Considerations for Icelandic Regional Development

- Is it more important for museums to function as cultural or economic resources for Icelandic communities (i.e, via tourism)? How might these roles be reconciled?
- Should cultural heritage museums be concerned with authentic representation? If so, should this be a matter of material authenticity or providing authentic *experiences* to visitors? How might various identities be reconciled in the museological context?
- Why is maritime heritage perceived as only that which is tangible/material? Is it important to continue to showcase maritime heritage given the changes in rural maritime industry (and coastal societies)? Are existing heritage museums alienating women, youth, and ethnic minorities or creating social rifts (e.g, between believers and non-believers in sea monsters)?
- What are the benefits and dangers of the development of cultural tourism, to cultural heritage, and how does museological representation play into this? How might the benefits be maximized and the dangers minimized?

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Thank you!