

Master's thesis



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

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Ísafjörður, May 2014

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45 ECTS thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of a Master of Resource Management degree in Coastal and Marine Management at the University Centre of the Westfjords, Suðurgata 12, 400 Ísafjörður, Iceland

Degree accredited by the University of Akureyri, Faculty of Business and Science, Borgir, 600 Akureyri, Iceland

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Printing: Háskólaprent, Reykjavík, May 2014

Declaration

I hereby confirm that I am the sole author of this thesis and it is a product of my own academic research.

Râna Campbell

Abstract

The Westfjords of Iceland have seen steady depopulation related to the decline in the fishing industry over recent decades. At the national level, new cultural policies emphasizing regional development have taken shape alongside the growth of the tourism industry. This has resulted in a proliferation of private enterprises- *cum*- cultural institutions across the countryside, many of which challenge the representational styles and ideologies of older heritage museums. I conducted case studies of the Westfjords Heritage Museum in Ísafjörður and the Sea Monster Museum in Bíldudalur in order to produce descriptions of the meaning that local communities attribute to the kinds of maritime heritage represented by these museums; and to determine what values they associate with the museums as cultural institutions. I conducted twelve in- depth, phenomenological interviews with heritage professionals and decision- makers for these sites, and moderated a two- hour- long focus group discussion among five Westfjords residents with no professional ties to the museums, using key observations from the interviews as topics. Thematic coding of the interviews reveals that the museums find themselves at the center of important debates about identity, representation, museology, and cultural tourism in Iceland, in addition to embodying various types of well- established, complex issues in international heritage scholarship. Condensation of the focus group into broad theoretical categories situates the museums within their wider cultural landscapes and introduces a diversified set of perceptions of heritage and representation. The study culminates in a rudimentary ethical reading of the results that serves to underline the importance of establishing an ethical framework for heritage representation and cultural tourism management in the Westfjords.

Úrdráttur

Á síðustu árum hefur stöðug fólksfækkun átt sér stað á Vestfjörðum samfara minnkandi fiskveiðum og fiskvinnslu á svæðinu. Í landinu er menningarstefna þar sem lögð er áhersla á svæðisþróun sem myndast hefur samhliða auknum ferðaþjónustuiðnaði. Þetta hefur haft í för með sér fjölgun menningartengdra verkefna um land allt í eigu einkaaðila, sem mörg hver sýna menningu landsmanna og hugmyndafræðina sem þar liggur að baki á annan og nýstárlegri hátt en eldri söfn hafa gert hingað til. Ég gerði vettvangsrannsókn í Byggðasafni Vestfjarða á Ísafirði og í Skrímslasafninu á Bíldudal í þeim tilgangi að athuga vihorf fólks á svæðinu til sýninga á þessum sjávarhengda menningararfi, sem þessi söfn hafa sett á laggirnar; hvaða gildi þessi söfn sem menningarstofnanir halda á lofti, að mati fólks á svæðinu. Ég tók 12 yfirgripsmikil viðtöl við stjórn og starfsfólk safnanna, auk þess sem ég setti saman og stjórnaði fimm manna hópi af fólki frá Vestfjörðum, sem engin fagleg tengsl höfðu við þessi söfn, til þess að ræða lykilatriði rannsóknarinnar. Við flokkun viðtalanna eftir ákveðnum þemum kom í ljós mikilvægi safnanna í samfélagsumræðunni er varðar hugtök eins og samsömun, sýningar, safnafræði og menningartengda ferðaþjónustu á Íslandi, auk þess sem komið var inn á velþekkt og flókin atriði innnan alþjóðlegrar fræðimennsku um menningararfinn. Samantekt umræðnanna úr umræðuhópnum sýnir stöðu safnanna í menningarflóru landsins um leið og hún sýnir fjölbreyttan skilning fólks á menningararfinum og kynningu á honum. Rannsóknin nær hámarki sínu þegar helstu niðurstöður hennar eru að lokum skoðaðar með undirstöðuatriðum siðfræðinnar í huga, til þess að undirstrika mikilvægi þess að setja á stofn siðfræðilegar reglur til kynningar á menningararfinum og stjórnunar á mennta- og menningartengdri ferðamennsku á Vestfjörðum.

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Hamit Atalay, whose wisdom and love transcend time and space.

Görüşürüz, Dedeciğim.

Table of Contents

Abstract	v
Úrdráttur	vii
List of Figures	xv
List of Tables	xv
Acronyms	xv
Acknowledgements	xvii
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Background and Course of Research.....	3
2.1 Fisheries, Culture, and Tourism in the Westfjords.....	3
2.2 Overview of Conceptual Frameworks and Reflection on Methods	4
2.2.1 Filling in the Theoretical Gaps	4
2.2.2 Research Questions	5
2.2.3 Case Studies	6
2.2.4 Focus Group.....	8
2.2.5 Operative Concepts and Scope of the Study	8
2.3 Cultural Heritage in Iceland	9
2.3.1 Political Climate.....	9
2.3.2 State of Knowledge and Contemporary Debates	12
3 Methodology	23
3.1 Data Collection.....	23
3.1.1 Case Study- Phenomenological Interviewing.....	23
3.1.2 Focus Group.....	25
3.2 Organization of Data: Transcribing.....	28
3.2.1 Interviews.....	28

3.2.2	Focus Group	29
3.3	Data Analysis	29
3.3.1	Thematic Coding of Interviews	29
3.3.2	Focus Group	31
3.4	Limitations	31
3.5	Research Ethics	33
4	Case Study: The Sea Monster Museum (<i>Skrímslasetrið</i>)	35
4.1	Summary of Findings from Sea Monster Museum Interviews	35
4.2	Identity	36
4.2.1	Community Identity	36
4.2.2	Individual Identity	38
4.3	Intent	45
4.3.1	Professional Interest	45
4.3.2	Roles and Responsibilities of the Museum	46
4.3.3	Perceived Reasons for Visits and Visitor Response	48
4.3.4	Change	49
4.4	Knowledge, Reality, and Modes of Perception and Expression	51
4.4.1	Nature and Culture	51
4.4.2	Being, Reason, and Faith	52
4.4.3	Entertainment and Education	54
4.4.4	Community and Tourists	55
4.4.5	Aesthetics and Atmosphere	57
5	Case Study: The Westfjords Heritage Museum (<i>Byggðasafnið</i>)	61
5.1	Summary of Findings from Westfjords Heritage Museum Interviews	61
5.2	Community, People, and Place	62
5.3	Purpose, Ends, and Identity of the Museum	63
5.3.1	Education, Entertainment, and Experience	63
5.3.2	Heritage Preservation and Cultural Representation	65
5.4	Cultural and Economic Value of the Museum	66
5.5	The Historicity of Cultural Identity	69
5.5.1	Intuition and Felt Experiences of the Sea	69
5.5.2	Materialism, Society, and Change	71

5.5.3	History's Cultural Legacies	77
5.5.4	Communicating History and Identity.....	79
5.6	The Centrality of the Exhibit to Cultural Representation.....	81
5.7	Envisioning the Museum of the Future	83
6	Focus Group Findings: Local Perceptions of Cultural Heritage, Identity, and Representation	85
6.1	Summary of Results from Focus Group Discussion	85
6.2	Observations on the Meaning of Heritage.....	86
6.3	Roles and Responsibilities of Heritage Museums	88
6.4	Observations and Experiences of Cultural Identity.....	91
6.5	Heritage and Social Dynamics	92
6.6	The Historicity of Culture	93
6.7	Closing Comments on Cultural Identity and Heritage Representation	95
7	Discussion	97
7.1	Representation as the Meeting of Style and Ideology	97
7.2	Inner Workings and Outward Expressions of Identity.....	100
7.3	Applications of Ethical Theory	103
7.4	Personal Observations and Concluding Remarks	105
	References.....	109
	Appendix A: Interview Guide	115
	Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide.....	117
	Appendix C: Manual Technique for Analysis of Interview Data	123

List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Theoretical framework 6

Figure 2.2. The Westfjords and Sites of Interest to the Study (Data source:
Landmælingar Íslands) 7

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Informants to Case Studies 24

Table 3.2 Focus Group Participants 27

Acronyms

SMM	Sea Monster Museum
WFHM	Westfjords Heritage Museum

Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible for me to complete this thesis in style had it not been for a constellation of brilliant people whose support I am most grateful for. I would like to thank my advisors- Albína, for being with me every step of the way and handling my periodic insanity with the utmost grace and professional integrity, and Þorri, for trusting my instincts even when I didn't. My family has always been a pillar of strength and I thank my mother, Füsün Atalay, and my aunt, Nurdan Atalay, especially, for actively encouraging my choices in education and helping me along my path.

I have been lucky to find a community of like- minded people and to make some good friends in Ísafjörður who have stood behind me in all my efforts. Many thanks to Salmar Jóhannsson for facilitating my access to people, places, information, and the Icelandic language; Valdimar Halldórsson for sharing books and ideas and for taking on the challenging feat of translating my abstract; Ingibjörg Snorradóttir for help with oral and text interpretation; and the Háskólaþing Vestfjarða staff, with a special tip of the hat to Dagný Arnarsdóttir for her gentle yet keen coaching skills. Funding from the Westfjords Regional Growth Agreement (WEGA) has been instrumental in my ability to conduct research in the region.

There is a group of young women I met here nearly two years ago whose friendship has been invaluable to me throughout times of joy, despair, and near- death experiences in the wilderness: Astrid, Claudia, Flor, Jennifer and Johanna, thank you for being who you are and for having been in the best of places at the best of times. Johanna, I don't know where my thesis would be without you. Thank you for pulling my documents together into a cohesive whole, and for deciding it would be fun to draw me a map of the Westfjords.

I am especially grateful to all the people who participated in my study for lending me their time and trusting me with their words. It is to them that I owe the fruits of this project, and I sincerely wish it to be of service to them and to the communities of the Westfjords as they march into the future.

1 Introduction

To embark on any project that has a bearing on heritage studies is a demanding task, particularly in light, on one hand, of the innumerable definitions and conceptual evolutions that the word ‘heritage’ has taken on over time along with the prolific literature pertaining to these; and, on the other, of its connection to numerous other fields of study across a variety of academic disciplines. It is, however, an important task, as people, communities, and nations adapt to social, economic, and environmental change at an unprecedented rate and their cultures and identities are challenged as a consequence.

Iceland is among the world’s small island nations facing challenges imposed by globalization, climate change, and rapid technological advancement, among other things. The Westfjords, in particular, have had to struggle through periods of social and demographic disequilibrium that have similarly affected other rural regions and the impacts of which on cultural identity continue to be felt.

I set out to explore the ways in which people living in the Westfjords experience cultural identity and how this affects their feelings about its representation by maritime heritage museums, with a view to demonstrating the ways in which ethical theory can be applied in this context. In order to do so, I conducted two qualitative case studies of Westfjords maritime heritage museums, built on twelve semi- structured, in- depth interviews with individuals involved in decision- making processes with regards to each museum. Additionally, I hosted a focus group discussion among five individuals in order to complement my interview sample and address gaps in the interview data. I used mixed methods for coding the data from the case studies and the focus group, and arrived at results that lent themselves to a rich though elementary ethical analysis.

Chapter 2 of the present master’s thesis introduces the reader to the Westfjords and briefly outlines some of the historical, social, and culture phenomena that have shaped life in the region. Further, it lays the groundwork for the present study by explaining its aims, scope,

and central concepts, by providing a rationale for the methods I used in relation to the subject of the study, and by reviewing the relevant literature.

Chapter 3 details and justifies the technical aspects of my methodology and describes the population sampled for interviews and group discussion. Further, this chapter discusses the study's limitations as well as some ethical issues related to the methods used. The interview and discussion guides I used can be found in appendices A and B. A photograph acting as visual support to the description of a manual data analysis technique I used can be found in appendix C.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the results of the case studies and the focus group. The first section in each chapter provides a brief summary of the results, whereas the following sections provide a detailed account by theme, in accordance with the codes produced at the data analysis stage. Answers to the first three of the four research questions driving the study emerge from the results.

Chapter 7 contains an analytical discussion of the results as they touch on issues of identity and representation. The section answers my fourth and final research question by providing an ethical reading of the study's outstanding results, and concludes with my personal observations of the research process and its final outcome.

2 Background and Course of Research

2.1 Fisheries, Culture, and Tourism in the Westfjords

The Westfjords constitute a remote peninsula in the northwest of Iceland, carved out by numerous deep fjords and rugged, mountainous terrain. The region has a rich history of maritime practices, a strong presence in the sagas, and vibrant folklore and musical traditions (cf. Þór & Óskarsson, 2003). It is heavily invested in the fisheries, receiving approximately 35% of its income from the industry. However, its population has diminished by at least 40% since 1940, due in part to economic duress in this sector (Magnusson, n.d.; cf. Stefansson Arctic Institute, 2009). The beginnings of these demographic changes pre-date the introduction and developments of the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) systems¹ between 1979 and 1991 (Magnusson, n.d.) and are connected to additional social and cultural factors (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006). However, the decline is said to have been aggravated by “decreased quota ownership” (Magnusson, n.d., p. 100) and the loss of “locally based control over... access to resources” (Skaptadóttir, 2000, p. 313) following the ITQ system’s implementation in 1984 (cf. Stefansson Arctic Institute, 2009).

Market forces and the advent of new technologies have also contributed to depopulation by altering the *modus operandi* and the dynamics of employment in the fisheries (Skaptadóttir, 2000; Magnusson, n.d.). One of the most visible impacts of these changes has been the migration of the youth to the capital area and overseas. Bjarnason & Thorlindsson (2006) have found that although there are numerous and complex reasons for the exodus of rural Icelandic youth in general, “perceptions of occupational opportunities are by far the strongest predictor of migration intentions” (p.290). Decisions to stay or to leave, however, are also deeply affected by the degree to which a young person identifies

¹ITQ and TAC are the two pillars of the current fisheries management system in Iceland.

with his or her community and this, in turn, is the result of a process of negotiating one's identity in the face of ever- changing and increasingly globalized influences on culture (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006).

An effect that has received less attention, particularly on the state agenda (Júlíusdóttir, 2010), is the plight of women in Westfjords fishing communities in the wake of changes brought on by the ITQ system (Skaptadóttir, 2000).

The Westfjords are rich in cultural resources connected to their history of fishing and farming, although the emphasis tends toward the maritime aspect (cf. Bernharðsson, 2003). Cultural resources have gained increased significance over the last twenty- five years, as national cultural policies have developed alongside regional development policies (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013; Hafsteinsson, 2010; Júlíusdóttir, 2010; cf. Harrison, 2002) and tourism numbers have risen dramatically (Icelandic Tourist Board, n.d), creating new economic opportunities. Still, much of intangible heritage, such as folklore and the more arcane cultural traditions associated with medieval paganism, has only been taken up fairly recently in the interest of promoting cultural tourism (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013; cf., e.g., www.skrimсли.is; www.galdrasýning.is). Furthermore, cultural tourism in Iceland is, itself, in its infancy, as the number of foreign visitors whose purpose is to experience the natural environment is double that of those whose purposes are cultural (Óladóttir, 2013).²

2.2 Overview of Conceptual Frameworks and Reflection on Methods

2.2.1 Filling in the Theoretical Gaps

It is within the social context outlined above that the subjects of my research are embedded, and from it that my interests in undertaking this project emerge. The goals of my study are to explore the relationship between maritime heritage and cultural identity in the Westfjords, to gain insight into the meaning of maritime heritage for local residents and

²This is most pronounced in the high (summer) season. In the winter, the gap closes somewhat, so that nature tourists outnumber culture tourists by roughly one and three- quarters (Óladóttir, 2013).

heritage authorities based on their experiences of the sea, and to discern what values locals, including heritage authorities, associate with maritime heritage representation in their communities. Additionally, I aim to highlight the ethical dimension in cultural heritage representation in the Westfjords. This is especially relevant given the inevitability of encountering value judgments along the lines of inquiry noted above. Furthermore, it is unique and timely in that ethical issues, while subtly weaving their way in and out of the general academic discourse on cultural matters, are rarely named or attended to *as ethical* (cf. Meskell & Pels, 2005). This is particularly true of tourism studies, where relatively few scholars have tread the ground of ethical tourism and even less of tourism ethics (Fennell, 2006; Fennell & Malloy, 1999), and especially true of the current Icelandic academic discourse (Þ. Árnason, personal communication, June 2013; A. H. Pálsdóttir, personal communication, August 2013). Cultural tourism in developed and affluent countries has received little attention from an ethical standpoint, with the emphasis having been on developing nations, sustainable tourism, and eco- tourism (for discussions of this, cf. Fennell, 2012; Fennell, 2006; cf. Butcher, 2009; for examples, cf. Macbeth, 2005, Hultsman, 1995). Thus, drawing from the concerns of Meskell and Pels (2005), the objective of this study is to promote the “*practical ethical engagement* of the professional self with its audiences” (p. 1) in the contexts of heritage representation and ethnographic museums.

2.2.2 Research Questions

I chose to investigate maritime heritage as a possible wellspring for ethical attitudes about cultural representation in the Westfjords, because it encompasses the relationship between people and sea, which, in turn, is fundamental to the region’s history and to the cultural identity of local communities (Magnusson, n.d.; Tulinius, 2003; Skaptadóttir, 2000; cf. Stefansson Arctic Institute, 2009).

The following questions, then, form the basis of my research:

- What is the nature of the relationship between maritime heritage and the identities of Westfjords residents?
- What are the motives and concerns of museum operators and decision- makers with regards to cultural heritage representation?

- How do individuals outside the circle of museum operators and decision- makers perceive and experience cultural identity and heritage, and their representation by local museums?
- What evidence is there of ethical dispositions, practices, or shortcomings in the foundation, operations, visions, or public perceptions of local museums, in light of selectively reviewed ethical theories?

Figure 2.1 illustrates the theoretical components of my research and the relationships among them.



Figure 2.1. Theoretical framework

2.2.3 Case Studies

Site Selection

For the purposes of this thesis, I selected one site in the northern Westfjords and one in the southern Westfjords for case study, partly as a matter of investigating sub- regional attitudes to cultural heritage. The selected sites are the Westfjords Heritage museum (*Byggðasafnið*) in Ísafjörður and the Sea Monster Museum (*Skrímslasetrið*) in Bíldudalur.



Figure 2.2. The Westfjords and Sites of Interest to the Study (Data source: Landmælingar Íslands)

The Westfjords Heritage Museum is a seventy- three- year old, publicly- funded museum built on the site of an early twentieth century fishing station, and the Sea Monster Museum is a five- year- old establishment paying homage to the area's popular sea monster folklore, born of a private initiative. I chose to compare these sites not only as a function of their locality and age, but also because they present an interesting contrast in concepts of heritage and provide fertile grounds for analyzing a number of important issues and oppositions that are central to heritage scholarship in a local context (cf. Graham & Howard, 2008).

Interviews

My case studies are built on two sets of semi- structured, in- depth interviews. These focus, on one hand, on the people and communities surrounding each site, exploring the ways in which they experience and engage with maritime heritage and with culture, more broadly. On the other, they focus on the museums themselves, taking into account questions of their

purpose, identity, and value. Thus, the study examines each museum's dual function as a cultural resource for the local community and a site of interest for tourists.

2.2.4 Focus Group

In addition to the case studies, I conducted a focus group comprised of five participants in order to address issues and explore ideas that had emerged from my earlier interviews, as well as to complement the sample population I had selected for interviews. I took a broader analytical approach to the focus group, primarily because my method for conducting it and the rationale behind this differed from those of the interviews. Furthermore, as, by nature, a less controlled affair in generating data due to the simultaneous participation of multiple informants and the motions of the group dynamic (cf. Freitas et. al., 1998), the discussion took on dimensions that reached beyond the bounds of what I sought to answer with the interviews. In doing so, however, it provided a textured social backdrop for my case studies.

2.2.5 Operative Concepts and Scope of the Study

For the purpose of conducting interesting and diversified research, I worked with a loose and atemporal concept of cultural heritage in mind at the time of interviewing, such that its meaning might be sketched by the individuals being interviewed. Nonetheless, my underlying belief about heritage is that it is a constructive cultural *process* rather than a monument, inheritance, or objective entity (cf. Vecco, 2010; Graham & Howard, 2008). I took 'tangible heritage' to refer to material items that are easily apprehended both physically and mentally, such as artefacts and other historical relics, and 'intangible heritage' to refer to immaterial and more abstract phenomena such as oral tradition, folklore, music, dance, religious and spiritual belief, superstition, etc. (cf. Vecco, 2010). Additionally, I took for heritage both what is strictly cultural and what resides in nature but has cultural values affixed to it. By contrast with the interviews, I put questions to the focus group that challenged the commonly accepted notion of heritage as "the selective use of the past for contemporary purposes" (Ashworth & Graham, 2005, as cited in McDowell, 2008, p.37- 53) as well as ones that highlighted the idea of natural heritage, in order to test for variation in perceptions of and attitudes toward heritage. Having expected that my research might not produce a uniform definition of cultural heritage or find unanimous

agreement on the value of its representations, I used these complimentary methods in order to gain as nuanced as possible an understanding of the existing perspectives in its regard.

Ethics is a subtle component of every facet of human activity. Thus, ethics scholarship is even more dispersed than is heritage scholarship. With the current study, however, I aim to highlight instances of theoretical and practical ethics in maritime heritage representations that might serve as a stepping stone toward conscious ethical engagement with heritage representation and cultural tourism in the Westfjords. In this, I take a Western perspective on what might be commonly intuited as ‘good’ and ‘right’, and make minimal reference to ethical theories from classical and continental philosophy. I apply this analysis particularly where attitudes about cultural representation and the possible consequences of various modes of representation are reflected. However, I also consider my results in light of the existing literature on tourism ethics. These considerations are necessary, as “more communities take up what has become one of modernity’s most powerful cultural forces, heritage tourism” (Porter, 2008, p. 279).

To undertake a profound or highly critical ethical analysis would reach far beyond the scope of my study, which is first and foremost a descriptive account of the relationships of individuals and communities with their heritage. Additionally, ethics is a difficult topic to discuss in the most ideal of situations. In this case it would likely have been subject to misunderstandings issuing from language barriers and cultural differences. Thus the methods of this study were not built around directly obtaining ethical viewpoints or attempting to discuss ethical questions. Rather, ethical considerations are reviewed in hindsight, as a way of reading the results of the study and presenting them under a new light. Most importantly, as a foreign and novice researcher, I did not feel it my place to be conducting research or analyses with a moralizing end in view, but, rather, to be loosening the hatch on a discussion of significant value for the local, academic, political, and professional communities of Iceland.

2.3 Cultural Heritage in Iceland

2.3.1 Political Climate

Answering to the cry of depopulating rural communities, the government of Iceland has sought to promote a “cultural economy” that mirrors the E.U’s “territorial approach” to

“funding regional development” on the continent (Júlíusdóttir, 2010, p. 67). The territorial approach is founded on a “politics of heritage” (Harrison, 2002, p. 357) that encourages the strengthening of community bonds through uptake of local cultural identity (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013; Júlíusdóttir, 2010), which is seen as “a fundamental basis for social stability and pride” (Harrison, 2002, p. 357). Cultural identity and heritage, then, are treated as valuable resources, and are at the center of a policy that aims at restoring economic security in rural regions, largely by means of cultural tourism (Harrison, 2002; Júlíusdóttir, 2010). In Iceland, this phenomenon is accentuated by the fact that with the election of a neo- liberal government in 1991 came a new cultural policy stressing “individual initiative, responsibility, and freedom” (Hafsteinsson, 2010, p. 269). These values have trickled down into regional development policy, where culture and creativity are associated with “valorisation of an entrepreneurial spirit” (Júlíusdóttir, 2010, p.67; cf. Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013) and have resulted in a virtual explosion of new heritage museums, exhibition centers, and “museum- related activities” across the countryside (Hafsteinsson, 2010, p. 269; cf. Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013). These museums took on iconic dimensions in the ongoing discussion about regional development, culminating in the founding of the Museum Council of Iceland (*Safnarað*) in 2001 (Hafsteinsson, 2010). The council is a legal entity operating under the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture (*Mennta- og- menntalmálaráðuneyti*), and is comprised of a regulatory board of several high- profile national member- museums and associations (Safnarað, n.d). In addition to certifying and monitoring museums as well as allocating government grants to museums throughout the country, it is responsible for contributing to Iceland’s overarching museum strategy (Safnarað, n.d). Thus, although such a central emphasis on culture may very well bestow significant social benefits on local communities and heritage agencies, “there should be no doubt that the primary motivation is political and economic” (Harrison, 2002, p. 357). The legal counterparts to these cultural policies are the national heritage laws (*Lög um menningarminjar*), focusing mainly on built heritage and archaeology (cf. 2012 nr. 80 29. júní/ *Lög um menningarminjar*), and the museum laws (*Safnalög*). The latter distinguishes among ‘museums’, ‘exhibits’, and ‘centers’ as well as outlining preservation obligations, of which ‘exhibits’ and ‘centers’, which account for many of the newer museums that have sprung up on the heels of the new policies, have none (2011 nr. 141 28. september/ *Safnalög*).

Harrison (2002) describes such cultural politics as a positive development in the direction of investment in culture and restoration of cultural identities. This is underscored by the fact that Europe in general is beginning to see culture as an agent of stability, at various spatial scales, in a world characterized by constant change (Harrison, 2002). There is an echo of this in Bjarnasson and Thorlindsson's idea (2006) that change and globalization pose challenges to the identities of rural youth in Iceland. The Iceland Regional Development Institute (*Byggðastofnun*), however, has taken the idea furthest, having advanced the notion that "with globalisation arrives international culture and local values weaken and disappear" (Júlíusdóttír, 2010, p.69). Additionally, the institute cites depopulation as factoring into a weakened sense of community identity in the places that have been most subjected to it historically, such as the Westfjords, and the solution to strengthening this identity as "reawake[ning] and rebuild[ing] it" through the use of "local specialty, knowledge, and culture"(Júlíusdóttír, 2010, p. 69). Insofar as these are the sole emphasis, Júlíusdóttír (2010) sees a deeply flawed framework for regional development, based on the idea that it contributes to "othering processes that marginalize the growing number of people of foreign origin living and working in these regions and in- migrants of Icelandic origin, but not embedded in the valorised local heritage" (p. 69; cf. Holtorf, 2011). She likewise finds it highly problematic that women are not overtly factored into regional development policy (Júlíusdóttír, 2010).

Necessarily, what begins to emerge from this sampling of the political climate is a reflection of the fact that the very concepts of culture and heritage, themselves, are laden with political ideology. They are, however, plural, and the degree to which they can be said to be bearers or representatives of identity is debatable (Howard & Graham, 2008). Indeed, Harrison (2002) is wary of the fact that despite the conspicuousness of the terms 'culture', 'heritage', and 'identity' on the "international political and social agenda", they have hardly been defined or differentiated, especially for public apprehension (p. 355). Vecco (2010), in tracing the Western European concept of cultural heritage back to its origins, provides a partial reason for this lack of definition, stating that the concept is "characterized by expansion and semantic transfer" and is unable to function as an umbrella term for the multiple ways in which it is understood and used. This is evidenced in the numerous foundational "directives, charters, and international resolutions" (Vecco, 2010, p. 322) she cites, as well as in the more recent conventions that, attempting to

democratize heritage in a Europe marked by social and demographic changes, refurbish and reinvent the concept yet again (Wolferstan & Fairclough, 2013). Although scrutinizing the theoretical evolution and practical incarnations of cultural heritage is beyond the scope of this thesis, examining the relationship between an elementary concept of cultural heritage and identity is a central component. For the purposes of this thesis, natural heritage is included in the concept of cultural heritage and the terms ‘heritage’ and ‘cultural heritage’ are used interchangeably.

2.3.2 State of Knowledge and Contemporary Debates

Heritage, Identity, and Maritime Culture

Heritage is a broad concept subject to debate across a vast array of academic arenas (Day & Lunn, 2010). Furthermore, conceptions of heritage aimed at shaping policy are subject to ideological clashes rooted in tensions between the mundane (Atkinson, 2008) and personal (Kean, 2008), and the monumental, outstanding, and universal (Wolferstan & Fairclough, 2013; cf. UNESCO, n.d). For the purposes of the present thesis, a review of some of the available literature specific to Iceland is presented in relation to its broader scholarly context.

Knowledge about matters of cultural heritage pertaining to the Westfjords is dispersed, with information appearing in local publications such as the Ísafjörður Historical Society’s annual compendium of essays and articles (*Ársrit Sögufélags Ísfirðinga*), and a weak presence in the English- language academic literature. Where the literature does discuss Westfjords heritage and/ or identity, it is primarily in the context of subjects such as the fisheries, the ITQ system, and various political issues, and in relation to social phenomena said to be common to rural Iceland (cf.; Júlíusdóttir, 2010, Skaptadóttir, 2000). These, combined with other contributions that take broader geographical and theoretical perspectives, address some of the questions of identity and representation that are at the heart of the present study.

An apt point of departure for examining these questions in the Icelandic context is Viking heritage, as it is commonly touted as the centerpiece of Icelandic identity. This is especially true with regards to the tourism industry, where the image of Icelanders presented to foreign tourists through destination marketing is that of the proud and mighty

descendants of these rugged explorers.³ While so-called Viking tourism in general lends itself to analysis for authenticity and commodification (Halewood & Hannam, 2001), Sindbæk (2013) approaches it from a different angle, underscoring the fact that Iceland is but one among many countries that the Vikings marked with their presence, and that Viking heritage informs not only national identities as it does in Iceland, but also regional and local ones in other parts of the world (Sindbæk, 2013). Thus, it is most historically relevant in its configuration as European and global maritime heritage (Sindbæk, 2013), a significance underlined by the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture in their nomination of Þingvellir national park as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

This brings to the fore several important points. First, as Viking heritage is essentially geographic, it is part of a cultural landscape. The latter term refers to the notion of landscapes as multi-tiered places; as geography overlaid with meaning through signs and symbols that portray how a community constructs its identity around its history (McDowell, 2008). As such, a landscape, “like society, is in a constant mode of flux” (McDowell, 2008, p. 38) as it is “rooted in perception, and is therefore as mobile and fluid” (Wolferstan & Fairclough, 2013, p. 14). Landscape has been a significant topic of European heritage discussions in recent decades. Harrison (2002) and Wolferstan & Fairclough (2013) base their studies on its uptake and developments by the Council of Europe as a foundation for heritage management that purports to at once strengthen regional identities and unite them in a common European heritage. Sindbæk’s (2013) example of Viking heritage may very well fit the bill.

Another important distinction that Sindbæk’s (2013) paper points to is that among local, regional, and national identities. Because memory, the main mechanism for constructing heritage and identity, is bound to place, its constructs inevitably take material from different spatial dimensions (Graham & Howard, 2008). This is a matter latent in discussions of Icelandic culture, politics, and society (cf. Júlíusdóttir, 2010; Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Skaptadóttir, 2000;), as well as visible in the at once locally distinct and nationally united (Skaptadóttir, 2000) identities of the regions. Iceland is no less in danger than any other country of overemphasizing place compared to other social

³This is evident from the number of times the word ‘viking’ turns up in an internet search of restaurants, hotels, shops, tour companies, and tourism products, services, sites, and activities in Iceland.

platforms for identification and memorialization (Graham & Howard, 2008), nor of “privileg[ing] the national at the expense of other scales” (Graham & Howard, p. 8). In this sense, it might likewise be at risk of enacting the subtle power politics of favouring or excluding certain groups from heritage representation based on and in relation to geography, history, class, ethnicity, and gender. Iceland, then, must be wary of its own “authorized heritage discourse” (Smith, 2008, p. 162).

Sindbæk’s (2013) most important contribution in light of the present thesis is to highlight the idea of maritime heritage, which not only encompasses Viking heritage (Sindbæk, 2013) and the whole of the Iceland’s history, but continues to be integral to the identities of fishing communities such as those that populate the Westfjords (Tulinius, 2003; Skaptadóttir, 2000; Magnusson, n.d.). Maritime activity remains a strong presence in the region’s economy and culture, and its past is preserved and displayed for the benefit of local communities and, increasingly, tourists, in regional heritage museums. While generally uncontested for the obvious reason that Iceland is a fishing nation, concepts of maritime heritage in the Westfjords are not entirely unproblematic in light of the literature on heritage and identity (cf. Graham & Howard, 2008). Nor, for that matter, is its representation.

Heritage Representation and Museology

Maritime heritage museums in the Western world are seen, for the most part, as having moved away from representations of grand, monumental portrayals of maritime history, defined by a single, usually elitist narrative, toward ethnographic representations shaped by a preoccupation with social history (Day & Lunn, 2010; Leffler, 2004; Hicks, 2001). Thus, for imperial and ascendant nations with long histories of seafaring such as Great Britain and the United States of America, where naval exploits and great exploratory feats were once the sole subject matter of maritime museums, there has been an increased focus on “issues of race, gender, and class” (Leffler, 2004, p.24), such that exhibits endeavour to “featur[e] narratives of women, labourers, ethnic minorities, or the underclass” (Hicks, 2001, p.160). Leffler (2004), however, notes that significant omissions continue to haunt maritime exhibits, citing as an example the general lack of representation of the sea’s implication in the slave trade in Great Britain. Further, Day & Lunn (2010) are wary of the side-effects of democratizing the museum, arguing that the shift to a focus on “vernacular

heritage” (p. 294) and its “nostalgic form[s] of representation” (p. 289) runs the risk of romanticizing maritime history and engendering uncritical views of it; particularly, as is the case with many European fishing communities, given the increasing remoteness of human enterprise and experience from the sea.

The Stefansson Arctic Institute, which is at the heart of the FISHERNET project for Nordic collaboration on “preserving, disseminating and using fishing- and coastal cultural heritage in addition to strengthening networking activity related to this... topic” (Fishernet, n.d.), uses a concept of maritime heritage which, in Iceland’s case, is said to include all elements in “the social web that is the foundation for... coastal heritage” (Stefansson Arctic Institute, 2009, p. 3) as well as to re- value a history of struggle which for some time was thought best forgotten. Yet Iceland’s maritime heritage is no less at risk of being subjected to politicized, preferential, or exclusive representation. This is particularly true in the context of museums, where McLean (2008) claims that the “poetics and politics of representation” (p. 284) shape a discursive ordering of exhibits and objects on display, thereby essentially *producing* meaning for consumption and interpretation. In the case of maritime museums, according to Leffler (2004) and Hicks (2001), such meaning typically appeals to national identity. Further, that the Association of Maritime Museums of Iceland (*Sjóminjar Íslands*) does not include the Sea Monster Museum, in Bíldudalur, on its list of institutions (*Sýningar og setur/ Sjóminjar Íslands*, n.d.) is rather telling of the ideology underlying the dominant concept of maritime heritage in the nation. On the other hand, the recent “proliferation of museums displaying the vernacular” (McLean, 2008, p. 293) across the Icelandic countryside (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013; Hafsteinsson, 2010) is seen by some as “reflecting a more inclusive approach to representation than the traditional collection museums that exhibit elite forms of knowledge” (McLean, 2008, p. 293), as well as engaging in a *new ethnography* of rural Icelandic communities that challenges convention and the established institutional authorities on matters of cultural heritage (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013).

This new ethnography resonates with Holtorf’s notion of a “new heritage” (lecture, 2011) designed by professionals with an interest in attracting visitors to heritage sites, not least with a view to capitalizing on cultural tourism. Because north western European societies are significantly multicultural, heritage sites are, *de facto*, endowed with “multiple values” (Holtorf, lecture 2011). To add to the complexity of this, heritage museums house the

intermingling identities of those who create the exhibits, those who view or otherwise engage with them, and those who are represented by them (McLean, 2008). In light of these pluralities, Holtorf argues that “familiar notions [of heritage] are untenable” (lecture, 2011), as they assume a collective origin. Thus, they risk excluding significant numbers of people who are not of the origin in question or who do not share in the identity associated with it. For Holtorf (lecture, 2011), this origin is paramount, in most cases, to national identity. The same, however, can be said of concepts of regional and local heritage and identity (cf. Júlíusdóttir, 2010).

Crooke (2008) warns that while community heritage initiatives are important means for “social and economic development [and] local regeneration” (p. 415), they may, on one hand, mask political agendas under a façade of grassroots organization or, on the other, be based on unreflexive and exclusionary criteria for membership to the community. It is incumbent upon community heritage museums, then, to reflect upon whether they could be “contribut[ing] to the creation of stereotypes [or] the isolation of non- members, and justify[ing] the difference” (Crooke, p. 420). In spite of this, museums are “a potent force for engendering respect for different identities” (McLean, 2008, p. 283) and may well do so if managed with care.

For Holtorf, the new heritage, rather than being a matter of paying homage to collective origins, is one of creating social identity through collective mythologies (lecture, 2011). In a sense, this might be seen as the ideology underlying the cultural policies developed in Iceland between 1991 and 2009, which promote innovation in heritage representation with an emphasis on entertainment value while underlining perceptions of public heritage institutions as boring and stagnant (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013). The local initiatives undertaken as a consequence of this policy not only display a concern for local communities and for tourists, but are seen as fostering social cohesion through economic competition and a renewed interest in culture. This has resulted in a resurgence of intangible aspects of the culture which have typically been shunned as superstition, falsity, or a shameful heritage of past ignorance, i.e., ghost stories, witchcraft, and sea monster folklore (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013). This new paradigm reflects the notion that heritage museums, in order to maintain public appeal, must be ‘alive’, i.e., they must be able to provide services to visitors, to host or stage events, and to change exhibits regularly and frequently (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013).

The Stefansson Arctic Institute (n.d.) shares these concerns, stating that “items, structures, artifacts, [and] knowledge may be used in an innovative fashion and for the creation of new opportunities for individuals, communities, regions, or countries, not least within the tourism sector” (p. 3). While the operative concept in the report is ‘fishing cultural heritage’, it includes on its list of museums enacting “conservation and good practices” (p. 6) not only traditional maritime museums representing the fisheries, but also a number of other types of businesses, sites, structures, and centers that relate to the sea and the coast. The Sea Monster Museum, as well, is on this list, hailed as an “innovative grassroots project... whose goal is to give something of value” (p. 8) to the community of BÍldudalur through what can arguably be considered a rendering tangible of the sea monster folklore.

The concern for innovative styles of representation is likewise reflected in Bernharðsson (2007; 2003), whose primary interest is in visual history. Having completed a tour of heritage museums throughout the country, Bernharðsson (2003) identifies five main styles of representation at work in the exhibits: *open storage*; *theme change/ chronology*; *old times/ present times*; *emotional/ intellectual experience*; and *abundant/ minimal text*. His critique revolves around the fact that the standard design of exhibits in Iceland tend toward open storage, the isolation of the ‘old times’ in their stark contrast to the present day, an emphasis on intellectual experience, and a text- heavy format for the dissemination of historical information (Bernharðsson, 2003). While open storage poses spatial problems for accommodating visitors as well as physical threats to artefacts, the three other styles risk alienating visitors through varying degrees of inaccessibility (Bernharðsson, 2007; 2003). While the dominance of old rural life in museological representation, marked by heavy text and an intellectualized format, has persisted as a form of remembrance in a rapidly changing society (Bernharðsson 2007; 2003), Bernharðsson has noted that museums which have embraced alternative approaches to design enjoy considerable popularity. Alternatives include the use of new media, interactive technology, and performances in order to bridge the gap between the increasingly remote past and the present, as well as to shift the focus to more current, live aspects of culture (Bernharðsson, 2007). Again, the emphasis is on creating a meaningful link between entertainment and education (Bernharðsson, 2007).

While Bernharðsson (2007; 2003) does not examine themes of identity or exclusion, his work displays a concern for the democratization and accessibility of museum exhibits that

resonates with the views of other authors cited throughout this section. Further, his emphasis on the active engagement of visitors subtly implies that they, too, are involved in processes of identity creation and interpretation (cf. McLean, 2008). Last, he notes the importance of the connection between cultural museums (also, ‘exhibits’ and ‘centers’) and the tourism industry, reflecting a trend that inevitably cuts across various disciplines in heritage scholarship.

It is partly in light of this connection that Icelandic communities, particularly those that have been struggling against population decline and diminishing employment opportunities, have taken up the task of renewing Icelandic ethnography by means of such new, design- oriented museums (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013; cf. Bernharðsson, 2007; 2003). Institutions such as the Ghost Center in Stokkseyri are said to practice education through entertainment by blurring the lines between fantasy and reality as a method for imparting the folklore upon visitors in a sensory- experiential manner (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013). Such institutions have been criticized for using what are, in some views, dubious aspects of culture, and, further, for elevating their cultural status as a marketing ploy to attract tourists (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013).⁴ However, the museums, themselves, have made concerted efforts at undertaking research and collecting stories and objects of cultural significance, and are generally perceived as representing genuine aspects of Icelandic culture as well as basing their material on reliable sources (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013). Some of these museums have even opened access to an understanding of generally underrepresented parts of the population, as the Museum of Prophecies in Skagaströnd has done by introducing women’s oracular culture (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013).

While there is currently no comprehensive body of literature on the matter, it is important to acknowledge that there are ongoing debates within the Icelandic academic community not only about the heritage value of the new ethnographic museums, but also about their planning, establishment, and methods of dissemination (A. H. Pálsdóttir, personal communication, February 2014). Magnúsardóttir sees cultural authenticity in the way the

⁴ Several of these institutions, while bearing the words *sýning* (show, exhibit) or *setrið* (center) in their names, in keeping with their legal statuses under the Icelandic museum laws, are translated to ‘museum’ (*safn*) and marketed as such in English. For the purposes of this thesis, the term ‘museum’ is generally used to refer to any of these types of institutions.

SMM brings folklore to life through its text- based informative introduction to the exhibit, “remind[ing] the guest that the supernatural is a part of life” and “literally add[ing] to one’s knowledge and imagination” (personal communication, March 26/ April 16, 2014). There are other scholars, however, who perceive museums of the same nature as “vulgar” and are highly critical of the lack of academic involvement in the researching and planning phases of the institutions (A. H. Pálsdóttir, personal communication, March 2014). One timely critique rests on the notion that businesses operating under the auspices of cultural heritage lack any input from the humanities and as such are in danger of running self- destructive operations that will have negative consequences for local communities and economies (L. Magnúsardóttir, personal communication, March 24, 2014; Magnúsardóttir, lecture, 2011). This is based on the threefold idea that tourism, as the prime market for such institutions and the harbinger of a new economy, “affects culture” and thus that a support network comprised of people who study culture is necessary for businesses that sell it; that “a quality of ‘real’ culture is the only way to create quality in cultural tourism”; and that a failure in either of these instances will result in the production of “cheap cultural imitations that can be both the ruin of tourism and quality of life” for rural communities (L. Magnúsardóttir, personal communication, March 24, 2014). This critique does not target the museums subscribing to Hafsteinsson and Árnadóttir’s (2013) new ethnography, but is a comment on the phenomenon of cultural tourism throughout rural Iceland at large. It is reminiscent of Murzyn’s (2008) claim that “changes of ideology and economic system inspire and are paralleled by shifts in the attitude, usage and interpretation of the past, bringing about many opportunities, but also threats and challenges” (p. 339).

Cultural Tourism and Ethics

There is a voluminous body of literature on cultural tourism that touches on subjects ranging from the sustainable management of built heritage sites (cf., e.g., Garrod & Fyall, 2000) to authentic representation (cf., e.g., Yang, 2011) and cultural commodification (cf., e.g., Halewood & Hannam, 2001), and again to tourist motivations for visiting heritage sites (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003). Indeed, Porter (2008) points out that “the tourism literature is vast” (p.268) and that despite important contributions, “there appears to be little consensus on what heritage tourism is” (p. 269). He nonetheless signals issues similar to those outlined in the preceding review of the international and Icelandic heritage literature, i.e., the power of national governments in defining heritage tourism destinations,

the drive of “local and private initiatives” (p. 272) in crafting cultural tourism experiences, and the potential conflicts arising over representation (Porter, 2008).

In Iceland, Magnúsdóttir & Ólafsdóttir (2013) and Helgadóttir, Huijbens, & Björnsdóttir (2007) have produced comprehensive reports for the Tourism Research Center (*Ferðamálastofa*) reflecting their views about the involvement of academia in cultural tourism and describing cultural tourism in Eyjafjörður, respectively. Given the volume of these reports and the lack of English translations, however, it is impossible to review them here.

There is significantly less literature on the connection between cultural tourism and museums, and with some exception, much of it is considerably outdated (cf., e.g., Prentice, 2001; Silberberg, 1995; Zeppell & Hall, 1991). For the purposes of this thesis, the most relevant literature from tourism studies are the branches connecting tourism to ethics and raising issues of authenticity, as these touch on the subjects of identity, heritage, and representation.

Fennell (2009; 2006) outlines the most prevalent ethical theories in Western philosophy by dividing them into two categories based on their underlying concerns. These are teleology, the philosophy that what is important in deciding on a course of action is its possible consequences, or, its ends, and deontology, an emphasis placed on the means of action as that which defines whether or not it is ‘good’ or ‘right’ (Fennell, 2009; 2006; cf. Jamal & Menzel, 2009). Utilitarianism, roughly defined as the idea that the best course of action in a situation is the one that will result in the best possible outcome for the greatest number of people, along with virtue ethics, belongs to the first category; while philosophies propounding principles of conduct in the service of an ideal good based on various conceptions of justice and rights, for example, such as religious credos and corporate or institutional codes of ethics, belong to the second (Fennell, 2009; 2006; cf. Jamal & Menzel, 2009).

Virtue theory posits good conduct as the product of an agent’s good character, which is acquired through her cultivation of practical wisdom (Jamal & Menzel, 2009; cf. Fennell, 2009; 2006; Sherman, 1999). The latter is a finely tuned ability to discern the course of action appropriate to a situation (Nussbaum, 1986), and is associated with the agent’s capacity for ethical sentiment (Kosman, 1980), i.e., her ability to empathize with the

subjects of her actions, the sincerity of her desire to act well, or similar affective states directed toward others. Virtue theory is seen by Jamal & Menzel (2009) as offering up a “cogent concept of good action that is relevant to all of tourism's stakeholders, particularly those in positions of power” (p. 232), as it unites in its concept a concern for both the means and the ends of action. This is necessary in order to render both utilitarian and deontological concerns practicable, as either one without the other falls short of truly ethical action by being practiced at the expense of one person or group or another (for practical examples, cf. Jamal & Menzel, 2009; cf. Jamal, 2004; Tribe, 2002).

In tourism studies, as outlined in section 2.2, ethical theory has been summoned primarily as a matter of principles and ends in relation to subjects such as sustainable tourism, ecotourism, tourism in developing countries, etc. However, the less- attended to ethical concept of existential authenticity has been taken up by a few authors interested in lived experience, as well as proposed as an alternative to common definitions of cultural authenticity in conceptualizing the relationship between tourism and authenticity (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Wang, 1999; Cohen, 1988). In very basic terms, to exercise existential authenticity is to practice good faith (Fennell; 2009), which is to responsibly exercise one’s free will in enacting his personal value system without reference to pre- ordained rules or theories of morality (Fennell, 2006). By contrast with other ethical theories, the concept of existential authenticity does not offer any normative or prescriptive standards for ethical action (Fennell, 2006); it is rather something that is performed through one’s uptake of his existence and his engagement with the world around him.

Building on Wang (1999), who critiques the inability of the “conventional concept of authenticity” (p. 349) commonly used in “ethnic, history, or culture tourism” to explain the full range of tourist motivations and experiences, Kim & Jamal (2007) conducted a study of a group of tourists committed to regularly attending an annual renaissance festival in Texas. The findings of this study reveal that despite general inaccuracies affecting the authenticity of costumes and accessories purporting to replicate period artefacts, the participants enact individual and interpersonal authenticity on many levels in the context of the festival. Among these are the liberation of a self normally constrained by moral codes and social expectations in day- to- day domestic and work life, genuine encounters with other festival- goers, the formation of lasting friendships, and experimentation with and re- construction of personal identities via all these avenues (Kim & Jamal, 2007).

While Kim and Jamal's (2007) context is unique, the results of their study echo ideas that can be found in Cohen (1988), whose examination of commoditization in cultural tourism leads him to posit that authenticity can be "conceived as a negotiable... concept" defined by modes of "touristic experience"; that "new cultural developments can... acquire the patina of authenticity over time"; and that "commoditization does not necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural products, although it may change it or add new meanings to old ones" (p.1). These ideas, in turn, have direct relevance to the ideas raised by Holtorf (lecture, 2011) on old and new conceptions of heritage and by Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir (2013) on the transitional phase in which cultural museology in Iceland currently finds itself, among others. In light of this, they may be thought of as having been both inspiration and influence in the course of the present study of cultural representation in Westfjords museums.

3 Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

3.1.1 Case Study- Phenomenological Interviewing

The main pillars of my research were the two case studies I conducted investigating maritime heritage representation by local museums. These were studies of the Sea Monster Museum in Bíldudalur and the Westfjords Heritage Museum in Ísafjörður. These case studies were built on twelve semi-structured, in-depth interviews with individuals who are either founders, curators, or employees of the museums, who either are or have previously been involved with the museums in an academic or consultative capacity, who are knowledgeable about heritage and/ or cultural tourism, or who act in a financial decision-making capacity with regards to the museums. Five of these were conducted in relation to the SMM and seven in relation to the WFHM. I used a mixed sampling method, employing a combination of random purposeful, snowball, and opportunistic (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) means for identifying and accessing informants. While the population sample I chose loosely met the criterion of being somehow professionally involved with either museum, I at times followed leads from the first individuals I interviewed, that is, those most directly and regularly involved as employees, curator, or owners, and took advantage of opportunities to speak to people they referred me to. Those others were more distantly connected to the museums but offered up a wealth of information and experiences on the subjects of my interviews. This allowed not only for the inclusion of a broader range of perspectives but also for a degree of triangulation of the data collected throughout the interviewing process (cf. Gibbs, 2007). Table 3.1 lists the informants, their occupations, and, where required, their links to either museum, in the order in which they were interviewed.

Table 3.1 Informants to Case Studies

Name	Museum	Occupation	Connection to the Museum
Pernilla Rein	WFHM	Project Manager, University Center of the Westfjords Municipal Librarian	Seasonal work as a tour guide
Jón Þórðarson	SMM	Owner of Eaglefjord Tours	Operates business in connection with it
Ingimar Oddsson	SMM	Multimedia Artist Museum Staff Math Teacher	Seasonal employment, visioning, promotion
Jón Sigurpálsson	WFHM	Curator	
Björn Baldursson	WFHM	Museum Staff	
Þorvaldur Friðriksson	SMM	Broadcaster, National Radio (<i>RÚV</i>)	Sea Monster Expert: Collects folklore, produces drawings from eyewitness accounts
Jón Páll Halldórsson	WFHM	Retired Fish Factory Owner	Has written books about the history of the fisheries and fishing culture in the Westfjords
Daníel Jakobsson	WFHM	Mayor, Ísafjörður	Financial decisions
Elías Jónatansson	WFHM	Mayor, Bolungarvík	Financial decisions
Ómar Már Jónsson	WFHM	Mayor, Súðavík	Financial decisions
Magnús Óskarsson	SMM	Graphic Artist	Owner
Valdimar Gunnarsson	SMM	Entrepreneur, Sports School Operator	Owner

I used a phenomenological approach to interviewing, meaning that I sought primarily to gather data as it emerged from my informants' expressions of thoughts and opinions and their descriptions of life experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Kvale, 2007; Gibbs, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Lowes & Prowse, 2001; Moustakas, 1994). Although I prepared an interview guide to frame the conversation and to direct it to relevant topics if and when necessary, I allowed the informants ample room to express themselves and to describe their experiences. I similarly allowed for spontaneous questions and unusual turns in the conversation. While I initially attempted to bracket my knowledge of the subjects being discussed as is required by Husserlian phenomenology (Lowes & Prowse, 2001; Moustakas, 1994), I found this approach incompatible with my own constructivist stance on knowledge and learning. Consequently, after having conducted my first two interviews and run into some "methodological confusion", I took up the Heideggerian approach (Lowes & Prowse, 2001, p. 1; cf. Gibbs, 2007; cf. Moustakas, 1994). This means that while I kept myself out of the interviews as much as possible, I did not attempt to approach them independently of my subjective viewpoint but, rather, came to them with an awareness of my own interests, opinions, and relationship to the subject matter. I allowed, when it was called for, for the interviews to be communicative, constructive, two-way flows of knowledge and personal experience (cf. Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Kvale, 2007; Lowes & Prowse, 2001). Thus rather than acting as a detached scientific observer, I assumed my position as a student who has been living in the Westfjords, learning Icelandic language and culture and engaging with local communities for approximately a year, and I allowed myself to be questioned by informants, at times, about my own experience of cultural heritage in Iceland or in my native Canada, as well as to periodically express agreement with or enthusiasm for a point made by an informant. These instances were scarce and by no means elaborate. However, they were conducive to establishing a comfortable atmosphere for discussion and a basic level of trust between myself and my informants. Thus, rather than compromising the data, it is likely that this approach opened the channels of communication for more sincere and transparent discussions. The interview guide for both case studies can be found in appendix A.

3.1.2 Focus Group

As my case studies focused on information collected from interviews with people generally connected to the operations of the SMM and the WFHM, I chose, as a secondary method,

to conduct a focus group discussion with local residents having no such connection. The purpose of this was to gain an understanding of their conceptions of cultural heritage, the roles and responsibilities of cultural heritage institutions, and their perceptions of the SMM and WFHM as cultural heritage institutions, and through this to cast light on the data collected from interviews. Thus, I crafted questions for discussion around issues emerging from the interviews as well as anonymous quotes from various interviewees on the nature of cultural heritage, the roles of cultural heritage institutions, and questions of Icelandic and Westfjords cultural identity. Furthermore, I attempted to use the focus group to level out the age, gender, and ethnicity biases inherent in my interview sample as well as to address issues that I perceived as being worthy of discussion but that were either absent from or minimally discussed in my interviews. Among these issues were the experiences of women, ethnic minorities, and youth of Westfjords maritime heritage, as well as the representation of these groups, or lack thereof, by the WFHM.

I tried to use a maximum variation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) approach to recruiting focus group participants, but this fell short of its mark for reasons that are outlined in section 3.3.3. I sought a sample that included younger individuals, preferably in their teens or early twenties, people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, and women, as I had only had one female informant across both case studies. I also sought out people who embodied a combination of these demographic factors. I was able to recruit three female participants, one of whom is of foreign origin, but the group for the most part reflected the same demographic as that which dominated my interview samples (cf. section 3.2.2). Table 3.2 lists the names and occupations of focus group participants, along with the reasons for which they were selected.

Table 3.2 Focus Group Participants

Name	Occupation	Reason for Selection
Valdimar Halldórsson	Curator, Jón Sigurðsson Museum	Curatorial perspective
Ólöf Björk Oddsdóttir	Artist, Student	Gender and previous work on women's heritage project in Ísafjörður
Einar Hreinsson	Scientist, Marine Institute (<i>Hafro</i>)	Fisheries knowledge, knowledge about the community, alternate professional perspective
Ingibjörg Daníelsdóttir	Road Information Officer	Gender, and founder of <i>Rætur</i> , a grassroots association promoting multiculturalism
Helga	Entrepreneur, Cultural Tour Guide	Gender, ethnicity, and knowledge about cultural tourism

I came to the focus group with a pre- defined set of theoretical categories, having prepared a discussion guide that addressed information which had emerged from my interviews. However, I let the discussion be led by the participants, occasionally reining it in when it began to stray from its intended topics. While the discussion focused on a broader concept of heritage, it inevitably touched on maritime heritage, along with the subject of coastal communities and their relationships with the sea. Most importantly, it spoke directly to some of the issues raised in my interviews, expanding and elaborating on these, as well as to some of the absences noted above (e.g. representation of ethnic minorities working in local fisheries). It likewise provided additional insights into the Icelandic societies of the past, present, and future, and how these shape and are, in turn, shaped by cultural identity and heritage, as well as contextualizing common issues in heritage scholarship on local, regional, and national scales. The discussion guide for the focus group can be found in appendix B.

3.2 Organization of Data: Transcribing

3.2.1 Interviews

I transcribed the audio recordings of my interviews verbatim, in order to capture as much emotional and non- verbal content as I could in text format, such as hesitations, thoughtful pauses, amusement, etc. I went to great detail to do this, noting every single “um”, “uh”, and other such non- verbal utterance of each informant. Indeed, this proved to be excessive, as it was not only extremely time- consuming, but counterproductive, in the last analysis. The text was broken up by these utterances and the accompanying erratic punctuation, such that it would have been very difficult for someone who was not familiar with the interviews to follow. Thus, when I selected passages from the interviews to quote at the time of writing, I removed such utterances unless they were minimal and I judged that the quotes gained something from them. Further, I removed all excessive punctuation and corrected spelling that mimicked the Icelandic accent or that reflected interference of the Icelandic language in the formulation of an English word or expression. I omitted excessive repetitions of a word where an informant was searching for a way to express his or her thought, and I generally omitted words and phrases used as fillers, such as ‘like’ and ‘you know’, except where I judged that these were essential to the meaning of the cited passage.

Where informants used Icelandic words and phrases, I ran them through the Google Translate tool and cross- checked the translations with definitions of the terms in online bilingual dictionaries. I sought help from Icelandic colleagues and supervisors when necessary. In the case of one interview in which a significant amount of Icelandic was used, I cited the English translations of Icelandic passages or parts of passages that I wanted to quote in the final report, and I provided the original in a footnote. I only corrected English errors in the informants’ speech to the degree that they made it difficult to read or to understand the text, which was not very common.

In preparation for data analysis, I numbered the lines of the interview text and created a separate document in which to kept analytical memos, which I cross- referenced with the relevant lines from the interviews.

3.2.2 Focus Group

By contrast with the interviews, I transcribed my audio recording of the focus group leaving out non- verbal utterances, repetition, and fillers from the start. This was partly a lesson learned from the pains of having used a most literal concept of ‘verbatim’ in transcribing my interviews, and partly a pragmatic response to the length of the focus group and the density of information contained in it. Indeed, it allowed for improved time efficiency as well as greater ease of isolating passages for analysis and a smooth transition into quoting participants at the time of writing.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Thematic Coding of Interviews

A common method for analyzing the data from phenomenological interviews is “data-driven” or “open” coding (Gibbs, 2007, p. 44- 45). This is an empirically- based approach that allows the data to ‘speak for itself’ and to generate codes rather than to be grouped under the headings of pre- determined codes. In analyzing my interviews, I used a two-tiered open coding scheme. I created one set of generalized codes in the margins of the interview transcripts, which I derived from condensing the meaning of the informants’ narratives into thematic units (cf. Gibbs, 2007). Once all the interview text was coded, I created a codebook (Gibbs, 2007) which listed the themes as headings, and added a bullet-pointed list of notes under each heading as to how these themes came into play in the interviews. Thus, for example, the heading ‘personal interest’ would have subsumed the point ‘as a driver for involvement with the museum’. This was primarily a descriptive process which lent itself to my reporting of the results for the each case study.

Alongside this process, I created a separate document in which I listed codes encapsulating more subtle themes that wove their way in and out of the interviews. I used a simple colour- coding system to locate these themes in the analytical memos I kept for each interview. By contrast with the meaning- condensed coding, this was an interpretive process that served to flesh out the results by addressing the more abstract undercurrents in informants’ narratives. Although the consequence of this level of coding was that some degree of interpretation was incorporated into the results, I generally created these codes when the themes they represented appeared to me sufficiently common, recurrent, and

homogeneous to be considered descriptive of a reality, or distinct enough to signal diverse alternate realities portrayed by the informants, rather than as a matter of pure interpretation. One such example is that of the phenomenon of storytelling as an attribute of the local culture of Bíldudalur in the SMM case study (cf. chapter 4). Further, on the grounds that “there is no such thing as *pure* description” but that, rather, “description, analysis, and interpretation [are] matter[s] of emphasis” (Wolcott, 2009, p. 32), I share in the conviction that qualitative research reports stand to benefit from a healthy dose of interpretative and analytical material in terms of intellectual coherence and narrative harmony.

In order to explore the internal relationships among the codes at each level as well as their cross-level relationships, I used a manual technique for generating analytical categories. I printed the document containing the broader thematic codes in the form of headings and the points listed under them, and subsequently cut these out by group. I laid them out on a large piece of cardboard and arranged and rearranged them into various positions in order to look for patterns and divergences among them, and I ‘plugged in’ the secondary codes from the analytical memos where relevant. As a result of this process, I was able to devise overarching analytical categories that allowed me to formulate statements describing the life of each museum as it appeared to me (cf. sections 4.1 and 5.1). A photograph documenting the final product of this technique as applied to the SMM case study can be found in appendix C.

In addition to coding the primary data, I took reflexive notes and attributed a coloured code to them in order to keep track of interview segments in which I may have influenced the informant or the direction of the interview, or revealed personal biases. The gravest and most commonly occurring of these was my tendency to subtly downplay the importance of economic value or of the tangibility of a heritage site or item in favour of discussing cultural values and intangible heritage. Often, I did this by means of using words such as ‘just’ or ‘only’ in reference to the former and asking if there was ‘something more profound’ to the value of either of the museums, mentally associating this, of course, with the latter. This code helped me to exercise reflexivity throughout the processes of analysis and writing and to ensure a degree of reliability in my reporting by the avoidance of drawing conclusions from questionable exchanges in the interviews.

3.3.2 Focus Group

As the focus group was a secondary method with the main purpose of addressing issues from the interviews, my method for analyzing the data it generated was, in a sense, the opposite of the method I used for analyzing the interview data, i.e., it was “concept-driven” (Gibbs, 2007, p. 44). Thus, I created a rough set of *a priori* theoretical categories based on information and issues generated by my interviews. I took notes in the margin of the transcript on medium to large segments of text and condensed the meaning of the text into units that signalled any of the descriptive codes from my interviews. After comparing these units throughout the transcript, I adjusted my theoretical categories to include any additional concepts that were relevant to but had not been mentioned in or implied by the interviews. As with the interviews, I made headings out of the thematic categories, which I listed in a separate document and noted, under each of these headings, the particular manifestations of each theme in the discussion. Thus, for example, under the heading ‘The Historicity of Culture’, I listed the idea expressed by one of the participants that as society changes over time, so does cultural identity (cf. chapter 6).

3.4 Limitations

There are, of course, numerous theoretical limitations to my study, due especially to the fact that it touches upon several very dense fields of academic inquiry as well complex social, cultural, and even personal phenomena. Additionally, my theoretical framework is largely reliant on a number of Icelandic academic texts. I did my best to extrapolate the most relevant information from these, by running them through the Google Translate tool for documents and reading the English translations alongside the originals so that I could compare them where my level of Icelandic allowed me to do so. Further, I cross-referenced translations with online Icelandic and bilingual dictionaries where required, and sought help from my advisors, both of whom are native speakers. Nonetheless, although the information I took from these texts has served my purposes well, there is surely a wealth of analytical nuances in the texts that I have not been able to access, nor, by consequence, to use in defining the present master’s thesis.

Perhaps at once the most significant limitation and the greatest strength of this study is that I have brought to it my own way of understanding the world, which is shaped by my own life experiences as well as influenced by my education in and propensity for philosophy.

From a methodological standpoint, my study was primarily limited by problems related to sampling. First, despite consciously employing a variety of complementary methods in selecting informants for the case studies, there was, inevitably, an element of convenience built into my choices. There were instances in which I jumped on an opportunity to schedule an interview as a function of time and cost efficiency. Thus, I may have sacrificed opportunities to obtain data reflecting expert knowledge or vastly divergent perspectives in the matters I was researching, not to mention demographic diversity, had I been able to commit the resources required to accessing the appropriate individuals.

The demographic represented by the sample population for interviews was overwhelmingly homogeneous. With the exception of one woman of Swedish origin, it consisted entirely of men aged approximately 40- 55 years and one nearing or in his eighties, all of Icelandic origin in terms of both nativity and ethnicity. Most of these individuals were university educated. While this demographic homogeneity does not hinder the acquisition of relevant data, it limits it considerably and may present biases.

Sampling for the focus group posed a set of problems in and of itself. As mentioned in section 3.1.2, I attempted to obtain a maximum variation sample in order to offset the limitations imposed by my interview sample. However, this proved difficult for a number of reasons. Language barriers, differences in education levels, and perhaps cultural differences between myself and various people of foreign ethnic origins, whom I contacted in the hope of recruiting them for participation, brought to the fore misunderstanding of my purposes and a general shyness and hesitation on their part. One person of non- European ethnicity did agree to participate, along with two teenage girls who work, variously, in a fish factory and in a traditional dancing troupe performing for tourists in the summer. However, the impossibility of scheduling a date and time for the focus group that was compatible with everyone's availability caused me to have to forego including the former, whereas the latter changed plans at the last minute.

The most unfortunate limiting factor to the focus group, by far, was my inability to include anyone from Bíldudalur or the surrounding area in the discussion. This was a consequence

of time constraints as well as the onset of winter and fickle weather and road conditions affecting travel to Ísafjörður. Biases disfavouring the SMM and its subject matter are outstanding in the focus group results.

Although most of my informants spoke fair to very good English and there was little miscommunication or misunderstanding, there were nonetheless language barriers that impeded the discussion from attaining certain depths beyond our common level of understanding. The most extreme example of this was my interview with Jón Páll Halldórsson, which was conducted almost entirely in Icelandic, with the help of an interpreter. The interview was rather short compared to the others and mostly grazed the surface of the relevance of the fisheries to the Icelandic economy and the representation of this by the WFHM. This, however, is not to say that it was not a valuable source of information, as it provided a fascinating counterpoint, from the perspective of an elderly, lifelong member of the community, to the views expressed by some of the other informants.

3.5 Research Ethics

Confidentiality was a difficult phenomenon to deal with in the context of this study, and ended up being abandoned for practical purposes, with the consent of the informants. On the naïve assumption that anonymity was the most desirable state for informants, I drew up a letter of informed consent that briefly explained the nature of my research and assured the informant's anonymity. I left one copy of this letter with each informant and had each sign another copy, which I kept for my records. At the stage of writing, however, it became clear to me that it would be extremely difficult to mask the identities of the informants given the sizes of the communities, the uniqueness of their occupations, in some cases their national or international renown, and other such information with which my data and results were laced throughout. Thus, I contacted each informant and, explaining my case, asked if they would mind that I use their real names. Most agreed without hesitation. Some requested to see the passages in which I cited them and agreed to being identified and directly quoted upon deeming that these passages, which I had e-mailed to them, did not contain any sensitive or unduly personal information.

Where the focus group was concerned, in an attempt to learn from my interviews, I drew up a letter giving informants three options: complete anonymity with the possibility of reference to the informant's occupation, gender, or ethnicity where relevant to the results of the study; being named on a list of participants but dissociated from their quoted statements; or being named and directly quoted. This, of course, raised logistical problems as there were only five participants. While most agreed to full disclosure of their identities, two were hesitant, in addition to being easily identifiable by various combinations of occupation, gender, and ethnicity even with the use of pseudonyms. After having written my report on the focus group results, I contacted these informants to reassess the situation. They both agreed to the use of their names upon having viewed the passages in which I cited them, although one asked to have only her first name listed. The other good-naturedly engaged me in a discussion signalling the ongoing ethical problematic of participant confidentiality in the social sciences, particularly where research is conducted in very small communities.

4 Case Study: The Sea Monster Museum (*Skrímslasetrið*)

4.1 Summary of Findings from Sea Monster Museum Interviews

The Sea Monster Museum stands at the confluence of identity and intent which, through various modes of perception, categorization, and expression of reality and knowledge, opens onto an ideal of lived experience. The museum's value lies at the crux of its ability to create a space for enacting and engaging with local identity/ies and its experiential media for doing so.

There is significant evidence of a distinct sense of local identity in Bíldudalur, although this often appears as a characterization of the community from someone residing outside of it. More subtly, individual identities embed themselves in the local community and landscape, and find expression through a sense of rootedness in these. The overall effect is a dynamic interplay of individual identities within the sphere of a shared community identity. Each individual has a singularly unique vision and aspires to something distinct and personal in his efforts lent to the SMM; yet a sense of solidarity with the community unites most in a creative process that aims to benefit the village economically as well as to enrich the life experiences of tourists and locals alike. This nexus of identities often seeks to situate and position itself within and in relation to national and international identity-contexts.

Maritime heritage is an elusive concept in this case study. Sea monsters themselves are generally not thought of as heritage and the sea monster folklore is not thought of specifically as *maritime* heritage. Rather, it is thought of as oral and literary tradition, in the same class as elves (*álfur*), hidden people (*huldufólk*), and ghosts (*draugar*). However, in most cases there is a clear connection between the maritime culture of the fishing village

and the identities of those who grew up there. This is at times punctuated by identification with the nation's fishing history, but for the most part it is expressed as childhood memories, family, feelings, experiences of place, and life events.

Intent is the other meaning- making mechanism at work from the inception of the museum to its current operations. With it, identity is bound to practical considerations and actions that have endeavoured to make of the museum an institution that will revitalize the town and improve the quality of life as well as the morale of the local community. There is some divergence among informants' prioritization of the museum's duties, ranging from heritage preservation to knowledge production. However, all recognize its value as a business. Therefore, purposive concerns often manifest as opinions about the roles and responsibilities of the museum, speculations about visitor motivation, perceptions of visitor response, and ideas about the need for change in order to maintain continued success. These views, along with the informants' more personal narratives, reveal elements of their assumptions about reality and provide insight into the ways in which they perceive and engage with knowledge and with their cultural landscapes. These modes of perception and expression, in turn, funnel into their plans and visions for the SMM. While the main driver for investing effort in the museum is the desire to do something good for the community, the ideal medium for doing so is lived experience. It is thought that by being able to provide guests with an experience that exceeds the bounds of traditional museological representation, the SMM will succeed both economically and culturally, having delivered a high quality product that at once preserves local heritage and imparts it upon visitors in a memorable way.

4.2 Identity

4.2.1 Community Identity

Local identity in Bíldudalur is expressed in several different ways. First, it takes form in the life narratives of informants who grew up in the village but have since moved to Reykjavík. These lean on comparisons of rural and urban settings and reveal enthusiasm for the natural environment. The preference for a rural lifestyle stems from a feeling of freedom that is associated with proximity to nature and an ability to roam the landscape without restriction. This freedom, in turn, is the product of a social culture characterized by

close interpersonal ties, wherein the town's children are everybody's concern and therefore parental roles are more relaxed. Valdimar, reflecting on his history with Bíldudalur, expresses a deep sense of place attachment originating in his feelings of rootedness in the community and punctuated by his memories of starting his own family there. Magnús compares the village to a big family and cites friendship as an important element in town life.

There is further evidence of a community identity in that the people of Bíldudalur are often described as sharing certain characteristics that define them and distinguish them from other communities in Iceland:

The *people* in Bíldudalur, they are *different*. They are funny, they are *storytellers*. And you always have fun when you're in Bíldudalur... (Valdimar)

There is an overarching tendency either to identify locals as storytellers or to allude to a propensity and a talent for storytelling within the community. Further, this is thought to be what has kept the sea monster folklore alive in Arnarfjörður, as compared to other parts of the country.

Porvaldur, the only informant born, raised, and living entirely outside the region, distinguishes Bíldudalur from other communities by insisting that its inhabitants are especially open- minded. He associates this open- mindedness with the community's artistic and literary flair, and sees it as the prime factor in the generally receptive attitudes about reported sea monster sightings. Its ultimate proof is the fact that "they have built this monster museum that can be a platform for research and collecting more *information* about this phenomenon" (Porvaldur).

More subtly, the local community might be characterized by the social conventions and norms that bind it. However, these, as described by Porvaldur and Ingimar, are inherently contradictory. According to Ingimar, sea monster sightings in Arnarfjörður are as common as regular wildlife sightings and might be discussed just as casually, although only with certain trusted individuals such as himself. This is because, as he puts it, the subject is taboo and any serious talk of it entails suspicion that one is "not right in the head".

Porvaldur, who is similarly invested in the subject of sea monsters, also states that people in Bíldudalur talk to *him* about their experiences because they trust him. Conversely, they

do not discuss their experiences with others in the community for fear of being thought of as “some kind of a lunatic”. Þorvaldur is also cited by Ingimar as having previously claimed that eyewitnesses are shy in coming forth with their reports. Both of these informants hesitate over use of the term *storytelling* because, as they see it, stories are *not* being told or shared within the community for fear of social stigmatization.

Whether characterized as storytellers or by an absence in storytelling resulting from dominant social norms, it is clear that the people of Bíldudalur are thought of as collectively possessing a unique set of qualities that endow the town, itself, with a personality of its own. The apparent contradictions in various individuals’ attempts to describe the standing of sea monsters in the community indicate that, despite the small size of the community, social attitudes are complex and multifaceted. This matrix of attitudes and dispositions, in turn, shows that people in the community perceive, engage with, and express reality and knowledge in numerous different ways.

The story of the SMM itself provides an alternative angle on the notion of community identity, as this institution owes its existence to the commitment of a group of locals and former residents who joined efforts to build, to found, and to operate the museum from a desire to give something of value to the community. The drive to undertake this initially daunting project and the ongoing commitment to see it through are markers of the intent that was built into the museum at both its conceptual and constructive stages. With intent, identity is bound to practical considerations and actions that have sought to make of the museum a place that will enrich and enliven the town, thereby improving the quality of life and the morale of the local community.

4.2.2 Individual Identity

Life Histories and the Maritime Environment

Discussions of the natural environment and the local community give way to the individuation of each informant through his more intimate narratives and observations. As individual identities emerge throughout the discourse, they tend to arrange themselves along a continuum of experiences of maritime culture that moves from general identification with the community's fishing history to direct employment at sea or in fisheries- related work. On one end, individuals who grew up in Bíldudalur and later

moved away describe their experiences of fishing as a more general identification with their hometown as a fishing village, or as brief forays into the profession:

When I was, I think, *thirteen years old*, I started to go to sea, and I thought I would be a fisherman. And I would go to school and learn to be a captain, or something like that. When I finished school, I went to sea for three years. And... I was sailing the coast of Greenland, and I was staring into the fog, and said, 'Valdimar, this is not for you' [laughter]. But young boys in this village, they- I think we all think we have to go to sea and be fishermen. That was the spirit, it was a fishing village. (Valdimar)

On the other end, Jón explains that he followed in his father's footsteps and worked nearly a lifetime in the industry himself, as a fisherman, a fish worker, and the owner of a processing factory as well as a grocery store in the southern Westfjords.

In most cases, reflections on the role of fishing and seafaring in one's life entail a broader discussion about the relevance of the sea to one's sense of identity. Life in proximity to the ocean and the internalization of maritime heritage and practices are phenomena that have a great deal of influence in shaping informants' perceptions of culture and even reality. Generally, regardless of an informant's degree of involvement with the fisheries, culture is inevitably tied to the nation's fishing history and therefore inextricable from the sentiments that shape his relationship with the sea. This is best illustrated by Þorvaldur, who has never worked as a fisherman and has no known ancestors who were fishermen:

I love the sea. It is the life- giving... it is giving life to us, here on this island. Giving us everything...In Iceland, the profession of being a fisherman has always been very respected. So a good fisherman is a very good husband and very good person for the society.

Section 4.2 suggests that a characterization of the people of Bíldudalur as storytellers may indicate self- identification as such within the community. This idea may well find support when likewise considered in the context of individual identities. Informants' experiences with fishing, sailing, and seamanship are often linked to family histories shaped by storytelling. Valdimar, for example, recalls hearing such amazing stories from his grandfather about life at sea that he, himself dreamed of becoming a fisherman.

Stories of another kind were also making the rounds in local families- that is, stories about sea monsters, told to children for entertainment or as cautionary tales about lingering along the shore by nightfall. Valdimar recalls the following:

It was my *father* and his brother who told me the sea monster stories...at that time, we took the garbage- it was in a bucket⁵ in the kitchen, and at night, when we were finished eating, someone in the family had to take the bucket down to the shore and into the sea. And it was always in the dark. And I can remember, we were always afraid of the fjörurlalli⁶, if he would come... [laughter]. So, I think these stories had some effect on me and later, when we were thinking about what we could do in Bíldudalur, the sea monster stories were the first to come up- we had to do something about these stories, and... it's a *lot of* stories from Arnarfjörður... and, we grew up hearing these stories.

Magnús also clearly remembers the omnipresence of the sea monster folklore throughout his childhood in Bíldudalur, stating that “we have all heard the stories” and explaining, like Valdimar, that it was impossible to ignore the call of ‘doing something about them’ when the time came to plan a project for Bíldudalur. While he and Valdimar both deny that the stories had any significant role in shaping their sense of identity, Valdimar’s allusion to having been *affected* by them suggests that he *has* internalized them to some degree... enough, as it were, that they followed him into his adulthood to become the basis for a business project he would eventually initiate. Thus, the stories and storytelling may well be built into his identity, despite general irrelevance to his daily life.

The Sea

The concept of the sea contains elements of informants’ relationship to the natural environment and of their sense of cultural identity as experienced through varying levels of engagement in maritime activities. Þorvaldur points to the idea that all of Icelandic society is bound up culturally in the sea. All Icelanders, historically, learned to read the sagas. Thus, while fishermen and farmers were highly literate, men whose professions were more closely linked to their literary education all, at some point, spent time working at sea or on farms, as did appropriately aged boys. By contrast, more recent generations of youth have not had the same opportunity to work in these environments.

Þorvaldur does not comment on whether or not there is any relation between his own feelings of connection to the sea and the existence of sea monsters, in which he believes, or the sea monster folklore. He does, however, specify that “nobody believes in sea monsters”, thereby indicating that whether as the subject of folklore or serious inquiry, they have no impact on cultural connections to the sea.

⁵The word ‘bucket’ is a direct translation of the Danish word ‘spand’ that the informant originally used.

⁶This is the name of one of the four sea monsters in the folklore, translated as ‘Shore Laddie’ in English.

Magnús feels a strong personal connection to the sea, which he attributes to having grown up in a coastal village. He experiences this connection as something felt inwardly, which does not simply take root in a view of the sea as the source of life and economic activity nation- wide. Pounding his chest to indicate that the connection is felt “in here”, he explains that he misses Bíldudalur’s proximity to the water and makes frequent trips to the Reykjavík harbour to watch the boats and “see the sea”. In revealing this attachment, Magnús intimates the presence of an intangible element in cultural heritage and identity, that is, one that is not easily defined in terms of material history. This intangible heritage, rather than belonging to the arts, to literature, or to language, presents itself as the emotional space one occupies within one’s cultural landscape. By contrast, the sea monster folklore, by definition also an intangible heritage item, is said by Magnús to be inconsequential to his feelings of connection to the sea.

The notion of intangible heritage as one’s sentimental position in his surroundings similarly presents itself in the language Valdimar uses to describe his relationship to certain environments. He says of his attachment to Bíldudalur, “I don’t know if it is the people, or if it is the place, but there is *something* that always... draws me back”. Yet he suggests a lack of profound sentiment with regard to the sea, asserting that “I like to go to the sea, but there is nothing that *draws me out* to the sea”. Despite this, he, like Magnús, enjoys visiting the Reykjavík harbour to “see what’s going on” and claims that in this sense, he does indeed feel connected to the maritime environment.

Jón, with his extensive experience as a fisherman, is initially overwhelmed and perplexed when asked to comment on the sea and the meaning it holds for him, stating that there are “so many things” that can be said about it and that “we must find something to talk about”- an angle, or a focal point. He leans naturally toward describing the difference between his work as a fisherman and his work as a boat- tour guide, and what emerges, rather than being an expression of sentiment, is a description of the sea *as experience*- as a different experience, in fact, depending on how it is being used. His comparison is expressed as follows:

When I was a fisherman, and when men normally are fishermen, they are working on the sea and they are working with all the things you use on the boat, whether it's a fishing trawler or boat, or small boat or big boat... and, you see it with different eyes. When I started going with the tourists on the sea, I started seeing the mountain and the landscape and started to think about the fish in a different way. Because I see the landscape and see the mountain and the ocean with *your* eyes. More than with my eyes... it is always a new experience...⁷

Personal Interest

Individual identities also find an outlet for expression through personal interests, and, in fact, are engaged in the museum project as matters of interest as well. Interests and identities are bound together in the concept of cryptozoology, though each informant has a different stance in relation to it. Cryptozoology is defined as “the search for and study of animals whose existence or survival is disputed or unsubstantiated, such as the Loch Ness monster and the yeti” (Cryptozoology: Definition of cryptozoology in Oxford dictionary [British & World English], n.d.), and is generally thought of as a pseudoscience (Cryptozoology - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, n.d.), or, alternatively, understood in some circles as a phenomenon “not formally recognized by mainstream science” (Cryptozoology, n.d.). Þorvaldur and Ingimar are strong advocates of cryptozoology as a science and are committed to the study and representation of sea monsters as unidentified marine and coastal biota.

I believe in animals that are not *known* to science. That would be like cryptozoology. Cryptics that have not yet been discovered. I do not believe, personally, that they are imagined. Or mythic, or spiritual beings, anything like that. I think that these creatures people see are actually creatures but we don't know what creatures they are. (Ingimar)

Jón, who suspends judgement on whether or not sea monsters actually exist, is similarly inclined to thinking from a cryptozoological perspective:

I believe in animals in the sea that we have never seen before. But, it's a question of are they here or are they somewhere else, I don't know. But some of the stories are about animals that people have not understood. Maybe old people that's never seen some *kind* of animals... and then you call it sea monster. And maybe, if they see all the animals and could take a picture of it, then it's possible to explain what animals it is.

⁷ The last six words of this sentence have been translated from the Icelandic, “það er alltaf ný upplifun”.

Talk of cryptozoology occurs in all but one interview, either overtly identified as such or via more subtle descriptions of the informant's beliefs about the existence and nature of sea monsters. Þorvaldur takes the concept furthest, claiming that people who have seen such creatures do not *think* of them as monsters, only as creatures that they have never seen before and cannot identify. Consequently, they are *called* monsters for lack of an appropriate label- a practice which, according to Þorvaldur, is common throughout the country. Magnús is hesitant to take a stance on their existence. On one hand, he believes that “nobody knows what can be hidden in the deep” and, on the other, he is keenly aware of the numerous reported sightings from around the country as well as the homogeneity of the descriptions of these animals, as collected by Þorvaldur. On the premise of these, he says, one must believe, at the very least, that eyewitnesses are telling the truth about what they have seen.

Despite the fact that most informants cite sea monsters as inconsequential to their identity, the idea of these creatures nonetheless has a strong hand in uniting identity and purpose in the figure of the museum, where identity is embodied in personal interests, and purpose straddles the line between education and entertainment as well as between service to the local community and service to tourists.

It is worthy of mention that although there is only one informant who overtly makes such a connection, the SMM appears to passively draw out the personal interests of various individuals by appealing to their aesthetic preferences, creative visions, or ideologies. Ingimar recounts how he was struck, upon his first visit to the museum, by its atmosphere and by the attributes of the objects on display, which he immediately associated with the Steampunk aesthetic of which he is an enthusiast. He describes this as a “retro- futuristic” view of the Victorian and Edwardian eras and as part of a larger ideology that he believes the owners of the SMM share with him:

The people who have been working here are also interested in the same thing. And the company, or the community that owns the museum, all of them are very interested in this ideology- to put more adventure, Jules Verne, into the restaurant, into the coffee house, and out on the street- in advertizements, in, maybe, you know, it would be an idea to have a car, which would be the monster car, and it would be like, all steampunked... and especially made to hunt for monsters. In a way. But that would be like fictional.

For Ingimar, ideology is clearly tied to the SMM's aesthetic qualities as well as to the notion of injecting the museum and its operations with adventure. However, the term also

points to an altogether different facet of individual interest in the museum project, namely, the desire to do something of value for one's community. Ingimar, himself, states that even before the museum captured his imagination, his move back to Bíldudalur was motivated by an "interest in making something *good for this place*- for Bíldudalur, for the Westfjords."

Valdimar and Magnús voice the same initial concern for the community. Magnús draws attention to the fact that as a business, the museum would have done much better in Reykjavík, where most of the tourism in Iceland is concentrated. With this observation, he leverages his claim that the primary interest among himself and the others who conceived of the museum was in drawing tourists to Bíldudalur in order "to do something for our old city, where we grew up". Similarly, Valdimar states that the project was essentially fuelled by the fact that "people were willing to help...because our little village *needed* help", although he couples this with the equally potent fact that the building of the museum came to be an enjoyable weekly event which caught the attention of many and consequently garnered increasing interest in participating.

The volume of people volunteering to build the museum is, in itself, a testament to the degree of interest that existed in seeing the fruition of the project. Magnús explains that every weekend, for "many weeks", there were between fifteen and twenty people, either residents of Bíldudalur or former ones who are now living in Reykjavík, who participated in the museum's construction. The pleasure the volunteers took in contributing something positive for their hometown was highlighted by their Saturday evening feast, a regular gathering wherein they relaxed and had fun together after the day's work. This element of fun was built into the process at the planning stage:

We didn't have any money, and we were only five, so we sat down and talked about it, how can we have a *lot* of people come, drive from Reykjavík to Bíldudalur, four hundred kilometres, and work all weekend? What do we have to do? So we thought, it *must be fun*. So, we found a guy who is *very* funny, he can tell stories, play guitar, and he can make *veery* good food, so we went to Bíldudalur, about twenty, twenty- five times from Reykjavík, with the people, fifteen, up to thirty- five people- that was the biggest group. And, we *always had fun*. So, there were people calling me, 'can I come with you?' Because people heard that was showtime in Bíldudalur, it was always on the Saturday night, it was always very good food, a little wine, playing guitar, singing, telling stories. (Valdimar)

Valdimar's mention of telling stories as an integral element in the merrymaking surrounding working weekends lends support to the idea, introduced in section 4.2.1, that a

flair for storytelling and a tendency to derive enjoyment from it are distinguishing features in the character of the community.

4.3 Intent

4.3.1 Professional Interest

Professional interest lies at the crossroads between personal interest and the SMM's direction and purposes as a business. Ingimar has found, in the museum, an opportunity to put his multimedia education to work in the service of his aesthetic ideals and, in so doing, to give form to his creative vision in the interest of “promoting” the SMM. His job guiding tours through the museum's exhibit allows his interest in cryptozoology to be absorbed into his work life. Similarly, Þorvaldur is involved with the museum out of an interest in participating in and advancing this field of study. The owners, along with Jón, are more attentive to the business aspect of the museum, although their desire to see it thrive as a business is coupled with a recognition of the intrinsic value of the folklore as a part of Icelandic culture and, especially, as a part of the culture of Arnarfjörður.

Jón has a transactional relationship with the museum, as he rents its lobby as a space from which to run his company, Eaglefjord Tours.⁸ Being familiar with “how [the owners] were building [the museum] up”, in addition to being knowledgeable about the sea monster folklore, he saw potential for an exciting, mutually beneficial partnership. When discussing the value of the museum, he places the greatest emphasis on its business aspect, stating that he feels it has come to a standstill in its operations since it opened in 2009 and must change or be able to offer visitors new experiences in order to function and grow as a business.

The museum owners, by contrast, while working toward the goal of running the museum as a business that will, on the basis of the values introduced in section 4.2.2, attract tourism to Bíldudalur, have a parallel interest in branding and operating the museum as a cultural institution.

⁸At the time of writing this thesis, Jón Þórðarson, along with his business, relocated to Þingeyri.

4.3.2 Roles and Responsibilities of the Museum

As outlined in section 4.2.1, interest in the idea of building the SMM was initially sparked by a desire of former residents of Bíldudalur, who have retained a strong sense of place attachment, to bring business to the community. As Magnús discusses the reasons for deciding specifically to build this *type of business*, however, a dual purpose emerges. On one hand, the idea was to create an attraction that would be able to offer something of interest to tourists travelling through the region. In so doing, the museum would also tell them “some *story* about what has happened in this fjord”. On the other, the owners were motivated by a will to appropriate and preserve the folklore that, although not unique to Arnarfjörður, is most abundant in and culturally relevant to the area:

We wanted to *keep these stories alive*. Because... most of them are old stories. And, we want to keep them alive, for the next centuries, just to keep them and make them a beautiful home in the museum. (Magnús)

Preservation is an oft- cited concern, usually coupled with a claim to the importance of preserving for preservation’s sake, or with the fact that folklore is a cultural rite of passage of sorts.

At some time in the life of the people in the fjord, people *believed* that there was something in the sea. They don't know what it is, but we have to *keep it*, and *save* the stories for- like ghost stories, and elves or hidden people, that is the same kind of stories. People told each other in the dark, so, we can't lose them... (Valdimar)

The subject of preservation as the museum’s primary responsibility surfaces in relation to discussions about the uses of the museum for entertainment purposes and in the service of the tourism industry, on one hand, and for cultural education purposes and in the service of the local community, on the other. Even with their concern for developing a flourishing business in Bíldudalur, the owners, themselves, feel that in being faced with the challenge of striking a balance between offering an experience similar to that of a theme park and staging an exhibit that keeps the folklore in the limelight and serves to preserve the heritage represented by it, the latter is the key priority.

In addition to wanting to create opportunities for the community, Valdimar and Ingimar, along with Magnús, genuinely wish to offer an enjoyable experience to the people passing through or visiting the region during the tourism season, while Þorvaldur lists fun as a necessary element in the museum experience, not least for its ability to ensure the SMM’s continued success. He surmises that the owners feel the folklore belongs to their heritage,

particularly as people from Arnafjörður, and that they consequently feel a responsibility to use the museum, to some degree, as a site of preservation. However, his own perception of the role of the museum looks more to the future than to the past, and is more a question of promotion than of preservation. From his perspective, the folklore is already preserved and will continue to be, in books. Those engaged in the museum project, then, should be actively collecting *new* stories in order to produce new knowledge about sea monsters and the environments they inhabit, thereby opening the dialogue to scholars, researchers, and “anyone interested in this part of the culture”. Þorvaldur also sees publishing eyewitness accounts and other material concerned with sea monsters to these ends as an important future endeavour.

Ingimar is similarly concerned with the content of the museum and the way in which it is handled, although his conception of its role is far more extensive. He believes that the SMM has a responsibility, in presenting the stories of encounters with sea monsters, to invite visitors to think about these creatures and about cryptozoology, without attempting either to convince them of their existence or to disprove it. Furthermore, he believes it the central role of any museum to impart visitors with “knowledge, experience, [or] feelings”, and thus for people to leave the museum changed, even if in the smallest of ways.

Ingimar shares with Þorvaldur an interest in having more eyewitnesses come forth and in bringing additional information to the exhibit, and he has a desire to see the museum expand “based upon the same ideology”. Expansion, for him, involves not only a physical expansion of the space occupied by the museum, but an extension of its content to include information and displays about legendary lake and sea monsters worldwide, in effect making the SMM “*the mecca* of cryptozoology”. He envisions a greater experience surrounding the museum that might take it to the height of a theme park in its operations, however, he is also very concerned about keeping its cultural authenticity and its preservation role intact.

The idea of ‘building up’⁹, be it in terms of physical space, the museum’s content, or its services as the hub of tourism in Bíldudalur, is often cited as a necessary element of the SMM’s operations. Furthermore, it appears to be thought of as the sole way in which the

⁹ ‘Að byggja upp’ in Icelandic.

business can thrive and the folklore at its heart can continue to be preserved in the dynamic way that most informants see fit for it.

4.3.3 Perceived Reasons for Visits and Visitor Response

Just as the SMM is seen as having two different roles to play and two different sets of responsibilities to fulfill, visitor motivation is seen as twofold. The museum's roles and responsibilities to the local community differ from those to tourists. Likewise, the reasons for which informants believe people visit the museum as well as the kinds of reactions they have to it appear to differ depending on whether the visitors, themselves, are locals or tourists.

Jón does not distinguish the motivations of one group of visitors from those of the other, but sees visits, in general, as being for any of a number of different reasons- not all of which necessarily involve entering the exhibit hall to view what is on display. According to him, people go there either for the museum itself, for the restaurant that is located in the lobby, or to deal with him directly in order to book tours offered through his company, including guided tours of the exhibit, which he runs from the front desk.

Valdimar has little to say about people's reasons for visiting, though his suppositions about visitor response, focusing only on foreign tourists, imply that people might be visiting primarily out of curiosity. Visitor response is overwhelmingly positive, as expressed in comments left in the museum's guestbook and interactions Valdimar has had with guests. Overall, his impression is that visitors "think it's *interesting* to see that there are people in the world that believe in such kind of creatures". He adds that they are usually surprised by the museum's design and method of exhibition, which he contrasts with what he perceives as the standard style of representation in Icelandic museums, i.e. posters hanging from walls. Further, they are often surprised to find "such a museum" (referring to the museum's design) "here in the wilderness" (Valdimar).

Magnús also bases his speculation about visitor motivation and response on what he has read in the guestbook, surmising that "the tourists have *no idea* what they are coming to see" and that, where they arrive with some expectation of a cartoon- like representation of sea monsters, they are surprised by the more sober message and material of the museum.

He has been complimented by visitors on the museum's design and, similarly to Valdimar, believes that they are pleasantly surprised by it.

While Valdimar and Magnús state that there was a significant 'buzz' about the museum from the time of its construction up to its opening in 2009, receiving nine hundred visitors on the opening weekend during the Bíldudals Grænarbaunir festival, Ingimar cautions that locals have become used to it and are no longer "affected" by it. The museum, to them, has become commonplace and their interest in visiting usually stems from a perception of it as a coffee shop, a place of social gathering. Likewise, rather than using it as a forum for discussing sea monsters and possible encounters, or as a resource on the matter, their interactions with the staff remain superficial, focusing on visitor numbers, opening hours, and so on. Ingimar's statement that the locals have not been returning from one year to the next supports his opinion that the SMM has come to a standstill in terms of what it has to offer, a view he shares with Jón. Though this would seem to be the case with regards to Ingimar's observations about the local community's relationship to the SMM, Jón, on the other hand, relates it to tourists. He claims to have met repeat visitors to the area who, upon learning that there has not been anything added to or changed in the museum since their last visit, deem it unworthwhile to visit again. In his view, this is detrimental to the business and will have negative impacts if there are no changes over the long term.

Like Valdimar, Ingimar appears to think curiosity is at the heart of tourists' inclination to visit, and that the idea of a museum devoted to the subject of sea monsters is interesting to them. He notes a similar reaction of surprise when they learn "about the reality behind it", and he observes that where they enter the museum not knowing quite what to expect, they exit it with a sense of awe and wonder as to the nature of the creatures called sea monsters. It is in this sense that Ingimar believes that the museum stimulates earnest intellectual musing about its subject matter, thereby accomplishing what, in his view, is a large part of its mission.

4.3.4 Change

Stemming partly from informants' fundamental recognition of the SMM as a business and partly from the creative visions of some, change is frequently cited as necessary to the establishment's flourishing and its ability to touch people.

Valdimar and Magnús both see a bright future for the SMM, provided that the challenge of funding can be met. Magnús feels that the museum has improved a great deal since its opening in 2009, at which point, and throughout its first year of operation, it was not quite complete. He points out that for the time being, there is no profit from the business but, in the hope of raising its performance *as a business*, the team is looking to change the museum primarily by adding new material to it. There is additional space in the building for the exhibit to expand into, and some ideas to build a cinema where sea monster films can be screened as well as to add a boat tour to the museum experience have been discussed in meetings.

Valdimar claims that the museum is *still* incomplete, referring to fact that its current state is not representative of what the group of owners originally had in mind, but, rather, reflects the alternate route they had to take due to trouble with financing following the Icelandic bank crisis in 2008. While he is pleased with the response the museum is eliciting, he hopes to be able to raise the money required to make the envisioned changes to it, emphasizing the importance of bringing something new to it every year.

Jón and Ingimar are more insistent on the need for change due to a shared sense that the SMM is at a standstill in its operations. Jón explains that while the number of visitors is growing, the museum itself is stalled, not having changed from the inside or out since its beginnings in 2009. Although he feels “it is a very good museum” that has been “building up well”, he insists that this momentum must be maintained in order for the SMM to see growth as a business.

Ingimar offers a passionate treatise of change, particularly with regards to the role he sees himself as having in it. In terms of business, change is essential to catching the public’s attention and attracting the required number of visitors. However, beyond business, he perceives the part he has in shaping the museum’s future as a labour of love and, arguably, the museum itself as a playground for his imagination, wherein he can bring to life the abundance of creative ideas that are inspired in him by steampunk culture and his engagement with cryptozoology. In this sense, he often expresses his ideas about change in a way that showcases his sense of identity and the niche he has carved out for it in the museum. These ideas include, for example, village tours taking on the aspect of sea-

monster hunts, and they are fuelled by a desire to create an atmosphere that would suffuse both the museum and the entire town with adventure, mystery, and excitement.

Ingimar's views about change are consistent with some of the views, cited in section 4.3.2, that preservation of folklore is a matter of keeping it alive, along with Þorvaldur's view, also cited in section 4.3, of the museum as a platform for collecting new stories and producing new knowledge about sea monsters.

It could be a *living*- I think that's also what Jón was talking about- being stuck, nothing is happening. It *needs more life*. We always have to add something to it, we always have to keep it alive, keep it going, *change* the stories, find new stories, find new evidence, have seminars, and so on. We have to keep it alive. (Ingimar)

4.4 Knowledge, Reality, and Modes of Perception and Expression

Where identity and intent set the course for the SMM's operations, it is the various modes in which informants perceive, engage with, and express knowledge and reality that steer the museum on its course to attaining its ideal of lived experience.

4.4.1 Nature and Culture

Where identity is concerned, informants' thoughts and sentiments regarding rural society and the natural environment give way to subtler indications of their ways of engaging with nature and culture; where, in some cases, the two are seen as continuations of each other and, in others, they are seen as conceptually, if not experientially, distinct.

Magnús, in expressing the strength of his connection to the sea, assents to the idea that people in Bíldudalur generally share this feeling, adding that the mountains surrounding the town are an equally important part of their inner experiences of the environment. He is uncertain as to whether sea monsters can be said to belong to the fjord's natural heritage, but sees them as a lively part of literary culture. While he affirms that the community has a positive disposition toward the sea monster folklore and therefore has been receptive to the museum from a cultural standpoint, he cautions that from a natural standpoint, there may be some doubt about the existence of sea monsters. By the same token, he is invested in the museum's role as a cultural institution that serves to preserve and hand down the folklore rather than as a research center that endeavours to produce scientific knowledge.

Þorvaldur, who, by contrast, *is* concerned with the SMM's role as a research center of sorts, situates sea monsters in nature and, by virtue of this, argues that they are an important part of Icelandic cultural identity. In his view, the natural environment is a defining feature of national identity, and to the extent that the people of Bíldudalur respect, revere, and show stewardship of their environment and their country, their culture and identity are linked to the existence of sea monsters-*as unidentified animals*. As far as culture in itself is concerned, however, sea monsters, as the creatures portrayed in the folklore, are of no import since, he claims, nobody believes in their existence.

Jón, on the other hand, sees no room in nature for sea monsters. According to him, they belong strictly to culture, which he defines as the basis for art, playwriting, and the social life of the nation. He associates sea monsters with elves and hidden people as topics of coffee-talk, situating them in a context similar to, though more subtle than traditional celebrations such as Þorrablót.¹⁰ In his view, as sea monsters are as yet unknown to the natural sciences, they are not real. Nature, in essence, can be apprehended and understood, whereas culture is foggy and impalpable, as it were. Culture, he concludes, is a matter of intellectual contemplation and lighthearted enjoyment, where the natural world is the reality that one may grasp in the most concrete of terms.

Ingimar appears to give sea monsters equal weight as natural entities and cultural items, given the following view:

We are nature. Of course, humans are just animals, one animal in nature and what we create is the same thing as what other animals create like the beaver and the ant and the birds, in making their nests, but of course, we are doing it on a much greater scale. And I consider culture to be a part of nature. And vice versa.

In addition to his vision of the SMM as a center for cryptozoology, he also sees it as being “really about the folk stories of the people.”

4.4.2 Being, Reason, and Faith

The views expressed on the nature and existence of sea monsters are very telling of cultural attitudes about the unknown. As indicated in section 4.2, these attitudes are

¹⁰ A winter festival named after ‘the hardest month’, known as Þorri on the viking calendar and corresponding to the period from mid- January to mid- February in the current era (from personal communication with anonymous informant).

complex. They are often articulated in contradictory or belaboured ways, making them difficult to categorize. Nonetheless, they reveal various perceptions of the nature of being and knowledge.

Attitudes about sea monsters represent different shades of knowledge, from that obtained through intellectual inquisitiveness to that proclaimed by faith in an object. The terms ‘faith’ and ‘faith- based’ here do not carry any connotations of religious faith, but, rather, refer to the simple act of believing in the existence of an object.

Ingimar is an ardent advocate of intellectual inquiry about sea monsters. He feels it is important for the SMM to present the eyewitness accounts in an unbiased way so that visitors may employ their own reasoning and come to their own conclusions about whether or not sea monsters exist or what they might be. He dissociates the subject from any questions of religion or faith, stating that “it’s not a decision to make, it is rather a question to ask”. Conversely, he dissociates the subject from thought and uses spirituality as an analogy for demonstrating society’s predominant way of engaging with the matter:

People don't really think much about it. It's like elves and many things... some people believe in them, some people don't, some people believe that this *might be something*, but we don't know what something this *is*. You know, there *might* be something to spirituality, but what it is, we haven't proven, so still almost every human being on this planet has some sort of connection to spirituality... And, we don't know *what*, really, we cannot examine it in a laboratory. But we still *have* the open mind, that there is something more than just [knocks on the table] this material thing. And that is also, I know, true of all the other things, like monsters...

It would appear, then, that the most common attitude locals have to sea monsters and sea monster sightings is to suspend judgement on the matter, reflecting the kind of open-mindedness that Þorvaldur credits the community with in section 4.2.1. This is evidenced in Jón and Magnús’s attitudes to sea monsters. As noted in section 4.2.2, both hesitate to come to any strict conclusion in their regard. Magnús is most intrigued by the uniformity of eyewitness accounts. Jón, on the other hand, is careful in his use of the term ‘sea monster’, demonstrating an unwillingness to commit to any of its possible semantic or conceptual designations.

While Þorvaldur is, as Magnús puts it, “a believer”, the views he offers in section 4.2 on sea monsters as at once scientific phenomena and cultural constructs are extremely complex and do not lend themselves easily to philosophical analysis.

4.4.3 Entertainment and Education

Throughout each informant's deliberations on the purpose of the SMM and, in a broader sense, of cultural tourism experiences, there is an apparent tension in conceiving and enacting the educational and entertainment factors that are at play in these contexts, and in the value judgements these entail. While a few of the informants openly discuss entertainment, none so openly identifies education as part of the museum's role. Rather, entertainment is seen as an essential factor in the museum's success as a business by means of an enhanced visitor experience, thereby key to the promotion, for some, of the ideology associated with cryptozoology and, for others, of the heritage embodied in the folklore. This interest in promotion suggests that there is an underlying ideal that may be serviced by entertainment. Considering the frequent juxtaposition by informants of ideas such as 'entertainment', 'theme- park', and 'fun' with ones such as 'serious', 'information', and 'knowledge', it may be reasoned that the underlying purpose of the museum *qua* museum is to educate. Naturally, then, the discussion is often centered on the notion of maintaining a balance between education and entertainment.

According to Jón Þorðarson, the SMM's exhibit brings a smile to people's faces, having provided them with "a good show" and told them some "interesting" stories. While this description is consistent with the descriptions of visitor response presented in section 4.3.3, it underlines, here, the public image and reception of the museum, particularly by tourists, as an entertainment center. Jón further emphasizes this by explaining that while some visitors are impressed by the exhibit insofar as they take the eyewitness accounts presented within to be true, they generally do not take the subject matter seriously.

Regardless of the fact that the SMM's image may lean toward entertainment, its planning and operation have, since the beginning, upheld a standard of sobriety in terms of representation. Valdimar recalls that he and the other owners, in the initial phase of design, deliberated as to whether they should "do it like Disney" or otherwise, concluding that the folklore must take precedence. Nonetheless, they decided that they could tell the stories with "a new technique" and make the museum "interesting for young people to see".

Ingimar's vision of a more "steampunked" museum reflects this dual objective of respectfully showcasing the folklore while taking an innovative approach to design and

visitor experience. A noteworthy point among his priorities, as well as Valdimar's, is the question of appeal to a young audience:

I wanted to make it more like a theme park, as well, to make it both serious and also something to enjoy, for kids, especially kids. And I had some ideas about how to make the sea monster museum more popular or, you know, get to more audience... (Ingimar)

According to Ingimar, crafting an enjoyable experience for the visiting public while simultaneously maintaining the integrity of the folklore comes down to the challenging act of balancing fantasy and reality. He is emphatic in his concern that the remaining space in the museum and its envisioned future services must be handled carefully so that the "serious aspect" remains in the foreground, without being overrun by a theme park ambiance and activities. He believes that despite this challenge, it is possible to "add something to [the museum] aesthetically" without compromising its value as a cultural institution and center for cryptozoology.

Þorvaldur, though uninvolved in the planning or operating of the museum, sees fun as a necessary element in its success, and likewise underlines the importance of giving people "something to look at". In his view, the ensured continuity of the SMM relies on the clever use of communications media by the owners, suggesting that he favours the notion of building anticipation around the museum. He proposes that scientists be invited every summer to accompany visitors on a quest to find sea monsters, thereby revealing a twofold perception of the SMM's identity similar to that of the two previously cited informants, i.e. as a "center of entertainment and joy" (Þorvaldur) and also as one of learning.

4.4.4 Community and Tourists

Section 4.3.3 shows that the motivations and responses of visitors to the SMM differ depending on whether the visitors are tourists or locals. Due to demographic and social factors such as the small size of the local community, the locals' familiarity with the museum and, in a few cases, their resistance to or criticism of it, the SMM, as a business, has primarily been tourist- oriented. Therefore, most observations of visitor motivation and response have been generated by and focused on interactions with tourists. With regards to the purposes the museum tries to serve, however, informants are vocal about its value for the local community.

Jón, who has noted in his work as a guide a tendency among tourists to take more interest in natural than cultural phenomena, identifies the SMM as an attraction rather than a site worthy of visiting in and of itself. He uses the example of the Látrabjarg bird cliff in the southern Westfjords as a site which is *truly* of interest to one's travels to the region, or even to Iceland, and states that one might, on the way there, stop in Bíldudalur to take in the museum as well. Ultimately, the SMM "is just part of your visit to Iceland". Despite his suggestions that nature takes precedence over culture, he believes that the cultural content of the museum is important for the community. "All stories are important"¹¹, he says, for building selfhood and community; stories of sea monsters, elves, and hidden people alike. Nonetheless, just as some cultural heritage institutions are only part of a broader experience of Iceland for foreign visitors, so do they pay homage to what is only part of a broader cultural identity, which is rooted in the natural environment.

Magnús is confident that the SMM is valuable both for locals and for tourists seeking an enjoyable activity to engage in, although he is especially keen on highlighting the good the museum has done for the community. The media spotlight that shone on Bíldudalur throughout the museum's construction has, in his eyes, had positive repercussions by generating talk about the place across the nation. While he cannot affirm that the SMM unites the community or appeals to any shared sense of identity in the folklore it represents, he admits that this is something that he and the other owners are trying to achieve. He hopes that the locals will share the stories with tourists in a way that will plant the seed of thinking that "maybe, something *may* be out there" and get everybody talking. Ideally, this would create an aura of "mystique" in Bíldudalur and make it "worth visiting, maybe something *mysterious*, and worth looking at".

Þorvaldur, on the other hand, believes that the museum has thus far served to unite the community as well as those natives of Bíldudalur who have moved to Reykjavík. An outstanding reflection of this, in his view, is the fact outlined in section 4.2.2 that many have made repeat trips to work without pay towards building the museum.

Valdimar is a strong supporter of the notion that the SMM acts as a catalyst to the revitalization of the town. He recalls that the two- year- long construction process was the

¹¹ Translated from the Icelandic "allar sögur eru mikilvægar".

most talked about event among the locals, who asked week to week when “the monster guys” would next be coming to town. The apex of this was reached when the national television program Landinn¹², which showcases local stories and events from communities throughout the country, set up camp in Bíldudalur for a week to document the process. As a result, all Iceland’s attention had been brought to the project. Valdimar remembers having been greeted as ‘the monster guy’ in Reykjavík after the show had been aired. In his view, this, in itself, breathed new air into Bíldudalur and culminated in an overarching sense of optimism. “I have heard”, he says, “that when people came to Bíldudalur, something happened there. People saw we *can do something*.... even if you don’t have money to do it”. Likewise, he feels that the volume of people travelling from Reykjavík to invest themselves as volunteers in a local project fostered a sense of pride among those living in Bíldudalur. He credits the SMM with having kick- started creative thinking about future projects, such as salmon farming, for the town’s economic development.

4.4.5 Aesthetics and Atmosphere

As shown in section 4.2.2, Ingimar has a strong interest in the SMM’s aesthetic. His artistic leanings, along with his desire to contribute to restoring vitality to Bíldudalur, are at the basis of his motivation to lend his talent, training, and efforts to the museum. While he is the most passionate advocate of the importance of aesthetic appeal, his view resonates in the discourses of other informants. Magnús, in particular, often invokes the notion of having or providing something look at, and frequently makes statements underlining the primacy of visual experience. The importance of aesthetic appeal is primarily ascribed to the desire to create an atmosphere, whether throughout the museum or the entire town. The purpose of this is to create a ‘buzz’ about Bíldudalur and to make of the museum an enjoyable and potentially transformative experience in the service of communicating cryptozoology, intangible cultural heritage, and, perhaps, the character of Arnarfjörður.

The *experience* of going through the museum is what you get. All of it. The information, whatever it is, the music, the sounds, the smell, the lighting, the aesthetics, it's all about experience and you are going through the monster museum reading about real events, and you experience something and to strengthen your experience, we can have the museum *look the part*. (Ingimar)

¹² This name translates to ‘The Country’.

Herein lies the suggestion, consistent with previously cited conceptions of the museum as a center of education about reported encounters with sea monsters, that experiential qualities are necessary in order to heighten a visitor's receptivity to the message it is trying to convey. Ingimar contrasts this experiential factor with what Valdimar, as cited in section 2.3, identifies as the standard mode of representation in Icelandic museums:

I have been to museums that are only, like, posters on the wall. You know, just information on posters on the wall. And, all this information we can gain from going to Wikipedia. We don't need to go to the museum and read it there and pay the extra thousand kronur. So, we want to create the atmosphere and the excitement and let people somehow *live* the events they are reading about... So we *are* thinking, *experience*. *Experience it*. *Feel it*. Not only read about it. Because then, it's far away. But when you're *here*, going through the museum, you *are* THERE. You *are* with the monsters. You are *experiencing* the *feeling* of proximity to sea monsters... we wouldn't get that if we wouldn't have these aesthetics inside the museum.

To leverage these views, Ingimar revisits his earlier descriptions of ideas he has been discussing with the owners for extending the SMM experience beyond the museum walls and into the surrounding landscape, as well as for creating a multimedia phenomenon around the museum. He remains, throughout, heavily invested in the ideal of lived experience and insists on using the area's resources in a way that will allow visitors to "get into the atmosphere" and therefore to "be *more connected* to this reality".

Valdimar also believes that the SMM's atmosphere is its most effective medium for bringing the folklore to life. He cautions, however, that a degree of contextualization is key to ensuring that a viewing of the exhibit will be interesting and meaningful to visitors. Showing a penchant, himself, for the storytelling that he has identified among natives of Bíldudalur, he is careful to point out that in order for there to be an atmosphere, the scene must be set by preparing visitors in advance for what they are about to see. Preparing visitors, according to him, involves explaining what they are about to see and why this museum has been devoted to the subject. He contrasts his observations of people who have entered the exhibit hall and exited shortly after, unaffected, with those of people whose anticipation has been aroused beforehand and who have been taken through on an explanatory tour. For the latter, he says, "it's *another museum*" altogether. Valdimar says the staff is essential to this kind of contextualization, implying that the people who are running the show, so to speak, will have a hand in shaping the experience. They are therefore a crucial part of the museum and must be chosen carefully.

Jón is particularly keen on *context*, his concern for which may be equated with a concern for atmosphere similar to that held by Valdimar, Magnús, and Ingimar. While he is an enthusiast of the sea monster folklore, he believes that the most important factor in its representation is *where* and *how* the stories are told. In a compelling example, he describes his approach to introducing the Gísla Saga on a longboat tour that visits Dýrafjörður, the very setting of the story. Here, he tells the story as though he knows each of the characters of the saga intimately. Further, his narrative weaves itself seamlessly into the landscape, the places where the events of the saga unfolded. This, he says, is crucial to a meaningful visitor experience and therefore a successful tourism business, thus the sea monster museum must strive to do the same. When asked what he would change about the museum, he proclaims that he would build it, with windows, under the surface of the ocean; so that visitors can have a “real see into the sea”. In his view, “a museum like this must be very special”, such that nothing like it can be found anywhere else in the world, in order to do justice to the extraordinary stories it tells. The only kind of representation that would be suitable, then, would be one that places visitors in the context from which sea monsters originate and where, if they do exist, the visitors would have the most hope of catching a glimpse of one. Arnarfjörður, as it were, provides the perfect environment in which to build such a structure.

5 Case Study: The Westfjords Heritage Museum (Byggðasafnið)

5.1 Summary of Findings from Westfjords Heritage Museum Interviews

The Westfjords Heritage Museum appears to be undergoing an identity crisis of sorts as it tackles its dual role and the associated, sometimes conflicting responsibilities. While it has traditionally been a center for cultural preservation with local communities and the Icelandic population at heart, there is increasing pressure on it from the tourism industry to serve as a hybrid of entertainment and education for consumption by its foreign guests. Likewise, because informants present a case of diffuse geographical identity and widely varied life experiences, the WFHM itself is subject to equally diffuse opinions, appraisals, and direction. There are, however, some very strong strands of thematic unity regarding its cultural value, particularly for local communities and for Icelanders. These are typified by identification with the nation's history and the assertion of a national character. Consequently, there is a perceived need for an institution that houses this history and gives form to the national character. Informants' perspectives on the identity and ends of the WFHM give way to their value judgements in its regard. It is clear from their identification of the museum as a site of heritage preservation, and of its ends as variously engaged with historical education and representations of cultural identity, that the value informants attribute to the museum is predominantly cultural.

Cultural identity emerges as the centerpiece of this case study. The dominant view is that cultural identity is defined by cultural history- that the history of the nation is not only the story of where Icelanders come from, but an explanation of who they presently are. The same is true of local and regional histories, although expressed to a lesser degree. Cultural identity and history are treated as two sides of the same coin in discussions of heritage.

Just as Iceland's history flows from the sea, so, too, does a vast proportion of the meaning attributed to its culture. The sea yields experiences that are connected to both the immaterial and the material, that possess both tangible and intangible qualities. Therefore, cultural identity, as moulded by the nation's maritime history, is a complex of immaterial ways of relating to the material world, and is constructed, at the individual level, in relation to a tangible heritage that has left an intangible legacy.

The sea, on a conceptual and intuitive level, is in itself a kind of grand storyteller. By being the source of the nation's history, the beginning of its time, in a manner of speaking, it is akin to history itself as it ebbs and flows through people's lives relating events, bearing news, deciding fates, and acting as the medium through which people come to understand both their social and natural environments. While this understanding is one of a history of tangible practices, there is an element of the intangible in individual experiences of the sea residing on the peripheries of consciousness; and while the sea is experienced through the senses and embodied in physical phenomena, its meaning amounts to something greater than the sum of its physical parts.

5.2 Community, People, and Place

Whether born in Ísafjörður or not, all informants who currently reside there express some form of place attachment. Some are connected to the town through family, friends, or professional ties, while for others the attachment has developed as they have established themselves and grown into the community. For those two who were born, raised, and are currently living in Bolungarvík and Súðavík, on the other hand, place attachment is deeply rooted in geographical space and connected to the physical environment of each town. Elías describes this as a simple matter of origins, stating of his return to Bolungarvík after his studies abroad, "I was born and raised here and came back because I wanted to". Ómar Már, who sits on a number of administrative boards responsible for making financial decisions and promoting economic growth in the Westfjords, expresses place attachment as an identity anchored in and an active commitment to the region.

Informants from all three towns identify strongly with the community and name small group associations, good-natured interpersonal relations, short distances and time spans to amenities and facilities of interest, and safety as key elements in the quality of life they

enjoy. Proximity to nature is noted by some, along with a general appreciation for the local landscape. In most cases, these qualities are contrasted with perceived characteristics of life in the city. For Jón, this contrast is a matter of the scale on which projects can be carried forth and of the tensions between the priorities of the national government and those of the municipality, which inevitably affect his ability to execute ideas or plans for the WFHM. Nonetheless, he feels that the community elicits individual engagement and is characterized by networks of positive reinforcement from within that make it easier to carry out certain types of projects, such as opening an art gallery, which would be more difficult to do in the city.

Residents of Ísafjörður also cite multiculturalism, open-mindedness, egalitarianism, and social solidarity as valued characteristics of the community. Daníel correlates the prevalence of an egalitarian mindset in the community with cultural heritage, explaining that it may be indicative of society's emancipation from the hierarchies that were defined by the authority of ship captains in the early days of fishing.

5.3 Purpose, Ends, and Identity of the Museum

The valuation of potential developments for the WFHM, as a publicly funded entity with split municipal ownership, is determined in relation to the available funding. Consequently, its *value* is inevitably defined in relation to financial considerations. Questions of how to invest the money available for the museum's continuity are caught up in the struggle in which local heritage and municipal authorities find themselves, i.e., the struggle to balance the museum's educational and preservation roles with its entertainment role, and likewise its responsibilities to the local community with its services to tourists.

5.3.1 Education, Entertainment, and Experience

Of the informants who directly express views on the purpose of the museum, all feel that the most important of these is to educate, despite being well aware of the increasing need for an entertainment component. This augmenting attention to entertainment is, in part, a response to the growing number of tourists visiting the museum. In this regard, it is deemed necessary to create an experience for tourists that will allow them to learn, in an enjoyable way, about the heritage of the town and country they are visiting, and in so doing serve to bolster the local tourism industry. It is also, however, a strategy to awaken the

interest of locals in visiting, by bringing novelty to the museum and making something exciting, in contemporary terms, of the heritage it represents.

While Jón affirms that the museum's purpose is to communicate cultural heritage, he recognizes the value of entertainment to this end and tries to incorporate it into his efforts at work:

Now I have to start to look for an exhibition which is recalling some ... *reaction*. And with the reaction, the people come to visit. It's constantly the work of the museum and we are always trying to make it more pleasurable and worth seeing... But, that changes, of course, also, from one period to another...

Although here, he relates an enjoyable museum experience to attracting more visitors, he also notes changes in social attitudes about learning, with the implication that the museum must be able to change in order to reflect these attitudes in its educational mission:

Since *I* started, I noticed a different *attitude* to museums, also... in the community. The museum today is *more*.... it's more than an educating room. It's also a fun room.

For Daníel, the identity and the value of the museum reside in its preservation role, and are primarily defined in relation to the local community. As the history of the community is predominantly the history of its maritime activity, so is the museum a collection of maritime artefacts that allow locals to maintain a “*connection* with our *history*”. The important thing, for Daníel, is that there be such a place where the items that are meaningful to the community are collected and cared for. This facilitates intergenerational exchanges in the community and the handing down of a cultural legacy from the older to younger generations. While he admits that the youth might not immediately appreciate the value of such links to their history, he believes that most grow to appreciate it. Furthermore, he, like Jón, connects learning to fun, stating that heritage is “really easy to bring to life and to make exciting” for the youth.

Pernilla, on the other hand, has a decidedly tourism- oriented view on crafting the museum experience. The ideal museum visit is accented by “that little extra something which will make [the] visit very special”. This may be something as simple as personal contact. A guide, for example, by explaining the uses of the items on display, endows them with meaning. When asked what the local community might gain from being able to provide that ‘extra something’ to visitors, Pernilla, having already cited it as something that is important for the tourism industry at large, answers, laughing, “we can of course get more

visitors... if that's what we want!"). She invokes the concept of the happy customer, stating that people who have had an experience that has touched them in some way are likely to recommend the destination to others in their home countries, which is "the best kind of marketing".

5.3.2 Heritage Preservation and Cultural Representation

The WFHM's preservation and education roles are significantly interrelated. On one hand, in preserving artefacts and historical knowledge, the museum fulfills an educational role vis-à-vis the local community in serving as a point of reference for cultural history and identity. On the other, also by means of preservation, it becomes an *embodiment* of cultural history and identity, therefore a physical representation of certain cultural values. As such, it is an outward expression of selfhood, nationhood, and community character.

Where some informants are concerned that locals and Icelanders are losing interest in cultural heritage, marked by significantly low numbers of visits to the museum, Jón Páll perceives an ever-heightening interest among the younger generations in their history and thus believes that the museum, as a substantiation of this, is of increasing cultural relevance.

For Ómar Már, the identity of the museum, while without question revolving around cultural representation, is not as clear-cut as it is for most others. When asked if the WFHM is true to the people and practices it represents, he offers the following consideration:

True. That's a big question. We like to look at things in so many different ways. How you put the history on the table... I don't know! I don't know how true it is. I think it's more that we select it- the things that we like to be something we can be proud of, something we would like to be realistic, or better to be in front, and other things we do not. We select the things we put in front. And who selects it? That's ourselves!

By 'put in front', Ómar Már means 'to showcase', and is here explaining that the WFHM is in some ways a forum for self-expression through selective representation of cultural history and identity.

The *exhibit*, in fact, is seen as paramount to cultural representation, regardless of what one makes of the *concept* of the latter. Most agree that the WFHM's ends are bound to its modes of representation and, consequently, affected by the successes of these. The

museum itself is defined by its collection, the exhibits in which items from the collection are displayed, and the predominantly tangible heritage that is contained in and represented by these.

The limiting factor to the museum's success in cultural representation is said to be its financial capacity, which hinders the ability of decision- makers and staff to implement changes that would allow for more affective, hence *effective*, exhibits. Nonetheless, Jón and Björn have been making concerted efforts at maintaining a lively atmosphere. Among these are the cyclical rotation of thematic exhibits and the staging of live events such as the saltfish (*bacalao*) festival, wherein traditional ways of producing sun- dried, salted cod are enacted on the museum grounds.

5.4 Cultural and Economic Value of the Museum

The WFHM embodies values that are tied to history and central to cultural identity. Thus it possesses intrinsic value from a cultural standpoint. Some economic value is attributed to the WFHM, however this, by contrast, is perceived as *extrinsic*, as it is defined by tourist visitation rates. Economic and cultural value judgements are bound together in the process of financial decision- making for the museum. These value judgements will have bearings on the museum's dual identity and orientations as a sober site of preservation and a tourist attraction.

Jón Páll says of Iceland, “our story is very special”, and he is emphatic about the WFHM's ability to preserve this story for viewing by younger generations. Elías likewise refers to the histories represented by the museums (referring to both the WFHM and the old fishing station- turned- museum, Ósvör, near Bolungarvík) as “something very special, and something that we should promote” because “this is where our roots are”. He agrees that the museums' cultural value is grounded in preservation, although he is doubtful that locals, themselves, hold this value to heart. Nonetheless, he claims that Bolungarvík locals “want [Ósvör] to be there”, as a site of interest in their town that they can point visitors to and take pride in:

I think it's everywhere in the world, that people like to show off something. At their home. If you bring somebody to your home, you want to show them something you were doing in your garden, or, *something you're proud of*. And, I think *that's* actually it. People are *proud* of the museum. I can tell you... as an example, we had a French photographer here who took pictures of Ósvör in the northern lights. It was very nice pictures and it was on display in the underground trains in France, in Paris. So, I think this is something that makes you proud. Of your hometown. When you *know* it's on display, in a large city, out in the world.

Cultural value from the perspective of locals, then, is associated with place attachment and appears to arise from the more subtle yet dynamic identity work of contemporary day-to-day living.

Elías sees no economic value to the WFHM or to Ósvör, claiming that any income earned from entrance fees serves only to pay salaries and that additional funding, either from the communities or the state, is required in order “to upkeep it and build it up”. He adds that the municipalities are “constantly trying to build it up”, referring to both sites as parts of a wider heritage product. Conversely, Björn and Jón believe that the WFHM is of great economic value to the community due to the increasing numbers of visits from tourists and the potential to capitalize on this. They are concerned, however, about the lag in the number of visits from locals and domestic tourists, as they both hold to heart the museum’s cultural value.

In acting as a link to local, regional, and national histories, the WFHM is a bastion of cultural identity within the community. For Björn, it provides insight into the lives of one’s ancestors. For Jón, it gives form to Icelandic values by showing “the *background* very clearly”, that Iceland is “not a *new* society, it’s built on very old roots”. When asked why this is important, he answers:

It’s difficult to say, but, everyone likes to have... valuable background. I mean, it shows how you... survived. I mean, clearly, it was difficult, a hundred years ago. And you survive and you have, then, a museum, that shows you and tells you how you survived, and your ancestors. And, you feel proud of it. And, you're happy to be part of it.

Ómar Már likewise attributes significant cultural value to the WFHM as a link between Icelandic society and the story of its beginnings:

We want to be able to recognize ourselves or to get other people to read us. Where do we come from? Why are we here? And what brought us up to this, today? Because, it was not many years ago when we were very few and it was very cold winters so we didn't have many houses, that the Danish king was seriously thinking about 'why don't we just take all the Icelanders and move them to Denmark?'. You know, it's not very many years ago, and I think Icelanders have become *proud* of that. They have, in a very short time, gone really fast into getting quality life, like is the best way in Europe... and that's been in a very, very short time- there's only sixty years, since we used to live in houses which were made of mud and grass. There's only *sixty years* since! So, I think that has something to do with the pride- 'this is what we are, and, look how we are now, only sixty years later'.

When asked if this pride is a marker of cultural identity, he answers affirmatively, joking about the tendency of Icelanders to self- identify with the Vikings and attributing this tendency to a need to make tangible “the survival element” of which Icelanders are proud. He believes, however, that the notion of heritage itself is generally “in fog” among Icelanders, and that because of this their connection to heritage institutions is weak.

Pernilla offers a strikingly similar assessment to Ómar Már's of the cultural value inherent in the museum's historical representations. She stresses that it is particularly important for the younger generations to be able to see the leap that Iceland took from being a nation of simple means surviving through very harsh environmental conditions to being a country on par with the rest of the world in terms of technology and quality of life. The realization “that *this society didn't come out of nothing*, it was a lot of *hard work*”, which, as she sees it, may come out of a visit to the WFHM, is integral to one's understanding “of *self* and identity... cultural identity” (Pernilla).

Daniel, addressing the question of the museum's significance for tourism, states that it is rather a matter of interest for tourists who want to glean an understanding of the people in the places they are visiting, and perhaps to compare the histories of others to their own. He is doubtful, however, as to whether the community can gain anything of value from educating visitors about its history, based on the belief that “it's not important what opinion others have of us”. What matters most regarding tourism is that it “happens on *our* terms”.

5.5 The Historicity of Cultural Identity

5.5.1 Intuition and Felt Experiences of the Sea

The relevance of the sea to cultural identity is unquestionable. However, felt experiences of it, such as the high degree of reverence it commands, often evade description. Thus, while the sea itself is a physical element in nature conceivable by the human mind, its overall apprehension by individuals and the nature of their relationships to it reveal instances of abstraction and intangibility. Indeed, in some cases, the sentiments that informants express with regard to the sea can be likened to spiritual sentiment, although this should be read as a matter of soulful connection rather than conflated with religious belief.

On a very basic level, these feelings manifest as a profound recognition of the sea as the source of all history and heritage throughout the country.

Our... heritage *is* all at sea, somehow. If it hadn't been for the sea, we wouldn't have been living here. So, if we talk about heritage being fifty, one hundred years ago, it was all about the sea. So, if it is directly or indirectly tied to it, you can always find some kind of connection. (Dániel)

According to Jón, maritime heritage is something that “you *get... in your blood...* you are *born* with it”. The existential quality of his description places it in the realm of felt experience and, to some degree, distances it from the physical objects which purport to represent it.

For Björn, adding to its existential quality, the sea is an omnipresent, necessary element in everyday life. He recalls that growing up on the island of Vígur, it was impossible to distance oneself from the sea physically or mentally. If any kind of travel was required, so was a boat- crossing, and recreation often consisted of catching fish. Likewise, his parents told him myriad stories of sea monsters, along with cautions to safety when on or near the sea. He, in turn, told similar stories to his own children whom, he recalls with laughter, reacted to them with fright just as he had. In this sense, the sea inspires sentiments connected to place, childhood memories, and physical and emotional experiences throughout various stages of life.

Björn also notes that his children for the most part do not relate to the sea in the same way as he does. When asked if he feels that something is lost with the severing of this connection, he replies negatively, concluding that the younger generations simply “have something else”. Daníel, likewise, perceives a weakening of this bond, but is similarly unconcerned, as “the children have other dreams”.

On the other hand, Elías, accounting for the youth as well, says plainly of Bolungarvík that “it’s a *seaman*’s community” and that, as the life of the town “thrives on fish”, the general mood of the community tends to be affected by whether or not the fishing has been fruitful on any given day, or by the weather conditions that determine this. In a similar vein, Ómar Már says that growing up in Súðavík, all he knew was the life of a town that was defined by fishing and fish processing. Thus, for some time, he had no other thought than to go to sea as an adult. While Ómar Már is not aware of the existence of any kind of relationship of a less tangible nature between the community and the sea, Elías affirms that there is such a connection in Bolungarvík. Those who have left the fishing industry in Bolungarvík remain in contact with the fishing firms and keep well informed about news regarding boats and business. “They’re *always talking about it*”, he says, “so it’s very much in the culture”.

The sea likewise rolls into felt experience as the harbinger of news, events, or weather conditions, and as such, it is an important entity in one’s physical environment and psyche. Björn tells of a house he previously lived in, in Ísafjörður, where he “*couldn’t see the sea*”, describing the experience as “terrible” and adding with gusto “I just *had to see the sea!*” He explains that having a view of the sea has always allowed him to take a reading of the weather and to witness the comings and goings of ships, implying that this visual contact is central to his understanding of his environment.

Daníel, as well, describes as an “incredibly strong commitment to the harbour”. This commitment betrays a remarkably existential quality, issuing from “an extremely strange” and indescribable feeling. “It’s like some kind of, somehow - *real life*, when you see the boats coming in”, he says.

It is when Daníel directly links his sentiments about harbour activity to the past that the connection between cultural history and felt experience begins to consolidate, and thus that the notion of cultural identity as defined by history begins to emerge. He muses that this

connection to the harbour must be inherited from a past in which it was common for people to flock to the waterfront to see if boats had returned, or whether or not they had returned with a sufficient bounty of fish to assure work for those on land in the upcoming days. He believes that people of his generation and older ones share in this experience, although he specifies that he speaks mainly for men and boys and does not know if or in what ways women feel connected to the sea.

Pernilla, the only female informant to this case study, describes a different kind of relationship to the sea. The quality of her experience differs depending on whether she is in Iceland or in her native Sweden. She feels that the sea is more accessible to people in Sweden by virtue of both infrastructure and the warmer temperatures of the water in the summer, which allow for comfortable swimming. Thus, her connection is through activity and direct physical contact with the sea. In Iceland, on the other hand, while she feels in some ways distanced from it physically, it remains a notable presence in her life:

Here, it's more a question of maybe hikes, or walks, or just *enjoying* the sea out of my window at home... It's always close- it's really that feeling of smelling the sea. That's something that's really important to me. And especially where I live, you have that really *nice* smell of the sea. Which is really different here, whether you're on the north side of the sand spit or the south side. If you're on the south side you have more this feeling of a little duck pond, which doesn't smell as nice! But I live on the north side, where I feel that you have this really *nicely* scented sea- *feeling*! So it's a question of, part of the nature, just the views, and, and the landscape, but also this *scent*!

5.5.2 Materialism, Society, and Change

Economic Activity

Despite expressions of the immaterial in many of the informants' descriptions of their relationship with the sea, the dominant worldview is a materialistic one.¹³ Jón Páll is the most vocal advocate of a materialistic conception of the sea and, likewise, of the history of Iceland. He says with certainty that the people in Ísafjörður feel an important cultural connection to the sea because “we are living off the fish, and the fish industry, that makes the money for everyone.” As he sees it, aluminium manufacturing now complements the fisheries in generating income for the country, and tourism is a secondary industry from

¹³My use of the term ‘materialistic’ denotes philosophical materialism, i.e., “the view that the world is entirely composed of matter” (Blackburn, 2008) ; and, to a lesser degree, “the theory or belief that consciousness and will are wholly due to material agency” (Materialism: Definition of Materialism in Oxford Dictionary [British & World English], 2014, par. 2).

which, alone, the nation will never be able to support itself. Similarly, unless Iceland begins exporting *skyr*¹⁴, he jokes, agriculture will never be able to meet export demands and remains a domestic sustenance industry. The fisheries, in his view, will always be at the heart of Iceland's economic activity and for this reason defines national identity. He laughs upon mention of the sagas and sea monster folklore, stating that these stories are "from the *old* time", and denies that they have any bearing on cultural identity. He claims that "in Bíldudalur, they can tell foreign people about sea monsters... not to Icelanders". Not only is Jón Páll's conception of heritage informed exclusively by the tangible, but it likewise signifies a nationalistic stance on the notion of cultural identity. Furthermore, this conception is rooted in a more recent history than, for example, medieval times or the settlement era.

A relevant implication of Jón Páll's view that Iceland will never cease to rely on its fisheries is the notion that the sea, as the source of the economic activity that so defines national identity, is subject to a constant, unchanging position in the culture of Icelanders. There is a counterpoint to this in Björn's observations. He sees sweeping changes in economic activity, particularly at the level of the local community, as entailing changes in the relationship between sea and culture. Like Jón Páll, he holds that the community's connection to the sea is mostly a practical one. In other words, it is a matter of the centrality of the fisheries to the community's livelihood. However, unlike Jón Páll, he notes that this has been changing to a significant degree with the advent of high technology, such that in his estimation only thirty or forty percent of the community is now earning its living directly from the fisheries. Jón Sigurpálsson is similarly cognizant of these changes. He explains that up until fifty years ago, "there were farms in every fjord" and fishing stations like the one at Ósvör dotting the coastline. Maritime commerce has undergone similar changes, as once- busy trade routes were abandoned along with the farmland that now forms a quiet stretch of wilderness at the northernmost tip of the Westfjords:

¹⁴A popular yogourt- like dairy product, steeped in tradition in its own right.

If you take an example of a deserted area- Hornstrandir- a lot of farms there, and they were also fishing, and the merchants came there to collect the fish. It was salted there, and then they bought the fish from the farmers and they, the farmers, got sugar and flour and things like that, everyday needs. And, with the technology, we got trawlers, and the farming got more difficult because it was a changing of the *system*, I mean it was other *kinds*, and with the technology there are fewer people needed on board on each ship, and slowly it's changing, yes, of course. (Jón)

When asked if cultural identity continues to be shaped by maritime heritage, he answers “I think that’s changing as well”. While technology is at the heart of this change, however, so is it at the heart of emergent industries servicing the fisheries. Jón cites as an example 3X Technology, a local manufacturer of equipment for fishing boats and trawlers¹⁵, suggesting that maritime heritage might not be fading from the culture, but merely changing faces as the nature of maritime activity and the industries that service it change.

For Elías and Ómar Már, while cultural identity rises from the sea, the communities of Bolungarvík and Súðavík are also characterized by the history of their social and economic struggles, which have invariably made their mark on each community’s identification with maritime heritage. These struggles have also, to some degree, determined the direction each has taken for the future, constructing and reconstructing identity throughout the process. Elías describes his own feeling of connection to the sea as entangled in the community’s, which is based on their recognition of it as the site, source, and embodiment of *contemporary* commercial activity:

I’m not, obviously my business is not concerned with the sea but we have our *income* from the boats that go fishing, because they pay, when they land their fish, through the harbour, we have our income based on that. The *community*. So we are very well connected to what is happening in the fishing industry. Especially the fishing, itself, rather than the processing. Although we also get income tax from the people that are working in the processing. But, from the boats, there’s a tax on every kilo that they import or that they land, and we also, of course, get income taxes from the seamen themselves. So if they are doing well, we get more flow of money into the community.

In this sense, the sea is culturally relevant in a current, immediate, and direct way, and is central to a life being lived and hence to a local identity being built in the present moment, from one moment to the next. This idea is reinforced by Elías’s description of the effects of past economic troubles on local identity. After having enjoyed a twenty- year period of abundance, he explains, Bolungarvík began to fall into a “steep recession” in the late 1980s, due to diminished fishing quota. This recession lasted until roughly the year 2000 and saw the loss of jobs, the mass exodus of the local population, and the devaluation of

¹⁵At the time of writing, 3X Technology was sold to a company based in Reykjavík.

property, phenomena which occurred throughout the Westfjords around the same period of time. According to him, community identity was “very much” affected by this, but is currently back on the rise as pre- recession quotas are once again beginning to be attained. Throughout history, however, the sea has remained at the center of the town’s *raison-d’être* and is a force that creates a sense of belonging in the community:

We've been fishing in Bolungarvík since the year one thousand or so. And, the reason being that we have- the fishing grounds are very close to Bolungarvík, much closer to us than to Ísafjörður and Súðavík, and when you're rowing, that matters *a lot*. And this is why we, this is why Bolungarvík exists. It's because, how short distances there are to the fishing grounds. And, even today, this is what's making us a bigger fishing village every year.

Súðavík, on the other hand, has gone through several phases in its commercial relationship with the sea. While Ómar Már does not directly address identity, he is keen to discuss local economic activity in a way that characterizes the community as possessing a high degree of initiative towards the ideal of economic independence. He explains that historically, Súðavík was embroiled in internal conflict due to the fact that for a long time, there was only a single company operating the only fish processing factory and, some decades later, the only trawler in town. Because of this, most residents were employed by that company and thus, the company exerted considerable power over the town, controlling it altogether, as it were. “*It was not a good feeling*”, he recalls, lending weight to Daníel’s suggestion, cited in section 5.2, that some elements of cultural identity, such as an egalitarian mindset, may well be a backlash to past conditions of excessive authority. Despite the relative wealth Súðavík enjoyed through this fishery, the company eventually collapsed due to its sole reliance on prawn.

Ómar Már, having grown up in a town the livelihood of which revolved around the sea, fishing, and fish processing, returned to a town not only on the verge of being divested of its main source of income, but also preoccupied with building itself anew after a devastating loss of lives and homes to the avalanches of January of 1995. From the time that reconstruction of the town was complete, in 2002, locals began looking to ways of re-setting the local economy. It was during this time, says Ómar Már, that people began exploring the idea of tourism and various other options, to the effect that by 2012, “it start[ed] waking up again”.

Ómar Már, with the help of a small group of interested individuals in the municipality, has undertaken a research project that aims to uncover knowledge about the 19th century

whaling industry in Súðavík, in the hope of building something around this knowledge. Despite the fact that the period of whaling was equally short-lived to the period dominated by the local fishery, he believes that local heritage has a deeper connection to the whaling era. He explains that although most people in the community are vaguely aware that there was a whaling station at Lángeyri at one time, most know very little, if anything, about it.

Regardless of whether the community's history is seen to be predominantly the history of fishing or that of whaling, what stands out in Ómar Már's discourse is his overarching association of local cultural history with maritime economic activity. This association is carried forth in his vision for Súðavík's future, which reveals a sense of local identity very much attached to local geography and environmental resources. On whether the sea creates a sense of belonging in the community, he answers:

I think that we are all, now...realizing it, *how important it is* that we control what we do to the fjords. And to the sea. Because it belongs to the government, and, we have nothing to say about what they decide to do... we want this [to] be *ours*, to *plan*, to *decide* how we will use it because there are *so many* possibilities.

The community is, he says, united in this sentiment, and from it comes the driving force of their future as individuals with ideas, experience, and interest gather to plan local resource usage for economic independence.

Technology

While the sea, whether at local, regional, or national levels, is seen by all informants as the seat of cultural identity, technology is what historicizes this identity, thus revealing the historicity of the sea as a cultural icon. Additionally, the speed of technological advancement, by consequence of the changes it has brought upon society, is said to have fuelled the robust sense of pride that is characteristic of national identity.

This is a view often revealed in discussions of what message the WFHM communicates to foreign visitors about Icelanders. Pernilla is extraordinarily impressed with the sheer survival element attached to the history of fishing in the Westfjords- a sentiment which is revived every time she guides cultural tours, particularly to Ósvör. With great enthusiasm, she details the nature of a typical early twentieth-century fishing trip:

You get these stories, about fishermen coming there part of the year- and really, the *hardest* part of the year, they spent *fishing*- and how cold and slippery and dark, and this kind of life, you know, and I mean, nutrition- wise, they were so limited, and how many people must have drowned, how *really* tough it was, and how much they put themselves through to drag those fish to the shore, and especially when they went for, say, *shark*, which was-well, as someone put it, one of the curators put it- probably the *craziest* types of fishing trips that anyone's ever been engaged in, in Iceland, because they went farthest out for a few days, they hardly had anything to eat, they would have, maybe, a barrel of whey or something to drink and I mean, the sharks stay really deep and it's difficult to drag them up and then you get a creature which is the size or even bigger than a boat! And then you have to kill it quickly, and get out the liver and get as much liver as you can and then head back home. And, just what they put themselves through just to stay alive, get some fish for the family or whatever.

Daníel offers a similar view when asked what the WFHM teaches foreign visitors about, although, as a native, his view of history is much more notably internalized.

It's some kind of *picture* painted, [of] how it was.... And [it] gives them insight in how *difficult* life must have been here, and, actually, *amazing*. It helps people better to compare their *own* way, what were *we* doing here in Iceland in 1900s and how was it in *their* country, to compare, and it's a little insight in the past here, and I hope it shows them also how *fast* we have changed, from being many centuries behind in everything to being almost equal to Europe in roads, internet connections, airplanes, snow shovelling, avalanches.

When pressed on the point of what this might say about contemporary Icelanders, he answers, with a laugh, “that we are this *raw* people that have lived in very harsh conditions, I think... and that would help the visitors to understand why we are so direct and loud, and- crazy”. It is worthy of notice that in this instance, he shifts from pointing out the rapid onset of modernity in Iceland as a centerpiece of cultural identity to describing the national character in terms of qualities that are inherited from past times. Thus, not only is cultural identity characterized by the forward motion of history, but it is likewise built up retroactively.

Elías, while hesitating to comment on what might be learned from the WFHM about *Icelandic people*, nevertheless has a similar view as to what might be learned about the nation's history. The museum, he says, exemplifies the long- standing simplicity and homogeneity of fishing technology and practices prior to the industrial revolution. He contrasts this with the ongoing escalation of innovations and change typical of the present day, concluding that “it's this question of economic growth, it's the same thing that happens with technology, in every way”. While he cautions that at Ósvör, a visitor will only catch a glimpse into a very specific period in the history of fishing, as though frozen

in time, he affirms that the WFHM's current exhibit¹⁶, by contrast, effectively communicates the region's adaptation to rapid change. This is the result of an exhibition that, in displaying models of various vessels, gives "more perspective of the new things" and therefore a "wider angle of the time". Thus visitors can see the contrast between the early days and the current era in domestic fisheries. Jón Páll confirms this, stating that, first and foremost, visitors to the WFHM learn about "the change" by viewing the "old equipment" on display.

5.5.3 History's Cultural Legacies

Sections 5.5.1 and 5.5.2 demonstrate that there is a tapestry of experiences weaving the intangible with the tangible into a picture of cultural identity that is coloured throughout by history. This latter is the greater whole, the reality within which material and immaterial experiences of the sea and incarnations of heritage are united. The most compelling example of this comes forth in Daniel's comparison of his childhood experiences of coastal life with those of contemporary youth. He recalls that ships frequently sank when he was younger, which might explain why some, like himself, are still drawn to the harbour as though anticipating the return of a vessel. Furthermore, the recurrent loss of lives at sea set off processes whereby, over time, improved technologies for handling ships, along with protective measures such as fences along harbours, made it "difficult to get really close". He adds that nowadays, "you almost never see fish", as landings typically arrive in containers, as opposed to being thrown onto the shore from small boats as was common practice in his youth. It is because of this gradual disconnection from the tangible aspects of maritime heritage, he believes, that younger generations no longer connect as much to its less intangible aspects, such as through the kinds of felt experiences discussed in section 5.5.1.

Jón, whose outlook and experiences are more materialistic, inadvertently points to the interconnectivity of tangible and intangible heritage. Although tales of the sea do not factor into his life own experiences, he concedes that families with a long, uninterrupted lineage of fishermen might, in fact, possess such oral and folkloric traditions.

¹⁶At the time of writing the present master's thesis, the exhibit at the WFHM focuses on the transition from small boats to trawlers in Westfjords fisheries.

For Pernilla, on the other hand, folklore and maritime practices simply coexist side- by- side in the coastal community, although she initially has some difficulty recalling any stories and her understanding of maritime heritage is punctuated by a picture of the early shorelines, burgeoning with fishing stations and industry.

There is, in the ancestry of all, some relation to the fisheries, and connectivity with the sea is indelibly written into these family histories. It is important to mark, however, as Jón does, that the history of fishing in Iceland is interlaced with the history of farming:

My grandfathers, they were just workers in the south and they were farmers and went to sea in the winter and came to the farm in the summer, that's how it is, that's how Iceland is. If you look through the history of Iceland it's every common people , and especially of course in the Westfjords, the living is divided into, it's farming, and, fishing. And, that's how I experienced it in, if you look, if I look through the history of *my* family, it's like that, for centuries.

A portrait of cultural identity so strongly attached to national history, then, is essentially the portrait of national identity. Björn, for example, does not feel that the sea is a source of identity particular to the community in Ísafjörður, as the history of coastal life is common to the nation. However, there are instances in which local communities and their ties to this heritage may be seen to be preserving elements of the national identity that are perhaps fading on the national scale. Daníel feels that where the harbour is growing distant in some places, in others, such as Bolungarvík, it is just as lively an experience as it was in the past and “must be an adventure for the little kids”. He attributes this to the town’s continued use of small vessels and the daily comings- and- goings of numerous boats, in contrast to the few large vessels that set sail for matters of days, even weeks, from Ísafjörður. His insistence on the identity of the WFHM as “basically a *maritime* heritage museum” through the description he gives of its activities might also be read as an instance of local, or regional, uptake of national identity. Here, he addresses elements of heritage where the tangible and the intangible intermingle:

At the heritage museum, we are preparing salted cod as they- bacalao- as they did fifty years ago, we are trying to let the people experience how to eat fish as it was processed long time ago, we have a festivity regarding that at the museum, the basic exhibition is really tied, there are a lot of boats, there are nets, and stuff. You have the accordion, which is directly linked to festivities among the seamen... so I think we are really influenced about that.

Regardless of scale, however, the dominant paradigm for cultural identity, as a historical phenomenon, is to some degree contestable. Ómar Már points out that the WFHM’s representation of heritage is limited in that it shows only the evolution of the fisheries from the early twentieth century onward, whereas Iceland’s history dates much farther back.

While he recognizes that this is largely a consequence of the availability of material for exhibition from the period in question, he is critical of the inadequacy of government funding to developing the museum such that it can “get the story closer to some kind of truth”.

Additionally, traditional notions of cultural identity in the region are strongly influenced by the image of the fisherman. As Elías explains, fishermen are and always have been held in very high regard, even idolized by young boys. Yet, the women processing the fish on-shore had an equally important role, as their work consisted in transforming the catch into a product fit for sale. This does not entirely lack representation by the WFHM, as there are numerous images on the museum walls of women working the fish. Also, the mere fact that there is an annual salted cod festival is, in itself, celebratory of a side of the industry that was dominated by women. Nonetheless, Björn and Ómar Már alike affirm that women could be better represented.

The same might be said of foreign workers, who, according to Ómar Már, began arriving in the Westfjords around 1975 to work in the fish factories and continue to be a strong presence on the workforce, particularly as interest in the fisheries among Icelandic natives declines. While there is barely any discussion of immigrants and ethnic minorities, they are unquestionably a part of the changes by which Icelandic society, as described by most informants, is characterized.

All in all, history and identity are seen as reciprocal subjects of education. According to Daníel, the importance of having the WFHM in the community is so that those who visit it, particularly the young people, might gain a deeper understanding of “why things are as they are” and of the cultural mindset defining their environment. This understanding, he says, is conducive to open-mindedness and allows people, in assimilating the past, to make better progress toward the future.

5.5.4 Communicating History and Identity

Section 5.4 notes that the WFHM is highly valued from a cultural standpoint. Given the relationship of cultural identity to history, the museum’s value is ultimately determined by its representation of the latter. Jón draws attention to the issue of representation by contrasting the events and activities associated with the WFHM’s salted cod festival with

the “dry, informational exhibit” that chronicles the transition from deck boats to trawlers. The former consists of events and activities such as live music, dancing, and food sampling, and has been a very popular event for the last decade. He emphasizes that the mode of representation is key to any museum’s success, stating that heritage can, in fact, be represents in an “interesting and nice way”. He likewise admits that the WFHM tends more toward a dry style of exhibition.

Jón Páll, on the other hand, feels that Iceland’s history is very well represented by the WFHM, as the museum possesses and displays a vast collection of old objects that capture the essence of the era being depicted. The artefacts “allow you to see what has changed” over the last one hundred and fifty years and in so doing, “brings [the nation’s] story to its guests”. He considers it a shame, however, that the history of agriculture and the transition from farming to fishing is not exhibited, as he considers this a key phase in the country’s development. According to him, the majority of the population “lived like dogs” as farmers, and it was only with increased fishing that they began to build towns and their living conditions improved significantly. This, he feels, merits attention.

There is a suggestion implicit in Jón Páll’s opinions, particularly regarding the quality of the objects on display at the museum, that history requires authentic representation in order to be effectively communicated. While the concept of authenticity differs somewhat from one informant to the next, it is generally associated with the idea of being able to create a realistic feeling for museum guests of what the early days of local fisheries might have been like. For Elías, while there are and always will be differences in opinion among decision- makers as to “what should be on display and how it should be displayed”, the WFHM is representative of cultural identity in that those responsible for operating it have created a realistic picture of “how people lived... how the day was”, and how tasks were accomplished on a typical workday.

Björn believes that the artefacts themselves create an atmosphere and effectively communicate something about the past to visitors, particularly as they lend themselves to a sensory experience:

People are allowed to touch everything in the museum. They can take the artefact and roll it around, and...yeah. I think that it gives you an *extra* good connection. With the things, and, with the past life.

Daníel is also keen on experience, but of a more active kind. While he feels that the current modes of representation the museum employs provide “some insight” into the past, he feels that the museum is limited by its reliance on “pictures and small things”. As he sees it, visitors would have a more authentic feel for the times if they were able to take boat trips, try on the old fishermen’s clothes, or otherwise actively engage with the material on display. He cites Ósvör as an example of authentic representation, where artefacts are “put in their *real* life”, i.e., placed in their genuine historical context.

Regardless of the preferred mode of representation or dominant concept of authenticity, cultural history is perceived as being characterized by the changes to Icelandic society brought on by technological progress, and, therefore, cultural identity as heavily accented by these. Thus, it is thought important by some that the WFHM convey a message akin to ‘look how far we’ve come’.

5.6 The Centrality of the Exhibit to Cultural Representation

If authenticity is the key to the WFHM’s success in terms of cultural representation, then the exhibit is the vehicle for authenticity and thus is of the utmost importance. This, of course, underscores the material aspect of history and therefore draws attention to tangible heritage. Björn, for example, places a great deal of emphasis on the ability of the museum to “show” a lot of “things” in discussing its effectiveness and challenges in communicating the past. Like Jón Páll, he finds it unfortunate that only maritime heritage is displayed, but looks forward to being able to unveil the museum’s collection of agricultural artefacts in the new building that is planned for construction. His vision for the future of the museum is its expansion, such that it will have the capacity to house more exhibitions.

Jón also attributes the museum’s cultural value to the quality of its collection, stating that it consists of an abundance of rare items and is probably one of the best of its kind in Iceland in terms of its preservation value. He adds that the WFHM is in possession of objects that are unique to the area and thus that visitors can see things in its exhibits that they cannot see elsewhere in the country.

For Daníel, as explained in section 5.3.2, the notion of the exhibit encompasses a broader vision, one that is centered on being “proactive” and “dynamic”. He feels that the current style of exhibition is somewhat static, and states that where now, visitors to the museum are mostly “seeing something”, he would “like to go further and try to let people experience” something.

An exhibit can be said, by virtue of its etymology, to be a matter of outward presentation by nature; thus these views about material representations might merely be reflecting this fact. However, they might also be reflecting more traditional views of the meaning of exhibition and representation, which are complemented by the novel use of resources both reaching beyond the display and enhancing it internally. There is already a suggestion of this in Daníel’s conception of a more sensory and affective exhibit. This, in turn, resonates with Pernilla’s idea that the artefacts and the exhibits at the WFHM have tended to be insufficiently marked for explanatory purposes, thus hindering their accessibility to the visiting public. She feels that a communicative approach to imparting information would alleviate the problem of viewing an exhibit with no framework for understanding what one is looking at.

Björn raises the unconventional idea of representation as extending beyond the on- site exhibit and reaching into the community by various means. One of these is the use of external media, such as the museum’s website, for communicative and informative ends; another is maintaining close ties with local schools to promote ongoing education and to keep them abreast of WFHM policies and activities.

From the perspective of identity, then, the exhibit is essentially that which communicates history and is therefore a conduit to cultural education. From the museological perspective, on the other hand, it is the vessel for visitor experience and is therefore instrumental to success. Additionally, change is a necessary element in shaping the exhibit and its very nature over time. For Elías, change is a matter of emphasis. If one visits the museum a decade from now to view the same objects displayed in a different way, the exhibit is serving its heritage preservation function and all the while shifting the emphasis in representation, undoubtably reflecting contemporary concerns or interests. For Jón Páll, it is crucial that the exhibits be rotated from one year to the next so that “when locals come,

they always see a new museum”, thus having a renewed interest in the WFHM as a local heritage resource.

Despite the work that is invested in changing the WFHM’s exhibits regularly, these are nonetheless bounded by material and conceptual limitations. As noted by Ómar Már in section 4.3, the museum’s artefacts date no further back than c. 1900. Likewise, its representation of women’s roles is limited, occurring mainly as a muted presence in photographs in the current exhibit (“From Deckboats to Trawlers”), and, although their heightened presence in regional fisheries is relatively recent, there is no representation of the ethnic minorities now dominating the processing arm of the industry.

5.7 Envisioning the Museum of the Future

As shown in section 5.6, cultural representation revolves around the nature, quality, and quantity of exhibits that can be offered, and is in some cases envisioned as a heritage *experience*, one that, in Daníel’s view, is oriented toward long, engaged, visitor stays as opposed to short visits for the passive viewing of exhibits. However, as the staff face perplexities in connecting local communities and Icelanders to the museum and simultaneously find themselves increasingly caught up in answering to the demands of the tourism industry, they similarly become caught in a tension between the museum’s roles and responsibilities as, on one hand, an institution for preservation and education and, on the other, a “tourist theme park” (Daníel). While the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, it is their planning and presentation that is crucial to maintaining the WFHM’s integrity. Daníel believes that although the museum is managing well for the time being, it is possible that the future will necessitate the division of the WFHM into “two institutions—one preserving, and one... making an exhibition *out of* the old things”. He emphasizes that the balancing of these roles and responsibilities will always necessitate discussion around the planning of the museum’s future.

Jón states that “we have great plans for the future”, highlighting the general enthusiasm among staff and decision-makers for the impending construction of the new building, for which the foundation has already been laid. This new building will house an exhibition concerning the Hornstrandir nature reserve as well as a new tourist information center, thereby diversifying the museum’s operations. Jón maintains that constant change is

needed to ensure that the museum keep up to date with the changing social attitudes he has noticed, cited in section 5.3.

Elías, like Daníel, places an emphasis on planning, although his vision extends to infrastructural planning for the areas surrounding both the WFHM and Ósvör. Because of the increasing numbers of tourists, he says, the capacity of each museum and its surrounding area to receive and to service them must be increased. It is less a question of altering the museums themselves than it is of providing sanitation and making room for visiting cars and buses, and perhaps of opening an on- site gift shop, as well. He is careful to note that planning around such efforts includes considering ways of keeping the new structures “low profile” so that they do not draw attention away from the museums, which are unique in architectural style.

While Elías displays some interest in partnering with schools for community education purposes, expressing the belief that this connection is under- exploited, he feels that the schools, themselves, must have the interest, the time, and the capacity for engaging with the museum. For the time being, tourism- related matters appear to be more urgent to everyone involved in planning and operations.

6 Focus Group Findings: Local Perceptions of Cultural Heritage, Identity, and Representation

6.1 Summary of Results from Focus Group Discussion

In expressing their widely varied views about cultural heritage, focus group participants signal a number of issues that are central to heritage scholarship. These fall into roughly three groups, as follows:

Ontological Questions

- What can we call heritage/ what kinds of things can we admit to heritage?
- Is heritage only *cultural* (as opposed to natural)?
- How old does heritage have to be?

Questions of Identity

- Who is admitted to cultural heritage; who is, can, and should be represented by cultural heritage institutions; who has legitimate claims to the cultural identity of a place?
- Can individual people and their lives (e.g., through their contributions to society) be considered a heritage of sorts?
- Cultural landscapes

Questions of Representation

- Heritage as a consumer product/ production
- Exhibit vs. museum, made- up heritage, and the idea that heritage, by definition, belongs to the past or is somehow antiquated

- Should a heritage museum only represent what is from the past and has stopped happening, or can exhibits of work- in- progress (e.g, industry, technology) also be considered heritage representations?

A general discussion of the meaning of cultural heritage gives way to one of identity and representation, yielding the notion that culture is a historical phenomenon characterized by social dynamics and differentiation, and that cultural heritage museums have a dual role wherein they must at once be attentive to the local community and to tourists. Regarding the former, heritage preservation and cultural education are key responsibilities, whereas regarding the latter, business acumen, community participation, and authentic cultural representation figure prominently. Maritime heritage, particularly fishing heritage, is seen as the core of cultural identity in the Westfjords and thus it is thought crucial for it to be represented in any regional heritage museum. However, it is also seen as but one among several facets of the region's cultural landscape that merit representation. The others are the region's social struggles, its adaptation to harsh environmental conditions, its Viking-era heritage, and its progression through history along with the changes this has brought to the cultural ethos.

The ideas brought forth by focus group participants cast light on those of the interview subjects, in some cases aligning themselves with the latter with regards to national, regional, and local heritage and its representation, and in others departing from them. Most significantly, the discussion paints a picture of the world outside the museums and serves as a platform for critical analysis of these from the vantage points of social, political, and economic issues.

6.2 Observations on the Meaning of Heritage

There are varying degrees of divergence in opinion as to what constitutes heritage, whom it belongs to, and how it should be represented. Some participants consider natural heritage a part of cultural heritage or see contemporary phenomena, such as geothermal energy structures, as equal to artefacts and historical records in heritage value. Others, however, are resistant to incorporating contemporary items into their concepts of heritage, primarily because of its semantic association with the notion of an inheritance. The same participants are similarly conservative about fusing culture with nature or the concept of a museum

with that of an exhibit, hinting at the definitions ascribed to these terms by the Icelandic museum laws (*Safnalög*).

Where people and community are concerned, however, some participants are warm to the idea of *heritage- in- the- making*, i.e., of heritage as a process whereby people continuously build identity at various scales simply by living their lives and participating in culture. Focus group participants unanimously agree that the ethnic minorities in the Westfjords who now form the majority of the workforce in the fish factories merit inclusion in the concept of Icelandic heritage; and, likewise, representation in the WFHM. Valdimar, however, cautions that there is a danger of concretizing difference and thereby othering ethnic minorities by setting them apart in a museum exhibit. One “democratic” solution he offers is to represent them alongside people from other parts of Iceland who came to the Westfjords to work in the fisheries, whose stories, as well, have gone untold.

Helga identifies with Icelandic culture and feels that she is both a participant in and a product of it through her work in cultural tourism. Commenting on the representation of foreign workers in the Westfjords, she agrees that while she does not feel the need to be classified and represented by nationality, she would appreciate being included in the concept of locals of foreign origin who might, at some time, be celebrated by the WFHM as a part of local history. This sparks a discussion about immigrants residing in Ísafjörður who are perceived “much more” as “local patriots and *Vestfirðingar*” than many natives are, due to their more fervent identification with and promotion of the local community and the region (Einar). Participants believe these individuals are genuine and present interesting examples of place- based identity. There is some hesitation, however, in linking them to cultural heritage.

Heritage takes on another dimension when discussed in relation to tourism. It becomes, in Einar’s words, “pure business”. While most other participants agree on the business opportunities inherent in cultural heritage *vis- à- vis* tourism, they tend to see the role of heritage museums as split between operating as businesses and as institutions for cultural preservation and education. While in general, the concept of heritage as a product for consumption is not frowned upon, Helga and Ólöf are wary of the tourism product becoming a *production*, i.e., of becoming a staged, inauthentic representation closer to “showbusiness” (Ólöf) in its demeanour. When it attains such a state, says Helga, it is

“made heritage”, which is not heritage at all as it no longer retains any real ties to the past. It is not, however, thought inauthentic to transform entire settings into a cultural tourism landscape such as, for example, by “do[ing] our whole country like a heritage museum” (Helga). Just as it is deemed necessary for a heritage museum to be “presented in a way that’s interesting for the visitors and [to] tell a story, not just show individual items without any context” (Ingibjörg), it is thought that a town like Ísafjörður could benefit from signs indicating historical landmarks and providing information about them. Sensory engagement is considered very important, based on the perception that tourists want to *experience* cultural heritage rather than to view it passively.

The concept of heritage is further expanded to include that which is current in society but has evolved from traditional practices. Ólöf notes that the numerous local companies that use “high science” in the service of the fisheries can harness additional business opportunities through tourism. She supposes that few, Icelanders and foreigners alike, are knowledgeable about the modern- day fisheries and can thus learn from exhibits built around the industry of these companies.

6.3 Roles and Responsibilities of Heritage Museums

Heritage museums are not thought of as having any responsibility to tourists. Rather, they have a role to play, exemplified by some of the ideas noted in section 6.2, in the interest of succeeding as businesses for the benefit of the community. Likewise, they have a responsibility to local communities as cultural institutions. It is the work of the museum to educate local communities, through preservation and exhibition of cultural heritage, about the ways of life of the past. This is particularly important in order for younger generations to understand “how *hard* it was to get rights, here in Iceland” (Ólöf), as well as to dispel “romantic ideas about the past” by educating “for better and for worse” (Ingibjörg). Most participants think of the educational role of museums as going hand- in- hand with the more engaging ideals of heritage representation, but Einar’s separation of the museum’s role as museum, on one hand, and as tourism- oriented business, on the other, suggests that it would have distinct responsibilities in each of these incarnations. Furthermore, he answers to Valdimar’s claim that “what is evaluated or judged as heritage... depends on the view[s] [of] today” with the assertion that such evaluation ultimately issues from “the people you are selling to”, as “it’s all about money”.

The notions of the dual role of heritage museums and of heritage as a consumer good are explored in the figure of the Sea Monster Museum, which elicits a passionate reaction from several participants. On one hand, the SMM is perceived as a crass, commercial tourist attraction that “really twists the foreigners’ ideas of Icelanders and their culture, same as with elves” (Ólöf). Those who adhere to this idea neither believe in sea monsters nor have an affinity for the folklore. They concede that it may well be a special part of the heritage of Arnarfjörður, but draw a line between the stories themselves and the attraction built around them. Einar remarks that “the attraction itself is not a heritage, but the stories are there... we would not react so aggressively if someone tried to market the story itself... but when they start to create the *Skrímslasetrið*, that’s enough for us”. Ingibjörg elaborates: “the question is whether the stories are presented as stories or truth- true beliefs- there’s a difference”. Valdimar, by contrast, observes “but they play with that”, to which the rest of the group rebuts that regardless, the SMM is unreal, staged, fictional, and so on.

Nevertheless, those who are most virulently opposed to the SMM also find it “well done” (Ólöf) and think it is a fine business opportunity grounded in a novel marketing strategy. Some admit that they would encourage tourists to visit the SMM and even play along with the idea that there are sea monsters dwelling in Arnarfjörður to this end. The SMM is not seen as having any cultural value for Icelanders, however.

By the same token, participants are vocal about what they perceive as a lack of entrepreneurial spirit and innovative thinking on the part of ‘genuine’ heritage museums such as the WFHM. They depict these museums as stifled by tradition and by overly conservative attitudes to cultural preservation. Some suspect that their curatorship may be disdainful of business models or of modern media for representation and marketing. It is thought very important that heritage management, in the context of museums, take an integrated approach, involving private- public sector partnerships and community engagement. This issues in part from the notion that “taking ownership of such a project... creates something [and] stimulates your thoughts”, such that “something more will come out of” the process of collaborative planning (Ingibjörg). There is a strong inclination toward the idea that heritage museums must be developed as businesses, though not necessarily privatized, because they are ultimately *a service to the people*, i.e., a consumer good. Nestled in this idea is a concern for understanding the needs of tourists, who are the

primary consumers of heritage, as well as of the youth, who are its heirs and future stewards.

Thus, when asked what it means to *build up* a heritage museum, and what concerns should be at the heart of endeavours to do so, most participants give answers indicating that visitor experience is crucial. For Helga, this is a question of creating atmosphere and providing a sensory link to the past, whereas Ólöf would like to see heritage museums “utilize the newest technology to [tell] a story and to really create context, put everything into context”. Einar feels that it is important for museums to work toward attracting investment, as public funding is insufficient for carrying forth curators’ and municipalities’ numerous ideas for development. Making people “understand that it is wise to invest in this”, however, is “the hardest part” (Einar). Several suggestions are offered as to the kinds of exhibits that might help to build a heritage museum up successfully. These stem from perceptions of how best to truly create an interest in heritage and connect visitors to the past, and include stepping outside the bounds of *maritime* heritage as well as focusing on small things, such as household items, that have not quite attained the hundred- year mark by which artefacts are defined as heritage, in legal terms.

I think it's important to have something from your own lifetime, from your youth. You connect psychologically, you get much more excited about something that you used to know, and has now disappeared, than something from the time of your mother or grandmother. (Ingibjörg)

While the concept of authenticity is not directly addressed as such in the discussion, it is inherent in many of the opinions that participants express, as, for example, in the case of the SMM. Authentic representation is, on one hand, thought of as necessary in order to portray one’s culture with honesty and integrity to tourists. On the other hand, it is the key element in facilitating a real feeling of connection to the past and thus to cultural identity. For Einar, some of the most poignant local representations of Icelandic cultural heritage are the WFHM’s screening of the film *Give Us This Day*, which chronicles a typical day of fishing in the early twentieth century, and the old fishing station at Ósvör, which now serves as a heritage museum.

What [is] very important for *me*, about the cultural heritage, is a phenomenon like Ósvör. And to have it there as it is now. It helped me a whole lot to understand my ancestors, my father, my grandfather and grandmothers. 'Cause I had heard all the stories, and the tellings and so on, but to be able to observe it, and see how it *was*, then things, yes, they start to fit, and you understand them much better. And you understand where you come from... A phenomenon like Ósvör is much *better* than the museum... It is at the right place, the boat is as the boats were, and the housings, we believe- at least you can imagine and understand the conditions. (Einar)

6.4 Observations and Experiences of Cultural Identity

Cultural identity, as experienced by participants, presents itself primarily as a matter of comparison to and differentiation from other cultures. Einar's example of the documentary that is screened at the WFHM, cited in section 6. 3, serves to highlight the notion that in coming face to face with this kind of a representation of the nation's history he understands that "this is *me*, this is *my* people, this is *my* history". This feeling is especially strong when he views the film in the presence of his foreign students, who are taking it in through the eyes of people from other backgrounds. Further, such a film provides a contrast with what he has learned and experienced of other countries, thereby allowing him to differentiate himself and to understand wherein the difference lies along with what makes him and his culture unique.

Valdimar feels that living abroad made him realize he was different from others, although he is unable to grasp what this feeling of difference is rooted in. He does not identify in the least with the sagas, nor can he think of anything from Icelandic culture with which he does strongly identify. Einar, who has also spent time living abroad, states simply that when one is faced, inevitably, with the other, "the picture becomes much clearer" regarding one's identity.

Ólöf displays a perplexity similar to Valdimar's on the subject of cultural identity, stating emphatically "I *never* think about this". However, likewise reflecting on her experience of living abroad as a student, she remembers having been under the impression that she possessed both a mental and physical capacity to work harder and longer than her non-Icelandic counterparts. Several groans, sighs, and mumbles from the other participants suggests a knowing assent.

Helga, as a citizen of non- Icelandic origin, also describes cultural identity as to some extent defined by the gaze of the other. For her, this gaze has the power to validate one's identification with the culture either of the native land or the country to which one has immigrated. Her own identification with Icelandic culture, however, takes on an additional dimension through gender. As a woman, she claims, she takes pride in the hard work of the coastal women of Iceland who had the task of processing fish and who had a fundamental role in the structuring of the family and thus of society.

Ingibjörg sympathizes with the difficulty some of the participants have in describing feelings of cultural identity, noting that “for decades, we were taught to be embarrassed about our past”, particularly of the poverty and housing conditions. However, like Ólöf, she identifies Icelanders as hardworking people and believes this quality is attributable to “the old Icelandic heritage”. Being hardworking is not exclusive to Icelanders, however, nor a matter of ethnicity, as the whole group affirms that the ethnic minorities working in Icelandic fisheries are very hardworking, though poorly recognized for it outside of the workplace. Some discussion ensues regarding class distinctions, however, these stray from the main intended topics.

6.5 Heritage and Social Dynamics

The idea that heritage is embodied in the social dynamics of a nation, region, or community plays a central part in the discussion. Participants see the social dynamics of Westfjords communities as defining the regional and local cultures extensively. For Ingibjörg, who was born on a farm in the northlands (*Norðurland*) and moved to Ísafjörður with her family as a child, maritime heritage was, initially, entirely unfamiliar. Throughout her lifetime, what has impressed upon her most about local identity is its strict association with family and ancestry. “The family... [is] a very closed unit”, she says, explaining that despite establishing herself and being respected and well- liked in the community, she has never been considered *Ísfirðingur*. Einar, who was born into a large family in Ísafjörður, and who went to school with Ingibjörg, confirms this, joking “you’ll never be”. Similarly, Ólöf, who was born in Ísafjörður and has since moved to the nearby town of Suðureyri, claims that not only is she not considered a local there; but her mother, who was among the women pioneers moving to Ísafjörður to settle in and learn homemaking skills at the local school for housewives, never came to be considered a local, herself. Yet Einar, with whom Ólöf grew up, refers to her frequently as a fellow local patriot. Helga, like Ingibjörg, explains that despite also being well- established and well- liked in the community, she tends to be forgotten when events are being planned or various types of meetings held, and finds that she has to extend herself to others socially rather than to expect invitations to meet or participate in events. Einar confirms that it is generally true that “you can easily be lost, even in this small community”.

The exclusivity of the family in and around Ísafjörður is attributed to its stability as a social unit, by contrast with friendships and other interpersonal associations. Aside from social contact in the workplace and through hobbies, most relationships are played out within the family. Friendships are often formed in the workplace, but are also often limited to the workplace, as the home is quite literally the private sphere. Likewise, friendships and small group associations, like the communities to which they belong, are prone to dissolution by the departure of one or more individuals, for example to work or study in the city or abroad. Such departures, by breaking social bonds, affect the identities of individuals to the extent that these are socially constructed.

Additionally, Ingibjörg notes that the community's social life has traditionally been at once gendered and place- based. For housewives, it was normal to have friends visit for coffee, whereas men tended to be at sea or out on the docks. Their social lives, then, were enacted around work and they virtually never invited friends into the home. Likewise, gender relations and family structure have been defined by the nature of a community's means of sustenance and geographical setting. Thus, for example, men were the heads of households and leaders of community affairs in the relatively sedentary farming societies. By contrast, women were "much more independent" and "self- sufficient" in fishing societies as a result of having to raise families and uphold communities in the absence of the seamen (Ingibjörg). In light of the existence of such regional particularities, Ingibjörg believes that cultural heritage is bound to differ subtly from one place to another. Einar, on the other hand, is uncertain, as he is uncertain that such place- based social dynamics have always been this way.

6.6 The Historicity of Culture

Social structures and interactions such as those described in section 6.5 are, indeed, seen as being bound to history and therefore marked by change. For many rural communities, the loss of "the young people, the educated people, and the people with initiative" (Ingibjörg) has had resounding impacts on local communities and therefore, with time, on their identities (Ingibjörg). In the Westfjords, the reason for this loss is the fact that the fishing industry is "losing weight" (Einar) and the younger generations, seeing no future in it, are opting for higher education. A higher education is not only seen as opening the doors to business and positions of higher authority. It is also a move away from the owner/ worker

dichotomy of the fisheries, whereby ship owners and captains are in the most well- to- do and powerful of positions by contrast with ordinary fishermen or factory workers, whose positions are viewed as commonplace or even low and undesirable. While modern times have brought modern opportunities such as policy, governance, and fisheries sciences, the youth are thought to be deterred from pursuing these opportunities because there is no demand for them in the industry. Similarly, since the decline in fish stocks and the introduction of the ITQ system, there has been less demand for fishermen and captains. Thus, while society's traditionally high regard for these individuals still exists, general cultural attitudes about fishing are changing dramatically as the economy transitions.

Where the transitioning of the economy is concerned, foreigners are seen as having the advantage in being able to recognize the opportunities available to Iceland and to the Westfjords, especially- opportunities that "the old Icelandic community" does not see (Einar). Participants univocally agree that "our future depends on foreigners now" (Einar), and see multiculturalism as a welcome herald of positive changes and an expanding sense of cultural identity.

Just as society and the economy change, so, too, do cultural attitudes and conceptions of what is valuable cultural heritage. Taking up Ingibjörg's idea that Icelanders were once taught to be ashamed of their past, Valdimar comments on the way in which the public image of turf houses (*bustabær*) has changed over time, from having been perceived as worthless and demolished indiscriminately, to being at the center of domestic criticism as to how quick Icelanders are to discard such heritage treasures.

While changes accompanying an increasingly multicultural society are thought to be beneficial, there is nonetheless a sense of cultural origins that has shaped identity and that, in Ingibjörg's view, is fading as traditional practices fade and rural regions face the threat of desertion as a result:

In essence, culture of course is about humans, about human life, and, here in the Westfjords... what is it that has shaped the human life through the centuries, and all the way into the present... definitely this is the sea, and fishing, and all that, possibly other aspects of this area, the landscape and the fjords and mountains and all that... there is one thing that we haven't, maybe, touched on- we have mentioned how... people have been moving away from the Westfjords and how people are fighting for their life. The livelihood that made the culture of the past has now changed, so the culture of the present cannot be built on the same way, so we feel that we are both losing our people and heritage itself, away from the Westfjords. And it's especially hurtful because we have a whole area in the north that is *entirely* deserted, and this is such a visible *threat*, because we have this area there. And, we even say, "who will be the last to turn the lights off when the last of the area will be deserted?"

Ingibjörg explains that these changes are very real, immediate, and threatening to Westfjords residents and, as such, incorporate themselves into the fabric of cultural heritage. Thus, it is important that they be represented and that the people who are affected by them be given a voice in cultural heritage museums. Einar also underlines the importance of communicating social change in heritage representations. However, for him, this is a matter of showing “how the Icelandic people survived across the eras of the sagas, of farming, and of fishing, how they “are coping with the present” and how they “are going to cope with the future”.

6.7 Closing Comments on Cultural Identity and Heritage Representation

In concluding, participants are asked to reflect momentarily on the discussion and to summarize, briefly, what for them are the most significant aspects of Westfjords cultural heritage and how they think local museums can work toward preserving and promoting these. For Ingibjörg, the most important aspects of regional heritage are its maritime culture and the social changes that are affecting the region, as cited in section 6.5. The same can generally be said for Einar, who reiterates that heritage museums must operate as businesses because heritage is primarily being consumed by tourists. Likewise, they must work to change domestic attitudes about cultural heritage so that its economic potential, which Einar believes exceeds that of the fisheries, is recognized and acted upon.

Helga maintains that the early days of the fisheries, which she refers to as “the flowering time in Ísafjörður”, are the most important aspect of regional heritage to represent, particularly in light of her perception that this is precisely what tourists to the region with an interest in culture come to learn about. Representation of this period must be done in an experiential, storied, and contextualized manner in order to bring the heritage to life and

capture the interest of visitors. It is very important, in this regard, to be able to touch artefacts or otherwise have a sensory experience, such as at Ósvör, as well as to be in the presence of someone who can explain the exhibits in an interesting way.

Ólöf sees opportunities for using modern technology to simulate aspects of the Westfjords' relationship with nature and the challenges and threats it has posed to communities in the region. As she sees it, the Westfjords are characterized by endurance in the face of harsh weather conditions, deaths and disappearances at sea, and avalanches, and these things can be made tangible and very interesting to visitors who do not know what it is like to live in such an environment.

Valdimar points out that despite the region's Viking- era heritage, museums remain fixated with a history that dates back to around 1900, at the earliest. He believes that regional identity would be revitalized if more effort were consecrated to representing earlier periods in the history of the Westfjords:

There's one thing that's missing in all this. We have Viking stories and so on here, but we're missing a lot of stories, the history of the Westfjords here between 1300 to 1800, 1900, so, I think that's a *huge* stuff which has to be brought up in order to... get ourselves *proud of being* from the Westfjords again. Because, thirty years ago, when I left, we were quite proud here. But then I come back here, everybody's sort of, 'it's the worst place in the country' and things like that, it's *completely* different than it was thirty years ago. So, how to sort of turn it around, that would be one of the ways of doing it.

7 Discussion

7.1 Representation as the Meeting of Style and Ideology

Despite the sparsity of academic investigation into Icelandic heritage museums from the perspectives I have adopted in the present master's thesis, the Sea Monster Museum and the Westfjords Heritage Museum embody precisely the kinds of phenomena that are at the heart of the existing literature. On one hand, they are simultaneously subject to and participating in changing conceptions of cultural heritage in Iceland, and on the other they exemplify many of the problems that fuel contemporary debates about identity, heritage, and representation. Further, they are crystal clear mirrors of the social and political systems in which they are embedded, along with the paradigms that govern these.

The configurations of identity in the ethos of each museum are dynamic. Where the SMM is concerned, identity is the medium for creating economic opportunity in Bíldudalur. In the case of the WFHM, identity is an end, i.e., something that must be remembered and reinforced through preservation. However, the museums' representational choices shift the positioning of identities on the means- ends spectrum. Community identity appears to have been reawakening as a consequence of the SMM's creative uptake of local heritage, thus it has gone from being the museum's motivational means to being an end to continue striving for in spite of any adversity. Conversely, where the WFHM maintains a focus on preserving symbols of national identity as the most important end in sight, its means for doing so, and for communicating the values attached to these symbols, are stifled by insufficient financing and difficulties in conceiving of developments that maintain a balance between entertaining and educational representations. Without a strong, determinate, and unified vision for the future, the museum's own identity becomes confused in the process of meeting these challenges.

This raises several important points. First, although the individuals interviewed in the context of each case study can be situated within a similar cultural landscape due to common experiences of maritime culture, they differ widely in their ways of engaging with this landscape. Thus, so do their outlooks on its interpretation and representation by museums. The SMM is clearly a participant in the ‘new ethnography’ (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013) of the Icelandic countryside. It is not entirely free from the shadow of a heritage associated with ‘collective origins’ (Holtorf, lecture, 2011), in a local sense (cf. Júlíusdóttir, 2010). Nonetheless, its focus on process and design (Bernharðsson, 2007; 2003) signal concerns that Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir (2013) place at the heart of all such museums that are preoccupied with the welfare of their local communities and the enjoyment of visitors. By contrast, the WFHM is invested in its collection and typically exhibits artefacts in the more static style that Bernharðsson (2007; 2003) associates with older ideologies of heritage representation, and that distances visitors from its heritage content (Bernharðsson, 2007; 2003).

Secondly, representative style and design feed straight back into identity either by maintaining or challenging what Holtorf (lecture, 2011) sees as an untenable concept of heritage, as well as the ‘authorized heritage discourse’ (Smith, 2008) that has given rise to the familiar imagery associated with Icelandic maritime history. The SMM, spurred on by business interests, has been quicker to enact this challenge by paying homage to folk culture and providing a space in which the public may actively engage with it through various media. Thus, although it does not identify itself as a maritime heritage museum nor, by the same token, does the literature on maritime museums recognize institutions of this kind that are devoted to intangible folk heritage, the SMM is the antithesis to the maritime museums that promote what is arguably, despite its humble origins, an elitist narrative of Icelandic history and culture (cf. McLean, 2008; Leffler, 2004; Day & Lunn, 2003; Hicks, 2001).

The WFHM is by no means a crusader of elite representation, however. This is evident, on one hand, in the concerns of the staff to reintroduce exhibits about farm culture, which, in the collective memory, is associated with dark and difficult times in Iceland’s history. On the other, the fact that the WFHM is moving toward embracing new representative ideals indicates that it is making efforts to render heritage more accessible to a wider public and thus vernacularizing itself as an institution. The WFHM of the future, then, might be one

exhibiting increased appeal to the emotions as a complement to or enhancement of its more demanding intellectual material (e.g., text-heavy informative plaques), and that invites visitors to participate in heritage interpretation and identity construction through interactive exhibits, rather than relating to them as passive audiences (cf. McLean, 2008; Bernharðsson, 2007; Bernharðsson, 2003). In this sense, it may benefit from emulating the SMM, which uses interactive media in attempting to create an affective learning environment that will act as a catalyst to intellectual inquisitiveness about sea monsters. An interesting note on this point is the fact that while many of the informants to the WFHM case study present an intellectual discourse on national maritime heritage, although notably laced with sentiment, the informants to the SMM study, by contrast, are very expressive of affect in their relationships with their cultural landscape. It is a matter of small wonder, then, that the philosophies of representation underlying the museums' exhibits manifest, by turns, as primarily intellectual or emotional in public appeal.

It is hardly a coincidence that the WFHM's shift in its conception of heritage is occurring alongside the growth of tourism. It would appear that as tourism places increasing demands on the museum, it is being required to adopt a more entrepreneurial mindset in order to become an economically valuable resource for the community. Interestingly, the ideals that the WFHM is being driven to adopt by virtue of catering to the tourism industry are the same ones that are seen by some as the only viable way of reconnecting the local community and Icelanders to the heritage it represents. Herein lies the paradox of representations of the vernacular and popular education styles of representation: that in their attempts to nurture an interest among an increasingly jaded public or a youth distanced from its origins, they run the risk of romanticizing the past and fostering uncritical attitudes about it (Day & Lunn, 2003).

While it might be argued that the WFHM is vernacular by nature, considering the rustic origins of the artefacts, pictures, and stories it displays, it participates in an ethnocentric and predominantly masculine narrative of the life of the fisherman, a highly regarded figure in society. Additionally, its potential for feeding into a sense of national pride that touts the culture, variously, as one of tough, loud, crazy, extreme, and sovereign survivalists puts it dangerously on the verge of lapsing into stereotypes (cf. Crooke, 2008). It is in this sense that it can be said both to romanticize the image and the life of the fisherman, to which, in part, the latter depiction of the culture owes its existence, and to

elevate it to an elite status in heritage representation, if it does not already enjoy that status in the cultural mindset.

7.2 Inner Workings and Outward Expressions of Identity

As mentioned in section 7.1, though identity figures prominently in the fundamental principles of each museum, it does so in different ways. The WFHM operates on the premise of a collective valorization of national identity and its incarnation at the regional level. This is problematic not only for the reasons of omission, romanticizing, and stereotyping noted above, but also because it risks emphasizing national identity over regional, local, and even individual ones, a problem outlined by Graham & Howard (2008). Despite being a museum devoted to the heritage of the region, its collection embodies ideals of national identity shaped by the history of seafaring and fishing. There is little attention to the less tangible aspects of regional heritage beyond the annual salted cod festival and the collection of accordions said to have been integral to folk festivities. Further, an informative exhibit about the region's flora and fauna is located on the uppermost floor and does not seem to receive the same attention as do the cultural artefacts. Perhaps this will change with the new exhibit on the Hornstrandir wilderness area, the building for which is slated for construction in the summer of 2014.

Nevertheless, the values underlying the WFHM's endeavours to preserve and to promote heritage as a matter of national identity are genuine, appealing to a sense of selfhood, pride in one's origins, awareness of the uniqueness of one's culture, and to intergenerational recognition and continuity in matters of identity. Further, acknowledgement on the part of some informants that women are underrepresented and of others that farming culture is, as well, signals an essentially democratic mindset. This is especially true with regards to farming, considering that it has traditionally been looked back upon with shame, but raises the question as to if and why folklore is neglected as a matter of shame (cf. Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013). By contrast, there is much respect, admiration, and pride expressed, by turns, in the role that women played in early fish processing, thus it is incumbent upon the museum to further democratize its picture of national identity where gender is concerned.

That there has been little, if any, thought given to taking up multiculturalism and the ethnic workforce in the museum's representations may be an innocent slight due to the fact that multiculturalism in Iceland is relatively recent and has not yet concretized itself in the national, regional, or local identities. Yet the museum, as an inherently powerful cultural force, could very well facilitate this by giving ethnic minorities a face, a voice, and a presence in the heritage discourse (cf. McLean, 2008). Further, as part and parcel of the social changes that are at the heart of the WFHM's cultural chronology, the question must be posed as to the ways in which they have been absorbed into or shaped national identity. Such inclusion would not only be welcome, but is seen as a duty of the museum, as is evident from the results of the focus group.

While such questions are less applicable to the SMM given its subject matter, it is nonetheless important that the museum not be caught in the trap of cultivating a single image of local identity to the exclusion of others, especially in relation to the ways in which gender and different ethnicities impress upon the cultural landscape (cf. Júlíusdóttir, 2010). Similarly, because the SMM is of a markedly local flavour, it must be attentive to any possibilities of excluding the values of Icelanders from other regions in its representations, a danger signalled by both Júlíusdóttir (2010) and focus group participants in different contexts. At present, this does not appear to be a real threat, as all those involved with the museum are keen on expanding its scope to make it a national and international center for cryptozoology. However, given the complexity of beliefs about the existence of sea monsters and of the social attitudes regarding these beliefs throughout Arnarfjörður, the museum must take the utmost care not to contribute to discord and division lines between people identifying as 'believers' and 'non-believers'. Thus, while giving a voice to the 'believers' by documenting their stories of encounters with sea monsters, museum professionals must ask themselves whether they are bringing positive attention to these individuals and their stories or fuelling contempt toward them within the community by formalizing stereotypes in their images and narratives (cf. Crooke, 2008).

It is important to note that there are significant similarities between the ways in which matters of identity are handled by the mayors of Bolungarvík and Súðavík, answering for the WFHM, on one hand, and the owners of the SMM, on the other. All four individuals display an exceptional sense of solidarity with their respective communities, and their expressions of identity are tied to locality in a way that those of the Ísafjörður-based

informants are not, in addition to being less insistent upon national identity. Their ideas of history, rather than being dominated by the national narrative, are shaped by personal histories as well as by memory of their communities' hardships. Likewise, they are all of a notably entrepreneurial mindset, whether in relation to the museums themselves or to local development, particularly through tourism. While this is not a subject that can be explored in great depth here, it points to the notion that there are, indeed, very strong local identities embedded in yet independent of regional and national ones. The extent to which they reflect national identity is defined by the extent to which they boast pride as a cultural characteristic. However, they are also distinguishable from national identity in that this pride, though sharing in a recognition of national origins and progress, departs from it in its cultivation at the regional and local levels based on the presence of local landmarks and community initiatives that put each town 'on the map' internationally. Thus the work of identity construction within local and regional settings occurs with reference to national and international contexts.

Additionally, the mayors of Bolungarvík and Súðavík, as well as the SMM's owners, show a pointed interest in contemporary economic activity in their communities and thus for local identities as they take shape in the present and project into the future through visioning and planning for the economic growth of each town. By contrast, the historicity of cultural identity as described by the informants residing in Ísafjörður is defined in relation to the past.

A most interesting phenomenon is that during the interviews with the mayors of Bolungarvík and Súðavík, who had been chosen as informants to my WFHM case study, it proved difficult to contain the discussion within the bounds of the WFHM. Rather, Elías had much to say about Ósvör and the planned future developments around it, whereas Ómar Már was very enthusiastic in outlining the numerous business opportunities and initiatives present in Súðavík and returned to the topic time and again. This may be for the simple reason that the responsibilities of these individuals with regards to the WFHM are more remote from those of other individuals dwelling in Ísafjörður, particularly the mayor, as well as being anchored in each of their respective towns. Nonetheless, it underlines the strength of local identity and local interests in very small communities. It also raises the question as to whether it may be the comparative cosmopolitanism of Ísafjörður that distinguishes it from Bolungarvík, Súðavík, and Bíldudalur in this way, i.e., whether it is

the case that local identity is homogeneous in the four smaller communities and less so in Ísafjörður. If this is, indeed, the case, it may also be at the heart of the WFHM's struggle to define itself in relation to the changing views and roles of museums in Iceland. However, rather than being seen as a challenge or a threat, it should be seen as an opportunity- not least by seeking to house the more inclusive forms of representation discussed above.

7.3 Applications of Ethical Theory

An ethical reading of the preceding sections uncovers fertile grounds for professional engagement with matters of ethics in heritage representation and the business of cultural tourism.

The most transparent distinction between the SMM and the WFHM in these matters is that the WFHM can be seen as operating on the basis of a deontological principle of sorts, whereas the SMM is a hybrid of deontological and utilitarian concerns embodied in personal virtues. In other words, the WFHM, on one hand, while perhaps not acting in accordance with an official code of ethics, is striving to employ the most appropriate means to attaining what it upholds as the ultimate goal, which is to preserve cultural heritage for posterity. The SMM, on the other, shows evidence of a dialectical synthesis of ethical theories in action (cf. Jamal & Menzel, 2009). First, there is a utilitarian end in sight, i.e., the greater good for the greatest amount of people in Bíldudalur through economic regeneration and, perhaps, a renewed cultural solidarity in the local folk heritage. Second, there is the principled notion that despite the business and 'fun' aspects of the museum, measures must be taken to ensure not only the preservation but the authentic representation of the folklore. Third, these principles and ideals are enjoined in the *genuine good will* of the people operating, employed at, or otherwise involved with the SMM. This good will is manifest in sincere social and cultural concerns as well as in a heartfelt desire for guests to enjoy themselves and to learn something over the course of their visits.

It is interesting that while the SMM, classified as a 'center' under the Icelandic museum laws (*Safnalög*) and therefore having no legal obligation in terms of heritage preservation, its owners and staff nonetheless cite preservation as a duty. Additionally, while they deem it a priority to maintain a balance between the educational and entertaining elements so that

a standard of cultural authenticity is upheld, they are in fact both enacting existential authenticity and providing a space in which visitors may do so as well. An outstanding example of this is the interest of the main full- time staff member in bringing elements of steampunk culture to the museum's aesthetics and operations. Steampunk, by its very nature, plays with anachronism, and, on the surface, is all but a complete cultural misfit in the Icelandic context. Yet Ingimar identifies with it very strongly and, as the filter through which he views and engages with his surroundings, it appears to be his medium for enacting existential authenticity in ways resembling those observed by Kim & Jamal (2007) at the Texas Renaissance Festival. Similarly, Ingimar's desire to craft an experience of the museum and of the surrounding countryside that brings to life steampunk ideals such as mystery and adventure is indicative of a desire to offer visitors the opportunity to engage with the cultural landscape in an existentially authentic way as well. In this sense, the SMM may be seen as going beyond representation, i.e., breaking the barriers built by traditional representative styles through the imposition of a self/ other dynamic, and inviting visitors to participate in the local culture by simultaneously identifying with and differentiating themselves from it in the process.

The WFHM, in re-evaluating its concepts of representation and priming itself for the new era in ethnographic museology in Iceland (cf. Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013), is moving towards an ideal of existential authenticity as well. Many of the informants to the case study are well aware of the changing cultural landscape, but remain fixated on a notion of material authenticity that is tied to the museum's collection of nineteenth and early twentieth century artefacts. While it is possible, through the organization of more experiential exhibits, to create ways for visitors to enact existential authenticity in this context, it would also be a worthwhile enterprise to create representations and experiences of more modern or contemporary aspects of heritage such as, for example, the high- tech industries that now service the fisheries. Exhibiting modern- day pieces of equipment to this end, or replicas of the existing artefacts for various practical purposes, may not line up with ingrained notions of material authenticity. However, such exhibits may come into an authenticity of their own as they are taken up in the existential engagement of visitors with their cultural surroundings (cf. Cohen, 1988).

Laying aside ethical theory and taking up common Western notions of good and right conduct, it is important to note that despite the myriad ways in which the museums engage,

however consciously or unconsciously, with ethics, there are significant ethical failures or pitfalls for both. These are outlined in section 7.2. In order to truly practice ethical museology, the WFHM must turn its own gaze and that of its visitors to those currently excluded from its representations. Similarly, the SMM must remain attentive to the ways in which it acts upon local culture and contributes to the morphology of the cultural landscape. Indeed, those involved in making decisions for the two museums, as spokespersons for culture, have a responsibility to ask themselves continually not ‘what should we do?’ but, rather, ‘who are we, *really*, and what are we saying about ourselves?’

7.4 Personal Observations and Concluding Remarks

On a personal note, one of the more eye- opening findings of my study is that maritime heritage, although important in the Icelandic cultural mindset, is not really ‘the issue’. Throughout the processes of data collection, analysis, and writing, I was intrigued by the extent to which the relatively narrow concept of maritime heritage opened the door not only to a broader discussion of cultural heritage and representation, but also to a sea of cross- scale social, political, and even personally- tinged issues. Indeed, it was this discovery that led me back to the idea of cultural landscapes, which I had read about but shelved, thinking that the maritime environment was the only cultural landscape with which I need to concern myself. By contrast, the idea of the cultural landscape is now at the very heart of my belief that existential authenticity is the most relevant theory of ethics to consider in managing heritage museums in the Westfjords, given the times and the issues particular to cultural museology in Iceland, as the cultural landscape is the symbolic whole with which the self engages when visiting heritage museums. As discussed in section 7.3, local, regional, and national identities will no longer hold given traditional styles of representation, nor will these styles do justice to the myriad individual identities participating in heritage- making; particularly in the face of tourism and its tsunami- force power to impact upon culture. Thus, my first recommendation for heritage museums in the Westfjords is that they strive to go *beyond representation* and to invite the public to co- create culture and identity by participating in them in the museum space (which need not be confined to what is inside the walls of the built museum). Of course, the creation of a space for the enactment of existential authenticity must be tempered by principles and a view of desirable ends in order to avoid the trap of promoting a view that ‘anything goes as

long as people are having a good time’ - a view which can easily be abused to the ends of monetary profit.

A number of important questions arise regarding the implications of the co- construction of identity given a public consisting largely of foreign tourists. Because the focus of the present thesis has been primarily on producers and less so on consumers of heritage, any insight into these questions offered herein would be speculative. Future research, however, might address the question as to whether identity is a concern for foreign visitors to museums, what kind of a role they might have in co- constructing identity and culture with a local host community, and what such co- construction might mean for more conventional heritage museums that aim to preserve heritage in the same vein as the WFHM. Section 7.3 introduces the idea of the participation of foreign visitors in local cultures through simultaneous processes of identification and differentiation facilitated by the museum experience. This idea may serve as a theoretical roadmap for exploring the issues listed above.

Despite the importance of the relationship between heritage museums and cultural tourism, it has proven difficult to glean any more than a cursory understanding of how the latter affects or plays into the mores of the former, possibly as a consequence, in part, of my focus on heritage production. Perhaps the most important observation I can offer is that Lára Magnúsdóttir (2013; 2011; personal communications, 2014) is right to discern a need for the involvement of the humanities in managing this phenomenon. Although her concern regarding the production of “cheap cultural imitations” might be a comment on material authenticity, it can apply to existential matters as well. Indeed, the production of cheap, generic experiences would backfire in terms of existential authenticity, acting as a barrier to true cultural engagement. Thus they would be no less damaging to the reputations of museums, communities, or the country, nor, by consequence, to the economy. As a case in point, the WFHM’s association of national identity with concepts such as pride and survival could, in theory, lapse into stereotyping and ridicule in terms of representation, whereas, carefully managed, it might serve to cultivate dignity and honour the nation’s ancestors by highlighting their hard work and persistence in building a cohesive society. While scholars are by no means the only people capable of seeing this, their training, skills, and insights would without doubt be of benefit in crafting the museum experience to the latter ends.

The SMM, which has been on the receiving end of criticism citing vulgarity, inauthenticity, and the promotion of falsities about Icelandic culture, was, by contrast, conceived as a tasteful representation of the sea monster folklore and a high quality cultural tourism product. It is unclear what the greater public perception of it is, but it is telling that both the Stefansson Arctic Institute (2009) and Lára Magnúsdóttir herself (personal communication, March 26th, 2014) see it in this positive light.

It is not a coincidence that as a student of philosophy and an ethicist, at heart, I nod to Lára's critique of cultural tourism. For the same reasons that she outlines as the basis for a need for cultural tourism management frameworks stemming from the humanities, as well as in relation to the findings of my research and the issues outlined throughout this chapter, I am, myself, very much a proponent of practical applications of philosophy and, most importantly, ethics, in the context of heritage representations and cultural tourism. Thus, my second recommendation for Westfjords heritage museums is that they open their doors to people who are knowledgeable about such matters and truly engage with people and problems both personally and professionally, intellectually and emotionally. The participants in my focus group, though not discussing ethics, directly, were keenest in their perception of the need for collaborative, integrated management of heritage museums as tourism sites, pointing to the notion that multi-level collaboration can only enrich the experience. In concurrence with this idea, I suggest that such collaboration might also quiet the bickering among museums as to which is a truer picture of cultural heritage or identity and set up a network for sharing information, knowledge, and experiences that will unite them in their diversity and help to promote richer and more nuanced cultural images and experiences.

Viewed in this light, opportunities for future research into cultural museology abound. Some issues relating directly to the subjects of the present master's thesis but that I have not been able to address here are tourist perceptions and motivations in visiting various types of Icelandic heritage museums; the role of affect in generating critical responses to cultural representations; the relationships of rural youth with cultural heritage, representation, or tourism; absences in the representation of 'negative heritage'; and the role of museums in effecting social change, among, conceivably, many others. While I am aware of the limitations to my study imposed by the factors outlined in chapter 3, I am confident that it contributes original insights and timely questions into the dynamics and

ethos of museological heritage representation in rural Iceland. In this sense, it is of significant theoretical and practical value to the various communities whose business this is, and can be used as a springboard for future research or for experimenting with applied ethics in the management of cultural museums and, to some degree, tourism.

In closing, it seems fit to lighten the mood by sharing what I found to be the most surprising and amusing result of my study. This was the fact that while the younger of my informants associated folklore, in general, with ‘old people’ and saw it as being threatened due to a broken link with the younger generations, it was the oldest of my informants (one of whom was older than all the others by *at least* two decades) who took attitudes ranging from criticism to mockery towards it on the basis that it dates back to *very* old times! Like some of the other issues raised throughout this study, these perceptions could form the basis of a case study in and of themselves. For my purposes, suffice it to say that perhaps there is something to the resurrection of these stories for posterity, and perhaps this is precisely what the emergent ethnography (Hafsteinsson & Árnadóttir, 2013) and its concurrent styles of representation (Bernharðsson, 2007; 2003) are mirroring, however unknowingly. This, however, as Michael Ende (1979) liked to say, “is another story, and shall be told another time”.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Each interview was guided by four main questions, those listed in bold type. The bullet-pointed questions served as prompts in the event that the informant had difficulty answering, or to redirect the discussion if it strayed far beyond the bounds of the topic of research.

1) Tell me a little bit about yourself and your connection to Bíldudalur/ Ísafjörður.

- How long have you lived here? Have many generations of your family lived here?
- What do you appreciate most about living here?
- Do you feel attachment to the local community?
- What can you tell me about the community?

2) Do you feel a connection with the sea? Can you describe this connection?

- Has there been a tradition in your family of working in jobs that are related to the sea?
- Did you grow up or raise your own children hearing/ telling stories about the sea?
- How did these stories affect you when you were growing up? What purpose do they have for you now, as an adult?
- Is any of this typically the case for others in the community?

3) SMM: What is the role of sea monsters in local cultural heritage?

- Are they an important part of your culture and traditions? How about those of the Bíldudalur community, at large?
- Does the folklore create a sense of belonging to this community, of sharing something unique with the people around you?
- Does the folklore shape your feelings about the sea? What kind of a role would you say the folklore plays in the community's relationship to the sea?

WFHM: What is the role of the sea in local cultural heritage?

- Is it an important part of your culture and traditions? How about those of the community of Ísafjörður, at large?
- Does the sea create a sense of belonging to this community, of sharing something unique with the people around you? How about coastal or sea-based practices?
- Do traditional or current coastal and sea- based practices shape your feelings

about the sea? What kind of a role would you say these practices play in the community's relationship to the sea?

4) What do you think of the Sea Monster Museum/ Westfjords Heritage Museum as a cultural heritage institution?

- What value do you think the museum has for the community? Who does it have value for in the community? What's the nature of this value- cultural, economic?
- Which cultural or community values does the museum represent?
- Does it communicate these values well to people visiting from foreign countries? How about from other parts of Iceland?
- What do you think makes it successful or unsuccessful at representing or communicating these values?
- Do any of its physical features have a role in this communication? What about non- physical features? Is it true to the stories and beliefs it portrays?
- Do you feel that it preserves and promotes your heritage?
- What were your impressions when it first began servicing the public/ you began working there/ you first became involved with it? What do you imagine the future of the site is?

5) Do you have any final comments about anything we've discussed? Is there anything you would like to add to the discussion?

Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide

The discussion guide was conceived as an exhaustive list of questions to prompt participants to speak, if necessary, as well as to direct the discussion over a planned two-hour session. The conversation was bounded by four main categories, listed in bold type. Many of the sub- topics in each category arose naturally in the discussion, but many were also left unaddressed due to the flow and the time limits of the conversation. I allowed the group a significant degree of self- direction but reined the discussion in using questions from the guide when it strayed far off- topic.

Building Up (Að Byggja Upp):

In my interviews, a concern that I have consistently come across is that of building up local cultural heritage museums, and I'm interested in learning more about what the perceived implications of this are. This evening, I'd like to have a discussion about what you think cultural heritage means and what you think about some of the museums in this region, and I'd like to end the discussion by coming around to your thoughts about 'building up'.

General Sentiments about the Community (Samfélagið):

- When I asked the people I was interviewing what they appreciate the most about living in the Westfjords, here are some of the answers they gave me:

- Short distances to go to places you need to go to, or get the things you need.
- You are close to nature- the mountains and the sea are near, you have a lot of freedom to be outside, you can go for hikes or walks very easily, the scenery is beautiful, etc.
- Most people know each other, it is a safe place for children, everyone shares in each other's joys and sorrows.
- People are open- minded, and it's a rich and varied community- there are lots of different cultures, and there's a lot going on.

Please discuss these statements. Do you agree with them? What are some of the characteristics of your community that *you* like the most and least?

Do you agree with the following statement?

"These small communities in the Westfjords ask that you participate in what happens in the community, and it's easier for people to be involved in what happens than it is in the city. For example, it would be easy for somebody with an idea for a project, to start this project, and to get people involved in making it happen".

Why do you agree with it, or why not? Please comment/ discuss.

Thoughts on the Meaning of 'Cultural Heritage' (Menningararfur) and Sentiments with Regards to Icelandic Cultural Heritage:

Generally, cultural heritage is defined as the things that you inherit from the past, which are a part of your culture and of who you are, and which you take care of in the present in order to pass it along to future generations. (Definition adapted from Wikipedia). These things can be tangible, for example, material artefacts, such as the old things you find in a museum, or they can be intangible, for example traditional songs, dances, stories, knowledge, or even language (*ibid*). They can also be parts of nature, for example protected areas such as national parks, landscapes, or natural features that have a connection to the culture- for example, the farm Sæbol, near Þingeyri, is culturally important in Iceland because it is the site where the Gísli Saga took place.

- Let's talk about this definition: Do you agree with it? Fully or in part? What about it do you agree/ disagree with?
- Is there anything that you would add to or take away from the list of things that are considered a part of cultural heritage?
- What are some of the things that you consider part of Icelandic cultural heritage?
- For those of you who were not born here, what kinds of things do you consider part of *your* cultural heritage/ the cultural heritage of your country of birth?
- What about those of you who were born here but whose parents or ancestors are from somewhere else? Do you feel that you have more than one heritage?
- How do you compare Icelandic heritage with the heritage of other places in the world, or of your ancestral country?
- Do you think that the idea of cultural heritage is simple and clear? Do you think there are problems with it? What are these problems?

What do you think about the following statements about cultural heritage?

1) "Cultural heritage is about *old* things that show the history, or the past, of a society. Objects in a heritage museum should reflect this".

- What about societies that are not so old? Do they have valuable cultural heritage?
- Is the heritage of a society that is modernizing rapidly, such as Iceland, limited to its artefacts or oldest practices?
- Can heritage in general, then, also be about changes that are taking place here and now, or about the way a society is moving toward the future? Can it be a dynamic process rather than something that is fixed in the past?

2) "You always want to know about how people were living in the past".

- Do you agree? Does this apply only to the country you were born in or live in, or are you generally interested in how people all over the world lived in the past?
- Do you feel this way specifically about Icelandic history and cultural heritage?
- What aspects of Icelandic heritage do you identify with the most and the least?

3) "Everybody wants to know where they come from".

- If you were not born here, or if you were born here but are from a different ethnic (**þjóðarbrót**) background, what does 'where you come from' mean to you? Are Icelandic history and heritage a part of this?
- How about those of you of Icelandic ethnicity (**þjóðerni**)? Perhaps you have lived in another country at some time, or you have a strong appreciation for a certain other culture. Is 'where you come from' a term that is limited to Iceland, or can it include other places?

4) "The past, cultural heritage, and museums are things that we don't really appreciate, or even that we find boring, when we're young, but that we learn to appreciate as we get older. It becomes more important for us, as we get older, to remember where we came from".

- Do you agree? Have you felt this way, yourself, throughout your life?
- What do you think motivates people who work for museums and other similar institutions to preserve cultural heritage?

- What do you think of the idea of preserving heritage in order to hand it down to younger generations? Is it important to do this?
- Is it important to know about the past of a place you did not come from?

5) "Knowing where you come from helps you to know where you are going".

6) "Knowing the past makes you open- minded".

7) "Knowing the past helps children and young people know why things are the way they are".

Let's talk, for a moment, about intangible cultural heritage in light of some of the things we just discussed.

- Do you think this kind of cultural heritage is as important as physical artefacts?
- Does it play an equal role in reminding us of who we are and where we came from?
- Can it help us know where we are going in the future, as a society?
- Can it help to make us more open- minded people?
- Does it have value for children and younger generations? What is the nature of this value?
- Does it matter how old intangible heritage is? Do only traditional songs, dances, and stories, for example, have cultural heritage value?

Thoughts on the Roles and Responsibilities of Cultural Heritage Institutions in General, and of Byggðasafnið and Skrímslasetrið in particular (if and where possible):

Now that we've talked about cultural heritage, I'd like to turn the discussion to cultural heritage museums.

- Considering the opinions you expressed about cultural heritage up to this point, what do you think is the general role of a heritage museum? Who does a heritage museum have responsibilities toward (within a community and without?)
- What are these responsibilities?
- Whose responsibilities are they- the government's? The museum management's? Individuals within the community, or the community at large?
- What do you think are the consequences of not fulfilling these responsibilities?
- Do the roles and responsibilities of museums representing tangible heritage differ from those of museums representing intangible heritage? If so, in what ways?

- Who should a cultural heritage museum be representing?
- Who should a heritage museum and its exhibits appeal to?
- What kinds of things should be part of an exhibit of tangible heritage? What about intangible heritage?
- What are the characteristics of a heritage museum and its exhibits that make it successful or unsuccessful at preserving heritage? What are the characteristics that make them successful at educating people about heritage?
- What do you think is the role of a heritage museum in tourism? Should its goal be to entertain or to educate? How should it use its income from tourism?

Let's now contextualize what we've been discussing: how many of you have been to (A) Byggðasafnið? How many to (B) Skrímslasetrið?

- Think about the last time you were at (A). What are the features of it that stand out the most in your memory? What impressions were you left with after this last visit? What about (B)?
- Now think about the *first* time you were there. What can you remember about the experience? How do your first and last experiences compare? What about (B)?
- What do you think are some of (A)'s strengths and weaknesses? How do these affect its ability to educate people about local cultural heritage? What about (B)?
- What do you think (A) has to offer to a visitor from abroad? What do you think the visitor can gain from this? Can the local community gain anything from the kinds of experiences visitors have? What about (B)?

If anyone has not been to either museum:

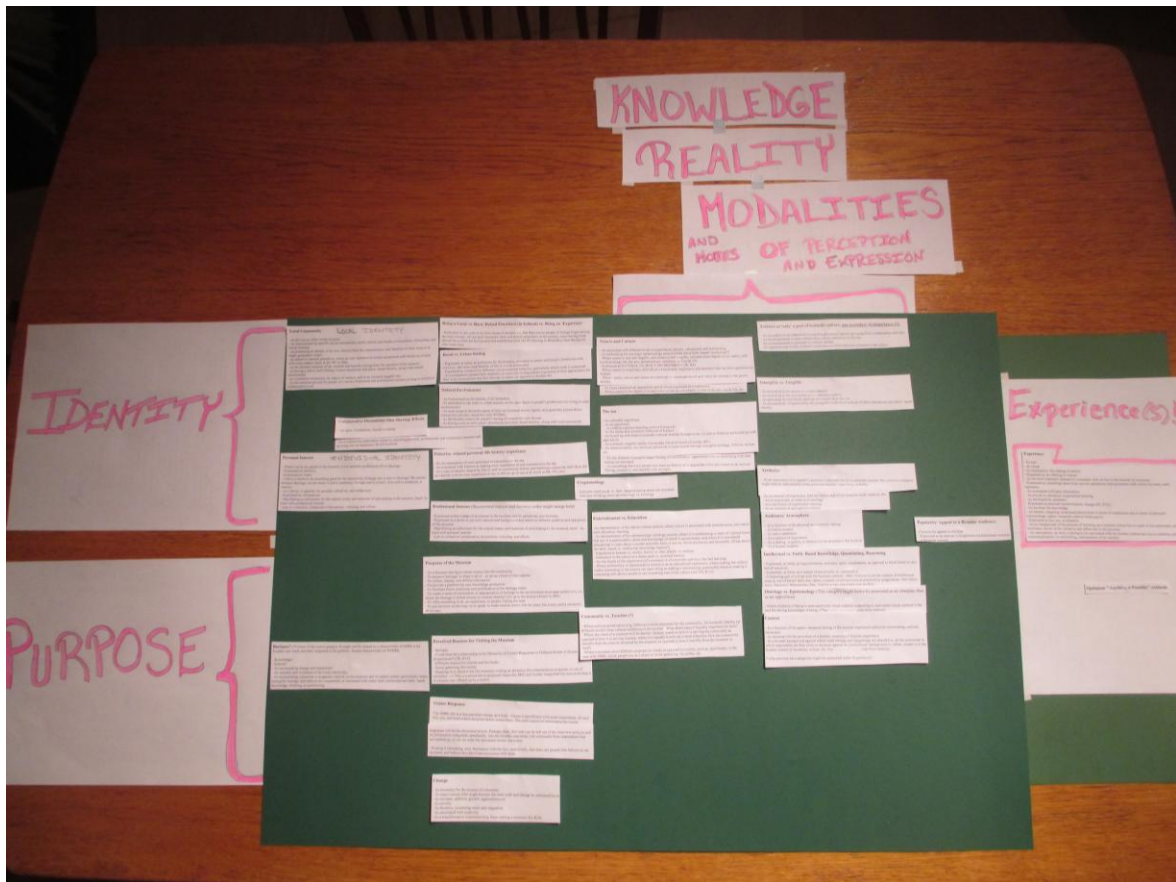
- Have you had the opportunity to inform yourselves in any way about (A) or (B)?
- What are your general impressions of it based on what you've heard or read?
- What are your thoughts about it as an institution that is said to represent cultural heritage?
- Think about any conversations you may have had about it with others, or comments you may have heard or read about it from other people- what do you feel people generally think of it?
- Would you visit this museum? What would be your reason for doing so, or not?

We are coming to the end of our meeting, so I would like to discuss a few last questions that relate everything we have been talking about back to the main concern I mentioned at the beginning- that is, what it means to build up cultural heritage in this region. Let's use the same two examples, Byggðasafnið Vestfjarða and Skrímslasetrið, to discuss this issue.

- How do you, yourselves, define the terms 'að byggja upp'? What does it evoke for you in the context of a heritage museum? For example, is it a question of infrastructure, physical expansion, extension of services, etc.?
- What concerns should be at the heart of an effort to build up cultural heritage museums?
- Do you think that building up one of the museums we discussed should be a tourism- oriented or locals- oriented endeavour? Imagine you are the curator or owner of one of these museums. How would you go about striking the balance between these extremes? What are some of the actions you would take, and what would you try to avoid?
- What are your thoughts on the current debates around Iceland about the struggle between museums displaying 'pure' representations of cultural heritage and museums that seek to entertain and that may have more theme- park- like characteristics? Again, imagining that you were the curator or owner of one of the museums we discuss, how would you go about navigating these two facets of heritage representation while trying to build up your museum?
- In building up Byggðasafnið and Skrímslasetrið, what would you add to, remove from, or change about the exhibits?

To conclude, take a moment to think about everything we've discussed over the past couple of hours. Summarize, in one or two sentences, the most important elements of Westfjords cultural heritage and how local museums can work in the interest of preserving and promoting these.

Appendix C: Manual Technique for Analysis of Interview Data





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