

Master's Thesis



# Can Sustainable Development Save the Rural Coastal Community?

## An Assessment Tool for Sustainable Development in the Rural Coastal Community; a Case Study of Isafjordur, Iceland

Jennifer E. Brown

Advisor: Helga Ögmundardóttir

University of Akureyri  
Faculty of Business and Science  
University Centre of the Westfjords  
Master of Resource Management: Coastal and Marine Management  
Ísafjörður, May, 2011



## **Supervisory Committee**

Advisor:

Helga Ögmundardóttir, PhD

Reader:

Sigrún María Kristinsdóttir, MA

Program Director:

Dagný Arnarsdóttir, MSc.

Jennifer E. Brown

Can Sustainable Development Save the Rural Coastal Community?

An Assessment Tool for Sustainable Development in the Rural Coastal Community; a Case Study of Isafjordur, Iceland

30 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

Copyright © 2011 Jennifer E. Brown

All rights reserved

Printing: Háskólaprent, Reykjavík, May 2011



## **Declaration**

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

---

Jennifer E. Brown



# **Abstract**

The research is presented as the final component of a Master's Degree in Natural Resource Management with a specialty in Coastal and Marine Management from the University of Akureyri in conjunction with the University of the Westfjords. It serves to answer if the theories of sustainable development can be used to assess the degree of sustainable development taking place in a rural coastal community in a meaningful way. Through the development of a Sustainable Development Assessment Tool for Rural Coastal Communities, sustainable development in Isafjordur, a community in the Westfjords of Iceland is assessed through a case study. The assessment tool is analysed using a SWOT analysis and is found to provide communities with a large amount of diverse information but the potential for bias exists. The research concludes that the strengthening of connections regionally and at the state-level would benefit the community of Isafjordur and communities like it in their pursuit of sustainable development. Recommendations include improvements of these connections through the diversification of the economy and the use of sustainable development principles to solve community issues.



# Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Helga Ögmundardóttir, the staff of the University of the Westfjords and the instructors of the Coastal and Marine Management Programme for their personal and academic guidance throughout this process.

Special thanks are given to my family and friends, especially Lindsay Church, Gunna Sigga Matthiasdottir, Eric Leonard, Darko Milosevic and my 'Icelandic Family' who supported me and made my stay in Iceland both memorable and life changing.

Lastly, I would like to thank the community of Isafjordur for allowing me the opportunity to call it home.

# Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	XIII
List of Tables .....	XIV
Chapter 1.Introduction .....	1
1.1 About the Researcher	
1.2 About the Research	
1.3Research Question, Goals and Objectives	
Chapter 2. Method .....	7
2.1 Theoretical Overview – Literature Review	
2.2 Results – Sustainable Development Assessment for Rural Coastal Communities	
2.3 Case Study Method	
2.4 Analysis	
2.5 Recommendations	
Chapter 3. Theoretical Overview .....	19
3.1 Sustainable Development	
3.2 Rural Coastal Communities	
Chapter 4. Results .....	39
4.1 Community Worksheet	
4.2 Sustainable Development Assessment Tool for Rural Coastal Communities	
Chapter 5. Case Study .....	57
5.1 Context	
5.2 Exploratory Interviews	
5.3 Application of Sustainable Development Assessment Tool for Rural Coastal Communities	
Chapter 6. Analysis .....	103
Chapter 7. Discussion and Conclusion .....	109
7.1 Results	
7.2 Theoretical Discussion	
7.3 Value of Research	
7.4 Strengths, Weaknesses and Limitations of the Research	
7.5 Conclusions	
Chapter 8. Recommendations .....	117
8.1 Recommendations for Isafjordur	
8.2 Recommendations for future research	

Chapter 9. Summary .....	123
References .....	127
Appendices	
Appendix 1.....	133
Appendix 2.....	136
Appendix 3.....	148
Appendix 4.....	149
Appendix 5.....	150

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Method Diagram .....	17
Figure 2: Schematic diagram of dynamic equilibrium of supply and demand.....	22
Figure 3: The Three Pillars of Sustainable Development .....	24
Figure 4: The Nested Model of Sustainable Development .....	24
Figure 5: Rural Populations Shares and GNP Per Capita .....	33
Figure 6: Eight Administrative Regions of Iceland .....	59
Figure 7: Context Map of the Westfjords .....	61
Figure 8: Graph showing migration statistics from Isafjordurbaer .....	62

## List of Tables

Table 1: Description of Interviewees .....	14
Table 2: Example of table used to organize interview results .....	15
Table 3: Community Worksheet .....	39
Table 4: Sustainable Development Assessment for Rural Coastal Communities .....	45
Table 5: Classification of Administrative Regions According to Percentage of Rural Residents .....	58
Table 6: Exploratory Interview Results .....	60
Table 7: Community Worksheet for Isafjordur .....	69
Table 8: Sustainable Development Assessment for Rural Coastal Communities Applied to Isafjordur .....	85
Table 9: SWOT Analysis Summary .....	101