Chapter 1.0

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Tourism is the largest business sector in the world economy (Mintel Report, 2003 and WTTC et al., 1995) and has been since the late 1990's (Honey, 2002). Tourism is a highly researched field with extensive information about sustainable tourism. Tourism has expanded for the last six decades according to the World Tourism Organization's long-term international tourism trend (2010, p. 2). Although international tourist arrivals decreased by 4.2 % in 2009 due to the worldwide economic crisis, this trend is expected to continue (WTO, 2010, p. 2). As the fastest growing economic sector in the world (WTO, 2010, p. 2), effectively managing tourist destinations is pivotal in maintaining local natural resources. WTO believes destination management is becoming increasingly important as "destinations compete to provide the highest quality of experience for visitors; and to manage the impacts of tourism on host communities and environments" (WTO, 2007, p. ix).

1.1.1 EarthCheck Certification

As consumers become increasingly aware of the detrimental environmental impacts tourism can have on not only the host country but on a global scale, tourism providers are responding (Honey, 2002). Gaining a sustainable tourism certification is one-way tourism destinations can respond to environmental impacts and at the same time they can market themselves towards environmentally conscious tourists. Certifications such as EarthCheck, formerly known as Green Globe, pride themselves in being internationally recognizable (EarthCheck Pty Ltd., 2010a, p. 1).

Green Globe to EarthCheck

EC3 (Evaluate Communicate Evolve) Global and their EarthCheck programme previously underpinned the Green Globe tourism certification scheme via Green Globe Asia Pacific (EarthCheck Pty Ltd., n.d.). In February 2010, however, ties broke between Green Globe and EC3 Global (S. Gíslason, personal communication, October 18, 2010). EarthCheck continues to provide scientific benchmarking and certification standards to members, including Snæfellsnes Peninsula but today, independent of Green Globe (EarthCheck Pty Ltd., n.d.).

What is EarthCheck?

EarthCheck uses a science-based approach to address climate change issues to ultimately improve the environmental performance of organizations (EarthCheck Pty Ltd., 2010b). Two companies developed the EarthCheck scientific benchmarking and reporting tools: the non-for-profit Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) funded by the Australian Government and EC3 Global, a Brisbane-based company (EarthCheck Pty Ltd., 2010). EarthCheck's environmental philosophy is based on Agenda 21 principles for Sustainable Development endorsed by the 182 Heads of State at the United Nations Rio De Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992 (EarthCheck Pty Ltd, 2010). EarthCheck science was first developed twelve years ago and is reviewed annually by leading university scientists "to ensure that it meets international standards relative to Greenhouse gas Protocols and Certification" (EarthCheck Pty Ltd, 2010, p. 2).

1.1.2 State of Knowledge

There is a vast amount of academic research on tourism ecolabels (Buckley, 2002; Font, 2002; Honey, 2002) and a fair bit of information on sustainable tourism certification schemes (Honey, 2002; Honey and Stewart, 2002; Synergy, 2000). The Green Globe certification programme was a point of interest among academics in the early 2000s (Font, 2002; Honey, 2002; Koeman *et al*., 2002; Synergy, 2002) but there is very little research documented since EarthCheck became a stand-alone programme and started certifying communities. The latter point is one reason for conducting this research project.

1.1.3 Justification

The Snæfellsnes Peninsula was the first community in the Northern Hemisphere and the fourth community in the world to receive EarthCheck certification (Umhverfisvottað Snæfellsnes, 2010). After speaking with local tourism stakeholders in the Westfjords, it became apparent that the Westfjords Tourism Board was considering EarthCheck certification as a destination brand. This prompted me to pursuit a case study analysis on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula to shed light on what the EarthCheck sustainable community programme actually achieves and to determine lessons learned for the benefit of the Westfjords.

1.1.4 Pertinence

The "United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and Conservation International have indicated that most of tourism's expansion is occurring in and around the world's remaining natural areas" (The International Ecotourism Society, 2006). Iceland's diverse and magical natural landscape is one of the main draws to the Country (Lonely Planet, 2009a; Lonely Planet, 2009b; Visit Iceland, n.d.). Assuming UNEP's prediction to be true, Iceland needs to take a precautionary approach to tourism and strategically plan for tourism to rise. This is an opportunity the Westfjords should take advantage of and develop an effective, holistic destination management plan. Case study findings are intended to aid the Westfjords in their journey towards a sustainable destination management plan.

1.2 Community Profile

Snæfellsnes Peninsula is located on the west coast of Iceland, south of the Westfjords (Figure 1). This coastal region is comprised of five main communities: Hellisandur, Rif, Ólafsvik, Grundarfjörður and Stykkishólmur (refer to the black circles in Figure 1). The peninsula is approximately 90 kilometres long with a long mountain range with the Snæfellsjökull National Park at the end. The National Park is the only National Park in Iceland that reaches the coast.

Figure 1: Map of Snæfellsnes, Iceland. Modified from Dörrbecker (2009).

Snæfellsjökull glacier is situated at the tip of the peninsula within the National Park and is the main tourist attraction in Snæfellsnes (Framkvæmdaráð Snæfellsnes and

Ferðamálasamtök Snæfellsnes, 2010, p. 1). It reaches an impressive 1446 meters high, which is higher than any other mountain on the peninsula. Snæfellsjökull is considered one of the most beautiful mountains in Iceland and one of the seven main energy sources in the world, attracting many visitors hoping to harness some of the glacier's energy (Snæfellsnes – Magical Iceland, n.d.).

The Snæfellsjokull glacier is not the only natural phenomenon in Snæfellsnes. The landscape is described as "diverse and magical" (Snæfellsnes – Magical Iceland, n.d.). The landscape varies from lava fields from various geological eras, large sweeping fields with horses running about, light and dark sand beaches stretching along the coast, basalt columns, mineral springs in Ölkelda, geothermal areas in Stykkishólmur and Lysuhóll (refer to Figure 2), and remains from ancient fishing settlements.

1.3 Background

1.3.1 How and why was EarthCheck Certification gained in Snæfellsnes?
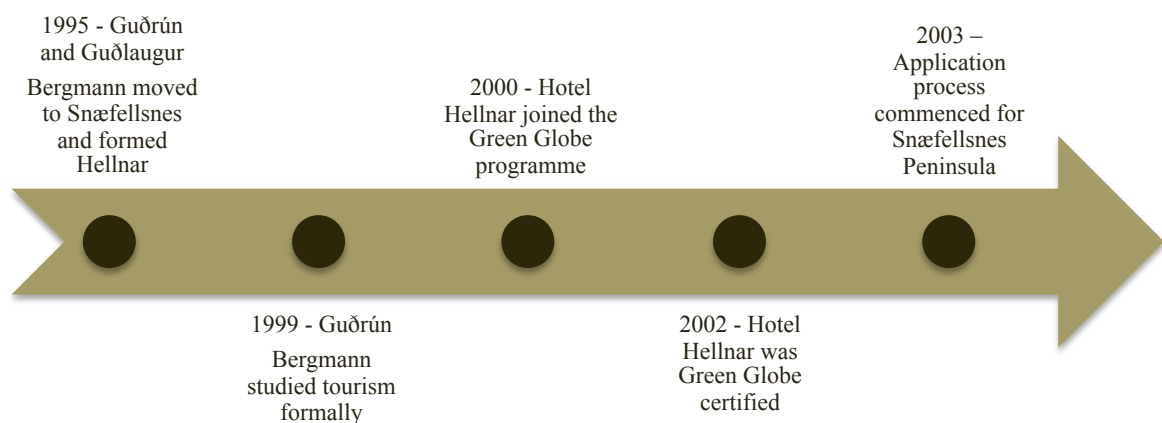

Figure 2: Snæfellsnes Timeline. Source: G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010.

This story begins with two passionate environmentalists, Guðrún and Guðlaugur Bergmann. They moved to Snæfellsnes in 1995 and formed Hellnar community (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010). Although the community did not grow very much, Guðrún and Guðlaugur continued to run their hotel, Hotel Hellnar, there (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010). Since they were already in tourism, Guðrún decided to formally study tourism in 1999. It was at that time when Guðrún came across the Green Globe label for the first time. Agreeing with the

underpinning environmental philosophy, she then decided to restructure their hotel business so they could enter the Green Globe certification programme. In 2000, Hotel Hellnar joined Green Globe and gained certification two years later (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010). Shortly after gaining certification, at the annual tourist board conference, it became apparent that certifying communities was a possibility as well (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010). The Bergmann's believed in the Green Globe programme and wanted to take the next step. They approached the mayor in Snæfellsbær and eventually approached all the mayors on the Snæfellsnes peninsula in hopes to gain their support and move forward. Fortunately, the Minister of Tourism and Transportation at the time was originally from Snæfellsnes and decided to support the project financially (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010). As a result, funding from the government allowed them to hire an environmental consultant to help with the structuring and application process (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010). The application process started in 2003 and in 2004 the entire Snæfellsnes peninsula was Green Globe benchmarked (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010; M. von Schmalensee, personal communication, October 4, 2010; R. Stefánsson, personal communication, October 4, 2010).

Figure 3: Snæfellsnes Timeline continued. Source: G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010; M. von Schmalensee, personal communication, October 4, 2010; R. Stefánsson, personal communication, October 4, 2010)

In 2006, they applied for Green Globe certification but failed the third party assessment (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010; M. von Schmalensee, personal

communication, October 4, 2010; R. Stefánsson, personal communication, October 4, 2010). The group working on this project did not give up after this, the necessary changes and adjustments were made and in June, 2008 Snæfellsnes peninsula gained Green Globe certification for the first time (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010; M. von Schmalensee, personal communication, October 4, 2010; R. Stefánsson, personal communication, October 4, 2010). The region recently renewed their certification as a certified EarthCheck community in July 2010 (EarthCheck Pty Ltd., 2010).

1.3.2 Rise in Tourism

The local economy in Snæfellsnes is based on farming and fishing (Snæfellsnes - Magical Iceland, n.d.) Today, tourism is becoming increasingly prominent in the region (Snæfellsnes - Magical Iceland, n.d.). Thus making this a crucial and interesting time with respect to future destination planning in Snæfellsnes but also the Westfjords.

Iceland received a lot of publicity in 2010 that could have and could potentially affect the travel and tourism sector benefiting both Snæfellsnes and the Westfjords. For example, Eyjafjallajokull volcano erupting created quite the buzz; Iceland was voted the safest country in the world by Tourism-Review.com; Lonely Planet advertised the Westfjords, Iceland as the 5th place to visit in 2011 and the Westfjords also received the European Destination of Excellence (EDEN) sustainable tourism prize. The European Commission awards the EDEN prize to "Europe's hidden gems" that promote sustainable tourism (European Union, 2010, p. 2). The Westfjords were chosen "for their natural beauty, cultural life and commitment to sustainable tourism" (Vatnavinir Vestfjarða, 2010). This award is intended to boost tourism in the winning destination area.

These examples of publicity further support the impeding necessity of effective tourism destination management not only in Snæfellsnes and the Westfjords but also in any tourist destination community. It was this latter realization that led me to form the following research question.

1.4 Research Question

Is EarthCheck community certification programme an effective tourism destination management tool from a sustainability point of view?

1.5 Goals & Objectives

The goals of this research project are three-fold:

- assess if gaining EarthCheck community certification improved the environmental, economic and social well-being in Snæfellsnes;

- determine if EarthCheck community certification is an effective sustainable tourism marketing tool; and

- develop a set of recommendations for the Westfjords with respect to applying for EarthCheck community certification.

A number of objectives were designed to help achieve these goals:

- determine key stakeholders in Snæfellsnes to interview;

- determine how and why EarthCheck certification was gained;

- perform a SWOT analysis on EarthCheck sustainable community standard; and,

- draw comparisons between theoretical and actual changes in Snæfellsnes.

1.6 Organization of Paper

This research paper is organized into six chapters following the introduction: theoretical overview; methodology; results; discussion; conclusion and recommendations; and, summary.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Overview

2.1 Introduction

This case study touches on many academic domains. The literature review is divided into five themes: sustainable development, environmental planning, community development and destination management, tourism and case study methodology.

An extensive amount of literature is available on sustainable development, sustainable tourism, tourism certification and case study methodology. The concepts of sustainable development and sustainable tourism are not new but the interest in these two ideologies remains in the forefront of many academics, policy makers and world leaders. As the tourism industry grows and climate change becomes an ever-pressing global issue, the importance of changing how we view the environment and utilize our natural resources is imperative. Tourism certification, destination management and destination branding play an increasingly important role in this matter. A synergy exists among these fields and is discussed below.

2.2 Sustainable Development

Sustainable development emerged from two main sources: increased awareness and concern for ecological degradation around the world and increased global poverty levels (Kemp et al., 2005). According to Briassoulis (2001); Lele (1991); Buckingham-Hatfield & Evens (1996); and, O'Riordan & Voisey (1998), sustainable development is understood intuitively by all but is difficult to describe in a linear fashion. Interpreting sustainable development creates controversy over whether the concept of sustainable development is achievable (Hunter, 1997).

2.2.1 Definitions

A commonly accepted definition of sustainable development is used in the United Nations document known as the Brundtland Report, formally named Our Common Future (1987). The Brundtland Report explains sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987, Chapter 2: Towards Sustainable Development, para. 1). According to Pearce et al. (1989), this global acceptance of the Brundtland definition is because it can be interpreted in many different ways making it easy to incorporate into political sound-bites. While there is a political consensus on the Brundtland definition of sustainable development, this does not rationalize the fact that it is extremely vague (Daly,

1996). Many believe this lack of clarity created a sense of frustration around the concept (Goldin and Winters, 1995; Tryzna, 1995).

2.2.2 International Commitment

Since the release date of the Brundtland Report, sustainable development has been used as an environmental management concept (WCED, 1987). The United Nations first declared their commitment for achieving sustainable development on a global scale at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (United Nations, 2002). Commitment was re-affirmed in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation document. One of the main goals the United Nations recognizes is the "wide-spread adoption of an integrated, cross-sectoral and broadly participatory approach to sustainable development" (United Nations, 2009, para. 3).

2.2.3 Practical Application

In recent years debates on that matter of sustainable development encompass successful ways to implement sustainable development practices. One practical method of applying sustainable development within a town or community is known as environmental planning. Environmental planning is often misinterpreted (Marsh, 2005). While sometimes confused with environmentalism, environmental planning incorporates a number of topics including but not limited to: land development, land use, environmental quality, wetland management and watershed management (Marsh, 2005). William Marsh (2005) describes environmental planning as a type of management, which focuses on environmental factors "rather than social, cultural, or political factors" (p. 3).

2.2.4 Sustainable Indicators

Once steps towards sustainable development are implemented, how they can be measured is an issue continuously being investigated. The importance of determining sustainable development indicators was recognized in Agenda 21 (Quarrie, 1992) in order for decision makers to have a solid base for policy application (George, 1999). The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSC) encouraged further work on sustainable indicators in the mid 1990s (United Nations, 2009a). As a result, in 2006 a third revised set of CSD indicators was finalized, which was based on the previous two editions released in 1996 and 2001 (United Nations, 2009a).

2.3 Environmental Planning

While this research project is focused on a sustainable tourism labelling scheme, one of the main features of EarthCheck community certification is changing how a community or region is managed at the municipal level. EarthCheck (2010b) provides literature on the effectiveness of EarthCheck as a tourism marketing tool (p. 2), however there is little information and research on whether EarthCheck is an effective environmental planning tool.

Designing and planning sustainable communities is a daunting task community planners face in today's world. However, Mark Roseland (1999) believes cities provide an enormous opportunity to tackle sustainable development issues as long as local governments play an integral part. The field of environmental planning is not new and encompasses environmental conservation and protection, watershed planning, land suitability analysis, ecosystem based management and coastal management among other areas of interest (Marsh, 2005; McHarg, 1969). Beatley (1995) describes the field of environmental planning as:

> "the commitment and priority given to respecting ecological limits in the planning, design, operation of our communities… it is a matter of considering ecological limits and environmental impacts at every step of community development in every aspect of community design, from the energy efficiency of buildings to the regional transportation system to how industrial and commercial sectors in the community go about business" (p. 384).

Best practice environmental planning uses ecosystem-based management, which focuses "on the whole ecosystem, defined in local, biophysical and cultural terms, and on development of an integrative process for planning and management" (Slocombe, 1998, p. 483).

The nine main sections that EarthCheck evaluates in a community include: sustainability policy, energy consumption, greenhouse gas production, air quality, water consumption, solid waste production, resource consumption, biodiversity and waterways quality (EarthCheck, 2010). In Beatley's "Planning and Sustainability: The Elements of a New (Improved?)" article, he asks, "What will guide communities in determining how far to go

in reducing their impacts? How will we know when ecological sustainability is reached?” (1995, p. 384). He suggests using local and regional indicators and being aware of the environmental carrying capacity. McIntyre (1993) defines carrying capacity as “the maximum use of any site without causing negative effects on the resources, reducing visitor satisfaction, or exerting adverse impact upon the society, economy and culture of the area” (p. 23). Using carrying capacity to gauge sustainability is a long-establish mechanism (Hunter & Green, 1995; Lindberg et al., 1997; Wright, 1998). However, on the topic of tourism and sustainability Jennings (2004) claims carrying capacity is not the most effective method to analyze the relationship between tourism and the environment. He recommends using the ‘limits of acceptable change’ (LAC) as an alternative to carrying capacity and adopting LAC as a planning framework to guide tourism development. Furthermore, Jennings (2004) argues implementing LAC requires consensus building among not only planners and political figures but in conjunction with the public.

2.4 Community Development & Destination Management

Community development varies considerably depending on local needs and assets (Brown, 2008, p. 11). In the context of tourism, the term destination management is used to describe a very specific form of community development. A common thread among all community development initiatives is the underlying purpose, which is to improve communities to mirror the wants and needs expressed by residents. Destination managers call this step situation analysis. One must understand the community’s aspirations and values; the current tourism market; consumer profiles to determine future target markets; and, analyze how the community operates internally and externally to determine factors that may influence the planning and development of the destination (STCRC, 2010).

In *Community Development in Canada*, author and university professor Jason Brown (2008) discusses four effective community development practices. While Brown’s (2008) book includes Canadian case study examples, he maintains that his community development principles are applicable in any community. The first practice is referred to as strengths-based. The larger and more diverse the groups involved, the stronger the project. Contributions from government, local businesses and residents are important (Brown, 2010). Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) (2010) has a similar

recommendation that all relevant stakeholders be engaged, participate and committed throughout the destination planning process. Partnership is the second effective community development practice. Essential contributors (government, businesses and residents) should stay involved with maintenance and operation practices. In addition to the government and residents, tourism professional support providers, tourism businesses, academics, researchers, students and media are all considered destination management organizations according to STCRC (2010). Grassroots involvement is Brown's third factor. Local involvement is key and stressed in STCRC's Sustainable Tourism – Destinations and Communities document as well. The final development practice is integration. Brown suggests not duplicating existing services and becoming aware of similar amenities.

The application of effective community development practices can lead to a stronger community. Brown (2008) identified six factors that strengthen communities. The first factor is the presence of a wide range of organizations. Having a variety of voluntary organizations "suggests that not all communities have surrendered all of their functions to distant bureaucracies" (Brown, 2008, p. 13). The second factor is about community identity. A strong community identity or common pride is indicative of a strong community (Brown, 2008). In top-down approaches, the first task of a community worker "when entering a community is to recognize evidence of collective pride" (Brown, 2008, p. 14). Promoting a sense of community identity can occur when opportunities for skills-exchange arise (Brown, 2008). An identity grows as people invest their skills and knowledge into the community. Having a community centre is the third factor that strengthens communities. A community centre is a "focal point where residents can meet together informally" (Brown, 2008, p. 14). Brown refers to a community centre as a gathering place; a community centre may not be an actual building or the geographical centre of a neighbourhood, rather a feature or event that brings the community together on a regular basis. The fourth factor is establishing a common need. "People are often much more willing to be collaborative when they are confronting a common issue" Brown, 2008, p. 14). A good transportation system is the fifth factor. Well designed, safe roads, sidewalks and bike paths have a major impact on communities (Brown, 2008). Lastly, balanced land-use plans are necessary to ensure communities have "adequate parklands, accessible services, a good supply of well-maintained housing, a strong economic base, and well developed land-use plans to manage population density and design and promote

sustainable development" (Brown, 2008, p. 14). When effective community development practices are used, a healthy community emerges in addition to a strong community.

2.5 Tourism

2.5.1 Sustainable Tourism

The concept of sustainable tourism emerged from the ideology of sustainable development (Hunter, 1997) but the link between sustainable development and sustainable tourism is often missing (Hunter, 1997; Butler, 1991; Forsyth, 1996; Klemm, 1992).

Ambiguity among terminology

The terms sustainable tourism and ecotourism are often used interchangeably (Buckley, 2009). Tourism literature does not exactly align on one definition of sustainable tourism or ecotourism, which provides further confusion. According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2006), ecotourism is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people" while Black and Crabtree (2007) describe ecotourism as "a force within the [tourism] industry that, in its very essence, aims to minimise tourism's negative impacts whilst maximising tourism's positive impacts" (p. 27). Adding to this disparity, in *Ecotourism & Certification Setting Standards in Practice*, editor Martha Honey proclaims there are three trends within what is commonly labelled ecotourism. The first trend is referred to as 'ecotourism lite', which involves token, cost-saving actions instead of fundamental changes in practice that affect the society and environment. The example Honey uses is the British Airways/American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) annual ecotourism award given to hotels in the mid-1990's that was part of the International Hotels Environment Initiative for installing energy-saving showers and only washing guests' towels on request instead of everyday. While these measures are encouraged, it is not ecotourism (Honey, 2002). Greenwashing is the second trend. Greenwashing is when the concept is marketed when in fact no actions are taken. This is why sustainable tourism labels or ecolabels are criticized. It was extremely easy for a company or business to design and attach their own 'sustainable tourism label' to a product or destination. Today, although consumers are increasingly aware and educated about labels it remains difficult to make decisions based on these standards. The third trend is the "authentic form of ecotourism which is derived from the concepts of ecosystems, and therefore includes the environmental and human (social,

cultural, political and economic) effects of tourism" (Honey, 2002, p. 7).

Ecotourism often encompasses other forms of tourism, such as nature tourism or 'experiential' tourism (TIES, 2006). According to The International Ecotourism Society (2006), experiential tourism is an umbrella term used to refer to various types of tourism, including: ecotourism, nature, cultural, soft adventure, rural and community tourism. Buckley (2009); Donohoe & Needham (2006); and, Weaver & Lawton (2007) all agree that ecotourism is both a practical and theoretical construct which aims to "change real-world operations in the tourism industry, as well as improve our understanding of tourism as a social phenomenon" (Buckley, 2009, p. 643). Buckley (2002) argues the term ecotourism is used so loosely that it is almost meaningless to the individual consumer. He defines sustainable tourism as "tourism at any scale with practical and proactive design, engineering, and management to reduce environmental impacts"(2002, p. 187) and ecotourism as small-scale tourism "ideally with a significant environmental education component and some contribution to conservation of the natural and cultural environment" (2002, p. 187). However, Buckley (2002) fails to include the social and economic part of sustainable development which makes this definition unfit for this research project.

Sustainable Tourism vs. Ecotourism

While the term sustainable tourism is used globally, the exact meaning can be ambiguous and left for interpretation if the term is not defined. Even when defined, however, it is not clear how to go about achieving sustainable tourism. Although the precise definition of sustainable tourism remains debatable among the academic community (Buckely, 2002; Weaver, 1999) the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) (2004) and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) agree, "sustainable tourism should:

- Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
- Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation." (Sustainable Tourism: Definition, para. 2)

In this research paper, the term sustainable tourism will be used, rather than ecotourism for three reasons: first, the term ecotourism is not used by EarthCheck; second, using sustainable tourism is keeping in line with the terminology used by the EarthCheck Sustainable Community Programme; and, lastly, sustainable tourism is more of an umbrella term which can include ecotourism but is not limited by ecotourism. Furthermore, the UNEP and WTO definition of sustainable tourism will be used to analysis whether the EarthCheck community certification is an effective destination management tool.

2.5.2 Tourism Certification Programmes

The confusion and ambiguity that is associated with terms such as sustainable tourism and ecotourism also exist when it comes to tourism certifications, often referred to as ecolabels. Much of the literature on tourism ecolabels focuses on why environmental accreditation in the tourism industry is so controversial. Buckley (2002) and Font (2002) are two prominent researchers in this field. Buckley (2002) claims this controversy is due to the wide range of companies, individuals, governments and associations using them in marketing schemes which receives criticism from environmental groups while expecting consumers to pay attention and make informed decisions. Controversy also exists because of the sheer number of labels that exist. Buckley (2002) argues that the lack of enforcement in the sustainable tourism field lead to a surplus of ecolabels, "each having different meanings, criteria, geographical scope, confusing messages, limited expertise and expensive systems" (p. 203).

One of the main issues with tourism ecolabels is determining whether they actually measure sustainability. What makes an ecolabel scheme effective is highly discussed in sustainable tourism literature (Synergy, 2000; Buckley, 2002; Font, 2002; Honey and Stewart, 2002). The first step in analyzing the effectiveness of an ecolabel, is determining what type of certification programme is behind the logo. There are two categories of tourism certification programmes: process-based and performance based schemes (Synergy, 2000). Academic literature discusses at length which tourism certification method is the most effective. Honey and Stewart (2002) favour performance-based certification programmes because: "they measure achievement, not intent; they are less expensive and more applicable to small businesses; comparison among businesses is possible; a variety of stakeholders are involved; performance inside and outside the business is measured; and, different levels are offered encouraging competition and

continual improvement" (p. 57). Although Honey and Stewart compare both performance and process-based certification systems in *Ecotourism & Certification Setting Standards in Practice*, only disadvantages were provided for process-based systems and only advantages were highlighted for performance-based systems. While Honey and Stewart poorly compared the two processes, their points are supported in a report by Synergy (2000) on behalf of World Wildlife Fund - United Kingdom. This document argues that certifying a 'process', for example ISO 14001 or EarthCheck, is insufficient in generating sustainable tourism. Furthermore, Synergy (2000) states that incorporating performance measures that tackle sustainability (environmental, social and economic factors) is much more difficult to encompass than process within a certification programme that aims at being internationally applicable.

EarthCheck Certification

The EarthCheck certification programme is considered a process by Synergy, 2000 and Honey ad Stewart, 2002. However, EarthCheck certification programme has evolved significantly since the early 2000s and no analysis of the current community certification programme exists. This gap in the literature is one of the main reasons this research project was conducted and hopefully will provide some insight into the EarthCheck community certification scheme as it stands today.

For maximum effectiveness, ecolabels need to be recognized on an international level (Buckley, 2002; Font, 2002). EarthCheck is an "internationally recognized environmental benchmarking and sustainability certification programme, designed to address the challenges of climate change and improve the environmental performance of organisations" (EarthCheck, 2010b, p.1). In 1998, Green Globe emerged with an environmental standard applicable to tourism businesses worldwide (Font, 2002). This early version of Green Globe certification was criticized for allowing businesses to use the Green Globe logo on the basis of commitment, not performance (Font, 2002; Synergy, 2000; Koeman et al., 2002). While many changes and potentially even improvements were made to Green Globe's environmental standard, sceptics remain because of the doubt that surrounds sustainable development, sustainable tourism and lastly, sustainable tourism certification schemes.

While Synergy (2000) critically evaluates Green Globe 21, as EarthCheck was called in

2000, and makes recommendations on how to improve the environmental standard, no such document exists for the latest version of this standard.

2.5.3 Destination Branding

Sustainable tourism certification programmes, such as EarthCheck is one example of a destination brand. According to Blain, Levy & Ritchie (2005), research indicates destination branding is important because it enhances the image of a destination among visitors and aids destination management organizations (DMO) in measuring success. The logo adopted or created by a destination is central to branding; consider the McDonald's golden arches or Nike's swoosh (Blain et al., 2005). Logos are used to identify the company, product or place which helps raise consumer awareness (Blaine et al., 2005). Additionally, logos are "one of the main vehicles for communicating image" (Henderson & Cote, 1998, p. 15). Logos provide a distinctive image, ideally one that is easily recognizable. These visual cues can enhance a destination's reputation and serve as a market advantage (Baker & Balmer, 1997). Destination logos provide a brand image and identity, which is important to have in place prior to visitors arriving so they can influence visitor choice behaviour (Blain et al., 2005). This occurs when the logo connects in a positive manner with the target audience by "positively symbolizing the anticipated visitor experience" (Blain et al., 2005, p. 332).

2.6 Case Study Methodology

A case study is a common qualitative research approach in the social science field (Noor, 2008). Noor believes a case study is intended to view "a particular issue, feature or unit of analysis" (2008, p. 1602). Yin describes a case study as an empirical inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context using multiple data sources (1989). According to Patton, case studies are particularly appropriate when in-depth information about a specific area of knowledge or problem or situation is required (1987). Case studies are also known as triangulated research (Tellis, 1997). Triangulation is used to "confirm the validity of the processes" (Tellis, 1997, para. 8). Triangulation can occur with data, investigators, theories and methodologies (Snow & Anderson as cited in Feagin et al., 1991; Denzin, 1984): data source triangulation involves looking to various contexts to confirm data remains the same; investigator triangulation requires multiple researchers looking at the same data; theory triangulation includes researchers with different

theoretical backgrounds analyzing the same results; and, methodology triangulation uses multiple methods to increase reliability in findings (Tellis, 1997).

2.6.1 Case Study Types

Yin organizes case studies into three categories: exploratory, explanatory and descriptive (1993). Exploratory case studies allow the researcher to explore any phenomenon in the data that peaks their interest (Zainal, 2007). Explanatory case studies typically go one step further than an exploratory case study by trying to explain the phenomenon in the data (Zainal, 2007) and are often used in casual research projects (Zainal, 2007; Umit, 2005). Descriptive case studies involve the researcher describing the phenomenon in the data (Zainal, 2007). In addition to these three forms of case studies, Stake includes three more: intrinsic, instrumental and collective (1995). An intrinsic case study is used when interest in a researcher is peaked to such a level that a case study is required in order to learn more (Stake, 1995; Tellis, 1997). Instrumental case studies are used to gain a general understanding by posing a specific research question, studying a particular case and then applying the results to a larger group (Stake, 1995; Zainal, 2007). Data from several different sources are coordinated and incorporated when using a collective case study method (Stake, 1995; Zainal, 2007). Research methods literature generally agrees on these six forms of case studies. The best case study method is not discussed in any great length but simply depends on the topic and the researcher.

2.6.2 Strengths

A number of advantages exist for case study research methodology. Data is typically studied within the context of its use (Yin, 1984) unlike a scientific experiment, which is conducted under ideal conditions in isolation. Case studies can use qualitative data, quantitative data or even both (Zainal, 2007; Yin, 1984). Another key strength is that multiple sources of data and techniques are used to gather information, (Soy, 1997) providing a holistic view of the situation (Gummesson, 1991). Lastly, detailed case studies go beyond explaining or describing information collected by actually shedding light on the complexities of real-life situations, which is difficult or even impossible to capture in an experiment or survey (Zainal, 2007).

2.6.3 Weaknesses

Many weaknesses accompany the above strengths of case study research methodology. In Robert Yin's 1984 book, Case Study Research: Method and design, he discusses three main arguments against case study research. A popular criticism of case studies is the possibility of generalization (Yin, 1984; Noor, 2008). According to Yin, a commonly asked question is, "how can you generalise from a single case?" (1984, p. 21). Lack of rigour is another weakness. Yin claims using biased or ambiguous findings to guide further research can hinder the legitimate nature of the study (1984). Finally, sheer length and the amount of documentation is not only considered an inconvenience but can be a serious issue when data are not labelled and organized correctly (Yin, 1984).

2.7 Summary

The literature reviewed provides a holistic picture of the past, present and future discussions within the realm of sustainable tourism, tourism certifications, sustainable development, environmental planning, community design and case study methodology. This analysis highlighted several gaps in the academic fields of sustainable development, sustainable tourism and environmental planning. The fallacy that these three fields are independent of each other is a major barrier to any advancement towards universal sustainability and desperately needs dismantling. Considering sustainable tourism certification standards, such as EarthCheck, as an environmental planning tool used to yield sustainable development within a community is new and something this research project will explore.

Chapter 3.0

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Case study methodology was the overarching framework used in this research project. Section 3.2 outlines and justifies the type of case study chosen. This case study was divided into four main sections: data collection; results; analysis; and synthesis. This is described in sections 3.3 to 3.7 and illustrated in Figure 6 located at the end of the chapter.

3.2 Case Study Type

3.2.1 Explanatory-Exploratory Case Study

I applied an explanatory-exploratory case study for this research project. The explanatory strategy came from the need to determine under what circumstances is EarthCheck community certification appropriate and what is required for the project to be successful. The exploratory strategy came from the need to determine whether the EarthCheck certification improved the social, environmental and economic well-being in Snæfellsnes communities. The unit of analysis was the Snæfellsnes peninsula.

3.2.2 Single-Case Study

I used a single-case design because there were no other available cases to study in Iceland. Snæfellsnes peninsula is one of four communities in the world to be certified with EarthCheck and the only community in Europe with this certification.

3.3 Data Collection

Preliminary background information on the Snæfellsnes case study was gathered from websites, informal conversations with tourism stakeholders in the Westfjords via email and in person. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders provided details necessary to tell the Snæfellsnes 'story' outlined in the background. To confirm the validity of this single-case study I used data source triangulation. Site visits, EarthCheck documents and interviews were the three main sources of data.

3.3.1 Site Visits

Figure 4: EarthCheck Logo. Source: EarthCheck Pty Ltd. (2010c).

I visited Snæfellsnes peninsula on two different occasions, the first time on October 4th and the second time on October 18th and 19th. The purpose of

these site visits was to find anything indicating I was in an EarthCheck certified community (signs, flags, posters, information posts, etc.). I searched for both the EarthCheck (Figure 4) and Green Globe logo (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Green Globe logo. Source: Green Globe (2009).

3.3.2 Documents

On my first trip to Snæfellsnes I was given a number of EarthCheck related documents, which were used to cross reference information gathered from interviews. A complete list of documents received is as follows:

- Sustainability Policy of Snæfellsnes (English)
- EarthCheck Certification Auditor Checklist and Report for Snæfellsnes (English)
- Ferðamenn á Vestfjörðum Sumarið 2008 (Icelandic)
- EarthCheck community power point presentations (2) (Icelandic)
- Framkvæmdaáætlun Snæfellsnes 2008 -2012 / Action Plan for Snæfellsnes 2008-2012 (Icelandic)
- Snæfellsnes Visitors Map & Book 2009 (Icelandic and English)
- Samskiptaáætlun ("Communication Plan") (Icelandic)

I used Google translate to translate the majority of the Icelandic documents and received further aid from a professional translator when necessary.

3.3.3 Interviews

I conducted thirteen semi-structured interviews. Two of these interviews, however, were not used in this research project as they did not meet participant requirements. There was an executive group of people that worked on the initial phases of the EarthCheck project and are working on the project today. Only information from this group of people was analyzed and synthesized. This included Mayors of the Municipalities in Snæfellsnes, an environmental consultant, current EarthCheck project manager for Snæfellsnes, the project initiator and those who worked on gaining and maintaining the EarthCheck certification in Snæfellsnes. The purpose of these interviews was three-fold:

1. to gain a general understanding of the EarthCheck project as it is applied in Snæfellsnes;

2. to understand the environmental, social and economic changes that occurred in Snæfellsnes after the community gained EarthCheck certification; and,

3. to determine what is necessary for the EarthCheck programme to succeed and continue in the future.

Interviews were conducted in English. All eleven interviewees were native Icelanders and spoke Icelandic as their first language. An initial list of people who played an integral part in starting or running the project was gradually constructed from input from my supervisor, Kjartan Bollason. A preliminary list of people to interview was devised. I used the snowballing method to determine other integral stakeholders involved with the EarthCheck project to interview. I contacted potential interviewees via email or Facebook indicating who I was, what my project was about, why I wanted to talk to them, and asked to set up an interview time. This preliminary contact message is attached as Appendix 1.

My first trip to the Snæfellsnes area occurred the beginning of October 2010. I conducted three interviews in Stykkishólmur and two in Ólafsvík on October 4th and one interview in Reykjavik on October 5th. The remaining interviews were conducted on October 18th and 19th. One in Borgarnes, one in Grundarfjörður and one in Hellissandur on the 18th. On the 19th, two were in Ólafsvík and the last one took place in Stykkishólmur.

Interviews either took place at the individuals work place, their home and in one instance, at a coffee shop and over Skype. I devised independent interview scripts prior to interviewing the stakeholders. Questions were divided into subsections based on research goals:

- To determine if gaining Green Globe destination certification improved the environmental, economic and social well-being in Snæfellsnes;

- determine if EarthCheck community certification is an effective sustainable tourism marketing tool; and

- to develop a set of recommendations for the Westfjords with respect to applying for EarthCheck community certification.

While I customized the interview script according to the interviewee, the core themes included:

- Background information on interviewee (current and past involvement with the project, profession and residence history)

- The Green Globe/ EarthCheck Initiative
- Snæfellsnes Community
    - Social, economic and environmental impacts
- Future Direction

The basic interview script used is attached in Appendix 2 Sections or parts of sections were removed depending on the interviewee and their role in the EarthCheck programme in Snæfellsnes. I asked permission to record each interview first and used an iPod nano 5th edition to record all interviews. Interviews were on average 51.64 minutes long. After each interview I gave the participant a letter indicating my educational background, research goals and contact information in case they had further questions or comments. This letter is attached as Appendix 3. With the letter I informed them their name would remain confidential, however, each participant verbally indicated the use of their name was acceptable.

I stopped interviewing people when no new information was revealed during interviews. However there was one individual who was contacted but failed to respond to my emails asking to interview them.

3.3.4 Theoretical Overview

A detailed literature review provided a thorough theoretical background on sustainable development, community design, environmental planning, sustainable tourism, sustainable tourism certification programmes, destination branding, case study methodology, and Green Globe/EarthCheck certification.

I used Memorial University's e-journal online library (mun-resolver.asin-risa.ca) and the National Library of Iceland's database (Hvar.is) to search for online journal articles. I conducted research in two phases, the first prior to any primary data collection and the second after I interviewed people from Snæfellsnes. After the first round of interviews, it came apparent that environmental planning and community design are intertwined with sustainable development and EarthCheck community certification. As I analyzed the information gathered further research was sometimes required to support concluding arguments. In summary, the literature review chapter continuously evolved.

3.4 Results

Results from site visits were visually represented and explained further in paragraph format. EarthCheck documents were scanned to reveal their relation to the UNEP and WTO's sustainable tourism definition. These results were represented in a table (Table 1). Interview recordings were transcribed into Word documents and answers were organized into theme-based tables (Appendix 4). Results were summarized in paragraph format according to theme.

3.5 Discussion

3.5.1 SWOT Analysis

I used the analytical tool known as a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) to assess the opportunities and constraints of the EarthCheck community certification programme in the context of Snæfellsnes Peninsula. This was used to produce a holistic perspective of the EarthCheck programme.

I defined the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of EarthCheck certification standard by using a combination of theoretical research, site visits and information from in-depth interviews and EarthCheck documents. Criteria for the SWOT analysis stemmed from the first research goal.

3.6 Recommendations

I developed a set of recommendations for the Westfjords and Snæfellsnes based on the weaknesses, opportunities and threats discussed in the SWOT analysis.

3.7 Limitations

Many limitations exist for this research project, including time, language barrier and the use of a single case study.

3.7.1 Time

I had three months to collect data, analyze information and synthesize results in order to come up with helpful recommendations and conclusions for the Westfjords Tourism Association. Had this been a longer project, a questionnaire would have been useful to

fully understand the community's opinion of the EarthCheck project in Snæfellsnes, rather than only gaining key stakeholder input.

3.7.2 Language

Most of the EarthCheck documents received were written in Icelandic, naturally. As a non-Icelandic speaking person, these documents were not very useful. While Google translate was used when necessary and was generally sufficient, a fully translated version of the Snæfellsnes Action Plan 2008-2012, for example, would have been ideal. If the translation provided by Google was unclear, an Icelandic translator provided further clarification.

3.7.3 Single Case Study

As mentioned in the literature review, the drawback to a single case study is that generalization is not usually possible. However, understanding what happened in Snæfellsnes and learning from their mistakes prior to commencing the same project in the Westfjords may be helpful in the long run to ensure the EarthCheck community certification is truly a community project run by the community for the community rather than a task taken on by the powers above.
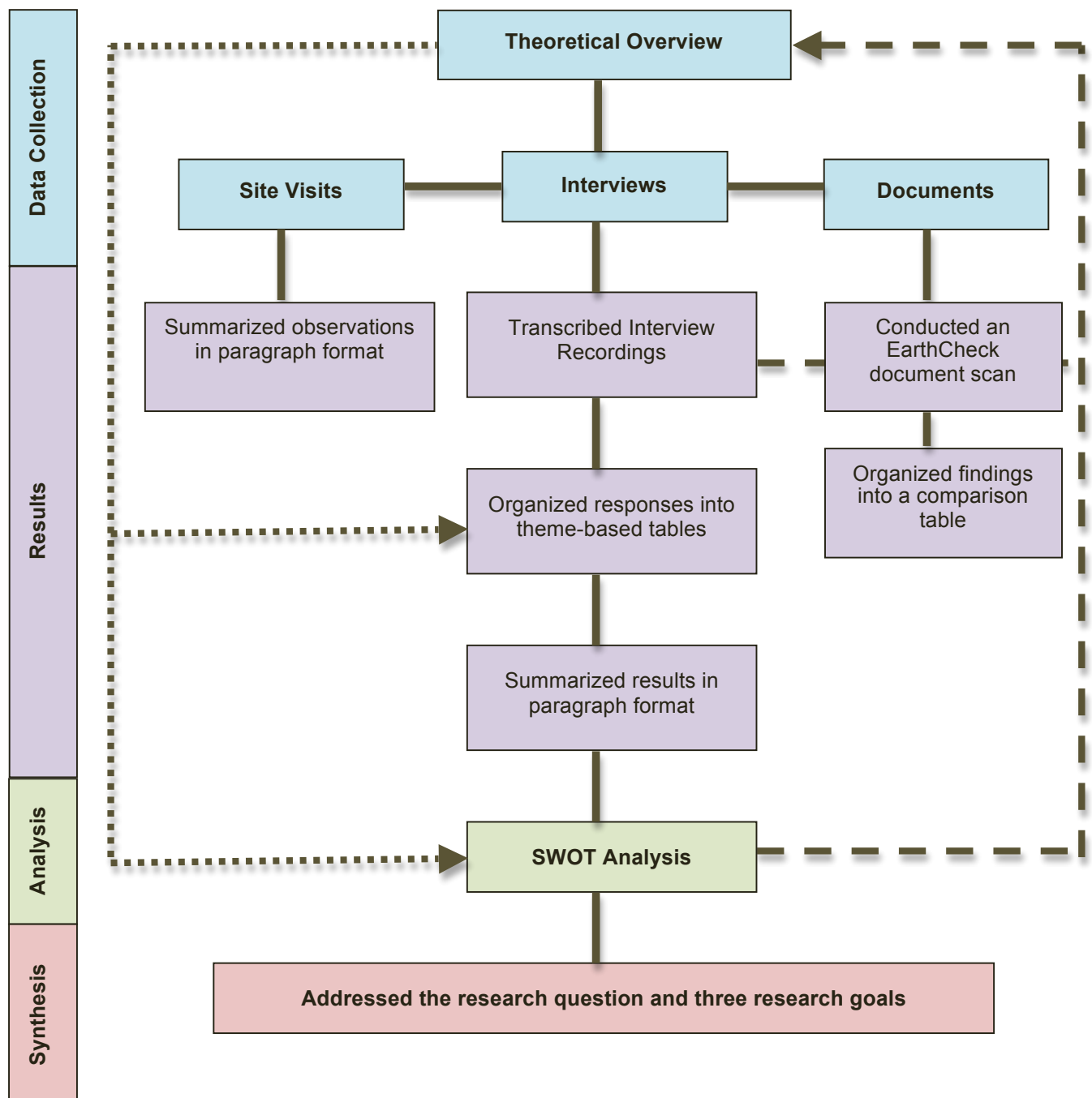
Data Collection

Results

Analysis

Synthesis

Theoretical Overview

Site Visits

Interviews

Documents

Summarized observations in paragraph format

Transcribed Interview Recordings

Conducted an EarthCheck document scan

Organized responses into theme-based tables

Organized findings into a comparison table

Summarized results in paragraph format

SWOT Analysis

Addressed the research question and three research goals

Figure 6: Method Diagram

Chapter 4.0

RESULTS

4.1 Site Visits

4.1.1 Assumptions

I made two assumptions prior to visiting the area and interviewing people about Snæfellsnes as an EarthCheck certified community. The first assumption was that advertisements in some form would visually indicate to me, the tourist, changes that took place since EarthCheck certification was gained in 2008. This assumption stems from the fact that EarthCheck certification is a branding method communities can use to market their destination as an environmentally focused region. The second assumption was that I could spot these changes on my own, without any background information or aid from those working with the project. These assumptions were false. This is important to note particularly because the EarthCheck project manager in Snæfellsnes wants to eventually use the EarthCheck brand to market the region to tourists.

4.1.2 Evidence

There are, apparently, two large Green Globe signs on Snæfellsnes peninsula although only one was spotted on route 54 just before the turnoff to Stykkishólmur coming from Borgarnes (Figure 2). There is also a Green Globe flag flying outside of the Ráðhús in Stykkishólmur, the building where EarthCheck project manager, Theódóra Matthíasdóttir is located (Figure 3).

Figure 7: Green Globe Sign in Snæfellsnes. Photo by Alex Allison

Figure 8: Green Globe flag flying outside of the Ráðhús – Stykkishólmur Council Hall. Photo by Lindsay Church

During my tour around the entire Snæfellsnes peninsula, these were the only two pieces of evidence clearly marked with the Green Globe logo located outdoors. There was no sign in Snæfellsjökull, the National Park, and no sign on the southern side of the peninsula.

Other than the three-bin waste management system that exists in Stykkishólmur there are not many changes one can observe by walking down the streets of the five main towns in Snæfellsnes (Stykkishólmur, Grundarfjörður, Ólafsvík, Hellissandur and Rif). Perhaps, if one visited five years ago and then visited again today the general tidiness of the towns might be acknowledged (K. Jonasson, personal communication, October 18, 2010). According to interviewees, however, community changes are not visible by walking down the street, they are more internal and affect how the community is managed.

4.2 EarthCheck Document Scan

The UNEP and WTO (2004) sustainable tourism definition was used in this research project. The table below outlines how the EarthCheck program aligns with UNEP and WTO's (2004) sustainable tourism environmental, societal and economic requirements. The economy section is marked with a star because the economic benefit is mentioned in the 2008-2012 Action Plan however there are no tangible economic changes since the EarthCheck project commenced.

Table 1: Sustainable Tourism Requirements vs. EarthCheck Changes Source: WTO (2004); Framkvæmdaráð Snæfellsness and Ferðamálasamtök Snæfellsness (2010); Environice (2008).

UNEP and WTO Sustainable Tourism Requirements		EarthCheck Check List
Environment	Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development	Snæfellsjökull and Snæfellsjökull Glacier (Snæfellsnes Vistors Map and Book)
	Maintain essential ecological processes	4.4 Protection and Management of Ecosystems (2008-2012 Action Plan -Framkvæmdaáætlun Snæfellsness)
	Conserve natural heritage	4.12 Protection of Cultural Heritage (2008-2012 Action Plan - Framkvæmdaáætlun Snæfellsness)
	Conserve biodiversity	3.2.8 Biodiversity Benchmarking (Auditor Checklist and Report for Communities 2010)
Society	Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities	4.5 Management of Social and Cultural impact of tourism (2008-2012 Action Plan - Framkvæmdaáætlun Snæfellsness)
	Conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values	4.5 Management of Social and Cultural impact of tourism (2008-2012 Action Plan - Framkvæmdaáætlun Snæfellsness)

	Contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance	Green Flag – School Program
Economy	Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation	*4.7 Social Economic benefit to the area of Tourism (2008-2012 Action Plan - Framkvæmdaáætlun Snæfellsness)

Table 1 indicates that the EarthCheck project aligns largely with what UNEP and WTO believe to be required for sustainable tourism to occur. However, it becomes clear that the intention of the EarthCheck programme varies greatly from the actuality of the project. This is illustrated in the SWOT analysis in the discussion chapter.

4.3 Interviews

A number of themes were identified when organizing interviewee responses (please refer to Appendix 4 for theme-based result tables). Result themes identified based on interviewee responses included: the initial versus current goal of the project, community response, marketing strategy, criticisms, successful traits, and future direction. These results are summarized in paragraph format in sections 4.2.1 to 4.2.7.
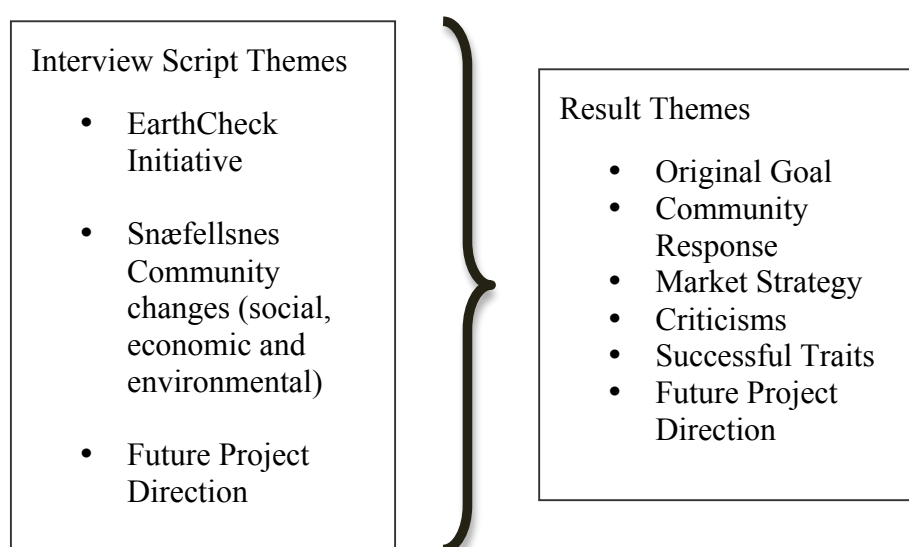
Figure 9: Result themes that emerged from interview script themes. Source: Lindsay Church

4.2.1 Goal

Market edge

Guðrun Bergmann indicated in her interview that the main goal of gaining EarthCheck community certification, initially, was linked to the tourism industry. There was an appeal

to be the first community in Iceland and part of a small group of communities in the world to gain EarthCheck community certification (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010). The Bergmann's believed Snæfellsnes would have a market edge over other regions in Iceland by gaining the certification. It was not indicated that this was the sole purpose of gaining the certification in any interview but being the first community in Iceland to gain EarthCheck certification was mentioned in a number of interviews and deemed important. Furthermore, those same individuals whether they agreed with the certification or not, all indicated that it was imperative for the community to retain the certification and continue to work towards the intended goals.

Although the original motivation for branding Snæfellsnes as an EarthCheck community stemmed from tourism, it is unclear based on interview responses whether the current goal still lies in the tourism sector or if it has shifted to improve town management to create a more sustainable community. Based on the Environmental and Social Sustainability Policy for the Snæfellsnes Community which is a mutual policy of sustainable development adopted by all five municipalities in Snæfellsnes as well as the National Park, there is "special emphasis on environmentally responsible tourism in the area" (see Appendix 5 for Policy). This policy was adopted by local governments in 2007 but has yet to be revised since that date (T. Mattíasdottír, personal communication, October 4, 2010). The policy mentions tourism in one other section: "Snæfellsnes is proactive in its approach to preventing the depletion of natural and social resources, and encourages other organizations and individuals to follow its example and improve their sustainable performance, especially in respect to tourism". While there is discrepancy in the interview responses, the policy statement clearly indicates that there is a synergy between sustainable management of the communities and tourism.

4.2.2 Community Response to EarthCheck

There were mixed answers from interviewees when asked whether there was any resistance in the community to apply for EarthCheck certification. One person said no, there was no resistance at all and another person said people were not necessarily resistance but hesitant to support the project. Community members were deemed hesitant or unsure of the project because they did not trust the project as they believed "specialists" or "well polished suits from down south" were coming into their community with new ideologies trying to change everything (M. Jónsson, personal communication, October 19, 2010).

Most interviewees, however, were of the opinion that when the project was first proposed to Snæfellsbær and then the rest of Snæfellsnes, there was significant resistance among community members. According to Guðrún Bergmann, one of the dedicated pioneers who initiated this project, she and her husband were "considered almost dangerous because they were asking for so much change". Moreover, one participant indicated resistance existed within the communities as well as the minority local government at the time.

Whether these feelings of resistance have subsided remains unknown. There is a general sense that community members reached a turning point recently. According to Mayor Kristinn Jónasson, project manager Theódóra Matthíasdóttir and National Park manager Guðbjörg Gunnarsdóttir, local mockery of the project has stopped and people are now starting to demand for more changes to occur. For an accurate social depiction of how community members feel about EarthCheck certification, further investigation is required.

4.2.3 Community Changes

Waste Management

When interviewees were asked what has changed in the community since Snæfellsnes gained EarthCheck certification, responses were generally vague and included: a lot has changed; or, I'm not quite sure what has changed; or, not much. Follow-up questions encouraged participants to explain the changes in terms of environmentally, socially and economically. When asked for specific examples, a change in the waste management system and the schools obtaining the Green Flag were two reoccurring answers. The most obvious changes are found in Stykkishólmur. A three-bin waste separation system exists where each household divides their waste into organic material, recyclable (plastic, aluminium and paper) and waste for the landfill. Other communities in Snæfellsnes have started to recycle and compost but are not as advanced as Stykkishólmur. Stykkishólmur was the first town in Iceland to sort their garbage at each home, which is a fact everyone I spoke with seemed proud to mention. Other municipalities in Iceland have followed suit and implemented "Stykkishólmur's Way", as it is often called.

Green Flag

Guðrun Bergmann and Headmaster Kristinn Jónasson believe gaining EarthCheck certification not necessarily allowed the schools to gain the Green Flag but certainly acted

as the catalyst, which encouraged the schools to work with the EarthCheck project by applying for the Green Flag. When speaking with Headmaster Magnus Þór Jónsson, he agreed that the certification, without a doubt, influenced his schools progress on becoming more sustainable. The first school to gain the Green Flag, Lýsuhólsskóli í Staðarsveit, located in Snæfellsbær became the role-model school in Snæfellsnes. When the region was fighting for EarthCheck certification, the schools in Snæfellsbær wanted to do their part to help the region gain this certification and learn from this school in Staðarsveit. Working towards the Green Flag in Snæfellsbær was a chance for these schools to work together for a common goal, which was important since the recent school merger created rifts within the teacher and student community. Working on gaining Green Flag for the schools brought teachers, students and parents together, communicating and focused on one common goal.

Environmental/Social/Economic

Other changes that people mentioned included: removal of derelict vehicles; implementation of harbour safety measures; purchase and use of environmentally friendly soaps and detergents; purchase of new copy machine which copies on both sides to help reduce quantity of paper used; additional green spaces created in Ólafsvík; decreased amount of litter in the towns; method of paper work within the municipal institutions; developing a sustainability policy for the region; study on invasive species; and, lastly, the way residents think in terms of social responsibility and the environment.

All changes that people mentioned fell into the categories of environmental or social changes. No economic changes were recognized. Guðrún Bergmann stated that creating new jobs and improving the local economy was not the point of this project. However, this is not in tune with the Sustainability Policy of Snæfellsnes. According to this document, Snæfellsnes is committed to "continual improvement of its environmental, economic [italics added] and social performance" (Framkvæmdaráð Snæfellsness, 2008, p. 2).

The Snæfellsjökull National Park did not experience many changes according to the Park manager who is no longer involved with the EarthCheck project.

Is EarthCheck certification necessary for these changes to occur?

All eleven interviewees were asked this question. One person did not answer the question, another person answered by saying, "That's a good question", two people said no, and five out of the nine who answered the question responded to this question with a 'yes'. Those that said 'no' were highly involved in the project and both individuals described EarthCheck certification as a "carrot". It encourages the communities to be more environmentally aware and is validation that the municipalities are actually doing what they claim they are doing (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010 & S. Gíslason, personal communication, October 18, 2010).

4.2.4 Tourism

Marketing Snæfellsnes

Aside from the municipalities using the EarthCheck logo on stationary, two businesses use the logo to promote their product. Jökull beer located in Stykkishólmur is one which indicates on the label of every beer that their beer is brewed with water from an EarthCheck certified community. Hraðfrystihús, the fish processing plant in Rifi, advertises their fish is processed in an environmentally conscious community.

Snæfellsnes is not advertised as an EarthCheck community. Except for a couple of signs posted when entering the peninsula (refer to Figure 7) there is no way a tourist would know Snæfellsnes is any different from any other region in Iceland. Theódóra Matthíasdóttir stated in her interview that in the past they have not advertised the area well enough. This is evident if you search Snæfellsnes on the search engine Google. None of the major tourist websites mention that Snæfellsnes is an EarthCheck certified community; this includes:

- www.snaefellsnes.is
- www.seatours.is
- www.whygoiceland.com
- www.nat.is
- www.icetourist.is

Two travel websites do mention that Snæfellsnes is EarthCheck certified: www.icelandguest.com and tripwolf.com. The latter site however, is the exact write-up on

Snæfellsnes from Wikipedia. Both the EarthCheck homepage (www.earthcheck.org) and the project website (www.nesvottun.is) provide information on the project as well.

The tourism industry in Snæfellsnes was deemed important by many interviewees and encouraging tourism businesses to gain an environmental certification is a priority Theodora is currently addressing.

4.2.5 Criticisms of the EarthCheck programme applied in Snæfellsnes

While interviewees were not asked initially to critic the EarthCheck programme, this naturally emerged in the interviews.

Time Frame

While some changes have occurred, it has taken time. This was a common criticism. Progress in Stykkishólmur has been faster than other communities in Snæfellsnes. While progress continues, it is slow because it "takes time to change how people think" (R. Stefánsson, personal communication, October 4, 2010). People directly involved with the project seemed to understand that the expected changes would take time and that it is a continuous process, not something that happened overnight.

Lack of Public Participation

Lack of community involvement was another reoccurring comment made by seven of the eleven interviewees. Although there were a number of changes that occurred since and before Snæfellsnes gained certification for the first time in 2008, many of them are not visible by local residents. Many of the initial changes took place internally and involved municipal officials and the group of people working on the project. A few informational community meetings may have taken place over the years but most interviewees could not specify when or where these meetings took place. In section 6 of the Snæfellsnes Action Plan 2008-2012 an implementation plan is outlined chronologically. Listed under 2008 there are three information presentations that were planned for companies, institutions and households on anthropogenic climate change and ways to minimize your impact, power saving mechanisms, nature in Snæfellsnes and environmental management in Snæfellsnes (Environice, 2008). Training presentations were also scheduled in 2008 on how to reduce waste, organic labelling and environmentally friendly weed and pest management options. Listed under 2009, there was only one information presentation planned on the nature in

Snæfellsnes. In 2010, the same information and training presentations listed under 2008 were planned. Whether any of these presentations took place is unknown.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Five people believed that community members are unaware of the EarthCheck project today. Since many of the changes do not directly affect all residents, it was speculated that people have forgotten the project is ongoing. Theódóra Matthíasdóttir is responsible for communicating the project to the five communities to ensure people understand what are the goals and objectives of the project, what has already occurred and what is intended to happen in the future. She has been giving many of these presentations recently and according to Theodora, the EarthCheck project has evoked great interest among listeners (personal communication, December 3, 2010). Most of Theodora's work this past fall involved applying for future funding for the EarthCheck project and compiling statistics for EarthCheck. She is currently organizing meetings with those working for Snæfellsnes municipalities to discuss matters pertaining to the EarthCheck programme.

4.2.6 Road to Success

Bottom-up Approach

No questions were asked originally about what is required for the EarthCheck project to succeed but is one that I added during the second round of interviews that took place on October 18th and 19th. In general, people gave variations of the same answer. They stressed the importance of a strong grass-roots connection or willingness of the people but went further into detail and expressed the need for a passionate leader or a mixture of bottom-up and top-down approach. A couple of people agreed firmly that the project could not be political and has not been political in the case of Snæfellsnes. This does not mean however, that local political members should not be involved. Former local politician believed that unless councillors and mayors supported the project the project could not succeed.

4.2.7 Future Direction

Marketing

The next steps for Theódóra as the EarthCheck project manager is to market Snæfellsnes as a tourist destination and encourage tourism businesses to gain EarthCheck or a similar

certification. EarthCheck requires tourism businesses to gain an environmental certification and without this number increasing over the next few years, their community certification could be in jeopardy (S. Gíslason, personal communication, October 18, 2010). Theódóra will also be working on trying to draw new businesses to the Snæfellsnes peninsula.

Community Outreach

Community outreach is another task on Theódóra's to-do list. She is planning a number of presentations to each of the five communities in Snæfellsnes explaining the reason for the logo change from Green Globe to EarthCheck, what has been going on in the past couple of years and what they are working on now.

Catch-up

Due to a recent municipal election there are some new members on the Snæfellsnes Executive Board. As a result Theódóra will be working with them to fill them in on where they are with the project and the direction that they are taking.

Chapter 5.0

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The third and fourth objectives stated in the introductory chapter are addressed in the discussion chapter. A theoretical versus practical analysis of the EarthCheck community standard from a sustainable tourism perspective is discussed in section 5.2 followed by the opportunities and constraints of the EarthCheck programme in section 5.3.

5.2 EarthCheck Analysis

I used a SWOT analysis to analyze the EarthCheck Sustainable Community programme in the context of Snæfellsnes Peninsula. I posed two questions to help analyze the information gathered:

- did the EarthCheck programme succeed in enhancing the environmental, social or economic well-being of those residing in Snæfellsnes; and,
- what is necessary for the EarthCheck programme to succeed in Snæfellsnes?

The analysis draws from my theoretical overview, site visit observations, knowledge gained from interviews and EarthCheck documents. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified are listed in Table 2 and explained in further detail in sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.4.

Table 2: EarthCheck SWOT Analysis. Source: Lindsay Church

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Spin-Offs - Community Changes - First to Gain EarthCheck Certification	- Lack of Public Participation - Lack of Partnership - Lack of Strength-Based Community Involvement - Process System - Lack of Clarity
Opportunities	**Threats**
- Bottom-Up or Top-Down Approach - Planning	- Costs - Market Edge - Time

5.2.1 Strengths

Spin-Offs

All the schools and kindergartens in Snæfellsnes have the Green Flag. The EarthCheck project encouraged the schools to gain this certification (G. Bergmann, personal communication, October 5, 2010 and M. Jónsson, personal communication, October 17, 2010). Since one school in Snæfellsnes had the Green Flag before the EarthCheck project commenced, it is impossible to conclude whether the EarthCheck project was necessary for the rest of the schools to commit and follow suit. However, it is clear that the Green Flag and EarthCheck project support one another. Green Flag schools educate their children and youth on sustainability and how this concept relates to their local environment, culture, and heritage (M. Jónsson, personal communication, October 19, 2010). Forming this educational basis within the communities increases the willingness of the community to accept and participate in the EarthCheck project, which can lead to a sense of ownership and community pride.

The schools in Snæfellsbær gained the Green Flag by working together for a common goal. The educational curriculum has changed due to this commitment. Children are learning about their local environment and community, about natural resources and how they are used. They learn how and why we should use less cleaning products and try to reuse before we recycle or dispose. The compulsory school in Snæfellsbær recently developed a school strategy so the school could become more connected to nature. The main theme of this strategy is knowledge and nature. The local public was highly involved in the strategy making process. Public meetings were held which allowed people to voice their ideas about what and how their children should learn.

Additionally, the marina in Stykkishólmur has the Blue Flag. The Blue Flag is a voluntary eco-label award run and operated by Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), a non-for-profit and non-governmental organization. In order for a marina to gain the Blue Flag, it must comply with 24 criteria covering the following aspects: environmental education and information; environmental management; safety and services; and, water quality (Blue Flag, 2010). This eco-label is awarded for one season only and will be revoked if "criteria are not fulfilled during the season or the conditions change" (Blue Flag, 2010). While interviewees stated there were two harbours in Snæfellsnes with Blue Flag,

the Stykkishólmur marina was the only Blue Flag recipient listed on the Blue Flag website.

Community Changes

Although not all changes are visible by the public and input from interviewees was vague to begin with, there were some significant changes that occurred that need acknowledgement. The three bin waste management system developed in Stykkisholmur is clearly a change people are proud of and other communities in Snæfellsnes and Iceland want to replicate.

People's environmental perspective has shifted since this project began as well. Mayors indicated that people used to scoff and make light of the changes that they were trying to implement in the communities during the first few years of the project. Now people are demanding more environmental changes and starting to care about the welfare of their community. This was evident during the 2010 spring elections in Snæfellsnes. For the first time the debate was "not about how to get the fisheries or the quota…people wanted to get more services and a nicer town and we needed to pick up on the tourism" (M. Jónsson, personal communication, October 19, 2010).

First to Gain EarthCheck Certification

Those interviewed appeared proud to say Snæfellsnes Peninsula gained EarthCheck certification prior to any other community in Iceland and Europe. Even those who are sceptical of the project, feel it is important to maintain the certification because "[they] were the first". This indicates that people want the project to continue, despite their personal opinions about the project. One interviewee stated, "it matters now we've got it, people are more, like I say, the big thing is getting it because people will always be worried if you lose something you already have" (M. Jónsson, personal communication, October 19, 2010). Community-will can be a powerful driver when people come together and decide to take action. If the community is not only informed about the project but invited to participate, then the response could be quite powerful.

5.2.2 Weaknesses

Lack of Public Participation

According to Jason Brown (2008), gaining community support is a key community development factor. Incorporating public opinions into the process allows people to feel proud and develop a sense of ownership, which in turn increases the probability of success. This was and continues to be the largest downfall of the EarthCheck project in Snæfellsnes. There were mixed views on whether Snæfellsnes residents feel proud about the changes that have occurred in their communities. Mayors indicated that their residents do feel proud while others stated local residents feel resentful and distrust the EarthCheck project because they are not informed about what the project is about, the purpose, current action and future direction. One participant referred to it as "a hidden project" (G. Gunnarsdóttir, personal communication, November 18, 2010). It was argued that most of the effort was internal and not visible to inhabitants (B. Agustdóttir, personal communication, October 18, 2010). Agreeing with most community development literature, a number of participants stated the need for increased public participation to understand how residents view their community, what they feel they can do better, what they are willing to do and to facilitate a general discussion among and between residents and decision makers.

Lack of Partnership

Recently, the Snæfellsnes executive board only comprises municipal mayors and for the time being, the project manager, Theodora. This means there is no representative from Snæfellsjökull National Park included in this elite decision-making group, even when decisions affect the Park. Meetings are sporadic and closed to the public. The National Park is one of the main tourist attractions in Snæfellsnes. This lack of partnership with key stakeholders creates a disconnect between those directly involved with the project and the rest of the community. The only partnership that is ongoing and has been ongoing since the project started is with Stefan Gíslason, environmental consultant for Environice. Although this partnership is necessary it is not ideal as Stefan is located in Borgarnes and is not part of the Snæfellsnes community. With Theódóra working full-time as the project manager, Stefan's involvement is minimal but continuous.

Theodora is working on increasing the transparency of the project by holding community information sessions and publishing updates in the community newspaper. But until essential contributors or destination management organizations defined by STCRC (2010) and Brown (2008) such as businesses, residents, tourism professional support providers, tourism businesses (Snæfellsjökull National Park), academics, researchers, students and media along with government officials from all five municipalities are involved with project maintenance and operation practices, progress will be slow.

Lack of Strength-based Community Involvement

As a result of the lack of public participation that has occurred since the EarthCheck project commenced, there is a lack of public awareness that the project is on going. A number of interviewees stipulated one of the reasons the public remains sceptical or resists acceptance is because they are left in the dark. Furthermore, the number of people directly working with the project has dwindled to include only the three mayors in Snæfellsnes. There was a Snæfellsjökull National Park representative who was involved from the beginning but since the Executive Board was restructured, she is no longer apart of the EarthCheck project. Having a small group of decision makers is often more productive than a large group of people, however, decreasing community capacity by cutting off all communication from prior members and people who helped get the project to where it is today is dangerously alienating. It is important to involve as many local businesses, organizations, community members and government officials as possible (Brown, 2008). Furthermore, STCRC (2010) recommends these diverse stakeholders be engaged, participate and committed throughout the destination planning process.

EarthCheck does require more and more tourism businesses to become environmentally certified each year however, currently there is only 1 out of 103 tourism businesses on the Snæfellsnes peninsula with EarthCheck certification. Less than 1% is not a sustainable percentage that ensures the EarthCheck project will continue in the future. Two businesses, Jokull beer and the fish processing plant in Rif, use the community's certification to market their products. Since the companies are not EarthCheck certified they cannot use the logo on their products and their support for the community project does not count towards the 1%.

To make matters worse, the economic crisis that occurred in 2009 greatly affected the projects progress. Since 2008, when Snæfellsnes first gained certification little has changed as a result of decreased financial support. Not much effort was put into advertising as the majority of the work involved in-house tasks, which were not visible to the public. This is a case of "out of sight, out of mind".

Process System

Honey and Stewart as well as Synergy categorize EarthCheck Sustainable Community programme as a process-based certification programme. Process-based programmes are less conducive for small businesses (Honey & Stewart, 2002), which is evident in Snæfellsnes as only 1 out of 103 tourism businesses have EarthCheck certification.

Environmental aspects addressed by process-based programmes are not site specific resulting in important local factors being overlooked. For example, in Snæfellsnes there is a project underway regarding Lupines, an invasive plant species. EarthCheck did not originally examine Lupines but once this was recognized as an ecological important issue, it was mentioned to an EarthCheck assessor and now Lupines are included under environmental concerns.

Another criticism of process-based certification schemes is the possibility of a place or business being permitted to use the EarthCheck logo for setting up a management system when in fact they may be less sustainable than their counterparts. The system is slightly different now compared to when the standard was named Green Globe. Previously, the Green Globe logo was awarded when an organization became a member and as the organization progressed through the programme the logo discretely changed. With the EarthCheck programme there are four levels that exist: Bronze Benchmarked, Silver Certified, Gold Certified and Platinum Certified. Depending on how one's organization fairs against an EarthCheck assessment the appropriate level will be awarded. However, with the updated EarthCheck system, the criticisms pointed out by Honey and Stewart still stand. One of the pioneers who started this project in Snæfellsnes recognized this fault and stated that the EarthCheck certification is simply a quality mark to verify the community is actually doing what they claim they are doing, nothing more, nothing less.

Honey and Stewart claim that gaining certification and knowing how to implement the programme is not self-evident and often a consultant is hired resulting in additional

expenses. Snæfellsnes hired Stefán Gíslason, the Director of Environice to aid them in preparing everything in order to gain certification and maintain that standard. During the largest economic crisis Iceland has ever endured, having to pay a consultant in addition to a project manager may not be the wisest decision.

Lack of Clarity

There is a discrepancy about what is the purpose of the EarthCheck community certification. Those directly involved with the EarthCheck project were not able to clearly or easily express to me what the purpose was which means it is most likely safe to assume the Snæfellsnes community does not have a clear understanding of why this project is in place. This lack of clarity means people are working towards very different end goals. People are unaware of what needs to be accomplished, what will be gained and who will benefit. For a common goal to be reached, then a common goal created with the community, not for the community is imperative. The community needs to develop a vision for their community and determine what they are willing to do to help move Snæfellsnes towards a more sustainable future.

5.2.3 Opportunities

Bottom-up or Top-down

Some participants described the Snæfellsnes EarthCheck project as a grass-roots initiative while different participants stated it was top-down. This is interesting because Guðrún and Guðlaugur Bergmann lived in Snæfellsnes. Even though they lived in Snæfellsnes they were viewed as outsiders in some towns on the northern side of the peninsula. This is something that community developers always try to avoid. Being targeted as a know-it-all outsider will never gain community support. Although some of these opinions may be incorrect the perception of what the EarthCheck programme was and is today may be more important than what the actual structure of the project actually is in reality.

Planning

EarthCheck does require some planning to occur. EarthCheck certification requirements in relation to planning includes the development of a Community Sustainability Strategy/Plan which defines key social and environmental sustainability issues, specifically addressing tourism activity and development issues. Furthermore, corrective actions must be

prescribed, performance is monitored through benchmarking indicators (see Appendix 6 for list of indicators) and lastly, corrective measures are designed to ensure continuous improvement (EarthCheck Pty Ltd., 2010). This is listed under opportunity because according to the Auditor Report and Checklist February 2010 for Snæfellsnes, tourism and development activity are addressed generally and it was recommended by the auditor for this part to be more specific (EarthCheck Pty Ltd., 2010, p. 28). Tourism development was the original goal of this project but clearly, sometime during this journey, this goal was left behind.

Moreover, under section 5.0, clause 5.5 of the Snæfellsnes Auditor Report and Checklist, February 2010 the auditor remarks:

> Effective environmental planning and development control are not yet in place. The Planning and Building Act No. 73/1997 specifies the use of development and planning guidelines that encourage sustainable development but no clear mechanism has been developed to ensure sustainable tourism development will take place. Suggested mechanisms to guide the tourism industry in more formal and controlled way have been suggested and are being considered. (p. 31)

Once again, the opportunity is there to practice environmental planning but is not being done. One possible reason for the lack of follow-through could be the fact that there are no trained environmental planners working on the project.

The EarthCheck Executive Board, comprised of the Snæfellsnes municipal Mayors, is required by EarthCheck to review it's own effectiveness as an organization achieving sustainable outcomes for the community. This has yet to be done and a formal review process has not been developed. It should be interesting to learn about this process and see if the public is involved in some form.

5.2.4 Threats

Costs

It does cost money to be an EarthCheck member and prices are thought to vary depending on whether a community or business applies, although there is no evidence of this on the EarthCheck website. According to the EarthCheck Certification brochure, the difference in programme price is between EarthCheck Assessment and EarthCheck Certified. An

EarthCheck Certified programme costs annually $3500 AUD and an EarthCheck Assessed programme is only $395 AUD per year. EarthCheck does not distinguish between communities and businesses, at least on their website. However, after contacting an EarthCheck representative (Patrick Renouard) for further details regarding prices, it was expressed via email that community membership fees vary according to population size outlined in the Table 3 below (P. Renouard, personal communication, November 26, 2010). In February 2010, Snæfellsnes received a two-day onsite audit by Australian, Kathy Colgan which amounted to $3,400 AUD plus travel expenses (P. Renouard, personal communication, November 26, 2010). Renouard suggested that future onsite audit fees would be lower because there is an auditor based in Reykjavik (personal communication, November 26, 2010).

Table 3: Annual EarthCheck Community Membership Fees. Source: P. Renouard, personal communication, November 26, 2010.

Community	Annual Membership Fee ($ AUD)
Pop < 150,000	8,000
Pop 150,000 – 500,000	17,000
Pop > 500,000	POA

Renouard also stated that EarthCheck distinguishes between communities and businesses but not between company sizes. However, he was interested in negotiating a discount fee if multiple businesses were to apply. The EarthCheck Assessed programme is much cheaper and allows the business or community to submit their benchmarking data, which is based on a set of benchmark indicators established by EC3 Global, via EarthCheck Benchmarking Software. Data is then reviewed by a Benchmarking Assessor "to determine the organization's performance against industry, sector, country and climate zone specific baseline and best practice standards. A formal Benchmarking Assessment Report is then issued" (EarthCheck Pty Ltd., 2010a, p. 2).

The membership fee is not the only monetary requirement a company or community has once they enter an EarthCheck programme. Costs are also associated with any necessary changes a community of business needs to make in order to gain certification status. Depending on what needs to change based on the EarthCheck standard, this could quickly become an expensive venture.

Market Edge

A project goal, according to many interviewees, was gaining a market edge by becoming the first EarthCheck certified community in Europe and the fourth in the world. The 2008-2012 Action Plan (Framkvæmdaáætlun Snæfellsness) claims that the tourist industry has benefited from gaining EarthCheck and indeed created a market advantage in the tourism industry (Environice, 2008, p. 35). Contrary to this statement, interviewees were not certain the EarthCheck certification has been used as a marketing tool to help draw tourists to the region. However they were hopeful tourist businesses are using the fact they are located in an environmentally certified community to draw tourists to the area but are not certain this is being done. Theódóra stated in her interview that her next steps would involve using the certification to market Snæfellsnes.

Using the EarthCheck certification to market Snæfellsnes seems counter-intuitive at this point. There is a copious amount of data indicating that both the industry and tourists want to support sustainable tourism (Conroy, 2002). Both tourists and tourism brokers are aware of the damage that the tourism industry can wreak on the natural environment if precautions are not taken and tourism planning does not exist. Gaining a sustainable tourism certification, such as EarthCheck, is one method of destination branding. However, environmentally branding a destination with the intention of attracting more tourists without understanding the ecological limits of the region is counterproductive. EarthCheck does require the collection of benchmarking data so an organisation can track future changes but does not require a community to determine the environmental carrying capacity. Gauging sustainability by determining the LAC could easily be incorporated into the EarthCheck system so a community could understand where they are and where they need to be in the context of their own environment, rather than using international standards that may or may not be applicable.

This is a concern because there is very little research on tourism in Snæfellsnes. Thought has not gone into determining what type of tourists are wanted and needed in Snæfellsnes in relation to the ecological carrying capacity of Snæfellsnes. This needs to be the primary concern for any community interested in developing a destination brand.

Time

A criticism of the EarthCheck programme was the amount of time it has taken to gain certification and achieve the set of accomplishments Snæfellsnes has achieved. People need to understand that sustainability is a process not an end product. I think people's frustration, in part, came from working in such a small group for years trying to put everything together to gain the certification. The amount of people who work on this project today still remains relatively small. People need to accept this project as an ongoing process that will get easier with time by setting milestones and incorporating as many stakeholders as possible, which will help disseminate the information, knowledge and workload.

Time was also not on their side because Snæfellsnes was the first community in Iceland to gain EarthCheck certification. If the Westfjords were to join the EarthCheck programme, they could learn from Snæfellsnes. Many interviewees said it would be easier for the Westfjords because the Snæfellsnes project laid the groundwork. This could be true so long as the communities in the Westfjords agree that EarthCheck certification is the right brand for the region, which is discussed in the conclusion.

Chapter 6.0

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The overarching research question and the three research goals set forth in the introductory chapter are addressed in the following conclusion chapter. Investigating whether EarthCheck community certification programme is an effective tourism destination management tool from a sustainability point of view guided this exploratory-explanatory case study. Recommendations to Snæfellsnes as well as the Westfjords are made based on findings outlined in the discussion. Final conclusions pertain to the necessity of EarthCheck certification as a destination management tool in Snæfellsnes.

6.2 Did EarthCheck improve the environmental, economic and social well-being in Snæfellsnes?

Figure 10 illustrates how EarthCheck community certification affected the environmental, economic and social well-being in Snæfellsnes according to interview responses and EarthCheck documents. Figure 10 is explained below.
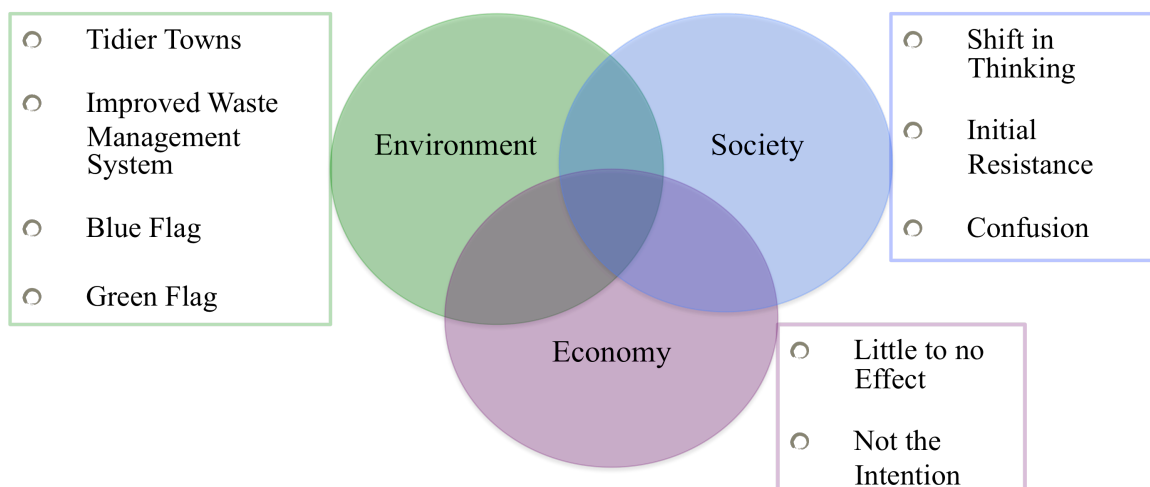
Figure 10: Environmental, social and economic changes experienced in Snæfellsnes. Source: Lindsay Church

6.2.1 Environment

Based on community results accumulated from interviews and EarthCheck documents, the natural environment in Snæfellsnes has improved. Towns are tidier than they once were, waste management has improved, harbours are safer and cleaner according to Blue Flag standards, and policy was created to hinder derelict machines from being abandoned in the countryside. As schools become more involved with Green Flag, they also influence the

health of the environment and are working hard to teach children about their natural environment at the local and national level.

Managing the environment with respect to tourism however, does not exist within the EarthCheck framework. EarthCheck does not require communities to establish their environmental carrying capacity, which is recommended by Timothy Beatley (1995) to aid communities in determining when ecological sustainability is reached. Nor does EarthCheck require communities to use 'limits of acceptable change' (LAC) as an alternative to carrying capacity, which is viewed by Simon Jennings (2004) as the more appropriate method to guide tourism development. It is suggested that Snæfellsnes adopt LAC as an environmental planning framework. Without a trained professional to successfully carry out this framework, external help is required.

6.2.2 Social

The social implications of gaining EarthCheck certification in Snæfellsnes are not clear-cut. The project was met with a lot of initial resistance. This was stated by Guðrun Bergmann and confirmed by other interviewees. According to the core group of people interviewed this is starting to decrease. However, to confirm these opinions further research is required. Interviewees also indicated that they believe there is confusion among the general population in Snæfellsnes about what EarthCheck is, why Snæfellsnes is certified and as a result do not want to be involved with the project in any form. Again, polling the general population to determine their views on the EarthCheck project is required to confirm these views.

The group of people that initially worked together to organize and manage the EarthCheck programme consisted of a diverse set of individuals with different educational and professional backgrounds: two hotel owner and operators, a headmaster, Snæfellsnes National Park manager, the three Snæfellsnes mayors, an environmental consultant, two biologists from Náttúrustofu Vesturlands and the founder of Átthagabönd (Heritage and Community Centre). This group was reduced in 2010 to include the three mayors and the current EarthCheck manager to form an Executive Board (T. Matthíasdóttir, personal communication, October 4, 2010). This reduction in community capacity diminished community integration and partnership, which threatens effective community development

and in turn, the success of the project according to Jason Brown's (2008) community development best practice principles.

6.2.3 Economic

EarthCheck has not affected the local economy thus far. Aside from the project manager position, which recently increased from a 25 percent position to a full-time position, no new jobs were created.

Two companies located in Snæfellsnes, Jokull beer and a fish processing company in Rif, use the EarthCheck certification to market their products. It is unknown whether using the EarthCheck certification positively increases sales of these products.

With regard to tourism, no research has been conducted to learn why tourists visit Snæfellsnes. It is not understood whether tourists visit Snæfellsnes because it is EarthCheck certified or not. According to interviewees, improving the local economy was never the intent, which is at odds with the goals of both sustainable development and sustainable tourism.

6.2.4 Summary

Since Snæfellsnes gained EarthCheck certification, the natural environment has improved. The same improvement cannot be confirmed for the socio-economic sectors of sustainable tourism in Snæfellsnes however. While the EarthCheck programme has good social and economic intentions, not enough information was gathered for the social aspect to accurately be described and no economic-tourism information is available with respect to EarthCheck certification.

6.3 Is EarthCheck community certification an effective sustainable tourism marketing tool?

To date, the EarthCheck brand has not been used to market Snæfellsnes to draw new tourists to the region, despite being one of the main objectives of gaining EarthCheck certification. Less than 1% of businesses have the certification and only two businesses are using the certification to market their product. None of the interviewees knew if the EarthCheck brand has affected the number or type of tourists that visit the peninsula because no one is researching this topic.

As a result, the second research goal cannot be adequately answered due to the lack of research and existing information on the topic. To determine if EarthCheck certification is an effective sustainable tourism marketing tool, the following steps must be taken:

- market Snæfellsnes as an EarthCheck community (Theódóra did indicate in her interview that marketing Snæfellsnes as an environmentally certified destination is on her 2011 agenda);
- develop current Snæfellsnes tourist profiles to provide baseline data; and,
- monitor and evaluate how the marketing is affecting tourist profiles and number of visiting tourists by updating Snæfellsnes tourist profiles each year.

6.4 Effective Destination Management in Snæfellsnes

The SWOT analysis highlighted many practical and theoretical holes in the EarthCheck programme as it is applied in Snæfellsnes. Four academic disciplines were noted in the SWOT analysis: community development, environmental planning, sustainable development and sustainable tourism.

Figure 11: Effective destination management. Source: Lindsay Church

Figure 11 suggests that by applying these four disciplines to Snæfellsnes, effective destination management in Snæfellsnes is attainable. These fields hold the underlying knowledge required to effectively manage Snæfellsnes as a tourist destination. In other

words, effective destination management in Snæfellsnes will only occur when these four disciplines converge.

6.4.1 Using Theoretical Knowledge to Bridge the Gap

Under community development there is a lack of grass-roots involvement, a decreasing level of partnership between local stakeholders and the Snæfellsnes Executive Board, which of course minimizes the diversity of businesses, organizations and local community groups working in cooperation with the project as well.

According to the Auditor Report and Checklist February 2010 for Snæfellsnes environmental planning is not being implemented in Snæfellsnes and in turn neither is an ecosystem-based management system. Jennings's (2004) suggestion to use 'limits of acceptable change' (LAC) as a planning framework when one does not exist was not followed.

The three pillars of sustainability encompass societal, environmental and economic factors. However, the Snæfellsnes economy has not been affected by the EarthCheck project and according to some interviewees that was never the point of the project. Despite these views, sustainability cannot be practiced if all three pillars are not considered.

Similarly, sustainable tourism, as defined by WTO (2004), affects the society, environment and economy. The EarthCheck programme in Snæfellsnes has not affected the tourism industry, according to interviewees. Policies implemented do mention tourism but the project has only recently reached the point where the Executive Board is interested in using the standard to market the region to help boost tourism.

Applying community development, environmental planning, sustainable development and sustainable tourism best practice principles to the Snæfellsnes case should lead to effective destination management.

6.5 Recommendations

Recommendations stem from the theoretical overview, site visits, interviews and the analysis conducted on EarthCheck community certification in the context of Snæfellsnes Peninsula.

6.5.1 Snæfellsnes Peninsula

It is recommended that the Snæfellsnes Peninsula:

- involve the Snæfellsnes community in the EarthCheck Executive Board evaluation process to ensure some level of accountability;
- increase community involvement and community consultation to improve community awareness about the EarthCheck project and help instil a sense of ownership and pride among residents;
- increase signage in each community indicating what EarthCheck is, why it was implemented in Snæfellsnes, and use community examples to illustrate what has changed since Snæfellsnes Peninsula gained EarthCheck certification;
- use the internet to advertise and market the EarthCheck project to tourists as well as Snæfellsnes residents; and,
- adopt LAC as a planning framework to guide tourism development.

6.5.2 Westfjords

Prior to becoming an EarthCheck member and pursuing EarthCheck certification it is recommended that the Westfjords:

- recognize that EarthCheck is only part of the picture and for effective destination management to take place in the Westfjords environmental planning, community development, sustainable tourism and sustainable development need to coincide;
- question whether the EarthCheck programme is the right brand for the Westfjords region prior to applying; and,
- involve all municipalities within the Westfjords to obtain a public opinion about branding the Westfjords based on effective destination management theory, not necessarily as an EarthCheck community.

If EarthCheck certification is what the Westfjords community wants, then it is recommended:

- the initiative apply the four community development principles: grassroots involvement, partnership, integration and strengths-based;
- integrate LAC into the local planning framework; and,
- utilize sustainable development and sustainable tourism best practice principles.

6.6 Is EarthCheck Certification necessary?

It is of the opinion of Guðrun Bergmann and the author that gaining the EarthCheck certification was not necessary for the following achievements to occur: developing a three bin waste management system; removing derelict vehicles and developing policy to help improve town cleanliness; helping harbours gain the Blue Flag; encouraging schools to gain the Green Flag; and, monitoring water and energy usage. All of these changes that occurred in Snæfellsnes as a result of the EarthCheck programme could occur without gaining EarthCheck certification and in fact does. But in a country where communities do not always cooperate with each other and natural resources such as potable water and energy are plentiful, perhaps an environmental standard such as EarthCheck is exactly what Icelandic communities need. In Snæfellsnes, gaining EarthCheck certification was a common goal the communities worked together to achieve and continue to work together to uphold.

The most pivotal change that occurred in Snæfellsnes due to the EarthCheck program was the shift in mentality to being more environmentally aware, thinking locally and realizing the importance of educating children on this matter. If there is a chance that the EarthCheck program could have the same effect in other regions of Iceland then gaining EarthCheck certification is worthwhile.

Chapter 7.0

SUMMARY

7.1 Summary

The Snæfellsnes EarthCheck programme initiated at the grass-roots level but over time adopted a top-down approach, which is now led by an executive group comprised primarily of Snæfellsnes mayors (T. Mattíasdottír, personal communication, October 4, 2010). This change decreased community capacity, which threatens the successfulness and future existence of the EarthCheck programme in Snæfellsnes.

To support the EarthCheck programme in Snæfellsnes, it was recommended sustainable development, sustainable tourism, environmental planning and community development best practice principles be incorporated into the project.

While many positive environmental and social changes in Snæfellsnes were acknowledged by interviewees, the response to whether EarthCheck certification was necessary in order for these changes to occur was typically no. Despite admitting EarthCheck certification is not necessary, interviewees recognized the importance of maintaining certification status solely because they did not want to lose what they already gained. The EarthCheck programme was described as a carrot because it encourages communities to be more environmentally and socially sustainable by requiring international standards. The EarthCheck programme is also a stick because it requires communities to implement certain systems in order to gain and maintain certification status.

EarthCheck Pty Ltd. (2010c) advertises the EarthCheck sustainable community standard both as a destination management tool to help communities deal with climate change and a marketing mechanism. Using the EarthCheck brand to advertise a sustainable destination is dangerous when determining the 'Limits of Acceptable Change' is not required.

Research results played an integral role in understanding the opportunities and constraints of the EarthCheck sustainable community certification programme as it is applied in Snæfellsnes, Iceland. This case study provided insight into the EarthCheck programme as it relates to sustainable tourism, sustainable development, community development, destination management and environmental planning. Recommendations were made for Snæfellsnes as well as the Westfjords as the latter region is considering applying for EarthCheck certification.

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