



**Egilsstaðir**

**-The Sleeping Giant and its Contents-**

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# **Egilsstaðir: The Sleeping Giant and its Contents**

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12 ECTS thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of a  
*Baccalaureum Artium* degree in Tourism

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# Abstract

Travellers' numbers to Iceland are increasing each year which means that tourism policies need to be made stronger. Egilsstaðir is an important place for east Iceland as it is the service community for the region. Not only is it located on the biggest intersection in the east but it also does get all traffic from the Smyril-Line ferry, sailing in to Seyðisfjörður, weekly.

The goal of this research is to find out if Egilsstaðir meets up to the expectations of the tourism sector. Interviews were taken with seven people and were designed to reach a conclusion in this matter with the interviewees all being a part of the tourism sector in Egilsstaðir in one way or the other. The interviews were designed from Gunn's ideology on how to build up a good destination and with Butler's lifetime cycle of destination.

The importance of Egilsstaðir as a good service destination is huge and a good and well thought out structure and policy is needed for this place to succeed.

Keywords: Destination, attractions, travellers, Egilsstaðir.

# Útdráttur

Ferðamannatölur til Íslands fara sífellt hækkandi á hverju ári og stefnumótun í ferðapjónustu þarf því að vera markviss og sterk. Egilsstaðir er mikilvægur staður fyrir Austurland þar sem að bærinn er aðal þjónustubærinn á því svæði. Egilsstaðir eru staðsettir á stærstu krossgötum Austurlands og fer því mikil umferð þar í gegn. Einnig fer öll umferð frá Norrænu, ferjunni sem siglir inn í Seyðisfjörð, í gegnum bæinn í hverri viku.

Markmið þessarar rannsóknar er að komast að því hvort að Egilsstaðir séu að standa undir væntingum ferðapjónustunnar. Tekin voru viðtöl við sjö aðila sem starfa við ferðapjónustu á Egilsstöðum og voru þau hönnuð með það markmið í huga að komast að niðurstöðu um Egilsstaði sem áfangastað. Við hönnun viðtalanna var stuðst við kenningar fræðimannsins Gunn's um það hvernig góður áfangastaður skuli vera byggður upp og einnig var stuðst við líftímakúrfu Butler's um áfangastaði. Það er mikilvægt að Egilsstaðir sé góður áfangastaður og sé ríkur af góðri og fjölbreyttri þjónustu. Uppbygging bæjarins þarf að vera góð og stefnumótun í ferðapjónustu sem og öðrum þáttum þarf að vera markviss til þess að staðurinn nái að blómstra sem áfangastaður.

Lykilorð: Áfangastaður, aðdráttarafl, ferðamaður, Egilsstaðir.

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# 1 Introduction

Iceland has been growing a lot as a tourism destination in the last three years. Visitor numbers have been growing and in 2012 there was an increase of 18,9% and in 2014 the increase was 23,6% (Ferðamálastofa, n.d.). Because of these increases in visitor's numbers every destination has to have a clear image of what they want to present to travellers and know if they have the means to provide what is needed.

Egilsstaðir is one of the destinations that requires very structured image and policy for tourism to blossom in the area. Egilsstaðir is also a very important destination for east Iceland as a whole area since it is the centre for this part of the country. The number of travellers going through Egilsstaðir on a yearly basis is important for the area. The ring road (road number 1) around Iceland is 1332 km in length (Vegagerðin, n.d.) and Egilsstaðir is on the opposite side of the country from Keflavík. Most foreign travellers come through Keflavík airport and the drive to Egilsstaðir is about 670 km. That is the reason why it is so important for Egilsstaðir to stand much stronger as a destination than other places closer to Reykjavík; the road is long and the flight is not in east Iceland's favour if we look at the prices. So to get travellers to come to Egilsstaðir and to the east as well, destinations need to be organized properly.

The awakening of this research of mine started in the summer of 2014 when working at the Information Centre in Egilsstaðir that serves the whole east Iceland. Travellers came in to get to know the east part and where they should go and what was interesting at each place in the east. There always seemed to be little interest in staying in Egilsstaðir for a long period of time. Travellers were happy to hear about the forest Selskógur, the swimming pool, the nice walks around the town and the museum. Still there was something that the traveller seemed to linger after and the thought of something more seemed to be more appealing. Does there always need to be more to an attraction than just the attraction? It seemed to me that there has to be a reason that an attraction is an attraction and why a destination is a destination. We do need to make the demand for an attraction or a

destination since we do supply it and we need to define it. Maybe Egilsstaðir needs to create the demand side as a destination to have travellers staying longer.

In this research the term ‘traveller’ will be used instead of the term ‘tourist’. The term ‘tourist’ is often seen as a slightly more negative term to use for describing an independent traveller (O’Reilly 2005 in Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005:155). ‘Tourist’ is often a term that describes a mass traveller, a herd lacking independent travel ideas and travellers will most likely be offended by being called tourists (O’Reilly 2005 in Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005:155). Since this research is not written to offend anyone, the term ‘traveller’ will be used.

This research is based on interviews and aims to determine if Egilsstaðir is in fact a good destination and if it needs improving of some sort. It is also trying to see what makes travellers rush quickly through this town so fast as it seems.

The research questions in this quantitative research are:

*Is Egilsstaðir a destination?*

*Are the infrastructures for serving travellers strong enough?*

To conclude this introductory chapter, section 1.1 provides a brief description of Egilsstaðir and section 1.1.1 the ferries that bring passengers to this destination. Following is the literature in review chapter two where references of destinations, attractions and destinations structure are presented. Chapter three is about the research method used and describes why quantitative methodology was chosen and what benefit that brings to this research. The chapter of the interviews analysis, chapter four, follows and chapter five discusses about what the findings of the interviews show. Chapter six is the conclusion to the thesis.

## **1.1 Egilsstaðir – a brief description**

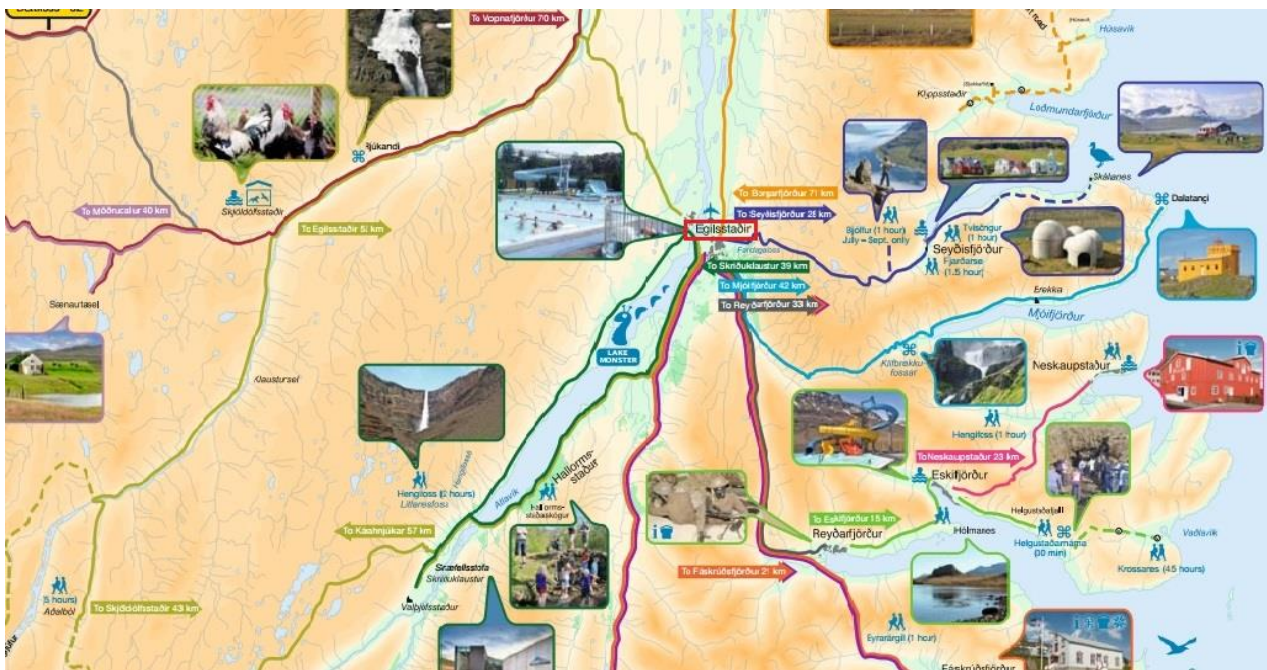
“However much you strain to discover some underlying charm, you’ll find sprawling Egilsstaðir isn’t a ravishing beauty. It’s the main regional transport hub, and a centre for local commerce. Sorry, it’s about as

enchanting as it sounds. Services include an excellent regional tourist office and quality accommodation.

Egilsstaðir’s saving grace is its proximity to lovely Lagarfljót, Iceland’s third-largest lake. Since Saga times, tales have been told of a monster living in its depths. If you want to do some beastie-hunting, or explore the forest on the lake’s eastern bank, Egilsstaðir makes a good base.”

*(Lonely Planet, 2014).*

The description above can be found online on Lonely Planet’s webpage. Lonely Planet is a travel guide book series that many people purchase before heading on an adventure and this text is not exactly inspiring for people to visit Egilsstaðir. Egilsstaðir is in a way a bus stop; people are for the most part just coming through to leave right away for another destination that interests them more.



**Figure 1 – Egilsstaðir and its surroundings (East Iceland, n.d.)**

Egilsstaðir is located on the banks of the river Lagarfljót and on the other side of the river is Fellabær. These communities are located in the largest lowland area of the east which means that the climate is mild in summer and cold in winter (Birgir Sumarliðason, 2015). Egilsstaðir is the largest town in east Iceland. The population in 2015 is 2.319 people according to Iceland’s Statistical Office (Hagstofa Íslands, 2015). Its airport is suitable for

both domestic and international flights and the airport is one of four airports in Iceland that fulfil requirements for international flights (Isavia, n.d.). In 2014, the service community was established to try and make a more sufficient tourism sector in Egilsstaðir. The service community is a union that consists of around 50-60 companies working together with the municipality and that is very strong for Egilsstaðir.

Geographically, Egilsstaðir is located on a crossroad that leads south to Höfn, or north to Mývatn. It is often thought of as a stop between north and south Iceland and of course to the fjords in the east as well. Travel books provide travellers with the information that Egilsstaðir is only a place to quickly fill up your stomach and the tank of your car. The towns' location provides it with huge potential due to all the traffic running through. A ferry stops in Seyðisfjörður and passengers cannot leave the east part of Iceland without driving through Egilsstaðir. All basic services are in the town and the infrastructure is there, though some things might need to be renewed and fixed.

Egilsstaðir's vicinity is called Fljótsdalshérað and reaches all the way from Héraðssandur beach and up to Vatnajökull National Park. Numerous culture festivals are held all over Fljótsdalshérað and attract artists from all of Iceland to participate and one can say that the society is vibrant in that way. On the edge of the town lies the forest Selskógur. In the forest mushrooms and berries grow and the market trails make the forest a nice place to walk in (Fljótsdalshérað, 2008-2013).



Figure 1 2 – Fljótsdalshérað vicinity (Wikipedia, n.d.)

### **1.1.1 The ferry and the passengers**

In the two last years, 2013 and 2014, almost 20.000 people each year came as passengers with the ferry Norræna Smyril-Line to Seyðisfjörður. In 2013, 18.530 passengers came through Seyðisfjörður and in 2014 there were 19.948 passengers. Those are only the numbers for passengers coming with the ferry. A total number for both incoming and

outgoing passengers in 2013 was 36.622 and in 2014 were 39.950 passengers. This means that Egilsstaðir has up to 40.000 people going through on yearly basis only from the ferry (Sófus Jóhannsson, 13.02.15). Having the ferry bringing all these passengers through to Seyðisfjörður means that these passengers will all go through Egilsstaðir and use the services provided there. Economically this is very good for Egilsstaðir and it means that services can be built up stronger for the town. Residents in east Iceland use Egilsstaðir as a service hub so losing all that traffic that comes with the ferry will drag Egilsstaðir's services down and make them weaker and therefor affect the whole region. There had been a talk about the ferry being moved to Reyðarfjörður or Eskifjörður over the wintertime which would have a huge impact for the whole east part of Iceland (RÚV, 2013).



## 2 Literature review

In this chapter literature supporting this thesis will be introduced. In chapter 2.1 literatures about destinations will be explained and in chapter 2.1.1 literature about destinations attraction will be explained. In chapter 2.2 Gunn's model will be introduced. In chapter 2.3 literatures about destinations development and structure will be explained and in chapter 2.4 Butler's cycle will be introduced and explained. All this literature is what my thesis is built up on as well as interviews with interviewees.

Tourism is a field that is built up on certain factors; there is just a small part of tourism that can be planned to the fullest (Gunn, 2002:4). It does matter for tourism that the structure is organized in a certain way and that it spreads out to the community in the most efficient way possible for the individual to experience it. It is not possible to invest in experience beforehand; it is created with each and every one in a different way. That is why the tourism industry must do its best to be influential in delivering its product in a way that the experience will be delivered to the fullest. The tourism industry can contribute to a society by making sure that every aspect of the sector is systematically presented and follows the tourism market and its behaviour (Anderson, 2007:46).

The historical development of the tourism sector has influenced how tourism is manifest in the present, and is also a product of the impact of more recent globalization. People travel for many different reasons, many seek a change from their daily life (George, Mair & Reid, 2009:126) and some are looking for a way out of their comfort zone. The geographical location of a destination matters for every place and it can also cope with the travellers' decision on where to go and what destinations to visit (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003:234). For example, if a destination is far from main roads or points of interest travellers are more likely to not stop by due to extra travel time. This does not go for every traveller or destination, but can be hindering for the traveller. Bear in mind though, that it is not just the location of a destination that needs to be in order, the destination itself also needs to be attractive to be a point of interest.

The word *tourism* has been defined by various authors. *The World Tourism Organization* in Page (2009:14) defines tourism as all the recreation that goes on outside of one's home and outside of the regular dwelling spot, whether travelling between A and B or in one specific place. The place chosen as a travel destination depends on the person who is travelling and the intention or the purpose of the trip. To attract visitors, destinations need to possess certain factors and combine in that most of the traveller's primary needs (Page, 2009:87) and to do so tourism companies will need to put in a lot of work and money and invest in the area and its development.

Image is important for every nation and of course to every destination as well. Image is about people, culture, and the type of the community, employment, and form of regime, products and words. Creating image is important and brings some sort of advantage to the destination or nation. Image attracts people, brings in equity and ideas and if the image is good it can bring positive economic impact to the community (Forsætisráðuneytið, 2008:4). A destination's image has a huge impact on the travellers' decision making when it comes to choosing what to see and where to go.

The geographical location of a destination, history, culture, and diversity in leisure, the intensity in marketing, events and how they are arranged, are all the key factors when it comes to enticing travellers to visit a certain destination (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003:111). Dubinsky (1994) states that the tourism sector is all about making some sort of an image or illusion for the traveller (cited in Shaw & Williams, 2002:65) and that is possible by having all those factors mentioned above in order and desirable. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is relevant in this matter. *Maslow's hierarchy of needs* is a list of the five primary human needs (McLeod, 2007). Looking at the hierarchy from the bottom to the top we must be able to fulfil the bottom need to be able to fulfil the rest of the hierarchy. If the bottom need, the physiological needs, is not fulfilled, it will affect the traveller's experience of the factors following in the hierarchy (Page, 2009:93) and so forth.

When planning tourism it must always be kept in mind that a journey is taken for a certain purpose. The traveller often seeks to participate in some events or leisure and that is often the main purpose of the trip. Maslow's hierarchy can be very handy when organizing an attraction or leisure activity at a destination so that this particular destination can fulfil the

primary needs of the traveller. Leisure and events are a huge matter when it comes to organizing a journey (Page, 2009:134-135) and in some cases, leisure or events are the main purposes for the trip. Another thing that organizers must bear in mind is that the access to a destination is important. If transportation to, and within a certain destination is difficult and precarious it is unlikely that the traveller would want to visit that destination (Page, 2009:141). It should always be kept in mind that tourism is simply about people (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997:133) and tourism should always evolve around that.

## **2.1 Destinations**

Broadly speaking, if a destination has a good structure and its formulation is well organized, travellers number are more likely to increase. For the numbers to increase, buildings, facilities and infrastructure that will fulfil the primary needs of the tourism are necessary. The entire tourism destination product is complex and has both tangible and intangible sites. Parking facilities, means of access, visitor attractions and the physical stock of hotels are all a part of the tangibility provision. Intangibility on the other hand is all the thing a destination is built on; the image and culture for example (Palmer & Bejou, 1995:617).

The tourism sector as a product does and will reflect the overall experience of the destination, which is a combination of many service factors such as accommodation, transportation (self-drive or public), leisure and restaurants. Combined, these factors should create an attraction for the destination (Ritche & Crouch, 2003:19). In this research, the community itself is the hub of the destination and therefore plays the biggest role of all in the part that is important for the tourism sector. All aspects must be taken under the microscope since the suppliers also help with the overall tourism product. Buhalis (2000) in Enright & Newton (2004:777), points out the overall outcome of this problem and where it can lead to, it can raise difficulties in marketing issues for example.

An attraction is the main point of a destination because in a lot of cases, that is what attracts individuals to visit (Page, 2009:341). A destination without an attraction or uniqueness is less likely to be visited. Visitor centres, public bathrooms, opening hours, markings and signposts need to be available and visible to inform and serve (Page,

2009:362). When an attraction has been delivered to the traveller and the traveller has experienced the uniqueness in a positive way, in many cases it leads to repeated visits by that individual. This often leads to a positive effect on the destination, the whole community and the tourism sector in that area. If you are happy with your experience you are more likely to spread the word, a marketing concept called *word-of-mouth*, which is a form of free publicity. Of course this also goes the other way around, a negative experience will also spread out (Page, 2009:365). The point with one's travelling is to enjoy the ride. It has been pointed out that tourism now days and the complicated characteristics of it have the tendency to reduce the travellers' satisfaction of the trip though the destination has all that it takes to be delivered in the best way possible to the traveller (Gunn, 2002:15). Some destinations are better than others in terms of natural appearances and those destinations become the most popular ones (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003:111).

### **2.1.1 Destinations attraction**

In many cases the primary purpose for travelling evolves around visitor's attractions which can either be human-made or natural (Leask, 2009:155). In destination development, attraction is the key thing. Destination development often focuses on the purpose of the attractions, but what makes an attraction successful has rarely been published (Leask, 2009:158). So there does not seem to be a clear idea of what kind of attraction does attract visitors. In that case benchmarking is a recommended way to raise the standards of the sector and to tackle fast growing competition (Leask, 2009:162). Attractions are often thought of as "natural" attractions that appear to the individual as some extreme type of phenomena or even some interesting landscapes (Jacobsen, 1997:343) for example, the northern lights attract travellers coming to Iceland just to witness this phenomenon. For a tourism attraction to be applicable in the eyes of the traveller it needs to be special, extraordinary or even represent and give a good image of what the destination is and its history or even the culture (Jacobsen, 1997:344).

## **2.2 Destinations supply-side**

Tourism is not a new activity and has, over time, developed into a product that has become accessible worldwide. History shows us there has been a change in traveller's nature (Page, 2009:37), from Pilgrim travels, Grand Tour, Olympic Games in Greek societies and to what we know today. From the times of Aristoteles and the Roman Empire tourism and travellers behaviour have been developing and changing (Page, 2009:39). Travellers enjoyed experiencing and visiting a new place and to get to know new culture, be in that place and experiencing the characteristics of the destination (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997:84), it did not call for the need of something bigger. Today, the tourism sector has developed and changed and one could conclude that globalization has something to do with this change. The tendency to find a destination that possesses a certain attraction is growing and travellers choose their destination according to this attraction. This attraction has to not just attract, but also to keep visitors to it busy while staying there (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997:84).

As an industry, the tourism sector is driven by two factors, supply and demand. Within

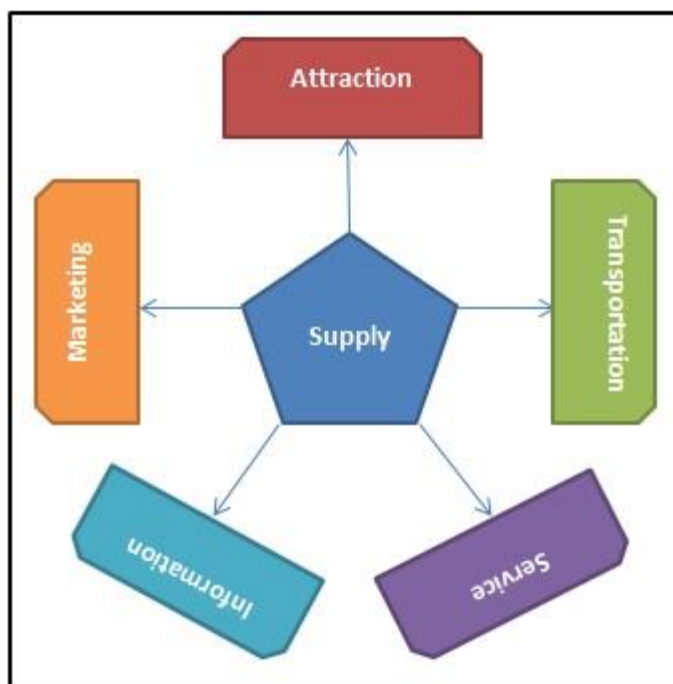


Figure 1.3 - The supply model (Gunn, 2002:34)

these two factors a number of things are necessary to keep in mind for success. The connection between supply and demand is basically the same as it was years ago. For example, airlines and hotels are good at promoting themselves, but the tourism sector will not run itself with just hotels and airlines. Gunn's (2002) model, see Figure 1.3, describes five factors that must be in order when developing tourism destinations.

- *Attraction* - which connects with image and creating an image,
- *Transportation* - (public or self-drive) to, from and around the destination
- *Service* - the need of primary service on the destination

- *Information* - such as information centres and visitor centres
- *Marketing* - is one of the key things. If you don't have marketing but all of the other factors, then what is the point, nobody will know about it (Gunn, 2002:34).

Although the supply side is important, the demand side cannot be forgotten. The supply needs to be there and then the demand will for the most part follow (Gunn, 2002:40). The attraction of a destination is what makes the supply side. The market supplies the *pull factor* for the traveller, but the attraction is the *push factor* (Gunn, 2002:41). The pull- and push factors can be defined in this way; people travel because there is something within them, some inner conviction or power that pulls them into going on a journey. Then there is some external power; for example, marketing that can push the individual into travelling to a certain destination (Mohammad & Som, 2014:41).

## **2.3 Development and structure of destinations**

The concept *destination* has been explained in this chapter in a certain way. What a good destination is about is that the accessibility around it is acceptable, the sight and approach is good and that the diversity in attraction is sufficient. A destination can be built up out of many communities and the connection between the community and the attraction needs to be both available and visible. The diversity of the destinations can provide a motive for someone to travel between them. The connection between the destination and the attraction is important when looking at the development and structure of a destination. These connections need to be well planned so that the attraction is delivered in the best way possible to the traveller (Gunn, 2002:223). An unorganized tourism sector can lead to destruction in some way (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997:115). The authority has a role to provide the basis of tourism planning, amongst other things outside the tourism sector and in its public area, subject to the municipality (Gunn, 2002:11). In Iceland the authority should be in the hands of the Icelandic Tourist Board that could then provide the municipality with the instructions.

Tourism companies can have significant economic impact on destinations. Accommodation, restaurants, transportation, travelling agencies and other tourism companies provide employment and bring the most income in the destinations that have

reached a certain height in the tourism sector (Gunn, 2002:45). The role of transportation needs to be empowered both for the benefit of travellers and the local people (Gunn, 2002:53), especially in the high travelling season.

Passing on positive information is important for a destinations success and by giving good and accessible information a contribution is made to attract travellers. Information can take many forms such as signs or maps, travel guide books, videos, articles in magazines, a narrative from a guide, booklets and likewise *word-of-mouth* (Gunn, 2002:54). A destination's image can easily be harmed by dis-satisfied travellers spreading negative comments (Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott 2003 cited in Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2007:461) and that is the disadvantage of the *word-of-mouth* concept. The combination of an unstructured destination and dissatisfied locals will result in a negative reputation due to *word-of-mouth* (Crick 2003 cited in Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2007:461). So destinations organizers must be aware of not leaving their destinations open for negative comments spreading over the world, building a reputation takes a long time, but ruining it takes one nasty comment or feedback.

## **2.4 Tourism lifetime cycle**

Tourism and travellers behaviour are dynamic and ever-changing. Over time travellers' needs are subject to change as well as their preferences. This can also occur to a destination or its attraction, cultural or natural; it can change or even disappear (Butler, 1980:5). Butler (1980) had a simple idea in mind with the destination lifetime cycle and borrowed the basic idea from the product lifecycle and transferred it over to destinations (Hovinen, 2002:210-211). The cycle is best measured with Butlers (1980) destination lifetime cycle, see Figure 1.4. Destinations can easily be self-destructive by quenching the original attractions of the place and replacing them by outweighing and over commercializing what was the first tourism attraction (Butler, 1980:6). Initially in every destination visitors numbers are low due to lack of access, local knowledge and facilities, for example. Increasing awareness for the importance for these things mentioned above, will lead to an upgrade of the destination that will lead to increased visitors numbers.

A destination must always keep in mind that when carrying capacity is reached, attractiveness will reduce. The same goes for destinations in the neighbourhood; a decrease in attractiveness affects the whole vicinity (Butler, 1980:6). Carrying capacity is defined as such by the Icelandic Tourist Board:

„The maximum number of travellers that can travel around the area without resulting in an unacceptable degradation of the environment or the travellers experience. Researches on carrying capacity have shown that it is difficult to find out the right number for the maximum number that is desirable in a certain tourism destination. This is mainly because there are many factors that must be considered, both social and nature based factors. In addition, ideas are diverse with each and everyone on when changes become unacceptable“ (Anna Dóra Sæþórsdóttir, Guðrún Gísladóttir, Arnar Már Ólafsson, Björn Margeir Sigurjónsson & Bergþóra Aradóttir, 2001:iii).

Explaining the stages of Butler’s (1980) cycle provides a clearer image about the discussion, see Figure 1.4. First, the *exploration* stage occurs when small numbers of

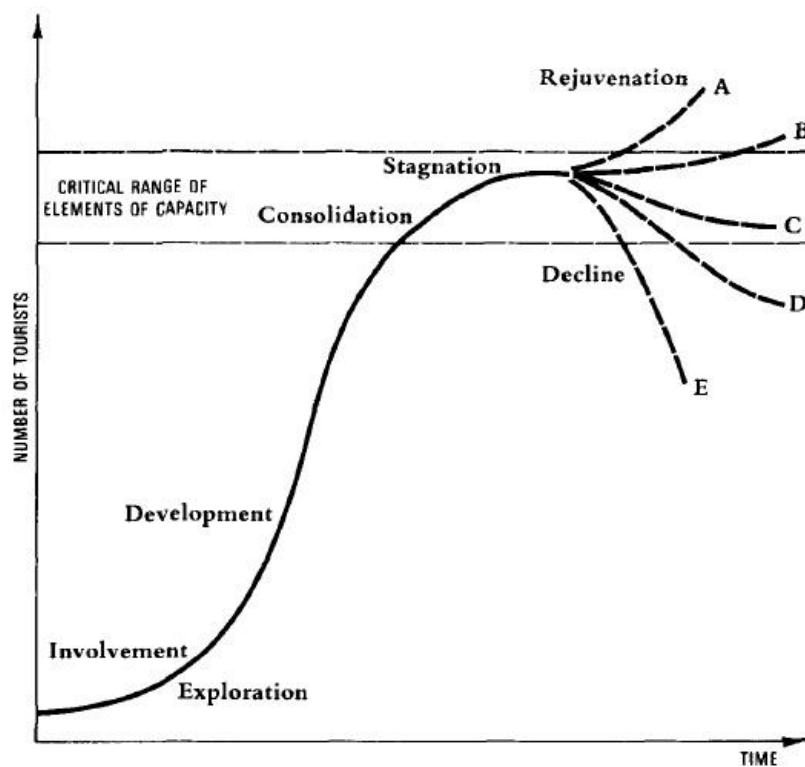


Figure 1 4 - Butler (1980:7) lifetime cycle model

travellers visit the destination. No specific facilities for visitors are provided, so local



facilities need to be used and local residents need to socialize and spread information to the visitors. This can also be the major attraction factor for the area (Butler, 1980:6-7). Next is the *involvement* stage where visitor's numbers are increasing. Provision of facilities is increasing, often with help from residents. The facilities are built for both visitors and residents. At this point advertising usually starts and the initial marketing area is likely to be defined (Butler, 1980:7). Next is the *development* stage where a well-defined tourist area is reflected which coincides with heavy advertisement. At this point, local provision of facilities declines and bigger organizations take over the market bringing in newer and more elaborate facilities (Butler, 1980:8). In the *consolidation* stage visitor's numbers do not increase as rapidly. A large part of the area's economy is connected to tourism. Conflict between residents who are not a part of the tourism sector and residents running the tourism sector can be caused at this stage. It can also lead to deprivation and restrictions by landowners, for example (Butler, 1980:8). The *stagnation* stage is the next stage. This is where the peak in visitors' numbers has been reached and capacity at sensitive factors at the area has been exceeded. It applies to the environment, social, and the economic. At this point, it is hard to maintain the visitors' numbers and the image of the destination and the geographic environment are separated unpredictably (Butler, 1980:8). From the *stagnation* stage a destination can go different ways. It can hit *decline* stage or *rejuvenation* stage. In *declination* the destination is not compatible with newer destinations and slowly the destination will move from an economy tied to tourism to moving out of tourism. This is also the stage where the bigger organizations leave and local involvement in the industry will grow again since prices are falling with the declination of the market. Finally, the area becomes a tourist slum or loses its tourism entirely (Butler, 1980:9). At the other end of the line is the *rejuvenation* stage. This is a stage that will most likely never be reached unless the image of the tourism sector changes entirely at the destination. There is an alternative for every destination in this matter and that is to use "the old box in the back that never has been opened before", an attraction that has not yet been advertised (Butler, 1980:9). This can lead to the point where the area loses all of its competitiveness in the end (Butler, 1980:9), so this is a risky stage as well as the *decline* stage. Of course not all destinations reach the stages in the cycle as clearly as others, and it might be that later stages of the cycle are more obvious since they are more related to the tourism sector than earlier stages (Butler, 1980:10).

Observations have shown that those who are responsible for planning, developing and managing tourism areas, need to have a positive attitude towards tourism (Butler, 1980:11) and be able to visualize the changes in some way. It must also be kept in mind that destinations and attractions are not forever and should be handled with precaution (Butler, 1980:11). Researchers have emphasized that the most attractive areas and destinations will at some point become relics (Butler, 1980:12).

According to Singh (2011) what Butler left out of his model of tourism life time cycle is the carrying capacity of the destinations. Singh (2011) also explained how the model only studies the destinations for a short period of time so outcomes are not as significant as they would be if looked at the destination for a longer period.

„...destination competition alone cannot explain tourist area life cycles, and one has to understand collaborations and partnerships, as well as strengths of satellite areas, important for diversifying and marketing the tourism product in an age of stiff competition“ (Singh, 2011:1186).

It might take thousands of years for evolution for tourism destinations to rise and fall over and over again. Butler's (1980) model explains the rise and falls of destinations in too short period of time as mentioned above and that is the drawback to the model (Singh, 2005:1185-1186). Longer periods of time would be more thorough. Butler (2006:41) suggests that the most fitting way of using Butler's (1980) cycle is to measure travellers length of stay at a destination instead of calculating numbers of travellers. That is because looking at the early stages of the cycle, destinations can be hard to access and that is the argument for measuring longer stays (Butler, 2006:41). There have also been other pointers from different researchers. Debbage (1990) in Butler (2006:47) suggest that there is more than the carrying capacity that leads destinations into the decline stage; there is also outside competition in the sector that pushes a destination in that stage. Debbage (1990) in Butler (2006:47) also mentioned that the oligopoly is what what causes stagnation and declination.

Butler's (1980) cycle still is relevant today, the framework is good, but the cycle could be made more useful for example with the realization that all tourism products also have their own lifecycle and each and everyone supports and affects the destination in a different way

(Hovinen, 2002:227). So it should be clear to researchers using this cycle that an attraction or a destination does not entirely stand on its own, it needs something more, good infrastructure and image for example.

### 3 Research method

Research methods can be qualitative or quantitative. Quantitative methods focus mainly on numbers and everything that can be measured or counted, and contacts with participants are usually limited (Sigurlína Davíðsdóttir, 2003:221-222). Qualitative methods, on the other hand, look at how a person or a group experience a certain issue and how to understand the participants view on it (Sigurlína Davíðsdóttir, 2003:222 & 226). The researcher is the biggest part in qualitative methods because s/he collects the data used and analyses it using inductive analyses (Newman, 2006:83).

#### 3.1 Methodology

In this research the chosen method is qualitative because the ability to see things through the eyes of the people or the society is interesting and relevant to the study. Interviews are defined by Berg (2001) as a conversation with a purpose where the purpose is gathering information. Gathering information from individuals and see what lies within their thoughts is what I believe is most suitable in this research. Since there is not much literature on Egilsstaðir as a destination methodology was chosen. Qualitative research methods give you words, not numbers, the participant's point of view, not the other way around. It gives you a close contact with the research and the participants. The data is usually deeper in qualitative methods (Bryman, 2004:286-288) and that is what I am looking for.

All interviews were conducted in Icelandic and were transcribed into English after the processing of the interviews. Two different sets of interview questions were used in this research, both semi-structured, and seven people participated, see Table 1.

Name	Position	Interview date	Interviewee number
<b>Björn Ingimarsson</b>	Mayor of	Interviewed on the 8th	No.1

	Fljótsdalshérað vicinity	of December 2014	
<b>María Hjálmarsdóttir</b>	Project manager at Austurbrú, marketing office for East Iceland	Interview questions sent and received through email	No.2
<b>Sandra María Ásgeirsdóttir</b>	Project manager at Travel East	Interviewed on the 8th of January 2015	No.3
<b>Sigurbjörg I. Flosadóttir</b>	Owner of Hotel Eyvindará	Interviewed on the 8th of January 2015	No.4
<b>Ívar Ingimarsson</b>	Owner of Guesthouse Birta and Guesthouse Olga	Interviewed on the 8th of January 2015	No.5
<b>Skúli Júlíusson</b>	Owner of Wildboys	Interviewed on the 8th of January 2015	No.6
<b>Gunnlaugur Jónasson</b>	Owner of Guesthouse Egilsstaðir – Lake Hotel	Interview questions sent and received through email	No.7

**Table 1 – Participants in the research**

A semi-structured interview technique was chosen because it has a clear structure but is still flexible, questions are half open (Gillham, 2005:70), and that leaves the participant to state their opinion without going off track. There are negative effects of using this method and the one I was dealing with was achieving adequate efficiency (Gillham, 2005:79). Two of the participants, Björn Ingimarsson and María Hjálmarsdóttir, got a slightly different interview than the rest of the participants. You can see the interviews in Appendix 1 and 2. Why the interviews were not exactly the same is because Björn and María play a different role in the tourism industry than the rest of the participants who all work on the field; own or run a tourism business of some sort and María and Björn are managing tourism. The participants for this research were chosen from the aim of the research and the purpose of it, as to make the research more credible. The participants all have personal experience in

the field researched and that is why they were chosen. This method in choosing participants is called theoretical sampling (Katrín Blöndal & Sigríður Halldórsdóttir, 2013:130-132).

In the process of analysing the interviews there was a realization that most participants do not have a long history in the tourism industry in Egilsstaðir but they are positive and powerful and that is, what will be seen in the interview chapter. Analysing an interview, it is good to look for a certain theme or repeated answers. That is what was done in this case. Interviews were looked at again and again to find or see the similarities and to compare different answers. That is what was done in the analysing process.

## **3.2 The research process**

The aim of this research is to analyse Egilsstaðir as a destination. Since there is not much existing data on Egilsstaðir, I needed to gather primary data. At first, the plan was to have a face-to-face interview with the mayor and the project manager at Austurbrú – Marketing office for East Iceland, and send out a questionnaire to the whole tourism sector in Egilsstaðir. Because that might not have given me the proper response rate due to a small community and response rates are often not very high, the outcome might not have been trustworthy. With guidance from my supervisor, fewer participants were chosen and a semi-structured interview was decided to be the most suitable approach. The research was carried out in winter. Therefore it was not possible to include traveller's participation, since the area is not rich with travellers in winter time. That might definitely be something worth looking in to later, to understand the travellers' perspectives of Egilsstaðir.

The formal work of the thesis started in the end of September 2014, when the first meeting with my supervisor took place. Research work started at the beginning of December when interviews were ready. Initially I sent an email to all of the participants who I wanted to interview (see Appendix 3). All of them were willing to participate except one person who advised me to talk with a colleague in the same company. Two participants could not meet face-to-face so I sent them the interview by email and they answered the questions through email as well, which unfortunately does not give the same outcome as in a face-to-face interview and is not as personal. Most of the interviews took place in Egilsstaðir on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2015, where each interview was around half an hour. The interview with the

mayor took place on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2014. Interview responses through emails were received on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2015. All of the interviews, except for the emails, were recorded and then transcribed into readable text on my computer so that analysing of interviews could take place.

Data collected was not only through interviews, but the interviews were the primary data of this research. Literature was also gathered through books and articles about the research topic; destinations. I also contacted the office, Austfar ehf, of the ferry in Seyðisfjörður, Smyrilline, for the numbers of travellers on a yearly basis that arrive with the ferry to Seyðisfjörður. Smyrilline gave me secondary data to help with the research.

When looking at drawbacks with the face-to-face interviews, it was hard to disguise myself as the researcher (Gillham, 2005:7) since most of the participants could form some sort of personal contact with me through work, from where I grew up and so on. The fact that I grew up close to this community and worked in Egilsstaðir at the Information Centre made it hard to keep a certain distance. At times my views on this research contents, might have partially affected the outcome of the interviews. To avoid this personal contact I could have used e-mail interviews to extend the distance between myself and the participants. It is the same with face-to-face interviewing and e-mail interviewing; it gives good data, but just maybe more specific and more determined answers (Gillham, 2005:108). E-mail interviewing does not give the researcher access to the participant's state or feeling at the time of the interview and could as well corrupt with the outcome of the interviews. Advantages and disadvantages exist in both techniques in this case.

## **4 Processing of the interviews**

Interview questions were sorted into chapters and then divided into five themes. The first chapter is about Egilsstaðir as a place and its advantages and disadvantages. Chapter 4.2 is about the municipalities' approach to Egilsstaðir. Chapter 4.3 explains expectations to Egilsstaðir and the expectations to Egilsstaðir in the future. Chapter 4.4 describes the infrastructure of Egilsstaðir and how Egilsstaðir is in the high season. The last chapter in this section is chapter 4.5 and that is about the traffic running through the city centre. Most of the interview participants in this study live in Egilsstaðir. As mentioned in the Research method chapter above, interviewees were purposefully chosen because they are all involved in tourism in Egilsstaðir.

### **4.1 Egilsstaðir as a place**

Egilsstaðir is a place known for its pleasant climate, nature and for the reindeers found across east Iceland. It is the centre of east Iceland and is the service provider in that area. The town is usually thought of as a drive-through place. Interviewee No. 1 says Egilsstaðir is a service centre and should build up on that because that is not going to change.

Egilsstaðir has the potential to be much more prominent for the travellers to stop and enjoy. Interviewee No. 5 says: "I've said that I feel like Egilsstaðir is like this sleeping giant..." the place is rising up and it needs good marketing to rise as well. From Egilsstaðir to every place in east Iceland, even to the highlands, is approximately one hour drive. A deterrent for travellers to Egilsstaðir is the very expensive domestic flight between here and Reykjavík said interviewee No. 5. The distance from Reykjavík is a long drive and, especially during winter, weather conditions do not always allow driving over mountain passes and that is where flights should be the other option added interviewee No. 5; however, due to costs, that is not a viable option for many travellers and locals.

In most cases, travellers only stay for one night in hotels or guesthouses and then either head south or north. This might mean that Egilsstaðir is not marketed correctly since



travellers do not know what there is to do in the town. The word must be spread, travellers must know about the things that are available in the town. Egilsstaðir seems to not have proven itself enough for travellers. Travellers find Höfn and Mývatn more attractive than Egilsstaðir. “We want them to stay longer, visit Egilsstaðir and also use tour operators that have their starting point in the town” said interviewee No.3. Interviewee No.5 said: “By far the greatest part of travellers only stays for one night, which might tell you that they arrive in the evening and leave early in the morning. Maybe we are not telling our story, what is here to do, so travellers only plan their overnight stays with us and then pack up and head on to a place that is doing it better than we are. Maybe we are not handing them the menu we have. There is the forest on the verge of the town and in the autumn it is filled with blueberries and falling leaves, which is something that should be spread out amongst travellers for example”.

#### **4.1.1 The advantages and disadvantages of Egilsstaðir as a destination**

Interviewee No. 1 said that Egilsstaðir has a lot of potential but it seems to be missing some attraction or the attraction is not being delivered effectively to travellers. Interviewee No. 2 also emphasized how many possibilities Egilsstaðir has for example, the close proximity to Vatnajökull national park. Still there is the problem with the attractions in the town itself.

#### **4.1.2 Advantages**

All of the interviewees agreed that the geographical location of Egilsstaðir is a key factor in its development as a tourism destination. Whether you are coming from the north or south and heading on in a circuit, you will always need to drive through Egilsstaðir. Having said that, the traffic going through is at the highest level in Egilsstaðir of the entire east Iceland and service and infrastructure have to be according to that. The geographical location also makes weather conditions a positive thing. Interviewee No. 1, says: “The weather here is pleasant, nature is beautiful and the surrounding of the town is diverting. Egilsstaðir is a mixture of urban and rural area and it only takes few minutes’ walk and you are in the forest Selskógur”. So for travellers who do not want to feel confined in an urban area, Egilsstaðir is a good place to visit. Interviewee No. 6 says: “Egilsstaðir and east Iceland

should be known for how short the distance is to go out in nature and to visit the highland”. The service community established in 2014 emphasizes that Egilsstaðir is the middle of east Iceland and distances from Egilsstaðir are not long. The service community slogan is: “Egilsstaðir: Centre of the east”.

Interviewee No. 3 says: “The infrastructures are here, but they need strengthening. Egilsstaðir has it all, just needs to work with what they have and make it stronger”. Egilsstaðir is first and foremost a service town so building a strong infrastructure is very important. Interviewee No. 4 says: “Egilsstaðir should be a place where the traveller stops and relaxes and organizes their trip around this part of Iceland. There is a lot of beautiful nature all around us and Egilsstaðir should be the spot to sit down and plan where to go and what to see.”

#### **4.1.3 Disadvantages**

Interviewee No. 7 pointed out that the town itself is still so young that it is missing a certain character. That can be both a positive and negative. Egilsstaðir is not only a young town, but interviewee No. 5 also pointed out that the town is as far away from Keflavík airport in Iceland as possible. Most travellers in Iceland come through Keflavík airport into the country.

Egilsstaðir is a small town and that affects the domestic market and makes it harder for companies to grow said interviewee No. 5. The service that is provided in the town does not thrive because of how small the market is. Interviewee No.5 said that the city centre is not good as it is set up now, but he also pointed out that it can easily be fixed. Interviewee No. 3 and interviewee No. 4 both mentioned the need for public toilets in Egilsstaðir and found it very interesting that at least up until now there public toilets have not been available in Egilsstaðir.

Interviewee No. 3 pointed out that the people in this area seem to have woken from their sleep later than in other places in Iceland which affected the effort in marketing for Egilsstaðir. The reactions in this area might have been slower than for example in the north and in the south if we look at Akureyri and Höfn. Interviewee No. 3 said “ people wonder

why we are so far behind than Akureyri for instance, in visitors stay and the population in Egilsstaðir”.

It is also a bad thing when people in service companies, locals in Egilsstaðir, do not recognize the area around them and therefore cannot instruct travellers when asked for information said interviewee No. 6. People working in service and all front line staff need to know the area because they are the face of the particular place visited.

## **4.2 The municipalities approach**

Interviewee No. 1 described the municipality’s approach to the tourism sector. They hired an employee who focuses on the industrial affairs and the tourism sector is involved as well. The municipality own the camping site in Egilsstaðir and a private company takes care of its operational. When the service community was established in 2014 the council decided to support that association so that they could hire their own employee. The decision was thought to be more effective than the council hiring staff in to their office. So, they gave money to the service community for them to choose who is their “person” and speaks for them. This makes the municipality not a direct participant, but they are there to help and they believe that this is a far more effective way to cooperate. Interviewee No. 2 pointed out that the focus of the municipality should be more on the airport and Vatnajökull national park. Internationalization for the airport in Egilsstaðir is an important issue for Egilsstaðir and all of east Iceland as well. Interviewee No. 2 also mentioned that the person who is working on tourism in this area has a lot of projects and that persons focus is elsewhere as well, so there is not so much time for focusing on the tourism sector in Egilsstaðir particularly.

A tourism policy for Egilsstaðir is included in the master plan for Egilsstaðir and Fljótshérað. The emphasis in the master plan is on the tourism sector as well as other industrial affairs. Therefore, there is no direct tourism policy in that area. “There is always the talk about tourism policy in the discussion” said interviewee No. 1. The outcome was that the best way would be to support the service community, as mentioned above, so they could hire their own employee. The municipality decided that it would be better that this

person was working in that field so that she could have direct contact with the tourism sector in Egilsstaðir.

Most of the interviewees agreed that the municipalities approach to tourism has improved the last two years. People are realizing that something has to be done for the community and for travellers in the community. There is an increase in travellers visiting Iceland and the town has to respond to that extra flow. Egilsstaðir is not, like the fjords surrounding it, built up on fisheries said interviewee No. 5 “providing services for Icelandic and foreign travellers is the most vital thing for Egilsstaðir and it is also a big revenue for the town. It is thanks to the municipality that the service community was set on foot”.

The establishment of the service community was a good start and has built a bridge between the companies in Egilsstaðir and the municipality. The service community activities include, fixing signs and directions, and making public toilets and long-time parking lots available. The municipality is doing a lot of work with the service community, but this all could have been done a lot earlier. Interviewees all agreed that this was a step forward and were really happy with this work. The service community maintains a webpage called Visit Egilsstaðir and that was well appreciated amongst some of the interviewees. Interviewee No. 4 wanted more support from the municipality to the people in the area who are constructing and bringing in more employment for the area. “The municipality needs to show more moral support” she said.

### **4.3 Expectations for Egilsstaðir**

Interviewees all agreed that they wanted travellers to stay longer in Egilsstaðir, to explore and experience Egilsstaðir and its neighbourhood. Egilsstaðir should be able to attract visitors that like to visit the place and take organized trips from Egilsstaðir and visit museums. Interviewee No. 3 hopes Egilsstaðir will be a destination that travellers visit and do not storm out of either for Höfn, Mývatn or Akureyri. Egilsstaðir should be a place where people try to relax; the problem is all the cars and traffic in the city centre.

Getting an international airport to the east is also a very important trade for the east. An international airport would increase employment in Egilsstaðir and its neighbourhood and would also bring in a lot of money for the east area. This would mean growth for the

community and a rise in the employment market. This is a key thing for the area and for its possibilities for growth. Although the ferry in Seyðisfjörður brings in travellers that will never be equivalent to an international airport.

Interviewee No. 3 wants east Iceland to look more at how organizing and structuring is done in the north by the tourism sector and marketing office, not to copy their ideas, but to see what is being done there and introduce that to the east. There are always things that are in need of improvement and can be bigger and better. Egilsstaðir needs to create some sort of uniqueness for the town for example, interviewee No. 6 thinks Egilsstaðir needs to promote the good weather and the swimming pool in summer. Interviewee No. 4 believes that Egilsstaðir can blossom just as well as Húsavík. Húsavík has created a dense core for tourism activities in the town that makes a strong image for Húsavík. That is missing in Egilsstaðir. As the town is set up now, the centre is too scattered.

#### **4.3.1 Expectations for the future**

All interviewees agreed that they wanted to see Egilsstaðir grow and to see the service centre grow and get stronger. Every place in east Iceland needs to be connected or make better connections with Egilsstaðir. Interviewee No. 5 mentioned that Egilsstaðir needs to see nearby Norðfjörður as our home and vice versa. This would increase marketing options, create job opportunities and create a whole union. As the town is now the market is too small for companies to thrive here extensively. Egilsstaðir is like other places in the east, a small place, “they don’t have the means to provide that kind of service the young adults are looking for today” added interviewee No. 5. There is no university in the east which means that young adults move away and do not move back, except for the summer when they return home for working in the high-season, to gain money for ongoing education in either the north or the south. This is a threat that leads to those young adults creating a family where they have settled away from Egilsstaðir and often grandparents move as well to be closer to grandchildren and their own children.

Interviewee No. 1 hopes for a continuing increasing population and that Egilsstaðir will keep on developing. It still needs to develop slowly, not with a big kick like happened when the Kárahnjúkavirkjun power plant was being built. People moved to Egilsstaðir and

then when the power plant was ready all these people moved back and Egilsstaðir was left behind.

Interviewees emphasized how important the international flight is for Egilsstaðir and the east. The international flight would help make the season in the east longer and there would be travellers coming in all year around, not just over the high season. The traffic has to come through east Iceland as well as the south. Not having the international airport stands in the way of Egilsstaðir and the whole east Iceland's success in tourism. Interviewee No. 6 said "It does not matter to the traveller who either way is driving a circuit, where the starting point is. We are not talking about getting the whole traffic here to the east; we just want a little piece of it. East Iceland does not handle all that traffic, but bits and pieces of it would do it".

#### **4.4 The infrastructure of Egilsstaðir**

Egilsstaðir has strong infrastructure, but it needs to be fixed and made stronger. The level of service provided in the town is good, according to interviewees, for both the locals and the travellers as well. Egilsstaðir was first established in 1947; therefore one could imagine that the tourism sector in Egilsstaðir is really young and lacking experience of tourism. It takes time to gain knowledge and experience but Egilsstaðir seems to be speeding up now and realizing that tourism is a really important factor for the economy of the community.

Though Egilsstaðir has good infrastructure and is a service town, there is always something that can and needs to be upgraded. Professionalism for example is not at a high level and in the long term that will not make a good structure. Egilsstaðir is upgrading its service level. Interviewee No. 3 mentioned that Egilsstaðastofa, a visitor centre for Egilsstaðir and Fljótshérað was about to open just beside the campground in Egilsstaðir, long term parking lots and public toilets are therefore also now available. "This means that now this will all be in one spot; buses, parking lots, information, public toilets and service" said interviewee No. 3.

Interviewee's No. 4 opinion is that east Iceland has always been a little bit left out. It was recently pointed out to her that many of the tour operators in Reykjavík are planning the same things in the east as they did many years ago. This lack of change suggests that they

do not know what they are selling in this part of Iceland, so they are not upgrading their trips to fit in with the changes around the country.

“Egilsstaðir has great potentials with all the service that is already in the town. As for travellers there is everything to cover the basic needs; food, information, pharmacy, hospital, auto repair shops, all the basics” said interviewee No. 5. The swimming pool is also an attraction for travellers and provides good entertainment for families and friends. Front-line staff in Egilsstaðir needs to be conscious about what there is to do in Egilsstaðir and its neighbourhood. It is common that the front-line staff are young people working only for the summer and that is what makes this hard to control, “it should of course be a part of the job to know what is going on around you in your area” said interviewee No. 6.

#### **4.4.1 Egilsstaðir in the high season**

Egilsstaðir’s strength is service. There is good variety of hotels, restaurants and service for travellers in the town. In the high season, service and sleeping accommodation cover the amount of visitors coming through. Interviewee No. 3 said “In the summer we are doing quite well. We have some variety of restaurants, but could have more. I think that we do handle the amount of travellers coming through now well. The only problem is that in the high season they are not dwelling in Egilsstaðir for long time, it is a drive-through spot.” Interviewee No. 6 said, “There is everything here; it is only the spirit in the community that is missing”. Interviewee No. 4 spoke of the same thing that the spirit and the soul in the community are missing she said, “Internally we need to become a stronger community, show what we got”.

Interviewee No. 7 said: “Egilsstaðir can handle much more travellers; the carrying capacity has not been reached yet”. Tourism really matters for this area when looking at employment and development. In the high season Egilsstaðir has almost reached the limit, but the same does not go for the low season. The season needs to be lengthened and that is where the international airport can assist. Prospective travellers to this area must be able to fly right in since mountains can be an obstacle, not just for individuals travelling but also for tour operators in Reykjavík using the domestic airport.

## 4.5 Heavy traffic through the city centre

Egilsstaðir is located on the largest intersection in east Iceland that leads you from the east to either the north or the south. Interviewee No. 1, pointed out that the geographical placement of Egilsstaðir makes it into a bus stop and that is what was done by government laws made in 1947 when Egilsstaðir was established. All operations in Egilsstaðir have to be developed with this in mind and this is what characterizes the town said interviewee No. 1. This is a debate that many will not agree on and that we will see when reading further.

Interviewee No. 2 wants to move the main road outside of the city centre and a lot of the interviewees also mentioned that. Interviewee No. 5 mentioned that though road number one will be brought out of the city centre, Fagradalsbraut, which now is road number one that drives through the centre, can still stay in place. Road number one needs to be moved to direct heavy traffic such as trucks around the centre. Of course distance can matter and this might affect the service business in Egilsstaðir but as many of the interviewees mentioned, Egilsstaðir is a big service town and is not compatible with other towns in east Iceland.

When Salt Bistro opened in the city centre in May 2013 (Gunnar Gunnarsson, 2013), it did a lot of good things for the town, and it brought a new appearance to the centre. Travellers and locals enjoy sitting there but still there is heavy traffic just beside you, big trucks and buses that feel disturbing. There is no place in the city centre where you can just sit down and relax. “There is not even a bakery except for in Fellabær, on the other side of the lake...that is what travellers from other countries and Iceland as well are used to. They start their travels early in the morning and want to grab a coffee and quick breakfast before they go” says interviewee No. 4. There is too much action in the city centre, noise and speed. Interviewee No. 4 also finds that road number one should not go straight through the city centre, people should be able to walk around the centre carefree, “The city centre is not attractive enough in this situation, pollution and things like that...it is not very good to have people sitting down enjoying a nice cup of coffee and breathing in all the pollution from the heavy traffic going through. Where in the world do you find such a thing, trailers and heavy trucks right in the city centre?” She also mentioned that she finds the city centre missing soul and feeling. Interviewee No. 3 finds that there is too much going on in the city centre in the high season, parking lots for buses are very few or none and trucks and buses



are parked here and there in bigger parking lots. This must be taken care of she said. Egilsstaðir has not been able to offer better facilities for people in the centre. The speed and traffic, parking lots and so on, are not attracting visitors to sit down and relax and enjoy the place.

In this chapter I have, with the help of my interviewees, been through the five themes that the interviews were divided into. Next chapter will discuss what this chapter has been going through.

## 5 Discussion

This chapter, chapter 5, is a discussion of the topics in chapter 4. What this research found out is that interviewees all agreed that Egilsstaðir has good infrastructures but the marketing might not be working. The location is Egilsstaðir saving grace and because of the location there is a great amount of traffic running through that could spend more time in Egilsstaðir, but they do not seem to be doing it at this point. The drawback to the town is that it has not been satisfying travellers primary needs and front line staff is not properly aware of the possibilities of what the area has to offer. It has been brought to light with the interviews that the municipality and the community have been stepping up for the last two years and finally some changes are just around the corner.

According to what interviewees said, travellers to Egilsstaðir often only stay for one night and no one understands why that is. Infrastructure is strong and plentiful enough to allow travellers to stay longer. There is something that is not keeping travellers at Egilsstaðir. Is the problem just that there is not enough attractions in the town or does the problem lie in the “menu” not being given to the traveller? This is a material that can fit into another research. Interviewees mentioned that some sort of uniqueness has to be created for Egilsstaðir. When looking at Húsavík in the north, they have succeeded very well and made a strong and important image for the destination. Perhaps tourism policy making is more important for destinations and questions like “Where are we heading?” and “How do we get there?” need to be answered and maybe other destinations such as Höfn and Húsavík have focused more on that. That can also fit into yet another research and will not be discussed further in this research.

Making a destination work is more or less based on how it is presented to the world and what the image presented is telling. The demand side has to be equal to the supply side and vice versa. Building an image is related to how the structure of a destination is build up and how it is organized. Egilsstaðir seems to have the potential to be a strong destination when we look at the infrastructures and it seems to have attractions but we do need to let the world know about it. It would definitely be worth further research to see how Egilsstaðir is

represented on the web, whether the image is being published and also if it is being publicised.

With Egilsstaðir's location geographically, length and distances will not matter due to the town being located at the biggest crossroads in east Iceland. Egilsstaðir is on the main road which makes it inevitable for travellers to stop by. Distances are short both to the highlands and to sea and that should be appealing to the traveller. Travellers are always going to be going through Egilsstaðir, but that is not what tourism in Egilsstaðir should be built on. A good structure and organized tourism sector is important for the town so that travellers will seek the opportunity to spend time in Egilsstaðir. As referred to earlier in this research, a good location of a destination does not necessarily mean that travellers will spend time there but rather that they will have to, in one way or the other, pass by or use services provided. To have travellers spend time in a perfectly located destination requires appropriate management.

A drawback to Egilsstaðir has been that it has not been satisfying primary needs according to *Maslow's hierarchy of needs* theory. Public toilets have been lacking entirely up until now as well as public, long term parking facilities. With the making of the service community the town has been waking up and realizing the problem. All interviewees agreed that the municipality approach has grown and become stronger in last two years, which hopefully will lead to bigger things happening and the establishment of the service community, is a step upwards. Information will be upgraded and made a bigger part of the society with the making of the service community; putting up signs and opening a visitor centre for Fljótsdalshérað is also an important step for the vicinity. This will all improve Egilsstaðir and Fljótsdalshérað as a destination; more information possibilities and satisfaction of primary needs. With the primary need being fulfilled, the rest of the needs listed in the *Maslow's hierarchy* have the possibility to be fulfilled.

According to interviewees, front line staff is not being informed of what there is to do in the area and this makes it harder for them to instruct the traveller. If front line staff do not recognize the possibilities in the area and are not spreading information about the area to the traveller the possibilities might not deliver in the way we like. Front line staff is usually young adults working in the summertime and not necessarily emphasizing the important

role they have been given, that is that we are all part of some sort of an information bill board. Service industries are tourism based companies and we are all helping out travellers: whether it is to pump their gasoline tanks, help them find the shelf with the milk carton or waiting at an excellent restaurant, we are always providing travellers with some sort of information. We must not underestimate the importance of front line staff when it comes to the tourism sector.

As Egilsstaðir looks now, the giant has been shaken from his deep sleep and is slowly opening his eyes. Hopefully the development will keep on going steady and accordingly. The giant must though be careful not to run too fast towards the sun to end up being turned into stone, but rather know when it is time to stay out and when to stay in. Always know where we are headed and how we are going to get there; let us not lose sight of the target in reach.

## 6 Conclusion

The goal of this research was to find out if Egilsstaðir is a destination and if the infrastructure is strong enough. Gunn's supply model showed us five things that need to be in place if we want a destination to work; attraction, transportation, service, information and marketing. According to interviewees, the attraction seems to be there but is not marketed very well. Egilsstaðir is accessible when looking at transportation. Its location on the main road makes the town easy to access both with public transport and on self-drive tours. If we look at the service side of Egilsstaðir, up until now primary services have not been fulfilled, but that seems to be changing with help from the municipality and the service community. Information is also developing. A visitor centre is opening for Fljótshálsa, the vicinity Egilsstaðir is located in, and the service community is working on signs and marks around the area so information is going upwards. What seems to be a drawback to Egilsstaðir as a destination is that marketing is not handled right; at least the traveller does not know the "menu" offered at Egilsstaðir. Therefore the marketing needs to be looked at. The municipality and the tourism sector in Egilsstaðir need to decide where they want to head with this destination and what information they want to provide for travellers. A tourism policy might be the solution to make a clearer image of the destination.

The municipality has decided to support the tourism sector in Egilsstaðir and Fljótshálsa by hiring a person working in the tourism field to take care of the Fljótshálsa's tourism development. But, is one person enough to handle all of these inquires that needs to be looked at in developing a destination? This person has the whole service community behind her back, but is this task more than one person's work? Has the increase in visitor's numbers to Iceland not shown that this particular sector is important when looking at the benefits for the municipality's economics? We must remember that Iceland as a whole is a resource and we may not step on its toes. That is the reason why it is so important to make a clear policy about what we are doing. For example, what is Egilsstaðir carrying capacity in visitor's numbers? We constantly need to remind ourselves

to not find the giant turned into stone because it desired the sunlight too aggressively. We need to stick to the policy and follow it with every decision making.

What surprised me the most throughout this research process is that it is only two years since the town rose up and started working on the tourism sector. The ferry has been bringing passengers to Seyðisfjörður since 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2003 (Austurland.net, 2015) and according to interviewees; nothing in particular has been done to respond to this increased numbers in travellers until two years ago. It is interesting indeed. I am certainly glad to see that the municipality has stepped up in the last two years but at the same time it concerned me that it did not start earlier, in correspondence to the ferry for example. My hopes for Egilsstaðir's future in tourism is that it will have a clarification for where it is headed in tourism and how far in it is going to go; what it wants to represent. Of course I hope to see a positive population development for the local community and I want to see this town blossom as the centre of the east.

The geographical location of Egilsstaðir is clearly this town's unique position and more emphasis should be put on promoting that fact. If an international airport will be built in Egilsstaðir this will be a very important direction in marketing for the town amongst other things. It is time to choose the image that the municipality wants to spread out to the world and use the image in marketing. It must be kept in mind that the sleepy giant cannot lose its alarm and fall back to sleep; it must be prepared and ready to face the tasks waiting.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1 - Interview

1. What do you think the image of Egilsstaðir is?
2. Do you think that Egilsstaðir is desirable of receiving more travellers than the once already flowing through?
3. What is the municipalities/marketing approach to tourism in Egilsstaðir? (Funding, policies, etc...)
4. Is there any tourism policy in the town administration? And if so what is it? If not, are there any plans of making one?

Note: this question is only applicable for the mayor, Björn Ingimarsson.

5. Is there a particular focus on tourism in the organization of the municipality and what is the main focus? /
6. There has been the talk about Egilsstaðir being mostly just parking lots and a traffic spot, what is your stand on that and how do you think that might be changed?
7. Do you have any particular expectations for the town's growth in the future?
8. What is the thing most urgently needing an improvement?
9. What do you think is Egilsstaðir's best quality?

## Appendix 2 – Interview with participants working in the tourism sector

1. To start with, what kind of place is Egilsstaðir to you (the big picture)?
2. How do you find the municipalities/marketing office approach to tourism in Egilsstaðir?
3. How do you find Egilsstaðir standing in the high-season of tourism travel? (f.e. accommodation, food and drink/refreshments, facilities, infrastructures, service...)
4. How do you think Egilsstaðir is doing with the carrying capacity of the town for more travellers?

5. From past experience, do you think travellers are staying in Egilsstaðir long enough?
6. From your experience how well do you think Egilsstaðir serves it's travellers?
7. Do you think that the infrastructures of Egilsstaðir as a society are strong enough?  
(f.e. main elements of the society, such as transport, education and health)? What are your expectations to Egilsstaðir as a tourism destination? As a tourism operator in Egilsstaðir, what are the strongest factors you find the town possesses?
8. Then, what would you say is Egilsstaðir biggest weaknesses?
9. Do you in have any particular expectations for the town's growth in the future?
10. At last, is there something in particular that you would like to see happening in Egilsstaðir in the next 10-20 years regarding the structure of the town/destination? /
11. Do you have any tourism education/qualifications?

## **Appendix 3 – Letter sent to participants**

Góðan daginn „X“.

Anna Margrét heiti ég og er að skrifa BA ritgerð við Háskólann á Hólum. Ritgerðin er nokkurskonar úttekt á Egilsstöðum sem áfangastað, greining á staðnum. Til þess að ég geti unnið ritgerðina vantar mig hinsvegar að fá þína innsýn í ákveðna hluti. Því langar mig að athuga það við þig hvort að ég mætti koma og taka smávægilegt viðtal við þig um viðfangsefnið? Viðtalið tekur um 30 mínútur.

Ég held norður á Hóla sunnudaginn 11. janúar svo ef þú sérð þér ekki fært að ná viðtalið með mér fyrir þann tíma þyrftum við að leysa það á annan veg J

Með fyrirfram þökk,

Anna Margrét Jakobsd. Hjarðar