Arctic Tourism in Times of Change

Uncertain Futures - From Overtourism to Re-starting Tourism
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Contents

Authors 2
Preface 4
Summary 5
I. Uncertain future? From overtourism to re-starting tourism: Introduction 8
II. Overtourism 11
What is overtourism? 11
Coping with overtourism 12
Lessons to be learned 14
III. COVID-19 and tourism 16
Narratives of crisis 16
Diverse coping strategies between business strategies and lifestyle choices 18
Lessons learned 22
IV. Re-starting and re-considering tourism 23
Re-starting or re-considering 24
Future direction for Arctic tourism 25
Challenges ahead 29
V. Conclusion 30
Appendix I 32
References 34
About this publication 39

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Tourism development in the Arctic is uneven. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 at the beginning of 2020 many destinations in the circumpolar region were struggling to attract tourists and build up viable businesses, while others were experiencing a rapid and unsustainable growth in tourist arrivals. The project *Partnership for Sustainability: Arctic Tourism in Times of Change* sought to develop a framework for the sustainability of Arctic tourism. The project was funded from the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Arctic Co-operation Programme 2018–2021 and consisted of three sub-projects. In 2018 the focus was on the *Seasonality of Arctic Tourism*, in 2019 dimensions of *Urban Tourism in the Arctic* were explored, and in 2021 (postponed from 2020), the theme was overtourism and the challenges of re-starting tourism post COVID-19.

This report presents the findings from the last sub-project titled: *Uncertain future? From Overtourism to Re-starting Tourism*. It is based on a workshop and a field course, originally planned in the autumn 2020 in Reykjavík, Iceland, but postponed and eventually taking place online May 18–20, 2021. During these three days 16 researchers and 16 students from the partner universities in Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Canada met together with industry representatives, policymakers and entrepreneurs from Iceland, Finland, and Norway to discuss overtourism and share visions about re-starting tourism post COVID-19. As part of the event, the project hosted a public webinar attended by roughly 70 people from the Arctic region as well as videos and podcasts produced by students were shared online at the project’s website.

The notion of overtourism captures the situation when tourism has grown out of proportion either in terms of societal implications or impacts on nature. It is the situation when tourism is not improving the quality of life for inhabitants but rather decreasing it or when tourists experience deteriorating service due to overcrowding. With the global halt of tourism due to COVID-19 beginning in early 2020, the attention of researchers, policymakers and tourism entrepreneurs swiftly moved away from overtourism towards the state of no-tourism. Consequently, the problem-solving focus also shifted from how to avoid too much tourism to how to re-start tourism in a post COVID-19 world or, more likely, how to re-start tourism with COVID-19. In the months that followed as the COVID-19 crisis ensued, a global discussion began on what the impacts on tourism would be in the long range. During the workshop it became evident that the crisis COVID-19 has brought to tourism, has also offered opportunities to re-consider tourism development in the Arctic.
Summary

This report presents the findings of the third and final workshop and field course hosted by the project Partnership for Sustainability: Arctic Tourism in Times of Change funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Arctic Co-operation Programme 2018–2021. The focus of the workshop was on overtourism and the impact of and response to COVID-19 by companies and stakeholders in Arctic tourism.

The first section of the report focuses on overtourism in the Arctic. The notion of overtourism underscores the risks of uncontrolled growth of tourism. The incidence of overtourism is highly place-dependent and might occur in certain places but not in others nearby. Similarly, overtourism occurs at certain times such as during peak seasons and not at others. In addition to seasonal fluctuations, unpredictable changes of flows of tourists both in time and space must be taken into consideration. These fluctuations have practical implications for entrepreneurs and planners operating and managing tourism underlining the importance of pro-active management. A key for sustainable and dynamic tourism adaptation to overtourism and ‘undertourism’ is that entrepreneurs and other tourism actors are aware that they are part of a tourism system and that they know their place within that system. By understanding this, the tourism actors are better equipped to plan and respond to crises that potentially will affect other actors in the system first, but eventually influence everyone in the system.

Second, we present the implications of COVID-19 on the tourism sector in the Arctic region and identify how it has coped with the pandemic. The cases explored underscore the diversity of tourism in the Arctic. While the COVID-19 hit tourism hard across the Arctic, there is a considerable difference between and within regions when it comes to how much tourism has decreased. In some cases, there has been an increasing tourism in connection to a rise in interest by local and domestic tourists in outdoor recreation and leisure close-to-home. Other destinations that have been more dependent on international markets have lesser chance in responding to the sudden halt of tourism. Strategies to cope with the crisis are marked by different context, especially when it comes to travel restrictions. Domestic tourism, government support and lifestyle choices all play a major role for tourism companies in the current circumstances. It is important to consider the businesses’ capacities to make adjustments in light of the extreme uncertainty that marked the first weeks and months of the pandemic. The pandemic revealed the vulnerability of the tourism product the way it has been developed in many Arctic regions and communities. It opened a space for reconsidering tourism growth and the negative impacts of tourism on climate and biodiversity, and communities. The pandemic also implied a greater awareness for the need to cooperate, to build up and sustain trust between companies and governmental bodies on different levels.

Third, we address questions that support re-consideration and re-starting of tourism in the Arctic. These include but are not limited to questions on the value base of tourism business and tourism economy, how to build up valuable tourism products or experiences that are also of value and that matter for local communities and wellbeing of humans and other actors, such as the environment and the flora and fauna that play a part in that performance. We use the term ‘reconsideration’ to
refer to a more complete structural and ideological shift within the aims of tourism development at different levels. We discuss three possible viewpoints on the future of Arctic tourism that emerged from the workshop discussion, namely 1) Normative tourism / Tourism defined by health security; 2) Increased interest in nature-based tourism; and 3) The role of local, regional, and domestic tourism. They illustrate the diverse discourses underlining the need for reconsideration of tourism. All the three viewpoints require new perspectives to tourism development and challenge diverse tourism stakeholders at different levels. The re-consideration of tourism according to the three approaches increases the need to build tourism based on tourism-community collaboration. Nature-orientation together with local and regional tourism approaches especially require that local communities (including non-human communities) are included in development activities, while normative tourism raises the question if and what kind of regulations could be enabled at the local and community level if the role of governmental regulation increases.

Notwithstanding the significant differences that exist related to the uneven tourism development across the Arctic, a number of relevant overarching questions arise from this final sub-project, including:

- How can the lessons from regulating travel during the pandemic be applied to building a more sustainable future - e.g., for advancing social, cultural, ecological and political sustainability of the tourism industry?
- In relation to the locational scale of issue identification and problem-solving, where should the initiatives for sustainability emerge from and be directed to (e.g., local, regional, national, or international)?
- Given the possibility that nature-tourism trends will continue to boom in the future, which educational approaches can be developed for executing and developing nature-based tourism and recreational activities and infrastructure? Moreover, will these strategies meet the challenge of incorporating a much-needed multispecies approach where non-human species can also benefit from tourism?

The pandemic issued a call to reconsider ‘distance’ at the core of perspectives on what Arctic travel has been (and relied upon) and to rethink the historical significance of international tourism markets. This kind of imposed ‘rethink’ resulted in the identification (and, in some cases, confirmation) of the potentially rich opportunities available with ‘nearby’ or domestic tourism. Among these opportunities is a call for tourism businesses to enhance their flexibility market-wise and diversify their tourism offerings to meet local market interests and needs. By extension, this also underlines a more emergent role to rethink community-based tourism planning and the possibility of re-thinking what expectations are available at the community level for the benefits of tourism.

However, in all future steps the Arctic and local context need to be taken into consideration. Significantly, the uneven tourism development within national and regional destinations and widely observed internationally is critically important to understanding and addressing the future of Arctic tourism development. Embedded in the nature of the uneven tourism development is the much-underlined claim that there is no “one” solution for every destination and those solutions rely on different aspects – geography plays a role, as does how tourism plays out in the economy at local and networked levels.
Nonetheless, and while there is a need to consider the heterogeneity of the Arctic and its many tourisms, there is also a need to maximize upon lessons learned and the experience with strategies that may also be informed by their similarities. Indeed, there are at least two high level findings from the 2018 project that also resonate across the 2019 and 2021 projects and relate to developing sustainable governance models in Arctic tourism destination development:

• Strengthen the connections made between sustainable governance initiatives and discussions as they are occurring in the Arctic with tourism development processes, including pan-circumpolar and East to West network building, and knowledge creation and sharing;

• Utilize sustainable and responsible tourism initiatives within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); broaden the knowledge base and research, produced and utilized for developing tourism-related innovations.
In recent years the Arctic has increasingly become a popular destination for tourists. The rate of tourism growth and pace of tourism development is, however, uneven and dependent on many diverse factors. Overall, tourism in Arctic environments was, prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, on the rise (Maher et al., 2022). Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and has in recent years moved to centre stage as a global economic driver of capitalist accumulation (Huijbens, 2021). According to estimates by the World Travel and Tourism Council tourism provided 10.4% of global GDP in 2019, which decreased to 5.5% in 2020 due to travel restrictions (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2021). An example of the significant role tourism has in the Arctic and sub-Arctic region is Iceland, where tourism generated 8% of GDP in 2019 (Mælaborð ferðaþjónustunnar, 2021). The share of tourism in other national economies in the Arctic is smaller, but nevertheless it is of high importance for many local communities and regions in the sparsely populated North (Lundmark, Müller, & Bohn, 2020; Maher et al., 2022) where it has often been promoted as a driver of economic growth and a response to decline in other traditional primary industries such as mining, forestry, and fisheries.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing travel restrictions have brought to light the wide-ranging effects of tourism and implications it has for the wellbeing of people. It has also underlined what many tourism scholars have argued in recent years: that tourism can not be reduced to “a series of discrete, enumerated occurrences of travel, arrival, activity, purchase [and] departure” (Franklin & Crang, 2001: 6). This is in contradiction to what has commonly been described, not least in policy and business-oriented literature, but rather, tourism is a relational and messy assemblage of practice (see e.g., Ren, 2021; Ren, van der Duim, & Jóhannesson, 2020). Tourism is then about sustaining and performing social relations, connecting with multiple others as much as it is about business. If we allow ourselves to explore this assemblage, we will come across a wide array of actors, human as well as more-than-human, the Coronavirus being one of them, which entwine and create the fabric of tourism. This “more than human” approach opens the space of tourism and makes it livelier but also more uncertain and chaotic. As Gibson (2021: 1) argues, while the COVID-19 pandemic has “illustrated the fragility of tourism capitalism”, it is a crisis that should not be regarded as a singular event but as a part of a more complex and wider ranging dynamic connecting past experiences with present stresses and future outlooks. Tourism cannot be isolated from the climate emergency, and more generally, with the rising consciousness that humans are part of the Earth. The latter is exemplified when tourism is associated with the concept of the Anthropocene and in relation to ‘things’ like the Coronavirus, bushfires, volcano eruptions, plastic pollution, colonial pasts, food production and refugees, to name only a few of the “messmates” of tourism (Ren & Jóhannesson, 2018). Tourism is part and parcel of who we are as the inhabitants of the Arctic and how we try to shape our future.
It is obvious in the face of the climate emergency that the unfettered growth of tourism is unsustainable. More responsible versions of tourism are needed. The development of sustainable tourism in the Arctic has been the core theme in the project Partnership for Sustainability: Arctic Tourism in Times of Change funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Arctic Co-operation Programme 2018–2021. During its lifespan the project has hosted three workshops and field courses in which Masters students from the seven partner institutions, tourism entrepreneurs, policy makers and researchers have explored the processes, challenges and opportunities of sustainable development of Arctic tourism from different regional and scaled vantage points. From the outset we have taken a bottom-up approach, starting from local contexts and lived experiences of tourism entrepreneurs and communities, seeking to develop and live with tourism and its uncertain futures. This grounded approach supports accounts of tourism development that combine the political-economic, emotional and more-than-human earthly relations of tourism (Gibson, 2021; Huijbens, 2021).

This report presents the findings of the third and final workshop and a virtual field course for graduate students held by the project in spring 2021. It dealt with uncertain futures of tourism in the Arctic, not least manifested in the dramatic shift the tourism sector had to grapple with, from dealing with challenges of overtourism before the outbreak of COVID-19 to pondering how to re-start tourism after and during the pandemic. The report is based on the discussion and dialogue at the workshop, including presentations and panel discussion as well as group work in which academics, students and stakeholders participated (see programme https://arctictourism.hi.is/programme2021/). Furthermore, we make use of data collected as a preparation for the workshop and the virtual field course. This includes video and audio recorded interviews with researchers, managers, and tourism entrepreneurs from different places in the Arctic. A list of interviewees as well as students that participated and contributed to the workshop and fieldcourse is available in Appendix I.

The following chapters present key topics and learnings from the workshop in context of a wider scholarly discourse relevant for policy development and strategic advances as tourism moves forward. To organise the evolution of the third workshop, we follow the trajectory of events as they have unfolded in the Arctic. The first section of the report focuses on overtourism in the Arctic. The notion of overtourism underscores the risks of uncontrolled growth of tourism. It captures the situation when tourism has grown out of proportion, either in terms of societal implications or natural impacts. It exemplifies tourism where tourists are experiencing deteriorating service and where there is a widening gap between what visitors pay for and what they receive in return (Goodwin, 2017). Some of the characteristics of the Arctic predispose this tourism context to the likelihood that it will experience overtourism. Those characteristics include high seasonality, small population bases – and, thus, limited pool of labour force – as well as other demographic realities such as indigenous populations addressing the long-term effects of colonisation and designing new, decolonisation models, for moving forward. Finally, the Arctic is a fragile natural environment and is most impacted by climate change and the climate crisis. Still, it is also important to critically scrutinise the concept of overtourism and its usefulness for developing sustainable tourism (Lundmark et al., 2020; Sæþórsdóttir, Hall, & Wendt, 2020a; 2020b).
Second, we present the implications of COVID-19 on the tourism sector in the Arctic region and identify how it has coped with the pandemic. The cases explored underscore the diversity of tourism in the Arctic. While COVID-19 hit tourism hard across the Arctic there is a considerable difference between and within regions when it comes to the impact of COVID-19. In some cases, there has been growth in tourism in connection to increased interest by local and domestic tourists in outdoor recreation and leisure close-to-home. Other destinations that have been more dependent on international markets have had lesser chance in responding to the sudden halt of tourism. Strategies to cope with the crisis are marked by different context, especially when it comes to travel restrictions. Domestic tourism, government support and lifestyle choices all play a major role for tourism companies in the current circumstances.

Third, we address questions that support a re-consideration and re-starting of tourism in the Arctic. These include but are not limited to questions on the value base of tourism business and the tourism economy, how to build up valuable tourism products or experiences that are also of value for local communities and the wellbeing of humans and other actors, such as the environment and the flora and fauna that play a part in that performance. It should be noted that the re-starting of tourism cannot be seen as an easy straightforward alternative for re-consideration. We use the term ‘reconsideration’ to refer to a more complete structural and ideological shift within the aims of tourism development at different levels. We discuss three possible viewpoints on the future of Arctic tourism that emerged from the workshop discussion, namely 1) Normative tourism / Tourism defined by health security; 2) Increased interest in nature-based tourism; and 3) The role of local, regional, and domestic tourism. These viewpoints illustrate the diverse discourses underlining the need for reconsideration of tourism. The final section summarises the main topics and outcomes of the workshop and connects to the previous two projects that focused on seasonality and urban tourism.
II. Overtourism

What is overtourism?

Although the Nordic countries are sparsely populated by global standards, the concentration of population in cities and towns is prominent. To a certain degree, this is also the case with tourism activities. In mature and highly developed metropolitan destinations such as Reykjavík, Oslo, Stockholm and even in the northern metropoles of Rovaniemi and Tromsø, the tourism infrastructure has developed over a long period and can handle large inflows of tourists. Lately, their capacity to withstand the pressures that result from hosting tourism has, however, come into the spotlight, partly due to the increasing interest in the North and the changes in tourism flows due to the pandemic. It is questioned how much tourism can grow in a short period without it becoming unsustainable? The same applies in less populated and rural places, where even a modest number of visitors can seem like a lot, especially concerning for local populations and (tourism) infrastructural capacities. This has been called overtourism.

What is the phenomenon of overtourism perceived to be? The popular image of overtourism often relates to dysfunctional relationships between locals and tourists, wherein locals are resisting tourism or where tourists are dissatisfied that other tourists are visiting the same places as they are, reducing the original attraction values that might have drawn them there (Milano et al., 2019; Sæþórsdóttir & Hall, 2021). For sparsely populated areas and rural places, these issues might be related to, for example, a (perceived) lack of silence and solitude. However, there is still a shortage of studies on overtourism in rural and peripheral areas (Hall et al., 2009).

Overtourism is a concept that highlights some of the issues that might occur with tourism and has been defined as “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors’ experiences in a negative way” (UNWTO, 2018). In a northern or Arctic context, many tourists are attracted by descriptions and images of natural wilderness areas with unique flora and fauna and exotic experiences such as snow, darkness, aurora borealis, midnight sun etc. (Hall et al., 2009; Maher, 2007; Maher et al., 2014). Northern places can, therefore, quickly be perceived as having overtourism by tourists, as they have not imagined or expected meeting other tourists or experiencing populated areas in these places. The Arctification of the North is a process that accentuates this image of the North and also contributes to the issues of overtourism due to the increasing tourism it creates (Lundmark, Müller, & Bohn, 2020). Previous research defines overtourism as occurring in “… destinations where hosts and guests, locals and visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life in the area or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably” (Goodwin, 2017, p. 1). A similar definition is offered by Peeters et al. (2018, p. 18), who say that “Overtourism describes the situation in which the impact of tourism, at certain times and in certain locations, exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, and/or political capacity thresholds”. As noted by Dodds and Butler (2019), these externalities are not new and have been the subject of many studies for decades.
Coping with overtourism

The informants who participated in the study came from various Arctic places and industries and illustrate different case studies across the region. Based on the cases, we highlight three themes which we deem particularly relevant in terms of overtourism. These are place, time, and the future of tourism.

Place

With place, two types of challenges seem particularly relevant: first, the uneven spatial distribution of tourism, and second, the uneven planning for tourism and the (tourism) infrastructure of places. For example, before COVID-19, Northern Norway was in the midst of strong tourism growth, but there was an uneven distribution, as the numbers of tourists varied greatly between the counties of Nordland, Finnmark and Troms; Finnmark County had tourism numbers that are less than half of those of Nordland (Maher et al., 2022) and Troms' county capital Tromsø demonstrated to be one major factor contributing to Troms county’s tourism growth. The number of international commercial overnight stays in Tromsø during the winter season increased from 18,000 in 2008 to 200,000 in 2018 (Jakobsen & Engebretsen, 2019), while the growth in winter tourism in Finnmark, the most Northern part of the region, was much more limited during the same period (Maher et al., 2022). In Iceland, a similar visitor distribution pattern between regions can be discerned. For example, 45.2% of all the overnight stays by foreign visitors in Iceland during 2019 (7.3 million) occurred in the capital area and 25.6% in the south region of Iceland, while more distant regions such as the Westfjords or Northwest Iceland received only around 2% each of the total overnights stays that year (Statistics Iceland, 2021). The visitation of several tourist attractions in Iceland show similar inequalities and was named ‘bottlenecks’ by a tour operator, Ryan Connolly, one of the founders of the adventure travel company Hidden Iceland. According to Connolly, certain places such as the Golden Circle are filled with tourists whereas other places such as the East- and West fjords suffer from a lack of tourist flows. These places are screaming out “we have hotels, we have waterfalls, we have glaciers, why is no one coming?” (R. Connolly, personal communication, April 2021). The different cases indicate that a proposed solution to the overtourism problem is to plan the distribution of the tourists throughout the country to maintain or even enhance the benefits from tourism rather than reduce tourist numbers.

However, planning to cope with overtourism in the northern countries should not entirely be focused on the redistribution of visitor flows. According to Kajsa Åberg, tourism strategist at Region Västerbotten in North Sweden, overtourism can mean two things: “too many people in the same place at one time or bad management. If you do not manage tourism appropriately you only have to have 20 people in a certain way to destroy a place” (K. Åberg, personal communication, April 2021). This was also highlighted in the cases of Whitehorse, Canada and Kuusamo, Finland. Here the uneven tourism development was described as problematic by locals complaining that they could not find empty parking spots or unoccupied local firepits because they were taken by visitors. Such complaints were made even though these places do not have as high tourist numbers as other northern destinations, but then perhaps are a paradox because without high numbers they did not have the facilities to support large numbers of visitors (L. Mäkelä, personal communication, March
Furthermore, one of the interviewed entrepreneurs argued that Iceland was given a bad reputation since “a lot of tourists came at the same time and many of the tourists did the same things, thus, experiencing places where the current infrastructure proved to be insufficient in terms of meeting the needs of the tourists” (R. Connolly, personal communication, April 2021).

**Time**

The different cases explored above illustrated that time is an important factor when discussing overtourism-related challenges. This was evident both regarding predictable fluctuations in tourism flows due to seasonality, with high and low seasons in different places, and due to unpredictable fluctuations, for example during times of crisis - such as with COVID-19. Before COVID-19, Tove Sørensen, the owner of Tromsø Villmarkssenter in Norway, described the problem of seasonality in Tromsø by saying that we need to stop and think about what we want with all the tourism and what it means. We don’t need more hotel rooms, they are full in January and February, but not the rest of the year (Larsen & Hansen, 2019). This highlights some of the problems of seasonal overtourism. Bente Bratland Holm from Innovation Norway argued that they instead wanted to focus on a strategy of planning for distributing tourism over all of Norway throughout the entire year. Holm explained that this would create a situation with less pressure on sensitive areas at sensitive times and also create year-round work within the tourism industry (Rustad, 2018). Similarly, the Kuusamo region in Finland has previously experienced signs of overtourism during the summer period in the nature reserves and national parks, which is one of the side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic according to Liisa Mäkelä, project manager of Naturpolis Ltd, a rural development agency in the Kuusamo region (L. Mäkelä, personal communication, March 2021). Venla Karkola, senior advisor for nature tourism from Metsähallitus Parks and Wildlife Finland, explained that “the Finnish people have discovered the Finnish nature in a new way, the national parks...however, they are not familiar with the rules and regulation of the parks” (V. Karkola, personal communication, March 2021). This unexpected confluence of domestic travellers in protected areas of the Kuusamo region reflects temporal implications of overtourism in the form of unpredictable tourist patterns.

The COVID-19 pandemic put an abrupt hold on (over)tourism in many places, meaning a sudden change from too many tourists at one place at a time to hardly any tourists at all. Clara and Q Thuilliez, owners of Dogsledding Iceland explained that their company “hit the wall” in March 2020 going from four dogsledding trips a day to one trip a week. Moreover, they said that being one hundred percent reliant on tourism is not the path they would like to take anymore (C. Thuilliez & Q. Thulliez, personal communication, March 2021). Another Icelandic entrepreneur, Ryan Connolly, added that their post COVID-19 customers are less likely to ask to go to the most popular sites, but seek to visit other areas now that the pandemic is starting to end. Specifically, “the customers who are getting in touch with us ... are saying: ‘where can we go to social distance and get away from the crowds?’” According to Connolly, this provides an opportunity to take their guests to locations where most tourists do not go (R. Connolly, personal communication, April 2021).
Future of tourism

Lastly, the cases demonstrate different ideas and approaches towards the future of tourism. For example, the owners of Dogsledding Iceland said that the COVID-19 pandemic was an eye-opener for them and their understanding of tourism. They explained that running their business is based on a huge passion for dogs and dog sledding and that it is more of a lifestyle rather than a career. Hence, they do not want to expand their company and become reliant on foreign tourist demand and end up in the same place again with a crisis such as COVID-19 (C. Thuilliez & Q. Thuilliez, personal communication, March 2021). On the opposite side of the spectrum, Ryan Connolly explained that his company’s strategy has always been to increase their income and retain money to be prepared for hard times in tourism. This strategy had developed over years based on their experience and concern of the future events, mentioning volcano eruptions as an example (R. Connolly, personal communication, April 2021). Kristin Røymo, previous mayor of Tromsø, defined Tromsø’s future strategy as enhancing the city’s identity where the future should meet the needs and wants of both the local inhabitants and the tourists in a sustainable way (Larsen & Hansen, 2019). Still, there are worries of new unpredictable factors that might influence the tourism industry. An example is the aforementioned case of Finnish people having discovered Finnish nature in a new way but not knowing the rules and regulations of the national parks (V. Karkola, personal communication, March 2021). This lack of awareness leads to practical issues that in most cases are the source of nuisance among locals. According to Karkola, many visitors concentrate on a few locations where they search the most ´Instagrammable spots´ to use as a background for their selfies, however, several of these places are the habitat of endangered species which obligated the park to restrict the entrance to these sites during certain times in the year (V. Karkola, personal communication, March 2021).

From the examples discussed here, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic has led many tourism entrepreneurs to reconsider how they engage with tourism and the expectations they have from their tourism activities. It provides insight into a process where some entrepreneurs were led to critically reconsider what successful recovery means and what the future of tourism should look like.

Lessons to be learned

There are lessons to be learned from academic research and scholarship, from the experience of tourism entrepreneurs, and tourism industry planners and strategists. Academically, issues around overtourism, in contrast to carrying capacity, are seldom addressed from a rural or sparsely populated area perspective, thus discarding those places from scientific analysis and theory development. However, as is shown, the importance of time and place are important factors when discussing overtourism. The incidence of overtourism is highly place-dependent and might occur in certain places, but not in others even if quite nearby. Similarly, overtourism occurs at certain times, such as during peak seasons, and not during other periods, as is shown especially in the cases from Iceland and Finland.

In addition to seasonal fluctuations, unpredictable changes of flows of tourists both in time and space must be taken into consideration (particularly prescient in light of
the COVID-19 pandemic). These fluctuations have practical implications for entrepreneurs and planners operating and managing tourism. Kajsa Åberg, one of the Swedish informants, summarized the idea well, saying that: “Proactive management should be central in the strategy to cope with overtourism in which measures that distribute visitor flows spatially and temporally should prevail above measures that attempt to reduce these flows’’ (K. Åberg, personal communication, April 2021). A key for sustainable and dynamic tourism adaptation to overtourism and ‘undertourism’ is that entrepreneurs and other tourism actors are aware that they are part of a tourism system and that they know their place within that system. By understanding this, the tourism actors can plan for crises that potentially will affect others in the system first, but that eventually trickles down to everyone in the system. For example, as one of the Icelandic tourism actors explained, their company strategy was to save money to prepare for possible crises, and they were able to handle the COVID-19 crises quite well due to their understanding of the system (R. Connolly, personal communication, April 2021). Is this unique to Iceland and crises that have gone before (2008, as an example)? The tourism system is of course not equal everywhere and the actors themselves need to identify these links to other important actors within their local, regional and even national/internationals systems. Adding to such a notion, a place must adapt to the local capabilities and capacities of the place. To paraphrase Kajsa Åberg, tourism planning needs to be adapted to tourism flows both spatially and temporarily, thus no model fits all.
III. COVID-19 and tourism

Narratives of crisis

The factual development

At the beginning of 2019, most Arctic destinations could look back on more than a decade of tourism growth often based on an increase in international and, indeed, global demand (Müller, 2015; Müller et al., 2020; Varnajot, 2020). This development was well in line with an overall growing attention towards Arctic issues, triggered by climate change and increasing geopolitical interest in Arctic areas.

Though not the first challenge for tourism in modern times, the COVID-19 pandemic hit tourism in the North in a significant way, eradicating recent tourism growth and in most places resulting in tourism figures rather known from the early 2000s (Table 1).

Table 1: Decline of commercial guest nights in selected Arctic municipalities and regions, 2019–2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Guest nights 2019</th>
<th>Guest nights 2020</th>
<th>Change %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Västerbotten County*</td>
<td>1,878,059</td>
<td>1,243,038</td>
<td>-33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norrbotten County*</td>
<td>2,666,676</td>
<td>1,740,818</td>
<td>-34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital region (Reykjavik and surroundings)**</td>
<td>3,591,458</td>
<td>1,064,195</td>
<td>-70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South region**</td>
<td>2,142,464</td>
<td>851,774</td>
<td>-60.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westfjords (Northwest region)**</td>
<td>216,780</td>
<td>151,965</td>
<td>-29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troms and Finnmark***</td>
<td>2,171,819</td>
<td>1,403,445</td>
<td>-35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordland***</td>
<td>1,854,748</td>
<td>1,485,379</td>
<td>-19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapland****</td>
<td>3,100,000</td>
<td>2,100,000</td>
<td>-32.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Tourism i Skåne (2021)
**Statistics Iceland (2021)
***Statistikknett.no/reiseliv, based on Statistics Norway’s databases (Statistikknett Reiseliv 2021),
****visitory.fi
Of course, the crisis unfolded differently in many Arctic destinations, but as reported by one of the interviewees in Sweden, especially the share of international tourists in a destination pre COVID-19 influenced the scope of impacts, since particularly international tourism was slowed down and effectively halted for some time by travel restrictions. However, even destinations dependent on business tourism suffered from significant decline (Müller, forthcoming). In contrast, some domestic tourism, for example, related to the use of privately owned second homes, indeed increased during the pandemic as did leisure travel to close-to-home destinations. Still, close-to-home tourism benefited peri-urban destinations mainly, since remote destinations tend to attract fewer tourists overall because of accessibility and distance decay (Hall, 2005). This applies not least for places like Iceland, where a local population cannot compensate for international losses. In northern Norway, the overall growth in domestic summer tourism in 2020 in Nordland county to the south, was, however, exceptional, resulting in an 11,1% annual increase in domestic tourism (Statistikknett Reiseliv, 2021). Even in Finland some destinations reported an overall increase of tourism. Hence, in Kuusamo the number of guest nights increased by 200,000 (18%). While the number of guest-nights in hotels, motels, guest houses, hostels, holiday villages and campsites decreased, growth was registered in peer-to-peer and non-commercial accommodation. In contrast, nearby Rovaniemi with a greater dependence on international tourism experienced a dramatic decline by more than 35% (visitory.fi). Hence, although the pandemic meant a shock to the tourism industry, far from all tourism disappeared and particularly less-commercial forms of tourism managed to sustain and sometimes to develop positively.

**The perceived development**

Many northern communities have turned to tourism as a promising new economy after decades of struggles with depopulation (Saarinen, 2003; Kauppila et al., 2009; Bohlin et al., 2016). This investment in tourism triggered Schmallegger and Carson (2010) to ask whether this focus on tourism, as a remedy to various regional problems, in fact followed the path of previous industrialization; was tourism the base for a new staple economy? The pandemic made it even clearer that communities now rely on tourism and that this development had brought unpredictable risks for already marginalized northern communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic first and foremost constituted a public health care crisis in these communities. However, and in terms of a potential economic recession at a local and regional level, the pandemic became a tourism crisis as the future of experience producers, restaurants and hotels suddenly was put at risk. This also made highly visible how the communities themselves had benefited from tourism also in non-economic ways, for instance, in terms of a strengthened infrastructure and services available for local inhabitants. The sudden eradication of tourism growth in the Arctic implied a discursive shift from discussions of over-tourism and other problematic aspects of tourism growth to discussions that pointed to how tourism had strengthened the communities. At the same time, the atmosphere of crisis narrowed the local space for problematizing the sustainability of pre-pandemic tourism in some destinations, as seen in Tromsø in the public controversies during autumn 2020 over the development of the Arctic Center, a ski resort close to the city.

One aspect of tourism for the benefit of northern communities relates to population
development. Tourism has been an engine for attracting not least young and female migrants to sometimes remote places (Lundmark, 2006; Möller & Amcoff, 2018). Although employment is often seasonal and sometimes low-paid, migrants settle in these places even if they continue their working life in other industries offering better-paid full-time jobs (Müller, 2006, 2022). The pandemic and the loss of employment opportunities obviously affected the attractiveness of the tourism industry. In the short term, employment opportunities became scarce and immigration for taking up jobs in the tourism industry has been paused. Even experienced and loyal tourism workers already in place needed to look for employment in other sectors. In the long term it is uncertain to what extent the crisis will have more profound impacts on the image of the tourism industry as an employer. The current uncertainty regarding the future development of tourism will possibly affect young people's interest in planning to take up a seasonal employment in the industry. Such a situation would have consequences for the labour supply of the tourism industry but also for the communities that previously benefitted from the inflow of youngsters.

Diverse coping strategies between business strategies and lifestyle choices

The COVID-19 crisis implied the need to cope with the new situation. A lack of demand and income required immediate action. However, since Arctic states employed different measures to fight the pandemic and because of different tourism characteristics (Rantala et al., 2019; Müller et al., 2020), destinations faced heterogenous challenges. For example, Sweden employed a liberal approach favouring recommendations over lockdown, which enabled a continuation of domestic travel. In contrast, the Yukon suffered from travel bans even within Canada, while other Nordic states applied strict quarantine regulations on entry and re-entry, hindering all international leisure travel. This discontinuation of international tourism affected of course particularly those destinations dependent on international tourists.

For example, while the Yukon experienced few COVID-19 infections in the first year of the pandemic, tourism was decimated since all non-essential travel was banned; borders were closed even to neighbouring provinces to the south (British Columbia and Alberta), and on its eastern border, the Northwest Territories. The absence of global demand hindered the local companies from operating, simply because no customers could make it to the destination. Local demand could only marginally compensate, not least since Yukoners would usually not use professional outfitters to experience nature. Even temporary openings allowing for tourists from British Columbia, which enabled a positive psychological impact, did not alter the flow of tourists, and, consequently, economic opportunities. According to Yukon tourism entrepreneurs, Max Gouyou-Beauchamps, (co-owner of Terre Boreale), Joel Hibbard (Nahanni River Adventures & Canadian River Expeditions), and Manuela Larsen (co-owner of Muktuk Adventures), sparsely populated areas in Canada were hit hard by the pandemic. By the spring of 2021, Yukon tour companies still did not have the bookings to plan for hiring (M. Gouyou-Beauchamps, J. Hibbard, & M.Larsen, personal communications, April, 2021).
However, not all destinations experienced the same impacts and sometimes differences occurred even within a destination. Such patterns of versatile impacts can be exemplified by the Swedish county of Västerbotten where national restrictions related to COVID-19 had different impacts on different parts of the industry. Here rural destinations offer mainly nature-based experiences and products that are not reliant on international tourism. Indeed, during the pandemic these activities were popular and lured tourists into the periphery. In this context, privately owned cottages, promising physically distanced experiences for a limited number of people, were particularly popular. At the same time, the urban areas of the region, offering conferences and business tourism, suffered more from the pandemic.

Another aspect that illustrates the diverse impacts of the pandemic is seen when looking at the season-distance axes in north Norwegian tourism: in the southernmost county, Nordland, the increase in domestic summer tourism compensated the lack of international tourists substantially and reduced the total 2020 tourism decrease in the county (-19.9%) considerably (Statistikknett Reiseliv, 2021). The summer season, however, compensated the 2020 decrease figures (-35.4%) for destinations in Troms and Finnmark weakly. This was not only because of their location farther away from the domestic summer market; the strong position they had gained in winter tourism up until 2020 added to their vulnerability when relying only on a domestic market during the first pandemic winter season of 2020–2021.

**Domestic tourism**

Overall, Arctic tourism entrepreneurs sought opportunities for staying in business with adjusted products directed towards national or more local audiences. One example from Alta is Trasti and Trine and how they had worked for a long time with local relations that they now could benefit from (Trine Lyrek, personal communication, October 2020). Another and very different example is Tromsø villmarkscenter, where they started courses for kids and young people. In addition, they opened up a Husky cafe for inhabitants of the city and also connected to the city through adopting dogs out. Even in Finnish Kuusamo entrepreneurs and the national park management reported domestic tourism as a way of compensating losses from discontinued international travel.

Promoting domestic tourism in the Yukon was also a strategy designed by industry with support from the Yukon Government. Without international or domestic (Canada) visitors due to the territory’s closed borders for much of 2020 and into 2021, a staycation program was funded through a new funding program, Elevate, which aimed to support tour operators facing hardship due to the pandemic. Among other things, the program encouraged Yukon residents to book a Yukon wilderness tour and receive 25% reduced fees.

Not surprising, staff layoffs were also a consequence of the decrease in tourism. For example, an Icelandic adventure company, Hidden Iceland, had to lay-off all its staff. The limited number of domestic customers implied that few alternatives were available. International students provided temporary relief but could not compensate for the international losses by far. An Icelandic bus company offered discounted prices to schools, kindergartens, and local companies to compensate for some of the losses.
Increasing domestic tourism during the pandemic also had a downside. In Finland, for example, a park manager noted an increase of tourists not familiar with regulations in the national parks and how to behave in nature as discussed in section II above. Consequently, an increase in littering became a problem. Norwegian destinations faced similar challenges in nature-based tourism and, all in all, the pandemic intensified public problematizations of the future of Allemannsretten (Granås & Svensson, 2021). Altogether the increasing number of visitors also warranted a more active planning mobilizing the total recreation opportunity spectrum of the destination in order to avoid crowding.

**Government support**

Certainly, government support schemes were quickly put in place, but they unfolded differently in Arctic destinations. Similar to the Yukon’s situation, in Iceland a total collapse of the tourism industry could only have been avoided because of the government support. Moreover, the financial sector contributed by accepting postponed payments and extended loans (Halldórsdóttir, 2021). However, according to the Icelandic Tourist Industry Association, sometimes micro-firms did not qualify for public support schemes – mostly because of their size, economic viability, and limited sources of their own and, therefore, they struggled during the crisis. This challenge applied even for many restaurants. A consequence has been a massive employment reduction in the industry. Even the cash flow for the companies amounted increasingly to a problem since government support enabled survival but only on a limited level (Jóhannes Pör Skúlason, personal communication, April 2021).

In many countries further education was offered as an option during the pandemic but far from all workforce used such an opportunity. In many cases the laid-off workforce successfully looked for and gained employment in other industries. For example, Hidden Iceland, an Icelandic adventure company, had to lay-off all staff but reported that they asked them back to the guide jobs after staying connected to them during the entire pandemic. Many had, however, shifted into other industries and only some returned. Hence, new employees needed to be recruited.

**Lifestyle considerations**

Though all tourist destinations and companies involved in the project workshop reported some kind of hardship caused by the pandemic, the COVID-19 experiences also provided an opportunity to reflect on business strategies and practises. In Iceland, the pandemic provided an opportunity to take a pause from the rapid development that signified the years before the pandemic and to rethink business ideas and indeed life choices. One of the Icelandic lifestyle entrepreneurs noted that COVID-19 was an eye-opener in terms of figuring out “what you really want to do in your life and how much you need to work to make a living” (C. Thuilliez and Q. Thulliez, personal communications, March 2021). From that point of view, tourism entrepreneurs were inspired to consider a different tourism future recognizing the need for a more reasonable work-life balance.

Similarly, a small-scale tourism company from Ruka, Finland, realised that their business model, based on sustainability already implemented prior to the pandemic, in fact was sustained during the crisis. Certainly, they also needed to cut costs, but
their focus on small groups, enabling a good quality of life for themselves, allowed them to go through the crisis without collapsing. They also noted that other companies in the destination now needed to think along similar lines to make their companies more resilient. Even some Yukon companies indeed thought that being small-scale was advantageous during the pandemic and that the model promised to be sustainable also for a post COVID-19 future. Still, the pandemic implied a significant stress on the entrepreneurs and their mental well-being, they noted. Reflecting on the pandemic, entrepreneurs in Kuusamo reported a desire to offer more year-around experiences. The expected benefits refer to the entrepreneurs’ own work-life balance, but also to the employment opportunities that they can offer. Year-round employment obviously would allow for employees to get settled in the destinations.

A recently started Icelandic adventure company shifted business strategy. Instead of selling through travel agents, they now aimed at direct sales to end-customers. To achieve this, they actively worked with journalists and invested in promotion. This investment was done to avoid commission costs paid to travel agents and to improve the economic viability of the company. However, they also experienced a shifting demand focusing on customised self-guided and socially distanced experiences.

Tourism system challenges

Besides lifestyle considerations, the total scope of tourism was eventually interrogated. In the Icelandic case, the development of mass tourism at certain attractions in the country had entailed a challenging situation warranting management. Einar Sæmundssen, park manager of Pingvellir National Park, claims that management has been successful in general in recent years, he also said that intangible values in the Park were threatened by rapid growth of tourism (Einar Sæmundssen, personal communication, April 2021). According to stakeholders participating in the workshop, the pandemic allowed for reassessing ideas held about carrying capacity and allowed tourism entrepreneurs to reassess their related strategies.

However, changing business strategy is not an easy undertaking because of the horizontal integration of the tourism industry. For example, in the Yukon it was noted that even a loss of parts of the regional supply chains will threaten the ability to provide a functional destination. Destinations in northern Norway have been strongly affected by the crisis, for instance via negative impacts COVID-19 has had on the operations of Hurtigruten. Hurtigruten is a protagonist in Norwegian tourism and main cooperative partner for many experience suppliers in the region. In Finland entrepreneurs discussed the relation of small-scale companies and larger industrial players. The latter were needed to maintain tourist flows and justify infrastructure and transportation. Still, a partnership on more equal terms, appreciating local stakeholders and integrating them in a fair way, would be appreciated, since, after all, even small businesses need to sustain the incomes.
Lessons learned

In retrospect, it is important to consider the businesses’ capacities to make adjustments in light of the extreme uncertainty that marked the first weeks and months of the pandemic. Also, it is important to take into account that not all companies had the opportunity to continue with their core activities, given the absence of foreign, and in the Yukon case, domestic tourists from other provinces and territories.

The pandemic revealed the vulnerability of the tourism product the way it has been developed in many Arctic regions and communities. The vulnerability of moving bodies (with viruses) in a vulnerable climatic situation opened a space for reconsidering tourism growth and the negative impacts of tourism on climate and biodiversity as well as communities that again were closed in the northern peripheries (public discussions) in a crisis situation where the reliance on the tourism economy became recognized for the first time more thoroughly. The vulnerability of Arctic places that for long have been marked by depopulation and economic marginalisation, may, however, also challenge the space for critical considerations of tourism industry that is more strongly recognized as of importance to the future of the place. The closing of borders and other travel regulations and recommendations implied that not least destinations depending on a global demand market registered significant losses.

Kajsa Åberg, Region Västerbotten, pointed to the need for diversified business structures in tourism areas. According to her, for the region as a whole, tourism has not been a major industry which turned out to be advantageous, since economic impacts did not hit all parts of society. The pandemic had, however, also implied a greater awareness for the need to cooperate and help each other; the need for working together is now embraced by more companies (K. Åberg, personal communication, April 2021). This insight was shared by Yukon tourism industry respondents who underlined the importance of increased cooperation.

The deputy mayor for the city of Reykjavik, Þórdís Lóa Þórhallsdóttir, claimed that a lesson learnt not only in relation to the pandemic, but also to the previous situation of rapidly growing tourism is to balance demand and supply. Hence, a new tourism strategy for the city highlights the need for sustainable transportation and environmental awareness (Þórdís Lóa Þórhallsdóttir, personal communication, April 2021). Even Jóhannes Pór Skúlason from the Icelandic Tourist Industry Association claimed that coping with a dramatic growth implied learning too. Thus, he was optimistic that a return to larger tourist volumes can be handled not least by creating new attractions around the country and promoting tourism outside Reykjavík (Jóhannes Pór Skúlason, personal communication, April 2021).
IV. Re-starting and re-considering tourism

COVID-19 called a halt to international tourism globally. Soon after the initial shock, the discussion about the pandemic as a possible opportunity to reboot tourism and start a fresh and positive transformation towards something new, a more sustainable future, gained ground both among researchers (see Brouder et al., 2020; Lew et al., 2020), industry representatives and global organisations (e.g. UN policy brief on COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism, 2020). At the same time, some in the tourism academia emphasised the role of researchers in advising and supporting the industry in developing recovery strategies for returning to “business as usual” as soon as possible (see Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021).

When the situation extended, the pressure for re-starting and re-opening businesses in any format increased and seemed to push the reboot/transformation discussion into the background again. The latest marketing activities of tourism agencies have continued to appeal to the customers’ passion to travel and their frustration for not being able to visit places far away. Some even have “mocked” or made fun of the new habits of people when they have during pandemic times started to spend more time outdoors, in nature and close to home. One good example of this kind of marketing was the television advertisement of an airline company, where a (Nordic) family is enjoying their time in nature when the sound of an airplane makes them abandon all their tramping gear and run towards the planes/civilization (and travel to southern destinations). However, as the findings of our workshop indicate, the transformation discourse continues both among practitioners and researchers in the Arctic.

The following section discusses the future direction of Arctic tourism in more detail and focuses on three viewpoints that came through at the workshop. In the workshop, the participants were asked to discuss the theme of restarting tourism in small groups, utilising Miro board (an online group work software) as a documentation tool. After group discussions, the outcomes of each group were presented to other groups and eventually three major viewpoints were encapsulated from the workshop. These were: 1) Normative tourism / Tourism defined by health security; 2) Increased interest in nature-based tourism; and 3) The role of local, regional, and domestic tourism. First, we introduce how the concepts of re-starting and re-considering tourism were reflected in the workshop, and then we examine the three viewpoints. In the last section of this chapter, we summarize the discussion on re-starting and re-considering tourism by reflecting on the potential challenges arising from the three viewpoints to future tourism development. The italics in the text refer to comments written in the Miro board during the workshop.
Re-starting or re-considering

At the workshop, the discussion on ‘re-starting’ tourism after COVID-19’ and ‘recovery’ of tourism after COVID-19’ very soon raised another concept, ‘re-considering tourism’. The re-consideration concept relates with the term ‘transformation’, which has in the last 5–10 years gained more ground among (critical) tourism researchers. For example, Ateljevic (2020) explains, the term refers to transforming the tourism world and (re)generating the potential ‘new normal' by deeply reflecting on our dominant worldviews and our value systems. This is in line with current research related to the 'Anthropocene' that underlines the need to reconsider tourism due to the current environmental crises (e.g. Gren & Huijbens, 2016).

The workshop participants were hesitant to discuss "re-starting" tourism and the term "recovery" was greeted with a similar attitude. In addition, the question whether tourism should go back to before or to something new raised lively discussion. The participants agreed, that before one can talk about restarting tourism and to outline a post-pandemic future, each actor in tourism should define from their own perspective on what is the successful recovery of tourism. The participants were unanimous that the increased collaboration in regard to sustainability during the pandemic could continue, while also building tourism based on tourism-community collaboration was considered as important for the way forward (it was also brought up that without tourism for the last 14+ months (at the time of the workshop), we have an opportunity to see differently the role of tourism and what it contributes to our communities).

Re-consideration was intertwined in this discourse, where the purpose and meaning of tourism and its objectives were challenged from many perspectives. The following example, from the co-constructed Miro board, of what tourism in (Northern) Finland could mean and what issues should be considered, demonstrates this infiltration:

- focus is on tours with smaller groups
- individualized services are popular now
- focus on hygiene
- make sustainable decisions in everyday life
- more focus on the “new” domestic market as well as more in balance with the international market

It should be noted that the re-starting of tourism cannot be seen as an easy straightforward alternative for re-consideration. Re-starting is not a clear forward concept in this context as many entrepreneurs re-started already in spring 2020 and took part in the “humpy-bumpy” summer season of 2020. Some establishments, for example, restaurants and cafes, have re-started several times during the last 1.5 year. Hence, re-starting may include some reconsideration, but in this section we use the term ‘reconsideration’ to refer to a more complete structural and ideological shift within the aims of tourism development at different scales. We will next discuss the three possible viewpoints on the future directions for tourism in the Arctic that emerged during the workshop. They illustrate the diverse discourses underlining the need for reconsideration of tourism.
Future direction for Arctic tourism

1) Normative tourism / Tourism defined by health security

In the workshop, the role of public authorities was highlighted in relation to creating safe future tourism, e.g. through action plans, public health priorities, vaccination passports, restrictions, and financial support. Elsewhere, (e.g., Suopajärvi et al., forthcoming) the role of governments and regional authorities have been brought up when discussing the future of tourism in the Arctic. Governmental and regional politics are seen to strongly direct the development of tourism. For example, the EU has been criticised for its inability to proceed quickly with the vaccination passport system, while Iceland has been seen as a positive example of tackling the problems with its own digital registration system. All in all, one consequence of measuring the amount of COVID-19 cases, vaccinated people and pandemic-related deaths have given rise to new statistical means for regulating and developing travel. Therefore, re-considering tourism by focusing on health security underlines normative solutions. Here, the role of political steering on regional, national and, for example, EU-level decision-making interacts with the local level tourism development.

According to Romagosa (2020) and Fletcher et al. (2020), the current restrictions and controls on the mobility of people, imposed by the pandemic, demonstrates how it is possible to regulate tourist flows and private enterprises' actions according to certain standards – if there is will and political consensus to do so. Previously, the strong intervention of the governments has been considered challenging, and the public regulation has mostly happened via incentives and education (Hall, 2011; Joppe, 2018). Especially climate change and environmental regulation have been difficult issues in tourism-related policy- and decision-making (see e.g., Gössling & Hall, 2008).

The new statistics related to the progress and decline of COVID-19 as a tool to regulate tourist flows, in addition to the traditional tools (for example, overnight statistics and other travel-related numbers), also illustrates that it is possible to apply different measurements to channel the development of the travel industry and the investments of the industry. Thus, it is relevant to ask how can the lessons from regulating travel during the pandemic be applied to building a more sustainable future - e.g., for advancing the social, cultural, ecological, and political sustainability of the tourism industry?

Tourism is often seen as a small-scale entrepreneurial activity. The result is, for example, that environmental assessment requirements do not apply to tourism projects due to the fragmented nature of the investments. Furthermore, tools such as environmental accountancy are seldom applied for managing tourism development (Suopajärvi et al., forthcoming). The political steering and decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic has made the role of central governments and international bodies more visible. Furthermore, in future there can be increased demand for this type of steering role in order to develop documentation related to sustainability in tourism, to push the green energy transition, to manage and plan tourism towards sustainability, as well as to increase the politicians' and operators' awareness of sustainable development; and that tourism brings wellness to the locals (Suopajärvi et al, forthcoming).

In many Arctic communities, development of tourism is a community level question (see Rantala et al., 2019). In northern Norway, community-based management and
planning of tourism has recently become visible as an emphasis on developing local visitor management measures, particularly in relation to challenges that follow the growth in nature-based tourism. Awareness of the value of planning tourism development in a community-first mode is also heightened (see Rantala et al. 2019). On the one hand, the attention towards the needs and perspectives of a community is a political and normative one that is nurtured “from below”, i.e., from within Arctic communities, as they experience the consequences of tourism growth. On the other hand, the community-first principle is part of the sustainable tourism paradigm, which, to varying degrees, is reflected in national and international strategies for and regulations of tourism. The normative tourism future viewpoint illustrates the re-consideration of tourism as a strategic level decision-making matter and emphasises political willingness to act for sustainability. One question that remains open in this context is the scale: where should the initiatives for sustainability emerge from and be directed to?

2) Increased interest in nature-based tourism

Nature-based tourism has for a long time been considered as one of the fastest growing forms of tourism (e.g. Sæþórsdóttir & Hall, 2021; Sæþórsdóttir, Hall & Wendt, 2020a). The general sustainability discourse, together with growing awareness of global environmental change (including both climate change and biodiversity loss issues), may also have influenced the interest towards nature. However, it appears that in many countries – especially in the Arctic context – the pandemic raised nature and its role in everyday life and recreation to a completely new level. This increase in interest is evidenced in statistics depicting visits to national parks and other recreation areas, and several recent studies report similar outcomes (e.g., Fagerholm et al., 2021; Fredman & Margaryan, 2021; Venter et al., 2021). For example, the increase in Finnish national parks visitation in 2021 (January - July) was 25 percent compared to the same time period in 2019 (Metsähallitus, 2021). Studies from Southern Finland, by Fagerholm et al. (2021), and from northern USA, Vermont (Grima et al., 2020) support the assumption that new users have discovered nature and developed the desire to enjoy outdoor recreation. The pandemic showed a similar trend in Norway, with a growth in short travel excursions and use of neighbouring landscapes (Granås & Svensson, 2021). In Canada, as a result of pandemic-imposed lockdowns, wide-spread discussions ensued on public space, including diverse types of nature spaces (de la Barre et al., 2020). In addition, pandemic-times studies report changes in recreation patterns, for example, the close-to-home locations or even personal home yards becoming more important for nature activities, as was the case of birders in the study by Randler et al. (2020). The same nature-seeking strategies may apply to cases where strict closures and lockdowns prevented mobility between national parks and residential areas. It remains to be seen whether the current nature-boom continues in the new normal and where travellers will spend their holidays and free time in the future. One study from Norway already suggests that the interest in at least urban green spaces was sustained even after COVID-19 closures (Venter et al., 2020). However, to predict the future, it is important to understand the motives and reasons for increasing enthusiasm for nature and visitor numbers in nature-based destinations. Potentially, the reasons may relate with distancing (from crowds), wellbeing effects, travelling with family, searching for clean air and similar attributes.
What then are the implications of this boom in interest in nature and what issues arise from the perspective of reconsidering tourism? First of all, there are the major environmental impacts from increasing usage. In many places, the infrastructure has not been made to serve such a high number of visitors. In addition, some of the (new) visitors are not familiar with the codes of conduct or allemandsretten, the right to roam, and the responsibilities attached to these rights (Granás & Svensson, 2021). These new users have resulted, among other things, in littering, unauthorised firepits and generally inappropriate behavior; all of which may lead to new challenges, as some of the ‘old’ recreationists feel the presence of these new users disturbing and not respectful towards nature.

The increased interest in nature tourism has been celebrated by many. It has been suggested that positive and restorative experiences in natural environments result in increased environmental awareness (e.g., Collado & Corraliza, 2015). To face the climate change and biodiversity loss issues, an increase in the will to protect nature and promote environmental responsibility would be very welcomed. If the nature-tourism trend continues to boom in the future, there is a need for a more educational approach for executing and developing nature-based tourism and recreational activities and infrastructure. This should include an implementation of a multispecies approach, with placing also other species than humans in the groups of those who should benefit from tourism. Policymakers and tourism stakeholders might usefully turn their attention to the domestic market, both in terms of education and preparing for increasing domestic use. This leads us to the third aspect of the workshop discussions.

3) The role of local, regional, and domestic tourism

The idea and need to diversify offerings to meet local markets’ needs was highlighted in the workshop. This perspective turns the attention to the role of local, regional, and domestic markets as part of the reconsideration of tourism; it challenges the singular or primary focus on developing international tourism. Also, as Gössling et al. (2021, pp. 13–14) suggest, the “COVID-19 crisis should be seen as an opportunity to critically reconsider tourism’s growth trajectory and to question the logic of more arrivals implying greater benefits.” When facing the issues related to climate change and the need to reduce the carbon footprint of the tourism industry, a dependency on continuous growth cannot be the sole solution for the future of the tourism industry (Suopajärvi et al., forthcoming).

The experts in our workshop pointed out that for a long time the focus in marketing and service development, especially as guided by the EU, national and regional agencies, has been on the international markets. For example, most funding available for tourism development has been ear-marked for creating international growth. Thus, the possibilities of individual businesses for focusing solely on domestic markets have been limited, and the creative solutions serving local markets have been conspicuous by their absence. Nonetheless, some tourism companies have managed to serve their local customers and to re-package their products for domestic tourists. Preparedness for serving local, regional, and domestic markets has still been low, as the following examples related to expenditures of tourists and establishment of local relations indicate.

In Finland, there was a record in overnight stays in July 2021, and tourism increased
during both summer 2020 and 2021. The longed-for increase of summer tourism (see Rantala et. al., 2019) was due to increase in domestic travel, and the main increase was in overnight stays, not in turnover. Often, domestic tourists spend less money than international visitors, as their needs for services differ greatly. In the case of Finnish Lapland, the complaints towards tourism enterprises for not offering services and products attractive to domestic customers were plentiful during the COVID-19 closure – there were no products available and suitable for domestic visitors. Thus, it is no wonder that the workshop participants called for diversifying the offerings to meet local markets’ needs.

Trasti and Trine in Alta, Norway, exemplify a business that has worked with local relations for a long time. They had run a café and bakery for local inhabitants not so much for making money as for creating loyalty among inhabitants and spurring their engagements in word-of-mouth marketing of their business. As the pandemic hit, they could make use of already established local (regional and national) relations of loyalty; the local customers became more eager customers at the bakery as well as at the different food experiences they developed within the limitations set by the pandemic. In contrast to this, the businesses that were established and developed solely with international tourism in mind were very different in their steps towards tapping into national markets.

Other ideas that emerged from the workshop called for more balanced tourism between domestic and foreign tourism – between winter and summer tourism. It was well understood that the combination of domestic/international tourism provides different preconditions for restart and the domestic (mostly regional or local) market was seen as a good opportunity to restart.

Based on these insights, we can argue that businesses will continue their production with an increased flexibility market-wise and one that encompasses local customers and national audiences in addition to international tourists. Possibilities related to intra-regional tourism development and attracting visitors from nearby areas fit well the fight against climate change. These visions are also emphasized when discussing the increased digitalization and the new trend to combine work and leisure time and to prolong this way the stay during the holidays (Suopajärvi et al., forthcoming).

The focus on domestic, regional, and local markets will lead us to reconsider the idea and meaning of ‘distance’ in tourism (Höckert et al., 2022). Travelling long distances may turn into something else in the future, and, rather than the kilometres travelled, tourists could perceive distance in terms of travel costs, time and (cultural) novelty or familiarity of the destination. Distance can also refer to rhythms of travel (e.g., slowness or speed), and to travel inwards, reflective, contemplative, impacting both personal growth and increased self-awareness (Salmela et al., 2021). One of the workshop participants pointed out that people discuss this topic in (mainstream) media and argue that they as travellers themselves have (finally) discovered proximity tourism (in nature, cf. point 2) and decided to make more sustainable choices and stop travelling that far and that often. Even though these kinds of discourses appear, tourists may well continue to search for escape from the routines of everyday life. Thus, the tourism industry serving local, regional, and domestic customers’ needs to (continuously) develop products and services that offer ‘tourism’ experiences in a familiar context. This may be one of the biggest issues for a reconsideration of tourism.
Challenges ahead

The above-discussed three viewpoints offer possible future directions for tourism in the Arctic and illustrate the need for reconsideration in tourism. They are not mutually exclusive but share similar issues and challenges, and their ‘implementation’ requires further examination.

All the three viewpoints require new perspectives to tourism development and challenge diverse tourism stakeholders at different levels. The re-consideration of tourism according to the three approaches increases the need to build tourism based on tourism-community collaboration. Nature-orientation together with local and regional tourism approaches especially require that local communities (including non-human communities) are included in development activities, while normative tourism raises the question if and what kind of regulations could be enabled at the local and community level if the role of governmental regulation increases.

One of the biggest challenges in the re-consideration of tourism relates to geographical scales. The current funding schemes and political guidance for tourism development has been extremely growth-oriented and attracting international markets has been seen as the ultimate goal for development. Tourism strategies and investments have been mostly directed to creating competitive advantages on international scale and new markets and have not reflected, for example, on the climate change and the uncertainty related to it. If reconsideration and the transformative ideology supporting it are to be embedded in Arctic tourism development, then the policies need to change accordingly. National tourism development schemes must include incentives that spur sustainable development of businesses and destinations. Hence, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the individual states can take a greater role for either enabling or regulating tourism flows. This could be seen as an example of the possibility of the governments to regulate mobility and tourism also in order to enhance the sustainability issues. It remains to be seen whether this kind of change will happen or if the tourism businesses and tourists are left alone in their endeavours.
V. Conclusion

The overarching goals for the project *Partnership for Sustainability: Arctic Tourism in Times of Change* sought to develop a framework for the sustainability of Arctic tourism. Each of the three sub-projects illustrated diverse and connected issues present in Arctic tourism development. This report presents the issues highlighted by academic researchers, tourism operators, and industry players when considering over-tourism (pre-pandemic) and restarting tourism (during/post pandemic). Inherently embedded in seemingly unrelated at first glance deliberations is a demonstration of the connective tissue that underscores the importance of the contextual platforms that exist for the future planning and development of Arctic tourism.

Notwithstanding the significant differences that exist related to the uneven tourism development across the Arctic, a number of relevant overarching questions arise from the final sub-project, including:

- How can the lessons from regulating travel during the pandemic be applied to building a more sustainable future - e.g., for advancing the social, cultural, ecological and political sustainability of the tourism industry?
- In relation to the locational scale of issue identification and problem-solving, where should the initiatives for sustainability emerge from and be directed to (e.g., local, regional, national, or international)?
- Given the possibility that nature-tourism trends will continue to boom in the future, which educational approaches can be developed for executing and developing nature-based tourism and recreational activities and infrastructure? Moreover, will these strategies meet the challenge of incorporating a much-needed multispecies approach, where non-human species can also benefit from tourism?

The pandemic issued a call to reconsider ‘distance’ at the core of perspectives on what Arctic travel has been (and has been relied upon) and to rethink the historical significance of international tourism markets. This kind of imposed ‘rethink’ resulted in the identification (and in some cases, confirmation) of the potentially rich opportunities available with ‘nearby’ or domestic tourism. Among these opportunities is a call for tourism businesses to enhance their flexibility market-wise and diversify their tourism offerings to meet local market interests and needs. By extension, this also underlines a more emergent role to rethink community-based tourism planning and the possibility of re-thinking what expectations are available at the community level for the benefits of tourism.

However, in all future steps the Arctic and local context need to be taken into consideration.

Significantly, the uneven tourism development within national and regional destinations and widely observed internationally is critically important to understanding and addressing the future of Arctic tourism development. Embedded in the nature of the uneven tourism development is the much-underlined claim that there is no ‘one’ solution for every destination and those solutions rely on different aspects - geography plays a role, as does how tourism plays out in the economy, at local and networked levels.
The importance for understanding that there is not one ‘Arctic’, and, therefore, no one solution approach to Arctic tourism development, was a finding across all three projects within the Partnership for Sustainability: Arctic Tourism in Times of Change.

The 2019 project on Urban Tourism in the Arctic reported a widespread increasing appeal held by tourists to visit the modern urban places found in the Arctic. Still, they remain urban places with differing layers of tourism and play different roles within their respective regional and national urban systems. The latter is influenced not only in terms of how Arctic urban places differently embrace their northern identity and their northern culture, but also how they are called to operationalise their different roles as regional service centres and how they may be relied upon as regional socioeconomic hubs.

Similarly, the 2018 focus on Seasonality of Arctic Tourism underlined in its problem-solving strategies that there are no general ‘one size fits all’ solutions to the challenges posed by seasonality in Arctic tourism destinations. Recommendations recognized diversity by demonstrating that specific community needs should be taken into account by applying community-first planning approaches – approaches that are founded on specific characteristics of local contexts and global processes.

In light of the findings across all three projects, any framework considered for the sustainability of Arctic tourism must first and foremost consider the differences that exist across the Arctic. In other words, any framework developed for dealing with tourism management and policymaking will need to consider contextually specific situations where (and when) tourism may constitute a problem and/or an opportunity. Nonetheless, and while there is a need to consider the heterogeneity of the Arctic and its many tourisms, there is also a need to maximize upon lessons learned and the experience with strategies that may also be informed by their similarities. Indeed, there are at least two high level findings from the 2018 project that also resonate across the 2019 and 2021 projects and relate to developing sustainable governance models in Arctic tourism destination development:

- Strengthen the connections made between sustainable governance initiatives and discussions as they are occurring in the Arctic with tourism development processes, including pan-circumpolar and East to West network building, and knowledge creation and sharing;
- Utilize sustainable and responsible tourism initiatives within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); broaden the knowledge base and research, produced and utilized for developing tourism-related innovations.

Finally, the three projects and the fertile cross-pollination of perspectives, experience and knowledge, bringing together Arctic researchers and students from seven different regions, tourism operators and industry partners, demonstrate that these, more than ever, are significant collaborations.

They point to a more emergent role for the research community to work with all those involved in the sustainable development of tourism. It is in this manner that the future of Arctic tourism can be reconsidered and development strategies that are sustainable and achievable created.
## Table 2. Arctic Tourism in Times of Change: Uncertain Futures: From Overtourism to Re-starting Tourism. List of interviewees*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna Dóra Sæþórsdóttir</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margrét Wendt</td>
<td>Researcher, Department of Geography and Tourism, University of Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Einar Sæmundsson</td>
<td>Director of Þingvellir National Park, Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórdís Lóa Þórhallsdóttir</td>
<td>Deputy Mayor of Reykjavík</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jóhannes Pór Skúlason</td>
<td>Managing Director at the Icelandic Industry Travel Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirpa Kämäräinen</td>
<td>Owner, CEO, Isokenkäisten klubi, Kuusamo, Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katja Vira</td>
<td>Owner, Sales Director Isokenkäisten klubi, Kuusamo, Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lotta Sandvik</td>
<td>Adventurer and owner, Outdoor Passion Finland, Kuusamo, Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liisa Mäkelä</td>
<td>Project Manager, Naturpolis Oy, Ruka-Kuusamo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venla Karkola</td>
<td>Senior Adviser for Nature Tourism, Metsähallitus Parks and Wildlife Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan Connolly</td>
<td>Marketing and Environmental Manager, Hidden Iceland, Iceland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saga Hlíf Birgisdóttir</td>
<td>Trex Fleet Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Claire Thuilliez</td>
<td>Owner, Dogsledding Iceland</td>
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<td>Q Thuilliez</td>
<td>Owner, Dogsledding Iceland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erwin van der Werve</td>
<td>Iceland Yurt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Þóra Sólveig Bergsteinsdóttir</td>
<td>Iceland Yurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max Gouyou-Beauchamps</td>
<td>Co-owner, Terre Boreale, Yukon, Canada, Co-Chair of the Yukon Wild Marketing Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel Hibbard</td>
<td>Nahanni River Adventures &amp; Canadian River Expeditions, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuela Larsen</td>
<td>Co-owner, Muktuk Adventures, Yukon, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kajsa Åberg</td>
<td>Tourism strategist a Region Vasterbotten, Sweden</td>
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*Videos and podcasts available at [https://arctictourism.hi.is/videos_podcasts/](https://arctictourism.hi.is/videos_podcasts/)
Table 3. Arctic Tourism in Times of Change: Uncertain Futures: From Overtourism to Re-starting Tourism. List of students participating in the virtual fieldcourse.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>University</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>University of Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Traini</td>
<td>University of Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loshan Kannangara</td>
<td>Umeå University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Karanja</td>
<td>Umeå University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wendy Mubaiwa</td>
<td>Umeå University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elaine Crew</td>
<td>Vancouver Island University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna Virtanen</td>
<td>University of Oulu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pinja-Emilia Lämsä</td>
<td>University of Oulu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elina Heikkilä</td>
<td>University of Oulu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emmi Korhonen</td>
<td>University of Oulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiina Heikkilä</td>
<td>University of Lapland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moaadh Benkherouf</td>
<td>University of Lapland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elena Beuttner</td>
<td>University of Lapland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heli Rantapelkonen</td>
<td>University of Lapland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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