Sustainability and cruise tourism in the Arctic: stakeholder perspectives from Ísafjörður, Iceland and Qaqortoq, Greenland

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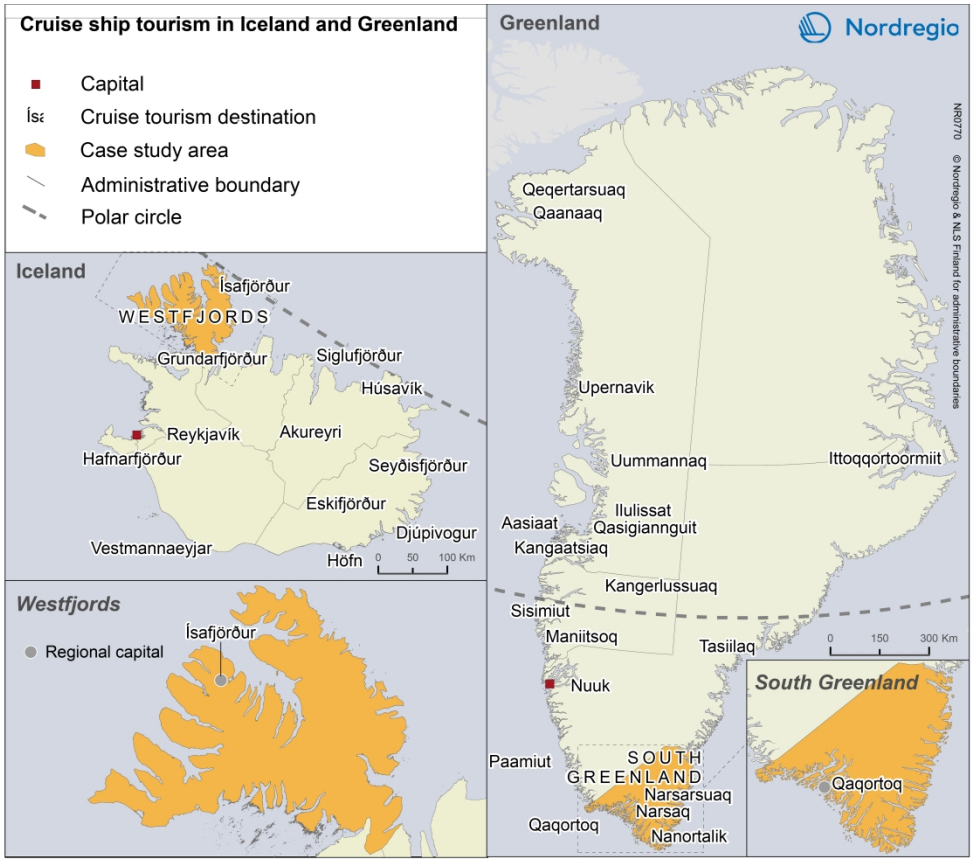

Figure 1. Location of Qaqortoq, Greenland and Ísafjörður, Iceland

207x177mm (600 x 600 DPI)

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Abstract

This paper compares two Arctic cruise destinations – Ísafjörður in Iceland, and Qaqortoq in Greenland – focusing on stakeholders' perceptions of the sustainability of cruise tourism, and how they are managing the development of the industry in the context of imbalances in power between place-bound local stakeholders and global cruise lines. Drawing on interviews with local stakeholders, the paper argues that destination development stage and the relative importance of land-based tourism frame the ways in which stakeholders perceive the sustainability of cruise tourism. While there were differences in the emphasis placed on environmental, socio-cultural and economic aspects of sustainability in each destination, there were similarities in the ways in which stakeholders conceptualised relations between the different aspects in terms of trade-offs and competition, together with a lack of a holistic perspective and concern about economic dependence on global cruise lines. The findings suggest that intergovernmental agreements are needed to address regulatory issues and that national coordination may help to improve collaboration between destinations.

Keywords: cruise tourism, sustainability, Arctic destinations, Iceland, Greenland

Introduction

In recent years cruise tourism has expanded significantly in the Arctic region, with cruise ships visiting destinations such as Svalbard, Iceland, Greenland and the Eastern Canadian Arctic (Maher, 2012; Lamers & Pashkevich, 2015; Lück, Maher, & Stewart, 2010). This growth has prompted considerable debate regarding the sustainability of cruise tourism and how it can be managed (Lester & Weeden, 2004; Klein, 2011). The Arctic expedition cruise sector is largely self-regulated by the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO). This organisation was set up to represent the interests of the cruise industry and to minimize negative impacts (van Bets et al, 2017a; Dawson et al, 2014). It manages the activities of its members through a set of by-laws and guidelines that dictate appropriate

behaviour for tourists and operators. However, as McCarthy (2018, p.289) has noted, the literature on the impacts of cruise tourism is limited in relation to small and medium destinations away from the Caribbean and Mediterranean. Arctic destinations face particular challenges in managing cruise tourism due to their remoteness, the harsh environment, unpredictable weather conditions, and lack of infrastructure. In addition, the social and economic impacts are likely to differ from those in less isolated destinations, and the focus of Arctic cruises on nature-based experiences means that they may have a greater direct impact on vulnerable environments and wildlife than other types of cruise tourism. Moreover, we know relatively little about the views of stakeholders in the Arctic communities directly affected, and how they conceptualise sustainability; for example, whether it is perceived narrowly in terms of economic, social and environmental impacts within a destination, or more holistically in terms of the resilience of wider socio-ecological systems (Saarinen, 2014; Hall, 2019). This is important because it has implications for the way that local stakeholders try to manage and develop cruise destinations.

This article contributes to the literature by investigating how the sustainability of cruise tourism is understood and managed by stakeholders involved in the operation and development of cruise tourism in two Arctic destinations - Qaqortoq in Greenland and Ísafjörður in Iceland. The findings show that the sustainability of cruise tourism is primarily conceptualised as a series of trade-offs between local-scale economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts, expressed most often in terms of a destination carrying capacity. However, there are also important differences between the destinations, and we argue that destination development stage and the status of alternative tourism development paths shape local stakeholders' attitudes towards cruise tourism impacts and sustainability issues. We also argue that the imbalance of power between local communities and global cruise lines negatively affects the ability of local stakeholders to develop cruise destinations collaboratively.

The article is structured as follows. The second and third sections comprise a review of research on the sustainability of cruise tourism and local stakeholders. The fourth section sets out the methodology and introduces the case studies. The fifth section presents an analysis of different stakeholders' views on the sustainability of cruise tourism in Qaqortoq and Ísafjörður, and their attempts to manage conflicts about the development of the destinations. The sixth section discusses the findings in the context of the wider literature on sustainability and cruise tourism. The final section presents the main conclusions and discusses the implications for the management of Arctic cruise destinations.

Framing sustainability and cruise tourism

Sustainability is a complex and contested concept. It first gained widespread attention in the late 1980s, following the publication of the so-called Brundtland report, "Our Common Future", which defined sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p43). However, as MacKenzie and Gannon (2019) have argued in their historical analysis of the antecedents and legitimisation of sustainability in hospitality and tourism, there is little consensus regarding the key characteristics of sustainability. Jones et al (2016) similarly argue that often it seems to mean 'all things to all people'. Many definitions, however, try to integrate environmental, social and economic dimensions (Buckley, 2012) and the UNEP and WTO follow this 'triple bottom line' approach in their definition of sustainable tourism as: 'tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities' (UNEP-WTO, 2005, p.12). However, this impact-based approach is only one of many that have been developed since the early 1990s and excludes other fundamental principles such as futurity, equity and holism (Redcliffe and Woodgate, 1997; Butler, 1999; Moscardo and Murphy, 2014).

Saarinen (2006; 2014) identifies three main traditions in the conceptualisation of sustainable tourism, which vary in the way that they define acceptable and unacceptable changes to socio-ecological systems, and how tourism should be managed. The *resource-based* tradition draws on the notion of an objective scientifically defined carrying capacity; i.e., the maximum number of tourists a destination can support without serious negative impacts on the natural and socio-cultural environment. It developed from the broader debates about environmental carrying capacity that emerged in the 1970s (Butler, 1999). The *activity-based* tradition operates with a more dynamic view of the limits to growth, which are dependent on the tourism industry itself and its capacity to adapt and manage tourism to minimise unacceptable changes. It encompasses the neo-liberal ecological management approach critiqued by Hall (2019), which is framed in terms of technical solutions to enable continued tourism growth. Finally, the *community-based* tradition focuses on the perspectives of stakeholders, particularly local communities, and their perception of acceptable or unacceptable changes caused by tourism. It emphasises local control and empowerment in relation to tourism development and is exemplified by the local, community-based tourism development, which typifies the 'smaller is better' understanding of sustainable tourism (McCool et al, 2013).

A growing literature on the sustainability of cruise tourism takes an impact-based approach, documenting the environmental, economic and social impacts of cruise ships and passengers in different destinations, including some research in the Arctic (e.g., McCarthy, 2018; Dawson, et al, 2014, 2016, 2017; Stewart et al, 2015). In relation to environmental impacts, for example, researchers have

identified issues including pollution from vessels, discharge of organic and hazardous waste, air emissions, the destruction of natural habitats, and the disturbance of wildlife (MacNeill and Wozniak, 2018; Adams, 2010; Davenport and Davenport, 2006; Klein, 2011; Carić and Mackelworth, 2014). With regard to social and cultural impacts, overcrowding and competition for resources are frequently noted (Brida and Zapata Aguirre, 2010), with the worst effects in small destinations where large numbers of passengers come ashore at the same time. There are also concerns about a shift from locally owned shops to international franchises, and negative impacts on local culture and heritage due to mass cruise tourism (e.g., Hritz and Cecil, 2008; Maher, 2012; Pino and Peluso, 2018). More positively in relation to Arctic destinations, some studies have found that community engagement and educational opportunities are associated with cruise tourism (Schonka & Schweitser, 2004; Stewart et al 2015).

In relation to economic impacts, there is considerable debate about the benefits for local communities (Torbianelli, 2012; Rodrigue and Notteboom, 2013). One of the main reasons that cruise visits are attractive for ports is the potential for large numbers of passengers to come ashore and spend money on local goods and services. However, the cruise industry has a very high level of ownership concentration, with the three largest parent companies (Carnival, Royal Caribbean and Norwegian) enjoying a 96% market share, measured by the number of passengers (Cruise Marketwatch, 2018). These companies hold a powerful position in relation to potential cruise destinations as they are able to change their itineraries according to the attractiveness of different ports; for example, in relation to natural attractions and potential excursions for passengers, or taxes and regulations. Cruise lines also exercise a high degree of control over onshore excursions by making agreements with local providers to sell tours and other activities to passengers. The cruise ship usually keeps 50% or more of the price passengers pay on board, affecting the profitability of local tourism businesses (Klein, 2011; Brida & Zapata, 2010; Diedrich, 2010; Joao & Dredge, 2018). Several studies have also indicated that cruise tourists spend less money than land-based tourists, partly because they have relatively little time ashore (Satta et al, 2014, 2015; Larsen et al, 2013; Larsen and Wolff, 2016; Penco and Di Vaio, 2014).

Stakeholder views on the sustainability of cruise tourism

Documenting the environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts of cruise tourism on local destinations is an important task and the literature identifies some key issues that are likely to concern stakeholders in Arctic destinations. However, it is unclear how the stakeholders involved in managing cruise tourism in such destinations conceptualise sustainability themselves; for example, whether they operate with a resource, activity or community-based perspective, or if they consider the broader

principles of holism and futurity. As commentators have noted in relation to other types of tourism, the holistic approach often disintegrates in practice into trade-offs between environmental, economic and social goals (Balslev Clausen and Gyimóthy, 2016), and present-day needs tend to take priority over more uncertain future consequences, undermining the principle of futurity (McCool et al, 2013). This is important because it has implications for the way that stakeholders approach the management and regulation of cruise tourism.

There is evidence of conflicting opinions about sustainability issues among local stakeholders in relation to cruise tourism generally (e.g. van Bets et al, 2017b; Diedrich, 2010) but only a very small number of studies have investigated the views of stakeholders in Arctic destinations, and these – like the wider literature on sustainability and cruise tourism – focus on managing impacts at the destination level. Van Bets et al. (2017a), for example, document the tensions between different stakeholders in relation to environmental regulation in the context of the collective self-governance of cruise tourism at Svalbard, demonstrating the difficulties involved. Another study by Stewart, Dawson and Draper (2011) examined stakeholder attitudes towards cruise tourism in Nunavut and Cambridge Bay in the Canadian Arctic. They found more positive attitudes towards cruise tourism in Cambridge Bay where cruise tourism is at an early stage of development, but also that in both destinations environmental issues were downplayed in relation to the perceived economic and cultural impacts (ibid, p. 104). However, in a later piece of research, which included stakeholders from Arctic communities across Canada, Dawson et al (2016) concluded that there was a clear desire to manage cruise tourism in a way that balances socio-economic and environmental imperatives.

As Budeanu, et al (2016, p.288) note, the notion that community engagement and stakeholder involvement is crucial to the implementation of sustainable tourism is widespread, but stakeholders often hold different views on what sustainability means and how important it is. In a different tourism context, Balslev Clausen and Gyimóthy's (2016) study of the Mexican national tourism program *Pueblos Magicos* showed how different groups bargain on behalf of 'the community' and promote incompatible visions of sustainability and tourism development. They emphasise that local communities are not necessarily homogeneous or cohesive. Hatipoglu et al's (2016) research on tourism planning in Turkey also concluded that a major issue is finding a common understanding of what sustainable tourism is or could be. Indeed, they concluded that 'stakeholders' narrow vision, lack of strategic orientation and financial focus based on self-interest may impede the realization of sustainable tourism despite the local community's involvement in the planning process' (ibid, p. 306). Saarinen (2006, p.1133) reminds us that 'local communities do not have automatic privileges over the ethical or sustainable aspects of tourism, nor do they necessarily have any intrinsic knowledge of the impacts and the scale of these impacts on the environment'.

In the case of cruise tourism, there are additional problems, even where local communities agree on how to develop and manage tourism, because the flows and impacts of cruise ships are difficult to regulate by place-bound and state authorities, such as ports or environmental agencies (van Bets et al., 2017a; Johnson, Dawson & Stewart, 2017). The power of cruise lines to change itineraries, and the consequences thereof, is a recurring theme in the literature on cruise tourism (Esteve-Perez & Garcia-Sanchez, 2015). Dawson, Johnson and Stewart (2017) express concern that 'over-regulation' of the Canadian Arctic might lead to cruise ships choosing itineraries around Greenland or Norway instead, and Adams (2010) study of Haines in Alaska documents the economic devastation caused by the rapid decline of visitors after the Royal Caribbean cruise line dropped the port from its itinerary.

To summarise, the so-called 'three pillars' of environmental, social and economic impact are a common way to conceptualise and study the sustainability of cruise tourism, although this understanding of sustainable tourism is contested (Butler, 1999; Sharpley, 2000; Liu, 2003). Commentators such as McCool et al (2013, p.218), for example, have argued that 'overly simplistic models and panaceas—such as finding the intersection of ecological sensitivity, economic feasibility and cultural acceptability—are deceptive'. The debate has developed further to include ideas about complex adaptive systems and resilience as alternative frameworks, and more radical agendas such as degrowing tourism (Dwyer, 2018; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2019) but we know little about whether these ideas have gained traction among those involved in tourism development. Research on sustainability and tourism in a range of contexts indicates that local communities are heterogeneous, and different groups of stakeholders have conflicting views regarding the definition and management of sustainable tourism. However, there has been little research on how stakeholders involved in cruise tourism conceptualise sustainability and what the implications are for how they try to manage its development. The literature on stakeholders' general perceptions of cruise tourism indicate that destination development stage and power relations between global cruise lines and local communities shape the way that management issues are framed, and it seems likely that they will also influence stakeholder perspectives on sustainability. These issues are explored in the following analysis.

Methods

The following sections present an analysis of stakeholder perceptions of the sustainability of cruise tourism in Qaqortoq, Greenland and Ísafjörður, Iceland. A multiple case study method is applied, comprising two case studies that have been selected based on their contrasting growth profiles in relation to cruise tourism. This is because previous research in the Canadian Arctic has shown that stakeholder views on cruise tourism more generally are affected by overall visitor numbers (Stewart,

Dawson & Draper, 2011). Whilst both are relatively isolated Arctic destinations, with populations of approximately 3,000 people, Ísafjörður has a much larger number of cruise calls and overnight stays. Thus, the case studies have been selected with a view to theoretical replication (Yin, 2009) in which contrasting results are expected due to the differing contexts of the case studies. Table 1 provides an overview of tourism in the two destinations and Figure 1 shows their location.

Table 1 here

Figure 1 here

Qaqortoq, Greenland

Qaqortoq is the principal town of Kujalleq municipality, which was formed in 2009, comprising the previous municipalities of Narsaq, Nanortalik and Qaqortoq in South Greenland. The municipality has around 6,900 inhabitants, of which 3,000 live in Qaqortoq. In the Municipality's development plan from 2017 a renewed emphasis is placed on developing the fisheries industry, including ambitions to start local fish processing. Tourism is also a strategic focus area and, in relation to cruise tourism, improving the conditions for port access is a priority (Kujalleq Municipality, 2017). South Greenland has one airport in the town of Narsarsuaq, which receives smaller flights from Iceland and other airports in Greenland. Qaqortoq is accessible by helicopter and by boat. The boat traffic between towns and settlements in South Greenland is managed by a privately-owned operator, which also serves as a tourist information office in Narsarsuaq and offers package tours for overnight tourists.

Qaqortoq, along with other destinations in the South and south west, generally attracts more medium-sized and larger cruise vessels of 500-2,500 passengers, whereas the destinations in the northern part of Greenland attract more expedition cruise ships. Part of the reason for this is that Qaqortoq is included in itineraries between the North America and Europe.

In Greenland, cruise tourism is managed by individual operators in the local destinations, supported by the national tourist board Visit Greenland. Passenger-related services for cruise ships are managed by three different tour operators who make agreements directly with the cruise companies. The activities of cruise tourists are centred on the town and include boat tours, the museum, the Great Greenland tannery, traditional "kaffemik" visits to local homes, and tasting menus at the hotel. Local handicraft producers sell their products at the harbour.

Ísafjörður, Iceland

Ísafjörður is the principal town of the Westfjords peninsula, in the North West of Iceland, and has a population of approximately 3,000. Traditionally, the fishing industry has been the mainstay of all the towns and villages in the Westfjords. In recent years the importance of tourism has increased and there has been rapid growth in cruise tourism (Vinnumálastofnun, 2015). The Westfjords is a remote destination that is not easily accessible by car, and therefore cruise tourism is seen as important for the tourism industry in the area. In addition, the number of ships calling each year is known in advance, which provides security in terms of hiring staff for the tourism season.

Cruise tourism in Iceland is managed by two Reykjavik-based cruise destination management companies – Iceland Travel and Atlantik – which compete for contracts with the cruise companies. These two firms in turn either manage the local tour operation for cruise ships or contract a local operator. In Ísafjörður the main tour operator is West Tours which collaborates with other local stakeholders, including bus companies, guides, the museum and people in the surrounding villages. There is well-established collaboration between public and private stakeholders in relation to cruise tourism in Ísafjörður. The harbour (part-owned by the municipality) manages bookings from the cruise companies, and all suppliers that are involved in cruise tourism are called to a meeting before the start of the season. At this meeting the cruise schedule for the summer is discussed, especially the challenges related to the so-called 'red days', which refer to days where more than 2,500 cruise tourists visit the town.

Data collection

The aim of this project was to develop an in-depth understanding of stakeholders' perspectives on sustainability and cruise tourism. A qualitative research strategy based primarily on individual interviews was therefore employed in order to explore the complexity of the situation in the destination in depth with stakeholders (Richie et al, 2014). Documentary information in the form of project documents, national tourism plans and local strategy documents, as well as news websites were used to gather background information in preparation for interviews. The desk research and informal conversations with local stakeholders indicated that in both destinations there were potentially sensitive issues and a degree of conflict related to cruise tourism and sustainability (for example, around destination management, passenger numbers and local impacts). In this respect, being 'outsiders' to both destinations, uninvolved in local conflicts, was an advantage. Interviews were

carried out with 23 cruise tourism stakeholders in (or in the case of the national destination organisations, working with) the two destinations. The same types of stakeholders were interviewed in the two case study areas, as far as possible. Interviewees were selected on the basis of their involvement in cruise tourism using an initial web-based search supplemented with a snowballing technique to identify important stakeholders in each destination. These are very small destinations and the main stakeholders involved in planning, managing and servicing cruise tourism in each were interviewed. The interviewees were asked about their views on the different impacts of cruise tourism and its sustainability, and how local actors managed the opportunities and challenges related to its development. Table 2 provides an overview of interviewees in the two case studies.

Table 2 here

Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, but due to geographical distance and challenges of logistics, some interviews took place via Skype. The interviews were conducted in Danish in Greenland. In one case the interviewee preferred to speak Greenlandic and an interpreter was used. In Iceland the interviews were conducted in English. Ethical issues are raised by conducting research in small destinations, because it is challenging to ensure anonymity. It was agreed that when quoting from interviews, stakeholder categories would be used without reference to the specific organisation which the stakeholder represents. However, interviewees may still be identifiable locally, and this may have affected how open they were about conflicts within the destination. A limitation of the research is that only stakeholders directly involved in cruise tourism were interviewed, and their views may well differ from other stakeholder groups (see Stewart, Dawson and Draper, 2011).

Stakeholder perceptions of cruise tourism sustainability in Ísafjörður and Qaqortoq

In the following sections we explore the ways that stakeholders in the two destinations construct and relate different aspects of sustainability to each other. We compare the views of stakeholders in Ísafjörður and Qaqortoq regarding the economic, socio-cultural and environmental sustainability of cruise tourism, and the extent to which they manage the development of cruise tourism collaboratively. In the discussion section, we set stakeholders' perceptions of the sustainability of cruise tourism in the context of empirical findings from other destinations and the broader literature on sustainability and cruise tourism.

Economic sustainability

In both Ísafjörður and Qaqortoq the economic sustainability of cruise tourism was an important concern for most stakeholders. There were, however, important differences between the two destinations. Ísafjörður is generally seen as an economically successful cruise destination by both national and local stakeholders, and cruise ships are considered to be an important source of income for both the harbour and other local businesses. Cruise ships typically stay in port for eight hours with tours to nearby fishing villages and other attractions at relatively short distances from town. Three tours of three hours duration to different locations are usually organised simultaneously and the same tours can be organised both in the morning and in the afternoon. This means that the cruise tourists can spend half a day in town and half a day on a tour. This arrangement is popular because it maximises income for both the tour operators and local businesses, as well as spreading out tourists across a wider area:

> 'One thing that is done well is that we work with the neighbouring towns. We have a bus tour around Ísafjörður visiting the heritage museum, the forest, the church. The Arctic fox tour. So the money does not only stay within one company but is spread around the region'. (Tourism business, Ísafjörður)

The tour operators are competitors, but they also have a well-functioning collaboration, which is facilitated by the large number of cruise tourists coming to the area. Since they are nearly always fully booked, tour operators are happy to refer customers to other firms when they cannot accommodate cruise passengers on their own tours.

In Qaqortoq, the situation is quite different. The overall number of cruise ships calling at the port is much lower and cruise tourism is not seen as such a significant activity for the town although passenger numbers are increasing. While some stakeholders were concerned about capacity in the future, others suggested that taxation and changing regulation of cruise ships may in fact reduce passenger numbers. The introduction of new environmental regulations means that vessels of more than 400 passengers are required to have two ice pilots on-board when travelling to Greenland, making the destination more expensive for cruise lines. Stakeholders suggested, for example, that one of the large cruise lines had stopped calling at Qaqortoq as a result of the higher costs (and, according to some stakeholders, lack of improvements to the harbour facilities).

Cruise tourism has become a source of conflict between tour operators who compete for tourists and staff. The locally based tour operator (which also serves as a tourist information centre in Qaqortoq)

managed the majority of cruise calls for many years, with the remainder managed by a Danish-based tour operator. However, a new operator, based in Sisimiut, has started a business that provides passenger related services to cruise companies at destinations all along the coast. This entrepreneur has been successful in negotiating contracts with many of the cruise ships arriving at Qaqortoq and maintains a network of guides in every harbour where they operate – approximately 50 people along the coast. In Qaqortoq there are a limited number of tourist guides, so this is of concern for the local tour operators, and a key area of conflict:

> 'Sometimes guides are not there when I need them because they have got a better offer from another tour operator that can afford to pay them better (…) I have spent time and resources training the young people and it upsets me when someone comes in and takes them away' (Tour operator, Qaqortoq).

The guide education programme based in Qaqortoq has increased the supply of guides, but for most it is a side activity to other occupations.

Another challenge faced by the tour operators is the number of boats available to take tourists on tours. When cruise ships arrive in Qaqortoq, passengers have often already booked tours through the cruise line that require boat transport. The number of boats authorised to take passengers is limited to two private boats in town and the boat company which manages most of the boat passenger transport in South Greenland. This company prioritises local residents and tourists arriving by air, which means that its boats can usually not be booked on days with flight arrivals.

In Ísafjörður there are also problems accommodating both cruise and land-based tourists. On cruise days all tours are fully booked, preventing other tourists from taking them:

> 'For me the cruise tourists are mainly a nuisance to the other tourists. They get off the boat for a couple of hours to be able to say they have been here. The other tourists genuinely want to experience the country' (Tourism business, Qaqortoq)

In addition, some stakeholders worried that their businesses were too dependent on cruise ships that squeeze the operators' margins:

> 'I know what tours cost on board the cruise ships and it is much higher than what I am selling directly to my customers. Every season you are fighting for the percentages but on the other hand I'm now able to plan according to the number of cruises. If we did not have the cruise ships it would be more shaky to invest in staff. The cruise ships are

driving the revenue. It is good but also bad, because so many eggs are in one basket' (Tour operator, Ísafjörður).

A related issue, which is common to both destinations, is concern over the spending patterns of cruise tourists compared with land-based tourists, although stakeholders in both destinations still considered cruise tourists to be beneficial to the local economy. In Qaqortoq, for example, cruise passengers provide a market for local products:

'There are many who sell handicrafts at the stalls. You can feel that they are benefitting. They often ask for currency conversion, so they know how much they can take for the goods' (Tourism business, Qaqortoq).

Stakeholders also mentioned fishermen taking tourists on tours, visits to local homes for 'kaffemik', and local food tasting sessions. Other stakeholders, however, suggested that cruise passengers spend relatively little:

'We do not make money on cruise tourists: they live out there…We have a restaurant and cafe all year round. About 90% of guests in the cafe are locals' (Tourism business, Qaqortoq).

In Ísafjörður, several stakeholders also expressed a preference for larger cruise ships that stop in the port, rather than expedition vessels, which may not stop in the harbour of Ísafjörður but instead travel directly to the local nature reserve. Since they do not dock at the harbour, the municipality loses harbour fees and local businesses lose the opportunity to sell to cruise tourists. This is difficult to resolve because legally the municipality is not able to prevent the expedition cruise ships from entering the nature reserve. Similar concerns were voiced by some stakeholders in Qaqortoq but one important difference between the destinations is that in Greenland all harbour fees are transferred to the Self Rule government, whilst in Ísafjörður they are retained locally and used to develop the harbour. This is a source of frustration for stakeholders in Qaqortoq who would like the small harbour to be improved.

Socio-cultural sustainability

Social and cultural issues in each destination were also very clearly linked by the interviewees to cruise passenger numbers. In Ísafjörður there were concerns about the impacts of large numbers of tourists

on the days when cruise ships dock, whilst in Qaqortoq stakeholders were more focused on the role that cruise tourism might play in counteracting outmigration, particularly of younger people.

Most stakeholders in Ísafjörður discussed the disruption caused to local people when large numbers of cruise passengers arrive on one day and fill the town centre. As one stakeholder describes it:

> 'Everything is put on hold when the ships come in. It is a conflict. To everyone else we are saying come and experience the solitude, off the beaten track…800-1,500 we can service at a comfortable level. We can spread them out so there are not too many at the same time in one place. With 2,000 we manage but it is putting stress on guides, busses, stops'.

Most interviewees mentioned crowding when large numbers of passengers come ashore but some also said that it was nice when the town was livelier in the summer months due to the visitors. In Qaqortoq, where the number of tourists is much lower, there were not perceived to be any particular difficulties or conflicts between locals and tourists:

> 'I think the locals are good at accepting the passengers. It is only those about four months, and it is not like they are there all the time' (Economic development officer, Qaqortoq).

However, stakeholders in Qaqortoq were more concerned about the social consequences of part-time employment, which means that very few people can make a living from tourism, and the reluctance of some tour operators to hire local people as guides. This issue was linked by interviewees to the activities of Danish tour operators who bring in Danish guides for the season. The Danish tour operator present in the region and the local boat company both bring in seasonal employees from Denmark and elsewhere. Other tour operators, however, highlighted their priority to engage local people. This is done in order to support local employment but also to provide a better experience for the tourists:

> 'I only use local guides. It does not matter where they are from as long as they live in Greenland and can talk about what it is like living here. The Danish companies send guides up here for two to three months. They cannot give the tourists the real story' (Tour operator, Qaqortoq).

Some stakeholders argued that the local population does not benefit enough from cruise tourism and linked this to the colonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland. However, other stakeholders mentioned that the local population could also show more initiative when cruise ships arrive. For

example, there are stalls located by the harbour where handicrafts and other products can be sold. The tour operators have found that there is a high demand for locally produced handicrafts, but they are not always available when the passengers arrive.

The only other socio-cultural issue mentioned by interviewees was the presentation of local culture and traditions. In both destinations cruise tourism was seen as positive in this regard as it provided a market for local food and drink and souvenirs, as well as supporting local museums.

Environmental sustainability

As with the other aspects of sustainability, environmental issues in each destination were interpreted in relation to cruise passenger numbers. In Qaqortoq, environmental impacts were seen as low and manageable by the vast majority of interviewees:

> 'There is nothing environmentally problematic. If we got 1 million tourists a year it would probably look different, but when we just get the 50,000 or how many it is' (Tour operator, Qaqortoq).

Very few stakeholders mentioned any specific issues that concerned them. Those stakeholders involved in the regulation and inspection of cruise ship activities in the harbour thought that existing environmental regulations were sufficient, but admitted that they knew little about the impacts on wildlife:

> 'We have rules. No waste or waste oil. The waste they burn on board. I don't know how the wildlife is affected. If they are going to leave waste here, we have made an agreement in advance, and then they pay for it. Foreign rates are more expensive than for locals' (Harbour, Qaqortoq).

However, some stakeholders were concerned about potential accidents. As one interviewee in Ísafjörður put it:

> 'We don't have the manpower to do anything if a cruise ship is stranded, there is an oil leak or something like that' (Tour operator, Ísafjörður).

In Ísafjörður environmental concerns were more prominent and several stakeholders discussed issues related to the dramatic increase in the number of tourists and, in particular, the impacts on the local nature reserve. Expedition cruise ships sometimes docked at the reserve instead of the harbour and

several stakeholders argued that this is damaging to the natural environment and also interferes with the experience of the local population and land-based tourists hiking in the area. Some stakeholders thought that cruise ships should be required to take a local guide who knew the area and wildlife:

> 'Hornstrandir nature reserve which has been protected for 40 years, a problem is cruise ships going directly there. It is very hard to control it…The municipality is getting a ton of money from cruise ships and it is difficult to say no' (Tour operator, Ísafjörður).

> 'They don't have a local knowledge of the area, they don't have a local guide. We need to find a way to ensure they don't dock' (Destination Management Organisation, Ísafjörður).

In general, there was consensus that most local stakeholders wanted to develop tourism in a way that limited negative environmental impacts. They pointed to some successes in this regard, such as preventing helicopter flights, but it was also apparent that local stakeholders feel relatively powerless to control development:

> 'Local tourist companies said they want to focus on sustainability. We made big noise for example last year when we had a helicopter company that wanted to come here and fly around Hornstrandir. We managed to convince them not to come, it doesn't fit with what we do. If they had insisted, we could not have stopped them' (Destination Management Organisation, Ísafjörður).

Overall, most stakeholders in both Ísafjörður and Qaqortoq conceptualised environmental sustainability in terms of some kind of relatively fixed carrying capacity. In Ísafjörður many stakeholders argued that extremely rapid growth in the number of cruise ships visiting the port had created huge pressure on local resources and that the limit had been reached. As one interviewee put it:

> 'we are having days where, for example, twice this summer more than 5,000 passengers coming on one day. It is dawning that there are limits' (Destination Management Organisation, Ísafjörður).

There have been discussions between the stakeholders regarding the possibilities of capping the number of cruise ships but no agreement, which most interviewees attributed to the prioritisation of economic development. In Qaqortoq, the number of visitors is much lower. Although some interviewees mentioned that the small harbour can lead to capacity problems in summer when cruise

ships and fishing boats need access at the same time, the vast majority of stakeholders wanted to increase the number of cruise calls, and did not have concerns about environmental impacts.

Discussion

In both Qaqortoq and Ísafjörður, stakeholders have concerns about the sustainability of cruise tourism that are similar to those reported in cruise destinations elsewhere, although stakeholders also raised specific issues related to the local context. In common with other studies (e.g., Larsen et al, 2013; Penco and Di Vaio, 2014; Satta et al, 2024; 2015), stakeholders perceived cruise tourism positively in terms of economic sustainability but there were concerns about the lower spending of cruise tourists compared with land-based visitors. In Ísafjörður there was also concern about over-reliance on cruise tourism. In Qaqortoq, by contrast, lower numbers of cruise passengers contributed to conflicts between tourism businesses who compete for customers and employees.

Cruise passenger numbers were a constant reference point for interviewees in both destinations and also framed their understandings of other aspects of sustainability. In Ísafjörður, stakeholders were concerned about over-crowding during the summer months, whilst in Qaqortoq the lack of full-time employment opportunities and competition between Danish and Greenlandic workers for a small number of guiding jobs were of greater concern. The number of passengers also informed perceptions of environmental sustainability, with many stakeholders in Ísafjörður referring to an absolute limit to the number of passengers that could be accommodated. In Qaqortoq very few stakeholders perceived any environmental problems due to the relatively low number of cruise ship calls.

The findings from Qaqortoq and Ísafjörður support the argument that destination development stage affects perceptions of sustainability (see Stewart, Dawson and Draper, 2011). However, the data also suggest that the sustainability of cruise tourism is conceptualised in relation to other forms of tourism. In both destinations, stakeholders discussed the sustainability of cruise tourism explicitly in relation to land-based alternatives, which are perceived by the stakeholders to be more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable at a local scale. One of the biggest concerns about cruise tourism is that the large numbers of passengers who come ashore over a short period of time disrupt the experience of land-based tourists who spend a longer time and more money in the destination. Land-based tourists are also preferred because they are considered to have a more genuine interest in Arctic nature, cultures and societies. Although other studies have considered the relationship between tourism and other economic activities in Arctic destinations (Ren and Chimirri, 2017), our findings suggest that distinguishing between different types of tourism is also important.

In neither case did stakeholders take a broader or more holistic perspective on the sustainability of cruise tourism; for example, considering impacts outside the destination. Our findings suggest that, as Saarinen (2014) argued, a holistic orientation is not common, much less an understanding of sustainability based, for example, on resilience or complex systems (McCool et al, 2013; Hall, 2019). Instead, interviewees in both destinations tended to discuss cruise tourism in terms of local trade-offs between different types of sustainability and perceived limits to growth. Some stakeholders referred to absolute limits while others discussed adaptations to the organisation of cruise tourism activities. Our findings therefore suggest that the resource- and activity-based perspectives discussed by Saarinen (2006; 2014), conceptualised at a local scale, are most prevalent in these destinations.

Most stakeholders also indicated that short term economic growth is prioritised over environmental and socio-cultural issues. Thus, for example, stakeholders in both destinations expressed concerns that environmental regulations had or would impact negatively on the number of cruise calls, and in Ísafjörður this was seen as the main impediment to agreeing a cap on the number of cruise ships visiting each season. In this sense, the findings reported here are similar to those from other studies, such as Dawson, Stewart and Johns (2016) and van Bets et al (2017a), which also found that the power of cruise lines to change itineraries is seen as a constant economic threat and makes agreement on regulation more difficult. Many stakeholders expressed a sense of powerlessness in relation to the future direction of cruise tourism, since cruise lines determine, to a large extent, the type and number of tourists who visit. In this sense, a community-based approach to developing cruise tourism more sustainably was not seen as realistic by the stakeholders.

These case studies also suggest that collaborative governance arrangements - or the lack thereof - appear to be an important factor in the management of cruise tourism and the potential for developing it in a more sustainable way; for example, in the areas of education, development of tourism products, marketing, involvement of the local community, and environmental regulation. In the case of Ísafjörður, well-functioning local stakeholder collaboration between tour operators and suppliers is in place to manage the cruise calls. However, current stakeholder discussions concerning potential limits to growth and reducing the number of cruise ship arrivals is challenged by the economic dependence of the destination on global cruise lines. Stakeholders from the municipality express awareness and concern for the increasing social and environmental impacts from cruise tourism, but the dependence on the income from the harbour and maintaining jobs in the area carries more weight in decision-making. Economic development is the overriding concern for the Municipality that has the authority to limit the growth of cruise tourism.

Collaboration is not so successful in Qaqortoq due to rivalry between tour operators and the limited number of guides and boats available in the area. Another reason for the lack of collaboration seems to be that there is not a convenor in place who is seen as legitimate by most stakeholders. While individual suppliers to cruise tourism collaborate with the tour operators, there is no overall public-private structure in place to manage Qaqortoq as a cruise destination, although a destination management organisation has recently been established. The stakeholders express different perspectives on the management of cruise tourism and its future. The national tourist board believes that Qaqortoq should prepare and develop nature and culture-based products targeted at smaller expedition ships, because Greenland is likely to see fewer large ships and more expedition ships in future due to regulations and increasing costs. The local tour operator, however, disagrees and wishes to continue focusing on large ships. The tour operators are in ongoing conflict and competition about winning agreements with ships, employing the local guides, and getting access to tour boats.

In neither case is there agreement between the stakeholders on how to manage cruise tourism, but the higher passenger numbers in Ísafjörður make it easier for stakeholders to collaborate. Although the dynamics of collaboration are different in the two destinations, they are both affected by the imbalance of power between global cruise lines and local stakeholders. In relation to cruise tourism more generally, this imbalance is an important consideration in the context of debates regarding the importance of local stakeholder engagement in the implementation of sustainable tourism (Budeanu, et al, 2016), and suggests that coordination at a national and international scale is required.

Conclusions

The aim of this article was to compare Qaqortoq, Greenland and Ísafjörður, Iceland in terms of stakeholders' views about the sustainability of cruise tourism, and how they are attempting to manage its development in the context of an imbalance in power between place-bound local stakeholders and global cruise lines. The findings provide evidence that stakeholders in small Arctic cruise destinations share some of the concerns expressed in other parts of the world, but that there are also context-specific issues. In both destinations, economic and socio-cultural impacts were most commonly mentioned, with environmental sustainability apparently a lesser concern. Furthermore, environmental and socio-cultural sustainability were seen in opposition to economic sustainability rather than in a holistic way. Stakeholders typically conceptualized sustainability in terms of trade-offs between different types of impacts at a local scale.

The overall development stage of cruise tourism in terms of passenger numbers shaped stakeholders' views on sustainability in both destinations. In Ísafjörður, cruise passenger and overnight visitor numbers have increased significantly. This has resulted in stakeholder discussions about limiting the number of cruise ships, which are framed in terms of the social and environmental carrying capacity of the destination. In Qaqortoq, the numbers of cruise passengers and land-based visitors are much lower (but growing), and this contributes to conflicts between tour operators who compete for the limited number of customers. The findings also suggest that conceptualisations of cruise tourism sustainability are shaped by the relationship between different types of tourism. In small and remote Arctic destinations, limited resources (tour guides, transport, amenities) mean that there is very clear competition between different forms of tourism, and the acceptability of the various impacts of cruise ships and their passengers are assessed in relation to land-based alternatives. Thus, stakeholders' perceptions of sustainability, like those of tourism impacts more generally, are context-dependent, dynamic, and relational. Longitudinal research would improve our understanding of how they change as cruise destinations develop over time. A limitation of this research is that only stakeholders directly involved in cruise tourism have been interviewed. Including local residents and other businesses would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how local communities understand and engage with sustainability and cruise tourism.

Our findings are also important in relation to policymaking, because stakeholders' perceptions of sustainability issues affect how they collaborate to manage and regulate cruise tourism, particularly in relation to the prioritisation of local economic growth and their willingness to regulate cruise ships in different ways. Both Qaqortoq and Ísafjörður illustrate the tension between local policymaking and multinational cruise lines discussed in other studies of cruise tourism destinations (van Bets et al 2017a, 2017b). Local stakeholders referred repeatedly to the power of cruise ships to simply go elsewhere if regulation becomes too onerous or harbour fees are too high. This involves both competition between destinations within the same country and between different territories in the Arctic, which the current self-regulation of the industry does not address.

Agreements between national governments with Arctic territories on the harmonisation of fees charged by local harbours and a set of common guidelines and requirements for cruise ships would be an important step in reducing the imbalance of power between cruise lines and local destinations. In 2017, the North Atlantic Think Tank published recommendations to maximise the benefits of cruise tourism. They call for enhanced intergovernmental cooperation to harmonise tax regimes and set common environmental standards, to avoid a damaging race to the bottom in terms of local regulation. Initial steps have been taken in the intergovernmental cooperation between Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and coastal Norway, and this would appear to be the most promising way forward.

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Table 1 Overview of tourism in Ísafjörður and Qaqortoq, 2018

	Qaqortoq	Ísafjörður
Number of cruise calls	27	110
Number of passengers	28,025	80,000
Number of overnight stays (South Greenland & Westfjords & West Region, Iceland)	10,563	227,278

Source: Visit Greenland (2018; 2019); Statistics Greenland (2018, 2019); Cruise Iceland (2019); Statistics Iceland (2018).

Table 2 Number and type of stakeholder interviewees in each destination

Stakeholder	Ísafjörður	Qaqortoq
National destination management organisation	1	1
Local destination management organisation	1	N/A
Economic development and planning	3	2
Harbour	1	1
National cruise destination management company	2	1
Local tour operator	1	1
Local tourism businesses	3	4
Tourism education	N/A	2
Total	11	12

Summary of changes

Comment	Action
Add explicit recognition that sustainability is a contested concept	Added paragraph introducing sustainability more generally, emphasizing that it is a contested concept
Include recent work in International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	Added references to some relevant work on sustainability in tourism and hospitality from International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management
Add short rationale for methodological approach	Added a short rationale at beginning of data collection section
Comment on limitations of the work	Added comment on limitations to conclusion