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# Mobility to the Edges of Europe: The Case of Iceland and Poland



edited by  
Dorota Rancew-Sikora and Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir



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SCHOLAR Publishing House  
Warsaw 2016

Reviewed by Prof. Raymond Taras  
Prof. Katarzyna Warmińska

Proofread by Timothy Alexander, Marjorie Castle, Karolina Dębska

Cover by Katarzyna Juras

ISBN 978-83-7383-806-2  
doi 10.7366/9788373838062

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The publication is a result of the project carried out by the University of Gdańsk (Poland) and the University of Iceland within the framework of the Scholarship and Training Fund: “Leisure practices and perception of nature. Polish tourists and migrants in Iceland” (2014–2016).

The project and the publication were supported by a grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA, and Norway Grants and was co-financed by Polish funds.



UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND



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Scholar Publishing House, Ltd.  
ul. Wiślana 8, 00-317 Warszawa  
e-mail: info@scholar.com.pl  
www.scholar.com.pl

## Contents

Introduction: Blurring boundaries in mobility studies . . . . .	7
<i>Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, Dorota Rancew-Sikora</i>	
The tourist and the migrant worker: Different perceptions of mobility in Iceland. . . . .	17
<i>Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, Kristín Loftsdóttir</i>	
Tourists as migrants/migrants as entrepreneurs – the agency of the visitor’s eye . . . . .	38
<i>Anna Karlsdóttir, Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson</i>	
Becoming a tourist in the home country: Polish migrants visiting home . . . . .	66
<i>Anna Wojtyńska</i>	
Storytelling of Iceland: Creating imaginations of place on the basis of reading literary translations. . . . .	84
<i>Dorota Rancew-Sikora</i>	
Disgusting shark meat and the taste of North: Icelandic food in the “mouth” of Polish tourists and migrants . . . . .	109
<i>Agata Bachórz</i>	
Migrants’ experiences of nature. Post-2004 Polish migrants in the West Midlands, UK . . . . .	136
<i>Anna Horolets</i>	

Genius loci and social activity. The case of Polish immigrants in Reykjavik and the Tricity . . . . .	162
<i>Karolina Ciechorska-Kulesza</i>	
Tour guides in nature-based tourism: Perceptions of nature and governance of protected areas, the case of Skaftafell at the Vatnajökull National Park. . . . .	187
<i>Harald Schaller</i>	
About horses and tourism. Uniqueness of Icelandic horses constructed for touristic pre-narration . . . . .	215
<i>Magdalena Anita Gajewska</i>	
Theorising the movement of people in an era of exploded mobility . . . . .	232
<i>Małgorzata Irek</i>	
The Authors . . . . .	251
Index. . . . .	255

# Introduction: Blurring boundaries in mobility studies

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The contemporary globalised world is characterised by new and growing mobilities of different kinds. A great deal of the social science research from the last two decades reflects this reality, often referred to as the mobility turn. In fact, in recent decades, mobility has been an increasingly applied approach (Cresswell, 2010; 2006; Kaufmann, 2002; Merriman, 2012; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2000). This approach has challenged former, more sedentary perspectives and overlaps with a focus on flows and mobility in which weight is given to a critical examination of boundary, making and the interplay between the static and the fluid, the construction of places, and hybrid identities (Appadurai, 1996; Bærenholdt & Granås, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2011). As Nina Glick Schiller and Noel B. Salazar (2013, p. 183-184) point out, the different kinds of mobilities, such as those undertaken by students, volunteers, tourists, or migrants, have in the last two decades been studied through the analytical lens of mobility. However, they warn against a celebratory approach and argue for the importance of including the relation between mobility and immobility and to “place these concepts within a theory of unequal globe-spanning relationships of power” (Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013, p. 195). In recent years we have, for example, seen that the

growing movement of people has also been coupled with construction of new boundaries that mark populations and often restrict mobilities (Fassin, 2011).

Although there are many ways in which tourism and migration are interconnected, current research focuses, with some exceptions, on either migration or on tourism. This is reflected in journals and conferences, which rarely combine these different kinds of mobilities. Tourism is commonly linked to consumption, and is defined by the temporality of people's stay in another location. In spite of a growing amount of literature on temporary work abroad, migration is generally defined as a longer-term stay and is connected with the sphere of production (Williams & Hall, 2000). However, the boundaries between tourism and migration are not always clear cut. Tourists may take on temporary work either for wages or as volunteers, and it is not uncommon for migrants to arrive to new places initially on tourist visas. As C. Michael Hall and Allan M. Williams (2002, p. 2) point out, the same person may combine different roles in this process – a tourist, a student, and/or a migrant labourer. Migrants commonly take part in leisure activities in the receiving country and they may be engaged to varying degrees in organised tourism as consumers or producers. Many migrants continue to travel back to their country of origin, and visits of families and friends are common in both directions (Dwyer et. al. 2014, p. 131).

This book demonstrates the importance of blurring the boundary between these two kinds of mobilities (Hall & Williams, 2002) as well as broadening the categorisations of migrants and tourists. It is devoted to the various aspects of migration and tourism placing Poland and Iceland at the centre of the inquiry as geographic and socio-cultural focal points. Based on a collaborative project coordinated by Agata Bachórz, Anna Wojtyńska, and Anna Horolets involving researchers from these two countries (most of them associated with the University of Iceland and the University of Gdańsk), it examines the leisure and tourist activities of migrants, their perceptions of nature, changing images of migrants and tourists in Iceland, and changing images of Iceland as a tourist destination. By placing Iceland and Poland at the centre of inquiry, we also aim to demonstrate that different forms of mobility – as practices and as representations – change overtime. Thus



moments of rapid social change provide a unique chance to grasp the mutations of these forms and the consequences these mutations have for mobile subjects. Poles happen to be by far the largest migrant group in Iceland. In January of 2015 they constituted 45.6% of all foreign citizens in the country; at the time there were 11,073 Polish citizens in Iceland, a country with 329,100 inhabitants (Calian, 2015). Their arrival in Iceland took place over a relatively short period of time following the European enlargement of 2004. Over roughly the same period of time Iceland has become a popular tourist destination worldwide and the number of tourists visiting the country has grown exponentially (Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, this book). Both developments influence the ways mobility is practiced and perceived. Although in some ways this book continues the efforts of scholars who studied the relations between Poland and Iceland through research on migration (e.g. Budyta-Budzyńska, 2012; Wojtyńska, 2009) or cultural representation (e.g. Chymkowski & Pessel, 2009), it is less a book about particular places or groups and more a book about how focusing on a particular context can help to study a broader process and build theory.

There are ethical, theoretical, and practical reasons why this book focuses not only on tourism and on migration but instead considers them together within the framework of mobility studies. Ethical reasons for this choice are, for example, that migrants should not be treated simplistically merely as numbers or problems to be solved, ignoring their economic and cultural inputs to the receiving society, such as in the tourism industry or different social activities. Similarly, we need to describe tourists in more sophisticated and complex ways and not as mere consumers of what the receiving country offers and thus merely as a source of income.

By giving a more complex view of tourists and migrants and blurring the boundaries between these categories we want also to contribute to the development of mobility theory, unravelling the instances when old categories are not adequate to describe and interpret new processes. As Monika Büscher, John Urry, and Katian Witchger (2011, p. 2) write in the introduction to their book on mobile methods: “Through investigation of movement, blocked movement, potential movement and immobility, dwelling and place-making, social scientists are showing how

various kinds of ‘moves’ make social and material realities. Attention to the fluid, fleeting, yet powerful performativity of various everyday (im) mobilities transforms conceptions of social science inquiry, explanation, and critique.”

Practical reasons for analysing migration and tourism practices together lie in the potential usefulness of such an approach for policy makers. Seeing the two as interlinked practices can contribute to changing policies and legal regulations at the regional and national level and thus help adjust these policies and regulations to the complex reality of contemporary spatial mobility. One example of what can be improved is the way in which particular processes are counted and traced in the statistical definition of mobile populations. The statistical definitions of various mobile subjects should be made more adequate to the current forms of mobility in order to yield data that can be useful for academics and administration. Currently the existing categories of either tourist or migrant have become inadequate to grasp the mobility of people who are a part of programs for young volunteers; thus these mobile subjects are “lost in statistics.” Young volunteer programs, for example, do not fit existing categories of either tourists or migrants. Showing a more multifaceted view of mobile populations can also lead to improvement in terms of services connected with people’s displacements, such as transportation, accommodation, insurance, medical treatment, and education abroad.

From the methodological perspective the search for adequate methods and techniques that allow detection and interpretation on of the emerging forms of mobility, as well as grasping them as complex and interconnected, is still ongoing. The authors of this book use mostly qualitative methods that derive from different academic disciplines: sociology, anthropology, and geography. These methods include interviews, examination of written documents, fiction, and analysis of blogs and mass media. All of these have been adapted to the mobility paradigm and are used to study multiplicity and interconnections between different practices, imaginations, and identities connected with places. The authors were also tuned to reveal sensual and emotional dimensions of people’s movement, including their imaginative and communicative travels

realised through talking, writing, reading, and taking pictures (Büscher et al. 2011, p. 4-5).

In the first chapter of this book Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir examine the changing conceptions of newcomers: tourists and migrants in Iceland. They compare these two mobilities that have each shaped Icelandic society in recent years. They contextualise them within the vast economic and social transformations in Iceland and examine the perceptions of these groups, which are commonly framed within a national discourse of purity of nature and language.

The authors of the following two chapters, Anna Karlsdóttir and Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson, and Anna Wojtyńska, also depict the blurring boundaries between tourists and migrants, but they do it in different ways. Anna Karlsdóttir and Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson study migrants in the role of entrepreneurs in the tourism industry. They reformulate traditional issues of what constitutes labour and tourism, adapting the framework of geography of employment related to geographical mobility (E-RGM), which covers issues traditionally ignored in the field of geography of tourism. They emphasise the seasonality of jobs in the tourism industry and the young age of migrant labour in this sector, relegated to low strata in the hierarchy of jobs available in Iceland. The authors demonstrate also that the work of migrants in touristic services triggers touristic visits by their friends and relatives, as well as their own mobility. Cultural capital, interpersonal skills, and other competencies of migrant workers could play a role in shaping their individual careers, but hierarchies involved in the tourism labour market hinder their upward social mobility.

Anna Wojtyńska, who has studied Polish immigrants in Iceland extensively (cf. Wojtyńska 2009; Wojtyńska & Zielińska 2010), examines how migrants take on the roles of tourists in their home country. Wojtyńska shows how tourist activity plays an important role in maintaining migrants' transnational family and friendship ties, based on their attachment to their place of origin, and also contributes to creating the national identity of their children, based on family visits in touristic places in Poland. During these visits migrants often combine entertainment with education, giving their children knowledge and positive experiences connected with Poland.

Dorota Rancew-Sikora describes the imagination of Iceland based on Icelandic literary writings that have been translated to Polish. Being inspired by theoretical concepts of translation, the author demonstrates how Polish readers, including herself, learn about Icelandic nature and society from fiction. She discusses how they, with the important contribution of translators, try to depict similarities and differences between their lived experiences and the experiences they read about. Translators and readers choose between what to believe and what not to believe in fiction, and create quite independently their own imagined worlds connected with Iceland, which in this way become parts of their knowledge and are externalised and objectified during their communication with others.

In her contribution to the book *Agata Bachórz* continues to explore the traveller imaginaries that the chapter by Rancew-Sikora introduces, offering a study of exoticisation, orientalised, and borealisation processes, framed within the post-colonial approach and visible in narratives about Iceland written by Polish migrants and tourists. Her text focuses particularly on the culinary dimension of mobility. She investigates multiple relations between food discourses, geography, spatial imagination, mobility, and identity. The interplay between the sensual experience of visitors and imagined geography is seen as bidirectional: descriptions of both the lack of taste of Icelandic food and of its hyper-taste can be seen as a part of the cultural exoticisation of the country. Iceland is double-interpreted by Polish travellers as both a modern and pre-modern space. The data show a lack of closeness and intimacy in Polish relations with Iceland, but motifs of reducing the cultural distance by penetrating the food culture and building one's own expertise can be interpreted as new features of Polish discourse on Iceland.

The four succeeding chapters deal more directly with the topic of perceptions of nature and place by mobile subjects. They also offer a comparative perspective by bringing in new contexts of migration (i.e. internal and international migration; migration to destinations other than Iceland and non-Polish migrants in Iceland; human and nonhuman mobile subjects). In Anna Horolets' chapter a broad definition of nature and contacts with nature is adopted in order to introduce the vision of migrants as multi-dimensional subjects whose experience stretches

between labour and tourist practices. The author presents unobvious and complex ways of experiencing nature by migrants in a receiving society. They experience new milieu through their bodies, emotions, and the very fact that they – as all human beings – are themselves an indispensable part of the environment. The author therefore suggests viewing the process of migrants' adaptation unfolding not only on a socio-cultural and an economic plane but also on an environmental plane.

In her chapter Karolina Ciechorska-Kulesza applies the *genius loci* concept in order to explore the ways in which mobile subjects can link their social activity with the perceptions of place, environment, and nature. Based on research among Polish immigrants in Reykjavik and internal migrants to the Tricity area in Poland, she explores the impact of place on people's activity, their sense of agency, lifestyle, and general perception of the surrounding world. Despite different distances, forms of migration, countries, and social contexts for personal engagement in social life, Ciechorska-Kulesza has found many similarities as well. One feature that emerged in the interviews in both places was the coastal character of these two otherwise different places. Her interlocutors declared that the coast is for them a kind of border, which could serve both as a window to the external world and as a closing.

In his chapter Harald Schaller deals with the fact that tour guides, who frequently are also migrants, translate the natural landscape of Iceland for tourists and thus have an influence on tourists' experiences and behaviours. The author explores the perception of nature within nature-based tourism by asking tour guides about their opinion on the perspectives of tourism development at the Skaftafell area, a popular tourist destination in Iceland. Schaller focuses also on the guides' perception of changes in the natural and social system within the area and claims that the tour guides' knowledge and opinions should be incorporated in the decision-making processes of Vatnajökull National Park as a valuable perspective.

Magdalena Gajewska, the last author in the section on nature-related aspects of human mobility, presents the narrative strategies used for creating the unique tourist value of Icelandic horses. In her chapter Gajewska analyses selected threads in the stories that are being told to the tourists who travel on horseback across Iceland. She focuses on the

aspects of language and mythology concerning horses that influence the experience of tourists. In order to demonstrate the importance of context in the horse-related narratives and place-specificity of tourist narrative, the author refers also to narratives about Icelandic horses in Poland.

In the closing chapter of the volume, Małgorzata Irek offers her own theoretical conceptualisation of a blurred boundary between different kinds of mobility by suggesting concentrating on informal networks of mobile people. The author begins her chapter with selections from Herodotus, to show that in ancient times the concept of mobility was inclusive and continuous, without clear-cut delimitations between different forms and motives. Just as they do today, people then had complex personalities and several identities while living in different respective groups in continuous social time and space made through kinship and friendship networks. During her longitudinal study on informal networks in Europe, Irek interviewed a great number of Polish migrants in the UK; in her chapter she presents several interwoven mobile biographies of her interlocutors. Concluding her discussion the author writes: “Non-migrants, migrants, tourists, and travellers are not separate species. Mobility is a universal experience, and equally, everybody lives in the same infinite space of informality. Human movement in geographical space does not involve hierarchy, but is horizontal, as is informality, which, being devoid of form, is a continuous category, amorphous, lacking boundaries, infinite, and thus suitable for the observation and analysis of social space as a whole.” Despite the fact that informality is not the only theoretical concept that has been employed in this volume, we consider this quotation to be a fine summary of the call that this book launches. It is a call for seeing mobility in all its complexity and as embedded in multiple and ever changing contexts. It is a call for blurring boundaries in mobility studies.

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# The tourist and the migrant worker: Different perceptions of mobility in Iceland

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## Introduction

While mobility is one of modernity's key characteristics (Cresswell, 2006) different types of mobilities are too often theorised about separately. In spite of the so called "mobility turn" in the social sciences (Urry, 2000), global flows of expatriates, immigrants, volunteers and tourists are usually not analysed in connection to each other, nor is the different dynamic that they hold in relation to global power relationships and inequalities examined (see for example discussion in Leonard, 2010). Our chapter compares two types of mobilities that have played an important role in shaping Icelandic society in recent years: The rapid growth of employment-related geographical mobility and the escalation in tourism to Iceland. We examine the changing conceptions of these different kinds of mobilities and contextualise them within the vast economic and social transformations in Iceland of the last two decades. Iceland experienced an economic boom from the late 1990s to 2008 with growing numbers of people arriving to work. After the economic crash in 2008, the development of tourism played a central role in reconstituting the country during the subsequent recession.

We suggest that social discourses about immigrants and tourists make these sudden transformations meaningful, often by drawing from persistent ideas of Icelandic national identity as related to purity of nature and language. Our discussion maps out these two kinds of mobilities that have been important in shaping Icelandic society and depicts how they reflect complicated power differences both on the local and the global level and thus indicate Iceland's changing position within a global economy. We show that a moral panic can be discerned in some of the discussions, where these changes have been depicted as happening too fast and out of control. As scholars have pointed out, moral panic generally arises where there are transitions, social transformations, or societal breakdown, as well as in existing power structures where the reaction can either be consensual or divided (Garland, 2008, p.14). While these instances of moral panics that we observe are often inconsistent and expressed in contexts where people are not necessarily hostile toward tourists or immigrants, they reflect the continued importance of nationalistic symbols during times of transformations.

The borders between tourism and migration are not always clearly distinguishable, for example because some immigrants originally arrive as tourists, because tourists may take up temporary or seasonal paid or voluntary work, and because migrants may participate in tourist activities (Uriely, 2001). However, the power relationship between people in these roles and the local populations is often different. Migrant labourers are generally conceived of as more permanent than tourists despite the growing literature on temporary work migration, while tourists are defined by their temporality (Williams & Hall, 2000). While acknowledging the diversity within each category it is important not to lose sight of the global context and the enormous differences that often exist between the position of tourists and migrant workers. Zygmunt Bauman (1998) has reminded us how the freedom to move in the increasingly mobile world is an unequally divided commodity, which is commonly reflected in the different possibilities faced by tourists and by migrant workers. Their options and the conditions of their mobility differ, including in terms of class position, of the degree of freedom to move, and of the role they play in the economy. Fast growing tourism, such as Iceland is currently experiencing, calls for more migrant workers

to take on the new jobs in service industries, which are for the most part low paid jobs in the informal sector (Uriely, 2001). Tourists are usually in a more privileged position. Tourism often involves commercialization and objectification of difference, while economic migrants are for the most part looking for a better life. How tourists and migrants are positioned in society and culture and thus perceived differently by the host society reflects these differences. These relationships have to be contextualised within the global power dynamic (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). Keeping this in mind, it is interesting to reflect on the similarities in the discourses about migrants versus tourists in Iceland – in the perceived moral panic where both, although in different ways, are portrayed as a threat to this small nation, with its vulnerable nature and its language spoken by only a few. Here it is important to note that the land and the language have been two primary and interconnected features of Icelandic nationality. Prior to the 20th century Iceland was one of the poorest countries in Europe, under Danish rule, only gaining full independence in 1944. Icelandic nationalists emphasised the Icelandic identity as rooted in ancient history; medieval manuscripts written in ancient Icelandic were particularly important for claiming status as a sovereign nation. “Nature” has as well been a source of pride in nationalistic narratives in Iceland (Hálfðánarson, 2000, p. 23); it was seen during the fight for independence as important in shaping the character of the Icelandic nation, thus drawing a strong connection between this Icelandic nature and “the” Icelander (Loftsdóttir, 2015a). In the construction of Icelandic national identity, the Icelandic language and nature are characterised as “pure” and “untouched” and as having shaped Icelanders (Hálfðánarsson, 2000; Innes, 2015; Skaptadóttir, 2007; Þórarinsdóttir, 2010). However, while notions of bound essential culture have been important features of Icelandic national identity in the past, scholars have increasingly pointed out how within the global neoliberal economy, the reification of culture has been an important feature, with culture seen as “bounded, a-historical ‘facts of nature’” (Sylvain, 2008). Thus, contrary to what was often assumed in the late 1990s when global processes were starting to become more intensified, the role of the nation state and people’s identification with particular ethnicities or nationalities have not necessarily been diminished (see

discussion in Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin, 2002). Reifications of Icelandic national identity today thus should be seen as part of a more global transnational phenomenon in which “ethnicity” has increased salience, while drawing from nationalistic symbols (Loftsdóttir & Mixa, 2014).

We start the discussion by showing how these two ways of being mobile, tourism and immigration to Iceland, take place through different historical trajectories, with Iceland in quite different positions globally and economically. We stress the importance of recognizing mobility in shaping and transforming Icelandic society, as part of wider changes that shaped Icelandic society after the late 1990s. In the second part of the chapter, we look more closely at these two ways of being mobile, drawing out how in both cases people emphasise changes that are too fast and how often moral panic can be detected, while referring to important nationalistic Icelandic symbols such as the land and the language.

The discussion is based on related research, both previous and on-going, of the authors. Skaptadóttir has focused on immigration to Iceland – primarily work-related migration and issues related to inclusion and exclusion of migrants. In working on these topics she has conducted ethnographic research, including interviews and analysis of policies and of mass media. Loftsdóttir has conducted research on Icelandic nationalism, as shaped by its former position as a Danish colony as well as by its privileged position of whiteness, based on archival research, media analysis, and interviews, in addition to examining Icelandic nation branding in relation to the tourism industry. In this chapter, the two authors draw insight and data from their previous research projects, in addition to collecting related materials from the mass media. With this discussion we seek to intervene in the on-going discussion on tourism and immigration in Iceland, which we follow as anthropologists and as native Icelanders, with issues regularly coming up that are strongly debated in the Icelandic mass media. While our analysis refers to only a few Icelandic examples our intent is to set up further research on the links between tourism and immigration.

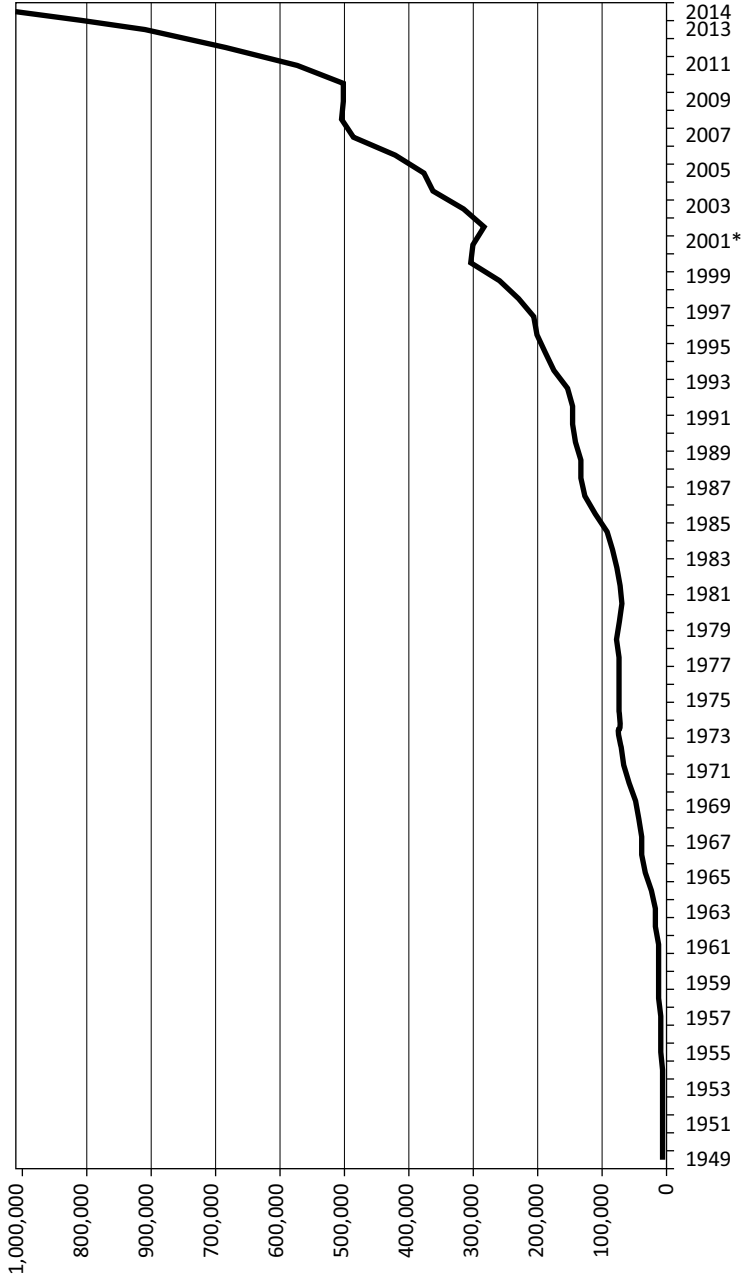
## The context of changing mobilities in Iceland

While focusing on two types of mobilities, we recognise that intensified mobility has been a central aspect of the economic transformations in Iceland in the last two decades. Iceland has been actively involved and affected by different forms of exchange and flows: flows of ideas, capital, objects and people that accompany Iceland's becoming part of various international political and legal structures. Iceland's neoliberal transformations opened up the flow of capital, thus creating mobility from and to Iceland. Iceland is also a scene for other kinds of mobility such as business trips and educational and artistic exchange. Although mobility has always been a feature of Icelandic life and economy the number of foreign citizens living in Iceland remained relatively low – fewer than 2% of the total population until the 1990s. The number of immigrants began to grow slowly in the late 1990s and rose steeply in the mid-2000s. While tourism has been important for the Icelandic economy for a while, an exponential growth in tourism was observed in recent years. Important reforms in the mid-1990s changed Icelandic society in various ways. Iceland joined the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1994 and became a member of the Schengen Area in 2001. The move from the post-war heavily regulated economy to privatization and deregulation was pivotal in this change (Wade & Sigurgeirsdóttir, 2011; Danielsson & Zoega, 2009). From 1997 to 2003 the Icelandic banks were privatised (Sigurjónsson & Mixa, 2011), and – as earlier indicated – increased connection with global financial markets went hand in hand with increased use of nationalistic symbols to make these transitions meaningful (Loftsdóttir & Mixa, 2014). The subsequent economic boom resulted in a great increase in employment-related mobility to Iceland. The most extensive growth in the foreign population occurred in conjunction with two developments: increased demand for construction workers, such as in the building of a mega power plant in the highlands and an aluminium smelter, and the opening of the labour market to citizens of the new member-states of the European Union in 2006. Thus the percentage of foreign nationals rose from 3.6% in 2005 to 7.4% in 2008 (Statistics Iceland, n.d.). The majority of those who arrived were people of working age; in 2007, at the height of the economic boom,

they constituted almost 10 percent of the work force (Wojtyńska, 2012). Men arrived to work in the booming building industry and women to work in food production and the service sector. The great majority of them came from Poland (Skaptadóttir, 2010; Wojtyńska, 2011). At this time of extensive economic growth nationalistic discourse emphasised Icelanders as having unique characteristics that were driving the Icelandic economic prosperity, which was in turn advancing Iceland upwards in the arena of global power relations (Loftsdóttir, 2014a). Economic migrants were not seen as playing an active part in this economic prosperity; the government did little to aid the integration of this newly arrived population leaving it to a large extent to private initiatives and not coming forward with a policy until 2007 (Skaptadóttir & Ólafsdóttir, 2010). As Skaptadóttir (2011) has pointed out, the Iceland government's lack of interest in creating a coherent immigration policy during this time period reflects how immigrants were primarily seen as a temporary labour force rather than as active participants in Icelandic society. The crash in the fall of 2008 led to an outflow – mostly of Icelandic citizens, but including Poles as well (Júlíusdóttir, Skaptadóttir & Karlsdóttir, 2013). Refugees and asylum seekers have been relatively few among the migrants, but as elsewhere in the world they have arrived in growing numbers during recent years.

In the aftermath of the economic crisis, tourism has been seen as one of the main solutions for the economy and as providing the basis for Iceland's economic recovery (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2010). Tourism to Iceland was quite minimal until the 1980s, even though it emerged as an industry after the Second World War (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2013, p. 134). Icelandic government has given the private sector considerable freedom in developing tourism, (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2013, pp. 139-140) and – in spite of the Icelandic government's attempting to implement several policies on tourism – stakeholders often complain about a lack of commitment and interest by the Icelandic government (Jóhannesson, 2012, p. 179). Moreover tourism was for a long time primarily seen as a tool for regional development (Benediktsson & Skaptadóttir, 2002). Only in the 1990s did the Icelandic government begin to acknowledge tourism as an industry (Jóhannesson, 2012, pp. 183-184). The volcano eruption at Eyjafjallajökull in 2010 was instrumental in

changing the role of tourism. The eruption caused a massive air traffic disruption in European air space, which along with the economic crash spread Iceland's image globally, proving to be very positive for the tourist industry (Benediktsson, Lund & Huijbens, 2011). In addition, this reinforced long-standing stereotypes of Iceland as exotic and different from the rest of Europe (Loftsdóttir, 2008). In 2010 after the eruption a special campaign called *Inspired by Iceland* was initiated to attract more tourists to the country. The promotion emphasised happy youth in Icelandic wool sweaters in various natural surroundings. It also depicted women in traditional Icelandic costumes and Icelandic fishermen, as well as panoramic images of Icelandic nature. The *Inspired by Iceland* promotion was widely successful and tourism has since been perceived of as one of the main pillars of the economy (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2013). After 2010 there was exponential growth in arrivals to the country with an increase of 16.6% from 2010 to 2011 and 18.9% in the following year. From 2012 to 2013 this growth continued, reaching 20%. The number of people arriving in Iceland almost tripled, from about 302,900 persons arriving in 2000 to almost a million in 2014 (Óladóttir, 2015). This is a large number in a country with a population of merely 330,000 (Statistics Iceland, n.d.). The majority of the tourists travel to the same popular destinations (Óladóttir, 2015). Research has shown that Icelandic nature has been the most important reason for tourists to travel to the country; their goal is to see wilderness and pristine environments (Sæþórsdóttir, 2010). With nature-based tourism becoming particularly important, the issue of sustainability has been evoked in a different context, with Iceland's sub-arctic environment being particularly vulnerable (Reynisdóttir, Song & Agrusa, 2008). In the tourism sector in Iceland there are a handful of dominant firms, with numerous smaller firms dependent on the directions chosen by the larger firms (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2010, p. 427). Even though tourism now has great economic significance, the government has still been extensively criticised for lack of policy leadership for this industry: what "lurks underneath the surface of government policy discourse in Iceland is no analysis or coherence, apart from seeing tourism as part and parcel of revenue-generating industries" (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2010, p. 431).



**Figure 1** Number of tourists in Iceland 1949-2014

Source: Ferðamálastofa (n.d.).



Mobility has thus – in various ways – played a major role in the recent economic and social transformations in Iceland. One of the most salient impacts is that on one hand we have a large number of people moving to Iceland to work in mostly low income jobs in order to enhance their position, often with limited possibilities of travelling, and on the other hand we have the tourists who represent the privileged side of global mobility, with people travelling for leisure. The former group was important for economic growth during the boom years. The majority of them have work in Iceland that allows them to lead a life that, for example, permits travelling; many of them have in fact been engaged in tourist activities in Iceland. They are often represented primarily as a labour force and therefore reduced to this function by the media and public discussion (Wojtyńska, Skaptadóttir & Ólafsson, 2011). Their economic contribution was not recognised, while on the other hand the tourists are very much seen in terms of their consumer role and the revenues that tourism brings to Iceland's economy. The population engaged in these different forms of mobilities are also to a large extent different. Tourists come mostly from countries that have strong geopolitical and economic status. It is estimated that the largest number of tourists in Iceland come from the United Kingdom, followed closely by tourists from the United States and then Germany, France, Norway and Denmark (Ólafsson, 2015). The immigrants who arrived during the boom years, however, came mostly from countries of lower geopolitical status, with a lower GDP per capita, such as Poland and other then-new EU member-states as well as from countries such as the Philippines and Thailand. Within a globalised world, the labour of these individuals is regularly seen as “cheap” as compared to that of the local population, while tourists bring strong currency in context of the “weak” *króna*. With a growing tourism industry there is once again a shortage of workers in the service sector in Iceland; thus the most numerous new migrant workers arriving in recent years are those coming to Iceland in order to work in various service jobs of the tourism industry. Many of those arriving for these jobs are young people from EU countries who are able to take on seasonal work. Since this is a group that is usually not considered as real workers, but rather as “working-holiday tourists” (Uriely, 2001), it is a group that may in fact – because of its increasing

role in the growing informal sector and the uncertainty of its working conditions – be in a more precarious position than earlier migrants. Generally this group gets little attention in current discussions of mobilities in Iceland.

### National identity, tourism, and immigration

The rapid growth of immigration with the economic boom and the opening of the labour market to new EU members in May of 2006 instigated debates in which the expression of a moral panic can be detected, a panic similar to that experienced in other European countries in the mid-2000s (Pijpers, 2006). Up until this point the growing numbers of foreign workers in Iceland were mostly perceived as hard-working. Voices accusing them of taking away “our jobs” were seldom heard. In fact, at that time Poles were often described as similar to Icelanders in their attitude towards work (Skaptadóttir, 2004). With the increasing foreign population, spurred by large construction projects, and with more non-native speakers of Icelandic language in service jobs these views began to change. Here one can discern views that can be described to as moral panic. Such perceptions are not usually shared by a majority, as indicated by surveys regarding migrants (Maskína, 2015) and tourists (Gunnarsson, 2014) in Iceland. In addition, individuals can be inconsistent in their views, with the same individuals expressing what can be seen as moral panic in one context but not in another. These views not only show concern regarding actual problems to be faced, but also reflect fear of mass migration, exaggeration of the situation, and political opportunism. Our analysis of printed media and social media shows that such views were most prominent in 2006 and 2007, at the time when migrant workers were arriving in the largest numbers (Wojtyńska, Skaptadóttir & Ólaf, 2011). At those points in time there were in fact a large number of people arriving; terms such as “out of control flow” and “floods” were being used in the media and in social media to describe the fear of an excessive amount of people coming to Iceland. It is interesting that the sense of moral panic reflected in media and social media regarding immigrants was more prominent during the economic boom than it was after the crisis. This was, for example,

reflected in the views of one relatively small political party, the Liberal Party, which received almost 8% of the votes in the 2007 national elections and based their campaign on warning against immigration (Loftsdóttir, 2015).

A theme that stands out in social media is the claim that foreign workers are not willing to learn Icelandic and are thus unwilling to adapt to Icelandic society. The responsibility of the state or the employers to provide courses or services for recently arrived migrants was not addressed (Skaptadóttir & Ólafsdóttir, 2010). Instead the blame was put on the immigrants themselves. Thus, in fall of 2006 the primary complaints voiced were that Icelanders no longer could understand the bus drivers or the people caring for the elderly, or that they could not get their desired choice of bread in bakeries because of the relevant employees' lack of knowledge of Icelandic (Skaptadóttir, 2007). The difficulties migrants might have faced in similar tasks received much less attention. Also ignored was the fact that a number of studies have shown that immigrants are greatly interested in learning Icelandic but often lack the means to do so (Jónsdóttir, Harðardóttir & Garðarsdóttir, 2009). This negative attitude toward immigrants was particularly striking during times of economic prosperity, given the fact that these same foreigners were important in making this boom possible by taking the low paying service jobs and hard labour that the native part of the population was not interested in.

Comments about "too many foreigners" were often directed towards the largest group of migrants, i.e. statements were made that there were too many Polish people. In 2007 concerns that foreigners were taking jobs from Icelanders began to be heard for the first time. In the growing discussion of foreigners as a threat, stereotypes of migrants emerged that were highly gendered and focused mostly on Polish and Lithuanian men. They were portrayed as a threat to the social order as potential criminals. On the other hand, women, in particular East European and Asian women, were portrayed as victims of trafficking or sexualised in one way or another (Ólaf & Zielińska, 2010). The negative stereotypes found in social media are similar to those observed elsewhere in Europe, where immigrants are portrayed as smelly, sweaty and not to be trusted (Sassen, 2014). Additionally in social media there was much discussion

about sending foreign criminals out of the country. The immigrant is clearly assumed to be male in much of this discussion.

The economic crash caused a paradigm shift in Iceland, in which – even though some part of the nationalistic discourse has been able to reinvent itself – Iceland’s position within a globalised world was seriously re-evaluated. Especially in the first years of the crash, there was a sense of Iceland becoming like poorer parts of the world, and losing status internationally (Loftsdóttir, 2014a). After years of presumed economic prosperity, Icelandic society was in ruins with enormous individual and institutional debt, massive ecological disruptions, and privatization of many services (Loftsdóttir, 2014b). As observed by Loftsdóttir (2014b) it was no longer regarded as self-evident that Iceland would automatically be a “winner” in globalization. While global involvement prior to the crash seemed to be discursively constructed in Iceland as involving Icelandic subjects going “out” and engaging with the global world, now it seemed almost as if Iceland was no longer a part of the larger globalizing environment. As the anger after the crash was for the most part directed at leading Icelandic businessmen, the crisis did not lead to stronger anti-immigrant protests than before the crash. In spite of this, many immigrants interviewed in our studies felt more excluded than previously – because of their high unemployment rate, double that of Icelandic citizens. Moreover at the time many experienced difficulties re-entering the labour market, because of an increased emphasis on speaking Icelandic as a precondition for getting a job. At the same time immigrants and any discussion of them largely disappeared from the media (Skaptadóttir, 2015). People seemed to be more worried about Icelanders moving abroad to work than about immigrants coming to Iceland (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013).

Today, as Loftsdóttir maintains (2014b), one can suggest that in Iceland the “global” is conceptualised as unpredictable, implying different kinds of engagements, some of which are beneficial to Iceland as a nation-state and others which are not. Also, before the crash discussions about smallness were common but these emphasised how “far” Icelanders had been able to go in spite of the small size of their country, while after the economic crash smallness was rather a symbol of Iceland’s vulnerability in the global economy (Loftsdóttir, 2014b).

After the economic crash, Iceland became not just a tourist destination but specifically a “cheap” destination with the decline of the Icelandic *króna* (ISK), especially immediately after the crash when the value of the *króna* dramatically within the span of few months (Wade, 2009, p. 12). The fall of the *króna*, the loss of savings, and the precarious employment situation also meant it became increasingly difficult for many Icelanders to engage in international tourism themselves. Most of the previously discussed post-2011 media discussion about tourists demonstrated concerns about too many tourists, and the inability of Icelandic society to accommodate them. The majority of tourists visit the same set of places, where there is a shortage of the necessary facilities to accommodate such large groups. This has resulted in strong debates on whether to require entrance fees to the natural attractions in Iceland in order to finance their maintenance and management (Reynisdóttir et al., 2008). It has also prompted discussions on the effects of the growing numbers of hotels and souvenir shops in downtown Reykjavík, as well as other tourist accommodations within residential areas (Silfur Egils, 2015; Sala á bókum fyrir erlenda ferðamenn hefur ekki aukist: Bókabúðir að breytast í lundabúðir, 2015; Jóhannsdóttir, 2015). The very fast growing tourism industry has, furthermore, sparked a large increase in new hotels, restaurants, and tours. Specialists in tourism studies have emphasised the importance of effective policy to protect fragile Icelandic flora and fauna and to avoid other negative effects (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2013, p. 144). It is in this context that we have the discussion of too many tourists and of the lack of infrastructure to receive such large groups of people. It should be noted that not all of the negative discussion has been directed at the tourists themselves. Some of it reflects concerns with increased inequalities within Iceland and continued corruption within post-crash society, with tourism seen as a “gold rush,” in which the large tourist firms or particular stake holders are the ones primarily benefitting from the tourism industry. This growth in tourism has also led to the growth of foreign workers both in construction of new hotels and in service jobs, but this is almost invisible in current discussions. A few recent articles in the Icelandic media criticised the increase in informal work and violations of workers’ rights in the tourism industry and in related service jobs, but these articles did not lead to public discussion,

nor did they note the precarious position of foreign workers (see for example Einarsdóttir, 2014; Brotið á starfsfólki í ferðaþjónustu – Svartur blettur á vinnumarkaðinum, 2015; Snæbjörnsson, 2015).

There is concern in the media about how Iceland can accommodate such large groups of people, with solutions offered that include dispersing these groups both geographically and by extending the seasons. But we also discern voices that can be seen as moral panic, with strong statements about destruction of the land and the way of life of Icelanders. As Pijpers (2006, pp. 91-92) points out, moral panic is instigated by an individual or group who perceives the moral order as endangered.

One example of expression relating to nationalistic emotions is the extensive media discussions during summer 2015 on the problems of tourists not using toilet facilities when travelling in the country and instead going behind buildings or shrubs. The Icelandic media reported extensively on this issue, which was also discussed on social media. Part of the discussion revolved around who should be responsible for providing the necessary infrastructure, i.e. government or the private bus companies, indicating the multi-layeredness of this discussion. In some cases, however, the argument was very much coded in the language of nationalism. For example, the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources addressed concern that in the national park Þingvellir tourists were defecating behind an old church in the graveyard where important national heroes Jón Sigurðsson and Einar Benediktsson are buried, even leaving toilet paper on the ground. The minister described this as “Sacrilige and disrespect toward everything and everyone. Civilised people don’t behave in this way” (Þingvallagestir hægja á sér í rjóðri við Þjóðargrafreitinn, 2015).

Another example is a fall 2012 TV interview with a Member of Parliament, which sparked a debate in printed media and various social media, showing the multilayeredness of the discussion. Talking about tourists he claimed that “we cannot cope with this large number. They are destroying the land.” He voiced his fear that Icelanders are losing their country to tourism companies and talked about tourism taking away the environment familiar to Icelanders. “We” can no longer view the important sites because of “the thousands of foreigners disturbing you in your own country.” (Erlendir ferðamenn allt orðnir allt of margir,

2012). Here his comments shift from emphasizing tourism firms to identifying tourists themselves as the problem.

The numerous comments on this interview are revealing. A large majority disagree with him mostly for economic reasons, seeing tourism as a saviour for the economy. Those who agree mainly blame the tourists themselves rather than the industry. They talk about tourists taking over coffee houses and destroying nature and society. Some of those who disagree with his statements accuse him of prejudice against foreigners and claim that his views are nationalistic and isolationist. One commenter writes that the MP's interview sets a record in hostility against foreigners" (Íslendingar komast ekki á kaffihús vegna ferðamanna. Þór Saari óttast ágang ferðamanna á Íslandi, 2012).

After the economic crash, debates and expressions of annoyance appear to be more intense with regard to tourists than economic migrants, which is probably different from elsewhere in Europe. In this regard it should be noted that a lot of the destruction to Iceland's sensitive sub-arctic environment has been done by recent governments through industrial planning. As pointed out by Karl Benediktsson (2009, p. 27), in spite of an emphasis on information industries and a more virtual economy, politicians and local authorities have promoted heavy industries such as aluminium smelters. The boom period construction of the nearly 200 meters high Kárahnjúkar power plant, situated within the mountains in Iceland's highlands, caused a dramatic change in a large and unique area of Iceland's interior, including for example the dam needed to provide energy to the new aluminum smelter (Benediktsson, 2009). The slow dying of the lake Lagarfjót is probably a result of its proximity to the Kárahnjúka dam. The issue is not that these projects have been uncontested in Iceland – because they have been protested by and criticised by, for example, biologists – but rather how discussion of tourist destruction of the national environment never contextualises or compares it to these industrial developments.

Moral panic is reflected in the ways in which these two kinds of mobilities are seen to threaten the two most important symbols of Icelandic national identity: the language and the land. Language has been one of the most prominent topics in debates about immigrants (Skaptadóttir, 2007; Þórarinsdóttir, 2010). While with regard to the

tourists the primary focus has been on crowdedness and the damage of nature by tourists, the discourse about immigrants has strongly focused on the Icelandic language. There are many instances of anxieties and alarm about threats to the social order and the Icelandic nation and what it stands for by the growing number of migrants and tourists; both of these mobilities have generated debates on excessively rapid changes that Icelandic society is not ready for. These debates show concern not only for problems that need to be confronted but also fear of the transformation of Icelandic society. While some scholars understand moral panic as only referring to overblown fear, stimulated or initiated by the media, others use the concept to analyse aspects with tangible consequences, placing the concept within the discourse of risks in today's societies, where anxieties and uncertainty have become important features of everyday life (Pijpers, 2006, p. 91-92; Garland, 2008). Thus, while some of the issues that are addressed in this discussion can be seen as referring to actual destruction, such as of fauna, the way that these issues are addressed is often very much like moral panic, referring very strongly to nationalistic emotions.

## Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter we have examined developments regarding two types of mobilities that have been shaping Icelandic society in recent years – the rapid growth of labour migration and the escalation in tourism to Iceland – in the context of large transformations in Icelandic society and economy in the last two decades. In both cases these developments have been debated on many grounds with diverse reactions. Our discussion shows the importance in an interconnected and increasingly mobile world of contrasting and comparing different forms of mobility, crucial in attempting to understand both the similarities between different forms of mobility and their differences. As we have stressed here, these mobilities have to be contextualised within the wider social and historical context, as well as within global dynamics. Both the reaction to tourism and the reaction to labour migration reflect the continuous importance of nationalism in the processes of globalization (Loftsdóttir, 2014a). Thus in discussion complaining about too many immigrants the



focus has been for the most part on language, whereas with regard to tourists it has focused on the vulnerable land, and especially places with particular meaning in the national identity such as *Pingvellir*, *Gullfoss* and *Geysir*. In this discourse the landscape is seen as passive and the earlier overgrazing and power-plant-caused damage in large areas of the highland are not mentioned. In both cases the government has been slow to react in making the necessary infrastructure accommodations, leaving the issue area to various private to initiatives. In both these debates moral panic can often be seen, in which these changes are depicted as out of control, creating anxieties.

Resentment toward tourists is interesting when put into context with the fact that hostility toward labour migrants did not increase significantly after the economic crash. The crash caused a shift in perceptions of Iceland in the global context, contrasting with pre-crash perceptions of Iceland's global involvement as Icelanders going "out" and engaging with the external world (Loftsdóttir, 2014b). These global processes were thus seen as existing somehow outside Icelandic society, as if it would be unaffected by them. Another point is how the tourist industry through its strong emphasis on nature involves to certain extent passivity. At the time of the tourist boom Icelanders are thus themselves in a more precarious situation than was the case when immigrants were arriving in large numbers doing jobs Icelanders would not accept and Icelanders seemed to be benefitting from the global processes.

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# Tourists as migrants/migrants as entrepreneurs – the agency of the visitor's eye

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Tourism is about mobility in its most general sense, and therefore seasonality and migrant labour relate to the subject of tourism services through the well-known term in tourism geography, complementarity. Moving for work is not new, but it is changing in ways that underscore the blurred boundaries between migration, work, and tourism. The issue of what constitutes labour and what constitutes tourism is an intriguing question in contemporary geography of employment-related geographical mobility (E-RGM), but has to a limited extent been clarified within the field of tourism geography. In much of the literature on the labour market of tourism-related occupations, the characteristic is that seasonality in jobs leads to more jobs being done by migrant labour, with these workers often ending up in low strata jobs. This paper, however, gives an overview in a first attempt to map out immigrants in Iceland as workers and entrepreneurs in tourism as well as shedding light on foreign youth labour involved in industry. Labour migration serves a function in tourism by generating visits to friends and visitors, with the potential for flows in both directions. Migrants therefore have agency in terms of innovating the tourism sector, although this is not yet thoroughly studied in the tourism geography literature. We will provide

a beginning overview of the shift in industry, exploring how people of foreign descent shape the industry, and discussing interrelationships among migrants and lifestyle tourism. The discussion illustrates that labour migration generates visits to friends and visitors, with the potential for flows in both directions grasped by the concept of complementarity. Migrants therefore have agency in terms of innovating the tourism sector; an aspect of tourism/migrant dynamics still not thoroughly studied in the tourism geography literature.

### Moving for tourism work in tourism geography

Iceland's appeal and image for tourists lies in between being a North European destination and an Arctic destination. From the very beginning of its emerging tourist industry, foreigners have been influential in shaping it. British entrepreneurs paved the way, providing an influx of travellers while local tour operators developed the industry further (Jóhannesson, Huijbens & Sharpley, 2010). A review of the history of the Icelandic tourist industry, however, would give a different impression, emphasising the heroic flight captain and the stewardess of the national flag carrier (Lúðvíksson and Sæmundsson, 1989) or the highland hikers of the past (Jónsdóttir & Johnson, 2015).

The story of tourism trade anywhere begins with ties and linkages between cultures across boundaries, coupled with progress in transportation. The term *complementarity* has therefore for a long time been applied in tourism geography, for the connection between places that differ from each other, where one contains the desire to travel, and in the other the ability to satisfy that desire (Boniface & Cooper, 2005). This complementarity of supply and demand will produce interaction between areas, i.e. through people wanting to go there and come back and eventually settle, which, for example, is enabled through flight connections. Examples of complementarity rarely use diaspora or migrant groups, even if it is obvious that they may in many cases generate complementarity between places. Thus, complementarity between Germany and Turkey is a good example. The large population of Turkish origin living in Germany creates complementarity between North Europe and the Mediterranean region. (Climate attraction is

part of the push and pull.) How do diasporas and migrants create complementarity through tourist flows? Through migrants' demand for returning home for shorter and longer periods visiting friends and relatives, and through the cultural encounters created through intercultural connection, transnational families, etc., the links and transport connections manifest the complementarity principle.

The global order is increasingly marked by intense mobility. Tourists, workers, students, migrants, asylum-seekers, scientists/scholars, family members, business people, and guest workers criss-cross the globe relentlessly. The preconditions for their movement vary as much as their motivation. Contemporary tourist consumption of exotic places is not just concerned with issues of temporary visits. In the present era of mobility, international migration patterns have changed and have also transformed our understanding of the concepts of home and away (Hannam & Knox, 2010).

Work-related mobility is indeed nothing new but its scale and more varied manifestations are unprecedented and continue to develop. By definition, employment-related mobility (ERM) occurs when workers regularly and repeatedly cross municipal, regional, or national boundaries to get to and from their place of employment, sometimes working in multiple worksites (e.g. construction and home care workers) or in mobile workplaces (cruise and cargo ships and trucks). Across the world a wide range of people move for work – women and men, citizens and temporary foreign workers, new workers and those near retirement. From daily commutes lasting several hours, to travel that takes workers away from home for days, weeks, months and even years; from cars and buses, to trains, ships and planes; from highly-paid top executive jobs, to minimum-wage service jobs; from natural resource-dependent industry to natural wonder-dependent tourism – the spectrum of employment-related geographical mobility (E-RGM) is dynamic and broad (On the move partnership, 2013). Given the scale of E-RGM, it potentially affects the dynamics and development of tourism in destinations like Iceland. Although being on the periphery in many ways, Iceland has experienced massive change in terms of arrival of migrant and seasonal workers of which many work and participate in the fast-growing tourism sector. Varieties of motivations influence decisions to engage in ERM



in tourism in Iceland. They can range from being sent by corporate division from one of the service entities of the MNC wherever in the world, to the other end of the spectrum, involving voluntary tourism.

This chapter explores the interstices between tourism mobility and migration with a focus on how the growing number of immigrants may affect tourism development dynamics. After an initial conceptual discussion about key concepts and labour mobility trends domestically as well as to and from Iceland, we discuss the hierarchical relations between tourists, migrants, and lifestyle travellers, which brings us to debates on the high proportion of self-employment and entrepreneurship evident among migrant populations. This is further explored through an analysis of the tourism sector in Iceland where varieties of tourist activities are driven by foreign-born migrant entrepreneurs. This small pilot investigation on economic activities of foreign-born entrepreneurs in tourism in Iceland reveals that it varies according to the extent that they are themselves lifestyle travellers or inhabitants who offer service.

### The relations between migration and tourism

At the turn of the millennium there was a discussion within the field of tourism geography about the blurring boundaries between migration and tourism. Martin Bell and Gary Ward (2000) identified temporary mobility as increasing and pointed out that comparisons of temporary mobility with permanent mobility, especially in the developed world, were rare and unsystematic. Studies of circulation occupied a central position in the literature on temporary mobility in developing countries. Williams and Hall (2000) found that weak conceptualisation of the difference between migration and tourism contributed to the relative neglect of their relationship. Given the blurring of boundaries between the objectives of cross-boundary travels, there was growing concern over how tourism was being conceptualised. This spurred questions about why tourism had not yet been situated within the wider context of temporary moves and permanent population. Bell and Ward (2000) found that tourism studies lacked an understanding of the processes of complementarity and substitution, which could underline the interconnectedness of different forms of mobility at

the individual level, as well as aggregate levels across space and time. A number of structural changes in consumption and production led to intensification and extensification of the interrelationships of tourism and migration. According to Hall (2005), broader economic and social trajectories introduced significant changes, such as increasingly volatile labour markets, in which careers were more and more disrupted by discontinuities, and in which job changes became more frequent. The increased labour mobility associated with this change, has contributed both sectorally and spatially to the geographical dispersion of friendship and family networks.

Another significant contributor to a changed economic and social trajectory is globalisation – involving not only capital but also labour, both unskilled and skilled (Castles & Miller, 1993; Dicken, 2011). Moreover, this means that international labour migration has internationalised the potential tourism networks of visiting friends and families; it also means that there is a larger mass of people having experience of working and living abroad, whether for shorter or longer periods of their lifespan (Williams & Hall, 2000). Lastly, migration flows have also contributed to the continuous formation and reconstruction of national identities, whether in terms of emigration (e.g. Ireland) or immigration (e.g. Argentina, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States). Given the interrelationship of identity, image, and place promotion, it should therefore not be surprising to see the location of different ethnic and cultural groups in a particular place as the subject of tourism promotion. Specific forms of tourism-migration relationships had evolved including tourism and labour migration, tourism and entrepreneurial migration, tourism and return migration, and tourism and retirement migration (Williams & Hall, 2000).

Social science has contributed to the impression that movement in and out of places is permanent, while the new paradigm envisions putting mobility rather than statics at the heart of inquiry (Walsh, 2012; Urry, 2000). In many cases the differences between permanent and labour migrants lie only in their initial goals: some labour migrants decide not to return “home” and so become permanent migrants, while some “permanent” migrants eventually decide to return (Williams & Hall,

2000). Therefore, human migration is only one form of mobility, and the term is used in an ambiguous way in the literature (Findlay et al., 2015).

One of the main findings was the need to dismantle the conceptual divide between types of movement, such as migration on the one hand and temporary mobility on the other (Bell & Ward, 2000). This was considered necessary in order to study tourism and the work of tourism. Issues such as location and mobility clearly transcend inherited disciplinary boundaries, and therefore geographies of tourism and mobility should not be left to geographers to explain, and matters of location and space should not be isolated from relations and linkages between spaces (Coles & Hall, 2006).

### Hierarchies of labour involved in tourism

Increasingly, studies of international migration engage in questions concerning the connection between spatial mobility, identity construction, and the structures of inequality in different nation-states into which economic migrants are absorbed or tolerated (McDowell, 2008). Migrants enter countries with gendered, classed, and racialised identities that may be renegotiated when they are directed to specific slots in the global labour market (McDowell, 2008). Tourism services have to be provided in situ. Thus the tourism labour force has to be assembled in situ at the point of consumption and, moreover, has to be available at particular time periods. The nature of the demand is such that this labour force must have sufficient flexibility to meet daily, weekly, and seasonal fluctuations.

According to Hall (2005), the significance of migration in tourism labour markets stems from the absolute shortage of labour where tourism is highly polarised. Thus the availability of migrant labour reduces labour market pressures, and consequently wage inflation pressures. Furthermore, the significance of migration in tourism is related to its contribution to labour market segmentation, especially where the divisions are along racial/ethnic or legal/illegal lines, and this can reduce labour costs for firms.

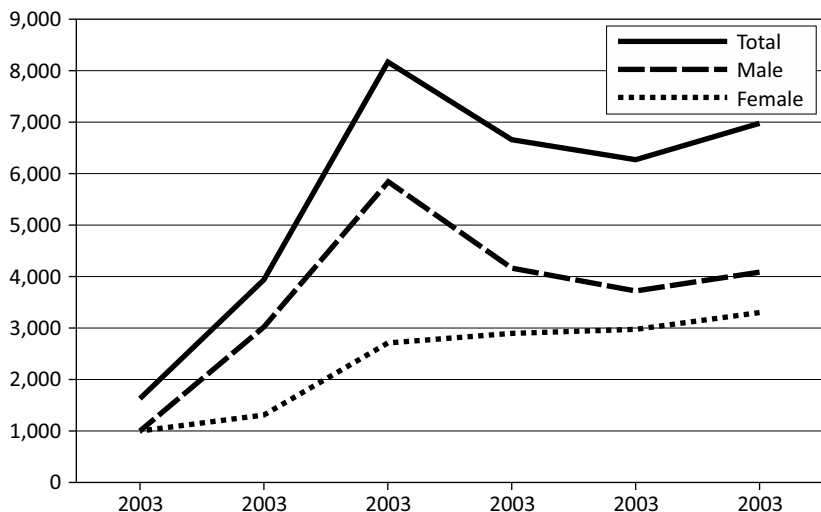
The functions that labour migration then serves in tourism are, firstly, that it generates visits to friends and visitors, with the potential for

flows in both directions (the previously mentioned complementarity). Secondly, labour migration experiences help to define the search spaces of both retirement migrants (pensioners residing in second homes in the South of Europe) and of lifestyle-seeking labour migrants.

Iceland has been through a shift in terms of labour migrants involved in tourism. Iceland's labour market has also become increasingly ethnically diversified due to the recent, predominantly employment-related immigration, with the number of foreign workers doubling between 2005 and 2008 (Sigurðsson & Arnarsson, 2011). The most dramatic change was among the Polish population in Iceland; their numbers grew from 2167 in 2005 to 10,540 in 2008, multiplying nearly fivefold within just three years (Bissat, 2013). (See also Figure 1).

As an example of the employment-related migration and intersection between migrants and work, the majority of the immigrant women heading for the fish factories in the 1990s came from Poland. Their recruitment was largely a result of growing unemployment in Poland, spurred by the shift from a socialist to a market economy and the opening of the borders to Western Europe. Migration streams gradually became more diversified, with people also from the Philippines and Thailand (Skaptadóttir & Wojtyńska, 2008). Many migrant women married Icelandic men and became key actors in successive chain migration, arranging jobs for close relatives such as parents, siblings, and grown-up children (Skaptadóttir & Wojtyńska, 2008; Wojtyńska, 2011).

Since the mid-20th century, farming areas in Iceland have faced a high rate of out-migration and a growing gender imbalance. In the 1990s, diversification of farming activities grew, as an effect of counter-urbanisation in some regions. There was a growth in horse farming, and many farmers ventured into rural tourism to complement their income. These developments led to labour recruitment, mainly from abroad (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013). Between 1998 and 2005 the number of foreign citizens working on Icelandic farms doubled. Taking care of horses in rural tourism attracts young women of German and Scandinavian origin, where the distinction between holiday and work is often blurred in the tourist season (Júlíusdóttir & Gunnarsdóttir, 2009). Lower strata jobs in rural tourism, such as cleaning, are increasingly done by immigrants from Eastern Europe (Jóhannesdóttir, 2008).



**Figure 1** Polish labour in Iceland 2003-2004, by gender

Source: Vinnumálastofnun, 2015.

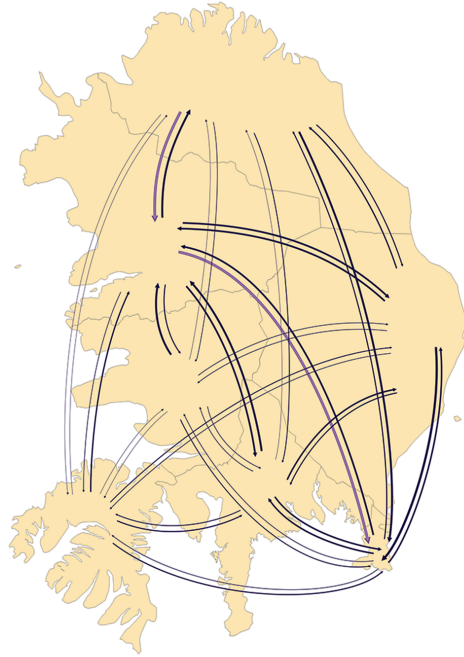
Coupled with social changes and the availability of jobs that educated Icelanders shied away from in many kinds of manufacturing, jobs that required gruelling graveyard shifts, immigrant labour filled holes in the labour market (now where, for example, fish processing was considered low class, immigrant labour filled holes in the labour market [Karlisdóttir, 2008]). The nexus of Icelandic migration policy thus reflects the nation's economic needs; individual migrant motivations have led to a situation in which Icelandic employers' trade relationship with migrants is primarily driven by the employers' need for low-wage workers (Bissat, 2013). The demand for labourers exceeded supply in the lowest sector of the Icelandic labour market (Skaptadóttir & Wojtyńska, 2008). As a result, a mismatch between immigrants' educational background and skills and their jobs became rather common in Iceland. This is clearly hierarchy. Highly educated professionals occupy low-skilled jobs. Even if the recession caused a small decrease in the influx of Polish migrants after 2008, many of them returned to Iceland after a while, in some cases because of personal ties and financial obligations, as well as hope for incidental job offers (Skaptadóttir, 2010).

The ratio of migrant labour occupied in services, including in the tourism sector, increased from 27% to 38% in the years 2003-2005 (Vinnumálastofnun, 2015, Hagstofa Íslands, 2015). However, because of statistical shortcomings (regarding the number employed in different branches of services and the total number with foreign citizenship among the employed), we have an inadequate picture of the contemporary occupational affiliation of people of foreign descent in Iceland.

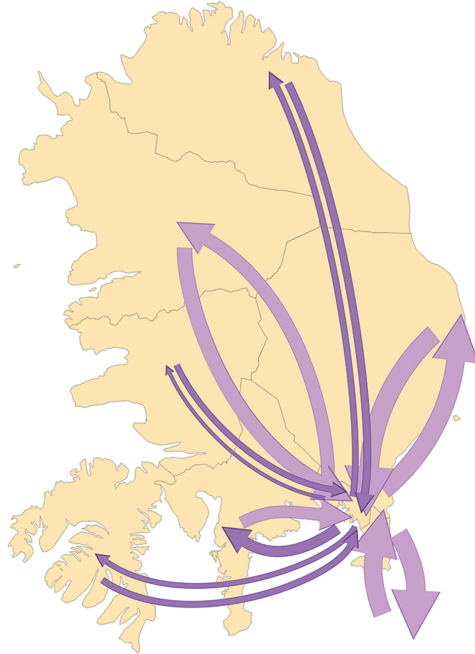
Motives may vary, and young people who have travelled more frequently than their parents or grandparents may have, at least for a while, different rationales for shifting places for work or leisure. From a life-trajectory perspective, mobility is relational, including in relation to other types of linkages between the individual and the employer. Furthermore, the residential mobilities of students in the early stages of entering the labour market have been shown to involve multiple temporary relocations between place of study, parental home, and residence close to a new place of employment (Findlay et al., 2015). For example, biology students from around the globe, from as far as away as Australia, are recruited as guides in Iceland's whale-watching business during the summer months. Are they migrants, or are they something else?

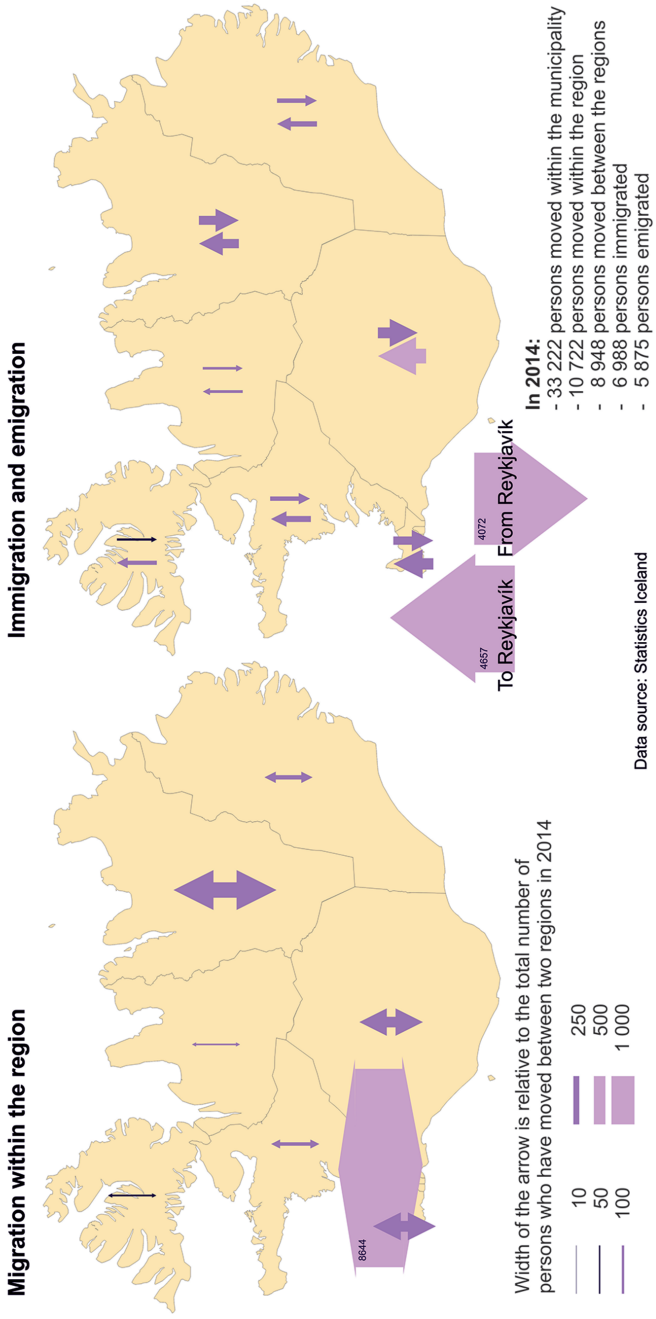
As stated above, the boundaries between leisure, travel, and work are in fact often blurred. In 2006 and 2007 one of the authors analysed Icelandic statistical data regarding tourists. After May 1, 2006, strikingly, many Polish tourists entered the country as tourists. Most of them probably came for work, because May 1 was the first day for the free flow of labour within EU boundaries, ratified by the Icelandic government. Many of them might in fact have been tourists, but the statistics do not make it possible to ascertain this (Karlsdóttir, 2008). The largest flow of people to Iceland (in migration statistics) is from the neighbouring Nordic countries (these includes diaspora Icelanders as well as other nationalities), the largest flow from Europe overall is from Poland, but the largest group leaving for settlement/emigrating is going to Poland or other EU countries (see Figure 2). This underlines the need for viewing the link between migration and tourism as a matter of flows in which the motives behind the movements are varied, and in which tourism and work migration are often interlinked.

**Migration between other regions**

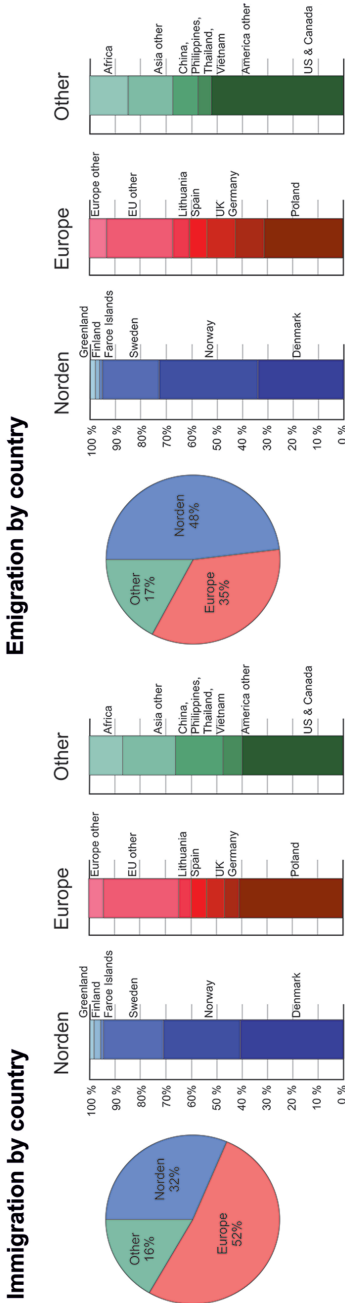


**Migration to and from capital region**









**Figure 2** Immigration and emigration by country  
 Source: processed by Johanna Roto for ©Nordregio, 2015.

Tourism itself is about mobility through the journeys of travellers. Less attention has, however, been paid to the labour mobility involved in tourism. Popular destinations for tourists are often places of transience for service workers, where youth may dominate part of the labour involved.

### The class question – migrant and lifestyle workers?

Much has been written about the hierarchies of the labour market involved in tourism service. The global division of labour reflected in the cruise industry is well known (Fay & Karlsdóttir, 2011). The ethnicities of the cruise ship workforce are mixed. Most managerial and “front-line” positions are held by Americans, Australians, Britons, and various other European nationalities, while the lowest ranked jobs on board, out of sight of the passengers, e.g. in cleaning and making beds, are filled by lower-ranked East European or Asian, often Bangladeshi, labour (Lee-Ross, 2006; Klein, 2003). Certain hierarchies demarcate the line of duty on board. Crews are probably the most globally diverse yet physically compact labour forces anywhere. They constitute a virtual laboratory for studying what a truly globalised labour force might look like and how global companies are responding to the challenge of recruiting and managing such diverse aggregations of workers (Wood in Lee-Ross, 2006).

Generally, jobs within the tourism industry are often described as low paid and low skilled. Hence, the industry accommodates a wide range of different types of jobs. Employment within the industry is mainly motivated by “the wish to deal with people, work in pleasant surroundings, and find an interesting job” (Szivas et al., 2003; Lundmark et al., 2012).

Horizontal and/or vertical segregation in the tourism labour market is a common feature of the tourist industry. The organisation of hotel operations roles and jobs is grouped by function and department with several levels of vertical hierarchy present; in some cases organisations have a paramilitary-like structure (Lee-Ross, 2006). Differential mobility empowerments reflect structures and hierarchies of power and position by race, gender, age, and class, ranging from the local to the global (Hannam & Knox, 2010). As different tourists may have different

mobility empowerment, different tourist workers may as well. There may also be differences in the degree one person can shift between these roles.

In a recent study of youth labour and labour practices in the Canadian Rockies (the national parks around Banff, Yoho, and Jasper national parks) and in the Iceland Golden Circle route, we found that a similar dynamic has evolved in tourism labour practices in our research sites in Canada and Iceland. Because many tourism workers are involved in face-to-face interactions with travellers, their cultural knowledge and their interpersonal and language skills are crucial assets to the tourism industry, but in some tourism branches, especially those that include traditions of voluntary labour, hiring practices seem to lead to an emerging perception of tourist service jobs as lifestyle tourism rather than real job offerings (Karlsdóttir, 2015). This has multiple impacts on the approach to running a tourism business. This practice seems to liberalise persons involved from lower strata hierarchical status assumptions, because they become more independent agents in the opportunities spurred by the experience and recreation economy.

However, lifestyle tourism can be seen to involve elements of what a precarious job is defined by, which is per se seasonal and therefore delimited temporarily. Young people, many of them still completing their education, take jobs during gap years or holidays, in order to earn pocket money while having an adventurous experience. Many questions emerge related to this development. For example, how does reliance on young adventurers/workers affect knowledge content and quality? The knowledge involved in servicing tourists is not accumulated; rather it withers away with every worker who finishes their seasonal job and leaves. How does this affect the attractiveness of jobs in tourism in general? Are low-pay, low-skill jobs in tourism thus inevitable?

The seasonal tourist industry in the Arctic relies on foreign labour to provide quality service. Hiring practices focus on seasonal workers, and it has been observed that migrant workers in the tourism industry are primarily employed in the hotel and restaurant sectors (Chen & Wang, 2015; Tuulentie & Heimtun, 2014). In a study conducted in Finnmark, Northern Norway, Chen and Wang found a sharp distinction in the vertical hierarchisation of jobs within the industry, with managers being Norwegians while the staff was comprised of foreign seasonal workers.

According to published news material on the Icelandic tourism industry, there are many indications that the same is the case in Iceland. The main motivation for taking on a tourism service job in a remote, mysterious, adventurous place with unusual natural beauty and wildlife, according to the informants in the Chen and Wang study, was the desire for novelty, for a favourable working environment, for exposure to scenery and nature, and for the possibility of professional development. Networking and establishing relations, as well as making new friends, were also mentioned as important motives. Seasonal employees long not only for practical experience and benefits but also for a unique professional experience that can lead to personal growth and enrichment (Chen & Wang, 2015). The question remains, however, if this in fact is the experience they get, for example, in cleaning jobs at hotels and restaurants. Certain occupational groups within tourism, where practices are more ad hoc or even rely on volunteers, may fail to provide these benefits. We are probably dealing with some complex inequalities. In Reykjavík hostels there is anecdotal evidence that it has recently become more common to hire people (most often foreigners) to do services for the hostel for no pay other than a bed. This layer of seasonal tourist workers are not registered as workers; they fit under the term “touristry,” occupational situations that involve touristic components (Uriely, 2001). Cohen (1974) defined several work-oriented travellers, such as “business travellers,” “tourist employees,” “conventioners,” and “official sightseers” as partial tourists. The terms “working holidays” or “farm tourism” thus describe types of tourism that include unskilled and manual work activities. The “working tourist” can therefore be used as a term for all types of travellers who engage in situations that combine work with tourist-oriented activities (Uriely, 2001).

As mentioned earlier, youth is at the centre of this development. In a number of tourist service industries, for example whale watching, ski resorts, and farms, “touristry” involves young professionals who engage in a form of journeying that depends upon employment, while the primary goal is travel itself. This becomes precarious in cases where employers take advantage of youthful labour’s vulnerability in the lack of knowledge about employee rights. Employers hire people on loose terms, through what they call trial periods, only to replace them with

new labour on new trial periods. In this process young service workers do not get paid during these trial periods. This practice has become more common among hotels and restaurants in Iceland in recent years. This is not to say that this exploitative practice is a dominant one, but it occurs more frequently. Some of the young people doing “touristry” engage in occasional and usually short-term employment as they travel, in order to finance their prolonged trip. In these cases the jobs that these travellers take are usually not related to their education, training, or skills. Typically they are engaged in unskilled and in some cases unpleasant manual labour in various fields (Uriely, 2001). Some of the frontline employees do in fact gain unique professional experience, as exemplified by one of the Polish informants in Chen and Wang’s study (2015). He explained how one of the main motivations for him was the opportunity to explore and see exotic places. Therefore, he had chosen Finnmark over other places due to its natural beauty. There is a strong likelihood that many seasonal tourist workers from abroad, employed in the Icelandic tourist industry, are driven by similar motivations, whether their experiences are good or bad.

According to Uriely (2001), migrant tourism workers are often preferred to local employees as a result of their foreign cultural background and their work experience in other resorts. Furthermore, as they respond to the requirements of seasonal tourism economies by constant movement from one tourist destination to the other, most of them are single without the obligation to support a family. Thus, they are willing to work for a lower rate of pay than local skilled workers. This might explain the high labour turnover observed in the industry. The value of cultural capital, interpersonal skills, and other aspects of competence play a role, but hierarchies involved in the tourism labour market merely underplay the migrants’ role in that respect.

Lundmark (2015) has focused on labour mobility in the hospitality and tourism sectors in Sweden, where he observes that workplace-to-workplace mobility is characteristic, as are low entry barriers (little emphasis on training before taking the job), rapid workplace turnovers, short-term contracts, and part-time work, as well as, of course, low income. These conditions are what is offered to the majority of the labour involved, and in particular youth (Lundmark, 2015).

Uriely (2001) identifies four different types of travellers through their work-related and tourist-oriented motivations, the characteristics of the work they engage in, and their demographic profiles. These are as follows: 1) travelling professional workers, who are mainly in situ because of their work within the tourist industry, and whose tourist activities are a by-product of their work-related excursions; 2) migrant tourism workers, who travel in order to make a living and “have fun” at the same time; 3) “non-institutionalised working tourists” who engage in work while travelling in order to finance a prolonged trip; and 4) “working holiday tourists” who perceive their work engagement as a recreational activity that is part of their tourist experience.

Migrants in Iceland working in the tourist industry are likely to cover the entire spectrum of these four types of migrant tourism workers, as well as be offered the conditions described by Lundmark (2015). In sum, this multiplicity reflects heterogeneity, the fuzzy interconnection between migration, tourism, and work, which is not too widely applied in tourism geography.

One of the class questions associated with who is a migrant in relation to tourism work, is who is liberated from the perception of being a foreign adventurer, investor, or entrepreneur? Assumingly it relates to where tourism workers are located in the hierarchy of jobs found within the industry, and also to where they have relocated. Furthermore, it relates to geopolitical questions, whether they are citizens of former or current empires or their colonies. Aure and Munkejord (2015) identified different migratory trajectories in a study on types of male in-migrants in Northern Norway. They found that a type of migrant that explained the new settlement in the region driven by the urge to experience something “different” and “exotic” in an Arctic region could be defined as international lifestyle migrants. Strikingly, many of those informants were occupied or self-employed in the tourist industry. This indicates that they identify themselves as adventurers or entrepreneurs rather than as migrants. It is, however, questionable whether a line can be drawn between who is perceived a migrant and who is perceived an entrepreneur. Nevertheless, it is known for a fact that citizens from the UK rarely have a notion about themselves as being migrants, in spite of living outside their country of origin. In contrast, Poles are known

throughout Europe as work migrants. This discourse also dominates in Iceland. The question remains if agency, i.e. the line between being an employee and being independent travel operator (entrepreneur, investor, and manager), would make a difference for who is considered a migrant tourism worker and who is not?

### Complementarity and foreign entrepreneurs

As mentioned in the beginning, the complementarity factor is important for explaining how interconnectedness of different mobilities evolve, and how cultural encounters between migrants and other people can be crucial in creating networking relations, including in terms of tourism and destination development. This is confirmed by Humbracht's recent research findings, which demonstrate that migrant residents are not "the other" but are rather an embedded part of the place regularly attracting visitors to the area (2015). Furthermore, during visits, lines between host and guest, migrant and tourist, and visitor and local are blurred. Residents and visitors, guided by the rules of hospitality, attribute new embodied meanings to tourist and migrant mobilities, which strengthen the bonds between the imaginations of residents and visitors and transnational networks. One manifestation of how international migration actively shapes tourism destinations and the sector itself is self-employment and entrepreneurial activity by immigrants.

The French word "entreprendre" means to undertake; this underpins the importance of agency. In the most basic terms the concept of entrepreneurship refers to capacity of actors to perceive opportunities for change and the ability to carry out change (Jóhannesson, 2012). Framed in Schumpeterian terms, the entrepreneur is then the innovator who carries out a new combination of products or processes; this can involve opening a new market, utilising new sources of supply, and creating new organisational forms (Lordkipadnidze et al., 2005).

Studies have shown that migrants are prone to engage in entrepreneurial activity, often bringing new skills and capacities into local economies (Lundmark et al., 2014; Kalantaridis & Bika, 2006). There may be different reasons that also vary between ethnic groups of immigrants. In their study, Lundmark et al. (2014) showed that the length

of stay in the country (Sweden in their case) is positively related to self-employment and also that in-migrants from Europe were more likely to start new businesses. In their words, “starting up and running a business as an in-migrant could be related to language, knowledge of market conditions, and specific cultural knowledge” (Lundmark et al., 2014, p. 435). The dynamics of in-migrant entrepreneurship thus relates to personal background and skills and socio-structural condition in the region in question. While some groups may experience self-employment as the only way to secure a decent income due to structural barriers to enter the labour market, others move to the area for lifestyle reasons and pursue a particular business due to such motives as well (Akgün, Baycan-Levent, Nijkamp & Poot, 2011; Lundmark et al., 2014).

Research on foreign-born tourism entrepreneurship is scant but supports the point that lifestyle motives are of crucial importance to understand the dynamics between migration and tourism. Lardiés (1999) examined new North European immigration into two Mediterranean regions and identified the characteristics of North European entrepreneurs who work in small tourist businesses. He found that the reasons for moving to these Southern European regions, the characteristics of company formation, and the style of running the businesses were motivated less by the need for work than by lifestyle considerations. Along similar lines, Akgün et al. (2011) found that lifestyle motives were the most important factor for in-migrant entrepreneurs in their comparison of 22 studies of rural development and entrepreneurship. Eimmermann (2015) further supported this in his study of lifestyle motives for Dutch families moving to rural Sweden. The results suggest that international migration theory offers little to explain these new migration inflows. They must be seen as an issue of consumption, rather than only of work. This supports the idea that in some ways tourism entrepreneurial migration constitutes a special case of both lifestyle-seeking migration and of labour migration.

In recent years there has been some focus on lifestyle entrepreneurship in tourism (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Ateljevic & Page, 2009; Peters, Frehse & Buhalis, 2009). Lifestyle entrepreneurs are driven not only by business motives for entering the tourism industry, and due to that it has been argued that they may hinder growth (Ioannides & Petersen,



2003). Research has indicated that lifestyle entrepreneurs may be reluctant to cooperate and their involvement in formal development strategies may be limited (Peters et al., 2009). On the other hand, it has been shown that lifestyle entrepreneurs are crucial actors for tourism development in rural areas because they are often the ones who initiate new products or services in places where more growth-oriented entrepreneurs may be hesitant to operate (Gunnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014). Entrepreneurial migration may thereby serve distinctive national tourist groups or resident communities in foreign destinations (Williams & Hall, 2000), but their distinctive effect is likely to vary considerably between regions.

Studies from the Nordic countries on immigrant labour and entrepreneurialism in tourism reveal that with the countries becoming more demographically multicultural, the number of foreigners involved in investment in tourism operators has increased significantly. This indicates also what was claimed earlier: that intercultural skills are in demand and complementarity is important in tourism development. Not only does it contribute to diversify tourism products and services needed, to cope with increased demand for new types of tourism needs (Lordkipanidze et al., 2005). Also that the comparative knowledge a migrant has, enables the person to identify what is unique and distinctive about the new place of residence, for the benefit of attracting a new tourist crowd to the place. Over time, migrants can be a crucial asset in what Aitken & Hall (2000) phrased as foreign skills and a tourism business's success of selling services overseas, even if not acknowledged properly by the surrounding native population. As an example, there were around 250 immigrants running enterprises just in the Söderslätt region of Sweden (Lordkipanidze et al., 2005). Although these perspectives do not remain dominant, within the studies on entrepreneurialism, they will be tentatively explored in the Icelandic tourism business below.

### Immigrants as entrepreneurs in tourism in Iceland

Although tourism remains one of the most globalised industries (Hjalager, 2007), the globalisation of tourist companies in Iceland was not really observable in 2007, except for some sporadic foreign

direct investment among Icelandic tourist companies in operations abroad. A study conducted by one of the authors found that strikingly little foreign direct investment could be observed in Icelandic tourist operations at that time. However, she suggested that it would only be a question of time until the involvement of foreign entrepreneurs and investors in the tourism business increased (Karlsdóttir, 2007).

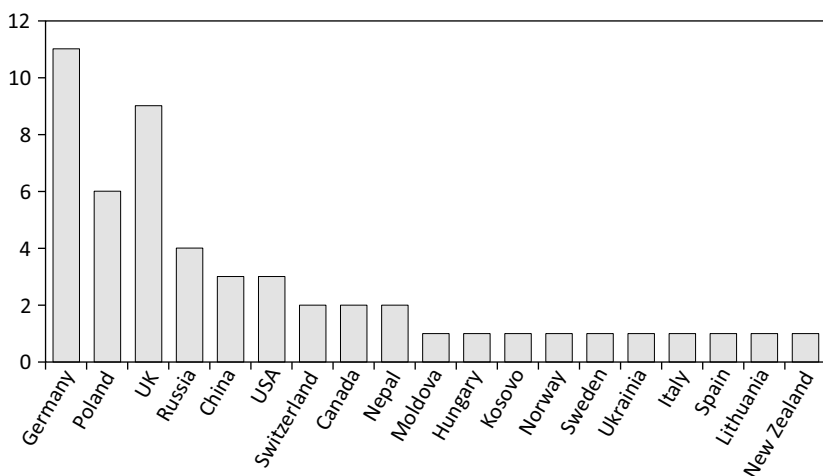
After identifying a lack of foreign ownership in Icelandic tourism companies in 2007, the first author observed a sea change by 2015, at least on the basis of sporadic qualitative observations and informal interviews with foreigners running Icelandic tourism businesses. The first author therefore decided to gain an overview by structurally exploring the presence of foreign founders of tourism companies operating in Iceland.

The point of departure was identifying people of foreign descent, who had established firms operating within the Icelandic tourism sector. Many different approaches could have been taken, but this initial study analysed officially licensed travel operators as of 2015. The Icelandic tourism council approves such licenses; the list is official and accessible (Iceland Tourism Council, 2015).

Out of 567 licensed travel operators, 55 of those were people of foreign origin. This is roughly 10%, which corresponds well with the ratio of the foreign population settled in the country. The term “foreign origin” can, however, be fuzzy in this respect. Tracing individual licenses through the national registry reveals that some of the founders had registered addresses in Iceland, while others operated from abroad. This study instead emphasised the way the entrepreneurs presented themselves on websites or other fora where their company marketed itself. If the entrepreneurs presented themselves as being of a certain origin (for example, in terms of being able to speak a particular language accommodating certain tourist segment groups), they were listed with the nationality they themselves presented, ignoring what kind of passport or national citizenship the individual owners held.

According to this preliminary study of migrant entrepreneurs, 11 Germans operated different types of tourist services in Iceland. This is probably a gross underestimation of Germans involved in tourism services, but this represents registered founders of companies operating within the sector. Six Poles were founders of tourism businesses. The

types of tourist operations included mountain tours, fly-fishing tours, general tour operator companies, web services, and accommodation. Other East European entrepreneurs derived mainly from Russia, Slovenia, Kosovo, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and Hungary. Their operations ranged from general travel operators, web services, fishing tours and Greenland tours, adventure and incentive tours, sailing tours, and photography tours. Overall, East European entrepreneurs with tour operator licenses in Iceland totalled 15, overshadowing other entrepreneurs of foreign origin.



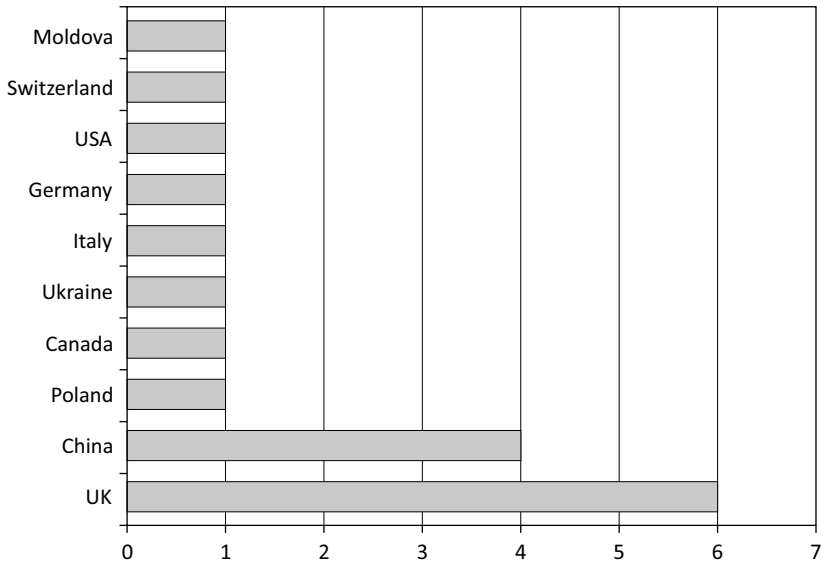
**Figure 3** Licensed foreign entrepreneurs in the Icelandic tourism business, by national origin, 2015

Source: Iceland Tourism council tour operators licenses 2015.

These tourism entrepreneurs operate in different areas of the country (north, east, west, and south) and have their registered addresses located in different regions of Iceland. However, one tendency was clear: entrepreneurs of UK and Chinese origin most frequently live abroad while offering services in Iceland (see Figure 4 below). Only three of the 15 East European entrepreneurs operated from abroad.

There are links between certain national origins and the types of tourist activities offered. Horse-riding tourism is primarily offered

by Germans and Swedes, who in many cases are co-founders of their companies, often partnering with Icelandic spouses on farms in Iceland.



**Figure 4** Licensed entrepreneurs of foreign origin with addresses outside Iceland

Source: National registry, 2015; data compared with Iceland Tourism council tour operators licenses 2015.

The motives of these entrepreneurs vary. Many of them envisioned opportunities in the tourism business after having lived in the country for a while undertaking other pursuits (e.g. working in the fishing industry). Others saw windows of opportunity as Icelandic tourism receipts rose. Some were initially recruited as travel guides because of their useful language and intercultural skills; later they realised they could develop a business of their own.

As mentioned earlier, migrant populations are often viewed in terms of alterity. This alterity may have different manifestations. The image of migrants in many western contexts is that of being poor or ethnically and religiously different. However, these differences can be an asset for agency in the entrepreneurship of tourism.

Some of those involved in tourism entrepreneurship have definitely contributed to the diversification of the tourist products available, e.g. photography tours and river rafting. As foreign seasonal workers in the tourism industry they might initially have been drawn by a place attachment, by an attraction to nature (such as scenic views), by social bonding, or by place identity. Whatever the initial motivations, we know that a significant shift has taken place and that migrants can be tourists and they can be entrepreneurs. Foreigners who were initially tourists or adventurers rather than migrants may, as illustrated in this pilot study, also become entrepreneurs in tourism. Their agency and their visitor's eye may pave the way to establish businesses that further develop Iceland as a tourist destination.

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# Becoming a tourist in the home country: Polish migrants visiting home

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“Space, like time, engenders forgetfulness; but it does so by setting us bodily free from our surroundings and giving us back our primitive, unattached state ... Time, we say, is Lethe; but change of air is a similar draught, and, if it works less thoroughly, does so more quickly.”

Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*

## Introduction

Today migrants are no longer perceived as uprooted; instead their multisided social embeddedness has been commonly acknowledged in the migration scholarship. The various economic, social, and cultural linkages that migrants maintain with their countries of origin have often been defined as transnationalism (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1994; Levitt, 2001; Vertovec, 2004). With simultaneous engagements and personal attachments in the host and home societies, migrants cross boundaries of one nation state creating so-called transnational social spaces (Faist, 2000; Pries, 2001). Visiting home is one of the prominent manifestations of migrants' transnationalism, as well as an expression of continued networks with the sending community. Migration typically entails more or less frequent travelling back and forth, and visits home (real or imagined) constitute an integral part of the migratory process itself (Baldassar, 2001). Migrants travel back primarily to meet their

family and so fulfil their social obligations as well as to satisfy their emotional needs. However, while visiting homes they often engage in activities that are related to tourist behaviour (Wagner, 2015, 2011). In this chapter, I focus on this touristic aspect of the return visits as well as the ways in which migration potentially channels tourism from host to native countries. By showing migrants in the role of tourists, I am contributing to the ongoing discussion in the migration literature that problematises the sharp distinctions between these two categories of mobility. I am drawing here on my ethnographic research with Polish migrants in Iceland, carried out for my doctoral dissertation. This material consists of interviews, formal and informal conversations, and participant observation collected in the last 10 years, and includes my own experience as a Polish migrant in Iceland<sup>1</sup>. The main topic of my research was transnational connections maintained by migrants, thus tourism as such was not my main interest. However, for the purpose of this chapter I reviewed my material searching for relevant accounts in the narratives of my interlocutors, in order to recognise issues that link migration experience with tourist practices.

### Visiting home: between transnationalism and VFR tourism

In the globalising labour market many contemporary migrants travel in search of work in order to improve their lives in their home countries, without the intention of staying permanently abroad. Thus, departure typically implies return. Karen Fog Olwig and Ninna Nyberg Sørensen (2002) named this kind of household strategy “mobile livelihoods,” emphasising movement as an indispensable part of the migrants’ reality, all the more as this strategy often involves leaving behind close family. Such transnational households allow financial benefits without making the investments related to settlement in a new place.

Expectedly, the intensity and character of the back and forth travelling vary significantly between different migration projects, which may range from more permanent residencies, through seasonal work, to more circular movements. Similarly, the nature of “going back” ranges from

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<sup>1</sup> I have been living in Iceland for the past 12 years.

shorter visits, through commuting between native home and work place abroad, to return and possible onward migrations. However, access to mobility is not equally distributed. The Filipina migrants described by Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2005) usually stay several years without visiting their homes, while undocumented migrants may be deprived of such a possibility at all. In contrast, when writing about post-wall Central and Eastern European migrants, Mirjana Morokvasic described them as “settled in mobility,” explaining that “[t]heir experience of migration (...) becomes their lifestyle, their *leaving home* and going away, paradoxically, a strategy of *staying at home* (...)” (2004, p. 7, italic original).

Visits home – rare or frequent – are clearly part of the migration system itself as a reflection of migrants’ identities and a manifestation of their sustained belonging to the native community. They are important mechanisms for maintaining social ties and intimate relationships with their place of origin. They may also help migrants to cope with displacement and discrimination encountered in host countries (Levitt, 2001; Smith, 2006). Commonly, people travel to reunite with family, relatives, and friends. Face-to-face meetings and corporal co-presence still seem to be necessary, in spite of developments in communication technology that allow many migrants to stay in more or less regular contact and to participate in the lives of those left behind (Larsen, Urry & Axhousen, 2006; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Parreñas, 2005). Apart from preserving and strengthening personal and emotional links, visiting home is often motivated by kinship and social obligations (Baldassar, 2001; Ignatowicz, 2011; Iorio & Corsale, 2013). For those travelling with children, trips to the native country can be used as a means to transmit cultural heritage (Klekowski von Koppenfels, Mulholland & Ryan, 2015). Moreover, as David Timothy Duval showed, they are vital in enabling future return migration (2002). However, while visiting home, migrants often engage in activities associated with tourist behaviour. Therefore, although travelling back and forth can be seen as a consequence of migration and thus an integral part of the migration project itself, it also embodies a touristic element. It is this element of the return journeys that I analyse in this chapter. Yet, perversely, focusing on their touristic side, I supplement the image of the multifaceted character of the migrants’ visits home.

Whereas the touristic aspect of return visits tends to be overlooked in the literature on transnational migration, it is commonly acknowledged in tourism studies, where migrants' journeys home fall into that special segment of tourism termed as Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR). In general, VFR tourism is identified either by the type of accommodation or by the purpose of the travel, so it is not necessarily limited to migrants, even if they constitute a large proportion of VFRs (Backer, 2007; Morrison et al., 2000). Subsequently, since VFR only specifies the purpose in very broad terms, including migrant-specific intentions, Elisa Backer prefers to talk about VFR travel rather than VFR tourism in order to encompass these different kinds of sojourners (Backer, 2012). With regard to migrants, VFR trips involve bi-directional movements, including expatriates' children travelling to visit relatives in the homelands of their parents or grandparents. Thus, this term often overlaps with what has been called diaspora, roots or ethnic tourism<sup>2</sup>. Initially, VFR entries were underestimated; thus this segment of tourism remained relatively ignored. But recently their importance has been repeatedly emphasised (Asiedu, 2005; Backer, 2012; Butler, 2003; Jackson, 1990; Morrison et al., 2000). The significance of VFR tourism is demonstrated by its large and growing volume as well as by its impact on the tourist industry and thus the economy. Consequently, accurate measurement or properly tailored marketing that addresses the special needs of migrant visitors are vital concerns for tourism studies.

Recently, Klekowski von Koppenfels, Mulholland, and Ryan (2015) questioned the surprisingly divergent conceptualisations in tourism studies and transnational studies (cf. Duval, 2002, who also indicated theoretical links between VFR trips and transnationalism). By exploring the multifaceted nature of the return visits, they attempted to situate

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<sup>2</sup> Brian King (1994) noticed that ethnic tourism is distinguished by the travel purpose and means going either to visit places inhabited by so-called exotic cultures (like Saami or San Blas Indians) or to meet with co-ethnic individuals (family, relatives, or friends). Since ethnic tourists tend to stay with relatives, in this second case the term overlaps with VFR tourism, which – according to King – refers primarily to the type of accommodation (ibid.). The terms diaspora tourism and roots tourism are usually used to discuss individuals travelling to the ancestral homelands (Butler, 2003; Iorio & Corsale, 2013). However, in a broad sense the term diaspora may also include migrants themselves (the so-called first-generation).

migrants' visits home between transnationalism and tourism. However, I would like to take this argument further. Trips not only combine migrant and tourist rationales, but they also blur and challenge the boundaries between these two categories. Thus, I address the general purpose of this book of showing "subtle and unobvious" connections between migration and tourism.

### Poles visiting their home areas: framing the context

The political transformation following 1989 gave Polish citizens the freedom to move, which has been further extended with Poland's European Union membership and the opening of the EU labour market to citizens of new member states after 2004. Importantly, as Mirjana Morokvasic concluded, post-wall migrants not only gained the freedom to leave, but more precisely were now "free to leave and to come back" (2004:7). Certainly, the free movement of labour within the European Union and the establishment of the Schengen Area along with the higher availability of cheap travel possibilities promote temporal, pendulum migrations and allow individuals to become more mobile. Accordingly, there has been recognised shift in Polish migration patterns, with greater diversity in types and an increasing number of people moving repeatedly on a short-term basis rather than permanently – sort of "swinging" between country of work and country of home (Okólski, 2001). Moreover, the systemic changes along with the revision of policy towards Polish ethnic groups abroad resulted in a rapid rise in visits from the old Polish Diaspora (Ostrowski, 1991). Based on his study, Stanisław Ostrowski estimated that almost half of the visitors from Western Europe and overseas in Poland in 1989 were ethnic Poles (1991, p. 127). This would indicate that more lenient border regulations not only permit new migrants to circulate between countries but also encourage pre-1989 emigrants and their descendants to visit their former homeland more often.

The mode of the back and forth travelling differs between various migration streams and various migration projects from Poland. Some migrants are more settled in the new country, others take up only seasonal work abroad, yet others remain quite mobile. Furthermore, the regularity and length of the visits is clearly related to geographical

distance and access to mobility, determined by resources such as money, time, or transport infrastructure (Urry, 2002). The ability to visit home depends on work arrangements, and in the case of many migrants it can be limited by low income. Undoubtedly, the expansion of fast and cheap travel is a critical factor that enables more frequent travels (Ignatowicz, 2011). This also allows some individuals to maintain mobile or even commute to work over longer distances and across borders.

Migration from Poland to Iceland was commonly intended as temporary, even though the stay was often prolonged or even altered into permanent settlement. Yet, it seems that the majority of Poles still plan to return to their home country. In a survey<sup>3</sup> conducted in the capital area of Iceland in 2010 as many as 78% considered this option, while about 18% had definite plans of coming back. This means that many Polish migrants, even if living already for several years in Iceland, remain somehow attached to Poland. Iceland, located about 2600 kilometres away from Poland, with a limited number of transportation possibilities, prevents extensive back and forth travelling. Therefore, migration leans towards long-term stays rather than circulation with frequent return visits. Moreover, it tends to be migration of entire families, a trend that probably intensified after the outbreak of the financial crisis. More than half of the respondents in the survey were living with their families in Iceland, while only 30% lived in so-called transnational households. Consequently, on average, Poles who reside in Iceland do not visit Poland more often than once a year, with some travelling less and some travelling more often. Accordingly, half of the respondents answered that they visited Poland only once during the last 12 months, while 36% did not go to Poland at all in this period. Trips to Poland could have been more frequent during the boom years, when, in relation to income, fare prices seemed more affordable. An interesting exception were Polish workers employed in aluminium smelting in the eastern part of the country, that were provided regular flight connections with Poland in a three-month span.

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<sup>3</sup> The survey was part of the project "Mobility and Migrations at the Time of Transformation – Methodological Challenges". It employed respondent-driven sampling and involved 480 Poles living in the capital region. For more about the results see Wojtyńska, 2012.

Among the main reasons for not travelling to Poland mentioned in my interviews were costs associated with travel, limited free time, lack of close family in Poland, and the desire to visit countries other than Poland and Iceland. Comparing with fare prices offered by low-cost airlines connecting Poland with other European cities, flights to Iceland are relatively expensive. Furthermore, direct connections and budget carrier services have been irregular and unstable. Another option – ferries – takes several days and is rarely considered. Thus, travelling to Poland can be quite time consuming, especially for those who live outside Iceland's capital region in the coastal villages around the country, which pertains to almost one third of Polish migrants in Iceland. Moreover, having a fixed amount of time and money to allocate for holidays, people are often compelled to choose between either visiting home, taking holidays in Iceland, or going abroad somewhere else, which at times is perceived by some as a disturbing inconvenience or limitation. This, in turn, may look opposite to the very idea of leisure, which is a domain of free choice. Yet, it is practices and experiences rather than primary motivations (even if some clearly go on holiday to Poland) that bring together migrants and tourists.

Certainly, return visits are predominantly related to family ties and are used for socialising. This is also supported by the survey data in which as many as 70% declared that during their visits they always or often spend time with family, and 56% said that they always or often spend time with friends, while less than 2% said that they go for business reasons and 3% to look for a job. Migrants often travel home as part of their emotional needs as well as due to family obligations. The visits are often related to important celebrations, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. However, I will not discuss these aspects here, but will focus only on the practices and activities that show migrants in the role of tourists.

### Migrants as tourists

The World Tourism Organisation defines a tourist as a person “travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other



purposes” (WTO, 1995). It is further specified that the period of staying away needs to be at least 24 hours, and its purpose can include family missions and meetings (Cohen, 1984). Tourism then, as determined by Mathieson and Wall (1995, p. 1), means “temporary movements of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater for their needs.” Short in character, pursued in free time, migrants’ visits home clearly fall into this definition and so can be recognised as part of tourism and thus are appropriately regarded as VSR travels. Interestingly, foreign residents are actually routinely classified as tourists in frontier statistics, when crossing the Icelandic border and using passports of their native countries.

In the most evident and explicit way, migrants come to be tourists when they are customers of the tourist industry. As they travel home they are inclined to depend on touristic infrastructure, such as means of transportation or hospitality services (hotels, restaurants). Actually, the trip home itself may contain elements of tourism and adventure, like in the following account from a Polish woman who moved to Iceland in 1994 and at the beginning was living and working in the far west-north part of the country. This is how she reported her very first visit to Poland:

We were flying three girls together. To Reykjavik. We stayed in Reykjavik as far as I remember for three days. We toured in Reykjavik and went for Golden Circle excursion. At that time there were not so many tourists. Then we took Flybus to Keflavik and we flight through Copenhagen to Gdansk. We waited three hours at the airport and we had to be called to the plane since we overstayed in some shop. So we were last on the board.

As in this case, travelling from other parts of the country often requires an overnight stay in Reykjavik before taking a flight to Poland, and until recently the flights were usually not direct connections. For the woman quoted above it was an opportunity to make some sightseeing and visit typical tourist places in Iceland as well as to take advantage of a stay at the airport to get lost in a shopping.

Despite the majority living with their families for the significant part of their visits, occasionally some need to rely on commercial

accommodation, for example on the way to their destinations or when they undertake travelling (for reasons discussed later) within their home countries. Importantly, some migrants do not have family or relatives that can host them or they prefer independence offered by public lodging. The fact that migrants use tourist services to various degrees (along with other expenditures during their visits) means that VFR is increasingly recognised as an important segment of the tourism industry.

In general terms, tourism pertains to modern leisure activities (Cohen, 1984). It is a time of “temporary reversal of everyday activities – it is no-work, no-care, no-thrift situation” (Cohen, 1972, p. 181). In other words, these are travels pursued for relaxation, amusement, and striving for immediate satisfaction; although there might be diverse ways to achieve it because leisure has different meanings for different people, from idle rest to active recreation. Even if migrants are visiting homes primarily due to continued social relations they try to balance this with pleasure and entertainment; not at least because it is a time of their holidays. A young woman, who has been living in Iceland for eight years, described to me how she spends her time in Poland:

Usually I go for five weeks. Always. It is such a time. The first week when we are in Poland, I do nothing. I don't even bother to go to shop. It is summer, it is warm. I have holidays. (...) Then, I try to use as much time as possible, at least one week and a half, to go somewhere, to see something.

People visit Poland in their free time from work, most commonly during summer holidays or sometimes during seasonal celebrations, such as Easter or Christmas. However, in all cases, it is a break from the regular time of work. It is also, as in tourist-motivated travel, a break from everyday spaces for leisure spaces (Rojek, 1993). To my question, why he is visiting Poland, a young Polish man answered:

“I go to Poland to get rest.”

“Can you not rest in Iceland?,” I asked surprised knowing his passion for the Icelandic landscape and frequent excursions he takes in this country. To which he clarified:

“But I want to rest from these views; I need to change the surroundings.”

Chris Rojek (1993) recognised leisure and tourism as a means of escape from work and ordinary duties of daily life. He further noticed, making reference to Walter Benjamin, that our dreams of escape are aroused by “the magic of distance” (ibid., p. 9). Travel, physical detachment is believed to facilitate and/or enhance the effectiveness of this escape. “Space, like time, engenders forgetfulness (...)” to recall the opening quotation from the *Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann. Rupture in time is transposed to discontinuity in space. And, “change of air” helps to disengage from everyday worries. Despite being familiar, Poland offers this desired change. Or maybe exactly because it is familiar it simultaneously offers escape from the otherness of the foreign country.

Another person, a woman who has been living in Iceland for almost 20 years explained to me why she did not travel in Iceland:

The time when I could [travel in Iceland – A.W.], that is in summer, but then I am in Poland. (...) Iceland is **not attractive** to me anymore, to deprive myself of going to some warmer climate. Right. Because it is not warm here. Wherever one goes, one has to be dressed. (...) It is cold. Everywhere winds. One needs to travel far to see anything. It is **not exotic** to me anymore. (...) I was never attracted by the north. I always preferred the south, warmth. (...) Holidays are holidays for me. It is full-time relaxation. Yes. For me. So Iceland... somehow no.

For most tourists, travel is a movement away from home, away from a familiar environment. Here, it is the home in the native country that acquires the attributes of “leisure-spaces” in contrast to Iceland, which with time has become familiar and so lost its lure and aura. Interestingly, the same woman indicated that coming for the first time, she saw her work in Iceland as extraordinary break in her usual routine or to use her exact words: “Man even saw it as a holiday, a sort of adventure”. The vast majority of Poles came to Iceland searching for jobs, and, as mentioned before, working in Iceland was usually meant to be only temporary. Consequently, it can be noticed that the lives of some are clearly oriented towards their homes in their countries of origin, and they remain in stages of “prolonged temporality” (Bailey, 2001). This results in a sort of a dichotomisation of space and time. Iceland is reduced to the place (and time) of work, while Poland becomes the place (and time) of

rest, exemption, and self-expression (Skaptadóttir & Wojtyńska, 2008). So the return visits of this woman appear like going home from work, although at greater intervals. Significantly, at the very moment Iceland alters into the place of regulated time and more daily obligations, it ceases to be *exotic* and *attractive* as a distant place for a tourist venture, and simultaneously these qualities are transferred over to “home” in Poland. Yet, there are certainly some migrants that have not lost initial enchantment in Iceland.

Moreover, it is implied in the above statement that proper summer holidays require the right weather conditions. The only way for her to relax is to enjoy warmth, the kind of warmth that was further associated with the south. In comparison with *horrible* windy weather in Iceland, Poland emerges as a sufficient summer destination. However, actually this woman usually combines visits to Poland with taking organised holidays abroad; whereas savings from work in Iceland – as she admitted – allow her to make her earlier dreams of travelling come true. Her argument also illustrates how one ascribes specific qualities to what would be an appropriate vacation place. For her, Iceland, in spite of its recent popularity among international tourists (compare other chapters in this book) does not necessarily meet this expectation. Cold and windy Icelandic summers do not offer the kind of rest she seeks after months of exhausting work. But, even some of the interviewees that enjoyed travelling in Iceland admitted that they need to take occasional refuge from its harsh northern climate (going to Poland or somewhere else). A few would even try to take holidays during the dark winter time and visit so-called warm countries in search of sun and daylight. Nonetheless, these kinds of return visits surly resemble what H. Peter Gray (1974) called “sunlust”, motivated tourism. Unlike “wonderlust” which is driven by the desire to experience something new and exotic, “sunlust” is directed towards relaxation. Furthermore, it is typically associated with the attractiveness of the sun, sand, and sea, since they are often perceived as most suitable sites for rest.

Tourism is considered to be one of the modern consumption practices. Moreover, travel itself frequently becomes periods of short-term, intensified consumption, undertaken to augment enjoyment, since holidays should be time of unconstrained “fun”. In other words, consumption typically embodies what is linked to the idea of being on

holiday (Wagner, 2011). In this respect, migrants' and tourists' routines converge as well. A Polish woman described to me:

When we come [to Poland – A.W.] then both the kids do a lot of shopping and I do a lot of shopping. True, ice-cream for less than eight zloty or something like this is not a big expense for us. And we do a lot of things... For example, for sure when you live in Poland you don't go to the zoo every day, you don't go to some museum, you don't go everyday to see something. We do it every day then, for sure. (...) Necessarily a visit to McDonald's. At least once during the whole trip.

Apparently, visits home are times when one can forget oneself, when one can spend money and wallow in consumption; it is a "no-thrift" time, to recall again Erik Cohen's definition of tourism. Consequently, migrants also emerge as tourists in terms of their consumption practices, such as shopping, dining out, or visiting places of amusement and interest. Clearly, savings from work in Iceland along with price differences encourage spending. Furthermore, the above-cited woman differentiates between herself and local inhabitants in the way she/they allocate/s her/their time. Although she came in purpose to see the family, it is her time away from work and she is attracted towards practices that are associated with holidays and that help to intensify pleasure. It is also quite common that Polish migrants use their visits to improve health or take care of their beauty. Again they take advantage of lower prices to engage in what could be called medical tourism and go to hairdressers, beauty salons, opticians, dentists, or doctors. Some go to sanatoriums in Poland.

Sightseeing is yet another activity shared by migrants, on their visits home, with other tourists. Many of the Poles I talked to engage in different kinds of excursion trips during their stays in Poland. Touring in Poland can be undertaken for various reasons. Often it is motivated by the will to show one's place of origin to an Icelandic spouse, partner, or friends. A Polish woman married to an Icelander with whom she had children described one of their joined trips:

I have family in the South of Poland. (...) So for example, we have rented a car to travel through Poland, to go and visit them. To show kids the family, but also to show them the Polish countryside etc.

They drove all the way from the north of Poland, where she comes from, to the south, stopping on the way to visit different places, usually identified as tourist attractions or places commonly entered by tourists. During that journey – the way she described it – they did not differ much from typical tourists, buying souvenirs or taking photographs. Moreover, during this trip she was not only a visitor but also a guide and mediator between her culture and her husband's. In rare cases, Poles become more or less formal guides for organised groups from Iceland, for instance during group trips from work places, quite popular in Iceland.

Very prominent and recurring in these interviews was the aim of travelling in Poland or visiting Polish tourist sites in order to familiarise children with their heritage and to develop their sense of belonging and attachment. Therefore, besides enabling children to meet their grandparents or other relatives, visits are also an important form of culture transmission, as illustrated by the following statement from a young Polish mother:

If I could and if there would be someone to take care of him [her son – A.W.] on the way, then I would send him alone. Because he needs it more than I. However, when I am with him, I try to show him as much as possible. The zoo. The **real** zoo. I send him to the amusement park – it is a **real** amusement part, not just few... [toys – A.W.]. I try to show him all that he will not be able to see here. (...) He learns things that he would never see here. That is why he has more knowledge about the world than some others do.

For her son, who was born and is growing up in Iceland, visits to Poland are crucial to build a connection with her home country, and to form Polish identity through direct participation and being-in-place. Her relation also shows the effort that parents often make to “present” Poland in an attractive and entertaining way, which in turn leads to access to leisure or tourist spaces. Many migrants who are concerned about bi-lingual and bi-cultural education admitted that time in Poland plays a vital role in Polish language acquisition. As she concluded, return visits enrich her son's experience, self-development, and education just like the outcomes commonly expected from travelling.

At the same time, she uses her intimate knowledge to show her son “real” places. It is interesting that the emphasis is on the “real” character of the visited sites in Poland, which may resemble the tourist striving for authenticity in the conceptualisation of tourist motivations by MacCannell (1976; cf. Cohen, 1979). The authentic is still elsewhere – outside the place of everyday residence, but located in the native land; it somehow gains authenticity through connection to the migrant past. Akin to this are what could be called sentimental tours undertaken in Poland, when migrants wish to return to places of their childhood, alone or with family. Yet, it seems that others, after years spent in Iceland, develop (novel or refreshed) interest in Polish history, tradition, and heritage as well as appreciation of the Polish landscape. A woman in her 30s, who has been living in Iceland for 12 years, noticed:

I don't know if it is related to age, but recently I like to take some excursion trips in Poland. I went for example to porcelain factory in Wałbrzych or visited the Riese Project [underground structures in the Lower Silesia build during Nazi German occupation – A.W.].

Sometimes this new enthusiasm for the place of origin can be channelled into direct promotion of the country, as in the case of another woman who mentioned that she intentionally put pictures from Poland on her wall in Facebook in order for her Icelandic friends to see its advantages. This corresponds with the empowerment practices pursued by Polish migrants in England described by Anna Horolets (2015), who present themselves as experts of the host country's leisure services to visitors from Poland; although in this case migrants use knowledge of the home country to awaken the interest of the host population.

Significantly, trips to Poland are not completely annihilating times of absence. Migrants often discover unexpected distance when coming back. Places change. People change. One can get lost in one's own home district and may need to ask for directions. One can suddenly find oneself in a situation where one does not know how to proceed, what tickets to use on a bus, where to find a chemist's or which coffee house to go to in order to meet with friends. To paraphrase Goethe (in

Rojek, 1993, p. 112)<sup>4</sup>, whenever migrants go home they come across unfamiliar objects in a supposedly familiar world. One sees changes from the position of an outside observer, which may result in a troubling feeling of being alienated, of not belonging. This can be reinforced by the responses of encountered locals as in the following case of a young man living in Iceland for five years:

“This feeling [like-a-stranger – A.W.] is my everyday life as soon the plane wheels touch the Polish soil. Exactly like a tourist. And the people around me take what I say as said by ‘alien,’ who doesn’t understand anything anymore.”

A.W.: “Why?”

“Because as a tourist, you search for attractions, pleasure etc., you don’t touch the issues that locals are absorbed in, you move on the surface of their everyday life. You don’t pay bills, you don’t struggle with offices, you’re not influenced the same way by the Polish reality as someone who lives in it. I often heard that I know nothing, since I show up and disappear.”

The above description mirrors the condition of being a tourist, in a form characterised Zygmunt Bauman as “being in a place temporarily and knowing it, not belonging to the place, not locked into the local life ‘for better or worse’” (Franklin, 2003, p. 207). Despite the efforts migrants make to maintain attachments with their place of origin, time away from home endangers their unquestioned belonging and intimate relations with local people and may render migrants to feel like tourist in their own country.

## Concluding remarks

I have presented only a small fraction of the complexity of the return visit experiences and their role in migrants’ lives, focusing only on their potentially touristic aspect. In some of their practices and behaviours migrants embody what is otherwise associated with tourism. They happen to be clients of the tourist industry, either on their way home

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<sup>4</sup> “Wherever I walk, I come across familiar objects in an unfamiliar world; everything is just as I imagined it, yet everything is new.”



or while undertaking excursion tours in Poland. Like tourists they tend to engage in intensified consumption and leisure activities of different kinds. As a result, return visits pursued by migrants, while being one of the prominent aspects of transnationalism, constitute – at the same time – a substantial sector of the tourism industry. The figures of the tourist and the migrant can stay separate on an analytical level, but in reality they often overlap and become fuzzy. Moreover, visiting home migrants seem also to challenge other dichotomies like those between being the host and the guest, home and away, or between familiar and strange. They are guests in the place that used to be, or they still consider, home, and at times they emerge as strangers where they once belonged.

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# Storytelling of Iceland: Creating imaginations of place on the basis of reading literary translations

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## Introduction

Imagination of place is a very important aspect of mundane knowledge that shapes human mobility. Touristic places are commonly created as imaginations in stories in which people are encouraged to believe. In fact, the coordinated performativity of service providers and consumers makes these imaginations temporarily true in a strictly material sense. This issue has gained the most attention in tourism literature because it is important both for tourists and the tourist industry (Winkin, 1996; Mossberg, Therkelsen, Huijbens & Björk, 2010). Less is known about the imagination of a place based on the international exchange of cultural products, especially in its informal flows (Griswold & Wright, 2004). Iceland is an exceptional place in this regard because the island, known from its wild, unique nature, which lends it touristic value, also has a uniquely rich literary tradition in which natural objects occur in different roles. In this chapter I shall discuss the problem of creating the imagination of Iceland abroad on the basis of reading Icelandic fiction. My empirical research includes both an analysis of Polish internet community reviews of Icelandic books and my interpretation of ten literary books focused on what is the Icelandic background of stories.

This interpretation is supported by a coding procedure, focused on what the writers themselves named as particularly “Icelandic.” Presentation of the empirical findings is preceded by theoretical considerations regarding translation as an important social and cultural process.

### The problem of translatability of a place

In the sociological concept of Michel Callon (1980) translation performs crucial functions in creating networks of relations, since it constitutes a necessary condition for the process of mutual influence of independent objects. Translation shapes relations carefully, placing differences of languages and meanings in the center of actors’ attention. Translation is based on a mutual definition of identities and interests of actors, allowing emergence of the network. Actors in the network are called *actants* because they could be both human and non-human in nature. They could be also material and ideational, more or less intentional and able to take initiative. Regardless of the different natures of actants, the role of human actors is especially important in any given network because they could speak and act on behalf of other actants, especially those that cannot speak and act consciously, like for example nature, nations, cultures, or their particular objects. In reference to my study, which is largely concerned with linguistic forms of translations, the sociological concept of translation could be successfully supplemented by recent achievements of translation studies, especially those of a *cultural turn*, informed by existential phenomenology, poststructuralism, and post-colonial studies (Berman, 1985, p. 199; Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999a; Venuti, 2000a, 2000b, 2006). Borrowing some ideas from this framework I will discuss how translating signs and meanings of a given place by stories is possible.

According to André Lefevere (1999, p. 75) every linguistic translation includes mediation between different code systems, where the source language is reformulated in a target language. Through socialization people learn what certain reactions should be elicited by particular textual markers expressed in their native language and that they are expected to fulfil these expectations. A translator who rewrites a foreign text in a different language must be almost as creative as the author

of the original version in order to provoke relevant responses from the recipients. Translated meaning has many determinants and different, partly contradictory, goals. To give the foreign text domestic significance, the translator negotiates the linguistic and cultural differences between two contexts and reduces many of them, establishing new sets of differences taken from the domestic context (Venuti, 2000, p. 468). As a result the foreign text is not “translated” as this has been understood traditionally, but rather rewritten and inscribed with domestic language forms and meanings. This complex discursive strategy Lawrence Venuti (2000a, p. 468) names *domestication*. Furthermore, Venuti and Antoine Berman (1985; 1992) also describe an opposite discursive process involved in translation, termed *foreignization*, which aims to preserve or restore the *foreignness* of the text, although it must be formulated in domestic registers, discourses, and styles.

Generally speaking, translating and understanding translations properly are like sailing among invisible rocks. Participants in translation processes try to come closer to the other culture but have only the tools created by their own culture, regardless how complex, heterogeneous, and dynamic that culture is. In their attempts they are similar to travellers who are invited to a given place but have to find out themselves what its unspoken rules are. In addition to perceiving the most visible elements of the foreign place, they are expected to reveal more hidden and less obvious signs and meanings, which is possible for them only when they find analogies within their own, domestic cultures (Venuti, 2000b). It is quite probable that this is the main reason that a short visit in a new place is more pleasant than a long one, because it does not require going beneath the visual surface of the place and beyond the bodily, sensual experiences it offers to strangers.

For anthropological research it is important that the effects of translations of foreign cultures are not limited to the cognitive benefits for members of the society. Venuti (2000b) argues that translation makes it possible to build communities both between members of domestic and foreign cultures and within a given society, communities that are created around particular texts and authors. What is more, members, through translations, are given a chance to supplement or to revise their cultures, values, and institutions. It can be said that this is the deepest

communicative and transforming function of literary translations. The insufficiency of one's own culture, for which people seek to compensate, is often the impulse for translating other cultures and building intercultural communities. It is possible that the desire to travel, whether realised in an imagined or a physical sense, is motivated by this need.

The ethical sense of making and appreciating translations is, according to Haraldo de Campos, that it is a reciprocal exchange rather than a one-way process. It is a form of dialogue, in which the translator is an important agent (Vieira, 1999, pp. 103-104). A translator quite often deliberately refuses to repeat what has already been presented as original, instead engaging in creative processes of reinvention, reimagination, and re-creation of the text (Vieira, 1999, p. 96). Homi Bhabha points out that translation creates a third, inter, or between space, which gives people the chance to live in a new kind of anti-nationalist and anti-polarised history (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999b, p. 6).

While sharing high expectations of the developmental potential of translations we cannot ignore their political asymmetrical engagements in power and postcolonial global relationships between national cultures. For example, Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (1999b, p. 3-4) stress the highly manipulative and charged character of translations, since they are regarded as either superior or inferior to the original, depending upon the higher or lower status of the translator and the author and the political relations between their countries. Rarely is translation considered a process of gain; more often it is referred to in a language of "loss," which places translators, translations, and their readers in lower positions relative to authors, originals, and their cultures. These remarks can only give a little insight into the huge problem of the politics of attributing authenticity and literary greatness, protecting heritage, and reviving nationalism, in which consideration of a translation as only a copy is involved. It is probably much more justified to not rely too much on the idea of an original and rather to perceive all texts as translations of other texts, originated in some respects from other cultures because of the continuous mobility inscribed in people's history. In fact, Octavio Paz considers translation as the principal means we have for understanding the world we live in (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999b, p. 3).

Keeping this in mind, in this chapter I examine the role of literary translations in building the image of Iceland in Poland. Both cultures involved in the process of translation, Polish and Icelandic, are in geographical, social, and political senses located on different edges of Europe, and have not had much direct mutual cultural influence so far. But now not only is there an increasing mobility of Poles to Iceland, but also an increasing interest in Icelandic nature and culture in Poland (Chymkowski & Pessel, 2009; *Islandia*, 2010). Therefore, it is worthwhile to ask more specific questions about the means by which imaginations and knowledge about Iceland develop in parallel to corporeal human mobility: In what way may literary translations from Icelandic to Polish be connected with forming relations between members of these two countries? What are the particular situations and contexts for these symbolic and social processes of translation?

### The Icelandic context: The importance of literary tradition

In 1955, after being awarded the Nobel Prize, Halldór Kiljan Laxness called Iceland “a book-loving country.” Johann Þórsson (2014) said similarly “I live in the land of books. Also of mountains and prettiness, but mostly books. More books are published per person in Iceland than anywhere else (about 5 per 1000 people). The culture is deeply bookish, and the question ‘read anything good lately?’ a perfectly normal conversation starter at the dinner parties.” From this perspective, it seems possible that Iceland should be read and listened to rather than only perceived visually.

Literature professor Dagny Kristjansdóttir (2009) writes that the 10<sup>th</sup> c. Eddas and the 12<sup>th</sup> c. Sagas have been of key importance in the formation of Iceland’s rich storytelling tradition. Sagas are stories that have been considered for a long time to be historical documents or at least documents partly based on facts. Owing to these kind of stories, the thousand years of Icelandic history seem to be very close to the present time. Stories give depth to current events and explain them. They are also closely related to places as they contain clear topographic references and give some explanations of particular terrain formations. Iceland’s history depicted in literature is divided into the pre-war period, characterised



by extreme poverty and dependence on Denmark, and the post-war period, characterised by freedom and prosperity (Kristjansdóttir, 2009). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century writers rejected the compulsion to maintain literary traditions going back to the sagas, managing to free themselves from those traditions to some degree. The greatest example of this tendency is Halldór Laxness, who wrote his own *Gerpla* saga without glorifying the warrior tradition. Although he was criticised for undermining national sentiments, Laxness was appreciated in the world and received the Nobel prize “for vivid epic power which has renewed the great narrative art of Iceland,” becoming an important or even central point of reference for younger authors. More recently, cultural postmodernism has allowed Icelandic writers a creative return to the tradition of sagas. Authors appreciate their philosophy, tragedy, portrayal of internal enemies, and descriptions of nature (Kristjansdóttir, 2009). It could be said that alongside stories about the country Icelanders do *storytelling about storytelling*. That is, they tell stories about what stories mean to them.

One of characteristics of Icelandic literature is its openness to the active participation of all social classes (Norðdahl, 2010). Erikur Örn Norðdahl (2010, p. 36) suggests that Icelandic literature has never been centralised, never subject to control, never reserved for the more educated or richer classes. For ages reading, telling stories, and reciting and writing have been popular and socially valued practices, and important components of social and family life (Kristjansdóttir, 2009). This made possible full participation in the public discourse to people of different genders, ages, social classes, and local groups. The tradition of writers and poets being present in local democracy also constitutes a way of looking for solutions to present problems (Norðdahl, 2010).

Literary tradition has always been important in the context of Icelandic collective identity, but now we may also observe its growing importance in the context of mobility and the intercultural encounters it occasions (Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2016). Because of existing and potential foreign interest in Iceland’s literary heritage, it is promoted by various national institutions, social and academic projects, and commercial tourist services under the general label of literary tourism (Þórsson, 2014). However, some people claim that Iceland’s literary tradition is not appreciated enough by visitors. For example, Kári Gíslason (2010)

explains that the sites of Iceland's literary past are overlooked by tourists because they are more interested in the environment and geology. In this way outsiders miss, Gíslason thinks, the chance to experience the Icelandic landscape in a way close to the perceptions of locals. Sagas remain an important part of how Icelanders view rural landscapes and perceive themselves as a nation, and saga-related travels could be a way of meeting the local culture through the environment. Emily Lethbridge (2011) writes that the "1000-year-old past described in the medieval Icelandic sagas is written into the landscape all around Iceland (...) the sagas are a living literature with an existence beyond the printed page."

### The Polish context: A migrant biography of one translator

The specific context of this study is that the corpus of Icelandic literature available in Polish has been rapidly growing in recent years, due to the translating work of one person, Jacek Godek, and due to the interest of publishers connected with development of Polish mobility to Iceland. The story of translating Icelandic literary books into Polish is closely related to the biography of their most productive translator. Besides studying the published biographic materials, I conducted an interview with Godek in his home city of Gdańsk, on June 9, 2015, in order to reconstruct the explanation of his interest in Iceland. A theatre actor, he was born in Poland in 1958. He came to Iceland with his family when he was twelve, and went to an Icelandic school for five years. Afterwards he came back to Poland, speaking perfect Icelandic, having translated some Icelandic poetry, and keeping his passion for the country and its culture. He has returned to Iceland many times. He translates literature in his leisure time, usually at night; he is highly effective in this creative activity, being limited only by the interest of publishing houses. In the space of eighteen years he has translated seventeen books. His first translation was *Devil's Island* (1997) and his second *101 Reykjavik* (2001 and 2011). As he put it during the interview, he could not bear to part with the latter book (by Hallgrímur Helgason) and give the finished translation to the publishing house, struggling to achieve the perfect linguistic form. After several years' break, from 2009 to the present he has been translating at least two books per year.

Recently he has engaged in creating a personal website dedicated to sagas, which he translates and makes audio recordings of for the Polish audience. It can be said that he has already taken part in creating a Polish community fascinated by Icelandic literature and has an ambitious plan for developing it further (Kozicki, 2015).

### The purpose of analysis, material, and method

My research is aimed at the problem of creating the imagination of Iceland in Poland on the base of reading Icelandic fiction. My intuition is that this issue might have something in common with Polish mobility to Iceland, although it cannot be proved straightforwardly. My empirical study includes both an analysis of internet community reviews and my interpretation of fiction focused on revealing the Icelandic background of stories. Internet reviews by Polish community were taken from *lubimyczytac.pl* website. Both kinds of resources concern the same selection of Icelandic books translated to Polish in the period 1957–2014.

As of 2015 the entire collection of Polish translations of Icelandic literature was approximately sixty books. I selected ten for my research, based on the date of publication, the genre and popularity of the book. The main criterion for the selection was to create a diversified sample of important books that generally represent the entirety (Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, 2003). The textual material under investigation comprises in total 3,182 pages of literary fiction. In this sample only Laxness's books, published in Polish in 1957 and 1963, were translated from Icelandic via third languages (German in the case of *Iceland's Bell* and a combination of three languages – German, Russian, and French – in the case of *Salka Valka*). One book was translated from Icelandic by Przemysław Czarnecki; the remaining seven were translated by Godek. The list of titles is attached at the end of this chapter.

The two kinds of material and methods of analysis included in the research were intended to supplement, verify, and complement each other. Internet reviews give relatively more objective information about the reception of Icelandic books in Poland, but in the same time they demonstrate the practical need of reviewers to assess books subjectively and briefly. My own interpretation is significantly more detailed and

focused on revealing the signs and meanings of the particular Icelandic background of the stories. It was supported by coding procedure. Since I gave special attention to fragments in which authors seemed to orient themselves directly to Icelandic collective identity, the main codes were: Iceland, Icelandic, Icelander, the island, the country, we, and foreign, stranger, abroad as different than in Iceland. After identifying fragments with such codes, I have abstracted and analysed them in detail. It was important that I, as the reader, was the active recipient of content and focused especially on the meanings that were new or strange for me as a member of a different socio-cultural and geographical context. While reading and experiencing episodic stories connected with the new place, simple place-related categories changed their meanings to become richer and more similar to my lived experience. In the paragraphs below I reconstruct some of such stories and descriptions that seemed to develop my understanding of Iceland as a unique natural, social, and cultural place.

### Opinions of community reviewers

As I expected, reviewers refer mostly to the literary value of the books and to the pleasure they had reading, and write less about the Icelandic context of stories, although this context is also quite frequently mentioned. Their references to Iceland will be a particular subject of concern below. Opinions of the reviewers about the Icelandic language and the quality of translations will also be taken into account as an important mediating factor in the reception of texts and a sign of direct experiencing the *foreignness* of the books and their authors.

Icelandic names are the only words that had not been translated in books, and as such they have become the most visible sign of *foreignization* in the text and at the same time the most often frequently commented on specifically Icelandic feature. One might say that Icelandic names turned into linguistic symbols of Iceland and caused many difficulties for readers, especially in distinguishing male and female characters, and in remembering them. One of the reviewers wrote that he stuttered over the Icelandic names, others declared that they almost stopped reading because they could not focus on the content, distracted by these names. Less frequently readers admitted that they simply avoided looking

at names. Some got used to them; one person wrote that she had no problems with Icelandic names and, on the contrary, was increasingly fascinated by them.

Some of the readers referred directly to the translations and appreciated the work of the translator or, less frequently, were critical of it. Their evaluations of the translation are interesting given that, as they themselves admitted, they did not know the original versions nor the Icelandic language. Thus, they based their opinions solely on their intuition and sometimes hesitated about who to blame or praise – the author or the translator – when they were not or were, correspondingly, satisfied by the language and the style. Also, unusual juxtapositions of humour and tragedy made the readers uncertain if the author was serious or ironic. Some described that they had laughed out loud, and others wrote that this kind of humour did not appeal to them at all. Nevertheless, both groups of readers seemed to be convinced that something like a distinct Icelandic sense of humour existed.

The northern atmosphere created by the authors was referred to very often as an important advantage of these novels. It is especially visible in regard to detective stories, with such statements as this:

On every piece of paper I feel the specific northern atmosphere, which fascinates and scares me a little, and yet incredibly attracts me; northern detective stories are characterised by a magic, gloomy, dark, and cold atmosphere; dark mysteries, sometimes even from the underworld and the stuffy atmosphere located in cold and windy Iceland; I wanted to get a typical, Nordic thriller, in which the cold climate of this place could be felt, and I have got that [all citations have been translated from Polish by the author].

Scandinavian literature stands here as a standard and a point of reference, which sometimes helped the readers in finding Icelandic books and encouraged them to read them. In other examples, however, having expectations connected with Scandinavian literature was a reason for complaint, when reviewers wrote that a book resembled contemporary Scandinavian literature too much, or, conversely, not enough.

Readers often reported in their reviews, quite surprisingly, that after reading Icelandic fiction they had become informed about the “real lives”

of Icelandic people and had changed their previous beliefs. They wrote, for example, that from a detective story they had learned that Icelandic society was not as lovely and wonderful as it might seem, just as if their knowledge had originated from press reports or criminal statistics. They had also found out that Icelandic society had many unresolved social problems, as if criminal or historical stories had given them hard data. From the behaviours and personalities of fictional characters they also created their imagination of “the national psyche of Iceland.” Referring to this “Icelandic mentality” one reviewer wrote:

People I know who have been in Iceland tell me that the people are nice and friendly but in books they are rude and unpleasant; the main character is as if frozen inside; she had incredible emotional control when she stayed calm in really difficult and unusual situations.

Reviewers compared Iceland and Poland, often recognizing either similarities or differences, especially the weather. They mentioned that they had found, bought, and read Icelandic books in the middle of a sunny summer or, more often, when it had been snowing and raining in Poland, which, as they described, positively influenced the believability of their imaginative journey to Iceland.

I'm allergic to the sun. I started reading when it was raining outside and it was grimey, so this was a perfect match; when the winter is outside, the white fluff is all around and the frost paints incredible pictures on the windows, with great pleasure I begin to read Scandinavian literature.

Sometimes they also made direct references to the geographical distance between Iceland and Poland and to their possible decision to go or not to go to Iceland.

I chose this book because the writer is Icelandic. The location is interesting; I have never been in Iceland and this is the reason that I read this book; after reading it the reader definitely does not want to make a trip to Reykjavik.

Some reviewers found that in regard to their personal problems and problems of their society, Iceland is like any other country, just

like their own place. This could be treated as an example of sharing universal truth among places through literary writing, translating, and reading. One of the readers wrote that the main character of the book might live in Iceland but at the same time he admitted that any reader would have known at least one family like that in his or her own social environment. The readers assumed that in these Icelandic novels they had met ordinary people, but often in “crazy situations.” One example of finding psychological and existentialist value in Icelandic stories is as follows:

The writer goes deep below the surface to explore dark corners of human nature; this is the whole world that frequently seems absurd; this kind of writing invites the reader to explore his or her own ghosts; our past enslaves us and we all struggle to break free, just like characters in this book.

\* \* \*

The presented examples show that fiction stories are reviewed on the basis of both universal literary standards and individual, subjective criteria. Through reading Iceland seems to become more accessible to Poles. What is strange and difficult for the readers, in particular Icelandic names, is sometimes negatively valued. Reading satisfaction is derived both from the originality of place as well as from familiarity of the Icelandic characters and their problems. In the next section I make more extensive references to particular books based on my own interpretation of how the Icelandic background is demonstrated by writers. The reconstruction of the scene will take more narrative forms.

### Reimagination of the Icelandic background based on fiction

There are some recurring motives and topics that reoccur regularly in Icelandic fiction regardless of the novel’s main plot. Their appearance seems to make the background uniquely Icelandic. In Kiljan Laxness’s books *Salka Valka* (1931-1932, Polish transl. 1963, marked as “sv” in following references) and *Iceland’s Bell* (1943-1946, Polish transl. 1957, marked by “di” below) the landscape of Iceland is not only extensively

but also illustratively described. Events take place in coastal villages, as well as during travels through the island's mountainous interior (sv157). The mountains and the sea and weather phenomena dominate in the landscape; the most dangerous and tragic events are related to them (sv217). The weather is paradoxical because it always changes and is invariably bad at the same time (sv63, sv97, sv215, sv235, di402). Spring is the time of the biggest joy and happiness: children recover from illnesses and problems get solved (sv144, di190). Coffee, beer, and good shoes provide help to inhabitants throughout the year (sv149, sv401, sv405). Coffee seems to have an exceptional position in everyday routines. Shoes are also symbolically very important. Shabby shoes reveal poverty; Laxness writes several times that worn out shoes are the only thing that is common for all Icelanders (di65, di110, di263, di275). Lucky is the person with waterproof boots, but usually only Danes or people who returned from abroad are that lucky. Shoes are so crucial mainly because travelling is important and difficult in Iceland (di97, di211, di338).

When sailing to Iceland, it is an impressive sight to watch how the island amazingly rises from the sea. Experiencing its unusual presence in the middle of the ocean (di368-369) is like a miracle of nature, simultaneously evoking the moment of the island's creation and reminding us of its temporariness. According to Laxness this view is essential to understanding why the most important chapters of Christianity have been written in this place. Thinking of the moment of the island's creation brings to mind not only joy and admiration but also the fear that the island will be flooded and will disappear underwater, which seems to be the worst curse for an Icelander (di101). After all, water is around and underneath Iceland, as well as frequently pouring from above. It penetrates into the interior of leaky houses, it soaks clothing and shoes. There is no way to get rid of it. The only possibility is to wait for the weather to change, but this is often a very long wait.

Trips over the sea and returns home are important events for the inhabitants. Some Icelanders take on the status of permanent travellers (sv50, sv53, sv141). This is an important identity because it gives access to events that happen overseas, and increases chances for wealth and education (sv123, di30). Foreigners are visible and important on the island, but not necessarily welcome, given their ignorance and aversion



toward Iceland (sv141). Within the island the dominant direction of travelling is from the North to the South and from the East to the West. The North is the area of hard work, poverty, and isolation (sv144). The south-western part of the island is associated with aspirations, with fulfilling dreams, and with better chances for success (di50). The weather makes travelling through the interior of the country very dangerous. In the memories of many are events where people have perished in the mountains and in the ocean, with their bodies never found. Knowing this from numerous stories creates a sense that those lost are still present in the landscape and in the emotional atmosphere of the island.

Laxness sets Icelanders the important task of remembering the better times of their history. (di42, di184, di270, di393-398, di435, di454, di457) Because they are *the people of the sagas* they are not able to forget anything, he writes. The reason for their love of stories is that the most important things happen in history and in overseas countries, as if Iceland is too small for big events. Information about what is happening sometime and somewhere comes as gossip, often unreliable, misleading, and contradictory, but still perceived as valuable and provoking extensive debates. This is because the imagination and memory contained in stories significantly improve the quality of life in Iceland. People take pride in excellent storytelling skills, in beautiful phrasing, and in extensive knowledge of books and poetry. Books are better than work because reading is a more certain route to happiness, freedom, and respect (sv84). Many characters and situations are related to sagas, poems, and books. Poetry is something quite serious and important, both for the community and for the individual. Poems are needed especially to express one's feelings. The ability to recite poems gives a dignity to the poor and uneducated that no one can take away from them. Even the drunk are interested in poems and have a love of language (sv97, sv108). Sometimes the love of books is destructive: a rural pauper buys books, instead food for the pauper's hungry children (sv242). Many people create poems and have the ambition to have them published and any criticism of a poem is painful for the identity of the author (sv241).

Regardless of the respect for Icelandic literary traditions, it seems that no one could characterise Icelanders worse than their own writers. In

*Iceland's Bell*, for example, the negative descriptions of islanders shocked me as a reader, even though they were often put into the mouth of Danish colonisers. These included: Nobody cares about the existence of such a country (124); Icelandic land is valuable for Icelanders only, for outsiders it is worthless (83); Iceland in fact is not a country and Icelanders are not humans. At best they once used to be human beings (366, 440, 129); in noble Danish company speaking about Iceland is a *faux pas* (388).

There are many examples of Danish aversion to Iceland in *Iceland's Bell*, despite the fact that Copenhagen is described as a city “built by Icelandic money and lighted with Icelandic fish oil” (367). There are also many descriptions of extreme misery, dirt, disease, and death in Icelandic settlements. For example: “When a house has two walls built from wood, it is a sign of the owners’ wealth” (168). Normally houses were made of peat, with many slots, absorbing water, and letting in the wind.

Periods remote in time, as I have already mentioned, are remembered as better and especially worth telling about, but recent tragedies and particularly difficult times of extreme poverty and destruction are also frequently written about. In many stories the role of women is important, because they often had to rely on themselves, demonstrating not only the ability to cope with extremely harsh circumstances, but often also the ability to defend and save men. What attracts attention in the Icelandic style of storytelling is that the characters show little respect toward rules of politeness and express harsh self-criticism and self-blaming instead of attributing guilt to others – all of this often mixed with humour and irony. Even descriptions of the Icelandic background seem to be radical, as a result of naturalistic expressions that create almost physical sensations of pain and disgust in the reader.

A similar style, with descriptions of poverty and difficult family life, can be found in *Devil's Island* by Einar Kárason, the first book translated from Icelandic by Jacek Godek. But in this book there are also new elements in comparison to Laxness's novels, such as the presence of numerous American soldiers in Iceland during and after the Second World War, and the visible consequences of this. As a result some Icelanders made fortunes, children were born with foreign features, barracks and blocks were built, American jeeps, strange furniture, and

other foreign objects became status symbols, and even cockroaches arrived (7-9, 12, 32, 33). The appearance and behavior of Icelanders was now described in contrast with Americans (15). The remaining army barracks became new poverty areas, with youth gangs (24, 32, 36). Einar Kárason devotes much attention to children who are especially difficult to raise (30, 35-38, 44, 50). Their births are the results of complicated sexual relationships of adults (17, 71-72). As teenagers they become grown-up themselves and often have children too early, which causes new personal and social problems. Generally children are rarely kind, partly because of their biographical traumas caused by poverty and the anomie of the post-war period, circumstances their parents can hardly hope to avoid.

In *101 Reykjavík* Hallgrímur Helgason changes to almost exclusively urban settings, especially interiors of different kinds: a bedroom, a flat, a bar, a taxi, a car, and also the psyche of the main character, Hlynur. In this novel Icelandic nature appears mainly as a view from the car's windows when Hlynur is transported through the city. It seems as if the protection of Icelanders against harsh nature has been successfully achieved. Hlynur seems to be poorly adapted to the Icelandic natural environment, sensitive to cold temperature and dampness; he interacts with the forces of nature only when he has to go from one building to another or when he gets out of the city (311-312). Apparently, nowadays Icelanders, like tourists, need tourist equipment and guidance when they are going to the mountains. Natural objects are used in Hallgrímur Helgason's writing mainly as metaphors that describe Iceland, persons, their behaviors, emotions, and relationships. Most often this includes maritime and weather phenomena; their recurring presence gives his narration an impressive character and cohesion. Examples include: Iceland itself is a "drifting village" (70), "a prison with books" (102), "waiting in a queue to the world," "full of unnecessary and unused mountains and fjords" (133); "windless days make it local" (139). It is difficult to distinguish rain, snow, and hail; all they are is simply "trash" from the sky (47, 86). The old times are remembered as when "moss growing on lava used to be people's only leisure and entertainment" (314). The main symbol for the national literary traditions is "the holy Kiljan" (257, 314). Words are "snowflakes," which could be "dispersed by the

wind” or collected as “a duvet” (28); woman’s cheek is like “a white flesh of a cod” (69); other’s cheeks are “covered by lava” (47); it is “snowing on her face” (189); her glance “changed drizzle into hail” (49); he “sailed” through the bar (20); “dropped an anchor” on the sofa (140); “the ocean of beer” (19); a glass of beer which “sank the ship” (20); everyone “drowns on one’s own bottom” (21). Language occurs in narration not only as material and a tool, but also as an important topic of dialog, and a personal and social feature. The change is that nowadays Icelandic is frequently mixed with English (30, 55) or broken by immigrants (64, 70). New important symbolic material things that play important roles in narration are for example: a TV remote control, a duvet, a cigarette, an ecstasy pill, and foreign food. Reykjavik flea markets and TV programs are spaces of cultural and consumptive variety, where Icelanders, not leaving the island, trace the diversity of the world (63). Icelanders’ problem is, in Hlynur’s view, that they watch everything but nobody sees them (126). On some world maps, like for example the one on a Pakistani TV program, Iceland is absent (125). The other national problem connected with TV is that Icelandic programs are too short and boring, focused mainly on fish and sea (71). Information about Iceland aimed at outsiders is dull, according to the main character of Helgason’s book (285).

Sjón’s *Skugga Baldur* (2003, Polish transl. 2009) represents the Icelandic poetic story genre. It reassured me that Icelanders highly appreciate the ability to express oneself with proper and beautiful speech (94). But on the other hand they do not care much about politeness and etiquette (70). The most important dangers in life are not from social interactions, so there is no need to protect oneself against others’ opinions. On the contrary, when you can lose your life in the mountains and the snow, direct and unambiguous speech is the most valuable form of communication. Correspondingly, a nice and elegant look is worthless in comparison with clothing adequate to weather conditions that provide warmth and dryness. American Icelanders as a new category of people appear in this text (100), and education abroad is presented as a basis for social prestige. My attention was drawn by the unfamiliarity of tea in everyday life and, again, the presence of books in poor peat rural houses.

Jón Kalman Stefánsson in his *Heaven and hell* (2007, Polish transl. 2010), like Sjón, visibly follows Laxness and the medieval Icelandic

literary tradition, using the genre of poetic prose and ignoring the urban environment as a setting. The ocean and mountains dominate in the landscape and, together with the wet and cold weather, can be deadly. Roads through the mountains can be easily missed, for example, when visibility is limited by fog or snowfall. People demonstrate aversion to eating fish, but reveal their love for coffee and beer. Books and the beauty of the language are crucial, even though love for books appears to be lethally dangerous (35, 36). The humiliation of people by poverty, described ironically in Laxness's books, is absent here, replaced by the dignity of fishermen and peasants.

Steinar's Bragi book titled *Women/Konur* (2008, Polish transl. 2010) contains many examples of reversals and rejections of Laxness's, Sjón's, and Jon Stefansson's styles. Like Hallgrímur Helgason, Bragi uses the urban environment and places his action both indoors and inside the psyche of the main character. He minimises the impact of nature on the story, and refers neither to the past nor the poor. The main female character, who is an American Icelander, consistently declares that she is not from here and that she does not care about Iceland. The whole story is about rape and violence directed toward her. The main similarities with earlier books can be found in a few linguistic devices and figures of speech, especially in metaphors, allegories and analogies relating to nature, as well as in the general mood of the story – the helplessness and loneliness of an individual. Bad weather, rain and snow, the sea and a glacier, the coming of darkness, which are all seen through the window, only strengthen the woman's experience of being caught inside an inhuman and hostile environment (14, 15, 100). There are not many descriptions of Icelanders beside two fragments, where they are characterised as clones: awful and clumsy interlocutors who do not respect any social conventions (16, 105). Heavy-drinking Icelandic women are described in terms of their plucked eyebrows and their makeup.

The last part of my short reconstruction of Icelandic background in fiction is based on three detective books, one by Arlandur Indriðason, *Voices* (Polish transl. 2011; marked as "a" in references), and two by Yrsa Sigurðardóttir, *Last rituals* (Polish transl. 2006; "t") and *My soul to take* (Polish transl. 2008, "d"). They will be analysed jointly. In these detective stories events often take place in touristic places like a hotel

and a spa resort used by foreigners as well as by Icelanders (15a), where immigrants work. (9t, 80t). Icelanders commonly get their education and make careers abroad (13a, 56a, 142-143a, 64t, 20w). They live mostly in Reykjavik and only on occasions travel to such natural sites. Newcomers seem to be in many respects out of place on the island because they are too joyful (196a), do not know the language, buy expensive things in tourist shops (202a, 80t) and water in bottles (25t), wear improper shoes (50a, 345d) and ask silly questions (141d). Shoes are still important to observe and comment on (53a, 165a, 166a, 23t, 250t, 279t, 285t, 107d), and coffee is the best drink, with beer reserved for the weekends (50a, 269a, 273a, 9t, 74t, 109d, 110d, 125d, 126d, 253d, 274d). Although travelling by car to the countryside would appear to be safer than travelling on foot or riding a horse, icy roads are still slippery and dangerous (124t, 127t). Many Icelandic families had lost members in the mountains or in the sea, changing the course of their lives and explaining bad things happening in the present (122-123a, 124a, 211a, 284a, 96d, 106d, 216d). Main characters are lonely and divorced; their teenage children, grown up too soon, addicted to drugs and alcohol, are a problem. They become parents themselves too early but are unable to care for their children (41a, 23d, 28d). To solve a crime, family secrets from the past have to be revealed (128a, 143a). Many people remember and refer to the times when all Icelanders were poor (210a). As language corrections during conversations are not rare, it seems that language skills are important in Iceland (20a, 80t, 126w, 142w). People have many books at home and spend much time reading (32a, 33a, 121a). Snow, water, fish, whale, heaven, and hell are frequently used comparisons and metaphors (9a, 10a, 112a, 159a, 161a, 290a). Non-Icelandic names are still rare in Iceland and perceived as odd (57a, 60a, 127a).

\* \* \*

These stories have their differences but they all fit into the Icelandic landscape, which affects the events and personal relationships described and gives the reader the feeling of being there and gaining important information about the land and the people. The process of historical and social change is also observable when we take into account the

different periods in which the books were written. Regardless of these changes there are some important themes that recur in the books, in part derived from the islandness of the country. These include its cold, wet and windy weather, the dangers of travelling through the mountains, the history of poverty, the negative social aspects of fast economic growth after the war, the importance of mobility of both Icelanders abroad and outsiders to Iceland, and the weight of the past. Among other material objects coffee and waterproof shoes carry special symbolic value in many novels. Both are ordinary things, used by people all over the world every day, but as we read Icelandic stories we become aware that there is a certain difference in their meaning, coming from historical circumstances, when surviving in Iceland was much more difficult than today. Coffee remains crucial both for sociability and the everyday routines of Icelanders, and shoes, depending on their adequacy for Icelandic weather conditions, are an important sign of the familiarity or strangeness of their wearer.

Ambivalence toward nature, which Icelanders are strongly attached to and identify with rather than admiring, is accompanied by ambivalence toward Icelanders themselves. In Icelandic books I have found numerous critical opinions and events that display the disadvantages and faults of the Icelandic people. Sometimes they are described seriously, at other times ironically, but often in a negative light. This critical stance by these authors could be probably explained by their social engagement – their intention to show contemporary social problems and juxtapose them with the Icelandic heritage.

## Conclusions

Taking pictures and creating visual imaginaries of the place seems to be common and sufficient for almost all touristic purposes. It seems also to be quite adequate to represent a picturesque landscape of Iceland. Nevertheless, this is definitely not sufficient when trying to understand the cultural and social meanings of Icelandic nature. Knowing stories might be necessary also because of the rich storytelling and literary traditions connected with this place. But when we read stories we start

a mysterious game with people's imagination. Is there anything described we could believe in?

Taking fiction as a source of knowledge about a place could be perceived as naïve. At the same time it is not necessarily totally absurd because writers themselves regularly use true features and events to make their books more realistic. For example, in interviews the authors of Icelandic criminal stories Arnaldur Indriðason and Yrsa Sigurðardóttir (Icelandic Literature Center ISLIT website) observe that not many crimes have been committed in Iceland, and that they thus had to create criminal stories and the atmosphere relevant for a crime from scratch. But in addition to the main story thus created, they included subplots and descriptions based on true events, such as those reported in the press, academic writing, or other sources. This creates a problem for readers – how to distinguish between the purely fictional and the more realistic parts? As we have seen in amateur reviews, readers make obvious mistakes in this regard. But who, including authors and translators, could distinguish between these perfectly?

My reconstructions of stories about Icelandic background and Polish opinions about Icelandic books are at their basic level about differences – not the differences between true and false but between domestic and foreign experiences described in novels. These differences are produced to a large degree by the translator, orienting his work to a Polish reader. He had to decide what differences, found reading the original, would be shown or hidden from the view of Polish readers. He also projected their reactions, using deliberately or intuitively particular patterns of Polish social norms and culture. In their interpretive work aimed to detect differences between the two cultures and environments the readers of translations could only respond to his work.

When I discussed the translation of *101 Reykjavík* with Godek I did not believe that it could be any kind of representation of Icelandic society. I said, in a patronizing tone, that its main character, Hlynur, could not be like a real Icelander. But Godek answered that while translating this book he lived in Reykjavík, regularly meeting Icelanders in bars in their leisure time; he portrayed them in *101 Reykjavík* exactly as he observed them. Then I realised that this book was not the kind of fiction that I had expected. I saw it differently from how its translator saw it; we



distinguished fictional from realistic fragments in a different way. This experience made me more aware how foreign fiction works. Translator and reader choose in good faith what to believe and what not to believe in fiction, each simultaneously creating their own imagination of place. They create, quite independently, their own imagined worlds, which later become parts of their structures of knowledge and which may be externalised and objectified during their communication with others through telling or writing (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The people who have translated and read Icelandic books, watched Icelandic films, or visited Iceland share their knowledge and assessments; chains and networks are built on the constructed imaginations of what the place is like. As Poles are increasingly interested in Iceland, this place becomes more and more an important point of reference for them. According to Haroldo de Campos, nationalism is a dialogical movement of difference (Vieira 1999, p. 103); therefore we can assume that Polish readers of Icelandic stories could begin to perceive their own background by using Icelandic standards, which represent the Western European culture to which they aspire (Horolets & Kozłowska, 2012). Thus they might become informed in some way about the strangeness of their own culture. At the same time, together with other Europeans Poles tend to perceive Iceland as an exotic place (Bachórz, 2016), which moves their position relatively more to the centre. This ambiguity could give their national identity dynamics, allowing further strategic moves in parallel to Polish corporeal and imaginative literary journeys.

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# Disgusting shark meat and the taste of North: Icelandic food in the “mouth” of Polish tourists and migrants

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## Introduction

This paper explores culinary themes as a component of Polish written narratives on Iceland. It seeks to answer the question: what are the representations of Icelandic food constructed by Poles travelling to Iceland and staying there for some period of time? Notions assigned to food cultures in connection to tourism and migration, especially questions about individual bodily experience and its links to culturally shaped discourses on places, are the main area of interest here. The general goal is also to investigate relations among food discourses, geography, spatial imagination, mobility, and identity issues.

The analysis presented in this article is based on Polish travellers' and migrants' writing on Iceland. It focuses primarily on contemporary publications published in books and journals; however, they are compared to selected historical texts (from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), which serve as a context for the analysis. Accounts published during the socialist times were used in similar way – as a point of reference for comparisons. Printed materials in general – whether historical or contemporary – did not turn out to be rich in culinary topics. Therefore various forms of on-line materials were examined (personal

blogs, travelogues, short articles on travel networking sites, guidelines for tourists and migrants, and other hybrid genres of internet material, both bottom-up and professional). The complete list of sources used in the analysis is to be found at the end of this chapter. This study is not quantitatively conclusive – instead its aim is to interpret different ways of speaking about food in the context of Polish – Icelandic mobility and intercultural relations.

The conclusions presented in the paper are discussed in thematic, not chronological order; nonetheless the time axis is indicated when needed. One should also remember the findings do not apply directly to the sensual experiences as such, but rather to their transformations into written forms. This means that the paper deals with meanings and usages of food. Class differentiation was not included in the analysis, but it may be assumed that educated and better situated migrants and tourists were overrepresented among the authors. Very important in the context of the whole book is also the fact that in some cases it is difficult to identify the genre of the text, since migrants' and tourists' perspectives are often blurred. This contributes to one of this book's questions, about defining the borders between these two modes of mobility. In this chapter it is assumed that in certain circumstances tourism and migration may be inscribed in the same interpretation frame, since some of their aspects are influenced by similar cultural processes.

### Food, identity, and imagined geographies

The individual meaning of culinary experience as connected to the project of self is strongly underlined by scholars. Food, situated between nature and culture, being literally incorporated into the body, is often linked to identity issues (Fischler, 1988; Hermansen, 2012; cf. Cohen & Avieli, 2004) and as such is eagerly conceptualised within a mobility frame. For example, taste and smell are seen as gaining importance in the tourism experience. Culinary tourism is understood as using food to explore cultures and ways of being (Molz, 2007). "Gazing with the tongue" (Molz, 2007) overcomes a hegemony of "tourist gaze" (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Everett, 2008; cf. Urry, 2002), since it strongly contributes to the authenticity of the experience (Wieczorkiewicz, 2008). "Local"

food travels with tourists and, like other mobile objects, becomes an agent mediating between dwelling and travelling (Lury, 2003). Moreover, as Jennie Molz in her analysis of round-the-world tourists, notes, “It [culinary tourism] is not necessarily about knowing or experiencing another culture through food but rather about using food to perform a sense of adventure, curiosity, adaptability and openness to *any* other culture” (2007, p. 79). According to this perspective, symbolic meaning is often connected not to food itself, but rather to people’s encounters with culinary products.

Migration studies also conceptualise culinary topics. On the one hand food is a tool to draw social distances between “us” and “them” in order to sustain social identities. On the other hand, food is used to talk in a positive way about diversity, multiculturalism, and cross-cultural exchange. It often mediates between hosts’ and newcomers’ societies and provides a ground for mutual adaptation. The issue of foreigners creating food industries in the receiving country, as well as questions about the stability or change of both newcomers’ and natives’ food cultures under the influence of migration have been raised as well (Gabaccia, 2005). Using food in the re-creation of home has also been discussed by scholars (Mata-Codesal, 2008).

There is a strong ambivalence built into the relation between food, places, and cultural representations. Food is ambiguous: simultaneously local and global. Bearing the notion of authenticity and sometimes being protected by state politics, it is considered to be closely connected to places – even “nationalised.” It is used in ceremonial and everyday nation-making practices (DeSoucey, 2010; Hermansen, 2012; Mincyte, 2011; Rybicka, 2014; cf. Edensor, 2004). At the same time it is seen as mobile or even displaced when easily transported physically and symbolically through cultural flows and networks (Lury, 2003; Molz, 2007; cf. Cook & Crang, 1996). This is a reason why food is not only an individual issue. It becomes rich in supra-individual meanings and may be linked to spatial questions of locality and displacement (Cook & Crang, 1996).

Food may be seen as part of wider discourses on places and space, helping to define and move intercultural borders or distances, as well as to build collective identities (Hermansen, 2012). Claims about food

are perceived as “unquestionable” and “objective,” regardless of how arbitrary they are, thanks to the impression that eating preferences are somehow “biological.” Discourses on imaginative geographies are shaped through establishing linkages between food, places, and routes (Molz, 2007). Thus not only is the individual dimension of transforming multisensual experience into discourses interesting for social research, but so is the role of food in drawing “culinary cartography” (Rybicka, 2014). Individual narratives mediate between body, identity, and imagery about Iceland. The relation is bidirectional: imagined geography is drawn thanks to bodily experience and bodily experience is shaped by imagined geography. Sensuality leads to construction of both self and space (Rybicka, 2014, p. 130).

The dynamics of internal (national) and external perspectives on food in connection to places are also an important dimension. The ongoing process of constructing narratives about one’s own food within Icelandic society interacts with external interpretations. The context of mobility makes these two perspectives comparable. Icelandic narratives on food are undoubtedly part of the process of constructing national identity. As such, they are also inscribed in international mobility networks through individual practices, activities of entrepreneurs, and official politics (Haraldsdóttir & Gunnarsdóttir, 2014; Schram, 2011; cf. Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2009). For example, the less than obvious usage of tradition-based “scary” meals as an identity tool has been studied by Kristinn Schram, who shows how migrants and Icelandic institutions abroad make use of tradition-based images and performances connected to national food, ironically processing atrocity and scarcity narratives (2011). Most importantly, Schram’s study shows that stereotypical representations of food do not have to be used literally as a “realistic” descriptive tool. On the contrary, they can be applied with irony and deliberate exaggeration, while still reproducing long-term images or serving as an identity-shaping tool.

However, we must pay attention not only to Icelandic discourses on national cuisine, but also to wider notions of the North and of things Nordic. The concept of transnational Nordic identity as something different from the rest of Europe (Hermansen, 2012) is included in this. In the field of cuisine an attempt to move towards gourmet cuisines



rich in vegetables and herbs, as well as towards incorporating notions of simplicity, purity, and health, has been made in Iceland and other Nordic countries. The best known example is the New Nordic Cuisine Manifesto and its accompanying project. This manifesto was created in 2004 by a group of Scandinavian chefs and food professionals in order to renovate the traditional image of Nordic countries. It has gained political support, providing the basis for promoting regional foodstuffs as part of tourism destination offerings (Haraldsdóttir & Gunnarsdóttir, 2014; Nordic Council of Ministers, 2008). It is interpreted as a modern version of constructing a transnational “imagined community” of Nordic countries (Hermansen, 2012). But it may be also perceived as a redefinition of Nordic food in order to make it acceptable by middle-class societies. This is also an interesting example of constructing a “proper” or “desirable” version of a national culinary heritage. This process is made possible by the duality of ideas of the North: simultaneously dystopian and utopian (Schram, 2011). Modern imagination chooses the latter and reinterprets tradition according to its own needs. As Haraldsdóttir and Gunnarsdóttir state, “Icelandic products, tourism as well as water, lamb, fish, and designer clothes, are framed and branded in the context of a pure and unspoiled northern nature” (2014, p. 2). The authors also notice that food has become an important destination actor in national tourism policy, while Nordic cuisine imagery and discourse have contributed to the intentional building of a (new?) Nordic identity (Haraldsdóttir & Gunnarsdóttir, 2014, p. 2), deriving from “purity” and “authenticity” rather than “savageness.” It is interesting to see if and how Icelandic food is perceived by visitors and newcomers, who – on the one hand – are the designated recipients of the commodified message, but – on the other – have their own biases derived from their home culture, as well as restrictions arising from both financial and identity reasons. If Iceland is capitalising on nature (Haraldsdóttir & Gunnarsdóttir, 2014), are Polish tourists and migrants receiving the message and “buying the offer”?

## The postcolonial frame, Borealistic pattern, and Polish descriptions of Iceland

Narratives and representations of food as part of wider cultural discourses are influenced by collective memory as well. Imaginative geography is shaped not only by the current situation, but even more so by deeply rooted narratives about “us” and “them,” “here” and “there.” Iceland has been classified as on the margin of Europe (Loftsdóttir, 2012), which generally is the case for the European “North” (Hansson, 2011). As periphery, it has been subjected to discursive processes similar to those applied to other European margins.

The term Borealism, created as analogous to Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism, is derived from the Latin “borealis” (meaning the North). According to some scholars it should be understood as a generalization-based distinction: cultural practices involved in exoticising the inhabitants of the North (Schram, 2011). As in Orientalism, the area in question has been perceived in two partly contradictory ways: one emphasising the unpleasant remoteness from civilization, which carries with it darkness or savageness, and another emphasising the felicity and virtue that derive from the absence of modernity’s negative influence. An ambivalent romantic wildness and a notion of the unknown are also components of both Orientalism and Borealism. Descriptions of the North as a place of “country people and rural life as ‘more real’, more dependable, and more in touch with the important things in life – generally more authentic” (Hermansen, 2012) resemble the kind of imagery used to describe the East. The idea of an uninhabited and passive nature dominating over culture is part of the picture too. Some of these notions are still “in play” in contemporary image making (Gunnarsdóttir, 2011).

Even though we are not talking literally about colonial power relations, a postcolonial frame is useful, allowing us to grasp the contradictory character of the images mentioned above. The idea of colonialism on the margins makes this even more ambiguous (Loftsdóttir, 2012). Iceland has occupied an ambivalent location inside the postcolonial frame throughout history, which makes its position still unstable and situational. Kristín Loftsdóttir focuses on the tension of whether Iceland

is or is not civilised: she portrays Iceland as symbolically subjugated and orientalised on one hand, and central and dominant on the other (2012). Heidi Hansson (2011), in turn, notices that since at least the nineteenth century the European North has had both anti-modern and modern characteristics; its characterization as progressive has derived from the same features as its marginality (such as freedom to build a new social order or the lack of social restrictions in relation to gender roles). This resulted in a dual image of Nordic countries, still witnessed today, as well as in the immanent tension between nostalgia and modernity.

For a long time historical relations between Poland and Iceland were not strong enough to produce mutual entanglements that influenced identity issues. The physical distance did not foster spatial contact and the geopolitical situation did not lead to strong interdependencies. Iceland has not played a significant role in Polish imagery, except as a mythical space, even though this situation has changed slightly after Iceland became a destination for Polish labour migration (Napierała & Wojtyńska, 2011; Wojtyńska, 2011). Nevertheless, Iceland as perceived by Poles may still be an interesting case: its perception is inscribed in wider power relations, going beyond these two countries (cf. Loftsdóttir, 2012). It may be treated as a proxy for Polish concepts about the North in general, which, in turn, contribute to the creation of an imaginative spatial grid and play a role in the symbolic location of Poland. Although on a lesser scale than in the case of East, representations of the North may be perceived as an important factor in Polish “games” with the center-periphery dilemma, as well as with modernization issues.

The complex and ambivalent location of Poland in the West/East axis has already been well described (cf. e. g. Jedlicki, 2000; Waldstein, 2002; Zarycki, 2004). Western and Eastern reference points have been very important in the process of Polish national identity formation, which has been described as hybrid in relation to both West and East (Janion, 2006). The West often served as a benchmark and a “difficult to catch up with” object of aspiration, while the Slavic or post-Soviet East became the area to lord it over (mostly symbolically). At the same time the East served as a tool for Poles’ own westernization, since Poles could identify themselves as “more Western” through comparison with the East and “nesting the orientalism” (Kuus, 2004). However, in Polish

culture Western influences were also seen as an unwanted external impact and as a kind of colonization (Zarycki, 2004), while the East could be perceived as something very close, a “forgotten” part of Polish identity, sometimes bearing the notion of anti-modern resistance (Janion, 2006). A twofold, ambivalent location inside the postcolonial frame was assigned to Polish consciousness. These elements are also reflected in Polish tourist discourse: the oriental clichés applied to the countries of the former USSR have been interpreted as a strategy for defining Poles’ own relationship to Europe, as a way to (re)construct a new identity after the political transformation from socialism to capitalism (Bachórz, 2013; Horolets, 2013). In the Polish context the category of the North has been less evident, but not entirely insignificant.

East and North to some extent have literally overlapped in Polish spatial imagination. On the one hand, for a long time the Russian Empire was not perceived as “East” in Polish culture. Even up to the nineteenth century it was seen instead as located in the far North, carrying with it notions of cold and darkness (Niewiara, 2006). On the other hand, Polish historical descriptions of Iceland fit the oriental pattern to a certain extent (Chymkowski, 2009). For instance, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Polish travellers explicitly used associations with Islamic countries while describing Iceland as they saw it for the first time. There were even comparisons of Icelandic scenes with the Mediterranean landscape (2009). The reason for this was, according to Chymkowski, the lack of other discursive tools in the Polish symbolical universum (2009). He demonstrates that Iceland had not yet been textually processed in mid-nineteenth century Polish culture. This is why travel writers eagerly used ready-made clichés, derived from a different but somewhat similar context, as they transformed their experiences into text. They constructed Iceland as an exotic, distant periphery not just in terms of physical distance. Their diagnosis of cultural provincialism and poverty went hand in hand with a perception of mystery, uniqueness, and anxiety. Iceland was portrayed as a poor country, as a society beyond history, where it was nature not culture that was to be admired. The North took over some properties of the oriental East, which was better known and well-described in Polish culture. Orientalism and Borealism merged into one.

For example Maurycy Komorowicz (1908) in his travelogue wrote about the “horrible North,” where lazy peasants lived within an empty landscape. According to the author, the Icelandic view was marked by a hopeless grey sky, merciless emptiness, deathly silence, bare grey boulders, leaden clouds, and stone desert. He also observed that all life on the island had expired. This did not keep him from comparing snowy deserts to images of gold sand, palms, and marble statues of gods (sic!). At the same time he described his home landscapes as characterised by groves, fields, starry sky, sun, and light, thereby making a connection between himself and Europe, while putting Iceland beyond the common European space (Komorowicz, 1908). In other words, Oriental clichés were used not just to describe the landscape, but also to draw the borders between “us” and “them” for the purpose of Poles’ own Europeanization.

Tadeusz Nalepiński (1914), in turn, compared the Icelandic landscape to the Polish-Lithuanian borderland and Siberia, both of which are somehow close and yet at the same strongly orientalised in Polish culture (cf. Bachórz, 2013). Another Polish writer, Ferdynard Goetel (1928), portrayed Iceland as an ambivalent country, where he described the high level of education and simultaneously used the quasi-oriental figures. He claimed a strong difference between Icelandic and “European” ways of living, noticed an exoticism of the language (“you have to be prepared in advance that you will be understood with more difficulties here than on the coasts of Africa or the islands of the Pacific Ocean”), and underlined the grandeur of the Icelandic past as compared to the present (Goetel, 1928, p. 125-126). (That last tendency is a very typical feature of Orientalism.) He also focused on nature, perceiving it to be as pristine and imposing as in Africa or Asia. Motifs of Iceland as a magic fairy-tale space were also present. At the same time Goetel clearly associates Iceland with the “pure North.”

Anna Wojtyńska, carrying out research among contemporary Polish migrants in Iceland, observes that even today some elements of this picture are to be found. Iceland is described as a totally unknown country (Wojtyńska, 2009), often exoticised, perceived through the prism of nature or lack of culture. Some of the descriptions still fit the orientalising pattern. The book written by migrant, Mirosław Gabryś (2010), can be an example of this perspective. This author, describing

his own experience of living and travelling in Iceland, not only repeats the well-known clichés of emptiness, freedom, a society without history, and the superiority of nature over culture, but also often focuses on the alleged lack of manners he witnesses there, portraying transgressions of bodily borders (such as overusing alcohol or belching). He is not the only one to use such images of nature and the body dominating over culture (Węclawiak, 2013; cf. Wojtyńska, 2009). Interestingly, it turns out that contemporary narratives tend to correspond with the oldest narratives in terms of using orientalisng techniques, while those published under socialism did not have this tendency (cf. Bogucki, 1970; Marciniakówna, 1986). It seems there is no strong or obvious connection between the level of actual cultural links and the tendency to exoticise the culture.

However, to make things even more complicated, it must be remembered that the idea of orientalism has its roots in the conceptualization of power relations between centre and periphery. Iceland today – as a receiving country for Polish labour migrants and as a tourist destination often inaccessible for economic reasons – would be seen by Poles rather as a part of the Western European centre rather than as periphery. The immanent features of tourism discourse based on romanticising nature and province can be only a partial explanation for this. Strategies of orientalisng the Occident, as a result of migration, have already been problematised and framed by the postcolonial perspective in the context of Polish migration to the United Kingdom (Horolets & Kozłowska, 2012). Iceland with its “borealis burden” seems to be even more susceptible to such strategies.

### Invisibility and lack of taste

Iceland is not a destination for culinary tourism, at least not in the narrow sense of the word. As one essayist notes: “Nobody goes to Iceland for the food” (Kinder, 2015). The material analysed for this chapter seems to confirm this statement. Culinary topics did not turn out to be either a central or a very visible part of Polish travel and migrant texts on Iceland. On the contrary, there are entire accounts (both historical and contemporary) that contain at most a single mention of eating.

This includes extensive and detailed first-person narratives of travel or work in Iceland, published in book form, over a long period of time (cf. Bogucki, 1970; Morzycka, 1896; Pankiewicz, 2012; Szymkiewicz, 2012; Węclawiak, 2013). While writers eagerly focus on other aspects of their experience, food is described either as an invisible part of the traveller’s daily routine (e. g. drinking coffee at the hotel) or as a part of an exceptional situation (e. g. visiting food factories or commenting on the offerings in shops). Sometimes the specific travel experience (such as advanced mountain climbing) explains the lack of contact with Icelandic food culture (Woźnicki, 1991). Moreover, one can rarely find portrayals of Icelandic hospitality, of visits to Icelandic homes, or of hosts and guests dining together (for exceptions: cf. Bogucki, 1970; Nalepiński, 1914). There are so few comprehensive accounts of eating that the aim of this research may be put in question. Nevertheless, this lack may also be significant, especially if it becomes an “empty background” for a few very vivid and repeatable images, which will be analysed in the next section of the paper.

Culinary topics appear at least a little more often in publications available on internet sites that claim to describe Iceland in quasi-ethnographic or guidebook manner. One example is a website that has a “cuisine” section with a description of Icelandic food evolution accompanied by traditional recipes, such as recipes for smoked lamb, stewed fish with potatoes, stewed cod, cookies, and bread (<http://www.islandia.org.pl>). Food is also mentioned in more personal on-line materials such as blogs or travel narratives, where it becomes part of general descriptions of a foreign country, one of the “interesting facts” or “curiosities.” It is particularly visible when it seems somehow “traditional,” for example in the context of feasts, festivals, open-air fairs, and celebrations. In the example below, the tradition-based food event is briefly mentioned as one picture caption among various snapshots of life in the country of migration: “Súpudagur – a meat soup day – was celebrated as it is every year. Volunteers lined up in long queues, tens of meters long. Of course, there was not enough for everyone” ([http://www.d-islandia.blogspot.com/2011\\_10\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.d-islandia.blogspot.com/2011_10_01_archive.html)). Another blog describes the Fiskidagurinn (fish festival) in the city of Dalvík:

Dozens of stalls with fish casseroles, pizzas with pieces of fish, a few meters of grills for fish-burgers, and everywhere the residents of Dalvík smiling, bustling around, distributing meals to all who are interested. Music is playing from the large stage in the middle of the square, somewhere around the corner a show for children is taking place, and a bit further a butcher – in front of a fascinated crowd – is carving a mighty Greenland shark. Dancing ladies peel shrimps, a singing old man bends over a bowl of soup, and somewhere in the middle of all this are we – charmed, amused, and indecently replete. (<http://www.tuitam.net/2013/08/fiskidagurinn-mikli-czyli-swieto-ryby-w-dalvik/>)

However, such food descriptions are not in-depth, extensive, or detailed. On the contrary, they appear tangential or an afterthought. The reasons why these accounts tend to show little interest in culinary themes may include not only its relative “unimportance” when compared to other types of activity undertaken in Iceland (especially nature tourism and work activity), but also the perception that the encountered food is not tasty enough. “Taste” itself is a category that has been “naturalised,” and is seen as biological, while at the same time it is translated into discourse and really should be seen as processual and culturally constructed (Davis, 2009). Icelandic cuisine has a long tradition of being perceived by Polish visitors (such as Daniel Vetter in the seventeenth century) as tasteless as a result of using no spices and no salt (Vetter, 1997). In contemporary travelogues and migrants’ accounts one may also find similar remarks on the lack of taste and the indistinct character of Icelandic food. For example Grzegorz Gawlik states that the food served in restaurants has no taste and no smell, and may be judged as good “only by the British.”:

Expensive, not very large portions (at least from the male point of view), often with a terribly bland [vague, indistinct] taste. Maybe for the average British citizen something like this would be tasty, but for a Pole, accustomed to good Polish cuisine, with its richness and its distinct flavours, food in Icelandic restaurants can be a problem. It is a waste to pay good money for something that you eat with little pleasure. In such situation, it is better to eat an Icelandic hamburger. (<http://www.grzegorzgawlik.pl/blog/item/438-gdy-zgłodniejesz-na-islandii-maskonur-hakarl-skyr-stek-z-wieloryba-islandzkie-potrawy.html>)



Mirosław Gabryś (2010), who writes from a migrant’s perspective, expresses the opinion that it is impossible to cook soup in Iceland, since the “proper spices” are unavailable in stores. Statements on this tastelessness can be extended to explain the claim of “no food at all.” By stating that “there is nothing to eat” in Iceland Gabryś (2010) means it is impossible to find good enough foodstuffs. This can eventually become a diagnosis of a lack of culture and reflects anthropological discussions about edibility as a group construction.

These authors also emphasise the Americanization of Icelandic cuisine. Some Polish migrants and tourists judge Icelandic food as insufficiently local and based mainly on global fast-food global products. The global-local axis is expressed in a perceived opposition between originality and imitation. These tourists and migrants see Icelandic cuisine as lacking its own roots, as borrowed, as an imitation, as coming from outside instead of inside within Icelandic society (“In Iceland almost everything is imported” – one of the authors states [grzegorzgawlik. pl]). These views may be derived from a perspective that sees Icelandic society as not independent enough to produce its own culture and thus dependent on external influences. The Western status of Icelandic culture would thus be seen as secondary.

The perspective of tourists and migrants includes various paradoxes concerning the global-local issue. While talking about American-style meals, some authors imply that food should not be universal; they expect it to arise from the natural resources and culture of the place. This is similar to a “primordial approach” (Hermansen, 2012). The expectations of Polish newcomers in Iceland, especially tourists, clearly follow this logic of differentiation of places, cultures, and cuisines. For instance, two different ways of describing the same type of foods (in this case, “local” desserts) may be juxtaposed, both of them inscribed in the same frame. The first one focuses on traditions as something people are obliged to follow (especially if they live at a tourist destination) and the second one, just the reverse, in which “local” meanings are assigned to global and universal meals even though they lack traditional roots:

When I said in various places that I would like to have a traditional Icelandic dessert, almost always I heard that they do not have such

a thing and they do not even know what it might be. A number of cakes were behind the counter, but **none of them traditional** (servings cost from 400 to 1000 crowns, 11.60 to 29 zlotys). Almost all recipes came from somewhere else and, although they were edible, you will get better pastries in any Polish pastry shop. (<http://www.grzegorzgawlik.pl/blog/item/438-gdy-zgłodniejesz-na-islandii-maskonur-hakarl-skyrstek-z-wieloryba-islandzkie-potrawy.html>)

And here is something that is not necessarily a culinary revelation, but the most adorable café I have found in Iceland – a little place in Isafjordur called Bræðraborg Café, where the cakes are baked daily by the passionate owners, a place managed as if for their friends by people who believe that even at the back of beyond it is possible to create a cosy place, where locals would drop in and travellers would visit to discuss their planned trips to the nearby Hornstrandir. **Even a simple chocolate-banana cake, served with strong black coffee, tasted differently there than anywhere else.** (<http://www.domithephotoblog.blogspot.com/2013/03/wszystkie-smaki-islandii.html>)

Assigning culinary products to geography is a universal mechanism, observed not only in the Polish-Icelandic context. However, in this case the economical asymmetry between home and host countries interacts with this universal tendency. The fact that authors of these travel narratives are most likely budget tourists and that Icelandic prices are high for Poles makes their expectation of “difference,” “locality,” and “tradition” especially difficult to accomplish. Thus fast food – preferably produced and sold outside the global chains – earns positive assessments, and is sometimes described as “special” and “typical” of Iceland – different than anywhere else and thus local. Food that is potentially disappointing may still be certified as local: “Pylsur is a regular hot-dog. But buying it in an unusual place makes it taste better” (<http://www.co-jest-doktoru.blogspot.com/2008/07/islandzkie-jedzenie.html>). Localness is not only expected, but also induced and constructed using the available components.

Yet the tension between global and local indicates another dimension of Poles’ experience of the Icelandic food culture. At one migrant’s blog one may read the statement:

The British Channel 4 came up with the idea that the Icelandic diet is one of the best in the world. ... The fattest nation in the world has the best way to eat in the world. Empty laughter. (<http://www.islandiablog.blogspot.com/2014/07/megrun.html>)

That statement is followed by a diagnosis of the average Icelandic diet as full of sugar, sweets, carbonated beverages, and fast food, which – in turn – leads to an epidemic of obesity similarly to that in American society. Later the author proposes an explanation of this apparent contradiction: according to him Icelandic society is divided into two parts representing two attitudes towards local and global food. Some people, indeed, reject the “original” and “retro” Icelandic diet, while this is the food British TV calls healthy. The quoted passage also expresses the paradox of defining “authentic” and “unauthentic”: fast food is perceived as the everyday face of local culinary culture, but not a “proper” one. Therefore the opposition between authentic and unauthentic food is defined not by frequency and typicalness of food habits, but rather by time flow (“retro” means authentic) and by lack of food pollution caused by external additives; authentic means using “one’s own,” “natural” resources.

At the same time the author of this blog accuses Polish migrants of not appreciating that “proper” Icelandic cuisine, replacing it by artificial (understood as full of chemical additives) food brought from home. Financial constraints (we assume) and especially the search for familiar home-like food keep them from appreciating the “authentic” type of food. This, in turn, allows the author to play the role of expert, going deeper into local everyday life – in terms both of not sticking to old food habits and of not judging by appearances. Food is thus used in two ways, to distance the author from “the majority” of Polish migrants’ habits and opinions, but also to distance the author from an undesired type of authenticity.

However, the ambiguity between fast food encountered in the context of mobility and the necessity of trying “real” national food also has another dimension. “American,” “global” food actually makes it possible to endure excessive distances between one’s own food and “their” food by replacing the latter with easily acceptable meals. It may simply serve as a safe “normality” in situations where “local” food is expected to be

peculiar, strange, and even disgusting. Thus, some ways of mentioning global food paradoxically serve as a tool to confirm the perception of far-reaching differences between food cultures. For instance, one of the authors, after listing peculiar Icelandic meals, states that visitors often resign from the wide choice of local delicacies and enjoy more “normal” regional food, such as smoked lamb with potatoes. Further the same author states:

Today, according to the needs of tourists, Icelandic cuisine is modified – chefs try to make traditional dishes as edible as possible for visitors. Fortunately, instead of seal fins or ram testicles, one may also have a reliable pizza or hamburgers with fries. (Żurawska, 2011. <http://www.etraveler.pl/>)

Another example can be found in the quotation below:

Except of as questionable delicacies as puffin ... and rotten shark ..., you can also enjoy more normal things in Iceland. The main roads are dominated by fast food places: hot dogs, hamburgers, French fries, open-faced toasted sandwiches, pizzas, fish and chips, and soups. (<http://www.grzegorzgawlik.pl/blog/item/438-gdy-zglodniejesz-na-islandii-maskonur-hakarl-skyr-stek-z-wieloryba-islandzkie-potrawy.html>)

Therefore mentioning fast food in Polish texts about Iceland may be interpreted as a way of defining Icelandic food culture as “inedible” and “repulsive.” Finally it turns out that Icelandic gastronomy is not only seen as “invisible” and not worth mentioning (such as when it is completely omitted), but also is described as bearing strong symbolic meanings.

“Hyper-taste,” exoticization, and personal disgust

In spite of some claims that it is not distinctive enough, in other contexts Icelandic food is described as extremely distinctive and indeed too “strong” to handle. Instead of having “no taste” (as described above) it has a “hyper-taste.” It is more than distinctive – it is different, and the difference is defined as vast, significant, and sometimes unacceptable. Discourse on Icelandic peculiarities and uniqueness is evident in tourists’ and migrants’ interpretations of their gastronomic experiences, and is

often one of the justifications for including eating experiences in texts. For instance one of the on-line sources defines food products available in Icelandic shops as “wonders” (<http://www.wygrywamzanoreksja.pl/tag/islandia/>). Another author writes that Icelandic food is simply “strange,” meaning not just peculiar, but also unknown and impossible to describe. He admits to not being able to decide whether or not he likes it, since his competence is not adequate when confronted with such an unknown reality (<http://www.co-jest-doktoru.blogspot.com/2008/07/islandzkie-jedzenie.html>). This is clearly reminiscent of the position of nineteenth century travellers to Iceland, who did not know how to describe the Icelandic landscape: their cognitive helplessness and inability to find adequate discursive tools made them resort to oriental clichés (Chymkowski, 2009). The exoticization of Icelandic cuisine seems to link the oldest and the newest texts, while those written in the twentieth century emphasise the difference between food cultures less (cf. Bogucki, 1970).

The images of “strange food” in Polish accounts are not surprising and do not differ from popular representations, easy to find both in widespread tourist discourse and in the inner identity narratives (cf. Haraldsdóttir & Gunnarsdóttir, 2014; Schram, 2011). The texts – when they refer to food – mainly describe repeatable peculiarities such as cured shark meat (*hákarl*), puffin meat, pickled seals’ fins, sheep’s head (*svið*), ram’s testicles, pudding made out of sheep liver, and other meals made of animals’ intestines. The list is rather short and based on very well recognised symbols, simultaneously transforming the experience of food into collecting unusual souvenirs:

Another rarity is meat, fat, and blood sewn into a sheep’s stomach called *slátur* [slaughterhouse] or *bló mörz* – blood sausage with tallow, as well as sheep testicles pickled in whey. (Czarnecka, 2008. <http://www.podroze.gazeta.pl>)

Being in Iceland and not seeing the Golden Circle is like not trying the rotten shark. I still remember the taste... (<http://www.co-jest-doktoru.blogspot.com/2008/07/golden-circle.html>)

During the journey one has to try different local “inventions” and I have to admit that puffin is very average. (<http://www.grzegorzgawlik.pl/blog/>

item/409-islandzkie-maskonury-to-przemile-ptaki,-ale-czy-smaczne.html)

Except for a few exceptions such as *skýr* (a diary product similar to yogurt), the dishes mentioned often teeter on the verge of shocking, and are described using blood and flesh images. Worth noting is the fact that these rarely involve the more “sophisticated” specialties of vegetable origin, such as Icelandic herbs, cakes with Icelandic moss, preserves made of angelica (<http://www.tuitam.net>), moss tea, or rye bread (<http://www.domithephotoblog.blogspot.com>).

Various difficulties in accepting foreign food by tourists have been described by Cohen and Avieli (2004), who emphasise that culinary experience can be not only an attraction, but also an impediment while travelling. They stress various transformations local food has to undergo to become acceptable for tourists, since taste – unlike vision – constitutes a direct risk for the tourist’s body. They also express the opinion that a neophobic attitude towards food is more typical for destinations perceived as remote, mysterious, and dangerous. Expressing aversion towards some meals, therefore, would be an indicator of cultural distances and civilisational asymmetries.

Nevertheless a sensory experience of dislike or disgust caused by smell and taste does not simply mean something must be avoided. Such experiences are also eagerly reported by authors of Polish texts on Iceland, who link these experiences to their discourse on Iceland itself. In one of the first historical Polish travelogues we read: “As for me, based on my own experience, besides disgusting salted meat and fish, old cans, tasteless milk and porridge, there is nothing to be had on farms” (Komorowicz, 1908, p. 31). This quotation juxtaposes two dimensions of “bad food”: lack of taste and the disgust caused by “hyper-taste.” Highlighting one’s own experience is significant here. In contemporary accounts food often becomes purely a personal experiment or adventure with symbolic meaning. As Molz states, culinary tourism “becomes an ingredient in an identity performance that is less about experiencing the local culture than it is about exploring the boundaries of these travellers’ own bodies and cultural identities” (2007, p. 86). Difficult and unpleasant sensual experience thus ceases to be unpleasant when

redefined in terms of overcoming risk or of personal bravery (cf. Bachórz, 2013, pp. 192–200). However, this individual sense of adventure still requires cultural images; in this particular case it is fed by the notion of the North, as described earlier.

The motifs of sickening, abominable, or even liminal food (e.g. “The shark was disgusting. No more shark. Yuck!” [<http://co-jest-doktoru.blogspot.com/2008/07/piatkowe-wieczory-w-reykjaviku.html>]) together with the emphasis on how the narrators overcame physical disgust are used in the texts in two important ways: as a sign of heroism or as evidence of the ability to become “one of them.” In the first case cured shark’s meat becomes an extreme food for daredevils. The authors create narratives of their own bravery or their struggles with their own bodies, referring to the experience of their gag reflex as a turning point – they either overcome it or fail to control it:

I opened the box ... and almost threw up. The stench was unimaginable. I closed it immediately. I lost my appetite. It was good that nobody else was in the room. After a minute I repeated the attempt, but again I gagged. Give up? Never, that’s not my style! On the third attempt, the stench was like that from a lethal chemical weapon. I took a piece of meat in my hand and after a while begin bit into it. The taste. So much better than the smell. But tasty it was not. I chewed, I swallowed. I closed the box. (<http://www.grzegorzgawlik.pl/blog/item/422-hakarl--zgnile-mięso-rekina---islandzki-przysmak.html>)

I put it in my mouth, one piece, chewed it for about three minutes and then spat it out, my body refused to swallow it. My wife ate a pea-sized portion, showing off how brave she was, after which her eyes watered up. (<http://www.yazhubal.jogger.pl/2007/01/03/jak-zjesc-h-karla/>)

From the readers’ comments on these passages:

“Rotten shark” and “topped by urine” were enough, even I did not want to touch it. My congratulations for your courage...

I admire this heroic effort...

This goes beyond single adventure-like experiences of tourists. Describing one’s involvement in liminal food may be used to emphasise the process of initiation into Icelandic society. Tasting is used as a metaphor of becoming “one of them,” as in this example: “When I ate the

weirdest of them [food products], raw shark, and I did not wince as much as I feared, I heard that I'm a real Icelander" (<http://www.lubieislandie.pl/smaki-islandii.html>). Trying "difficult" "local" food can also be seen as part of a game among migrants themselves. It confirms (or fails to confirm) their "cognitive openness," understood as a value; it serves as a tool of distinction:

Today, for the first time I asked for the sirloin lamb with additives as my main course. Yum! Delicious! Some of my colleagues, with whom I have worked in Iceland for three years, have never touched a dish with even a trace of mutton. I have tried most of them, I just haven't had enough courage to eat sheep testicles, which are a delicacy of Icelandic cuisine. (Pankiewicz, 2012, p. 93)

The acts of tasting "difficult" food and of consequently understanding the taste emerge as new competences to be taught and learnt. Migrants may even in the end become teachers, who explain and instruct how to experience particular types of food. The fact that Icelandic cuisine is presented as not easy and as not at first tasty makes it even more useful for this purpose. Changing one's food habits and starting to understand peculiar tastes as a less than obvious pleasure can be seen as learning how to perceive a "hidden beauty," thus developing an expertise. Therefore, these particular ways of talking about food should be seen through the prism of "getting into" Icelandic society – in both the tourist and the migrant version.

### Past, present, and twofold modernity: Conclusions

Undoubtedly there is confusion concerning the historical or contemporary character of the food described in these accounts. "Do they still eat such things?" The authors discussed here might respond to this question in different ways, despite the fact that experts on Icelandic food culture assert that "border" food plays rather a marginal role in contemporary everyday food routines (cf. Amilien, 2012). For example *svið* (sheep's head) is sometimes described as exceptional, old-fashioned, or special, while elsewhere one may read that it can be found in the cheapest discount shops (<http://www.lubieislandie.pl>), which would suggest that



it is an everyday meal for Icelanders. The same ambivalence applies to *hákarl*, and is clearly visible in the juxtaposition of two quotations below. The first one appears in a book by a temporary labour migrant and shows a paternalistic tone towards these persisting culinary habits. The second one, from a travel blog, shows awareness of the historical character of some dishes and their involvement in the tourism industry:

Its [shark's] meat is toxic and smells of ammonia, so after catching it, Icelanders bury it in the ground for two months. After a slight putrefaction they hang it in the air for the next four months. Afterwards, at the very thought of the feast awaiting them, they are as excited as if they were dealing with an aphrodisiac. (Pankiewicz, 2012, p. 215)

Throughout the whole stay I hunted for the legendary *hákarl*, rotten shark meat, the most popular Icelandic dish, symbolically representing the whole cuisine. This is definitely slander, since contemporary Icelanders eat this dish once a year at most, so it is produced mainly as a curiosity for tourists. Eventually, however, I found it in the market, in the food part, where ordinary Icelanders purchase all sorts of specialties, especially fish. Ready for a new experience, I therefore tried a little bit I was given... and this was probably the biggest culinary mistake I made during this expedition. *Hákarl* tastes awful. It is hard to describe it with words, but it's how I imagine meat that has rotted for half a year would taste. (<http://www.domithephotoblog.blogspot.com/2013/03/wszystkie-smaki-islandii.html>)

As a result of this tension between past and present, the archaisation of contemporary Icelandic culture is sometimes visible, as in this quotation: “*Svið* [sheep's head] is still a living witness of a time when Icelanders could not afford to waste even the smallest piece of meat” (<http://www.lubieislandie.pl/smaki-islandii.html>). The roots of the present are located – even though not directly – in pre-modern times. Eating “peculiarities” of animal origin, also interpreted in terms of “low quality food,” is explained by two factors: the character of Icelandic nature (perceived as hard and barren, which forces the inhabitants to eat barely edible products) along with the poorness and scarcity that the Icelandic nation is supposed to have experienced in its history: “I can understand, however, that when there was a problem getting any

food, puffin meat was valuable' (<http://www.grzegorzgawlik.pl/blog/item/409-islandzkie-maskonury-to-przemile-ptaki,-ale-czy-smaczne.html>). The origins of Icelandic food culture are seen in the necessity of eating rather than in "a joy of food." Although these deficiencies are assigned to the historical past, contemporary eating practices extend from the past to the present.

However, alongside the twofold character of Borealism – both utopian and dystopian (Schram, 2011) – two faces of culinary culture are also reflected in Polish texts. Beside primitiveness, we also find comments on food being "unspoiled" in a good way – in terms of purity and naturalness. Although the "new Nordic cuisine" discourse has penetrated migrants' and tourists' imaginaries only to a limited extent, the simplicity of Icelandic cuisine is viewed as valuable in some accounts. Water and fish are described as clean; the land is a paradise for cows, pigs, and sheep, which makes meat and dairy products better than in any other place. Berries in *skýr* are wild, meaning not cultivated by man. In this respect, the perceived pre-modernity of Icelandic food is very modern: a utopian resistance against industrial "artificial" food is accompanied by a more pragmatic view of this pure food as healthier. At the same time, as in example quoted above where Polish migrants were criticised for bringing their own food from home, appreciating this side of the food culture becomes a "more sophisticated" way of understanding Iceland.

When we pull all these threads together, we get a complex and paradoxical picture of a n ambiguous interpretation of Iceland. Both the central and the peripheral character of the country are confirmed by this uncertainty. Icelandic food is seen as both global and local, tasteless and tasteful, primitive and pure, pre-modern and modern. Polish perceptions of Icelandic cuisine repeat universal clichés than creating new images. At the same time, the picture reveals a lack of closeness or intimacy or understanding. Despite the fact that quantitative research was not conducted, we may also observe that contemptuous or ironic discourse about "bad food" seems to dominate, not discourse about health or "modern" naturalness. A paradoxical evolution of perceptions of Icelandic food is evident as well. On the one hand, motifs of decreasing cultural distance by penetrating the food culture and building one's own expertise are apparently new features of Polish discourse on Iceland,

developing together with increased Polish mobility to that country. On the other hand, these “acts of penetrating” are often based on the assumed exoticization of food, which – in turn – eagerly draws from historical images. This analysis also shows that “center” and “periphery” can be seen as fluid and changeable categories, while the intercultural contact caused by mobility has diverse symbolic consequences.

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# Migrants' experiences of nature. Post-2004 Polish migrants in the West Midlands, UK

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Migrants' contact with receiving societies unfolds on a variety of planes. This chapter proposes to focus on the issue of migrants' contact with nature in the receiving country. For the purposes of this paper nature is conceptualised in the broadest possible way and includes climate, weather conditions and elemental forces (water, wind etc.), flora and fauna of the receiving country (both wild and domestic, local and imported, edible and not etc.), specific nature sites as types of space and place (urban and non-urban), as well as landscape as a more visual category (cf. Greider & Garkovich, 1994; Ingold, 2000, 2011; Macnaghten & Urry, 1998). This understanding is not fully isomorphic with popular perceptions of nature as "everything that grows and flourishes" (Van den Born, 2008, p. 93; cf. Buijs, Elands & Langers, 2009), the perceptions that identify nature primarily with animate creatures and vegetation. The definition proposed here draws attention to a number of overlooked aspects of nature such as ambience or inanimate environment. Contact with nature can have a pragmatic or symbolic function and/or motivation, it can also be – and rather often is – inadvertent and independent of human will. By applying a broad conceptualization of both nature and the type of contact with it, the chapter seeks to parallel the vision of migrants as multi-dimensional



subjects whose experience stretches between labour migration and tourist practices, which this volume as a whole is designed to offer. The intertwining of migratory and tourist experience can be seen through the lens of contact with nature that has many (contradictory) aspects.

Relating migration to nature falls within the current tendency of questioning the nature/culture divide in anthropology (e.g. Hastrup, 2014; Ingold, 2000, 2011; cf. Pina-Cabral, 2014; Murdoch, 1997). Ingold's work is particularly instructive in suggesting that a human subject is an intrinsic albeit not central component of the ever changing environment. According to Ingold (2011), the constant intertwining of the material and the symbolic, the human and the non-human, the inert and the mobile constitutes the phenomenon of "being alive". Taking inspirations but also surpassing Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), Ingold demonstrates how a human subject is ethically equal to and ontologically non-distinguishable from the non-human components of the environment.

The aim of this chapter is to uncover the unobvious aspects of nature in and of the receiving countries as experienced by migrants. This will hopefully not only shed some light on the role of e.g. weather or fauna in experiencing the new environment (natural as well as social), but also draw attention to migrants as natural as well as cultural subjects. In what follows, an overview of recent literature on migrants/minorities and nature will be presented, followed by a brief description of post-2004 migration from Poland to the UK, West Midlands in particular, and the presentation of research material. Then several examples of the unobvious dimensions of nature perceptions and nature use that emerge from the interviews will be analysed. The complexity of human-nature interaction will be discussed with particular attention paid to migrants' situation. A discussion of how the migrants/nature contact can contribute to understanding migration will be offered at the end of the chapter. It is hoped that – even though it presents a particular case of Polish migrants in the UK – the chapter will contribute to the broader discussion about migrants' experience of nature in receiving countries and will provide the material for comparison with other migratory settings, notably with the experiences of nature among the Poles in Iceland (cf. Wojtyńska, 2015).

## Nature and migration experience: A literature review

Interest in migrants' contact with nature is not uncommon in literature on migration and ethnic minorities. In this section the major findings of the literature addressing this issue are reviewed in order to demonstrate a rather specific view of nature that the existing body of literature produces.

In Northern America (Canada and the US), access to recreational spaces, including natural environments, has been for a long time a primary concern for researchers. This is partially linked to the importance ascribed to integration (or acculturation) of migrant populations. Washburne (1978) developed the marginality hypothesis which has been one of the major theoretical frameworks for explaining limited access among migrants. It is a valid way to demonstrate that the structural limitations (insufficient financial means, residence in areas distant from nature sites, lack of means of transportation) stand in the way of migrants' use of natural environments understood as a type of public spaces available for all. An alternative explanation of migrants' (limited) access to leisure, including the use of natural environments, is called the ethnicity approach. It points at a distinct set of cultural norms and values with respect to recreation, including leisured use of natural environment, in order to explain differences in recreational behaviour (Aizlewood, Bevelander & Pendakur, 2006; Johnson et al., 1998). For instance, the differences in recreation patterns may stem from the concepts of wilderness typical of Latin American and Asian cultures as compared to a Northern American one (Johnson-Gaither, 2014; cf. Virden & Walker, 1999). It has also been noted that discrimination – both past and present – is an important limitation for migrants' and minorities' use of natural environment (Sharaievska et al., 2010; Erickson, Johnson & Kivel, 2009). However, the approach concentrating on discrimination (e.g. Stodolska, 2005), has not been widely used by Northern and Western European researchers.

Kloek and co-authors (2013) review recent studies on the relations between migrant and minority populations and natural environment in Europe. They are surprised to discover that the total number of publications is relatively low. In their review, predominantly scholarly

work from North-Western European countries (including Scandinavian countries, Germany, and the Netherlands, as well as the UK) is represented, since not many publications on migrants and natural environments have emerged in Southern and Central Europe. They discover that major research questions addressed in these studies are about: (1) meanings of natural environments, (2) if and how natural environments participate in the development of a sense of belonging and inclusion among immigrants in the host countries, (3) whether social interactions take place during leisurely use of natural environments, and what mechanisms of interaction are observed, and (4) discrimination of migrants in natural environments, especially the differences between types of natural environments in this regard (Kloek et al., 2013). These issues are not evenly addressed, most of the studies they review concentrate on recreational use and perceptions of green spaces, while less research is done on social and cultural aspects of migration and green space (with the exception of studies coming from the UK). Another common feature of this body of research is the concentration on non-European migrant and minority populations. Both urban parks and non-urban green spaces play a dual role in integration of migrants. They are instrumental in developing a sense of belonging among migrants who frequent them (Buijs, Elands & Langers, 2009; Peters, 2010; Wynveen et al., 2011). However, natural environments can trigger the sense of insecurity if the migrants do not know the rules of green spaces use or feel out of place in them. Overall, it is noted that migrants are under-represented among users of natural environments (cf. Buijs, Elands & Langers, 2009).

From the perspective of this article it is worth mentioning that climate or “poor weather” are noted as one of the reasons behind infrequent use of natural environments (Kloek et al., 2013). Also “ecological factors such as temperature, climate, and ‘pace of life’” are recognised as being important for migrants’ wellbeing more generally (Kloek et al., 2013). This line of inquiry is worth pursuing in order to demonstrate how migrants’ experiences with a receiving country’s climate and environment reveal an intrinsic entanglement of natural and cultural aspects in leisure practices.

When studying the “embodied experience of greenspace” (cf. Kloek et al., 2013), some authors mention such emotions as fear and nostalgia

related to nature use (e.g. Madge, 1997). Some of these embodied experiences include animate creatures, as in “fear of bugs”. Also, it is noted that animals and plants can trigger nostalgia in migrants (Rishbeth & Finney, 2006).

The features of natural environment use typical of migrant and minority populations have been studied too. For instance, preference for consuming food (picnicking) and going in larger groups is noted to be a characteristic of these groups (Jay & Schraml, 2009; Chavez, 2009). However, some of this research is criticised for “normalising” patterns of green space use typical of white middle class populations of receiving societies. In other words, migrants are made to look more different from the mainstream population than they actually are – if all the variety of tastes and lifestyles existing among the receiving countries’ population (and not only white middle class) are taken into account.

As far as conceptualizations of nature are concerned, these are predominantly spatial as reflected in the use of terms “city parks”, “urban greenery”, “national parks”, “forest preserves”, “community gardens” or “green space”. Nature is considered to be a public space (and also a public good, hence the discussions about welcoming migrants to share this good), less is said about “private” nature, although backyards and private gardens have already obtained some scholarly attention (Morgan, Rocha & Poynting, 2005; Graham & Connell, 2006). The animal world is not systematically studied as a part of nature.

The view of a migrant that emerges from this body of literature is therefore specific: usually migrants are (1) actors of the public domain and subjects who are acted upon (e.g. clients of social policies or subjects possessing human rights). They are also (2) culturalised individuals marked by a set of unalienable features (in particular this refers to migrants being ethnicised and racialised in research). As culturalised individuals, they are viewed as group members. Also they are viewed as (3) economic actors who use financial resources to access nature sites. In other words, migrants are not seen that much as natural subjects. The bodily, emotional and cognitive faculties of migrants as subjects are backgrounded in the reviewed literature and only sporadically reflected upon. In this article that focuses on post-accession Polish migrants in

the West Midlands, UK, we hope to position these aspects of migrants' experience of nature more centrally.

### Post-2004 Polish migrants in the West Midlands: Contextualization

In the aftermath of the EU enlargement in May 2004, the UK opened its labour market for citizens of new member states. Poles were able to work legally in the UK from May 1, 2004.<sup>1</sup> In 2011 the total number of people with Polish nationality living in the UK was estimated at 686,540, compared to only 70 thousand Polish-born residents in 2003 (ONS, 2013; cf. Trevena, 2009). Currently Poles constitute one of the three most numerous groups of British residents born outside the UK and about 70% of post-2004 migrants (Burrell, 2009).

The 2011 Census for England and Wales data suggest that 48,314 people<sup>2</sup> claiming Polish ethnicity reside in the West Midlands. The region has attracted high numbers of Polish migrants of the post-2004 wave due to the relatively large number of industrial jobs still available there. Polish migrants also work in seasonal agricultural jobs, and fill in numerous positions in the service sector, e.g. cleaning, bus driving or caretaking. Some of the migrants fill white-collar positions such as teaching assistant, interpreter, medical doctor etc., but these are a minority. Some Polish migrants are enrolled on various courses at West Midlands universities.

The climate in West Midlands is not as mild as in London, it is always several degrees centigrade colder in this area than in the south of England. Yet, compared to Poland, it is a milder, more humid and more changeable climate overall. The proverbial "four seasons in one day" do not often happen in Poland, while for West Midlands the changeability of weather is a norm. It is also more windy in centrally

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<sup>1</sup> On May 1, 2011, the obligation to register with the Home Office was lifted which further liberalised the British job market for Polish workers.

<sup>2</sup> The newest estimate of Polish migrant population made by the Oxford centre for migration studies COMPAS on the basis of census 2011 data was 52,000 according to an oral conference communication (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2015). I was not able to locate a written source, however.

positioned West Midlands than in most of Poland (with the exception of its coastal area). West Midlands border Wales, and the more mountainous terrain typical of Wales is visible from the borderland. Overall, West Midlands' landscape is moderately hilly, with an elaborate network of (artificial) canals that served for coal and ore transportation in the period prior to the development of railway. Currently the network of canals is a feature in the West Midlands recreation offer, it is suitable not only for boating but also for walks along the canals, and is widely used by the region's residents. Sometimes the canals are used as angling sites too. The network of defunct railways has in some places turned into green areas not specifically made for recreation but used for dog walking or hiking, not least due to the fact that it is easy to find one's way by going along the old tracks.

The cities of West Midlands where the fieldwork has been set have public recreation areas such as West Park and East Park in Wolverhampton, the former being a pre-war park area with a conservatory, a band stand, a pond, tennis courts and the possibility to play sports on some of the lawns and the like. Occasionally, urban parks become grounds for fun-fairs hosting various attractions, as it was the case in early May 2011. As a user of West Park during my stay in Wolverhampton, I recorded walking, jogging, dog walking, bird feeding (duck feeding), walking with children and taking them to playgrounds, playing tennis and other sports as the activities undertaken in this urban park. Migrants and non-migrants used this park peacefully side-by-side, similarly to the way they co-exist in other parks in the UK and across Europe (Peters, 2010). The research participants often mentioned parks as places where they go for a walk with their family.

Since houses (not flats) constitute a considerable share of the housing in the region, roughly half of my interlocutors had access to backyards. Only some of these spaces contained any vegetation (others were covered with e.g. concrete). If the backyards were green, migrants did basic gardening (mowing the lawn, planting flowers or vegetables), set a greenhouse or used the lawn recreationally by leaving it as a space for children to play ball games or by placing an inflatable swimming pool on it during summer months.

## Research methods

The empirical data used in this article come from the project on leisure mobilities of first-generation post-2004 Polish migrants in the UK's West Midlands.<sup>3</sup> The fieldwork was carried out between October 2010 and September 2011 and included participant observation at various venues in Wolverhampton, Birmingham and several other towns of the region. The researcher accompanied migrants to various recreational and leisure mobility venues such as urban parks, camping sites, beaches, and nature trails. Field notes were made in order to record migrants' observable behaviour and emotions, casual conversations as well as the sites' features. Apart from participant observation, 38 in-depth interviews with 41 individuals (21 male and 20 female) were conducted at their homes, public places and community centres. The participants were contacted at the above mentioned sites directly as well as through other participants. The interviewed participants constituted a diversified group in terms of age (varying from 19 to 56 at the moment of interview), marital status, education, current and previous occupation and employment status, size of the place of origin, and region of Poland.

The interlocutors were asked to speak about their migration history and occupation prior to and after migration as well as their leisure mobility experience in Poland and the UK. They were prompted to speak about leisure mobility destinations and modes of mobility. References to broadly understood nature emerged in almost all interviews in a bottom-up manner. The researcher registered all instances when nature in the broad sense – as defined at the beginning of the chapter – was mentioned by migrants, not limiting herself to the instances when research subjects directly used the word “nature” (Polish *przyroda* or *natura*). This methodological choice is justified by the focus of the analysis on experiences and not on perceptions (in the latter case the *emic* definitions of nature by research participants would be of utmost importance). Set in the interpretative paradigm, the research has no ambition of establishing what is typical (representative) for the whole population of Polish migrants in the UK. The main aim of the chapter

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<sup>3</sup> The project was carried out in 2010–2011 as a part of the Leverhulme Visiting Fellowship to the University of Wolverhampton.

is to unravel the patterns and aspects of migrants' experiences of nature and to decipher their meanings.

### Unobvious dimensions of nature as experienced by migrants

The literature overview demonstrates that nature in migration studies has been treated primarily as a venue for outdoor recreation. However, from research material collected among post-2004 Polish migrants in the UK it follows that nature can be found **indoors** as well as **outdoors**, it is present not only in parks and forest preserves but in mould on a house inner wall, in a creeping plant that grows from the floor in one's bathroom, in the wind that makes one feel anxious when it rages outside of a single-pane window and so on. The following types of natural phenomena are mentioned by migrants (although not always defined as nature by themselves):

- air temperature and ambience;
- weather and elemental forces, including wind, humidity, rain, fog, snow, ice on roads etc.;
- seasons and months;
- animate world, including creatures living in the wild or in a zoo, and domestic animals;
- plants, including edible and decorative, cultivated in backyards, city parks or growing wildly; mould can also be placed in this category;
- nature as a place or a site, including parks, woods, water reserves, mountains and the like;
- nature as landscape, something that is seen, observed.

This list is not a classification *sensu stricto*, the boundaries between the categories are permeable rather than clear cut. Nature as a place can easily become nature as landscape, for instance. In the following paragraphs the accounts of weather as well as slugs and fungus will exemplify the unobvious dimensions of nature that surfaced in the interviews.

In the West Midland, **weather** is rather often an obstacle for Polish migrants engaging in outdoor recreation: a walk in a park or a longer trip to a nature trail. (By contrast, local population pays less attention to weather conditions, which could be inferred from my own and my interlocutors' observations that Britons engage in outdoor recreation and



sports also when it rains or when temperatures are low.) In an interview carried out in mid-March an interlocutor pointed at temperatures typical for the whole winter season, as one can infer, as an obstacle for spending time outside:

Now, when it will be getting warmer, we'll go for a grill. We try to go out with other Poles. Now all the outings will start [...] earlier there was no possibility, it was so cold. (M\_1979a)<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, in Poland the winter season brings minus temperatures and snow (although mild snowless winters happen from time to time). The snow creates opportunities for outdoor recreation such as cross-country skiing, sledding or walking in natural environments. The snowy weather is perceived by many Poles as inviting for outdoor recreation, while the humid windy weather with temperatures around zero and overcast skies is not considered suitable for spending time outdoors. In another interview, this one carried out in mid-January, a female research participant spoke not of temperature as such (cold or warm) but rather of an unfavourable change in weather conditions, of the unpredictability of the weather and the concomitant difficulty to plan her recreation:

We planned to go to Scotland to ski for the week-end, but the weather has changed and now it doesn't make sense, it's 6° C and it is raining, we had hoped we'd do something over the weekend, but finally [husband's name] has done much – he has made shelves, and installed a lamp, and generally I have not left the house for two days (F\_1981).

In another interview mentions of unfavourable weather conditions were not only a description of the temperature or the inability to visit nature sites, but also an articulation of an embodied and interpersonal experience of the first period after migration. In this quotation, bad weather is linked straightforwardly to bad relations with a partner:

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<sup>4</sup> The interviews are marked with letters indicating the gender of the participants (M – men, F – women) and figures indicating their year of birth. The small letters a and b after the year of birth are used in order to distinguish two interlocutors of a similar gender and age.

We came in July [she and her husband], so after 6 months we had enough of it all. [...] It was so cold, so ugly, nothing was going well for us, we were quarrelling all the time. (F\_1984).

There is a link between nature and human relations, mood and health. On the one hand, weather conditions have an effect on the way migrants feel and perceive themselves in a new environment due to its physicality and unavoidability. In the case of migration from Poland to the UK, the change of actual climatic conditions is noticeable.<sup>5</sup> Migrants have to adapt physically to new natural conditions. On the other hand, nature is a metaphor that is used by migrants to conceptualise and describe their relations (cf. Gustafson, 2001; Tuan, 1971). As an incorporated experience, nature is intertwined with the experience of the receiving society as such, with relations between migrants, their relation with home, with the embodied experience of the place, rendering it meaningful, forming a place attachment or failing to do so. In what follows, another type of contact with nature will illustrate these links.

At one of the house parties of my Polish research participants, we were casually comparing our experiences of arriving to the UK and the topic of slugs surfaced in a bottom-up fashion. One young woman got really excited and told a blood-curdling story of waking up one morning, putting her foot in a slipper and feeling something slimy, jelly-like and cold on her bare skin – it was a slug! Her body-language spoke for itself: extreme disgust but also the irony of telling a story about being in a “developed Western country”, which Britain is supposed to be, and getting in contact with such terribly lowly creatures as slugs. Her story triggered a chain of similar stories from other party participants who also shared their expertise on the ways to get rid of the slugs, the creatures that appeared to be rather common in British houses Polish migrants rented.

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<sup>5</sup> Despite the uniqueness of Icelandic nature (cf. the chapter by Rancew-Sikora in this volume), there is a degree of similarity in the way Polish migrants in Iceland and the UK experience weather, which in both countries is overall more changeable and more windy than in Poland. However, for a more accurate comparison, regional differences (of both the region of the migrants’ origin and the region of settlement in the new country) need to be taken into consideration (cf. the chapter by Ciechorska-Kulesza in this volume: Polish migrants who come from coastal areas feel more at home in Reykjavik than those who originate from mainland areas).

A similarly unsettling if a slightly more sinister experience was accounted for in one of the interviews I conducted. My female interlocutor, a young mother of two, reminisced about her previous flat and mentioned that fungus had been developing there relentlessly. She had tried to get rid of it in a number of ways, scrubbing it from bathroom tiles and from every room corner. But she had lost her patience when – after opening her wardrobe in search for the summer clothes which had been stored away for the winter – she had found most of her clothes that lay at the back of the wardrobe rotten because of the humidity and fungus. Together with information from a doctor that fungus can be rather dangerous for young children this was the last straw for her and pushed her to change accommodation.

The observed and recorded instances of such “unwanted” contacts can be interpreted as an encounter with otherness. Various creatures (animals, plants, fungus) symbolise an otherness that is incomprehensible, unpredictable and sometimes threatening. Nature is a source of anxiety (fear of disease, disgust of unwanted bodily contact and so on). These invasions of nature into migrants’ domestic space pushed my interlocutors out of their comfort zone. Also as part of nature that is rather mundane and rarely discussed in public discourse, these manifestations of “alien” and “invasive” nature are puzzling and unsettling, and one can claim, heighten the feeling of being in a foreign place. However, dealing with these phenomena by either eradicating or domesticating them gives migrants some sense of control over the environment (another issue is that this is often done at the cost of this environment). Also “small stories” (cf. Galasińska, 2009) told about “taming” or domesticating these manifestations of nature are stories of resilience but also of evolving intimacy with the local environment. Importantly, the contact with the unobvious dimensions of nature is material and emotional, it calls for action on the part of migrants and engages them body and soul.

### Experiencing nature: Cognition, emotions, actions

Polish migrants’ contact with nature in the receiving society relies on all senses. Their experiences stretch between (1) bodily experiences of mundane and non-visual aspects of nature (such as temperature,

climate etc.) and (2) typically visual aspects of nature such as landscape and nature as a view. Metaphorically, one can say that nature is both a “pain in the bones” [Polish *tamanie w kościach*] and a “feast for the eyes”. It might be analytically meaningful to view the experience of nature through these discrete categories in order to emphasise different ways in which nature is contacted, e.g. either through the bodily/embodyed experience of walking, getting tired, becoming excited or restless, sweating, getting blisters on one’s feet etc., or through vision: observing, seeing, symbolising by e.g. ascribing evaluative labels (“it’s gorgeous”, “it’s ugly”). The quotation below demonstrates that the receiving society is perceived through the lens of **embodyed** and **tacit** experience of nature, e.g. temperature or climate:

B: We come from the pole of warmth [Polish: *z bieguny ciepła*],<sup>6</sup> because [town name] is the pole of warmth in Poland. It’s the opposite of Suwałki.<sup>7</sup>

A: Yes, we are used to warm climate. I really dream about it, I am also such a warmth loving creature and so afraid of cold [Polish: *tak mi się marzy, bo ja też jestem takim ciepluchem, zmarzłuchem.*]

B: I love sun.

A: Yes, English weather here gets on our nerves. We’ve got **pain in our bones**, as old people do sometimes. [Polish: *doskwiera nam ta pogoda tutaj w Anglii. Łamie w kościach, jak starców czasami.*] (A: F\_1982, B: M\_1983, emphasis added – A.H.).

Weather plays a double role here: it causes the embodied experience of discomfort and it symbolises the unwelcoming atmosphere of a new place. The mention of English weather as an experience of “pain in the bones” is in stark contrast with an experience of planning a short trip to a nature site based on its supposed natural beauty, or accounting for a past visit at a picturesque site in a manner that greatly resembles wordings from tourist brochures. The second and third quotation switches the perspective: nature is an object that is primarily seen (**a view, a landscape**) and anticipated thanks to imagination that is fed

<sup>6</sup> Additional information inserted by the author of this chapter is placed in square brackets within quotations.

<sup>7</sup> The area of Poland where the lowest temperatures are usually registered.

on tourist representations of the receiving country. Interestingly, the accounts contain fewer biographical and personal details, they create a more generalised “story”:

Now we plan to go to Lake District for two days, because it is something beautiful. From what I've heard this is one of the most spectacular places, in England for sure, and probably also in the world. It looks unbelievable in photographs, it's cosmic, so we want to go there... [M\_1989]

I've been to Cornwall, made some photos. I travelled along the coast. [...] It's very beautiful. Primarily there are cliffs at the coast, rocks, there are no beaches like in Spain or at the Baltic sea [...] People come there to stroll along the coast. [F\_1959]

It would be a mistake however to say that focusing on visual aspects and treating nature as a landscape is a uniform and simple type of experience. The visual representations of nature can also be rather different depending on a number of factors e.g. previous tourist experience, linguistic competence, some habitual or nostalgic interpretations of what is seen or felt. In other words, visual experience is co-produced by (1) symbolic and cultural knowledge that has been previously obtained and that is currently available to migrants (e.g. in flyers, Horolets, 2015) and (2) first-hand sensual experience of seeing. Similarly, non-visual experience is not devoid of symbolic underpinnings, i.e. the perceptive framing as well as interpretations of it are culturally conditioned.

These two seemingly opposed ways of experiencing nature (visual and non-visual) can be better understood if we take a look at the discussion of what the research participants said about non-visual and visual perceptions of nature as well as how the two are interconnected. The visual one and the wish to cast one's gaze (. Urry, 2002) onto the receiving country's nature (the one usually inspired by the tourist descriptions of it) is interrupted by and/or intertwined with other senses (sense of temperature, tactile sense, etc.). Moreover, both are rendered culturally meaningful. In the quotation below, the wind interferes with a wish to enjoy a beautiful seaside view:

I had this B&B at the outskirts of the city, at the seaside, it was beautiful out there, but the wind was so strong that no-one walked, the wind blew terribly. I went out for half an hour, it was May, a long weekend, but one couldn't walk there at all [F\_1959].

The visual way of experiencing nature framed by tourist discourse can also compete – and lose – with other senses (of smell or touch), as in the quotation below, in which my interlocutor takes cues from natural substances' smell rather than a landscape perceived as a view when she decides to “cast herself on the grass”:

It is beautiful [...] but guess what I liked the most? We came early in the morning, left the car on a lawn, I didn't pay much attention to it, but when we returned the grass on this lawn had been cut, and it was already dry, so I was thrilled, it felt just like in the Polish countryside, I just cast myself on this grass and lay like that for a while – this is how beautifully this freshly cut grass smelled. And my husband told me – you're crazy, there are such views and you cast yourself on the grass [F\_1977].

This quotation introduces the theme of sensory memory as an important component of nature experience: the smell of the cut grass invokes the nostalgic feelings in this migrant woman, she feels “like in the Polish countryside”. This individualised experience of nature based on memories from the home country that are prompted by the environments' tactile and olfactory features is an illustration that experience of nature is both embodied and symbolic.

Importantly, it often includes material objects and mechanic devices that mediate the human-nature contact, which is especially interesting in conjunction with one of the basic natural forces – time, as the quotation below demonstrates:

I like visiting cities, but only from time to time, Wales is beautiful and it has got the highest peak, one has to travel for 2-3 hours, the highest peak is in Snowdon, it's 1000 metres high. It's the highest peak of England and Wales, there are perhaps 5 different routes, on long weekends there are crowds climbing it and also a small train goes up there, not to the very top. Some 2/3 of a way one can [go] on a small

stinky train. [...] It runs on combustion, a little tram. It's for those who do not want to climb. But I did – I climbed from the steep side. It seems like a 1000 metre tall hill, but it's very steep, I really got tired. And also a lot of people climb up it, some climb down. [...] When I first went there, I went up by tram because I had little time and wanted to see many things, but where the tram goes, the slope is rather gentle, and when I went another time, I had a guide already and went along this very steep side [F\_1959].

The interlocutor says that when she had little time, she used a (“stinky”) train, while on another occasion she climbed the mountain all the way “and got really tired”. Experiences of nature unfold at different paces when the contact is mediated through technological devices (means of transportation). Social time (my interlocutor having or not having the time) is co-constructed by these technological devices (the tram is used when there is less time for recreational activity). The contact with nature involves not only the migrants' body and emotions, but also technologies and the conditions of social environment. In the following section, my aim will be to unwrap the complexity of contact with nature and its significance for broader migration experience.

## Complexity of experience

In an interview quoted below, my interlocutor expressed many complaints about his poor working conditions as a bus driver, a degree of dissatisfaction with his personal circumstances, and uncertainty about his future plans. Only one fragment of this interview was filled with positive emotions. Even his face changed completely, he became calm and satisfaction could be heard in his voice. This change happened when he started telling me about one of his favourite places where he went in his free time:

Or when I'm bored and the weather is nice, I like to go out and to simply do nothing [Polish: *normalnie się pobyczyć*]. To Barr Beacon. There is a War Memorial there on the top. There is a mountain and from it one can see Wolverhampton and all. From the other side the panoramic view of Birmingham is visible. [...] One can see all of Birmingham.

It depends on what side of the hill the sun is, even the mountain itself glitters beautifully, for instance in the morning – the light’s falling. [My interlocutor runs a slide show of these views on his computer for me]. I have bought a good camera specifically for this. [Polish: *specjalnie na to konto sobie kupilem porządny aparacik*]. These are the towers behind West Bromwich, they are TV towers or something. [...] These are random shots I took on one side and the other. [...] There is a view on the other side. Sutton Coldfield. [...] This is in the direction of Dudley, a view from this mountain, and here you can see Walsall from above. And this one is I think here, boiler-house, high rises in Wolverhampton, and one can see the contour, and this mountain is at Telford, it’s a big mountain. This already looks a bit Welsh. It’s not Wales yet, but there are a lot of mountains indeed and it’s nice. And this round metal construction near the motorway, as one goes from here, when the motorway goes round Birmingham, I don’t know the exact name of the area. [...] There are old sandpits and at the bottom little horses graze [Polish: *a u podnóża koniki się pasą*]. And there are even pigs in one place [M\_1979b].

The quotation above is particularly interesting if analysed in conjunction with the field notes from the interview. The whole quoted fragment was accompanied by my interlocutor running the slide show of photographs taken at the site for me. He decided to run it of his own accord, without being prompted. The photographs did not contain human subjects, they were landscape shots made on a sunny day, taken from the top of the Barr Beacon hill and showing its surroundings from all sides; this set of pictures formed a panoramic view of the area. My interlocutor was in high spirits when reminiscing about his photo session. While he was showing me the site, he behaved like a person who “shows around” somebody who is not that familiar with a place, perhaps performing the role of a host showing a guest around.<sup>8</sup> In his account, the site he was showing was not a place like any other. His (presumed and invisible) position at the centre and on top of the hill created in me, a listener, a viewer (and researcher), the impression that my interlocutor was “mastering” this environment, was on top and at

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<sup>8</sup> From research materials I have gathered it follows that migrants perform the role of a host in other leisure related contexts too, e.g. when they give advice on recreation sites (Horolets, 2015, p. 12).



the centre of it. He was an observer (cf. tourist gaze in Urry, 2002) and a conqueror of the environment he was now inhabiting.

It is in stark contrast with his account of his work conditions. For instance, his sense of controlling the situation at work is limited by the way the management assigns shifts to the employees as well as by the way time tables for buses are arranged (he complained that the timetables are unrealistic and put a lot of strain on the driver). One detail seemed particularly telling regarding the type of pressure experienced when the wish to control one's environment leads to sacrifices and a sense of insecurity. The driver tried to limit his intake of liquids<sup>9</sup> before work out of fear he would need to go to the bathroom during his long shift, while his company did not provide any facilities or schemes for such bodily needs (e.g. at terminals). (The company seemed to economise on everything: it headhunted for migrant workers in Poland, kept its vehicles in disrepair and exploited its employees). When contrasted with work-related practices, the peacefulness and confidence that emanated both from the photos and from the way he spoke about them could be interpreted as a manifestation of a feeling of security and being in control. The choice of the environment (top of a hill) can be seen as both pragmatic and symbolic. It offers the best view, but also mountains are deeply set in European culture as related to e.g. spirituality, contact with the transcendent, being able to see things better (in a metaphorical or metaphysical sense) (Funnell & Price, 2003; Nicolson, 1997). This experience, albeit unique, is similar to many instances when migrants achieve a sense of peacefulness or elation in natural environments that are primarily landscapes but also inhabited sites (Lee, Dattilo & Howard, 1994). The experience of contact with nature in a recreational context counterbalances their harried work routines.

The second case I would like to analyse points more powerfully to other dimensions of the complexity of nature experience. I will quote a longer fragment from an interview in order to demonstrate how the experience of nature is mediated through (1) previous knowledge of nature; (2) interest in particular aspects of the natural environment;

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<sup>9</sup> A similar practice of limiting one's intake of liquids is recorded by Sharma (2014, p. 75), who researches taxi drivers in North America.

- (3) technologies that allow contact with nature/acting in or upon nature;  
 (4) institutions, including law and organizations that are involved in setting the framework for human/nature contact.

A: "I lived in [city name] the longest and then when I came to know my wife I moved. There I've got a lake nearby, I am an angler. [...] This is my hobby."

**"Is it? And do you pursue it here?"**

B: "Not yet."

A: "No, but I will for sure."

B: "He's got plans."

A: "Everyone told me that there are huge carps in the canals here, that I should not buy god knows what [he means angling equipment here, see also below – AH]. They are having a laugh. Believe me. I've seen such a carp, in this canal. We've been on a walk – such a carp!"

**"Really?"**

A: "Only it was black. There are no light-coloured, normal carps, there are dark ones."

**"Is it a different type [Polish: *odmiana*]?"**

A: "No, it's not. Maybe it's because here... I suspect that they are black because there is not so much sun here, for one thing..."

B: "The water is dirty."

A: "And secondly, this water... Well – dirty [hesitation]. It's becoming cleaner and even now, I bet, the bottom is visible [Polish: *dno widać*]. [...] We were on a walk and there are large leaves here..."

B: "We had a camera with us."

A: "We had a camera with us and I said: give me the camera quickly. But before my wife took the camera out, the carp disappeared... [Polish: *to już karp sobie...*]. But I've never seen such a carp in Poland. All right, I saw somebody catch one like that, but I have not caught a carp like this. But I saw someone catch [such a big carp]."

B: "He was very disappointed [Polish: *ale przeżywał*]."

A: "Such a large one and also a black one. And also what people say here – Poles go angling rather often, to the canals – they say: do not buy god knows what, because if you catch a 14 kilo carp, your [fishing rod] will break. It's simple. Seriously."

B: "It'll pull you in together with the [fishing rod]."

A: "I wanted to buy one for 20 pounds... [...] In Poland I've got this sort of equipment for big fish, I even moved because I like [angling]..."

[A: M\_1976; B: F\_1977]."

The experience of nature is complex. The quotation demonstrates that the experience of nature post-migration is conditioned on previous experiences with natural environments and their inhabitants. The interest in fish that the interview participant demonstrates, his alertness to the presence of fish in the canals is the effect of his long-term interest in angling. Also in other parts of the interview he compares legal regulations concerning angling in Poland and in the UK, presenting himself as a knowledgeable person as well as one interested in the subject. From other research it follows that the differences in angling regulations have been a source of misunderstandings between migrants and local population in the UK (Pawlak & Bieniecki, 2009, p. 14). The knowledge of my interlocutor attests to his “transnational competence” (Koehn & Rosenau, 2002, p. 110). Contact with nature is mediated through other people who are important sources of information. They talk about it. The contact with it is usually experienced in the company of other people, usually the ones already known but sometimes also strangers. Here a husband and wife went for a walk, the interaction between them unfolded in nature surroundings, they reacted to nature-related stimuli (such as an unusually large carp in the canal). Although establishing new acquaintances is not usual during outings, recreation in natural surroundings gives a chance to at least observe others too (cf. Peters, 2010), it is an opportunity for migrants to see others outside of work or a public service context. The contact with nature is therefore simultaneously a contact with the social world.

Apart from law and people, another medium of contact with nature is technology – be it a fishing rod or a camera. The discussion about angling equipment is also an indication that the discourse of angling is a discourse of professionalism or of being an expert in a certain domain, and thus – an identity discourse. The mention of a camera gives a double indication: a previously unseen type of carp is a genuine source of excitement and curiosity, a camera is needed as a personal memory device; simultaneously, a camera is needed in order to create a socially tangible proof of an unusual and unique experience, something to show to other people. Capturing a unique element of nature can be translated into a symbolic asset that contributes to one's position in a group.

## Discussion and conclusions

The evidence presented in the three previous sections on (1) the unobvious dimensions of nature; (2) the various senses engaged in contact with nature; and (3) the complexity of encounters with nature, allows us to raise several discussion points. Nature in migrants' experience is not limited to itself but is intertwined with relations with other people and with receiving society (cf. Gustafson, 2001; Tuan, 1971). The meaning that migrants ascribe to natural phenomena (weather, slugs) can be read partly as an expression of the newcomers' situation in the receiving country. They convey a sense of discomfort, being out of their safety zone but at the same time a sense of persevering and acquiring a degree of intimacy with the new environment. Nature in migrants' experience should be seen as layered, consisting of various (conflicting) forces, and as material and at the same time symbolic.

In the case of the bus driver who spent his free time at the Barr Beacon hill, the degree of intimacy with the new environment is achieved with the help of (1) deeply rooted cultural scripts (e.g. associating the top and the central position with a sense of control, associating mountains with spirituality and the like), (2) technology (a camera and laptop allowing him to make and to show photographs), and (3) sociality (the experience is there to share with others, not only to keep for oneself). This experience is not limited to finding one's favourite nature site, it also contributes to finding one's place in the new society (cf. Horolets, 2015). While deprived of control of his time and severely limited even in bodily functions at work, the bus driver with whom I spoke constructs his story about being "in nature" as an alternative story of his stay in the receiving country, one in which he is joyful, relaxed and in control of his environment.

The interview fragment concerning angling can be interpreted in a similar fashion. For a migrant-angler the practice creates points of reference (also: "anchors", Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2015; or "emplacement", Ryan, 2015) in the receiving society. It is important that he has not started angling yet, he still fantasises about it, checks the equipment and is alert to the manifestations of nature that are connected to his hobby. Also, when speaking about the right kind of equipment he

poses as a specialist, and in this creates an identity role that is different and more dignified than the one stemming from his current jobs (odd manual jobs).

If put in this perspective, both cases are highly symbolic experiences of re-gaining control over one's life. However, it is important to keep in mind that it is also a bodily and emotional experience of the receiving country that is rather different from other everyday experiences. It is joyful and relaxing and therefore "salutogenic".

The evidence mounted in this article demonstrates that nature is also hybrid, i.e. it operates as an animate-inanimate construct (cf. Descola, 1996; Murdoch, 2001). Contact with nature is reliant on a certain degree of cultural knowledge about nature use and nature access. The latter are available through tourist industry interfaces (websites, flyers, press ads and the like), of which migrants make ample use (cf. Horolets, 2015). Language proficiency and previous experience with the use of tourist infrastructure are important resources that help to construct one's contact with nature. For instance, the research participant who travelled to Snowdon was fluent in English and an experienced traveller. Interestingly, her account of her travel experience is also more stereotypical and more "echolalic", i.e. very similar to the descriptions of nature sites that appear in many other narratives – commercial, public and private. I introduced the term "echolalia" elsewhere (Horolets, 2013) in order to describe the practice of talking about one's authentic experience using the form and content of other sources, such as tourist brochures. The concomitancy of the repetition of ready-made formulas used for describing one's contact with nature and the subjective perception of the uniqueness and authenticity of the contact is only superficially a paradox. The logic of popular cultural representation that favours understandable ways of expression welcomes repetitions, while the experience as such is unique to an individual who engages in it, exactly because it is bodily as well as symbolic. Nature is not only observed and then described but also incorporated (cf. Ingold, 2000).

A subject who comes in contact with nature – a migrant, in this case – should be considered not only as a cultural but also as a natural subject. Understanding migrants as natural subjects is conducive to seeing them as multi-dimensional subjects (or "plural actors", as Lahire

(2010) suggests to describe a contemporary individual who inevitably performs a number of different roles). Migrants thus emerge as people whose daily business of living is not limited to their migration experience and whose identities are far more complex than suggests the label “migrants” with which they are described in public discourse.

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# Genius loci and social activity. The case of Polish immigrants in Reykjavik and the Tricity

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The environment has a big impact on social life and social perception of the world, as well as people's role within it. In this article I link the phenomenon of social activity with notions of place, environment, and nature. Using the concept of genius loci, I want to show a strong mutual relationship between people and place. Taking the example of Polish immigrants in Reykjavik in Iceland and the internal migrants to the Tricity in Poland, I explore the impact of place and nature within it on their activities, lifestyles, and perceptions of the surrounding world. I am interested in the perception of environment especially from the perspective of incomers, and in reading its role in shaping social attitudes. The research material consists of individual, in-depth interviews with activists from Reykjavik and Tricity. Their statements emphasise the importance of place in their decision of where to live, manifested inter alia in a sense of self-agency and practices of social activities. One feature that connects the two (different in many ways but undoubtedly unique) places studied in this article is their coastal character.

## Around concepts of place and social activity: Theoretical and research assumptions

In this article I am mainly interested in the relations of humans with place and meanings given to it. The complexity of relationships of human being-place highlights, among other things, various ways of understanding the meaning of the place. The two main points of view in the humanities are based on the approaches of Plato and Aristotle. The former considered place a complex and subtle phenomenon. The latter conceptualised it as being empty, simply a container. The broad notions of space and place pose a challenge in contemporary social sciences. Trying to compromise about the nature of place between a traditional approach and a “progressive” one (closed vs. open, static vs. dynamic, essential vs. constructive), I take into account the physical features of the place, but in relational way. There are some objective characteristics of localisation, which make (or may make) places very significant for people staying there, but not in every part of their life, or not always (i.e. Lewicka, 2012, p. 81).

To show human relations with space I use the concept of *genius loci*. This term, meaning the generally prevailing character or atmosphere of a place, is very elusive. In classical Roman tradition *genius loci* was the protective spirit of a place. The meaning of the term *genius loci* has changed, from an appreciation of mainly exclusively rural and garden landscapes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to any place and any landscape, including urban ones (Jivén & Larkham, 2003, p. 68). This metaphor, it can be said – a historical one, is still in use today, although not without difficulties, associated *inter alia* with the changing world and the nature of places, especially cities (i.e. Rewers, 2008). The common definition of *genius loci* can be the quality of a place that consists of many elements, but primarily visual ones, which make the place attractive. Such a place has its own unique history that should be protected and conserved. It is closely connected with the search for authenticity of places (Jivén & Larkham, 2003).

The contemporary concept of *genius loci* is approached from different conceptual angles. This concept is complex and multi-layered. It is considered from a social, symbolic construct to the individual,

subjective perception of place, associated with practices and experience (Jivén & Larkham, 2003). In addition to the stability of physical forms, genius loci also includes of characteristic rhythmic fluctuations (continual changes of light and vegetation in the annual cycle). Also, the built environment is taken into account (Norberg-Schultz, 1980). The tendency of people to seek stability, and the authenticity of a place, by capturing its spirit is indeed associated with a continuous, inevitable change that often is in fact also an important element of the genius loci. Both in theoretical considerations and in everyday perception, deliberations on this concept to reflect a wider problem of the social world include: balancing between the permanent and the changeable, or between nature and culture. From the perspective of this article, this concept emphasises the special role of nature in the social and cultural construction of reality.

Social sciences, especially constructivist approaches, show that rather than singular nature there are various natures, produced by and through social practices (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998, 2000). People go freely from its monitoring and supervision to participating in it in different ways (Popczyk, 2011, p. 22). However, it still seems to be worthwhile considering “the old distinction of nature as an object of manipulation from nature as a force acting independently of human will” (Popczyk, 2011, p. 22). Taking into account the social and cultural conditioning of nature, it is worth recalling the term environment, understood as nature experienced by people. Environment cannot be considered in isolation from the human world: it integrally includes people (Frydryczak, 2010, p. 101). People are a part of nature and at the same time people change nature (Popczyk, 2011, p. 23).

Social sciences, primarily environmental psychology, have much to say about the human relationship with nature. Based on empirical studies, mainly quantitative ones, social psychologists emphasise the role of nature in creating and sustaining psychological identity (i.e. Clayton & Opatow, 2003), the tendency for people to associate with natural or built environments, as well as, among others, the importance of identity in understanding environmental attitudes (Clayton & Opatow, 2003; Schultz & Tabanico, 2007). In a study of self and identity the value of

contact with nature is emphasised (based on, for example, gardening) (Freeman, Dickinson, Porter & van Heezik, 2012).

By studying the social and cultural human involvement in nature, it is worth recalling the concept of land and landscape as well as to point out the distinction between them. Land is “a physical, tangible resource that is ploughed, sown, grazed, and built upon”, while landscape involves “appearance or look, of leisure, relaxation, and visual consumptions” (Macnaghten & Urry, 2000, p. 6). It seems that places have indeed been “physically and semiotically designed for landscape rather than land” (Macnaghten & Urry, 2000, p. 6). The changes of today’s world related *inter alia* to progressive environmental awareness, also aesthetically, as well as changing spaces at a rapid rate, mainly urban ones, lead to an increased significance of the term landscape, including the social sciences. Underlining the symbolic value of landscape, the authors closely relate this concept with territorial identity, as well as communication (i.e. Nogué & Vela, 2011). They also highlight the need for knowledge about landscape, enabling life in a particular place, affecting the active life and quality of it. Place orientation is especially significant in a new place, which is outlined *inter alia* by the researchers of migration (i.e. Horolets, 2012).

The concepts of space, place, nature, environment, and landscape are present in the study of migration. It seems that there is a strong relationship between the sense of self-agency and activism, on the one hand, and the choice of a place to live and perception of surroundings, on the other. However, literature and studies often explore place and place attachment in opposition to mobility. Generalising, there are two perspectives in social sciences: one values place roots territoriality, and the second emphasises changes in the contemporary world making social relationships and individual experiences dissociated from place (i.e. Gustafson, 2001). However, there are some researchers showing that people regard relationships of place attachment and mobility in various different ways. For instance, the roots/routes perspective used in sociology and anthropology suggests the relationship and the intertwining of those (i.e. Clifford, 1997; see also Gustafson, 2001). Some investigations show that people may regard place and mobility

in several different ways, also the two being an equilibrium or even complementary (Gustafson, 2001).

The concept of place attachment is also often used in reflections of social or, more precisely, civic activity. Relationships and correlates between these are not so obvious. A lot of studies show that place attachment is positively correlated with length of residence, age, and local ties (Lewicka, 2011). However, along with the traditional place attachment, there is the active and self-conscious attachment, slowly replacing the former one (Lewicka, 2011). People may also feel attached to place in which they have not lived for long and in which they do not have family roots and history (Lewicka, 2013). It applies to mobile people (in different ways), often very active in their life, in social, cultural, professional, or civic ways. Maria Lewicka suggests looking at the relationship between place attachment and civic activity in terms of two alternative paths: in the social-emotional path this connection is mediated by local social capital (especially by neighbourhood ties), and in the cultural path – by cultural capital and interest in one's own roots (Lewicka, 2005).

Keeping in mind the specificity of Polish society (historical and nowadays especially economic) and the characteristics and reasons for the majority of migrations related to this, I focus on a part of this phenomenon, concerning active people. Although Poles migrate to Iceland mainly for economic reasons (see more, i.e. Napierała & Wojtyńska, 2011), in this article I consider a fairly specific social category of migrants to which the term “lifestyle migration” seems to be helpful in order to describe this process of connecting active immigrants to a new place. In general terms it means “the relocation of people within the developed world searching for a better way of life”, understood in categories of quality of life or work-life balance (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009, p. 608). Migrants usually evaluate their chosen relocation by contrasting the features of the host community with home. Among the many merits of a new place relating to the capacity of valuable life, self-development, and activities, there are also the climate and health benefits or sense of community (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009, p. 610).

On the one hand, a beautiful landscape, proximity to the sea, and coastal features of a new residence bring migrants closer to “tourism as

a way of life”, emphasising escape, leisure, and relaxation. On the other hand, cities chosen by migrants can provide inspiration in cultural, artistic, creative way. These places are valuable and unique, and they play a big role in “following dreams”, “new beginning”, or “spreading wings”. Speaking more generally: in reflecting project of the self. The choice should be seen both in terms of structural constrains and individual agency, primarily: prior experiences of a location, culturally conditioned imagination of a place, and also, individual circumstances (including cultural capital) (i.e. Benson & O’Reilly, 2009, p. 613).

Studies on social activity have a long tradition in the social sciences. In Polish social sciences Florian Znaniecki was one of the first to develop this for sociology, while Helena Radlińska worked on it from the perspective of social pedagogics. Znaniecki introduced the concepts of “leaders” and “ideologists” (Znaniecki, 1974, 1990); both are used today, especially by researchers of locality and civil society (i.e. Bojar, 2006). Radlińska coined the concept of the “environment of life”, from which the education of place was drawn later. She was also an author of the concept of “action research” (i.e. Cervinkova & Gołębnik, 2013). In the Polish social sciences quite a lot of attention is paid to social activities, including the third sector and leaders. Sociological studies take into account the background of action: shapes and changes of society (including political one), social organisations, as well as the ethos of social activists and the intelligentsia, and the tradition of social activity (i.e. Hłowiecka-Tańska, 2011). The research involves social activity on the one hand for the formation of civil society, including public participation, and on the other: activities in the field of culture, also often fit within a broader social change, and cultural animation.

Social activity is combined with leisure, which is important in different dimensions of human life. Leisure is quite a complex term, pointing towards the complexity of social practices and meanings given to them, as well as broader socio-cultural changes. For example, studies on participation in culture in Poland reveals, among other things, that time of work and free time are mixed (i.e. Bachórz et al., 2014). For many categories of people these activities are intertwined, difficult to isolate both practically and mentally (Bachórz et al., 2014). Forms of participation in culture, including social activities, merge and also blur

the boundary between celebration and everyday life. It is also interesting in the context of the increasing intensity of human mobility.

Leisure as a significant social phenomenon in the context of the human relationship with place is also taken into account in the study of migration. Better understanding of how migrants' leisure is different from and similar to the leisure of the mainstream population can be beneficial not only for migrants themselves but also for the receiving society (Horolets, 2012). For individuals, leisure is important primarily in the dimensions of physical health, psychological well-being, emotions, prestige, identity, network building, social inclusion, and cognitive development (Horolets, 2012, p. 4). Therefore, integration policies can be designed so that they include leisure alongside other dimensions of life. Pragmatically, if migrants have free time, they can not only be a physically and mentally fitter labour force, which means less strain on public services, but also contribute to a receiving country a richer cultural life and have more chances for political integration, such as participation in its civil society (Horolets, 2012, p. 4).

Here, I understand social activity widely, not limited to the specific sphere of social life, social categories, or social practices. Describing socially active people I mean those who take actions that go beyond family or strictly professional or pragmatic obligations. The self-identification of activists, and more specifically, the subjective feeling of activity and taking care of place, has also been an important element in choosing respondents in my research. The broad definition of social activity is a result also of the difficulty in operationalisation of social activity, and even narrower: of the third sector. It should be noted that nowadays lifestyles have changed, including social practices relating to social activity, as well as perception and evaluation efforts for others, the community, and the need for self-development. Today the third sector in Poland is very diverse (i.e. Nowosielski, 2010; Goszczyński et al., 2013). Thus, for example, Polish people move away from the traditional membership organisations in the traditional, rigid sense for the project activities, an informal collective of spontaneous activity, including self-organisation with the assistance of web applications. There are new types of activity and association that do not fit within the traditional membership in formal organisations (i.e. *Sąsiedztwa i mikroorganizacje*, 2009). Also, it can



be seen that a significant part of the third sector have become modern and professionalised, inter alia by social economy (i.e. Nowosielski, 2010; Goszczyński et al., 2013).

In addition, there are different social, political, and institutional realities, which international migrants (the ones going from Poland to Iceland in this case) face. According to a recent social research project conducted in Iceland, Polish immigrants largely feel their influence on the new place of residence, manifested primarily in the cultural sphere (the breaking of Pole stereotypes, in raising awareness of Polish culture in the activity and participation in cultural events), but less in public participation related to local politics (Zielińska, 2012).

## Description of the study

I try to link the phenomenon of social activity with reflections about place, especially in terms of environment and nature. I notice the near absence of such a connection in sociological literature. This combination seems to be interesting and reasonable also because of the social category of activists that distinctly emphasises the causative role of people and their actions and interactions in the creation of place. Those people have usually wide reflections about place, which is very important to them, and they are willing to speak about it.

I try to bridge the gap between spatial and environmental reflection and social activity, by the example of two places: Reykjavik, the capitol of Iceland and the Tricity, which consists of Gdańsk, Sopot, and Gdynia, Polish cities on the Baltic coast. I am interested in the migrants' point of view: Polish immigrants in Reykjavik, and people living in the Tricity, who come from other parts of Poland. An important element of the project of study as well as the general idea was my personal experience as a person who moved to Gdańsk from another Polish city.

The empirical material for this article consists of qualitative interviews<sup>1</sup> with socially active people in Reykjavik and the Tricity that

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<sup>1</sup> The interviews, to a large extent, were carried out by Daria Cherek and Martyna Ziółkowska, students of sociology at the University of Gdansk. I thank them for their great support.

were conducted from November 2014 to October 2015. In total, we spoke with 15 people, including eight from Reykjavik and seven from the Tricity. The interlocutors, 10 women and five men, had lived in a new city for at least two years. They were aged between 24 and 38 years. They represent different kinds of activities, including mainly cultural events, mobilising local communities, activities for children and youths, and creating and popularising culture and art. Among them are teachers, journalists, managers of non-governmental organisations, employees of cultural institutions, amateur actors, and social and cultural animators. They are active very often in more than one of these areas.

Describing active people I do not put boundaries between life in the frame of social activity and beyond. The questions in the interviews concerned not directly their activities, which were the main criteria for choosing respondents for this study, but life as a whole, including everyday life practices. In the interviews we asked how it happened that people started living in this place; about life before migration; about their first impressions in the new place (including a description of the surroundings, environmental; paying attention to the naming of place); life in the new place (description, everyday life, activities); differences with the previous place; activities, also compared to the ones of the previous place of residence. Speaking of surroundings, we took into account: the natural environment (terrain, climate, weather, vegetation, animals, water, land, etc.), geographic location, also related to the social and cultural (e.g. architecture, spatial plan of the city).

Despite some difficulties that will be outlined below, the interviews with activists provided valuable insights into the way people's interaction with the environment unfolds and in the way they conceptualise it. Some respondents found it difficult to speak about social practices involving nature. Natural surroundings appeared in general descriptions, including perceptions of places, naming them, rather than in speaking of everyday practices. The interviews showed how much nature is separated from culture in oral language. In the case of speaking about biography, including experience of social activism, the interlocutors did it in exclusively culture-related terms, not including themes of nature and environment. Questions of social practices relating to nature and

the environment turned out to be an element of discovery or revelation for the respondents.

### Place means people

People turned out to be a very significant, if not the most important, element of *genius loci*. However, the human factor has been strongly connected here with the uniqueness of place. The respondents pointed out that people are a necessary part of making and shaping place. In spite of the bilateral impact (space on people and vice versa), the interlocutors underlined the potential that people have to create or shape space, in particular understood as the climate, the atmosphere, and uniqueness of the place.

According to the interviewees, it is not the place in itself that is important, but the people; not where we are, but with whom. Place depends only on people, as well as on some entity that can or cannot find curiosity there.

I think that mainly people create the spirit of the place. People who want to work and how they want to work. The climate, the possibility of space – this is a secondary thing. (W, 25, T<sup>2</sup>)

It appears that such an approach to a place is associated with the definition of oneself as a socially active person, or even more broadly, of human nature that is able to create and to change. In view of the interviewees, individualism is strongly intertwined with communitarianism. From the interviews, it followed that, on the one hand, the individual has an impact on the place (environment and people) and hence on the formation of the community, and on the other hand, the friendliness of the place, which allows relationships to be established for instance, influences the development of the individual, thus contributing to the importance of individualism.

Both in the case of the Tricity and Reykjavik, the difference with other cities in terms of people and relationships has been emphasised.

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<sup>2</sup> In brackets I describe the authors of cited expressions. Gender: W – woman, M – man; Age; Place of living: R – Reykjavik, T – Tricity.

Those places were rated positively and they were contrasted with other cities, mainly Polish and European metropolises. In Reykjavik, the relatively small size of the city was emphasised, and thus its uniqueness in Europe and the consequent friendly atmosphere that facilitates gathering information and getting involved in communication. The Tricity, despite its size and diversity, is different from a typical metropolis.

Now I cannot imagine that I could live anywhere else. Certainly not in Warsaw. There is a big rush of life that a person is an anonymous everywhere. You feel like a grey mouse, which we all may trample. I see here that an individual is more important. And also friends' circles... (W, 28, T)

The uniqueness of the Tricity has just some positive features of the metropolis, but with interpersonal relations and some characteristics of local, traditional community.

When I came to Gdansk I did not have too many friends, and those contacts, relationships I managed to make. It was not just that metropolitan problem. Although this is also metropolis, the huge city ... (W, 26, T)

Genius loci is also a friendly atmosphere for life and self-development, which has an impact on the choice of places to live, or on the decision to stay in such a location. Active people emphasised the importance of quality of life. It consists of inter alia relationships and community, based in some way on the family character of contacts.

Then, as I thought about future learning, I was not considering another place. Somewhere Torun appeared, but I insisted on Gdansk, and I totally do not regret. Largely there were people who offered me such, I could say, an urban family. (...) Some of them left, but the most important ones stayed. (W, 26, T)

The mentality of people, understood as consisting of the spirit of place, in both places was described positively. On the one hand, it has been pointed out that external factors associated with a place, mainly environmental and historical, affected the mentality of people. On the

other hand, it has been emphasised that these characteristics shape the inhabitants of the place. Still, in other cases, it was suggested that mentality is simply the consequence of difficult or inexplicable *genius loci*. The main feature of the Tricity residents, which co-shapes the unique atmosphere and increases quality of life, is openness.

I was positively surprised by great openness. I had learned from high school that people in Wielkopolska [region in Western Poland] are more closed, form groups. When I came here to study, immediately I was accepted by colleagues. I put roots into the place very quickly. I was surprised by large openness directed to people from various places in Poland. (W, 29, T)

Talking about people in Iceland, immigrants pointed to differences, especially in terms of mentality. Cultural differences are noticed especially in the beginning, when getting to know a new place to live. Most suggested the distance in human relations, but not combined with a lack of courtesy or other negative features.

However, the first impressions were that the people are very detached. I was hitchhiking, so I refer to those experiences. They are unlikely to offer more help than transporting someone from point a to b. This was in an incredible contrast to what I experienced throughout Europe, where people invite for a meal out of the blue. Here you rather do not experience this. (M, 33, R)

Distancing in interpersonal relations does not mean indifference. Despite the cultural differences in communication, helping each other is characteristic of the inhabitants of Iceland. This is most often explained by specifics in terms of physical space, and thus – the relatedness of people.

I think people behave in this way because they are one big family here, literally. All are related and I think this makes contacts so easy, and willingness to help others. Also it is not known when helping people will need some assistance, too. I have learned this from them and when I see an accident, for example somebody tripping on ice or falling of a bike, I always stop and ask if a person needs help. (W, 30, R)

The specificity of place, seen as a specificity of people, is closely connected to the fact that Iceland is an island. Respondents explained many of the behaviours, or even people's mentality, by the fact that they live on the island. They claim that islander mentality is primarily characterised by peace, detachment, and lack of haste.

Iceland is an island, people are typical islanders. This is the specificity. These are people who have time for everything. Very different way of thinking. They do not hurry too much, what for... When we talk about the organising something (...) you wait for a response, it is hard to contact in a business context. But this is also this chilling out ... (...) A man adjusts a little bit. (W, 34, R)

### Being close to diverse nature

The specificity of both cities, which makes them unique and is one of the most important elements of the spirit of the place, is its proximity to nature. This is, undoubtedly, the advantage of space, and even though it is not the main reason that they immigrated there, it becomes a very significant element of the evaluation of the destination over time, "without which you cannot now imagine life". In both places respondents emphasised easy and quick access to nature. This has an impact on the general perception of the city, and thus on life in these places.

The proximity of nature provides, among others, a sense of freedom. In Iceland, nature is mostly open spaces that are associated with openness, freedom, and lack of barriers.

You can be away from civilisation, that is, let's face it, half an hour's drive from the capital. It's close. Thanks to this space, everything opens up. (M, 32, R)

Uniting with nature, without effort, as part of daily activities, affects the perception of the city as unique, and at the same time creates a specific, difficult to grasp and describe, atmosphere of the place.

It was not important to me in making this decision. But I feel that it is important when I live here. There is a greater openness that I feel

in the city. That climate of the city. It is difficult to say what it is. But I really see it that I feel different in example in Cracow, in a crammed city full of smog. (...) Here is nature almost everywhere. (W, 28, T)

In the Tricity it is emphasised that nature “merges together with the city”. For some activists the place is unique also because of the lack of a clear division: the nature-city/civilisation. There were even opinions that the Tricity is not in opposition to nature, but its fulfilment, a harmony. A prime example is the shipyards, whose value is the meeting of industry with nature, often uncontrollable, but one of a kind and the giving spirit of the place.

At the same time there are places, like the shipyard, which are in the centre of the city, and are completely taken out of any context by the fact that there was a facility that no longer works. In the middle of the city fox and wild cats run, and wildlife pulls this city itself back. (W, 28, T)

In Reykjavik, nature is part of the city; it “comes into the city” primarily because of its size. The small capital of Iceland is rich with beautiful views. Nature is “felt” also because of weather conditions, especially wind.

The specificity of the Tricity nature is, in addition to its proximity and accessibility, also its wide variation. The uniqueness of the space consists of a variety of terrains, landscapes, especially coastal areas (beach and sea), and not monotonous forests.

There is very varied terrain around Gdansk. There is no monotony in the landscape. And the sea. This is the peculiarity of Tricity and surroundings. (M, 30, T)

The specificity of Icelandic nature is that it is hard to describe, it is other than elsewhere, the only one of its kind. This is nature that is the most difficult to grasp and name, and which makes it difficult to describe the specificity of the place.

It is hard to explain; you need to feel it. (W, 32, R)

Nature and wildlife: delight non-stop. (M, 33, R)

The nature in Iceland is so unique, mainly because it is challenging, even difficult, but fascinating.

First of all, the weather, which literally crushed me. I came in November, when storms are raging here. It blows, it rains. I faced a rather unpleasant weather, as for the first time. And limitless. Lava fields, like deserts. There is nothing but lava and mountains on the horizon. Well, it all fascinated me very much. Well, it was enough fascination to not give up and stay here. (W, 34, R)

According to respondents in both places the proximity of nature, physically and visually, can be felt, which makes people think more about wildlife and climate. Such circumstances can be challenging, but pretty easy to get used to. In the Tricity, it is mainly a maritime climate: primarily wind, rain, and a little bit colder weather than in other places in Poland.

The breeze is from the sea. This is nice. In winter, the snow there is not enough snow. In Grudziadz, Torun the frost is bigger, there is more snow, and here there is sleet. But then I appreciate that this climate is mild. When my family come as tourists, they were unhappy that there was no good weather. But we do not mind, it is not limiting for us at all. (M, 30, T)

Here the atmosphere is a little different. It's a little less sun than in Wielkopolska, which was an unpleasant surprise for me, because practically all winter sun does not shine. In contrast to those areas. It's a little depressing. (W, 29, T)

In Iceland what makes people "closer" to nature and climate is mainly the low temperatures, frequent and rapid changes of weather, the wind, and the long nights or days.

The climate is harsh, rather cold. There is no typical summer, and winters are mild. Day merges with the night. In the summer you miss the darkness, and in the winter almost never ending sun. The wind blows almost always, and most of the year it rains. You have to get used to. (M, 33, R)



A specific feature of Reykjavik is the continuous variation of landscape under the influence of the weather changes.

There are clouds, they can change the entire landscape, so wow, I've never seen it, because the weather has changed and in these conditions, everything looks completely different. (M, 33, R)

It's so crazy that you can have the sun, the rain, and snow, and hail, and everything. It could happen, and in the winter, and in summer. There are T-shirts: "four seasons in one day", something like that. (W, 37, R)

### The impact of environment on social practices

The environment turns out to be an important part of everyday life. Again, we can see a strong bilateral influence of man and the environment. According to the active respondents, "being" in the surroundings is an inherent part of their "I". "Using nature" or "being with nature", or "experiencing nature" is an important part of their lifestyle. It is part of their identity, but also, what has been always emphasised, it is due to (at least in part) the specificity of those places. Both in Reykjavik and in the Tricity nature is "intense": you cannot go past it without noticing it.

As far as the impact of external factors on everyday social practices is concerned, people, especially in Reykjavik, pointed the climate. In this tone they spoke mostly about reconciliation with nature, accepting the situation, such as it is. However, this does not mean ceasing to be active. Activism goes together with adaptation to existing conditions. Polish people living in Reykjavik described this in terms of cultural differences. Challenging nature and climate determines a certain lifestyle, leisure time, ways of raising kids, and the like. They notice at the same time that they adopted this lifestyle quite quickly, and it suited them very well. It made them feel fewer limitations. Paradoxically, people in Iceland spend a lot of time outside, even more than they used to do in Poland. This is because of the high unpredictability of the weather and condition of the surroundings. It makes no sense to wait for nice weather. Each type of weather is good, just adjustment and preparation are needed. The following story, one of many in a similar tone, represents the social practices in Reykjavik in the context of environmental influences:

I get up in the morning, and the first thing I do is checking the weather. I have the impression that all my decisions are dependent on the weather. Whether I have a trip for the weekend, whether I go for a walk, whether I walk or drive a car. Whether I go to the pool, or I go running outside or to a gym. Whether I go out to dinner in heels or in boots. You have to be friends with weather, and not fight with it because it always wins. You have to learn this, otherwise you probably will get depressed. I do not deprive myself of anything. If I want to go to the cinema, I go. If I want to go on a trip, I choose a weekend when it is not supposed to rain. But they are often wrong (laughing). The one thing I have often resigned from is a walk with my son. If it is just very windy he falls asleep during a quick walk around the house and I leave a stroller in front of the house. If the weather is nice we go for few hours walk. (W, 30, R)

The difference of the Icelandic surroundings makes Polish immigrants very curious and therefore they watch, explore, and learn about this new place. They are impressed by nature and the vast spaces that inspire and motivate them to partake in outdoor activities.

I was delighted the alleys space. At the beginning of every day I rode a bike (W, 35, R)

Also a large and important part of free time in Reykjavik takes the form of active trips outside the city. The diversity and variability of nature caused by continuous weather changes increases the need for constant exploration of the place and the desire to learn about it.

It is never get bored. Every time these places look different. (...) It is always some surprise. (W, 32, R)

Residents of the Tricity often emphasise the benefit from the fact that nature is close, “at your fingertips”. It creeps into everyday practice, for example by walking or riding a bike. Actively “being” with nature in the Tricity, as in Reykjavik, is also intentional. Respondents listed outdoor activities as follows: sports and recreation, but also rest, relaxation, time for reflection, inspiration, and, last but not least, social meetings.

Respondents from the Tricity underlined at the same time that, because of the specific environment of the metropolis, the culture of an active

outdoor lifestyle among its inhabitants has developed. A characteristic feature of the Tricity is, *inter alia*, that “people especially take care of physical culture” (W, 25, T). Also, the infrastructure, such as bike paths, hiking trails, parks, and beaches, helps people to connect with nature.

Activists from the Tricity underlined being non-tourists. As residents they claimed that they escaped the crowded, typical tourist places. They engage actively in sports instead of lying on the beach and sunbathing. If they want to relax, they choose quiet, not very well-known places.

In Gdynia it seems to me, for example, that this beach is so small, it is a roundup of people that season in general is not a pleasure. These forests are much nicer, there is no one, because no one knows them. (W, 25, T)

I mean, we do not use the sea as typical tourists, we do not lay on the beach, do not sunbathe (...) I guess, we have no such internal needs. (...) We go to look at the sea, we like sound of the sea, it is very calming. (W, 28, T)

## Place conducive to activism

The specificity of both places is conducive to broader human activity. Respondents combined the *genius loci* with social activities. To describe the specific local conditions associated with the willingness to be active they used the language of the environment. They pointed to the “unique atmosphere”, “energy”, “favourable climate”, and the wind.

This place itself has amazing energy. (W, 28, R)

I think that this wind rushes us somewhere all the time. (W, 25, T)

In the interviews the wind was connected with motion and, as a result, many social and cultural activities. Nevertheless, despite the fact that in both places, “a lot is going on, especially for those who are interested”, the specific atmosphere is primarily calm and favourable for creative action, for seeking inspiration.

Here, you want to do a lot, I do not know exactly why. Probably bit of everything. People, cool place, even landscape, variety of everything... (M, 34, T)

Especially the inhabitants of Reykjavik emphasise that the desire for action is associated with the indescribable atmosphere of the place associated with a feeling of calm. It has been argued that “here man does not get tired so quickly; however, actually quite a lot of things are being done” (W, 28, R).

Somehow I cannot explain that. But my friends here also say that life here is some such calmer. (...) I think of Iceland as about some idyll, peace, despite the fact that you work a lot (...) And it is not as rosy as it is often said (...) I have a lot of different activities. Yet I imagine Iceland as a country idyllic, quiet, safe ... But somehow ... you can call it paradise on earth. (M, 27, R)

Nature in the context of social activity is most often recognised in terms of encouraging it, as respondents as well as others, creating a specific atmosphere of an active life. The respondents emphasised the friendliness of the place, including the facilities, access to attractive areas, and thereby an accessible active lifestyle. The activity on various social fields is also, particularly in Reykjavik, a way to deal with the challenging features of the place, especially its nature and climate.

I think that here is a lot of organisations. If someone likes to knit and has a desire to meet someone that has such a chance. It's easier to meet people if someone is determined. But if someone is not determined, I do not know. If the weather would force him ... (...) The winter period is difficult. If someone wants to take care of yourself mentally he will go whether on a language course... (M, 33, R)

A variety of shared hobbies and the development of them within groups is explained by respondents in historical terms. However, the activity associated with the tradition of self-development, as well as activities for the local community, is combined with the specificity of the island, mainly with its difficult climate.

You just have to meet with people. And since it began historically. The period of winter, a time when there was no need to herd of sheep, hay and so on. People themselves sat, locked up in small spaces, and someone out there himself knitted, painted, wrote, sang. And here you can hear

the echo of the history till now. I do not know what in the world is what is not here. There is every possible group of interests, even if it was one person. (W, 30, R)

Such caring about quality of free time in Iceland is explained also by the fact that the country is an island. The activity is stimulated by isolation, limited external influences, and thereby by feeling the need or necessity to organise their lives by themselves, creating an attractive place.

One, that there is few people; two, that they are on the island, so they are isolated. If something is to happen they have to organise it. Well, you know, that people might come to ... well, there is a cooperation with other countries. But I think it had to be result of being closed. They organised a lot because they want to have things happened. The boredom is also a source of cool stuff. (W, 37, R)

Both places, according to some respondents, lead to creativity. It is manifested mainly in cultural, especially artistic projects. Activists, especially from Reykjavik, emphasised a friendly environment to develop an alternative culture. The unique nature, challenging climate, and relative isolation make artistic activities specific, characteristic, and alternative.

### Phenomenon of coastal place

Both places have in common the proximity of a seawater reservoir and their location on the coast. Reykjavik is located on the southern shore of the Faxaflói Bay. The Tricity is situated on the coast of Gdańsk Bay, which is part of the Baltic Sea. The coastal character of these locations is significant in social life, not only in everyday practices linked mainly to the specific maritime climate, but also in the social perception of place and its meanings. It seems that the water plays the role of a border: on the one hand – opening the land to the world, and on the other – closing it.

Being close the water is attractive for many reasons. Most of all, it remains that such a place is quite different, unique, diverse. It is associated with being on the border. On the one hand it limits, and on

the other – it gives freedom. This freedom, of which one reminded by among others the wind, makes people active.

Coastal places in the eyes of significant others are perceived very positively in many ways, but also as unknown, somewhat mysterious locations.

From friends from other cities I often hear: how cool, how wonderful that you're living here, and they are just jealous because of this access to the sea. This is seen as a friendly city. (W, 25, T)

My colleagues were a little jealous that I was moving to Gdansk. They mostly leaving to Wrocław and Poznań, so Gdańsk was quite exotic and unknown place. (W, 29, T)

Coastal city means also being close to diversity. Respondents from the Tricity emphasised the historical traditions of the flow of people, especially the Hanseatic Union of Baltic cities between the XII and XVII century.

There are traditions of the city that it was never closed for migrants. The merchant, Hanseatic nature supports the exchange of people. And it probably still works. Maybe in a shrunken form, but still... (M, 30, T)

The climate of openness is also connected with being a port city. The Tricity was associated with the Western world, especially during the post-war socialist regime in Poland.

I met very open-minded people. I do not know whether the effect is that they live in Gdansk, but also a lot of people working in the yard stress that Gdańsk has always been a different city than any city in Poland. The seaside towns have always had more contact with the world, because of sailors and goods from the world. There is something about this, for sure. Even oranges... in stories about Christmas they more often appear in Tricity than in the depths of Poland (laughs). I feel a climate of open city. (W, 28, T)

Also, during the transformation in Poland the Tricity was connected to a better world, being closer to the West. In the associations of respondents everything there was better, nicer, appeared faster than in the place where they lived.

I remember Crikoland (amusement park), for many years was my landmark of Gdansk (laughing). For me it was something so incredible that here, near Slupsk, there is a huge funfair. I always thought that such things can exist only in the West, but it was here, near my Grandma ... (M, 30, T)

The Tricity is a window to the world also from the perspective of financial opportunities. For people coming from other parts of Poland this place is sometimes associated with the North. Usually it means being, in some way, close to a wealthier part of the world. This is, among other reasons, because of economic migrations to the northern Baltic countries, perceived as the “rich” North, which is, in this respect, broadly understood as being part of the West.

This is just an introduction, the beginning of the better world, in a financial sense. I have the same positive associations with this region. (W, 28, T)

Iceland, for respondents living in Reykjavik, means literally a window to the world. They touch the new, they live in very different and unknown before surroundings. They get to know a culture that is different in many ways, and meet new people.

Despite quite a long time here I still get to know new things, and something surprises me. I’m still learning this place, although it seems to me that now I know it well. The first enchantment had long ago passed, though. (W, 30, R)

In the eyes of respondents from both locations Reykjavik seems to be the window to the world also in an economical sense. Some Icelandic migrants admitted that it also gives freedom and lets people enjoy their life and surroundings.

I do not know how much freedom landscape gives me, and how much the fact that I have money to pay bills and I do not have to worry. Maybe both. (W, 37, R)

The phenomenon of coast consists of the fact that the water in some way closes the space. Respondents from the Tricity sometimes admitted

that the Baltic Sea can be seen as a strong border, isolating them from lands they do not know. They have just some vague image.

It is interesting, the Baltic... but what exactly is behind this? (smile).  
Then the blank spot... (M, 30, T)

The closure is noticed even more in Reykjavik. This place is a challenge because of the island status of this place.

And the fact that we are on the island, which makes the whole world somewhere away, and you are here, your little world, which you are able to get to know quite quickly... And you have to arrange yourself here somehow. (M, 30, R)

The place of living for active people from the Tricity and Reykjavik turned out to be a very important part of self-identity. Both locations play a significant role in the perception of life, oneself, including the sense and motivation for activity. It seems that the idea of *genius loci* has its main meaning in the evaluation of space and the location of oneself within it. The perception and styles of speaking about both places is similar in many ways. In both locations, new residents emphasise the role of the people in building the character of the place. It is a kind of bilateral relationship. According to respondents, characteristics of the residents largely result from the main characteristics of these cities and their locations. In the studied cases it is primarily a diverse natural environment “at inhabitants’ fingertips”, which has considerable influence on lifestyle and also on social activity.

It seems though that the most distinctive feature of both locations, reflecting active newcomers, is their seaside character. A specific tension between closing and opening places is formed by the coastal phenomenon of those locations. This balance between the inner and outer world, between influences and independence and self-steering, between uniqueness and universality is considered as *genius loci*. Also, it reflects the greatest challenges faced by active people, which they face in everyday life in their new one-of-a-kind place.



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# Tour guides in nature-based tourism: Perceptions of nature and governance of protected areas, the case of Skaftafell at the Vatnajökull National Park

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## Perception of nature located within the themes of migration and tourism

Nature-based tourism depends on the natural environment and how humans experience and interact with it. Therefore, the perception of nature is of particular interest when it comes to the interaction of humans and the natural environment in the tourism setting. People try to make sense of the processes and the dynamics of their surroundings. First of all, the environment can be understood in many ways (cf. Attfield, 2003 in Holden, 2008) as follows: a) the surroundings, b) the objective system of nature (e.g. mountains, rainforests, etc.), and c) the perceived surrounding (e.g. providing a sense of belonging). This classification already shows that the environment is more than the physical location; it also has emotional, mental, sensory, and cultural aspects.

From a sensory perspective, Lund (2013) resonates the arguments of Ingold (2011) when she argues that the environment and especially nature is not a passive being, but rather it emerges as one engages with it through physical means (Lund, 2013). It is the engagement with the environment that shapes our perception of it. The natural environment

can be seen as an embodied experience within us and the fabric of our society (cf. Ingold, 2011). This embodiment emerges out of the activity of dwelling and the experience of natural factors (e.g. weather, temperature, food, and building materials) and so where the body becomes a part of its environment and the mind copes with unclear separation of the self and the environment.

Yet, due to the interpretation of the surrounding by sensory means and the mind, it can be argued whether or not a real environment exists (cf. Holden, 2008). The experience and perception of nature becomes embodied and envisioned, dependent on the pre-conditions of the visitor. These pre-conditions can be seen as filters through which the experience of the environment is filtered. These filters are based upon the visitor's own experiences, memories, and the values transported within society. Specifically, the background of the individual is of importance because it is rooted in the culture and society of the individual, and it shapes the interaction and interpretation with each aspect of the human and non-human environment (cf. Abt, 1989). The networks formed by different individuals also influence their perception of themselves and the world around them (cf. Marten, 2001). It is, in fact, these embodied, envisioned, and experienced environments within the individual that create the perception of the place within its environment. This makes tour guides interesting for this study because working in nature-based tourism means being in nature and being exposed to the forces of nature, as well as engaging with the landscape and other people.

Often, tour guides are not native to the host community they are working within. Therefore, migration is an important influencing aspect on the diversity of perceptions because it influences how and with what magnitude changes within the natural environment are perceived. How we value the changes is dependent on many factors. These factors can include aspects of temporality (exposure to changes, long or short exposure), economy (dependency on the natural environment for income, or ownership), and history (memories of places, and stories). Therefore, the perception of nature can be different among individuals. How one experiences or perceives nature is dependent on the cultural values transported between and embedded in individuals. But as culture is in constant flux and dependent on the shared interaction of members

of society with the environment, so the perception of nature is in flux as well. Tourism is an interesting factor for the study of perception of nature because of the intersection of many different perceptions within the theme of tourism. Guiding is an important occupation in tourism and it addresses manifold questions related to sense of place, safety, migration of people, as well as the translation of land and culture (cf. Zillinger, Jonasson & Adolfsson, 2012). Tour guides are important in understanding the dynamics of the interaction of humans with nature and with each other.

Research on tour guides provides insight into the perception of nature by visiting people, but also into the chronological changes within nature. The knowledge gained is essential in tourism management in order to be able to tailor the products towards the needs and desires of the customers. This is important, especially at the point of consumption in sensitive areas, such as protected areas. This chapter will deal with the imagination of place and people, and put the guides into the focus of tourism research. This focus can help close the gap in our understanding of the dynamic processes in tourism and support the ongoing discussion in Icelandic tourism. Still, tour guides are not identified as important stakeholders in the decision-making process of protected areas and tourism projects because they do not fulfil several important stakeholder classifications (cf. Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997; Reed et al., 2009), even though this chapter will argue for their other values.

### Aims, scope, and research questions

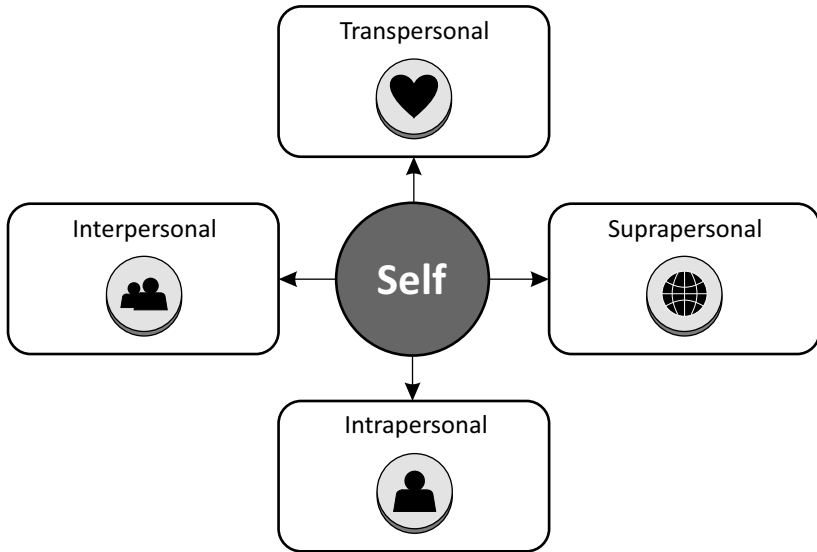
The research focuses on the case of tour guides at the Skaftafell area of Vatnajökull National Park and seeks to explore how they see their own role in tourism and protected area management. The aim is to increase the understanding of the role of tour guides for the protected area policies and to explore whether or not tour guides would be important for public participation processes of the Vatnajökull National Park. It is of particular interest to answer the question of how tour guides relate to the current development in tourism and their perception of nature, themselves, and tourists around them. This research will not examine in depth the issues of migration; however, it is part of the discussion. How

perception is influenced by migration, or how it differs between different groups of tour guides will be touched upon. To study the perception of nature among tour guides, the study in Iceland involved a journey to listen to tour guides talk about how they see the environment within which they are guiding and how they experience the changes over time.

### Tour guides in the broader social context

To begin this journey, it is important to turn to the question who tour guides are and why they are of importance. It is said that tour guides have been around for as long as humans have existed, and their role has always been regarded as vital to ensure safe and informed travels. With the emergence of tourism as an industry, the demands on guides have multiplied, to provide entertainment, information, and safety (cf. Ap & Wong, 2001; Cohen, 1985). The role of a tour guide is important in tourism for the industry as well as the consumer of the product. Tour guides embody various roles and responsibilities, which form a complex and dynamic environment. In order to understand and grasp this environment, it can be helpful to turn to Abt (1989) and his view that the self is unconsciously related to four realms (oneself, community, spirit, and matter). Jónasson (2005) has similarly used similar four realms by describing the self with regards to intrapersonal, interpersonal, suprapersonal, and transpersonal dimensions (see Figure 1). Using this framework can help to analyse the situation of guides by using a four dimensional approach because it helps to capture all aspects of life.

To locate the perception of nature by guides, the following chapter is divided into discussions about the current tourism system in Iceland, the role of guides, the interaction with tourists, and their role in the network of tourism.

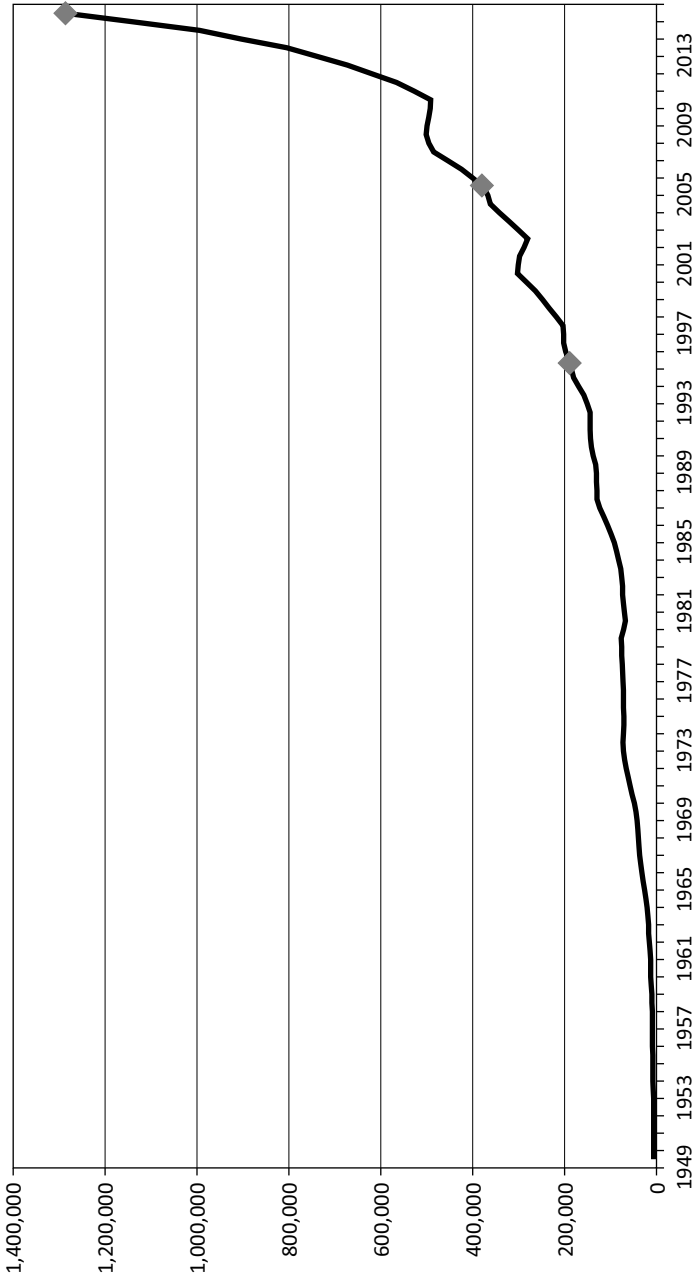


**Figure 1** The 4-realms approach and the self

Source: own; derived from Abt, 1989; Jónasson, 2005.

### Tourism industry in Iceland

On a global scale, tourism is one of the most important industries, creating one out of eleven jobs (UNWTO, 2013). Iceland is no exception of that development and represents an interesting example as it shows a tremendous increase in the number of foreign visitors and in the growing economic importance. In the year 2015, the amount of foreign citizens travelling through Keflavik International airport and via seaports was about 1.3 million (Icelandic Tourism Board, 2016) (see Figure 2). Tourism in Iceland has become an important economic sector (Boston Consulting Group, 2013; Icelandic Tourism Board, 2015b). The tourism industry in Iceland is currently in a state of rapid expansion and utilisation, leaving questions about the future of the industry as a whole, the people working in tourism, and the visitors. Even though tourism is important for the Icelandic economy, the significance of tourism is generally shadowed by issues of seasonality and migration of workers



**Figure 2 Development of number of foreign visitors to Iceland (airport and seaport) – years highlighted: 1995, 2005, and 2015**

Source: data by Icelandic Tourism Board, 2014, 2015a, 2015c.



(cf. Marcoullier & Green, 2000; Seaton, 2010). This is of particular importance because many workers in the tourism sector are only seasonal workers and due to the fact that working in tourism does not always need professional training, done by young Icelanders or migrants.

Currently, there is discussion about the risk of rapid environmental degradation due to increased tourism in Iceland (Árnadóttir, 2014; Fontaine, 2014). Tourism in Iceland is mainly nature-based tourism, so it is important to consider the sensitivity of the natural environment as it influences the future of the tourism industry. Even though there is concern about the environmental sustainability of tourism in Iceland, there are also examples where Iceland is portrayed as less developed and naïve. Gunnarsdóttir (2011) highlights this as she says that Iceland is “a place that waits for tourists to explore” (Gunnarsdóttir, 2011, p. 539). The attitude of tourism in Iceland is portrayed as playful and less developed because it is characterised by “the strong interest tourist’s show in gazing at, playing in and enjoying nature.” (Sæþórsdóttir, 2010, p. 29). Currently research is conducted on the experience of tourists and the state of the natural environment (Sæþórsdóttir, 2013; Ólafsdóttir & Runnström, 2013; Schaller, 2014) and on the perception of local communities (Huijbens & Bjarnadóttir, 2015; Market Media Research, 2015). But it appears that a better understanding of the direct interaction between the consumer and the front line of tourism is still missing. In addition, research about the role of guides, their perception, and vision is limited in Iceland. Conducting research on guides and their perception of nature is of importance as it provides a deeper view into the matters of environmental and social changes, as they have longer and more repetitive exposure to an area over time. Guides can be seen as returning visitors to an area which provides the option of having a deeper experience of the area and the changes happening within it over time. In addition to this the guides add to the discussion about tourism in Iceland because they also provide the possibility to give feedback on management actions with regards to tourism in sensitive areas. All this is important for the current discussion of the current state and future development of tourism in Iceland and even beyond.

## The role of tour guides

First we turn to the guides themselves and the fact that they are an essential part of the tourist industry. Cohen (1985) described two streams of origins of modern tour guides: pathfinders and mentors. The pathfinder is the guide providing access to an area, whereas a mentor can be seen as providing translation and interpretation of information. Dependent on the environment and the type of tour, these two roles can overlap, but these roles always inherit instrumental, social, interactional, and communicative functions (Cohen, 1985). These roles and functions open up a dynamic environment in which guides operate. Guides are in direct contact with tourists, interacting and working with them, the customer. As part of this direct contact with the customer they provide information and safety during the tour. Because of this it comes as no surprise that Ap and Wong (2001) describe them as front line players, working in a challenging environment.

Guides transform the existing resource of the site (e.g. stories, landscape, food, and services) into goods, services, and experiences that are utilised by the customer. This transformation process elevates the work of a tour guide from a provision of services into a translation of the land and its stories. The translation and interpretation is the centre of the work of a guide, during which a tour becomes an experience (Ap & Wong, 2001). The way and extent to which this is happening is dependent on the guides own cultural background, skills, and information. Dependent on the extent and difference in this inherited skill set, the interpretation can, therefore, differ from guide to guide, but also as an outside factor through the interaction with the customer. This can lead to a different interaction with the natural environment and the people around the guide (cf. Marten, 2001).

The guides' personal background shapes the experience of the tourists and their interaction with the natural environment. Their professional training and their own story with the land and its people influence their interaction with the surroundings. In addition to this, tourism and guiding is a sector that has a lot to do with migration of workers and seasonality (Marcoullier & Green, 2000; Seaton, 2010). As guides can come from different regions and countries their background and their

culture also influences the way they guide while they interact between the “*own*” and the “*other*” (cf. Jonasson & Scherle, 2012). Besides these factors, it is worth mentioning that their perception of their own roles in the social system is similar among individuals of different cultures, especially when the natural environment is of concern (cf. Schaller, Jónasson & Aikoh, 2013). All these influences encompass the challenges guides face are coming from the interplay with nature and society (Rokenes, Schumann & Rose, 2015). Therefore the role of the guide itself is important to understand their reaction to other people, and their actions with the natural environment.

### Interaction with tourists

As mentioned, guides are the connection between the host community, the natural environment, and the customer – the tourist. Therefore, guides are not alone in the natural environment because they are with tourists for a specific time (just a few hours, a day tour, or longer tours) and provide during this time services to the tourists and to the land. Guides often visit areas and become familiar with them (due to exposure or training). These destinations can be charged with a diversity of emotions and information, dependent on the personal experience of the guide. This diversity gives a point of differentiation of stories and interaction for the tour. Tour guides share their own side of the story to the different location (Bryon, 2012), which provides the possibility to have a diversity of stories and experiences dependent on the situation. This diversity is important for the tourists and the guide, as not all tours can be the same due to environmental (e.g. weather and accessibility) and human conditions (e.g. motivation of tourists and situation of guide).

### The role of tour guides in the tourism network

Tourism can be seen as a network of interaction between different players (cf. van der Zee & Vanneste, 2015); the tourist on one side and the tourism industry as well as the host community on the other. Tour guides can also be seen as the link between two network areas

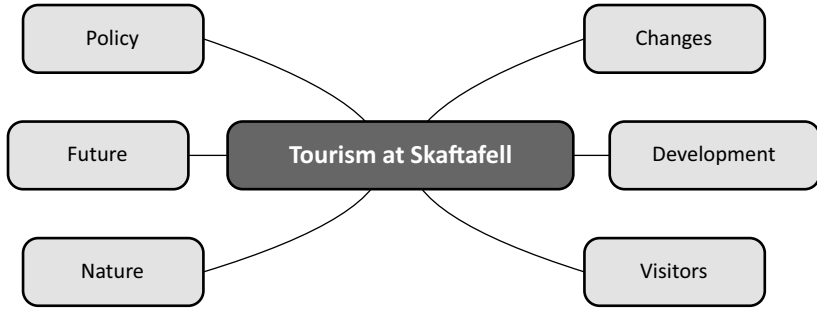
(cf. Jonasson & Scherle, 2012), which is represented in the node of the network of the host destination and the network of the incoming tourists. Their role is therefore not only to be a mediator and translator, but they can also be seen as gatekeepers for the tourists to the land and its culture (Howard, Smith & Twaithes, 2001). Guides provide the interface between the host destination and the tourists (Ap & Wong, 2001). Being at the forefront of tourism, at the point where the tourism experience takes place, the guides are also safekeeping the tourists and the natural environment in the form of instruction and guidance on proper behaviour. This intervention of habits and the customs with the land and its people is one of the spheres that Cohen (1985) defined as that within which tour guides operate. The role of the guide in the “mediatory-sphere” is of importance when analysing the perception of nature because here the understanding of the visitors and the host destination (the land and its people), and mediation between the two is formulated (cf. Pereira & Mykletun, 2012). The guide is in the position where he/she has the possibility to influence the actions and perception of the tourists. This intervention can be also seen as important when it comes to the subject of glocalisation. Glocalisation in the tourism environment can be understood as guides are at the forefront of the interplay of global (e.g. foreign tourists and the image of Iceland), and local (e.g. the culture and natural environment) (Salazar, 2005). It appears important to address this because it is linked with the personal background of the guide (e.g. migration), their culture, and their decisions affecting their environment, and the expectation, motivation, and images the tourists bring with them about the host destination.

## Materials and methods

The data for this research is based on semi-structured interviews with tour guides, working in Iceland. In general, tour guides working in Iceland are not required to have certification as a guide. Many of the guides working in Iceland are Icelandic citizens or have residence in Iceland as a foreign citizen. But there are also guides that work only during the summer in Iceland and are not employed by Icelandic companies. This

makes the collection of possible participants challenging, and because of this it was decided to get in touch with guides working only in Iceland. In order to contact these guides, the Icelandic Tourism Board ([www.ferdamalastofa.is](http://www.ferdamalastofa.is)) and the Icelandic Tourist Guide Association ([www.touristguide.is](http://www.touristguide.is)) were contacted. The Icelandic Tourist Guide Association has, at the time of conducting this study, more than 900 registered members, and it offered to forward the inquiry for participation through their newsletter. All members of the association received certification as a guide by completing some form of professional guidance at an Icelandic institution (e.g. The Iceland Tourist Guide School). The Icelandic Tourism Board provided a list of companies registered in Iceland and suggested two companies operating hiking tours within the Skaftafell area as the most important partners in this study. These two companies operate the majority of market share in Skaftafell and have been contacted with the inquiry to participate in this study. It was important for the study to find a representative sample of tour guides highlighting the development of the tourism industry in the area of Skaftafell, while giving all guides working in this area the possibility to participate. The initial collection of contacts included 13 individuals of whom a total of 10 came forward to participate in this study. Some of the participants in this sample were contacted by the two companies, while others came forward due to the inquiry for participation in the newsletter sent out by the Icelandic Tourist Guide Association. These 10 guides were interviewed during March and April 2015.

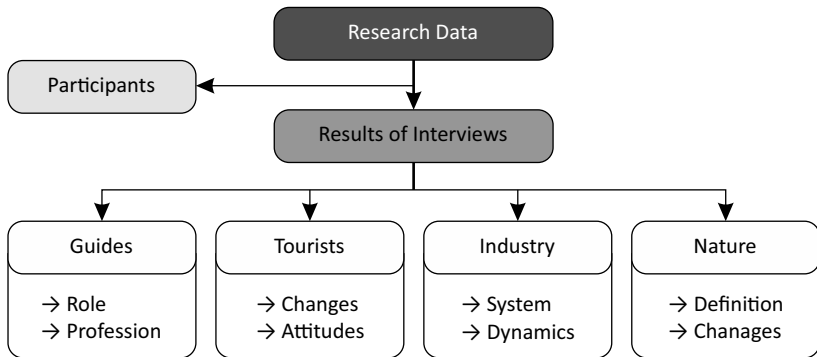
The interviews were semi-structured and based on a set of 13 questions regarding themes about tourism in Skaftafell (Figure 3). The order of questions was not fixed in order to give an organic flow of the interview. This practice was chosen so that participants could respond freely on aspects that they considered most relevant, while it was possible to maintain that all topics important for the study were covered (Veal, 2006). Each interview took between 40 and 60 minutes and was recorded on a digital recorder for future transcription and analysis. Quotes used in the text are retrieved from these transcripts and are shown in quotation marks. All participants gave their consent for complete access to their contribution. Even though several participants gave permission to be identified, all participants remained anonymous in this study.



**Figure 3** Framework of questions for tour guides in Skaftafell

Source: own elaboration.

The analysis of the transcripts was based on initial and axial coding, drawing out the main themes and terms mentioned by the participants. Deriving from the initial discussion about the self and the perception of the surroundings, the results of the interviews can be divided into four segments: a discussion about the guides themselves, the perception of the visiting tourists, the tourism industry in Iceland, and the perception of the natural environment. The four segments will touch upon issues mentioned by the participants: the role of the guides, the changes of the tourist groups and attitudes, the importance of guides within the industry, and the perception of nature by the guides (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4** Structure of representation of results

Source: own elaboration.

## Results

The following presentation of the data is broken down into two main segments: the participants and the results of the interviews. First, the information and demographics of participants are presented, before diving into the data of the interviews.

### Participants

For this research, 10 guides participated and gave their consent to take part in this study. Out of these 10 individuals, nine guides worked in the area of Skaftafell. The representation of males and females were almost equal, and the sample showed a heterogeneous background of the participants with regards to nationality and profession (see Table 1). Only two individuals identified themselves as Icelandic nationals, whereas the rest had either a foreign nationality or identified themselves with more than one nationality. Even though the participants mentioned if they

**Table 1** Demographics about participants (all except participant 09 worked in Skaftafell)

Participant	Age	Gender	Nationality	Residency	Years as guide	Main profession
01	30	M	D	IS	3	student
02	73	M	F / IS	IS	25	teacher
03	28	M	PL	IS	3	glacier guide
04	30	W	D	IS	5	guide
05	28	W	IS	IS	4	guide
06	46	W	IS	IS	15	teacher
07	29	M	MY	IS / US / ARG	3	mountain guide
08	39	W	PL / IS	IS	3	office clerk
09	NA	M	IS	IS	16	guide
10	33	M	D	IS	4	guide

Source: own elaboration.

worked in different places before, migration and the effects of that were not part of direct discussion during the interview. However, migration was an issue noticeable between the lines. Besides nationality, it was interesting to see that all participants had Icelandic residency, which was no surprise considering the way the participants got to know about this study. Only one guide mentioned that he had several residencies, which can be an indicator of the seasonality of his employment in Iceland. The number of years the participants worked in the area of Skaftafell was also rather heterogeneous, with only two individuals having worked for more than 15 years in the area of study, whereas the majority worked for five years or less as a guide in Skaftafell. It came as no surprise that the majority of participants identified themselves as guides, whereas the other participants had a diverse professional background.

### Results of interviews

Migration was, as mentioned, not the core of the discussion in this research; however, it is an issue for guides in Iceland. Migration of guides can happen on levels from abroad towards Iceland and within Iceland. As the majority of participants in this research had foreign roots, it is important to point out that their cultural background can influence the way nature is perceived and how the interaction with others is shaped. Although many guides said that they worked for more than six months at a time in Iceland, it is peculiar to guides to adjust to a certain working routine and habits in Iceland while remaining true to their own values. Nevertheless, guides shared similar views and perceptions when discussing nature, as deliberated later in this chapter.

Of interest is how tour **guides** see themselves. Several of the participants expressed their connection to the land because it provides their livelihood. This is either accounted for by the fact that they grew up in Iceland or lived in Iceland for a reasonable length of time. It is interesting to see that even though some of the participants live in Iceland just for the time that they work as a guide, they still feel a connection with the land:

The guides that work on the glacier, I mean these are people that want to be there. (03)



[The change in the nature] it is a big concern. For me personally, absolutely, it is alarming. To see the ice disappears. Because it is my livelihood. (03)

You give [the tourists] a glimpse of you, what you would see, or what you love so much. (07)

Because the fact that most participants expressed their connection with the land, they also feel that they have an important role to play in the interaction between the tourists and the land (natural environment and local community). Of particular interest is that the majority of participants did not plan to work as a guide in the tourism sector, initially. The reason for this can be the fact that being a tour guide is not really a profession that is seen as a lifelong occupation. Interestingly enough, several guides identify themselves as teachers or as embodying an educational role, some even have undergone a degree to become a teacher. This is related to the fact that guides have to be able to translate and explain the experience to tourists. It seems to be something that comes as a normal part of being a guide:

As a tour guide it is pretty much the same as a teacher. I enjoyed teacher and I enjoy being a tour guide. I am explaining the country. Explaining Iceland, and (...) that is what I like. I never get tired. That is very strange. (02)

Applying to [work a guide] was pretty natural to me – because part of it I always been in nature, and always knew how to interpret nature. And kind of analyse what I saw and kind of communicated to the tourists. So it was not a big step for me and it came pretty natural. (05)

Although the participants see themselves as an important part in the interaction, they also acknowledge that their role is more than “just” being the linkage between the customer and the place of visit. When asked about the role of guides in the management of a protected area, one participant expressed that working as a guide also comes with responsibility towards the change in the natural environment and in the tourism industry:

We see what happens there [in the area of Skaftafell]. We deal with most of the traffic. So we are the reason for lot of the traffic. So we can contribute to kind of making it smoother, making it better. (03)

Besides the reflection inside, it is also interesting to see how guides see themselves with regards to their importance for others. Several participants spoke of the power tour guides have but do not always realise. Power, with regards to guiding, is understood by the participants as the power to influence the behaviour of tourists and the power to shape the experience of the visitors. This power is sometimes due to the fact that they do not realise what impact their guidance can have on others around them:

I try to be the good example. You know. When I see trash on the path I pick it up and what ever I see people doing the same of my group. So rather be a good example (...). (01)

You are not only sharing your own passion, but also you are enriching the other. (07)

I always tell this my tourists, ahm, when I need an argument to say “Please, don’t go near to the waterfall”, then I usually say: “Think of the others. They would also do it and then we have a big mess here.” (10)

I’m influencing their experience. But anyway, of course, the landscape is usually impressing the people. It depends on the weather and the ahm attractions themselves are having. If I don’t sell them the attractions much, they have usually still an impact on the people. Which is usually positive. (10)

The last statement about influencing the experience of the **tourists** shows how the connection of the guide with the “others” is an important factor in the discussion. Looking at the recent, sharp increase in numbers of visitors, the question remains whether the situation of tourism and visitors was “better” in the past? When asked if tourists prefer a higher service than before, one participant expressed his view on tourism in Skaftafell and how it changed:

They want that more than before. I remember in the old days (,) it was not really (,) rooms clean, and that was all. And well, in the tent, tent. I remember it happened that the tent [gesture – blown away] – the kitchen tent – things like that (02)

(Interviewer) “How does that change make you feel? I mean this change of the old days, you know, were you went more with tents. No body

cared how the service or the rooms were, unless they were clean. (...) How tourism is now?

Yes. (,) I don't know what to say, actually. (,) perhaps, ah, (,) perhaps some tourists in the group are less interested in Iceland. Some of them now, I see that, ok they go to maybe China, Guatemala, oh – oh Iceland, ok. (...) Some of them are like ["I have not been there, yet"]. (02)

Apparently the view of Iceland among tourists is changing. This change appears to impact also the work of guides. The changes in perception towards travels and trips to Iceland is a reoccurring subject of comment by the participants, but also the change in behaviour of visitors and their knowledge about the place prior to their visit:

Before – it was of course rather wealthy tourists; (...) they were better educated about [the country and environment]. (01)

Tourism has kind of shifted in the past three years. It's kind of become a little bit too commercial. (03)

Everybody is showing their tip on [social media] or wherever. And people are always comparing their lives, and that was not an issue some years ago. (05)

In particular, the attitude of tourists towards their trip and the environment is something that seems to have changed over recent years. Many participants expressed how the attitude and emotions of tourists have changed over the years. It would appear that the visitors are becoming less interested, less knowledgeable, and more relaxed about their own experience in Iceland:

(...) the behaviour of tourists towards nature is getting more and more disrespectful. And if you tell people this. [Tourists say that something] Like this is just me, just setting aside, bla bla bla. (01)

[Nowadays] some tourists in the group are less interested in Iceland." (02)

As soon as Iceland became a hype, people just want to check it on their bucket list. (05)

It is interesting to hear that even though the people are less prepared for their experience, the visitors still enjoy their trip despite all the

hardship. The following comment points out that there is an outside system and dynamic that is driving the tourist industry in Iceland, and it perpetuates the machinery of creating images and inheriting images within the people and their expectations of the trip:

I am still wondering what is going on with the people, because usually everyone, like, nobody has a negative view on Iceland and usually people have a super positive ahm exaggerated view on Iceland which is kind of scary, I would say. (10)

This statement is also a reminder that the experience of tourists and guides is embedded in the tourism **industry**. This system is in constant flux because of the changes that happen from within and outside. The change in numbers of visitors over the last decade is a reminder of the immense pressure tourism has on small and isolated communities. Talking about tourism, the role guides have within it, and the opinion of guides towards the way it is shaped, many expressed a rather negative and complex situation of tourism. Asked about the environmental degradation that follows the increase in numbers of visitors, several participants articulated their concern:

I think tourism has grown quite too fast and I see no strategy, no policy [by officials]. (01)

The problem is becoming that there are more and more people coming and the Icelandic nature is slowly starting to suffer. (03)

I think [nature] is at great risk. Because we have too few signs and too few marked paths and roads and nobody is telling the people “please staying at the road” because we are selling endless freedom. And this endless freedom is what everybody wants to take. (04)

Almost every participant expressed that crowding is an issue that occurs more frequent in Iceland. The increased crowding leads to environmental degradation, and in order to fight the degradation while enabling sites to cope with the current and future influx of visitors, a tourism infrastructure seems to be a solution:

Perhaps [infrastructure] is necessary now. Unfortunately. I suppose so. (02)

If you want to have tourism there, you need to have trails. (...) So it's a necessary evil in the sense that if you want to protect and have everyone go everywhere and hurt themselves than you need to have that over there. (07)

But some participants went even further than the need for infrastructure. They described the tourism system in Iceland as a whole as a system that is flawed and in crisis. On the one hand there is a systematic problem within development of tourism, but on the other some participants also expressed that there is a problem with the people working in the industry:

I think, what usually, mostly about mass tourism and this kind of gold digger syndrome is how people stopped caring and they just can not towards stop being people and they become tourists, and areas that need to be worked on and people stop caring about as they just think, it is just lost. (05)

We can't think about [tourism infrastructure] in a long term. And it is an issue with a lot of these areas. And they get stuck in the very first steps and they are not willing to look 10 years ahead. (...) Because it is just about the first steps – what can I get and where is the money for it. (05)

This tourist ... this big boom or whatever it is called, this expansion will not keep going. I think it's not gonna last that long. I hope. (06)

Is there too many? We all, unequivocally think there's too many. The guides gonna tell you that. I mean, it's also our living. That's what we do for a living. (07)

MY [emphasis by participant] general perception is that we are not putting quality high up on the list right now. And that to me is Icelandic tourism in general. I think we are just looking at the cash that we can make and we just keep turning out. (07)

One issue that appears over and over again in the comments by many participants, is the fact that the tourism system in Iceland and the management approach for the development of tourism is not actively shaping the future of tourism but continues to react to the development in tourism:

(Interviewer) Would you describe the management then rather as reactive than as proactive?"

Pretty much yeah, I would say that is quite accurately phrased. because from what I see so far (,) everyone can tell you that there are a lot of changes and then past the number of tourists coming in and now that we just being caught with our pants down and just like: “oh wow, what do I do now?” (07)

Formulating more regulations for the management of tourism seems not necessarily to appeal to all participants, even though there is an acknowledgement of positive trade-offs:

I wouldn't have pleasure with [more regulations]. But, when I think about tourism and my tourists, I think it's maybe good. I have more control over my tourists, it's more security as well, I have less work to do as a mountain guide when the trail is well marked and well prepared. (10)

When asked about the development of tourism in certain areas in Iceland, the anecdote of one participant is quite telling when it comes to the current development in tourism:

It could refer to my mom all the time. But this is a phrase she used a lot of times: You clean your house before you invite people. But in Iceland it isn't done that way. Everybody is invited before the infrastructure is ready. (05)

Turning towards the perception of **nature**, the participants were asked to define the term nature and also nature in Iceland. Many of the participants mentioned spatial features, but often emotional terms were used to reflect the resonance of nature within them and the bodily experience the participants have within the natural environment:

Nature (...) you can see it, you can feel it. You can climb the rocks, you can hike some trails, but it isn't in the same way I mostly experience it. Since it is so touched by people. (05)

Everything is nature. (...) I would say that we see nature everywhere. People are part of nature, like everything is nature. (05)

We are supposed to be part of (nature). (...) Because of the end of the day it's how you define nature in the first place. If you don't see that we are part of it then it's just something that you go and visit. (07)

When asked to describe the nature in Iceland, the participants used terms that relate to the emptiness and wildness of nature, terms that are also used in the tourism media to promote and frame Icelandic nature. Another group of words used relate to the emotions that the nature evokes within the participant, when experiencing and being in nature. The interviews have been analysed and all of the terms used to describe nature in Iceland have been collected in one table. Several terms have been used by more than one participant. In order to show the relevance for all participants, a word cloud has been generated by importing the complete table of terms mentioned into online software. This software shows the count of each word by increased font size and thickness. In this word cloud it can be seen that interestingly, the area of Skaftafell, next to the glacier Vatnajökull, gives a view of Iceland being a wild, untamed, and sensitive environment (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5** Word cloud created with terms used by participants to describe the nature in Iceland

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the view of nature is in flux. In particular one participant was interesting, as he expressed how his cultural background and upbringing shaped his first impression of nature in Iceland, and how this changed over time:

Since I'm a mountain guide and since I'm more in tourism, I changed my attitude to watch on nature and it got from – in the beginning, you come from a big city, I lived in Berlin, and you come in a country to a country where you have a lot of nature and a lot of landscape, let's say it like this, rawness and wilderness, and in the beginning you come with a very typical (,) ahm, how do you call that, the typical romantic view from a big-city-citizen and you romanticise nature itself and you make something really big out of it, you make it bigger than it is, but since I am working now with it, I came more to the fact that nature is always changing, especially here in Iceland. (10)

Another participant expressed his view of Icelandic nature as being more than the features humans can define and experience. His view envisions nature as a living and animated entity:

I tell people that to me glacier is life. It has a different life form, like all has a different life form (...) I just feel like I have that connections with the environment that I am in, because at the end of the day, I am part of it. (07)

But even though nature is expressed in its multiplicity by terms of emotion and bodily experience, it has been mentioned by the participants that they are concerned about the changes of the natural environment. Guides care deeply about nature, one of the reasons is that it is also their source of income, and the growing degradation threatens this. Another interesting aspect is that the guides' view seems to differ from the perception of nature by the tourists. Often the change in the natural environment is accounted for by the increase in visitors, which is expressed in the following comments as a growing problem:

Because if too many people come, which is now happening, (...) It is, (...) adding a certain threat to nature in its form, or in its original form. (01)

Virginity [of nature] is perhaps going now with too many people. (02)

The problem is becoming that there are more and more people coming and the Icelandic nature is slowly starting to suffer. (03)

I am used to Iceland to go on this to wilderness that we can use the landscape but there they kind of institutionalised through the national



park term the nature itself and ahm made it in a way less nature and more like a museum. (10)

I think Skaftafell will lose its importance in tourism because they are not catching up with the tourist development and they can't offer too much ahm spectacular things to see. (10)

## Discussion and conclusion

Even though the economic aspect of tourism is positive, tourism in Iceland finds itself at a crossroad, as the continuous growth of tourism leads to environmental degradation and, therefore, threatens the future of the industry itself. On the one hand, the tourism industry perpetuates the image of Iceland as wild and unspoiled nature, a branding that reaches abroad and is carried on by visitors. But on the other hand, at the point of purchase the “tourism en mass” catches up with the reality. This negatively influences the experience of visitors and threatens the future of the industry. The guides in this study expressed their concern about this change in tourism and the perception of nature. On the one hand, because they are the frontline workers dealing with the expectation of the visitors and the reality of the experience, and on the other hand, because they express themselves as being powerless in the decision-making process. Their input in this study can be examined through different lenses: the interaction between guide and tourist, the system of tourism, the natural environment, and migration and culture of the guides.

The participants in this study stated that there has been a change in the type of tourists visiting Iceland. Over time, the individuals visiting Iceland have become less concerned and knowledgeable about the environment they are visiting. This has led to two profound changes among the visitors: people are more concerned with ticking Iceland off their bucket list and with sharing more of their experience online, rather than caring for the delicate environment. This has led to an increase in the number of visitors but also in a degradation of the experience for the visitors, especially the ones seeking wild and untouched nature. The question would remain if this is true for all visitors. The other thing that guides mentioned is the fact that tourism in Iceland is

lacking a clear structure, regulation, and a vision of the possible future of tourism. Participants expressed that the industry is currently trapped in a “gold-digger state”, where the development of infrastructure and regulations appears to run after the galloping increase in numbers of visitors. It seems almost that there is a run for the tourism money and no-one wants to be the last to jump on this train, while ignoring the warning signs of the formation of an economic bubble.

The question remains if proactive management of tourism is still able to shape a prosperous future for tourism while safeguarding the environment and avoiding further degradation and if guides can provide helpful advice. The guides see themselves as being in a position to help on the frontline of tourism to influence the behaviour of the tourists around them to minimise the negative impact. Hearing the story of guides, it can be said that they have valuable insights for the management of protected areas, but do not have the legal stake in it to participate. But participants also mention that tourism system itself is trapped in a loop of perpetuated creation of images about Iceland and the growing consumption of them, which motivates more individuals to visit Iceland. This is seen as a problem because instead of more meaningful tourism in Iceland, there is the notion of more consumption in tourism.

Nature is the livelihood of the guides, and they express their deep feelings and worries for the future degradation of the natural environment. Many of the participants became guides because they care for Iceland and its natural sites. It is of interest that guides express their concern about the changes in the natural environment beyond the area they are offering within the tours. They are often concerned not only about the experience of their group and themselves, but also for the other visitors (current and future). Although they often feel powerless in influencing the habits of tourists beyond their reach and the system of tourism in Iceland, they are a powerful ally in protecting the environment. Most guides see nature in Iceland as a wild and untamed environment, although it has been acknowledged that this view is prone to change over time.

The management of tourism and natural sites would do well to incorporate the knowledge of guides into their decision-making, because by doing so they could tap into their experience and expertise. Many

of them have been working for many years in the areas of interest and know the demands of tourists, understanding the ongoing processes, and the sensitivity of the area. Migration is an interesting issue of tourism and guiding, as it provides a different view on management issues and can help to formulate robust solutions.

With regards to migration and perception of nature, it is of particular interest that the participants appear to see nature quite similarly to each other, even though they come from different cultural backgrounds. Although it can be said that there is not one unified understanding of nature, previous research indicates that individuals can relate similarly to nature even though they are from different cultural backgrounds (cf. Schaller, 2010; Schaller et al., 2013). Tour guides are a specific subgroup of individuals which, in this research, care about the natural environment due to the nature of their profession. Therefore, if research raises similar underlying questions and confirms the hypothesis that if nature is at stake, then guides have a similar appreciation and perception of nature. These guides are of specific interest for research because they are in direct contact with tourists and nature over a long time.

With this in mind, it can be stated that tour guides are important for the management of protected areas because they can not only help to complete the picture of the interaction between people and nature in the tourism system, but also provide knowledge about the temporal changes within this system. Especially because of these benefits, it would be advisable to consider tour guides as key stakeholders in the decision-making process of protected areas, despite the fact that they would not be considered key stakeholders according to possible stakeholder classifications.

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# About horses and tourism. Uniqueness of Icelandic horses constructed for touristic pre-narration

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## Introduction

Since ancient times horses have been an important tool to help people work and travel. Their strength was used on the battlefield, but also in agriculture, mining, and transport. Nowadays, more and more horses around the world work in tourism and recreation (Malchrowicz, n.d.). The diversity of activities that horses were required to do, and the need to use their strength in traditional societies resulted in the creation of various breeds of horses “designed” to carry out specific tasks. And thus, the cold bloods (known for their attractive force) were used in agriculture, strong and short horses resistant to harsh conditions were used in mining, and strong horses that could travel long distances were used for transportation.

Horses came to Iceland around the 11<sup>th</sup> century. They were brought by Norse settlers and farmers. These horses were stocky and short (around 135-145 cm at the withers) with a thick mane. Despite the isolation and a ban on the importation of horses introduced in 1200, there are many breeds of horses in Iceland, and horse breeding is subject to special regulations (Pisarczyk, 2013, p. 25). As in other parts of the world, horses in Iceland have always had useful functions. They are

described as unusually resistant to weather conditions and hard work. The horses used on the island today are descendants of the horses used in agriculture, transport, and mining. Their role has changed with the changes in Iceland's economy, which began after the Second World War. Industrialisation, development of car transportation, and the use of machines in mining reduced the role of horses in these branches of industry. At present horses are bred for tourism, sport, export, and primarily for the food industry. Because of the landform and the values of sightseeing in Iceland, horses are still the main means of transport used to travel quickly to locations far from the road system. Hence, the tourism industry disseminates the image of Iceland as a place where you can see unique nature on a roadless track. Another feature of Icelandic tourism is its focus on rural and not urban areas (Gunnarsdóttir, 2005, p. 3). These associations have led to the popularisation of horse riding among tourists. The situation is similar in many other countries where horses are an important part of the economy related to tourism and recreation, but nowhere else is sightseeing on horseback so strongly advertised, nor the nature of horses presented in such an unusual way as in Iceland. According to Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir (2012), horse riding is one of the most dynamically developing branches of the tourist industry in Iceland, and it contributes a lot to the country's GDP. Data from 2011 show that around 17% of tourists visiting Iceland used services offered by horse tourism (Sigurðardóttir, 2012). It was noticed as early as 2003 that additional activities for tourists should be offered. Nowadays many farms base their offer for tourists on horses. Day tours and multi-day tours (as long as 10 days) are the most popular among tourists (Gunnarsdóttir, 2005). Research shows that tour operators prefer day tours (as the most profitable ones) even though they appreciate the value of longer rides, which give them a chance to meet interesting people. Those involved in equestrian tourism see themselves rather as farmers, not businessmen. They are well aware of the fact that they are expected to offer the tourist a taste of everyday life on a farm where horses are kept. Guðrún Helgadóttir and Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir (2008) claim that working with horses is typically a male job, which is characteristic of rural culture. However, in agritourism, as we observe in general, it is the women who are responsible for interpersonal relations



and marketing (Pisarczyk, 2013). Horse riding is inseparably linked with rural areas, which are supported by the tourism industry, and this way are protected from depopulation (Gunnarsdóttir, 2005, p. 13).

Tourism is now one of the most powerful branches of economy in many countries, including Iceland. Its economic significance is so high that it is becoming strongly affected by market regulations and marketing actions. This article will present tourism as “a commodified journey, delivered as a service, a product for sale, a consumer good” (Podemski, 2005, p. 9) on the one hand, and an important tool for giving significance to the objects human and nonhuman (Latour, 2005) which become part of it, since the tourist (who realises his/her own consumer needs by means of a journey) may be interested in his/her own body, spirituality, nature, architectural landmarks, local folklore, or sports events. In the 90s Edgar Morrin wrote that tourism was a journey through a world of landscapes, monuments, and museums. In the 1920s tourism was one of the means of commodifying everything, even the things which had always been protected by sacrum, or tabooed, as in the case of sex tourism. All the same, despite the passage of time, tourism is still a theatre with the dominant “perspective of a viewer who has seen, tasted, and listened” (Podemski, 2005, p. 10). I would like to apply theoretical tools developed in the field of cultural theory (Douglas & Wildawsky, 1982) in order to describe and scrutinise basic sociocultural contexts that have an impact on the interpretation of the risks connected with horses and riding, by analysing meaningful actions undertaken by collective agents, aimed at either maintaining or altering the existing knowledge paradigms and practices. When I am analysing pre-narrations presented by Icelandic tour-operators<sup>1</sup> I try to reveal how they are moderated by the structured social fields in which they take place, as well as cultural contexts to which they refer. The focus was placed on the reconstruction of risk and on the processes leading to constructing biological, social, and moral images

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<sup>1</sup> For reconstructing narrative style and to discover the main plot in tales about Icelandic horses I used discourse analyses (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978; van Dijk, 1993). I have built a corpus of texts based on advertisements published on the Internet by horse-riding operators. They are linked with descriptions of Iceland. I have collected texts by snowball technique. The corpus of analysis includes ten descriptions published on the Internet and five printed versions collected as additional material.

of horses. The horse body as a primal, fundamental tool is becoming social acting and a socially shaped object, is interpreted as a polisemic sign mediating between natural objects, objective cultural values, and psychological content. The socialised horse expresses the meanings of collectivities within which it functions and becomes socialised. Therefore, in late-modern touristic narrations the horse gains particular symbolic value, which is related on the one hand to its pure nature (something primeval and precultural) and on the other hand to pure culture (a sign, a code and meaning), and both of these domains are juxtaposed against each other.

### Cultural theory and narrations about nature

According to cultural theory (CT), perception and interpretation of every object, especially threats and risks, along with evaluating and formulating opinions concerning these objects, is significantly dependent on sociocultural context, in which the cognising persons are situated<sup>2</sup>. The perception of reality is, above all, based on the selection of significant and insignificant elements, yet it is also an active construction relying upon cultural interpretative resources and at the same time succumbing to structural and cultural limitations, which undergo transformation in the reflexive process because any representation of reality is possible only through symbols functioning within structured cultural codes. At this point it must be added that mental representations, at least to some degree, are also shaped by the features of these objects. Therefore, it is a moderate (soft) constructionism that does not negate the existence of objective reality. CT displays also a functionalist feature, assuming that the crucial function of socially selected risks, discerned aspects of nature, and other important object of social environment is to support and strengthen existing social order and institutions. At the very core of CT lies Douglas' typology of sociocultural orders, which makes it possible to compare institutional solutions as well as systems of values

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<sup>2</sup> Social location has two dimensions: objective (position within social structure and the use of collective cultural resources, e.g. language) and subjective (sense of solidarity with imagined communities and its symbolic indicators).

and beliefs present in historic societies (Douglas, 2003). One of the assumptions of cultural theory is that every empirical order is a system of model orders of varied intensity.

Individualism produces a vision of “benign nature”, which is predictable, rich in diverse resources, stable, and resistant as well as capable of enduring any human interference and restore balance. In this model risk management is lax, casual, and exploitative (*laissez-faire*). The process of planning any action is permeated with optimism, which creates a tendency to perceive risk as a challenge and at the same time an opportunity to benefit from it. Its followers optimistically assume that science will provide useful clues and effective solutions.

Enclave egalitarianism generates a vision of “sensitive nature” which is fragile, imbalanced, and susceptible to injury. It is constantly at risk due to human greed and carelessness, which can have catastrophic results. Mankind should learn to live in harmony with nature. The typical behaviour in this group is characterised by assuming a pessimistic stance – a pessimist is concerned about the tragic outcome of civilisational impact on both nature and society. What is more, such a person is particularly sensitive to the question of unfair inequality resulting from inappropriate actions. In other words, pessimists advocate the principle of prudence, according to which if there is no certainty as to the harmlessness of any given action, we should refrain from carrying it out in order to avoid potential damage.

Hierarchies employ a vision of “tolerant nature”, which acts in a predictable way and possesses regenerative abilities within clear-cut boundaries. Nevertheless, we should protect these boundaries against any disruptions. Therefore, it is of paramount significance to assess where they lay and to introduce adequate regulations that will prevent crossing them and enable the utilisation of this environment. Hierarchism is associated with a preference for bureaucratic solutions. Furthermore, its representatives maintain that every type of risk should be methodically managed. A management style of hierarchy requires the search for reliable data relating to the consequences of intervention and regulation. Science becomes a tool to establish regulations while being itself subject to rules.

Fatalists support a vision of “capricious nature” that is utterly unpredictable, and hence risk management has no *raison d'être*. In this

approach towards environment the predominant attitude is that of waiting passively while events take their own course. A lack of faith in the possibility of man's influence on reality leads to a lack of interest in the surrounding world.

If we extend cultural theory, we can propose a hypothesis that *despots* perceive nature similarly to *fatalists*. One could assume that they should treat nature as something completely subordinate to their will. However, assuming that nature is capricious and unpredictable is functional because it allows strong control to be imposed on subordinates and shedding responsibility in the case of missed predictions and ineffective actions.

### The role of narration in tourism

Narration created for the purpose of the tourism industry often plays the role of a pre-story (Bruner, 2005, p. 2). It builds the framework for the future experience of the tourist and, thus, influences it. Such narration can be found in travel guides, brochures, on websites, and in tales told by other travellers and friends. From a hermeneutic perspective, these pre-stories structure the future experience and affect the perception of the world. They are also present in the way objects are presented in photographs. An image is a crucial source of pre-stories – it provokes the author and the viewer to complement it, to create its meaning. The source of tales can also be found in smells and tastes that demand to be explained, named, and consumed (Baudrillard, 1990). According to Bruner (2005, p. 4) there are some dominant narratives in tourism, such as: Bali is the cradle of mysticism, Egypt is the home of pharaohs, and France is the capital of fashion and good food. These narrations are often accepted by local communities and incorporated into their own tales about the country and its culture.

Uniqueness is one of the key concepts in touristic narration nowadays (Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1973). Gudrun Gunnarsdóttir (2005) noticed that the image of Iceland and its tourist narration focus on presenting its natural values and not its products of culture. Iceland's uniqueness resides in its natural values. *Uniqueness* is one of the key concepts in strategies for tourism development nowadays. It is seen as a prerequisite by the global tourism industry (Buhalis, 2000, p. 97-116).

Creating the uniqueness of a product requires an intellectual effort to find a difference. It is about seeking ways to stand out from those whom the product targets, at the same time inviting them to identify this very difference. Thus, tourism is accompanied by a most interesting axiological process of giving identity to places and people, based on putting constant stress on the non-repetitiveness (uniqueness) and repetitiveness, and then putting them up for sale. What is lost in translation in this process of creating meanings is everything that happens on a daily basis, all that connects, all that could bring the guest closer to the experiences of a native participating in the everyday life of his/her country or region. This marketing strategy aligns with the definition of a tourist and helps identify his/her needs. A tourist is a seeker of otherness and authenticity which reside beyond his/her daily life. Experiencing other people's everyday life, he/she transcends its profane aspect and touches the sacred. The tourist leaves one daily life to explore the daily life of others (Bauman, 1991, 1997, 1998). According to Zygmunt Bauman, though, it is just a process of creating an illusion, since in its short-term and sporadic form (characteristic of the tourist's visits) the natives' everyday life cannot be revealed. In the end, the product on the tourism market is "nondaily daily life", and uniqueness is a relational category, constantly constructed, filtered by the social world, by what its participants understand as everyday life, any by the boundaries of their identity. This process of filtering applies not only to people's life and culture, but also to nature.<sup>3</sup> Narration plays a vital role in creating this illusion; it stimulates the tourist to experience a given reality, and realise or confront his/her expectations with real life.

Icelandic tales are predominantly narrations about nature not culture. The potential tourist is presented with images of post-volcanic landscape, northern lights, thermal pools, which stimulate the longing to get away

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<sup>3</sup> Using the concept of uniqueness in tourism means building narrations about places and social practices based on the rule of finding the difference. Uniqueness in tourism is grounded on experience where unique means other than daily. Tourism based on this policy of uniqueness uses the existing difference as a trigger to travel and find the otherness (Magoński, 2006). Uniqueness in tourism is related to the experience of time and space, which, thanks to this category, falls on the boundary between profane and sacred (Horolets, 2009, p. 77).

in sophisticated travellers (Horolets, n.d.). We can also point out that this vision is quite uniform in the narrations of travel agencies, and thus it prevents them from presenting local uniqueness or distinctness. Therefore, tourist narrations present Iceland as a homogenous area with one culture, despite the fact that its culture is based on the lives of small communities. What is more, Gunnarsdóttir (2005) notices that the image of Iceland presented to the tourist has not changed radically since the 1970s. Dominant and reappearing images in travel brochures are empty landscapes, nature untouched by human hands, by some seen as a contrived paradise (Horolets, n.d.), by others perceived as an extraordinary natural reserve. Still, browsing through materials advertising Iceland, we can clearly see more and more photographs of animals appearing from the 1990s onwards; these animals fit in with the exceptional concept of Icelandic purity. Currently, touristic narration leans toward presenting the landscape, geographical location, and history of the place and all the creatures inhabiting the island – also those which are not typically categorised as Icelandic, such as whales and migratory birds. These animals are presented in a special type of romanticised tale. Tour operators present horses as guides around the island, which allow tourists to discover places that cannot be reached by car. Horses are not only loyal companions but also primeval pathfinders of the secrets of Iceland. In this way a distinction is made between tourists, where only those who travel on horseback can reach farther and experience more.

### Nature and risk, narration and horses

Purebred since Viking times, the sure-footed Icelandic horse is the perfect companion for a ride through rugged terrain. Tours are at a leisurely pace and are suitable for beginners (Nordic Visitor. Day Tours in Iceland, travel agency website)

Mary Douglas in *Cultural Theory* (CT), and other available sources, suggests that tales and styles of narrations are linked with the place of nature and risk within social structure (Douglas & Wildawsky, 1982). In CT the relation with nature and how it can construct four social orders is crucial. Stories about horses presented to tourists from one side contain

the unique Icelandic narration about nature, which is unsubordinated to humankind, which is given the possibility to “speak for itself”, but they speak also about how this nature cooperates with man. The stories of horses that spend half the year in the wild, and then work for man for the other half year reflect narrations about heroes who belong to two worlds at the same time. The time in the wild is a prerequisite, since it strengthens the traits in the animal, which are valuable to humans, who, in the end make use of the horse. Because they live in a herd (in nature), the horses are gentle and calm with man (in culture); thanks to living in a harsh climate, only the strongest horses survive, but only a few will work with people. This mythical arrangement emphasises the trust of humans in nature and the special relationship between the islanders, nature, and their animals. This trust in nature does not, of course, preclude the fact that humans control it. The role of nature in horse breeding is subject to a hierarchical order, and to humans and their business<sup>4</sup>.

Icelandic horses are one of the oldest breeds of horses in the world. Their image is based on Nordic culture and the myth of warrior tribes colonising Scandinavia. Tourists are informed that they can travel on a Viking horse by almost every travel brochure, and elsewhere. Breeders and owners of Icelandic horses around the world are eager to mention this information, perceiving it as one of the crucial characteristics of the breed – descendance constructs the identity of this horse. This is a common way of creating tales about animals, especially horses. Interestingly, while the horse breeders point to specific ancestors and the genealogical tree of a given horse, or type of horse, narration created for the purpose of tourism points to actions taken by people and the appearance of culture in Iceland.<sup>5</sup> In This way the tourist can feel like

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<sup>4</sup> Cultural theory (CT) constitutes a theoretical perspective developed for scrutinising and comparing perception, interpretation, and construction of risk and nature in different traditional and modern societies.

<sup>5</sup> In this place we should notice that touristic pre-narration about horses does not include the same elements used in horse sport narration. We can separate the micro worlds of social experiences where horses are described from different perspectives and put in systems of value where they can be presented as: great athletes, with perfect ancestors, well built, stubborn, fast, crazy, intelligent, strong, and dangerous, as in some

a Viking who explored the island over a thousand years ago. Pointing to the fact that horses were brought to the island by Vikings, the authors of narrations create a bond between the tourist and Iceland, with its primeval, untouched environment, and the act of exploring nature. It is also a way of manufacturing tradition by the tourism industry (innovation tradition). Unspoiled Icelandic nature is highlighted by reference to the beginnings of settlement on the island, as can be found in a longer description from a tour operator's website:

When the first settlers sailed from Norway to Iceland in the 10th century, they could only bring about two horses per ship, so they selected the best and strongest horses. The horses were of Scandinavian origin, mostly from Norway. The settlers often made a stop-over in Ireland, Scotland or the Shetland Islands, in this way different breeds could have found their way to Iceland. The horse was necessary for the colonization of Iceland, even a long time after cars were common, the highlands and other parts of Iceland did not have roads so the horse was still important (Volcano Horses – Eldhestar, farm's website).

In this text the Icelandic horse is presented not as a helper of the colonisers of Iceland (one of whom the tourist can become) but as a wonderful creature gifted with a strong will, able to adjust to any conditions, whose life is closely connected to the Viking colonisation. Its exceptionality is also strengthened by the fact that it is isolated from all other breeds of horse. Moreover, as suggested in the text, only the environment and the breeders in Iceland were able to create this unique horse breed. What is also unusual here is the cultural narration about protecting breed purity, which is romanticised and dramatised by the rule that once a horse has left the island, it can never come back. It is a special way of building the narration about Iceland, a place whose isolation from the rest of the world allows it to stay close to the traditions and values of the Scandinavian world. Isolation and homogeneity are assets that strengthen the sense of authenticity and characteristics presented in the text below. They relate to one of the Scandinavian

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equestrian sport, or they can be: lazy, cooperative, thinking, great, knowing, good workers, and healthy, as in agriculture narratives for example.



touristic strategies (McNulty & Koff, 2014, p. 9). Cultural Heritage Tourism (CHT) is viewed as travel concerned with experiencing cultural environments, including landscapes, the visual and performing arts, and special lifestyles, values, traditions, and events. It is important to stress that CHT involves not only tangible or visible heritage, such as sites, colours, materials, and settlement patterns, but also intangible heritage, such as societal structures, traditions, values, and religion.

The Icelandic horses become incorporated into the cultural heritage of the Vikings, and emerge as Nordic, pure, primitive, primeval, and strong. Their otherness is not only a matter of their genetic code, but also of the resilience of their organisms, and their ability to accommodate to harsh conditions; it is also highlighted by the special way they move – the gaits typical of this breed (tolt – fast, smooth, four-beat gait and flying pace). Narrations about the Icelandic horse contain several important threads that add to its image of a unique one-of-a-kind animal.

As early as in the 10th century the Icelanders decided to stop importing horses and since then it has been totally forbidden to import horses to Iceland. This means that the horses have been very isolated, and the different breeds blended together and formed the Icelandic horse of today. The strongest and most well-acclimated horses survived and through this “Survival of the fittest”, the Icelandic horse of today is extremely well adapted to Icelandic conditions. Still today, it is strictly forbidden to import horses. A horse that has left Iceland can never return, so horses that take part in competitions in other countries must be sold after the competition (Volcano Horses – Eldhestar, farm’s website).

The first of these threads is a tragic-romantic story of the horses which leave the island never to return. On the other hand, it is a narration about values that are seen as representative of the culture of Iceland. Another is the issue of the identity of the Icelandic horse, which is under special protection. After all this is the only breed of horse on the island. Being one-of-a-kind (as a narrative thread) corresponds with the concept of uniqueness and the life led in a specific cultural and natural context. According to many sources the Icelandic horse is protected against any kind of influence of other horses. Horse riders are forbidden to bring any equipment that has been used in another country

and which has had contact with other horses, and breeders cannot bring any genetic material. The Icelandic horse is a cultural value protected by very radical legal and veterinary regulations. The threat of disease justifies the limitations and the constitution of their homogeneity. It is a way of securing the order in which anything that is on the island will not be modified by factors from outside (Douglas, 2003). There is only one thing that can introduce change – nature. Other genes and their carriers (such as other breeds of horse) are presented not only as a threat to the purity of the breed but also as a real threat to its existence. All this follows the dichotomic model of touristic narration used to create authenticity and uniqueness. The distinction between “us” and “them” becomes an issue even in the animal kingdom, since there are Icelandic horses and other horses (Gąsior, 2009).

The pure breed, primordality, and originality of the Icelandic horse on the island are in tune with other narrations found by tourists who create an image of Iceland in their mind. The horse is an important hero in sagas, it accompanies both gods and warriors (History of the Icelandic horse, n.d.); it is also the primary means of transport on the island. Its purity is not only a matter of its genetic code, but also of the environment it lives in. Icelandic horses, as can be found in tour guides and as reported by respondents, spend most of their life in natural conditions; they are born and they die on pastures without the interference of humans.

The unusual strength of the Icelandic horse is another story presented by tour operators. This strength is contrasted with the animal’s height. It is ascribed not to its extraordinary physical conditions (compared to the cold-blooded Belgian horse) but to the origin of the Icelandic horse and what can be called its spiritual power (prowess), and to the conditions on the island. Online videos that advertise this breed and travelling to Iceland focus on presenting values such as the ability to cope with extreme conditions (ice racing), long rides across rocky terrain, and extreme speed during races. These images serve as confirmation of the Icelandic horse’s uniqueness. The tourist receives a clear message that although the horse and the island are not very big their unusual value lies in the way they function and their ability to cope with such a harsh and demanding environment (History of the Icelandic horses, n.d.).

This is why norms and rules of horse breeding, training, and riding are so different in Iceland compared to other countries. The rule of handling the horse from its left side does not apply (in Europe all activities including mounting are usually done from the left side of the horse), there is less focus on the body position of the rider, or they way of holding the reins. Riding masters say that Icelandic horses can be mounted from either side and the “pr” sound is not used. Horses on the island are saddled up without a saddle cloth, and only with saddles produced specifically for this breed. A unique horse-riding culture has emerged around the concept of Icelandic horses and their uniqueness, a culture independent of European influences, called traditional Icelandic horse riding. A tourist who wants to ride a horse on the island is free from the norms and requirements of classical dressage that might apply in his/her culture. He/she can experience horse riding with a taste of freedom, community, and safety based on the trust given to the horses. It is a kind of illusion that enshrouds the hard work done to prepare the animals for their contact with tourists of various (sometimes zero) riding skills. Travel brochures abound with descriptions of how friendly and pleasant the Icelandic horses are, and how even beginners can trust these amicable, loyal, and devoted animals. The tourist is given a chance to participate in this universe created as a result of many years of horse training, and cooperation between many people and institutions. It is thus worthwhile to ponder the characteristics of narration created for horse riding in tourism. Nature and the horse as well lose their dangerous and unpredictable qualities and gain features that allow the tourists to build a safe pre-narration about their own encounter with nature.

## Conclusions

This paper presents the narration strategy used for creating the uniqueness of a touristic product, of which Icelandic horses have become an important part (Fraser, 2004). Horses play a special role in tourism in Iceland not only because of their utilitarian values, but also because of the strong connection between their identity, the island, and its image. The growing significance of these protagonists of Iceland’s tourist tales is reflected in their ubiquity – they appear in commercials onboard

national airlines, in airport advertising in Keflavik, and in brochures available in travel agencies, hotels, and guest houses. The Icelandic horse represents an offer targeting not only horse riding aficionados or horse breeders, but also virtually anyone visiting Iceland. Their presence cannot remain unnoticed by visitors to the island. The horse dominates painting and imagery of the rustic countryside, but also – similarly to goblins, Vikings, seaweed, runes, and lava – constitutes a specimen in the folk repertoire offered by souvenir shops. This paper is a presentation and analysis of selected threads in the story told to the tourists who travel on horseback across Iceland. In this text I focus on aspects of language and mythology which are used to create the identity of the horses, and which influence the experience of the tourists who visit Iceland. I wanted to stress the importance of context for our perception of animals (horses) by presenting the narration accompanying the Icelandic horses.

Touristic narration about horses not only on Iceland, but also in Poland, is characterised by minimising the risk involved in horse riding and contact with the animal. However, in touristic pre-narration the subject of horses is losing its breeds aspect and its names; its “aristocratic (genetic)” context is disappearing despite its importance in professional equestrian narration. The touristic horse had won beauty related with being “friendly”, “beautiful”, “helpful”, and “calm” (Birk, 2007). In touristic pre-narration the nature of horses is presented through a romanticised and idyllic lens in which risk and antisocial behaviours are eliminated. The horse is shown as a friend, like a connection between nature and man, a gentle creature supporting people in their sightseeing explorations. A completely different story is told by those who work with horses on a daily basis, preparing them for their contact with tourists. These reports present Icelandic horses as stubborn, mean, and ready to provoke dangerous situations. Most of the horses that are engaged in this market are older (sometimes 20 years old), have experience with people, and are in a physical anatomical condition that is suitable for a sense of comfort. However, in touristic narration concerning horses in Iceland we can find two types of social orders. The first could be described as egalitarian. This would suggest that the touristic narration about the Icelandic horse is deeply entangled in the axiology of the egalitarian order presented by Douglas in her *Cultural Theory*, where nature is

perceived as friendly, mystic, and favourable to man, can be confirmed by other researches. The egalitarian discourse is used here to create a special sense of communal experience between the participants of day trips and multi-day rides popular with tourists visiting Iceland (Douglas 1999; Douglas 1966; Helgadóttir 2006). As noted by Helgadóttir and Sigurðardóttir (2008, p. 102) a tale woven in this way creates a demand for horses sold at prices presented by the very same tale. However, this order is constructed based on a hierarchy that forms during selection of horses, where the training process and type of client is a deciding factor about the horse's attributes. It means that tourism on Iceland has an egalitarian pre-narration directed towards guests but beneath it lies a strong hierarchical discourse, where horses are controlled and prepared in order to be manageable.

Touristic narration has a direct influence on the Icelandic horse industry and market by setting the criteria for selection, and by prescribing certain methods of training used by horse breeders who supply the horses to the tourist market. This second, hierarchical narration has become clearly related with "one-day horseback riding" and as we can find it as a soft version of hierarchy, where hierarchism is associated with history, tradition, and narration about identity, where every type of risk should be methodically managed but not recognised by tourists, and the tourist-client is taught how to control the horse. It is also a lesson of communication between tourists and horses. We can conclude that it is the time and space for constructing a narrative style and body language (Douglas, 2003), rites that are linked with this social situation (Goffman, 1961; Collins, 2004).

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# Theorising the movement of people in an era of exploded mobility

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Human happiness never continues long in one stay  
(Herodotus, 1952, p. 18)

Talking about the “exploded mobility” of our times, we must not forget that mobility as such is nothing extraordinary – in fact it is a basic feature of humanity, for the history of human civilisation is the history of movements in geographical space, of population shifts and individual travels, of migrations made for economic or political reasons, of journeys motivated by necessity, commerce, curiosity, or indulgence. In short, the statement, that “the history of mankind is the history of migration” (Bohning, 1978, p. 11) has as yet not been challenged. The acclaimed father of history,<sup>1</sup> Herodotus of Halicarnassus, wrote his monumental book to preserve knowledge about “the great and wonderful actions of Greeks and Barbarians” for future generations (Herodotus, 1952, p. 1). But more than being just an account of the glorious deeds that we now

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<sup>1</sup> This title was given to Herodotus by Cicero and has been used ever since, as it has generally been acknowledged that Herodotus was the first to write history in its current meaning, namely as the “narration of a series of events of world-wide importance upon a comprehensive plan and to trace in those events the relations of cause and effect” (Chase, 2010, p. 427).



call violence, his book also appears to be the story of travels: of voyages for adventure, trade and pleasure, as well as a story of forced and voluntary migrations of the human groups known in his time, from the Persians, Greeks, and Phoenicians to the Scythians and the mysterious Neurs in the north. “This people, who had formerly dwelt on the shores of the Erythraean Sea, having migrated to the Mediterranean and settled in the parts which they now inhabit, began at once, they say, to adventure on long voyages” (Herodotus, 1952, p. 1). So writes Herodotus about the Phoenicians in the first paragraph of his text, on the first page of *Clio*, and from there takes us on a long journey along routes known to the ancient Greeks, including the northern fringes of the Amber Route. Herodotus himself had a turbulent history and what we call now “a migrant experience”. He left Helicarnasus for political reasons and moved to Samos, then to Athens, before finally settling in the Greek colony of Thurii, founded in southern Italy by Pericles. While doing research for his book he travelled widely in the Mediterranean and Asia Minor, and by the age of forty he visited such places like: “Cyprus, Delos, Paros, Thasos, Samothrace, Crete, Samos, Cythera, and Aegina, made the long journey from Sardis to the Persian capital of Susa, saw Babylon, Colchis, and the western shores of the Euxine as far as the Dnieper, travelled in Scythia, Thrace, and Greater Greece, explored the antiquities of Tyre, coasted along the shores of Palestine, saw Gaza, and made a long stay in Egypt” (Herodotus, 1952, p. IX).

Wondering about the true purpose of his journeys, some historians have suggested that Herodotus might have been a merchant or a professional reciter, travelling for money as much as for the mere pleasure of collecting and telling stories (Chase, 2010, p. 430)<sup>2</sup>. Herodotus himself claimed that, apart from war and commerce, “seeing the sights” or in Greek *theoria* was for a Greek one of the three great reasons to travel. According to James Redfield, the word *theoria* was then used similarly to our word “tourism”, i.e. to denote journeys made to see another country (Redfield, 1985, p. 98). Judging by modern standards he could be thus

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<sup>2</sup> Chase argues that it is also possible that some of the journeys had political significance, because knowledge of the places Herodotus visited was of great importance to Pericles.

classified as a political exile, a forced migrant, or perhaps an economic migrant, entrepreneur, or a travelling merchant. And since his travels had a circular character, he was also a tourist in line with the etymology of the word tourism quoted by Joseph Borocz, and derived from the French *tour*, meaning circular movement (Borocz, 1992, p. 726). But then, unlike a typical tourist, a person aware of the temporariness of his stay, purposefully othering himself from the observed people and accepting the role of a stranger who will soon return home (Redfield, 1985, p. 100), Herodotus had no permanent home to return to for, despite his popularity, even in Athens he could not enjoy the full rights of a citizen.<sup>3</sup> And the involuntary character of his migrations makes it hard to classify them as an example of lifestyle mobility.

Thus, while his magnum opus shows that two and a half thousands years ago the movement of people was the rule rather than exception, his personal history demonstrates that at his time the concept of movement was inclusive and continuous, without clear-cut delimitations between different forms. It was only after migration research took off as a separate academic discipline in the beginning of the twentieth century that the multiplicity of exclusionary definitions of human movement came to be assumed and accepted as a ruling paradigm. In line with these definitions, Herodotus fulfilled the inclusion criteria for at least four modern categories of mobility, but passing a definite verdict on what category he belonged to would be a difficult if not futile exercise. A fugitive, an economic migrant, a trader, and a tourist all in one, he escapes the logic of modern academic research, which forces everything social into mutually exclusive categories in order to classify it within a hierarchically constructed system. The world described by Herodotus is the world of mobility. And the author of *The History* himself exemplifies billions of ordinary people, who, even before the “era of exploded mobility”, have for centuries been moving between numerous geographical locations in multiple capacities and with complex motives, people whose movements are now being dissected into separate categories of displacement and analysed in a fragmented social and geographical space.

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<sup>3</sup> In the biographical note to the English translation of *The History* we read: Despite his fame in Athens, Herodotus may not have been reconciled to his status as a foreigner without citizenship (Herodotus, 1952, p. IX).

In their effort to order whatever they perceive and to present it in a scientific form, scholars of the social tend to forget that in empirically experienced life, *homo clausus* does not exist (Elias, 1998, p. 33), that individual actors have complex personalities which do not exclude possession of several identities at once and do not live all their lives closed in their respective groups, with set characteristics and closed borders. Also, they do not classify their life experiences according to the categories that scholars conceptualise. Above all, the social space created by their actions is not chopped up into pieces, but is continuous, for their kinship and friendship networks extend over large territories, cutting across different types of social organization. They also tend to be continuous in time, rather than being specific to particular settings. What we call the old and the new types of social organization are not mutually exclusive in the same setting and the same time, but coexist and blend with each other. We may speak of old and new waves of migration (Irek, 2012), of settlers, birds of passage, of travelling tradesmen, and tourists, but we must not forget that in reality they do not move from a single point to another one in sealed corridors reserved specifically for set numbers of specific actors, but that even on the move they all live their lives in a shared social space, where functions are multiple and borders blurred.

### Case study: Henry, the *homo apertus*

Let us take the example of an ordinary Polish migrant in the UK, one of the four thousand people who were interviewed by myself during longitudinal fieldwork on informal networks in Europe.<sup>4</sup> Let us call him

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<sup>4</sup> Fieldwork involving participant observation was conducted across European countries in the years 1987 to 2012. My research in the UK started in 1995 and continued until 2012. It included regular coach journeys between London and Poland (up to twice a month) until March 2005. From 2006 fieldwork was carried out on the planes of cheap airlines and at airports, mostly in the London vicinity (with significantly less travel from Manchester, Glasgow, Bristol, and Birmingham airports), as well as *en route* to different destinations in Poland. Altogether over 4000 interviews and group discussions were conducted. Since my fieldwork was on the sensitive subject of informal networks, any identifying information, including the names of persons and places, as well as the dates of interviews, have been removed for ethical reasons.

Henryk to protect his personal identity. Like Herodotus, Henryk started his journeys as a political refugee. He left his village in central Poland at the beginning of World War II to escape the German invasion. His father fought in the Polish army but was killed in the first month of the war, and his village was burned as the frontline moved eastwards and back. Just like majority of villagers who managed to survive the fierce fighting in the vicinity, Henryk, his mother and a younger sister took whatever was left of their belongings and escaped to the eastern fringes of Poland, where they stayed with his father's family.

“I promised my father that I'd take care of the women, so I could not join partisans. I had to take the women somewhere safe... Teresa (the older sister) stayed behind to wait for her husband. But their village was not burned... Then Ruski (the Russians) came and they took us all. They said we were 'bielaruczki' (had white hands). My mother's hands were covered with callouses from hard work, but they still took us with the rest. I could do nothing. I could not save them. They herded us. We travelled like cattle. All the way to Siberia. It was cold, and my sister died. She was so pretty, like a little angel. The Russian soldier that took her body cried”, he recalled.

“But how come you are in the UK?”, I asked.

“Normally, like all others. That is, I joined the Anders army. We travelled to Kazakhstan, then to Persia. They put us in a camp and gave us a lot of food. All the best food you can imagine. They wanted to make us fat before the battle. We were like skeletons... I saw oranges for the first time and had myself photographed on a mountain of oranges.”

Henryk's mother died in Siberia, but the families of other Polish soldiers were sent to India or Kenya, while the soldiers were deployed to fight Germans. Henryk was sent to North Africa and then to Italy, where he fought the battle of Monte Casino, iconic in Poland, in which he was wounded, obtaining the status of a hero.

“I was not a hero but a fool”, he commented.

“I should have stayed hidden behind that rock and minded my ass. They were shooting us like ducks.”

After the war the capitalistic Hero could not go back to communist Poland, so together with other soldiers who had fought for the allied armies, he was herded into a camp again. Upon receiving British

citizenship, he changed his name to something that sounded more British. He found a manual job in a factory in the North of England, married an Irish woman – let's call her Mary – and had two sons. Mary's brothers married Irish women and stayed in Ireland, but her sister married an American Italian and moved to the USA. The extended family members only met on important occasions such as Christmas, Easter, weddings, or funerals, not as often as they wished because communication was expensive and their earnings were modest. Nevertheless, Henry travelled abroad at least once a year and was confident that he could mobilise a large kinship network should he need a favour at any time. He himself took for granted his obligation to help his family dispersed across the world.

He also kept in touch with his friends from the army, especially one who had migrated from the UK to Brazil, where he became a teacher of English.

"How often do you see each other?" I asked, bearing in mind the classical concept of networks as defined by Mitchell (1969), their effectiveness being defined by the frequency of contacts and the physical distance between the actors. But these seemed unimportant to him. Like thousands of other interviewees I met in the field, Henry was not concerned with these rules and defined the strength of his network ties in terms of their emotional attachment rather than other criteria.

"We do not have to see each other like some coffee drinking ladies. Boys from the army are friends forever. They do anything for you, that is, even from distance. If you want to organise anything, anywhere in the world, just tell me. I have friends all over the world", offered Henry. "But certainly not in Russia"?

"Why not? I have had a big family in the east (of Poland). Not everybody was killed. Some stayed behind, and now they live in Ukraine, Belarus and even in Kazakhstan. They know people".

His older sister survived the war. They found each other through the Red Cross and, from the 1970s, Henry regularly took his holidays in Poland, while the members of his extended Polish family, their friends, and their acquaintances came to the UK as tourists to learn English and to work. Most of them worked informally, mostly in restaurants,

private homes, and farms, overstaying their tourist visas (Irek, 2011)<sup>5</sup>. Henry could not remember how many people he invited over the years, but estimated that there were at least a hundred. When martial law was declared in Poland, he was just hosting four “tourists” in his guest room, all of whom applied for asylum, claiming they were *Solidarność* activists and adding thus the category of political refugee to their portfolio of statuses. After his wife died at the beginning of the 1990s, Henry moved downstairs to his reception room and let out both his bedrooms to Polish “tourists”. Polish accession to the EU did not bring much change for him, except that he was older, so he employed a Polish woman, Magda, who cared for him in return for free lodging in his box room. She was working legally as a cleaner at a college and paying taxes, as well as social insurance contributions, but it was only during the interview (a year after her arrival) when she realised that technically, she was an illegal migrant, because she had failed to register with the WRS.<sup>6</sup> Marta was in her fifties and came from one of the poorest regions of Poland. Her son had lost his job, so to help to feed her grandchildren, she decided to emigrate. As she was desperate for every penny, she thought the WRS was a “f... waste of money and daylight robbery”, and she declared her intention of not paying money for nothing. She also mentioned the place in her lower body where she thought the scheme belonged.

Another difference Henry noticed after Poland’s accession to the EU was the rise in room prices, so he was relatively better off compared to the period starting in the 1990s, when the wave of working and learning “tourists” became bigger. Since 2004 he has been receiving more income from his Polish tenants. At the time of the interview he was hosting two university students in a small bedroom and two workers sharing the master bedroom. The students came to him through recommendations, being acquaintances of the children of his distant relatives in Poland and Lithuania. The student from Poland, Alex, came from a small town, but at the age of twenty-one he was a true cosmopolitan. His mother worked as a carer in Germany, so he lived there for four years and went

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<sup>5</sup> In the USA this type of migrant was sarcastically called “wakacjusze” (vacationeers).

<sup>6</sup> Workers’ Registration Scheme, meant to control the citizens of the A8 new states, obligatory from 2004 to 2011.

to a college there, then spent a gap year in Spain working as a waiter and, having met a Polish girl from London, moved to live in the UK, where he was studying tourism and leisure.

“It is cool here, really, but I miss Spain. The weather really makes a difference. As soon as I finish this university I go somewhere. Perhaps Japan.”

“Do you think they have better weather there?”

“No, I like the culture and they pay well. I can earn a bit there and then go somewhere where they have fun. I like to go places.”

Alex was constantly on the move, visiting his friends and family across Europe, and he combined work with sightseeing and studying. Ever since he moved into Henry’s home, he benefitted from his host’s contacts to find cheap lodging abroad. Henry boasted that he could send “the boy” to live with his acquaintances in any town from Asia to America, free of charge.

Of course, Henry’s favourite land in the world was the country of his childhood, Poland, but surprisingly, his best memories of his homeland were not those of an idyllic childhood, but from the 1970s.

“Lord, that was a good time! One could have a woman in Poland for a pack of tights, just like it was in Italy, right after the War! I went to Poland each year. That is, I went with my wife and children in my old Rover, and we all stayed the whole month, and it did not cost me a penny, journey included (...) They treated me like a king. People were different. I gave them chewing gum and coffee and some cheap things, and they were so happy. Nowadays people do not know how to be happy any more. They are all spoiled, that is. (...) We stayed four weeks, and we dined and wined, and they had a party every single day. I never went sober! Only on the last day before departure, for it was always dangerous crossing East Germany.”

“You said you would not spend a penny. How was it possible?”

“Well, I did what everybody was doing. I took with me things for trade. And then, on the way back, that is, I would take Polish things for trade.”

“What did you take to Poland?”

“Everything. That is really everything. They needed everything. Mary would take all the old clothes from the family in the USA and from

all the acquaintances here. And she would go to a pound shop and buy chocolate, tights, coffee, soap and washing powder and I don't know what else. We would pack it all in black bags (...) and go to Poland. People were begging us for stuff, and they paid a lot (of Polish zloty). And we could not spend it all. No way. So we got Polish stuff and we brought it back, that is, for sale here."

"Who would buy Polish goods in the UK"?

"Who? Ask me who would not buy Polish stuff! Hand-made things, amber, silver and all these souvenirs, not to speak of vodka. I paid at least five trips to Florida with them! Mary's family there only waited for the Polish stuff!"

The "golden seventies" were long gone, and after its accession to the EU Poland became an expensive country, although that does not mean that the flow of goods for sale has stopped. Henry was not trading any more, but he was always happy for his tenants to bring him a bottle of Polish vodka, the latest magazines, books, and cigarettes. His acquaintance's daughter, Basia, used to come regularly to shop in the UK. She would always bring from Poland cigarettes, vodka and Polish food, which she sold cheaply to the workers (but still at at least double the price), and for one bottle Henry would kindly allow her to sleep two to three nights on a couch in his living room. Basia was studying for her BA in business in a private college back in Poland, and she was paying her fees by selling clothes which she bought cheaply at sales in different countries, the USA included, transporting them back to Poland and then selling them to the aspiring Polish *nouveaux riches*. For this she used a small courier and transport company from Poland, also personally connected to Henry's relatives. Basia could have done her business in the UK in two days, but her policy was always to stay a day or two longer to have some fun and do some sightseeing. She was happy to practice her foreign language skills, and she boasted of having visited sites in Berlin, Frankfurt, Milan, London, Dublin, Paris, and New York, in some of which places she slept for free, or for a small gift from Poland, in the homes of Henry's acquaintances. After university she planned to get a job with a big corporation and go wherever they would post her.

Based on the date of Henry's arrival in the UK, the usual classification would place him in the so-called "old", post-WWII migration into the



UK and analyse his experience separately from those of 'post-accession' migrants such as Marta and Alex, or tourists like Basia. In other words, each wave of migration would be viewed as a function of structural change in European societies over time, and each capacity would be placed in a different category of migration. As a migrant from Ireland, even his own wife would be put in yet another category, as would her sister, who migrated to the USA. But Henry was not some relic of the past living in isolation, but playing important roles in the lives of migrants from different countries and different periods. His personal network spanned several continents during a period of more than sixty years, and his own migratory experience covered at least six countries where he persevered in the adverse natural conditions of local ecosystems, as extreme as the one in Siberia in the North and that of the Sahara in the South. His motives are difficult to classify in clear cut, precise terms because although his travels were forced by war, they were also voluntary, since he joined the army of his own will and he fought for his country in a patriotic gesture. Analysing his mobility we cannot thus be bound by a classification based on a single moment in his biography, such as the time of his migration, and neither by the necessity of proscribing him to a definite geographical place, known as the "home", nor by an obligation to close him in some specified ecosystem and in a single cultural context. And we cannot be bound by having to cast him in a single role. Like Herodotus, the father of history, Henry was a political migrant, but this did not exclude other "migratory capacities", the types of mobilities we can find in his biography, because he was also a leisure tourist and a mobile trader in one. And by providing formal invitations to the UK for people he had never met and thus facilitating their entry under false pretences, he belonged in the same category both with the anti-communist resistance movement and with human traffickers. Magda's mobility can also be classified into contradictory categories, because she was a legal and an "irregular migrant" at once, while Alex, the post accession migrant, was in turn a "mobile lifestyle", a student, and an informal worker, but also a keen tourist as well as a highly qualified professional in the tourist industry, similarly to Basia, who was a student, a trader, a tourist, and a declared "posted worker", a migrant to be. Clearly, the lived realities of Henry and of other actors involved

in the chains of egocentric networks connected with his person cannot easily be categorised within existing systems of knowledge, which use closed, hierarchically structured categories developed for the study of specific groups, cultures, institutions, delimited areas, and ecosystems. But then, despite scholars' attempts to escape the limitations imposed by these categories, an alternative approach, which would be suitable for whatever is diffused, has no clearly cut boundaries, is infinite, continuous, and amorphous, has not yet been adopted.

### Dissecting the social: in search of patterns, borders, and structures

We keep looking for patterns, for units delimited by borders, for the repeatable, static elements of the social, which we then order into structures, while at the same time we are talking about “exploded mobility” (Castells, 2000; Hinds, 2003; Bommès & Morawska, 2005), about the nomadisation, medievalisation of Europe, caused by political changes, cheap communications, the new culture of industrial production and technological leaps. We have been talking of the virtual revolution that has broken the classical unity of space, time, and action<sup>7</sup> as the new technologies have questioned the axiom that a person can only be in one place at a time (Gellner, 2012). All this time we have been aware that we often have no technical possibility of measuring exactly the size of a given population (Salt, 2005) or precisely defining the very criteria of belonging to a “group”, be it nation, diaspora, or ethnic community (Wimmer, 2007). And yet, we persistently aim to order the social space and to work out its patterns, so we differentiate between permanent and temporary migration, work and leisure migration, tourism and lifestyle mobility, between formal and irregular migration, even though we find it is increasingly difficult to assess what migration is at all. We have been observing moving people who are transgressing all borders and claiming space as a boundless whole in which the edges are no longer a periphery, but we have no appropriate theoretical perspective to research the whole and to see whatever new comes from this “explosion”.

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<sup>7</sup> This fundamental principle of the Greek drama was theorised for sociology by Georg Simmel (Simmel, 1997).

We know that the social space is not “given” but is continuously being produced by human action (Lefebvre, 1991); therefore, it is infinite. It is also heterogenous, i.e. it contains the elements of the physical *res extensa* together with the people who perceive it, as well as their ideas. But while we have developed whole academic machinery to describe the definite fragments of the social space, we have no analytical tools allowing us to research it as an infinite continuum, which prevents us from theorising the horizontal phenomena, including those connected with the exploded movement of people in geographical space. Although almost a century has passed since the standards of migration research were established, we have not yet been able to move beyond their vertical logic dating back to Darwinian ideas of hierarchy, and beyond the ruling hierarchical epistemology (Dumont, 1980; Irek, 2009). And even when we observe horizontal phenomena, they are described using vertical categories because human language itself is constructed in a vertical way (Chomsky, 1957).

Despite the shift to process sociology (Elias, 1994; Baur & Ernst, 2011; Giddens, 1984; Morawska, 2011), despite the talk of flat ontology (DeLanda, 2013) and geography without scale (Marston et al., 2005), and despite the official declarations of anthropologists that “it is no longer possible to pretend that the world is made up of discrete cultures” (Gellner, 2012, p. 4), the common denominator of the numerous, often irreconcilable paradigms that rule the methodology of migration research (Kuhn, 1962; de Haas, 2007) is that they are still using the same analytical categories, relying on a closed concept of culture and the static concept of population used by the Chicago school, which became outdated in its own time. The population is still understood, by default, as a finite number of people forming groups with set and constant characteristics that differentiate them from other groups in a permanent way. One still looks for the boundaries of studied groups, one looks for patterns and the specific positions of actors within these groups, classifying them according to whether their cultural, social, and economic capital is high or low – one looks for anything that can be expressed in numbers and that fits the normative approach. Even when it became clear that we should not necessarily “assume the existence of uniformly cohesive and discretely bounded groups” (Marin & Wellman, 2011, p. 13), research

still stubbornly comes back to the idea of boundaries as if they were built into a primordial logic.

In an effort to escape the limitation of these boundaries, one speaks of “sets of people” that structure social relations (Blau, 1994), of flows (Urry, 2000; Scott & Carrington, 2011), of transnationalism (Vertovec, 1999), interconnectedness, intersectionality (Anthias, 2012), and translocality (Freitag & von Oppen, 2009), of creolisation, hybridisation (Keith, 2005), and super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007). But all these ideas still develop with reference to a set “group”: a “flow” is not understood as something formless and continuous but as a transfer of a definite number of resources, or of ideas between a specified number of people and positions; “creolisation” and “hybridisation” assume the prior existence of pure forms; intersectionality is still displayed in the specified locations of defined nations; “translocality” is organised around a definite group (e.g. members of one village or one ethnicity), while “transnationalism” escapes locality, but then it implies both the existence of a definite nation (Glick Schiller, 2009) and a clearly defined ethnic group within this nation; “super-diversity” assumes the existence of multiple “pure types” and is displayed against the background of the super group that is the nation and “multiculturalism” assumes the prior existence of clearly definable cultures. Even the concepts of the “non-group” or “quasi-group” (Boissevain, 1968) or of the “foggy structures” (Bommes & Sciortino, 2011) are embedded in the original idea of a fixed group, a definite set with recognizable characteristics for the social sciences do not recognise infinity and unpredictability; they look for what is fixed, for paradigms, for matrixes and repeatable patterns. Whatever flexible can be found, it is still presented as a succession of finite forms, as events in multiple, mutually exclusive, vertically constructed, neatly defined social spaces, and analysed using traditional categories and vocabulary developed in the times of Georg Simmel.

We have not even tried to look beyond the form because the vertical epistemology encoded in our language has kept us locked within the normative logic, relegating whatever lacks form, whatever has no pattern and no exterior *limes*. As a result, the same social space that we have ourselves conceptualised as infinite and continuous (Lefebvre, 1991) is theorised in social sciences as a multiplicity of hierarchically structured,

relatively stable forms. And since the presently dominant social forms are the nation states (Hart, 2005), which create (and sanction) the rules and the norms, informality is defined after Keith Hart (1985, 2005), as an umbrella category for everything that happens beyond the control of the state.<sup>8</sup> Under this generally accepted definition, informality represents a deviation from the norms and thus social pathology, placed lower in the hierarchy of the social and conceptualised as the underground space, where shadowy creatures go about their dirty business (Henry, 1993).

In the macro-analyses, informality is theorised as the sphere of social interactions that lead to “favouritism, nepotism, and patronage” (Misztal, 2000, pp. 18-19), dysfunction of the economic system, and to social exclusion. It is seen as a destructive power causing degeneration of labour conditions and as a problem in need of fixing by the introduction of new forms – regulations and control regimes. The approach is different in the micro-level of social analysis, where informality is perceived as the narrow space left for the individual freedom of expression, consisting mostly of the absence of a dress code and non-adherence to local etiquette. This aspect of informality was theorised by Norbert Elias’ figurational sociology, in which civilisation itself was seen as a process, or rather as a complex mixture of processes of formalisation and informalisation constantly shaping the rules of behaviour that constituted social norms (Elias, 1994). Thus, for Elias, informality consisted of the relaxation of etiquette because in his view manners and dress code were expressions of the ruling power system. And although in such an interpretation informality is understood as a margin of freedom left for the individual actor, which can increase cooperation on a personal level, stimulate creativity and innovation, counteract bureaucratic totalitarianism, and thus generally increase the well-being of people in highly industrialised societies (Misztal, 2000), it still remains a relatively narrow category, negatively marked for value.

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<sup>8</sup> This concept is wider than the popular, ethnocentric definition of informal activities as developed by the American economists, but it does not contradict the idea of the “informal”, alias “underground economy” consisting of economic activities that are not reported to a taxman (Feige, 1985; Gutmann, 1985; Portes et al. 1989).

## Conclusions: informality as an alternative perspective in migration research

Informality and formality have been thus conceptualised as two mutually exclusive, vertically organised social spaces. In the existing, exclusionary approach to the social space, migration too has been researched as if it were some exception, a separate type of the social, a different condition of humanity and a deviation from the universal norm. Hence, research into informality in connection with migration leaves us with two “deficient” categories to work with, both negatively marked for value. But once we abandon vertical thinking and conceptualise social space as one continuum with plural attributes that do not need to be mutually exclusive or valued and pitted against each other to form a hierarchy, we will be able to cross the boundaries and to appreciate social life in its horizontal dimension. For the analysis of this dimension we need some categories able to express infinity, such as informality, which by the virtue of lacking form, also lacks boundaries (Irek, 2009). In this approach we can use the concept of informality as a vast category describing the universal human condition, while the state remains a finite and fixed form that controls only a fragment of human experience. Researching migration from the perspective of informality could be an answer to Stephen Castles’ call to bring migration back into mainstream sociology (Castles, 2007, p. 364), and it could finally enable us to describe adequately the “explosion of mobility”. The exclusionary approach is perhaps the biggest methodological problem of migration research to date for it is the same life, the same informality, experienced by actors of different origins, classes, religions, and professions – migrants or not, because neither migration nor informality represents the exclusionary experience of a select group, but rather both are ongoing processes and aspects of the human condition. Non-migrants, migrants, tourists, and travellers are not some separate species. Mobility is a universal experience, and equally, everybody lives in the same infinite space of informality. Human movement in geographical space does not involve hierarchy, but is horizontal, as is informality, which, being devoid of form, is a continuous category, amorphous, lacking boundaries, infinite, and thus suitable for the observation and analysis of social space as a whole.

The horizontal nature of informality allows us to exit and to abandon the logic of normative thinking, of the categorization and hierarchical classification of everything social. Seen through the lens of informality, there are no clear-cut collective types of mobility, no tourists, lifestylers, mobile workforces, expats, permanent, circular or temporary migrants, but just people on the move, social actors in pursuit of their individual goals and happiness.

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## Index

### A

Absher, J. D. – 161  
Abt, T. – 188, 190, 191, 211  
Abu-Lughod, L. – 20, 34  
Adolfsson, P. – 189, 214  
Agle, B. R. – 189, 213  
Agrusa, J. – 23, 36  
Aikoh, T. – 195, 214  
Airey, D. – 65  
Aitken, C. – 57, 61  
Aizlewood, A. – 138, 158  
Akgün, A. A. – 56, 61  
Amilien, V. – 128, 132  
Anders, W. – 236  
Anthias, F. – 244, 247  
Ap, J. – 190, 194, 196, 211  
Appadurai, A. – 7, 14  
Árnadóttir, N. – 193, 212  
Arnarsson V. – 44, 65  
Ásgeirsdóttir, Á. G. – 37, 83  
Asiedu, A. B. – 69, 81  
Ateljevic, J. – 56, 61  
Attfield, R. – 187, 212  
Aure, M. – 54, 61  
Avieli, N. – 110, 126, 133  
Axhousen, K. W. – 68, 82

### B

Bachórz, A. – 8, 12, 105, 116, 127,  
132, 167, 185, 251  
Backer, E. – 69, 81

Backman, M. – 64  
Bærenholdt, J. O. – 7, 14, 65, 83  
Bailey, A. J. – 75, 81  
Baldassar, L. – 66, 68, 81  
Basch, L. – 66, 81  
Bassnett, S. – 85, 87, 105–107  
Baudrillard, J. – 220, 229  
Bauman, Z. – 18, 33, 80, 221, 229  
Baur, N. – 243, 247  
Baycan-Levent, T. – 56, 61  
Bell, M. – 41, 61  
Benediktsson, E. – 30  
Benediktsson, K. – 22, 23, 31, 33  
Benjamin, W. – 75  
Benson, M. – 166, 167, 185  
Benton, L. – 249  
Berger, P. – 105  
Berman, A. – 85, 86, 106  
Berndt, L. E. – 248  
Bevelander, P. – 138, 158  
Bieniecki, M. – 155, 160  
Bika, Z. – 55, 63  
Birk, L. – 228, 230  
Bissat, J. – 44, 45, 61  
Bjarnadóttir, E. J. – 193, 212  
Björk, P. – 84, 106  
Björnsdóttir, H. – 36, 65  
Blau, P. – 244, 247  
Boersema, J. J. – 159  
Bogucki, D. – 118, 119, 125, 131  
Bohning, W. R. – 232, 247  
Boissevain, J. – 244, 247

Bojar, H. – 167, 185  
 Bommers, M. – 242, 244, 247  
 Boniface, B. – 39, 61  
 Borocz, J. – 234, 247  
 Bowker, J. M. – 159  
 Bragi, S. – 101, 107  
 Brezet, H. – 64  
 Brouder, P. – 61  
 Bruner, E. M. – 220, 230  
 Bryon, J. – 195, 212  
 Budyta-Budzyńska, M. – 9, 15, 36,  
 37, 65, 135  
 Buhalis, D. – 56, 64, 220, 230  
 Buijs, A. E. – 136, 139, 158, 159  
 Burrell, K. – 141, 158  
 Büscher M. – 9, 11, 15  
 Butler, R. – 69, 81

**C**

Calian, V. – 9, 15  
 Callon, M. – 85, 106  
 Campos, H. de – 105  
 Carrington, P. – 249  
 Castells, M. – 242, 247, 249  
 Castles, S. – 42, 62, 246, 247  
 Cervinkova, H. – 167, 185  
 Chartier, D. – 133, 135  
 Chase, G. – 232, 233, 247  
 Chavez, D. – 140, 158  
 Chen, J. S. – 51–53, 62  
 Cherek, D. – 169  
 Chomsky, N. – 243, 248  
 Chymkowski, R. – 9, 15, 88, 106,  
 116, 125, 132, 135  
 Cicero – 232  
 Cieciorska-Kulesza, K. – 13, 146,  
 185, 251  
 Clayton, S. – 164, 185  
 Clifford, J. – 165, 185

Cohen, E. – 52, 62, 73, 74, 77, 79, 81,  
 110, 126, 133, 190, 194, 196,  
 212, 220, 230  
 Coles, T. – 43, 62  
 Collins, R. – 229, 230  
 Connell, J. – 140, 158  
 Cook, I. – 111, 133  
 Cooper, C. – 39, 61  
 Corsale, A. – 68, 69, 82  
 Coulter, R. – 62  
 Crang, P. – 111, 133  
 Cresswell, T. – 7, 15, 17, 34  
 Czarnecka, M. – 125, 132  
 Czarnecki, P. – 91  
 Czarnecki, S. – 185

**D**

Dandy, N. – 213  
 Danielsson, J. – 21, 34  
 Dattilo, J. – 153, 159  
 Davis, M. – 120, 133  
 DeLanda, M. – 243, 248  
 Descola, Ph. – 157, 158  
 DeSoucey, M. – 111, 133  
 Dicken, P. – 42, 62  
 Dickinson, K. J. M. – 165, 185  
 Dijk, T. van – 217, 231  
 Doorne, S. – 56, 61  
 Douglas, M. – 217, 219, 222, 226,  
 228–230  
 Dowling, R. K. – 64  
 Dumont, L. – 243, 248  
 Durrenberger, E. P. – 34, 36  
 Duval, D. T. – 68, 69, 81  
 Dwyer, L. – 8, 15

**E**

Edensor, T. – 111, 133  
 Eggertsson, S. – 37, 83  
 Eimermann, M. – 56, 62



Einarsdóttir, M. J. – 30, 34  
 Elam, G. – 91, 107  
 Elands, B. H. M. – 136, 139, 158  
 Elias, N. – 235, 243, 245, 248  
 Eliot, Ch. W. – 247  
 English, D. B. K. – 159  
 Erickson, B. – 138, 158  
 Erlingsdóttir, I. – 36  
 Ernst, S. – 243, 247  
 Everett, S. – 110, 133  
 Eysteinnsson, A. – 107

**F**

Faist, T. – 66, 82  
 Falzon, M.-A. – 249  
 Fassin, D. – 8, 15  
 Fay, G. – 50, 62  
 Featherstone, M. – 249  
 Feige, E. – 245, 248  
 Ferman, L. A. – 248  
 Field, D. R. – 213  
 Findlay, A. – 43, 46, 62  
 Finney, N. – 140, 160  
 Fischler, C. – 110, 133  
 Floyd, M. F. – 159  
 Fontaine, P. – 193, 212  
 Forsyth, P. – 15  
 Franklin, A. – 80, 82  
 Fraser, H. – 227, 230  
 Freeman, C. – 165, 185  
 Frehse, J. – 56, 64  
 Freitag, U. – 244, 248  
 Frisby, D. – 249  
 Frydryczak, B. – 164, 185  
 Funnell, D. C. – 153, 158

**G**

Gabbacia, D. R. – 111, 133  
 Gabriel, N. – 247  
 Gabryś, M. – 117, 121, 131

Gaertner, W. – 248  
 Gajewska, M. – 13, 251  
 Galasińska, A. – 147, 158  
 Garðarsdóttir, R. B. – 27, 35  
 Garkovich, L. – 136, 158  
 Garland, D. – 18, 32, 34  
 Gawlik, G. – 120, 132  
 Gayle, V. – 62  
 Gąsior, P. – 226, 230  
 Gellner, D. – 242, 243, 248  
 Giddens, A. – 243, 248  
 Ginsburg, F. D. – 20, 34  
 Gíslason, K. – 89, 106  
 Glick Schiller, N. – 7, 15, 19, 34, 66,  
     81, 244, 248  
 Godek, J. – 90, 91, 98, 104  
 Goetel, F. – 117, 131  
 Goethe, J. W. von – 79  
 Goffman, E. – 229, 230  
 Gołębniak, B. D. – 167, 185  
 Goszczyński, W. – 168, 169, 185  
 Goudsblom, J. – 248  
 Grabowska, M. – 185  
 Graham, S. – 140, 158  
 Granäs, B. – 7, 14, 62, 65, 83  
 Graves, A. – 213  
 Gray, H. P. – 76, 82  
 Green, G. P. – 193, 194, 213  
 Greider, T. – 136, 158  
 Griswold, W. – 84, 106  
 Grzymała-Kazłowska, A. – 156, 158  
 Guha-Khasnabis, B. – 248  
 Gunnarsdóttir, Y. – 63  
 Gunnarsdóttir, G. Þ. – 44, 57, 62,  
     112–114, 125, 133, 193, 212,  
     216, 217, 220, 230  
 Gunnarsson, B. R. – 26, 34  
 Gustafson, P. – 146, 156, 159, 165,  
     166, 185  
 Gutmann, P. – 245, 248

Gyimóthy, S. – 112, 133

## H

Haas, H. de – 243, 248

Hálfðánarson, G. – 19, 34

Hall, C. M. – 8, 15, 18, 37, 41–43, 57,  
61, 62, 65, 81

Hannam, K. – 40, 50, 63

Hannibalsson, I. – 63

Hansson, H. – 114, 115, 133

Haraldsdóttir, L. – 112, 113, 125, 133

Harðardóttir, K. E. – 27, 35

Hart, K. – 245, 248

Hastrup, K. – 137, 159

Heezik, Y. van – 165, 185

Heimtun, B. – 51, 65

Heldt Cassel, S. – 64

Helgadóttir, G. – 216, 229, 230

Helgason, H. – 90, 99, 101, 107

Hennerbry, J. – 36

Henry, S. – 245, 248

Hermansen, M. E. T. – 110, 111,  
113, 114, 121, 133

Herodotus of Halicarnassus – 14,  
232–234, 236, 241, 248

Hinds, M. – 242, 248

Hjalager, A. M. – 57, 63

Holden, A. – 187, 188, 212

Horolets, A. – 8, 12, 63, 79, 82, 105,  
106, 116, 118, 134, 152, 156,  
157, 159, 165, 168, 185, 221,  
222, 230, 231, 252

Howard, D. – 153, 159, 196

Howard, J. – 212

Hubacek, K. – 213

Huijbens, E. H. – 22, 23, 29, 33, 35,  
39, 63, 84, 106, 193, 212

Humbracht, M. – 63

## I

Ignatowicz, A. – 68, 71, 82

Ilowiecka-Tańska, I. – 167, 185

Inda, J. X. – 37

Indriðason, A. – 101, 107

Ingimundarson, V. – 36, 63

Ingold, T. – 136, 137, 157, 159, 187,  
188, 213

Innes, P. J. – 19, 34

Ioannides, D. – 56, 63

Iorio, M. – 68, 69, 82

Irek, M. – 14, 235, 243, 246, 249, 252

Ísleifsson, S. R. – 133, 135, 212

## J

Jackson, R. T. – 69, 82

Janion, M. – 115, 116, 134

Jarecka, U. – 135

Jay, M. – 140, 159

Jazwinska, E. – 82

Jedlicki, J. – 115, 134

Jensen, L. – 35

Jivén, G. – 163, 164, 185

Jóhannesdóttir, H. C. M. – 44, 63

Jóhannesson, G. Þ. – 11, 22, 23, 29,  
34–36, 39, 55, 57, 62, 63, 65,  
252

Jóhannsdóttir, Á. K. – 29, 35

Johnson, C. W. – 138, 158

Johnson, C. Y. – 159

Johnson, H. G. – 39, 138

Johnson, H. G. – 63

Johnson-Gaither, C. – 138, 159

Jolliffe, L. – 133

Jonasson, M. – 189, 195, 196, 213,  
214

Jónasson, H. I. – 190, 191, 195, 213,  
214

Jones, J. – 249

Jónsdóttir, S. – 39, 63  
 Jónsdóttir, V. – 27, 35  
 Júlíusdóttir, M. – 22, 28, 35, 44, 63

**K**

Kaczmarczyk, P. – 134, 186  
 Kalantaridis, C. – 55, 63  
 Kanbur, R. – 248  
 Kárason, E. – 98, 99, 107  
 Karlsdóttir, A. – 11, 22, 35, 45, 46,  
 50, 51, 58, 62–64, 252  
 Kaufmann, V. – 7, 15  
 Keith, M. – 244, 249  
 Kim, J. – 160  
 Kinder, C. – 118, 134  
 King, B. – 15, 82  
 Kintsch, W. – 217, 231  
 Kivel, B. D. – 138, 158  
 Klein, R. A. – 50, 64  
 Klekowski von Koppenfels, A. – 64,  
 68, 69, 82  
 Kloek, M. E. – 138, 139, 159  
 Knera, J. – 185  
 Knorr, K. D. – 106  
 Knox, D. – 40, 50, 63  
 Koehn, P. H. – 155, 159  
 Koff, R. – 225, 231  
 Komorowicz, M. – 117, 126, 131  
 Kozicki, M. – 91, 106  
 Kozłowska, O. – 105, 106, 118, 134  
 Kristjansdóttir, D. – 88, 89, 106  
 Krohn, R. – 106  
 Krzyzanowski, M. – 158  
 Kubicka, H. – 230  
 Kuhn, T. S. – 243, 249  
 Kurczewska, J. – 185  
 Kuus, M. – 115, 134  
 Kyel, G. T. – 161

**L**

Lahire, B. – 157, 159  
 Langers, F. – 136, 139, 158  
 Lardiés, R. – 56, 64  
 Larkham, P. J. – 163, 164, 185  
 Larkin, B. – 20, 34  
 Larsen, J. – 68, 82  
 Latour, B. – 217, 231  
 Laxness, H. K. – 88, 89, 95–97, 101,  
 107  
 Lee, Y. – 153, 159  
 Lee-Ross, D. – 50, 64  
 Lefebvre, H. – 249  
 Lefevere, A. – 85, 106, 243, 244  
 Lemelin, R. H. – 35  
 Leonard, P. – 17, 35  
 Lethbridge, E. – 90, 106  
 Levitt, P. – 66, 68, 82  
 Lewicka, M. – 163, 166, 185, 186  
 Lewis, J. – 91, 107  
 Loftsdóttir, K. – 9, 11, 19–23, 27, 28,  
 32, 33, 35, 36, 89, 107, 114,  
 115, 134, 253  
 Lordkipanidze, M. – 55, 57, 64  
 Luckmann, T. – 105  
 Lúðvíksson, S. J. – 39, 64  
 Lund, K. A. – 23, 33, 187, 213  
 Lundmark, L. – 35  
 Lundmark, M. – 50, 53–56, 64  
 Lury, C. – 111, 134

**M**

MacCannell, D. – 79, 82, 220, 231  
 Machlis, G. E. – 213  
 Macnaghten, Ph. – 136, 159, 164,  
 165, 186  
 Madge, C. – 140, 159  
 Madianou, M. – 68, 82  
 Magoński, M. – 221, 231

Malchrowicz, E. – 231  
 Mann, Th. – 66, 75  
 Marciniakówna, A. – 118, 131  
 Marcoullier, D. W. – 193, 194, 213  
 Marin, A. – 243, 249  
 Marston, S. – 243, 249  
 Marten, G. G. – 188, 194, 213  
 Martins, H. – 249  
 Mata-Codesal, D. – 111, 134  
 Mathieson, A. – 73, 82  
 Maynard Hutchins, R. – 248  
 McCabe, S. – 62  
 McCollum, D. – 62  
 McDowell, L. – 43, 64  
 McNulty, R. – 225, 231  
 Mennell, S. – 247, 248  
 Merleau-Ponty, M. – 137, 159  
 Merriman, P. – 7, 15  
 Michałowski, L. – 185  
 Miller, D. – 68, 82  
 Miller, M. J. – 42, 62  
 Mincyte, D. – 111, 134  
 Misztal, B. – 245, 249  
 Mitchell, C. – 237, 249  
 Mitchell, R. K. – 189, 213  
 Mixa, M. W. – 20, 21, 35, 36  
 Molz, J. G. – 110–112, 126, 134  
 Morawska, E. – 242, 243, 247, 249  
 Morgan, G. – 140, 159  
 Morokvasic, M. – 68, 70, 82  
 Morrin, E. – 217  
 Morris, J. – 213  
 Morrison, A. – 69, 82  
 Morzycka, F. – 119, 131  
 Mossberg L. – 84, 106  
 Mulholland, J. – 64, 68, 69, 82  
 Müller, D. K. – 35  
 Munkejord, M. C. – 54, 61  
 Murdoch, J. – 137, 157, 160  
 Mykletun, R. J. – 112, 133, 196, 213

## N

Nalepiński, T. – 117, 119, 131  
 Napierała, J. – 115, 134, 166, 186  
 Neilson, W. A. – 247  
 Nicolson, M. H. – 153, 160  
 Niewiara, A. – 116, 135  
 Nijkamp, P. – 56, 61  
 Nogué, J. – 165, 186  
 Norberg-Schultz, C. – 164, 186  
 Norðdahl, E. Ö. – 89, 106  
 Nowosielski, M. – 168, 169, 186  
 Nyseth, T. – 33, 63

## O

O'Reilly, K. – 166, 167, 185  
 Obracht-Prondzyński, C. – 185  
 Okólski, M. – 70, 82  
 Óladóttir, O. Þ. – 23, 25, 35  
 Ólaf, H. – 25–27, 36, 37  
 Ólafsdóttir, H. – 22, 27, 37  
 Ólafsdóttir, R. – 193, 213  
 Olwig, K. F. – 67, 83  
 Opatow, S. – 164, 185  
 Oppen, A. von – 244, 248  
 Ostrom, E. – 248  
 Ostrowski, S. – 70, 83

## P

Page, S. J. – 56, 61  
 Palsson, G. – 34, 36, 158  
 Pankiewicz, R. – 119, 128, 129, 131  
 Parreñas, R. S. – 68, 83  
 Pawlak, M. – 155, 160  
 Pendakur, R. – 138, 158  
 Pereira, E. M. – 196, 213  
 Pericles – 233  
 Pessel, W. K. – 9, 15, 88, 106, 132,  
 135  
 Peters, K. – 139, 142, 155, 160

Peters, M. – 56, 57, 64  
 Petersen, T. – 56, 63  
 Pijpers, R. – 26, 30, 32, 36  
 Pina-Cabral, J. de – 137, 160  
 Pisarczyk, L. – 215, 217, 231  
 Podemski, K. – 217, 231  
 Poot, J. – 56, 61  
 Popczyk, M. – 164, 186  
 Porter, S. – 165, 185  
 Portes, A. – 245, 249  
 Posthumus, H. – 213  
 Poynting, S. – 140, 159  
 Price, M. F. – 153, 158  
 Pries, L. – 66, 83

**R**

Radlińska, H. – 167  
 Rancew-Sikora, D. – 12, 146, 230, 253  
 Rath, J. – 62  
 Redfield, J. – 233, 234, 249  
 Reed, M. S. – 189, 213  
 Rewers, E. – 163, 186  
 Rex, J. – 249  
 Reynisdóttir, M. – 23, 29, 36, 64  
 Riley, M. – 65  
 Riper, C. J. van – 186  
 Rishbeth, C. – 140, 160  
 Ritchie, J. – 91, 107  
 Rocha, C. – 140, 159  
 Rojek, Ch. – 74, 75, 80, 83, 134  
 Rokenes, A. – 195, 213  
 Rosaldo, R. – 37  
 Rose, J. – 195, 213  
 Rosenau, J. N. – 155, 159  
 Rott, D. – 131  
 Runnström, M. C. – 193, 213  
 Ryan, L. – 64, 68, 69, 82, 156, 160  
 Rybicka, E. – 111, 112, 135

**S**

Sæmundsson, S. – 39, 64  
 Sæþórsdóttir, A. D. – 23, 36, 193, 214  
 Said, E. – 114  
 Salazar, N. B. – 7, 15, 19, 34, 196, 214  
 Salt, J. – 242, 249  
 Sassen, S. – 27, 36  
 Schaller, H. – 13, 193, 195, 211, 214, 253  
 Scherle, N. – 195, 196, 213  
 Schouten, M. C. – 159  
 Schram, K. – 112–114, 125, 130, 135  
 Schraml, U. – 140, 159  
 Schultz, P. W. – 164, 186  
 Schumann, S. – 195, 213  
 Sciortino, G. – 244, 247  
 Scott, J. – 62, 249  
 Seaton, P. – 193, 194, 214  
 Seetaram, N. – 15  
 Sharaievska, I. – 138, 160  
 Sharma, S. – 153, 160  
 Sharpley, R. – 39, 63  
 Sheller, M. – 7, 15  
 Shinew, K. J. – 159, 160  
 Sigurðardóttir, I. – 216, 229–231  
 Sigurðardóttir, Y. – 101, 104, 107  
 Sigurðsson, J. – 30  
 Sigurðsson, K. – 44, 65  
 Sigurðsson, S. B. (Sjón) – 100, 101, 108  
 Sigurgeirsdóttir, S. – 21, 37  
 Sigurjónsson, P. O. – 21, 36  
 Simmel, G. – 242, 244  
 Sjón → Sigurðsson, S. B.  
 Skaptadóttir, U. D. – 9, 11, 19, 20, 22, 25–28, 31, 33, 35–37, 44, 45, 63, 65, 76, 83, 89, 107, 254  
 Smith, B. – 196, 212  
 Smith, R. C. – 68, 83

Snæbjörnsson, B. – 30, 37  
 Song, H. – 23, 36  
 Sørensen, N. N. – 67, 83  
 Stachura, K. – 185  
 Stefánsson, J. K. – 100, 101, 108  
 Stodolska, M. – 138, 159, 160  
 Stone, I. – 65  
 Stringer, L. C. – 213  
 Stubbs, C. – 65  
 Sylvain, R. – 19, 37  
 Szanton Blanc, Ch. – 66, 81  
 Szivas, E. – 50, 65  
 Szultka, S. – 185  
 Szymkiewicz – 119

## T

Tabanico, J. – 164, 186  
 Taranek, O. – 230  
 Theodori, G. L. – 161  
 Therkelsen, A. – 84, 106  
 Thulemark, M. – 64  
 Trevena, P. – 141, 160  
 Trivedi, H. – 85, 87, 105–107  
 Tuan, Y.-F. – 146, 156, 160  
 Tuulentie, S. – 51, 65  
 Twaihes, J. – 196, 212

## U

Ueda, R. – 133  
 Uriely, N. – 18, 19, 25, 37, 52–54, 65  
 Urry, J. – 7, 9, 15, 17, 37, 42, 65, 68,  
 71, 82, 83, 110, 134–136, 149,  
 153, 159, 160, 164, 165, 186,  
 244, 249

## V

Van Born, R. den – 136, 160  
 Vanneste, D. – 195, 214  
 Veal, A. J. – 197, 214

Vela, J. de San Eugenio – 165, 186  
 Venuti, L. – 85, 86, 106, 107  
 Vertovec, S. – 66, 83, 244, 248–250  
 Vetter, D. – 120, 131  
 Vieira, E. R. P. – 87, 105, 107  
 Viken, A. – 33, 62, 63  
 Virden, R. J. – 138, 161, 186

## W

Wade, R. H. – 21, 29, 37  
 Wagner, L. – 67, 77, 83  
 Waldstein, M. K. – 115, 135  
 Walker, G. J. – 138, 159, 161  
 Wall, G. – 73, 82  
 Walsh, D. – 42, 65  
 Walton-Roberts, M. – 36  
 Wang, W. – 51–53, 62  
 Ward, G. – 41, 61  
 Washburne, R. F. – 138, 161  
 Weissbort, D. – 107  
 Wellman, B. – 243, 249  
 Wenig, A. – 248  
 Węclawiak, M. – 118, 119, 131  
 White, D. D. – 186  
 Whitley, R. – 106  
 Wiczorkiewicz, A. – 110, 135  
 Wildawsky, A. – 217, 222, 230  
 Williams, A. M. – 8, 15, 18, 37, 41,  
 42, 57, 65, 81  
 Wimmer, A. – 242, 250  
 Winkin, Y. – 84, 107  
 Witchger K. – 9, 15  
 Wojtyńska, A. – 8, 9, 11, 15, 22, 25,  
 26, 37, 44, 45, 65, 71, 76, 83,  
 115, 117, 118, 134, 135, 161,  
 166, 186, 254  
 Wong, K. K. F. – 190, 194, 196, 211  
 Wood, D. J. – 50, 189, 213  
 Woodward, K. – 249

Worthen, D. – 159

Woźnicki, A. – 119, 131

Wright, N. – 84, 106

Wynveen, C. – 139, 161

## Y

Yuval-Davis, N. – 7, 16

## Þ

Þórarinsdóttir, H. – 19, 31, 37

Þórsson, J. – 88, 89, 107

## Z

Zarycki, T. – 115, 116, 135

Zbieranek, P. – 185

Zee, E. van der – 195, 214

Zielińska, M. – 11, 15, 27, 36, 169,  
186

Zillinger, M. – 189, 214

Ziółkowska, M. – 169

Znaniński, F. – 167, 186

Zoega, G. – 21, 34

## Ż

Żurawska, A. – 124, 132

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Although there are many ways in which tourism and migration are interconnected, current research focuses mainly on either one or the other. Tourism is commonly linked to leisure and business, while migration is generally associated with work, politics, and culture. In fact the boundaries between tourism and migration are not often clear cut and the consequences of different kinds of mobility are not obvious.

This book emphasizes the importance of blurring the boundaries between different kinds of mobility in social research and broadens our understanding of migrants and tourists as interconnected social categories, placing Poland and Iceland at the centre of the inquiry. Based on a collaborative project carried out by researchers from these two countries, it examines leisure and tourist activities of migrants, their perceptions of nature in Iceland and the UK, the changing image of migrants and tourists in Iceland, and the evolving attitude towards Iceland as a tourist destination.

