

Westfjords Sustainability Action Plan COAST

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Figure 1 Ísafjörður in the Westfjords & UN Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction to the case and community linked to the SAP

This Sustainable Action Plan was created for the [COAST project](#) (Sustainable Resilient Coasts), presenting opportunities for future action in the Westfjords of Iceland that can be taken towards fulfilling the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

The Westfjords of Iceland are a rugged, remote region to the Northwest of Iceland. They are characterised by deep fjords that cut into steep mountainsides culminating in high mountain plateaus. Settlements are sparse and the population is about 6.000 people altogether. The communities of the Westfjords have traditionally survived on fisheries, but with a change in fisheries quota management and a changing climate, other economic sectors had to be introduced. With a recent tourism boom and the rapidly growing aquaculture industry, even the remote fjords have become under pressure by multiple industries that are not only competing with one another but also impacting the ecosystems they rely on. This has resulted in the launch of marine and coastal planning in an attempt at finding a tool to manage the competing use of the fjords. The [Westfjords case study of the COAST](#) project has investigated the ongoing coastal and marine planning process, specifically in terms of public participation.

This SAP is concerned with the advent of coastal and marine planning of the fjord areas and points towards actions that can be taken in order to increase the sustainability of the communities, the fjords and the planning process. This SAP will therefore focus on the UN Sustainable Development Goals No. 14 Life Below Water, No. 13 Climate Action, No. 4 Quality Education, No. 17 Partnership for the Goals and No. 10 Reduced Inequalities.



Figure 2 Map of Iceland and Westfjords

Engagement of stakeholders and the community

Stakeholders and the community in the Westfjords have been engaged in the COAST project since the beginning. Specifically, a mixed method approach was taken to engage with different experts and community members. Apart from participant observation in the community, key stakeholder interviews were conducted. The interviews were held for the most part in person with a few online meetings and consisted of semi-structured interviews that were recorded and transcribed. For community engagement, a public workshop was conducted for information and discussion. The workshop had to take place online due to the COVID restrictions at the time. It was broadcasted live on facebook and is available as a recording [here](#). From all of these engagement activities, field notes and transcripts were made that were subsequently coded.



Figure 3 Invitation flyer for the public meeting in the Westfjords

Stakeholder feedback

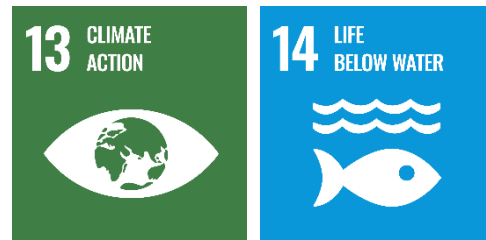
Stakeholders had the opportunity to engage with the project in several ways. They were invited to the public workshop and could leave feedback either in asking their questions or voicing their concerns, writing in the meeting chat as well as filling out a post-meeting feedback survey. Other than that, key stakeholders were personally interviewed. Some individuals even reached out to us and requested an interview. All in all, conversations were held with 53 individuals in the Westfjords.

Coastal Sustainability Action Plan of Westfjords highlighting opportunities in SMART Blue Growth

The Sustainability Plan is structured according to grouped SDGs (UN Sustainable Development Goals) that each section pertains to. Due to its focus on the coastal and marine field and its sustainable development, some SDGs are more prominent than others.

The Coastal and Marine Environment

SDGs No. 14 Life under Water & 13 Climate Action



Issues:

- Fragile coastal and marine environment is vital habitat
- Many local industries and communities depend on marine resources, it is vitally important to safeguard them
- Sewage disposal into the sea, pollution from shipping (cruises, touristic shipping, fisheries, commercial), fish farms, waste like ghost fishing gear
- Shifting species: puffins decrease (food shortage?), fish species changed, invasive species impacts (flounder etc.) not only on marine but also freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems
- Industries based on extraction, little restoration

Actions:

- Improve marine environment: more protection/balanced use
- Environmental factors need to be the basis for decision-making on human action
- Marine issues and climate action need a bigger profile in community, public debate, media and education

SMART Blue Growth and Sustainable Industries

SDGs No. 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, No. 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities & No. 12 Responsible Consumption and Production



Issues & Actions:

- Re-think development strategies: relying on a few industries at a time (before fisheries, now aquaculture and tourism) has led to boom-and-bust phases and debt
- Recovery from Covid economic losses – perhaps not just with cruise ships
- Re-think future harbour extensions – at what price to society?
- Diversity in industries and sectors needed
- Local consumption of produced goods needs to be considered

Cooperation

SDG No. 17 Partnership for the Goals



Issues:

- Lack of cooperation for sustainable development
- Industry, education and municipality/governance acting in silos
- No platform for cross-disciplinary discussion although many ideas present

Actions:

- Municipality to work with school & university centre: many emerging ideas for creativity, engagement in environmental stewardship etc.: planting of trees, beach cleaning, voluntourism
- Reach out to: sustainability working group, library, tourism board, community garden etc. to find common objectives and create projects

**Meaningful community
engagement and ocean
literacy**



SDGs No. 10 Reduced Inequalities, No. 4 Quality Education & No. 16 Peace, Justice and strong Institutions

Issues:

- Corruption and nepotism
- Intransparency of decision-making
- Role of few powerful individuals – needs balance
- Election year – suddenly things get done/happen, i.e student housing building etc.
- Depopulation/brain drain: how to keep and attract qualified young people & women (Westfjords are male dominated)
- Public participation in governance often a “check-box” activity, in general public often not seen as helpful or important
- Lack of marine environmental education in national curriculum
- Lack of marine education in public sphere
- Lack of agency and ocean & environmental stewardship in local communities

Actions:

- Need for democratisation of decision-making processes in municipalities, communities and planning
- Re-shape marine planning process to be more inclusive, participatory, i.e. democratically legitimate
- Re-structure planning processes and decision-making processes with input from community members from the beginning
- Ocean literacy programmes
- Include and engage women, youth and foreign nationals – targeted and differentiated engagement channels
- How to get there: Develop discussion platforms within the community
- Employ a community engagement officer

- Create various engagement and discussion opportunities, future workshops, field days etc. To engage large range of groups of inhabitants