

Sustainable Arctic Cruise Destinations: From Challenges to Practices

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ABSTRACT

Growing cruise tourism numbers in the Arctic have prompted concerns about a lack of local capacity to handle this form of development. To address these concerns, this paper discusses how Arctic tourism destinations manage cruise tourism. The study involved a cross-case analysis of five Arctic cruise destination communities. The empirical investigation identifies five practices—pricing, innovation, investment, regulation, and networking—that can be used to address local cruise challenges and secure local control over the number of incoming cruise tourists. The study concludes that sustainable Arctic cruise destinations rely on regional and national regulations, locally developed practices, and local governance arrangements.

KEYWORDS: Cruise tourism, Arctic, Communities, Sustainable practices, Governance



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Introduction

Local communities experience and react to cruise tourism in diverse ways. Cruise tourism can foster local pride and cultural exchanges while providing opportunities for the development of local infrastructure and services (Chen et al., 2019; Gutberlet, 2019). Such tourism can also have economic benefits that accrue from hosting cruise ships at harbors, as well as tourists' consumption when ashore. Cruise passengers can have positive effects on local income, particularly when passengers participate in guided tours and purchase goods from local businesses (Nikčević, 2019; Paananen & Minoia, 2019; Wang, 2020). Several studies investigating the economic dimensions of cruise development underscore the local value creation that results from tourist expenditures, with consideration given to factors such as duration of stay and the income distribution among various stakeholders (Li et al., 2021).

However, the various positive local effects are not always realized, while the negative effects of cruise tourism on local communities and environments are well-documented (e.g., Hoarau-Heemstra et al. 2023). Particularly in Arctic communities, an increasing and uncontrolled influx of cruise tourism can result in local dissatisfaction due to congestion, overcrowding, noise, littering, stress among residents, and loss of cultural identity (Gutberlet, 2019). Moreover, the negative effects of cruise tourism on the environment include water and air pollution, damage to vulnerable ecosystems, and disturbance of wildlife (Stewart et al., 2015).

Without effective tourism governance, the negative impacts are expected to worsen as rapidly increasing volumes of cruise ships and passengers continue to threaten Arctic environments (Cajaiba-Santana et al., 2020). Some studies suggest that typical all-inclusive packages and short port visits lead to inadequate local consumption by cruise tourists, thereby resulting in limited economic benefits for the local communities hosting cruise ships (Brida & Zapata, 2010; Gouveia & Eusébio, 2019; Larsen et al., 2013). With increasing cruise activity in Arctic communities, there is a clear need for more sustainable management strategies.

Research on Arctic cruise tourism has significantly expanded since the 2000s, largely driven by concerns surrounding sustainability and resilience (Dawson et al., 2017). A major focus has been the examination of cruise trends across the Arctic, the diversity of local impacts and responses, and stakeholder attitudes in Arctic destinations (e.g., Lück et al., 2010; Stewart & Dawson, 2011; Varnajot et al., 2025). It has been shown that residents' attitudes toward cruise tourism vary depending on the stage of destination development and locally perceived impacts (McCarthy, 2018). Furthermore, research also indicates that cruise tourism can improve local socioeconomic conditions and increase visitors' awareness of Arctic cultures, traditions, and the rapidly changing Arctic environment (Olsen et al. 2020).

While the impacts of cruise tourism have been broadly examined across multiple Arctic destinations, research on how local challenges are addressed in practice remains limited. In response, this study explores how locally developed practices contribute to managing cruise tourism in a more sustainable and context-sensitive manner. This study explores how Arctic cruise destination communities—i.e., those hosting cruise ships—engage with cruise-related challenges and opportunities, as well as how they navigate their role in shaping the development of cruise tourism in ways that reflect local priorities and constraints. Our research question is: How do locally developed practices shape or contribute to the sustainable management of cruise tourism? The present study consists of extensive empirical material to identify the challenges and opportunities stemming from cruise tourism, as well as local practices linked to the cruise industry in five Arctic coastal communities that host both overseas and expedition cruise vessels. The studied communities include Ísafjörður in Iceland; Nuuk in Kalaallit Nunaat/Greenland; and Alta, Honningsvåg, and the Lofoten Islands in Norway (Figure 1).

In these five coastal communities, we focus on locally developed practices that involve actions



initiated by municipalities, tourism operators, local businesses, and other community actors in response to the challenges and opportunities associated with cruise tourism. Through the analysis of these locally developed practices, this paper aims to improve our understanding of how local communities adapt to and shape cruise tourism in their areas in order to coexist with cruise tourism.



Figure 1. Map of Case Communities (Credit: Julien Lebel)

Conceptual Framework

Realizing that cruise tourism is expected to grow, especially in the Arctic, necessitates new and better ways of studying and understanding how local communities coexist with cruise arrivals, deal with the consequences, and attempt to govern the developments in their destinations. One way of achieving this could involve focusing on what tourism actors do to manage the consequences of cruise tourism at their destinations (Ren et al. 2021) and co-create value and civic wealth from cruise-related opportunities. Therefore, we adopted a practice-based approach (Schatzki, 2019) that enables an exploration of how tourism unfolds through recurring sets of “doings and sayings” that are situated in time and space (Schatzki, 2019, p. 28). Practice theory offers a valuable lens for analyzing how local communities coexist with and co-create the cruise industry locally. This is done not by focusing solely on individual behaviors or institutional structures, but by examining the routinized social practices that constitute everyday life. At its core, practice theory shifts the analytical focus from actors and outcomes to the practices themselves—defined as patterns of bodily activities, forms of mental and emotional engagement, the use of material artifacts, and shared understandings that are carried out in socially and materially mediated ways (Schatzki, 2002, 2019).

From this perspective, practices are not isolated acts but ongoing, socially shared accomplishments that form the backbone of both stability and change in social life. They are “open-ended, spatial-temporal sets of organized doings and sayings” (Schatzki, 2019, p. 28), entangled with power relations, cultural meanings, infrastructure, and social norms. Understanding the dynamics of Arctic cruise tourism through this lens involves identifying not only what people do, but how and why they do it, as well as how these patterned activities intersect with broader socio-material arrangements (Bargeman & Richards, 2020). Applied to cruise tourism, practice theory helps understand the relational and situated nature of community engagement. Rather than seeing communities as passive recipients of external tourism flows, this approach allows us to explore how local stakeholders actively participate in, adapt to, resist, or reshape tourism through a multitude of small-scale practices—from guiding and hosting to waste management, storytelling, or ceremonial



reception. By focusing on the practice configurations at the intersection of local livelihoods and global mobilities, we can better understand how Arctic communities make sense of, cope with, and potentially reconfigure the cruise industry's presence within their socio-material worlds. By applying this integrated perspective to Arctic cruise destination communities, we aim to address the multi-scalar and interconnected nature of local tourism practices when responding to economic opportunities or environmental and social disruption.

A practice-based approach to cruise tourism aligns with growing research taking a normative turn in tourism, emphasizing the importance of empowering and involving local stakeholders to move toward more sustainable and equitable tourism futures (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2021). This perspective highlights the centrality of local values, agency, and community-led decision-making in shaping tourism development and practice.

A neoliberal development paradigm, in which governments and big business prioritize corporate interests over the interests of local communities, promotes an unsustainable growth ideology (Fletcher, 2023). In contrast, there has been a call for community empowerment through self-governance and the development of local practices (Persson-Fischier et al., 2025).

We focus this study on the onshore dimensions of cruise tourism and the communities at the destination who must deal with and navigate the challenges and opportunities associated with cruise tourism. To empower local communities, tourism development should actively involve locals to determine how they want to invite, receive, and host cruise visitors in their communities, and to understand how they can benefit from these interactions in an equitable manner.

One way of approaching local practices is to examine how cruise tourism is not only challenging existing forms of social and economic organization but also creating opportunities for new collaborative arrangements, reinterpretations of local identity, or the emergence of hybrid practices that blend tourism and everyday life. Thus, we understand cruise tourism development not only as a top-down process, but also as a site of contestation, negotiation, and creative adaptation, where local actors serve a central role in shaping what sustainable cruise tourism can look like on the ground.

Methodology and Case Description

This study drew on research activities conducted under the project Sustainable Arctic Cruise Communities: From Practice to Governance (funded by the Research Council of Norway). This project focuses on Arctic cruise destination communities due to the growing pressure being placed on them from increasing cruise activities, often under extreme conditions that complicate the planning of such activities in these typically small and remote communities. Our methodology is designed to understand the socioeconomic and environmental impacts that increasing cruise activities have yielded in Arctic cruise destinations, and how these impacts are addressed.

To address the differences between the cruise destinations, diversity of cruise impacts, and locally developed practices, a case study approach was applied (Yin, 2014). Its application assists in understanding the context-specific perspectives on cruise development and the practices developed by local cruise stakeholders. The material for our analysis was generated through fieldwork in five communities that have experienced growth in cruise tourism activities in terms of both visitor and vessel numbers (see Table 1). These communities include Ísafjörður, Iceland; Nuuk, Greenland; and Alta, Honningsvåg, and the Lofoten Islands in Norway.

The fieldwork stage comprised several visits to the five case locations (introduced in further detail below). We conducted both semi-structured and unstructured interviews with local cruise tourism stakeholders, which include tourism operators, businesses, municipal representatives, port authorities, and other community actors affected by cruise tourism (Table 2). Furthermore, we attended relevant talks and events with local stakeholders and kept up to date with local news



regarding cruise industry developments. Given the COVID-19 travel restrictions that were in place during the 2020–2021 period, we had the opportunity to visit the case communities during seasons with little to no cruise visits. This context allowed us to assess novel insights concerning local dependence on cruise traffic and whether and how community members and cruise actors understood sustainability under these new circumstances.

Table 1. *Cruise Vessel Arrivals and Numbers of Passengers at Five Studied Destinations in 2017 and 2024*

Case community	Number of vessels			Number of passengers		
	2017	2024	Growth 2017–2024	2017	2024	Growth 2017–2024
Ísafjörður	89	180	102%	75,900	224,100	195%
Nuuk	29	NA	-	14,958	15,560	4%
Lofoten (Leknes and Svolvær)	73	122	67%	68,115	150,000 *	120%
Alta	21	92	338%	19,025	64,549	239%
Honningsvåg	97	141	45%	131,777	164,556	25%

* Estimated number

Data collection followed the guidelines for research ethics in the social sciences and the humanities, and was approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research in 2020. All interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, were recorded, and were conducted either online or during on-site field visits. Semi-structured interviews followed a prepared interview guide developed at the beginning of the project, while additional unstructured interviews—more informal and conversational in nature—were also conducted with stakeholders. The interviews were conducted in Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, and/or English, depending on the location, and they were subsequently transcribed into English to allow for cross-case analysis and comparison. The transcribed data were anonymized.

Data collection was guided by knowledge cocreation principles. In other words, the researchers engaged in open, transparent dialogue with case community members and stakeholders throughout the project by meeting with them, discussing cruise development trends, and continuously reporting back on findings. The fieldwork involved multiple visits to the cruise destination communities and included hosting community meetings or workshops. This method allowed us to reflect on local processes over a longer period (2020 to 2024), thereby resulting in a deeper understanding of local practices in relation to the questions asked. Traveling to these destinations during the high, low, and in-between seasons, as well as during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, enabled us to observe changes in cruise tourism development and shifts in local political leadership.

Table 2. *Overview of Data Generated from Fieldwork*

Number of interviews (Case: semi-structured/ unstructured)	Interviewees
Ísafjörður: 18/25	8 local decision-makers, 23 tour operators, guides, Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) representatives, 6 harbor employees, 6 local shop owners
Nuuk: 21/0	5 local decision-makers, 3 tour operators, guides and 4 DMO representatives, 4 harbor employees, 3 tourism businesses, 2 cruise sector organization representatives
Lofoten: 11/6	3 local decision-makers, 5 tour operators, 3 harbor employees, 6 guides, DMO representatives, or others
Alta: 13/4	4 local decision-makers, 12 tour operators, guides and DMO representatives, 1 harbor employees
Honningsvåg: 24/0	4 local decision-makers, 18 tour operators, guides, and DMO representatives, 2 harbor employees



Our cross-case analysis is based on community case reports from the aforementioned research project. The reports are available at the project's website (Reports – Sustainable Arctic Cruise Communities).

For these reports, practice bundles had already been identified to ensure that each report was structured for comparison, thereby allowing the researchers to systematically identify and describe the following: challenges and values associated with cruise tourism in each case community; practices for adapting, managing, and controlling cruise development; best practices for local management. This article presents an analysis of the case results and a cross-case analysis of locally developed practices (see also Lindberg et al. 2024). The categories of analysis result from the development of the conceptual framework and field guide in the project, where, based on a literature review, we identified cruise-related practices and practice bundles as well as practice-related analytical themes (Ren et al., 2021). Through the cross-case analysis, we identified four key challenges and five local practices used to manage cruise tourism, which are further explained below.

The aims of the cross-case analysis and identification of local practices were to inspire learning and exchange across Arctic coastal communities and to establish a solid basis for local decision-making during the transition toward more sustainable cruise tourism, with the overall purpose of promoting “response-ability” (Haraway, 2016). As argued by Ren and Markussen (2024), learning across Arctic destinations may offer “new possibilities to build synergies, cross-case learning and capacity through research and for the benefit of often small destinations and tourism actors,” thus providing tourism actors with “locally relevant and meaningful avenues by which to develop communities and destinations for the future” (p. 122).

Findings

Following the practice model developed by Bargeman and Richards (2020), we present the material, temporospatial, and structural conditions that are perceived as common challenges by the actors in our studied case communities. While other challenges also exist, we highlight those that are similar in all five cases. In the following, we first describe the four key challenges that Arctic onshore cruise tourism stakeholders must deal with, namely 1) managing the sharing of space and infrastructure, 2) addressing seasonality, 3) planning for on/off temporalities on cruise arrival days, and 4) mitigating environmental impacts. Furthermore, we present the local practices that local stakeholders have developed to deal with the aforementioned challenges and change the conditions under which cruise tourism occurs at their destinations. These include practices related to pricing, innovation, investment, regulation, and networking.

Challenges

Sharing Space

There is a long list of tours they want to go on, and they all need to leave from that little harbor. We know that it will be complete chaos, but...it simply can't be avoided. There is nothing we can do. (Tour operator, Nuuk)

The first key challenge is how to share harbor space and infrastructure with other industries, how to balance cruise- and land-based tourism, and how to share public space among tourists and inhabitants. In several of the studied communities, harbors have been adjusted to make them more hospitable and safer for tourists who go ashore. For example, some harbors have achieved this by creating temporary facilities, providing footpaths for tourists, separating cruise passengers from the harbor's industrial operations by installing fences, or expanding the parking space available for tour buses. However, the needs of other industries are often prioritized because cruises only oc-



cur during a few months of the year, whereas fishing and cargo handling are year-round activities. Additionally, there is no clearly established system among actors at these destinations concerning the core economic responsibility for planning and implementing the necessary adjustments for facilitating cruises and other activities. This lack of system can be explained in part by the fact that cruise tourism in the Arctic—particularly at this scale and intensity—is a relatively new and highly seasonal industry, making the coexistence of cruise operations with the year-round activities of other industries complex. Notably, this context complicates decisions about how harbor space and infrastructure should be developed and financed. In some cases, cruise tourism enables other forms of tourism and a year-round tourism sector, which can have positive spillover effects for other local businesses (e.g., shops and cafes) and sometimes results in a livelier community.

Managing Seasonality

“It is not economically viable to maintain a business that only operates 30 days a year, with empty days in between” (Tour operator, Ísafjörður).

The second challenge is addressing the seasonality of cruise tourism, which affects the ability to maintain year-round revenue and provide full-time local jobs in the hospitality industry—a problem greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Seasonality is an issue currently being addressed by employing temporary staff, such as seasonal international workers or international students. However, such temporary staff lack sufficient local knowledge and also leave municipalities with less tax revenue and money spent locally. Overall, there are many similar challenges across the cases regarding hiring staff and providing people with year-round employment opportunities. Employment is vital to attracting people to settle long-term, keeping younger generations from moving away, and achieving social and economic sustainability in (often small) Arctic coastal communities. While some would like to see cruise tourism more evenly spread out during the year through initiatives such as extending the tourism season, others would prefer a short, intense season that would allow them to have a break and do other things during the remainder of the year.

Managing Cruise Temporality

What I hope is that cruise ships will prolong their stay so that passengers can be given a chance to truly experience this place. As for now, cruises probably leave a much larger environmental footprint than the financial benefits they provide. (Local decision-maker, Honningsvåg)

...you get really worked up about the number of incoming cruise passengers, and you work from early in the morning until 1–2 AM, and it continues throughout the season. I have gotten better at not putting so much personal prestige into it, but it is still extremely difficult to stay unaffected by the number of people and their expectations of your tourism product. (Tour operator, Alta)

The third key issue is how to live with the so-called on/off micro temporalities of concentrated cruise arrivals. When cruise ships arrive in a harbor, there are often a few intense hours of busy activity consisting of shuttling guests to shore to waiting tour buses, helping tourists get to destinations, disposing of waste, and obtaining provisions. To accommodate this, local destination management organizations often set up temporary facilities in harbor receiving areas. For example, they may create pop-up tourist activities arranged specifically for the occasion. On cruise arrival days, tours cannot easily be adapted to fit the weather or unforeseen circumstances, and guides have little time to truly connect with visitors. Moreover, some tourists are extremely conscious of



getting what they have paid for, and operators worry about customer complaints that could lead to being paid less by the cruise line. Although cruise itineraries are prepared long in advance, the actual planning period for each location may be short—sometimes only a day in advance—making it difficult for local stakeholders to plan activities. Payments for tours are often made after the visit has taken place, and there might be no compensation provided for cancellations.

Mitigating Environmental Impacts

The fourth challenge addresses the negative environmental impacts of cruise ships at sea and cruise tourists on land. Cruise activities have negative impacts on the environment in which they operate, affecting local terrestrial and marine ecosystems. As one of the interviewees pointed out, “...when a boat is there, with the engine running like that, even if we don’t notice it, it does have an impact on the environment” (Decision-maker, Lofoten). Another factor is damage to fragile Arctic ecosystems, which also carries economic costs and threatens the sustainability of cruise destinations. Moreover, the cruise industry causes additional burdens on local authorities and communities to handle waste, congestion, visual and noise pollution, overcrowding in certain places, and wear and tear on infrastructure. While there are mechanisms for waste disposal management, such as charging for compulsory recycling services, congestion from cruise ship arrivals and docking, as well as emissions stemming from tour buses in the harbors, were noted by actors in several of our cases. Harbor electricity is currently not available in the studied cases since none of the harbors have the infrastructure or sufficient power network. Notably, codes of conduct are either implemented or under development to reduce wildlife disturbances at the study sites.

Practices

Our analysis identified five important practices used by actors in all of the studied cruise destination communities to maneuver within the larger global and national structures of cruise tourism: pricing, innovating, investing, regulating, and networking.

Pricing

By setting appropriate prices, local tourism stakeholders can attract the types of tourists they prefer. For example, they can offer more exclusive tours for cruise guests willing to pay a higher price instead of relying on providing experiences to the masses. Many local tour operators prefer fewer visitors who participate in longer stays and visitors who book more expensive trips. These groups often contribute more to the local economy by paying costs directly to the operator and purchasing local services and products. Fewer guests and longer stays allow for more meaningful connections between tourists and local providers, which often increases the tourists’ cultural sensitivity and awareness—values that we found to be important to the stakeholders. The tour guides also prefer having more time to talk to their guests instead of reading scripts and following tight schedules.

Moreover, pricing practices can be positive for nature preservation and conservation. For example, setting higher prices for walking tours in sensitive areas can reduce crowding and environmental degradation while fostering enjoyment for both tourists and local people. For example, in Alta, tour operators have deliberately increased the price of excursions to Komsa Mountain in order to reduce visitor numbers. By limiting demand in this manner, they have mitigated environmental degradation along the hiking paths while enhancing the quality of experience for both tourists and residents. In Honningsvåg, the shortage of guides during the off season has been addressed through the training of local school pupils, providing them with early work experience and raising their awareness of cruise tourism while also enabling visitors to engage with local cultural traditions. Together, these cases illustrate how communities and operators experiment with adaptive,



values-based practices that balance ecological concerns, economic viability, and social value creation. While such locally driven practices demonstrate innovative ways of addressing environmental and social challenges, they also underscore the need for more assertive national and local political engagement with the cruise industry to ensure that responsibility for sustainable development does not rest solely on communities and operators:

I think that we are far too passive in our demands toward the cruise industry. I expect both national and local politicians to be more direct and assertive when negotiating with the cruise industry about implementing greater measures to minimize the environmental impacts. (Tour operator, Honningsvåg)

However, pricing is often complicated due to the need for many intermediaries between cruise customers and local providers. Commonly, the money paid to a local tour company is much less than what the cruise guest paid when booking a tour through the agent onboard, resulting in a mismatch between the tourists' expected value and what the local provider can deliver. Although price-conscious passengers can book trips directly from the local providers at the destination, this may reduce the predictability of demand and local income security.

Innovating

Notably, local stakeholders can create new tourist products or rebrand existing tourist sites to steer cruise tourism in the desired direction. While some locations have iconic sites that always attract tourists, such as the North Cape in Honningsvåg, others rely on a combination of nature and culture plus excellent service quality. For example, in Alta, local stakeholders have tailored services and products to specifically cater to cruise passengers in the wintertime, which is a unique approach compared to the other communities. The presence of large numbers of cruise tourists has led to the creation of new and innovative local experiences by micro-scale enterprises and/or family-owned businesses. Examples include tours about Arctic flora and marine plants, culinary walks, beach clean-ups to promote environmental consciousness, and even visits to residents' private homes: "Just during this last decade, the tourism industry has expanded considerably, with both new attractions, accommodation, places to eat, and experiences creating greater diversity both for our customers but also local inhabitants" (DMO representative in Alta).

These experiences can offer cruise guests unique and meaningful interactions with people and places, support the local economy, and promote sustainable practices. Such innovations can transform how cruise tourists experience the community as well as how the local community experiences cruise tourism. Furthermore, innovative thinking and novel approaches can lead to win-win outcomes for locals and tourists while driving the transition toward sustainability.

Investing

In all the studied communities, more investment in infrastructure and tourism-related facilities is necessary to accommodate cruise ships and achieve more sustainable practices. However, there are varied views on what improvements are necessary, and it remains unclear who should bear the financial costs: Is it the municipality or the tourism industry that should pay? For example, building infrastructure to offer cruise ships electricity while docking would reduce air and noise pollution. However, installing shore power is expensive, and local electricity capacity is often inadequate. Moreover, this represents an uncertain investment since cruise lines may choose to opt out of itineraries without prior warning. In Ísafjörður, the municipality has made extensive investments to improve the port, motivated by the significant income generated from harbor fees by allowing more ships to dock simultaneously.



Personally, I think it [the port extension] gives the opportunity for better service for cruise ships. It provides the opportunity to give more options for greener cruise tourism. There is this talk about the cruise ships being connected to electricity from the harbor, so making the harbor bigger gives us the opportunity to do that later in the future. It also makes it possible for cruise ships that have had to be on anchor to dock at the pier. (DMO representative, Ísafjörður)

There are also plans to enable the harbor to host even larger cruise ships to boost the harbor's revenue, which many local stakeholders believe will benefit their entire community. In Nuuk, the municipality has invested in improving visitor experiences; for example, they have improved signage for attractions and developed more hiking routes. In Honningsvåg, a stone trail leading to the highest mountain top was paid for through a crowdfunding campaign in the interest of preserving the vulnerable environment while also making hiking safer. In the last two examples, investments have provided services to tourists and inhabitants alike. However, since cruise tourism remains a highly seasonal activity, money might be better spent on more flexible structures or pop-up solutions (e.g., cruise terminals and visitor and information centers), which have also been used in several of the studied communities.

Regulating

Cruise traffic can be regulated by initiatives such as introducing cruise taxes, setting a minimum duration of stay in the harbor, or defining limits on the number of cruise arrivals or guests per day. In many cases, the municipalities promote voluntary guidelines for all tourism activities. However, they would have to be coordinated across municipalities or even across destinations to achieve the maximum effect. Economic incentives are commonly used to regulate and promote more sustainable cruise practices. For example, mooring fee discounts are offered to cruise operators who comply with certain environmental requirements while docking in Norwegian harbors.

They [fees] are determined by each individual port. And it is decided politically by the port board. For example, the port board [at Vågan municipality in Lofoten], over the last year and a half, has adjusted some of the parameters so that boats that choose to dock without...using shore power, that is, without blowing up the chimney... they will then in a way receive—and it is linked to a so-called EPI (Environmental Port Index) score, that is—an environmental score in relation to emissions. (Vågan municipality representative, Lofoten)

Several stakeholders argued that stricter regulations must be enforced to reduce CO₂ emissions from cruise ships, both at sea and while docking. In Lofoten, another regulation under discussion is the implementation of a so-called tourist tax. While it could help regulate the number of incoming tourists, it would conflict with the freedom to roam (*allemannsretten*), which is a central outdoor principle in Norway. At the beginning of each cruise season in Ísafjörður, the municipality and the port authority distribute a booklet to all residents informing them of the expected cruise arrivals. They also have pamphlets with guidelines for what is considered appropriate visitor behavior, and these are distributed to the cruise guests. Notably, such efforts have helped reduce residents' complaints. Overall, the examples from our cases demonstrate that regulating cruise tourism locally at the destination and imposing demands on the cruise tourism industry requires collaboration among all sectors involved.

Networking

For local communities and tourist stakeholders to manage cruise tourism more sustainably, they must work together by engaging in activities across all sectors with municipalities. For example,



when winter cruises were introduced in Alta in 2009, a strong network secured higher overall prices for tourism services and products. In Nuuk, prior to the year's cruise season, stakeholders come together to discuss potential challenges and improvements to be made. Additionally, many cruise stakeholders are part of the Nuuk Maritime Network, comprising 50 actors from across the industrial, education, and public sectors.

Another network is the Lofoten Cruise Network, which brings together cruise-related stakeholders such as municipalities, Destination Lofoten (the local destination management organization), and local tour companies to discuss cruise-related issues, make recommendations, and present information about the benefits and challenges that cruises bring to Lofoten. Several stakeholders highlighted the need for a designated coordinator with the specific task of working on cruise-related issues across the Lofoten Islands. Overall, networking activities among local cruise stakeholders, as well as outreach information to inhabitants, are central in all five case locations.

Discussion

In this paper, we sought to answer the research question of how Arctic cruise destination communities can respond to and anticipate future cruise-related challenges and opportunities, as well as control cruise tourism development in their communities. In doing so, we addressed the recent call of Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2021) to place tourism in the local context in order to understand communities' values and empowerment. The practices identified in this study foster a sense of ownership and agency, offering communities a role in shaping cruise tourism while reflecting a shift toward socializing tourism. These locally developed practices, such as pricing, give communities some control over the economic value they receive from cruise tourism. Additionally, the development of local innovation allows communities to shape products and services that reflect their values. Furthermore, infrastructure investments help communities manage the cruise industry in ways that serve their interests, while regulations designed by communities give them a stronger voice in shaping the impacts of cruise tourism. Finally, community networking encourages collaboration and strengthens social cohesion. To a certain degree, these locally developed practices align with the notion of socializing tourism by reorienting tourism practices to prioritize the rights, needs, and empowerment of cruise destination communities. In this section, we revisit and highlight how local communities' engagement with cruise development and locally developed practices can benefit cross-case learning and lead to socializing tourism.

Local Practices

Cruise tourism is sometimes described as a form of neocolonialism where local communities are victims of global capitalistic industries (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021). However, our study demonstrates that the actors in the communities we studied are not powerless victims and that the representatives we engaged from these communities do not passively observe the growth of cruise tourism. Instead, they actively engage in building responses and (counter) strategies to steer cruise tourism at the destination. Local actors draw on several practices to continually improve the handling and management of cruise development while reaping its benefits and mitigating its negative impacts. In our study, we revealed how local practices are adjusted with the aim of social innovations, which are communities' strategies for coexisting with cruise tourism and crafting response-abilities to improve (Ren et al. 2021). All of these identified cruise tourism practices occur within the dynamic material, temporospatial, and structural conditions influencing Arctic cruise destination communities. These practices can also lead to the creation of new social structures, institutions, and relations (Bargeman & Richards, 2020).

Simultaneously, our findings further underscore the complex nature of practices developed in relation to cruise. Thus, suggesting taking a more holistic approach to management of Arctic cruise



tourism and moving beyond the often unidimensional and simplistic understanding of cruise tourism as either economically beneficial or purely destructive (Ren et al. 2021). Although the materials, competencies, and meanings varied across the case locations, the five identified practices of pricing, innovation, investment, regulation, and networking all occur in each of the studied communities to various degrees.

Our study revealed that Arctic cruise destination communities have much to gain from exchanging information and learning from each other's practices. Furthermore, some of the identified practices were able to positively enhance destination management. For example, the use of pricing in Alta, which now limits the number of visitors to Komsa Mountain, has proven to be successful in reducing environmental damage to the nature surrounding the hiking paths, thereby enhancing the enjoyment of both tourists and residents alike. To solve the shortage of local guides during the off season, local school pupils in Honningsvåg were trained to serve as guides for those few cruise guests arriving during this period, which has provided these young people with valuable work experience and an awareness of cruise tourism. This innovative practice has the potential to inform cruise passengers of local and cultural traditions and ways of life that they would not have otherwise experienced. We argue that making demands and setting local standards for the cruise industry do not necessarily lead to less cruise traffic (Persson-Fischier et al., 2025). However, simultaneously, our informants suggest that a joint effort in making demands toward the cruise industry seems to pay off. This is certainly the case in Alta, where the tourism industry negotiated not only the prices but also the prolonged stay of cruise ships at their destination. Similarly, in relation to the demands for higher environmental sustainability, this will have to be considered by the cruise operators coming to Norwegian waters.

Our exploration of how actors across five communities live with and seek to improve cruise tourism contributes to a more robust understanding of Arctic cruise tourism in terms of what the overarching challenges are, what is being done about said challenges in cruise destination communities, and what works. As argued by Ren and Markussen (2024, p.109), Arctic destinations are often researched through single case studies. However, using a comparative methodology "allows researchers, destinations and other tourism actors to reflect about and learn from other destinations and to speculate about tourism realities by also comparing tourism to other ways of worlding" (p. 109). Cross-case learning and comparison with other tourism peers can spark deliberation about ways of developing tourism. In our specific study, a comparative approach enabled the identification of challenges and practices that occur across destinations; subsequently, we shared this information with tourism actors through community meetings, consultations with the cruise industry, and both regional and local destination management organizations and their members. The smaller cruise destination communities certainly benefit greatly from being united. Moreover, the possibility to learn from each other can help to gain leverage against the often larger and more powerful international cruise operators. Incidentally, a recent study has identified that Arctic cruise destinations largely tend to work independently, resulting in a fragmented front against the more unified cruise tourism operators (Ólafsdóttir et al. 2024).

Moving Toward Socializing Tourism

Another interesting observation made during this study helped us realize that the foundations for socializing tourism proposed by Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2021) already exist in the destinations we studied, and our findings have provided examples of this. The adopted practice approach helped us identify common practices used by local stakeholders to exert local control over cruise tourism; however, despite these efforts toward socializing tourism, certain issues remain to be resolved in moving toward a more sustainable tourism paradigm. In general terms, these opportunities for socializing tourism can include educating tourists to behave respectfully and responsibly while on



their holidays, establishing the conditions to more equally distribute economic benefits from tourism development within society, and encouraging tourism businesses to adopt locally appropriate practices in their operating regions. Additionally, local governments can help influence the tourism industry to meet local community needs and promote values that ensure this industry can contribute to community well-being (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2021). Our study revealed a set of practices that are able to contribute to the empowerment of local stakeholders and inhabitants while simultaneously teaching tourists to behave respectfully toward nature and societies in the Arctic. However, this does not necessarily imply that the practices have driven a transition toward sustainability in the Arctic or that the empowerment effect will persist over the long term. Given the existing power imbalances between stakeholders and diverse visions of future cruise tourism development, no clear consensus has emerged regarding what improvements or measures are necessary or who should bear the financial costs and responsibilities thereof. Moreover, there was no *single* common direction for the future that all the stakeholders and community members agreed upon, which could make it difficult to meet multiple sustainability challenges.

The unsustainable growth ideology in tourism (Fletcher, 2023) remains prominent, with corporate interests often having more leverage than small-scale local businesses. Although locally established cruise networks attempt to compensate for this power imbalance, it is difficult to challenge the international cruise operators and corporations involved. This study highlighted that several small actors must cooperate at the local level to stand a chance against more powerful forces. However, internal competition among local tourism stakeholders may hinder collective action. Hence, despite the existence of locally developed practices, barriers to sustainable development must also be considered.

Furthermore, this study advocates the implementation of co-creation principles in arguing that to achieve sustainability, a collaborative and integrated approach to learning, communication, and knowledge management is essential (Hoarau-Heemstra & Eide, 2024; Olsen et al., 2020). The co-creation principle acknowledges a need to explore diversity in the perspectives and expertise of various stakeholders to foster an environment where knowledge is co-created and shared (Healy & Morgan, 2012). However, existing practices often fall short by failing to adequately involve all stakeholders early in the process, thus leading to mismatched solutions and the underutilization of knowledge. In line with Hoarau-Heemstra and Eide (2024) we argue that there is a need to shift from traditional destination governance toward a governance regime that enables and facilitates knowledge exchange and emphasizes the importance of a shared vision with the inclusion of relevant stakeholders in developing sustainable strategies. However, to develop a more socialized local organization of cruise tourism, the role of national governments should also be addressed (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2022).

Cruise tourism continues to grow, which constantly raises concerns about its diverse impacts and the capacity of local communities to handle such growth and development. The governance of Arctic cruise destinations is marked by overlapping issues, posing challenges for the local communities aiming to be active players in tourism development (Dawson et al., 2014; Ólafsdóttir et al., 2024). Despite efforts toward collective self-governance, regulatory voids persist, leaving local actors with limited control over cruise tourism activities (Van Bets et al., 2017). Although community empowerment and involvement in governance are essential, strategies for achieving these aims are beyond the scope of the present study—yet certainly remain a necessary avenue for further investigations.

Despite its useful empirical and theoretical contributions, our study is limited by the amount and type of data collected. Even though we conducted the study over a 3-year period, the results are merely a snapshot of local actors' daily activities in their coexistence with tourism. As such, there is a need to conduct more research to understand how actors are attempting to shape their present and future, as well as the structural conditions they are faced with in that process.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature on sustainable cruise development in local cruise destination communities by incorporating the voices of local stakeholders on cruise development. Understanding locally developed practices can help to determine what kind of tourism development is desirable for local communities.

Furthermore, we contribute to the debate on social sustainability and the empowerment of remote coastal communities. We demonstrated what socializing tourism can look like in practice and how small steps can define the direction of development. From a practice perspective, empowerment can be seen as the ability to decide what practices to prioritize, how to implement them, and who is involved in doing so. Our findings have revealed several ways in which individual actors, as well as groups and communities, can adopt, steer, and influence practices.

When a balance exists between corporate and community interests, there can be a discussion on the local meaning of sustainability. However, local interests must be organized and represented. When there is disagreement or a lack of social cohesion in a community, corporate interests will prevail. The examples of practices detailed herein can be useful for both Arctic as well as other cruise destination communities as they create an awareness of the active and ever-changing role of actors and their relations. Each new actor and every small change in the community changes the playing field. Communities have the responsibility to ask themselves what they want from cruise tourism. When they can envision the type of future they want for their community, they can adopt and steer practices in the appropriate direction.

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