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## ÁFANGASTAÐURINN AUSTURLAND DESTINATION EAST ICELAND

#### REPORT:

Start-up:

Destination East Iceland  
Brand & Design platform  
September-December 2014

#### PROJECT MANAGERS:

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ÁFANGASTAÐURINN AUSTURLAND  
DESTINATION EAST ICELAND



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# FOREWORD

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Over the decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and deepening diversification to become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Modern tourism is closely linked to development and encompasses a growing number of new destinations.<sup>1</sup>

Tourism has grown to become the largest export product for Iceland. During the last decade, the income from tourism has more than doubled, and the forecast show that the growth will continue.<sup>2</sup>

Regions can see an increased number of visitors, and opportunities to create value from tourism. When aiming to strengthen the destinations, places and attractions are being pointed out, branded and marketed to become more visible and attractive. Many destinations are in competition with each other.

Another aspect is to ensure that destinations are being developed in sustainable ways. There are not only great economic opportunities, but also possibilities to benefit the destination in developing the communities for the people who live and work in the region. By applying a process that help us to think creatively, to make the right decisions, and most important to work together, the ripple effects from our destination development can strengthen all parts of our community. Destination Design is one of the methods that can help us doing so.

When looking into what kind of foreign tourists Iceland attracts, we see that many are wealthy and interested in the nature. More are also getting further interested in the Icelandic culture. Most of the tourists comes during the summer seasons, but surely, there are great opportunities to develop the tourism all year around. Products, services and selling propositions should be developed for all seasons. Nature related activities are popular and highly appreciated by the foreign tourists.<sup>3</sup>

The descriptions of what tourists appreciate, are really a perfect match for what East Iceland has to offer. In the region of Austurland, all of the attractions are represented. Nature, culture, opportunities for winter tourism, great service, food and nice people. Austurland is Iceland for real. It is everything a visitor want. Here are also a great place to live and work, and a lot of space!

Working together, we can refine Austurland, our communities and our destination, and at the same time focus on sustainability, healthy societies and long-term prosperity. The word about the beautiful landscape in the east spreads, and when the visitors come, we stand ready helping them to find Austurland.





# INTRODUCTION

East Iceland, September 2012. Make it Happen - Creative Thinking Conference.<sup>4</sup> The event marked the end of the Creative Communities project, and was a ten-year celebration of the East Iceland Cultural Council. It was also the start for making things happen, as it was the embryo of this project - *Destination East Iceland / Áfangastaðurinn Austurland*.

The thoughts of bringing in “Destination Design” had been raised in early stages, as a natural extension of the aim for the Creative Communities project. Within the Creative Thinking Conference 2012, there was a keynote about Destination Design, and a workshop, focusing on the question “How can we together develop our region?” The workshop was held in Egilsstaðir at Austurbrú, with about 50 participants of whom about half of the participants were from outside of Austurland, and the other half locals.

The workshop resulted in many ideas for developing the region, and showed that there is a lot of energy and knowledge to take care of in further efforts for developing the destination of Austurland. The workshop highlighted the importance of involving all parts of the community in the regional development process. When building a destination - it is done best when we build together. Important actors should be involved; as regional connected organizations, municipalities, property owners, trade and companies. Most important is also that the people who live and work in the region are invited to take part in the process.

The focus on Destination Design, and the methods and processes being used, aroused the interest from several of the participants. After the conference, the East Iceland Tourism Association - FAUST / Ferðamálasamtök Austurlands started a plan for implementing Destination Design on Austurland. In September 2014, precisely two years after the Make it Happen Conference, the project *Áfangastaðurinn Austurland* was started.

## Project Organization

The East Iceland Tourism Association - FAUST / Ferðamálasamtök Austurlands, initiated the project Áfangastaðurinn Austurland. Initially, it is run in close collaboration with Austurbrú. María Hjálmarsdóttir at Austurbrú is involved as Project Manager and Coordinator, together with Daniel Byström who is directing the process.

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# THE INITIATIVE

During the project Creative Communities and MAKE by Þorpið, it became clear that there is an opportunity and a need for building a Brand and Design Platform for Austurland. Destination Design was pointed out as a potential method to apply within the regional development strategy of Austurland.

The outcome from the workshop that was held on the conference “Make it happen” in September 2012, consisted of many ideas for regional development of Austurland.<sup>5</sup> It expressed a potential in extending the workshop process, and look for opportunities to further develop the ideas into shared understandable and achievable goals that finally can be implemented.

The ideas from the workshop were not limited to a certain sector, but referred to all parts of the society closely connected to functions, experiences and daily life for inhabitants and visitors. The ideas were related to design and handicrafts, architecture, communications and

infrastructure, tourism and branding, sustainability, accessibility, food and services and more.

During the spring 2013 the planning of Destination Design for Austurland began. This resulted in a proposal for making a pre-study and Destination Design Management process.

In March 2014, during Design March in Reykjavik, there were further discussions between FAUST and Islandsstofa about Destination Design for developing the communities of Austurland. It was also presented opportunities for collaborations and experience exchanges, with other regions who works with Destination Design. Several Nordic regions have shown their interests into this opportunity. In end of August 2014 the project was formally started, initially focusing on starting up the first steps of the Destination Design process and making a 3 year work plan for the project.<sup>6</sup>

## MAKE IT HAPPEN : WORKSHOP 2012





# PROJECT PLAN

## Project Design Brief

The initiative aims to implement Destination Design on Austurland, in order to develop the region with focus on the well-being of communities and residents, and to strengthen the attractiveness and competitiveness of the destination.

### This include:

1. *Build a Design Strategy:*

“The future Austurland”. Aims and strategies for developing the destination; the experiences and services, to attract visitors and residents to the whole region of Austurland.

2. *Create a Design Program:*

Building a “toolbox” from the specific needs regionally and locally, to guide future actions

3. *Apply Design:*

Design and develop places and services on the basis of the Design Strategy and the Design Program

Collaboration is essential, across borders and intersectoral co-creation, in order to develop Austurland to a *top class destination, and an outstanding work and living area*. A well-functioning destination working as a municipal and regional storefront that attracts residents, companies and investments.

The initiative is characterized by a sustainable perspective; economically, socially and ecologically.

The development process needs to be based in dialogue with all the community. The purpose is to start up a joint development process that is owned and run by the stakeholders together. This involves all the municipalities in the region, companies, associations, and all the people who live and work in Austurland. The process must be open and invite participants from all across the community, from young to old, from different disciplines and backgrounds. The goal is to establish a movement that will be continuous over time.

## Project Work Plan

The project plan was adjusted and confirmed Sept 2014.

### Start-up: *Aug - Nov 2014*

- Making and evaluating work plan and project brief.
- Stakeholder mapping, processing and evaluation.
- Start-up seminar and Destination Design workshop 1.
- Processing; analysis and evaluation.

### Analysis: *Dec 2014 - May 2015*

- Dialogue, interviews and surveys.
- Making of a business intelligence analysis and bench marking.
- Evaluating development opportunities and establish a Design Strategy for the region.

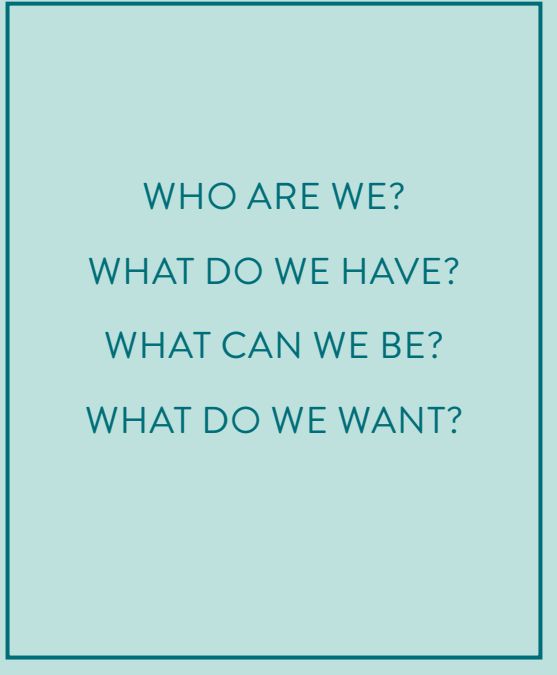
### Creation: *May - Dec 2015*

- Proposals on Design Concepts and Visual Identity.
- Decide Design Concept and Visual Identity and develop a Design Program including Toolbox with guidelines.
- Evaluation and refining.

### Implementation: *From Jan 2016*

- Spreading the Design Program and Toolbox within the communities. Introduction and learning process.
- Applying the Design Program on selected touch points; places and services.
- Defining marketing- and communication channels. Implementing and spread acknowledge about Destination Austurland.







# DESTINATION DESIGN

## About Destination Design

Destination Design is about telling a good story. And we are all actors in the story. Everyone is connected to the destination. The people who live and work in the region are always a part of the real story. Our experience of the story depends on our collective actions within the society we live in. It is determined by our own identity, and our interactions with other people.

For visitors, the story can be based on expectations. It can be built on an image perceived from what they have been told about the destination, or from the tourist information. The visitors experience plays a central role within Destination Design, throughout the whole journey. Not only from the destination itself. The visitor does not care about boundaries between communities and institutions. They move across borders. Different kind of visitors may be looking for different kind of experiences, but in common to all is to value good service through the entire trip from start to finish. The experience is the basis of the story that the visitors tell for other people about their trip.

A word that often is being used is attractiveness. How can the destination get more attractive? How to attract visitors? How to attract new residents and businesses to the community? How do the region interact to jointly enhance the attractiveness?

For new residents the character of the place is often an important aspect, close to the nature and other surroundings you want to have nearby. Also important are the conditions for living and working in the region. Ability to get a work, public services as health care and school. Studies also show that openness has a vital importance for our well-being and our decision to live in a place.<sup>7</sup>

Companies that want to establish in the region care about the climate to develop its business through growth and profitability. Visitors can have different reasons to visit a place. It may be to get away from the everyday life and find peace and harmony. It can be a conference. It may also be from the longing to see and experience a place.

The impressions that consists from a destination are the memories. The memories are characterized by the emotions that it has received during the journey and the stay. The individuality and character of a place are related to the real thing. The feeling of getting into society and experience the genuine values of the destination. What feelings are transmitted? What feelings and emotions do we want to transmit? What memories remains? What memories do we want to give?

By defining shared guidelines for the values of the destination, a common platform is created based on the visions that the stakeholders jointly set. It is important that everyone is invited when setting the vision, and knows about the opportunity to participate. Everyone should feel that there is a democratic basis of the destination's identity, since everyone is a part of the destination, and become ambassadors and mediators of the destination's story. The visions must also be based on a common understanding of the preconditions and possibilities for development.

The first step in Destination Design is to understand the visitors experience, and describe how the destination should be experienced. Then it is about developing a Design Program and a Toolbox with guidelines explaining how the destination can be built and strengthened. The guidelines can include visual expression through marketing, signage programs, arrival halls, recreational areas and more. Jointly set frames for services, and the wanted visitor's experiences, and develop the links between services and with physical environments. It can also be about how to work with hosting and hospitality, through personal meetings and the links to information and other services.

Through the Destination Design Process, procedures for how the destination communicates and interacts with residents and visitors are being developed. It becomes a way of working, which the destination continuously can gather around and use as a basis for further development and refinement of products, places and services.

# STAKEHOLDERS

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## Stakeholders list

As a part of the startup of the destination development process, an initial exercise was made in August/September 2014. The aim with the exercise was to inventory which stakeholders who are important to involve in the Destination Design process for Austurland. The result and the implementation from a regional development project like this, is very much depending on that all the actors/stakeholders must be invited and feel involved throughout the process from the beginning.

The exercise was made by the project group; people who have been connected into the project at early stages. The task was to make a comprehensive list of actors/stakeholders. The lists were returned to the project managers, who summarized and further processed the information.<sup>8</sup>

The instructions for the exercise did not specify the length of the lists. The participants were encouraged to brainstorm, and add as many stakeholders as they could come up with. Everyone from insiders and outsiders, municipalities, governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, partners, regional actors, various visitors and not at least the inhabitants and the different communities of the destination. Also trying to think of those who not always are mentioned as stakeholders, or those we not even might being aware of from before.

The assignment was also to mark the stakeholders as Secondary stakeholders, Primary stakeholders, Key stakeholders or Central players from the following description:

- *Secondary stakeholders* are actors whose involvement in the project is only indirect or temporary.
- *Primary stakeholders* are usually applied to those actors who somehow are directly affected by the project.
- *Key stakeholders* are everyone who is able to use their voice, skills, knowledge or position of power to significantly exercise influence in the project. We need them to be involved in the process to achieve common understanding and build shared visions.
- *Central players* are the actors who runs and coordinate the project, and ensures that all the other stakeholders are being involved and feel invited into the development process.

From the project group's answers a stakeholders-list was summarized. The list was used for inviting people to taking part in the Start Up of the project; and the seminar and workshop that was held on 23 September 2014 in Neskaupstaður.

Later on the list was processed further into a Stakeholders Map that indicates what influence the different stakeholders have within the destination development process.





## Outcomes from Stakeholder Mapping

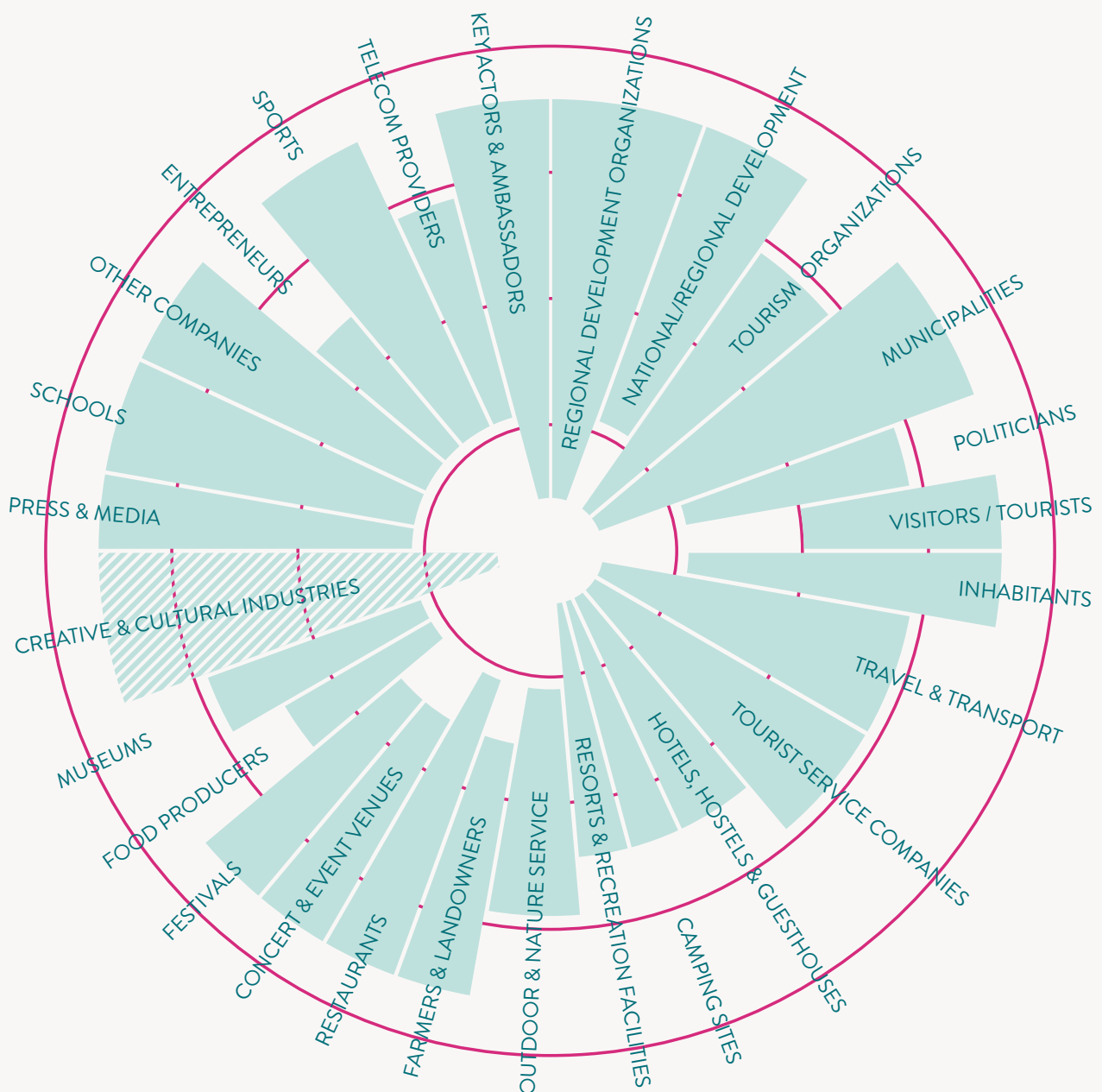
First of all, it is important to stress that the result from the exercise does not fully cover all the stakeholders who are connected to the destination of Austurland. The lists are based on the spontaneous answers that the project group came up with in a very short time. It is possible, and probably quite certain, that the answers would be different if the lists were made during a different period and among other participants.

Nevertheless, the results from the exercise indicate important stakeholders that should be invited to take part in the destination development project. The results can also be used for further discussions, and work as inspiration to find new connections and collaboration opportunities.

From the summary and evaluation of the stakeholders-lists, some groups stand out. Significantly the Creative and Cultural Industry, which seem to have an important role to play in the region. There are many people listed who work within the creative industry, and several associations and cultural centers.

Other stakeholders of general importance are the regional development organizations, the municipalities and key actors who are engaged in the society, and who work as ambassadors and contribute with energy.

Indicated as Key stakeholders and Central players are the Tourism organizations, Travel and transport, Tourist service companies, Hotels and guesthouses, Camping sites, Resorts and Recreation facilities.



# START-UP SEMINAR & WORKSHOP

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The Start-up seminar and workshop was held on the 23rd of September 2014 in Neskaupstaður. The aim with the seminar and workshop was to inform about the initiative, and to introduce the work process.

An open invitation was sent out to all the stakeholders; residents, communities, companies and others. Austurbrú was sending out the invitation by email, and it was spread through advertising in the local newspapers and social media online. About 30 participants from all over Austurland were attending the full-day seminar at Hildibrand Hotel in Neskaupstaður. Many also stayed on the following dinner in the evening.

It is important that everyone feel invited and involved from the start in the process. The aim is to create a forum that allows us to take advantage of knowledge, experiences and thoughts when developing our common destination. In this forum we can achieve shared understanding of our potentials, and we can build shared visions for our future destination. The Start-up seminar and workshop was the first public step for the initiative. It was very successful, inspiring and promising. All the material that was produced during the workshops, were summarized and documented.<sup>9</sup>

## Seminar and Workshop Summary

The seminar started with an introduction, telling more about the background and the initiative. Following a presentation about Destination Design; showing examples, and learning more about the methods. During the day the project plan was also handed out to the participants. Everyone was asked to come with any opinions about the project plan, with the opportunity to influence the content and the direction.

The first exercise in the workshop part focused on the journey through the destination from different perspectives; from the visitor's point of view, from new residents, and from the everyday life of people who live and work in the region. The workshop continued with an Open Space exercise, with the agenda set by the participants, followed by group sessions, and finally presentations and conclusion.

On the following days after the Start-up seminar, the project managers, aiming to meet people and tell more about the initiative, visited strategic places in the region. To reach out and anchor the project in the entire region of Austurland, and get everyone to feel invited and involved.

## Workshop results

### The Journey

In the first exercise, the workshop participants were asked to fill in a form, simulating the journey through the destination from different user's perspectives. In this case, from the visitor's perspective, from new residents, and from the everyday life of the people who live and work in the region. The exercise can be made from your own person, or from a fictive user profile, and filled in individually or in pairs.

The purpose of this exercise was to start from the user's experiences and needs, before moving to the next steps. This leads to a deeper insight of the total image of the destination, what kind of "touch points" that occur during the journey, and what can be developed to enhance the experience. The touch points are situations; services, places and environments that affect the user experience in a good or a bad way during the journey, and are remembered over time.

The summary of the answers gives a hint of strengths and opportunities for development. As for example the contact with people and nature based experiences are highlighted as best memories for the visitors. At the same time, the service factor sometimes can be lacking, and needs attention during the development of the future destination strategy. Job opportunities are one important trigger for new residents moving to Austurland, and the ability to get new friends and feeling welcomed in the community is important for a positive feeling.

The bonds to East Iceland are in general very strong for the inhabitants in the region; living in close relation to the nature and appreciating time together with their families. The answers serve as a base for further analyzes in the process.



### Open Space Workshop

The first step in the Open Space workshop was to set the agenda, and generate topics for conversations.

The participants wrote proposals of topics on Post-It notes and put them up on a bulletin board. When no more topics were added, the bulletin board was arranged into a market place with information of which conversations that was about to take place. For every conversation group one was assigned the role to take notes and in the end present a summary of the outcome.

A lot of knowledge and ideas came out, those has been documented, and are being brought into the continuing process

The workshop participants were also asked to mark which of the conversations that should be prioritized, and people signed up to be further engaged in the topics. The topic that engaged most people was "Vision Statements", closely followed by "Tourism all year around".

The following conversations took place during the Open Space workshop:

- COOPERATION BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES (TOWNS/COMMUNITIES)
- VISION STATEMENTS
- TOURISM ALL YEAR - PROBLEMS
- TOILET, TRASH, ENVIRONMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE
- TRANSPORTATION (EXPENSIVE)
- LOCAL PRODUCTS / ACTIVITIES
- LOCAL PRODUCTS / ENTERTAINMENT

## ÁFANGASTAÐURINN AUSTURLAND : START-UP SEMINAR & WORKSHOP 2014



# FURTHER PROCESS

When looking forward on the further process, the project now moves to the next steps in the Project Plan. That is the analyzing part, which has started and continues during the spring 2015. Dialogue, interviews and surveys will be made. In addition a business intelligence analysis and further bench marking.

When various development opportunities have been evaluated a Design Strategy for the region, expected to be developed before the summer 2015. The strategy will then be evaluated, processed and agreed on before the further steps. From the strategy the Design Concept and the Visual Identity will be developed, including a toolbox with guidelines for implementing.

## Competence list

As a part of the further process a list of needed competences has been made.<sup>10</sup> Resources has been listed, that can be useful when developing the destination of Austurland. This means competences that can be directly involved in the further process, when the project moves into the steps of building the Design Strategy, creating the Design Program and implementing the Destination Design.

The competences listed need to be hands on, and be able to contribute with tangible and concrete results. The aim is to build a team of competences that complements each other, and continuously can work with the destination over time. As far as possible, the aim is to find the competences needed in the region of Austurland, focusing on quality, commitment, sustainable approach and cooperation.

From the inventory of useful resources for the further development of the destination, the following competences has been listed:

- Graphic design
- Web development
- App development
- Interaction design
- Service design
- Architecture
- Printing
- Communication

- Marketing
- Follow research
- Business analysis
- Interior design
- Multimedia Design
- Photography
- Creative input
- Foreign crew from MAKE by Þorpið
- Illustration & Character design
- Event coordination
- Applications / Funding
- Final doers – installation
- Artists
- Product Design
- Furniture remaker
- Product developer
- Artists / Singer / Producer
- Innovation + workshops
- Associations
- Umbrella – design community.
- Fashion Textile Designers
- Graphic art
- Product development
- Video art + documentary
- Video – Promo
- Fine Art
- Translation & Administration

The further process in project Áfangastaðurinn Austurland will need key actors. There are a lot of work to be done. More people will gradually be involved, who can contribute with expertise and input that are essential for the development of the destination. One of the challenges are to spread knowledge about the initiative, and anchor the development of a common regional destination on local level. The project members also have to be ambassadors of the development. This requires understanding of the aim and a belief in the visions that are being set. Hopefully, this report can help bring clearness about the project, inspire and encourage to get involved.



EAST ICELAND HISTORY  
MARKET RESEARCH  
WHAT DO OTHERS THINK ABOUT US?  
WHAT DO WE DO & WHAT DO WE HAVE?  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRAND STRATEGY  
SET OUR BRAND VISION  
UNDERSTAND OUR MISSION  
DEFINE OUR MARKET  
DEFINE OUR ATTRIBUTES AND VALUES  
UNDERSTAND THE CUSTOMER BENEFITS  
DEFINE OUR BRAND TRIGGER  
DEVELOP THE COMMUNITY BRANDS  
BRAND POSITIONING  
UNDERSTAND VISITOR EXPERIENCES

.....

...and more input will be needed





#### References:

- <sup>1</sup> Tourism Highlights, 2014 Edition (UNWTO 2014)
- <sup>2</sup> Northern Sights: The future of tourism in Iceland (The Boston Consulting Group, September 2013)
- <sup>3</sup> Tourism in Iceland in figures - April 2014, (Ferðamálastofa, 2014)
- <sup>4</sup> <http://make.is/makeithappen/>
- <sup>5</sup> Make it Happen - Workshop notes (Design Nation, September 2012)
- <sup>6</sup> Áfangastaðurinn Austurland - Workplan (Design Nation, September 2014)
- <sup>7</sup> Why People Love Where They Live and Why It Matters: A National Perspective (Knight Foundation, 2010)
- <sup>8</sup> Áfangastaðurinn Austurland - Summary: Stakeholder Mapping (Design Nation, August 2014 - January 2015)
- <sup>9</sup> Áfangastaðurinn Austurland - Summary: Start-Up Conference & Workshop (Design Nation, November 2014)
- <sup>10</sup> Áfangastaðurinn Austurland - Summary: Competences (Design Nation, January 2015)





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