

Bioregioning workshop and learning journey in the Westfjords

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The Story of Place: Co-creating a Bioregional Macroscopic in the Westfjords of Iceland

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Context

As an extension to the core case studies in the COAST project, an opportunity to collaborate with the COBALT network arose. The proposed project “Story of Place: Co-creating a Bioregional Macroscopic” involved gathering interested individuals to form an Iceland-specific bioregioning group, identifying a geographical area of focus and undergoing several months of workshop sessions in order to better see and understand its environmental and governance systems and to identify potential future avenues of sustainable governance. Originally intended for locals to participate, circumstances and timing dictated that the Westfjords group finally consisted of seven scholars and sustainability practitioners, both within and outside of Iceland. Nevertheless, the Westfjords bioregional team was able to work together, investigate governance and engage local knowledge holders in the project of bioregioning.

Stakeholder engagement and workshops

The workshops were conducted online, with participation of multiple bioregioning groups in various countries across the Northern Atlantic (USA, Iceland and Ireland), between July 2021 and February 2022. Each of the ten thematically focussed modules was three hours long and comprised of lectures as well as time in break-out rooms for the bioregional groups to work together on ideas, worksheets and presentations. After each workshop module, a storymap of the contents and results was published online.

[Module 1: Introduction to Seeing, Connecting & Accelerating Transformative Systems Change](#)

[Module 2: Participation and Power](#)

[Module 3: Timelines](#)

[Module 4: Trends and Variables](#)

[Module 5: Mid-Point Reflections and Presentations](#)

[Module 6: Beginning to See the Governance Systems](#)

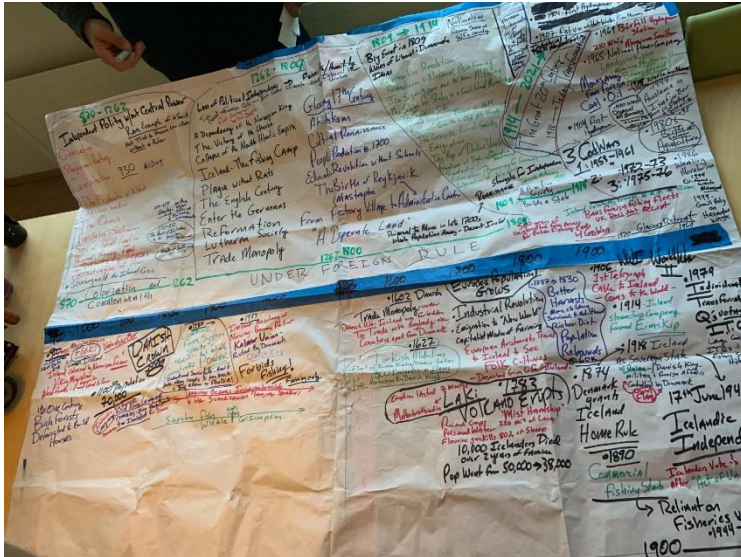
[Module 7: Governance Structures and Strategies Ahead](#)

[Module 8: Preparing for Final Presentation](#)

[Module 9: Anticipating the Climate Crisis](#)

[Module 10: Visualizing a Desirable Future](#)

See all storymaps of bioregioning workshops including lectures, reports and results presentations [here](#).



A draft of the Westfjords timeline

Learning journey and interviews

In addition to the workshops, a pilot learning journey was envisaged by COBALT leader Glenn Page in October 2021. As some of the Westfjords bioregioning team members had never been to Iceland, this was a great opportunity to continue the work we were doing and get locals involved on the ground. After some complex planning due to COVID restrictions, a team comprised of bioregioning group members, film crew and environmental governance practitioners made their way to Iceland and started the long road trip up to the Westfjords.



Pouring over the map on the ferry to the Westfjords

By stopping in several towns in the Westfjords, it was possible to gain and understanding of the geographical and physical challenges of the region as well as getting insights from locals. Several interviews were held in different locations. In Ísafjörður, our team was welcomed by the University Center of the Westfjords, took a walking tour around the harbour and listened discussed governance and environmental systems as well as tourism and industry with programme director Dr. Matthias Kokorsch and Dána JÓhannsdóttir from Vestfjarðastofa. On our way back, we visited the salt factory Saltverk as an example of sustainable use of natural resources.



Harbour tour in Ísafjörður



The learning journey team on the road

See the storymap detailing the full learning journey to the Westfjords by Jonny Norton [here](#). The documentary film [COBALT Bioregioning Learning Journey: Westfjords, Iceland](#) created by Mike Schuh tells the full story of our journey and our learnings:



Back in Reykjavík, the whole team took part in the Arctic Circle Assembly as part of the State of Maine Delegation representing a first foray into bioregional work in Iceland and deepening the network into research, policy and beyond. See the film created on behalf of the Maine Delegation [here](#).

Lessons Learned

Engaging in the workshops and conducting a learning journey through the Westfjords has offered valuable insights into the environmental and societal make-up of this remote region of Iceland. Although conducted mostly by scholars and external practitioners, it has been a first foray into bioregional work, engaging some local actors and finding interest in this work in the different communities. One theme that has come out as an interesting topic to follow up is the question of governance on a municipal level – specifically the merging of municipalities and its implications. Therefore, the Icelandic bioregioning team has picked up this topic as a case study and conducted extra interviews with locals on their views on potentially merging municipalities. This work was incorporated into the final presentation of the bioregional group.

There is undoubtedly a lot of potential for future bioregioning in the Westfjords, especially in terms of engaging more locals with this work. We have started the conversation and engaged several local inhabitants, both individual as well as on an organisational level. It is vital that local inhabitants continue this conversation in order to push for a more sustainable future in the Westfjords bioregion.