Melrakkaslétta the Meeting-Ground: Performing Qualitative Research at the Tourism Margin

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INTRODUCTION

Hraunhafnartangi is a place where no one has ever lived. That is, no humans have ever called it home. In a human sense, this place is therefore on the margin of nothingness—in other contexts it might be the core of everything. This place is real; it is a marked location on maps. To me this is also a personal place, connected to my childhood by family visits. The salty smell of seaweed and the ocean. A flashback to my small feet trying to balance a walk on the wet stones in slippery rubber boots. Sweaty sandwiches eaten at the foot of, what then felt like, a giant lighthouse; fights with my siblings over the last drops of lukewarm cocoa; the overwhelming threat of potential attacks from an army of arctic terns, a real threat to me-the-girl, although my parents probably never planned a visit here during the 'angry tern-bird' season. Hraunhafnartangi, one of

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the northernmost points of the Icelandic mainland, located on the coast of Melrakkaslétta, northeast Iceland.

Now, this place to me somehow resembles Melrakkaslétta overall. The place where my foremothers and forefathers were born, lived and died. On this peninsula is the farm where my mother was born, spent her childhood, sought her identity and always called home. And close by is the place where I grew up—in my father's childhood home—the place I for long called home, my roots. Today's visit to Hraunhafnartangi—the first in decades—awakes pleasant childhood memories yet interrupted by a sad reminder of what has been and of those who are not 'here' anymore.

Today, the heavy northern storm is powerful and loud, the ice-cold rain bites the few bits of skin not covered with layers of clothes. The overwhelming North Atlantic Ocean hammers its huge, smashing waves on the bulk of rocks it has for centuries thrown and built to a wall on the seashore of Melrakkaslétta's flatland. The lighthouse is still here, not as huge as it used to be, but now even a stronger reminder of seafarers touring the massive ocean waves—not always successfully.

It's early September 2020. No longer am I a child, visiting Hraunhafnartangi with my family. I am an adult with an agenda: a field trip to Melrakkaslétta as a kick-off into a research project. At this point in time, I have for two days been able to call myself a doctoral student in Tourism Studies at the University of Iceland.

These lines are from the first pages of my research diary, written as I started my newly assigned position of a PhD student at the University of Iceland. In early 2016, I had been employed as a researcher at the Icelandic Tourism Research Centre. That was in the midst of the Icelandic Tourism Boom. That year this island of 330,000 residents welcomed just under 1.8 million foreign visitors. By the time the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 harshly paused most of the world's travels, annual arrivals had for a couple of years exceeded two million (Icelandic Tourist Board, n.d.), making the tourism sector the main creator of the country's foreign exchange value (Sæþórsdóttir et al. 2020). The Icelandic capital area and the country's south and southwest are where the most tourism-related activities, development and economic effect have occurred (Árnason and Welling 2019). This chapter, however, is about the becoming of tourism research performed on the 'other side' of Iceland and the 'other side' of the Icelandic Tourism Boom; an area on the tourism margins annually visited by around 1% of the country's foreign tourists (Óladóttir 2020); the rural area of Melrakkaslétta, northeast Iceland.

The aim of the research is to explore place-making processes, the inter-actions and coexistence of humans and the more-than-human as well as the interlinked networks of tourism and other mobilities in this remote, non-touristy area. This chapter is about the designing of this research, set within a qualitative research paradigm, where through flat ontology and using a post-ANT lens, ethnographic methodology is applied with the aim of co-creating knowledge with the humans and the more-than-human world of Melrakkaslétta. Conducting qualitative research requires self-reflexivity (Pezalla et al. 2012). Writing the chapter offered a chance to critically reflect on the research agenda and my—the researcher's—role in the process. The introduction above, written to situate the reader in Melrakkaslétta, is furthermore a statement of my connection to and appreciation of Melrakkaslétta.

The becoming of the research is here explored through autoethnog-raphy, a qualitative research method that is at the same time a process and a product (Ellis 2004), applied when "the researcher is the subject of study" (Hughes and Pennington 2017, 5), a method partly emerging from the way that "some anthropologists began actively questioning their ways of knowing about others" (8). The method seemed well suited to investigate and review my journey throughout the research process. Finding courage in the notion of Braun, Clarke and Gray that when publishing academic papers, researchers rarely provide information on their uncertainties, challenges and "what at the time can feel like complete disaster to manage" (2017, 6), what follows is an honest telling about my 'travels' through the research process. The chapter, arranged in chrono-logical order, trails the setting of the research outline, its aim and scope and follows the performing of the research before narrating some lessons learned during the process.

The Search for Ground Zero

As can be gathered from the title and context of this book, my posi-tion as researcher was within the research project titled *Mobilities on the margins—creative processes of place making*, funded by The Icelandic Centre for Research. While the title of the underlying project set the general tone, by the time of my employment the part I was to conduct, tourism research in Melrakkaslétta, was still scarcely defined. In retrospect, I should from the start have set my focus on the *why* and *what-for* of the research—as in why conduct tourism research in a non-touristy area, and

to what purpose. Truth be told, those were not my focus points. Instead, I went straight on and got lost in the question of *how* to perform the research.

Diving in headfirst, my PhD study felt like *the* chance to learn and try out new ways of conducting research. I drowned myself in literature on research methods and then eagerly stressed to my supervisors my many ideas on methods to apply within and beyond Melrakkaslétta. Their reply was something in the line of "You need to think about the ontological and epistemological approach of the research". Such big words. Coming from applied research, this was a bit far from my everyday language, whether in English or Icelandic. It turned out that I was getting lost in a familiar process of being "more interested in solving a problem than in promoting analytical, theoretically informed work" (Gobo 2018, 66). Back to the reading, this time on research design, study outline and paradigms; ontology, epistemology and methodology—only to find somewhat conflicting information and an interchangeable use of terms. This led me to a vast literature on philosophical thinking where the list of what felt like necessary readings just kept growing. What I became sadly aware of during these months of falling further down the bottomless barrel of existing literature was that, given the half a century I had on my back, chances were my years ahead just would not cut it.

I had some breaking points for my gradual landing from reading mode. The real saviour, however, was Punch's subtle advice on getting back to "What are we trying to find out here?" (2014, 5). Not that this should have been news. Only, becoming a student yet again seemed to have robbed me of much of my experience, knowhow and even common sense. I grabbed a hold on Punch's lifeline and slowly got my head around the assignment. What I needed to do was to demarcate the project by drafting my first research questions. Those would become my ground zero—the *what* would lead me to the *why* and from there I would get to the *how*. Best of all, having started the process during travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, now months into the project, this would mentally reconnect me with Melrakkaslétta, the area of research.

Making Ready for Research

Historically Melrakkaslétta is the northernmost part of a peninsula on the Icelandic northeast coast (Fig. 8.1). Its history of human settlement traces back for centuries where sheep-farming and fishing were the main

occupations. Although rich in natural resources, Melrakkaslétta's bare and hence scarcely sheltered rocky tundra has nevertheless been considered rather harsh for modernised farming (Lund 2016). In recent times, the area has faced vast depopulation leaving most of the farms on its northern coast abandoned during winters.

Two small villages are on each of the peninsula's coastlines (Fig. 8.1), Raufarhöfn, growing from fishing and fish-processing (Kokorsch and Benediktsson 2018) and Kópasker, growing from services to its neighbouring farmlands (Björnsdóttir 2003). Kópasker has remained the smaller of the two villages, yet more stable at around 130 inhabitants. Raufarhöfn's residents peaked at little over 500 in the late 1970s whereafter vast depopulation has left the village to count around 180 residents (Statistics Iceland, n.d.).

In 2012, Raufarhöfn became a pilot settlement in a project titled Fragile Communities, initiated by the Icelandic Regional Development
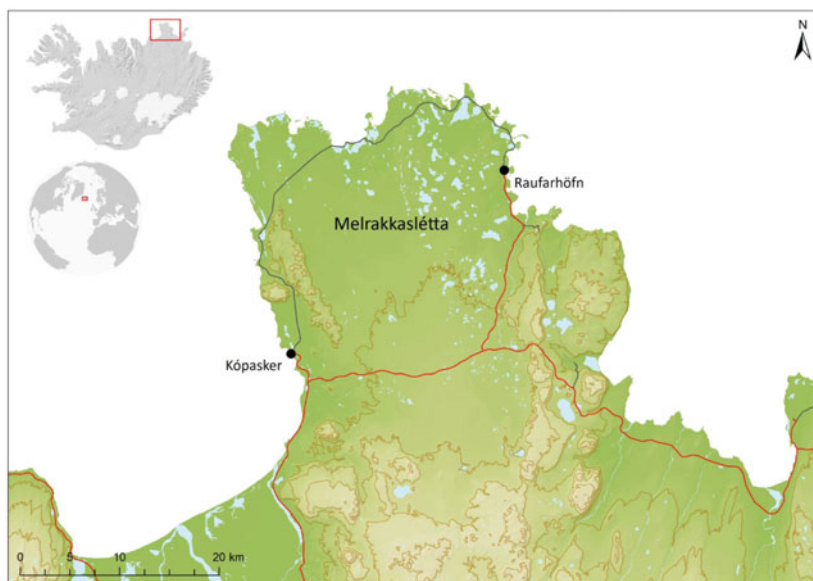

Fig. 8.1 Melrakkaslétta and its location in Iceland (*Source* The National Land Survey of Iceland. Place names added by the author. Map by Michaël Virgil Bishop)

Institute (IRDI), set to counteract the long-standing depopulation from rural areas (IRDI, n.d.), faced in particular by areas furthest away from the capital area and regional service centres (Bjarnason 2020). In 2015, Kópasker entered the project as a part of the neighbouring agricultural area, Öxarfjarðarhérað (IRDI, n.d.). In the project, applying a bottom-up approach to include and enable the locals to come up with feasible ways for their area's development, the residents of both Raufarhöfn and Öxarfjarðarhérað named local tourism development as one of their homestead's main possibilities (IRDI, n.d.).

This, I thought, would be my starting point. What I 'wanted to find out here' was to gain knowledge of the status and perceived role of Melrakkaslétta's tourism—that is, if the locals still regard tourism as the way forward in their area's development. But these were still questions for applied research, and I needed to dive deeper.

Designing the Research

After consulting with my supervisors, the research was set within relational materialism seen through a post-Actor-Network Theory (ANT) lens. ANT has its base in flat ontology, the form Harman calls Latourian, which "treats anything as real as long as it has an effect on something else" (2020, 375). According to ANT, reality is created within networks of actors where "all things are relational" (Jóhannesson and Bærenholdt 2020, 34). For Latour, researching social phenomena is not as much a "science of the social" as it is about "*tracing of associations*" (2005, 5). Research within ANT is therefore on how social order is established through networks of interconnections between humans and the more-than-human with an emphasis on the role of materials in these processes (Latour 1998), as materials are themselves seen as active players in the establishment of actor-networks. While ANT evolves around how stable order is established through actor-networks, post-ANT studies have broadened its scope by focusing equally on how networks evolve, change and are disrupted (Jóhannesson and Bærenholdt 2020). The post-ANT lens furthermore sees, e.g., experiences and feelings as being able to have an effect and be affected by actor-networks (Haug 2012; Jóhannesson and Bærenholdt 2020).

In setting the research's key concepts, I decided to follow the threads set in the underlying research project and focus on the concepts of *mobilities*, *place* and *margins*. By this, I felt I could combine its core with my

urge to capture the status and perceived role of tourism in Melrakkaslétta. Human travels are dependent on—and the driving force of—various forms of *mobilities* (Sheller and Urry 2006) through dynamic, complex and non-static systems, created through cooperation and integration of the human and the more-than-human (Ren et al. 2020). Mobilities are bound in relational patterns of movement, representation and practice through what Cresswell (2010) calls 'constellations of mobility', patterns that need to be studied holistically in order to be understood. In the context of tourism research the concept therefore seemed a highly relevant focal point.

Melrakkaslétta is as other *places* not fixed in time and space, but rather "always in the process of being made … a simultaneity of stories so far" (Massey 2005, 9). Thinking of *places* in the context of tourism brings forth how they, for the purpose of destination marketing, often are portrayed as specific locations with well-defined characteristics (Boisen et al. 2018). However, the locals' connection to the same place tends to be diverse (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011) and closely related to perception, symbols and memories (Frisvoll 2012). Places are where communal thinking and social characteristics are created (Shields 1991) although rarely being a defined point but rather existing in the context of what surrounds them, in the minds of those who stay there (Ingold 2000). Investigating Melrakkaslétta the place hence felt like a relevant task.

Margins are relational in that they occur as the margin *of* something. Conducting tourism research in a rural, non-touristy area might entail margins as a given, even more so when seen in the context of how rural tourism has been used to preserve and restore cultural heritage (Rytkönen and Tunón 2020). While Shields proposes places on the margins as being "left behind" and yet still able to "evoke both fascination and nostalgia" (1991, 3), Western media tends to portray daily life in the rural as rooted in the past, even presenting a depressing picture of rural existence (Mankova 2018). Research carried out in rural areas likewise tends to focus on various challenges, struggles and existential problems (Graugaard 2020).

I intentionally decided not to include in the core concepts the somewhat obvious conception of power in relation to the rural (Carson et al. 2020). Melrakkaslétta is an area "located beyond the immediate influence of either the Reykjavík capital area or any of the [country's] regional centres" (Bjarnason 2020, 58) and its societal vulnerability is evident from its fragile community status. Margins, however, do not only occur

through geographical remoteness but also as a result of remoteness from decision-making and lacking connections (Bock 2016). Melrakkaslétta's local government is based in the Western end of the municipality Norðurþing while Melrakkaslétta marks its eastern end. Despite good road connections, Melrakkaslétta is situated northeast of the domestic travel systems of aviation and public buses, while a visit to a specialised doctor or a hardware store demands a 2.5-hour drive to the regional service centre of Akureyri in central north Iceland.

While not wanting to hide from the obvious challenges these and other hindering factors are bound to cause, I felt that directing the research towards power-imbalance and hardship would clearly leave me with answers on just that. However, neither did I want the research to become an uncritical rant on Melrakkaslétta's greatness or a 'rural idyll' (Frisvoll 2013). I wanted to learn about Melrakkaslétta the place and find its "characteristic of localness" (Ingold 2000, 229) based on the assumption that challenges *and* wellbeing are part of everyday life in Melrakkaslétta as it is elsewhere in the world (Clark 2019).

Towards the Research Practice

As can be gathered from the introduction above, the setting of this research is close to my heart. Growing up in Kópasker as a descendant of Melrakkaslétta's farmers, this is 'my old home'. The peninsula's other village, Raufarhöfn, set to be at the centre of the research, felt somewhat more distant. Due to that, as well as to the number of decades passed since I last lived in the area, I did not expect to feel like researching a community that I would feel connected to. And yet, early on I realised that I was perhaps not an insider, but neither was I an outsider.

This might seem alarming to those embracing quantitative research methods that assume "a detached and value-free researcher in the acquisition and interpretation of gathered data" (Pezalla et al. 2012, 167). Those working within qualitative research might be less worried about my possible lack of true impartiality as the researcher is, within qualitative methodology, regarded as an active part and a tool within research. Qualitative research not only emphasises and embraces the active role of researchers, but is furthermore about "embracing researcher subjectivity, rather than viewing it as a 'problem' to be managed" (Clarke et al. 2015, 223). It felt clear that for me to capture the essence of tourism in the

everyday life of Melrakkaslétta and make use of my connection to the area, the research would be set within qualitative approach.

Qualitative research includes ethnography, which in the words of Ortner is "the attempt to understand another life world using the self – as much of it as possible – as the instrument of knowing" (2006, 42). I however did not want to merely utilise my own self and senses as research instruments. Avoiding seeing it as my role to "mine data, analyse it and represent reality 'out there'" (Ren et al. 2020, 2), I wanted to strive for the research developing through co-creation. This would be not merely through a community-academic partnership (Drahota et al. 2016) or even as a collaboration in rural tourism development (Chimirri 2020). What I wanted to aim for was research conducted within "a spatially and temporally situated practice … created through the combined effort of researchers and others" (Jóhannesson et al. 2018, 39). Setting out to conduct research *in* rather than *about* Melrakkaslétta, I was striving for its becoming through "*working together* in ways which strives for *critical proximity*" (Ren et al. 2020, 10), hence staying close to the research matter, still in the belief that "knowledge is always co-created through situated practices" (Ren et al. 2020, 10). That is, I was aiming for research that would be a co-creation *with* the humans *and* the more-than-human in Melrakkaslétta.

Having set the core concepts of the research and its ontological and methodological approach I was heading back to the methods and the performing of the research. For that I decided to aim for traditional ethnographic methods: observation, interviews and focus-groups, where the latter two are according to Braun et al. (2017) the 'gold standard', 'go to' and 'über-methods' of qualitative research. For analysing the data, I applied reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA). This felt well-fitting to analyse data gathered from qualitative research conducted through post-ANT thinking.

Applying a post-ANT lens means appreciating the relational complexities of the world and hence respecting the potential inability to "reach the end point of network order" (Jóhannesson and Bærenholdt 2020, 34). Analysing data through reflexive TA means staying true to the core of qualitative methodology by acknowledging the active role of the researcher throughout the research process (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019; Clarke et al. 2015). Furthermore, reflexive TA is about recognising that data can be introduced either through predominant themes or as a detailed analysis of particular themes. The former means that "some depth

and complexity is necessarily lost" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 83), while the latter is about detailed analysis on data relevant only to the theme in question (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019).

Performing the Research

The research was conducted during travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While able to plan and adapt dwelling on site and the face-to-face interviews according to the changing situation of the pandemic, running the repeatedly planned and cancelled focus-groups turned out to be 'a complete disaster to manage', ending up in me having to cancel the idea.

Despite my connection to Melrakkaslétta, I felt the need to reconnect to and (re)learn about the area and thereby escape what Graugaard (2020) calls 'hit-and-run' research, when researchers arrive in the field, staying only while collecting raw data, hence never connecting to the sites of research. I was able to dwell in Melrakkaslétta during all seasons, for four months in total, from the spring of 2021 to the autumn of 2022, conducting participatory observation (Phillippi and Lauderdale 2017), face-to-face semi-structured interviews (Brinkman and Kvale 2015) and planned as well as unplanned noted conversations (Radel 2018). For the semi-structured interviews, I drafted an interview guide (Brinkman and Kvale 2015), formed in accordance with the research design, to capture the issues of mobilities, place and margins, the conditions of the local tourism as well as the interactions of humans and the more-than-human in Melrakkaslétta.

Already feeling the connection to Melrakkaslétta, I initially thought I knew its location. And yet, after months of reading, I had realised that a place just isn't out there for me to make into a field. As with other matters of research, places "do not rest stable, waiting for us to unravel or map them with our tools" (Ren and Jóhannesson 2018, 35). I, therefore, decided to start the interviewing process in the village Raufarhöfn and amongst the landowners out on the northernmost flatland. It soon became clear that Melrakkaslétta the place has been (re)framed and enlarged by a new road at the roots of the peninsula (Barðadóttir et al. 2023) including 'my old home', the village Kópasker. Hence, this became the area of research (Fig. 8.2).

In order to capture Melrakkaslétta's 'characteristic of localness', I wanted the interviewees to be those with first-hand and felt knowledge
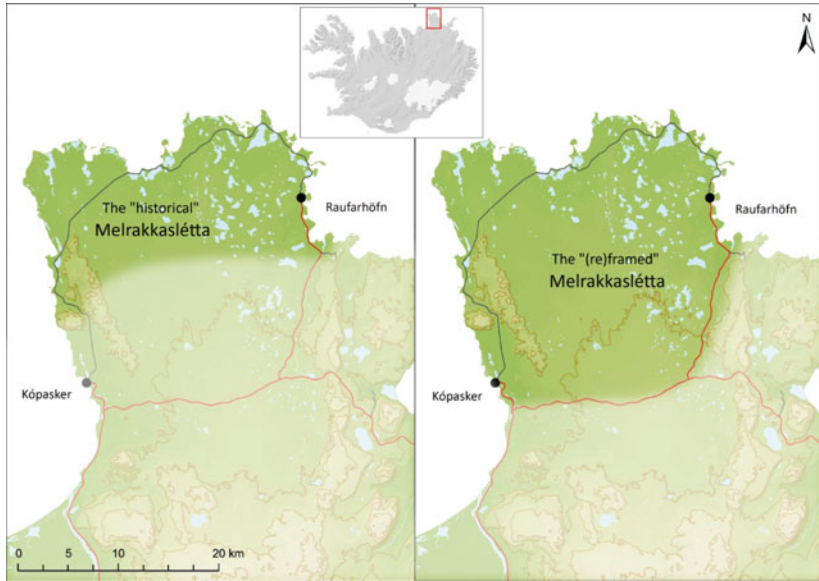
Fig. 8.2 The location of Melrakkaslétta. Historical location on the left—enlarged Melrakkaslétta, the research area, on the right (*Source* The National Land Survey of Iceland. Place names and area-definition added by the author. Map by Michaël Virgil Bishop)

of Melrakkaslétta. I applied targeted, chain-referral sampling (Heckathorn 2011) when selecting representatives of permanent residents in the two villages and in the area, landowners and frequent guests. Amongst the respondents were permanent residents who had been raised in Melrakkaslétta, others who had immigrated years ago, while yet others had a shorter record of residency. Amongst the landowners were those I identified as summer residents and summer dwellers. The summer residents annually arrive in early spring for a stay in Melrakkaslétta until the autumn when they leave to spend the winter elsewhere. The summer dwellers are those co-utilising their land and houses with others for shorter or irregular summer stays. Then there were the frequent visitors, those with no connection through ownership, yet repeatedly visiting Melrakkaslétta. The only respondents not with a felt connection with the

area were those directly targeted as representatives of the municipality, regional tourism and regional marketing office.

After having conducted 36 semi-structured interviews, I felt I had for the most part reached saturation based on the interview guide (Braun et al. 2017). For further clarification of selected subjects, I conducted ten planned noted conversations (Radel 2018) with regional and local (tourism) operators, landowners, residents and former residents, while the voices of tourists in Melrakkaslétta were collected through 54 unplanned noted conversations (Radel 2018). During and after the phase of fieldwork, I transcribed the recorded interviews. Analysing the data collected applying reflexive TA (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019; Clarke et al. 2015) I started out with a semantic, inductive analysis on the combined data and thereafter conducting latent analysis on predominant themes, that is, on the "particular patterns of shared meaning across the dataset" (Braun and Clarke 2019, 592).

Some Lessons Learned

In my research proposal, I had suggested walking as a possible approach to explore the human and the more-than-human encounters of Melrakkaslétta. Having read how walking offers the opportunity to interact with the land—the nature (Lund 2012)—in that walking can awake something far beyond "what is registered on the ground in the monotonous tread of feet" (Ingold and Vergunst 2008, 10), the method had me curious, yet a bit hesitant. Conducting PhD research felt as the time to follow the rules of research. However, not only did the rules of the walking method seem hard to grasp, it even seemed as if the goal was to escape all rules, as formulated by Vannini and Vannini: "In treating walking as a means to gather data in the traditional sense the act of walking becomes detached from both body and place, and this reduces walking to a set of overly planned instrumental protocols and procedures" (2017, 187). This did not make the matter less perplexing.

Then, during one of my stays in Melrakkaslétta, I went on a four-day guided walking trip in the area. The trip was enjoyable and informative, even more so since it provided the opportunity to see and feel the area through the notions of my walking mates. On three of the four days, we followed old coastal trails, some new to me, others I had last visited as a child. On the fourth day, the plan was set to visit the uninhabited heathland of Melrakkaslétta. Unable to join as the group headed out, I

followed later. The first hour or so I was not really enjoying or focusing on the walk. The weather was cold, the wind loud and the drizzle seemed unsure as to whether it should turn into full-blown rainfall. Furthermore, my concentration was on searching for fresh footprints in the moss and mud. Suddenly, I realised that I was more alone in the world than I had ever been in my life. Despite the proximity to my childhood grounds, never before had I been alone in the heathlands. No traces of humans, nothing but the flat moorland in view. Then, out of nowhere, the fog appeared on the horizon, approaching at the speed of an avalanche. There it hit me, my uncontrollable reaction, my fear, was the embodiment of what my interviewees had been describing, yet without me having the connection to really relate to it. Here, in the homogenous endlessness of Melrakkaslétta's heathland, fog is not just an irritating blurring of view, it is an overpowering, dangerous force of nature—an active player in the networks of human and more-than-human coexistence of Melrakkaslétta and my understanding of it came through the act of walking, of being there. I was learning, not just about walking as a research method, but also about myself as a researcher. In that I relate to Ellis's words "I learned as much from what I felt as from what I observed" (2004, 10).

Another major actor, I learned, in the networks of human and more-than-human entanglements of Melrakkaslétta is light, and the lack of it. Birds and mammals are affected by the continuous summer daylight and winter darkness of the high north (Blix 2016) where the midnight sun and northern lights alike draw visitors (Saarinen and Varnajot 2019). However, in that the way humans experience and observe light is dependent on, for example, the way the surfaces and surroundings absorb, deflect and reflect it (Edensor 2017), the natural features of Melrakkaslétta become relevant actors.

Melrakkaslétta is a flatland, covered with low vegetation, meaning that there is hardly a natural feature obstructing its rays of light. The surrounding North Atlantic Ocean furthermore reflects and bathes the peninsula in light. This together with Melrakkaslétta's northern position just below the Arctic Circle results in its peculiar shimmering light-blue daylight, the various kinds of orange during summer nights and the deep blue-black darkness during most of its winters. Remembering how I as a child had played outdoors long into Melrakkaslétta's spring and summer nights and how my friends and I would wander together, back and forth, during winter afternoons as none of us dared to walk home alone in the dark, I could relate to the many narratives on Melrakkaslétta's light and

darkness. It was however first during the interviews and the following analysis that I realised how active a part the arctic summer light and winter darkness play in the networks of human and more-than-human coexistence in Melrakkaslétta. The encompassing brightness is what the summer residents long for prior to arrival and what the frequent guests describe as one of the features repeatedly surprising them during visits, and the winter darkness is what keeps many of the summer stayers from becoming winter guests.

What Was It All For?

Despite my intention to strive for the co-creation of knowledge, looking back I must admit that while setting the research agenda and its methodology I still had myself placed right in the middle of things. Although respecting the importance of the principle that researchers "listen to the stones without forcing our will on them" (Gan et al. 2017, G11), I was still unsure how I should grasp the more-than-human aspects of Melrakkaslétta. The examples above are a few of the many pieces to the puzzle I collected along the way towards grasping the core of co-creation. As the researcher I *was* in the middle of things, but my role was never that of knowing-it-all but to co-listen to my respondents *and* the more-than-human of Melrakkaslétta. My part, as the researcher, was that of combining the information selected through interviews and conversations and my felt experiences from observation, dwelling and walking in Melrakkaslétta. Hence, my respondents, human and more-than-human, together with myself, contributed to the knowledge created through the research. Some aspects I did need to experience to understand what I was told, and other aspects I was able to relate to because of my connection to the lands, the living and the non-living beings of the area.

Coming into the project I felt it could become a challenge to argue for the relevance of such a singular case study, making me unsure if I might need to compare Melrakkaslétta to other places. Yet, the further I got, the more convinced I became that a comparison, for the sake of just that, would leave me demarcating and aiming the research towards factors fitting for comparison, as to "set up my project for macroanalysis" (Ellis 2004, 10). My months of reading have shown me how scarce knowledge there is on the context of tourism in non-touristy rural areas. Therefore, I decided to conduct this research to the best of my ability and then strive for being able to argue for its relevance.

Far from being indifferent towards Melrakkaslétta, I initially felt the urge to conduct good research that might serve as a voice of the humans and the more-than-human of this marginal place. In hindsight, I seem to have come out of the deep, dark foggy lands of academic literature, wanting to conduct good research, period. Not only did I briefly lose sight of Melrakkaslétta, but the very definition of good research is more-over a fluffy notion, or as formulated by Law and Mol, "Philosophy has a rich tradition of painstakingly seeking to establish standards for 'the good'" (2002, 84), and yet, the definitional task of that 'goodness' remains uncertain.

Despite the emphasis described above on my strong urge to conduct 'real' academic research, this journey has offered an opportunity to learn through research practice the blurred line between the conceptual and the applied. That is, conducting research based on academic thought does not exclude its agenda and outcome from having applicability. This became clear when, staying true to the research design of the co-creation of knowledge, in the fall of 2022 I went to Melrakkaslétta for the real exam: to present the research, report its findings back to the locals and have an open discussion on its premises and outcomes. After an approving reception and fruitful discussion, the real prospect of the research became clear through the words of a local: "Great thing you are doing this. It might wake us up to act on our tourism development ourselves". Should one dare to hope that the very performing of the research might play a small part in enabling the residents and "setting free what lives" (Veijola et al. 2014, 8)—that seems like the best kind of 'goodness' there is.

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