

## Analysis and classification of landscapes in Reykjanes Country Park

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Landscape is increasingly acknowledged as an important cultural, environmental and economic resource and access to high quality landscapes is regarded as a significant component of the quality of life. Although both diverse and distinct, Icelandic landscapes have not been the subject of systematic research until recently, and as yet, no system exists for their classification or evaluation. Here we report on a project aimed at analysing and classifying the landscapes of Reykjanes country park.

The landscapes of the volcanically active peninsula of Reykjaneskagi, SW Iceland, include extensive lavafields, sands, lakes, geothermal areas, hyaloclastic mountain ridges, isolated volcanoes, as well as birdcliffs by the coast. Since most of the region is poor agricultural land, settlements are largely confined to coastal areas, leaving much of the peninsula free of man-made constructions such as paved roads, buildings or power lines. There are two protected recreation areas on the peninsula, the popular skiing area of Bláfjallafólkvangur (84 km<sup>2</sup>) and Reykjanesfólkvangur (300 km<sup>2</sup>). The latter includes *i.a.* lake Kleifarvatn, geothermal areas (e.g. Brennisteinsfjöll, Krýsuvík), lavafields (e.g. Ögmundarhraun), and bird cliffs (Krýsuvíkurborg). Despite its proximity to the most densely populated part of Iceland, large areas within the park bear few visible signs of human activities. Brennisteinsfjöll and surroundings are the largest wilderness area in SW Iceland.

Landscape research can be broadly divided into that which deals with physical (natural, geographical, visual) aspects and a more abstract approach that seeks to describe and analyse landscape perceptions, public preferences and the aesthetic or scenic values of different landscapes. Classification schemes are mostly based on the physical landscape elements. Although a large number of classification systems for landscape have been developed in Europe, North America and Australia/New Zealand, few appear to be suitable for Icelandic landscapes.

This project will be divided into four parts. 1) A preliminary landscape classification of the Reykjanes country park, based on geological and vegetation maps, will be followed by a more detailed description based on field work. 2) From a survey of existing approaches, four methods (from Australia, United Kingdom, Norway and the system developed by Workgroup I in the Icelandic Framework plan for the use of hydropower and geothermal energy) have been selected and their applicability will be compared and evaluated with the aim of producing 3) a suitable system of classification for the range of landscapes found within the park as well as a 4) map of major landscape types. We hope that this work can provide a basis for a general classification of the volcanic landscapes of Iceland, including the central highland.