



DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE,  
HISTORY OF IDEAS, AND RELIGION

# A Heathen Mecca

## Interpreting the International Germanic Contemporary Pagan Response to the Icelandic Temple

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## **Abstract**

In 2008, in Iceland, the Germanic Contemporary Pagan (Heathen) organisation Ásatrúarfélagið purchased land to begin building a partly state-funded temple in Reykjavik. It was covered by international media variously as ‘first Viking temple in 1000 years’. As of January 2017 the temple remains unfinished, but in the last 8 years since its announcement, four Heathen temples have been built or purchased by groups in the US, UK, Spain and Denmark, also using the same headline in their promotion. All four groups share a Folkish (racialist) interpretation of Heathenship which is opposed by Ásatrúarfélagið and many other Heathens around the world. A number of events within the Heathen community in the last two years show a growing polarisation and division between Folkish and non-Folkish Heathens. This thesis uses data from interviews with 78 Heathens in North, Central, and South Americas, Africa, Europe, Australasia and Asia, as well as using a questionnaire with 110 US Heathens. The data shows that many Heathens perceive Folkish Heathens as in competition with the Icelandic temple. Moreover, the Icelandic temple is a beacon for change and inspiration among Heathens. Nearly all of my 188 informants intend to visit the temple, proving it is a significant turning point for this New Religious Movement, bringing a sense of strengthened confidence and international community. The data also indicates that racist organisations’ own temples are representative of competing religious ‘market forces’. This, in turn, has led to non-Folkish Heathens becoming more confident and communicative, and closing ranks against racist Heathens. This activity, indicates that many Heathens believe the temple itself will improve public relations and their social standing, numbers and ability to practice publicly; living more open and influential religious lives.

*The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.  
Surely some revelation is at hand;  
WB Yates- The Second Coming*

*Gods lead you, but you choose the path (Daria, Russia)*

*The following people have allowed this labour to be one of love.  
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*To Arianna & Honor.*

*To Christina, my lifesaver.*

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# 1 Introduction

What is a Heathen? Heathendom is a New Religious Movement of the “world affirming” type (Fox 2010, 345) focussing on a vivid pantheon associated with nature worship. Also called Ásatrú/Asatru, its mythology and ethical teachings are grounded in Old Norse (ON) sources, and a common appeal to Viking aesthetics. Heathens pursue reconstruction of pre-Christian Germanic religion, fulfilment of which is rejected by scholars (Raudvere, Andrén & Jennbert 2001). As a modern religion it originates with National Romanticism and Western Esotericism, linked to Madame Blavatsky’s influential period in the latter 1800s (Goodricke-Clarke 1992, 2002). The first modern Heathen was probably Australian Alexander Rud Mills, active in the 1930s, and convicted as a Nazi sympathiser. His ideas influenced the establishment of organisations in the UK and US in the following generation, namely those which continue today under the names Odinist Fellowship (UK) and Asatru Folk Assembly (USA/international). The broader religious community that exists today was along with the aforementioned white pride groups, founded in the early ‘70s. Parallel to the above organisations was Ásatrúarfélagið (Iceland), which arose from a different post-colonial context. Rather than white pride, Ásatrúarfélagið developed from cultural and folklore interests, and as a non-racist model of Heathendom -continues to inspire many Heathens today. All three organisations are central to this thesis, all three have simultaneously begun (or are undergoing) temple projects in the last three years.

Heathens have decades-old *cathedra* in the UK, Iceland, Scandinavia proper, Germany and North America. In the immediate period after Soviet rule, Russia has also seen substantial Heathen communities rise. As far as I am aware, my fieldwork is the first English language post-graduate study of Heathens to include informants from Russia, Brazil and predominantly Muslim countries. Therefore, Heathendom should be seen as a rapidly expanding global religion.

Sympathetic Pagan academic Graham Harvey argued Heathendom as having broad value to Pagan Studies: “Heathenism has much to teach Pagans about the value and power of a self-consciously polytheistic tradition. Many Pagans moderate their polytheism. [...] Heathens are aware that polytheism encourages the celebration of the ordinary facts of life” (Harvey 1997, 68). This “value and power” of Germanic Contemporary Paganism (Heathendom/Asatru) and its relationship with other Paganisms has changed since Harvey wrote some 20 years ago. Heathendom is fast becoming the most internationally widespread, populous and complex

Paganism (Chapter 13.1). Wicca has traditionally held primacy, with Celtic Contemporary Paganism (Druidry) being a major second.

The religious community (Heathendom) is divided on the basis of perception of racial exclusivity; those who feel race or genetically-relevant ancestry is essential (Folkish) and those who are happy for anyone to join the religious community (termed as Universalists by the Folkish). Several previous researchers have argued that these tensions are parallel to broader socio-political movements such as the New Right and Alt Right (Gardell 2003, Snook 2015, von Schnurbein 2016), supported by media coverage of Scandinavian Heathens in 2016 (Chapter 8). This conservative element in Heathendom is consistently referred to by my informants, many of whom self-identify as Folkish, Odinist, and conservative or anti-left.

This thesis specifically gathered data on what Heathens around the world say about the recently declared building of a partially state-funded temple for the Icelandic Asatru association, Ásatrúarfélagið. The architect, also a Heathen, calls the temple *Höfuðhof*; definite article *Höfuðhofið* -central or main temple; (cognate with Swedish *Huvudhovel*). This temple received the largest international media coverage the religion has ever received (Chapter 8). The news catalysed several major events within Heathendom, energising the division between Folkish and non-Folkish (Chapter 8). Once the Icelandic temple was announced, several major conservative Heathen organisations bought or built their own temples in the US, UK, Spain and Denmark apparently in response and competition to the Icelandic temple (Chapter 8). Although the Icelandic temple was announced in international press in 2008 with headlines such as “the first Viking temple in 1000 years”, as of 2016 construction is incomplete. During which time four Folkish temples have been built and announced similarly as “the first Viking temple in 1000 years” (Chapter 8).

The data from this fieldwork shows *Höfuðhofið* is overwhelmingly inspirational for Heathens. Informants express *Höfuðhofið* as showing what the religion can achieve in terms of public recognition and a sense of social permanency. One major result of the news of *Höfuðhofið* has been an obvious excitement among Heathens in wanting to visit, which has worried Ásatrúarfélagið. The temple is important not merely because of what it is -but where it is. It is a beacon for future pilgrimage which promises to be definitive for Heathendom, probably unwelcome, and will see dynamics intensify between ideological divisions.

## 2 Aim & Research Questions

To understand how and in what ways *Höfuðhofið* affects the international religious Heathen community (Heathendom). This is structured by the research questions:

1. How does the importance of *Höfuðhofið* relate to the current needs and experiences of the community?
  - a. What are the current needs and experiences of the community which the temple may fulfil?
2. What effects does the temple have on dynamics between Heathens internationally?
3. Why is the Icelandic temple more important than Heathen temples in other countries?



### **3 Scope**

To report the immediate perspectives of Heathens, my data is time-specific, due to international news coverage in the last two years (Chapter 8). I limited focus to the perspectives of Heathens. Within the time possible I modelled my approach on the only international study of Heathens; by Stefanie von Schnurbein (2016), gathering informants from as many continents as possible (Chapter 3).

## 4 Method

I used two major anthropology books as guides for my methodology. *Participant observation, a guide for fieldworkers*, by Kathleen M DeWalt & Billie R DeWalt (2011), and Sean Russell Bernard's *Research Methods in Anthropology, qualitative and quantitative approaches* (2011). I supplemented this with a critical guide to Grounded Theory- Kathy Charmaz (2008) "Constructionism and the Grounded Theory" in I.A. Holstein & J.R. Gubrium (eds.) *Handbook of Contructionist Research*.

These provided tools to answer my primary question. I conducted qualitative sampling using methods most practical for each informant; platforms included emails, social media, telephone, telepresence and face-to-face interviews.

My data was gathered via interviews with 78 individuals, and a questionnaire with 110 participants. Due to threats of violence made in the events surrounding the temple, I have given all named informants aliases.

### 4.1 Background & preparation

This thesis documents and interprets the reaction to the Icelandic temple among Heathens around the world. This was achieved by interviews with 78 individuals, supplemented by a questionnaire with 110 US Heathens. This type of fieldwork was chosen on the basis that: "Any qualitative study without extensive data can make only limited claims; small interview studies that make general claims stand on shaky ground. The generality of the claims needs to be proportionate to the thoroughness of the data collection" (Charmaz 2008, 410). My judgement of "proportionate-ness" of potential fieldwork was to measure it against the scope and findings of previous studies. Previous studies helped me to acquire theoretical sampling of early interviews (Bernard 2011, 435) leading to (Chapter 8) Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2008). This is what Bernard describes as "discovering pattern in human experience requires close, inductive examination of unique cases plus the application of deductive reasoning" (2011, 435). My method arose from the former, my theory from the latter.

My fieldwork was limited by the timespan of this thesis, 2015-2016, Dewalt & Dewalt call this "rapid appraisal procedure": "The shorter time available for the development of a closer understanding of the experiences of participants means that sampling must be focused even

more carefully on those places and activities that are most likely to yield insight” (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 132). What most efficiently yielded insight was individuals whose personal profile differentiated them from other samples, I therefore made this my main methodological process (detailed below).

#### **4.1.1 Theoretical sampling**

Theoretical sampling is contextualised by previous research: early samples in the field orientate and establish basic criteria (Bernard 2011, 435). On this basis I began sampling where previous research had been conducted- Denmark (Warmind 2007), Germany (von Schnurbein 1992. 2016), Norway (Asprem 2008), Sweden (Skott 2000. Gregorius 2008), and USA (Gardell 2003. Snook 2015).

I initially met the issue which scholars had perceived as a mainstream and periphery within Heathendom. This would mean that I would have to define each informant by how mainstream they were. Early sampling in the field showed this was an unrealistic measure, since there was no definition of what was mainstream, although there were perceived minority groups such as Loki-worshippers (Lokians). Examples of mainstream-versus-periphery perspective can be seen in Egil Aprem’s work using the term “mainstream Heathens” with ambiguous definition, remarking that in Scandinavia they were “adopting an explicitly anti-racist position” (Aprem 2008, 44). Conversely, at least one Pagan Studies scholar argued “It is undoubtedly true that Heathens are likely to be politically right-wing and generally conservative in their views, e.g. on sex, politics and history” (Harvey 1997, 65), although it should be noted that Graham Harvey has not published any of his own research on Heathens. Harvey contrasts with Mathias Gardell’s perception, despite extensive fieldwork among right-wing Heathens: “Among Asatruers are found anarchists, homosexuals, blacks indeed the whole gambit of humanity” (Gardell 2003: 153). My conclusion was that to represent a broad spectrum of Heathens globally, I had to find variety of identities. This was achieved by isolating three factors for differentiating Heathens from one another: country-of-origin, gender & sexuality, religious profile/expression. These factors were developed during theoretical sampling and observation.

This followed the guideline: “determination of the degree of expertise about an informant [...] and the articulateness of the informant [...] early goals of fieldwork should be to understand the kinds of diversity within a setting [...] based on existing literature” (Bernard 2011, 130).

What Bernard calls the “factorial design” was to not to gain an equal amount of informants from each possible country or expression (expertise, articulateness or diversity), since I was not seeking to survey the amounts of expressions or profiles among Heathens (quantitative). My focus was finding representatives of varied qualities of Heathens; expertise, articulateness or diversity (Bernard 2011, 110-112).

#### **4.1.2 Identifying factorial representatives**

Once I had established my factors for differentiating Heathens (Chapter 4.2), I identified whether an individual represented specific factors through observing their interactions online and face-to-face participant observation. I began with contacting or looking up organisations referred to in Previous Research. Using these gatekeepers I was able to “identify local leaders and organizations who represent the community in which the research will take place (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 42). Through the snowball effect (Bernard 2011, 144), of acquiring growing access to communities and their members, I gained entry into social media groups, which proved effective in contacting Heathens globally.

This process was partially modelled on Snook’s process and experience with entering the Heathen community (Snook 2013). I spent three years 2012-2015 joining social media groups, and contacting organisations in Europe which I could feasibly travel to and meet personally. I attended localised ritual and social gatherings of groups in Scandinavia and the UK. Some groups belonged to organisations, others were informal networks which communicated and planned meetings online. I also attended gatherings of the ‘festival’ type, open to people internationally. This learning period is in line with DeWalt & DeWalt’s “talking the talk” (2011, 54-60).

Previous Research helped me to recognise the patterns of behaviour in Heathen interactions, and the meanings of terms that Heathens applied to one another. These terms were specifically aimed at creating denominations or profiles dependent on an individual’s traits. For example, by observation I would notice that an individual would state online that their perspective was relevant to them being female, or a homosexual or as a person living in New Zealand. These types of traits meant that online and face-to-face conversations tended to be consistently polarised on the basis of how an individual identified themselves or was identified by others. These identities and profiles were drawn to certain generic names which are the basis for

denominations. For instance, it is common for homosexuals to worship Loki. There are Heathens that see homosexuality as unethical, and there are Heathens that see Loki as a satanic figure within Norse cosmology- these two perspectives therefore often combine so that Lokians are specifically stigmatised. Heathens that are homophobic and ‘Loki-phobic’ are often regarded as perpetuating Christian or post-Christian thinking. Consequently, these two profiles are often associated with the division between Folkish and non-Folkish/Universalist since Folkish Heathens tend to be more socially and morally conservative, and “universalists” liberal.

Defining individuals on the basis of denominations was extremely difficult since most informants were reluctant to classify themselves in the volatile discourse between factions. Profiling individuals on specific traits however, was easier, since Heathens were open about certain basic categories such as nationality, gender and in some cases, sexuality.

Interview subjects were approached on the basis of factorial design (Chapter 4.2), with those meeting two or more factors taking priority, due to restrictions in the study’s timeframe. Individuals were only included if they met legitimacy criteria (Chapter 4.4) (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 182-183). Factors were designed to cover as many different types of Heathens as possible within the timeframe, and the criteria were to ensure relevancy to the aims of the study. I judged each communication with an individual on the basis of my legitimacy criteria and pre-designed factors. My choices in the field are what Bernard calls purposive/judgement sampling (Bernard 2011, 145) with “hard to find populations” which he classifies as part of “intensive case study” (Bernard 2011, 146). Bernard warns that to differentiate opportunity from convenience one must “make them representative of what you want them to be. That’s what turns a convenience sample into a purposive one” (Bernard 2011, 147). My purpose, as a factorial directive, was to acquire a variety of sources.

## 4.2 Factorial Design

I isolated three factors which would characterise variety:

- A) Country-of-origin.** Like most New Religious Movements (NRMs), Heathens are heavily reliant on the internet, many are geographically isolated from other Heathens due to its minority. Through real-life gatherings such as festivals (Chapter 9) and online research, I found that there were Heathens on continents which the English-speaking

Heathen community had limited contact with, and which had received limited or no coverage in predominantly Anglo-European samples of previous researchers. So my data includes ‘new’ countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Poland and Russia. When I had acquired samples from North- Central- and South America, Africa, Australasia, Asia, and Europe, I reached saturation in my criterion for this factor.

**B) Gender & sexuality.** Previous researchers had difficulty finding a balance of genders in their sampling, with Snook calling US Heathendom a “heavily politicized hypermasculine ethos” (Snook 2008, 117). For example, of von Schnurbein’s 16 gender-specified interviewees, 1 was female (von Schurbein 2016, 373-374), of Gregorius’ 13 informants, 2 were female (Gregorius 2008, 331). 37% of my interviewees were female. To fulfil my criterion for gender/sexuality diversity I also sought out outspoken LGBT individuals, an identification rarely represented in previous studies (Lepage 2013). As with an organic presence of women in Heathendom, a well-represented number of LGBT identities became apparent during interviews with informants who fulfilled other profile criteria. In two cases self-identified LGBT individuals approached me on the basis that they felt that I should represent them in my data. Although potentially scientifically problematic, I assigned this self-awareness to Snook’s hyperawareness paradigm (Chapter 6), and therefore it did constitute representative data. 10% of interviewees identified as LGBT, leaving 53% heterosexual males in my interview data, a lower ratio than previous studies (Chapter 6).

**C) Religious profile/expression.** This aspect was the most carefully nuanced and characteristic of the religious community. There are a number of sub-sects or denominations within Heathendom, which are so numerous that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully describe, although brief definitions of some of these major denominations and the problems between them are given in the chapter “Key Terminology”. Online interactions showed conflicts and debates that made some identifications very clear, such as Lokians, which in that case had added criterion value in that many see Loki worship as an expression of their LGBT identification (Lepage 2013. Snook 2008, 74). Other identifications such as Seidr or Stav were also apparent by the types of information given in debates. On contacting some of these socially active individuals I was aware of the issue of gate-keepers (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 42-47) and therefore always tried to get secondary referrals or to penetrate into smaller communities rather than dealing with a very vocal individual. These individuals also met my legitimacy criterion for being socially active with other Heathens (Chapter 4.3).

### 4.3 Interview Process

Having made contact with individuals online or face-to-face, all interviews were conducted in English except for the cases in the following paragraphs. All interviews were semi-structured, with questions largely similar to those employed in the US questionnaire.

One Mexican informant had problems understanding some of my questions, I used a Spanish translator with experience in the tourist and service industry. Responses were given in English.

Some Scandinavian informants preferred to mix Swedish, Norwegian or Danish with English which was possible due to my fluency in Swedish.

I employed a translator when corresponding with some individuals in Russia and Azerbaijan, a Russian native with a BA in Russian Philology. These individuals were profiled and contacted on the basis of meeting factorial design which was discovered through using Google Translate of Russian social media site VK.com, and by snowball effect having made contact with local groups and asking them to pass on my contact details to anyone willing to be interviewed (Bernard 2011, 147-149). After initial contact all volunteers were then screened again (by directly supervised questioning) to check they met legitimacy criteria. Those individuals meeting two or more differentiation factors took priority within the timeframe I was constrained by, thus ensuring they followed the same standards as the individuals with whom I had direct communication with in the 'west'. Russian informants spanned from St Petersburg to Kamchatka.

Documenting profiles or denominations was difficult, since individuals were reticent or unaware of self-categorisation, where possible I have noted denominations in appendix and analysis.

### 4.4 Legitimacy criteria

All individuals had three criteria to fill to be included as data for this study. 1) Identify themselves as Germanic Neo-Pagan, Heathen, Asatru or recognise one of these terms as applying to them. 2) In contact with others of this identification. 3) Have heard of *Höfuðhofið* prior to me contacting them. According to the responses, 80% of USA questionnaire met these criteria, a further 2% identified as Odinst. It was impossible to remove those who did not meet

such criteria, and may be interpreted as margin of error for other results. All interviewees included in the thesis met these criteria. Asserting control bias measures (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011); I reserved questions about Iceland to the end of interviews. So all personal information and reflections were not consciously related to *Höfuðhofið*.

#### 4.5 US Questionnaire

The data given in my interviews, both from US Heathens and non-US Heathens were of the majority opinion that the US had the largest national population of Heathens in the world, and that US Heathens were very ideologically and ethically different from non-US Heathens. On the basis of between-group variance, intentional disproportionate sampling and PPS (probability proportionate to size) as laid out by Bernard (Bernard 2011, 118-122) this had consequences for my differentiation criterion, I required a larger amount of samples of US Heathens than interviews could account for in my timeframe. On the advice of experts such as Jennifer Snook I conducted a questionnaire based on the guideline, “another way to gain an acquaintance with a wide range of people in a particular setting, especially in a community study, is to carry out a census” (Bernard 2011, 131-132).

The questionnaire was placed in three private Facebook groups whose membership requirements were that the individual is based in USA, all groups had over 1000 members. Each group was specifically catered to a certain theme; 1) Arts & Crafts, 2) Religious Education, 3) Political debate. No group limited membership on the basis of organisation, profile or membership, but all were moderated against racial hatred as per Facebook legal terms of use. The groups did allow white pride posts however, but no group appeared to be only white pride, since the topics that were specifically Folkish, pro-LGBT, or for racial inclusivity were all highly debated by group members from other factions. Since all groups were listed as ‘secret’, my questionnaire was allowed to be posted on the provision that no groups would be named. My judgement was that the three groups covered a variety of membership profiles and denominations, such as Folkish or Lokian. Therefore, the US questionnaire gave representative variety, although there was no pre-requisite or record of factors 2 and 3- gender/sexuality or denomination, so it is unclear what percentage of questionnaire participants were for example- male, heterosexual, or Folkish.



Contrary to the expectations of my interview informants, US results indicated similarity with other interviewees. Furthermore, since 15% of the interview informants were US citizens, my conclusion therefore, was that I had reached theoretical saturation: results were significantly repetitive and corroborated by several identities (Bernard 2011, 436).

The questionnaire was operated through a Google application, and required an email address log-in; reducing the risk of ‘cheating’. All links to the questionnaire were posted on the same day. Conducted 04/11/2015 to 07/12/2015, I aimed for a round figure of 100 participants, as representative given that the largest claims of the population of US Heathens are 10- 20,000 (Online: Fox News 2006). I closed the survey just after passing 100 participants.

The questionnaire was made up of 15 questions regarding *Höfuðhofið*. Response options were formatted depending on the question, they included:

1. A range of limited emotional responses ‘dislike, neutral, predict positive effect, strongly agree’ etc.
2. Freeform
3. Yes, no, I don’t know
4. Of the limited response options, the maximum choice range was 6<sup>1</sup>, and the least 3<sup>2</sup>.

These options were designed on Bernard’s guidelines (Bernard 2011, 199-206).

Questions and answer-options were formulated mixing the religious identifications- Germanic Neo-Pagan and Heathen. These terms were used in questions that appeared after the question of religious identification was asked. In response to the initial question of religious identification,

- 79% of participants identified as Heathen
- 8% of participants identified as Germanic Neo-Pagan
- 5% of participants identified as Asatru (or cognate)

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<sup>1</sup> Q, How do you think other Germanic Neo-Pagans feel about the building of Höfuðhof? Options, “Most Heathens feel very positive...” ranging to “Most Heathens feel very negatively...”

<sup>2</sup> Q, Has the building of Höfuðhof made you feel religiously motivated? Options, “Yes, it has affected me” “No, it has not affected me” “Not sure”

- 8% of the remaining included ambiguous terms such as Atheist, Northern Traditionalist etc

All questions had clear majority responses. The largest percentage of majority agreement was 88%, the lowest majority was 47%, therefore we may infer that US questionnaire participants are largely in agreement.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.6 Presentation

Data is analysed as part of the Grounded Theory approach, and presented to the reader via Exemplar Quotes (Bernard 2011, 437-443. Charmaz 2008, 397, 406). Not all informants are quoted in the analysis since quotes are chosen as being representative of opinions shared by many, unless otherwise noted as divergent or unique to an individual. Some informants were particularly eloquent and therefore occur more frequently as examples.

The analysis is organised into three sections on the basis of pattern recognition and schema analysis (Bernard 2011, 439-443). These patterns and schema are then discussed through Religious Market Theory (RMT). RMT was the most useful model for me in interpreting data and drawing conclusions about what the reactions to the temple are, and what the potential future consequences and directions might be.

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<sup>3</sup> Not accounting for the 18% margin of error, although that still gives an impressive 70% and 29% majorities.

## 5 Theory

### 5.1 Grounded Theory

I took a Grounded Theory approach as a response to the data, “the idea is to become grounded in the data and to allow understanding to emerge from close study” (Bernard 2011, 430). This was based on Bernard’s three criteria

- 1) Look for repetitions [in the data]
- 2) Look for unusual terms or common words that are used in unusual ways
- 3) Look for evidence of social conflict, cultural contradiction, informal methods of social control, and information about how people solve problems (Bernard 2011, 430-431).

The first two criteria are introduced in this thesis’ *Background* and *Key Terminology* chapters. Bernard’s third criterion is seen throughout the data, and is discussed throughout this thesis.

### 5.2 Rational Choice- Religious Markey Theory

Tensions and dynamics within Heathendom led me to consider the denominations as in competition. Within the aspects of Rational Choice Theory, RMT occurred to me as the most useful tool in understanding these dynamics. RMT was originally developed by Laurence R Iannaccone and William Sims Bainbridge, and Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, an issue of which is its being macro-theory, and therefore not all elements are relevant to my application. Gregory D Alles has summarised the critique of Stark and Finke as “Although it presents itself as a general theory of religion, it is really only a special theory of religiosity in the United States in the last thirty to forty years. [...] What is needed is [...] a sense of the kinds of institutional constraints under which choice operates in specific situations” (Alles 2009, 96). In light of Alles’ critique, my application of RMT for this thesis should be valid due to it being a case-study of a time-specific situation in a limited community, albeit one with religious organisations rather than institutions.

My choice of RMT evolved from a Grounded Theory approach as the most reasonable means to understand the data, none of the informants referred to any sense of a religious market. I use RMT to see conflicting denominations as rival producers or brands, *Höfuðhofið* as a product or market resource, and Heathens as consumers, investors and producers. “As local churches and

denominations compete with each other for customers, the market as a whole becomes more vigorous. Customers receive more benefits from religion and more readily invest in it” (Iannaccone & Bainbridge 2010, 469). Here “churches’ refers to religious bodies, in case of this study -competing organisations would be Ásatrúarfélagið versus the American Folk Assembly. *Höfuðhofið* was announced (by media) as a new product which promised to invigorate the market, with serious consequences for competitors’ profits and the effect on product value, and purchasing power of limited organisations. Based on Economics theory, RMT also offers a powerful system for developing predictions; one of my key research interests.

A founding motivation in RMT aligns with my aim, “What are the costs of successful entry into the religious market? How does a new firm enter the religious market?” (Iannaccone & Bainbridge 2010, 472). For many Heathens a temple with broad recognition in mainstream society has always been a far-off goal. *Höfuðhofið* fulfils a long-held dream, and the promise of security in the global multi-faith market of religions. This is a progression from Axiom 5, Def. 11, “a limited supply means that persons cannot have as much of a reward as they desire” (Stark & Bainbridge 2006, 383). Therefore, the demand for consumers/producers to enjoy what they see as their product is a powerful impulse, this is the structure of my analysis.

Recently, Pagan Studies have come under critique for their lack of “academic rigour” (Altena Davidsen 2012). Therefore, I felt motivated to provide a more rigid interpretative structure to this large set of data to better contribute to the field and since a theoretical model of this type has not been used in previous studies of Heathendom, this study may be useful in making sense of the patterns and dynamics in the complexity of Heathendom in its most contemporary state.

### **5.3 Definitions of Spiritual and Social**

From the interview data, I isolated two types of experience which were repeated throughout, which I have termed spiritual and social. These were relevant to understanding why the temple is valuable, because these two categories of experience seem to be such major features of Heathen religious life, and may explain what Heathens say the temple gives them. For example, if the temple has value as a spiritual place, my logic was that we should be able to understand it better by looking at the current spiritual experiences as expressed in the data.

Spiritual and social aspects of religion are difficult to define, however they are adjectives meant to categorise the types of experience which informants described, therefore my definition of these terms is grounded in the information they gave.

Spirituality in Heathenship, could be relevantly described by other studies of New Age spirituality: “a “new religious synthesis” now exists for many people that combines the use of scientific rationality to enhance spiritual evolution with mystical ideas about nature and personal divinity” (Nelson 2009, 16) and “defined as the experiential and personal side of our relationship to the transcendent or sacred” (Nelson 2009, 547). Informants consistently refer to nature and a personal interaction with a divinity which both enhances and evolves their immersion in the religion (Chapter 9.2).

Social aspects of Paganism, refer to the way in which Heathens relate to society as a whole, usually feeling misunderstood or embarrassed. Barbara Jane Davy highlights these experiences and the need which my informants express, to be accepted by society at large. Davy describes Pagans as a whole as challenging “social norms” and that they “want Paganism to become unremarkable, just another of the world religions, with the same legal rights and freedoms as other religions” (Davy 2007, 42).

## 6 Previous Research

### 6.1 Context of this study

Studies of Contemporary Paganism are, in terms of Religious Studies still relatively few. From correspondences with researchers; many of whom have recently begun conducting the first university courses on Pagan Studies, it is clearly a promising field. However, very few academic papers have focussed on the situation in Iceland. Among them are as yet untranslated Icelandic theses Eggert Sólberg Jónsson MA (2010), Halldóra Gyða Guðnadóttir BA (2014), one journal article (Strmiska 2000) and a field observation of a ritual (Gunnell 2015). As far as I am aware, other than von Schnurbein (2016), this thesis is the only postgraduate work to include Icelandic Heathens in a global context. von Schnurbein's most recent Icelandic interview was conducted 2012 and was therefore unable to take the issues of *Höfuðhofið* into account.

Previous studies have argued that there is a disproportionate ratio of males-to-females in Heathendom compared to other Contemporary Paganisms (Skott 2000, Berger 2003, Gregorius 2008, von Schnurbein 2016). This thesis indicates that this scenario is changing (Chapter 4.2). Although, since many of the women I encountered had been Heathen for many years (which overlap with the period of all the above studies) it is more likely that earlier studies were unable to reach a significant number of females, and/or women are now more forthcoming or visible. This thesis offers a useful resource on the role and voice of female Heathens.

In previous studies on Heathendom, the majority of data covers several years, Gregorius 5 years (Gregorius 2008, 15), von Schnurbein 25 years (von Schnurbein 2016, 361-362) and Snook 12 years (Snook 2015, viii). This study has a comparable number of informants to these studies but does so in a very immediate time-span, an intense eighteen-month period 2015-2016. These interviews are specifically contemporary to the event of *Höfuðhofið* in Iceland, and therefore gives a rare opportunity to see a young but established religion at a formative stage. To my knowledge, my fieldwork is the first postgraduate study in English to represent Heathens from Brazil, Tunisia and Azerbaijan.

On the basis of Grounded Theory, previous research gave background history and context to the reactions and dynamics towards *Höfuðhofið*; of the Folkish denomination, and its opposition from within Heathendom, as well as outside critique.

## 6.2 Grounding texts

The history of Heathendom is shown to arise from National Romanticism, through the Völkisch pre-1945, and the New Age 1970-2000. Many studies focus on the issue of identity formation in narratives or myths of self, ranging from post-colonial whites seeking ancestry (Dobratz 2001. Gardell 2003. Hedenborg 2013. Pizza 2015), Queer social refugees seeking spiritual liberty (Lepage 2013), and teenage rock fans rebelling from Christian authority (Weston & Bennett 2014. Manea 2016). In many of these case-studies, because of the scope, the tendency is to see Asatru, Heathen, Wicca, and Norse Mythology as symptoms of any given angst, and is arguably reductionist. These identities have already been outlined in part in factorial design (Chapter 4.2), but are explained in more detail in the following selected texts. The anxieties in question are key energies that fuel the needs of producers and consumers in the religious market of Heathendom. The anxieties detailed in the previous research lead to my identification of two paradigms; that is to say a paradigm defined by Ian Buchanan (2016), Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory. These are the Gregorius Paradigm, and the Snook Paradigm- the latter of which is also related to von Schnurbein's work.

Egil Asprem (2008) "Heathens up north, politics, polemics, and contemporary Norse paganism" *Pomegranate, The International Journal of Pagan Studies*, 10.1, 41-69

Asprem's article is one of several small contributions to the subject, due to the dearth of books dedicated to Heathens specifically, such articles can be significant. Asprem tries to fit in a great deal of background information and context into his article, which shows the need for larger works. Asprem criticises the majority of studies that tend to underline American Asatru (Heathens) as representative of Heathens globally, that of course is relevant to my approach and method in accessing a variety of Heathen profiles. Asprem also sees events and public dialogue among Heathens as "accounts are symbolic of the kind of internal struggle over political issues within the Ásatrú community at large" (Asprem 2008, 62) which is again my interpretation of the immediate situational context of *Höfuðhofið* (Chapter 8).

Matthias Gardell (2003) *Gods of the Blood, The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*.

Extensive fieldwork in the murky world of 90s Right Wing extremist North America, and its pagan expressions. Gardell shows how several groups which feature in this study (Stephen McNallen's Asatru Folk Assembly (AFA), OR and other Folkish ideological groups) are integrated into the network of racists, White Pride, White Power and Neo-Nazi movements. He shows how these evolved from National Romanticism, theosophy and the turn-of-the century Völkisch movement. Gardell's work presents a historiographic bridge between 19<sup>th</sup> century identity creations, post-war racialism and Contemporary Paganism, incorporating the history of Völkisch, Runosophic (Germanic-mystical Theosophy) and romantic ideologies as evidenced by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke; *The Occult Roots of Nazism, Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (1992) and *Black sun, Aryan cults, esoteric Nazism and the politics of identity* (2002).

Fredrik Gregorius (2008) *Modern Asatro, Att konstruera etnisk och kulturell identitet*

Gregorius' award-winning PhD thesis and his subsequent redactions in papers are based on in-depth field-studies of Swedish Heathens, therefore I present his contributions overall. Gregorius contributes a range of valuable assets for studies of this subject. He suggests three categories of Heathendom: Racial, Genealogical and Cultural which roughly correspond to Matthias Gardell's interpretations (Gardell 2003, 152-157). Another of Gregorius's works added a fourth category, Paganistic (2005: 135-136). "Racial" and "Genealogical" cover denominations such as Folkish, Odinism etc. Cultural and *Paganistisk Asatro* are arguably grades synonymous with what Folkish Heathens call Universalists. Gregorius' "myth of the silent majority" was presented in (2015) what many Heathens assume to be sympathetic or grass-roots cultural inclination towards *sed*; deep-rooted or default in blood or culture. Gregorius' point is that Heathens commonly believe themselves part of an organic truth present in mainstream society and culture, if only people opened their eyes. This "Gregorius Paradigm", is a useful tool in understanding my informants' statements concerning a sense of returning to the "Old Ways" and forms a major element in my analysis and discussion chapters.



Allan Asbjorn Jøn (1999) “ “Skeggöld, Skálmöld; Vindöld, Vergöld”, Alexander Rud Mills and the Ásatrú Faith in the New Age”. *Australian Religion Studies Review* 12.1, 77-83

Jøn's article is short but it primarily serves as documentation of the domestic sources surrounding Rud Mills. One of the first modern Heathens, based in Australia, Rud Mills' overall mythos is referenced by Folkish Heathens but his writings are hard to come by. Therefore, Jøn provides a rare if limited study of what Rud Mills actually did and said, and the way in which he influenced the early modern Heathen groups since the '30s. Many of the primary sources about the early organisations are texts published by the organisations themselves.

Martin Lepage (2013) “A Lokian Family, Queer and Pagan Agency in Montreal” in *The Pomegranate* 1.1–2, 79–101

One issue in demographics concerning Heathens, which has had instrumental effect on my Method preparation, and perspective of a global religion, is the occurrence of ‘Heathens disguised as Pagans’. Some very recent studies continue to misplace elements of Heathendom under a concept of Eclectic Paganism. This is an issue in several large studies on Paganism as well in this particular field study. For instance, Martin Lepage observing a Montréal ritual that clearly involves worshipping Norse Gods, assumes that they are Wiccans rather than Heathens. Despite that some of his informants identify as the latter, and include Loki in the ceremony (Lepage 2014, 89-91). Since Loki is not usually a God worshipped or welcome among Heathens in North America (see Snook 2015, 72-75), Lepage seems to assume that worship of Loki, despite being a Norse God is reflective of a non-Heathen ritual. Although he does go on to explain the complexity of identities, he makes no mention of the subjects/practitioners as being Heathen only “Wicca and Reclaiming Witchcraft” (Lepage 2014, 81) Lepage's Lokians are part of a “kindred”, one of the typical Heathen terms for a congregation, but Lepage describes the group as, “not a common Asatrú grove, in fact not all members of the group call themselves Heathens. [...] Lokabrenna Kindred is not a coven either” (Lepage 2014, 91) missing the self-identification of most participants as Heathen. Perhaps the most telling phrase is “Asatrú grove”, since there are no groves in Asatru but rather in Wicca. Despite Lepage's interpretation of Lokians as Wiccans rather than Heathens, his study is a useful resource in how Lokian Heathens relate to Queer Culture, and perceive aggression from conservative elements in the

religion. Gay Heathens are a core cog in the events which this thesis studies; (Chapter 8. Events 7, 8, 9, 13, 14).

Stefanie von Schnurbein (2016) *Norse Revival, Transformations of Germanic Neopaganism*

von Schnurbein's work is a valuable reference point in method, theory, history and scope. Her introductory chapter is in agreement with sources on the historical origins of Heathendom, "We can identify German Romanticism as a key formative moment for the emergence of a discourse of Germanic myth, individual elements within this influential cluster of ideas were in place already in European humanism and Renaissance thought" (von Schnurbein 2016, 18). von Schnurbein systematically covers all the relatively recent expressions and dimensions of Heathendom with balance, if a slightly predominating interest in racist Heathendom. Areas are- belief and ritual, negotiating ethnic heritage, relationship with monotheist heritage, conceptualisation of nature, gender and sexuality, aesthetic expressions, and the relationship with academia. The latter is explored in-depth in her (2015) article "Tales of reconstruction. Intertwining Germanic neo-Paganism and Old Norse scholarship" in *Critical Research on Religion* 3.2, 148–167. von Schnurbein has highlighted that -like several Contemporary Paganisms that have been researched, subject-communities become aware and critical of the effects that scholarship has on shaping the subject itself. This agrees with Snook who perceives Heathens to be "hyperaware" of scholarship and racist issues, and as perceived from the media outside (Snook 2015, 162).

Jennifer Snook (2015) *American Heathens, The Politics of Identity in a Pagan Religious Movement*

Although Gardell covered American Heathens to an extent, his focus was mainly on extremist political groups. Snook's work gives an overview of the religious movement in the US, and often focusses on how many Heathens negotiate the apparent influence of Folkish organisations like AFA on non-members. Her work maintains the theoretical consensus and sociological reading of national politics and culture as defining factors in how local characteristics of Paganisms develop. This follows, for example, Kathryn Rountree's presentation in *Contemporary pagan and native faith movements in Europe, colonialist and nationalist*

*impulses* (2015). Snook tackles the discourse of how insiders rationalise faith in the Germanic Gods, often with underlying Christian structures. This has direct relevance to my data, not least due to the sizeable American presence in the rhetoric and interests of my informants. Snook has elsewhere stated that “Examinations of Heathenry are inseparable from examinations of whiteness as the benefactor of ethnic invention, as ethnicity is also a struggle between groups over new strategic positions of power” (Snook 2013, 71). Finally, Snook’s major contribution to Pagan Studies is the interpretation of the anxieties within Heathendom concerning society’s perception of Heathens as right-wing. von Schnurbein was in agreement with this when she concluded that “an elective affinity between this discourse on Nordic myth and right-wing thought is always immanent” (von Schnurbein 2016, 358). Snook’s analysis is that Heathens are hyperaware of how they are perceived by outsiders (Snook 2015, 162). I found this valuable in reading my data, and refer to it as the “Snook Paradigm”, which forms a major element in my analysis and discussion chapters.

### **6.3 Theoretical & methodological critiques**

Several useful articles have given this study structural and qualitative considerations from Pagan Studies, specifically from *The Pomegranate* journal. Highlights include the debate between Markus Altena Davidsen (Altena Davidsen 2012), Shawn Arthur (Arthur 2013, 164-177), and Ethan Doyle White (Doyle White 2012, 5-21) in response to Markus Altena Davidsen’s (2012) article “What is Wrong with Pagan Studies?” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 24, 183-99. For example, from the perspective of Religious Studies and sociological/anthropological methodology Arthur elucidates on Altena Davidsen in debate with archaeology PhD Doyle White that: “Merely describing the practices and explanations of adherents does not contribute to greater understanding, it only provides us with a bigger set of data...that we then need to critically analyze” (Arthur 2013, 174). The guideline for me being that several major works in previous research have focussed on documentation, whereas the field currently encourages scholars to attempt a critical method and interpretative theory. Therefore, in dealing with expressions and reflections of Heathens (“explanations of adherents”) I have focussed on “critically analysing” these in the structure of RMT rather than stopping at description.

## 7 Key terminology

These terms are key to understanding primary data.

Following the guidelines of *The Pomegranate* journal I have used upper case in the terms Pagan and God(s), as well as using the term Contemporary Pagan(isms) rather than neo-Pagan.

Specific Gods: In brief, many deities referenced will probably be recognisable to many readers -such as Odin, Thor and Loki. Other deities or mythological figures mentioned are for instance; Norns which represent time, fate or destiny. Suffice it to say that understanding the actual characteristics of these deities is not necessary for comprehending the study of people and events in relation to *Höfuðhofið*.

Heathens, Heathendom, Heathenship: Heathendom is defined as a Native Faith Movement (NFM) (Aitamurto & Simpson 2014. Rountree 2015), and Germanic Contemporary Paganism- the variety of Contemporary Paganism that grounds itself in Germanic mythologies (van Gulik 2015, 217). I only use the latter term in rare cases to differentiate from, for example, Slavic Contemporary Paganism. Trends in names for the religion have oscillated since the '40s, making a scientific noun difficult. Heathendom is a grammatically correct etic term, sometimes used in emic cases as the natural translation from cognate terms; *Heiduntum* (German), *Hedendom* (Swedish) etc. A secondary etic term means 'being Heathen'; 'Heathenship', from Old English (OE) *Hæðenscipe* is cognate with *Hedenskab* (Danish), *Hedenskap* (Norwegian), I use Heathendom as *the* religion and the community, and Heathenship is *their* religion or religiosity.

Lore: Lore is used by several informants meaning scripture, mainly Icelandic sagas and mythological *Edda* sources. Most tensions between Heathens are over the interpretation of lore, such as whether Northern Europeans descend from Gods -as is inferred in the 14<sup>th</sup> century *Rígsþula*. All ON mythological texts were composed or transmitted in Iceland, an important reason why all Heathens have an especially vested interest in- or idealisation of- Iceland.

Wights: When I asked Astrid (Norway) "How often do you conduct rituals or communicate with the Gods or spirits?" She replied "Well, I don't deal with spirits, I deal with wights". Her use of the archaic English word "wight" showed she was familiar with its revived use by Heathens in Anglo-Saxon countries as synonymous with Norwegian *vette*. Wights is an emic

word I have chosen referring to a nebulous category of supernatural creatures, entities or spirits in Heathendom that are not Gods. I did not use the term in my questions, so as not to lead the informant.

Denomination: Despite the debates and hostilities between ideological groups- most Heathens recognise that all the divided factions make up the community as it is, rather than how they would wish it to be. This is motivated by the interpretations of all studies in *Previous Research* and supported by the discourses in my data. A denomination, here, refers to perceived blocs of interpretation which divides Heathens into groups of “Ways”. There are, for example, Runic Heathens, Folkists, Universalists, Shamans, Lokians, Odinists etc. Some of these find the other blocs of Ways to be deviant, or as one online comment on a closed Facebook group read: “you are no true Heathen!” Which may appear to conflict with the assertion of a single religious community, however, these expressions simultaneously legitimise other factions by virtue of maintaining consistent discourse, this is supported by Snook (2015) and von Schnurbein (2016). The majority of Heathens, use the same social media groups, with many group moderation rules specifically stating that such debates are fundamental to the religion, and that any perspective on ‘true’ or ‘false’ Heathens are welcome. Therefore, I find these discourses between denominations to be a major factor within the developments around *Höfuðhofið*’s symbolism and conceptualisation.

The Folkish: My observations and data confirms that those who identify as Odinists or Folkish also identify as right-wing, and are heavily critical of what they see as liberal values or Cultural Marxism<sup>4</sup>. Folkists and Odinists make up the major denominations which are polarised against the others, and both groups overlap. These denominations are what Gregorius calls “Racial” or “Genealogical” Heathenship (Gregorius 2008, 81). They have the best documented history, and the oldest expressions covered by the current body of scholarship on Germanic Contemporary Paganism.<sup>5</sup> Folkism is still debated within Heathendom as it is often defended as non-racist, it

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<sup>4</sup> This is also supported by all the texts in *Previous Research*.

<sup>5</sup> Odinism is the oldest expression of modern Heathendom, founded by an Australian Nazi sympathiser during the Second World War, Alexander Rud Mills in 1933 (Goodrick-Clarke 2003, 259). He inspired the first major Heathen organisations in Britain and Canada circa 1972, and immediately afterwards -USA. Folkish was the next stage; originating with the US organisation AFA, led by Stephen McNallen, both feature heavily in this thesis. Jøn relates the Australian Odinist Mills directly to Ásatrú, to its eventual development and specifically to Mills as a ‘devotee of the Ásatrú faith’ (Jøn 1999, 77) despite there being no Ásatrú at the time. Jøn calls Mills a “racialist theosophical”, noting that Mills was heavily influenced by Ariosophists such as Guido von List (Jøn 1999, 78). John Yeowell founded the first Heathen organisation in the UK (Committee for the Restoration of the) Odinic Rite (OR) in 1973, which now exists as the Odinist Fellowship (Chapter 8, Event 4). Danish Nazi

is however definitively white separatist and racialist. Due to the stigma of the word ‘Folkish’, some of my informants eschew Folkish for the term Tribalist, historically Tribalist is a word that has had core value within Odinism (Gardell 2003, 157, 173, 201, 304. Snook 2015, 162). Some Heathens take umbrage with relating Tribalism to Folkism, however there is evidence that the term has infiltrated the community the one from the other. Tribalism is a term used in Richard B. Spencer’s Alt Right movement to negotiate White Supremacy (Online: The Atlantic, 2016). Significantly, Folkish groups consistently assert claims that they are not racist. Events of this year alone have shown that in USA (Chapter 8. Event 13), Sweden<sup>6</sup> and Denmark<sup>7</sup> Folkish individuals and groups have been accused of homophobia, nationalism, white separatism and open ties and/or membership in anti-immigration political parties. A growing number of non-Folkish organisations amend their by-laws to expel members who have such links or expressions.

Ritual: The common word for ritual used by Heathens in all languages is the word ‘blot’ from Icelandic/ON *blót*. Informants had different definitions of blot. Some religious practices are not blots, such as runic divination or shamanic experiences, often communal rather than personal. There are also experiences which informants describe as spiritual or ritualistic or sometimes as blot, but are spontaneous and solitary. To overcome these issues of definition, I use the word ‘ritual’ for the sake of consistency, with occasional reference to blot for the sake of context.

Congregation: Various local groups who gather for activities and common rituals use a variety of terms such as kindred, hearth, *blotlag*, *blotgilde*. I have translated these terms as ‘congregation’.

Ritual leader, administrative officer, spiritual advisor: ‘Clergy’ roles are ambiguous in Heathendom, the model is historical Nordic Paganism, therefore taking a variety of unique forms- consequently ‘priest’ in all cases is inaccurate. Leaders in Heathen organisations have set roles, some are spiritual and others are administrative. Often a ritual leader will be a

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and former Danmarks Nationalsocialistiske Arbejderparti member Else Christensen founded the Odinist Fellowship in Canada in 1972. During Christensen’s incarceration for smuggling heroine (at the age of 83) in the ‘90s, Yeowell claimed that it was Christensen who had introduced him to the legacy of Mills, and was the impetus for the British OR (Online: The Troth, 2016). Yeowell and Stephen McNallen (see below) ran campaigns to have Christensen released on grounds that she was a political prisoner (Gardell 2003, 176). Odinism is widely understood in Heathendom to mean white supremacist.

<sup>6</sup> New and expansive Nordiska Asa Samfundet have several key members who are or were members of the controversial nationalist Sverigedemokrater political party. (Online: Dagen, 2016)

<sup>7</sup> See footnotes for Section 8. Event 9

temporary post within a congregation, depending on who is able to attend, due to work, family, health and travel.

Mjöllnir: The Thor's Hammer pendant worn by most Heathens as a symbol of faith.

IASC: (International Asatru Summercamp), an organ of Asatru EU, a network originally of Dutch, German and Scandinavian cooperation. The 1<sup>st</sup> IASC was held in Denmark 2009, by 9 organisations, involving 150 people from 13 countries. The IASC council of 9 signatory organisations, as a result of the 2015 camp, formed the statement and support campaign/petition for Ásatrúarfélagið. This was in response to Hilmar Örn expressing in Icelandic media that Ásatrúarfélagið had received hate-mail and threats to deface *Höfuðhofið* in response to the organisation's stance on gay weddings (Chapter 8. Event 8). The statement began: "We, the groups and individuals behind the Asatru-EU network support and share Ásatrúarfélagið's non-discriminatory stance" (de Negen Werelden 2015).

Festivals: International gatherings like IASC are common, but always different. Viking Metal festival Midgårdsblot in Borre, Norway (August 2016) held an animal sacrifice blot with hundreds of participants and bystanders next to a reconstructed Viking hall. The first Asgardian Festival in Keyham, England (August 2016) had over over 100 participants from the UK. The fact these events are increasingly more common indicate a growing confidence within Heathendom.

Public Figures: Only two individuals are consistently referred to by informants in relation to recent events (Background chapter). They are representative of two opposing forces, Folkish and non-Folkish (Chapter 8).

Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson, current chairman and "High Priest" (Iceland Magazine, July 2015) of the Icelandic Ásatrúarfélagið. Music and film score composer. A driving force behind *Höfuðhofið*, his presence in media is extremely catalytic for the Heathen community.

Stephen McNallen, long time leader (1972/1988-2016) of AFA, the most influential figure in right-wing Heathendom, a Folkish, Tribalist and Odinist. Recently stepped down after purchasing and inaugurating the organisation's temple. Gardell, Gregorius, Snook and von Schnurbein have all interpreted his organisation and teachings as

racialist and networked with racists. One of his doctrines being “metagenetics”, a form of ethno-pluralism (Asatru Free Assembly, 1983).



## 8 Background

Ásatrúarfélagið's temple architect, Magnús Jensson, explained to me that he saw the construction of the Icelandic temple as a *Höfuðhofið* (main temple) since there were local shrines and places of worship already in Iceland; *Höfuðhofið* would therefore be a “centre-point” -for Iceland, not for the world. This vision has had unwanted side-effects, with Icelandic Heathens asking themselves, ‘do we really want Höfuðhofið to be a centre for Heathens internationally, and can we really do anything about it?’

Heathens perceive the temple in relation to several events. This chronology is of relevance to what *Höfuðhofið* represents. The following will be referenced in this thesis as ‘Events 1-15’.

1. January 2008. Ásatrúarfélagið purchases land to build *Höfuðhofið*. (Online: Ásatrúarfélagið. 2008)
2. 2008. Spanish Odinist Comunidad Odinista de España Ásatrú, of 400 members claims a ruined Moorish fortress as the headquarters of Círculo Odinista Europeo. (De Larramendi & Ortiz, 2009: 312)
3. December 2012. One of the first English language articles announces the plan to build a temple in Iceland. (Online: Iceland Review. 2012)
4. May 2014. Odinist Fellowship UK privately purchase 16<sup>th</sup> century Christian single-roomed stone alms-house. (Online: Facebook. 2014)
5. January 30<sup>th</sup> 2015. Beginning with BBC, global media begins a series of new articles about *Höfuðhofið*, typically with the headline “first Viking temple in 1000 years”. (Online: BBC. 2015) This headline seems to be copied by *Höfuðhofið*'s competitors over the next two years. It is the first partly government-sponsored neo-Pagan temple in the world.
6. May 1<sup>st</sup> 2015. Vice.com run interview with an Ásatrúarfélagið administrative officer expressing concern over racism among American Heathens compared to non-racist European Heathens; “How a Thor-Worshipping Religion Turned Racist.” (Online: Vice. 2015)
7. July 14<sup>th</sup> 2015. Icelandic media reports threats made to *Höfuðhofið* from abroad due to Ásatrúarfélagið officiating gay marriage. “Foreign groups who intend to visit temple to consecrate it in their own manner, to "correct" what those groups see as the incorrect tolerance of Icelanders” (Online: Iceland Magazine. 2015. (1)).

8. July 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. Headline: "Icelandic Pagan Association high priest moved by the outpouring of international support". (Online: Iceland Magazine. 2015 (2)). A Facebook group which ran for a month following the media coverage included over 2600 supporters (Online: Facebook. 2015) was initiated by the 9 member organisations and attendees of the 2015 IASC/Asatru EU.
9. March 30<sup>th</sup> 2016. Controversial TV presenter Jim Lyngvild<sup>8</sup> builds a medieval-inspired temple on his land over a three-week period. At the inauguration he invites only two politicians, both are whom are major figures in Danish anti-immigration politics, to cut the ribbon. Both Danish media and Scandinavian Heathens react with strong criticism (Online: Fyens Stiftstidende. 2016).
10. May 1<sup>st</sup> 2016. In order to concentrate on the campaign to purchase their own temple, AFA founder Stephen McNallen steps down to be replaced by Matt Flavel. (Online: Facebook. 2016. (1)).
11. June 18<sup>th</sup> 2016. Although built 2 years before, local news remarks on the Odinist Fellowship UK's temple. "World's first modern-day Pagan temple is in Newark". (Online: Newark Advertiser. 2015)
12. August 2016. AFA purchase a Californian ranch/former Christian youth centre, through fundraising and private financing. They claim it is "After a thousand years - a home for the Norse Gods and Goddesses in America" (Online: IndieGoGo. 2015).
13. August 21<sup>st</sup> 2016. Matt Flavel, issues official statement: "Today we are bombarded with confusion and messages contrary to the values of our ancestors and our folk. The AFA would like to make it clear that we believe gender is not a social construct, it is a beautiful gift from the holy powers and from our ancestors. The AFA celebrates our feminine ladies, our masculine gentlemen and, above all, our beautiful white children. The children of the folk are our shining future and the legacy of all those men and women of our people back to the beginning." (Online: Facebook. 2016. (2)).
14. September 5<sup>th</sup> 2016. 'Declaration 127' made against AFA as a racist, trans- and homophobic organisation. By December, 160 Heathen organisations and local groups from around the world had signed (Online: Declaration 127. 2016).

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<sup>8</sup> Although an outspoken homosexual, Danish celebrity Jim Lyngvild has been accused of homophobia by Copenhagen Pride, and as a racist in Danish media (Online: Her og Nu 2016. Metroxpress, 2015).

15. Summer 2016. Reports from Heathens returning from visits in Iceland claim that Ásatrúarfélagið have “raised the drawbridge”.

Notably, Ásatrúarfélagið did not name any Folkish or American organisation as the source of the threats, yet was understood by many Heathens internationally as meaning just that. This can be seen in the above event, and also represented in my data; many examples of which can be seen in the *Analysis* chapter. The reasons for this widespread assertion is based on past experiences, suspicion and prejudice about the Folkish; and the deep-lying polarisation in the religious community. Therefore, the consequent tensions between Folkish and non-Folkish denominations has been catalysed by the threats made upon *Höfuðhofið*. It is also noteworthy that apart from Folkish organisations, one of the few large organisations not to sign Declaration 127, was Ásatrúarfélagið themselves, explained by a personal correspondence from their administrative officers: “As stated by Icelandic law our members are, and will only be, registered residents in Iceland. Our activity as stated in the organization laws are only limited within Iceland” (Online: Iceland Magazine. 2015. (4)).

Many Heathens perceived Icelanders as increasingly isolationist, what Roger (Sweden) called “island mentality”, informants organising international events, were disappointed that Ásatrúarfélagið never replied: “not even a thanks, we got your message, no thanks” (Roger, Sweden). Others cited rumours that Icelanders were backing off due to experiences with right-wing Heathens. “One of us had only just gotten back from Iceland and he told us some rather sad news; that they had ‘pulled up the bridge’ after the whole hassle about gay marriage, it seems they are concerned what non-Icelandic Heathens will do to their temple” (Lewis, UK). Contrary to Hilmar Örn’s openness, negative and/or catalysing media coverage has led to a growing feeling among Icelandic Heathens that doors to *Höfuðhofið* should be closed to the outside (Online: Iceland Magazine. 2015. (1)). Several Icelandic informants felt frustrated at outside claims to *Höfuðhofið*; it is after all, they said, built with Icelandic money for Icelandic Heathens. Hilmar Örn referenced that doors would be closed not to “*blóts*” but “ceremonies”, that are usually private, such as weddings and funerals. As with all the Icelanders I spoke with, Hilmar Örn was tired: “We are trying to maintain a cordial relationship with interested parties. Although some people have felt that they have been viewed as a cross between lab-rats and performing monkeys in recent months”. Several Icelandic administrative officers declined to be interviewed, citing such experiences.

Since *Höfuðhofið* was announced, four temples in other countries sprang up in succession. All four temples are purchased or built by organisations (Event 13) or an individual (Event 9) with Folkish or extreme political standpoints. These temples appear to have been created in response and as rivals to *Höfuðhofið*. In each case, media and/or self-promotion re-used the same headline for *Höfuðhofið*: ‘first Viking temple in 1000 years’. This slogan informs part of my interpretation of the four Folkish temples as rivals, or competitors on the religious market (Chapter 10). The view that these four temples are rivals is common in my data (Chapter 9.3.3.2). The Folkish and conservative events above relate to RMT, “within religious groups there will always be subgroups having a conflict of interest over whom the religious organization is to serve” (Stark & Bainbridge 2006, 394). These “seeds of schism” can be read into the prerequisites of those Heathens who require ethnic or gender orthodoxy.

## 9 Analysis of Heathen responses to the temple

I have divided up the data received into three types of information, based on three major categories which I recognised. The first two deal primarily with: *What are the current needs and experiences of the community which the temple may fulfil?* The third category and following discussion deals with the questions: *What effects does the temple have on dynamics between Heathens internationally?* And *Why is the Icelandic temple more important than Heathen temples in other countries?*

Prior to my three categories of responses, I introduce the broad positivity concerning the temple (9.1).

### 9.1 Importance of Höfuðhofið

The US questionnaire showed an overwhelming enthusiasm and optimism concerning Höfuðhofið. Although an ambiguous definition, 73% considered it “holy”, and several informants referred to Höfuðhofið as holy: “I do not consider ‘holy’ any human-designed building. Now, this temple is for me the holiest possible temple in the world” (Sebastien, France). More secure indications of the temple’s value were shown in other US questionnaire responses:

- 87% thought Höfuðhofið was important for the religion, 47% of whom thought it was extremely important.
- 91% believed that other Heathens felt positively or very positively about Höfuðhofið.
- 72% believed Höfuðhofið would lead to more temples being built.
- 98% of US Heathens believed the Gods viewed Höfuðhofið positively.

The interview data of non-North American Heathens did not appear to conflict with US questionnaire perceptions of Höfuðhofið.

### 9.2 Category One. Ritual & Experiential aspects

This section collates the data on spiritual aspects, regarding my research question: *What are the current needs and experiences of the community which the temple may fulfil?*

In the article “Witches, Wiccans, and Neo-Pagans, A Review of Current Academic Treatments of Neo-Paganism” Siân Lee Reid and Shelley Tsivia Rabinovitch state that, “Pagans stand out in New Age quarters because of the strength of their attraction to the environment and the frequency with which they engage in magical rituals” (Reid & Rabinovitch 2008, 520). In the following section, my data shows how Heathens rely heavily on the natural world in religious experience, “magic”, and/or rituals which have a private nature. Rituals traditionally performed outdoors are unlikely to be enhanced by practice inside *Höfuðhofið*. Why then is the temple so important? Agnes (Iceland) did not grow up in Iceland, and found it difficult to spiritually connect to the geography. However, she took it for granted that she would still practice outdoors. I asked if she would go to *Höfuðhofið* on her own, she answered: “I might go there to seek some quiet moment, it will depend how it will look at the end”. The word I reacted to was “look”, since the aesthetic experience and sensory stimulation seems to be a major theme in Heathendom. Communication with Gods in nature or in an intimate inner body-environment is of central importance to many Heathens’ religious lives. In the majority, these formative experiences secure their Heathenship conversion, and continue to empower their faith. Therefore, *Höfuðhofið* may change the character of Icelandic Heathen experience. The variety of rituals referenced by my informants raises many questions about the potential effects of *Höfuðhofið* on Heathens, not only in Iceland but as a form of inspiration for Heathens globally. It also raises questions about just what the interest is for non-Icelandic Heathens in *Höfuðhofið* itself- because it is surely not as an improved experiential ritual arena.

By experiential arena, I mean that the experiences of the Gods are unlikely to be improved by the removal from the natural milieu. Contrastingly, it is widely understood that *Höfuðhofið* has practical value for conducting rituals: “A permanent place where Heathens can finally perform their rites in a sacred place within the city” (Lewis, UK). This practical value is dealt with in Chapter 9.4.2. *Höfuðhofið* as a model for Heathen developments globally, has significant consequences if spiritual experiences will be increasingly removed from nature-arenas. In light of this, and in relation to my research questions- *How does the importance of Höfuðhofið relate to the current needs and experiences of the community? What are the current needs and experiences of the community which the temple may fulfil?* I will now briefly outline the types of ritual currently common in Heathendom.

### 9.2.1 Ritual activities

The following subchapter details the various Heathen rituals and sets the potential of the temple in context to them.

1. Offering meal
2. Morning rites
3. Calendric Blot
4. Meditations
5. Shamanism
6. Runes

1. The meal is the most common Heathen ritual, described as “blot”. It focuses on sharing alcohol with the Gods and the participants. Alcohol is perceived as the divine drink of the Gods as depicted in several myths, giving humans creative inspiration, intelligence, knowledge and social prowess. Alcohol is poured onto the soil after a toast of thanks to a particular God, wight or ancestor, or pledging a future endeavour and asking for support or blessing. Heathens consider ritual relationships with Gods and otherworldly beings as pragmatic. In order to gain, one must give; if one is to maintain cosmic balance and seasonal order, one must give. Food can be consumed during ritual, or afterwards. This model of ritual can bridge the blot and a separate post-blot ritual called a *symbol* or *gille*. *Symbol* is often a picnic, a practitioner’s home, a pub or restaurant, depending on the time of year or meeting place. The social aspect is very important, not only to include the Gods and wights, but also strengthening bonds with other Heathens who are as likely to be strangers as old friends. Animal sacrifices are rarely conducted, but again- the purpose is offering and consumption with the participants and the Gods or wights, it’s character is dependent on social, legal and practical factors. Pouring alcohol on the earth or leaving food in the open, will be less directly possible in *Höfuðhofið*.
2. Morning rites are naturally intimate, personal affairs. They range from lighting a candle on a home shrine with small idols, a prayer, or including the Gods at breakfast. It is unlikely that a temple will affect or effectively replace an individual’s morning rite.
3. Calendric blots are the mainstay of Heathen ritual practice. Offering meals are usually focussed on these events with food being relative to the season. For example, bread is often given around the harvest period, eggs and fruit in spring. The eight blots correspond to the solstices and equinoxes and the dates in-between, this follows a pattern in most Contemporary Paganisms. Timed specifically with solstices and equinoxes, blots are intended to be a direct interaction with sunlight or a sacred night

prior to a festival day. For this reason, it is important that they are conducted in the outdoors.

4. Meditations vary from group to singular activities, typically New Age practices, these can take the form of oriental-style yoga or more occult-inspired magical focusses on a rune or specific deity. They can be conducted with the aid of music, usually of shamanic or ambient character, real or recorded. They are often conducted in privacy at home. ON *Galdr*, or OE *Gealdor*, is an oral performance or vocalisation considered to have powerful historical roots, and can be used in meditation.
5. A crossover with meditations are shamanic rites, which are far more energised and ritualised than more simple meditations. There are entire subsections of the Heathen community involved in shamanism, which is based on the historical precedent of *Seiðr*. That said, shamanism as it appears today is considered a fringe practice by most Heathens and does not form a central part of blots. In addition, the performance of shamanism often resembles generic neo-shamanism rather than historical records of *Seiðr*. Rituals are typically collective, they can be designed for divination, healing or personal enrichment. They are practiced both indoors and outdoors, with or without music, or *Galdr*.
6. Runes are a widespread and varied part of Heathen culture, used in aesthetics and mysticism. Some subsections of the Heathen community practice personal or collective activities rooted in runosophy such as Stav, which bears some resemblance to the use of *bokken* or *jo* in Aikido, mixed with runic yoga. Stav is often derided within Heathendom for its claims to be passed down from Viking times within a single family by its modern guru, a Norwegian farmer. Other runosophic activities crossover with meditation, *Galdr* and magic. Some rune-magic is specifically focussed on the creation of spells; for love, healing, curses, good luck etc. A third ritual runic practice is divination, despite having a historical basis, it usually takes on New Age expressions such as tarot. Individuals will carry out rune readings for themselves, and it can be conducted by a specialist for another person, usually present, or a group. These practices are not considered blots, and would probably not be considered appropriate for a temple, since many Heathens are sceptical of New Age practices or charismatic individuals who refer to magic, or personal assertions, or interpretations that are not dictated by -or originate in- Lore.



Considering the range of rituals within Heathendom and its many denominations, subgenres and crossovers, there are very few which would be relevant to a temple.

### 9.2.2 Communicating with Gods, experiencing Gods

Part of the reaction to the building of a temple in Iceland is how it relates to worship. Are Heathens all over the world so interested in *Höfuðhofið*, and believe the Gods look positively on *Höfuðhofið*- because it offers them the first real place to actually worship the Gods in a place purpose-built for that dedication?

I asked a number of questions related to “do you intend to visit *Höfuðhofið*?” –one of these was if they considered -or would consider- *Höfuðhofið* to be “holy”. A more indirect and perhaps more descriptive insight was given incidentally in response to various questions. These responses were not directly related to the questions asked; which I therefore interpret as evidence for a common underlying religious concept for many Heathens.

Spiritual advisor and ritual officer Astrid (Norway), spoke about her conviction that, “I don’t believe ritual entails communicating with Gods or wights. You set yourself in a mind-set where you are more susceptible to their *megin* [energy], but they do not talk to you”. This is something repeated by several Heathens: “You might think I’m crazy but it’s like I can hear them and feel them around me and in nature. All you have to do is to know how to listen.” (Nate US)

Another spiritual advisor and ritual officer -Hanna (Sweden) also spoke of communication with the Gods. When I asked if she had any specific religious or spiritual experience that she had in common with other Heathens; she said, “The religion communicates differently to each of us as we have different reception ability -if that makes sense.” It was difficult for her to explain, it was something central to her religious understanding, but it was complex. This felt quite similar to when Astrid (Norway) admitted it was difficult for her to explain why a *hov* was not a temple, as I called it. In response to another question, Hanna repeated the idea of reception:

“I have not a clear view of how they are or what they are. I think “they” communicate to and through us depending on how receptive we are. Due to that it’s quite “unclear” and due to that we translate it into something we can make sense of. So what they are can seem different to us. Though, with that said, I believe that the Gods and spirits are energy” (Hanna, Sweden).

In context of the temple, this reception and energy principle could be affected by the removal from nature, or take on new forms and create new characteristics of experiences.

It also occurred to me that for a religion where so many admitted that they are agnostic or atheist Heathens, a temple has an ambiguous spiritual dimension. For Dodek, (Poland) he had once seen the Gods only in terms as archetypes, but after feeling “the presence of Gods” which he found difficult to put into words, he was now much more dedicated to the Gods with rigorous faith, yet he felt it had no bearing on his relationship with other Heathens. If the presence of Gods (*megin*) is usually felt in nature, and this presence is a turning point for many agnostic or atheist Heathens, then surely *Höfuðhofið* –without nature- will have a limiting affect on Heathens’ ability to acquire faith. This is not to say that going to a temple regularly will mean that Heathens can no longer have experiences in nature, only that their religious focus is more likely to be triggered when visiting a temple. “I fear I would somehow feel like being in a Christian church. I do not need pictures or special places for my imagination. I rather feel places like this would spoil my imagination” (Ada, Germany).

This is perhaps most starkly illustrated by the more dramatic forces of nature. “A tornado ripped through my town and tore the roof off of my house. I was standing in the living room trying to evacuate the dogs to the basement at the time. I witnessed the very real and physical might of Thor. It was truly, literally, an awesome experience” (Karl, US). Clearly such a powerful experience cannot be experienced inside a temple, although that does not preclude Heathens from having powerful experiences indoors, only that their character is presumably going to be quite different. For a religion that appears to be grounded in nature, there must be consequences to this change.

Experiences with the Gods are very personal, and typically expressed in individual rather than collective experiences: “to know Ullr, I shoot archery. When I’m in the groove and mindful of the moment, I am closest to him. Thus, we come to find our *Fulltrúi* -closest friend” (Karl, US). In this respect, we could argue that being “susceptible to their *megin*” as Astrid expressed it, is more possible in nature or in an inner space.

“I have been cultivating a strong relationship with Eir, as I have lymphoma. I feel the Gods and Goddesses around me every day. I also treasure my relationship with Odin. He guides me to becoming better by seeking knowledge on a daily basis. I also feel a

close connection with Ullr. The Gods and Goddesses fulfil me. I think about the Gods, Goddesses, wights, and disir on a daily basis” (Ty, US).

I found it useful to enquire how these feelings expressed themselves in ritual. “I conduct a blot once a month. I also give offerings and talk to the Gods on a daily basis” (Ty, US). In this situation, the intimacy of Ty’s illness was the first thing he thought of, and clearly daily ritual is something that could be conducted in a local temple, but it would be more realistic to consider his monthly blot as something collective, whereas his daily ritual and talking to the Gods is more personal.

Henry felt that Gods are best approached as a collective rather than as an individual, although it seems this was more of a ritual ideal than a reality since he acknowledges personal intimacy with Gods, and his assertion that an individual’s relationships and exchanges are mainly with wights rather than Gods is not supported by the data.

“The Gods, I feel, are more readily approached by a group of people; they’re more likely to hear the chorus than the individual singer. Of course, that doesn’t preclude having a special relationship with one of the Aesir, but it does mean that for most people, that relationship is much more likely to be with a more local spirit or spirits” (Henry, US).

This ideal of Gods being met via a group, and wights on a personal level, is an interesting claim since that seems to be a theory in academic sources concerning historical “Heathenship”- ON polytheism. It is possible that for some Heathens, the idea of a temple will fulfil some goals of reconstructing what they see as historical practices of a group addressing offerings to the Gods in a more structured way. The data indicates that individuals have powerful experiences (*megin*) –not so much via meditations or ritual focuses, such as in a temple, but merely observing everyday life through the lens of Heathenship and being open or “susceptible to the [Gods’] *megin*”. Ravens, as mentioned by Nadir below, are an extension of Odin, and illustrate the kinds of *megin* unlikely to be experienced in a temple.

“One day a man showed up on the [online] group asking for prayers since he moved to a whole other country and clearly it was tough for him. I wished he’ll have guidance and joy through that. The guy later posted a picture of two ravens who landed in front of his car in the middle of the traffic, it may seem silly for some people but for me it was a wake-up call and it was a sign! Getting to know more and more about Asatru just

made me realise how beautiful this life is. Whatever natural event is happening I just appreciate it, I see lightning -I think of Thor and so I notice how beautiful that event is... I personally think that I am finding my own peace and I am so happy I decided that I need to retrieve my spirit from the situation I was in” (Nadir, Tunisia).

Milo’s experience of “influence” was sourced in natural areas, it was not something that could occur on a daily basis, but it was not something so very dramatic or hard to find either. It is noteworthy that Milo had to actually leave the village and find the very specific “no-built places”. Clearly an influence from the Gods or spiritual side of the world would be difficult in an urban temple. As several Heathens commented, experiences with Gods was often about merely being open to witnessing and understanding something that is there quite often, mundanely.

“I’m a part of the real side of the world, the Gods are parts of the spiritual side of the world, both sides form the real world and influence each other. I feel this influence, I accept it, but I don’t feel religious euphoria. [How often do you feel this influence?] I don’t know exactly - sometimes, when I’m out of my village, in the forest or at other no-built places, in my garden. Often, but not daily” (Milo, Germany).

This specific type of interaction with nature can be seen in Alicia’s rather subtle experience, she expressed her meeting with a God in terms of something that simply could happen at any time. As Astrid had said concerning being open to megin, Alicia only had to be in the right frame of mind,

“In the beginning, when I realised that I am a Heathen, there was a rainy day with thunder and lightning. I sat in my garden under the roof and I talked to Thor. I greeted him and said that I like him, then I kept my feet in the rain. The rain tickled me and I noticed a warmth through my body. A warmth feeling like I had “arrived” and was welcomed.” [Does that experience affect your relationship with Heathens or society in general?] “Only in the way that I am sure that I am a Heathen. Otherwise not” (Alicia, Germany).

Alicia had an intimate contact with a deity simply by being partially outdoors, in the comfort of her garden, the only place which is both home (intimate) and outdoors. Like many Heathens, such experiences are gateways into the religion, they can; in her words- affirm that they are

Heathen. Furthermore, she had to be aware that she was Heathen in order to have the experience with Thor. It was a choice, then the confirmatory experience followed.

Some Heathens go so far as to say that nature is not merely the milieu where they incidentally meet the Gods, but is an environment which define and reinforce their values, and the very definition of being Heathen. Stefan (Sweden) is from an organisation that predominantly uses Folkish rhetoric, in these cases it seems more common to find expressions about values and behaviour rather than faith or spiritual experiences.

“Heathen values does not change, people change, society change. More and more is going back to the old ways and the values of asatru. Before everyone wanted to move in the city... no contact with nature or animals there, except small pets. Now it is changing, people wants to get closer to nature, they move out of the city again and they start to find their way back to asatru values once again” (Stefan, Sweden).

Stefan’s assertion about Heathen values being attuned to a natural environment contrast to a temple in an urban environment, such as in Iceland, and one may assume that Höfuðhofs of the future will be paid for and used more frequently by urban collectives.

This is a good example of the Gregorius Paradigm, and illustrates the sense of a movement towards a righteous future which returns or restores the “Old Ways”. Three of four of the Folkish temples created -in what appears to be competition with *Höfuðhofið*- are all in rural, not urban, environments. There is perhaps also a significant economic reality to the purchases of land in rural areas. Three out of four of the Folkish temples were previously constructed buildings; therefore, buying cheap land and property in rural areas and converting it to Pagan use is perhaps an important part of the ability to fulfil the rushed aggressive project to be the first temple in 1000 years.

Like Heathen values, experiences in nature can be experiences with mythological beings, Gods and wights, but also be informative to a Heathen’s conscious concepts about orthopraxy.

“I was digging in my yard to install paving stones to extend my driveway. Hard physical labour. Slicing through roots and digging out bugs. I found myself communing with Ymir. Extremely alien, far more alien than a tree. I understood that for people who garden regularly the story of the earth being alive is a fact. So our tales mix fact and fancy in various ways so the boundary between symbol and literal is very blurred. Ever

since, I have defined Blot in two ways - every time you successfully make contact with a spirit that was Blot independent of intent. Every time you intend to make contact with a spirit that was Blot -independent of success” (Sean, US).

Could a constant sensory experience such as daily meditation at a temple, increase the likelihood of intensity of religious thought? It is well attested that the designs of many religious buildings are specifically to nurture and direct mental focus on spiritual doctrine, what Benedictine monk Mark Barrett has termed “*fugar mundi* withdrawal from society” (Barrett 2010). Many Heathens are already fully mentally equipped and immersed in what they see as Heathen thought, “Whenever I sleep, I see things I relate to Norse” (Nadir, Tunisia). So it is entirely possible that even without nature, a temple can be expected to empower Heathens, certainly those in urban environments, with Heathen thought. Regarding: *How does the importance of Höfuðhofið relate to the current needs and experiences of the community?* The temple does not seem to be perceived as fulfilling a need for *fugar mundi*, is in fact contrary to the current spiritual needs and experiences.

### 9.2.3 Ritual experience

As with the previously mentioned communications with Gods in natural environments, several informants said that they had spiritual experiences during a ritual. These rituals were group experiences, all in response to natural phenomenon, with the rituals held outdoors. For instance, I once observed a ritually activated spiritual zone set immediately around the participants, (*vé*) established at the start of a ritual during a storm. The clouds above the *vé* cleared during the ritual, so that there was no rain on the worshippers and instead the precise small area of the *vé* flooded with sunlight. This surprising phenomenon was experienced as a communication from a God. I call it the *vé* factor. In regard to the Heathen Temple in Iceland we can wonder to what extent being removed from *vé* factors will impact upon the spiritual experience of the attendant Heathens.

An interesting variation on the *vé* factor came from a Spanish informant. She explained that Spaniards are notoriously cowardly about getting wet or experiencing uncomfortable weather. So, once during a severe storm at Midsummer, a Spanish Heathen ritual was forced to be conducted indoors. When the ritual started, the weather outside became worse and the Heathens heard loud voices in the wind and were too frightened to continue. My informant then

considered that they had invited the Gods to the ritual but locked them out, so she opened a window and the voices stopped. “Since then we always open a window before we blot inside” (Francesca, Spain).

Naturally, the above indoor situation is probably not applicable to a large and complex structure such as *Höfuðhofið*. A solution for enhanced spiritual experience will probably not be achieved by merely opening a window. My Icelandic informants explained that *Höfuðhofið* was necessary due to the poor weather conditions in Iceland that made rituals very difficult. However, since Magnús told me that he had designed the interior to react to the sunlight in the summer solstice as well as the winter period, I am less convinced that *Höfuðhofið* is merely a weather shelter. Furthermore, in Moscow, the coldest capital in the world, Heathens still hold rituals outdoors even at the winter solstice.

During first-hand observations of rituals, I have noticed several *vé* factors occur during uncomfortable weather. Once, in the UK, a night-time ritual during typical British downpour saw the sky suddenly open up in a small patch between the clouds to show a much hyped comet, this was met by awestruck laughter and applause directed at the Gods. Another ritual in Sweden conducted by the sea saw the first snow of that year begin to fall, which despite the horrendous conditions (not least by our proximity to the water) was met with smiles and satisfaction by the attendant Heathens.

The rituals conducted in Iceland are no less commonly held in nature than in any other country, it seems, especially given that most Heathens seem to have the calendric eight blots in common. The temple will naturally change this however, and certainly mean that most Reykjavik Heathens will conduct their main rituals indoors, although my Icelandic informants also told me that it will give them the opportunity to perform rituals on a weekly basis as well. This may mean that Reykjavik Heathens might come to perform rituals far more frequently than Heathens in other countries, and that their rituals will be more often removed from nature than other Heathens. If Heathens meet or practice more regularly, it is possible that this may intensify the faith or Heathenship of Reykjavik Heathens in comparison with Heathens internationally, it also stands to reason that a shift in focus to nature and personal experiences may mean that collective experiences lead to a greater focus on the social aspect of the religion; “the affection between people grow after these events [rituals], you feel them getting more closer to you and become ‘part of something bigger’ ” (Phil, Brazil).

There are many types of Heathen ritual that my informants felt were not common or welcome in ‘mainstream Heathendom’. Rune readings, runic spells, *Seidr*, runic yoga, meditations and other more private rites would all seem to be rituals that would not be endorsed in a temple environment because they are divergent. “I feel more connected with other Heathens where there’s not much New Age, super-mystical and constant magical attitudes towards everything” (Nacio, Costa Rica). Therefore, one of two things may happen with *Höfuðhofið*: these other practices are welcomed and brought into mainstream Heathenship, probably by changing the types of people practicing these rituals and learning about them. Or, secondly, *Höfuðhofið* reinforces a type of collective ritual which is normative, and divergent rituals are kept out in private or natural arenas. This could create divisions, or it could help to compartmentalise certain rituals and interested specialists in Heathendom, actually popularising personalised aspects of the religion which are more customisable.

In conclusion, *Höfuðhofið* cannot be imagined to enhance or replace all types of ritual, but perhaps those rituals which are seen as public are more likely to be conducted in *Höfuðhofið*. Since the Icelandic model highlights the influence that Icelanders have over global Heathens, *Höfuðhofið* itself may continue to inspire Heathens in other countries to also begin to consider conducting public rituals indoors, either in purpose-built temples or in rented conference halls. Therefore, whatever changes begin to take place in Icelandic Heathenship may well be a precursor of changes in Heathendom overall.

### 9.3 Category Two: Social aspects

This section collates the data on social aspects, regarding my research question: *What are the current needs and experiences of the community which the temple may fulfil?* My analysis revealed gradually more information about how other temples are perceived and why, (Chapter 9.4) which began to answer: *What effects does the temple have on dynamics between Heathens internationally? Why is the Icelandic temple more important than Heathen temples in other countries?*

#### 9.3.1 Temple brings more Heathens

Many Heathens note that media such as films, TV series, books and music inspired them on an intimate level and led them to the religion. Nadir (Tunisia) for instance, went through a period



of serious physical illness, his female friend played him some Nordic folk-music which had such a positive affect on his morale that he felt changed, and so began an interest in Nordic mythology. This type of inspiration is unlikely to be directly affected by *Höfuðhofið*. Heathens seem unanimous (approx. 90% in the questionnaire) that *Höfuðhofið* will bring more Heathens into the religion. Therefore, the types of Heathens who will find the religion via society, such as news about *Höfuðhofið*, could be of a different character than those who have an inspirational experience derived from imaginative media. “We are gradually more. We gradually have more infrastructure. The comic-book movies have been a mixed good for us. We gradually work more and more archaeology into our practices, but we also gradually work more modern ways into our practice as well” (Sean, US).

The religion is expressed by many informants as ‘answering a call from the Gods’, and there is a consistent inference that a Heathen has a religious duty to be socially supportive to other potential Heathens.

“I am aiming for the Ambassador position [in an international organisation], as well as a graphic designer position, so that people like me who are wondering here in my country and cannot share anything with the people around them- at least will have someone to go to whenever they have something in mind and so I can be able to help whoever I can with anything I can” (Nadir, Tunisia).

The main impetus is not in helping others, but rather that the religion will be better when there are more people involved. “Hopefully the religion will expand, and grow to be a recognised religion everywhere. But fate belongs to the Nornir themselves, my highest hopes to a betterment of the faith and religion, but who knows?” (Phil, Brazil)

The internet means that the very idea of *Höfuðhofið* can be spread as news and as a fact in the real world, as a change in global society and therefore this has a very concrete affect on the worldview of an individual interested in Heathendom, or Germanic Mythology generally. Although Heathens are consciously aware and expressively against recruitment and proselytising, many Heathens felt that there was a personal responsibility to restore Heathen Religion, and to make it a viable religious alternative for people. This often motivated an action based on a religious duty in setting up contact networks to encourage Heathens to get together and grow.

“Unfortunately, many [Heathens] that I have met have been solitary practitioners simply because there are no other Heathens in their area. We are still a small community that is spread out all over the world. That is why I think the mission of theasatrucommunity.org is so important. We strive to bring Heathens together so they feel connected” (Ty, US).

In the cases of my informants in Muslim countries, the internet was a real lifeline, the passive information about Heathendom opened up new spiritual dimensions for them, encouraging them to see things in a global picture. Nadir explained that since becoming Heathen he wanted to help Heathens in Tunisia, or if he could not practice and express his religion he would move to Scandinavia to be in a culture that permits open worship of the Gods.

“Muslim people are said to be born Muslims, since almost all of them are born in a Muslim family and society, even though they do not practice anything religion-related they still call themselves Muslims. I, too was like them, I did not practice and I did not feel attracted to it. I just couldn’t. When I first heard about Asatru two years ago, I felt something strong calling over. I am trying to put my mind to ease, because I know there is something for me there” (Nadir, Tunisia).

When I asked Lucian if anything had changed for Heathens in the last decade, he replied: “One word: Internet. Without it we wouldn’t even be here and I doubt I would even know how to be a Heathen or even how to speak English! Before the creation of it, everyone was Folkish!” (Lucian, Brazil). Lucian meant that the internet was helping to educate Heathens about the more complex issues of Heathenship, and for example- the ethical consequences of highlighting Germanic ancestry. This can be contrasted with Stefan’s (Sweden) comments that by moving back into the countryside one develops Heathen values, it seems that for Brazilians and Tunisians, the internet also nurtured Heathen values.

Whilst Heathens do not proselytise, it is clear that many hope for social acceptance, social osmosis and establishment. Almost no informants had zero interest in seeing the religion bloom and its members multiply, this is highly significant to this study. *Höfuðhofið* acts as a reference point and encouragement for what Heathens stand for, that they exist as a serious religion rather than a passing trend, and that their religion has a concrete place in the world. In terms of the growth of the religion, the question is whether *Höfuðhofið* is going to passively convert, or to bring more people into the religion than otherwise would have come. As Sean said: “As

diversity increases we're just another option. Once you attend blot we've got you." (Sean, US). If the internet itself can shape Heathen values, the way that Heathens all over the world may be drawn to travel to *Höfuðhofið*, may mean that –like the internet- they meet and mix with other Heathens of different ideologies. The temple could create real-world education and bonds between Heathens globally, and the creation of temples based on the inspiration from Iceland also mean that locally there would be an increase in bonding and communication of ideologies within Heathendom.

Judging by the figures for conversion in Iceland (Chapter 13.1), *Höfuðhofið* seems to be producing a massive boom of those identifying with the religion. Whilst there are a number of social and cultural factors that make Iceland a very different case to other parts of the world, it may be argued as an indicator for future developments in a wider sense.

AFA has long had a system of "Folk Builders" an administrative officer tasked with cultivating local groups and enabling them to practice regular rituals and attract interested and formerly isolated individuals. Asatru UK also developed the expensive and ambitious Asgardian Festival as one of its key focuses to stimulate the growth of Heathen community in the UK. Social media groups typically exist to stimulate regional connections rather than language-specific groups. For instance, there are several Facebook-based organisations that preclude membership based on residence, such as Asatru UK for UK residents only. There are also specific groups for South Africa, for Australia & New Zealand, despite these countries using the English language, I had a hard time making contact since their groups are specifically designed for local purposes. This can also be seen in other languages, a Brazilian Facebook group is not merely a Portuguese-language forum, its goal is specifically for Brazilian activity, a situation reflected in the Spanish and Mexican Facebook groups. Russian social media groups on vk.com are formed around regional districts and cities rather than being nationwide discussion groups. Whilst there is a single large nationwide group on vk.com, the activity is far less than the regionalised groups. Overall, the instinct to encourage and organise religious community and boost membership is a key element of Heathen Religion. With this in mind, *Höfuðhofið* can be clearly expected to play a role in future plans for community, activity and membership.

If *Höfuðhofið* does draw more media attention, and foreign visitors, the frequency of rituals and, arguably the strength of communal participation, may well mean that more people are more often 'hooked' (to paraphrase Sean)- at least on site in Reykjavik.

### 9.3.2 Temple makes life as Heathen easier

I asked a number of questions regarding how and why someone becomes Heathen, and asked my informants to reflect on if the types of people becoming Heathen now are different than those in past decades, -or becoming Heathen for different reasons than in the past. I thought this would be a key to understanding the expectations about *Höfuðhofið* in regards to the religion's expansion. The reaction was generally that "Having a temple will hopefully show other Heathens and inspire them to get involved in their community as we are" (Nate US) or what Evan (Australia) termed a "respectable mainstream option". The overall opinion therefore was that -yes, there will be more Heathens- but that *Höfuðhofið* will give a sense of confidence to become active, and that those activities will be seen in the community. In the questionnaire, I posed three questions that directly sought to gauge the way in which US Heathens saw the potential of *Höfuðhofið* for the religion's future.

1. In what way do you think the building of *Höfuðhofið* will affect the way Heathens will see the future of Germanic Neo-Paganism in general?
  - 48% responded "positive"
  - 42% responded "very positive"
2. In what way do you think the building of *Höfuðhofið* will affect the way non-Heathen people see Germanic Neo-Paganism in general?
  - 56% responded "Have a positive effect"
  - 26% responded "Will have little or no effect".
3. How important do you think the building of *Höfuðhofið* will be for your religion?
  - 48% responded "Extremely important".
  - 41% responded "Slightly important".
  - 12% responded "Not at all important".

Responses to question 2 contrasts with the positivity of the other responses. If only half of USA Heathens thought *Höfuðhofið* will definitely have a positive effect on people generally, how could they be so sure (89%) that *Höfuðhofið* was important? The answer must be that *Höfuðhofið* is definitely important to the religion, and as answer to question 1 informs, 90% of US Heathens thought *Höfuðhofið* gave Heathens a very/positive view of the future. The 56%

response to question 2 is not in contradiction to my informants' responses, just not as eager to make predictions if there would be any future effect on society.

Some informants were sure that *Höfuðhofið* would have an educational effect on society, so that there would be a growing awareness of Heathen values, perhaps: "I hope it will open the existence of Heathenry up to the rest of the world. Bring us out of the dark ages and into a future world that will hopefully be less monotheistic and power hungry and more earth-centric" (Alice, Australia).

Francesca (Spain) like 26% of US Heathens was adamant that *Höfuðhofið* would have no effect. "Absolutely not. It's the Icelandic temple and not the German or Spanish". However, when I approached the topic from another angle it became clear that she could see a logical betterment for Heathens as a result of *Höfuðhofið*:

"Due to the media attention it's received recently, society is more aware that there are Heathens out there... And every day with more information, it makes it easier to become Heathen. If it's easier to become Heathen, we will have more public regional groups, with more public regional groups the information flow will also grow" (Francesca, Spain).

There was a simple discrepancy within some of the other negative views among my informants. When I asked Dodek (Poland) if he thought *Höfuðhofið* would change things for Heathens, he said it would "change nothing". However, contradictorily, he did think it would inspire other Heathen temples to be built around the world. Generally, my interviewed informants were clear about the social effects of *Höfuðhofið* as helping networks and spreading the word, but more specifically in making life easier for Heathens due to society having more understanding and respect for Heathens as a serious religion.

"I think it will be like a rock in a pond, it will generate a ripple effect, it may cause Heathenry to grow, achieve acceptance in other countries that reject our practices. It has given us goals to aim to. It may be beneficial if this gives us some good reputation too, mostly social benefits maybe" (Nacio, Costa Rica).

When I asked Hanna (Sweden) if she thought *Höfuðhofið* would affect Heathendom in her country she was very expectant: "I hope so. I hope our work for a religious place will get easier. I hope it's the beginning of 'our' return after centuries of Christianity". I observed that this was

the strongest ‘feeling’ apparent in the data as a whole; where spiritual aspects and expectations of ritual or communication with deities were more obscure, most Heathens understood *Höfuðhofið* as a clear social activator.

The socially activating effect is usually quite conscious: “There are plans of a temple in Germany, but I think a temple is a project for publicity” Ada (Germany). As Nate (US) mentioned at the start of this chapter, he hoped that *Höfuðhofið* would inspire Heathens to get involved with the community at large. He felt that *Höfuðhofið* was a call to action. Other informants had very clear ideas on how this could take shape:

“Too often Heathens, and other Pagans, are happy to dwell in a counter-culture state and claim persecution. If Heathens truly found the solicitors, architects, business people with Heathen views and organised them, then Heathenry could become much more mainstream and solidified” (Arthur, UK).

Just what “mainstream and solidified” meant in the context of building temples, seemed to be a very widespread conviction among my informants that *Höfuðhofið* set a precedent in informing the world: “More acceptance and a movement away and dispelling of all the bullshit stigma that has been attached to our beliefs” (Luther, South Africa). My impression was that the expectation from *Höfuðhofið* is that it will offer a sense of confidence and legitimacy in societies for individual Heathens. They felt as though *Höfuðhofið* would be a turning point in how they were seen by their society and how global senses of acceptance and knowledge would be amplified by *Höfuðhofið*.

In order to investigate the potential for change, and the realism of that hope that many Heathens had; I firstly probed how Heathens felt they were perceived by society. This has been an interest of other studies of Germanic Contemporary Paganism, such as Egil Asprem who called it “the shared polemical discourse between Ásatrú movements and the public at large” (Asprem 2008, 43). I found that Heathen senses of discourse with the public were incidental to the Snook and Gregorius Paradigms. As Snook says, Heathens are “hyperaware” of “shared polemical discourse” and the only way to ease that hyperawareness or change the discourse is realising the Gregorius Paradigm’s vision of a perceived ‘restoration’ of Heathendom.

Many informants gave detailed accounts of experiences where they felt outside of a norm. However, initial questions about how they were perceived by society were fairly superficial

remarks based on physical appearance. The reaction tended to be blasé; “Most of society does not care [...] Not because it is banned, but people generally do not care about it” (Alana, Czech Rep). Through difficult management of questions, I was able to gain specific examples of individuals’ experiences as a Heathen, from a full variety of cultures- secular, Christian, Muslim. The majority of informants were, despite the first dismissals of society’s views of them, relieved to express their anxieties and frustrations about being a Heathen in society. Mikke (Sweden) said that it almost felt like coming out of the closet as gay when he had begun talking openly about being Heathen. He added that it was demoralising to be laughed at in the workplace and not taken seriously by friends.

Not being taken seriously by society underlines the keen social ambitions of Heathens globally, and I interpret this being directly relational to the social expectations concerning *Höfuðhofið*, which seems to be the major reason Heathens are so positive about it.

“Some people from Primary School and High School who found me years later started talking in our school reunion groups about me -and not in a nice way. Even someone who was considered my best friend was constantly requesting me to stop being so dedicated to the organisation and taking it so seriously –saying it wasn’t going to flourish” (Nacio, Costa Rica).

Although Nacio and Mikke were not taken seriously, the majority of Heathens felt that the religion was perceived as politically and morally dangerous by society. There were Heathens that felt both issues were equally present,

“I think Americans as a whole have a tendency to view us as somewhere between ‘nerdy LARPer’ and the ‘Aryan Brotherhood’. Maybe a dash of ‘You must love those Marvel movies’ mixed in. We certainly don’t get much positive, or even passably neutral press. Best news article I’ve ever seen on Heathens was about the new temple being built in Iceland” (Randy, USA).

For this informant, therefore, mockery and fear towards Heathens in society can realistically change due to *Höfuðhofið*. Cäci felt that currently any attempt to worship as a Heathen openly would have severe consequences -or factually had aroused suspicion.

“Just imagine a Heathen group celebrating Ostara [Easter ritual] in the market square in front of the church and the town hall. People would call the police and there would be

a spontaneous anti-demonstration of enthusiastic anti-racists and anti-fascists hooting down the sacrifice. So if we meet, we meet in more or less hidden places, and people coming alongside by accident put their heads together and you see in their faces, that they think "Oh, that's the local chapter of NPD" (Cäci, Germany).

The Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) has been called "the most significant neo-Nazi party to emerge after 1945" (Davies & Lynch 2002, 315). Several German informants felt that by circumstance of being German, with its political history and ban on Germanic heritage symbols such as runes, that life as a Heathen would be better in the Viking homelands. This was a common perception, that something 'more Nordic' was more valuable in religious terms. I attributed this to the Gregorius Paradigm which I later address as a concept of Iceland as idyllic. (Chapter 9.4.1)

"Some people think we are Nazis, just because of symbols, they are very ignorant. To wear the Mjöllnir sometimes is enough... In Scandinavia or Iceland it's quite normal to be a Heathen and it's accepted by government." [Interviewer: Will *Höfuðhofið* change things for you?] "That other people see that our religion is reputable" (Alicia, Germany).

Cäci's fears are shared by Heathens well outside of Germany and its unique political relationship with Germanic Pagan ideology. Contrary to Alicia's assertion about "normal Heathens" in Scandinavia, there was just as much stigma there:

"Too much people are not educated and think that it has something to do with Nazism or extreme groups. That is very common in journalists and even in the education system. We got a call from a man that told us that the teacher in his daughter's school told the students that it was forbidden to have a mjöllnir pendant! In Sweden!! That is a lie and makes me furious" (Stefan, Sweden).

When I attended a blot in a woodland area one night, two policemen arrived with torches and asked us if it was "OK" to approach. They had received reports from passers-by -completely unseen by me even though I was supposed to be observing- that there were "Neo-Nazi Satanists sacrificing in the local woods". When I explained that I was a university researcher and the ritual was "mainly for my benefit" they stopped taking down the names and addresses of the ritual participants and wished us all well. The Heathens said they should bring me along more often.



In several countries, Heathens felt that their jobs would be in danger if word got around. “I write and publish under a penname in order to protect my family and professional career” (Arthur, UK). One would have thought that compared to Scandinavia and Germany; common knowledge of the Mjölnir standing for Nordic heritage was lesser known in USA, but there were similar fears as in Europe, “One of my kindred members got kicked off of his work site because a woman saw his hammer and reported him as a racist, he got suspended from the job for a few days” (Nate, US). Indeed, another American met this reaction regularly, “When I say I am Asatru the first thing people associate with it is Nazis which is not what I am by any means. I find that I have to educate everyone I meet on what being Asatru really means.” (Ty, US) This indicates that, at least in the minds of American Heathens, society is becoming quite aware of the presence and complex identity politics regarding this very small religious community, it is perhaps possible that there are sizeable Heathen communities in the local areas of these informants that have informed people’s opinions, participating in Asprem’s “polemical discourse”. Alternatively, the Snook Paradigm is a fundamental constant in Heathen identity and religious content.

One Heathen had managed to covertly express his religion socially through his work in academia, due to the inherent social dangers it posed to his career and to his family’s lives,

“When I had my [Heathen] conversion experience, I realised I was permanently departing the academic *cursus honorum* and that my participation in such matters would permanently damage any academic credibility I had. Fortunately, I work at a community college, where publishing is not very important. I’ve been able to switch my focus to Norse matters, and to do a lot of non-academic writing. I’m largely in the closet about my religion, and I am concerned how it might affect my wife if it became more widely known. We live in a small town and she is active in her Church” (Tim, US).

In contrast, in Poland, a country with historical animosity to Germanic heritage ideology, (Aitamurto & Simpson 2013) Heathens had less experience with the stigma of racism. “In the army they think that I’m different because I’m not monotheistic, and believe in many Gods, but they respect my faith. People are surprised that I believe in many Gods, and always say I’m a modern Viking” (Dodek, Poland). The common ground however, perhaps tapping into Asprem’s “shared polemical discourse” was still the experience of being an outsider, with enormous pressure that their religion was unacceptable. “Living in a Catholic country [...]

people think you're nuts, some that you're a Satanist. It's better to pretend that you're Catholic and don't even go to church than be a religious Heathen, how twisted is that?" (Anka, Poland)

There are indications, however, that *Höfuðhofið* could change things for Heathens on the basis that it gives them confidence. Roger (Sweden) said that he has noticed how reactions to him talking with non-Heathens about his religion has changed through the years, not so much a question of society changing but that Heathens, like himself, were speaking about their religion with more conviction. "I've noticed through the years that it's very much co-related to the subtle communication when you meet somebody". He emphasised body language rather than the actual words said. "The more I know what I'm talking about ... the more happy I am, the more proud I am, the more positive the response". Simple and obvious as this psychology was, I found it rather enlightening in context given that all my informants felt that although being a Heathen could be hard, things had been getting better over the years. This improvement was due to Heathens gaining confidence. Furthermore, perhaps *Höfuðhofið* was not so much about Heathens hoping people would now accept them as a 'real religion' but that they themselves now felt a sense of permanence, that their faith was not part of a fad, and that they could have faith in each other- in their community which is so troubled by divisions. "I reckon it will also tell others that the old Gods have returned, and that they are staying for good" (Lewis, UK). Lewis's assertion certainly affirms the Gregorius Paradigm, but it also applies to Heathens "being told" by the achievement of its community that the Gods "are staying for good".

This self-confidence about being Heathen made more sense when I considered that there were still many people who had no idea what Heathendom was, there was not a single "shared polemical discourse" (Asprem 2008: 43) rather there was hope in being an alternative, odd little religion. It fundamentally resolves the Snook and Gregorius Paradigms. There is the hope that the temple might provide an opportunity for a positive first meeting for people who have no knowledge or experience of Contemporary Germanic Paganism. Removed from political baggage, it is possible that Heathens, with growing confidence from *Höfuðhofið* become more influential in their secular and religious lives. Roger had learnt that he could talk quite freely about his religion to people who had no knowledge of Contemporary Paganism, since they were more curious and open. "The ones that do actually have a standpoint of religion or spirituality in general, they will have their standpoint no matter what the fuck I say". He related a story that once, on a train in Sweden, he came into conversation with a stranger who asked him where he was travelling, Roger explained to the person that he was a Heathen priest on his way to perform

a handfasting, a Heathen wedding ritual. Roger explained, “I present myself, not as a Gothi - because no one knows what that is-” but after saying rather directly that he was a Heathen priest the stranger smiled and allegedly said, “Wow! I didn’t know you even existed”. Roger also added that “In those situations it’s good to point out that most of our [modern Swedish society’s] traditions are actually Heathen”. Which is an example of the Gregorius Paradigm, and shows that currently the only way to ease the Snook Paradigm is by the potential to create a reality where the Gregorius Paradigm comes true and people begin to buy the product of the narrative that Contemporary Germanic Paganism is a form of ‘original religion’.

When I asked Nate (US) what he felt he would get out of *Höfuðhofið*, he replied in singular and plural terms. “Mainly here in the U.S. it’s to be recognised, one of the main requirements is a permanent place of worship. So having one will allow me to legally do handfastings and funerals things like that. And we will be taken more seriously as a religion.” Another American also commented on the legal aspects of being a Heathen, and the hope that *Höfuðhofið* would change that in future. “I think USA does not take Heathens seriously. In the eyes of the law Asatru is seen as a gang. We need everyone to know that we are serious in our religion and we have the same right to honour our Gods and Goddesses” (Ty, US).

Overall, the examples in this subsection above consistently fit into the Snook and Gregorius Paradigms. Heathens are hyperaware of how they are -or could be- perceived. This anxiety seems to be calmed by the hope of what temples like *Höfuðhofið* can provide.

### 9.3.3 Denominational Competition

As shown in Background (Chapter 8), four Folkish organisations have built their own temples in the US, and northern, western and southern Europe. All had strong public relations announcements copying the original media headline used for Ásatrúarfélagið temple. I interpret this, in line with many of my informants; as a reaction to the Icelandic project and that being first and having everyone know about it- is of fundamental importance to their own projects. Certainly in the case of the UK temple, which can house perhaps ten people- it is not made with the intention of fulfilling a desperate need for privacy, practical support or enriching religious communication. That temple specifically must be part of a status symbol signal. I interpret the other Folkish temples in the same light, for example Jim Lyngvild’s highly publicised inauguration with two anti-immigration politicians (Chapter 8, Event 9).

There is a qualitative difference between inspired organisations and individuals, and the motivations behind the four temples already built. The events surrounding *Höfuðhofið* (Chapter 8) highlight the major rift in the denominational difference between ultra-conservative and liberal-universalist Heathenship. In my theoretical interpretation, *Höfuðhofið* is at the centre of religious market forces, and the significant events outlined are expressions of consumers and competitors. The following sections outline the differences in these expressions.

#### **9.3.3.1 “I’ll build one myself.”**

As stated previously, some informants were less enthusiastic about the future, only to show that in fact they gave off mixed signals. For example; “The temple has some influence but I doubt that it will change the future significantly. Heathenry works well without temples” adding that, “if I will ever win the lottery jackpot I’ll build one myself” (Anton, Germany). The financial constraint was the major consideration for informants, on building a temple or not, despite generally being part of organisations. The understanding that *Höfuðhofið* is built with state money increased their assertion that Iceland has a cultural default to Heathenship (Gregorius Paradigm).

Some Heathens were so inspired that money would not stop them, now they knew what could be achieved. When asked if he would like to see a similar temple as in Iceland in Russia, Juriy answered with a smile, “I will build it on my own” (Juriy, Russia). I interpret this confidence in Chapter 10, in relation to Stark & Bainbridge’s Axiom 1 (Stark & Bainbridge 2006, 380). It confirms the newfound confidence (Axiom 1) as something communal and unifying. “Hell, I’d like to build one myself some day if only to prove that American Heathens CAN work together to accomplish something” (Randy, US). This reinforces the argument that the greatest value in a temple is social.

#### **9.3.3.2 Competition based on divisional difference**

As stated in Chapter 8, my interpretation of events is in agreement with the majority of my informants, “A lot of more conservative groups started their own Hofes here in the states after that whole conflict surrounding sacrifice. I think they wanted to steal the thunder of being the first and only. However, none that I’ve seen have been anywhere near the scale of what Ásatrúarfélagið is building” (Randy, US) This can be evidenced in rival Folkish temple-builders such as Stephen McNallen, “There has been no temple, shrine, or other structure like this in

almost a thousand years...It is a hallmark in the revival of our indigenous European faith!”  
(Online: Library of Asatru Lore. 2015)

Therefore, the symbol of *Höfuðhofið* is generally a means to disassociate oneself from lesser imitations, although the four Folkish temples have come first. A large part of the data I collected involved the Folkish issue, it was clearly a source of great frustration. Several Folkish informants expressed that their denomination was the largest, and that “universalists” were hypocrites and destroying the community. I did not observe any difference of opinion about *Höfuðhofið* between informants who made the point of identifying as Folkish and those who did not. My US questionnaire does not ask for any denomination, but the organisations where I gave access to the questionnaire allowed Folkish and Universalist members. Ideologically, Folkish can knowingly back an openly universalist temple, no universalists would knowingly back an openly Folkish temple, this is evidenced by the handling of divisions summarised by the following two testaments.

Simon (Denmark) a friend of Stephen McNallen, identifies as Folkish:

“What the universalists do is that they twist the ideas of the Folkish into raving racism... and fight is as if it was pure evil. As if there were not more important stuff to consider in a globalised world filled with crises and war. The funny thing here is that they are banging on open doors. In reality there are no hordes of people from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, south America or elsewhere that are desperately trying to enter Asatru... A few perhaps - but not the droves of sad, humiliated and desperate people turned down by the evil Volkish camp..... In the end it is just a theoretical debate that makes the universalist feel good. A little like the cries of racism when it comes to immigration. In reality many of the “good people” -politically correct people...the elite... do not have a single immigrant in their personal circles. Just to mention it – in my local group one of the most well-liked people is a woman of half-Turkish origin. We also have a young man married to a Chinese. He brings her from time to time without even thinking of it. Nice people are always welcome.”

Similar in age and length of time as Heathen to Sören, Sean (US) observed the danger of Folkish groups in that they failed to demarcate between heritage and white separatism, and their tendency to politicise themselves.

“In the 1990s I got along with both sides on the adoptive versus Folkish issue. I took flack from both sides over this. Eventually most ended up near the centre anyways so I ended up outliving the issue. But I learned some interesting stuff about the Folkish. They lack immunity to invasions by racists. I watched a Folkish kindred [congregation] admit a skinhead, who drove away a good member. Then every few months there was one more skinhead and one less good member. Eventually the skinheads took over. They ejected me from a meeting and stopped inviting me. Eventually they also stopped going to any Asatru events. A kindred 20 plus years old that died from admitting a skinhead who metastasised like cancer.” (Sean, US)

The difference in denominations is clearly more than a primary disagreement of a right to worship, it is linked to a socio-political polarisation. This polarisation in context of a temple as a product of values is, I find, essential to the dynamics of recent events (Chapter 8). Comprehending the data in context of these events creates the following logical question,

- Almost total positivity for Höfuðhofið
- Höfuðhofið stands for anti-Folkish
- Four rival temples have been built by Folkish organisations
- These temples have little global support
- Why?

One response would be: “A ranch in the midst of the mid-US is not a Heathen Hof” (Arthur, UK) referring to AFA’s temple. Despite potential problems in differentiating between temple and hof, the actual quality of each building- *Höfuðhof* versus ranch- must tie into the US Questionnaire’s 73% that felt the temple was holy. If religious power or sanctity can be graded in terms of how holy a temple is- what are the factors behind this? Could it merely be that Heathens see *Höfuðhofið* as holy due its location in a Viking country that has so much ideological symbolism for Heathens? If so, it seems to be expressed as an Icelandic ideal which in turn seems to form the Heathen Mecca concept.

#### 9.4 Category three: The Heathen Mecca

Whilst chapter 9.4 began to answer- Why is the Icelandic temple more important than Heathen temples in other countries? It became increasingly clear that the reasons were also

representative of socio-political tensions within the international community, answering- What effects does the temple have on dynamics between Heathens internationally?

Several of my informants used the term “Heathen Mecca”, in a negatory sense. An interesting choice of words in that it was common among so many who had no contact with each other, and I did not trace any origin to media coverage, making me inclined to assume that it was a common original thought rather than an idea or term that was trending. I had not seen the topic discussed online or mentioned in social gatherings. The term only emerged during my interviews, which was the first time that many of my informants claimed had ever discussed *Höfuðhofið* with anyone, Heathen or otherwise.

#### **9.4.1 The Icelandic Ideal**

The focus on *Höfuðhofið*, both in creating competition and inspiration derives from the rich profile that is Icelandic Heathenship. There are two main aspects of this ideal, one expressed in terms of Icelandic Heathens’ values and ethical Heathenship. The other aspect is rooted in a cross-cultural archetype of Iceland as a form of Holy Land for Heathens, this means that Iceland has a greater potency in the Gregorius Paradigm. I see this ideal as a cross-cultural archetype, because –as global media headlines show- Iceland can be widely recognised by non-Heathens as the archetypal Viking or Heathen landscape.

Furthermore, the Icelandic ideal fulfils two major drives. The Snook Paradigm is satiated because anxiety about being misunderstood or rejected by society can be changed by the moral standard that Iceland represents. This moral standard is given additional authority because a temple built in Iceland fulfils the Gregorius Paradigm; as the media say- “Iceland to build first temple to Norse Gods since Viking age” (Guardian February 2015), “Iceland Is Officially Worshiping Norse Gods Again” (Big Think, January 2016), “Return of the Norse Gods” (Renegade Tribune, February 2016).

##### **9.4.1.1 Humanist ideal**

All my Icelandic informants were connected to -or were actual members of- Ásatrúarfélagið. My impression is that most Icelandic Heathens are associated or willing to be involved with Ásatrúarfélagið, it is possible that this is due to the small population of Iceland (approx. 323,00). In contrast with continental Scandinavia and Europe, several informants were not members of any organisation. Ásatrúarfélagið’s statement, “We particularly reject the use of Ásatrú as a

justification for supremacy ideology” (Online: Ásatrúarfélagið. 2016.(2)). Their stance on Gay marriage is definitive of opposition to right-wing Heathenship, and is regarded as such by several informants, “I think they set the standard for what Asatru/Heathenry should at least be; open and good to all peoples regardless of faith or lack thereof; or race or sexuality. I personally look up to Iceland’s Ásatrúarfélagið in matters of society.” (Lewis, UK) This seems to be affirmed as a majority view (Chapter 8. Events 8 & 14)

#### 9.4.1.2 Authenticity ideal

Several Germans gave some of the clearest expressions of the Icelandic ideal, on the basis that they imagine Iceland to be more genuine and orthopraxic in its very culture; Heathen by default. Although it exemplifies the Gregorius Paradigm, it also illustrates the view that many Heathens see their religion as something cultural rather than racial- “cultural heathendom” as Gregorius categorises it (Gregorius 2015, 73). My Muslim informants in Tunisia and Azerbaijan both expressed a wish to move to Scandinavia because they believed that Heathens lived more freely there since Heathen practices and beliefs were part of the basic culture and folklore. “I want to be there because I want to know the place where the Norse ancestors was.... I think will be great to be with more persons as me. And know more about the old traditions” (Miryam, Mexico).

Anton (Germany), felt that Icelandic Asatru was very similar to Asatru in the rest of Scandinavia. “There are differences to Germany and the UK, as both countries have their own mythology”. Here Anton cited examples such as the Beowulf poem and German fairy-tale tradition, but that since information about German and English mythologies are not as ‘extensive’ as the Nordic mythology, most Heathens prefer to use ON sagas and the Eddas. Gerald (Germany) also noted that Germans have a different body of Lore to Icelanders and Scandinavians, but added that- “Often other Heathens are envious and/or try to copy [the Icelandic heritage]”. Gerald felt that the Icelandic ideal was popular among Heathens because it was “most easy to live it there, most authentically in adaption from what survived in scripts like the Edda and sagas”.

Part of the Gregorius Paradigm tells us that a country or culture imagined as ‘more Norse’ is expected to have more default Heathen value. “I think [Icelandic Heathens are] probably less reconstructed than Asatru in Germany and closer to the original religion.” (Rupert, Germany) This value of “original” means heightened value in contrast to anywhere else, “I’m a bit envious, they are more accepted. [How do you think Icelandic Asatru differs from Heathendom



in other countries?] I think they have more traditional knowledge” (Alicia, Germany). Note the expressions “less reconstructed” (Rupert) and “more traditional” (Alicia); both are expressions of value.

When I asked Ada (Germany) if she considered *Höfuðhofið* holy, she answered: “yes, but I don’t think all Asatru in the world have to visit this temple now and make a ‘holy trip’ like the Muslims’ *Haddsch*”. This product-value tied to a specific location creates the Mecca trademark. However, Heathens are clearly conscious and conflicted about the consequences of what their consumerism of the temple will mean for Icelanders. “You know that Ásatrúarfélagið, at the moment, is not so pleased to have the temple for public due to the menaces received. [But if allowed, would you visit?] I surely will do so” (Francesca, Spain). Astrid (Norway) was one of the few who were less sure about visiting: [Interviewer: do you want to go?] “No, I don’t.” However, even she added, “I mean, if I was already in Reykjavik, sure”. She had observed online that there were non-Icelandic Heathens who intended to visit *Höfuðhofið*, noting several negative intentions- “threats by so-called Heathens”.

Randy showed respect while expressing the spiritual pull: “I would likely just end up taking the tour, as I doubt Ásatrúarfélagið will be inviting just anyone to hang out for any services. Not after all the threats of defacement they got. I’d just like to see it, knowing that it’s one of the first temples to our Gods in about a thousand years; that’s a big moment” (Randy, US).

This imagined experience was consciously reflected over in different terms. Some were aware that promised experience would be powerful, Cäci (Germany) deflected the inference my question provoked with indignant humour, “What should happen in your imagination? Some kind of Messiah gliding down from heaven on some kind of cloud, surrounded by a chanting choir of angels? For me, this is a very Christian influenced sight on the theme. A temple is only a collection of stones, concrete and wood”. This repeats the opinion of Astrid that a temple in itself is not holy. On further discussion, Cäci appeared to contradict this view and which reinforced my understanding of the USA questionnaire’s 73% response that it was holy. Cäci said she would try to visit *Höfuðhofið*, because: “I want to feel it myself, if there is any kind of holy energy”.

Luther (South Africa) had imagined his experience to include the Icelandic perspective, “To see what Heathenry is like for Icelanders, first hand, and to speak to Heathens there in a space where we can feel a kinship”. When I asked him what he expected to find, “[I expect it will be]

pleasant, a footnote in my journey as a Heathen. A fact-finding exercise, even”. This sense of consuming a product and sharing in its production is expressed in terms of the religion advancing to a better level. Both Luther and Alice (Australia) expressed the imagined experience in terms of a spiritual ‘levelling-up’, again reflecting a sense of value increase, “It is another aspect of my religion that I would like to achieve” (Alice, Australia). The achieving in question is perhaps not so much about a spiritual journey, but the religion’s journey to attain a social permanency and authoritative quality, “I don’t think of it like a ‘Heathen Mecca’, but it IS an incredible achievement which I would like to see for myself and support if I can” (Randy, US).

#### 9.4.2 Living in Heathen Mecca

For those Heathens living in Iceland, there was a discomfort at being placed in the centre of international tensions, and given authority to be some form of solution. Agnes (Iceland) felt the media attention was confusing. When I asked her if people outside of Iceland knew much about *Höfuðhofið*, she answered that “*Höfuðhofið* got lot of attention, to my surprise [...] we got lot of attention from abroad, more than here in Iceland, I don’t understand it”. When I encouraged her to reflect on the possible reasons for this she explained: “Some Heathens have some strange idea that Iceland is like a Heathen Mecca or that because there is lot of literacy on the Heathen past, that we posses some ultimate wisdom of Heathenry”.

Although Alfa (Iceland) said that she felt things were generally the same as before, she did recognise that *Höfuðhofið* was raising awareness for Ásatrú in her country. “It has maybe sparked more interest in Ásatrú than before. Media coverage is increasing (both bad and good) and more Icelanders not familiar with Ásatrú are asking about it. So maybe people are now more educated on what we’re all about”. As with non-Icelandic Heathens who were conflicted that Icelanders might not like their ‘consumption’ of the temple, Icelandic Heathens were conflicted that although it is good for the religion, it is unpleasant for Icelanders.

“I must admit I am concerned for the attention *Höfuðhofið* will bring. For example, I would not want it to become a tourist attraction and wouldn’t want any tourists at all there. It’s a place of worship and community, not a zoo or something to take a million photos of. I am worried that *Höfuðhofið* could become as the Hallgrímskirkja -the famous big church in downtown Reykjavík where tourists are basically 24/7 taking

photos, walking around, looking etc. Maybe this comes off as an exclusionist view, but this temple is not meant to be the Mecca of Paganism. It is a building for the Icelandic Ásatrúarfélagið and should service its members” (Alfa, Iceland).

Alfa imagined *Höfuðhofið* as important for providing facilities for children, since they often get bored when adults go for a coffee and a chat at the current meeting centre. Alfa was interested in inviting non-Heathens into *Höfuðhofið* if it was for the enrichment of the Heathens themselves (not for tourism), such as involving the university who could give lectures on “history, sagas, archaeology”. Alfa was also keen on music, to, “offer artists to use the space if their art is connected to Ásatrú or Icelandic heritage”.

When I spoke with the architect himself, he said that a major design concern in the acoustics was getting an atmospheric balance between creating ambient reverb which is good for musical performances and the type of reverb that is bad for hearing people talk clearly, such as during rituals- which he underlined as the primary purpose of *Höfuðhofið*. He explained how important the possibility that musical performances could be conducted there; saying that many Icelandic Heathens are very active in music.<sup>9</sup> Magnús said that he and his team had used expensive and advanced computer modelling to design the exact micro-second of reverb to allow for the right balance between speaking and music. Therefore, the temple seems to have a very practical function and design for Icelanders, however, Icelandic Heathens seem to feel that the interest from abroad, and from tourists will compromise the practical needs for *Höfuðhofið* and the valuable practical uses it offers.

Agnes spoke about how important nature was to her religion, that she felt closer to the Gods there. In light of that I asked if *Höfuðhofið* would be holy for her personally. “I think that

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<sup>9</sup> Hilmar Örn himself has written the music for over ten films including *Beowulf and Grendel* (2005) starring Gerard Butler and Stellan Skarsgård. Magnús referred also to past public performances by Heathens such as Steindór Andersen a singer of Rímur; a traditional Icelandic chant, who regularly performs and participates in Ásatrúarfélagið events. Artists such as Sigur Rós have recorded and performed with Steindór Andersen several times, not least the medieval Heathen poem *Hrafnagaldur óðins* that also involved Hilmar Örn (Online: Ásatrúarfélagið. 2008.). Magnús’ performatory model of *Höfuðhofið*’s design, combined with previous Heathen musical cooperations in Iceland, can also be seen in Norway most recently with the start of the Viking, Folk and Black Metal festival Midgårdsblot. The festival was held at Midgård Historical Centre, located in Borre in Vestfold, where a reconstructed Viking hall stands. As part of the festival there was an animal sacrifice blot, where the blood was used to consecrate/redden participants and idols, the animal was then consumed in a ritual meal, based on historical reconstruction. Such blots are rare and even opposed by many Heathens due to the social taboos involved in animal sacrifice. As stated in the chronology section, the threats against *Höfuðhofið* actually involved animal sacrifice, which the Ásatrúarfélagið officially oppose. Therefore, the religious aspect of the animal sacrifice at the music festival of Midgardsblot and the pop musical performances planned as part of the social aspect of *Höfuðhofið*, are stark reflections of one another.

holiness of the temple is more about the society which creates it. Not about the building itself. With good people it will be holy, and of course it will be ours, not a place we have to borrow”. Musical cooperations with non-Heathen musical artists is clearly a social action of passive recruitment. It is a means to feel more accepted in society and to assert Heathen heritage in mainstream media. The temple might encourage non-Heathen family members and friends to participate or at least visit Heathen rituals. Certainly this would lead to a greater sympathy and understanding for the religion, but possibly increased conversion. As for Heathens outside of Iceland it is not likely that any major shift in familial dynamics would occur due to *Höfuðhofið*. However, as media shows increased support for Heathendom in Iceland, and its growing numbers of adherents, it is probable that a significant positive move occurs in how Heathendom is perceived. Reliable statistics show that Icelanders are becoming far more sympathetic to the religion since *Höfuðhofið* has been announced (Chapter 13.1)

## 10 Discussion

In answering- *How does the importance of Höfuðhofið relate to the current needs and experiences of the community?* It seems that the predominant need for Heathens outside of Iceland is to have the temple give them social acceptance, mainly by disassociation with Folkish Heathens. This leads to a kind of arms race, where the Folkish have responded with their own rival temples, which in turn has led to intensified rapprochement against Folkish organisations, and a greater value placed on the Icelandic temple. This means that the answer to the above question is answered also in response to: *What effects does the temple have on dynamics between Heathens internationally?*

Declaration 127 (Chapter 8. Event 14) and the IASC/Asatru EU support for Ásatrúarfélagið (Chapter 8. Event 8) indicates the move to bring other denominations together into a much more aligned and mutually accepting whole, where camaraderie is achieved through a common opponent. The impact of the temple within the Heathen community and an awareness that society is watching via global media (Chapter 8. Events 7 & 8), catalysed competing forces over a definition and face of the religion. The temple is as unifying as it is divisive, since a majority of interviewees and probably the community as a whole (Chapter 8. Events 8, 9 & 14) agree that genetic, gender, and sexual exclusionism is offensive and defamatory to a sense of ideal Heathenship. The Folkish side attempt to assert differentiation from inclusionary Heathens, such as AFA's announcement (Chapter 8. Event 13). The construction of temples by Folkish organisations is an action in this competition, arguably a marketing signal rather than something necessary for the intimacy of the organisation itself (Chapter 8. Event 9).

The construction of rival temples leads non-Folkish Heathens to claim comradeship with Höfuðhofið, and express affinity with Ásatrúarfélagið's democratic humanist inclusive ideals. Since non-Folkish ideologues cannot align with all the other temples- which are all Folkish, it means that there is a heightened focus on Höfuðhofið as the one and only. It also intensifies the significance and symbolism of what is developing into orthodox and deviant Heathenships, with Höfuðhofið being a kind of Mecca or central site for "universalists". However, it is unclear just how exactly Ásatrúarfélagið will police and regulate the visitors to their unwitting Mecca. It is foreseeably simple for Folkish rivals or any ideological opponents to create an actual hostile situation which forces Ásatrúarfélagið to simply close its doors to non-Icelanders altogether.

In understanding these tensions, we can also understand: Why is the Icelandic temple more important than Heathen temples in other countries? There seems to be two main reasons, and that is what I term ‘ideals’. Each ideal means that *Höfuðhofið* has a much greater value in the eyes of global media and Heathens themselves. I argue that the latter is probably specifically relative to the former. Global media are more inclined to be excited and sell the story of *Höfuðhofið* rather than its rivals in a sleepy English village as the ‘first temple in 1000 years’, due to the international concept of Iceland as a ‘Viking’ landscape. Heathens are equally inspired by this concept, and furthermore my research shows that Heathens react to the global media coverage, it catalyses their instincts and desires concerning their own religion, such as growth and acceptance in society. This aspect will now be discussed in terms of value- the prime importance of *Höfuðhofið*, where denominations and divisions are market forces, international support and interest in *Höfuðhofið* is investment, and rival Folkish temples are market competitors.

## 10.1 Theoretical application

Few Heathens themselves indicate that their temples are actions of a Religious Market, “Maybe a temple does some marketing and draws interest to the masses” (Anton, Germany), but the sense of competition between Heathens is understood, as is the competition to be seen as the public face of Heathendom. Furthermore, the long-running anxieties explained in the Snook and Gregorius Paradigms can be expressed in RMT, “difficulty in obtaining strongly desired rewards not only produces the emotion we call frustration, but also leads to a knotty intellectual and logical quandary” (Stark & Bainbridge 2006, 385).

Production, consumption and investment is largely carried out by the same group. However, clergy (administrative and spiritual officers) strive to channel production into brands or firms, in our case, the market competes over consumers, so that the quality of rival products is called into question in order to affect consumption and investment. The threats made on *Höfuðhofið* were an act of market aggression, the subsequent support of Ásatrúarfélagið and their brand of the humanist ideal was an investment. Declaration 127 (Chapter 8. Event 14) was an act of market aggression in retaliation to the product of AFA’S online declaration on heteronormativity and white separatism (Chapter 8. Event 13). It was also marketing the rival product; the humanist ideal.

What is apparent in the recent chronology (Chapter 8) concerning *Höfuðhofið*, is that a quick competition in actualising their own temple arose from groups that appeared to have different denominations (brands) than in Iceland. The media headlines and own words of these groups echoed specifically “first in 1000 years”, which is something of a brand trademark. It highlights the specific competition to be the first -and to fulfil a unique place- there cannot be several that are the first. Therefore, the other temples are not so much inspirations from *Höfuðhofið* -rather they are competitors. The quality of a brand being the first gives a product trademark that Folkish groups clearly felt enhanced their market value, since it meant that they were powerful and successful if they could assert an end to the anxieties of the Snook Paradigm, -this is dealt with in Chapter 10.1.2.

As many Heathens seemed aware- *Höfuðhofið* will have a major affect on public relations, that is, it will advertise and promote the religion and make lives better for Heathens since they themselves predict they will be more respected and taken seriously by society. Social rewards are argued by Iannaccone & Bainbridge as most clearly visible in the profit motive and entrepreneurial spirit in NRMs (Iannaccone & Bainbridge 2010, 464). If we see the social rewards of mainstream acceptance stemming from *Höfuðhofið*, we could say that the idea of *Höfuðhofið* is seen as a profit maximiser.

Profit maximisers derive from producers, which are human beings, *Höfuðhofið* therefore is a profit maximiser because it promises to enhance production. The product will sell more in mainstream society, because the Icelandic ideal sells more than an American temple. This can be described as “the reward of affection” (Stark & Bainbridge 2006, 383).

As we have seen, the Icelandic ideal is a not only based on aesthetics (authenticity ideal) but on the ideological politics (humanist ideal) and ethics which the mainstream perceives *Ásatrúarfélagið* to stand for. As the media has shown, *Ásatrúarfélagið* are under attack from Heathens opposed to homosexual marriage. The AFA’s official stance supporting heterosexuality was interpreted by many as proof that AFA was ideologically one of the organisations opposed to the Icelandic humanist ideal. We could say that the Icelandic ideal is a compensator because it promises to be the social relief of Heathens who feel embarrassed, misunderstood, discriminated against as “weirdos” or “neo-nazis”- anxieties of the Snook Paradigm.

Just why *Höfuðhofið* attracts a wider empathy than temples of Folkish competitors indicate that *Höfuðhofið* promises to stand for a humanist democratic ideology which is unambiguously non-racist and non-homophobic, and therefore will have a maximised profit efficiency in allowing Heathens to be accepted in mainstream society as individuals who cannot be misunderstood as neo-Nazis. The derision of Folkish competitors' temples as "ranches -not hofs" may be on the basis of the ideology that the organisation behind the construction are known to stand for, and not on the visual aspect. The essential question of what makes *Höfuðhofið* holy is that it has, at least in part, strong socio-political branding that will allow for much more powerful social rewards. Another social reward is the enlargement of the Heathen community due to 'marketing' power.

Production is group rituals, social activities, study groups, friendship networks- "even the faith maintained by congregations" (Iannaccone & Bainbridge 2010, 466). If the temple is a product of the collective, it proves the collective to be valuable, "Collective production tends to reduce the perceived risk and raise the perceived value of religious activities" (Iannaccone & Bainbridge 2010, 468). On one hand we have the Icelandic group who expect social activities in the actual temple on a daily basis. On the other hand, we have international Heathens who, by proxy, consume the production of *Höfuðhofið*. They consume it since it produces effects in their own lives via the online community, a sense of reduced risk and increased social value. This explains the overwhelming percentage of positive hopefuls in the questionnaire.

Where *Höfuðhofið* is concerned the allegory of religious investment takes on a very real world meaning where sympathetic Icelanders are giving tax investment to Ásatrúarfélagið to see it prosper (Chapter 13.1). They are not necessarily potential Heathens but they do want to see that brand on the market, and the social effects of its consumption to push back against the monopoly of the failed product of traditional local Christianity. In the same vein, Heathens all over the world are intent on visiting *Höfuðhofið* to invest in the brand, the product, the firm, and thereby make changes in their own local market to improve the product diversity where - according to my informants, Christianity and Islam has hogged the market and stultified it.

- Axiom 1:
- A 1. Def. 1 The past consists of the universe of conditions which can be known but not influenced.
- A 1. Def. 2 The future consists of the universe of conditions which can be influenced but not known (Stark & Bainbridge 2006, 380)



Axiom 1 has been reached and now sets new conditions for new influences. This allows for new evaluations. P10. Def. 15 “Evaluation is the determination of the value of any reward, including explanations; value is the equivalent to the maximum cost a person would pay to obtain the reward.” (Stark & Bainbridge 2006, 385) “Evaluation, in the terms of Axiom 1, are used to influence the future but must be based on knowledge of the past” (Stark & Bainbridge 2006, 385) With Axiom 1 reached, evaluations for future potential and expectations means that with *Höfuðhofið* in the rear view mirror, evaluations are levelled up.

- Axiom 7: “(Provisional) Social organizations tend to emerge in human society as social enterprises which specialize in providing some particular kinds of gratifications.” (Stark & Bainbridge 2006, 391)

### 10.1.1 Faith rewards

“According to our definition, such untestable and extremely general explanations [faith] are compensators” (Stark & Bainbridge 2006, 387). The strong data that Heathens believed the Gods welcomed *Höfuðhofið* can be said to present a compensator. The experience of Gods seems to be specifically tied to experiences in nature, and to a lesser extent such intimate territories as dreams and secret magical practices. The affirmation of faith in experiencing a communication with a God, who rewards the Heathen by signalling a response through a natural force such as a bird, storm, or unusual ocular phenomenon means that these rewards will not be present in *Höfuðhofið*.

Architect Magnús Jónsson was more than aware of this, as were *Ásatrúarfélagið* with whom he had developed his designs and vision. Therefore, he had focussed on *Höfuðhofið* as an organic and reactive non-linear environment which would experientially give a sense of connection to the natural world, specifically during the solstices and sunlight around the equinoxes. The product of *Höfuðhofið* is therefore an attempt to create an enhanced product of superior quality to those temples such as, incidentally, the rival Folkish temples that are not designed with the ability to maintain the reward of communication with Gods and wights in the natural environment. The product of *Höfuðhofið* in the cases outside of Iceland are specifically focussing on social rewards, and are unlikely able to provide a product which can compete with the natural world.

The ability for *Höfuðhofið* to provide this enhanced product seems to be unknown among the Heathen community, although this information has been presented to some extent in some of the news articles, clearly that was not the main headline nor the main impression among Heathens. The focus was on the social value. Yet, the overwhelming majority believed the Gods approved of *Höfuðhofið*, without considering or knowing about the actual experiential effects of *Höfuðhofið* on communication with the natural world and the affect on senses which Heathens so heavily and so broadly refer to in religious terms. The value of nature and sensory experience in *Höfuðhofið*'s design will be a new and unforeseen experience, as will its effect on ritual.

The design of *Höfuðhofið* also includes a heavy focus on creating social rewards. Icelanders expect major practical benefits from *Höfuðhofið*, but there will also be musical and creative performances which clearly are intended to have a broad audience, in the model of previous Heathen/mainstream musical co-operations in Iceland, and in fact in Norway most recently with the start of the folk and metal festival Midgårdsblot.

### **10.1.2 Denominational competitors**

The Folkish division can be seen in terms of “the historical tension between pluralism and exclusivity” (Iannaccone & Bainbridge 2010, 468) and the fact that “within religious groups there will always be subgroups having a conflict of interest over whom the religious organization is to serve” (Stark & Bainbridge 2006, 394). The aggressive and rushed construction of the Folkish temples once the news of *Höfuðhofið* was broadcast, can be explained as “the sheer fact of needing to compete with each other, clergy in different denominations will be forced to seek customers more vigorously” (Iannaccone & Bainbridge 2010, 469). The complex of producers-customers-investors means that the Folkish groups appeal to “market segmentation” (Iannaccone & Bainbridge 2010, 469) and try to specialise types of confidence as customised rewards or products (Iannaccone & Bainbridge 2010, 470). In real terms, a religious organisation such as AFA with around 700 members spread across the world, but mainly USAA, means that their temple is unlikely to service their entire market by direct visitation.

“Most tiny new religions cannot reach their market effectively, because potential customers may be strewn thinly over a wide area and can be reached only by extreme

marketing exertions. Thus, any chance of success depends upon an unusual degree of entrepreneurship, which we already noted is required to start the novel religion in the first place” (Iannaccone & Bainbridge 2010, 472).

However, as a symbol and social message it does provide its members and potential members who are “strewn thinly” with a compensator, a promise of reward, and a growing confidence in the brand due to the ability to produce a high value commodity- a temple.

In Chapter 5, discussing RMT, I highlighted the following questions as of relevance to the enquiries of this study, “What are the costs of successful entry into the religious market? How does a new firm enter the religious market?” (Iannaccone & Bainbridge 2010, 472)

If we imagine organisations as firms, the general events of Chapter 8 -of recent Heathen history- gives a list of answers to how Heathen organisations are trying to enter the international religious market. As for the costs of success, we could say *Höfuðhofið* is a very real cost. It is an investment of the literal kind, for Icelanders, as are the Folkish temples for their congregations, but there is also the ideological investment of supporting a brand or a firm. We can also argue a denomination as a firm, certainly when organisations seem to be local organs which are in general agreement on otherwise major divisive issues such as white separatism and gender rights (Chapter 8. Events 13 & 14).

The cost of entry into the religious market, concerning brands and products, is therefore a limitation on consumers, and a stronger characterisation of each product as separate from one another. In this case, we can see how *Höfuðhofið* and its rivals are part of a socio-political struggle within Heathendom’s identities which is encouraging stronger definitions of types of Heathenship. In other words, *Höfuðhofið*, by catalysing rival temples and by instigating debates on ethics, social politics, and moral standards within Heathendom -we are seeing a deepening polarisation. Brands, firms, and products are responding to specific types of customers and refining their services and sales pitches. We can also see that products are in direct competition with each other since they use a similar model, therefore the quality and character of the design of each product comes into question. Is a *Höfuðhofið* a better product than an American ranch?

We must also consider the inspiration factor, not only have Folkish groups been inspired to produce a temple, but many informants felt inspired to build their own, even admitting it was unrealistic. Yet it was a majority view that *Höfuðhofið* would lead to more Heathen temples

around the world. So do producers ask themselves, If I develop my own product, will it be a competitor to the Icelandic product or a local produce modelled on that design? I interpret the answer as a question of consumption, -will locals demand a Folkish design product or an Icelandic model? In terms of economical indications, RMT hints that the more temples there are, the greater the valued quality and model of Höfuðhofið.

As for the Mecca phenomenon, it seems clear that to produce something of the Icelandic model, consumers and producers intend to consume and invest in *Höfuðhofið*, which includes directly visiting and experiencing it. Icelanders indicate that they fear a corporate take-over from outside investors who could change the value of their product, reduce product availability by over-consumption or change the brand.

## 11 Conclusion

The data shows that there is a shared reality of designations, categories, classifications, expectations and majority agreement on definitions- it is a common specialised religious language. However, the Folkish ethical and socio-political schism means that each ‘side’ legitimises the other through discourse. The temple however, is a symbolic element in the ideological conflict which breaks discourse, it has effectively catalysed groups such as AFA to confidently specify their brand- their ethics and politics, due to having the power and authority they feel they have attained through their own temple. Similarly, Lyngvild and his organisational allies in Denmark and Sweden feel confident to use his temple to make a clear signal concerning their political brand -again through the confidence their temple brings and having a well-defined, valuable religious product (a temple) to a specified subgroup (market, consumer group). Separate to schisms, there are indications via RMT and in the data; that the religious community is given confidence equalling social rewards, such as mainstream acceptance, and growth.

Data is inconclusive concerning if *Höfuðhofið* will bring spiritual rewards, there are references to a perception of *Höfuðhofið* as holy- and this would infer a new substantial production of a valuable resource; a reward. There are methodological issues in supporting this assertion that I had not foreseen however, and the examination of which is probably beyond the scope of this thesis, suffice it to say that within the reach of more than 170 Heathens globally, *Höfuðhofið* is of great importance and value. Theoretical analysis also indicates that this is a turning point since it sets new standards, it is a major historical event in the evolving story of this new religion. There are now new interests for Heathens, a confidence to develop their own temples because they see these as socially, and perhaps spiritually- valuable and rewarding. In general terms, as well as for those that do not have the resources to distribute the product- *Höfuðhofið* acts as an ideal and a major achievement tied to a specifically valuable geography. The temple will draw pilgrimage, and it will likely force Icelandic Heathens to deal with Heathendom that exists outside of Iceland. Since we already know their ethical and socio-political standpoints, it would mean that Iceland will have profound influence and effects on any declarations it makes concerning schisms within Heathendom, or the spiritual and ideological content of Heathenship. Unwillingly, *Höfuðhofið* will amplify Ásatrúarfélagið’s role in Heathendom at the international level. Given the effective media-reach to non-heathens, ‘mainstream society’, and potential Heathens -we can expect that future heathens will be of a different kind. We can expect that with Iceland having a valuable position with greater influence, new Heathens will

be more likely to be in line with Ásatrúarfélagið's ideology. In turn, this will continue to marginalise Folkish groups and strangle their potential growth. This is a major identity change.

Lastly, there are indications that the inspirational power of *Höfuðhofið* as the first religious experience for new Heathens, and the inspiration for new temples that will have similar effects—means that ritual and spiritual experience will also have a large-scale transformatory effect on the character of Heathen worship and belief. The temple may well intensify dedication, ritual activity and mental processes. The temple experience may create a new discourse where ritual, experience and thought focusses collective decisions, and perhaps therefore lead to a more formalised structured content.

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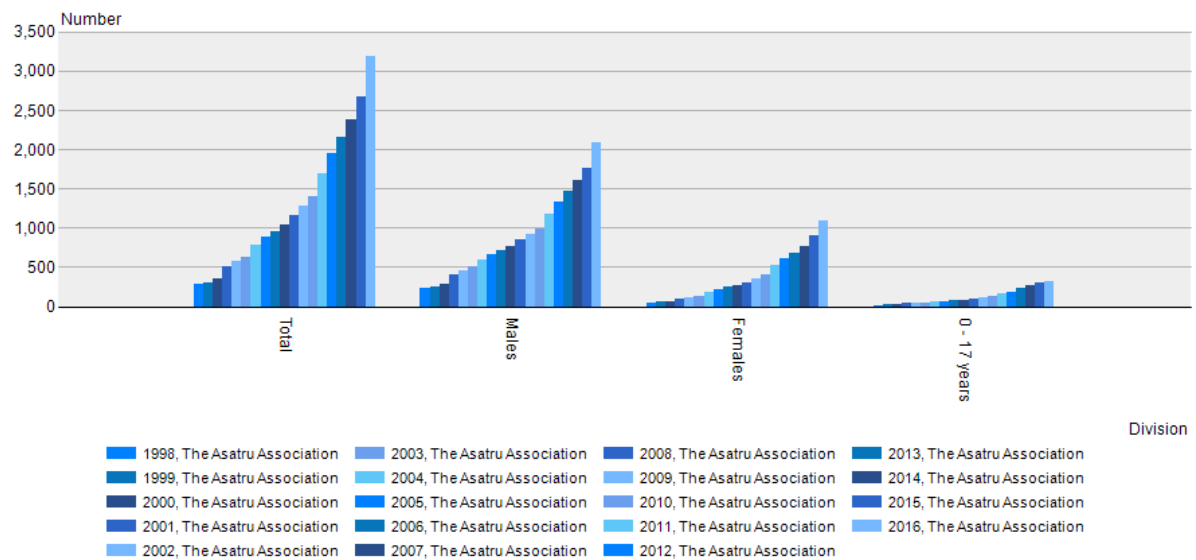
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## 13 Appendices

### 13.1 Official statistics for growth of Ásatrúarfélagið membership

Populations by religious and life stance organizations 1998-2016



Credit: Hagstofa Íslands, Centre for Icelandic Statistics

### 13.2 List of informants

Name	Gender	Country	Years exp.	Identification	Sec.reference
Aad	F	Netherlands	23	Asatruar	Germanic Heathen
Ada	F	Germany	13	Germanic Heathen	
Aglaya	F	Russia	-	Pagan witch	Loki follower
Agnes	F	Iceland	10*	Heathen	Ásatrú
Agrapina	F	Russia	5	Free Asatruar	
Alana	F	Czech Rep	10	Heathen	Slavic heathen
Alfa	F	Iceland	9*	Religious Heathen	Ásatrú
Alice	F	Australia	4	Heathen	Tribalist Asatru Heathen
Alicia	F	Germany	13	Asatru	polytheist
Anatoly	M	Russia	10	Asatru	
Anka	F	Poland	5	Asatru witch	Pagan
Annushka	F	Russia	3	Northern Tradition	Rökkatru
Anton	M	Germany	9*	Heathen	
Arthur	M	UK	5	Odian	Heathen
Astrid	F	Norway	20*	Heathen	Asatru
Căci	F	Germany	2	Heathen	
Conrad	M	US	-	Heathen	
Dan	M	UK	-	Heathen	
Derek	M	UK	4	Heathen	Pagan
Diana	F	Brazil	2	Heathen	Asatru
Dicky	M	UK	-	Heathen	
Dirk	M	Germany	39	Germanic Heathen	Continental
Dodek	M	Poland	16	Heathen	Asatru
Edith	F	Denmark	20	Asatru/Heathen	
Emmerich	M	Germany	14	Germanic Heathen	Asatru
Erin	F	Brazil	-	Heathen	Tibetan Buddhist
Eva	F	Germany	-	Heathen	
Evan	M	Australia	41	Rational Heathen	
Evert	M	Netherlands	-	Asatru	
Francesca	F	Spain	11	Asatru	Heathen
Gleb	M	Russia	-	Nordic Religion	
Guðrún	F	Iceland	23*	Heathenry	Ásatrú
Hanna	F	Sweden	6*	Forn sedling	pagan/heathen



Henry	M	US	27	Asatru	Folkish
Holly	M	UK	-	Heathen	
Ingrid	F	UK	3	Heathen	Asatru
Inma	F	Spain	10	Heathen	Vanatrú
Ívar	M	Iceland	-	Heathen	
Juriy	M	Russia	-	Heathen	
Karl	M	US	10	Ásatrúar	
Lewis	M	UK	2	Heathen	Asatruar
Linus	M	Sweden	-	Heathen	
Lucian	M	Brazil	3	Asatru	
Luther	M	South Africa	5	Heathen	Asatruar
Magnús	M	Iceland	-	Heathen	
Maria	F	Mexico	-	Heathen	
Mary	F	Germany	-	Heathen	
Mick	M	UK	1	Heathen	Asatru
Mikke	M	Sweden	-	Heathen	
Milo	M	Germany	6	Ásatrú	
Nacio	M	Costa Rica	7	Heathen	Ásatrú
Nadir	M	Tunisia	2	Heathen	Asatru
Natalia	F	Poland	-	Heathen	
Natasha	F	Canada	10	Asatru	Pagan
Nate	M	US	20	Asatru	Heathen
Nathan	M	Germany	8	Heathen	
Niels	M	Denmark	13	agnostic Heathen	Stav teacher
Phil	M	Brazil	9	Germanic Heathen	Anglo-Saxon Heathen
Pia	F	Germany	5	Heathen	
Randy	M	US	-	Heathen	
Raven	M	US	-	Norse Pagan	Rökkatru
Reinhart	M	Germany	18	Heathen	Nordic Pagan
Rickard	M	Sweden	-	Norse Pagan	Stav teacher
Roger	M	Sweden	15	Heathen	Sedvandrare, various
Rupert	M	Germany	-	Heathen	
Sam	F	US	-	Heathen	
Sean	M	US	28	Asatru	
Sebastien	M	France	20	Asatru	reconstructionist

Sigrid	F	Denmark	-	Asatroende	
Simon	M	Denmark	21	Asatru	Folkish
Stefan	M	Sweden	4	Asatru believer	Folkish
Tim	M	US	-	Heathen	
Tobias	M	Germany	-	Heathen	
Turk	M	US	10	Heathen	
Ty	M	US	12	Asatru	
Victor	M	US	28	Asatru	Tribalist
Yevi	M	Russia	-	Asatruar	Heathenism
Ziemowit	M	Poland	-	Heathen	

### 13.3 US questionnaire results

Selected extracts from questionnaire. Pie-charts clearly illustrate positive, majority opinions.

rossalexdowning@gmail.com ▼

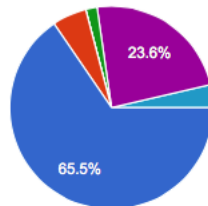
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## 110 responses

[View all responses](#)

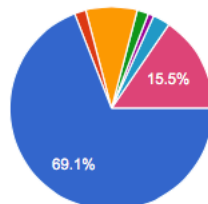
### Summary

**How did you first hear about the building of the temple in Iceland?**



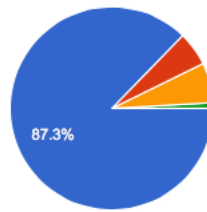
Through a heathen network, heathen news source or heathen community	72	65.5%
Through a heathen friend	6	5.5%
Through a non-heathen friend	0	0%
Through a non-heathen religious source (Christian, Neo-Pagan etc)	2	1.8%
Through a non-heathen non-religious source (public media, newspaper etc)	26	23.6%
Other	4	3.6%

**Generally speaking, how do you usually think of yourself in religious terms?**



Heathen	76	69.1%
Odinist	2	1.8%
Germanic Neo-Pagan	9	8.2%
Atheist	2	1.8%
Other religion	1	0.9%
Asatru	3	2.7%
Other	17	15.5%

**What was your first reaction to the news that the temple was to be built?**



Very positive	96	87.3%
Somewhat positive	6	5.5%
Neutral	7	6.4%
Somewhat negative	1	0.9%
Very negative	0	0%

### In brief terms, please explain the reason behind your feelings about the temple

The Asatruarfélagid is making a temple for their people and their folk. It's not some sort of magical heathen Mecca that will suddenly legitimize us world wide and far too many people think it's something it's not.

It is nice to see a Heathen temple, I suppose. Good on the Icelanders.

As a Norse polytheist I value a temple being built in what could be called a spiritual homeland. I also value the fact it is being built by a national organisation free from prejudice.

I believe the temple will help others better understand what Asatru and modern Odinism is.

How ever the sad downside to this is it could draw alot of negative attention due to the stereotype that Asatru is racist.

Ásatrúarfélagið is not the same as the asatru practiced elsewhere and the Icelandic identity does not support organized religion. people need to stop treating this as some sort of pagan mecca. it isn't.

I am very happy for the state recognition of Asatru as a "real" religion. It may make it somewhat easier for my family and friends to accept as a real religion, not some role-playing game. I am happy for the people who will be served by the temple. It does not affect me, in any meaningful way. I attend ritual and other functions at my kindred's hof, in the US.

The more that polytheism is seen as a positive, mature outlook on life, the better for all of us, not just heathens or polytheists in general.

Having such a temple is probably less important to individual heathens themselves, But it will go a long way toward a general acceptance of the faith as 'serious' among the mainstream, who otherwise cannot seem to acknowledge a faith as 'real' without an accompanying 'church'.

It's important to the people who built it, their devotion and hard work make it a holy place.

I'm happy they have the opportunity to build a temple to serve the Heathens of Iceland.

It's about time we had our own big public places of "worship". Over here (UK) every crappy little Xian sect can manage it.

Heathens have nothing in the way of public buildings. If people see it they will wonder what it is and may want to investigate further and find something interesting. I feel that it is a step in the right direction.

Its a great thing for them to continue to lead the way

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together. Having public temples where people can learn about who we are and what we stand for is important if we want to spread understanding and diversity.

I think that we need more hofs in general, more temples, more sacred space, more ve space, and I think this is a great step in that direction. I hope it pushes folks to get their own land and raise their own temples, communities, and so on together.

I believe that having temples as places to gather and build community between members of a religion is very important. Having a Heathen temple in a country where Asatru is recognized as a valid religion helps to show the rest of the world what can be done.

I think it is important for the rest of us in other countries to see the great example the Icelanders are setting for the rest of us.

I only wish there was some way non Icelandic people could join.

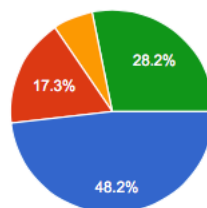
Asatru has the widest public recognition in Iceland. They now have all the trappings of a major religion. This is wonderful for the Icelanders. As the location where much of the lore used to recreate the religion originates, what happens in Iceland is a model for what could be possible in the rest of Heathendom.

It is the first step in truly reforming the faith. How can that not be seen positively.

I am always excited to see news of Heathenry growing as a worldwide phenomenon.

A step in the right direction

#### Overall what do you think of the appearance and design of the Icelandic temple?



I like it	53	48.2%
Neutral	19	17.3%
I do not like it	7	6.4%
I haven't seen any designs or plans	31	28.2%

#### How would you describe the look and design of the temple?

I haven't looked at the design diagrams

It looks like some attempt at traditional architecture was made.

i like it

Modern but fitting with the landscape

too modern for my taste

its not my temple so I could care less what it looks like

It is beautiful.

Modern, but with painstaking attention to detail

---

A good blend of traditional and modern

It will work no matter what

Not bad.

Very thought through

It's their temple, they should decide.

Like a modern art museum that will look dated and outmoded in about 20 years. It should have hearkened back to old heathen temples or at least long house or mead hall styles.

It looks like a big ship.

It seems sleek and modern, but inspired by a ship. I've heard that they've taken into account things like how the sunlight will fall in, that's nice if it's true.

I just looked it up - and it promises to be quite lovely! Beautiful, modern shape, with lots of notes and "nods" to nature and the staggering power of the Icelandic environment. A perfect blend of old and new for the first step into the future.

i would say that the design is fair (i only took a brief look) enough but in my opinion it should look more traditional and have shrines to the gods outdoors in the elements as well as indoors as for the location i dont know much about where they plan to build it my first thought would be in fjord overlooking the sea perhaps at a higher elavation although im not to sure what the final design might look like and that just my opinon it does look like they have put alot of thought in this so i wouldnt doubt they have grander ideas

I like that the temple is designed to be built in two phases.

A modern eclectic "new agey" expression that leaves out all traditional elements. A stave church/hall would have served better, being more in keeping with our desire for historical authenticity.

It seems like a very thoughtful design, one that's kept Heathenry's values in mind. Personally I think it's kind of ugly, as I'm not a fan of modern architecture. But the concepts behind it are cool.

cool

longhouse

Modern with religious elements guiding design features relevant to heathenism.

While it wouldn't be my personal choice I am indifferent if it serves the needs of the community there, they like it, and it generally fits the architectural style of the area.

It looks like quite an interesting design.

I think it's going to be an impressive sight to behold.

At first, I liked it. I dont understand much of achitecture, but the fusion of modernity and minimalism with natural elements looks very pleasing to me. Now, since I'm not that good in picturing buildings from a drawing, I'll have to wait and see it in person. :)

I have no known Icelandic ancestors, so I am not sure how vested in it my ancestors are. I would think, though, that the Icelandic ancestors would be pleased, and I would guess that the deities are pleased to have the temple established.

It's cool.

I won't tell a group that has mustered the support for such an undertaking how to do their job. They are getting it done, that makes them the rightful judge of what is the proper way to go about doing so.

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Interesting. It looks almost like a longboat from the outside. It wouldn't have been the design I would have gone with, but the design looks like a callback to the long-ships and a modern idea of a hof.

As long as the Icelandic folk are happy with it, who am I to judge?

It is a very well-designed modernist temple with inter-cultural elements. I think it is great.

However, if I was contributing to the design of a temple I would have wanted something more archaic that adapted historical examples.

you didn't have anywhere else to put additional information, so I'm going to put this here.

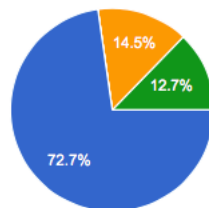
Some of the questions in your survey were confusing, such as the question regarding how other neo pagans feel about building the temple. In this question, you did not specify whether quite was stronger than very. Also, the question "has the building of the temple made you feel religiously motivated" only has answers pertaining to whether the building of the temple has affected the answerer, and not whether it has influenced their religious motivation, which is confusing. Some of your questions are leading as well, and I imagine it might be difficult to get good data out of them. I also found it difficult to understand what the point of the survey was, and some of the questions seemed redundant.

I've only seen pictures of the out side, but, I like the looks of it. I hope to visit the temple one day.

Gol

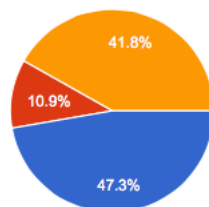
Disappointing

#### In what way do you/will you see the temple in terms of being a sacred space?



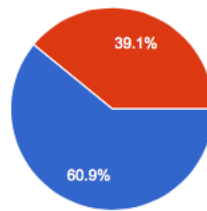
I consider it holy	80	72.7%
I consider it unholy	0	0%
I consider it neutral	16	14.5%
I have no opinion on this	14	12.7%

#### Do you intend to visit the temple?



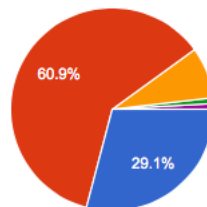
Yes	52	47.3%
No	12	10.9%
Maybe	46	41.8%

**Has the building of the temple made you feel religiously motivated?**



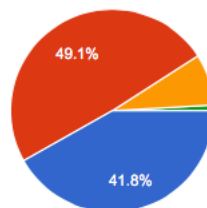
Yes, it has affected me	67	60.9%
No, it has not affected me	43	39.1%
Not sure	0	0%

**How do you think other Germanic Neo-Pagans feel about the building of the temple?**



Most heathens feel very positive about the Icelandic temple	32	29.1%
Most heathens feel quite positive about the Icelandic temple	67	60.9%
Most heathens don't care about the Icelandic temple	9	8.2%
Most heathens feel quite negative about the Icelandic temple	1	0.9%
Most heathens don't know about the Icelandic temple	1	0.9%
Most heathens feel very negatively about the Icelandic temple	0	0%

**In what way do you think the building of the temple will affect the way heathens will see the future of Germanic Neo-Paganism in general?**

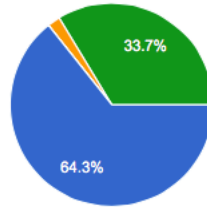


Very positive	46	41.8%
Positive	54	49.1%
Neutral/No effect	9	8.2%
Negative	1	0.9%



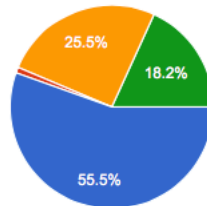
Very negative    0    0%

**How do you believe the gods and/or ancestors relate to the Icelandic temple?**



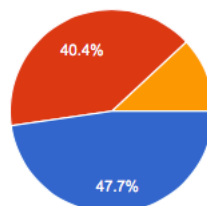
Positively	63	57.3%
Negatively	0	0%
The gods have no interest in the temple	2	1.8%
I do not know what the gods would think and feel or about this	33	30%

**In what way do you think the building of the temple will affect the way non-heathen people see Germanic Neo-Paganism in general?**



Have a positive effect on people's opinions or knowledge	61	55.5%
Have a negative effect on people's opinions or knowledge	1	0.9%
Will have little or no effect on people's opinions or knowledge	28	25.5%
I expect it will have an effect on people generally but I do not know in what way	20	18.2%

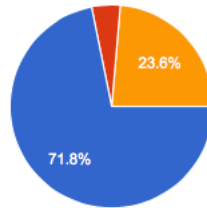
**How important do you think the building of the Icelandic temple will be for your religion?**



Extremely important	52	47.3%
Slightly important	44	40%

Not at all important    13    11.8%

**Do you think the building of the Icelandic temple will lead to more heathen temples being built elsewhere in the world?**



Yes	79	71.8%
No	5	4.5%
I don't know	26	23.6%

### Number of daily responses

