

# Countering “Arctification”: Dawson City’s “Sourtoe Cocktail”

Elizabeth Ann Cooper, Michelle Spinei and Alix Varnajot

## Abstract

**Purpose** – *The purpose of this paper is to focus on the Sourtoe Cocktail, a custom in Dawson City, Canada’s Yukon, in which participants drink a shot of alcohol with a dehydrated human toe in it. Springing from a local legend, the thrill-inducing Sourtoe Cocktail has attracted the attention of tourists. The paper reveals insights from this particular case study in order to discuss potential future tourism trends within the Arctic, especially in regard to the development of a sustainable tourism industry. Additionally, it illustrates how local communities can avoid negative effects of “Arctification.”*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *The case study is deconstructed through Dean MacCannell’s (1976) framework of sight sacralization. The Sourtoe Cocktail is analyzed based on the five stages of the framework, which helps to reveal the various elements at play at the local level. The framework specifically highlights linkages between society and the Sourtoe Cocktail as a product in order to understand how it became a tourist attraction.*

**Findings** – *The use of MacCannell’s sight sacralization framework reveals the intricate relationship of the Sourtoe Cocktail to both the Arctic and the local folklore of the Klondike Gold Rush. In addition, it is argued that the activity can serve as an example of avoiding “Arctification” processes for northern communities.*

**Originality/value** – *The originality of the study lies in the application of the sight sacralization framework to an ordinary object – a toe – instead of an object of inherent historical, aesthetic or cultural value. The paper proposes a complementary study to the recommendations provided in the Arctic Tourism in Times of Change: Seasonality report (2019) for the development of sustainable Arctic societies.*

**Keywords** Sustainability, Tourist experience, Arctic tourism, Arctification, Sight sacralization

**Paper type** Research paper

Elizabeth Ann Cooper is based at the Department of Culture and Global Studies, Aalborg Universitet, Aalborg, Denmark. Michelle Spinei is based at the Department of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland. Alix Varnajot is based at the Oulun Yliopisto, Oulu, Finland.

## 1. Introduction

The Sourdough Saloon, located in Dawson City’s historic Downtown Hotel, in the heart of Canada’s Yukon Territory, looks like a western movie set with saloon doors, dark wooden furniture, deep red bordello wallpaper and antlers hung on the wall. Dwayne, a local piano player, bangs out old-fashioned tunes on the piano every night before heading back to his home in the bush. A mix of locals and tourists congregate until toe time is announced by a bell at 9 PM and tourists start forming a line at the bar. A handwritten sign explains the process: Step 1 – buy a shot of alcohol at the bar that must be at least 80 proof; Step 2 – go to the toe table and pay \$5 to tip the toe captain; Step 3 – follow the captain’s instructions. The toe captain, decked out in a sailor’s hat, administers the Sourtoe Cocktail. Participants pay \$5 to the toe captain and give their name which is written down in a logbook and on a certificate along with the date and their member number – almost 80,000 are part of the Sourtoe Cocktail Club at the time of writing. The toe sits in front of the participant on a silver platter, on a bed of salt. The toe captain explains the rules and warns that there is a \$2,500 fine for swallowing the toe. The fine was instituted after one customer purposely swallowed it. The toe captain picks up the toe and then recites, “You can drink it fast, you can drink it slow, but your lips must touch the toe.” First, the participant kisses the toe, which is then plunked into the shot glass, and then drinks the shot making sure the toe touches their lips. The toe captain takes the toe and puts it back on the salt, shakes the participant’s hand, and gives them the Sourtoe Certificate. They are now part of the exclusive Sourtoe Cocktail Club.

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In recent decades, tourism has become a major reason for human presence in the Arctic (Grenier, 2007; Palma *et al.*, 2019; Stewart *et al.*, 2005), although the first tourists started to explore the circumpolar North more than 200 years ago (Maher, 2017; Stonehouse and Snyder, 2010). Tourism in the Arctic is growing (Hall and Saarinen, 2010; Maher, 2017) and in this context, tourism in the Yukon is also flourishing (Hull *et al.*, 2017). In 2017, the estimated number of overnight stays in the Yukon Territory was approximately 334,000, representing a growth of 2.5 percent compared to 2016 and of 21 percent compared to 2013 (Yukon Government, 2017). Today, Dawson City is the second-most populated Yukon settlement, with approximately 1,400 inhabitants (Statistics Canada, 2016). Once the epicenter of Yukon's economy due to the Gold Rush, Dawson City is now at the periphery of the Yukon, and on a larger scale, of Canada. The Downtown Hotel has served the Sourtoe Cocktail since the 1970s. Nevertheless, it truly became a tourist attraction in 2011 with the creation of the Sourtoe Certificate, which recognized successful entry into the Sourtoe Cocktail Club.

The goal of this paper is to explore, on a conceptual level, one specific example of a product turned into a tourism attraction, located in the Arctic, namely the Sourtoe Cocktail in Dawson City, Yukon Territory. This example is deemed to be worthy of study because it is not a typical example of "Arctic tourism," and because its deconstruction reveals intricacies and connections to alternative trends in tourism in the Arctic. The deconstruction of this case complements recent developments around the concept of "Arctification." Arctification was first mentioned by Sverker Sörlin, from KTH Royal Institute of Technology, and can be defined as "a social process creating new geographical images of the North of Europe as part of the Arctic" (Müller and Viken, 2017, p. 288). The process typically occurs along with stereotypically "Arctic" imagery related to winter and snow (Rantala *et al.*, 2019). Areas that are peripheral to the Arctic become perceived, especially from an outsider's perspective, as Arctic through the use of reinforced imaginaries. The imagery depicts the Arctic as a homogeneous, empty wilderness, empty of people (Hansson, 2015; Loftsdóttir, 2015). In a report entitled Arctic Tourism in Times of Change: Seasonality, Rantala *et al.* (2019) argued that the process of Arctification is evident within the tourism industry in Northern Europe. This has significant implications for the future of tourism in the North, particularly with regard to sustainability challenges. Although the Sourtoe Cocktail is located in North America, we believe its analysis can provide an alternative perspective for the future of tourism in the European North context.

Our analytical framework is based on insights from the Sourtoe Cocktail attraction case study, which is deconstructed using Dean MacCannell's (1976) five stages of sight sacralization. Rather than analyzing the attraction in its entirety, the framework is applied to the main element of the Sourtoe Cocktail, namely the toe that is dropped in the alcohol. The paper is structured according to the five stages of MacCannell's sight sacralization: naming, framing and elevation, enshrinement, mechanical reproduction and social reproduction. In the discussion section, we deepen our findings through a conflation with the sight sacralization framework, and then we bring to light the connections between our case and the Arctification of the tourism industry in the North. We finally use our findings to complement and expand existing discussion about the trend of Arctification.

## 2. From a product to an attraction: sight sacralization of the Sourtoe Cocktail

There are many frameworks available in the field of tourism studies that can act as a tool through which to deconstruct and understand tourism phenomena. The application of Leiper's (1979) framework of interconnecting geographical, human and industry elements as well as Butler's (1980) lifecycle of a tourism destination would certainly open up our case to interesting discussion. In selecting MacCannell's sight sacralization for the Sourtoe Cocktail, we have settled on a framework that is both applicable to our case and that reveals a unique interplay between stakeholders.

MacCannell's (1976) theory of sight sacralization aims to locate tourism attractions in their sociological and anthropological contexts (Forristal *et al.*, 2011), and thus reveals the role of society in underlining the importance and authenticity of an attraction (MacCannell, 1976). This is done by breaking down the development of a tourism sight, site or object into the five distinct

phases already mentioned. Through deconstructing the timeline of a tourism attraction's development, MacCannell's framework highlights the importance of societal recognition in the reproduction of an attraction to its eventual success, popularity or status as a desired destination. It is argued that once an attraction has completed its journey through all five phases, it can be considered an attractive destination or successful attraction (Forristal *et al.*, 2011).

Our application of MacCannell's framework to the case of the Sourtoe Cocktail is not as simple as using the framework to "test" whether or not the Sourtoe Cocktail can be considered a successful attraction according to MacCannell's criteria. Although the analysis will inevitably give an indication of how developed the attraction is, it is primarily a lens through which to tease out the peculiarities of the case. MacCannell's theory of sight sacralization is not all-encompassing and without criticism (Jacobsen, 1997; Löytynoja, 2008; Forristal *et al.*, 2011); this paper, therefore, does not represent a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon. It highlights original and creative qualities which are worthy of in-depth discussion, and which contribute to the broader discussion of where the future of Arctic tourism is heading. In addition, this originality and creativity is revealed by focusing on the toe itself as the "sight" or the "object" to be sacralized, rather than the activity of drinking the Sourtoe Cocktail.

### **2.1 Phase 1: naming**

The first stage of MacCannell's sight sacralization framework designates the differentiation of the sight from other potentially worthy-to-visit attractions (Löytynoja, 2008). According to MacCannell (1976, p. 44), a "great deal of work [for] the authentication of the candidate for sacralization" is required, including the recognition of values that turn the object into a sight worthy of attention and preservation (Fine and Speer, 1985). These values include aesthetics and historical and recreational significance (MacCannell, 1976).

The story of the toe dates back to the 1920s when two brothers, Louie and Otto Linken, were running whiskey to Alaska during the US Prohibition era. During a blizzard, Louie stepped through a patch of ice and soaked his foot. By the time they arrived at their cabin, Louie's foot was frozen. In order to prevent gangrene, the second brother, Otto, cut off his brother's toe and put it in a jar of alcohol which was stored in their remote cabin. The jar was forgotten about until 1971, when Captain Dick Stevenson found it exactly as the two brothers left it decades ago. Upon returning to Dawson City, Stevenson had the idea of serving alcohol with the toe dropped into it, and created the Sourtoe Cocktail in 1973. The strangeness of this idea set Stevenson apart and he quickly became a famous member of the Yukon's well-known colorful 5 percent; a bunch of exceptional and quirky characters who have significant influence on the Yukon's heritage and culture.

The Sourtoe attraction, therefore, partly finds its origins in the rough Arctic conditions and imaginaries. Indeed, the Arctic is often portrayed as a region with a harsh climate, frozen landscapes and extremely cold temperatures (Hall and Johnston, 1995; Hall and Saarinen, 2010; Saarinen and Varnajot, 2019) which requires bravery and courage (Varnajot, 2019) to enter. These representations are often created by outsiders for outsiders (Viken, 2013) and are the results of imaginaries conveyed by the epic tales of adventurers, popular myths, movies and TV shows (Fjellestad, 2016; Sæþórsdóttir *et al.*, 2011).

In addition, the story of the Sourtoe Cocktail takes place in Dawson City, a city founded in 1896 in the midst of the Klondike Gold Rush. The city rapidly became the capital of the Yukon, and the largest Canadian city west of Winnipeg, and grew to be home to 25,000 inhabitants in 1898 at the height of the stampede (Coates and Morrison, 2005; Guest, 2012). The Klondike Gold Rush is intrinsic to the identity of Dawson City and is filled with representations of crowds of gold seekers rushing from San Francisco, Seattle or Vancouver and enduring cold and harsh conditions in mountainous environments (de la Barre, 2013; Morse, 2003). Although located about 750 km south of Dawson City, the dramatic photos of men and women climbing the Chilkoot Pass, depicting "an endless line of determined gold seekers, burdened with packs, heads cast downward, marching lockstep in single file up a precipitous snow-covered slope to the summit" of the Pass (Morse, 2003, p. 3) resonate in collective imaginaries. This episode of the Klondike Gold Rush is specific to the history of Northwestern Canada, but it is one of the many examples of expeditions, adventures or rushes that took place in the North. Even though the Sourtoe

Cocktail's story dates back to the 1920s, the attraction lies in this Gold Rush folklore, pertaining to extreme Arctic conditions.

The Sourtoe Cocktail is the result of mixing past imaginaries of the Klondike Gold Rush with representations of the Arctic, resulting in intertwined origins. The connection between the toe and the Arctic can be understood as a dual relationship. On the one hand, the story of the brother suffering frostbite from cold conditions feeds these representations of a harsh Arctic. On the other hand, these rough conditions of the North feed back into the legend behind the Sourtoe Cocktail as an attraction. Both elements support each other in their existence, resulting in a myth wherein the Cocktail can find its origins. This intricate interplay of historical values, which underlines the Sourtoe Cocktail activity, works to differentiate it as worthy of attention or indulgence, as per the first phase of MacCannell's framework.

## *2.2 Phase 2: framing and elevation*

According to MacCannell (1976), the framing and elevation phase consists first of the placement of an official boundary around an object (framing) and second of its placement on display, or its opening up for visitation (elevation). MacCannell argues that framing can be manifested in two ways: through the protection of the object, by placing glass around it, for example, or through the enhancement of the object, by placing it under a spotlight, for example.

In the case of the Sourtoe Cocktail, and in particular of the toe itself as the sacralized sight, the first evidence of the framing of the object was not its placement behind glass but within glass – a jar of alcohol. Interestingly, the primary aim of this action was for the biological preservation of the toe itself. Nowadays, the toe is placed inside a shot glass for the inevitable elevation of being the toe that the tourist must touch during their completion of the Sourtoe Cocktail experience.

Here, the framing stage does not create a boundary between the object and the tourist, but in fact dissolves the boundary since the tourist is invited to make direct physical contact with the toe itself. The act of not only touching the detached toe, but making contact with it with one's mouth, crosses not just a sanitary boundary, but also throws into question MacCannell's "sacralization boundary." This raises the question of whether or not the object can retain its sacred quality when the physical boundary between it and the tourist participant is removed.

Conversely, one could argue that the sacred quality of the toe is fully realised by the breaking of this boundary. In other words, that which makes it sacred (or valuable, or worthy) is that participants can touch it. This argument could be developed to suggest that what is sacred is, therefore, not the toe itself but the experience of physically interacting with the toe.

## *2.3 Phase 3: enshrinement*

This third stage of the sight sacralization process occurs when the container of the attraction becomes itself an attraction on its own (Jacobsen, 1997; MacCannell, 1976). According to Fine and Speer (1985, p. 82), "the notion of shrine further suggests a necessity for pilgrimages and rituals to be performed upon arriving." In line with this, taking the Sourtoe Cocktail when in Dawson City, especially if it is the first time, could be seen as an inescapable ritual.

The Sourtoe Cocktail is served in Dawson City's historic Sourdough Saloon, which has been located in the Downtown Hotel since the 1970s (Plate 1). Both the Downtown Hotel and the city of Dawson can thus be understood as containers for the attraction. The hotel has gained notoriety for being the place where the infamous cocktail is served. The building itself has retained its "authentic" wild west style, and has become an unmissable sight in the city. Located at the corner of Second Avenue and Queen Street, in the heart of Dawson, it is now a prerequisite for tourists visiting the city even if one is not drinking the cocktail. The Downtown Hotel could even be considered to be the epicenter of a city crystallized in the past. Indeed, the hotel as well as the Cocktail are incorporated in an atmosphere that recalls the far west conquest. The architecture and physical aspects of the city center's buildings (Plate 2), the streets and urban furniture provide the general ambiance of a city preserved from modernization, untouched by globalization. Western-like wooden facades and sidewalks and dusty unpaved streets, as well as

**Plate 1** The Downtown Hotel



Source: Author

**Plate 2** Streets of Dawson City



Source: Author

the buildings' interiors, such as that of the Downtown Hotel or of Diamond Tooth Gertie's French cancan and casino, contribute to this feeling of living in the gold rush past and its environment (Plate 2). In addition, Dawson City's atmosphere is shaped by daily local activities and practices. For example, gold mining still exists in the Klondike region, and according to the Yukon Geological Survey, about 72,000 ounces of crude gold were declared in 2017 for a value of CAD \$94m (Bond and van Loon, 2018). This leads to an incongruous practice where one can still pay for goods and bet at the casino with gold nuggets instead of regular Canadian dollars. This practice adds to the uniqueness of the context in which the Sourtoe Cocktail is served. In other words, the Cocktail as an attraction is contained within the Downtown Hotel, which is itself contained within the ambiance of Dawson City.

#### **2.4 Phase 4: mechanical reproduction**

This fourth stage refers to "the creation of prints, photographs, models or effigies of the object which are themselves valued and displayed" (MacCannell, 1976, p. 45). In the case of the Sourtoe Cocktail, three types of mechanical reproductions can be observed.

First, the original toe was replaced several times since 1973 for different reasons. The repetitive use of the original toe for the cocktail led to its deterioration over the years and several toes have been stolen, swallowed or simply lost. The bar owners had to find new toes to continue the attraction and over the years, people have donated their toes to the Downtown Hotel for future use. As a result, the original toe has been replaced or reproduced numerous times, and a range of toes are stored at the bar at any one time – working in rotation to act as "the toe." This process of reproduction is rather long as the toe is preserved and dehydrated in salt before being used for the cocktail, which takes around six months. This suggests that the sacralized object of this attraction is no longer a specific physical toe, but an immaterial object, or even a symbol.

Second, the Sourtoe Cocktail also exists through souvenirs. Books narrating the discovery of the toe by Captain Dick Stevenson, the man behind the cocktail, can be found in souvenir shops around the region. In addition, as proof as well as a concrete memory, a certificate and a membership card are offered to the visitor who was brave enough to take the shot. In this example, the toe is not literally reproduced, but it is the act of touching a mummified toe with your lips that is immortalized and thereby sacralized. The certificate (Plate 3) celebrates the experience rather than the toe as an object. Therefore, it can be argued that there is a shift in the sight sacralization process from the toe as a sacralized object to the toe as a sacralized experience.

Third, the experience of the Sourtoe Cocktail is preserved through a variety of digital content consisting of videos, photographs, blog posts and articles. This also evidences the close connection between tourist experiences and technology such as photography or social media (Balomenou and Garrod, 2019; Gretzel, 2017; Kim and Fesenmaier, 2017; Lo and McKercher, 2015; Urry and Larsen, 2011). Indeed, inside the bar, participants often record themselves or ask other visitors to film them while drinking the shot (Plate 4). This demonstrates how mechanical reproduction adapts to new technologies as these reproductions are not only physical (in the form of souvenirs), but also – and increasingly so – digital.

These three distinct types of mechanical reproduction suggest that the activity is well developed in terms of MacCannell's fourth phase. In addition, its reproductions are not only highly valued but also work to motivate others to take part in the activity.

#### **2.5 Phase 5: social reproduction**

MacCannell defines phase 5 as when groups, cities or regions begin to name themselves after the attraction (MacCannell, 1976). In other words, when the attraction begins to be reproduced not just in the form of concrete souvenirs or merchandise, but in the form of inspiring social processes or groups in other destinations.

There are no examples of places, areas or institutions named after the Sourtoe Cocktail, which would ensure the perpetuation of the sight as a valued attraction (Fine and Speer, 1985), but there have been cases that reproduce similar experiences. Another example of a cocktail, which





Source: Author



Source: Author

publicly admits to having been inspired by the Sourtoe Cocktail, is the Dog Ball Highball. This was part of an event in February 2019 which raised funds for the Humane Society Dawson animal shelter (Discover Dawson, 2019). Similarly, to the Sourtoe Cocktail, in the Dog Ball Highball a real dog's testicle replaces the human toe in a shot of alcohol and the participant must drink the shot, letting the testicle touch their lips in order to join the "club." This reproduction of the Sourtoe Cocktail reflects the desire to be identified with the authentic (original) cocktail that has become a symbol of Dawson City (Fine and Speer, 1985).

It is worth noting that similar practices involving alcoholic rituals take place in other locations across the Circumpolar North. In Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, it is customary to welcome newcomers by performing a ceremony known as Kissing the Cod, in which tourists must kiss a codfish before taking a shot of local rum (Byrne, 1997). Similarly, to the Sourtoe Cocktail, the cod kissing is accompanied by speeches and certificates are presented, recognizing the participant as an authentic Newfoundlander. In Iceland, visitors are encouraged to eat hákarl, a fermented piece of shark, chased down with a shot of local schnapps, Brennivín, also known as "black death." Although this particular practice belongs to Icelandic culinary traditions, restaurants of Reykjavik purposefully aim it at the tourist crowd (Bachórz, 2016).

In spite of these examples, the fifth phase of the sacralization of the Sourtoe Cocktail is not as developed as the mechanical reproduction phase. Although the social reproduction is still in its infancy, future possible steps for the attraction could emerge in the form of local restaurants or boutiques being renamed after the cocktail.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1 *Sight sacralization and the Sourtoe Cocktail attraction*

Historically, the theory of sight sacralization has been applied to inherently symbolic, precious or remarkable sights; MacCannell (1976) used the examples of the "true Crown of Thorns" or the "Gutenberg Bible." Jacobsen (1997) applied the framework to North Cape, Norway, symbolizing the northernmost point of continental Europe. Löytynoja (2008) also investigated the development of North Cape as a tourist attraction, along the Arctic Circle in Rovaniemi, the central point of Finland and the easternmost point of (continental) EU. In their article, Fine and Speer (1985) analyzed tour guides of the Lindheimer House, Texas, a historic landmark since 1936.

The originality of the Sourtoe Cocktail case stems from the intriguing fact that the sight is not an object of obvious worth or value, a rarity, or the result of notable talent, skill or creativity. On the contrary, it is one of the most common and everyday objects known to us – a part of the body of which almost everyone possesses ten. Taken out of context (i.e. detached from the body), the toe arguably gains even more pointlessness and bizarreness as almost nobody knows whose toe it was and only few participants are aware of the story behind and whose toe it is supposed to symbolize. In addition, the appeal of the toe lies in the ordinary nature of the sight, rather than being an exceptional attraction, turning this product into an absurd activity.

Tourists are far from being simply passive consumers in this case. Rather, they can be seen as essential actors (Edensor, 2000) alongside the toe, contributing to the success of the Sourtoe Cocktail as an attraction. They become performers and express feelings of disgust or fascination while curious visitors watch and take photographs and videos (Plate 4). They perform the practice and thereby confirm the sight's sacredness for prospective participants and onlookers. Indeed, the climax of the attraction occurs at the point of contact between the participants' lips and the toe. The toe taken separately would probably not be as emblematic as it is when it is combined with tourist engagement. In this attraction, the Toe Captain is only a mediator – a convener who emphasizes the *mise-en-scène* of the spectacle.

Another point emerging from this study, and revealed by the sight sacralization framework, is that the actual sacralized object is not a single toe, but several, as demonstrated by our analysis of the elevation and mechanical reproduction phases. Today, what is referred to as "the toe" could be any one of a range of toes that have reached the saloon in a variety of often uninteresting ways.



In other words, the sacralization shifts from the toe as an object to the toe as a symbol. The draw is the sheer strangeness and perhaps the taboo of drinking a shot with a dehydrated mummified toe in it. The experience of interacting with the sacralized object is then more exciting and attractive than the object itself.

The application of MacCannell's framework to the Sourtoe Cocktail reveals a shift from the sacralization of a sight (a physical object) to the sacralization of an experience, wherein the toe becomes a symbol. As demonstrated, the actual attraction is the experience of drinking the Sourtoe Cocktail, rather than the toe as a simple object. Therefore, immaterial attractions such as particular experiences and performances (Fine and Speer, 1985) become relevant to deconstruct under MacCannell's framework.

Since the experience becomes identified to some extent with the destination, we can argue that the experience of the Sourtoe Cocktail, on a destination branding level, differentiates Dawson City. It is possible that tourists choose destinations not because of the physical characteristics of the destination but because of a particular experience that the destination offers. In many cases, the particular experience relies on physical characteristics of the destination. Although many tourists may travel to the Grand Canyon for a helicopter flightseeing tour, for example, this experience is impossible to carry out without being at the Grand Canyon. The case of the Sourtoe Cocktail, as we have argued, no longer relies heavily on its geographical Arctic context – it could be done anywhere – and this is perhaps why it is necessary that it is so bizarre and totally unique. We could argue, therefore, that experience sacralization requires the experience to be particularly unusual and unlikely to be replicated elsewhere. Although it is an interesting strategy of Dawson City to market this bizarre activity, it must be acknowledged that this one interesting experience does not brand, characterize or revitalize the entire destination.

### **3.2 *Artification and the Sourtoe Cocktail***

In tourism studies, there is no sound geographical definition of where the Arctic begins; some researchers have used the Arctic Human Development Report definition (Maher *et al.*, 2014), the tree line (Stonehouse and Snyder, 2010) or the Arctic Circle (Viken, 2013). In their book on Arctic experiences, Lee *et al.* (2017, p. 2) simply included as their definition all “areas and regions as per the consideration of relevant phytogeographic, climatic, geomorphological, latitudinal and geopolitical criteria.” Therefore, depending on the borders used to delimit the Arctic, Dawson City can be included within the Arctic, or, at the very least, can be considered as part of the periphery of the Arctic that could plausibly be incorporated into the image of the Arctic through Artification.

In their report, Rantala *et al.* (2019) emphasize the negative impacts of Artification, arguing that, because of the reliance on winter imagery (ice, snow and darkness, for example), tourism activities become highly landscape based and reliant on seasonal characteristics. This leaves tourism operators dependent on climatic elements that they cannot control, and locks activities into particular seasons. This restricts their potential to exist year-round, which is argued to be beneficial for the local economy. Neglecting distinct seasons in Arctic locations has arguably led to a “Disneyfication” of Arctic tourism, whereby the culture, nature and geography of the northern region is repackaged in a soft and commercial nature. In this way, Arctic tourism products arguably become shiny, “soft” adventure tourism products which are accessible to a wider segment of tourists but which do not reflect the true conditions of the Arctic and are not perceived to represent the “authentic,” the “real reality” of the Arctic, to use MacCannell's words (1973, p. 591).

Having identified that Artification is a trend in tourism in the North, the report on seasonality suggests some recommendations for operators, policymakers and others involved in the tourism industry. In relation to Artification, the authors suggest that practitioners should “develop high-season tourism based on the local community perspective and with diverse images representing a variety of Arctic meanings and experiences” (Rantala *et al.*, 2019, p. 63). Such strategy aims at “[avoiding] stereotypical production and marketing of winter tourism that reinforces the Artification process and the image of the Arctic as cold, snowy and empty of people” (p. 63).

As revealed by the deconstruction of the Sourtoe Cocktail case according to MacCannell's sight sacralization, the connection between the Sourtoe Cocktail and the Arctic is evident only at the first stage and from a historical perspective. Indeed, the origin of our case study lies in the rough conditions of the Arctic, in a blizzard that in the 1920s led Louie Linken to suffer from frostbite and lose his toe. The attraction gained notoriety because of this incongruous story that today is almost narrated as a legend. The harsh Arctic became the first driver of the Sourtoe Cocktail by bringing some absurdity on the one hand, as well as some credibility on the other hand. Indeed, the story had to be believed in order to generate curiosity among locals and visitors, and the Arctic, with its long history of epic adventures and tragedies, brings some reliability to this context. Nevertheless, the connection to the Arctic seems to stop here, at the origins of the story that led to the creation of the Sourtoe attraction. Indeed, as demonstrated, the enshrinement phase led to a greater connection with the Klondike gold mining folklore.

Due to its detachment from stereotypical Arctic characteristics, its focus on the very local context, and the ability of the activity to be conducted all year around, the Sourtoe Cocktail can be seen as an example that fulfills the recommendation quoted above. The Sourtoe Cocktail, through its unique quality, is certainly diverse and brings a greater variety of meanings to Arctic or potentially Arctic experiences. In this way, it combats the arguably negative trend of Arctification and contributes to a sustainable future for tourism in Dawson City, by tackling the restrictive nature of seasonality and incorporating local communities in the development of the product rather than global, homogenous perspectives of the Arctic.

The Sourtoe Cocktail is not a shiny, "Disneyfied" product. On the contrary, it is born out of a story of rough Arctic conditions, and the activity itself is raw and shocking to many. Although the story of the loss of the original toe takes place in a snowy, inhospitable and empty Arctic, the constant supply of human toes required to sustain the offering of the Sourtoe Cocktail as a tourism product reminds us that the Arctic region is very much inhabited, and that people are very much an integral part of it. In countering Arctification, Rantala *et al.* (2019) call for innovativeness, creativity and diversity in products, and this is something that the Sourtoe Cocktail activity offers in spades.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study has explored the intricacies of one particular tourism attraction located in the Yukon, known as the Sourtoe Cocktail. MacCannell's (1976) sight sacralization framework was applied in order to deconstruct some of the processes and relationships that permeate the activity. Analyzing the Sourtoe Cocktail according to this framework prompted an interesting discussion about the absurdity of what is being sacralized in this case – something very ordinary, and not of any obvious cultural, historical or aesthetic worth. Therefore, in this case, the making of the Sourtoe Cocktail product as an attraction started with the sacralization of the toe (an object), and as the product became more and more touristic, the sacralization shifted from the sight to the experience. We suggest that this opens the framework up to be applied to tourism experiences and performances as well as to more typical sights, and questioned whether this indicates an emerging shift in the tourism landscape, from the sacralization of objects to the sacralization of experiences.

Our analysis of the toe using MacCannell's framework revealed the local and social connections between the activity of the Sourtoe Cocktail and its Dawson City context. We argue that the activity is only "Arctic" in the sense that the original toe was lost in Arctic conditions, and that the activity's connection to the Arctic is therefore rather weak. This goes against the trend of Arctification which has previously been identified in northern regions. Actively counteracting Arctification becomes necessary in the contribution of a more sustainable and diverse future of Arctic tourism, where the tourism industry would become more relevant to local communities.

The Sourtoe Cocktail, of course, is only one example of a tourism activity in one northern destination that counteracts Arctification, but it nevertheless complements Rantala *et al.*'s report (2019) by exemplifying how products with their roots in stereotypical Arctic imagery can work to promote and increase sustainability, diversity and local relevance in Northern regions. Our case also builds on the report's findings by expanding its scope – offering an example from northern

Canada while the report focuses mainly on examples from northern Europe. This suggests that a countertrend to Arctification (which could be termed de-Arctification) can be seen to be developing not just in the European Arctic but in other Arctic or Northern locations as well. Overall, the case shines a positive light on the future of tourism in Northern and sub-Arctic areas. As argued in Rantala *et al.*'s report (2019), if de-Arctification contributes to the sustainability of tourism in the Arctic, then the Sourtoe Cocktail and its making into a tourism product can be seen as an example to follow for tourism practitioners in their future developments. Finally, this study calls for further research, both on the case study of the Sourtoe Cocktail and on the development of tourism in the Arctic at a more global scale. Additional research, including comprehensive and empirical ethnographic data collection would complete our conceptual approach of the Sourtoe Cocktail and benefit to its understanding and role in the tourism industry in the context of Dawson City. We also suggest that further research could focus on the examination of other emerging and peculiar or anomalous examples of tourism in the Arctic, and to further investigate the potential of de-Arctification.

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### Corresponding author

Alix Varnajot can be contacted at: [alix.varnajot@oulu.fi](mailto:alix.varnajot@oulu.fi)

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