

Coastal Tourism in Historic Newburyport, Massachusetts: A  
Mixed Qualitative Methods Exploration of the Impact of  
COVID-19

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**Abstract**

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Tourism studies is a critical topic within the field of marine and environmental affairs. Deeply connected to the social, material, and natural environments, tourism shapes the lives of people worldwide. The onset of COVID-19 created major shifts and new challenges across global tourism systems. This thesis explores coastal tourism in Newburyport, Massachusetts during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic using mixed qualitative methodology. Building on a foundation of theoretical frameworks for touristic study, this thesis presents the area's touristic history, culture, and traditions, and examines the conflicts, plans, challenges, and other factors shaping tourism. This thesis identifies 8 major themes of convergence and 6 major themes of divergence to emerge in the first two years of the pandemic. COVID-19 has escalated many of the existing touristic tensions but has also led to unexpected solutions and improvements. The long-term impacts of the still developing pandemic on tourism cannot yet be known but presents a timely and critical area for academic study. This research provides recommendations about tourism's development for city leadership and contributes to the growing body of touristic literature vital for the field of marine and environmental affairs.

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## **Introduction**

The field of marine and environmental affairs lies at the intersection of multiple disciplines and addresses a myriad of social and environmental issues. This includes but is not limited to issues of law and policy, fishery and resource management, ecosystem and biological research, and coastal economic development. This thesis focuses upon an incredibly important field within marine affairs: coastal tourism. As an industry, tourism has been present throughout history but has exploded over the last century alongside the rise of globalism. Despite its global prevalence, tourism is an understudied but growing area of academic inquiry. Tourism deeply shapes the lives of many people worldwide, and understanding it is crucial in a world of escalating environmental and social tensions. COVID-19 is one such external factor, and pandemic's onset created major shifts and new challenges across the tourism industry.

Coastal New England has a rich history of tourism revolving around the area's culture, oceanside scenery, and appealing aesthetic. The Massachusetts city of Newburyport (NBPT) exemplifies many of the classic characteristics of New England tourism, but also encompasses all the complexities and controversies inherent to tourism as well. COVID-19 has escalated many of the existing touristic tensions but has also led to unexpected solutions and improvements. The long-term impacts of the still developing pandemic on tourism cannot yet be known, but presents a critical area for academic study.

## **Plan of Thesis**

This thesis explores tourism in the NBPT area during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The thesis is structured into two sections, each with three chapters. **Part I: Basic Concepts** introduces necessary background information unconnected to the NBPT area. Chapter 1 defines relevant sub-categories of tourism and introduces a series of frameworks for studying tourism. Chapter 2 explores the nascence and subsequent diffusion of COVID-19. Chapter 3 discusses the mixed qualitative methods used to undertake the original research. There is then a brief written segue into **Part II: Newburyport Study**. Chapter 4 introduces the setting of NBPT, with relevant stakeholder, geographic, and historical context. Chapter 5 discusses the data collection process and modes of analysis. Chapter 6 presents the results and discussion of the original research, before the final Conclusion. Also included are five appendices containing: an autoethnographic note with remarks on the research process; a series of interview profiles written following oral history and journalistic traditions; an interview guiding document; a supplementary PowerPoint on the interviewing process; and a related article exploring COVID-19's impact on recreational boating. I hope to present a holistic and practical exploration of tourism in NBPT during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Chapter 1: Theoretical Frameworks for Tourism Research**

*"Tourism is omnipresent, directly or indirectly involving a huge number of people around the world. Because tourism is easily undertaken and witnessed, it is especially tempting for all of those on the scene to regard themselves as expert analysts and judges. In fact~ systematic tourism studies are relatively uncommon and the magnitude and significance of touristic phenomena are frequently subject to both under- and over-estimation by the casual observer... Tourism, then, is unpredictable, inherently controversial, and utterly social. It should come, therefore, as no surprise that our understandings and opinions of it are so maddeningly ephemeral."*

(Miller, 1993, p. 182)

### **Chapter Introduction**

There are several major theoretical tools available to help study tourism systems and processes. While this research primarily focuses on the human and social dimensions of tourism, the issues at hand can only be understood with a holistic, systems perspective. This chapter begins by offering a definition for the primary topic of study, tourism, and for several relevant designations within tourism: coastal tourism, cultural/historical tourism, and nature tourism. With these definitions presented, this chapter introduces theoretical frameworks for studying the multi-faceted dynamics of tourism: the Broker-Local-Tourist (BLT) System and the Human-Artifactual-Natural System (HANS). This chapter concludes with a brief explanation on destinations and activities.

### **Tourism Defined**

No one definition is likely to meet the needs of every tourism researcher. However, several key components of defining tourism merit discussion or at least, explanation. The first and most important of these is the necessity of understanding tourism as a system. Systems thinking, an approach critical for handling the complexity of modern social issues, calls upon the researcher to “see both the forest and the trees; one eye in each” (Richmond, 1994, p. 7). A more recent and perhaps more practical definition describes systems thinking as:

“A set of synergistic analytic skills used to improve the capability of identifying and understanding systems, predicting their behaviors, and devising modifications to them in order to produce desired effects.” (Arnold & Wade, 2015, p. 7)

These synergistic skills are crucial for parsing the relationships between social, natural, and built environments found in tourism. It is not enough to say tourism is travel for leisure; nor is it enough to say tourism is the industry that supports this travel. Understanding tourism as an entire system is the only approach encompassing all aspects of the field.

Another point of clarification regards the idea of *travel for contrast* (Miller & Ditton, 1986). Whether motivated by work, education, religion, culture, finances, or just plain hedonism, the ultimate goal of touristic travel is to experience that which cannot be found at home. There are many forms this contrast might take, but it is a fundamental part of the tourist system.

For the purposes of this research, tourism is defined as: *the systems surrounding and supporting travel for contrast, including all the stakeholders (broker, tourists, and locals) that facilitate this travel through interaction with people, objects, nature, religion, culture, history, and markets.*

## **Destinations**

Before exploring the different types of tourism relevant to this research, the concept of tourist destinations is worthy of note. The paradoxical nature of destinations is described by Miller and colleagues:

“Destinations are real and concrete in that they are actual places that can be objectively described, measured, owned, and governed. They are unreal and ethereal in that they also exist in people’s dreams and hopes.” (Miller et al., 2013, p. 118)

Destinations become locations where tourists’ expectations meet reality, and this collision reveals contradictions for the destination and the tourist. Additionally, destinations mean different things to different categories of people. For tourists, they are a place to be visited. For locals, they might be home, or something else entirely. Offering a concrete definition of destinations is, as Miller et al. point out, not a simple task:

“In the case of destinations (as with the other elusive concepts), tourism experts have simply come to realize that the term is polysemous, hence vexing. As the remarks in the introduction suggest, destinations have different degrees of significance for different kinds of people (tourists, analysts, policy makers, entrepreneurs). The meaning of destination hinges on the purposes for which it is defined in the first place. Thus, any destination definition only has value to the

extent to which it helps people to achieve their particular ends.” (Miller et al., 2013, p. 119)

Thus, it is sometimes necessary to select the most useful definition, as opposed to trying to find one that can meet every need. For the purposes of this thesis, a deep delve into the different possibility of destinations is not relevant. Rather, I borrow the World Heritage Centre’s 2007 definition, which is broad enough to be helpfully unconstraining:

“Destination: Any place at any scale defined by the market as a unique location capable of attracting visitation. A site is a location of a unique feature; many sites may be within a single destination.” (p. 137)

In this thesis, the term destination will refer to the greater area of Newburyport (NBPT). The terms attraction and feature will be used interchangeably to describe the specific events, activities, and locations sought by tourists.

### **Relevant Categories of Tourism**

Tourism to the greater NBPT area is by pure geographic nature, coastal tourism. Coastal tourism encompasses a broad range of activities. The coastal environment is rich in cultural and natural resources that drive tourism and is thus encompasses the other types of tourism discussed here. Additionally, the coastal zone is inherently a multi-use space. Fishing, boating, shipping, aquaculture, and development industries often vie for access to limited space. Thus, coastal areas often become arenas for competition, congestion, and conflict between stakeholders and industries (Miller, Auyong, & Hadley,

2002). The coastal spaces surrounding NBPT are no different, as will be explored more in later chapters.

## **1. Beach Tourism**

Coastal tourism has grown immensely in recent decades, replacing historic activities like fishing and boating as the dominant seaside industry (Klein, Osleeb, & Viola, 2004). Worldwide, a majority of tourism-derived profit is concentrated in areas less than 50 miles from the coast (Klein et al., 2004). The most obvious and most studied attraction in coastal destinations is that of beaches. While broad, white-sanded tropical beaches are primary destination of coastal tourists, even the colder beaches of New England have their appeal. Infrastructure supporting the access and enjoyment of these spaces comprise a thriving 'beach industry,' maximizing the pleasure and profit in these spaces (Jones & Phillips, 2011; Williams, 2010). Allan Williams categorizes beach destinations using myriad criteria, including those stemming from geomorphology, climatology, development, origin, and use (Williams, 2010). He designates five main categories of beach type: resort, urban, village, rural, remote. The beaches that draw tourists to the NBPT region best fit Williams' village category. They are "outside the main urban environment" and have a "small, permanent population reflecting access to organized but small-scale community services such a primary school(s), religious centre(s) and shop(s)" (Williams, 2010, p. 6).

## **2. Cultural Tourism**

Cultural tourism is somewhat elusive concept, constantly evolving, and encompassing the nexus of societal, aesthetic, symbolic, spiritual, historical, and economic values. One scholar, Lluís Bonet, argued that “it is actually very difficult to define what cultural tourism is about. There are almost as many definitions as there are tourists visiting cultural places” (Bonet, 2013, p. 387). Touristic consumption of culture is a shared feature of most definitions, but the definition of culture itself varies widely. Rather than attempt an original definition for cultural tourism, this paper shall borrow the words of Noonan and Rizzo in their 2017 essay “Economics of cultural tourism: issues and perspectives”:

“...cultural tourism often involves more than just museums, monuments, plazas, and other infrastructure that is itself historic or contains cultural artifacts. Cultural destinations can involve the intangible and, indeed, the temporary.” (Noonan & Rizzo, 2017, p. 98)

Certainly, cultural tourism in NBPT encompasses the history, events, arts, and traditions of the area. An argument could well be made for the use of an additional separate category here containing the restaurant and the retail scene in NBPT. However, for the purposes of this thesis, commercial tourism is treated as a component of cultural tourism. Conventional commercial tourism, evocative of shopping malls and extravagant food experiences, does not appropriately convey the feeling of shopping and dining in NBPT. The primary appeal of NBPT’s specific brand of tourism is the small-scale, quaint appeal typical to seaside New England communities. It is this unique feeling, cited by tourists and locals alike, that draws visitors to NBPT, and this feeling resonates much

more with the aspects of history and culture than with commerce. For this reason, retail and food industries will be included in the definition of cultural tourism for the purposes of this thesis.

### **3. Nature Tourism**

A not insignificant number of people travel to the NBPT area to visit the array of state parks, to birdwatch, and to otherwise enjoy the scenic river and seaside. For these individuals, NBPT offers an appealing array of naturalistic pursuits, and these are perhaps the only designation of tourist present year-round in the community. In describing the activities of these typically semi-local (often, in-state) travelers, I reject the now conventional term ecotourism, which:

“Centers nature-based attractions; employs best practice environmental management; contributes to conservation; involves local communities; offers effective interpretation; and generally, though not exclusively, favors smaller scale operation.” (Nyaupane, 2016, p. 1)

Defined as such, ecotourism does not apply to NBPT because there is no discernable attempt on the part of these tourists to minimize their environmental impact, or find sustainable methods of engagement. They partake in existing infrastructure, used and facilitated primarily by locals, but contribute nothing towards the aforementioned ‘best practice environmental management’. For this reason, my research designates this manner of tourism as *nature tourism*, and I will use this to refer to those primarily seeking nature-based attractions in the greater NBPT area.

### **Tourism Frameworks**

Tourism systems must be viewed with a holistic perspective to account for their many facets. To research these systems, this thesis relies upon two frameworks: the Broker-Local-Tourist Model, and a Human-Artifactual-Natural System. These are explained below.

### **A. The Broker-Local-Tourist Model**

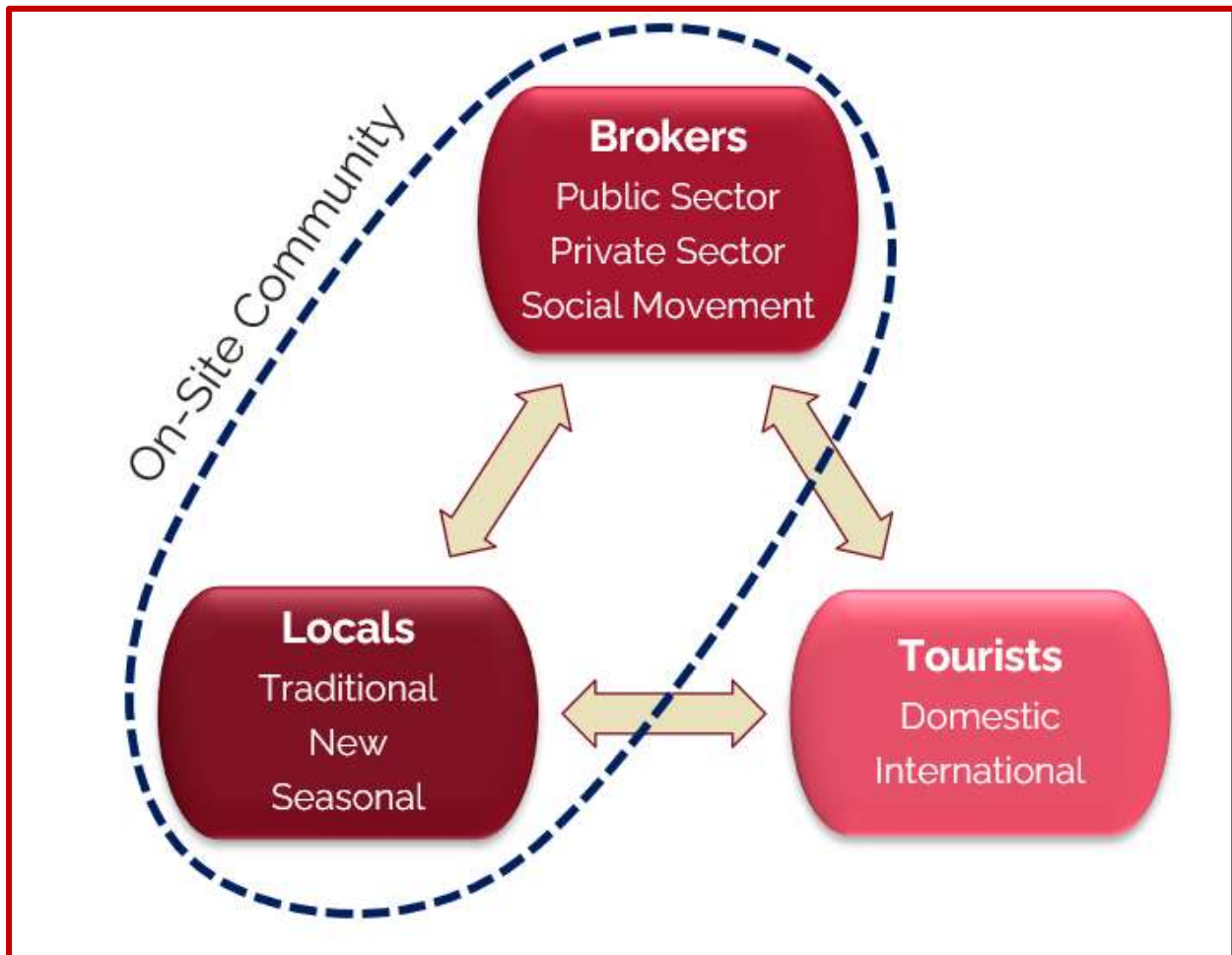
Understanding and researching the complex dynamics of tourism is a task made easier by theoretical frameworks. The first framework employed in this research is that of the *Broker-Local-Tourist (BLT) Model*, created by Miller and colleagues (Miller, 1993). This framework, displayed in **Figure 1.1**, deals with the social aspects of tourism and designates three distinct categories of individuals who participate in tourist systems: brokers, locals, and tourists.

*Brokers* are those who “in one way or another pay professional attention to tourism” (Miller et al., 2002, p. 7). This encompasses a wide range of commercial enterprises, who inevitably carry a vested interest in the expansion and development of the tourist industry in their area. Tourism brokers can be further subcategorized into three groups:

- *Private Sector Brokers*, forming a significant part of the tourism industry.
- *Public Sector Brokers*, who manage, plan, research and regulate tourism activities and industries.

- *Social Movement Brokers*, operating in nongovernmental, non-profit, and environmental organizations addressing tourism issues.

**Figure 1.1 (Adapted from Miller, 1993; Miller et al., 2002): The Broker-Local-Tourist Model of Coastal Development.** The BLT model illustrates the human setting of tourism dynamics. The Brokers and Locals are part of the Onsite Community, and the diagram shows the different sub-categories of each BLT designation.



These three sectors of broker do not always agree on how touristic development should advance, leading to frequent conflict, as well as collaboration (Miller et al., 2002).

*Locals* are those who reside in the vicinity of coastal tourist destinations, but neither profit from tourist activities nor engage in the government and management of these activities (Miller et al., 2002). Locals can be longtime residents or recent neighborhood additions, and often have strong feelings about tourism in their locale. Together, locals and brokers serve as the *on-site community*.

*Tourists* are those who travel for relatively short periods of time to a destination before returning home. They can be motivated by a wide variety of things and can be international or domestic in origin (Miller, 1993; Miller et al., 2002).

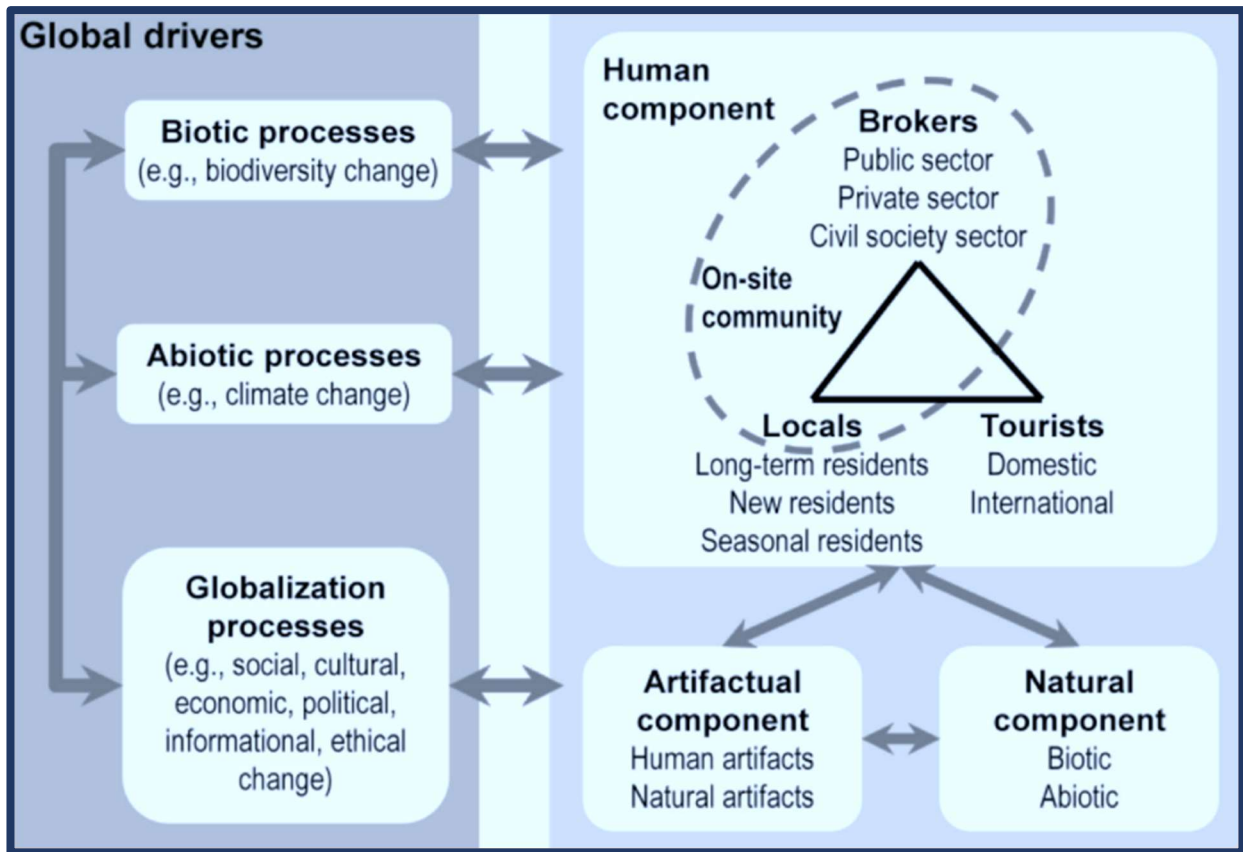
## **B. The Human-Artifactual-Natural System**

The BLT Model addresses the social dimension of tourism, but that is just one small component of the larger collective. The next framework, a Human-Artifactual-Natural-System (HANS), encompasses human, built, and ecological dimensions and is a critical tool for a holistic understanding of tourism systems (Miller, Carter, Walsh, & Peake, 2014). HANS dynamics, displayed in **Figure 1.2**, are an example of a coupled natural and human system. The framework positions the BLT model within the broader contexts of our surrounding environments, and with global drivers impacted the tourist system.

*The Human component* of the touristic HANS is best understood through the dynamics of the BLT model. It is the “behavior, beliefs, knowledge, and emotions” of

these groups that impact each other and drive tourism and development in an area (Miller et al., 2014, pp. 261–262).

**Figure 1.2 (Adapted from Miller et al., 2014): The Human-Artifactual-Natural System.** This model positions the human, artifactual, and natural environments with outside global forces. © Rodney William Carter, *Author Content*, 2014



The *Artifactual component* of the HANS is a category containing “the elements of material culture that are the products of human innovation, as well as natural and non-natural objects created or utilized by non-human organisms” (Miller et al., 2014, p. 262). The inclusion of an artifactual category is an important addition. It provides

“...explicit acknowledgment that human daily behaviors and routines are, in part, determined by our artifacts in the same way they are by cultural and social

standards, language itself, and the outer environment. What we decide to wear, where we choose to interact, and what we equip ourselves to accomplish in a national park are simultaneously facilitated and constrained by artifacts.” (Miller et al., 2014, p. 262)

No list of touristic *human artifacts* could possibly be comprehensive, but some artifact examples include:

“... technologies, tools, machines, utensils, utilities, art, clothing, artificial foodstuffs, and the countless parts constituting the built environment... a wide range of infrastructures, devices, and instruments that meet basic transportation and access needs (roads, airports, piers, boardwalks, marinas), accommodation needs (hotels, rental homes, campgrounds, restaurants) and special activity needs (scuba equipment, cameras, binoculars).” (Miller et al., 2014, p. 262)

*The Natural component* encompasses the abiotic and biotic functions of the world, including systems both valuable to tourism, and not. The surrounding environment unconstructed by humans, the wildlife, and weather and climate, and more elements construct the natural component of the HANS.

*Global drivers* are the final piece of the HANS, and are categorized by Miller et al, 2014, into three types:

- Biotic processes, as illustrated by biological and ecological processes influencing change in biodiversity (malaria, bubonic plague, SARS)
- Abiotic processes, as illustrated by physical and chemical properties contributing to change in climate (climate change, earthquakes, meteor strike)

- Globalization processes, as illustrated by social, cultural, economic, political, ethical, informational processes shaping change in the social order (AI, world war, political revolution, economic collapse)

The primary global driver of interest to this thesis research is global and biotic process of COVID-19, which has dominated the tourism industry for the last 2 years.

The origin and diffusion of coronavirus, and its impact upon tourism processes, is explored in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2: The COVID-19 Pandemic

*“Which visitors do we miss now? Which ones were creating frustration? What sites are benefitting from a respite from the crush of visitors?”*

(Frank Haas & James Mak, 2020, para. 1)

### Chapter Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The emergence and spread of COVID-19 impacted societies the world over and continues to shape the lives and behaviors of people each day. As of early 2022, the global pandemic is rampant and evolving, with a race ongoing between vaccine/treatment development and distribution and the virus’ own variants and spread. Although vaccines have lent a degree of safety to some communities, distribution inequities and vaccine resistance abound. In the United States, infection and death rates ebb and flow and vary by geographic and political region, with much uncertainty remaining around the future of the pandemic. This chapter defines COVID-19, maps its origin and diffusion globally, and discusses its impact upon the coastal tourism industry.

### COVID-19 Defined

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<sup>1</sup> The onset, development, and continuation of COVID-19 has evolved in such a rapid and expansive way that updating this chapter to reflect current information would become an unending task. This chapter seeks to outline context of COVID-19 in relation to the time of study. While there have been many subsequent developments since the time of original authorship, the thesis is limited in scope to the first two summers of the pandemic, in 2020 and 2021.

Defined by World Health Organization (WHO) as *an infectious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus*, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) can cause mild to severe respiratory illness and even death, especially in older individuals and those with underlying medical conditions (WHO, 2021). The WHO and other official public health bodies promote similarly worded definitions of the disease, all sharing the same major traits.

For the purposes of a scientific definition, this paper borrows one from the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC). The CDC defines COVID-19 as “a respiratory disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, a new coronavirus discovered in 2019. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. Some people who are infected may not have symptoms.” (CDC, 2021, para. 1)

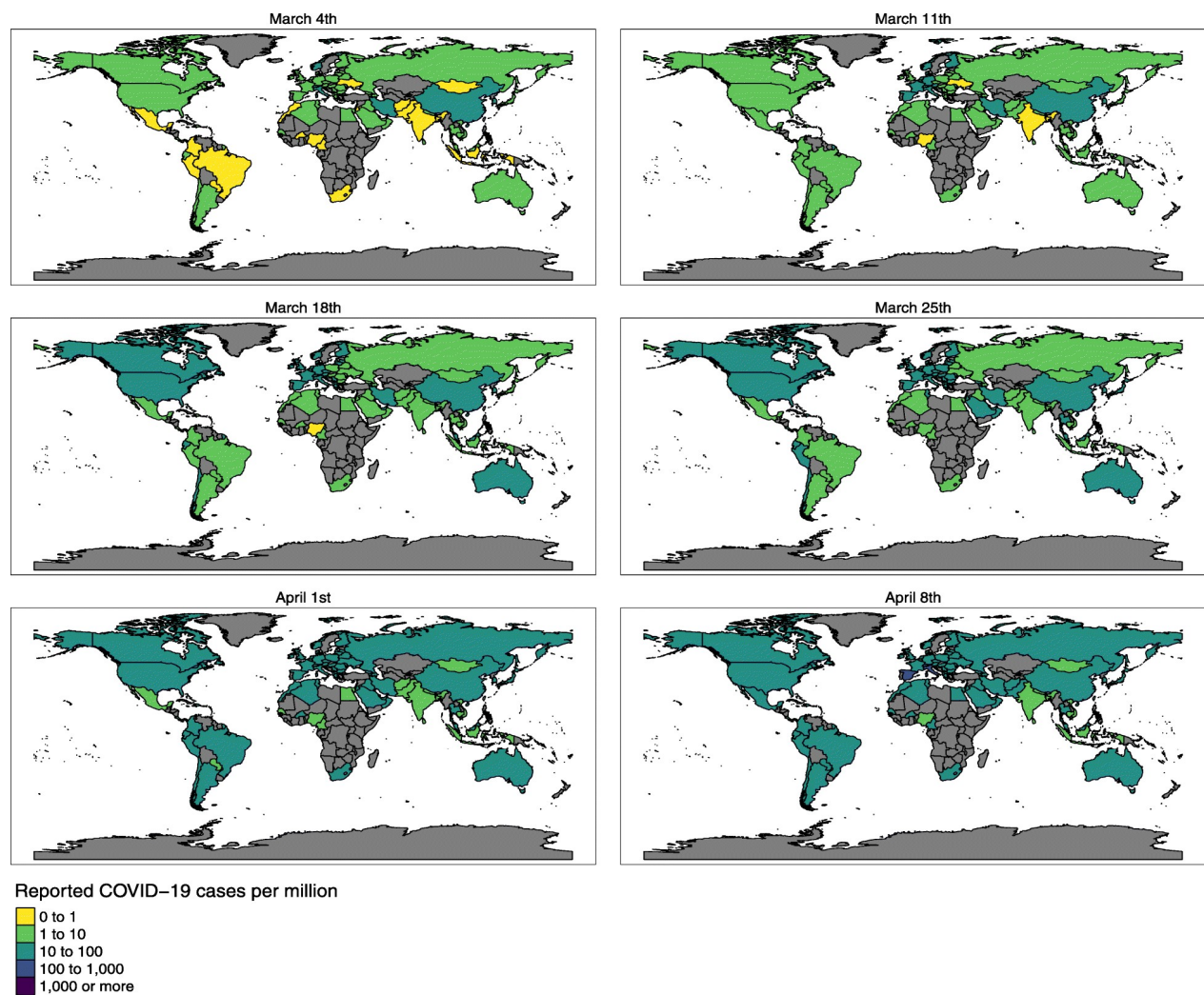
Through this thesis, the terms COVID-19 and coronavirus are used interchangeably when discussing this infectious virus and the disease it causes.

## **Origin and Diffusion**

The first cases of COVID-19 were reported in December of 2019 in Wuhan City, Hubei province, in China, although at the time, it was reported as a novel viral pneumonia of unknown cause (Carvalho, Krammer, & Iwasaki, 2021). The new virus' genes were isolated for study, which traced its likely origin to bats (Fernández-de-las-

Peñas, 2021). While there have been two other recent coronavirus outbreaks caused by similar viruses, first in 2002 and then in 2012, neither reached more than 10,000 cases worldwide, and the newest virus has proven to be far more infectious and dangerous (Carvalho et al., 2021).

**Figure 2.1 (Sigler et al., 2021): Early Rates of Novel Coronavirus March-April 2019.** These maps highlight the rapidity of COVID-19’s international spread. © 2022 BioMed Central Ltd



The earliest cases of COVID-19 described the initial common symptoms as fatigue, fever, coughing, and muscle pain, which then lead to pneumonia. Of 41 early documented patients, 13 required intensive care treatment and 6 died. Twenty-six of

them suffered some lasting respiratory and immune deficiencies known as “long COVID” (Fernández-de-las-Peñas, 2021; Wu, Chen, & Chan, 2020). Concern over person-to-person transmission intensified as evidence pointed to an upsetting feature of COVID-19: pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals can transmit the virus to others (Carvalho et al., 2021). This led to the conclusion that COVID-19 had been circulating in Wuhan City since mid-December 2019 untraced (Carvalho et al., 2021).

Two months after its discovery, three novel features of the virus, now labelled COVID-19, were highlighted by health reports as unique characteristics defining this coronavirus outbreak: aggressive person-to-person transmission; an incubation period that varies across age ranges—5.7 days for young adults, 8 days for older adults—making it harder to consistently detect and trace; and evidence for transmission between pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals (Kong, 2020; Wassie, Azene, Bantie, Dessie, & Aragaw, 2020; Wu et al., 2020). Reports of significant numbers of cases of COVID-19 from other countries burgeoned in February, with the virus rapidly evolving into an international concern (Sigler et al., 2021). Three months after the initial Wuhan City cases, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. By the end of May, the death toll in the United States had passed 100,000, although health experts say this is likely a significant underestimate (AJMC Staff, 2020).

By the Summer of 2020, the pandemic had spread worldwide, becoming the dominant influencer of behavior, policy, and economies. New developments, such as

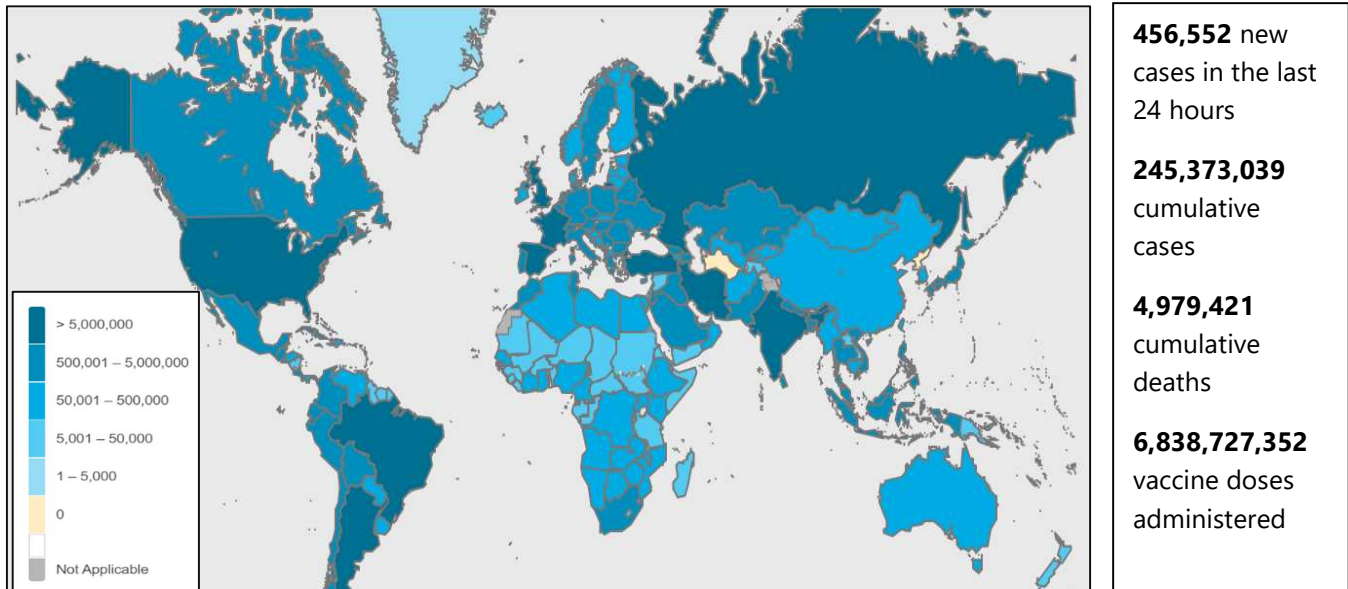
reliable saliva tests and rapid tests, allowed for more rigorous tracking and prevention of viral spread, but availability and use of such developments was and remains very limited in some countries, including the United States (Liu, 2021). During this time, vaccine research and development was pushed into overdrive, with private and public institutions alike holding clinical trials and, in some cases, pooling information to increase the odds of the quick discovery of a viable vaccine (AJMJ Staff, 2020). These efforts culminated in the creation of several successful vaccines, with the most used vaccines in the first 18 months of the pandemic being developed by pharmaceutical companies Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, and AstraZeneca (WHO, 2021). The distribution of these vaccines is ongoing and varies significantly country to country, and certainly state-to-state in the U.S., depending on affluence, political ideology, and availability. Use of these vaccines is constantly evolving, with much current focus placed on the safety and effectiveness of these vaccines for children and for severely immunocompromised individuals (WHO, 2021).

The scientific understanding of COVID-19 and its health impacts increased over time, bringing with it the knowledge that the virus can cause lasting, potentially permanent, damage to respiratory, neurological, and immune systems, even in patients did not require hospitalization or treatment (Fernández-de-las-Peñas, 2021). Scientific guidance on minimizing the risk of transmission has shown the effectiveness of certain behaviors like masking (with appropriately robust filters), social distancing, and installing

air filtration measures, and the importance of hygienic behaviors like handwashing and disinfection processes (AJMJ Staff, 2020; Bielecki et al., 2020). Though supported by sound data, the prevalence of these behaviors was undercut by contradictory, unclear, or outright negligent policy responses in the United States (Liu, 2021). In September of 2021, the WHO's effort at creating and distributing a global vaccine equitably amongst developing countries was rejected by the United States, and the country hit a record high of 100,000 new coronavirus cases in one day on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (AJMC Staff, 2020). This daily record has since been surpassed, with an astounding 1.35 million cases reported on January 10, 2022 (Shumaker, 2022).

Since Spring 2021, international focus has been on vaccine distribution, on ensuring safe vaccines for children (in part to facilitate a safe return to schools) and on economic recovery (WHO, 2021). Global supply chain shortages, present from the pandemic's onset, have limited the availability of crucial medical supplies such as syringes, masks, air filters, sterilization equipment, life-saving intubation machines, and more, which disproportionately endangers poorer countries and locals worldwide (Chappell, 2021). Vaccine disparities have been exacerbated by political resistance and vaccine denialism in the United States, which has discarded over 15 million expired vaccine doses that went unclaimed by resistant populations, while other less affluent countries like India continue to suffer from high death rates and vaccine shortages (Lie & Miller, 2021; Padma, 2021).

**Figure 2.2 (WHO, <https://covid19.who.int/>, 2021): Coronavirus Global Case Count October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021.** Shows the current case count for coronavirus and its variants worldwide. Included are cumulative counts of vaccine and death rates. © World Health Organization



Spring 2021 saw the emergence of several COVID-19 variant strains, with the most famous ones currently being the colloquially called Delta variant, known for heightened transmission rates, and the Lambda variant, known for increased symptom severity (Callaway, 2021). The spread and rates of these variants, and the original strain, have fluctuated over the last months, with herd immunity remaining out of grasp in the United States and in vaccine-strapped countries (Altman, 2020). Daily infection rates remain high, but deaths are concentrated in unvaccinated or poorly vaccinated communities (Sigler et al., 2021). This is a testament to the efficiency of the vaccines which do not prevent coronavirus transmission or infection, but do vastly minimize the risk of developing severe symptoms leading to hospitalization and death (Lie & Miller, 2021).

As of October 2021, several concerns continue to dominate the research and communication surrounding COVID-19. The first of these is the pressing need for a child-safe vaccine. Approval of existing vaccines for children ages 5 and up is pending, and trials are underway for children as young as 6 months old (WHO, 2021). While children are at relatively low risk for severe symptoms, a return to public education as before can only be facilitated by the presence of an effective vaccine.

Another significant concern, primarily in the United States, is the presence of vaccine resistant pockets. Whether rooted in confusion, mistrust of science and government, information politicization or malice, a significant portion of the population have refused the free vaccines offered. Even positive incentives to vaccinate (e.g., cash bonuses, vouchers, coupons, lotteries, free drugs, and more) and negative consequences for refusing vaccination (e.g., loss of employment, increased health insurance costs, and public shaming, for example) have failed to induce widespread vaccine support, especially in Republican dominated states (Altman, 2020; Lyerly, 2021; Yilmazkuday, 2020). Additionally, the presence of significant unvaccinated populations necessitates punitive enforcement and tracking of vaccination status, as incidents of counterfeit vaccination cards has skyrocketed in the United States in response to government and corporate vaccine mandates (Hasnan & Tan, 2021; Peretti-Watel et al., 2019). Until this resistance is overcome, achieving herd immunity is impossible, and a full relaxation of mask and social distancing mandates will be unlikely as unvaccinated individuals can

pose significant risk to each other and to those with underlying medical conditions (CDC, 2021).

As the US enters into its third year of COVID-19, the scientific understanding of the virus has increased significantly, but the uncertainty surrounding the virus' future remains, especially the Omicron and subsequent variants continues to spread. The situation's rapid evolution, and the United States' inconsistent and insufficient response likely means that COVID will be a major factor influencing our society for a while to come (Carvalho et al., 2021).

### **COVID-19's Impact Upon Coastal Tourism**

The onset of COVID-19 struck many industries, and tourism has been drastically impacted in many ways. Early in the pandemic, many major tourist destinations shut down entirely, or began operating with limited capacities and strict safety guidelines. Some of these were due to specific government policies. A 60-80% decline in the international tourism economy was reported for 2020 (OECD, 2020b). Over the course of 2020, many countries, including the United States, have implemented, removed, and re-implemented an ever-fluctuating set of travel restrictions that have shaped the possibilities for tourism during the pandemic.

The realm of coastal tourism is somewhat unique and has not necessarily operated with the same restrictions as tourist industries broadly. While museums, concerts, and all manner of indoor events and attractions were stymied by coronavirus restrictions,

outdoor attractions saw an increase in traffic during this time. Public parks became the safest gathering places for many social occasions. Beaches, and the litany of outdoor recreation they enable, have not necessarily seen the same decrease over the last year as urban, cultural, or other types of tourism. For example, the boating industry has boomed since the onset of the pandemic, and still is struggling to meet the uptick in demand. Coastal tourism is not monolithic, and the activities of destinations during this time have largely depended on area-specific restrictions. Select examples of impacts on coastal tourism are highlighted for Australia, Japan, and the United States in the following sections.

## Australia

**Figure 2.3 (Photo by James D Morgan/Getty Images): Closure of municipal beach in Sydney, Australia.** Beaches across many countries were shut down in March of 2020 in the effort to promote social distancing in public areas. These restrictions have been lifted in most places. © 1999-2015 Getty Images



Australia implemented closures of most non-essential operations, including most tourism related activities, and continues to employ some of the strictest COVID-19 safety policies worldwide at the start of the pandemic. This arguably led to a

comparatively low level of mortalities, but caused significant diminishment of the arts and cultural tourism sectors (Boland, 2020; Janda & Laskar, 2020). Major cities like Sydney and Melbourne implemented public beach closures in March of 2020, and these normally bustling areas sat empty during peak seasons.

## Japan

**Figure 2.4 (Photo by Jenny Evans/Getty Images): Bondi Beach, just outside Sydney.** Scenic beaches sit empty due to COVID-19 restrictions in March 2020. Since the country's widespread use of the vaccine, Australia has re-opened its major public beaches. © 1999-2015 Getty Images



Japan, which has avoided the level of major outbreaks seen in Europe and the United States, declared a state of emergency in spring, 2020, that lasted through September of 2021 (japan-guide.com, 2021; Wu et al., 2020). Most tourist locations

closed fully in spring of 2020, and while there have been moments of respite in the form of reopening, the onset of the Omicron variant is spurring new closures (Disaster and Travel Alerts, 2021). As of January 2022, Japan has stopped allowing entry of most foreign travelers, but is actively encouraging domestic tourism to return to its beaches, with significant safety precautions in place.

### **United States**

In the United States, COVID-19 policies and closures have generally not been strict by international standards, even in states operating with a high level of disease risk (Yilmazkuday, 2020). Although there was a significant dip in tourism-related economy over the summer of 2020, most US tourism operations have been operating at partial or even full capacity for much of the pandemic (Debata, Patnaik, & Mishra, 2020). While the federal government and states offered some financial assistance for businesses over the last several years, this paltry support has not been enough to save small businesses hard hit by the pandemic. While data on how many tourism-brokers closed shop during this time is not available, many communities lost long-time businesses (OECD, 2020a). Those brokers that survived may benefit from decreased competition, while still having to manage increased health risks.

Controversies within tourism systems have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Miami Beach, Florida, one of most popular spring break destinations in the U.S., drew record breaking crowds in March of 2020, and again in March of 2021; both years,

spring break revelers (and the businesses courting them) clashed with panicking policymakers over the throngs of unmasked students flaunting social distancing practices (Altman, 2020; Rosa, 2020). Miami Beach enacted curfews in an attempt to control the chaos, but both years resulted in significant COVID-19 surges amongst college students. This is just one of many clashes occurring among tourists, businesses, and local government.

Another preeminent US coastal tourist destination is Hawaii. At the beginning of the pandemic, Hawaii went “from ‘overtourism’ to virtually no tourism” due to immediate closures and restrictions. Hawaiian locals were growing frustrated with overcrowding, congestion, and environmental degradation long before coronavirus, and for many, these new restrictions were a relief (González-Reverté, 2019). However, as restrictions eased and tourism (largely from the mainland United States) returned, so too did these problems, with the added danger of COVID-19. Local leaders made public, impassioned pleas to tourists to be mindful, to follow restrictions, or to not even visit in the first place, sending conflicting messages to would-be travelers.

Many social conflicts spurred by COVID-19 are being played out in coastal tourism arenas worldwide: those who took advantage of cheap plane tickets to travel to tropical beaches, versus vulnerable host communities who viewed such travel as selfish and irresponsible; those who want to see compressive shutdowns and health-oriented policy, versus those who want to prioritize economic gain. As the world enters its third

year of the pandemic, the future direction of coastal tourism remains unclear. What is universally clear, however, is that COVID-19 has been an enormous agent of change for coastal tourism industries worldwide.

## Chapter 3: Mixed Qualitative Methods

*"The qualitative research interview aims at obtaining nuanced descriptions from the different qualitative aspects of the interviewee's life world; it works with words and not with numbers. Precision in description and stringency in meaning interpretation correspond in qualitative interviews to exactness in quantitative measurements."*

(Kvale, 1996, p. 32)

### Chapter Introduction

There are more ways to study tourism than can be imagined, and no one of them is the single correct approach. This thesis utilizes a mixture of qualitative methods in an effort to capture the complexity and character of tourism systems. Research generally requires four distinct stages: research design, data collection, data analysis, and discussion. This chapter deals with the two middle stages of data collection and data analysis. This chapter introduces four methods of research used and provides an overview and justification for each: 1. *Interviewing*; 2. *Content Analysis*; 3. *Limited Participant Observation*; and 4. *Archival/Library Research*. Used collaboratively, these three methods can provide a holistic overview of tourist systems.

### Interviewing

*"Conversation is a basic mode of human interaction. Human beings talk with each other—they interact, pose questions, and answer questions. Through conversations we get to know other people, get to learn about their experiences, feelings, and hopes and the world they live in."* (Kvale, 1996, p. 5)

As a research method, interviews are deceptively straightforward. Their popularity for evaluating social dynamics is understandable, and there are numerous definitions

and types of interviews. Interviews are an important tool for social scientists and are often—but certainly not always—an appropriate method for data gathering. For the purposes of this thesis, an interview is defined as a deliberate and systematic process of questioning, conversing, or communicating with another for the specific purpose of learning about their experiences, opinions, culture, or knowledge on a clearly defined or open-ended set of topics. This definition is perhaps more expansive than needed but covers all necessary ground for the specific methods used.

### **Interviewing Backgrounds**

The practice of interviewing can be understood as stemming from three traditions: the social sciences, journalism, and oral histories. These three traditions form the basis of modern interviewing, with each possessing unique but overlapping methods and theories.

### **Social Science Interviews**

The question of how to study human societies and understand human behaviors is a long and hotly debated topic that is largely outside the scope of this thesis. However, it is necessary to note that the traditional *positivist* hypothetico-deductive models employed by the natural sciences fail when applied to human behavior (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1983). The traditional deductive methods of positivism seek truths that are empirical, objective, and universal, criteria that are out of reach for the

social sciences. Positivism's clear failure in these fields led to the rise of various counter-theories of knowledge and corresponding methodologies. These new theories have been able to account for cultural contexts and uniqueness and richness of human experiences. Interviewing in the social sciences has stemmed from these traditions of *hermeneutics* and *phenomenology*, which use interpretation and description to understand the meanings behind human behavior (Seamon, 2018).

The social science interview has, in academia, been the domain of political scientists, geographers, anthropologists, social psychologists, ethnographers and sociologists interested in the behavior of elites: politicians, executives, and scholars. Derived from some combination of journalistic and surveying techniques, the social science interview departs from traditional inquiry and is flexible (Roulston, Demarrais, & Lewis, 2003). These interviews can have radically different emphases—interpretation, meaning, description, experience, consciousness, interactions, conflicts, power—but generally seek to understand the nuance and complexity of human relationships in a way quantitative research cannot (Kvale, 1996). Gradually, other disciplines have grown interested and adopted these methods, and the social science interview has gained credibility and traction as a legitimate qualitative methodology across many disciplines (Roulston et al., 2003).

### **Journalist Interviews**

*The journalistic interview* is perhaps the form of interviewing most familiar to non-academic audiences. Narrative-driven, long form literature, dubbed “New New Journalism”, has taken over the forefront of American new reporting, pioneered by icons such as William Finnegan, Ted Conover, and Gay Talese, to name a few (Boynton, 2005). This ‘avant-garde’ phenomenon is deeply concerned with social, cultural, and political context and upended journalistic norms by “placing the author at the center of the story, channeling a character’s thoughts, using nonstandard punctuation, and exploding traditional narrative forms.” (Boynton, 2005, p. xii) New New Journalism is concerned with the story and presentation of an interview. Within that, New New Journalists operate with a wide range of interviewing techniques.

Jonathan Harr, author of the famous environmental justice exposé *A Civil Action*, is one such journalist. *A Civil Action* alleged that massive corporations, Beatrice and W.R. Grace, had been dumping into the water in Woburn, Massachusetts, leading the leukemia and subsequent death of several local children. In conducting his interviews, Harr considers himself more an observer than a reporter:

“I like to do interviews in the character’s own environment, whether that’s an office, home, laboratory, courtroom—anywhere he spends time. I notice what books are on the shelves, what paintings are on the walls, how they keep their house, what kind of car they drive. The setting of an interview functions as a way to let me look around their lives. I’m always thinking about how I can construct a scene that will reveal something about a character.” (Boynton, 2005, p. 115)

In addition to observation, Harr relies upon meticulous notes and prepared questions.

Conversely, biographic reporter Richard Ben Cramer eschews questions entirely in his interviews, preferring instead a technique of persistent presence scattered with genuine inquiry: "When I go in to interview someone, I don't prepare any questions. And not only do I have no questions, I don't have a notebook—and if I *have* a notebook, I don't take it out of my pocket." Cramer goes on to describe the type of unique question he would ask after observing a subject, and the types of response he'd receive: "And he *can't* brush me off with a prepared statement, because he's never rehearsed an answer to this kind of a question. All of a sudden I'm in a whole different territory of journalism." (Boynton, 2005, p. 39)

Another, more lackadaisical approach to interview preparation is described by Ted Conover: "I do write out questions beforehand. But it's more like a safety net: I often get completely sidetracked and never ask them." (Boynton, 2005, p. 20)

Harr, Cramer, and Conover demonstrate the diversity of method within the journalistic interview and highlight an important point: while each researcher follows a method that works for herself, there is no single correct way to achieve a successful interview. What even constitutes a successful interview is debatable. For some, a truly great interview includes the same components as a fiction story: rich characters, conflict, growth, and hopefully, resolution. For others, a successful interview is one that just

produces a single 'jewel' of a quote (Strong, 2014). Whatever their specific goals and purpose, the tradition of the journalistic interview can greatly enhance the value of academic research.

## **Oral Histories**

Turning away from the social science and journalistic forms of interviewing, it is time to introduce the final field of oral histories:

"Oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Oral history is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s and now using 21<sup>st</sup>-century digital technologies." (Oral History Association, 2022, para. 1)

This process is done with mutual deliberate intention to create a record contributing to the understanding of the past and present. Such documentation results in a verbal document of the oral testimony, which can then of course be subject to further interpretation and analysis. Oral histories have been the domain of historians and ethnographers, but are becoming widely valued for their ability to capture the richness, nuance, character, and specific historic and cultural context of humans in the past and present (Andrews, Jimura, & Dixon, 2018). Unlike other interviewing traditions, oral history places no particular relevance on a person's status or power; even the experiences and stories of regular folk are worth recording.

Oral histories provide tourism researchers a valuable but often overlooked tool. The work of transcribing, listening to, and analyzing past conversations can be tedious but presents distinct advantages for addressing tourism. Given the unique and location specific character of tourism, replicability in research is less of a concern, which naturally suits oral histories. Tourism scholar Trapp-Fallon argues for the use of ethnographic oral histories as a tool in tourism research:

“Using oral history for tourism research seems to fit well in an environment where social science is criticized for trying to predict and emulate the natural sciences. In particular, where there is a call for investigation into the local, national and global problems that we all experience, oral history can offer a useful tool for communicating and constituting findings from these investigations in ways that relate to our values and understanding of the world. The suggestion that tourism ethnography would benefit from more reflexivity and an incorporation of more of the local and advocacy is further evidence that there is room for an oral history approach.” (Trapp-Fallon, 2018, p. 128)

Oral histories requires the researcher to directly interact with the research subject in a way that is intensely personal and contextually dependent, just like tourism itself. For this thesis, I draw on tools from all three of these interviewing traditions.

### **Selection Process**

*“It is altogether natural that there should be no statistics as to how many interviewers experience refusals and how many proportionally succeed in seeing most or all the people whom they planned to see. But, so far, the proportion who succeed in getting needed interviews is almost certainly much greater than the proportion who fail.”* (Dexter, 2006, p. 36)

This is a brief but necessary note on selecting interviewees. I employed two methods: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Used in combination, these techniques

granted access to numerous high-profile individuals in the NBPT area who provided (Bernard, 1996)valuable insights during their interviews.

- Purposive Sampling is a form of non-statistically representative sampling in which the researcher relies upon her own knowledge and judgement to choose members of a community for participation in interviews. The method was effective given both my familiarity with and the relatively small size of the target community. (Bernard, 1996)
- Snowball Sampling is, likewise, a form of non-probable sampling in which the researcher asks participants to identify other subjects. Again, the method of recruitment worked well for the tightly knit world of small-town tourism, wherein many of my subjects know each other and can easily recommend other potential interviewees with relevant expertise. (Bernard, 1996)

When it comes to interviewing, flexibility is not only beneficial, but absolutely vital:

“What may be suicidal or impractical for one interviewer or in one situation may be feasible or even the best way to proceed for another interviewer or in another situation. A manual about interviewing is logically like a manual on how to play tennis or how to conduct warfare; no writer of a tennis manual can tell his readers how to win, and no Jomini or Clausewitz can show young officers a certain route to victory. But such writers can suggest some of the issues and tactics which are worth thinking about, and consideration of which can make victory somewhat more likely.” (Dexter, 2006, pp. 31–32)

It is in this vein that I now introduce the general models of interview that informed my approach, with the caveat that it varies slightly with each interviewee.

## **Semi-Structured**

Although flexibility and adaptation are a crucial part of successful interviewing, some structures and uniformity are helpful to legitimize the collection of data. One helpful framework and definitions comes from Steinar Kvale's explanation of the semi-structured life world interview:

*"It is defined as interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena...The research interview is not a conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls the situation. The topic of the interview is introduced by the researcher, who also critical follows up on the subject's answers to his or her question."* (Kvale, 1996, pp. 5–6)

Following Kvale's method, I created a single guiding document that served as the basis for all my interviews, although the specific questions varied between Broker-Local-Tourist (BLT) designation. Not every question was asked in every interview, but several main questions were consistently answered by participants with or without direct prompting. This has allowed for consistency as well as flexibility. Please see **Appendix I** for a full copy of the interview guiding document.

## **Elite and Specialized**

Another technique, easily used in combination with the principles of semi-structured interviewing, is that of elite and specialized interviewing. This method does not utilize a sense superiority as perhaps implied with the word elite, but rather, requires "VIP treatment" of the interview participants (Dexter, 2006). Specifically, elite and

specialized *interviewing* does this by “stressing the interviewee’s definition of the situation, encouraging the interviewee to structure the account of the situation”, and generally treating the interviewee as an expert regardless of their conventional level of expertise defined by education or job rank (Dexter, 2006, p. 18). This method calls upon the researcher to employ a heightened level of flexibility:

“In elite interviewing...the investigator is willing, and often eager to let the interviewee teach him what the problem, the question, the situation, is—to the limits, of course, of the interviewer’s ability to perceive relationships to his basic problems, whatever these may be...Another characteristic of elite interviewing is this: In the standardized interview, the typical survey, a deviation is ordinarily handled statistically; but in an elite interview, an exception, a deviation, an unusual interpretation may suggest a revision, a reinterpretation, an extension, a new approach.” (Dexter, 2006, p. 19)

It is with the principles of flexibility and adaptivity, while still proceeding methodically, that I approached interviews, combining aspects of the semi-structured and elite and specialized approaches.

### **Interview Content Analysis**

Following interviews, some method of parsing, categorizing, or otherwise analyzing these conversations is necessary to reach an understanding. Productively analyzing interview transcripts is a daunting task, especially with a large amount of data. There are several key pieces of information that make this process manageable. Kvale (1996), in Chapter 10 of *InterViews*, poses a series of guiding questions, which are each briefly addressed before discussion of the analysis process.

- *How shall I conduct my interviews so that their meaning can be analyzed in a coherent and creative way?* This question must be considered parallel to the development of a research plan. By following an interview guide and keeping clear written notes, I have set up my interview data to be relatively easy to analyze.
- *How do I go about finding the meaning of the many interesting and complex stories my interviewees told me?* The question creates a much grander problem for research relying upon an overwhelming number of pages of interview transcripts from many, many hours of interviews. More is not always better, and a few really rich interviews may be more valuable than dozens of superficial ones. By focusing on themes and creating interviewee profiles, I can highlight the important and unique experiences shared without getting lost in an overwhelming amount of data.
- *How do I go about finding out what the interviews tell me about what I want to know?* The flexible form of interviewing makes the research vulnerable to tangents and the researcher a victim to long-windedness. Much of what is discussed in an interview is partially or not at all related to the main topic of inquiry—in this case, tourism—and might not be useful to the researcher. Not every part of every interview will be given equal time nor yield equal value, and I will attempt to be discerning into which parts of the data are most constructive.

- *How can the interviews assist me in extending my knowledge of the phenomena I am investigating?* Similar to the above question, this requires some discernment on the part of the researcher. However, this also requires that the researcher turn outward, away from the contents of interviews, and towards the larger field of tourism studies. To this end, I have completed a significant amount of background, ethnographic, and archival research on NBPT tourism that can enrich the insights from interviews, and vice versa.
- *How do I analyze what my interviewees told me in order to enrich and deepen the meaning of what they said?* An interview recording or transcript is not a finished product. Kvale eschews the usefulness of transcripts alone:

“The transcript is a bastard, it is a hybrid between an oral discourse unfolding over time, face to face, in a lived situation—where what is said is addressed to a specific listener present—and a written text created for a general, distant public...The originally lived faced-to-face conversation disappear in endless transcripts, only to reappear butchered into fragmented quotes.” (Kvale, 1996, para. 182)

Thus, some transformation is necessary to translate an interview to the reader, and some care must be taken in that translation process.

- *How do I carry on the dialogue with the text I have coauthored with the interviewee?* Once the interview has ended, and the researcher is left alone with the data, there is the matter of carrying on the information to new places. Sometimes this is easy, and the research topic is explicitly discussed or obviously present in the interview; sometimes, the continuations are more obscure. In either

case, the narrative of the interview must be expanded, evaluated, or otherwise continued outside of the boundaries of the original conversation.

- *How can I reconstruct the original story told to me by the interviewee into a story I want to tell my audience?* This final question ties the interview content into the broader research narrative, and relates to the researcher's purpose and intended outcomes. Whether the interview supports or challenges these goals may be secondary to their level of usefulness and the understandings they can provide.

With these primary questions about analyzing interviews thus addressed, I will describe the specific methods and outcomes of the analysis.

## **Process**

*"Many readers, and beginning interviewers, think that once the interview is down on tape, the rest is easy. All you have to do is put the Q's and A's in front of the dialogue, right? Wrong."* (Brady, 1977, p. 202)

The appropriateness of various analysis methods depends on the intended outcomes of the researcher. They all more or less deal with description and hermeneutics, or the act of interpreting the interviewing content. A spectrum exists between description and interpretation, containing many possible techniques for analysis. This thesis employs two such methods of analysis: meaning condensation and ad hoc analysis.

- **Meaning condensation** "entails an abridgement of the meanings expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations...Meaning condensation thus involves

a reduction of large interview texts into briefer, more succinct formulations”

(Kvale, 1996, p. 192). In doing this, the researcher can present the major themes and ideas from many conversations in an organized and approachable manner.

Meaning condensation follows a 5-step process, as described by Kvale (1996)::

1. The interview is read in its entirety to get a sense of the whole.
  2. The researcher determines measurable “meaning units” which emerge naturally from the expression of the subjects.
  3. The major themes informing these meaning units are stated succinctly in simplified language; in this, the researcher must try to thematize the content without prejudice and create an accurate understanding cognizant of the subject’s perspective.
  4. Interrogate the meaning unit’s central themes with regards to the topic of research. This method would thus inquire into what the central themes can reveal about tourism.
  5. Present the essential, nonredundant central themes into a descriptive statement. This final step can provide a single summary condensing an entire interview that can then be positioned in the larger project narrative.
- ***Ad hoc analysis***, an eclectic method, follows no prescribed methodology, and can lead to a product that is textual, numerical, or visual in nature. The freedom

and lack of set procedures within ad hoc methods of analysis are the greatest strength of this strategy:

“There is instead a free interplay of techniques during the analysis. Thus the researcher may read the interviews through to get an overall impression, then go back to specific passages, perhaps make some quantifications like counting statements indicating different attitudes to a phenomenon, make deeper interpretations of specific statements, cast parts of the interview into a narrative, work out metaphors to capture the material, attempt a visualization of the findings in flow diagrams, and so on. Such tactics of meaning generation may, for interviews lacking an overall sense at the first readings, bring out connections and structures significant to the research project.” (Kvale, 1996, pp. 203–204)

Here, it is worth turning again to the different traditions of interviewing explored earlier in this chapter. Kvale’s instructions fall into the tradition of social science interviewing. I do not intend to limit this thesis to the methods of social science inquiry, when there is so much relevant expertise from the alternate traditions. Ad hoc analysis is an esoteric way to describe something that journalists do regularly. This is to say, that the journalistic need to sort through a veritable mountain of interview material and make sense of it can be filled in a variety of ways. The methods employed to do this can range from the mundane to the bizarre:

“When [Murray] Fisher sits down to edit an interview transcript, he begins by drawing a line across the page wherever he senses a jarring change of subject. He then rearranges the pieces of the interview, taping sections together so that one subject leads inexorably to the next. This usually means that long sheets of paper are hanging from Fisher’s office walls.” (Brady, 1977, p. 203)

Another equally eclectic method comes from adventure writer John Krakauer:

“Before I begin writing, I reread all my transcripts and notes, underlining any useful passages. Once I’m done, I go back to the passages I’ve underlined and tag them with sticky, colored plastic flags in order of significance: red means most important, blue means second most important, etc...My methodology requires me to go through my notes over and over again. I think there is great value in rereading your notes as many times as you can stand it. Late in the process, I often stumble on crucial quotes or information that appeared unimportant to me at the beginning.” (Boynton, 2005, pp. 175–176)

Whilst the goals of journalists are admittedly not the same as the goals of academic researchers, there is still significant merit in adopting an individualized approach to transcript analysis. By adopting a hybridization of these many different methods, I hope to distill the meanings from these interviews through an amalgamation of practices many fields.

### **Limited Participant Observation**

*“The most venerable tradition among qualitative methods is unquestionably participant observation. Strictly speaking, this stiff but precise phrase refers more to the oscillating situation of researchers as they move in, through, and out of the field than it does to a particular research technique.”* (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 7)

Limited participant observation (LPO) is a method of ethnographic enquiry.

Inductive and open-ended, LPO method directs the researcher to identify areas and topics significant to their target community, as opposed to testing a series of predetermined hypotheses. LPO simultaneously requires immersive participation in peoples’ lives, while observing it as an outsider. While this places the researcher in a paradoxical position, it also opens the door to meaningful insights about the lived experience of individuals:

"Participant observation is the most appropriate method when the research is concerned with human meanings and interactions from the insiders' perspective especially where there are important differences between the views of insiders as opposed to outsiders...Participant observation seeks to uncover, make accessible and reveal the meanings people use to make sense of their everyday lives. The use of the first-person singular is an attempt to avoid disguising the researcher as neutral." (Cole, 2005, pp. 3–4)

LPO is an obvious supplement to any community engaged research and can be easily completed in conjunction with other qualitative methods.

### **Archival and Library Research**

*"Social scientists who use archives enter a new world of information. These repositories challenge and extend the usual methods of finding and collecting data."* (Hill, 1993, p. 1)

Analysis of documents, literature, and other records, once the domain of professional historians outside of the social sciences, is becoming more frequently the realm of the social researcher. Documents of this nature can provide much needed historical context, reveal the historical power relationships shaping modern social dynamics, and provide insight into developmental, social, and political trends. However, it can take keen discernment and strict process to derive value from such archival records. On this surface, this process seems tedious but leads to exciting results:

*"Archival work appears bookish and commonplace to the uninitiated, but this mundane simplicity is deceptive. It bears repeating that events and materials in archives are not always what they seem on the surface. There are perpetual surprises, intrigues, and apprehensions. Archival research holds the power to confirm as well as to disturb our collective legitimations. Archival discoveries are, often as not, threatening to established reputations and the hegemony of the status quo."* (Hill, 1993, p. 6)

The value that can be added through archival and library work cannot be understated, especially on topics as inherently social as tourism. Much like tourism, the ways that archival records come into existence are eclectic and informed by luck and circumstance: "The routes by which materials come to repose in archives are neither certain nor systematic" (Hill, 1993, p. 8). Layers of archival 'sediment' contain priceless clues about the past but also, frustratingly often, lead to dead ends and conspicuous information gaps. Archives are often not arranged systemically, an additional challenge for identifying helpful information. Like sedimentary beds, archival records accumulate and erode with the passage of time.

Social researchers are thankfully not alone in our interest in historic documents. Libraries, volunteer and nonprofit historic societies, and museums preserve and maintain archival documentation. To make sense of the often-overwhelming amount of information held in these historical records, some planning and preparation is needed. To approach the numerous records relevant to this research, I used the following standard methods, expanded from Hill (1993) in Archival Strategies and Techniques:

1. Treat archival research as a standard literature review, checking academic and historic library resources for major publications regarding areas relevant to research.

2. Search the indexes, abstracts, references, and bibliographies of initial documents for mention of other authoritative articles and sources. Keep records of which documents interact with each other.
3. Be careful of needlessly reinventing archival discoveries. Keep track what has already been done:

“It is useful to know what other researchers have already discovered, if anything, about your archival target. Discovering a good published study about your target often saves a lot of groundwork. In fact, after reviewing the major studies listed in your master bibliography, you may decide that the archival work you planned to undertake has already been covered satisfactorily by other scholars.” (Hill, 1993, p. 30)

This thesis draws upon the extensive recordkeeping on Newburyport’s history and development by the Newburyport Public Library and The Newburyport Historical Society, among others. Certainly, in the case of this thesis, there is distinct overlap in the work of such archivists, and the interests of cultural tourism brokers. Much of Newburyport’s tourism scene depends upon the meticulous records and countless historical displays showcasing the town’s rich maritime past. Taken together, the qualitative methods of research outlined in this chapter provide a robust foundation for understanding the nuance of tourism dynamics. This concludes this thesis’ coverage of theory, background, and context. It is now time to turn to the research setting, Newburyport, which is introduced in the coming chapters.

## **Transition to Part II**

Chapter 3 concludes **Part I: Basic Concepts**, which introduced major theoretical, cultural, and methodological frameworks foundations for the study of tourism. The tools, impacts, and methods described thus far are applicable to the broader study of tourism and do not specifically pertain to the geographic region of Newburyport (NBPT). **Part II: Newburyport Study**, which includes the original research component of this thesis, begins with an introduction to the setting of NBPT, and the city's tourist dynamics. The goal of Part II is to explore the impacts of COVID on NBPT's tourism, and to gain a nuanced understanding of the region's tourism as a whole. To this end, Chapter 4 begins with a history of NBPT with an emphasis on the touristic development of the area.

## **Chapter 4: Research Setting**

*“Stroll through downtown and admire the history, architecture, window boxes and beauty that fill this picturesque city. Enjoy bird watching or a beach trip to Plum Island or a harbor cruise. Then, stay for an evening concert or a play, drink or dessert. With dozens of festivals planned by countless organizations yearly, this seaport offers memorable experiences for you, your family and even your business to savor. Find out why so many people come back to our shores and downtown year after year. From all of us here in the Great Newburyport region...welcome!”*

(Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce & Industry, 'Official Visitor and Resource Guide', 2021-2022. P. 2)

### **Chapter Introduction**

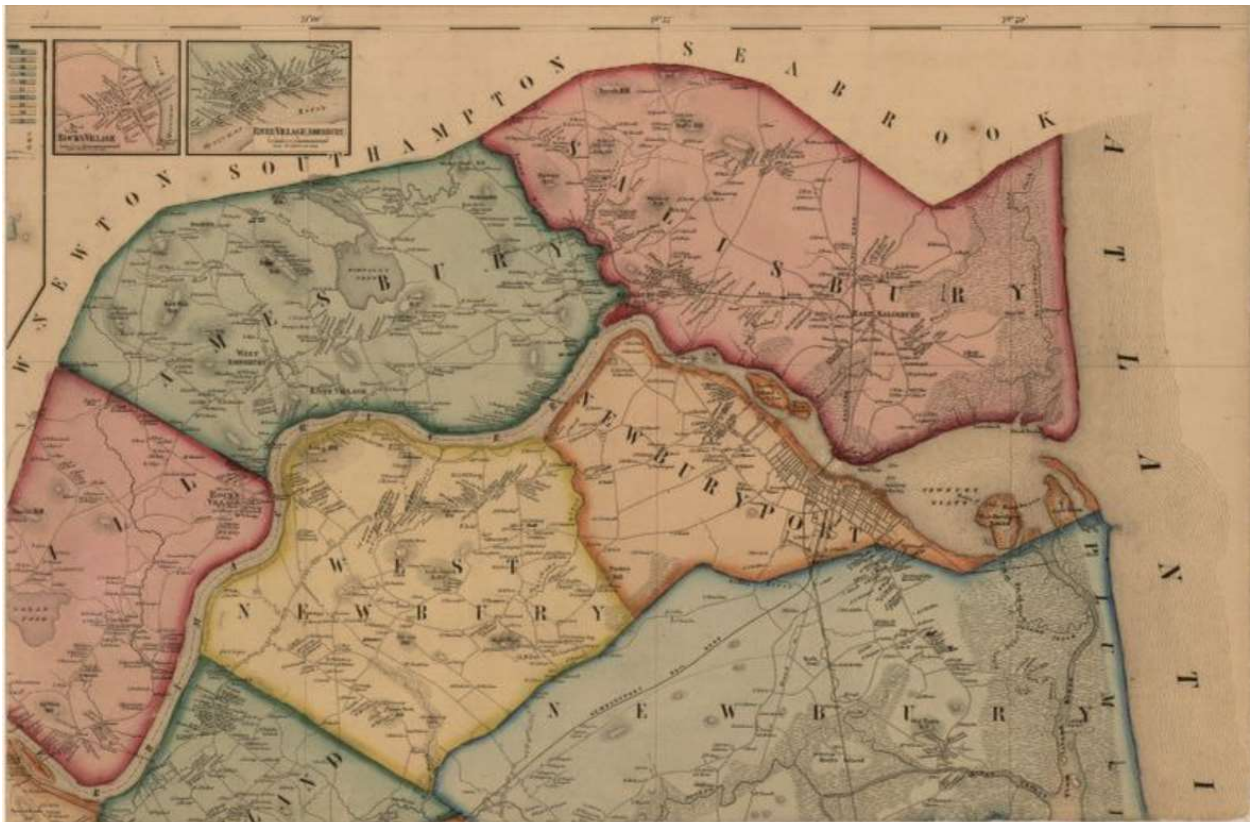
The primary setting for this research is Newburyport (NBPT), a picturesque port city that sits at the mouth of the mighty Merrimack River in the northeast corner of Massachusetts. NBPT boasts of a rich maritime and cultural history which serve as both a primary attraction for tourists and a major source of pride for locals. The importance of cultural heritage in NBPT, and its continued relevance to modern day tourist systems, merits an overview of the port city's history. This chapter begins by introducing the geography and physical setting of the greater NBPT region and summarizes the major history of the area up to the modern day. Then, this chapter turns to NBPT area tourism dynamics, and introduces relevant Broker-Local-Tourist (BLT) stakeholders. Finally, I introduce the major destinations, activities, and attractions that currently compose NBPT tourism, and conclude with a discussion of the plans for tourism in the future.

### **Newburyport Area Background**

The land on the south bank of the mouth of the Merrimack River that would later become NBPT was originally inhabited by the Pawtucket prior to its occupation by European colonizers. Extensive written archives exist chronicling the region's history development from settlement in 1635 onwards. An extensive review of these sources is not necessary for the scope of this thesis, but a brief history contextualizes the modern-day situation in the NBPT region.

### A. Geography and Environment

**Figure 4.1 (From Walling, 1856): A Topographical Map of Essex County**, which displays the location of Newburyport and surrounding communities. © United States Copyright Office



The topography of the Essex County—encompassing the NBPT region—was shaped by the vast ice sheet once covering New England. Glacial recession formed a

highly heterogenous landscape of rounded granite outcroppings, sloping hills, drumlins, kettle-holes and kames (Currier, 1909, Chapter XIX; Walling, 1856). Downtown NBPT sits atop a terrace formed by ice contact, composed of boulder till, clay and quartz beds (Sears, 1905). Most of the area has now been cleared of its old growth forest and the original Indigenous occupants were violently displaced through colonialism. These losses were a realization of manifest destiny, as told in sweeping romantic terms that erased the brutalities of colonization by John James Currier in 1906:

“Little more than two centuries have elapsed , since the ground we now occupy was covered with the primeval forest, which grew in hardy freedom almost to...the pure waters which rolled untamed from the snowy mountains of the North , till they met in its sober strength the broad arm of the ocean , forbidding its farther wanderings, and betimes rolling it back to its sequestered sources, were ever the bearer of the birch canoe , and the swarthy occupants of those frail, romantic barks. The huts of the red man had already shrunk and decayed, as if in prescient comprehension that these tall oaks must be felled, to make the white man’s ships, and the haunt of the deer must be mown away for the more useful, but less picturesque fold of the white man’s herds and flocks. A few poor and degenerate Indians, the last of their race, wasted by the pestilence, and destroyed by the hand of savage enmity, first shrunk from the presence, and then sought the protection of the coming sovereign of the land. Little more than two hundred years ago, and while the solitude of the southern banks of the Merrimac were almost unbroken by the voice of savage or cultivated man, save here and there a solitary and hardy pioneer who had erected his but by the banks of this fruitful stream.” (Currier, 1906b, p. 3)

Currier’s account accurately maps the transition of the environment from a perceived wilderness through deforestation for agriculture, pasturing, husbandry, and development. White settlers occupied the landscape, molding it and mining it for resources:

“That little band , sitting down by that silent stream, soon taught its unfurrowed waters to labor for their sustenance the tall trees were levelled with the earth , and sprang up anon in the form of dwellings the hill-sides , bleak and cold in the early spring time , were presently covered with the creatures which were to furnish the next year’s raiment for that undaunted band.” (Currier, 1906b, p. 3)

Although the NBPT area has grown away from its wilderness roots, the region still boasts diverse flora and fauna, especially in the numerous areas dedicated to conservation and outdoor recreation. NBPT experiences the full range of New England seasons: sunny summers, colorful autumns, freezing winters, and blustery springs. This seasonal diversity appeals to the many locals and tourists, who pursue outdoor recreation year-round.

**Figure 4.2 (Adapted from Google Maps, 2022): Modern day Newburyport and surrounding areas.** Note the mouth of the Merrimack and surrounding beaches.



No discussion of the NBPT area would be complete without turning to the lifeblood of the community: the Merrimack River (and by extension, the Atlantic Ocean).

Affectionately nicknamed the Mighty Merrimack, the Merrimack River flows southward over 100 miles from New Hampshire, emptying into the Gulf of Maine at the harbor city of NBPT. The Merrimack River has historically been the center of both recreation and commerce for riverside communities, which have relied upon the river for a wide variety of industries.

The Merrimack River is no stranger to anthropogenic pollutants. Manufacturers have long operated their businesses along the river and the resulting chemical and bacterial pollution has dirtied the waters since the start of the Industrial Revolution (Meader, 2005). Despite this, the river also serves as the recreational, cultural, and environmental heart of surrounding communities. The most immediate value of the Merrimack's water quality stems from its use as a surface water source, providing drinking water to upwards of 600,000 people annually (Eigerman et al., 2017; US EPA, 2021). Residents of the Merrimack Valley have other uses for the river as well. Swimmers, anglers, boaters, and birders all come to play in the Merrimack, and locals and tourists alike use the river's waters year-round (Eigerman et al., 2017). Some of these activities are now discouraged or actively prohibited due to poor water quality (Conway, 2018; US EPA, 2021). Locals value the Merrimack for its natural beauty, rich biodiversity, and ecosystem services, all of which are threatened by poor water quality. Whilst the water quality has been improving in recent years, sewage overflow during storms still releases a significant number of toxic pollutants annually (US EPA, 2021).

The Merrimack River empties into the Atlantic Ocean between the townships of Newburyport, on the southern bank, and Salisbury on the northern bank. The beaches formed in the areas are scattered with jagged rocks and fields of beachgrass, bordered by salt flats and marshy wetlands, with crashing waves and water that never gets warm enough for comfortable swimming, even at the height of summer. The northern beaches bear the name of their town: Salisbury Beach. The ocean-facing beach on NBPT's side is formed by a barrier island, called Plum Island, named for the local abundance of beach plums. A popular alternative origin for the name is the distinctive, purple-red granules of garnet characteristic of Plum Island's sands.

## **B. History and Culture**

*"To write the History of a Town or City, resembles much the work of a Biographer; for though composed of numbers, these separate units, in their corporate capacity, form but a single figure they have a physical structure which is their own, wants unfelt by others, and means of enjoyment within themselves, in which the stranger has no part, except by courtesy or invitation."* (Currier, 1906b, p. 2)

The history of the City of Newburyport began as the history of the City of Newbury. Incorporated in 1635, the township of Newbury was centered on the banks of the Parker River, further south than the Merrimack and originally encompassed the entire region. The northern part of this township was settled first by "traders, merchants, and mechanicks [sic]", who eventually organized and successfully petitioned for their own township (Currier, 1909, p. 18). Thus, the nascent city of Newburyport was incorporated in the year 1764 (Currier, 1909). This township grew significantly in the

following 100 years, expanding in both geographic size, population, and commercial and industrial diversity.

**Figure 4.3 (Adapted from Newburyport Renewal, 2022): An 1851 Map of Downtown Newburyport, with major streets and docks. © 2022 History- Newburyport**



The culture of the settler inhabitants derived from the strict religious practice of the Quakers and Puritans, with much emphasis in the early histories placed on the progressive establishment of parishes and churches. NBPT now contains close to a dozen churches, overwhelmingly Christian, including Methodist and Presbyterian denominations.

At this point, NBPT did not consider itself to be a destination, and there was not a defined tourism economy in the town. Shipping and shipbuilding were the dominant industries for most of its history, although the milling and shoemaking industries enjoyed significant success as well (Groff, 2012; Newburyport Renewal, 1851). Mostly, the harbor at NBPT dealt with lumber and coal shipments along the Merrimack River to other coastal New England community (Currier, 1906a). The port also engaged in slave trading with the West Indies up until the Embargo Act of 1807 (Currier, 1906a). Whilst the forces of modernization and globalization made NBPT's once pivotal role in shipping obsolete, the vestiges of these maritime activities shape the character of the city today.

A key moment in the development of tourism in NBPT, especially for the downtown area, was the fire of 1811 (City of Newburyport Massachusetts, 2022). The downtown area originally comprised of dense wooden structures in the historic Federal architecture style. Started in an unassuming wooden stable, the fire alit and leveled 16 acres of wooden frame housing, including in the heavily settled downtown area on

Federal and Market streets (Groff, 2012). After this devastation, the downtown was rebuilt using dominantly brick with strict fire safety standards, a revitalization effort that laid the foundations for the tourist culture existing in town today.

The onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a long, slow decline of the areas milling industry, culminating in the Great Depression in 1929 (Groff, 2012). The economic slump lasted decades until the urban renewal of the 1960s, followed by a spike in historic preservation and revival in the 1970s (Groff, 2012). Residents and businesses alike have invested an increasing amount into NBPT over the years, and now it sits as a highly sought-after port destinations for visitors, businesses, and aspiring homeowners alike. Recent years have seen a complete departure from the fishing, shipping, and milling industries towards an economy centering tourism, dining, arts, and high-end retail.

According to the city's 2017 Master Plan document:

"The economy of the region is focused on healthcare, advanced manufacturing, creative economy, tourism and biotech business clusters. Many of these industry sectors are represented in Newburyport, along with the emerging green technology/clean energy sector. (Eigerman et al., 2017, pp. 1-7)."

Residents in NBPT tend towards affluence to afford the already-high-but-ever-rising cost of living in the area, with many being white-collar workers who commute to the Boston area (Eigerman et al., 2017). Much of the city's appeal rests in its historic character and small-town feeling encapsulated by the charming brick downtown and easy access to nature.

## **Tourism Dynamics in Newburyport**

Here, I provide an overview of the modern-day tourism systems in the NBPT region, including major stakeholders and social actors. I then will briefly discuss the major destinations and attractions of the NBPT area.

### **A. Stakeholder Identification**

The following identification process follows the designations the Broker-Local-Tourist (BLT) Model introduced in Chapter 1 of this thesis (Miller & Auyong, 1991). Following are the relevant actors in NBPT as classified by the BLT, and a brief description of their role in the community.

#### **The Brokers**

The brokers in NBPT are those who profit from and manage tourism practices. In many ways, these are the most influential parties when it comes to the direction of touristic development. Furthermore, the broker sector was uniquely impacted by COVID-19, having to interpret inconsistent state and federal regulations, and often having to create and enforce their own policies.

- **Public Sector:** The political governance of tourism in NBPT is largely the domain of the Office of the Mayor, and by extension the City Council. The Office of the Mayor “coordinates and administers the operations of City government to ensure residents, businesses, and visitors are provided

with excellent services” (City of Newburyport Massachusetts, 2022, para. 1). Relevant to COVID-19 and tourism, the Office of the Mayor prepares annual budgets, executes laws, communicates policies, operates city services, represents the city to county, state, and federal agencies, and participates in city and economic planning (City of Newburyport Massachusetts, 2022). This thesis primarily fell during a mayoral election cycle. During the data collection, the Mayor of Newburyport was 3-term incumbent Donna Holaday, who has now been replaced by former school council member Sean Reardon.

The City Council is also a significant governing body of NBPT. Whilst these elected city councilors are locals by nature, and theoretically represent the voices NBPT locals, many have vested political interests and motivations in the economic development of the area, and many also profit from tourism directly or indirectly. The City Council holds weekly public meetings to hear community concerns, and engage with the Office of the Mayor in developing appropriate policy responses.

While not necessarily involved in the decision-making processes of touristic management, those who work in city departments, commissions, and boards, play the role of brokers as they implement the policies created

by the mayor and council. This includes entities such as the Office of Arts, Tourism, and Cultural Affairs as well as the Parks Department.

- **Private Sector:** NBPT houses a diverse commercial industry that relies upon the flow of seasonal tourists to the area. Restaurants, retailers, bars, antiques stores, galleries, and cosmetic shops are just a few of the myriad businesses represented in the NBPT region. Some of these have been staples of the community for years, becoming standbys of longtime residents, newcomers, and visitors alike. Others struggle to last for a single season, falling victim to high rent prices and slow business.

The interests of NBPT private sector brokers are largely represented by the Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GNCCI), a professional collective and business directory that provides support, advocacy, resources, and more to its over 800 corporate members. The GNCCI directly collaborates and communicates with the City Council and the Office of the Mayor on strategies for tourism development, management, and more. The current chair of the executive committee is Taunya Wolfe Finn, owner and operator of Wolfe Adventures and Tours. It is important to note that the GNCCI does not represent the viewpoints of all NBPT private brokers, and there exist those independent businesses

that resist (and in some cases, actively resent) the dominance of the GNCCI in regulatory and political affairs. This conflict will be discussed more later.

- **Civil Society:** Civil societies in NBPT comprise largely of nonprofits and external organizations involved in tourism systems. Specifically, NBPT hosts many nonprofit organizations working across three aspects relevant tourism: those interested in the archiving and historical preservation of the region, such as the Newburyport Preservation Trust (NPT); those operating arts and cultural activities in NBPT, such as arts, dance, theater, and cultural organizations like Theater in the Open the Actors Studio; and those concerned with the environmental, natural, and biodiversity conservation, such as the Audubon Society. These are just a few examples of civil society brokers in NBPT, but it is as diverse and vibrant a sector as the public and private ones.

## **The Locals**

Approximately 18,100 people reside in NBPT (Delloitte & Datawheel, 2018). The median age is about 50 years old and the median household income is close to \$110,000 (Delloitte & Datawheel, 2018). Ethnically, NBPT is extremely homogenous, with 92.4% of its residents being white (Delloitte & Datawheel, 2018). No measurable number of households speak a primary language that is not English at home (Delloitte & Datawheel, 2018). Many residents of NBPT have been locals their whole lives, often for

generations back, and are fiercely prideful of their city's history and heritage. Other (usually younger) residents have been drawn in more recently by the safety, beauty, school quality, or other aspects of the port community. Long-time residents can be distrustful of the latter, but despite their differences, these two groups can often find more common ground with each other than with the Brokers and Tourists<sup>2</sup>. Opposition to expanding NBPT tourism comes primarily from locals, who are frustrated with the congestion, long wait times, and since the onset of COVID-19, viral illnesses that tourists bring to town.

### **The Tourists**

Categorizing the tourists is a difficult task, as there is a dearth of specific demographic and behavioral data about this group. That said, several major identifiers about NBPT tourists are apparent based on discussions by city leadership and in observation of the tourist population. Firstly, they are typically younger and more diverse than average NBPT residents but are still overwhelmingly white. Secondly, they tend to be wealthy, or at least financially stable. Thirdly, most are return tourists to the NBPT area, or if it's their first time, most intend to come back. Fourthly, they have their

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<sup>2</sup> There does exist another set of individuals in NBPT that could arguably be categorized as locals or as tourists: seasonal residents. Especially common in waterfront areas, this transient community presents an interesting dilemma, and deeply connecting with and researching this particular facet of the population is outside the scope of this thesis, although it still merits mention.

own cars or vehicles for their vacation, and do not rely on public transport in the area. These characteristics are shared largely among NBPT tourists.

NBPT does not see much in the way of international tourism; most visitors are domestic in origin and are largely from within the New England area. Those that are not from the Northeast are typically visiting Boston for other reasons and come up to NBPT for a day or weekend. NBPT's capacity to host tourists directly in town is severely limited, and building a hotel is majorly desired by Brokers wishing to expand overnight options. There is a small number of bed & breakfasts and Airbnb options, but not enough to serve large numbers of visitors.

Some tourists also come to NBPT by waterway. The Merrimack River is popular for recreational boating, and recently, NBPT has opened a new Harbormaster's facility full of resources for maritime tourists. Over the years, NBPT has shifted away from shipping and fishing towards recreation and tourism, and now, only 2 commercial fishing boats operate out of the harbor. Conversely, the city has seen a record number of tourists visiting by boat.

## **B. Destinations and Attractions**

These destinations and attractions are derived from the GNCCI's Official Visitor and Resource Guide for 2021-2022, which includes a comprehensive list of businesses and activities in the NBPT area. This thesis provides a non-exhaustive list of major

destinations and attractions (used interchangeably with the word activities) in the following categories: history and culture, dining and shopping, and nature and outdoor recreation. It is crucial to clarify that none of these categories are exclusive of the others. In a city like NBPT, the special character of the commercial and outdoor activities is inseparable from the historic and cultural attributes of the community. However, for covering the major touristic sites, some denomination is necessary here.

- **History and Culture:** Tourist brokers and leadership do not hesitate to laud (perhaps excessively so) the rich colonial and maritime history of the area in their marketing and outreach strategies. Resources, display boards, and statues relaying the city's foundation, leveling and subsequent rebirth, and featuring prominent figures from the past are scattered abundantly through the walkable NBPT area.

#### **Major Destinations and Attractions:**

- **Custom House Maritime Museum and Gift Shop**, a museum containing ship models, maritime artwork, features on ship construction, the Coast Guard and famous locals.
- **William Lloyd Garrison Statue** in Brown Square, a homage to beloved NBPT-born abolitionist.
- **Statue of George Washington**, who was famously fond of NBPT and visited often.

- **Bartlett Mall**, a glacial kettle-hole turned frog pond, popular for visitors to relax around greenery during the summer, and popular for aspiring ice skaters during the winter.
- **Historic Cemetery Tours**, which cover the Oak Hill Cemetery and Chapel as well as the Old Hill Burying Ground
- **Spencer Piece Little Farm**, a 230-acre farm showcasing the history of local agriculture and providing year-round programming and access to petting animals.
- **John Greenleaf Whittier Home and Museum** dedicated to the former abolitionist, environmentalist and poet's anti-slavery activism.
- **Clipper Heritage Trail**, a walking tour that passes through many destinations listed here.
- **The Firehouse Center for the Arts**, which hosts plays, concerts, dances, gallery showings, and more for local artists year round, and is popular amongst locals and visitors alike.
- **Annual Yankee Homecoming Festival**, a week-long heavily programmed celebration of local history and arts culture, put on by local businesses. Includes activities like an antique car show, fireworks, bed race, parade, concerts, and more.

- **Other Seasonal Programming**, outside of Yankee Homecoming, includes: The Literary Festival, The Chamber Music Festival, the Chamber of Commerce’s Spring Fest, Fall Fest, Oktoberfest and Riverfront Festival, the Documentary Film Festival, the Friends of the Library’s Great Old Book Sales, the Eagle Festival, the New Works Festival, the Greek Festival, the Earth Port Film Festival, the Field of Honor, Winter Carnival, and Newburyport Preservation Week.

(Eigerman et al., 2017)

- **Dining and Shopping:** NBPT’s culinary and commercial scene is thriving and has been featured in Food Magazine and other major publications. A comprehensive list of restaurants can be found here: <https://www.newburyport.com/restaurants-in-newburyport-food-and-drink/>. The city has options for American, Asian, Hawaiian, Indian, Mexican, and Italian cuisines, as well as desert, breweries, cafes, pizza, seafood, taverns and more. Similarly, NBPT features a diverse array of retail options, with an emphasis on high-end clothing, art galleries, and antique stores.
- **Nature and Outdoor Recreation** is a broad category encompassing many of the activities pursued in NBPT. The very appeal to downtown NBPT and its many historic, cultural, and commercial features is its walkability. On warm summer days, NBPT’s parks, beaches, trails, and other public spaces

jam with visitors. Many of these destinations remain popular year-round amongst the locals, who utilize the outdoor spaces for recreation and exercise of their own.

- **Beaches and Water Activity**, accessed through Plum Island which offers miles of municipal beach, and through the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, which caters to bird watchers and nature enthusiasts with it's 5000 acres of protected area. Local marinas, yacht clubs and charters offer access to whale watches, cruises, deep-sea-fishing, party boating, sunset viewing, historic ferry tours and more. Kayaking and windsurfing options are also offered locally.
- **Clipper City Rail Trial**, a multi-use pathway of which the GNCCI and town leadership are very proud. This connects the commuter rail station and offers miles of paved pathway for cyclists and pedestrians through waterfront, residential, and industrial neighborhoods. The city has installed large amounts of public art along the Rail Trial, making it a unique attraction.
- **Parks and Playgrounds** abound in the NBPT area. Notable ones include Atkinson Common, the Bartlet Mall, Cashman Park, Inn Street Playground, March's Hill, Maudslay State Park, Mosely

Woods, Newburyport Skatepark, the Waterfront Park, and Woodman Park. There are a variety of tours and activities at these locations, largely administered by civil society brokers.

### **C. Future Development and Plans**

This chapter has illustrated NBPT's rich history and highlights that it is well situated as a growing destination within New England. Not only does NBPT have tourism history, but intends a tourism future. The nature of this future will be determined primarily by the behavior of brokers and locals, and will inevitably be shaped by external global drivers such as COVID-19 and climate change. Several public documents shed light on the plans of city leadership and other stakeholders for the future of tourism in NBPT.

- **Brokers:** The main plans devised in collaboration between public, private, and civil society brokers for the development of NBPT are contained in "The City of Newburyport Master Plan" document completed in 2017 by city council members, the planning committee, the mayor's office, and a dedicated steering committee. The Master Plan document addresses a comprehensive range of services including those relevant to tourism revolving around themes like historic character, walkability, space, commercial diversity, and commutability.

"The plan states that residents and stakeholders alike "desire to maintain the character of Newburyport through reinforcing downtown's role as the center of the community, respecting and preserving its historic structures,

and ensuring only appropriate residential and commercial development through the creation of architectural design criteria and the formation of partnerships to accomplish the overarching goal of preserving Newburyport's inherent character." (Eigerman et al., 2017, p. LU-16)"

The Master Plan goes on to list "tourism, hospitality, entertainment, and retail as one of the six major markets in the area, providing around 2,500 local jobs concentrated in the downtown and waterfront areas" (Eigerman et al., 2017, fig. ED-6). Additionally, the plan predicts the rapid growth of this sector—growth that may have been only temporarily disrupted by COVID-19—even though the jobs are predominantly low wage. Also mentioned are the concerns that these jobs fluctuate seasonally, and workers struggle to find affordable housing. The Master Plan identifies cultural tourism, encompassing "arts and culture, historical and natural heritage resources", as the fastest growing and most lucrative form of tourism for the city (Eigerman et al., 2017, p. CR-2). Once again, the Master Plan explicitly states the goals of public sector and civil society brokers when it comes to the future of tourism in NBPT:

"Tourist dollars will contribute to the necessary maintenance of its historic infrastructure, the viability of downtown businesses and the conservation of its beaches, parks and waterways. In order to achieve the goal of becoming a local, national and even international cultural destination, it is incumbent upon the Office of Arts, Tourism and Cultural Affairs to work closely with City departments and the community's arts and heritage organizations to create lasting and meaningful partnerships focused on Newburyport's cultural assets." (Eigerman et al., 2017, p. CR-14)

In 2016, NBPT opened its Harbormaster Visiting Boater Facility, containing generous amenities for those travelling by boat. This has allowed the growth of a boating tourism economy, which had previously been strictly limited by a lack of dock availability.

- **Locals:** While enthusiasm for the growth of tourism is largely unilateral across the categories of brokers, locals tend to resist the ever-growing influx of visitors to their town. Whilst preserving the historic nature and small-town feeling of the city is repetitively listed as the primary development goal, many locals do not feel able to access the city's amenities and public spaces during peak tourism seasons. Despite this feeling of resentment towards tourists, there is very little organized resistance to the economic development in the city. Despite the year-round patronage of locals, it is the seasonal money of tourists that keeps most NBPT businesses open.
- **Tourists:** Discerning what the hopes and goals of tourists for the future of tourism in NBPT is a challenging prospect. However, the behavior—especially the spending behavior—of visitors is closely tracked by private sector brokers, whose insights are useful for determining the motives of tourists. Their growing interest in cultural tourism is readily apparent, as “the average cultural tourist visits multiple destinations during a visit to a community and stays approximately one half-day longer at each destination [than those visiting for non-cultural tourism]

(Eigerman et al., 2017, p. CR-3)". The average cultural tourist also spends more money—\$62 per day more—than the non-cultural tourist. Within this growing group of cultural tourists, another preference is emerging, not started but certainly exacerbated by the onset of COVID-19: frequent independent travelers (FITs), composed of couples, families, friends, or individuals desiring a customized experience (Wolfe Adventures and Tours, 2022). FITs do not want to stay at commercial hotels and eat at chain restaurants, preferring unique and local options, and tend to be willing to pay more for a customized experience. These tourists work closely with brokers such as travel agents and tour operators to guarantee the custom experience.

This chapter has provided a broad overview of tourism stakeholders, history, and dynamics in the NBPT area. However, this introduction does not yet show the depth, complexity, and controversy present in these systems. Next, the thesis turns to data collection, which starts to reveal some of the relationships and conflicts present.

## **Chapter 5: Data Collection and Methods of Analysis**

*“Most social science measures are flawed in some respect. However careful researchers may have been, their measures will still be imperfect in important ways...The fact that data can be biased by the ways they are collected makes it essential for the researcher to know how data collection has affected the data: what respondents were expecting in a survey, how interviewers were behaving, and how institutions carried out their data collection.”*

(Northey, Tepperman, & Russell, 2002, pp. 105–106)

*“If you have never recorded an interview before, you might practice the night before.”*

(Brady, 1977, p. 146)

### **Chapter Introduction**

In previous chapters, I have described in detail the research methodologies used in this thesis. This included both the theoretical foundations and general research processes for mixed qualitative methods, discussed in an abstracted way. Now that I have introduced the specific research setting of Newburyport (NBPT), I discuss the actual data collection process that took place within NBPT. This chapter begins with details of the data collection process in a non-theoretical sense. I describe my specific methods for interviewing, observing, and studying tourism, including relevant experiences and obstacles encountered. Once the process followed is clearly outlined, this chapter summarizes the totality of data collected.

### **Process of Data Collection**

The data collection occurred May to September of 2021. During this time, I lived in NBPT, simultaneously conducting and transcribing interviews, observing locals and tourists, and performing archival research.

### **Interview Selection**

I began my purposive sampling process by creating a list of the types of individuals I recruited to discuss tourism. This list was categorized into Broker, Local, and Tourist designations, with subcategorizations where necessary. I also compiled a list of relevant people with whom I had a personal connection, or who are known locally to be outspoken about town issues. Being a NBPT resident myself helped immensely in this regard, as I have a vast network of local connections upon which to draw. I then began reaching out to people on my initial list, with either an email introduction or a phone call to the appropriate office. While these initial communications were highly tailored to their respective target, they all included a personal introduction of myself, an overview of the planned research, and an invitation to interview in a setting most comfortable to the subject. This tactic yielded many successful meetings, with most people responding affirmatively without needing follow up. There were a few instances where my initial emails/calls were not returned, and no subsequent attempts were successful. From these, I moved on quickly to more responsive alternates.

In addition to the purposive sampling described above, I frequently asked interviewees to refer me to others with relevant expertise and experience. Many

participants were only too happy to oblige, and many of my most informative interviews came through this method of *snowball sampling*.

## **Interviews**

I created an interview guiding document, included in **Appendix I**, that served as a common baseline for all of my interviews. While each interviewing encounter varied significantly, but the common purpose and themes covered remained the same. Interviews occurred in three ways: face-to-face, phone call, or Zoom.

I conducted the majority of interviews face-to-face. These in-person interviews occurred at the interviewee's workplace office, place of residence, or in a public outdoor space. When face-to-face meetings were not possible due to time constraints, geographic distance, COVID-19 safety or other reasons, I preferred to set up Zoom interviews, which still allow some visual connection. In the few instances where neither in-person or Zooms meetings were an option, I conducted the interviews via phone call. All interviews were recorded over Zoom or on a SONY ICD-UX560 Stereo Digital Voice Recorder. I also relied heavily upon notetaking to capture information from the interviews and archival study detailing experiences, observations, thoughts, and questions arising in my research experience. I maintain these in a physical journal, with no corresponding digital copy. I integrated the important components of these written notes into other parts of the thesis as appropriate. These notes are separate and

supplementary to the interview transcripts, which are word-for-word recordings of interviews.

The shortest interview I conducted lasted approximately 15 minutes, and the longest lasted close to 2 hours. The average interview lasted approximately 1 hour. Every interviewee consented to being recorded and to having their words shared and presented through this thesis. All names have been removed and subjects are identified by their professional role. All individuals who are identifiable by this role (e.g. The Mayor, The Police Chief, etc.) have consented to the process and presentation of this thesis, per University of Washington Internal Review Board standards.

### **Observation**

I carried my field notebook constantly throughout the research period, both during interviews and throughout my day-to-day activity in the NBPT area. This gave me ample opportunity to record observations about the behaviors, conversations, interactions, and lifestyles of locals, tourists, and brokers in the area. The recorded observations do not rise to the level of empirical evidence but provide a robust body of ethnographic context for the social dynamics of tourism in NBPT.

### **Source and Archive Review**

The Newburyport Historic Society and the Newburyport Public Library house enormous quantities of physical and online records, many of which I sifted through to

build an understanding of NBPT’s cultural and historical context. Additionally, I used the University of Washington’s library system to access sources in scholarly journals. Taken together, these archival, academic, and historical sources allow a holistic foundation for the study of NBPT.

## **Collected Data Summary**

What follows is a brief description of the collected data. Content details are not covered in this chapter but are incorporated into the subsequent analysis and discussion in later chapters.

### **List of Interviews**

Interviewees are referred to with a professional moniker. See **Appendix 4** for individual profiles.

### **Brokers (Public Sector)**

#### **1. The Mayor**

Mayor of NBPT finishing her final term in office after serving for 12 years.

#### **2. The Police Chief**

In charge of the local police force.

#### **3. The Harbormaster**

In charge of the municipal dock services.

#### **4. The Ranger**

Parks Director for city of NBPT, deeply involved in the maintenance, use, and development of public greenspace.

## **Brokers (Private Sector)**

### **1. The Baker**

Owns and operates a local bakery, and is a longtime member of the Newburyport Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI).

### **2. The Travel Agent**

Owns and operates a local tourism and travel company, and is a member of the NCCI's leadership.

### **3. The Boat Captain**

Owns and operates a local whale-watch company and is involved in the fishing industry.

### **4. The City Councilor**

Owns and operates several businesses, mostly cafes and coffeeshops. Longtime city councilor at-large.

## **Brokers (Social Movement Sector)**

### **1. The Librarian**

Head librarian, involved in the archival work done by the Newburyport Public Library.

### **2. The Historian**

Member of the NBPT Historical Society.

### **3. The Actor**

Deeply involved in the arts, theater, and cultural sectors of NBPT through nonprofit and volunteer work.

## **The Locals**

### **1. The Professor**

Former economics professor, current city council member and mayoral candidate.

### **2. The Dog Walker**

NBPT resident for over 20 years and frequenter of the many parks in the area.

### **3. The Businessman**

NBPT resident for over 20 years, works near Boston, now remotely due to COVID.

## **The Tourists**

### **1. Boating Tourist**

Longtime tourist to NBPT, involved in recreational boating.

### **2. Boating Tourist**

Longtime tourist to NBPT, involved in recreational boating.

### **3. Summer Tourist**

Returning tourist to NBPT, interested in food, shopping, and the beach.

## **Field Notes**

Another product of the research process is the significant number of notes taken throughout. These include notes from the above interviews, as well as from my limited participant observations. These field notes are compiled into several journals but are included in the thesis' text where relevant. An additional autoethnographic note on my own experiences of the research is detailed in Appendix ?.

## **Relevant Literature**

There are two dominant pieces of literature crucial for understanding the historical and modern status of NBPT tourism. The first of these is a series of books from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: The History of Newburyport 1736-1906, by John James Currier. This archival series is the most comprehensive record of NBPT's foundation and early history, with an emphasis on the important political figures, industry trends, geographic and social development of the region. Currier's meticulous historical work has been foundational to other amateur and professional historians interested in the NBPT area.

The second piece of dominant literature is the 2017 City of Newburyport Master Plan (MP):

<https://www.cityofnewburyport.com/sites/g/files/vyhlf7106/f/uploads/2017-master-plan-final-printed-version-w-adoption-dates.pdf>

This plan covers the history, status quo, goals, and development in Newburyport, and is a key primary source for the body and context of this research. The MP addresses NBPT's response to climate change, aging infrastructure, and economic fluctuation.

NBPT has developed a COVID-19 response plan more recently. The breadth, depth, and goals of the MP is stated in its opening:

"This Master Plan provides an overall development concept that promotes continued prosperity for the community and is intended to lend City officials, administrators and community leaders support in their daily efforts to manage and shape Newburyport's growth into the future. Newburyport's character and charm is likely to remain largely unchanged; however, trends in demographics, land use, housing, municipal finance, education and other areas will require proactive efforts to achieve a positive vision for this dynamic City. Each of the Plan elements presents the existing conditions, trends and goals with accompanying actions; these actions, when implemented, will result in a community that meets the needs and expectations of its residents while welcoming visitors, supporting local businesses, and responsibly and sustainably planning for the future." (MP, p. S-1)

The MP is guided by the principles of environmental, social, economic, and fiscal sustainability, and identifies as key issues preserving NBPT's historic identity, ensuring economic stability, and providing a healthy and connected community. To accomplish these goals, the MP lays forth a range of specific policy recommendations with

accompanying actions, timelines, and analyses across a variety of issues. This document provides policy plans in the areas of: Land Use Planning & Development; Economic Development; Housing; Transportation and Circulation; Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation; Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage Resources; Municipal Facilities and Services; Energy and Sustainability; Community Engagement; and Education.

Of these topics, all are at least peripherally related to this thesis' research topic, but those of Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation and Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage Resources are most relevant.

## **Chapter 6: Results and Discussion**

*"I started work as travel agent in 2002, right after 9/11. I thought, if I can make it right after 9/11, I can make it anytime! And then COVID hit, and I had to rethink that statement."*

(Travel Agent, July 19, 2021)

### **Chapter Introduction**

In this chapter, I present the major themes that emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts, with relevant quotes. These themes emerged through analysis methods described in the previous chapter. The sets of themes to emerge from this analysis are categorized into two sub-sections: converging themes and diverging themes. Each set of themes is supported with illustrative quotes from the interviews, and commentary from the researcher, to serve as both example and evidence for the social dynamics at play. Following the presentation of these themes is a discussion regarding their relevance to NBPT tourism.

### **Converging Themes (CT)**

Emerging from similarities, shared experiences, and agreement across interviews, the following converging themes represent consensus within Newburyport's (NBPT) tourism systems. The first four of these converging themes center around tourism in NBPT, and the latter four center around COVID-specific experiences and outcomes.

#### **CT 1: Understandings of Tourism**

The first theme to emerge from the transcript analysis relates to the brokers', locals', and tourists' *understandings of tourism*. The reported and surmised understandings of NBPT tourism largely align across all three BLT designations. Even in situations where brokers and locals disagree about tourism strategies and development, both groups give similar assessments of the status, characteristics, and attractions defining NBPT tourism.

Public, private, and social sector brokers agree on the relatively recent boom in the NBPT tourism industry. The city has had some touristic appeal since the historical revivalism of the 1970s, but the industry has burgeoned in recently response to deliberate and aggressive economic development of the tourism sector. Expansion of NBPT's tourism has coincided with continuously elevating property prices for locals, phenomena highlighted by brokers and locals:

"We used to be a community people would drive by en route to Portsmouth or Portland, and they wouldn't stay here or come here deliberately. That's changed. All the hard work we've done has paid off. People come here and fall in love with it. It used to be a hidden gem and now it's not hidden. I remember I was shocked when the first local house sold for over a million. Now it's a regular occurrence. It's incredible" (The Mayor, July 28, 2021).

One longtime NBPT resident not involved in tourism directly corroborates this understanding of NBPT's appealing nature, and how it seduces visitors into returning:

"Well of course tourists like it here for the same reasons residents do. Newburyport is a beautiful city: great downtown, lots of nature, easy to walk around. Some locals like the area for the schools, but really, anyone who comes

here, even just to visit, is going to want to come back or stay. I don't blame them at all" (The Businessman, July 2, 2021).

This experience is again echoed by tourists, the majority of whom return to visit annually, or have intentions of returning:

"Appreciation for the shops, the downtown, the history, all of it has kept me visiting for close to 10 years now. The people are fabulous, and I really haven't met anyone who wasn't just welcoming in Newburyport. It's just a pleasure to go up there and visit" (Tourist, July 13, 2021).

These and others clearly understand NBPT's as an attractive tourist destination with a lot of return value. The following subcategories show specific aspects characteristic to NBPT's tourism dynamics, around which there is significant agreement.

## **CT 2: Coupled Perceptions of History and Tourism**

The second convergent theme is the unilaterally *coupled perceptions of history and tourism*. By all accounts, the two feed and define each other, with cultural and historical tourism existing as the dominant type of tourism within NBPT. Even the components of NBPT tourism that do not fall under these categories are enabled by the resources and proximity of historical tourism. The revitalization of the historic downtown in the 1970s after it was levelled by fire is frequently cited as the start of NBPT's touristic scene: "Thank god for the people that saved the downtown in the 1970s, if they hadn't done that, people would not come here today" (The Travel Agent, July 19, 2021).

One longtime resident recount visiting NBPT as a tourist in the 1970s, and explores how the dynamics of the city has changed over time:

"If you go back 50 years, Newburyport was not at all focused on being a tourist destination. Certainly, people did come here, but it just wasn't as much of a destination as Hampton Beach... In the 1970s, Newburyport's downtown was dead. 30 years later, with the historic restoration of the downtown, things got better. Newburyport had figured out how to maintain their central business district. It no longer provided goods for locals. But the historic restoration and preservation of the storefront made Newburyport a place where people wanted to go. It harkened back to an earlier era in which there were central business districts. The stores don't sell the same things they did 70 years ago, but it attracts people in the same way. They feel good coming here. It's a beautiful, fun place to come for a day" (The Professor, July 31, 2021).

The city's aspirations of becoming a significant tourist destination were aided by the vibrant community of history buffs, archival documenters and genealogy enthusiasts present in the New England area. Much work has been done in NBPT to revive and maintain the city's history, from museum exhibitions, ample signage on important sites and people, and extensive historical archives. The downtown area is littered with homages to NBPT's past as a major port city, Revolutionary significance, and maritime industries. A local librarian discusses the importance of historical work to NBPT's tourism sector:

"We have great relationships with the cultural organizations in town: artists associations, Historic New England, the Museum of Old Newbury, in particular the Maritime Museum. We share with those history-oriented cultural organizations. Tourists come a lot to Newburyport for the history. It's all about our history, our beautiful architecture, all of that. They often stop at the library because we have a wonderful archival center that has a great collection of original materials on local history and genealogy. Tourists might come here first and then go off to find a grave of a relative. Or they might be at the Maritime Museum, and something sparks their interests or imagination in that way, and they come here to learn more" (The Librarian, July 19, 2021).

This account is reiterated by members of the Newburyport Historical Society:

“We work with the library and other cultural centers to preserve, promote, and share in the rich history and community of Newburyport. We are interacting with locals and tourists, many from New England but not always, who want to learn more about the history and area. It’s such a cool part of the city, to have such a rich history on the mouth of the Merrimack” (The Historian, July 16, 2021).

Another broker wholeheartedly endorses the historical angle of tourism and argues that NBPT should develop it even further: “We need to embrace our waterfront and our nautical roots. We need fishing trips, harbor tours, all within walking distance” (c

All of this demonstrates the consensus that NBPT’s history is central to its tourism industry, an awareness that has enabled brokers to shape their destinations accordingly.

### **CT 3: Appeal and Attractions**

Another theme to emerge is the clear recognition of key characteristics of NBPT that provide the city’s *appeal and attraction* for tourism. First and foremost amongst these are the restaurants, shopping, and high walkability of the downtown area. Their appeal is echoed across BLT categories as the primary attraction for tourists:

“People come for the local shops and the local restaurants. They don’t want to shop at a Target. They want to support locally owned businesses. So that’s what we do. We bring people in” (The Travel Agent, July 19, 2021).

“What brings people here? Restaurants, public drinking establishments, and retail. You want Newburyport to be a place people come to eat, spend some time, and spend some money” (The Professor, July 31, 2021).

The walkability of the downtown area has been crucial for the city's touristic successes. This is not lost on many brokers, who often seek to leverage the walkability of NBPT as a major component to accessing their services.

"People come to Newburyport for a lot of different reasons. There's that whole group that want an outing and are looking for a fun place that is walkable. There's interesting restaurants and cute stores to poke in. We're perfect for that. We benefit from being walkable as a library. Tourists just are drawn in by the signage as they're walking by" (The Librarian, July 19, 2021).

"People love the walking. We'll do walking tours, walking along the river, the downtown, stop off at Chococoa, break out the whoopie pies. It's a give and take with the local businesses here. Tourists walk all around, so stores try to make their window displays and fronts appealing to shoppers" (The Travel Agent, July 19, 2021).

Many of the city's dining establishments cater almost exclusively to tourists, relying upon seasonal visitors to offset the slower months when they must rely solely on locals for business. Many new restaurants in the downtown do not have a strong following of local regulars, but draw in many tourists through their ideal location, visibility, and good marketing:

"I see a lot of people from out of town. They ask where to get food...I tell people staying at the Garrison Inn to walk down Pleasant Street, read the menu at Loretta's, read the menu at Brine, read the menu at Sea Level, read the menu at the Poynt, check out the new restaurant in the Tannery. I play ambassador. Everyone loves to eat in Newburyport." (The City Councilor, August 9, 2021).

The success of such strategies is shown by the preferences of tourists:

"We went to Sea Level, which we were introduced to for the first time this year. I understand it has been there for a while. We went for dinner one night and were so impressed we went back for lunch." (Tourist, July 13, 2021).

"We didn't realize Tuscan Kitchen was a chain. Not a big fan of chains restaurants and probably wouldn't have gone there if we'd known. But the atmosphere was awesome, and the food was outrageously good, so I can't complain. It's quite pricey, but it's worth it. When we're on vacation, we don't really look at the dollar signs at that point. We just go where people tell us to go." (Tourist, July 13, 2021).

Beyond the dining and retail within the ambulatory downtown, interviewees identified a couple other tourist attractions of note. The abundance of parks, easy access to nature, and the beach significantly contributes to the area's touristic appeal:

"The river and beach are extremely important. The cleaning up of the Merrimack River was tremendously important. It was bad. Now it's cleaned up. It's a sand bottomed river. Once we stopped polluting it, it pretty much cleaned itself up. You wouldn't want to hang out at the waterfront if it stunk. The river and beach were always there, but that wasn't enough to make us a destination. The cleaned river, the historic, walkable downtown, the arts and scenery, all of it together is what makes Newburyport appealing to visitors and locals" (The Professor, July 31, 2021).

"We come here for the beach! Plum Island is beautiful, and we love all of the walking trails" (Tourist, August 2, 2021).

Another attraction that is clearly distinct from the appeal of the natural environment (but not wholly separate, as the following will demonstrate) is the thriving artistic community. Gallery showings, music festivals, and theatrical productions are a critical and growing factor in the region's tourism. Where the city does have multiple indoor arts venues, much of the arts community uses Maudslay State Park and other area parks as a basis for operations. This creates a seamless and unique merging of arts tourism and ecotourism.

"Another significant pull for tourists is the arts community. For our size, we have amenities through the roof. Whether to observe, to see a show, to listen to music,

to see visual art at art galleries... Newburyport Arts Association does a great job. It provides a service for tourists and locals. There truly is just a thriving arts community here" (The Professor, July 31, 2021).

"We put on outdoor shows starting in the springtime and continuing through autumn. We do family shows every month while it's warm enough; we do Shakespeare in the summer, and a Halloween walk in the fall. Most of our audience is locals, but every year we get more and more out of town folks. We advertise with the Chamber of Commerce and other venues, so that people know we're here. A lot of times, tourists will watch our shows without planning on it. They'll be visiting the park and happen upon the show. We don't charge admission, so they just stay and watch. Then, they come back on purpose next time" (The Actor, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021).

A final important component agreed upon by interviewees is the recent improvement in NBPT's recreational boating capacity, and the expansion of boat tourism that has followed. This is largely due to the recent construction of the new Harbormaster Facility:

"Building the Harbormaster Facility was huge. It turned our boating tourism industry to a whole new level. Having showers, washing machines, the things that people want has drawn in these massive boats. It's made a huge difference" (The Mayor, July 28, 2021).

"All the marinas are full. We built the new Harbormaster facility, and that's been huge. We only have two or three fishing boats that operate out of Newburyport, but now it's mostly recreational. That's been a big transition over the years. The number of boats coming in has increased hugely. A few years ago we joined an app-based entity for boaters to check and book dock space. It's made it a lot easier for recreational boaters to come in...That brings a lot of people in. People come for a day or longer. Since we don't have a hotel, boaters can still be successful" (The Professor, July 31, 2021).

"The facility itself is one of the nicest cleanest facilities that we've been to by boat, so that's great. It's just a pleasure to go by boat, to sit and watch the Merrimack and all the boats go in and out...It's all done electronically so it's even easier than picking up the phone and calling in" (Tourist, July 13, 2021).

The retail, the dining, the history, the nature, the arts, and the maritime industry constitute the vast majority of NBPT's touristic appeal. This information is well established within the community and represents a shared basis of knowledge surrounding NBPT's current tourism systems.

#### **CT 4: Tourism Needs**

In addition to its well understood history and status, tourism faces several established obstacles well defined by majority consensus. These clearly defined *tourism needs* are the next converging theme. NBPT's tourism capacity is strictly limited by the lack of local lodging options for out-of-town guests. While there are a few small inns and homestay options (such as Airbnb), tourists during the crowded summer months often are forced to stay out of town, losing NBPT precious revenue. The critical need for a hotel, preferably within walking distance of the downtown and its amenities, is the primary inhibitor to further touristic growth. Whilst brokers disagree on the details and location of a prospective hotel, they certainly agree that it is desperately needed:

"We bring big student groups and adults. We have buses of twenty-plus people, we have high end adult groups as small as six people. Since there isn't a hotel in town, we can't have big groups stay right in town. We have them staying Amesbury, or Danvers, or even Boston, depending on the group. It's a real shame" (The Travel Agent, July 19, 2021).

"Our capacity for tourism used to be limited by parking. A precondition for expanding our clean, beautiful waterfront was building a parking garage. Now that we've built it, we have to focus on a hotel. A hotel is the one thing I think Newburyport could really use. We have businesses complain about having to use

Portsmouth's hotels, they'd love to stay here in Newburyport for conferences" (The Professor, July 31, 2021).

"We were going to come for longer, but there was nowhere to stay" (Tourist, August 2, 2021).

The consensus that a hotel is needed has not resulted in successful plans.

Constant negotiations about downtown property for a hotel are ongoing between the city's leadership and New England Development, the company that owns most of the properties in the downtown area. Currently, New England Development remains unconvinced of the value and potential profit a hotel in NBPT could offer. Unless their stance changes, a hotel is unlikely to be feasible in the already highly developed downtown area.

Another need, mentioned exclusively by private sector brokers, is longer hours of operation for downtown businesses, especially during the busy season:

"I do wish the retailers were open later. They close very early. As I said, it's a give and take with the locals. Tourism connects retail, connects museums, connects restaurants, connects inns. I've talked to small business owners about staying open later, because people will definitely shop after dinner, but it's a challenge. They want to know *when do I get time to myself?* And as a small business owner myself, I get that. I often ask that. But it would be well worth it, those two extra hours. But it has to be consistent" (The Travel Agent, July 19, 2021).

The possibility of extending hours was mentioned positively by other downtown businesses, but with the concession that it'd would only be worth it as a united effort. This might be an interesting arena for the city to explore in the future.

## **COVID-19 Experiences and Impacts**

In terms of the onset of COVID-19, many people shared aligning experiences across BLT categories as well. Many but not all of these pandemic related experiences center tourism, but all of them speak to the attitudes and general vibe of NBPT during the pandemic, which certainly impacts brokers, locals, and tourists alike.

### **CT 5: Economic and Social Impact**

One major theme to emerge early in the pandemic response was a generally high level of compliance with and support for safety precautions in NBPT. Most individuals, while deeply impacted by COVID-19 in many ways, reported feeling relatively safe in the NBPT area. Tourism was largely shut down in the spring of 2020, but proceeded with some restrictions starting in the summer of 2020:

“Last summer, I closed down parking for out-of-town residents, and only allowed locals. We knew we wouldn’t be able to control the virus if we just opened things up. We did two marketing videos last summer. One went out in a 50 mile radius and had 1 million hits, and it had the theme *you bring the mask, we provide everything else...* For the most part, people downtown were grateful for the foot traffic” (The Mayor, July 28, 2021).

“We came by last summer. It was quieter than usual, but we still had a nice visit. We felt safe walking around the downtown and wearing masks going in shops” (Tourist, July 13, 2021).

NBPT’s health policies allowed for a partial operation of tourism during the first summer of COVID-19. The city was not, however, able to guarantee the survival of businesses through the pandemic, and the first year saw the closure of many long-standing and recent businesses in NBPT. Private sector brokers were especially devastated by the initial closures and losses, in part because of their heavy reliance on

seasonal tourists for profit. Even with significant government aid in the form of Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) for small business protection, the community lost many businesses. Even when tourism revived somewhat after mass vaccinations, the struggle for brokers continued as businesses struggle to find employees.

“The PPP was critical. Businesses lost so much revenue, and right now, everyone is struggling with staffing. It’s a real concern. We had a lot of business turnover. But people need to be patient. It takes longer to recover from these things” (The Mayor, July 28, 2021).

“I had to use PPP loans to pay last month’s rent. We got the money, but it wasn’t for the bank, it was for the bills” (The City Councilor, August 9, 2021).

“If we hadn’t owned our own property [a storefront near downtown], we wouldn’t have made it through COVID. The PPP helped a lot. Without it, even more businesses would have folded, especially in tourism” (The Travel Agent, July 19, 2021).

“COVID is devastating. Everything—harbormaster revenue, parking revenue, income from state taxes, food tax, all these local revenues hit the municipality hard. If that’s happening, you know the businesses have been hit hard. These are proprietary reports, so we don’t have all this info, but know the PPP and COVID relief helped tremendously” (The Professor, July 31, 2021).

One business owner and member of the NBPT Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) attributed her business’ pandemic era success to a variety of factors, but mostly, to adaptability:

“People used businesses differently during this time...Every day brought its own challenges, but we offered everything from distancing, new air filtration systems, extremely diligent cleaning and wiping of surfaces, spacing out, curbside, online, home delivery, whatever it took... we had an adapting mindset, trying to be smarter. We stopped trying to get back to where we were before. You go in a straight line for a while, and then realize you need to zig and zag” (The Baker, August 2, 2021).

Despite a variety of experiences, brokers unilaterally agreed that the years directly following the onset of COVID-19 were some of the most challenging in business history.

### **CT 6: Positive Outcomes**

Despite the overall negative impact of COVID-19 on the tourist industry and related activities, brokers, locals, and tourists all identified positive outcomes from the pandemic as well. This was the single area in my interviews that generated the most agreement from participants across all BLT groups. The positive outcome overwhelmingly identified was that of outdoor dining. Before COVID-19, outdoor dining was a rarity in NBPT, with only a small selection of restaurants possessing outdoor capacity. The limiting factor was an unwillingness to loosen liquor licensing for outdoor drinking, which was eased by the state at the start of the pandemic. In combination with enthusiastic support from city leadership and residents alike, outdoor dining has burgeoned in NBPT and is set to be a staple for the warmer months moving forward.

“Outdoor seating was huge, and kept us going. Even over the winter, people still came and sat outside. We made an investment in outdoor seating” (The Baker, August 2, 2021).

“Outdoor dining is something I always have wanted to implement. But the liquor licensing was so extremely conservative, very Yankee-Puritan, when it came to outdoor liquor. They relaxed their licensing through COVID and there have been no problems. No one sneaking drinks out, or whatnot...Going forward, restaurants will have to pay some small fee to have outdoor dining to cover the cost of parklets but that’ll be fine” (The Mayor, July 28, 2021).

“We loved getting to eat outside. I don’t remember being able to do that before COVID but it’s been very pleasant” (Tourist, August 2, 2021).

Another positive result of COVID-19 identified by several public and social sector brokers is the increased use of virtual and hybrid meeting formats. This has allowed for increased participation in civic matters, and is likely to continue into the future, especially as we endure frequent COVID-19 spikes and backslides.

“Another benefit has been the new levels of participation we’ve had through hybrid meetings” (The Mayor, July 28, 2021).

“I think remote meetings will stick around. Other than that, we’re seeing people get back to business as usual” (The Park Ranger, July 27, 2021).

Beyond these few silver linings, brokers, locals, and tourists didn’t identify other positive outcomes from COVID-19. One travel agent, when asked about other positive impacts, morosely remarked: “I hate to say it, but one positive is that if you’re still in business at this point, there’s less competition. COVID-19 took a lot of places out. Sad but true. (The Travel Agent, July 19, 2021)”.

### **CT 7: COVID-19 as Catalyst for Tourism Change**

Another point agreed on by the vast majority of interview participants is that due to COVID-19, for better or for worse, tourism will never look the same. One tour guide offers a deep explanation of COVID-19’s impact on the tourism industry:

“COVID has been a reset. We’ve had to rethink the way we’ve been doing things, implementing changes we didn’t have time for... People had been thinking that tourism would change for a while. It had already started before COVID, and now even more so. Frequent independent travelers are more frequent and are willing to pay much more for a customized and private itinerary with more free time. Groups are overall much smaller. Organizations are changing their minimum pricing packages. People know it’s going to cost more, but they know they’re getting improved experiences, with more free time and less waiting. They get

more flexibility and privacy, so they're willing to pay more with less people...If COVID taught us anything, it's to always have backup. This has been harder than the recession in 2008 and 2009. This hasn't just been about money; it's been about a contagious disease. It's an ongoing recession snowballed with a pandemic" (The Travel Agent, July 19, 2021).

Brokers, many possessing considerable experience in the tour industry, recognize that the future of recreational travel is not going to mirror the past. Some participants hazarded guesses about the future of tourism, although only time can prove them right.

### **CT 8: Recreational Boating**

COVID-19 has also driven some tourists to pursue less conventional means of travel. The boating industry underwent unprecedented growth during the pandemic's onset, with NBPT and other coastal cities seeing noticeable upticks in leisure boating traffic. For a full chronicling of COVID-19's impact on boating, please see **Appendix V**.

### **Diverging Themes (DT)**

I identified the following themes from contradictory information and explicitly stated conflicts from the interviews. Many of these are abstract, dealing with themes of identity and aspiration; others are experiential and reference specific interactions where conflict occurred. Either way, these points of divergence highlight the contrasting and controversial nature of tourism. The first three diverging themes (DT) revolve around tourism, and the latter three are COVID-19-specific.

### **DT 1: Understandings of Tourism**

As mentioned before, there is considerable agreement and communal understanding surrounding the history and current status of NBPT's tourism, as well as major needs and obstacles. However, within this general consensus exists a multitude of conflicting preferences, ideals, and aspirations in the present and for the future of the city.

### **DT 2: Conflicts Between Brokers and Locals**

A conflict readily visible in NBPT's tourism system is not unique to the seaside city but is a tension common in tourist destinations worldwide: the eternal battle between brokers and locals over the presence and growth of tourism in town. Brokers derive potential financial benefits from tourism. The city's funding and resources are directly tied to its prestige as a tourist destination. Locals who do not profit directly from tourism tend to view out of town travelers as a nuisance and resist the idea of constant industry growth. These tensions were heightened further by the onset of the pandemic, as crowds of tourist posed a health hazard in addition to causing the usual frustrations. These conflicts between opposing desires for NBPT are demonstrated by the following excerpts.

"I know some people would prefer to not have all these tourists coming to the city right now, but that's how it goes" (The Mayor, July 28, 2021).

"When COVID hit, we saw crowds coming to parks. More people started using these spaces...I'm sure there are people from out of town using our parks. We just don't have the manpower to track that. We've had locals, longtime dogwalkers and stuff, complain because they can't use the parks anymore. They're too crowded" (The Park Ranger, July 27, 2021).

“Those first few months of COVID were very nice, in way. We got to have NBPT to ourselves. There was less traffic, things were quiet. It would have been nice if it stayed that way” (Local, July 14, 2021).

Protestations come from locals who are concerned that too much tourism will cause NBPT to lose its small seaside town feeling that attracted them to it in the first place. City leadership does not share their concern, and continue to develop and grow tourism whenever possible.

### **DT3: Festivals and Events**

A mainstay of NBPT tourism, Yankee Homecoming (YH) is a weeklong festival hosted by the city every summer. Now in its 65<sup>th</sup> season, YH celebrates the history, arts, and culture in town through an eclectic range of events including antique car shows, fireworks, craft fairs, music productions, and more. YH is funded by local and chain businesses and supported by volunteer and staff labor. Despite the event’s prestige and popularity with many families, tourists, and businesses, YH is far from universally loved. In many ways, the week of YH epitomizes all that locals despise about tourism:

“Yankee Homecoming is the worst time of year for many of us in town. For the whole week, you can’t go anywhere because of the mobs of people. Locals don’t even get to enjoy the celebration. Most people I know try to book their own out of town vacations during Yankee Homecoming” (The Businessman, July 2, 2021).

I grew up hearing my parents, neighbors, and other locals complain about the congestion, the uncouth crowds, and the other ways that YH ‘ruined’ NBPT for its own residents. Of course, the profit brought in by tourism to the city during the event has successfully dissuaded all serious public conversations about the harm caused by YH.

Funding for YH comes from major corporate entities—banks, real estate agencies, and, of course, Dunkin’—rather than smaller local businesses. The support of these major funders combines with the prestige and publicity of the event renders most serious debates about YH’s place in tourism dead on arrival. A major point to arise from the interviews is that doubts about the overall benefits of YH are pervasive amongst brokers (especially private sector ones) and not just locals.

“I don’t know if festivals really provide anything at this point in time” (The Baker, August 2, 2021).

The harshest and most nuanced condemnation of YH is provided alongside some suggested alternatives by one NBPT shop owner:

“I am actually planning a survey of business owners in town, broken down by category, to ask: *what do you think of Yankee Homecoming?* I’m so put off by the window vendors, all out of town, out of state crafts people, when our own retailers are having a hard time staying open...Where’s the Yankee Homecoming money going? We looked it up, since their tax filings are public, and they are claiming \$178,000 gross. Who does that go to? What good does Yankee Homecoming do? The restaurants are happy about it but I expect the retailers are struggling...We need only local art, only local stores. We should do away with the week-long festival but have regular programming, events, concerts, etc. Why don’t we have street performers and jugglers. The whole thing is a wasted opportunity.” (The City Councilor, August 9, 2021).

The structure of YH allows any business, including out-of-town ones, to buy a slot as an outdoor vendor, at a very steep cost. This led to an inundation of out-of-town artisans—tourists in their own right—to dominate YH sales, further escalating the controversy of the event.

## **COVID-19 Experiences and Impacts**

There exists significant disparity in experiences, feelings, and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, the pandemic's onset exacerbated existing tensions within the community: locals who already disliked tourism, dislike it more; the aspects of NBPT's tourism that already draw in crowds—outdoor attractions, small town feeling, walkability—hold more appeal during an airborne virus; and brokers wanting to further develop NBPT find ways to turn a crisis into an opportunity whenever possible. In some cases, COVID-19 created new areas of conflict revolving around safety, compliance, and enforcement, and revealed ideological differences amongst city bureaucracy.

### **DT 4: Access to Spaces**

An immediate conflict emerging from the onset of COVID was disagreement over which spaces should be kept open and which ones closed for health and safety. This conflict was played out in public parks, on the rail trail, in playgrounds and in skateparks throughout the city.

“Skateparks and playgrounds all over were a problem. Basketball hoops and climbing gyms in particular, because we couldn't keep the kids out of there. And at that point, we had no idea how COVID worked. There was talk about it sticking around on surfaces for hours, days even, so we had a real problem. We didn't know what we were dealing with, so shutting those down was the best decision for the city” (The Mayor, July 28, 2021).

The head of the parks department disagreed with the need to shut down these spaces, but nonetheless dutifully responded to constantly updating health precautions and guidelines:

*"We were being asked to make immediate changes. Like, take down all the basketball nets, take down the swings, install new signage, rapidly. We had to close down the skatepark...We talked to the mayor and she allowed us to remove and reopen the park for a short while. It was a disaster. People weren't wearing masks, weren't keeping distance...We did have some moments where the mayor considered shutting down the rail trail, but we just can't do that. We just can't. The boardwalk isn't our jurisdiction, but they did try to shut that down for a while. I don't think it helped"* (The Park Ranger, July 27, 2021).

The public brokers I spoke to were all too happy to dispute the ideal access to outdoor spaces and the measures taken to keep these spaces, especially the skatepark, safe. These particular conversations are less directly related to tourism than other COVID-19 related conflicts, but provide an interesting window into public decision making processes around access.

#### **DT 5: Disagreement Over Precautionary Policies**

A hallmark of this nation's pandemic response has been, since the beginning, a patchwork of confusing and contradictory health policies, operating with inconsistent levels of support and enforcement. NBPT has fared better than many places—it is an affluent and dominantly white suburbia, so better health outcomes are not surprising—but still has struggled to find consistency and practical health policies. Many of its chosen strategies have led to disputes, as demonstrated by the following bureaucratic challenges and disagreements:

“When we were first told by the health director to shut the park, I fought it. The best place for kids to be is outside, in the fresh air, spread apart. They said no, CDC recommends closing it, that’s what we think is right. That’s just part of working in a corporation. You sometimes have to toe the line” (The Park Ranger, July 27, 2021).

“The CDC & Governor’s mandate to eliminate all restrictions left us scrambling, I’ll admit. We had about 10 days to know that, all of a sudden, we would no longer have restrictions. The Governor had been saying August, or July 4, and then, all of a sudden, they said May 29<sup>th</sup>. It really blindsided us” (The Librarian, July 19, 2021).

The lack of coordination in pandemic response has directly led to many unnecessary COVID-19 deaths, and these poorly communicated policies had their impact in NBPT, even at a much smaller scale (Horton, 2021).

### **DT 6: Conflict over Masks**

An obvious phenomenon emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic is conflict over mask behavior and policies. Similar conflicts are observable nationwide and globally, and create an additional difficulty regarding safety mitigation efforts. Certainly, in NBPT, businesses and municipal spaces alike struggled to achieve compliance with mask mandates, an issue only aggravated by the presence of tourists. Conflicts often but not exclusively involved people responding to mask mandates with defiance and belligerence. Various brokers and residents report local instances of these conflicts, but dislike to intervene, even in an official capacity:

“If we run into a problem with mask related conflict, and people need to be removed from a restaurant or shop, the police can get involved. But we really don’t like it to get to that point” (The Mayor, July 28, 2021).

"It's hard to monitor mask policies, and we don't have the staff to personally enforce them...We had complaints about people not wearing masks. Or people complain about the exercise groups that come through maskless, all sweaty and panting. Multiple complaints. But again, we cannot control how people behave unless they are breaking the law and we can call the police...We've had people band together during these times; we've also seen people become more hostile and violent" (The Park Ranger, July 27, 2021).

"We had people come in after seeing our sign about still requiring masks who were not library users, who came in without their masks on to make a statement, just to come in, complain and not have their masks on" (The Librarian, July 19, 2021).

"The conflict over masks was everywhere. I got calls about mask irresponsibility on the rail trail, or other places. Even got some calls from the other side, of people who weren't wearing their masks outside and felt harassed by the glares they were receiving. Some of the store owners downtown had people come in and be militant about not wearing a mask. And the store owner would say *we're not going to serve you* and they'd say *then I'm never coming back here*. And we've heard about a few situations like that. Predominantly, that puts a lot of stress and tension on employees and owners. Then if you call the cops, they don't want to arrest people for not wearing masks. All that was a major issue. We got a lot of complaints about police not wearing masks. As a cop on a detail, I understand that it's hot and you're alone. But people thought they weren't wearing a mask for political reasons" (The Professor, July 31, 2021).

"We've had some disputes in the last year about people not wearing masks in businesses that require it, or conflicts otherwise stemming from COVID. We try not to get involved and keep the peace, but if a business wants to have a mask rule and customers don't want to wear them, they need to leave. We're not going to get into a back and forth. It's the business' right. If the person doesn't want to leave, we'd charge them with trespassing. That's our way of handling it, but we didn't really have many confrontations about that. We had *complaints* of confrontations but that's mostly it" (The Police Chief, August 28, 2021).

So while NBPT largely avoided the extreme masking conflicts observed at other locations, there still existed tension between those who wanted strict enforcement of public health policies, and those who were apathetic or opposed to such policies.

## Discussion

The resulting 8 converging themes and 6 diverging themes are presented in

**Figure 6.1.**

Converging Themes		Diverging Themes	
1	Understandings of Tourism	1	Understandings of Tourism
2	Coupled Perceptions of History and Tourism	2	Broker and Local Conflict
3	Appeal and Attractions	3	Festivals and Events
4	Tourism Needs	4	Access to Spaces
5	Economic and Social Impact	5	Precautionary Policy Disagreements
6	Positive Outcomes	6	Mask Conflict
7	COVID-19 as Catalyst for Tourism Change		
8	Recreational Boating		

**Figure 6.1.** Converging themes 1-4 address tourism generally; 5-8 address tourism and COVID-19. Diverging themes 1-3 address tourism generally; 4-6 address tourism and COVID-19.

These major converging and diverging themes highlight the complex social dynamics of NBPT tourism, and the ways in which COVID-19 has emerged. I discuss several of these themes and offer my own interpretation, prediction, or recommendations. The first areas of note I want to explore involves the future of NBPT's tourism, from **CT 2-4**, and **DT 1-3**. The city clearly understands its own history, tourism system, and intended pathway forward. However, the NBPT's progression as a tourist destination is currently stymied by New England Development, which has such a

chokehold on the downtown property market that no serious discussion about development can take place without it. NBPT's leadership must continue unsuccessful negotiations with New England Development *or* find a way to loosen the collective's control over the downtown area. NBPT recently invested in a new parking garage, that now sits empty much of the year because there's nowhere for visitors to stay. Tourism in town will forever be limited to day-trips and boaters until the hotel situation is addressed. This should be a major economic priority for the major and city council.

Another recommendation to better NBPT's tourism system is to completely reevaluate the summer schedule and structure of event programming. YH has dominated the summer event schedule for over 60 years, and there is not satisfactory evidence that it is the best alternative for NBPT. Tradition should not dictate future developments, and the city consider other structures beyond a single, weeklong festival. YH concentrates summer programming—and thus, the tourism that comes along with it—into an incredibly short duration. Providing smaller but more frequent events instead could help provide a steadier customer stream to local businesses, instead a highly concentrated week that profits many out-of-town retailers. Changing the intensity and structure of YH could help alleviate some of the tensions between local and brokers as well, in an attempt to find a popular compromise on the summer tourist season.

Based especially on **CT 6 & 7**, the clear support for outdoor dining and its continuation indicates that NBPT should invest more heavily in infrastructure to support

it. While the city has already committed to provide parklets, protective barriers, and the licensing to continue outdoor dining, there is concern about the proximity of diners to congested, narrow downtown streets in the summertime. NBPT should seriously consider closing down or limiting car traffic on major downtown streets during the warmer months. This would have a multitude of potential benefits: it would allow for significantly expanded outdoor dining, already shown to be popular; it would help combat the increase in traffic and car accidents that occurs every summer while encouraging foot traffic, which is excellent for retailers; and it would increase the walkability and accessibility of the general area. Many sidewalks in NBPT are narrow enough to begin with, and the addition of outdoor seating can create dangerous bottlenecks that can be totally inaccessible, especially for wheelchairs or other mobility devices.

A final point of discussion touches on something gathered through observation and intuition as well seen in **DT 4-6**. Several locals and brokers mentioned complaints about NBPT city police officers not wearing masks, and even outright refusing to enforce mask policies in the city. While city leaders did not say this directly, they alluded that police officers were not willing to enforce mask policies, especially in public or outdoor spaces (as opposed to in private businesses, where the trespassing charge is legitimate). When asked directly about such behavior, the police chief did not acknowledge the question, let alone the behavior of field officers. If in fact, officers were

not compliant with the major and the city's health directives, it could indicate that the city has less control and oversight over its police than ideal. While the well documented and vast evidence of systemic corruption with U.S. police departments is outside the scope of this thesis, the disconnect between the city leadership and the police is a possible point of concern in NBPT (Collins, 1998; Walby, Lippert, & Luscombe, 2018).

The possible themes to emerge from this analysis are many. This chapter aimed to capture the most salient themes emerging from interviews and distill them into informative and actionable areas of concern, that can be explored in further research on NBPT, tourism, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis examines tourism in the Newburyport (NBPT) area through the study of social dynamics during the onset of COVID-19. The goal of the research, as stated in previous chapters, is not to answer a set of specific questions, but to explore, using mixed qualitative methods, the nuance, impact, and experiences of NBPT tourism. Interviews supplemented with observations and historical context led to the development of 8 converging themes and 6 diverging themes evident in NBPT tourism during the onset of COVID-19. These themes, and their implications for the city of NBPT, are discussed in Chapter 6.

There are several recommendations for future study not specific to the NBPT area. A primary area of future research needed to enrich the field of marine affairs is a comprehensive and adaptive understanding of COVID, and its short- and long-term health, social, economic, environmental, and other impacts. The pandemic has been rapidly changing since 2020, and beyond reasonable doubt will continue to be a dominant global force for years to come. The relationship between COVID and tourism continues to evolve, with new challenges and dynamics constantly emerging. Ongoing research into this relationship is crucial for the tourism industry. This thesis does not engage with the many numerical metrics of COVID-19's impact on tourism, but future research should incorporate the quantitative and qualitative methods for a truly holistic perspective.

More detailed research into the ways that COVID served as a catalyst for change across the tourist industry would be valuable. Comparing the behavior of tourists and brokers before the onset of COVID, during the earliest, subsequent, and future waves of the pandemic would show the shifts brought on by the pandemic. Deepening our understanding of COVID's impact could allow for a stronger response to future health crises.

From general observation, this is a timely thesis, addressing a range of critical topics. This thesis opens the door for comparative case studies. These could focus on the general New England area but could also compare the experiences of coastal tourist destinations on the broader coastal Atlantic and Pacific U.S., as well as globally. Additionally, this research focuses on the social aspects of tourism dynamics. There are absolutely other dimensions of touristic systems that merit exploration, not limited to the physical, psychological, political, artifactual, equitable, and ecological realms.

Methodologically, this study shows the use and potency of a mixed qualitative methods approach, which as lead to valuable insights for the region of NBPT. Replication of the methods used here could provide other such insights in other coastal tourism destinations, in and outside the New England region. The approaches used—particularly the interviewing and limited participant observation—were well received and successful and could be applied to other realms of marine study. No thesis can address all relevant issues. Without timing and financial constraints, I could have interviewed

more people, from a wider range of backgrounds, in more diverse positions. There are many exciting avenues of study that could continue the work begun here, both in relation to the area of NBPT and to the general fields of tourism studies and marine affairs at large.

The field of marine affairs is incredibly diverse, and by nature incorporates elements of the human, constructed, and natural worlds. Tourism sits at the intersection of these many worlds, and the inherent controversy and complexity of tourism only increase with global pressures such as COVID-19. Research like this thesis can help increase the understanding of tourism's past and present, but more importantly, can help create an informed pathway towards improving tourism in the future.

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### **Chapter 3: Mixed Qualitative Methods**

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## **Appendix I: Interview Guiding Document**

Following is an interview guiding document for the semi-structured and elite interviews. This includes research questions which use technical language, and are not intended to be shared with participants but are for my own reference. There are also background questions, to be asked to all participants. There are also three sets of specific guiding questions, split by Broker-Local-Tourist Model Categorization. It is important to note that this is just a guiding document, and much of the interviews consisted of follow up questions pertaining to individual interviewee's answers.

### **Opening Information:**

*Hello, my name is Rachel Ameen, and I am a master's student at the University of Washington's School of Marine and Environmental Affairs. I am working on my master's thesis, which explores the dynamics of tourism within and surrounding Newburyport, MA, during COVID-19. I am interested in getting the perspectives from tourists, locals, and brokers from the surrounding community. Specifically, I'm interested in hearing from people with hands-on, lived experience relevant to the topic, and in understanding relationship dynamics, connections, and conflicts. As a person who has agreed to be interviewed for this research, I really appreciate your willingness to talk with me. I will start with some background questions, and I do have plenty of question prompts, but I encourage you, as the expert, to take the conversation in any direction you feel relevant. Your opinions, experience, and perspective are what I want to showcase in this project.*

Below are background questions (BQ), research questions (RQ) and posed questions (PQ). Also included is one thematic guiding question. Research questions are intended to be scientific with technical terms not necessarily known or used by people in the communities I will be working in. Posed questions are intended to address and answer the research questions, but in a vernacular that would be best understood by the interviewee and will be the questions that are actually asked. The thematic guiding question is a general conversation starter for my research topic.

### **Thematic Guiding Question**

*Tell me about your experience with tourism and COVID-19 in the last year.*

### **Background Questions (BQ)**

1. What is your name and occupation?
2. What is your relationship to the city of Newburyport?
3. What is your general impression of tourism in Newburyport?

4. Do you feel that gender impacts this issue? If yes, how?

*RQ1: What are the themes, values, and opinions dominant in the Newburyport tourism system?*

**PQs for Tourist Brokers**

1. How did your business/job/position operate during COVID-19?
2. Have you felt safe at your position during COVID-19?

**PQs for Newburyport locals**

1. How long have you been local to the area?
2. Have you felt safe as a local during COVID-19?

**PQs for tourists to Newburyport**

1. Describe your history visiting Newburyport? (Is it your first time? Are you a regular visitor? How often do you visit, and how long do you stay?)
2. Why did you select Newburyport as your destination?
3. Where do you stay and what do you while here?
4. Have you felt safe as a tourist during COVID-19?

*RQ2: How has COVID-19 impacted tourism with Newburyport?*

**PQs for Tourist Brokers**

1. Did you experience any positive impacts during COVID-19 upon your position?
2. Can you compare your experiences across pre-COVID summers, the summer of 2020, and this current summer?

**PQs for Newburyport locals**

3. Did you experience any positive changes to tourism in the area because of COVID?
4. Can you compare your experiences across pre-COVID summers, the summer of 2020, and this current summer?
5. Describe your position in the community.
6. How has that position changed during COVID-19?

**PQs for tourists to Newburyport**

5. Would you say your experience as a tourist has been improved or harmed by COVID-19?

6. Can you compare your experiences across pre-COVID summers, the summer of 2020, and this current summer?

**RQ3:** *What are the perceived relationship dynamics, and how they interact and conflict with each other?*

**PQs for Tourist Brokers**

1. What is your position in the tourist industry, and how long have you held it?
2. As a broker, how do you relate to and interact with tourists?
3. As a broker, how do you relate to and interact with locals?
4. Has COVID1-19 changed those relationships? How?

**PQs for Newburyport locals**

7. As a local, how do you relate to and interact with tourists?
8. As a local, how do you relate to and interact with tourism workers (brokers)?
9. Has COVID-19 changed those relationships? How?

**PQs for tourists to Newburyport**

7. As a tourist, how do you relate to and interact with locals?
8. As a tourist, how do you relate to and interact with workers (brokers)?
9. Has COVID-19 impacted those relationships? How?

## **Appendix II: Interview Profiles**

What follows is a series of profiles stemming from select interviews, presented in a manner drawing on the traditions of oral histories and journalism. Specifically, these profiles are meant to emulate the work of American journalist “Studs” Terkel, who created similar brief snapshots of his interview subjects. These profiles are written using a combination of field notes of participant observation, and the elite and semi-structured interviews. These profiles are not direct interview transcriptions, but are composed of participant’s own words, edited for clarity and rearranged for the purpose of narrative flow. Despite these alterations, the profiles faithfully represent the experiences, opinions, and intentions present in the unaltered transcripts, presented in a stylized narrative.

### **Profile 1: The Mayor**

*Newburyport’s Town Hall is opulent in a distinctly New England way: oil paintings of puritanical men-of-yore, grimacing through decades of grime; walls of wood panels over brick, classic to colonial architecture; and, of course, the maritime-themed décor ubiquitous to the seaside community. The Mayor, enthroned amongst a lush but eclectic range of chairs, talks in a languid, confiding manner. We discuss COVID-19, health ordinances, touristic development, and the town’s future. The Mayor’s answers are thoughtful and clever, and she carries herself with the air of a well satisfied alley cat. She is master of her domain and knows it.*

We used to be a community people would drive by en route to Portsmouth or Portland. They wouldn’t stay here or come here deliberately. That’s changed. All the hard work we’ve done has paid off. People come here and fall in love with it. It used to be a hidden gem and now it’s not hidden. I was shocked when the first local house sold for over a million. Now it’s a regular occurrence. It’s incredible.

Part of it was making sure that the city has all the needed amenities. Building the harbormaster facility was huge. It turned our boating tourism industry to a whole new level. Having showers, washing machines, the things that people want, has drawn in these massive boats. That's made a huge difference.

Prior to the pandemic, I was really wanting to establish an economic director. That job is tied into the mayor's office and the chamber of commerce and would work on tourism in that regard. The tourism grant projects have been stalled by COVID. Entering the pandemic season, the last 18 months has been challenging.

All the decisions that I made were based on science, data, and what we were hearing from our governor's office. Every step of the way, we worked with the health department to make the best possible decisions for the city. We had about 11,000 cases over 18 months and 6 deaths, which is pretty good compared to other communities.

I made as many PSAs as possible to keep people updated. I had people tell me how comforting that was, that my weekly addresses gave them hope and calm during this time. As a leader, it was important for them to know that I was engaging with the data, the schools, the experts, and working in the best interests in the city. I'd love to have had rapid testing, and more pooled testing. That was the one thing I'd have liked to really see more of. Contact tracing really helped when things were bad. We have a fairly educated population here in Newburyport, and that helped the most.

Skateparks and playgrounds all over were a problem. Basketball hoops and climbing gyms in particular, because we couldn't keep kids out of there. And at that point, we didn't know how COVID worked. There was talk about it sticking around on surfaces for hours, days even, so we had a real problem, especially with the skatepark. I had been begging people, directly addressing skateboarders, begging them to wear masks. I just couldn't get their cooperation at all. There would be way too many people in the park, they'd be rude to our staff, swearing, giving the finger, horrible. So I filled it

with mulch. I just didn't care. We didn't know what we were dealing with, so it was the best decision for the city.

Last summer, I closed down parking for out-of-town residents, and only allowed locals. We knew we wouldn't be able to control the virus if we just opened things up. We also worked closely with Salisbury and Amesbury, and communities in southern New Hampshire. Since we're so close, it's important to coordinate with them so neither of us gets rushed by out-of-state crowds by opening at different times. If they opened up beaches before us, they were concerned they'd get an influence of MA folks, and vice versa. We had a hard time hiring lifeguards too, since who was going to want to give mouth to mouth during COVID?

We did two marketing videos last summer. One went out in a 50-mile radius and had over a million hits, with the theme: *You bring the mask, we provide everything else: food, culture, art, etc.* I know some people would prefer to not have all these tourists coming to the city right now, but that's how it goes.

## **Profile 2: The Baker**

*I meet the Baker at her café, a cozy split-level crammed with roomy booths and smaller tables. The bakery's focal point is the long glass display case running the length of room, showcasing an enticing array of treats: croissants, lemon bases, scones, mini-cakes, turnovers, muffins, and the house specialty, whoopie pies. These come in a variety of flavors. The Baker prompts me to try some on the house, and our interview takes place over a selection of raspberry, vanilla, chocolate, and caramel filled pies. The Baker is gregarious and friendly, and we are interrupted multiple times in our conversation by customers saying hello to her. It is very clear from the deferential glances and enthusiastic organization of the employees that she runs a tight ship. This is to her benefit. Her business has thrived over the last several years, according to her, due to her willingness to try untested and innovative business strategies during the onset of COVID-19.*

People used businesses differently during this time. We tried to inspire businesses to think outside the box and be creative about how to operate. That was a big part of my brand during this time: adapting and creating awareness. Because we were open, we felt strongly that we had to give back to the community. We did masked whoopie pies, donating proceeds to the heroes fund at the local hospital. We really had to think outside the box. While there were obviously downsides to being open during the first pandemic surges, we were still getting business and bringing in money, something a lot of other places didn't have an opportunity to do.

We had the challenge of keeping ourselves safe, keeping our employees safe, and keeping our customers safe, so they could trust our brand. They had to see that we were doing everything right. Every day brought its own challenges, but we offered everything from extreme social distancing, new air filtration systems, extremely diligent cleaning and wiping of surfaces, spacing out, curbside, online, home delivery...we did whatever it took. We realized we were one of the lucky ones, able to be open.

For the businesses that could be open, staffing was a huge challenge. But I think there were a lot of success stories in Newburyport. We saw a huge increase in our online sales for holidays where people couldn't be together—Mother's Day, easter. We weren't expecting that at first, but it was a real boom.

Outdoor seating was huge and kept us going. Even over the winter, people still came and sat outside. We made an investment in outdoor seating and in air filtration systems. Our landlord worked with us, gave us permission to make the changes. It was a very strong partnership. His goal was to have no one go out of business.

This community offered so much generosity. They made sure that staff was tipped. As challenging as it was, it was one of the most humbling experiences of my life, because people came out and supported us because they wanted to make sure we would survive this. It was pretty amazing.

### **Profile 3: The Librarian**

*The Head Librarian at the Newburyport Public Library (NPL) is diminutive and fashionable. She appears almost frail at first glance, but that illusion is quickly dispelled by her incredible energy and purpose. Beloved by library staff and patrons alike, she has been a mainstay in the NPL's leadership for almost two decades and is known for her constant good cheer and endless vivacity. She is my first interview subject, and our conversation is easy. After all, she has known me my entire life, all of which I have spent as a library mainstay. Our discussion, frequently interspersed with anecdotes and personal asides, encompasses the library's role in tourism and the challenges of COVID.*

To be honest, libraries are one of the first stops for tourists throughout the country because we have free public restrooms. People will come in and say, "we're looking for a good place to eat lunch." We are very accessible to tourists because we're open a lot of hours—open until 9 at night, 9-5 on the weekend. There are not a lot of other places that are free and have information that people can rely on to go and get assistance.

I think COVID has changed a lot of people's behavior. A lot of people just hunkered down—like a lot of older people, which is many of our patrons, who are retired—who've been very locked down this last year. No going to restaurants, not going shopping, not going downtown...not walking by the library either. Even patrons who knew what we were open weren't comfortable coming into the building until they were vaccinated. Their needs were met by the patio pickup, so why come in?

We really had to change our workflow completely. We really had to look at our workflow and how we provided services. We were really, really strict. We did a lot of training with our staff about protocols and cleaning and mask wearing. We bought lockers for staff, so they no longer had things hanging up together. We got sign-in software—we used to have staff sign a paper form, but no more. Now we do it all

online, so no one is sharing pens. We implemented a lot of things that we're continuing to use that kept our staff and our patrons safe. I felt very confident. I'll admit there were staff who were extremely anxious.

We had a couple of staff who chose to retire rather to work with the public. That's certainly their prerogative. Even now, we have some staff who are feeling fairly anxious knowing that there are people in building not wearing masks who are unvaccinated. We can identify kids, we know they are not vaccinated just by their age, but there are certainly other people who don't have a mask who aren't vaccinated, I'm sure. Everybody is still navigating that, patrons and staff alike. It may change. If other variants become more prevalent, people may feel they want to go back to wearing a mask. I think staff felt proud that we were able to serve patrons as well as we did throughout the period. We never stopped that service.

I think one of the most challenging things about COVID for staff in particular is that we really lost a lot of what makes it fun to be a librarian. The best part of being a librarian is interacting with the public, and there wasn't any of that unless you were working patio pickup. Even folks who were coming into the building could only be there for a very short amount of time and were doing self-checkout, so there was very minimal interaction with the public.

The other thing is staff love working together. During COVID, we had to maintain 6 feet apart. We were really strict with maintaining that social distancing during COVID. Interacting with your coworkers is so fun, and it was hard to do without it.

The third big problem was having to say no so frequently to the public. The public are used to us saying "yes, of course we can help you". And instead, we're saying: no, you can't stay longer than half an hour; no, we can't do that; no, you can't come in without a mask; no, you can't come in without sanitizing your hands; no, we don't have newspapers you can read; no, we don't have a place you can sit down and relax. That

was challenging. Very challenging. All of things you work so hard for as a library, being a community center, a place people of all ages feel comfortable coming...it felt like we were saying no to these things.

Don't get me wrong, we were still serving the public, but with so many no's. So now, we can just say yes again. It is really freeing.

#### **Profile 4: The Travel Agent**

*I meet the Travel Agent in her tour company's storefront, just a few blocks from central downtown. Copious sunlight filters through the floor to ceiling windows, highlighting walls covered with postcards, travel brochures, certificates, awards, memorabilia, and more. The Travel Agent herself—vivacious, blonde, social—is a wealth of knowledge on the world of tourism in Newburyport and is not afraid to share her own stance on the issues covered. More often than not, I find myself agreeing with her observations and opinions, and even when I do not, I am still swept away by the torrent of information she enthusiastically provides. We discuss her career, the impact of COVID and the future of the tourism industry.*

I started my company in 2002, right after 9/11, and I thought *if I can make it right after 9/11, I can make it anytime*. Then COVID hit, and I had to rethink that statement. I

I bring groups to Newburyport. I talk about Newburyport *a lot* to people. First you've got to sell people on Boston, then Salem, and then get them to the rest of the Northshore and greater Boston area. Once we get them to Newburyport, they love it, and wonder why they'd never come here before. [laughs] It's a great town, great people. People come for the local shops and the local restaurants. They don't want to shop at a Target. They want to support locally owned businesses. So that's what we do. We bring people in.

Over the last 10 years, people in the industry have worried that tour operators will become irrelevant. I don't think that's the case. We will still have older populations. We have 30 and 50 year old's who don't want to do the same things as our 80 year old cliental, but that's because they're not 80. They won't want to hike and camp forever. They're not going up in to space.

Frequent independent travelers are more and more frequent, and are willing to pay much more for a customized and private itineraries with more free time. Groups are overall much smaller. Organizations are having to change their minimum pricing packages. People know it's going to cost more, they understand that. But they know they're getting improved experiences, with more free time, less waiting. They get more flexibility and privacy, so they're willing to pay more with less people.

We've seen that shift with museums and restaurants as well. They're learning that tour operators might not bring in a big group of 50, but might bring in two groups of 25, and still should receive the operator discounts and comps. We used to argue and compromise a lot to get a discount for couples and small groups. Now businesses are doing it, the deal goes through their office, and everyone benefits.

Tourism was changing before COVID. COVID has been a reset. It's been a reset for tourism, and for the whole town. We're trying to navigate that, and figure out how to help everyone out. We're just trying to get things on the calendar so communities know, and so people know they can come support local businesses. We have members all throughout the local area we have to think about.

Come March and April [of 2020], I knew nothing would be happening in the summer. I cut costs, and didn't even try to do things. We had one married FIT couple come up from Texas, and I was fine with that. I met them in a parking lot, gave them their welcome basket and a bottle of wine, said *you've got my cell, text me if you need anything*, and sent them on their way.

I saw a lot of companies flounder this last year. They kept trying to plan and design, and then people would cancel, and cancel, and cancel. These companies were just spinning their wheels and getting so depressed. A lot of it depended on which area in the country you were. A lot people didn't want to travel as the vaccine was rolling out, because they didn't want to miss their appointment. But once they got the vaccine, business really picked up. People would call tour companies and book two, three of their events at once, as soon as they were vaccinated.

With COVID, we're all in the same storm, but are often in very different boats. Some are in yachts, some in rowboats. And we have to worry about those in rowboats and on rafts before we can get to the yacht people. If COVID taught us anything, it's to always have backup. This has been harder than the recession in 2008 and 2009. This hasn't just been about money, it's been about a contagious disease. It's an ongoing recession snowballed with a pandemic. We're going to have to get better at thinking on our feet and making the adaptations we need to stay safe, because we are not out of this yet.

### **Profile 5: The Professor**

*Before the interview began, the Professor gives me a tour of his wonderful garden, where we stand sampling sun-warmed cherry tomatoes wrapped in fresh basil leaves—a perfect snack for a hazy summer afternoon. Inside, I am almost overwhelmed by the density of the space: every surface is piled high with books, the walls are all bookcases, and he moves a pile of books off a chair in his office for me to sit upon. Our conversation lasts well over two hours. A lifelong academic, public servant, economist, and history lover, he offers much valuable insight into my areas of inquiry. At the time of our meeting, he was in the midst of an (ultimately unsuccessful) mayoral candidacy for NBPT and has served as a city council member for several years. The Professor is enthusiastic and thoughtful, and his answers are full of tangents about the history and culture of New*

*England. Afterwards, he sends me on my way with an armful of borrowed history books and more fresh tomato and herbs from the garden.*

I moved here 22 years ago. I grew up upriver in Lowell. In college and later for me, Newburyport was *the* place to visit. I was attracted to Newburyport first as a tourist. We'd go to the beach, Plum Island refuge. My wife and I always liked Newburyport, back in the 70s when we visited. We'd come, we'd go to Fowles & buy the *Times*, go to Cathy Anne's, get a pastry and coffee, go spend the day at the refuge, and then come back and go to the Grog. We'd always had it in the back of our heads that we'd move here. We were looking to buy an antique house, this was available, and we've been very happy.

I first ran for ward 4 city councilor in 2013. That was just a culmination of personal interests. I was working with a group in Lowell when I was 22 that was opposing the building of a highway through some historic property, a fight that was happening in Newburyport in the 70s as well.

In the 1970s, Newburyport's downtown was dead. 30 years later, with the historic restoration of the downtown, things were better. Newburyport has figured out how to maintain their central business district. It no longer provides goods for locals. But the historic restoration and preservation of the storefronts made Newburyport a place where people wanted to go. It harkened back to an earlier era in which there were central business districts. The stores don't sell the same things they did 70 years ago, but it attracts people in the same way. They feel good coming here. It's a beautiful, fun place to come for a day.

The question for downtown Newburyport is can we keep these small little shops. The retail piece is our toughest component. 50, 60 years ago, the threat was malls. Now, it's online purchasing. The stores that are located here have to be unique, with a good

shopfront, to survive. The problem with retail shops is business is seasonal. They're dead all winter.

The pandemic forced a collapse in the economy. Because of the disaster circumstances, both Democrats and Republicans passed the economic support needed to protect from the worst of it. With Ronald Reagan, we saw a shift away from New Deal policies. Now might be start of a return to that level of federal support. COVID has stimulated that shift.

A year ago, we thought state revenue was going to have a cataclysmic collapse. In fact, it looks like we'll end the fiscal year with a 4B dollar excess. Because they've been taxing online purchases and the federal relief, there's a lot of money. There are a lot of states and municipalities that are hurting. We are not one of them.

The conflict over masks was everywhere. I got calls about mask irresponsibility on the rail trail, or other places. Even got some calls from the other side, of people who weren't wearing their masks outside and felt harassed by the glares they were receiving. Some of the store owners downtown had people come in and be militant about not wearing a mask. And the store owner would say *we're not going to serve you* and they'd say *then I'm never coming back here*. And we've heard about a few situations like that.

Predominantly, that puts a lot of stress and tension on employees and owners. Then if you call the cops, they don't want to arrest people for not wearing masks. All that was a major issue. We got a lot of complaints about police not wearing masks. As a cop on a detail, I understand that it's hot and you're alone. But people thought they weren't wearing a mask for political reasons.

As a nation, as a world, there were people who were saying this was coming. And we ignored all of that.

## **Profile 6: The City Councilor**

*The City Councilor and I meet under a pavilion by the river at the dog park. The day is bright and clear, and our conversation is punctuated by our mutual frequent distraction by the myriad of canines playing around us. Windswept, tall, and opinionated, the City Councilor changes topic and covers ground faster than I can keep up with. I quickly abandon my notetaking and gratefully rely upon my digital recording to capture the torrent of eclectic information. He is not afraid to disparage the city's leadership, Chamber of Commerce, voting population, and more, but he's harsh critiques clearly stem from a deep passion about the community. More than any other interviewee, the City Councilor has a definitive and progressive vision for tourism and the future of Newburyport. His clear belief is that local traditions and "Puritanical" culture is stymying the city's potential, especially regarding commerce.*

*A perfect example of this conflict arose during our interview, when we were briefly engulfed in a cloud of potent herbal smoke from a passing group. Recently legalized in Massachusetts, the blossoming recreational cannabis industry provides a popular influx of funds to state and towns with dispensaries flocked by locals and tourists alike. Newburyport has not been the beneficiary of such funds due to a town referendum—spurred by a coalition of concerned local parents—that resulted in the controversial decision to not license dispensaries within town limits. The "loss" of this industry has caused the ire of many brokers blaming the referendum's outcome for perpetuating conservative and outdated stigma and costing the town huge potential profits. The City Councilor is quick to share his thoughts on the cannabis licensing issue, and the indications for Newburyport.*

I've been smoking pot since I was 15. Those parents—very fit housewives in expensive athletic clothes—heard that weed was legalized and started freaking out over nothing. It was a minority, but a vocal one, and they scared the school board and young

parents. They don't know a damn thing, if you heard what'd they were saying, you'd think the state legalized heroin, meth, crack, hard drugs. They started saying how Newburyport would be like a ghetto, all this shit. It was racist and it was stupid, and more than anything, it was short-sighted. I stood up and said that at a town council meeting. I said that when we're the only town in the state without a dispensary, and all those visitors over the summer are going to Amesbury or Salisbury because they can get the dope there, we'll be missing that money. And those people have no clue.

This gets back to this question about the future. Who are we? And what do we want to be when we grow up? I know what I would like to see. I'd like to see an implementation of economic development, especially of the retail stores. Economic development involves a vibrant downtown, that isn't just offices and restaurants, but retail stores. We need to showcase only local art, only local businesses. Why don't we have street performers, and jugglers, artists? We have this great space, beautiful area, but it's a missed opportunity right now.

The city hasn't done a great job distributing these funds, and the Chamber of Commerce is worthless. The way money was managed during COVID was just about gross bureaucracy. We should have treated it as a business interruption. Let the businesses pay the employees, let them sit at home, or clean, or paint, or any number of things. But this is all in hindsight.

Now I am going to talk about Yankee Homecoming, which hasn't been good for a while. I'm so put off by the window vendors, the out of town, out of state crafts people, when our own retailers are having a hard time staying alive. I also think Yankee Homecoming has jumped the shark with safety, but that's just a part of it. Where's the Yankee Homecoming money going? A friend and I looked it up, since their tax filings are public, and they are claiming 178,000 gross. But what good does that do for the town, to have all that money.

I know the restaurants are happy but our own retailers are struggling. I am hellbent on buying local. But 50% of the time, the local hardware store doesn't have what I want. I think there needs to be a concentrated effort to educate the community about what's really going on in town. Who are we, what do we want to be? The only way you can answer that is by being aware of things going on in town. You can either be proactive in that or you can educate.

## Appendix III: Autoethnographic Note

This Appendix was compiled over the course of research as a reflection upon the role of gender in the research process. This collection, inspired by *Femininities in the Field*, comes in the form of journal entries taken over the data collection stage of the research. This is a first person, informal method of reflection, and provides some introspection on the identity of the researcher—young, female, white, queer, able-bodied and cisgender—and how it impacts the research process.

### May 2021

Very early on in my life I realized that there was social expectation placed upon me, placed upon all women, really, revolving around gender. I don't need expound upon the many deep impacts of growing up in a patriarchal world here but suffice to say I knew from a depressingly young age that my sex was likely to be an obstacle. While that continues to be true throughout my existence, I quickly realized something that generations of women before me had also realized: it can also be an advantage. Leveraging gender is a powerful tool in a society so heavily dictated by binaries. Despite (or because of) the obvious paradoxical role of gender, I had not seriously considered its place in relationship to my own research. It was something to be overcome, or ignored, or used, but certainly not something to explicitly acknowledge in serious academic writing.

*Femininities in the Field: Tourism and Transdisciplinary Research*, the wonderful collection of articles edited by Brooke Porter and Heike Schänzel, has been my main reading material as of late. This book explores the role of gender in field research through the experiences of women researching tourism across many disciplines. I appreciate the diversity of experience showcased in *Femininities*, and how it

demonstrates that femininity can be an advantage to the research process. I will keep these stories in mind as I embark on my own interviews this summer.

### **June 2021**

In the initial interview emails I've sent out, I've already noticed a (perhaps coincidental) trend based on the gender of the potential interviewee. I have received affirmative responses from everyone who bothered to respond, but the manner of the affirmation has varied significantly. Almost every woman I've contacted has asked follow up questions about my research project, goals, background, and more. None of the men have. Might just be coincidental, but I thought it would be worth noting.

### **July 2021**

I have now had the opportunity to conduct several interviews and haven't yet felt my sex to be a particularly large influence on these interactions. My subjects have thus far been of the older demographic, and our conversations have been professional, polite, and informative. Some of my interviews have been with people that I've known for some time—my neighbor, who is running for mayor; the librarian who first met me in my infancy, the city councilor who frequents my local dog park—which has helped make our relations amicable and clear cut. The only real interaction involving gender was with the latter subject, who made a pointedly snide (and accurate) remark about some of the area's housewives, which he promptly apologized for (unnecessarily, as I am not a housewife and took no offence). Would he have felt the need to apologize had not been a woman myself? A ponderable but ultimately unanswerable question.

Next week, I hope to interview some of the harbor and restaurant workers downtown, which brings me outside of my comfort zone somewhat. I am excited to hear their perspectives on tourism and the pandemic.

### **August 2021**

I have been thoroughly derelict in my note-taking enterprise. Over the last month and half, I have been called 'sweetheart' and 'honey' by adult men whom I was interviewing, but that is no more than an extension of something I (and most other women I know) have been dealing with all our lives. The culprits are typically well-intentioned older men who don't understand the difference between 'a compliment' and unwanted verbal endearments, but I do not feel that the quality of the interview suffered for these dynamics. As I said, I have lots of experience smiling through the discomfort of such interactions, and they have absolutely been in the minority of my interviews.

### **September 2021**

I think being a woman has served as a distinct obstacle for connecting with a certain genre of the men I've been interviewing. The middle-aged working men—police chief, harbormaster, boat captain, businessman—do not seem very comfortable interacting with a young woman, especially one asking so many questions. Their discomfort, which is typically physically and audibly apparent, manifests in short answers and a clear desire to end the interview as soon as possible. I expect that I might have an easier time connecting to these individuals if I were something other than what I am. I have nonetheless gained some valuable insights from these participants, despite their coldness.

Converse to this experience, I find it incredibly to connect and quickly build comradery and rapport with female interview subjects across all age groups. Additionally, some of the older men I've talked to adopt an avuncular and confiding manner, which has led to some incredibly fruitful conversations. These groups seem to take warmly to a young, inquisitive woman researcher, and many have said as much directly. These conversations have proved the most informative for this research leading to many insights and points of reflection.

## **Appendix IV**

The following article was published in November of 2021, and includes excerpts from interviews conducted for the thesis, as well as supplementary interviews. The article was published in the SMEA student run blog, Currents.

### **Nautical Newcomers: How the Pandemic has Changed Recreational Boating**

#### **Rachel Ameen**

Leisure boating, much like life, has always entailed a certain amount of risk, risk that has considerably increased since the onset of COVID-19. The greatest danger to recreational boaters, at least in coastal New England, has historically been the [harsh currents and severe riptides](#) of the Atlantic and its tributaries. However, since the start of the pandemic, a new danger has eclipsed the familiar maritime hazards, causing headaches—and too often, collisions—within small mainland ports: amateur boaters.

“They don’t know what the f\*ck they’re doing,” complains Matt, a longtime boater and Massachusetts resident, of the COVID-induced influx of new boaters. Every summer, Matt and his wife Caroline sail along the Merrimack River from their home in Gloucester to the river’s mouth, stopping at ports along the way to shop, eat, and sightsee. Their plans were much the same during COVID-19, but since summer of 2020, they’ve faced levels of congestion and irresponsible vehicle operation at never-before-seen levels. Now, Matt has taken to making obscene hand gestures at the obvious amateurs, much to their dismay.

“When COVID hit, everyone had to social distance, and a bunch of people went out and bought a boat. And everyone that bought a boat did not have a captain’s license and had not ever been on the water before,” says Caroline on the nautical newcomers. “They were pretty clueless, and they didn’t know the proper channels or

etiquette. Many of them don't have a [chartplotter](#) or a [depth finder](#), so they can't even tell where it's shallow and where it's not. We've witnessed all kinds of incidents over the past 18 months—boats running aground, hitting docks, people hitting the gas instead of the brakes...it's been unbelievable."

COVID-19 inspired the pursuit of many hobbies—remember the [sourdough bread mania](#)—and for affluent coastal U.S. residents, the pandemic seemed like the perfect time to indulge their ultimate nautical fantasies. Boat sales across every category [increased significantly](#) in 2020 and show no sign of slowing in 2021, with manufacturers and dealers celebrating record profits while simultaneously struggling to meet the heightened demand. Experienced boaters and newcomers alike are now subject to long wait times, competitive harbor space booking, overwhelming congestion, and backordered equipment. At the peak of the pandemic, these issues were compounded by government [office closures and funding cuts](#), delaying licensing, training, and safety procedures. Although the vaccine has alleviated these to a degree, marine vendors, port communities, and related businesses are still facing staff shortages, supply chain shortages, and heightened harbor traffic.



Crowded Marina, 2020. Unknown Author, licensed under [Creative Commons](#)

Caroline and Matt's concern with this new inexperienced population is echoed by boaters, fishers, and harbormasters all along the coastline, and not just in New England. The pandemic saw a massive uptick in recreational boating accidents everywhere. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Coastguards joint-annual report on [Recreational Boating Statistics](#), fatalities had only increased 3.2% from [2018 to 2019](#), but increased an unprecedented 25% from 2019 to 2020. Of these deaths, [77%](#) occurred on boats where the operator was not trained in boating safety instruction. Only [12%](#) of fatalities took place on vessels where the operator had received a nationally approved boating safety education certificate in cases where this data was known. The Recreational Boating Statistics report notes similar extreme increases in accidents and injuries, with the most common causes being operator inattention, operator inexperience, improper lookout, excessive speed, and machinery failure. Not unlike terrestrial vehicle operation, [alcohol consumption](#) is a considerable contributor to accidents, and responsible for [18%](#) of boating fatalities. Don't drink and boat!

The above statistics highlight the importance of proper safety training and licensing procedures. While all coastal states ([except for Alaska, weirdly](#)) require some form of licensing and safety training for the operation of recreational boats, there is some flexibility on how to meet this requirement. While an extensive hands-on safety workshop with a trained instructor is, of course, preferred, many coronavirus-era nascent boat-owners were able to complete an [online training](#) and become certified without real-water experience. There were certainly some online training courses available before the pandemic, but now, their existence is ubiquitous. While there have not yet been any peer-reviewed academic studies examining recreational boat licensing procedures in the time of COVID, there is likely a connection between ineffective online training courses and irresponsible boat operation.

These shortages and delays that characterized the new normal seem [unlikely to improve anytime soon](#). Wait times for would-be boat owners can currently stretch to 2023 for new vehicles ranging from yachts to small motor vessels, even down to manually crafts like kayaks. Even the demand for used boats has skyrocketed, but for many marinas, [boat sales are down](#) because supply is so outmatched by demand.

“We don’t have any boats for sale.” The words of this one marina operator, Kal, disappoint the roomful of aspiring kayak owners that has gathered inside his business’ small shop. Despite the yard deceptively full of kayaks on racks on full display to passing cars, this marina cannot part with any of its crafts. From kayaks to yachts, would-be-water-craft owners are facing shortages related to a COVID-19 induced industry boom. Formerly, the marina operated with a steady stream of vessel turnover, receiving trade-ins, new orders, and donations frequently. “We aren’t getting any used crafts in from people, and we can’t consistently get new ones in. Our normal suppliers are out of stock all the time. Most of these people aren’t going to find a boat to buy this season, even if they’re willing to spend a lot of money,” Kal predicts after the throng of disappointed

patrons has dispersed somewhat. Some stick around to ask about rentals, but the marina is booked solid through the end of the summer.

So what does all of this mean? Well, that depends largely on whether you're planning on buying a boat. If you are, perhaps reconsider. If you're determined, you might be able to turn the recreational boating business boom to your advantage, with some patience. Paul, a seasoned harbormaster, is skeptical of the longevity of the pandemic interest in boat ownership. "How long do you think they'll stick with it? I don't know. Boating is an expensive hobby, and we're already hitting dock capacity every season." The harbor he is referencing has, over the last several years, stopped berthing fishing vessels almost entirely—local fisherfolk have been driven to smaller harbors to the north, where they hope the tourists won't follow—and now caters exclusively to a clientele of recreational boaters.. There is dock space available for season-long rentals used by local boat owners, and for short term space used by tourists passing through by water. Securing space can be competitive, and prices are soaring for even the least desirable dock space.

"Plenty of people who bought boats at the start of the pandemic weren't able to get a dock for them, weren't able to get them in the water. So they think, okay, I'll book early next season! But then everyone is booking early, and they're realizing how much it costs to store and move and maintain a vessel like this," Paul muses while observing the congested water from his harbormaster's office. "I don't think all of them will stick with it. If people can't use their boats, it won't take for them to want to stop owning them."

Boat owner Caroline echoes Paul's sentiment: "Our dock fees, our winter storage fees have all doubled since COVID. These new boaters don't realize this is a \$20,000 hobby. We're just lucky we have a place to store our boats. People who aren't ready for that are going to sell their boats. This will go on for another year or so, then you'll see the market flooded, and you'll have your pick of some beautiful boats for below market price."

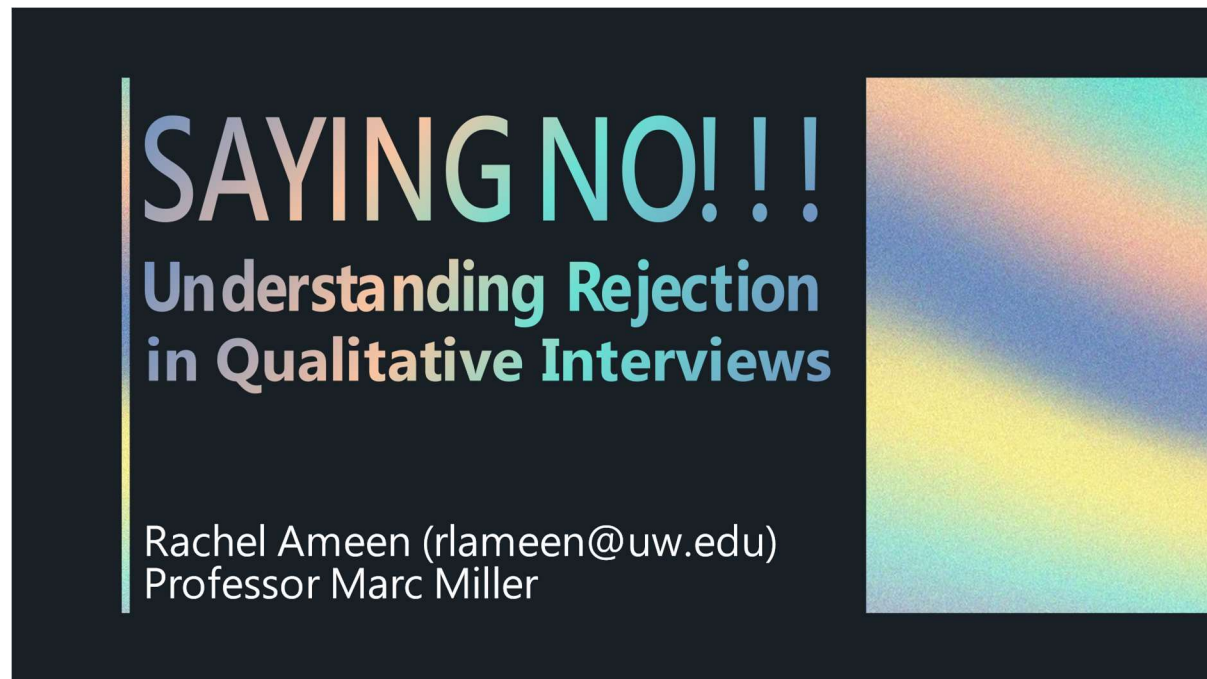
The economic implications of COVID-19 upon recreational boating are as of yet understudied, but very well could shape the leisure boating industry for a long time to come. Already, Caroline indicates one pandemic inspired phenomena in the world of nautical leisure: “Boats named *Corona*. We’ve seen so many. We saw one boat called the *Socially Distant*, they were clearly new boaters and kept hitting the dock wall. They must have hit it four or five times.” At this, Caroline laughed, “Matt shouted at them that they should have named their boat the *Amateurs* or the *Rookies* instead.”



Photo from [Boat Names by the Boat Name Guy](#) used with permission from the owner

## Appendix V: Supplementary Presentation

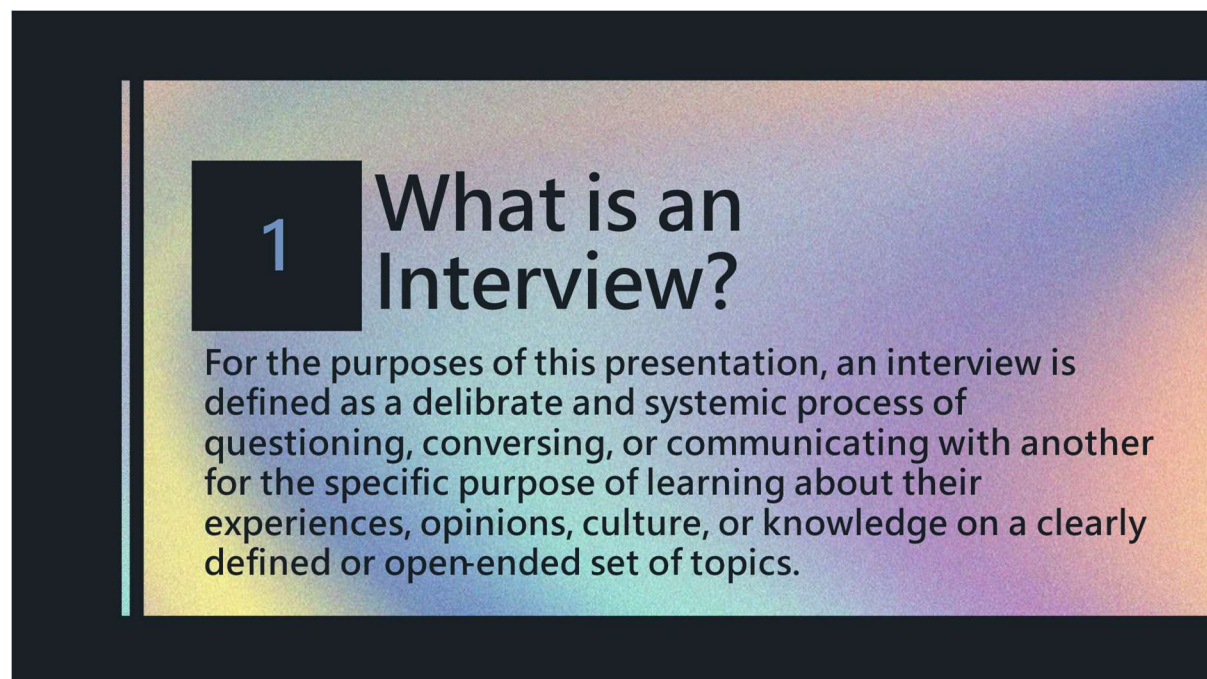
Following are slides from a presentation, originally created for SMEA 512: Interviewing Methods for Environmental Topics, taught by Dr. Marc L. Miller in Spring 2021, on rejection in the interviewing process. While not directly referenced by the text of the thesis, these slides provide valuable insight into the interviewing process and are an interesting if not critical supplement to the methodology of this thesis.



**SAYING NO!!!**  
**Understanding Rejection  
in Qualitative Interviews**

Rachel Ameen (rlameen@uw.edu)  
Professor Marc Miller

This slide features a dark background with a vertical light-colored bar on the left. The title 'SAYING NO!!!' is in large, multi-colored letters. Below it, the subtitle 'Understanding Rejection in Qualitative Interviews' is in a smaller, multi-colored font. At the bottom, the names and email of the presenters are listed in white. A colorful, abstract graphic is on the right side.



**1** **What is an Interview?**

For the purposes of this presentation, an interview is defined as a deliberate and systemic process of questioning, conversing, or communicating with another for the specific purpose of learning about their experiences, opinions, culture, or knowledge on a clearly defined or open-ended set of topics.

This slide has a dark background with a vertical light-colored bar on the left. A large number '1' is in a black square on the left. To its right, the title 'What is an Interview?' is in a large, bold, black font. Below the title, the definition of an interview is written in a smaller, black font. A colorful, abstract graphic is on the right side.

## What types of people are accessible to be interviewed? How might their willingness vary across the board?

1

### The Eager Participants

Far-and-away the most desirable (and most frequently encountered) subjects are those who are eager to talk, have a lot to say, and are willing to do so without much prompting

2

### The "Convince Me" Participants

These folk are perhaps willing to talk, but not to just anyone. They might demand details about your project, a high level of interviewer qualifications, or a personal reference before agreeing to talk

3

### The Inaccessible Participants

As the name suggests, this is that inevitable category of those totally unwilling to be interviewed, and no amount of communication, qualification, or personal connection can change that. Best to find someone else and move on.

## What factors determine whether a person can be accessed for an interview?

The willingness of potential interviewees to engage is not randomly determined, but nor can it reliably be predicted. Several factors are likely to impact access:

- Industry affiliations
- Interview subject matter
- Conflict of interest/NDAs/legal roadblocks
- Overscheduling/lack of time availability

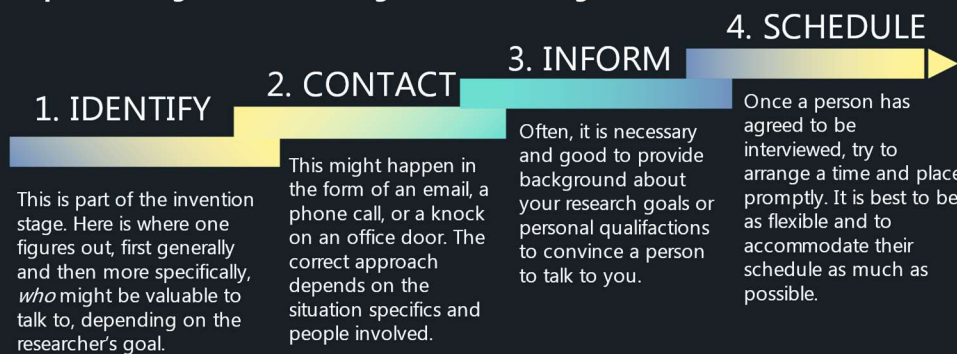
Keep in mind, the single reliable factor for all interviews is that each one will be different and must be handed on a case-by-case basis.

“While research textbooks discuss many issues in research, few address [gaining access] explicitly or in depth...Yet access is the major hurdle for most researchers, particularly when researching in companies. **Attempting to gain access is a lengthy and sometimes dispiriting activity with outcomes that are often satisficing rather than optimal.**”

—Erica Smith, 2012, Abstract, 1

## How does one make contact with a potential interviewee and successfully secure an interview?

**Suggested procedures for securing interviews vary across disciplines, and from scholar to scholar. Again, the only certainty in the interviewing process is uncertainty. In general, the protocol might look something like the following:**



# GATEKEEPERS

Professionals at getting in the way of things

In some cases, it may not be possible to directly contact the expert you wish to interview—political or industry elites, for example, are hard to access. Often, the first point of contact here will be a lower ranking intermediary, whose job it is to determine the merit and validity of the interview request.

“Then there is the challenge of connecting with people at the top of a hierarchy who are insulated by layers of staff, from receptionists to communications directors, who act as gatekeepers. If a member of the upper strata of society does grant an interview, the researcher must be mindful of the considerable power imbalance”

—Marland & Esselment, 2019, p. 675

“It is altogether natural that there should be no statistics as to how many interviewers experience refusals and how many proportionally succeed in seeing most or all the people whom they planned to see. But, so far, the proportion who succeed in getting needed interviews is almost certainly much greater than the proportion who fail.”

—Lewis Anthony Dexter, p. 36

### The Ghosts/ The Email Void

As the name suggests, there are those who are simply impossible to contact. They do not respond to emails, they do not return phone calls, and they never seem to be around in person. Trying to reach a ghost participant can quickly become a black hole of energy for the would-be interviewer. How much energy should be put into continuing to try to reach a person like this is determined by the researchers needs and the availability of other eligible interviewees.

### The Commitment Issues

Perhaps you've managed to connect with a would-be-interviewee who has agreed to talk, but when it comes to locking down a time, their lack of commitment shows. "There are, of course, individuals who, for personality reasons, find it difficult to keep to a schedule or who chronically overcommit themselves; it is ordinarily possible to get to see them, though in such cases it may be necessary to circumvent a protective secretary or assistant." --Dexter, p. 36

### The Direct Reject

There will of course be individuals who have no problem refusing an interview outright, for any number or reasons. The delivery and tone of these rejections can provide some insight into the reason behind the refusal, and the likelihood of convincing them to change their mind. Successfully persuading someone to reconsider is never a sure thing, but success here is always situationally dependent.

### The No Comment Comment

A common form of rejection often seen in news articles. This is the byline for corporations, politicians, or those involved in potentially controversial business who are not ready or willing to make a public statement. This taciturn reluctance is commonly interpreted as guilt by journalists and readers alike. Whether or not guilt is implicit in a "no comment" rejection depends on the circumstance. Either way, we can presume that the party who refuses to comment has weighed the benefits and decided that silence is their best option.

### The Conditional Acceptance

This type of person agrees to talk, but only if certain caveats and limits are agreed to in advance by the interviewee. The acceptability of these confines depends on the needs of the researcher. On conditions, Brady says "They are generally confining for the interviewer and self-serving for the subject; but if the interview is important enough, the interviewer has little choice but to agree to them." —Brady, 1997, p. 15

### The Picky Answer

Like the Conditional Acceptance category, these people are be willing to talk, but consider certain subjects to be off limits. They might alert interviewers in advance to their conditions, but not always. They might not even be aware of their own limits until a particular line of questioning hits upon a sore spot. These circumstances are best handled with tact. In some circumstances, continuing to dig can yield fruitful answers; in others, refusing to drop the subject might scare off the interviewee entirely.

**“Even in this land of milk and honey, getting interviews can be tough. Or easy. Or, at best, uncertain. Perhaps the uncertainty of it all is what keeps a good interviewer going: the thrill of the chase.”**

—John Brady, *The Craft of Interviewing* 1977, p. 5

## The Inherently Individualistic Nature of Interviews and Thus, of Interview Rejections

“The most nearly universal rule for elite and specialized interviewing is that *the best way to interview in a concrete situation depends on the situation (including the skills and personalities of the interviewers.)*”

--Dexter, p. 31

“What may be suicidal or impractical for one interviewer or in one situation may be feasible or even the best way to proceed for another interviewer or in another situation.”

--Dexter, p. 31

## Why turn down interviews?

### *To Avoid Harm*

"An interview creates a situation in which problems and tensions become "public," and conflicts may be reenacted, in a way that may cause experiences of distress and painful conflict."  
—Henning, 467

### *To Protect Privacy*

"As an interviewer, one "intrudes" into a private realm, and one is confronted with matters that are not normally one's concern. In fact, it is typically morally questionable to go around judging other people's moral conduct." —Henning, 467

### *To Adhere to Professional Norms of Empirical Research*

"Here, the idea is that the researcher's task is precisely to not get involved in the object of his or her study, to avoid messing with the data. For the sake of objectivity of the result, he or she must therefore be as detached and "invisible" as possible.  
—Henning, 467

### *To Coordinate Responses*

In situations when the interviewee is affiliated with a larger organization or system, respondents might be under obligation to consult with others before addressing certain topics. Rejection or elusiveness might indicate that the subject doesn't know the appropriate stance.

## Interviews Require Trust

"The situation is usually defined as one in which a stranger sets the agenda, asks the questions, controls the flow of the talk and probes for information about internal or backstage realities. To agree to sit down for an interview, no matter how friendly or conversational, is to give up some control and to risk having one's public persona stripped away."

—Schwalbe & Wolkomir, p. 9

## Trust is Not Guaranteed

# 8

## How to Handle Rejection\*

What happens once they've said no?

\*Disclaimer: specifically refers to rejection for interview requests; does not apply to romantic rejection or otherwise.

### When at first you don't succeed...

"Once a person has refused, it is often desirable to get him to reconsider; (one can never be sure how the refusers will differ from the people immediately willing to be interviewed)." –Dexter, p. 38

"Have a flexible schedule and be easy to contact on short notice. Be respectfully persistent. Before giving up, try a standard final appeal. Consider interviewing a gatekeeper and/or a retired politician instead." –Esselment, 2019, p. 700

Seek out contacts and use personal connections to secure interviews with those otherwise inaccessible

“Contacts are often decisive for ‘getting the interview,’” –Leuffen, 345

“Specifically, it is usually beneficial to utilize personal contacts prior to embarking on cold calling methods; personal connections are helpful to jumpstarting the process of recruitment by leading to some early and easy recruiting successes.” –Nir, 77-89

**If all else fails, it might be necessary to change plans and find someone else to interview. This is why it’s important to be adaptable throughout the entire research project, especially with those project designs with interviews.**

## Things to Consider About the Rejection

### Work Factors

#### Ask:

Does the person who rejected my interview request hold a job position that might explain their refusal? Are there factors about their work that might preclude transparency? Might an interview reveal information that threatens profits for their company?

### Personal Factors

#### Ask:

Does the person who rejected my interview request have a personal history with my research topic? Might there be negative personal experiences, or even trauma, surrounding that topic for them? Is there a way I could have been more sensitive when approaching the topic?

### Time Factors

#### Ask:

If the subject is genuinely too busy to sit for an interview, why are they so overscheduled? Is their level of availability standard for people in their position? Did something change in their position or job recently to make them so busy?

### User-Error Factors

#### Ask:

Did something about my approach alienate or discourage the interviewee? Was there a different recruitment method I could have used that would have met with success? Are there things I can change about my behavior when I approach potential interviewees in the future?

**"It is important to remember that the basic purpose is not to get interviews but to collect data relevant to some problem or descriptive of some situation; frequently, the circumstances of the refusal, the way in which it is done, the excuses given, the reaction to the interviewer, may provide valuable data or, at the least, hypotheses about the situation." --Dexter, 37**

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