

# Topic 5

## What shapes a place?

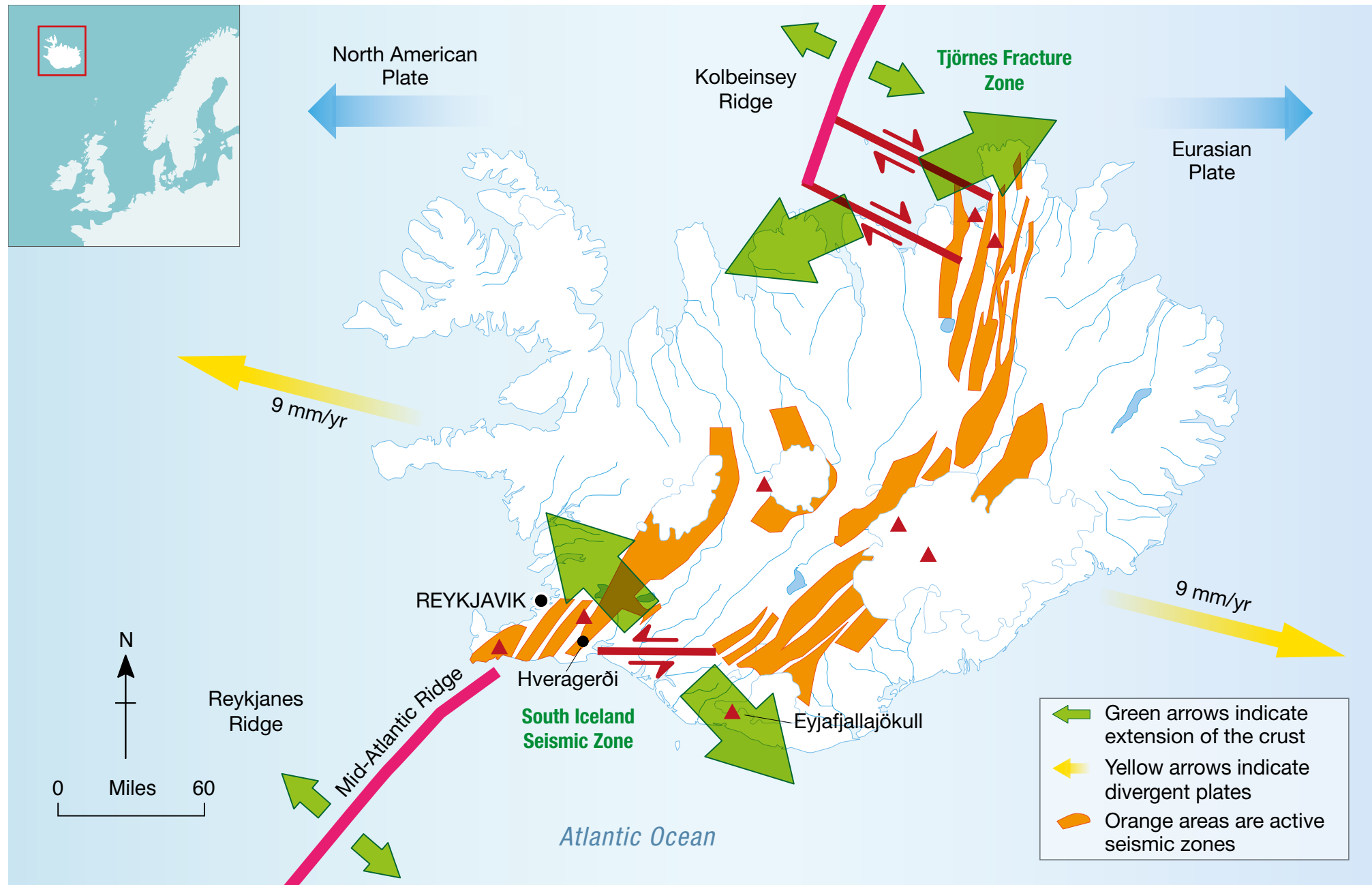
*Case study:*  
*Hveragerði, Iceland*

Resources and answer guidance

# Where is Hveragerði?



# Iceland: tectonic forces





# Hveragerði's physical geography





Q1

ANSWER

## Hveragerði: location and physical geography

Endogenous factors (local or internal factors contributing to the characteristics of a place):

- **Geology** – constructive plate margin processes, primarily geothermal activity (hot springs), which were initially feared by local people but then offered opportunities for horticulture, recreation and tourism. Hot springs are central to the town's character. The recent earthquake of 2008 affected hot spring distribution and levels of activity.

## Q1

## ANSWER

(continued)

## Hveragerði: location and physical geography

- **Topography** – the steep cliff face and uplands to the north provide shelter for the town nestling at its foot. The coastal plain provides extensive land for development, enabling the town to spread out and exhibit a low density of housing.
- **Geomorphology** – the River Varma, flowing all year due to the hot springs, has been important in providing power for electricity generation and stimulating early wool industry. It has carved a steep-sided valley, providing an amenity for leisure and recreation.

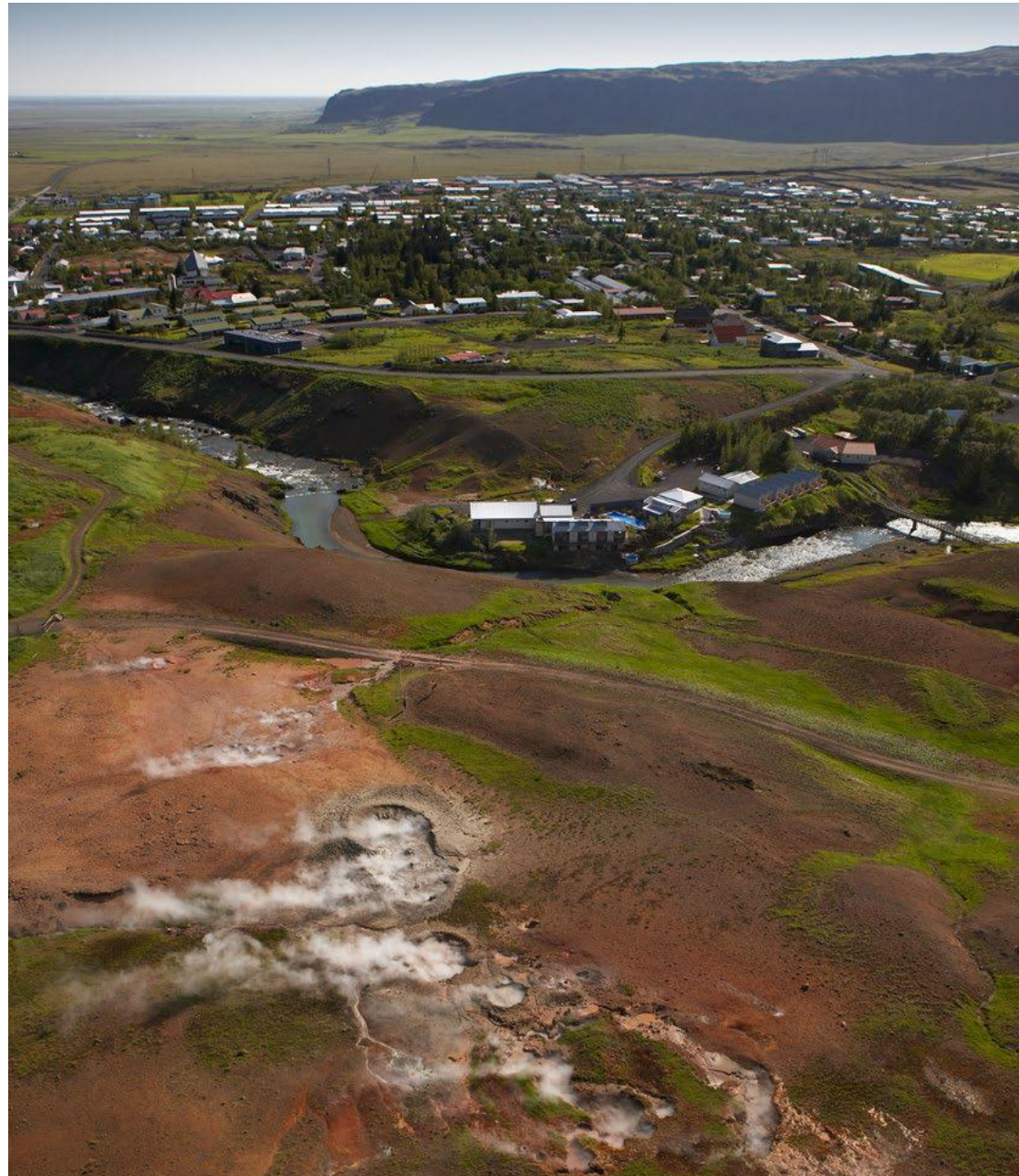
## Q2

## ANSWER

## Hveragerði: location and physical geography

- Geological factors are endogenous and exogenous.
- The presence of the constructive (divergent) plate margin accounts for many of Iceland's relief features, lava flows and other volcanic rocks. Earthquakes (e.g. 2008) have a profound impact on the hot spring activity in Hveragerði, reducing activity in the central geothermal area but causing new springs to form in the hills above the town. These are exogenous factors.
- The presence of hot springs on the hillsides accounts for the current town's site and its character – endogenous.

# Geothermal activity at Hveragerði





## Q3

## ANSWER

## The development of Hveragerði

- Use a timeline to describe the chronological development of Hveragerði. The starting point could be 1700, when the early settlers first considered the area to be inherently dangerous.
- Key dates or time periods can be identified to reflect the development of the town's characteristics, its multiple functions and associated place meanings.

## Q4

## ANSWER

## The development of Hveragerði

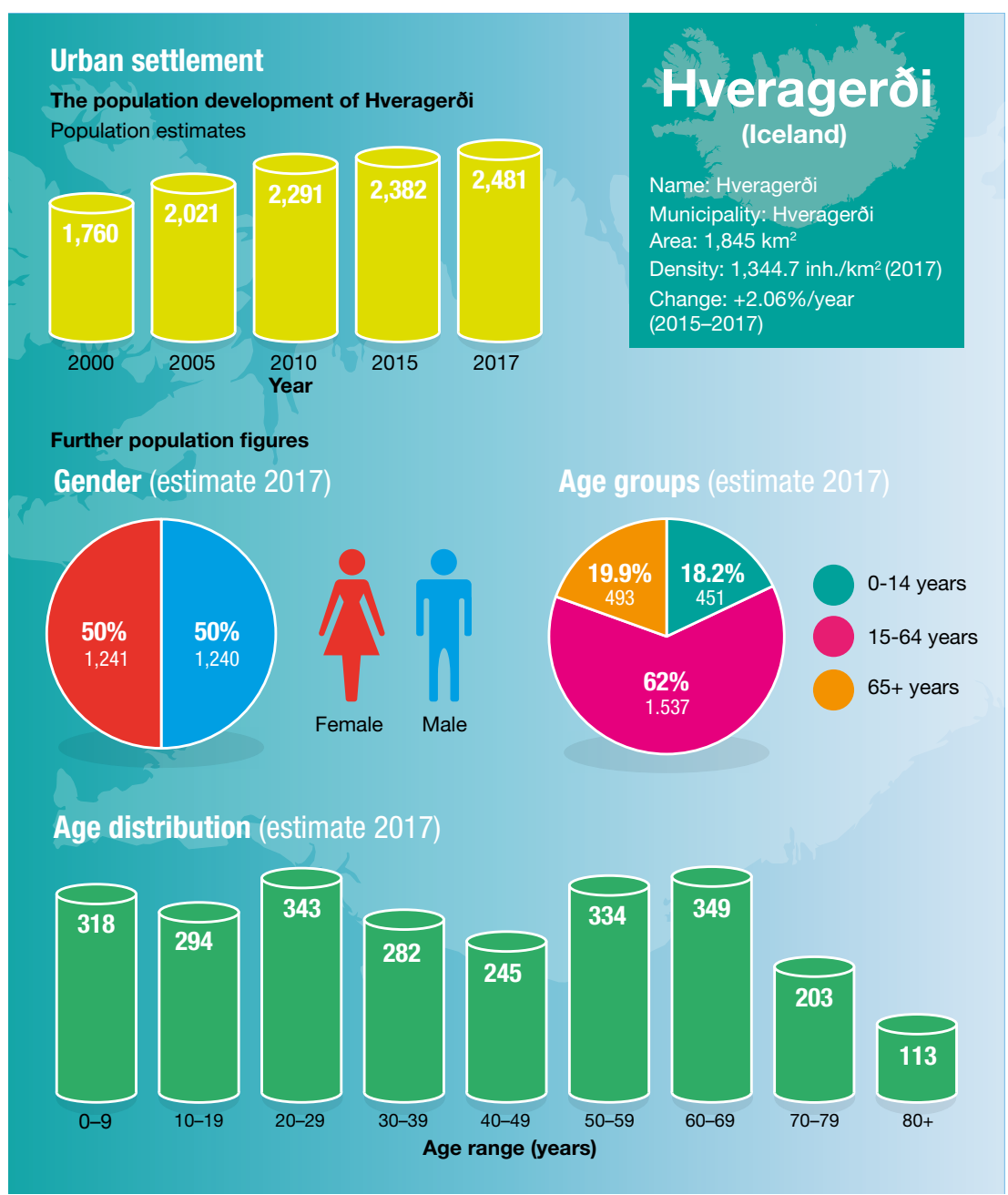
- Early settlers considered the springs to be very dangerous ('killing springs') because of their extreme heat, noise and strong sulphurous smell together with their unpredictability and occasional eruptions.
- Over time, however, people started to use the hot water for bathing, washing and heating, and the hot rocks for cooking. The springs became a resource rather than a hazard. This has continued with their use for heating greenhouses, providing domestic hot water and in generating electricity in geothermal power stations.

# Hveragerði town plan





# Demographic data for Hveragerði



Q5

ANSWER

## Modern Hveragerði

Attractions/opportunities for tourism include:

- Information boards (history signage)
- Waymarked trails and hiking paths
- Gardens
- Hot springs
- Flower shops, main shopping area and tourist information
- Restaurants
- Car parks and picnic sites
- Hotels

## Q5

## ANSWER

(continued)

## Modern Hveragerði

- The attractive map in Resource 6 is targeted at visitors and clearly intended to encourage tourists to spend time in the town. This suggests that tourism is a key aspect of the town's present-day character and is expected to play a key part in its economic future.
- The views expressed on a website like TripAdvisor are incredibly influential, shaping the itineraries of international tourists. The footfall and visitor spend shapes the economic prosperity of food outlets, retail establishments, hiking trails, etc.



## Q6

## ANSWER

## Modern Hveragerði

- The population of Hveragerði is expanding by over 2% per year (2015–17).
- The population has grown from 1,760 (2000) to 2,481 (2017), indicating the town's popularity, economic viability and sustainability.
- There is a gender balance (50:50) and the age structure suggests equal levels of dependency (young and old), with a healthy 62% of working age, suggesting long-term sustainability.

## Q6

## ANSWER

(continued)

## Modern Hveragerði

- The age profile bars indicate a high proportion of people in their 50s, but this is balanced by a high proportion in their 20s.
- Demography would seem to be an important endogenous factor in shaping the character of Hveragerði – a broadly balanced demography with some older, retired people who will probably be keen to retain the town’s historical heritage as well as younger people who will be keen to promote new initiatives.

## Q6

## ANSWER

(continued)

## Modern Hveragerði

- Further details would be useful about the percentage of the population employed in different sectors of the economy, or data about the level of education of different groups of people within the town's population, compared to Iceland as a whole.



# Hveragerði – an artist's impression of Poet Lane (Frumskógar) in the 1970s





# Frumskógar in 2015



## (a) 'Men growing flowers: Hveragerði' by Sheenagh Pugh

*What a place to grow flowers;  
a few houses clustered just under  
a sullen, low-lying mist, sulphur springs  
hissing from the ground, the shadow  
of a mountain, strictly non-scenic.*

*And what growers of flowers;  
these men, their faces ribbed  
like the volcanic rock, the hard grasp  
of their hands numbed of feeling.  
It is these hands*

*that foster in the glass houses  
the fragile ferns; these fish-eyes  
that watch the colours spill  
out of the calyx, the delicate shape  
unfold itself,*

*and why, after all, should not  
men in the bleak terrain  
that makes their life, nurture  
some bright thing: what a place  
to grow flowers.*

From *Selected Poems* by Sheenagh Pugh (Seren, 1990)

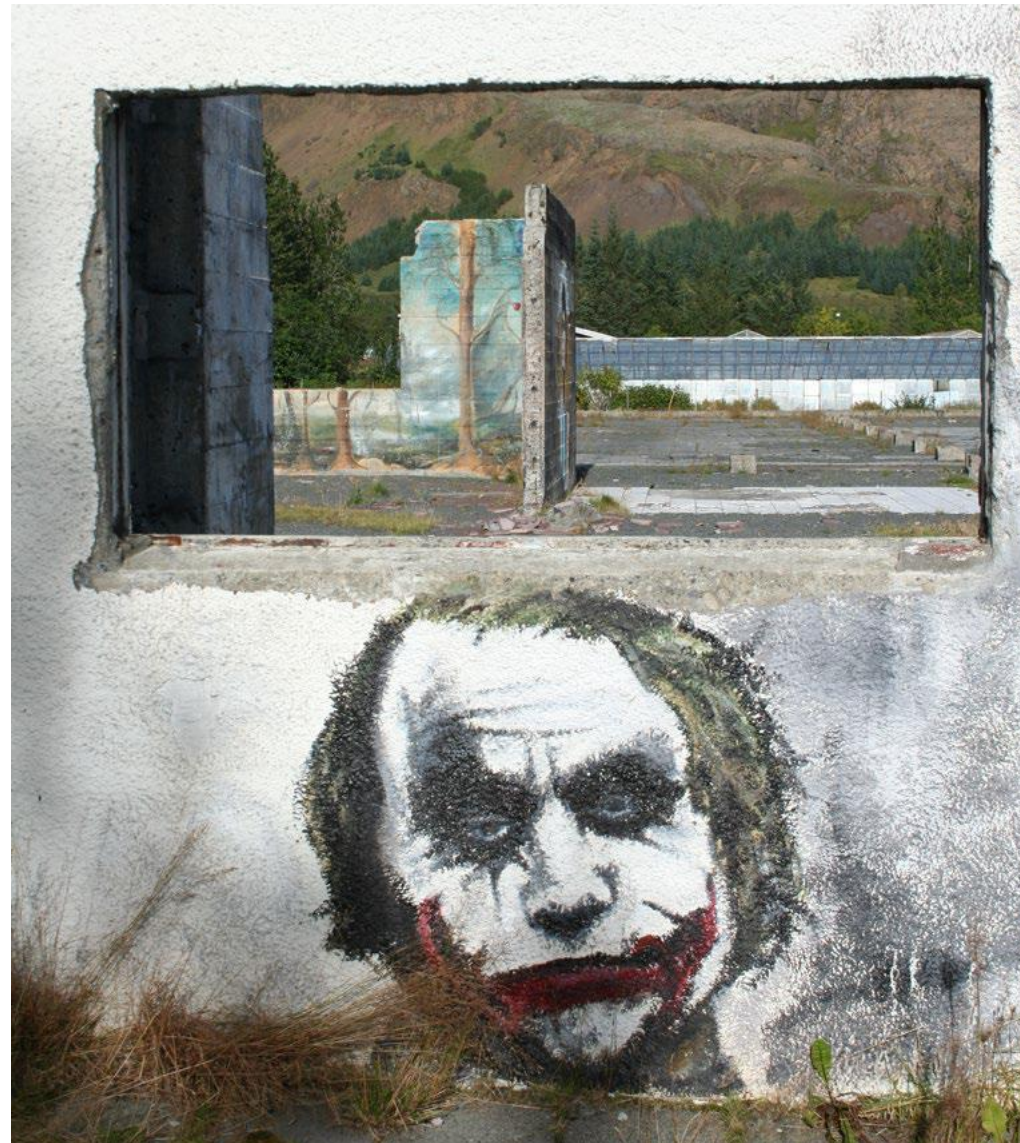


## (b) Street art on the gable wall of the school





## (c) Street art on derelict walls – the former Eden greenhouse



## Q7

## ANSWER

## The influx of artists and poets

- Artists and poets moved to Hveragerði from Reykjavik in search of better living conditions. Hveragerði offered cheap heating and cooking using the local hot springs. Space for building and the attractions of rural living were probably also strong attractions.
- Street art and galleries introduced an important cultural dimension to the town.
- The artists' colony expanded the town in a westerly direction, with the development of Poet Lane (Frumskógar).

## Q8

## Practice exam question

ANSWER

(continued)

Here are a few ideas to consider:

- Are endogenous and exogenous factors intrinsically linked in terms of Hveragerði's physical geography?
- Although Hveragerði's local character (its physical and human characteristics) shaped immigration, the cultural community has had a larger influence on further growth of the town. Do you agree?
- How important is the town's proximity to Reykjavik (in the past, present and future)?



**Q8****ANSWER**

(continued)

## Practice exam question

- Is the economy sustainable, given the fickle nature of international tourism?