

The survival of an island

A study on landownership and depopulation on the islands Mykines and Skúgvoy in the
Faroe Islands



A picture of Mykines taken from a helicopter (Picture: Olga Biskopstø 2013)

“We do not want our island to be a museum demonstrating how the Faroese people used to live” (citation from an outer islander).

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Abstract:

Urbanisation is an ongoing trend all over the world, and these same trends occur in the Faroe Islands as well. Some of the small peripheral islands are now believed to be on the verge of becoming unpopulated. This study investigates the role of landownership in depopulation on the outer islands in the Faroe Islands. The study looks at two islands in particular and investigates trends in land ownership and access to local resources in relation to local residency. In order to situate the issue of outer island depopulation in the Faroes in a larger context, world system analysis, post colonialism and ecologically unequal exchange are applied in the analysis of the material. The study shows a clear historical trend demonstrating that decrease in population on the small islands goes together with decrease in local-resident ownership. This thesis argues that the issue of depopulation is rooted in the structural problems in the modern world system where capital and labour are accumulated in the core areas. The study also shows that there are strong cultural ties, which make the non-local residents interested in owning land in the peripheral areas and thus having access to the local resources.

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List of Faroese words used in the text

Útoyggjar: Outer Islands

Útoyggjafelagið: The Outer Islands Association

Festi: Copyhold farm

Festari: Copyhold tenant

Landsjørð: Crown land

Ognarjørð: Freehold land

Uttangarðsjørð/hagi: Outfield

Innangarðsjørð/bður: Infield

Markatalshygdir: Old villages with outfield belonging to them

Feli: Commons

Grannastevna: Village convention

Bygdamenning: Development of villages

Økismenning: Development of periphery

1. Introduction

All around the world people are moving from less populated places to more populated places. The reasons for this urbanisation trend are several; few monetary paid jobs, none or few educational opportunities, lack of entertainment opportunities etc. The amount of people moving from rural areas to urban areas has been increasing much and rapidly since the 1950's, especially in North America and Europe. The United Nation is projecting that the same trend will continue for the following decades (UN 2014). The Faroe Islands are not an exception in this matter. The smallest of the Faroe Islands are at risk of losing their local/traditional knowledge and culture due to depopulation. The Faroe Islands is a small island nation¹ with eighteen islands (see figure 1) and is located in the North Atlantic Ocean (see figure 2). Within these islands, there is a mainland, an inner periphery and an outer periphery – in the outer periphery are the so-called outer islands (*útoyggjar*). The outer islands are the smallest and least populated islands in the Faroe Islands. The population on these small islands has been decreasing since around the 1940's and 1950's (Biskopstø 2001: 23). Then it becomes relevant to ask the question of why the future of the outer islands should be any different from other rural areas in the rest of the world.



Figure 1: Map of the Faroe Islands. Permission to use this map is granted under the GNU Free Documentation license (Wikimedia Commons 2015). Figure 2: Map of The Faroe Islands in its region. Permission to use this map is granted under the GNU Free Documentation license (Wikimedia Commons 2015).

¹The Faroe Islands is a small self-governing nation (under Denmark) with less than 50 thousand inhabitants. The Faroe Islands are located in the North Atlantic Ocean between Iceland, Scotland and Norway, the area is 1399 km². The fishing industry is the nation's main source of income (Statistics Faroe Islands 2015).

As some of the smallest islands in the Faroes are on the edge of becoming uninhabited, there are voices that make an effort to prevent these losses from happening. The Outer Islands Association² - which purpose is to improve the living conditions on the outer islands - is elucidating that land ownership is one impediment to small island development (Biskopstø 2013, Dímun 2015). Thus, this master thesis will focus on the topic of depopulation in relation to land ownership on the outer islands.

1.1 Brief background and history

As the Faroe Islands shifted from being a peasant society to an industrialised fishing society with a market based economy, the outer islands lost the majority of their population due to lack of employment opportunities on their islands and the lack of commuting opportunities to work on another island. As these societal changes occurred, the life on the outer islands changed as well – they went from being a community³, which was fairly self-sufficient with local resources, supporting a much higher population than today to a point where that community life is less needed and attractive. In those days, the outer islands were rich compared to many other places in the Faroes (Joensen 1987A, Petersen 1968). In year 2000, an outer island resident said: “[N]ow it is only being talked about the outer islands, the names of the islands are barely mentioned any more, and we are not of equal value as everyone else anymore, because we live on an ‘outer island’. There is something wrong” (Biskopstø 2001: 8).

Today, around 200 people live on these eight outer islands (Statistics Faroe Islands 2015). The land on the outer islands is mainly used for sheep rearing and is divided among many different owners of which many do not live on the islands – this means that a large part of the resources belong to people that live in other places. What all the *útoyggjar* have in common is the fact that they only have connections through sea and air to the mainland. Therefore, they are relatively isolated from the mainland and the activities there. The outer islands are surrounded by the rough sea and often harsh weather conditions which means that the travelling connection can be unreliable.

I identified two main discourses in the Faroe Islands surrounding the outer islands issue of depopulation. The dominating one is upholding that nothing can or should be done to prevent the outer islands from becoming depopulated – this is just the way things are going. In addition,

² The association has representatives from all the eight outer islands in the Faroes.

³ The village functioned as a community where people were dependant on each other in the everyday tasks.

the outer islands are often regarded only as an expenditure for the mainland and that the mainland does not receive anything in return. In contrast, there is a widespread thought that the outer islands are exotic and nice to visit now and then. The other discourse is arguing that there has never been a will or a political effort made to stop the depopulation of the outer islands and it has almost been the other way around that the current structures - in an indirect manner - are making it unliveable on the outer islands. The Outer Islands Association is pushing the agenda for this discourse.

I have chosen two islands in particular in my research, namely Skúgvoy and Mykines (see figure 1). Since land is used mainly for sheep rearing, I will pay attention to the cultural, social, environmental and economic aspects of sheep rearing. The thesis will raise the questions if the islands are predestined to become depopulated, and if depopulation is related to land ownership issues.

1.2 Purpose, aim and research questions

The purpose with this study is to use theoretical frameworks and analytical tools such as World Systems theory, Postcolonial theory, and Ecologically Unequal Exchange to shed new light on the issue of outer island depopulation. The issue is approached mainly through the discussion of land ownership, which is perceived to be one of the hindrances to island development (Biskopstø 2013, Dímun 2015). To fulfil this purpose I will ask the research questions:

How is land ownership related to depopulation?

How could changes in land ownership reverse the depopulation trend or at least prevent the islands from becoming uninhabited?

I have pursued two main sets of working guidelines:

- How much of the land is owned by local people? What are the trends in land ownership in relation to local residency on the islands? What percentage of the island land and resources do local people have access to? And how are island resources distributed between local and non-resident land owners?
- Which perceptions do local people have on the issue of depopulation and its relation to land ownership? And, what is the relation between living circumstances and land ownership?

The main aim of the study is to get a better understanding of the phenomenon of outer island depopulation in the Faroe Islands in the hope of contributing to both sustained and sustainable island livelihood in the future. This study aims to present how land ownership and land use is affecting the living circumstances for the residents on the outer islands. The research aims at getting figures on land ownership and local resource flows. My literature review found that there is very little or no research done on the connection between land and depopulation in the Faroe Islands – and little research on the issues that the outer islands are dealing with today. My hope is that my research can contribute to the discussion regarding privatisation of all the land in the Faroe Islands and in the discussion about a land reform that several farmers, politicians and others advocate for. Finally yet importantly, my aim is that this thesis contributes to a better understanding of the situation by using insights from human ecology.

1.3 Choice of topic

During my internship at Agenda 21 in the Faroe Islands in fall 2013, I was doing a two days field trip to Skúgvoy and held a meeting/workshop there with people from the island, both those who live there but also some who own land but do not live on the islands. The meeting/workshop was organized according to the concept of Future Workshop⁴ where I asked everyone about their visions concerning the island and themselves and also about the negative sides of living on the island. What I found very interesting was the statement from a young man in his first twenties. He said, “We are what the Faroese want to be”. He further explained that when Faroese people e.g. are abroad and explain about their home country or talk to tourists who come to the Faroes, they tell stories about how they (the Faroese people) live off nature; catch birds etc. However, in reality this is not what the majority of the Faroese people do - this is the culture that still is alive on the outer islands, he explained. During the meeting I also asked about land ownership and land use; e.g. I asked if the people living on the island should have the right to use all the land but no one seemed interested in discussing this issue. Under more informal circumstances after the meeting, people were more openhearted, and some expressed the opinion that of course it was the people living on the island which should have access and the right to use the land.

⁴ A Future Workshop is a participatory method where the participants are part of future planning that affects them. In the workshop the participant go through work and mental phases – two of them being phases of critique and visions (Creighton 2005:116-117, Jungk, Müllert 1987).

These statements and – in my opinion - the unwillingness to speak in public about the question of land, spurred my curiosity and motivated the research presented in this thesis on ownership and land rights, access to resources and how this effects local livelihoods on the outer islands. Although land ownership is perceived to be one of the obstacles to island development (Biskopstø 2013, Dimun 2015), there is little research done on the issue of how changes in land ownership would potentially change island livelihoods. Another factor that made me realise that it is urgent to present some data about land and land ownership is that the Minister of Agriculture has plans to privatise Crown land⁵, reasoning that the land use will be more productive. In my opinion, there is not enough discussion around the issue of privatisation nor land use at all in the Faroe Islands.

The outer islands issue with depopulation and lack of political will to make some necessary changes is not a new topic for me. Even though I am from the mainland in the Faroe Islands, I have been familiar with the issue while growing up. Since I was a child and travelled several times to an outer island with a childhood friend, I have had great interest in the outer islands.

1.4 A conflict over land?

“As we proceed into the twenty-first century, there are signs that we may be returning to land as the key resource [...]” (Hornborg 2013: 13-14). Today there is a worldwide increased interest in land again. The capital (big corporations, World Bank and others) is investing in and taking control over large areas of land resources (referred to as land grabbing), especially in the ‘less developed’ places. This makes it harder for local people to make a living from their land (Hermele 2012: 186-190, 210-216, Bryant and Bailey 1997, Paulson 2012, Hornborg 2013: 13-14). Having Hornborg’s words in mind makes it crucial to stress the role of the land on the outer islands. Moreover, it is important to investigate land in a broader spectrum including access to and control over land and resources (Escobar 2006: 8, Paulson 2012).

During my investigation I have several times been told that there is no money in cultivating the land and in sheep rearing – neither on the outer islands nor in the rest of the country. Instead of focusing only on the monetary aspect of land use on the outer islands, I will depart from the perspective of human ecology. The human ecology perspective recognises that nature is the foundation for our society and of human life (Hornborg 2001: 191-194). More specifically this master thesis integrates the intersections of culture, power and sustainability. The conflict in

⁵ Crown land is land owned by the state. 45,7 percent of the land on the Faroes is Crown land, and the state affords use rights to farmers (Heimabeiti.fo).

my topic is about land use with an emphasis on where people can live and if they can live on an outer island. If the outer islands will be unpopulated in the future, this will of course affect the land use and thus it becomes an environmental and cultural conflict.

Land has many different values to people; it provides the necessities of life for everyone, it has a local cultural importance, it has intrinsic value and instrumental value etc. (Bergstrom 2005: 64-76) - these are to some extent bound to the social relations between owners of land, users of land and non-owners of land.

1.5 Thesis outline

Chapter one was an introduction to the topic together with the research questions. In chapter two, I describe the framework of this study and what theories I use in the analysis of this thesis. Chapter three explains which methods were used in the investigation and why these are chosen. In chapter four, I present more background information about the Faroes, sheep rearing, the outer islands and my own experiences. Chapter five and six present my statistical findings and information from the interviews together with theoretical insights and my own interpretations. Then I end with the conclusion in chapter seven followed by the literature list and appendix.

2. Framework of study

2.1 Political ecology

The issue of depopulation and land ownership in this research is being investigated from a political ecology perspective - which is a holistic approach that integrates political, economic and ecological concerns when investigating a phenomenon (Paulson and Gezon 2005: 1). Political ecology acknowledges that human, social and environmental relations are an intertwined phenomena (Hornborg, A. et al 2012: 1-2, Robbins 2012: 3). Paulson and Gezon demonstrate that political ecologists when investigating “[...] have looked beyond the local community to explain natural resource use, explored power dynamics in everyday interactions and formal policy arenas, and paid increasing attention to the environmental interests, knowledge, and practices of social groups differentiated by race, ethnicity, gender, or other factors.” (Paulson and Gezon 2005: 1).

Political ecology is relevant as a methodological framework in a human ecology research field in the sense that it aims at politicising the ecology/nature aspect of an issue. By this, I mean

that when the ecology/nature becomes politicised then power structures of an environmental issue are discovered and dealt with. Moreover, in a political ecology framework these power structures are - in a certain researched field - analysed together with the aspects of culture and identity (Escobar 2006). In power structures, one needs to look at the unequal relations and it is important to find out what kind of or how much power each social group or actor possesses and see how these are related (Bryant and Bailey 1997: 39). In order to deal with an environmental issue or conflict, Hornborg writes that “[i]n integrating cultural, political, economic, and ecological perspectives on conflicts of interest between different social groups, political ecology requires transdisciplinary analyses that are able to handle the great variety of factors that enter into any such environmental conflict” (2007: 3).

Another matter of importance in a political ecology approach is space and scale – these are significant in understanding human-environmental dynamics. An environmental issue or change can have different impacts and different conflicts at the diverse scales and places (Paulson and Gezon 2005, Bryant and Bailey 2005: 33-38, Moran 2010: 70-111). When investigating the political ecology of an issue, researchers tend to conduct place-based research and analyse it at different scales, e.g. the local scale and the global scale. These analyses will give different perspectives but both might be essential for understanding the situation that is being analysed (Paulson and Gezon 2005: 7-12). This research is investigating land ownership in a local context and by scaling up and looking at it from a space where powerful decisions are made (e.g. agricultural legislation), can reveal some power structures that influence how the situation has become as it is. In order to analyse power structures in a broader context including culture and ecology it is important to understand the power dynamics in the specific space where it is practised, and this - the search for cultural and ecological values and meanings - lays the ground for the decision on what empirical data to gather in this research.

In sum, political ecology provides tools to explore the complex issue of depopulation and land ownership in a critical way - including the social, political and economic structures that are a part of this context. By this, political ecology enables me to link the larger structures to the local level matters.

2.2 Theories

While using political ecology as a framework for my methodological approach in gathering cultural, ecological and political material regarding land ownership, I will approach the analysis of this information by applying other relevant theories and ideas.

What World Systems analysis, Post colonialism and Ecologically Unequal Exchange all have in common is that they stress that the ‘stronger’ and the ‘weaker’ both exist on the account of the other (Wallerstein 2004, Frank 1975, Said 1978 and Hornborg 2013, Hornborg 2007: 1-23). These theories use different terminologies to express these phenomena (e.g., core and periphery, developed and less developed, the ‘Occident’ and the ‘Orient/Other’).

World Systems Analysis is a holistic approach/thought developed by Emmanuel Wallerstein that goes beyond the traditional divisions of disciplines, and explains how the entire world is a social system connected through the capitalist world system (Wallerstein 2004, Frank 1975). Eric Wolf (1982) demonstrates as well in his book *Europe and the People Without History* how the entire world of humans is established through interconnected processes. Wallerstein uses the terms core, semi-periphery and periphery and these positions have been developed as the modern world system has emerged (Wallerstein 2004). Unequal exchange and unequal power relations are used as explanatory elements when looking at core-periphery relations in World System Theory and accumulation is a central matter when looking at unequal exchanges where certain groups enrich themselves through these unequal exchanges (ibid: 28-29, Hornborg 2013: 77, Hornborg 2012: 13).

Post colonialism deals with the notion of the connection between the pre-colonisers and the pre-colonised and how they perceive of one another, and is much used in analysis of literary texts (Barry 2002: 192-202, Sharp 2009: 6). Post colonialism is a critique and an analysis of how western values have set the agenda during the time of colonialism and how the colonised people have been labelled as the ‘primitive’ (Wolf 1982: 7). In Post colonialism, the suppressed cultures make up with this label of being the ‘other’ and demonstrate how they can be the alternative to the dominating western ideal (Sharp 2009: 3-5). Joanne Sharp wrote that “[P]ostcolonialism is an analysis and critique of the ways in which western knowledge systems have come to dominate” (2009: 5). Post colonialism can also be used to shed light on the construction of today’s unequal areas – where one part is culturally (also politically and economically) oppressed by another part (Childs and Williams 1997: 2-3). Although the outer periphery in the Faroes is not precolonial, Postcolonial theory can be applicable in the analysis of how the outer islanders perceive of their situation in relation to the main land. Thoughts and concepts of Post colonialism and World System Analysis (core-periphery relations) will lay as ground for my analytical framework for understanding and analysing the connection between landownership and depopulation.

2.2.1. Islands and Ecologically Unequal Exchange

In order for islands to sustain a society and a living, there must occur material flows outside its shores and this is commonly done through exchange (Clark and Tsai 2012: 53). Ecologically Unequal Exchange can be used as a tool to measure material flows between e.g. core/industrialised areas and peripheral/'less-developed' areas in the world system (Foster and Hollemann 2014: 199-200). These material (ecological) flows are an alternative measurement of exchange to the monetary measurement of exchange. Hornborg (2013: 9) makes a distinction between ecological value and monetary value and argues that exchange can be measured in multiple ways (e.g. in energy, labour hours, weight, land). Conducting a total ecologically unequal exchange investigation on the flows to and from the islands Mykines and Skúgvoy is out of scope in this thesis – that would be another thesis. Rather, the framework of Ecologically Unequal Exchange is used to look at what the land is used for in material/ecological terms and where the resources end and look at it in relation to the rest of the Faroes and the surrounding world.

2.2.2. The notion of development of the periphery

The discourse of progress and herein development escalated in the time of modernity and has since then been the driving force of western⁶ thought. The trust in progress has justified the westerners to enlarge this belief onto other geographical areas and thus having them to share the same progress ideals even if they might not even benefit from the progress (Norgaard 1995: 1-2, 49-52). Mainstream/neoclassical economists have - for the past decades - argued that progress and development in technology and development of the 'less developed' is the solution to many or all of the world's environmental and social problems (ibid: 53-55). Both Norgaard (1995) and Hornborg (2013: 14) criticise the notion of development of the 'less developed' nations.

Joanne Sharp links development strategies to Post colonialism as she stresses that the US “[...] shared its capital and its technology to help others help themselves“ (2009: 71) when there were no more geographical areas to explore, and she puts modernisation as this: “Global modernisation was being driven by colonialism and was eradicating otherness and exotic ‘elsewheres’” (ibid: 72).

⁶ Western Europe and North America

3. Methods

In answering my research question, I have chosen to use both quantitative and qualitative data. I soon found out that there were no statistical facts on how much of the land is owned by local island residents and non-residents nor were there any numbers on where the local resources go. Therefore, I have collected this data myself. This is done by gathering official data on landowners and by talking to people and asking them questions about land use and sheep rearing. The data regarding sheep is used to make a quantitative estimate of who owns local resources, if they are owned by locals or non-locals and for this part I have used analytical and methodological frameworks on ecologically unequal exchange.

In addition, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with landowners and local residents. Interviews can complement the research because they “[...] yield rich insights into people’s biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings” (May, 2011: 131). Furthermore, they are “used as a resource for understanding how individuals make sense of their social world and act within it” (May 2011: 157). The reason for choosing semi-structured interviews instead of some other kind of interview is because these are both unstructured and structured at the same time, and thus allowed me to be more free in asking further questions. More specifically, I wanted the informants to feel free to express their perceptions of how it is to be a citizen on an outer island and about land ownership on their islands. In a semi-structured interview, I had the freedom to curiously ask deeper on the answers given and therefore seek elaboration and clarification on them and by this start a dialogue with the informant (May 2011, Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 124). An advantage in conducting semi-structured interviews instead of unstructured is that they make it possible for me to make comparisons in the answers given and find similarities. These similarities can help me in the analysis of the interviews to categorise the data under different topics (May 2011: 153).

What an interview does not provide me with is the actuality that is outside the interview, “[T]hey cannot be assumed to produce data which reflect a real world beyond interpretation” as May claims (Ibid: 157). Therefore, my statistical data can be useful in adding parts of that information, and this can be referred to as triangulation. Triangulation “[...] refers to the use of multiple research methods and types of data to analyze the same problem.” (Ayoub, Wallace and Zepeda-Millán 2014: 69).

3.1. Considerations on anonymity

I have chosen not to reveal age or sex of the people interviewed, which of the islands they live on or how much land they own or hold. I have very seldom written the exact sentences that they said, rather have I summed up what their opinions and feelings are, because when coming from such small places, this paper can easily reveal who the informants are, and I am not interested in that because people have shared their personal thoughts with me.

3.2. Participatory Action Research as inspiration

In designing a suitable methodological framework for my research, I have used Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an inspirational help and guidance. PAR is a research method where the researcher works together with members from a community or organisation – they can collaborate in defining the problem and further aim at making changes that can improve their situation (McDonald 2012: 36). I am aware that PAR as a methodological framework ideally requires long-term interaction and quite close cooperation with my “research subjects”, and I have not spent enough time in the ‘field’ for that (McDonald 2012). However, what I find valuable in PAR and action research in general is that it enables the researcher to contribute in social change: “Ideally, the purpose of all action research is to impact social change, with a specific action (or actions) as the ultimate goal” (Ibid: 35). This purpose of PAR together with what Zimmerer (2000: 357) writes about political ecology “Political ecology seeks to contribute *both* to sound environmental management (including nature conservation) and to the empowerment of dis-advantaged social groups” goes well with my aim to contribute in the Outer Islands Association’s ongoing struggle for improving the opportunities to live on the outer islands.

3.3. In the field

I have been in the Faroe Islands for all the period of the data collection, from summer 2014 to mid-January 2015. Going to my home country and looking at an issue from another perspective than I am used to when growing up and living there, has on occasions been a challenge, so too has the analysis of the data.

After deciding that my focus would be on the outer islands and landownership conditions on these islands, I contacted the Outer Islands Association and I have had contact with their

coordinator during the entire research period. The Outer Islands Association has been one of my key-informants both when it came to getting in touch with people living on the outer islands and also in helping me defining the problems and also possible solutions for the outer islands. The methods used in the data collection are described in the method section. I conducted nine interviews with thirteen people (the questions asked are in Appendix 1). The language used during the interviews was Faroese, since that is my and the interviewees mother tongue. I was supposed to travel to both Skúgvoy and Mykines but due to bad weather conditions I only came to the island Skúgvoy and not to Mykines. Luckily, the interviewees from Mykines came to the mainland in other errands and thus the interviews were conducted there. All the recorded interviews were conducted either at the interviewees' home or at their workplace. I let them choose the place for the interview.

Apart from the recorded interviews, I talked to some of them several times, especially those on Skúgvoy. The island is small and when going out for a walk you often meet someone - or as I in some cases – just knocked on their door and they invited me in for coffee or tea and then we talked more about the island life. Although I would not say that I have conducted participant observation, because I have not spent enough time in the field that I am studying, I would still say that my role while doing the field trips to Skúgvoy have to some extent been resembling a participant observer (May 2011: 161-190). I have also been talking to many of the interviewed people on the phone and we have been emailing as well if I had any further matter of dispute.

4. Land use, land tenure and the actual circumstances in the Faroes today

Having described the theories and methods applied in this research, I will now turn to the empirical part of the research. However, before presenting my gathered material, I will give a chapter on how and where I conducted the research, and describe a rather large subject, namely land tenure and agriculture regarding sheep rearing on the Faroe Islands. In addition, I will elaborate more on the discourses mentioned in the introduction, and also the cultural aspect of sheep meat. This is necessary in order to understand the actual circumstances where the material is gathered and to understand the cultural dimension of sheep rearing – and further, how this can be part of the trends in the changes in land use today.

4.1. Brief description of land use and tenure in the past and present

Agriculture was the principal industry up until the end of 19th century in the Faroe Islands. Besides sheep and cattle keeping - and to some extent the keeping of horses and cultivating the soil – fishing from open boats, seals, birds and pilot whales were also of great importance. These were closely linked to land right. Only people who owned or were holders of land had the right to marriage. Thus, land was the core of the Faroese society (Joensen, 1987A: 12, 21). The outer islands had a rich bird life and the distance to go out fishing was relatively short when living on an outer island. Living there was a good strategically settlement in order to get access to the natural living resources (Petersen, 1968:18).

The land is divided into Crown land (copyhold) and freehold land (allodium/privately owned). 45,7 percent of the land is Crown land and the rest is freehold land (Heimabeiti 2015). The Crown land is divided into *festi* (which means copyhold farms). These copyhold farms are different in size and consist of cattle keeping, sheep rearing or a combination of both. A tenant holds the right to use the copyhold land.

Most villages have outfield (*uttangarðsjørð/hagi*) and infield (*innangarðsjørð/bøur*). The outfield is 92,2% of the total land in the Faroe Islands (Djurhuus 2013: 22-23). Nearly all the outfield in the Faroe Islands is used for grazing the sheep, and parts of the infield are used for winter grazing. The size of the land is measured by *mørk*, *gyllin* and *skinn*⁷ (Heimabeiti 2015). During summer period all the sheep are on the outfield and during the winter period mostly all sheep have access to the infield as well (Bjarnason and Simonsen 2007: 36). In some areas, the sheep are being fed during winter period. The outfield is mostly commons (*feli*) which means that there is common grazing and all the work tasks on the outfield are done collectively by the owners (Joensen 1987A: 72), and the infield it is not commons and is often divided into small parts where each owner takes care of their own strip of field. It was common to most households to hold a cow. The cows needed access to the grass on the infield (Joensen 1987A: 62-68) and thus there are often parts of the infield that are neglected, and not used for anything today.

The copyhold land is land, which belongs to the state, and a copyhold farmer or tenant is a person who has been given the right to use the land. Copyhold land is in most cases divided into relatively larger pieces of land compared to the freehold land (*ognarjørð*) which is commonly divided into smaller parts. When a copyhold tenant (*festari*) is retiring from being a tenant, then the oldest son or daughter has the first right to inherit the copyhold farm, or the

⁷This is an old measurement of land. The size of these measures can vary from village to village and island to island. 1 mørk is 16 gyllin and 1 gyllin is 20 skinn (heimabeiti.fo). Thus is it not possible to compare this measurement with an international measurement

tenant can appoint a future tenant who he thinks is suited. The copyhold land was not divided into smaller parts but remained the same size for generations. However, a new agricultural legislation has made the copyhold land alienable and by this, the tenant has the opportunity to sell the right to the land – also into smaller pieces (logir.fo 2015). The freehold land is privately owned, and therefore often inherited into smaller parts of land and hence there are often very small pieces of land in between the rest of the land. This arrangement of the land has been functioning for hundreds of years (Joensen, 1987A: 12, 21).

4.2. Sheep rearing on the outer islands today

The arrangement described above is also valid on the outer islands. Each part of the outfield (*hagi*) has its own shepherd, and the shepherd is in most cases living on the island. The shepherd's duty is to look after the sheep; deciding when to drive the sheep from the mountain, maintenance of the outfield's properties etc. The days when the sheep are driven to the sheepfold for medicine, to shear the sheep or to slaughter them the owners come and do their part of the work or they get someone to do it for them. The shepherd gets sheep in payment.

All the sheep are being slaughtered on the islands, it is forbidden by law to transport living sheep between the islands (Heilsufrøðiliga Starvsstovan 2015). Since there are no large-scale slaughterhouses on these small islands (Skúgvoy and Mykines), each family slaughters their own sheep in private houses or in their homes – this is an old tradition and the sheep slaughtering has not been commercialised. However, some have more modern slaughtering facilities.

In order to control the time of the lambing season, the breeders⁸ are for a large part of the year being fed indoor. The local residents take care of the breeders the whole year around; they feed them, muck under them (clean their floor), give them medicine if necessary etc. This means that those who are responsible for the breeders are very bound to being on the island. Also those who need to complement their sheep with feed during winter time are tied to be on the island.

4.3. The village as community

The Faroe Islands have since a long time back been divided into old villages, called *markatalsbygdur*. This means that these villages were a community in itself; the outfield (land)

⁸A breeder is a male lamb selected as breeder (sprotin. fo).

surrounding the village was owned and used by the people living in the village (Joensen 1987A: 15). The villages in the Faroe Islands have functioned as a community where everyone was dependent on each other in the everyday tasks, such as fishing, catching birds, go to the outfield to milk the cows, sheep rearing etc. (Joensen 1987, Petersen 1968, Biskopstø 2001). If there have been any matter of dispute regarding land affairs, people have always had a place to show their dissatisfaction and discuss these. This is done at the village-meetings called *Grannastevna* (Petersen, 1968: 311-318, Heimabeiti 2015).

The villages today do not function in the same way as formerly - when everyone was dependant on each other in order to get their daily bread (Joensen 1987B). However, there are still matters where the community is current. This community is existing in the land use connected to sheep rearing, bird catching in cliffs and in pilot whale hunting (Joensen 1987B, Biskopstø 2001: 24). The reasons for why the communities linked to these living resources are still valid can be that these resources are of great cultural value to the Faroese people.

These changes in the community can be explained by looking at what happens all around the world today - instead of being dependant on each in the community, we rely on other people's work and resources in another place in the world system (Singh 2003: 45, Hornborg 2013: 4).

4.4. The cultural importance of sheep meat

The climate in the Faroe Islands together with the limited amount of fertile soil make the islands poorly suited for agriculture (Edwards 2005), and because of its geographical location, the Faroe Islands' traditional food is from animals: fish, birds, whales, sheep etc. (Joensen 2003). Many of the Faroese traditional dishes are absent today but there are still some that are very popular – and most of these are from the sheep meat. There is an old tradition in the Faroe Islands to hang the carcasses⁹ of the sheep in a storehouse called *hjallur*. A *hjallur* is a drying/fermenting house which the fresh air can stream through and the carcasses hang there for fermenting or drying. Depending on the time-period in the *hjallur*, we get *ræst* (fermented, also called Faroe dry-aged (sprotin.fo)) and *turt* (dried) sheep meat. The *ræst* meat together with *ræst* soup is a delicacy for the Faroese people and is commonly eaten at festivities (ibid, Joensen 2015A: 176-179). *Turt* sheep meat, also called *skerpikjöt* is considered to possess a high status value among the people. People often talk about or ask where the sheep came from,

⁹ A carcass is the sheep body after it is slaughtered (bone and meat)

which mountain it walked etc. In addition, there are nation-wide arrangements regarding sheep and sheep meat, such as meat-tastings and sheep show (ibid, Joensen 2015B: 211-214).

It is tradition that the men deal with the physical hard work: drive the sheep from the mountains, get them home and do the part of the slaughter that does not concern the intestines. The women take care of the intestines and prepare it to food (Joensen 2015A: 147-153). While the meat has gained higher status, the food that the women have been preparing has lost much of its value among the Faroese people.

4.5. The discourses

In the Faroese society today the focus is on what is economically safe and therefore there shall be done no political changes to “save” the outer islands - this is simply the way things are going because the outer islands are not productive enough. Listening to the news or reading the newspapers, this discourse is easily confirmed because the media is dominated by the economic discourse. Some economists and others who represent this discourse demonstrate that people do not want to live on the smaller places and base the explanation on the demographic changes in the past decades. The dominant discourse is - in the public debate - stating that the outer periphery is only an expense to the rest of the country. This can further be confirmed on the political arena by looking at the changes or rather non-changes that have been made in favour for the outer periphery.

The other discourse is saying that we have never tried to do anything to “save” the outer islands – and there is a lot that can be done. There has rather been a systemised political process to make people move from the outer islands. This discourse is the one which *Útoyggjafelagið* (the Outer Islands Association) is representing and they are not alone representing this discourse. In 2001 the *Útoyggjanevndin*¹⁰ (the outer islands committee) wrote a report on the conditions of the outer islands and further presenting concrete suggestions on what can be done to achieve more endurable conditions for the future of the outer islands e.g. how people can thrive and work there and how young people can make a living on the islands. If any at all, very few of the suggested changes have been adopted by the authorities (Biskopstø 2001). I have in the interviews informants who represent both of these discourses.

¹⁰ This was a committee set by the government. In the committee were representatives from all the outer islands and Olga Biskopstø was the coordinator (Biskopstø 2001: 5). The Outer Islands Association was founded by some of the same people that where in the Outer Islands Committee (Glóðin 2012).

However, nowadays there seems to be a broad (represented by both discourses) optimistic thought that tourism is a solution for the islander's way out of unemployment and depopulation, where ecological modernisation is the discourse and sustainability is the keyword (Glóðin 2013 and 2012). However, there is no clear strategy or guidance from the actors involved on how this shall be managed in a manner that does not harm the nature and living resources on the islands (Petersen 2013: 38-39).

5. Who owns land?

In finding out how land ownership is related to depopulation, I have investigated how much of the actual land belongs to the people living on these islands and how much does not. This means that I have looked at how much of the land do the local people have access to – further I have asked the local residents what they think about land ownership and if it has a role in their everyday lives.

In this and the following chapter, I will include the information I got from the interviews and other informants with my statistical findings to describe and explain the actual circumstances on Mykines and Skúgvoy today. All this is presented together with theoretical insights. Even though the outer islands have been described as a unified subject throughout my writings, I am aware that the outer islands are different and that the residents have diverse opinions and interest conflicts as well.

5.1. Mykines and Skúgvoy

Skúgvoy and Mykines are two very small islands; both are 10 km² (Statistics Faroe Islands 2015). Nearly 200 people are owners or holders of land on these islands – this means that some pieces of land are tiny (Umhvørvisstovan 2014). Both of these islands used to have an extremely rich birdlife in their cliffs (and are famous for that) and therefore the islands could support many families with its natural living resources (Joensen 1987A: 113-114). Today, the birdlife is much less in comparison to how it used to be (Bergur Olsen: personal communication 2015), especially on Skúgvoy and consequently is bird catching and robbing nests on the bird cliffs hardly practised anymore. Mykines still has some activity in the bird cliffs but the outcome is not much in comparison. The local people talking about the decline in the bird stocks did not have a clear answer for this – rather they thought that there were many different

reasons, one of them being that there is not enough food for the birds. Experts believe that the reason is lack of food (Bergur Olsen: personal communication 2015).

There are summerhouses on both Mykines and Skúgvoy – these are mostly old houses, where someone used to live in. During summer and other holidays, the islands are full of people and the summerhouses are well visited.

All of the people living on these islands today own land, some more than others. While some only have sheep as a supplement to their household, others try to make a living of sheep rearing but in order to make it work, they need to have a second income too. The islands possess some part time jobs such as postman/woman, responsible for the electricity, boat and helicopter travel service etc. Both of these islands have an ageing population – the average age is much higher on these islands than in the rest of the Faroe Islands (Statistics Faroe Islands 2015, Glóðin 2013: 27) and this will probably make it more difficult to look after the sheep and manage the tasks that follow in the future.

One thing to keep in mind is that the number of people registered living on the islands is not the actual number of residents living there. It is common for the outer islands to have people registered in the island municipality but not residing there. These are often young people who have moved from the island to go to school, tenants of copyhold land (who are required to have address there) or others who want to pay tax to their home island etc.

5.2. Landownership today and historical trends

In the figures concerning where the owners live, I have not distinguished between freehold land and copyhold land. I have here considered both types of ownership as equal. Table 1 demonstrates how much of the land was owned by the people living on Skúgvoy and how much was owned by those not living on the island in the years 1986, 2000 and 2014. Table 1 also shows the population on Skúgvoy in the same years. It is clear that there have been big changes in this period. In 1986 almost all the land (86,30%) belonged to the people living on Skúgvoy and 28 years later in 2014, this percentage has lowered down to 55,94 percent. People living on other places thus own almost half of the land on Skúgvoy today. The decrease in population is even higher in this period. There has been 60,24 percent decrease in the population in 28 years. There is a clear trend demonstrating that decrease in population goes together with decrease in local-resident ownership. The reasons why local ownership decreases as the population decreases are several. One is because people have moved from Skúgvoy and still own a piece of land there or because some of the owners have died and the relatives who live

somewhere else have inherited the land, and a third reason is that those who inherited the land, sold it to someone who does not live on the island.

	1986	2000	2014
Owners living on Skúgvoy	86,3 %	62, 6 %	55,9 %
Owners not living on Skúgvoy	13,7 %	37,4 %	44,1 %
Population on Skúgvoy	83	78	33

Table 1: shows the percentage of how much land belongs to residents in Skúgvoy and shows the population in Skúgvoy. The population figures are from Statistics Faroe Islands.

Table 2 demonstrates how much of the land was owned by the people living on Mykines and how much was owned by those not living on the island in the years 1981, 2000 and 2014. The table also shows the population on Mykines in the same years. Table 2 shows a quite different picture than table 1 on Skúgvoy. The depopulation on Mykines started many years earlier than in Skúgvoy. In 1925 the population on Mykines was 179, and in 1965 it was 111 (Statistics Faroe Islands 2015) and it has decreased rapidly since. Also, the trend with land is quite different. Today there is more land (almost 20 percent) belonging to the local residents than in 2000 despite a small decrease in population. Small variations can change these figures significantly, such as one person moving who owns relatively much land has changed these figures dramatically.

	1981	2000	2014
Owners living on Mykines	46,14 %	30,72 %	50,04 %
Owners not living on Mykines	53,86 %	69,28 %	49,96 %
Population on Mykines	34	16	13

Table 2: shows the percentage of how much land belongs to residents in Mykines and shows the population in Mykines. The population figures are from Statistics Faroe Islands.

An interesting finding in the list of owners on Mykines was that a shipping company (not belonging to Mykines) has not long ago bought land there. This is a new trend that companies own land.

Most of the non-resident owners on both Mykines and Skúgvoy have family ties to the islands, some have close ties while others had family living on the islands many generations ago, but still own the land. Moreover, some of the owners do not have any ties to the islands other than an interest in owning land there.

5.3. Depopulation of the outer islands in a global context

As shown in table 1 and 2, it is clear that there has been a drastic decrease in the past decades in population on the small islands in the periphery. Drawing on World-System Theory, these changes in population can be explained by looking at larger world structures. Frank (1975) and Wallerstein (2004) both explain how the developed/core and the underdeveloped/periphery came to existence as the processes of capitalism emerged. The periphery exists because of the core and the core exists because of the periphery – and these two are connected through unequal exchange. The more the core develops the more the periphery underdevelops – they are “[...] two sides of the same coin” (Hornborg 2013: 19). Hornborg (2013: 14) refers to this as the zero-sum game.

As stated in the introduction there is a mainland, an inner periphery and an outer periphery in the Faroes. These fit the categories of the core, semi-periphery and periphery merely in a smaller context. The above-described theories are here used to analyse the relation between the core and the periphery in the Faroe Islands, and the Faroe Islands in the world system. As the fishing industry in the Faroes grew and became more industrialised, some villages - which were better suited for the industry - grew as well and people moved to these larger places. This is when people started to move from the outer islands (Joensen, 1987B:136). In the light of World Systems perspective, this is the point when the Faroes were entering an era where the nation got much more integrated in the modern world system and the world economy - when import really started and therefore the Faroes started getting access to cheap natural resources (through ecologically unequal exchange). This again changed and affected the situation and the power structures in the Faroes. At this point, the Faroe Islands altered from a traditional fairly self-sufficient peasant economy towards an industrial fisheries economy. Agriculture however, remained largely the same (Joensen 1987A).

5.3.1. Losing access to land and resources

While many people in different places around the world have lost access to their local land and resources and thus have to move because capital has an interest in land and resources (Bryant and Bailey 1997, Paulson 2012), it has happened in a slightly different manner in the Faroes. People did not leave the islands because they lost access to the land or resources. It is almost the other way around, people cannot sustain a living on an outer island because of several reasons explained in the modern world system (e.g. accumulation of capital and people in the core areas) and when they leave the island, they take the landownership with them. Large parts of those who have left the islands hang on to the landownership and that is how the ownership does not belong to local residents.

One opinion expressed during the interviews was that it is very annoying that so many non-residents own so much land on the islands because they do not care about anything here; they just come here in the autumn when the slaughter is – and barely come in the summer. All the common activities connected to sheep rearing shall occur when they have time to do it – we (the local residents) just have to adapt to their timetable. It was further expressed in an interview that this presumption from some of the non-resident owners was very irritating. Moreover, that these have the money to buy land and thus have more power; where there is money, there is power. In addition, it was wrong by those who sell their land to sell it to people with more money who live elsewhere, they should rather sell the land to the people living on the islands – for a cheaper price if necessary, was stated.

5.4. Concrete issues today

There is a dilemma in the question of all the land belonging to the outer islands because there are so few people on the outer islands that they cannot themselves manage all the work tasks that are tied to sheep rearing, e.g. sheep shearing and slaughtering. Because of this labour shortage, they need the co-owners to be an active part of the work tasks that follow in sheep rearing (Biskopstø 2001). There are also other complications when dealing with depopulation, which are not directly tied to land but still are of importance and are a part of the larger problem concerning the outer islands. If young people decide to live on an outer island it is almost impossible for them to start a living there, because they will most likely not get a loan from the bank to buy or to build a house. In addition, it is hard for them to keep a job on another island and live on the outer island because of the uncertain travelling conditions, especially during

winter time. Moreover, it is very difficult if not impossible to get funding to start their own business on an outer island, e.g. in agriculture (Olga Biskopstø: personal communication).

In the interviews, it was pointed out that if someone decides to move to one of these islands and lease a summerhouse that is not being used, then it would be too uncertain for them to repair the house because they have no guarantee that the owner will not sell the house afterwards. The same is valid when dealing with the infield that is not used. In most cases, the owners living elsewhere do not mind if the local residents use their infield if it is not used for anything but again, it is very unreliable to put energy in cultivating the land if the land is sold the year after.

Some of the interviewees talked about how their adult children had been very interested in moving back to the islands but it was not possible because they could not support a family there.

5.4.1. The question of landownership

As the Outer Islands Association has pointed out land ownership as one factor of the lack of possibilities to improve island life, most of the interviewees said that land ownership and land tenure did not have an impact on their daily life nor had the circumstances with land anything to do with people moving from the islands. Many had never thought of land circumstances as a component or as a decisive factor of why it is hard to sustain a life there.

Conversely, all of the interviewed people thought it would be desirable if everyone who owned land lived on the island as well. Some were more prompt about this, while others said that this was not a realistic demand or wish and that they just have to accept that this is not how it is. Further, some argued that no one can demand that someone shall live on an island when the pieces of copyhold land are divided into such small parts that no one can make a living of it. Those who were more definite about the land thought that of course all the land should belong to the people living there.

Another opinion argued that if you compare the life on an outer island with elsewhere, where there are good jobs with high wages, then this island life is not important in comparison because if people do not have a fairly paid job then there is nothing – and if you have a family to take care of then you need money. For young people to come back to an outer island to rear some sheep and have a potato field, that is not an option in today's society, was argued.

This last opinion stated that in our current world system of capitalism, it is difficult to sustain a living in the periphery because the accumulation of money, people, work, resources etc. occurs in the core areas and not in the periphery (Hornborg 2013: 15).

5.5. Privatisation of the land

As mentioned, the Minister of agriculture has plans on privatising the Crown land in the Faroe Islands but the public has not been given much information about how this shall be conducted nor is there a consensus among the politicians concerning the privatisation issue. The Outer Islands Association (*Útoyggjafelagið*) believes that privatisation of the copyhold land is not a solution, at least not for the outer islands. They reason that some of the copyhold farms should be gathered into larger units in order for the tenant to be able to live of the farm. The committee also says that the new agricultural law is a hindrance for occupational agriculture on the outer islands since land is the primary natural resource on the outer islands. Hence, the Outer Islands Committee invokes the political authorities to make it obligatory for the landowner to produce something from the land and to be resident there as well. Therefore, it shall only be attractive to people to allot themselves land who want to reside on the land and to use the land (Dímun 2015). When discussing land and sheep rearing in the Faroes you cannot get around – and this is applicable for all of the country – the debate on whether sheep rearing shall be a hobby for more people or a branch of occupation for fewer people (Biskopstø 2013).

There was no doubt about what the local residents meant about privatisation. Everyone stated clearly: privatisation is not a solution for them. They explained that the land will be sold to the highest bidder and people living on the outer islands will not afford to buy any land. One argued that then it will not be the persons with passion and interest in the land that will own the land, rather some rich men who think it is fun to own a piece of land without looking after it themselves. Perhaps have a shepherd to do that for them, while they have a well-paid job elsewhere, was expressed.

If all the land in the future will be privatised, it will be the capital deciding who gets the island resources – and an indicator of that is the fact that a shipping company recently became a landowner in Mykines. Eric Clark stated that when environments are commodified by the financial sector this means “[...] entailing enclosures of resource commons and displacement of people, their livelihoods, knowledge and practices.” (2013: 129).

5.5.1. Other solutions to the land issue

I got the feeling that none of the interviewees had one clear solution to the land issue – rather they explained how complex the problem was, and some said there is a lack of public and political discussion around the land issue, especially concerning the outer islands. One of the interviewees hoped for a land revolution where all the crown land was gathered and wished for a land reform as well. This person was definite that if the Crown land was divided into two equal parts on the island, then two families should be able to live off it, also collaborate with the work tasks, and hence produce more from the land. That person further argued that if the copyhold farms were large enough to support an entire family then the political authority should have certain demands to the land use. Those who talked about a land reform did not have a clear picture of how a land reform shall look like but stated that there is a lack of discussion regarding land – and a lack of political will and demands when it comes to land and land use. However, some of them pointed out that the Faroe Islands ought to have two agricultural legislations; one for the outer islands and one for the rest of the country because the outer islands do not function under the same terms as the rest of the country. One opinion was that it is difficult to do any political changes because the majority of the land is freehold (privately owned) on their island. In the future there will most likely only live the copyhold farmers (Crown land) on the outer islands because the freehold land is divided into such small pieces and since no one can live off such small pieces of land than they cannot support themselves on an outer island was further explained.

5.5.2. Crown land or freehold land

The question of freehold land or Crown land must be taken into consideration as it keeps coming up in the investigation of landownership. As the copyhold farms (Crown land) have stayed the same in size for decades, the copyhold land has gone into smaller and smaller pieces as the years have gone and next generations inherit the land. The division between Crown and freehold land on Mykines is respectively 31,68 and 68,32 percent, and the division between Crown and freehold land on Skúgvoy is respectively 53,97 and 46,03 percent (Heimabeiti 2015). This means that Mykines has much more freehold land than Skúgvoy. There are also more land owners in Mykines than in Skúgvoy as the pieces of copyhold land tend to be divided between family members as the next generations take over. In other words, this means that a larger percentage of people can have access to land when it is freehold in contrast to copyhold

where there is one tenant responsible. The local residents do not have the same access to money as those who live on the mainland. Hence, the copyhold farms are more likely an opportunity for them to have access to resources as they seldom have money to buy the freehold land that is for sale. If all the land on Mykines and Skúgvoy was copyhold farms, this would mean that the broader public would not have the same access to the resources and land as they do now.

When discussing the issue of private land or Crown land and having environmental governance in mind, it is worth mentioning that several scholars point out that a favourable organisation of the commons and resource management is through a mixture of participating actors (e.g. public-private partnership) (Clark 2013: 129, Agrawal 2006: 206-208). One of them being Elinor Ostrom (1990: 15) stating “In field settings, public and private institutions frequently are intermeshed and depend on one another, rather than existing in isolated worlds”.

In the 1970's when people really started to move from the peripheral areas in the Faroes, there was a political and public discussion around the issue of land ownership on the outer islands. It was debated on whether there should be a law that all the land on the outer islands should belong to the local residents or not. After some years that debate ended and there were no changes in the legislature regarding land ownership and residency. Some of the interviewees meant this was because there is too much personal interest (by politicians and others) in the land and resources on the outer islands. However, there have been other development strategies and I will touch upon these in the next section.

5.6. Development strategies of the peripheries

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a political top-down strategy in the Faroe Islands, called *bygdmenning* (development of villages). The purpose of this policy was to develop the semi-peripheral and peripheral areas in the country. The strategy was industrial development that should be beneficial to the entire country and in practise it amounted to politically deciding where to place fish processing and filleting plants, boats and infrastructure in peripheral areas in order to generate growth there (Hovgaard 2001: 2-3). However, these improvements in hard infrastructure did not stop people from moving from the peripheral areas. After this there was a new strategy introduced, called *økonomening*, which was based on improving the soft infrastructure - this meant that the state should focus more on public institutions and services in the peripheral areas places (ibid). Yet, the population on the outer islands is still declining (Statistics Faroe Islands 2015). Today, it does not seem as if there is the same will to redistribute resources as the dominant discourse is the economic one.

The reason for why the strategy *bygdamenning* did not work out is because industrial infrastructure requires a constant flow of cheap resources to keep functioning, and the outer islands do not have access to that.

This chapter has demonstrated with figures that there is a clear trend that decrease in population and local resident ownership go hand in hand - the more people leave the small islands the less land belongs to the local residents. The reasons for these rapid population changes have been discussed together with World System Analysis. Moreover, the local opinions about privatisation, landownership and other related issues have been put forward and in the end different strategies on the notion of development of the periphery have been discussed. I will now look at what this means for the distribution of the natural resources, which are produced on the outer islands.

6. Who has access to resources?

In this chapter, I will present my findings regarding the local resources and relate these to landownership. Again, I will include findings from the interviews together with insights from Post colonialism and World System Analysis.

Since sheep are the main or perhaps only resource that the outer islands export to the mainland, I will look at the production and distribution of sheep meat using insights from the theoretical framework developed around the concept of Ecologically Unequal Exchange in this research. During the interviews (in the end of them), I asked about where all the sheep on their island end up after slaughtering. I asked how much of the meat and also food from intestines etc. is left on the island, how much is being sold off the islands and by whom (by the islanders or by others) and also how much is being transported to those who own land and live on some other island (see Appendix 1).

In addition, I would like to stress that there are alternative (not monetary) ways to have access to the sheep meat and this is through helping out with the diverse activities connected to sheep rearing. The helpers are normally given meat in payment. This means that there are hardly any money involved in sheep rearing and thus can be said that the production of sheep meat is hardly a part of the Faroese market economy. This is good in some ways, but at the same time it means that people who want to live by rearing sheep cannot do it because they are partly excluded from the monetary sphere.

6.1. The local resources

Table 3 shows where the sheep meat (carcasses) in Skúgvoy ends up after slaughtering. 56,6 percent of the meat belongs to the people living on the island and 43,4 percent belongs to the non-residents. This ratio is almost the same as the percentage ratio on where the owners live. 57,9 percent of the meat is consumed by the owners and helpers and 42,1 percent is sold. The local residents sell almost half of their sheep meat – some sell more than others – while the non-residents sell much less. This means that less than a third of the meat is consumed by the islanders. The reason for why the local residents sell a larger share of their meat than the non-residents can be explained by looking at the size of pieces of land; the non-locals often own much smaller pieces and thus the sheep meat is only a supplement to their own household.

	Consumed	Sold
Locals	29,6 %	27,0 %
Non-residents	28,3 %	15,1 %

Table 3: shows the percentage of where the sheep meat on the island Skúgvoy goes.

Although I got information (from my informants) about the sheep meat in Mykines, I was not able to make accurate figures from them. The numbers of how much is left on the island, how much is sold and how much is transported to non-resident owners was not in accordance with how much is being slaughtered on the island and thus I cannot present exact figures. Nonetheless, I can say that the trend is the same as in Skúgvoy - that the largest percentage of the sheep meat is leaving the island. In Skúgvoy are 43,4 percent leaving the island through non-locals and 27 percent are leaving the island through the local residents.

6.1.1. Material flows in term of sheep

The outer islands (the outer periphery) possess about 11,3 percent of the total sheep population in the Faroes and the total population of people living on the outer islands is about 0,4 percent of the total Faroese population. Mykines and Skúgvoy together possess about 2,9 percent of the total sheep production in the Faroes and the population on these islands is about 0,1 percent of the total population in the Faroes (Heimabeiti 2015 and Statistics Faroe Islands 2015). This

means that the outer islands produce a larger percentage of the sheep meat than the rest of the country.

The framework of ecologically unequal exchange has been used as an inspiration to look at what the land is used for and where the resources go. In other words, the outer islands (and the people living there) produce a relatively large share of the sheep meat which is consumed all over the Faroes, especially at festive occasions where traditional food is often considered an essential ingredient.

6.1.2. A note on the validity of this data

When dealing with sheep that are living freely outdoor most of the year, the numbers vary from one year to another, thus these percentage outcomes are estimated reasonably. The payment to those who help in the diverse tasks in sheep rearing is included in the “consumed” part because it is difficult for the sheep rearers to give exact numbers since these can vary much.

6.2. Values of the local resources

My personal experiences and by talking to people about rearing sheep I can say that there is no monetary motivation for sheep rearing. People rear sheep because they like doing it, they appreciate the activities that follow sheep rearing and they like the food, and because there is a great cultural value attached to these practices as well as to the food it produces. Those who are sheep rearers have mostly grown up with it but not always.

Table 3 above demonstrated that a large percentage of the meat on Skúgvoy is being transported off the island to non-resided owners and other buyers of the meat. The matter of these high culturally valued resources was touched upon during the interviews and one said that nowadays it seems as if it has become popular to rear some sheep and this makes it harder for those who try to make a living out of it. Two others explained that some people in Tórshavn¹¹ can brag about them being sheep rearers on an outer island and owning a piece of land there. They come to the islands a few days a year and that is it. As if they want to be outer islanders but that is not what they are. They just come here to get food and then they leave again. Many tons of food have been dragged from our island; a lot of value and much money – and we are left with the rest of the work, was said.

¹¹Tórshavn is the capital in the Faroe Islands (see figure 1). Approximately 20.000 people live there (Statistics Faroe Islands 2015).

What these islanders say - they are left with the rest of the work while the non-residents come and get the food – can be linked to what Hornborg is arguing about time and space saved at one place is spent at another place. “[T]echnologies for locally saving time and space often tend to draw on investments of time and space (labor and land) in other parts of the world-system” (Hornborg 2007: 7). The people living on these outer islands are in their everyday lives keeping a culture alive as they take care of the sheep and breeders together with the following tasks, while the non-resident owners come on occasions and are then a part of these happenings. These local residents use their energy (time) to produce a resource (space) but they cannot live by it because this production does not have the same value as monetary paid work elsewhere.

6.3. The people, the islands and resources as cultural objects

Having demonstrated that the sheep meat is of great cultural importance to the Faroese people and that a large percentage of the sheep meat on Skúgvoy and Mykines leaves the islands through non-local residents, I will now touch upon how the local residents think about these realities and how they feel they are perceived in the Faroese society.

Earlier in the thesis, three citations from outer islanders were used. The first one on the front page stated that the local residents do not want their islands to become unpopulated and then be used as an example of how the Faroese people used to live in the past. The second citation (page 8 in the Introduction) where one outer island resident explains how the outer islands are not of equal value as the rest of the Faroe Islands anymore. The third citation (page 10) is quite different. This is a young person answering back on how the outer islands residents have been labelled since they became ‘the periphery’. By saying that the outer islanders are what the rest of the Faroese people want to be, this person demonstrates how the outer islanders represent a cultural side of the Faroese society that the Faroese people are proud of¹².

In the interviews, there were two sides expressed how they feel as outer islanders. Some explained (not all) how they get questions such as: *Do you live on an outer island? Why don't you move?* This made them sometimes feel as being a second-rate citizen, and as if the outer islands do not belong to the rest of the country – and as if only ignorant people live on the outer islands. It was also expressed by many how they feel privileged to live on such a unique small island and I sensed a kind of proudness when talking to some of them.

¹² These three citations are not from the interviews but from the village meeting in Skúgvoy which I arranged in 2013 and from the report that the Outer Islands Committee made in 2001.

There is a clash between how the people and the outer islands are viewed in the Faroese society and the status of the resources that these people and islands produce. These contrasting views fit well into the analysis of Post colonialism. Post colonialism criticises the notion of how the West (the core, the developed) find the ‘Other’ exotic, exciting and are fond of their resources and at the same time they think of the ‘Other’ as primitive and ‘underdeveloped’ (Said 1978: 1-28).

6.3.1. The outer islanders as agents

The people living on the outer islands have not been passive while these dramatic population and land use changes have occurred in the past decades. Together with the Outer Islands Association, they have had a voice in the public arena and have tried to influence the political authorities with diverse matters that are affecting them (Glóðin 2012). They also arrange annual outer islands festivals that rotate between all the eight outer islands. These festivals are well visited by the Faroese people and at the festival they arrange many sorts of cultural events for the visitors. Apart from these popular festivals, they also take part in other arrangements (e.g. political discussions, food festivals, music festivals) and demonstrate what they have to offer (ibid). Post colonialism points out how the ‘Other’ who used to be suppressed by the ‘Occident’¹³ now demonstrates how they can be the alternative to the ‘western’ ideal’ (Sharp 2009: 5). “[P]ostcolonialism is also a more positive project which seeks to recover alternative ways of knowing and understanding – often talked of in terms of ‘other voices’ – in order to present alternatives to dominant western constructs” (ibid). This is what the outer islanders have been doing for the past 15 years.

However, one said in an interview that these cosy festivals are not enough to make any changes – if the outer islands shall have any chance to stay populated in the future, there has to be some drastical changes. This person was afraid that these drastical changes could be something like a worldwide famine or war and then the Faroese people (including the local residents on the outer islands) would see the land and resources as a necessity again. Another opinion expressed was a strong belief in that sometimes in the future the outer islands will be high valued again. Linking this to Hornborgs (2013: 13-14) words about land becoming the key resource, this might be right.

¹³ Edward Said uses the term ‘Occident’ to express the Western world (Said 1978)

One matter which the outer islanders and the Outer Islands Association have put much energy in is to lobby for improving their travel connection to the mainland and to that issue I will now turn.

6.4. A question of mobility

When living on an island, there is always the question of mobility. Everyone mentioned this issue during the interviews even though I never asked any direct question about it. All of them argued that the largest hindrance when living on these islands is the travel connection. One opinion was that the only thing that could prevent these islands from becoming unpopulated would be to have a much better travel connection to the mainland – the question of land ownership or any other matter would not prevent people from leaving the islands was expressed. Some dreamt of having a paid job and being able to come home every day after work, but the lack of monetary paid work on their islands and the lack of commuting opportunities prevented them from this.

Another matter of importance expressed in the interviews was how their everyday activities are determined by nature, by the weather conditions. They expressed it as; you live closer to nature here - nature is in charge. It was several times mentioned that when living isolated on an outer island, it is not possible to buy themselves out of everything as it is in some other places.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how land ownership is related to depopulation on the outer islands in the Faroe Islands and further the question was asked how and whether changes in land ownership could reverse the depopulation trend or at least prevent the islands from becoming uninhabited.

As the Faroe Islands became an industrialised fishing nation and entered the modern world-system, the outer islands have gone from being a place rich of resource to a place where it is difficult to sustain a living. One general conclusion from the interviews is that these people living on the outer islands mention some of the things that are also problems of other marginalized areas in the world system; such as not having access to resources and money (Bryant and Bailey 1997).

One thing is certain – if the trend is allowed to continue there is reason to believe that soon people who do not live on the outer islands will own most of the land there. The resources produced on the islands will leave the islands as well. However, if the outer islands will become unpopulated in the future, it will be difficult to continue to rear sheep on the islands because there is no one to manage all the everyday work tasks connected to sheep rearing (feeding, taking care of the breeders etc.). It is the people living on the outer islands that keep the islands alive (by using their time and space) and not the non-resided owners. If privatisation of the land becomes a reality, there is evidence that it would be even harder to sustain a living on an outer island since commodification of land tends to alienate people and their local knowledge and culture from the place and land.

The alternative distribution of payment means that people have access to meat not only through monetary means but as payment for helping with the slaughter etc. The resources produced on the outer islands although having almost priceless cultural value, are not really part of the monetary system in the Faroes. This means that those who live on an outer island do not have the same access to money and paid work as those who live on the mainland – and that is the core issue. In the introduction, the dominating discourse was presented which says that the outer islands are only an expense to the rest of the country and they pay nothing in return. Maybe the outer islands do not give money in return but they give something else in return – and that is that they produce something, which has an immense cultural value to the Faroese people.

It is one thing to say that land ownership plays a role in depopulation, but in order for it to have a real effect, attention must be set on the value of land and on what the land produces. This can be linked to the global situation. Land is not valued and therefore, local people cannot live off small plots of land. Land is bought and used by large actors, large companies, or by people who do not have to live off the land. This last one states the reality on Mykines and Skúgvoy: people who do not have to live off the land, own half of the land on these islands today.

Thus, I will argue that there needs to be a different kind of debate in the Faroes regarding the future of the outer islands. Instead of focusing on the monetary aspects, the debate should rather be on the cultural values that the outer islands produce. Perhaps a result of this could be to exclude non-residents to own land on an outer island and thus also lose access to land and resources. By this, the local residents would have access to all the land and resources and not only half of it as it is today.

If land, resources and the following work tasks were valued equally with paid work in core areas, then the question of land ownership would be of importance in the discussion about

depopulation. Even more, local land ownership would then be a component to prevent the outer islands from becoming uninhabited. The question of survival of these small islands must be addressed by starting a broad public discussion revising the value of land and what the land produces since these are of great cultural value to the Faroese people. Additionally, more research on the topic of cultural values and land use could be a contributing factor in this debate in the Faroes.

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Appendix 1

Questions asked during the semi-structured interviews

First, I briefly explained that I was a Human Ecology student at LU and I was interested in researching land tenure, land ownership and land use on their islands. Also I asked for permission to record the interview and explained that it was only for my own use and that their names would not appear in my thesis.

The questions:

1. While asking the first question I showed them a map of their island which showed the division (in different colours) of how much of the land is owned by the people living there and how much is owned by living elsewhere, and also showing the division of freehold land and copyhold land. Then I asked what they thought of the map. If they were satisfied with the division of the colours or if they had any other thoughts about this division.
2. Could changes in land tenure and land ownership improve your lives here on the island? (How? Why?)
3. Are you satisfied with your lives here – your living circumstances?
4. Would you like to live off agriculture and other resources that are on the island?
5. What do you think of common land, e.g. that the whole island owned all the land in common?
6. How do you feel as an outer islander in the Faroe Islands?
7. Where do you use your energy? E.g. working power?

Then I asked more specific and detailed questions:

8. Again I showed them the map (which was from year 2000) and asked if there have been any changes since then? (This is the only way to find out if there have been any changes in land ownership since then because there exist no lists of names of the owners from that time).
9. How much of the sheep meat is being sold in their outfield and by whom is it being sold? And how much is given in payment for helping out with slaughtering, driving the sheep from the mountain, shearing etc.
10. Practical questions on sheep rearing and bird catching:
 - Who decides the dates for the different sheep rearing activities?
 - Who is participating in the work? People living on the island or people living elsewhere? or both?
 - Who is slaughtering and “taka upp”?
 - How much of the intestines are being consumed? And by whom?

- On Mykines I asked these same practical questions regarding bird catching. There is almost no bird catching on Skúgvoy any more.

11. What is your infield being used for?

12. I asked about the infields of the people not living on the island? Is it being used and by whom?