



**Háskólinn  
á Akureyri**

*School of Humanities and social sciences  
Social and Economic Development  
2010*

**„I will never be an islander“**

*Grímsey, small island north of Iceland*

**Monika Margrét Stefánsdóttir**

**Final thesis in Humanities and Social Sciences**



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## **„I will never be an islander“**

*Grímsey, small island north of Iceland*

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*Final thesis for 180 credits a BA degree in Humanities and Social  
Sciences*

**Statement:**

„I hereby declare that I am the only author of this project and that it includes  
my own investigation“

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Monika Margrét Stefánsdóttir

„It hereby confirm that this thesis satisfies the requirements in my opinion for  
BA degree in humanities and Social Sciences „



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Michael Gibbons

## Abstract

Grímsey is an island north of Iceland where around 60 people live all year long but more people are there over summer time. Life there has centered on the fishery but tourism has been growing there the last few years. The fishing quota has changed in Iceland, and because of this it is getting harder for islanders to live on Grímsey. As a result people have been moving away from the island for the last 2 – 3 years. However, people do not want to move away and they are willing to do what they can to enable a life on Grímsey in the future. It is expensive to manage the school and the instruction has to be as good as possible, despite being in such small place. The school offers teaching for children to 13 years old. After that they have to move to the mainland for last two years to finish school. There are not many activities for children both over summer and wintertime and it is hard to offer more because there are so few children that live on Grímsey of such different ages. Overall, people are contented with the offered adult activities on the island. Work other than fishery or tourism is not diverse and especially women in certain age do not have jobs that suit them. The few that are offered in Grímsey are part time jobs. Service is getting much better to Grímsey and then especially in travel to and from Grímsey to the mainland both in flight and with the ferry. Service on the island is getting much better after the restaurant and the new guesthouse came there. The service is much better in the store as well. The merger with Akureyri makes people hope it is getting better for the island that they are under this big city because they have to get all their services from the mainland in Akureyri in most cases. In the end Grímsey residents are happy about their island and about their home and practicality is what holds them together and their spirit and desire to live on their island is priceless.

## Útdráttur

Grímsey er eyja sem liggur norðan við Ísland, þar búa um 60 manns allt árið en mun fleiri búa þar yfir sumartímann. Veiðar hafa einkennt störf fólksins í Grímsey en ferðamennska hefur eflst mikið á undanförunum árum. Kvótamál hafa breyst á Íslandi og hefur það gert fólki erfiðara fyrir að búa í Grímsey. Á síðustu 2 – 3 árum hefur fólk verið að flytja frá eyjunni sökum þessa, samt sem áður vill fólk ekki flytja í burtu og er það tilbúið til að gera allt sem það getur til þess að búa áfram í eyjunni. Rekstur skólans er kostnaðarsamur og það þarf að fylgjast vel með kennsluháttum á svona litlum stað. Skólinn býður upp á kennslu fyrir börn upp í 14 ára aldur, þá þurfa þau að fara í land til að klára síðustu tvö árin af skyldunáminu. Það er skortur á tómtundum fyrir börnin í eyjunni bæði á veturna og á sumrin en erfitt er að breyta því þar sem börnin eru fá og á mismunandi aldri. Mikil ánægja er með félagsstarfsemina sem er fyrir fullorðið fólk í Grímsey. Vinna fyrir utan sjóinn og ferðamenskuna í eyjunni er ekki fjölbreytt og skortur er á störfum fyrir ákveðin aldurshóp, þá sérstaklega fyrir miðaldra konur. Þau störf sem henta þeim eru fá og eingöngu hlutastörf. Þjónusta við eyjuna hefur lagast mikið á síðustu árum og þá sérstaklega í ferðum á milli lands og Grímseyjar. Einnig er öll þjónusta orðin mun betri bæði við eyjuna og innan hennar með tilkomu veitingarstaðar og fleiri gistiheimila. Einnig er þjónustan í búðinni mjög góð. Með sameiningunni við Akureyrarbæ er fólk að vonast eftir því að það muni koma eyjunni til góða að hafa sameinast undir svona stóran stað þar sem öll þjónusta fer í gegnum Akureyri. Grímseyingar eru stoltir af eyjunni sinni og er það ástæðan fyrir viljanum og lönguninni til þess að búa áfram í eyjunni.

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
Research Focus and Methodology .....	5
Findings .....	5
The quota.....	5
Tourism .....	8
Islander .....	10
School and activities for children.....	13
Activities for adults .....	16
Work in Grímsey .....	18
Service .....	19
Merger .....	22
Conclusion.....	23
Reference:.....	27

## Introduction

When studying communities it is usually necessary to make boundaries to separate the community from nearby other communities. However, in studying islands the boundaries are geographically real (Gibbons, 2002). Grímsey is one such place that has real boundaries. It is a small island 40 km north of Iceland and there are only two ways to go there, by sea or by air. This island is 5,3 km<sup>2</sup> and the arctic circle goes through the north part.

In communities dependent upon the fishery fortunes, the rise or fall of the fishery will affect the populations (Hamilton and Colocousis, 2004). Changes in the fishing quota in Iceland have had deleterious effects on small places. The fishery, along with the birds, has sustained life in the community on this island for the centuries. In earlier times men went down the cliff to take the eggs and down to sea for fish. They did this to have food for their families. While they still do these activities, the changing economics of the island now they have to think more and more how to make a living from the tourists that come there.

*“Thanks to a self-evident vulnerability, “the island”, with fallacious simplicity, can be conceived as a convenient platform for any whim or fancy”  
(Baldacchino, 2007).*

Grímsey is one of many places trying to find new ways to support their community. As with other places people have tried to build more tourism into their economies than before.

To satisfy the tourists there has to be some symbolic fabrication of the community. People living there are aware that the tourists look to them to see what normal life is like on Grímsey. This public orientation of the islanders towards the tourists is why the identity of islanders and the community overlapped (Gibbons, 2002). Some islanders understand this. They try to tell the tourists about the past and how people lived on Grímsey when there were fewer trips to the mainland, and especially when they had to find food on the island and sea.

In the wake of globalization there have been disagreements about islands and their communities. Swift changes in population have thrown island communities' survival into question. In changing from traditional industries to tourism, identities are also being changed. Identities of people that do not live there all year long and other temporary populations are thrown into question (Peter Hay, 2006). Research on Grímsey provides a case study to see whether such an island community will dwindle or survive.

When people have children, they often wonder where is the best place to raise them, while also good for the rest of the family. Grímsey is an small island with a population of just 92 people (Hagstofa Íslands, 2009) where there are not many things to worry about for children and usually everyone keeps an eye out for what island children are doing. There are also many differences from the mainland including school issues. There are certain things that children cannot do on Grímsey that are offered on the mainland. Grímsey residents simply try to do as much as they can as well as they can.

However while it may be good to have young children in such a small, closed rural community like Grímsey, there are disadvantages when the children get older. It can be difficult because children have to go away to a mainland school when they are young. However they benefit from the socialization with children their age.. Otherwise they would be isolated with much younger children in their island school.

*In a very real sense, young people must make the decision to stay as consciously as they must make the decision to leave. As a result, the decision to stay or to go, as well as the prospects of returning home or staying gone, has become a prominent issue in growing up in rural and urban communities alike (Bjarnason and Þórlindsson, 2006).*

Though rural communities are understood to be good places for children when they are young it does not necessarily remain true as they grow older and into young adults (Glendinning, A., Nuttall, M., Hendry, L., Kloep, M. And Wood, S. 2003). Even though they



would not have to go away to finish grade school, most of the children do go away eventually. The real challenge to holding people in small islands is not keeping people from leaving but instead developing the things they have learned and finding a way to use them in the islands (Hay, 2006).

In rural places such as Grímsey women often provide unpaid community labor through childcare and care for the elderly. Similarly, organizations or clubs in small places like Grímsey provide activities and it is becoming more difficult to find young women that can continue and grow such clubs (Dahlström, 1996). This is not occurring in Grímsey and the women are working diligently for the women's club.

*The geographical isolation and compact socio-political universe of small island territories is 'likely to promote feelings of fellowship and a sense of community' (Baldacchino, 2004).*

Working at sea is second nature to people in Grímsey because their lives depend on what the ocean gives them, but much more than just the sea matters living in such an isolated place. The closeness to your neighbors and the closeness to the natural world are mostly because of the boundaries islanders find and these boundaries help people to maintain the island communities (Conkling, 2007).

Works and services matters everything for such isolated place like Grímsey because without it there were no residents on that island. Also matters the service like the ferry for them so they can send the fish fresh to the mainland.

## **Research Focus and Methodology**

This project focuses on three different researches which are all connected in one way or another. The first research was on the changes in the fishing quota, tourism and the islanders' identities. The next examined activities for two different subjects, children and adults. The focus on children included activities both after school and in the summertime. The third research investigated work outside of the fishery, including the merger of Grímsey and Akureyri, and the service economy in general.

The methodology employed was in-depth interviewing of people living in Grímsey. The interviews occurred on site at Grímsey, in the respondents' homes. Following a semi-structured format, interviews started by focusing on the same questions, but were open-ended enough to capture a wide variety of exploratory and off-script material. There were twenty four respondents in the first wave, and twelve respondents in the last two projects. They appeared pleased to help me in this project. Of the 36 respondents between all three projects, 17 were women and 19 were men. In the first wave, ten were women and fourteen were men. In the last two waves seven were women and five men. All respondents live on the Island most of the time.

## **Findings**

### **The quota**

For communities such as Grímsey which rely heavily on the fishery difficulties arise when the quota system is not working in their interest. The quota changes in the last few years have affected many small places in Iceland including Grímsey.

All the respondents talked about the curtailment of the quota over the last two years. They estimated the reduction to be about a 30% of the quota for Grímsey, and tied the quota reduction directly to the decrease in the population.

Reflecting on the overall impact of the quota change, sixteen spoke about people moving away from the island, twelve about less work and twelve mentioned how bad this is for the community. Also, nine people talked about how bad an impact this quota change has had in their finances. There were several men that bought fishing quota only to have it taken away from them again – despite leaving them to pay for it.

*We bought 200 tons of quotas that they took away from us right away, and they took a little more than that (male 63 years).*

When there is not enough work in the fishery, it is difficult for Islanders to find other work in small places like Grímsey. As a result people have made adaptations to continue fishing with the lower quotas. Eight mentioned fewer boats fishing, and eight also mentioned decreased work overall. People have lost a lot of quota and two mentioned there were people that have lost their jobs. One tactic people use is to combine their quota. In one example fishers took quota from one boat so they could apply it over the summertime in other boats they are using.

*We did stop using one boat to put the quota to the other two we own we are trying to solve the problem that way (male 59 years).*

Lower wages are making it hard for people to live in Grímsey. People have moved away from the Island because they do not have any work. It is difficult for such a small community when many go away and no one is coming to replace them.

*Every one that needed a job could have a work here and people came from the main land to work, now we are lucky if the Islanders have jobs and also if we have jobs for our kids here (male 31 years).*

Regarding how the quota changes have affected people's jobs, thirteen talked about less work, which is the largest affect on the island. Also four said there were fewer boats in the island, four talked about people moving away and four that there is not as much salary.

*Probably I have to go away this winter to get another job, curtailment of my wages have been 30% in one year (male 60 years).*

I also asked how the quota changes have affected the respondent and his or her family. Five discussed the quota they bought but which was taken away from them even though they still had to pay the debt for it. "The Island has lost about 700 tons of quota in the curtailment, there is contraction in everything here, on land and at sea". Another said "we have bought a lot of quota and put us in to a lot of debt." Twelve talked about lower wages, four talked about people losing their jobs, four talked about a smaller catch, and three talked about less work. One said that if he wanted to move he could not because his home and his fishery are in Grímsey. He said that he cannot go away - it is not an option for him or his family because he still has to pay the debts.

Many Islanders are tense and worried about how things will be on Grímsey if nothing changes in the quota system there. One woman said that she thinks no one will live in Grímsey in a few years if the quota situation is not corrected. She claims that will be the end for Grímsey as we know it today. It will become an Island where people have their summerhouses but no one will live there over winter time, she said.

## Tourism

Every Islander in Grímsey is used to tourism and it is part of their life meeting new people, especially over summertime. The nature, birds, cliffs and the sea fascinate tourists that come to the Island along with the fact that there are people that want to live on a place like this.

Tourism is a business that can change from year to year and one of the questions asked is how tourism has changed in the last 3 years. Twelve people said tourism has increased over the last three years. Ten mentioned that Básar Guesthouse had a new owner who straightened it out. Seven talked about charter fishing, and three talked about Krían restaurant.

There are always more tourists that come during the summertime to Grímsey and the Islanders spoke about how much more Icelandic tourists came this summer than previously.

When asked ‘what summer tourism activities are you aware of?’ most people talked about the growth of tourism this summer. Six people mentioned that the ferry now stops for four hours so tourists have more time to view things in the Island. Three said that most of the tourists come to go over the Arctic Circle, and three said that the number of tourists visiting the Island has increased. Tourists come to look at birds and all the life around. Some tourists also come to sight-see with a guide.

Over winter there are not many tourists on Grímsey. However there is always someone that wants to see the Island in that season – to see the northern lights and see how the weather can change many times in the same day.

Asking Islanders about what winter tourism activities they are aware of, most people, or twenty two said there was almost no tourism over the winter time. Two thought that if there was an attractive travel package then people would come.

*There are not a lot of foreign tourists but we are trying to do more for Icelandic tourists so they will come to us over winter time. Come over*

*weekends in quiet countryside. This is what we are trying to do but still there is no experience on this (female 30 years).*

Respondent were also asked if there is anything more Islanders can do for tourists that come during the winter time. Ten answered yes and six did not know. Three did not have an opinion, two said 'I don't think so' and one said no.

People are very optimistic about tourism in Grímsey and there is a lot they are willing to do to make it work. In the question 'what plans to expand the tourist economy are you aware of?' there were eight that had not heard anything. However, five people talked about taking people to sea and five more talked about taking them charter fishing. Four talked about making a golf course on the island. Three talked about making it easier for the tourists to see as much in the short time they have. Two had heard that the ferry would maybe stop over the weekend in the summertime.

*Try to mark trails so it would be easier for people to walk around the island, put up some signs to point out the best way because of the short time people have that comes with the ferry and stop only for four hours (male 31 years).*

Básar guesthouse has new owners and they have high hopes for tourism in the future. Gallery Gullsól is open the days the ferry comes and tourists can go there to buy souvenirs and get a diploma if they go over the Arctic Circle. Krían restaurant is open every day during the summer and people can sit down, get food and a drink and talk to people, tourists or islanders there.

When islanders were asked what tourism activities they are involved in or are aware of, nine people talked about Gallery Gullsól, and eight talked about the guesthouse Básar. Seven talked about charter fishing and three people talked about Krían restaurant.

*Better places to sleep for tourists and food they can buy, and when they are welcomed, and islanders are guiding them on the island (male 52 years).*

People have high hopes for tourism. However one said that before they never had to think about anything but fish. But now because of all the changes in the quota system this is probably going to be what Grímsey needs in the future.

A question was asked, what ideas people have to expand the tourist economy. Ten talked about taking more tourists charter fishing. Eight talked about guiding the tourists when they go around the island telling them about it, and five talked about having tours around the island. Four talked about sailing around the island with tourists and four talked about looking at the cliffs and things connected to them. Teaching tourists to hunt puffin and taking them whale watching were things a few mentioned.

*Trip on the island and try to make it old fashion, have tractor with cart that have good seat for people, take them up on the island and show them the cliffs (female 31 years).*

The last question about tourism was, do you know of anyone who has reduced their fishing and increased their tourist activity for income? All answered no, but there was one that hopes he will be able to do that next summer

## **Islander**

Hagstofa lists one hundred and three people living on Grímsey (Hagstofa, 2008), but not all of them live there all year long. Some of them only stay there for two or three months in the summer while others come more often throughout the year. This number includes children that had to move away to finish the last two years of elementary school which they cannot

finish in Grímsey. After counting everyone that lives there most of the year the population is around sixty people.

These questions examine what aspects of life on this island matter to the people that live there. Some are born there and others moved there to be with the man or the woman they love but either way everyone I talked to wants to live there and are willing to do many things so they can.

To keep the community on Grímsey going, there are many factors involved. People living there have their own reasons for staying as well as their own opinion about what it is that makes them an islander. They also have opinions about who are islanders and who are not and whether or not people have to live on Grímsey to be islanders.

Examining if people have to live in Grímsey to be an islander was interesting, and many talked around it in their answers. There were thirteen that said no, eight that said yes, and three that said if someone is born and raised there, they can call themselves an Islander, even if they have moved away.

When asked ‘what makes someone an Islander?’ Three themes emerged. Eight respondents eight talked about the fact of living in Grímsey, six that they want to keep their island going, and two said that living in an isolated community is what makes them an Islander. There were other answers including that they are able to see what the island has to offer and that the islanders stick together.

*People become islanders by living here and it is just the community that makes us what we are. In a short time we all just become an islander (female 27 years).*

When islanders are asked whether living on Grímsey will make one an islander, people talked around that too. Fourteen said yes, and seven said yes but it takes time. One said no, one said not real islander and one said “I will never be an islander.”



*Yes people that move here can become an islander, if they can think of living on such small place, fall in love with the nature and feel the freedom (male 59 years).*

An important part of a small community is the characteristics of the people that live there, and Grímsey is no exception. People in such a small community like Grímsey have their own ideas about how long people have to live there to be an islander.

Asked ‘what are the characteristics of an Islander?’ people were not sure how to answer. Many talked about how strange it was for them to judge about that. Nevertheless most of the people gave an answer. Seven said unity, six talked about how good it is for people to come and visit because of their hospitality and five talked about the practicality that people have. Four talked about how fun the people are and the joy of life they have, while two talked about their optimism.

When people answered how long someone has to live on Grímsey to be an islander there was much variety what they think. The lowest value was as soon as people move their address to the island and the most common response was that people would never become an islander even though they lived there. The lowest number that was given was one to two years and the highest number was fifteen years. Other numbers I get were two years, five years, seven years and eight to nine years. The average response 5,69 years for people to live on the island before they can call themselves an islander.

It was interesting to see the answers for these island questions. One man said it is so special to be an Islander that he does not think everyone that lives there for a short time can call themselves an Islander. Another said it is not a question of whether a person can become an Islander just by living on the island while another just said no. It can be hard to move on a place like Grímsey because of the isolation but it is much easier to go to the mainland now than before. One woman said that she wept for the first ten years she lived there, but today she

thinks of herself as an islander. Yet another that has lived there for almost forty years says she will never be an islander.

Unity is a characteristic for Grímsey. People's focus is pragmatic and people are willing to help each other if they are able to. People enjoy living on Grímsey and they are all proud of it. Like one man said, "the loyalty to the island is what made me an islander but it is a little crazy to live here!"

### **School and activities for children**

In Grímsey there are only 11 children in the school and 2 teachers that work there. Children are split into two groups in the school. The first group is 1<sup>st</sup> grade to 4<sup>th</sup> grade and the second group is 5<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They can only finish 8<sup>th</sup> grade in Grímsey after which they have to go to the mainland to finish the last two years of the elementary school.

When asked what they think about sending children to the mainland for school at 14 years old everyone responded that they think it is hard. Some said that they think it is terrible to send their children to the mainland this young, but some mentioned that this is just one of the things that happened in a small community. It also came up that variation between children affects how difficult it is for them to go away from home. Some children seem to respond better than others. For some children it was more fun and they had enough to do, but others thought it was hard. Two people talked about how hard it was for them to leave when they were children, but one spoke about how different it is today.

*I went to school when I was 12 years old, I was in dormitory but my daughter was with her grandmother. Kids today come home once a month but like it was when I left I came home over Christmas, Easter and summertime. Also can kids call home many times a day today but that is something we could not do back then (male 45 years).*

Even though people think it is hard to send children away to mainland school at 14 years old, only five people thought it would be best for the children to finish the school in Grímsey. Seven said it would not be good for them because they need more social interaction with other children their same age, and they will learn social skills that they would not get in Grímsey.

*I have 2 of 5 girls that are in the school and the older one is the only 10 years old kid in the school. She is lonely and I just look forward for them both when they go to the mainland to school, just for their social life (female 30 years).*

Children go to different places when they go to the mainland for school. For many years many of them went to Hrafnagil or Húsabakki for boarding schools but today there are no boarding schools in Iceland. Some went to other places like Reykjavík, but Dalvík and the other two and were the places most children went to. Two mothers I talked to went with their youngest children to the mainland so they could finish their school, and I know there are more outside of my respondents that have also done that.

People have very different opinions about the school in Grímsey. Some talked more about how the school was in the past than how it is now. This winter they had a new teacher and principal and they were all in agreement that it is difficult to judge their work after only 3 months. One said the whole school situation had been broken and six said that they did not think the school had been good. Three said that they thought the teacher and principle had been doing good work over the last few years.

Looking at the teaching of the school seven were not happy with the instruction in the last few years but have high hopes for the new teachers today. One said that teachers were not ambitious enough to go and learn more about new things that were happening in the mainland. Three have mostly been happy about the last few years of teaching in Grímsey.

*In the last 15 years no child from Grímsey has failed on standardize test, but there were a lot more children that did not get that before we did get those teachers (male 64 years).*

When I asked people about the things that school in Grímsey need that the bigger schools in the mainland have, ten mentioned that sports and physical fitness teaching were most important. People also said that they would want to have musical instrument instruction at the school and more handiwork for children such as sewing and making things more from wood. New teachers have started teaching sports at Grímsey and people are happy about that. Some talked about lack of facilities, but are pleased that they are doing their best in these circumstances.

*Everything about sports here, even though they are trying their best I just don't think it is good enough (female 57 years).*

People were asked if there were after school activities and also if they had any suggestion what it could be. Six said that was nothing organized for them to do after school and six talked about open houses for the students. Some said these were once a month and others said twice a month. Seven people think there is more that could be done for the children after school. Suggestions people came up with include instrument teaching after school and some type of sports like practice football. Two did not see that it was possible to do something more for the kids than already is being done

*The kids here are not that close so I cannot see that it could be possible to find something for them to do together (female 40 years).*

*I don't know what more we could do for them because they are few and the age different is that much so I think it is hard to find something for everyone (female 25 years).*

The last question asked about school and activities for children referred to organized activities over the summer time. Everyone answered the same except one, stating that

children have summer jobs and they start working at 6 or 7 years old. In this summer job the children cut grass, remove junk from the island, paint and clean down at the harbor. One suggested a problem with this. Because they are so young when they start working like this, older children will not have any interest in working there with them since they do not match together in this broad age scale.

Another problem that people in Grímsey is facing now is after the merger with Akureyri they cannot offer work to this age of children because children under 14 years old are not allowed to work.

*But here when kids are 14 years old they are working in other things than this so we did get a permission from Akureyri to keep it like we had done it, and I think that is a good thing for the kids (male 54 years).*

Five people said that for children in Grímsey it could be fun to have play course over summertime. One of them explained:

*...I think it is really hard to do because people go to the mainland over summertime and the kids here are maybe 8 or 9 and not always home at the same time so it is hard (female 40 years).*

## **Activities for adults**

When people live in a small community they do not have the access to a coffee houses, theatres, movie theatres, restaurants and other amenities of larger cities. So the first question in activities for adults was what activities exist for adults in Grímsey. Everyone answered the same, Grímur Kiwanis club for men and Baugur women's club, to which every respondent belongs.

The next question was how active are these clubs. Everyone said that the women's club is really active and all except one said that Kiwanis were also active.

*...it is not as much happening in Kiwanis now and I think it has a lot to do with the fact that eight or nine men that are in Kiwanis have not been home this fall. We should have started our work but I don't think it will happen until late in November because of this situation (male 61 years).*

Regarding these clubs' activities, four talked about the women's club having handworks meetings twice a month. Four talked about playing cards at night two times a month, where every adult can come and play. Three talked about the Kiwanis' attempts to have bingo every month over winter time. Every year Kiwanis has an annual celebration where people come together, eat good food, drink, and dance and have a good time.

People spoke of other happenings in both of these clubs. In the women's club they are celebrating the birthday of Willard Fiske. They make a special day with fun for everyone. Willard Fiske was a man that gave a chess set to every home of Grímsey around 1900 and he also gave the island books for their first library and some money that the island could use. This is a special day that is similar to Independence Day for people in Grímsey. They also have Þorablót, traditional Icelandic late-winter food with drinking and dancing into the night.

The next question asked is there something more you think adults need in activities? People came up with many ideas and there were only three people that said that they did not think they would need anything more than is in the island now. The suggestions people came up with activities for them like football, basketball, physical training for adults, dance course, dances often in weekends and putting on a play.

*I would love to see theater here which we are acting in I think it would be great if we would put up one show over winter time. I think it would be really fun and I am not going to stop talking about that until it happens (female 28 years).*

When looking at how involved people are in activities, every woman I talked to was in the women's club and the men in Kiwanis. The final question is how do you like being in these activities? Three people said that they would not want to live in Grímsey if they would not have these clubs. Every respondent except one said they liked it a lot to be in these clubs. One woman said she has lived here too short a time and cannot judge yet. Nevertheless, she likes the clubs, despite her inexperience.

*I like it a lot and I think it is what we need here, we are more together and I think this make a good spirit in the island (male 64 years).*

## **Work in Grímsey**

When looking at the work available in a small place like Grímsey the diversity is small and the potential jobs are rather few. Many people therefore go to the mainland to get advanced degrees and most do not come back to live on the island.

The first question asked was how diverse are the jobs that are available in Grímsey, other than fishery or tourism. The majority, or ten, talked about the diversity of jobs and there was only one person that thought the jobs in the island are not diverse.

The next question was have jobs increased or decreased in recent years and a large part of respondents, or seven, thought jobs had decreased. However, there were people that said it was hard to say if the jobs had decreased or increased because of the changes that have occurred on the island. There were fewer boats than before but more tourism prompted more jobs so they thought it was hard to answer.

The third question asked if there were a lot of differences between jobs in the winter and summer time. Eight people said that over the summertime there is more life on the island

when the tourists are coming and with more tourists there are more jobs for people that live on the island.

*There are 2 guesthouses on the island and there are many things we are trying to do around them. We are trying to do more for the tourists so they want to stop for longer time when they come here (male 64 years).*

Question four regarded the people on the island, asking are there enough people over wintertime to work or do you need to get people from the mainland? Most people said that there are usually some people in the island over wintertime working that come from the mainland and also there have been people from Poland working there for few years. But some said that there were enough people on the island but they just do not want to do the jobs.

*There are enough people in the island to work but not all people want to work these jobs. Also do people have to want to work, I think it is disgraceful that we have to get people from the mainland to work here because there is enough work here only if people wants to work (female 30 years).*

The last question asked about summertime, are there enough people on the island to work. Most of the people talked about the young people coming home from school over the summertime so there are enough people to work; people that want to work can get a job.

## **Service**

When looking at a small community like Grímsey service both from the mainland and the services in the island is one thing that matters a lot to the people that live on the island. There are certain services like doctor's visits, school services, ferry and flight to and from the island and others that they are through the government and then the services they are getting from bigger companies from the mainland. Changes have occurred in some services over the last



few years. Some think the changes have been for the worse but most people agree that the services over the years have been changing to for the better.

Looking at what people think about the services both on the island and to the island is interesting, especially when looking at the changes over the last few years. When asking if there have been any changes in services in Grímsey for the last few years, people are in two groups. One group thinks there have been a lot of improvements in the services, while others think there has been little change. People who think service has improved talk about changes in the store, more travel between the island and the mainland. Those that think changes have been for the worse, say they do not get their post to their homes anymore. Instead they have to get it to the store every day.

When looking at how happy people are with the services offered in Grímsey most people are satisfied with the service they are getting. Some think the store and the restaurant could do more for the people that live in Grímsey all year long such as stocking more variety in the store and extending the hours of the restaurant over the wintertime.

*Can we ask for something more when we are just around 70 people that live here in Grímsey all year long? (male 64 years).*

When looking at what services matters most, everyone was unanimous that Grímsey would be unlivable without the store. Several also mentioned that the post office is another thing they would not want to miss. Others and also spoke about the flight and the ferry as most important.

Regarding services lacking on Grímsey, most people mentioned the doctor's visit. The doctor visits once a month, but people would prefer he come more often than that. People also said they would like to have one nurse in the island full time because it would bring them more safety. They would have more peace of mind just knowing about someone has the skills

if something happens. Many however thought the islanders are in a good spot and do not think there is anything more they will likely need as one pointed out:

*In this small community like ours it is unrealistic for us to ask for much more than we have. This is all things you know when you move here and you cannot put the standards higher or ask for more (female 25 years).*

Regarding the flight service to the island people are in two groups. One likes the service and the other doesn't like the service. A few said that they like the service but think it is too expensive; that people of Grímsey should get a discount rather paying the same price as everyone else coming to the island by air. A few just don't like the airline's service and think that they could do much better.

*It does not matter what happened we are always put behind if there is something wrong, there is only one air plane and we have so many times heard the excuse that the plane is in some other flight on the mainland and then we just have to wait here in Grímsey no matter what is happening here (female 30 years).*

Responses regarding the ferry service are similar to the flight service. Most like the service on the ferry but they do not like that they have to pay the same price as everyone else. People talked about how much they like the service on board and how the person that works on the ferry is always really nice and does everything they can to make the trip as good as possible. What people do not like is that they are charged the same price as others and the price has gone up the last two semesters both for them and their cars.

*The ferry is the main road for us and it is really expensive and getting more expensive for us to get products sent here than others that is getting products between places on the mainland. It is getting too expensive to transport cars and things between Grímsey and the mainland, the price I always getting higher and higher for us (female 59 years).*

## Merger

Grímsey has been its own civil parish until this year when they merged with Akureyri after voting in both places. Recently Grímsey has not wanted to merge with anyone. However in Iceland there are certain rules about how big or small civil parish can be, and Grímsey falls far short of the minimum.. As such it was just a question of when the government would force the merge with another civil parish and then the citizens of Grímsey would not have anything to say about it.

The first question was what impact the merger going to have on Grímsey. Most people hope it is going to be better for the island but it is too early to tell. People also spoke of how little they know about what is going to happen. There have not been meetings to tell them about what will and will not change and, so they think it is hard to judge.

*I don't know what we are getting out of this but people in Akureyri that introduced the merger to us did not promise anything and just told us it would be like it was before here for us. I am happy that now we can vote people that know what they are doing and they have an education to do these jobs. Being a head of a local government takes a lot of time and it costs a lot of money sending him or her to meetings in the mainland and I think it is better to skip that (female 59 years).*

All the respondents said that they had voted for the merger and when asked why there were a variety different answers. Most mentioned that Grímsey would be obliged to merge with another township within two years anyway. As such they preferred to merge electively with Akureyri rather than whomever the government assigned at the end of the two year period. There were concerns that other parishes would not treat Grímsey as well in a merger as Akureyri would.

*I did vote with the merger because it was in offer to merge with Akureyri. If we had not done it now we would have been set to merge with someone else in 2011 and then it could have been some of the small places around us. In that case I think it is better to have a choice and choose Akureyri (female 25 years).*

## Conclusion

This paper is built on three waves of research on Grímsey. Those three waves of research looked at quotas, tourism and what it means to be an islander?

First I explored the economic and social impact the quota reduction has had on the residents of Grímsey. I asked about the quota, how it has changed, and what affect it has had. I also asked what changes people have made to continuing fishing after the quota adjustment. I asked what impact this has for the families and what the overall impact is going to be for the community in Grímsey. These responses make it easier to see what people are going through and what they have had to do to make things work after all the changes on the island.

Then I explored perceptions of the tourism economy, specifically in relation to the reduction of the fishing quota, and residents' attempts to expand tourism. I asked about how tourism had changed in the last three years and what people are most aware of in tourism activities both in the summer and winter time. I also asked what ideas people have and have heard about to increase tourism on the island.

In these responses I could see that there are many ways people are thinking about increasing tourism. I also got information about what has changed and what new things in tourism people have been trying.

The third and the last thing I looked at was how gaining a sense of Islander-ness as understood by those who live in Grímsey. Here I asked islanders what makes them islanders and if people have to live in the island to be an islander. I also asked if people can become an islander after moving there and how much time it takes for people that have moved there to become islanders. I got information that was fun and interesting, and learned that people see a few things in very different ways.

What I found in this project was that people are willing to do as much as they can to live on their island. Many changes have been made in the fishery and many of the islanders

feel that perhaps the best thing is to move towards tourism. This is a proud, hard working people that are willing to make an effort so they do not have to move away from Grímsey.

The next wave focused on activities for children and adults in the island. First I explored school organization and teaching in Grímsey I also explored activities that are offered for children over summer and winter time. I asked if there were some things that are missing in the school in Grímsey that school on the mainland offer. Then I asked people what they think about sending their kids to the mainland when they are only 14 years old, and where they went to school on the mainland. Finally I asked people about activities for kids both in winter time after school and in the summer time.

Through these responses I could see what people thought about the school, and how the teachers have been doing. I learned what people in Grímsey think about sending their children to the mainland at 14 years of age. I also got information about what activities there are for kids in the island.

The second thing I explored in this wave was activities for adults in Grímsey. Here I asked islanders what activities exist on the island for adults and if people think there is more that is necessary for adults. I also asked what activities people are involved in and how active are these two clubs on the island.

Through these responses I could see how active and necessary these two clubs are for such a small place as Grímsey. I got information that almost everyone living on the island are in these two clubs that are there. Further, most of the people I talked to agreed that they would not want to live in Grímsey if they would not be in these clubs. Also was it heartening to see the respect between the woman's club and Kiwanis Club. They are very well operated and I believe that is a result of Grímsey's isolation, and they need to stick together if anything happened.

This project showed me how much need there is for adult people to have something other to think about than home or work in their lives. I knew that both Kiwanis club and women's club are active and there is great need for Grímsey residents because they are so isolated. Also it showed me that people care much about their children and their school but it is hard to implement change in such a small place. But similar to the prior research, it was clear that those living on this island are a proud people willing to do everything they can to stay on their island. They are islanders and they are proud of it.

The third and final wave of research focused on work in Grímsey, service on the island and the services the island gets from the mainland and the merger with Akureyri. First I explored how diverse jobs are in Grímsey other than sea or tourism. Then I asked people about employment, and if jobs have increased or decreased over recent years and if they think there is a big difference in winter or summer jobs in the island. Finally I asked respondents if there are enough people over wintertime in the island to work the jobs that are offered or if they have to get people from the mainland to do this work. I also asked them the same questions regarding summertime.

Through these questions I could see that most of the people I talked to thought the jobs in Grímsey are fairly diverse. Looking at the question on jobs increasing or decreasing people responded in two ways, some that there were fewer boats so that employment had decreased. Others looked more at how much tourism had grown so they think there are more jobs around that in the island than before.

The next thing I explored was the services in Grímsey. First I asked people if they thought the services had changed on the island in recent years, and then I asked if they liked the service that is offered in Grímsey. I asked if there were some services that mattered more than others on the island and then if there were some services lacking on the island. The last

questions were about the flight and the ferry, and how people like the service islanders get there.

Through these responses I could see that most people do like the service over all that they get on the island. However, many are not as happy about the services they have to get from the mainland. In those cases people mentioned the price and service on both the flight and the ferry. Some spoke of the doctor that just comes once a month, as they would like to see him more often on the island.

The third and final thing I explored in this research was the merger with Akureyri. First I asked about expectations about the impact the merger is going to have on Grímsey. Then I asked if people were for or against this merger and why.

Through these responses I saw that people I spoke to voted for the merger. However they often did not know what changes to expect. Many felt that they did not get much information before they decided to merge with Akureyri. They are all very hopeful that in the long run, the merge is going to be better for them. They focused especially on electing to merge with Akureyri now as opposed to being forcibly merged with whomever the federal government decreed in the near future.

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