

## Speech given on May 23, 2019 at Edu-Arctic Conference in Paris

Good morning excellences', ladies and gentlemen.

It is a true pleasure and an honour to be here today to celebrate and learn more about the results of the Edu-Arctic project.

Growing up by the harbour in a small town in the Faroes in the middle of the North Atlantic at the gate to the Arctic, you are acutely aware of the nature that surrounds you.

The nature decides whether the economy is growing or if it is declining. The nature literally decides whether you are able to leave your house, your island or the country. The nature inspires and astonishes, and the nature is reckless and takes lives.

Growing up with nature on your doorstep, you would expect that an integrated and dynamic approach to the natural sciences in the school system would be self-evident.

Well, going to school in the middle of the 80'ies and the 90'ies this unfortunately was not the case – as in most other countries, I expect.

The classes in biology, physics and chemistry were a constant struggle. There weren't many attempts in trying to translate these vital subjects into matters that involved us, our lives and our surroundings.

However, there were exceptions. In the first years at school, we had a young and energetic teacher who took us out on field trips. I vividly remember the seaweed excursions in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and it is still printed in my mind that there are 261 different species of seaweed in the Faroes.

Another exception were the classes in geology. We learnt about the origins of the Faroes. We visited sites in our island where you could see the layers of basalt, volcanic ashes and coal and we visited the researchers at the national geological research institution.

The teacher managed to make the subject relevant to us and create an eagerness in learning more about the early days of our archipelago. It didn't result in a geology degree, though, but the fascination and curiosity about the creation of our planet will always be there.

Curiosity is an innate characteristic of the human species. I can see it in my 8 year old who is constantly requiring explanations from his poor parents about all sorts of animals and natural phenomena.

With a strong focus on improved teaching methods and the importance in cultivating the interest of children in the STEM subjects, there is no doubt that things have improved immensely in the Faroes, but as you all know this requires constant vigilance.

This is why the Edu-Arctic programme is a truly fascinating project and the Faroe Islands are very proud to have been represented by Jarðfeingi who has been an active partner in the project.

Having followed this process from the side it is apparent that this project is run by idealists with a firm belief in the importance of attracting young people to the natural sciences and raise awareness of the interconnectedness in nature.

The enormous interest in the project is a clear sign of the need for tools like these as well as a sign of the huge international interest in the Arctic.

An important explanation of the success of the project is without doubt the variety of innovative online tools combined with expeditions and competitions

With this project, you have made an important contribution in developing citizens who cherish nature. Citizens where an evident part of their lives will be to respect the nature and use it sustainably. You get citizens who engage in science and dare to question scientific results. And you certainly get more young people who want to create a career as scientists.

I am very excited to hear the presentation later today about one concrete result coming out of the Arctic competitions, the idea of Yngva Lamhauge from the Faroes to spread knowledge about the Arctic with a mobile quiz. And I was very pleased to learn that some of the winners of the latest competition will be going to the Faroes this summer.

In the Faroes, our heavy economic dependency on natural resources and export of seafood means that we are well aware of the need to encourage and support future generations of researchers in the “STEM” subjects.

It is vital to invest in research and development both in order to create new insights but also to provide knowledge and solutions which lay the basis for creating a sustainable and progressive society.

We have a range of dynamic research institutions with highly qualified researchers in the Faroes. They provide irreplaceable knowledge to most sectors of society - fisheries, aquaculture, health, linguistics to name a few.

However, living in a small country in the High North there is a constant risk that the young people leave the islands to get an education and eventually decide not to return - with invaluable losses for the society.

Therefore, we need to develop a society that attracts young people and extends rich and qualified educational offers for young people in the Faroes. This is something we have been working on for many years – for instance by upgrading the number and variety of educations.

And indeed, the efforts bear fruit. Today many young people choose to stay and get their education in the Faroes. And those who leave, return after they have finished their studies.

The result is that we in recent years have gone from having a decreasing population to having a population growth on 7% - which is the highest in Europe.

However, in order to guarantee high quality educations and research these cannot be performed in isolation.

Therefore, it is decisive that Faroese researchers take active part in international scientific cooperation.

Since 2010, we have been an associated country to the EU's research programmes, currently known as Horizon 2020. The Faroese participation has been a success and is much valued amongst Faroese researchers.

As a part of our participation in Horizon there are plenty of opportunities for researchers to come to the Faroes for shorter or longer periods. In the Faroes, researchers get the rare opportunity of being a big fish in a small pond rather than a small fish in a big pond.

The Faroese government is also aiming for the Faroes to join the coming Erasmus+ programme in 2021 so that Faroese students, in addition to having access to Nordic Universities also can study at European Universities and vice versa.

Faroese researchers are also very engaged in Arctic research – both in the Arctic Council Working Groups and in Nordic and North Atlantic scientific cooperation.

Faroese participation and expertise in Arctic research and monitoring covers a range of areas, from flora and sea birds, marine biology, oceanography and climate change, to environmental pollution and radiation, as well as human health, social development and governance.

The commonalities we share with other circumpolar countries and communities provide an excellent basis for focused and effective international research cooperation in our region.

Such cooperation is not only necessary, but absolutely vital for small countries. We have specialized and highly relevant contributions to make through collaborative and comparative projects in collaboration with other researchers from the High North as well as from the EU and other international partners.

According to Faroese researchers, the Arctic cooperation is one of the few where participants have a common understanding of the link between human and nature, sustainable use of the natural resources and the challenges we share as countries and communities in the High North. Therefore, the Arctic cooperation is highly valued in the Faroe Islands.

Once again, congratulations to all the partners with a very successful project. It will be interesting to follow the legacy of the Edu-Arctic Project.

In any case, the public access to all the lectures on YouTube is a treasure along with the seeds you have planted in thousands of young people in the Arctic and Europe with an interest in STEM subjects and a respect for our nature.

Thank you.

Elin Mortensen, Head of Mission of the Faroes to EU