

Faroe Islands – The periphe



By Elin Heinesen, managing director of SamVit - Faroe Islands Enterprise.

As people living in an increasingly globalised environment the Faroese, much like the rest of the world, need to embrace change to whatever extent necessary. The ability to cooperate effectively and develop strong networks is becoming more important. And still it is crucial for us to hold on strongly to our unique identity if we want to stay competitive.

The burning question is: What role can a little nation like the Faroe Islands play in a globalised world? In my view information, communication and technology are creating a new reality. It's the 'levelled playing field' where small companies and nations can now compete, whereas before they simply did not stand a chance. Things like innovation and creativity are becoming essential in every area of business, and a nation like the Faroes has a distinct strength in this context. I think it's crucial that we use this as an opportunity.

To stay competitive, we have to be inventive and learn how to develop new concepts and fresh thinking. And when setting our goals and objectives, we have to be strategic and think ahead – yet in following through on plans we have to be consistent. But nobody can be an expert in every field and that's why networking is so important... knowing who to turn to when... With all this new technology – and the Faroes are very much up-to-date – we're looking at something quite interesting.

The World is Hungry for Originality

But what contribution can the Faroe Islands make? In my view, it seems that remote places like the Faroes are becoming more and more interesting to more and more people. I believe that in a world of increasing globalisation the periphery inevitably becomes interesting because it is so different. Just think of Iceland and Bjørk. I believe that people are hungry for originality and authenticity – maybe mainly on the mainland where globalisation has levelled out cultures almost to the point of lost identity. That might be the reason why peripheral countries like the Faroe Islands can now become



the focus of attention and therefore – in a way – become a new centre.

A New Frontier

There are still new frontiers to be discovered in the world – and the Faroe Islands might be just that: a new frontier – an unspoiled treasure. People are becoming aware of that. Tourism is now the fastest-growing industry in the Faroes. But what's so attractive here on this rain-ridden, wind-torn archipelago? So much so that some of our guests return every year, and some even decide to settle down for the rest of their lives? Words like powerful, intense, peaceful and authentic are often used when trying to describe the feel of the Faroes – and the fact that everything is close, whether you want it or not. People are fascinated by the contrasts and the Faroe Islands are truly a land of contrasts: romantic and dramatic – a modern society, in an unforgettable timeless setting.

The New York Times published an article about The Faroe Islands by the journalist Stephen Metcalf on the 25th of March this year. The headline went: "Into the Mystical Unreal Reality of the Faroe Islands". I'll quote from this article:

Like Reality and Fairy-Tale in One

»The Faroe Islands is easily the most moodily beautiful place I have ever been. Each island is a giant slice of elaborately tiered basalt, tilted to one side and covered in green, tussocky felt. Streamer clouds, almost mannered in their perfection, encircle the mountains. Rocky cliffs, topped in arêtes and tarns,

plunge into the sea, while up from the water jut massive, looming sea stacks. It rains here a lot, and waterfalls flow pretty much continuously.«

This is – in my view – a beautiful poetic description of The Faroes. And let's stay in the poetic corner. Danish author and jazz singer Suzanne Brøgger, who visited the islands in March this year, described her experience in a radio programme in this way: »It's a cosmic experience. The Faroe Islands is a country which is – and is not. It is in constant flux. It keeps disappearing: One moment it's lost in the fog, and suddenly – there it is again in all its magnificent beauty. Like magic. Like reality and fairytale in one. In these majestic surroundings you become almost painfully confronted with life's vulnerability – and that is really inspirational. That is probably why creative people thrive here and why such magnificent art on an absolute top international level is created here. Actually, I was invited to the island Antigua to sit under a palm tree, but I preferred to visit the Faroe Islands – maybe because it seems to suit my temperament more.«

Bad Weather Has Become Our Advantage

Indeed, the Faroese have a very rich culture and history. We all share a profound love for our country and our heritage. But we have not been so proud of having what we think is probably the worst weather on earth. We cannot imagine that people from countries with warmer and sunnier weather would be interested in visiting a place like this. So even if this country has developed into a modern society fully in line with our neighbours,

we have been keeping a low profile outwards for a long time. Living tranquil is living well, they say here.

That is the main reason why the Faroese have kept the secret to themselves, and why the Faroe Islands have not been culturally affected by the outside world as much as many other countries in this part of the world. Consequently the Faroese have a very strong cultural identity, which is one of the things that often amazes visitors. In a world where globalisation – as I said – levels out cultures to the point of lost identity, things have actually combined in favour of the Faroese. In that sense bad weather has formed the surroundings, the skills and the very soul of the Faroese in a favourable way. If you turn it around this way – 'bad weather' might just be the reason why you should visit the Faroes!

The Country Holds Many Surprises

For millions of years the roaring ocean with its heavy waves has been slowly eating away at these rocks in the middle of the North Atlantic in a constant battle with the cliffs – leaving almost vertical hillsides that suddenly drop hundreds of meters straight down into the deep blue sea. The ocean climate and the small size of the Faroes may make them one of the wettest countries on earth, so the landscape is traversed by rivers, brooks and waterfalls wherever you go. It is a miracle that people and creatures have managed to survive here in this seemingly inhospitable place for more than a thousand years. You've got to be creative to do that.

But there is more to it than first meets the eye. This misty

fairy land hidden out here in the North Atlantic holds many amazing surprises. If you travel just a bit deeper into it you will find narrow fjords and straits and soft sappy grass in bright green valleys complemented by cosy small villages by the seaside with closely-packed houses in all colours of the rainbow, where people live together in peace, feeling content and safe. The crime rate here is among the lowest in the world, the average life expectancy is among the highest in the world, and the birth rate (2.6 children) is the highest in all of Europe.

If you delve even further, you will discover that this nation – once so isolated – has moved to a new level. Today, highly educated Faroese people work all around the world – scientists, engineers and hundreds of sailors navigating heavy tankers and carriers across the five oceans. So even if other people might be unaware of the Faroes, the Faroese themselves are very aware of the outside world. So what advantages do we have in comparison with the outside world?

A Modern Society in the Middle of Everything

The Faroe Islands might seem remote and peripheral, but they are actually in the middle of everything – strategically located along important sea lanes in the north-eastern Atlantic right between the two richest continents on earth – only a one-hour flight away from the UK, Norway and Iceland and two hours from Copenhagen, Denmark.

We have other advantages as well. Today, the islands are fully up-to-date in terms of modern technology. Almost everyone is online, connected to the outside world by satellites and fibre-optic cables on the bottom of the ocean. Until recently, the only way to reach the remote villages and islands was either by small boats or by walking up and down steep mountains. Today the country is pierced with tunnels through mountains and under the sea, leaving 85 % of the people less than an hour away from each other. It is also worth mentioning that 45 % of the power consumption is generated by rainwater.

The Best Fish Products in the World

The waters around the Faroe Islands are said to be the cleanest in the world. The perfect mix of the warm Gulf Stream from the south and the Arctic waters from the north produce a paradise for marine flora and fauna around the Faroe Islands. Hungry fish stocks come in all sizes to graze and it is no coincidence that the