



Dvørgamoy at Toftir being manned. Photo Regin Debess.

Living Culture - an Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Faroe Islands

The Faroese Boat – boatbuilding, traditions and use

Its origin is the Nordic clinker-built boat, but the Faroese boat has been adapted for conditions in the Faroe Islands, and boat-builders have passed the craft on to future generations. It was relied upon when fishing, hunting and in transportation between the islands. The Faroese boat is not as important any more, and today it is mostly used in rowing competitions and other leisure activities. But Faroese boats are still being built, and the beautiful boats still play an important part in Faroese culture.

The Faroese boat has had immense importance for living conditions in the Faroe Islands. It has been used for fishing, fowling, whale hunting, in agriculture and for transportation between the islands.

The commercial use has been considerably reduced, but the Faroese boat is still being used in fishing and for leisure pursuits, and it is not uncommon for people to own a Faroese boat although many of them are resting idly in boathouses around the country.

Today interest organizations are responsible for most of the activities concerning the Faroese boat.

Several associations have been established with the purpose to encourage the use, knowledge and maintenance of the Faroese boat. The associations maintain old boats, have new boats built and organize and facilitate clinker boat related activities, particularly for children and young people.

During the summer several hundred people take part in the rowing competitions, which are the main attraction in the summer festivals around the country.

Most boats built today are racing boats. Only exceptionally a boat may be built for an individual or a boat club.

Approximately ten boat-builders are active in the Faroe Islands today although they don't have boatbuilding as their sole occupation. The boatbuilding craft has been conveyed from one boatbuilder to the next. Based on the age-old craft, size and shape are calculated and formed to fit conditions and planned use.

The Faroese boat can be seen as a race boat and a rowing boat, frequently with an outboard motor and sometimes with a sail, and as a motorboat with a house for the engine.

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The origin of the Faroese boat is the Nordic clinker-built boat with approximately 2000 years of history. It is believed, however, that the Faroese boat got its beautiful, seaworthy shape in the middle of the 17th century. Lucas Debes writes in 1673 that "...some practise boatbuilding, building the most beautiful boats, light and very advantageous in these dangerous seas, so that the Norwegian boats cannot be compared to the Faroese ones."

The Faroese boat was used for all transportation and for fishery. The boat was adapted to the conditions making it seaworthy and light. In many places the landing conditions are difficult, and where the coast line is steep, the Faroese boat was well suited because it is stable at sea and light to haul ashore.

The characteristics of the Faroese boat is the construction with keel, boat planks and rowing gear. A clinker-built boat has its keel raised, and the planks are subsequently added edge upon edge and riveted together. The boat is formed gradually as the planks are added. The keel is from oak, and the boat planks are from spruce, pine or larchwood.

Boatsizes are mostly named according to the number of rowers: "tristur" and "tribekkur" – a boat with three thwarts, four-oar boat, five-, six-, eight-, ten-oar boat and "seksæringur" – a boat rowed by twelve. In recent times a few "teinæringar" – a boat with ten pairs of oars – have been built as well.

Faroese boats are not built according to a fixed design, but according to measuring stick, key measurements and traditions from older skilled craftsmen and by the builder's eye.

A person could call himself a boatbuilder after apprenticeship with an older boatbuilder for two winters and subsequently having built twelve boats. Originally boats were built out of doors. Boatbuilders would travel from village to village with their tools, building boats on the spot. Later other bigger tools were added, and the boats were built inside. The knowledge and skills of boatbuilding were passed on, and special professional environments with boatbuilding as the main profession, were to be found in Nólsoy and Mikladalur.

The social significance of the Faroese boat changed in the beginning of the 20th century when it was substituted by bigger boats and ships. The first racing boats, which are particularly light and fast boats, were built in the first half of the 20th century, and the motor boat - a considerably bigger and heavier boat, used for example in fishing in Greenland, got its shape in the middle of the 20th century.

The number of boatbuilders has been decreasing steadily, and the Faroese boat was transferred to the museum.

PRESENTATION AND NARRATIVE

An important element of the presentation and narrative of the Faroese boat is its visibility in everyday life and the opportunity for people, particularly children and young people, to acquire knowledge about the boat, both by transmission between generations and by organized clinker boat experience. And much is being done.

Several interest groups organize lessons in rowing and sailing for children and young people. They also organize activities and trips with Faroese boats. The organizations do great work by spreading knowledge about the Faroese boat, as well as about rowing and boat building.

The racing boats are evident around the country throughout the summer, and many children, young and adults are active in the many rowing associations in the country. The rowing competition is broadcast live on Faroese Radio (Kringvarp Føroya), and there is vast interest in rowing competitions among people. The National Rowing Association (Róðrarsamband Føroya) is actively encouraging interest in the Faroese boat and the rowing competitions in the Faroe Islands.

Boatbuilders receive visitors, both Faroese and foreigners, and several projects are being planned to create living museums with boats and boatbuilding.

In Tórshavn the City Council has reserved the innermost spaces at the boat bridges in the harbour - on the Kongabúgv - for Faroese boats so that they are easily admired, lending a charming atmosphere to the harbour area.

Several local museums have Faroese boats in custody. The National Museum has more than 30 boats in store, extensive collections of images, documents and artefacts, such as boatbuilder's tools and gear in safe keeping. The Faroese boat is on exhibition, and the school service in the National Museum imparts knowledge of the Faroese boat and Faroese boatbuilding to students.

FUTURE SITUATION

There is great interest in the Faroese boat, and given all the activities instigated by individuals and associations its prospects seem good – at least for some time.

The biggest threat to the Faroese boat and Faroese boatbuilding is the smallness of the market and the fact that boatbuilders are growing older and fewer in numbers.

A report on Faroese boatbuilding published by the Ministry of Culture (Mentamálaráðið) recommends the development of new business opportunities for traditional boatbuilding. The recommendation is for the establishing of a boatbuilding yard as a living museum where the craft is preserved while boatbuilders get a job opportunity presenting the craft for tourists and school classes.

The report also recommended organizing courses on Technical College and a stand on vocational education and apprenticeships in boatbuilding. With no apprentices in the making, it will only be c. 20 years until the manually transmitted knowledge of Faroese boatbuilding will be gone.

That is why measures are necessary to save the Faroese boat.

THOSE WHO PERFORM INTANGIBLE CULTURE AND HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRADITIONAL HERITAGE.

The Faroese boat is part of the intangible culture belonging to most people in the Faroe Islands. Many people own a boat or know someone who does. Many have been out fishing in a Faroese boat, and many have tried to use an oar.

Much knowledge about the Faroese boat rests with people all around the country for example members of boat organizations and local museums. The boat associations organize activities related to living culture involving the Faroese boat, and every year thousands of people join in boat festivals, outings, courses, celebrations and other arrangements.

The association *Teinæringur* in Tórshavn and the interest group *Greipur* in Argir and Hvítanes arrange lessons for schoolchildren and other activities.

The association *Grindabátarnir* (*The pilot whale boats*) in Vágur has about ten old pilot whale boats and racing boats. The boats are being used both in pilot whale hunt and for excursions, engaging both young people and grown ups and elderly people, both men and women.

The association *Nadoddur* in Tvøroyri arranges excursions and they have a club house in Hvítanes in Tvøroyri.

In Toftir the interest group *Dvørgamoy* organizes culture-historical events as well as events for students.

All these people and associations combine to keep the cultural heritage involving the Faroese boat alive.

Róðrarsamband Føroya (The Faroese Rowing Association) and the 33 boatrace clubs around the country keep rowing competitions alive. Several hundred people are involved in the boat races. The organizers, the boat crews, and those supporting the activities one way or other keep the cultural heritage concerning Faroese boatrace alive.

The expertise in Faroese boatbuilding rests first and foremost with the boatbuilders who have acquired the knowledge and perform the craft. There are approximately ten boatbuilders, and it varies how many boats each of them builds. The boatbuilders are the leading bearers of the living cultural heritage concerning the Faroese boat.

REFERENCES

The National Library (Føroya landsbókasavn) in 1966 published the second edition of the booklist The Faroese Boat. Books, articles and manuscripts. A selection. (Hin føroyski báturin. Bøkur, greinir og handrit. Eitt úrval). In the booklist there is a survey of books, articles and extracts about the Faroese boat. The material is about the boat in general, boatbuilding, boatnames, traditions in relation to boats and about the use of the boat. 88 references are in the booklist.

Andras Mortensen, historian, published his ph.d. thesis in 2000: *The Faroese Rowing Boat. Maritime culture in the Faroe Islands in the old days. (Hin føroyski róðrabáturin. Sjómentir føroyinga í eldri tíð).*

The National Museum (Tjóðsavnið) has a large collection of pictures and documents about the Faroese boat, www.tjodsavnid.fo.

The webpage of Róðrarsamband Føroya (The National Rowing Association of the Faroe Islands) contains material on the Faroese boat and boat racing, www.rsf.fo

The Association Grindabátarnir in Vágur has informative material about their boats, presentation and pictures from excursions and arrangements, www.grindabatar.fo

The interest club Nadoddur has informative material on <https://www.facebook.com/groups/520933744603297/about/>.

The association Teinæringur has informative material on the homepage www.batasmid.com

About the subject

Title

The Faroese Boat – boatbuilding, traditions and use.

Classification in the inventory

Oral cultural tradition

General tradition, customs and festivities

Knowledge and tradition concerning nature and the universe

Traditional workmanship

Location

The Faroese boat is built and used all over the country. Boatbuilders, boatrace clubs, interest groups and individuals with an interest in the Faroese boat are active around the country

Submitting parties

Róðrarsamband Føroya (The National Rowing Association of the Faroe Islands), Felagið Grindabátarnir í Vági (The Grindaboat Association in Vágur), Felagið Teinæringur (Ten Pairs of Oars Society), Bátafelagið Naddoddur (Naddoddur Boat Society), Áhugafelagið Greipur (Greipur Boat Society), Ánarafelagið Dvørgamoy (Dvørgamoy Boat Society), Jóan Petur Clementsen, self-employed boat builder; Guðmundur Sjúrdarson Norðbúð, self-employed boat builder; Kaj Hammer, self-employed boat-builder; Sámal Hansen, self-employed boat-builder; Terji R.Jakobsen, self-employed boat-builder and Tjóðsavnið (The National Museum).

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