

# The Danish language in Iceland

THE KEY TO THE NORDIC COMMUNITY

ANN-SOFIE MICHELSEN

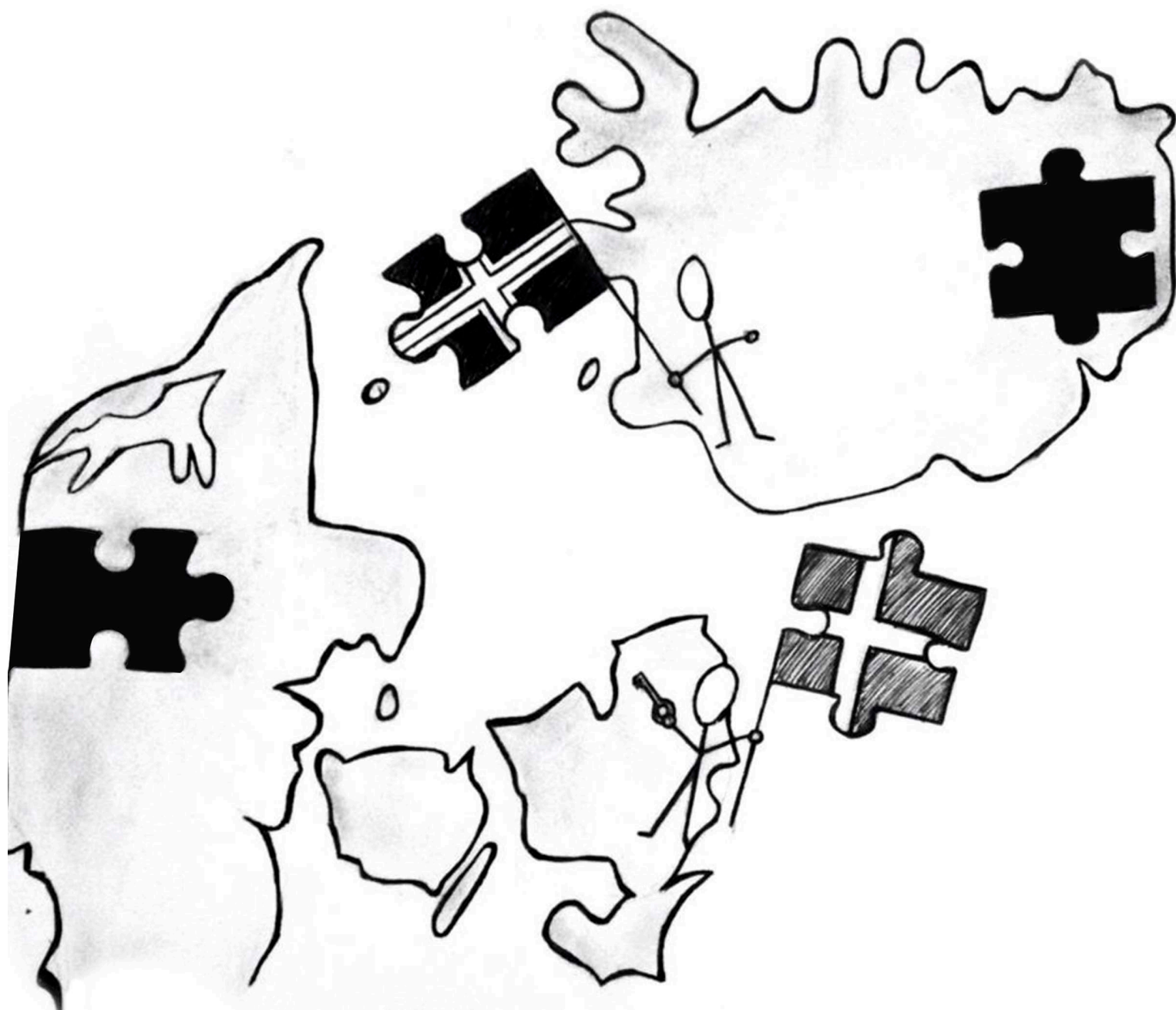
FLEUR VAN TOOR

HANKE MARA VAN EK

LAURA SANDLYKKE TRANBERG

MARIA MEI-MEI KJÆR PETERSEN

ÓSK ANNE-SOPHIE MANNICHE



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SUPERVISED BY MICHAEL HARBSMEIER

**ABSTRACT:** The historical and cultural relations between Iceland and Denmark date back to the Viking age. Today the connection between the two countries are less visible but can be tracked in the Icelandic Educational system where the Danish language is being taught from 7th-10th grade. We investigate the relevance of the Danish language within the Icelandic education system and the experience of the language by interviewing students, politicians, and experts within the field of education as subjects for the study. The findings emphasize how the subjects make meaning of the relevance of the language through their lived world. It can be concluded that it is not only the history between the two countries that dominates the importance of Danish being taught as a subject within the Icelandic education system, but moreover also the important part the language take in connecting Iceland to the rest of the Nordic community in regards to education, labor market, and politics.

**SUMMARY:** El proyecto que estamos escribiendo es una etnografía sobre el idioma danés en Islandia. Nuestro objetivo es investigar si el danés es útil en los colegios islandeses y si les será útil en un futuro.

Además si la historia compartida entre Dinamarca y Islandia ha dejado huellas en la Islandia actual, una fuerte conexión entre estos dos países, varias tradiciones y eventos culturales, siguen encontrándose y por eso es importante estudiar si es necesario o no estudiar danés como asignatura obligatoria. Ya que nuestro trabajo se basa en prácticas, nuestro apartado de metodología gira en torno a entrevistas e investigación de calidad.

Por otra parte, nuestra teoría se envuelve sobre teóricos como Richard Jenkins y Benedict Anderson.

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Ann-Sofie Michelsen

Fleur van Toor

Hanke van Ek

Laura Sandlykke-Tranberg

Maria Mei-Mei Kjær Petersen

Osk Anne-Sophie Manniche

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## 1 - INTRODUCTION

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Iceland - the island made of fire and ice! That is usually how Iceland is introduced. The Icelandic landscape truly portrays a winter wonderland with its geysers, glaciers and stunningly beautiful mountains.

It sounds cold, hard and dangerous. Still, some 323,000 people have chosen to live here. (Statistics Iceland, 2014)

Iceland as a nation-state is a rather new concept in the perspective of history, as its independence from Denmark was not gained until 1944. It has been a long struggle for independence that has taken nearly 700 years.

However, Danish still plays a great role in today's Iceland as it remains the second foreign language and is taught mandatorily from seventh to tenth grade.

It is particularly this case that is the main focus of our project, as it at first glance seems as if the continuation of the Danish language is a post-colonial heritage that ties Iceland to its past.

In June this year, a new agreement was signed by the two ministers of education from Iceland and Denmark. It is a collaboration that has been on-going since 1996, and the new agreement will span towards 2019. The agreement ensures Danish economical support for Danish as a subject in the Icelandic education system, in order to both encourage and strengthen the oral Danish language among Icelandic students. As it is stated in the agreement, this is done in order to *“increase interest in the Danish language and strengthen awareness of the importance of Danish language skills in the Icelandic community”* (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014:2).

To investigate this statement further, we aim our research towards various subjects within Icelandic education and politics by conducting qualitative interviews; this is done in order to gain an understanding of how Icelanders may view the reasons to why Danish is taking part of the educational system, as well as to understand how the Danish language plays a relevant role to their future lives and how it benefits the Icelandic society.

## 1.1 Problem Area

Since the independence, Denmark and Iceland has kept a very close relationship; this relationship is clearly present in the Icelandic Educational System, where Danish still takes part. The Danish language has however lost its place as a second language to English, but remains the third language, which is taught in Icelandic schools.

The whole idea of Danish can be puzzling, as its use seems less and less relevant today compared to other languages such as English, Spanish, German or French. Historical and economical reasons is in favor of Danish instead of Norwegian, Swedish or another language. Although it is argued that Danish is the most difficult language to learn for Icelanders between the Nordic languages, it seems by learning Danish the Icelanders will apt to understand both Swedish and Norwegian. Danish as a subject is supported economically – not only by the Icelandic Government, but also the government in Denmark. This agreement was first signed in 1996 in order to sustain and improve the Danish language position in the Icelandic Educational System, and has since then been renewed every four years.

To approach the problem, we are taking a look at the historical events that led to Danish in the Icelandic school system. This will mainly be through literature, but also through an analysis of the rise of nationalism and post-colonialism in Iceland with Benedict Anderson's theory on Imagined Communities. This is important in order to understand how the structure of the Icelandic Educational System became what it is today, and also to understand why Icelanders find Danish lessons in school to be perhaps rather inapt. Richard Jenkins' Social Identities then elucidates how language is a part of the creation of the individual's identity in the earliest processes, and can thereby be applied to understand whether or not the learning of Danish can influence the individual Icelander.

To really understand the Icelanders and their view on the Danish language, we arranged a field trip to Iceland. Here, we conducted a variation of interviews with Icelandic politicians of opposite political beliefs, six high school students with different linguistic focuses, one Danish teacher and the chairwoman of the Icelandic Foreign Teachers Association. The reason for doing the interviews with local Icelanders in so different fields



of Icelandic culture was to gain an insight on the means of learning Danish in Modern Iceland, as well as reaching an overview of the different perspectives on our problem formulation.

With our interviews and our theories, we believe we have made it possible to answer our research question, which has led us to our conclusion of the Danish language in the Icelandic Educational System and the means of learning it.

## **1.2 Problem Formulation and research questions**

How does the Danish language play a role in Iceland's educational system?

- Why is Danish being taught in Icelandic schools? Has it proven to be necessary/relevant for the students' future lives?

- With the increasing dominance from English, what does the future behold for the Danish language in Iceland?

- To what extent does the Danish language play a role in the Icelandic self-image?

## **1.3 Dimensions**

### **Culture and History**

This project is naturally linked to the dimension of Culture and History. The project aims to investigate the linkage between the rise of nationality in Iceland after the colonization by Denmark, and connect it to the contemporary culture with a specific focus on the Icelandic Educational System and the function of the Danish language in Icelandic culture. The project will focus on the Icelandic history and the historical perspective of how and why Danish was implemented first as a second and later as a third language taught in school - we will also look into whether this is still of relevance to the Icelandic people in their everyday lives. We are including Benedict Anderson's theory from the book "*Imagined Communities*", published in 1983, this book explains Anderson's theory of the rise of nationalism and the *imagined communities* the world is made up by, which we see as

very relevant to our project in terms of analyzing historical events that has led to the feeling of Icelandic nationality and identity.

### **Subjectivity and Learning**

The project is also anchored within the dimension of Subjectivity and Learning. The dimension reflects in the questions we formed for our interviewees on the Danish language; the interview questions for the subjects from Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík were directed to elaborate on the subjects' possible influence from the Danish language as well as their feelings towards the learning of the language. The subjectivity and learning approach is also included by the usage of Richard Jenkins's theory on Social Identity - a theory that, amongst other things, include society, interactions and identification as well as the creation of identity through language. We will be applying his theory to our analysis when we examine the results we have gained from our interviews. The fieldwork will hopefully raise our awareness on the Icelandic culture, the Icelandic consciousness, and socio-cultural conditions concerning our project and by using Jenkins's theory, a better understanding of the process of identification within our subjects is reached.

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## 2 - HISTORY OF DENMARK AND ICELAND

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The history of Iceland is long, and the island up north has belonged to both Norway and Denmark before gaining its independence. In this chapter the history of Iceland will be established, as well as the relationship between Denmark and Iceland - from before Iceland was sovereign to the Danish king and to the relations between the two countries in contemporary times. The history of Iceland is quite important to the Icelanders and the purpose of describing it is to gain a better understanding of their values and self-understanding throughout their historical timeline. These matters will be examined and elucidated further on in the project.

### 2.1 The rise of Nationalism in Iceland

The history of Iceland began rather late; for a long time, the island stayed out of reach of land explorers. The first discoverers were Irish anchorites around 800 (Nordal & Kristinsson, 1996:61). The first signs of settlement came from Norwegian Vikings around 900 CE. They may have heard about the existence of the island from the Irish, or stumbled upon it accidentally bypassing the Faroes Islands. In 930, the chieftains of the Vikings formed a sort of governance; this makes it one of the worlds' oldest parliaments. The parliament was called the *Alþingi* (Althing). Icelanders came along in *Pingvellir* every year around midsummer to resolve disputes and to establish rules together (1996:65). All free men could attend the assemblies, and so this period has been interpreted as the origin of an independent state, a republic. The Norwegian king from that time, Olaf Tryggvason, brought Christianity to Iceland (Karlsson, 2000:33). This era is called the Old Commonwealth and during this period, Iceland stayed independent.

King Hákon, a member of 'the Old' Norway, was interested in adding Iceland to his kingdom because of the trading options, and its upper class had already close cultural and

social links with Norway (Nordal & Kristinsson, 1996:69). He started to urge the Icelanders for subjection to the crown of Norway in which he succeeded in 1262. The lords and leading farmers of all domains swore allegiance, which marks the end of the Commonwealth. In the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Norway came to be ruled by Denmark. Iceland was included because it was a part of Norway but became already a Danish dependency in the course of time because of all the Icelandic relations with Copenhagen, irrespective of Norway (1996:75).

Iceland gained an attractive position because of its location and fishing and trade industry. The Danish royal administration was not very effective in Iceland which led to England largely controlling Iceland after 1400 as England was an important contact to Iceland when it came to trade. At this point in time England could potentially have gained full control of the country but did not pursue it because of the good relations to Denmark. It was first when a German invasion fleet tried to reach Iceland the Danish king took action and addressed his administration to take care of the island in the north (1996:75).

In 1397 all of the Nordic countries; Denmark, Sweden (including Finland), Norway, (including Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands), were united under a single monarch, in the Kalmar Union.

The Lutheran reformation prevailed Denmark in around 1535. The Danish king wanted Iceland to follow, and Danish royal officers started to take over monasteries in Iceland, but they were attacked and killed. The supporters of the monasteries killed all Danes they saw as revenge for taking over the monasteries, but when Danish forces arrived it resulted in the Icelanders accepting the reformation. After this conflict, Icelanders never tried to withstand to foreign domination again. The Danish royalty benefitted from this because of the increase in power and wealth, occupied from the monastic institutions (1996:76).

The Danish king created a full Danish trade monopoly in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He instituted taxation of merchants and he began to sell licenses for the exclusive right to trade in each port (Karlsson, 2000:138). Around 1600 onwards, trade was forbidden for Germans

and other non-Danish merchants. Because of the absence of competition, the trade was at a minimal level and was not able to respond to changes in the market. Because of this, Iceland started to lose contact with other countries than Denmark. Some merchants from Copenhagen started a company to run the trade with Iceland, Faroe and northern Norway, called the Icelandic, Faroese and Nordic Trade Company. The company was not able to secure regular commerce with Iceland, which led to disintegration in 1662.

A group of Icelandic officials started an education in Denmark but they mostly spoke better Latin than Danish (Nordal & Kristinsson, 1996:76). All the decisions on Iceland, were made by Danes with little knowledge of Iceland. These manners had inherent consequences of autonomy of Icelanders.

Fishing was very important to the economy in Iceland, with the North Atlantic Ocean surrounding them, giving the locals a rich opportunity of using what the oceans has to offer; a sea full of stock fish (1996:77). But, due to the trade monopoly, the growth of this industry was restrained. Icelandic traders were prohibited from having any contact with England, Holland, and France who had the deepwater fishing entirely in their hands. Because of the poor prospects in fishing, Icelanders started to focus on agriculture.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the climate in Iceland started to change (1996:77). This period was called the '*Little Ice Age*'. The ocean brought sea ice to the shores of Iceland which made the temperature drop on land, and resulted in great damages on the agriculture. As a solution, the Icelanders worked harder and adjusted to the harsh conditions. The resolute policy on the fishing, which was being upheld more by the Icelandic upper class than by the Danish authorities, meant that most of the Icelanders lived on farms.

In 1783, also due to climate changes Denmark perceived a more liberal point of view towards Iceland, when grass poisoning struck the Icelandic landscape which lead to the death of the majority of the livestock and it seemed to threaten the existence of Iceland as a place where people live (1996:81). Denmark decided to eliminate the trade policy in

1787. The expectation was that the agriculture and fisheries would grow immediately but the freedom in trade was only limited.

Because of the Napoleonic Wars between 1803 and 1815, Norway and Denmark started to split up. No one talked about Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland being colonies of Norway in medieval, since they had no links to Norway anymore, so Iceland stayed under the crown of Denmark (1996:82-82).

## **2.2 The Independence of Iceland**

The Danish language played a vital role in Iceland during colonialism. For years, Danish was the official language of administration between Iceland and the authorities in Copenhagen, as well as being the way of communication in the market due to Danish merchants commonly being in charge of trade. All official accountings and records of trade were likewise in Danish. Sources show that it was common for the Icelander to read a broad range of literature in Danish; hence the Danish imported word “*róman*” (novel), that became a part of the Icelandic vocabulary in the 1800<sup>th</sup> century. It was also in the 1800<sup>th</sup> century that many book clubs and the like started to appear – the material that remains from these book clubs shows that a vast majority of books would be in Danish. To master the Danish language was often the key to education as well; being it academic, in crafts, or simply the basic gathering of new knowledge. The majority of Icelanders would then study in Denmark to collect information on current matters related to the rest of the world (Hauksdottir, 2005:8).

However, when King Christian VIII in 1840 announced the intention for a reinstatement of Alþingi and a constitution that would give the national parliament legislative authority on the matter of domestic affairs and national budget, the struggle for Independence began. The assembly was based on the original idea of Alþingi, which was build on an Icelandic political structure rather than a foreign concept of a government (Árnason and Wittrock, 2012:255-256). The constitution was given to Iceland by the Danish king in 1874 and with it went the sovereignty that the Danish king had previously

had over Iceland (2012:252). After Norway had taken Iceland under its kingdom it was as if Iceland had been lulled to sleep, but with the promise of a rebirth of Alþingi in 1840 the nation woke up to fight for its freedom at last.

In 1902 a new liberal government came to power in Denmark and Iceland was invited to setup its own home rule government. It was not until 1904 that the home rule government was officially acquired. This meant that the rights to executive power were finally in the hands of Iceland. Yet, Iceland was still economically dependent on Denmark (2012:256)

The period following from 1904-1918 was politically chaotic as the constitution from 1874 still integrated Iceland as part of the Danish kingdom. In 1918, a Danish-Icelandic act of Union gathered Denmark and Iceland in a personal union where they shared the same king. This secured Iceland's sovereignty as a state, but Denmark was responsible for its foreign affairs and defense interests. The act would be up for revision in 1940 by both parties.

In 1940, during second world war, Iceland and Denmark were placed in opposite camps. With the German forces occupying Denmark, Britain seized control over Iceland. Denmark was thereby not able to be responsible of Iceland's foreign affairs. Alþingi therefore decided that the Icelandic government would take over the responsibility during this period.

It was in Denmark's interest to withhold the union but from an Icelandic viewpoint this was not a mutual wish. In 1944 Alþingi declared the act of union lifted and for Iceland to become a republic. This was followed by a public referendum that confirmed the declaration. So on the 17th of June 1944 the first elected president Sveinn Björnsson declared Iceland for independent (2012:264). The one-sided lifting of the union act was not formally acknowledged though until 1950 after negotiations between Denmark and Iceland, where the Danish king finally signed and the break between the two nations was made official (Arnorsdóttir, 2012).

There is no doubt that the tradition for the use of Danish language in Icelandic society has been going strong during the time under the Danish Kingdom; the time after the independence, however, looks drastically different. According to our own collected data, Danish is rarely used in the everyday life of an Icelander, and the official language of administration has - almost - been devotedly restored to Icelandic. It seems as if Iceland has succeeded in reestablishing its Icelandic language – however, a recognizable trace of Danish is still to be found in Icelandic schools. Danish is taught as a compulsory foreign language in primary and secondary school, including academic- and vocational education. Many Icelanders Danish skills depend completely on the outcome of these Danish classes, as Danish is rarely introduced elsewhere in Icelandic society. So why does Iceland keep hanging on to the Danish language?

### **2.3 The Nordic community**

An answer to the question above can be given by looking at Iceland's relation to the Nordic community. The north is made up by several nations - some organizations (e.g. NORA) say that the north consists of Canada, Scotland, Iceland, Greenland, and the coastline of Norway. Other organizations (Norden) say that the north consists of Greenland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Faroe Islands and Iceland – we have decided to focus on the relations between these countries to gain an understanding of the means of their bond. (Gremaud & Thisted, (2014) Danmark og det nye Nordatlanten, Tidsskriftet Grønland) The Nordic countries have a long history of being united and being separate. Through unity the countries have influenced each other and have somewhat similar cultures and values. Before, kings united the North – but now a days the Nordic cooperation is linked through a Nordic Council as well as a Nordic Council of Ministers. The Nordic Council was gathered in 1952 after the Second World War. The guidelines for the Nordic Council and the council of Ministers cooperation agreement, '*Helsingforsaftalen*', was signed in 1962 by Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. The Council is build upon common cultural values and understandings, with the purpose to encourage progress in the cooperation between the countries as well as to develop the countries together as a unity



(Norden, 2014). The Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers changes amongst the countries every year. The Council has sessions twice a year to find a new Presidency for the council. The current President of the Nordic Council is the Swede Hans Wallmark, from 2015 Iceland will take over the Presidency with Höskuldur Þórhallsson as president. The political agreements and decisions are made in committees and political groups dependent on the cases that are being dealt with. The Nordic Council consists of many different agreements that includes all the Nordic countries - from educational matters, to health, government support to the question of language usage - all of these agreements have been made to secure the Nordic citizens, for easier access to education, public health and equal rights – although The Nordic Council consists of independent countries, they are tied together by this Council which represents the goals of the Nordic countries to prevail the cooperation between the countries.

#### **2.4 The Danish-Icelandic cooperation on Danish in the Icelandic educational system.**

The Danish-Icelandic cooperation project was signed in 1996, and has been renewed every fourth year to benefit both countries - Denmark and Iceland - the most. At this time the countries in the Nordic Council also signed another agreement; to give students the freedom to choose a higher education in another Nordic country, as well as to promote the quality of the educations in the Nordic countries (Norden, 2014). This shows that there was a great focus on education in the north around the mid 1990's. The Danish-Icelandic agreement was made to preserve the Danish language in Iceland and is mandatory in the compulsory school from seventh grade. In high school Danish is a selective language that the students can resume learning after compulsory school. The Danish Minister of Education, Christine Antorini, along with the Icelandic Minister of Education, Illugi Gunnarsson, signed a new cooperation agreement in June 2014; this agreement was taken into effect in August this year and will extract until July 2019. As Christine Antorini explains; *“The Danish language is Icelandic youth's input to all the education systems in the Nordic region. Therefore, Denmark must help, support and ensure that young,*

*Icelandic people have great opportunities to get good and quality education in Danish. It is also important that there is great interest among the Icelandic Danish teachers to have Danish culture as a part of their course” (Antorini & Gunnarsson, 2014).*

The official goals of the new agreement is to:

- 1) Support the teaching of Danish in the Icelandic education system, with special emphasis on strengthening students’ oral skills
- 2) Promote Danish culture in the Icelandic education system
- 3) Increase the interest of Danish, as well as to improve awareness of the importance of Danish in Icelandic society

The project is funded by the Ministries of Education in both Denmark and Iceland; Denmark has allocated an annual budget of 3 million DKK in the years of 2014-2019. Iceland will then contribute with 6 million ISK (287.000 DKK) that, according to the agreement, will be spent on “*special projects*”. These special projects include training courses for Icelandic Danish teachers in first and secondary schools, as well as the administration and coordination of two Danish teachers (from Denmark) that arrives in Iceland for one or more school years. These teachers are usually referred to as “*travel teachers*” or “*travelling teachers*”, and their main purpose is to improve the Icelandic students’ fluency in Danish, as well as plan courses for the Icelandic Danish teachers to improve their Danish. It is a requirement that the travel teacher has Danish as his/her native language. Besides the travel teachers, the Danish government will also provide a professor for the University of Iceland to help the students to improve their oral Danish skills (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

To briefly summarize: as to be derived from the history of Iceland, the Icelandic culture has mainly been influenced by the Danish culture and to a lesser extent the Norwegian culture. This is also due to the geographical position of Iceland and the often severe weather conditions. The subjection to the Norwegian crown of king Hákon started in

1262 with close trading, cultural and social connections between Norway and Iceland. In the 14th century Norway came under the reign of Denmark and Iceland as well. This Danish rule over Iceland lasted up to the independence of Iceland in 1944. It goes without saying that the Danish language and culture became deeply embedded in Iceland. Also, because Denmark created a trading monopoly for fish and other products of Iceland. Due to this, no influences of other countries were allowed. For the Icelandic people it was therefore very important to learn the Danish language not only for trade, but also for getting access to a good University education system in Denmark. Since its independence in 1944, the Danish language is only used in certain courses at school. This is also based on an agreement between Iceland and Denmark whereby the Danish financially support Iceland to continue to promote the Danish language in Icelandic schools. Hence the oldest people still speak some Danish, after the independence the Danish language was less used.

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## 3 – THEORY

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### 3.1.1 Benedict Anderson on Nationalism

To understand what influence Danish might have for the understanding of the Icelandic-self, it is necessary to gain a better comprehension of Iceland as a nation. Benedict Anderson, a British historian and professor of International Studies, and his theory on imaginative communities is a useful tool in order to explore the gathering of Iceland as a united nation and the feelings within Icelandic society. Anderson has his key focus on the connection between language and nationalism; the same foundation as the problem formulation.

Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* was first published in 1983 and was quickly seen as a cult book in regards to nationalism research. His theory has since then been revised and the latest edition of *Imagined Communities* was published in 2006. Anderson characterizes nationalism and nationality as special kinds of cultural products – the approach to the national emphasis is thereby a cultural rather than a political factor, which could be equivalent to cultural terms such as gender or age (Anderson, 1991:5). To Anderson, the idea of *“the national”* represents a new radical form of consciousness, and in *Imagined Communities*, he presents his theory on the cultural and materialistic conditions that has influenced the rise of this consciousness and its spread as a global phenomena (Anderson, 1991:3).

To understand Anderson's theory the term *“imagined communities”* has to be clarified. He defines a nation to be an imagined political community. Imagined which is the key word to his theory, he explains: *“It is imagined because of members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”* (Anderson, 1991:6). Thereby not knowing your fellow citizens of your nation, one is still aware that the nation

contains more than just ones family, friends, relatives and acquaintances, usually it is made up by many more than the individual will ever meet. Anderson characterizes the imagined community as *limited, sovereign* and as a *community*. Limited because the nation has boundaries which distinguishes them from other nations. Sovereign, as of historical occurrences such as the Enlightenment, which resulted in the uprising of nations after the break from religious domination. Community as the nation that is “*conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.*” (Anderson, 1991:7). By combining these three one have the pillars of a nation.

Anderson focuses very much on what he describes as ‘*print capitalism*’ – print capitalism evolved out of a pre-industrial commercial capital, which then produced capitalism’s first mass-produced product – the book – hence the newspaper, along with several other printed or written products. Anderson argues that there are several reasons why print capitalism and its products are central to his theory of nationalism; first, the novel and the newspaper helped to spread a new, common conception of time. This is a necessary condition in order to conceive the nation as imagined; Anderson calls this moving calendrically homogeneous, empty time and defines the time-consumptions which becomes apparent to the community where not all individuals know each other through print-capitalism, and is conceived as moving up or down through history (Anderson, 1991:26).

Second, printed products created standardized written language of dialect diversity: “*Nothing served to ‘assemble’ related vernaculars more than capitalism, which, within the limits imposed by grammars and syntaxes, created mechanically reproduced print-languages capable of dissemination through the market*” (Anderson, 1991:44). In other words, Anderson believes that printed media created a link between a specific language and a specific territory, which later became a fundamental element of national ideologies and national identities (Anderson, 1991:26).

Thirdly, these mass-produced products also presented the nation to a wide audience through the printed news and stories. In Anderson's theory, it is this linkage between secularization, print capitalism, its mass-produced products, printing of language territoriality and a new sense of simultaneity that make up the inaugural dynamics or

fundamental matrix, which makes it possible to consider the nation as an, in Anderson's words, '*imagined Community*' (Anderson, 1991:26).

In relation to the colonial territories, Anderson specifically highlights the colonial state's role and their control of the printed capitalism. Countries who were deeply influenced by a western colony have in some cases returned back to their roots. Anderson has several examples of this, one is Africa with its many dialects and languages which can be traced back to the colonial times (Anderson, 1991:75).

As mentioned, Anderson's theory is highly regarded in the study of nationalism. We have decided to use his theory as we see the relevance of the Icelandic history being an old Norwegian/Danish colony, and the maintenance of the Icelandic language. In the next part, we will apply Anderson's theory to the Icelandic nationalism.

### **3.1.2 Anderson's theory and Icelandic Nationalism**

As mentioned above, Anderson believes that every nation is an imagined community this also applies for Iceland. Iceland gained its independence in 1944 after being under the Kingdom of Denmark through centuries - the fight for independence usually originates in emotion. However, what makes the Icelandic fight for independence so extraordinary is the fact that this emotion relies on literature and history to a much greater extent than usual. Financial causes have their say too, of course, along with numerous other contributing triggers, but these have seemed correspondingly less central in Iceland compared to most nations involved in struggles to reclaim or win separate statehood. To understand this significant role that literature and language has played in Iceland with Anderson's terms, it is a necessity to gain an understanding of the country's correlation to Denmark and the rest of the world.

It is estimated that between year 872 and 930, the amount of colonists in Iceland grew to the vicinity of 50,000. The origins of these settlers are, however, more uncertain -

the majority of the newcomers were Norwegian Vikings, as mentioned in our history part, with a minority of the new settlers being Irish, it seems as if there are no proof that any of these newcomers would have originated from Denmark, Sweden, or any other country except those previously named (Stefansson, 2014). Settlers who were already familiar with small communities from their country of origin discovered Iceland and build a nation, which through trades and voyages helped the growth of the country and made it into what Anderson calls an imagined community. What is clear when reading the history is the means of the Icelandic parliament *Alþing*. It is a part of the Icelandic self-understanding, it has a historical meaning to the Icelanders. The Vikings would meet up every year to resolve disputes and to establish rules. The *Alþing* meetings were open for everybody, which gave the people a sense of community – imagined community – because they would never know all the people assembled at the yearly meeting.

The language of the Vikings, due to their supremacy and prowess, was commonly understood in northern Europe at this time. Poetry was a great skill within the Icelandic community – many would be court poets, travelling to Scandinavia, Britain and Ireland, most of them returning home with foreign wives or dependents. Also trading voyages often resulted in new relations; during the twelfth and thirteenth century, the trader would usually stay in Iceland during winter and as a result, many married into Icelandic families. Imagined communities is build on a nation being within its limitations which separates one community from another, but Iceland being as isolated as it is also expanded its limitations, not geographically but population wise.

As arctic explorer and journalist, Vilhjalmur Stefansson explains: *“Modern Danish, Norwegian and Swedish differ as much from the common Norse of a thousand years ago as French, Italian and Spanish differ from Latin. But the current Icelandic differs less from that same Norse than modern newspaper English differs from the speech of Shakespeare. The explanation usually put forward is that the three Scandinavian tongues changed so much because of intimate commercial and other relations with foreign countries, but that Icelandic remained stationary because of the geographic isolation of the country in the*

*north Atlantic. But the larger share of the truth is in the literary view, that the sagas and poems stabilized the language”* (Stefansson, 2014).

As mentioned, Danish later became the official language of administration to the authorities in Copenhagen and to the Icelandic and Danish tradesmen. These influences are what Anderson is referring to with *‘print capitalism’* – this, of course, being controlled by the Danish colony. Danish was a way to improve an Icelanders life – by knowing Danish, the Icelanders had the opportunity to go to Denmark and study. Although being under the Danish Kingdom, Iceland still managed to maintain the unique Icelandic and only take in little influence of Danish. The print capitalism was used both to improve nations but also to hold some back if colonized such as Iceland.

The Dark Ages (also known as the Middle Ages) casted great depression upon the rest of Scandinavia, but only a minor shade fell on Iceland. During that miserable and, in most of Europe, unlitrary time, the Icelanders almost alone remained litrary. Throughout a thousand years, Icelanders has seen it as custom for the whole family to gather during the long winter and read enhanced poetry, sagas and other chants. Stefansson states that *“It was through these evenings of prose and verse, fashionable in Iceland as never in Norway, Sweden or Denmark, that the literature secured the effective stabilizing hold on the language that makes the present vernacular almost identical with the classic records, and makes the Icelanders still so passionately aware of their former independence and their former litrary and political importance.”* (Stefansson, 2014). Benedict Anderson agrees, but describes these happenings as the way and the link between a specific language and a specific territory is remarkably being reinforced - a link, which, according to Anderson, later became a fundamental element of national ideologies and national identity.

The Reformation later also contributed a stronger sense of language territoriality and this imaginative community - the sense of a collaboration with unknown people, a union that share the same sense of the present. In 1849, the Icelanders own community was strong, and together they commenced their battle for independence under the leadership of Jon Sigurdsson. This conflict ultimately culminated in 1874 when the King released a constitution for Iceland giving legislative power to the Althing and thereby launching self-



government for Iceland in domestic affairs, but with executive power lodged in Copenhagen in a Danish Ministry for Iceland.

It is difficult to apply Benedict Anderson's theories on society today, as new information no longer is limited to '*printed capitalism*'. However, it has led to the modern days' way of communicating. The internet has truly erased any kind of limitations to the *imagined community*, making it possible to belong to several communities. Today, a part of the Icelandic population still argues that Iceland should desire complete independence due to Iceland's importance in aviation. The population has become more aware of Iceland's great potential as a logical midway-station on flights between Europe and America. As Stefansson phrases it: "*In a flying age, Iceland will therefore be tied close into the network of commercial countries. Many dirigibles will pass over, and some of them will stop for commercial or tourist reasons. The air-planes will have regular way stations there, as they will in Labrador and Greenland and in the Faroes, halfway between Iceland and Scotland. All these are on the direct route from Chicago to Paris; they are so little out of the way on the New York-Paris route that many planes will doubtless fly that way for increased safety as well as for the comfort of being able to allow passengers to stretch their legs occasionally and to get meals and relaxation on the ground*" (Stefansson, 2014). Maybe imagined communities are not only tied to a nation in sense of a country, but also a nation in terms of a larger union of nations which can be united and of which you share a bond such as the cooperation with the Nordic Council. The Nordic Council could be argued as a larger imagined community, in the same relation as Europe could, through limitations, sovereignty and community. These unions are just in a larger scale – which also means that one unity is juxtaposed with other large units such as The United States of America. Although the smaller communities might be arguable to flounder because of modern day technology, the imagined communities may also be viewed in a larger scale than just what is in front of our noses.

### **3.2 Richard Jenkins' Social Identity**

When looking into the self-image Icelanders might have in relation to the Danish language, we have decided to use the theory of Richard Jenkins. Jenkins is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Sheffield, UK. He has done research in Ireland, Britain and Denmark as an anthropologist. In his book *Social Identity* (2014), he argues that social identity must be seen as individual and collective. He further explains that social identity is a *process* of identification and without this, there would simply be no society - because without these frames of conventions and differences, people are not able to relate to each other in a meaningful way (2014:48). This process includes understanding who we are, and reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and understanding who other people are. Jenkins noted that identity is internal; the way we look at ourselves, and external; the way others see us.

According to the theory of Richard Jenkins, social identity is achieved through socialization within social groups. Not only the way we interact with others is the key factor in the development of social identity - also social class, gender and ethnicity plays a significant role (2014:72). Jenkins also argues that by placing themselves in the role of others, people, particularly children, gain a greater understanding of the role that they should play (2014:93).

#### **Social identity and language**

According to Jenkins, language is a part of identity. A child will use language while developing an identity and to ask questions about the world and their place in it. Children must rely on grown ups while discovering the world because as they are very dependent in the beginning (2014:86). In the process of growing up, they will exercise autonomy; they have to learn who is who and what is what. If they do not learn this from others, they will not learn it at all. People need to talk to children about this, so language is a key factor here. Jenkins suggests that identities established at a young age may be less flexible than

identities gained later in life, but identification will never be permanent (2014:87). Children of a young age are not able to give strong responses on internal self-definition and cannot modify or reject them - this makes the identifications in early life more authoritative. Because of this, language, and learning to talk, is an important part of identification during this period.

Without language, people cannot hear themselves in the same objective way that they can hear others (2014:60). Individuals can react upon the other by speech. Hearing what the other say is tending to respond as the other person responds. People use speech in their minds to think. If there was no language, there was no distinctly human interior world. There would be nothing to talk about or think because there is no stimulus of interaction with others. All of these factors will be kept in mind and applied when going through our analysis.

### **3.3 Theory of the humanities**

When reflecting upon our choice of theory, we believe the theory of humanity progression course have given us the necessary tools in order to investigate the benefits and limitations of our selections. To make sense of the literature gathered on the relations between Iceland and Denmark, and especially our focus point being the Danish language in Iceland, we found it necessary to link it with a theory; we found Benedict Anderson's theory on imaginative communities as a useful tool in order to explore the congregation of Iceland as a united nation and the feelings within Icelandic society through time. Anderson has his key focus on the connection between language and nationalism; the same foundation as our problem formulation.

Anderson's theory turned out to be explanatory in relation to the rising support to Jon Sigurdsson, the frontman in the Icelandic struggle for independence. However, as Anderson's theory dates back to 1991, several key factors in today's society are not present in his interpretations – important missing influences such as globalization and the Internet made us realize that Anderson would not be a helpful tool in analysing the present connection between the Danish language and Iceland's nationalistic identity.

In order to solve this problem, Richard Jenkins were recommended to us - luckily, we found Jenkins theory relevant when answering matters on the Danish language and its potential relation to the understanding of Icelandic identity, as Jenkins sees the language as an important part of one's social identity. With language, people are able to communicate with each other - a factor that, according to Jenkins, plays an essential role in the identity-making process. To investigate if the Danish language has an influence on today's Icelandic living, we asked people if the language is somehow linked to their self-image. In the following analysis, parts of Jenkins' theory is applied in order to gain a better understanding of the self-image and the link with the future.

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## **4 - FIELDWORK**

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In the following chapter, we will go through and elaborate on the fieldwork by focusing on the Icelandic Educational System as it has been subject to our fieldwork as well as we aim to specify which realistic limitations there has been to the research project. At last we will approach and outline our use of method. This chapter should leave the reader with an understanding of what was the aim and why we approached it as well as how the study was approached and handled according to Kvale and Brinkmanns guide to doing qualitative research (2009).

### **4.1 Understanding the Icelandic Educational System**

In relations to the study we went on a fieldtrip to Reykjavik in Iceland to collect data and information on the Danish language in the Icelandic Educational System. The next two sub-sections will focus on the Icelandic Educational System and the school where we conducted interviews with young students.

#### **4.1.1 The Icelandic Educational System 101**

Since the project is about the Danish language in the Educational system in Iceland, it is important to have a general idea how this system works.

The compulsory education starts when the child is 6 years old, and lasts till the student is 16. It is up to the individual pupil to decide whether he or she wants to continue with their education after the age of 16.

In the Educational System in Iceland, the responsibility for the execution of the legislation lies with various departments of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

to all school levels from pre-primary and compulsory education through the upper secondary and higher education levels, as well as continuing- and adult education. Broadly speaking, there are four types of schools; pre-primary education (age 0-5), elementary education (age 6-15), secondary education (age 16-20) and university (age 20 and up) (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Focusing on languages within the Icelandic Educational System it can also be put forth that English is the second language to be taught mandatorily in school and is taught from fourth grade and onwards. Danish enters as the third language and is taught mandatorily from seventh grade throughout second grade of high school.

#### **4.1.2 Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík**

As a subject for the project, we decided to focus our research on students in Upper secondary education. To give an example of the structure of one of the upper secondary institutions in Iceland we will draw on Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík as an example, as it will be essential to the project at a later point in the project when the reader is introduced to the participants from the school in our interviews.

In Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík there are four levels: third grade (3. bekkur), fourth grade (4. bekkur), fifth grade (5. bekkur) and sixth grade (6. bekkur). These are not to be confused with the compulsory grades of 1-10th grade. We also distinguish third graders as first year students, fourth graders as second year students, fifth graders as third year students, and sixth graders as fourth year students.

Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík is different from most other upper secondary institutions as it is structured into two leading fields of science: the Language line and the Nature Science line. However what distincts the school from other schools are the first two years functions as basic years where it is first on your third year you can specify a direction of your studies. This way of dividing the field education is uncommon in the Icelandic Upper

Secondary Education system as it is more traditional that students upon their change from primary to upper secondary school already have selected a field of study rather than commencing to two basic years before specifying.

This part will concentrate on the Language line as it is within languages the focus of the project is anchored. Bear in mind there has not been focused on other subjects than the linguistic ones, but the students are of course also educated within other subjects than just linguistics.

The third and fourth graders are taught English and Danish as mandatory subjects according to the national curriculum as well as a third foreign language of the students choice between Spanish, French or German.

In fifth grade the students have to specify a field of focus in either: Old Languages 1, Old Languages 2, New Languages 1, or New Languages 2.

When they hereafter specify their field of education it is important to note that the Danish language disappears from the school schedule in the shift from fourth grade to fifth grade in exchange for other foreign languages.

As our subjects were all attending third grade it will therefore not be necessary to go into the different branches as there was not focused on their choice of education as it according to our study was not essential because of the way the school was structured.

This also leads us to the limitations for the project which will be followed up in the next chapter.

## **4.2 Limitations and findings**

It is important to be able to be critical towards ones own research as well as ones findings when working within academia it will take the research to a meta-level where one can discuss what might have hindered the progress of the research and how to deal with

those complications. We will in the following subsections outline what we found as limitations for our project and the outcome that followed because of those limitations.

#### **4.2.1 Participants**

What can be set as a limitation for how we approached students has been that our original aim were to interview a range of students from several schools in order to gain a comprehension to the different identities across a wider range of different forms of high schools with different focuses. One reflection we have made upon our return has been that if we knew beforehand that we with a more narrow focus on fewer students, than we could have had a greater opportunity to investigate the single student's background for a deeper understanding of the self-identity of the student and its connection to Denmark through history and habitus.

We contacted numerous high schools around the area of Reykjavik, but unfortunately, as our fieldwork was during the exam period in Iceland, only Menntaskólinn were able to help us out. For the interviews with the students, we have guaranteed their participation would be anonymous, and they will therefore not appear with real name, but by number. The focus of these interviews were mainly on the content of the interviews, and it is therefore not important for the reader to know their public identity. Our first idea was to interview students who choose to continue with Danish, after the mandatory period, and also students who did not choose to continue, to collect two different sides on the language. Unfortunately, we only had the chance to speak with students who still have Danish as a mandatory subject, due to a misunderstanding with the contact of the school as well as the way the school was structured.

The subjects of interest for the interviews were selected on the background of relevance to the research. One area of focus was on the Icelandic upper-secondary school students in the age group of 16-18. It was interesting to focus on particularly students who have had to make a decision for their future life and education, in terms of choosing to continue with Danish as a course or not, but because of the school that volunteered to help



us with our interviews, this did not happen quiet as we were wanting it to. We only spoke to students who had the course mandatory.

Since we were trying to find a debate on keeping the Danish language in the system, we tried to find people with different viewpoints. Unfortunately the project can seem a little one-sided as the majority of our participants were in favor of the Danish language and the way things are now. We therefore mainly have a positive sight on this matter. If we had more time, we could have searched for people who did not agree with keeping the Danish language in the school system. Also, all of our interviewees were volunteering to be interviewed which can be a limitation since people with a more negative view could feel uncomfortable about openly speaking negatively to Danish people about this matter. It could be helpful, for a following study, if we have had the time to find people with a more objective view who wanted to change the current situation.

#### **4.2.2 Synchronous and asynchronous communication**

We, with the advanced technology today, are able to make contact across borders without ever leaving home, but some vital parts of communication are lost. It would without a doubt have been considered a different project if we had not been able to go and do fieldwork in Iceland. The project is unique in the way that the interviewees are leading subjects in our project of which we try to make sense of their answers to our questions. Whether the same statements would have been possible to gather through e-mail, phone or a Skype call can be discussed - but being able as an interviewer to be face to face with your interviewee creates a connection between the two that enables them to read each others social cues, and this would not be possible through other communications forms as they are asynchronous (Opdenakker, 2006:2).

The advantages of synchronous communication forms (e.g face to face interviews) are, amongst other things, the limited time the interviewee will have to answer the questions - though this may not ensure reflected and considerate answers, it will guarantee a spontaneity and an in-sight to their thoughts on the subject that to this project is of a much higher interest than well reflected responses. A well-, longtime reflected answer can show

perhaps a wider perspective, but it would also risk that the answers would not be as sincere and serve as a realistic portrait of the interviewee.

One of the disadvantages for asynchronous communication forms are furthermore the fracture of time; as correspondence is not *'live'*, we lose the closeness and connection that is guaranteed from face to face interactions. We can also argue that our experience from communicating and setting up interviews have proven to be inconsistent as one is not guaranteed a response from the other part. This has sadly led to a limited amount of participants in the study than originally intended.

### **4.2.3 Time and other factors**

*"Time is of the essence"* as the phrase goes, and we must use it well. Before the fieldtrip we scheduled interviews and planned the upcoming meetings, as we knew we had to make use of the limited time. Time is inevitably a constraint when doing a project within the span of a semester, as one must be realistic of what can be accomplished within the limited timespan.

Our fieldwork was partly to figure whether Icelanders understood how Danish in the educational system were relevant to their society, also to investigate potential controversial statements. Our findings proved that all participants through their own identity made sense of the importance of the Danish language in Iceland, which leads us to the necessity for the fieldtrip - our outcome changed completely after our fieldwork was conducted.

The following chapters will thoroughly explain the field of ethnography and how we through methods collected and handled data.

## **4.3 The Ethnographic-landscape**

Ethnography is the study of people and culture. It is intended to explore a phenomenon within a certain culture and means to have the researcher observe society with the same outlook and standpoint as the subject of the study. Ethnography is a method one

can use to represent the culture of a specific group, both in writing and graphically. When collecting ethnographic data, the methods mean to express the normal activities and social meanings of the group in their natural settings.

In our ethnographical field study we aim to reflect the cultural viewpoints of the students in Icelandic schools. We, the researchers, through the project try to place ourselves in our subjects' everyday life, which also can be referred to as *'the field'* and our goal hereof is to collect data that will be less imposed by any personal biases we might have.

#### **4.3.1 Positioning the Study on the Ethnographic Field**

Before we start on how we approach and conduct the study, it is important to be informed on previous studies within the field. As positioning the study between earlier studies is necessary as a researcher to gain full knowledge of the field that the study moves around within.

Prior to the historical material available on the case, one important source has been leading and dominating the area of research within the past twenty five years.

Auður Hauksdóttir has a PhD in Danish from University of Copenhagen and is currently a professor in Danish within the University of Iceland's faculty of Language, Literature, and Linguistics. This study moves in-between her thorough studies of Danish in the Icelandic educational system and her concentration on teachers and pupils' experience of Danish as part of the education. Where we emphasize on the students in the midst of the study of Danish, Hauksdóttir has focused on the time after their choice on further education has been made.

We have been aware of the existence of her studies and also made use of some parts in our project as her works are some of the only studies made upon the subject. We hope that we have aimed for a niche that has not yet been explored, and in that way can lead to new studies within the field or to function as informational for the reader.

## 4.4 Introducing Methods

To approach the work with methods within this project, we have used the book *Interviews* by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) and followed it as a guideline to set up and work with qualitative Interviews. The book introduces seven stages of an Interview:

Thematizing, Designing, Interviewing, Transcribing, Analyzing, Verifying, and Reporting.

We will in this section make an account of how we have followed the seven stages and incorporated it in the project. By clarifying our use of methods it will also add to the validity of our research in the ethnographic research field for later research on the topic.

### 4.4.1 The Seven Stages of Interviews

In the book ‘InterViews’ by Kvale and Brinkmann, it is emphasized that in the stage of *Thematizing*, it is important to ask clarifying questions to the purpose of the research project (ibid:105).

We have previously made an account for the purpose of the project, and this part will mainly focus on *how* we will approach the study by selecting a *specific* method.

Deciding to base the project on data from interviews rather than literature seems natural to the nature of the project. The reasons for this are, as previously stated, the fact that limited material has been available on this exact case study. Auður Hauksdóttir's studies of the Danish language in Iceland have been informative and inspirational, but we found that it could not alone answer the research questions for the project. We therefore decided to conduct interviews with subjects that could share further information, the aim being to investigate perspectives of the subjects lived world (ibid:106). The thematic focus of the project is the aspect of the subjects experience of the Danish language in Iceland and, more specifically, in the Icelandic Education System. When it concerns studies within the

ethnographic field, as this project is anchored within, informal interviews serves as important sources of information (ibid:117).

There is as such no standard procedure concerning how to conduct an interview according to Kvale and Brinkmann (ibid:99). However, it is important to have made thoughtful decisions on the approach of the study, where it has to be taken into consideration what you want out of the interviews (ibid:99-100).

This brings us to the *Design* stage of conducting interviews, where preparing the interviews are essential as it will lay ground for what data the study will consist of, being a data driven project.

In our quest for the perfect interview questions, we aimed to ask questions in close relation to those of our research questions for the study. The questions for the subjects (available in appendix 7-9) are open-ended questions. This was decided as we did not wish to lead their answers in any direction but for them to answer truthful to their own experience.

#### **4.4.2 Interviewing Subjects**

Our first intend was to conduct several interview guides, as we knew that we would interview different subjects with different background and experience. This required different questions for each category of subjects. The questions for the politicians and experts were not as personal as the ones for the students as we expected a more professional relation to the field from the politicians.

During the interviews with the politicians and experts, we were concerned that they would have prepared a speech to promote their perspective, and we knew that we should be able to be critical when in the analysis stage. This is also why we, in the limitation section of this chapter, have mentioned the recurring positive attitude towards the Danish language from our subjects in the study.

One question to take into consideration is the amount of subjects we interviewed for this study, and when we decided enough was enough. We decided that six school students would be enough with the hope that our subjects could be three who wanted to continue with their Danish studies and three who wished to study something else, as well as we wished to have two interviews covering the two sides of the political field to look for other viewpoints. The two interviews with the experts from the Ministry of education and the Association of Foreign Language Teachers was meant to serve as additional information for the project.

#### **4.4.3 Handling the data**

Moving on to *analysis*, we intended the project to focus on the content of the interviews rather than the other focuses put forth by Kvale and Brinkmann (ibid:197).

To analyse means to separate something into parts or elements as is stated in the book by Kvale and Brinkmann (ibid:193). The interviews will therefore be fragmented and pieced together into new understandings of the total picture of the study.

To understand the answers we gained through our interviews and to make sense of them, we have decided to categorize the data from each interviews in the following categories:

- Cultural and historical background
- The future perspective
- Self-imaging
- The Nordic Community
- Political take,
- and the Educational Perspective.

The goal in the development of categories is to gain the total experience of what we have studied. Data instances are compared for both similarities and differences, and the

outcome of this leads to new discoveries or so called '*new data*'. The analysis then move from a descriptive level to a more theoretical level (ibid: 202).

These categories will not only sum up the overall content of the findings from our fieldwork, but also make it possible to seek further knowledge within theories on nationality and self-identity, in which we wish to make use of the theory by Richard Jenkins to incorporate theories that explains existing phenomenons.

It is important to highlight that our findings should not be made into a generalization on Iceland's overall situation, but only assist as an insight to personal experiences of the Danish language. This approach is the phenomenological subjectivist paradigm of conducting qualitative research. It cannot both attempt to reach the bigger picture as well as comprehensively include the representation of the demographic of the focus group at hand. In particular, it is the way the subject perceives the world, and the subject's inherent subjectivity, which makes it impossible to conceptualize any of the subject's viewpoints as generalities that apply to all, in relation to the problem field (Wolff et al., 1993:119).

Further, drawing conclusions or making a prediction of a trend in the focus group demographic would be premature as well unsubstantiated. Rather, the phenomenological way of conducting qualitative research places the moderator's focus upon the subject's inherent subjectivity, and tries to understand the subject's world view, and theirs alone, as detailed as possible (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:26). Generalizations are not only to be avoided, they are impossible to be made by using this method of approach.

In short, representatively in qualitative research can only be present if the analysis provided by the researcher is true to the individuals own positioning of themselves and the way they perceive the world.

#### **4.4.4 Validating the outcome**

To elaborate on the *reliability* of the study, and to conclude this chapter, we can put forth that our interviews are very positive elated towards the Danish language and its position in Iceland. This came as a surprise as we had a preconception that at least *some* of

our subjects would have a more negative attitude towards the case. The findings from our interviews proved the preconceptions of the case wrong, and we chose to work with the data according to their conception, being as objective on the case as possible to present the data as they were collected.

The use of a qualitative method and the selection of subjects made it possible to gain an insightful view upon the case, and as several of the interviews' content had many similarities rather than differences despite their different positions in life, it seemed to be a general opinion of our subjects.

As mentioned before, it could for a further study and a more generalizing project be interesting to find out if there are opponents to the position of the Danish language in Iceland and what their arguments against it would be, as well as to see which generations who were of the opinion. One can definitely argue that our outcome is slightly one-sided.

The strengths of this project have been the results of the interviews being opposite to the ones of our preconceptions, leading to a project that is balanced between researcher's approach to the project and handling the data ethically correct.

The weakness of the project is perhaps the lack of contradictions, as well as the recurring positivism to the Danish language to the point where it could be put to a discussion whether these viewpoints are to promote themselves through the interviews and therefore not reveal the real truth (ibid:147).



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## 5 - ANALYSIS

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In this chapter, we will extract and categorize the data we received from our interviews conducted in Iceland. This stage, also referred to as the analysis (ref. to methodology chapter), is of high importance to the project as the data as it was collected is very unsystematic - it is therefore our aim to make sense of our findings and present them in a clear and digestible manner, so the important pieces from the findings can be highlighted for a later discussion.

To make this section more comprehensible, the subjects of the interviews will now be presented before moving on to the selection of data.

Through contact with a Danish teacher from **the Icelandic High School Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík**, in addition to an interview with the same teacher also, six students were selected by the teacher to participate in interviews for this project. The six students are attending the high school and each are studying Danish and another foreign language. The conducted interviews has been of the essence to this project, as our focus mainly lies on their perception of the Danish language in their education. The young students portray an insight into how a younger generation sees the importance of Danish in regards to their world where further education and social background has been determined factors at play in their reflections.

**Brynhildur Anna Ragnarsdóttir** who is the Chairwoman of the Association of Foreign Language Teachers in Iceland contributed with insight knowledge to how other foreign languages such as Norwegian, Swedish, and Polish education was placed within the current education system. She is deemed an important informant to understanding the position of Foreign languages in the Icelandic Educational System and structure of the system.

**Kristín Runólfadóttir and Kristbjörn Steffansson**, Advisers in the division of Policy and Development within the Ministry of Education.

Also to cover a political position on the study two parties agreed on interviews leading the project to uncover possibly political indications.

**Pórður Þórarinnsson** is the General Secretary of the Independence Party who contributed a political insight from a political party that are currently in Government.

**Páll Valur Björnsson** who is an elected member of Bright Future Party and part of the General Education Committee also contributed with a political insight to the study, as Bright Future is currently in opposition to the Independence Party.

The findings from these two particular interviews presented us with a rather more personal opinion rather than fully political as it in neither of the two parties cases are a trademark to sustain the Danish language. This however does not mean that the interviews are not of importance to the project as these participants with their subjective take on the Danish language give the project a viewpoint from the older generation in Iceland.

The subjects in these conducted interviews were asked in regards to the Danish language. Both students, teachers, and political subjects all had important points to emphasize. Some were of a more similar nature than others. In order to summarize and highlight the points in the interviews, what follows shortly are categorized extracts from the transcription of the interviews to provide a clear overview of the important points.

Especially six points were essential to categorize and elaborate:

- The Cultural and Historical background
- Danish opens the door to the future
- Self-imaging
- Danish as the key to the Nordic Community
- The political take on the Danish language
- Way of teaching

## 5.1 The Cultural and Historical background

According to Páll Valur Björnsson, Iceland feels a connection to Denmark because of their shared history (App 1: p3). We very much expected this answer, as this historical connection is the most obvious link between Denmark and Iceland. One example of influence would be the annual celebration of the launch of the Danish Christmas beer; J-dag, which has become a big celebration in Denmark. Páll Valur Björnsson from Bright Future says that they also celebrate this day in Iceland; there is a lot on the television and in the bars and many Icelandic people go to Denmark to celebrate this day (App 1: p3). Other influences would also be how some Icelanders celebrate Christmas in a traditional Danish way with a Danish Christmas dinner, Ragnarsdottir explains (App 3: p12).

Some parts of Iceland also has Danish days, which is what the spokesman from the political party Bright Future describes. These '*Danskir dagar*' ('*Danish days*') are celebrated on the West coast in the town Stykkishólmur, every year in August since 1995. They celebrate the town's historical connections to Denmark. Also other Icelandic towns with connection to Denmark have Danskir dagar (Hringhotels, *no date*).

The Danish language is also visible other places in Iceland; there are still Danish magazines, Danish restaurants, Danish TV series, Danish movies, a Danish café etcetera. When it comes to sports, Denmark is Iceland's favorite team says Kristbjörn Steffansson (App 2: p2). Nordic countries influence the Icelandic society through the academic, political and business-minded elite who have studied abroad. "*Fifty percent of these people are educated in the Nordic countries so they bring a lot of influence with them, at the language and at the society*" says the general secretary of the Independence Party (App 4: p5). He also says that there are so many remaining Danish influences in Iceland that he could not really come up with an example, like architecture and in their culture wise (App 4: p5). When interviewing Ragnarsdottir she mentions something important: "*Our entire culture is more or less inspired by Danish I suppose, which makes sense in one way or another (...) We stopped thinking of them [cultural influences] as Danish*". (App 3: p12) The Danish culture is still traceable in Iceland, but none of the interviewees could distinguish between Icelandic culture and Danish because it just might not be only Danish anymore.

Due to Denmark and Iceland's shared history, many of Denmark's cultural traditions have manifested themselves in different Icelandic cultural events such as, for example Christmas. This could also partly be why a series of closely connected customs are still to be found in today's Iceland.

## **5.2 Danish opens the door to the future**

The most unexpected answer on why Danish is taught in Icelandic schools has a lot to do with the future of the students. Learning the Danish language is for students, a good opportunity for their future lives and education. A lot of Icelandic students travel abroad to finish their education elsewhere, or they try to find a job when graduating, usually in one of the other Nordic countries. Since Norwegian has almost the same written language and Swedish is pretty similar to Danish, the students get a profound foundation when learning the Danish language.

Even though learning Danish also has a historical background, Brynhildur Anna Ragnarsdottir also stresses that Danish is the hardest language to learn of the three nordic languages and therefore very important to know as it opens up for new worlds and understandings that can not be understood by only knowing Icelandic (App 3: p4). Páll Valur Björnsson from Bright Future says that it is better to live in Denmark, since it is difficult for young people to buy a house in Iceland (App 1: p3). According to Páll Björnsson who talked to students at the school where he used to work, *“The students were talking about oohhh we are going to Danish class. And I was then: Why are you sad about that? ... I talked to them about the opportunity they can have, when they get older. And I said; think about how nice it is, to go to Denmark and you can speak their language. ... It would open many doors for you and then they think about it ... How important it can be for them in the future. There is a reason we are teaching Danish. We are not just teaching Danish to annoy them, but because they have the opportunity in the future to use it.”* (App 1: p3). Besides providing future study possibilities, Denmark is the biggest importer of goods in Iceland, with a Danish export amounting to 2.7 billion DKK in 2011

(Hemmingson, 2013). Especially the food- and construction industry in Iceland are in great business collaboration with Denmark; a cooperation that, according to the Danish Trade Council, only will increase in the future. One can argue that Danish skills therefore becomes important within the business field in Iceland - this is further elaborated in the discussion.

According to Brynhildur Anna Ragnarsdottir, the students are positive towards learning Danish and can see the possibilities it gives them if they want to study, work or live in one of the other nordic countries, although she emphasizes the low priority the teaching of Danish has in the secondary schools compared to English (App 3: p4). The Danish teacher that we spoke to from the Icelandic school Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík, says that *“There are some subjects that we don’t have at Icelandic universities, therefore we have to travel abroad.”* (App 6: p3). She also says that it is less expensive to go to Denmark to study, than it would be in the US, England, Hungary or any other country. So the students will appreciate Danish if it gives them obvious advantages and there are many advantages in studying in Denmark compared to other countries.

As seen on table 1 (further down), a high number of students (709 students in 2012) went to Denmark to study while only a small amount (75 students in 2012) travelled to Norway (Statistics Iceland, 2014). There has been a decrease in students travelling to Denmark between 2010-2012 and an increase of students travelling to Sweden, as seen on table 1. So the students start prioritising Sweden as opposed to Denmark.

Norway has proven to attract migration in contrast to education possibilities. Table 2 shows that in 2013, 996 Icelanders moved to Norway while 716 Icelanders moved to Denmark. In 2011 there were 1,508 Icelanders moving to Norway. Norway is thus a really popular country to go. Many Icelanders go there to search for a job, because there are a lot of request for job seekers in Norway. Kristín Runólfadóttir from the Ministry of Education agrees with this and says that there are a lot of jobs in Norway while there are not that many jobs in Iceland nowadays, which can be the reason for the migration (App 2: p4). Knowing another Nordic language can also help with finding a job in Iceland - one of the

students tells a story about his father. *“My dad for example, he was unemployed for a long time and he was applying for jobs, and very much of the cases, it would say: Nordic language is required, like Danish, Swedish, Norwegian. So for finding a job in Iceland you often have to know Danish. And in the tourist industry in Iceland, there are a lot of Danish people, German people – I mean if you know Danish you can kind of understand German better. It’s kind of linked”* (App 5.4: p14).

**Students abroad by country, broad fields of study and sex 1997-2012**

	Total		
	2010	2011	2012
<b>Total</b>			
Denmark	972	802	709
Norway	64	84	75
Sweden	178	206	237
United States of America	285	298	315

Table 1

(from Statistics Iceland, 2014)

**External migration by sex, countries and citizenship 1986-2013**

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
	Emigration	Emigration	Emigration
	Icelandic citizenship	Icelandic citizenship	Icelandic citizenship
<b>2011</b>			
Total	824	1,508	690
<b>2012</b>			
Total	949	1,395	671
<b>2013</b>			
Total	716	996	535

Table 2

(from Statistics Iceland, 2014)

Ministers, politicians and teachers all mentioned how the knowledge of at least one Nordic language can be beneficial for students to learn in Icelandic schools. When one considers that many students leave to study in Denmark or how in Iceland itself Danish can be part of a job requirement, it becomes clear that Danish could be a useful tool to be taught in Icelandic schools. Further it got established how it is not only the Danish language but

also Denmark itself that is appealing to the Icelandic students. At least according to Páll Valur Björnsson, Denmark is where it would be possible for students to buy houses and also students government support to study which is a huge attraction for students.

### 5.3 Self-imaging

To have an idea on what effect the Danish language means for the Icelandic-self we chose to ask the students we interviewed if they believed that their self-image was affected by learning Danish. According to Jenkins (2014:75) your self-image is how you see yourself, your individual identification. *“Individual identity formation has its roots in our earliest processes of socialisation (...) This further suggests that identities which are established this early in life – selfhood, human-ness, gender and, under some circumstances, kinship and ethnicity – are primary identities, more robust and resilient to change in later life than other identities.”* (2014:41).

The questions about self-image and self-understanding in the interviews were something the students found very difficult to answer. Kristbjörn Steffansson says about this: *“The students don’t learn Danish so well that they can communicate. Teenagers are worried to talk Danish, they did not hear it enough. They perhaps heard it on television, but it’s not in the environment here”* (App 2: p2).

The students were volunteers, which keeping in mind could influence their answers, and they all talked about how they like Danish. None of them were negative about the Danish language itself. Especially one of the students was very enthusiastic about Danish. *“I love the Danish language. At home we talk Danish sometimes just because.. We are all Icelandic, so sometimes, just for jokes, we speak Danish for half an hour”* (App 5.6: p18). According to a student, some words and phrases in Danish gives you a perfect image of a Danish person, such as the phrase ‘*hygge sig*’ (‘*to cozy up*’ in English). He thinks that there are a lot of words that, when you just read the words, you can picture Danish people (App 5.4: p13). And when he pictures Danish people, he sees fun people. The student do believe that Danish affects his self-understanding a little - although this is also a matter of family influence, *“The people I grew up around, like my grandmother, they were kind of these*

*posh upper-class Icelanders back in the time 1950's, and in Iceland back in those times we talked Danish on Sundays. That would be kind of posh if you spoke Danish on Sundays, then you were top class"* (App 5.4: p14). He also says that the upper-class Icelanders thought that knowing Danish well meant that you were a clever kid, although the student himself did not use the Danish language very often outside of Danish class (App 5.4: p14).

Another student says that he does not feel like his self-understanding is being influenced by learning Danish, since the cultures are pretty similar because Denmark and Iceland used to be one, and their culture have been much influenced over time. Now, however, it is their own culture, and not Danish culture, in Iceland (App 5.4: p15). One of the other students did not feel his self-understanding being influenced but it gives him more confidence when he travels (App 5.5: p16). One of the female students says that she views Denmark as a neighbour country but she does not feel influenced by it though - she explains that she tried to speak Danish in Denmark but that the people answered in English, she found this response to be very rude. With regards to this specific scenario, where one of the two interacting individuals chooses a certain '*speech*', or language, and makes their choice depending upon the other, Jenkins clarifies with a quote; "*Speech, says Mead, can react upon the speaking individual as it reacts upon the other . . . the individual can hear what he says and in hearing what he says is tending to respond as the other person responds .*"(Mead, 1934:69-70 and Jenkins, 2014:57-58 ). "*Thus an individual can adopt the attitude of the other as well as adopting an attitude toward the other.*" (Jenkins, 2014:58).

Since a self-image means how you see yourself, this also means how you see your future which is also something you picture on yourself, then these two things seem related. Theoretician and sociologist Richard Jenkins pins out how Goffman and indeed Barth made a similar assumption that individuals consciously pursue goals and interests. Further how individuals seek to '*be*' and '*seen to be*' either '*something*' or '*somebody*' in order to successfully become certain identities (2014:42). In this particular matter one might say the goal and interest is for the students to '*secure*' and possibly open more doors in their future. By learning an attractive language the students strive to become somebody someone would maybe later hire, be in need of and so on.



An understanding of one's own self in relation to a language or country was what we sought to elucidate within this chapter, and thereby facilitate our understanding of the attitude one might adopt towards a certain nationality, country or even language. This particular paragraph clarifies how some of the students had a very coherent image - maybe not of themselves - but of a Dane and Denmark in general. Some did see a connection between their self-understanding and the Danish language. One student talks about how knowing Danish as an Icelander marks you as being on the upper levels of Icelandic society, and how being able to speak it can be seen as an indicator of intelligence. The other student considers the question of self-understanding in a more general sense, concerning Icelandic and Danish culture, and seems to consider his place in a more global sense. Consider these two students and their different interpretations of a same question of their self-understanding. One of the students sees the question of his self-identity as personal and can relate the issue back to his family and their experience of speaking Danish in a class society; the other immediately brings the question to a global scale, comparing the two nations in question. For them, learning Danish impacts each their lives in a contrasting fashion.

#### **5.4 Danish is the key to the Nordic Community**

When looking at the interviews, one of the main reasons for keeping the Danish language alive in Iceland is the strong connection within the Nordic countries, including the West- Nordic collaboration with the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Almost all the interviewees mentioned this connection. The Nordic community consists of the following countries: Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Finland and their autonomous regions the Aaland Islands, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. According to the European community, the Nordic community is a relatively coherent bloc with one of the best partnerships in the world (Tandf, 2014). This strong partnership descends from after the Second World War where countries all over the world searched for stronger international cooperation. The United Nations, the Council of Europe and the first steps towards the EU were formed

around that time. The Nordic countries needed a partnership as well and as a result, the Nordic Council was established in 1952 (Norden, 2012).

Páll Valur Björnsson, Bright Future, stated the Danish language as *“the key language for Icelanders to communicate with other northern countries”* (App 1: p1). An example hereof was when he mentioned that the Faroe Islands and Greenland do not speak English very well and that is why they communicate in Danish. The members of the Nordic Council all signed a contract on speaking either Norwegian, Swedish or Danish at the Council. *“That is the language we are communicating in at the meetings with the Nordic Council. With a different accent, but we understand each other”* (App 1: p1). Þórður Þórarinnsson of the Independence Party says that Danish brings them together in the meetings with the Nordic Council, since the majority of the political members know Danish; *“In my work as a the general secretary for the west Nordic countries, I mean I had a lot of Icelanders, because we have a lot of expertise in Iceland, sometimes I had to ask people to come and give a lecture to the counselor, and many of them are like ‘I don’t know anything in Danish’. Then I said ‘Okay, but it has to be in Danish, because we have Greenlanders who do not speak English, so either in Danish or we drop it’. So they sat down, and in the end they are all able to write a text in Danish. It was not always good, but it was basic. I went through it and correct it and then they.. I wouldn't say that they did their presentation fantastically, but everybody is able to say something and then I just handed out the text in written. So we have the foundation, or the basics”* (App 4: p7). The similar values of the Nordic countries which Iceland also rely on is also supported in being able to communicate in a Nordic language, and maybe divert from English because members of the Nordic Council are not expected to be able to express their political views in that language, but instead in Danish.

According to one of the members of the Ministry of Education, Iceland uses the Danish language as a kind of currency in order to keep their relation to the Scandinavian countries. She mentions that a lot of people go to the Scandinavian countries for further studies at the Universities, so it is always great to have some knowledge of the Danish language. *“We have a strong cooperation with the Nordic countries and to be able to*

*participate in the Nordic corporation it's important to at least have an insight to the Nordic languages” (App 3: p2).*

Kristín Runólfadóttir of the Ministry of Education talks about young people around the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century in Iceland that went to Denmark to study. They did not have a University in Iceland, so most of the younger people got educated in Denmark at a Danish University. There are a lot of stories about Icelanders who lived in Denmark and wrote poetry, literature and spoke about society. *“They say that Copenhagen is our second capital” (App 2: p1).* However, when Iceland got their own university, at the beginning, a lot of the literature was from Denmark. The general secretary of the Independence Party says: *“Now we have a lot of literature in Icelandic. That's only recent like 20 or 30 years since we produced our own literature. Much of it came from Denmark and many Icelanders throughout the second part of the last century what started or took further education, they took their education in the Nordic countries. Not only in Denmark but in the Nordic countries” (App 4: p2).*

Kristbjörn Steffansson from the Ministry of Education also mentions the campaign that was going on in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to reduce the Danish influence, because all the officials were from Denmark. Even a lot of people in the shops were Danish and they sold Danish goods. *“Iceland was starting to forget Icelandic, for example in Reykjavik” (App 2: p1).* However, when we talk about the future with the spokesman, he says that Iceland is probably going to lose these roots on the way, but the official inter Scandinavian comity in the European Union or conferences stick together. *“I heard from experts that there is no region in the world like this” (App 2: p2).* He also says that this Nordic community helped the Baltic States (Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian) to work together and now they have a successful partnership. *“The west Nordic cooperation, and we appreciate the cooperation, it is important for us, we get a lot exchange or expertise between the Nordic countries” (App 4: p6).*

Brynhildur Anna Ragnarsdóttir has a great interest in the Nordic community due to her work, and is also very passionate about this topic. According to her the reason for learning Danish is to be able to communicate with the entire North, not only Denmark. By mastering the Danish language the other languages will come easy (App 3: p11). She feels

strongly about the unity of the Nordic countries, explaining that the relations between the Nordic countries is to be found nowhere else in the world, and that it is a pity if we are not able to communicate with each other in our Nordic tongue and have to speak English because of lack of wanting to tune our ears to understand the other languages. *“I actually believe that we are all like the old radios from when I grew up. You always had to tune the radio to get the right sound, and always tune your ears to get it clear. And I believe that when you are switching between languages... then sometimes I go ‘Okay’ and I tune my ear and it is all good”* (App 3: p14). The Nordic people have to tune their ears when speaking to each other, this is why Icelanders learn Danish - it is their lingua franca to the rest of the North according to her (App 3: p15).

In this particular paragraph it has been extensively discussed how the Danish language is not only an essential skill within the Nordic committee but also the common language or the lingua franca, so to speak, of the Nordic council. Moreover it has been elaborated upon by state officials, students, and teachers and so on that it becomes easier to learn, and listen to other Nordic languages with a basic knowledge of the Danish language.

## **5.5 The political take on the Danish language**

The teaching of the Danish language in schools is not a matter much spoken of in the parliamentary debates. Many Icelanders are happy with the way it is now. The General Secretary of the Independence Party Þórður Þórarinnsson agrees with this. *“They are fighting against the changes, all of them. It's it's, they are conservatives actually, not conservative politically, but people are trying to be rather conservative because, people are afraid of changes”* (App 4: p4).

The younger people do not like to learn the language, this is mainly because they find it boring but the the student-subjects that we interviewed did see the advantages although the language is difficult to learn. Although the students who responded in the interviews were all very enthusiastic about Danish, they said that they all had at least one friend who strongly disliked Danish (App 5.6: p18), (App 5.4: p13), (App 2: p1).

Kristín Runólfsdóttir gets the impression that people are very happy with the Danish language and that they are very fond of using it and being taught in school. *“The contract is good for both countries, Danish teachers get the opportunity to live in Iceland and go around the country to teach the teachers how to teach Danish”* (App 2: p7).

According to Kristbjörn Steffansson, the Icelandic parliament decided in 1996 to change the second language to English instead of Danish. At this moment, the Danish government decided to support Iceland financially to keep Danish alive in Iceland. This contract was renewed in 2014 and will expire if not once renewed in 2019 (App 2: p2).

The debate on changing the second language from Danish to English was the last debate about the Danish language in their policy. According to the Ministry of Education this was because they had to take reality into account; English is in their environment and Danish is not (App 2: p2). Here the General Secretary of the Independence Party says that the change was in harmony with all the political parties. *“There were some thoughts that we should continue with the system as it was, but most of the people wanted English as the second language”* (App 4: p2)

Yet, if Danish is believed to be difficult to learn for Icelanders due to pronunciation and the Norwegian pronunciation seems closer to the Icelandic language, why not change to Norwegian? The General Secretary of the Independence Party states that they would never change to Norwegian as there, according to him, are several disputes with the Norwegians. *“It is more like a love/hate relationship with the Norwegians than the Danes.. There are also no big issues to press us to change.. But there is another problem with the Norwegians, I don't know if you know it, but they have many dialects. And they have actually two or three languages in Norway, also written languages, and this is very difficult so they have at least three link written languages that are very different from each other“*, he says (App 4: p3). When interviewing Ragnarsdóttir, she also touches upon the question of why Danish rather than Norwegian. According to her, the reason is also economical: *“I believe it is too expensive for us to change it, we do not have the learning supplies, or the same connections in the educational system.”* (App 3: p13). The reason why the Icelanders are still learning Danish is different depending on who you ask, but it is certain that the Icelandic students will keep learning Danish at least until 2019, when the agreement between Denmark and Iceland has to be renewed.

Denmark has a vested political interest in keeping the Danish language in Icelandic schools, and so the Danish government has been funding the continuation of the teaching of Danish. At least from Iceland's perspective, continuing to teach Danish after English became the nation's second language is a natural progression of events, when you consider their mutual history and the continued, stronger influence of Denmark in Iceland, rather than Norway.

## 5.6 Way of teaching

The way of teaching is a topic that is frequently discussed in the interviews. Many of the students that we spoke to were not in favor of the way Danish is taught in neither secondary schools nor high schools. It is important to note that the students were only negative about the way of teaching, not the language itself. Páll Valur Björnsson from Bright Future agrees: "*We should teach Danish in schools, but we have to change it and make it more fun*" (App 1: p2). In the interview, he mentioned a friend who wrote an essay on the way Danish was taught in schools; the essay's conclusion was that the teachers have to make it more fun for the students to learn the language, and also that a more active inclusion and focus on the oral skills should be present (App 1: p2).

One of the student says that she does not like the way of the teaching (App 5.2: p2). She thinks that there is too much theory and learning, instead of talking. It is only reading and learning grammar, and she does not believe this to be the most efficient way of learning. She adds that they sometimes watch Danish movies in class, but unfortunately, these movies are not particularly entertaining and as a consequence, the students grab their phones and do not participate. "*We're all in the school because we chose it, but sometimes people are tired or they lost their will to study. Like now, when Christmas break is almost there. We have to do ten Christmas exams and everyone is tired. Nobody's listening and watching anything anymore*" (App 5.2: p3). She speaks about schools where they visit countries and she believes that way is more efficient when learning a language. Another student was also sceptical towards the way Danish is taught, although she likes the language (App 5.6: p18).

Because of the low priority Danish as a subject has in the Icelandic school system, Brynhildur Anna Ragnarsdóttir agrees that Danish is no fun to learn, but this has nothing to do with the teachers, she states (App 3: p11). Iceland is in need of Danish teachers, and it is often left to the head of the individual classes to teach Danish, even if the teacher is not specialized in the subject - this is especially a problem in the schools outside of the city.

She further criticizes the usage of the Danish *'travelling teachers'* coming to Iceland to help Icelandic teachers with their Danish to maintain a high standard of Danish in Iceland. Ragnarsdóttir is not critical towards the teachers from Denmark coming to Iceland - but the structure of the teaching system in Iceland which diminishing the purpose of the Danish teacher coming; *"They [the travelling teachers, red.] will be placed all over the country to help the teachers with the oral (...) In many of the small schools there are no specialized teachers, so a teacher who is following sixth or seventh grade this year, might follow a first grade class next year. So the help he got from the travelling teacher, it will not become anything if he has to start of with first grade again."* (App 3: p10) Brynhildur Ragnarsdóttir explained that over the years, studying languages has become less attractive to the students, but she does not have a reason for this tendency. (App 3: p10) She also mentions that it is not only Danish that the teachers are not sufficient enough to teach, but also English - the difference being that the students are surrounded by English with the new technology, music and TV, whereas Danish is only something they are connected to because of school (App 3: p11).

Kristín Runólfssdóttir mentions students who have chosen to study Swedish or Norwegian instead - however, this is only an option if the student has either parents or other relations to the two countries. (App 2: p3). She mentions that some students find the Danish pronunciation very hard, and think it is easier to learn Norwegian as it is closer to Icelandic than Danish. The ministry does not have it in the budget, however, to pay for Swedish and Norwegian teachers and textbooks (App 2: p3).

Also the teacher of the Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík mentions the difficulties that students experience when learning Danish. She explains how students had to learn Danish in primary school for a year, but at their high school they noticed that the students used to

be better at Danish and they did not learn a lot in that year (App 6: p2). That is why they decided that Danish should be taught more in primary school. The high school students can choose for themselves whether they want to continue with Danish, the high school decides how many hours per week the students are being taught Danish (App 6: p3).

### **5.7 Concluding the categories**

All in all, a lot of information has been collected during these interviews. The reasons for holding on to this Danish tradition are many; the most observable one is the argument that many Icelandic students still find Denmark to be a popular country in regards to further studying. According to LÍN (Icelandic Students Fond), 623 Icelandic students applied for a study grant in Denmark during 1999-2000. That number rose to 1069 in 2009-2010 (L` 2014). The bond between Iceland and Denmark is very present in these numbers – and even more so in the Danish-Icelandic cooperation agreement from 1996: an agreement that simply ensures financial and moral support to the Danish language and culture education in Icelandic schools.

Two other key reasons that defend Danish as a mandatory subject in Iceland has been given by Audur Hauksdottir, an Icelandic historian. She claims that the Danish language simply creates a connection to the Nordic countries, a connection that is very vital to Iceland. The Norsemen are very few compared to the many people who have Chinese, English or Hindi as their mother tongue, for example, and simply logic could reason that the time and energy should be spent learning these languages instead. However, Hauksdottir argues that it should not be the size or the majority of the world's population that forms your identity, it should be the people closest to you or to whom you have a shared history – and, in order to prevent conflict, a friendly bond needs to be created to the particular country/countries (Hauksdottir, 2005:12). Through language, a common understanding of shared history and core values is found, hence the strengthening of a connection to each other. According to Hauksdottir, it is therefore key for the Icelander to gain an understanding of Nordic culture and history in order to comprehend himself and his



own culture. This understanding is introduced and gained by the study of the Nordic languages – Danish, Swedish and Norwegian.

Hauksdottir further explains the need for Danish by arguing that Danish is the one language that resembles the other Nordic languages the most. Once the Icelanders Danish skills are developed, Swedish and Norwegian become easy to master (Hauksdottir, 2005:14).

However, our fieldwork has also proven that the actual learning process of Danish is difficult to the students, as the language is taught in such a way so that even though they themselves chose to continue with the subject, they simply lose interest.

When looking at our collected data, the benefits of learning at least one Nordic language – particularly Danish – seem to be self-evident in terms of a young person's education and future prospects; whether that future entails a living in Denmark, getting governmental supported to study and in an affordable living situation, or in Iceland, where it can be a job requirement as well as the mark of an education. When considering Danish as heritage, we get the assumption that Danish is still a big part of the Icelandic culture. Students who chooses to study further in Denmark usually return with cultural souvenirs, so to speak, and it becomes clear that traditions are to be shared across borders. An example hereof is the '*J-dag*' celebrated in Denmark, Iceland as well as some other countries.

As for adopting and learning the language itself, it has been discussed at length that it is a much-needed skill set for students to possess. As earlier mentioned by Páll Valur Björnsson, the Danish language can be seen as the '*key to the north*' within the linguistic setting; the Danish language therefore becomes of great use to the students. The political standpoint share this view in regards to Danish as a mandatory subject in the Icelandic schools. As previously referred to, the Danish government is economically supporting the proposition and will continue to do so if a renewal is agreed upon in 2019.

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## 6 - DISCUSSION

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The analysis of our fieldwork touches upon several key points that defend the validity for the remaining of Danish as a foreign language taught in school. To summarize, our fieldwork have concluded that:

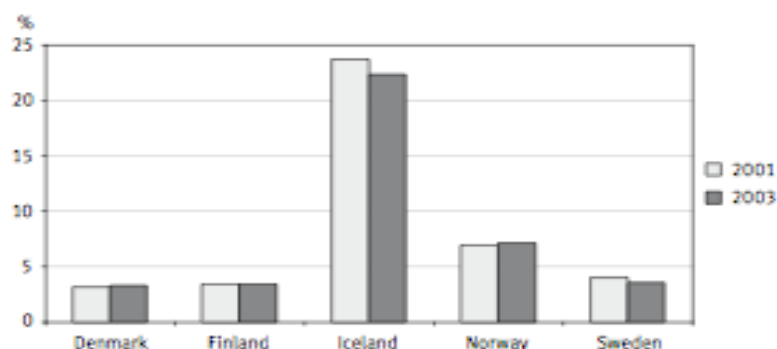
- A high percentage of students choose to study further in Scandinavia
- Danish has proven to be the linguistic key to the Nordic region
- Denmark and Iceland's history are closely connected to each other
- Nordic cooperation is one of the cornerstones in Iceland's foreign policy
- Many officials and businessmen use Danish when participating formally and informally in a Nordic cooperation

This section will investigate and discuss some of these remarks further, in order to reach a valid conclusion to our project formulation.

### 6.1 Students choose to study further in Scandinavia

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is an association that provides reports and statistics on different economic and social well-being matters. Based on OECD's statistics, Figure 1.1 illustrates the total amount of students from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden studying abroad in 2001 and 2003 as a share of the country's total student frame enrolled in higher education. The proportion varies remarkably between the Nordic countries. The OECD report did not specify the situation of the Faroe Islands, but other sources have shown that up to 60 % of Faroese students choose to study abroad. Besides the Faroe Islands, Iceland has the largest share of students studying abroad; more than one fourth of Icelandic students were studying abroad from 2001 to 2003. Compared to the other Nordic countries, Norway is approximately 7 %,

whereas Finland and Denmark is around 3–4 % of the country's total student body in higher education (OECD, 2008).



Source: OECD 2003 and 2005.

^Figure 1.1: Citizens enrolled abroad as a percentage of total tertiary enrolment in Nordic countries in 2001 and 2003.

An explanation to why Iceland stands out remarkably when looking at the chart is given in our interview with the Danish teacher. It is pointed out that Iceland has limited options when it comes to further study possibilities – certain fields are not represented in the Icelandic education system, which leaves the Icelandic students with no other option than to study abroad. The great majority of the Icelandic students who study abroad have chosen Denmark – but is this simply because of the historical bond that the two nations share?

An important remark to make in this relation is the fact that Icelandic students have several possibilities when it comes to applying for student loans or grants in Denmark. One of the many examples is The Foundation for Danish-Icelandic Cooperation – as they explain themselves, they “*aim to promote understanding and cooperation between Denmark and Iceland. In particular, it has a duty to promote the Danish language in Iceland. The Foundation supports, for example, working and study trips in Denmark and Iceland, scientific work, professional training for Danish and Icelandic tradesmen, and cultural exchanges in the form of performances and art exhibitions*” (Fondet for Dansk-Islandsk Samarbejde, 2013). The fund was established by the Danish government in 1959 –

in 2013, its capital was set at approximately 6.5 million DKK. This Danish fund along with several others all contribute to a very generous financial support to Icelandic students who chooses Denmark as their country of study. Not to forget the newly signed and updated Agreement Act of 1996 that grants the Icelandic Ministry of Education 3 million DKK a year til 2019 in order to preserve the Danish language. All this is of course very beneficial to Iceland. But what is in it for Denmark?

For starters, Iceland is the largest buyer of Danish products measured per capita. As mentioned in the analysis, exports from Denmark to Iceland amounted to 2.7 billion DKK in 2011 (Hemmingson, 2013). Danish goods and the Danish corporate brand stands strong on the Icelandic market, and the great export is only expected to increase within the next years – the construction sector is at the moment flourishing in Iceland, and Iceland will therefore need a bigger import of building materials and intermediate goods for construction.

In addition, investments in the fishing industry are currently growing, and consequently, so is the need for new fishing gear and processing materials. The Icelandic fishing fleet turnover was at an impressive 6 billion DKK within the first ten months of 2011 – there is no doubt that this is great news and of excellent benefit to Denmark (Hemmingson, 2013). The Danish Trade Council have also stated that within the next 10 years, it is expected that also public investments in the Icelandic health sector will grow – hence a vaster need for the import of Danish products as well as Danish services. In other words; Iceland is the land of great business opportunities, and Denmark is the merry exporter.

## **6.2 Officials and businessmen use Danish in Nordic cooperational affairs**

The Nordic countries have a long tradition of cooperation, and this, of course, entails several meetings and conversations across borders. From our collected data during fieldwork, several interviews with different politicians states that the preferred language

throughout meetings is Danish – and that this is no problem. The Danish Trade Council also provide an interesting comment on the language used at their meetings with business partners in Iceland: as it says on their webpage, *“Generally, Icelanders are quite good at reading Danish, and it is usually okay to write to them in Danish. However, Icelanders often respond in English, as English is most firms’ international business language. When you speak Danish with Icelanders, you must speak clearly and not too fast. A general rule is that the elderly often like to speak Danish, while the younger generation are very shy and always prefer English.”* This is very coherent with the impression we got from the younger generation on Iceland and from the collected interviews with the students.

There is no denying that a decline in interest of the Danish language is present within the younger generation on Iceland. As Kristbjörn Steffansson from the Ministry of Education puts it: *“The students do not learn Danish so well that they can communicate. Teenagers are worried to speak Danish, as they have not heard the language enough”* (App 2: p4). He explains this lack of interest with a slightly out-dated curriculum and also missing evaluations of the teaching in Danish classes; *“We have not truly evaluated the language teaching here at the schools. (...) I think that could be a good idea. To have more evaluation about what is really happening in the schools. How are children motivated and how are they learning? What works and what does not work? We do not know so much”* (App 2: p.3). He confirms that the interest in the Danish language has partly been replaced by the significance of the English language: *“The English language has so much mass media, so it is easier to find something interesting in all this bullsh\*, video games etc. There is perhaps not so much in Danish or Norwegian. The most popular video games and tv-shows are in English”* (App 2: p2). This is an undeniable challenge that the Icelandic community will have to face in collaboration with Denmark if they wish to maintain the Danish language’s role of today – the Ministry of Education proposes a more up-to-date curriculum; a comment that one of the students also point out in an interview.

### 6.3 Critical reflection on the positivistic attitude towards Danish

Our project so far has been very centralized on the positive side of learning Danish – and not to be forgotten, there are also Icelanders who does not support the education of Danish in the Icelandic school system. Although is it very inadequate that we did not get in contact with these people, while hoping that doing the interviews with the newer generation would give us a broader view upon the learning of Danish, this did not seem to occur. It was clear through our interviews with the students that there is a tendency of disliking Denmark and Danish, the phrase: *hate* Denmark and Danish was also mentioned a few times throughout the various interviews (App 5). One of the interviewee reasons this tendency with the teaching of Danish, that his friend had a difficult time learning Danish, which resulted in resentment. (App 5.4: p13) This student also states that many Icelanders pressures the students in a demotivating way when the students are to learn the language, by telling the youth that learning Danish is horrible - he calls it “*a stereotypical view on Danish*” (App 5.4: p12).

To redirect our project we will speak of some of the negatives sides of Danish; the political view upon Danish is as a general very positive, according to both Þórður Þórarinnsson from the Independence Party and Páll Valur Björnsson from Bright Future. But why not learn Danish since the Danish government heavily supports it – it would almost be foolish not to accept this support, in the very end what the students ends up with is more knowledge and the basic understanding of another language. But this language is also a continuous reminder of the historical connection between a superior nation to a smaller one although Brynhildur Ragnarsdóttir underlines that there is no post-colonial resentment towards Denmark, and the reason is for learning Danish is not for the sake of Denmark but instead to open the doors to the all of the Nordic countries (App 3: p10). Ragnarsdóttir says that there has been a large interest in Norway, which has led to many Icelanders moving there – and by having learned Danish makes it easier for the Icelanders to integrate into Norwegian society (App 3: p6). The Ministry of Education explains this tendency with more job possibilities (App 2: p3). Although there is an increasing amount of Icelanders moving to Norway rather than Denmark it will probably not result in a change of

mandatory Danish to Norwegian because of the financial support that the Icelandic government get from Denmark, but also because it is too expensive for the Icelandic government to change the school material for the students (App 3: p13 and App 2: p3). So although only 6 million people speak the language the Icelanders will continue learning it.

There have been changes in the Icelandic school system though, such as making Danish their third language and English the second, but as Þórður Þórarinnsson says, there have been no debate about it (App 4: p2). We in the group, believe that disliking Danish is not an uncommon thing in Iceland, but it is not a heated debate in the public nor amongst the people either.

Our interview with student 3 took a strange turn when he in the beginning said that he did not get any motivation from his family because they were not “for” Danish (App 5.3: p10), and in the end of the interview he says that both of his parents have a positive view on Danish (App 5.3: p11). These two statements from the boy are contradictions but the reason for them is still a question?

This is an example of the negative comments of Icelanders towards Danish and Denmark.

What we also question is why they are learning a language that only 6 million people are speaking – English has taken over a need of learning other foreign languages. If an Icelandic student wants to study at for example Roskilde University they have the possibility of studying in English. RUC is not the only university to offer a university degree in English – so the need for learning Danish has decreased and replaced with the need of learning English, which seems more useful because this is what everybody are using now a day. Although compelled to agree with this, it also seems a little ignorant to believe that English is the newer key of communication. Knowing English is very essential to know in modern day’s society, but with smaller nation-bound communities such as the Nordic countries, it should be a common Nordic tongue that should amongst other things bind the countries together, such as Brynhildur Ragnarsdóttir also says (App 3: p8) and not a “foreign” language such as English – this is difficult to come to life though with the strong English/American language which has an influence on every nation these days.

Danish is a hard language to learn, and learning it can be juxtaposed with learning German in Denmark. Learning German is also hard and sometimes it seems a little redundant to learn because of English, but just as Ragnarsdottír argues that in a larger scale there is a reason to learn a foreign language (App 3: p11). But Danish also has a historical meaning in Iceland, as mentioned earlier; Danish was used by merchants in Iceland to communicate with the Danish merchants coming there to trade. According to Anderson the bourgeois part of society consisted of; “*Nobilities, landed gentries, professionals, functionaries, and men on the marked - These then were the potential consumers of the philological revolution*” (Anderson, 1991:77). One of our student-interviewee’s also enlightens that speaking and using Danish used to be regarded as being well educated. His grandparents spoke Danish on Sundays, which was seen as posh (App 5.4: p14). A reason for this could be that to learn Danish they had to attend school, and therefor not work – which means that the family must have been with in wealth for not to work. Although as Ragnarsdottír says that there is no post-colonial traces in Iceland, there could still be a vibe within the population of resentment towards Danish because it used to be an upper-class language.

For our group to say that Icelanders are anti-Danish is wrong because we have not spoken with anyone who is opposed to learning Danish – but through our interviews we can see that the Danish language in the Icelandic education system is not a dance on rosepaddles.



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## 7 - CONCLUSION

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There is no doubt that our fieldwork on Iceland has had a significant impact on our perception of the final conclusion. When we first started this project, we believed that the reasons for keeping the Danish language were simply based on history and tradition – we could only imagine that with the many resources and time put into teaching a language that only a few million of the world’s population speaks, a strong debate on the remaining of this would be present within the Icelandic community. Before leaving for Iceland, we strained to gather as much insight to the development of the Icelandic feeling of nationality with the use of International Studies professor Benedict Anderson’s theory on imagined communities. Anderson taught us that especially the sagas have given the Icelanders a feeling of a linkage between their territory and language. This confirmed our first assumption of a nation with proud traditions – hence the tradition for continuing the Danish language, which seemed rather contradictory.

However, the fieldtrip and the following analysis of our gathered material provided us with a new knowledge on the present circumstances. From our analysis, it is concluded that a high percentage of Icelandic students choose to study further abroad; the majority choosing Denmark as their country of study. Furthermore, our analysis determined the Danish language as being the linguistic key to the Nordic region – not only in regards to education, but also in relation to the Nordic cooperation in Iceland’s foreign policy, as the language of collaboration with the Nordic region – according to our interview subjects – is mainly in Danish. It is our perception that especially the older generation sees the many benefits of the Danish language, and the importance of the relationship to the Nordic region. The Danish language simply creates a bond across borders; a bond that undoubtedly is greatly treasured to the Icelandic government. However, an important factor to consider is the 1996 Agreement Act that is frequently being updated and signed, latest in June 2014. An act that grants the Icelandic Ministry of Education 3 million DKK annually in order to

preserve the Danish language and relation. It seems as if the presence of the Danish language in Icelandic schools can be explained by the means of tradition, important relationships and simple convenience.

Be that as it may, this convenience does not seem to be present in the classrooms. The students we interviewed at Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík all mentioned the difficulty of the learning process, as well as the slightly out-dated curriculum. The Danish Trade of Council also confirms that communication with their younger partners often takes place in English.

Nevertheless, it is not our impression that this weakening of the Danish language within the young generation have resulted in an overall decline in the interest of Denmark; Denmark and the many possibilities that comes with this unique relationship are still highly appreciated in Iceland, just as well as Denmark greatly appreciates the strong friendship - not to forget the corresponding business agreements, that are very much beneficial for both parts.

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