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Understanding the Faroese North. Perception of the Grindadráp and the process of putting down roots among Polish migrants in the Faroe Islands

*Zrozumieć farerską Północ. Recepcja praktyki Grindadrápu
a proces zakorzeniania się polskich migrantów
na Wyspach Owczych*

Introduction and the theoretical context¹

This article explores the interrelations between migrant adaptation, home-making, and engagement with locally embedded, environmentally grounded, but globally contested forms of cultural heritage. While early anthropological and sociological studies often conceptualized encounters between newcomers and host communities through linear models of acculturation (cf. Berry 1997: 9–11), contemporary migration scholarship calls for a more nuanced, multidimensional understanding of adaptation as a process shaped by social, cultural, and environmental contexts.

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Rather than reducing adaptation to a single trajectory of assimilation or separation, recent approaches emphasize that migrants actively negotiate their relationships with places, communities, and systems of meaning. Adaptation is therefore shaped not only by interpersonal relations and institutional structures, but also by the specific characteristics of the receiving environment and the cultural practices through which local communities understand and inhabit their surroundings.

Furthermore, standard acculturation frameworks frequently overlook the differentiated socio-economic positions of individuals undergoing adaptation, for instance, the distinct expectations and pressures experienced by highly skilled migrants, long-term settlers and temporary seasonal workers. Adaptation is shaped by the social scale and relational density of the receiving environment. In small and geographically isolated communities, where social life is characterized by high visibility and dense interpersonal networks, belonging often depends upon the ability to participate in local practices, understand shared meanings and navigate culturally significant expectations (Eriksen 2001).

In island societies, belonging is often negotiated through complex relationships between mobility, locality and social embeddedness. As Karen Fog Olwig argues, migration does not necessarily weaken attachments to place; rather, it may generate new forms of rootedness through everyday engagement with local social and cultural landscapes (Olwig 2007; Smith 2006: 11–15). In such contexts, the natural environment is not merely a physical background for social life, but an active dimension of cultural belonging. Environmental histories of marine hunting demonstrate how relationships between ecosystems, animals and human communities become transformed into cultural practices that carry meanings of continuity, identity and collective memory in sub-arctic societies (cf. Demuth 2019: 35–42).

For migrants encountering the Faroese practice of *Grindadráp* (communal pilot whale hunting), adaptation involves learning how a particular relationship with the marine environment has become embedded within local heritage and collective identity. Engagement with this practice does not simply represent an encounter with a controversial tradition; rather, it constitutes a process through which newcomers negotiate their relationship with the place they inhabit and the community to which they seek to belong. The acquisition of localized environmental and cultural knowledge becomes an important element of putting down roots (acquiring a sense of belonging or “feeling at home”), allowing migrants to connect their physical presence with the historical, ecological and social continuity of the host society (cf. Harrison 2013: 45–49).

Therefore, this article positions heritage knowledge and environmental socialization as important dimensions of migrant home-making. Through engagement with local traditions and understandings of the surrounding environment, migrants negotiate their place within the host community and position themselves in relation to practices that function as symbolic markers of belonging, continuity and collective solidarity.

The population of Polish migrants in the Faroe Islands is far from homogeneous. It encompasses both long-term settlers, frequently embedded in Faroese kinship and social networks, and a mobile population of seasonal workers whose presence is often temporary and economically motivated. These distinct social positions shape migrants' opportunities for belonging, their modes of engagement with local society, and their interpretations of culturally significant practices such as Grindadráp.

Accordingly, this article explores how responses to Grindadráp constitute a symbolic site where questions of belonging, identity and attachment to place are negotiated. As a locally valued yet internationally contested practice, Grindadráp reveals how migrants navigate the intersection between Faroese cultural heritage, environmental understandings, and global debates surrounding conservation and animal ethics. Through their engagement with this practice, migrants negotiate their relationship with the island environment and the local community, gradually developing forms of belonging rooted in everyday participation, cultural learning, and the interpretation of place-specific traditions.

Socio-economic context and the pluralism of Faroese society

To understand how migrants adapt to the Faroe Islands, one must look closely at the archipelago's distinct economic and social architecture. The Faroe Islands represent a highly specific sub-Arctic, oceanic environment where isolation and climatic volatility historically forged an intense work ethos and a collective social dependency (Arge 2014: 18–22). For centuries, the local economy was completely dependent on traditional sheep farming, fowling and fishing (Wylie 1987: 74–79). This material vulnerability created tightly knit, rural communities where social non-conformity was structurally unsustainable; survival required absolute cohesion and mutual reliance during environmental crises.

Today, the Faroese economy is remarkably dynamic and affluent, boasting one of the highest standards of living in the Nordic region, driven by a highly modernized, industrial fishing and aquaculture sector (<https://hagstova.fo/en/business/agriculture-forestry-and-fishing/income-statement>). However, this rapid economic modernization has brought about significant demographic and structural challenges. The archipelago faces persistent labor shortages in fish processing plants, construction, and maritime services. This vacuum has catalyzed unprecedented waves of migration, drawing in foreign workers, predominantly from Central Europe and Southeast Asia, into specific sectors of the economy.

The Polish presence on the archipelago perfectly mirrors this dual economic structure, being structurally bifurcated into two distinct groups. The first is a permanent,

long-term settlement group consisting of approximately 100 individuals who have lived on the islands for years, often decades, and are frequently married to Faroese nationals. The second is a fluid, rotating group of approximately 200 seasonal workers who arrive for short-term contracts in the fish processing factories or construction sectors and maintain minimal social contact outside their work environments (<https://hagstova.fo/en/population/migrations/immigration-and-emigration>; based on author's fieldwork, 2025).

Crucially, the host society itself is not a monolithic block of uncritical defenders of traditional hunting practices. The *Grindadráp* is currently a site of profound internal friction and debate among the Faroese themselves, creating a complex interpretive landscape for incoming migrants (Gaini 2013: 92–96). Since the publication of extensive longitudinal toxicological research by local medical authorities, which proved that pilot whale meat and blubber contain highly dangerous levels of mercury, PCBs, and other marine contaminants, a significant public health debate has emerged (Weihe, Debes, Joensen, Grandjean 2005: 331–334). Many local medical professionals openly advise against consuming the meat, particularly for women and children.

Furthermore, younger generations of Faroese, especially those residing in the capital, Tórshavn, or those who have returned from studying in Denmark or elsewhere, increasingly express discomfort with the tradition (Gaini 2013: 92–96). They view it as a cultural relic that complicates the islands' international standing, noting the severe reputational damage inflicted by global social media campaigns. Organizations like the local initiative *Marni* ("Protect") actively advocate for cetacean protection, showcasing that alternative ecological narratives exist within Faroese culture itself. Thus, Polish migrants arriving on the islands do not encounter a uniform cultural consensus, but rather a society navigating its own internal cracks regarding identity, health, and global visibility.

Research methodology and reflexive limitations

This study draws upon empirical material collected during ethnographical fieldwork conducted in the Faroe Islands from 15 July to 13 August 2025. Given the scarcity of existing literature on the sociological dimensions of contemporary migration to the archipelago, the research design was exploratory, aiming to examine the lived experiences of Polish migrants' adaptation, with particular attention to how newcomers negotiate belonging, develop relationships with place, and engage with culturally and environmentally significant practices within the host society (Babbie 2013; Flick 2009). The primary data consists of 30 in-depth, unstructured ethnographic interviews with Polish nationals residing across various settlements in the archipelago. These interviews

were conducted in natural social settings, such as respondents' homes or local cafes, or during shared outdoor activities, which made it possible to immediately observe how migrants navigated the physical landscape of the islands. All conversations were recorded with explicit consent, transcribed, and analysed utilizing grounded theory coding procedures (Charmaz 2009: 65–72) to allow key conceptual themes concerning belonging, place-making, cultural learning, and migrants' engagement with local heritage practices to emerge directly from the empirical material. In terms of methodological reflexivity and limitations, it is critical to acknowledge an important structural bias within the compiled analytical material. While the research sample deliberately sought out individuals from both the seasonal labor pool and the permanent resident population, the qualitative data and the specific narratives detailing profound cultural alignment are heavily skewed toward long-term, settled individuals.

Temporary seasonal workers, due to their language barriers (lack of English or Faroese) and their isolated position within industrial processing spaces, rarely engage with local cultural events like the *Grindadráp* to any extent beyond superficial observation. Conversely, individuals who have permanently settled on the islands, particularly Polish women married to Faroese men, are deeply embedded within local kinship networks. Their narratives are significantly more expressive, detailed, and defensive of local customs. This overrepresentation of the settled voice is an analytical reality of the fieldwork: individuals who choose to remain permanently are often those who have had more opportunities to develop sustained relationships with local communities, acquire knowledge of Faroese cultural practices, and negotiate their own forms of belonging within the social and environmental landscape of the islands.

Grindadráp in the past and today: evolution of the tradition and heritage acquisition

Grindadráp, the traditional Faroese pilot whale hunt, is both a cornerstone of local cultural identity and one of the most contested examples of the relationship between humans and the environment in the North Atlantic region. Historically associated with the survival of island communities, the practice has become the subject of intense international debate, revealing tensions between locally embedded understandings of heritage and broader global discourses of animal protection and environmental conservation. In a harsh climate, where agriculture was limited to crops resistant to severe sub-Arctic conditions and access to protein was periodically restricted, the meat and blubber of pilot whales (*grind og spik*) constituted a crucial source of energy and vitamins. The hunt, documented as early as the 10th century, was deeply intertwined with the ecological conditions and social organization of isolated island communities (Joensen 2009).

In the past, *Grindadráp* functioned as a complex ritual that integrated the community. When a pod (*grind*) was spotted, information spread rapidly through smoke signal systems or the ringing of church bells. Men in rowboats, acting in a coordinated manner, herded pilot whales towards designated shallow bays. A key element of traditional community praxis was the precise understanding of the seabed contour and animal behaviour to ensure the herding process was as effective as possible. After stranding, the animals were killed with traditional tools, such as the whaling knife (*hvalaknívur*), aiming to break off the spinal cord as quickly as possible. Women's role, although situated outside the direct act of hunting, was fundamental to the sustainability of this local knowledge network. They were responsible for the complex processes of meat preservation, salting, wind-drying (*ræst*), and rendering the fat, which ensured food security for months. The entire process was completed by the fair, free distribution of the catch among the inhabitants, which strengthened social bonds and a sense of mutual dependence, making the hunt a communal act that built the Faroese identity and solidarity (Wylie 1987:56).

Contemporary *Grindadráp*, while retaining its communal character, has undergone a process of profound professionalization and institutionalization. Hunts are conducted under strict government supervision and their participants are required to complete specialized training and hold certificates authorizing slaughter. Although the traditional method of herding is still used, modern motorboats and communication systems have significantly improved the process. A key technological innovation, introduced in response to ethical criticism, was the *mútabani* lance. This tool allows for the immediate killing of the animal, minimizing its suffering and reducing the time of agony to a few seconds (Faroe Islands Government 2023:8–12). Today, the importance of the *Grindadráp* as a source of survival has given way to its symbolic and identity-building function. In an affluent society with a developed economy, pilot whale meat is a prized delicacy consumed during celebratory events, but it no longer constitutes a basis for structural existence.

This transformation highlights that *Grindadráp* must be analytically understood not only as a functional ecological practice, but also as a highly contested form of intangible cultural heritage situated at the intersection of local identity, environmental knowledge, and global debates concerning animal ethics and conservation. The acquisition of knowledge regarding this living heritage becomes a critical vehicle through which newcomers navigate the host society. As scholars of heritage studies emphasize, cultural heritage is not a static repository of historical relics, but an active, continuous process of meaning-making, identity negotiation, and social positioning (Smith 2006: 11–15). For incoming migrants, encountering, understanding, and making sense of such an intense local heritage is not a passive intellectual exercise; rather, it represents a core element of “feeling at home” and embedding oneself

within the historical continuity of the place (Harrison 2013: 45–49). Following Olwig's approach to migration and place-making, belonging should not be understood as a simple outcome of cultural assimilation, but as an ongoing process of becoming attached to place through everyday practices, social relations and participation in locally meaningful forms of life (Olwig 2007). From this perspective, engagement with Grindadráp represents not merely an encounter with a cultural tradition, but an opportunity for migrants to learn how the island environment is experienced, valued and socially inhabited by the receiving community. Engaging with the meanings and practices associated with the hunt becomes an important dimension of migrants' negotiation of belonging, allowing them to develop a relationship with the place they inhabit and participate in the collective narratives through which Faroese society understands its connection with the surrounding environment.

As outlined in the previous section, the international controversy surrounding *Grindadráp* should not be understood as a simple opposition between Faroese tradition and external criticism. Rather, as already noted, the practice has become a field of internal debate within Faroese society, where different understandings of heritage, sustainability and human relationships with the marine environment coexist. As mentioned above, contemporary Faroese society is far from homogeneous in its attitudes towards *Grindadráp*. Although this tradition enjoys widespread public support, critical voices from Faroese people themselves are becoming increasingly louder across the archipelago, which constitutes a significant element of the internal dynamics of local cultural heritage. This opposition does not always stem from the adoption of external, continental ethical norms, but often has its roots in local reflection on the changing world. The main argument raised by Faroese opponents of the hunt is health safety. As noted earlier, following the publication of the groundbreaking research on high mercury and PCB levels in cetacean meat, some members of the public, including many medical professionals, began to openly question the validity of continuing a tradition that they believed endangered the health of future generations (Weihe et al. 2005: 331–334). For this group of the Faroese, intangible heritage should remain dynamic and adapt to new existential threats, which in this case would mean ceasing the consumption of contaminated meat.

Furthermore, younger generations of the Faroese, particularly those with experience of studying abroad, increasingly question Grindadráp as a practice that may conflict with the image of the Faroe Islands as a society integrated into global debates on conservation and animal welfare. Discussions about the “aesthetics” of hunting in the age of social media, as well as the emergence of local organizations opposing the practice, demonstrate that alternative ecological interpretations have developed within Faroese society itself (Gaini 2013: 89). Building on the discussion presented above, this internal pluralism is particularly important for understanding how Polish migrants

negotiate belonging within Faroese society. Encountering competing interpretations of Grindadráp, migrants engage with different narratives concerning heritage, environmental responsibility and local identity. While defenders of the practice emphasize its sustainability and cultural significance, critics highlight concerns related to animal welfare and changing understandings of heritage (Bloch, Desportes, Zachariassen, Christiansen 2003: 200). Thus, Grindadráp constitutes a dynamic field of negotiation where ecological knowledge, identity and global conservation debates intertwine, shaping how migrants develop their relationship with place and community (cf. Smith 2006).

Discussion of empirical results: avivating the Grindadráp as living heritage

The qualitative analysis reveals that Grindadráp operates as a symbolic arena through which Polish migrants negotiate their social and emotional positions within Faroese society. Responses to this practice are highly differentiated and correspond closely to migrants' length of residence, family status and degree of engagement with local cultural heritage. For many newcomers, especially long-term settlers, developing a sense of belonging involves navigating between different interpretations of Grindadráp: the local understanding of the practice as an element of Faroese history, identity and community life, and the broader European and international discourses that often frame whale hunting primarily through the perspectives of animal welfare and environmental protection. Rather than abandoning previous values, migrants gradually acquire contextual knowledge that allows them to understand the cultural meanings attached to this practice and to position themselves within the social debates surrounding it. This process is clearly expressed by Respondent 3, a vegetarian who has lived on the islands for ten years and speaks fluent Faroese:

I can't judge it in a binary way. I'd have to live here for generations to fully understand what it means to them. As a vegetarian, it's difficult for me; I only eat fish because I have to, for health reasons, and I can't deny whale hunting, since I come from a country where many cows, pigs, and chickens are raised in terrible conditions. Grindadráp is rare here; they have their own rules about it and they don't do it thoughtlessly... (Respondent 3, interview, 17 July 2025).

This narrative demonstrates the way in which migrants develop interpretive strategies for understanding a highly contested heritage practice within its local context. Rather than simply adopting or rejecting the practice, the respondent situates Grindadráp within broader debates concerning animal welfare, sustainability and human relationships with animals. By comparing the regulated, localized and non-industrial character of Faroese pilot whale hunting with the conditions of industrialized factory

farming, she emphasizes the specific social and ecological framework in which the practice takes place. Her account highlights how acquiring knowledge about local traditions enables migrants to understand the meanings attached to heritage practices and to negotiate their own relationship with the community and the place they inhabit. In this sense, engagement with *Grindadráp* becomes part of the process through which a sense of belonging is gradually developed.

For Polish migrants who have married into Faroese families, defending the hunt becomes an act of familial loyalty and an active internalization of the community's historical trauma, deeply tied to kinship, collective memory, and social solidarity. Here, the process of "feeling at home" is achieved by absorbing the historical depth of the islands' living heritage. Respondent 9, a Polish woman married to a Faroese national, explicitly connects the contemporary practice to the historical struggle for survival in the North Atlantic:

It's so... well, it wasn't easy, this constant struggle for existence and such uncertainty, you know... Will the weather be good, can they sail out, can they catch whales, because really... really, a day-to-day life! [...] That's why they're so humble, really. Although we know that life is different today, we have different accessibility, but sometimes, for example... I remember when we had a strike and we couldn't, you know... the ships wouldn't come with food, we're terribly limited here, really [...]. And that's why they, from this lamb, from this sheep, they use everything, and these intestines, everything... And that's understandable, because that's how they used to have to do to survive (Respondent 9, interview, 1 August 2025).

Respondent 9 effectively adopts the collective historical memory embedded in Faroese intangible heritage. By invoking a modern crisis, a dockworkers' strike that temporarily halted food supply ships, she argues that the islands' geographic isolation creates a persistent, structural vulnerability. In her view, the *Grindadráp* is not an archaic sport, but an ongoing, active symbol of food security and resource maximization. Her process of putting down roots within the local social fabric is evident: her personal culinary preferences are subordinated to her deep respect for the community's historical narratives of survival, demonstrating how the acquisition of heritage knowledge functions as a tool for domestic spatial socialization.

On the other hand, for newer or more structurally detached migrants, the process of finding their place occurs not through deep ideological alignment from the outset, but through initial participation in the local gift economy, which serves as a pragmatic introduction to Faroese heritage. The traditional distribution of whale meat (*grindabýti*), which is distributed equally and free of charge among the inhabitants of the hunting district, acts as a powerful mechanism of social inclusion. Respondent 12, a short-term resident with limited language skills, describes his encounter with this practice:

I'd been here a few months, and there was a whale hunt. [...] the day after the hunt I received a package of whale meat, and what a shock... well, I was surprised, I didn't know what to do with it at all, I had to look for a recipe. It was strange. And nice, very nice [...] everyone in the area gets something from the hunt. It may not be a pleasant tradition, but they really don't waste anything... [laughter]. These animals are big, lots of meat, skin, bones. Apparently, they make something out of everything, they don't throw anything away, that is important to them (Respondent 12, interview, 9 August 2025).

As classic anthropological theory establishes (cf. Mauss 1925: 16–21), receiving a gift creates a structural bond of reciprocity and inclusion. For Respondent 12, receiving the meat from his neighbors made him feel recognized, signaling an early, pragmatic phase of becoming rooted in a place and acquiring a sense of being “at home”. Even without a sophisticated understanding of Faroese history, the physical act of preparing and consuming the meat forces the migrant to engage directly with local domestic traditions and tangible elements of intangible heritage, leading to a pragmatic defense of the hunt based on the shared community value of zero-waste efficiency.

At the most profound level of spatial socialization, the migrant's personal identity becomes completely intertwined with the heritage of the place, promoting a transformed self-awareness where the individual acts as an “ambassador” of the host culture, actively defending its core traditions against external, global condemnation. Respondent 5 expresses deep frustration with how international media and environmental organizations depict the archipelago:

It is unfair, unjust. Just look at it. This place should be famous for what we have here, for this nature, for peace, for safety, not for the supposed slaughter of whales. If only someone would take care of it properly, but if you read all these articles about *Grindadráp*, there's no information about it being monitored, about there being a “killing director” [*grindaformaður*]... That doesn't sound good, but he's making sure it doesn't turn into a bloodbath, but that it serves the purpose it served in the past, and could serve today (Respondent 5, interview, 27 July 2025).

Respondent 5's narrative incorporates specific Faroese legal and cultural terminology, such as the *grindaformaður* (the district whaling commander responsible for overseeing the execution of the hunt). Her emotional defensiveness demonstrates that she no longer views herself as an outside observer looking at a foreign ritual; she speaks from an internalized “we” position, having fully embraced the local heritage as her own. Confronted by global anti-whaling campaigns (e.g., Sea Shepherd Global 2016), she actively resists the external “authorized heritage discourse” that vilifies the practice. By transforming her defensive stance into a primary marker of local belonging, she demonstrates that understanding and validating the *Grindadráp* has become the ultimate prerequisite for her complete integration into the Faroese cultural universe.

Conclusions

The restructuring of this empirical material demonstrates that the cultural adaptation of Polish migrants in the Faroe Islands is a highly non-linear, structurally differentiated process wherein the reception of local traditions serves as a primary barometer of integration. Moving beyond simplified, classic frameworks of acculturation, we observe that acquiring the feeling of “being at home” in an isolated island community requires navigating intense cultural focal points. In this context, the Grindadráp operates as the ultimate symbolic threshold and a foundational pillar of local intangible cultural heritage. This study argues that migration to a small-scale, geographically isolated archipelago creates specific conditions that intensify the process of spatial and cultural socialization. Rather than viewing adaptation as a psychological shift in abstract values, the reception of Grindadráp demonstrates how belonging is actively negotiated through everyday practices and engagement with locally embedded, environmentally grounded heritage. Drawing on contemporary anthropological perspectives on place-making and on the process of putting down roots (cf. Olwig 2007; Smith 2006), the article examines how newcomers navigate their position within a highly dense relational network and a distinctive marine environment. The movement from a continental European setting to a sub-Arctic, geographically confined archipelago introduces migrants to distinct environmental and sociocultural realities. This encounter does not trigger a radical shift in personal moral frameworks. However, when asked by a researcher, the newcomers position themselves in relation to a practice that is highly central to local identity. In a tightly knit society, navigating this contested tradition becomes less about re-evaluating one’s internal values and more about engaging with the social expectations, community boundaries, and historical contexts of the host community. Consequently, encountering a highly contested heritage practice such as the whale hunt initiates a complex process of spatial and cultural socialization, through which migrants learn to interpret the meanings attached to local traditions, negotiate their relationship with the island environment, and gradually develop a sense of belonging within the host community.

For temporary seasonal workers, Grindadráp rarely transcends the status of an exotic or pragmatic curiosity. However, for long-term settlers, acquiring knowledge of this living heritage is a fundamental strategy for transforming a foreign space into a meaningful place. By participating in the traditional gift economy (*grindabýti*) and internalizing collective historical memories of survival in the North Atlantic island environment, these individuals transition from an outsider’s view, one often shaped by global conservation narratives, to a localized understanding of the practice. Crucially, this process allows migrants to situate Grindadráp within its broader cultural, ecological and historical context, moving beyond dominant global representations to understand its deep connections with community solidarity, local identity, and relations between the human beings and their environment.

Ultimately, this article highlights that what is required in order for a person to become culturally rooted in small-scale communities is more than structural employment; the process of putting down one's roots demands active engagement with the internal frictions of the host community. By navigating local debates surrounding health risks, global visibility and ecological ethics, Polish migrants cease to be mere outside observers. They utilize intangible heritage as a vehicle for emotional alignment, proving that making oneself at home is achieved when the host society's contemporary identity struggles are fully embraced. Cultural rootedness is thus demonstrated not by passive assimilation, but by active navigation through internal dialogues where localized heritage intersects with global environmental discourses and changing perceptions of nature.

Closure

The insights gathered from this exploratory study open up vital avenues for future scholarly debate within migration anthropology and critical heritage studies. By moving away from rigid, functionalist perspectives that view local customs as static artefacts, this research highlights the necessity of analyzing intangible cultural heritage as a dynamic, deeply contested space of social negotiation. In an era characterized by unprecedented global mobility and intensifying cultural flows, the transmission and acquisition of heritage knowledge can no longer be examined solely through the lens of internal, monocultural reproduction. Instead, future research must urgently address how diverse migrant groups process and internalize, or resist, highly localized and globally polarized traditions, particularly in geographically isolated or tightly knit communities where social cohesion demands strict alignment with collective memory. The case of Polish migrants in the Faroe Islands underscores that becoming culturally rooted is fundamentally a process of semiotic and spatial domestication, where the ultimate challenge for the newcomer is not merely structural assimilation, but navigating the internal cracks, ethical debates and public health anxieties of the host society itself. Ultimately, expanding this research paradigm to other migrant cohorts and comparative geographical contexts will offer deeper insights into how contemporary societies build social resilience, manage reputational risks in the age of global social media, and renegotiate the boundaries of belonging when ancient island heritage collides with modern continental ethics.

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Summary

The article addresses the complex relationship between the cultural adaptation of migrants and their perception of local traditions. Based on exploratory fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2025 in the Faroe Islands, using 30 in-depth ethnographic narrative interviews, the analysis focuses on how

Polish migrants interpret the practice of *Grindadráp* (traditional pilot whale hunting). Drawing on contemporary migration scholarship, this study examines how engagement with a locally valued yet internationally contested cultural practice serves as a mechanism for emotional and cultural rootedness ("feeling at home"). Situated at the intersection of Faroese cultural identity and global conservation debates, *Grindadráp* provides a unique lens through which to explore migrants' negotiations of belonging in a distinctive island environment. The findings show that the reception of *Grindadráp* is not uniform and functions as a significant barometer of migrants' integration. While temporary seasonal workers tend towards pragmatic or detached rationalization, long-term settlers, particularly those integrated into Faroese families, are more likely to internalize and defend the practice against external criticism. The paper highlights the multidimensionality of adaptation in small, geographically isolated island communities, showing how migrants negotiate belonging through their engagement with local cultural heritage and the socio-cultural dynamics surrounding a highly contested tradition.

Keywords: migration anthropology, Faroe Islands, Grindadráp, acculturation, cultural heritage, identity, rootedness

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje problem złożonej relacji między kulturową adaptacją migrantów a ich postrzeganiem lokalnych tradycji. Opierając się na eksploracyjnych badaniach terenowych przeprowadzonych latem 2025 roku na Wyspach Owczych, obejmujących 30 pogłębionych etnograficznych wywiadów narracyjnych, analiza koncentruje się na sposobach, w jakie polscy migranci interpretują praktykę Grindadráp (tradycyjnego połowu grindwali). Odwołując się do współczesnych badań nad migracjami, artykuł analizuje, w jaki sposób zaangażowanie w lokalnie cenioną, lecz jednocześnie międzynarodowo kontestowaną praktykę kulturową staje się mechanizmem emocjonalnego i kulturowego zakorzenienia (poczucia „bycia u siebie”). Grindadráp, usytuowany na styku farerskiej tożsamości kulturowej oraz globalnych debat dotyczących ochrony przyrody, stanowi wyjątkową perspektywę do analizy sposobów, w jakie migranci negocjują swoje poczucie przynależności w specyficznym środowisku wyspiarskim. Wyniki badań pokazują, że odbiór Grindadráp nie jest jednolity i stanowi istotny wskaźnik stopnia integracji migrantów. Podczas gdy sezonowi pracownicy częściej przyjmują postawę pragmatycznej lub zdystansowanej racjonalizacji, migranci osiedleni na stałe, zwłaszcza związani z rodzinami farerskimi, częściej internalizują tę praktykę i bronią jej przed zewnętrzną krytyką. Artykuł ukazuje wielowymiarowy charakter procesów adaptacyjnych w małych, geograficznie izolowanych społecznościach wyspiarskich, pokazując, w jaki sposób migranci negocjują swoją przynależność poprzez zaangażowanie w lokalne dziedzictwo kulturowe oraz społeczno-kulturowe uwarunkowania otaczające wysoce kontestowaną tradycję.

Słowa kluczowe: antropologia migracji, Wyspy Owcze, Grindadráp, akulturacja, dziedzictwo kulturowe, tożsamość, zakorzenianie się

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