

## **Nordplus Stipend- Greenland Seal hunting documentary report (DMJX)**

Journalism provides an opportunity to tell the stories that count, the stories that matter. But not only that, it actively seeks out those that wouldn't normally get told- those of real people who are affected by real events. However often these stories are the hardest to pursue because if they do not tick the news value checklist, they're off the radar and so are the vital resources needed to tell them. The following is a reflective report of a story that myself and my colleagues Bobby Schinkel and Anne Lebreton undertook with the help of the Nordplus stipend while studying at the Danish School of Media and Journalism.

Our brief was fairly open. We were to produce a short 12-15 minute documentary report on a topic of our choosing. After significant research we decided to produce a story on the Greenlandic sealskin industry, looking at how local hunters had been affected by the recent collapse of Greenland's sealskin exports. Seal hunting has long been a part of Greenlandic culture and tradition. Just like their ancestors Greenlanders rely on the seal for food, clothing and cash. Today seal hunting is largely subsistence-based, with the animals hunted mainly for their meat. However up until recently hunters made a cash income from selling the seal skins to Great Greenland, a national company that exports the fur to Europe and the world.

However in recent years this market has almost completely collapsed as a result of environmental campaigning against commercial seal hunting in Canada which was seen as cruel and unsustainable. The Greenland seal hunt, however, is a different story. Despite the hunt being endorsed by WWF and other conservation agencies for its sustainability, it was all the same in the eyes of consumers who've come to view sealing as cruel and thus boycotted the skin market. The effect on exports has been devastating. In just four years the Greenlandic sealskin industry went from being worth \$70m to just \$7m. This has left many Greenlandic hunters struggling to make a living and put a question mark over a profession that forms a very prominent part of the country's tradition.

With the help of the Nordplus Stipend the three of us flew to Sisimiut, Greenland in early May to make a short documentary report about the seal hunters. Before we left we interviewed the CEO of WWF Denmark in Copenhagen and made contact with a number of locals in Sisimiut through social media. Through these connections we were able to secure accommodation at the local trade school for the duration of our visit. However we found it difficult to contact local hunters while we were still in Denmark due to the remote nature of Greenland and the difficulty of communication.

When we arrived we immediately began networking to find sources. Through a number of students at the local school we met Iquai, a young 23-year-old seal hunter who was trying to make a living. Iquai turned out to be the town's youngest hunter and ended up being our main source, which we used throughout the documentary to fuel the narrative. We learned a lot of lessons about improvisation and thinking on our feet, as much of detail surrounding the documentary was unplanned.

Although we knew the basic narrative we wanted to tell, we had to simply make it up as we went, as it is almost impossible to plan anything in Greenland due to the nature of the culture.

Another challenge we had was the language barrier. Most of our sources spoke no English whatsoever and we spoke no Greenlandic. We overcame this only with the help of the friendly locals, many of whom offered to translate for us. We would often simply ask someone the day of a planned interview if they could come and translate our questions for us and they would happily help. Likewise after filming, we would visit the local school and find someone who could help translate and transcribe the interviews. This was another lesson in using what was available to us and finding people as we went. In reflection, we acknowledge this would not have been as successful if we were filming in another country, whose culture was more structured. However we quickly learned that if we were to make this documentary in Greenland, we were going to have to be very flexible.

In terms of a learning process for us as students, filming the documentary in Greenland was an invaluable experience. We learned the importance of good networking, thinking on our feet and good planning and documentation of notes and scripts along the way. When it comes to recording real life and forming a narrative from it, these skills are invaluable. We also learnt to work as a team while in Greenland with each of us assuming different roles that were vital to make the project a success.

We could not have completed this documentary without the Nordplus stipend, which mainly went towards airfares to and from Greenland. As well as this, it covered living costs while we were in the country leaving us to support ourselves with the essentials while we were there. The stipend allowed us to access a country and a community that is largely out of reach to most journalists and filmmakers. Through this opportunity we were able to tell a story that would have otherwise remained untold, in a visual sense. We have had remarkably good feedback from all sources that we have showed the documentary to who are very appreciative of our efforts in telling their story. We would like to thank Nordplus for giving us the opportunity to experience something that has no doubt contributed to both our professional skills as journalists as well as our personal view of the world we live in and the many perspectives it contains.

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