Contents

Acknowledgements i
Nomenclature and glossary ii
List of figures v
List of tables xvii

Chapter 1: Introduction: Islands and human impact 1
Overall aim and objectives 1
Rationale and overall importance of the research 1
The importance of an interconnected human-environment approach 2
The importance of a historical perspective 3
The importance of an island focus 3
Scales of research 4
Thesis structure and summary of research approach 6
Specific research questions and hypotheses 8
Specific research questions applicable to the "fundamental issues" (at the scale of global islands) 12
Site-specific research questions applicable to the Faroe Islands 12
Research questions applicable to the wider context (at the scale of the North Atlantic islands) 12
Hypotheses 13
Chapter summary 13

Chapter 2: Approaches to, and concepts of, human-environment research 15
Introduction 15
2.1 Approaches to human-environment research 15
Human-environment relations and theories 15
The effect of nature on society and culture: environmental determinism 15
Nature as a limiting factor to human possibility: Malthus and Darwin 17
The effect of cultural history on society and culture: Possibilism 18
Cultural ecology 19
Historical ecology and temporal and spatial perspectives 19
A comparative approach 21
Approaches to human-environment research in the North Atlantic 22
2.2. Concepts in human-environment research 22
Environmental change and thresholds 22
Responses to change 23

Environmental responses: sensitivity and resilience 23
Human responses 25
Adaptation 26
The influence of information, perception, memory and decision making on adaptation 28
Chapter summary 31

Chapter 3: Island contexts 33
Introduction 33
Island contexts as models for human impact and global change 33
Island ecosystems and biogeography 36
Colonisation of remote islands 38
Timing of colonisation 40
Human impacts and environmental change in remote islands 40
Population and resources on remote islands: cultural stress and collapse 42
Population and resources on remote islands: population regulation and sustainability? 46
Inherent sensitivity of island ecosystems 47
Climatic change on islands 48
Summary: a global model of island colonisation and human impact? 49
Chapter summary 50

Chapter 4: North Atlantic context: environmental trajectories and cultural change 51
Introduction 51
Background to North Atlantic research 51
4.1 North Atlantic climate systems 52
North Atlantic pre-colonisation climate trajectories 55
Climate trajectories over the period of settlement 57
Climate-people integration 58
Climate and landforms in the Faroe Islands 59
4.2. North Atlantic environmental context 61
The Faroe Islands 61
Faroe Islands geography and environment 61
Faroe Islands biogeography 64
Iceland 65
Icelandic geography and environment 65

Icelandic biogeography 66
4.3 North Atlantic (Faroe Islands) human context: Overview 68
4.4 North Atlantic human context: Colonisation 70
The Viking expansion 70
Pre-Norse colonisation of the Faroe Islands 71
Norse *landnám* in the Faroes 73
4.5 North Atlantic human context: Long-term settlement and adaptation 74
Norse "cultural capital" 74
Faroese "cultural capital" developments 76
Faroese settlement patterns in a North Atlantic context 77
Faroese farming systems in a North Atlantic context 79
Land and resource ownership in the Faroe Islands in a North Atlantic context 83
4.6 Human impacts and environmental change in the North Atlantic islands 83
Chapter summary 86

Chapter 5: Methodological framework and data collection 87
Introduction 87
Methodological framework 87
Field site selection 91
Hov and Sandoy, the Faroe Islands 91
Eyjafjallahreppur, Iceland 98
Spatial methods 98
Landscape mapping 99
Archaeological survey 102
Settlement and landholding data 103
Conceptual methods 107
Interview process 107
Temporal methods 109
Stratigraphic sections 109
Radiocarbon chronology 110
Chapter summary 112

Chapter 6: Data presentation 115
Introduction 115
6.1. Presentation of spatial data 115
Hov: landscape units and geomorphic features 115
General summary of Hov geomorphology 115

Summary outline of specific geomorphic features 119
Box-type gullies 119
Small scale gullying 119
Inactive fan 122
Active fans and river systems 122
Sandoy: extent of land degradation 129
General summary of landscape-scaled degradation patterns 129
6.2. Hov and Sandoy: sites of cultural activity 141
Extent of archaeological survey in Hov and on Sandoy 141
General description of archaeological monuments in the Faroese outfields 141
Outfield structures relating to sheep and cattle 141
Structures relating to peat cutting activity 155
Drainage ditches 155
Cairns (varðar) 159
Identification and description of archaeological "zones" 159
Hov archaeological zones 159
Sandoy archaeological zones 165
Detailed mapping of torvlutir in central Sandoy 167
Comparison between cultural zones and land cover classification mapping 167
6.3. Interview data 169
Combined summary of interview data 169
Peat; methods of extraction, its geographical exploitation and ownership 169
Fowling; ownership, methods and geographical exploitation 170
The importance of the grind (pilot whale hunt) 173
Farming and sheep grazing 173
Settlement patterns, social structures and connections 175
The impact and significance of weather and climate 176
6.4. Presentation of temporal data 176
Detailed descriptions of characteristic profiles 194
Detailed description of example profile from Hov (KAM20) 194
Detailed description of example profile from Sandoy (KAM 61) 194
Summary description of Holocene sediment sequences in Hov and Sandoy 195
Summary description of targeted transects in Hov and Sandoy 197
Hov: Transect 1a and 1b (KAM 1-7, 16-18) 197
Hov: Transect 2a and 2b (KAM 8-9 and 30, 10-15) 197

Hov: Transect 3 (KAM 19-25) 198
Sandoy: Transect 1 (KAM 60-64) 198
Sandoy: Transect 2 (KAM 71-73) 198
Sandoy: Transect 3 (KAM 65-70) 199
Sandoy: High altitude profiles (KAM 83-86) 199
Loss-on-ignition and radiocarbon dating 200
Review of original Icelandic data 200
Chapter summary 212

Chapter 7: Discussion: Historical human-environment interactions in the southern Faroe Islands 213
Introduction 213
7.1 Historical human-environment interactions in the southern Faroe Islands 213
7.2 The pre-colonisation landscape of the southern Faroe Islands 214
Long-term trajectories and thresholds: soil stratigraphic and landform evidence 214
Hypotheses regarding the timings and causes of thresholds 218
Environmental thresholds in late Holocene Faroes 220
Evidence of environmental thresholds in surface landforms 220
Thresholds and spatial factors in relation to surface cover 224
Evidence of environmental thresholds in sediment stratigraphies 227
Timing of thresholds and possible causal relationships 231
Climatic, ecological and environmental changes coinciding with the timing of Phase 1 (c. 2900 – 2300 cal yr BP) 235
Climatic, ecological and environmental changes coinciding with the timing of Phases 2a and 2b (c. 1900 – 1300 cal yr BP) 238
Conclusions: how did pre-colonisation landscape change affect settlement? 242
7.3 Human impact in the southern Faroe Islands 243
The impact and geomorphic significance of *landnám* 243
The geomorphic significance of post-*landnám* anthropogenic impact 245
The significance of long-term grazing impacts 246
The significance of landscape impact related to resource exploitation 250
Conclusions: how has human impact affected the Faroese landscape? 251
7**.4. Why might human impact in the Faroes have been limited?** 253
How geography, topography and settlement factors may have influenced environmental and cultural trajectories in the Faroe Islands 254
How specific resource exploitation strategies may have limited human

impact on the environment 256
The nature, methods and significance of fowling and egg collecting 256
The nature, methods and significance of the grind (pilot whale drive) 260
Conclusions: why might human impact in the Faroes have been limited? 261
Chapter summary 261

Chapter 8: Discussion: The Faroe Islands and the wider North Atlantic context 262
Introduction 262
8.1 The importance of a wider spatial context 262
8.2 Summary of trajectories and thresholds in the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland 263
8.3 Comparisons between the Faroe Islands and Iceland 266
Why are trajectories between the Faroes and Iceland different? 266
Inherent physical and ecological differences between the Faroe Islands and Iceland 268
Differences in the utilisation of resources in the Faroe Islands and Iceland, and how these develop over time 268
Isolation, contact and disease in the Faroe Islands and Iceland 269
Why might human impacts in the Faroes have been limited? Insights from Iceland 272
An example from south Iceland: identifying the differences in environmental trajectories between the farms of Mörk and Dalur 272
An example of contrasting environmental trajectories between adjacent farms in the Mývatnsveit region, north Iceland 276
8.4. Comparisons between the Faroe Islands and Greenland 281
Are there comparisons between the environments and subsistence practices and impacts in the Faroe Islands and Norse Greenland? 281
Similarities between the scale of settlements and population in the Faroe Islands and Greenland 281
Similarities in the pre-settlement environments of the Faroe Islands and Greenland 282
A comparison of resource utilisation in the Faroe Islands and Greenland 283
Why might trajectories in the Faroes and Greenland be different? 284
Differing patterns of conflict and goals and aspirations between the Greenland and Faroese Norse 284
To what extent does climate matter with regards to differences in cultural and environmental trajectories in the North Atlantic? 286

When climate doesn't matter: a comparative example of cultural collapse from south east Polynesia 287

8.5. Chapter conclusions 290

Comparison of approaches to adaptation on the North Atlantic Islands 290

Were outcomes on the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland inevitable? 291

Chapter summary 293

Chapter 9: Conclusions: Under what circumstances do people put unsustainable demands on island environments? 294

Summary 294

Implications of site-specific research in the Faroe Islands 296

Implications of inter-island comparisons in the North Atlantic 297

Implications of the thesis for the fundamental issues of islands and human impact 300

Appendix A: Additional archaeological data 304

Sandoy archaeological structures and GPS coordinates 304

Appendix B: Interview data 310

Interview framework 310

Notes from interviews 313

Notes from interview with Gunnar Bjarnarsson (GB): 28/04/2006 313

Additional notes from second interview with GB: 04/05/06 318

Notes from interview with Joannes Johannessen (JJ): 02/05/06 318

Notes from interview with Johan Petur (JP): 01/05/06 323

Notes from interview with Petur Clementson (PC): 02/05/2006 326

Interview transcripts 328

Transcription of interview with Gunnar Bjarnarsson (GB): 28/04/2006 328

Transcription of interview with with Joannes Johannessen (JJ): 02/05/06 348

Appendix C: Icelandic stratigraphic and sediment accumulation rate data 364

Methodological summary 364

Appendix D: Papers arising from the thesis 375

References 376