

**The School in the Isles**  
Abstract

## Islands

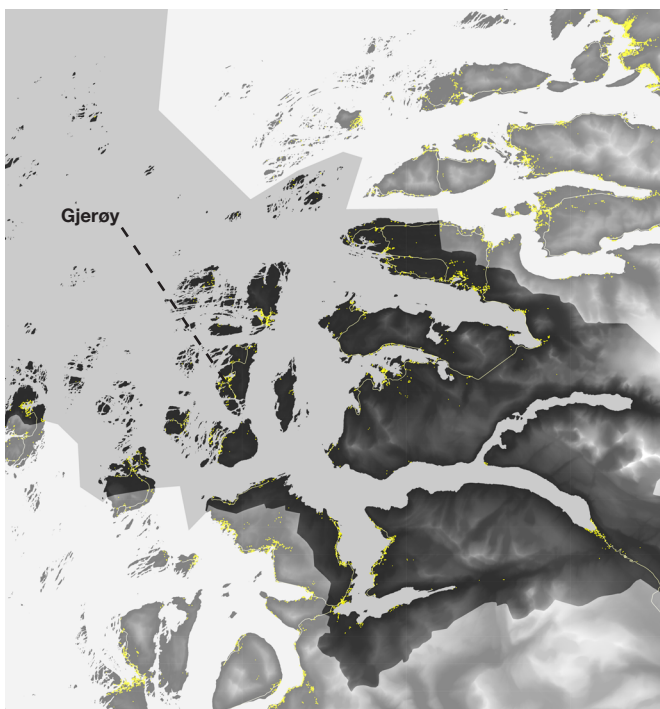
There are about 240 000 islands in Norway, and they make up a belt along the coast which has been populated for more than 10 000 years. Some of these islands have big cities, such as Tromsø, and are connected to the mainland via bridges and tunnels. Some of them are small, with only a few houses and sometimes even fewer people. Some of them are dying, some prosper, and some have an uncertain future. My preliminary diploma report was about public space in island communities. My diploma project is a further exploration of the theme, narrowed down to the island school in particular.

With the analysis of three different island communities from the pre-diploma as a basis, I set decided to continue working with the islands in Rødøy Municipality in Nordland County. People in Rødøy live on islands and in the fjords. 377 out of a population of 1238 live on islands. Rødøy is truly a rural municipality, and it makes it challenging to run, especially in terms of education and health care. The population live on 14 different bodies of land, some are islands, some are mainland communities, but none of them are connected to the others, other than by boat. Only one of them are connected to the mainland road system.

Twenty years ago there were ten schools in Rødøy. Six were situated on islands, the rest in the fjords. Today there are six schools left. Three in the isles, three in the fjords. Traditionally each island would have its own school, and at a time were most people were farmers and fishermen, daily life would unfold on the island, except for Sundays, when people of the isles would gather at the church on the main island; Rødøy.

Modern life is quite different, also in the small island communities of Rødøy. Fast ferries has made it possible to commute to other islands or to the center on the mainland on a daily basis. Schools have been closed due to a decreasing number of children. Workers and pupils get on the boat every day to get to work and school, but the structure of public services are upheld; each island should have its own school as long as there are children. This has been a policy for decades and the positive thing about it is that schools are close to where people live. The downside however is that the school in itself becomes a symbol of the vitality of each island or fjord community. When a school is closed, people will say: "now, no young people would like to move to our island", or "this is the beginning of the end for the island".

The School of the Isles is about changing the perception of community, and to explore how architecture can bring new meaning to a traditional program. What are the boundaries of a community surrounded by water? The answer seems simple when looking at a geographical correct map. But I think the ocean represents an endless number of possibilities in connecting people and communities, and I think space and form has an important role to play.



Gjerøy's location in the municipality.



Rødøy Municipality is situated on the coast of Northern Norway.

## Site

The site was chosen as a result of a set of criteria that I defined in the pre-diploma:

1. The site must be on an island with at least 50 inhabitants.
2. The site should be in close proximity of a ferry quay.
3. There should already be a school on the island that is functioning.
4. The Island should be central in relation to surrounding islands.

I found three islands in Rødøy that met these criteria; Nesøy, Rødøy and Gjerøy. Gjerøy was chosen due to its central location in the island district. A secondary reason was the island's topography, which is almost an opposite of its neighbouring islands. Gjerøy is the only island in the municipality with an interior. Small hills and rocks surround the island, protecting the landscape and limits visual access to the ocean. The site is located on one of the few places where the road finds a way between two small hills and meets the ocean and the fairway that passes by.

Gjerøy has 80 inhabitants and a school with 16 pupils. The school is situated in the interior of the island, 1.2 km from the ferry quay. This school must be closed at the expense of the new school in the isles. I will argue that that a new school for the isles should be located by the water to make it more accessible for neighbouring islands. That is the obvious reason. Another reason is that building something new could have a strong unifying effect, once it is regarded as a common project for all the islanders. The old schools were built for each island, and would be "rivaling" schools ever since. A new school with a new name on a new site would perhaps create a stronger sense of belonging in the people who are going to use it.

The different regional and local boat routes call at the island several times a day. It is located by the busiest fairway for passenger boats in the municipality, making it quite accessible for commuters and pupils from other islands.

## Objects, symbols and tradition

In the coastal landscape, big objects visible from the fairway becomes important markers of place. Some are structures built to guide sailors, like a beakon on a rock. Other are built for a spesific use on land, but can become important symbols for people passing by due to an odd shape or a strong color. In a way these objects belong to everyone who passes them, and they tell stories about what a place is, what it used to be, and what it is to become. They can be markers of distance, but they can also decieve. A small mountain on the coast can be visible from miles away. Its precence in the horizon reduces the mental distance to the place it represents.

Some motives are more known than others. The traditional storage buildings would usually be the biggest building on an island. A big roof could house two stories of extra storage, and the painted timber cladding would make it visiable from a far. The building would rest on timber foandations or on a solid stone base, grounding it to the rock. Another motive is compleety different; an oil tank. A painted steel sylinder placed near where the boats dock. An odd shape for a stranger travelling by, creating new images associated to the place.

The School in the Isles will become an important building for the entire island district of Rødøy. It will become an object that represents a node in the public sphere. How should it appear?

Schools in these communities are small, but they are often the biggest building on the island. How do we deal with relatively big structures in a context of small houses? One way is adapting to the landsce, dealing with one or several volumes in one story that stretches out horizontally. In this context i choose to go the opposite way. The school is the most important building in the isles, therefore it should appear as big as it is. The new school will be an important symbol of the unity of the island communities in Rødøy, it should awake a feeling of ownership in everyone who uses it. As the traditional white timber churches, it should be visible as a strong shape in the costal landscape. The new learns from the old.

During the process it has been important for me to explore the relationship between autonomous external forms and internal space. How do the one inform the other, and what spaces can come out from designing a building from, so to say, starting in two opposite ends. Another factor has been important for me in order to honor at least one segment of local building tradition; namely pragmatism. This project has been created where uncompromising forms has met with the demands of a fairly straight forward program, mixed with some pragmatism from local building tradition, and it has become The School in the Isles. What did I want to achieve when I started? Presumably only to find out how the island school of tomorrow looks like, but the challenge has been both creative, structural, intellectual and technical. I hope something interesting came out of it at the end.



Old storage bulding at Kjerringøy



Modern oil tank at the old trading post Selsøyvik

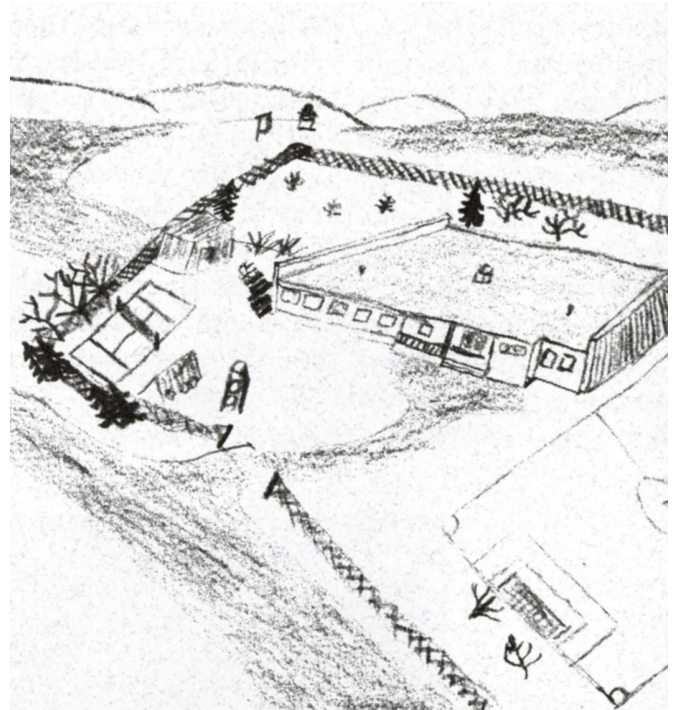


The island of Rødøy with different scales of objects. The mountain "Rødøyløva" (The Rødøy Lion) is visible from miles away and has been an important marker for sailors for centuries. It's also the motive of the municipalitie's coat of arms, a strong identity marker for the people of Rødøy. The white gable of a storage building leads the way to safe harbour and an important trading post. The church spire is visible from several miles away. It tells the story of the historical significance of this island.

## Program

**Primary School for 1th - 10th grade.  
20 - 40 pupils.**

Total net area:	973 m <sup>2</sup>
Classrooms:	142 m <sup>2</sup>
Library:	47 m <sup>2</sup>
Group spaces	101 m <sup>2</sup>
Gymnasium	260 m <sup>2</sup>
Kitchen	38 m <sup>2</sup>
Restrooms	26 m <sup>2</sup>
Locker rooms	79 m <sup>2</sup>
Circulation	133 m <sup>2</sup>
Head master's office	10 m <sup>2</sup>
Teacher's break room	14 m <sup>2</sup>
Teacher's work space	17 m <sup>2</sup>
Teacher's locker room	5 m <sup>2</sup>
Entrances	11 m <sup>2</sup>
Storage	36 m <sup>2</sup>
Technical space	92 m <sup>2</sup>



Children's drawing of the old school at Selsøyvik



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