

Motoring in Greenland

There are plenty of myths about Inuits and Greenland: The Inuits are primarily hunters. Their favourite means of transport are kayaks and dogsleds. They eat almost exclusively whales and seals, and they probably still reside in igloos?

The media image of the Inuits and Greenland contributes to create these myths. When journalists, photographers and filmmakers come to Greenland, they are usually in search of the original world: They focus on what they think will be exotic to the people in their home countries.

But the true picture is that the traditional Greenland constantly is changing, and these changes are very similar to the trends observed in the rest of the world. There are still many sled dogs in North and East Greenland. But since 1990 the sled dog population decreases continuously. In 2011, there were 24,046 sled dogs in the country. The population had fallen to 15,451 sled dogs in 2011.

Today, the daily means of transport for many families is the car. In the capital of Greenland, Nuuk, there is traffic jam twice a day. Around eight o'clock in the morning the roads from the outlying neighbourhoods of the town are long tailbacks of cars.

It seems grotesque with so many cars in a town without roads out of the town. You can not drive to other settlements or drive to the countryside. In Greenland there are today approximately only 370,000 kilometres asphalt and dirt roads.

The country used a lot of money on cars and traffic. Each year, the municipalities have to carry out major repairs of the roads. The harsh climate makes it impossible to asphalt, so the asphalt will last for several years. The harsh climate costs the municipalities a lot of money to keep the roads clear of snow and ice.

The imports of cars beat every year new records. The statistics shows

that in 2011 the total number of vehicles in Greenland was of approximately 6,000. This is a lot for a population of only 57,000 inhabitants.

Also otherwise motoring in Greenland seems absurd. The capital Nuuk and several of the other towns get energy from hydroelectric plants. But the cars continue to run on imported gasoline, and even here in the clear Arctic air you really can feel the pollution from the cars.

The politicians often demand the gasoline-powered cars to be replaced with electric cars. This year the municipality Sermersooq has declared the political aim that 80 per cent of all cars ten years from now have to be electric cars. A few companies have started tests of electric cars, but otherwise it still seems like wishful thinking, and we still lack a concrete action plan to achieve the ambitious target.



Traffic in Nuuk – road slippery with snow, February 2011