

# IFLA/FAIFE World Report: Libraries and Intellectual Freedom



## Iceland

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Iceland is an island nation, situated in the northern region of the Atlantic Ocean, midway between the North American and European continents. It has an area of 103.000 square kilometres. The population density is 2.7 persons per square kilometre. Iceland is thus a sparsely populated country, with its inhabited areas strung out along the indented coastline, but approximately 62% of the population live in the capital Reykjavik and in other towns in its vicinity. In Iceland there is a high demand for knowing other languages in order to be able to keep abreast of new developments in every subject field. Fast and easy access to information is therefore vital for the Icelandic society.

<b>Population:</b>	278,702 (1999)
<b>GNP per capita:</b>	\$29,330 (1999)
<b>Government / Constitution:</b>	Republic
<b>Main languages:</b>	Icelandic
<b>Main religions:</b>	Lutheranism
<b>Literacy:</b>	99%
<b>% of population online:</b>	52.11% (July 2000)

### The Situation of Libraries, Librarianship and Intellectual Freedom

Although Iceland has an enduring literary culture and an ancient writing tradition, it does not have a lengthy library tradition in the sense we give this word today.

The first Icelandic reading society, predecessors of the public libraries, was founded in 1790. Now there are 106 public libraries in the country and they are becoming more and more important for the society. As recently as 1955 the first public library laws were passed, to which amendments were added in 1963 and 1978. In 1997 finally a new law was passed. Connected with the law is a codicil saying that in the years 1997-2001 the government will give grants to support public libraries to offer the newest technology available and to enhance the connection to the digital information network.

The National Library, founded in 1818, is by far the oldest Icelandic research library and was for a long time the only library in Iceland that regularly acquired foreign literature. The University of Iceland was established in 1911 but the University Library was not formally opened until 1940. The two libraries above merged in 1994. Nowadays there are about 45 research libraries in the country.

The education legislation stipulates that in each elementary school there must be a library or school media centre. Unfortunately not all elementary schools can boast of school libraries of their own, but in all secondary schools are libraries services provided.

Library education was established at the University of Iceland in 1956. The curriculum in library and information science is designed as a part of the BA program, which consists of 90 credit hours. Research master degree can now be achieved from the University of Iceland. Before 1956 a few Icelanders had graduated from library science schools abroad, the first one in 1921.

Iceland is an old democracy where democracy seems to be given and librarians seldom discuss its definitions and aims.

There is a lack of discussion of the role of libraries in Iceland and there is also lack of awareness from politician's point of view of the role and mission of the public libraries, but in general the libraries are not victims to censorship and there are no systematic examples of censorship.

It is common that Icelandic libraries have guidelines and policies of buying and storing material and the guidelines are similar among the different libraries.

A special committee on acquiring data bases and access to electronic information on national basis is working on several contracts to guarantee access to information for the nation as a whole. For an island nation like Iceland with high demand for information electronic access to information through the Internet is very important in order to be able to keep abreast for new technologies and developments.

At the moment (summer 2000) a committee is selecting a new library system for the country as a whole.

Public Libraries and the National and University Library as well provide access, mostly free of charge, to the Internet for their users.

## Specific Cases of Censorship and Violations of Intellectual Freedom

Censorship and Violations of intellectual freedom are rare, but some cases have come up regarding authors who use existing persons and their biographies as subjects in their books.

Censorship and free access to information are being more often discussed in newspapers and journals in relation to unlimited access of minors to material, especially pornography, on the Internet.

## Legislation on Intellectual Freedom, Libraries and Librarianship

In Iceland the fields of freedom of expression, of access to information and of libraries are regulated in the following laws:

- *The Constitution* (from 1944) states that "Every person has the right to express his thoughts in print; nevertheless, he shall be responsible for them before the Courts. Censorship and other restrictions on the freedom of expression in print must never be enacted."
- *The Information Law No. 50/1996*. This law regulates the conditions for exercising the right of access to public information, i.e. government and municipalities documents. These include information within the public administration. This right is increasingly used by journalists with success.
- *Law on Public Libraries No. 36/1997* states that "Public libraries are institutes of knowledge and culture. Their purpose is to provide people, children and adults, with ready access to a diverse repository of books and other media, including computer equipment and information in machine-readable form. Libraries shall promote free and uninhibited access by the public to information and repositories of knowledge. Libraries shall, each in its own area of service, endeavour to support cultural activities and to make available to the public information on public institutions and services. Their objective shall be to promote the Icelandic language, encourage lifelong education and promote interest in reading.  
All Icelanders shall be entitled to avail themselves of the service of public libraries. All municipalities are required to provide such services pursuant to this Act.  
All public libraries shall organise their activities so as to enable the best possible co-operation of the libraries in the country in their service to users."
- *Law on Elementary Schools No. 66/1995* state that "Every compulsory school shall have a resource centre. The school resource centre shall serve as one of the principal aids to school activities and the facilities, books and other instructional materials it is equipped with and its personnel shall reflect this.  
A local authority may combine public library facilities with those of the school resource a centre provided this does not, in the opinion of the School Board and the principal, reduce the value of the centre for the school."
- *Laws on Secondary Schools No. 80/1996* state that "Every upper secondary school shall have a resource centre. Its role is to serve as information centre for pupils and teachers. It shall be equipped with books and audio-visual materials, together with other resource materials connected with the subjects taught in the school. The accommodations of the resource centre shall include provision for study facilities with access to reference works in the resource centre.  
The activities of the school resource centre shall emphasise the training of pupils in independently seeking information and using data banks."
- *Laws on the Authors' Library Fund No. 33/1997* In this law there is a regulation about the contribution the public libraries have to pay for exercising lending rights of published materials.
- *New Laws on Legal Deposit* submitted to the parliament in the year 2000. According to the new proposal access will be provided to all material published in the country, to the extent permitted by the law on copyright. The material will be accessible in the National Department of the National and University Library and/or in the National Film Archive of Iceland.

## Code of Ethics for Professional Librarians

The Icelandic Association of Professional Librarians has adopted professional code of ethics. The code was approved in April 1995.