

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

National Cultural Policy

Iceland

Reykjavík 2013

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Published by: Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland 2013

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ISBN: 978-9935-436-13-9

Printing: Háskólaprent

Introduction

On 6 March 2013, the Althing passed a resolution mandating the Minister of Education, Science and Culture to implement a policy on the arts and the cultural heritage – the National Cultural Policy. This is the first time a specific public policy is drawn up in this domain.

The policy document describes government's involvement in matters relating to the arts and the cultural heritage. The terminology used should be viewed in light of this demarcation, considering that the policy does not address issues relating to particular artistic disciplines or individual cultural heritage stakeholders. The policy is intended as an aid for government and lawmakers in future debates, in policy-making in specified areas and in decision-making. The National Cultural Policy has been drawn up in the hope that it will serve as an incentive for the large number of people and institutions active on the Icelandic cultural scene to focus on quality and look to future in their decision-making and planning. It should prove useful to politicians and government officials, employees at cultural institutions, researchers, committees responsible for the allocation of funds, artists and artists' associations, media employees and anyone taking part in cultural life. A number of the government's partners in the field of culture, such as local authorities and private actors, should also be able to use it as a point of reference.

There has been a long-standing call for the Icelandic government to draw up a specific National Cultural Policy. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture started work on the policy in 2009, consulting extensively with those involved in the cultural scene. For this purpose, the Ministry in 2010 organised a conference entitled "The Land of Culture" (*Meningarlandið*) to discuss how the policy should be shaped.

Iceland possesses a rich cultural and artistic life characterised, in a variety of fields, by worthwhile original creative work which is of importance both to its inhabitants and to the world at large. In the sphere of cultural heritage the government has a key role to play since an understanding of the nation's cultural history is one of the prerequisites for active participation in society and an important part of each individual's personal identity. A varied cultural life also contributes to general well-being in society and promotes equality. Participating in cultural activities is conducive to a full life and stimulates positive interaction between different social groups and generations. Cultural activities are also a key factor in the development of tourism.

The following four factors are the cornerstones of the National Cultural Policy:

- * Creative work and participation in cultural life.
- * Easy access to the arts and to the cultural heritage.

- * Cooperation between the government and the large number of people and institutions which are active in the field of culture.
- * Participation by children and young people in cultural life.

It is imperative for the cultural policy to be at all times a dynamic part of further policy-making, legislation and decision-making in this field, and for its different aspects and priorities to be allowed to evolve in harmony with social changes, technical innovation and international currents.

The National Cultural Policy is meant to reflect the dynamic character of Icelandic cultural life and contribute to its further strengthening. A flourishing national cultural life brings benefits to all.

National Cultural Policy

A guiding light for government in the domain of the arts and cultural heritage

a.

The Icelandic government sees it as its role to create the appropriate conditions for fostering diversity, innovation and initiative in the field of the arts and cultural heritage.

b.

The government considers adequate access to cultural activities and awareness of the nation's cultural heritage to be important components of the social fabric. Research into the cultural heritage and the dissemination thereof lead to a heightened sense of historical continuity and strengthen the national identity. The Icelandic language is a crucial part of that identity and should be reinforced in every possible sphere of society in accordance with Icelandic language policy.

c.

The government wishes to promote the increased participation and improved access of every citizen to cultural activities supported by public funds.

d.

Government involvement in cultural life is structured by legal provisions and by the support measures implemented. Government support is primarily directed at professional activity in the arts as well as at the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage.

e.

The government considers a diverse cultural scene to be an important part of the national economy, and one which is likely to carry even further weight in the future. The cultural life in Iceland has a wide-reaching derivative economic impact, including in the tourism and technology sectors, in education, and in trade and services.

f.

While recognising the independence of public institutions in the field of culture, the government expects their directors and employees to maintain a high degree of professionalism.

g.

The government prioritises the quality of the work done by all recipients of financial support in the domain of culture, and expects them to display professionalism in their activities and in the services they provide.

h.

The government is not directly involved in the programming and daily activities of any of the public cultural institutions or of other recipients of public financial support. However, it carries out performance assessments for these activities and enforces the accountability of directors, board members and others responsible for the management of public funds.

i.

The government prioritises support for regions that are at a disadvantage when it comes to enjoying the services of the main cultural institutions, achieving this through cultural contracts, investment plans and development projects.

j.

The government manages its support for cultural activities in accordance with the arm's length principle as applicable to the allocation of public funds for cultural purposes, for example in relation to the work of institutions and foundations, as well as of the allocation committees of artists' stipend funds.

k.

The government places special priority on promoting the culture of children and young people throughout the country and enabling them to become active participants in cultural life. Publicly funded cultural institutions and other recipients of public support are encouraged to plan their programming having due regard, inter alia, to the needs of children and young people, and to organise their activities so as to allow them easier access to the arts and to culture, irrespective of their financial standing.

l.

The government works to facilitate the cooperation of the different participants in cultural life. The creative energy of different groups and individuals strengthens cultural life, the basic prerequisites for any such creative activity being the freedom of expression and democracy.

m.

One of the government's priorities is cooperating efficiently with local authorities and their regional associations on cultural issues, and encouraging them to collaborate between themselves on individual cultural projects. Cultural contracts are drawn up with regional

associations with the purpose of supporting cultural activities outside the capital region. Cooperation with the City of Reykjavik, the country's capital, is very important.

n.

The government prioritises the digital dissemination of the different aspects of cultural life. Cultural institutions are expected to make targeted use of information technology in their work, in particular for the dissemination of cultural heritage.

o.

The government encourages the cooperation and participation of individuals and companies in cultural life.

p.

The government aims to support the high-quality promotion of Icelandic culture abroad as well as international cultural cooperation.

q.

The government's support for cultural and artistic life must be in harmony with contemporary trends with due regard to diversity, continuity, and the language, heritage and history of Iceland.



Cultural participation

Having access to culture is an important aspect of living in a free society. Cultural activities support knowledge seeking and innovation in society. Two other key aspects of cultural life are the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage and the importance of the Icelandic language.

Cultural literacy and cultural participation play a significant role in the upbringing of children and adolescents. Access to culture makes them more broad-minded and tolerant and cultural participation enhances their sense of democracy, justice and historical context. This makes them more likely as citizens to adopt a mature and skilful approach to participation in society.

Cultural diversity strengthens society and contributes to the quality of life of people in Iceland. Cultural activity encourages social interaction and reduces the risk of the cultural isolation of individuals or groups. The role of the media in highlighting the diversity and dynamism of cultural life is crucial.

A rich cultural life is of importance not only to the inhabitants of Iceland, but also to visitors and tourists who are interested in acquainting themselves with the country's population and its history.

Diversity and professionalism are key factors in making culture accessible to all and facilitating active cultural participation, in addition to being a guiding light for all types of cultural tourism.

Objectives

1.

To preserve and enhance the diversity of cultural life so as to make it possible for everyone to find something to their taste.

2.

To ensure the highest possible level of access to culture for all groups of society, irrespective of place of residence or financial standing.

3.

To increase the cultural offer for children and young people, and to increase their participation.

4.

To strengthen the teaching of and about the arts in schools, and to continue developing university-level studies and research in the field of culture and arts.

5.

To encourage active participation, creative work and initiatives by individuals in accordance with the increased emphasis on critical thinking, creative activity and tolerance in curriculums at all levels of the educational system.

6.

To spur cultural institutions and those receiving public support for carrying out cultural activities to constantly aim for a wider audience, thereby counteracting cultural barriers.

7.

To ensure that cultural institutions stay at the forefront of the spreading of cultural diversity, each in their respective fields.

II

Living cultural institutions

Cultural institutions are important to the functioning of society. They strengthen the national identity and have a role to play in underpinning social relations.

Cultural institutions afford the people of Iceland a chance to enjoy artistic creations and to acquaint themselves with the cultural heritage, as well as playing a significant role in cultural research, archiving, documentation, preservation and administration. They are service-oriented institutions taking the diversity of the society as their starting point in their activities and programming, besides playing a key role in providing education in the field of culture, to children and adults alike. Moreover, cooperation on cultural research between universities and cultural institutions is one of the prerequisites for innovation in the fields of research and dissemination.

Traditionally and according to law, publicly funded cultural institutions enjoy independence in their work. Their activities are regulated by the provisions of acts and regulations, and their objectives and priorities are laid down in performance management contracts.

Objectives

1.

For cultural institutions in Iceland to focus on professionalism, diversity and quality in their work.

2.

For cultural institutions to support original creative work in the arts and search for new ways to carry out research into and dissemination of cultural heritage.

3.

For cultural institutions to initiate collaboration with independent actors, in the interest of both parties, and aim to increase the flexibility of their activities and policies. For cultural institutions to seek cooperation with the grassroots of cultural activity with a view to enhancing their work and promoting innovation.

4.

For cultural institutions to seek to define the group of people they serve and make it their aim to reach out to other groups of society.

5.

For the programming of cultural institutions to be seen as a worthwhile option for the leisure activities of Icelandic families. Particular attention should be given to programming for children and young people, including through cooperation with educational institutions.

6.

For cultural institutions having a national focus to provide services to those living outside the capital region to the extent possible.

7.

To explore the feasibility of merging cultural institutions, where appropriate, in order to take advantage of synergies and reinforce the professionalism of their work.

8.

For government to formulate a long-term housing policy for cultural institutions.



Cultural cooperation

Although cultural activity in Iceland takes place to a large extent without any government involvement, public support for cultural institutions, funds and contracts consolidates the foundations of the various cultural activities carried out by professionals.

Individuals and their associations are the principal driving force of cultural life and provide a foundation for creative work and cooperation. Advancement and innovation in cultural life are dependent upon wide participation by and cooperation between different actors. A thriving artistic and cultural environment requires cooperation between public institutions and private actors.

Cultural life is one of the prerequisites of permanent residence, in the same way as access to occupation, health services, education and social security. The government promotes the strengthening of cultural activities throughout the country, and a precondition for this is close cooperation with local authorities, for example in the form of financial contributions under cultural contracts signed with the regions.

Publicly funded cultural institutions serve as focal points for cooperation and lead the way professionally in their respective fields.

Objectives

1.

To carry out regular assessments of the results achieved through cultural contracts entered into between the state and local authorities, with an aim to strengthening the cooperation.

2.

To ensure that every type of cultural cooperation is based on professionalism and that allocations of public funds take place in accordance with the arm's length principle.

3.

To ensure that cultural and educational institutions cooperate toward the goal of enhancing cultural literacy among the younger generations.

4.

To promote increased cooperation between artists and schools, with priority being placed both on facilitating the enjoyment of the arts by children and young people and on fostering creative activity and critical thinking among them.

5.

To encourage increased social participation by undertakings and individuals through the support provided to cultural activity.

IV

Iceland in an international context

Icelandic cultural life is nourished by international currents while at the same time contributing to those currents. This kind of interaction is indispensable for the advancement of artistic and cultural activity. Participation by Icelandic artists in international cooperation enlarges the market they have access to and heightens the standard by which they are measured, while at the same time contributing to the enrichment of the country's artistic and cultural life.

Iceland's cultural life influences many people's experience of the country, and its reputation is enhanced by high-quality cultural projects presented in the international arena.

Preserving the cultural heritage, including the Icelandic language, is important in a global context, not to mention the importance of that heritage as a fundamental component of the national identity.

One of the roles of government in the domain of the arts and culture is to promote participation in international relations and cooperation.

Objectives

1.

To increase international cooperation, including through the promotion of Icelandic culture abroad by professional means with the active collaboration of everyone concerned. To bolster, for this purpose, the activities of the information centres for the arts and induce them to seek closer cooperation with their sister organisations in the other Nordic countries and elsewhere in the world.

2.

To ensure that participation in international cooperation in the domains of the arts and the promotion of Icelandic arts abroad takes place on the terms of art itself. The information centres for the arts, Promote Iceland, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs have important roles in this.

3.

To make it easier for Icelandic artists to participate in artistic activities in other countries and to strengthen the role of the information centres for the arts in this respect.

4.

To take advantage of a variety of ways to disseminate the Icelandic cultural heritage, prioritising participation, learning and own experience.

5.

To promote active cooperation on cultural affairs between the government and international organisations.

V

Operational environment in the field of culture

Freedom of expression is a basic condition of cultural life, and the government has an obligation to safeguard that freedom by every means available. Public authorities must not attempt to influence creative activity or the content of the arts or other parts of cultural life. Government involvement in cultural life is structured by legal provisions and by the support measures implemented, which primarily concern the activities of institutions and professionals in the domain of the arts, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage. The government respects artists' length rules and aims to create a precedent of best practices and good governance.

The operation of cultural institutions, artists' stipend funds and statutory project funds enhances the diversity of cultural life. Public authorities have an obligation to ensure that funding is put to good use and that policies and decision-making are governed by professional considerations. Satisfactory overview and effectiveness are both important when it comes to the allocating public funds for the arts and for activities in the field of cultural heritage.

Objectives

1.

To channel public contributions to cultural projects through statutory funds administrated by professionally led allocation committees which allocate the funds based on well-conducted peer reviews. Fund boards should adopt good governance practices, respect the arm's length principle and observe generally accepted eligibility criteria.

2.

To ensure that artists' stipend funds and project funds are properly defined and that they reflect the diversity and on-going development of cultural life, including as regards cooperative projects.

3.

To look for ways to further strengthen private support for cultural endeavours and make it a worthwhile pursuit. To foster mutual understanding and recognition of the common interests of the cultural and economic spheres of society.

4.

To improve the working environment of artists in terms of taxation, social security, health insurance, etc.

5.

To support research into the importance of culture for the Icelandic economy in order to provide a firmer basis for artistic and cultural activities in the nation's economic and social life.

6.

To make the macroeconomic impact of artistic and cultural activities a part of regularly tracked statistics.

VI

Digital culture

Information technology and digital distribution methods are factors of strong influence in the sphere of contemporary culture, whether as regards entertainment, creative work, communication, research, or the preservation and diffusion of different types of cultural material. A constantly growing group of people uses online resources to search for

information on Icelandic culture, which is becoming increasingly accessible through digital distribution methods. Iceland is a country with a high rate of Internet access, and Internet usage per capita is one of the highest in the world. The conditions are therefore favourable for making even further progress in this domain.

Providing easy access to Icelandic culture and related information in digital media is highly important for the maintenance of a rich cultural life in the society. In order to further improve the public's access to the treasures of Iceland's artistic and cultural heritage, it is necessary to increase the supply of new digital content and render older content accessible in digital form. Adequate access to cultural material provides support to the teaching of culture and the arts, counteracts the illegal use of copyrighted content, and promotes interest in and knowledge of Icelandic culture.

The use of digital technologies for artistic purposes is increasing fast, and it is important to promote original creative expression in this field while at the same time enhancing the general public's ability to use digital media. The rapidity of technological advances poses significant challenges for the digital preservation of cultural material, and there is a need for a careful examination of possible solutions to those challenges.

Objectives

1.

To make the nation's cultural heritage accessible in digital form wherever possible. For this purpose, cultural institutions working with digital material must cooperate, prioritise and make appropriate plans.

2.

To safeguard the quality and visibility of the supply of Icelandic culture in digital form.

3.

To ensure the professionalism of online presentations by cultural institutions of their activities, both in Icelandic and in foreign languages.

4.

To promote active participation and creative activity by the country's population on the Internet. Media literacy in the educational system is an important basis for any such participation, and consequently information and media literacy is one of the priorities of the recently updated curricula for the different school levels.

5.

To search for solutions to copyright and intellectual property issues on the Internet, cooperating in this respect with artists' associations and public authorities in neighbouring countries.

6.

To ensure that cultural institutions step up their efforts to make artistic material and the cultural heritage available in digital form and that they strive for close cooperation with the relevant stakeholders.

National Cultural Policy – Comments to the proposal for a parliamentary resolution

This is the first time a specific public policy in the domain of the arts and cultural heritage is presented for approval in parliament in Iceland. The policy covers all areas of responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in the domain of culture, with the exception of sports and youth-related affairs. The Ministry has recently drawn up a policy in the area of sports, and work on a Youth Policy is underway.

The National Cultural Policy is intended as a broad description of the government's involvement in matters relating to the arts and cultural heritage, and as an aid for the government and parliament in future debates, in policy-making in specified areas and in decision-making. The terminology used should be viewed in light of this demarcation, considering that the policy does not address issues relating to particular artistic disciplines or individual cultural heritage stakeholders. The policy will hopefully serve as an incentive for the large number of individuals and institutions active on the Icelandic cultural scene to focus on quality and look to future in their decision-making and planning. It should prove useful to politicians and government officials, employees at cultural institutions, researchers, committees responsible for the allocation of funds, artists and artists' associations, media employees and anyone taking part in cultural life. A number of the government's partners in the field of culture, such as local authorities and private actors, should also be able to use the policy as a point of reference.

It is important for public authorities to pay careful attention to their involvement in this domain and to cooperate actively with the largest possible number of cultural actors. It is also important to review the policy at regular intervals and to make sure that it reflects the government's priorities at each time.

There has been a long-standing call for the Icelandic government to draw up a specific National Cultural Policy. Preparatory work has been on-going at the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture for a few years, including an assessment of the need for such a policy as well as work on a draft policy document. For this purpose, the Ministry in 2010 organised a conference entitled „The Land of Culture“ (Menningarlandið) where a large number of stakeholders met to discuss the shaping of a cultural policy, and a number of actors in the domain of culture have been consulted. The opinions of those invited to submit comments, as well as the conclusions of the conference, have been taken into account in a number of ways in the policy presented herein.

The principal role of the state in matters of culture is to create the appropriate conditions for fostering diversity, innovation and initiative in the field of the arts and cultural heritage, and to safeguard the latter. This entails, for instance, the creation, through legislative, administrative and budgetary means, of a framework for cultural life that allows it to flourish and encourages the participation of the public. It is important for this framework to be shaped in a way that avoids any direct influence on the content of artistic and cultural activities, and that the independence of artists and cultural institutions is fully respected.

Iceland possesses a rich cultural and artistic life characterised, in a variety of fields, by worthwhile original creative work which is of importance both to its inhabitants and to the world at large. In the sphere of cultural heritage the government has a key role to play since an understanding of the nation's cultural history is one of the prerequisites for active participation in society and an important part of each individual's personal identity. A varied cultural life also contributes to general well-being in society and promotes equality. Participating in cultural activities is conducive to a full life and stimulates positive interaction between different social groups and generations.

The following four factors can be said to be the cornerstones of this proposal for a public policy in the domain of the arts and cultural heritage:

- * Creative work and participation in cultural life.
- * Easy access to the arts and to the cultural heritage.
- * Cooperation between the government and the large number of people and institutions which are active in the field of culture.
- * Participation by children and young people in cultural life.

In practice, public cultural policy also manifests itself in various pieces of legislation as well as in regulations and other administrative provisions. This includes in particular:

- * The state budget, which contains provisions on public funding for cultural activities.

- * Legislative and regulatory provisions on cultural issues, for example regarding institutions, project funds, artists' stipend funds, copyright, media, etc.
- * Cultural contracts drawn up with regional associations of local authorities, performance management contracts signed with institutions, as well as the terms of reference of the directors of those institutions, and cooperation agreements drawn up with various parties regarding specific projects and operations.
- * Other policy documents, such as the Icelandic language policy, the policy of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture's on sports and youth-related affairs, museum policy as regards national treasures, and cultural policy in relation to infrastructure.
- * Various other measures by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and other ministries in the domain of culture.

The concept of culture is broad and difficult to define, and opinion differs as to where the line between culture and other aspects of the social setting should be drawn. Culture is a fundamental concept in a variety of disciplines. To illustrate, the classical anthropological notion of culture was shaped by customs, traditions, ideologies, the values of society, etc. In its widest sense, the term "culture" may designate any human activity. In the context of a national cultural policy, however, that definition is ambiguous and too broad, and the present policy mainly focusses on government involvement in matters of the arts and cultural heritage.

One may ask, however, whether a national culture should be considered as unified and indivisible or as complex and composite. The Icelandic culture has often been presented as being distinct from other national cultures. Defining it along such lines is hardly appropriate in the contemporary world where cultural influences cross borders even more readily than before, not least considering the fast-moving technological advances and distribution methods offered by the Internet. Indeed, the Icelandic language lies at the heart of Icelandic culture, but the cultures of neighbouring countries and of distant parts of the world also contribute something new to cultural life in Iceland every day. A wide range of creative activity, debate and exploration of cultural life is also made possible by information technology, and for this reason it is important for public cultural policy to take this digital environment into account. Factors such as globalisation, technological innovation and increased supply and access to diverse cultural activities have also shaken the foundations of the persistent division of culture into 'high' and 'low'. The salient feature of the contemporary consumption of culture is that it is governed by the consumer's search for new knowledge and experiences. New experiences constantly shape the individual's interest in the arts and his/her awareness of the cultural heritage.

The way in which children are introduced to culture and the arts is of great importance. The crucial point is that children must be allowed to approach the experience on their own

terms. Publicly funded cultural institutions are encouraged to facilitate active participation in their activities by children, young people and their families by presenting their subject-matters in animated and interesting ways, thus aiming to provide a positive experience of and sharing in cultural life. Certain aspects of the cultural policy are principally directed toward children and young people. This includes cultural activities and introductions to the arts that take place in Icelandic schools at all levels of the educational system, often in cooperation with cultural institutions. Given the considerable creative energy of children and young people, it is also important to involve them as active participants in cultural life. It is important for organisations, groups and associations in the domain of culture to initiate cooperation with schools to the extent possible, and for schools to strive for such relations in the same way. Schools at all levels of the educational system have an important role in the nation's cultural life, not least in relation to children's culture, education about the arts and the enhancement of cultural literacy, and their impact on the general public's relation to culture and the arts is wide-ranging.

A large proportion of all cultural activities in Iceland is in the hands of individuals and their associations, without any public intervention as regards the arrangement of the activities. The government operates artists' stipend funds and art project funds with the aim of supporting the activities of independent professionals while ensuring that applications are screened by allocation committees that apply a rigorous peer review process, respect the arm's length principle, and are subject to the regular replacement of committee members. The state also operates cultural institutions in the domains of the arts and cultural heritage as required by law, insisting at the same time on the independence of those institutions. Performance management contracts are drawn up with these institutions with a view to ensuring the efficiency of their services and day-to-day operations. Over the past few years, cultural contracts have also been signed with the different regions with the aim of guaranteeing the best possible allocation of public funds with the help of members of the local population having the appropriate perspective. These activities must be subject to systematic performance reviews so as to ensure at all times the best possible performance of the cooperation of the state with local authorities and their regional associations.

A country can best achieve a thriving cultural life by paying attention to the relations and interactions between its different elements. Thus, although experimentation and innovation are important aspects of cultural life, supporting cultural activities is not only a question of starting new projects, but also of making the best use possible of public funding and of maintaining diversity. The interaction between institutions and the grassroots in all areas of culture is of the utmost importance in order to enable the public at all times to cultivate a sense for the nation's cultural life and become acquainted with both modern and traditional aspects of the arts and of culture.

There can be no doubt that the Icelandic population is interested in both having access to a diverse cultural environment and running various cultural projects. This interest must be

built up and strengthened, and in this the government has a significant role. The potential exists, since a rich and varied cultural life tends to inspire greater creative activity in the economic, scientific and innovative spheres of society, as well as increasing the quality of life of the population. While the creative energy and the search for knowledge characterising the artistic and cultural life of Iceland benefit the country's economy in a variety of ways, it is important for statistical reports to show the economic impact of cultural activities more clearly than has been the case until now. For this purpose, foreign models should be studied in cooperation with public authorities in neighbouring countries.

This policy document is presented in the context of the government's general goal-setting as laid out in the strategy document Iceland 2020. It is imperative for the National Cultural Policy to be at all times a dynamic part of policy-making in this field, not least on account of the rapid changes occurring in the contemporary world and the fact that technological advances and the increased mobility of people and capital make it necessary to review the rationales behind any public cultural policy at regular intervals. That review is on-going and also takes place with the help of general policy instruments in the field of culture. A flourishing national cultural life brings benefits to all.