

The Journalist Union and the Icelandic Media Condition – an overview

A Brief Introduction to
the Media Landscape
and History

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1. Introduction – Iceland

Iceland is an island in the North Atlantic, located in a “hot spot“ on the mostly underwater Atlantic ridge. Volcanoes, lava, hot springs and glaciers characterize the landscape. With a population of about 320 thousand, Icelanders speak their own language, Icelandic, which is in essence the medieval Old Norse that the Vikings spoke. Just over half of the population lives in the South West corner of the country, in the capital city of Reykjavík and the surrounding area. The rest of the population is lives in towns, villages and valleys by the cost all around the island. The single largest town outside the metropolitan area is Akureyri in the north.

Iceland was settled in the 900s by Viking emigrants from Norway and their Irish slaves, and for some centuries a prosperous society thrived there, both in terms of economy and culture. This was the period when the great Icelandic sagas were written, literature that constituted the most advanced literary exercise in Europe at the time and is still today the basis for Icelandic cultural heritage.

However, this golden period was followed by centuries of poverty, degradation and foreign domination, first by Norway and then by Denmark. During this time the harsh natural conditions such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes or extended winters due to sea ice at the cost, added to problems caused by social and political developments.

In the 19th century there was a nationalistic awakening and Icelanders were moved by the waves of liberal ideology created by the European revolutions of 1830 and 1848. Important steps on the road to national independence were taken in the latter part of the 19th century culmination in Icelandic home rule in 1904 and national sovereignty with a common monarch with Denmark in 1918. In 1944 Iceland became a republic declaring full independence from the Danish kingdom.

Living standards and general economic wellbeing has been relatively high in Iceland in the last decades and the country has ranked high in terms of GDP. Iceland prides itself of being a modern Scandinavian welfare state with distinct cultural heritage, universal literacy, comprehensive school system, theatres, a professional symphony orchestra and eight universities. However the financial crisis hit Iceland massively in 2008 and all three major

banks in the country went bankrupt. The country plunged into a recession with massive cutbacks in public spending, foreign debt and unemployment up to the unprecedented level of 8% in early 2010.

Iceland was a founding member of NATO in 1949 and had for the latter part of the 20th century special relations with the US, not the least because of a US military base in Keflavik – base that began to shrink in importance in the 1990s and was finally cancelled in the early 2000s. With the change in international relations following the fall of communism the US connection has grown looser. At the same time Iceland has steadily grown closer to Europe, becoming a member of EFTA in 1970 and entering the European Economic area in 1994. In 2009 Iceland filed an application for membership in the European Union, although the application has created considerable political debate and controversy domestically.

2. The Journalist Union of Iceland

The Union of Icelandic Journalists, *Blaðamannafélag Íslands (BÍ)*, is both a trade union and a professional society. The union was first founded in 1897 and was, along with other Scandinavian journalist unions, among the first to be established in Europe. For the first several decades the Union was more of an editor's club with a low level of activity. From the mid-1930s until the end of the Second World War the Journalist Union was dormant, but revived twice and an attempt made to redefine its role in defending and attending to the rights and work conditions of journalists (Birgir Guðmundsson, 2007; Þróstur Haraldsson, 1987).

2.1 BÍ as a Trade Union

Since the late 1940s the Union has operated continuously to the present with classical trade union functions such as wage bargaining, working conditions and rights being an important part of its existence. The Union negotiates wages or a wage-framework for most of Icelandic journalists and only reporters working in the newsrooms at the State Broadcasting Company, RÚV, are represented by a different union. Apart from basic wage-negotiations the BÍ has entered into several contracts and negotiations regarding journalists' rights in the work place and measures to support members when it comes to health problems and recreational activities. Also important steps have been secured regarding collective copyright claims for the group as a whole. An ever expanding part of the operation of the union is also to create and provide opportunities for holiday dwellings for members and the BÍ now has holiday accommodation in three different parts of the country, Akureyri in the north, Stykkishólmur in the west and in Brekkuskógur in the south.

2.2 BÍ as a Professional Society

While performing an important role in guiding the material interests and formal rights of Icelandic journalists the BÍ began to widen its scope of activity in the late 1960s onwards. Greater emphasis was put on the BÍ becoming a professional union as well as a trade union. In the mid 1960 the Ethical Code and Committee were first established and in the following decades a number of measures were taken by the BÍ to support independent journalism. This process went hand in hand with the loosening of political parallelism in the Icelandic media as party based media was slowly giving way to market driven media and the ideology of objective independent journalism. Changes in the way in which the leadership of the BI was selected and the regular publishing of a professional organ, *Blaðamaðurinn* (The Journalist), are examples of this development.

The significance of the BÍ for journalists and the media in Iceland has increased in the last two decades. More complex labour relations that accompany market media along with new technology, more mobility of journalists, copy right issues and job security have highlighted the trade union role of the BÍ. At the same time its other main function, to by a professional union, has received greater attention and efforts by the BÍ leadership. This is manifested in the increased force put into the publication of the printed organ, the establishment of a web site primarily dealing with professional issues, a variety of conferences and debates on professional questions and last but not the least the establishment in 2003 of a Journalism Price which is handed out every year in four categories

2.3 Photo Journalist Society

Photojournalism in Iceland began to develop in the 1960s although photographers had been working at newspapers since shortly after World War II when the first full time photographer was hired to an Icelandic newspaper, *Morgunblaðið*. The development of photojournalism was closely linked to new developments in newspaper printing and then grew into its present form in the late '60 and in the 70s. Professionalization and class awareness of photojournalism developed rapidly although the photographers came from different backgrounds some of them being educated in the craft of photography while others were not. In 1978 a special Photo Journalist Society was founded within the Journalist Union which has been operating ever since. This society has now for over two decades held annual exhibitions called „The Photos of the Year“ and this exhibition has become a major cultural event in Iceland. At the opening of the exhibitions the results of a photo contest, also called the Photos of the Year, are announced and the photos of the exhibition are published in a yearly book.

2.4 Other Media Unions

There are only two unions specifically related to media workers, one is the Journalist Union of Iceland and the other is RUV-News Reporters Society. All editorial media staff in the Icelandic media is in one of these two unions, the Journalist Union being by far the larger one. All journalists of the print media and of the private broadcasting and new media stations belong to the Journalist Union. The RUV New Reporters Society is limited to reporters in the State-broadcasting newsroom and it only deals with wage related issues. The Journalist Union on the other hand both negotiates wage rates and rights for its members and keeps up operations related to the professional values of journalistic principles. Thus many of the reporters in the RUV News Reporters Society are also members of the Journalist Union and there is, and has been for some time, an ongoing discussion on the merger of the two organisations. However, some media people, in particular technical and support staff, is also in other less specialized unions.

3. Media landscape in Iceland

In the following lines a general overview of the development of the Icelandic media will be given, both in terms and traditional media and the new media.

3.1 Print media

3.1.1. Print Media - history

The history of the Print Media in Iceland from the middle of the 19th century up to the present day can be divided into six periods, each with its own particular characteristics. The boundaries between these periods are sometimes unclear, and putting an exact date on the transition between periods is not always possible. The periods are:

- I. Post and Tidings (1773–1848)
- II. Editorial Sheets and the Struggle for Independence (1848–1910)
- III. The Early Years of the Newspaper (1910–16)
- IV. The All-embracing Political Party Press (1916–60)
- V. Decline of the Political Party Press (1960–2000)
- VI. The Market Media (2000–)

The first period begins with the publication of the first Icelandic journal " Islandske Maanedes Tidender " in October 1773 for the first time. The journal was first and foremost addressed to Danish readership and came out until 1776. It, as indeed other posts and tidings that followed until the mid-19th century, was directed to the ruling class in the country.

The revolutions of 1848 marked the beginning of a new era, the period of editorial sheet and struggle for independence. New newspapers emerged as the second half of the 19th century saw political and social discussion revolve almost exclusively around issues of independence from Denmark. Many titles came out in this period, albeit some just for a short period of time with one or two leading papers surviving for extended periods of time. However what the newspapers of the time had in common was that the editors were also the owners and ran the papers as their private organ expressing their own points of view. Hence a change of editor meant a change in editorial policy of the paper.

In the early 1900s the main lines in the struggle for independence became clearer and the editorial policies of newspapers became more party partisan and less dependent on personal opinions of individual editors. This marked the beginning of a new era when the papers became organs of political beliefs rather than private opinions of the editors.

The third period in media history can be said to have begun with newspaper publication in the country at the end of 1910. Iceland had undergone extensive social change, the social, economic and political reality had radically altered. This was a period of new experiments in journalism and interestingly enough the two daily newspapers that survived began as nonpartisan news based papers.

Urbanization and new industries created on the one hand a new class of working people and on the other hand caused uncertainty and concern for the status of older professions. In addition to the political articulation of the interests of the upper class the working class began to organize in trade unions and parties. The same was true for farmers in the rural areas who were faced with a completely new worldview. And then, the establishment of newspapers that became the political extension of this class-based political system, followed. Throughout the better part of the 20th century the media system was characterized by a political party press, with four or five newspapers representing the Icelandic four party system. The bourgeois press was for most of that time considerably stronger than the press to the left and centre. Considering that local and regional newspapers were in fact a reflection of the national newspaper flora it is safe to say that all media in the country at this time were more or less

politically connected. Not just the party newspapers themselves, but also other media such as the State Radio that was for all intents and purposes held hostage by a political regulatory and surveillance board.

The unwinding of the hard grip of the political parties of the press was a long process that can be said to span nearly forty years. During this long period important changes and innovations were introduced in the realm of media. The situation was thus very different in the beginning of this period from what it was towards its end. The underlying driving force that characterized the evolution was a gradual emphasis on non-partisan and independent journalism. The emphasis on political party evangelism gave way and the emphasis was placed on credible and balanced information furthering the public good.

As the new millennium dawned, bringing to an end the period of the Political Party Press, the market media period got underway; professional working methods achieved through education and preparation are now a priority for everyone involved in the field.

3.1.2. Print Media -present

The single most important development in the print media in Iceland in recent history is the emergence of the daily newspaper Fréttablaðið in 2001 and its consequent success in the newspaper market. Prior to Fréttablaðið's entrance three daily newspapers were on the market, two of them seemed to stand strong, Morgunblaðið dominated the morning paper market and the tabloid paper DV dominating the market in the afternoon. The third newspaper, Dagur, was in a much weaker position and was amalgamated with DV in 2000. Fréttablaðið is a free newspaper delivered door to door in the largest urban centres of Iceland and it was received well from the beginning. However the paper ran into financial difficulties in its earliest stages but took off after new and wealthy investors from the retail business took it over in 2002. Fréttablaðið had an enormous impact on the other newspapers and already in February 2003 it overtook Morgunblaðið as the most read newspaper in the country according to Gallup measurements and by the end of the year it had a 65% average reading as opposed to Morgunblaðið's 53%. Morgunblaðið had to downsize and so did DV and both papers felt the presence of Fréttablaðið through shrinking advertising revenues and subscription numbers. In May 2005 another national free daily newspaper was established, Blaðið. Although relatively successful in terms of readership this new free paper did not prove to be economically viable and in 2007 it was bought by the publisher of Morgunblaðið and operated for one year as it's free sister paper under the new name: "24 hours". However in

October 2008 the publication of “24Hours” was terminated. DV has in the last few years experienced difficulties. It went bankrupt in 2003 and was re-established by new owners as an aggressive tabloid paper. In 2006 it ran into difficulties as its aggressive editorial policy caused controversy and public criticism following the suicide of a person who was a subject of one of the papers stories. As a result the paper cut down its publishing days. For some years the paper has remained relatively small but influential. The papers ownership has exchanged hands and now the paper is published three times a week and has a popular website. In addition to DV there are published two national weekly newspapers One is less general and focuses on business matters as its name suggests, Viðskiptablaðið or the “Businesspaper” and the other is a general interest newspaper like weekly that is a free paper, called Fréttatíminn. Finally a monthly national newspaper is published as an extension of an online new and current affairs website called Stundin, but this editorial office consists mainly of former employees of DV, people that left DV following a change in ownership of that paper.

Thus there are at present in Iceland two daily papers, Morgunblaðið that is a subscription paper and the free paper Fréttablaðið. According to Gallup measurements Morgunblaðið has in recent years enjoyed around 30% average readership while Fréttablaðið has an average readership of just over 50%. In addition to these two daily national papers there is the twice weekly tabloid paper DV, a weekly business paper and a weekly free general interest paper.

3.1.3 Print Media - local

Local and regional papers in Iceland are not very strong, the strongest ones being located close to larger urban centres. All in all there are just over 20 local or regional newspapers and 16 of them are published outside of the metropolitan area. The papers that are covering districts in the capital are published monthly, but most of the other papers are published weekly. Some of the local papers, in particular those that come out in densely populated areas are free newspapers but those that are published in the country side of towns outside of the South West corner of the country are subscription papers. For an extended period of time the regional papers have had an insecure economic foundation, especially in regions outside of the capital area. The Icelandic local media is important to community viability, but at the same time the local markets which the local media serve are too small and sparsely populated to give the local media firms a viable economic foundation.

In Iceland a whole variety of magazines are published, both of a general nature and special subject journals. The largest publisher of magazines is “Birtingur” that publishes some eleven different magazine titles at present. Other publishers are much smaller.

3.1.4 Print Media – ownership

Ownership of traditional print media in Iceland can be seen to be highly concentrated with two main ownership blocks. Ownership of newspapers is however intertwined with broadcast media, as there are no special limits on cross ownership between these two types of media. The two large publishing houses are Árvakur, on the one hand, and 365 media, on the other. Árvakur publishes Morgunblaðið and owns a large and powerful printing machine which prints all kinds of smaller papers, leaflets and advertising booklet and often distributes these printing goods through its newspaper distribution system. Subscribers to Morgunblaðið thus often get all sorts of junk mail with their paper. The 365 media on the other hand publishes the free paper Fréttablaðið, the most read newspaper in Iceland. But 365 media also owns and runs a TV and radio station with a number of channels. A small company, partly owned by the editors and some staff, publishes DV. Vidskiptablaðið is also run by a relatively small publishing company called Myllusteinn ehf.

3.2 Radio

3.2.1. Radio –History

After two unsuccessful attempts to establish viable private radio in the towns of Reykjavík and Akureyri in the late 1920s, a national State Broadcasting Radio, RÚV, was established in 1930. The Radio was a new and revolutionary medium that entered into a system of party political newspapers. All parties recognized the potential political power of the Radio and thus the RÚV became a hot political potato whilst at the same time it became a unifying platform for nation building and national identity. Almost from the very beginning the station was overseen by a Board of Supervisors that was politically appointed and these political representatives most often saw it as their duty to oversee if there was any political bias in the firm’s operation and broadcasts. RUV was from the very beginning extremely preoccupied with keeping a non-partisan image and practices. In the different ground rules for the RUV newsroom in the period from 1930 -1986 one can see that the institution preferred to avoid controversy even at the expense of telling an interesting news story. This policy may not have

delivered the most interesting or even the most important news, but the news RUV brought to the people was considered reliable and true. This confidence in RUV is reflected in the exceptional trust RUV still today entertains among the Icelandic people in comparison to other media organizations. Results from the marketing firm MMR in Iceland showed that in May 2010 only 15.4% of Icelanders trusted the Media in general. However some 51.8% of the population trusted RUV.

From 1930 – 1986 there was state monopoly on radio and television broadcasting and up to 1983 RÚV only broadcasted on one radio channel. The programming policy was an ambitious one, with a high proportion of cultural and educational content and little light entertainment and pop or rock music. As a response to growing criticism on program policy and the state monopoly RUV began broadcasting on a second channel, Rás 2, in 1983. This second channel was a more easy listening station covering some current affairs and playing popular music. It instantly became very popular.

3.2.2. Radio –Present

State monopoly of broadcasting was abolished at the beginning of 1986 in compliance with a law that was passed in 1985. Private stations emerged in that year, the first one being Bylgjan, that was in many respects a similar station in terms of programming as Rás 2 of RUV was. However, Bylgjan became very popular and introduced almost from its first days real competition on the radio broadcasting market. Other private stations emerged in the following years, both commercial national stations and local stations and there was for some period of time a community Radio Station in Reykjavík. However in the long run, only Bylgjan and the two RUV channels have lasted as the most important general programming Radio stations. However the radio market has in recent years become increasingly fragmented, as a number of specialized music stations and talk radio stations have emerged. In addition to these three stations there are in Iceland a dozen or so stations that have certain smaller target groups. Among these are stations that play almost exclusively certain types of music or are e.g. particularly directed towards young people.

3.2.3. Radio – ownership

Ownership of the important radio stations is for all intents and purposes with two parties, the State Broadcasting Company, RUV on the one hand and 365 media on the other. RUV runs its two channels and has a combined average listening for both channels of about 25-26 % of total listening time. That is considerably less than Bylgjan which is owned by 365 media,

which has around 50% of the total listening time, according to the Capacent Gallup media measurements and thus is by far the most popular radio station in Iceland. In addition to Bylgjan, 365 media runs four smaller radio channels that are aimed at more specific target groups. Other radio stations are owned by smaller companies or individuals and do not take part in listening measurements that are made public.

3.3 Television

3.3.1. Television – history

The Icelandic Broadcasting Company, RUV, made the first Icelandic television broadcasting in 1966. In its early years Icelandic television was limited in scope with broadcasts in the evening three days a week. It was not until 1968 that the Icelandic television began broadcasting six days a week. RUV stuck to the custom until 1987 of keeping one day a week, Thursdays, without TV broadcasts. Similarly the RUV-TV did not broadcast at all for the whole month of July due to summer holydays until 1983.

3.3.2. Television – present

However with increased competition with video and in particular other TV stations that were established following the termination of state monopoly of broadcasting, the RUV television gradually increased its broadcasting time and revised its programming in order to make it more appealing. Still today the RUV television broadcasts mainly on one channel and in 2009 its broadcast time per day was 14 hours while it was considerably longer hours for the private stations. The proportion of reruns on the RUV channel is however much lower. In 2007 new law was passed in parliament about the structure and governance of RUV. The main change the new law entailed was that RUV became what was called a “public stock company” a public company owned by the state but had organizational characteristics of a classical stock company. This was seen as a means to increase the managerial responsibility within the company, make it more efficient and productive. Thereby RUV was seen as being able to operate as a private company, although it in fact still was a public one. At the same time the RUV lost its possibility of collecting users fees, but instead a head tax was introduced which should go to the company. The public service duties of RUV are then defined in a special service contract the company makes with the ministry of Education and Culture, each contract lasting for a period of five years.

In 1986, when the state monopoly on television ended, a private TV station, Stöð 2 (Channel 2) was established. This was a subscription channel that scrambled most parts of its program. Already when Stöð 2 began its broadcasting it had sold tens of thousands of subscriptions, but in spite of its popularity the company was faced with some financial difficulties. However the company survived albeit with some changes in ownership and has grown to become an integral part of the 365 media conglomerate. It constitutes the core of a number of digitalized TV channels that 365 media runs, the other channels being more specialized in topics such as sports and movies. In addition to these 365 media offers a variety of foreign TV stations through its digital connections with the company Digital Ísland that uses the digital distribution network of the Vodafone telephone company.

The third player on the television market is a private television station called SkjárEinn (Screen One). It was established in 1999 and made a name for itself by showing a lot of American sitcoms and entertainment programmes along with a fair amount of low budget but popular Icelandic production. With the advent of digitalization SkjárEinn has become a part of Skjárinn which is a digital television provider firm providing the TV material of SkjárEinn as well as a consortium of foreign TV stations and an interactive Video on Demand (VOD) service. This service is available through both major digital distribution system in the country the distribution system of the telephone company Síminn, and the before mentioned firm Digital Ísland which hooks up with the system of the Vodafone telephone company.

According to the Capacent Gallup media measurements RUV has the most following with total viewing time for people 12-80 years old between 40-50%. Comparable figures for Stöð 2 are just over 30% and a little less than 10% % for SkjárEinn. It is however clear that RUV is more popular with people over 50 than the other stations that have a younger audience profile.

Icelandic content featured in the programming of the TV stations is highest in RUV and according to the Icelandic Statistical Bureau in 2008 some 46% of its total content was Icelandic material while it was only 12% in SkjárEinn and 17% in Stöð 2. However, the proportion of Icelandic content on the private channels is considerably higher during prime time than it is in their total broadcasting hours.

3.3.3. Television – news

RUV and Stöð 2/Bylgjan run news departments and these provide both TV news and also Radio news. The RUV news department produces Television news for the TV's main

newscast at 19:00 in the evening and for a shorter newscast at 22:00. It also provides news for RUV radio which has its main newscast at 12:20 noon and at 18:00 hours. Furthermore there are shorter newscasts on the hour every hour day and night except at 04:00 and 05:00 hours in the night. Last but not the least the RUV news department provides news on the Company's website and on Text TV.

The Stöð 2/Bylgjan news coverage is also quite extensive, with one major news cast on Stöð 2 at 18:30 and a major news cast on radio at 12:00 noon. Bylgjan then has shorter news casts on the hour every hour during the daytime.

SkjárEinn has shown interest in running a news department and for some six months last winter, the station sent out news cast that the daily newspaper Morgunblaðið had prepared and also published on its website.

3.4 Cinema

The first Icelandic Cinema, "Reykjavík Biograftheater", opened in November 1906. Among the first films to be shown was a news reel of Icelandic parliamentarians visiting the Danish king. Throughout the 20th century the cinema was a popular form of entertainment and in the mid-1960s there were about 40 cinema theatres in the country. However in the early 1980 the number of cinema theatres began to decline but the numbers of halls in each theatre increased. In 2004 the number of theatres in the country was down to just over 20 and the number of seats per capita has slightly decreased in the last two decades. That reflects a slight decline in attendance in the last decades. Icelanders see about 200 premiers every year and more than 95% of them are foreign. Domestic films only constitute a 2-5% of the film premiers in Iceland. US films dominate the Icelandic cinema with three out of every four films premiered being from the United States.

In the period 1926-1977 seven Icelandic films were produced. In contrast 87 Icelandic films were made between 1978 and 2005 or just over three films every year on average. Since then about 5-6 Icelandic films have on average been made every year. Film production has therefore in the last three decades been a relatively thriving industry and there is considerable experience and know how in Iceland in this field. The legal framework of the film industry is well defined and on this legal basis the industry is subsidised by the state. Grants are distributed through the Icelandic Film Centre in an open process based on certain explicit

criteria. The law also suggests an institution of Film Censorship that looks at all films and videos shown in the country and checks if they are suitable for viewing and if some age restrictions should be suggested. In 1999 a temporary law was implemented which stated that special VAT refunds would be available for the production of films. This refund was available both to Icelandic and foreign film companies and stimulated considerable filmmaking in general in Iceland.

Following the economic recession grants for filmmaking have shrunk and also the amount of money the state television is putting in domestic film and drama making. This has called for criticism of government policies and concerns about the future of Icelandic filmmaking.

3.5 Online Media

The use of the Internet is widespread in Iceland with over 90% of the population using computer and the Internet. According to Statistics Iceland (2014) Internet usage in Iceland is high with 95% of the population being regular users of the Internet. That is the highest percentage in Europe with the average percentage of regular Internet users in the EU being 72%. Almost half of Icelandic Internet users connect to the net on mobile phones or smartphones, and 72% thereof use their phone devices to take pictures and upload them directly to the Internet. Icelanders use the Internet mostly for information and communication, but to a lesser degree for shopping.

3.5.1. Traditional Media – Web Sites

Basically all traditional media offer content online. The bigger media companies have comprehensive websites offering content in the form of video, pictures and texts. This content is created by journalist and media staff for the more traditional outlets such as TV, radio or newspapers, but also tailored to the web. However, a considerable amount of content is produced exclusively for the web. Morgunblaðið has its own website, which is a popular and influential website, with news, videos, entertainment and blogs. The website of the 365 media conglomerate, Visir.is, similarly offers a variety of news, videos, entertainment and blogs and so does the website, dv.is, of the tabloid DV.

RUV, the State Broadcasting Service, also has its own website with news and information, but RUV is not allowed to sell advertisements on its website.

An interesting type of online news/opinion media has occurred in recent years with the emergence of what can be called collection websites or mixed websites. There are quite

popular such sites that are linked to news feeds of all the major online news sources and thus keep readers up to date on content from a wide spectrum of sources. However these sites have in addition their own editorial staff writing news stories and thereby giving the sites their distinct character. Furthermore these sites have made contracts with some popular bloggers who blog on different issues and their blogs or references to them get highlighted on the page as if their opinions were news. This practice may blur somewhat the distinction between fact and opinion, but apparently there is demand for this kind of content and political debate in particular tends to be very visible in these sites. Some important websites of this nature are Pressan, Eyjan, Herðubreið, and Kvennablaðið.

3.5.2. New Critical Web Based Media

In addition to what has already been mentioned, two websites have emerged claiming to conduct serious journalism, analysis and investigative journalism. One of them is Stundin, which was mentioned before in relation to the print media, as this firm publishes a monthly newspaper magazine that accompanies the website. The other is Kjarninn, who run the website kjarninn.is, an independent editorial office seeking to do critical analysis.

3.5.3. Complete Digitalization

The digitalisation of the Icelandic media is almost complete, in the sense that all media use digital means for acquiring, storing and distributing information and content material. All TV and radio are distributed through digital means but the main TV stations and most radio stations also use a terrestrial analogue distribution. The two main phone companies, Siminn and Vodafone, run distribution systems for digital TV where Video On Demand and other services are offered. Furthermore, many TV and radio programmes, such as new and current events, are also transmitted via the Internet.

3.6 Social Media

Other activities on the Internet are growing in popularity and as in other countries social network media have gained momentum. In particular Facebook has become an important medium with some 80% of Icelanders being Facebook users in 2013 which is the highest Facebook user ratio in Europe. Similarly Icelandic firms use Facebook and social media a lot, second only to the Netherlands in a European context. A poll among politicians standing in the May 2014 municipal elections in Iceland and the 2013 parliamentary elections showed that they considered Facebook the most important medium in the election campaigns with around 90% of candidates standing in these elections using this medium much or very much.

3.7 Other media outlets

The Icelandic media companies have traditionally produced most of their content themselves. However, in television independent producers have been an important factor and increasingly so in recent years. In the public service contract that RUV makes with the Ministry of Education and Culture a clause dictates that RUV is obliged to buy material from and/or co-produce with independent producers. In practice the private TV stations have chosen a similar path in the production of much of their Icelandic content. This has been an important factor for keeping up the standards and the know how in the film industry in Iceland (See also 2.4 above).

4. Media legislation

The main legal ground rules of Icelandic media can be found in the Media law from 2011. This is a comprehensive framework dealing with rights and duties of the general media and media professionals, registration and transparency of media ownership as well as conditions and terms of media ownership concentration. Furthermore the Audio-visual Media Services Directive, which governs EEA-wide coordination of national legislation on all audio-visual media is introduced by this Media law. This means that the law covers, advertising rules, advertising “unhealthy“ foods and beverages in children’s programmes, and promotes areas including media literacy and access for persons with a hearing or visual impairment. The law also makes provision for; the designation of major events, short news reporting, promotion of European works, rules relating to product placement, jurisdiction issues, self and co-regulation, and independent national regulators. The law designates a special body, the Media Commission, to carry out the supervision and day-to-day administration in the fields covered by the law.

A number of other laws also affect the media. There are e.g., articles of the Constitution dealing with freedom of speech and protection of privacy, a law to access of information (50/1996); and a special law on the Public Broadcasting Corporation, RÚV (23/2013).

Clearly some other legislation, such as laws on libel and slander, also affect the operation of the media.

4.1 Political controversy

The introduction of a comprehensive media law has been the subject of political controversy in the first decade or so of the century. Already in 2003 the government at the time pushed through parliament a Media Act that mostly dealt with the concentration of ownership. The act was highly controversial and was said to be directed against a particular media company. In any case the president exercised his veto powers on the act in June 2004, which led to the government withdrawing it. The matter was then put to a cross-political working committee that reached a consensus and published an extensive report with suggestions. In the 2009/2010 parliament session the minister of Education and Culture then proposed a bill to the Parliament, and in 2011 the present version of the law was finally agreed.

Interestingly enough, the bill itself does not deal with two sensitive issues and the bill does not deal with questions regarding economic support or incentives from the state within the media system.

4.2 The IMMI

On 16 June 2010 the Icelandic Parliament unanimously approved a parliamentary declaration on a so-called "Icelandic Modern Media Initiative" which suggests that Iceland assumes a leading role in terms of press freedom in the world.

The idea includes protection from "libel tourism" and other extrajudicial abuses, protection of Internet service providers, whistle-blower and source protections and an ultra-modern Freedom of Information Act. This declaration does not automatically have any binding commitments for the Icelandic authorities but nonetheless states the viewpoint of the parliament. The implementation of this parliamentary will has not yet been carried out but within the government administration some tentative or preparatory steps have however been taken.

4.3 Accountability systems

In Iceland there is no official accountability system supported or dictated by law or the authorities. It is however possible to hold the media accountable for their editorial content through the courts in case of illegal conduct. A self-regulation system is in place as the Journalist Union operates an Ethical Committee that rules on cases brought before it and determines whether or not the Ethical Code of the Journalist Union has been violated or not. The Code of Ethics has been in force since 1966, but underwent a major revision in 1991 (See

appendix). Accompanying the code is a regulatory institutional structure with an Ethics Committee which deals with issues and complaints brought against journalists and media that are thought to have been in breach of the code. The Ethics Committee consists of five members, three of whom are elected by the Journalist Union, one member who represents the media companies and one member appointed by the Centre of Ethics at the University of Iceland. The Journalist Union finances the operation of the committee and handles practical matters regarding its operation. The rulings of the committee are published on the Union website and in the printed journal. Furthermore, the medium in question is also obliged to publish the decisions. The powers of the Ethics Committee lie solely in its nature as peer-evaluation, and no further sanctions are involved. Indeed the committee has adopted a working rule that if a complaint is taken to the courts it will not be dealt with by the Committee. The penalty for violating the Ethical Code is that the medium in question is obliged to publish the verdict of the Ethical Committee and the verdict is also made public on the Union's website and in its magazine.

The media law puts some obligations on the Media Commission to oversee the rights and duties of the media in general and in particular things that relate to the implementation legal obligations dictated by the Audio-visual Media Services Directive. However the Commission has not seen general journalistic accountability as a part of its mandate.

5. Journalism education

In Iceland journalism education and training is a relatively new phenomena. There is no tradition of Journalism Schools and no formal journalism education is demanded for those who work as journalists. Most of the larger traditional media require however university education although such a requirement is not a strict condition for employment across the board with all major media organisations. However, the university education required can be from a variety of academic fields and only some journalists – albeit an increasing number – have an education specifically geared towards journalism or media. Still, many media companies have their own “journalistic exams” that they require applicants to pass before they are hired. These exams are meant to test the applicant's knowledge of current affairs and aptitude in the Icelandic language. Two universities in Iceland offer media or journalism education, the University of Iceland offering a MA programme in journalism and the University of Akureyri offering a BA programme in media studies.

Unlike the systems that are in place in other Nordic countries, there are no special provisions for continuing education for media professionals in Iceland, and no institution specialises in this field. The continuing education system has been built up in a different manner. Funds, partly provided by the Journalist Union (Blaðamannafélag Íslands), give journalists the opportunity to attend courses that are generally available in the public market or within the education system. In recent years university education has become a standard requirement for people entering the journalist profession.

Journalist education courses in Iceland might thus be said to fall into three categories:

1) University degree courses that are a regular part of the curriculum in two universities. At the University of Akureyri a B.A. degree in Media Studies is offered, which has considerable emphasis on journalism. At the University of Iceland in Reykjavik an M.A. degree in journalism is offered.

2) Continuing education courses that are held intermittently, sponsored either by journalist associations or media companies. The most highly respected courses are run by the NJC in Aarhus and at Reykjavik University.

3) Courses in communications studies and communications technology, taught as options in upper secondary schools.

7. Development trends

In the last decade the Icelandic media system has undergone a major transformation, the outcome of which is still not entirely clear. This change is the result of two different but interrelated trends. On the one hand it is the transformation from a politically dominated media system to a market driven system. However, the division between the market and politics is not always clear – as the financially strong players on the market are often political stakeholders. The other trend is the technological innovation which can be labelled the digital revolution. The advent of Internet, digital TV and radio, and all sorts of social media have created a whole new gallery of media outlets that are all at once, new business opportunities for the entrepreneurs of the new media market, an explosion in the supply and amount of information for the public, and a window through which the traditional Icelandic communication system can renew itself. The attempts in recent years to introduce a general law on media governance and the heated debates on the matter reflect the fact that the media situation in Iceland is still in a flux. If and when the present media bill goes through the

parliament in the near future the situation might become somewhat clearer. But whether or not the bill will go through or not, the most important question to be debated regarding Icelandic media is the financing of the media system as a whole. Until now it has been considered self-evident that media corporations, other than RUV, should be regarded as any other businesses. Following the economic crash in 2008 scepticism about such a model has increased, as the connection of important media to some of the major players in the collapse and the economically weak situation of all media today has undermined its credibility. Increasingly suggestions are being made that some sort of public support is required to secure an independent media and high quality journalism. The Journalist Union of Iceland – as the principal spokes organization for journalistic values – pledged that professional standards and independent journalism is of major concern and a priority. In this respect the Icelandic condition is similar to the situation in other Nordic and European countries.

Appendix: Rules of Ethics in Journalism

In their work, journalists of all media must constantly bear in mind the basic rules of human relations, and the public's right to information, freedom of expression and criticism.

Clause 1

A journalist aims to do nothing which may bring his profession or professional organisation, newspaper or newsroom into disrepute. He must avoid anything which may be deleterious to public opinion of the journalist's work or damage the interests of the profession. A journalist must always be honourable in his dealings with colleagues.

Clause 2

A journalist is aware of his personal responsibility for all that he writes. He bears in mind that he is generally perceived as a journalist, even when not expressing himself as such, in writing or the spoken word. A journalist respects the necessary confidentiality of his sources.

Clause 3

A journalist observes the highest possible standards in gathering information, processing this information, and in presentation, and shows the utmost tact in sensitive cases. He avoids all that may cause unnecessary pain or humiliation to the innocent, or those who have suffered.

Clause 4

Should a journalist accept a bribe or use threats in connection with publication of material, this is counted a very serious violation. Journalists must always be conscious of when names should be published for the sake of public safety, or in the public interest. In accounts of legal and criminal cases, journalists must observe the general rule that every person is innocent until proven guilty.

Clause 5

A journalist must do his best to avoid conflicts of interest, for instance by reporting on companies or interest groups in which he himself is involved. He must primarily serve the interests of the readers, and the honour of the journalistic profession in all that he undertakes in the course of his work.

A journalist writes always on the basis of his convictions. He makes sure not to confuse editorial material of clear informative and educational value with advertising in pictorial and / or written form.

This code of ethics does not limit the freedom of expression of journalists who write under their full name clearly defined items in newspapers, e.g. criticism, where the writer's personal views are of the essence.

Clause 6

Any person who believes that a journalist has offended against the above code, and

whose interests are at stake, can make a complaint to the Ethics Committee of the Icelandic Union of Journalists within two months of publication, provided the item published is not the subject of court action at the same time.

The complainant must, however, have previously sought redress from the organ (newspaper, broadcasting company) in question. The Ethics Committee may, however, rule to make an exception to the rule on seeking redress due to other circumstances. The Ethics Committee shall discuss the matter at a meeting within one week and shall publicise a well-grounded ruling as soon as possible.

When the Ethics Committee undertakes to investigate a complaint, it must take into account the overall coverage of the matter in the medium against which the complaint has been made. The respondent shall be given the opportunity to explain his view of the matter.

The Ethics Committee classifies three categories of violation, according to their nature:

- a) reprehensible
- b) serious
- c) very serious

No appeal can be made against the Ethics Committee's ruling. The ruling of the Ethics Committee, together with the grounds and arguments of the ruling, shall be published as soon as possible in the journalists' union periodical. The Ethics Committee's ruling shall be sent to the organ in question at the first opportunity, with a request for publication in the case of an offence in category b) or c). Three days later, the ruling shall be sent to other media.

The principal ruling of the Committee shall be published verbatim. In the presentation of news on rulings from the Ethics Committee, journalists shall observe all precautions which this code lays down, cp. clauses 1 and 2 above.

Should the board of the Icelandic Union of journalists feel, after the Ethics Committee has ruled, that a violation is so serious that further action is required, it may submit a proposal for sanctions against the journalist in question to a meeting of the members, provided that the intention to do so has been mentioned in the announcement of the meeting.

In the case of an article not being clearly attributable to a writer, or that the journalist in question is not a member of the Union of Journalists, the Ethics Committee's ruling shall apply to the editor or guarantor as directly concerned. Even if none of these individuals is a member of the Union of Journalists, the Ethics Committee can still make a ruling on a complaint.