

National report for Iceland

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Contribution to the European report:

Stald, G. and Haddon, L. (2008) *Cross-Cultural Contexts of Research: Factors Influencing the Study of Children and the Internet in Europe*. A report for the EC Safer Internet Plus Programme, 2008.

Universities and Disciplines

In Iceland, three universities are accredited to offer programs within the social sciences. Media studies exist in two universities, The University of Iceland and The University of Akureyri. The former offers on the one hand a limited number of courses at the BA-level (about 20 students are enrolled annually) and on the other hand a two-year master's programme in journalism and broadcasting (about 15 students enrolled annually). The latter offers a BA-degree in media studies (about 15 students enrolled annually). IT exists in individual courses at the undergraduate level but not as a degree subject.

National Data Collected

Information on access to and use of internet is collected for adults by Statistics Iceland. However, no similar data are collected on children and the internet. Among non-government bodies, SAFT Iceland is an important one. SAFT Iceland has collected data predominantly on children, but the lowest age is 9 years. There are some regular studies which are repeated.

Institutional processes in applying to conduct research

While there are some regulations with regard to ethics, Iceland probably has a rather liberal policy where everything is allowed except for what is prohibited (in some countries everything is prohibited except that which is allowed). Research in Iceland is mainly restricted by two regulatory bodies. One is the *National Bioethics Committee* and the *Icelandic Data Protection Authority*.

The main role of the *National Bioethics Committee* is the evaluation of applications for research proposals incorporating the participation of human subjects and concerning health issues in one way or the other. Examples are genetic research on human diseases, drug trials or experimental treatment aiming to alleviate pain and cure diseases, as well as studies comprising the collection and/or interpretation of health related information, i.e. from medical records or through questionnaires. The evaluation of the National Bioethics Committee pertains to both the scientific and ethical issues concerning the proposed research project, as stated in the Act on the rights of patients no. 74/1997 (Article 2): "An evaluation of the research made by the scientific ethics committee or an ethics committee, pursuant to Article 29, must have revealed that scientific and ethical views do not oppose its implementation." The Regulation on Scientific Research in the Health Sector No. 552/1999 states (Article 4): "It is prohibited to conduct scientific research on humans without prior approval of the ethics committee as provided in Art. 2 or the National Bioethics Committee as provided in Art. 1."

The *Data protection Authority* works under the Act on the Protection and Processing of Personal Data, No. 77/2000. The act substituted an Act Respecting Systematic Recording of Personal Data, passed in 1989. The act implements Directive 95/46/EC on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data. The purpose of the Act, is to promote the practice of personal data being processed in conformity with the fundamental principles of data protection and the right to privacy. The Act applies to any automated processing of personal data and to manual processing of such data if they are, or are intended to become, a part of a file. There is no specific stage of approval that all research proposals have to go through, only studies that fall under jurisdiction of *Data*

protection Authority or the *National Bioethics Committee*. Proposals do not need to be approved by the department/university either.

Pressures to conduct research

Research activity is essential for academic promotions and also affects payments to individuals. While there is no direct pressure to collaborate with industry, co-operation is viewed favourably by official funding bodies. Industries often approach academic bodies for research, and so do Government ministries and research councils. Universities do the same as well.

Factors influencing the orientation of research

Since the establishment of the faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Iceland in 1975, quantitative research has been strongly emphasised. A BA-degree in the social sciences includes at a minimum of 18 ECTS in quantitative research methods. During the last fifteen years qualitative methods have been given increased attention and presently an undergraduate degree in the social sciences at the University of Iceland includes at least 6 ECTS in qualitative methods. Studies of the mass media have been conducted since 1968. In 1996 the Icelandic Government set up a committee to put together proposals for action to be taken regarding information technologies and subsequently in 1998 the first survey on the use of the internet and mobile phones amongst adults was conducted. However in 1997 there was a study on children's use of media which included questions on mobile phones and internet use.

Sources of Funding for Research

Most of the funding comes from the Government or the Research Councils. Commercial companies do not usually fund academic research. As far as research on children and the internet is concerned funding from Government sources is rather limited.

Political initiatives influencing research

In Iceland, the Government put together a committee on information technologies in 1996 which commissioned a survey in 1998. There have not been any changes in general media regulations, the boundaries of censorship, or legal changes to do with the internet. Awareness raising initiatives, and or other similar initiatives by the government are not common either.

The Influence of media coverage, events and lobbies on research

SAFT Iceland is the result of an initiative by the Parents' and Teachers' Association in Iceland.

Particular debates and concerns about children

Once in a while there always emerges a debate on the commercialisation of childhood and there is regulation which prohibits children's programmes from being interrupted by advertisements. The children's ombudsman has for several years had a program aimed at engaging young people in debate on various issues. There is no substantial concern about public spaces being dangerous for children.

Case Studies

This was a University of Iceland funded study. Our focus came about as a response to changes in the media and communication environment. Old habits and an emphasis on methodological continuity directed our methodology. Also, our written questionnaire methods were well suited for this kind of data gathering. The choice in terms of children's age was directed by convenience and tradition. The lower age limit, 10 years, was chosen because by that age the vast majority have acquired sufficient writing skills. Our research questions were

largely inspired by an interest in making a comparison with other media use, other research and as a reference point for future research.