



VIGDÍS INTERNATIONAL CENTRE  
FOR MULTILINGUALISM AND  
INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

# 2017 Annual Report

The Vigdís International Centre for  
Multilingualism and  
Intercultural Understanding



## Content

1. Introduction
2. Inauguration of Veröld – House of Vigdís and Opening of the Centre
3. Objectives and Functions of the Centre
4. Governing Board, International Advisory Board and staff
5. Financial Support and Management of the Centre
6. Activities of the Centre
7. Thanks

## Introduction

The Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding (VIMIUC) is an independent professional research and instructional centre under the auspices of UNESCO and a part of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages (VFI). The Centre is operated by the University of Iceland as part of its Centre for Research in the Humanities. The Centre was formally opened on 20 April 2017.

On 15 April 2013, the Minister of Education, Science, and Culture, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, on behalf of the Icelandic authorities signed an agreement between the Government of Iceland and UNESCO. Under the agreement, the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding will operate under the auspices of UNESCO as a Category 2 Centre. The occasion was marked with a ceremony at which the minister presented Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former president of Iceland and Goodwill Ambassador for Languages at UNESCO, with a copy of the agreement. University rector Kristín Ingólfssdóttir delivered an address, thanking Katrín Jakobsdóttir and Vigdís Finnbogadóttir for their important contribution to the finalisation of the agreement. Attending the ceremony were former University rector Páll Skúlason, Faculty of humanities dean Ástráður Eysteinnsson, and Jón Atli Benediktsson, assistant rector of science and teaching, as well as the director of the VFI, Auður Hauksdóttir.

On 27 June 2013, the agreement was signed by Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, on behalf of UNESCO. The signing took place at a ceremony held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, with Vigdís Finnbogadóttir in attendance. Among other guests were various UNESCO officials and a number of international Goodwill Ambassadors, as well as Berglind Ásgeirsdóttir, Ambassador to Iceland in France, and Auður Hauksdóttir, director of the VFI.

Irina Bokova and Vigdís Finnbogadóttir delivered short addresses after the signing.

In her address, Irina Bokova thanked the Icelandic authorities for supporting the agreement and thanked Vigdís Finnbogadóttir for her unstinting international promotion of foreign languages. She also thanked VFI scholars for their contributions, attributing the Centre's success in large part to their work and expertise. She emphasised that tolerance

without action is no longer enough – that people must be able to unite around important issues, discuss them, and solve them in a constructive manner – and that languages play a key role in this process. In this context, she mentioned Nelson Mandela, who said once that “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.” According to Irina Bokova, the Vigdís International Centre “is inspired by a simple idea – that language is a core part of the identity and cultural heritage of humanity.”



In her address, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir extended her gratitude to UNESCO for its invaluable support of the Institute that bears her name. She said that the cooperation agreement gives Icelanders even greater possibilities to make their presence felt in a field that has long strengthened the identity of the nation, which has been able to preserve its native language ever since the country was first settled. She also pointed out that Icelanders had always learned foreign languages and that this knowledge had been the key to their positive relations with the rest of the world.

On 25 to 27 May 2015, Irina Bokova made an official visit to Iceland. On her visit, Ms. Bokova held a public lecture at the University of Iceland where she pointed out the influential power inherent in the role and agency of UNESCO and continuously emphasised the importance of the plans for the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding, now in preparation, and steadfastly proclaimed UNESCO’s support of the project.

## **Inauguration of Veröld – House of Vigdís and Opening of the Centre**

On 20 April 2017, Veröld – House of Vigdís, was inaugurated and the Centre formally opened. The inauguration took place in Háskólabíó in the presence of the president of Iceland, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former president of Iceland and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Languages, Kristján Þór Júlíusson, minister of education, science, and culture, Jón Atli Benediktsson, rector of the University of Iceland, Soo-Hyang Choi, head of the Division of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development at UNESCO, Rigmor Dam, minister of culture and education of the Faroe Islands, Pia Lyngge on behalf of the Greenland self-government, Mònica Pereña, president of Linguapax International, representatives of the European Language Resources Association (ELRA), collaborators from the West-Nordic Network, ambassadors of several states, along with sponsors and collaborators. In total, one thousand guests attended the inauguration.

A number of Icelandic artists performed at the inauguration and speeches were given by the president of Iceland, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Languages and former president of Iceland, Rigmor Dam, minister of culture of the Faroe Islands, Jón Atli Benediktsson, rector of the University of Iceland, Auður Hauksdóttir, director of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages, Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, writer and director of the University of Iceland's Art Museum, and Mònica Pereña, president of Linguapax International. Irina Bokova, director-general of UNESCO, spoke in a videotaped address.

Below are the speeches of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, Irina Bokova and Jón Atli Benediktsson in their entirety, in the order they appear on the programme. Other speeches can be found in the 2017 Activity Report of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages, accessible through the Institute's website, [vigdis.hi.is](http://vigdis.hi.is).

### **Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, rector of the University of Iceland**

Mr. President, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, former President of Iceland and honoured guest of this ceremony, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the Minister for Education and Culture, Kristján Þór Júlíusson, the Minister of Education of the Faroe Isles, Rigmor Dam, ladies and gentlemen.

I bid you all a hearty welcome to this formal gathering to celebrate today the inauguration of a new and magnificent building of the University of Iceland, which has been named *Veröld – hús Vigdísar*, as well as the launching of the Vigdís Institute, an international centre for languages and cultures at the University of Iceland.

The idea for establishing an international language centre at the University of Iceland was first mooted just over a decade ago within the university's Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute for Foreign Languages, which had been founded in 2001, the European Year of Languages and the ninetieth anniversary of the University of Iceland. The institute has always enjoyed the assistance of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, a former president of Iceland, and her support has made all the difference to the institute that bears her name. Madame

Vigdís has, among other accomplishments, been designated a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) since 1998, and has in addition supported the teaching of foreign languages in many practical and influential ways.

A great step towards shaping and gaining support for the idea of an international language institute came in 2008 with the formation of an international advisory board that was to assist and guide the institute's ruling body. In the beginning of 2011, developments within the institute had reached the point that the Minister for Education formally applied for an international language centre at the University of Iceland to gain recognition as an institute within UNESCO. In November of the same year, the general assembly of UNESCO agreed that the Vigdís Institute could operate under the auspices of UNESCO. Finally, in June 2013, the then Minister of Education and Culture and Irina Bokova, the Director General of UNESCO, signed an agreement between the Icelandic government and UNESCO.

The main role of the Vigdís Institute is to support and preserve languages and to assist those in danger of becoming extinct by instigating research, conferences and publications concerning them. The aim of the institute is to support research into language policies and politics with the aim of improving literacy and education. The intention is also to make the institute an international centre for research and discussion about languages and cultures for leading scholars in these fields. Finally, the institute will establish a museum of languages to disseminate knowledge of languages through the best methods museology has to offer.

Dear guests, the inauguration of Veröld – hús Vigdísar is a moment for great celebration, for the humanities at the University of Iceland now have a place in the very heart of the university area to be the centre for teaching, research and creativity in the fields of foreign languages and cultures. The building has something for everyone, with excellent facilities for faculty, students, foreign and Icelandic guests, a superb lecture hall with facilities for interpreters, a wide variety of teaching rooms, a modern library with both books and electronic data, rooms for symposiums and conferences, a cafeteria and an open-air square for outdoor events. Finally, there is excellent space for exhibitions that will open today with one celebrating the life and work of Vigdís entitled "Samtal – Dialog". Last, but not least, the interior is adorned with splendid works of art by both Icelandic and foreign artists, about which Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, the director of the University of Iceland Art Collection will tell us a little more hereafter.

The architects of Hús Vigdísar have done a magnificent job. Veröld is a complex, individual work of constructional art that both connects buildings already in the university area and gives them a new role. The most tangible example of this is the tunnel under Suðurgata which will be taken into use at the same time as this building and which will link Veröld with Háskólatorg and thereby the eastern and western parts of the university area. Thus an old dream of those of us who work here will come true. Along with Háskólatorg and Gimli, Veröld will now change the university area from a collection of individual buildings into a real university village, a true *campus*. It is a mark of the ingenuity and historical knowledge of the design of Veröld that this newest building of the University of Iceland throws a spotlight on to its oldest building, the Telegraph Station, a little pearl from

the classic Icelandic style of concrete structures that will celebrate its one hundredth anniversary next year.

It is safe to say that the construction of Veröld has gone well and fast. The ground-breaking ceremony took place on 8 March 2015, International Women's Day, the cornerstone was laid on 19 June 2016, and the building completed in the middle of this March. The official inauguration takes place today, on the First Day of Summer 2017. It has truly been a great success, for the very name Veröld suits the building perfectly, it is indeed a whole world in itself.

We have no doubt that this beautiful and magnificent building will serve its purpose well and make our world more accessible as the motto of this opening programme suggests. Languages open up the world. These are true words indeed. We all have our native tongues which are also a pathway to ourselves, other individuals, and the whole world. A language preserves the heritage of past generations while providing us with the hope that we who live and breathe now will remain connected to future generations. Language is our way of existing in the world. It is a means by which we both conceive the world and ourselves within it. The native tongues of the world are innumerable though, and so in all truth it might be said that we do not obtain a full understanding of ourselves, or the world, unless we studiously take into account this multiplicity of languages.

In all probability, the significance of languages will steadily increase in the years to come. Not so long ago it was said that the continents of the world were merging into one giant, global village. On the other hand, however, there are now signs that we are facing perhaps the greatest migration of peoples in human history along with its consequent clashes of cultures, religions, and beliefs. It is thus foreseeable that an understanding of languages, with all the cultural nooks and crannies they contain, will be of major importance for the wellbeing of mankind over the next few decades as never before.

Dear Vigdís. I would just like to say this to you: It is more than a great honour for the University of Iceland and the Icelandic nation to be able to dedicate to you, the first woman in the world to be democratically elected a president, this magnificent building. Over many years you have always shown the University of Iceland special support and goodwill while working night and day for your ideals in the cause of languages. You enjoy the respect of not only the Icelandic nation, but also the whole world, and you have received an honorary doctoral degree in two departments of the University of Iceland: the Department of Engineering, and the Department of Languages and Culture. May this magnificent building always live up to its name.

Dear guests. You will soon formally open Veröld – hús Vigdísar by entering the building. The work of the Vigdís Institute's International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding will then officially commence.

I would like to finish by thanking all those who have put their shoulders to the wheel in making Veröld – hús Vigdísar become a reality. It would take too long to name all of them here. I draw your attention to the booklet which you received as you entered the auditorium which contains a detailed history of the building and all who took part in its creation. I cannot end my speech, however, without mentioning professor Auður Hauksdóttir, the director and chairperson of the board of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute, who has worked tirelessly at this project for many years. I would like to thank her personally for all

her labours on behalf of the University of Iceland and Icelandic culture. Her vision and perseverance are an admirable example to us all.

I would now like to welcome on stage four actors who will lead us through the programme that follows by reading aloud some excerpts from the book *Languages Open up Worlds*, which was published in honour of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir's landmark birthday seven years ago.

Thank you for coming. Congratulations on the new building! Happy First Day of Summer! Enjoy the rest of your day!

### **Address by Irena Bokova, Director General of UNESCO**

Excellency Ms. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former President of the Republic of Iceland, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, dear friend; Mr. Benediktsson, rector of the University of Iceland; Ms. Hauksdottir, director of the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding; excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen.

I'm deeply honoured to participate in the opening of the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding, a specialised centre under the auspices of UNESCO. I participate through this video message.

I wish to thank the government of the Republic of Iceland, and especially President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. This centre pays tribute to your vision and your leadership.

Against a backdrop of rising intolerance, the need to defend and promote linguistic diversity has never been so important. Language is fundamental to who we are. It structures our thoughts and identities. It is the means by which we preserve and share knowledge, wisdom, our intangible cultural heritage. Respecting linguistic diversity is essential for defending cultural diversity to ensure every society, every community can prosper in its own right. This requires teaching mother tongues. It means promoting multilingualism, to engage in intercultural dialogue, to craft meaningful solutions to the challenges we face.

Throughout its history, Iceland has always placed a strong emphasis on culture and education, to foster innovation, to overcome challenges. This is especially vital today. When linguistic diversity faces rising pressures, notably on the internet, where eighty percent of people use only ten percent of the world's six thousand seven hundred languages.

This is the importance of UNESCO's two thousand three recommendations concerning promotion and use of multilingualism and universal access to cyberspace. We must build on all UNESCO's normative instruments, in education and culture, to promote linguistic diversity.

I look forward to the leadership of the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding, to share best practices, to mobilise new research, to shape more effective policies. In this period I thank you Vigdís, I thank you again, and I wish every success to this conference.

**Address by Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador of Languages and former president of Iceland**

Our distinguished President and First Lady Eliza,

In this moment of celebration, foremost in my mind is a sense of gratitude toward those who have made Veröld, a shrine to languages in Iceland, a reality.

Language is the starting point for everything. Nothing can happen until we put our thoughts into words – in one of the six thousand languages that exist on the planet. Just as for the people of the world, some of these languages face harsher struggles than others – too many are fighting for survival – and the death of a language is a cultural loss to the detriment of all mankind and all nations.

In a lead pipe that was bricked into the western wall and laid as a cornerstone to Veröld on 19 June 2016, the following text is preserved:

“Language is the mark of mankind.

“If you wish to become perfect in knowledge, you must learn all the languages; and yet, do not neglect your native tongue.” So says the thirteenth-century text *The King’s Mirror*.

This building is erected to the glory of the languages of the world which preserve the memories and history of mankind. There is no better guiding principle for the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages building, which will be dedicated to global knowledge, a panoramic view of the world beyond Iceland, than this ancient wisdom recorded in the *The King’s Mirror*.



Humans speak and think in languages. The languages of the world are us, you and me, regardless of where we stand in the world.

A language unites everyone who understands it.

The languages of the world are the memory bank of past generations.



Everywhere on Earth, languages echo with the traces of mankind's environment, wisdom, traditions and circumstances.

Those who possess knowledge of other languages have a broad outlook and understanding and are able to build bridges between nations, promoting unity and peace.

The Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding is a collaborative project between Iceland and UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The Vigdís International Centre is intended to play an important global role, raising awareness of the value of languages among academics and the public alike, communicating knowledge on languages to the public and the scientific community.

This building is the property of the entire Icelandic nation, and anyone wishing to discuss the languages of the world will find a warm welcome here. The Vigdís International Centre will attract widespread interest and will therefore be shared with other nations.

The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages is focused on global culture and this building is erected in that spirit, with the University of Iceland in the fore.

The text is undersigned by Rector Jón Atli Benediktsson and those standing here today.

There are many people to thank for the fact that we are able to inaugurate an international shrine to languages in Iceland: three rectors of the University of Iceland and three deans of the School of Humanities, who never ceased to provide motivation and encouragement; the brilliant architects, true artists guided by beauty and incredible ingenuity; the construction committee, made up of uncompromising and first-rate professionals; the contractors and managers who worked on construction of the building we open today, completed to an exceptionally high standard.

I also wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to all those people, individual benefactors, who have supported the Institute and this building with generous donations, good will and the most valuable contribution of all: vision. Worthy of particular mention, we are hugely grateful for the solidarity we have seen from our neighbouring nations, who were among those who enabled us to keep the project afloat after Iceland experienced a memorable spot of financial bother.

Last but not least I would like to thank Auður Hauksdóttir, Professor of Danish at the University of Iceland, who came up with the original idea, on the University's 90th anniversary in 2001, of an international language institute, which has now begotten the building that we open today. She has been the director of that distinguished institute from its inception. Everyone involved is agreed that she has led this Institute, which has now acquired generous new accommodation, with exceptional diligence and enterprise, the like of which is rarely seen.

I now invite everyone to walk over to Veröld, the International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding that we know will make a global impact. I would like to congratulate every one of us on this distinguished institute – which is unique in the world.

## **Linguapax**

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir has collaborated with Linguapax for a long period of time, and in her speech, Mònica Pereña, president of Linguapax International, announced Linguapax's decision to honour Vigdís for her work in support of languages on the occasion of the organisation's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. For her visit to Iceland, Ms. Pereña had requested a meeting with Vigdís Finnbogadóttir and the director of the VFI to discuss future collaborations of Linguapax, the VFI and the Centre, and expressed her will to sign an agreement thereof.

## **ELRA**

On the opening day of the International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding, the European Language Resources Association (ELRA) signed a collaborative agreement with the International Centre. The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute has collaborated with the Association for many years. Khalid Choukri, the director of ELRA, Dr. Joseph Mariana, honorary president of ELRA, Auður Hauksdóttir, chairman of the board of the International Centre for Multilingualism, Sebastian Drude, managing director of the Centre, and Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former president of Iceland, put their names to the declaration of intent in the Vigdís Room. Collaboration between ELRA and the Centre will focus on how technological change can be used to enable all languages to thrive in a digital world. Projects will take various forms. ELRA and the International Centre will work jointly towards publishing and publicising conferences and have agreed to hold regular meetings to discuss ideas and plans in various areas. At least one event will be organised every year, either in Reykjavík or Paris.

## **West Nordic network**

In connection with the inauguration of Veröld – House of Vigdís and the opening ceremony of the International Centre for Multilingualism, the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute organised a meeting of the West Nordic collaborative network and the international advisory committee. The meeting focused on how the International Centre for Multilingualism can use traditional conferences, symposia and lectures as well as exhibitions and innovative media and technology to further research into linguistics and cultures in the West Nordic region and also public understanding of languages and cultures.

## **Inaugural Exhibition**

An exhibition dedicated to the work and interests of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir entitled SAMTAL – DIALOGUE was held to mark the inauguration of Veröld – House of Vigdís. The exhibition retraces Vigdís' years as a student abroad and her work as a teacher of French, tourist guide and director of the Reykjavík City Theatre. The exhibition also details the diversity of Vigdís' role as president from 1980 to 1996 and the importance of the work she has undertaken since her years as president, for example as Goodwill Ambassador for Languages for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,

UNESCO, and as a special supporter of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages. Visitors to the exhibition get an insight into Vigdís' interests through some of her favourite books, quotations and poems, and come to understand the ideals she holds dear, such as integrity, human rights, knowledge, equality, progress, broad-mindedness and education.

The director and designer of the exhibition was Þórunn S. Þorgrímsdóttir. The caption texts were written and edited by Bryndís Sverrisdóttir. The graphic designer was Salbjörg R. Jónsdóttir, and lighting was by Páll Ragnarsson. Translation was by Anna Yates. Valgerður Jónasdóttir was in charge of image processing and acquisition of pictures. Nanna H. Grettisdóttir filmed material from Vinaskógur (Friendship Forest). Material from the film Ljós heimsins (Light of the World) is by Ragnar Halldórsson. Also involved in the organisation of the exhibition were Auður Hauksdóttir, Kolbrún Halldórsdóttir and Ástriður Magnúsdóttir.

### **Financial contributions to the inauguration of Veröld – House of Vigdís**

Companies and organisations were approached for financial support to meet the cost of the inauguration of Veröld and the design of the opening exhibition. As usual the VFI met with great kindness and generosity. A donation of 2,500,000 ISK towards creating a website about Vigdís that is accessible in Veröld was received from Íslandsbanki, and 2,000,000 ISK from Isavia. Contributions of 1,000,000 ISK were made by both Eimskip and Landsbankinn and 650,000 ISK were received from Íslandsstofa Promote Iceland. The project received donations of 500,000 ISK from SA Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise, SI – the Federation of Icelandic Industries and Toyota Iceland. Hotel Holt and Extón made generous direct and indirect contributions. Finally Vigdís' fellow Rotarians from the Reykjavík Centre Rotary Club contributed generously towards the cost of the state-of-the-art B&O sound system in the Vigdís Room. The remainder of the cost was borne by Bræðurnir Ormsson.

Messages of goodwill, flowers and gifts were received on the day of the inauguration from many institutions working collaboratively with the Institute, including the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies and The Farmers Association of Iceland.

The members of the Institute wish to extend their deepest thanks to all those who made this memorable inauguration of Veröld – House of Vigdís and the Centre possible, with their generous donations.

### **Objectives and functions of the Centre**

The Centre operates according to the Agreement Between the Government of Iceland and UNESCO. According to the Agreement, the objectives and the functions of the Centre are as follows (see art. 7.1 and 7.2 from the Agreement):

The objectives of the Vigdís International Centre are to:

- a) promote multilingualism in order to further understanding, communication and respect between nations and cultures;
- b) raise awareness of the key role of languages as a basic aspect of the human cultural heritage;

- c) contribute to the preservation of languages;
- d) function as a clearing house in the fields of multilingualism and linguistic diversity for decision makers, experts and the general public;
- e) promote translation and translation studies in order to enhance the respect for and enjoyment of cultural diversity and intercultural understanding;
- f) contribute to worldwide monitoring of the implementation of language policies and language planning in the field of mother-tongue-based multilingualism;
- g) promote research and education in foreign language and culture studies;
- h) support and promote research into the role of the mother tongue as a human right;
- i) promote the investigation and analysis of and compilation of statistics on translation flows.

The function of the Centre shall be to:

- a) work towards and encourage the preservation of languages by maintaining and supporting digital archives for languages of the world;
- b) support language vitalisation and create a “planetarium of languages” – a combination of a real and virtual reality museum on the languages of the world with exhibitions to be experienced both on location and on the internet;
- c) promote and disseminate research on languages and cultures as an element of the human cultural heritage by supporting research chairs for outstanding scholars, including scholars from developing countries;
- d) provide a forum and facilities for international doctoral students and academics, especially from the developing countries;
- e) devise and make available worldwide strategies and methods in support of endangered and indigenous languages through research projects, conferences and publications;
- f) support outstanding research in the field of language policy and politics;
- g) provide facilities and expertise for research projects and disseminate results with a special view to the objectives of the centre;
- h) demonstrate how native language visions and focused language policy can enhance literacy and education through the means of research projects and dissemination of knowledge;
- i) develop an international discussion platform;
- j) collaborate with all relevant UNESCO programmes, in particular in the field of translation flows observations, like the Index Translationum (International Translation Bibliography).

Furthermore, the Centre operates according to the Rules and the Procedures of the Vigdís International Centre that were formally agreed upon by The Centre for Research in the Humanities at the University of Iceland on 27 November 2012.

## **Governing Board, International Advisory Board and staff**

### **Governing Board**

On 15 April 2014, Ástráður Eysteinnsson, dean of the School of Humanities at the University of Iceland, nominated the first Governing Board of the Centre for the following three years. The board is composed of three representatives of the University of Iceland, two representatives from UNESCO (one from the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris and one from the Icelandic UNESCO-committee), and one representative from Iceland's Ministry of Education and Culture. Alfredo Perez de Armiñán, assistant manager of UNESCO for Cultural Affairs, represented UNESCO in Paris, and Eiríkur Smári Sigurðarson, director of research at the School of Humanities (University of Iceland) the UNESCO-committee in Iceland. Guðrún Kvaran, professor emeritus of Icelandic, was nominated by the Minister of Education, Science, and Culture, and finally, on behalf of the University of Iceland, were nominated Auður Hauksdóttir, chair, professor of Danish and director of the VFI, Ásdís R. Magnúsdóttir, professor of French language and literature, and Þórhallur Eypórsson, professor of linguistics in the Department of English. In early 2017, Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, dean of the School of Humanities, nominated a new board of six members. UNESCO nominated Susanne Schnuttgen as their representative, who later the same year was replaced by Irmgarda Kasinskaite Buddeberg. Other members remained unchanged.

According to the UNESCO agreement and the Rules and Procedures for the Centre, the Governing Board makes all strategic decision on behalf of the Centre and is responsible for its finances towards the Board of the Centre for Research in the Humanities and the Dean of the School of Humanities. The board shall also ensure that the Centre fulfils its role, decide on its research policy, grant funding for individual research projects and approve its annual operating budget and annual report.

The first formal meeting of the board took place 10 September 2014 via Skype. Rochelle Roca-Hachem, UNESCO Culture Officer, took part in the meeting on behalf of Alfredo Perez de Armiñán. In the meeting it was decided that during the first years of the Centre its activities would focus on languages and cultures in the West-Nordic Region, namely The Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and the west coast of Norway, both in the field of research and dissemination of information. The decision reflects the emphasis that the VFI has placed on research on the ecology of languages and language contact in these regions, in collaboration with researchers in universities in Norway, Denmark, Faroe Islands and Greenland.

### **International Advisory Board**

During the last years, the Board of the Centre has worked with the Board of the VFI on the preparation of the Centre's activities, mainly funding and collaboration with foreign associations and institutions. An International Advisory Board has assisted the VFI and the Centre's board in this preparatory work. The members of the Advisory Board are: Anne Holmen, professor of parallel language use at the University of Copenhagen and director of the Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel Language Use (CIP), Anju Saxena, professor of linguistics at the University of Uppsala, Bernard Comrie, professor of linguistics at the University of California in Santa Barbara, Jens Allwood, professor of

linguistics at the University of Gothenburg, Lars Borin, professor of linguistics at the University of Gothenburg and director of Språkbanken, and Peter Austin, professor of linguistics at School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. Henriette Walter, professor emeritus of linguistics at the Université de Haute-Bretagne and director of the phonological laboratory at l'École Pratique des Hautes Études at the Sorbonne, also took part in the meeting of the Board in 2015. The cost of the activities of the Advisory Board has been covered with a grant from Riksbankens Jubileumsfond – The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences of the Swedish National Bank. A number of enterprises and institutions, as well as the Icelandic Government have sponsored the Centre.

## **Staff**

The position of a managing director for the Centre was announced on 7 July 2016 with a deadline for application on 15 September 2016. Seventeen applications were received and six applicants were interviewed. Two applicants were invited to give a talk at the VFI. On 1 April Sebastian Drude was hired as Managing Director of the Centre. As a managing director, he represents the Centre, manages its day-to-day operations, handles preparation of budgets, planning and fundraising and handles the implementation of other matters entrusted to him by the Board.

Sebastian Drude is a German documentary/anthropological linguist interested in linguistic diversity and language technology. He obtained a Dr.Phil.-degree at the Freie Universität Berlin in 2002. Over 12 years (1998–2010), he was a visiting researcher at the Museu Goeldi, Belém, Brazil, and studied the Awetí language in central Brazil, doing fieldwork and language documentation (2000–2006 in the DOBES programme). From 2008 to 2011 he held a Dilthey-Fellowship at the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, where he continues to be affiliated as Privatdozent since 2012. From November 2011 on, Sebastian Drude has worked as Scientific Coordinator and Head of “The Language Archive” (TLA) at the Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen. From September 2014 until assuming his position as the Centre’s Managing Director in Iceland, he was General Coordinator in the European Language research infrastructure CLARIN ERIC.

Events and public relations managers for the International Centre for Multilingualism and the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute were appointed in May. Their job percentages were designed as two-thirds for the Centre and one-third for the VFI. A large number of applications were received for both posts. Valgerður Jónasdóttir was selected as events manager and Þórunn Elísabet Bogadóttir as public relations manager. Valgerður is a graphic designer and holds a BSc in psychology and an MA in development studies. She has worked at Creditinfo and in events management at the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute. Þórunn holds a BA in political science and gender studies and an MS in international and European politics. She has worked in the media as a journalist for Morgunblaðið, Fréttablaðið and Kjarninn.

Ólöf Ingólfssdóttir, MA in Applied Studies in Cultural Communication, was hired temporarily as a project manager, first for three months (100%) and then for four months (80%). She received visitors and guided them around the building, dispensing information on Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the architecture of the building and the activities.

# Financial support and Management of the Centre

## Financial support

In November 2016, the director of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute met with Sigurður Ingi Jóhannsson, then prime minister of Iceland, to explore the possibility of a three-year state grant to support the running of the Institute. A written request was later sent to the government of Iceland requesting financial support for three years for the running of the Centre, with the cost of exhibitions in Veröld – House of Vigdís and payment of salaries particularly in mind. The request was approved at a governmental meeting on 8 November, but was referred for budgeting as the current government was provisional. At the end of 2016 and beginning of 2017 the government approved funding of an annual 20,000,000 ISK for three years. The city of Reykjavík and neighbouring municipalities were also approached for similar funding. The city of Reykjavík agreed annual funding of 3,000,000 ISK for three years towards the operations of the International Centre for Multilingualism. The agreement was signed at the inauguration of Vigdís Square. The town of Hafnarfjörður agreed to support the Centre with a grant of 750,000 ISK in 2017, Garðabær gave 300,000 ISK, Mosfellsbær 200,000 ISK and Seltjarnarnes 110,000 ISK. This generous support was greatly appreciated by the Centre and will be used to pay the wages of the events and public relations managers and to meet exhibition costs. The rector of the University of Iceland grants the Centre with 15,000,000 ISK every year for the first three years, for wage payments of the managing director. In addition, the rector supported the Centre by donating 50% of the wages of the chair of the board for the period of January-June 2017.

The Centre benefits greatly from all the goodwill and support which the VFI has received from a number of organizations and individuals throughout the years. Presently, all efforts are being made to provide funding to support its future operation. The Centre is grateful for all the important support it has received, without which the Centre would not exist.

## Veröld – House of Vigdís

Veröld – House of Vigdís houses teaching for the Faculty of Languages and Cultures at University of Iceland's School of Humanities, and for other faculties. Offices of professors, researchers and other staff are on levels two and three of the building, along with study areas for students. A cafe will open on the ground level.

The Centre occupies approximately 500 square metres in Veröld – House of Vigdís; *Vigdísarstofa*, exhibition space, auditorium, the director's office, two offices for guest researchers, and the "home area" of languages. The administration of the University of Iceland made the decision to assist the Centre by cancelling all rent charges for this area of the building, for the year of 2017. The Centre is grateful for this invaluable support from the University of Iceland.

The Centre generates income by leasing the auditorium and class rooms of the building. The income contributes to financing the Centre and its activities, and towards cleaning and maintenance of the building. Approximately 50 reservations of the auditorium and rooms were made in the period from August to December 2017.

## **New edition of *Languages open worlds***

The book *Tungumál ljúka upp heimum. Orð handa Vigdís* (Languages open worlds. Words for Vigdís) was published in 2010, in celebration of the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir. The book contained texts by 27 Icelandic authors written for Vigdís with their thoughts on language, in the hope that her dream of an international language centre would become reality. By the beginning of 2017 the book was unavailable.

To mark the inauguration of Veröld – House of Vigdís, Oddi printers decided to bear the cost of a reprint of 1000 copies of the book. The profits of the sale of the book will go to projects organised by the International Centre for Multilingualism.

In 2016 the director of the Vigís Finnbogadóttir Institute applied for a grant from Fondet for Dansk-Islandsk Samarbejde (Danish-Iceland Cooperation Fund) to cover the cost of translating Danish of *Languages open up worlds. Words for Vigdís* into Danish. The application was successful and the fund donated 15,000 DKK towards the project. Erik Skyum-Nielsen, literary theorist and translator, translated the book, which is now ready for printing.

## **Activities of the Centre**

### **Board meetings**

The Governing Board of VIMIUC was consulted several times during the hiring process of the managing director, event manager and public relations manager in the early months of 2017.

The board met formally four times during the year. The board of the VFI was present at the first two meetings that took place on 6 June and 16 June. The members of the board of VFI are:

Auður Hauksdóttir, professor of Danish and director of the VFI,  
Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, professor of second language acquisition,  
Geir Þórarinn Þórarinsson, adjunct lecturer in Greek and Latin,  
Oddný G. Sverrisdóttir, professor of German,  
Guðmundur S. Brynjólfsson, doctoral student.

Vice members of the VFI board:

Hólmfríður Garðarsdóttir, professor of Spanish,  
Gísli Magnússon, associate professor of Danish.

The UNESCO representative from the headquarters in Paris did not attend these two meetings.

The other two meetings of the board (21 August and 9 October) were held with the UNESCO representative from the headquarters in Paris participating via Skype.

At the board's meeting 9 October it was agreed to appoint an executive board from among the board's members to handle the Centre's affairs on its behalf in order to enhance the efficacy of the board and of the Centre.



The members of the executive board are: Guðrún Kvaran, Auður Hauksdóttir, chair, Ásdís R. Magnúsdóttir and Þórhallur Eypórsson.

## **Exhibition**

The current exhibition *Samtal – Dialogue* was set up for the opening of Veröld, 20 April. (see 3 above). In accordance with the Centre's emphasis on the West-Nordic region, the next exhibition should focus on the "language ecology" in this region.

A long-time goal is to acquire a *Science on Sphere* (SOS) system, and to develop language-related materials to be exposed on this attractive gadget. In May 2017, the Centre got in contact with the institutions behind SOS and inquired costs and feasibility. The result is that, in addition to the substantial costs (~250,000 USD), a regular SOS system needs more space than is available in Veröld. There are now, however, smaller versions which could be installed.

## **Events organised or coorganised by the Centre**

In August 2017 the International Centre for Multilingualism became a co-organiser of the Café Lingua project, with the Reykjavík City Library, and Veröld – House of Vigdís became one of the locations for the regular "Language Rendezvous" events, which promote multilingualism and language learning in agreement with the objectives of the Centre. The managing director of the International Centre for Multilingualism gave a talk as part of the opening programme in August, entitled "Fjölbreytileiki tungumála og tungumál í útrýmingarhættu" (The diversity of languages and languages in danger of extinction). In total, five events were held by Café Lingua in Veröld during the autumn semester 2017, including a Christmas celebration with the choir *Multikultikorinn*.

On 19 August, the day of the Culture Night (Menningarnótt) of Reykjavík, the square south of Veröld – House of Vigdís, 'Vigdísartorg', was named and inaugurated in an official event arranged by the rector of the University of Iceland, the VFI and the Centre in cooperation with the City of Reykjavík, which financed the area, designed for outdoor events.

The mayor of Reykjavík, Dagur B. Eggertsson, and the rector of the University of Iceland, Jón Atli Benediktsson, gave a speech and Vigdís Finnbogadóttir inaugurated the square in a symbolic manner when she planted a tree, assisted by several children. During the Culture Night, the Centre was open to the public.

An "International Translators Seminar" was held 11-12 September, in cooperation with the Icelandic Literature Center (MÍB), The Icelandic Association of Translators and Interpreters, Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, Association of Icelandic Editors, The Writers' Union of Iceland, Reykjavík UNESCO City of Literature.

At the seminar, translators were given the opportunity to meet their colleagues from various parts of the world, as well as Icelandic authors, academics, publishers and others with a genuine interest in Icelandic literature. They could also attend lectures and talks and participate in panel discussions on literature and translations. The opening address was given by Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, president of Iceland.

The annual summit of Women Political Leaders (WPL) was held in Iceland on 28-30 November. About 400 women political leaders from 100 countries attended the global summit. The summit took place under the special aegis of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former president of Iceland. An evening programme entitled “How women leaders change the world” was held in Veröld – House of Vigdís on Tuesday, 28 November. It was organised by the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute, the International Centre for Multilingualism and the city of Reykjavík, in cooperation with Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir, director of WPL, and Silvana Koch-Mehrin, president of WPL. The event included a performance by a choir of 65 women, led by Margrét J. Pálmadóttir. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir gave an address, after which there was a panel discussion with Silvana Koch-Mehrin, president of WPL, Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, president of Malta, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, former chair of the African Union Commission, and Helen Clark, former prime minister of New Zealand. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir received a special honorary award at the Global Summit in Harpa. In her thank-you speech Vigdís discussed the importance of languages. The Centre was present with a stand on the Centre during the two days of the main event in Harpa.

### **Other events with the presence of or contributions from the Centre**

On 29 May Auður Hauksdóttir and Sebastian Drude presented the Centre to leaders of the University of Iceland and distinguished guests from the University of Minnesota.

Móðurmál - The Association on Bilingualism in Iceland, held their annual conference in Veröld 25-26 August. Sebastian Drude gave a talk entitled “The Vigdís International Centre: Promoting the beauty of languages”.

The Icelandic Association of Translators and Interpreters organized a symposium in Veröld – House of Vigdís on 30 September, on the occasion of the International Translation Day. Sebastian Drude gave a talk on “Language diversity, language vitality, and translations”.

On behalf of a team of authors from the University of Iceland, including Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir from the VFI, and members of the Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies, as well as the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, Sebastian Drude participated at the FEL (Foundation for Endangered Languages) Conference “Communities in Control – Learning tools and strategies for multilingual endangered language communities” 19–21 October 2017 in Alcanena (Portugal), delivering a talk on “Digital collaboration and resources: Expanding the EGIDS scale for language development into the digital domains”. This provided opportunities for networking and laid the ground for hosting 2018’s FEL conference at the Centre in Iceland.

On 28 October Vigdís Finnbogadóttir and Sebastian Drude were invited to open the annual Polyglot Conference, which was held in Harpa Reykjavik Concert Hall and Conference Centre.

Suzanne Gessner and Sebastian Drude gave two short lectures on 8 November: “Language endangerment and documentation: an overview”, “The situation of indigenous languages in British Columbia” as a part of Málvísindakaffi Íslenska málfræðifélagsins og Málvísindastofnunar HÍ.

## Research projects

The general research topics of the Centre are defined in the UNESCO agreement; they include linguistic diversity, multilingualism, language(s) as heritage of humanity, language education and research, translation and translation studies, as well as language policies and support for endangered, minority and heritage languages. These topics, in particular education, translation and language(s) as heritage of humanity, were chosen so as to connect with the expertise and interests existing within the Institute.

In order to define priorities for a profile which would distinguish the Centre from other similar institutions, the following specific topics have been defined for the Centre:

- Language Ecology and Multilingualism – how do languages live side by side, how is the usage of the different languages in different domains decided, how can that be influenced by language policies?
- Language Ecology in the Digital Space – what to set against the overwhelming dominance of English, how to develop and assess measurements of digital language use?
- Maps as vehicle of conveying and transporting knowledge about language use.
- Overview of language diversity – which languages and varieties exist? (Language catalogues, surveys, connecting to existing initiatives including language maps, ISO-639, Glottolog, UNESCO, etc.)

The Centre applied for the following grant: Multi-Layer Language Maps (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowships, Career Restart Panel). Applied for 191,325 EUR on 14 September: (~24,273,500 ISK) with the European Commission, Horizon 2020, Call: H2020-MSCA-IF-2017.

## Cooperation

### *The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages*

The support for the VFI research in 2017 consisted mainly in providing the Auditorium for the Institute's events (lectures and talks). The Centre also offers support in the development of grant proposals.

### *University of Iceland*

In June 2017, the Centre was approached by the office of the University's rector in order to support the implementation of a "UNESCO Chair" within the network "Le Réseau International pour L'accompagnement à L'orientation des Personnes Tout au Long de la Vie Vers le Travail Décent et le Développement Durable" of which the University of Iceland is a part. The Centre met with Guðbjörg Vilhjálmisdóttir, professor of career counselling and guidance and head of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, and they discussed a possible profile for the UNESCO chair to be implemented. The Centre proposed to Guðbjörg Vilhjálmisdóttir that the focus could be on languages as an asset for career development.

### *UNESCO*

Sebastian Drude, managing director of the Centre, visited UNESCO early in June 2017 and discussed possible forms of cooperation. The Centre was consulted by UNESCO for the International Mother Language Day, 21 February 2018, and for the preparations for

the International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019 in a meeting on December 2017 at the UNESCO Headquarters.

### *CLARIN*

In June 2017, the Centre participated at a meeting of leaders of the European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) CLARIN (Common Language Resource and Technology Infrastructure) with representatives of Icelandic institutions that have a stake in building an Icelandic associated infrastructure. Sebastian Drude presented the Centre and its goals and its interests in participating in a national CLARIN infrastructure.

### *City Library of Reykjavík*

The VFI has cooperated with the City Library of Reykjavík on the Café Lingua Project for several years. In June 2017, the Centre met with Kristín Vilhjálmsdóttir and other members of the City Library of Reykjavík in order to reinforce this cooperation. In fall 2017, Café Lingua events were held in three locations: City Libraries and other cultural centres (special events dedicated to a topic or language / language group; once a month); Stúdentakjallarin (Language Rendezvous; once a month) and in Veröld – House of Vigdís (Language Rendezvous; once a month).

### *City Library of Reykjavík and the Árni Magnússon Institute*

The Centre supported the City Library and the Árni Magnússon Institute in preparing the celebration of the day of the Icelandic Language (19 Nov. 2017), in a campaign involving the production of short videos on “What do you do for Icelandic? What does Icelandic do for you?”

### *International Standardization Organization (ISO)*

Sebastian Drude participates in ISO’s Technical Committee 37, Subcommittee 2, Working Group 1, as a project leader on a framework for linguistic variation (ISO 21636). This work is closely related to the UNESCO Atlas of languages and similar initiatives in the area of endangered languages and linguistic diversity. In June 2017, Sebastian Drude led a working meeting in Vienna during ISO TC37’s annual meeting.

### *Foundation for Endangered Languages (FEL)*

In the fall of 2017, Sebastian Drude joined the FEL executive board (EB) in order to make the Centre visible in this community and to be able to grasp opportunities of collaboration, in particular on the future UNESCO Atlas of languages (FEL functions as European UNESCO partner for this topic, and FEL-EB member Chris Moseley is the editor of the current atlas). Since October 2017, the Centre participates regularly in the meetings of the EB via Skype. The first result of this cooperation is the upcoming hosting of the FEL XXII conference in August 2018, with the Centre as the host and as main organizer.

### *Infoterm*

Infoterm is an international organization dedicated to terminology and translations, co-founded by UNESCO. The long-standing cooperation between Sebastian Drude and Infoterm leaders has now been mobilized in favour of the Centre. In fall 2017, the Centre was offered to receive a donation from Infoterm, consisting of relevant parts of the Eugen Wustner / Infoterm collections, which comprise in particular many specialized dictionaries. The Centre formed a consortium of stakeholders in Iceland, which all agreed that it was desirable to acquire this unique collection. (The collection arrived in February 2018). The stakeholders are: VIMIUC, VFI, The Translation Centre of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs

(Þýðingamiðstöð utanríkisráðuneytisins), The Translation Centre of the University of Iceland (Þýðingasetur), The National and University Library (Landsbókasafn Íslands), The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum), namely the Lexicography and Language Planning Departments.

#### *Modeling the Linguistic Consequences of Digital Language Contact - MoLiCoDiLaCo*

In early June 2017, representatives of the MoLiCoDiLaCo research project and the Centre discussed possible cooperation, in view of the general theme of the research project being close to topics of the Centre (language contact, multilingualism, language-endangerment, language policies, etc.).

Sebastian Drude wrote a paper, with a group of researchers, on the topic of digital language vitality, which was presented at the FEL conference in Alcanena in October 2017 (see above, other events). The objective for the Centre was to become visible and expose the expertise and interests of the Centre to the scientific community, aiming at future partnerships and project collaborations.

#### *Other organizations*

The Centre has been in contact with numerous organizations and on some occasions, there has been a practical cooperation, for instance in organizing an event (see above “events”). These include the Nordic House, the National Museum, the Association for Bilingualism (Móðurmál), the Icelandic Association of Translators and Interpreters (THOT), The Literary City Reykjavík, Visit Reykjavík.

## **Thanks**

At the end of this first half year of its activities, the Centre extends its deepest gratitude to all those who contributed to the Centre, in particular its opening, both materially and conceptually.

We are extremely grateful for the financial support that enabled the construction of Veröld – House of Vigdís and hiring of employees for the Centre.

The help and the encouragement of the University of Iceland rectors, Páll Skúlason, Kristín Ingólfssdóttir and Jón Atli Benediktsson, and members of the University’s administration has been invaluable. Special thanks go to Guðmundur R. Jónsson, director of finance and operations, Sigurlaug I. Lövdahl, office director, and Eiríkur Hilmarsson, chair of the SVF building committee.

We would like to thank Guðmundur Hálfðánarson, dean of the School of Humanities, and Ástráður Eysteinnsson, former dean, as well as the members of the VFI who have contributed in so many ways to the Centre.

We thank the International Advisory Board for their valuable contribution and fruitful meetings throughout the years.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to Vigdís Finnbogadóttir for her enthusiasm and long standing contribution towards culture and languages.