Languages Open up Worlds – Words for Vigdís
April 20 2017
Today is a day of celebration at the University of Iceland. We are formally opening a splendid new building which has been given the name Veröld – hús Vigdísar. Today we launch the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding, which will function under the auspices of UNESCO.

Veröld is a remarkable building in a number of ways. The humanities at the University of Iceland hereby gain a magnificent centre at the heart of the University campus which will be a setting for teaching, research and innovation in the field of foreign languages. The building will also house an International Centre for Multilingualism, and the Vigdisarstofa exhibition space where visitors can learn about the life and work of former president Vigdis Finnbogadottir. The building provides all facilities, making excellent provision for staff, students, and visitors from Iceland and abroad; an outstanding lecture theatre, teaching spaces, a state-of-the-art library and data centre; spaces for exhibitions, seminars and conferences; works of art, a restaurant and a piazza.

The architects have excelled in their work. Veröld is a multifaceted work of architectural art, and at the same time it links together existing buildings on the campus and endows them with new roles. It is an indication of the inventiveness of the architects that this, the newest structure on the University campus, should also elevate to a well-deserved place of honour the oldest, the former Telegraph Office, which will be 100 years old next year.

The name of the new building, Veröld, has symbolic significance - embracing the entire world in its role as a home for languages – and languages are one of the pillars of the edifice of the world.

It is an honour for the University and the people of Iceland to be able to dedicate this fine building to Vigdis Finnbogadottir, the first democratically elected woman president in the world. Vigdis has always shown great support and goodwill for the University of Iceland, in her unceasing efforts for the cause of languages. It is a sign of the respect in which she is held by the people of Iceland and around the world that she has been awarded honorary doctorates by two faculties of the University of Iceland - the Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Languages and Cultures.

On behalf of the University of Iceland, I extend heartfelt thanks to all those who have contributed to making the dream of this building a reality. It is my sincere wish that Veröld – hús Vigdísar will stand in perpetuity as a living monument to the ideals of Vigdis Finnbogadottir and the University of Iceland.

[Signature]
Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages

The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages (VFI) is a research institute under the aegis of the University of Iceland Centre for Research in the Humanities. It serves as a forum for scholars of the University’s Faculty of Foreign Languages, Literature and Linguistics who carry out teaching and research in the languages taught at the University, i.e. Arabic, Chinese, Danish, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish and Swedish.

The Institute was founded on 1 October 2001, during the European Year of Languages – also the year that the University of Iceland marked its 90th anniversary. A resolution of the Faculty of Humanities to name the Institute of Foreign Languages after Vigdís Finnbogadóttir stated that the purpose is to honour Vigdís for her diligent work on behalf of languages, and to strengthen research and teaching in foreign languages, and in Icelandic as a foreign language. Vigdís, it states, has highlighted the importance of language skills, in the native language as well as foreign ones, and has made a valuable contribution to this issue in her work as a teacher, as president of Iceland, and as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. By naming the Institute af-
The Executive Board of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute now comprises: Auður Hauksdóttir (Chair), professor of Danish, Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, professor of English, Geir P. Þórarinsson, adjunct lecturer in Greek and Latin, Guðmundur S. Brynjólfsson, doctoral student, and Oddný G. Sverrisdóttir, professor of German. Substitute members are Gíslason, associate professor of Danish, and Hólmfríður Garðarsdóttir, professor of Spanish. Auður Hauksdóttir has been director of the VFI from its foundation.

ter Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the Faculty of Humanities wishes to express in practice its appreciation of her vital contribution; and it also believes that the Institute will benefit from the association with her name and work.

From the outset the Institute has placed emphasis on scholarly work through new research and development projects, in addition to academic publications, and it has sought to disseminate knowledge of language and culture through conferences and lectures. Before long it was proposed that the Institute should have an international role in its scholarly field, and hence a programme was launched to promote the Institute abroad and seek collaboration with universities in other countries on research and development. This outreach began in 2002 in Japan, followed by Denmark (2003), Germany (2004), Sweden (2004), Spain (2005), Norway (2006) and France (2008). Annual reports on the activities of the Institute since its foundation are accessible on the Institute's website www.vigdis.hi.is
The Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding

For more than a decade work has been in progress to found an international language centre at the University of Iceland. In that process Vigdís Finnbogadóttir has made an invaluable contribution, by her unfailing support through her work.

In 2008 an international consultation group was appointed, funded by a grant from the Swedish Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation) to advise the Institute’s board regarding the international language centre. The group comprised:

Anju Saxena, professor of linguistics at the University of Uppsala; Bernard Comrie, director of the Department of Linguistics at the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig, now professor of linguistics at the University of California, Santa Barbara; Jens Allwood, professor of linguistics at the University of Gothenburg; and Professor Peter Austin of SOAS, University of London. A further grant from the Foundation in 2014 enabled the group to bring more scholars on board: Professor Anne Holmen of the University of Copenhagen, director of Center for Internationalisering og Parallelsproglegioned (CIP, Centre for Internationalization and Parallel Language Studies); Lars Borin, professor of linguistics at the University of Gothenburg and director of Språkbanken (the Swedish Language Bank); and Henriette Walter, emeritus professor of linguistics at the Université de Haute-Bretagne and director of the phonological laboratory at the Sorbonne.

In 2009 the Ministry of Education and Culture applied to UNESCO with a view to the international language centre at the University of Iceland being certified by the organisation as a Category 2 centre. UNESCO sent inspectors to Iceland to assess
the main points of the application and the work of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute.

In early 2011 the Minister of Education submitted the formal application to UNESCO, and it was approved that spring. The process was finalised when the UNESCO General Conference resolved on 4 November 2011 that the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding would function under the auspices of UNESCO.

**Objectives and functions**

The objectives of the Vigdís International Centre are stated in the agreement with UNESCO, to:

- promote multilingualism in order to further understanding, exchange and respect between cultures and nations;
- raise awareness of the importance of language as a core element of the cultural heritage of humanity;
- promote translation and translation studies in order to enhance the enjoyment of cultural diversity and intercultural understanding;
- contribute to preservation of languages and to worldwide monitoring of the implementation of language policies and language planning in the field of mother tongue based multilingualism;
- promote research and education in foreign languages studies and cultures;
- support and promote research into the role of the mother language as a human right.

The principal roles of the Vigdís International Centre are to work for the preservation of languages, and to devise and make available worldwide strategies and methods in support of endangered and indigenous languages through research projects, conferences and publications; to support outstanding research in the field of language policy and politics; delineate how native language visions and focused language policy can enhance literacy and education through the means of research projects and dissemination of knowledge; to develop an international discussion platform; to promote and disseminate research of languages and cultures as an element of cultural heritage of humanity by supporting research chairs for outstanding scholars, also from the developing countries; and to 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.

Rules of procedure for the Vigdís International Centre were approved by the board of the VFI on 19 November 2012, and by the board of the University of Iceland Centre for Research in the Humanities on 27 November that year.
Agreement between the Icelandic government and UNESCO regarding the Vigdís International Centre

On 15 April 2013, Minister of Education and Culture Katrín Jakobsdóttir signed a collaborative agreement between the Icelandic government and UNESCO providing that the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding would operate under the auspices of UNESCO, and on 27 June that year Director-General Irina Bokova signed on behalf of UNESCO. The following year Bokova visited Iceland for the Language Resources and Evaluation Conference (LREC), and delivered an address at the University of Iceland. In media interviews she highlighted the opportunities offered by the Vigdís International Centre, and the important global role foreseen for it.
Governing board and launch of the Vigdís International Centre

On 14 April 2014 the Dean of the School of Humanities, Professor Ástráður Eysteinsson, appointed a governing board for the Vigdís International Centre for a term of three years. At the beginning of 2017 the present Dean, Professor Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, appointed a new governing board, in accord with the Centre’s rules of procedure. Its members are: Susanne Schnuttgen, Chief of the UNESCO Capacity Building and Heritage Policy Unit (nominated by UNESCO); Eiríkur Smári Sigurðarson, research manager of the University of Iceland School of Humanities (nominated by the Icelandic UNESCO committee); Professor Emerita Guðrún Kvaran (nominated by the Ministry of Education and Culture); and (nominated by the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute) Professor of Danish Auður Hauksdóttir (chair), Professor of French Ásdís R. Magnúsdóttir, and Professor of English Þórhallur Eyþórsson. The board’s work has been mainly focused on preparation for the activities of the Vigdís International Centre.

The decision has been made that in the initial years the focus will be on the linguistic ecology of the West Nordic region – i.e. the relationship between languages and cultures on the west coast of Norway, in the Faroes, Iceland and Greenland. An international network of scholars has already been formed, representing the University of Greenland in Nuuk, the Greenland Language Committee (Oqaasiliortut), the Universities of Trondheim, Bergen, Oslo, Copenhagen, the Faroe Islands and Iceland. The network has received grants from Nordplus Sprog og Kultur.
SEBASTIAN DRUDE has been appointed director of the Vigdíðs International Centre. He holds a doctorate from the Freie Universität Berlin, and has carried out research in language documentation and comparative linguistics at the Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main. He has been Scientific Coordinator and head of The Language Archive at the Max Planck Institute, and has more recently worked for the European Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure (CLARIN). He entered his new post on 1 April 2017.

Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of Iceland, and Vigdíðs Finnbogadóttir, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador of languages, formally launch the Vigdíðs International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding on 20 April 2017.
Sponsorship of the Vigdís International Centre

Financial sponsorship from a number of companies has been crucial to preparations for the work of the Vigdís International Centre. In 2010 Valitor made known that it would contribute a grant for the preparation of the Vigdís International Centre for three years; Arion banki contributed grants in 2012-2015, and Íslandsbanki in 2012. In 2013 nine companies signed a three-year agreement to provide funds for those preparations. University Rector Kristín Ingólfsdóttir signed the agreement on behalf of the University with the following companies: Íslandshótel, Landsbankinn, MP-banki, Promens, Reginn, the Blue Lagoon, Icelandair Group, Icelandic Group and N1.

In January 2016 an agreement on further sponsorship for three years was signed by University Rector Jón Atli Benediktsson with eleven companies: Landsbankinn, Icelandair Group, Radisson Blu Hotel Saga, Arion banki, Alvogen, the Blue Lagoon, Kvika, Reginn, Íslandsbanki, Íslandshótel and N1. In 2017 Icelandic made an agreement for sponsorship during that year.

Rector Jón Atli Benediktsson has been supportive of the project in many ways - both financially and through his encouragement and vigilance.
Preparations for the “House of Languages”

At the start of a conference honouring Vigdís Finnbogadóttir on her birthday, 15 April 2005, University Rector Páll Skúlason made known that the University Council had at a meeting on 7 April resolved to appoint a group of five people to make preparations for construction of a building for the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute. Its members were Auður Hauksdóttir, director of the Institute, Professor Ingjaldur Hannibalsson, business graduate Inga Jóna Þórðardóttir, Professor Kristján Árnason, and managing director Þórður Sverrisson. The group’s brief was to consider what activities were to take place in the building, assess the space needed and make a cost estimate. They were also to explore funding options.

This decision led to great optimism and energy regarding the project, which had the support of Rector Páll Skúlason and of his successor Kristín Ingólfsdóttir after she took over in 2005. At a meeting in June 2006 the University Council resolved that the University of Iceland would contribute up to ISK100 million to the Institute’s construction annually for three years from 2008, provided that twice that amount could be raised from other sponsors and sources of funding.

In that year the Institusjonen Fritt Ord in Norway contributed a grant of ISK10 million towards preparations for the Institute building. November 2006 marks a turning-point, when Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller, board chair of the A. P. Møller Foundation (A.P. Møller og Hustru Chastine Mc-Kinney Møllers Fond til almene Formaal) in Denmark informed the Institute that the Foundation would contribute a grant of DKK5 million. This generous grant was hugely important to the progress of the project; and afterwards many more parties declared their willingness to contribute.

The collapse of the Icelandic banks in 2008 was a blow to all the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute’s plans. Sponsors found themselves unable to meet their commitments, and there was loss of funds accumulated. Despite this adversity, a decision was made not to give up, but to strive to achieve the objective. In connection with Vigdís’ 80th birthday in April 2010, a campaign was launched to raise funds for the building; and in spite of the difficult economic situation the project proved to have extensive support. Clearly many people wished to honour Vigdís on this occasion, and see her dream of an international language centre become a reality. Many contributed to the campaign; but, as so often in the following years, the efforts of Ásmundur Stefansson, former director at Landsbanki Íslands, and Director Birna Einarisdóttir of Íslandsbanki, were crucial. Former prime minister Þorsteinn Pálsson and Steinþór Pálsson, former director of Landsbanki, also played an important role. The largest individual grants were contributed by the Spron Fund (ISK60 m), Landsbanki Íslands (ISK50 m), Actavis (ISK30 m), Icelandic (ISK30 m), and Bjarni Ármansson and Helga Sverrisdóttir (ISK25 m), while the contribution of the Faroese parliament and businesses (close to ISK20 m) was also significant. Contributions from many businesses, funds, voluntary organisations, individuals and
the Faroese parliament, in addition to pledges from the City of Reykjavík in 2010 in connection with Vigdís’ birthday, brought the project closer to its objective. And ISK200 million from the Icelandic government in early 2011 provided yet more support.

A meeting of the University Council on 7 April 2011 approved Rector Kristín Ingólfsdóttir’s proposal to appoint a building committee for the Institute. The committee’s members were: Associate Professor Eiríkur Hilmarsson (chair), Auður Hauksdóttir, director of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute, doctoral student Ásdís Guðrún Sigmundsdóttir, Guðmundur R. Jónsson, head of the University’s Division of Operations and Resources, business graduate Inga Jónína Pórardóttir, Professor Ingjaldur Hannibalsson and writer Pétur Gunnarsson. Halldóra Víffilsdóttir, project manager at the Government Construction Contracting Agency, worked with the building committee from the autumn of 2011. Pétur Gunnarsson stood down from the committee in 2012, and the committee suffered a blow with the sudden death of Ingjaldur Hannibalsson in the autumn of 2014, aged only 62. He had been an avid supporter of foreign-language teaching, and of the Institute. Sigurlaug I. Lövdahl, office director of the University’s Division of Operations and Resources, has assisted the committee and served as its secretary. Valþór Sigurðsson carried out monitoring on behalf of the building committee. The committee’s first meeting was held on 15 April 2011. The last of its 52 meetings took place on 10 January 2017.
Design Competition

In December 2011 an open competition was held for a design for the Institute; a total of 43 proposals were submitted, from nine countries. The members of the judging panel were Inga Jóna Dórðardóttir (chair), Auður Hauksdóttir, Ingjaldur Hannibalsson, and architects Helgi Mar Hallgrímsson and Halldór Gíslason. Halldóra Vifilsdóttir was the panel’s secretary, and Sigurlaug I. Lövdahl assisted the panel and liaised with the University.

The results of the competition were announced on 16 May 2012: the winning proposal was that of architects Kristján Garðarson, Haraldur Örn Jónsson, Gunnlaugur Magnússon and Hjörtur Hannesson of the Andrúm studio.

The judges commented on the winning design: “...the principal strengths of the proposal are excellent links with the surroundings, and good internal connections within the building. The internal spaces focus on an open central spaces which links all the levels, providing good visual connections between levels..."
A meeting of the University Council resolved on 6 March 2014 that the University of Iceland would meet the balance of costs in funding the construction, while fundraising efforts would continue. An important element was that shortly before the meeting of the University Council the Executive City Council of Reykjavík had confirmed that it would finance the creation of a piazza at the south of the building, for approximately ISK90 million.

On the First Day of Summer (a traditional Icelandic holiday) Vigdís Finnbogadóttir and Auður Hauksdóttir met with Ane Mærsk Mc-Kinney Uggla, board chair of the A. P. Møller Foundation, to discuss the status of the project. After that meeting she informed the Institute that a further grant of ISK100 million would be made. The funds raised, together with a generous contribution from the University through the University Lottery, meant that the project could be put into practice. Including the government contribution of ISK200 million, voluntary contributions accounted for about 40% of total costs.

In the autumn of 2014 all design and review of the tender documents had been completed, and the project was put out to tender on 23 December. The lowest offer was submitted by Eykt, and in due course the company was contracted for the project. Guðbjartur Á. Ólafsson was appointed construction manager, and the project was supervised by Gunnar Örn Steingrímsson and Hjörtur Björnsson for Eykt.
Milestones

The groundbreaking ceremony for the new building was carried out on 8 March, International Women’s Day, 2015, by Vígdis Finnbogadóttir, Minister of Education and Culture Illugi Gunnarsson, and University Rector Kristín Ingólfsdóttir.


The project was completed in March 2017.

The building will be formally opened by University Rector Jón Atli Benediktsson and Vígdis Finnbogadóttir on 20 April, the First Day of Summer, 2017.
What shall we call it?

A competition was held to decide a name for the new building. Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, announced the competition at the Humanities Conference on 10 March 2017, and nearly 800 proposals were submitted by more than 1,000 people. These were considered by a selection committee comprising Eiríkur Smári Sigurðarson from the Faculty of Humanities (chair), Geir Þórarinn Þórarinsson for the board of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute, Guðrún Kvaran for the Vigdís International Centre, and Inga Jóna Þórðardóttir on behalf of the University Rector. The committee reached the unanimous conclusion that the building should be called: Veröld – hús Vigdíssar. The name Veröld had been proposed by two entrants: Hulda Egilsdóttir and Sveinn V. Ólafsson. The additional name Hús Vigdíssar had been proposed by five people: Ingunn Björnsdóttir, Jónína Hallgrímsdóttir, Kristín Helgadóttir Ísfeld, Sesselja Friðgeirsdóttir and Sigríður B. Guðjónsdóttir. Prizes were awarded for the winning proposals.
Veröld – hús Vigdísar – contributions

University of Iceland via the University Lottery.

Funds: A.P. Møller and Hustru Chastine Mc-Kinney Møllers Fond til almene Formaal/The A.P. Møller and Chastine McKinney Møller Foundation for General Purposes (Denmark), Spron Fund (for lecture theatre).

The Government of Iceland.

Løgting Faroese parliament.

Municipalities: City of Reykjavík, Tjörnes district, Grímsnes and Grafningur district.


Corporations and bodies in other countries: KLP Bank (Norway), Bergen University (Norway), BERO/Eric De Rothchild Projet (France), Nord-Trøndelag Elektrisitetsverk (NTE, Norway), Framherji (Faroes), Pf Føroya Banki (Faroes), Pf Atlantic Airways (Faroes), Smyril Line (Faroes), Pf Tryggingarfelagðið Føroyar (Faroes), Sparebank 1 (Norway), Es team AB (Berlin, Germany)/Guðrún Magnúsdóttir, Icelandic Roots/Sunna Furstenau (USA).

Icelandic organisations: Teachers’ Union (for lecture theatre), Association of Academics, Association of Women Business Leaders, Iceland-Japan Society, Women’s Rights Association, Kópavogur Rotary Club, Association of Chartered Engineers, Association of Teachers of German, Alliance Française in Reykjavík, STÍL – Association of Foreign Language Teachers.

Organisations in other countries: Lärarförbundet (Sweden), Utdanningsforbundet (Norway) Hekla Club (Minnesota, USA), OAJ – Undervisningssektorns Fackorganisation (Finland).


Anonymous donations and unidentifiable telephone donations arising from fundraising campaign.

For further information see: www.vigdis.hi.is.
Languages Open Up Worlds

to mark the occasion of the opening of Veröld – hús Vigdísar and the inauguration of the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding

University Cinema – main auditorium – April 20\textsuperscript{th} 2017

University Choir
Conductor: Gunnsteinn Ólafsson
- The Cloud-Capp’d Towers
- Vaughan Williams / William Shakespeare - The Tempest
- Now you wake, my people
- Gunnsteinn Ólafsson / Hallgrímur Helgason

Auður Hauksdóttir, director of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute

Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of Iceland

Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, director of the University of Iceland Art Collection

Rigmor Dam, Faroese Minister of Education and Culture

Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir sings music from around the world, in seven languages, with Esther Talía Casey, Margrét Arnardóttir og Birgi Bragasyni
- O poštaris avel, sīgaunala in Romany
- El Feo in Spanish and Zapotec
- Báidhin Fhelimí, Irish folksong in old Gaelic
- Byssan lull by Evert Taube in Swedish
- Je sais comment in French
- Padam Padam by Norbert Glanzberg/ Henri Contet, in French
- Youkali by Kurt Weil/ Roger Fernay, in Catalan

Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, President of Iceland

Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO

Mònica Pereña, President of Linguapax International
Vigdí Finnbogadóttir, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

Women’s Choir of the University of Iceland
Conductor: Margrét Bóasdóttir
Piano: Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir
  The Mountain Peek Through Mist - 山在虚无缥缈间
  Huang Zi / Wei Hanzhang - 作词: 韦瀚章 - 作曲: 黄自
  Ásta (Ástkæra ylhlýra málíð)
  Atli Heimir Sveinsson / Jónas Hallgrímsson

The programme will be interspersed with readings from „from Languages Open Up New Worlds“ a festschrift for Vigdí, read by Birgitta Birgisdóttir, Björn Ingi Hilmarsson, Hjórdís Anna Haraldsdóttir and Arnar Ægisson

Songs will be interpreted in sign-language by Ástbjörg Rut Jónsdóttir, and addresses by Ærný Guðmundsdóttir.

Photography and photo design: Vigfús Birgisson
Graphic design: Salbjörg Rita Jónsdóttir
Technical supervisors: Atli Már Sigurjónsson og Hlynur Friðriksson

Following the inaugural ceremony, guests are invited to walk across to the new home of the Vigdí Finnbogadóttir Institute, where they will be welcomed by Vigdí Finnbogadóttir and University Rector Jón Atli Benediktsson. Along the way, songs from around the world will be sung.

Participating Choirs:
University Choir - Conductor Gunnsteinn Ólafsson
Women’s Choir, University of Iceland - Conductor Margrét Bóasdóttir
Music Faculty Choir, Iceland Academy of the Arts - Conductor Sigurður Halldórsson
Flensborg Choir - Conductor Hrafnhildur Blomsterberg
Choir and Junior Choir, Öldutún School - Conductor Brynhildur Auðbjargardóttir
Vox Feminae, Domus Vox and Cantabile - Conductor Margrét Pálmadóttir
Reykjavík Girls’ Choir - Conductor Sigríður Soffía Haflíðadóttir

Director of the inaugural programme is Kolbrún Halldórsdóttir.
Assistant director Orri Huginn Ágústsson
Veröld – hús Vigdísar

The architects of the Andrúm studio explain:

In designing the building we sought to reflect Vigdís’ views and values with regard to culture and history, communication, and respect, in the broadest sense.

The Veröld building interacts across the piazza with the old Telegraph Office, which in former times played a crucial role in Iceland’s communication with the outside world. Today the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute is the torch-bearer – an international centre of language, and at the same time a pioneer of culture.

By lowering the ground level at the south of building to form a piazza, the building takes account of the immediate surroundings, while also creating a clear and natural connection with the Háskólatorg centre, and in the future with further buildings on the campus.

The building also looks inward; all the major aspects of the manifold activities to be housed there are focussed on an open space, Miðjan, which effectively accesses all levels and all departments – brings us closer to each other, brings us together, to quote Vigdís herself. Thus in the end it has proved possible to integrate all the demanding roles required of the languages centre.

Exterior connections and surroundings

The building stands in a prominent location on the University campus, and makes an impression from Suðurgata, in its striking position on the cor-
Like any good neighbour, the building shows consideration for its surroundings, by reducing its impact: much of the activity is concentrated on the ground floor facing the new piazza to the south. The piazza is strongly connected eastwards via a tunnel under Suðurgata to the Háskólatorg centre.

Good access to the piazza is provided by steps and a ramp which meanders around it. Here and there are places to sit and relax – as the site is sheltered and sunny.

On the piazza is a solitary tree – a representative of the Friendship Forest at Þingvellir. Set into the piazza pavement there is a work of art representing branches splitting into ever-smaller tendrils – a symbol of the history of language.

**Interior connections and plan**

In designing the building, emphasis was placed upon interior links between areas – both on each level and between levels. Such links are achieved *inter alia* by utilising the large central space for visual and intangible connections. Stairs and bridges provide connections, just as the gaps between cultures are bridged by language. The building commands splendid views.

**Ground floor**

The ground floor provides the necessary connection to the Háskólatorg centre via a tunnel under Suðurgata. A lecture theatre and the largest classrooms connect with the *Miðjan* central space, as does the café which can be opened out to the piazza in fine weather.

**Level 1**

On entering the building via the main (west) entrance, the lecture theatre is seen, lit form above by the central open space. Ahead is the *Vigdisstofa* exhibition space, which connects to the open space and also has a balcony facing the piazza, which can be used for open-air events. The balcony also evokes iconic images of Vigdis and her daughter Ástríður, greeting the crowds from the balcony of their home the day after she was elected in 1980. The information and education centre, located at the entrance, is suitable for multimedia installations. The lecture theatre has been designed on principles of state-of-the-art acoustics; and special provision has been made for facilities for interpreters. Along the north and west sides are mid-sized classrooms.

**Level 2**

On level 2 the “home areas” of languages, the language centre and the data library are placed around the open space. Smaller classrooms are also located on this level; these can serve as meeting rooms, offices, research spaces and student reading rooms.

**Level 3**

The top floor is mainly devoted to offices of the Vigdis Finnbogadóttir Institute, together with staff facilities with access to a south-facing balcony, and a conference room.
Character

The design is grounded in principles of sustainability and an environmentally-friendly methodology, in keeping with the University of Iceland’s environment policy – and special attention has been paid to accessibility for all, with all-round design. The entire design process has been based upon the building meeting standards for BREEAM certification.

In the design of the building, strict cost controls were applied, in order to ensure that the total construction costs would be moderate, and to ensure efficient operation.

Exterior walls of raw concrete, together with pillars and concrete floors and stairs, are striking features. The exterior of the building is clad in staves of larch, which will grey naturally over time; much of the larch was sourced from Icelandic commercial woods. Acoustic design has been given priority in all the spaces. The ground floor and Level 1 have terrazzo floors.

With this building, the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages has an appropriate setting and forum in which to nurture interest in language and culture.
Furniture

Good working facilities are provided for everyone who works in the building. The principle was to select the work of Icelandic furniture designers, in combination with foreign designs. Chairs in teaching spaces and visitor chairs in offices are all designed by Guðmundur Lúðvík Grétarsson and Hee Welling, and the restaurant chairs by Sveinn Kjarval. Epal and Onecollection generously supported the project by providing furniture by Danish designer Finn Juhl at exceptional prices; the light and elegant forms of his design harmonise especially well with the formal concept of the building.

Art

The building committee appointed a three-person advisory group regarding selection of artists and works of art, and future planning for art in the new building. The advisors were Auður Ólafsdóttir for the University of Iceland, Steinþór Kári Kárason for the Public Buildings Art Fund and Kristján Garðarsson for the architects.

The advisory group concluded that three artists should be selected to respond to the building, each in his/her own way, guided by the concepts of language and translation. Two women and one man were selected – two Icelanders and one foreigner – and artists of three different generations.

The largest work, by Lawrence Weiner, is on a wall by the stair at the north of the building; Margrét Blöndal’s piece is in the connecting tunnel under Suðurgata; and Arna Óttarsdóttir’s work is in the lecture theatre.

Lawrence Weiner, born in 1942 in the Bronx, New York, is a world-famous artist – a pioneer of conceptual art in the 1970s, known for text art which is at the heart of his ideology. The concept of “translation” is crucial – i.e. the transfer of meaning between languages, and between text and imagery. Weiner’s works are site-specific.

Margrét H. Blöndal, born 1970, trained as an artist at the Iceland Academy of the Arts and in the USA. She is a leading contemporary artist who has made a name for herself with philosophical pieces grounded in a grandiose lyrical mundanity and a feminine perspective.

Arna Óttarsdóttir, born 1986, has rapidly gained a reputation as one of the most original artists of the younger generation. She has worked in various media: in the autumn of 2016 she showed wall-hangings which made an impression.
Dialogue – an exhibition on the life and works of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir

SAMTAL – DIALOGUE is the inaugural exhibition in the new home of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute, Veröld – hús Vigdísar. It explores in a range of media the life, work and causes of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir.

The exhibition recounts Vigdís’ student years abroad and her career as a teacher of French, a tour guide, and manager of the Reykjavík Theatre Company, then explores her many-faceted role as President of Iceland 1980–96, and all the good works she has done since leaving office – for instance as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, and with the Institute of Foreign Languages which bears her name.
The exhibition also provides insight into interests and causes that are dear to Vigdís’ heart; visitors will see some of her favourite books, along with quotations and poetry; and observe the Friendship Forest at Þingvellir grow and flourish. Visitors are encouraged to participate in dialogue with Vigdís: to take seat in the blue theatre chairs and contemplate concepts such as: honesty, human rights, culture, knowledge, equality, language, progress, broad-mindedness and education.

The books in the exhibition have been kindly loaned by Vigdís Finnbogadóttir for the duration of this exhibition. The exhibition has been created in consultation with Auður Hauksdóttir, Kolbrún Halldórsdóttir and Ástreiður Magnúsdóttir.


The exhibition is sponsored by: the Government of Iceland, the City of Reykjavík, the municipalities of Hafnarfjörður, Garðabær and Seltjarnarnes, Promote Iceland, Íslandsbanki, Isavia, Eimskip, Landsbankinn, Toyota Iceland, Hotel Holt and the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages.
Vígðís Finnbogadóttir website

The *vigdis.is* website was launched on 19 June (Icelandic Women’s Rights Day) 2009 by Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir. The project had been initiated by Minister of Foreign Affairs Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, who assigned the Vígðís Finnbogadóttir Institute to undertake design of the website, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contributed funding. On the occasion of the centenary in 2015 of Icelandic women gaining the right to vote, a decision was made to remake the website with additional content, in more languages. The new website was ceremonially opened in January 2016 by Minister of Education and Culture Illugi Gunnarsson.

On International Women’s Day, 8 March 2016, Creditinfo presented to the Institute a collection of media material about Vígðís: press reports and articles extending over many years. At that time Íslandsbanki, Veritas Capital and Pfaff made known that they would contribute generous grants in order to digitise that material and make it available on the *vigdis.is* website. The grants were also to go towards searching out and acquiring visual material for the website. On International Women’s Day, 8 March 2017, Íslandsbanki announced a further contribution to the project. Much has now been added to the content of the website, which may be seen in the *Vígðísarstofa* exhibition space, together with extensive information about Vígðís’ life and work. Graphic designer Valgerður Jónasdóttir has been in charge of this extensive task.
Festschrift for the Vigdís International Centre

In 2010, when Vigdís celebrated her 80th birthday, 27 Icelandic writers presented her with writings expressing their thoughts about language, in the hope that her dream of an international language centre would become a reality. Thanks to extraordinary solidarity and concerted efforts by many, that dream has now indeed come true.

To mark the occasion of the opening of Veröld, the new home of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages, along with the formal opening of the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding, the festschrift, Tungumál ljúka upp heimum. Orð handa Vigdísi (Languages Open up Worlds. Words for Vigdís) is republished, all costs being met by the Oddi printing company. All profits from sales of the book will go to fund the work of the Vigdís Centre.

Publication

One of the purposes of the Vigdís International Centre will be to highlight the importance of translations and research on translation. In keeping with this, in its first year the Centre will publish an academic work on the works and translations of Guðbergur Bergsson. Under the title *Heiman og heim* (Home and Away), the volume will contain essays on Guðbergur’s fiction and translations, by Icelandic and foreign writers and scholars – including some leading translators of Icelandic literature into European languages. The book will be edited by Birna Bjarnadóttir, an expert on Guðbergur’s work, who will also write an introduction. The book will be published in collaboration with the Icelandic Literary Society. The publication is sponsored in part by the municipality of Grindavík (Guðbergur Bergsson’s home town) and the local fisheries company Þorbjörn.

Iceland and the New World

On the occasion of the opening of the Vigdís International Centre, a fund has been established at the University of Iceland in the name of Icelandic-Canadian poet Stephan G. Stephansson (1853–1927). The objective of the fund is to promote scholarly research in Iceland and North America in the field of migrant literature. It is hoped that it will be possible to commence activities at the Centre in memory of Icelandic writers in the New World. Stephan G. Stephansson’s grandson Stephan Vilberg Benediktsson and his wife Adriana have contributed a founding endowment in his memory. Further contributions have been received from Heather Alda Ireland and her husband William of British Columbia, and Moorea and Glen Grey of Alberta.
Generous gifts

In the autumn of 2016, the sons of Icelandic writer and translator Thor Vilhjálmsson presented to the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute their father’s extensive collection of foreign literature. The library comprises many treasures of world literature, in particular European contemporary literature. This generous gift of books from one of Iceland’s most respected writers, and a prolific literary translator into Icelandic, will be a valuable contribution for students and scholars in foreign languages and translation studies. An exhibition is planned about the book donation, and they are to be made accessible later in 2017.

In 2015, Elísabet, Kristín, Eiríkur and Vilhjálmur, the children of Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, former curator of the Icelandic National Archives, donated to the VFI a number of rare books from their father’s collection, including Björn Halldórsson’s *Lexicon islandico-latino-danicum* edited by R. K. Rask., and Rask’s landmark work *Vejledning til det islandske eller gamle nordiske sprog*, published in Copenhagen in 1811.

In that same year Guðný Ýr Jónsdóttir, widow of poet Sigfús Daðason, gave to the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute valuable books from her husband’s collection: Marcel Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*, published by the Pléiade collection of the Gallimard publishing house, and anthology of 16th-century French verse from the same publisher, *Poètes du XVIème siècle*. 
The widower of Sigrún Tryggvadóttir Rockmaker, a translator in the USA, presented to the VFI in 2014 a large collection of books from her library, including belles lettres and scholarly works, beautifully bound.

In 2013 Professor Jón G. Friðjónsson and his wife Herdís Svavarsdóttir gave the VFI a beautiful facsimile edition of the King Christian III Bible. Originally published in Copenhagen in 1550, it was the first complete translation of the Bible available in the Danish language. The couple also presented to the Institute a copy of the Bible of Bishop Steinn Jónsson, the third complete Bible in Icelandic, printed at Hólar, north Iceland, 1728–1734.

In 2014 the descendants of Guðmundur Gíslason (1921–2002), the chief bookbinder at the Ísafold printing press, presented the VFI with an Icelandic-Danish dictionary compiled by Sigfús Blöndal, bound by Guðmundur himself. Also in that year, film maker Ásdís Thoroddson gave the Institute an Icelandic-Russian dictionary published in Iceland in 1962, owned and used by her father Sigurður S. Thoroddson. A different kind of gift was received from film director Ragnar Halldórsson, who gave to the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute in 2015 the rights for his documentary film Ljós heimsins (Light of the World, 2001) on the life of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir. Ragnar was producer, director and writer of the film, part of which may be seen in the Dialogue exhibition in Vigdísarstofa.

To mark its 25th anniversary in 2015, the Iceland-Japan Society donated a piece of Japanese glass artwork to the VFI.

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Iceland in 2016, Japanese parliamentarian Shinako Tsuchiya, chair of the Iceland-Japan Society in parliament, visited Iceland, where she presented to Vigdís Finnbogadóttir beautiful hand-crafted Japanese dolls for the Institute. Vigdís and Shinako Tsuchiya’s father were good friends: he served as governor of Saitama and was speaker of the upper house of the Japanese parliament.
Acknowledgements

The Board of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages extends its sincere thanks to all its wellwishers, in Iceland and elsewhere, for their invaluable support in recent years. Without their efforts the dream of the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding would not have become a reality, and the Veröld building would not stand here today, ready for use.

The board also wishes to thank Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of Iceland, and former Rector Kristín Ingólfsdóttir, for their endless support and encouragement. On this special day we also remember with respect and gratitude the late Rector Páll Skúlason.

Thanks to Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, dean of the Faculty of Humanities, and his predecessor Ástráður Eysteinsson, for their collaboration and support.

Finally, the board would like to thank the building committee and its staff and not least its chair, Eiríkur Hilmarsson, for their vital contribution – together with the architects, and all the others involved in the design and construction of Veröld – hús Vigdísar.

Last but not least, we thank Vigdís Finnbogadóttir herself for her assistance, friendship and invaluable contribution.

Spring 2017

Auður Hauksdóttir

Auður Hauksdóttir
Director of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir
Institute of Foreign Languages
Languages Open up Worlds – Words for Vigdís
April 20 2017