
SKÓGRÆKTFRÉLAG ÍSLANDS

2020
NETWORK
ASSESSMENT
REPORT

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Picture: Smalaholt - Skógræktarfélag Garðabæjar



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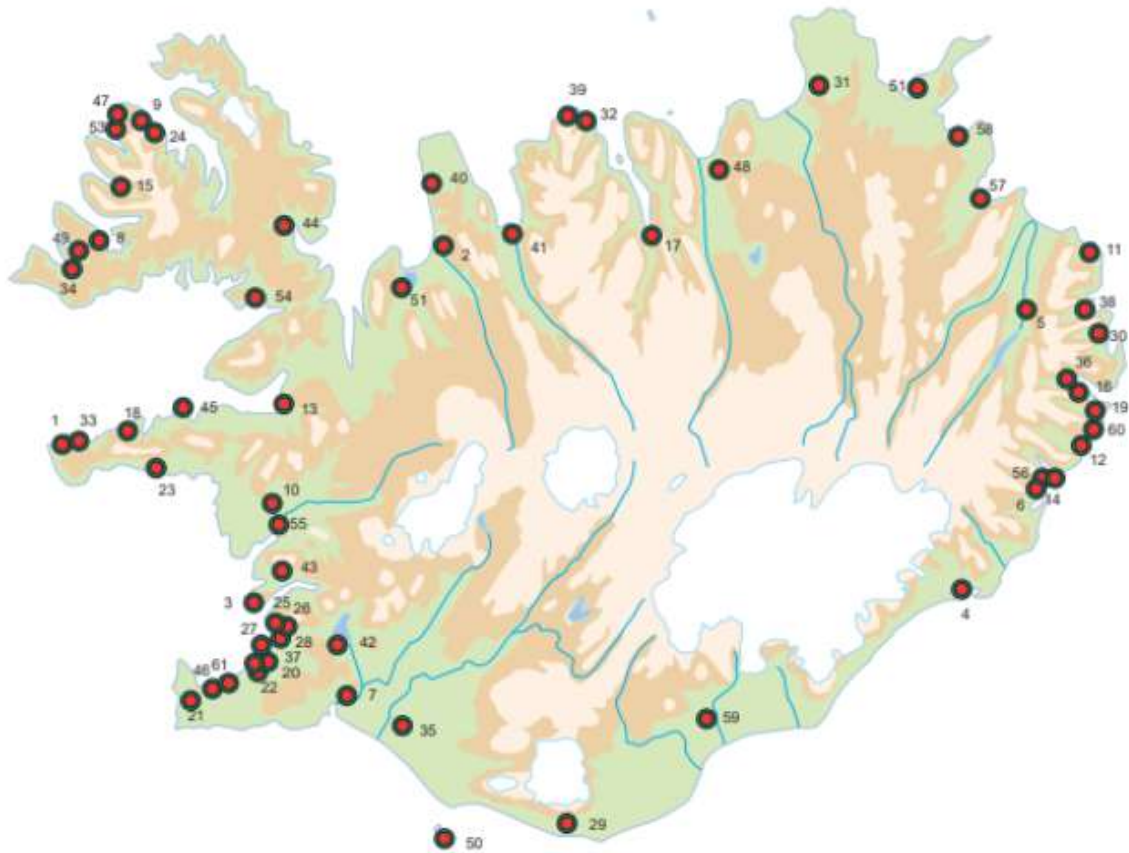
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MAP OF FORESTRY ASSOCIATIONS



© Map by Ragnhildur Freysteinsdóttir, Skógræktarfélag Íslands.

1) Skógræktar- og landv.fél. undir Jökli	21) Skógræktarfélag Ísafjarðar	42) Skógræktarfélag Skagfirðinga
2) Skógræktarfélag A-Húnavetninga	22) Skógræktarfélag Grindavíkur	43) Skógræktarfélag Skáta við Úlfjótstvatn
3) Skógræktarfélag Akraness	23) Skógræktarfélag Hafnarfjarðar	44) Skógræktarfélag Skilmannahrepps
4) Skógræktarfélag A-Skaftfellinga	24) Skógræktarfélag Heyðsýninga	45) Skógræktarfélag Strandasýslu
5) Skógræktarfélag Austurlands	25) Skógræktarfélag Kjálarness	46) Skógræktarfélag Stykkishólms
6) Skógræktarfélag Álftafjarðar	26) Skógræktarfélag Kjósahrepps	47) Skógræktarfélag Suðurnesja
7) Skógræktarfélag Árnesinga	27) Skógræktarfélag Kópavogs	48) Skógræktarfélag Súgandafjarðar
8) Skógræktarfélag Bildudals	28) Skógræktarfélag Mosfellsbæjar	49) Skógræktarfélag Tálknafjarðar
9) Skógræktarfélag Bolungarvíkur	29) Skógræktarfélag Mýrdælinga	50) Skógræktarfélag Vestmannaeyja
10) Skógræktarfélag Borgarfjarðar	30) Skógræktarfélag Neskaupstaðar	51) Skógræktarfélag V-Húnavetninga
11) Skógræktarfélag Borgarfjarðar Eystri	31) Skógræktarfélag N-Þingeyinga	52) Skógræktarfélag Þórshafnar
12) Skógræktarfélag Breiðdæla	32) Skógræktarfélag Ólafsfjarðar	53) Skógræktarfélag Öndurfjarðar
13) Skógræktarfélag Dalasýslu	33) Skógræktarfélag Ólasvíkur	54) Skógræktarfélagið Björk
14) Skógræktarfélag Djúpavogs	34) Skógræktarfélag Patreksfjarðar	55) Skógræktarfélagið Dafnar
15) Skógræktarfélag Dýrafjarðar	35) Skógræktarfélag Rangæinga	56) Skógræktarfélagið Kvistur
16) Skógræktarfélag Eskifjarðar	36) Skógræktarfélag Reyðarfjarðar	57) Skógræktarfélagið Landbót
17) Skógræktarfélag Eyfirðinga	37) Skógræktarfélag Reykjavíkur	58) Skógræktarfélagið Lurkur
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19) Skógræktarfélag Fáskrúðsfjarðar	39) Skógræktarfélag Siglufjarðar	60) Skógræktarfélagið Nýgræðingur
20) Skógræktarfélag Garðabæjar	40) Skógræktarfélag S-Þingeyinga	61) Skógræktarfélagið Skógfell
	41) Skógræktarfélag Skagastrandar	



INTRODUCTION

The Icelandic non-governmental organization Skógræktarfélag Íslands (SÍ - Icelandic Forestry Association) celebrated in 2020 its ninety years of existence. As an umbrella organization, it is in charge of promoting forestry and arboriculture, of participating in the reclamation of land and the reforestation of the country, of educating and raising awareness on the need of forests among the general Icelandic public through various publications and events, and finally of representing the sixty-one volunteer-based forestry associations and looking after their interests. Over ninety years - and even before - local communities and groups of people have taken upon themselves to improve their communities' life conditions by planting trees and creating forests where there were none. Also, since the origin of the forestry sector - quite young compared to other Nordic countries - and the creation of the organization in 1930, the number of associations has increased and so has the number of contracts dedicating acres to community-driven forestry.

Although the public opinion has definitely evolved towards a more positive attitude to forests, additional pressure is expected to be put on the network and its members from changes observed in the Icelandic governance context. Therefore, concurring to the forthcoming century of its existence, Skógræktarfélag Íslands has initiated a national survey of its network to assess its health and dynamism and reinforce its bottom-up governance.

The goal of the survey was to obtain a clear picture of the state of the network for the year 2020 and to hear the recommendations of the chairmen of each forestry association within the country regarding various issues. Its main goal was mainly to assess the associations' needs and anticipate what the future will hold by understanding the associations' situation on a case by case basis. It thus follows a trend that had been engaged by Skógræktarfélag Íslands a decade ago when staff members of the institution travelled around the island to meet with associations. It thus follows the wish to engage more with the network, according to its internal policy, updated during the Annual General Meeting of 2018 (1).

1. Skógræktarfélag Íslands (August-Sept. 2018), *Stefnumótun Skógræktarfélags Íslands*, www.skog.is/aealfundur-2018/



The main objectives of this survey for Skógræktarfélag Íslands were the following :

- Check the level of activity for each association and determine the factors contributing to their dynamism or their inactivity,
- Determine if there are any existing collaborations, partnerships, and cooperation processes between the forestry associations and other groups or associations, and see the impacts they have on the associations' activities,
- Make an inventory of any existing tensions and/or conflicts that would add some difficulties for the forestry associations to practice their activity,
- Assess the level of enthusiasm towards the associations' activities locally and their role in local social life,
- Assess whether, and if so how, the municipalities are providing support to the associations,
- Determine the current needs of the associations,
- Understand the associations' perception of Skógræktarfélag Íslands and its role, and list their recommendations to improve its democratic decision-making processes.

This six-months long survey was led as an anthropological qualitative research. Ethnography - a methodology that can combine both formal and informal data collection - was favored for data collection.

First, an online survey was conducted so as to obtain as much data as possible regarding the associations' activities. In total, 56 out of 61 associations (91,8%) participated and answered the online survey. This insured equal and horizontal treatment for all the associations, no matter their size or level of activity, as it is particularly difficult to make a comparison between them due to radical differences in sizes, locations, activities, incomes, and local involvements.

Secondly, the chairmen were contacted and met in order to discuss in depth activities and potential issues. In total, 52 chairmen out of 61 (85.3 %) agreed to meet. In total, 61 interviews were conducted during the three months dedicated to data collection, involving also stakeholders who did not take part in the online survey such as:

- the managers of the biggest associations and their employees,
- people interested in reactivating some of the currently dormant associations,
- the managers of the tree nurseries,
- the chairmen of forestry associations directly working with SÍ whose members are not yet formally registered.

As it was decided that the survey would be anonymous, the names of the interviewees and their associations will not be mentioned.



1- LOCAL AND LEGAL CONTEXTS OF FORESTRY IN ICELAND

Contestations regarding the legitimacy of forestry in Iceland within the scope of environmental protection have always been fierce, and reforestation and afforestation projects have been debated. To understand the context surrounding the associations' activities today, questions were raised regarding the environmental institutional and governmental governance of forests.

a. Forestry policies in Iceland

The environmental sector is becoming more and more important in the landscape of Icelandic politics. Indeed, Iceland has joined several major international agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol in 2002 on greenhouse emissions reduction targets, or the COP 21 in Paris of 2015, that led to the legally binding Paris Agreements on climate change mitigation. At the same time, the Icelandic government has issued several Climate Action Plans over the years. Its climate strategy was updated in 2018 where it presented its ambition to increase reforestation throughout the country as a way to reach carbon neutrality by 2040, and meet the 2015 Paris Agreements targets in CO₂ emissions cuts (2).

It was then updated right before this survey, in June 2020, reinforcing the government's wish to increase efforts in the LULUCF (Land-Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry) sector and to strengthen the role of forestry for carbon sequestration and its potential in the years to come (3).

It is in that context that Kolviður - the Icelandic Carbon Fund - was created in 2007 by Skógræktarfélag Íslands and Landvernd - the Icelandic Environment Association. Today managed by Skógræktarfélag Íslands, its role is to offer carbon offset through tree planting to companies and institutions. Through the years it expanded: its activities increased and plantations occurred in the Suðurland, the Suðvesturland, and the Norðurland, thanks to the help of international volunteers and in partnerships with local forestry associations. Following this idea, some chairmen evoked their wish to develop their activities through carbon sequestration processes and partnerships with Kolviður. They also mentioned the role of carbon offsetting as a new kind of argument to promote their activities within their local communities.

2. Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources (September 2018), *Iceland's Climate Action Plan for 2018-2030*.

3. Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources (October 2020), *Iceland's 2020 Climate Action Plan*.



Implementing these ambitions, new forestry laws were adopted in May 2019 (4). Although Skógræktarfélag Íslands and the associations are not identified as stakeholders, it encourages forestry and reforestation notably as a way to bind carbon and promote a sustainable use of forests. Municipalities thus get more responsibility in working with local forestry stakeholders.

b. Enthusiasm regarding woodlands and forests

The forestry sector has thus been benefiting from an increasingly positive political and institutional context. However, it was mentioned many times that there was very little community support towards local forestry until a few decades ago. The chairmen were therefore asked if they considered their communities to be positive towards their activity and generally enthusiastic concerning the presence of forests. The answer was almost unanimously positive, and the presence of people in forest areas was perceived as an indicator of a successful and meaningful activity.

As the chairmen improvised visits to the plantation sites and forests during the interviews, individuals, children, families, and random groups of people were observed taking walks, making use of existing infrastructures, and foraging berries, mushrooms and other forest products.

The recreational forests were thus presented as very popular and it is safe to assume that their presence fitted with local customs of outdoor activities, which is a beginning for a very positive trend of local habituation to these new ecosystems.

Moreover, where this enthusiasm was not felt, single trees were nevertheless observed within private gardens and public spaces, thus indicating that mentalities regarding the impossibility to grow trees changed over the last decades. It was indeed with great pride that the chairmen explained how their associations were able to prove the skeptics wrong. Also, they considered that the public opinion is increasingly positive and that tensions with local environmentalists are almost non-existent.

"- Everybody plants trees in Iceland! I'm not sure it's the same in other countries. [People] buy trees for thousands of thousands of kronur just to plant in the nature! I think it's quite special.

- But Icelanders [...] don't know how to treat the forest. [...] It is interesting to see how young we are when it comes to relationships with the forest in this country.

- A lot more people like the forest than people think."

Meeting with 3 interviewees, August 6th, 2020

4. Alþing (May 15th 2019), "Lög 33/2019: Lög um skóga og skógrækt" www.althingi.is/



Figure. 1: How many employees does your association have ? (56 answers)

2- PRESENTATION OF THE NETWORK

a. Ambitions and management models

Most of the associations are volunteer-based as one can observe in the graph hereinabove (*Figure.1*), although five of them - mostly found in the biggest cities of Iceland - became professional through time and hired foresters to manage the associations' interests and areas on a daily basis. This shows that the network depends for the most part on the involvement of people.

Given this parameter, it becomes clear that the role Skógræktarfélag Íslands and its associations hold within the forestry sector is thus not completely turned towards biological ecosystemic considerations or financial timber production. It is also linked to a strong sense of community and relies on the dynamics of groups of people who decide to fill their free time by creating

woodlands and taking upon themselves to manage them. In the earlier half of the 20th century, communities reacted to an emerging national concern for degraded environmental life conditions, such as soil erosion or exposure to violent meteorological events. This led to some of them creating forestry associations. While their first ambition was undoubtedly the improvement of environmental conditions, their mode of action was however directed towards the improvement of social life through a collective dedication for an endangered neighboring nature.

This altruism is still predominant today : the ideal remains to give inhabitants a place that improves mental health by shortening the walking distance to nature, to bring shelter for communities from wind and precipitations, and improve community resilience and bonding by increasing community gathering opportunities.



Kjarnaskógur - Skógræktarfélag Eyfirðinga

To that end, volunteers seek to propose good-looking forests, and much of their efforts go towards thinning, pruning, maintaining paths (Figure.2), and even sometimes developing a tree species planification to bring ecological variety and diverse shades of seasonal colors. The majority of the associations brought the “good-looking” argument as a description of their goal. Answering to the population enjoyment of outdoor activities, the association thus included the development of recreational forests in their objectives (5), and built benches, picnic tables, barbecues, firepits, and decorated pavilions so as to attract people and insert forests in everyday socialization processes.

“We should think about the beauty. Not only planting; you also think about the beauty of the landscape and the trees: how it fits to nature. We should think about that. And we should also think about which trees we are planting, and where! That’s the work of the future.”

October 9th, 2020

To reach these ambitions, the member forestry associations must - by law - have a hierarchical structure with a chairman, a treasurer, board members, a vice-chairman and/or a vice-board. This very mechanical organization is in reality counterbalanced with a very organic approach, meaning that the associations adopt a very horizontal organisation.

5. Sherry Curl (October 2008), *Planning and Management of Recreation in Icelandic Forests. Developing infrastructures (input) strategies based on preference and benefit (output) analysis*, Landbúnaðarháskóli Íslands - Agricultural School of Iceland.

Members come with their own background and/or expertise and decisions are made collectively. It was observed during the survey that - apart from the professional ones - almost no associations have a mechanical structure in practice. The associations are thus independent and choose the kind of internal organization that best fits their activities.

As a general rule, they all try to have regular meetings in addition to their annual general meeting during summer time. Some associations choose to have very organized task planification processes: they schedule monthly or even weekly meetings to gather active members, see what there is to do, and plan working days ahead. Other associations choose to have a more chaotic approach, meaning that there is no formal task planning. Instead there are informal and spontaneous gatherings depending on the availability of the members. It was interesting to note that the associations fluctuate between these two approaches over time.

46.4% of the associations who answered the online survey declared having a Facebook page or a website to communicate their activities to their members and their local communities. They also used online means to advertise for working days in order to get new members (e.g. community-based Facebook groups). Some of those who were not present online were however advertising in their local newspapers. When unsuccessful in mobilizing people, some associations often ended up having a more chaotic organization.

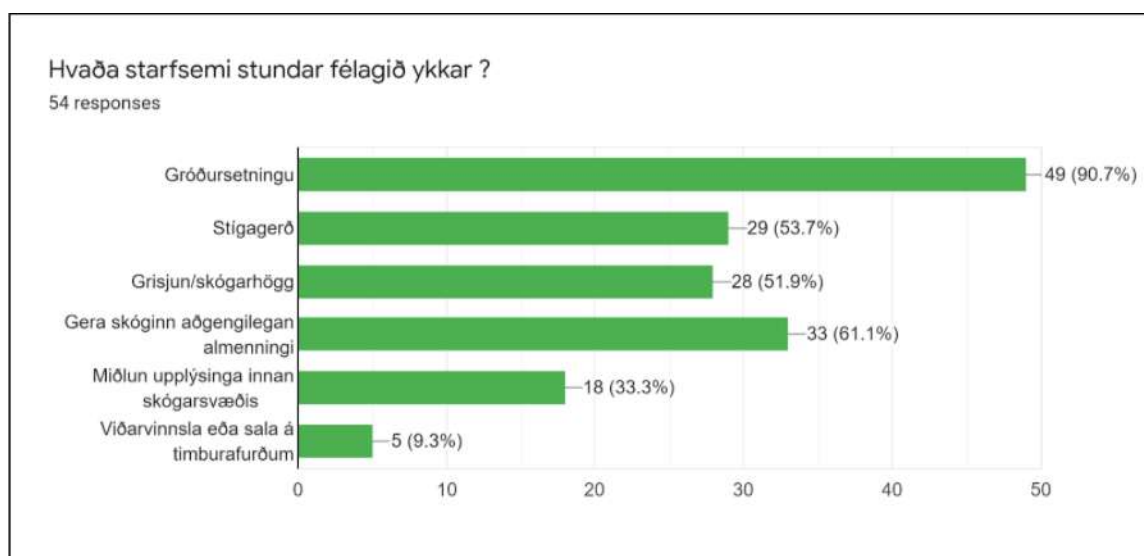


Figure. 2: What is your association doing ? 1. Planting ; 2. Path-making ; 3. Thinning ; 4. Opening the forest to the public ; 5. Putting information signs; 6. Processing and selling wood products. (54 answers). Seven associations are currently dormant and could not answer this question.

However, communicating regularly in order to maintain an active online presence proved efficient in feeding a feeling of dynamism.

b. Activities of the associations

The associations' activities fluctuate between forestry and social events. Forestry-wise, the activities of the associations are divided and distributed as shown hereinabove in *Figure.2*.

The success of planting (6) - through the Land Reclamation project (*Landgræðsluskógar*) notably (7) - can be explained by its inherent social dimension. Indeed, it was mentioned many times that planting became a hobby and a social occasion for people to meet outdoors. But it can also be explained by it being a relatively easy activity for neophytes. The managers of the two existing tree nurseries however raised questions regarding their nurseries abilities to follow through the increasing

demand in plants and advised to strengthen even more relations between the forestry sector and the plant production sector.

Putting information for the public within forests mainly concerned the associations involved in the Open Forest (*Opinn Skógur*) project (8). It was reported that activities related to the management of already existing woodlands needed means such as equipment, competent manpower and sufficient financial resources, which not every association had access to. Finally, timber production only concerned associations with professional means. In addition, a small number of associations chose to produce tree seedlings by owning or working with tree nurseries.

6. The most common trees belong to the following families: *betulaceae*, *populus*, *salicaceae*, *sorbus*, *pinaceae*, and *picea*.

7. See more on: www.skog.is/landgraesluskogar/

8. See more on www.skog.is/opinn-skogur/



Hjallaskógur - Skógræktarfélag Neskaupstaðar

“It’s not just going to be trees, it’s going to be some kind of small park. There are going to be hiking paths around it, and everywhere around the mountain. So we’re going to try to build up a nice forest, so people can go there, and hike, and enjoy the day.”

October 22nd, 2020

Socially-wise, many associations developed strategies to insert forests in socialization processes to create local forest cultures, thus legitimating their presence and obtaining more public support. Their challenge today is to transform woodland areas into social spaces people can feel free to use. This was done by notably organizing specific events such as annual concerts, mass, hikes, runs, nocturnal events, artistic exhibitions, treasure hunts, weddings, educational walks, and *in situ* Christmas tree sales. Other events such as Life in the Grove (*Líf í Lundi*) during summertime were quite popular across the network. These events usually needed to be funded and/or required the elaboration of relevant partnerships with other volunteer-based associations - the most common - but also businesses or institutions.

Additional stakeholders were participating in the planting and the management of specific woodland areas, or were helping by providing the associations the means necessary. In total, 49% of the associations who answered the online survey declared that they had ongoing partnerships. These situate the associations within the cartography of active local groups thus creating new connections and projects.

Associations who did not have any were nevertheless working with their local municipality, or Skógræktarfélag Íslands.

3- LOCAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE ASSOCIATIONS

a. Involvement throughout the network

The number of members for the whole network is 7540 as of 2020. As reported by the office of Skógræktarfélag Íslands, this number tends to fluctuate, thus establishing a mean number of *circa* 7000 members over time. Since 2018, the network has welcomed broadly 500 additional members. One can see the distribution of members in the network in the graph hereinbelow in *Figure 3*. As the graph shows, more than half of the associations (64%) had less than 100 members. As the five professional associations are some of the biggest ones, this indicates that more than half of the network depends on volunteering and local involvement. The associations who were unsure about the number of members - due to a lack of activity - are found in this half.

It was noted that the degree of involvement of the members varies greatly between the associations. Some of them manage to mobilize 15 to 25 members, which was perceived as positive. Other associations managed to maintain their activities despite being able to mobilize no more than 5 or 6 members - usually the board members.

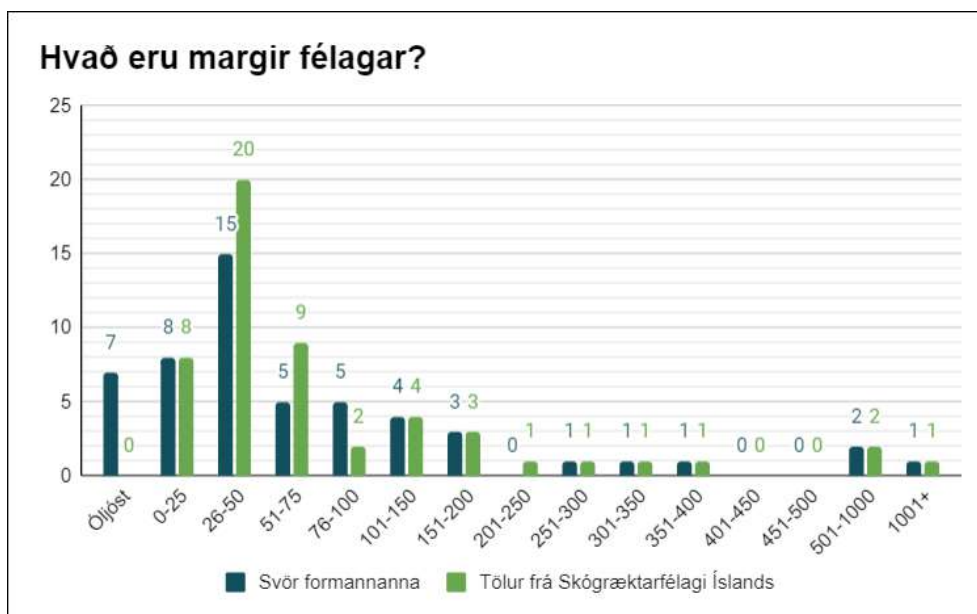


Figure 3: How many members does your association have? (53 answers) (“Óljóst”: unclear / “Svör formannanna”: chairmen’s answers / “Tölur frá Skógræktarfélagi Íslands”: numbers from the Icelandic Forestry Association).

Occasionally, but not rarely, some associations were single-handed.

34.5% of the interviewees declared that the inhabitants of their area were taking part in their activities. It was indeed reported that the associations’ ability to attract newcomers had been decreasing for the last decades (10). This lack of active members was explained by the increasing difficulties to manage forests as they grow and expand, by a lack of interest within local communities, as well as by the aging of the members.

10. This is not specific to the forestry associations. It was pointed out many times that this lack of involvement could be found in all types of volunteer- and associative-based movement in Iceland.

11. This number doesn’t take into account the association of forestry students as its members are not registered due to its inherent continuous turn-over.

When asked about it, 57% of the interviewees declared that the mean age of their associations was situated between 50 and 60 years old and 27% situated it over 60 years old. Numbers from Skógræktarfélag Íslands for 2020 show however that in reality 82% of the associations have a mean age over 60 years old - the exact number being 62. By contrast, the youngest associations (1.6%) have a mean age between 40 and 50 years old (11).

“In the beginning it was a lot of volunteer work, and I guess members were much more active, you know, putting up fences and all the planting. And I think it’s easier; it’s a simple task. [...] But you don’t call your members and explain in a day how you’re going to clear the forest; it’s not possible!”

August 10th, 2020

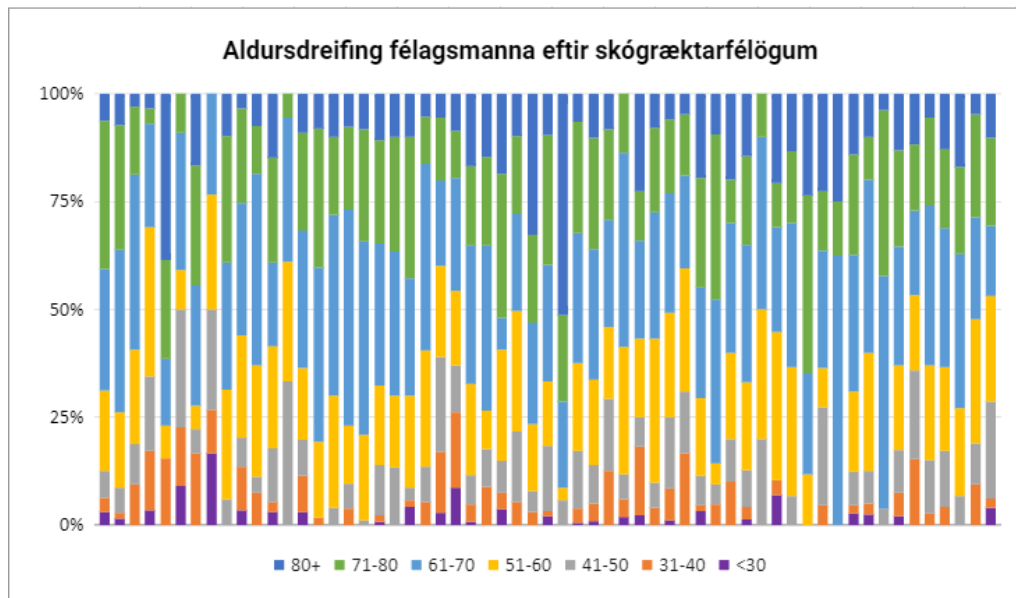


Figure 4: Age distribution for each association (the 59 whose members are registered). Numbers from Skógræktarfélag Íslands, december 2020. The names of the associations have been hidden to ensure anonymity and avoid comparison processes.

When it comes to age distribution throughout the network, the graph here above (Figure.4) gives a better overview. The percentages of members depending on their age is as follows : 1.9% are below 30 years old, 7.2% between 31 and 40 years old, 13.3% between 41 and 50 years old, 20.9% between 51 and 60 years old, 27.2% between 61 and 70 years old, 19.5% between 71 and 80 years old, and finally 10.1% over 80 years old.

b. Early education to forestry

The percentage of youth involvement is thus quite low compared to the presence of pensioners. This was interpreted as a consequence of the lack of interest in the general public. Indeed, young adults seem to concentrate their energy on their studies or their search for a job.

“Maybe that interest comes later in life. When they are young, they are more interested in making fun, making out and finding a job. You’re very occupied; and should be! When you grow up and live in a community, you start to look at what’s happening and how you can better things. Maybe you need to be a bit more mature to understand that. [...] There are two things one can leave behind when one leaves the Earth: either plant a tree or write a book. Then you know you have something for the next generation.”

September 2nd, 2020

“- So, it’s a family thing ? - Yeah, I think so. I don’t think I would’ve been here if my grand-mother had not been managing the forest. But I really like it and I guess I will be more active now after working in the wood. [...] I had never thought about wanting to work in the forest and fix it [before]. Now I know, so I guess I’ll be doing a lot here.”

Interview with a 23 years-old, August 10th 2020



Höfðaskógur - Skógræktarfélag Hafnarfjarðar

This accentuates the general rural exodus happening in Iceland from local communities to bigger cities. Many associations from small communities lost members through that process.

Interviewees shared nevertheless their hopes for the new generations who appear more sensibilized to the current climate and environmental crisis. Occasionally, young adults who were met within the span of this survey showed great interest in their association's activities and the network. In addition, two associations within the network are nowadays dedicated to young people interested in forestry - professionally or not - although their members are not registered yet. Some chairmen were young active individuals who enthusiastically shared their ideas and projects for their associations. Seemingly, more were expected to be elected chairman over the next few years.

The role of an early education to forestry - or at least a familiarisation to the presence of trees from childhood - proved efficient. Indeed, many chairmen, active members, and random forest hikers reported they had been used to being active in woodland areas when they were younger, sometimes becoming chairman after their parents. This explains the phenomenon of having "forest dynasties" (12) within the network, one of the most visible proof of the transmission of forestry as a life-style and a passion.

This process concurred with a motion initiated by former president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir between the 1980s and the 1990s. After the publication of a book on trees and forestry destined to children, she created the *Yrkja* Fund - managed by Skógræktarfélag Íslands - through which schools could buy young trees and teach children how to plant them (13). The schools involved in this educational project thus account nowadays for more than half of the Icelandic schools. In majority, these schools are working with the local forestry associations and plant on land they manage. Very interestingly, 2020 marks the end of the three decades of existence of the *Yrkja* Fund. It is thus expected to see more young active individuals getting involved in social forestry as they were sensibilized during childhood through the project. As many informers declared during the survey : a growing number of Icelanders end up having planted trees in their lives.

"When I was a kid, it was strictly forbidden to go in the forest. Because in those days, the wood, they didn't think of it as a place to go. It was a place where they planted trees. [...] It was a completely different attitude. It was something to protect. [...] Anyway, we took picnics and went berry picking and I think all the kids did the same. We liked to go there, even though it was not well looked upon."

September 25th, 2020

12. Quoting an interviewee.

13. See more on www.vigdís.is

4- MANAGEMENT OF LAND DEDICATED TO FORESTRY

a. Differences in land-use practices

Over the 56 respondents of the online survey, 73.2% declared that there were no tensions or conflicts regarding their activities. Although occasional disagreements occurred, they were most of the time not perceived as a hindrance. Of the 16 chairmen who reported having issues with other stakeholders regarding the practice of local forestry, 81.3% pointed out tensions with landowners with different land-use practices, most of them being farmers from the livestock farming sector. The tensions mostly concerned sheep grazing, fencing, and cost sharing, as well as land acquisition. However, this trend is expected to decline even more in the next decade as more and more farmers join the Regional Afforestation Projects managed by Skógræktin (Icelandic Forest Service), through which private landowners can reforest their land and be refunded the costs by the government. Thanks to this, the “forest farmers” became a major workforce in reforesting the country. Some of them got even involved in local forestry associations, to the point where they sometimes became chairman.

Quite rarely but in a significant way, some chairmen expressed concerns regarding their activity being hindered by either local environmentalists or people engaged in the nature conservation movement.

Indeed, political and ideological debates around the existence of forests intensified: researchers, institutions, and policy-makers argue concerning the possible invasive dimension of certain tree species, the protection of wetlands, and the efficiency of reforestation as a rapid carbon sequestration process. There were therefore tensions whenever these debates happened to reach the local scale. Nevertheless, these ideological debates between environmental conservationists and foresters remained for the most part in the institutional and scientific spheres, as forests are increasingly well-perceived by the general public.

“Quarrels are somehow always personal. We are trying to find a solution and I think I have found one. And therefore I don’t want to speak too much about it. I hope it will be a positive thing, and it’s better forgotten. [...] Planting trees is part of healing the Earth. You are doing something good, therefore there are always obstacles around this. [...] With all the negative voices, they are disturbing this healing process. So I want to be in the positive position.”

August 18th, 2020

b. Relationships with the municipalities

Most of the tensions the associations experience come from their relations with their municipalities. As they hold definitive decision-making power over the attribution of land and the type of support they can get, they become their primary interlocutor.



Blöndalsbúð í Eyjólfsstaðaskóg
Skógræktarfélag Austurlands

The sources of tensions come from two different dimensions. Firstly, when an association wishes to extend its area of activity and get more acres for plantation, it often has to go to its municipality in order to see if its request aligns with local land planning (14). This process is tedious if the municipality is not keen on enabling the associations to conduct their forestry activities smoothly. Secondly, issues related to having municipality workers helping the associations with heavy workload were raised, especially when the work needed was long overdue and municipalities were reluctant to lend employees for a short period of time. A certain level of frustration was observed during the survey due to slow administrative procedures or local tensions. Some associations considered it difficult to get the municipalities fully on board, and wished they would be more positive and reactive.

Yet, answers to the online survey (Figure.5 and 6) show that associations are generally speaking in good standing with their municipalities. Many of them get manpower from their towns through annual summer job programs for teenagers, and can apply for funding. As for the new forestry laws, the chairmen were mainly optimistic regarding their potential consequences at the local scale, although some of them were still waiting to see things unfold. Interviewees who had very good relationships with their towns emphasized the fact that the associations should seek closer relationships with their municipalities.

Overall, they insisted on the importance of networking, especially in medium to big communities.



Figure 5: Are your municipalities positive regarding your activities ? (yes: 94.2%, no: 5.8%)

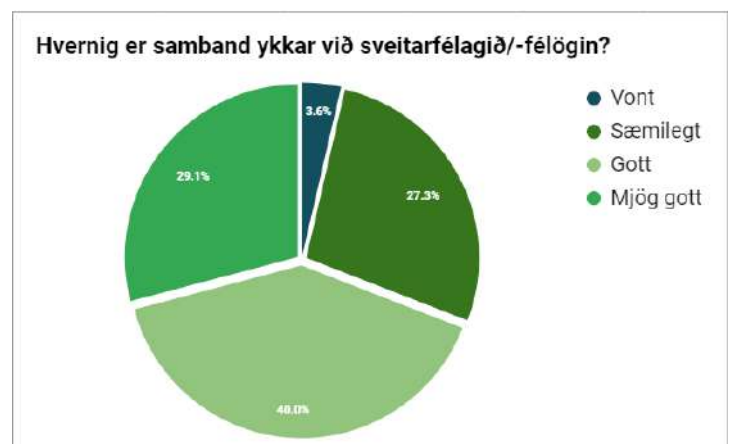


Figure 6: How are your relationships with your municipality-ies ? (bad: 3.6%, acceptable: 27.3%, good: 40%, very good: 29.1%).

14. On the local scale, land planification goes through the *aðalskipulag*, the main land planification system. It decides how land should be allocated, to whom and for which activity. It is further detailed in the *deiliskipulag*, which takes into account very local parameters. See more on: www.skipulag.is/skipulagsmal/um-skipulagskerfid/



5) HEALTH OF THE NETWORK

Skógræktarfélag Íslands overall benefited from a positive reputation throughout the network. The interviewees appreciated its professionalism, and were grateful for the help, advice or the information the organization can provide; generally speaking its role as an umbrella organization was fully recognized. Efforts to include more women in the network were appreciated as well (15). It can be assumed that the level of participation in the survey is a sign of the healthy relationship between the organization and its member associations. However some associations shared that they had difficulties connecting to the network and observed there were major differences between the means of bigger associations and theirs. The sense of networking was unequally distributed across the country, as local chairmen were not always aware of the neighboring associations of their region - thus not being able to discuss common issues and shared interests. This - added to harsh environmental conditions - made it sometimes difficult for the associations to maintain a continuous activity.

15. Vennesland, B., Björnsdóttir, B., Dolling, A., Hujala, T., Nybakken, L., Strange, N., & Hildebrand, S. M. (2020). *Gender balance in the Nordic forest sector*. Nordic Forest Research (SNS). A recent study from the Nordic Forest Research (SNS) shows that the amount of women in the forestry sector in Scandinavia it is still unbalanced. From the numbers they got from Skógræktarfélag Íslands, they conclude that the network counts 43% of women as of 2018.

To address this issue - and those aforementioned - the chairmen shared recommendations (from the most mentioned to the least).

Concerning the role of Skógræktarfélag Íslands, the chairmen proposed the following points:

- Have someone visiting the small associations for at least a day (answering the need for dialogue on a more regular basis),
- Help in forest planification,
- Hold meetings to reactivate dormant associations, if there is known local interest,
- Have someone visiting when there is a newly elected chairman,
- Help advertise Life in the Grove in countryside parts (without towns),
- Strengthen the relationships with Skógræktin,
- Include more the association in SÍ's projects (with Kolviður - the Icelandic Carbon Fund - notably),
- Initiate a partnership with Garðyrkjufélagið - the Gardening Association - and lead meetings between local gardening and forestry associations,
- Have an online option for the annual general meetings.

Concerning the health of the network, the chairmen thought it would be good to:

- Initiate more collaboration between associations, whether they are big or small,
- Have more opportunities for discussion,



- Help associations from the same area to connect by holding regional meetings and having a spokesperson representing each area,
- Address the issue of youth involvement,
- Have a platform or someone condensing local sociological and forestry knowledge and sharing it to the rest of the network,
- Discuss a method to activate the members.

Concerning the creation of an Icelandic forest culture, the chairmen imagined the following solutions:

- Help the associations with grant applications, or develop grants opportunities focusing on the associations' own socio-cultural projects,
- Attract more foreigners,
- Increase collaborations with artists,
- Focus on public relations and become more visible,
- Define a specific wood market strategy focused on design, decoration, architecture.
- Create a center for forest culture,
- Engage more with tourism.

"- One thing is to meet them and discuss things with a cup of coffee. And also, you should be out in the forest and look at it, and that takes time also. One or two, at least one day for each association! In some places you know, where there is a forest. There are quite a lot of forests in the area, so it's quite a job. [...] There are always lots of things discuss and show... I don't know. Do they have the capacity to do that? Not all associations in a year, but some part of the country and visit. How many are they now?

- Sixty-one.

- Sixty-one? Jesus. But I know they are busy with work."

[...]

"We are a small club, these foresters in Iceland. [laughter] Everybody knows each other."

October 20th, 2020



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it should be summarized that the social and political contexts surrounding the activities of the associations is particularly positive. Indeed, the Icelandic governance is actively promoting forestry as a way to mitigate the effects of climate change, local communities are increasingly enthusiastic towards forests, and tensions throughout the network remain occasional. This is combined with a positive perception of Skógræktarfélag Íslands as an umbrella organization and efficient strategies being implemented regarding the education and involvement of youth. It is thus safe to assume there is a strong basis for the establishment of a strategy to address the issues on the lack of involvement and the aging of the members, as well as the networking issues previously evoked. These should however be addressed when possible as the state of things seemed to be a *status quo* that has to adapt to the changing political, social and environmental contexts.

It is therefore recommended to Skógræktarfélag Íslands to pursue its efforts in undertaking efforts to have a more social perspective and encourage socio-cultural initiatives, transgenerational dialogue, to increase its visibility on the international scale, and finally to strengthen the dialogue with other relevant actors in the forestry sector (the Icelandic Forestry Service, the Agricultural and Forestry School, the tree nurseries and the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources) in order to nurture its uniqueness.

It is also recommended to the associations that they seek and maintain contact with Skógræktarfélag Íslands and regularly report on their activities so the organization can accompany them better.

Finally, the most important recommendation for Skógræktarfélag Íslands and its member associations is to nurture a sense of optimism and imagine positive outcomes from the challenges ahead. Although hindrances may appear, they are always a way to question one's activity and imagine different solutions, and enable people's ability to improve and adapt.