Nordic Journal of Criminology | Scandinavian University Press

RESEARCH PUBLICATION

Volume 26, No. 1, pp. 1–18
ISSN online: 2578-9821
DOI: https://doi.org/10.18261/njc.26.1.3
Received: 9 May 2024
Accepted: 9 October 2024

Prison break—or a break from prison? Reflections on escapes from Icelandic prisons

Francis Pakes
Professor, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Portsmouth
francis.pakes@port.ac.uk

Helgi Gunnlaugsson
Professor of Sociology, University of Iceland
helgigun@hi.is

Abstract
Escapes from prison can be said to pose an existential challenge to the prison, a violation of its very *raison d'être*. The question is whether this is true for escapes from Nordic prisons too. Part of the folklore of Nordic prisons seems to indicate the existence of a different culture towards escapes. Escapes are frequently normalised as a natural reaction against the unnatural situation of confinement, while escape talk is frequently dominated by concern for the welfare of the escapee rather than focused on the risk they may pose while on the run. If this is the case, does this mean that escapes have no consequences for the prison system and those who run it? This article focuses on escapes from Icelandic prisons in order to separate the reality from the folklore by examining whether escapes represent a crisis or simply business as usual. Taking a 'telling cases' approach, we identify that escapes from open conditions tend to be used to advocate for open prisons and resist any change to their operation. Escapes from closed conditions, however, are often seen as a security failure and are frequently leveraged for change. This can be changes in staffing, security technology hardware or operational practices. In this way we can say that escapes have helped make the closed prisons more secure. At the same time, escapes have been used as an opportunity to highlight the virtues of open prisons. Here, escapes have not been a lever for change, even in the face of highly dramatic escapes. More broadly, we conclude that Nordic penal exceptionalism as well as normalisation in Nordic prisons needs to include consideration of frequency of, nature of, and attitudes to escapes, as it seems that the welfare-oriented approach that is in view is extended even to those who escape.

Keywords
prison escapes, closed prisons, iceland, Nordic penal exceptionalism, open prisons

Introduction
Chantraine and Max Martin (2018) call escapes the prison's most fundamental challenge. After all, the one thing that prisons are assumed to achieve is incapacitation. When this is violated through an escape, it challenges the very essence of the prison. Because of this, prison escapes are a particularly salient type of occurrence. They are a 'diagnostic event' (Falk Moore, 1987) in which the social arrangements, normative repertories and subject positions of prison actors play out (Chantraine & Max Martin, 2018, p.14). In simple terms, prison escapes and their aftermath help us to 'see' something essential about prison systems. This is an important reason why we should study prison escapes: when the prison

is punctured, it is set to reveal something essential about the larger whole of the prison system.

Despite this, escapes remain largely unexamined from a sociological perspective. While we can say that there is an embryonic sociology of escapes, there is a body of literature that considers the when, who and how of escapes. It seeks to profile either prisoners or prisons in terms of their 'escape-proneness'. For example, Culp (2005) looked at escapes in the United States in the late 1990s, using official sources, and then compared this data to 88 escapes covered in the news media. Culp detailed that previous research in the U.S. already provided an escapee profile of sorts: those who escape are more likely to be young, white, property offenders, and with previous attempts. His research replicates this with the exception of an effect of race. Culp also reported a long-term decline in frequency of escapes from the 1980s into the 1990s (Culp, 2005). Research from New Zealand (Centre for Research, Evaluation, and Social Assessment, 1996) found that prisoners frequently reported internal pressures as reasons for escape (such as bullying or boredom) whereas staff frequently assumed that escapes were driven by external pressures, such as trouble at home. Peterson et al. (2016) considered a dataset of 611 inmates who escaped in the U.S. in 2009. While they confirm previous demographic outcomes of such studies, they also found that most escapes are largely unplanned. If planned, the plan is usually simple, and most escapes do not involve violence. Peterson et al. (2016) also looked at capture, to find most escapees soon apprehended. Thus, we can say that there is a body of knowledge on who tends to escape, when, and how. But what is lacking is an analysis of what happens in the aftermath of an escape. This includes in the affected prison, the prison system and society at large. We intend to include this in our focus.

Chantraine and Max Martin articulate that prison escapes do not just challenge the *raison d'être* of the prison, or as they put it: an escape "shames the existential logic of the prison itself". (Chantraine & Max Martin, 2018, p. 10). There is more to it than that. Escapes can serve to bolster the prison. After all, prison escapes can be labelled a crisis and through that frame of reference the escape can be utilised to actually strengthen the prison, its importance and its security. In other words, and paradoxically perhaps, through escapes the system is justified, sometimes changed, and (re-)organised. In this way, escapes serve as productive local practices. They challenge the system too, physically, practically or symbolically. Simply put, we echo Chantraine and Max Martin that prison escapes have the metaphorical capability to both 'make' and 'break' the prison. Our focus is therefore not precisely on who escapes from where, and how. Instead, our keener focus is on both what escapes *mean* and what escapes *do*, in other words what systemic and cultural effects they may have.

We will consider these effects in the Northern European country of Iceland. For starters, it is not immediately obvious that in Iceland, or the Nordic countries more widely, escapes do indeed challenge the existential logic of the prison. One of the factors frequently associated with Nordic prison culture is a relatively relaxed attitude to prison escapes. This was foregrounded most notably by Pratt and Eriksson (2011) who titled their well-known article "Mr. Larsson is walking out again". In it, they relay an anecdote of a prisoner escaping, although "ambling off the premises" is in fact a more apt description. Pratt and Eriksson got this story from the late Norwegian criminologist Thomas Mathiesen who was talking to a governor of an open prison in Norway. The story goes:

> On observing, from his office window, Larsson strolling to freedom out of the prison grounds, the governor remarked to Mathiesen that 'Mr Larsson is walking out again'

> then resumed their conversation. There was no alarm or security call. No doubt he was confident that Larsson would return and resume his sentence when he was ready to do so – as, it seems, he had done on previous occasions. (Pratt & Eriksson, 2011, p.7).

Pratt and Eriksson explained that they shared this story to highlight this calm attitude to prison escapes in the Nordic countries. This forms part of a wider concept of Nordic penal exceptionalism (Pratt, 2008a, b). Nordic penal exceptionalism is described as follows: the rate of imprisonment in the Nordic countries is relatively low, prisons are relatively small but well equipped materially, staff-prisoner relationships tend to be more characterised by trust and informality while there tends to be more freedom to move around the prison establishment than in other countries. Because of that, prisons are frequently regarded as less traumatising and more rehabilitative (Pratt, 2008a; Pratt and Eriksson, 2011, 2014; Crewe et al., 2023).

The precise constituents of Nordic penal exceptionalism have been listed in several publications, including Pratt and Eriksson (2011) and Ugelvik (2016). Pakes (2020) reviewed these to find that while a non-prioritisation of security is often included, a relaxed attitude to escapes was actually never mentioned as a characteristic that typifies the exceptional approach to punishment in the Nordic countries. This is perhaps surprising. What underlies Nordic penal exceptionalism is the notion of normalisation or normality, that life in prison should mimic 'normal' life outside as much as possible. Van de Rijt et al. (2023) reviewed the literature on the notion of 'normalisation' as a pillar of Nordic penal exceptionalism. They noted that 'normalisation' in prison is a multifaceted concept. While the overall notion refers to life in prison resembling, where possible, life on the outside, they distinguish the following four distinct yet interrelated areas. First, normalisation refers to prison design, with prisons being relatively small and allowing for a degree of freedom of movement. The second is an absence of obstructions to access services and facilities including the internet. The third is to do with atmosphere, such as relaxed staff-prisoner relations and daily routines. The fourth refers to identity, such as allowing prisoners to hang on to pre-prison identities and skills, in other words, to avoid prisonisation.

We can say that in Iceland's open prisons all these criteria apply: prisoners have freedom of movement within these small establishments; they have access to learning, carry mobile phones, and have internet access, which allows them to stay in touch with work, family and friends (Pakes, 2023). In closed prisons this is to a lesser extent the case, although there are still relatively good staff-prisoner relations, access to work and learning, and generous visiting arrangements including conjugal visits, whereas from new prison *Hólmsheiði*, national phone calls can be made for free from prison wings.

Van de Rijt et al. (2023) distinguished 'normalisation by design' from 'normalisation by default'. Given its historical roots, the latter applies to Iceland where prisoners are less alienated by society. In addition, due to Iceland's historic isolation and small size, in the public mind the prison population never became an amorphous mob of dangerous strangers (Gunnlaugsson & Galliher, 2000). Instead, the notion that prisoners remain people who will once again be community members after their sentence was an important motivation to have prison sentences be, if not effective, at least not unnecessarily harmful to prisoners. However, their review is silent on escapes. It does indeed seem as if escapes, highly salient in some respects when discussing Nordic prisons, have largely escaped scholarly scrutiny.

This is not to say that there is not a longstanding attitude to escapes that is calm and humane. Pratt and Eriksson (2013) presented data that show that prisoners walking off was, literally, a daily occurrence in Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1961 they documented 1,214 escapees (Swedish Annual Report of the Prison Service, 1962 p. 9), out of a total prison population of 4,909. This is more than three per day on average and suggests that on average more than one in five prisoners in a year escape. The official explanation emphasised the unnatural nature of confinement: escaping or absconding was argued to be a natural reaction to being imprisoned (Pratt & Eriksson, 2013). This is an interesting comment as it seeks to normalise wishing to escape rather than emphasising the deviant nature of escapes as frequently done elsewhere.

To a degree, that culture persists today. During a visit to a low-security prison in Norway one of the authors was told a story of a recent escape. The essence of the story was that officers impress on prisoners that, should they escape, the staff would appreciate a phone call so that the prison staff would know that the escapee has not come to harm. Such stories foreground a welfare concern for the prisoner: the focus is upon the harm that may befall them, rather than the harm that they may cause whilst on the run, or the very breach of prison security. The extent of truth of the story is, in a way, immaterial; its significance lies instead in the messages it conveys about culture, values and priorities within the prison system. In these stories, escapees are never demonised or viewed through a lens of crisis or risk. Instead, these stories foreground the normality of the wish to escape, the understandable temptation of an escape, the acknowledgement that escapes are possible, and concern for the welfare of the escapee when on the run.

This paper considers the position of Iceland in this (see Gunnlaugsson and Galliher (2000)) for a thorough treatment of crime and justice in Iceland, and most recently Gunnlaugsson, 2021. It has been argued before that Iceland provides for an interesting case of Nordic penal exceptionalism. Situated on the edge of Europe, Iceland's history has been characterised by a great deal of isolation. The nearest big city centres, such as Copenhagen, Glasgow or Oslo, are hundreds of miles away. Its economy was traditionally based on farming and fishing. While World War II gave Iceland a degree of presence on the world stage due to the stationing of allied forces who, among other things, built an international airport, it was the entry into the European Economic Zone in 1994 that brought prosperity and also, gradually, an influx of immigrants, most evident in the new millennium. In 2000 less than 2% of residents were born outside Iceland. It is 18% today. We see a similar development in relation to foreign national prisoners. There were literally no more than three foreign national prisoners in 2000 but their numbers have gradually increased. In 2020 there were 31, 18.9% of the total population. There are no specific provisions for foreign national prisoners, and they seem to enter open prisons with the same frequency as other prisoners (Pakes, 2023).

Iceland's governments over the years have been coalition governments with progressive parties usually carrying a strong voice. Changes in government do not tend to majorly affect prison policy or practice, and certainly not in any abrupt or dramatic fashion. Prison policy is therefore mainly a matter of evolution in which the opening or closing of prisons tend to be the major developments. None of these developments, however, have tested its core assumptions favouring rehabilitation and normalisation.

Pakes (2020) and Pakes and Gunnlaugsson (2018) have sought to place Iceland's prison system within this framework of Nordic penal exceptionalism. They found that Iceland's prisons correspond to key cultural and social characteristics of Nordic penal exceptionalism. However, in relation to meaningful activity, work outside the prison and the training

of officers, Iceland fails to match its Nordic neighbours. But when it comes to staff-prisoner interactions, the food, and most other material conditions, Iceland's prisons fit well within the framework of Nordic penal exceptionalism, although, as is the case in the other Nordic countries, some prisons are clearer examples of it than others. As elsewhere, it is in low-security establishments in particular that this culture seems to blossom (Pakes, 2020, 2023).

Given its small size, and in particular the small number of people imprisoned, escapes in Iceland are rare occurrences. This also means that every escape tells its own story, certainly in Iceland where the line between local news and national news is distinctly blurred also due to a relative lack of local news outlets (Jóhannsdóttir and Ólafsson, 2018). We will present some of these accounts here. We have in particular sought to include in our analysis what effects, if any, these escapes have had. This is to critically question the folklore that says that in the Nordic countries, escapes are 'normal' and not seen through a 'crisis' lens. From that, it can be assumed that in Iceland, prison escapes would not serve as catalysts for change. We will see, however, that they regularly can be exactly that, which is rather contrary to received wisdom.

This article therefore takes a critical perspective to this seemingly well-established Nordic culture of a *laissez-faire* attitude to prison escapes as a key part of Nordic penal exceptionalism: where escapes in places like the U.K. and the U.S. are likely to lead to wild chases, use of police helicopters and lockdowns of community areas, in the Nordic countries, so it is portrayed, escapes are part of the texture of everyday prison life and as such do not involve much anxiety or any such crisis-like responses. This article seeks to assess whether the folklore matches the reality.

This project: Method and setting

As part of this research we visited all four prisons in Iceland. We were already familiar with these establishments due to previous projects. We were also familiar with the former prisons that interviewees mentioned that have since closed. Permission for the study was granted by the Iceland Prison Bureau (*Fangelsismálastofnun ríkisins*) and a relevant university ethics committee. We interviewed prison governors, former governors and staff at the central prison bureau in Reykjavík. We also spoke with prison officers and prisoners during our visits. In addition, we sought official statistics at a national and international level. This allowed us to consider our key questions:

1. What are historical trends in escapes?
2. What frame of reference is applied when discussing escapes?
3. What are longer term repercussions of escapes?
4. How can we characterise the situation in Iceland with reference to escapes?

The small size of Iceland's prison system has previously attracted comment (Pakes, 2023); see also Baldursson (2000) and Hamilton (2013) on the importance of a country's size in relation to its criminal justice system). In addition, although less well known, its changeability is also noteworthy, meaning that any description of Iceland's prisons is inevitably a snapshot. In 2024 there were four prisons. The oldest is *Litla Hraun*, situated on the South Coast. It is a tired looking high-security facility with a see-through fence, and holds 83 prisoners. There are workshops involving wood and metal work. Many prisoners work in recycling of various electrical appliances. Built in the 1920s, its appearance is rickety,

with parts of it nearing a state of disrepair. In contrast, 55 kilometres nearer to the capital Reykjavík is a brand new multifunctional facility. It is set in heathland, which is reflected in its name *Hólmsheiði*. It is a very modern prison, reminiscent of Halden prison in Norway and Greenland's new facility in Nuuk. It started operating in 2016. It is hailed as a prison that solves many local conundrums due to its agility. For example, it has a women's wing that can be extended or reduced in size depending on the number of women being held. It has a remand section that similarly could be extended or reduced with cell space made available to be used for other groups of prisoners. The facility also includes police cells, isolation cells, dedicated areas for medical examination, and areas for visits, including conjugal visits. All cells are individual cells. The agility with which its capacity can be deployed is the subject of much praise from those working in the system. However, at the same time, whilst clean and well-equipped, the prison is characterised by many prisoners as sterile and 'cold'. Prisoners dislike the fact that staff quarters are inaccessible and behind thick concrete walls. They report that they detest having to speak with staff through an intercom. The prison certainly does not facilitate community building in the way in which Iceland's prisons usually operate.

Near these two prisons is an open prison with a capacity of approximately 20 people, *Sogn*. It is near the South coast, and housed in a former sanatorium, with spacious cells/rooms over three floors including a basement. Much further away from populated areas is *Kvíabryggja*, a converted farm that has served a penal function since the 1950s. It houses nearly 20 residents/prisoners and continues to look and feel much like a farm rather than a prison. It has hardly any security features at all.

In Iceland, a prisoner's journey through the system is mostly straightforward: most prisoners arrive at *Hólmsheiði* first, many spend time in the other high-security facility *Litla Hraun*, and many get transferred, sooner or later, to one of the open prisons which together account for about 25% of total capacity. A halfway house, *Vernd* in Reykjavík is also available after a prisoner has served time in the open prison units before being electronically tagged. Based on our experience of the prison system in Iceland, it is quite conceivable that a 12 year prison sentence could be served in the following way after release on parole after two-thirds of the term completed: closed prison for 18 months, open unit for four years, 18 months at a halfway house, and finally 12 months electronically tagged.

Escapes from prison in Iceland: Context and frequency

Due to the size of the general population (approximately 380,000) and the prison population in Iceland (less than 200 altogether) it is no surprise that the number of escapes is in fact very small. Still, every escape has a story and some of these live on in the public consciousness. Methodologically we can call these 'telling cases' (Mitchell, 1984). As the term 'telling case' is perhaps controversial (Andrews, 2017) it is important to explain what we mean by it. By adopting the telling case methodology, we do not select cases that are either archetypical or representative (e.g. as Pakes (2024) lists). Instead, cases are selected because they are, first, rich in information, and second, because they reveal, we argue, something essential about a larger whole, which goes beyond escapes. The larger whole about which we seek to reveal something essential is the Icelandic prison system as a specific exponent of Nordic prison systems and cultures. In this way, our analysis intends to transcend the immediate casuistic detail. Instead, they serve as vehicles to reveal deeper truths about prison systems, confinement, deviance and control. We believe we

operate in the same way as Block (2022) did in the area of linguistics: telling cases are neither typical nor atypical, he argued, but reveal something essential about the broader subject matter. Indeed, as Andrew argues in his highly critical account: they are an important tool in an analytical approach "focused on making visible previously hidden or poorly understood theory … [and] on identifying the necessary conditions for that theory's relevance" (Andrews, 2017, p. 459). To us, these escapes represent case studies with a message about the larger whole and are selected as they are, to quote Block (2022), "uniquely enlightening".

The cases chosen in this article are exactly that, either because they caused much public debate or because several respondents thought to mention and discuss them with us. In this article we describe these escapes, their aftermath, the public and official response and their longer-term repercussions. We will see that while the Nordic approach of a calm, considered and welfare-oriented approach to escapes is widespread, there have also been incidents of public disquiet and outrage. In addition, it is also clear that escapes have been framed as crises that produce leverage for change. In that respect, the public response and official response to escapes in Iceland do share important characteristics with those in many other countries.

In accordance with other Nordic nations, Iceland has experienced a long-term decline in the number of escapes. A report by the Prison Service from 2001 provides statistics on escapes since 1986 (Prison and Probation Administration, annual report, 2001, p. 16). Between 1986 and 1990 there were 31 escapes recorded; this increased to 49 escapes between 1991 and 1996. Bearing in mind that the prison population in this era hardly exceeded 100 in total, this is a remarkable number. The actual number of prisoners setting foot outside their prison in a clandestine fashion is likely to be much higher still. We were told stories dating back to the middle of the 20th century of prisoners running off from high security *Litla Hraun* as a form of wantonness. They were, mostly correctly it seemed, assumed to come back of their own accord. This occurred with such frequency, we were told, that exasperated prison officers threatened those who did this with a lock out. This is another example of cultural messaging of a world upside down in which escapees are threatened with being locked out of the prison rather than locked in. To be fair, in the unforgiving climatic conditions, the prospect of being locked out may indeed act as a deterrent. Another anecdote shared with us was that, in the high security prison *Litla Hraun*, prisoners playing football on the prison's enclosed football pitch was, and still is, a common activity. Should the ball be kicked over the prison perimeter fence, one prisoner would simply scale it, fetch the ball and climb back in. Thus, in urban legend, the absolute porosity of Iceland's largest high security prison was a fact of life, as was prisoners taking advantage of it.

At the same time, there is a different, darker, history of prison escapes in Iceland. These mainly involve events at a now defunct prison, a small facility in downtown Reykjavík called Hegningarhúsið. This facility was established in 1872 and closed in 2016. One of these escapes, at night in June 1991, involved no fewer than six prisoners, a third of the total population. These prisoners had managed to dislodge a roof window frame and then put chairs on top of tables to enable an escape via the roof. While they were all caught within two to three days, the escape led to significant changes in terms of security arrangements, cameras and operational practices (Morgunblaðið, 1991).

Another attempt involved a prisoner hiding behind an open door ready to assault an approaching officer as he came through the door. The prisoner was armed with a table leg with which he assaulted the officer and broke his arm. Despite this, the injured officer

managed to lock the cell door and prevented the escape. Finally, in June 1991 there was a prisoner who sought to create chaos in order to enable an escape attempt. He did this by trying to start a fire using fuel, a towel and a lightbulb. While the fire didn't catch on, smoke built up quickly. The fire brigade was called and one prisoner made his exit in the situation that ensued. While the fire was quickly put out, there is no doubt that this event could have had disastrous consequences. While these events are vividly remembered by those who were there, they seem long forgotten in the public consciousness. What is striking, however, is how much these incidents are at odds with the cosy tales of prisoners wandering off and such events airily dismissed as boyish misdemeanours. These were violent and dangerous events.

Since the turn of the millennium, escapes have been few and far between. In fact, there has been a downward trend since 2010. Data from Space I (collected and published by the Aebi et al. (2023)) give some context. Between 2001 and 2005 there were 20 escapes reported. Between 2006 and 2010 this rose to 32, and then dropped to 19 in the subsequent five years between 2011 and 2016. In the last five years the number of escapes has reduced to four. This trend is discernible in other Nordic countries too. We mentioned the high number of escapes in Sweden in the 1990s. Between 2001 and 2005 this number was still considerable, at 566 per year. Between 2006 and 2010 the average per year was still 455. However, between 2011 and 2016 it went down to 162, and further fell to 123 escapes per year after that. Pratt and Eriksson (2013) mention that dramatic escapes in Sweden in 2004 involving firearms leading to the death of two police officers were instrumental in enhancing prison security in this country. In Norway there was a particular steep drop in escapes from 2016 onwards. In the early 2000s, between 2001 and 2005 Space I recorded 185 escapes per year on average. For the next five years it was 136, and between 2011 and 2016 the number rose slightly to 147, after which it steeply dropped to no more than 21 per year on average. There really has been something we can call '*The great Nordic escape drop*' which corresponds to a drop in escapes in many other countries, including the U.K. (Bennett, 2018) and the U.S. (Culp, 2005; Peterson et al., 2016).

It is important to note that a prison escape by itself does not constitute a criminal offence in Iceland. Conspiracy to escape, however, does (article 110 in the Penal Code), and assisting from the outside does too (article 111). These are punishable up to three years and two years in prison respectively. However, there has not been a successful prosecution for over half a century.

We will now discuss several prison escapes in Iceland as 'telling cases'. We distinguish between escapes from high security conditions and escapes from open conditions. We will briefly discuss these escapes, their aftermath, and the official and popular response to them. This will enable us to see patterns and assess the meaning and impact of prison escapes collectively whilst making important distinctions such as between open and closed conditions.

Escapes from closed prison *Litla Hraun*

The escape of former U.S. marine Donald Feeney is the most appropriate starting point. Although it took place more than thirty years ago, in August 1993, the event lives on in legend. Feeney was convicted of kidnapping, a botched attempt to take two underage girls from Iceland, where they lived with their mother, back to their father in the U.S., in relation to a custody dispute in a U.S. court. The highly trained former soldier smashed an outdoor lock and was able to scale the single fence of Iceland's then only high-security

prison *Litla Hraun* in the company of a local inmate. They then made their way to Reykjavík by taxi before boarding a chartered flight to the Westman Islands (*Vestmannaeyjar*) just off the Icelandic South Coast. There they had arranged to rent an aeroplane to take them out of the country to the Faroe Islands. While Feeney successfully made it to the Westman Islands he was caught before he could board this rented plane and taken on a police plane back to the Icelandic mainland (Dagblaðið Vísir, 1993). He completed the rest of his sentence in isolation, part of which he served in the then detention centre Síðumúli in Reykjavík.

Feeney's escape caused a furore in Iceland. In part this was due to the fact that Feeney had had help from the outside and the escape was organised and planned, at least up to a point. It was aggravated by the fact that Feeney got very close to actually leaving the country, possibly evading the Icelandic authorities for good. Much was made of the physical prowess of Feeney, a trained mercenary. He was frequently portrayed as a type of hardened prisoner that the system was not equipped to deal with. Some newspapers portrayed Feeney as a Rambo-style hero. Meanwhile the prison staff were portrayed as "hillbillies", as one former prison governor put it, who allegedly were no match for this professional combatant with experience in warzones and hostage situations.

The Feeney escape confronted the Icelandic prison service with some uncomfortable truths. "We realised that we had not one secure prison" said an official at the prison bureau. "We realised that we had to professionalise." It was explained to us that Iceland's prisons were traditionally filled with people perceived as drunks (due to the country's strict alcohol laws) and vagabonds who did not pose too much of a threat to the system. Feeney was different. Resourceful and trained as a soldier, the porosity of Iceland's main prison presented an obvious opportunity to him. At a time when foreign national prisoners were vanishingly rare, it was clear that Feeney constituted a challenge that the prison system had not been ready to meet.

Staff at the prison bureau agreed that the Feeney escape served as a catalyst for change. First, it led to physical change to transform the country's main high-security prison into a prison that is actually secure: a five-metre-high fence was erected so that the prison perimeter became double-fenced throughout. Locks and keys were updated. In addition, a watchtower was built that still exists today. It gives the prison an appearance reminiscent of U.S. prisons and different to other prisons in Iceland. It remains rarely used for its original purpose of surveillance. Thus, the Feeney escape was far from inconsequential, and led to physical and operational changes to Iceland's then largest prison. That change is still present today, more than three decades later.

In January 2024 news agency ran a news item marking 30 years since Feeney was released from prison, including interview footage with Feeney on his first day out of prison (Pétursson, 2024). It placed the Feeney case once more in the public eye.

The next escape from *Litla Hraun* was more than 14 years later. In October 2007 two inmates escaped from the same high-security *Litla Hraun* prison after attending an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting (Iceland Review, 2007). Both were young men not considered dangerous (Iceland Review, 2007). They were apprehended soon after and the escape did not seem to have had any lasting effect on the prison system or the public consciousness.

The next escape, another five years later, in December 2012, was much more high profile. (Iceland Review, 2012). It would be the very last escape from *Litla Hraun* prison to date. The escapee, 24-year-old Matthías Máni Erlingsson, was assumed to have scaled both fences at *Litla Hraun* prison. Earlier that year, Erlingsson had been convicted of

attempted murder of his stepmother. Due to the specific circumstances of his offence, there were major concerns for the victim and others in his immediate family (Iceland Review, 2012). After his escape Erlingsson spent a few days in an empty summerhouse, of which there are large numbers scattered all around Iceland, all the time watching the television news for updates on his situation (Morgunblaðið [MBL], 2012a; Dagblaðið Vísir, 2012). The police set up an operations team in neighbouring Eyrarbakki, while the coast guard provided a helicopter (; Morgunblaðið, 2012a; Morgunblaðið, 2012b). A few days later his stepmother left the country, fearing for her safety, while Erlingsson's father received police protection (Morgunblaðið, 2012c). Erlingsson turned himself in after a public appeal from his biological mother. He did so by knocking on the door of a remote farm some 70 kilometres away from the prison he escaped from. He went back to the same prison where he was kept in isolation for two weeks, after which he went back to the regular regime. It later transpired that he had in fact broken into three summer homes (Morgunblaðið, 2012b) and had managed to steal a car from one of them. He later pleaded guilty to breaking and entering and theft.

The timing of this escape was rather salient. Erlingsson's escape occurred on 18 December 2012. It dominated the national news in the build up to Christmas. The escapee's mother's public appeal was made on December 23 and Erlingsson came out of hiding on the 24th. All of this provided sufficient ingredients for some to frame the whole affair as a strange twist on a typical Christmas story. This framing in the news media once more showed how escape stories in Iceland are frequently flipped, not only by those in the system but on occasion in the media too. In this story, part of the country was in fact rooting for the prisoner to be 'coming home for Christmas', as the trope goes.

The Reykjavík Grapevine, an English language news website, told the end of the story as follows. When Erlingsson decided that the game was up, he knocked on the door of a nearby farmhouse. About the events on Christmas Eve, the farmer told the media: "We started to talk to the boy through the kitchen window and offered him soup and smoked meat. We handed it to him through the window, but he seemed easy to talk to so we took him inside" (Anderson, 2013).

The farmer continued: "When he came inside, we gave him some coffee and Christmas cake and talked to him. He said he didn't want to let his family suffer by hiding over Christmas. Then we just waited for the police and he ate." Once again, the welfare of the escapee seems to take pride of place in the story, in which Erlingsson, a high-profile violent offender, is assigned the role of prodigal son (referred to as a 'boy') (Anderson, 2013) with Iceland's culture of inclusivity and community played up and his violent background played down.

In this story, however, the plot twist is that 'home' is in fact a high security prison in which Erlingsson spent Christmas 2012 in isolation (Morgunblaðið, 2012c). A few years later the then-Prison governor at *Litla Hraun* said in an interview with one of the authors that she also had been worried about Erlingsson's well-being, on the run in the dark and cold Icelandic winter, once again showing a widespread concern for the welfare of the prison escapee.

In December 2012 the Head of the Prison Bureau Páll Winkel quickly made a public statement announcing a review of processes in response to the escape. However, the changes were rather mundane, consisting simply of fixing and enhancing the CCTV and motion sensors around the prison perimeter. Other changes were operational such as limiting the number of prisoners in relation to internal movements. While *Litla Hraun* over time became increasingly secure, internally the prison has remained relatively

non-compartmentalised, which has made separating groups of prisoners difficult. The Head of the Prison Service explained to us that he did put in a bid for funding to enhance security further, including extra staffing. However, this was rejected by the Government. Here we must remember that Iceland was at this point still recovering from the global financial crisis of 2008, which hit Iceland particularly hard.

Staff at the prison bureau vividly remember the strange twist in the media coverage, over a decade later: "It had become a Christmas type story here in Iceland. People were pleading with us: 'Don't put him in isolation, it's Christmas!', they said. It was really a big story. But he was convicted for attempted murder. He was believed to be really dangerous!"

Escapes from open prisons

In July 2015 two prisoners absconded from *Kvíabryggja* open prison in the remote West of Iceland. Both were young men around 20 years of age and were found missing at the end of the day. They were picked up a couple of days later in an apartment in Reykjavík, which is some three hours away by car. Prison Bureau Chief Páll Winkel quickly issued a statement emphasising that both men, in for drug offences, were not considered dangerous. Because of this their names were not released to the public. While this escape, like any other, was covered by the national press (Iceland Magazine, 2015), it was short-lived and seems to have had little impact on either the public mood or the prison itself.

These two prisoners who absconded from *Kvíabryggja* prison exemplify one classic type of escapee: prisoners who, as one former prison governor we spoke to put it, not so much seek a prison break, but rather a 'break from prison'. They, it seemed, simply left on a whim with the intention of making it to Reykjavík and getting drunk. There was no public unrest associated with this event. While both prisoners were returned to closed conditions, it is clear by all accounts that their adventure was always intended as purely temporary and universally agreed as poor decision making. This is much more reminiscent of the attitude evident in Sweden in the past that escape or absconding is understood as a natural (if ill-advised) reaction to the unnatural conditions of confinement. We were told that one of the two was later sent to an open prison once again, perhaps highlighting the forgiving nature of the prison system in Iceland, that a successful escape does not prohibit this from occurring.

The year 2018 saw Iceland's most spectacular escape – spectacular not only because of the way it occurred but also because of how far the prisoner actually managed to travel and in whose company that journey took place. In the media it is frequently referred to as the '*bitcoin heist*' escape (e.g. Gibbs, 2018; Segal, 2018; Sydney Morning Herald, 2018). The suspect, Sindri Þór Stefánsson, was accused of involvement in stealing 600 computers that were used for 'mining' bitcoin and other virtual currencies. On the night of 16 to 17 April 2018, Stefánsson climbed out of his room window at *Sogn* open prison. His departure was not noticed until the morning. Utilising a movie-style escape method, Stefánsson had prepared his bed to make it look as though someone was lying in it, by stuffing a range of soft items underneath the duvet before climbing out of the window. Stefánsson had apparently booked a flight to Sweden, and by the time the alarm was raised he was airborne. The most likely scenario is that Stefánsson had bought a ticket under a false name and was not asked to show a passport at departure, something that is possible due to deals between the Nordic countries and typically within Schengen countries. The story was spiced up ever further due to the fact that, by strange coincidence, Iceland's then-prime minister, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, was on the very same flight to Sweden (Gibbs, 2018). It is

not uncommon for the prime minister of Iceland to travel on official business on regular flights.

It has remained unclear whether Stefánsson received any outside help. According to the then-police chief Gunnar Schram it was very likely that he did. As Keflavík International Airport is some 50 kilometres from the prison, Stefánsson will at least have required transport (in an interview he said he had hitchhiked his way there). A few days later, Stefánsson was found in Amsterdam after having shared details of his whereabouts on social media. Utilising the Schengen area's open borders, he had travelled over land from Sweden to the Netherlands via Denmark and Germany. The Dutch police were alerted to a post on Instagram where Stefánsson was pictured in a luxury department store in the City Centre (NOS, 2018), which enabled his arrest by the Dutch police on April 22, 2018.

Stefánsson publicly defended his escape. He argued that his 'escape' was in fact not unlawful on a technical point. He was at the time in custody awaiting trial. While Iceland's open prisons are not necessarily the obvious place to serve that detention, it does on occasion occur, certainly when there are capacity issues elsewhere in the system. A judge in fact ruled on his detention the very day when his escape was discovered, so there is an argument to be made that the term of his detention may have lapsed just as Stefánsson prepared for this escape.

Be that as it may, this escape made world news, including the BBC (2018) and the *New York Times* (Segal, 2018). Some time later the coverage also included a highly sympathetic interview in *Vanity Fair* (Seal, 2019). This is no surprise, as the story unfolded like a movie script. It includes the biggest theft in Iceland's history, an escape that is a classic in the genre: making off through a window whilst dressing up the bed as if someone is lying underneath the duvet, the flight abroad, with, by freak coincidence, the Icelandic prime minister on board, up to Stefánsson's subsequent arrest due to the prisoner's oversharing his whereabouts on social media. For the world's news media, this escape story unfolded like a dream.

For the prison service, however, this whole episode was rather nightmarish. In discussing the matter at the prison bureau, Head of the Prison Service Páll Winkel argued:

> I decided to be honest with the media. They asked me, should this be possible, and I said yes! You can walk away if you want to but it is stupid to do it! We are not going to change the open prisons because of this. It is a concept we believe in. We were just honest and explained why it is a good thing to have people in closed conditions for as little time as possible, and then go to open conditions.

But prison bureau staff also conceded that escapes bring pressure:

> Every time it happens the media put a spotlight on us. They ask us, how could this happen, we are not tough enough on crime. We need this to happen as seldom as possible as it puts pressure on the way we do things.

In *Sogn* prison itself however, the reaction was quite calm. By chance, both researchers visited this establishment the very next day after the Stefánsson escape to find operations taking place as usual. When we asked staff on site about the expected negative publicity, it was calmly dismissed as "three days of shit" after which business would return to usual.

For the central prison bureau, however, there were pertinent questions to answer. And one relatively small operational change was made. The head of the prison bureau explained:

> I said to [the governor of Sogn]: "we have to do something. It is not right that we say goodnight to a prisoner and when we open the doors 10 hours later he's gone and we have no idea when he went. So two times during the night they go out of the house, walk around and see if any windows are open. 3 o'clock and 6 o'clock. We still do that.

Staff at the prison bureau also recognise another disadvantage of escaping from a prison in Iceland. Media are usually restrained in naming suspects. The prison bureau maintains this practice by only releasing the name of any escapee if they are deemed dangerous. This does, however, leave a lasting legacy in terms of the internet: your name will forever be online associated with this escape. "Google is a more effective deterrent than fences" one staff member at the prison bureau commented, and this has become something of a maxim in Iceland. While this easily could be seen as a throwaway comment, what it does point to, as do other comments, is the fact that the prison authorities are simply not driven by a mission to eliminate any possibility of escapes. They accept the theoretical possibility of escape from high-security prisons and the practical ease with which escape could be achieved from open prisons. It is the cost-benefit analysis that prisoners themselves are supposed to make that is regarded as the strongest deterrent against escapes. The Head of the Prison Bureau summarised the official view on escapes as follows: "You can escape if you want to. Both from closed and open prisons. But there is so much to lose."

Stefánsson is the only escapee in Icelandic history who managed to leave the country. However, prison bureau officials maintain that, in a way, Iceland has a perfect record on escapes: no one has got away and stayed away. All escapes have been either aborted or have been short lived.

Conclusion: The nature, meaning and consequences of prison escapes in Iceland

First, we must re-emphasise the historical perspective. The historical situation seems to be highly reminiscent of the situation in Sweden where escapes happened on a daily basis. They were mostly of the variety of absconding and prisoners were almost inevitably soon returned or, perhaps even more commonly, returned of their own accord. This normality of escapes, the frequency of escapes and their often trivial nature is also documented in Iceland and continues to be part of prison folklore.

Through analysing several 'telling cases' this article reinforces the notion that escapes and the reactions to them tell us something vital about prison systems and cultures. Starting with the culture introduced by Pratt and Eriksson (2011) who share the story of Mr Larsson ambling off the premises of an open prison in Norway, we discover that many escapes in Iceland are also seen through a welfarist lens and that this is true both for officials and, apparently, much of the population. Escapees are not vilified and the risk they pose is not embellished so as to raise a moral panic.

This fits the Nordic penal exceptionalism case well, in which prisoners remain part of society whilst in prison and their welfare emphasised, both whilst in prison and even during escapes. The fact that prison escapes, in particular from open prison, are met with calmness, accepting the human tendency to fight confinement, and concern for their welfare shows that the notion of normalisation, in which prisoners are humanised and

individualised is maintained even in a potential crisis point like an escape. While Pratt and Eriksson (2013) did not include this attitude to escapes as defining of Nordic penal exceptionalism, the way they utilise this escape story further verified that we can actually see a real potent expression of Nordic penal exceptionalism in the response to escape: even in escape, prisoners remain part of the herd.

At the same time, however, there have been escapes and escape attempts that do not fit any quaint picture of harmless prisoners leisurely strolling off the premises. In the late 20th century there have been escape attempts involving firesetting and violence, in particular in the now closed prison in downtown Reykjavík, Hegningarhúsið (Morgunblaðið, 1991). These incidents, while clear in the memory of those who were involved at the time, are at odds with the general picture of countless escapes to be light-heartedly dismissed as inconsequential.

From the early 1990s onwards, escapes from closed conditions did serve as a catalyst for change. Nowhere was this clearer than in the aftermath of the escape by Donald Feeney in 1993 which painfully demonstrated the inadequacy of Iceland's main high-security prison. It prompted a transformation of the physical estate and spurred the professionalisation of the prison service. While this professionalisation may have occurred regardless of the Feeney escape, this escape brought both the realisation of its urgency, as well as its political and financial facilitation. The 2012 escape from the same prison kept the country on its toes in the build up to Christmas, to allow for competing narratives to dominate the national media. One was of a violent criminal with a grudge against several individuals, one of whom hastily left the country. The other was of a cold and lonely wayward escapee in the build up to the festive season. Either way, the escape was utilised as leverage by the prison service to seek increased funding from the government. While monies for physical changes that involved electronic devices was granted, extra staffing on a structural basis was denied. We must remember that 2012 was not very long after the financial crisis in Iceland, with public finances stretched enormously so that room for manoeuvring was still limited. This may well explain the relatively modest change made after this particular incident.

Escapes from open prisons vary from the forgettably mundane to the level of international drama. The instance of the young men who left *Kvíabryggja* in 2015 'to get drunk' was a situation soon forgotten. However, the bitcoin heist escape in 2018 became world news. It contained so many powerful ingredients to put pressure on the prison governor, the prison service and the government. After all, here was an escape not noticed for at least several hours. It was a person involved with quite a notorious crime; the person was able to leave the country – something in which no escapee in the history of Iceland had ever succeeded – and most dramatically, the person was on the same plane as the country's prime minister. In most countries such a situation could be career ending for a whole range of officials involved with the prison system, airline security, policing and personal protection. It is nothing short of remarkable that in Iceland none of this occurred.

Head of the prison service Páll Winkel in fact robustly defended the country's open prisons in the aftermath of the bitcoin heist escape. The one small change made was to do with shift patterns and the requirement to do a headcount at midnight and a walk around the prison to check that all is in order. This is minor compared to the upheaval caused by this escape.

It is noteworthy that there have never been specific convictions for prison escapes in any of the cases described here. Even where there was use of violence or where several prisoners escaped in one event, articles 110 (conspiracy to escape) and 111 (outside

assistance of an escape) of the Penal Code have never successfully applied in court in living memory. This perhaps is further evidence that the response to escapes frequently has been to reinforce the closed prison, and the returned escapees never seemed to have suffered from particular demonisation or particularly harsh treatment. It is true that there were consequences for the prisoners, of course, such as a return to closed conditions, or a period of isolation. But still, the book was never thrown at them, it seems, which can be seen as another manifestation of Iceland's relaxed attitude towards escapes, even at their most dramatic and violent.

Using our telling cases approach we can identify the impact of escapes in Iceland as follows. Escapes prior to the early 1990s were dealt with without vision or strategy. They were accepted as facts of life despite the fact that some deployed high levels of violence and vandalism. The Feeney escape in 1993 led to a professionalisation of the prison service overall and in particular served to make the high-security estate more secure. The 2012 Erlingsson escape in smaller ways did that too, and it is noteworthy that despite Iceland's prison history being littered with prisoners walking, climbing and running out, there has not been an escape from closed conditions in over a decade. The high-security estate has, indeed, become secure, and escapes did play no small part bringing this about.

In relation to escapes from open prisons the response tends to be the opposite. Here the immediate reaction from prison governors and prison authorities has been to defend the philosophy underlying these prisons. Their openness was presented as part of the reason why they are successful. Even the 2018 escape from *Sogn*, which in most countries would have been sufficient to topple a whole national prison hierarchy, had virtually no effect on the prison, the prison system, or the government at large. This escape therefore had the opposite effect to the Feeney escape in the 1990s. The Bitcoin escape was used as an opportunity to sell the open prison model to both the country and its government. And, it seems, with success. The number of open prison places has steadily risen since 2000 and is set to rise substantially further in the near future. So where the Feeney escape exposed the weakness of the closed prison system at the time, the Stefánsson escape in fact exposed the strengths of the open prison system and, indirectly, helped facilitate its expansion.

It is important to understand this dual notion of what escapes do. On the one hand they challenge the status quo, even in Iceland. On the other they are utilised to advocate for the current state of affairs. So, regarding the simple question of what escape can achieve in terms of systemic change, the answer is that it matters less *who* escapes, and more where they escape *from*. Escapes from open prison serve to solidify current arrangements, whereas escapes from closed prison are utilised to further enhance their security. This dual notion of imprisonment may well be typical for the Nordic countries where notions of safety, crisis and purpose in the prison system seem to be treated with more nuance than elsewhere.

Finally, prison escapes need to be included in analysis of Nordic penal exceptionalism. The welfare-oriented nature of responses to escapes that we documented here highlights that the welfare orientation towards prisoners even extends in escape. The fact that escapes are not typically seen as crimes, and that welfare considerations almost always remain prominent throughout, seems to show that even in escape, prisoners remain part of society.

References

BBC. (2018). Iceland's Bitcoin Heist Suspect 'flees on PM's Plane. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-43799281

Aebi, M. F., Cocco, E. & Molnar, L. (2023). *Prisons and prisoners in europe 2022: key findings of the SPACE I survey*. *UNILCRIM*, *2023 (2)*.

Anderson, A. (2013). A true Icelandic Christmas story. *Reykjavík Grapevine*, 11 January 2013. Available online: https://grapevine.is/mag/editorial/2013/01/11/a-true-icelandic-christmas-story/

Andrews, P. (2017). Is the 'telling case' a methodological myth? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *20*(5), 455–467. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1198165

Baldursson, E. (2000). Prisoners, prisons and punishment in small societies. *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention*, *1*(1), 6–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/14043850050116228

Bennett, J. (2018). *Representations of prison escapes in films*. I *Prison breaks: toward a sociology of escape* (s. 265–290).

Block, D. (2022). The dark side of EMI?: A telling case for questioning assumptions about EMI in HE. *Educational Linguistics*, *1*(1), 82–107. https://doi.org/10.1515/eduling-2021-0007

Centre for Research, Evaluation, and Social Assessment. (1996). *Escape pressures: Inside views of the reasons for prison escapes*. New Zealand Ministry of Justice.

Chantraine, G. & Max Martin, T. (2018). Introduction: Toward a sociology of prison escape Palgrave. In T. Max Martin & G. Chantraine (Eds.), *Prison breaks: Toward a sociology of escape* (pp. 1–29). Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64358-8_1

Crewe, B., Levins, A., Larmour, S., Laursen, J., Mjåland, K. & Schliehe, A. (2023). Nordic penal exceptionalism: A comparative, empirical analysis. *The British Journal of Criminology*, *63*(2), 424–443. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azac013

Culp, R. F. (2005). Frequency and characteristics of prison escapes in the United States: An analysis of national data. *The Prison Journal*, *85*(3), 270–291. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885505279412

Dagblaðið Vísir. (1993). Höfðu leigt sér flugvél til Færeyja (Had rented a plane to fly to the Faroe Islands). *Dagblaðið Vísir*, p. 2. Available online: https://timarit.is/page/2615649#page/n1/mode/2up

Dagblaðið Vísir. (2012). Gekk tugi kílómetra á flóttanum (Walked tens of kilometres on the escape). *Dagblaðið Vísir*, 27 December 2012. Available online: https://www.visir.is/g/2012712279985/gekk-tugi-kilometra-a-flottanum

Falk Moore, S. (1987). Explaining the present: Theoretical dilemmas in processual ethnography. *American Ethnologist*, *14*(4), 727–736. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1987.14.4.02a00080

Gibbs, S. (2018). "Big bitcoin heist" suspect escapes prison and flees Iceland "on PM's plane". *The Guardian*, 18 April 2018. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/18/big-bitcoin-heist-suspect-sindri-thor-stefansson-escapes-prison-flees-iceland-pm-katrin-jakobsdottir-plane

Gunnlaugsson, H. (2021). Criminal justice in a small Nordic country: The case of Iceland. *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Kriminalvidenskab*, *108*(1), 27–45. https://doi.org/10.7146/ntfk.v108i1.125562

Gunnlaugsson, H. & Galliher, J. F. (2000). *Wayward Icelanders: Punishment, boundary maintenance, and the creation of crime*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Hamilton, C. (2013). Punitiveness and political culture: Notes from some small countries. *European Journal of Criminology*, *10*(2), 154–167. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370812464469

Iceland Magazine. (2015). Prison escape: Two on the run from Kvíabryggja minimum security prison. *Iceland Magazine*, 14 July 2015. Available online: https://icelandmag.is/article/prison-escape-two-run-kviabryggja-minimum-security-prison

Iceland Review. (2007). Two convicts escape from Litla-Hraun Prison. *Iceland Review*, 3 October 2007. Available online: https://www.icelandreview.com/news/two-convicts-escape-litla-hraun-prison

Iceland Review. (2012). Dangerous prisoner escapes captivity, still at large. *Iceland Review*, 18 December 2012. Available online. https://www.icelandreview.com/news/dangerous-prisoner-escapes-captivity-still-at-large/

Jóhannsdóttir, V. & Ólafsson, J. G. (2018). *The icelandic news media in times of crisis and change. Icelandic Review of Politics & Administration*, *14*(1), 189–210. https://doi.org/10.13177/irpa.a.2018.14.1.9

Mitchell, J. C. (1984). Typicality and the case study. *Ethnographic research: A guide to general conduct*. Academic Press.

Morgunblaðið. (1991). Sex strokufangar hafa verið sýknaðir (A total of six acquitted for a prison escape). *Morgunblaðið*, 19 December 1991, p.4. Available online: https://timarit.is/page/1756542#page/n3/mode/2up

Morgunblaðið. (2012a). Strokufanginn er ofbeldismaður (Escaped prisoner is a violent person). *Morgunblaðið*, 18 December 2018. Available online: https://www.mbl.is/frettir/innlent/2012/12/17/strokufanginn_er_ofbeldismadur/#mblcarousel-innerRTn

Morgunblaðið. (2012b). Allir þættir málsins í rannsókn (All aspects of the case under investigation). *Morgunblaðið*, 27 December 2012. Available online: https://www.mbl.is/frettir/innlent/2012/12/27/allir_thaettir_malsins_i_rannsokn/

Morgunblaðið. (2012c). Matthías Máni í einangrun í tvær vikur (Matthías Máni in isolation for two weeks). *Morgunblaðið*, 25 December 2012. Available online: https://www.mbl.is/frettir/innlent/2012/12/25/matthias_i_einangrun_i_tvaer_vikur/

NOS. (2018). Ontsnapte IJslander opgepakt in Amsterdam (Escaped Icelander arrested in Amsterdam). *NOS.ni.* Available online: https://nos.nl/artikel/2228665-ontsnapte-ijslander-opgepakt-in-amsterdam

Pakes, F. (2020). Old-fashioned Nordic penal exceptionalism: The case of Iceland's open prisons. *Nordic Journal of Criminology*, *21*(2), 113–128. https://doi.org/10.1080/2578983X.2020.1809199

Pakes, F. (2023). The shallow end: Understanding the prisoner experience in Iceland's open prisons. *Incarceration*, *4*. https://doi.org/10.1177/26326663231160343

Pakes, F. (2024). *Comparative criminal justice* (5th edition). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003390688

Pakes, F. & Gunnlaugsson, H. (2018). A more Nordic Norway? Examining prisons in 21st century Iceland. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, *57*(2), 137–151. https://doi.org/10.1111/hojo.12244

Peterson, B. E., Fera, A. & Mellow, J. (2016). Escapes from correctional custody: A new examination of an old phenomenon. *The Prison Journal*, *96*(4), 511–533. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885516650873

Pétursson, H. M. (2024). Ótrúleg atburðarás fyrir þrjátíu árum: Tveggja barna móðir svæfð á Holtinu og börn hennar numin á brott (An incredible sequence of events thirty years ago: A mother of two was put to sleep and her children were taken away). *Vísir*, 26 January 2024. Available online: https://www.visir.is/g/20242520640d/o-tru-leg-at-burda-ras-tveggja-barna-modir-svaefd-a-holtinu-og-born-hennar-numin-a-brott

Pratt, J. (2008a). Scandinavian exceptionalism in an era of penal excess: Part I: The nature and roots of Scandinavian exceptionalism. *British Journal of Criminology*, *48*(2), 119–137. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azm072

Pratt, J. (2008b). Scandinavian exceptionalism in an era of penal excess: Part II: Does Scandinavian exceptionalism have a future? *British Journal of Criminology*, *48*(3), 275–292. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azm073

Pratt, J. & Eriksson, A. (2011). 'Mr. Larsson is walking out again'. The origins and development of Scandinavian prison systems. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, *44*(1), 7–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/0004865810393105

Pratt, J. & Eriksson, A. (2013). *Contrasts in punishment: An explanation of Anglophone excess and Nordic exceptionalism*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203096116

Prison and Probation Administration, annual report. (2001, p. 16). accessed 20. March 2024 https://www.fangelsi.is/media/skjol/Arsskyrsla-FMS-fyrir-arid-2000.pdf

Seal, M. (2019). The big bitcoin heist. *Vanity Fair*, 4 November 2019. Available online: https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2019/11/the-big-bitcoin-heist

Segal, D. (2018). He fled a prison in Iceland. Now it's good to be back. *New York Times*, 4 May 2018. Available online: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/04/business/iceland-bitcoin-heist.html

Sydney Morning Herald. (2018). Suspect in Iceland's 'Big Bitcoin Heist' escapes prison. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 April 2018. Available online: https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/suspect-in-icelands-big-bitcoin-heist-escapes-prison-20180418-p4za7j.html

Ugelvik, T. (2016). Prisons as welfare institutions? In Y. Jewkes, J. Bennett, & B. Crewe (Eds.), *Handbook on prisons (2nd edition)* (pp. 388–402). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315797779-23

Van de Rijt, J., van Ginneken, E. F. & Boone, M. M. (2023). Normalisation by default and normalisation by design: A systematic review of empirical studies on the normalisation of prison life. *Incarceration*, *4*. https://doi.org/10.1177/26326663231196671