

BEYOND THE STATE

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Music in the rural creative economy

Simon McKerrell



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Simon McKerrell

CHAPTER 1

Why the rural creative economy matters

In the seminal 1973 book, *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams outlines the literary history of the centuries-old binary of the country and the city. In it, he takes a deliberate and nuanced tour through the oppositional narratives of the countryside and the city, and how these are mediated in English literature. His tour is a detailed argument that can be essentialised as an argument of the countryside as nature itself and the city, as the product of capitalism. For Williams, the struggle between the rural and the urban is the struggle of capitalism itself: of workers' rights, of production, of the destruction of the natural world, of human needs set against industrial demands, of growth versus sustainability: 'An insane over-confidence in the specialized powers of metropolitan industrialism has brought us to the point where however we precisely assess it the risk to human survival is becoming evident, or if we survive, as I think we shall, there is the clear impossibility of continuing as we are' (Williams, 1973, p. 432).

Today, his words echo louder. Following the global financial crash, massively increasing urbanisation, ongoing marketisation, de-population across many rural parts of the world and across the United Kingdom too, the Covid-19 pandemic and the most significant crisis – the climate crisis – his words have a renewed urgency as I write this. However, Williams who was a Marxist scholar intimately familiar with the Welsh countryside and various global cities, differs from me quite significantly in outlook, place and time: I come to this research differently, trained as an ethnographer of music,

as someone who has more interest in the people and their local solutions, than in any universalist arguments about the systemic means of production. I have more certainty that anthropological and more recent understandings of meaning and value must go beyond Marxist conceptions, and follow Appadurai and Taylor's (2024) conception of artistic and musical value, where symbolic meaning can create value, for particular people in a particular place and time. My belief is that it is local and regional solutions, policy, digitalisation and new ways of living and sustainable enterprise will ultimately provide hope for the future. And that these are to be found in the relationships and ingenuity of people working together, and what they value amongst themselves. My own research (and that from quite a few scholars of rural issues) suggests that rural communities very often lead and exemplify the most innovative and radical solutions to the contemporary changes to society, which is basically the opposite of the established enlightenment culture, so well outlined by Williams, where progress is embodied in the metropolitan elite and the rural are synonymous with backwardness. My hope in the rural as the forward-thinking arena where innovation is often tested, is a view broadly supported by rural sociologists, who have suggested that, '... the greater the social and or geographic distance from dominant political, social and economic actors, the greater the potential for cultural and social innovation' (Brian Lowe [2014] in Prest, 2016).

I will not offer a historiographical summary of the changing winds of meaning around the creative industries, creative economy or even the cultural industries here as others have ably covered this ground (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008; Galloway and Dunlop, 2007; Hartley, Wen and Li, 2015; Howkins, 2002; Oakley, 2009; O'Brien and Miles, 2010). What I do wish to emphasise however, is that musical enterprises, musicians, teachers, festival and hall organisers and promoters amongst many others, have a real and important influence on the aesthetic and economic lives lived in rural areas (and urban ones too). That is to say, that people do important work when they make and support musical activity, which we can label part of the 'creative economy', and that it matters – in many ways – aesthetically, socially *and* economically.

This book therefore, and the context in which it was researched and written, have been central to building my belief in the agency and innovation of *rural* communities. Throughout the book, you will find first hand testimony from my own case study, the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, about the sorts of hopeful, creative and communal ways of getting things done that support musical ways of being in rural and island life. There are policy suggestions for sure, and a good deal of structural analysis of global and national forces that impinge upon local ways of living, but time and again throughout the interviews for this book, I have found that musicians, festival organisers, community hall committees, teachers, luthiers, administrators and ordinary citizens living in rural communities have shown tremendous energy and imagination in order to support the things they value most – the social and musical ways of living alongside each other in rural and island communities.

WHY THE RURAL CREATIVE ECONOMY MATTERS

Philip Schlesinger asked in 2015 – what is the creative economy? His thesis has been that the aggregation of 13 distinct areas of cultural practice were categorised as economic areas and defined as cultural and artistic domains primarily for their economic outcomes, arguing that culture has been seen primarily as about embodying economic value and that this has become a policy orthodoxy.

‘For the most part, the “creative economy” has been a mobilizing slogan, it’s been deployed along a range of cognate ideas and associated practical inventions. The conceptual parade includes, creative cities, creative innovation, creative skills, creative education and creative ecology . . . The categorization of creative industries is everywhere deeply linked to measurement, of employment, industrial scale and tradable value. Because counting is what is politically comprehensible, and has therefore become the primary mode of accountability.

If we stopped talking about the creative economy, would anything be lost? Hardly. We still have a language for human

inventiveness and originality, nothing stops us talking comprehensively about the diversity of cultural practices that continue to exist but which are overshadowed by a compelling label of convenience which has put the economy in the driving seat and shaped the public discourse so insistently. Surely, that's an invitation to think afresh?' (Schlesinger, 2015).

I agree that there has been a great bloat of grey literature that has sought to collocate the arts with economic imperatives across the last two decades (see also Schlesinger, 2018). One of the frustrations with that literature today, is that very little of that literature on the creative economy has dealt with the sorts of individual or micro-enterprises that make up the vast majority of creative activity in rural areas. Colleagues in England have shown that about ten percent of the employment in rural England falls into the creative industries (NICRE, 2024, p. 2), and the figure would be similar in Scotland. There is therefore, a lot of creative activity in the rural economy, but creative industries literature tends to focus in on the higher GDP industries in the sector such as software, gaming, design, advertising, film & TV etc.: a lot of the literature sits adjacent to musical, drama, crafts, artistic or performing arts activity because economically, the impact of these smaller industries or practices is largely insignificant for national-level policymakers concerned with high-GVA or GDP industries. But the small creative acts, performances and makers deliver an outsized impact on local communities and their various forms of capital.

Most definitions of the 'creative economy' rest upon the citations of New Labour's vision which has been modified and refined through time, but when the 'creative industries' were initially defined in 2001 included: advertising and marketing; architecture; crafts; design and designer fashion; film, TV, video, radio and photography; IT, software and computer services; publishing; museums, galleries and libraries, and; music, performing and visual arts. The Scottish Government defines these as 16 distinct industries: advertising; architecture; visual art; crafts; fashion and textiles; design; performing arts; music; photography; film and video; computer games; radio and TV; writing and publishing; heritage; software/electronic publishing; and cultural

education.¹ The aggregation of these very different sectors into one domain has had significant effects on the policy and support for the arts. Largely, it has left the performing arts less visible in national policy-making, and in terms of government. It has also masked freelancers and micro-enterprises in national level schemes and discourse on the creative economy that privileges gaming, IT, software, advertising, TV, virtual reality and other big, globalised sectors of creative endeavour. Probably the cleanest definition of the 'creative industries' however comes from Ruth Towse, who defines them as consisting of, 'firms that mass-produce or distribute goods and services with sufficient artistic content to be considered creative and culturally significant. The essential features are the combination of industrial-scale production with creative content' (Towse, 2020, p. 137). Another notable re-classification of the creative industries is to categorise three overarching domains of creative work—expression, application and technology that have overlapping sub-sectors but require different approaches (see Collins, Mahon and Murtagh, 2018). For instance, villages in rural areas, might very well recognise a local musician, instrument maker, drama or dance club, music festival, craft workshop or other micro-enterprise, but they very rarely recognise large-scale creative economic enterprises such as advertising houses, software or games publishers, or television studios. That in and of itself, is one of the primary arguments for improving our understanding of what the creative economy or creative industries is, and how it is supported through policy-making or local government in rural areas. But it goes further, because rural creative businesses or sole traders in general terms make very small amounts of revenue, or operate on a cost neutral basis. In this context therefore, we need a different focus for creative industries policy-making, and perhaps a different terminology that recognises the micro-enterprises, freelancers, small halls and festivals across rural areas.

The arts, and rural arts matter, and even very small incomes from music-making, festivals or instrument repair and sales do matter because they provide both life to the local community, to the

1 The Scottish Government, <https://www.gov.scot/policies/creative-industries/> [date accessed: 2 April 2024]

individual and also bring in economic benefits when understanding the socio-economics of individual artists, villages and venues. In national terms however, and for the creative economy literature; almost all of this sort of activity is statistically invisible, because sole traders and individuals who pursue most of this activity cannot be seen in aggregated statistics or in lobby group publications or politics (aside from those directly advocating for the self-employed and freelancers). But the social impact of rural arts is significant in a number of meaningful ways, which came across strongly in interviews throughout this research.

The rural creative economy is distinct from the urban creative economy, not only in terms of what sectors of industry or business exist, but also in terms of the forms of capital that predominate. And as rural studies have flourished across several related disciplines, there has been a growing rejection of 'rural/urban dualities' as rurality has emerged as more than territorial, and an important socially constructivist category that, 'has different meanings to different people, and whose meanings and symbols may be manipulated and contested as part of social struggles' (Shucksmith and Thompson, 2012). This book will demonstrate that this settled view of a non-binary rurality extends well beyond notions of territory or practice, as rural creative work and lives draw and produce myriad forms of rural imaginary that range from the most prosaic, landscape-based rural creative acts to deeply sophisticated, embodied notions of what it is to perform rurality across musical, artistic and community performances.

Nancy Duxbury, in a wide-ranging literature review identifies three main themes running through the academic and grey literature surrounding *rural* cultural policy: '(1) cultural vitality, that is, culture as a resource for community development; (2) the "rural creative class," recently linked to rural innovation; and (3) rural creative economies and creative entrepreneurship in rural and remote areas' (Duxbury, 2020). This book largely focuses upon the third area of the literature identified by Duxbury, a focus upon the sustainability of micro-enterprises and creative entrepreneurship in the rural creative economy. In one dimension then, this book is an attempt to demonstrate the complexity of the rural creative economy, and particularly why the micro-enterprises, or individual artists, organisers, promoters

and those involved in rural creativity matter – because even small amounts of money matter – but perhaps more importantly, because other forms of capital matter despite being overshadowed in policy discourses on the ‘creative economy’ and ‘creative industries’. Social capital in particular, is often one of the key forms of capital in rural areas, and as will be seen from the fieldwork evidence, has different agency on people’s lives and a real impact on the creative activity itself in rural and island areas.

Social capital matters, and amidst the depopulation, social polarisation and digitalisation of our lives, ensuring that we have exciting, welcoming and thriving social communities in our rural areas is an absolute necessity for the twenty-first century. The rural creative economy spans artistic practice, festivals, manufacturing and production, but it also has multiple complex relationships into the touristic, social and environmental dimensions of rural and island places. In particular, increasingly today, having people living in our rural and island communities is key not only for the maintenance of the society and culture of those regions, but also for the sustainability and environmental goals of those regions, as well as all the economic benefits that are constitutive and causally related to thriving rural communities. As we are moving further into the twenty-first century, we are able to better understand not only the increasing importance of the natural world, but also that our ability to survive and to flourish, will depend upon having active citizens in rural areas maintaining and protecting the shared natural world. As Robert Putnam has observed, ‘The most certain prediction that we can make about almost any modern society is that it will be more diverse a generation from now than it is today’ (Putnam, 2007, p. 137). We are beginning to grasp that this applies to both our cities and rural areas, and that immigration to rural areas, will be crucial for their survival in the twenty-first century. Furthermore as many rural regions around the world are transitioning from agricultural and aquacultural work towards digital and tourist-related sectors, the position of the creative economy in rural areas has become rapidly more significant as a source of income and sustainability. There has therefore never been a better time for policy and thinking around rural arts, and our understanding of the ‘creative economy’ to be subject to innovation and renewal.

Lang and Fink make a very clear explanation of a form of terminological definition that is relevant and useful to rural creative economy research and that helpfully allows for a more meaningful research focus, when thinking about how social capital is manifested in the rural context.

'Bonding capital is considered an attribute of homogenous social networks (e.g. those where network members share the same interest) and is also associated with trusting but inward-looking relationships that may constrain behaviour and the flow of information. In contrast, bridging capital is described as encompassing outward-looking relationships which connect people with different socio-demographic backgrounds and social identities, and so provide the rural social entrepreneur with crucial access to new information and resources (Granovetter, 1973; Poortinga, 2012). Linking capital can be regarded as a specific form of bridging capital. Like horizontal bridging capital, it also "cuts across different groups" (Ferlander, 2007, p. 119) but connects people vertically across different power levels (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004, p. 655). These vertical ties can help rural social entrepreneurs to leverage resources and information from rural communities. However, it is important to be aware that linking capital also has a dark side and, like every form of social capital, can have negative effects. Privileged access to resources can for instance lead to "nepotism, corruption, and suppression.'" (Lang and Fink, 2019, p. 156).

And although they assert that only a comprehensive approach to analysis of rural networking can in fact give a meaningful picture of social capital and entrepreneurial activity, they essentially argue '... that rural social entrepreneurs represent intermediate actors in the spatial hierarchy who can establish a link between local rural communities and key resource holders in the wider institutional environment' (Lang and Fink, 2019, p. 156). This is a key question in the rural creative economy, not least because of the special role of entrepreneurial actors in their rural communities, but also because

often, in the musical field, those people who make things happen, bring in money and visitors for festivals, gigs, workshops and tourism, are so critically important to the cultural life of rural areas.

Although quite a bit of ink has been spilled on Bourdieusian forms of cultural, economic, social forms of capital and music; very little work has been done upon the ways in which music acts to transform different forms of capital. Sociologists call this the 'fungibility' of capital – most relevant for the creative economy – how can cultural or social capital create a big enough pull factor to motivate people to spend money on going to a gig, paying for online musical tuition or buying a festival ticket? The academic and policy literatures have an abundance of analysis about how music constructs social bonds and economic advantages in many contexts, but there is a distinct lack of understanding of the crucial fungibility of capital in musical contexts (or any performing arts for that matter). This matters for various reasons: 1) if we knew how for instance cultural capital normally supports the accrual of economic capital in musical contexts then we would be able to support venues, musicians and rural communities in strategically planning their future prosperity to draw upon cultural assets, as well as natural and human ones; 2) the long debate(s) about the value of arts in Anglo–American society and economies would move forward from a position of fairly simple binary disputes about the economic versus the public good in arts funding, towards a more interesting space where we are able to give a name and properly value and estimate the transfer or future potential and sustainability of economic prosperity and how it relates to investments in culture and the arts (or various other less instrumentalised alternatives). We would not only be able to make a fuzzy assertion; but analysts and policy makers would be able to model it and use evidence to judge how successful cultural tourism, music festivals and the cultural sectors are in a particular context, which could transform underlying assumptions for planners and government, and; 3) it could be transformational for academic disciplines to move out of their silos (especially in the conservative musico-logical and arts fields) and to base interdisciplinary research and collaboration upon genuinely shared conceptions of how performing, and the wider arts, have social, economic and symbolic impact that

is understood properly through the analysis of their agency in all parts of human life. All that is to say that fungibility of capital is a very good place to start when we want to answer hard questions about how the aesthetic and the instrumental actually interact and construct each other, or as more ubiquitously understood, the 'cultural value' of the arts, which has been a major focus of the last decade of scholarship in the UK context with little consensus on a way forward.

Previous attempts to move beyond the intrinsic–instrumental value debate have tended to be either too reductive to be persuasive in any meaningful sense, or politically too biased to be of much empirical use. For example, Sam Whiting in 2021, looks directly at the value of small live music venues and how they develop social and cultural capital. His argument runs that:

'Venue booking agents mobilise the intrinsic value (i.e. use-value) of their venues, drawing on the cultural and symbolic capital of the venue spaces themselves, the combined capital of others working in these spaces, and their own social and cultural capital to do so. These hybrid forms of capital take on an instrumental value (i.e. exchange-value), which is traded for economic capital. However, the emphasis throughout this process remains on intrinsic forms of value, which are the true source of small venues' revenue and capital, economic or otherwise.' (Whiting, 2021, p. 2).

So his argument rests on the assumption that it is the aesthetic understanding and reputation of venues, musicians and agents that is essentially commodified or exchanged for money as tickets or subscriptions. Whiting's solution is to complicate and blur the binary between instrumental and intrinsic value (p. 4), which in the end is an easy solution but does not move the binaristic debate further forward between those who privilege intrinsic/aesthetic value or those who privilege the instrumental or output values of musical participation and performance. In part I agree, the exchange happens when people buy tickets or subscriptions, but is it not the desire of the audience that is the key commodity in this exchange? Thinking

about audiences and promotion is key to this and to moving away from the long-standing intrinsic–instrumental debate, which Whiting rightly identifies as a false dichotomy anyway (for good summaries and discussion of this binary debate see Behr, Brennan and Cloonan, 2016; Belfiore and Bennett, 2008; Miles and Gibson, 2017).

The proposition in this book is that we need to recognise that the categories involved in the debate have now changed since the globalisation and digitalisation of everyday life since the turn of the century. For music, and for the implications of the platformisation of music and our data, this has made a fundamental change to the ways in which we consider value, commodities and labour. In Chapter 4, I explore this shift in relation to sustainability in the musical creative economy, but the core proposition in this work is that it is crucial to understand that music is not the commodity in the way that older arguments about Marxist readings of music, labour and capital suggest. In a more relational view that reflects the massive digital and global shifts in our social and working lives, I suggest that the key to sustainability is not music as a commodity which has traditionally been the foundation of theories of music and capital, but that value is created, and only realised in the moment of exchange: when a ticket is sold to a gig or festival, or an album or radio station bring an exchange of capital. In that sense, it is the desire of audiences to participate, listen and pay for music that is the commodity – as the big platforms have already realised long ago – it is the desire and willingness to participate that is the commodity. Platforms sell user data as a means to create capital, musicians have to exchange their audience's desire to be part of their music into event/festival or gig tickets, album sales, products or lessons. In this model then, music is *labour* not commodity, in this I am leaning on Michael Heinrich's view of the value of commodities (1999) (via Christian Fuchs) that moves on from Marxist views to understand that capital *exchange* is where value is created (not in the act of musical creation as labour itself). Significantly then, this view of music (and the arts) takes us past the old binaries of authenticity – fake, old, new, instrumental, intrinsic and so on, and puts the emphasis on relationships between people, where our emotions and desires are at the heart of the economics

of the creative economy. It has significant implications for the rural creative economy, because it opens up fresh thinking about exchange of capital and sustainability, that shifts the focus away from musicians and music-as-object, onto the desires, relationships and possibilities of exchange of value and capital that can support the development of new digital livelihoods in rural contexts. In short, the sustainability of a musical career rests in the desires of audiences rather than the intentions of musicians, and this has implications for the sorts of fieldwork we do, and the questions we ask when trying to understand music in the rural creative economy.

BEYOND THE STATE: THE POLITICS OF LOCAL IN THE RURAL CREATIVE ECONOMY

Dewinter, Rutten and Bradt (2020) asks one of the key questions about the social impact of the arts: to what end does the transformative potential of participation in art contribute?

‘From the 1990[s] onwards, various authors have taken a clear position in the debate about what the social dimension of the arts could engender. Yet, at the same time, there is a growing body of literature that illuminates how this debate cannot be separated from a wider debate about the rationales for public support of the arts. Following the critical voices of Belfiore and Bennett (2007a, 2007b, 2010) and Gray (2002), who alludes to the strategy of “policy attachment”, the question arises whether the arts themselves have directed this debate in a certain way in order to benefit from the larger budgets and greater political influence of the social and economic areas of public policy.’ (Dewinter, Rutten and Bradt, 2020).

This is a political question; situating the undeniably transformative potential of the arts within a political sphere about where society is/ should be heading. Whether conservative, capitalist, communitarian, liberal, egalitarian, more or less inclusive or regulated, this matters for musicians and artists because many of them are political, and

many of them reside on the left-leaning end of the political spectrum where some degree of communitarianism or egalitarianism motivates their sense of Self, but also their art. Indeed, a degree of counterculturalism has at times been considered essential by some in the artistic process, however, as many readers will know, there are also very many wonderful musicians and artists that are either apolitical or motivated by other influences such as the natural world, ideas and tensions around visual/sonic and other forms of beauty, human and other forms of relationships or indeed, the craft aesthetic itself.

However, political agency (or lack thereof) motivates many artists, and also many academics whose scholarship is similarly motivated by their political worldview. It is worth considering therefore, whether the (now) decades-long policy discourse around the social impact of the arts is effectively supported by their collocation with health, social or other economic benefits for the people that perform, participate and create? Certainly, I have never heard a musician locate their own artistic motivation in the socio-economic extrinsic effects of artistic practice, and surely this would hold for less artistic and less performative sectors of what has become known as the 'creative economy', for example, various genres of design, software and games production. In other words, the notion of the 'creative economy' has both been dominated by economic conceptualisations of artistic benefit, and simultaneously, been subject to a political narrative from the artists and administrators themselves that has sought to build that narrative for the wider professional benefits of the arts, all of which underplays the central exchange which is usually emotional, affective and takes place between people. In the UK context, especially in the early 2020s as cuts to public services, and the arts run deep across all four nations, it is worth posing the question of whether the links and arguments for the social and economic benefits of the arts will in the long run help or hinder artistic practice? And how and when the social and economic benefits of the arts should be understood in the context of significant state retreat from the arts? Or put another way, how must the conceptualisation of the creative economy change if it is to be more useful for small,

micro-enterprises and rural sectors as we move towards the middle of the twenty-first century?

The answer to that question for many involved in the study of cultural policy is that it should be devolved more closely to the local. In recent years, the obsession with 'national cultural policy' has waned and the deep centralisation in the UK context of almost all policy areas (see discussion in Chapter 3), has come under attack as unproductive and limiting. Indeed, this book adds to those voices (Durrer *et al.*, 2023a) that call for a much greater devolution of cultural power, policy and funding to local regions where truly integrated conversations about place-based innovation and policy can properly take place. As Durrer *et al.* (2023b) point out, much of the cultural policy literature has tended to focus on cities, often quite justifiably given the advantages that have accrued for cities from locating cultural workers together for economic and cultural benefits over the past decades. The insistence in this book however, is that there is a great opportunity for the creative economy and creative workers to revitalise and reinvigorate rural communities and places, but that it will require attention to more local, place-based regional policy and a collective conversation that understands the challenges of rural creative work outlined in this case study of the musical creative economy amongst many others (Duxbury, 2021; Gibson and Connell, 2013; Mahon *et al.*, 2018; Munro, 2016).

In some ways the politicisation of the 'creative economy' – the construction of a powerful narrative of the economic and social benefits of artistic and creative practice – has led to its emergence as a form of party political capital subject to the same short-termism as key domains such as housing, health and education. The problems of this short-term and increasingly polarised politics are evident across society and the media, and for some, we are at a critical point in both the final breakdown of the post-war settlement in the UK. But there is another way of looking at this (in relation specifically to music), a decidedly less overtly political perspective, which is to consider both the nature of musical participation (in whatever active form it takes in the rural areas) and similarly what the economic and community outcomes are from this artistic participation. That is to

say, this research focuses the fieldwork on evidence of *local* change, and the economics and longer-term sustainability of musical and artistic livelihoods in rural areas rather than the political capital of the arts or of individual creative sectors at the national level. The book therefore considers the impact of regional and national policy and how it has affected wider cognate issues such as the educational pipeline via music education (so critical to the creative economy and forever undervalued in domestic politics), and the wider professional and bureaucratic structures of the creative economy that emerge from fieldwork with venues, support services, police and administrators.

Rural lives offer a glimpse of the sorts of innovative ideas and pluralistic living that is increasingly under pressure in our cities, and therefore, one of the contributions of this book is to bring forward ideas that will re-invigorate the utility of the creative economy more widely. Much of the innovation from rural communities offers us a way forward beyond the state, a model of how to move towards a more sustainable livelihood and communities that exists beyond state subsidy or indeed, short-term political investment.

This is in part because the state is largely absent in the rural *creative* economy. One of the most significant findings of this research is the sheer lack of public investment in the rural creative economy. To be clear, there has been a lot of government discourse and some investment in rural business support, typically focused on agriculture and tourism. The creative sector is characterised by micro-enterprises and sole traders, and as this book demonstrates, these sorts of enterprises are largely absent from reporting on either the creative economy, or on the rural economy – precisely because they are tiny businesses, and in the case of music, very often part-time enterprises. And whilst the Scottish Government acknowledge that rural businesses are more likely to be micro-enterprises, their own research acknowledges this, ‘... measuring the impact of business support is challenging’ (The Scottish Government, 2022, p. 13). The Scottish Government’s own National Council of Rural Advisors, also reflected that view in their milestone recommendations: ‘National policy making processes do not always effectively represent rural interests and have not delivered the

best economic outcomes for Scotland' (National Council of Rural Advisors, 2018, p. 3).

In almost all the interviews conducted for this study, the place of the local and national government in Highlands and Island cultural life was either peripheral or non-existent. They have very little agency, funding or indeed bandwidth to be significant actors in the rural creative economy. Indeed 'state retreat' has been recognised as an aspect impacting the rural creative class both in Greece and in Ireland (Lang and Fink, 2019), and this book sets out the case that it has had a constitutive influence on rural creative policy in the UK in the past decade. This has two significant and observable impacts on the rural creative economy: 1) The little state support for arts and the creative sector that does exist in rural areas tends to go only to the professionalised and politically progressive arts rather than local priorities, or any more traditional and conservative musical activity. And 2), that innovative non-state models of financial and social sustainability that have sprung up across rural areas are beginning to demonstrate how the rural economy can support local activity beyond any influence of the state. Most of this happens via social networks and rural entrepreneurs who make culture work, and manage to create successful and sustainable (or not) festivals, venues, gigs, tours, teaching and musical cultures. Understanding how these networks operate, and sometimes don't, is very much at the heart of this research and will hopefully contribute to creating more successful rural creative cultures and businesses in the coming years.

Very few participants in my research working across charities, the third sector, individual musicians or sole traders ever report any local authority support in their local area. Most state support at the regional level is to be found in financial grants or loans, there are some in kind support, particularly in recent years that often takes the form of business support, or consultants typically conducting market research on digitalisation or business support audits and reports. However, with the exception of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), looking closely across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, it is very difficult to find any examples of local government or regional state support for the arts, and certainly nothing

like what would be found in other European states such as France, Germany or Spain. The UK with its Anglo-American model of capitalism has actively avoided state intervention in the performing arts, and when it does, it tends to come in the form of arms-length funding for national quangos such as Creative Scotland or the English equivalent, The Arts Council of England.

France stands out as a reasonable comparator, but clearly with a different approach to public funding of the arts. There has been a public mythology for decades in France that the French Ministry for Culture should aim to, 'reach 1% of the [national] budget' (Pflieger, 2013, p. 4) which as the funding increased during the twentieth century was approximately accurate by the 1990s. This dwarfs anything in Scotland or the UK; the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) spending amounts to something like 0.35 per cent and local authority spending is 'at least as important' (Pflieger, 2013). In Scotland, the Creative Scotland total budget for 2022–3 was £96.5 million (from Scottish Government and National Lottery) of which they committed *circa* £91.5 million in grant expenditure.² The Scottish Government grant of £64.3 million to Creative Scotland is a tiny fraction of total Scottish public spending of around £56.5 billion, meaning in Scotland we are spending very roughly, 0.1 per cent of the Scottish annual budget on national arts funding. However, in this book, the picture is complicated further by the transformation of local government since the turn of the century where Scotland has been eliminating almost all public funding for the arts in local authority budgets over the past decade via the introduction of Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations (SCIOs) to use as non-governmental legal bodies to run all libraries, leisure and culture services (discussed in Chapter 3).

But clearly the 'creative economy' is not a synonym for 'arts', and one of the key criticisms in academic literature is that the creative economy (and its predecessor the 'creative industries') is precisely a misnomer because of the disparity in scale, intention, agency and

2 Creative Scotland Annual Plan 2022/23, <https://www.creativescotland.com/resources-publications/publications/plans-and-strategy-documents/annual-plans/annual-plan-2022-23>

commerce across the variable sectors lumped together in the creative economy. Funding from the state in the UK, although delivered in different ways via innovation vouchers, city deals, arts councils and other means makes the landscape of the creative economy unorthodox and heterogeneous for simple, national-level quantitative analysis across the entire creative sector(s). Thinking about the segmentation in geographical space also considering the rural-urban divide makes creative economy research a good topic for qualitative or ethnographic research, which has been lacking in the academic literature where the bias has tended towards statistical and quantitative analysis by sector.

The question of state funding at either the national or regional level for creative enterprise and the arts more widely is complicated by the evidence of erosion of state funding across all areas of government spending. The UK and Scotland are not outliers here; the shift from, 'centrally driven Keynesian systems with a stronger social safety net to market-oriented, neo-liberal governance systems' (Lobao *et al.*, 2018) can be observed in many advanced economies around the world and twentieth century models of arts funding have inexorably moved towards government support for creative industries and economic activity that reflect systemic changes in production and the role of the state more broadly. In the UK context, which is one of the most centralised forms of government anywhere, this has been observed not only in the decline of direct state funding for the arts, but also in a historical lack of regional investment in arts funding (in comparison to European nation states). Predictably then, where professional arts are concerned, national arts funders have been the only game in town for any substantive organisational funding beyond the market, and many organisations that emerge from artistic communities assume that their funding will come either from national-level arts funders, usually in combination with some additional, but not sufficient, form of commercial income from performances/festivals or events. There are some advantages and problems with the 'market failure' ecosystem of arts funding that follow a subsidy model; not least amongst them that financial risk is shifted from businesses or the state onto individual and increasingly precarious workers/

artists (Mahon *et al.*, 2018, p. 273). Similarly, rural organisations tend to have much less national presence or lobbying power than the large, metropolitan arts organisations or national companies that are closely aligned with political power.

In the Scottish context, for the few organisations that substantially rely upon some form of state support to subsidise their activities, either from Creative Scotland or from other forms of state funding such as education departments or local authorities, they are beholden to the ever-shifting priorities of highly politicised organisations and government. This form of reliance on the state has various effects, and this book does not intend to rehearse well-worn arguments about the need for, or privilege of arts funding or market failure (for further discussion see Durrer, Gilmore and Stevenson, 2019; Gray, 2000; Robinson, 2012; Stevenson, 2014), or indeed, the long debate about the social impact of the arts and its instrumentalisation in state policy (see for instance the large literature around this area: Belfiore and Bennett, 2008; Hallam, 2010; Matarasso, 1997). But the effects of this relationship of rural-based arts organisations towards the centralised, nationalised arts funding system have consequences for both the nature and duration of work. Most profoundly, the majority state-subsidised arts organisations have to work almost exclusively on a project-based system of precarious funding, usually justifying each project in terms of the social, economic or aesthetic benefits the project will bring to their local community, or the communities which they serve. That means that they are subject to the changing landscape of political desires that flow through arts councils and quangos constantly having to justify their project-based work in terms of other people's agendas, and almost exclusively, metropolitan, national agendas. In this sort of funding environment, local priorities, desires and narratives can be squeezed out in favour of the latest political desiderata which range from arts-for: social inclusion, rehabilitation, audience growth, disability and other forms of equalities agendas, neighbourhood gentrification, employment, mental wellbeing, etc. As Kate Oakley has accurately observed, 'discussions of cultural policy ultimately become entwined with question[s] of aesthetics, politics, identity and meaning . . . Debates about culture take place in a contested space, and so they

should, as they are essentially political debates' (Oakley, 2009, pp. 411–2).

Although almost all desirable social outcomes, there are serious unintended consequences for rural arts organisations that, as one participant told me, '... we work on a project-to-project basis, our main funds come from Creative Scotland and not being an RFO [regularly funded organisation] means we can't really plan ahead' (identity anonymised, fieldwork interview). This inability to plan for the future or to have strategic or long-term initiatives is undermined by the precarity of project funding in state-supported arts organisations. The effects of this are various but include aspects such as: long-term commitments to other people's political priorities and the devaluing of local traditions and musical demand – effectively a 'supply-side mentality' where policy dictates musical projects rather than supporting community priorities. It also has indirect effects on project-based precarity of work for musicians and other artists, who rarely can rely on any income stream for more than a few weeks or months. Over time of course, the reliance on instrumental arguments of the benefits of artistic practices and the arts more widely on the economy, health, education and social cohesion, supports the case for the privileging of non-aesthetic and non-artistic arguments for the creative economy.

This privileging of national, and the passing political priorities of arts professionals tends to mean the devaluation of highly localised performing traditions, and the underserving of amateur and non-elite performing arts, and critically, the unintended audience segmentation where some constituencies go underserved (for example in the Scottish rural context: Gaelic speakers, older people, those with mainstream, conservative or middle-of-the-road aesthetic tastes in music or art, highly traditional and conservative art forms such as bagpiping, religious choirs or non-place-bound musics such as metal, popular or Anglo-American jazz or popular music). Simply put, the system of arts funding where organisations rely on state support for survival means that short-termism and progressive or more highly professionalised forms of performance and art are favoured over amateur and more conservative, locally bound practices. Part of this book therefore deals with, and privileges

the voice of the amateur, the local and rural, in order to attempt to bring their voices into the discussion about where we put resources, or what art forms it is possible to support.

But perhaps most crucially in this research, given how complex the narratives around creative economies, arts, funding, political will and marketisation have become, one of the key insights that has emerged from this research is that the state-retreat from rural arts and the music sector has meant that non-state, commercial and more innovative forms of third sector sustainability have begun to flourish in the rural creative economy. This is a central focus of this research, and the future for the rural creative economy and rural music more broadly will rely on more of these bottom-up innovations in governance, sustainability and cross-sectoral collaboration, beyond the state.

SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THE RURAL CREATIVE ECONOMY

Musical (and basic) sustainability in rural areas is heavily dependent upon social networks, and the social linking capital between local community groups and regional or national cultural actors can be particularly powerful in the creative economy. That is because for many in the cultural sector, particularly where there is a non-commercial activity such as music education or community organisations whose business models depend upon state financial support, are very vulnerable to changes in grant aid, to the political environment at the national or regional level. The linkages between local actors and agencies, such as national arts funders or government, have the power to create and destroy sustainability where there are recurrent or substantial financial ties.

One of the key aspects of the rural creative economy which I have come across time and again in my fieldwork is the simple disconnection between people living and working in the arts in rural and island communities. For example, in a number of larger rural local authorities and islands, there is no overarching arts coordinator in the local authority or in the third sector, there are numerous micro-enterprises

living and working in music, events and in the arts more broadly with really no real social network in between, and concomitantly, no ability to collectively bargain or lobby for improved services or offers around place-based marketing or state funding. This means that there is little opportunity to benefit from phenomena such as the massive increases in cultural and events tourism in rural regions, or to work cross-sectorally for mutual benefit. Interviewees described this variously, but one or two mentioned that sense of isolation within the sector, working on their own projects for the benefit of their local rural community. The exception to this was where interviewees were part of a larger network such as The Touring Network, who actively support gatherings for rural and island promoters and musicians. But in general, this isolation for creative workers amplifies the precarity faced by individuals and organisations in rural areas, and the shrinking of local government and state retreat ensures no public funding for regional coordination of opportunities. This makes it impossible to connect with other sectors for the very powerful mutual benefit that can accrue from network effects.

As Skippington and Davis (2016) found in their research in Australia, rural arts are usually associated with wellbeing, feelings of community cohesion and other soft outcomes. Part of the problem with this is the public bias against arts and their economic viability which has ballooned in the early twenty-first century in the UK. This bias towards arts and culture as soft and not associated with real financial gains for businesses and communities, is substantially challenged by the data I have gathered about the importance of small incomes for people working in music (see Chapter 4) and the new forms of digital revenues now emerging in the rural creative economy.

Economic sustainability in creative sectors traditionally relies upon social proximity as Richard Florida so famously outlined (Florida, 2003). For rural areas of course – proximity is fundamentally a problem because the distances are large, and even those working in music may not know others in the same sector relatively nearby if they move in different social circles. Part of the problem is statistical invisibility for freelancers and sole- or micro-enterprises who are rarely VAT registered and invisible as significant employers in

rural areas. There are not clear rural examples of micro-enterprises in the creative economy economically benefitting rural areas, in the Scottish context, and this stands in clear contrast to the proximity clusters of for instance, the gaming industry in Dundee; FinTech in Edinburgh; or performing arts festivals in Glasgow. It is difficult for economic planners in rural local authorities to think of culture and the arts as a means towards economic prosperity and growth when they cannot see the proximity effects operate at an economically visible scale. Yet despite being geographically distributed, creative work is profoundly important for rural areas, not just because of the pro-social outcomes, but for its economic impact that is not well recognised, precisely because policy in the creative economy has been predicated upon proximity measures of 'clustering' that privilege cities and towns over rural and remote geographies. The over-reliance on proximity effects in the understanding of the creative economy is one of the weaknesses of UK policies in the sector, and a key reason why the economic impacts of small and micro-enterprise incomes and geographically distributed creative work has been largely absent from the literature since the turn of the century.

One of the huge shifts in recent years has been the move towards digital social networking for everyone; underway before the pandemic but hugely accelerated. The research in this book demonstrates that this is indeed having a transformative effect upon music in the rural creative economy, and that any consideration of sustainability in the creative sector must now consider digital social networking alongside in person proximity and events. Throughout the interviews with musicians, administrators, instrument makers and festival, venues and events programmers came a strong thread of transformative change that is manifesting new forms of sustainability in the rural creative economy. These are seeded throughout the book but particularly evident in Chapters 3–6 where online participation is transforming the sustainability of musical careers through born-digital live events, online music education, new revenues from digital distribution rights, and quite real changes to community networks of practice and place via digital networking and how this shapes new forms of leisure tourism, direct sales and music festivals and events.

RURAL DEPOPULATION AND THE STATISTICALLY INVISIBLE RURAL CREATIVE ECONOMY

Depopulation is one of the very central issues facing rural and island communities across Scotland, but also across many parts of the UK, Ireland and the rest of the European continent. Depopulation has so many problematic effects, and many of those are being played out in Scotland today. Recent population data in Scotland suggests that we are witnessing a counter-intuitive period of demographic change; the population of Scotland is growing much faster than in recent years, almost entirely driven by UK and international net migration.³ Simultaneously, there continues to be more deaths than births, and the population is getting older. Rural council areas in Scotland continue to suffer from depopulation, with Na h-Eileanan Siar, North Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway and Angus all suffering with large decreases in population of young and working age populations, whilst Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen saw the largest increases in young people. The overall picture shows an ageing population across the country, with rural areas tending to have older age profiles than urban regions.

Rural depopulation means many things, not least, lower tax receipts for local authorities with a reduced working age population, lower economic activity in the region overall, meaning businesses struggle, the weakening of education systems, and school closures (almost always a critical blow to rural communities) and higher costs for public services as fewer residents remain to pay for bins, roads, schools, social services and health. Depopulation can lead to essentially the weakening of social life within a (usually) ageing population.

Rural depopulation is tackled in policy through things like incentivisation for inward migration to rural areas, support for local businesses, better broadband and various other incentive structures for people to move to, and to remain living in rural areas. What has gone unexplored in the UK and in Scotland has been the policy change associated with creative industries policies that have worked in other parts of the world. This problem is not unique to Scotland,

3 See mid-2024 population estimates Scotland <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/mid-2024-population-estimates/#>

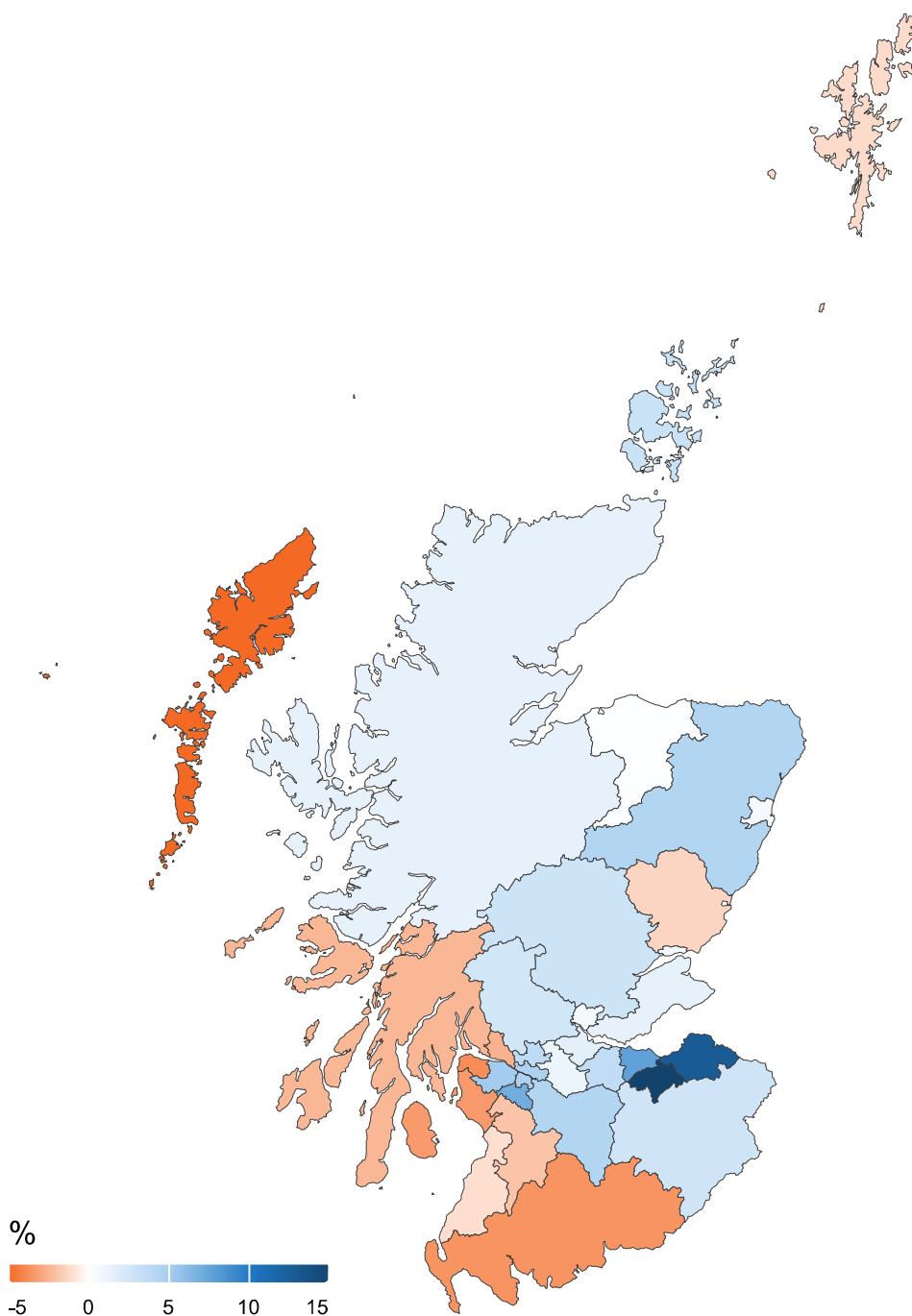


Figure 1.1 Depopulation map of Scotland showing change between 2011 and 2022 census data by council area (The Scottish Government, 2023).

and as Lang and Finke have noted, the very existence of the EU is threatened by structural weakness in rural parts of Europe (Lang and Fink, 2019, p. 155). Depopulation in rural Scotland is now a major issue. Although the Scottish population is at a record high at the time of writing of 5.5 million people in 2024, largely due to inward migration, there continues to be a significant problem of rural depopulation, a low birth rate and ageing population, now compounded by the major economic shock of the pandemic (The Scottish Government, 2021a, p. 3). The 2022 Scottish census demonstrated that depopulation is happening fastest in the Outer Hebrides and the southwest of Scotland – in Na h-Eileanan Siar, Argyll and Bute, in Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway – all rural regions (see Figure 1.1).

The data on depopulation shows a mixed picture in the Highlands and Islands (see Figure 1.2) and the latest census data released in 2024, give useful depopulation data at ward level, on Highland Council that show greater depopulation in Northern and Eastern Highland wards (see Table 1.1).

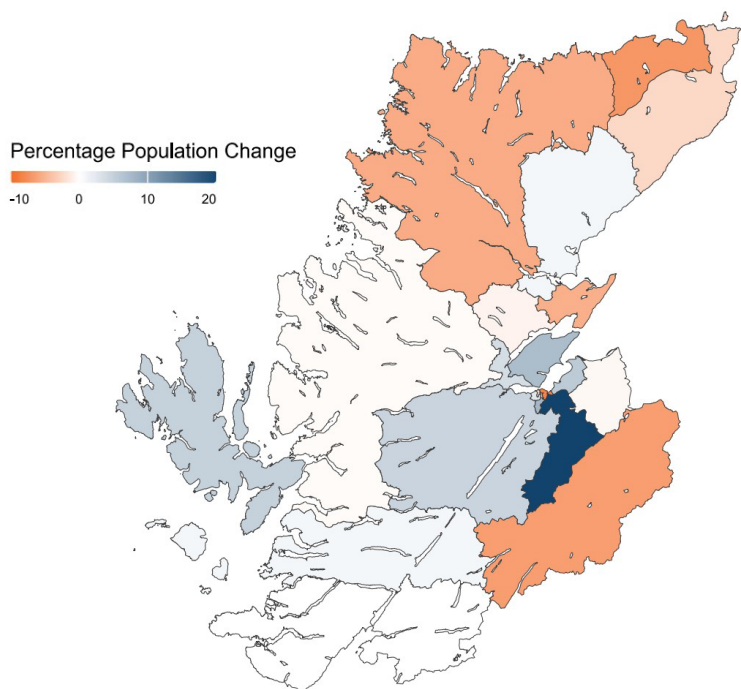


Figure 1.2 Depopulation map of Highland Council from Scottish Census 2022 (The Scottish Government, 2024).

Area name	Percentage change (%)
North, west and central Sutherland	-5.6
Thurso and northwest Caithness	-7.0
Wick and east Caithness	-2.6
East Sutherland and Edderton	0.9
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	-0.3
Cromarty Firth	-0.8
Tain and Easter Ross	-5.3
Dingwall and Seaforth	3.6
Black Isle	7.1
Eilean a' Chèò	5.0
Caol and Mallaig	0.9
Aird and Loch Ness	4.6
Inverness west	2.6
Inverness central	-2.6
Inverness Ness-side	7.6
Inverness Millburn	-8.2
Culloden and Ardersier	5.6
Nairn and Cawdor	-0.5
Inverness south	27.7
Badenoch and Strathspey	-6.5
Fort William and Ardnamurchan	0.0

Table 1.1 Percentage change in population 2011–22 (Scotland's Census. 2022).

This is useful because it shows the complexity of what is happening on the ground. In Highland region, there has been some strong population growth – in Inverness South (+27.7 per cent), the Black Isle (+7 per cent) and the Isle of Skye (+5 per cent) for instance, whilst other rural and remote areas such as Sutherland and Caithness have seen substantial depopulation, along with Badenoch and Strathspey. In some senses, we are seeing continued urbanisation across Scotland again, with the largest cities growing rapidly in the 2020s. Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen all have growing populations, whilst rural and

island council areas fall.⁴ The entire nation is ageing in almost every region. Median ages are increasing in rural areas and working age populations are decreasing.

These pose significant problems for core community issues around housing, economy, education and health. On one level, for the creative economy, this suggests that there will be opportunities for music in cultural tourism and also in older audiences, but the creative economy as a whole relies upon housing, education, health and all the other public services. This means that in some respects, examples of how the cultural economy can counteract rural depopulation could be particularly useful for Scottish rural areas. Scotland's rural areas have relatively precarious economies yet have higher employment and higher rates of engagement in economic activity as this report from the Scottish Government's *Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population* makes clear.

'Labour markets in sparsely populated areas are particularly vulnerable to small fluctuations in labour supply. Here it is useful to distinguish between "deep" and "shallow" markets. Markets are described as deep when there are many buyers and sellers, which implies that the loss of a few buyers or sellers would make no material difference to the operation of the market. Labour markets in sparsely populated areas are, in contrast, extremely shallow. Small increases or decreases in labour supply can have large effects on the viability of the local economy. These effects may be amplified to the extent that households are dependent on both partners working. The loss of one job may cause both to emigrate to take up new employment opportunities. It may also cause a loss of children to the area who would form the future labour supply. Nevertheless, those in remote rural areas are typically more economically active than those in the rest of Scotland, albeit by a small margin. Annual Population Survey data for 2017 shows that 81% of adults in remote rural areas between 16 and 64 were economically active,

4 See mid-2024 population estimates Scotland <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/mid-2024-population-estimates/#>

compared with 80% in accessible rural areas and only 77% in the rest of Scotland. With unemployment rates at around 4% (irrespective of geography), employment rates in the remote rural areas stood at 78%, therefore exceeding those in the rest of Scotland where they were 74%. Remote rural areas are also characterised by more diverse employment patterns than elsewhere. Self-employment accounts for 23% of employment in remote rural areas, 18% in accessible rural and only 11% in the rest of Scotland. The proportion of the employed in remote rural areas with a second job, at 6%, was double the rate for the rest of Scotland. And the proportion working from their own homes comprised 24% in remote rural areas in 2017 compared with only 9% in the rest of Scotland. The share of those working from home rose dramatically during the pandemic: this was a working pattern with which residents of remote rural areas were already more familiar. It remains to be seen how much of the change in working patterns persists after the pandemic.' (The Scottish Government, 2021b, pp. 20–1).

The official data are a double-edged sword: on the one hand, the national-level data show that rural areas contain in Scotland at least, twice the national average of people with a second job. Similarly it also shows that self-employment is much more likely in rural areas. However, the data do not really give any useful indication of how well sole traders are, or anything of any use on self-employed people, who make up the vast majority of music-related enterprises in my own research.

The official figures in the UK context make creative economic research difficult – they do not recognise the shape or nature of the performing arts or of many businesses or enterprises across the creative industries. Indeed, the sector is acknowledged as being statistically invisible for various reasons, not least because micro-enterprises and sole traders do not often meet the £85,000 VAT registration threshold, which is a real problem in understanding the creative economy; 'Scotland has almost as many unregistered businesses as registered businesses. Unregistered businesses are likely to be relatively small and therefore disproportionately located in

remote rural areas' (The Scottish Government, 2021b, p. 21). Again, this lack of visibility was highlighted in the Council of Rural Advisers' report to the Scottish Government in 2018 where they emphasised the problems of mainstream economic policy were not fully recognising the rural contribution, because, 'traditional calculations of economic growth leave out huge areas of rural economics, such as: the large number of non-VAT registered businesses and microbusinesses that are prevalent in rural areas; natural capital accounting, and; the social impact of economic activity in ensuring sustainable service provision and infrastructure' (National Council of Rural Advisors, 2018, p. 8).

This book is in part therefore a response to the rural depopulation and statistical invisibility of rural creative workers and micro-enterprises. By demonstrating the vitality and offering case studies of how music is supporting livelihoods and transforming the sustainability of rural communities, it offers a contribution both to the understanding of cultural policy for rural areas, as well as how the rural can be understood in creative economy more broadly.

METHODOLOGY, INTENTION AND INDUCTION

The research for this book was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) via a Research Leadership Fellowship from 2020 to 2022. The book has been written based upon detailed ethnographic interviews with musicians, venue operators, musical instrument makers, festival organisers, venue promoters, public officials, charity officers, police, educators, tutors, and so on. Central to this research was ethnographic induction. That is to say, the broad field of enquiry for planning the fieldwork for this project was music in the rural creative economy of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and the interviewees were to direct the areas of specialisation in the research (sometimes called co-production or grounded theory in qualitative research). Within that large topic, I had developed from my reading around the various intersecting literatures an interest particularly in the sustainability of musical livelihoods and in the rural dimensions of musical life in the Highlands

and Islands. During the project in responding to interviews, I also developed a strong interest in the state of musical education across rural areas and the Highlands and Islands in particular, and in the governance of musical activities in contemporary Scotland and the UK. I do see this as strongly related to the understanding of entrepreneurialism and musical sustainability in the rural creative economy. However, in seeking to ensure that I gathered enough data to produce both an accurate and meaningful picture of music and sustainability in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland across different musical genres and practices, I realised that my interviews were only partly inductive, but also in some respects, deductive. Not only in the sense of deciding whom to interview, but also in the sense of wishing to pursue certain ideas and answer the interesting questions that were beginning to arise in interviews. Questions such as, what is the relationship between place, musical genre and enterprise in the Highlands and Islands? What are the best governance arrangements for different types of musical organisations, venues or festivals in rural areas? What are the possibilities for future growth that come with the increasingly better access to digital technology across the Highlands and Islands? And, what are the effects of the continued retreat of the state from the arts in contemporary Scotland and the United Kingdom in my case study?

These questions I have attempted to address in this book, and I have stuck to ethnographic research. One of the advantages of ethnographic research is that it focuses entirely on the gathering of nuanced, rich data: interviews, participant observation and focus groups, for instance. This is the best methodological approach to understanding human approaches to making music, how it makes us feel, act and how it moves us and our communities. What is more difficult, is to understand how the whole system works, or to get an understanding of the systemic parts of rural music making, education and enterprise. One can pick up comments in interviews about policy, about practice and how people have overcome obstacles, or benefitted from certain individuals, but to understand a creative economy and for academic research to make more of a difference in the world, means that we take account of public and social policies, legal frameworks, local politics and quantitative data on

production, consumption and the flows of capital. The combined intelligence of both the local ethnographic knowledge with a systemic understanding of the economic and policy context for music can transform research on the arts from the observational and analytic, to the active and transformational.

The final interviews for this book were undertaken with around 70 people across about two years of fieldwork. The majority of these were necessarily conducted via Zoom and online and usually lasted for around an hour. There were several field trips as pandemic restrictions eased and these were important, as they had initially been planned to be central to the book's methodological intention, both in terms of ethnographic interviews, but also some sense of participant observation. I have had to rely on my own deep and decades-long experience as a musician and tutor of music across my adult life, alongside the much more narrowly focused interviews for this project. I am well known as a bagpiper (of both Scottish Highland bagpipes and Irish Uilleann pipes) who has recorded at least 11 albums and in a former life, was an active touring musician and former member of the *Back of the Moon* folk group. I have also had the privilege of teaching many people to play the bagpipes across Scotland and the US, and also at the National Piping Centre, and for many years regularly competed in solo piping competitions right across Scotland, and internationally.⁵ I therefore have leaned into this experience, having largely now graduated beyond any sense of 'emic resistance' – that sense of resistance to translate or explain one's own deeply felt traditional embodied musical knowledge in academic work, that I have outlined elsewhere (McKerrell, 2022b). I hope I understand through many years of performing and travelling across the Highlands and Islands, something of the issues and challenges facing musical enterprises, but as ever, have actively remained open to conflicting and counter-intuitive narratives across the entire working life of this book. These connections certainly supported my own entry into fieldwork for this study, but I have been very conscious of moving across different musical genres and, as

5 For more details on the author's performing career, see <https://simonmckerrell.com/music/>

such have interviewed promoters and musicians from across traditional, popular, classical and other forms of music working across the Highlands and Islands. I also conducted three online panel debates as part of the fieldwork to facilitate dialogue around music education, policy and creative work. These were held during 2021 and were very successful, attracting between 40–70 people to each panel. The panels focussed upon live events (April 2021), Music Festivals in the Highlands and Islands (June 2021) and Music Education in the Highlands and Islands (June 2021).⁶ I also produced a policy launch event in December 2022 in collaboration with The Touring Network in Inverness. Gender was largely balanced across these interviews and appears to be fairly balanced in terms of key posts across festivals, venues and the wider music sector in the Highlands and Islands.

The people I interviewed have largely opted to generously provide ethical consent for their words to be used in this book, but in some cases they have asked to be anonymised, or I have anonymised their words, generally because they are often in politically sensitive positions in large third-sector organisations across the Highlands and Islands.

The geography of these interviewees is all within the Highlands and Islands, and interviews have been conducted from as far south as Argyll and its islands, through the central and northern Highlands, to include both the Isle of Skye, and the Outer Hebrides and Shetland Isles. In this sense, I believe I have managed to capture a broad sense of place for rural creative workers and volunteers, and there are elements of the book that address particularly island-based concerns, as well as the ever present and typical concerns of rural life focused around distances travelled, broadband access and rural housing. Interviewees have included many different types of people

6 For more detail on speakers and archive video footage, see <https://simonmckerrell.com/2021/03/17/public-panel-unlocking-live-events-in-the-highlands-and-islands-1pm-5th-april/>, <https://simonmckerrell.com/2021/05/17/music-festival-futures-in-the-highlands-and-islands-of-scotland-1pm-tuesday-1st-june/> and <https://simonmckerrell.com/2021/06/08/music-education-futures-in-the-highlands-and-islands/>

involved in the musical creative economy such as: musicians; promoters; venue operators; festival organisers; music teachers; manufacturers; luthiers; as well as those in associated roles that are critical to the creative economy such as local authority, arms-length organisations external to government (ALEOs) and government policy makers as well as police. I hope the book reveals some of the complexity of their working lives and concerns.

The research underpinning this book is not therefore, generalisable in the strict sense, but hopefully useful to a wide range of people, policy makers, decision makers and publics who have any interest in music in rural areas. During the course of writing this book I simultaneously conducted some research with my colleague Jasmine Hornabrook, on the effects of the pandemic upon the Scottish traditional music community for the Scottish arts body – Creative Scotland. This report was published in 2023 and includes a sample of survey data which in some senses will inform readers of this book as to the immediate effects of the pandemic upon musicians and learners across traditional music in Scotland (McKerrell and Hornabrook, 2023).

This book however is based upon detailed ethnographic interviews with around 70 interviewees, and years of participant observation, and ranges much further and incorporates interviews across different musical genres with a different geographical focus across the whole of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, where the social and geographical framework are discussed in some detail in Chapter 2. As a consequence, this book examines the spatial dimensions of music in the rural creative economy in some depth, and particularly the relationship between genres, music and place (Chapter 3). Methodologically, I have stuck to tried and tested methods of interviews of around up to an hour's length with repeated re-listening to hear what my informants were really saying – I've never been able to get that clear from a single interview and find listening back essential. To that end, many of the quotations in the book come directly from these interviews which consider first-hand evidence from people living and working in the rural creative economy – in other words – those who are best placed to tell us what is happening. My own role as an analyst draws much from my

ethnographic and ethnomusicological training, but goes further than that to outline the potential wider implications and actions that might flow from these analytical observations and coding of data.

It must be noted however that interviewees who work professionally, or semi-professionally in the creative and cultural industries (CCIs) are not representative of the general population. Indeed, one of the main problems of interviewing people in cultural occupations is that they are entirely unrepresentative of the rest of the population when it comes to politics, culture and music. As O'Brien and others have demonstrated, 'cultural workers are by far the most engaged of any occupational group. They are more culturally active than their middle-class professional colleagues. They are also totally unrepresentative of the patterns of cultural engagement in the working class population' (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020, p. 20). My interviewees are important because they represent the key workers in the creative and cultural music industry across the Highlands and Islands, but importantly therefore, they do not represent the Highlands and Islands really in terms of reception and consumption of culture – this is a different study which would necessitate a different methodology. It is also well recognised that musicians in particular do not reflect the career structures written about in the academic literature, where even portfolio careers assume several different roles in a linear chronology; musicians' lives take a different path, often to be successful as a musician means that the realities of a musical career involve '... concurrent multiple job roles as opposed to the more main stream view of a series of short-term roles ... a sustainable career within the music industry requires the following elements: awareness of self and musical identity(ies), ability to (practically, emotionally, financially) handle concurrent multiple job roles, hard and soft skill sets which can adapt to a range of environments and demands, as well as a clear baseline of expert knowledge which can be adapted to specific contexts', (Gee and Yeow, 2021, p. 351). Straightforward, it is not. Constructing any sort of policy and structural context for these sorts of creative careers essentially involves an awful lot of ongoing conversations across many institutional, governmental and philosophical boundaries. That is tricky, but I want to advocate in this book for making

the effort to integrate cultural policy for music and musical micro-enterprises, with a range of core policy discussions in rural and island regions, where artists, retailers, tutors and administrators of musical livelihoods are given a seat at the table where the big questions on housing, transport, enterprise, health and education take place (see below for a fuller discussion of examples from the international context).

As I outline elsewhere (McKerrell, 2022a), I understand 'policy' in a broad, Habermasian sense, as the framework of underlying principles that support action, and as such, I think 'policy' can be enacted by quite a diverse range of people and not just civil servants and quangos. To me, policy can be enacted both from below (by audiences, business owners, festival organisers, musicians and makers) as well as from above (by local and national government, civil servants, police, arts quangos and regulators), and in some ways indirectly from other sectors that significantly affect music and the arts (such as tourism agencies, universities, colleges, transport businesses and other sectors that all have a strong influence on people and places in rural areas). In that sense, I hope the book will empower people in the rural creative economy, both by reflecting back to them the importance of their own actions and agency, but also by suggesting ways that might support rural communities to thrive in the face of the continuing and substantial challenges of the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 2

The Highlands and Islands: the creative context

All presents emerge from the past. It seems obvious, but what we call the 'creative economy' in 'rural' 'Highlands and Islands' of 'Scotland' have beginnings, threads and histories that largely depend upon who is telling them, and who is listening. New thoughts and experiences are like the gravity of experience, suggests Andrew Abbott from the University of Chicago (Abbott, 2001). Gravity helps sediment new into the old through the sedimentation of our experience, ideas and thoughts. In relation to the Scottish Highlands and Islands, there has been a great weight of mythological and historical gravity that has sedimented a landscape that is richly collocated with romanticism, stoicism and rugged beauty. What many rural and island communities are beginning to discover in the twenty-first century is that this historical gravity of romanticism and physical beauty can now be a symbolic foundation for local creative practice and industries. That which indexes Scottish Highland history, also indexes some of the creative industries today; the connection to place, landscape, adventure, romanticism and other dimensions of our human experience are implicated now in capitalist experience alongside the mythological narratives surrounding rural and island places. Although there has always been an artistic resistance to the relationship between art and capital, the Highlands and Islands of Scotland (and many other places) have been benefitting and marketing themselves as romantic, rugged and beautiful for centuries. As Sir Walter Scott sold a version of romanticism, so too do many craft workers, musicians and artists working across the

Highlands and Islands today. Immediately recognisable in album covers, websites, social media and even in form and function. Those that think that capitalism and marketing are, and should always be, distinct from all things artistic are simply failing to recognise the interconnection, and complexities of long-established narratives. How can we separate the history of the Highland clearances from the Gaelic revitalisation and festivalisation across the Highlands and Islands? Indeed, the film lyricist and producer Arthur Freed, famous for his 1954 film *Brigadoon* described as a 'low-cultural travesty of Scottishness' was famously quoted as saying that the film had to be filmed in a California MGM film set because, 'I went to Scotland, but I could find nothing that looked like Scotland' (Goldie, 2006). The sense of Highland landscape and mythological authenticity that Freed was searching for was no doubt fictional in imagination and imagery, yet was nominated for three Academy Awards and won a 1955 Golden Globe (despite quite a variable critical reception). The sense of place and historicism of the Scottish Highlands and Islands is powerful and has had real power for mythologising film studios, romantic nationalists and many other artists besides. The cultural capital forged in folklore, romanticism and visually through images of mountains, glens and beautiful Scottish scenery is part of a continuum that stretches back to the Enlightenment coffee houses. Much of this cultural and social history is well documented elsewhere, for instance histories have been written and re-written (Devine, 1999, 2018; Hunter, 2011; Pittock, 2014; Tindley, 2021) the folklore, anthropology and cultural histories of the Highlands (Campbell, 1900; Macdonald, 1997; McNeil, 2007; Newton, 2009) and of course, the musical tradition (Alburger, 1983; Beech, 2007; Dickson, 2006, 2009; Gillies, 2005; Gore, 2005; Lamb, 2013; McKean, 1998; McKerrell, 2016; McKerrell and West, 2018; West, 2012;).¹ This chapter does not repeat these narratives, but deals with the socio-political context of the Highlands and Islands today, as well as how this has

1 These references are by no means complete but offer a starting point for those that may wish to explore the social, cultural and mythological histories of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. There are many roads into these narratives and the references presented here are a small representative selection.

been defined, and how the historical context emerges in today's musical creative economy.

To understand the Highlands and Islands today, one needs to understand *how* rural it is, and *how* strong or weak the economy is in relation to the rest of Scotland, the UK and other rural parts of Europe. Scotland is in fact mostly rural; Highland Council itself, contains about 11 per cent of the total land area of the UK (*circa* one third of Scottish land area). Rural Scotland (which is much larger and includes remote rural and accessible rural parts of the Borders and the north east, as well as Dumfries and Galloway, contains approximately 17 per cent of the Scottish population and 98 per cent of the land mass.² Rurality brings with it many benefits and challenges. Many of the wider issues for people and cultural organisations in rural areas are the same as for the general population: distances travelled for transport, broadband, depopulation, access to services, housing and healthcare have all greater friction and demands than where populations are most densely situated near the cities. Many of these broader socio-economic challenges emerged in the interviews for this book, and affect music festivals, touring and music education in different ways.

In particular, depopulation is a significant concern that emerges throughout this book, and the needs and solutions for young people in relation to music and the arts, that very often shows up in interviews in the core concerns of housing, transport and employment. As the leader of Highland Council, Raymond Bremner says, this challenge of depopulation is being driven by, 'the lack of sustainable employment, the lack of services provision, and the lack of affordable and available housing' (Bremner in Romei and Jopson, 2025). This is a widely held view with a great deal of truth behind it, but, as I intend to show in this book, if policy makers can better understand the creative sector and micro-enterprises then there are many dimensions of the Highlands and Islands where there can be a bright future ahead, that can help to combat depopulation.

Rural and island Scotland represents around about a quarter of Scotland's economy, and has always had lower unemployment (The

2 See Scottish Government figures <https://www.gov.scot/publications/rural-scotland-key-facts-2021/pages/2/>

National Council of Rural Advisers, 2018). However, one of the key concerns that led to the research for this book was that much of the creative industries policy and academic literature tends to rely upon large-scale businesses, and neglects micro-enterprises, or sole traders, where almost all of the musical economy sits, and almost wholly in rural and island Scotland. Taken together, there are thousands of musical micro-enterprises working across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and when considered with arts and crafts, this is a sector of the Scottish economy and society that is not well understood by policy makers, or well represented in the media. This is partly because individual musicians, tutors, instrument makers, festival organisers, composers, village hall volunteers, sound and lighting technicians, workshop leaders and administrators work away in the background, often unacknowledged and unseen by those who do not engage with their live events, teaching, festivals, venues or performances. Importantly also, much of the musical creative economy is only part-time, and the lines between amateur and professional are indistinct. Many of those working in the musical creative economy make only part of their annual livelihoods from festivals, gigs, teaching, retail or charitable work. Many people I spoke to had two or several jobs.

In understanding the context of rural and island Scotland today, it is useful to examine the broad socio-economic and demographic position of the Highlands and Islands *vis-à-vis* Scotland, the UK and more broadly, Europe. Taking my lead here from Lang and Fink's (2019) study of social entrepreneurship in rural areas, we can see in Table 2.1 some of the structural characteristics of the Highlands and Islands (adapted from format outlined in Lang and Fink, 2019). I have used various sources including the UK and Scottish census data, the Office for National Statistics in the UK, amongst others. Figures should be regarded as indicators rather than exact comparisons given that the data sources are the most recent but range across several years of census, demographic and economic indicators in the 2020s. In relation to defining the Highlands and Islands, for the data specified here I have worked with a close approximation of the Highlands and Islands. This includes aggregated data from the Highland, Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Western Isles), Orkney Isles, Shetland Isles and Argyll and Bute council areas. In this I have taken

my lead from the aggregation of regions on the Public Contracts Scotland.³ There are different ways to aggregate, and various statistical issues that arise, but Table 2.1 is meant to give a demographic and economic context to the Highlands and Islands within the Scottish, UK and EU-27 areas. In this way it is a helpful starting point for more specific socio-economic and creative industries analysis.

Measure	Highlands and Islands	Scotland	UK	EU-27
Gross domestic product*	£11.3 (billion combined)	£187.3 (billion)	£570.7 (billion)	€15.8 (trillion)
GDP per capita	£31,473 (average)	£34,229	£33,271	€31,090
Total population†	392,500	5.4 million	67 million	449 million
Population 0–14	14.8%	15.3%	17.5%	14.9%
Working age population	60.34%	64.6%	62.9%	63.8%
Population 65+	24.84%	20.1%	18%	21.3%
Population density	13.62 per km ²	70 per km ²	276 per km ²	109 per km ²
Employment Rate	79%	72.9%	74.4%	75.3%
Unemployment	2.38%	4.9%	4.4%	6%

* GDP estimates for each Scottish Local Authority. Data from the Office for National Statistics, and includes regional GVA + VAT estimates amended for inflation: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/datasets/regionalgrossdomesticproductlocalauthorities> [date accessed: 29/07/24].

† Scottish demographic figures for each council area. Data from the Scottish Census publications 2022: <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/2022-reports/scotlands-census-2022-rounded-population-estimates/> [date accessed: 29/07/24].

Table 2.1 Key socio-economic indicators for the Highlands and Islands.

3 <https://www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk/Maps/LocalAuthorityRegions.aspx> [date accessed: July 2024].

Table 2.1 demonstrates some of the underlying structural socio-economic issues in the Highlands and Islands, taking the 'Highlands and Islands' in this case to mean the combined five local authorities. In some senses, there are real problems indicated by the ageing of the population in the Highlands and Islands. The region has a 'greyer' population than Scotland, the UK or the EU-27, with the highest proportion of 65+ age population. The propensity for some people to retire to rural areas of Scotland, or to move later in life to more rural areas may explain this, or it may be health related. However economically, the Highlands and Islands are in better shape than Scotland or the UK, with roughly half of the unemployment rate for working age people than Scotland, and less than half of the EU-27. The per capita GDP figures, also show a reasonable picture, and this is surprising given that the Highlands and Islands contributes only around 6 per cent of Scotland's total GDP wealth. What is even more striking however is that with only 7 per cent of Scotland's population, the region has roughly 20 times lower population density than the UK as a whole. It is a sparsely populated region in Scottish, UK or European terms. Challenges from depopulation, a greying population, and a lower number of children are at the heart of the issues facing rural issues – consequences or causal factors in the problems for families in securing housing, health services and employment in parts of rural and island Scotland. The region also has a high proportion of those employed in the public sector compared to Scotland nationally (23.3 per cent). Population density is very low compared to urban areas, which is a core and defining aspect of rural creative industries around the world. So much of creative industries theorisation and thinking has depended upon the original Floridian ideas of proximity – clustering creative industries and people near each other will produce a multiplier effect on innovation and hence positive benefits for the economy – that thinking through rural creative economies requires fundamentally a different intellectual foundation. Part of Florida's original argument was that cities themselves were more likely to provide an inclusive and diverse social space than smaller towns or rural areas (Florida, 2003). That inclusivity and diversity was important to attracting artists and a 'creative class' to prosper, live and work in cities where creativity was increasingly essential to the changing economy.

It is now a quarter century since Richard Florida was writing his book and thinking about the long-term changes to cities and the economy. Since the turn of the century, there has been a huge shift in online working, which accelerated during and after the pandemic. Not only has hybrid or remote working become something ubiquitous, it has also changed social interactions. There are examples of this in this book in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, where music teachers who were traditionally confined to the local area or region for pupils now teach people online on a weekly basis, and make a reasonable living doing so. The performance rights and use of digital payments have made rural creative careers more possible and in some cases, lucrative. Urban flight has not really taken a grip in Scotland in the way that it did post-pandemic in countries such as the US: during 2020-1 in the US, rural population gain exceeded urban population gain for the first time in 50 years (Johnson, 2023). Whether that is a longer-term trend remains to be seen, however many countries saw people moving during the pandemic to rural areas. What is critical for those working in creative occupations with substantial digital and online presence, is both their connectivity, and also as we see in this research, their connection to rural place. Rural place becomes not only something attractive to people seeking a lovely environment in which to work, but it also emerges in this research as a source domain of capital; of human, cultural and through musical work, economic capital. What is striking therefore is that today, globalisation and the digitalisation of musical communities of practice have enabled the use of rural place itself as a convertible (or 'fungible' as the economists have it) source of capital which can function to support the creative economy in rural areas. Therefore, digitalisation and globalisation at the local and regional scale are making rural creative occupations more possible and sustainable.

Is it therefore possible now that the proximity effects so long discussed in relation to cities and urban environments have a counterpart in rural place as a means of supporting and growing regional economies and individual sustainable livelihoods? The potential for solving the huge problems of depopulation in many rural areas does exist and could be properly supported in government policy at national and local levels, and in many dimensions of housing,

tax, and business support as demonstrated here in the particular case study of the Highlands and Islands.

DEFINING ‘RURAL’ SCOTLAND

Definitions of rural Scotland are not commonly accepted, and have varied across time and industries or disciplines. Most of the fieldwork for this book was conducted by interviews with people living and working in the local authority regions: Highland, Na h-Eileanan Siar, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Argyll and Bute local authorities. When referring to the Highlands and Islands in this book, I am therefore generally implying this combined, five-local authority area, unless otherwise specified.

The Scottish Government has a standard classification of urban and rural definitions, that rests upon population size and drive time. This is done via either a 3-fold, 6-fold or 8-fold definitional basis – with increasingly smaller and refined units of distinctions between urban to rural and remoteness. At its simplest level this categorises Scotland into three areas (see Table 2.2).

Classification	Definition
1 – Rest of Scotland	Settlements of 3,000 or more people.
2 – Accessible rural	Settlements of less than 3,000 people and within 30 minutes drive of a settlement of 10,000 or more.
3 – Remote rural	Settlements of less than 3,000 people and with a drive time of over 30 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more.

Table 2.2 RESAS Classification model (RESAS, The Scottish Government, 2018).

Statisticians go a lot further than this and further divide up places by other factors as well. Definitions are explained in the Appendix of the Scottish Government’s 2018 ‘Understanding the rural Scottish economy: research paper’ (Kleinert *et al.*, 2018), but vary according

to many authors by population, remoteness, broadband connectivity, demographics, population density and access to services amongst other factors. There are several Scottish Government approaches to defining rural Scotland, but in this book I will stick with the five-local authority regions defined above, but when appropriate I may refer to the three-part definition above, or the four-level definition which is much more comprehensive produced by the Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services (RESAS) unit of The Scottish Government in 2018. The vast majority of the interviews for this research were conducted with people living and working in the 'islands and remote', or 'mainly rural' classifications by RESAS. Taking simplistic definitions of rurality in Scotland can mean that there are major anomalies – for example that Inverness or Stirling can be included in local authorities that are largely rural in nature. The RESAS service therefore produced a combined index of rurality for the local authorities. They classified all Scottish local authorities in the following level of rurality with four main categories, shown in Figure 2.1.

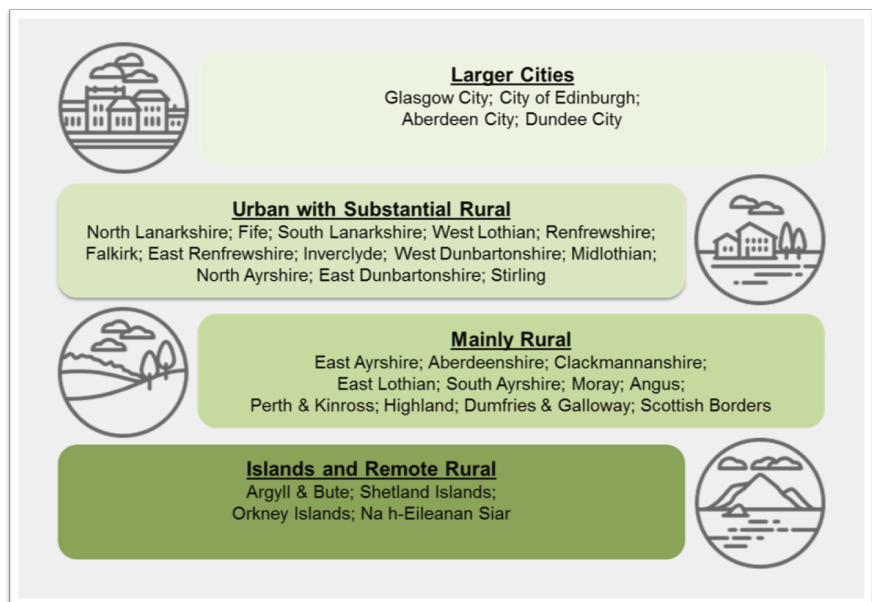


Figure 2.1 RESAS 4-level classification of Scottish Local Authorities by combined rurality (RESAS, The Scottish Government, 2018).

This can then be seen on their visual mapping of the authorities which provides a fairly comprehensive view of the four-level combined definition of Scottish rurality in Figure 2.2, which supports my view of the five-local authority definition used within this book.

In the Scottish Government's 2018 report, entitled, 'Understanding the Scottish rural economy: research paper', they argue that the largest sectors of the rural (and urban) economy in Scotland are 'public administration' and 'distribution, wholesale and retail' by GVA. Other key sectors in the Scottish rural economy include 'real estate', 'construction' and 'agriculture, fisheries and forestry' (Kleinert *et al.*, 2018, p. 3). One of the issues uncovered in this research was the lack of visibility of both creative musical occupations, and creative musical industries. In their book, *Culture is Bad for You*, Brook, O'Brien and Taylor discuss the inequalities that exist in the creative workforce. We now know with robust data that the national picture for the arts, and for musical workforces is very unequal, both in terms of ethnicity, socio-economic class and gender. We know also that music itself as a creative sector is amongst the most male-dominated occupations in the UK, if data from the The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) holds true in Scotland also: only 28 per cent of the total workforce of musicians in England were female in 2021 (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2024, p. 9). In the Highlands and Islands, we do not have accurate data of the occupations in the creative and cultural industries, but have some analysis of the outcomes as forms of creative or cultural industry or as a sector. In many ways, micro-enterprises, or sole traders are statistically invisible. Not only because of the way in which national level economic indicators are gathered and focused, but also because they have very little political or lobbying power. Some trade organisations do exist to speak and lobby on behalf of musical sole traders or micro-enterprises, but they are quiet in the national conversation where elite artists tend to receive far more media coverage. In the Highlands and Islands, there are one or two outstanding organisations, such as The Touring Network (that support programmers and small venue operators as well as

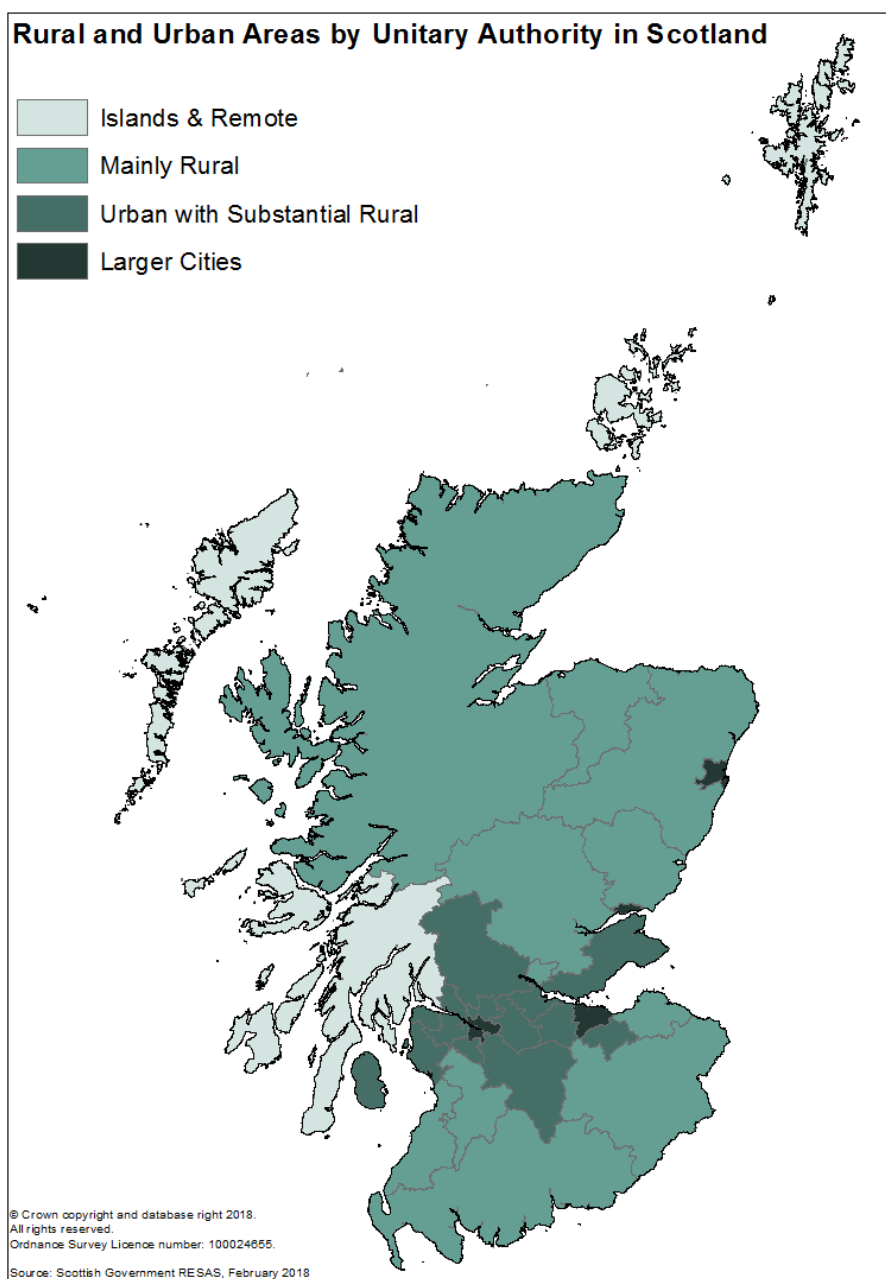


Figure 2.2 Rural and urban areas by Unitary Authority in Scotland (RESAS, The Scottish Government, 2018).

touring artists in rural Scotland), Fèisean nan Gàidheal (that operates a huge network of local Gaelic-medium teaching events across Scotland) and others such as Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland (TRACS – that exist to promote the traditional arts of music, storytelling, craft and is a membership organisation with a national voice). In understanding musical work and the creative economy in rural areas such as the Highlands and Islands, it is therefore important to hear from the people working and living in those areas who understand their networks, support and relationships to both national funder (vertically) as well as their local communities and other peers (horizontally).

CATEGORIES OF MUSICAL WORK AND MICRO-ENTERPRISES IN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

The consideration of music and musical micro-enterprises operating in the creative economy takes in a vast range of working professions and categories of worker. Clearly, most people associated with 'musical' work, tend to perform, work with musicians or teach music. However, performance-related occupations are just one dimension of the total musical workforce across a large region or country. As much of the grey literature demonstrates, the overwhelming majority of those working in the arts do so on a self-employed basis, or as part of small charities or micro-enterprises. For the purposes of this study, I define musical micro-enterprises as businesses related to music that have fewer than 10 employees. This follows similar research in this area by Galloway and Mochrie (2006) and Hill *et al.* (2016) which in turn, rests on the recommendation by the EU in 2003 that offered this accepted definition (EU Commission 2003/361/EC). One of the problems with creative economy or creative industries research in the past two decades, has been the lack of research on micro-enterprises, freelancers and sole traders, who in reality make up the majority of any meaningful definition of the 'creative economy' that would inclusively accept those that often work part-time or voluntarily across the creative sectors. Creative PEC suggest that 92 per cent of 'creative businesses are micro-businesses (fewer than

10 employees)'.⁴ They are therefore a core focus of this book, yet a statistically invisible workforce in national-level economic statistics. This is one reason why ethnographic and qualitative interview-based research is so important in this sector; to enable their voices to be heard.

Part of the reason for this focus on 'micro-enterprises', or very often in reality – sole traders – working in music or music-related areas, emerged from my initial conversations with HIE, musicians and in my previous fieldwork in preparation for this research. Much of this fieldwork and my own experience suggests that most music-related enterprises in the Highlands and Islands are either sole traders or employ a handful of people at most, and often on a part-time basis. Many of them are heavily committed to bringing, teaching, performing and making music in their rural communities and unflinchingly invest their own economic, social and cultural capital to achieve something valuable in their local area. Furthermore, it is a weakness of the academic literature that it has failed to properly engage with the motivations and social aspects of freelancers, micro-enterprises and sole traders across music, visual art, dance, crafts, and even the larger sectoral groupings in gaming, architecture and so on. This weakness has led to a narrative in the UK that tells a story about big, or international businesses, and therefore weakens the relevance of entrepreneurial, rural economy, creative and cultural economy, media and music research dealing with the 'creative economy'. Tackling this, in order to stimulate more sustainable working lives with better and more reliable rewards for those involved in music should be a key objective for those doing research in this area, and has largely gone unaddressed in musicological research, finding its home in media and communications and business departments, and sometimes in sociology or marketing and entrepreneurial approaches.

During my research I developed a taxonomy of musical micro-enterprises in my fieldwork that involves many working professions, very often part-time, very often operated at substantial personal

4 Statistic from Creative PEC, <https://pec.ac.uk/rd-innovation-and-clusters/> [date accessed: 20 September 2024].

costs and where a good financial year-end would be to break-even rather than lose money. Key working areas I have identified include those in Table 2.3.

Musical sector	Primary role (creative or cultural occupation)	Secondary role (support for creative or cultural events or occupations)	Tertiary or non-creative cultural industry (CCI) roles supplying or selling to CCIs
Musical performance	Musician (includes singer)	Sound and public address systems operators; lighting operators/suppliers; stage and festival infrastructure companies; festival organisers; venue operators/administrators; promoters; agents; policing; festival suppliers	Insurers; catering; sanitary distribution companies, e.g. festival toilets; equipment manufacturers
Music education	Music teachers; Summer School music tutors; online teachers; classroom music teachers; universities and colleges	Educational managers; school headteachers; music officers with local authorities or Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations	
Music retail	Musical instrument suppliers	Record shops; digital music retail platforms	Programming for commercial platforms/digital broadcast; landlords; online retailers and distributors
Musical media	Broadcasters (commercial and public); recording engineers; distribution companies	Musical legal services	Digital platform operators, administrators and programmers; coders

Musical sector	Primary role (creative or cultural occupation)	Secondary role (support for creative or cultural events or occupations)	Tertiary or non-creative cultural industry (CCI) roles supplying or selling to CCIs
Manufacturing	Luthiers (stringed instrument makers); instrument manufacturers, e.g. bagpipes, woodwind, percussion	Retailers; distributors	Timber merchants; manufacturers in other sectors

Table 2.3 Taxonomy of musical creative occupations in the Highlands and Islands.

I have divided the occupations into five key domains: musical performance, music education, music retail, musical media and manufacturing. All five of these domains operate at different scales across rural areas, with musical performance being the most publicly visible and others largely hidden from public view. Clearly, the benefits of locating together in cities for musicians, educators, recording studios, distributors, retailers etc., means that there is a close interchange between the different occupations, and a gestalt effect where new ideas and sounds are quickly spread throughout the community. In rural areas, this proximity does not operate except at major music festivals, where very often the same performers will find themselves meeting and performing with friends in rural and island festivals. One of the reason those festivals often tend to have such a loyal following is that people go back year on year to reconnect with friends and family members which can create a very strong social capital for rural music festivals, and a reliable source of income in the local community. In this context then, the very rurality of the place or remoteness of island can become a pull factor for audiences who are deeply committed to those festivals and places. The rural landscape and often deep heritage of rural and island communities and places can in and of itself become

the source of sustainability for musical micro-enterprises, for festivals and events.

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON MUSIC IN RURAL CREATIVE ECONOMY

As we have seen after the pandemic, musical festivals and events gradually returned or disappeared, but the story from many in the sector is of a smaller scale and diminished audiences, which has led to long-established festivals and venues closing, and people seeking new work. The pandemic has been much written about, and the impact on musical and artistic sectors well documented in the UK context (Spiro *et al.*, 2021; Touring Network, 2021; Walmsley *et al.*, 2022). I have also conducted research on the impact of the pandemic on the traditional arts in Scotland alongside my colleague Dr Jasmine Hornabrook (McKerrell and Hornabrook, 2023). The Covid-19 pandemic came at a time of increasing digitalisation, convergence and platformisation, but it has to be understood today, with some distance from the immediate and terrible consequences for human health and the very damaging effects on the musical and creative economy. Part of this realisation includes an understanding of our human impact on the climate. I was struck during the pandemic (as many of us were) by the accounting of both how the sudden break in our live face-to-face events drastically affected our collective mental health, but also to some extent, because it was a global, massive and sudden challenge, just how huge the pandemic became and the variability of the political and legislative responses around the world.

The pandemic for me, but also for many of us around the world, was one of the key events that made clear our presence and impact on the natural world: human society's effect on the globe is now so consequential that geologists now term this era the 'Anthropocene'. During the pandemic lockdown in 2020, scientists estimated that the total weight of all human-made earthly material had exceeded the weight of the entire planet's biome. Even middle-of-the-road suburban workers such as myself sat up and

cannot have failed to notice that the effects of human activity on the planet have exceeded various tipping points, and that the climate crisis was, if we thought about it rationally, probably an even bigger problem than the pandemic. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) estimates the total net financial impact of pandemic in 2020/21 in Scotland would amount to around £767 million (Accounts Commission, 2021, p. 7). And part of this reflection for scholars of culture therefore must include thinking about human culture and its relationship to the physical places we live in, and particularly for those of us interested in rural life, what role human cultural activity is playing in the transformation of rural environments and vice-versa, how changes in our rural places are transforming culture and music.

As Caitlin Vincent makes clear (2022), for her classical musicians in Australia, the pandemic had a seismic impact on musicians' employment; 70 per cent of her respondents noted they lost more than half their anticipated performance income due to cancellations. Her respondents were involved in a digital pivot entitled 'Melbourne Digital Concert Hall' which in the end, was very successful at counteracting the worst effects of the impact of 'loss of identity' and 'loss of community', and, to a lesser extent, useful in counteracting the 'loss of work', all variously understood under the concept of 'occupational deprivation' (Vincent, 2022). However, what the digital pivot did not do in that context, was provide any effective counterbalance to the 'loss of audience'. This pandemic initiative has now been funded by the federal Australian government and emerged as the 'Australian Digital Concert Hall', with a more national focus (2022). For her respondents, the digital performance model during the pandemic fell short of the live performance with real in-person experiences, her participants generally citing the lack of human-to-human real-time interaction in performance as both an aesthetic and social barrier to the expansion of born digital musical performance formats. The major report conducted by Ben Walmsley *et al.* (2022) also demonstrated very significantly that we need to better understand the role of freelancers in the cultural life of the UK as they constitute around 62 per cent of the creative workforce. They also make clear that much of the arts workforce

is at the point of burnout and that the deep seated inequalities that are structurally embedded within creative occupations shaped the pandemic outcomes with loss of jobs and work very unevenly distributed across the workforce (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022).

Much of this is true for the Highlands and Islands and was borne out in interviews. SEALL arts in Skye attempted to counter the devastating impact of the pandemic by actively putting on gigs digitally for audiences and musicians, and was one of those arts organisations that deliberately sought to engage in the widespread digital pivot seen across the arts globally as the former Director Marie Lewis suggests:

‘My main focus really [during the pandemic] was to provide work for local musicians whose world had fallen off a cliff, and also with what had happened with the care home on Skye, with a third of the residents dying. It felt pretty traumatic at the time, overwhelming, so we decided to get some wellbeing funds from the Scottish Government, and it was successful and so we did 32 gigs online on Zoom in two months. It was amazing!’ (Marie Lewis, fieldwork interview, 2020).

Many local arts organisations made hugely beneficial interventions such as this, but many also ceased to exist when live performances became impossible. Perhaps the most devastating cultural effects of the pandemic (as opposed to the very real human suffering) was on educational pipelines. My own research into Scottish traditional arts demonstrated that:

‘There has been a very uneven impact from Covid-19 on children and adult learners, with adult learners finding the digital pivot during the pandemic much easier than young people. Consequently, there is a strong feeling across the sector that the recruitment and retention of children to Scottish traditional arts has been more severely affected than anything else during the pandemic. This, combined with the ageing profile more broadly, makes recruitment and retention of children and young people to Scottish traditional arts the top priority

for pandemic recovery across the country.’ (McKerrell and Hornabrook, 2023, p. 3).

There were devastating losses of income forcing many people to look for new forms of work and for some, to leave the cultural sector altogether. The digital pivot of the pandemic was for many people transformative, changing their relationship to their musical learning forever, and for some unattractive and ineffective. Many people reported that they missed the social real-world connection to others which is a core part of musical performance and festivals. For musicians, the inequalities that pre-existed the pandemic were reproduced, with those well networked and connected able to weather the financial turbulence of the pandemic and to also construct very quickly born-digital events and workshops online which in some cases have remained. For rural areas therefore there are several longer-term effects that accelerated or emerged from the pandemic that will need research in order to better understand their impact in the coming years. Urban flight (see p.43) has the potential to counteract rural depopulation as people find housing more affordable and are attracted to rural and island lifestyles, but it has not had a substantial impact in Scotland yet. The massive increase in older people in the coming decades will have a profound effect on audiences and service provision in rural areas. Many of these older people were quick to take to online concerts, classes and socialising during the pandemic, and if properly organised, these can form part of a useful strategy for local arts organisations and music educators. Similarly, many of the ‘silver audience’ have meaningful amounts of disposable income and can form part of the rural creative and cultural sector’s core strategy for audiences. Considering simple things such as when gigs or events are put on (daytime driving often preferred for older audiences) to the accessibility of venues will become increasingly important in future years. For music media, digitalisation is a standard now, the age of cassette, CD or even LP has passed, and this can mean that rural locations become more attractive for wholly digital businesses such as digital distribution or music library services. Much of this depends on improved broadband connectivity.

LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND MUSICAL IDENTITIES IN RURAL AND ISLAND SCOTLAND

In many rural and island communities around the world, there are minority language and cultural identities that are deeply connected to the geographies and histories of areas, often distant from the centres of power. Scotland is no exception, English is spoken throughout the Highlands and Islands, but the region has an indigenous past rooted in the Gaelic language and culture. Like many musics, the relationships between music and language are complex, and often very powerful, as it is for Gaelic in Scotland. Although the principal language of the region was Gaelic right through to the early twentieth century, many factors led to a decline in usage of Gaelic (see for instance Millar, 2020; McLeod, 2022). Gaelic remains, and there has been a slight increase in the number of those who can speak the language – the 2022 census showed that around 2.5 per cent of people in Scotland had some skills in Gaelic, which is an increase from 2011. In Na h-Eileanan Siar, the Western Isles, the majority of people living there still have Gaelic (57.2 per cent), which dwarfs the number of speakers in any other council area (The Scottish Government, 2024). The census also reveals some interesting aspects of changing Scotland, in particular there has been a significant rise in the number of people from an ethnic minority background, up to 12.9 per cent of the population and 2022 was also the first census where the number of non-religious Scots outnumbered those with a religion.

In the Hebrides, the geography of island life combined with Gaelic as the primary ethno-linguistic culture are both critical to the planning, funding and understanding of events, festivals, transmission and music-making. Indeed, across a range of venues and events in this study, the authenticity of the Gaelic culture emerged as an important driver of cultural capital, and consequently, of economic sustainability. That is to say, that venues and festivals when making programming decisions on Hebridean Islands, and in some cases elsewhere where there is a rich indigenous culture of Gaelic, actively consider the authenticity of acts in thinking about whether or not they will book them, and how this will shape their public relations.

The cultural capital that is generated by the authenticity of Gaelic indigeneity in the Hebrides has a real financial impact on businesses and charities in those island communities. It, alongside the natural beauty of the landscape, heritage, whisky and outdoor activities drive tourism in particular, and has a significant impact on the creative economy in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Therefore, part of this book is intended to better understand how that sense of Gaelic and Highland cultural authenticity can be collectively harnessed for a more sustainable creative economy.

But we don't always value these cultures at home, and in many instances the biggest Gaelic cultural acts or Hebridean music bands such as *Peat and Diesel* and *Niteworks*, often find a more enthusiastic reception for their work in Europe and America. This has long been a feature of Scottish traditional music, and is shaped by many factors including powerful cultural influences such as the long-standing Anglicisation of professions and the Scottish educational system, and also the Scottish 'cultural cringe'; somewhat lessened since the turn of the millennium, but still there and powerfully visible in the embarrassment and ignorance of mainstream Scottish media in rural and Gaelic indigenous traditions. Venues such as An Lanntair in the Isle of Lewis, festivals such as the international HebCelt festival, Orkney and Shetland Folk Festivals and many musical organisations based on islands such as SEALL in Skye, and Ceòlas in South Uist recognise that they are both crucial for the talent pipeline in educating islanders about their own culture, and also that they need authenticity in their performances to be able to sustain their activities and cultural capital in their local island communities. As Jamie MacDonald from Tiree suggests, the Feis as a week-long and culturally rich event is often a high point in the year for island communities that can bring with it a welcome influx of visitors: 'Everyone would acknowledge, having the opportunity to learn from someone different for a week . . . I always really looked forward to the Feis and finding out who was going to come and teach fiddle and get a week with them. Some people book their holidays around the Feis dates as well' (Jamie MacDonald, Tiree, January 2022).

Ceòlas is essentially a cultural charity that exists in the isle of South Uist in the Outer Hebrides, that seeks to, 'celebrate, promote

and nurture traditional music, language, culture and heritage, collaborating with local, national and international communities who have shared interests'.⁵ The organisation regularly runs a major international music festival, a summer school, Gaelic classes for teacher training, and community classes throughout the year. Many Gaelic learners, particularly those that have moved to the island, often progress with the language and linguistic skills and hit a plateau fairly quickly. Ceòlas have recognised this and provide continuous classes for Gaelic learners, primarily those that have moved permanently to the Hebrides and are seeking to learn and integrate into the local culture. Cnoc Soilleir, the building was finally begun in 2020 and was completed and opened after some pandemic delays in 2022.

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF THE RURAL CREATIVE ECONOMY

Like a lot of people undertaking academic research into the creative economy, I have come from a discipline within it and spread outwards and examined concepts and arguments from across many epistemological traditions. My approach is rooted in my own scholarship of ethnography, but I have enthusiastically embraced the more empirical dimensions of cultural policy studies and the sociology of the arts broadly defined. Similarly, I have also borrowed from media studies where the text itself has pride of place. The long tradition of rural sociology has emerged as important and influential on many other traditions, not least because of the quality of the work that has been done but also the important notions of rural imaginaries and socially inclusive forms of rural futures that envisage a 'socially sustainable and resilient [countryside] . . . as a shared responsibility between citizens and state' (Shucksmith, 2018, sect. 5.1). With the exception of practice-based research and scholarship, there are now substantial issues for those working in single disciplinary approaches to creative traditions that are making narrow views of music, visual art, craft, dance, architecture, increasingly obsolete because they

5 See <https://www.ceolas.co.uk/about/> [date accessed: 26 May 2022].

do not recognise the ongoing convergence of media and of technology that has made artistic traditions more porous as time goes on. Similarly however, with the wider academic disciplines such as media, cultural policy studies, anthropologies and sociologies of the arts, the impact of digitalisation, convergence, globalisation and platformisation is making it hard to maintain canonical traditions of scholarship. These epistemological issues are also complicated by ongoing urbanisation and the transformations taking place in rural communities that have higher numbers of older people, and continually improving access to digital tools, platforms and services.

As Geoffrey Hobbis *et al.* recently observed, it is high time that media studies began to seriously engage with rural media and social life (Hobbis, Esteve-Del-Valle and Gabdulhakov, 2023). Not only because digitalisation has collapsed many of the historical realities of real and social distance in space and time, but also because of the unexamined metropolitan assumptions that permeate media studies. As Christopher Ali has pointed out, “we don’t know” what it means “to be rural” in the digital age’ (Ali [2018] in Hobbis, Esteve-Del-Valle and Gabdulhakov, 2023). Music studies (broadly defined) has rarely engaged in any specifically ‘rural’ framing for scholarship. Indeed, why would it if the primary object of study are the musical materials itself? Ethnomusicology, as the one sub-discipline of music studies that is defined by its ethnographic approach rather than the genre of music, has engaged often with both urban and rural contexts for music-making, and over decades, can of course boast many ethnographic accounts of deeply rural musical and social experiences (I am thinking here of classic ethnographic studies such as Alexandru, 1980; Berliner, 1978; Cooley, 2005). But what is interesting (and tangibly observable) however, is that ethnomusicology, as with other ethnographically-based disciplines, has tended to shift away from ethnic and geographically focused ethnographies of music and social life, towards more critically engaged, often geographically diverse studies of musical communities, identities and pivotal cultural movements in the past two decades (see for instance books such as Dave, 2019; Garcia, 2017; Morcom, 2013). In this, the tendency has been a movement towards considering more urban and popular studies of contemporary issues in heavily mediatised and transnational

musics, that has tended to neglect any theorisation of specifically 'rural' issues or problems. This shift in focus is welcome because it brings with it an acknowledgement of the previous inequalities of perspective and scholarship which are seeded throughout all epistemological traditions.

My answer to these dissolving boundaries and the rapid social change emerging from digitalisation, platformisation, globalisation and convergence, is to concentrate on what people say themselves. That is why the ethnographic (the qualitative for the social scientists) approach is so powerful: it does not depend on the ongoing tensions between the academic canon and periphery; it does not depend upon one author's inevitably impoverished scholarly positioning and it does not depend upon the ideological or political fashions of the moment. Speaking with people and listening to what they say is one of the most powerful methods of gathering primary data for real world analysis. To be sure it is not generalisable, and cannot give the sociological view of underlying statistical trends or emerging change, but the words of those people whom we interview and observe provides a platform for analytical truth in a time of increasingly contested narratives in every dimension of our lives.

Studies of the rural creative economy have been emerging and are hugely important, particularly in advanced economies such as the UK and in Europe, where state retreat, climate change, an ageing population and rural employment and policy changes are combining to create the conditions for the fastest social and economic change in rural areas that we have witnessed since the nineteenth century (see for instance Bennett *et al.*, 2020; Ballico, 2021; Collins, Mahon and Murtagh, 2018; Duxbury, 2021; Forsyth, 2014; Gibson and Connell, 2013; Merrell *et al.*, Munro, 2016; 2021; White, 2010). One of the key components of these studies and much of the recent work on creativity in rural areas, is that place matters. The literature supports the notion that there is a real relationship between rural places, cultural work and the sustainability of the creative economy. I would argue that this is not the same in urban areas: the particular economic conditions in cities matter, their position and their affective dimensions too, but they do not have such a direct impact on the practice and working lives of those working in rural creative

occupations who are bound by place and geography more than communities of practice which tend to dominate scenes in cities and towns. That is why it is important to understand the relationships of culture, history, economics and people in rural studies of creativity because it has a more direct and immediate impact on people's ability to earn a living, maintain healthy communities and relationships in rural communities. Rurality, and the landscape itself has a direct impact on the marketing and sustainability of creative livelihoods, more than in urban contexts. Often (but not always) place matters more than practice in rural areas.

CHAPTER 3

Music and place in the rural creative economy

Understanding how music works in rural areas, and what people making music means in rural communities, is to acknowledge the cliché that musical communities bind people together, not only through a shared interest in musical identities, but also through people's intense connections to cultural places.¹ Why otherwise would promoters and local enthusiasts around the world offer their labour for free, facilitate and actively help musicians in their genre to perform online gigs and host them in their small community venues and sometimes, even their own homes? What I argue in this book is that one of the results of the continuing globalisation and digitalisation of society is a return to the local, place-based communities, not

1 'The study of people making music' is a useful shorthand definition of ethnomusicology from Jeff Todd Titon – it manages to encapsulate some of the key trajectories in scholarship of the anthropological study of how, when, where and why people make music, and what that can tell us about culture and society (Titon, 2015, p. 183). But it is also a reaction against the long histories of studying music-as-object, based on various threads of positivism largely growing from the nineteenth into the early twentieth century. Despite engaging in a career that has moved at times very far away from an anthropology of music, and come back for significant 'visits', I still think that any useful study of music in relation to culture and society, and even economics, has to acknowledge that epistemological history, and hit the starting line with a much richer understanding of music and musical sounds that are (very neatly) captured in Titon's 2015 (1989) definition.

simply as an oppositional reaction to the ever growing internationalisation of the economy, work and cultural events, but in more subtle ways, as identity-work, in forms of place-centred social belonging and the relations between culture and the economy. The emergence of digital platformisation of the music industry, and the emergence of streaming as the new global form of revenue for commercial musics, has radically altered the music industry, and audiences' interaction with music (DCMS, The UK Government, 2021; Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2023, 2024; Prey, 2018). This move towards streaming and platformisation is understood fundamentally as the logical outcome of the profit motive in capitalism, and a consequence of the shift in the production of capital from labour to data (for a useful summary of this transformation see Srnicek, 2017). As it happens, almost all of the musical taste-based algorithms used by Spotify, Apple and all the big platform companies have their genesis in the academic research in the early 1990s that sought a practical way to deal with email inbox overload. The movement therefore towards more highly localised place-based cultural production that connects people to events associated with villages, glens, islands or regions can also in some ways be understood as a reaction against the data profusion in our lives. So much information is available that place-based communities on- and off-line offer a sensible way to dip into the stream by focusing our attention on hyper-local neighbourhoods, villages, towns or regions.

My fieldwork demonstrates that entrepreneurial actors now understand that the intangible cultural values and deep heritage of people and place can now act as a mechanism that facilitates the transference of capital between social, economic and cultural domains, thereby facilitating a more sustainable rural creative economy. This chapter examines the relationship between these local, rural and island musical cultures, entrepreneurialism and place in rural creative economy, bringing forward evidence from elsewhere in the world, as well as the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and as such, attempts to contribute towards the understanding of how musical places can not only help to drive rural creative economies, but also underpin people's sense of belonging to place and to different musics. Place and place-based expression are critical for a range of

creative micro-enterprises in rural areas because it shapes both the performance (or product) and our desire to participate and hence willingness to pay. As Patrick Collins *et al.* suggest in relation to Irish Aran jumpers, Donegal Tweed, and West Clare traditional music, 'place is . . . ingrained in the product' (Collins, Mahon and Murtagh, 2018).

In this book, I understand 'place' as a concept that describes the social and cultural relationships and resources that form in a particular physical landscape or region. This notion of place draws upon the formation from both cultural studies and from enterprise and management studies and I emphasise the relational over the physical (Drake, 2003; Durie, Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2006; Hill, 2007; Stokes, 1994). That means that this conceptualisation of place affords an integrated analysis of both the offline and the online worlds, and how they relate to real people and their social and cultural worlds within a particular geographical location or region. It is important to this research that the digital or virtual worlds are integrated into any understanding of place, not only because of the huge acceleration of digital connections during the pandemic and since, but also because a proper understanding of the digital sphere and how it relates to rural areas is more important than ever in framing an understanding of how people make a living now, and into the future. There are businesses, sole traders and micro-enterprises right across the Highlands and Islands that have come to rely upon digital place-based marketing, and music and musicians are increasingly demonstrating that place-making and culture can produce economic, as well as social and cultural capital. Indeed, one of the key transitions we are witnessing in the ongoing digitalisation and globalisation of cultures throughout the world, is the continuing and ever-growing digital construction of places, online and through participatory events.² And particularly when it comes to visually arresting and beautiful rural landscapes,

2 Sometimes discussed in relation to the arts and entrepreneurialism, in the literature on 'glocalisation' which examines how local regions and places emerge in the ongoing globalisation and digitalisation of economic, social and cultural relations.

there are new income streams to be wrought from place-based online performance, tuition and marketing of musical services and products that rely on the natural and cultural capital of a region and that offer new-found ways to convert this to economic capital, often in ways not possible in urban and post-industrial areas. Think of the marketing of harp manufacturers who rely upon Celtic identities with rural place and heritage, or the ethnic minority languages around the world that often find more international attention through the digital reach of their musicians and singers most closely identified by ethnolinguistic markers and place-based costumes and landscapes. One only needs to visually examine the album covers from the traditional or folk musics of a region in order to see the deep co-dependency between the landscape and the music.³ But many other heritage traditions in craft, dance, visual arts and in some of the newer creative disciplines such as TV drama, gaming or role playing similarly rely upon rural concepts of place and its embedded histories (think of *Outlander*, or the games *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* or *A Highland Song*).

INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF MUSIC, ENTERPRISE AND RURAL PLACE

Running alongside the massive shift to online commerce, social media and platform capitalism has been the huge transition from music as a form of retail (selling musical objects such as CDs, and previously as cassettes, LPs and various forms of real-world objects) to the new digital economy where music is either streamed, broadcast or heard live at events and festivals. This has had huge

3 For more discussion of why I maintain a distinction between 'folk' music (as a commercial sub-genre of popular music) and 'traditional music', which I suggest should be understood as 'music that functions as a marker of identity for a particular cultural group and that has grown out of their oral tradition, or that has been composed using musical characteristics derived from oral tradition' (McKerrell, 2016), please see this discussion: <https://simonmckerrell.com/2014/06/02/98/>

consequences for musicians, for bands, for venues and all the associated categories of workers in the music industry, yet the platforms have also enabled the global emergence of local place-based musical communities on- and off-line. I would argue that this is effectively a *re-emergence* of the local and place-based musical cultures from essentially the era before mass production and retail of musical recordings through the twentieth century, and it brings with it the potential for new forms of entrepreneurialism and revenue for musicians and artists. This is not without irony; that the continuing massification of user data (including geolocation data that relates to locations) is driving even greater concentrations of wealth into the hands of fewer and fewer people, whilst simultaneously those platforms that make those global businesses possible (Amazon, Alphabet, Apple, Spotify, amongst others) allow place-based communities to construct their own musical narratives and events that celebrate and engage highly localised cultural traditions, songs and tunes.

In rural areas, this realisation often comes alongside significant concerns about depopulation, infrastructure, education and all the associated problems facing rural development in advanced economies. Quite often therefore, initiatives for the rural creative economy rely upon creativity to help alleviate some of those problems in rural and island communities. There are well documented case studies of how this has been successful in diverse regions such as Cape Breton (Brown and Geddes, 2007; Feintuch, 2004a), Tasmania (Verdich, 2010) and elsewhere that have often engaged a strategic plan for engaging creative tourism to support economic sustainability in the region (Richards, 2016, 2020). There is also growing evidence that these development initiatives involving creative trails, events and festivals can actively encourage musicians and creative workers into rural regions, kickstarting efforts to combat depopulation (see some case studies in McKerrell and Hornabrook, 2021). Many countries and regions are also mobilising their Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) for more sustainable creative careers, often involving traditional arts (music, dance, crafts and drama) that reflects the place-based heritage of the region or nation. For instance, the University of Iceland has been involved in

mapping their ancient sagas to the contemporary landscape, which is providing a foundation for creative businesses in west Iceland. This region is another that is moving from agricultural economy to a more creative tourism economy. In so doing, they have leant on visual art for the sagas and high-quality displays with narration for visitors in collaboration with the city council. They are now moving into providing more creative spaces for young people to support the growth of their cultural region. As deindustrialisation and fishing have struggled in west Iceland, culture has moved in as the new driving force for innovation and that economic transformation for sustainability (personal communication, Erna Kaaber and Anna Hildur Hildibrandsdóttir [Bifröst, Iceland]).

In the United States, the conversation about place-based innovation and cultural policy is quite different to Europe. Cultural funding is more distributed into a federated model (less centralised than the UK) and there is much greater diversity of source funding from not just the state but also private companies and individuals. There is a widely held view in the US academy that the USA '... does not have a cultural policy or that its government does not support the arts. On the contrary ... American local cultural policy is lively, connects the arts with place, and is animated by multiple, creative efforts' (Redaelli, 2023). Thinking about the deep centralisation also in the cultural policy and arts ecosystem of the UK (see Chapter 4 for fuller discussion), the sense that there could be great benefit to decentralising cultural policy and budgets for arts might enable greater integration with regional development plans and sustainability initiatives in rural parts of the UK. The other dimension is that in the US, philanthropy supports much arts programming in a way that is much less common in Europe and in the UK. Sometimes however, the specific development of regions and cities includes the arts in a way that is much less compartmentalised than in Scotland.

For instance, the Dallas Cultural Plan 2018 shows how artists were brought into administration and civic discussions. This arose from a feeling amongst stake holders that too much money had been invested into buildings and physical assets, and not enough into programming and people-based initiatives. Economic growth had stagnated and there was uneven access to arts across their different

neighbourhoods. In short – they were in the position that many rural regions find themselves in the UK and across Europe today. The response was to shift funding towards the people, communities and organisations and away from buildings, and to plan a much more creative and supportive access programme to the arts in a more equitable way that supported diversity but also the meeting spaces where art and public art could take place. There were many dimensions to this plan, but the place-based dimensions of this plan were very much embedded in the local region and city.⁴ There is much to learn from the US models, in terms particularly of how they have managed to integrate their cultural policy into regional and city-region planning. For rural regions, the potential for the sorts of ‘creative sociabilities’ that have been sought in Dallas could operate to alleviate the depopulation and economic growth issues if properly integrated and implemented in long-term regional strategies.

Elsewhere and around the developed world there are rural projects that focus on artistic and creative responses to contemporary problems to forge new solutions. Another of these, of particular interest for its islandness and intermediary cultural significance is the Transmalhar project in Portugal, situated in the Azores – one of the most peripheral islands in Europe in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. The geography of these islands is defined by the absorption through time of European and American influences into Portuguese culture. The nine islands have significant problems with depopulation and an excessive dependence on political power with lower levels of education. There are weak connections between cultural actors on the islands and in common with many island and rural communities – weak coordination has hampered the growth of creative and cultural industries. The project attempts to address literacy through artistic and community practices via place-based methodologies and coordinated networking with key cultural and creative actors. The AZORESLAB project also works with schools to improve the professionalisation in the sector. Drawing on the very rich and cosmopolitan cultural heritage of the Azores is helping to support creative tourism, music festivals and performance arts and the

4 See <https://dallasculture.org/about-us/dcp2018/>

emergence of a more robust cultural sector. The project aims for greater sustainability, and to improve communication between practitioners and policy makers, alongside much better cooperation between public and private organisations (see Frarioli and Duxbury, 2023) and personal communication, Isabel Albergaria (University of the Azores, Portugal).⁵

In Greece, there are many similar rural areas with problems of depopulation and ageing demographics. One such cultural project focused on a single village as a total project across culture, innovation, entrepreneurialism, and agriculture and tourism. The Vamvakou Revival project was supported by a private foundation, in response to a vision to bring life back to the village, which in common with many Greek villages, the majority of the residents had emigrated to Athens and other cities. By 2009, there were only nine people left in the village and the project foregrounded arts and culture as a means of revitalising the village wholesale. It was as much about creating the right conditions for the village to attract people to come back and live there as it was to stimulate jobs and an improved hyper-local (village) economy. Bringing cultural opportunities in the village through events programme means that they have encouraged revenues back to the project and created jobs and a better village economy in a virtuous circle. The project team initially focused on creating infrastructure by agreeing with the local authority to rebuild the local derelict village school into a cultural hub. They have taken advantage of the rich surrounding natural environment to deliver yoga, meditation sessions and cultural walks around the village to highlight the landmarks and history of the village. The second phase of their project was to create an annual programme for the village that includes multifaceted events with theatre, crafts, concerts, and in the summer, they host an annual Vamvakou festival. Project leaders collaborate strongly with NGOs and with larger-scale national cultural groups such as the Greek National Opera. The audience and participants were key for the project - initially a difficult dimension of the project but they began by mapping the village and surrounding region, and reached out to villages and towns

5 In relation to creative tourism and island communities see Baixinho *et al.*, 2020.

nearby to attract visitors. They also provided access through transportation to and from the village and free events. Five years later, and they have had more than 600 events and 25,000 participants with many collaborative events that are reinvigorating the village socially and economically (personal communication, Aristi Stathakopoulou [Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Greece]).

These projects all demonstrate the importance of place-based innovation in rural creative projects and also taking a well-rounded view of the contextual situation, involving multiple stakeholders to produce revitalisation effects in rural areas.

MUSIC AND PLACE-BASED INNOVATION IN CONTEMPORARY HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

The Highlands and Islands of Scotland come with big semiotic historical baggage. The cultural sociology is immense, if one considers how cultural meaning and artistic aesthetics have been shaped over the centuries in this small corner of Atlantic civilisation. Almost all of the culturally leaning scholarly work on the Highlands and Islands is historical and heritage-based research, but there have been some wonderful, more contemporary sociological contributions that help us to understand the contemporary position of how *culture* performs the place and reflects its people (Macdonald, 1997; Ó Giollagáin *et al.*, 2020; Scottish Human Rights Commission, 2024). From the political and linguistic boundaries that were initially mapped onto the topology of the region, to the unique cultural forms of *piobaireachd*, Ossianic poetry or to the economic and now global products of whisky, tartan, tweed and shellfish; mapping a relationship between the physical landscape, the cultural place(s) and the music of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland tends to lean into histories of complexity and emigration, leaving us somewhat short of contemporary data about place and its sociological and economic impact in the Highlands and Islands.

My fieldwork with people across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland reveals that social media, digital platforming and globalisation are simultaneously offering brand new methods that will

inevitably enhance rural areas and are already transforming the economic systems in local communities around the Highlands.

My fieldwork for this book was supported by The Touring Network.⁶ The Touring Network is a registered charity and also a company limited by guarantee that operates across the Highlands and Islands, that has in general, been a regularly funded organisation (RFO) from the national arts funder in Scotland – Creative Scotland. They are governed by a Memorandum of Association and the members all pay to be subscribers. The majority of the subscribers are in fact music or show promoters in rural and island parts of the Highlands and Islands. The mission for The Touring Network is to, ‘... inspire and enable those who deliver remarkable performances in rural and island communities in the Highlands and Islands – connecting people and transforming places’, and their principle aims and objectives are:

‘To ensure the cultural sector is fairly supported in the region; access to culture, regardless of where you live, demonstrates a just, fair society, without discrimination and invests into the wealth of cultural capital and community spaces across our region.

To support rural communities to regularly stage high quality live performances; having access to live performances on our doorstep, decreases audience travel to venues further away, contributes to the rural creative economy, offers social benefit and demonstrates the viability and importance of our community spaces.

To ensure audiences are inspired by attending live performances in rural communities; the civic role of arts in bringing people together for a collective live experience is vital in improving the wellbeing of our people and places¹ and instilling a sense of pride.

To ensure professional performers place rural communities at the heart of their tour plans; a place-centred approach to

6 See <https://thetouringnetwork.com/> Declaration – the author is and has been, a member for some years during the fieldwork for this book and beyond.

making or touring work continues to show better outcomes and increased resilience for performers and communities.

To ensure touring is sustainable and resilient; net-zero targets and rising costs means solutions are needed to balance resilience with carbon reduction.'

(The Touring Network, End of Year Accounts 2023-4, publicly available: <https://thetouringnetwork.com/about/>).

The network is both impressive and unusual for rural arts, in that it primarily exists to help build rural networks and exchange advice, best practice and to help the promotion of live performance in rural areas. They hold regular meet ups in the Highlands and Islands, they also provide one-to-one advice for their members, do online meetings and training sessions, and host several larger events with performers and promoters and funders in the Highlands and Islands to showcase work and provide space for members to meet and grow the network. During the course of the fieldwork, the Touring Network were invaluable to me in providing access to promoters working in rural areas, and to better understand how members, often working in small village halls, or in rural, regional or island contexts, make live performance work through the year(s). One of the key elements of the fieldwork that emerged was that doing promotion for rural music is quite different from being a promoter in a city or a big town. Part of that difference is to do with the role of the promoter in their community and the role of rural events in village halls, festivals and in regular gigs and teaching. For instance, on the Island of Tiree, every year they have sold out, their festival capacity of 2000 with the majority of the audience from Scotland but with many international visitors too.

On South Uist, like other island communities, programming and timing are critical. South Uist audiences will always turn out for pipers and piping, but more foreign or avant-garde performances of drama and music will sometimes struggle to get an audience, especially if there is no connection to the culture or people of the islands. Similarly, pragmatic arrangements around ferries and timetables can often be fundamental to islanders' participation at in-person events on the mainland, and are often the very issues

that are misunderstood by mainland cultural leaders and national charities.

'The people who decide that they're going to be very kind to the islands, and put something on in Skye or Lewis, and they don't bother to check whether there's a winter or a summer timetable. Now if for example something went on in Skye, and they'd put it on a week later, we could have gone out for the day and gone to it and come back. It's the cost of overnighting that's so horrendous. Nobody checks when the summer time table starts. So if it's summer timetable then I can go to Stornoway for the day and back, if it's not the summer timetable I can't. Same with Skye, if they book the day when there's a morning ferry out and an evening one back then we can get 3 or 4 hours in a meeting, great. But nobody thinks of these and then they wonder why you don't come.' (Mary Schmoller, fieldwork interview, 2020).

Therefore, one of the aspects of interviews that comes across strongly, again and again, is that networking and communication between rural promoters and mainland promoters is absolutely key.

Typical of many village halls, Resolis hall in the Black Isle, is a hall that has a national reputation for events in drama and music. For many years, they have operated on a break-even basis and built up a loyal following for their 120+ seater venue. Many community venues operate on this break-even basis, and rely entirely on local volunteers to set up and run the events. Today, Resolis Community Arts has been promoting for more than 15 years, and until fairly recently, benefited from a small annual grant from the Highland Council of £1500. It now operates by trading on their hard-earned reputation guaranteeing the artist(s) all 'the door' minus the hall fee and the nominal sound and lighting costs. The only other outlay is the cost of food; they always cook for the artists and sit down with them in the hall for a pre-performance meal. This has become an important tradition. They can no longer afford to pay for bed and breakfasts for performers and therefore rely on accommodating them in the homes of the committee members.

David Gilbert, who helps coordinate the gigs and brings volunteers together does it for the joy of it, and to share in a wonderful communal experience. Every promoter or volunteer I spoke to during the fieldwork emphasised the sense of *communitas* and joy that they feel from putting on events in their local community. This is not entirely ephemeral; it has a real influence on both the promoters, the artists and the audience. At Resolis, as with many other small halls, the social life with and between the artists, promoters and audiences is as much a part of the events as the actual performance. There is a real benefit in terms of bonding social capital from this, and although not accounted for in any budget line, this is at the heart of people's motivation to make rural music happen, as David explains:

'We had Martin Simpson, I liked what he did a lot and I thought he would work really well in the hall, I spoke to his agent, and eventually we sorted something out. I managed to speak to one or two other promoters that I knew well at the time, Duncan MacInnes on Skye with SEALL [and others], and we put a tour together. He played the hall and it was one of the most amazing nights, and he got a *fantastic* reception. He came off in tears, and I was in tears, it was that emotional. He went back to a small B&B in Cromarty just down the road. And his agent, the next morning emailed and said; "Martin tweeted last night, that he's just performed in Resolis, one of the finest gigs he's ever performed in his career". And I thought, this is just fantastic. It's so good to do, the audience and the performers love it! I mean why wouldn't you do it?'" (David Gilbert, fieldwork interview, 2020).

Many interviewees reported that the place-based nature of their artistry and music was crucial to their ability to their financial sustainability. One of the key observations from the fieldwork interviews was that the rural context affords a different and transferable form of cultural capital for musicians, artists, promoters and festivals. This is hugely important for the future of rural arts because it supports the idea that there are some special affordances for rural music-making that can actively support certain musical

careers better than in the city. As some musicians suggest, the landscape around them, whether mountainous, sea-based, pastoral or barren, can provide a visual and cultural context that their audience admire and often seek out. An artist's online profile can be enhanced via its rural connections, and this can have real-world impact on the sustainability of their career. This is not true for all artists but was particularly true for traditional musicians and folk musicians, whose material very often is connected to the landscape around them historically and through associations with people and place-based culture that goes back centuries. For instance, Gaelic culture has a particularly strong connection with song and instrumental music across the Highlands and Islands, in a way that contemporary rock music does not. That is not to say that a traditional Gaelic singer will make it in a rural setting, and the rock band will not, but it does mean that the rurality of the local landscape and cultural connections in the musical material can all be mobilised to promote and sell music online and in live performance somewhat more directly and easily than the rock band or the classical ensemble. This place-based connection is a key dimension of the rural creative economy and is understood analytically as a form of transfer of cultural capital to economic capital, through the affordances of rural imagery, culture and sound. This offers quite substantial potential for the future creative economy and sustainability for individual musicians, promoters, venues and micro-enterprises in the Highlands and Islands. For example, Hamish Napier, who is a pianist, flautist and composer based in Grantown makes this very explicit in his interview when he shows that his clear strategy of marketing his rural lifestyle and connection to the area has real-world economic benefits:

'I have someone who does my social media, to make sure my work goes out online at the best times, because musicians are famously hopeless at promoting themselves! That has become a hugely important thing for me, dare I say it, to find a brand. I had to find a way to say: I'm from the Highlands, I'm a tutor, I write music; I'm a folk musician; this is what I do, boldly and I've tried to find a way with the logo, the website where

everything points towards that. To make it *clear* to people that's what I do. It is thought through.

I put up pictures of me out building a poly-tunnel, out digging a tattie patch and people are interested in that, and are inspired by that. It's about getting closer to the land, closer to the landscape. And it does sound a bit contrived, but it is important to share my lifestyle, because that's actually where all the music, the inspiration comes from. Living remotely is not a problem, because in Glasgow I was remote as well. To reach your audience, you need to be doing performances in key venues around the Highlands, but you also need to get on the social media so that people are hearing about the things you're doing and everything that feeds into that. Being in the country gives you the inspiration, but also the *incentive* to promote yourself and keep on top of it, you're not in the city bumping into people, you've got to tell people what you're doing.' (Hamish Napier, fieldwork interview, 2020).

RURAL MUSIC PROGRAMMING IS MORE INCLUSIVE

One of the key concepts to emerge from the fieldwork in rural music-making was that rural music programming is more inclusive than urban, city-based music programming. The essence of this difference is that rural programmers who are planning and putting on festivals, or planning gigs for their community, usually live within that community, and mostly are very well known in their local community as the person that does the programming for the hall or festival. They therefore are more visibly connected to their neighbours who will be forming their audience than urban programmers, and similarly, have a sense of responsibility to put on gigs and events that bring people of all ages and tastes together. This can be tricky, to be able to programme for an intergenerational audience that is united by geographical place rather than by artistic taste or aesthetics makes a fundamental difference to the job of the rural promoter.

Roz Bell is the former Head of Live Performance for Eden Court

Theatre in Inverness. She oversaw programming for the various venues in the largest venue in the Highlands – which has the second biggest stage in Scotland. As such, Eden Court is a focal point for performance in the Highlands and Islands in Inverness and sees many different types of performance across the year, from comedians, to live music, to pantomime, musicals and the national classical companies such as the Scottish orchestras, ballet and opera, who all visit the theatre. As a large venue, Eden Court has the ability to put on bigger live performances, and the decision whether to host a touring show or live act is a complex one that involves both commercial decisions as well as judgement about the potential success of any particular show or genre for the audiences in the Highlands and Islands. Like all professionalised venues, more popular, commercially successful work helps to subsidise the theatre to put on less popular acts and genres. And like other large venues, commercial performances and conferencing also help to keep the theatre and the engagement work in the community running across the year. Cross-subsidy at large arts organisations is a fact of life, and an essential consideration in programming decisions. Programming at Eden Court is complex, but unlike large arts organisations in cities, programming involves calculations about the distances travelled for audiences spread across large rural regions.

‘We’re not just here for Inverness, the building is where the building is, in Inverness, we think we’re here for the Highlands, we’re there for everybody. Whenever there’s a show coming in for kids, our thought is, are there possible schools’ performances? And it’s very expensive for schools to hire buses to come and see us. In previous years we had a small fund which helped to subsidise some of the bus travel costs but that is not available anymore. We’re always thinking about what time shall we put that show on, all those conversations happen all the time. How does the timing of that performance help that section of the performance that are coming from Ullapool [from distances of tens of miles across the Highlands to travel to Inverness].’ (Roz Bell, fieldwork interview, September 2020).

Similarly, because of the position of Eden Court, like many programmers I spoke to, programming decisions must account for place-based audiences necessarily, rather than in cities where programming can be targeted at particularly communities-of-interest, specific genres or communities-of-practice. That means that many rural programmers cannot take risks on more experimental or avant-garde performances as it can be harder to find an audience where populations are much more highly dispersed and travel further with often a bigger financial commitment to attend a live performance, as Roz Bell explains:

‘There are certain things we can’t sell. I struggle to sell experimental theatre for example. There’s a lot of things I might go and see at the [Edinburgh] Fringe, but Eden Court couldn’t sell it. But then you’ve also got to consider audience development. Some contemporary dance; people just won’t come out for that one solo performer standing on the stage, however amazing and talented they are, certain [forms of] jazz won’t work. But then, certain types of jazz will sell, the old style for example. Even Scottish trad music doesn’t always sell, you’ll get small audiences, but maybe getting 40 or 50 people is a good audience for certain things and you just have to accept you’re not going to sell the thing out. But it’s also about what that audience experiences when they were in the building, did they have a good time? Did the artist have a good time? And if we don’t lose money then [in those contexts] I would consider that okay. But we are very mindful that our capacity to take risk is much reduced for various reasons including seating capacity and rural demographics albeit that Inverness itself is a city.

We’re not like the big urban venues, we don’t have a big pool of technical people which can also impact on programming, it’s very much an interwoven ecology.’ (Roz Bell, fieldwork interview, 2020).

GOVERNANCE AND MODELS FOR ENTERPRISE IN RURAL CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

In the US, the physical boundaries of the smallest local unit of governance are the county, founded upon the 'team-haul' principle, that is, '... the maximum distance a team of horses could pull a wagon to the county seat (typically located near the center [sic]) and return the same day' (Allen and Dillman, 1994, p. 30). In the Highlands and Islands, the smallest unit of political governance are the 32 local authorities of Scotland, whose boundaries were initially determined through the Local Government (Scotland) Act in 1994, and which came into effect on April Fools' Day 1996. The boundaries of these local authorities changed the old model of regions and districts in Scotland and the responsibilities for the boundaries of these areas now lies with a public body called Boundaries Scotland, which replaced the older Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland. There is not in Scotland therefore the same relationship as there is between the US rural county and the US state, and on up to the national federal government. In Scotland, local government has far fewer powers than a state in the United States. In the US, a state can pass its own laws, tax its citizens and enforce these in its own courts. These powers are established in the US constitution and model a much greater form of decentralisation than in the UK and Scotland. Local authorities across the Highlands and Islands have very limited powers and this has been eroded in the twenty-first century through greater centralisation to Edinburgh and consequently have very little authority to transform and improve their local towns, villages and countryside. The boundaries of the 'Highlands and Islands' therefore are complex; not only in terms of history but also in terms of politics and geography (see Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of the delineation of the Highlands and Islands for this book). This confusion has also been getting worse, and not better under the SNP government since 2007:

'In rural, town and city-region webinars, there were multiple references to the patchwork of boundaries that Scottish Governments have allowed to emerge within public bodies,

agencies and quangos. If there is to be a better and more coherent articulation of place policies between the Scottish Government and other orders of governments, communities and the private sector urgent ACTION (9) is required to ensure that: the boundaries of all of Scotland's agencies and quangos should re-realigned to coincide with those of Regional Economic Partnerships (that may also require some adjustment).' (MacLennan, 2021, p. 16).

Another key aspect of rural promoting and events planning is to understand at a national scale the regional agglomeration effects of large towns on their rural hinterland. Agglomeration effects are usually understood as the structural and economic advantages that accrue from locating creative industries closely together, especially in distinct fields. These clustering effects (agglomeration effects) are understood to be geographical and have led to a huge range of analysis of the UK's creative economy based around agglomeration of what are now known as 'creative clusters' across the UK (see Pratt, 2004). So for instance in the UK contexts, there are large agglomerations such as the digital games industry in and around Dundee, the pottery and crafts agglomerations in the West Midlands (Comunian and England, 2018), or advertising in Manchester for example, which form important strands in UK-wide creative economy policy for government.

I have therefore in this research, focused less on the exact geography of the Highlands and Islands, and more on a relational analysis of how people interact, communicate and make music together. After all, a festival in Beauly might involve people from across the UK and internationally, and many businesses in the Highlands export internationally. The growth of digital music instruction online that exploded during the pandemic also has increased the pace of digital globalisation of music tuition. This has had some very positive effects for rurally based musicians of high calibre who have been able to make a more sustainable living in the rural Highlands of Scotland with more reliable digital income from online teaching. These trends are set to accelerate during the next 10 years and are already in use in the music education for

	Financial Sustainability Index	Scale of audience	Digital/non-digital characteristics
State-subsidy models including fully subsidised to hybrid income	2	Often the default for arts organisations and also the least sustainable option for long-term viability. Audiences will be 10-100 or unknown in advance. Hybrid models offer excellent value for audiences who perhaps can benefit from subsidised events and workshops in rural areas that would be financially unsustainable with smaller audiences in urban settings.	State-subsidised models such as charities, CICs, creative cultural industries, etc., tend to have a fairly active digital presence to recognise their public programmes, but also as a form of evidence.
Commercial, subscription or break-even costs models	6	Suitable for mass audience models or for large events that can sustain thousands of participants, break-even can work on a commercial level where there is a highly committed community of practice with great loyalty (e.g. festivals, affluent clubs, annual events for affluent audiences).	Will have strong social media and online presence to maximise reach and audience. Break-even models often involve place-based community activists running a local rural venue or festival. Subscription options increasingly useful for musicians or international special interest or teaching groups that exist mostly online.
Cross-sectoral subsidised models (with or without subsidy)	8	One of the most sustainable models in the rural creative economy. Models tend to cross-subsidise music and arts activity via another sector, e.g. rental income, investment income, contractual work in health or education provision, and classically in rural and island communities – via creative tourism. Suitable for many creative activities, requires better governance arrangements at the start but has advantage of long-term sustainability.	May not have a strong digital presence – particularly if cross-sectorally working with health or tourism businesses who will have their own forms of digital presence. Can be useful for public sector and private sector collaborations.
Non-economic, volunteering collectivised models	10	The most sustainable model here is guaranteed to be financially sustainable as there are no fixed, ongoing costs. Relies on volunteers or a committed community of practice. Susceptible to volunteer fatigue, but powerful model for local rural regions, youth groups and festivals that do not incur significant costs to run. Also music tuition groups run by and for the community can be highly sustainable in this model but require non-professional tutors to give time. Excellent for ongoing music education and other local arts groups.	Will almost certainly have a social media presence, sometimes without a fixed digital home such as a website or webpages. This will be maintained by individuals within the collective making social media key to egalitarian access and shared responsibility.

Table 3.1 Sustainability of governance models in musical enterprises in rural Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

Staffing	Examples
Mostly paid staff, often professional administrators with fractional contracts, with a strong volunteering group. Hourly-paid performing and teaching staff make this model cost heavy but bring benefits of policy and equalities through their public and funding duties.	Typically education charities, Large regional arts organisations, national companies, often large-scale with professional arts in place-based or national settings.
Sometimes driven by one individual (e.g. professional music tutors, festival directors), only employers in unusual cases, or for seasonal work at festivals, events, etc.	Festivals, village halls, community groups, self-employed musicians/performers can be understood in this way.
Mostly will involve staff working on a fractional basis or even full-time who work across performing arts with another sector such as tourism, health, education. Can often involve public sector employees who devote several weeks of their role to an event, festival or youth or community education scheme in partnership with creative practitioners.	Often charities with two arms – a limited company cross-subsidising a charitable arts subsidiary – in some cases very large arts organisations can function very sustainably. Also some Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations, which have a legal personality that can employ and hold assets, but enjoy tax advantages as exempt from business tax for charitable purposes.
Not staffed in any employment formal relationship, however will pay artists or fees for services on an ad hoc basis. This eliminates threat to activities as if activities are not financially viable they will not proceed. Worth understanding of course that non-economic or pure volunteering models will not sustain professional or semi-professional careers for musicians or artists, but they can be valuable for grassroots activities or small festivals/events. Brings risks for highly regulated areas such as safeguarding, security, health and safety, if these areas are not well understood	Smaller festivals, local music groups, youth groups, town arts, informal communities of practice, e.g. particular genres, crafts, guilds, etc.

school children across the Highlands and Islands with very positive effects.

Many venues for performing arts use a binary structure with perhaps a venue hosting a commercial business such as a café, hotel or conferencing side, from which the profits pour into a charitable structure that operates the performing arts, festival or educational trust. This binary structure is common amongst larger arts organisations in the UK that own or have long-term leases on a physical venue, and it is a fantastic means of supporting arts sustainability because it removes (sometimes entirely) the need for any state-funding for loss, or break-even arts operations. These sorts of structures have been particularly important for long-term sustainability in Scotland and organisations, such as The National Piping Centre and Eden Court Inverness, and many others operate on this basis.

In many cases across the arts, larger organisations tend to have a charitable status in law and several employees as well as freelance employees and volunteers. This is a standard governance structure for musical charities that deliver events for a medium-to-large venues or larger music education and outreach activities. One example of this is Fèis Rois, based in Dingwall, north of Inverness in the Highlands. This is a nationally funded and recognised organisation that has done a great deal of valuable work across the Highlands and Islands and indeed, more recently across the Borders and elsewhere in Scotland. In this sense therefore, it has a large turnover and makes a significant contribution both to the local economy of Rosshire, but increasingly in other parts of Scotland also. Typically, a large proportion of their revenue goes directly to self-employed freelance tutors and musicians each year, for work that includes residential music education, lifelong learning, youth music education, Gaelic-medium education both in person and online, as well as partnership work with health and education services for various demographic groups in rural areas. Much of their work is delivered via group teaching of music, and they have a highly regarded adult Fèis, where several hundred people come to learn and play music in Ullapool on the west coast of Scotland. As an RFO from the national arts funder Creative Scotland, like many large arts organisations, they require professionalised staff to organise, deliver,

monitor and report on their activities, including both the educational and logistical dimensions, as well as the safeguarding, EDI and environmental impacts across their operations. They are a good example of a third sector organisation having a substantial impact on music and musical livelihoods in rural Scotland largely beyond the state. Like their sister organisation Fèisean nan Gàidheal, they work in partnership with public service providers which supports their income portfolio, but also takes music into other services, and provides employment for music tutors in other sectors supporting their own livelihoods in rural areas. In this way, the work of the Fèis not only provides sustainability for the organisation through diversification, but it also provides more sustainable incomes for musical freelancers. These sorts of cross-sectoral collaborations are key to some of the larger arts charities in rural areas and demonstrate the strength of the work in the third sector who can work across the arts and social care to the benefit of their local communities.

What became noticeable during fieldwork was that governance structures in rural arts and music are more important for sustainability than many people have acknowledged or are represented in the literature. These cross-sectoral collaborations are vital to the sustainability of larger charities and non-profit organisations, such as community interest companies or SCIOs. Indeed, there are some highly innovative forms of financial sustainability through necessity in the rural music organisations. For instance, Muriel MacKaveney, working to promote Gaelic arts and music in Argyll reported that:

‘Our funding comes mainly via windfarms, Cal Mac, and we were getting a slice of funding that came via Creative Scotland via Fèisean nan Gàidheal, that came through Argyll and Bute Council . . . There’s a trust set up for every windfarm that has an amelioration fund where people in the local postcode can apply for funding. For the Ceilidh Trail, Cal Mac were fantastic, generally funding a lot of stuff but they’re very particular.’ (Muriel MacKaveney, fieldwork interview, 2020).

These sorts of collaborations are more visible as time progresses, and the state retreats from providing any direct or indirect support

to musical enterprises, or indeed the third sector organisations. The result is that there is an evolving model of both public and private cross-sectoral collaborations which help the most innovative creative enterprises to sustain their activities. In my research I have found four basic models of governance that have a constitutive effect on sustainability: 1) State-subsidy models including fully subsidised to hybrid income; 2) commercial, subscription or break-even costs models; 3) cross-sectoral subsidised models (with or without subsidy) and 4) non-economic, volunteering collectivised models (summarised in Table 3.1).

One aspect of creative industries policy which has received little attention is the non-enterprise, charitable and co-operative structures of ownership. Indeed, ownership in my own fieldwork came up as a key issue both in how it relates to financial sustainability and how it has a causal role in social and communicative action. Boyle and Oakley's research also contends that this is an area where more research is needed: 'While we are not suggesting that co-ops are "the answer" to all of the problems, or that they necessarily guarantee stronger growth, we do believe that the question of ownership and business models have been neglected in creative industries policy' (Boyle and Oakley, 2018, p. 2). My own research in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland suggests that communities and activists on the ground across the rural and remote parts of Scotland were driving quite adventurous and positive forms of social and community enterprise. Often, completely separate from any more formal structures provided by local government or even large charities, often *beyond the state*. I would go as far as to suggest that rural creative livelihoods require a greater sense of innovation and self-drive to achieve meaningful cultural outcomes. And not just because of the usual problems of distance, geography, connection and politics in rural areas. Rural areas often lack the most basic infrastructure such as performance spaces, sound or lighting facilities, toilets, catering and sometimes even accommodation that those working in the arts in cities take for granted. Rural events, festivals and residential schools can be hugely attractive, but often involve higher costs than urban events simply to provide the basics. These issues of structure *vis-à-vis* sustainability can be summarised

in the Table 3.1, which are also discussed in relation to practical issues in the Appendix.

Of all the alternative models of governance and financing rural arts, both the commercial, profit-subsidy and the non-economic models of practice offer many advantages to local communities. If one considers the sustainability of arts or cultural organisations, then clearly, there are strong arguments in favour of locally based, voluntary organisations which can maintain the participation and activities within their local communities.

The richness of historical cultural traditions across Scotland, and many other rural parts of the world, grew largely from the participation of local people coming together regularly within their local communities to celebrate, mark particular calendrical rituals in the year, perform local traditions, and to live together in geographical communities that were bound together as much by geography as by interdependencies in food, trade, travel, education and religion. Economic capital changes this, both in terms of what and who is involved, but also where and when. Funding for cultural organisations around the Western world that is dependent upon state or local public funds to sustain itself is always already in jeopardy for its very survival. There are numerous examples of fantastic charities, organisations and other festivals and events that were established on a purely state-subsidy model that have done valuable work in local communities; rarely however, do they survive for many years.

In some senses, the core question for rural arts organisations is what do you want to do with any money that comes from direct grant funding via local or national state, or from other third sector funders? Subsidised funding in the form of public grants for the arts, and how it is spent has been a hotly contested area of both public debate and cultural policy studies for many years (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020; Galloway and Jones, 2010; Gray, 2000; McKerrell, 2014; Robinson, 2012). There are of course many diverse answers to this question, from many political standpoints. However, within my fieldwork I encountered a small number of people in rural areas that eschew regular cultural funding for their activities, and do not wish to either receive or charge money for their activities or their participants. For too long,

there has been no substantial discussion of volunteering in cultural policy debates, beyond the well-worn arguments about motivation and retention of volunteers, the volunteer fatigue and the positive impacts on social cohesion from volunteering in the arts (Gamble, 2022; Hersberger-Langloh *et al.*, 2022). The most successful music education organisations I know rely upon volunteers, and are therefore able to set their own agenda, and for that agenda to reflect the hopes and agency of the volunteers who run the organisation. Often times of course, when a key individual passes away or hands over the control, then that organisation will change or sometimes fold completely. However, when one considers the most sustainable organisations in rural musical communities, it is no surprise that they are most often entirely voluntary: pipe bands; fiddle groups; choirs; amateur dramatic and musical associations; regional branches of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann; instrumental societies; competitions such as the Royal National Mòd, and its regional feeder events across Scotland; and religious choirs or amateur orchestras. Some of these are networked into larger, international organisations with some professional staff, but all of them run primarily on the ground using a massive cohort of volunteers.

In some respects, the model of sharing one's culture locally is much closer to traditional Gaelic culture in Scotland, and important to those people that identify as having a Gaelic identity. In Oban, a town of around 8,000 people on the west coast of Scotland, there are still many Gaelic speakers and Gaelic learners. One of the most active members of the community is Rhona NicDhùghaill, who has been deeply engaged in music and cultural activities in Oban for many years. She has advocated voluntary and free-to-access music and ceilidhs in Oban for the local community, largely drawing on the deep Gaelic cultural traditions in Argyll, and the west coast of Scotland and her desire to have an active cultural life in her own hometown. She suggests that there are strong and hugely meaningful outcomes from this:

'On the surface, it's about having fun, but deeper down for me it's about community connection and strengthening communities. If you can experience arts and culture together, or make

music together, the more your community is knitted together and the stronger it is. That makes for a better community life for everyone. Historically, that's been a big part of communities in the Highlands and Islands. I've grown up with this notion that art is something to be shared, particularly music, but also poetry and other things in Gaelic culture, and of that having a really big place in our culture and community life.' (Rhona NicDhùghaill, fieldwork interview, 2022).

The model she used in Oban was important in distributing the leadership of open mic nights, music and dance nights, and new writing/new music events on a monthly basis. This supporting of the scene is framed by her as a modern instantiation of the historical model of shared cultural practice in the 'taigh ceilidh' ('the ceilidh house' or, visiting house) in Gaelic culture (for useful descriptions see Bennett, 1998; Feintuch, 2004a; McKean, 1997).

There are many positive outcomes of this model of non-economic sharing of culture in the local community, both in terms of people's sense of agency and the ongoing sustainability and identity for the local community. People feel an ownership of the event nights, they are sustainable because they continue to live on a voluntary basis—which she argues 'is a more empowering approach' (personal communication, January 2022). Rhona argues that creativity in this voluntary model as totally embedded in her life in the local community, the professionalisation of arts practice creates a false division between self-identity and community-identity in professional arts workers. She therefore argues that the community arts connection for participatory arts workers to other people in their community is essential to this model and cannot really work with parachuting in arts workers.

The difficulty of course in advocating a non-economic model of sustainability for the arts in local communities is that it precludes the involvement of the professional class of musicians, artists and administrators and promoters. If no money is changing hands, then you have complete sustainability as long as people enjoy their get togethers, but there is no economic reward, and in some ways, no direct economic impact to the creative economy. I would argue,

however, that this non-economic sharing culture is something that is critical to the ongoing health of rural musical cultures (and urban ones for that matter) and that it does have substantive *indirect* impacts on the rural creative economy. These include over time, the access to musical traditions for young people who may be entering into a future career in the creative economy (the pipeline of creative talent), a sense of empowerment and local belonging that can foster audiences for the professional sector, for the music festivals and events throughout the year, and finally, a much improved sense of social capital that is absolutely essential for rural communities and for which, various policy-makers have argued about whether or not to put an economic proxied value on over the years. To be sure, I am not advocating for non-economic forms for the creative economy in totality, but the real benefits of enduring collective creativity are often bound up with volunteering structures and organisations. Making money is critical also for the rural creative economy, and requires robust planning if it is to be sustainable, and sometimes these operate in mixed governance structures that can be very successful over years and decades.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES, CHARITIES AND SCIOS FOR THE DELIVERY OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

One of the key aspects of this rural innovation, in terms of governance and enterprise models, is the relationship between local authorities, of which there are 32 in Scotland, and music education services, arts and libraries around the country. For many years, the delivery of arts in rural communities has either been done on a purely voluntary basis by interested local people, or where, on a more professional footing, by artists as individual freelancers and registered as 'sole traders' for self-assessment tax in the UK, or, by local or regional arts organisations registered as charities in the UK. Ministers in the Scottish Government introduced a new form of legal entity called a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) in April 2011, 'to allow charities to be incorporated but to be administered and

regulated by a single body, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR). Charitable companies, which are also incorporated, report both to OSCR and to the Register of Companies ('Companies House') (Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator [OSCR], 2011, p. 5). This new form of legal vehicle has proved very popular in Scotland with people looking to remove culture, leisure and libraries from local authority provision, and to set up, smaller, bespoke companies that can deliver these functions independently from local government. Indeed, all 32 local authorities in Scotland have now used these SCIOs as a public-private quango to effectively deliver culture, leisure and library services for citizens that were previously delivered by the local authority. It is one of the great, untold stories in Scottish public life in the early twenty-first century.

The main advantage of this new entity, the SCIO, is that their charitable status can be used to avoid paying business rates (tax) on their activities, but at the same time, because they are 'incorporated' as a form of business, they are entitled to have employees and to operate and charge for their services, providing they are fulfilling their charitable mission. A charitable trust in Scotland is understood and defined in law as having 'no legal personality' which means that the trustees must personally undertake any transactions, or own buildings or pursue activities on behalf of the trust, whereas, with a SCIO, the SCIO itself can undertake transactions and own buildings and the liability of the trustees is limited (as in a normal trading company). That makes it an attractive choice for those wishing to save the roughly 20 per cent business rates that would be payable by a normal company operating in the Scottish economy. The SCIO has a structure that is required in law to have at least two members (the equivalent of trustees for a charity) that are required to keep and return accounts, ensure that the SCIO remains charitable in its actions and so on, and crucially, are legally required to report on their charitable activities every 15 months. This essentially places the SCIO at some distance from the previously regional government structures where music education, leisure, sports halls, venues and libraries were operating under local government rules and regulations. Those operating these SCIOs suggested in my research, that one of the attractions of this form of organisation, is you give a

renewed identity and focus to staff working in areas like culture, leisure and libraries, where staff are able to find a new focus with a more entrepreneurial mindset. Part of this was a much greater focus on the individual areas of responsibility than previously in local authorities – for instance, a much tighter focus on student numbers, engagement with those services (rather than simple provision of service) and financial sustainability.

The largest SCIO in the Highlands and Islands is High Life Highlands, the SCIO that operate leisure, library and culture services on behalf of Highland Council, but as a separate legal entity. This saw all of the music education, and other services such as sports development officers and youth development officers, moved outside of local authority control into the new SCIO. As a largely rural organisation, the challenges of rural distances does pose a significant challenge not faced by urban music education organisations. Geographically, coordination and development officers are assigned to rural regions that largely map onto the secondary school catchment areas of which there are 29 in Highland region. In common with many SCIOs operating in Scotland, the local authority retained control of the buildings, premises and maintenance, which is more cost effective in the transition, and the SCIO operates in those facilities. The public service obligations are transferred for sport and culture to the SCIO, and, therefore, they maintain a close working relationship over public service obligations, consultations, building and other areas. Structurally, there are significant advantages as the council drops its liabilities for the employment of all the employees and their associated costs, and the SCIO saves on business taxes of 20 per cent that are necessary for other public companies.

The move from local authority control to High Life Highland as the operating company for music tuition across the Highlands and Islands has been a highly positive move for music educators working with children across the Highlands and Islands. Previously, until around 2014, all music tuition was delivered under the local authority control, and then those staff left to join the SCIO High Life Highland which has contracts in place with the local authority and is totally devolved. The change in work culture and positivity moving from the public sector, into a quasi-private SCIO with a much more focused and

dedicated staff, was immediately noticeable. Norman Bolton, the Head of Music Development for High Life Highland explains:

‘It was never marketed to us [those of us who used to work in the local council delivering music tuition] as, “come to High Life and we’ll make money”. [The proposition was] come to High Life and we’ll create a bigger income cushion that will take a bit of the pressure off, if we end up being subjected to cuts. Now that’s a totally different mindset, and it’s a totally different mindset for the people who are working day-in, day-out in schools. A lot of us are long in the tooth ex-local authority employees, constantly jaded [of the cuts to local authorities and our budgets] and we are totally different now. It’s the support network, this is a much more compact organisation means that there’s more support, I am trusted to do what we need to do to run the service.’ (Norman Bolton, fieldwork interview, 2021).

To some degree then, the size and scope of the services delivered matters quite profoundly: to be part of a music service delivering instrumental and vocal tuition across the Highlands and Islands works far better and with more flexibility and autonomy as part of the SCIO High Life Highland, whereas, previously there was a palpable sense amongst music instructors that their work was a hugely insignificant part of a much larger organisation at the local authority, which continues to be dominated by social care, health and general education outcomes across the territory. This shift from the bottom of the pile, to a dedicated organisation means that Norman and his colleagues have doubled the number of music lessons being delivered to children across the Highlands and they personally feel much more highly valued. In terms of the public funding aspects of music tuition in schools, the current head of that service, Norman Bolton suggests, ‘. . . it is almost impossible to run a music tuition service to *make* money, it never makes money’ (Norman Bolton, fieldwork interview, November 2021).

In the years 2020–1 there were 4,040 children taking instrumental and vocal lessons. This figure has essentially doubled from around

2,000 when music tuition was delivered as part of the council services. In terms of sheer numbers, therefore, High Life Highland's work as a SCIO has made a remarkable difference and vastly improved the number of children accessing music tuition across the Highlands and Islands. Today, children's parents pay for their lessons, but recent campaigns in Scotland for music tuition have noticeably altered the Edinburgh government's approach to music lessons, and during 2021, they committed to making this service free again, for the first time since the spiral of music education cuts began for council services in the mid-1990s.

The geography of the Highlands, and for many rural areas around the world is one of the most visible challenges for music education across the world. In this respect, the pandemic has proved, across a range of educational issues for rural living, to be the catalyst that has either cemented the importance and utility of digital education or has introduced it where everything had been previously in-person. For music and for wider performing arts education, the shift to online working is one of the hugely positive legacies of the pandemic.

High Life Highland during the pandemic used Google Meet (integrated with Google Workspace, formerly G Suite) and Microsoft Teams, which made a huge difference both to the delivery of music tuition, but also to the communication and management of the large team of music instructors across the region.

'Google Meet and [Microsoft] Teams has allowed me to have a lot more contact [with music tutors] rather than spending the bulk of my working life sitting in the car running around the Highlands going to see people. One very good habit pre-pandemic was going to Thurso, where I could actually get four instructors, in the same school on the same day; but not the fifth! Technology has helped that a lot, and made it easier. And it's something we're keeping for our teaching as well, because it's allowed us to open up access for pupils in very remote schools where we would never get someone on a weekly basis. So for example, we've got one voice teacher who stays in Aviemore and services Badenoch, Strathspey, Inverness and Nairn – so it's already quite a sizeable patch. He now also

services Ullapool, Kinlochbervie and Scourie remotely. So he does remote lessons once a week and once a term he will do a whole day workshop with the kids face-to-face.’ (Norman Bolton, fieldwork interview, November 2021).

For many children across rural areas, the benefits of digital lessons for music are opening up opportunities for professional tuition that were never realised before 2020. The students not only use real-time lessons, but can also record the lessons and demonstrations and use them repeatedly to go over material specific to their learning trajectory dealing with their specific level of ability. The possibilities now exist for music education in rural areas to employ more remote, yet enthusiastic music teachers who teach mostly online, and make occasional visits to their schools.

For children in the Highland region, musical instruments are available to borrow for free. Instrument tutors maintain a library of musical instruments for children to use across the region. In addition to this, for school use of musical instruments, parents can also go and buy musical instruments via the school without additional VAT costs. Many parents choose to invest in the months leading to Christmas in the VAT-free instrument for their children. Not all areas of the Highlands and Islands have had such a positive experience, indeed the state-provided ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ in Scotland has many detractors and supporters depending on one’s perspective. One promoter I interviewed talked in stark terms about the state retreat in their local authority, with particular reference to the lack of any music activity for kids in their local area.

‘Depressingly, XXXX council have less and less money all the time, there are fewer people around, we’ve got a lot of depopulation here and we’re surrounded here by areas on the deprivation index. The music department does nothing other than deliver the curriculum, because that’s what they are contracted to do, there is no support from that at all. I’ve been here more than twenty-odd years and they’ve never run any [music] groups in all that time.’ (Anonymised promoter, fieldwork interview, 2020).

LUTHIERS, MAKERS, AND PLACE-BASED MARKETING IN THE RURAL CREATIVE ECONOMY

In today's creative economy, one of the great anomalies of musical livelihoods that remains, despite all digitalisation, globalisation and the platformisation of music, are the luthiers and instrument makers. Those people that manufacture instruments or accessories for musical instruments or live performance, are one of the only groups of workers now left in the musical creative economy that sell a physical product. That distinction sets them apart from other aspects of the musical creative economy globally, because almost all other dimensions of the musical creative economy are ephemeral without a physical presence in the world. Musicians, agents, promoters, festival organisers, teachers of music, administrators, sound and lighting engineers, recording engineers, singers, choirs, bands, streamers, solicitors, distributors', amongst many other categories of employment or work in music do not engage in physical products or services at all; they are involved in the experiential part of provision. Their products are intangible. This makes instrument manufacturers and luthiers particularly unusual in the creative economy, and presents a different set of challenges and opportunities for those businesses and sole traders.

A violin, double bass, cello, guitar, banjo or other stringed instrument such as a harp or mandolin or bouzouki, requires a great range of skills to produce, and a foundational working knowledge of physics, acoustics, silvology, carpentry, organology and arboriculture (amongst other things). From a creative economy perspective, luthiery is an unusual profession: luthiers are statistically invisible like almost all sole traders working in music in the United Kingdom, but because they sell a hand-crafted physical product, often with a long waiting lists or order times, there is no mass production and hence they exist apart from mass market economics and sometimes, if internationally renowned, local economic conditions. Individual guitar or violin luthiers, with a good reputation, will sell their instruments for thousands, or tens of thousands of pounds. Less well-known luthiers will usually make part of their living from

repair-work and often the maintenance of publicly owned instruments such as maintaining a school district's stock of violins, violas and cellos.

Those challenges in rural areas often involve the central rural issues of distances travelled, or the travel cost burden, but also often involve postage and route-to-market problems for rural makers. Not only do many postal services now find it increasingly costly to deliver to rural areas (and therefore have withdrawn some of these services), but also there are additional time and money costs for those businesses not faced by urban makers. Conversely, instrument manufacturers also benefit from their rural setting through the capitalisation of rurality, both in terms of their place-based marketing advantages and through lower housing and premises costs, often lower business taxes, and sometimes, better access to natural materials such as wood, leather and wool for instance. Many of the rural instrument manufacturers in Scotland rely upon their place-based heritage to market their instruments as more authentic: think of harp makers who lean into the mediaeval and modern experiences of Gaelic harping traditions in Scotland and Ireland; the bagpipe makers that emphasise their connection to the great players and instruments of the nineteenth century as a means of establishing their authenticity; or the fiddle makers working in a long tradition of fiddle manufacturing that extends right across from the Shetland and Orkney Isles throughout the mainland over many hundreds of years. The ethno-linguistic dimensions of place-based heritage are often the key dimensions of rural musical instrument manufacturing, but the historical associations of different regions are also present in some manufacturers' work.

Lochalsh Pipes in the Highlands, emphasise the local place and history to construct the authenticity and quality of their instruments. Ross Calderwood, who manufactures these pipes, uses:

'... mainly indigenous hardwoods, such as holly, laburnum, fruitwoods and yew. These timbers would have been traditionally used to make bagpipes in the Highlands providing first class tonal qualities as well as being of outstanding beauty. All pipes are finished using natural materials such as

tagua nut (vegetable ivory), Buffalo horn, rams' horn, light coloured woods such as sycamore and holly. He has several local timber suppliers which means when you purchase a set of pipes he can tell you exactly where the tree was felled that provided the timber for your pipes.' (Ross Calderwood, Lochalsh Bagpipes, <https://www.lochalshpipes.co.uk/about> [date accessed: 10 January 2025]).

For Lochalsh pipes, both the design of the instruments, from revival instruments, and the materials used to make them have a deep physical connection to the rural place of the Highlands. They are part of a much wider renaissance of traditional music instrument manufacturing across the Anglo-American world that coincided with the multiple folk revivals in the latter half of the twentieth century. Another key instrument maker in the Highlands is Burgess Bagpipes who are based in Dunphail, in the Highlands of Scotland. They rely on their deep connections to the key people and places in the Highlands in establishing their authentic brand of bagpipes:

'Like most Highland Families our origins are a mix of clans and places. We are lucky in that we can trace our family tree back to the 1640s. The Hays originate from Highland Aberdeenshire, Glenbucket and Tomintoul. The McDougalls were cleared from Strathglass to the west coast marginal land of Sloch, Ardnish, Arisiag.

That is where our piping tradition started in the 1870's with Alexander (Sandy) McDougall. He later moved to Glen Tanar in 1903, where John McDougall Snr was born in 1907. John Snr was an accomplished piper and in 1936 his son, world champion piper John Alexander McDougall was born in Aberdeen.

This piping tradition continues on to this day through his daughter Fiona and grandson Scott.' (<https://www.burgessbagpipes.com/our-story/> [date accessed: 10 January 2025]).

Their website establishes both the authenticity of their personal family heritage in piping and Highland culture, but also gives visitors

news items of related interest and stories that deepen their connection to the Highlands and to their craft of bagpipe manufacturing.

There are several harp makers in rural Scotland – Ardival in Rosshire, Starfish Harps in Ballachulish, Norris Harps in Peebles – who all make various sizes of harps or Clarsachs (the Gaelic word for a harp). ‘Clarsairs’ or harpers in the Gaelic tradition were traditionally high-status musicians working at the court-level for aristocratic patrons, and very often travelled around the great houses working in the oral tradition to bardic compositional rules. There are two surviving older harps that survive in the material record in Scotland; the Queen Mary harp and the Lamont harp (Loomis *et al.*, 2012). These instruments have formed the basis for both reconstruction manufacturing and new products, as well as musical explorations of their tonality and musical possibilities (Eydmann, 2017; Sanger and Kinnaird, 1992). Today, the revival of Scottish traditional music has meant that there are thousands of harpists around the world, performing a wide range of music on these reconstructed and new instruments.

Starfish Harps in the Highlands are popular instruments internationally, and their range pays homage to the place-based heritage of the local region, selling models such as The Glencoe, The Mamore and The Lochaber harps, all locations nearby their workshop in Ballachulish. Their brand emphasises the materials and manufacturing choices they have made over many years but visually and textually, they rely on rural symbolism for the names of their harps and the images on their website. On the other hand, Ardival Harps in Rosshire have been working for many years in both the manufacturing and promotion of nylon- and wire-strung harps in Scotland and around the world. Their products are sold internationally and as a rural business they have not only brought income into the local economy, but also provided employment opportunities for several others. Their instruments rely on place-based traditions of both much older mediaeval harps alongside more recent historical harps that emulate the eighteenth and nineteenth century traditions. Their range of harps includes the key wire strung harps made with contemporary materials that reflect the Gaelic traditions in the Highlands of Scotland, as well as the European and Medieval traditions of the Bray harps and Pictish harps:

‘People have been playing harps in Scotland for over 1000 years, and there have always been different sizes and shapes of harps and different kinds of music. The harps ranged from lap harps, as seen on the Pictish stones (like our Rosemarkie harps), to the medieval wire-strung clarsachs (like our Kilcoy, Rose and Kinnellan), to the renaissance gut-strung harps with buzzing bray pins (like our Rosslyn and Urquhart), to the modern gut-strung lever harps (like our Wyvis) which are used for all sorts of music.’ (<https://www.ardival.com/index.asp?pageid=294613> [date accessed: 10 January 2025]).

It remains the case not just in rural areas, but across the handmade instrument industry and for luthiers, that many people both professionally and semi-professionally will not make all of their income from this single source. The fieldwork demonstrates that most of the luthiers and instrument makers I spoke with are working on a spectrum from hobby- or lifestyle-businesses, through to full-time makers that occasionally have to take other work in order to pay the bills. Indeed, much research around the world suggests that many artists and musicians do not make their primary income from music or the arts – but they cross subsidise their participation with work in other sectors. Evidence from the United States that is robust and based upon labour market data suggests that there has been a large decline during the twenty-teens of earnings of artists compared against non-artists. The evidence suggests that the disadvantage of being an artist could be as high as 30 per cent, and that workers who have an arts degree, but who do not work as artists, ‘incur an additional earnings penalty’ (Makridis, 2025). To some degree, luthiers then, like many working in the rural creative economy, are making a lifestyle choice that is based upon their personal values and wishes about how to spend their working lives.

During fieldwork, I asked every person I spoke with what motivates them. Roundly, they all reported that they loved the music itself, both the participation, as audience, but also as a celebration of their cultural belonging and identity. These are powerful feelings, where the sonic and somatic aspects of musical participation can really have a profound emotional affect upon individual musicians, promoters,

performers and organisers. But more than that, people who work in music, and particularly those with a real love of the social and musical interactions understand that their work does make a difference. They understand that it's only through active promotion, organisation and campaigning that the culture that matters to them in their part of the world will continue to flourish, and that young people in particular, will have a chance to learn their own cultural traditions and musical inheritance. Mary Schmoller of Ceòlas in South Uist explains it better:

'When we started Youth Music programme in about 2005/6, since then we've spent over £108,000, that's in 13 years. That's why we have the bands like Ben Lee and all the rest of it – because they've been nurtured since they were children. When the tutors play together and the interrelationship, when they play together, that's the magic. When two people who didn't really know each other when they arrived on the Saturday, and by the next Friday night they're playing together and sometimes, it's just so out of this world you just think, wow!' (Mary Schmoller, fieldwork interview, 2020).

Almost all future work in handmade luthiery and instrument making relies upon reputation. As a result of globalisation of trade, the UK along with most of the developed west, is saturated with cheaply manufactured, Chinese-made instruments (fiddles, violas, orchestral wind instruments, and guitars). This saturation means that accessing an instrument on which to learn has become more accessible to many children and families, yet the quality of those instruments and the historical tradition of homemade amateur instruments has declined substantially, '... there's just so much competition from the east, in general' (anonymous luthier working in rural Scotland, 2020). The effect of proximity to professional musicians is a factor that faces luthiers and semi-professional instrument manufacturers in rural areas. Being close to the class of urban professional musicians across several different genres, offers a competitive advantage to city-based luthiers of high quality, who, if their instruments are of an excellent standard, can therefore enjoy accelerated reputational

benefits because they have day-to-day access to the professional class of musicians who tend to make up the majority of instrument teachers and workshop leaders for children, and those who are involved in mass mediated broadcasts and recording that carry further reputational enhancement for instrument manufacturers and luthiers. One luthier I spoke with, who makes a living from very high-end instruments, said:

'I've had very few of my instruments go out for full-price. Most of my customers are local musicians who've had an absolute bargain. Generally I'm looking for £4,500 for a violin, based on 500 hours, that's still not a great wage, so my personal philosophy does come into it . . . Nine out of ten times I'd say I'm doing something superior to what I'm competing with. [But it comes down to] reputation, the folk that have the money to throw at high end [instruments] are not quite ready to give benefit of the doubt to a teuchter in the North.' (Anonymous luthier, fieldwork interview, 2020).

For this manufacturing luthier, their interest in the craft tends to override their financial motivation to improve the speed of manufacturing, the requirements of marketing and the business elements of growing a part-time business into a more profitable full-time business. Collective action here in promotion at the national level could help with facilitating the marketing and business-related promotional activities of small-scale rural businesses like this. HIE already deliver vital resources to creative workers across the Highlands and Islands in terms of digital marketing, scaling up and many other key topics. But there could be more support delivered for those self-employed and partial incomes in the rural creative economy that facilitates selling platforms, shared and collectivised public liability insurance, or even digital rural hubs that enable those sole traders to benefit from a much wider reach and scale of engagement with the international market for creative goods, products and music.

The notion of rural enterprise hubs have been already shown to be successful and beneficial for rural micro-businesses, helping not

only to facilitate economic transformation for rural workers but also to help overcome social institutional and geographic barriers for those working across the rural economy (Duxbury, 2020; Merrell, 2019; Merrell *et al.*, 2021). To some degree this is already being facilitated by HIE with their valuable XpoNorth Digital initiative, which supports digital innovation and growing the rural creative economy.⁷ This could form the basis for an expanded and targeted policy for creative innovation in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the way that other areas around the world have done (see p. 66 onwards for further discussion).

7 <https://www.hie.co.uk/our-region/our-growth-sectors/creative-industries/>

CHAPTER 4

Sustainability, capital and policy in the rural creative economy

The very notion of sustainability is contested according to whichever discipline and life domain one prioritises. One of the key challenges when considering the sustainability of any practice, system or worldview, is to be able to imagine sustainability working, both for those who agree with one's own worldview and moral, political and social values, but also for those who do not. No really powerful model for sustainability can survive contact with the Other unless it accounts for conflicting and different ways of thinking and being in the world. We see this emerging in the movement for environmental sustainability most visibly with clashes between worldviews on the streets of our major cities, and demonstrations that in many respects, are fundamentally about differences of what constitutes a sustainable way of living today. It is therefore important to recognise that economic sustainability sits alongside social, environmental and cultural forms of sustainable living, and that these dimensions do not always align, or form the basis of mutually agreed consensus across different groups in society, but ideally, should be understood when making policy or attempting community projects. For the creative economy, the tension is always already between the economic predilection for growth and the creative predilection for authenticity and originality. Put simply, thinking about sustainability, the 'creative economy' is a dichotomous term that embodies tensions and difference between different actors and communities. The scholarly literature reflects those tensions and different priorities across disciplines.

As Throsby and Petetskaya point out, the notion of 'growth' is

baked into most western models of 'sustainability' but not really in indigenous thinking on sustainability (Throsby and Petetskaya, 2016). Indigenous models of sustainability in the Australian case are predicated on their relationship with the land. In other contexts around the world similarly stark differences in worldview between what actually constitutes something sustainable are knowable in many different domains. It is a simplification to suggest that most arts disciplines do not tend to regard economic sustainability as high on the agenda, and in fact, in many views, one of the key problems with sustainability in much of the literature is the assumption that economic sustainability depends upon growth in GDP or profitability within the capitalist system. In more recent research, there have been some impressive contributions from those in rural arts and development, notably by Nancy Duxbury, who identified a range of key recurring ingredients that helped to foster the arts and culture in rural areas which included cultural infrastructure development amongst other attitudinal and social networked characteristics (Duxbury, 2010, 2021; Hristova, Dragičević Šešić and Duxbury, 2015). She emphasises the notion that sustainability must go beyond economic measures because it is deeply connected to cultural belonging and vitality, and in some ways aligns well with the views from Jeff Todd Titon in the ethnomusicological literature (Titon, 2009). His thinking, and much of the ethnomusicological literature on sustainability, rests on the corollaries drawn from ecological models of thinking, and either making direct homologies of environmental sustainability to musical sustainability or, by using ecological concepts of renewal and balance, as conceptual metaphors for thinking about musical continuity and sustainability in human cultures. More recently, Schippers and Grant's major research on sustainability in world musical cultures takes a five-domain model, proposing a very systematic reading of how one can understand the sustainability of orally transmitted music and heritage in today's globalising, extractivist and commodified world. Huib Schippers has outlined with Catherine Grant a fairly simple mapping of musical sustainability that outlines 'the five domains of musical sustainability developed by the research collective: 1) Systems of learning music; 2) Musicians and communities; 3) Contexts and constructs; 4) Regulations and infrastructure; and 5) Media and the music Industry'

(Schipper and Grant, 2016). They argue, that one of the key advantages of having an ecosystem approach is that it helps to compare data on sustainability across different cultures in the world, providing a shared framework to analyse and understand the sustainability of music cultures. Again, more recently, the ecological model has been called into question. Rowan Hawitt has recently outlined some of the problems of fairly literally mapping ecological scientific concepts onto cultural sustainability, and suggests that these models of sustainability lack analytical power and real world usefulness, because of their necessarily 'idealised holism' which perpetuates, '... a picture of symbiosis and harmony which does not represent the reality we face' (Hawitt, 2020, p. 351).

I would argue that sustainability requires us to think more deeply about economics in the arts, because we have had too binary and too static a model of sustainability in arts and humanities particularly, that has focused upon the wrong object of study. What we need to do if we are interested in sustainability of the arts, or indeed in the economics of the arts, is to focus on the exchange value of cultural, economic and social capital, and how that emerges from people's feelings of joy, authenticity, pleasure and belonging in music (and art more widely). Sustainability is both to be found in economic and non-economic contexts but whether or not someone is paying for a lesson, live gig or performance or recording, they all rely on the intangible commodity which is *people's sense of desire to participate and belong*. Sustainability in the arts must take account of the massive shifts in globalisation, digitalisation and the understanding of the economics that have come in the early twenty-first century, and are emerging again even more rapidly with the onset of artificial intelligence (or simulation media).

The challenge is to lay out a different model of sustainability that rests primarily on a relational understanding of music and the performing arts, rather than the reductive binaries that have been at the centre of debates about arts, instrumental and intrinsic value, the public good and sustainability in the past forty years. I would suggest that the core concept for understanding sustainability of the arts is a systemic understanding of the economic, social and cultural factors that influence people's *desire* to participate in the arts, rather

than the old dichotomous push and pull between authenticity and economic value of performance. In essence, a relational view rather than an assets-based view of sustainability. What this involves is thinking differently about the object of study for sustainability, which should really be more focused upon people's sentiments or desire to participate and how this is understood within their lives. It is this will to participate that essentially underpins the exchange of capital in the arts and can be sustainable in more than one dimension. That is to say, that the real commodity that motivates capital exchange between economic, social and cultural capital is people's desire or will, whereas the actual artistic practice itself (for example, doing and participating in the arts/music, dance, visual or digital arts, drama, craft, writing, reading and performance) should be understood as the labour rather than the commodity. We have tended to model sustainability based upon ecological models that see the system sitting in an enclosed system where music and art are public goods, and in my view, we have not paid enough attention to the economics of sustainability of art.

The average value of a commodity in Marxist theory is determined by its labour value (Fuchs, 2014, p. 36). However, this only really results in a view of commodities as fixed, or realised objects. In Michael Heinrich's view of the value of commodities (1999), he argues that Marx viewed commodities mainly via labour, to see '... Marx's labour theory of value as a "quantitative theory of labour quantities" ... [his] basic point is that value does not exist in the individual commodity, but only in exchange, and therefore is dependent on the money form' (Fuchs, 2014, p. 41). It therefore follows where sustainability is concerned for modern capitalist states and systems, that the value is created during the musical participation (because it creates a desire and emotion within participants in artistic activity) but that the value is only realised in the moment of exchange: when a ticket is sold to a gig, a festival sells tickets, an album or book is purchased or an experience or lesson paid for. Sustainability in this conception relies upon the exchange of the commodity for money. In this model the commodity is intangible yet strongly felt in the desire for artistic participation or learning and the value is realised in monetary terms. Music in this model is actually a form of labour, not the commodity, but listeners

also perform labour in the digital age by listening to their favourite artists and offering their time and data to the platform owners.

One of the reasons that musical theorisation of sustainability has tended to focus on music as the commodity rather than music-as-labour, is that we have relied upon a lot of binaries in discussing sustainability, music, arts and the public good: intrinsic versus instrumental; old versus new; tradition versus modern; authentic versus fake; front space versus back space; economic versus aesthetic; quality versus quantity, and so on. These binaries are convenient because they capture something of reality in relation to authenticity and the performing arts, but precisely because they are categorical – they focus our minds on art-as-object, performance as isolated event or a singular economic value or song, tune or dance. Music and all the performing arts are deeply relational activities, that is, they require not just creators, performers and audiences, but also involve people's desires and will to be involved which is the key to understanding the creation of value; it takes place at the moment of exchange of capital, and does not reside in the commodity or labour itself.

Much of this thinking pre-dates contemporary digitalisation and globalisation not just of markets, but of ourselves and datafication of our likes, dislikes and personal preferences. Often predicated on the notion of the public good of the arts, which is complicated in advanced capitalist contexts, and has the potential to dissolve the old binaristic conceptions of authentic musical experience versus economic exchange value. It is complicated because we have reached a stage where both public and private lives have been commodified, most notably as data to be used for advertising profit on a global scale. If our very feelings and emotions are subject to this commodification, then it means that theorising sustainability of the arts in advanced capitalist contexts, has to incorporate processes of capital exchange within our understanding, rather than narrower studies of insider practice and politics in discrete communities.

Platforms like Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Google (Alphabet), eBay, Spotify, etc., essentially are simply logical extensions of capitalism in the new context where the raw material is now data which can be refined to produce value. The key insight is that digitalisation and platformisation has allowed the platform owners to shift

value-creation from labour to data (the best explanation of this is contained in Srnicek, 2017). Therefore artistic practice under the old model of retail capitalism where people sold physical CDs, cassettes or LPs meant that musical labour enabled artists to create value and to benefit from sales, whereas now, the product of that labour has become intangible as digital music files encoded on a device or in the cloud without any physical format and overwhelmingly streamed by audiences, essentially devaluing musicians' means of creating any value from their labour and effectively minimising their role in the production of capital exchange. The music platforms have already understood this and modelled their profit-making upon the sentiment of their audiences or users who spend time on their platforms – they understand that their profits come directly from the datafication of their users: the more time that we spend on data platforms, the more data they have which supports their ability to profit from the sale of that data to advertisers. In terms of sustainability then in the digital age, there has been a fundamental shift which needs to be understood in terms of capital, labour, commodity and exchange value. Music is not a commodity when it has no physical form, the commodity is the data produced by users on digital platforms who listen to music, which in turn is motivated by their desire or willingness to participate through listening or streaming music. So to understand sustainability, I would argue that it is crucial to understand people's desire and willingness to participate in music – shifting the focus more onto audiences and listeners and the platforms and systems that support musical participation and communities. The same argument about refocusing our attention on the core understanding of the exchange value of artistic practice and the public good is required if we are to properly understand sustainability.

What this means for artists is that a digital presence is even more essential. And not just having a social media strategy, musicians and artists have to be 'algorithmically visible' on the platforms, streamers and online because, '... algorithmic recommendation systems are reshaping independent music scenes. Whilst playlist placement remains important, labels report increasing focus on triggering algorithmic discovery mechanisms that create sustained visibility over time ... Although independent labels have traditionally positioned

themselves as more accessible and artist-centred alternatives to major labels, platform imperatives now introduce new barriers to entry, enacted not through overt commercial demands but rather through expectations of advanced digital literacy and continuous platform engagement' (Raffa, 2025). In other words, the platformisation and digitalisation of musical production and consumption, means that data on streaming, consistency, popularity and algorithmic visibility are forming a new way for artists to gain traction in the online market, this at once is positive for emerging rural artists, but also presents one more additional challenge because of the significant digital literacy and skills on content creation that are required for independent artists to gain any digital audience. However, the platformisation itself does present a new opportunity for artists to leverage their rural cultural capital on platforms, and to engage strongly with their audiences not just based on their artistic identity, but also based upon the rurality and the place-based capital that they might be able to mobilise as part of their creative rural identity.

As Ruth Towse has pointed out, many people commonly mistakenly, '... equate public funding of arts organisations with public goods' (Towse, 2014, p. 17). Arts organisations may provide services that contribute to the public good, but it is hard to make a causal link between public subsidy for arts organisations and the nature of their contribution that they provide to the public good. The social impact of music (and the arts for that matter) is closely related to the public good but is not quite the same thing. Social benefits accrue to individuals and are usually measured in relation to transformation or positive change on individual people either as part of a survey or interview or focus group. The public good however, accrues to the public, and is therefore related, but different from the social benefit (or external benefits in cultural economics). To illustrate, one can imagine that the public subsidy for a musical charity working with children to encourage their confidence and improve their communicative skills could be described as a public good. However, providing that the charity fulfils its remit professionally, then strictly speaking the benefits of their work would accrue to the children whose lives have been somehow positively transformed by the work of the charity. That is a social (or 'external')

benefit and not really a 'public' good. That charity could still remain functioning and delivering transformative social impact if all public subsidy was removed (as many have during austerity in the UK) and still deliver the social benefits to the individuals involved. The 'public' bit of the 'public good' would involve some form of public subsidy in the absence of any market for that service, without which the 'good' would not exist. However, the case can be made for funding for this fictional arts organisation because state subsidy meets the cost of the service and because the public or private donors want those services to be provided for the children who benefit. The point therefore is that in terms of the sustainability of arts, the public good argument is very often misapplied, because public goods require that participation in the arts would not reduce the offer for other people and that public goods are not things that can normally be charged for, because that prevents the public from accessing them.

Sustainability therefore goes well beyond public good arguments, because it suggests that if economic sustainability is important (or at least as important as the cultural and social sustainability of a particular musical or artistic tradition) then in today's world, unless the state is providing unlimited, free-to-access models for musical or artistic participation, then sustainability needs to be understood as something not in terms of rights or the public good *per se*, but as a relational concept, where the exchange value is at the heart of the concept of how to sustain the feelings and desire to participate through time. Based on these assumptions, I therefore define the sustainability of a musical or artistic practice as, *a measure of the confidence in the future existence of a particular musical or artistic practice, organisation, product, tradition or service based upon its economic, cultural and social exchange value.*

This view of sustainability rests on the idea that music and arts are not in and of themselves the commodity, but are in fact artistic practices that produce the feelings, desires and emotions in people that are the commodity that drives exchange value. Economic, social and cultural exchange is only realised when people act according to their desires/feelings. And it is the moment of exchange itself – that drives the sustainability. When we understand this, it means that the research questions have to be a little different, and the people with

whom we are doing research also needs to shift so that we can do interviews, focus groups and surveys with more than the artistic communities of practice, we need to understand how audiences, tourists, retailers, platform owners, online fans and the general public all act in our newly commodified world.

Taking a systemic view of these complex forms of new capitalism and how they affect rural creative workers and communities necessitates the development of a much wider fieldwork of evidence gathering from a more plural range of constituencies that still includes musicians, but places just as much value on other actors in the relational understanding of music and art, such as audiences, online fans, tourists, networking sites, platforms, local communities and business owners to properly theorise and understand how the arts can have a bright, sustainable future that models out the financial sustainability alongside the social and cultural sustainability. I have attempted to show how these contribute to the overall sustainability of a creative rural enterprise in Figure 4.1 that presents [to avoid repetition] a model of sustainability for rural creative enterprises. The theoretical positioning of these concepts *vis-à-vis* real-world operation of a rural creative enterprise can of course be taken together or apart, but the systemic view of how this sort of complexity results in more or less sustainable micro-enterprises does genuinely rely upon these forms of capital exchange, whether or not this is tacitly or explicitly understood. Capital exchange is, therefore, an important arena for sustainability, and its complexity should be welcomed because it reflects the complexity of the real world. If we are to understand this commodification and to have useful models of understanding that speak across disciplinary boundaries, we must not simply ignore this complexity and commodification, but engage more actively in a relational understanding of these established, and emergent forms of capital.

One of the key problems when considering musical practices or other performing arts, is the conflicting values and agency between communities of practice, policy makers, tourists, programmers, audiences and the public. One reason this has been hidden to a certain degree is that academics tend to do research fieldwork only with the artists or the performers because the practice itself has been the traditional object of study – even where the research questions

focus on its relationship to other dimensions of human life, and that needs to change. I hope that this book provides a tiny counter-example of how fieldwork with non-musicians can be useful for understanding rural creative lives, but we are moving further into a period of transactionalism, where a greater emphasis on the economic exchange value of music and rural arts will be ever more important given the state retreat across the developed world. The theorisation of exchange allows analysts and policy makers to move beyond binary conceptions of culture as modern/traditional, old/new, authentic/commercial, and so on, and to consider a more complete model of sustainability that goes beyond rights- and assets-based approaches to sustainability, to consider how conflicting and plural values within a real world socio-cultural and economic model. Capital exchange as a theoretical concept is therefore processual and involves bringing previously disconnected perspectives into collision for a new understanding of how both tangible and intangible culture work in the real world. It gives a voice to the social and intangible values that are so important to community formation and belonging alongside the more economic forms of understanding such as economic exchange value, trips, spend-per-consumer, confidence, margins and usage, which are regularly used and discussed within the tourism and heritage industries.

SUSTAINABILITY AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Music in the rural creative economy has great potential for sustainable livelihoods in rural areas. The ability to develop place-based marketing of musical performance, teaching and online communities is at an early stage in Scotland but offers great promise for rural creative occupations. Running alongside this new model of emerging rural enterprise however, sits the national and international policy in the field of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). This is a discourse where there is emerging a new settlement about the sustainability of traditional music, dance, crafts and storytelling (traditional arts) that has been based upon the UNESCO 2003

Convention on Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage – recently ratified by the UK, and similarly, by one or two other advanced English-speaking countries such as Ireland and Canada (Byrne, 2021; Howard, 2012; Kurin, 2007; Norton and Matsumoto, 2018; Smith and Akagawa, 2009; Stefano, Davis and Corsane, 2012).

There are now emerging useful examples across the arts, music and heritage literature that detail how exchange value can be mobilised for more sustainable financial as well as social contexts for traditional cultural practices. Both in the ICH literature which flows from UNESCO's 2003 declaration and is now an established field of study for ethnomusicologists and the anthropologically inclined around the world. The literature and policy instruments on the sustainability of traditional music has largely rested upon a rights-based approach to safeguarding 'masterpieces' of traditional music through the 2003 UNESCO Convention on ICH which although successful in quite a number of regional contexts, has also been widely criticised for the effects it has had of 'freezing' of musical traditions and their top-down approach to policy (Smith and Akagawa, 2009; see for instance Grant, 2013) and for the focus upon material and monumental culture (Hoeven, 2016). Catherine Grant's work shows a well-developed theorisation of sustainability for endangered, small traditional musics, which is based on the more advanced work from language sustainability as discussed above and elsewhere. However, the ICH literature rests upon essentially a rights-based view of traditional cultural practices such as traditional music, dance, drama and crafts, and not sustainability in the sense of exchange as discussed above. Much of the literature and theorisation of ICH sustainability focuses upon minority musical traditions, who are often facing substantial threats to their sustainability from poverty, economic development and globalisation, very often in non-western states, many of whom have signed the ICH UNESCO convention.

What has not been addressed particularly well in the literature, is how sustainability can be understood for those highly developed late modern western states where digitalisation and globalisation are now woven into the social fabric. In these countries, a rights-based approach of UNESCO to ICH is only now emerging as a priority for policy makers, and I would argue an assets-based approach where

tradition is viewed as an objectified asset to be exploited is similarly reductive and inappropriate. For the reasons outlined above, nations that rely upon capitalist foundations, and particularly Anglo-American capitalist models make rights-based, or assets-based approaches too reductive as they tend to focus on one or several components of what makes an artistic practice sustainable, and very often, neglect the economic dimensions of arts which is fundamentally problematic for artists and creative communities in capitalist states.

Theorising sustainability via processes of exchange allows us to really understand who is involved, why they are involved and when and what value is created in the process of exchange. We can see an understanding of this in the literature when we look at how countries such as India, Croatia, Portugal and (only in 2015) Ireland, that have comparably substantial media and arts sectors, are already moving ahead in leveraging their ICH for economic and cultural sustainability. In Asia, which has been at the forefront of developments on music as ICH, Helen Rees shows how music framed as ICH tourism offers real sustainability in Chinese traditional music.

‘The qin tradition seems to be one instance in which a top-down initiative, the UNESCO nomination and everything associated with it, has had a huge impact on the number of people involved in the art . . . I cannot help but conclude that while the improved economic standing of China’s middle class makes it possible for thousands around the country to pursue an interest in the qin, in most cases it is surely the intangible cultural heritage policies and publicity that brought the instrument to their attention as something worthy of their time.’ (Rees, 2012, ‘zither quin’ section).

This is similarly highlighted in Jeff Todd Titon’s contribution on music and sustainability where he suggests that the national recognition of traditions as ‘masterpieces’ can transform the indigenous conceptualisation of native traditions as something worthy of national and international recognition and attention (Titon, 2009). What Rees and Titon are capturing here is the notion that the change in status of these musical traditions bestowed upon them by the UNESCO labels

as ‘masterpieces’ gives them a cultural capital, which can then be exchanged for economic capital to render these practices more sustainable options for people who participate in them. In the west, we might well benefit to some degree from the improved public status of traditional music, dance, drama or crafts via UNESCO recognition, but fundamentally, countries like the UK have tended to construct a much smaller budget for state-support of the arts as a proportion of GDP than Asian economies, or indeed, Mediterranean or former Soviet states where there has been a much longer and more robust system of state support for traditional arts. The UK in particular is a special case because of the roughly £4 billion raised in taxes each year to spend on the BBC, which acts as a proxy for cultural and artistic state support – with the rather unfortunate consequence that policy on traditional arts is generally made by BBC commissioners who tend to be motivated by audience reach and increasingly commercial metrics, rather than any notion of public good or community benefit. The UK also spent less on culture in a multi-year analysis to 2016 than almost all other European countries with the exception of Greece and Portugal as a percentage of public spending (<1 per cent) or as a percentage of GDP (<0.4 per cent) (Rius-Ulldemolins, Pizzi and Rubio Arostegui, 2019). And according to research on post-financial crash central government expenditure for culture per capita, the UK spent less in 2009 on culture than countries such as Estonia, Belgium Finland, France, The Netherlands, Denmark Cyprus, Austria, Slovenia, Ireland and Luxembourg (Srakar, Čopič and Verbič, 2018). Governments and arms-length bodies in other European countries not only spend more state funds as a proportion of GDP on the arts but they also support broadcasters and the third sector who deal directly with traditional music and other traditional arts.

Another way to think about the sustainability of ICH and music in that state-sponsored policy system, is to examine the presence or otherwise of state-funded archives of traditional music across Europe and its continent. In the UK, the position on traditional music archives is a little complex because of the long history of both anthropological fieldwork and imperial exploration from historical British institutions and the long-established approach of the British Library to collecting and preserving traditional and world musics. It

is fair I think to say, that at the time of writing there are no state-funded archives of the ICH traditions of music, dance, drama or crafts of ethnically English, Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish communities. However, this is too reductive, because the British Library for many years has approached the indigenous or autochthonous music and ICH of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland within the overall framework of 'world and traditional music'. And although historically very large with several million sound archive items in the British Sound Archives held at the British Library, very little of it is available as an online resource for good reasons, as the British Library is not really a 'rights holder' in the way that the now gigantic volumes of music available on streaming platforms are set up. For traditional musics, as Janet Topp-Fargion has explained, 'Copyright legislation does not deal with intangible cultural heritage in a meaningful way' (Janet Topp-Fargion in Russell, 2013). And as a consequence, the valuable collections of traditional ICH recordings of indigenous English, Scottish, or Irish music of the UK is held at the British Library, within a much more globalist collection and preservation policy for traditional musics amidst very substantial collections of African, Asian and other traditional musics from around the world.

This is unusual within European policy, but can be understood as a consequence of the historical obscuring of culture spending in the UK by the sheer weight of spending of the BBC licence fee. The BBC does not provide any dedicated archives of traditional music in any part of the UK, and although it does occasionally archive radio and television output in its own archives (or sometimes the British Library), none of this is searchable, known, or has much viable and publicly available meta-data that would enable it to be freely available online. To understand how unusual this is, it is therefore worth understanding the position of ICH archives for traditional music and traditional arts across the European continent. Table 4.1 shows a sample of these bodies and funding from across the European mainland gathered in 2023.¹

1 I would like to acknowledge the support and information gathered by many colleagues from the European Folk Network in 2023 who helped the author to compile Table 4.1.

Country	Funding	Institution	Notes
Latvia	State-funded	State-funded folklore archive in Latvian University in Dept. of Literature, Folklore and Arts. http://www.garamantas.lv/ State funded Latvian Radio (also has the largest sound recordings archive). https://latvijasradio.lsm.lv/lv/piedavajumi/fonotekas-ieraksti/	Maintains all old recordings and manuscripts, but also collects contemporary materials. Latvian Radio has biggest archive of sound recordings of Latvian traditional music and song.
Belgium	State-funded	State-funded Muziekmozaïek supports folk and jazz and has a substantial archive of recordings and resources, funded by the Flemish Government. Also the Projet Melchior – state-funded project to digitise historical recordings of Walloons funded by Wallonia-Brussels Government.	There are numerous projects that are state funded and privately funded in Belgium that speak to the different demographic and political constituencies. For instance, KBR, the Royal Library of Belgium holds the archive of Lucy Gelber and her encyclopaedia of the living Flemish Folk Song (Encyclopedie van het levende Vlaamse Volkslied).
Ireland	State-funded	State Funded Irish Traditional Music Archive Taisce Cheol Dúchais Éireann https://www.itma.ie/about	Very substantial and increasingly growing archive of Irish traditional music and song, many projects for public benefit and for research.

Country	Funding	Institution	Notes
Sweden	State-funded	Musikverket and Visarkivet (founded by the government). Svenskt visarkiv, the Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research, collects, preserves, researches and publishes in the fields of instrumental and vocal traditional music, older popular songs and Swedish jazz. Svenskt visarkiv is open to all: researchers, students, performing musicians and the public. https://svensktvisarkiv.se/	Very comprehensive – perpetually state funded, began in 1960s and continues to this day (direct funded).
Hungary	State-funded	The (National) Museum of Ethnography's Audio Archives of the Folk Music Collection, the oldest Hungarian ethnographic institute, preserves analogue machine recordings of over 10,000 melodies. https://www.neprajz.hu/en/gyujtemenyek/ethnological-archives/audio-archive/audio_archive.html The Hungarian Heritage House is a major national institution founded in 2001 by the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Cultural Heritage with the purpose of preserving and promoting Hungarian folk tradition. https://hagyományokhaza.hu/en/the-institution	The Folklore Database operating at the Hungarian Heritage House has processed 1,420 hours of video and nearly 6,000 hours of audio recordings of folk dance and folk music belonging to many ethnic groups in the Carpathian Basin. The Hungarian Heritage house has a vast collection that is maintained for the national heritage directly funded by government.

Country	Funding	Institution	Notes
Wales (UK)	State-funded	People's Collection Wales – this national archive contains many recordings and documents for Welsh-language and Welsh cultural heritage.	Run by the National Library of Wales and the National Museum of Wales. They have their own board and committees as a Senedd Supported directly funded Public Body (but separate to any arts council).
Iceland	State-funded	Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum – The Arni Magnusson Institute and Landsbókasafn Íslands – National Library of Iceland jointly hold and manage a major archive of recordings going back to the beginning of the 20th century. https://arnastofnun.is/en/about https://landsbokasafn.is	It includes a lot of folk music and interviews with traditional performers, all online at https://ismus.is/ The site is a tremendous resource but is only in Icelandic as yet.

Country	Funding	Institution	Notes
Finland	State-funded	Kansanmusiikki-instituutti (Folk Music Institute Association). The largest archive of Finnish folk music and dance. https://kansanmusiikki-instituutti.fi/en/arkisto-ja-kirjasto/ The Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura (SKS) Archives consist of two collections: the Traditional and Contemporary Culture Collection and the Literature and Cultural History Collection. Collecting and documenting traditional culture has been part of the activities of SKS ever since its establishment in 1831. https://www.traditionarchives.org/archives/finland The Finnish state also funds the Global Music Centre Library: a service for students, professionals and amateurs working in the World Music field. There is a work station for the use of researchers and provision for listening to sound recordings. https://www.globalmusic.fi/en/library	The Finnish state places great emphasis on the Intangible cultural Heritage of Finland – for various reasons not least to do with its recent history. The state funds several key collections and audio archives. The Traditional and Contemporary Culture Collection is the central resource for the research of folklore and cultural heritage in Finland. It encompasses oral tradition, folk music, ethnological descriptions, biographies and oral history as texts, images and sounds. The collection contains approximately 4 million folklore items, 30,000 hours of sound and video recordings and 140,000 photographs or drawings.

Country	Funding	Institution	Notes
Spain	State- and third sector-funded	The Joaquín Díaz Foundation was created in 1985 as a result of an agreement between the 'Diputación Provincial' of Valladolid (Provincial council) and the folklorist Joaquín Díaz whereby he made over his collections (prints, 'pliegos de cordel', library, recordings and instruments) and had them displayed in the 18th century mansion the provincial council owns in Uruña. https://funjdiaz.net/idioma.php?id=2	Various regional archives and projects to preserve and transmit the intangible cultural heritage of different regions which are both state- and charitably-funded.

Table 4.1 Partial list of state-funded archives for traditional music across Europe.

There is however, a new opportunity for a shift in policy in the UK in how we deal with ICH traditions, now that the UK has ratified the 2003 Convention. This could provide a different and entirely new framework for supporting the traditional musics of Scotland (and of England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and for potential new enterprise models built on the back of new state-resources for more sustainable participation of traditional music and traditional arts in rural areas.

Ireland ratified the convention in 2015, and most recently in 2024, the UK ratified the UNESCO 2003 convention, and are both therefore roughly at the beginning of this journey and it is an excellent time to be considering the implications of sustainability and development goals – and how these sorts of exchanges can transform traditional arts. However, the ICH convention tends to objectify musical practices as heritage objects embedded in the rights-based approach and has been criticised for that reification of tradition. Time will tell as to whether the UNESCO convention implementation in advanced capitalist countries will adapt to the different economic conditions to provide a useful framework for sustainability policy. But there are already examples of economic and social exchange

for sustainability elsewhere in the world from which rural arts organisations and communities can learn much.

Some of these examples model economic exchange more prevalently than in the UNESCO discourses on ICH. For instance, examples of sustainability from the English-speaking world include The Crooked Road music trail in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Virginia (Fussell and Kruger, 2013; Rockwell, 2011), which has been a major success demonstrating how coordinating musical events and publicising them through radio beacons can provide a coherent heritage tourism strategy for a cultural area that brings in substantial numbers of visitors every year. That model of mobilising music for economic gain through tourism has been highly successful in Cape Breton too, where studies have shown that the fiddle music and dance have provided both direct and indirect employment and income for many in the local community suffering from the decline of heavy industry (Brown and Geddes, 2007; Feintuch, 2004b). In Ireland today, there are several companies that have sprung up charging wealthy visitors largely from the North American diaspora many thousands of pounds each for bespoke guided tours of key musical heritage sites with live, authentic traditional music in local pubs each evening. Not only does this provide well paid employment for the musicians cutting out the middle (wo)man, and running the company, it also leaves those tourists who visit Ireland for these tours with a genuine sense of getting a glimpse inside a very special musical tradition offering them access to increased feelings of belonging and heritage capital, and to experience the holiday of a lifetime. Again, – the commodity here is the tourist's desire to belong to a sense of Irishness through musical participation – the music is the labour that makes exchange possible.

Martin Pogačar demonstrates that in the Slovenian context, digitalisation has both undermined any possibility for a singular, solid narrative that traditionally flowed from the state's interventions in culture, and has also made possible a burgeoning multicultural heritage through the online spaces that are allowing people to participate and discuss their heritage online as part of the daily lives, wherever they may be (Pogačar, 2014). Elsewhere too, the newly emergent markets for music as ICH are enabling new sources

of revenue for traditional musicians and institutions. For example, the nationally state-funded Smithsonian Museum in the United States of America has continued a long-running fieldwork recording series of archival CDs and downloadable digital sound outputs. The Smithsonian annually sells now millions of dollars of these recordings and pays back to musicians over half-a-million dollars in royalties and licensing fees (Kurin, 2007, p. 18). Why do people buy musical recordings? So they can have access to listen and participate in a genre with which they identify, in short, they feel they belong to that tradition and are willing to spend money to feed their desire.

We know from Bourdieu and from more recent cultural sociology, that increased cultural capital can lead to increased social capital, and also that music is a key arena for the construction of belonging and identities (Bennett *et al.*, 2009; Savage *et al.*, 2013). Exchange itself implies a sense of movement and interchange in whatever domain that takes place. All musical performances involve exchanges of one kind or another, and these reflect and construct both their authenticity, aesthetics, and the unspoken tacit values that often remain unvoiced. Consider for instance the sense of belonging that is engendered for those dancing or simply listening attentively to a national anthem: whether or not the individual feels any ethnic or national sense of belonging, or indeed, the very performance gives rise to antidisestablishmentarian feelings, nevertheless, theirs has been an exchange of quite complex notions of identity, belonging, nationalism, Selfness and/or Otherness, which can be understood as an active process of exchange through performance.

In rural creative industries, much of the long-term sustainability can be founded upon cross-sectoral collaboration. In many examples from fieldwork, and from elsewhere around the world, sustainability comes for music and artistic communities, from their relationships with other sectors, not only financially, but also socially and culturally. For instance, Avril Joffe, who is the UNESCO Chair at the Wits School of Arts at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa, suggests that this lesson can be seen in multiple examples across the African continent. For example, the Na Ni Who is a statement made by a Nubian elder in 2011 which has led to arts projects

dealing with residents in Nairobi, who felt very little connection to the city as migrant workers. Through their festival workshop process they engaged with the neighbourhood residents which resulted in a project that has been running for 13 years using arts and culture to engage people in the design of public policy.² Similarly, the Malian festival of *Sur le Niger* founded in 2005 emerged from creative practitioners in a very rural area in Mali. They involved the community to clean the river in this area to build a barge and host a music festival. This festival combined environmental and musical objectives, to stimulate economic development via accommodation and homespun restaurants in local homes. The entire festival was designed and delivered by the local community. This has now also brought tourism to the area. The festival was founded upon collaborative practice in rural Mali, which combines a humanist 'Maaya' philosophy with contemporary concerns for the environment and rural depopulation.³ Part of the learning from this festival and its economic and environmental outcomes was that for rural areas, government can support the cultural networks that underpin cultural and creative events so that there is someone collectivising in each region to stand between the informal and formal/professional organisations.

In my own fieldwork in Scotland for this book, there are numerous examples of cross-sectoral collaboration that make musical livelihoods, festivals, performances and events more sustainable over the long term. These are cross-sectoral collaborations between creative organisations and tourism, health, education, retail and other industries such as food and drink. The potential of cross-sectoral collaboration is obvious in some respects, it allows (often) small amounts of financial support or in-kind support to flow into musical communities in rural areas, and in turn, musicians, festivals and promoters are able to provide entertainment, authentic touristic experiences or Scottish cultural capital to different brands or events. There are good examples of this in third sector organisations such

2 See <https://thegodown.org/nai-ni-who-2/>

3 See <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/fondation-festival-sur-le-niger/> and <https://www.fondationfestivalsurleniger.org/>

as Fèisean nan Gàidheal amongst others, where quasi-public services, or actual delivery of public services can cross-subsidise musical and creative educational work in the organisation as Arthur Cormack explains:

‘We set up the Fèisgoil service to deliver services in schools. With the Fèisgoil service we actually provide something that a local authority or a public body wants to buy. Whether it be a series of music classes, or a series of Gaelic [language] classes, or Gaelic-awareness raising training for a public body. We buy in tutors who do that for them, we get a small management fee for that. And the management fee we get for delivering that for them goes back into supporting the Fèisean. We provide services to public bodies, freelancers get employed, it’s a win-win for everybody and the Fèisean end up getting the support they need because we can put the management fee back into supporting them.’ (Arthur Cormack, fieldwork interview, 2022).

In this way, traditional music is being promulgated and promoted nationwide because the local authorities working with Fèisean nan Gàidheal is a nationwide organisation working right across both rural and urban local authorities and in schools across Scotland. Because of legislation in Scotland mostly set out in the 2005 Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act, there is a requirement for local authorities to provide a Gaelic language plan that will outline how the local authority promotes and facilitates the use of Gaelic in its operations and services. They must also provide opportunities for the public to engage with services including signage, correspondence and customer service options, as well as measures to train staff. All of this provides several opportunities for music and arts providers such as Fèisean nan Gàidheal to branch out and widen their public service remit with music and linguistic provision, which in turn provides greater security for their charitable endeavours teaching Gaelic language and music classes to children across Scotland. This is both a more sustainable model of funding and further embeds Gaelic language provision within the culture of public bodies and local

authorities in Scotland, providing a model for further partnerships in the public and potentially, private sectors.

Similarly, new models of climate-related financing for grass-roots music making are also emerging, such as those found in Argyll where the local windfarms are generating place-bound, local trust funds that are being used to pay for performing arts tuition creating a sustainable form of music education that is entirely beyond the state and has strong long-term potential (see p. 85).

The key dimension then of sustainability for the rural creative economy is an understanding of both the commodity, labour and exchange value for music and how the rural context alters and makes particular the exchanges taking place in the rural or island communities. What we see already is that cross-sectoral collaboration in rural areas makes artistic practices more sustainable because they are given instrumental exchange value in health or educational out-comes within their communities. The ICH field offers real potential in the coming decades as a framework for understanding sustainability as a total system of exchange and community value, yet it remains to be seen, how the more prevalently rights-based discourses that have worked so abundantly in Asian and Mediterranean contexts might translate into Anglo-American capitalist contexts, surely key to this will be accepting that economic exchange values beyond the state, in that enterprise and entrepreneurial opportunities must be part of the future for sustainable creative practices in rural and island communities. Nevertheless, understanding that the key dimension of sustainability is the commodity which is not the music, dance or craft as an object, but in fact the desire or will to participate, is the principal insight that I bring to the discussion on sustainability, and modelling how that is understood in social, cultural and economic conditions in the rural context, will hold the key to the long-term survival of rural music-making and artistic livelihoods. In relation to local conditions in Scotland emerging from my fieldwork, I have tried to summarise these in the Figure 4.1 that outlines the core issues of sustainability for rural creative enterprises.

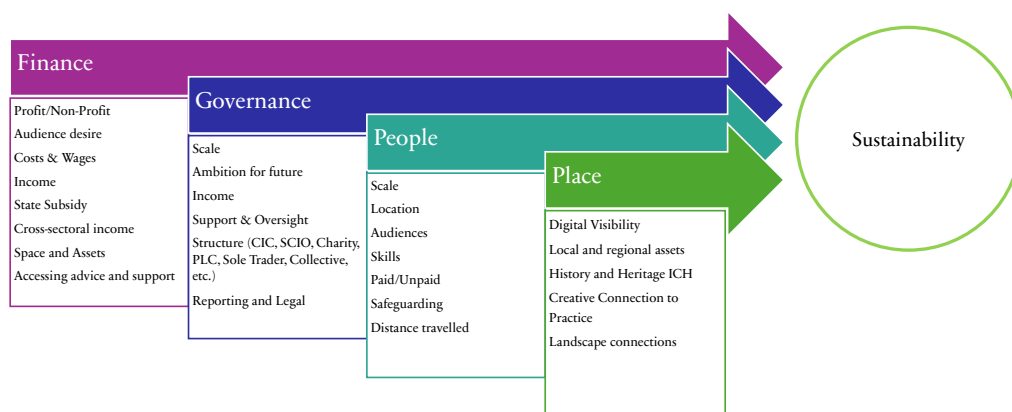


Figure 4.1 Dimensions of sustainability for rural creative enterprises.

ISLANDS, MUSIC AND POLICY IN SCOTLAND

Scotland has more than 790 islands, of which 93 are inhabited. The main challenges include depopulation, limited employment and housing, particularly for younger residents. In common with other rural areas, touring musicians, bands and shows incur much higher travelling costs to perform on islands, and hence there is very often a focus on intense island music festivals across Scotland, some of which continue to be internationally successful (for example, The HebCelt Festival on the Isle of Lewis, and the Orkney and Shetland Folk Festivals).

‘There are four main island groups: Shetland, Orkney and the Hebrides, divided into the Inner and Outer Hebrides, and there are also smaller island groupings, such as the Small Isles. A large proportion of the population can be found on a small number of islands, and there are many islands with very low population levels . . . Taken together, population estimates show that in 2020 there were 2,800 more people living on Scotland’s islands than in 2001. The population of Scotland as a whole grew at a much faster rate than this over this period (7.9 per cent), with some parts of the mainland experiencing particularly significant growth, including Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire in the North East, and the Highlands.’ (Atterton *et al.*, 2022, p. 16).

The Scottish Government passed the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and then created the National Islands Plan which was published in December 2019, and the island communities impact assessments were enacted from December 2020.⁴ In terms of the arts and music, the island communities impact assessments are the key bit of policy at the national level, and in some ways they are better protected in policy impact and services from government than other rural areas in Scotland. The provision in legislation to actively 'island-proof' all areas of policy from government is a provision that really has power in policy circles and has a daily impact in the provision of funding across arts, transport, housing and all areas of government. Effectively for islands, all new policies, strategies and services have to be island-proof, which is essentially a route for policy makers to be able to ensure that policies that work for the large urban populations of Scotland will not adversely affect small island communities, or if new policy does, then it has to be mitigated via these Island Community Impact Assessments (ICIAs). These ICIAs are therefore quite powerful policy safeguards that do have a real effect on protecting and enabling arts and island life in Scotland and are part of a multi-faceted approach to dealing with the well-documented problems of depopulation on islands across Scotland.

Many interviewees across the Highlands and Islands suggested that the local authority reductions in budgets has hit them hard, with local authorities having to move to a position of outsourcing all of the culture, leisure and arts budgets into SCIOs – new legal vehicles outside of local authority control (see p. 90 for a fuller discussion). This is also true in the islands, and inevitably, under smaller budget settlements from Edinburgh, many local authorities have had to prioritise health, social care, housing and core statutory services. Indeed, in many island contexts, the issue of availability and affordability of housing came up in several interviews. Not only in the sense that there has been a complete lack of any social housing built in recent decades, but the specific impact on young creative enterprises, and the ability for younger people starting out to have somewhere even to live on Scottish islands, and from which to build

4 See <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-plan-scotlands-islands/>

a business, startup or event. Jamie MacDonald in Tiree who works as a performing musician but also online, suggested that housing was a particularly important factor for island creative workers:

‘The islands are beholden to the people that have the money to move there, I think it’s important to acknowledge that my entire generation either live with their parents or in caravans and until we get the housing situation sorted out the problems will remain. Undoubtedly, every conversation about development or improvement about community always comes back to that factor. People are looking at it and it has reached a breaking point and there is a bit of hope there.’ (Jamie MacDonald, fieldwork interview, 2022).

The other aspect of live music making in Scottish islands that is important, is that the local conditions matter, perhaps more so than on the mainland. What might work in Shetland won’t necessarily work on the Isle of Lewis or on Skye. Alex Macdonald has been promoting music on the Isle of Lewis for many years, with many successful events and festivals that have made a huge impact on the local island economy, as well as the cultural vibrancy of the Outer Hebrides. However, as she explains, the geographical distance and rural travel burden for island festivals is still something that is hidden or unrealised for many in the music sector itself.

‘Generally people are guilty of describing us as the remote Hebrides, but we’re not remote really, it’s just that we cannot fly people in because it’s really expensive and we don’t have the budget, we just can’t afford to.

I have had some ridiculous questions asked of me about our location and why I’m looking for money for transport. There’s one I always remember, when I had an agent in London phone me up and said “I want to come to you this date”, and I said to her, “where are you the night before, and the night after?” because we want to make sure they can get here on time and leave on time. She said, we’re in Mull the day before and then we’re going to Shetland the day after you. And I said, “Oh, do you have a map” and I said,

“you know the blue bits? That’s water, so you have to take two ferries and there’s no way you’re going to get from Mull to Lewis in a day”. And then she was talking about Shetland and, I said, “hang on, is Shetland in a little box on the left hand side of your map?”. And she said, “oh yes, I never noticed that was in a box”. And I said, “that’s not where it actually is”. So you know, the tour didn’t happen funnily enough. That sort of naivety we’re very well aware of.” (Alex Macdonald, fieldwork interview, 2022).

Similarly, in some of the interviews, organisations working in arts and music expressed a view that they felt working towards their objectives outside of government policy and funding can be more productive, and offers greater freedom of action. Clearly, for arts groups and the third sector, this means moving past the financial benefits of state funding, in whatever form it comes. However, many of those I interviewed across the project, indeed some of whom are working in national government and/or involved with local government acknowledged that the reductions in local authority budgets in the 2010s has had a profound impact both upon the priorities of local authorities and how they deliver services. Sometimes the state-sponsored funds for the arts themselves are not well suited to island contexts: ‘An interesting thing with the Scotland on tour fund that came out, it doesn’t really fit us. If I was taking on a band, I wouldn’t want to give them a second gig 30 miles away, we can’t really do two nights, but we can do one’ (Alex Macdonald, fieldwork interview, 2022). Here Alex demonstrates one of the key differences for island music promoters, that audiences have to be carefully curated so that success can mean shouldering the expense for one major event or festival, and ensuring the band does not dilute the audience by playing two nights on the same island.

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY AND ITS FIT WITH RURAL CREATIVE ORGANISATIONS

One key aspect of the ecosystem in cultural policy, is the relationship between national funding bodies such as Creative Scotland, Arts Council England, Arts Council of Northern Ireland or the Arts

Council of Wales. These bodies are the arms-length quangos that distribute public funding directly to cultural organisations across each of the four nations and regions in the UK. They each have a particular history and trajectory, but they all also face geographical challenges with one or more metropolitan conglomerations where power and arts funding are concentrated and various levels of rural and peripherality beyond. In Scotland, Creative Scotland has always taken an organisation-centred approach to distributing its funding, based upon a semi-responsive but structured approach to institutional understandings of need and priorities across Scotland.

The question of urban-rural dichotomy has largely been left aside in the numerous analyses of national cultural funding in the UK; indeed, there has been a small industry of cultural policy analysis at the national scale, and part of this study has been motivated by a reaction against that continuing narrative of ‘national’ cultural policy in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are numerous ways in which rural cultural policy has different demands from urban cultural policy and national arts funding. Foremost amongst those differences are the huge travel costs for artists and audiences in rural areas, not only in the form of fuel, plane or rail travel, but also in terms of the logistics of ferries and flights. Touring, promoting or running a venue in rural areas is different to doing the same thing in towns and cities.

There are so many reports, articles and policy documents engulfing the creative industries, creative economy and the arts at this point in the twenty-first century Britain, that it can be difficult to know how to think and frame the issues surrounding policy for music in rural areas. Clearly there are various actors with varying agency and agendas, there are communities both real and imagined, and events, festivals and a substantial third and private sectors who all have an interest in policy. As a policy-interested scholar, I have tended towards the Habermasian approach; that is, a sense of a framework for action that is agreed either explicitly or by tacit consensus. That is a slightly different formulation of what policy generally means in the academy and in government because it opens up areas of unwritten practice as a form of policy and extends the influence of those beyond government. This is appropriate in music and the

creative economy, on various grounds, but particularly because the size of the third sector involvement in the arts is huge, and because in the UK context, both local and national government has undergone a period of sustained state retreat from the arts – both in terms of what it will pay for, but also in terms of politics. Therefore, when considering policy for music, music education and festivals and events across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, one has to understand that almost all of it is now delivered by charities, trusts, SCIOs and local individuals and community groups who simply wish to keep their local cultural life afloat and to provide opportunities for a socio-musical life for themselves and their neighbours.

That said, there has been a recent reframing of the role of government in culture and heritage, that has been led from Westminster rather than in Scotland itself. In January 2021 the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) released a policy framework entitled 'Valuing Culture and Heritage Capital: A Framework Towards Informing Decision Making'. The ambition behind this framework has been to think and flesh out a systemic approach to accounting for the cultural and heritage value of events, buildings and activities across the UK that have almost always been left beyond the decision-makers' consciousness in previous years. Much of this work from London and English-based policy makers has not yet emerged properly in the Scottish context but is useful in reflecting on what policies matter for rural creative economies.

Moving from rural place-to-place requires a different set of assumptions for artists and their agents, as well as for rural venues and arts coordinators at all levels from the city with an extensive rural hinterland like Inverness, to the island cultural venues serving several islands and constituencies spread across hundreds of miles like An Lanntair in the Western Isles. Seall on the Isle of Skye has been working with numerous public bodies and charities across their island to reduce isolation on the island. But as Sara Bain explains, for those organisations reliant on public or state funding to do this kind of cultural work with a social purpose, national funders don't always understand how the rural comes into play on islands such as Skye, where people can live tens of miles from each other:

‘We live in one of the most geographically challenging areas of Scotland. The transport network is poor, mobile phone and internet networks are still relatively insufficient, and many older residents don’t drive cars, so there’s a lot of very isolated people on the islands that fall under the radar of broad-brush national indicators. We work in most of the venues across Skye and Raasay. We are fully mobile and are able to get to our audiences if they can’t come to us. In 2020 the Government promised to give support to the events industry, but they initially left organisations like us out of their funding strategy because we don’t actually have our own venue.’ (Sara Bain, fieldwork interview, 2020).

There is in effect for rural arts organisations, an additional ‘rural travel burden’ which adds costs to any rural events, festivals or touring schedule and has to be accounted for at the planning stage, and is often invisible or absent from national funding schemes. One rural promoter told me:

‘There’s no through traffic – you have to come to the events as we’re at the end of the road. Bad weather puts a lot of people off and immediately your audience can half. In the central belt, this wouldn’t have as big an effect, especially through the winter months, when it’s been snowy and icy you lose a chunk of your audience, especially older folk.’ (Rural promoter, fieldwork interview, 2020).

Many in the arts are sceptical about any private involvement in public services or government. My fieldwork in the Highlands and Islands has, however, shown that innovative forms of public-private partnership are in the case of music, working far on the ground than in older, state-only models of music education provision.

In the Scottish context however, there has been a long history of thinking not just about economic flows of capital and skills, but also about place and communities. In considering rural policy, there has also been a rich history of ideas and policy around rural communities. However, one of the problems in some rural areas is that austerity

in local government over decades has meant that there is little to no capacity for transformative change when energies are routinely absorbed in simply keeping services running. And similarly, as Duncan MacLennan describes in his comprehensive report *A Scotland of Better Places* (MacLennan, 2021), very often, these local histories of cuts and austerity in local government and in the third sector, prevent people from making change by consuming the key actors in conversations about definitions and direction rather than action: 'We've been talking about inclusive growth for five years, and there's been as much discussion about what it is as opposed to how we actually do it' (Duncan MacLennan).⁵

MacLennan also picks up on the deep centralisation of Scottish Government as a key aspect that needs to change. This leads to problems in terms of transformative change, that are key to understanding Scotland's rural creative economy, but that are aspects of Scotland's economic and civic life that have been developing for years: Scotland has very large local authorities; one of the most centralised financial systems for local government in the world. The report identifies real enthusiasm for community wealth, community energy, community land and community housing. 'The arguments around an extension of community ownership of land [in rural areas] are really unanswerable' (Duncan MacLennan, 2021). These, and many other core issues in the construction of Scottish rural life, sit atop a decades-long history of deep centralisation in Scottish public life.

The concept of place-based policy has had a renewed focus since the pandemic and has emerged as a significant concept for policy in the Scottish Government, seeking to address the deep inequalities that the pandemic exposed across Scotland. The report published by the David Hume Institute in Edinburgh makes a key contribution to the notion of 'place' policy and governance in Scotland. The report is important for several reasons, but it has exposed several key aspects of place that are important to Scotland, and the rural creative economy: the failure of national redistributive

5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8ysjTTPsJE> [date accessed: 14 December 2021].

policy making as a means to address inequalities and exclusion in many communities; the deep centralisation of Scottish (and UK) policy-making is a barrier to flourishing places; that devolution to Scotland since 1999 has been positive but 'after two decades it has not promoted significant further devolution within the nation' (MacLennan, 2021, p. 7); and that in the decade from roughly 2010 to 2020, the spending control and power has shifted from local to national government in Edinburgh. All this centralisation, and policy-control prevents the sort of complex, collaborative and local, multi-sectoral working that is convincingly emphasised as a key means to enact powerful policy delivery in the report.

'The default setting in public policy in Scotland is to identify a problem of shortage, look for Scottish Government investment to alleviate needs and control prices, without any long-term investment strategies (involving the use of taxes and charges) that may reduce difficulties (without making poorer households worse off). Councils need to be able to incentivise better outcomes for their residents and businesses and to have appropriate tax and charge powers to do so. Reforming local government finance in Scotland will be easier if Scottish level government reduces its distinctive strangle-hold on local governments. That action will take more than a parliament to deliver. It needs to start now.' (MacLennan, 2021, p. 11).

Housing in rural areas interacts deeply with culture. Housing prices locals out, it limits growth, it supports migration patterns and sustainability. As many in rural areas know – it is difficult to sustain a job without a house, and it is difficult to maintain a house without a job.

CHAPTER 5

Music and digitalisation in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland

DIGITALISATION AND THE HYPER-LOCAL IN THE RURAL CREATIVE ECONOMY

There are obvious ways in which digitalisation of the creative economy in rural areas is making rural living and performing a more sustainable endeavour; not least the ability to earn from online tuition, gigs or live-online events for musicians and educators. But more than this, the digitalisation of the rural creative economy is enabling other, more innovative forms of collectivisation possible that support artists and community organisers to sustain and grow live events and festivals. These include digital place-bound collectives such as CHARTS (Culture, Heritage & Arts, Argyll & Isles),¹ which is a collective organisation that is helping to network regional artists and craftspeople, and which substantially supports the collectivisation and learning community for their *circa* 700 members. These sorts of supportive rural networks for creative people have a very useful role to play into the future, in terms of not only supporting the economic aspects of their lives such as insurance, transport or online marketing, but also the social solidarity between those attempting to make a living from creative occupations in rural areas.

Other, newer streams of revenue are also appearing in fieldwork across the Highlands and Islands. It was clear that the pandemic

1 See <https://www.chartsargyllandisles.org/>

had both a devastating effect on live music, and the events and cultural tourism sectors, whilst simultaneously accelerating the trend towards digitalisation and remote learning and working across rural Scotland. Although many musicians, festival organisers and promoters, for instance, were working digitally before the pandemic, the almost total digital pivot in work and civic life during 2020–1 led to a shift in attitude (see p. 52 for a fuller description). But the digital pivot during the pandemic lockdowns has changed the landscape forever, not just introducing new technologies, but accelerating the trends for digital take-up that were there before the pandemic. One of the key developments that emerged during and after the pandemic was the new use of digital technology to deliver local events for local audiences, and at the other end of the scale, to open up highly geographically specific local communities to global audiences and musicians. Even the fairly informal weekly ceilidh online during the pandemic that was hosted on the local authority website Na h-Eileanan Siar gathered around 30,000 visitors to its website.² We also know now, that, '... alongside the cost-of-living crisis, there has been a slower-than-expected return of in-person, core audiences. This situation, along with reduced funding, was felt particularly sharply by those organisations relying on local and central government support, in-person audiences, and ticket sales for revenue. The post-pandemic cultural landscape has therefore created significant new challenges for both engagement and work-forces in arts, culture and heritage' (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2024, p. 13). How well-connected rural businesses are with their local community has been shown to be crucial to their success and adaptability to expansion and growth beyond the region (Bowen, 2011; Young, 2010). They are better able to coordinate and communicate with their communities which then supports their financial success. Hyper-localism offers an important new route to economic sustainability for digital musicians and micro-enterprises. However, this can also be a drag on sustainability for musicians (because they sometimes do not renew social and musical partnerships beyond their local community) and because income streams

2 Fieldwork interview, September 2020.

have to involve money flowing into a local economy from outside, as well as flowing out. As (Young, 2010, p. 395) points out, '... an exclusive or nearly exclusive focus on locality ignores the realities of economic globalisation'. And particularly for music and other intangible cultural commodities where they are embedded not only in local, live performance, but also in global digital commerce and marketing; rural musical enterprises need a particularly sharp focus on their digital presence. Perhaps more so than urban musicians and festivals (see the Appendix: Making rural music work, Digital visibility and algorithmic visibility). All this suggests that it is increasingly important to think about the rural and place-based dimensions of rural creative enterprises, and how to leverage those as a form of cultural capital, to be exploited and made fungible to convert into economic capital in the global, digital economy.

My own experience performing and working over the past 30 years across rural Scotland and internationally, bears witness to the real power of deeply local traditions, and how important they are for successful gigs, events, competitions and festivals. For instance performing at Orkney Folk Festival, musicians and audiences alike are drawn into the strong sense of islandness and Orcadian culture; not only through the place itself, the programming and complex transport arrangements of getting there and performing on islands in the archipelago, but also through shared experiences and repertoire playing music with people that has a distinctive Orcadian flavour with its distinctive rhythms, bowing and tonality (see for example various, 2004, 2014). The tunes themselves carry a sense of islandness that emerges in performance. This is perhaps at its core, how the most embodied dimensions of our musical culture work to excite and inspire people to be part of musical events and festivals. These non-textual, embodied yet deeply emotionally powerful aspects of our creative experience draw us as audience members and musicians to participate together and to come back year after year to festivals, gigs and to play together.

Similarly, I have for many years performed at the annual Skye Games in Portree, on the Isle of Skye, which remains a huge draw for tourists and locals, bringing a focal point to the summer for the town of Portree and the vast numbers of tourists visiting the Isle of

Skye. Playing in the venues in Portree alongside all the other pipers has been one of my most treasured experiences, not simply because it is a major competitive event in the piping calendar, but because competitors and tourists can be immersed in the piping traditions of the island itself. Repertoire for the competitions comes from the famous MacCrimmon pipers of the Isle of Skye, and competing performers are required to submit tunes that have a local connection to the famous MacCrimmon dynasty of composer-pipers (Cheape, 2009). Again, in this way, the musical experience for both performers and listeners binds us together in a shared experience that is hyper-local and which relies on the deep cultural heritage of the island and its long and storied histories. Many rural and island musical events rely implicitly on this sense of connection and emotional power to attract their audiences and hence there is a visceral link between our own deeply felt experience and the fungibility of economic capital that can keep rural creative livelihoods sustainable. Increasingly, this sort of ICH is foregrounded in marketing and the digital presence of rural festivals and events. This constructs an online sense of placedness that is important not just for the straightforward imperatives of attracting an audience, but also in creating that desire to participate in an authentic, local tradition that draws people in to online and in-person participation.

One of the arts festival administrators I spoke to suggested that everyone had been doing a certain amount of online and digital events work prior to the pandemic, but post pandemic, turned into an everyday workstream for their rural events enterprise. They expressed this in terms of taking a different, much more focused view of this in terms of their business-as-usual approach, to ensure they have blended and online plans for all their events, and that the whole sector would have to be involved in this sort of shift. Individuals and organisations now have a different horizon, one that includes real in-person events, with a range of digital media running alongside from the simplest online marketing of events, through to multi-site live streamed online concerts. Although, it is now clear that rural localities have been reinvigorated in some ways, and re-imagined within the digital sphere, the digital manifestation of 'the local' is a new horizon for individual artists and organisations working across

rural Scotland (usually discussed in academic literature through the ungainly term, 'glocal'). The long talked of 'urban flight' has not had a huge or demonstrable impact on working lives in the Highlands and Islands, although shifting perceptions about location and work-places has led to higher house prices and a renewal in the prospects for island and rural communities if they can support remote and digital working. Jamie MacDonald is a young fiddler and arts administrator living on Tiree, who is decidedly upbeat about how useful this digitalisation has, and could be, for Hebridean life:

'I feel very strongly that you can definitely make it work; living on Tiree and working as a musician. And I think a lot of people are quick to dismiss that. I did my uni course online, I did my undergraduate online as well. I think the way that the islands survive and have a community that is turning over . . . that's the only way the island is going to survive. I feel strongly about being a part of that, I want to live in Tiree, why wouldn't you!

I think we're at a pivotal point because as the infrastructure improves, particularly in terms of access to the internet, there's people on the island who have been able to move back and work totally remotely. I would say my work is kind of hybrid, I mean if I'm doing a gig, I need to be where the audience are, although arguably, during the pandemic, that isn't as applicable as it used to be! So I think that in the next couple of years we'll see if that's a major factor with people relocating.' (Jamie MacDonald, fieldwork interview, 2022).

Similarly positive about the possibilities of new local digital cultural work, one rural promoter I spoke to, emphasised how surprised they were at how unexpected and personal moments could be created via Zoom:

'I think quality aside, it was the connection between people, that commonality between people in the care home doing something together and something to focus on every week, all on Zoom . . . there's been some real gems in the care homes when we've been doing work. For example, the musicians tried

to choose really relevant, local songs and tunes, so one of the pipers played xxxxx [a local bagpipe tune] and when it finished, there was clapping and everything and then yyyyy, the activities coordinator there, said she was sitting next to a lady and holding her hand, and it [turned out that lady was related to the man named in the pipe tune]! She was so chuffed! It was really lovely.' (Anonymous promoter, fieldwork interview 2020).

These unexpected moments of connection emerged often during the pandemic and have in many ways transformed people's notion of the value of online musical performances and the human connection that is possible at a very local level.

In this way then, digitalisation is being integrated and making more visible, the truly hyper-local across rural areas. Whether that's using Zoom for local meetings, rehearsals, or including those working away for community meetings, or enabling creative workers to market their performances, tuition or products with a strong local flavour to the wider world, all of these and many other forms of hyper-locality are being conducted online and often in-person also. There is a real positive dimension to this hyper-localism that makes the desire for people to participate visible in online engagement statistics, born-digital gigs, subscriptions, Patreon pages, donations, crowd funding and the simple retail of creative products and services, that are enabling people to lean on their local place and traditions to make rural livelihoods more sustainable and possible. As argued in Chapter 4, it is this desire to participate (sometimes called willingness to pay) that underpins the sustainability model for intangible creative services and products: people's attraction and desire to be part of something as hyper-local and authentic as an online sing-a-long or born-digital gig with connections to a village, region, island or cultural tradition is the key dimension of the capital exchange, turning cultural capital, and place-based capital into economic capital. The hyper-local and place-based model that has been opened up through the digitalisation of rural communities is a key dimension of making the rural creative economy more sustainable for those who wish to work and live in rural areas. Simply put, people's desire to be connected to authentic local traditions from Glenuig,

Skye, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland or Shetland can form part of the capital exchange that makes it possible to make a living in these areas. As other fields are discovering, hyper-localism is something that can both drive engagement digitally with communities in rural areas, and potentially offers useful answers to the massive hollowing out of key fields such as journalism. As David Baines suggests, hyper-local media can be powerful for local people in constructing their sense of community belonging, and although complicated in practice, has the potential to 'support the sustainability of rural communities' (Baines, 2012). Similarly, Ewart and Brabazon (2024) find that rural news media are vital for 'community formation and connection'. The same is true for music and other creative enterprises: the interests of global platforms and technology companies are not in the hyper-local, or in community cohesion, but in profit. However, those platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and X, are being used for community groups to post services, news, campaigns and all manner of social (and performative) discourse that strengthen hyper-local social ties and enable creative workers to showcase their creativity.

Richard Florida's work on the creative class (2003), on how proximity of creative workers can boost growth and how cities can attract creative workers, which will in turn provide spillover effects that support economic growth, has been a foundational text in creative economy research. One of the aspects that has been particularly dominant has been research on creative clustering in the creative industries; that moving creative occupations and firms nearer to each other in 'clusters' provides a boost to productivity, innovation and spillover effects into technology, manufacturing and other areas of the economy such as housing and the wider regional economy. Clearly, for rural communities, there cannot be substantive clusters, that is many firms co-locating together that brings a concentration of occupational talent and growth. Researchers suggest there are around 47 creative clusters across the UK that grew their creative employment between 2007 and 2014 (Mateos-Garcia and Bakhshi, 2016), which was expanded to 55 over time. These clusters inevitably focus upon cities such as London, Edinburgh, Dundee, Cardiff, Manchester, Leeds and Bristol, often with particular clusters such as

the gaming industry in Dundee, or the textiles and fashion industry in Leeds.³ The problem with this approach of proximity-based and GVA-based economic analysis is that it does not reveal much about creative industries for micro-enterprises, freelancers or sole traders in rural areas (see a fuller discussion see Chapter 1). Rural creative micro-enterprises, are thus not particularly susceptible to 'clustering' analysis by their very nature, as, '... rural areas are commonly disregarded in enterprise development and innovation policy (Merrell *et al.*, 2022). But a more systemic approach to supporting these people, places and occupations should be grounded in place-based support, as that is now accepted as a key dimension of how rural development and rural enterprise can flourish, and is also supported in this study. Recent research suggest that for rural areas, the sharing, and co-location of rural businesses or micro-enterprises can help cross-pollinate skills such as accounting, marketing and branding skills, suggesting that there are two distinct types of rural hubs: those where a group of sole traders or businesses can co-locate together to share expertise and sell to the public (honey pot hubs), and those where creative workers and businesses co-locate together in rural areas that have complementary sectoral skills and attract business-to-business interactions (hive hubs) (Merrell *et al.*, 2022). Enabling digital access and co-locating in these hubs can help micro-enterprises to learn from each other and thereby build their brands and enterprises leaning on the complementarity of each other's skills and knowledge. The honey pot hubs can also act as a focal point for tourism and attract visitors who know that several creative businesses will be located together. Similarly, with tenants in the creative sector, their research shows that rural enterprise hubs can provide a, 'substantial set of spill-over effects, captured in terms of the different dimensions of proximity' (2022, sect. 6) as well as providing a useful foundation for peer-learning between people working in the rural hubs. The most recent research on proximity and creative clustering, suggests that the creative micro-clusters grow fastest across the UK where there are cultural organisations,

3 See <https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/case-study/creative-clusters-in-the-uk/> and https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/creative-clusters-case-studies/

and joined-up thinking across regional government and administrative boundaries highlighting the role of devolved powers such as the Scottish parliament to support creative micro-clustering across regions (Siepel, Alejandro and Rathi, 2023). Research and development and business support across regions can help promote knowledge and stimulate creative economic activity in micro-clusters. Perhaps policy support in rural areas could be considered for micro-enterprises via joining up enterprise support with arts and cultural agencies more broadly; the ways in which enterprise and business support are funded tend to be very separate from artistic or cultural state support and therefore potentially considering more collaboration between these forms of state or arms-length actors might help to invigorate ideas such as honey pot rural enterprise hubs in rural areas, or the sorts of digital services support needed by micro-enterprises and sole traders, so often invisible in national-level creative economy statistics and debate.

MUSIC EDUCATION AND DIGITALISATION IN RURAL AREAS

Music education is one of the most significant parts of any analysis of music's role in people's lives, in their communities, and similarly in the creative economy. Music education is a loose term and can mean various things from school music curricular, to community learning for adults, to informal kids' groups, through to advanced private or elite conservatoire education in music. Similarly, the diversity of genres in music education makes it a tricky object of study, given the historical bias in musicology for metropolitan and elite classical music (western art music) in genre, and public pre-occupations with school education curricula. This position has changed somewhat. Schools, certainly in Scotland and across the UK, take a much more diverse view of what music education might include and the curricula, although impossibly conservative in some exam boards, have shifted over the years to include more popular music, folk music and musicals and other genres. This is not however, a book about music education, a large and specialist field in and of itself, but in this

chapter the key issue from a creative economic perspective is how music education enables a pipeline for talent into the creative economy in rural and island communities, particularly in relation to my case study in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. My view has been that the compartmentalisation of 'education' by academics, teachers and policy makers, combined with the structural divisions in government between the economic, enterprise and educational civil service, tends to mean that there is little conversation or debate that discusses creative education as a pipeline for the creative economy. The debate is much more often a fertile field for politicised debates around the aesthetic, political and social merits of art, music and performance. Clearly also, the division within educational and pedagogical fields of information technology and arts, performance and music are unrepresentative of the modern economy given how much digitalisation has occurred since the 1990s in creative industries. In particular, for music, there continues to be a significant disconnect between the musical lives of the citizens and the music education agenda of educators. The shift from a retail musical economy (where people were sold musical objects like cassettes or CDs) to the new international platformised streaming economy for music is poorly understood, and only beginning to be tackled by legislators in the third decade of the twenty-first century across Europe. Politically, always an afterthought, the aesthetic dimensions of arts and music are still misunderstood as something largely placed in opposition to the economic, the market and the politics of everyday divisions of resources, that relies on those long histories of Kantian dualism that still pervades everyday conceptions of music's place in our lives. Within music education in the UK, and more broadly across genres of different practice, there has in recent years however, been a growth in the debate around the approaches to music education and genres since the turn of the century (Green, 2017; Miller, 2023; Pitts, 2019; Schippers, 2009).

In rural areas, school music education has almost always been subject to various serendipitous flows that include: 1) the prevailing education policies at national and regional level; 2) the presence or absence of individual teachers (whether classroom music teachers or in other subjects) who have a strong personal commitment to

developing children; 3) the challenges of declining populations (depopulation) in rural areas of the developed world; 4) geographic isolation in various ways, from other music teachers and from resources; and 5) cultural and regional traditions in one or more practices of music-making. As Daniel Isbell's work suggests (2005), music teaching in rural areas is highly dependent upon what is locally available to them both in terms of resources, but also in terms of people around them in the local community. More so than in cities, because children do not have access to larger communities of practice in particular music genres but do have usually good community access to a far smaller community of people surrounding their family, home and school life.

Anita Prest, who has extensively studied the relationships and policies surrounding rural music education in small schools in British Columbia, suggests that place-based music education, where educators particularly, '... promote curricula that focus on local histories, geographies, and culture in order to provide authentic, relevant, experiential, and community learning experiences with which to engage students' (Prest, 2016). Other than the inclusion of some traditional music formats and genres as building blocks of the Scottish education curriculum that emerged in the 1990s onwards, there is little evidence of a place-based curricula in Scottish music education. And indeed, there is a real need for further research on how the deep and hugely symbolic histories and musical traditions of the Highlands and Islands could be incorporated more actively into local and regional music classrooms in schools. Making the local place-based connections between the heritage, history and traditions of a locality to the music curriculum would be a powerful means of building a stronger pipeline for place-based creative industries in rural and island communities. Clearly, that would have to be balanced with a wider cultural relativism that pays attention to Other musical traditions and trajectories in different genres of music, but it is clear in some senses that there is quite a gulf between the formal music curricula on offer in Scottish classrooms and a place-based offering that might better support the creative industries in rural (and urban) areas. That is not to say of course that this does not happen in community music settings and via informal local music

groups, and most visibly through the hugely successful education of the Gaelic Fèisean across Scottish communities. However, like so much of what happens across the Highlands and Islands, there has been very little interest in indigenous or local, or even civic engagement with local communities when it comes to school classrooms across Scotland. Prest suggests that that approach is particularly suited to multi-year, or 'multi-graded classrooms in small rural schools where a holistic, thematic approach may be more viable than one that is grade-specific' (2016, n.p.). In large part however, many of the problems surrounding music education and its lack of fit for music industries and the creative industries more widely is fundamentally grounded in the educational foundation for classroom music teaching in Scotland, which continues to be dominated by classical music. Straightforwardly, this can be understood from examining the curriculum for the Scottish Higher music examinations, which demonstrate this clearly: 10 of the 12 styles for higher music are classical or 'art music' styles (Plainchant, Oratorio, Mass, Recitative, Sonata, Chamber music, String quartet, Lied, Impressionist, Musique concrete, and the other two being Jazz funk and Soul); almost all the melodic/harmonic concepts apply straightforwardly to classical music practice and there are no other relevant conceptual areas that apply to Scottish traditional music in the higher curriculum. There are elements of Scottish traditional music that has the strongest place-based connection to Scottish localities in the National 5 curriculum and elsewhere; however, fundamentally, these are organised and categorized according to art music principles. Classroom music education in Scotland does not include many dimensions that would support a pipeline of vocational learning into industry, with no understanding of digital rights management, streaming practices, SEO integration, music audiences, or non-classical performance attributes such as regional styles, vibe, entrainment, tradition bearers, authenticity, and so on. And particularly when considering the fundamental shifts in the music industry towards digital content and data management, the secondary, and to a large extent, the tertiary curricula in Scottish music provision do not equip children for the industry, for jobs or for understanding the relationships between performance, economics and practice.

Secondary and tertiary curricula could move much further to embedding digital skills for music careers into their programmes and qualifications, which would help support the digital skills pipeline for creative industries (particularly in rural areas).

BROADBAND AND PLACE IN THE MUSICAL WORLD

As much of this book demonstrates, many of the dimensions important to meaningful work and opportunity in the rural creative economy rely on fundamental infrastructures common to many sectors such as transport, energy and communications. Broadband is an area of rural infrastructure which underpins many strategies and hopes for those people who wish to live and work in rural areas. It is a truism to suggest that rural broadband is in many instances quite poor, but it is worth remembering that there has been a great deal of progress on access to the internet and good, high-speed connections across rural parts of the world, in Scotland and right across the UK (see for instance Kleinert *et al.*, 2018; Jennings, 2021; Munro, 2016; Philip *et al.*, 2017; Roberts and Townsend, 2016b; Townsend *et al.*, 2017). High-speed broadband is a key variable for businesses and rural economies, ‘... the lack of high-speed broadband does not only affect homes, but also enterprises and their business. Access to high-speed broadband is described as a key enabler. However, whilst in urban areas nearly all households can access at least 10Mbit/s, this is not the case for more rural areas’ (Kleinert *et al.*, 2018, p. 64). Research from the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise at Newcastle University found that 34 per cent of rural enterprises in England found ‘their broadband quality to be “poor” or “very poor” (compared to 20% in urban areas)’ (NICRE, 2024, p. 5). For those working in the creative industries, there are often artist, festival or organisational website, social media, video or streaming platforms to engage with on a daily basis, and often very large file transfers or music album edits to send to others in digital form. Marketing for creative businesses relies on high-speed broadband, and when one considers the often visual basis for the place-based marketing of rural businesses, and the audio-

visual presence of most musical micro-enterprises and organisations, reliable and speedy broadband can have a transformative effect on the viability of rural careers.

One of the great untested questions for creative economy research is whether or not community construction online can be used for network effects and enhancing rural businesses? In this sense, can digital proximity for creative enterprises overcome the physical lack of proximity in rural areas to provide network effects and spillover effects to help people's businesses grow? There is some evidence from Germany and elsewhere for instance that the social networking of key cultural entrepreneurs exerts a significant influence on the development of their cultural businesses (Konrad, 2013, p. 315). That is to say, the social connections, both on and offline can overcome other barriers to success for cultural enterprises because reputation and social connections are more critical than in some other sectors. But the picture is mixed, as Anderson, Wallace and Townsend found in their work with businesses in Northern Scotland: '... we observed very little collective interaction and had no sense that there was a collaborative clustering online. We observed little collaborative synergy but instead mainly purpose-full and instrumental one-to-one connections' (Anderson, Wallace and Townsend, 2016, p. 462). My own research suggested that mostly the most successful musicians and micro-enterprises in the Highlands and Islands tended to have quite a strong social media and digital presence, that went beyond simplistic advertising of forthcoming gigs or events. Often, there is a strong sense of rurality and place in the branding itself for different musicians, bands or instrument makers that underpins their authenticity and audience reach. What this suggests is that digital skills for musical micro-enterprises are more critical than ever, or at least access to those skills for marketing and brand creation could make a strong contribution to the success and sustainability of rural creative enterprises.

Although much of the musical cultural activity, events and classes across rural Highlands and Islands relies on face-to-face, in-person gatherings, many musicians and organisations are increasingly building online connections particularly for teaching sessions, meetings and even performance events. The pandemic has had a

profound impact on the use of internet technologies such as Zoom, Microsoft teams and Skype and so on, and there was a very uneven take-up of online technologies during the pandemic in the sector. However, organisations such as Ceòlas in the Outer Hebrides (see p. 57 for a fuller description) emphasise the importance of decent broadband connectivity to the ability of organisations to flourish and to their day-to-day cultural work.

‘The internet is spasmodic; it comes and goes. We’re in Daliburgh, we don’t have the fibre optic, I’m not sure they’ve switched it on; there’s bits of the place that seems to have it but other bits that don’t. Eriskay’s as fast as anything, but down in Daliburgh, it’s mostly alright. But I’m six miles away and I’m not on the fibre list at all. I was talking to someone from Lewis the other day and she said it was fantastic!’ (Mary Schmoller, fieldwork interview, 2020).

Na h-Eileanan Siar as a local authority has one of the worst broadband connectivity statistics in the UK. Na h-Eileanan Siar has 5.5 per cent gigabit-capable broadband, compared to a UK average of 79 per cent, from Ofcom data. This essentially is ‘the percentage of premises that have coverage from a gigabit-capable service (download speeds of 1,000 Mbps or more), in the UK, as of January 2024’.⁴ The roll out of broadband, increasingly available in rural parts of the UK, and elsewhere, does bring substantial opportunities to rural creative economies. The chance to work via digital services, to teach, to mix and master and to perform music online for a live digital audience is bringing with it significant changes and despite the many problems of broadband connections, enhancing the possibility of rural creative work in music. Of course, increasing access to broadband and to the internet not only brings opportunities for digital work in rural areas, but it also increases the availability of global news, global trends, Other cultures and more diverse perspectives on the world.

4 See <https://explore-local-statistics.beta.ons.gov.uk/areas/S12000013-na-h-eileanan-siar/indicators> [date accessed: 29 July 2024].

The evidence on whether digital media leads inevitably to political polarisation is mixed, but there is certainly evidence that the more involved one is in politics, the more polarised your perspective can be (Fletcher, Cornia and Nielsen, 2020; Prior, 2013). One of the particular problems in relation to the politics of the creative economy, is that like almost all aspects of digital consumption and sentiment, it is extremely difficult to research, and that most of the research focuses on the United States, which in many ways is quite different to European or other nations around the world. Fabrizio Gilardi describes research in digital communication as like a sandcastle: 'hard to construct, and quick to decay' (Gilardi, 2022, ch. 5.1). What is not in doubt however, is the continuing massive changes wrought by digitalisation and globalisation are altering how people make a living in the creative economy, in music and particularly changing the nature of rural livelihoods.

Platform capitalism has resulted in the emergence of data as the new raw material which has had a profound influence on the older models of the creative economy that were mostly built on the assumption that labour was the underlying force for the production of capital. As Nick Srnicek's work (2017) and others have shown, this fundamental shift is affecting almost all sectors in the creative economy (music, film, TV, games, design, software design, advertising, marketing, crafts, photography, IT software and computer services, publishing, museums, galleries and libraries, architecture, and so on), as well as many other sectors such as retail (for example, Amazon and eBay) and agricultural (for example, Monsanto). In music, the huge shift from advertising revenue flowing via publishers and eventually to musicians, has been forever altered, as the audience data itself is the key source of capital, and this has meant that data platform owners pay only a fraction of advertising revenue to rights holders, but are now largely concerned with shareholders. Thus, very little money in this new creative economy flows through to musicians and creators of content from platforms such as Spotify. Historically, the musicians were in a tripartite model in the initial stages of digitalisation where the record company sold mp3s or albums as a proxy for a physical product direct to consumers and paid the artists a percentage of each sale: consumer – record

company – musician(s). Traditionally, music was a kind of retail sector, where a physical product itself could be limited, such as in the physical supply of cassettes, CDs or vinyl records. Today's streaming environment now means that user/audience data is the fundamental basis for capital production and therefore musicians and creators themselves have very little power to influence the flows of capital. However, one possibility, that offers hope for small-scale musicians and organisations is that the limited supply, which was the basis of the historical retail offer for music, could return via blockchain technologies. Blockchain technologies offer the possibility of limiting supply of artistic products in digital form, just as in the way that cybercurrency also offers limited supply, therefore pushing the valuation of bitcoin for instance, to historic highs in 2024. Clearly this technology is advanced, and musicians would need to rely upon collectivised groups for production and setup, but this is an area where music revenues from recordings or tuition or any born-digital product could return much higher revenues to artists themselves. Given that streaming technologies are often particularly unreliable in rural areas, there is, perhaps, an opportunity for rural creative communities to invest in the blockchain technologies to lead the way for the 'tokenisation' of musical products in the future.

CHAPTER 6

Live events, festivals and the development of the rural creative economy

Live events and festivals in rural areas tend to carry more economic agency than in the city. People (including both audiences and performers) have to travel to the area, often stay overnight, generally spend more than they would on day visits or simply evening events in the city, and may combine these visits with other activities in the area. Rural live events are therefore not just about the event(s) and their creative, artistic, social or economic impacts; they are very often key events in the local calendar and critical tourist events. The success or failure of an island music festival can have a major impact on the local economy and on the viability of island businesses and even ferry services. Live events in rural areas therefore tend to be more inclusive, with a broader appeal, and often programming is sometimes more risk averse than city-events to ensure the widest possible audience. Rural festivals are also very often intergenerational affairs, with different members of the same family at all ages in attendance. Rural festivals generally are important for building social capital in rural regions and networks, as friends living miles from one another may often meet only at musical or festival events, or build relationships with those from elsewhere on an annual basis. They are key sites of social connectedness, and for building local, national, as well as international relationships. They matter, and they tend to matter more to the people who live in rural areas, than festivals in cities – which often tend to be focused upon the community of practice or genre, than in rural areas – where they are for place-based locals as well as visitors.

Much has been written about the relationship between musical communities of practice or communities of interest and belonging, identity and community. As well as social capital however, events and festivals can form the basis for a renewed economic development in a town or rural region. This is well discussed in certain regions of the world elsewhere where case studies from the creative industries show the power of music and the creative economy to build a more prosperous, often post-industrial future for rural and island economies. Areas such as Nova Scotia in Canada (Brown and Geddes, 2007; Feintuch, 2004b; Galloway and Mochrie, 2006; Sparling, 1999), Asheville, North Carolina (Strom and Kerstein, 2015) and Tasmania (Verdich, 2010) show how this can be done in a systematic way. These examples from elsewhere in the world demonstrate that there is real economic benefit to cross-sectoral collaboration between the creative sectors, such as industry and tourism, that can build to something that is significant in a regional context. Gibson and Connell's work in this area stress a mutual relationship between economic growth and decline and the fortunes of music festivals (2013). They argue that music festivals can have a substantive role in economic regeneration of local economies, but that this potential comes with limitations and social complexities. They demonstrate how music festivals involve often years-long efforts to build community relations between rural residents and the festival organising committees, where pressures on small places can result in tensions and dissent alongside success. In their words, music festivals can, 'put towns on the map and keep them there' (2013, p. 17). I have not encountered these sorts of problematic relationships in festivals and local rural communities in my research. Many of the organisers, promoters and musicians I spoke with described deeply place-based festivals that rely on local musicians, heritage and connections to successfully sustain annual events that bring a great deal of direct and spillover benefits to their communities. In Scotland, there has been little deliberate, or active policy support for creative place-making (as it is sometimes called) or festivals in rural and island communities, beyond isolated grants or in-kind support from local authorities or national arts funders. Elsewhere in the world however, the real economic benefits of music

festivals and creative events is well established as a means towards regeneration.

One such example is Šibenik in Croatia, an excellent example of how culture and creative activity has been used both deliberately and serendipitously to improve the economic and social life of the region. Post-war in Croatia, Šibenik local politicians took the deliberate decision to increase the funding for the cultural sector and various initiatives centred on music with rock and pop festivals and high school bands have been events that have supported the ongoing growth of Šibenik as an artistic and cultural destination. On a visit there for the In Situ conference on *Horizons of Sustainability: The Power of Creative Innovation for Transformation of Rural and Non-Urban Futures*, in 2024, local leaders and cultural policy makers and civil servants talked proudly about how even just more than a decade ago there were really no distinct venues and artistic centres. The investment led to the creation of many different festivals of music and arts, and they credit the revitalisation of Šibenik with fundamentally, the creative and cultural activity (personal communication, Gorana Barišić Bačelić, Fortress of Culture, Šibenik, Croatia, 2024). The investment was made via both European funds alongside local government funds to transform venues to host numerous types of cultural programmes, including concerts in the House of Arts Arsen, the cinema, children's performances, seminars, workshops, and many types of cultural programming.

One of the leaders in the field of rural creative development, Nancy Duxbury, discusses the developmental power of aligning creativity with rural (non-urban) revitalisation. She suggests that we are witnessing a new approach in non-urban areas to a 'paradigm shift in how we view and imagine peripheral regions as sites of creativity and hubs of cultural production' (personal communication, Nancy Duxbury, 2024). Her research project, located in multiple European sites under the banner of the 'In Situ: Place-based innovation of cultural and creative industries in non-urban areas' was a four-year project to examine innovation-related practices and the potential of the CCIs to contribute to rural life and development.¹ The project

¹ See <https://insituculture.eu/>

substantially challenged the idea that urban areas are the centre of cultural and creative policy, and that rural/non-urban areas can be the leaders in this field for the revitalisation of the local economy. The project demonstrates that creative enterprises can have a deep influence on the local cultural landscape, where music is a universal part of each regions' creative ecosystem as can be seen in the work of the In Situ project team, in the Irish case study (personal communication, Mark Rainey, University of Galway).² The project also found many of the similar challenges for creative regions in terms of infrastructure across Europe, but a strong desire for more robust, strategic cultural policy making in each of these regions. They approached the cultural policy making with data from each of their six regions to support policy making.

All this is to suggest that rural festivals and events have to have a laser-like focus on place and sustainability that reaches across the community of practice of music, and seeks to engage with other sectors in the rural region, and to align with, and contribute to, their strategic objectives. Some of the lessons from these many projects include insights around cultural policy making and rural economic development, but almost all of them emphasise the importance of place-based policy, often working within European systems that are deeply centralised in terms of resources and policy. During the research, festivals and events that are more deeply embedded in place and with local people are more sustainable and have a more secure future. Examples of this can include festivals that seek to hold their events in the available spaces in local rural communities and to programme accordingly, as opposed to the other way around. Festivals that collaborate with other sectors, for instance forestry, health, education or tourism stand a much better chance of securing long-term sustainability than those that make an offer primarily predicated on musical communities of practice. Examples of this include: festivals that engage local rural schools in music education programmes year-round; music festivals on islands that collaborate with local companies to include touristic experiences as part of the festival ticket (tours of other businesses, touristic or historic sites

2 See <https://insituculture.eu/case-study-projects/>

on the island[s]); collaborations between arts events organisers and natural environment and natural tourism and forestry sector; musical trails that engage with place-based history and traditions and engage with the museum and heritage sector to collaborate on rural trail-based tourism; and ritual events that involve collaboration between musicians, historical and cultural rituals, such as Fire festivals, May Day agrarian traditions, Hogmanay/New Year celebrations, pagan festivals and spiritual events, and competitions such as annual Highland Games, stone skipping and other examples of rural place-based events and sporting festivals more widely (for some more detailed examples, see McKerrell and Hornabrook, 2018).

These collaborative approaches can unlock funding from educational, health and tourism that can help to support festivals and events as part of a wider, regional, place-based strategy. More than urban and city-based festivals and events, rural events need a well-developed digital strategy for reaching possible tourists and visitors (see Digital visibility in the Appendix).

VENUES

The performing venues are of course a key consideration for any festival or event, and the approach in many rural and island communities is to use available spaces for cultural events, and sometimes even people's homes. In my fieldwork, I found that there are often venues in rural and island communities that are mixed-usage venues where professional gigs and festivals might put on their events. These tend to be multi-purpose community assets such as schools with a large concert hall or stage set up, or colleges or village halls with large indoor spaces. Some rural places have dedicated arts venues such as An Lanntair (Stornoway, Isle of Lewis), Lyth Arts Centre (Caithness) and Mareel (Lerwick, Shetland Isles), amongst others. These obviously tend to rely on semi- or fully-professional staff and consequently require a dedicated venue management team with all the associated public administration, insurance, facilities required. That means that those sorts of venues require an ongoing interaction with local government, national cultural policy stakeholders,

and often politicians as well, in order to secure adequate ongoing funding.

However, one of the other dimensions of rural and island musical enterprises is that they can be mobile and pop-up in other venues such as schools, village halls, scout halls, sports clubs and even people's houses. House concerts in rural areas have become increasingly popular, and tend to rely on a very well connected rural social networks that are willing and able to host and support visiting artists. The great benefit of these venues is that they make the ongoing sustainability of a musical enterprise more likely given that they do not incur fixed and heavy ongoing costs of buildings maintenance, insurance, facilities and so on. House concerts can be very profitable for touring artists, and they always involve agreement from three actors: the musician(s), the audience and the hosts, who are in a mutually compatible dynamic. House concerts tend to involve a high degree of trust between the host/promoter and the audience, and because of this they can be intimate and really enjoyable experiences for both musicians and audience members (Mellis, 2020). These sorts of gigs can be quasi-private affairs, and hence are great for cementing existing social ties, and less good at bringing in new audiences and people. Much of the marketing and advertising for these sorts of small, local concerts relies on social media and word of mouth, hence they are very useful in rural areas where there is a well networked community of artistic interest.

Quite a substantial number of live events in rural Scotland are held outside (increasingly since the pandemic) and rely upon a network of public services and accountabilities that usually begins with the police, and may involve transport companies, as well as often volunteers and emergency services such as health and other public officials, and crucially, private insurance companies. Research into music events, or any arts events and festivals, quickly brings an understanding that almost none of the core issues have anything to do with the artistic aspects of music or art! Very often, cultural policy is the last aspect of successful events and festivals, and event organisers, festival committees and anyone involved knows, getting the transport, policing, insurance, marketing and planning right lie at the core of success. Ensuring that an outdoor live event (whether

musical or otherwise) is legally allowed to proceed usually begins with the public entertainment licence, but the issues involved are potentially vast. Often local authorities and the police will be able to advise, but a good example for rural events comes in the form of the published guidance from Angus Council in Scotland, which lays out many of the core operational and delivery issues in event and festival planning, and includes aspects such as: alcohol licencing, street traders licencing, public processions, charitable collections, trading standards, age-restrictions, fair trading, health and safety, food safety, noise nuisance and waste management, building standards, insurances, fire and disabled access, traffic management and road safety, parking, damage limitation, publicity, risk management insurance, child protection and young people's issues, equal opportunities legislation and data protection (Angus Council, N.D.).³ This is before anyone even sets foot on the event itself.

What this demonstrates is the deep bureaucracy surrounding live events in Scotland (and in many developed western states), which is evidence of bureaucratic creep, as different publicly accountable functions and services in Scotland have gradually added to the burden facing live festival or event organisers over many years. The interesting aspect of this is that the burden is almost entirely placed upon the events organiser or committee. Sharing this burden or reducing the range of contacts that an individual or voluntary committee has to deal with would be a very simple and effective policy recommendation for councils to enact that would help local authorities realise their ambitions for vibrant communities, and support tourism in their area. One cost neutral benefit to support the rural creative economy would be for regional government or local authorities to designate an employee either in licensing or in tourism, to be the single point of contact for festival and events organisers wishing to put on an event in their area. Thereby reducing the burden on events organisers and voluntary committees and helping to bring a more vibrant local cultural ecosystem one step closer (see the Appendix for more on the key issues for festival and events organisers).

3 See https://www.angus.gov.uk/media/your_guide_to_safe_and_legal_events_pdf

For festivals and events, the focus of their offer has always been partly bound in with the aesthetic beauty of rural and island Scotland, and the economic benefits that they bring for the local community. Indeed, the rural and natural capital of beautiful mountainous and island land- and sea-scapes, often with rich cultural heritage, are a core part of the place-based advantages for rural creative enterprises. This means that musical enterprises can have portfolio approaches to events and festivals, that can cross-subsidise these activities from retail, heritage, education, agriculture and in many cases, tourism.

Jamie MacDonald is a west coast fiddler from Tiree; his group Eabhal tours and records and he works as a freelancer across a range of sectors. Like many musicians, he wears several hats in a portfolio career. He works as a professional musician, in logistical and administrative support for the Tiree music festival, as a weekly Gaelic-medium broadcaster on Celtic Music Radio and is simultaneously a Director of the local Community Development Trust on Tiree. This busy portfolio career is typical of highly motivated and active young performers and requires a huge range of skills across musical, administrative, relational and financial disciplines. But, as Jamie explains, he feels they are mutually complementary, and that the variety in his working life is a source of stimulation rather than stress:

‘My main income is performing, but I also have two glamping cabins and I rent them out, which is a great safety net and I help my dad on the croft. I’m also doing a law degree so I’m kind of doing lots of things, but the music is my main income and the cabins kind of support that . . . In terms of sustainability, the cabins are pretty secure [income], in terms of the music, that’s a bit more volatile . . . but I’m including within that I include my freelance contract with the music festival, but I’ve always had that security from that . . . I think for me, the kind of person I am, I’m very aware that I need to be better at saying ‘no’ to projects as they come in but I also enjoy having a variety of different things, being able to be creative and to totally compartmentalize [the different work roles in my life]. Taking

a break from one, kind of builds the energy back up to get back into it. You can definitely make it work, as a musician living on Tiree, (Jamie MacDonald, fieldwork interview, 2022).

For Tiree Music Festival, their summer festival like all festivals has to contend with the busy festival calendar around the whole country. This affects not only bookings for larger, more prestigious acts, but also the logistics of where else they might be playing and the high costs and travel time required to make it to the island and back to mainland. Tiree music festival benefits from the strong pull of the Island of Tiree and its rich musical and cultural traditions. So like many rural and island festivals, the place itself can be mobilised to bring in audiences, and consequently income.

FESTIVAL AND MUSIC EVENTS AUDIENCES

Festivals in rural and island areas tend to be focal points of the regional calendar, drawing in an intergenerational crowd, often with local and family ties to the place, and sites of real social connectedness, in ways that urban festivals rarely achieve. In many contexts, it is the place-based traditions and heritage that acts as the draw for audiences, sometimes with diasporic connections, or sometimes simply huge fans with a loyalty to a festival or local rural town, village or island. Again, the importance of their place-based community can override genre-based or community of practice-based social connections so that rural festivals have a more powerful and outsized impact on their local communities than urban festivals. Audiences and performers' sense of rural or islandness can be a deeply felt form of shared imaginary (Shucksmith and Thompson, 2012). And festivals draw on these to construct their own identity, and the marketing materials that surround their online brand. Measurable dimensions of economic benefits are often the metrics most favoured by policy makers, and certainly have an important place in festival evaluation studies and funding campaigns. Often constructed around aspects such as visitor numbers, associated spend, indirect spending, ticket sales and accommodation bed availability, etc., these quantitative measures play an

important role in the economic arguments about music festivals and creative events more widely across rural and island places. But the simple statistical accounting of financial benefits to communities is only one dimension of rural music festivals. As the literature makes clear, in addition to economic benefits, most studies suggest there are two other key dimensions that include: 1) the community cohesion created from participatory events (social capital); and 2) positive spillover effects such as wider, 'economic boosts, increased tourism knowledge transfer and the desirability of an area' (Roberts and Townsend, 2016a).

For some larger venues in the Highlands and Islands and in many rural areas, audiences have farther to travel than larger venues in urban areas. There are many consequences to this, both in terms of the audience demographics, programming, venue sustainability and touring infrastructure. Larger venues in the Highlands and Islands include Eden Court (Inverness); Perth Theatre and Concert Hall; An Lanntair (Stornoway); and Pitlochry Festival Theatre; and various medium-sized venues including Mareel in Shetland (capacity 600 standing), Nevis Centre Fort William (800 standing) and others, such as the 180 capacity Aros centre in Portree, Isle of Skye.

Many medium and larger venues run professional outreach programmes, as well as professional and semi-professional schemes that partner arts education and participation alongside other dimensions of people's lives, such as education, allied health and in cultural programming. Some larger rural venues and organisations can diversify for financial sustainability into health-related programmes for older or younger people in the community, or into educational delivery such as in the case of Eden Court in Inverness, whose participatory arts deliver dance and drama qualifications for the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Schools' programmes and outreach programmes are a staple of many medium-to-large arts organisations in rural areas, and very often grant-funded by national arts organisations, charities or local health trusts. These invariably involve specific demographic groups, such as young people who are at risk in the community, and usually partnership working with local government, public health or third sector partners across their region (for a useful example see p. 127).

The assessment of the rural arts organisation's success is largely predicated on the same measures as urban professional arts: self-administered surveys of arts participants in their own programmes, and consequent qualitative evaluation of programmes, festivals and events. These are often visible when combined into larger, annual reports, and can form the basis for multiple reports back to national arts funders or partners in regional and third sector over time.

Regardless of what goes in the reports back to national funders, it is the job of rural venue promoters and music festival administrators to really get a granular understanding of their audiences if the festival or event is to have any chance of long-term survival. As Tkacynski and Rundle-Thiele convincingly argue for religious music festivals (2013), understanding their audiences by segmenting their audiences by demographic profiling factors is key to understanding different motivations to attend. And this makes it more likely that festivals will be sustainable financially because a refined understanding of audience segmentation can help festival organisers to target their marketing efforts to the right audience demographics (2013). Segmentation can be done by the simple self-evident categories (resident/tourist; male/female; young/old; income, and so on) but today, most professional approaches involve starting with the audience data and working out the multi-factor segmentation approaches based on festival or event attendees. Motivation to attend the festival is generally the most common approach to segmentation (Kinnunen, Luonila and Honkanen, 2019) and there is important research to do here on segmentation of rural music festivals, which could make a meaningful impact on the allocation of resources for music and cultural tourism. Understanding whether your festival goers are, 'well-educated omnivores', 'younger hedonists' (or indeed older hedonists!), 'social seekers' or 'loyal rural residents' will make a substantial impact on how rural festivals can be marketed, and on which platforms they might use to reach new audience members (see Kinnunen, Luonila and Honkanen, 2019 for further discussion). For rural festivals of course, this is doubly important because rural music festivals and events almost always rely on a high degree of music tourism in addition to the local or regional resident audience. Yet again, therefore, digital literacy and training

for rural festival organisers makes this a key dimension for the rural creative economy, in a way that is less vital in urban contexts, as they rely on proximity to attract similar sizes of audience.

PUBLIC FUNDING FOR EVENTS AND FESTIVALS IN RURAL AREAS

One of the most problematic areas for the sustainability of rural artistic venues and organisations is the grant-aided public funding. As noted, many larger organisations in rural areas (and elsewhere) tend to use a portfolio approach to combining different sources of income. But as state retreat in local government continues across many European states (see p. 116 onwards for a fuller discussion of this in relation to rural sustainability) then directly state-funded arts and participation/outreach programmes have all but disappeared in rural Scotland. Clearly this is politically difficult, and the merits of state-funding the arts has been well covered elsewhere in the literature (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008; Cloonan, 2013; Gray, 2000; McKerrell, 2014; Street, 1993). However, shrinking public funding for arts venues and outreach in the rural arts can have counter-intuitive dimensions to this in the sense that in some cases, it forces the third sector to step in, or in many cases, local volunteers to group together for low-to-no-cost solutions to arts participation and provision in rural areas. Within my own fieldwork, I found that sometimes there was recognition of this even within the arts sector itself.

‘If local authorities aren’t funded to the level they need to be by their national government they have to make difficult choices, and it’s much easier to scrap arts officers than it is to close a GPs surgery, and no-one would argue that a GPs surgery should be shut in favour of arts officers. And if you get rid of it all, culture will still exist, the grassroots will build up and do phenomenal things, and that’s exactly what happened in XXXX. They cut it off, and XXXX is now one of the most vibrant [places] in the country. It’s starting to happen in YYYY. The local authority got rid of all the arts and culture funding . . . and the

artists in YYYY [got together] and there's really interesting stuff happening. It will always exist, whether that's formal or informal culture with people coming together, and there's real value and impact from that. The shortsightedness of that, is that in ten years down the line there will be young people in particular, who have missed out, and that's when you start to see your crime rates going up, your anti-social behaviour going up and if the investment was there properly the whole time there would be a saving I believe.' (Anonymous rural arts professional, fieldwork interview, 2020).

This is not an argument in favour of de-funding the arts, it is however, an argument in favour of long-term funding grassroots that feed social outcomes in the arts. There is indeed an argument to be had in Scotland (as surely in many other nations with established rural creative industries and arts practice) about what in fact public investment in the performing arts particularly should look like. This rural arts professional saw firsthand that the cuts to the budgets for arts had real consequences in terms of withdrawing a whole generation of opportunity for young people, and that the social and community benefits were even more stark; the artistic practice came back via volunteers and grassroots enthusiasts, but the health and social benefits that accrue from arts participation for young people in particular led to financial and social costs to rural society from the loss of those youth arts and community arts programmes. The difficulty for advocates of these systems is that it is difficult to articulate how your festival outreach programme, or charitable community arts programme is benefitting the regional community. Being able to articulate these sorts of instrumental benefits has become key to the role of the professional (and semi-professional) arts administrator today, and can be particularly powerful for rural areas where the population is distributed, and there are few opportunities for young people to come together. One way of tackling this is to lean on the expertise of public health and social work staff working in the public sector when considering the cost-benefit analyses of performing arts festivals and events and their outreach and educational and community programmes.

In the UK, much of this non-financial benefit has been recognised and central government has led the way in producing a substantive Culture and Heritage Capital programme in the Department of DCMS for the UK. This prioritises the value of creative culture and heritage and their impact on welfare, growth and people's lives through a view on their holistic capital valuation, that is, understanding the natural, human, social and financial capital (Sagger and Bezzano, 2024).

What is fascinating about this approach is that for the first time, there is a fungibility of cultural and heritage capitals (termed 'cultural capital' in the documentation) that derives from the Bourdieusian work, that gives an economic benefit and pricing structure for cultural activities within the UK. For most of the past 70 years or so, much of the heritage and cultural funding from the state has gone to maintaining physical cultural assets such as historic buildings, castles and nationally important collections. The interesting shift in cultural policy has been that the work on ICH and the human-based skills and knowledge is now making inroads into formal government policy in the UK. In addition to the recent ratification of the UNESCO Convention on ICH (see p. 114 for discussion) the UK government has developed a valuation model that begins to embed the benefits of weekly music lessons, visits to galleries, museums and arts concerts into a formal model.

This model provides some figures that can be used in business cases for applications based on detailed research in cultural capital and health economics. For instance, in some instances, '... frequent engagement [and participation] in a choir, weekly for at least 3 months, on general health, for adults aged 65 and over. A value of £553 per person per years is estimated' (Sagger and Bezzano, 2024, p. 71). Similarly, infrequent attendance at museums art galleries, valued at £369 per year, or weekly activities relating to art, music or theatre (for instance, being part of a band, attending a play or an art institution) at least once per week has a positive impact on the mental health of young adults aged 18–30. A value of £748 per person per year is estimated (2024:70). Most of the remit of the UK Government's DCMS is in fact reserved to Westminster, meaning that this work can be used in Scotland for value business cases by

festivals and charities in Scotland wishing to use green book valuations in their own proposals to provide a proxy financial value for cultural activities. Sport and the Arts are devolved to Scotland, but this does not cover the full remit of the UK government department, and it is worth considering this approach for rural investment and business cases in the creative sector.

As many interviews demonstrated in this research, the case for rural and island music festivals, arts festivals and other events is strong. Successful festivals in the Highlands and Islands tend to quickly gain an incredibly loyal following because of the connection between rural and island place and the arts. This is a dimension of rural programming that is hugely beneficial and relies on place-based activities. It is also strongest (as seen in Chapter 3) for the traditional music and song where there is a historical and heritage connection between the landscape, the cultural history and the people and places of the Highlands and Islands. Many festivals sell out before even announcing their acts – Belladrum Festival and Tìrè Music Festival are two such examples. That is a very strong signal that for many rural and island music festivals, the experience is far more of a draw than the acts themselves. As long as audiences can trust the programming generally, many members of the audiences come for the experience of the island festival itself.

CLASSICAL MUSIC IN THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

Classical music across the Highlands and Islands has not benefitted from this close connection between the musical materials and the place-based heritage of rural Scotland. The lack of a fixed geographical heritage within classical music makes it difficult to attract audiences, and also difficult to sustain live musical festivals and events. In some respects, the problems of promoting and sustaining classical music of a high professional standard in rural and island communities is a direct consequence of its complete professionalisation. Despite many attempts over the years to try to align classical music with wider audiences, and to rid itself of the reputation and

association with upper-middle-class identities, we still live with the great social tautology that it is the genre with the least participation and commercial success, yet remains the core stream of our educational offer to children in schools. The disassociation of classical music with place marks it out alongside some other genres such as jazz and certain mid-Atlantic forms of popular music, as genres that are difficult to sustain in rural areas because of their lack of association to geographical places.

One of the consequences of this professionalisation of classical music, is that those venues in the rural hinterland that can sustain regular classical concerts, such as Perth Concert Hall, have to programme their repertoire carefully and fairly conservatively to cater for an ageing audience demographic, and are, therefore, more inclined to the canonical repertoire than the avant-garde, as one promoter of classical music explains:

‘In terms of classical programming, it’s pretty mainstream, there’s not a lot of risk capital. You can occasionally, if you’re very clever, come up with a site-specific narrative for something that will sell. You can take some risks in the central belt, you really can’t take in Perth. You can have shows [in Perth] that really don’t sell. And if you were to look at the programme of Perth Festival of the Arts, it’s pretty straight down the line, it does come back to a certain extent to that [ageing] demographic; the well-heeled, 35-year-old cultural risk-taker is a rare beast in Perth. I don’t think the central belt goes to Perth for its risks.’ (Anonymous promoter, fieldwork interview, 2022).

What is interesting about this in terms of festival and events, is that the programming itself is tied to the cultural appetites of locals, emphasising the canonical centre of the classical genre, against the more avant-garde, or novel compositions. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, it pushes the newer work of composers and festivals for the dedicated classical music audiences into the cities, where there are economies of scale that can support audiences large enough to attend less established musical events. It is worth noting, however, that even with this predisposition for urban-based classical music,

the genre remains the most heavily subsidised form of music in Scotland, and across most European nation states.

A further problem for classical music promotion that also fundamentally stems from its elite training, is that in order to bring classical music and highly elite forms to rural audiences requires professional performers, largely turning them into 'helicopter arts' in rural areas. This is where small pots of tightly defined, short-term arts funding results in professional artists and productions being helicoptered into a rural region or island, that disappear again quickly without leaving any legacy or trace of their artistic or social impact. There is a great deal of work to do in relation to classical music programming in rural areas, and one that requires a fundamentally different approach. There are potentially good audiences for classical and elite forms of art music, but mainstreaming classical forms of music requires a new approach most likely grounded in amateur and community music groups that have a fundamentally different objective for audiences and participants. The much maligned El Sistema model of classical music community education, has largely been a success of political capital rather than music education (Baker, 2014; Baker and Frega, 2018) and indeed, have been criticised for perpetuating Victorian class inequalities: 'In prescribing classical music as a cultural intervention for disadvantaged communities, Sistema-inspired programs reinforce the idea that being poor is about the behaviour and the culture of poor people. The programs may be new, but their thinking is old, and it is far from emancipatory' (Bull, 2016, p. 143).

As much of my fieldwork suggested, rural arts are very often participatory arts, more inclusive and deeply connected to place. A form of classical music that engages with those principles could prove highly successful in rural and island communities, but unlike El Sistema models the opportunity for classical music awaits fresh, place-based thinking that eschews the fundamental instinct for competition, elitism and professionalisation in rural areas.

APPENDIX

Making rural music work

This section of the book is designed specifically for those working in music, programming, venues and culture in rural and island settings (and other art forms), and brings together some ideas from across this project and other people's research, to map out some key ideas and questions towards more sustainable livelihoods in rural and island communities.

There are four key questions for any rural creative enterprise, that wishes to consider the future and sustainability of their programmes, events, music or business (there will be others of course):

1. How can I/we ensure financial sustainability?
2. What governance or organisational structure is best for us?
3. Who will be doing this work into the future?
4. How can I take advantage of our rural/island place?

These encapsulate the key findings of this research and focus on four key dimensions that will lay the groundwork for any rural or island creative enterprise long into the future outlined in Figure 4.1. The key difference to urban creative enterprises is to consider how the rural/island place-based history, heritage and landscape can be mobilised to support these two areas. This is critical for rural enterprises because it will often provide the answer to how the financial sustainability, alongside the cultural and social dimensions of the enterprise will thrive in the long-term.

Sustainability is a baggy term today, and it has taken many forms and meanings across different practices and disciplines (see

discussion around definitions in Chapter 4). Sustainability is often broken down into different dimensions such as economic, social, environmental, and so on, and these can be useful ways of thinking about your own work and practice. Here I am simply implying the idea that an activity, enterprise, business, event or practice will have the ability to continue into the future, rather than collapsing quickly when people, money, support or demand falters. In the Anglo-American context, sustainability in rural creative enterprises has to account for these different elements. My research suggests that social and economic factors are important, but that for rural enterprises, considering the governance structures and the place-based issues are really critical for rural and island contexts. It might be that travel costs present significant financial burdens for your festival, or that demand for in-person performances or tuition is severely limited by the rural context. There are ways to mitigate and overcome these factors, but considering how the rural or island place around you can help is necessarily important for rural creative enterprises, in a way that perhaps is less so, for urban contexts.

DIGITAL VISIBILITY

Similarly, the digital presence for your enterprise is key. Having a source of revenue for digital-only services (such as teaching music, mastering/mixing sound files and design) can be something hugely valuable in today's rural creative enterprises. Born-digital events similarly are those online events (that exploded during the pandemic) that have been retained by some rural and island enterprises as a new, core part of their work. These might include online concerts, meet-ups, networking, digital collaboration on project work, closed community workshops or festival events online, album launches, live composition, Q&As, interviews, panel debates, conferences, symposia, rehearsals, and many other digital-only live events. The power of these events cannot be overstated for rural creative enterprises, because they offer an opportunity to use the special artistic and place-based creative capital from your own practice or business, and to take it to a global audience. The key dimension is that people

meet in real time together, but online in a digital space that brings the rural place into the lives of your audience. Many musicians have shifted much of their teaching online in the past decade, which has enabled them to make a living in rural and island contexts where previously they would have to have lived in towns and cities to reach pupils and communities of practice.

Another important dimension to the digital life of your rural enterprise, is the ways in which it is visually and aurally represented online. In some cases, people try to represent their rural and cultural capital through use of rural and island images (of which there are no shortage in Scotland). But in other cases, it can be more subtle, where the sounds of traditional cultural practices such as songs, tunes or stories are woven through more personalised images on various forms of media including websites, social media, print and broadcast. Indeed, the form of media you choose will affect both the reach and engagement of your audience; there are now numerous examples of rural creative enterprises that are capitalising on the attractiveness of their rural lifeways and traditions to turn cultural capital into economic capital (see discussion p. 66 for some examples).

As discussed in Chapter 4, the platformisation and digitalisation of music is having profound effects upon musicians, audiences, companies, retail and streamers. One of the changes that potentially enhances rural creative artists, is that talent scouting for record companies has now moved towards more digital and data driven approaches (Raffa, 2025), meaning that those in-person social networks based in the big cities for emerging artists have less power (although still a potent route into commercial careers for many musicians working in mass musical genres). For a rural artist, if they have the right digital strategy and visibility on streamers and playlists, their 'algorithmic visibility' can mean that they could stand as good a chance as city-based artists at getting signed to a major label. This is no easy task, because it involves a degree of digital literacy that surpasses ordinary use of social media and tools such as email. Artists in rural creative contexts can stand to really benefit from the platformisation and digitalisation of music consumption, but it does require quite sophisticated knowledge about how to create that sort

of digital presence. Agencies such as XpoNorth via HIE have been making good progress for rural artists in Scotland, providing useful workshops and services for sole traders and creative workers across the Highlands and Islands. In other countries also, policy makers and quangos can offer useful workshops and advanced training on digital literacy and presence that can support the development of commercial artistic careers, as well as the growth of rural festivals and events.

Issues in understanding how your enterprise can enhance and optimise digital discoverability, SEO integration, engagement metrics, posting regularity, audio-visual and interactive formatting, metadata and hashtags, and trend participation can really help with algorithmic discoverability and visibility, eventually leading to monetisation and more stable income from born-digital enterprises. It is worth noting that these are as important for the non-profit third sector organisations if online presence and reach is important for their long-term financial and political sustainability.

AUDIENCES

Audience accessibility is another key consideration in any model of sustainability for a rural creative enterprise. As discussed elsewhere across this book, the distance travelled has a profound effect upon the success of events, festivals, teaching and businesses. This extends to postage costs in and out, tariffs for trade with the European Union and the Rest of the World, and to touring bands, musicians as well as school programmes. A key aspect of audience accessibility is both the digital access (discussed previously) and in-person accessibility.

Festivals, businesses and charitable organisations that pursue limited audience engagement can find that their audience narrows. This has a snowball effect in that it sometimes leads to narrowing of age diversity in the audience and thus a decline in numbers and is often accompanied by zealous gatekeepers to events or musical traditions, and the decline of amateur and community participation. This can lead to conservatism and restrictions on who can partici-

pate. Rural creative enterprises need to be more welcoming than urban creative enterprises because of the distance travelled and increased costs of doing business with audiences who are, in most cases, travelling to see shows, festivals or to be part of in-person events as tourists. In the same way that programming needs to be more multi-generational in rural areas (see p. 77), strategies for creative rural enterprises need to really consider how they can appeal to diverse audiences in the region or island and how to reach them. This means that social media presence is important, and that traditional marketing routes for events such as posters, adverts and media such as local radio and regional newspapers can play a significant part for micro-enterprises in the rural creative economy. In a way that perhaps they do not for urban communities of interest, where narrower marketing strategies can sustain a programme of activities, or businesses relying on fewer, more specialist channels of communication.

Audience diversity implies not only thinking about where people are travelling from, but also which groups you can reach in terms of socio-economic class, ethnicity, race, gender and of course age. The growth of second homes in rural areas for retirees has had a major impact on audiences for rural events and festivals, for which rural programmers are very conscious. Often affluent, and with more disposable income than younger audiences, the older audience has to be a consideration in rural programming and enterprises. These older groups can be a huge benefit to creative groups, bringing a massive range of skills from their professional lives, and energy to volunteer and publicise events. Careful understanding of their needs, and how to diversify the age profile of rural and island enterprises can significantly enhance the sustainability of the audience. One promoter told me, 'Our second home owners are really important because they bring a disposable income, they bring audience which is really positive. The problem is when they sell their homes' (rural promoter, fieldwork interview, 2020).

Bringing some diversity to the audience is, therefore, important; particularly age diversity. Various models to enhance this include: subsidised travel for young people to festivals; reduced ticket prices for local residents; tourist bed taxes for cultural tourists to subsidise

local grassroots activities and services; variable programming and timing of events, such as putting on shows in the middle of the day to facilitate those driving greater distances; and hybrid offerings where there is both in-person and digital simultaneously. Working cross-sectorally has emerged as a key benefit for rural creative enterprises, so considering working with schools, education departments, youth charities, sports clubs, health and social care companies, travel and tourism companies, all of whom offer interesting opportunities for developing the audience and new forms of sustainability of audience and participation.

The demographic challenge is becoming more acute as the twenty-first century continues with rising life expectancy, lower birthrates and political and social turbulence over migration for urban and rural areas. The prize of increasing the diversity of your audience includes: greater sustainability, through larger and more regular audiences; better income; improved youth participation; more regular and active engagement in year-round shoot-off programmes of tuition or local events tied to a major festival; a healthier pipeline of new talent inspired by the social dimensions of more regular and larger activities (on- and off-line); and ultimately greater political and media visibility and consequently, sustainability.

FINANCE AND SCALE

Considering how to approach your rural creative enterprise, you may or may not have financial questions that are worth answering. Are you working in another career and attempting to establish your creative enterprise on the side? Are you currently working elsewhere and hoping to relocate to a rural/island area for your future? Do you currently work in a rural creative enterprise and are attempting to upscale or increase the financial profitability of your enterprise? Are you starting your own new community event, online business or digital-only services? Do you need to provide a retirement income or supplementary income? Tuition network? Are you employed? All of these sorts of scenarios come with different basic financial

assumptions that will only ever be specific to you and your creative enterprise. There are, of course, some fundamental aspects of approaching creative enterprises that are worth understanding.

Many creative enterprises are set up on a non-profit basis, because they are primarily about community benefit (such as festivals, village halls as venues, and so on), and many rural creative enterprises are sole traders, or individuals working to turn a hobby into a business that might supplement or support them into the future. Recent reporting suggests that the key challenges for rural creative enterprises financially, tend to be difficulties in accessing startup funding, reaching new markets, and generally understanding how to access audiences and customers for creative services (EKOS, 2018, p. 18). My own research suggests that planning and skills that will support digital presence for creative rural enterprises would be significant in supporting the sustainability and ambition of creative enterprises. There are many willing people across the rural and island communities, but you need to consider what sort of professional advice might be useful (and from what sort of peer group) because entrepreneurialism is often a defining characteristic of rural communities and lifestyles, but working in agriculture, retail or education all come with very different assumptions about audiences and customers.

In the context of the creative industries more than many other sectors, that means that networking is particularly important for startups, and in rural and island contexts, vital. This is partly why HIE have prioritised networks for the creative industries, which have been largely successful based on external evaluations. The activities are largely focused on people and business support, and it is worth considering accessing some of this support if you are looking to find advice about your own rural creative enterprise. There has been consistent support in the form of individual advice, industry events, networking events, trade and partnership deals, promotional videos and training opportunities across the Highlands and Islands since HIE launched their creative industries strategy in 2014. Support via arms-length organisations is also a feature of many developed countries approaches to rural and island support, so it is worth checking what support might be available in your region or nation that might not always be highly visible.

However, considering the scale of your ambition is important, and thinking about others that have done this elsewhere in rural areas can be an extremely powerful way to approach a rural enterprise. This is why organisations such as The Touring Network, who work on behalf of rural promoters and artists are so important – they allow people previously disconnected from each other to learn through meet ups, network events and exhibitions. There are other examples in the Scottish context such as CHARTS Argyll, The Creative Futures Partnership’s Design Network (a collaboration between The Glasgow School of Art and HIE), and particularly XpoNorth which is the digital presence for creative economy support across Highland Council region.¹ A review of the creative industries networks tends to show that they have real value in connecting and supporting creative industries to thrive in the Highlands and Islands, and that the majority of creative enterprises supported by HIE in the Highlands and Islands in Scotland tend to be music businesses (EKOS, 2018, p. 14). Contacting HIE can often help with signposting and support for your business, and elsewhere, there are many quangos and support services such as business gateways that can help to consider financial and governance options when starting a creative enterprise.²

Other tools to help you think about the finance and business support for your enterprise exist across many different countries. In Europe, there are of course, many fine examples of toolkits or other documents out there that can help to understand how this is being achieved internationally. Not least the SPARSE programme³ operating across 11 partner countries in Europe, as well as the IN SITU research programme on non-urban creative development similarly working across multiple sites in Europe.⁴

1 See <https://xponorth.co.uk/>, <https://thetouringnetwork.com/>, <https://www.chartsargyllandisles.org/> and <https://timeline.hie.co.uk/stories/creative-industries/>

2 See <https://www.hie.co.uk/our-region/our-growth-sectors/creative-industries/>

3 See <https://www.sparse.eu/>

4 See <https://insituculture.eu/>

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN RURAL PERFORMING ARTS

Performing arts enterprises specifically, whether individual or small-to medium-sized businesses or non-profit enterprises, all have to consider the sorts of questions around profit and non-profit, sustainability. The performing arts in particular have always fitted awkwardly into business analyses of profit-based enterprise, not least because performing arts are *experiential*. Similarly, they fit in somewhat awkwardly too into 'creative industries' discourse and analysis because of the breadth of those industries (see Chapter 1 for a fuller discussion). That is to say, if you are charging for the performing arts, you are charging for a one-off, live event or a series of experiential events, gigs or lessons (whether that is performed in person with the audience or online as a live, born-digital event). As discussed in Chapter 4, the key insight is that performing arts can only thrive on the basis that economic sustainability is largely determined by your audience's desire to participate in the performance, or to take part. Once you understand that it is actually people's desires that really motivate them to participate in performing arts (rather than the older and rather binary notions of authenticity versus instrumental value [intrinsic/instrumental] in the arts). Understanding that economic sustainability for performing arts essentially is the result of people's desire to participate (or in economic terms – their 'willingness to pay') is key to thinking about how you will create a more sustainable enterprise. It is no good spending months rehearsing a show of experimental contemporary composition if there is no audience willing to pay to hear it. Similarly, if there is great enthusiasm in the rural region for traditional music heavily tied to local place and heritage, then it is going to be harder to make it there as a mid-Atlantic singer songwriter or Baroque string player. The financial sustainability of your performing arts enterprise therefore primarily rests upon appealing to the desires of your available audience (not the imagined audience you would like). That is one reason why your digital offer is in some ways more important for rural creative enterprises than urban ones, where there is access to a community of interest that do not have the travel

burden and can regularly meet up in a local scene or network. Rural creative enterprises have to really consider how they will reach their audiences online, or whether they can be mobile themselves. This is key to the long-term sustainability of your enterprise. Performing artists and obviously, musicians, do not manufacture goods to sell or have services that can be bought in the way that one might think of insurance, health, banking or retail services. However, if you are considering a rural creative enterprise, and making any sort of business plan, it is worth considering how financial and governance arrangements can support the sustainability of that enterprise into the future, and what your ambitions might be for the scale of the business.

As any good promoter, musician or festival organiser will know, to achieve a level of performance expertise on a musical instrument or voice, for which people may wish to pay to come and hear, is something that takes many years and thousands of hours of training – very little of which can be adequately reflected in ticket prices! In the academic literature this is essentially known as Baumol and Bowen's 'cost disease' (Baumol and Bowen, 1965). This concept states that the effort (labour) and the time required for a string quartet has not substantially changed in 400 years, but the costs always rise because of inflation. It is a good example of how the highly skills-based vocation of music is very simply subject to the systemic financial changes of the economy.⁵ Perhaps most succinctly summarised by Gregory Besharov:

'They illustrated the cost disease with a two-sector model economy. In one sector there is productivity growth of 4 percent per year. In the other sector productivity is stagnant. The growth sector can be thought to represent a manufacturing industry in which labor-saving [sic] technology is constantly being improved. The no-growth sector represents an arts activity in which technology is constant,

- 5 Incidentally, this is one of the key arguments that music degrees are essentially highly vocational in the same way as other deeply vocational degrees, such as dentistry or law.

the classic example being a string quartet that always requires four musicians. The two sectors share a common market for labor. With wages based on output, the rising productivity in the growth sector results in a rising wage in both sectors. Since the wage goes up and productivity remains constant in the arts sector, its cost of production rises relative to the manufacturing sector. With the further assumption of prices proportional to costs, the relative price of output in the arts sector will increase relative to the other. Hence the cost disease.' (Besharov, 2018, p. 83).

The ultimate victim of cost disease is of course opera, where the costs of production have risen for decades, making traditional, full-cast and orchestral opera today, essentially a market failure by definition. Almost all opera seats involve hefty state subsidies, and these make it similarly almost impossible to put on in rural areas – resulting in opera being confined to our larger cities, and heavily subsidised by the state. The obvious answer to these problems for opera promoters has been the evolution of low production costs and micro-operas, which may yet reinvigorate the commercial tradition. The same problems however, beset all promoters and festival organisers across all genres, who are subject to the constant rises in the cost of living and inflation that make transport, insurance, hire costs, artist fees, site fees, toilets, staging, lighting, policing, staffing and catering all more and more expensive simply because they have to be provided within the general economy where inflation continues to move prices ever higher. The key, therefore, is to be clear about what other people would like to hear, see or do; to be at least in part, paying attention to your audience and their desires and preferences. The stereotype of the authentic and self-absorbed artist who cares nothing for their audience has never been true for successful and long-term careers (despite what many performing artists often say in broadcast interviews!). Finding the intersection with your own artistic talent and enthusiasm will be key to constructing a sustainable performing arts career in rural settings.

GOVERNANCE

When considering the governance model for your organisation or enterprise, it obviously helps to know the scale of the current and future ambition. Many rural creative businesses are started by well-funded retirees, who have moved to rural and island communities, often with those (now obsolete) final-salary pensions and if healthy, can have many years of active living and contribution to make to the local community. However, as is well understood anecdotally, many of these types of enterprises (performance events, festivals, community assets, online creative enterprises, cultural tourism and crafting businesses) have a short shelf life of between 5 and 10 years. This is often because 'just-retired' business startups, can build a successful self-employed enterprise in several years, but then as they age or other life changes emerge, those retirees who have the security of a personal as well as a state pension, decide to stop the activity without often finding anyone willing to keep the rural enterprise going, and/or they have not built in succession planning. There are very many examples of these across the UK and elsewhere where excellent small businesses or micro-enterprises emerge in rural and island communities only to fold 5 or 7 years after they are established. Indeed, recent research finds there is a distinct failure rate for businesses at the 5-year mark for island business startups, which is strongly correlated with older, well educated, female incomers who tend to be transitioning from a full-time job to a new rural business startup at the end of their working lives (Cowling, Brown and Ioannou, 2024). Passing it on, should be something to consider at the very start.

The overwhelming majority of rural creative enterprises emerge as either sole traders or micro-enterprises of fewer than five employees (often one or two people are involved). In this case, having a succession plan for the business, venue or events is vital to ensure that the positive dimensions of rural community life are able to thrive after the initial founder has exited the enterprise or moved away. Especially where there are employment opportunities. Additionally, there are sound financial reasons for ensuring a sustainable succession plan that can include continued income from the enterprise,

long-after the initial founder has moved on or retired completely. The key issue for many rural communities is therefore scaling up individual sole traders' enterprises, or ensuring that there are enough people involved to make the enterprises resilient to the changes in people's lives that inevitably emerge, especially for older retirees or for those younger entrepreneurs who can be pushed and pulled by the demands of portfolio careers and multiple jobs or family-life.

There are some key questions to consider such as: Do you wish to create an event that will operate in one summer with great success, never to be repeated? What costs will you have? Can you subsidise your enterprise via cross-sectoral collaboration? What spaces will you use for performance? What travel burden is associated with your performances? For audiences? For performers? What costs are associated with those venues such as public liability insurance or policing presence?

Governance structures are key to these sorts of issues of sustainability and this is an area that emerged in my research as one of the key determinants of sustainability for rural arts. There are really only four basic models of financial sustainability in rural creative economies for any organisation from the most commercial to the fully charitable:

1. Commercial, subscription or break-even costs models.
2. State-subsidy models including fully subsidised to hybrid income.
3. Cross-sectoral subsidised models (with or without subsidy).
4. Non-economic, volunteering collectivised models.

See Table 3.1 for a fuller discussion of these issues and how they operate in each of these four basic models for governance.

OTHER RESOURCES

There are of course many other resources that need to be considered for any creative enterprise, especially for events-based enterprises. These include areas such as insurance, policing, safeguarding and

rental agreements, where there are specific legal and regional dimensions that may have to be considered for any event or ongoing business or enterprise. Often, the council will be the first contact for public services, but there are numerous guidelines and policy documents available in these areas. It is always worth speaking to people who hold similar events in your area or in a nearby region to ask about their experience with resources including:

- Insurance (buildings, contents and public liability insurance, especially important for events)
- Policing and security
- Physical infrastructure and spaces
- Toilets, pathways and fencing
- Employment and working conditions for tutors and staffing
- Space and rent
- Safeguarding, child protection and vulnerable adults
- Volunteer fatigue
- Ticketing and capacity audiences
- Fire safety.

Local authorities can help with contacting others who have implemented useful strategies to deal with these issues, but there are many examples of policies for resource areas above online. Gaining an understanding of what is necessary in statute and what is useful is part of the complexity of creative enterprises in developed rural countries that could be significantly simplified by government and could make an important impact in reducing friction on rural creative entrepreneurialism for the future.

AFTERWORD

In addition to the interviews and participant observation noted above, I conducted three online public panel discussions in 2021, took part in various workshops with my partner organisation The Touring Network (7 October 2021; Big meet up), and there was a major conference on rural creative economy at Newcastle University in January 2022: <https://simonmckerrell.com/creative-rural-conference/>

The policy report of initial findings was published in 2023 at Glasgow Caledonian University and is available here: <https://simonmckerrell.com/research/music-in-the-rural-creative-economy-project/>

I welcome all feedback on the research, if you wish to contact me, please do so via Scottish Universities Press.

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