Mobilizing traditional music in the rural creative economy of Argyll and Bute, Scotland

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines the key issues that emerge in the understanding of traditional music as micro-enterprise in the rural creative economy of Argyll and Bute, Scotland. Using evidence from detailed ethnographic fieldwork, with musicians, festival organisers, tour operators, business owners and civil servants, this paper examines how issues such as geographical and social distance, internet connectivity, and cultural tourism are understood in relation to the musical life of Argyll and Bute. We advocate for greater ethnographic engagement with local communities in order to provide a more sophisticated, real-world understanding of rural cultural policy and the impact of current policies on local musicians. The paper therefore foregrounds ethnography as an important method in local, rural contexts such as Argyll and Bute, where typically, much of the creative economy is embedded in statistically invisible economic and cultural activity and portfolio employment.

Introduction
This paper takes an ethnographic approach to examine the key issues that emerge in the understanding of traditional music as micro-enterprise at the local level in the rural creative economy of Argyll and Bute, Scotland. Cultural policy research in recent decades has focused upon urban and national settings, both because of the growth of cities, and the desire to conjoin the creative economy with urban regeneration and national economic growth. Much urban policy research relies on notions of proximity in cities (Gibson 2010; Harvey, Hawkins, and Thomas 2012; Luckman 2012); this case study of more confined and limited research in a highly dispersed rural creative economy highlights the importance and advantages of ethnography in understanding the rural creative economy. So much research has been focused upon cities, it is now acknowledged that many of these urban policies cannot simply be transplanted to rural contexts (Bell and Jayne 2010). Creative Economy research has not only focused almost exclusively on urban contexts for its evidence-base, it has also
suffered from what Simmel termed, a ‘metropolitan’ outlook (1971). Ethnomusicological work on music and tourism in Australia, Crete and elsewhere suggests that music festivals in rural and island contexts can bring positive social and economic benefits (Gibson and Connell 2013; Dawe 2004) and mobilize the symbolic agency of rurality for economic benefits (Gibson and Davidson 2004). Recent policy research from the Scottish Government suggests that the rural economy is now of growing importance to the national debate about the future of sustainability in Scotland, and that there are moves to establish new statutory instruments for both local and national bodies in order to prioritize rural living and business in Scotland.¹

Micro-enterprises in music and the arts more widely, are now the key ways in which musicians and artists make a living in the UK today, yet they remain largely ignored in the literature of the creative economy, which is similarly almost exclusively based upon urban research and assumptions. Research from across ethnomusicology, cultural policy, rural development and economic geography suggests that in rural contexts, attention is now turning towards a more relational understanding of highly situated rural economies and creativity, resting on the widespread turn away from agriculture and rural manufacturing towards service economies (Krüger and Trandafoiu 2013; Lysgård 2016; Bell and Jayne 2010). There is a clear difference between analysing the role of business in a rural creative economy which is where the majority of analysis of the creative economy has taken place, and the actuality of sustaining a creative career as an individual in a rural area. As is the case in many such places: ‘Micro-businesses, rather than enterprises of significant scale, or even SMEs, are now the most characteristic way of organising contemporary creative work so the work of such bodies is highly pertinent to the workings of the marketplace’ (Schlesinger, Selfe, and Munro 2015:105).

In March 2018 there were 15,505 registered enterprises operating in the Creative Industries growth sector, representing 8.8% of all registered businesses operating in Scotland. The Scottish sector is characterised by small businesses: in 2018, 97.9% of Scottish Creative Industries registered enterprises were small (0–49 employees) accounting for 53.5% of employment in this sector, whilst large enterprises (250+ employees) accounted for just 0.6% of registered enterprises but 30.2% of employment (Growth Sector Briefing–Creative Industries, November 2018, Office of the Chief Economic Adviser, Scottish Government).

Our research demonstrates that Argyll and Bute has a high number of creative businesses relative to other rural council regions in Scotland, and a rich musical heritage. This paper examines how the traditional musical economy relates to the larger structures in a very dispersed rural region, but also seeks to evidence the claim that these partial, often very small incomes in music have a much larger importance in their cultural capital for the region and are currently unrealized potential in the regional economy and for cultural tourism. The lack of cross-sectoral collaboration in rural regions such as Argyll and Bute results in an under-developed cultural tourism potential. It is the leading council area in Scotland for tourism employment with 17%
of the population employed in tourism; twice the national average in Scotland and more per head of population than any other council region (Visit Scotland 2017). However, Scotland is currently reimagining its cultural heritage as a heritage asset (McKerrell and West 2018), and based on interviews from across Argyll and Bute, we explore how traditional music and song might be better mobilized in policy for a sustainable economic future, whilst retaining and strengthening the very deep roots of tradition in Argyll.

**Materials and methods**

The research for this study was based upon fieldwork interviews, observation, and desk research on secondary sources. Fieldwork was largely conducted between March and August 2018, in Argyll and Bute and the central belt of Scotland. The fieldwork included interviews with some 50 musicians, promoters, organisers and businesses in the region. Alongside this, some of the summative quantitative data about the creative economy and music in Argyll has been specially extracted from Companies House Data and cross-tabulated with postcode indexes to produce comparative data between different localities and council regions in Scotland, in order to set the scene for Argyll nationally (see Table 1). We have also drawn on the publicly available census data from 2011 to ascertain the spread of occupations across Argyll and Bute. Methodologically therefore, this paper combines insights from ethnographic interviews which is then coded by theme and combined with some quantitative data giving a snapshot of the current picture for traditional music, and in some respects, the vernacular reality of traditional music in the creative economy in Argyll and Bute in 2018. As Anne Gadwa points out, rural places are sometimes constitutive in and of themselves of distinctive artistic traditions that, ‘retain[ed] cultural practices outside of the mainstream, such as craft artisanship, and language, dance, and culinary traditions’ (2014:n.p.). We believe this is true of Argyll and Bute, which retains distinctive bagpiping, fiddling, craft and arts practices unique to the place of this rural region itself. This rural research study therefore offers ethnographic fieldwork as a relatively unusual approach that can provide meaningful evidence and analysis for policy makers at the regional level.

**Argyll and Bute**

Argyll and Bute is a relatively small and rural council on the West coast of Scotland with a substantial history of traditional and folk music, that includes piping, fiddling, song, composition and more recently, innovative bands that showcase the rich musical heritage. Traditional music performance and recordings occur in a variety of ways in the region, such as festivals, community-based piping, piping for tourists, pub music sessions, musical entertainment in hotels, ceilidhs for visitors, village hall concerts and ceilidhs, recordings on tourism marketing videos, images on heritage attraction promotional material and performances in arts centres. Recordings of traditional music are also played on community radio, in cars and buses by tour guides, in local cafés and shops, and are on sale in bookshops, tourist information centres and souvenir shops.
The 2011 census showed that there are 41,795 working age (16–74 year olds) people in employment in Argyll and Bute.\textsuperscript{3} That is a very small population for such a large geographical region of 690,946 hectares and reflects the rural spread of population year round. The region of Argyll was reformed in 2011, expanding the old definition and now includes an area from the numerous islands on the West coast such as Islay, Jura and Mull to Helensburgh near Glasgow and from Campbeltown in the South of the Kintyre peninsula all the way North to Oban and Bridge of Orchy. This makes for a very varied territory with services spread across many types of community. One of the most significant challenges socially and economically in the region is population decline. The region of Argyll and Bute is suffering some of the steepest population decline within Scotland and current estimates suggest the total population is around 86,000: ‘Between 1997 and 2017, the population of Argyll and Bute has decreased by 5.4%…. Over the same period, Scotland’s population rose by 6.7%.’\textsuperscript{4}

In recent years, Argyll and Bute council area has suffered a serious decline in the 25–44 year old population, with projections suggesting that the area will also suffer from a decline in 16–24 year olds over the coming decade. The area has a rising average age as the baby boomer generation aged between 1997 and 2017. Set within

### Table 1. Showing the regional spread of creative economy businesses in Scotland through cross comparison of DCMS Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes against Scottish Postcodes.

| Council area       | Number of arts (and related) companies | % of Scottish total companies |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| **Total**          | 2903                                   | 100.0%                      |
| Glasgow City       | 713                                    | 24.6%                       |
| City of Edinburgh  | 631                                    | 21.7%                       |
| Highland           | 134                                    | 4.6%                        |
| Renfrewshire       | 94                                     | 3.2%                        |
| Fife               | 90                                     | 3.1%                        |
| Aberdeenshire      | 89                                     | 3.1%                        |
| East Lothian       | 85                                     | 2.9%                        |
| South Lanarkshire  | 83                                     | 2.9%                        |
| Dundee City        | 77                                     | 2.7%                        |
| North Lanarkshire  | 77                                     | 2.7%                        |
| Aberdeenshire      | 66                                     | 2.3%                        |
| Perth and Kinross  | 62                                     | 2.1%                        |
| Scottish Borders   | 62                                     | 2.1%                        |
| East Renfrewshire  | 55                                     | 1.9%                        |
| East Dunbartonshire| 54                                     | 1.9%                        |
| Dumfries and Galloway| 51                                   | 1.8%                        |
| East Ayrshire      | 48                                     | 1.7%                        |
| Stirling           | 46                                     | 1.6%                        |
| North Ayrshire     | 43                                     | 1.5%                        |
| Midlothian         | 42                                     | 1.4%                        |
| South Ayrshire     | 42                                     | 1.4%                        |
| **Argyll and Bute**| **41**                                 | **1.4%**                    |
| Falkirk            | 40                                     | 1.4%                        |
| West Lothian       | 39                                     | 1.3%                        |
| Clackmannanshire   | 23                                     | 0.8%                        |
| West Dunbartonshire| 23                                     | 0.8%                        |
| Moray              | 22                                     | 0.8%                        |
| Na h-Eileanan Siar | 22                                     | 0.8%                        |
| Angus              | 16                                     | 0.6%                        |
| Inverclyde         | 15                                     | 0.5%                        |
| Orkney Islands     | 12                                     | 0.4%                        |
| Shetland Islands   | 6                                      | 0.2%                        |
this context, the opportunities for the creative economy could be particularly powerful if the policy and local conditions can encourage in-migration to Argyll and Bute, especially for younger people actively engaged in music and if income to support cultural tourism could provide an improved economic basis for the population as a whole.

When one moves from census data to businesses, the picture is more bleak for Argyll and Bute. Our analysis suggests that Argyll and Bute has 41 registered arts and related businesses which is around 1.4% of the Scottish total of arts and related businesses (which we estimate at 2903 using DCMS Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes). This obviously does not include sole traders as our method only deals with limited companies that are registered with Companies House and then filters that list by SIC code. The statistical invisibility of part-time or seasonal employment in the creative occupations is one of the key issues for rural creative economies. Many key data sources including VAT registrations, SIC coding, census data and others simply are not granular enough to collect data on low or partial incomes or self employment. Regional enterprise bodies such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) recognise these disjunctures and suggest that creative micro-enterprises are often not picked up through SIC and SOC codes or registered for VAT. As a result, the economic contributions of these individuals, micro and small businesses ‘... are essentially invisible and underreported both in terms of their profitability and contribution to the wider economy’ (HIE 2014:43). With individuals, micro and small businesses within the sector, HIE suggest that the creative industries are characterised as being populated by ‘lifestyle businesses’, which imply ‘that they are not businesses that are in pursuit of growth or genuine business opportunity’ (HIE 2014:44). As the fieldwork has shown, these perceptions have underpinned current views about value of traditional music and musicians in Argyll and Bute amongst some key stakeholders in local government and nationally. This is a particular problem of statistical invisibility which affects many rural regions; because much of the work in the creative economy is part-time, seasonal or only partial, it goes uncounted in national statistics, and is one reason why ethnography can be a more powerful method for investigating the rural creative economy. However, our data does give a general indication of the spread of music and arts enterprise activity for all council regions in Scotland which is up-to-date as of July 2018. The data is based upon registered addresses for all companies in Scotland and therefore does not necessarily represent where those companies do business, but where they are registered, which in the case of many companies will normally be the address where their principals are working from. Table 1 uses cross-tabulation of postcode data for Argyll and for Scotland as a whole from the National Records of Scotland compared against the July database for all companies registered in the UK available freely from Companies House.5

Table 1 shows very obvious strength in Glasgow and Edinburgh having 46% of all arts/music and related businesses. Similarly, it demonstrates in absolute terms that the majority of companies are clustered around the major cities in Scotland. Interestingly however, the data shows that Highland and Fife regions do remarkably well in terms of number of businesses registered in the creative economy, suggesting that lessons could be learned for areas such as Argyll and Bute which have similarly low population densities and, in the case of Highland region, have a relatively stronger
tourism sector. The data also puts Argyll and Bute on a par with city regions such as Stirling, with a much more concentrated geographical clustering of creative businesses. Therefore, further research is needed to interpret this sort of data to show how comparatively well each council region performs, controlled for population and geographical dispersal, and to examine the flows of profit in clusters, especially in the context that some of the most lauded creative economy enterprises are multinationals, where profits flow straight out of the regional economy. We now turn to explore five key themes that emerged from our coding of the ethnographic fieldwork.

**Governance and stakeholders in the region**

A number of key regional organisations and agencies have emerged during the fieldwork that play central roles in the creative economy of the region. These key organisations include: Argyll and Bute Council; Culture Heritage and Arts in Argyll and the Isles (CHArts); Argyll and the Isles Tourism Cooperative (AITC); Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE); and Fèisean Nan Gàidheal.

Like other local authorities, Argyll and Bute Council have pulled back on their financial support of arts, culture and heritage. Consultations for the Cultural Assembly’s 2014 culture, heritage and arts strategic action plan revealed a perceived lack of appreciation of the importance of culture, heritage and arts as an economy or economic regeneration and an inconsistent approach to council investment in the sector (Argyll and Bute Council 2014). Such sentiments were mirrored in this fieldwork with participants suggesting that the potential for musical enterprises, in particular, are not valued or taken seriously by the local authority. Musicians and others working with music in the region have commented on the difficulties of embarking on innovative and enterprising projects as a result of the lack of accessible – in terms of cost and location - and specialised marketing and business skills. The council’s Business Gateway department do provide business start-up advice to traditional music enterprises, such as ceilidh bands and pipe tutors, as they would provide to any start up in the area, including advice on business planning, partnership agreements and marketing. The lack of specialised marketing and business skills are a significant issue for the growth of local festivals and competitions with voluntary, multitasking festival committees, particularly those who are enthusiastic to attract visitor audiences. In relation to other local authorities in Scotland, Argyll and Bute Council’s outward profile of their support for arts and culture appears to be in a period of transition, both because of falling local authority income and a changing landscape for statutory duties and governance of culture and sport across Scotland. For instance, the region’s local authority does not currently employ a dedicated arts development officer or provide specialist advice, funding or opportunities for those working in arts and culture. Other local authorities such as Aberdeenshire, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, East Dunbartonshire and Scottish Borders provide easily accessible promotional support, comprehensive events listings, arts development officers, regional music strategies and art and culture trail maps.

The local authority’s venues also frequently emerged as an issue in fieldwork interviews. While the £30 million CHORD project is investing in the redevelopment
of venues in Campbeltown, Rothesay and Dunoon, participants felt that the local authority’s investment is regionally uneven or, in some cases, investing funds into venues that are unsuitable for local music performance and festivals. Due to significant financial pressures, Argyll and Bute Council took the decision to transfer culture and leisure services to a trust in November 2016 setting up a management takeover of the local authority’s venues by the charitable company, *Live Argyll*, in 2017.

*Live Argyll* has a dual entity structure making the most efficient use of their income and expenditure, having both a limited company and a charitable trust (Scottish Registered Charity SC047545), where any surpluses from trading are reinvested into the work of the trust. Furthermore, major savings from this new structure have ensured that council venues such as the Victoria Hall, Queens Hall and others are still owned by the council but operated by the new charitable trust Live Argyll and council redundancies have been avoided. This is a new charitable vehicle in Scotland called a SCIO—Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organization. Given that the charitable trust has only been in operation since 2017, we are yet to see whether this new structure proves useful for the arts and wider culture sector in Argyll. This development is in line with almost all 32 council areas in Scotland who have almost all shifted some combination of their culture, leisure and library services and staff into the SCIOs. These have now emerged right across the public sector in Scotland and control around £400 million of previously local authority spending with the main advantage being the business rates relief that flows from their charitable status and a high degree of liability protection. Time will tell as to whether this move has other consequences for culture, sport and libraries, but these services are now essentially held accountable to the commercial-charitable company boards rather than the local authorities themselves which does pose governance and accountability challenges for communities across Scotland.

However, in Argyll and Bute, despite the move for sports and culture staff and venue operation to the new SCIO—Live Argyll, statutory responsibility for arts development, events and festivals still lies inside the council within the Transformation Projects and Regeneration team in the Economic Development section to some degree (personal communication, November 2018). Early issues facing the new charitable company Live Argyll emerged in our fieldwork such as: increasing venue hire costs to community groups who are now struggling (despite a banded structure to hire costs); changes to the programming of key venues across the region; and a lack of oversight for decisions taken in the new corporate charity resulting in a weakening of oversight around the cultural offer in the region. Argyll and Bute Council also maintains some small, direct public subsidy of arts and events through funding such as the £113,000 set aside for 2019–2020 events, a newly competitive open fund into which festivals and events in the region may bid, aimed at strategic events and festivals (attracting visitors from outwith the area). These are small funding pots of up to £5,000 and over £5,000 and through smaller dispersal of funds via the Local Areas Committee, which supports local events and is decided through public voting. Moreover, Argyll and Bute Council contribute to traditional music education through funding music tuition in the region’s schools, with traditional music and piping being taught at schools in Oban (as part of the School of Traditional Music), Tobermory,
Islay and Campbeltown. However, it is fair to say that arts spending directly by local government in the region now represents a tiny fraction of public money, which is a situation reflected across many rural parts of Scotland.

**Geography and proximity in the rural creative economy**

The geography of the region was the strongest theme to emerge in the research interviews. From the remoteness and natural environment, to issues of connectivity and tourism, the vast and varied geography of the region generates a complexity across the social, economic and musical landscapes of Argyll and Bute. Unlike other parts of rural Scotland, Argyll and Bute has no obvious centre or capital in the region, but instead has five main towns: Campbeltown, Helensburgh, Oban, Lochgilphead and Dunoon. The lack of a geographical centre creates difficulty in the coherence of a music scene in the region. Oban has emerged as the musical centre in terms of the live music scene in the town's pubs, the renowned High School Pipe band, the School of Traditional Music, the Oban Live music festival and the town's proximity to the ‘musical’ islands of Tiree and Mull. Despite the concentration of musical practices and events in Oban, there are other hubs of musical activity, such as Campbeltown and Tobermory, and frequent community-based musical activities in the villages of the region. We found that the main challenges within the creative economy and sustainability of traditional music in the region include: significant additional costs resulting from geography; the cost and time of travelling around the vast area; the distinctions and issues between mainland and island musical activity and the problematic concept of Argyll as a coherent place.

One of the promoters in the region, John Saich, who runs events at Ardfern Village Hall and has been heavily involved in many regional initiatives across musical genres summed up this challenge of geographical dispersal and the concept of place in Argyll and Bute:

> Argyll is quite a difficult concept because in a way it is an artificial place, because of its history has been changed through administrative boundaries, all these different elements coming in. You call it a rural economy and it is but when they brought Helensburgh on board, it's not very rural at all. And all these things kind of skew it in terms of what people think about it. I've spent years talking about this, when you go and say “Argyll” to people they come up with all sorts of associations that might be a ship or a knitting pattern or a car ... but actually do they think of it as a place? Not that much, because it kind of isn't.... Mull is a place people know, Iona is, Campbeltown, Dunoon all these places have their own identity, Argyll's quite ephemeral as a brand. (Fieldwork interview, May 2018)

Daniel Gillespie, professional accordion player from the band Skerryvore, and festival organiser, suggests that the region's geography is a source of inspiration for traditional music but it is also a significant weakness, particularly in relation to the music festival he organises on the island of Tiree:

> The great thing is it's inspiring [the geography]. It's inspiring young people to take up music, it's inspiring people to come and visit and we're seeing that from the festivals.... We always say that, our biggest asset of Tiree is also our biggest weakness and that's our geographical location, our geographical location is the biggest asset we have and it's also our biggest weakness. The geographical location will always be a positive because you'll always have that, as long as the landscape isn't damaged or that it's not compromised. There are many elements that are its weakness in terms of travel, connectivity all these
things can be improved or made better, or supported better. So that's the part that can
give me inspiration to keep going. (Fieldwork interview, March 2018)

In relation to the Tiree Music Festival, as is the case for Argyll and Bute as a whole,
depopulation is a significant factor as a result of its remote geographical location
and limited education and employment opportunities. Many of Argyll’s professional
musicians are now based in Glasgow. The lack of employment opportunities and the
remoteness of the region has resulted in a number of Argyll’s most successful mu-
sicians basing themselves outside the region, including Gillespie. John Saich summed
this sentiment up in his statement; ‘If I wanted to work full-time in the arts profes-
sionally, I would probably have to leave here’ (fieldwork interview, May 2018). Gordon
Maclean, musician and artistic director at An Tobar arts centre, said that working as
a professional musician on Mull, for instance, ‘is nigh on impossible’ (fieldwork inter-
view, March 2018). He added, ‘there certainly isn’t enough work round about here to
make a living from being a musician, but that’s the case for everyone’ (fieldwork
interview, March 2018). A number of musicians do live on Mull and on the region’s
other islands, however, issues such as relying on ferry crossings, and still being three
hours away from Glasgow once on the mainland in Oban, is demanding and ‘more
impractical’ for a musical livelihood. The type of depopulation seen in Argyll is under-
stood in the research literature as the ‘centripedal trend’ of rural areas to, ‘lose talented
up-and-comers in the creative industries to larger centres’ (Gibson 2010:n.p.). Travel
time and costs between musicians’ homes and performance venues can be significant.
For instance, Ewan MacDonald from Ceol An Aire, says that the band often drive 100
miles each way for a gig during weekends. Due to the many single track and
poor-quality roads in the region, travelling to perform also involves a considerable
investment of time for musicians. Travel expenses are often passed onto venues and
clients, considerably raising the costs for live music. The Oban-based band play on
the surrounding islands, as well as for international events in Majorca and Poland. It
can cost as much to get from Glasgow to Tenerife as to the Scottish island of Tiree.
This makes touring and festivals, particularly on the island settings, a very costly
proposition, again adding to the cost burden in the rural creative economy. We heard
from community groups such as pipe bands, who often use the donations and pay-
ments they receive in order to pay for the high costs of travel to attend and compete
elsewhere in Scotland. These costs are similarly passed onto event organisers or the
community. These travel costs inevitably have a significant impact on the sustainability
and growth of Argyll’s musical heritage. Organisers of village hall concert series and
other non-subsidized, community-based concert series, often book solo, duo or trio
acts (rather than large bands) in order to keep costs affordable, to deliver regular
concert series and to ensure there are more people in the audience than on the
stage (Campbell Cameron, fieldwork interview, March 2018). The dispersed geography
therefore directly affects the type of live music heard in the region. Individuals working
in other arts in the region attempt to solve the difficulty of travel costs by clustering
performances and encouraging venues to collectivise in particularly remote areas of
the Highlands and Islands in order to save on travel and accommodation expenses.
During the fieldwork, musicians suggested that the concept of collectivisation would
help musicians with their current travel and accommodation costs and, while this is


happening to a small extent, more could be done to collaborate with and between venues in the region. One of our informants Scot AnSgeulaichc explains:

There’s a big barrier with venues, or potential venues and the people in charge of them thinking “I can’t afford this on my own but why can’t we have a festival and we have it running simultaneously in 5 venues when the festival of seafood or whatever it is [is on], so then you have musicians playing in several points during a seafood festival…. There’s less of that [collaboration] in Argyll and Bute. (Scot AnSgeulaichc, fieldwork interview, April 2018)

This social distance between different musicians, and between promoters of live music or festivals is a significant opportunity cost in creating more sustainable livelihoods for locally based musicians and venues. The lack of a comprehensive central directory or website at present means that informal gatekeepers are usually approached by outside agencies or others looking for music in Argyll and therefore those artists and venues working within Argyll and Bute have less agency in their own promotion and audience reach. However, as Comunian, Chapain, and Clifton (2010:8) have suggested, this ‘soft infrastructure’ is typical of the creative economy and favours those with good social capital both within and beyond the region. In an interview, a destination development agent suggested that a catalogue or library of contact details for bands and musicians would be beneficial for the region (fieldwork interview, May 2018). Without suitable connections or a comprehensive directory of musicians in the region, tourism campaigns and events approach local destination marketing agents and individuals, such as Iain Hamilton from HIE, to gain details specifically for traditional musician contacts from Argyll (fieldwork interview, July 2018). Individuals working within organisations in the region act as ‘hubs of information’ (anonymous, fieldwork interview, May 2018), connecting the local and regional informal networks with potential clients outside the music community. While such informal networks are important within musical communities, they have little reach outside parts of the region and outside of the music sector. Individual gatekeepers provide information and contacts to businesses and organisations outside of the music and arts sector, however, a formalised and specific directory of musicians in the region would further aid the process of other sectors and businesses employing the region’s musicians. Rachel Granger and Christine Hamilton demonstrate that there are particular difficulties in implementing policies in relation to informal, semi-formal and formal networks, or under, middle and upperground creative spaces (2010:54) but we suggest that at a minimum, presenting some sort of directory of musical acts or collectivizing the gatekeeping for external audiences (including tourists and tour operators) could boost the contact and opportunity for micro-enterprise and creative sole traders across the region.

Connectivity and the rural creative economy

The physical geography of Argyll also affects the daily running of creative businesses in the region. Internet access, transport and business services in the rural region are some of the most significant factors in creating a liveable situation for musicians in Argyll and Bute. Speaking about the Cowal peninsula in relation to the innovative
theatre group, The Walking Theatre Company, Sadie Dixon-Spain points out that while the Cowal peninsula is only approximately 35 miles away from Glasgow, transport is a significant challenge because of the quality of the road coming through Loch Lomond and the quickest route from the central belt to Glasgow includes a ferry crossing. The transportation routes result in additional costs for services, particularly in terms of Post Office deliveries that count the Cowal Peninsula as in the Highlands and as an island ‘irrespective of the road coming through Loch Lomond…’ (Sadie Dixon-Spain, fieldwork interview, June 2018). The Walking Theatre Company also has perpetual problems with wifi to the extent that they pay high sums to satellite companies in order to have access to working wifi at all. This is only a partial solution as the satellite company feeds their internet through Germany which causes problems with licensing filters and therefore access to theatre and music video content becomes an issue. Dixon-Spain asserts that while the geography of Argyll is beautiful, as a creative business they are disadvantaged in terms of everyday services and infrastructure. She says:

[The Cowal Peninsula is] … only 1 hour 40 minutes from Glasgow but in actual fact it feels like several hours and it can feel like several different time spans [or] decades away from the rest of the world occasionally. It’s a stunningly beautiful area but economically it has significant challenges. (fieldwork interview, June 2018)

The additional costs resulting from the region’s geography inevitably have an impact on the creative economy. While individuals, organisations and companies already struggle with the precariousness of working in the culture, heritage and arts sector, they also face significant costs based on their locality. These additional costs are present at a time when depopulation of the region is a major issue identified by the local authority. The sustainability of professional and community-based traditional arts and music is a major concern with such additional costs resulting from the region’s geography, while the geography and natural environment is simultaneously a considerable asset for the region’s tourism and residents’ quality of life.

In 2017, following several years of growing recognition of the size and potential of the creative economy in the UK as a whole, the UK government moved to increase the Gross Value Added from the digital sectors from £118bn in 2015 to £200bn by 2025. A key part of this strategy involves support for business connectivity. Internet connectivity is a major problem in some parts of Argyll and was repeatedly raised by our interviewees relating to business connectivity.

The disconnection of the region and of the sector is additionally challenged by the access to high-speed broadband. The region is currently part of the £146 million Highlands and Island rural broadband project with a recently revised target of 88% coverage (HIE 2018a), leaving the remainder of 12% of the region without superfast broadband.

In July 2018, areas in progress included parts of the Cowal peninsula, the Isle of Coll and Portnahaven on Islay (HIE 2018b), while parts of the Cowal peninsula, rural Bute and rural Kintyre are not covered in this current project but are part of a community broadband project (HIE 2018a). The Scottish government’s 2021 project for national access to broadband is still two years from completion and the Better
Broadband scheme helps with the installation of satellite or wireless system as a temporary measure (HIE 2018a).

Commenting on the access and quality of broadband in Ardfern, John Saich said the available broadband has recently improved, but emphasised that other places in the West Coast are still struggling. Working on data-intensive music reduces the broadband speed and creates issues when clients and colleagues in Glasgow and London expect those working remotely to have as fast broadband as themselves. This is a crucial issue therefore for those seeking even partial employment in the digital creative economy in rural areas: John recounts, ‘[t]hey’ll say “send me your WAV files” and it will take the whole morning!’ (fieldwork interview, May 2018). Reflecting on remote working before the use of the internet, John suggested that it was in some ways better when he worked with physical tapes, working in Argyll and sending recordings to England for example. Working with tapes and sending via recorded delivery from the local post office, John suggests there was more equality between people working in remote and urban places as everyone had to send the tapes via the post. He said, ‘in some ways we were better off 15 years ago’ (fieldwork interview, May 2018). Daniel Gillespie similarly commented on the unequal access to high-speed broadband connectivity and emphasised the importance in connectivity in relation to the region’s depopulation and musical sustainability. He said that transport and broadband are key areas in order to provide equal opportunities to those working, living and organising events in the rural and remote region.

Digital communications is important … so they have to improve digital connectivity in these rural regions, because that bridges the gap between what makes it difficult to remain and work in a rural area. … It has to be as good as it is in Glasgow and Edinburgh … but it’s trying to bridge the gaps all the time. That’s the element we’re really, really frustrated with. (Daniel Gillespie, fieldwork interview, March 2018)

Currently, there is a discrepancy in the access to good-quality broadband between rural and urban centres and digital connectivity is vital for those trying to stay and make a living in remote regions (for a broad overview of broadband and rural issues in Scotland see Townsend et al. 2017). With significant depopulation of the region, Daniel’s comment that equal access to digital communications in order to ‘bridge the gap’ between Argyll and the central belt for musicians is vital. Townsend et al.’s study on rural creative industries and broadband in Scotland emphasizes the critical role of broadband in reducing the ‘penalty of distance’ and connecting them to their peers in order to support growth in their business. Better connectivity can reduce travel for those in remote areas, reduce fuel and transport costs, improve reach to a wider, international audience, and facilitate collaboration more easily for many creative micro-enterprises:

Increasingly, and particularly marked within the creative industries, practitioners are expected to deliver content online, some of which consists of data-heavy files such as HD video, music and photography. This activity requires broadband speeds greater than 2 Mbps, suggesting that for the rural creative economy to flourish, investment in better broadband (particularly via fibre-optic technologies) is required in rural areas. (Townsend et al. 2017:457)
Agencies such as HIE encourage musicians to work via remote participation and use the resource of online fanbases to generate alternative revenue streams (Iain Hamilton, fieldwork interview, July 2018). Digital connectivity for traditional musicians in rural and remote areas is, therefore, vital to align with national creative industries strategies. By assisting musicians and music organisations in the region with good-quality internet connectivity, particularly through subsidised rates, the government would not only address issues of depopulation but also show their recognition of the importance and value of the musical traditions within the region.

Traditional music and tourism

The tourism industry in Argyll and Bute is significantly more buoyant than the Scottish average and is a key driver of the region’s economy and employment (Argyll and Bute Council 2018). With a focus on growth in the sector by organisations such as the AITC, we found a high demand from tourists for traditional music in Argyll and Bute, that is largely underexploited across the region.

Project participant’s working directly with tourism have commented that visitors often ask for local tips and suggestions for live traditional music. Specifically, tour operators have commented that the most frequent demand for traditional music is in the form of pub sessions. Rachel MacNeill, a tour operator on the Isle of Islay, emphasised the demand for traditional music, particularly by overseas visitors who visit Islay for its whisky:

… all the time [visitors are] looking for traditional music, where can they hear it? … all the people we get here [on Islay] are international visitors. We have a completely different visitor demographic to anywhere else in the UK because we have got our distilleries…. So our clientele is not local. It doesn’t come from England, it comes from the world. And they are desperate to hear Scottish traditional music and they always request it…. But when they [visitors] come, they certainly expect there to be … more music than there is playing. You know, the way Ireland is, there is always a musician in the corner. Well they imagine we’ll be like that and sadly we’re not, but I think we should be like that. (fieldwork interview, April 2018)

Rachel suggests that the whisky distilleries have continually provided employment on the island, including stable jobs for the island’s traditional multitasking musicians. As a result, the supply for traditional music does not match its demand. Rachel often directs visitors to the frequent charity fundraising ceilidhs taking place on the island, in addition to the pubs and hotels that hold weekly sessions during the tourist season. These ceilidhs and sessions are performed by resident musicians who do not rely on music as a primary means of livelihood (Rachel MacNeill, fieldwork interview, April 2018).

The demand for traditional music from visitors extends to other parts of Argyll and Bute. Town ambassador for Oban, Kay MacDonald, echoed the demand for traditional music from visitors. She said, ‘as an ambassador, you’re always getting asked where to go and hear traditional music’ (Kay MacDonald, fieldwork interview, March 2018). During the tourist season in Oban, town ambassadors advise visitors to listen to the High School Pipe Band practice in the square next to the harbour on Wednesday
evenings, attend The Royal Hotel on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings, go
to the Skipinnish Ceilidh House on Thursdays and see traditional music bands in
Markie Dans pub on Friday and Saturday nights. These events all take place in the
evening and most in bars, thereby restricting access to traditional music performance
for certain visitor audiences, such as families and day visitors. Day visitors only hear
traditional music if there are buskers performing and a number of Oban High School
students do busk during the summer months. With the popularity of, and focus on,
annual music festivals in the region, less attention has been paid to visitor-focused
performances spread throughout the year despite the demand expressed by visitors.

Tour operators, such as Best Scottish Tours based in Argyll, commented that, most
visitors specifically request music sessions in local pubs, which clients ‘love’ (Best
Scottish Tours, personal communication, March 2018). Like Best Scottish tours, other
operators in the region take visitors to live music events as a matter of chance or
‘pot luck’, depending if there is a session in the local pub that evening, a ceilidh in
the village hall or a booked music act at their hotel. The chance element is both
appealing and practical for tour operators, as the ‘surprise’ of a musical performance
in a small pub, for instance, is a real bonus for their clients (Andrew Gray, Tailored
Tours of Scotland, personal communication, April 2018). In practical terms, including
a fixed music night, activity or event in a tour creates logistical and marketing issues
for tour operators as they market widely and may get groups who do not wish to
participate in musical activities. These sorts of comments that emerge in ethnographic
fieldwork interviews, reveal hidden demand and highlight the utility of ethnography
to the creative economy research.

While the appeal and practicalities of live musical performance in tours is a matter
of chance, a high-proportion of tour guides and operators play traditional music
recordings in their tours. For instance, Rachel MacNeill plays recordings of Gaelic
songs and piping during her car journeys with her tour groups. As her tour groups
spend a lot of time in the car, travelling between distilleries and around Islay, Rachel
commented that ‘music is integral to what I do, it’s not distinct, it’s part of it… It’s
just part of the life that we share with people that come here’ (fieldwork interview,
April 2018). Tour operators also encourage their driver-guides to play traditional and
contemporary Scottish music when they are not providing commentary on their tours.
The integration of recorded music in the journey often results in visitors leaving the
tours with CDs and download lists from their guides (Best Scottish Tours, personal
communication, March 2018). The consumption of live and recorded music by visitors
and tour guides further increases the demand and potential opportunities and part-
nerships for traditional music and musicians in the region.

There has been an absence of organised music trails or tour itineraries in Argyll,
when compared to other regions in the UK and Ireland (Sliabh Luachra Music Trail
2018; Belfast Trad Music Trail 2018) or in North America (Strom and Kerstein 2015;
Forsyth 2013; Fussell and Kruger 2013), however the success of the North Coast 500
route in Scotland, is now galvanising key tourism stakeholders to develop regional
trails and routes around Scotland. Self-guided trails, in particular, are regarded to
have an important role in responsible tourism (MacLeod 2016:134) and have great
potential for the region through their thematic flexibility, their promotion of alternative
cultural themes and local identities, the low start-up costs involved and little
requirement for infrastructure development (MacLeod 2016:136). The development of a trail forms business clusters and encourages interaction and participation between musicians, the local community and businesses to ensure that an appropriate and welcoming trail is developed for visitors (MacLeod 2016:137–138). Trail information can be made available through websites and apps, thereby also providing a suitable platform for the musical content of local traditional musicians. Good examples include Blue Ridge Music Trails in North Carolina and the Mountain Music Trail in West Virginia where radio masts guide the visitor through pre-recorded and live information about events, traditions and culture. The self-guided Ennis Trad Trail, an online trail promoted through the Visit Ennis destination marketing organisation, features a nightly programme of performances in various venues in the town. The development of music tours and trails could result in new partnerships between musicians, local businesses and organisations and an innovative and sustainable generation of income for the Argyll and Bute's traditional musicians.

For instance, the AITC are currently promoting various itineraries and trails around Argyll and Bute to encourage visitors to stay in the region for longer. Visit Scotland have also emphasised the demand for ‘experiences and itineraries’ from visitors, and therefore the AITC are developing trails ‘wherever they can’ (anonymous, fieldwork interview, May 2018). These itineraries are being developed through the AITC’s sectoral groups and partnerships, such as the Argyll bike-packing trail, Food for Argyll Cooperative and Artmap Argyll, through their related travel itineraries, food journeys and studio and sculpture trails. This sort of initiative has been found to be successful elsewhere in the world, particularly in Ireland and in North America and as the 2010 working group report on Traditional Music points out:

Such circuits have been established with some success through the National Rural Touring Forum in England, notably in Lincolnshire and Leicestershire. The annual Ceilidh Trails organised by Fèisean nan Gàidheal offer a version of the same idea in the Highlands, with particular emphasis on entertaining visitors to the area. (Francis 2010:24)

The physical geography of the region can help to connect and develop musical activities and events with tourism. Sarah Diver Lang from CHArts suggested that the rural and remote nature of the region in itself develops and promotes ‘slow tourism’, as it takes a long time to physically move around the region (fieldwork interview, June 2018). Mirroring the AITC’s aim to keep visitors in the region for longer, Sarah foresees slow tourism as a means of increasing the demand to become involved in the root of the region’s culture. Speaking in contrast to the whistle-stop coach tours that have historically engaged with musical performances in the region’s large hotels, Sarah suggests that there should be ‘levels of experience’ available to visitors (fieldwork interview, June 2018). She said

… in a place like Argyll and the Isles … the geographical nature of it [the region] almost forces you to have that slow experience with it because it’s a difficult place to get around, you have to spend your time with it. And if you find those kinds of … secret opportunities that are not part of the bigger coach [tour] or it’s that real high-quality experience that you can come across, that then stops that fatigue that a tourist is just there to … grab a souvenir and check a box which can be quite difficult. (Sarah Diver Lang, fieldwork interview, June 2018)
Sarah’s comment reflects the common association of tourist-aimed musical performances in the region consisting of duets and trios performing in seaside hotels for large coach tour groups. This coach tour association has frequently emerged from interviews and conversations throughout the fieldwork and has a negative impact on the perceptions on the integration of music in the tourism offer for musicians and tourism organisations. Across the tourism industry in Argyll, the current focus on bringing in ‘a different type of tourist’ from the coach tour parties suggests it is an important time to change these associations of traditional music and tourism. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that this could work in a region such as Argyll and Bute.

Recent analysis of the rural creative economy in Prince Edward County in Ontario, Canada shows that regional amenities and quality of place factors can not only attract tourists but also creative workers into the region (Stolarick et al. 2011). This work highlights the importance of broadband internet connections (see also Townsend et al. 2017), but also the quality of life and the role of organizational catalysts such as universities (cited in Canadian Heritage-Policy Research Group 2013). Given Argyll’s geography, local government could potentially begin conversations about strategic initiatives (low cost) in real and virtual organizational catalysts in the region such as libraries, colleges, schools, charities and businesses. This has to some extent begun with the work of CHArts, but could provide a new means for distributed catalysation with an emphasis on support and connectivity for economic activity and support for creative enterprise.

Funding or even beginning facilitated discussions in these organizational catalysts could contribute to the sustainability of Argyll’s musical heritage. Similarly, rather than funding production directly, key stakeholders such as Creative Scotland and Argyll and Bute Council could consider investing in the underlying structures needed for musicians’ livelihoods. The critical issue is that this enterprise support should be directed at sole traders or micro-enterprises, which in the cultural sector might specifically include Argyll-based, accessible, and specialist training in marketing, accounting, digital skills for start ups and continued development to expand.

**Conclusion**

Our research found that many of the problems for the creative economy in rural Argyll and Bute, are in fact the same problems facing rural regions across the UK and elsewhere in the developed world: the challenges of broadband connectivity for business; large distances adding significant costs for events and for tourism; social distance between small communities and a lack of infrastructure and accessible support. However, we also find that there are particular issues that stem from rurality for the creative economy in this region: The disconnection from both dispersed regional geography and social distance means that very little coordinated action that might support improved collaboration or cost sharing takes place, and; secondarily, that the rural context also necessitates creative practitioners take on a very wide range of skills and roles in order to sustain even a partial income from music or events. This is not necessarily the case in the city, where there are usually clearer
roles in the music and events sectors that divide labour into compartmentalized roles such as performer, promoter, fixer, technician, agent, administrator, etc. It is only through ethnographic fieldwork, that nuanced understanding of local issues like this emerges, especially given the lack of detailed research on the rural creative economy in the UK context.

However, the geographical and social distances in a region like Argyll and Bute also offer opportunities that do not exist in the urban creative economy, and that are we believe, currently underexploited in the region. As Arts Council England have suggested in their review of the relationship and value of the arts: ‘There are five key ways that arts and culture can boost local economies: attracting visitors; creating jobs and developing skills; attracting and retaining businesses; revitalising places; and developing talent’ (Arts Council England 2014). We found that the close connection between traditional music and the heritage and sense of place in Argyll and Bute suggests that developing a more joined up approach to cultural tourism that acknowledges Argyll’s rich musical and artistic heritage could echo the success of the cultural tourism offer elsewhere in the world. Supporting more sustainable incomes from visitors, but also making the region a more attractive place in which to live. This requires greater collaboration not only between actors in the musical economy, but between different sectors in the region. This sort of collaboration has not been present in Argyll and Bute, and is not facilitated in the established governance or policy structures at the regional level. The potential for high quality cultural trails, or self-guided tourism routes with coordinated events during the tourist season could offer benefits across the creative economy. Similarly, coordination of costs for festivals and events around insurance, policing, performers, fencing and sanitation etc., could dramatically reduce the costs for already established events without having to increase their audiences.

More ambitious proposals might involve the production of new regional funding from a tourist tax or levy, that could support the social and cultural foundations for traditional music across the region, and provide support for micro-enterprises that wish to collaborate across sectors; musicians working with digital marketing or hoteliers and restaurateurs collaborating with tour companies and musicians in a sustainable and mutually beneficial manner. Research from elsewhere in the world demonstrates that price elasticity and the method of administrating these proposals are critical to their success. What is most critical in our view for rural creative economies like Argyll and Bute, is the ability to communicate across sectoral boundaries, to get people talking and collaborating across traditionally compartmentalized sectors for mutual benefit.

Much of the rural creative economy is statistically invisible, because people are working or volunteering for events, festivals or village halls and do not earn anything like enough money to sustain a sole income in the creative economy. However, it is clear from our fieldwork, that the activity that does take place is critical to the sense of place and to rural cultural life. We therefore believe that ethnographic fieldwork should now take its place as a key methodological component, that provides nuanced detail around the motivations, challenges and social life of the creative economy, particularly in rural areas like Argyll and Bute.
Notes

1. National Council of Rural Advisors. 2018. ‘Together We Can, Together We Will: Analysis of Consultation Responses - Gov.Scot’. The Scottish Government. https://www.gov.scot/publications/analysis-responses-national-consultation-rural-conversation-together-together/pages/9/.
2. For a definition of ‘traditional’ and ‘folk’ music please see the following definition: https://simonmckerrell.com/2014/06/02/98/.
3. Crown copyright 2013, Scotland’s Census.
4. Source: National Records of Scotland, Population Estimates [date accessed: 01.05.2018], https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/argyll-and-bute-council-profile.html.
5. Contains NRS data © Crown copyright and database right [2018].
6. ‘CHORD’ is the acronym given to an economic regeneration project that seeks to invest and implement positive developments across five key waterfront towns in Argyll and Bute: Campbeltown, Helensburgh, Oban, Rothesay and Dunoon.
7. Figures estimated from publicly accessible information on the last year’s financial returns listed on the register for the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator: https://www.oscr.org.uk/.

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