

# THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT AGENCIES AND INVESTMENTS IN GAELIC ARTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

## Labour market impacts for Gaelic speakers

DOUGLAS CHALMERS & MIKE DANSON

### Abstract

There is a positive link between a vibrant Gaelic cultural and artistic sector within the Gaelic heartlands of the Hebrides archipelago of northwest Scotland and the sustainability and growth of Gaelic-speaking communities. This is argued by both arts and cultural organisations but also by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), the economic development agency: “Investing in the native language and cultural traditions of the region ... can lead to population retention, inward migration ... greater entrepreneurial activity and business creation”.

However, many public sector jobs in the ‘Gaelic labour market’ have been created in the media clusters of the urbanised mainland cities rather than in the traditional heartlands and market drivers in such sectors favour concentration and centralisation in the cities of central Scotland. This conflict between efficiency and economy on the one hand and quality job generation in the periphery on the other has not been resolved satisfactorily. In this paper, we explore the causes and dynamics of these developments, and identify challenges for policymakers and supporters of the language and islands.

### Keywords

Arts and cultural sectors; economic development; Gaelic; labour markets; Scotland

### Introduction

*Placing more value on, and investing in, the native language and cultural traditions of the region will result in fortifying cultural identity and sense of place, increasing confidence and self-esteem. This in turn can lead to population retention, inward migration, greater entrepreneurial activity, business creation and ultimately higher GDP. Quite simply, at Highlands and Islands Enterprise we believe that there is a direct link between levels of confidence and levels of economic activity and economic growth.*

*Our investment in Gaelic language and Gaelic arts and culture not only brings about the direct creation of employment in the Gaelic sector, jobs which are largely based in the Highlands and Islands, but represents an investment in the seedbed of the cultural and creative sector ... Increased cultural vibrancy and nurturing a ‘creative cluster’ make the area more attractive as a location, helping drive economic growth. Gaelic not*

*only plays an essential and crucial part in this, but it also helps reinforce the culture of sustainable development across the region, which is at the heart of everything we do at HIE.*

This quotation from Willie Roe, the Chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), the regional development agency, at the launch of the Gaelic Arts report<sup>1</sup> on the links between language, culture and the economy within the Highlands and Islands of Scotland captures the economic rationale for support for Gaelic in the region. Below we explore why the market and enterprise can make the realisation of this strategy problematic.

### The Western Isles: Some geographical considerations

The Western Isles, ('na h-Eileanan Siar' in Scottish Gaelic) is an archipelago that covers an area of over 3,000 square miles, from its most populated island, the Isle of Lewis in the north, to uninhabited Mingulay in the south. Overall, there are approximately seventy named islands, with only eleven inhabited at present. Its estimated population in 2010 was just over 26,000, a decrease of over 300 since the 2001 census; it is estimated that the overall fall in population between 1991 and 2013 will be of the magnitude of ten percent. The population of na h-Eileanan Siar is aging more quickly than the Scottish average, and the community faces some difficult economic circumstances from a combination of depopulation, seasonality in terms of tourism, and challenging geography throughout the island range.



### Map 1: Na h-Eileanan Siar (the Western Isles)

As a result of these factors, the islands experience lower-than-average economic growth, and higher transport and energy costs. Employment statistics show a higher-than-average dependency on the public sector, but also labour shortages in professional areas such as education and health and in semi-skilled jobs (Chalmers and Danson, 2011). According to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation in 2009, na h-Eileanan Siar are categorised as one of the most deprived areas in rural Scotland. In the words of Western Isles Enterprise and the Western Isles Council, it is a 'fragile' area (Western Isles Council, undated). Previous work by the present authors has categorised the predicaments of the Isles as including "endemic depopulation, ageing communities and isolation" (Chalmers and Danson, 2006) and has argued for an approach to economic and social development that capitalises upon the locally based diversity in language, arts and culture to be found in na h-Eileanan Siar.

### Local authority single policy approach

The current *Single Outcome Agreement*<sup>2</sup> adopted by the local authority, the local enterprise company and other community partnerships looks to joint working between organisations and for the strengths and resources of the islands to be well utilised, including cultural traditions. The agreement states:

*Our vision for the Outer Hebrides is a prosperous, well educated and healthy community, enjoying a good quality of life and fully realizing the benefits of our natural environment and cultural traditions* (Western Isles Council, undated).

The proposed outcomes in the single agreement include ensuring: a stable population with a better balance of age, gender and socio-economic groups; the people of na h-Eileanan Siar are "well educated, skilled, and well trained", and a balance between deriving maximum benefit from the natural resources of the area and the safeguarding of these resources to benefit future generations. Within this approach, the *Outer Hebrides Migration Study* (Hall Aitken, 2007) suggests that supporting the development of key growth sectors, such as the creative industries, as well as the development of services, leisure and cultural facilities, would be an important factor in attracting and retaining the required workforce and helping to ensure economic development. Finally, the draft *Outer Hebrides Creative and Cultural Industries Strategy* (Western Isles Council, 2012) also sets out a vision for the local creative industries to become an internationally recognised creative cluster, recognising the unique environment, language and cultural heritage of the Outer Hebrides. It is thus from within a growing consensus that this paper focuses on some yet unresolved tensions relating to job prospects for professionals and creative workers, which threaten to undermine the possible success of this approach.

## The role of the creative industries

The United Kingdom Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) defines the creative industries as “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of economic property” (DCMS, 2001). Increasingly over the last two decades, policy makers in the UK and wider afield have begun to acknowledge the economic impacts of such industries. This insight has been at the heart of a series of urban and rural studies of Scotland.<sup>3</sup>

Reflecting in part policy makers’ concerns relating to the impact of the shift from manufacturing to services in many industrialised regions, there has been an increasing interest within these studies as to the possibility of cultural and creative industries acting as a partial replacement for declining manufacturing employment. Particularly in urban areas, the high ‘labour intensive’ nature of much of the arts, combined with their local sourcing, has led many commentators to consider these industries, together with cultural tourism and the niche marketing of cultural aspects of the local economy, to be key benefits of a shift towards a ‘service economy’.

In addition to the job creation aspects of traditional ‘arts and culture’, however, other writers have examined the question of language, culture and diversity as a motor for economic change through its impact on ‘human capital’. Thus commentators such as Florida (2005) have promoted the idea of economic development being generated from within these creative sectors. Adopting this standpoint would therefore suggest that the existence of a viable creative and cultural sector in na h-Eileanan Siar is of the greatest interest in terms of potential future development, and supports the strategic approach of HIE outlined by Willie Roe above.

Adopting the definition of the creative industries given by the United Kingdom’s DCMS, and using the figures produced by the UK’s Business Register Employment Survey (BRES), allowed a calculation of employment in the sector; of the 11,150 jobs in na h-Eileanan Siar in September 2010, 370 were in the creative industries. Of these 370 jobs, a recent report for Creative Scotland (DC Consulting et al., 2012) indicated that radio, TV and the closely related film and video industries made up forty per cent of the cultural and creative sector in this geographical area. This same report was able to draw on the views of more than 130 of those individuals to ascertain the characteristics and drivers of ‘arts and culture’ in na h-Eileanan Siar. For seventy-five percent of these respondents, creative activity accounted for more than three quarters of their generated turnover, allowing the fairly robust assumption that these respondents would identify themselves as ‘creative and cultural workers’, and therefore that their views might usefully represent those working in the sector as a whole. These views will be returned to after a brief review of the local labour market and the ‘Gaelic labour market’ (Hecla Consulting, 2008).

## The ‘Gaelic labour market’

In seeking to define and describe the Gaelic labour market, Hecla Consulting (2008) concluded that there are several hundred jobs in Scotland requiring an ability to speak, read and write Gaelic, but for many speakers—and so for potential recruits to such posts—their primary labour market attachment is to their profession rather than to the language. Nevertheless, there have been major investments in Gaelic education, culture and related employment in recent years.

As well as maintaining the economic benefits of the significant arts and cultural sector in Edinburgh, authorities in Scotland have been supporting, since the late 1980s, the economic regeneration of the major industrial city of Glasgow through the promotion of the arts, culture and hospitality sectors (Chalmers and Danson, 2011). In a major strategy of 're-imagining' the city, there has been a focus on strength in cultural and creative industries, and in higher education through an emphasis on elements of the knowledge economy and related cultural sectors, including Gaelic (Glasgow City Council, 2010; Chalmers and Danson, 2011). It has been revealed that the Gaelic dimension to the arts and cultural sectors tends to be at the higher value end of economic activity (Hecla Consulting, 2008: 29). Gaelic speakers tend to be in the higher status occupations, and this is even more the case in the city than nationally (Hecla Consulting, 2008: 30). Nationally, over a third of employed Gaelic speakers (thirty-five percent) work in professional and associate professional occupations; these are concentrated in the urban centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Well over half of those with ability in the language in these cities are in management and technical employment compared with significantly lower proportions in Scotland as a whole for speakers and, in particular, non-speakers of Gaelic. In other words, those who have capabilities in the Gaelic language are qualitatively different from their non-Gaelic speaking contemporaries, with consequential implications for their consumption patterns, interests and related abilities and skills. Arguably, this may be linked to common cultural attributes shared within the Gaelic community (Throsby, 2001), which strengthen their attachment to the language and cultural commodities.

In parallel with these cultural and creative industry developments and investments, there has been significant expansion in Gaelic education at all levels. To facilitate this, there has been a complementary growth in dedicated Gaelic training for the professions and educators; this is concentrated in higher education institutions in the central cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. For instance, in Glasgow universities alone, about 250 students are enrolled in Gaelic courses, representing about one in seven students enrolled in Gaelic or Celtic degree courses across the country. Therefore, amongst those with the language, this 'central belt of Scotland' is over-represented in the age bands and occupations of people with high disposable incomes who tend to consume above average levels of arts and cultural goods and services. Glasgow and Edinburgh are hosts to Gaelic-speaking communities, which are constantly replenished by incoming students from the rural heartland and from learners of the language, many of whom will associate with community-based organisations.

Studies have demonstrated that the converse of this concentration of well-paid professional and higher occupation employment in the central belt is a relative dearth of such better paid jobs in the traditional Gaelic heartland of na h-Eileanan Siar (Hecla Consulting, 2008; Chalmers and Danson, 2011). But while these jobs offer enhanced access to the career ladders of their respective professions generally (Borooah et al., 2009), the attachment of Gaelic speakers is to those professions *per se* rather than to the language. So expansion of the Gaelic arts and cultural sectors nationally promises to generate more attractive jobs for the cities, retaining more high-status posts within this core region rather than in the archipelago of the islands. This outcome will be in contradistinction to the aims of HIE, and the reasons require deconstructing.

In the cities and rural areas, there appears to be a tendency for the parents of children entering Gaelic-medium education to be higher educated themselves, with a bias to membership in the local 'creative class'. However, this interest in Gaelic language and culture is by no means restricted to them. Chalmers (2003) first isolated in the northwest of Scotland, and Chalmers and Danson (2006 and 2009) verified for Glasgow, that the breadth of support for Gaelic culture is wider, more inclusive, and less class-dominated than for many other cultural activities in other cities and economies.

Generally, arts, cultural, and creative industries have been promoted and developed for the last quarter of a century in Scotland at all levels, especially in the cities and in fragile rural areas. However, the workings of specific labour markets drive professional and higher occupational staff to seek employment in their skill areas within the higher levels of the urban hierarchy and within 'escalator regions' (Fielding, 1992) in particular. The enterprises and other actors in the supply chains and clusters of the creative and cultural sectors similarly tend to locate themselves in the core regions, again driven by economic considerations. The economic plane is not featureless; distance and proximity are important considerations in determining business locations, employers, and key players in these industries, with inevitable consequences for job locations.

### Issues raised by creative and cultural workers

The conclusions of the earlier studies by Hecla Consulting (2008) and by Chalmers and Danson (2006 and 2011) are also echoed in a more recent report by DC Consulting, *Economic Impact Case Study: The arts and creative industries in Eilean Siar* (2012). Amongst the findings of the latter report was the perception of tension between a strong sense of identity surrounding the Outer Hebrides as a place and what was seen as an indistinct marketable identity, capable of supporting the arts and creative industries of na h-Eileanan Siar both locally and in the wider world. This clearly could have implications for mobile professional, cultural, and creative workers, and for their location choices.

Interestingly, although Scottish Gaelic lies at the heart of the culture, history, and traditions of the Outer Hebrides, the DC Consulting survey also suggested that less than thirty percent of respondents<sup>4</sup> thought Gaelic was 'critically' important, 'extremely' important or 'very' important to what they actually did as artistic or creative workers. However, the report continues to reveal that this should not be seen to indicate that the cultural significance of Gaelic to na h-Eileanan Siar is diminished, but only that the majority of those contributing a view did not regard Gaelic as central to their practice in the artistic or creative industries.

## Conclusion

Given the tendency for the higher-status and better-paid jobs requiring Gaelic to be located in the cities and far from the Gaelic heartland, there is a need to review how strategies and policies to support, sustain, and advance appreciation of Gaelic culture, traditions, and the language can contribute to economic development and job generation in the Western Isles. It has been argued that the concept of an archipelago is a 'human construct' which would benefit from being broadened from a strict terrestrial base (Hayward, 2012: 1-2). From the above, such a revision can also be applied to define the Gàidhealtachd (the Gaelic heartland) to include cities and labour markets outside of the islands. This offers a way to progress towards an ability to direct flows of income and activity. In turn, this suggests improving the embeddedness of the language and culture across and between the cities and traditional heartland and increasing the connectivity across these geographies.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> <http://video.google.co.uk/videoplay?docid=-1537200931924256974>

<sup>2</sup> Single Outcome Agreements are agreements between the Scottish Government and Community Planning Partnerships which set out "how each will work towards improving outcomes for the local people in a way that reflects local circumstances and priorities" —<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/local-government/delperf/SOA#>

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance: Myerscough, 1988, 1995; Hughes, 1989; MacKay Consultants and McGrath 1991; Sproull and Ashcroft 1993; Matarasso, 1996; EKOS, 2000; HIE, 2001; Chalmers, 2003; Dunlop *et al.*, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> The respondents of this survey consisted of approximately 140 individuals involved in the artistic and creative industries in the Outer Hebrides. The range of those consulted—in terms of size and type of organisation, the type of creative or artistic activity, and geographic location—would suggest that the study achieved coverage that encapsulated the characteristics and profile of artistic and creative industries in the Outer Hebrides.

## Bibliography

Borooah, V, Dineen, D and Lynch, N (2009) 'Language and occupational status: Linguistic elitism in the Irish labour market', *Economic and social review*, v40 n4: 435-460

Chalmers, D (2003) *The economic impact of Gaelic arts and culture*, Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University, Division of Economics and Enterprise

Chalmers, D and Danson, M (2006) 'Language and economic development: Complementary or antagonistic', in Macleod, W (ed) *Revitalising Gaelic in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press

Chalmers, D and Danson, M (2009) *An Economic impact study of Gaelic arts and culture in Glasgow*, Glasgow: Glasgow City Council

Chalmers, D and Danson, M (2011) 'The economic impact of Gaelic arts and culture within Glasgow: Minority languages and post-industrial cities', in Lorentzen, A and van Heur, B (eds) *Cultural political economy of small cities*, Abingdon: Routledge

DC Consulting, et al. (2012) *Economic impact case study: The arts and creative industries in Eilean Siar*, Edinburgh: Creative Scotland

Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (2001) 'Creative industries mapping document 2011'—[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/publications/4632.aspx](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/4632.aspx)

Dunlop, S, Hamilton, C, Galloway, S and Scullion, A (2004) *The economic impact of the cultural sector in Scotland*, Stirling: Scotecon

- EKOS Limited (2000) *Economic impacts of enhanced funding for Gaelic broadcasting*, Inverness: Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- Fielding, A (1992) 'Migration and social mobility: South east England as an escalator region', *Regional Studies*, v26, n1: 1-15
- Florida, R (2005) *Cities and the creative class*, Abingdon: Routledge
- Glasgow City Council (2010) *Gaelic language plan, 2010-2012* — <http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/6E72B840-C1AF-493D-8AE7-15A702ADC696/0/GaelicLanguagePlan.pdf>
- Hall Aitken (2007) *The Outer Hebrides migration study*, Glasgow: Hall Aitken
- Hayward, P (2012) 'Aquapelagos and aquapelagic assemblages', *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* v6 n1: 1-10
- Hecla Consulting (2008) *Measuring the Gaelic labour market: Current and future potential*, Inverness: Hecla Consulting
- HIE (Highlands and Islands Enterprise) (2001) *Economic impact of the creative content industries in the highlands and islands*, Inverness: Sneddon Economics and Market Research
- HIE (Highlands and Islands Enterprise) (2006) *Launch of the report on the demand for Gaelic arts* — <http://video.google.co.uk/videoplay?docid=-1537200931924256974>
- Hughes, G (1989) 'Measuring the economic impact of the arts', *Policy Studies* v9 n3: 33-45
- MacKay Consultants and McGrath, T (1991) *The economic and social impact of the arts in the highlands and islands of Scotland*, Inverness: Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- Matarasso, F (1996) *The social impact of arts programmes*, The Round, Bourns Green Stroud, Gloucestershire: Comedia
- Myerscough, J (1988) *The economic importance of the arts in Britain*, London: Policy Studies Institute
- Myerscough, J (1995) *The economic importance of the arts in Glasgow*, London: Policy Studies Institute
- Sproull A, and Ashcroft, B (1993) *The economics of Gaelic language development*, Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University
- Throsby, D (2001) *Economics and culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Western Isles Council/Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (undated) 'Single outcome agreement'—<http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/cxdir/executiveoffice/documents/Single%20Outcome%20Agreement%202011-13.pdf>
- Western Isles Council—Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (2012), *Outer Hebrides creative and cultural industries strategy (draft), 2012-2015*, Stornoway: Western Isles Council