

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE ARTS IN THE WESTERN ISLES

SUMMARY REPORT

1.0 Background

- 1.1 This brief report summarises the key elements from the study of the Social and Economic Impact of the Arts in the Western Isles that was commissioned in July 2004 by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Western Isles Enterprise.
- 1.2 Its primary purpose has been to establish a clear economic and social value for the arts, supported by empirical data and reasoned justification, to inform the development of a cultural strategy and support the future development of the arts in the Western Isles.
- 1.3 The study appraises the role of the arts and artists across a range of social and economic objectives, as well as recognising their inherent value, to help ensure that a coherent and co-ordinated approach is adopted for future arts development.

2.0 Context

“We should make the development of our creative drive the next major enterprise for our society. Arts for all can be a reality, a democratic right and an achievement of the 21st century”
Jack McConnell MSP, 2003

- 2.1 Over the last ten years evidence of the arts’ impact on areas such as health, education, and social work has grown in range and substance. The evidence has pointed to impressive improvements in self-esteem and confidence – prerequisites for healthy individuals and communities – and to a range of practical skills development, from developing creative ability to managing small businesses.
- 2.2 The successful organic growth of Taigh Chearsabhagh, for example, and its impact socially, economically and culturally on the surrounding community is cited throughout the Scottish cultural sector as an ideal model of how an arts-based project can effect a broader impact.
- 2.3 Similarly, our research reveals the social impact of the Fèisean as another excellent example that shows clear evidence of (a) the tremendous personal impact that the arts have on individuals in the area, some adults acquiring the confidence to start successful businesses as a result, and (b) the impact on sustaining local culture which, in some areas, has been in decline.

Cultural Tourism

- 2.4 Cultural tourism, which continues to be a major growth sector in tourism worldwide, is an important aspect of Western Isles tourism. There were a total of 179,700 visits to the area in 2002, a growth of 8.8% since 1999. The 2002 survey estimates the total value of tourism in the Islands at £39.3 million – an increase of 19.7%.
- 2.5 Those areas with distinctive cultural factors have a huge advantage in tourism. The Western Isles are far richer than most areas in this regard – Gaelic; Harris Tweed; Callanish; St Kilda – are all world-known. The Hebridean Celtic Festival, Ceòlas, Barra Feis, An Lanntair, Taigh Chearsabhagh – are all nationally known and held in high regard, although this is perhaps not fully exploited for the benefit of the area.
- 2.6 The *Strategic Plan for Tourism in the Western Isles, 2001 – 2005*, identifies niche markets, including cultural packages, as a key development opportunity. Promotion of the Gaelic language and culture is adopted as one of the prime actions of the strategy.

3.0 Key Aspects of the Study

- 3.1 As part of our research, questionnaires were sent to all individuals, organisations and businesses identified as being involved in the arts in the Western Isles. The survey results are summarised in Section 3 of the full report, and these could be used as a baseline for future monitoring of changes in arts activity, viability, and views on economic and social impact.
- 3.2 Case Studies of six key organisations were undertaken – Ceòlas, An Lanntair, the Fèisean, Hebridean Celtic Festival, Harris Arts, and Taigh Chearsabhagh – and interviews were held with several regional and national policy and funding agencies, and with individual artists.

4.0 Social Impact

- 4.1 This study follows two reports produced since 1996 that have assessed aspects of the social impact of the arts in the Western Isles. The clear and consistent indication is that increased activity in the arts in many parts of the Western Isles is having a very beneficial effect on various aspects of society.

Community Identity

- 4.2 Local skills and talent are increasingly being recognised, and the indigenous language and culture are being appreciated more and more. There is a consequent increase in confidence in individuals and an increased sense of community.

- 4.3 There was a widely-held view that the potential for arts activity to have an impact in small, rural, communities was much greater than in an urban setting. Some quoted the *ceilidh* as the definitive social gathering.
- 4.4 Many felt that not enough emphasis was being placed on the potential that a relatively small increase in arts activity or support could have in its consequent effect on such communities. Taigh Chearsabhagh was frequently cited as an example.

Participation and Under-represented Groups

- 4.5 Our research indicated broad rather than detailed data on under-represented groups. These focussed on:
- Low socio-economic groups
 - Young people with low educational attainment
 - People with mobility impairment
- 4.6 The main barriers to participation were cited as:
- Lack of time and money (particularly for families)
 - Availability and location of activity
 - Lack of transport
 - Lack of information
- 4.7 The main issue, however, was felt to be that people ‘did not think the activity was for them’. This notion of ‘exclusivity’ seemed to be less apparent in the Western Isles than nationally – perhaps because of the closer nature of the community, but also (as some mentioned) because indigenous culture, particularly traditional music (through the Fèisean and Ceòlas) is far more accessible.

Voluntary Involvement

- 4.8 Many felt that the tradition of voluntary activity was the bedrock of arts activity in the area. This dependence is particularly strong in the community drama sector.
- 4.9 Similarly, it was widely held that (a) the importance and impact of voluntary activity were not recognised sufficiently by funding authorities, and (b) the danger of ‘volunteer burnout’ was threatening to stifle arts activity and may in fact lead to some groups winding up.
- 4.10 The Hebridean Celtic Festival uses a tremendous amount of voluntary effort, without which it could not happen. There are some fears that the level of voluntary engagement now expected of a handful of key organisers is so great as to be difficult to sustain. The Festival Trust’s new business plan will, no doubt, be addressing this issue.

- 4.11 There was some expectation that the Comhairle, and perhaps WIE, should address this issue of volunteer fatigue more seriously – modest additional financial support was suggested as part of the answer.

Audience Development

- 4.12 The majority of respondents indicated the need to develop an audience for the arts – increased audiences, by implication, increasing the potential impact that the arts generate. Some of the suggestions of achieving this are outlined below:
- Partnership working with the local community
 - Programmes reflecting local interest and artforms
 - Evening openings of facilities such as galleries
 - Sunday openings
 - More social events in arts spaces
 - Making existing programmes more ‘user friendly’ and accessible
 - Targeting particular groups and organising events around that age range/geographic area/arts interest
 - Getting connected to the new HI Arts electronic box-office

5.0 Economic Impact

A comprehensive economic impact analysis of the arts in the Western Isles was carried out through obtaining information on:

- Direct employment (artists, administrators employed by public agencies and arts-related organisations, business employees, teachers and tutors)
- Multiplier impacts through the spending of these direct employees and business spending on supplies and services
- Employment generated by the wider spending of tourists and other visitors whose trips are at least partly related to arts provision in the area
- Employment generated by the wider spending on their day or evening out to attend an event, exhibition or workshop by local residents where this value-added would not otherwise have accrued to the Western Isles

The key findings of these calculations were that:

- There are almost 100 full-time equivalent artists living in the Western Isles (plus a considerable number of amateur artists who produce work or perform for the public)
- The arts support an estimated 177 direct full-time equivalent jobs in the area
- The overall annual employment impact of the arts is an estimated 431.5 full-time equivalent jobs, which would bring in approximately £4.7 million of additional household income. This employment impact is considered to represent more than 5% of the full-time equivalent jobs in the Western Isles

Volunteer input is valued at approximately £112,500 per annum for 3,000 volunteer days work. The full-time equivalence of this taxing and often highly skilled work would be around 13 full-time equivalent jobs.

6.0 Policy Recommendations

Strategic Partnerships

- 6.1 The Comhairle, WIE, VisitScotland, Bord na Gaidhlig and other appropriate partners should develop a joint overarching strategy to enable the arts to be developed to deliver their full social and economic potential and maximise their contribution to tourism.

Strategic Development

- 6.2 Strategic development – through a jointly agreed and prepared Cultural Strategy – should take place through sectoral development plans that take account of current provision and aspirations in individual artforms.

Support Mechanisms

- 6.3 Arts groups and organisations are often working in isolation and there is a need to promote interaction, the sharing of best practice and communication with the statutory agencies.

Opportunities to Participate

- 6.4 The arts provide an excellent vehicle for personal and community development through, for example:
- further development of out of school arts activities
 - further development of outreach services by established arts organisations
 - artist residencies/animation in local communities

Opportunities to Perform and Exhibit

- 6.5 There is a need to develop the opportunities local people have to perform and exhibit, and to promote their work on the islands both to local people and to visitors. This would further the development of the artists and significantly enhance the cultural tourism product.

Promotion of Western Isles Arts

- 6.6 The artistic product of the islands could be promoted more widely through:
- supporting mainland tours by island bands
 - visual arts and crafts showcase exhibitions toured to venues across the UK
 - developing a portal Western Isles Arts website

Gaelic

- 6.7 Establishing national Gaelic initiatives in the Western Isles is a good way of capitalising on the relative prominence of the language, as well as creating new arts-related employment (as is the case with Proiseact nan Eilean itself).
- 6.8 Two projects indicated as potentially fulfilling a development role nationally are a Gaelic music centre and a storytelling centre. More ambitiously, a Centre in the islands that supported, facilitated and promoted all forms of Gaelic art (including also literature and dance) would give the language and the Western Isles enhanced local and national profiles.

Integration with Tourism

- 6.9 Further action is needed to develop the potential of the arts in attracting visitors and supporting the tourism industry. This would benefit from:
- improved links between arts providers and tourism operators
 - showcasing local culture during the tourist season
 - developing niche cultural products in association with tourism operators

Advocacy

- 6.10 The public agencies are critical in representing and reflecting the role and importance of the arts at both local and national levels. They are also essential champions of specific initiatives – this includes capital projects, but also extends to issues of strategic importance, i.e. the creation of a digital broadcast channel for Gaelic.

External Funding

- 6.11 It will be important to maximise support from external sources, including the Scottish Arts Council and EU Programmes, towards new initiatives to supplement available local funding.

Action by Other Parties

- 6.12 To realise their potential, arts organisations and businesses in the Western Isles require support from the public sector:
- to pump-prime new initiatives
 - to offer encouragement, advice, co-ordination and development funding
 - to give organisations a more secure base for strategic development
 - for strategic planning of artforms

7.0 Areas of Particular Potential

An Lanntair

- 7.1 The investment in An Lanntair should work to the benefit of other cultural initiatives in the area, including developing its outreach programme in cooperation with CnES and Lews Castle College. The building could become a prime reason in itself for visitors to come to the town and islands.

Gaelic Arts Strategic Development Fund

- 7.2 The £400,000 fund to be administered by Proiseact nan Eilean on behalf of a forum of key bodies can make substantive changes to the arts sector in the Western Isles. Many respondents felt that investing the bulk of the money in the voluntary sector would give a proportionately ‘bigger bang for the buck’.

Crafts

- 7.3 There is potential to develop and exploit the indigenous crafts industry. The presence of a highly recognisable global brand name – Harris Tweed – could help spearhead any focussed investment and marketing guidance from the enterprise sector into the craft industry.