



Scottish Island Futures - 2050 Workshop 2 Report

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ABSTRACT

The findings of the first RSE funded Scottish Island Futures – 2050 and Beyond workshop, which explored Speaking of the Future – the Role of Language, Culture and Heritage, 3 March 2023.

Dr Andrew Jennings

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Introduction

The workshop was held on **3 March 2023** (10.30 – 16.30) and was entitled ***Speaking of the Future – the Role of Language, Culture and Heritage.***

It was held both at Lews Castle College UHI in Lewis and online. It looked at the role of the indigenous culture and languages in supporting vibrant communities. In particular, it focused on whether there will be a future for Gaelic and the Northern Isles dialects. In addition, given the range of expertise shown by the participants, who were involved in language research, heritage and creative practice, it also explored the intersection of language, culture, heritage and the creative industries. How they might support and bolster each other and how worst-case scenarios – language death, population decline etc – might be avoided, so that islands might achieve a high-aspiration future – continued community language use and vibrant communities engaging with their heritage in creative ways.

As with the first workshop, this workshop was in two parts - a focused group in the morning and a streamed session in the afternoon. In the latter, ideas and recommendations that had come up in the morning were further discussed and shared with a wider group. In both the morning and afternoon sessions there were 23 participants.

The morning session began with a short introductory presentation from Jennings explaining the theme of the workshop, and the nature of futuristics. Jennings encouraged the participants to think beyond the planning horizon. During the session there were short talks delivered by Conchúr Ó Giollagáin, Breesha Maddrell, Meng Qu, Keith Macintyre, Michael Foxley and Tiber Falzett.

The sessions were recorded¹. During the sessions Slido was used to collect ideas, comments and opinions.

¹ <https://youtu.be/YfM0Wsy6lls> and https://youtu.be/tFzYU_LJ7HQ

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The Morning Session

There were three means of acquiring data – **Slido** polls, transcripts of the VC online discussion and VC Chat. At the beginning of the morning session the question was asked - **Where in the world are you?**



Figure 1

The participants were based in the Scottish islands, the Isle of Man and Australia (the Japanese participant joined shortly after this poll). Figure 1 shows Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles were represented.

Participants were asked, - **What is your main research or professional focus?** These were listed as follows:

Archaeology, heritage management

Professional focus: social art practice/creative industries. Research focus: societal threats

(particularly climate crisis and nuclear threat); cold war period, impact from industrial scale wind farms, the arts to communicate these threats. Photography, film, sound, textiles.

Year-round island economies. Resident Communities. Digital solutions. isledevelop.com

Creative Geography, Regional Revitalization, Art Islands, Creative In-migrant, Art Festival Tourism, Island Studies

Lecturer in Folklore and Ethnology, Scoil na Gaeilge, an Léinn Cheiltigh agus an Bhéaloidis, UCD, Fieldwork experience working with Gaelic speakers in Cape Breton Island and Uist.

Scottish cultural history, Northern language and literature. Leading the Institute for Northern Studies!

Economic Development in the Outer Hebrides - focussing on Creative Industries and Population

Minority language sociolinguistics and Gaelic social culture

Creative Geography, Regional Revitalization, Art Islands, Creative In-migrant, Art Festival Tourism, Island Studies

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Gaelic Language Consultancy/Advocacy

Lead a cultural (heritage) charity with a focus on intangible culture – I come from a language and music background.

Regional development with a specific focus on islands.

H&I politics

Creative practice and creative economies in island places

Linguistic typology, contact linguistics, historical linguistics; special focus: documenting & describing Shetland

Shetland heritage

Ordinary folk in Orkney

The participants embodied a great deal of linguistic, cultural and creative practice expertise. This expertise covered both Gaelic and the Northern Isles dialects.

Participants were then asked - **What aspects of language, culture and heritage do you want to discuss?** These topics were taken into account in the subsequent discussion. These are listed as follows:

How they can all work together to benefit the local economy and communities.

Minority language recognition and how language, culture and heritage form a holistic whole. Also how recognition of local languoids/varieties enhances the confidence and performance of the respective communities, and as such constitute an investment in brain gain, which in turn makes it an investment in a real commodity and natural resource.

Socially engaged art as a way to empower communities for future; heritage and culture - learning from the past to shape the future.

Sustainability of indigenous language, folklore, and culture, and how to enable island communities to be empowered to discuss this without it being assumed they are criticising those who are not in the islands or originally from the islands.

How new culture replace old one. What "revitalization" means in the island context.

Collaborative projects, youth engagement

Gaelic; Land Reform

Material culture and archaeology. I'm sympathetic towards Gaelic but don't speak a word!

A societal approach to the Gaelic vernacular situation. Its future, but also its continual use in everyday life.

After this introduction to the expertise and interests of the workshop participants there were the series of talks. These talks were intended, amongst other things, to set out the nature of the challenges facing the islands and insular languages, and to provide inspiration for ways of meeting these challenges.

The first talk was delivered by **Conchúr Ó Giollagáin**. He is the UHI Gaelic Research Professor, and the academic director of *Soillse*, a multidisciplinary and multi-institutional research project and is based at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, on the Isle of Skye. He set out the existing language situation in the traditional Gaelic speaking areas. After noting that a

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recent study found that the size of the vernacular Gaelic-speaking community has fallen to around 11,000 people, he presented four academic questions to be addressed:

Why has the approach to language promotion gravitated towards A. an individualized neo-liberal approach to minority language policy and planning, and B. a consumerist user aesthetic for minority language sociocultural engagement?

Why is much of the official minority language policy and planning in a contradictory relationship with, or in a general disregard for the society-reality of the Gaelic language speaking community?

What are the impediments to an embodied aesthetic, cultural interest, that is rooted in an engagement with minority language social reality in other words, why is language promotion not rooted in the societal reality of the vernacular group?

He argued that answers might be found in looking at four interrelated challenges. Firstly, the official language revitalization policy agenda in Scotland is not focussing on the ongoing context of speaker group decline. Secondly, prescriptions for minority language revitalization are not rooted in a diagnosis of the societal challenge faced by the native speaker language group. Thirdly, there is the issue of individualism and sectorialism in language promotion, which can lead to a situation where there's language promotion, but it is not reflected in the ordinary social experience of the speakers. Fourthly, we seem to be in a situation where we have power brokers and an institutional ascendancy, which is monopolizing attention and resources, and creating the conditions for a containment exercise of a very difficult societal issue. He suggests that we have language promotion without sufficient language protection of the existing speaker group. We have officially sponsored language revitalization projects occurring in the context of speaker group decline. He rounded up by questioning what would improve the situation? He suggested, we need to focus on the politics of empowerment for a highly threatened linguistic minority; we need to pay attention to the socio-economic and community development needs of the Gaelic-speaking community; and we need to have language protection policies along with language promotion. Or in one summing up sentence, we need to give the remaining Gaelic vernacular group, agency in their own context and in their own social geography.

The next talk was given by **Breasha Maddrell** the Director of Culture Vannin, who provided a Manx perspective on the importance of traditional languages. She picked up on some of Ó Giollagáin's comments, including the fact that communities can become factionalised and split into different groups, which is counterproductive. She presented the work of *Culture Vannin*, and in particular their focus on developing Manx language use. She was keen to point out that coordination and partnership with other organisations was vital. This has led to the joint Manx Language Strategy and the increasing number of Manx children learning the language. She suggested that being a small community with its own heritage organisation was an advantage. In a sense, she was pointing out that the Manx people have agency when it comes to language revival. Ultimately, she offered a story of hope, that languages can be revived. Before the next speaker, Jennings asked whether there was evidence that learning Manx had an impact on people's self-esteem. She answered that

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research was ongoing, but it seemed that Manx was providing a means for people to identify with the island and that it brought a sense of inclusivity and inclusion, rather than excluding anyone.

With the next speaker the focus of the talks was directed towards the importance of creativity and the arts. Providing an international perspective **Meng Qu**, who is an Associate Professor at the Hokkaido University Center for Advanced Tourism Studies and co-convenor at Small Island Cultures Research Initiative (SICRI), discussed two projects he has been involved with, one exploring the understanding of islandness and island studies in East Asia, and the other researching a new island tourism development related to creativity and art in Japan. Firstly, he discussed how China, Korea, Taiwan and Japan understand the concepts of islandness and whether it is the same as the occidental view. It seems that there are similarities. He continued with a description of the depopulation issue facing Japan and the impact of the Naoshima effect, attracting millions of tourists to threatened islands. However, he made the important point that many Japanese islands are never likely to be repopulated once the existing population goes, and that, 'The new concept of creative depopulation really matters since we cannot really bring the population back, but at least we can do something to create better quality of life for both locals and tourists.' He concluded that art tourism projects needed to be co-created with the local population, who need to be socially engaged in the development, and that post-Covid smaller more diversified development is the way to go.

The creativity theme was continued by **Keith McIntyre** in his presentation. He is the emeritus Professor of Creative Practice at UHI and lives in the Isle of Berneray, Uist. He began by explaining that the fact Berneray has a causeway to North Uist, built in 1999, was one of the reasons that encouraged him to move to the island. He pointed out that he is part of the changing population in the island, which has had a cultural and linguistic impact. There is Gaelic in the island, but not long ago the whole Sunday church service would have been in the language. Now it is restricted to perhaps one psalm. The change can be seen clearly when comparing the island today with the way it was portrayed in the 1981 film *The Shepherds of Berneray*. He made a really powerful point that although artists may not be able to solve the decline in conversational Gaelic within island communities, they are being attracted to the islands and through their artistic activism, with its symbiosis with place and the linguistics based in that space, they are creating art which is engaging with the issue. Donald Urquhart was commissioned by Taigh Chearsabhagh to create thought provoking Gaelic signs, and McIntyre himself was involved, through his art, in a Manx language project *Moylley yn Burroo*.

After pointing out two culturally positive developments which have occurred during his life, namely the expansion of shinty playing and the ability of traditional musicians to now make a professional living from Gaelic music, **Michael Foxley** vice-chair of the UHI Regional Strategy Committee and former leader of Highland Council, criticised the impact of capitalism and money and how it threatens the bond between community and land. Their impact on rural housing and young people, who are unable to afford houses. Market forces have also destroyed collective community collaboration in crofting. He argued for land

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reform because that's what's needed to safeguard rural populations, and he pointed out the unjustness of crofting tenants being unable to be involved in carbon trading. Moving on to Gaelic he noted that research he and Bruce Robertson had undertaken showed that 225 new Gaelic teachers are needed in the 5 years to meet current and future demand. He also noted that he was in favour of positive discrimination for Gaelic to counter the drop off between primary and secondary school, and that while the older generation are still there, it was vital to encourage intergenerational transfer and communication. He agreed with Ó Giollagáin that many of the bodies whose job it is to support and promote Gaelic were in denial about the problem. However, he finished on a positive note, describing his recent experience in South Uist which he identified as the definition of a Gaelic vernacular community.

Tiber Falzett Lecturer/Assistant Professor in the University College Dublin School of Irish, Celtic Studies and Folklore, who has conducted over 15 years of fieldwork amongst native Gaelic communities also noted South Uist in particular, and expressed his great gratitude in the way they had embraced him and mentored his Gaelic learning. His talk focussed on the important relationship between *beul aithris* 'oral tradition / folklore' and Gaelic language transmission and learning. He pointed to the great value of communal immersion programs in Cape Breton with master apprentice mentoring, where a younger person is mentored by the older native speaker and gains tremendous skill in the language. He is currently developing a project that will train those who have come through these programmes in ethnographic research methods. His main point was to ensure a future for Gaelic in Cape Breton intergenerational participation and culture have to be engaged.

Gaelic is not the only language in the Scottish islands that is under threat. The Northern Isles have their own distinctive dialects, known as *Shaetlan* in Shetland. This is studied by the Swedish scholar **Viveka Villupillai**, Honorary Professor in the Department of English at the University of Giessen. She, along with her colleague Roy Mulla, has been working on promoting understanding and use of the dialect within Shetland. She presented an overview of work including the project *I Hear Dee*. She explained how *Shaetlan* is a contact language, indeed a mixed language with mixed Scots and Norn ancestry. She has a corpus of over 400,000 words from which they have developed a language primer, and an online, interactive dictionary. Their aim is to destigmatise *Shaetlan*. They have produced an information leaflet for the archaeological heritage site Jarlshof in *Shaetlan*, and their online site *I Hear Dee* has a series of films on non-fictional topics in the language. She pointed out the importance of digitalk (digitally facilitated communication) for indigenous and endangered languages, and the fact that *Shaetlan* speakers engage in this activity. She agreed with previous speakers that it is artificial to separate the concept of language and place. They belong together and 'language is the breath of culture and the culture evolves with place'.

(See Appendix 3 for the transcripts)

After the talks, Jennings asked an intentionally gauche question on Slido - **How important are Gaelic and the Northern Isles' dialects to the future of the islands?** This generated a discussion, which seemed misdirected initially, as it focussed on discussing the lack of relevance of Gaelic to the Northern Isles, which tells us much about the potential pitfalls of

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researching the Northern and Western Isles together, but the participants brought up the following important points, one was reframing the question along the lines of how important are the indigenous languages in terms of the future of the islands and their sustainability, because without a knowledge of the indigenous language of a place there is a disconnect between the people and the place, secondly it was noted that it can cause unnecessary conflict if language policies are applied to areas with a different cultural heritage, and thirdly, it was pointed out that some islands have a sustainable population today because of incomers and their very presence can lead to the death of the indigenous language. However, despite the fact that a sustainable island population can exist without the indigenous languages, it was still felt by 100% of those who filled in the poll that the languages were very important for the future of the islands.

The next Slido question addressed the question of how optimistic were the participants about the future of the indigenous languages. The result can be seen in Figure 2. The barometer pointed slightly more towards optimism, with just under a third of the votes. However, the largest percentage of voters (44%) were neither optimistic nor pessimistic. A quarter were pessimistic.

How optimistic are you about the fate of indigenous languages of the islands?

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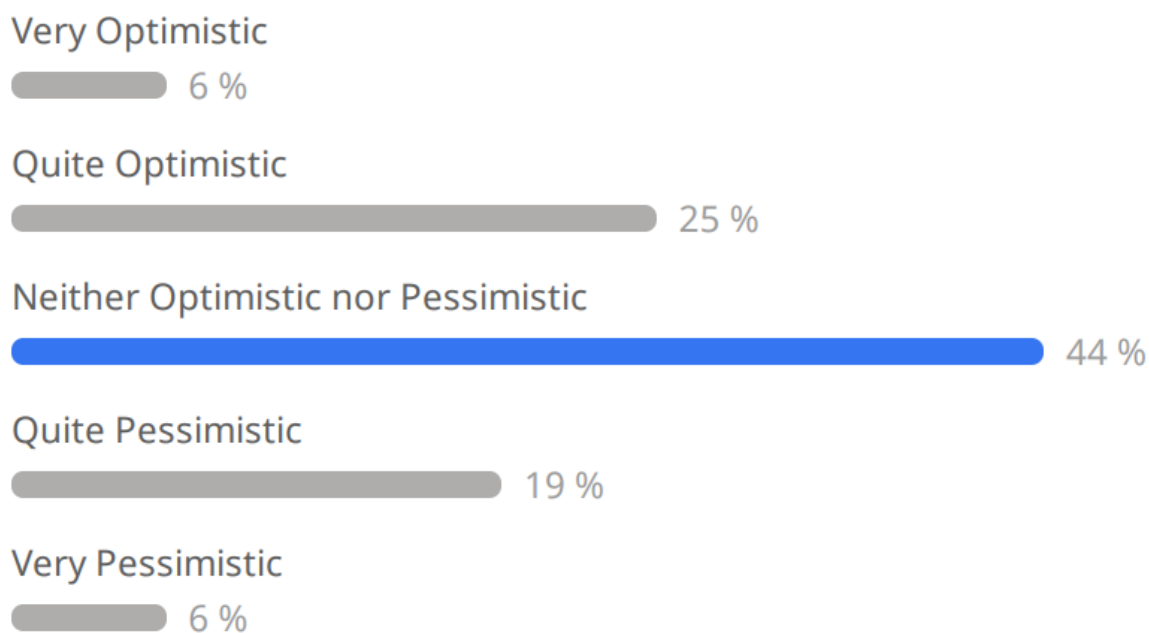


Figure 2

Next the participants split into two breakout groups, randomly allotted, to discuss the worst-case scenario for the indigenous languages. A positive, best-case scenario was discussed in the afternoon.

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Breakout group one reported that they did not actually come up with a worst case scenario. However, they felt that if the languages disappeared it would be down to a failure in Government policy. They discussed the relationship between incomers, who are interested in the culture and heritage of the communities and some of the indigenous people who are not as interested as they might be. Indigeneity does not necessarily equate to interest in local culture and heritage.

Breakout group two reported that the worst-case scenario would be language loss by 2050. However, they noted that it was a very different situation for the *Gaidhealtachd* as compared to the Northern Isles. They felt that the situation suffered from policy making at a distance. There were points made that intergenerational transmission was being affected by Gaelic medium education, and that the language might be continuing but in a different form because the underpinning culture was being lost. This will have ramifications in future if traditional knowledge is lost. Also the Northern Isles' dialects will be progressively levelled out.

Jennings asked the group whether the crofters of the Western Isles are indigenous and Kirsty MacDonald from South Uist replied absolutely, her father's family can be traced back to the islands through a mixture of *sloinneadh* and DNA to the 8th century. Gareth Davies commented from the Welsh perspective that it was in people's financial interest to learn Welsh and it was now seen as trendy to be a Welsh speaker, which had resulted in an increase in Welsh speaking population. He suggested that Welsh style policies might be introduced in Scotland to protect Gaelic. Viveka suggested that Scottish situation was more complicated than that in Wales, because of Scots and Gaelic. Would people have to learn both for parity? Then there is the dialect situation to be considered. Simon Clarke observed that what the State can do is maybe marginal and that the reason Gaelic is failing is because it is less connected to community because of sociological factors and that we don't have intergenerational transmission because we don't live in intergenerational households any longer. Conchúr Ó Giollagáin commented that when you are dealing with a subordinate culture, you need horses for courses, based on sound analysis. He said thinking of Ireland, there has been 100 years of language strategies and policies, but you can have language promotion and language decline simultaneously. What is happening is that Irish is being promoted to death. He continued we have to start talking about language protection instead of language promotion. Breesha Madrell picked up on this, she said that we need art and artists to connect people's heart-space to their language and culture, rather than always thinking about policy and it's how you get people back, get them to connect to their cultural heritage.

The Afternoon Session

The afternoon session Jennings began with an overview of the issues that had been identified in the morning session. He noted that these included major problems and challenges, such as an aging population in the islands, the economic problems faced by people trying to buy houses, the failure of governance strategy towards the languages, the

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impact both positive and negative of incomers coming to live in communities without having the indigenous languages, and a decrease in the intergenerational transmission of languages and culture. There are now possibly as few as 15,000 Gaelic speakers habitually using Gaelic in the Western Isles. Similar research has not yet been undertaken in the Northern Isles, so we don't know how many people are habitually using Shetland or the Orkney dialect. He also noted that Conchur had made a very good case for focusing on language protection instead of language promotion and that this might provided a focus for the afternoon's discussion. In the morning session there was a recognition that there were new social and economic realities in the islands, that it's not the 1950s, and that it's not going to be the 2020s in the 2050s. There will be ongoing changes, which we can see happening at the moment. There's also going to be an increasing use of technology which will impact on both language use and creative practice. He also noted that there had been interesting comments about the importance of not just language, but cultural heritage or *dualchas*, for community vibrancy. With these thoughts in mind, the series of afternoon short talks then followed. The speakers were **Simon Clarke**, **Lynn Campbell**, and **Kirsty MacDonald**.

Simon Clarke, Senior Lecturer in Archaeology and Heritage Management, and Section head for Creative and Cultural Industries at UHI Shetland, began with a talk entitled the Future of the Past. This included looking at archaeology, the past, and the different uses of heritage, the present and future, with a focus on the excavation of the site at Scatness, in Shetland, which a collaboration between Bradford University and the Shetland Amenity Trust. This in many ways was a successful project, with 5-8000 people visiting during the excavation season. However, there were some problems firstly, the excavation was both a research excavation and a training excavation for undergraduates, who were not expert archaeologists, and there was some tension between these undergraduates, primarily from England, and the local participants, who were looked down upon by the former. However, the main tension was between the learning outcomes and the research outcomes of the university, and the public engagement and educational objectives of the Shetland Amenity Trust. However, Bradford University is to be commended for spending tens of thousands of pounds on presenting the site to the public. Nonetheless, there is a tension between research archaeology and presentation of archaeology. For example, the research outcome of excavating the Scatness broch primary floor surface had to be abandoned to preserve a later and unexpected Pictish period cellular structure found within the broch. There was also a tension between excavation and presentation to the public, as after each excavation season the site was covered up. Post-excavation the site has been consolidated but there were problems with that too. Excavation and presentation to the public is a compromise and some important features of the site has still not been consolidated. Shetland Amenity Trust failed in its bid to attract £8 million in funding to create a visitor attraction. Clarke believes it was unlikely to have been successful as the number of visitors to the site is very small compared to Stonehenge which received £25 million for its visitor centre. In the islands we should aim lower and make use of things like virtual reality. In conclusion he noted that archaeological monuments are an asset, but they are also a liability and responsibility when you expose them. If you want to keep archaeology safe keep it buried. If you expose it, unless you have got a good plan for presenting to the public, it should be

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reburied again. Local agencies are going to be interested in creating amenities, but they need to think about whether they are creating amenities for mass tourism, or for educational purposes and local identity. There are many things to think about there in terms of what is heritage for, and it is not about the past, it is about how one manages the resource going forward. There is also the tension between how much of the resource do we use now, and how much do we leave for the future.

Jennings asked what Clarke's feelings were now when he looked at the Scatness site on his way to the airport. Clarke admitted some frustration and guilt, but he did criticise things at the time. However, the various partners went into the project with good intentions and the Amenity Trust did work constructively with the academics. However, he hoped that things would be done differently now, that there would be planning for the long-term future of the site and its interpretation.

Lynn Campbell, Institute for Northern Studies UHI Lecturer and Programme Leader for the BA (Hons) Culture and Heritage, spoke next about her knowledge of, and desire to protect and promote Orcadian heritage, in her roles as a tour guide, tour guide trainer, secretary of Stromness Museum and Orkney Heritage Society, and with SEPA. Her talk was based on a talk given to cruise ship passengers (arriving on an expected 220 ships in 2023), introducing them to the wide range of Orkney's culture and heritage offering, including not only Orkney's Viking and UNESCO recognised Neolithic legacy, but many other aspects, such as projects looking at the community usage of St Magnus Cathedral, cultural heritage associated with 17th century Skail House, the important remains from the world wars, Orkney's natural heritage, its food and drink, its arts and crafts such as the Orkney chair and its intangible cultural heritage like the Ba.

Campbell's comprehensive overview of the rich culture and heritage of Orkney was followed by the final speaker of the afternoon **Kirsty MacDonald**, filmmaker, and Gaelic language consultant from North Uist, who has established the Gaelic language consultancy *Comas Creative*. Her focus was on Gaelic language and culture. Her perspective has been shaped by a varied career, including cataloguing the entire *Tobar an Dualchais* recordings for the School of Scottish Studies, creating Historic Scotland's first Gaelic language plan, and laterally revising and adding to the statements of culturally significant intangible cultural heritage for all the Historic Scotland properties. In 2022 she co-directed a full-length documentary film called *Dùthchas*, which she suggests closely approaches the concept of indigeneity. This explored why people had to leave the Western Isles historically, and what that meant for the language and culture. She suggested that in order to figure out where we need to go and how we need to move forward, we need to understand where we've been. She had the privilege of working with 1st Nation's people from Turtle Island, and was fascinated by the fact that many of them could not speak their indigenous languages, yet they still felt this deep connection to their land and their culture and that was still being transmitted down through the generations without the language. For MacDonald, perhaps the essential thing, is valuing the cultural heritage and folklore and the connection to the land, because one thing that she does not want to see happen in the Western Isles, is alienating the indigenous people of Uist. People who have been there for centuries, but who

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no longer speak the language. They feel the connection every bit as strongly as Gaelic speakers do to the land, and they share the cultural heritage just as strongly as the people who do speak the language. MacDonald had some comments on the question of people moving to the islands. She noted that without many of the people who have come into the islands, a lot of enterprises might not have happened. However, some of these people, when they come to live in the Western Isles, are completely unaware that they are moving to a place that 50, 60 years ago was entirely Gaelic speaking, and that if they had moved here then, they would have been very much in the minority by being monolingual. Now they can move to the islands and not learn Gaelic. Indeed, many are not really interested in it. For them, it might be their art, painting or whatever, that interests them, or the landscape. How do we encourage these people to engage with the language and the heritage? She suggested ways forward. One of things missing, which she mentioned in the morning session is intergenerational living. Her father, who is 83, grew up in a house with his granny who was born in the 19th century. He learned oral history from her, oral tradition that can be easily lost if not passed on. She felt that the key to protecting language and heritage is instilling a sense of place in the younger generation. She suggested that although she has worked in public bodies and in language planning, and at the community level, perhaps, instead of promoting policies that continually try to normalize the use of Gaelic at every occasion, we should perhaps be teaching our children how precious and precarious their culture heritage and language is. This might instil a sense of pride in teach them that they are the torch bearers for future generations.

Discussion

Jennings picked up on MacDonald's point about the importance of pride of place, which he pointed out you can adopt even if you are not born in the place, you can still be proud of it, and appreciative of its history, culture and heritage, and identify with it in that sense.

MacDonald replied that she had experienced this while working on the Scotland's rural past project with local community groups. Many of the people involved did not originate in the locality, but they were engaged with local history and felt included and pride in the place they were living.

Clarke commented that archaeology and languages have a problem with engaging some members of the public. Historic Scotland and English Heritage have trouble recruiting and attracting people from ethnic minorities and from the working class. Perhaps, there is a problem with the concept of heritage, the idea of an inheritance and of a direct line of descent. To ensure the future of Gaelic, people will need to be recruited, people whose families have never spoken Gaelic. So perhaps, instead of focussing on heritage as some sort of inheritance we need to think of it as something that is yours if you are interested in it.

Frank Rennie, Emeritus Professor of Sustainable Rural Development and founding member of the Scottish Crofters Union took a different view. He suggested that for example, understanding the place names of the landscape gives you a much greater depth of perspective about what you're looking at and if you were to lose the understanding of the Gaelic names of the place, you might as well be in the Epsom Downs. People can move into the islands and learn the culture and become part of it and contribute it. If one simply

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protects language out of context, one loses so much. Clarke replied he did not disagree, but he was arguing that getting people to see it as something that's relevant to them is part of the challenge for both archaeology and the language. He noted that there is an obligation to make archaeology accessible to everyone even those with only potentially limited interest. If the information is broken down into relatively small size, digestible bits, that could work.

Lynn Campbell suggested this had been done at the Ring of Brodgar where the academics had produced a populist book, that can be read and understood by anybody. It has been a best seller in Orkney.

Keith McIntyre noted that one of the reasons that he was attracted to the island of Coll when he was about 18 were the ceilidhs held every night. These were verbal gatherings not dances. As an outsider he felt he was coming to something precious because he was coming to somewhere where he heard people talking and stories being told. He didn't understand the language, but he understood the passion of what they were saying, and he wanted to find out more. It led him into being a visual artist. He continued that many people say that the culture of the ceilidh does not happen now, and he wondered if whether there should be a national policy of funding the traditional ceilidh, a place of knowledge being shared and the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic.

MacDonald replied that *Ceòlas*, in North Uist, do that. It is part of their funding to run a ceilidh one night a week. They get people to host a house ceilidh and they provide them with funds to buy some refreshments. It is sort of artificial, but it does give a taste of what it used to be like. It is never going to be like it was, but perhaps there are creative ways that something can be done. But she believes that if it is left to national policy, it is not going to work. It has to come from within the community.

Jennings posed the question to MacDonald that the people in this workshop might be keen on preserving or promoting Scotland's indigenous languages, and might believe that this is the main feeling in the communities themselves, however, did she have any idea how common this feeling actually was, and if people are not actually using their language then how committed to it are they in reality?

MacDonald provided an example from her experience. Around 2005 / 2006 Western Isles council released their Gaelic plan, which said that they were going to start up Gaelic medium schools. So she as the vice chair of the National Board of *Comann nam Pàrant*, set about trying to make Cairinis school, her local school, a Gaelic school. She visited every house with preschoolers in the whole of North Uist, and undertook a feasibility study. Everything looked great and then it came to public consultation and it was a traumatic experience for her personally. There was visceral opposition to the idea. To the extent that there was a petition started up in the local shops. It was apparent to her that not everybody who speaks Gaelic sees it in the same way as she does, or did. In the end, the education committee voted against it and now there is no Gaelic school in North Uist. Well, in theory, there is a Gaelic school with an English unit, but she suggested that as everyone who knows anything about language acquisition knows, that does not work. In her experience it is effectively an English language school with a Gaelic unit.

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Velupillai provided a Scandinavian perspective, commenting on the Saami situation. She suggested to avoid alienating those who feel a connection to their Gaelicness without actually, speaking, Gaelic, we could look to the Saami. They are spread across Scandinavia. There are many different Saami groups and many of them no longer speak one of the several Saami languages. However, they are very much tied to their Saaminess, their reindeer culture and the pride of place and their symbiosis with the land. They are no less Saami, though they no longer speak a Saami language. They are tied together through this common sense of Saami identity which is tied to the land, and to the feeling of pride of place.

The discussion now moved on to language protection instead of language promotion.

Ó Giollagáin was asked how he would differentiate between the two concepts. He said that protection is about maintaining the culture of the linguistic minority as it exists, while promotion is about creating the context for overall efforts no matter if it is for learners or the native speakers. He said what we have currently is that we have promotion of the language among school learners and official language plans, but we have very little activity focussed on protection of the cultural asset of the existing speaker group. Further he said you cannot save a language. You can only help a group of people who possess the cultural capital of that language to survive. The current language policy is sufficient to preserve Gaelic as a school language, but it is not sufficient for anything else, and all the promotion efforts are basically camouflaging the reality of the social demise of the Gaelic group. This situation can be remedied if we follow a community development model that leads to the social development of the language, rather than the institutional development of the language. Generally, the vernacular group accepts this diagnosis and wants to see public debate on new strategic, collective efforts to deal with their situation. However, in official circles, and in certain academic departments, there has been hostility to this idea. He offered four recommendations for turning the situation around.

The first is that the Gaelic group in the islands need to be given agency over their own context. He suggested that there is no way somebody is going to solve their difficulties by a remote control process from the central belt.

His second recommendation was that we need to put strategic effort into developing a community development model. There is community development in the islands. But he suggested that some of it is not focused on the collective coherence of the Gaelic group. We need a more coherent focus of all the efforts that the different Gaelic bodies are dealing with.

His third point was that we need some type of risk management. He believes given the current trajectory, that the Gaelic social group, the vernacular group will disappear. Nonetheless, if they disappear, people will still have an interest in Gaelic affairs and Gaelic culture, Gaelic ethnography and so on. They will ask 2 questions, what did these people sound like and what were their concerns? What did they talk about it? Therefore, we need to engage in a more systematic collection of material. There is work being done at UHI, *Stòras Beò nan Gàidheal*, but we need as much vernacular use of Gaelic, over a wide range

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of domains, wide range of social situations and social functions, recorded for posterity. In other words, if the culture, the living culture disappears, we need to have a digital archive of the last generation of the full speakers of that culture. The people that possess the cultural capital of that culture.

His 4th recommendation was that we need to comprehensively integrate all the engagement efforts currently being undertaken - schooling, the official approach to language promotion, the culture and heritage focus, the ethnographic focus and place based aesthetics. To do this the community themselves need agency over the issue and we need strategic effort that is focused on giving some collective coherence to all these issues.

To summarise we need local agency, strategic effort, risk management and an integration of efforts.

Don Esson the Area Education and Learning Manager with Highland Council, who is based in the North of Skye at Uig, picked up on some of the previous points. He suggested that there are a plethora of plans, and not just in Gaelic language, across many different agencies, and there needs to be a review of the planning and the purpose of the planning. He said that both protection and promotion are taking place, but there is an imbalance at present. Promotion has been highly successful, especially in the central belt, but almost to the detriment of the more indigenous areas. There have been serious issues of recruitment and retention of teachers because of the successes in the central belt. He agreed with Conchur's recommendations. There needs to be a review of the strategic way forward, which this has to look at language protection. He suggested that one of the ways that we could look at protection is to look at particular local areas where there is strong intergenerational transmission and strong culture, music and things happening, which has an indirect or a direct contribution to schooling, where there is good practice happening.

He agreed with Ó Giollagáin that there is a lack of connectivity across all the different areas and that there needs to be a strategic overview, creating a balance between protection and promotion.

Current funding models could be questioned. This needs to be put into the local areas, to local organizations and groupings within local areas giving them agency to promote good practice in supporting music, drama, culture, history. This has led to success in the north of Skye. Language is not just the language of the school. It becomes more the language of the community, the wider of community when culture is integrated. Members of his own family have gone through Gaelic medium education in Skye and the major contribution to their acquiring fluency has been the family and the community around them supporting language acquisition and fluency. As far as promoting intergenerational transmission, we need to go back to activities which were the norm, using village halls, village communities groups, visiting, meeting each other, getting the youngsters together, getting the community together in different types of events, these are all ways of supporting and promoting the language.

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He pointed out that promotion is working, as we are getting more and more people learning Gaelic, but we need to ensure the survival of indigenous local communities where the language is alive, by sharing good practice, we'll learn from that process.

Conclusion

Jennings then asked what the participants would see as success in 2050. In the context of the Western Isles, would it be an increased population of say 100,000, but without Gaelic, or a decreased population of 20,000, but fluent Gaelic speakers? He turned to the creative practitioners in the workshop and asked what role did they feel the creative industries might play? MacIntyre said he did not like the term creative industries, which was a Labour Party neologism, and has an economic focus. He preferred concentrating on the idea of creative practice and building people's confidence, in using the language and in creating art. He pointed out that in his visits to Finland he was very impressed by the little art schools, that pupils went to after the school day. These were places that encouraged pupils to sew, paint, create and he would like to see something similar in Scotland. Frank Rennie suggested that the Feisean fulfil a similar role, where thousands of children have learned to confidently play instruments. MacIntyre said that the engagement with music transferred into other activities like language and added to a holistic cultural experience. He further suggested that money from the Islands Deal should have been supporting smaller, holistic cultural spaces for people to engage with. MacIntyre then noted the importance of the knitting group in the Western Isles and suggested that Siun Carden would agree. She did agree about the democratisation of recognising forms of creativity that do not neatly fit into the creative industries and she hoped that by 2050 we might never have to mention the term creative industries again. She said that recently she was consulting people in Shetland about a public art project and was told by a young Shetland artist that the latter had been told on occasion that she did not have the professional experience to apply. She asked was it a local arts agency's responsibility to help young artists get experience and if outside artists are given contracts should not some of that contract include providing professional experiences to local artists? Sometimes local artists are seen as a resource for visiting practitioners and expected to share their skills and knowledge, rather than being seen as professionals themselves. In the chat, Clarke suggested that success in 2050 might look like a community of practitioners comfortable in itself and also welcoming to newcomers – survival is not enough. MacDonald agreed that the Feis movement was transformative. Esson reiterated the importance of the Feis movement, and noted that when there have been major difficulties with teacher recruitment the Feis has supported primary school curriculum development. He suggested that groups like the Feisean and Gaelic art and drama groups should not be seen as add-ons in this discussion, but they should be supported and connected to education more formally, in order to support language development and acquisition. As a balance to the Gaelic discussion, Velupillai was asked what she would see as success in Shetland in 2050. She would like to see Shaetlan on the census, PhD theses written in Shaetlan and Shaetlan being taught. She would also like to see learners, who are not yet fluent, being accepted. In fact, she would like to see it being treated as any other language.

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After viewing and discussing the film Seanachas made by Frank Rennie, which explored his home island of Lewis, and the similarities with Orkney and Shetland, the meeting drew to an end. The final comment was that having a pride of place is extremely important and that it is something which both the indigenous population and those who have come to the islands can share, and creative practitioners have a role in building pride of place by producing materials that engage and excite.