

Popular Music-Making and National Identity: Contesting Narratives of Icelandicness

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the contesting narratives of Icelandicness in popular music in contemporary Iceland. These narratives are informed by local historical and contemporary contexts, international notions of ‘the North’, and stereotypes of Icelanders. The thesis problematises a simplified narrative of Icelandic popular music that has often focused on the connection between music and nature. It provides a local context, grounded in historical understanding of the place, which is often missing in existing scholarship. By addressing and exploring these contesting narratives, and critically re-examining the relationship between the music and place, a deeper and more complex understanding of the situation has emerged that reflects a wider spectrum of perspectives than are currently available.

The methodology used in this research emerges from the field of popular music studies and is firmly rooted in scholarship on music and place. A qualitative research strategy was adopted, relying on mixed methods of textual analysis and ethnography, in order to gather an extensive outlook with multiple perspectives on Icelandic music and the music scene in Reykjavík. I collected various textual material, music documentaries, and other audio-visual material which contained discussion about the music scene. The ethnography was informed by, but also complemented, the textual data, as I gathered information directly from members of the music scene between 2012-2016 through participation and participant-observation. The primary sources of ethnographic data originate from the 35 interviews I conducted with musicians and music industry members. Output from thematic analysis provided a focus for the thesis chapters and their various subsections.

My data shows the internal struggles musicians have with their connection to nature. They strengthen these connections through their artistic processes, but they also actively try to work against them. The image of Icelandic nature and landscape is a powerful marketing tool frequently used by the music and tourism industries. Musicians find the image limiting, as it impacts both reception of the music and influences artistic decisions. At the same time, musicians actively participate in advancing the borealistic representations of themselves and the othering of other people in Iceland through their musical outputs. The contesting narratives also emerge from within the local context where musicians strive to position themselves as relevant in society, both in terms of politics and the economy. My participants regarded the ‘smallness’ as a key characteristic of the music scene and explained the different ways in which that manifested. This thesis shows how contesting narratives of both international perspectives and local experiences contribute to the image and identity of contemporary popular music in Iceland. I argue that sensitivity to the historical context is a key to unpacking the various contesting narratives. Through this I offer a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between music and place in Iceland.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
LIST OF TABLES	VII
LIST OF FIGURES.....	VIII
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Aim and Objectives.....	1
The Origins of the Project.....	3
Key Concepts	5
Approach and Structure of the Thesis.....	9
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY.....	11
Positionality.....	12
Site of Research.....	14
Research Methods	25
Ethical Considerations.....	40
Conclusion.....	42
CHAPTER 3: MUSIC-MAKING AND NARRATIVES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN PAST AND PRESENT	44
Contesting Narratives of Icelandicness	45
The Development of Icelandic Nationalism and National Identity.....	47
Nostalgia and the Economic Collapse.....	58
Musical Exoticisms Beyond World Music.....	59
Conclusion.....	64
CHAPTER 4: REPRESENTATIONS AND MEDIATISATION OF MUSIC.....	66
Nature as a Key Component of the Icelandic Image.....	67
Representing Iceland Through Nature in Music Videos and Promotional Material.....	70
Othering Processes in Music Documentaries.....	87
Agency and Borealistic Discourse	89
Exotic Image as Marketing Tool.....	93
Conclusion.....	96
CHAPTER 5: PERSONAL NETWORKS AND PRECARIOUS MUSIC INDUSTRY	98
The Social Importance of the Scene.....	100
A Scene Without Money	111
Underdeveloped Music Industry	116
Conclusion.....	121
CHAPTER 6: THE RISE OF THE KRÚTT	123

The Term Krútt: Definition and Origins	125
Who are Krútt?	130
Krútt Sound and Art	132
Values and Ideology of the Krútt	137
Conclusion.....	141
CHAPTER 7: ICELAND AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN <i>HEIMA</i>	143
<i>Heima</i> : A Film by Sigur Rós.....	144
Links Between Music and Nature	146
Nostalgia and the ‘Good Old Days’	150
‘Gítardjamm’ in Djúpavík.....	154
‘Heysátan’ in Selárdalur.....	156
Conclusion.....	160
CHAPTER 8: THE INTERPLAY OF MUSIC AND TOURISM	163
Tourism Strategies.....	163
Changes and Impact on the Music Scene.....	173
New Musical Tourism?	176
Iceland Airwaves Music Festival	182
Conclusion.....	192
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION	195
Findings.....	196
Limitations of the Research and Suggestions for Future Research.....	201
Reflection on the Research Period	203
BIBLIOGRAPHY	204
APPENDIX I: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS	224
APPENDIX II: INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM	227
APPENDIX III: TOPIC GUIDE	232

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. A LIST OF THE MUSIC DOCUMENTARIES (AND OTHER SOURCES) ANALYSED.	28
TABLE 2. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS.	31
TABLE 3. INFORMATION ON THE CODING OF SOURCES.	37
TABLE 4. SELECTED CHRONOLOGY OF HISTORICAL EVENTS IN ICELAND.	47
TABLE 5. THE WRITTEN MEDIA SOURCES USED IN THIS ANALYSIS.	124
TABLE 6. THE FORM OF THE SONG ‘HEYSÁTAN’.	157
TABLE 7. NUMBER OF FOREIGN VISITORS TO ICELAND IN 2000-2016.	164

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1. MAP OF THE CENTRE OF REYKJAVÍK.....	16
FIGURE 2. THE CONCERT- AND CONFERENCE HALL HARPA IN REYKJAVÍK.....	17
FIGURE 3. CALENDAR OF LIVE MUSIC IN REYKJAVÍK FROM ‘WHAT’S ON IN ICELAND’.....	18
FIGURE 4. THE CODES CREATED FROM THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE DOCUMENTARIES.....	36
FIGURE 5. SCREEN SHOT OF A CODED TRANSCRIPT IN DEDOOSE.....	37
FIGURE 6. A CODE CLOUD FOR THE DOCUMENTARIES.....	38
FIGURE 7. A BOOK PLACED IN A MYSTICAL WILDERNESS OF ICELAND.....	68
FIGURE 8. IMAGES FROM THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE FOR ICELAND’S PARTICIPATION IN THE FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR 2011.....	69
FIGURE 9. STILLS FROM ‘BIRTHDAY’ VIDEO BY THE SUGARCUBESÆ.....	71
FIGURE 10. PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS OF SIGUR RÓS IN ICELANDIC NATURE.....	76
FIGURE 11. STILLS FROM THE VIDEO OF ‘GLÓSÓLI’ BY SIGUR RÓS.....	78
FIGURE 12. PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL FOR SIGUR RÓS’S ‘ROUTE ONE’ PROJECT.....	79
FIGURE 13. A STILL FROM SIGUR RÓS’S ‘ROUTE ONE’.....	80
FIGURE 14. STILLS FROM THE SIMPSONS, WHERE HOMER AND FRIENDS GO TO ICELAND. ...	81
FIGURE 15. PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL FOR THE MUSIC FESTIVAL SECRET SOLSTICE.....	87
FIGURE 16. DEPICTION OF THE KRÚTT BY HALLDÓR BALDURSSON.....	126
FIGURE 17. STILL FROM HEIMA. SIGUR RÓS PLAYS ‘GLÓSÓLI’ BEHIND A SCREEN.....	147
FIGURE 18. STILL FROM HEIMA OF ICELANDIC NATURE.....	148
FIGURE 19. STILL FROM HEIMA. OLD TRACTOR IN A REMOTE VALLEY.....	151
FIGURE 20. STILL FROM HEIMA. TRADITIONAL ÞORRI-FEAST FOOD.....	154
FIGURE 21. ‘FANCY A DIRTY WEEKEND’ SLOGAN IN AN ADVERTISEMENT.....	166
FIGURE 22. STILLS FROM THE ‘INSPIRED BY ICELAND’ VIDEO.....	168
FIGURE 23. THE LANDING PAGE OF INSPIRED BY ICELAND AND ITS FIRST TWO BANNERS..	169
FIGURE 24. INSPIRED BY ICELAND PORTAL. EXAMPLES OF THE ‘THINGS TO DO’ SECTION.	170
FIGURE 25. POSTERS FROM ‘TOURIST CONCERTS’ FROM RECENT SUMMERS.....	175

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, the reputation of Icelandic popular music has steadily grown internationally. The country's music is now arguably one of the most important associations people make with Iceland, perhaps only second to landscape and nature. This association has developed through contesting¹ narratives and has been informed by local historical and contemporary contexts, international notions of 'the North', and stereotypes of Icelanders. In this thesis I explore the 'co-construction' (Green, 2017) of image and identity of popular music in Iceland generated by these contesting narratives. Icelandic music has been thought to resemble or portray the landscape or nature of the country, with darkness, isolation and even volcanic eruptions seen to be reflected in the music (Young, 2001; Sullivan, 2003; Mitchell, 2009). Journalists often frame their discussion of Icelandic musicians and the music scene within the natural environment of the country (Fricke, 1988; Chalard, 2016). Musicians have described the importance of nature and landscape as a source of inspiration and how the environment impacts their creative processes (Walker, 2003; Grant, 2014). Documentaries about Icelandic music create strong links between nature and music (Deblois, 2007; Magnússon, 2007; Staines and Guðbjörnsson, 2011), and many music videos depict nature or feature geological signifiers of Iceland (Dibben, 2009b). These depictions come mainly from international perspectives, but some musicians have criticised this focus on nature (Prior, 2014) and have sought to distance themselves from it by offering alternative, albeit contesting, narratives.

Aim and Objectives

This thesis will explore these contesting narratives in order to examine how they contribute to the image and identity of contemporary popular music in Iceland. The contesting narratives also emerge from within the local context where musicians strive to position themselves as relevant in society, both in terms of politics (Chapter 6) but also for the economy (Chapter 8). The thesis draws on extensive fieldwork to examine how musicians within Iceland articulate their relationship with place and nation. My data shows the internal struggles musicians have with their connection to nature. In some cases, they tend to strengthen this connection through

¹ The term contestation is used throughout the thesis to depict the various ways in which the narratives of the music scene are not consistent and sometimes contradictory. In some instances, the case could be made that the narratives are in conflict with each other whereas on other occasions the difference is more ambivalent and subtle.

their artistic processes, but in others actively try to work against it. This image of Icelandic nature and landscape is a powerful marketing and branding tool, which musicians, music industry workers, and the tourism industry have taken advantage of. However, my findings also show that musicians find the image limiting and that it impacts both reception of the music, and in some cases, has influenced artistic decisions (Chapter 4). The international ‘gaze’ of journalists, fans and others interested in the music plays a role in this ‘borealistic’² discourse, by seeking out the musics which fits within this predetermined image, thus confirming the importance of the image for the music scene (Chapters 4 & 8).

The research conducted for the thesis reveals how influential this international perspective is. Throughout my fieldwork, the phrase ‘*upphefðin kemur að utan*’, which translates to ‘the prestige comes from abroad’,³ reoccurred. The sensitivity to the views of the outside world of local musical practices in Iceland is part of a larger issue of national identity which, I argue, is rooted in the post-colonial history of the country. Icelanders were preoccupied with becoming a nation amongst nations during their struggle for independence from Denmark and mirrored their own cultural practices on those of ‘civilised’ Europe (Chapter 3). The need for outside recognition has remained up until the present day and appears clearly in the music scene. The manifestation of this aspect of national identity is a mixture of megalomania and an inferiority complex, as has been discussed by scholars (Óskarsson, 2003; Elisson, 2009; Hreinsson, 2010). Musicians compare their experiences in Iceland to some imagined other place, where the music scene is better supported, more professional and further developed, thus making music practices in this other place easier. At the same time, due to the underdeveloped music industry in Iceland, musicians are relatively free to do what they please, and they tend to believe that this contributes to the ‘specialness’ of the music scene that is often reported in international media (Chapter 5).

Although representations from outside of Iceland are influential, and musicians lament that they are not afforded enough agency when representing Icelandic music, the image and identity of the scene is co-constructed with local perspectives. The exotic representation of the scene

² Borealism will be further discussed below, but this is a term is sometimes used to describe exotism in the Nordic context.

³ This phrase is discussed in an article titled ‘Recognition Still Comes From Abroad’ in the newspaper *The Reykjavik Grapevine* (Andersen, 2009).

impacts how local places in Iceland are perceived. For example, musicians based in Reykjavík, borealise others in Iceland that are outside of the Reykjavík music scene. Rural areas and traditional practices (such as rímur⁴ singing and traditional food) are commodified by musicians, partly to satisfy the borealistic image (Chapter 7).

The Origins of the Project

The contradictions described above provided an impetus for the thesis, which developed out of personal annoyance; I had been involved in the music scene in Reykjavík for more than a decade and had become disillusioned with reading yet another article from an international music journalist or scholar in which Icelandic music was seen to emerge from the nature and landscape of the country. I felt that many aspects of the local music making in Iceland, especially social ones, were overlooked or underrepresented because of the emphasis on the natural environment. In addition, the music, musicians and the country were often exoticized in international discourse. Therefore, my study began, like many others, because of my dissatisfaction with the current state of scholarship on the subject (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 22).

This thesis will problematise such simplified narratives of Icelandic popular music and provide local context, grounded in historical understanding of the place, which is often missing. By addressing and exploring the contesting narratives, and critically re-examining the relationship between the music and place, a deeper and more complex understanding will emerge, which hopefully reflects a wider spectrum of perspectives than currently are available. In other words, the rationale for this study emanates from my desire to uncover a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between music and place in Iceland than is offered in current scholarship and in the media. As my personal experience did not match media images of the music scene, I suspected that other people working in the music industry might feel the same, so I set out to explore this.

The thesis contributes to the study of representations (Kidd, 2015) as the case of Iceland offers certain perspectives which I argue are different to many other places. This includes the long, post-colonial history of struggle over representation and the related co-construction of images

⁴ Rímur is a traditional vocal music which are half chanted, half sung.

and identities, which I attribute to the importance placed on the international recognition of the nation's merits. At the same time, popular music from Iceland, unlike many musics that are exoticized and othered, has not been placed in the category of 'World Music' (Born and Hesmondhalgh, 2000; Taylor, 2007; Locke, 2010) (Chapter 3). The thesis explores how these issues play out in what is essentially an Anglo-American musical tradition. Furthermore, by examining musical practices and identities in Iceland, I contribute to the ongoing scholarly discussion about Icelandic representations and identities (Hálfðánarson and Rastrick, 2006; Schram, 2011b; Ísleifsson and Chartier, 2011; Kjartansdóttir and Schram, 2013), and the growing body of scholarship on Nordic musical identities (Dyndahl, 2009; Hawkins, 2016; Bohlman, 2017; Green, 2017).

This thesis is firmly rooted in scholarship on music and place, drawing on the seminal work of scholars such as Sara Cohen (1991) and Ruth Finnegan (1989) where they investigated local music life. As the focus is on the music scene in Reykjavík, the study also contributes to ongoing theoretical work on urban 'music scenes' (Straw, 1991; Bennett and Peterson, 2004b; Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Bennett and Rogers, 2016), and on music and cities more generally (Cohen, 2007; Krims, 2007; Lashua, Spracklen and Wagg, 2014). The idea of an 'Icelandic sound' is an important example of how music is localised, and I engage with scholarship on 'local sounds' (Cohen, 1994; Bennett, 2002; Henning and Hyder, 2015). The relationship between music, national identity and place making (Connell and Gibson, 2003; O'Flynn, 2009; Morra, 2013; Schiller, 2018) is important for the study as I trace much of the contemporary practices to the national identity of Icelanders. This is one of the first in-depth studies of the popular music scene in Reykjavík, and popular music in Iceland in general, where an extended time in the field provided the key findings. Nonetheless, it draws on and adds to existing scholarship on Icelandic popular music that has been accumulating over the last decade. In particular, it addresses and contributes to research on the music scene of Reykjavík (Baker, 2014; Prior, 2014; Cannady, 2017),⁵ and on the relationship between music, nature and landscape (Dibben, 2009b; Mitchell, 2009; Dibben, 2017; Mitchell, 2017; Størvold, 2018a).

⁵ Just as I was finishing the thesis and getting it ready to submit, two new (and unpublished) pieces of research became available to me. Firstly, Arnar Eggert Thoroddsen's PhD thesis (2018) and secondly, Kimberly Cannady's article on Iceland Airwaves and tourism (Forthcoming). Although I was unable to systematically examine these works, I did manage to draw on particular aspects of them; Thoroddsen's approach to indie (Chapter 6) and Cannady's discussion on Icelandair and music tourism (Chapter 8).

Further discussion about the relevant scholarship and contextual aspects of this thesis can be found in Chapter 3.

Key Concepts

Three terms need to be clearly defined, as they play a central role in the thesis. These are the ‘music scene’, ‘indie music’ and ‘krútt’.

Music Scene

The term ‘music scene’ has been used by journalists, and more recently by academics, to ‘designate the context in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others’ (Bennett and Peterson, 2004a, p. 1). I am aware of academic debates surrounding the term (Bennett, 2004; Bennett and Peterson, 2004b; Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Silver and Clark, 2015; Straw, 2015), and different definitions of it, including Straw’s definition of a music scene as a ‘cultural space in which a range of musical practices co-exist interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization’ (Straw, 1991, p. 373).

However, I try to use the term in the same way that my research participants do, as they are mostly unaware of any academic discussion. The music scene in Iceland is most often described in the singular form, ‘the scene’ rather than ‘the scenes’ (plural), although sometimes ‘scenes within the scene’ do appear. This might have something to do with the networks of musicians and flow between genres, which will be discussed in Chapter 5, or it is perhaps because most people connect to an idea of being within a national music community. Musician Ólafur Arnalds describes the scene in the following way: ‘Every single scene [in Iceland] is so small that it just became one scene. It is just the music scene’ (Arnalds in Bevan, 2014). In this thesis, the focus is on popular music and on those musicians who are making and performing their own music who would be considered indie musicians in the international context (see below). This is the scene which has gained the most recognition abroad. The scene is located in Reykjavík where most of the music activities ‘take place’. However, the scene is almost never spoken of as the ‘Reykjavík scene’ but rather as the ‘Icelandic scene’.

Scenes can be regarded as a mode of inquiry or an analytical approach to a subject, which allows for flexibility and openness. Indeed, Will Straw believes that the future of the term is bound up in ‘the multiple directions in which it may be pulled’ (2015, p. 484). Scene studies have been prominent in music scholarship. Early examples of notable studies of urban music scenes using ethnographic methods are those of Finnegan (1989) on music-making in Milton Keynes, and Cohen on contemporary rock culture in Liverpool ‘as a way of life’ (1991, p. 223). I have drawn on these studies for their ethnographic methodology and the ways in which they explore everyday music making of a music scene(s). Other notable scene studies have focused more on global issues and on appropriation (Mitchell, 1996; Lipsitz, 1997). John Street (1995) uses ‘scene’ to explain ‘locality’ in music and argues that one can explore (infra)structure, politics, ideology, identity and meaning in music through scenes. I draw on Street’s work when I examine my participants’ alternative narratives of the defining aspects of the Icelandic music scene as related to infrastructure, networks and politics (Chapter 5). The notion of ‘scene’ has also been used to explore the collaborative efforts of musicians, and to support facilities and fans in the process of making music (Bennett and Peterson, 2004a, p. 3). To some extent, this is also my approach to the topic.

As Iceland is inhabited by relatively few people (about 350,000), small music scenes are of special interest to this study. Most of the musical activities included in the study take place in the capital of Iceland, Reykjavík, where about 220,000 people live. Despite its small population, Reykjavík has to include all the necessary infrastructure for a capital and the only city in the country. As a relatively isolated island in the Atlantic, it is difficult to find comparable music scenes elsewhere. Comparable cities in the UK, population wise, would be Aberdeen or Reading but due to the population density of the UK in general, the dynamics of these cities are very different. Through the research process I’ve found it most fruitful to compare the analysis of Iceland to that of New Zealand (Shuker and Pickering, 1994; Mitchell, 2013) and Darwin in Australia (Gibson, Luckman and Willoughby-Smith, 2010), as these areas present a small music scene far from major musical centres.

Indie Music

As my study focuses on Icelandic ‘indie’ rock/pop, it is worth defining this term. Indie music is sometimes equated with alternative music (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35). It originates from the small independent record labels, which were historically considered to be more flexible and

innovative than the large ‘major’ labels. David Hesmondhalgh argues that indie, as a genre, grew out of punk and post-punk, and by 1986 the term had become accepted as a description of alternative pop/rock in the UK. Although boundaries between ‘indies’ and ‘majors’ have become blurred in the last few decades (Holt, 2017, p. 65), a distinct ‘indie ideology’ emerged that emphasised authenticity and set itself opposite ‘mainstream’ music (Shuker, 2005, pp. 144–145). Hesmondhalgh explains that ‘indie’ ‘described a narrower set [than post-punk] of sound and looks. [...] Indie records turned to ‘jangly’ guitars, and emphasis on clever and/or sensitive lyrics inherited from the singer/songwriter tradition in rock and pop, and on minimal focus on rhythm track’ (1999, p. 38). Ryan Hibbett distinguishes between the ‘low-fi’ strand within indie aesthetics associated with Lou Barlow (an American rock musician and songwriter) and his DIY approach, and the ‘post-rock’ strand of indie associated with Sigur Rós, which is characterised by ‘slowly developed compositions’ (Hibbett, 2005, p. 56). The latter category expresses a ‘renewed seriousness’ and, in the case of Sigur Rós, a kind of otherworldliness (2005, p. 66).

Wendy Fonarow explains that simplicity is one of the characteristics of indie music, both with respect to the songs and the musical knowledge of the musicians. She argues that from the indie perspective, formal education can distance the performers from the core of the music as aspirations are more important than musical know-how (2013, pp. 42–43). Hesmondhalgh explains this as the ‘minimum display of musical prowess’ (1999, p. 38), which seems to suggest that the musical knowledge is in place but the musicians are not flaunting it. Fabian Holt notes that indie music became important in the Nordic region by mid-2010s and has become ‘a medium of new pop culture sensibilities and forms of Nordicness, thus paralleling the function of cool jazz in the 1950s’ (2017, p. 65).

My own approach to the term draws much upon the definitions presented above, but it is worth noting that the indie music in Iceland has become the most recognisable musical output of the country and the musical genre which is the most exported. This is in line with Holt’s statement about indie in the Nordic region in general. The music grew out of the punk scene in Iceland (Chapter 3), and I argue that a special indie ideology has developed in Iceland (Chapter 6). Most of the music labels in Iceland would fall under the ‘indie’ category and there is a clear DIY attitude within the scene (Chapter 5). Due to the strong music school system in the country, many of the musicians who are part of the scene do have formal musical education, and thus the scene does not conform to the description of distance from formal education made

by Fonarow (Chapter 2). The term indie has been incorporated into the Icelandic language as ‘índí’ and is commonly used by people working in the music scene and the media to describe both a genre and the scene itself.

Krútt

Krútt is a term coined by Icelandic journalists for a group of musicians and artists considered to have certain ‘cute’ qualities. The term can be used either as a definite noun or collective noun, referring to one or many musicians. It is also used as an adjective, describing certain qualities, and as an adverb, such as to play in a krútt (cute) way, for example. Musicians who have been associated with this category include Björk, Sigur Rós, múm, and Amiina, who were all at the forefront of the Icelandic music scene at the beginning of the 21st century. Most research on Icelandic popular music has focused on these artists. Nicola Dibben’s monograph on Björk (2009a) provides an in-depth study of the artist’s music and is the single most extensive academic book on Icelandic popular music. There has been a considerable amount of other academic writing in the form of articles and book chapters on Björk, focusing on aspects of her compositional style and aesthetic (Malaway 2010, 2011; Grimley 2001), and on feminist-nationalist and posthuman analysis of her music (Goldin-Perschbaker 2014; Marsh and West 2003; Robbie 2007). Sigur Rós has also been the focus of a number of scholarly articles, most notably for their film *Heima* (Osborn and Blake, Forthcoming; Dibben, 2009b; Mitchell, 2009; Osborn, 2013; Hall, 2014) and their album *()*⁶ (Hayden, 2014). There have also been investigations into the indie music scene of Reykjavík to which these artists belong (Prior, Forthcoming, 2014; Baker, 2014), and I have written a book chapter specifically on the krútt (Hall, Forthcoming).

Both in the textual and ethnographic data collected for this thesis, the krútt are described by music-makers and journalists as sounding specifically Icelandic and having a strong relationship with nature and landscape. This relationship and how the term krútt has been used ‘could be seen to operate as a form of self-borealism, just as Said’s term [orientalism] has become applied to a context of self-orientalism’, according to Tony Mitchell (2017, p. 160). However, it is unclear from his discussion in what way this process of self-borealism happens. Mitchell states that “‘krútt’ is a domestic term without transnational applications’ (2017, p.

⁶ To prevent any confusion, I would like to clarify that the title of the album is ‘()’.

160), but I argue that there are strong connections between krútt and international indie music, and some participants interviewed for this study directly equated krútt with Icelandic indie music. The term is explored further in a case study about the krútt in Chapter 5.

Approach and Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of nine chapters. The first three provide necessary information which the subsequent chapters built on, such as introduction to the topic, methodology, and contextualisation of the field. Chapter 2 explains and rationalises the methodology of the study, which combines textual and ethnographic analysis. Before I introduce the methodology, I provide information about my personal background and about music life in Iceland as the site of research. In that section, I reference my research participants before formally introducing them in the latter half of that chapter. In the thesis, my research participants are introduced with full name and background (i.e. musician/journalists) the first time they appear, but after that I only refer to them by surname.⁷ Scholars are introduced by their full names the first time I refer to them, but in following appearances they are only referred to by surnames. Similarly, I introduce institutions, terms, or topics only when they first appear in the thesis. Rather than having a single dedicated theory chapter, the literature review comes throughout the thesis and underpins Chapter 3 in particular. That chapter provides contextual information about Iceland, its history, and musical practices. Through that discussion I also introduce and review relevant scholarship within the field that my research draws from and addresses.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the key aspects of the thesis, including how contesting narratives of Icelandicness contribute to the image and identity of the music scene. Chapter 4 explores the relationship between music and nature through various representations, both local and international. The aim is to show the contesting narratives of the representation of Icelandic music and the impact of the strong connections between music and nature on the music scene. In Chapter 5 I provide space for my participants to give alternative narratives and express what they believe to be the defining aspects of the Icelandic music scene. I pay particular attention

⁷ When applicable, I use musicians' stage names, rather than referring to musicians' surnames. This includes Björk, Jónsi, Mugison, Sóley and Hildur. During interviews, I offered my participants to specify how they would like to be referred to (this is identified in the list of participants). If nothing was requested, I follow the English language convention of surnames, since I am writing in English. There are two musicians Ólafur Arnalds and Ólöf Arnalds who are cited in the thesis. Since they have the same surname (they happen to be cousins), I will refer to them by both names throughout to prevent confusion.

to how musicians and industry workers describe their experiences with the music scene and their comparisons to other imagined or actual music scenes. This is an example of a common process of identity construction that typically distinguishes ‘us’ from ‘them’, but it also serves as an example of another contesting narrative that plays out within the scene.

The three final chapters are based on case studies, which gives me the opportunity to explore how some of the issues set forth in Chapters 4 and 5 play out in detail. Chapter 6 focuses on krútt and explores discourse of how the term was contested when it first appeared. Even though the musicians who have been associated with krútt, such as Björk and Sigur Rós, have attracted international acclaim, and have been written about extensively by both journalists and scholars, the contested aspect of krútt has not been sufficiently explored. I show that the debate over the krútt is an example of contesting narratives within the local context, where musicians engage with the larger community in Iceland and argue for their own importance. Chapter 7 involves a case study on the film *Heima* by the krútt band Sigur Rós. I explore the representations of Iceland in the film and analyse the apparent nostalgia and national identity constructions, arguing that they constitute another type of contesting narrative. I also argue that the film borealises and others local areas of rural Iceland and its inhabitants. The inhabitants are not granted agency in the film and might challenge *Heima*'s version of their everyday reality, were they given the chance. Chapter 8 involves a case study on the relationship between the music scene and tourism in Iceland. It offers an example of yet another contesting narrative, in this case between the music scene and the tourism industries. Chapter 9, the concluding chapter of the thesis, draws together the main findings and points out the limitations of this study and potential areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

As explained in the introduction, the aim of this thesis is to problematise the simplified narrative of Icelandic popular music, which have focused on the connection between music and nature, and provide a local context, grounded in historical understanding of the place, which is often missing. The connection between place and music is complex and intersects with genres and styles. While the images and representations that I explore transcend popular music and have also been applied to classical music, the wealth of sources available about the indie rock scene made this a fruitful site of research. In fact, the sheer quantity of international media outputs related to the indie rock scene in Reykjavík demonstrates the international interest in the scene. This is therefore the most visible scene in Iceland and in studying it, I have taken account of Finnegan's argument for the study of what people do, rather than of what is deemed the 'best' or the 'highest' (1989, p. 6). I do not claim that this scene is better than other music activities that take place in Iceland.

As mentioned in the introduction, my background in the music scene has informed my views on media representations of the scene. Within this thesis I critically examine the more dominant international discourses on Icelandic music by offering a 'local' perspective. Most of the research on Icelandic popular music has been conducted by scholars who do not live in Iceland and do not speak the language (Dibben, 2009a; Prior, 2014; Mitchell, 2017; Størvold, 2018b). Despite the competencies of such researchers, there are certain aspects of Icelandic music that they have inevitably overlooked or underrepresented. This does not mean that I propose a departure from the international scholarship, as I actively engage with and build on the work of these scholars. However, by being embedded within the scene for a long time, I bring forth a more nuanced perspective, which is rooted in a deep understanding of the networks within the music scene, the historical legacy of how Icelanders relate to the outside world and vice versa, as well as an understanding of the exotic image Icelanders sometimes have in the eyes of the world. Furthermore, as an Icelandic speaker I am able to incorporate material written in Icelandic, which has not had a wider airing due to the language barrier.

In this chapter, I begin by providing more detail on my personal background and music life in Iceland as the site of research to give background to the study. I then move on to the presentation of the methodological approach. I will first describe the textual and ethnographic methods used in the study. I then discuss the analytical methods applied to the data collected.

Finally, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and the limitations of the research methodology will be considered.

Positionality

My background informs my perspectives and choices throughout the research process. It therefore helps to explain how I came to this research topic, where I place myself in it, and how I analyse and interpret the data I gathered (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 12). I have been involved in the music scene in Reykjavík for over a decade, although my musical engagement began much earlier. My family can be seen as a ‘musical family’. Both my parents are amateur musicians who studied instruments during their childhood but did not pursue music professionally. I began my formal musical education at the age of three, and during my childhood I studied the violin, clarinet, piano, and cello, and I sang in both a school and church choir. The cello became my main instrument early on, and I carried on playing the cello in music college and received lessons during my post-graduate studies.

My introduction to non-classical music came relatively late in life. It was not until my teenage years that I became an avid listener of various popular music genres. During grammar school (age 16-19), in addition to my classical cello studies and various choir engagements, I began playing with pop and rock bands as a session player. When I began university, where I studied cello and musicology, gigs (both classical and pop) became a nice way to supplement my income, and I performed and recorded for various bands and musicians in Reykjavík. I became part of the band Hjaltalín for a few years, which is the most in-depth experience I have had in the popular music scene. Having been brought up in the classical music tradition, I never quite felt at home as a performer within popular music genres, although I very much enjoyed many aspects of it. Since the scene is very small, I became familiar with most of the musicians working in popular and classical music during these years.

After returning from my post-graduate studies in the UK, I secured a post teaching musicology at the Department of Music at the Iceland University of the Arts (IUA), where I had studied previously. As this is the only higher education institution teaching music in the country, many of the musicians working in the scene today have gone through the institution, either as students or teachers, regardless of the genre they are working in. Through my work at the IUA and for various music associations such as KÍTÓN (Women in Music) and my continuous engagement

in the music scene as an audience member and sometimes performer, I have developed and nurtured strong bonds with the local music scene.

The discussion above illustrates the ways in which I have been a part of my own field of study, even though I am no longer an active performer; instead, I am now a scholar with a background in performance. Due to my late introduction to popular music in my musical life, I came to this research with both an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’ perspective, and I experienced a shift between these two perspectives throughout the research process. Cohen describes this process as follows:

strangeness, familiarity, otherness are shifting categories. A situation or friend can be both strange and familiar concurrently or at different times and in different contexts, and one can alter perspective, engaging with and distancing oneself from relationships and activities around one (Cohen, 1993, p. 125).

In any ethnographic work, researchers are likely to experience this shift to varying degrees, as strangeness, familiarity and otherness are constantly changing throughout the research process. When discussing researchers who are engaged with their ‘own culture’, Amanda Coffey explains that

[t]here is always a balance to be struck between the healthy scepticism of the researcher and ingratiation into a culture. Yet, it is naïve and epistemologically wrong to deny the situatedness of the self as part of the cultural setting. As a positioned and contexted individual the ethnographer is undeniably part of the complexities and relations of the field. The pursuit of cultural understanding and the process of personal development are intimately rather than tangentially related (1999, pp. 22–23).

I was aware of issues related to over-identification and immersion within a cultural setting. Thus, due to my relationship to the field, I’ve kept in mind the importance of keeping ‘critical, analytical [and] self-conscious awareness’ (Coffey, 1999, p. 32) during the fieldwork and tried to keep it as ‘anthropologically strange’⁸ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 9). My position within the field should be categorised as someone who ‘possesses some of the esoteric knowledge and an empathetic self’ (Coffey, 1999, p. 33).

It is difficult to determine when the formal ‘fieldwork’ began but as Wolcott defines it, it has more to do with intent than location (2005, p. 58). After I completed my MA in music from the UK in 2009, I knew I wanted to explore the local music scene in Reykjavík further. The opportunity to do so came when completing an MA dissertation in cultural studies at the

⁸ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson explain this as making ‘explicit the presuppositions he or she takes for granted as a culture member’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 9).

University of Iceland and Bifröst University in 2011, where I focused on the image of Reykjavík city and the impact of the music festival Iceland Airwaves on this image. Before commencing the PhD studies (in 2012), I had already begun to think about various aspects of the local music scene and was chatting informally about them with friends and acquaintances.

Ethnography, according to Cohen, should consist of the following:

Ideally, ethnography involves a lengthy period of intimate study and residence with a particular group of people, knowledge of the spoken language, and the employment of a wide range of observational techniques, including prolonged face-to-face contacts with members of the local group, direct participation in some of that group's activities, and a greater emphasis on intensive work with informants than on the use of documentary and survey data (Cohen, 1993, p. 123).

My engagement 'in the field' can therefore be seen as an extended ethnography, although the boundaries between being a participant and conducting participant-observation research are blurry. Prior to starting my PhD, I did not experience my engagement with the scene as fieldwork, although I wrote down noteworthy experiences and conversations. From the time I began the PhD process, however, I engaged with the music scene in Reykjavík with the 'intent' of a researcher. I attended events and took part in the music scene as much as I could, whilst juggling full time employment and family. The latter half of my PhD studies was also coloured by having a young child, which impacted my ability to attend late night gigs.

Site of Research

As discussed in the introduction, the popular music scene of Iceland is most often referred to as 'the Icelandic music scene'. However, that is a misnomer, as the music frequently featured in the media is indie music and is mostly based in the capital area, Reykjavík. Although there are many things that the capital area has in common with more rural areas, there are also some differences. The aim of this section is to introduce the musical life in Iceland, draw out some of the unifying characteristics and differences between the capital and rural areas.

A nation of 300,000 people and 90 music schools, 6000 choir members, 400 orchestras and marching bands and unknown number of rock bands, jazz combos and DJs (Magnússon, 2007).

This is how musical life in Iceland is presented in the film *Screaming Masterpiece* from 2007. Although the statistics presented are unverifiable, it provides insight into musical life in the country. A new report, funded by various stakeholders in the music industry and the Ministry of Industries and Innovation, showed that the yearly revenue of the Icelandic music industry

was 3.5 billion ISK 2015-2016, of which about 60% derives from live music, while 21% is derived from recorded music and 19% from copyright. Additional 2.8 billion ISK in derivative income is secured due to music tourism (Guðmundsdóttir and Sigurðardóttir, 2018, p. 27). According to Iceland Statistics, the gross national income was 2185 billion in 2016 (Iceland in figures 2015, 2015, p. 18) and as such, music contributed to 0.28% of the gross national income. However, the music scene is larger than the yearly revenue suggests, as 67% of active musicians receive 40% or less of their total income from music activities (Guðmundsdóttir and Sigurðardóttir, 2018, p. 29). Although these musicians are considered hobby musicians in economic terms, they have an important impact on the music scene.

Iceland has an extensive system of after school music schools which are funded by local government. According to The European Music Union, between 12,000 and 13,000 pupils currently attend music schools in Iceland across 92 music schools and conservatoires⁹ ('Iceland', 2017). I would like to note that almost all of the musicians who participated in the research had gone through the music school system and many held university degrees in music. The schools are spread across the country and small towns and villages are likely to have access to a music school. The music school system combined with the popularity of amateur music making in Iceland, as reflected in numerous amateur bands and choirs (Bamford, 2009, pp. 34–35), ensures that music life flourishes around the country. Icelanders have consequently been described as 'what may be the most musical nation on earth' (Ross, 2017).

My own participants also depicted Icelanders as musical people with 'a general interest and awareness of music and a participation by a large part of the inhabitants' (Sigurður Halldórsson, Personal Communication, 25/02/16). They stated that taking part in musical activities was a normal thing to do:

Half of the nation is in a choir or plays the accordion. I think there are very few people who grow up not having someone closely related who pursues some kind of musical activities or has studied music or been in a brass band at some point in their life. The notion is that it is natural to do music and it is not taboo (María Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir, Personal Communication, 31/03/16).

⁹ According to Statistics Iceland 44,527 pupils attended school (year 1-10) in autumn 2016 ('Meðalaldur kennara í grunnskólum heldur áfram að hækka', 2017).

Despite my participants' own background, the music school system and education in general was not discussed as an important factor in the music scene by my participants. This was something that surprised me, as I believe this to be a key to music life in Iceland. One explanation for this can be that this system and the general high level of education across the country is taken for granted, as it is ingrained in society, as the statement from Sigfúsdóttir implies.

The following section introduces music venues in Reykjavík and the varied musical activities which take place both in Reykjavík and in the more rural areas of the country.

Venues and genre

Due to the relatively high population density in the capital area compared to the rest of the country, most live musical activities take place in the centre of Reykjavík, in postcode 101 (see Figure 1).

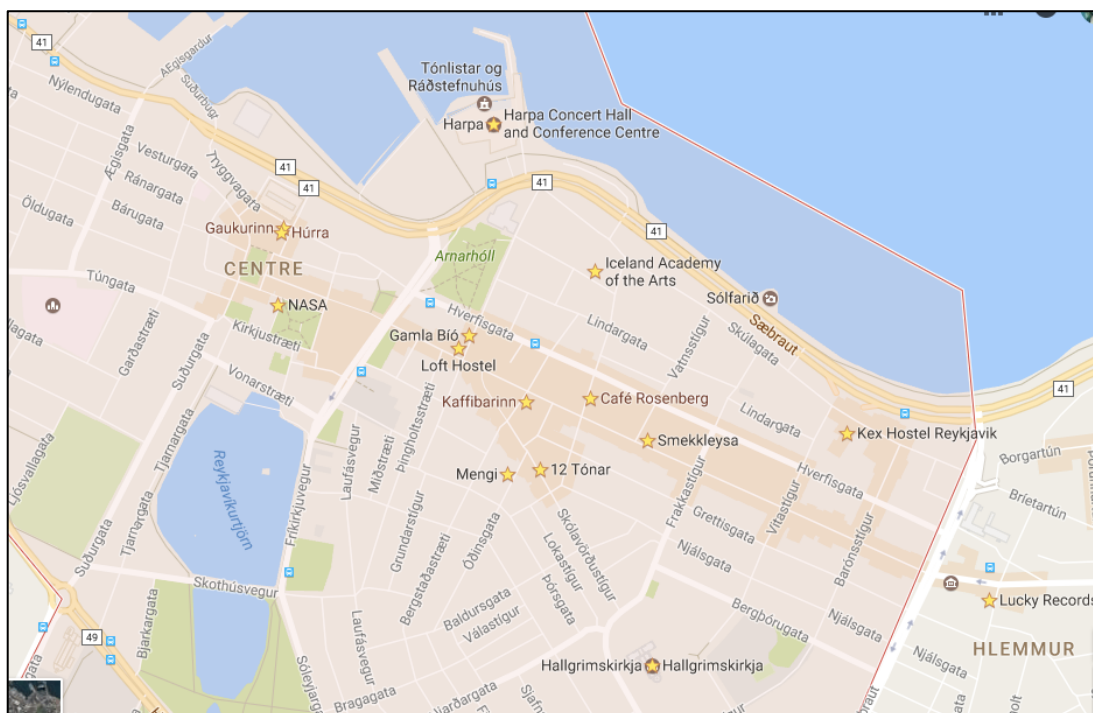


Figure 1. Map of the centre of Reykjavík, created in 2017, with the 101 postcode highlighted and music places marked with a star.

The 101 area is the home of Harpa Concert Hall (Figure 2), which houses the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra, the National Opera, the Reykjavík Big Band, and various music festivals and concert series. Harpa is one of the key buildings for music in Iceland, for both local musicians and the touring musicians who also perform there. For some genres, such as classical

orchestral music, the building was seen as a prerequisite for receiving visiting orchestras. Soon after Harpa opened in May 2011, popular musicians expressed their reservation with the management of the building, as classical musicians seemed to be prioritized (Morthens, 2011). However, these initial reservations seem to have faded, and both the Iceland Airwaves Festival and Sonar Festival have taken place in the building.

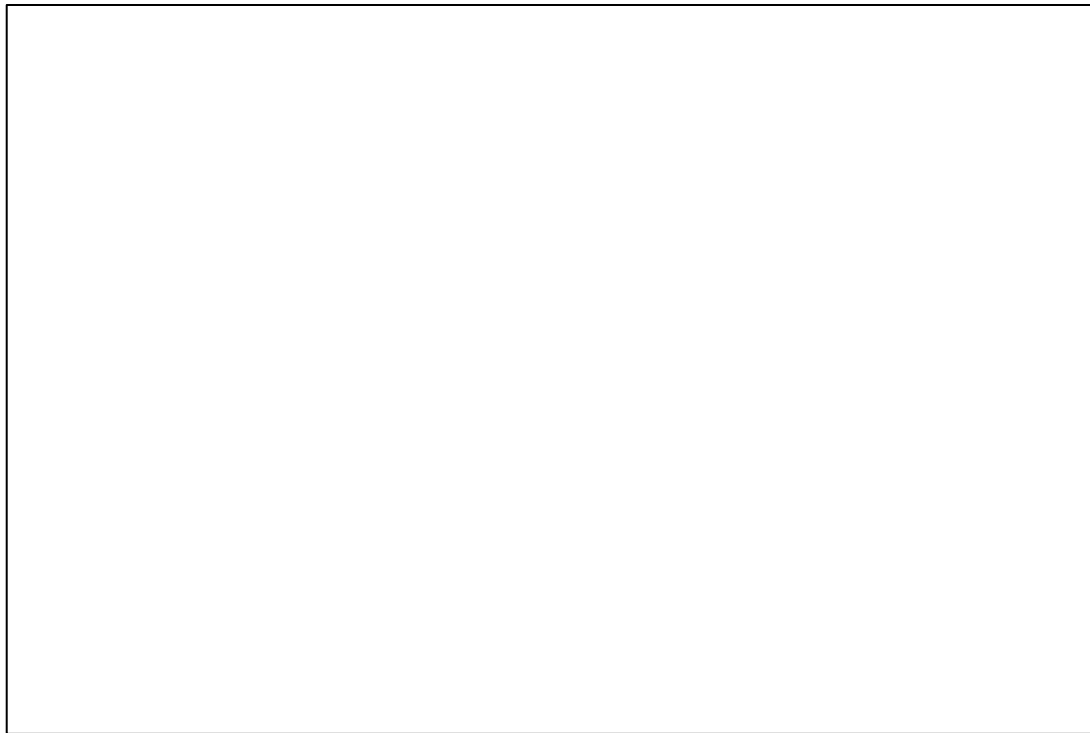


Figure 2. The concert- and conference hall Harpa in Reykjavík. (Source: Harpa.is)

Before Harpa opened, the Iceland Symphony Orchestra played in a cinema hall, and churches were important venues for classical music. Hallgrímskirkja is still an important concert venue for classical choral music, as it is the home to Móttettukórinn (the church choir), Schola Cantorum (a chamber choir) and Organ music series, and hosts various concerts on a regular basis. Mengi is a relatively new venue (2015) that specialises in experimental music.

There are several venues worth mentioning for live popular music, including Húrra, Gaukurinn, Loft Hostel, Kex Hostel, and Gamla bíó. Kaffibarinn is a notorious party venue that provides live music on weekends (mostly DJs). There are three record stores: Lucky Records, which specialises in vinyl, and 12 Tónar and Smekkleysa, the latter two being record labels as well. All these venues are in close proximity to each other (Figure 1) in the vicinity of Laugavegur, which mainly contains shops, restaurants, cafes, and bars. Music venues change relatively

quickly, and in the last few years quite a few have been shut down. This is part of bigger changes happening in the town centre, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

It is possible to see a variety of genres and styles live on any given night of the week in Reykjavík, as exemplified by two weeks of the live music calendar presented by What's On in Iceland for the beginning of April 2017 (Figure 3).

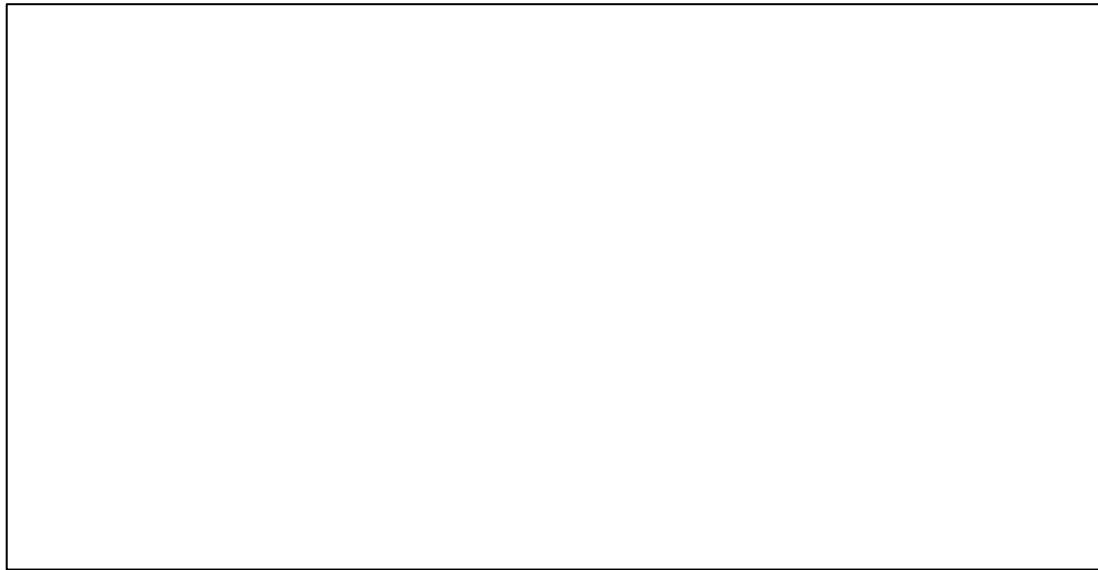


Figure 3. Calendar of live music in Reykjavik from 'What's On in Iceland'.

The calendar contains various styles of live music including baroque music, opera, art and folk songs, jazz, blues, gospel, experimental music, punk, rock, and pop, various DJs, and a karaoke night. It does not show all live music events, as it only represents those who take the time to submit their events to What's On. There are various festivals in Reykjavík with a special genre focus, including art music, experimental music, rock, metal, electronic music, dance music, jazz, blues and folk.¹⁰

In addition to the genres mentioned above, there are various amateur musical practices taking place within the capital area. Numerous choirs are active, both church choirs and secular ones (including male, female and mixed choirs), and choral practices are very popular in Iceland in general. There is also an amateur symphony orchestra and several brass bands in the area.

¹⁰ A list of music festivals has been compiled by the Iceland Music Export Office (see <http://icelandmusic.is/festivals/>).

Music in communities

While most of the professional musical activities take place in the urban context, amateur and community music making are the dominant musical practices in rural areas. Most villages have a choir and a music school in the area where professional musicians teach. Larger towns have music societies that organise concerts and other cultural activities, often in collaboration with the local music school. Akureyri, which is the largest town besides the capital area, boasts of a (semi-) professional symphony orchestra and a theatre company. Most towns organize a town festival once a year and live music often plays a large role in those, ranging from providing the back drop to dancing and/or partying during the night, to fully fledged music festivals, such as Aldrei fór ég suður (I Never Went South), an indie festival in Ísafjörður; Eistnaflug (Flying Testicles), a metal festival in Eskifjörður; Norðanpunk (Nordic-Punk) in Laugarbakki; the electronic music festival Extreme Chill Festival in Vík; Skálholt Summer Concerts, an early- and contemporary music festival; and a chamber music festival in Reykholt, to name a few.

Institutions, support and funding

Having briefly introduced music life in Iceland today, it is important to consider the infrastructure in which the music scene operates and the main music institutions and resources involved. This provides a context for Chapter 5, which focuses on the networks and relationships of musicians and industry members, and on other social aspects of the scene. In Iceland, the government plays a significant role in support for the arts. According to the current cultural policy of the Icelandic government, which was made by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Icelandic Government sees its role as being to:

create conditions for diversity, creativity and initiative in arts and cultural heritage. ... The government believes that the access to cultural heritage and awareness of cultural heritage are important aspects of the social structure. Research and mediation of the cultural heritage strengthen the awareness of historical context and strengthen the identity of the nation. The Icelandic language is an important part of that identity and it should be strengthened in most areas of the society in accordance to the Icelandic language policy (Tómasson and Ólafsson, 2013, p. 9).

These are the first two points in the cultural policy and it is interesting that the main emphasis is on the heritage aspect of the culture, rather than on creating new art and culture. This

demonstrates the perceived value of national identity and the role of cultural heritage in strengthening that, as well as larger issues of nationalism that will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The government does, however, support current music making through several institutions and funds. For musicians, there are four main funding bodies to apply to: The Music Fund (i) allocates grants to various musical projects, in addition to awarding fixed sums to orchestras and other parties under various agreements the Recording Fund (ii) supports new recordings and record releases, and both the Musicians' Salary Fund (iii) and the Composers' Salary Fund (iv) provide musicians with salaries for various projects. The funds are governed by special committees whose members come from the Ministry and from different stakeholders, such as the Icelandic Musicians' Union, the Association of Icelandic Musicians, the Association of Icelandic Composers and Samtónn – the joint copyright organisation for composers, performers, and producers.

The government also funds certain music and art institutions. and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for the following music 'projects':

- The Iceland Symphony Orchestra (which is required by law to perform and promote Icelandic music).
- The Icelandic Opera.
- The Reykjavík Arts Festival (which has music, literature, visual and performing arts in its programme).
- The North Iceland Symphony Orchestra (which receives an operational grant according to an agreement with the Municipality of Akureyri that supports cultural activities in the town).
- The Icelandic Music Information Centre (which is operated by the Icelandic Composer Union and is funded by the State Treasury to preserve and catalogue Icelandic contemporary music, and to promote it both domestically and abroad).
- Music for All (which is a collaborative project between the state and local authorities where school pupils in Iceland are introduced to various types of music).

Iceland's parliament, Alþingi, also provides grants for various musical performances and projects under the national budget (*Culture: the arts, the national cultural Heritage. Broadcasting, language policy, sports, youth activities*, 2010, pp. 8–14).

There are various other funds for musicians which are partly or fully funded by the state and hosted by institutions and associations that support musicians and the music scene. These include:

Performing Rights Society of Iceland (STEF):

- Sheet Music Fund
- Recording Fund
- Composers Fund (in collaboration with the National Broadcasting Service (RÚV))
- Travel Fund
- Composers Fund (in collaboration with 365 Media)

Iceland Music Export (IMX):

- Icelandic Music Export fund
- Travel Fund (Reykjavík Loftbrú) in collaboration with the airline Icelandair.

Reykjavík City:

- Musica Nova (Fund for creating new music).

Many of the musicians' unions also offer their members funding for projects or travel assistance. Before the financial collapse in Iceland in 2008¹¹, the private sector (especially financial institutions) supported the arts with project funds, but most of these funding opportunities disappeared during the economic crisis and have yet to reappear. Regardless of the many funding bodies, some of my participants felt that there were not enough funding options that suited their needs. Perhaps this has to do with the genre, scope or time of their projects. Many of the funding bodies have traditionally focused on art music, although changes have been made in recent years.

Despite all of these funding opportunities, the Iceland Music Export Office (IMX) was the support institution most commonly mentioned by my participants, which gives an indication of its importance for Icelandic music life. It was founded in 2006 by the Icelandic Music Association (*Samtónn*) in partnership with governmental and private funds. Its aim is as follows:

¹¹ Iceland suffered an economic breakdown in 2008. Three of Iceland's international banks collapsed in a single week due to the global credit crunch and flawed banking regulations in the country. The banks were nationalised, and the country was forced to seek help from the International Monetary Fund. This is further discussed in the thesis and in Chapter 3 and 6 in particular.

The aim is to bring together the disparate strands of Iceland's eclectic scene under one roof. By increasing access to information about artists, collaborating with companies to promote Icelandic music abroad and organizing marketing strategies, festival and event participation, IMX will increase the visibility of Icelandic music in the international sphere, and provide an essential one-stop resource for all interested parties (*About the IMX*, 2017).

In my efforts to understand the infrastructure of the scene, I found the idea that one organisation could provide a one-stop shop for everyone concerned with Icelandic music interesting. This interest led to an interview with the project manager at the IMX, Anna Ásthildur Thorsteinsson (Personal Communication, 04/07/2016), who was asked to provide information on how the institution operates. According to the musicians interviewed for this thesis, the IMX promoted funding for marketing and travel, and some of them claimed that the IMX showed bias towards certain musical genres. Despite this, my interview with Thorsteinsson suggested that the institution does much more than that. The following list draws out the main activities which Thorsteinsson pointed out to me:

- Collaborating with the music festivals to import media and stakeholders to attend (with funding from Promote Iceland).
- Creating networks by attending showcase festivals.
- Releasing *Made in Iceland*, a CD with various Icelandic artists.
- Matchmaking service to connect interested parties with Icelandic musicians.
- Promoting Icelandic music to the world via the Icelandmusic website.
- Providing education and tools for musicians (both online and in workshops).

Through these various activities, the IMX tries to promote Icelandic music and support musicians to promote themselves. Thorsteinsson stressed that they did not act as managers for musicians, which has sometimes been an issue, given that the infrastructure of the music industry in Iceland sometimes lacks the professional skills needed to accommodate the significant international interest. Therefore, they placed emphasis on educating musicians and supporting people who might be trying to work as managers for musicians.

Thorsteinsson was clearly aware of the criticism, voiced by my participants, that the institution had a genre bias, and she explained their policy without being prompted on the issue. According to her, the policy is to meet interest from abroad and to try to further this interest by sending musicians abroad and enable them to attend festivals. The IMX felt it would not be democratic for them to decide who or what genre should be promoted. However, Thorsteinsson did

acknowledge that the staff had their own strengths and personal relationships with certain genres. She mentioned that they had good connections and knowledge in the indie rock genre for historical reasons, but they lacked connections within the metal genre, which was receiving increased interest.

All of my participants mentioned the festival Iceland Airwaves as a key institution in Icelandic music life and as a vital opportunity to cultivate international connections. Chapter 8 of the thesis will focus on this festival as a case study. Other festivals are also seen as important, and the growing number of festivals was seen as an indication of an expanding music scene. Performing at festivals in Reykjavík and in the countryside is a way to ensure income, but such festivals are also important promotion opportunities for musicians and can serve as springboards for other gigs. *Músíktíraunir* (Music Experiments) is an important ‘battle of the bands’ type event for up and coming bands that sometimes also serves a gateway to performing at other festivals. It was initiated in 1982, and most of the bands active in the scene today have taken part in this competition.¹²

Media institutions were also mentioned as an important part of the music scene, although there was some nostalgia for the era before the economic collapse, when more emphasis and money was spent on culture in the media. There are two daily papers in Iceland, *Morgunblaðið* and *Fréttablaðið*. The latter is a free paper and seems to have less room to discuss the arts. *Morgunblaðið* was seen to have had a good music section in the past, but the more in-depth discussion have been reduced substantially. *RÚV*, The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service, was also seen as important, partly due to the fact that it is bound by law to play and promote Icelandic music. Even there, however, participants felt that music was receiving less attention than in the past.

In general, musicians felt that they were poorly supported and not shown enough understanding from the government. The existing funding was deemed insufficient and there was too much competition for it. The artists’ salaries were perceived to be mainly for art music and ‘arty’ popular musicians. Rehearsal spaces were in high demand, and some musicians wished that the government would provide facilities where musicians could intermingle and collaborate.

¹² Further information about *Músíktíraunir* can be found in Thoroddsen (Forthcoming).

In general, people found it difficult, if not impossible, to live off their music making, and this is especially true for younger musicians. The lack of professionalism was also flagged, because there was not enough funding to develop a long-term strategy and people were putting on festivals and events out of idealism on a voluntary basis, and then suffering burn-out from the work. This situation is by no means unique to Iceland, and studies have shown that the music industries depend on voluntary work, cheap labour and people who invest time and effort like other cultural and creative industries (Alacovska, 2018). This will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Gatekeepers

Some of my participants had rather romantic notions about music making in Iceland when discussing the infrastructure and the nature of the music scene. They suggested that their motivations for music making came from the love of music, was self-initiated, and was without boundaries. Despite that, most people agreed that there are a few key individuals and entities that function as so-called ‘gatekeepers’ within the scene. Firstly, RÚV’s Channel 2 was considered very important because it broadcasts popular music across the entire country. The radio DJ Ólafur Páll Gunnarsson was seen as the most influential person within the station. Musicians that he favoured were likely to be broadcast regularly and were more likely to succeed. If he did not like a musician, however, this would be a potential hindrance to their reaching a wider audience: ‘I find it really peculiar that there is an autocrat on Channel 2, an autocrat with a particular musical taste which seems to be played there more than anything else and is not open for all new music’ (Anonymous 2, Personal Communication, 14/07/16). Many other participants echoed these sentiments and were surprised that there was not a formal committee in place for choosing the focus or breadth of the playlists for such a public radio station. Gunnarsson and his colleague Matthías Már Magnússon were regarded as the key individuals in choosing musicians to represent Iceland in the festival Eurosonic, and for getting on the playlist of European radio stations, which are both seen as important for further careers in Europe.

Festival programmers were also seen as important people, especially Grímur Atlason, who was the artistic director of Iceland Airwaves when the interviews took place.¹³ One music producer,

¹³ Atlason was the artistic director of the Iceland Airwaves for eight years, but announced his departure from the festival in February 2018. This was part of a change in the ownership of the festival when the Icelandic Events

Guðmundur Kristinn Jónsson, was mentioned as influential by several people, as the people he works with seem to receive attention and success. Other people mentioned a specific grammar school (*Menntaskólinn við Hamrahlíð*), attended by those who were interested in making important networks and friends. Some of the female musicians I interviewed pointed out that most of the radio DJs and festival programmers were men, and this influenced the development of female musicians. They felt they came up against walls more often than their male counterparts and that this was a serious problem within the scene.

It was pointed out that the scene in Iceland is very small and it is easy to become famous overnight if the right people like you, but that fame could quickly disappear. Thorsteinsson from IMX also pointed out that even though some bands struggled in Iceland and were not accepted by the ‘cool scene’, it did not mean that they would not succeed abroad. She mentioned the bands Of Monsters and Men and Kaleo as examples. She felt that people abroad were more in control of bands’ fates than people in Iceland. She also mentioned that it was not until foreign media began writing about the rap and metal scenes that the locals started paying attention to them.

Research Methods

The methodology of this research emerges from the field of popular music studies. I adopted a qualitative research strategy and relied on mixed methods, such as textual analysis and ethnography, in order to gather an extensive outlook with multiple perspectives on Icelandic music and the music scene in Reykjavík. The textual data was collected in three steps. First, I collected various material on music in Iceland and the Reykjavík music scene (detailed below). Second, I collected material on the ‘krútt’ scene, which can be described as the Icelandic ‘indie’ scene. Third, I collected documentaries about Icelandic music and other audio-visual material that contained discussion about the music scene. The ethnography was informed by, but also complemented, the textual data, as I gathered information directly from members of the music scene. I attended gigs and music events, performed in concerts, and organised public events that were all part of the participant-observation of the scene. Apart from this participant observation, the primary sources of ethnographic data originate from the 35 interviews I

Management Company Sena Live acquired the festival and Ísleifur Þórhallsson, Sena Live’s CEO became the new chief (Rogers, 2018).

conducted with musicians and music industry members. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, generating themes that informed and provided a focus for the thesis chapters and their various subsections.

Textual data

Hammersley and Atkinson emphasise the importance of documentary sources and material artefacts for ethnographic researchers (2007, p. 121). Various documents and artefacts can shed a light on a music scene, and in this study I emphasised collecting a range of textual data, including music documentaries, music videos, promotional material, and journalistic writing about the music scene (both from Icelandic and international sources). These sources provided context and a framework for the ethnography, as well as ‘stimulating analytical ideas’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 122). A series of questions emerged from the analyses of these texts that were addressed in the ethnographic research, including how the participants engaged with these texts and what sort of images/perspectives of Icelandic music they promoted.

Online and printed sources

I collected¹⁴ Icelandic media discourse published between 2000 and 2015 that featured music in Iceland and the Reykjavík music scene in particular. These are journalistic accounts, interviews and writings about the music scene found both online (web-versions of national newspapers, music sites, tourism sites, music blogs) and in print media (national newspapers). Many of these accounts have not yet reached the scholarly sphere because of language barriers, and my engagement with these provided a local context to my study. In addition, I collected international articles in the English language (mainly British and UK based music press and national newspapers), which offered insight into how the music scene is discussed in the international context. Secondly, I gathered various reports on the music scene and promotional material, including images and videos, followed online discussions, and reviewed comments added to music videos on YouTube and Vimeo, which were mostly in English, although both Icelandic and other languages appeared sporadically. This material offered various information about the scene, its wider context and particularities. I only collected material that discussed the music scene or provided analysis of the music, and I excluded generic announcements about

¹⁴ This collection of textual material proceeds the official PhD starting date (October 2012), as this became a way for me to keep tabs on the music scene in Reykjavík when I was living abroad during my MA studies.

concerts, single and albums releases, tours, musicians' personal issues, etc. This collection is by no means exhaustive for all discussion about the music scene in Reykjavík in Icelandic and English, but it serves to provide examples of how and what people write when writing about the music scene. Many of the English language accounts were linked to, or even re-published in, the Icelandic media, which shows that they find their way into the local discourse. The aim was to engage with 'broad and eclectic reading of textual sources [... which would] inform the generation of concepts throughout the research process' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, pp. 122–123). This established an idea of the discourse around the music scene, and I identified commonalities that directed the next phase of the research through reading this material. I have kept up with the current debate as much as possible, even after the formal research period ended (in 2015), and have continued to collect and reflect on this material, which informs my discussion. This material currently adds up to over a hundred sources.

After immersing myself with this material, I realised that during the first years of the 21st century the Icelandic media associated *krútt* with the most frequently mentioned bands and artists in both Icelandic and English-speaking accounts. It became clear that the 'krútt' scene warranted further investigation, but the term had been mostly confined to the Icelandic language. At the point of submitting this thesis, there is no published work on *krútt*. I investigated the term '*krútt*' through an analysis of written sources identified by an online search. I identified media sources by a google search on separate occasions between 2010 and 2015 using different versions and combinations of the keywords '*krútt*', '*krúttkynslóðin*', 'cute', 'cutesy', 'music' and 'Iceland', and I then selected only material referring to Icelandic music. The result was twenty sources focused on *krútt*. The *krútt* scene will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

Audio-visual material

There was clear evidence from the material discussed so far that music was seen to be strongly connected to the local environment of Iceland, its nature, and landscape. I collected and analysed documentaries about Icelandic music to investigate how the music scene has been 'located' or 'placed'. A systematic collection and analysis of music videos was previously carried out by another music scholar (Dibben, 2009b). I built on that by analysing a few music videos (not studied by Dibben) which serve as examples of how music has been interwoven with nature and/or landscape images. Several music documentaries have been made about

Icelandic music in the period under examination (2000-2015). Many of them feature the popular music scene and can be seen as an important contribution to the image of the scene. They play an essential role in how Iceland and Icelandic music are introduced and portrayed to the world. Documentaries are a powerful medium to construct an image of a certain phenomenon and can transform the subject matter into ‘mythscape’ (Bennett, 2002) that allow it gain a certain independence.

I selected twelve documentaries, two video interviews, and one radio programme for analysis, as shown in Table 1. Some of these, including *Heima* and *Screaming Masterpiece*, have been examined by other scholars (Dibben, 2009b; Mitchell, 2009; Osborn, 2013; Cannady, 2017) but this is a larger sample than has been studied before. About half of the films can be found on the online portal of Icelandic films, icelandiccinema.com, where they were stored under the selection ‘music’. The remaining sources were found either at the public library in Iceland or online through a google search for ‘Icelandic music’.

Table 1. A list of the music documentaries (and other sources) analysed.

Name	Year	About	Director	Language	Media
<i>Inside Björk</i>	2003	Björk	Christopher Walker	English	Documentary
<i>Screaming Masterpiece</i>	2005	The music scene	Alexander Ergils	English/Icelandic	Documentary
<i>Heima: A Film By Sigur Rós</i>	2007	Sigur Rós	Dean DeBlois	English	Documentary
<i>The Sky May Be Falling</i>	2009	Ólafur Arnalds	Gunnar Guðbjörnsson	English	Documentary
<i>Icelandic Music</i>	2009	The music scene	Iceland Review	English	Interview
<i>Backyard</i>	2010	The music scene	Sveinn Rúnarsson	Icelandic	Documentary
<i>Where's the Snow?!</i>	2010	Iceland Airwaves	Bowen Staines and Gunnar B. Guðjónsson	English	Documentary
<i>Icelandic Music: Beyond Sigur Rós</i>	2010	The music scene	Brett Gregory	English	Documentary
<i>Björk's Interview for the Polar Prize</i>	2010	Björk	Unknown	English	Interview
<i>Árstíðir</i>	2011	Árstíðir	Lilja Häfele	English	Documentary
<i>Iceland Airwaves – A Rockumentary</i>	2012	Iceland Airwaves	Guðjón Jónsson	English/Icelandic	Documentary
<i>Reykjavik Revisited</i>	2013	The music scene	Juro Kovacic	English	Documentary
<i>Do It Yourself-Music Documentary</i>	2013	Iceland Airwaves	Agus Makkie	English	Documentary

<i>Tónlist: Icelandic Music Documentary</i>	2014	The music scene	Stephen Bevan	English	Documentary
<i>Songs from a Dark Place</i>	2014	The music scene	John Grant	English	Radio programme

Documentaries not fitting the time frame of this project (2000-2015), or those focusing on a specific band/musician and thus not attempting to comment on the scene in general, were excluded from this research. It is possible that more documentaries about Icelandic music, which did not appear online using the search terms, or are neither in English nor Icelandic, might exist. The aim, however, is to gain some insight into how the Icelandic music scene is ‘placed’ and discussed through this material and not to provide a comprehensive overview of films on Icelandic music. The textual material and the key themes that I identified from the analysis influenced how I structured and thought through the ethnographic part of the research, and they refined ‘foreshadowed problems’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 124), of which the relationship between music and place was particularly prominent. The analysis of this material will be discussed below, after a discussion about the ethnographic approach.

Ethnographic approach

As the textual data offers an understanding of how the music scene, the musicians, and the music itself have been represented, and how their images have been portrayed, it was necessary to obtain data directly from members of the music scene. I concluded that ethnography was the appropriate method, as it focuses on people and aims to ‘observe and interpret the cultural beliefs and practices of social groups’ (Grazian, 2004, p. 197). This was the lens through which I wanted to contrast and examine the textual data. I wanted to gain an understanding of how local musicians and people working in the music industry experienced the music scene in Reykjavík themselves, what they felt were the most important aspects of it, and how they felt about the image and representations of the music and the music scene. I wanted to create our (mine and my informants’) ‘version of reality’ (Cohen, 1993, p. 124), to offer a local and perhaps counter narrative to the popular representations. I undertook the ethnography in a reflexive manner, with the emphasis that I was part of the social world under study (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 18) and assumed that I would impact the data that I collected. In my approach to the ethnography I was also influenced by other studies of popular music (Finnegan, 1989; Cohen, 2007; Hogan, 2015), although my approach represents somewhat a departure from the ‘classic’ ethnography presented in these studies. As I was examining how people (musicians, industry workers, documentary makers and media workers)

construct narratives about the music scene, it became clear that my focus had to be on the interviews instead of my own experience in the field. Rather than following a few selected individuals and/or offer ‘thick description’ about a particular venue, night or festival which I experienced, I wanted to hear as many stories about the scene as possible.

The research participants and interviews

The interviews form the basis of the primary data of this thesis. They took place between February 23rd and July 21st of 2016. Mike Crang and Ian Cook note that, along with participant observation, interviews have been ‘a primary means through which ethnographic researchers have attempted to get to grips with the contexts and contents of different people’s everyday social, cultural, political and economic lives’ (2007, p. 60). Since I lived in the field, the participant observation began even earlier and continued throughout the research process.

I decided early on that I wanted to get as large a picture as possible and gather data from a broad pool of participants so as not to be able to anticipate the results. I spoke with both musicians and other people working in the music scene (industry members) and covered a breadth of ages and experiences, and I included both male and female perspectives. In addition, although my research was focused on indie music, I included perspectives from people working with various genres and styles. This was all done in order to gather as many representations as possible. The corpus construction of the interviews was therefore semi-structured¹⁵, but I also relied on snowball-sampling¹⁶ once I secured the first participants.

I used my personal connections when recruiting people to interview. Many of the largest names in the Icelandic music scene were hard to get in contact with. When I didn’t manage to use personal connections and had to contact the agency representing the band or the manager, I was never successful in securing an interview. Several musicians from my initial ‘wish-list’ of participants were never reachable. In most cases, people that I contacted were happy to be interviewed and the recruitment process was much easier and more enjoyable than I had

¹⁵ The corpus construction could have also been defined as ‘theoretical sampling’ as defined by Crang and Cook where the ‘quality and positionality of the information that they [the potential participants] can offer’ is important to the sampling method (2007, p. 14).

¹⁶ After each interview I asked the participant if they could recommend someone that they felt I ‘should’ speak to. I also inquired about gatekeepers during the interview in order to find out if I was forgetting someone who was regarded as such within the music scene.

expected. I did manage to recruit a range of participants (from early career to experienced) and several participants have been commercially successful. Table 2 shows a list of participants and Appendix I gives further information about when and where the interviews were carried out.

Table 2. List of participants.

No.	Name	Background	Gender
1	Anonymous 1	Musician	Male
2	Anonymous 2	Music promoter	Male
3	Andreas Engström	Music writer and scholar	Male
4	Anna Ásthildur Thorsteinsson	IMX project manager	Female
5	Arnar Eggert Thoroddsen	Music journalist and scholar	Male
6	Árni Heimir Ingólfsson	Music scholar	Male
7	Árni Matthíasson	Music journalist	Male
8	Atli Bollason	Music journalist	Male
9	Colm O'Herlihy	Label and studio manager	Male
10	Gunnar Lárus Hjálmarsson (Dr. Gunni)	Music writer	Male
11	Egill Sæbjörnsson	Musician	Male
12	Einar Örn Benediktsson	Musician	Male
13	Elísabet Indra Ragnarsdóttir	Venue manager	Female
14	Grímur Atlason	Festival manager	Male
15	Guðný Þóra Guðmundsdóttir	Festival manager	Female
16	Hildur (Hildur Kristín Stefánsdóttir)	Musician	Female
17	Hjálmar H. Ragnarsson	Musician	Male
18	Högni Egilsson	Musician	Male
19	Hrafnkell Flóki Kaktus Einarsson	Musician	Male
20	Hrafnkell Pálmarsson	STEF	Male
21	Lára Ómarsdóttir	Musician	Female
22	María Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir	Musician	Female
23	Mugison (Örn Elías Guðmundsson)	Musician	Male
24	Nicola Dibben	Music scholar	Female
25	Páll Ragnar Pálsson	Musician	Male
26	Paul Evans	Musician	Male
27	Ragnhildur Gísladóttir	Musician	Female
28	Ragnar Þórhallsson	Musician	Male
29	Reuben Satoru Fenemore	Musician	Male
30	Sigurður Halldórsson	Musician	Male

31	Sindri Ástmarsson	Manager	Male
32	Sóley (Sóley Stefánsdóttir)	Musician	Female
33	Steinþór Helgi Arnsteinsson	Promoter, manager,	Male
34	Þórarinn Guðnason	Musician	Male
35	Þorbjörg Roach Gunnarsdóttir	Musician	Female

The participants came from various backgrounds, worked in many genres, and some were relatively new in the music scene, whereas others had worked in the scene for a long time. The number of interviewed participants was 35: 10 females and 25 males.¹⁷ I identified 19 as musicians (mostly working in the indie scene but some had other backgrounds) and 16 as other industry members. Those categories often overlapped and the classification in Table 2 is my own reflection on the purpose the participants served within the frame of my research. The age ranged from early 20s to mid 60s, with most participants being in their late 20s to 40s. Most of my participants were Icelandic (30) and all but two of the Icelanders were based in Iceland. Those two were included because of the value of having perspectives from people looking at the music scene in Reykjavík from some distance. Out of the five non-Icelandic participants, three were based in Reykjavík and offered the perspective of ‘outsiders’ in the music scene. Here I was looking for representation of people working in the scene who are used to other scenes, and who might find it easier to identify differences and similarities between the Reykjavík scene and other scenes. The two other non-Icelandic participants were scholars and music writers who have written extensively about Icelandic music and offered a similar ‘outsider’ perspective on the scene. The number of participants was not predetermined, but I stopped interviewing people when I felt that the stories that I was being told had begun to sound familiar, reaching ‘theoretical saturation’ (Crang and Cook, 2007, p. 14).

¹⁷ There are no statistics available for the ratio between women and men in the music scene in Iceland, but research in other places has shown that men have dominated the music industry (Cameron, 2003; Leonard, 2007). From my own experience, men seem to be the majority of the Icelandic music scene, although within the krútt scene there is probably a higher number of women than in other scenes. The imbalance of my participants reflects my experience of the music scene. When I was recruiting participants for the interviews, I found it more difficult to identify women than men with whom to talk. Musician and gender studies researcher Lára Rúnarsdóttir has shown the bias in the work environment of the music scene in Iceland and the challenges facing women in the scene (Rúnarsdóttir 1982, 2015). For the purpose of the thesis, I wanted to include female perspectives to ensure as many representations as possible.

The interviews

The structure of the interviews was informed by the results of the textual data which I had collected and analysed previously. Themes that emerged from that analysis became the framework for the interviews. The interviews were the primary method of data collection after the textual analysis was completed. The participants were given the option of meeting me at a location of their preference, but I also offered my office as a meeting place, and most participants chose my office. On two occasions I met people in their homes, twice I went to their work place, and on three occasions we met in a café. During the first initial contact (via Facebook chat or e-mail) I described my research and why I wanted to interview the participant. On the bases of that information, people agreed (or refused) the interview. Before the actual interviews began, I gave the participants an information sheet that detailed the purpose of the study and they signed a consent form, permitting me to record the conversation and use the information for my PhD thesis and other scholarly dissemination. The participants also had the choice of being anonymous or being named. Only two participants chose to appear anonymous, but the rest preferred being named¹⁸. I made it clear that the information belonged to the participants and that they could withdraw sections or the interview in its entirety at any point, but so far, nobody has done that. I also offered them the option of anonymising any sections of the interview, which a few participants requested. The information sheet and consent form can be found in Appendix II. Further discussion about this process can be found below in the discussion of ethical concerns.

The interviews were semi-structured (Crang and Cook, 2007, p. 60), and I used a topic guide as an aid during the interviews (see the topic guide in Appendix III) to ensure that I covered all the themes that I had identified (Lofland, 1971, p. 84). The topic guide served an alternative purpose, as I used it to write down notes during the interview, such as comments on something that I wanted to revisit or explore further in the interview, instead of interrupting the participant's current thoughts. I also felt that the note-taking worked as a tool to create a certain atmosphere during the interviews and put the participants at ease. The participants seemed encouraged by my note-taking, and it seemed that it communicated to them that their information was of interest to me. It also created pauses and breathing room in the interviews

¹⁸ In many instances, the participants did not seem to care if they were identified or were kept anonymous, and quite often they asked me what I would prefer. I claimed that I had no preference, so as not to pressure them either way, but I was happy with how many preferred to be identified. Due to the small size of the scene, it would have been difficult to ensure the complete anonymity of all of the participants.

for the participants to think or add to their responses without me rushing to the next question or topic.

I organised the interviews in three sections. First, we discussed the participant's background. I thought of this part as the 'warm-up' part of the interview and a way to ease into the topics at hand, although the background information did also serve its purpose for the research. Second, we discussed the participant's involvement in the scene and their personal experiences. Finally, we moved onto a discussion about the scene in general and their perspectives on it. Overall, I was happy with the results from the interviews. I felt I managed to build a trustworthy relationship with my participants, and I was touched by their openness and willingness to share with me their thoughts and opinions. It seemed that I was not considered a threat from which they needed to guard themselves, likely because the scene is small and all of the participants had a way of 'locating' me within the scene, either from a personal experience or through a mutual friend or colleague. Most of the interviews lasted about an hour.

Organisation and analysis of the data

As detailed above, the data generated through the research included (a) various textual data of the music scene in Reykjavík, (b) texts about the krútt (20 sources), (c) music documentaries and other audio-visual sources (15 sources) and (d) interviews (35 sources). I also had data from my own observations. As the textual data (a) was collected throughout the process I did not conduct a formal thematic analysis on this data. Nonetheless, it underwent informal analysis similar to what Crang and Cook describe: 'The "analysis" of this informally constructed "data" is likely to be via an informal process of piecing things together, figuring things out, gaining focus and direction as the research unfolds' (2007, p. 132). I immersed myself in the sources, took notes and revisited the material repeatedly. The sources were organised and archived using the online Diigo software¹⁹. Out of this, an understanding of how the music scene has been depicted emerged, which I compared and contrasted with my personal experience of the music scene in Reykjavík. The data collection and analysis which followed was informed by my personal experience, the critical reading of this textual data, and the review of relevant academic literature.

¹⁹ The software can be found here: <https://www.diigo.com/> (Diigo, 2018).

The analysis of the remaining sources all followed the same methods, with slight nuances to accommodate the different types of sources.

1. Review of the sources.

The krútt sources and the music documentaries were examined, and I made a decision about whether the source should be included or excluded. Preliminary notes were written about all the sources, and in case of the interviews, this was done directly after each interview.

2. Transcription of sources.

In the case of the documentaries and the interviews, the raw data had to be transcribed to text. I transcribed all the documentaries, and I included both audio and visual material, i.e. what was being said or performed, and what was being shown on the screen at the same time. I transcribed six of the interviews myself, but the transcription of the remaining 29 interviews was outsourced as the transcriptions were extremely time consuming. The material was transcribed using the free online software oTranscribe²⁰, which supports both audio and video formats.

3. Transcripts reviewed and ‘open coding’.

I reviewed the interview and documentary transcripts whilst listening to/watching the original sources to ensure that everything was included. In addition, I made notes of tone and atmosphere, which disappears out of the transcripts but adds richness to the material. Here the opportunity presented itself to be reminded of the context from which the material emerged (Crang and Cook, 2007, p. 134). Simultaneously I was ‘open coding’ the material, i.e. jotting down what I felt about the meaning and intent of the material as I went through it (Crang and Cook, 2007, p. 137).

4. Themes mapped out and codes developed.

Once I had reviewed all the transcripts and gone over the preliminary notes, I had gathered enough information on the data to map the themes out and develop the initial codes which would then be applied to all the manuscripts. I used a mind mapping technique to help me with this part of the process, as I found visualisation helpful to organise the codes within a theme. To give an example of this, Figure 4 shows the mind map of the codes created after reviewing the transcripts of the music documentaries.

²⁰ The software can be found here: <http://otranscribe.com/> (Bentley, no date).



Figure 4. The codes created from the thematic analysis of the documentaries.

These were the first general codes, but more codes were added as the next phase of coding the transcripts began and aspects came up which had not been accounted for in the original codes. The mind map also helped to envision the emerging themes, as I grouped them together under the same ‘parent’ codes that I felt were related. For example, growing out of ‘the scene’ are four subcategories: ‘DIY’, ‘genre’, ‘industry’ and ‘networks/friends’ (see Figure 4).

5. Codes applied to transcripts

Next, the codes were applied to the transcripts using a web application for mixed methods research named Dedoose.²¹ I used the computer programme to assist with the management of the data. All of the transcripts were uploaded to the programme and could be retrieved instantly. The coding itself worked similarly to using different colours of highlighters on the transcript as Figure 5 shows.

²¹ The software can be found here: <https://www.dedoose.com/> (Home | Dedoose, 2018).

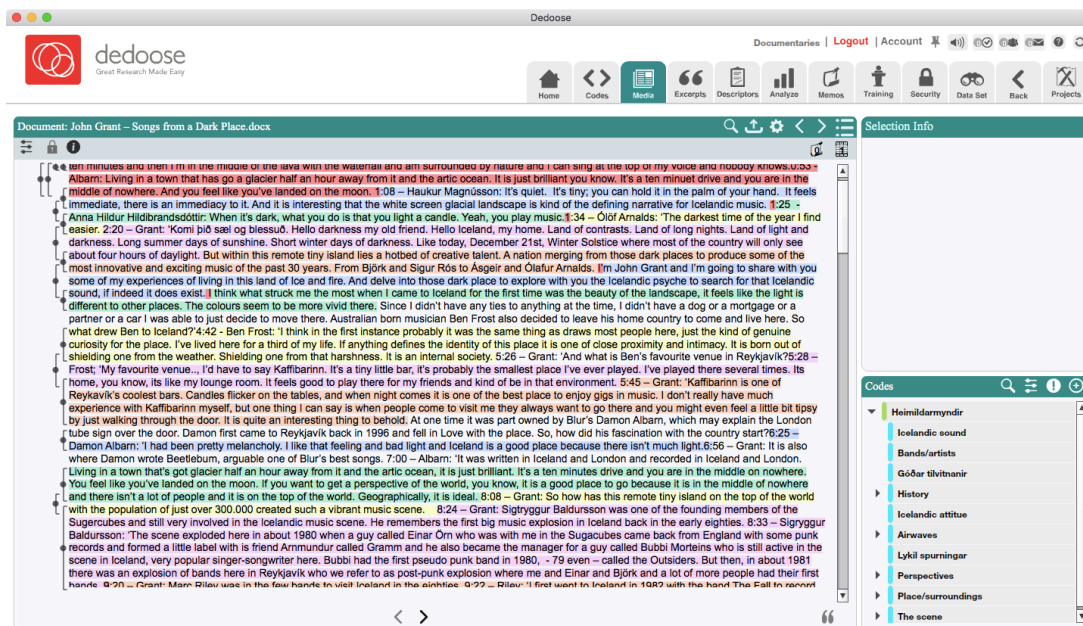


Figure 5. Screen shot of a coded transcript in Dedoose.

Using the programme, codes could be applied to the correct part of the data, even if it overlapped or nested within other coded stretches. This allowed for a more complex and sensitive form of analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 154). Table 3 shows the sources analysed and the statistical data for each type of source, the number of codes created, the number of excerpts created, and the number of code applications. It shows a higher number of code applications than excerpts created, which reflects the multiple or overlapped codes on the same data stretch.

Table 3. Information on the coding of sources.

Sources	Number Sources	Codes	Excerpts created	Code applications
Krútt material	20	9	123	188
Documentaries	10	33	225	322
Interviews	35	17	460	482
Total	65	59	808	992

If the number of codes for the documentaries is compared to the mind map in Figure 5, it becomes clear that an additional ten codes were created during the coding process. A closer and more systematic reading of the transcripts revealed that not all themes/topics had been accounted for. As Table 3 demonstrates, 992 code applications were made in total, but Dedoose created excel worksheets for all the excerpts with the same code application, which made the analysis much more manageable. Figure 6 shows a Code Cloud for the documentaries with all

of the codes applied to all of the transcripts. The size of the letters reflects the frequency of code applications for each code and gives an indication of what was most frequently being discussed or portrayed within the documentaries.



Figure 6. A Code Cloud for the documentaries. The size of the letters reflects the frequency of code applications for each code. (Image generated through Dedoose).

6. Excerpts analysed

Once all the transcripts were coded, the actual analysis began by working through all the data connected to a single code. The Dedoose programme enabled me to retrieve all excerpts from all transcripts labelled with a single code with a click of a button. These themes then became chapters (and subsections) or case studies within the thesis. It should be noted that although the computer programme was used, the same actions could have been done manually in a much more time-consuming manner. The programme itself did not perform any kind of analysis. Once all the sources had been coded and the excerpts with the same coding were analysed, certain themes became clear. This process should be regarded as the ‘decontextualization’ of the data from its original source and ‘recontextualization’ as they became ‘analytically driven categories’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 156). The de- and recontextualizations were a way to observe new and different themes and patterns in the data (Crang and Cook, 2007, p. 133).

7. Synthesising and interpretation

The final methodological step was to synthesise the primary findings with the existing literature and relevant theory to ensure ‘theoretical adequacy’ as defined by Crang and Cook (2007, p. 15). I emphasized a ‘bottom up’ approach where the findings of the primary data informed the theory applied, as Cohen explains in relation to ethnography:

Ethnography is meaningless in the absence of theory, but theoretical models are not simply imposed on field situations and data; rather, they provide an orientation to the research which can be developed by the researcher over the course of analysing data. This allows one to begin to develop theory in a way that provides much more evidence of the plausibility of different lines of analysis than is available to the armchair theorist or survey researcher. It has been labelled the ‘bottom up’ approach, in that one moves from the particular to the general (although theory does not somehow arise naturally from the data, but is informed by it) (Cohen, 1993, pp. 132–133).

I chose to immerse myself within the data to fully understand it before applying relevant theory in order to prevent my analysis from (subconsciously) focusing on certain aspects that might easily fit pre-selected theory. The data collection process informed how I approached the subsequent steps. I looked for patterns throughout the collected data in the search for relationships across my material that pointed to ‘stable features ... that transcended immediate contexts’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 163). There were examples of themes/concepts which I had not intended to incorporate in the thesis, but the data presented them across the entire material. One example is the impact of tourism in the music scene, which almost all of my participants commented on without being probed on the subject by me. This topic was also apparent in the textual data, and it therefore became a separate case study in the thesis (Chapter 8). Consequently, the writing process can be categorised as ‘writing through codes’ as defined by Crang and Cook (2007, p. 158).

When the theory was incorporated into the primary findings during the writing process, it was sensitive to the nuances of the specific cases in question and helped to make sense of the data. I did not try to find an overarching theoretical framework which could be applied to the research topic as a whole. I felt it would not be suitable in the present instance to select a narrow framework, as quite often is the case according to Hammerley and Atkinson:

[F]or some analysis, it is almost always a mistake to make a whole ethnography conform to just one theoretical framework.

Theorizing need not, and should not, be like this. It ought to involve an interactive process in which ideas are used to make sense of the data, and data are used to change

our ideas. In other words, there should be movement back and forth between ideas and data. So, analysis is not just matter of managing and manipulating data (2007, p. 159).

Of course, the analysis took place throughout the research process, from determining what I found significant in the field, or in the textual material, to choosing questions in the interviews and working interactively with the data as described above (Crang and Cook, 2007, p. 152). During this process, I was informed by the existing literature in the field but not bound by any one theory or idea. The last interview (late July 2016) represents the end of the active research period for this thesis. The subsequent time until submission was spent on analysis and writing up the thesis.

Ethical Considerations

The project underwent a review at the Committee on Research Ethics at the University of Liverpool. It did not require permission from the National Bioethics Committee in Iceland. In any research study which deals with living subjects, ethical issues arise. The researcher is responsible for informing and protecting the participants. Upon initial contact, potential participants were informed about the general aim of the research project. It was explained that participants would not be paid for the participation, and they were free to withdraw from the study. At the time of the interview, research participants received and read through an information sheet. The information sheet explained the research, gave information about me and what I was hoping to get out of the interview. Upon reading the information sheet, the participants were required to read and sign the consent form (see Appendix II). The detailed consent form ensured that the participants were thoroughly informed about the use of the data they provided and knew what they were consenting to. When going over the consent form with the participants I stressed that the information they provided was their own and they were in control of it. I also gave them the option of retracting specific statements and having their interview material remain anonymous. The data was kept secure and anonymised for the person who transcribed the interviews.

I was aware that there are inherent risks in all research, but they were minimal in this case, as the study did not require the discussion of sensitive topics. However, there was always the possibility that some individuals would find being questioned stressful, or it would trigger distressing memories/emotions. Had there been such unexpected outcomes, the interview/observation would have been stopped immediately and not resumed until the participant agreed. Thankfully this did not occur. The interviews were carried out either in

English or Icelandic based on the preference of the participants. All but two participants whose mother tongue was neither Icelandic nor English were therefore able to speak their native language, which ensured comfortable communication. The two remaining participants spoke fluent English so there were no issues with regards to understanding and communicating.

Trustworthiness and limitations of the methodology

The methodology of the study has certain limitations. Some of them are inherent for any qualitative study, but others are related to the design of this study. In all qualitative studies the researcher's subjectivity impacts the analysis. In this case, the potential bias is my personal experience within the music scene in Reykjavík as it may impact how I understand it and interpret the data collected. My prolonged involvement in the field and familiarity with it also provides me with certain credibility, although the familiarity with the research participants is also a limitation. I knew many of the participants from contexts outside of my research and there was always the risk that our relationship would influence their responses. I made sure that I responded in the same way regardless of the position participants took on different matters, and I tried to interrupt as little as possible. I aimed to create an atmosphere of honesty and openness. Another danger is that the participants could have wanted to provide the answers for which they thought I was looking, and this could also be connected to the idea of truth. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that what I was told by my participants could not be considered an 'absolute truth', as Crang and Cook explain: '[R]esearch must involve the struggle to produce *inter-subjective truths*, to understand why so many versions of events are produced and recited' (2007, p. 14). In those instances when different versions of the same event/idea appeared, in some cases even by the same person, I sought to understand why this was the case.

A further major limitation of the study, which is inherent in ethnography and all qualitative methods, is the sample size. The research is 'small-scale and face-to-face' and has therefore limited possibility of generalisation or 'typicality' (Cohen, 1993, p. 125). However, the hope is that this study creates some knowledge and insights into music scenes more generally, and that the lessons learned during this research can be used for other scenes or settings. By offering detailed descriptions of the local music scene in Reykjavík and including a substantial amount of quotes from my research participants, I hope to offer a well-rounded and realistic picture for the reader.

Another aspect of the methodology which needs to be addressed is the issue of language. Many of the textual sources and thirty of the interviews were in Icelandic. Interactions in the field and participant-observation were in Icelandic. The PhD, however, is written for a university in the UK, and the academic community that I am part of speaks English, so these primary sources and my own notes and thinking processes (as evident by the few Iceland words in the Code Cloud in Figure 6) have to be translated. All transcriptions were made in the original language and the analysis was similarly carried out in the original language; I waited until the very last moment to translate the text to attempt to retain as much of the original content as possible. Crang and Cook paraphrase an issue concerning translations from Twyman *et al.* (1999):

What translation produces, therefore are hybrid, in-between forms of cultural understanding in which choices have been made about whether and how to hide and/or highlight the failures of fit between one language and another (Crang and Cook, 2007, p. 25).

The voices of my participants will not be communicated directly through my writing, but will be found in my translations, where I tried to be as true to the original as possible. I took great pains in choosing the ‘correct’ terms and deliberately tried to avoid academic language in the translations. I chose to include quotations rather than paraphrase when possible in order to best represent my participants.

The issue of language is also part of a larger concern of writing in my second language, which means that I am less sensitive to the delicate timbres and tones of the English language as I would be were I using the Icelandic language.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced the field of study and my personal background, and I highlighted how this has informed the research design and direction. My own experiences in the music scene in Reykjavík led to the path taken in the current study, and ongoing participant observation and engagement with published material on Icelandic music further developed the methodological approach. This approach was explained in three sections. The first section introduced the collection of the various textual data included: writings about the music scene published online and in print, promotional material, images, videos and music documentaries. The second section described how findings and analysis from the textual material informed the themes and questions addressed in the ethnographic work. The ethnography provided the

primary data for the thesis, most of which was produced through semi-structured interviews with 35 musicians and industry members. The participants covered a breadth of ages and experiences, genres and styles, as well as both male and female perspectives to ensure as many representations as possible. The third section of the methodological approach was a detailed description of the organisation and analysis of the data. In total, 65 sources were transcribed and reviewed to create open codes that were then thematically analysed using Dedoose. The final section of this chapter focused on ethical concerns, where the ethical precautions taken were described and the trustworthiness and limitations of the methodology were explored. The main strength of this methodology is the combination of the varied textual sources, in both Icelandic and English, with the long-term ethnographic work. This means that I can draw on my own experience as a member of the music scene in Reykjavík and my deep knowledge of the local environment.

CHAPTER 3: MUSIC-MAKING AND NARRATIVES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN

PAST AND PRESENT

As I argue in the introduction, the image and identity of Icelandic popular music has developed through the co-construction of contesting narratives. These can be traced back to historical aspects of national identity, to the contemporary context in Iceland and to international pre-conceptions of Iceland and Icelanders. They are rooted in ideas about the North and Icelandic stereotypes that began to form during the middle ages (Ísleifsson, 2011). The aim of this chapter is to provide context for these historical aspects, which the subsequent chapters further develop, and to frame my discussion within relevant scholarship. I begin with two examples of how Iceland and Icelanders have been represented within the international sphere that demonstrate the contesting narratives concerning the image of Icelanders and Icelandic popular music. The first example is the documentary *Screaming Masterpiece* by the Icelandic film maker Ari Alexander Ergis Magnússon (2007) that describes the contemporary music scene. The second example is the discourse around the 1905 Danish Colonial Exhibition in Copenhagen. This latter example traces these contesting narratives back to the struggle of independence to show how contemporary issues regarding the national identity and image of Icelanders are historically rooted. Building on the two examples, I will show how nature and culture were keys to developing the national identity of Icelanders. I emphasise the importance of the struggle for independence from Denmark, as this laid the foundation for the contemporary national identity of Icelanders. At the time, the nation was grappling with how to become a nation amongst nations and was positioning itself alongside other European nations. This positioning paved the way for two sides of Icelandic national identity to emerge: the so-called megalomania and the inferiority complex. I explain how stereotypes of the North, and Icelanders more specifically, developed and how these contribute to the exoticism of Icelanders. I place that in the context of musical exoticism in general before introducing the term 'borealism' which I argue suits the Nordic context of my study better. I conclude the chapter with a discussion about contemporary place making practices and how music can contribute to those. I intend to use this discussion to situate the thesis in a scholarly context while also situating my work and contemporary Icelandic music more generally within global and historical contexts.

Contesting Narratives of Icelandicness

To begin this chapter, I offer two examples of contesting narratives of Icelandicness to emphasise the importance of historical sensitivity and to explore how these issues play out in contemporary music products. The music documentary *Screaming Masterpiece* (2007) focuses on the contemporary popular music scene in Reykjavík, but it strongly relates these musical practices to Icelandic history. In the film, the perceived uniqueness of the music scene is traced back to the settlement of the country. The film begins by citing the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus from the 12th century: ‘They [Icelanders] have their own alphabet and great stories of their triumphs. They still record their history in songs and rhymes [rímur] or carve it into rocks so that these memories will be preserved unless the violent forces of nature erase them’ (Magnússon, 2007). This citation reveals the particular narrative created in the film: The Icelandic people are depicted as a cultured nation by referencing the literary history of the country, and attaching music making to that well-known history affords this music making a sense of legitimacy while also connecting it to nature. The audio-visual counterpart to this is a wild landscape of Iceland, where the camera is flown over snow-covered mountains and glaciers, and Steindór Andersen²² sings traditional *rímur*. The combination of this citation and the audio-visual material creates a continuity between the past and the present. This historical context is further emphasized by the composer and current Ásatrú chieftain²³, Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson, who believes that the ‘roots of Icelandic music lie somewhere back in the Viking age’ (Magnússon, 2007). This follows the methods of Icelandic nationalism, which can be traced back to the late 19th century and draws on the idea of the ‘Golden Age’ of the settlement period. It shows the large role history and Iceland’s national identity still play today. It is an example of the representation of Icelanders as a nation of Viking descendants who continue their traditional craft of literature and have even superimposed it onto modern music making.

²² Steindór Andersen is arguably Iceland’s best known rímur chanter due to his collaboration with popular musicians such as Sigur Rós and rapper Erpur Eyvindarson. He is a member of the Iðunn Chanting Society. The film ends with a powerful performance by Andersen and members of the bands Sigur Rós and Amiina with a large choir and a symphony orchestra performing a new arrangement of the 800-year-old poem, Hrafnagaldur (Odin’s Raven Magic), which contains traditional rímur chanting. The context of rímur chanting within popular music seems rather far-fetched and none of my research participants mentioned rímur chanting as the foundation of popular music in Iceland. Sigur Rós did collaborate with Andersen and showed interest in the tradition, but in general this is not a common practice in contemporary popular musical practices.

²³ Chieftain is the head of the Icelandic folk religion Ásatrú.

My second example, although an early example in the modern period, is an example of the contesting narratives prompted by the exhibit on Iceland in the 1905 Danish colonial exhibition in Copenhagen. The idea was to showcase the people, habits, and ways of life in the Danish colonies, including Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the West-Indies. The exhibition demonstrates the position of Icelanders on the world stage in the eyes of Danes at the time. Icelanders, however, protested against being categorised with ‘Negros and Eskimos’ as they considered it to be an insult to Icelandic culture and nationality (Jóhannesson, 2003, p. 140). In spite of being in this colonial relationship with Denmark, Icelanders positioned themselves with the ‘imperial Europe when speaking of the exploration and colonization of the world’ (Bergmann, 2014, pp. 24–25). In the protest, Icelanders neither complained about the idea of showcasing ‘nature people’ for the amusement and education of ‘civilised people’, nor did they criticise the binaries of ‘civilised’ and ‘uncultivated’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘Europe’ and the ‘other’. Instead, they were most critical of their place in this binary (Hálfðánarson, 2014). This exhibition has been examined in different fields of study, including anthropology (Loftsdóttir, 2011), history (Hálfðánarson, 2014), art history (Gremaud, 2010), political science (Bergmann, 2014) and in theatre studies (Þorbergsson, 2013), and is an important moment in history to shed a light on national identity, post-colonial consequences, (self-) image, and the positionality of Icelanders at the time.

The exhibition came at a crucial time for Icelanders; they were developing their self-identification as a modern nation during the struggle for independence, and they were striving to convince the world that they should be regarded as a part of the ‘civilised’ Western world (Bergmann, 2014, pp. 24–25). Iceland’s positionality, in the minds of its inhabitants, was clearly different from the stereotypes of Icelanders as uncivilised ‘nature’ people, which had developed in Europe from the 16th century. Jenny Kidd explains that ‘when people create representations of the world there are agendas at play, and particular sets of ideas, values, attitudes and identities assumed and normalized. There are thus issues of power, ownership, authenticity, and meaning at stake’ (Kidd, 2015, p. 4). As such, the exhibition was a signal of Danish power to the world and its ownership of these colonies, which assumed certain values and identities of the nations being represented. This hindered and misled Icelanders’ quest for autonomy and their struggle to be able to represent themselves as a modern, civilised nation. It forced them to assume the stereotype from which they were trying to distance themselves. The result was that they rebelled and refused to be represented in this way. This can therefore be

considered an early example of the contesting narratives between the external and the internal image of Icelandicness, which much of this thesis investigates.

The Development of Icelandic Nationalism and National Identity

The development of Icelandic nationalism began in the late 19th century, but its roots can be traced back to the settlement of the island in 870 CE (Table 4). Those who settled in Iceland (and on other islands such as Shetland, Orkney, and the Faroe Islands) set sail to escape the tyranny of the Norwegian king (Oslund, 2011, p. 11). The Norse ruling class moulded the society, and the language was indistinguishable from Norwegian until the 14th century when, due to isolation, Icelandic began to develop differently than Norwegian (*Iceland: national report to UNCED*, 1992, p. 23). Gunnar Karlsson explains that the idea of nation had not really emerged during this time. Instead the medieval population in Iceland either saw itself as Norwegians living away from their motherland, or it was not even aware of a communal Norwegian ethnicity, as such ideas only emerged in Norway in the 19th century (Karlsson, 2000, p. 62).

Table 4. Selected chronology of historical events in Iceland until the establishment of the Icelandic republic.

ca. 870-1100	Settlement of Iceland.
ca. 930	A general assembly for Iceland (Alþingi) established.
930-1262	Commonwealth Period.
1262	Unification with the Norwegian kingdom.
1873-1904	The Governors' Period.
1904-1918	Home Rule Period.
1918-1944	Constitutional Monarchy.
1944	Iceland becomes a Republic.

During the struggle for independence from Denmark at the turn of the 20th century, there was a need to 'root in history the national identification of the emerging Icelandic state' (Karlsson, 2000, p. 62). Historians at the time pointed to the establishment of Alþingi, the general assembly in Iceland, as the birth of the Icelandic nation state and of the Icelandic people. The historians pointed to characters in the Icelandic Sagas of the 10th and 11th centuries identifying as Icelanders as evidence for a separate Icelandic identity (Karlsson, 2000, pp. 62–63). The Commonwealth Period from the establishment of Alþingi to the unification with Norway became mythologised as the 'the Golden Age' by Icelandic nationalists during the struggle for independence. The society during the Golden Age was described by the historian Jón Jónsson

Aðils (1869-1920) as superior to other societies, and as a society that enjoyed the highest standard of living and culture so rich that it only compared to ancient Greece (Bergmann, 2014, pp. 21–22). This narrative can be seen as an attempt to reclaim the power of representation and to change it from the stereotypical European depiction, which will be discussed below. The cultural production of poems and sagas during the Golden Age became the foundation on which Icelandic nationalism was built.

The decline of Icelandic society after the Golden Age, sometimes referenced as the ‘Dark Middle Ages’ (characterised by a period of geological unrest, plagues, and famines), became attributed to the loss of independence and was blamed on foreign influence during the struggle for independence. The only way to ensure prosperity and enhancement was to become independent, and it was emphasised that it was ‘unnatural’ for a nation to be ruled by another (Hálfðánarson, 2000, p. 91). From the mid-18th century, Icelanders slowly moved closer to their goal of full independence by resurrecting Alþingi (1845) and receiving a new constitution from the Danish king (1874), which granted Alþingi some legislative power in domestic matters and democratic rights. Iceland received home rule in 1904, although the country remained part of the Danish Kingdom. Sovereignty was won in 1918 when Iceland became an independent monarchy with the Danish king as a ceremonial head of state.

The glorified image of the nation during the golden age and its cultural products were used to solidify the importance of the Icelandic nation. It thus contributed to one important pillar of the national identity, which has been described in various terms such as megalomania, arrogance, and boastfulness (Óskarsson, 2003; Elísson, 2009; Hreinsson, 2010). The megalomaniac tendency of the national identity developed during the struggle for independence when Icelanders had to project a strong identity to the world, but it may have grown out of insecurity about Iceland’s current position on the world stage. Insecurity is another pillar of Icelandic national identity, which is most often referred to as an inferiority complex (Elísson, 2004, 2009; Hreinsson, 2010), and this has been traced back to the ‘Dark Middle Ages’. Högni Óskarsson explains that the shame Icelanders feel towards their history and the ‘Dark Middle Ages’ has resulted in an ‘elevated complacency and [...] bleak inferior complex’ (2003, pp. 21–22). The inferiority complex could also be linked to the negative stereotype of Icelanders depicted as a barbaric nation and the inferiority Icelanders experienced when they compared themselves to European culture at the beginning of the 20th century. These two sides, the megalomania and the inferiority complex, of the Icelandic national identity have

been discussed by scholars, both before and after the economic collapse of 2008 (Óskarsson, 2003; Elísson, 2004), and it was also used to contextualise the irresponsible behaviour of Icelanders, especially the bankers (Elísson, 2009; Hreinsson, 2010). Megalomania is the term most often used in everyday contexts (see for example a discussion about the megalomania of the national identity during the success of the Iceland national team in football during the last few years (Júlíusson, 2015)) and will be the term used for describing this tendency in this thesis. This terminology has been established in the national discourse in Iceland when describing certain qualities of the Icelandic national identity. In those instances, it is not referring to the clinical definition, but rather a behaviour which seemingly is out of proportion with the size of the nation. I have only seen it used in internal discourse in Iceland, as a self-criticism or even ‘tongue-in-cheek’ to poke fun at certain (often unrealistic) expectations or behaviour. It should be emphasised that when I used the term in the discussion below, I am not assigning the clinical definition to the musicians but rather point to how some of the narratives about the music scene can be connected to this discourse.

The development of Icelandic nationalism complies with two different theories. Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson have written about the nation as a social custom (Gellner and Breuilly, 2009) or ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 2006), whereas Anthony D. Smith has focused on the ethnic aspect of the national community (2000). As Birgir Hermannsson has shown, Iceland fulfilled aspects of both theories:

- Nationalism was popular in the country before modernization.
- Icelanders easily fulfilled Smith’s criteria for being an *ethnie*.
- Iceland had an early history as a free state.
- Iceland had a long cultural tradition and an old high national culture.
- Iceland was an isolated country and its population had distinct cultural traits, most importantly its own language (2005, p. 112).

The nationalistic movement in Iceland was, as such, not much different from other countries and built its ideals on the Enlightenment and Romanticism, although with some exceptions when it came to music. Eiríkur Bergmann explains that when Iceland won full independence in 1944, the ‘*everlasting* independence struggle’, which he calls the *Icelandic Project*, began: ‘The duality of the national identity often creates tension between emphasis on *internal* independence and *external* recognition – between *isolationist* and *internationalist* approaches’ (2014, p. 188). This shows how the contesting narratives discussed in this study are an example

of wider tensions within the national identity of Icelanders, where there is a constant contest between the internal and external representations of Icelandicness.

Musical nationalism

Although folk songs were collected in Iceland to some extent²⁴, there is a different relationship to traditional music in Iceland than in many other European countries. European nationalism celebrated local culture, such as folk songs and traditional music, as important aspects of the nation. The traditional musical practices in Iceland, such as *tvísöngur* and *rímur*, declined in the late 19th century with the emergence of nationalism. Árni Heimir Ingólfsson argues that the modernization in Iceland ‘left people feeling ashamed of their “old-fashioned” traditional music’ (Ingólfsson, 2016). During the struggle for independence, the role of music was seen as a key to the prosperity of the nation, but it was important to have the ‘right’ kind of music:

The leaders in music in the latter half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century realised the political importance of music. If Iceland was to prosper, Icelanders had to adopt modern music, the music which was rooted in the bourgeois national culture of the West. The old Icelandic *rímur* tradition should be extinguished. The rhyme tradition was, according to them [the musical leaders], not an echo of a glorious past, but a symbol of poor intellectual and cultural circumstances of the Icelandic nation. This singing would have ruined the emotional life and aesthetics of the nation, and to be a free and independent modern nation, Icelanders had to get away from the past and learn the new music. Only then could Icelanders become a nation among nations and “keep their head high and be men among men” (Björnsdóttir, 2001, p. 13).

The traditional music was considered barbaric and uncivilised and should therefore be replaced by the European musical styles. The task of the composers at the turn of the century was to modernise the musical practices of the country and set music to the national poetry, similar to national songs of other Western nations. Poets had composed national poems since the Age of Enlightenment that depicted the country, its landscape and nature as as ‘pure’ and ‘unspoiled’.

²⁴ *Íslensk þjóðlög* (Icelandic Folk Songs) (1906) was published by Bjarni Þorsteinsson. In the prologue of the book he described the struggle with getting funding from the Icelandic government to publish the manuscript and in the end, it was funded by the Carlsberg foundation in Copenhagen, Denmark (p v-ix). This indicates how little the Icelandic government and society valued traditional music at the time.

This followed the traditions of the national romantic movement in Europe and supported the claim for independence. These poets often sought to draw out what was special about Iceland and its people.

During the presentation of a new constitution by the Danish king to the Icelandic nation in 1874, a choir performed with only foreign songs in its repertoire. When the king asked for something Icelandic, the choir master claimed that he did not know any Icelandic songs (Tobiasson, 1958, pp. 45–46). This was later regarded as a scandal, but as the struggle for independence edged closer to bearing fruit, composers became more encouraged to compose national songs (Pétursson, 1973, p. 18). The government took an active role in introducing arts into the nationalist discourse by providing artists with grants and scholarships to study abroad and subsequently return home to ‘produce images that visualised romantic attitudes towards Icelandic nature, both drawing on and readily feeding on, the nationalistic spirit of the times’ (Hálfðánarson and Rastrick, 2006, p. 104). The modernisation of Iceland became important during the struggle for independence as a way to demonstrate that Icelanders were modern, counter to the prevailing stereotypes that I discuss below.

Culture played an important role during the independence struggle and period of modernisation, as it worked to counter the barbaric stereotype of Icelanders and demonstrated to the world that the Icelandic nation was a modern society. This entailed the foundation of various cultural institutions that were needed for the nation to become ‘a nation among nations’ (Björnsdóttir, 2001, p. 13). The University of Iceland was founded in 1911 and was the first and only higher education institution in Iceland until the 1980s. Reykjavík’s Orchestra was founded in 1921 to celebrate a visit from the Danish king. It gave regular concerts from 1925 to 1930 and took part in the 1000 year anniversary of the foundation of Alþingi in 1930. In 1923 the National Theatre Trust was founded, and the Cultural Council and the Cultural Fund were established in 1928. And in 1930, a very important year in the cultural history of Iceland, RÚV and the Reykjavík College of Music (Tónlistarskólinn í Reykjavík) were founded, both of which can be considered cornerstones of culture and music in the country. Ingólfsson has argued that the country legitimised itself through culture (Ingólfsson cited in Ross, 2017). This process can be seen at work both on a domestic and international level:

The external and the internal factors – gaining the respect of other nations and enhancing the confidence of the local population as a nation – were of course

interlinked aspects of the same objective. To be an independent and sophisticated nation of equal standing to other ‘cultured nations’ was the yardstick of success in this context. Foreign recognition was to boost self-assurance of the nation, just as national confidence was to promote international acknowledgement (Hálfdánarson and Rastrick, 2006, p. 105).

At the turn of the century, politicians argued that artists were important for the nation, and it was worth supporting their further education. The arts were considered most useful if Iceland was their main subject matter. The majority of paintings from the first four decades of the 20th century depicted Icelandic landscape. These paintings, according to the politicians, could have two roles: to strengthen the nation by showing the landscape which the national poets had glorified, and to show the rest of the world that Icelanders were capable of entering the world stage in all of the arts (Helgason, 2016, p. 322).

In the period following independence in 1918, composers like Sveinbjörn Sveinbjörnsson (1847-1927) and Páll Ísólfsson (1893-1974) were preoccupied with making up for lost time by composing in the style of the classical and romantic masters. Later, Jón Leifs (1899-1968) who was one of the pioneers of modern Icelandic composition, sought to develop an ‘Icelandic sound’. He was the first Icelandic composer to combine elements of the Icelandic folk music tradition²⁵ (parallel 5ths and rímur melodies) with the European court and church musical tradition. He strove to create a special Icelandic compositional style, where the core energy of nature could sound in music, and he composed pieces named for waterfalls, volcanoes, geysers, and other local natural phenomena. Since Leifs, many composers seem to have followed suit in naming their pieces after the nature and landscape of Iceland and in using elements from the folk music tradition.

Popular music: from the margin to the centre

Popular music arrived in Iceland in the early 20th century (Hjálmarsson, 2012, p. 19). Jazz was performed beginning in the 1930s and was firmly rooted in the nation during the second world war, when Iceland was occupied by both British and American troops due to the occupation of Denmark by Nazi Germany. This caused tensions within Icelandic society as the occupation

²⁵ This met with some resistance due to the circumstances surrounding the traditional music explained above. This changed later, and modern composers have embraced the national/folk aspects.

(and jazz by extension) was seen as a threat to Icelandic national identity (Hall and Jónsdóttir, Forthcoming). Soldiers brought records with them, which they gave away to locals, and there was increasing demand for entertainment. All this impacted the local music life. The establishment of jazz in Icelandic society was met with resistance from the ruling elite, since jazz, and its origins in Africa, was regarded as being just as ‘barbaric’ as the rhymes and traditional music that they had sought to eliminate. Furthermore, although the leaders of Icelandic culture wanted to model themselves on international trends, jazz was not considered to be a desirable foreign influence (Hall and Jónsdóttir, Forthcoming). Furthermore, because of its barbaric origins, jazz was even considered a danger to Icelandic society and the national identity. Ólafur Rastrick has explained that due to ‘elements of unwanted foreign influence that were pervading and polluting authentic Icelandic culture [...] jazz thus serves as a rejected other in the process of constituting Icelandic identity as civilized’ (Forthcoming). Bergmann argues that the national identity places emphasis on formal sovereignty rather than being an equal partner in Europe (2014, p. 188), and this conflict between the idea of protecting the sovereignty of Iceland and taking part in the international world has dictated politics in Iceland.

Popular music continued to develop in the country and by the late 1950s, rock’n’roll emerged. To begin with, rock and pop groups modelled themselves on dominant Anglo-American acts (such as Icelandic versions of Elvis Presley and an Icelandic ‘Beatles’ band). By the end of 1969, new musical trends had emerged with more socially aware and serious bands dominating the 1970s (Hjálmarsson, 2012). Hjálmarsson has published the history of Icelandic popular music both in Icelandic (2012) and in English (2013) which cover the music’s development from early 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century.

Björk has argued that with the arrival of the punk scene in the late 1970s (Hjálmarsson, 2012, pp. 246–247), musicians began to have the courage of ‘just being themselves’ for the first time (Magnússon, 2007). Björk has claimed that a musical declaration of independence followed the emergence of punk, and it was only then that Icelanders dared to be proud of being Icelandic (Magnússon, 2007). Björk has put this into the context of national identity. Her argument is that it took two generations from the time Iceland received its full independence from Denmark in 1944 for people to realise what it meant to be Icelandic and to be proud of it. Here, she links music making directly to ideas of national identity, and she emphasises the importance of independence for the creativity of musicians. She explains that people used the power from the punk aesthetics to do things regardless of knowledge or capability, and that she and her fellow

musicians brought forth some kind of musical declaration of independence (Magnússon, 2007). She has explained this in more detail:

The problem that was yet to be solved when punk happened in Iceland was to define what it was to be Icelandic. It was a question of not forgetting about nature, how important that is. Not to forget about the mythology that we have, that is very strong in our culture. I think all of it went together in a quite explosive pot (Walker, 2003).

Nature and mythology are what Björk suggests should be the defining aspects of the Icelandic national identity. Kimberly Cannady has shown that the punk movement had strong connections to the old Norse religion *Ásatrú* and the traditional *rímur* (chanted poems) as musicians performed concerts with Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson, who would chant *rímur* (Cannady, 2018). The importance of nature can be seen in the Sugarcubes, who emerged from the punk scene and were the first Icelandic popular music group to become successful internationally, thus laying the foundation for the contemporary music scene in Iceland. The qualities that the Sugarcubes promoted and embraced, their quirky personalities and the use of Icelandic landscape and nature in their music videos, continue to be influential today and will be examined further in Chapter 4.

Björk, who was the main singer of the Sugarcubes, has been credited as being an important inspiration for the younger generation. Musician Ólöf Arnalds explained the influence Björk had on her: ‘For me, being a teenager and seeing everything that she [Björk] was doing and witnessing; this unbelievable individuality and grace and courage was tremendously inspiring’ (Grant, 2014). Sigtryggur Baldursson (musician and the director of the IMX) illustrates the importance of Björk: ‘Up till then [before Björk’s appearance on the world stage] the only cultural export that anyone knew anything about was literature. I would say that in the last twenty years that has changed quite a bit’ (Grant, 2014). Björk was the first popular musician from Iceland to use nature and references to national identity in her work, and Björk has claimed to be ‘inventing a specifically “Icelandic” music, where none previously existed’ (Dibben, 2009a, p. 59)²⁶. I argue that her use of nature pays homage to the artistic trends which

²⁶ In Dibben’s book there are chapters on both nature and nationalism, which suggests the importance of these issues in Björk’s artistic practice (2009a).

emerged during the struggle for independence, discussed above, but it was also a way to distinguish herself from other international musicians.

New representation of nature in national identity

We have no museums worth mentioning; we have no buildings worth viewing; we have no trained singers, no bands, no parks – in short; we must escape to the mountains with our guests as it is only nature which can entertain them not us or what we have accomplished (Páll Þorkelsson, 1907, cited in Helgason, 2016, p. 319).

Þorkelsson's attitude towards culture and nature is a good example of the importance nature had within the national identity at the beginning of the 20th century, and it clearly was the pride of the nation. Nature had a prominent role in Icelandic nationalism, exemplified in the national poems and songs created during the struggle for independence, as 'the home of the nation' and the 'motherland' (Hálfðánarson, 2007, p. 192). The attitude of Icelanders towards nature was moulded by the national-romantic ideology from the 19th century (Karlisdóttir, 2010, p. 28) and the national identity was seen to have its 'roots in the rural areas where the "green life tree" had originally been planted' (Matthíasdóttir, 2004, p. 143).

A new kind of nationalism has now emerged at the beginning of the 21st century, after a large part of the population has moved from rural to urban settings, which has influenced the relationship between humans and nature. The society has distanced itself from nature and the majority of the nation lives 'in man made surroundings and is mostly unaffected by whims of nature' (Hálfðánarson, 2007, p. 212). As the urbanites have become alienated and disconnected from what was felt to be 'true nature', nature has been personified in both social and political senses. An example of the political context can be found in a recent attempt to modernize and update the Icelandic constitution – a constitutional council suggested that the Icelandic nature should have human rights (Magnúsardóttir, 2012, p. 3). Nature has been placed on an untouchable pedestal. Guðmundur Hálfðánarson explains that this has a nationalistic reasoning; the clean, wild and untamed wilderness in Iceland, with its special character, is compared to the city's 'foreign' influences. 'When the Icelandic leaves the city and experiences nature, he/she renews its Icelandic identity' (Hálfðánarson, 2007, p. 211). Consequently, if Icelanders did not have access to rural wilderness, they would lose their sense of identity. Similarly, politicians have made the connection between the wilderness and the uniqueness of

Icelanders: ‘open space and wilderness nourish the Icelandic national identity, create our uniqueness and mould us into what we are’ (Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir former Minister for Foreign Affairs quoted in Karlsdóttir, 2010, p. 30).

Hálfðánarson explains that environmentalists have adopted the methods used in the fight for independence in Iceland around the turn of the 20th century (2007, pp. 213–214). Unnur Birna Karlsdóttir identifies new attitudes to nature conservation among certain Icelanders who feel that it does not fit the national image to harness power in the wilderness. Instead they want to promote the image of a leading nation that conserves its wilderness and beautiful, unspoiled nature. Thus, the wilderness has received a symbolic status in Icelandic national identity. It is believed that the wilderness makes Icelanders and Iceland special, and a ruined wilderness means that Icelanders will not be able to distinguish themselves from other Western nations (Karlsdóttir, 2010, pp. 234–235). I argue that nature is now just as important and central to the national identity of Icelanders as it was during the struggle for independence.

Icelandic popular musicians (and especially krútt musicians) have taken an active part in fighting for the conservation of the wilderness and have used similar methods employed in the struggle for independence a century earlier. This reflects the important relationship these musicians have with the nature of the country. Environmentalism in krútt music has been analysed by musicologists. Dibben (2017) explores how transnational music, such as the music by Björk and Sigur Rós, allows people to ‘develop a sense of environmental world citizenship’ (176) as the music communicates certain environmentalists’ beliefs. Tore Størvold (2018a) investigates how listeners’ experiences and relationships to Icelandic nature is impacted by the musical material of Björk, Sigur Rós and Valgeir Sigurðsson. Dibben and Størvold both reflect on the value that the musical materials bring to nature. I argue that the music of these artists (and the value that it brings) mobilises international audiences to not only protect the nature of Iceland, but to also protect what makes Icelanders distinctive. I build on this discussion in later chapters of this thesis, but my approach to environmentalism is different from that of Dibben and Størvold, as I am more concerned with tensions within the local context in Iceland. I explore this in relation to the political engagement of the krútt scene (Chapter 6) and representations of national identity and nostalgia (Chapter 7).

Ecomusicology, which developed in the late 20th century, links environmental issues with music studies, thus positioning music in a conversation with the environment (Allen, 2011;

Allen and Dawe, 2015). This field was previously dominated by the visual arts and Hicks *et al.* (2016) argue that the tendency to think about landscape in visual terms has meant that examining landscape through music has been neglected (p. 1).²⁷ However, there is a long history of representing landscape in classical music. George Revill (2012), for example, traces two distinct compositional approaches: the national romantic tradition and the experimental tradition of field recording that developed from R. Murray Schafer's work. It is not surprising that nature has been an important part of the scholarship on Icelandic music given the importance of nature in the national identity of Iceland, and the strong links made to it by musicians such as Jón Leifs and Björk²⁸. Dibben has written extensively about the use of nature and landscape in Icelandic popular music and music videos (2009b), in addition to writing about the connections Björk has to nature and landscape (Dibben, 2009a) discussed above. Korsgaard (2011) has shown how Björk has created a brand of Icelandic popular music, by 'indicating a relation between the music and the natural landscapes of Iceland' (p. 206). It is safe to say that scholarly interest in the relationship between music and the natural environment has increased in the last decade, perhaps alongside an increased awareness of the challenges of climate changes that face us.

The connection of landscape with music in the context of national identity is an important field of study (Grimley, 2006, 2011; Muller, 2016), where music is often regarded as having a national sound because of the landscape qualities it possesses. Mitchell (2017) has explored the relationship between landscape and music in Icelandic films in which he detects varying degrees of (self-) exoticisation. Cannady (2017) has studied the exoticism which has developed through the relationship of landscape and music, and she argues that popular music is now 'one of the foremost sites of exotic image making in Iceland' (2017, p. 201). This thesis draws upon this scholarly discourse and expands it through original case studies on the music scene in Iceland and the investigation of the contesting narratives of image and identity that emerge from both local and international perspectives.

²⁷ To that end, an international research network, Hearing Landscape Critically, was established, supported by a UK Leverhulme Trust Grant, to draw critical attention to the importance of sound in landscape.

²⁸ Recently, composer Anna Þorvaldsdóttir has described the influence that nature and landscape have had on her work (Lanzilotti, 2017), which shows that this is still an ongoing practice in Iceland.

Nostalgia and the Economic Collapse

Nostalgia became a dominating quality of the national identity in the aftermath of the economic collapse. During the subsequent recession there was a sharp turn away from consumerism, which had characterised Icelandic society, and towards a nostalgic past by reverting to old customs and traditions. The writer Guðmundur Andri Thorsson has remarked on this behaviour and regards it as symptomatic of the years after the collapse; the few strange old people who have lived in rural Iceland without communication with the rest of the nation have become role models (Thorsson, 2012). The inward-looking state is a reaction to the failed attempt to be part of the international landscape of finance and power. This longing, however, has not been reflected in changed patterns of habitation, as more people have actually moved to the capital area in Iceland than away from it over the last few years ('Búferlaflutningar eftir byggðakjörnum og kyni 2011-2016', 2017). The dream of going back to nature is more of an ideology than an actual act. It is nostalgia for a simpler life, like the 19th century ideals of 'pastoral' country life.

Nostalgia has become interwoven in contemporary life in Iceland in various ways, as exemplified by Icelandic design, which has drawn on nostalgic elements to represent 'Icelandicness'. Ólöf Gerður Sigfúsdóttir has explained: 'By using sheep wool, sheep horn, fish skin, and sometimes lava, designers use natural materials that represent "Icelandicness" in the sense that they are inseparable from the country's culture and nature' (2011, p. 366). Using traditional practices, references to folkloric tales, and raw materials in new design objects (for both locals and as souvenirs) links the product to 'pre-existing forms in cultural history of Iceland, thus creating a link to a remote past' (Sigfúsdóttir, 2011, p. 367). In this thesis (Chapter 7) I argue that nostalgia becomes an important part of the national identity of the nation during the period after the economic collapse, and I draw on Thorsson's idea about longing for rural Iceland. Dibben (2009b) has demonstrated that many Icelandic music videos depict rural and traditional characteristics, often treated nostalgically. John Richardson (2012) and Lawson Fletcher (2011) discuss nostalgic aspects of Sigur Rós's *Heima* that emerge through the way that time and space are treated. Although I agree with this notion, there are more elements that contribute to the sense of nostalgia in the film, including instrumentation, use of tradition, customs, and visual effects (Chapter 7). The nostalgic representation of Iceland in the film reflects the longing for the past described by Thorsson above, which can be dangerous if not treated critically. As Svetlana Boym (2001) explains, uncritical nostalgia can 'breed monsters'

(p. xvi) who are willing to kill for an imagined place that never existed. This is particularly relevant in the present battle between an isolationist and internationalist approach, not only in Iceland where this conflict has been active since the independence as discussed above, but also internationally where populist parties with isolationist agendas are gaining power.

Musical Exoticisms Beyond World Music

Having discussed issues of national identity in Iceland, I would like to move on to exoticism and place-making. I need to introduce what exoticism is and how it has worked in the context of Iceland before I begin examining musical exoticism. Exoticism can be defined as the ‘evocation of a place, people or social milieu that is (or is perceived or imagined to be) profoundly different from the accepted local norms in its attitudes, customs and morals’ (Locke, 2010, p. 1). There are plenty of travel accounts from people who travelled to Iceland as a part of their tour of ‘exotic’ places (see further Ísleifsson, 2011, 2015). In those accounts the power of representations is clear; through descriptions of behaviour and ways of living of ‘the uncivilised’, the civility of the readers in Europe and their identity as ‘real Europeans’ were reaffirmed (Hálfðánarson, 2014, p. 57). The image of Icelanders has long been tied up in the image of the North, but common concepts influencing the national identity stereotype process are centre-periphery and North-South. Historically, it was generally believed that the farther a place was from European civilization, the more barbaric its inhabitants were (Ísleifsson, 2011, p. 61). The stereotype of Icelanders has constantly been connected to nature and the natural world. In the 16th century they were described as ‘beastly creatures unmannered and untaught’ (Boorde, 1870, cited in Ísleifsson, 2011, p. 47). In the 17th century the outlook towards Icelanders had turned more positive and contemporary accounts describe them as simple folk, who ‘for the most part, are of plain and simple nature, living (as in the *Golden Age*) on that which nature gives them’ (Heylin, 1666, cited in Ísleifsson, 2011, p. 48). Similarly, in the 18th century they were portrayed as primitive and innocent, and in the 19th century Icelanders were represented not entirely as savage people, but they did not belong with ‘civilised people’ either (Loftsdóttir, 2012, p. 59).

Musical exoticism can be found in many aspects of musical works: in the sound world (discussed below), in song lyrics, as compositional titles, sets and costumes in operas, music videos, and promotional material (Locke, 2010, p. 1). Ralph P. Locke notes that even though the extra-musical material (such as the titles or costumes) evokes exoticism, many of the

musical works themselves are ‘musically indistinguishable from non-exotic compositions of the day’ (2010, p. 2). Locke has focused on how non-Western sounds have been incorporated into Western music, including gamelan music and the octatonic scale in art music, and influences from Caribbean and Brazilian music in jazz. Timothy D. Taylor argues that the way otherness was represented in music can be compared with ‘the colonial exploitation of natural resources’ (2007, p. 211). It was done to make the musical works more interesting and appealing. The way in which exoticism plays out in Icelandic music differs from Locke and Taylor’s description of musical exoticism, as it does not borrow or appropriate non-Western music, but rather draws on the othering processes and stereotyping of Icelanders and Iceland discussed above.

Taylor (2007) and Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (2000) connect exoticism in music to ‘world music’, or what Steven Feld describes as ‘third-world music’ ((Feld (2000) in Connell and Gibson, 2004, p. 354):

a ‘fetishization of marginality’ and an essentialist identification of cultural practices in developing countries with otherness itself. [...] This fetishization was part of a broader trend to seek out cultures that were stable and introspective, relatively untouched by processes of commodification, otherwise most evident in some forms of tourism, which exaggerate, reify and romanticize the extent to which any culture, and place, is isolated from others (Connell and Gibson, 2004, p. 354).

To some extent, the reception of Icelandic music has been through a ‘fetishization of marginality’ and has that in common with the ‘world’ music category as described by John Connell and Chris Gibson. Scholars pay little attention to the possibilities of exoticism appearing within a ‘first-world’ or ‘developed’ context. The processes of exoticism, essentialism and othering of world music described by these scholars can be applied to my study, even though Iceland does not fit within a ‘third world’ paradigm, and Icelandic popular music is never categorised as ‘world music’. According to Holt, people working in the indie music industry in the Nordic countries have avoided the label ‘world music’. This represents a ‘low-expectation category’, whereas the stereotypes of Nordic indie music have the reputation of being ‘quality music’ (2017, p. 69). Juxtaposing ‘low-expectation’ and ‘quality’ sends the message that the world music category is considered to be of lower quality than other musical categories that are not constantly being othered. Furthermore, musicians within that category might also struggle more with crossing over to the mainstream than those who are labelled as ‘indie’ due to the notions that ‘world music’ is different and does not appeal to wide audiences.

At the same time that popular music from the Nordic countries has largely avoided being labelled as ‘world music’, scholars have developed the term ‘borealism’ to describe the specific process of exotification in the North. This term was recently brought into scholarship discussing Iceland and national identity by Kristinn Schram as an appropriation of Edward Said’s term Orientalism (1979), which deals with distinctions between East and West and cross-cultural power relations. Similarly, borealism ‘is the signification, practice and performance of the ontological and epistemological distinction in power between North and South’ (Schram, 2011b, p. 99) and is a way to make sense of the images of the North or of Icelanders in the context of centres and margins (Schram, 2011a). Borealism has a longer history and can be traced back to eighteenth-century Europe. Philip Bohlman (2017) regards it as ‘a child of the Enlightenment born of ancient ancestors’ (p. 39), and explains that in the rise of borealism, ‘Europe’s foundational mythical past were sutured together to draw them from the peripheries and forge a future history that would become as modern as it was European’ (p. 40). This description is somewhat similar to the process Icelandic national identity went through during the struggle for independence, as discussed above.

Musical borealism, as theorised by Bohlman (2017), provides a new way of understanding Nordic musical history and

is both dependent upon and independent from European history. [...] The moments of musical borealism move between the everyday and the nation, the former timeless in our experience of it, the latter historical in our reckoning of the impact of the past on the present (p. 34).

Musical borealism, as I use it in the Icelandic context, enables us to analyse everyday musical practices through the historical context of the nation and the othering and exoticisation which takes place, both within the nation and internationally. Scholars writing about the North, and particularly Icelandic music and culture, have turned to this term when exploring exotic elements of music in connection with the post-colonial history of the North Atlantic region (Cannady, 2017), the Faroes Islands as an example of the ‘Nordic peripheries’ (Green, 2017), the exploitation of exotisation in music and Icelandic films (Mitchell, 2017), and in analysing Sigur Rós’s reception and their musical styles (Størvold, 2018b). This shows that the term has been adopted into scholarship on Icelandic popular music, but I further develop its use by investigating the local (historical and contemporary) context in which borealism is promoted and contested, which sometimes has been overlooked in these studies.

Tourism and co-construction of place making

Local musics have been used to represent nations in the global market place. They are a way to communicate some uniqueness of a nation to the international sphere, and are often linked to tourism initiatives:

Local musical differences have been appropriated and transformed into representations of the national, both within nations (by cultural elites and nationalists) and beyond the nation (as part of the trend toward exoticising culture). [...] These appropriations and clichés, while never absolute, present simplified versions of nationhood and ethnicity that ‘stick’ in global mediascapes, ‘postcard’ images that are as much related to national tourism campaigns as they are to sustained local cultures. Achieving notional homogeneity, and a ‘national music’, demands crude essentialism (Connell and Gibson, 2003, pp. 125–126).

The ways in which music is used in place making often simplify the complexities of local cultures, and a struggle over the representation of both music and place can occur within the local communities. The contesting narratives of the image of Icelandic popular music contribute to what Joshua Green has termed ‘co-construction’ of place-based identities (2017, p. 112), drawing on and further developing Daniel Chartier’s notion of ‘cross-cultural constructions of representations’ (2011, p. 513). Chartier explains that places exist both in reality and as representations. Iceland as a representation is

produced by different discourses, it should be regarded as “the idea of Iceland,” which must be understood, analyzed, and interpreted as a broad and complex combination of internal discourse (from Icelanders about themselves), external discourse (from foreigners about Iceland), and a variety of elements taken from pre-existing discourses (insularity, the North, Scandinavia, and many others) to which Iceland may be linked. The relationship between how it is perceived, what others consider it to be, and what Iceland considers itself to be must be taken into account, even if the fact remains that this confronts us, as always, with discursive representations, some of which are based in reality, whilst others are imagined (2011, pp. 513–514).

This perspective of competing representations derived from different sources supports my own approach of ‘contesting narratives’, which contribute to the co-construction of the image of popular music in Iceland. This is further confirmed by Schram’s findings about representations of Icelandic national identity, where he argues that ‘in contemporary times marked by international market forces, tourism and global media many Icelanders are not simply reluctant receivers of exotic representations but have actually become their active performers’ (Schram, 2011b, p. 228). These representations, developed through the complex process of co-construction, create identities, which inform the ways in which people experience others, as well as influencing what ‘we should be like, even what is appropriate behaviour for us’ (Kidd, 2015, p. 11).

Tourism industries take an active part in constructing these images, and as Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir (2011) explains, Icelandic tourism authorities have ‘invested heavily in constructing and developing Iceland’s image as a tourism destination’ (p. 537). This image has focused on nature, rather than culture and presents a ‘gaze from the distance, rendering an image of a slightly mysterious country far away in the bluish north’ (Gunnarsdóttir, 2011, p. 546). This is in line with images of Iceland constructed through, and promoted by, music videos (Chapter 4) and music documentaries (Chapter 7). The relationship between music and tourism in Iceland will be discussed further in Chapter 8, which shows how music can contribute to this process of place-making. The images and uniqueness of national scenes are often created from beyond the place itself and perpetuated by media (Connell and Gibson, 2003, p. 112 and 126). However, with regard to Iceland and as should be clear from the discussion above, I argue that these images are not only created from abroad but also through the contesting narratives that emerge from within the nation.

The construction of idealised places through music can be seen as a process which Andy Bennett terms ‘mythscape’. He explains that

in addition to visual images, music can also play a significant role in the construction of mythscales. Thus, the marketing of canonized ‘genres’ such as Cajun, blues and ‘world music’ has served to create a series of romanticized myths surrounding particular regions of the world as listeners use these musical styles as means of mapping out the relationship between social and geographical landscapes (2002, p. 89).

The process of transforming landscape (place) into a mythscape happens in steps, whereby a landscape is turned into mediascape through audio-visual representations (including music, music videos or music documentaries). These media representations become the primary mode through which audiences understand a place and update their current knowledge of the place.

The final step is when

[d]econtextualized images and information are recontextualized by audiences in to new ways of thinking about and imagining places – the result of which is a *mythscape*. The mythscape in turn begins to take on a life on its own – stories, discussion and anecdotes being linked to a place entirely in relations to that place’s representation as a mythscape (Bennett, 2002, p. 89).

Bennett argues that due to multiple opportunities to mediate and communicate via the internet, the constructs between music and place become easier to disseminate and recreate across the world (2002, p. 90). The process of place-making by translating landscapes into mythscales is relevant for this study, as it adds yet another dimension to the process of image creation of Icelandic popular music, a process almost identical to that described by one of my participants,

although the term ‘mythscape’ was not used. The representations of Iceland presented in the mythscape also contribute to the “Tourist Gaze” (Urry, 2002), and in Chapter 8 I give examples of tourists who visit specific sites in Iceland just because of a particular music video they saw.

Conclusion

I have shown how nationalism developed through the struggle for independence at the turn of the 20th century, and how claims of independence were made with reference to the long history of the nation and the significant literary achievements of the Golden Age. I have explained how tendencies towards megalomania on one hand, and an inferiority complex within the Icelandic national identity on the other is entwined in the insecurity of the nation when comparing itself to other, seemingly more cultured, nations. This is an example of contesting narratives of the Icelandic national identity, which, as I will argue in the thesis, impacts musical practises in various ways today. Cultural nationalism was an important part of the struggle for independence. It paved the way towards modernisation, which was the key to be considered a ‘nation amongst nations’. Popular music today has been built on this cultural nationalism and through the use of nature, landscape, and mythology, it can be seen to represent Icelandic national identity.

Furthermore, I have illustrated the central place nature has had both in Icelandic nationalism and national identity, both in the past and even today. Icelandic nature, represented by the wilderness, is considered to be at the core of Icelandicness and a way to distinguish the nation from other nations. As such, it needs to be protected and conserved in order to ensure that Icelanders retain their uniqueness on the international stage. Icelandic musicians have played an important role in nature conservation in Iceland and have been vocal about the importance of nature in Iceland. Nature has always been an important subject matter in Icelandic music and the musical practices today draw on traditions which were established during the struggle for independence which placed emphasis on depicting the nation through nature.

I have explained how Iceland has been exoticised through the ages and introduced common stereotypes of Icelanders which were constructed in Europe from the 16th century. Musical exoticism in Iceland does not follow the same conventions as other Western music but seems to have more in common with what has been coined ‘World music’. Popular music in Iceland, which has its roots in Anglo-American musical traditions, offers an example of musical

exoticism of a Western musical tradition. When discussing exoticism in the Icelandic context, I argue for the use of the term borealism, as it is more sensitive to specific Nordic contexts. Musical borealism allows for the analysis of everyday musical practices, with reference to both historical and contemporary contexts, and for the contesting narratives that emerge from both the local context and the international perspectives.

CHAPTER 4: REPRESENTATIONS AND MEDIATISATION OF MUSIC

It is quiet, it is tiny; you can hold it in the palm of your hand. It feels immediate, there is an immediacy to it. And it is interesting that the white screen glacial landscape is kind of the defining narrative for Icelandic music (Magnússon in Grant, 2014).

This is how musician and journalists Haukur S. Magnússon describes the music scene in Iceland. It is an example of the connection between music and nature that has become a prevailing image for Icelandic music and is the topic of this chapter. Places often become known because of the music created there. It is a common narrative in popular music writings, especially in rock music discourse, to find connections between ‘sites and sounds, for inspirations in nature and the built environment’ (Connell and Gibson, 2003, p. 91). Journalists, the music press, and music documentaries often search for geographical roots for certain musics, and musicians recount places as important influences for a certain ‘sound’ (Connell and Gibson, 2003, p. 91). Iceland is no exception to this and, to some extent, illustrates the potentially problematic aspect of linking music to place by selecting exotic imagery of nature.

This chapter focuses on how Icelandic music has been represented in various media and connected to its place of production, both by musicians themselves, in their music videos and other promotional material, and by documentary makers and non-Icelandic journalists. The aim of this chapter is to give insight into the contesting narratives of how music has been presented and connected to Icelandic nature through various formats and to show how this has affected musicians and their music making. It shows how the image of Icelandic music has been co-constructed through these processes. First, a few examples will be given of music videos and promotional material that feature nature and landscape in the visual material. Second, music documentaries about Icelandic music will be explored and the ‘placement’ of the music will be investigated. Third, the narratives that have been created about Icelandic music in international media and the questions and assumptions journalists make when interviewing musicians will be investigated. Finally, the benefits and limitations of the nature image in connection to Icelandic music will be analysed to understand how it affects the music making and identity of musicians.

Nature as a Key Component of the Icelandic Image

As discussed in Chapter 3, the image and representation of Iceland and Icelanders have often been bound up in the natural landscape of the country, and the notion that Icelanders are ‘natural people’, or have strong connections to the land, has been a recurrent theme in travel accounts from Iceland from the 16th century onwards. However, during the struggle for independence, emphasis was placed on the modernisation of the country and its people, and the nation’s leaders strove for a modern and civilised society. An example of this is the representation of Iceland at the World Expo in New York in 1939-40 where the city of Reykjavík was put into focus and presented as a modern city with a university and other modern institutions. In the 1990s the emphasis returned to the nature image, with renewed interest in Iceland from abroad (Ólafsson, 2012). Ann-Sofie N. Gremaud has argued that the nature image has in recent years been promoted by a group of urban people who had very little connection to nature:

This is a group that has spent most of its life in an urban landscape, either in Iceland or abroad, and has an urban outlook towards nature, as a magical phenomenon. The nature image which this group puts forth, in promotional material and can be seen in the art made by Björk, Sigur Rós and others, is appealing to a similarly urban group of foreigners who want to visit the country and experience it from this perspective. When I lived in Iceland it surprised me that it was only a very small and contained group of Icelanders who identify with these ideas, which are in the eyes of foreigners, the key characteristics of Icelanders. I noticed that people from the country side found it difficult to identify with the image of nature which artists such as Björk depict (Ann-Sofie N. Gremaud cited in Ólafsson, 2012).

What Gremaud describes is a narrow representation of Iceland and Icelanders and the tenuous connection to landscape and nature put forth by musicians and artists. This resonates more with how Iceland has been promoted and the international images of what Iceland is, rather than lived experiences by the inhabitants. Cannady has argued that

popular music is now one of the foremost sites of exotic image making in Iceland [...and the] exotic perception of the country [...] regularly evoked by foreign journalists as markers of difference. Today, music journalists, documentary filmmakers, and travel writers commonly link such descriptions

of the Icelandic landscape and folk beliefs to the sound of Icelandic music and the behaviour of musicians (Cannady, 2017, pp. 203–4).

This narrative is examined in the present chapter with the aim of drawing on the many examples where music and place are linked together by musicians, video and documentary makers, and journalists to understand how this narrative has been created and what impact the representations have on the music scene in Iceland.



Figure 7. A book placed in a mystical wilderness of Iceland. One of the images from Iceland’s promotional material for the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2011.

It is worth noting that the images of nature are often found when promoting Iceland abroad more generally, not only when it comes to music.²⁹

²⁹ A recent example is the use of Icelandic nature and landscape in the Netflix TV series *Strongland* (Sansom, 2018) in the episode which investigated Iceland. The TV series investigates the roots of ‘strongman’ traditions. Icelandic Cinema and TV series have also used nature and landscape on a regular basis, and the beginning of the second season of the TV series *Ófærð (Trapped)* (Kormákur, 2018) is an example of that. Mitchell (2017) has written about the use of landscape in Icelandic films. On January 25th 2019 Icelandair announced a new in-flight beer. This was advertised on ‘Iceland Naturally’ (further discussed in Chapter 8) and the image was of the beer on snow-covered ground with mountains in the background. The image on the beer can is also of nature (‘Icelandair announces new in-flight beer!’, 2019).

One example is the promotional material for the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2011 where Iceland was the ‘guest of honour’.³⁰ The promotional material placed books in various natural landscapes, including mystical wilderness (Figure 7), and wove them into waterfalls and in columnar basalt (Figure 8).

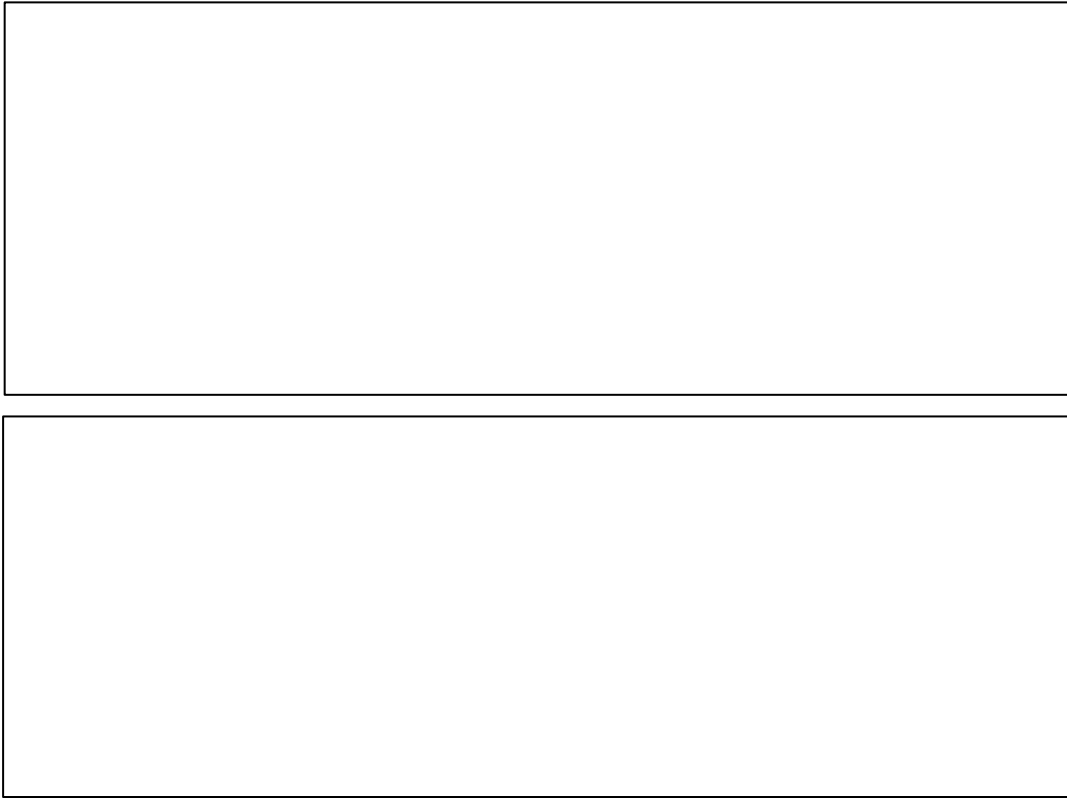


Figure 8. Images from the official website for the Iceland’s participation in the Frankfurt Book Fair 2011. Books are placed in the landscape and become part of it. Here books become columnar basalt and a waterfall.

It has been argued that this honour was used as a chance to reinforce a certain image of Iceland, where

external projections and exotification were promoted as self-image, carrying undertones of hyper-Nordic exceptionalism, and used strategically in a sales context. In general, the representations draw on the ancient tradition in European culture of viewing Iceland as a place associated with myths, saga literature and explosive forces of nature (Gremaud, 2014, p. 85).

³⁰ Each year at the Frankfurt Book Fair one country has been selected as the ‘guest of honour’ and has a central place in the fair. Through that, the country receives extra attention from the publishing world, and the idea is that this can encourage cultural exchanges and increase tourism.

Another aspect of this nature image is folklore which has its place in the national psyche. The folklore about elves and *huldufólk* (hidden people)³¹ is still alive in Iceland. Although there are few people in Iceland who believe in elves, research shows that few people are also willing to deny the idea of elves all together (Gunnell, 2008). Perhaps this is more a tribute to the respect people have for the Icelandic folklore, since I have never personally met anyone who claims to believe in elves or hidden people. However, the folklore is a part of the lure of Iceland and is central to the image of the country. Foreign media outlets and Icelandic media outlets that cater to foreigners, such as the Reykjavík Grapevine, frequently report on issues of elves and their potential dealings with humans, which probably contributes to the steadfast presence of the idea (Jacobs, 2013; O’Sullivan, 2016; Rogers, 2016). In an article about Icelandic music and musicians from 2001, Rob Young interviewed Hilmarsson who was collaborating with the band Sigur Rós. He describes the folk belief as follows:

Icelanders converted nominally to Christianity 1000 years ago, but they never really *did* it. So we’ve had the old gods, they live through the folklore, they live through all these different customs, and you find out that the majority of the population believes in elves and power spots and stuff like that. So in a way, the invisible world is always with us. We believe in it. I think magic and ritual works only if you believe in it (Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson cited in Young, 2001, p. 33).

The idea that Icelanders are connected with nature, together with the nation’s folklore, contributes to another aspect of the image of Icelanders as quirky or weird. Interviews with musicians about folk beliefs, such as the one cited above, can be seen to further strengthen the links between musicians and these notions. These aspects have become a part of a general image of Iceland and Icelanders today.

Representing Iceland Through Nature in Music Videos and Promotional Material

Musicians have made use of similar signifiers of Iceland in promotional material and music videos, and this technique has become fairly common. It shows that musicians take an active part in constructing images of the popular music by using the natural environment of the

³¹ Huldufólk, or hidden people, in Icelandic are types of elves who look like humans but have fairer complexions and are usually more attractive and better dressed than their human counterparts. They often live in rocks and entice humans to their abodes with their singing.

country in their works. Dibben studied Icelandic music videos and concluded that about half of the videos surveyed had clear signifiers of Iceland, of which nature references were particularly noticeable (Dibben, 2009b, p. 135). In this section, several bands will serve as examples of these links between music and nature, from the Sugarcubes' 'Birthday' song of 1988, to songs by Kaleo and Vök from 2016. However, the focus will be on Björk and Sigur Rós, as these are the two artists who have received the most critical and commercial success internationally and have also been written about the most internationally. They have also been influential for other bands and provided a model for others to draw on.

The Sugarcubes

The Sugarcubes was one of the first bands from Iceland to become known outside of the country. It has been described as Iceland's 'first universally known—even famous— rock band' (Hjálmarsson, 2011). The song which seemingly attracted the world's attention was 'Birthday', which became the 'Single of the Week' in both *NME* and the *Melody Maker* when released in 1987. The band was subsequently featured on the cover of both of these weekly music publications (Hjálmarsson, 2011).

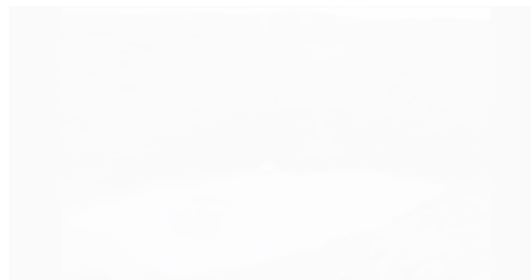


Figure 9. Stills from 'Birthday' video by the Sugarcubes where natural signifiers of Iceland can be seen.

The video accompanying the song 'Birthday', directed by film maker Friðrik Þór Friðriksson and the Sugarcubes themselves, featured many of the phenomena which have since become regarded as clichés (see Figure 9). During the four-minute long video the viewer is shown waterfalls, black sand shore, snow-caped mountains, geysers, volcanic eruptions, cliffs by the shore, the blue lagoon, and icebergs in Jökulsárlón. Due to the camera work, the viewer's experience is that of flying over the terrain, accompanying the raven which is featured throughout the video. These images blend in with images of the band walking around Reykjavík, floating on a small boat in a volcanic crater, and sitting at a table outside in Reykjavík with Esjan, the local mountain, as a backdrop. One could argue that this video influenced how Icelandic music went on to be interpreted by foreign music critics and audiences. Music writer Gunnar Lárus Hjálmarsson has argued that since 'music from Iceland was an exotic novelty, most of the interviews became a tourism promotion for Iceland. [...] This would be the standard style of Icelandic music coverage for decades to come' (2011). An early example of international coverage of Icelandic music is an article from 1988 in *Rolling Stone* by journalist David Fricke. Here, the importance of the natural environment is emphasised when he describes the surroundings on his way from the airport to the Sugarcubes' studio:

To the south a jagged checkerboard carpet of new-fallen snow and jet-black lava stretches out to a distant wall of icy mountains and extinct but still quite menacing-looking volcanoes rising up to meet the gray winter morning's sky. Stiff winds blow wispy curtains of snow across the barren plain, while occasional puffs of white steam on the horizon bear witness to the violent level of geothermal activity taking place just beneath the earth's surface, resulting in the hot springs, geysers and mud pools that dot the country's interior (Fricke, 1988).

Interestingly, Fricke's description includes most of the nature phenomena which could be seen in the 'Birthday' song. After this introduction to the landscape he moves on, expressing his amazement that anything could exist in such a strange place: 'In short, it's hard to believe anything with a beat could grow in a landscape as otherworldly and physically inhospitable as that of Iceland. Mother Nature, in all her harshest majesty, is the headline act here. She is not easily upstaged' (Fricke, 1988). Fricke's use of the word 'grow' here is noteworthy. By using the metaphor of music growing (or not growing) in the landscape like a plant, he ties music and landscape together in an organic way. Later in the article he makes the connection between

the music and place once again when he states that ‘the Sugarcubes make music that is very much like Iceland itself, a collision of extremes that can be at once forbidding and mysteriously compelling’ (Fricke, 1988).

This way of connecting music to the nature and landscape of Iceland by foreign journalists had become standard practice by the 21st century, but it remains an area of contention, as will be shown below. Fricke’s article also gives some indication of the importance of the Sugarcubes for the music scene that would emerge in Iceland in the following decades. Cannady argues that Fricke’s writing ‘demonstrates a specific way of associating Icelandic popular music with place that echoes earlier discourse of othering and temporal differentiation’ (2017, p. 208). Fricke’s writing is thus not only important for the tradition of journalistic writings that would develop on Icelandic popular music, but it can also be linked to the early travel writings discussed in Chapter 3. Cannady explains that through the discourse created by music journalists and documentary makers, ‘Iceland is portrayed as inherently set apart from modern Europe, [and] is rooted in Iceland’s postcolonial inheritances’. She uses the documentary *Screaming Masterpiece* (discussed below) as an example of where the discourse created ‘paints a picture of Iceland in which nationalism, heritage, landscape, and paganism seem to be on the tip of every musician’s tongue. The viewer, however, remains unaware of the degree to which this is a carefully and strategically cultivated image’ (Cannady, 2017, p. 209). Therefore, journalists arguably are not investigating the discourse about music and nature but creating it. One early example of the exoticisation of Icelandic musicians was an interview with Björk and Einar Örn Benediktsson from the Sugarcubes undertaken in the UK in the late 1980s:

It was a TV interview that Björk and I did in press tour number two around the UK for ‘Birthday’. We were placed in these massive chairs so we seem like very small people, our feet were dangling about a meter above the floor. Then the interviewer was always in a separate shot and was never seen with us, so one could not see the ratio between us and him. We just appeared as these tiny people. The day following the broadcast, Derek [Birkett at One Little Indian] got a call asking ‘Where did you find them? Are they all so small?’ We had nothing to do with this, we were just placed in these circumstances, placed in these chairs as miniatures (Einar Örn Benediktsson, Personal Communication, 05/04/2016).

Benediktsson is recounting an experience he had when the international media deliberately went out of its way to exoticize him and Björk when they were in the Sugarcubes, and the link to folklore can be seen here again. The Sugarcubes were one of the first Icelandic bands to reach international audiences, and the way they portrayed themselves, and were represented in international media, had an impact on the world's knowledge and understanding about Iceland and the Icelandic music scene.

Björk

When the Sugarcubes disbanded in late 1992, the band members went their own way and worked on different projects. The Sugarcubes' best known member, Björk, released her debut album in 1993. Björk has often emphasized the importance of nature for her music and even described the music on *Homogenic* as having 'volcanic beats' and 'patriotic strings' (Walker, 2003). The video, directed by Michel Gondry for the song 'Jóga' on the *Homogenic* album, depicts various vistas of Icelandic landscape. Here, as in parts of the 'Birthday' video, the viewpoint is a bird's-eye view, with the viewer flown over various forms of landscape, including barren highlands, snow covered mountains, geothermal areas, lush valleys with rivers flowing and moss-covered lava fields. Björk is only present at the beginning of the song, where she lies on a black sand beach, and at the end where she stands on a mountain. There, her chest is opened up to reveal the landscape inside.

Björk has been very vocal about her relationship with Iceland and how the country has influenced her music making. In the film *Inside Björk* the singer sits in a rubber dinghy in Jökulsárlón (the Glacial Lagoon) and explains this relationship: 'I think that the biggest influence Iceland has had on my music is organic. This thing with twenty-two-hour daylight in the summer and darkness in the winters. Absolutely normal. And Icebergs and eruptions and no trees at all, is the way it should be' (Walker, 2003). Björk emphasises elements of Iceland which might be the most unique and unfamiliar to those living outside of the country. These are the elements which have come to characterise the image of the country from the outside but do not necessarily play a large role in everyday life. Volcanic eruptions do not happen every day in Iceland and icebergs can only be found in one place in the country, where the filmmaker chose to position Björk in this interview. The extremities of the country are highlighted and Björk explains that these have had an organic influence on her music making. Although the significance of this relationship is not clear from the quote, it serves as a reminder

that Björk traces the roots of her music making to her Icelandic background and communicates her uniqueness and difference. Later in the interview Björk explains her relationship to Iceland in more detail:

Iceland probably affected a lot how I sing. Because I did spend a lot of time as a kid in nature. The way I sang would just form itself. It was definitely not influenced by other singers. Just walking outside to school or maybe in blizzards it just happened. And you would walk and there would be no wind and you could be all quiet and whispery. And you would sneak down next to the moss and maybe sing a verse and then you would stand up and run to a hill and then sing a chorus. You had to do that quite loudly because the weather was strong (Björk Guðmundsdóttir in Walker, 2003).

Here she connects her singing to both weather and landscape and removes it from human influences, further strengthening the connection between music and nature. She also portrays herself as a strange child running around in nature and singing out loud. Although it is not specified in the quote, the impression she gives by referencing the moss is of rural surroundings. The image offered is one of a child of nature, which seems to be the image she has cultivated throughout her career. In 2014 she reiterated the importance of Iceland for her in a radio programme about Icelandic music made by musician John Grant, who has been based in Iceland for several years:

Iceland is what I'm made of. And I thrive best knowing that I can wake up in the morning and take a taxi for ten minutes and then I'm in the middle of the lava with the waterfall and am surrounded by nature and I can sing at the top of my voice and nobody knows (Björk in Grant, 2014).

In addition to the importance of the natural environment of Iceland for Björk, she also commented on how folklore is a part of the Icelandic psyche: '[Iceland], it is a little bit like a fairy tale really, with Harpa [the concert house in Reykjavík] and mountains all around and a very strong belief from the people in nature and elves. It's like a story telling nation basically' (Björk in Grant, 2014). The folklore aspect will be further discussed below and is something that non-Icelandic journalists seem to be fascinated by. This is something which breaks away from the norm and offers a new way of representing an artist and is a useful way to distinguish her from other artists. The journalistic writing on folklore contributes to borealism and ideas of the north in general, which were discussed in Chapter 3.

Sigur Rós

Sigur Rós is another band that has on various levels used Icelandic nature and landscape in their extra musical material. The band is central to this thesis and is further discussed in Chapter 6, which focuses on krútt, and the film *Heima* by Sigur Rós is the case study of Chapter 7. The band was formed in 1994 and released its first album, *Von* (e. Hope), in 1997.

Figure 10. Various promotional photos of Sigur Rós in Icelandic nature and landscape.

Their second album, *Ágætis byrjun* (e. A Good Beginning), which was released in 1999, was successful internationally, and the band promoted it on tour with Radiohead as their supporting act. They have released seven studio albums, written music for films and a Merce Cunningham dance piece, and collaborated on several projects, including a traditional Icelandic rímur project with the performer Andersen (discussed in Chapter 3). At the turn of the century their music was heard in the Cameron Crowe film *Vanilla Sky* and TV programs such as *24*, *CSI* and *Queer as Folk*. Since then their music has been in several TV programs and films, including the *Simpsons* in 2013, where the band wrote most of the music for an episode and was featured in

the plot. The music can be categorised as ambient post-rock, and Jónsi, the singer, uses a cello bow to play the guitar, which has become one of the trademarks of the band. Another trademark is Jónsi's falsetto singing, which in the early days coincided with a made-up language that journalists coined 'Hopelandic' (play on the words Icelandic and hope, which was the first album of the band).³²

Their promotional material has had a strong connection to Iceland's natural environment, and they are often situated in this environment on photographs. Figure 10 gives an insight into how Sigur Rós has been related to nature through promotional photos. In these photos the band is seemingly alone and undisturbed by other people, and the natural environment is void of any human signifiers, such as roads, cars, buildings or other things that might remind the viewer of the human inhabitants of the country. This has a role in strengthening the idea that music is linked to nature and folklore, similar to how Björk described the influence of nature on her singing. One example of how Sigur Rós has used Iceland in their audio-visual projects is the video for the song 'Glósóli' from 2005, directed by Arni & Kinski.

Figure 11 shows stills from the video, where children are at play in Icelandic wilderness, passing lava fields, geothermal areas and fields. In the video, time is unclear as markers of both the Icelandic past and present can be seen. The children are not wearing modern clothes, which suggests to the viewer that the video is set sometime in the past. However, ruins of an old car are shown, and children cross a modern tarmac road, which positions the video in modern times. Another interesting aspect is how the children are presented. They seem to appear from rocks, they have fair complexions and are well dressed. This can be seen as an homage to the folk belief of hidden people in Iceland as the children's appearance is similar to the descriptions of hidden people. At the end of the video when the children fly, it becomes clear that they are not human, or at least that the laws of nature do not apply to the place created in the video.

³² For further information on the ambience of the band see (Mitchell, 2009) and on the effects of the falsetto singing in Sigur Rós's music see (Miller, 2003).

Figure 11. Stills from the video of 'Glósóli' by Sigur Rós.

Sigur Rós has used Iceland as a stage for various music videos and in writings about their music, journalists and scholars emphasise the importance of their natural surroundings: 'Sigur Rós's music could be said to embody, express or evoke sonically [...] the remote isolation of their Icelandic location' (Mitchell, 2009, p. 188). The notion that their music is somehow glacial is one of the most frequent ideas (Prior, 2014, p. 4). Sigur Rós's film *Heima* [e. At home] from 2007 played a large role in strengthening the band's relationship to Iceland and will be discussed further in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

Figure 12. Promotional material for Sigur Rós's 'Route One' project.

Another project where Iceland is central is 'Route One', which took place on the summer solstice of 2016 (see Figure 12). It was described on the YouTube streaming site as follows:

sigur rós will be unveiling a 24-hour 'slow tv' event live on iceland's national television – and streaming live globally via youtube – set to a constantly evolving soundtrack based around elements of new song óveður. [...] driving anti-clockwise round the island, the journey will pass by many of the country's most notable landmarks, including vatnajökull, europe's largest ice-sheet; the glacial lagoon, jökulsárlón; as well as the east fjords and the desolate black sands of möðrudalur (Sigur Rós, 2016).³³

Under the band's soundtrack, the viewer was driven around Iceland on the ring road, stopping, for instance, to add more petrol, and taking a quick detour to enjoy Jökulsárlón, the glacial lagoon. Important places were indicated to the viewer by writing the name and showing location of the place with a small red dot on a small map of Iceland. The context of this place within the journey was presented by placing an arrow on a line that represented the entire journey. Figure 13 shows an example of this.

³³ All texts which come from Sigur Rós's official platforms are written without capital letters. In direct quotations, I retain the original style.

Figure 13. A still from Sigur Rós's 'Route One'. Information about the name of the place and location and context within the journey is provided.

It is unclear whether the band is trying to compose music about Iceland, or of Iceland, or if the aim is to create sound that somehow represents the nation. In addition to using Iceland as a stage or a visual counterpart to their music, some song names have connections to Iceland. For instance, on Sigur Rós's album *Kveikur* from 2013 there are songs named 'Brennisteinn' (e. Sulphur), 'Hrafninn' (e. Obsidian), 'Ísjaki' (e. Iceberg) and 'Stormur' (e. Storm). Sigur Rós also provided the soundtrack to an episode of *The Simpsons*, where the narrative took place in Iceland and the images of the natural landscape of Iceland appeared through familiar representations (Figure 14).

The fact that the band was to appear on *The Simpsons* was widely discussed in leading US and UK music magazines (*Pitchfork*, *Consequence of Sound* and *NME*) leading up to the premier of the episode in May 2013. On Sigur Rós's homepage it was stated that

sigur rós have scored part of an upcoming episode of the simpsons. the episode, which will feature new, original music by sigur rós, as well as their take on the simpsons' theme song, will air on may 19th. in the episode, entitled "the saga of carl," homer, moe, lenny, and carl team up to buy a winning lottery ticket, but after carl snags the ticket and flees to his home country of iceland, the guys head there in hot pursuit. the band's music scores homer's visit to iceland, marking an unprecedented musical collaboration between the

show and a band; with this episode, sigur rós have written and performed more original music for the simpsons than any other outside band in the show's history³⁴ (Sigur Rós, 2013b).

Figure 14. Stills from the Simpsons episode 21, season 24, where Homer and friends go to Iceland. The images show natural phenomena that Iceland is known for, trolls and elves, Reykjavík city, traditional Icelandic food, traditional woolly jumpers, and Sigur Rós.

³⁴ The grammatical errors are kept as they appear in the original source.

The Simpsons' creator Matt Groening is also cited, stating: 'i'm a longtime fan of sigur rós, and we're honored to bring their icelandic, ambient moods to our goofy cartoon show' (Sigur Rós, 2013b). It seems as though Groening wanted to incorporate an 'Icelandic sound' into the sound track since the narrative took place in Iceland, which is why he sought out Sigur Rós for collaboration. This shows how it has become such a familiar way of representing Icelandic musicians. Homer, Lenny and Moe experience some adventures whilst in Iceland and get to know some of the local people and the landscape. They also adopt the local fashion, as they are all seen to wear the traditional woolly jumper, and they use the traditional food to torture Carl for information, to which Carl replies: 'No, no! Anything but the inedible, repulsive food of my native land!' The Icelandic sagas play a large role in the narrative and northern lights; elves and hidden people are also depicted. These signifiers of Iceland are similar to those depicted in the music videos discussed above and also to those that appear in the film *Heima*, discussed in Chapter 7.

In addition to the audio-visual representation in Sigur Rós's output, the merchandise from the band also shows a willingness to link the music to Icelandic nature. In their online store it is possible to purchase scented candles to experience 'Instant Iceland':

The smoky, slightly briny smell of a flotsam campfire on a distant black beach under a wan midnight sun. And, most recently, the smell of Sigur Rós's studio, while they go about the quasi-mystical business of making the magic happen. Specially developed to the band's olfactory specifications, this candle burns for 35 evocative hours of "instant Iceland", or something like that (Sigur Rós, 2013c).

The tone of the description seems to poke fun of the band's image by referring to 'quasi-mystical business', and the band seems to be parodying their own links between music and landscape, whilst at the same time capitalising on it. It seems as if the band would like to engage as many senses as possible, by adding the sense of smell to the experience. In April 2017, the band introduced yet another product that can be seen to engage other senses; in collaboration with cannabis brand Lord Jones they produced cannabis gumdrops which were named 'Wild Sigurberry' and 'inspired by the flavors of foraged icelandic berries – wild blackberries, strawberries and blueberries' (Sigur Rós, 2017). Here the emphasis is still on Iceland, as the flavour is inspired by Icelandic berries. As a result, one could see Iceland via Sigur Rós's visual

material, hear Iceland in their music, smell Iceland with their candle, and taste Iceland in the gumdrops, thus providing a multisensory experience of Iceland.

Sigur Rós seems to have become synonymous with Iceland and actively incorporate images of nature and landscape into their visual material. Størvold has explained that when Sigur Rós appear on the international music scene, listeners and critics ‘mobilized the readily available mythscape surrounding Iceland when describing their music: Norse mythology, arctic landscape, and the (often misconstrued) folk beliefs of Icelanders became props deftly employed in portraying the band as an exotic anomaly on the current indie music scene’ (Størvold, 2018b, p. 371). This reception was similar to how the Sugarcubes and Björk had been received two decades earlier. The ways to listen to and experience the music were almost predetermined, and this is in line with how other Icelandic bands and artists had been received before Sigur Rós appeared. Størvold demonstrates, however, that the metaphorical language used to describe the band and its music can be connected to some of the musical elements in his analysis of the track ‘Svefn-g-englar’ (1999). He argues that the experience of spaciousness and ‘unearthliness’ might be due to the use of the falsetto in the voice and timbral qualities of the bowed electric guitar (Størvold, 2018b, p. 389). Thus, the image people have of the band due to its connection to Iceland is further confirmed by their sonic output, which can be categorised in the post-rock genre, where ‘exoticism’ and ‘grandeur’ are key elements (Hibbett, 2005, p. 65). As shown above (and will be discussed further in Chapter 7), Sigur Rós has nurtured this reception by providing its listeners and critics with a steady stream of extra-musical material linking them to the country. As a marketing process, this is known to be a successful way to promote Icelandic products. However, Sigur Rós’s connection to Iceland seems to go beyond simple marketing ploys, as the respect they show, and the environmental protection activism they have partaken in, suggest a deep appreciation and even awe of the country from which they come.

Regardless, they have made efforts to distance themselves from the links to nature and landscape. One example is an interview with bassist Georg Holm in *Vanity Fair* where he states: ‘It’s a boring cliché. We live in Reykjavík. We’re not thinking about glaciers and volcanoes’ (Georg Holm cited in Helmore, 2005). Similar statements came out during my fieldwork, where musician María Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir, from the band Amiina and wife of Kjartan Sveinsson, former keyboard player in Sigur Rós, explained: ‘My husband, Kjartan, says that people really took off with *Ágætis byrjun* [1999] to connect it to nature, which he

found really curious because it was all written and recorded at night in a windowless basement' (Sigfúsdóttir, Personal Communication, 31/03/2016). These statements are interesting as they do not reflect the artistic practice of the band, as the examples above show, but instead they speak to the limitations musicians can feel if discussed in these terms. The music is not being critically addressed when the only comments from journalists and critics are about the nature and landscape of the country. These limitations will be addressed later in this chapter, but Sigfúsdóttir commented on them:

When this ball starts rolling [the connection to nature], it is difficult to turn it around. It has been difficult for people to not only be musicians but always Icelandic musicians and wherever you go, you are also promoting Iceland [i. landkynning]. If you are going to get any finances, you need to sell yourself as that [promoting Iceland] and then you have shot yourself in the foot because you have become a promotor for Iceland, but you didn't want to be (Sigfúsdóttir, Personal Communication, 31/03/2016).

This quote illustrates the complicated relationship musicians have to Iceland and tensions that emerge in this context. Musicians appreciate the country and want to present it through extra-musical materials, thus drawing on the already established traditions of representations. However, they do not want to act out clichés and be branded as 'promoters of Iceland' [landkynning]. This is something that will be discussed further in this chapter, as well as some of the subsequent chapters. It should be clear that it is not only the journalists and the media that create the link between music and nature, but the artists themselves foster these connections, most likely as a way to distinguish themselves from others in an oversaturated market.

Other examples

Two recent examples of musicians that use nature and landscape in their music videos are indie-pop-electronica band Vök, and rock/blues band Kaleo. In Vök's video from 2016 for the song 'Waiting' the band appears in various 'Icelandic' settings such as on cliffs, on a black beach, in geothermal areas, and by glaciers. Kaleo made two 'live' videos in 2016 that are also of interest. One is filmed inside the volcano Þríhnúkagígur, and the other is filmed on an iceberg in the glacial lagoon Fjallsárlón. In these instances, the bands are performing alone in the landscape and there are no reminders of human inhabitants, which again separates them from other humans and further strengthens the link to nature, similar to the examples of Björk

and Sigur Rós. This gives the viewer the impression that Iceland is an untouched wilderness. Discussion about the use of landscape imagery in music videos and promotional material came up during my fieldwork. These two bands and examples were brought to my attention by Thorsteinsson. From her experience with working at the IMX, it had become ‘uncool’ to use this kind of imagery for promotion, but ‘if you make a video with beautiful Icelandic mountains, people will watch it. It is such good content’. She also explained that musicians play into these ‘clichés’ because they work so well. She told a story about a friend who manages the social media of a band that had just released a music video which ‘had a lot of nature in it’. The friend expected people to react really negatively to it because of the use of these images. Thorsteinsson explained that this was because ‘so many people hate these clichés so much and try actively to fight against them’ (Thorsteinsson, Personal Communication, 4/7/16). Kaleo has been based in the US since 2015. Their use of unique geological signifiers of Iceland as a way to distinguish themselves as Icelandic musicians has seemingly been successful.

Not only Icelandic artists have filmed their music videos in Iceland. The American indie-folk band Bon Iver released a video for the song ‘Holocene’ in 2011, which is somewhat reminiscent of ‘Glósóli’. In the video a child is roaming around the Icelandic wilderness, and it seems to be set in the past. Just as in many of the other videos, the viewer is taken to familiar sites, including a glacial lagoon, over black sands and cliffs, and by glaciers and lava fields. Justin Bieber, in the video for his song ‘I’ll Show You’ from 2015, goes down a similar path where he is running alongside canyons, by waterfalls and cliffs and ends up in the very same glacial lagoon for a swim. Bieber’s video caused some controversy in Iceland, especially in the communities where the video was shot, and it inspired an article in *Guide to Iceland* titled ‘5 reasons not to behave like Justin Bieber in Iceland’. The author of the article explained the perils of Bieber’s behaviour in the music video, including the dangers of swimming in the glacial lagoon. She also criticised the choice of locations in the video and explains:

It’s somewhat ironic that the title of the song is ‘I’ll show you’, but then the video is shot in the most typical locations in Iceland, all along the main ring road in the south. They are all gorgeous of course, but we feel that for the budget of making a music video for such a famous, well-financed, international star, he might want to go somewhere out of the beaten path. On the other hand Bieber seems to be making an easier version of Bon Iver’s Holocene music video and throwing in some Walter Mitty’s skateboarding

scenes for good measure. FYI, skateboarding is really not the most useful transport method in Iceland - and you'll probably ruin it on the volcanic sand.

It does look cool in a video however (Gunnarsdóttir, 2015).

With regards to the critique of the locations chosen in the video, it is clear that Bieber is drawing on established ideas of what Iceland is and how this location should be communicated to the viewers. Bieber was also criticised for not being attentive to environmental concerns, as the areas he had to cross in order to reach some of the locations have been closed off to foot traffic for protection reasons. He was also seen rolling around in very delicate moss in Eldhraun that can easily be destroyed beyond recovery. These concerns were discussed in local media in the context of tourism, as the video could possibly inspire people to flock to Iceland to experience the same locations (Fontaine, 2015; Sigurðardóttir, 2015).

It should be emphasised that the examples above demonstrate the most striking cases of the use of typical or even clichéd images of Iceland. In these videos, the natural environment of Iceland, its nature and landscape are presented mostly as untouched by human intervention, and musicians position themselves in this space as performing in or even for the landscape. The depictions are all of rural areas and seem to follow a similar path, thus showing examples of phenomena that Iceland is best known for: hot springs, glaciers, snow covered mountains, waterfalls, glacial lagoons, and even volcanic eruptions.

These videos influence people's ideas of what Iceland is like and inspire them to want to go to the country as a result. On the video comment threads for both the Bieber and Bon Iver's videos, there are various comments from those who wonder where the video was shot and describe a longing to go to Iceland. This is also the case with the Icelandic musicians. One example can be seen in the comment thread on the video for 'Glósóli'; in September 2016 someone wrote: 'I'm going to Iceland in June and this music video and band has been my inspiration for over 12 years!! can't believe I'm finally making my dreams come true :D.' This person received 45 replies. In September 2017, another commenter wrote: 'I went to Iceland for a week last year. An almost mind bendingly beautiful country with people who are vastly more in touch with their surroundings. It's a wonderful, wonderful place and I'd like to go back again someday.' These online discussions can be seen to further strengthen the experience the viewers have of the music videos and the representations of Iceland.

Figure 15. Promotional material for the music festival Secret Solstice.

Icelandic landscape is not only used in music videos, it also plays a role in various other promotional material within the music scene. Figure 15 shows promotional material for the music festival Secret Solstice which takes place in a field close to the city centre. From the promotional material, one could draw the conclusion that the festival might take place somewhere in the wilderness of Iceland, rather than in the city centre. Here, both music and country are being promoted at the same time and attracting tourism on two accounts, similar to the approach to the promotion of Iceland at the Frankfurt Book Fair discussed above. Another way that the relationship between music and place is constructed is through documentaries about music and music scenes of a specific place.

Othering Processes in Music Documentaries

Given the prominence of nature and landscape in Icelandic music videos and promotional material, it is interesting to see how Iceland and its music are presented in documentaries about Icelandic music. As discussed in the methodology chapter, twelve music documentaries, two video interviews, and one radio programme about Icelandic music were reviewed, all released during the years 2003-2014. Music documentary makers often seek to discover the geographical roots of musicians and their musical output in their works (Connell and Gibson, 2003, p. 91), and the documentaries discussed here are no exception. Analysis shows that there are two main aspects of how the music is staged through the visual material accompanying the

music heard in the film. On the one hand, the music is staged in the wilderness, playing with the rural clichés of Iceland that portray the country as pure and untouched by people, similar to the music videos discussed earlier. On the other, it is staged in the cosmopolitan city, offering a standardised insight into live concerts and nightlife. Most of the music featured in the documentaries is created, produced, and performed in the city of Reykjavík. It is therefore unsurprising that the city becomes one of the key settings for the music. Some of the films, such as *Where's the Snow?* (2010) and *Iceland Airwaves – A Rockumentary* (2012), draw on clichés about excess partying and female promiscuity to further emphasise the ‘quality’ of the urban experience through music and music festivals. The urban image will be discussed further in Chapter 8 in connection to music and tourism in Iceland.

The film’s focus on the music scene in Reykjavík, and music making outside of the capital region is largely ignored. Most people in Iceland live in this region and the country’s music industry is concentrated there. When featuring live concerts or interviews with musicians or industry members, the visual subject matter moves to rural Iceland with an emphasis on nature and landscape, while the audio remains with the concert or interview. This follows the established conventions of how Icelandic music has been represented. It can also be seen as a way to appeal to international audiences who have come to expect rural scenes when experiencing Iceland. As such, it is a way to market the documentaries outside of Iceland. All the rural depictions seem to follow a similar path and show examples of the best-known phenomena of Iceland: hot springs, glaciers, snow covered mountains, waterfalls, glacial lagoons, and even volcanic eruptions. The wilderness is emphasized by excluding people from the scene and it is mostly devoid of any reminders of human inhabitants. The musicians themselves are seldom represented as part of the rural experience. Their place in the films seems to be in the city, which is the place where they are interviewed or featured performing on stage. By splicing together the ‘urban’ soundtrack of the musicians with the ‘rural’ visual, the music is connected to nature and landscape.

The rural imagery can frequently be seen at the beginning of the films, serving perhaps as an introduction to the place from which the music stems. From the analysis, it became clear that the non-Icelandic film makers use this device more frequently. Perhaps they feel that it is important to ‘locate’ the film clearly within the country, as the potential viewers are possibly not familiar with the place. *Screaming Masterpiece* (2005) is made by an Icelandic film maker but it is in English, and the objective of the film is to draw out the uniqueness of Icelandic

music. The influence of nature and landscape plays a large role in the film, and it is not surprising that the film also uses this technique of depicting clichéd images of Iceland at the beginning of the film.

Icelandic nature and landscape are also frequently shown when the discussion moves away from specific bands or events to the history of music in Iceland and the music scene in general. One example is in the film *Where's the Snow?!* when Donald Gislason, musicologist and interview subject in the film, states:

The entire country has like 300.000 people and instead of asking why is Iceland the way it is I started to ask why aren't we [North Americans] more like Iceland. Because as a musicologist I am supposed to be able to describe things but I just can't. I just say that you got to go and see it. [...] Jules Verne wrote that the entrance to the centre of the earth was situated in Iceland. And I guess that the little secret is that the musical centre of the earth is in Iceland (Magnússon, 2007).

Through this statement, the viewer sees a geyser spouting, waterfalls, wild landscape, and a volcanic eruption. Consequently, the music is connected to these images. By describing Iceland as the musical centre of the earth he invokes a further sense of connection between music and the nation.

Agency and Borealistic Discourse

In addition to music videos and documentaries, music journalists also play a role in connecting music making in Iceland to the nation and to the image of Icelanders as 'strange' and 'otherworldly'. The connection between music and place is not unique to Iceland, and emphasis on the natural environment and landscape is also prominent in writings about classical music in the Nordic region (Grimley, 2006, 2011). Cultural geographer George Revill has traced two compositional lineages where landscape has been particularity prominent. One is the romantic tradition (Strauss's 'Alpine Symphony', Smetana's 'Má vlast', Sibelius's 'Finlandia') and the other is the experimental tradition that began with R. Murray Schafer and Hildegard Westerkamp's field recordings (Revill, 2012, p. 231). Other geographically isolated countries, such as New Zealand, have also had this connection between music and the natural landscape, as composer Douglas Lilburn discussed (2011, pp. 44–45). Discussion about popular music

has had more focus on built, urban environments, rather than the natural environment.³⁵ Mitchell has argued for a ‘psychogeographical’ reading of both Iceland and New Zealand through music, as ‘topographic, geomorphic and geographical features predominate in the national psyche’ (Mitchell, 2013, p. 42). Mitchell discussed the uniqueness of New Zealand music, which he felt could be found in the ‘Dunedin Sound’ and developed due to the isolation and remoteness of the place (Mitchell, 1996; Connell and Gibson, 2003, pp. 96–7). Andrew Schmidt later engaged with Mitchell’s research by arguing that such a reading of New Zealand music could risk ‘reductive interpretation’ (Schmidt, 2016). The reductive quality of ‘local sounds’ will be discussed further below.

Street notes that it is common to find references to place or locality in writings and reviews of popular music, and that this is particularly frequent in indie rock. He chooses to use the term ‘locality’ instead of place in his analysis in order to be able to include environmental and social aspects, such as community, scene and politics (Street, 1995, p. 255). Much of the academic work on popular music and place focuses on the urban environment, communities, scenes, and politics, rather than the natural environment. Some academics, however, find the connection between music and natural environment so important that a new discipline has appeared named Ecomusicology. Brad Osborn explains: ‘Though one could theoretically apply these modes of analysis to any body of music, Icelandic popular music – specifically its inextricable link to modern conceptions of Icelandic culture and the Icelandic natural landscape – suggests the need for a more active link between ecology and analysis’ (Osborn, 2013, p. 220). Scholars continue to debate this ‘inextricable link’ between Icelandic landscape and popular music. Nick Prior has described how Icelandic musicians have reacted to the question about the influence of nature on their music with despair, boredom and irony, and that they ‘lamented the lack of repertoires for understanding the multifaceted and plural influences on their music’ (Prior, 2014, p. 5).

Journalists have contributed to the link between music and nature with their writing, and the questions asked of musicians by journalists shed a light on this process. As David Pruett explains, most of the material available via the mass media has been ‘filtered and modified’ (2011, p. 8) and journalists, similar to others working in the music industry, are motivated by

³⁵ There are exceptions to this, such as discussion about pastoral imagery in the work of the Beatles (Daniels, 2006).

commercial gain. They need to sell and publish their articles, and they need to create a narrative that makes the story interesting, albeit subconsciously. Writing about nature, landscape, and mystical aspects of music is much more interesting than revealing the fact that music was composed in a basement in the city. Journalists, thus, contribute to the borealistic discourse.

The folklorists Katla Kjartansdóttir and Kristinn Schram discussed one of their participants, an important musician in the Icelandic music scene, who frequently ‘deals with perhaps clichéd media questions on the relationship between musical creativity and the Icelandic nature’ (Kjartansdóttir and Schram, 2013, p. 64). When being interviewed, the musician explains, the questions frequently asked are: ‘Why is it this kind of music which comes from Iceland? Is it because of the beautiful nature? Or is it the power of nature and fire and ice which creates this?’ (Kjartansdóttir and Schram, 2013, p. 64). I experienced something similar during my fieldwork, and tensions around the relationship of music with nature and landscape were clear. All my participants had thought about this issue and musicians had commonly been asked about the influence of nature, landscape, elves or even trolls on their music in interviews with international journalists. An example of this was given by Sigfúsdóttir:

It is very rare to experience an interview with foreign media without being asked where you come from and then how Iceland impacts the music creation. During the first years, I’d agree with it [the connection between music and place] and then shortly after 2000, questions about elves and glaciers kept reoccurring. It was funny to begin with [...] but very surreal because it got circulated so much that this became the first thing people asked about (Sigfúsdóttir, Personal Communication, 31/03/2016).

Another example, where folklore myths are at the forefront of an interview, is given by musician Hrafnkell Flóki Kaktus Einarsson:

I was being interviewed on Radio Eins [in Germany] because our record was the ‘record of the week’ there. The first question we got was something like ‘are there any trolls on the record’ and when I denied that, I got asked about how trolls influenced it. Then the question ‘what about Björk?’ came. I can handle this OK. Gulli [his band member] he hates this. Then the interview is just over for him. [...] It would have been very easy to play along with this and make jokes, but that has so much impact. If you say something and people

believe it, like that trolls influence you, then you make an even worse stereotype, which I do not want to do. People need to label things. Nothing is allowed to be as it is. Our music is labelled and is connected to Icelandic nature phenomena, which is very funny. [...] When foreigners listen to Icelandic music, they connect Iceland to certain artists and all the nature which is always being discussed. That is the conversation which the music cannot escape (Einarsson, Personal Communication, 23/02/2016).

Both citations give insight into the questions asked by international media personnel and how these musicians react to it. The fieldwork analysis shows that there are different tactics employed by the participants when replying to the questions that they found ridiculous. Those can be cast into three categories: Firstly, some participants found it easiest to agree with the ideas that journalists were putting forth and gave reasons such as not wanting to ruin the image people had, but they also wanted to provide the information that was desired in order to move the interview forward to what the musicians themselves wanted to discuss. Secondly, other participants played along with the ‘absurd’ questions and gave ironic answers, which could potentially further strengthen the clichéd stereotypes or essentialisation. This tactic is somewhat similar to what Kjartansdóttir and Schram describe when discussing the behaviour of Icelandic expatriates who turn ‘representations of eccentric northern nature-folk to their own ends. These individuals have re-appropriated exoticized vernacular practices abroad as a tactic to gain access and influence within the strategies of new localities’ (Kjartansdóttir and Schram, 2013, pp. 56–57). Some musicians see these clichés as a way into the international music industry; they obviously have something to offer that makes them unique. Thirdly, some participants were very particular that they did not entertain these notions of links between music and nature and/or folklore, and they always made sure to deny these connections in interviews. One of my participants, musician Sóley, made it clear that she never used nature images in her promotional material and never even joked about it being an influence. She felt as though it would reduce her to a stereotypical ‘Icelandic musician’, which was a category she did not want to be included in. But then she said, ‘but I don’t judge people who do that’ (Sóley, Personal Communication, 28/04/2016). From this discussion it should be clear that there is not a singular reaction to the connection between music and Iceland. Some musicians embrace the connection whereas others see it as a troublesome cliché.

It is worth noting that not all participants felt the need to reject the impact of the surroundings on their music making or on the music scene in general, and some even found it to be important. Sigfúsdóttir explained her outlook, which many of my other participants seemed to agree with: ‘it would be very arrogant to state that what you experience in life does not influence’ [your music making] (Sigfúsdóttir, Personal Communication, 31/03/2016). From the interview data it could be argued that the natural environment of Iceland influences musicians alongside many other aspects important to musicians, and as such has an impact on their music making. It is difficult, however, to determine the exact impact and most likely it influences different people in different ways. Further discussion about how musicians experience the relationship with nature and landscape will be addressed in Chapter 6, when discussing ‘Icelandic sound’.

Musicians and other industry members, including journalists and documentary makers, all contribute to the image of Icelandic music in different way. As Pruett explains, interviews with popular musicians often contain ‘influences from multiple individuals, leaving the unsuspecting viewer with only a distortion of the artist’s intent’ (2011, p. 12). These influences can come from PR representatives and managers who are carefully curating the artist’s image, or the journalists or documentary makers who strive to create a compelling narrative. The artists themselves, however, should not be denied their own agency, as the image created is completely removed from the artists’ intentions. The analysis of the music videos and the fieldwork shows that this relationship is much more complex, and musicians see that there are both benefits and problems with this image.

Exotic Image as Marketing Tool

Magnússon sees the image of Iceland and Icelandic music, and the clichés which are connected to it, as a marketing tool. Iceland, ‘because it is quirky, because it is foreign, because it is different’, is easy to sell to the media and when writing a press release it is best to have a particular angle (Bevan, 2014). Iceland, with its unique nature and landscape seems to have become that angle for Icelandic music. However, Magnússon detects a shift from the ironic generation X of the Icelandic music scene, who made fun of these clichés and played around with them, and even lied to journalists in order to make fun of these things, to generation Y who wanted to capitalize on the stereotype: ‘You want elves? I give you elves, no problem. You have money?’ (Bevan, 2014). This shift is interesting and perhaps shows that some musicians are aware of the power of the image and how they can use it for their own gain.

Music scholar and journalist Arnar Eggert Thoroddsen detects a similar trend: ‘Icelanders have to some extent begun to play along with this and give people what they want. [...] if you have a stronger chance of securing gigs if you put a photo of Vatnajökull [a glacier] on the record album, then one understands why that is done’ (Thoroddsen, Personal Communication, 25/02/2016). Ólafur Arnalds draws out the positive side of having such a strong image of the music scene:

We have mixed feelings about these clichés about Icelandic music. Because, on one hand it is not true. But on the other hand, having such a strong image as a music scene can really help us out of here. To go on tour internationally and get record labels in other countries interested in what we do because they think there is this ethereal vibe about Icelandic music; everyone is mysterious and exciting (Arnalds cited in Bevan, 2014).

From the fieldwork data, it became clear that musicians believe that being from Iceland, because of the strong image, gives them an advantage in the international context: ‘It is really funny, touring abroad as an Icelandic band, just because it is such a big plus just being from Iceland. In every single concert, there are people who show up just because we are from Iceland’ (Þórarinn Guðnason, Personal Communication, 24/02/2016). This confirms the perspective brought forth in the discussion in the first section of this chapter about nature and landscape images in music videos. Musicians are aware of the power of image and the strong ‘brand’ of Icelandic music and use it to their advantage. It becomes a way to distinguish themselves from other musicians.

The reduction of Icelandic music to a simple image can be useful as a branding exercise and a way of creating an identity for Icelandic musicians and Icelanders in general. The homogeneity is limiting, however, for the musicians and their identity, and, as discussed above, musicians experienced it as reductive and troublesome. Cohen found that bands in Liverpool also didn’t like to be labelled or categorized and explained that the bands she was working with, like all other bands that she had met, wanted ‘to appear unique and make music that was “different”’ and concluded that the ‘quest for originality could perhaps be placed within a general cult of originality that has influenced all arts this century’ (1991, p. 182). Thus, the negative reactions Icelandic musicians have had to the limited image of Icelandic music, or to be framed as Icelandic musicians, illustrate a trend that can be seen in other places.

The strong connection people have to this narrowly defined image is problematic. Those who do not fit with that image may be in danger of being excluded, as musician Ólafur Arnalds explains: ‘a lot of these really promising new bands are very much overlooked because they don’t fall under that stereotypical image of Icelandic music. While it made my life a bit easier, it may have made their life a bit harder, having such preconceptions’ (Ólafur Arnalds in Bevan, 2014). Those musicians who do happen to live up to the image of Icelandic music, like Ólafur Arnalds, benefit from the image, but others may suffer.³⁶ This will be further discussed in connection with the idea of ‘Icelandic sound’ in Chapter 6. It seems that people come to expect a certain sound from Iceland, and if that is not delivered, they get disappointed. Thorsteinsson agreed with this assessment and explained that the image was, ‘positive and strong, but homogeneous and confined to the indie-krútt scene which was harmful for musical projects not falling under this definition’ (Thorsteinsson, Personal Communication, 04/07/2016).

Musicians also described pressure which came with being labelled an ‘Icelandic musician’, as they were expected to be somehow better and different to other musicians, ‘have magical surroundings’ and ‘put on a pedestal just because [I’m] from Iceland (Sóley, Personal Communication, 28/04/16). The longing to be ‘just’ a musician rather than an Icelandic musician is understandable given the preconceived notions which follow the label of being Icelandic described above. A similar worry is put forth by musician Ólöf Arnalds: ‘It is almost like a brand also [Icelandic music]. It can be a two-edged sword, so to say. If that brand becomes the main focus of why the artist is considered interesting or good’ (Ólöf Arnalds in Grant, 2014). It seems that musicians worry that the image or the ‘brand’ can take over and become the main source of interest, rather than the music itself or the individual musician. It is clear that the strong image of Icelandic music can be an asset for musicians when trying to gain international awareness. It has its drawbacks, however, as audiences and journalists expect a certain sound and a certain type of attitude and artistic preference. Such circumstances can also provide a hidden pressure on musicians to create a certain sound, or a certain style of music, behave in a certain way, or bring forth proven aesthetics.

³⁶ One aspect I wonder about is the point of saturation. When do too many artists trade off the same visual imagery? This is not something my participants discussed and perhaps this point has not yet been reached in the international context.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how music has been connected to nature in various ways, and I have explored the contesting narratives regarding this connection and the image of popular music in Iceland. Not only music has been associated with Icelandic nature, as similar practices could be found in the way Iceland was represented at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2011. This demonstrates that nature is central to the national identity of Icelanders, at least when it comes to representing Icelandicness to the outside. The image of music is co-constructed by musicians, industry workers and local and international journalists. I pointed to the appearance of the Sugarcubes on the world stage, as an important historical point, which laid the foundation for how Icelandic music has been represented both locally and internationally. The video of the song 'Birthday' (co-created by the band) is an example of self-borealism through its emphasis on connections to nature. Similarly, the way in which David Fricke, a journalist for *Rolling Stone*, wrote about the Sugarcubes further evoked the connection of their music to nature. This borealism was confirmed by Benediktsson's description of an exotifying interview situation which he experienced on a press tour in the UK, promoting the Sugarcubes' first album.

I discussed Björk and Sigur Rós as examples of how musicians have reflected on the importance of nature for their music making and how nature has been at the forefront of their image through promotional material, music videos, and other projects. Björk has explained how the natural environment in Iceland has influenced her singing. In the case of Sigur Rós, they have pushed the nature image onto much of their merchandise (the examples of the scented candle and gum drops), and they capitalise on this image, even though the connection is sometimes presented in an ironic manner. Furthermore, Sigur Rós have also tried to distance themselves from the nature image, by explaining that their song writing takes place in a windowless basement in an industrial area, making this a good example of the contesting narratives of image creation that the thesis explores.

The connection between nature and music is also promoted and further enhanced by the ways in which music has been presented in various documentaries about the Icelandic music scene. Images of the natural environment in Iceland are a frequent counterpoint to bands performing (which mostly takes place in concerts in Reykjavík). The connection to nature is an issue which musicians address in the documentaries, without the viewer knowing whether the

musicians were asked directly about the connection to nature by the film makers, as Cannady (2017) explains. I have shown how international journalists contribute to this image-making by continually referring to the natural environment of Iceland when writing about the music. My participants confirmed the emphasis placed on this connection internationally by sharing some of their experiences with international journalists.

My findings show that musicians have a complicated relationship with the image of nature. Whilst they recognise that using nature to promote themselves works well and is a proven strategy to make them stand out in the oversaturated global music market, they also find it limiting. I argue that musicians who do not fall within this image struggle, as the international market is more open to music that reflects the image of what Icelandic music is deemed to be. It can also mean that musicians are more likely to make music which falls within this category (see discussion in Chapter 6), and therefore the image has an impact on the creative processes. Musicians felt that this image brought expectations of how they should present themselves, and one participant explained that she just wanted to be regarded as a musician, rather than as an Icelandic musician. The material presented here thus demonstrates the complexities of musicians' relationship to the image, but it also illuminates the various competing narratives that take place, both between the music scene and the international perspective, and also within the music scene and amongst the musicians themselves.

CHAPTER 5: PERSONAL NETWORKS AND PRECARIOUS MUSIC INDUSTRY

In the previous two chapters I discussed Iceland and Icelandic music and explored how the image of Icelandic music has impacted on the music scene. This has provided a general context for the following four chapters, which explore the country's contemporary music scene. This chapter explores the social aspects of the scene, building on Prior's examination of the social networks involved (2014), and drawing on the work of Street, which shows how these networks shape the kind of music that the scene produces. The chapter focuses on what musicians and industry members see as key characteristics of the music scene and what they see as its significant forces. The main finding that came out of my analysis of the music scene (as described in Chapter 2) was that musicians and industry members regarded the smallness of both the music scene and the society in Iceland to be its shaping force. In the first half of the chapter I explore the impact of this smallness on the social aspects of the scene and the relationships between musicians. The second half focuses on the financial aspect of the music scene and on what my participants described as the 'lack of music industry' because of the aforementioned smallness. I will reveal a particular discourse that characterises the scene and relates smallness to originality and uniqueness. It should be noted that my participants frequently compared the music scene with scenes in other places. Usually either London or New York was selected, rather than a city of a comparable size, so it is understandable that they perceived those places as representing something significantly different from the local scene in Iceland.

As I discussed in Chapter 4, Icelandic music is often connected to the natural environment and mythological aspects of Icelanders, which many musicians have grown tired of. This chapter thus offers an alternative narrative, built on what musicians themselves deem to be important. In this sense, it seems to be closely related to John Street's discussion about 'particular arrangements' of local scenes:

[W]hen people talk of the 'Manchester sound' or the 'Seattle scene', they are not evoking some mystical connection between place and aesthetics – it is not something in the air, or in the 'nature' of the people. It is, in fact, the consequence of particular arrangements which allow music to be made in one way rather than another and which encourage one set of aesthetic judgements to take precedence over another (Street, 1997, pp. 101–102).

Street dismisses ‘mystical connections’ for music scenes and focuses instead on other aspects of localities, such as the industry, community, politics, social experiences, and aesthetic perspectives. Roger Wallis and Krister Malm draw attention to the ‘informal and formal local groupings’(1984, p. 43) within music scenes which they see as their foundation. This chapter will therefore explore the social aspects of the scene, focusing on the networks of individuals, groups, and organisations that make up the scene, and on their perspectives on the scene and its social characteristics.

Before discussing how the size of the scene influences the music-making and the discourses that characterise it, it is worth giving examples of how musicians and industry members describe the smallness of the music scene. Wallis and Malm define ‘small countries’ as having either a small population (10-12 million people for industrialized countries) or small material resources (in the case of developing countries) (1984, p. 18). Iceland is a sparsely populated country with just under 350,000 people living there³⁷ and could even be categorised as a microstate. Wallis and Malm note that small countries usually have fewer musical sub-cultures than larger countries, and the behaviour and decisions made by the state affect these musical sub-cultures and the music industry of the country. The smallness of Iceland contributes to the ways in which the local scene and the music industry functions.³⁸ The musician Ásgeir Trausti Einarsson describes the scene in Reykjavík as follows:

So most of the musicians are staying in Reykjavík and it is a small town, with about 180.000 people. So it is really easy to get to know one another and we have a few clubs and a few places we can play at. And just for myself, I have been in the music scene for just about a year, I’ve been playing in clubs in Reykjavík and venues and you just know every musician after these few months being in the music scene because you are always playing before some band or after some band and you are always meeting the same people (Einarsson in Bevan, 2014).

³⁷ 218,000 people live in the capital area, where most of the music activities take place.

³⁸ Due to its geographical characteristics and location, Iceland can also be seen as a marginal place (Robinson, Buck and Cuthbert, 1991).

Due to its small size, there is only a handful of venues for music performance in the capital area. As a result, musicians quickly get to know each other. I experienced this personally when I was part of an indie rock band. It did not take long to get to know other musicians, because we were often performing at the same events and venues as other bands. The smallness also has an effect on promotional work, as musician Mugison describes: ‘It is a crazy small country. Abroad, promoting a record takes ... nine months to do, before it is released, [it] takes about three hours on a bike here at home. That is all the PR stuff you need to do’ (Mugison, Personal Communication, 14/07/2016). From the journalistic perspective, Thoroddsen describes how the size of the scene impacted his job at a daily newspaper: ‘The first thing I noticed as a journalist at *Morgunblaðið* was the size. Three or four critics could cover everything that was released in a year, which was about 120 albums. When I had worked there for two years, I had interviewed everyone in the industry, all genres included’ (Thoroddsen, Personal Communication, 25/02/2016). These excerpts from interviews serve as an introduction to the discourse which musicians and industry offer when discussing the distinctiveness of the music scene in Iceland.

The Social Importance of the Scene

The smallness of the scene is seen by musicians and industry member to have various effects on relationships among the scene’s musicians and on their music making. Firstly, it the size is considered as a contribution to the diversity of the scene as people are more conscious of doing something differently than other bands. It is likely that musicians know each other personally, and it was reported to be ‘uncool’ to do something similar to others. Several participants suggested that in larger places, mentioning London or New York as examples, one successful band would breed several similar bands. This was not the case in Iceland, where originality was seen as more important: ‘It was totally forbidden to do the same as the next band. The country was small enough as it was. This was very clear, and everyone was very aware of this’ (Páll Ragnar Pálsson, Personal Communication, 04/04/2016). Doing something musically similar to others is frowned upon, and being original and inventive can be seen as an incentive. Also, since the scene is so small it is quite possible to run into the band or the musician that had been copied or imitated, and this can be potentially embarrassing: ‘Say you are going to copy Jónsi from Sigur Rós. Then it would be difficult to face him next when you go to [Iceland] Airwaves and out to smoke. You’d meet him within a half a year of when you’d copied him’ (Mugison, Personal Communication, 14/07/2016). The example of krútt contradicts these

perspectives to some extent, since it is conceived as a genre which has a unified sound world (see Chapter 6).

Secondly, the scene is portrayed to be very friendly and supportive. People share rehearsal spaces, know and live near each other and musicians often end up spending their time in the same places. The scene is described as being made up of friends. Dagur Kári from the band Slowblow explains these characteristics:

What perhaps characterises the music life in Iceland is ‘all the animals in the forest should be friends’. There is strong friendship and unity and people help each other out. If someone owns a piece of equipment which I don’t own, I’ll just borrow it, and the boundaries between bands are very fluid. The same people are perhaps in three bands and everyone is always playing for each other. I think that is interesting and perhaps makes Icelandic music what it is, this family atmosphere (Dagur Kári cited in Magnússon, 2007).

Many of my participants touched upon the aspect of friendship and described how their network of musicians had been built up through mutual friendship and acquaintances. Musician Ásgeir Trausti Einarsson has explained it as follows: ‘Iceland is such a small community; the music scene is really small here and tight and people are just really helpful and creative and want to help one another in an artistic way’ (Ásgeir Trausti Einarsson cited in Bevan, 2014). Sindri Ástmarsson, the general manager of Mid Atlantic Entertainment, which is a music managerial, booking and promoting firm, describes how his client base was built up by a certain ‘friend group’ (i. *í vinahópnum*):

This is the Icelandic way. If we take an example, when Úlfur Úlfur came to me and wanted to work with me, it had extensive effect because when they play live, Agent Fresco plays with them. Agent Fresco learned about this, and they also came aboard. They also play with Gauti [Emmsjé Gauti] and then he wanted to join. So all of a sudden, I start representing three bands (Ástmarsson, Personal Communication, 21/072016).

Similar findings can be seen in Prior’s research on Iceland (2014, p. 11) and research on other scenes has also revealed similar notions. Eileen Hogan notes that Cork is described as ‘a city that feels like a town or village which is populated by friendly tribes and supported through networks of kinship and comradeship’ (Hogan, 2015, p. 100). Most musicians spoke of the

friendships and networks as a positive thing and something which was easy to build up or get into, due to the size of the scene. However, one musician did point out that it could potentially be difficult for people who are starting out (Lára Rúnarsdóttir, Personal Communication, 20/07/2016). Since the scene is built up of interconnected groups of friends, which formed in school or college, it can be perceived as exclusive. This was also seen to be especially difficult for people who are not from the capital area and do not have contacts there (Árni Matthíasson, Personal Communication, 13/07/2016). It was also mentioned that since this is such a small community, ‘you can be doomed if you offend someone with power [...] or they just don’t like you, because there are so few people with a lot of power, both to help you but also to hinder you’ (Lára Rúnarsdóttir, Personal Communication, 20/07/2016).

It has been argued that ‘small population size limits the possibilities of distinct “scenes” forming around specific creative activities’ (Gibson, Luckman and Willoughby-Smith, 2010, p. 32). Research on the music scene in Darwin, Australia can offer some insights into how musicians experience other small and isolated scenes. It has a similar population to Reykjavík and is far away from other cities in Australia. A musician in Darwin explained how this influenced the scene and his own creative work:

[T]he location and the size of the city doesn’t allow for really strong cliques of people to form. You tend to interact with all sorts of people. Say if I was in Melbourne or Sydney and I was into electronic music, I could hang out with my electronic music friends, but there’s just not the critical mass to do that here. So, I make weird electronic music, I’m in a rock band, a reggae band, I play in a Gamelan ensemble, there’s so many different outlets that Darwin just exposes you to (Musician cited in Gibson, Luckman and Willoughby-Smith, 2010, p. 32)

Similar accounts can be found from Iceland and the music scene is made up of people working in various genres as there are no barriers between people from different fields. Musicians emphasise that there are not musical styles or genres which tie them together but rather friendship, a shared mentality, shared instruments and, in some cases, shared band members.

I think they [the different bands] have a similar aesthetic and approach to making music, even though their music is very different. Also, this spirit of not being afraid of being surrounded by different types of music, instead of

something like the metal kids only hang with the metal kids and the rock guys and all that. That is not the mentality of this group (Árni Sveinsson in Beckett, 2010).

These ideas arguably adhere to Street's notions about 'locality as community' in which the community becomes 'the receptacle of the shared values and perspectives that shape the artist' (Street, 1995, p. 256). In a small community, the shared values and perspectives are possibly even more potent, as the group of people is smaller and there are fewer voices, and people often have known each other for a long time. Atlason, describes the community in terms of its isolation:

This is really incestuous. We are all so connected, and we never know what will happen, who we will meet and how connected he is to us, and that is really claustrophobic. This has an effect. It was more decisive when we only had one TV channel and no TV on Thursdays and in July and all that. When I was growing up, there was nothing. [...] Perhaps the isolation has disappeared with the internet, but we are still geographically stuck in this small bar on the other side [of the ocean] where everyone meets up, about 20 people, it is so small [the pool of] the interesting people. And everyone has been with everyone, which makes sense since these are the only [interesting] people, this is the group of people in town you are interested in (Atlason, Personal Communication, 12/07/2016).

Although Atlason is probably not referring to an actual bar, his metaphor is clear: the pool of people to choose from is very limited and people become very close. Mugison compared the relationships within the music scene to a family and to an AA meeting, where everyone is helpful and understanding because musicians have all experienced very similar things: 'All are broke and about to give up, but at the same time are on the brink of something genius. Everyone is in a similar place, regardless of what scene you belong to, if it is hip hop, electronic music, pop or rock, and even jazz' (Mugison, Personal Communication, 14/07/2016). The personal interaction between musicians and the close-knit community that they form is seen to influence music making in several ways. Musicians and industry members build on their personal friendships and networks to develop their profession, and they experience support and encouragement from other musicians. The importance of friendship and communities among musicians is not unique to Iceland. These networks were also reported by musicians in the UK

to provide ‘friendship, co-operation, support, musical collaboration and learning opportunities’(Coulson, 2012, p. 258). Having shown how the music scene is described as a community, regardless of which musical genres people belong to, it is worth exploring how musicians cross these genre boundaries in their practices.

Fluidity of musicians across genres

Gislason describes the lack of boundaries between musical genres as one of the key characteristics of the popular music scene in Iceland in the music documentary *Where’s the Snow?!* (Staines and Guðbjörnsson, 2011). This is not unique to Iceland, however, as it has been reported in other small places. In Darwin, Australia, it has been reported that creative workers work in various arts categories ‘as a survival strategy in a small town ... [which] reflects the fluidity and comparative openness of cultural expressions in remote, small places’ (Gibson, Luckman and Willoughby-Smith, 2010, p. 32). Ruth Finnegan makes a similar point in her study of music ‘worlds’ of Milton Keynes, where some musicians are involved with several worlds at the same time, and the boundaries between these worlds are not fixed but fluid (Finnegan, 1989, pp. 181–182).³⁹ In Iceland, the reasons given for the genre fluidity is that the market is too small for people to specialise, and people collaborate with musicians from different genres because there might not be someone else working in the same field. I have personally experienced this fluidity between genres. During my undergraduate studies in a music college, while studying classical cello performance, I played the cello with the indie-rock band Hjaltalín. I also did recording sessions/concerts with musicians in various genres, including pop musicians, metal bands, jazz musicians and other indie pop/rock bands. Sigfúsdóttir describes this aspect of the music scene as follows:

One thing that is both a pro and con with Icelandic music life is, because the market is so small, no one can specialise. You cannot be a string player who specialises in Telemann, there is no market for it. [...] You have to be a jack-of-all-trades. I think this is partly why the music life is so diverse. People have had to do different things and to do things themselves (Sigfúsdóttir, Personal Communication, 31/03/2016).

³⁹ Finnegan does note that most individuals belonged to only one musical world due to time constraints. But she also reported a ‘scattering of individuals’ who belonged to more than one world (1989, p. 181).

Other participants also mentioned examples of members of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra doing jazz or pop gigs on the side (Reuben Satoru Fenemore, Personal Communication, 08/07/2016), and the composers who write for the Symphony Orchestra but also play the drums with a band in a small venue downtown or are in a hip hop group (Elísabet Indra Ragnarsdóttir, Personal Communication, 12/07/16; Colm O’Herlihy, Personal Communication, 14/07/2016). This is in line with research from the UK, where Susan Coulson found that in regional settings, as opposed to large music centres, musicians often took on different types of jobs (in different types of ensembles and genres, teaching and studio sessions) in order to make a living (Coulson, 2012, p. 255). This fluidity was also seen to have increased with the foundation of the Iceland University of the Arts at the turn of the 21st century (Ragnarsdóttir, Personal Communication, 12/07/16; Mugison, Personal Communication, 14/07/2016). This is also my personal experience, and I both studied at the university (2003-2007) and have worked there since 2010. Perhaps this is due to the fact that cross-disciplinary approaches have been encouraged at the institution, and the students who have been admitted have had very diverse musical backgrounds. Since the music department is small, all these different students in the different study programmes take the same courses and undertake collaborative projects.

The fluidity of musicians between genres was also reported to increase exploration into unfamiliar artistic avenues.

I think it is great we are kind of forced to collaborate with musicians or artists who are doing nothing like ourselves necessarily. But I think that is a big part of why the music scene is so strong is that we have had to open up, had to accept people who think in different ways than we do ourselves. [...] and this has forced us to open our eyes to different things and grow and try different things that in the end create unique ideas (Ólafur Arnalds cited in Bevan, 2014).

Ólafur Arnalds’s perspective is that the smallness of the scene forces musicians to collaborate with people that they would otherwise perhaps not work with in larger communities. As a result, musicians are forced out of their comfort zone and end up investigating new areas unknown to them and that encourages innovation.

Collaboration and competition

Collaboration is another defining aspect of the music scene that both musicians and industry members who were interviewed considered a consequence of the small size of the community. There is also a strong belief that there is less competition than in other places. Music journalist Árni Matthíasson describes this in the following way:

People are always ready to help and lend equipment and support each other. It is much more open than what I have experienced abroad. ... There I found out that there is a lot of separation between bands and people didn't really talk to each other. There was no chance you could borrow a drum stick. Here, you can call someone you don't know, but know is a musician, and ask to borrow an amplifier, and he will do so (Matthíasson, Personal Communication, 13/07/2016).

The notion is that in Iceland, musicians help each other out, even though they might not know each other, unlike other (unnamed) countries where there is much more competition. Musician Snorri Helgason confirms this idea of support, but also emphasises that since it is such a small community, musicians work together, which reduces the competitiveness:

It tends to become a small little group and everybody working with everybody which is really good and that also decreases the kind of competitiveness which one can feel in London or bigger places. Yeah, people [in bigger places] are always kind of competing and dragging each other down. Here it is more like collaboration than competition (Snorri Helgason cited in Bevan, 2014).

Here again, the comparison to other larger places is crucial. Large places are described as competitive, whereas Iceland is collaborative. Musicians and industry members consider this as partly due to the tight-knit networks described above. The musician Hildur explains that the support within the scene is obtainable because no two musicians are doing overly similar things, and, as a result, musicians are not in direct competition:

Here there is very beautiful collaboration and you regard other musicians in Iceland automatically as your friends. Because we are all in this together. You can always ask for help and people are happy to do you a favour. Perhaps play something for you, and then later you play for them or we play together in a concert. [...] Everything is really nice and I think it is exactly because you

always want to do something different, because there is not space for two people to do the same thing. As a result, the music becomes more diverse and you are nice to bands that are not doing the same thing as you, because you are not in competition (Hildur, Personal Communication, 18/07/2016).

Although there might be less competition between musicians because they are not doing the same thing, this practice of doing favours by playing for each other is another element of the smallness. Similar collaborative behaviour has been reported in other places, including Jamaica, where musicians struggle to get by, and mutual support is necessary (Robinson, Buck and Cuthbert, 1991, p. 9). Ólöf Arnalds also explains the collaboration in terms of necessity:

It is a little bit like you are in a family, because we are few, equipment can be hard to come by when you live in an island. So people have to be prepared to help each other out. Because if we don't help each other out we can't really do it (Ólöf Arnalds in Bevan, 2014).

There is a strong sense that the limitations of the music scene require people to help each other out in order to achieve their artistic intentions. The collaborative dimension was also described as dictated by the ownership of equipment. Dibben asked Björk why she had collaborated with certain people in the past and the reason given to her was because the person had the kind of keyboard or some bit of equipment that they needed (Dibben, Personal Communication, 17/03/2016). Clearly, limited physical resources, such as equipment, are partly the reason why people work together. The English musician Paul Evans, who is based in Iceland, also pointed to the limited number of musicians: 'Collaboration is a necessity. There are limited numbers of musicians and Maggi the drummer [Magnús Tryggvason Eliassen] is in every single band. That must have an impact. There is perhaps a homogeneity to it, but also like... yeah... I think it is really collaborative' (Evans, Personal Communication, 20/07/2016). Evans's perspective is important, as he can be considered an outsider to the music scene, although he is based in Iceland. He detects homogeneity with the same musicians performing in many different bands. This is different to the perspective offered by Mugison and musician Páll Ragnar Pálsson at the beginning of the chapter, as they emphasised the importance of not doing anything similar to the next band. The example of Maggi, the drummer, is an interesting one, and Evans is not the first person to identify him as a typical active musician in Iceland. In 2009 he was interviewed in *Morgunblaðið* because he was performing with six different bands in one weekend festival, and it was stated that he was a member of more bands as well (Kolbeinsson,

2009). This gives an insight into how small the scene really is and how good musicians become almost essential to the scene.

This is perhaps one of the reasons why musicians are friendly to each other, and my participants did not report much rivalry between bands. It is difficult to not stay friendly if bands are sharing band members. I consider this collaboration between bands important, and through my personal experience I have found this to be one of the most important aspects of the music scene. It is not only that bands share members and lend equipment. In the case of Hjaltalín, the band I was part of, musicians from other bands in the scene wrote lyrics for some of our songs, produced our first album, and the aforementioned Maggi also performed with us when our drummer was busy. Several of our band members were also in other bands. To illustrate this point, I attempted to create a chart of the collaborations and connections between musicians and bands within the music scene, but it soon became too complicated to visually represent this in an any meaningful way.

Thorsteinsson from the IMX also finds that the support and friendliness within the scene come from people playing in many different bands and working with diverse groups of people. ‘Because it [the scene] is so small and therefore there is a lot of collaboration and people are playing together. [...] There is more collaboration, not as much competition, and positivity. Abroad there is more competition and people keep their contacts close and don’t share anything. Here everything is more open and I think it influences the music as well.’ She also sees the intimacy and physical space as a factor in moulding the scene (Thorsteinsson, Personal Communication, 04/07/2016). Colm O’Herlihy, musician and the studio- and label manager of the Green House from Cork, Ireland, offered his perspective on this as an ‘outsider’, although he has been living in Iceland for the past couple of years. His thoughts on the supportiveness of the scene were as follows: ‘I find it really supportive, it is not competitive in a way you get in a lot of other countries. I never hear anything negative about other people’s music. People are really supportive’ (O’Herlihy, Personal Communication, 14/07/2016).

Not everyone agrees with the narrative that there is no competition. Ragnar Þórhallsson from the band Of Monsters and Men said that he had experienced some competition, although he did not regard it as a negative thing. His band got popular internationally quickly and he explained that the band members sometimes felt guilty about skipping over about ten years of struggle, which most bands go through before (and if) they ‘make it’ abroad: ‘I think we have

all felt a pang of conscience for that [skipping the struggle]. I think people didn't like it. Sometimes you felt like people thought you had cheated somehow' (Þórhallsson, Personal Communication, 21/07/2016). Þórhallsson explained that they had also felt that they had missed out on being part of the scene and becoming friends with other Icelandic musicians. Since they gained international popularity quickly, they did not play many concerts with other Icelandic bands or hang out with them, as was described above. Their method in resolving that issue was to invite Icelandic bands and musicians to tour with them abroad as opening acts. During the last few years, they have toured with

Mammút, Ásgeir Trausti, Sóley, Mugison and Lay Low, because we want to get to know more Icelandic artists, because we went so quickly through the scene and straight abroad. ... We felt like we were buying friends [he says jokingly]. I feel the need, or like it is required of me to help Iceland to promote its music. Because we got this chance, we should help other people to become known as well. But there is always some competition (Þórhallsson, Personal Communication, 04/07/2016).

The guilt, which Þórhallsson describes, is interesting because they did nothing wrong. They became successful quickly, and Þórhallsson feels he experienced the attitude from the scene that somehow they had not 'paid their dues'. Perhaps they therefore did not get to know the music scene as much as they would have liked. They had not shared the experience that Mugison described above, where everyone is in the same boat, broke and about to give up. As a result, Þórhallsson felt that he wasn't part of the family that so many musicians described, and he was trying to remedy that by 'buying friends' by inviting people to tour with them. This also illustrates the sense of community and friendship within the music scene. Of Monsters and Men did not need to be part of the Icelandic music 'family', as they received international success and seldom performed in Iceland, but they still felt compelled to contribute to it in some way.

In conversation with Thoroddsen, I tried to understand why this narrative of friendship had become prominent and why musicians placed so much emphasis on it. He argued that in such a small society one could not get away with 'back stabbings. You have to contain yourself, because news travels fast' (Thoroddsen, Personal Communication, 25/02/2016). Here, the smallness comes up again; everyone is connected and working in the same place, therefore one must keep the peace. The likelihood of meeting and having to work with people you might

have a disagreement with is very high in such a small community. Therefore, it is arguably better to be friendly or even become friends.

Most of my participants agreed with this general image of the music scene in Iceland as being friendly and supportive and with little competition. However, not everyone believed the situation to be as simple as this. Sóley felt that other musicians were perhaps a little jealous of her frequent touring, although this was never voiced clearly to her. In the interview, she explained it was more of a feeling she had, ‘so she might even just be paranoid’ and said that she would probably feel the same if she did not have all these touring opportunities (Sóley, Personal Communication, 28/04/2016). Atlason has personally experienced the competition and comparison between musicians in his job at the Iceland Airwaves festival. He said that people were always comparing themselves to other musicians and wondering why they were getting paid less or given fewer opportunities. He believes that the idea that ‘everyone is friends’ is wrong and potentially dangerous:

The smallness is our biggest problem, but it also has its advantages, as many play in many projects. Everyone knows everyone, and I think there is a lot of competition and I think people don’t necessarily like everyone [‘s music], even though everyone claims to be such good friends, then there is always, ‘wait, why does he get this?’. This is just human behaviour. This [idea that everyone is friends] is not simple, and it is naïve and dangerous to claim that there is no competition. ... I think it is good and healthy to admit that here is envy and competition and hurt feelings and all this. Everyone can’t be friends (Atlason, Personal Communication, 12/07/2016).

Arguably, due to Atlason’s position as the director of the largest festival and most important musical event in Iceland, he has had experience with other aspects of the music scene than the musicians I interviewed. He sees the side of musicians that they might not want to publicise and that does not fit with the image of the scene at large. Although the scene is described as non-competitive and friendly, several of my participants did give examples of how they had experienced jealousy and competitiveness. Due to the close-knit community and family atmosphere described, and the fact that many people are in different bands and collaborate with various people, it is understandable that the scene does not feel competitive. These findings are similar to Hogan’s conclusion about the music scene in Cork, Ireland (2015), so it could be argued that smaller places are more likely to produce more supportive scenes as people are

required to collaborate and interact more closely. Nonetheless, this is yet another example of the contesting narratives within the music scene, where the image of the scene does not necessarily match the experience of every single individual.

Having described various social aspects of the music scene and the networks and collaborations musicians form, the second part of the chapter focuses on how the size of the music scene and the accompanying market impacts on the financial aspects of the music industry, which musicians and industry members describe as influencing creativity.

A Scene Without Money

The financial aspect of the music scene has various angles. From the fieldwork, four main themes emerged in connection with finances: (i) how musicians struggled with living off music making, (ii) how the lack of money was considered artistically liberating, (iii) the ‘underdeveloped’ music industry and music support system in Iceland, (iv) the DIY approach taken by many, because of the lack of support. Before investigating the themes, it should be noted that the music industry in Iceland, just as elsewhere, has gone through transformation brought by digital technology. Even though my participants did not bring up this topic, it is worth explaining some of its aspects in the Icelandic setting. As in other places, live music performance is the most important avenue of income for musicians. In a report on the music industry from 2018, about two thirds of participants claimed that live music was their main source of income. Sync (selling music for films, TV, games and advertisements) was the second most important avenue (for those who were involved with that at all, which was only about 50% of participants). Airplay on the radio was the third most important source of income. Record sales was in fourth place, with 70% of participants engaging in that activity, though only 8.2% of which claimed this to be the most important income avenue. Finally, streaming and digital sales were the least important source of income for most people, although about 60% of participants had some income through those platforms (Guðmundsdóttir and Sigurðardóttir, 2018, pp. 8–9). Although digital consumption of music has increased steadily in Iceland over recent years, Icelandic music is still consumed mainly in record form (64% compared to 17% through digital platforms). This is currently changing, due to increased consumption of Icelandic rap on Spotify (Guðmundsdóttir and Sigurðardóttir, 2018, pp. 13–14). This matches how my participants described the music scene, where most musicians still emphasise releasing physical albums. This is not to say that the music scene has not adopted

to the use of digital platforms has well. Prior (2014, p. 8) has described the digital dissemination and consumption of music in Iceland and my participants clearly used digital platforms and social media to promote themselves, both locally and internationally. Now we turn to the themes described above, and deal with them in turn.

Making a living

I feel that I am quite a large figure in the Icelandic music scene but I can only play twice a year, and then I have drained the market (Mugison, Personal Interview, 14/07/2016).

As Mugison describes, his experience is that he can only play about twice a year in Reykjavík, and if he gives a third concert, far fewer people turn up. He mentioned that he could go to Akureyri and play there in addition to Reykjavík, but these seem to be the only two towns worth performing in. Many of my participants commented on the difficulty of making a living from music in Iceland, and many stated that it was impossible for anyone, except for the most famous pop musicians, to do so. This was partly seen as having to do with the size of the market and the limited possibilities of touring in the country. It has been shown that many musicians in Iceland struggle financially and only certain genres are likely to be commercially successful (Baker, 2014, pp. 38–40). The possibilities for performing and getting paid for it are limited, and, just as in other countries, record sales have diminished because of the changes in music distribution and consumption. People did mention the music festivals, both in Reykjavík and in the countryside as important events to earn money, and the rapid increase in the number of festivals in recent years must therefore have had a positive effect. The performance opportunities are a key for musicians to make a living, and Icelandic musicians have very limited opportunities within the country.

Musician Hildur drew my attention to the fact that many people in the music scene are there only as ‘hobbyists’ as they work full time doing something else. She imagined that most of them would like to work as musicians full time but stated that it is really hard. Some work part time doing something else, but she wondered what effects better support and regulation would have on the music scene (Hildur, Personal Communication, 18/07/2016). Other research has shown that there has been a ‘shift from “working Icelandic musicians, mainly looking at the Icelandic market and the possibilities that it was offering” to the evolution of “another kind of musician” who is “not looking at the Icelandic market as a working place; they’re more looking

at the Icelandic market as a *practice space*” (Musician cited in Baker, 2014, p. 38). This research by Sarah Baker showed that musicians were happy to perform for free because it was seen as good practice or good exposure. She cited a music industry consultant who explained that many ‘left field’ musicians viewed their music making as a hobby rather than as a career because it was unlikely that they would make much money from doing it (Baker, 2014). The argument of gaining experience or practice whilst working for free is well known in all the ‘creative industries’ and has been the topic of various research projects, including Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010), Gillian Ursell (2000) and Angela McRobbie (2002).

Atlason was sympathetic to the small live-music market in the country. He also had very strong opinions on the lack of stamina Icelandic musicians display and feels that the musicians show an incredible amount of ‘first world problems’. He noted that he is not the only one in the industry who feels like this. He states:

Icelandic musicians, when you look at it, it is really good what they do; the music, the quality, the composition and power and everything. But working with them is hopeless. Musicians in the UK, they live off nothing, there is horrible competition, you need to fight, you need to get into that truck and stay in it forever. [Here,] there is endless demand for financial support and the rights they [musicians] have. I think this is a national characteristic [of Icelanders] and a first world problem. [...] This is very harsh of me to put it like this, but I feel like I see this clearly. Those who are hard-working get the furthest, and there are lots of those. However, this lack of commitment has stopped so many (Atlason, Personal Communication, 12/07/2016).

Here the comparison is made to the UK, and Atlason describes British musicians as more determined to succeed, despite difficult conditions. He also suggested that musicians in Iceland might have more options than musicians in the UK to change course and do something else, like going to university after giving up on being in a band. He felt that Icelandic musicians, like Icelanders in general, were used to much more wealth and luxury, which made them less tenacious. Evans also pointed out that bands in Iceland didn’t seem to last more than three or four years, because Iceland, unlike the UK, did not have the infrastructure to make sure that musicians made money off their music making somehow, and as a result, musicians were more likely to give up. It is unclear which aspects of the infrastructure Evans is actually referring to, or what level of musician he’s discussing. The assumption, which Evans and many of my other

participants made, was that being at the centre of the musical world here would mean that musicians would remain at the centre of any musical world to which they could be transplanted. Throughout this section of the chapter, musicians and industry workers are comparing the Icelandic scene to some other scene. Most often it is unclear if this is an actual place (sometimes London and New York are mentioned) or if this is an imagined scene.

Evans also felt that people in Iceland had more options to do other things. ‘But a lot of people [musicians] are quite happy, it is not life or death, it is just something that they enjoy doing. [...] and you have a good welfare system and people have loads of jobs. So I think you can afford to fail’ (Evans, Personal Communication, 20/07/2016). The welfare system in Iceland and wealth of jobs was thus regarded as counter-productive to musicians. An industry worker also mentioned the lack of effort or stamina that some musicians show, but he argued that it was because they did not expect to make any money from their music and thus were only doing it for fun (Steinþór Helgi Arnsteinsson, Personal Communication, 18/07/2016). It seems as if some people do not view their music making as a potential employment opportunity and see it instead as an enjoyable hobby, and these musicians are not willing to do what it takes to succeed. This approach of having music as one of many possible options in life is different to how Cohen describes the rock scene in Liverpool, where musicians were willing to leave school and possibly accept unemployment benefits to focus on their music, since for them, ‘music was going to be it’ (Cohen, 2007, p. 48).

The struggle to make money from music is a longstanding international phenomenon, not unique to Iceland at all. Research conducted in the 1980s on music making in musically ‘peripheral’ countries showed that very few musicians profit from their music making and most spend their earnings on music-related expenses. Many musicians were also found to subsidise their music making with wages from other jobs (Robinson, Buck and Cuthbert, 1991, p. 169). Some of my participants reported that all the money their band makes goes back into the band. It is clear whether people have a certain model in mind when they discuss the music industry to which they compare the Icelandic reality. It is an example of the internal discourse that takes place within the scene. From the perspective of the people working in the scene, there is a sense of infrastructure that should be in place but is instead missing. This contributes to how the scene is created. I feel that this perspective is a mirror of the development during the early 20th century, when Icelanders were desperately trying to develop culture in the country, so they could compare themselves with other nations in Europe. Something similar seems to be at play

here, as there is a constant comparison with some other, who remains unclear or imagined in most of these accounts. I would like to argue that the need for comparison is part of the inferiority complex rooted within the national identity of Iceland. It reflects the worry that the local culture is not on par with that enjoyed by other nations against which Icelanders want to measure themselves.

Freedom from money

The low financial stakes are also described by my participants as one of the reasons for the friendliness of the scene and the collaborative aspect of it. The theme ‘freedom from money’ came out of the fieldwork analysis: the idea that people were more liberated in their music making because there was no competition for money and were therefore more willing to collaborate. ‘Money ruins everything. [...] Whilst there is no money available everything is simpler and lighter, and people are just together and collaborate’ (Árni Matthíasson, Personal Communication, 13/07/2016). This is different to research on other places, as Cohen reported that in the music scene in Liverpool, the attitude was, ‘when you have scarce resources things get very competitive’ (2007, p. 114).

During our interview, Mugison referenced Barði Jóhannsson, from the band Bang Gang, who said that because the society was so small, musicians were never going to make any money so they should do whatever they like, and only please themselves. Mugison thought that was a really good attitude to have and believed that there was some truth in it (Mugison, Personal Communication, 14/07/2016). This sentiment was echoed by musician Högni Egilsson who believed that it was good that the music industry was unprofessional because that offered more freedom, and people allowed themselves to explore sounds which might not necessarily be ‘in’ currently (Egilsson, Personal Communication, 01/03/2016). Gislason also attributed the variety within the music scene to the ‘unprofessionalism’ of the music industry and to the fact that there are no big record companies in Iceland:

Here in Iceland do you have not only variety of musical styles but the same people can do different styles. People are in three bands and a choir. And of course, no band here would be caught dead being similar to any other band. I think North-American society has a lot of barriers ... but there is just not a big record company here which gives you the incentive to streamline yourself into

this genre or that genre that a major record company can market (Gislason cited in Staines and Guðbjörnsson, 2011).

According to Gislason, the music scene is defined by the lack of major record labels and the little money to be earned. Since musicians are not going to sell many records they are free to do whatever pleases them artistically without the pressure of being ‘sellable’ (Magnússon, 2007; Guðbjörnsson, 2009). The limited income musicians believed they were able to obtain was considered artistically liberating, although it did mean that musicians were less likely to persevere for a long time in the music industry. The issues of lack of support and the problems with the music industry were mentioned repeatedly during my fieldwork and will be explored in the next section.

Underdeveloped Music Industry

Many of my participants spoke about how unprofessional or immature the music industry was, and some even said that the ‘industry didn’t exist’ (Personal Communications, Paul Evans, 20/07/2016; Ragnar Þórhallsson, 21/07/2016; Sindri Ástmarsson, 21/07/2016). My participants pointed out that certain positions in the music industry chain are missing, such as publishers, booking agents, lawyers and marketing people who specialise in music, and that there are only two or three agents or managers in the country. The reason for this, they implied, is that the few musicians who manage to gain considerable success abroad, often with foreign labels, quickly turn to foreign personnel. As a result, not many people in Iceland have had the experience of working with bands that have become successful internationally in these support positions. These jobs are mainly filled, if at all, by friends of the bands without any know-how and are usually short-lived, especially because it is difficult to make a living from such jobs. Therefore, people are seen to be repeating the same ‘rookie mistakes’ (Arnsteinsson, Personal Communication, 18/07/2016) as knowledge does not accumulate. Steinþór Helgi Arnsteinsson is one of the few people who have tried to work as a manager and he even received funding from the IMX to go to the UK and learn the ‘tricks of the trade’:

No one lasts long in this because you can’t live off it. You’ll have to do something else. I really tried and moved to London and then I came home and went back to live with my mum ... I got a job with Sonar [the festival] but I don’t get paid [there] and I worked with Samaris and Hjaltalín [as a manager] and only got some change there. In the end, I was offered a job with CCP

which I accepted. And then I got this attitude ‘you gave up’ [from other people] (Arnsteinsson, Personal Communication, 18/07/2016).

Just as musicians experience financial restrictions, these support positions are impacted by the same circumstances. If the musicians are not earning money, then the managers are not earning money either. Arnsteinsson describes how the Sonar festival was not able to pay either. I found that researchers have reported similar findings in New Zealand, which also has a small music scene (although the population of New Zealand is ten times larger than in Iceland). ‘One aspect of this is the role of managerial support, which is largely lacking. Management is hardly a viable career option with few musicians making a full-time living from their music in New Zealand, and many acts have to function without a manager’ (Shuker and Pickering, 1994, p. 265). Smaller music scenes seem to have these elements in common, as few people are able to live off their music making. Several participants believed that there were some changes on the horizon, however, both because there was an increased awareness for the importance of these positions, and Iceland Airwaves was seen to have somehow ‘professionalised’ the scene. Both Hrafnkell Pálmarrsson, musician and employee at STEF (Performing Rights Society), and Thorsteinsson mentioned that STEF and IMX were putting considerable resources into educating musicians about these aspects of the music industry and training people for these positions (Personal Communications, Pálmarrsson, 13/07/2016 and Thorsteinsson, 04/07/2016).⁴⁰ The lack of support for musicians has meant that they have had to do the jobs others might do themselves, which has arguably fuelled the discourse on the DIY element of the Icelandic music scene, which will be discussed in the next section.

⁴⁰ The description above has depicted the situation in the popular music scene in Iceland, but it seems that the situation is similar in the ‘art music’ scene, as the festival director, curator and musician Guðný Þóra Guðmundsdóttir explains:

It is like we are in a dysfunctional system where everyone works for free. Everyone just wants to promote their work. When someone manages to get out of this lion den, then all sign-posts are missing for how this industry works. At least in the scene of classic and contemporary music, in which I work. Everyone is always inventing the wheel every single time. When people have built up the foundation knowledge, they have burned out and given up, so that the knowledge does not disseminate further (Guðmundsdóttir, Personal Communication, 11/04/2016).

She mentioned that she believed the popular music scene had developed further in this area, especially because of the Iceland Airwaves festival. However, it seems that her description could just as well be about the popular music scene and that the country’s entire music industry is underdeveloped in this area.

DIY

Baldursson, in his capacity as the director of the IMX, explains the DIY element of the Icelandic music scene as follows:

We live in what I call a bubble. Because we are an island and it is a really small community, so it is easy for people to make a band, create music and actually get it played on the radio. It is not so complex. And you can usually do all this yourself. And people grow up sort of having a really healthy DIY element. They do everything themselves. They make the music, record it, they'll be their own manager, they'll call the paper and ask for an interview. They will call the radio station and ask them to play their record on the radio. They'll call and book a gig themselves. So they have a basic knowledge of everything that the music business does, but in a nutshell. So when they decide to try and go abroad, take their career abroad, it is often a shock to them that all this is done by different people (Baldursson cited in Kovacik, 2013).

Musicians can promote themselves, get played on the radio and put on gigs without having to rely on others or invest much money in it. Many musicians self-publish and there are several examples of musicians that pull together and create their own label, to publish their own and some friends' music. These elements reflect the general state of the music industry in Iceland, even before the general changes that came with the digitalisation of the industry. This is similar to how Roy Shuker and Michael Pickering portrayed the music scene in New Zealand back in 1994, which is another example of small music scene (1994, pp. 264–265). This is of course how many music scenes operate in what Jo Haynes and Lee Marshall call the 'new music industry', where many musicians have to be entrepreneurs in order to survive (Haynes and Marshall, 2018, p. 465) . The music industry is generally centralised, but with the rise of the internet and social media there has been increasing emphasis on DIY, as people have been able to produce and promote their music more easily, and modes of listening have changed. When asked whether the perceived DIY aspect of the scene was due to ideological reasons or aesthetics, Pálmarsson firmly stated that it was only due to lack of know-how and industry support (Pálmarsson, Personal Communication, 13/07/2016). This is similar to how musicians interviewed by Haynes and Marshall described their processes, as taking 'a pragmatic rather than ideological outlook to being DIY' (Haynes and Marshall, 2018, p. 470). Due to the size of the scene, most of the domestic labels would fall under the definition of DIY independent micro record labels:

These micro-labels produce a limited number of records (generally ranging from around 250 to 3000 copies of each release) that are aimed at a relatively small but loyal market. These are small-scale operations usually run from private addresses (in fact they are sometimes referred to as ‘bedroom independents’) by one or two individuals who undertake all the tasks necessary for the commercial release of a recording themselves (from making contractual arrangements with musicians to organising finances, from designing and packaging to promotional activities) (Strachan, 2003, p. 13).

It should be noted that these types of labels characterise the entire music scene in Iceland. Therefore, if you are signed to a domestic label, you are not likely to receive the involvement of the business structure in the music industry (managers, booking agents, media industries, sponsors) described as customary by Heynes and Marshall (2018, p. 466). Musicians are only likely to receive such support if they are signed to an international label, as discussed above.

As seen from the discussion about finances and the pragmatic outlook of musicians towards getting paid for their music making, it is safe to say that the scene leans more towards the ‘arts’ rather than ‘commerce’, which is another characteristic of the independent DIY scene (Strachan, 2003, p. 17). Einarsson felt that the lack of an industry to dictate a ‘mainstream’ scene led to honesty in the music making, which was unique to Icelandic music: ‘It is the honesty. Everyone is true to themselves and are not trying to fit into some mainstream scene, because there is no mainstream scene here.’ (Einarsson, Personal Communication, 23/02/2016). However, with regards to ideas about DIY there is another aspect to consider, as Thoroddsen sees this ‘just do it’ attitude as a national characteristic of Icelanders:

It is prominent in us Icelanders - just do it. Why shouldn’t I do it or why should I not be able to do it? A lot of people [musicians] who came to Mogginn [*Morgunblaðið*, the daily newspaper] were rather brass. They did not have their feet on the ground, it was kind of a ‘what the hell’ attitude. [...] Musicians were coloured by the fact that you can walk in to the radio with a demo and get it played. This does not happen abroad. The effects of the small society are everywhere (Thoroddsen, Personal Communication, 25/02/2016).

Here, the ongoing comparison to the imagined music industry can be seen. The local music scene is described in opposition to what is common place ‘abroad’. The small society is seen

as a key factor and it is perceived as impossible to have a similar setting outside of Iceland. There is not a sense of comparing the music scene in Iceland to other small places, where musicians could in fact walk into a radio station with a demo and get it played.

Among my participants, there seemed to be a consensus that people in Iceland were not afraid to 'rig up a gig' and perform publicly, and this was linked to the national characteristics of Icelanders that includes doing things without much planning. 'Another thing with Icelanders, everything is really last minute. There are no big plans. You kind of just go with the flow. I think that is good for music as well. Because sometimes when it is forced, it is a nightmare' (O'Herlihy, Personal Communication, 14/07/2016). The idea of 'failure' also came up in the context of people not being afraid of failure when trying new things, which results in more frequent experimentation. This was considered to be one characteristic of the Icelandic music scene and a result of the small society. Evans also commented on how easy it was to initiate things in Iceland. He found that there was less of a social barrier prohibiting amateurs or hobbyists from getting on stage in Iceland than in other places. He also commented on how people were happy to identify themselves as artists: 'People aren't scared of saying that they are an artist when they are also a nurse. People just define themselves however they want to and that is a really refreshing thing' (Evans, Personal Communication, 20/07/2016). Evans, being from the UK, is perhaps more used to musicians only regarding themselves as 'professionals' if they are able to financially support themselves with their music making. This, and valuing one's worth as an artist by the income made, is something that Heynes and Marshall found prominent in their research on UK musicians (2018, p. 473).

Evans found that in Iceland there is 'a self-confidence and a lack of self-criticism', and he argued that people could not be too critical of other people because of the size of the society. This enables people to perform who might not otherwise have the confidence, but it could also cause the quality to drop. The fact that some of the people who make music and are active in the scene are not only musicians, but also have other jobs, can have both positive and negative effects. People are not afraid of performing publicly and identifying as musicians. As such, this makes the scene larger and livelier than if only those who could live off making music were a part of this. However, Evans also mentioned that this might cause people to not try their very best: 'But maybe there is a downside in that people don't strive as much as they might normally do. You have a few artists who clearly are so incredibly driven to achieving something unique or unusual'. (Evans, Personal Communication, 20/07/2016).

Conclusion

The main theme in this chapter is that practising musicians and industry members considered the smallness of the place and the scene to be the key defining and differentiating feature of the music scene. The analysis shows that this smallness had two distinct derivatives. Firstly, it influences people's relationships, both on a personal and professional level. Everyone knows each other and collaborates extensively, both within and between genres. This encourages people to strive for originality in their music making, leaving little room for copycats and, to some extent, decreases competition between people. As a result, people described the music scene as a family and as a group of friends. However, it was noted that people are also competitive and compare their success (or lack thereof) to that of others. Secondly, very few people live off their music making since it is such a small scene and a small market, and this makes the scene somewhat amateur or semi-professional, with a prominent DIY approach. Many participants explained that there 'is no industry' in Iceland, meaning that positions such as managers, publishers and R&D are very rare or even non-existent. People experienced this 'lack of industry' in a positive light as this ensured genre fluidity, and people were not forced into a pre-defined box made by the industry. They also pointed to negative aspects, however, such as the struggle to finance their music making. This, and the smallness of the scene, ensured that people could not specialise in their music practice, which encouraged genre crossing and collaboration.

These dominant features of the Icelandic music scene were explained in terms of the smallness of the scene and Icelandic society. Although there are many small music scenes which have similar qualities, the unique fact in this case is that these factors dominate all music scenes in Iceland, regardless of the genre. Since the country has only about 350,000 inhabitants and is relatively isolated, with the neighbouring countries only reachable by three-hour flights, the case of the Icelandic music scene is different to other small scenes. Research in New Zealand has shown the most comparable results, although the population is more than ten-times larger. My participants tended to compare the Icelandic music scene with London or the UK⁴¹ instead of looking at more obvious places, such as New Zealand or even Copenhagen, despite the post-

⁴¹ It is worth mentioning that the UK is seen as a gateway for Icelandic musicians to touring internationally (one participant explained that everyone had to survive the UK before getting anywhere else). Fabian Holt confirms this perspective as he states, 'London in particular has been a global gateway for indie music artists [...] and London has played a particularly big role in the growing trajectory of the Icelandic indie music especially' (2017, p. 68).

colonial context. This is also an example of the contesting narratives which take place within the music scene, where there is a constant comparison with some other, often imagined, music scene that my participants felt had more professional infrastructure. This shows both the dominant Anglo-American influences on Icelandic music, and that musicians seem to be unaware of the peripheral context of the Icelandic music scene as they compare the scene and themselves to large musical centres. To some extent this is indicative of the larger trends of national identity, where there is a constant push and pull between aspects of inferiority complex and megalomania.

Straw has explained that 'localism has been reproduced, in relatively uniform ways, on a continental and international level' (Straw, 1991, p. 378), and some of the elements seen in the Icelandic music scene, such as the networks and communities musicians create and the financial struggle, are similar to those in other places (Shuker and Pickering, 1994; Gibson, Luckman and Willoughby-Smith, 2010; Hogan, 2015). There are some aspects of the scene, such as the lack of business knowhow within the industry and the cordial interactions between musicians, that do not seem to be as prevalent in other places, most likely because it is conventional in Iceland to refer to just one national music scene.

CHAPTER 6: THE RISE OF THE KRÚTT

Krútt is ‘cute’, even ‘cuddly’, but also ‘clever’ and irresistibly attractive in a childlike way—precocious but still, perhaps, a bit naïve (Proppé, 2005).

In Spring 2015, when I was interviewing applicants for studies in the Music Department at the Iceland University of the Arts, one potential student described her band as a ‘*krútt*’ band. She did so without hesitation or further explanation and no one on the admission committee asked any further questions about this matter. I found the communication interesting since the term ‘*krútt*’ was presented as a genre term, and everyone involved seemed to know exactly what it entailed. I remembered reading articles in Icelandic newspapers where musicians rejected the term and the ‘death’ of the *krútt* as a scene was announced. This developed into a deeply political debate over the role of *krútt* within Icelandic society following the economic collapse. I argue that despite its contentious nature, the term has evolved into a meaningful description of an important genre in Icelandic popular music. To underpin my discussion of the music scene, I highlight some of the internal debates about the term that have mainly remained outside academic discourse. These debates again illustrate the contesting narratives that appear about the role of music and how musicians defend their importance within Icelandic society.

The aim of the chapter is to shed light on the term *krútt*, and the music it refers to, by analysing print and online media discourse. Journalists have an important part to play in defining and constructing new genres, and launching artists in what Jason Toynbee calls ‘media sponsored pin-ups’ (Toynbee, 1993, p. 294). Despite the changes in music distribution and consumption, the media still plays an important role in the music scene. Perhaps because of the ‘village like’ behaviour of the Reykjavík music scene, where everyone knows each other (Prior, 2014, p. 10), media discussion can have an even greater effect in creating a genre than in more populous areas. In informal discussions about the term among people in Iceland, there was a general consensus that the term was created by the media in order to shed light on the phenomena. It certainly did not come from the musicians themselves. At the height of media discussion on the *krútt* in 2007 and 2008, everyone who followed the local news in Iceland heard this term, and those with an interest in culture understood that there was a specific scene or genre at play with discrete qualities. Musicians associated with the term included Björk, múm, Sigur Rós, Amiina, Ólöf Arnalds, Kira Kira, Seabear, Mugison, Trabant, Rúnk, Slowblow and Emiliana Torrini.

With this in mind, I investigated the term krútt. I explored how this term was used to describe a section of the popular music scene through an analysis of written sources identified by an online search and supplemented with interviews drawn from my fieldwork in Iceland. I also drew on my informal observations and experience as a native Icelandic. This offered insight on the term, the scene, and the music which it describes, and it revealed who was considered part of the scene, as well as the values and ideology involved. By understanding how and why the term krútt originated, and how the scene was understood and defined through the term, one can gain insight into musical life in Iceland in the 21st century. This also enhances understanding of how musical scenes develop. Key questions that I address are: What were regarded as the defining features of the krútt and why did it receive this name? Who were considered part of the krútt scene? What caused the debate about the term krútt in 2008 and when did the term gain general (and accepted) status? The twenty sources that provide the foundation for the discussion in this chapter can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. The written media sources used in this analysis.

Source	Type of media	Language	Writer	Year
Krúttkynslóðin	Magazine article	Icelandic	Journalist	2002
List Icelandic Art News	Academic article	Icelandic	Critic	2004
Nýlistasafnið Carnal Knowledge	Art criticism	Icelandic	Critic	2005
Eru krúttin dauð	Newspaper article	Icelandic	Music Journalist	2007
Meira en bara eitthvert krútt	Newspaper article	Icelandic	Music Journalist	2007
Af ótímabærum dánarfregnum	Newspaper article	Icelandic	Musician	2008
Af tilvist, dauða og pólitík	Newspaper article	Icelandic	Music Journalist	2008
Er nóg að vera bara krútt	Newspaper article	Icelandic	Academic	2008
Krútt or Being cute	Blog	English	Audience	2008
Krúttin og kreppan	Newspaper article	Icelandic	Music Journalist	2008
Ótímabær andlátsfregn	Newspaper article	Icelandic	Musician	2008
Listin á tíma kreppu	Newspaper article	Icelandic	Academic	2008
Iceland's Cuddly Generation	Newspaper article	English	Journalist	2008
Þjóðin þarf krútt og ljóð	Newspaper article	Icelandic	Audience	2008
Krudt-kynslóðin	Blog	Icelandic	Audience	2008
The party's over for Iceland	Newspaper article	English	Journalist	2008
Survival of the Cute	Newspaper article	English	Journalist	2008
Krútt, and post-krútt, or prútt	Blog	English	Audience	2009
Krútt - Egill Harðar	Blog	Icelandic	Music Journalist	2011
Just Another Snake Cult - krútt	Blog	Icelandic	Musician	2011

The list reveals that most of the discussion of the term *krútt* is localised in Iceland, but it reached an international audience in 2008 when a journalist from *The Observer* wrote an article about the financial collapse in Iceland and *krútt*'s role in the aftermath (McVeigh, 2008). Half of the listed material is from 2008 when a highly public debate arose about the term and its status in the context of the economic recession. As discussed in Chapter 3, the majority of scholarly work on popular music has focused on the most well-known musicians such as Björk and Sigur Rós (Dibben, 2009a; Mitchell, 2009; Webb and Lynch, 2010; Richardson, 2012; Osborn, 2013). More recently, research has focused on social aspects of the musical scene through ethnographic studies that investigated the economics of Icelandic popular music (Baker, 2014) and how the spatial structure of Reykjavík influences music making (Prior, 2014). The sometimes heated debate around *krútt* has remained hidden from the international academic and musical community, perhaps because the discussion took place predominantly in the Icelandic language.

The Term *Krútt*: Definition and Origins

The term *krútt* does not have a simple definition or easy translation into English. Dictionary definitions include terms of endearment and affection, a pet name, and most often in relation to children but rarely to a significant other. 'Delightful', 'adorable' and 'lovely' are variously offered as English translations of the term. It also appears in use as a noun: 'He is such a *krútt*' (e. adorable/lovely). Etymologically the term is related to '*angi*' which would translate to 'a small child' In this setting the term becomes somewhat negative and minimizing; the receiver of this 'term of endearment' is automatically subordinate to the bestower (Sigmundsson, 2012). These are the etymological definitions, but colloquial explanations are often more along the lines of what is stated in the quotations above, namely the idea of *krútt* as cute, cuddly and childlike. These latter meanings are the qualities that have been attributed to the artists who have come to be known as *krútt* in Icelandic media. The term can be used both as a definite and collective noun, referring to one or many musicians. It is also used as an adjective describing certain qualities and as an adverb, for example to play in a cute way.

Figure 16. Depiction of the krútt by Halldór Baldursson accompanied the article by Ragnar Pétursson in *Mannlíf*.

The term krútt first appeared in 2002 in an article by Ragnar Pétursson titled '*Krúttkynslóðin*' (e. the Cutesy generation), accompanied by an illustration depicting well-known musicians (Figure 16). The article was commissioned by writer Gerður Kristný Guðjónsdóttir, who was the editor of *Mannlíf*, a human interest and lifestyle magazine. Every source used for this chapter cited her as the creator of the term, with the explanation that she described the emergence of a new group of artists who were cute and 'publicly appeared as if they still ate sand' (Arnsteinsson, 2007). Here again, the connotation of childhood is strong and in this instance it is rather belittling, although a later article by Guðjónsdóttir (2008) shows more respect towards the krútt as she argues that 'The krútt should be proud to be krútt as they are what the nation needs now [in the recession after the economic collapse]'.

The suheading for Pétursson's article reads: 'There is a group of young people who would rather play yatzy⁴² than make money. Are they perpetual teenagers or geniuses?' (Pétursson, 2002, p. 39). A short anecdote about the BBC children's television series 'Teletubbies' follows – a programme which his young daughter finds relaxing. The Teletubby characters are carefree, affable, and no one is bad, arrogant, beautiful or ugly; they are not real, they will not grow up but will remain insouciant and innocent. He remarks on the emergence of a group of people who remind him of the Teletubbies, namely the krútt. In his examination of this group, its appearance, interests and ideology, he makes three main points. First, this group of people places a great emphasis on being different, i.e. they avoid the 'mainstream' at all cost. They buy their clothes in alternative stores, markets, or second-hand shops abroad. They do not smoke the most popular brands of cigarettes; they prefer wine to beer and listen to experimental music and do not recognise the bestselling pop band of that year. Pétursson finds them open-minded but characterises them as sometimes showing prejudice towards those who are not as different as they are, as they are all 'different'. What Pétursson describes as different might be what Prior experiences as 'alternative' and "'authentic" music culture' in his fieldwork in Reykjavík (2014, p. 14).

Pétursson's second point is that the krútt are childlike and seem sexless. Björk appears at awards ceremonies and in interviews in strange clothes and childlike accessories; he refers to interviews with krútt where one has chosen a children's song as her favourite song, and another picks chocolate cake and milk as favourite foods. He also mentions a childlike approach to music making and childlike qualities in the music and lyrics, which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter. Pétursson's third point, which other sources have also found to be central to the krútt, is their (lack of) political engagement. According to Pétursson, the krútt neither have opinions nor take a stand on controversial issues: 'It is fun to be a child, it frees one from responsibilities. We can laugh instead of understanding class struggle and the EU. Most of the krútt have opinions on power plants but nothing other than that' (Pétursson, 2002, p. 39).

These three aspects of krútt which I identify in Pétursson's article, are central to the term as it is used in other sources. The general tone of the article is rather patronising, and early on in the

⁴² Yatzy is a dice game, similar to Yacht and Yahtzee, which is popular in the Nordic countries.

article the author discusses the members of the scene in a condescending and negative manner. He names a few artists who he sees as part of this movement including Björk, Sigur Rós, múm, the violinist Sigrún Eðvaldsdóttir (1st Concertmaster of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra), the artists Gabriela Friðriksdóttir, the artistic collective The Icelandic Love Corporation, and the writer Andri Snær Magnason. This is the first attempt to list particular people as being krútt. Interestingly, it is not only contain popular musicians, but also a classical musician, visual artist, and writer. Overall, the article is rather harsh and judgemental and seems to belittle the artists involved and the author clearly finds them pretentious and naïve. At the very end of the article the author changes his tone. He proposes that one need not wonder whether the krútt are genuine and ‘authentic’: ‘We should just listen to their music, look at their art, watch their videos and try not to envy these krútt of their artistry and uniqueness’ (Pétursson, 2002, p. 44). In the article Pétursson captures and presents a vivid picture of this emerging scene with its peculiarities and uniqueness, and in doing so provides the foundation for all further use of the term.

It should be noted that although this is a relatively new grouping of artists, the ideas of childishness and cuteness central to krútt were apparent for many years in reviews of Björk in the UK music press. In 1993 she was referred to as ‘a mischievous child’ and in 1998 as ‘pop’s mad Arctic cutestress’ (Leonard, 2007, pp. 82–86). Pétursson even confers Björk with a maternal role towards this movement when he uses the subheading ‘after the hen comes the egg’, and traces a path from ‘the Queen of the Krútt’, i.e. Björk, to the next generation, including Sigur Rós and múm (2002, p. 40). In fact, the musician Mugison was very happy to be regarded as the prince of the krútt, with Björk as the queen, Jónsi from Sigur Rós as the king, and the visual artist Ragnar Kjartansson as the princess (Mugison, Personal Communication 14/07/2016).

After the first article in 2002, the term krútt was not widely used in print until 2005 when it appeared in an article in the online journal *List: Icelandic Art News*. *List* was an English language journal published by the Centre for Icelandic Art, a cooperative project of Iceland’s museums and artists’ organisations. The journal has since ceased to exist. The article, ‘“Krútt” and Its Discontents’, was written by the Icelandic curator and art critic Jón Proppé (2005). In the previous year an art exhibition had taken place titled Krútt (‘Krútt and Lorna’, 2013) and perhaps that exhibition was in Proppé’s mind when he wrote the article. The aim seems to have been to offer a critical introduction to the term krútt for foreigners interested in the Icelandic

art scene, as he begins the article by addressing those potential readers: ‘Those of you abroad who follow the Icelandic art scene, in the last couple of years, have heard a strange word that crops up in discussion more and more often’ (Proppé, 2005). This statement implies that the term had gained in popularity between its first appearance in 2002 and this article from 2005. The author states that the label is used as an umbrella term ‘to categorise a generation of Iceland’s creative youth’ and mentions the same artists and musicians as Pétursson: namely, Björk, Sigur Rós, Gabríela Friðriksdóttir and The Love Corporation. It shows that there was some consistency in who were considered to be krútt soon after the term was coined. He states that it is not clear why some of the art made by these artists and musicians should be considered as ‘cute or childishly innocent’ as it is technologically advanced, ‘dark’ or critical. He finds the term specifically Icelandic: ‘The term certainly does not correspond directly with any particular international style or ideological formation; it is not employed in self-conscious emulation of art-historical terminology’ (Proppé, 2005).

A new genre can only be established if it has a name and Fabian Holt explains that discourse is central to the creation of new genres. The naming process can be difficult and ‘is often met with resistance. ... some people are sceptical of categories and refuse to deal with them’ (2007, p. 3). The krútt label is no exception and in Proppé’s article from 2005 he notes resistance to the term:

Krútt now shows every sign of becoming another of those labels that progressive artists everywhere loathe; it is even being embraced as a style term, self-consciously mixing woollen socks and designer clothing. But you can be sure that few serious artists will accept such a fascicle [*sic*] definition. Even cute babies will bite when provoked (Proppé, 2005).

This resistance is also noted by Hjálmarsson who explains that ‘krútt is a label that the alleged krútt care very little for and consider derogatory, and they are right, as the krútt label is both simplistic and unfair’ (2013, p. 192). He notes that the term is contested by the scene it purports to label, but he does not explain how the term is unfair. It is not clear whether this concerns its etymology, cultural connotations, the context in which the term has been used, or some other reason. The description of the label as ‘simple’ is also undefined. Is it the act of categorising these artists together under one term which is simplistic, or does he find that the term itself suggests that the musicians or the music are simple? It should be noted that despite his issues with the term krútt, Hjálmarsson uses it for a chapter title in his popular music history book (Hjálmarsson, 2012), thus further validating its existence.

The reaction to the term *krútt* is similar to what happened with the label ‘grunge’, and is typical of the development of scenes, according to Magnússon, who is both a member of the rock band Reykjavík! and a journalist: ‘No one dares to admit that he is playing into a certain scene ... but the term *krútt* works well and people understand what you are referring to’ (Arnsteinsson, 2007). Magnússon finds the term particularly useful as a journalist because it works as shorthand for a large selection of bands and musicians and he feels that people know what is being conveyed when using the term *krútt* (Arnsteinsson, 2007). In this sense the term makes the life of journalists easier, and it is understandable that musicians hold journalists responsible for disseminating the term. In addition, in a small community such as the music scene in Reykjavík, news, trends and gossip travel fast. Perhaps that is why the term quickly became well known and frequently used; it only had to be used a few times before everyone knew and understood it. Sigfúsdóttir is one of those who have no problems with the categorisation itself, but she does not like the term. In her mind it developed negative connotations ‘not necessarily within media, but in the society in general, with people that neither understand the music nor belong to the scene.’ She found it sad that a whole generation or a large group of people was judged to be something small or cute due to one definition (Arnsteinsson, 2007). Sigfúsdóttir described how people talked to her condescendingly when associating her with the *krútt*. By contrast, she emphasized that the people linked to the *krútt* were adults who strongly believed that they were carrying out important work (Arnsteinsson, 2007; Geirsdóttir, 2008). As this illustrates, for some musicians the ‘cute’ label undermines the importance of the artistic product. The remaining discussion will focus on specific characteristics of *krútt*, including its membership, the sound of *krútt* and finally its values and ideology.

Who are Krútt?

Although Pétursson’s list, which first mentioned certain people as *krútt*, presented a fairly wide pool of artists, shortly after, the term became mostly used for popular musicians. Björk, múm, Sigur Rós, Amiina, Ólöf Arnalds, Kira Kira, Seabear, Mugison, Trabant, Runk, Slowblow and Emiliana Torrini are those who are named repeatedly in the sources on which this chapter builds (Bollason, 2007, 2008; Pálsson, 2008; Thoroddsen, 2008). In the beginning, the term was only used by cultural commentators, and it seems that the artists themselves had no public role in how they were framed. Then, in the summer of 2005, there was a deliberate attempt by musicians to take over the term *krútt* and make it their own when Svavar Pétur Eysteinnsson and Berglind Häsler from the band Skakkamanage organised an art festival titled *Krútt*. Musicians

and bands participating in the event included múm, Hudson Wayne, Reykjavík!, Skátar, Skakkamanage, Brite Light, Benni Hemm Hemm, Auxpan, Kimono, Borko, Ólína Gunnlaugsdóttir, Hundslappadrífa, and Mice Parade, and several visual artists took part in an art exhibition during the festival, including Pétur Már Gunnarsson, Elsa D. Gísladóttir, Davíð Örn Halldórsson, Bryndís Ragnarsdóttir, Baldur Geir Bragason, Baldur Björnsson, Hildigunnur Birgisdóttir, Kolbeinn Hugi, Þór Sigurþórsson, Berglind Ágústsdóttir, Sígga Björg, Hugleikur Dagsson and Guðný Rúnarsdóttir. Thoroddsen wrote about the festival and argued that the term krútt had previously been used in a degrading way to describe artists, but by naming the festival Krútt the musicians were cherishing and accepting it (Thoroddsen, 2005). Arguably, this was a way of claiming power over the term and trying to rid it of the perceived stigma:

We wanted to get the indie-scene to the countryside and keep the festival small – small and cute. [...] We decided it would be fun to play around with the term that one keeps hearing, a term which comes from people who stand outside of the group which apparently is part of this cute generation. We thought it would be fun to bring it to the surface and investigate thoroughly who these krútt are (Thoroddsen, 2005).

This description of the festival offers an important viewpoint: the organisers of the festival, themselves musicians in a band that had been labelled as krútt, equate the krútt with what they call the ‘indie scene’. Indeed, the most prominent trend in the popular music scene in Iceland in the first decade of the 21st century can be categorised as indie rock/pop. For Thoroddsen (2008) and Pálsson (2008) the term krútt includes the most active and important musicians working in Iceland, but they are unified by their success, not their stylistic attributes. The krútt’s international success is frequently mentioned when discussing the term, and one source goes as far as stating that the krútt dominated most of the first decade of the twenty-first century (Bollason, 2007). Hjálmarsson, in his history of Icelandic popular music, similarly argued that the krútt were the most important ambassadors of Icelandic music (2012, p. 398). In the concept of the festival, krútt describes some of those indie bands not (only) as a certain musical phenomenon, but as group of young people (then in their 20s) who had several things in common.

The relationship of the Icelandic krútt with indie music seems to be ambiguous. When I discussed the term with a musician working in a different genre, she explained that she understood the term to be synonymous with Icelandic indie, asking: ‘Isn’t krútt just the Icelandic indie [music]?’ The two-disc compilation series of Icelandic popular music, *Hot Spring*, made for the country’s main airline, Icelandair, and *This is Icelandic Indie Music*, both

feature many krútt musicians and bands among the (mainly) indie music. The resemblance between the two compilations, and the appearance of the same bands on both, confirms the impression that the international market for Icelandic music is centred on the indie scene and encompasses krútt and indie. It is clear that krútt are part of the indie scene. Nonetheless, other indie bands which did not fit the krútt scene co-existed in Iceland. Gestur Guðmundsson and Arnar Eggert Thoroddsen argue that a shift in the indie scene took place in 2005, whereby bands ideologically opposed to the krútt bands, and in opposition to the introverted, shy krútt musicians, also emerged: '[T]he new scene was extroverted. The order of the day was campy fun and catchy tuned, grounded in an indie-rock outlook. Retro Stefson, one of the leading lights, played an eclectic mix of musical styles: a colourful platter laid with indie pop/rock and heaped with bossa nova, disco, jazz' (2016, p. 62). Retro Stefson, Jeff Who? and Sprengjuhöllin are examples of this other version of indie music that displayed 'jokey shenanigans and pompous declarations' (Thoroddsen, 2018, p. 35).

Krútt Sound and Art

The term krútt is highly contentious. According to Thoroddsen, the term krútt 'is too vague and wide and does not hold as a definition for a musical genre' (2008). Proppé (2005) states that the term has been used to describe musical and artistic practices that feel particularly 'Icelandic'. In international reviews, critics have even equated the sound of the krútt with the idea of an Icelandic sound that is rooted in the landscape (Sullivan, 2007). Mugison describes a certain shift with the krútt, where the focus moved away from dance/entertainment music to a more 'serious' musical practice which he calls art pop (Mugison, Personal Communication 14/07/2016). These 'serious' musicians were those who became the 'ambassadors of Icelandic music' as Hjálmarsson puts it; they became the representation of Icelandic music, and as such, their sound and music came to represent an Icelandic sound. Pálsson (2008) claims that 'in the eyes of the universe Icelandic music and artistic introversion – *krúttism* – are one and the same'. This is similar to my own findings, and my participants agreed that, if anything, the krútt could be seen as the 'Icelandic sound'.

There were two reasons why the krútt came to represent the 'Icelandic sound'. Firstly, the krútt musicians were prominent internationally. Secondly, the unified sonic qualities of their music, further discussed below, were different to what was popular at the time in other places, and thus seemed unique. Cohen has noted that if an artist from a specific place becomes successful,

that place is commonly sought out by industry personnel who try to build on that success (1994, p. 118). She explains that signing several artists from the same place can ‘contribute to a media construction, promotion and marketing of a local “scene” or “sound”, as with the so-called “Liverpool Sound” in the 1960s, the “Coventry Sound” in the 1970s, and the “Manchester Sound” in the 1980s’ (Cohen, 1994, p. 118). The ‘Icelandic sound’ of the krútt scene is such an example, where an interest in a specific scene, which was considered different to other contemporary musical outputs, created the notion of a unique national sound.

The idea of the ‘Icelandic sound’ is co-constructed by audience and the media outside of Iceland: ‘I think that you have to be like an outsider to hear the Icelandic sound’ states Katrína Mogensen the singer of Mammút (Grant, 2014) and this is partly true. Connell and Gibson note that ‘assertions of local “sounds” are never wholly created within places. While local authorities, media, corporations and musicians often entrench territorial claims or emphasise difference through identifications with regional “sounds”, they also form part of a mythology of “the local” created from beyond: “a commercially constructed strategic essentialism of place”’ (2003, p. 112). Only a small part of the music created in Iceland manages to gain an international audience and subsequently become the representative of the ‘Icelandic sound’. Peter Webb, in his discussion about the ‘Bristol Sound’, explains that the bands that came to represent the ‘Bristol Sound’ gained their status because of their local importance but also because ‘of their acceptance and elevation by the national and then the global music industry’ (2005, p. 84). The same seems to be true within the Icelandic music scene. The krútt music, which came to represent the ‘Icelandic sound’ was not only accepted in Iceland, but also gained recognition and elevation internationally. The international elevation might arguably be even more important in the Icelandic context than in other places, because of the fragility of national identity in Iceland, where a recognition from abroad is cherished above local recognition (see Chapter 3).

Krútt sound has been described as ‘soft, emotional, and on the surface naïve – but with an eyebrow raised. It’s tonally advanced and escapist in nature, but also self-aware; a beautiful world created knowingly, and a counterculture that replaced the antagonism of punk with walks in the woods’ (Cohen, 2017). Proppé finds ‘advanced tonal techniques and hyper-intellectual associations’ in the work of Björk and Sigur Rós (2005). Hjálmarsson describes the sound as ‘wellies and woollen jumper in music ... not with a lot of hormones. A little bit childlike and homemade. Introvert and not aggressive’ (Hjálmarsson, Personal Communication, 18/07/2016).

These descriptions of the krútt sound are also applicable to Björk's *Vespertine*, which was released in 2001. Given the important place Björk has in the krútt scene, the album might have been influential in the development of the sound, although it is never mentioned in the sources analysed. Krútt musicians themselves describe the music in terms of timbral characteristics and Sóley depicts it as follows: '[T]here's always stuff like weird keyboards and the glockenspiel but it's more of the vibe around the music. The lyrics and how you sing it: its breathy and introverted. Krútt music is all different but it has a "We are very shy," attitude. That is the krútt thing' (Sóley cited in Cohen, 2017). Hildur explains that when her band Rökkurró was starting out (in 2006), the krútt was the most prominent scene in Reykjavík. Initially they were influenced by krútt and their music included an accordion and glockenspiel and Hildur sang in Icelandic, in high pitches, even using falsetto. These elements are what Hildur regarded as krútt. When Rökkurró developed their style, these elements were removed because they wanted their sound to be more 'mature' (Hildur, Personal Communication, 18/07/2016). This account indicates that the band was aware of both the benefit and limitations of certain sonic signifiers. Sigfúsdóttir characterises the krútt sound as 'ethereal and floating' (Sigfúsdóttir, Personal Communication, 31/03/2016) and musician Alvia Islandia portrays it as 'music with like a quiet guitar and soft voice that lingers in your head all smooth and soothing. It doesn't harass you, just slides into the ear. But it can have more energy too. Like FM Belfast is just a big krútt party' (Alvia Islandia cited in Cohen, 2017). In general, the sound of the krútt's music is seldom discussed in any detail in the media. Instead they focus on the qualities of the people who make the music, rather than the music itself.

The child-like personae and aesthetics of the krútt, first raised in Pétursson's article, are found in discourse around the musical materials and style. Jónsi explains their artistic processes in the following way: 'I think our music is extremely simple, somewhat childish. We like looking at different spheres, investigate things, just as children do' (Jónsi cited in Pétursson, 2002, p. 42). Some journalists have echoed this description of the music and their way of working as childlike, describing the music of the krútt as unforced, cute, sweet, collaborative, playful (Sigurðardóttir, 2005), and the melodies as simple (Bollason, 2007). Sigur Rós is well known for using instruments which have childlike connotations, such as a toy piano and glockenspiels, the latter being a core instrument in music classes in Icelandic schools and beyond. A photo of Sigur Rós's keyboard section in a concert filmed in *Heima* (Deblois, 2007) was published in a booklet with the DVD. The photo shows two glockenspiels, a toy piano and several keyboards of different sizes, one with colour-coded stickers on the keys. The stickers, used to assist

playing, is something one would normally associate with beginners and/or children who have yet to master their instrument, not professional musicians. As the image features in the booklet accompanying the DVD of the film, it suggests that the band is content with this portrayal. Fonarow (2013) explains that simplicity is one of the characteristics of indie music, both with respect to the songs and the musical knowledge of the musicians. She argues that from the indie perspective, formal education can distance the performers from the core of the music as aspirations are more important than musical know-how (Fonarow, 2013, pp. 42–43). Hesmondhalgh explains this as ‘minimum display of musical prowess’ (1999, p. 38), which seems to suggest that the musical knowledge is in place but the musicians are not flaunting it.

Some of the krútt are regarded as having especially child-like voices and speech patterns (Pétursson, 2002, p. 40), and the whispered or half broken vocals of the early múm records caught the attention of foreign critics. Reviewing múm’s album *Summer Make Good* (2004) the music journalist Ian Watson writes: ‘The girl starts singing in heavily accented English... or is it English at all? [...] Squeaky, elfin, almost infantile vocal style. [...] She has the strangest voice, part Midwicht Cuckoos, part Ophelia, part little girl who’s seen much too much’ (Watson, 2004). The album represents a move away from many of the child-like characteristics prominent on the band’s first two albums. It offers a wide array of instruments, a much darker sound world, and thicker texture, but at the same time it sounds exploratory, which resembles children exploring an unfamiliar territory. The most dominating characteristic, however, is the infantile sounding vocals as Watson describes, which give the listener the impression that it is made by children. Analysis of múm’s song ‘Weeping Rock, Rock’, which is the first proper song on the album, illustrates some of these child-like features. The vocal tone is childlike, untrained and high pitched, full of air and sentimentality, offering a strange intimacy. The vocal melody is short and simple and is repeated throughout the song without any development. It is accompanied by an instrument playing in unison to support the singing. In the final moments of the song the vocals are layered, sounding like a children’s choir in the distance. The singing is often mumbled, akin to humming, making it difficult to hear the lyrics. The lyrics are fairly strange, but perhaps fit the voice that sings them with a heavy Icelandic accent. They are written in grammatically poor English, mixed in with occasional Icelandic words, including skara (to poke), ró (calm), ligg (lie), creating a strange mixture and giving the impression of a childlike grasp of the English language. Overall, the song has a simple structure, a musical idea is introduced at the beginning, and the song is extended by introducing various layers of

instruments and the vocals onto it. At its core, the entire song is built on this single musical idea that is repeated throughout the song.

The innocence and child-like behaviour can also be seen in the krútt's artistic output. The album covers of *The Peel Session* and *Marmalade Fires* by múm and *Benni Hemm Hemm* and *Kajak* by Benni Hemm Hemm are good example of this, as the cover art resembles children's drawings. Children have also been prominent in Sigur Rós's music videos: in 'Viðrar vel til loftárása' the key character is a young boy, who is seen pushing a doll pram with two dolls at the very beginning of the video, and in 'Glósóli' a group of children are at play. Parallels can be drawn between the childlike aspect of the krútt and indie rock in general. As Marion Leonard notes, within a certain strand of indie music 'a tradition of the fetishisation of childish things' can be found (Leonard, 2007, p. 94), and Simon Reynolds states that 'a huge proportion of indie groups have pictures of children or childish things on their record sleeves' (Borthwick and Moy, 2004, p. 189). It is clear that this aspect of the krútt has its roots in a broader context of the international indie genre.

Reynolds defines indie in opposition to 'mainstream' values, 'against the mainstream image of a desirable body ... the indie ideal is slender, pale of skin, childishly androgynous' (Borthwick and Moy, 2004, p. 190). Fonarow believes that this image is connected to indie's longing 'for a return to an imagined childhood'. This includes technophobia, preference of vinyl over the CD which sounds metallic and 'too clean' (2013, p. 47). The indie ideology calls for a return to the basics, the simple, ordinary and untrained. A desire to return to the past informs the beliefs, styles, customs and practice of indie (Fonarow, 2013, p. 50). Here again, the discussion of the krútt follows in the footsteps of general indie discussion. Musicians associated with the krútt label release music on vinyl, use low-tech recording techniques mixed in with the standard digital methods, and, in many of the sources analysed, have been regarded as the lo-fi and DIY generation (Bollason, 2008; Hooste, 2008; Guðjónsson, 2011).

Proppé, as stated above, sees the krútt as something specifically Icelandic, but international comparison is also appropriate. Only a single source attempts to contextualise the krútt amid a wider musical scene: in this instance, musician and journalist Atli Bollason (2007) compares the krútt to the 'twee-pop' of 1990s Britain and draws attention to similarities regarding their characteristics and political circumstances. I have shown that the child-like aspect of the krútt is mirrored in discussions about indie. According to Pete Dale the term 'indie' changed in the

late 1980s, moving the focus away from the modes of production and distribution to taking on ‘a specific definition, flagging up a particular kind of music’ (Dale, 2009, p. 178). This change has been correlated with the “twee ditties” of the C86 compilation cassette⁴³ (p. 178) and the scene became ‘known variously as “cutie”, “shambling bands” or “C86”’ (p. 179). In writing about the ‘cutie’, ‘twee’ or ‘indie-pop’ label of Sarah Records, Michael White describes the vocals on the Field Mice’s debut EP, *Emma’s House*, as ‘the singer who imparted his words in a shy, confiding near-whisper’ (White, 2015, p. xix). This depiction somewhat resembles the múm review, which was cited earlier in this chapter, and some parallels can be drawn between the krútt and the indie pop of the late 1980s.⁴⁴

Values and Ideology of the Krútt

An article in *The Economist* explained that ‘Iceland’s banking collapse is the biggest, relative to the size of an economy, that any country has ever suffered’ (2008). Some Icelanders lost their savings, others their jobs, and loan interest rates rose considerably. No political leader took responsibility. This spurred public social protest which reached its culmination in late January 2009, causing the government to collapse midway through their term in office (Jordan, 2009).

Shortly after the collapse, the term krútt became a controversial issue in Iceland and the death of the krútt was announced. This was a deeply political discussion and the liveliest debate in Icelandic media concerning popular music in recent decades or perhaps ever. Musicians, journalists, music pundits, scholars and the general public took part in the discussion about krútt in newspapers, blogs and online forums, and even on television. The death of the krútt was announced by the historian Valur Gunnarsson. Rather than issuing his death certificate on musical grounds, he focused on the politics of the music, as in times of recession there was ‘a demand that musicians have something more to offer’ (Gunnarsson, 2008b). This statement

⁴³ This was a compilation cassette tape produced by the UK weekly magazine *NME*, which helped to group the featured artists together. See (White, 2015, pp. xvii–xviii) for further discussion.

⁴⁴ It should be noted that 1960s UK rock can also be seen as influential with its interest in romantic mysticism, pastoralism, ruralism and nostalgia (Stump, 1998, pp. 41–42). Emily I. Dolan discusses childlike aspects of indie pop in general, which serve to ‘conjure images of an imagined childhood’ (Dolan, 2010, p. 464). Another international comparison can be made with the cute Kawaii aesthetics in 1980s Japan, although there it was heavily associated with consumerism (Kinsella, 1995) which is different to the krútt.

(and a debate he had about the krútt with Guðmundur Oddur Magnússon,⁴⁵ research professor of graphic design at the Iceland University of the Arts, on the television news magazine *Kastljós*) prompted music journalists and musicians to respond. Various individuals, including journalists, writers, and musicians, engaged in the debate, although some only to refute the death announcement and emphasise the value of the krútt's participation in Iceland's music life (Guðjónsdóttir, 2008; Pálsson, 2008; Thoroddsen, 2008). Bollason argued that even though the krútt could very well be political in their personal sphere, this neither appeared in their music nor in the presentation (i.e. extra musical material) of their music. He suggested that the krútt 'employ some kind of "passive-aggressive" political method, they refuse to accept the premise of liberalism, do not partake in discussion which is defined by its idiom and ideology' (Bollason, 2008). These seem to be contradictory statements: the krútt are both non-political and use a 'passive-aggressive' political method. He does not state how effective he feels the krútt are but Gunnarsson is clear in his point of view. Since the krútt do not partake in the political sphere, they have nothing to add to the discourse and are thus worthless (Gunnarsson, 2008a).

Sigfúsdóttir was one of the few musicians regarded as krútt to engage publicly in the debate. She took offence at Gunnarsson's statement that the krútt have nothing to offer and explained:

This is the group which during the last years has been the most hard working and done well but has not been so focused on declaring it as the older generations. They build up their thing slow and steady and it is childish to misinterpret that as uninteresting and empty (Sigfúsdóttir cited in Geirsdóttir, 2008).

She felt that it was easy to attack the krútt, because the people associated with the term were honest and gentle in their endeavours: 'They [the krútt] are people who are without pretention, they offer their soul and heart for their work and thus become targets, as they are not armoured' (Geirsdóttir, 2008). Pálsson also disagrees with Gunnarsson as he finds a certain resistance to consumer society in the krútt's ideology. He states that 'Amiina's slow music resembles the calm at the eye of the storm, made to get people to slow down and look around. It reflects a certain viewpoint, not indifference' (2008). The resistance that Pálsson sheds light on is arguably along the same lines as Bollason's ideas of a 'passive-aggressive' political method, and it can be seen as an opposition to the neo-liberalism which had gained a strong foothold in Icelandic society at the turn of the twenty-first century (Bollason, 2007; Magnússon, 2009).

⁴⁵ This is the Magnússon being referred to throughout this chapter, not Haukur S. Magnússon who has been referred to in other chapters.

The krútt ideology, with its second-hand clothing, DIY approach to music making, designs of album covers and promotional material (Sokol, 2008), was a form of resistance to consumerism. Magnússon stated that the krútt had qualities which would become valuable in the contemporary sociological reality of Iceland after the financial crisis:

At the beginning of the century at the same time as people flocked to business school to become part of the assembly line at banks, a group of young people reacted to this. They began thinking about sustainability and refused to use designer labels. They made music with children's toys. They know how to make gold out of nothing. These are the people we call the krútt-generation today. Somehow they are better equipped to live with recession than others, as they have the mentality of not needing and not wanting luxury (Magnússon, 2009).

Magnússon believes that these are the people who will lead the Icelandic nation out of the recession, and therefore they can be seen as important political figures. The political commitment of the krútt can be seen as part of a broader debate about the role of music in political engagement (Street, 2012).

As political figures, krútt musicians have been active in environmental issues, and their general political position is frequently referred to in the sources I examined. As a result, krútt have had substantial impact on environmentalism by drawing international attention to the issue. Dibben and Størvold illustrate the power and international reach of the environmental message in projects by krútt musicians, including in Sigur Rós's *Heima* (Dibben, 2017, p. 171) and Björk's 'Náttúra' single, one of the most downloaded Björk songs (Størvold, 2018a, p. 11). Dibben has written extensively about Björk's participation in environmental projects (Dibben, 2009a) and the environmentalism of Icelandic musicians in general, and she has shown how 'popular musicians [have] contributed to a discourse emphasising Iceland's international duty to protect its land' (Dibben, 2009b, p. 144).

Björk has been the most visible music-activist and has organised and participated in several protest concerts, including Stop the Dams Concert in 2006, where she performed in the company of leading Icelandic musicians, including múm and Sigur Rós, and popular foreign musicians such as Damien Rice, Lisa Hannigan and Damon Albarn ('Stop the Dams concert a massive success', 2006). In the summer of 2008 Björk, Sigur Rós, Ólöf Arnalds and Ghostigital organised a protest concert in Reykjavík to raise awareness of environmental issues ('Náttúra Concert A Success', 2008), but Björk was the figurehead and main sponsor of the Náttúra project as a whole (Dibben, 2009b). With all these concerts, the question remains as to whether

these initiatives do more than raise awareness of environmental issues and actually impact on public opinion or policy making. One event, which coincided with a change in both public opinion and policy, was the 2014 Stopp – gætum garðsins.⁴⁶ The aim of the event was to raise awareness and funds for the Hálandið – Iceland National Park project, which fights for the conservation of the Central Icelandic Highlands as a national park. Björk was one of the key organisers and many krútt musicians performed (‘Stopp - Gætum garðsins’, 2014). After the event took place, some changes were apparent, as a Gallup poll in 2015 showed increased support from the public (Guðmundsson, 2015, pp. 4–5) on this issue, and in 2018 the government announced the appointment of a cross-party committee working towards establishing a national park in the Central Highlands (*Stjórnarráð Íslands*, 2018). It is impossible to determine the exact impact of the event, but perhaps it is no coincidence that these events followed the music campaign.

The environmental perspective and stance on landscape⁴⁷ which the krútt have adopted is indebted to romanticism. Several of the media sources deemed this romantic outlook to be an important aspect of krútt ideology (Pétursson, 2002; Bollason, 2007; Pálsson, 2008; Guðjónsson, 2011). Magnússon explains his understanding of this aspect of the krútt as follows:

Romantic at its core, where it is searching for an inner truth, the child within, something noble and real. ... A group that was raised in a high-tech society where people know how to copy and paste but have now realised that it is possible to use scissors and glue. Low-tech blends in with high-tech which their parents offered (Guðmundsson cited in Arnsteinsson, 2007).

Dibben has argued that the romantic ideology present in Icelandic popular music videos and documentaries is the same as has ‘underpinned other Icelandic culture in the twentieth century’ (Dibben, 2009b, p. 145). She notes that the popular music she examines reveals a tension within the national identity as, variously,

rural, traditional and tied to the land, versus the country’s current position as an industrial, urban, modern state; between an idea of the nation as bounded, homogenous and isolationist and its desire to be seen as a national equal to that of other European nations; and between a desire for internationalisation and interaction versus preservation of national culture (Dibben, 2009b, p. 145).

⁴⁶ Many thanks to Tore Størvold for bringing this to my attention.

⁴⁷ Another aspect that is beyond the scope of this chapter is the issue of the commodification of the Icelandic landscape for tourism purposes, which is related to the use and representation of landscape by *krútt* musicians.

The romantic ideology embedded in the scene is marked by a rural, traditional, isolated, homogenous character of Icelandic national identity, and one can perceive this as a nostalgic expression. The krútt have grown up with the technology and amenities of contemporary times and seemingly experience a kind of detachment and alienation from it; they look back to the past in both artistic practices and ideological outlook, as I argue in my analysis of the film *Heima* by Sigur Rós (Chapter 7). Nostalgia has been seen as an important part of Icelandic society and influences people's lifestyles. This is not unique to Iceland, however, and according to Reynolds, nostalgia has become increasingly important in popular culture and is now 'thoroughly entwined with the consumer-entertainment complex' (Reynolds, 2011, p. xxix).

Conclusion

This chapter has revealed a significant aspect of musical life in Iceland that has remained hidden in international discourse, despite the fact that krútt music is arguably the most successful Icelandic musical export and is closely associated with the 'Icelandic sound'. By analysing the mainly Icelandic discourse and focusing on the nuanced discussion of the krútt, and unusual public interest in the local popular culture, I presented a grounded and local perspective on the subject of Icelandic music. Hopefully this work can be informative for international scholars and commentators, since it provides a context for the term and encourages a critical approach to the topic. The chapter has also provided further examples of the contesting narratives that play out within Icelandic society, particularly those concerning the place of the krútt scene and its importance during the aftermath of the collapse.

I have shown that the label krútt was originally used to define an artistic phenomenon in a particular time and place. Although the term was regarded as depicting something specifically Icelandic, it is clear that krútt music, aesthetics, and ideology have roots in indie music with especially strong connections to the British indie pop of the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s. The krútt is part of the Reykjavík music scene, and as the term came into existence, it followed a pattern of behaviour typical for a new genre term: the label became a useful shorthand for people, especially journalists, to discuss a certain artistic phenomenon. It has also been used and interpreted as a derogatory term by both music writers and musicians. The politics of the krútt were in the spotlight after the financial collapse in Iceland in 2008, and its social significance and status were intensely debated in public. Since then, discussion of the term has subsided but the publicity surrounding the term ensured that it became firmly positioned in

Icelandic vocabulary as a scene descriptor. In the last few years, the krútt scene has seemingly lost its dominance, and other genres in Iceland have received international attention. The musicians associated with the term, however, are still active and remain some of the most prominent in Iceland. Moreover, new musicians have appeared who fall within the krútt categorisation and some are even self-proclaimed krútt. Today, the term seems to have lost most of its negative connotation and is used unproblematically as another label to categorise music, musicians, and to differentiate them from the rest of the music in Iceland. This acceptance is evident in the attitudes of hip-hop musicians and krútt musicians interviewed about those genres (Cohen, 2017), and in the willingness of a younger generation of musicians to describe themselves as krútt.

CHAPTER 7: ICELAND AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN *HEIMA*

This chapter uses a case study of the film *Heima* (2007) by the krútt band Sigur Rós to draw together the central issues presented in the thesis so far. I have discussed issues of borealism, nature, nationalism and nostalgia, but I will now focus on one film, and more specifically on two scenes in that film, to show how these issues play out in one of the most successful music releases in Iceland in recent years. The chapter will investigate the construction of the role of nostalgia in Icelanders' self-imagination of heritage and belonging. Thus, it provides an opportunity to leave the outside perspective and focus on an example of contesting narratives of place construction, which takes place inside Iceland. Nostalgia is prominent throughout the film, and the analysis identifies such features in both the cinematic and recording techniques. This is especially the case in the two songs that I analyse in detail, where I read nostalgia in the structure of the songs, in timbre and timing, as well as in the lyrics. Both songs are performed in the Westfjords, which is a large peninsula in north-western Iceland. The area has suffered depopulation, and it is characterised by rural or uninhabited areas, dramatic landscapes, harsh weather, and the most fatal avalanches in Iceland's recent history. Due to the site specificity, I argue that the nostalgic presentation in the film is particularly problematic, as uncritical nostalgia can be dangerous according to Boym, as it promotes places, time and conditions which never existed (2001, p. xvi), and as such can have hampering impact on the development of these places.

The structure of the chapter will be as follows. First, I introduce the film. Secondly, the relationship between nature and music and their conjunction is analysed. It further develops the material discussed in Chapter 4, but the relationship between nature and music provides a compelling framework for the nostalgic ideology of the film and the message communicated to the viewers. Thirdly, the stereotypes of Icelandic national identity appearing in the film are examined and put in context with the ideas from the national romantic movement and its modern counterparts, which were discussed in Chapter 3. Fourthly, two particularly nostalgic scenes from the film are analysed and placed in context with contesting narratives of place creation. I argue that the film contributes to place making based on an othering process constructed on a long-distance connection to the place, rather than a lived experience.

Heima: A Film by Sigur Rós

The film presents the tour of Sigur Rós in Iceland during the summer of 2006. The title of the film, *Heima* (transl. 'at home'), implies that the emphasis is on showing the band 'at home' through the tour in Iceland and on presenting the band's own notion of their homeland. At the very beginning of the film, before the first song starts, band members reflect on the tour, which the viewer is about to experience. They claim they felt like they were on trial when playing for the Icelandic people and were nervous playing for friends and family, but also found it interesting to play for their countrymen 'because they are so judgemental' (Georg Holm, minute 02:45⁴⁸). They explain that bands had commonly toured the country and played in small towns in the past, but this was no longer the case. Their tour can perhaps be considered a homage to this tradition. It is clear that the band members see the tour and their free concerts as a way to repay the support they have experienced from the Icelandic nation: 'I guess that is sort of one idea, to give back in a way' (Holm, minute 11:19). The film offers a clear perspective of what the band considers as 'home' and how they see Icelanders.

The film is a mixture of a concert film and a documentary of the band. The film is in English indicating that it is intended for the international market. The film documents the free concerts given in sixteen places around Iceland. The viewer experiences the atmosphere at the concerts as both the band and the audiences are depicted, and it seems that the surroundings of the place are carefully examined. However, the film does not give the viewer an insight into the production side of the tour. Whilst the band and crew (81 members according to the credit list) are on the road or preparing and finishing up shows, the viewer is shown Icelandic landscape, which does not necessarily correlate with the route of the tour. The editing makes the viewers experience a sense that they are following the band from one place to the next, which is in fact an illusion. It follows the direct cinema tradition (Nicholson, 2003, pp. 195–196), has no narrator, and the film maker is absent. Some interviews with band members of Sigur Rós and Amiina⁴⁹ do take place, lending the film a clearer structure and depth. The interviews function as commentary or reflections on the tour, as they were taken after the tour had finished. Perhaps the film works better as a concert film, or even as an extended music video, rather than a documentary. The rare interviews (less than 2000 words are said in the entire 97 minutes long

⁴⁸ I provide name and time in the film when I reference interviews in the film.

⁴⁹ Amiina was on tour with Sigur Rós and was originally their backing band, at the time a string quartet, but the band now has a flourishing career in its own right.

film) primarily serve to express the band's view of Iceland and how it was to play 'at home'. The authorship of films is often unclear, but in the case of *Heima*, the band members themselves are listed as executive producers. In addition, two directors, other producers, both from the band and from EMI, contributed and arguably had some input into the creation of the film. However, as the title of the film *Heima: A film by Sigur Rós* suggests, the band members are presented as the authors, and one can therefore assume that the voice of the film and the ideology presented is that of Sigur Rós.

One of the producers explained that 'the purpose of the journey is to play for 'country and nation' and shoot a documentary about the band, Icelandic nature and nation' (*Morgunblaðið*, 2006). The film director Dean DeBlois⁵⁰ is credited for the directing although the production notes explain that he was not involved in the project until after the main filming had taken place. The musicians were, however, interviewed after the tour through his initiative. It was initially decided to have an all-Icelandic film crew to avoid 'clichéd lures of volcanoes, geysers and the Blue Lagoon' (Best, 2007). After running into problems with the 120 hours of footage, DeBlois was contacted and asked to make it into a film (Best, 2007⁵¹). The story of *Heima* is presented as a simple film documenting the band's tour of their home country:

Last year, in the endless magic hour of the Icelandic summer, Sigur Rós played a series of concerts around their homeland. Combining both the biggest and smallest shows of their career, the entire tour was filmed, and now provides a unique insight into one of the world's shyest and least understood bands captured live in their natural habitat (Best, 2007).

Here, another perspective on the content of the film is offered. It is not only showing Iceland and Icelanders, but also giving the viewer a 'unique insight into one of the world's shyest and least understood bands captured live in their natural habitat' (Best, 2007). This discourse implies that the band needs to be in its 'natural' surroundings to be understood, just as a wildlife documentary is not shot in a zoo, but in the wild to contextualise and understand animal behaviour. The film offers thus yet another example of how music and nature are linked in the works of krútt musicians, and is an example of self-borealism, as discussed in the previous chapters.

⁵⁰ Dean DeBlois's work includes *Lilo and Stitch*, and he has worked largely for Disney.

⁵¹ John Best is Sigur Rós's manager and is credited for all the texts on the film's web page. He was also one of the producers of the film.

The natural habitat of the band presented in the film is the stereotypical rural, uninhabited, and untouched Icelandic landscape and nature, which was discussed in Chapter 3. This follows the romantic idea that the identity of Icelanders rests in the rural part of the country, especially in the wilderness. The idea of Iceland that is created and the way Icelanders are depicted arguably reflect the othering process of stereotypes. I have chosen the first scene in the film for my analysis in this chapter, as it sets the atmosphere for the rest of the film. It is a good example of how the relationship between music and nature/landscape is established at various layers of the film. Preservation of nature and culture is the focus of the last section of the chapter, and several examples from the film are chosen to illustrate the othering process of the nation and country.

Links Between Music and Nature

The nature images in the film resist simple analysis, as they are complex and the landscape which appears in the film can never be ‘natural’. Landscape is always, according to Daniel Grimley, a human perspective. Thus, the construction of nature and landscape in *Heima* is bound up in a certain ideology. It is clear that the film is meant to present an Icelandic reality, and viewers do experience aspects of an Icelandic summer and nature, thus reflecting what ‘home’ is to the band. The importance of the country was highlighted in the statement that the aim of the tour was to play for ‘*country* and nation’. This implies that the country is capable of listening and suggests a relationship between the music and nature. The following analysis is based on the first scene (and song, ‘Glósóli’) but many of the issues there characterize the whole film.

In the first song, ‘Glósóli’, various technical tricks have been applied to make both landscape and nature seem more exotic and abstruse, perhaps purposefully making Iceland special. The first trick, which becomes apparent, is that rivers and waterfalls are shown to flow upwards thus mystifying nature. This is done in a subtle way and initially it is unclear what exactly is out of place. One has the feeling that something strange is going on; there is certainly some distortion in the landscape and nature is not behaving ‘naturally’. This effect is underlined in the music, where sound bites are seemingly played backwards, creating the same distortion in the audio part as in the visual. These are similar, delicate effects, which serve to connect the audio and the visuals together, much like the efforts to connect music and nature.

Figure 17. Still from *Heima*. Sigur Rós plays 'Glósóli' behind a screen. Silhouettes of the band appear through a see-through screen, which is almost like gauze. Landscape pictures are projected in a grey-scale colour palette on the screen.

Secondly, clouds and fog are shown to move very fast, again emphasising the mystical nature of the country. The movement is linked to the band and the music by cutting between this material and the stage, where the band plays behind a screen (Figure 17). It is unclear what the viewer is actually being shown because of extreme close ups. Further, nature images are projected on the screen and these intermingle with silhouetted shadow-images of the band produced by lights. Therefore, it becomes unclear whether the viewer is observing the concert spectacle or Icelandic nature. As the images seemingly morph from one into the other, continuity is created between the two, and the band becomes part of nature, while nature becomes part of the band.

Thirdly, the colour of the nature images (Figure 18) appear in the same colour 'palette' as the shadow pictures on the screen during the concert. They are in grey-scale, and the nature in the film also appears in a similar colour palette. This representation nature feels different to my personal experience of unmediated Icelandic landscape. This colour palette has the connotation of being old, like the camera setting 'sepia' and resembles some of the filters that the smart phone application Instagram now offers. Arguably, the old and archaic representation of the country can imply a time before human intervention or corruption of the land by civilisation, which correlates with the ideology of the band and *krútt* more generally.

Figure 18. Still from *Heima* of Icelandic nature. The colour of the nature is made 'old' and similar to the colour of the shadow images on the screen.

Another example of how music and nature are interconnected is the use of the 'Mickey-Mousing' technique.⁵² In 'Glósóli' the viewer is shown a small, clear stream floating down small rapids. This is accompanied by a glockenspiel in the music, a simple and clear sound, which fits perfectly with the small stream of water. The small stream grows into a big and powerful river, and, similarly, the music develops and becomes more complex and powerful. The camera movement and cuts play a similar role: the song begins slowly, the camera is mostly still, and the shot is long. Subsequently, the shots become shorter and the cuts mirror the development of the song. The sound continuity conceals the cuts and the different perspectives. The viewer therefore experiences that the development in nature is happening at the same time that the concert takes place.

By the end of the first song and the first scene of the film, the music has been sutured into the images of making the band and the music seem a part of the nature of Iceland. There seems to be a living relationship between the music and nature, and they are mutually affected by each other. The viewers are drawn into this constructed world, which seems to be realistic while also mystical and abstruse. These effects take hold at the beginning and do not let go throughout the film. The world presented holds similar characteristics as the stereotypical description of

⁵² This is when the music heard in a film is in complete synchronisation with the action happening on the screen. The term comes from Walt Disney films, where music often mimicked what was happening on the screen (Hickman, 2006, p. 42).

Iceland and the North reviewed in Chapter 3. Iceland has now become strange, dark, gloomy and sublime. Dibben explains that the vastness of nature is conveyed through the cinematography of the film:

Minimal cutting and a large number of static camera shots, the majority of which are directed at the landscape, rather than performance; people and objects pass across the camera's field of view rather than being tracked by it. As a consequence, the subject position implied by the camera is passive rather than active, and the static camera shots suggest a landscape that exceeds human perception (Dibben, 2009b, p. 138).

She notes that the music of Sigur Rós embodies 'geographical space' (p. 140), which is moulded through 'suspension of time and place' (p. 138). The songs are longer than usual rock songs and are constructed on repeated melodic and harmonic material with improvisation adding an active layer onto the static core (Dibben, 2009b, pp. 138–139). Mitchell seems to concur with Dibben, but is even more specific: 'Sigur Rós's music could be said to embody, express or evoke sonically ... the remote isolation of their Icelandic location' (2009, p. 188). The band members experience being in Iceland in terms of space: 'Usually when we travel we are playing in these crowded big cities. So it is really nice to come back here to all the space in Iceland just to relax a little bit' (Jónsi, minute 27:40). The space and vastness of Iceland offers breathing space, which arguably becomes a factor in both the personal and musical life of the band. Sveinsson also comments on this space: 'Space is what we have here, in our personal life and in the land as well' (Kjartan Sveinsson, minute 14:24). The idea of space is a key to forming the national identity of Icelanders, as discussed above.

The depiction of Iceland given in *Heima* corresponds with the national romantic movement that was described in Chapter 3. The country is beautiful, even 'magnificent and sublime' and the film accentuates its mystification. In the film the viewer mostly sees band members and their concert guests, and people are nowhere to be found when the scenes move from the concerts to nature images. Vehicles are rare and human constructions of any kind are few outside of urban areas. The expression of nature seems to take on the same 'urban' outlook as Karlsdóttir and Hálfðánarson are quoted as discussing in Chapter 3. Nature appears to be far away and unobtainable; wilderness seems to epitomise Iceland.

Nostalgia and the ‘Good Old Days’

There are more aspects than nature that evoke Icelandicness in the film. As discussed in Chapter 6, the krútt have certain nostalgic qualities. Here, as Sigur Rós is a krútt band, I develop the nostalgic aspect of the krútt further by examining two scenes in the film, which are particularly nostalgic. The krútt are known for nostalgic and childish values and appearance, a certain ‘back to basics’ attitude, and opposition to consumerism and modern greed. They value the behaviour and customs that thrived before Iceland was urbanized, and this seems to have spread to a certain part of the society as nostalgia was particularly apparent after the economic collapse. It influences people’s choice of food, clothes, and furniture, and affects people’s attitude towards medicine and the environment. No comprehensive study has yet been undertaken to explore the cause and effect of this phenomenon on Icelandic society and modern ways of living. Through my research, nostalgia appeared as an apt way to analyse some of the internal dialogues about place making and representation of Icelandicness.

The term nostalgia is formed by the Greek words *nostos*, meaning to turn back home, and *alia* which is a desire or longing. The term thus means a longing for a home that no longer exists or never existed. Nostalgia is the feeling of loss and displacement (Boym, 2001, p. xiii). The first appearance of the word nostalgia was to describe a diagnosed medical condition that Swiss soldiers suffered during wartime when they were away from home. Allowing them return back home was said to be the only cure. Later, nostalgia became a psychological condition, which seemed to go hand in hand with urbanisation. Progress, instead of curing nostalgia, seems only to aggravate it; with increasing globalisation, people seem to have an even greater need to put down roots somewhere (Boym, 2001, p. xiv). Initially, nostalgia seems to be a longing for a place, but it is also a different time that is sought after --- the time of childhood or dreams. In a wider perspective, nostalgia can be seen as a rebellion against the modern idea about time that is grounded in history and progress (Boym, 2001, p. xv).

A nostalgic outlook can be found at various levels within the film *Heima*, as discussed above. Firstly, the whole aesthetic of the film can be seen as nostalgic since the band investigates the countryside in their quest for home, implying that the core of Iceland can be found there. Secondly, a clear longing for a simpler life in a rural setting is presented in the film. This is epitomized in Palli (Páll Guðmundsson from Húsafell), the only person outside the band who speaks in the film. He, according to Jónsi, is a ‘totally natural guy. He just lives alone with his

mother in the countryside and just makes things all day, like carves a stone or something like a rhubarb marimba made out of old rhubarb' (Deblois, 2007). Palli, who makes instruments out of material collected from nature, is clearly held in high esteem by the band, who, along with granting him a voice, provide him ample screen time in the film.

Preservation of the past

Several examples will be given of how the nostalgic ideology finds its way into *Heima*, but the film is a good example of how this ideology appeared within society after the economic collapse. A particular type of nostalgia is evoked. It emphasises the subsistence farming of the past when people lived in turf houses and every day was a struggle. This way of living is not desirable in contemporary society. For example, there is a long shot of an old and completely destroyed tractor in a remote valley (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Still from *Heima*. Old tractor in a remote valley.

A clear focus on neglected farm houses and a grassed over cemetery introduces great nostalgia and a longing for former times, when most people lived on small farms and relied on primitive methods of cultivating the land. The tractor is seemingly at peace with its surroundings, it has become part of nature and is thus 'natural'. Perhaps this can be seen as a glimpse into the band's nature protection ideology: an environmentally friendly way of using nature without harming it with large-scale equipment.

Preservation is a key term for the ideology offered by the film. It stages a number of old cultural events, most likely with the aim of repairing the national image. The supposed continuity from past to present and the tradition and rules that entails is a key to the creation of a nation (Hobsbawn, 1995, p. 149). A nation is an ‘imagined political community’ (Anderson, 2006, p. 6), and the nation building process is carried out by powerful groups within society instead of including everyone. Consequently, the imagination process and the resulting ‘nation’ only reflect that particular group of society, and those outside the realm of power lose their voice. The nation thus becomes imagined just as the landscape. It can be argued that the nation, which is presented in *Heima*, is created through the strong cultural power and ideology of Sigur Rós. In so doing, they have moved out of their sub-cultural group (Hebdige, 2002) and into the mainstream and managed to influence society at large.

There are many examples of this in the film, such as fashion, which is one of the markers that Dick Hebdige indicates. The traditional woolly sweater is featured frequently in the film and is worn by both band and audience. Sigur Rós was one of the first bands to appear in the traditional sweater in promotional material in media, in concerts, and just out and about. Subsequently, high fashion labels emerged selling traditional woolly sweaters, *lopapeysa*, and modelling their brands on similar values as the band. Farmers Market, founded in 2005, is one example, and Bergþóra Guðnadóttir, the owner and designer, describes her label in the following way: ‘We place ourselves at a junction. A place where heritage meets modernity, the national meets the international, and the countryside meets the city. We find this an exciting area to explore’ (Guðnadóttir, 2013). The woolly sweater not only was rebranded into a high-fashion item, but many people started knitting their own sweaters during the first decade of the 21st century. Even a former First Lady in Iceland stated in an interview that the sweater was timeless and would never fall out of fashion (*Morgunblaðið*, 2012).⁵³

Being ‘at home’ clearly entails Icelandic nature and the traditional woolly sweater. Home consists of effects with a clear string to history and heritage in the attempt to distinguish home in Iceland from home elsewhere. As the authors of the film are musicians, music is discussed

⁵³ The Icelandic *lopapeysa* has also travelled internationally, and on Instagram and other social media spaces dedicated to knitting the yoke pattern is prevalent. One example appears on the Tin Can Knits website, introducing the Strange Brew pattern book where knitters ‘headed on an epic adventure around Iceland to photograph the knits against the stunning mountains, seascapes, waterfalls, and dramatic geology of this special place’ (*Strange brew*, 2018).

and performed in order to give an insight into the music life of the country. Sveinsson states: ‘Every small little village in Iceland there is a choir, you know. [...] It is very interesting for us because we are kind of learning about things as well, exploring them, like the rímur, the old chanting style’ (Sveinsson, minute 62:21). This statement is cut into a scene of a group of old people, wearing traditional costumes and singing traditional rímur at Þingvellir. Hence, the viewer probably assumes that the performers represent the ‘choirs in every little small village’ and are, thus, part of the musical identity of Icelanders. This could not be further from the truth as the group belongs to a chanting society in Iceland founded in 1929⁵⁴ to preserve the tradition of rímur chanting (*About*, 2018). Similarly, the dress code or the traditional costumes were also reinvented in modern times, although based on historical sources (Þjóðbúningaráð, no date).

Þorrablót (a feast of Þorri) is another example of ‘the good old days’ staged in the film. Þorrablót is a relatively recent invention (from the 1970s) of an annual gathering of communities/families who come together in January or February to eat traditional food (food which was eaten in Iceland during the previous ages) accompanied by traditional spirit, brennivín (e. burning wine) (Figure 20).

In the film, while people eat and drink, footage of Sigur Rós performing a modern version of an old rímur with Andersen, is cross-cut into the scene. The soundtrack therefore creates continuity between the two spaces. In recent years the ‘traditional’ feast has become increasingly popular, although some of those attending do not eat the food. The feast has been rebranded and modernized to please the masses. Now one can even purchase Þorri feast food in Ikea, both to eat in and to take away. Thus, the tradition has been modernized and appropriated for contemporary society.

⁵⁴ This used to be the only rímur society in Iceland until the late 1990s. Currently, there are eight societies around the country, most founded after 2000.

Figure 20. Traditional Þorri-feast food, including putrefied shark, filled sausage/black pudding, ram's scrotum with testicles, sheep's fat, jellied sheep's head and smoked lamb.

The following analysis is an attempt to uncover why two songs/scenes in the film feel particularly nostalgic. Both songs are performed in the West Fjords, an area which is still mostly outside of the purview of most international tourists. I argue that these are examples of hyper-Icelandicness, which is often discussed in nostalgic terms, even within Icelandic society. Electricity came late to the area (Westfjord Power Company was founded in 1978) and the whole area still suffers power blackouts on a regular basis. The area has been going through depopulation, and there is a job shortage, especially for educated people. Farms have been deserted in recent decades, and infrastructure is often insufficient. Poor roads and weather conditions hinder travelling, especially during winter when roads frequently close, and air travel is often restricted. Avalanches are frequent in the area, and in 1995 two large avalanches fell on Súðavík and Flateyri where 34 people lost their lives. The avalanches caused much damage, and to this day there are still areas in these villages where people are not allowed to live during the winter months because of avalanche risk. Through my analysis, I aim to offer a more internally grounded discussion, where I balance the romantic outlook, rooted in nostalgia, with the difficulties people of the area have faced in the past and continue to experience in the present day.

‘Gítardjamm’ in Djúpavík

In the first scene examined, the viewer is shown dark and gloomy images from present day Djúpavík, a small, now almost uninhabited village in the West Fjords. These shots are

subsequently spliced together with old footage of herring being unloaded into a fish factory at a time when the village was alive and full of people, and this is accompanied by a popular old song, the 'Herring waltz'. The band members comment on the isolation and the decline of the place: 'In Djúpavík, you see this big rusting ship, it is just lying there and this old factory which was probably just used for two years and then there was no more fish and they just closed them down'. Sveinsson adds, 'Only two people live there, all year round', and Jónsi experiences this as well: 'Total isolation, it's like nothing there' (Deblois, 2007). The music, which follows the 'Herring waltz', further accentuates this feeling of isolation and decay. Without an audience Jónsi sings inside an empty oil tank, accompanied only by a string quartet. The song sounds like a lamentation for the place and a cry for the past and better times. This song can only be found in the film and has not been released in any other version or format. This is unique for the film, as all other songs had previously been released. The name 'Gítardjamm', Guitar Jam, suggests that this was possibly composed *ad hoc* in the venue, and can be seen to have certain place specificities.

The fact that the song has no understandable lyrics, being sung in a nonsense language, somehow emphasises its nostalgic aspect with the suggestion that it belongs to a faraway space and time. It is at the same time intimate, since it is produced by recording the voice from a very close proximity, and Jónsi's breathing is clearly audible. The melody is simple and natural and could easily belong to the beginning of the 17th century, as it shares some of the musical conventions of the sacred music of that time. The clear direction of the melody, although seemingly improvisational, adds to the impression. It has jumps succeeded by step-like movement in the opposite direction, resembling Palestrina-style counterpoint. The accompaniment also works in counterpoint, with voices slipping in and out. This, and the immense reverb in the tank, also gives the song a spiritual quality. In addition, the 'hopelandish', as Jónsi's made-up language has been termed by journalists, much to his dismay, and his falsetto singing style remind me of a dog howling. This experience is further accentuated by glissandos and the interval jumps up, staying only momentarily on the lower note. A dog's howl is a sign of separation anxiety, and I would like to suggest that the song expresses an anxiety towards leaving the past behind. This is confirmed by the visuals that switch between the past footage and the present, as if not knowing where they belong. Subsequently, a band member is heard saying: 'It felt good to be able to bring life back to the place, just for a short moment, one night' (Deblois, 2007), commenting on the concert that took place there in the evening.

‘Heysátan’ in Selárdalur

The second example is the song ‘Heysátan’ which is filmed outside the farm Brautarholt in Selárdalur in the West Fjords. This time the band performs outside by an old farm, where houses and other manmade surroundings are decaying and being claimed by the elements, thus slowly uniting with the landscape. It seems as if nature is taking over the place. Sveinsson explains his understanding of the song⁵⁵ as follows:

With heysátan my idea of it after we wrote it, was that there was an old man looking over his field, a big view over the sea or something, and he is dying. He is going to die. He is just lying on the grass, and he is going to die, but that is fine because he has had a good life. He is quite happy dying, actually. And that is what the song is to me. It’s kind of that emotion. [...] He is really peaceful and he is dying and he is not afraid. Yeah, it’s just a cute story about a man dying (Sigur Rós, 2013a).

This description seems to fit very well with the setting in which the song is performed. Perhaps the location was chosen with the lyrics in mind, but the song is on the album *Takk*, and is again performed in dialogue with nature and landscape instead of in front of an audience. Here, the nostalgia is emphasised in the dialogue. During the many pauses in the song, one can hear birds singing and the wind blowing as if to let the place communicate its own past, memories, and stories. It also gives the feeling of nature participating in this, and it arguably becomes a concert for the landscape. Its sounds replace the sounds of the audience in many of the other songs, although the sound of the crowd never receives this much space.

Another layer of nostalgia can be found in the sound world of the song spearheaded by the use of harmonium and a hymn-like harmony. The harmonium was the most common keyboard instrument in Iceland from the time it was first introduced around 1850 until the mid-20th century. It was common in country churches and as such fits well with the old tractor and farming equipment shown in the film. The relationship between the visuals and the lyrics almost begins to resemble the ‘literal video’ tradition⁵⁶, as most of the cuts are in sync with the

⁵⁵ Loose translation of the lyrics is as follows: Stack of hay / I leaned on the hay cutter / But I mowed / I mowed the field / I’ve mowed god damned enough / But I mowed / Stack of hay / It starts to blow away / Into the rough / I towed hey on a Massey Ferguson / But the carriage fell off / And I slipped, Goddamn / I fell under [the carriage] / And now I lie here / With a bent shade [on a baseball cap] / and rest my head with contentment (*Heysátan Lyric Meaning* - Sigur Rós Meanings, no date).

⁵⁶ One of the most famous literal video is with the Bonnie Tylor song (*Total eclipse of the heart (literal video version)*, 2010).

music. One sees a tractor in the film when the tractor in the lyrics is mentioned, and the old overgrown cemetery is in the forefront when the lyrics refer to death.

Table 6. The form of the song 'Heysátan'.

HEYSÁTAN						
INTRO						
i	G	C	Bm	Em7	D	
i'	G	C	Bm	Em7	D	
i''	G	C	Bm	E m7	D	
i'''	G	C	Bm	E m7	D	
A						
a	Em 7	D		G	C	B m D
a	Em 7	D		G	C	B m D
a	Em 7	D		G	C	B m D
B						
b	G	Am	E m			
c	Bm		C	Bm	C	D/F #
b'	G	D/F #	E m			
c	Bm		C	Bm	C	D/F #
	Bm	Em				
OUTRO						
a	Em 7	D		G	C	B m D

a is repeated without voice - serves as an outro.

Time is also a very important aspect in this song and a conscious play with time seems to be at work, which results in an unfathomable time and atmosphere. This is achieved by adding and reducing beats in bars that are originally set up to be standard 4/4. Table 6 shows the structure of the song and how time is stretched out. The colour changes from light grey to black as the beats per bar increase. The song begins in the standard 4/4 for pop songs. Pop songs, however, are usually in four, eight or sixteen bar phrases, but 'Heysátan' has five bars of 4/4 in the intro. The intro repeats the first phrase (chord progression) four times with an ever-changing number of beats per bar, and that complexity increases over the course of the four repetitions.

The A section consists of three identical phrases where bars with two beats and eight beats alternate. This is steadier than the timelessness created in the intro, although it still can be seen as playing with time, but now it turns into a foreseeable pattern. This arguably fits with the lyrics, which describe the farmer looking over his field. It draws up the picture and provides a setting for the song before the dramatic narrative begins. It is almost as if the A section represents the landscape and nature before the man enters. The action takes place in the B section where the farmer is killed. The tension is created musically by irregular phrases, less repetition in the chord progression, and shorter bars, thus supporting the action in the lyrics. The outro serves as a reminder of the A section and the setting that was created at the beginning of the song, which gives the impression that the place remains the same, although people come and go.

The song gains an additional site-specific meaning by performing it in Selárdalur. The last inhabitant at the Brautarholt farm was the artist Samúel Jónsson, who was known by the nickname 'the artist with the heart of a child'. His art was characterised as naive art or outsider's art. During the last couple of decades, it has been debated what should be done with his works of art as they are now 'at risk, as the harsh forces of nature are slowly but surely destroying them' (*Morgunblaðið*, 2002). Jónsson fits well with the ideology of the krútt, including DIY and the recycling of materials, and it is not surprising that this scene is used to pay respect to his memory.

The most famous inhabitant in Selárdalur was probably Gísli Gíslason in Uppsálar. His biography was the top selling book in Iceland in 2012, and Guðmundur Andri Thorsson believes that the recent interest in Gíslason reflects a change in the national psyche of the Icelandic people, discussed in Chapter 3. Thorsson discusses how the people living in isolation and out of touch with modern times have become role models in an article from late 2012:

After the collapse, it seems as if people have started to think: ‘The odd people in the rural areas - they are us.’ And then a strong interest awakens in their old arch symbol [Gislason]. Gislason is no longer strange, not any more, not the ‘other’, he is a symbol for us all, symbol of the core of the national psyche. [...] Last year was the year of incomprehensible longing to shed worldly possessions and rebuild a cottage in a remote dale. Keep a few sheep and two cows, grow cabbage, harness the stream and keep a few hens. Write poems at night and talk to god, be content with oneself, live off the land and renounce the world (Thorsson, 2012).

This seems to be exactly what is presented in *Heima*; a longing for a simpler life somewhere in the middle of nowhere making nostalgia so important in the film. Either Sigur Rós managed to forecast what was to come in society, or they are so influential that six years after the film was shot, the world created in the film has become a model for an exemplary society. The film offers insight into the internal process developing within Icelandic society, and it shows how nostalgia is used to depict and forecast to a way forward in Iceland that is different than in other places. Thus, nostalgia is at play for Icelanders themselves, even though there is an awareness of some external viewing as well.

Part of the ideology of the krútt was taken over by the right-wing, neo-liberal leaning post-collapse government in Iceland (2013-2016) under the banner of ‘national culture’, which is typically considered worth preserving and supporting. These nationalistic tendencies are problematic, and it is worth remembering the meaning of nostalgia. Boym mentions that nostalgia dangerously confuses the real home with an imagined home, which never existed, and the associated longing is grounded in imagination. The longing for past times and romantic rural settings in *Heima* are a good example. The nature and world created in the film have little to do with the harsh and difficult reality that people in Iceland had to cope with less than a hundred years ago; every winter was a battle with nature over life and death. Arguably, the film shows an urban or even foreign view through the eyes of those who have never had to combat the forces of nature. In extreme cases, nostalgia can create a home, based on fantasy, which individuals are willing to kill or be killed for. Boym believes that uncritical nostalgia ‘breeds monsters. Yet the sentiment itself, the mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility, is at the very core of the modern condition’ (Boym, 2001, p. xvi), and it is as such difficult to avoid. Therefore, it is important to approach nostalgia critically and not to be fooled by alluring offers of a faraway past, which never existed. This is particularly potent for the West Fjords where people have faced hardships well into the 20th century. The area is

desperately trying to break away from the past by modernising the infrastructure and improving job opportunities in order to battle the depopulation of the area.

The film seems to advocate for the preservation of nature as well as for the preservation of traditional culture and values. Nature is facing danger, and the band takes part in a protest against a hydroelectric power plant during the film. They play a concert for the protesters, and in those scenes the viewers are offered images of beautiful landscape and the awesome constructions of the plant. The song they play is very melancholic and can be seen as a kind of lamentation for the place. The Icelandic flag flutters in the sky giving the moment a nationalistic tone. Icelandic musicians have taken an active part in these issues, of which Björk's 'Náttúra' (i. e. "nature") project is perhaps the best known.⁵⁷ At the protest camp in Kárahnúkar, the band had to change their performance habits: 'They brought out this small PA and they were going to get electricity from some generators, but then we thought, we are actually here to protest the building of a dam to produce electricity, so we thought it is a good idea to do it completely acoustically' (Holm, minute 56:59). The band usually plays with amplification and electric instruments, so at the concert at Kárahnjúkar their different performance practice fit better with the setting and the ideology presented. In addition to the general practice of using amplification and electric instruments, transporting a crew of 81 people around Iceland is energy costly. Perhaps the acoustic performance highlights the problems of the larger approach of the film: focusing on the beautiful Icelandic nature, but at the same time ignoring human intervention. This can be seen to reflect a common attitude: people are happy to have opinions and support a good cause but are not ready to give up any of their lifestyle qualities.

Conclusion

The film *Heima* powerfully presents a world unspoilt by modernization and globalization through the connections and continuities between its musical and visual elements. The film thus presents an image of Iceland based on an imagined time before urbanization. By focusing on the wilderness, the film downplays human intervention. The exoticism of Iceland, which has been created through centuries of stereotyping and play with images, is enhanced by technical tricks. The view of nature, emphasizing the wilderness, is a contemporary, urban

⁵⁷ See Dibben (2009b, 2017) and Størvold (2018a) for further discussion.

outlook rather than an experienced one. This reflects the authorship of the film; band members, directors and producers are arguably all urbanites and cosmopolitan members of society. The film does not present the band's everyday reality, but a certain image of the society and country deemed fitting for the band. This is a nostalgic way to represent the country from which the band profits.

The idea that the wilderness is the core of Icelandic national identity, as presented in the film, has been used to argue for environmental conservation, but the film can be seen as an example of the problematic nature of the environmental debate. It can be argued that for many, the underlying reason for preserving nature is both economic and utilitarian: the country should be kept unspoilt, making it appealing to foreigners who have a certain image of the country in mind (Chapter 3). The film plays on these expectations by only showing a narrow view of the country, which is a proven marketing strategy for Iceland. It seems to be more profitable to showcase all the strange and eccentric habits rather than admitting that Iceland is part of the modern world. In the film, traditional rímur chanting is presented as an everyday practice and many customs considered strange (and even gruesome and barbaric) by foreigners are on display. Contemporary Iceland, where most of the inhabitants live in urban settings and enjoy the luxuries of modern technology, does not seem to be a strong selling point, particularly in times when tourism plays an ever-increasing economic role in the society.

The film 'others' the nation and the country in order to make it more appealing to the urban or even international gaze. This results in one-sided nation-building that is limited to only a select few who accept this image as their own identity, and that does not afford any agency to the people living in the area presented in the film. The primitive and 'unmodern' aspects of the West Fjords romanticised in the film could potentially be harmful for the development of the area. The film can possibly do the area's inhabitants a disservice by promoting and celebrating its isolation and ruralness, which they are desperately trying to change. This marginal area may become a living museum of a nostalgic past as the result of presenting such an idealised version of rural Iceland to the world. It is thus an example of how specific areas are othered by the popular music scene in Iceland, and to some extent it can be seen to mirror the othering that the musicians themselves have complained about (Chapter 4). This chapter serves as a case study of how musicians actively participate in borealistic representations of themselves at the same time that they other rural people in Iceland through their musical outputs. As such, this material contributes to the examination of the contesting narratives of the music scene and

gives yet another perspective of the co-construction of place through music-making. The next chapter offers another example of the contesting narratives on the local level by examining a case study of the interplay between music and tourism.

CHAPTER 8: THE INTERPLAY OF MUSIC AND TOURISM

Tourism might be killing the music scene a little bit (Paul Evans, Personal Communication, 20/07/2016).

The origin of this chapter can be traced back to the interview phase of the research, as tourism emerged as a key issue for my participants. The interviews were semi-structured, and participants could bring up issues and subjects that they felt were important for the music scene. Tourism became a recurring theme. It therefore became clear that this topic needed to be critically addressed and included within the thesis. Although nature is the biggest appeal of Iceland (Ferðamálastofa / Icelandic Tourist Board, 2017), the fieldwork data shows that people working in the music industry are generally convinced that many people come to Iceland because of the music scene. The chapter explores the complex ways in which music and tourism are interconnected and mutually beneficial, and I place special emphasis on Reykjavík as a key zone. At the same time, it also highlights the threats that tourism is perceived to pose to the music scene.

First, I will briefly introduce the most prominent strategies employed to increase tourism in Iceland. Secondly, I will describe the changes in the city of Reykjavík and how the city's music scene has been impacted by tourism. Thirdly, I will point to four different ways that the music is seen to influence tourism. The chapter concludes with a case study on the music festival Iceland Airwaves. The festival will be explored as an example of how governing bodies have made efforts to promote music tourism and use music as a place-marketing tool, and I will consider what impact the festival has had on the music scene. Throughout the chapter I will examine the contesting narratives that emerged through my research concerning the importance of the music scene for tourism in Iceland.

Tourism Strategies

In Iceland's recent history, the development of tourism has been a way to increase foreign revenue in the country and create jobs. The tourism sector grew rapidly in the 21st century and accounted for 39% of all export income in Iceland in 2016 (Ferðamálastofa / Icelandic Tourist Board, 2017). There are five times more foreign guests visiting Iceland in 2016 than there were in 2000, and between 2010 and 2016 there was a particularly rapid increase (see Table 7). The total population of Iceland was just under 340.000 people on 1 January 2017, and in the year

prior 1.8 million people visited Iceland, which is more than five times its population (Ferðamálastofa / Icelandic Tourist Board, 2017; ‘Lykiltölur mannfjöldans 1703-2018’, 2019). This has had enormous effects both on people living in the country and on the foreign visitors.

Table 7. Number of foreign visitors to Iceland in 2000-2016. Source: Icelandic Tourist Board.

Year	Number of visitors	Change from previous year
2016	1,792,201	39.0%
2015	1,289,100	29.1%
2014	998,600	23.7%
2013	807,349	20.0%
2012	672,773	18.9%
2011	565,611	15.7%
2010	488,622	-1.1%
2009	493,900	-1.6%
2008	502,000	3.5%
2007	485,000	14.9%
2006	422,280	12.9%
2005	374,127	3.8%
2004	360,395	12.6%
2003	320,000	15.1%
2002	277,900	-6.1%
2001	296,000	-2.3%
2000	302,900	15.3%

It is worth understanding the strategies employed to attract visitors to Iceland and the role of music in this context. Nature has always been the top attraction of Iceland with three main themes: The Blue Lagoon and natural pools and springs, the northern lights, and geysers. The first steps toward ‘cultural tourism’ were taken in the 1990s and the early 2000s when more cultural aspects of Iceland were emphasised, ranging from the Icelandic Sagas to night life in Reykjavík (Alessio *et al.*, 2012, pp. 21–22). Cultural tourism has been defined as follows:

Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries, with culture and heritage being marketed and promoted to entice travelers to a particular location or experience. Cultural tourism allows visitors to experience a region’s food, art, geographic features, environment, and lifestyles of its native people as well as its historic sites and significant attractions (Rydgren, 2018).

At the end of the 20th century, cultural tourism was seen as the ‘most desirable development options for countries and regions around the world’ (Richards, 2009, p. 1), and in 2007 cultural

tourism represented about 40% of global tourism (*The impact of culture on tourism*, 2009, p. 21). The developments in Iceland are therefore representative of a larger global trend. This coincided with an image building journey undertaken by Icelandic authorities and stakeholders over the last two decades. They obviously felt the need to “repackage” Iceland’s image and seek the source of its brand’ (Huijbens, 2011, p. 557), which was partly a way to enhance Iceland’s image as a tourist destination.

The key institutions in Iceland for nation branding and image building for tourism at the turn of the 21st century were the Icelandic Tourist Board and Icelandair, the only airline in Iceland at the time (Alessio *et al.*, 2012, p. 25). In 2001, the following description was written about the change in strategy and its results in the *Time International*:

It may be the marketing coup of the century: take a frozen lava field on the edge of the Arctic Circle, where the skiing is not great, the food is overpriced and the capital city is a windswept collection of multicolored concrete boxes, and turn it into one of the world’s hottest winter vacation spots. How does Iceland do it? By touting its reputation for swinging nightclubs packed with platinum-haired babes and hearty Nordic men, its unspoiled natural wonders and, not least, the low-priced winter deals offered by Icelandair, which enjoys a monopoly on air service to the 40,000-sq.-mi. North Atlantic island (Sancton, 2001).

In the 2000s the emphasis was on Reykjavík as a global party capital, and Iceland’s only airline, Icelandair, came up with various campaign slogans to entice guests to the country, many of which entailed sexualised double entendre such as: ‘Fancy a dirty weekend in Iceland’ (Figure. 21), ‘One Night Stand in Reykjavík’, ‘Free Dip Every Trip’, and ‘Pester A Beauty Queen’. Icelandic women were at the forefront of the marketing campaign of the early 2000s, in which they were stereotyped as beautiful, happy to drink alcohol and party, and sexually promiscuous.

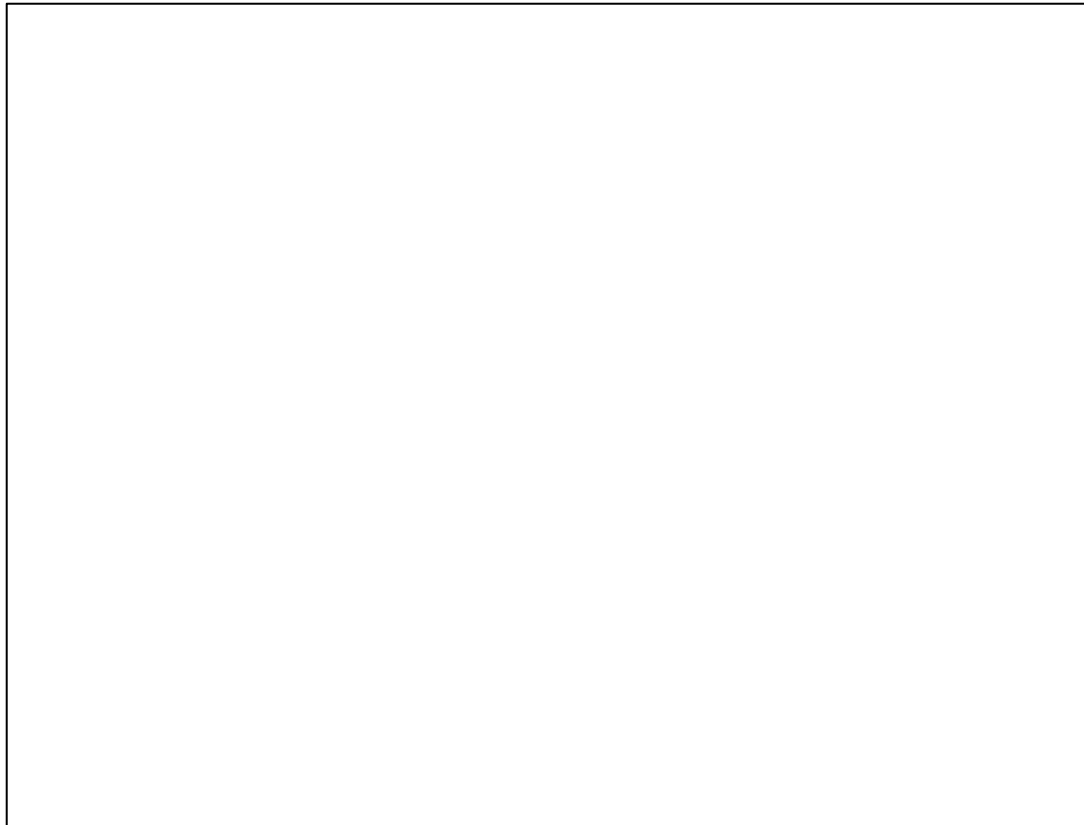


Figure 21. 'Fancy a Dirty Weekend' slogan in an advertisement from Icelandair from the early 2000s.

Such stereotypes of Icelandic women were discussed in various international contexts, including on *The Sopranos* (2002), on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (2002) and on Conan O'Brien's *Late Night Show* (2006), where Quentin Tarantino described his experience of the drinking culture of Icelanders and behaviour of women:

But you know it's funny because normally in America, the idea is to get the girls drunk enough to go home with you [...] In Iceland, you get the girls home before they get so drunk that they're passing out in your bathroom, or vomiting all over you. That's the trick (Tarantino cited in Andersen, 2014).

The discourse of Reykjavík as a party paradise gained a life of its own, since it was constantly being repeated and confirmed by foreigners and Icelanders alike, who sometimes lived up to the image (Jóhannesdóttir, 2005). The Icelandair marketing campaign received considerable negative discussion in Iceland (Alessio *et al.*, 2012, p. 33). It seems that before 2008, when Iceland struggled with gaining international awareness,⁵⁸ any publicity was considered good publicity, even though it could potentially have harmful effects on the reputation of the nation.

⁵⁸ According to Hlynur Guðjónsson, Iceland's counsel general and trade commissioner for North America (Markelz, 2017).

Everything changed in 2008. During the economic meltdown, 600 articles were written about the country in seven weeks; that number of articles would have been about two decades' worth of content prior to the meltdown (Markelz, 2017). Although the Icelandic currency lost about half of its value against the US dollar in a short time, making Iceland more affordable to foreigners, much of the media discussion focused on the irresponsible bankers, which was perceived as negative publicity. Another surge of international attention happened in the spring of 2010 when Eyjafjallajökull erupted and brought air traffic in Europe to a standstill for seven days. The imagery within these news reports featured volcanic ash and bursts of lava.

The Icelandic president responded to these negative media discussions and the decrease in tourism in 2009 (Table 7) by appearing on live TV in June 2010 to ask Icelanders and 'friends of Iceland' to share positive stories about the country through personal social channels or via the campaign's site 'Inspired by Iceland'. At the centre of the campaign was a music video for musician Emiliana Torrini's song 'Jungle Drum' with people dancing in various tourist destinations across the country. The video was quirky but incorporated common representations of Iceland, such as some of the most familiar aspects of the country: mountainous landscape, the Blue Lagoon, natural pools and springs, and geysers. There were also some 'cultural elements' such as women in national costumes, the Reykjavík nightlife, and a band performing outdoors (Figure 22). The images presented in the video have some resemblances to the aesthetics of the film *Heima* discussed in Chapter 7. The purpose of the video was to show that Iceland was a safe place despite volcanic eruptions (Alessio *et al.*, 2012, p. 25). Within a week, 1.5 million stories had been posted as a result of this campaign, and ten weeks later 22 million stories had appeared (Markelz, 2017).

The next step in the 'Inspired by Iceland' strategy was to encourage people to visit Iceland during the winter months, as it had proven problematic for the tourism industry to rely on a single season approach. Those who visited in the winter of 2011 became 'honorary citizens' and were invited to take part in local people's lives, which included dinner with the president and a live concert in a recording studio. This was all captured in a documentary as 'the most successful tourism winter in Iceland' (Markelz, 2017).

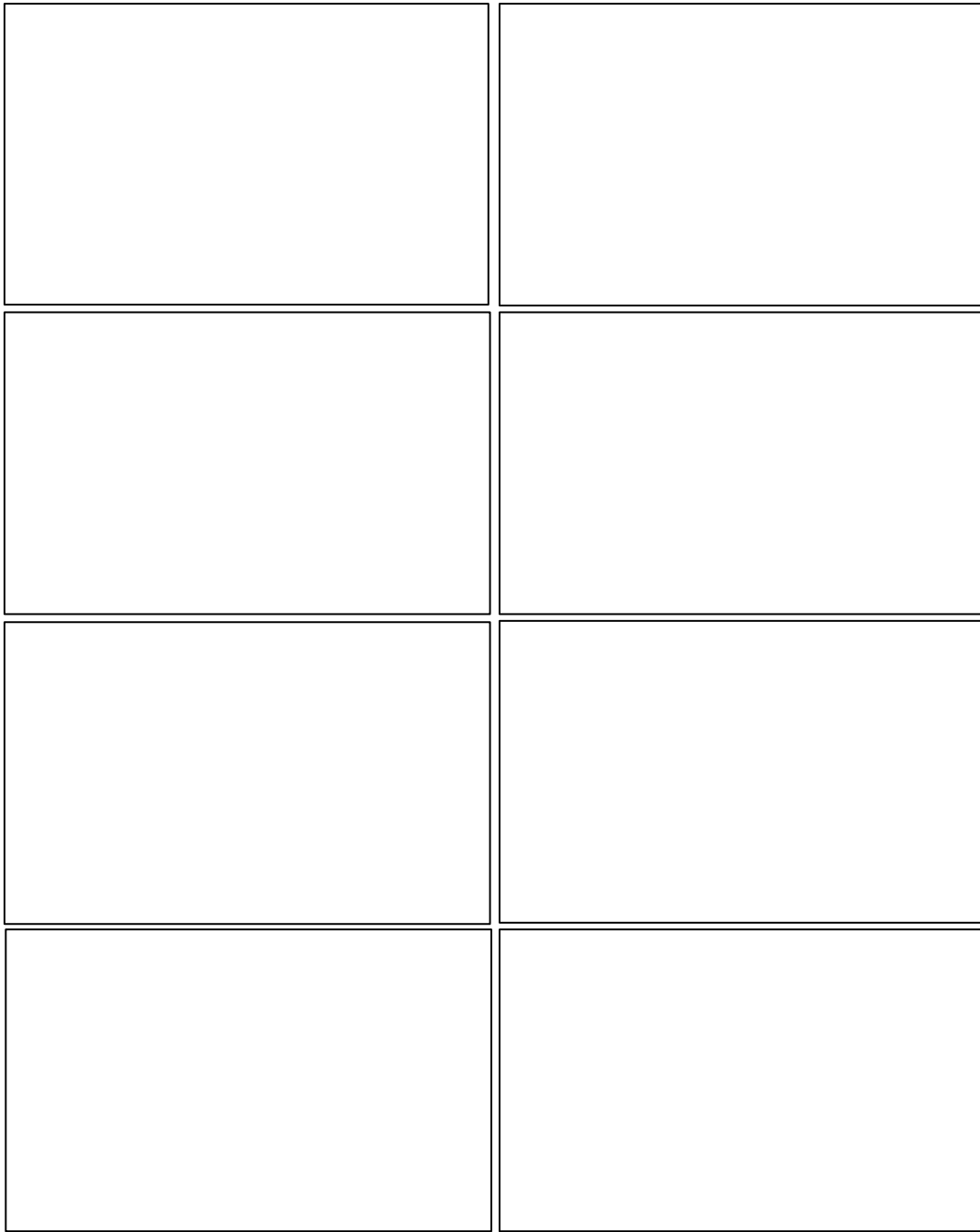


Figure 22. Stills from the ‘Inspired by Iceland’ video where the viewer can see common representations of Iceland.

According to the director of tourism and creative industries at Promote Iceland, the target for this campaign was ‘the enlightened tourists’ who are people that ‘have education and income above average. It’s a person who will travel independently, likes to book on her own—a person who has an interest in culture, is open to taking a vacation out of season, seeks adventure and is ready to share the stories of the country’ (Inga Hlín Pálsdóttir cited in Markelz, 2017). This represents a clear shift from the emphasis on attracting young men to the country with promises

of the promiscuous Icelandic women, to a more mature approach where culture is perhaps treated in a wider context. Music was arguably part of the promotional package in the new context. The campaign was obviously successful as indicated by the rapid increase of tourists (Table 7).

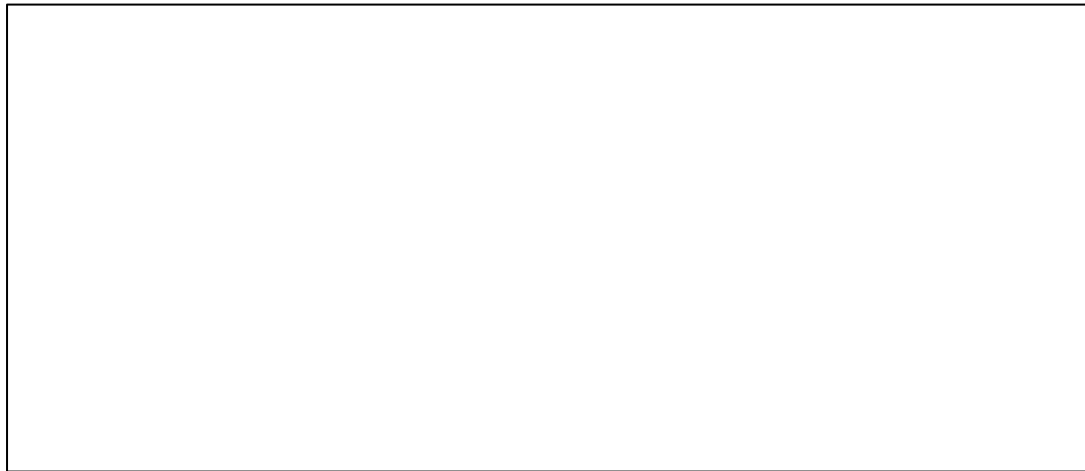
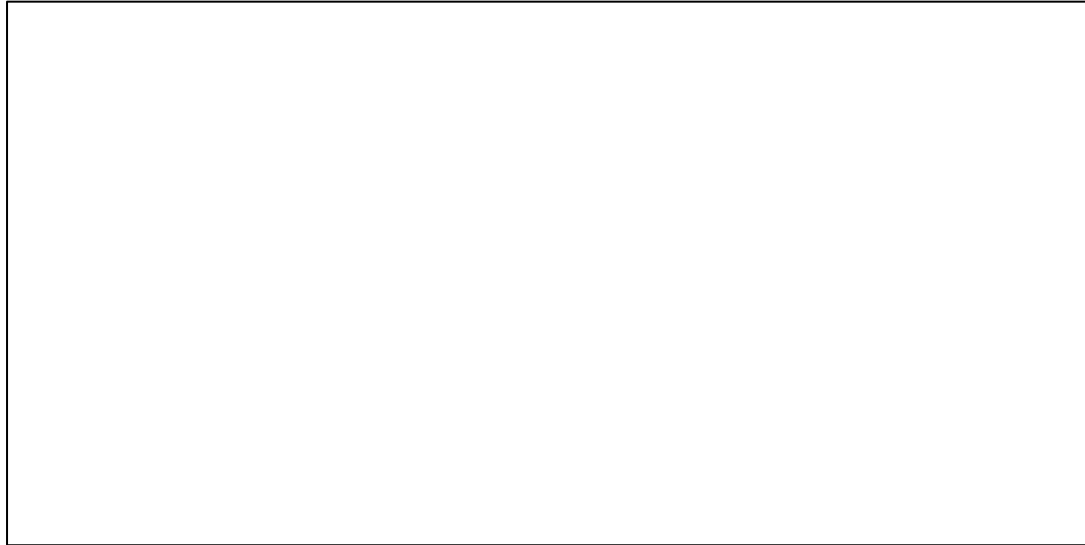


Figure 23. The landing page of Inspired by Iceland and its first two banners. (Source: Inspired by Iceland).

‘Inspired by Iceland’ is in its current form an online portal which offers insight into aspects of Icelandic culture, history, and nature, suggests activities to do, and how to plan a trip to Iceland. It is run by the public-private partnership Promote Iceland (i. Íslandsstofa) whose goals are ‘promoting Iceland as a tourism destination, assisting in the promotion of Icelandic culture abroad, and introducing Iceland as an attractive option for foreign direct investment’ (About, 2017a). It is responsible for tourism marketing for the country (Alessio *et al.*, 2012, p. 25). Figure 23 shows the landing page of the Inspired by Iceland portal and the first two banners that appear. Those serve as a good example of the tone of the portal and its content, but

emphasis is placed on the nature and landscape of the country.

In the ‘things to do’ section (see Figure 24) various outdoor activities are suggested: whale watching, swimming, horses, northern lights, hiking, running, cycling, caving, ice climbing, bird watching and helicopter tours.

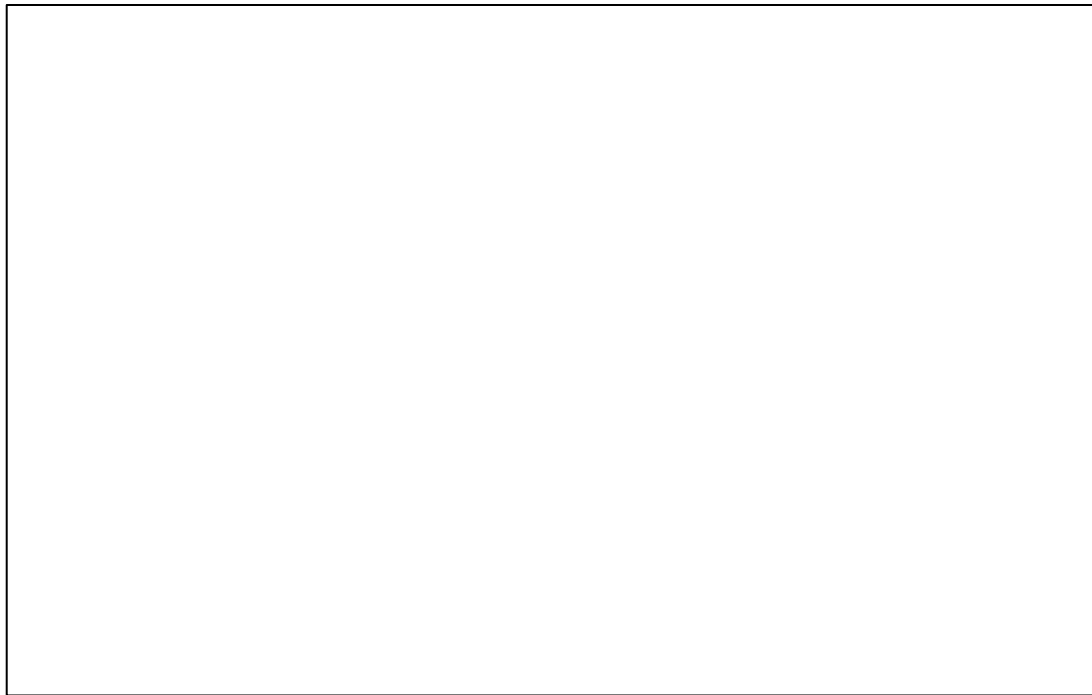


Figure 24. Inspired by Iceland portal. Examples of the ‘things to do’ section.

There are also some suggested cultural activities: shopping, dining, festivals and museums. The festival section lists various events, including numerous music festivals, a film festival, a food festival, art festivals, and sport activities such as the Reykjavík Marathon, Iceland Winter Games, and cycling races. However, as of 2017 music is not featured prominently, and the only text about music falls under a description about the creative arts in a section ‘about Iceland’ where it is stated:

For an isolated culture in the North Atlantic, creativity is important. Since Iceland was settled in the 9th century, writing and music have been an integral part of life in the country and have in recent years reached a large audience on the global stage thanks to the efforts of pop stars such as Björk and Sigur Rós, as well as the wide readership of authors like Halldór Laxness, Arnaldur Indriðason, and Yrsa Sigurðardóttir (‘Creative Iceland’, 2017).

Nature and landscape are portrayed as the most important aspect of Iceland when it comes to marketing it to tourists, while music seems to play a very small role on this platform, with only this single mention throughout the entire content. This seems to be quite different to what Connell and Gibson reported about the relationship between music and tourism in Iceland back in 2005:

The Iceland Tourist Board has sought to build on the recent popularity of star performers such as Bjork and, more recently, Sigur Ros, as both indicators of the cultural wealth of the country (alongside references to the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra and others) and invitations to travel. Conversely, Bjork's own website (www.Bjork.com) has linkages to Iceland Tourism pages in an unusual reversal of more common advertising practices. At the very least the high profile of these performers has given Iceland new media coverage (2005, p. 80).

Although music is not featured much in the official tourism webpage, I argue that the branding of the country in the 'Inspired' campaign drew aesthetically on the image that musicians such as Björk and Sigur Rós had developed in their extra musical material, including music videos, promotional images and documentaries. This will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter. In 2017, there are no links on Björk's website to any tourism pages and perhaps this mutually beneficial relationship has run its course over the 12 years since Connell's and Gibson's work was published.

Another platform, the 'Iceland Naturally' programme, which 'promotes tourism, services and products from Iceland' ('About', 2017b), places much more emphasis on music. In the 'Music & Art' section there is a frequently updated newsfeed that provides information about music events in Iceland and about Icelandic musicians touring abroad (*Music and art*, 2017). Iceland Naturally was mentioned by one of my participants as having the tendency to appear in the cities where her band was performing 'even though we had nothing to do with them, and they brought with them Reyka Vodka and Gullfoss and Geysir CDs, this was just horrible' (Sigrúsdóttir, Personal Communication, 31/03/2016). She felt that this behaviour was crass and exploitative. She told more stories about how Iceland Naturally had organised 'Iceland' music festivals abroad that seemed to place more emphasis on marketing some Icelandic food products than the music. Nonetheless, this is an example of how tourism has deliberately used music to market Iceland internationally.

Iceland.is, another website maintained by Promote Iceland and claiming to be the ‘the official gateway to Iceland’, offers diverse information about Iceland, including politics and history, business and investments, travel and leisure, and arts and culture. It also contains an event calendar where music events are included as well as a page dedicated to Icelandic music (*The official gateway to Iceland*, 2017). The whole website seems to be more of a general information page about Iceland rather than a site catering to tourists who are coming to the country and planning their trip.

The airline Icelandair, the largest tourism company in Iceland, which founded the Iceland Airwaves festival, has relied heavily on using music as a major part of its marketing and promotion. When the airline launches new destinations, they have brought Icelandic musicians along to perform as part of their promotion (Cannady, Forthcoming). Icelandic music is played aboard their airplanes during boarding and de-boarding. In the personal in-flight entertainment system, passengers can watch documentaries about Icelandic music and listen to various Icelandic artists. Passengers can buy the airline’s own compilation CDs with Icelandic popular music in the duty-free shop, and in 2017 the airline had produced five ‘Hot Springs’ compilation CDs with ‘Icelandic music they recommend’, as stated on the CDs. They describe their music involvement as follows:

Icelandair has been a proud supporter of the Icelandic music scene over the years, from the ever-popular and annual Iceland Airwaves music festival, to playing music from some of our favourite home-grown artists as you board our flights. To help bring those sounds and memories home with you, the Hot Springs collection began (‘Hot Spring – Icelandair collection of Icelandic music’, 2017).

The airline also maintains a Spotify profile of 16 playlists, where (mostly) Icelandic music can be found, in addition to the five Hot Spring CDs. Icelandic music is therefore a large part of the overall experience when flying with the airline. The relationship between music and airlines has been documented, and Gibson and Connell have shown how Air Pacific, Qantas and Air Sahara have used music in a significant way (2005, p. 13). This relationship between Icelandair and the music scene will be explored further using the case study of Iceland Airwaves at the end of the chapter.

Changes and Impact on the Music Scene

The city centre of Reykjavík has been transformed with increased tourism (Table 7) from a quiet town to a bustling metropolis. Tourists fill the streets and amenities, but rent has increased and established shops, which have served the inhabitants for decades, have closed. Buildings are torn down to be replaced by new hotels, apartments are converted into guesthouses, and airbnb rentals have increased year by year.⁵⁹ Local people have started to move away from the area, leaving it as a ‘Disneyfication’ of its former self (Davies, 2016). During my fieldwork, musicians frequently brought up the paradox that tourists want to hear live music in Reykjavík, but to accommodate them, concert venues of all sizes have been torn down and replaced by hotels. Pálmarsson explains that ‘the music industry is struggling because of the tourism industry but what they [the tourism industry] do not understand is that without culture there is no tourism’ (Pálmarsson, Personal Communication, 13/07/2016). This is an international issue of increasing concern, as venues are known to become victims of urban redevelopment (Bennett and Rogers, 2014, p. 306). One participant in my research worried that the city would change so much that musicians would not run into each other anymore:

This is what is happening in Reykjavík. You find that all the spaces, where musicians and artists can rehearse and bump into each other, and bars you bump into people, they are going to be gone. I think it is all about people meeting up and that is what makes a great scene and if everyone is moving out and is going to spread out – when are you going to see these people? Yes, it is going to ruin it, for sure. 100%. Give it two years (Colm O’Herlihy, Personal Communication, 14/07/2016).

This is considered to have a serious effect on the music scene, as the physical environment is seen as one of its forging factors (see Chapter 5 for further discussion).

There were many positive aspects attributed to the increased tourism, and musicians pointed out that tourists attend concerts and are happy to pay for them. There are no official figures of how much music lifts the economy in terms of tourism, but my participants noted that tourists also buy records and music memorabilia as souvenirs, and as such support the local music industry:

⁵⁹ According to The Housing Financing Fund, Airbnb units have increased from 1,100 in January 2015 to 7,500 in summer 2017 (Helgason, 2018).

During the summer, in Húrra [a concert venue], there are so many tourists in the audience during concerts. And they also buy Icelandic music. 5500 foreign guests came to Iceland Airwaves last year [2015] and they bought a lot of Icelandic music. Those crazy nerds I know in the scene, they spend something like 50,000 ISK [\$500 US] in Lucky Records or 12 Tónar or Smekkleysa [record stores] or even more (Grímur Atlason, Personal Interview, 12/07/2016).

It is a bit funny to perform in a concert in the summer time now, because it is always packed because there are so many tourists who grab every opportunity to go and see Icelandic music (Hildur, Personal Communication, 18/07/2016).

Musicians are convinced that music attracts tourism. Many of my participants told stories about being stopped frequently in the street by tourists looking for live music. One of my participants gave an example of how bands could take part in developing music tourism by getting in touch with tour guides. He explained that it really made a difference when he had organised a concert and a large group of tourists showed up, because he had been in touch with one tour guide (Sindri Ástmarsson, Personal Communication, 21/07/2016). I have personally experienced the presence of tourism in concerts in Reykjavík. I have been at concerts where the musicians have asked the audience if there were some non-Icelandic speakers in the audience and tried to accommodate them by speaking some English between songs. My participants estimated that tourists frequently accounted for about half of the audience and the majority in some instances. The music festivals, both in Reykjavík and in the country side, attract foreign guests, and more than half of the attendees at the Iceland Airwaves 2016 were such guests (*Morgunblaðið*, 2016). Tourists make up a considerable part of the concert attendees and have an impact on the scene. One participant pointed out that the expanding tourism had possibly caused mediocre bands and musicians to survive longer because they had greater opportunity to perform, and he wondered about the long-term effect on the scene (Árni Matthíasson, Personal Communication, 13/07/2016). Although the tourists are interested in the music scene, a representative from the Iceland Music Export Office explained that there had not been much interest from the tourism industry to develop music tourism (Anna Ásthildur Thorsteinsson, Personal Communication, 04/07/2016). This indicates that the tourism industry is not convinced that music is important for tourism, and this is yet another example of the contesting narratives of the local music scene.

In addition to tourists attending ‘normal’ concerts, a few music events have recently appeared that cater specifically to tourists. Figure 25 shows posters from such ‘tourist concerts’. Live music is often adapted to ‘the perceived needs of tourists’ (Gibson and Connell, 2005, p. 267), and these concerts can be seen as such examples.

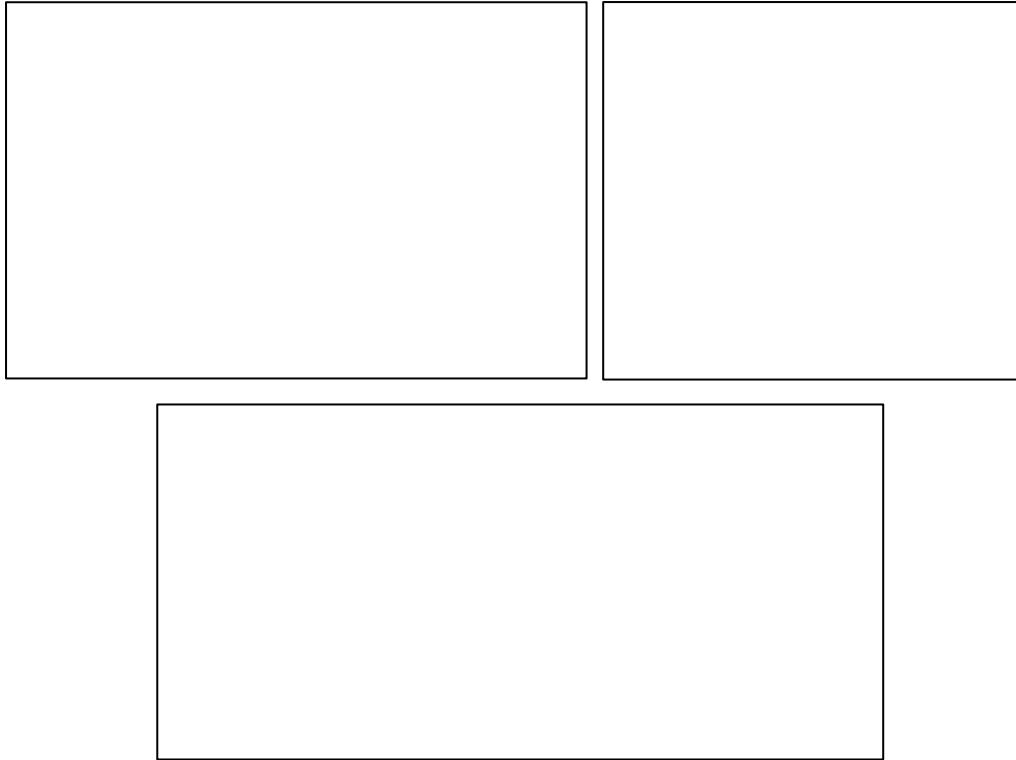


Figure 25. Posters from ‘tourist concerts’ from recent summers.

There are two summer concert series currently on offer: Pearls of Icelandic Songs and Reykjavík Classics in Harpa concert house, and Schola cantorum Summer Concert series in Hallgrímskirkja, where the repertoire focuses on Icelandic folk songs and contemporary music for a cappella choir.

Within popular music the only attempt to create ‘tourist’ concerts I know is when the musician Mugison offered concerts of his music in both Icelandic and English and advertised them in English. His series did not tap into the tourism market as he had hoped for, and the second half was cancelled. Perhaps popular music does not need a reconfiguring into a ‘tourist friendly format’, and hipsters definitely do not want to attend something that is specifically designed for tourists. Since there is a steady supply of ‘normal’ concerts, there was probably not a market for a concert series that specifically catered for tourists, although it has been argued that ‘tourists do not always expect authenticity, nor do they recognise it’ (Gibson and Connell,

2005, p. 267) when it comes to live performances. The findings from the fieldwork show that tourists seek out ‘authentic’ concerts rather than attending those specifically launched for them.

Reykjavík city has not invested in comprehensive music tourism strategies, such as those described in a report on Music Cities by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry and Music Canada, including ‘music-based branding, promotional campaigns, wayfinding apps and other social media strategies, investment in music infrastructure and signage, and programming’ (Terrill *et al.*, 2015, p. 15). Nevertheless, there are various opportunities for tourists to experience music in the country. Perhaps the reason why the tourism industry is so reluctant to develop music tourism further is the liveliness of the music scene. Most music tourism has its roots in the past, and it has been argued that ‘where performers are alive or too mobile, tourism is usually absent’ (Gibson and Connell, 2005, p. 264). The best-known Icelandic music is made by living musicians, and there is limited interest in music heritage. It can be argued, however, that the festival Iceland Airwaves does function as the city’s promotional tool for music tourism (which will be discussed further below). Festivals are known entities for developing music tourism as place-marketing or image branding tools (Waite, 2008, p. 516; Getz, 2010, p. 5; Webster and McKay, 2016, p. 15). Reykjavík ticks many of the boxes regarded as essential for ‘Music Cities’, according to the report, including ‘artists and musicians, thriving music scene, access to spaces and places, a receptive and engaged audience and record labels and other music-related businesses’ (Terrill *et al.*, 2015, p. 17).

New Musical Tourism?

I think it is obvious when you look back to 1986, when nobody was visiting Iceland and compare that to today. We can disagree whether this is a good development, but it is obvious, in my mind, that the world discovers Iceland when the Sugarcubes become famous and Björk becomes a global superstar. And the name of Björk was always associated with Iceland (Grímur Atlason cited in Helgason, 2015).

According to a study made for the Icelandic Tourism Board in 2017 about travel habits of foreign guests to Iceland, 10.5% mentioned Icelandic music as a reason for travelling to Iceland, and 16.3% mentioned international audio-visual material, including music videos. This indicates that music is quite prominent as a reason why people decide to travel to the

country, although nature is still the most common reason (57.8%) (Maskína, 2017, p. 61). Holt finds the reasons of the growth of music tourism in Iceland to be a combination of various elements:

The growth of Iceland as a destination of music tourism can be interpreted as a discovery of its rich musical culture – with remarkable emphasis on musical performance in everyday life and in schools – accelerated by cheap flights with Iceland Air [*sic*], the airline’s sponsoring of the Iceland Airwaves Music Festival, and the fascination with Iceland as a remote and exotic destination in influential American and British music media (Holt, 2017, p. 62).

During my interviews the relationship between music and tourism came up frequently. Musicians and industry members felt that Icelandic music had a considerable role to play in attracting people to the country, and some even believed that it was one of the top reasons why people came to Iceland (Reuben Satoru Fenemore, Personal Communication, 08/03/2016). One participant explained that the Iceland Music Export Office (IMX) had data showing that Icelandic Music was googled more than Iceland, and Of Monsters and Men (the band) was googled more than Reykjavík (Hrafnkell Pálmarrsson, Personal Communication, 13/07/2016). Here again, we see how convinced musicians are of the importance of music for the tourism industry, and the need they feel to bring that forth to justify their existence and stress their importance for the society.

The relationship between music and tourism is complex, and Gibson and Connell describe it as follows:

Music is bound up in place and in transformations of material spaces; increasingly this occurs through tourism and its promotion. Some tourist destinations have developed because music (or the performers themselves) had some connection with those places, but music is more subtly connected with tourism in other, more diverse ways. Music is a cultural resource bound up in how places can be perceived, and how they are promoted. It is one means by which places can be represented in wider mediascapes, shaping local or regional identities; and, by design or default, music influences the images that attract tourists. [...]Whether actively, though attendance at events, or visiting

‘heritage’ musical sites, or merely passively, music plays some part in many holidays (2003, p. 221).

The different aspects depicted by Gibson and Connell emerged through the fieldwork data as the ways in which music was seen to attract tourists in Iceland. These can be categorised into four different types: heritage tourism, event tourism, nature tourism with interest in music, and mythscape tourism. I discuss each of these in more depth below.

Firstly, heritage tourism is regarded as important, because tourists want to see the place where the music was created or where the musicians come from:

Yes, there are a lot of music tourists. People who heard about Iceland because of the music. [...] There are people who search for where Björk lives and that kind of thing. There are people coming because of it [the music] and that has an effect (Grímur Atlason, Personal Communication, 12/07/2016).

I am sure that there are many more tourists coming because of the music. It would be great if it could be measured in order to show those who do not support the music industry that we [the musicians] are bringing all these tourists here but do not really make any money from it. I heard often, when I was with Rökkuró [the band] that people had gotten to know Rökkuró and then begun to look at Iceland and wanted to go there. There is a very strong connection (Hildur, Personal Communication, 18/07/2016).

As these quotes show, it is believed that tourists are coming to the country to experience the ‘birth place’ of certain musicians or the place of origins of the Icelandic music scene. It is difficult to estimate to what extent these are narratives musicians tell themselves in order to justify their own existence and whether they can be substantiated with hard data. Nonetheless, this kind of attraction to places is one of the core aspects of music tourism as:

Places where famous recordings were made, that hosted internationally famous music scenes or were the homes of famous composers and performers, have been those where the most commercially successful music tourism industries have emerged. Vivid myths of place are linked to music there, and local identity is partly constructed in relation to unique musical sounds or successful people (Gibson and Connell, 2005, p. 43).

The myths linking Icelandic music to nature and landscape, discussed in Chapter 4, further empower the tourist attraction to the place. In the quote above, Hildur states that although musicians attract tourists to the country, the musicians themselves do not benefit economically. This viewpoint is in line with Martin Stokes' argument that 'whilst music may be used with increasing intensity to promote certain cities as tourist sites, it certainly seems to be the case that musicians rarely benefit in any direct and sustainable ways from the promotion of tourist locales' (Stokes, 1999, p. 147). Stokes explains that the 'complex and fragile world of music making' is largely invisible to the policy makers who rely on activities of musicians in order to promote places through music (Stokes, 1999, p. 147).

Secondly, event tourism, where people come specifically to Iceland to attend a music festival or a concert, was frequently mentioned:

So many young people have come to Iceland just because of the festival [Iceland Airwaves] and then continue coming (Þorbjörg Roach, Personal Communication, 20/07/2017).

I think one of the keys now is that people are coming [to Iceland] deliberately to experience Secret Solstice [the music festival]. The tourism industry is benefiting from these events. (Hrafnkell Pálmarsson, Personal Communication, 13/07/2016).

Events are another important aspect of music tourism and it has been argued that event tourism is the oldest and most common form of music tourism (Gibson and Connell, 2005, p. 220). Connell and Gibson argue that music tourism is not likely to be successful without visible reminders of a musical past (heritage) or annual music festivals (2003, p. 222). The music festivals in Iceland, and Iceland Airwaves in particular, have been successful in attracting tourists to the country. Music festivals have been regarded as 'medium-long term' resource as 'they bring repeat visitors, spread word of mouth, provide positive images of places in the mainstream metropolitan press and constitute a lively tourist product' (Gibson and Connell, 2012, p. 26). It should be mentioned that music festivals are not only seen as a positive attraction for tourists to a certain place; they also influence the image of a place internally and make it more attractive to live there (Webster and McKay, 2016, p. 15). The relationship between Iceland Airwaves and place branding will be discussed below, but it is worth noting that the festival is the most researched event in the Icelandic music scene.

The third category is closely related to the second one. It involves tourists who are primarily interested in the country because of its nature and landscape, but they also want to experience some culture and choose to attend music events during their trip:

When I tell people abroad about my festivals, they explain that they had been looking for a reason to go to Iceland and the festivals become that reason. [...] They want to see something that is going on and enjoy the nature at the same time. I think this really has an impact. We see tourists all year around and that is particularly due to the culture (Guðný Þóra Guðmundsdóttir, Personal Communication, 11/04/2016).

People are using the opportunity. I would like to come to Iceland, ok, there is a metal festival, I love metal, I'll go to Eistnaflug [a metal festival in the east of Iceland] (Anna Ásthildur Thorsteinsson, Personal Communication, 04/07/2016).

It shows that cultural tourism is often part of a larger experience and can even be secondary to primary motivations for traveling to another country. There is an immediacy to festivals that might make some people book tickets rather than putting the trip off for another year or so. This also contextualises the argument that music tourism does not exist in isolation from other aspects of tourism, as most tourists seek varied experiences, including landscape, cuisine, accommodation and transport, that are separate from the musical experience (Gibson and Connell, 2005, p. 16).

The final category of how music influences tourism in Iceland is that tourists are seen to come to the country because of the image of the country created by musicians and through music videos and music documentaries. I call this mythscape tourism (as discussed in Chapter 4):

Direct influences of music on tourism I think have perhaps been overestimated. There are not hundreds of thousands of people who come to Iceland because they love Sigur Rós. But the music has fed the image [of Iceland] which has been taken up both by private companies but also public institutions such as Promote Iceland. This image is directly under the influence of the music videos which the bands made and the image of the country created

by musicians in [foreign] interviews (Atli Bollason, Personal Communication, 28/04/2016).

I think that they [Sigur Rós and Björk] did film Iceland in a kind of... I think that is what drew people in, because no one had really seen what the place looked like. [...] when Björk and Sigur Rós were doing them [the music videos and documentaries], nobody knew about Iceland. And it definitely promoted the country 100% and has contributed to the tourism of the country massively. Because nobody would have known about Iceland if it hadn't been for that. It hugely contributed to Iceland and the Icelandic music scene (Colm O'Herlihy, Personal Communication, 14/07/2016).

The fourth type was considered the most effective and important according to the participants. It is known that music documentaries, music videos, and visual material accompanying the music can affect how people imagine music and the place from which it comes, and mythscape is created through this mediation (Bennett, 2002, p. 89). The imagination, expectation and experience can be contesting, however, and it results in a problematic representation of Iceland. This is related to Gibson and Connell's idea of 'virtual tourism', where lyrics or album covers 'provided metaphors for being elsewhere [and] such places were seen through the prism of essentialism, reflecting the rose-tinted gaze of Europeans rather than experiences of reality' (Gibson and Connell, 2005, pp. 40–41).

The quotes above show that representations of music and music's extra material, such as album covers, music videos, documentaries, and promotional material, are believed to have impacted audience/viewers and developed them into potential visitors of Iceland. They then become tourists who want to experience the country represented through this material. This links directly to the relationship between music and nature and landscape discussed in Chapters 4 and 6. In addition, the image of the country developed by musicians is appropriated by the tourism industry as a way to brand the country. Gibson and Connell touch upon this relationship between music and tourism and explain why this use of music has proven successful:

Why music is powerful in this regard is in part simply because of its ability to elicit emotional responses from audiences – excitement, energy or melancholy – while music, and popular culture more generally, may be perceived as providing more credible images of places, in contrast to more 'controlled'

promotional campaigns, brochures, paid advertisements, where the audience is usually aware of absorbing one-sided, deliberately constructed and positive images explicitly geared towards selling a product (Gibson and Connell, 2005, p. 72)

The images of Iceland presented by musicians in their art works are powerful and are believed to be more ‘real’ than if they had come from the tourism board. It is difficult to determine to what extent the music’s image has been co-opted by the tourism industry. It is similarly difficult to gauge just how much musicians are building their promotional material and videos on known images of Iceland, which have been proven successful in place marketing, as discussed in Chapter 4. There are thus contesting narratives of whether musicians are creating tourism or are the product of it; both narratives are most likely true.

The only statistics available on the relationship between music and the tourism industry indicates that 10.5% of people give music as a reason for travelling to Iceland, while 16.5% give audio-visual material, including music videos and music documentaries as a reason. While there are not many physical reminders about music in the past, the lively music scene and numerous festivals attract people to the country. The image musicians have created of the country has indeed become the general image of the country promoted by the tourism industry.

Iceland Airwaves Music Festival

The Iceland Airwaves Music Festival has been held in Reykjavík every year since 1999, and it has been continually expanding, both in terms of the number of guests, performers and venues. It was founded by the airline Icelandair and was run by the IMX (as a non-profit company) until 2018 with funds from Icelandair and the city of Reykjavík. It is a showcase festival, which by definition aims to exhibit up-and-coming artists and act as a ‘breeding ground for the market’ (Holt, 2017, pp. 66–67).

In its current form, it is a multi-venue showcase festival stretching over five days at the beginning of November. In 2016, about 220 performers played in 300 concerts and the audience numbered around 9000. Icelandic bands have traditionally been emphasised at the festival, and in 2015 there were 170 Icelandic bands performing. In an interview with Eldar Ástþórsson, the director from 1999-2008, he explained that, in order to create a unique position for the festival in the ‘international sea of festivals’, it was decided early on to program it with

80-90% Icelandic music (Ástþórsson, Personal Communication, 21/06/2011⁶⁰). Atlason explained that the festival staff try to keep track of new and ‘up and coming’ bands that are doing interesting things in order to keep the festival fresh every year. The festival’s ability to spot such talents has been hailed as one of the keys to the festival’s success, since many musicians or bands have played at the festival just before they ‘broke’ onto the international scene and became famous. Atlason also emphasised the need to appeal to local young people (aged 18-20) and get them interested in coming, as otherwise the festival would die (Atlason, Personal Communication, 12/07/2016).

To give further insight into the festival, some non-Icelandic bands have performed there including: The War on Drugs, The Flaming Lips, The Knife, Kraftwerk, Dan Deacon, Julia Holter, Dizzee Rascal, Keane, Hot Chip, Nina Kinert, Robyn, Bombay Bicycle Club, Sinéad O’Connor, Yoko Ono, Thievery Corporation, Sparta, Fatboy Slim, and The Kills, just to name a few. When it comes to the Icelandic bands, it was decided early on that the emphasis should be on the more ‘alternative’ bands, and the most popular pop artists were therefore excluded because they had their own performing opportunities. Arguably, this was also way to create an image of authenticity and edginess for the festival. Ástþórsson emphasised that the idea of ‘alternative’ could be stretched in all directions and genres, but bands that were doing something new and exciting were prioritised (Ástþórsson, Personal Communication, 21/06/2011). In 2009 Páll Óskar, who is one of Iceland’s most popular pop musicians, performed at the festival with the indie chamber pop/rock band Hjaltalín. In a news release from the festival it was stated that: ‘The festival’s organisers are very pleased that Iceland’s brightest pop star had found its Airwaves costume’ (‘Stefnir í uppselda Iceland Airwaves hátíð’, 2009). From this statement, it can be understood that Hjaltalín is seen as Páll Óskar’s festival costume, and it is implied that without this collaboration he would not have suited the festival. In the aftermath of the 2016 festival, a discussion broke out in the local media about the festival and its programming. This was sparked by a Facebook post made by the musician Ingólfur Þórarinnsson who was upset that Jón Jónsson, a popular musician in the country, did not get a spot at the festival despite having several songs on the top of the charts:

For whom is the festival Iceland Airwaves when Jón Jónsson, the most popular musician in the country, is rejected when he applies to perform? The festival

⁶⁰ This interview was conducted for a research project that I did in summer 2011.

receives millions in funding from the city of Reykjavík and from funds from the government on the basis that it is a good promotion for musicians. [...] But no, sadly there is no interest in having him at this festival, probably because he is not cool enough for the organisers. I don't know what other reason there could be, since the charts tell their own story. It seems more important, if you want to promote your music at Iceland Airwaves, to know the right people or be in the clique, than to have numerous top charting songs during the last four to five years (Þórarinnsson, 2016).

Although neither the festival director nor Jón Jónsson himself wanted to engage in a debate with Þórarinnsson about the issue (Hólmkelsdóttir, 2016), the concerns he raised are clear: If the festival is run by public funds, it should serve all musicians, rather than only a certain sector or genre of the music scene. It is unclear whether this sentiment reflects attitudes of other popular musicians who have not been fortunate enough to find 'their airwaves costume' and feel excluded from the event and all the opportunities which it potentially entails. Ástþórsson did note that there were always applications from pop musicians that were rejected on the grounds of genre or not fitting into the image (Ástþórsson, Personal Communication, 21/06/2011). The festival staff is bound by its aims to make a compelling festival, to attract people to the country, and to introduce Icelandic music to the world. Those bands and musicians who are excluded from the festival are obviously not seen to fall into any of these categories. Arguably, the discussion again relates to the ideas of the international arena about Icelandic music, which were introduced in Chapter 4.

In addition to the formal programme, various bars, clubs, cafés, shops and other institutions organise 'off-venue' concerts. These are free and open to performers in the official programme and musicians only playing these 'off-venue' gigs. Atlason, described the 'off-venue' performances at the 2015 festival as follows:

The off-venue schedule runs from the morning to 8 o'clock in the evening, and shows happen all over town across 40 to 50 venues — probably around 600 to 700 shows in total. These shows usually have attendance of 60,000 people. Off-venue shows are free of charge, too, so if you find yourself around one, just enter and join. They're at the bookstore, the barber, the coffee shop (Grímur Atlason cited in Phillips, 2015).

Anyone can organise an ‘off-venue’⁶¹ performance, and many of the local businesses use the opportunity to take part in the festival and increase foot traffic. They arguably also benefit in branding and image from being part of this ‘cool’ event. Since 2012, around 55% of the festival guests have come from abroad to attend the festival, and the landscape of the city completely changes with the surge of ‘pop-up’ concerts at various venues with young festival goers out and about in town.

History and aims

The Iceland Airwaves festival is an example of an event that simultaneously accommodates the needs of the music industry; private companies, such as Icelandair; the city of Reykjavík; and the public tourist institutions. Atlason explains the festival’s aims as follows:

The festival has had three clear aims from the beginning. The first aim is to produce an international music festival which is recognised internationally. The second aim is to increase tourism outside the high season, which is perhaps a small window today but it used to be very large, but it is still important to do so. The third aim is to export or help Icelandic music to travel the farthest, so people see it and discover it. [...] We are a good example of when corporate needs and musicians’ needs go together (Atlason, Personal Communication, 12/07/2016).

The festival began as a one-concert event in October 1999. In a news release a month earlier it was described as a ‘special presentation on Icelandic popular music’ where scouts from international record companies would flock to Iceland to attend this concert, which was produced by the airline Icelandair and the record label EMI. It is not clear where the original idea came from, but Baldur Stefánsson, one of the concert organisers, explains the beginnings as follows: ‘The idea of an international music week where foreign bands would come to the country and Icelandic bands would be introduced to music industry people had been a long lasting dream. When EMI contacted Icelandair a few months ago it became a viable project’ (Baldur Stefánsson cited in *Morgunblaðið*, 1999b). The news release explains that the US band *Thievery Corporation* was to perform together with four Icelandic bands, which had been

⁶¹ For a few years, musicians who wanted to apply for the main travel funding (Loftbrú) hosted by the IMX (supported by Icelandair) had to perform at the festival, which had the effect that various genres were represented in the ‘off-venue’ programme in order to be eligible to apply for that funding. The rules for this fund were changed recently, and now musicians are not required to participate in the festival.

chosen as ‘export ready’ for the US music market. It was emphasised that playing in the concert and being part of the event would be a great opportunity for Icelandic musicians. More than 50 music industry people from the US were expected to attend the concert and stay in Iceland for four days to familiarize themselves with the Icelandic music scene. This was to include people from EMI Music, Elektra Records, Warner Brothers Records, Maverick Records, MCA Records, Sony Music, and Arista Records. The news release concludes by stating that if this event were to succeed, it could become an annual event and be a great opportunity for Icelandic musicians to create a name for themselves internationally (*Morgunblaðið*, 1999b). The concert took place in Airplane hangar no. 4 at Reykjavík’s domestic airport, and in the end seven bands played: three foreign and four Icelandic. In a review in *Morgunblaðið*, the main emphasis was on the number of foreign media representatives and the special interest of the music industry people in some of the bands (*Morgunblaðið*, 1999a).

From the very beginning, the role of the foreign music industry was emphasised, both in the material provided by the festival organizers and the Icelandic media. It was stated that the festival would not have been possible without EMI, and the main objective of the festival was to forge international industry connections. Therefore, the aim was not to organize a concert for the music loving public of Iceland, although they could purchase a ticket to the event. The bands chosen to perform were those who were most likely to break into the US music scene and would thus promote Iceland as a destination. The Icelandic media emphasised these expectations by mainly featuring the business side of the event and placing less emphasis on the music. Perhaps the strong link to the international music industry was needed to ensure that the local musicians would participate in the event. As will be discussed in the next section, the festival was developed to increase tourism to the country and the initiative did not come from the music scene (Ástþórsson, Personal Communication, 21/06/2011). It was therefore vital to ensure that musicians perceived the importance of the festival for their own future.

The festival and music tourism

I argue that cultural tourism in Iceland has changed substantially in the 21st century. Alongside the economic collapse and the subsequent recession, there was a shift in the tourism strategy towards a greater focus on culture, including music. As mentioned earlier, the image of promiscuous women was at the forefront of Icelandair’s marketing strategy at the beginning of the century along with an emphasis on Reykjavík as a wild party place. As these strategies

(especially the image of promiscuous women) became unacceptable, music seems to have gradually begun to play a larger role in the branding of the country and of the capital city as the Iceland Airwaves festival developed. Icelandair's PR agent explained the role of the festival as a part of a marketing strategy by creating events to strengthen the already created image of the city:

[Icelandair has] worked to develop the image of Reykjavík as a lively and fun city in touch with nature. [...] Reykjavík has now a strong image as a city of interesting music [...] Iceland Airwaves is regarded as different and peculiar and that is exactly what we are looking for (Guðjón Arngrímsson cited in *Vísir*, 2004).

The festival was a way to brand Reykjavík and Iceland in a specific way; it was seen as alluring for guests from abroad and as something 'different and peculiar', to use Arngrímsson's words. This ties in with the discussion about the borealism image of the Icelandic music scene in Chapters 4 and 6. Icelandair, through imaginative marketing and drawing on examples abroad such as South by Southwest, managed to channel a promotional source that had not yet been tapped in Iceland: 'The vision of the company [is] that new Icelandic music is one of the best promotions of Iceland possible. Music crosses borders and connects in its own way to different cultures and promotes country and nation' ('Icelandair felur ÚTÓN framkvæmd Iceland Airwaves hátíðarinnar', 2010).

In 2001, two years after the foundation of the festival, the city of Reykjavík became the second main sponsor. The festival quickly became a part of the marketing of Iceland, and Reykjavík, in particular, was promoted as an 'exciting destination' outside of the tourist high season (*Vísir*, 2004). Not everyone believed there was a strong impact of music on tourism, as exemplified by the director of tourism for the city of Reykjavík in an interview in 2004: 'When we ask foreign guests why they come to Iceland it is most often due to the nature. We are yet to see it black on white that music has something to say there. However, that day might still come' (Magnús Oddsson cited in *Vísir*, 2004). Despite sponsoring the festival, the city's top official for tourism did not have any data which supported the idea that music could be an attraction. Here again, the contesting narratives over the impact of music can be seen.

Only six years later, significant changes had taken place within the culture and tourism sphere of the city. The then-director expressed the opposite view:

The Iceland Airwaves festival has long proven its cultural role, as well as being a very important channel for the international promotion of Reykjavík as an exciting and powerful music city. Reykjavík city has now, for a period of time, been an important sponsor of the festival, because research shows that the festival repays these contributions many times (Svanhildur Konráðsdóttir cited in ‘Icelandair felur ÚTÓN framkvæmd Iceland Airwaves hátíðarinnar’, 2010).

The study mentioned by Konráðsdóttir is worth exploring further. In 2005, Iceland Airwaves was investigated in a Nordic research project where the aim was to estimate the influence of major events and festivals in the economy of cities. The main results with regards to Iceland Airwaves were that 36% of attendees were people from abroad, and about two thirds of them had come to the city especially for the festival. The economic impact of the festival was about 134 million ISK (\approx 1 million GBP) (Turismens Utrednings Institut 2005). In 2010, the Iceland Music Export office repeated the study. Similar findings were reported, but the revenue created had increased by 22% from 2005 which was regarded as the most important finding (Young, 2011, p. 20). In 2010 73% of people gave the festival as the reason for being in Reykjavík, which is a considerable increase from 2005. This study was repeated from 2010 to 2014 to understand better the expenditure by the foreign guests (‘Kannanir á meðal erlendra gesta á Iceland Airwaves 2010 – 2014’, 2015). These findings have been used to show how much money the festival brings to the local economy and to argue for its importance. It seems that the burden falls on the festival to prove its monetary value in order to justify the public funding it has received. These research projects, and the known-fact that festival guests do spend money in the city, have arguably led to the changes in perspective between the two directors of tourism from 2004 and 2010. Music festivals are well-known contributors to local economies, as Gibson and Connell have explained: ‘Music festivals can therefore be serious components of local economic development and regeneration strategies, especially via their link to tourism and its direct economic benefits – through visitor expenditure, both at the festival and en route, for such obvious things as petrol, accommodation, food, drink, tickets and souvenirs’ (Gibson and Connell, 2012, p. 22). The economic impact of festivals has been thoroughly studied in an academic context (Getz, 2010, p. 10) and is a powerful way to communicate the importance of festivals to policy makers and stakeholders. It is worth noting that the relationship between music and city in Iceland will be explored further in a three-year project on Reykjavík as a music city, which commenced in 2017 (Eggertsson, 2017). This shows an increased awareness by city officials of the importance of music in the city.

Festivals, however, are not only seen to impact guest expenditure since ‘elusive impacts of image may be equally or more valuable than the hard currency of immediate economic success’ (Gibson and Connell, 2012, p. 23). As Iceland Airwaves takes place in various venues all over the small city centre, the atmosphere of the city is reported to change dramatically during the festival week. The following description was used as a part of the marketing of the city by the (now bankrupt) airline Iceland Express for the festival week: ‘Aside from the great music, the whole city behaves like it’s Christmas, New Years, and your best friend’s wedding all rolled into one’ (Valgeir, 2009). The international media has also reported on this change: ‘The whole of Reykjavik stops for Airwaves. The streets are thronged with festival-goers deep into the Arctic night, strange impromptu performances spring up in tiny backroom clubs and cafes, and there’s no festival in the world more likely to lead to an “all back to mine” situation’ (Osman, 2009). These quotations show the tight relationship between the city and the festival and how the city is seen to impact the atmosphere of the festival and *vice versa*. Festivals have been used to promote urban places for a long time, and ‘urban festivals endorsed specifically by municipal authorities as a place-marketing tool to promote a particular place image also have a historical legacy’ (Waite, 2008, p. 516). Reykjavík and the festival are therefore in the company of cities such as Dublin, Edinburgh, Leipzig, and Wexford, which have all used festivals for promotion, and it has been argued that festivals are ‘increasingly central element of city living’ (Waite, 2008, p. 516).

It should be noted that although cities use festivals to market and create something distinctive about themselves, there is always a risk that the efforts become counter-productive if there are no real connections to the locality itself. There has been a criticism of ‘the prevailing “just add culture and stir” approach to urban regeneration’ (Quinn, 2005, pp. 927–928), which seems to be the approach of an increasing number of festivals. Ástþórsson emphasised, however, that the only reason Airwaves became successful was because it evolved into something ‘real’ for musicians; the festival was not just another tourism initiative, but it had the ‘heartbeat of the music scene’ (Ástþórsson, Personal Communication, 21/06/2011). Therefore, I argue that, even though the original idea for the festival came from the tourism industry, it became important for the music scene early on, and it has grown into the cornerstone of the local music life.

The festival is not only important for the branding of the city, but it uses the reputation and the image of the city in turn for its own marketing purpose. The following was written about

Reykjavík on the Iceland Airwaves home page in 2011: ‘Reykjavík is quite possibly the perfect festival city – small enough to be welcoming, sophisticated enough to offer cultural, historical and nightlife diversions to rival cities ten times its size. Maybe twenty. [...] And it’s surrounded by some of the most unique and astonishing natural beauty you’re ever likely to see’ (‘History’, 2011). The image of Reykjavík plays a large role in the image of the festival. Ástþórsson was aware of the role of the city and country in promoting the festival, since Iceland Airwaves would potentially be in competition with many festivals all around the world. The place helped create a unique position for the festival, and he explained that all promotional material emphasized the Icelandic location:

This is not Airwaves, this is Iceland Airwaves [...] the city has been influential, as the image of Reykjavik as a certain party town has helped the festival to gain international footing and also in the marketing. [...] We are not creating anything new but rather putting this in the forefront in the international marketing (Ástþórsson, Personal Communication, 21/06/2011).

According to Ástþórsson, the image of the city as a ‘party place’ helped the festival to gain international recognition and forge its uniqueness. Therefore, traces of the early marketing of Iceland and Reykjavík has had an impact on the development and success of the festival.

Icelandair released a documentary about the festival, *Iceland Airwaves – A Rocumentary*, in 2012 where the relationship between the city, as a party place, and the festival is emphasized. Throughout the film, guests and musicians are asked what makes the festival special, thus highlighting the uniqueness, or even the ‘carnavalesque’ nature of the event, to use Bakhtin’s term (Buchanan, 2010). The city becomes a repeated theme, mostly presented as a venue for night life. Partying and drinking are mentioned by many interviewees, both guests and musicians, and the venues in Reykjavík are portrayed as offering unique opportunities to socialize with musicians, probably because the venues are small and intimate: ‘You go to a bar and whatever and you are partying and you realize that most of the people there, performed that night’ (Rebekka B. Björnsdóttir in Jónsson, 2012). In the film, the festival is described as egalitarian since there are few boundaries between musicians and the audience in many of the venues. Private spaces for performers, or ‘green rooms’ are not available at all the venues used during the festival, and performers are consequently more available than they otherwise would be. The customary hierarchy between performers and the audience at concerts or music festivals are presented as non-existent, just as in Bakhtin’s carnival (Harcup, 2000, p. 225).

The film features footage from live concerts but the emphasis is often on the audience and their behaviour, instead of on the performing musicians. This is extended to interviewing festival guests on the streets of Reykjavík as audience members move from one venue to the next, and to the late evening when the official festival programme has finished, supposedly to give insight into what the atmosphere is like:

Right now, I'm going to tell you, it is 2 am and we are going to the second bar, we are just starting. You can drink on the streets. I've never seen a police officer here and I've never seen a fight here, which is amazing, because you have huge guys here. No one wants to fight, everyone is very loving. That is amazing. [...] It is love. Everyone is excited about Reykjavík and the Iceland Airwaves. It is totally different (Festival guest in Jónsson, 2012).

This guest depicts a certain atmosphere of intensive partying, love and peace. This aspect of the festival's image is also criticized by a local journalist in the film:

I was getting a bit bored of how much emphasis was placed on this [the partying] at the beginning. During Airwaves you would be drunk all the time and would have made 200 new friends and you would wake up in after-parties not knowing where you were. [...] I think the foreigners are a bit flabbergasted by the Icelandic drinking culture, which is ridiculous. It is not fun to walk up or down Laugavegur [the high street with many of the bars and concert venues] at 2 am if you are sober. It is like walking through inferno (Arnar Eggert Thoroddsen in Jónsson, 2012).

Thoroddsen thinks that the party image of the festival is something that should not be promoted, and he is negative towards the drinking culture. Including his perspective in the film further intensifies the image of the festival and the city as a party place. By emphasising the performers' and audience's experiences of the festival, the viewers are offered the opportunity to imagine themselves at the festival. Since the film was produced by the airline Icelandair, it obviously serves as promotional material for both the festival itself and Iceland as a destination. The airline has claimed to have almost single-handedly marketed Iceland, and Reykjavík in particular, as a tourist destination, and they have influenced the image of the country immensely (Arngrímsson, 2002). The film can be seen as an extension of this tradition.

Conclusion

It has been shown that musicians and other music industry workers believe that music plays an important role in developing cultural tourism, and in promoting the city of Reykjavík and Iceland as a destination for people interested in music. The image of Iceland presented in official promotional material from the government has strong characteristics of some of the better-known Icelandic music videos, and it has been argued that the ‘official’ image of Iceland has been influenced by the music scene. Increased tourism has also benefitted the music scene, as it has attracted more people to concerts and encourages visitors to purchase music products. Tourism can therefore be seen as a fertiliser for the local music scene. Changes to the city centre have had an impact on the scene, and musicians lament the concert venues that have been torn down to make space for hotels and other tourist facilities.

The Iceland Airwaves festival not only plays a role in attracting people to Iceland and assisting with rebranding the country and the city of Reykjavík, it is also the most important event of the year for the popular music scene in Iceland. Every single interviewee I spoke to mentioned the festival as a vital part of the scene, and it has been the focus of many music documentaries about popular music in Iceland. Musicians organise their year around the festival, both when they release new content and tour abroad. As discussed in the chapter, the festival is important in several ways: Firstly, the festival is seen as a key incentive for musical creativity and for the musicians performing there. It provides a clear deadline for finishing new material and ‘outdoing’ other bands⁶² at the festival. The festival offers a platform to showcase music, and musicians strive to give their best performance. The festival is arguably one of the few events in Iceland where something is at stake for musicians. Festivals have been shown to be platforms to reach new audiences (Webster and McKay, 2016, p. 12), and Icelandic musicians are likely to maintain their fan base by performing and releasing new material at this key annual event. The idea of ‘outdoing’ other bands is interesting, as it points to some competitiveness within the scene. This is not how the scene would normally portray itself, as discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

⁶² It is interesting that none of the respondents mentioned the influence of foreign musicians during the festival on the local music scene, and foreign musicians were hardly mentioned at all.

Secondly, the foreign audiences and industry people are also seen to play a key role for the festival and the music scene, thus giving the bands the chance to network, establish contacts, and potentially obtain opportunities abroad. This is almost vital to enable musicians to live off their music making. Music festivals are known as good events to ‘enhance the status of a musician’ and therefore increase the likelihood of further bookings, and even to export musicians abroad (Webster and McKay, 2016, p. 12). Airwaves has had this role of bridging musicians and international industry members from the very start, and this component of the festival can be seen as a key to its success.

Thirdly, even those who do not get to perform at the actual festival can perform ‘off-venue’ and get their ‘break’ there. Many foreign industry people wander between ‘off-venue’ events, and several bands have told stories of how they were discovered by chance at these events. As discussed above, the ‘off-venue’ aspect of the festival is open to everyone. It therefore offers those who want to participate a platform on which to perform, and they can arguably receive some of the benefits of the festival in terms of exposure to industry people and new audiences. There is also a lot of contention amongst musicians about the ‘off-venue’ programming. They feel they are being exploited by shop and café managers, as they provide free labour to attract more patrons rather than being given an opportunity to perform on the festival stage’. No one is forced to perform ‘off-venue’, however, and musicians participate entirely voluntary. Since many musicians do take the opportunity to perform at these events, it is likely that something is to be gained from doing so.

Finally, the festival becomes a way to brand musicians internationally, as musicians get the opportunity to perform or to be exposed to foreign industry people. As a part of the marketing and networking for the festival, the festival team travels abroad with Icelandic musicians and bands and throws ‘Airwaves’ parties and takes part in other festivals:

We have travelled with musicians, paid for their flights, held parties abroad where we invite Icelandic musicians to perform. We use the connections, which both I and the festival have, to promote Icelandic music. No other festival in Iceland does this. This is perhaps the uniqueness of this festival, it is very important for the Icelandic music scene (Grímur Atlason, Personal Communication, 12/07/2016).

This can arguably be contributed to the organisation of the festival and its relationship to IMX, whose role is to promote Icelandic music abroad. It is seen as more attractive to promote Icelandic music through the brand of the festival rather than through the institution of IMX (Grímur Atlason, Personal Communication, 12/07/2016). Therefore, the musicians who fit the image of the festival are more likely to be part of such promotional activities than those who don't. There are no equivalent music festivals for all genres of music produced in Iceland, and other festivals do not have the same collaboration with the IMX. Therefore, the international representation of Icelandic music is likely to be impacted by the festival. Iceland Airwaves, which was originally founded to increase tourism, has become crucial for the development and sustainability of the music scene. Musicians organise their schedule around the festival and it is considered to be a driving force of creativity. This event offers the largest possibility of gaining exposure, from local audiences and new international audiences and industry personnel, which could develop into further opportunities abroad.

I have shown how contesting narratives appear in the discussion about the importance of the music scene for the Icelandic society, and music industry workers believe that they truly impact the tourism industry in a substantial way, even though tourism research tells another story. This is an example of the contesting narratives that emerge from the local context where musicians strive to position themselves as relevant in society and for the economy.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

As I drove to work one morning in December, I observed yet another debate about the centenary of Icelandic sovereignty (i. *fullveldi*) from Denmark. The radio presenter posed a question to Lilja Alfreðsdóttir, the current minister for Education and Culture: ‘what is the sovereignty worth, without the Icelandic language and culture? Is it even possible to claim that we are still free and independent if we do not cultivate our connection to history, preserve our language?’ (*Morgunvaktin*, 2018). My attention was drawn to the programme when Alfreðsdóttir described her correspondence with the Keflavik International Airport about its signs not being in Icelandic. Alfreðsdóttir argued that ‘in times of globalisation, everything that is unique has certain attraction.’ She explained that tourists come to Iceland ‘because Iceland is unique, there is spectacular nature here, incredible culture and good food’, and that they are not interested in having everything in English (*Morgunvaktin*, 2018). What interested me was the fact that the minister wanted signs in Icelandic, not to support the development of the language, but to serve the international ‘gaze’, and thus contributed to the exotic representations of Iceland. In my own research, patterns of exoticism and self-exoticism have been reproduced in various forms, which I have addressed throughout this thesis. The radio discussion reinforced my understanding that, although, the material I draw on comes from musical practices, it contributes to and reflects the contesting narratives of representation that play out in everyday life in contemporary Iceland. The radio discussion also illustrated the relevance, as demonstrated throughout the thesis, of the saying ‘*upphefðin kemur að utan*’ (the prestige comes from abroad), and the act of taking behavioural cues from international expectations.

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this thesis was to problematise what I perceived to be a simplified narrative of Icelandic music, and to offer a more nuanced understanding grounded in local knowledge and sensitivity. Before commencing my research, I imagined that the narratives of the music fell into two camps: on the one hand, the simplified narrative, most often created or at least perpetuated by international media and fans, and on the other hand, the local narrative, which I presumed to be more in line with my own experience of the music scene, and thus, a more ‘accurate’ representation of it. As my research developed, it became clear that this was a far too simplified description of a much more complex phenomenon. My findings show that there are contesting narratives at play, not only between local and international perspectives but also at the local level, which manifest themselves in various

contexts. The thesis reveals how they are rooted in the post-colonial national identity of Icelanders in complex ways. The aim of this concluding chapter is to present the main findings of the thesis and discuss how they contribute to the existing scholarship. I also address some of the limitations of the thesis and suggest how it could be developed further in future projects.

Findings

Throughout the thesis, various contesting narratives concerning Icelandic popular music have emerged, and I will now draw them together and consider what they suggest about music and place. I argue that the different manifestations of such contesting narratives fall within three overlapping categories.

Borealism and music's 'natural' character

The first category is the contested relationship between music and the natural environment. I have shown how nature is central to the national identity of Icelanders and how it was used to induce nationalism during the struggle for independence. I have also explained how nature was central to the stereotype of Icelanders that had developed since the middle ages. During the struggle for independence, and the desire to be regarded as a 'nation amongst nations', there was a push to move away from the 'barbaric' nature image to ensure that the world, or at least the nations which Iceland was modelling itself on, would consider Icelanders 'civilised' (Chapter 3). This historical context shapes the contemporary connections between nature and music, and my findings, similar to Dibben's research about Björk (2009a, pp. 31–33), show how these stereotypes still have an impact on the international reception and journalists' depiction of the music. Thus, the international media contributes to the representation of Icelandic music as being linked to nature and I argue that this contributes to the borealistic discourse.

I also argue that the strong representation of nature in Icelandic national identity not only influences reception, but also facilitates the use of nature in musicians' artistic practice (e.g. music videos and promotional material). Throughout the 20th century, and especially during the struggle for independence, the intertwining of music (and the arts in general) and nature was considered especially powerful in conjuring nationalism and representing Iceland on the global stage. My findings show that both musicians and people working in other positions in the music industry are aware of the power of representing music through nature. In some

instances, the use of nature is a way to make the music distinctive in an oversaturated global market, as it is regarded as very sellable and ‘good’ content to market. As I have discussed in various chapters of the thesis, however, the environmental protection practices of musicians demonstrate how much they value Icelandic nature and how central it still is to the contemporary national identity. Therefore, the links made between music and nature should not only be conceived of in terms of marketing and branding, but also as a sincere and emotional representation of identity. Nonetheless, by using images of nature in music videos or promotional material, musicians and industry workers contribute to the borealistic discourse and to some extent, take part in self-exoticism.

Although Størvold argues that some of the sounds heard in Sigur Rós’s music reflects the band’s borealistic reception (2018b), my findings show that most musicians working within the scene do not believe that the ‘Icelandic sound’ can be heard in terms of nature and landscape, if it can be heard at all. I show that the idea of the ‘Icelandic sound’ is linked to the krútt scene, since it was the first prominent scene to come out of Iceland and move onto the international stage. The krútt bands tapped into a unified sound world, and they were presented internationally as a cohesive scene. The aesthetics that the krútt promoted aligned with the stereotype of Iceland and Icelanders in general. In so doing, they further strengthened the Icelandic signifiers of the scene, and many of the bands contributed to the self-exoticism discussed above.

I have shown that musicians, local industry workers and journalists contribute to borealistic representation of the music scene in different ways and are motivated by different, and sometimes contesting, factors. There is another competing narrative, where musicians decline the connections made to nature. In discussing this narrative, I have drawn on Prior’s work (2014), which argued for emphasising the social aspect of the scene instead of only focusing on nature. Although he does warn that the reduction of a music scene ‘to the immanent or generative qualities of nature is simplistic at best, and damaging at worst’ (p. 2) he does not explain in what way the damage can play out in a local context. My findings show that musicians regard the potential damage of these nature representations to lie within both the expectations for the music and musicians, and the reception of the representations internationally. Musicians felt this representation to be limiting, as they felt that there was a certain expectation of how they should behave themselves, how they should look, and how their music should sound. Furthermore, they felt that some musical styles, which had links to

the ideas people had about the ‘Icelandic sound’, would be more likely to be successful internationally than other styles or genres that did not fit the image or stereotype of Icelandic music. This is also an example of how musicians try to avoid labels as they perceive themselves to be unique and different from their local peers, as argued by Cohen (2007).

Othering rural Iceland

The second category moves away from musicians’ struggles with exoticism to examples of how these same musicians borealise others in Iceland that are outside of the Reykjavík music scene. While musicians lament how they have been depicted by international journalists and the lack of agency they have in these representations, I have also shown that musicians actively participate in advancing the borealistic representations of themselves as they ‘other’ other people in Iceland through their musical outputs. The film *Heima*, by the band Sigur Rós, represents Iceland for the international gaze. The Iceland presented in the film, however, only represents a limited version of the country, much of which is beyond the band members’ most frequent haunts, as they live in the capital area and have been touring extensively outside of Iceland. I argue that the nostalgic representations of rural, sometimes isolated Iceland, and the traditions that appear in the film, work to other the place, and this contributes to the borealistic representations discussed above. Although many scholars have discussed various aspects of the film *Heima* (Osborn and Blake, Forthcoming; Dibben, 2009b; Richardson, 2012; Osborn, 2013; Størvold, 2018a), none of them addressed the intricate local dynamics at play through these representations, and the lack of agency can possibly impact the local inhabitants and places visited by the film.

The songs staged in the West Fjords that I discussed in Chapter 7 are not merely examples of self-borealism, as these representations depict the area and should also reflect the people living in that area. The rural places are presented as idyllic, and the tone in the film is mournful of the past and the old ways of life that have ceased to exist. This version of Iceland is created to feed the consumption of people who most likely live in urban settings and do not know the reality of everyday life in these places in the past or present. It neither depicts the hardships of life experienced by the local people, nor the current political issues dealt with on a daily basis.⁶³ It

⁶³ An example of this can be found in a newspaper article where holes in the Vatnsnesvegur road were causing children to throw up on their way to school in their school bus due to car sickness. This has caused the children anxiety and the result has been that pupils only go to school four days a week, instead of the normal five days (Kjartansson, 2018).

gives value to the rural and isolated attributes without allowing locals agency over these representations. As such, it could hinder progress and modernization of places like the West Fjords, which currently suffer from depopulation and long standing economic difficulties. This is an example of contesting narratives about the representation of Iceland in which musicians play with the stereotypes of national identity. Through the film, the band not only others themselves, but they exoticise people outside of the music scene who might not benefit from this representation in the same way as the musicians.

Contesting narratives of music's social character

The third category is the alternative narratives offered by musicians and industry workers about the nature connection, which focused on the social character of the music scene. My findings show that my participants regarded the 'smallness' to be a key characteristic of the music scene and explained the different ways that manifested. I argue that this is a 'local representation' of how local stakeholders (musicians and industry workers) depict the scene. This local representation appeared when musicians described the scene and constantly compared it to an unknown entity. The comparison to another unknown scene identified the shortcomings within the Icelandic scene: musicians had fewer opportunities to get paid; the infrastructure did not support their music making; the music industry was underdeveloped, or, according to some musicians 'did not exist'; and funding was lacking. It also explained some of the positive aspect of the music scene, such as the friendliness of the scene, and the frequent collaborations and partnerships that contributed to the idea that there was no competition within the scene. The 'lack of industry' also translated to an erasure of genre boundaries, and musicians were free to experiment and to try different musical styles and genres.

The perceived uniqueness of the music scene in Iceland was always described in relation to another idealised place. I argue that such a comparison is an example of an internal dialogue of legitimising the scene and viewing it as different and unique. I have shown that the narrative of the local music scene is constantly mapping itself onto this 'other' entity. This is similar to the comparisons made during the push for modernization of cultural practices in Iceland during the early 20th century (Chapter 3), during which Icelanders imagined themselves in relation to an undefined other. This shows the inferiority complex of the national identity and the importance placed on the opinions of others.

It is also worth emphasizing that my participants usually compared the Icelandic scene with that of London or New York, not cities or countries with comparable sizes of population. Selecting some of the largest musical centres in the Western world reflects where musicians are positioning themselves within the global industry. It is not surprising that musicians and industry workers feel that the music scene in Iceland is unique if they are comparing it with London or New York. I also argue that selecting these large musical centres as a point of reference is an example of the megalomaniac tendencies which also mark Icelandic national identity. Through these contesting narratives in the local context (and with an imagined other), both the inferiority complex and the megalomania of the national identity can be detected.

Furthermore, there is the ongoing internal legitimization of the music scene, which I detected in the discourse. In Chapter 6, I discussed how the term *krútt* was received by those it depicted and how it developed. Special focus was on the debate that developed after the financial collapse, where the relevance of the *krútt* for Icelandic society was questioned. The term *krútt* was considered belittling and demeaning for the music scene as musicians felt that it would imply that they were not taken seriously as artists. During the post-collapse debate, musicians and other industry workers rallied around these *krútt* musicians and emphasized their importance, both for the music scene and for the society at large. The discourse in Chapter 8 represents a similar narrative, as musicians and industry workers gave numerous examples of how the music scene contributes to the local economy by being one of the most important tourism attractions of the country. The statistics on the number of tourists who come to Iceland due to the music, however, do not match the musicians' narrative. This is another example of contesting narrative, where the importance of the scene is directly contested.

This shows the different ways that struggles over representation take place within the local context of the scene. Most of my findings of the scene are in line with conclusions from other scholars who have recently engaged with the music scene in Reykjavík, such as Prior's (forthcoming Forthcoming) descriptions of the importance of spatiality, sociality and circulation, and Cannady's (forthcoming Forthcoming) work on the Iceland Airwaves music festival. I advance this debate by placing it in the context of Icelandic history and national identity and by critically addressing the tensions that underpin these narratives.

I have explained the complicated relationship Icelanders have with nature and how important it is for their national identity, although it has also been seen as a hindrance to modernization.

I argue that the national identity, with its ingrained inferiority complex and accompanying megalomania, has impacted how musicians and industry workers experience and explain the music scene in Iceland. This thesis has shown how contesting narratives of both international perspectives and local experiences contribute to the image and identity of contemporary popular music in Iceland. I argue that sensitivity to the historical context is a key to unpacking the various contesting narratives. Through this I offer a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between music and place in Iceland.

Limitations of the Research and Suggestions for Future Research

Due to the official rules regarding word-length, some of the material which emerged from the research process had to be cut from the final thesis during the editing process. I had compiled a detailed history of the development of popular music in Iceland, and whilst that was an interesting process to go through, it became clear to me that this was not vital to the main arguments which I set forth. I also ended up deleting other, carefully collected contextual material, such as geographical and demographic information about both Iceland. Throughout the research period I came across interesting topics that I was unable to engage with due to word-length restraints and for the need to maintain focus on the key issues. I have identified six areas for future research, which I will discuss below.

I would have liked to have devoted more time to exploring the idea of ‘Icelandic sound’ (this is briefly touched on in Chapter 5 and 6). I had a lot of material which is only included in summarised form in the thesis. Furthermore, in collaboration with a colleague in Creative Music Communication at the Iceland University of the Arts and three students from the Department of Music, I developed a project that explored people’s ideas about ‘Icelandic sounds’ through music and song writing workshops. It included brainstorming sessions and discussions, all of which were documented. About 25 people participated, including those with and without a background in music performance, local residents, and tourists. Ethical approval was secured through the Iceland University of the Arts rather than through the University of Liverpool, so the research and findings are not discussed here. Nevertheless, the project was informed by my PhD research and provides interesting perspectives on the idea of ‘Icelandic sound’.

Gender is another theme I was not able to accommodate in the thesis. I am, however, particularly interested in gender as a founding member of KÍTÓN (the association ‘Women in Music’ in Iceland). I have strong opinions about gender and music in Iceland. My research suggested that despite Iceland’s reputation for gender equality, the scene is male dominated, and women are at a disadvantage. While this was not something my participants commented much on (or something that I asked them to comment on), this is an area which I would like to explore further.

Ethnicity is something that was never mentioned during my field work, and I did not focus on ethnicity as part of my textual analysis. The Icelandic population is very white, and the music videos and the promotional material which I analysed reflect that reality. Although immigration is increasing every year, most immigrants to Iceland are white Eastern Europeans. My personal experience from working in the music scene is that it does not reflect the percentage of immigrants within Icelandic society (12.6% in January 2018) (‘Innflytjendum heldur áfram að fjölga’, 2018). This area would be worth investigating further, especially since I argue for the various connections between music and the national identity of Icelanders. The national identity is strongly bound up in language and a sense of shared history, and immigrants might struggle to identify with these aspects.

My research focus was on the capital area of Iceland and it could have been interesting to investigate whether different experiences are found in other places in Iceland. Other towns are also important for Icelandic music, including Akureyri, (the ‘capital of the North’) and Ísafjörður. The latter is the largest town in the West Fjords and hosts the festival *Aldrei fór ég Suður* (I Never Went South), which the Reykjavík indie scene frequents. There are popular music festivals all over Iceland, all of which contribute to the Icelandic scene as well as to the local music making.

Music education and the education system in Iceland was briefly touched upon in Chapter 2, but this was not a key theme in the analysis as my participants rarely mentioned it in the interviews. I imagine the reason for the lack of discussion about music education is that it is taken for granted by my participants and Icelandic society more generally. However, I believe it is one of the keys to the Icelandic music scene, and it would be interesting to specifically investigate music education’s role in the music community.

Finally, my research focused on popular musicians and industry workers and their experiences and opinions regarding Icelandic music, and it would be interesting to compare these findings with the experiences of local audiences. Similarly, as stated in Chapter 2, other music genres, such as art music or jazz, could have been included, but due to the fact that the majority of the textual material available was focused on the popular music scene, this became the chosen focus of this study.

Reflection on the Research Period

Since I began working on this thesis, there have been some interesting developments both in the music scene and in the academic field working on Icelandic music. Krútt still dominated the music scene when I began my research, but during this time several other music genres have become prominent, most recently hip hop. Research on Icelandic music was fairly peripheral when I started out, with only a handful of scholars working on Icelandic music. The field has grown tremendously during these six years, and in addition to my own PhD, one has just been completed and another one is in the final stages. I have been at the forefront in developing the field. I have organised panels on Icelandic music at international conferences, I co-organised the first symposium on popular music in Iceland a few years ago, and I am co-editing the first volume on Icelandic music which will be published later this year. I am also the co-editor of *Þræðir*, an Icelandic language journal on music, published by the Iceland University of the Arts since 2015. I have had the pleasure of communicating with several students, both within Iceland and abroad who are working on undergraduate or master's research on music in Iceland, and overall, there is an increased interest in this field. I think it is fair to say that the future of Icelandic music research is bright.

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APPENDIX I: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Nationality	Background	Gender	Date	Place
Andreas Engström	Sweden	Music writer and scholar	Male	12/04/2016	Berlin
Anna Ásthildur Thorsteinsson	Iceland	IMX project manager	Female	04/07/2016	Reykjavík
Anonymous 1	Anon.	Musician	Male	15/07/2016	Reykjavík
Anonymous 2	Anon.	Music promoter	Male	14/07/2016	Reykjavík
Arnar Eggert Thoroddsen	Iceland	Music journalist and scholar	Male	25/02/2016	Reykjavík
Árni Heimir Ingólfsson	Iceland	Music scholar	Male	15/07/2016	Reykjavík
Árni Matthíasson	Iceland	Music journalist	Male	13/07/2016	Reykjavík
Atli Bollason	Iceland	Music journalist	Male	28/04/2016	Reykjavík
Colm O'Herlihy	Ireland	Label and studio manager	Male	14/07/2016	Reykjavík
Egill Sæbjörnsson	Iceland	Musician	Male	12/04/2016	Berlin
Einar Örn Benediktsson	Iceland	Musician	Male	05/04/2016	Reykjavík
Elísabet Indra Ragnarsdóttir	Iceland	Venue manager	Female	12/07/2016	Reykjavík
Grímur Atlason	Iceland	Festival manager	Male	12/07/2016	Reykjavík
Guðný Þóra Guðmundsdóttir	Iceland	Festival manager	Female	11/04/2016	Berlin
Gunnar Lárus Hjálmarsson (Dr. Gunni)	Iceland	Music writer	Male	18/07/2016	Reykjavík

Hildur (Hildur Kristín Stefánsdóttir)	Iceland	Musician	Female	18/07/2016	Reykjavík
Hjálmar H. Ragnarsson	Iceland	Musician	Male	13/07/2016	Kópavogur
Högni Egilsson	Iceland	Musician	Male	01/03/2016	Reykjavík
Hrafnkell Flóki Kaktus Einarsson	Iceland	Musician	Male	23/02/2016	Reykjavík
Hrafnkell Pálmarsson	Iceland	STEF	Male	13/07/2016	Reykjavík
Lára Rúnarsdóttir	Iceland	Musician	Female	20/07/2016	Reykjavík
María Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir	Iceland	Musician	Female	31/03/2016	Reykjavík
Mugison (Örn Elías Guðmundsson)	Iceland	Musician	Male	14/07/2016	Reykjavík
Nicola Dibben	UK	Music scholar	Female	14/03/2016	Liverpool
Páll Ragnar Pálsson	Iceland	Musician	Male	04/04/2016	Reykjavík
Paul Evans	UK	Musician	Male	20/07/2016	Reykjavík
Ragga Gísladóttir	Iceland	Musician	Female	15/07/2016	Reykjavík
Ragnar Þórhallsson	Iceland	Musician	Male	21/07/2016	Reykjavík
Reuben Satoru Fenemore	Australia	Musician	Male	08/03/2016	Reykjavík
Sigurður Halldórsson	Iceland	Musician	Male	25/02/2016	Reykjavík
Sindri Ástmarsson	Iceland	Manager	Male	21/07/2016	Reykjavík

Sóley (Sóley Stefánsdóttir)	Iceland	Musician	Female	28/04/2016	Reykjavík
Steinþór Helgi Arnsteinsson	Iceland	Promoter, manager,	Male	18/07/2016	Reykjavík
Þórarinn Guðnason	Iceland	Musician	Male	24/02/2016	Reykjavík
Þorbjörg Roach Gunnarsdóttir	Iceland	Musician	Female	20/07/2016	Reykjavík

APPENDIX II: INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM



The Idea of Icelandic Sound: Identity, Place and Space in Icelandic Popular Music

Information Sheet for Participants – February 2016

Introduction

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends and relatives if you wish. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

What's this project about?

The Idea of Icelandic Sound: An Ethnographic Study is a project that explores ideas about the sound(s) of popular music in Iceland and the notion of a distinctive Icelandic sound. I have been analysing music documentaries and media accounts about Icelandic music to understand how it is discussed. I am also interested in talking to musicians and people from the music industry about the ideas presented in the films and media, and whether they think there is a specific Icelandic sound.

I will ask you about your opinion of Iceland's music scene(s)', including its music industry and local music media; music performance venues and audiences; social networks and networking; music recordings produced in Iceland; audiences; representations of Reykjavík/Iceland/place in the music produced in Iceland.

Who am I?

I am a Lecturer at Iceland Academy of the Arts but am undertaking this project as part of my PhD research at the University of Liverpool.

What am I hoping to do?

There has as yet been little research into Icelandic popular music. I hope that this research project will enable a deeper understanding of the popular music scene its multifarious aspects, with a special focus on the perspectives and experiences of people who work in the music sector. It will result in a written PhD thesis and I also plan to write about your music and music-making in research papers that will be published and shared with other academics interested in Icelandic popular music and in music, place and identity.

The discussion will be with me (Þorbjörg Daphne Hall) and will be recorded and later transcribed into written form. The recording and transcription will be treated as confidential and stored electronically and securely on Liverpool University's M drive for the duration of the study, after which it will be deleted. Other than contact details, no personal details will be kept. In reports and publications based on the research participants will be treated anonymously and all names will be changed, unless participants request otherwise.

Participants are free to withdraw participation and leave the study at any time,

Unfortunately I am unable to reimburse you for your contribution to the project.

What am I asking you to do?

If you agree to take part I would ask for your written consent to be interviewed (approximately 30 minutes) as part of the research, and to use the information you provide as a basis for analysis in the written thesis and in publications based on the research.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the project so please do ask if you are unsure of anything I have outlined here or would like some further information.

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please email me at: thorbjorghall@lhi.is, or call me at my office on 5452289, and I will try to help. If you remain unhappy and have a concern that you feel I have not been able to adequately address, you can contact the Research Governance Officer at the University of Liverpool: ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of any concerns you might have.

Interview Schedule

If you agree to participate in the project you will subsequently be invited to participate in the interview, and we will find a time and place that suits your schedule. You will not be required to bring anything to the interview but you may bring anything that you think you may find useful such as chord charts, lyric sheets, still images or sound recordings which could potentially shed light on the idea of the sound(s) of popular music in Iceland and the notion of a distinctive Icelandic sound.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: The Idea of Icelandic Sound: Identity, Place and Space in Icelandic Popular Music

Researcher(s): Þorbjörg Daphne Hall

**Please
initial
box**

I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated February 2016 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

The information you have submitted will be published as a report; please indicate whether you would like to receive a copy.

I understand that confidentiality and anonymity can be maintained so it will not be possible to identify me in any publications. Please indicate 'Yes' in the box below if you wish to remain anonymous under a pseudonym or 'No' if you are happy to be identified.

I understand and agree that my participation will be audio recorded and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the following purposes: research publications and conference presentations.

I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.

I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant Name

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Student Researcher:

Name: Þorbjörg Daphne Hall

Work Address: Iceland Academy of the Arts, Sölvhólgata 13, 101 Reykjavík

Work Telephone: 5452289

Work Email: thorbjorghall@lhi.is

APPENDIX III: TOPIC GUIDE

Bakgrunnur

Aldur, kyn
Menntun

Formleg - óformleg - tónlist - annað
Reynsla í tónlist - lengd - umfang - fjölbreytileiki
Kveikjan? -
Áhrifvaldar - fyrirmyndir
Á hvað hlustarðu?
Tónleikasökn? - Staðir - festivöl
Atríunna - tónlist - hlífsmark - kennsla - annað

Tónlistaríðkun - persónuleg

Hvái drúfur þú áfram?

Tilgangur m. íþkun

- Velgengni - þrívíkingar - innvi þarf - feedback

Hveran mikið tími fer í þetta?

Ferli? (tónmiðlegi)

ÍEingur - tónleikar - upptökur

Útgáfur - dreifingaráttur

Umboðsmáður - af hverju (eun)?

Hvaðan koma mestu tekjurnar

Kynningarmið - heimasíða - facebook?

Tónlistarmyndbönd

Þátttaka í heimiðarmyndum

Made in Iceland

Icelandic indie

Hot Springs

Tónleikar - vettvangur - staður - festivöl - hvaða viðbúðir

Tónleikafurðingur - hvert - hindranir

Umfiðun um tónlistina þína?

Hvák miltar?

Samband við umheiminn - hvernig?

~~Ástæða umgjörð~~

Ástæða - Umgjörð - tónlistarsengun

Styrkir - loftbúi - úttönn - annað

Þjónusta - ástæða

Stofnanir

Skilningur á mikilvægi

"Gate keepers"

Samkeppni - samstarf - tölufari

↳ Umhverfi - tónlistarsengun

- Einkenni? - Eigin upplifun

Umfiðun um tónlistarsengunna - einkenni

Eigin upplifun og viðtöllum

Sérstafa

Áhrif ferðameislu?

Er þú sér-íðenskur hljóðheimur?

Upplifing zkræna endurtektaþráði/spurningar

stáa kvenna?