

Creative Entrepreneurship An approach to rural business in Shetland

Report to the Arkleton Trust Andy Ross, GlobalYell Ltd

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CHAPTER ONE Introduction

Spreading enterprising behaviour across sparsely populated areas

Creative approaches to living in isolated, rural areas can be found all over the world. People have always found a need for innovation and creative solutions to life in places where living is difficult, where populations are small, and where conditions are not necessarily conducive to farming, agriculture or settlement. Sometimes, these places have engendered a need for artistic expression; art helps release tensions, helps people to understand each other better, and, sometimes, simply tells a story. The very hardship that people experience in living in these areas helps to nurture a creative, artistic spirit which, in turn, helps to give people the strength of will to continue to live there.

This report explores why art and creativity are important to the future economic and social development of rural and remote communities. Art is so integral to our lives that often people take it for granted and do not value it highly enough. History shows that it is a vital part of our identity and has helped to create the societies in which we live. Prehistory has some intriguing and tantalising glimpses of artistic pursuits to reinforce the notion of the centrality of art. The first section of this report illustrates this by discussing several examples from different parts of the world including South Africa.

Art continues to play a role in the development of society in the current time. This is particularly so in Shetland where creativity is highly valued and has led to some interesting ways of living in the islands. Creative people live in rural and remote islands in order to pursue their careers in illustration, music, textiles, sculpture, glass making and ceramics precisely because these areas are peaceful and tranquil, and the identity of the islands has been influenced by artists and craftspeople for as long as people can remember and for as long as people have lived in Shetland.

It is important to have people living in these rural areas because without the energy of communities, remote areas become moribund, sometimes preserved in time as relics and used only by the birds and animals. The flowers bloom unseen and gradually the old ways of living and the new ways that people have found to continue to live are lost and with it, the world loses ideas, identities and cultural riches. As people move away from remoter areas, because of economic pressures, and as those remaining grow older, communities are in danger of disappearing and becoming lost.

Yet, on one of the Shetland Islands, Yell, there is a significant development happening that provides indications of how rural communities can attempt to reverse these trends. On the island of Yell, three companies have come together and are working to promote the island as a good place to live and work. Two of the organisations are involved with the arts and have influenced the identity of the area through their activities. A hub of creativity is beginning to emerge, and with it opportunities and possibilities for the future that may impact the future economic and social wellbeing of the surrounding community.

The 'Community hub' is an idea that has been around for a long time, and with technology allowing contact to be made across the world easily, sharing knowledge and expertise is possible at a scale never before experienced. Is there a way that this idea can be explored in a world that is rapidly changing so that everybody learns and benefits together? Can art and craft really help to sustain a population in a rapidly changing world, and what might that model of development look like?

The second part of this document sets out an international context for developmental hubs, backing this up with national and local strategies, before exploring the emergence of the hub in Sellafirth, Yell.

Finally, the report looks at a possible future for the hub idea, through the involvement of a partner that can bring together groups from disparate backgrounds to share information and ideas. The Arkleton Trust, with its extensive background in international development in rural areas, would be an ideal partner to work with on the development of the Shetland Hub, participating in the project to disseminate experiences to a wider national and international audience.

CHAPTER TWO

Artistic leanings?

People have always made art or created beautiful craft objects and as we learn more about the ways people lived, we can see that art is often central to the creation of personal and community identity. In places where there are huge contrasts in geography and climate, from wide open scrubland with low rainfall to mountains tipped with winter snow and covered with forest, we can find ancient drawings and paintings, depictions of life and lives. For example, in Zimbabwe's Matobo Hills,¹ the quality and quantity of cave art is world-famous,

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704281204575003441739599812.ht ml

while in Namibia,² the rock art pictograms can be seen up close, bringing a sense of wonder to anyone who sees them. Why do people make art when it seems that there would be more pressing things to do, such as finding food or water in seemingly inhospitable places?

People make art for practical reasons, for economic, material and social gain. We dance as ways explaining the world to others, paint and draw to relieve stress and explain difficult problems, and sing to tell others what we believe.

On a purely practical level, Australian aboriginal people use <u>Songlines</u>,³ literally singing the landmarks of the countryside so that other members of the group can find water and food. In a country of such strong contrasts and such scarce resources, this has helped groups to survive and thrive in apparently inhospitable environments. While in Mali, The annual Festival au Desert⁴ grew out of an annual gathering of nomadic Tamashek people who came together to celebrate their culture in song, dance, poetry, dance, ritual sword fighting and other traditions. The gathering allows groups to merge and split, resources to be shared, and information imparted.

On a more personal and deeper level, people may be 'hard-wired' to enjoy the arts. In <u>The World in Six Songs</u>,⁵ Daniel Levitin suggests that the advent and rise of the musical song has had a physical effect on the brain and thus has had a direct effect on the history of the world. He is not alone in suggesting that music influences and shapes our being; Oliver Sacks, the physician and psychiatrist believes in the power of music to reach people because that art form is such an integral part of civilisation.

People make and enjoy art to belong, to confer prestige or even to pass judgement. Canadian Pacific Northwesterners carve <u>totem poles</u> to⁶ denote kinship or make <u>shame</u> <u>poles</u> to indicate that there is a wrong that needs to be righted. Social bonds are cemented through the act of putting up the poles, and will be seen for years to come, signifying strong community and leadership. Zimbabwean farmers get together at barbeques, called <u>braaivleis</u>, and exchange tall stories and music as a release of tension, and for cementing social bonds. In Dr Fiona Ross' book, <u>Raw Life, New Hope</u>,⁷ the concept of respectability in the squatter camps of South Africa is tied into a system of purchase of goods. People save

² <u>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGTNzy0jQPI</u>

³ http://www.josephhyde.co.uk/video/songlines/

⁴ <u>http://www.festival-au-desert.org/</u>

⁵ Levitin, D, <u>The World in Six Songs</u>, New York, 2008

⁶ <u>http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Totem_pole_</u>

up or put themselves into considerable debt in order to purchase a beautiful item of furniture that gives them status and respectability. To let people know that this cupboard or this garden or this painting is yours, people need to see it and to see it they would need to come into your house or live on your estate. It seems a party is in order, and with it music and theatre, costume and dance.

Similarly, in the Shetland Isles, Up Helly Aa, which celebrates the return of the sun in the dead of winter is a series of fire festivals across the islands, led by a central group, the Jarl Squad headed by the Guizer Jarl. Other squads are formed and spend the time prior to the celebrations working out short sketches of dancing and acting. In the North Isles, the squads' focus is on local events and each year, notable things that have happened in the community are re-enacted in village halls, sometimes with devastating accuracy. The guizers in the squads wear masks and costume to disguise themselves, although this is more show than anything else because individual voices in small communities are recognisable, and the proceedings go far into the night and into the next day. In fact, the schools in the islands close when the local community has Up Helly Aa because it is so important in the calendar. Up Helly Aa allows comment to made, in a way that everyone can access, about difficult things that have happened in the community, and gives people an opportunity to be someone else for a little while. In small communities where politically it can be difficult to speak about issues or problems, opportunities to gather together to defuse tension and talk is vital and important to keep people living there. How better to open discussion than to portray significant events in disguise, allowing attention to be drawn to them without drawing focus directly to the perpetrator.

CHAPTER THREE

Developing rural areas

International examples of arts-based rural development

Around the world's rural areas, development has been approached in many different ways. In recent years, technology in particular has provided an impetus to develop an area. In Italy, the medieval village of Colletta di Castelbianco,⁸perched on a hilltop in the Pennavaire Valley, was in ruins and uninhabited for thirty years until it was decided to renovate and breathe new life into the area. The village now boasts good facilities including high-speed broadband, and events and festivals bring visitors year round. The village was

⁷ Ross, F. (Dr.), <u>Raw Life, New Hope, Cape Town,</u> 2009

redesigned with modern convenience in mind so that buildings are underfloor heated, and there are conference and business facilities available to bring different kinds of visitors to live and work in the area. The aim of the village restoration was to save a cultural icon by increasing its current usability and to attract freelance professionals and small businesses in the media and IT sector to the area, lured by high-speed internet connections and the quality of life - creating a 'silicon hamlet.' In 2007, the village was selected as one of the most beautiful places to live in the whole country.

The rise of "teleworking", flexible work practices enabled by advantages in technology, has enabled the creation of community spaces, commonly known as "Community Hubs" in the twenty-first century. An internet search on Google⁹ turns up many examples of the use of flexible space and technologically enabled areas where communities can gather. This use of technology and community is primarily focused on urban areas, but there is an interesting idea in the use of community, technology and business where rural parts of the UK are concerned. Harnessing the knowledge and energy of a community to further its own development has always been a vital part of rural living, and with remote working now very much a part of twenty-first life, could the two be put together with technology to provide a model of development?

In Finland, the concept of the rural village gave rise to a unique collaborative working, learning and development environment, netWorkOasis,¹⁰ which was created and designed specifically to allow people to live and work in a remote area, to connect to each other both virtually using high speed networks, and to encourage people from a wide range of disciplines to talk together in spontaneous encounters. The idea that academics, artists and other creatives and the local community of woodsmen might have something to say to each other was interesting, as was the concept of creating spaces that academics and artists could use for research alongside places where people could meet to chat and socialise. The use of technology in these rural spaces meant that people could do their work from remote places with the aid of the internet. At one stage the university planned to develop a network of remote lakeside cabins connected by high speed internet that could be

⁸ <u>http://www.colletta.it/</u>

⁹ <u>https://www.google.co.uk/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ie=UTF-8 -</u> <u>hl=en&output=search&sclient=psy-ab&q=community hubs</u>

<u>&oq=&gs_l=&pbx=1&fp=547fc97169c3a7b0&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.r_qf.,cf.osb&biw</u> =848&bih=431

http://www.joensuu.fi/tutkimustuki/koovee2/sisallot/international_research_establish ments.htm

used by visiting artists and academics but the concept did not progress much beyond ideas stage.

The author of this report believes that the creation of developmental hubs is an exciting option for the development of the creative economy in remote communities in many parts of the world, building communities of interesting and creative people through technology and networks. These hubs could take the form of technologically-enabled spaces that can serve as business hubs for creative organisations which are mobile, compact and transportable for the most part, relying on good technology and people relationships to function. In a 2006 report, <u>Creative Countryside - creative industries driving new rural economies</u>, the role that technology and community could play in developing rural economies was highlighted, and, as we have seen, there are examples from across the world of technologically enabled spaces helping to regenerate rural areas.

How do the creative industries fit in with government strategies for rural areas in the United Kingdom?

In England, in 2010, the Rural Cultural Forum published the Rural Cultural Strategy¹¹ which followed on from the Rural Strategy published by DEFRA in 2004 and the national Creative Economy report. The Strategy placed the arts at the centre of development in rural areas and outlined a way forward for support and innovation in rural areas through culture. However, anecdotally, there appears to be slow take-up of the idea of development using creative hubs. The majority of what there is seems to be tagged onto a traditional concept of land use; ie encouraging creative businesses to move into farming areas as additional income generators rather than as principal "movers and shakers". Diversification¹² of land use appears to have been interpreted as creative businesses or organisations renting space or using buildings and land for arts projects rather than the creation of spaces that creative organisations use to actively develop the economy of a community or region.

In Scotland, in 2011, the Scottish Government gave a response to a public consultation about rural areas, <u>Speak Up for Rural Scotland</u>.¹³ The response, <u>Our Rural</u> <u>Future</u>,¹⁴ highlights the need for diversification and enterprise, support for tourism and

¹¹ <u>http://www.ruralculture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/RCS_web.pdf</u>

¹² http://www.ruralhubspartnership.co.uk/creative_advantage_fund

¹³ http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/319168/0102002.pdf

¹⁴ http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/344246/0114504.pdf

industry to develop, and support for different models of working. In Shetland, <u>On the Cusp</u>,¹⁵ a cultural strategy for Shetland also highlights the need for education, training, uniting people, celebrating heritage and culture, and offers significant support for those organisations that are working in the creative and cultural sectors.

The situation for rural Scotland is somewhat different to that of England. In June 2012, Creative Scotland and Scottish Enterprise published a research study on the economic contribution of the creative industries to Scotland. The document highlights the importance of the sector to the economy, directly bringing in £3.2 billion in 2011. Many of the jobs and the organisations are in urban areas with Glasgow and Edinburgh accounting for 40% of these, but a key message from the report shows that creative industries are flourishing in the rural areas of Scotland.

Many of these rural businesses are micro-enterprises or small-scale producers. Given that the arts are so important to people and play a useful social and economic role in the economy, there would seem to be a valid and important contribution in using the developmental hubs concept to support the creative industries as principal developers of a rural area. How can the creative industries work together to bring the benefits of creative endeavour to rural areas? In the next chapter this question is explored in relation to the challenges presented by remote island communities in Shetland.

CHAPTER FOUR

Working in rural areas - life on the islands

The challenges of island living and working

Shetland¹⁶ is a remote place, far from the challenges of city life and far away from the knowledge of most people in the UK, yet it holds a unique place in the imaginations of people around the world. Few have visited and even fewer have stayed, but Shetlanders have crossed and re-crossed the world, and made significant contributions to culture, from setting up companies that still ply the seas with cargo to Fair Isle knitwear which has given its name to a style that is copied around the world. The identity of Shetlanders is inextricably bound up with creativity, and making art and craft is an important part of what it means to be from the islands. People who move into the islands to live and work find themselves part of

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http://www.shetland.gov.uk/community_planning_dev/documents/CulturalStrategyDi gital.pdf

this creative melting pot, and quickly become assimilated through the events and festivals, and the celebrations that go on throughout the year. The islands, because of the attitude towards the arts, rate highly in the cultural capacity rankings. Cultural capacity - the openness of a society to culture and cultural change - is a key to island survival. By embracing the arts, people are able to make significant changes and cope with change. Shetland has recently appeared as one of the best places in the UK to live and work, and shares a top ranking on the well-being chart¹⁷ created by the Office of National Statistics.

In common with many parts of the rural UK, communities, businesses and organisations find there are challenges to living in Shetland. The isles have relied and continue to rely heavily on volunteer support for organising events and activities especially where the populations are smaller such as in the outer-lying areas. People experience committee burn-out quickly because of this and events tend to come and go as people move on. The islands population is ageing and the older generation cannot do the volunteering that they used to, and require additional care. This puts a strain on communities and the resources of Shetland, and there are innovative ways in looking after the elderly being trialled, such as assisted living on the island of Unst.

For business, distance to market is even more pronounced for the remoter islands than it is an issue for those in the major settled areas, and with few jobs that young people want to do, the isles have suffered from slow depopulation although the overall population is stable and even rose slightly in the last few years.

Linked to the strong traditions that still exist in Shetland, there is a lack of enthusiasm for work in the traditional and heritage sectors. It is within living memory that electricity came to the North Isles; the 1970's oil boom brought this modern luxury, and young people have been deterred from taking part in knitting and weave because they can remember their parents having to do these jobs to make a meagre living. A shortage of skills is very much evident in many businesses in the North Isles, and this drives young people to go south for work or to emigrate overseas to pursue a career.

In addition to these issues, life in the islands is expensive. Transport costs are higher than elsewhere, and, with the addition of ferries, the time it takes to get to a meeting in Lerwick, the largest town on the Main Island, adds an extra few hours onto a working day.

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http://www.shetland.gov.uk/economic_development/documents/29523statisticpages _____001.pdf

⁷ http://www.shetlandtimes.co.uk/2012/07/24/were-happy-and-we-know-it

CHAPTER FIVE Sellafirth - an island perspective Succeeding creatively - Sellafirth Business Park.

Given the constraints to island life, can creative businesses survive in Shetland and grow to benefit the islands?

Yell is an island in the middle of three other Shetland Isles, Mainland, Unst and Fetlar, and the satellite island of Whalsay. In 2005, speculative office buildings were erected by Shetland Enterprise with European funding, to encourage investment in an area that was suffering from population decline, with limited rural capacity for business, and at a time when the islands were still reeling from the withdrawal of the RAF from Unst. Initially, only one of the four units was occupied by an Apple Mac computer shop, and this was joined in 2006 by GlobalYell Ltd,¹⁸ a charitable company with education and training aims in textiles and music. GlobalYell had acquired weave assets from a foundation in England via charity transfer, and the equipment was installed in the fourth of the units, at the end of the business park. The Mac shop closed and the three remaining units stood empty for a little while before Bluemull Development Company¹⁹ moved in. Bluemull Development Company is a reimagining of Initiative at the Edge which was formed to help peripheral areas to succeed by bringing in funding and resources. For four years, BDC and GlobalYell operated side by side, GlobalYell working to bring music and textiles tourism into the area, and BDC by offering office services and remote working facilities. Linked by good broadband facilities and infrastructure, with easy access, the companies developed their own identities and began to bring people to this rural area of Shetland by virtue of their different aims.

An unusual place in an unusual place - The Shetland Gallery

In April 2012, a couple who had moved to Yell from England, and who had strong family connections with the area, bought one of the business units and opened The Shetland Gallery.²⁰ Shona and Alan Skinner had identified the need for Shetland artists to show their work and sell it, and they defined their business as "Presenting the best art and craft that Shetland has to offer". The Gallery was an immediate success and the gallery has remained a popular destination for both the local community and seasonal visitors to the island.

¹⁸ <u>http://creativeindustriesshetland.org.uk/</u>

http://www.bluemulldevelopmentcompany.com/ http://www.shetlandgallery.com/

Gradually, as the three organisations have gotten to know and understand each other, ties have been made and relationships forged, and the business units at Sellafirth, formerly empty, now form an exciting creative destination. Visitors to one visit all, and conversations between neighbours lead in new, unexpected and interesting directions.

A weave studio, a service company and a gallery

Just as art encourages people to come together, so having an arts focus encourages other businesses to participate. The hub at Sellafirth boasts a private company (The Shetland Gallery), a social enterprise (Bluemull Development Company) and a charity with limited company status operating as a social enterprise (GlobalYell Ltd). The original incumbent in the units was GlobalYell bringing a clear artistic identity to the area. Bluemull Development brought an administration and back-office focus which encouraged other companies and organisations to use the facilities, and the Gallery has encouraged artists and visitors to drop in and spend time.

As the number of businesses has increased and the number of visitors has grown, so the organisations in Sellafirth have come to rely on each other for moral support as confidence has grown. Each company has a separate and distinct identity with a clear focus for development, and each company benefits the others through its presence and work. In the end, it has not only come down to simple broadband connections or infrastructure, but to the willingness of all the parties to work together for a common good through the shared vision of creative living.

CHAPTER SIX

A possible future?

Spreading the message - Partnerships in Sellafirth

The development of Sellafirth as a hub is proving to be of interest to locals, visitors and policy-makers around the islands and across the UK. Recent visitors to Sellafirth have included a member of the Scottish Parliament, the head of Development of the Shetland Island Council, who was "extremely taken by the dynamic" between the organisations, and a large group of Norwegian textiles makers who return every year for a look at the studio. In addition, individuals and smaller groups of visitors and local people who simply want to have a look make a journey to Yell especially, to see the Gallery and weave studio. There is a natural point at which the critical mass of organisations and ideas comes together to do something that is truly inspirational and useful, changing the landscape of the ways in which people work and live.

Given that Sellafirth is unique in the islands in terms of its artistic identity and makeup, is there a possible solution to some of the problems faced by the outer islands that can be freshly addressed? Tried and tested methods of rural development do not appear to be working in the current economic climate, and cuts to budgets mean that school closures are threatened and infrastructure support is being pared down.

As the businesses in Sellafirth become busier and more people visit, the need for space has become evident. Artists and makers want to be a part of this development but there is no space for them to use. Academics want to work in the area and there is nowhere to offer them as a friendly place to work and stay. Visitors want to see more work that is being produced locally and there is nowhere to show this work. Local people and visitors alike want to come to workshops and talks, demonstrations in dance and song, and there is no space for these. It seems Sellafirth could do with more room!

One of the units at Sellafirth, adjoining GlobalYell's weave studio, remains empty, six years after the business park opened. The unit is self-contained, with kitchen, toilet, office, garage and a light, airy main space, which faces out onto the sea and the fields. What would it take to make this a multi-purpose extension for the organisations in Sellafirth, attracting different disciplines by providing the technology to be connected to the wider world and the support to encourage others to work and live in the area?

GlobalYell, on behalf of the organisations in Sellafirth, would like to ask the Arkleton Trust to help with the next stage of work, and to become involved with the park at an important time in its development. To start the next stage, we would like to do a feasibility study to look at the space and possible funding sources to purchase or lease it, and to do this initial thoughts are to conduct:-

- · Interviews and workshops with local makers;
- Focus groups with businesses, Shetland College, Shetland Arts and other possible stakeholders;
- Meetings with Shetland Islands Council Economic and Community Development Department;
 - Detailed case studies and visits of other UK rural development hubs.

The suggested work will take six months and a preliminary budget is included at the end of this document.

In the longer term, we would like to work with the Arkleton Trust on creating and supporting a network of international makers, artists, academics and practitioners who can learn from

each other, give support, advice and expertise, and help this rural island area to succeed. We believe that, by working with the team in Sellafirth, the Arkleton Trust can help us to create long-term and viable solutions to the problems and concerns that are facing rural areas in the islands, and can help to take the experiences out to and bring new ideas from other people and places.

Sellafirth is becoming an exciting destination in Shetland, and the organisations working from the business park would like to share experiences and knowledge. We hope that the Arkleton Trust would like to be a part of this venture, and look forward to exploring a bright and creative future together.

Preliminary budget for the next stage of work

Stakeholder meetings	Unit cost	Number of units	Total o	cost
10 meetings with various stakeholders Local, regional, and national				
Preparation time	200		2	400
Transport	30		5	150
Accommodation	50		4	200
Subsistence	50		4	200
Meeting time	200		4	800
Writing up findings	200		3	600
Case studies				
Desk research	150		4	600
Library research	150		1	150
				0
Visits to other UK hubs				0
Transport	400		3	1200
Subsistence	50		6	300
Accommodation	50		6	300
Six days of visits	200		6	1200
Two days to write up and report on visits	200		2	400
Writing up the entire project	200		2	400
		Total project costs		

APPENDIX – RESEARCH SOURCES

INTERNET SOURCES

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