

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: 22 – Anthropology and Development Studies		
Title of case study: Promoting the cultural and linguistic values of fishing in the Outer Hebrides		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Magnus Course	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 09/2007 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research into the cultural and linguistic value of fishing in the Outer Hebrides, and innovative ways of presenting research results, achieved significant impacts on several levels:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Teaching and recording local fishing songs in the community of Uist has brought back a strong local awareness of the bond between Gaelic language, culture and the fishing industry. (2) A short film, which won the 2019 Gaelic Film Award, brought this awareness to the general public, resulting in BBC cooperation for the production of a full documentary, which will be broadcast UK-wide. (3) Findings of concern relating to fisheries policy, particularly the value of inshore fishing on Gaelic language maintenance and transmission, and the value of Traditional Environmental Knowledge, have been taken up by members of the Scottish and UK Parliaments. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Current debate on the nature and scope of environmental designations in Scotland's seas has focused upon the environmental value of marine diversity and the economic value of fishing. Yet, the cultural and linguistic values associated with fishing livelihoods and fishing communities have been absent from this debate, although any policy decisions affecting fishing are obliged under EU, UK, and Scottish law to take their impact on minority languages and cultural heritage into account (3.1). Since 2015, Dr Magnus Course has conducted extensive ethnographic research in the isles of South Uist, Eriskay, North Uist and Benbecula, focusing on the relationships between Gaelic, fishing, and environmental issues.</p> <p>Course's research addresses two core questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of fishing in the maintenance and transmission of the Gaelic language? • How does Gaelic support fishing, taking into account social, economic and environmental perspectives? <p>Scottish Gaelic is both a minority language and an endangered language, with the number of speakers having declined by 72% since 1901. The Outer Hebrides are considered the last bastion of Gaelic with just over 14,000 speakers, constituting 52% of the population. However, the percentage of fishermen who are Gaelic speakers is significantly higher – with an estimated 75%, the highest for any economic sector in Scotland – which points to the importance of fishing to the Gaelic language in terms of maintenance, transmission, and lore. Course's research since 2015 has documented that not only everyday communication on fishing boats (including radio communication) and in the processing and packing plants takes place in Gaelic, but also that fishing livelihoods play a crucial role in introducing young people to Gaelic-speaking</p>		

environments (3.1). Accordingly, it revealed the pivotal and unique role fishing plays in the maintenance as well as the inter-generational and intra-communal transmission of Gaelic.

Further, the connections between fishing livelihoods and the Gaelic language were found to be part of a deeply elaborated cultural understanding of fishing as central to the marine ecosystem (3.2). Contrary to their portrayal in the media, Course found that fishermen in the Outer Hebrides care deeply and passionately about the health of the sea (3.3). He identified fishermen's strong pride in maintaining traditional knowledge of the maritime environment, ensuring the sustainability and diversity of their fishing grounds over centuries via a voluntary and self-imposed form of environmental management (3.1). This Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK), built up cumulatively over generations and, thus, deeply embedded in Gaelic language and lore, was perceived as the basis for fishing practice and fishermen's success (3.2, 3.4).

Despite this strong link between, and mutual influence of, Gaelic language, culture, and the local fishing industry, Marine Scotland (the responsible agency for the Scottish Government) does not have a Gaelic language plan, nor does it recognise the cultural linguistic and social value of fishing communities in its plan for Scotland's seas. At the same time, Course found that many fishermen themselves were not aware of the public, policy and legal recognition that their language and way of life merit. Therefore, Course's research built the foundation for awareness-raising activities that directly addressed not only policy makers and the general public, but also fishermen and fishing communities themselves (3.5).

3. References to the research

3.1 Course, M. and MacMillan, G. (2021) Fishing, Gaelic, and Environment in the Outer Hebrides. *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig*. In: *Cànan is Cultar/Language and Culture: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig* 9 (eds. Wilson McLeod, Anja Gunderloch & Rob Dunbar), Aberdeen University Press. [Delayed output due to COVID-19; publication 01/2021]

3.2 Course, M. (2021) The Woman who Shed her Skin: towards a humble anthropocentrism in Hebridean fishing. In: *Environmental Alterities* (eds. Cristobal Bonelli & Antonia Walford). Manchester: Mattering Press. [Delayed output due to Covid-19; publication 10/2021]

3.3 Course, M. (2020) The Human Sea. *Causeway/Cabhsair: A Magazine of Irish and Scottish Writing*, Vol 11.1, p52-57. (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.4 Course, M. (2019) Houses of Uist: memory and dwelling in the Outer Hebrides. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol 25,1, p51-65. DOI: [10.1111/1467-9655.12962](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12962)

3.5 Film: Muir ar n-Athraichean. (Our Fathers' Sea); 5 min.

Producer & Co-Director: Magnus Course

Camera, Co-Director, Online Editor: Alastair Cole

Editor & Post-production: Jarvis Gray

<http://filmg.co.uk/en/films/1810/>

The film, which documents Course's research findings, won the 2019 FilmG Award in the category for Gaelic films about environmental issues.

4. Details of the impact

Course's research has promoted a greater awareness of the bond between Gaelic culture and the fishing industry at community level, it has brought this awareness into the public sphere in further areas of Scotland and beyond, and it has raised awareness amongst policy-makers that the future of Gaelic and the future of fishing in the Outer Hebrides are intrinsically interlinked.

Impact on community: Strengthening local bonds between Gaelic language, culture and fishing

With the decline of Gaelic as a community language, the community singing of Gaelic songs, many of them dealing with the sea and fishing, has also declined. Supported by an ESRC Impact Accelerator Grant (2016) and in cooperation with the Western Isles Fishermen's Association, Course collaborated with the Gaelic teacher, singer and composer Gillebrìde MacMillan to identify songs that were specifically composed or collected in Uist, and that had a connection with the fishing industry. These songs were transcribed from original recordings and then, taught to the community in Uist, where singers were keen to learn the songs together with the origins of the poetry and music: "After we learnt the songs we brought them into our normal repertoire [...] and we do perform them to the community, they are sung at ceilidhs and at the Ceòlas [local cultural organisation] summer schools" (5.1, 5.2). Moreover, through the re-learning of traditional fishing songs that had been forgotten, the project facilitated the learning of Gaelic words that had gone out of usage.

Additionally, the project produced an album, *Aig an Iasgach* (At the Fishing), which features community singers from Uist singing the fishing songs. The production of this album fostered a sense of pride amongst these singers regarding the validity of their traditions: "How does it feel to sing these songs? I think it's really important in what makes Uist Uist"; "It's been a good thing [...] otherwise we wouldn't come together and do these things. [...] it makes me proud"; "It's been a privilege to take part in these things" (5.1). The songs have featured on BBC Radio nan Gàidheal's morning program *A' Mire ri Mòir* 14 times between 10/2018 and 09/2019 (5.3).

Overall, the re-learning and performance of these songs not only enriched substantially the local song repertoire and, as such, enhanced local cultural preservation, but it also raised the community members' confidence in using Gaelic (5.1, 5.2) and "contributed to local understanding and appreciation of the fishing sector in strengthening the Gaelic language and culture" (5.4). As described by the MP for the Western Isles, "the work by Magnus Course has tied up an awful lot of loose ends in the community that people had dangling in front of them but surprisingly never made the connections before. It was fascinating to see [...] lights going on around people's heads when they saw fishing in connection with the community, the way of life - particularly the Gaelic language" (5.5).

Impact on society: Bringing awareness of the link between Gaelic language and fishing to the public sphere

Under the ESRC Impact Accelerator grant, in 2018 Course also produced and co-directed the short film, *Muir ar n-Athraichean* (Our Fathers' Sea), which documents visually the connection between fishing and the Gaelic language (3.5). It features members of South Uist's fishing community at work and gives them a platform to discuss their views on the industry. This film was screened at a variety of levels. Locally, it was launched via a community screening in South Uist, reinforcing the connection between economy and community (5.4), raising awareness and encouraging action: "Since I've seen that film I [community member] have contributed to the public consultations on Marine Protection Areas and things like that. No way: if we lose our fishermen there is no community left" (5.1), and it has been used by Ceòlas in their 'Gaelic Immersion' classes (5.1).

Regionally, it was part of the 2019 Hebrides International Film Festival with 8 screenings in different island locations, and audiences coming from across the UK across the islands (5.6). Reaching out beyond Scotland, the film has been used by CoDel (Community Development Lens), a community development organisation leading the EU Smart-Islands project in Scotland and Ireland, to discuss the topic in a 2019 event with a diverse audience of 50 young Irish and Scottish islanders. As stated by the CoDel Director, "the discussions revealed different impacts on different groups of participants: for non-Gaelic speakers, the film created an awareness of the important links between Gaelic and fishing. For Gaelic speakers, it reinforced their awareness of these links. Specifically for Irish Gaelic speakers, it was a revelation that these issues, which they had felt to be specific to their local environment, were shared with Gaelic speakers from the Scottish islands" (5.7).

Also in 2019, the film won the FilmG Award in the category for Gaelic films about environmental issues (5.8). FilmG is the Scottish Government-financed MG Alba's Gaelic short film competition, which was launched in 2008 to develop new talent for the Gaelic channel BBC Alba. The award event was attended by 400 people, the film had its TV premiere on BBC Alba, was re-broadcasted in February 2020, and it is available online (>300 viewings on Vimeo and YouTube) (5.9). However, the film's success not only brought an awareness of these issues to the Gaelic-speaking public, but it has also prompted a BBC collaboration in the production of a full-length (89min) documentary, *Iorram* (Boat Song), with Course as Co-producer and academic advisor. It first aired in BBC Alba's prime slot of New Year's Day 2021, broadcasted UK-wide (5.9; 5.10).

Impact on policy-makers: Addressing the need to include Gaelic language issues in fisheries policies

Already in 2014, a report commissioned by the Highlands & Island Enterprise (HIE) had explored the economic and social value of Gaelic as a unique asset for Scotland, however, the HIE findings under-reported on the island's fishing industry – “an omission”, as understood by the MSP for the Western Isles, “which Dr Course's subsequent work has gone some way to highlight” (5.4). Accordingly, the research evidence raised awareness amongst policy makers that the value of inshore fishing in terms of the maintenance and transmission of the Gaelic language, as well as the maintenance of cultural heritage, must be recognised and sustained by future fisheries policies, including by addressing the lack of a Gaelic Language Plan within Scotland's National Marine Plan (5.4). To summarise, “Dr Course's research represented the first time that the fishing sector's role as an important repository of indigenous language and culture was measured against areas of public policy in Scotland”, and it “carries significant policy implications for the rural economy, fishing sector, island communities and Gaelic development” (5.4).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Transcripts/quotes from 8 interviews with community members in Uist, testifying the impacts of the fishing songs project and the *Muir ar n-Athraichean* film:

- Interviews with community members (singers and non-singers)
- Interviews with Ceòlas staff

5.2 Testimonial Gillebrìde Macmillan about the impact of re-learning fishing songs and CD production on singers and community

5.3 BBC Radio nan Gàidheal: data about airplay of songs from *Aig an Iasgach* CD

5.4 Testimonial from Alasdair Allan (MSP for the Western Isles)

- Impact on local understanding and appreciation of the fishing sector in strengthening the Gaelic language and culture
- Impact on policy-making

5.5 Testimonial from Angus Brendan MacNeil (MP for the Western Isles)

Impact on community awareness and reinforcing the connection between fishing economy, Gaelic language and community.

5.6 Hebrides International Film Festival (HIFF)

- website documenting the HIFF 2019 film screenings in 8 locations
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200129160336/https://www.hebfilmfestival.org/events/12-sep-2019-muir-an-athraichean-our-fathers-sea>
- audience map for the HIFF 2019 festival
<https://web.archive.org/web/20201130112052/https://www.hebfilmfestival.org/hebrides-international-film-festival>

5.7 Smart island meeting 2019:

Impact case study (REF3)

- Testimonial of CoDel Director about the impact of the screening and discussion of the film at the Smart Islands meeting in Grimsay
- CoDel project report 'From Grimsay to Galway', December 2019 (participant numbers).

5.8 FilmG Award: News articles / online media documentation

- <https://web.archive.org/web/20200130154400/http://tonguetiedfilms.co.uk/muir-an-athraichean-our-fathers-sea/>
- <https://web.archive.org/web/20201002145927/http://filmg.co.uk/en/films/filmg2019/winner-s-shortlists/open/>
- <https://web.archive.org/web/20200507070552/https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000fc4d>

5.9 Email from Business manager of Cànan Graphics Studio:

- Viewing figures from Film G website / Youtube and Vimeo
- FilmG award event audience
- Impact of award on commissioning full-length documentary *Iorram* / Boat Song (previous working title: *Tuinn Cagarach* / Whispering Waves) by BBC Alba.

5.10 BBC Alba full documentary *Iorram* (previously *Tuinn Cagarach*)

- Film pitch
- BBC Alba programme January 1st, 2021
- *Iorram* description