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Abodes of Harmony

An investigation of traditional music session culture along the Menai Strait

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Abodes of Harmony: An investigation of traditional music session culture along the Menai Strait

Muhammad Irfan bin Abdul Rais

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the College of Arts, Humanities, and Business



PRIFYSGOL
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UNIVERSITY

School of Music, Drama and Performance, Bangor University

July 2021

Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw'r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o'r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw'n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy.

Rwy'n cadarnhau fy mod yn cyflwyno'r gwaith gyda chytundeb fy Ngoruwchwylwyr.

I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.

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Abstract

The area along the Menai Strait in the Welsh principal area of Gwynedd is home to a rich and thriving traditional music scene as a result of the folk revival movement across Britain in the middle to late 20th century. One of the places where traditional music can exist include informal events known to its practitioners as *sesiynau* in Welsh, or *sessions* in English. Surprisingly, tunes and songs outside of Wales regularly feature in these sessions. The aim of this thesis is to develop a theory to account for the diverse nature of traditional music played in these sessions along the Menai Strait. Current literature regarding Welsh traditional music has not addressed this in the context of informal music making, which is a gap this thesis will cover. This thesis asks why there is a multiplicity in traditions practiced in sessions along the Menai Strait, and how it fits in the wider traditional music scene. This is to better understand how transnational elements can play a part in shaping musical practice within the context of revival.

Through observation, interviews, case studies, and surveys, I found that the multiplicitous nature of sessions in the area exists because of increasingly accessible resources leading to diverse interests, amplified by the insular nature of sessions as practiced in the area. However, the different traditions that are represented in sessions of the area are interpreted through the framework of Irish traditional music, which practitioners use because of how it established its practices are in the wider traditional music world. This importance of this study is that it introduces a focus on relationships between transnational practices and informal musicking in the revival process, adding to our understanding of how practitioners utilise various elements informed by practices from other traditions in order to revive and reconstruct broken traditions.

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Terminology and Acronyms used in the thesis

Community	A subset of the scene (see below), a community is made up of individuals who attend specific sessions.
CT	Cadw Twmpath, a popular tunebook used as a reference.
Musicking	The action of participating in music-making processes. These actions include, but are not limited to singing, dancing, listening, and preparing scores for an orchestra.
Scene	A term used to collectively refer to people who take part in session activities as a whole. The scene is divided into several Communities (see above)
Session	An informal event where participants gather in public spaces to musick (see Musicking above).
Sessioner	An individual who takes part in session activities. A sessioner may be a musician, i.e., one who actively participates in music-making, or a non-musician, i.e., one who does not actively take part in music-making but participate in other group activities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*Q are the quids at the bar that we spend, this is our session!
And R is the roar of applause when we end,
With a toot on the flute and a squeak on the fiddle,
You're welcome, friends, to our session*

Excerpt from 'This is our session', written by Geoff Hardman¹

1.1 The session: An overview

Imagine going to a pub or any other place where you can get a drink. You hear music, but not from a jukebox nor the stage. The music is coming from a group of people sitting in a corner. They are customers, not unlike yourself, but they have brought their own musical instruments, and are singing and playing music. This is a session; an informal form of music-making that takes place in public venues. Unlike concerts or open mic gigs that may take place in this same establishment, session music does not have a clear distinction between audience and performer; those who are playing the music are doing so for their own entertainment, rather than entertaining others. As such, sessions are comparatively unstructured; there is no setlist, for instance, and the music is not rehearsed. That said, playing music in sessions is not the same as jamming; in the case of the sessions that will be examined in this thesis, the material comes from specifically the traditional/folk music genre. As such, the music played in these sessions have specific practices relating to this genre, which means that those who wish to take part in this activity will need to be familiar with the practices associated with it.

Session music and activities have appeared in popular mainstream media, showcasing either actual music-making or implied through the use of diegetic music. Examples of the use of session music in popular media include *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997), *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (Guesdon, Ismail, & Kieken, 2013), and *The Umbrella Academy* (Marsalis, 2019), to name a few. However, the vast majority of session music represented in popular media comes from the Irish traditional repertoire, despite session culture also existing in cultures adjacent to Ireland.² Examples of places with a traditional session culture include Canada, England, Scotland, the USA, and Wales.³

¹ See Appendix 4.2 for full lyrics.

² Apart from the usual meaning of being physically next to something, the term 'adjacent' here also reflects the increasingly popular usage of the word to mean 'similar to'.

³ The website thesession.org is an excellent resource for up-to-date lists of active sessions from all over the world.

I came into this community when I migrated to Wales (and by extension, to the United Kingdom) in 2015 and subsequently joined other sessions in the area. I was struck by the multiplicitous nature of sessions in the region. In one session, Irish tunes might heavily feature in the event; while in another, Welsh tunes would dominate the evening.

The purpose of this thesis is to dive deeper into the practices of traditional music along the coast of the Menai Strait by examining elements pertaining to the musickal activities that take place in sessions of this area. This thesis also seeks to understand the position of the traditional music of the Menai Strait in the wider traditional music scene. More specifically, the thesis aims to address the following inquiry:

Why is there a multiplicity of musical traditions in sessions of the Menai Strait, and how do they fit in the wider traditional music scene?

In order to approach this inquiry, I have identified four smaller, more focused themes, namely

- Commonalities between the different traditions
- Origins of influences and how they affect current musical practices in sessions
- Relationship between place and traditions
- Construction of musickal spaces

In describing the genre of music played in sessions, two terms come to mind: ‘folk’ and ‘traditional’. While both terms are interchangeable within the context of the music we will be investigating, a deeper examination of these labels reveal subtle nuances particular to each term. Firstly, the term traditional (often shortened to ‘trad’ by practitioners) music is generally applied to the music of Irish or Scottish origin, whereas folk is generally applied to those of English and Welsh origin.⁵ That said, reversing this by describing Irish or Scottish music as ‘folk’ and Welsh or English music as ‘traditional’ is not likely to cause confusion or protest.

Owe Ronström (2014) discussed the nuances and implications of the terms ‘folk’ and ‘traditional’, especially in the context of revived music, noting folk/traditional music’s ability to create musical mindscapes. He notes that the context of folk music has shifted as the field moved from being knower-centric to doer-centric from the late eighteenth century to the 1970s (Ronström, 2014). In other words, work surrounding folk music has shifted from those who collect and edit music to those who actively practice it. Ronström also notes how tradition

⁵ This is further strengthened with the choice of the words ‘traditional’ and ‘folk’ in the respective indigenous languages of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales: ceol traidisiúnta (Irish: traditional music); ceòl tradaiseanta (Gaelic: traditional music); cerddoriaeth werin (Welsh: folk music).

relates to the folk, stating that ‘the tradition leads to the local, with the idea that this music belongs to, represents, and is used by a local “folk”’ (Ronström, 2014). Furthermore, Ronström also discusses the possibility of ‘heritage’ music as a new label. He argues that while tradition evokes cultural rights and ownership by honouring specific pasts, heritage is not as closely associated with the past in the same manner. Tradition, according to Ronström, uses time to create places and cultural geographies, whereas heritage, on the other hand, uses place to produce pasts.

This leaves me with three possible ways to describe the music played at sessions. The terms ‘folk’ and ‘traditional’, and ‘heritage’, although arguably interchangeable in our context, highlight slightly different elements of the music that will be discussed in this thesis. Adding to Ronström’s position, I argue that the term ‘traditional’ also highlights process. In terms of etymology, the word traditional has a stronger implication of a cultural object being handed down from one generation to the next by maintaining current practice. In terms of etymology, the word tradition comes from the Latin *trāditiō* (teaching, an instruction), which in turn comes from the verb *trādō*, a compound word made of the morphemes *trāns* (across, beyond) and *dō* (I give). The roots of tradition, according to etymology, is the act of passing something from one person to the next. Even in terms of more contemporary everyday usage, the word ‘traditional’ is usually applied to a cultural object that is passed down from one generation to the next, even if it is family specific. As such, from this point onwards, I prefer to use the term *traditional music* throughout this thesis to describe music played in sessions to emphasise its nature of being transmitted from one person to the next.

This thesis also makes use of the terms ‘scene’ and ‘community’. It must be clarified that these terms are not used by those who take part in sessions but are terms I use for describing social groups I have observed during the research period. There have been discussions on the use of these terms in musical scholarship itself, particularly in the realm of popular music studies. Shelemay (2011) notes that the term ‘community’ has been a point of contention with scholars of music studies because of a lack of consensus over what the term means amid an evolving intellectual landscape (2011, 359). James et al. (2012) also acknowledge these tensions, inviting us to examine how community identity is continually created and re-created under these evolving circumstances, noting that the definition of community

...needs to be generalizing across quite different settings, but without simply being a matter of subjective and changing self-definition and without including all forms of association or sociality that happen to be important such as the family (2012, 15).

Will Straw (1991) raises the issue of linking music studies with community studies, noting that it results in discussions that become entangled with ‘concepts of space and nation’ (1991, 368). Community, Straw argues, carries the implication of a group of people whose composition is ‘stable – according to a wide range of social variables’, and that they continuously engage in musical idioms that are informed by inherited ideals specific to the area. A scene, on the other hand, is a place with a multiplicity of practices which interact with each other by building musical alliances and creating musical boundaries (1991, 373). In other words, ‘community’ given its implication of inflexibility, is not adequate enough in capturing new musical processes in the same way ‘scene’ can. However, theorising the scene in this way may be problematic because of how prevalent the word ‘scene’ is outside of the realm of academia, which may lead to differences between practitioners and academics. This means that the use of this term may not necessarily conform to Straw’s definition; in fact, Hesmondhalgh (2005) notes on how the concept is muddy, citing the trend of scholars using the term freely to mean any musical practice in any given locality or to describe a cultural space unbound by geographical limits (2005, 29). In a way, this reflects Peterson and Bennett’s (2004) observation of how researchers are using this term to describe how different people share their common musical interests and distinguish themselves from others. In fact, Peterson and Bennett note that recent academic work on local music scenes focuses more on how music forms a part of a process where members of local scenes ‘construct shared narratives of everyday life’ rather than on the relationships between music and culture of the locale. This has resulted in the equation of ‘scene’ with ‘community’ in current discourse (2004, 7-8).

In this thesis, I will be using the term scene to refer to the collective whole of the people who take part in sessions along the Menai Strait, reflecting on its wider and more accessible use to describe communities of mutual musical interests as noted by Peterson and Bennett (2004) I must clarify that those in the scene do not necessarily have to come from the areas along the Menai Strait, nor do they have to live in the area; these are people who regularly attend sessions in this area. In this study, I will be using the term community based on Straw’s (1991) argument, referring to a stable group of people practicing music specific to the area. As such, communities are subsets of the scene; these are smaller social units that are defined by which sessions they attend. It is possible that an individual from the session scene who attends different sessions regularly be part of multiple communities. Each community may also be defined by different styles, repertoires, and even experiences. Usually, those from the same session community

would also hold closer social relations with each other. These communities will be explored in-depth in Chapter 3.

1.2 Thesis Overview

In this thesis, I present what I have uncovered and learnt in this research project. Throughout this thesis, I shall be investigating the central elements of the session, with each element being examined closely in their respective chapters. I will also be discussing these elements through the relevant theoretical frameworks relevant to them.

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 examines the locations in which sessions exist. Here, I describe the establishments which have hosted sessions during the research period. This is then followed by an exploration of how these spaces are used by those in the session and an investigation of how these spaces are shared with the other customers of that establishment. Finally, I discuss how these sessions can be regarded as special forms of the third place.

Chapter 3 explores the people who take part in these sessions. Firstly, I present the list of the different session communities I have identified during the research period, mapping their domains onto the locations outlined in Chapter 2. Next, I present the results of the survey carried out at the beginning of the research period; these results provide the general demographics of the session communities which help us to understand who these practitioners are. The results of this survey are then discussed. Regional trends between the Eastern and Western ends of the Menai Strait are also examined, as well as the differences between the two communities based in Bangor.

Chapter 3 will be followed by a brief essay that will briefly explore the phenomena surrounding the Welsh Weekend. This is an event that sees a mass movement of members of the Bangor Sessions community to Ireland for the weekend for a musical exchange. This segment discusses this event through the theoretical framework of communities of practice.

In Chapter 4, I investigate the interactions that take place in these sessions. This chapter begins with an essay detailing my experience in one of these sessions. This is then followed by a theoretical segment where I focus on three significant topics surrounding interactions in sessions: participation and relationships; communication, and etiquette. I begin by assessing different types of participation and mapping them onto Brynjulf Stige's model concerning participation (2010b). I then investigate how relationships shape interactions in sessions. Further to that, I explore the various forms of communication that take place during sessions.

Finally, I flesh out the rules of etiquette in sessions and comparing them to the concept of involvements as theorised by Erving Goffman (1966).

Finally, Chapter 5 explores the music that is played in sessions along the Menai Strait. Here I examine the repertoire of tunes that were heard in sessions and investigate how new tunes enter this repertoire. A case study of a tune making its way to the Menai Strait will be presented. Finally, I will discuss how traditions are being reinvented through music. Here I will also assess the position of session culture of this area in the context of the revival movements described above.

1.3 Research context

The sources I have consulted for this research project have primarily come from the disciplines of sociology and ethnomusicology. In this segment, I will be reviewing theories related to musicking, places, and traditional music itself; furthermore, I will also be discussing how they relate to each other.

1.3.1 The field of (ethno)musicology

Before delving into the literature, I believe it is imperative to examine the field of (ethno)musicology as a whole since this is where the bulk of the methodologies I have used come from. (Ethno)musicology is a field that originally made use of anthropological methods to give context mostly to music of non-Western cultures, although today it is much more interdisciplinary, with researchers making use of theories from fields such as folklore, gender studies, and dance, to name a few. Research in this field has included music from Western culture as well, challenging the othering element of exclusively looking at non-Western music.

At the time of writing, the field of (ethno)musicology is finding itself at a crossroads. I wish to draw attention to the current discourse around (ethno)musicology by placing the ‘ethno’ prefix in brackets. Stephen Amico (2020) highlights the problems this prefix poses to both insiders and outsiders of the field, noting that even though ethnomusicology is defined by its methodology rather than the ethnic or geopolitical entities, its name strongly implies the othering of non-Western musics (2020, pp. 8–9). Furthermore, Amico notes that the ‘ethno’ prefix highlights the observer/observed dichotomy that is central to the field, along with its imbalances in power and its roots in colonialism (2020, p. 18).

How then, should the questions presented above be approached? Danielle Brown (2020) offers suggestions moving forward in her earlier open letter about the racist structures inherent in the field of ethnomusicology and music education, many of which intersect with the structures

described later by Amico (2020). In one of her suggestions, Brown emphasises the need to bring equity into the field; in her case, specifically, that meant amplifying the voices of people of colour so that their stories are placed in the fore. The nature of this research project is different to Brown's and Amico's reflections, however, since I am a scholar of colour studying a musical tradition that is practised overwhelmingly by white people. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the position of power I am in as a researcher in the field, since I will be the one presenting their voices in this thesis.

1.3.2 Musicking and Participation

One of the concepts that will be used extensively in this thesis is the concept of musicking as developed by Christopher Small (2011). According to Small, musicking is

to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practising, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing (Small, 2011, p. 9).

Small posits that music should be analysed as a verb rather than a noun, thus highlighting music's nature as a process, rather than just a mere object. He argues that music has a social meaning, and therefore its nature is based on what people do and how they take part in it, rather than based upon objective meanings embedded in musical works. In other words, musicking is an active and communal activity that takes place in social events. Small also posits that musicking does not have to occur in buildings specifically designed for musickal activities (2011, p. 21). This is especially striking because this reflects the nature of sessions itself since they exist in spaces that are not likely designed to support their activities in the same way concert halls do.

In this thesis, I may be referring to things that are 'musickal'. This is completely intentional; in doing so, I hope to focus on the practical, active aspect of musicking as highlighted by Small. Leaving out the k and spelling it as 'musical', in my opinion, fails to capture social processes and relationships described in musicking that do not directly involve music-making. Sessions are social events after all; even if music-making represents the central activity of sessions, there are other social activities taking place in that event as well. This practice of including the k in musicking reflects the discussion had by Odendaal et al., (2014). In their discussion, they explore the possible implications of applying musicking in educational settings, noting that doing so would shift the focus of music education away from merely achieving goals determined by practical music-making. Odendaal et al. argue that because of how musicking

stresses social relationships, introducing musicking in educational settings can encourage the development of values such as community building and agency.

Since musicking highlights social process, it is necessary, then, to discuss participation. Brynjulf Stige (2010) presents a model for self-presentation which was derived from his analysis of musical participation during the Cultural Festival. This annual festival is held in the county of Sogn og Fjordane in Norway, catering to adults with intellectual disabilities and those who care for them. During the festival, various workshops on music, drama, and art are held, cumulating in a performance at the end of the three-day event. In his analysis of the event, Stige (2010) offers three interpretations of what participation is: firstly, as a style of self-representation; secondly, as co-creation of social space; and finally, as ritual negotiation. In addition, he has identified five different styles of self-presentation: (1) non-participation by not being there, (2) silent participation by being there and not joining in, (3) conventional participation by joining in but not standing out, (4) adventurous participation by standing out without challenging existing structures, and (5) eccentric participation by challenging existing structures (Stige, 2010, pp. 130–131). Stige's research has been thorough in fleshing out themes that surround the definition of participation, making use of theory and discussion in order to construct the interpretations of participation in the first place. In this thesis, I will be using Stige's model of self-presentation to analyse the various degrees of participation that take place in sessions.

Stephanie Pitts' (2005) valuation of musical participation offers an alternative viewpoint in examining musical participation. In her analysis, she has identified several themes, describing musical participation as (1) a source of confidence; (2) an opportunity to demonstrate or acquire skills; (3) a way of preserving and promoting repertoire; (4) an opportunity to perform with others, (5) a space to form and maintain social relations; (6) a way of enhancing or escaping everyday life, and (7) a source of fulfilment and pleasure. Interestingly, while Pitts and Stige have both identified valuable themes in their research addressing the description of participation, their analyses offer different approaches to the subject. Pitts' study theorises potential individual motivations for group musicking, while Stige's (2010) analysis reveals how musical participation forms the social context for a certain musicking event.

Keeping to the theme of socialising and participating, Erving Goffman (1966) has provided a framework for allocating involvements in certain situations. Involvements are defined as 'the capacity of an individual to give, or withhold from giving, his concerted attention to some

activity at hand...’ (1966, 44). His framework deals with allocating involvements in unfocused interactions into four categories: main, side, dominant, and subordinate. However, I have expanded the use of this model in this thesis to explore tacit rules in taking part in musickal activities in sessions, which I have found particularly useful for describing situational nuances outside the scope of unfocused interactions. I believe I am the first to use Goffman’s theory in this particular manner. Using this framework in this way shows the dynamic nature of musicking in the session context.

In this thesis, I shall be making use of the theories of musicking (Small, 2011), self-presentation (Stige, 2010), and involvements (Goffman, 1966) to identify the common traits of the multiple musical traditions present in the Menai Strait and how these are utilised to take part in musickal activities in sessions. Additionally, these theories will be used to identify the effects of these multiplicities on the musickal practices in these sessions.

In this thesis, I shall also be expanding on third place theory (Oldenburg, 1999). At its essence, a third place is one where an individual can exist outside the realms of work and home, but not in a fleeting, temporary sense. In other words, a café would qualify as a third place, but being on a train during a commute would not. Purnell and Breede (2018) have expanded on Oldenburg’s theory by applying notions of the third place onto events. In the chapter exploring the locations and places, I will be mirroring Purnell and Breede’s idea of applying Oldenburg’s theories to non-physical places. I will be examining how the social processes of musicking can create third places, both physical and non-physical.

In addition to this, I will also be investigating the physical space in which sessions exist. In order to do so, I turn to the field of proxemics. Developed by Edward Hall in the 1950s and 1960s, this field studies how the physical use of space affects human behaviour and interaction. In his seminal work *The Hidden Dimension* (Hall, 1990), he explores how the spaces between one individual and another, referred to as *distance*, can produce different interactions between these individuals. Of course, the size of these distances differs from one culture to the next. Applications of proxemics into music studies have been explored by previous scholars (see, for instance, Morreale et al. 2014; and Moore, Schmidt, and Dockwray 2009), but there is still a gap in the literature when it comes to applying proxemics into informal musicking where performances may be less structured.

1.3.3 Traditional Music

In today's context, traditional music has become slightly problematic, since there are many definitions of traditional music, even in the literature. This can be attributed to the fluidity of traditional music as it constantly recontextualises itself, where its original purpose may have been lost over time, but the musical material may survive by being adapted into another context. As such, one person's idea of what traditional music may be different to another individual's idea of such. On top of this, tradition also implies that the manner of handing down this practice is somewhat conservative, prescriptive, and resistant to change, especially in the discussion of social and religious customs.

There is general agreement that traditional music has roots in older practices. Colin Hamilton (1999) notes that the term is used in the context of Irish music to 'denote older dance music and song and Ireland' and that the tunes that are played today within the traditional repertory were contemporary in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Traditional music today is a product of these older tunes played with the influence of 'modern "folk" music, nineteenth-century "national" and "popular music", and early nineteenth-century "parlour" national songs' (1999, p. 401). Sally Harper (2011) proposes a more inclusive model of traditional music, stating that traditional music must fulfil the following criteria:

- 1) it must be currently or originally passed down through oral means
- 2) it is associated with a distinct people or region
- 3) variations are a key feature, and
- 4) it is still practised today. (2011, xvii).

Interestingly, both Hamilton's and Harper's attempts at defining traditional music suggest that traditionalist prescriptivism does not apply in the field of music for whatever reason. On the contrary, musical practices seem to be open to change over time in traditional music, according to them.

However, not all traditional musics are tolerant to flexibility. Frits Staal (1996) notes that the songs used in the Agnicayana ritual in South India were passed down from father to son with no tolerance of variation. Some of these songs contain mantras comprising meaningless syllables in an unknown language. The lexical meaninglessness of these mantras, Staal argues, is responsible for the unchanging nature of the text:

...Vedic mantras were orally transmitted without any change. Why? Because they were meaningless. Languages change because they express meaning, are functional and

constantly used. Meaningless sounds do not change; they can only be remembered or forgotten (1996, p. 135).

In effect, Staal's study throws Harper's (2011) model of traditional music into question, as Harper's proposal states that variations are integral to traditional music. This opposition reveals some of the multiple meanings of traditional music: in some contexts, on the one hand, traditional music plays a ritualistic role and therefore care is taken to preserve it in its entirety; on the other hand, traditional music that is a product of cultural expression would be more susceptible to change as social conditions change across generations.

Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin (2004) acknowledges this somewhat complicated situation, noting that there is 'no iron-clad definition' of traditional music, instead opting to describe what it is rather than defining it: 'It is best understood as a broad-system which accommodates a complex process of musical convergence, coalescence and innovation over time' (2004, p. 5). Traditional music in the Irish context is the result of musical development over time, passed down orally across generations through performance. Additionally, the oral nature of the music in the Irish context has resulted in liberal interpretations of a conservative base of tunes.

While it is clear that Vallely's, Harper's and Ó hAllmhuráin's stances of traditional music are Eurocentric in nature, doing so would be reasonable as their commentaries concern themselves with the traditional music of Ireland in the case of Vallely and Ó hAllmhuráin, and Wales in the case of Harper.

The fluidity of traditional music in the European context demonstrates that it can recontextualise itself across generations. A notable study on how traditional music can do so has been conducted by Hazel Fairbairn (1994), who examines the dissociation of Irish traditional music from its original purpose of accompanying house dances. The early twentieth century saw a pattern of economic emigration from rural areas in Ireland into bigger urban centres in Ireland and England. The isolation of musicians who have migrated into urban areas prompted them to form new musical communities in their new homes, leading to the emergence of session culture in pubs in Ireland and London (1994, 582). Music played in these sessions came from the various rural communities that these musicians have come from. Fairbairn reminds us that session music is flexible and informal. Musicians playing the melody have complete autonomy of their own musical line, contributing a line which itself is a complete musical performance, which suggests the absence of interdependence of musical roles. Fairbairn argues that the informality and flexibility of these sessions in terms of the arrangement of the music can be traced to the solo tradition (1994, 585). She concludes that by

maintaining their informality that would be otherwise undesirable in other musical ensembles that require a group effort, sessions recreate the ‘intimate involvement between local people at a house dance’ (1994, 597). Fairbairn’s study reveals a noteworthy situation where the tunes are maintained and elements of performing those tunes survive in the form of informality and flexibility, but the context of the music has shifted from intimate house dances to public informal music-making. Fairbairn’s study indicates that music can recontextualise itself to exist in a different space and situation, but the flexibility of Irish traditional music suggests that there are underlying elements that influence the way the music is played when contexts change.

In his book, Jochen Eisentraut (2012) encounters a similar phenomenon of adopting non-native cultural elements in a case study where he examines the samba scene in Wales. He finds that the acceptance of samba in a culturally and linguistically foreign environment such as Wales is attributed to the fact that it is accessible on three levels: (1) the physical; (2) the personal; and (3) the participatory (2012, 273). Eisentraut’s study on the accessibility of music sheds light on how the meanings of music may be constructed and reconstructed in changing contexts. His research prompts more questions, such as how musical accessibility plays a part in the creation of interest for a particular style of music, or the revival of a musical style as observed by Fairbairn (1994) or Rees (2007).

The accessibility of unfamiliar music is currently increasing due to globalisation and the platform provided by the Internet. Andy Hillhouse (2013) studies the globalisation of Irish traditional music by examining memorable melodic formulae, or hooks, in new traditional music. He argues that ‘the hook is a contributing factor in the popularity of certain tunes, but also that examining hooks can lead to insights into the changing boundaries of (Irish traditional music) practice within the context of transnationalism’ (2013, 38), indicating that the melodic structure of the tune can provide an insight into the community who plays them. Hillhouse’s study finds that as Irish music becomes increasingly dissociated with Irish culture, new tunes would absorb new elements borrowed from other traditional musics while still conforming to the commonly accepted idioms of the Irish traditional music genre, such as rhythm, musical phrasing, and use of the diatonic and pentatonic scales. There are no similar studies when it comes to the new traditional music of Wales, and I intend to address this by studying the repertoire that has been written by either traditional musicians living along the Gwynedd coast, or practitioners who specialise in Welsh music in general.

Ó hAllmhuráin (2004) offers some insights into how new tunes become part of the traditional music repertoire. He suggests that newly composed music in the traditional style enters an intermediary state, where tunes may be accepted into the tradition. If that tune becomes integrated into the repertory, the tune would undergo variations as it passes on from one musician to the next within the bounds of established tradition. In this process, the composers of these tunes may even be forgotten (2004, 6).

Hillhouse's and Ó hAllmhuráin's findings regarding how traditional music tends to conform to established musical patterns draw an interesting parallel to Fairbairn's (1994) study where certain elements are entrenched in the musical tradition while others are more responsive to change. New elements, however, are grounded on the elements that do not change. In the case of Hillhouse's study, hooks display rhythmic and melodic innovation but conform to traditional phrasing and scales. In Ó hAllmhuráin's study, melodic variations reflect each player's musical 'dialect' but do not render the original tune unrecognisable. Finally, Fairbairn's study demonstrates that the spatial and temporal contexts of Irish music have changed over time, but informality and individuality left over from the solo tradition still prevails and influences the performance practices of Irish music today.

The studies mentioned above by Ó hAllmhuráin (2004) and Hillhouse (2013) examine the processes of change and transmission within the limits of tradition. There is still a gap in the literature, however, on the process of adopting and localising tunes from different traditions to fit sessions, which I believe is crucial in understanding how multiple musical traditions can exist in the context of session culture along the Menai Strait. In this thesis, I will be drawing upon these studies to investigate the effects of the different traditions present on the Menai Strait on musical practices in sessions and to draw out some commonalities as well as unpacking where these influences may have come from. Furthermore, I will also contribute to the discussion surrounding the processes above by theorising the process in which tunes from different traditions become adopted and localised into the repertoire.

In the examination of traditional music, especially within the context of Wales, it would be crucial to reflect on research regarding revivals. While Welsh harp music enjoys an unbroken tradition, the same cannot be said for the other instrumental musics of Wales. However, due to the efforts of organisations that promote Welsh musical traditions and practices such as Clera

and trac Cymru, there is a revival of interest in Welsh traditional music today.⁶ Research suggests that revivals are social movements in action. In his analysis of the musical literature regarding revivals, Owe Ronström (1996) identifies key 'struggles' which revivalists engage in, such as the fight against modernity, commercialisation, urbanisation and dull rationalisation; the struggles faced by class, race and regional divisions, and the fight for visibility through claims of distinction (1996, 9–10). In that same study, Ronström develops a theory on revivals which describes musical revivals as a process of traditionalisation in the present, which creates symbolic ties to the past and the creation of individual and collective identity in the future (1996). Tamara Livingston (1999) explores the concept of revival further, arguing that historical context, social trends and intellectual trends produce revival culture, and changes in any of these elements would also change the course of the revival movement. Additionally, she theorises that music revivals exist on a continuous scale, with specific points along the continuum representing different parts of the revival phase. Hill and Bithell (2014) build upon this, raising the question of what happens at the end of a revival when a tradition is perceived to be no longer in danger of extinction. They propose a post-revival phase, where practitioners are unbound from specific praxes associated with 'tradition', since it is no longer moribund. Because of this, Hill and Bithell suggest that spin-off genres may arise due to the shift in context (Hill & Bithell, 2014, p. 29). Using Livingston's model and the suggestions put forth by Hill and Bithell, I shall be situating the session culture of the Menai Strait within the music revival process.

1.3.4 Welsh Traditional Music

Welsh traditional music is an established field of enquiry. Historical practices and song studies are particularly well-researched areas within this field (see Kinney 2011, for instance). That said, new research is emerging with regards to more contemporary approaches to Welsh traditional music, but this remains an under-researched area in the field. Kinney (2011) notes that new elements are being introduced into traditional music practice in terms of instrumentation and repertoire, suggesting that these changes are a response to changing

⁶ Clera, whose name derives from the Welsh term for musicking as a wandering minstrel, is an organisation founded in 1996 that promotes Welsh musical instruments and Welsh traditional music. Its activities include publishing tunebooks, hosting sessions and workshops at the National Eisteddfod of Wales and maintaining the alawoncymru.com website. In comparison, trac Cymru (founded in 1997) is broader in scope, aiming to developing folk arts in general such as dance, music, and storytelling. Trac Cymru's activities include running annual workshops, connecting folk artists to other organisations such as FOCUS Wales and the English Folk Expo, as well as partnering with BBC Wales, Radio Cymru and the Arts Council of Wales to create the Wales Folk Awards.

situations where musickal gatherings such as the *noson lawen* no longer have the same social functions as they used to have in the past (2011, 288).

Except for harp music, Wales does not have a surviving tradition of instrumental music unlike that of Ireland. Stephen Rees (2007) notes that printed music were valuable sources for repertoire during the revival of Welsh traditional music, although the broken tradition of instrumental music meant that there was no performance style to emulate, arguing that the revival of Welsh music is essentially the creation of a new tradition rather than its recreation (2007, 306, 320). During the 1970s and 1980s when the revival was underway, musicians have borrowed elements from other musics, notably from the Irish tradition, and applied them to Welsh traditional music as a response to the absence of an indigenous performance style (2007, 319). This is largely due to the accessibility and perceived cultural proximity to Irish traditional music among Welsh musicians and audiences. Rees compares this phenomenon of recontextualising music to suit the taste of the audience to the work of Edward Jones in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, who had also adapted Welsh traditional music, but instead for an urban and sophisticated audience in London (2007, 321). However, Rees' study focuses on revival efforts and approaches before the emergence of the Internet. Kinney (2011) does point out that with the rapid development of technology, approaches to traditional music are likely to evolve with it (2011, 228). This gap has been partly addressed by Huw Dylan Owen (2015) who touches on various aspects of folk sessions in Wales.

Not all Welsh traditional musicians view the practice of borrowing elements from Irish tradition positively. In his study on sessions in Wales, Owen (2015) note that some view the influence of Irish music on Welsh music as comparable to the influence on English on the Welsh language, stating that there is a danger of Welsh tunes being drowned by Irish traditions (2015, 9).⁷ This practice is likely exacerbated by the wider use of 'Celtic music' as a broad designator of music of Celtic nations. Rees (2007) notes that this puts individual traditions in a somewhat precarious position since it erases not only the individual national roots of music, but also the individual genres within the scope of that tradition (2007, 304).

Owen (2015) establishes some relationships between Welsh and Irish music, noting that tunes are understood to have similar origins. However, Owen also said that Welsh musicians are not

⁷ 'Teimla rhai cerddorion gwerin bod dylanwad cerddoriaeth ddawns werin Iwerddon ar gerddoriaeth ddawns werin Cymru yn debyg iawn i ddylanwad y Saesneg ar y Gymraeg. Hynny ydy, mae perygl i'r alawon Cymreig gael eu boddi'n llwyr gan y traddodiad Gwyddelig sydd yn tra-arglwyddiaethu.'

likely to join sessions in Ireland, suggesting that musical styles and difference in musical standards have made it difficult for Welsh musicians to participate (2015, 10).⁸ This is particularly interesting because Owen's observations do not line up with the lived experiences of some musicians on the Menai Strait who do establish connections with musicians across the strait in Galway, and of musicians in the region in general who would be comfortable playing tunes different from Welsh tradition. This suggests that there is a gap in knowledge regarding session culture along the Menai Strait, specifically with regards to the diverse practices present in sessions and with how these practices fit into the wider traditional music scene.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Relationships as a researcher

I came into this research project with some experience with the session scene in the Menai Strait; before the start of the research period, I had been taking part in session activities since moving into the area in 2015. However, my relationship with the scene cannot be clearly defined as an insider or an outsider. I have been practising traditional music prior to the start of this project, but this music is not native to my cultural upbringing.

The position of researchers as insiders or outsiders in qualitative studies have been discussed previously, particularly in methods of ethnography, participant observation, and fieldwork. Essentially, researchers who conduct studies on groups or communities they are already in are referred to as *insiders*, whereas those who conduct research outside their own communities are referred to as *outsiders*. That said, a number of scholars have challenged the notion of insider and outsider as two dichotomous entities (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Katyal & King, 2011; Milligan, 2016). Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) explore the notion of 'the space between', placing insiderness and outsiderhood as two ends of a spectrum rather than two discrete and opposing categories.

In some ways, I do lean towards being the 'insider': I came into the scene already knowing how to participate in session activities, and I already knew some of the tunes that are played in these events and how to perform them according to the context of the session. Additionally, I had already acquired a basic grounding of the Welsh language at the time, which may have possibly shaped how others in the scene perceived of me as a newcomer.

⁸ 'Ond yn ddiddorol iawn, nid oes llawer o awydd gan gerddorion Cymru i ymuno mewn sesiynau yn Iwerddon. Efallai, yn syml, oherwydd bod cymaint o wahaniaeth rhwng y steil cerddorol neu oherwydd bod safon y chwarae mor aruthrol, aruthrol o dda yno yn aml.'

However, I also lean towards the outsider in some ways. This can be attributed to my being relatively new in the scene at the start of this research project, as well as being in the intersection of race, nationality, and musical upbringing. When I joined the scene in 2015, I was the only non-white person; and the only one whose immigration background was trifold, i.e., from outside Wales, outside the United Kingdom, and outside of the European cultural sphere. Furthermore, my musical upbringing was based on Chinese classical music, although I did venture into traditional Irish music shortly for a year prior to migrating to the area. That said, these elements of ‘outsiderness’ did not negatively impact the social relations I have made with the community; however, I acknowledge that it must have influenced how I interacted with others and how others with myself, whether we were aware of it or not.

These personal circumstances I have shared demonstrates the liquidity of my identity as a researcher and a participant of session culture. Milligan’s (2016) reflections build upon Corbin Dwyer’s and Buckle’s (2009) notion of the ‘space in between’, suggesting that liquid identities like mine are not set in stone. Milligan’s assertions remind us that researchers have the agency to make conscious decisions to move towards either side of the insider-outsider spectrum when designing research (Milligan, 2016, p. 248). This has influenced me to play two primary roles as a researcher: (1) a participant who observes, and (2) an observer who participates. During the research period, I frequently positioned myself between these two roles, depending on what I needed to address at that point in time.

Being an insider has allowed me prior access to the scene, and thus has immediately enabled me to play the role of a participant who observes. This opens both opportunities and epistemological issues, especially seeing that I was already familiar with the nature of the musical activities and on familiar terms with those who practice these activities. I did not have to prepare myself to enter an entirely new situation as I was already in the field. Being already familiar with session culture also gave me the potential to make theories based on perspectives that may have been ignored if I were an outsider. In other words, because I was already an insider, I did not have to spend time getting to know the community. As a result, I was able to identify areas of study relatively quickly. Of course, being an insider may also pose some epistemological issues. Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) warn insider researchers of having biases when interpreting findings; they may even take routine events for granted, highlighting bigger, more dramatic events instead. This raised concerns early in the research, although I did find that discussing my findings with my colleagues and participants did help in identifying areas of interest that I have overlooked.

My outsidership, on the other hand, facilitates me to play the role of the participating observer, especially when dealing with research questions that may require a degree of objectivity and emotional detachment. Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) note that taking an outsider stance is particularly useful when sensitive information is needed, due to the temporality of the researcher. In my case, taking on the role of an observer who participates allows me to examine questions relating to behaviour and interaction without posing a threat to the social fabric of the different communities. The specifics of this will be explored later in this chapter.

1.4.2 Study design

For this research project, I made use of ethnographic methods, which are also widely used in (ethno)musicological research. Ethnography refers to the ‘holistic’ approach to the study of ‘*socio-cultural contexts, processes and meanings* within cultural systems’ (Whitehead, 2004) (emphasis not mine). Ethnographic methods are predominantly qualitative, although Whitehead argues that quantitative methods can also be integrated into ethnographic research (Whitehead, 2004, pp. 6–7). Fieldwork forms the backbone of ethnographic research, where the researcher becomes part of the community and actively engages in it to collect data relevant to the research question. This process is especially important to achieve ‘emic validity’, which refers to the understanding of cultural phenomena from the insider’s perspective (Whitehead, 2004).

Research took place between January 2018 and December 2020. Table 3 below summarises the timeline of the research:

	2018				2019				2020			
	Jan	Mar	Jun	Sep	Jan	Mar	Jun	Sep	Jan	Mar	Jun	Sep
Pilot												
Survey												
Fieldwork												
Archival work												
Interviews and FG												

Figure 1: Timeline of research, with the calendar year divided into quarters. Each shaded box represents the work done in the corresponding time period.

1.4.3 Data retrieval methods

To approach the research problems above, I have made use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of enquiry. In order to obtain data for this research, I made use of three systems, namely: survey, participant observation, and existing sources. Furthermore, I also employed semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and informal conversations as supplementary strategies to retrieve additional data.

1.4.3.1 Survey

The first method I utilised is the survey, which was carried out during the start of the research period. This was designed to gather general information from the participants to gain an understanding of the demographics of the scene, thus addressing the questions related to the people and communities that make up the session scene. The survey asks for the following:

- 1) Name
- 2) Gender
- 3) Primary and secondary instruments
- 4) Age
- 5) Where the participant is based
- 6) Traditional music experience
- 7) Formal music experience

The survey forms were printed out with English on one side and Welsh on the other and were distributed to those who take part in sessions across the Menai Strait at the start of the research period, between November 2018 and January 2019. The full questionnaire, which also includes the participant consent declaration, can be found in Appendix 3. In total, I had collected thirty responses. When the forms were returned to me, I made a mark on their forms indicating where I had collected them; this allowed me to make observations regarding which session community the respondents belonged to. In cases where a respondent attends different sessions in different locations, I did not ask them to do the form again; instead, I made a note of their attendance and marked their forms where necessary.

I had also encouraged participants to respond to the survey in the language their preferred language so that I can also gain an understanding of Welsh language skills among the members of the scene. However, I had committed an oversight during the first round of survey sessions. Because there was a lot of people in that session, not everyone was aware of my encouragement to complete the form in their preferred language. Additionally, I had presented the form

English-side up, which further obscured the fact that there was a Welsh-language option. As a result, because all the participants spoke English even if it was not their first language, several participants who had filled out the survey form in English even though they would have preferred to respond in Welsh. In subsequent survey sessions, I made sure to make myself clear on encouraging participants to respond in the language they were most comfortable in and to also present the survey forms Welsh-side up while verbally clarifying that the English option was overleaf.

The data collected from the survey were then inputted in Microsoft Excel and stored on OneDrive, which allows for the information to be stored in a cloud and encrypted with a password. Firstly, I entered all the survey responses into the relevant cells, and then made separate worksheets for different session locations. I then sorted every participant into the different locations I had seen them in. Further to that, I also made two more worksheets dividing the Menai Strait into two general regions. Doing so allows me to analyse the survey findings on three levels: (1) general; (2) regional; (3) local. Excel was also useful in calculating statistics that will be presented in the Communities chapter.

The sample of the participants who responded to this survey reflects the demographics of those who attend sessions in the area regularly, seeing that no session regular declined to take part in the survey.⁹ The survey also included the responses of participants who occasionally attend sessions who were happy to take part in this study.

1.4.3.2 Participant Observation

Several authors have noted the usefulness of participant observation in qualitative and mixed-method research (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Fine, 2003; G. Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2017). Guest et al. (2017) especially note the effectiveness of this method in obtaining contextual and confirmatory data. However, several authors warn of side effects of overt participation, most notably of the Hawthorne effect (Oswald, Sherratt, & Smith, 2014; Payne & Payne, 2004). First described in the mid-twentieth century, the Hawthorne effect refers to the phenomenon where participants alter their behaviour as a result of knowing that they are being observed. In my case, the Hawthorne effect may be unavoidable since I am already a part of the session community before this research, and for ethical reasons, I had chosen to be transparent about my role as a researcher to the participants. Oswald et al. (2014) recommend maintaining a close rapport with participants; by doing so, researchers present themselves as non-threatening

⁹ Here, I consider a regular as someone who reliably attends any given session.

entities with whom participants would be comfortable and see no need to build psychological barriers by changing their regular behaviour.

Participant observation was used to gain the contextual data as noted by Guest et al. (2017). This method was useful in providing data with regards to musical material and has provided answers with regards to interactions in sessions. In this thesis, observation notes were also used for gaining context from the survey and confirming data elicited from interviews.

I made a total of 70 research visits on the ground throughout the whole research period. Table 1 below summarises the number of visits to each site:

Number of visits to each site	
Ballyvaughan, Ó Loclainn's	1
Bangor, Boatyard Inn	39
Bangor, Tafarn y Glôb	15
Bontnewydd, Newborough Arms	10
Caernarfon, Anglesey Arms	1
Caernarfon, Black Boy Inn	2
Caernarfon, Royal Welsh Yacht Club	1
Rhosgadfan, Mountain Rangers Club	1

Table 1: Summary of number of visits to each site

There are two reasons why I attended more sessions in Bangor than in other locales: (1) Bangor was far more accessible as I did not have to pay for or to arrange transport to get there, and (2) sessions in Bangor were far more regular compared to those happening outside of it (see Table 4 for a detailed schedule of sessions).

As mentioned in the previous segment, I played both the role of the insider and outsider in this research, shifting roles depending on the question I wanted to address. I did not need to gain access to the session scene as I was already on familiar terms with the people in it. Ideally, I wanted to be unobtrusive as possible during the observation sessions to avoid disrupting the natural flow of the event. This was a challenge in the initial stages of this research; in the interest of ethics, I had to publicly declare to those in the scene that I was a researcher, and they were subjects of my research. This, along with carrying out the survey mentioned above, had created a considerable barrier between the participants and myself. I also took notes during the session itself, which had led to some participants making comments about their awareness of being researched, and one participant expressed that it felt like I was grading them on their

performance. While these comments were light-hearted and not intended to be malicious, it did highlight how my actions as a researcher may be disrupting the event. However, this barrier eventually broke down in subsequent periods of time as the participants became used to my presence, and as I participated in session activities together with them.

I made use of basic tools when taking notes during sessions. This is mostly limited to either making voice or written notes on my smartphone or writing them down in a notebook with a pen. Throughout this process, I applied the theory of writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018) when taking notes and processing them. This refers to using creative writing practices to construct knowledge about people and the world in general. By writing more consciously and using creative techniques, she argues that the researcher's voice would be amplified, thus strengthening the reader's engagement with the written material.

On top of writing, I had also initially considered capturing the session in photos, videos, or audio form. However, this may not be productive when collecting data in sessions. Hield (2008) noted that bringing in extra tools that take up space in sessions, such as cameras on tripods, for instance, may create even more barriers between myself and the participants, both physical and psychological (2008, pp. 26–27). Because of this, I eventually decided against making use of excessive tools for documenting these sessions, only taking photos on my smartphone when I was confident that it created as little disruption as possible.

1.4.3.3 Existing sources

I also made use of existing sources to gain data for this research, particularly for investigating questions related to music. These sources include tune books, dance manuals, as well as non-scholarly sources published for general consumption. Because tune books and dance manuals were primarily used in the music chapter of this thesis investigating tune sources and naturalisation, I had sourced these out from a wide range of dates, ranging from books in the late 18th century to current books published within the decade at the time of writing.

I have also made use of non-scholarly books to gain supplementary data for the interactions chapter. I selected publications that provide commentaries of session culture. Occasionally, the nature of these texts can be humorous, relying on insider jokes and tropes, which can be argued to reduce the seriousness and credibility of the text. Based on my experience, however, this humour reflects the session experience as a whole. As someone who has been taking part in sessions before this research, I argue that my experience and insider knowledge has allowed

me to read these texts more critically, picking out relevant commentaries on the session experience within the frame of non-seriousness.

Apart from the sources mentioned above, I had also made use of sources such as community Facebook groups and on-site information found in pubs to gain some historical context for this research. I found that posts on community Facebook groups are not only especially useful in gaining some historical contexts, but they are also useful sources for images and videos.

1.4.3.4 Semi-structured Interviews

In order to gain insight or to obtain some historical context into a phenomenon that I cannot otherwise obtain through observation, I made use of semi-structured interviews. Before each interview, I had prepared an interview protocol using the Interview Protocol Refinement Framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The first step was to formulate key questions for the interviewees which align with research questions. To ensure this, I acted upon Castillo-Montoya's recommendations by clearly writing the objectives, themes, methodology, and target on the protocol, and then creating a matrix with interview questions in rows and research questions in columns (2016, p. 812). Interview questions that may potentially answer research questions were then marked with an X (see sample interview protocol in Appendix 2). Since these interviews aimed to elicit additional information that would have been obtained during the observation process, I selected interview participants who would be able to provide the relevant information based on their session experience, and the interview questions were likewise tailored specifically to the relevant interviewee. The suitability of the participants was determined by my observations and informal conversations with sessioners. These conversations were helpful as sessioners were happy to recommend someone who would be suitable for the interview. Furthermore, they also functioned as feedback and pilot sessions for the interview (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Majid, Othman, Mohamad, Lim, & Yusof, 2017).

Between the start of the research period to February 2020, interviews were conducted face-to-face, at a place and time that is convenient and comfortable to the participants. I conducted a total of six interviews with Lesley Conran, Geoff Hardman, Kieran Lynch, Simon Ager, Jan Hurst, and George Henderson.

Sessioner	Session community
Simon Ager	Royal Welsh Folk Club, Tafarn y Glôb
Lesley Conran	Bangor, Ballyvaughan, Bontnewydd
Geoff Hardman	Bangor, Ballyvaughan, Bontnewydd, BUFS Sessions

George Henderson	Ballyvaughan, Bontnewydd
Jan Hurst	Caernarfon, BUFS Sessions
Kieran Lynch	Bangor, Ballyvaughan, Bontnewydd, BUFS Sessions, Tafarn y Glôb

Table 2: Interview participants and the sessions they attend

Lesley, Geoff, Kieran, Simon and Jan were chosen because they are active in multiple session communities and attended sessions regularly during the research period. On the other hand, George was chosen because of his long-established and close connection with the session community from the area. All the interviews lasted for less than an hour. Initially, I had used my smartphone to record these interviews, as well as pen and paper to note down particularly interesting points in our conversation. Even though the smartphone itself was functional, I later invested in a Tascam DR-05 voice recorder for capturing the interviews because the quality and functionality on it were better. After the interview was over, I then transcribed these conversations with oTranscribe, a free HTML web application whose interface allows users to speed up or slow down audio files which facilitate the transcription process. Initially, I had concerns over the security of using internet tools to handle potentially sensitive information, but upon further research into this tool, I found that the audio files are not uploaded into a server; instead, they reside on the user's web browser itself. This meant that there is security in using oTranscribe, and I was able to easily remove the audio file from the web application by simply clearing my temporary internet files.

From March 2020 onwards, I decided to cease all face-to-face interviews due to the development of the COVID-19 pandemic; all conversations with sessioners from this point onwards until the end of the research period was conducted over mail or via a videotelephony software, such as Zoom. Carrying out interviews online may create potential practical and ethical challenges, however. Firstly, carrying out interviews online requires all parties involved to have a reliable internet connection as well as decent quality hardware such as computers, webcams and microphones. This turned out not to be too much of a problem, however, seeing that many of the participants responded to the lockdown triggered by the pandemic by learning how to use Zoom for personal and social reasons, as well as for taking part in online session activities. This meant interview participants were already adept at using these tools by the time I approached them for an interview.

Carrying out interviews online does pose some ethical challenges as well. Moving the interview from face-to-face to an online format means that I no longer have complete control over the

environment in which the interview is held, especially in terms of privacy. When carrying out any activities online, the security of private data is always a concern. There is always a risk of zoom bombing, which refers to the infiltration and the subsequent disruption of a video call by an uninvited user. Addressing this issue is simple enough: to prevent uninvited Individuals into the interview, I made sure to send the links and the password to the participants' personal emails and discouraged everyone from sharing the link publicly. The other security issue poses a more difficult problem with online tools in general: software companies usually share user data with third-party companies and advertisers. This data can also be easily leaked if the software lacks the infrastructure to protect itself against hackers and ransomware. Some software companies actively listen into conversations: Skype, for instance, gives access to human contractors to collect snippets of conversations for their translation service (Foley, 2019); Apple and Google suspended human reviews of voice commands for Siri and Google Assistant respectively after concerns of privacy were raised (Haselton, 2019; Lomas, 2019).

In any case, when using online tools, our personal data is always at risk. This means as a researcher, I had to weigh out the issues described above with the ease of using these tools. I decided to go with Zoom since it is comparatively accessible to everyone, and participants did not have to spend money buying more software they would not have used outside the context of research interviews.

The Zoom platform is particularly useful as it allows me to record conversations with interviewees. Since recorded conversations were indicated as such at the top of everyone's screens, I was initially concerned that participants would be distracted by the constant reminder that they were being recorded. Nevertheless, I found that our conversations online were as natural as they would have been had we met face-to-face. After the interview, I then imported the video file into Logic Pro X, which allows me to isolate the audio file and to also manipulate the audio by speeding it up or slowing it down. This proved to be helpful in the transcription process.

1.4.3.5 Focus groups

Throughout the research period, I also made use of focus groups to elicit data. I was motivated to utilise this method by Kitzinger (1995), who noted its suitability for broadly open-ended questions. Focus group discussions can generate new areas of enquiry from the participants themselves and are also useful in eliciting experiences and ideas in the participants' own words (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2011; Kitzinger, 1995). However, Bloor et. al (2011)

note that because they overlook intra-group differences, focus groups are not so useful in eliciting data for group behaviour and attitudes. Keeping this in mind, I had opted to gain data pertaining to the interaction chapter primarily through observation, although I did find that focus group discussions were very useful in providing context for the observations I made.

As with interviews, focus groups were all conducted face-to-face until March 2020, from which they were conducted over Zoom. Unlike interviews, I held focus group discussions in public spaces, sometimes even during sessions themselves. These focus groups involved regulars in that given session, which means that those who took part in the survey also took part in these focus groups (see Appendix 7). However, not all those who took part in the survey took part in these focus groups. Hield (2008) notes how eliciting data this way may not be ideal since it intrudes upon the sessioner's leisure time. On the other hand, however, sessions are ideal for having focus group discussions since the practitioners were already there in the room, thus saving the need to make appointments with multiple individuals, which may be tricky. Keeping the need to balance these two points in mind, I had designed in-session focus groups to exist within conversational periods.¹⁰ This meant that focus group discussions in sessions had to be kept short and the discussion topic had to be similar to topics that would have come up naturally in sessions anyway. This was determined by paying attention to the themes that arise in conversations before and during the pilot period of this research. Based on these, I had chosen to discuss themes related to group history and places during in-session focus groups.

As with interviews from March 2020 onwards, all focus groups were moved to an online format over Zoom. Since people were opting to stay at home during the lockdown periods, it was easier to make an appointment to have a focus group discussion at this time. To make these appointments, I mentioned having a focus group meeting for the purposes of research in one of the Zoom sessions and took note of who was interested in taking part. I then sent an email around to those interested in order to arrange this focus group.

I was also concerned that I was intruding on other people's lives as they had to adjust themselves to the new conditions brought upon the lockdown, especially to those who may face mental difficulties at this stage. Because of this, I ceased all focus group activities until after September 2020 when I was certain through informal conversations online that my presence and research would not be disruptive to their lives. Focus group discussions held over

¹⁰ The concept of conversational periods will be discussed in the Interactions chapter.

Zoom were also recorded, which were then processed in a manner similar to how Zoom interviews were processed (see above).

On top of the focus group sessions described here, I had also designed a special focus group method to discuss session etiquette. I incorporated elements of anonymity to encourage participants to express their opinions and ideas without the risk of being singled out. I felt this is especially important because this study can potentially seriously affect personal relations with each other, and I did not want to create a scenario where a participant could potentially be openly criticised or alienated as a direct result of this research. Of course, this could happen in the other focus group sessions, but I thought this is more likely to happen here since we were discussing what amounts to desirable behaviour.

I was invited to give a workshop on this subject during the Gŵyl Tân a Môr festival in Harlech early in the research period in 2018, and I took this opportunity to hold a focus group discussing etiquette. Those who attended this workshop were practitioners of traditional music in the area, although there were other practitioners who had travelled from outside the geographical boundaries concerned in this research to attend the festival. I had sought verbal permission from the participants of this focus group to use the discussions arising from this session, assuring them that they cannot be individually identified in this thesis. I began the session by sharing material from Barry Foy's *Field Guide to the Irish Music Session* (2008). This book provides an overview of how sessions work in a light-hearted and humorous tone, which I anticipated would set the tone for the rest of the discussion. In the second half of the workshop, I encouraged the participants to write their pet peeves in sessions on identically coloured cards that I have prepared beforehand. I also supplied identical pens to the participants to decrease the chances of being identified. When they were finished with writing on their cards, I collected the cards personally and put them in a drawstring bag without looking at them. When I had collected all the cards, I gave the drawstring bag a shake in front of all the participants so that they knew there was no way I could identify which card belonged to which person. I then pulled out the cards one by one at random and read out the issues that were raised and facilitated the proceeding discussions among the participants. This method was effective in garnering a conversation about a potentially sensitive topic in a focus group since opinions were anonymised, even to me. I also did not use any audio recording devices to capture the discussions in the interest of anonymity as well; instead, I used a pen and notebook to record interesting points in the discussion.

1.4.3.6 Informal conversations

The final method of garnering data that I utilised in this research is through casual conversations. Initially, I did not anticipate that insights valuable to this research would occasionally come up naturally in conversations during sessions. That said, having conversations as part of the participant observation process have been commented upon by several authors (Bernard, 2006; G. Guest et al., 2017; Kawulich, 2005), although Kawulich (2005) and Bernard (2006) frames these conversations completely within the context of informal or unstructured interviews. Guest et. al (2017), however, makes the distinction between interviews and informal conversations: while both methods are moderately participatory on the researcher's part, casual conversations reduce the researcher's visibility to the participants compared to interviews (2017, p. 86). This opens up potential ethical challenges, as the lack of transparency on the researcher's part may affect the intricacies of informed consent. Participants have the right to know that research is being carried out and to know their role in it before deciding whether to take part in it (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 272).

In the context of this research, since casual conversations were used as a supplementary strategy to gain context to my observations, the participants were already aware of my presence as a researcher. That said, I had sought to be as transparent as possible when using conversation topics for research. When relevant points of interest came up in conversations, and I had evaluated that the conversation would not bring social or psychological harm to the individual, I made a point to ask if I could 'get a quote' from them. I would then either record the conversation as a voice note on my smartphone or take down the main points on paper. At the end of the session, I would review the conversation with the participant. This ensured that the participant was aware of the conversation being used in research, and to what extent it was being used.

This was the least utilised of all the methods I have used, due to how rare research-relevant topics came up naturally in conversations, although when they do, they were particularly valuable for gaining anecdotes, and personal and historical contexts in the participants' terms. I also found that the need to be transparent somewhat disrupted the natural flow of the conversation and suspect that a psychological barrier was built between myself and the participant.

1.4.4 Data Analysis

The primary method in which the data retrieved from the methods above is through thematic analysis. This is recommended in Amanda Coffey's (2018) manual on carrying out research using ethnography. Coffey notes that thematic analysis allows for organising and retrieving data through a process of 'code-and-retrieve', which involves taking large sets of data and segmenting them into smaller and manageable analytical units, known as codes or themes. Scholars have written about the advantages and disadvantages of thematic analysis. On the one hand, thematic analysis is very accessible to researchers who are in earlier stages of their careers since it does not demand the same level of technical and theoretical knowledge demanded by other forms of qualitative analysis, yet it produces a rich account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method of analysis also affords a degree of flexibility: because there is no right way of generating codes and themes, researchers can determine them in many ways depending on the object that is being approached (Coffey, 2018; Holloway & Todres, 2003). However, Nowell et al. (2017) argue that the relative lack of substantial literature about thematic analysis, as opposed to other forms of analysis such as grounded theory, for example, may be problematic. This is mainly because those who are unfamiliar with this method be concerned about the rigorousness of their analysis. Furthermore, the flexibility in thematic analysis mentioned above can lead to inconsistency and incoherence when determining themes (Holloway & Todres, 2003).

The first step I took in the analysing process was to become familiar with the data. This involved transcribing interviews and reviewing notes and material gathered from focus group discussions. Next, I identified codes from the raw data, from which I generated themes. I used simple tools such as the highlight function in Microsoft Word to do this. Oftentimes, one interview may provide interesting insights into several topics covered in this thesis. While conversations like these may be useful in getting to understand various aspects of session culture, I was concerned that it might result in the inconsistent themes as described by Holloway and Todres (2003). To avoid this, I decided to code using a deductive approach as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves deriving themes based on 'the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area' (2006, 84). This contrasts with the inductive approach which Braun and Clarke note may result in themes which bear little relation to the research questions (ibid.). For example, when looking out for codes and themes related to the topic of locations, I would go through observation notes and interviews and highlight *only* things pertaining to locations, even if things related to other topics such as interactions

come up in those interviews. The highlighted items would represent codes. After the whole process, I looked at what was highlighted and identified elements that certain codes had in common. These elements were themes that were used to for discussion in the respective chapters. I would then return to the same material later when I was more mentally refreshed to carry out the coding process again for another chapter.

After generating initial themes, I then returned to the participants to discuss what I had found so far. Coffey (2018) notes the importance of this process, asserting that data analysis is *not* a phase in ethnographic research. Once initial ideas have been generated from data analysis, more data needs to be collected to develop and explore those ideas (Coffey, 2018). In order to collect this data, I held focus groups either during sessions at conversational periods, or separately from the sessions later in the research period. I then repeated the coding process above, although because conversations tended to be more focused the second time around, it was easier to be more consistent when it came to generating themes.

This coding process was also applied to the survey. After inputting the data into Excel, I made notes of interesting patterns that arose in the survey that may not have been explicitly asked in the survey, namely confidence in the use of the Welsh language and how far participants were travelling. Patterns that did arise in the survey were identified as themes, while raw findings themselves that led to the uncovering of these patterns were codes.

With the special workshop focus group involving cards mentioned above, I analysed the data slightly differently. After the workshop, I reviewed the notes recorded in my notebook and compared the discussion with the cards I had collected from the workshop itself. I then coded both the cards and the discussion notes and fleshed out points of concern that were raised in the event. Because this focus group was used to explore unspoken rules, I looked out for codes that could uncover those rules of etiquette. When these codes were then grouped together, the themes would then reveal the expectations practitioners have when carrying out musickal activities.

Themes and codes gathered from observation, interview, and focus groups notes inform the content of this thesis and how it is organised. The themes generated from this process formed the basis of the sub-sections for each chapter, while the codes inform the content itself.

For Chapter 3b, I also made use of on-site information to gain context into activities related to session migration. On-site information came in the form of write-ups, photos, and paintings displayed on the walls of the pub where I carried out research. I took photos of these for later

reference and discussed it with George Henderson who I had interviewed for this chapter. This was useful in establishing the timeline and understanding how the Welsh Weekend in Ballyvaughan came to be practiced like how it is today. I also made use of archival study in Chapter 5 in a case study involving how tunes become localised. I sourced out the material via Google searches which led to the materials used in that chapter, both of which were in the form of piano scores. I then reduced them into skeleton scores by removing the bass and harmony lines. This was especially useful in drawing out certain features of the tune and simplified the comparison process with current versions of the tune that is investigated in the case study.

Keeping in mind about the need to be reflexive as recommended by Hellier-Tinoco (2003), I shared excerpts of this thesis by email to those who were directly mentioned in it to get comments. I then met the participants who were directly mentioned in the thesis either personally or in small groups of two over Zoom, except in the case of Lesley Conran whom I met face-to-face. It gave participants a chance to comment on the work and to verify that I had portrayed their views accurately.

At this stage, some participants raised issues with privacy and requested that I retracted certain parts of the thesis. I dealt with this by removing the segments of concern, and in places where there is too much retraction, I would rewrite these segments in a way that would not identify the affected participants.

Chapter 2: Session Locations

Writing about music is like dancing about architecture

Repeated by Kieran Lynch, as heard from Spike Jones

There is currently little discussion about the domains in which contemporary traditional music in Wales exist, especially with regards to where it is the most accessible and visible. These domains may include televised concerts such as S4C's *Noson Lawen* programme and radio programmes such as BBC Radio Cymru's *Awr Werin*.¹¹ However, the session represents a place where traditional music and techniques are actively transmitted from one individual to the next and therefore has significant potential in ensuring the continuation of tradition.

Sessions have existed along the Menai Strait for at least 50 years, particularly in Bangor. The oldest of these sessions are run by the Bangor Sessions community, which began in a pub in lower Bangor that no longer exists today known as the Ship Launch Inn, run by the Flynn family (Conran, personal communication, ~2019). These sessions were made of both locals and labourers from Ireland who had come over during the rebuilding of the Britannia Bridge between 1970 and 1972. At this time, the community based in Bangor had also established ties with communities in Ireland, cumulating in annual international events like the Welsh Weekend (see Chapter 3b). This coincided with the folk/traditional music revival movements across Great Britain and Ireland with the rise of several significant musical groups such as Runrig, the Bothy Band, and Fairport Convention. Irish tunes were especially influential in the music played in those sessions since they were easily accessible at the time through exposure from fellow sessioners at the time. Welsh tunes only became popular later on, becoming accessible through successful bands such as Ar Log and Cilmeri, the foundation of the record label *Sain* by folk singers Dafydd Iwan and Huw Jones, as well as notable publications of Welsh tunes like *Cadw Twmpath* and *Blodau'r Grug*. Irish tunes had firmly become part of the repertoire of the Bangor Sessions Community by the time people became interested in Welsh traditional music (Conran, personal communication, ~2019). Recent years has also seen a boom in the session scene, with sessions in Rhosgadfan and Caernarfon being formed in 2012 (Hurst, personal communication, 2020). The university has also recently contributed towards

¹¹ S4C is a Welsh-language television channel.

shaping the session scene, particularly through the efforts of the folk society. The society used to host sessions from as early as 2013 up to 2018. Even though these sessions were student-run, locals would also attend these sessions as well. These sessions would eventually merge with the sessions in Tafarn y Glôb, which began in 2017 and is regularly attended by younger musicians made up of both students and locals.¹²

In this chapter, I focus on examining the nature of places where sessions are held and discuss how these spaces are used. I will be limiting my observation to places where sessions are held regularly, at least once a month. This means I will be excluding places that have held one-off, special occasion sessions from this study. This chapter aims to address the central question by examining three things, namely: (1) the effects of place on musickal practices in sessions; (2) the relationship between place and tradition, and (3) the construction of musickal space.

The first part of this chapter examines the physical space in which session activity happens, specifically investigating how space is used and how users of that space organise themselves. The second part examines how space is negotiated between the different groups of people who are in it and how this space is used. The third part expands on Oldenburg's (1999) concept of the third place while testing Purnell and Breede's (2018) theory of how social interaction can produce third places. In essence, third places are those where individuals exist outside of liminal spaces which are neither their homes nor their workplaces. Third places, therefore, are places of leisure where social interaction can take place. In this part, I shall be building on Purnell and Breede's (2018) work by examining how musicking can produce third places.

2.1 Session Spaces: The place

2.1.1 Types of spaces

The social nature of sessions mean that it can happen anywhere it is welcome. In the case of the session culture along the Menai Strait, sessions primarily take place in public spaces, although these events were adapted to an online format when the COVID-19 pandemic forced venues across the UK to close from the 20th of March 2020 onwards. Sessions in public spaces were found regularly in the settlements of Bangor, Caernarfon, Bontnewydd and Rhosgadfan (see Figure 2 below).

¹² A more in-depth exploration into these communities will be presented in Chapter 3.

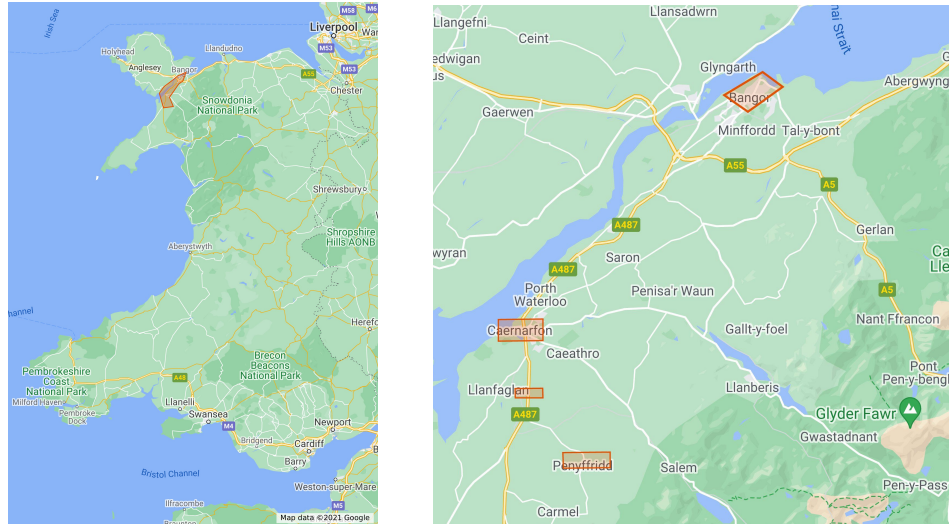


Figure 2: (Left) Map of Wales with research area highlighted; (Right) local map with session locations highlighted from north to south: Bangor, Caernarfon, Bontnewydd, Rhosgadfan.¹³

Physical sessions along the Menai Strait take place in a variety of public spaces. Most of these sessions take place in pubs, but they may also take place in hotels and sports clubs. In order to understand the use of space in a session and how it is negotiated between sessioners and non-sessioners, I propose that these locations be classified into two different kinds of spaces where music-making occurs:

1. Isolated spaces (near-total physical separation of sessioners and non-sessioners);
2. Shared spaces (little to no physical separation of sessioners and non-sessioners); and
3. Virtual spaces (online presence only, complete physical separation of sessioners)

Here is a brief explanation of these categories.

Isolated spaces are places where the sessioners are physically separated from the non-sessioners, whether deliberate or unintentional. This means that the sessions take place in a different room from the rest of the clientele of that establishment. Interactions between sessioners and non-sessioners are negligible in these places; they are largely restricted to two situations: (a) between sessioners and staff of the establishment when drinks are being delivered into the room or when empty glasses or mugs are being cleared out; and (b) between sessioners and the more adventurous non-sessioners who have decided to sit among them to listen to the music. However, the phenomenon of having a non-sessioner in these spaces is extremely rare.

¹³ Online high-resolution copies of these maps can be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/3zouMbD> (last accessed 10 June 2021).

Shared spaces are places where the sessioners and non-sessioners share the same room, but not necessarily within the same zone of interaction. Sessioners and non-sessioners alike often inadvertently form their own personal zones in these places separate from each other in the establishment. However, because of the lack of significant physical separation between the two groups, non-sessioners can engage with the sessioners if they so wish. It is also in these spaces where non-sessioners can truly present themselves with the music produced by the sessioners (see Table 20, p. 155 on self-representation in musical participation).

Virtual spaces are places where everyone involved is physically separated from each other but are present online. Of the spaces listed in this list, virtual spaces give the most amount of control to the sessioners, since participants have to be invited to take part in session activities here. This means that there is no possibility of having non-sessioners in these spaces. However, because participants of sessions in virtual spaces are not in the same physical space as others, these sessions often operate differently from other sessions taking place in the spaces mentioned above. Sessions in virtual spaces did not exist before March 2020.

Using the characteristics established above, I have classified all the locations where sessions take place into these three categories. Table 3 below is a summary of all the locations that have been used for sessions between September 2017 and the time of writing, categorised by their room types.

Settlement	Venue	Space type
Bangor	The Boatyard Inn	Isolated / Shared
Bangor	Patrick's Bar	Shared
Bangor	Tafarn y Glôb	Shared
Bangor	Waverley Hotel	Isolated (Dining room) Shared (Pub area)
Bontnewydd	The Newborough Arms	Isolated
Caernarfon	The Anglesey Arms	Shared
Caernarfon	Black Boy Inn	Shared
Caernarfon	Royal Welsh Yacht Club	Shared
Rhosgadfan	Mountain Rangers Club	Shared
Virtual Sessions	Zoom app	Virtual

Table 3: Session locations and their space types

2.1.2 Description of session spaces

This segment explores the venues where sessions take place, providing the description of each venue and paying particular attention to the spaces in which these sessions exist.

The Boatyard Inn is a pub located in the Hiracl area of Bangor. The space in which sessions happen in this pub poses an interesting situation. As seen in Table 3 above, the space where sessions take place in the Boatyard Inn can be classed as both isolated and threshold. This is because of the layout of the inn itself. The bar is situated in the middle of the establishment, surrounded by smaller pockets of space that have their own interior concepts. The session takes place in a room to the left of the bar, which itself is divided into two spaces. This is the reason why I have classified this location as both an isolated and shared space: it is isolated because it takes place in a different room from the rest of the establishment, but that room contains multiple spaces, which is characteristic of shared spaces. One of the spaces in this room has light-coloured walls accentuated by cool lighting. This area is fully carpeted and furnished with a set of wicker furniture, comprising an armchair, a sofa, and a low coffee table. There is also a dining table in this space, accompanied by three matching chairs. The other space, on the other hand, has yellow walls and warm lighting, a stark contrast with the other space described above, although, like the other space, this area is also fully carpeted. This space is ordinarily used as a dining room, which can be seen by the fact that there are four dining tables with matching chairs. Interestingly, the dining chairs used in this space have the same design, but the dining chairs used in the other space is of a different design. This may possibly contribute to the illusion that this space is made up of two rooms. While the two spaces in this room differ in terms of lighting and furniture, they are unified by a marine theme that is constant throughout the Boatyard Inn, which can be seen in the walls of the room which are ornamented by decorative items such as model boats, lighthouses, a small lifebuoy, and pictures of the sea. The sessions take place in the space with warmer lighting, as seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4.



Figure 3: View of the session space in the Boatyard Inn. Note the contrast in lighting and furniture style with the other end of the room



Figure 4: View of the session space from the other end of the room in the Boatyard Inn. Note the contrast in lighting and furniture style

Patrick's Bar is a pub situated in Upper Bangor, close to the university. Sessions in this establishment take place in an area close to the bar. There are two tables of differing sizes in

this area: the smaller table has two armless wooden chairs on each side, while the bigger table has three wooden chairs with armrests on one side and a repurposed cushioned church pew on the other. The sessions are centred on the smaller table. This area is part of a bigger room and is therefore classed as a shared space. However, there is a significant divide between the spaces used by sessioners and non-sessioners here. The session area is located next to the bar, which means that footfall in this area should be significantly higher than the other areas of the pub. However, the lack of tables other than those in the session area within this vicinity and the transient nature of interacting with the bar staff has led to a division of space between sessioners and non-sessioners.

Tafarn y Glôb is a pub located on Upper Bangor, just around the corner from Patrick's Bar above. This pub has a special relationship with the Welsh language; the predominant language seen and spoken in this establishment is Welsh, reflecting its niche pool of regulars of both Welsh-speaking locals and students alike. Sessions in this pub take place in one of the corners of the establishment, sharing the same room with the rest of the clientele. As such, the session area here is classed as a shared space. This corner is located close to the entrance to the pub and the male toilets, and general footfall in this area is therefore relatively high. The session is centred around a dining table, with an L-shaped bench on one side and stools on the other. There are also another five tables nearby, two of which function as storage space, which sessioners use to store items such as coats and instrument cases. The other three tables are not used by the sessioners and are often occupied by non-sessioners instead. Interestingly, when the stools around the session table have all been occupied by sessioners, other sessioners who have come late would procure unoccupied stools from these five tables. On top of furnishings, there is a jukebox and a slot machine in close vicinity to the session area as well, although the jukebox is shut off when the session is in progress.



Figure 5: Session area in Tafarn y Glôb. The tables in the extreme left and the centre-right of the picture are used as storage areas.



Figure 6: Session area in Tafarn y Glôb. Note the seating area in the background, which would typically be occupied by non-sessioners

The Waverley Hotel is a hotel situated opposite the train station in Bangor. Sessions in this venue took place either in the dining room area or in a space close to the bar. The dining room

area is approximately 12 metres long and 7 metres wide. This room is therefore classed as an isolated space, as the session takes place in a room separate from the rest of where the clientele would ordinarily be located. This room has changed many times in terms of furniture placement and interior design between September 2017 and the time of writing, as the hotel has undergone several changes in management in this period. However, the room has always been large and has always been furnished with typical dining room furniture with high, wooden tables accompanied by cushioned chairs. There are three types of chairs in this room: wooden chairs with armrests, wooden chairs without armrests and metal chairs without armrests. Generally speaking, the metal chairs seem to be popular with musicians as these are normally the first to be occupied. Sometimes there would be a sofa in the room as well, but this has never been occupied by any of the sessioners. The placement of furniture in this room is sometimes modified by the sessioners, who would move the tables and chairs around to make it more conducive for sessions.

Sessions also occasionally took place in the bar area of the Waverley. Unlike its dining area, the bar area is a shared space. Sessions typically take place around several tables close to the bar itself. These tables are the same height as those in the dining room and are placed in front of a long bench which runs along the length of the room. There are also wooden stools placed by the tables as well. There are also slot machines and a jukebox close to the session area.

Sessions currently do not take place in this location after the session community's decision to hold sessions in the Boatyard Inn instead as of the 1st of March 2018 onwards.

The Newborough Arms is a pub located on the main street in the village of Bontnewydd. The sessions here take place in a room separate from the rest of the establishment and is therefore classed as an isolated space. This room is similar in layout to the Boatyard Inn above, where the room is divided further into two areas. The first area when one enters the room is approximately 3.5 metres wide and 5 metres long. There are two tables on each side of the room. Each table is flanked by a repurposed church pew on one side and two uncushioned and armless wooden chairs on the other. This area of the room serves as the primary session area. This room has a secondary area located at the back, divided from the rest of the room by a walled partition (see Images 5 and 6). This secondary area is approximately 3 metres wide and 3.5 metres long. This area is dominated by a pool table in its middle, with small round tables in each corner except for one, where there is a slot machine instead. This area is used as a storage space where instrument cases are put away when the session is in progress. Even though

this room is partitioned in the same manner as the Boatyard Inn above, this room cannot be classed as a shared space as the back area can only be accessed by entering the session area, whereas the back area in the Boatyard Inn can be accessed without entering the session area.



Figure 7: Entrance to the session space from the bar in the Newborough Arms



Figure 8: Backroom (foreground) and session space (background through the partition) of the session room

The Anglesey Arms is a pub located in Caernarfon just outside the town walls, near where the Seiont river flows into the Menai Strait. Sessions here take place around a table in the pub area next to the bar. The sessions here take place in the same room as the rest of the clientele of this establishment. The session zone consists of a single table flanked by a partition on one side, separating the sessioners from the rest of the clientele, and a wall on the other. The partition does not reach the ceiling; it is only slightly higher than the average person and was likely to have been installed to serve as a visual blocker of the ladies' restroom which is placed directly in front of this table. Interestingly, this blocking effect also gives this table an illusion of being in a separate room altogether, which means while the distance between sessioners and non-sessioners feels bigger than it is in this space.



Figure 9: Session zone in the Anglesey Arms. Note the partition in the background right of the picture

The Black Boy Inn is an establishment that provides bed and breakfast accommodation, located in the walled area of Caernarfon next to the walls. Sessions here take place in the pub in one of the corners close to the bar, close to the fireplace. The floor of the room is made of stone; the beams on the ceiling are decorated with paper money from all over the world, and the walls are filled with labels of drinks that were likely to have been served on tap at one point in the bar. The decorations are effective in creating conversation, as someone tried to initiate a conversation with me whilst I was observing the session in the pub. The room itself is poorly lit and relatively cramped compared to the other rooms that have been discussed so far. This closed environment produces a room where the distances between sessioners and non-sessioners are greatly reduced.



Figure 10: The session area in the Black Boy Inn

The **Royal Welsh Yacht Club** is a clubhouse for the organisation of the same name, situated within the city walls itself near where the Seiont River meets the Menai Strait. This venue is ordinarily open to club members only, except when specific events are due to take place, such as house concerts, parties, and sessions. During these events, the clubhouse is open to non-members of the club as well. This venue comprises two floors. The sessions take place on the top floor, which also comprises the toilets, kitchen, bar, and seating area. The sessions take place on the first floor. This area is relatively wide with a fully carpeted floor and walls adorned with yachting-related items such as regalia, photos, oars, and names of the past commodores of the club. There are several tables placed around this area, but the sessions take place around the largest table in the room, while non-sessioners normally seat themselves in one of the many smaller tables in the room.

The **Mountain Rangers Club** is a sports club located in the centre of the village of Rhosgadfan. This venue also doubles as the social centre of the village, and hosts events such as gigs and bingo nights. Sessions here take place in the main hall, which is a large room with a long bench running parallel to two of the walls, with an assortment of tables running parallel to it. There are stools next to the tables as well (see images below). There is set of tables and

stools on the other side of the room, together with a stage on one end of the room and a bar on the other. The room is carpeted except for the middle part, which is a big space used for dancing.¹⁴



Figure 11: Mountain Rangers Club in Rhosgadfan

¹⁴ See the prelude essay to Chapter 4 for a detailed exploration of how this space is used.



Figure 12: Mountain Rangers Club in Rhosgadfan

Zoom is cloud-based software owned by Zoom Video Communications Inc. This software provides video communication services, serving arrangements such as teleconferences, working from home and home-based learning. During the COVID-19 pandemic and largely through the efforts of Geoff Hardman, the Bangor Session community made use of this technology and adapted sessions to a digital format in response to the closure of public spaces.

Sessions on Zoom are held in a private room that requires initial invitees to have a room code, which is supplied in email blasts sent weekly. This code, however, remains the same from week to week. The virtual rooms in which these sessions take place are the same as any other private Zoom meeting. Participants have the option of showing themselves on camera and adding a custom background if they have access to a green screen or a suitable alternative. Furthermore, those in the room have access to features such as screen sharing and the in-meeting chat.

Of course, while the interactions in Zoom take place in a virtual setting, the participants still physically exist in their respective homes. In this scenario, Zoom functions as a virtual space that people access to attend these virtual sessions.

2.1.3 Suitability of session spaces

While sessions can theoretically happen in any public space, some places are deemed to be more suitable than others. Opinions of the sessioners vary slightly with regards to the ideal venue for carrying out session activities, and when asked about what makes a good session space, a discussion surrounding the use of space and the proprietors' attitudes towards sessioners frequently arise.

Being able to hear each other is understandably one of the biggest concerns raised by the sessioners. Perhaps because of this, one element that is brought up frequently is the issue of flooring. Sessioners across the board agree that hard, uncarpeted floors are ideal for sessions as the acoustics are better. Carpeted floors, on the other hand, tend to absorb the sounds of the music. Interestingly, while the issue of flooring is of high concern, sessions are nevertheless still taking place in spaces with carpeted floors, such as the Newborough Arms and the Boatyard Inn above.

Partitions may also make it difficult for sessioners to hear each other. Kieran Lynch recounts one time when he arrived late to the Newborough Arms sessions, and had to be seated in the pool table area which is partly separated from the main session area because of the lack of available seats (see Figure 7 above):

There's a partition to the part with the pool table, and if you're out there you can't really hear you can't really participate... I pity poor Steve, he sings. He's usually out there (Lynch, personal communication ~ 2019).

It also should be noted that the session room in the Newborough Arms is also fully carpeted, which may have well contributed to the difficulty in hearing others.

Seating also presents a major concern among the sessioners. This particular attention to seating arrangements is not at all surprising here, as this is integral to retaining customers within the venue (Mehta & Bosson, 2010, p. 782). Because of the sedentary and musical nature of sessions, the available chairs, stools and benches must be able to support musical activities. This is the reason why chairs with armrests are generally unpopular with sessioners. Armrests are generally seen as hindrances, especially to box players whose instruments demand actions perpendicular to the player, and to guitarists whose instruments would sit awkwardly in the presence of armrests. Because of the unfavourable attitude towards chairs with armrests, these chairs would only be occupied as a last resort. This is seen in Patrick's Bar where the session space is comprised of a large table with chairs with armrests and a smaller table with chairs without armrests. Despite the logistical advantage of occupying the bigger table first, this is

never observed because the bigger table has unsuitable chairs. Of course, some musicians do not mind being seated in a chair with armrests. A conversation with multi-instrumentalist Meinir Olwen reveals that armrests add a dimension of comfort for playing the harp; armrests pose no significant hindrance to playing the harp because of the forward-facing nature of the instrument (Olwen, personal communication ~2018).

The initial layout and furnishing of the room or the establishment may influence the suitability of the space for sessions, although this applies more to shared spaces than to isolated spaces. In isolated spaces, sessioners have been observed to move furniture around in order to make the space conducive for session activities, but because of the communal nature of shared spaces, sessioners do not have as much free reign to move furniture around. Taking unoccupied chairs from other tables, however, remains perfectly acceptable.

The presence of noisy equipment also affects the session, especially so if they are near the session space. Lesley Conran notes that the most frequently offending items of equipment are slot machines and jukeboxes, which she claims makes a big difference to the space if present (Conran, personal communication, ~2018). There is no doubt that the use of the jukebox when a session is in progress is an annoyance at best and can potentially give offence to the sessioners. Slot machines, on the other hand, are potentially disruptive in two ways: when not in use, they emit flashing lights that can be distracting, and when in use, they tend to be noisy (Conran, JV, personal communication, ~2018). Other sources of music, however, are easily controlled: piped music can always be switched off at the request of the sessioners, and televisions can always be muted or switched off altogether. However, sometimes these distractions are prioritised over the sessions; I have observed how sessions can be delayed for a few minutes because of live telecasts of important events such as sporting events involving Wales.

Interestingly, one of the most influential factors in determining the suitability of session spaces is not the nature of the space itself, but, in fact, the attitude of the proprietors who own the establishments which host the sessions. Sessioners will naturally feel a sense of belonging to the venue if their owners have a positive disposition towards having sessions in their premises, and I have personally observed a session move to a different location because the sessioners had no longer felt welcome in the previous location. It is crucial as well that the owners are happy to host the session on a regular basis: an interview with the Friday session group in Bangor had revealed that they used to play in a pub whose owners were agreeable to hosting

sessions, but because that venue had lined up so many musical events, it was impossible to have sessions there regularly.

2.2 Session Spaces: Negotiating Space

In his book *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Small (2011) uses the metaphor of the concert hall to demonstrate how spaces are conceived and built to compartmentalise aspects of human behaviour and relationships (1998, 20). In his description of the concert hall, he constructs a world made of three concentric layers: the everyday world, which forms the outermost layer; the transitional space represented by the inside of the concert hall building but outside the performance area, which forms the 'transitional space' which concertgoers pass through from one space to another; and the performance area itself which represents an 'inner world' when a performance takes place (2011, p. 23). However, because the session is not a performance per se, it lacks the audience-performer relationship as described by Small. That said, certain ideas with regards to the multi-layered construct of space can be observed within the session context. Even though shared spaces do not have borders that physically separate the sessioners and the non-sessioners like isolated spaces do (see p. 36), the interactions of sessioners and non-sessioners are strikingly similar: in both spaces, sessioners and non-sessioners alike would tend to limit their interactions only with people they know and with the staff of the establishments. This consequently gives rise to the phenomenon of *zoning*, where the sessioners place themselves at a distance from the non-sessioners within the same room, whether intentional or not. This phenomenon echoes partly with Small's idea of a multi-layered musical world, especially so if the position of the sessioners is presented as the 'centre' of activity. However, it can be argued that it is unsuitable to analyse music as the centre of activity within the context of sessions because not all the paying customers who come to these establishments would want to listen to the music, nor are they expected to. This is in significant contrast to performances where people are expected to listen to music. It can be said, therefore, that music plays a secondary role in the context of sessions and the activities of the sessioners should not be taken as the centre of activity. As such, session spaces should be examined by zones of activity that exist alongside other zones of activity, rather than the concentric layers as described by Small.

2.2.1 Zoning and distancing in session spaces

Zoning of the venue where sessions are held is realised in several ways; one of the most visible manifestations of zoning is the formation of distances between the session group and the various non-session groups. The nature of shared spaces mean that they are open enough for

sessioners and non-sessioners alike to come and go as and when they please and use those spaces in a sociable manner. Those who have come to these places with the intention to socialise would have made a prior group decision to do so in the first place, even if that group decision was the decision of the more influential members of that social circle. This means that interactions within threshold spaces would be limited within the individual social circles that have come to these places, and between customers and staff of the establishment. Bryan Lawson (2001) notes that in spaces like these which allow multiple social circles to exist, several different relationships exist between various people within the same space. This leads to multiple expectations of distance between the different groups (Lawson, 2001, p. 120). For example, a sessioner might expect to be physically close to another sessioner but prefer to maintain a distance away from rowdy non-sessioners who might disrupt the session. Similarly, non-sessioners may prefer to maintain a distance from the sessioners or other non-sessioners, especially if they perceive the activities of others to be disruptive to their socialising. As such, while it is possible for these groups to coexist within the same space, each group would keep their interactions limited to their circle. Nevertheless, because of the pervasive nature of sound, the music produced by the sessioners cannot be completely ignored by those with the sensory capabilities to perceive it. This, therefore, means that it is possible for non-sessioners to participate with the music of the session to a very low degree.¹⁵

Some spaces may be smaller or have an unusual layout which may force sessioners and non-sessioners to be placed close to each other. Two notable spaces are the Royal Welsh Yacht Club and the Mountain Rangers Club. In the Royal Welsh Yacht Club, the sessions take place around the largest table in the relatively wide area of the space while non-sessioners are seated at the smaller tables close to the session zone. Because of the way the furniture is laid out in the room, the distances between non-sessioners and sessioners are inadvertently smaller compared to other spaces described above. The Mountain Rangers Club, on the other hand, has a rather unique layout where the furniture is arranged in linearly (see Figure 11 and Figure 12 above). This forces sessioners and non-sessioners to sit in an uninterrupted, long row. The distance between sessioner and non-sessioner in the middle of the row is understandably the smallest.

Sessioners tend to place themselves within personal and social distance of each other in shared spaces. Because of personal and cultural differences, there are many definitions of what

¹⁵ A more detailed discussion of different levels of participation can be found in Chapter 4.

constitutes as personal and social distance. Hall (1990) defines social distance in American society to be approximately between four to twelve feet (1.2 to 3.6 metres) between the interactors. On the other hand, Lawson (2001) offers a more subjective definition, noting that within social distances, the faces of the interactors can be clearly seen but the details of the face cannot be closely examined. Furthermore, conversations can be carried out at this distance at a normal volume in most circumstances (2001, p. 118). Being able to see each other and communicate easily facilitates the musicking that takes place in sessions.

Personal distance, on the other hand, represents the minimum acceptable distance that separates people in social settings, between one and a half to four feet (0.5 to 1.2 metres) away from the observer (Hall, 1990, pp. 119–120). Lawson (2001) notes that it is difficult to ignore others within this distance, and that another person's face at this distance fills one's foveal field of vision.¹⁶ While this is fairly close, Hall notes that this distance maintains an arms' length from one individual to another.

In my observations, I have noted that sessioners usually place themselves at a personal distance from the next individual regardless of how big the space is, and generally keep in social distance from each other. However, in bigger sessions where there are more participants or in sessions where peripheral seating is observed (see seating arrangements below, p. 59), sessioners may have no choice but to seat themselves in a way that they may be beyond the social distance of another sessioner on the other side of the space. An example can be seen in Figure 13 below where the flautist on the extreme left of the picture and the woman seated in the back row in the centre-right of the picture are beyond each other's social distances.

I have also seen interesting ways in which sessioners deliberately use distancing to form smaller groups. This is seen in a situation where less advanced sessioners form groups by deliberately choosing to maintain a personal distance with each other, whilst at the same time situating themselves further away than the rest of the group in that particular event.

¹⁶ This refers to the field directly in the centre of vision where clarity of vision is the highest, as opposed to periphery vision where visual clarity is ordinarily relatively lower.



Figure 13: In big sessions like this where there are more participants, some sessioners may be beyond the social distance of another individual across the room, but still maintain personal distances between one other.

This calls to question the notion of social distance in the framework provided by the field of proxemics. So far, researchers have offered pragmatic metrics of social distance based on personal and cultural differences (see above), but I believe social distances can be more fluid and context-sensitive than what is previously suggested based on my observations in the session.

In Figure 13 above, some of the individuals can be seen sitting beyond the social distance of another because of the large number of participants in this particular session. I did notice in these situations, sessioners would have conversations with those who were closer to them in terms of distance. I gathered that this is because it would be socially inappropriate to communicate by shouting across the room to another; if someone wanted to have a conversation with someone else, they would move closer to each other into their social, or even personal, spaces. However, at the more musical episodes, sessioners would play the tunes and participate collectively even if they are placed outside the boundaries of social distance.

Clearly, in this specific situation, sessioners are socialising at a distance greater than what is noted by Hall (1990) or Lawson (2001).¹⁷

Based on the observation above, I argue that in addition to personal and cultural differences, the notion of distance is also influenced by micro-situational differences. Social distances can expand and contract in any singular social event attended by people who share a common culture. In the session context, the micro-situations are the musical and conversational episodes of the session. When playing music, clearly the social distance is larger, seeing how people musick together even if they are situated relatively further away. However, in the conversational phase, the social distance shrinks and is closer to what is described by Lawson (2011). The way social distances can expand and contract in the session indicates that micro-situations can influence the notion of distance similarly to personal and cultural differences.

2.2.2 Personalisation of space

Another way that zoning is realised in session venues is the personalisation of the session space itself by sessioners for their benefit. Mehta and Bosson (2010) note that personalisation of space refers to the ‘act of modifying the physical environment and an expression of claiming territory, of caring for and nurturing the claimed territory’ (2010, 781). The phenomenon of spatial personalisation can be observed in both isolated and shared spaces.

In isolated spaces where sessioners are placed in a different room, they are free to move the furniture around in the room to make it more conducive for music-making and conversation. This may include taking chairs from other tables if there is not enough to go around, taking chairs from other rooms in the venue if the chairs provided in the session room are deemed unsuitable for session activities, or even moving tables and stacking them on top of each other to make more space. Interestingly, I had observed numerous times that no prior authorisation was sought from the owners of the establishment before moving the furniture around within isolated spaces. Figure 14 (p. 56) was taken during a session in the Boatyard Inn that had a larger attendance than usual. The extra sessioners were folk musicians from Ireland, elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and the Isle of Man, travelling through Bangor to attend a festival the following day on Anglesey. In order to accommodate the guest sessioners, the furniture was moved around so that everyone would be sitting in a big circle with a table in the middle. To do this, two tables from the dining area where the sessions regularly take place were pushed

¹⁷ A closer examination to how musicking can differ in conversational and musical episodes is offered in Chapter 4.2.

together to form one long table, and the chairs are placed around this table. Compare this with Figure 3 and Figure 4 where the furniture has not been moved significantly because of the smaller attendance.



Figure 14: Furniture has been moved around to accommodate a large session here in the Boatyard Inn.

Modifying the room as such is the most likely reason why non-sessioners may be uncomfortable to sit amongst them as it may be seen as an act of invading their territory, even if that was not the intention of the sessioners themselves. However, this scenario may be beneficial for some sessioners who may prefer the privacy afforded by isolated spaces. The uncertainty of the characters of those who may sit in and listen to the musicians be seen as a lack of territorial control, which, under normal circumstances outside of the session context, can lead to the perception of spatial insecurity.

Personalisation of space also occurs in shared spaces, as seen in Tafarn y Glôb above (see p. 40) where sessioners would take unoccupied stools from outside their space in the event where there are no available stools left in the session zone. However, because the room is occupied by both sessioners and non-sessioners, the level of personalisation is far more limited in these spaces compared to isolated spaces.

2.2.3 The sessioners' zone

Sessioners' zones, at the very least, have to have enough suitable chairs for everyone participating in the activity and somewhere to place their drinks, which almost always comes in the form of a table. The importance of having a place for drinks, however, diminishes if there is a high number of participants in the session. In bigger sessions such as the Not the Bangor festivals, some sessioners are seen placing their drinks on the floor near the foot of their chairs or a ledge nearby. This can be seen in Figure 13 (p. 54) where someone can be seen placing a drink on the floor on the right-hand side of the image.

Food is also a feature in some sessions, especially in locations where the owners encourage session activities in their establishment. They are provided to the sessioners at no charge and often come in the form of finger food such as chips and sandwiches. The food is served communally on a big plate that is placed in the middle of table within easy reach of those seated around it. In bigger sessions spanning across multiple tables, the sessioners would pass the plate around the room, and the establishment may even provide several plates of food.



Figure 15: A typical table used by sessioners

Some sessioners expect other fellow sessioners to also be aware of the space they are taking up, and not to occupy so much space that leads to the exclusion of other sessioners. In a discussion, one of the participants mentioned that certain instruments are ‘tricky’ in a session vis-à-vis the amount space they occupy (JE, personal communication, ~2019). JE has skills in several instruments, one of which is the handpan. However, because of the handpan’s limited nature, JE notes that one would need several pans propped up on individual stands to play traditional tunes effectively. While handpans are not particularly bulky instruments by themselves, setting up the instruments in such a manner would nonetheless take up a significant amount of space, discouraging JE to personally use handpans during sessions. This conversation has indicated two things: (1) some sessioners are aware to keep session zones as inclusive to other sessioners as possible, and (2) the amount of space taken up by any given instrument influences the choice of instrument to bring to the session in the first place.

Thinking about the occupation of space may be tricky for musicians who play multiple or large instruments. Tables are used to place instruments when not used at the moment by the musicians; this is seen in Figure 15 above where there is a fiddle, flute, and concertina on the table. Instruments could be placed there for several reasons: the musician could be playing another instrument, or they could be away at the bar or using the restrooms instead. In any case, putting instruments on the table takes away space for other things such as food and drink. This problem is especially apparent if the musician plays a large instrument such as the guitar or bouzouki, since putting their instruments on the table would prevent others from using the table surface. Leaning the instrument against the table or a wall is also not a desirable solution as it leaves the instrument in an unstable position.

That said, sessioners who do play these instruments have found a solution to this problem: the Pub Prop. This is a portable clamp that can be attached to pub tables; instruments with necks, such as fiddles and guitars can be secured to the table with this device. It also has a slot to allow fiddlers to hang their bows conveniently. Pub Props can be seen in use in sessions in Figure 7, Figure 9, Figure 20, and Figure 15. These devices are especially useful because they can be easily taken apart, thus taking up minimal space in the musicians’ instrument cases, and they take up less space than a floor stand would in a session. However, the Pub Prop is less useful in sessions spaces where there might not be a table close by to attach the device.



Figure 16: Close up photos of the pub prop. (Left) Pub prop attached to a table; (Right) Pub prop used to secure an instrument to the table

2.2.4 Seating arrangements

Throughout the research period, I have noted how sessioners always seem to seat themselves in particular patterns, depending on where the sessions take place. I have identified three different seating patterns, namely:

- 1) Concentric circular seating around a table, or a group of tables. Inner layers formed before outer layers
- 2) Concentric circular seating without a table in the middle. Inner layers are formed before outer layers
- 3) Perimetric seating, i.e., seating around the perimeter of the space. Outer layers are formed before inner layers

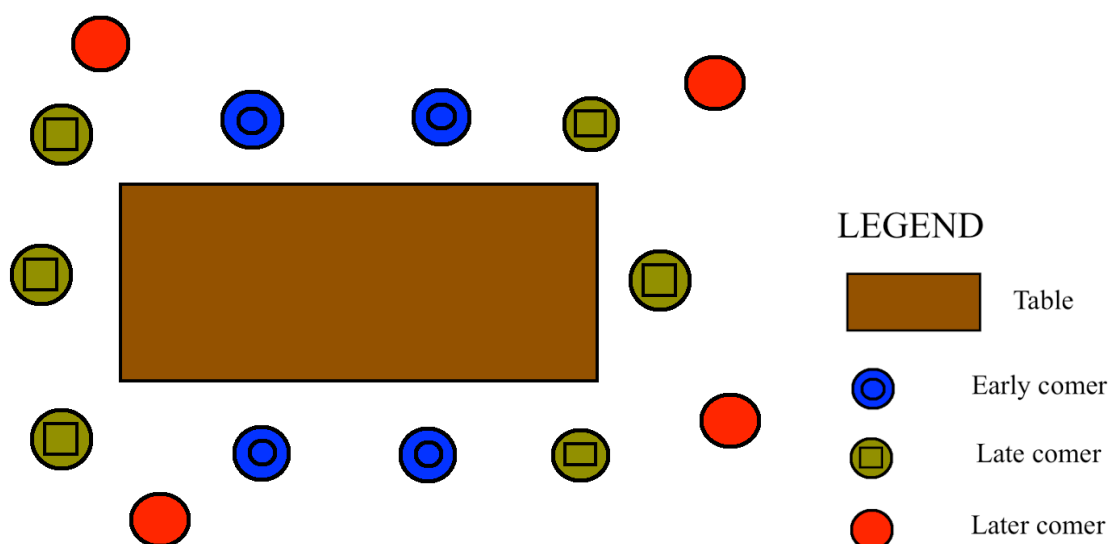


Figure 17: Hypothetical scenario showing circular seating with a table in the middle

The first pattern described above is the most common seating arrangement that is encountered in sessions along the Menai Strait. This can be seen in all the locations in Table 3 (p. 37) above except for the Boatyard Inn, the Newborough Arms, the Mountain Rangers Club, and most of the time in the Waverley Hotel dining room. The popularity of seating around a table can be attributed to its practicality: the tables provide a place for sessioners to conveniently place their drinks and instruments. If we were to examine the locations further, we can see that all the sessions that take place around a table also take place in shared spaces. Because of the open nature of these shared spaces, sessioners are likely to carve out their own zone of activity in the process of establishing an appropriate distance away from another social group. This need to territorialise explains why the arrangement of sitting around a table is so successful in shared spaces: sitting around a table creates a well-defined boundary between the session and non-session zones.

Figure 17 above depicts a hypothetical scenario in sessions with circular seating, based on my observations of how sessioners would set themselves around the table. I observed how sessioners filled up the available space in several sessions over the research period; the hypothetical scenario presented above is the most common pattern I have observed in this time. Early comers get to occupy seats that are already there at the table. In the case of the hypothetical scenario, the table has four chairs marked in blue with a circle in it. Those who come later would have to take free chairs or stools from other tables. If there is still space in at the table, they would usually seat themselves in those spaces. These are marked in green circles with a square in it in the hypothetical scenario. If there is no space at the table, those who come

much later would have to be seated behind this circle around the table, these are represented by the solid red circles above.

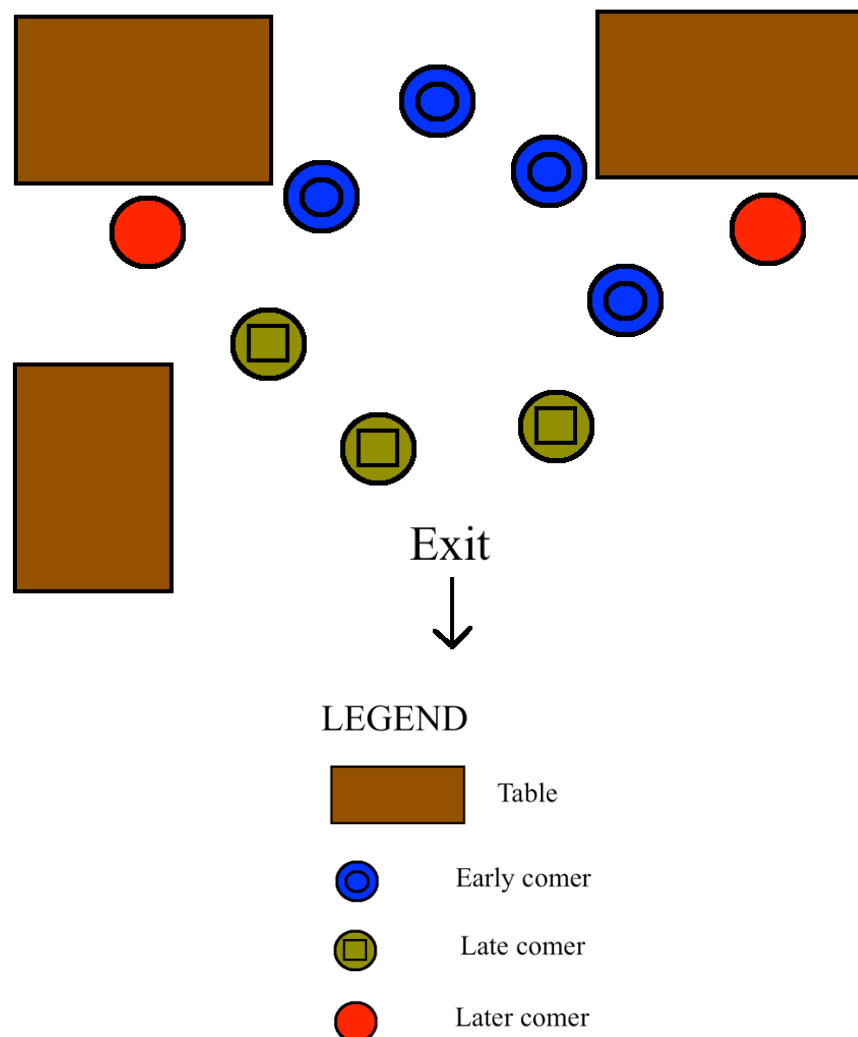


Figure 18: Hypothetical scenario showing circular seating without a table in the middle

The second category, seated in a circle with no table in the middle, is relatively rare. This seating arrangement only occurs in the Boatyard Inn, a space that is both isolated and shared at the same time. The reason for this lies in the pre-existing layout of the furniture in the room where the dining tables are arranged around the perimeter of the room but placed in such a way that their wide ends are pointing towards the middle of the room. It is possible that this manner of table placement somehow discourages a session to form around it. Occasionally, sessions in the Waverley hotel dining room take place in a circle without a table in the middle, but this is extremely rare and would only happen if the turnout that evening were low. In any case, for sessions where a circle is formed without a table in the middle, it is still crucial that there are

tables nearby for the sessioners to put their drinks and instruments on, preferably within an arms' reach.

Figure 18 depicts a hypothetical scenario where sessioners are seated in a circle without a table in the middle, derived from the same methods described previously. Early comers would normally seat themselves away from the exit to allow those who would come later to come into the circle; early comers are represented by the blue circle with another circle inside, while late comers who complete the circle are represented by green circles with a square inside. Once the circle is closed, those who would come even later would have to sit outside it; this is represented by the red circles above.

Of course, I have observed exceptions to the hypothetical scenarios presented in Figure 17 and Figure 18 above. During these sessions I noticed some individuals who would always opt to sit outside the inner circle, even when they have arrived on time and are able to seat themselves within this circle. Conversations with these individuals reveal that logistical and personal factors also play a part in how sessioners decide to place themselves. One sessioner remarked that because of the size of their instrument, sitting within the circle may take up too much space for others who may need it more. Furthermore, some sessioners prefer to stand up while playing, rather than sitting down in the chairs provided; those who prefer to do so would also place themselves behind the inner circle.

Nevertheless, the tendency to sit in circles echoes the observations made by Colin Hamilton (1999), who notes that musicians in the session tend to sit in closed circles. The tendency to sit in closed circles is the likely reason why tables with one end against the wall are never used for sessions, as seen in the Boatyard Inn because the wall would have prevented the circle to be closed. Additionally, Hamilton also notes that the leaders of the session are always seated in the middle of the group in the innermost circle; and if there was only one circle, they would often sit facing the non-musicians at the bar who may or may not be listening. Helen O'Shea (2007) remarks that this position would normally mean to be seated furthest away from the noise and movement of the bar yet still maintaining a full view of the bar and perhaps also the exit and the toilet, which she interprets as a position of power, advantage and comfort. The balance of isolation and apparent omniscience provided by this position interestingly ties in with the prospect-refuge theory developed by Jay Appleton (1996), which is based on the human tendency to prefer environments with unobstructed views, which represent prospect, and areas of retreat which represent refuge. Environments that have these elements are

perceived as being safe. It is highly possible that the arrangement of the session group may be influenced by a more innate instinct of territoriality and security, especially in spaces that are shared with non-sessioners, with the session leaders occupying the safest place in the session zone.

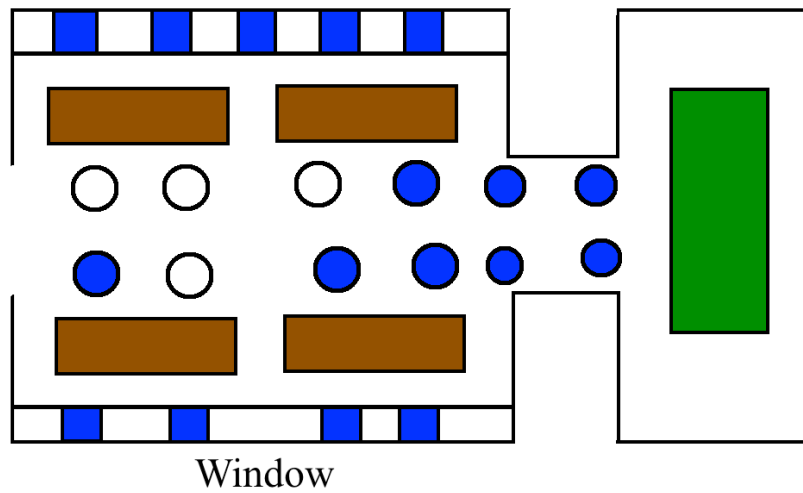
Of course, seating in closed circles also facilitates session activity. By sitting in a closed circle, sessioners can see each other and easily make eye contact, especially if they are within social or personal distance from each other. This in turn enables non-verbal communication to occur, which will be discussed later in the Interactions chapter. It is highly likely that the reason why circular seating is so common across the different sessions can be attributed to the ease of communication as a result of sitting in this arrangement. That said, not all seats are of equal desirability when sitting in concentric circles. As mentioned before, session leaders tend to sit in the inner circle because of the points discussed above. Being in the inner circle also has other benefits. For sessions with a table in the middle, being in the inner circle gives them the convenience of having food and drink placed within easy reach, which is why circular sitting around tables is the most popular seating arrangement found in sessions across the Menai Strait.

Even if a table is not available due to room layout and logistics, sessioners may end up sitting in a circle anyway. Based on my experience during the research period, it is easier to communicate in the inner circle compared to being outside of it. While not impossible, leading tunes can be difficult because of the challenge of establishing eye contact and making non-verbal cues from outside the inner circle. Outside of music-making itself, being placed behind others may make it difficult to participate in conversations. For these reasons, being in the inner circle may be more desirable for those who wish to participate in session activities more actively.

That said, I have observed some sessioners who would avoid sitting in the inner circle, even if they have arrived in time. Conversations with sessioners to do so have revealed several reasons behind avoiding the inner circle. One sessioner, EC, remarks that the size and shape of their instrument make it impossible to sit in the inner circle, especially if there is a table in the middle. Moreover, they prefer to play standing up, and therefore being in the inner circle might be disruptive as it might hinder eye contact with the rest of the sessioners sitting down. Another sessioner, SW, who I have observed regularly placing themselves outside the inner circle agreed with EC's viewpoint. As a fiddle player, SW doesn't have the logistical limitations that EC's instrument poses, but like EC, SW personally prefers to stand up while playing. In sum,

for these individuals, spaces *outside* the inner circle are perceived to be more desirable than spaces in it. Positioning themselves behind the inner circle in their circumstance creates a scenario that would benefit everyone; there would still be chairs in the inner circle for those who would prefer to sit in it, and everyone would be playing comfortably together at their own preferences. Standing up outside the inner circle as EC and SW do facilitates non-verbal communication as well, since their faces are positioned higher than those who are sitting down in the inner circle.

Returning to the three categories of seating arrangements, the final category is perimetric seating where the sessioners are seated along the perimeter of a given space. This seating arrangement can be found in the Newborough Arms session in Bontnewydd and the Mountain Rangers Club in Rhosgadfan. This seating arrangement is characterised by the lack of a defined centre, and that interactions in this space tend to go outward *towards* the perimeter of the space, rather than *into* the middle as observed by Hamilton (1999) above. In the case of the Bontnewydd sessions, the room has four tables in it, accompanied by two chairs and benches placed against the wall. These benches tend to be occupied before the chairs placed along the aisle, with the space towards the backroom to be the last to be occupied. The most esteemed member of the group who frequents this session, Gerallt, often occupies one of the corners nearest to the door on the outer ring. Even though it appears that there are concentric circles formed in this session, and therefore have a geographical centre, the way the seating works in this room effectively takes away the centrality of the geographical centre. The four tables themselves have their own centres, although this is subverted by the fact that the session zone spans beyond the zones created by the tables. Another element that contributes to the decentralisation of the room is the position that Gerallt occupies. His preferred location is in a corner quite far away from the geographical centre of the room, and those who are socially close to Gerallt would prefer to occupy the area as close to this spot as possible (Lynch, personal communication, ~2019). This will be explored in-depth in the following segment. The lack of a centre in this room is especially visible when the seats close to the geographical centre of the room becomes occupied: under normal circumstances where there is a clearly defined centre, one would find chairs pointing towards the middle of the room, but in the case of the Newborough Arms sessions, one would instead find that the chairs are faced in all manners of directions, and rarely towards the middle of the room (see Figure 20 below).



LEGEND






-  Table
-  Pool table
-  Occupied chair
-  Unoccupied chair
-  Occupied bench space

Figure 19: Layout of the session room in the Newborough Arms. Seating information is based on Figure 7, Figure 8, and Figure 20



Figure 20: Session room in the Newborough Arms. Note the lack of centre of the room as evidenced by how the chairs are pointing and how interactions tend to go away from the middle of the room

Perimetric seating is also observed in the Mountain Rangers Club. Here sessioners organise themselves in an L-shape following the layout of the furniture (see Figure 11 above, p. 47). This layout is influenced by the fact that the music produced by the session here also occasionally functions as an accompaniment to the dance event, and this seating arrangement allows for the musicians to have a clear view of the dancers' space (see the Village Hall Twmpath essay, Chapter 4). Like the Newborough Arms above, the lack of a centre is characterised by the fact that interactions always radiate outwards towards the perimeter, even during sets where dancing is involved.

2.2.5 Privileged spaces

In the previous segment, we briefly explored how some spaces are more desirable based on sitting position. This brings to mind O'Shea's (2007) account in an Irish session where she notes how it was customary in that session for new musicians to sit by the fire, while places in the inner circle are 'earned' through regular participation. While sessions along the Menai Strait do not have such explicit rules on seating, I have nonetheless observed how certain spaces can be privileged for some individuals.

In O'Shea's account, the desirability of seating places is not only based on practicality, but also on the established customs practised by those who participate in that session. In her case, the inner circle, as well as the stools set aside for regular musicians, are reserved for those who are held in higher regard in the session; newcomers are expected to avoid being in it, even if there are spaces available and empty stools. This phenomenon in O'Shea's account is not surprising, however, seeing that behaviour in a session is heavily influenced and controlled by musicians of higher status (C. Hamilton, 1999, pp. 345–346). None of the sessions in the Menai Strait has such strict policies on seating as the session described by O'Shea; nonetheless, I have seen how some spaces can be more prestigious than others.

I have observed some situations which suggest that sessioners allocate certain privileges to specific spots in their space. Some spaces, for instance, privilege certain positions for musicians or certain members of the session community. We have seen this in action in the Bontnewydd session, where the session organiser, Gerallt, always occupies a specific spot in the room (see the layout in Figure 19). This inadvertently privileges the area around this spot for those who are close to him; this area is usually occupied either by musicians who are close to him or members of his family who are not musicians. This scenario is an explicit example of how certain places, even within session spaces, can be privileged.

Conversations with sessioners suggest there is privileging of certain places for musicians over non-musicians. This is indicated in a conversation I had with Kieran when we were discussing the seating arrangements in the Newborough Arms sessions in Bontnewydd:

Kieran: Well, I came late last time, and N (Gerallt's wife) had a seat right beside the door, beside Gerallt, and she gave it up to me ... I felt rather guilty.

Me: How nice! The Bontnewydd session, you know, the way people fill up the room is very interesting because they always start off with the outside booths, and then it's going to be the chairs inside, and then it's going to be the back, which is quite counter-intuitive because, you know, you normally try to fill up the back first.

Kieran: Well, people want to be close to Gerallt (personal communication, ~2018).

This excerpt shows how prestige is placed upon the seats closest to Gerallt, seen in how Kieran feels people wanting to be seated closed to him. This excerpt also highlights how some have priority over others for certain seats in a session. In the situation Kieran described above, all the seats in the main room had been taken up; had N not given up her space, Kieran would have had to seat himself in the back room where it would have been harder to participate. This scene

described by Kieran reveals how musicians may be privileged over non-musicians in certain places. Even though N was not obliged to give up her space as a non-musician, it did suggest that she may have felt like the space was privileged for someone like Kieran in this case.

2.3 Sessions as third places

When observing the sessions, I realised that while the nature of the physical space is important to the session experience, meaningful interactions are just as productive in creating ‘place’. I believe that musicking in session produces third places.

Much like the idea of safe spaces for marginalised groups which are created through actions and signals more so than referring literally to physical space, sessions can also create mental spaces through interaction with each other. In this segment, I argue that social interactions in sessions, and by extension musicking, can produce third places. The original definition of third places is public spaces outside of work and home where people can socialise with friends, family, or even strangers (Oldenburg, 1999, pp. 14–15).

According to Oldenburg, third places are typically small, commercial establishments such as cafés, pubs, and shops, but may also occasionally include non-business spaces such as community centres. However, for them to be considered truly as third places, Oldenburg theorises that there are certain further characteristics that universally links them, which he argues transcends temporal and cultural boundaries. The following characteristics were identified: (1) the spaces need to be neutral grounds outside of the homes or workplaces of individuals; (2) the spaces must reduce everyone in it on the same social level; (3) conversation must be the main activity in those spaces; (4) they must be physically accessible and must accommodate people outside the hours in which they have the most responsibilities, i.e., at work or at home; (5) their character is heavily shaped by their regular clientele; (6) they must be plain enough to encourage the clientele to come as they are, which encourages social levelling; (7) the atmosphere must be playful; and (8) the spaces must be a ‘home away from home’ for those who take part in activities in it (Oldenburg, 1999). Purnell and Breede (2018) have taken this concept further, arguing that the definition of a third place should be more than its physical attributes and should include the interactions which happen within the place itself. In other words, they propose third places should also be examined by their *use* instead of their *purpose*. Applying the theory of third places in this manner allows us to examine specific events, and therefore the activities taking place within this context, as third places as well. In the following discussion, I will build upon Purnell’s and Breede’s work by examining how

Oldenburg's third place theory applies to musicking in sessions itself in addition to the physical spaces they take part in and provide a critical response to their study.

2.3.1 On neutrality

Because of their flexible nature, sessions can take place either in private or public settings. Indeed, in my experience, I have attended several sessions held in the homes of the members of the community and have even hosted private sessions myself. These sessions tend to be small and reflect the space which can be afforded by the hosts. However, these sessions are all one-off events that happen rarely and may celebrate special occasions. Regular sessions, on the other hand, are all held in public locations, as seen in Table 3. These locations fit closely to Oldenburg's definition of a neutral ground since they are outside the realms of the home and work where friends may engage with each other and are free to enter or depart the space at their own time (1999, pp. 23–24). I theorise that the neutral nature of the locations in Table 3 is responsible for the regularity of these sessions. Having a session in a neutral space eliminates any pressure on the individual member to host these events. Furthermore, on a more personal level, these neutral spaces allow for the separation of the individual's private and social lives. This means that private sessions have certain intimacies which may be lacking in regular sessions. This difference in intimacy may also be felt on other occasions: a birthday or holiday celebration, for instance, may have different implications if it were held at home as compared to it being celebrated in a public space. In public sessions, on the other hand, participants are free of any formalities or social expectations that accompany hosting or being guests.

Based on the points discussed above, it could be argued that some sessions do not fall neatly into Oldenburg's theory of third places. Because of the privacy of the setting in private sessions, these do not qualify as third places. However, these private sessions are few and far between compared to those that take place outside the home. Public sessions, on the other hand, would satisfy Oldenburg's requirement of being a neutral space.

2.3.2 On social levelling

Apart from the neutrality of the space, Oldenburg also notes that third places are inclusive in nature and function as a social leveller (Oldenburg, 1999). They are generally accessible to the public and do not have formal membership systems, which in turn create policies of exclusion. Inclusive spaces have the potential to remove barriers such as social class and rank, which would otherwise exist outside of them. Effectively, inclusive spaces reduce those who are in it on the same social level. The idea of inclusivity and social levelling is also coincidentally in

line with the political ideology shared by those from the folk music community, who Simon Keegan-Phipps notes generally identify with the liberal left on the political spectrum (Keegan-Phipps, 2017, p. 6).¹⁹

However, there are elements of exclusion in the practice of music-making in sessions that need to be addressed. Music-making often requires some investment on the musician's part. To contribute to the music-making portion of the session, musicians would need to invest money in order to acquire and maintain their instruments. On top of that, they would also need to invest time to learn the techniques relevant to their instruments and to learn the repertoire of tunes relevant to their session. Singers, who represent musicians who do not play instruments, also have to make a significant investment in their time collecting, learning, and in many cases, memorizing songs to share in the sessions. Furthermore, those who wish to meaningfully take part in sessions often must learn the intricacies of session etiquette and customs to avoid creating conflictive or awkward situations.²⁰ Therefore, those who actively take part in sessions would have to make significant investments to be part of what can be argued to be a group of niche interest.

Exclusive elements in sessions also manifest in the virtual sessions held in lieu of physical sessions during the restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. To take part in a virtual session, participants would need to enter a room code into the Zoom interface, which they would have received in an email blast. Those who are not part of the initial email blast may still join the session if one of the original recipients informs them of the session details and room code. Based on the organisational methods employed in this scenario, it is clear that the participants of virtual sessions are invitees. This in turn reveals the exclusive nature of the session community. The exclusive characteristics of a session discussed thus far can be problematic when considering sessions to be third places.

In his work discussing exclusion in community, Butchart (2010) unpacks the structures that exist within human groups, positing that the existence of a community is predicated on the exclusion of those who are not recognised as its members. In our world where individuals inherently have unique personalities, backgrounds and values, communities are simultaneously

¹⁹ In his article, Keegan-Phipps refers specifically to English musicians, but based on personal conversations with traditional musicians from along the Menai Strait, I have found that they generally fall on the same political spectrum as their English counterparts.

²⁰ An example of such a situation is recounted in MacKinnon (1994, p. 100), where a competent, classically-trained violinist managed to create an awkward atmosphere in the session by violating certain unspoken rules, resulting in them being 'frozen out' by the rest of the participants.

exclusive and inclusive in nature: it excludes those who may disturb its internal coherence and includes those who maintain it. Indeed, Purnell and Breede (2018) echo this sentiment, arguing that exclusion and limitations are necessary to create inclusion because over-inclusion would lead to disorganisation, causing the community to fail.

Despite the various elements of exclusion present in the session community discussed thus far, I argue that sessions should still be considered as third places; this is because they nonetheless represent a levelling ground for those in the community. Social and professional differences held by an individual outside the session do not apply in the session. When attending a session along the Menai Strait, it is possible to encounter individuals of various professions and backgrounds; examples of these include freelancers, doctors, students, farmers, writers, and professional musicians. While these backgrounds may be acknowledged in sessions, they are not central to the session experience. I have found that during sessions, there is an element of prestige in how the attendee participates in a session: those who take part in it with an understanding of session culture and etiquette are often held in higher regard compared to those who do not. An in-depth discussion of participation will be presented later in Chapter 4: Interaction.

This dynamic caused by the erosion of societal status has nonetheless produced new hierarchies within the session, (see section 4.1.1.2: Relationships, p. 155). However, the levelling element proposed by Oldenburg (1999, p. 23) has nevertheless been observed in sessions along the Menai Strait: those who are new to the session are often encouraged to share tunes or songs, regardless of their musical proficiency. This shows that there is always space for those attending the event to contribute to the session.

Even though music-making plays a defining role in sessions, it does not encompass everything that is session activity. Sessions are set apart from other, more formal forms of music-making because of the social aspect that is associated with it. If there are already enough musicians in the session to fulfil the collaborative music-making aspect of a session, it is then possible to take part in session activities without actively making music. This is reflected in a proportion of the session community along the Menai Strait who attend sessions regularly but are not musicians. This group, which I refer to as *non-musician sessioners* in this thesis, will be discussed at length in subsequent chapters. It can be argued that the presence of non-musicians in the session community suggests that musical skills are not a prerequisite for entry into the

community. The exclusionary aspects of music-making discussed above therefore do not represent formal requirements to take part in sessions.

Virtual sessions are slightly more problematic because of the ‘invitation-only’ nature of the event. However, it can be argued that this form of exclusion is not intended as it is logistically impossible to host and manage truly open online sessions that run smoothly. Writing from her experience hosting online singarounds, Hield (2020) warns of the difficulties and stress when faced with dealing with disruptive ‘gatecrashers’ as a result of providing the Zoom link publicly over social media. In order to avoid a similar phenomenon from happening in other singarounds, Hield recommends sharing the link in an email list. This experience with gatecrashers reflects prior analyses on the nuances and dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in a community discussed earlier (Butchart, 2010; Purnell & Breede, 2018).

Upon entry to the virtual session, however, elements of inclusion and social levelling can be seen. In the virtual Bangor Zoom sessions, participants are prompted by the host to share a tune or a song if they wish in a round-robin manner, which means each participant gets to share the same number of tunes in the session. While the session community itself has certain hierarchies associated with it (see p. 155) the virtual session is especially levelling in nature, since the medium forces the democratisation of space to share tunes to be apparent.

2.3.3 On conversation and play

The social levelling as seen in both virtual and physical sessions leads us to another characteristic of third places, namely, conversation. Oldenburg theorises a multileveled reading of conversation: on a superficial level, conversation is talking between several individuals (1999, p. 23). On a more profound level, Oldenburg associates conversation closely with play, comparing interesting conversations to a well-played ball game where all the players involved passes the ball effectively (1999, p. 29). This ties in with another characteristic of third places proposed by Oldenburg, namely a playful mood (Oldenburg, 1999) Oldenburg perceives multi-player games such as dominoes and cribbage to be particularly effective at stimulating conversation, especially about how their companions are playing the game and less so about the game itself. Two-player games such as backgammon on the other hand are not so effective at doing so (1999, p. 31).

Traditional music sessions are defined by the collaborative musicking that takes place in them. Without their musical aspect, sessions would be no different to a group of friends hanging out in a public establishment. The centralisation of music in the definition of a session may be

problematic in the discussion of sessions as third places since it is fundamentally at odds with Oldenburg's requirement that conversation is 'sine qua non'²¹ of the third place' (1999, p. 28). Nevertheless, it is worth analysing the extent of the role conversation plays in a session and how it contributes to the session experience.

Some from the session community consider talk to be an essential element for an enjoyable session. During one of the sessions, I had a conversation about talk in sessions with the Bangor session community, which revealed fascinating perspectives about it:

Michael: I find that... I've been to loads of sessions and ones that are the least enjoyable is the ones where people are just thrashing [i.e., churning out tunes], not talking to each other and just playing tunes, I don't see the point of turning up. If you don't have a chat, then even if you're talking about the weather, it's a waste of time. (*Geoff and Gerallt nod in agreement*).

Geoff: You're just as well practice your tunes and singing your songs at home by yourself... (personal communication, 4th August 2020).

Conversation as talk can exist throughout the session, especially for those who are not part of the session community but happen to be in the same space as the session. For those in the community, however, conversation primarily happens between sets of music. In other words, for this group of individuals, the flow of the session is made up of alternating episodes of music and talk. However, deeper connections between these two episodes can be made by applying Oldenburg's observations of the links between play and talk into the session scenario. In order to do so, the links between musicking and play shall be briefly explored.

Elements of play arise when making music together in a session have been observed.²² In this context, the manner in which individuals engage in music-making is different to more formal and organised contexts of music-making, such as in rehearsals or concerts. In the session context, not only do the session participants engage in the performativity of the music, but they also engage in the more ludic aspects of music-making. Some examples I have observed where play is engaged in session music include:

²¹ Sine qua non: *n.* a necessary condition without which something is not possible (Cambridge Dictionary)

²² Some languages, such as English, Greek, and Malay, even make the linguistic link between music and play; the verb associated with the act of making music in these languages is specifically to *play* music, where play also refers to an act that creates amusement. However, this is not a universal concept across all languages. A deeper analysis of the connection between these two elements has also been explored in the field of ludomusicology, although most of the research produced in this field focuses on the music of interactive media such as video games (Kamp, Summers, & Sweeney, 2016; Moseley, 2016; Van Elferen, 2020).

- Playing a tune faster than usual or slowly increasing the speed of the tune, generating a more excited response from both the musicians and non-musicians after the set.
- Purposefully changing a tune slightly, challenging other musicians to keep up with the modified version of a tune.
- Singing songs with funny or unexpected lyrics.

In these situations, the performance of the music is accompanied by elements that illicit ludic response. In other words, musicians who carry out the activities above may find it enjoyable and fun to do so. Making music in this manner often generates more conversation after the set has ended, usually about how the tune was played. In a way, this situation bears some parallels to Oldenburg's observation of a game of gin rummy, where he notes that the game invites conversation from both players and spectators alike, especially when interesting cards are dealt or when frustrating moves are made (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 29).

Songs are effective tools for play in the session because they can also function as commentary due to the presence of lyrics. Conversations in sessions are often topical in nature; current affairs of the time are often discussed during the session. At times, this has even influenced the music played during a session, occasionally inspiring original tunes and songs from the more creative members of the community. A notable example of an original song reflecting topical issues would be Geoff Hardman's song 'President Today', written originally in response to Donald Trump's presidential inauguration in 2017. Hardman has since added another verse in 2020 responding to the handling of the COVID-19 crisis in the United States of America (CW, 2020).²³ This song is essentially a critical commentary of current affairs but presented in a playful and parodic manner. The way this song is presented has always been successful at generating lively conversation and a playful mood whenever it is sung in sessions.

The points discussed above reveal the links between musicking and play, and how that generates conversation, thus demonstrating the extent of the role conversation plays in sessions. While sessions are defined by the presence of musicking, it is evident that conversation plays a vital role in shaping the overall session experience.

2.3.4 On accessibility and accommodation

The next point in the discussion of third places is accessibility and accommodation (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 32). Oldenburg considers a place accessible and accommodating if it is able to serve

²³ Lyrics of this song can be found in Appendix 4.

its users at any time of the day or evening outside of their homes and work (i.e., accessible) with the assurance that they will be in good company (i.e., accommodation). However, the issue of accessibility here can be potentially problematic as not all places would have the practical, financial, or legal capacity to be open for such long hours to be able to serve their customers at any time outside their homes or workplaces at any time of the day or evening. This problem would potentially be compounded by the fact that sessions themselves are specific events that happen once a week within a limited number of hours at most along the Menai Strait. Sessions, therefore, do not quite fit within the definitions of a third place based on Oldenburg's definition.

This issue was also raised in Purnell and Breede's (2018) analysis of conferences as third places. Like sessions, conferences also do not happen every day, but it is still a place where one can turn up alone and be in the company of friends if they turn up within the temporal boundaries in which the conference exists (2018, p. 518). Here, Purnell and Breede have offered a more pragmatic reading of accessibility by setting realistic constraints when analysing third places. In this discussion, I will be applying Purnell and Breede's rereading of accessibility, evaluating the accessibility of the session within the times when they are supposed to take place.

All the physical sessions in Table 1 are advertised online in various Facebook groups and pages. Except for the Tafarn y Glôb session, all of them also advertise the time at which the session starts. However, because of the informal environment that manifests in third places, there is a lack of policing when it comes to arriving on time. Musicians generally arrive around the time that has been advertised and musicians who only arrive when the session has gone into full swing would not suffer any serious consequences as they might in a more formal arrangement elsewhere. This is not unusual of general session culture around the world.²⁴ In his light-hearted guide to the Irish music session, Barry Foy (2008) observes that there 'is no such thing as punctuality in a session' (2008, p. 55). Hield (2008) notes that there is a 'general enthusiasm' for punctuality as implied by advertisements and conversations she has had whilst carrying out her fieldwork in the Sheffield folk singing scene, although she also notes that 'the extent of reference to [starting on time] suggests that it is not a common occurrence' there (Hield, 2008, p. 93). In contrast to arriving on time, many musicians do stay for as long as possible in sessions along the Menai Strait. Musicians tend to leave sessions when they

²⁴ Session culture here refers to sessions that take place around the world featuring traditional music of the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the Isle of Man.

absolutely have to; closing times in the respective venues directly dictate when the musicians are to leave the premises, but there are other reasons why the musicians leave when they do, such as catching the last bus home, for instance. That said, the musicians are technically free to leave whenever they want. This phenomenon links back to the concept of neutrality, where none of the individuals has any social obligations to host the event, to stay, or to leave, yet everyone feels comfortable to be there (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 22).

2.3.5 On regulars

The accessible and accommodating nature of third places produces regulars who patronise the place loyally. Oldenburg argues that regulars are crucial in building the atmosphere of the place and accepting new faces into it and can influence the interactions between individuals within the space. Furthermore, Oldenburg suggests that the influence of regulars may even supersede the welcome and given by the establishment, stating that the offerings made by the management, such as food, drink, and prices, are only secondary to constructing a third place (1999, p. 33). This implies that Oldenburg's definition of regulars in the discussion of third places extends beyond the expected implication of 'regulars', referring to frequent or loyal patronage. Regulars, in this context, refer to individuals who can form social bonds with other patrons who are in the same place. In their analysis of academic conferences as third places, Purnell and Breede read Oldenburg's definition to an extreme, regarding the social connections formed by these regulars to be the main indicator of their regularness instead of the frequency of their appearance in a place (Purnell & Breede, 2018, p. 518).²⁵

The concept of individuals being regulars has been observed in sessions. I argue that the influential members of the session community represent the group of regulars in the context of third places. These members may be influential in sessions for several reasons, which may include the following points:

- Having a wide range of tunes in their repertoire
- Being exceptionally proficient at their instrument(s) and displaying high levels of musicianship
- Being in the session community for a significant amount of time
- Having wide connections in the wider traditional music world
- Generally being good company during and outside of sessions

²⁵ 'Attendees can be established as "regulars" without that distinction being conditional on the frequency of attendance, as long as there are acquaintances present that welcome their return' (Purnell & Breede, 2018, p. 518).

Through the relationships that are built as a result of interacting with them, influential members are especially important in developing the session community in several ways. These include developing and expanding the repertoire, accepting new members into the community, or even determining where the sessions are to be held. The nature of these relationships will be discussed further in Chapter 4 (see p. 155).

2.3.6 On profile

One of the characteristics of third places in Oldenburg's theory is that they have low profiles (1999, p. 36). In terms of physical locations, Oldenburg equates low profiles with plainness, which he argues is instrumental in breaking down social barriers by removing elements of pretentiousness, thus linking back to the characteristic of social levelling discussed earlier. Purnell and Breede (2018) counter this view when taking into account of how the space is used. They suggest that the interactions between individuals in a luxurious space can still produce the low-profile characteristic of third places, provided that the quality of the interactions is able to take away those elements of luxury (2018, p. 518).

On a superficial level as events, sessions themselves may be seen as contrary to low-profile places. Making music in a public space inevitably attracts some attention from other customers who may be patronising the establishment, especially if that establishment does not ordinarily offer live music. The places where sessions happen may also contain elements contrary to Oldenburg's idea of plainness by having decorations of interest that would draw attention to the physical space. The Boatyard Inn, for example, is nautical-themed and the space decorated with items related to boating; the walls of the pub in the Black Boy Inn, on the other hand, is decorated with coasters and banknotes from all over the world. The attention-grabbing nature of music-making in a public space, coupled with some places where the space is decorated with items of interest, may disqualify sessions as third places by Oldenburg's criteria. However, elements of low profile can still be seen in sessions through closer examination. As Purnell and Breede have argued in the conclusion of their study, the use of space through interaction is more crucial than the spatial design when it comes to third space construction (2018, p. 521).

In the case of sessions, the music can attract attention; however, the spaces where the music-making happens do not suggest a place for performance. Sessioners are seated at tables like other customers in the establishment and not on stages. Even in places where sessioners and non-sessioners share a common space, there is an intangible boundary that separates the two groups, which means that interaction between sessioners and non-sessioners is minimal. Even

though there is music coming from the sessioner group which may garner interest to those outside the group, non-sessioners usually restrict their participation in the music in a very limited manner.²⁶ The interactions within the sessioner group are also instrumental in building a third place for the sessioners. These interactions focus inwards into the group, which means that conversations, musicking, and any other social activity that sessioners take part in would stay within the group. Interactions with non-sessioners are therefore secondary within the session context. The nature of the sessioners' interaction suggests how the place is decorated is not immediately relevant to the session experience.²⁷ The nautical theme in the Boatyard Inn, for instance, does not affect how the session is experienced; one can have a similar experience in a plainer space. Session activities are effective in stripping a venue of its excesses, such as decoration and luxury. It can therefore be argued that through breaking down these excesses, a low profile is produced within the context of the session.

2.3.7 On emulating home

The final characteristic of third places is a homely atmosphere which emulates the individuals' homes (1999, p. 38). Oldenburg employs a broad working definition of home: this is a place where the environment is 'congenial' (1999, p. 39). In other words, a third place should offer psychological security comparable to, or exceeding, the individuals' respective homes. Oldenburg cites David Seamon's work (1979) analysing the traits of homeness, stating that homes are: (1) places where individuals are rooted in and have a great deal of familiarity of the place itself and the people in it; (2) places that allow specific individuals to appropriate from it, i.e., extending privileges to a select group of people that would not be extended to the more transient individuals;²⁸ (3) places where the individual can restore themselves psychologically by winding down; (4) places where individuals are able to be themselves and be able to actively express their personalities, and (5) places that provide psychological warmth where individuals are friendly towards each other through expressing support and mutual concern for each other (Oldenburg, 1999, pp. 39–41).

In my experience, sessions do exhibit the traits outlined above. Sessions represent places of gathering for the community. In these gatherings, members socialise by taking part in common

²⁶ A more thorough discussion regarding the delimitation of space will be provided later in this chapter in the Zoning segment, and an analysis of participation mentioned here will be presented in the participation segment of Chapter 4.

²⁷ The physical layout of the space may influence sessions, however.

²⁸ An example of this would be the permission to use toilet facilities. In private homes, toilets are generally closed off to people outside the occupants or invited visitors to the home; in public establishments; toilets are generally reserved for staff and paying customers.

activities such as musicking, having conversations, or having drinks together. The communal and leisurely nature of sessions indicates that people who participate in them have a degree of familiarity with the others in the same event, eroding the need to be overly formal with each other. This satisfies several traits mentioned above. Sessions are places where individuals ‘go home’ to the community where they have built roots previously, and they are also places where members can figuratively let their hair down and be themselves. Occasionally in a session, I have also observed and participated in overt acts of collective support and concern, such as writing a few words of congratulations for a birthday card and expressing condolence in a sympathy card. Appropriation of the place is observed in sessions as well. In some venues where the space may be perceived to be less conducive for having sessions, I have observed and participated in moving the furniture around to improve the layout of the room for making music together. This usually involves moving chairs and tables around the room. A more extreme instance of appropriating a space for sessions would be to request the proprietor for any piped music to be turned off, thus prioritising the music played by the sessioners.

2.3.8 Discussion

Purnell and Breede (2018) propose that ‘it is in the interactions within places and not the places themselves that set the criteria of a third place’ (2018, 521). However, while my observations indicate that session activities do indeed create mental spaces through interactions within places, they also show that physical space does play a significant part in the production of a third place. My observations throughout this chapter have demonstrated the relationship an individual has with the space they occupy, and I argue that the act of musicking produces third places through this relationship. Sessioners do take physical place into account when assessing the suitability of session locations. We have also seen how they negotiate the spaces available to them to create a conducive environment for themselves to carry out their activities, which eventually led to the fulfilment of Oldenburg’s eight criteria for third places. The third place, therefore, is both physical and metaphysical; I thus argue that the relationship an individual has with physical spaces is just as relevant as the interactions in producing Third Place.

2.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explored the places in which sessions take place and how they are used. My observations have shown that in this context space and musicking have a close relationship. Sessioners use various strategies to assess the suitability of their spaces, and to personalise and even modify these spaces to facilitate the activities that take place in them. These strategies may produce new zones which create imaginary demarcations between the sessioner and non-

sessioner groups. One of the effects of zoning is also the production of hierarchies where certain locations within the sessioners' zone can be more desirable and prestigious than others. This notion of privileged spaces can even influence how people situate themselves physically in the session. In any case, this suggests that musical spaces in sessions are both physical and non-physical.

In some cases, places and traditions bear a close relationship to each other. Certain places have cultural associations which may encourage certain musical traditions to exist in their space. For example, Tafarn y Glôb has long been associated with the Welsh language in the area and thus may play a part in encouraging Welsh tunes to dominate.

The musical spaces are constructed through relationships between sessioners and their physical space. This is achieved through zoning strategies and personalisation of space by moving around furniture to facilitate musicking activities. Through this, I have also contributed to the discussion of the concept of Third Places. The close relationship between place and the interactions taking place within it as observed in this study calls to question Purnell and Breede's (2018) assertion that it is interactions and not the physical space itself that create third places. My observations indeed show that musicking, i.e. the interactive aspect, does play a role in creating Third Places, howeverm they also suggest that the spaces where they happen also play a part in producing Third Places.

Chapter 3: Session Communities

Now that the places in which sessions take place have been explored, we will now explore the people who make up the traditional music scene along the Menai Strait. An examination of the different communities mapped on to the locations discussed in the previous chapter will be provided. Further to that, I will also present the demographics of the session communities. This segment explores different characteristics of the people who take part in session activities, from general ones such as age and gender distributions to scene-specific ones such as instrument choice and musical experience. From there on, a selection of interesting trends based on region-specific data will be presented. The source data for this chapter is taken primarily from a survey carried out early in the research period, between November 2018 and January 2019, although the discussions presented here are also informed by my experiences as a participant both prior to and during the research period. This chapter aims to identify where various influences would come from and their impact on musical practice in sessions, as well as establishing the relationship between place and tradition by understanding those who take part in traditional music activities.

3.1 Session communities and their domains

During the research period, the traditional music scene on the Menai Strait was made up of seven session communities. Some of these sessions have since become defunct during the research period, resulting in the merging of several communities. Table 4 below shows the complete list of all the sessions that were between September 2017 and May 2021.

Session community	Session locations (between September 2017 and -)	When sessions happen
The Bangor Session	Waverley Hotel, Bangor (until February 2019) Boatyard Inn, Bangor (March 2019 – March 2020)	Friday evenings
	Zoom sessions, online (from April 2020 onwards)	Tuesday evenings
Tafarn y Glôb Session	Tafarn y Glôb, Bangor	Every other Monday evening
Bangor University Folk Society Sessions (defunct)	Patrick's Bar, Bangor	Thursday evenings
Bangor Welsh Session (defunct)	Waverley Hotel, Bangor	Second Monday evening of the month
Caernarfon Sessions	Black Boy Inn, Caernarfon	First Thursday evening of the month
	The Anglesey Arms, Caernarfon	Third Tuesday evening of the month
	Mountain Rangers Club, Rhosgadfan	First Tuesday evening of the month
Royal Welsh Yacht Club Folk Sessions	Royal Welsh Yacht Club, Caernarfon	First and third Monday of the month
Bontnewydd Sessions	Newborough Arms, Bontnewydd	Last Wednesday afternoon of the month

Table 4: List of sessions along the Menai Strait (session community names are my own)

The **Bangor Session** is the longest-running session in the list and the oldest community in this list; interviews with those who take part in it suggest that its origins even predate the Welsh traditional music revival in the 1970s. Because of its ties with Irish musicians, a large share of the music played in this session is Irish in nature. The session itself has moved many times in several locations in Bangor during its existence, most notably the Ship Launch, a former pub ran that used to be situated on Garth Road near the pier, which has since been converted for residential use. Other notable locations where the Bangor session has taken place include O'Shea's, also known as the King's Arms on the High Street; the Nelson in Hiracl; the Boatyard Inn near the pier; and the Waverley Hotel opposite the train station. At the start of the research, this session took place in the Waverley Hotel until the 1st of March 2019 when the group decided to move out of the venue due to dissatisfaction the group had had with the Waverley Hotel. The group settled on resuming its regular Friday sessions the week after in the Boatyard Inn. The choice of having sessions in this establishment was not random, however. The group had been having sessions in the Boatyard Inn before moving to the Waverley Hotel in 2015. The Bangor Sessions continued meeting up in the Boatyard Inn until March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, forcing the group to cease face-to-face sessions. Since then, the group has adapted to these conditions and continues their weekly meeting on Zoom to have online sessions.

The sessions in **Tafarn y Glôb** takes place on Mondays since it began in mid-October 2017. The location itself has a reputation which led it to be popular with Welsh speakers, both locals and students alike. As a result, the sessions that take place here also attract the Welsh-speaking members of the scene. That said, this session is also attended by a handful of non-Welsh speakers. The sessions here occur fortnightly although it went through a brief spell between January and April 2019 where musicians meet up every week instead. Welsh traditional tunes and songs dominate this session, although non-Welsh tunes are also occasionally heard and thoroughly welcomed. These sessions have taken a hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic, although members have expressed interest to resume these sessions when it would be safer to do so.

The **Bangor University Folk Society Session** was a weekly session organised by the university's folk society which ran up to June 2018. Those in this community were mostly students of Bangor University, although this session attracted local traditional musicians as well. Like the Bangor Session above, this session also has had many homes in the past: it took place in the Greek tavern in Upper Bangor until its closure in December 2016. It was then

moved to the Skerries Pub in Lower Bangor from January to June 2017, before moving back to Upper Bangor in Patrick's Bar in the academic year 2017/18. Interest in this session slowly waned in this time and finally became defunct in June 2018. Those who were still in this community by this time had joined the Tafarn y Glôb community, thus merging the two communities.

The **Caernarfon session** community is made up of three sessions: one in the Anglesey Arms, one in the Black Boy Inn and another in the Mountain Rangers Club, all of which began around 2012 (JH, personal communication, 2020) I have put these sessions together under one community because the attendees of these sessions are made up of the same group of sessioners. The sessions in the Anglesey Arms and the Black Boy Inn used to be the same session in Bontnewydd over a decade ago (MK, personal communication, ~ 2019), but when it moved to Caernarfon it was split into two session locations. Despite the split into two locations, the community has managed to maintain itself. This means that those who attend the Anglesey Arms sessions would also attend the Black Boy Inn sessions, and vice-versa.

The **Royal Welsh Yacht Club** session community is divided further into two groups: the Gypsy jazz group and the folk music group. The folk music session became defunct in March 2019, although the Gypsy jazz sessions were ongoing right up to the lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The folk session was particularly notable as it also had a well-advertised tune club on the third Monday of the month where session leader Neil Browning shared new tunes to those who attend it.

The **Bontnewydd** session community was founded by Gerallt Llewelyn, who was active in the Bangor session community. This session came into being in 2016 as sessions at night in Bangor became too inconvenient for Gerallt, which is why these sessions occur in the afternoon. This community is made up of members from both the Bangor session and the Caernarfon session sub-communities. Furthermore, because of Gerallt's close relations to musicians from beyond the Menai Strait region, some musicians from the Bray Singers' Circle based in Bray, County Wicklow, occasionally attended these sessions in Bontnewydd. This connection with the Bray Singers' Circle is shared with the larger Bangor session community, as both groups also attend the big session weekend in Ballyvaughan in February.²⁹

²⁹ A detailed ethnographical essay detailing this event can be found in the essay preceding this chapter.

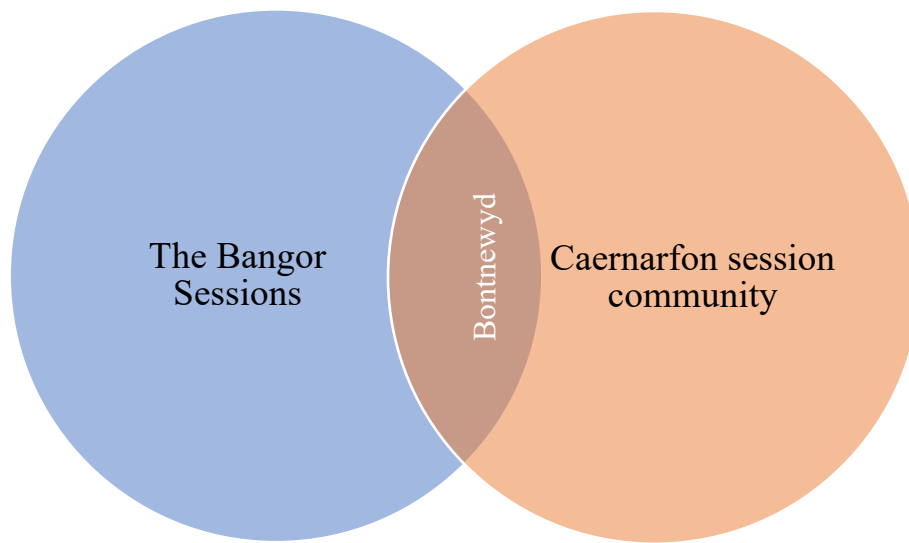


Figure 21: The Bontnewydd session community is made of sessioners from the Bangor sessions and the Caernarfon session communities

3.2 Demography of the session community

This segment will present the data collected from a survey that was held at the beginning of the research period in 2018. The survey enquires general demographical questions, namely the participants' age, identified gender, and place of residence. Additionally, the survey also asks for the participants' musical experience and skills. Because the survey is bilingual in English and Welsh, it also inadvertently shed light on which language the participants prefer to use.³⁰

³⁰ Details on how the survey was carried out can be found in the methodology, and a copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3.

3.2.1 General demographics

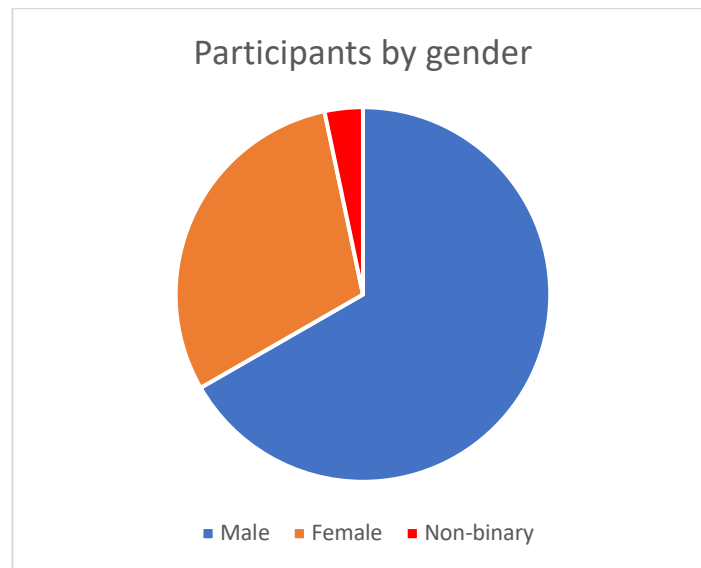


Figure 22: Gender split of respondents

Distribution of participants by age			
Age	n	%	
18-29	6	20.0	*****
30-39	1	3.30	*
40-49	2	6.70	**
50-59	4	13.3	****
60-69	12	40.0	*****
70-79	4	13.3	****
80 and above	1	3.30	*

Table 5: Age distribution of the session community of the Menai Strait. For visual purposes, each asterisk represents 1 respondent.

In terms of gender, the division of the responses is 66.7% male, 30.0% female and 3.33% non-binary. The highest divisions of the sample by age were at the 60-69 age group followed by the 18-29 group, at 60.0% and 40.0% of the responses respectively. As seen in Table 5 above, the survey shows that the distribution of participants by age is bimodal, which peaks significantly at the two age groups mentioned.

Language used to respond to the survey								
<i>Language/Age group</i>	<i>Overall</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60-69</i>	<i>70-79</i>	<i>≥80</i>
English	14	2	0	1	3	6	2	0
Welsh	13	4	1	1	1	5	1	0
English, but didn't realise there was a Welsh option	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	1

Table 6: Language used to respond to the survey

Language use is also reflected in the survey, where the respondents had the choice to either respond to the survey either in Welsh or English. Responses in Welsh were expected to come from two groups of people: (1) native Welsh speakers, and (2) Welsh L2 speakers who feel that they are competent enough to read and respond to the questionnaire in Welsh. 56.7% of the responses were in English, and the remaining 43.3% were in Welsh. However, due to an oversight I had committed early on in the research, three participants, or 10% of respondents had responded to the survey in English even though they would have preferred to have done it in Welsh. All the age groups suggest that the use of the English language is preferred except for the 18-29 age group where 66.7% of them preferred to respond to the survey in Welsh.

Geography and transport infrastructure also influence which sessions are attended. Table 7 and Table 8 below demonstrate how far the respondents have travelled to attend any given session. Table 7 reflects the numbers for sessions in Bangor, namely the Bangor Sessions, the Bangor Welsh Sessions, the Bangor University Folk Society Sessions and the sessions in the Glôb. Table 8, on the other hand, shows the numbers for sessions in Caernarfon, Bontnewydd, and Rhosgadfan.³¹ The 'boundaries crossed' columns in both tables refer to the number of boundaries a sessioner would have to pass through to attend the sessions. The following are definitions of the areas that are used in this research:

Anglesey **The area governed by the Isle of Anglesey County Council between 2017-2021.**

³¹ The data is presented as such because Caernarfon, Bontnewydd and Rhosgadfan are (1) situated on the western extreme of the Menai Strait, and (2) are relatively close to each other. Bangor, on the other hand, is relatively isolated from these places and is also situated on the easternmost extreme of the Menai Strait.

Arfon East	The area covered by the LL57 and LL56 postcodes, as well as the village of Abergwyngregyn. ³²
Arfon West	The area completely covered by the LL55 postcode, as well as LL54 postcodes not overlapping with the Dwyfor Meirionnydd area (see below). ³³
Conwy (County)	The area governed by the Conwy County Borough Council.
Dwyfor Meirionnydd	The area covered by the Westminster and Senedd constituency areas of Dwyfor Meirionnydd.

For context, Arfon East is bordered by Anglesey to the north, Arfon West to the west, and Conwy County to the east; while Arfon West is bordered by Arfon East to the east, and Dwyfor Meirionnydd to the west. A map showing clearly showing these boundary lines and area limits can be found in Appendix 5.

Where have participants travelled from to attend sessions in Arfon East?				
Area	<i>n</i>	%		Boundaries crossed
Anglesey	5	23.8	*****	1
Arfon East	8	38.1	*****	0
			*	
Arfon West	5	23.8	*****	1
Conwy (County)	2	9.5	**	1
Dwyfor Meirionnydd	1	4.8	*	2

Table 7: Arfon East session attendance

Where have participants travelled from to attend sessions in Arfon West?				
Area	<i>n</i>	%		Boundaries crossed

³² At the time of writing, the following electoral wards fall into this definition: Arllechwedd, Deiniol, Dewi, Garth, Gerlan, Glyder, Hendre, Hiracl, Marchog, Menai (Bangor), Ogwen, Pentir, Tregarth & Mynydd Llandygai, and Y Felinheli

³³ At the time of writing, the following electoral wards fall into this definition: Bontnewydd, Cadnant, Cwm-y-Glo, Deiniolen, Groeslon, Llanberis, Llanllyfni, Llanrug, Llanwnda, Menai (Caernarfon), Peblig, Penisarwaun, Seiont, Tal-y-Sarn, and Waunfawr

Anglesey	2	12.5	**	2
Arfon East	3	18.8	***	1
Arfon West	5	31.3	*****	0
Conwy (County)	0	0		2
Dwyfor	6	37.5	*****	1
Meirionnydd				

Table 8: Arfon West session attendance

As seen in both tables above, there is a general inverse relationship between the number of people from a certain area and the number of boundaries they must cross in order to get to the session. As the number of boundaries that are crossed increases, the number of participants for that session decreases. This suggests that there is an element of localness within the Arfon session culture. A notable exception in the data is evident in Table 8 above, where there is a higher number of sessioners from a neighbouring region (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) compared to the number of sessioners based in Arfon West itself. It can be said, however, that it is generally unlikely for sessioners to cross two regional boundaries in order to get to a session, unless there is a motivation for them to do so. Conversations with sessioners reveal one instance of one such motivation is to want to remain in contact with friends who may attend sessions from further afield. A closer examination and discussion of the differences and similarities of these regions will be presented in the regional trends segment below (p. 104).

3.2.2 Musical experience

Music experience was also examined in the survey and was divided into traditional music experience and formal music experience. Traditional music experience includes, but is not limited to, any activities such as learning tunes and songs aurally/orally where relevant or taking part in traditional musical processes such as sessions or any other cultural equivalent to a session. The results indicate that the general traditional music community along the Menai Strait is highly experienced in traditional music, with 70% of the responses indicating more than two decades of traditional music experience, and with virtually everyone at the age of 60 and above having more than 21 years of experience. Among the younger members of the community, the experience of traditional music is understandably lower.

Traditional music experience by age group								
Length	<i>Overall</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60-69</i>	<i>70-79</i>	<i>≥80</i>
Less than 5 years	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
5-10 years	6	4	0	1	1	0	0	0
11-15 years	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
16-20 years	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
> 20 years	21	0	0	1	3	12	4	1

Table 9: Traditional Music Experience by age group

Formal music experience, on the other hand, refers to the experience with music in organised contexts. These contexts may include, but are not limited to, music lessons received outside of school, taking part in competitions, or participating in a community orchestra or choir. The distribution pattern here is similar to that of traditional music experience above (see Table 9 above), with a majority of the respondents having more than 21 years of experience and lower numbers for all other responses. However, a closer look at the data reveals an interesting pattern in the sample of those of the ages of 50 and above: for every respondent who is experienced in formal music, i.e., more than 21 years, there is nearly one other respondent who has either none or little experience in formal music in relation to their age, i.e., 10 years and less.

Formal music experience by age group								
Length	<i>Overall</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60-69</i>	<i>70-79</i>	<i>≥80</i>
None	4	0	0	0	0	3	1	0
Less than 5 years	5	1	0	0	1	2	1	0
5-10 years	3	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
11-15 years	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
16-20 years	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
More than 21 years	11	0	0	0	3	6	2	0
Undeclared	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 10: Formal music experience by age group

3.2.3 Instrumental and vocal skills

One of the questions in the survey asked for the participants to fill in their main instruments and any secondary instruments that they have any skills with, including vocal skills. The data shows that having skills in more than one instrument is the norm across the traditional music scene of the Menai Strait. In fact, out of the thirty respondents, only two has declared skills in only one instrument. Multi-instrumentalism is especially prominent within the 18-29 age group, where 5 out of 6 respondents declared skills in three different instruments, while the other remaining respondent declared skills in four instruments.

Skills in number of instruments by age group									
No.	of	Overall	18-29	30-	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	≥80
instruments				39					
1		2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
2		10	0	0	0	2	4	3	1
3		11	5	0	1	0	5	0	0
4		5	1	0	0	1	3	0	0
5		1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
6		1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Table 11: Skills in number of instruments by age group

There is a wide variety of instruments that are being played by those in the scene, shown below in Table 12. The survey records a total of 26 different instruments that are played by the respondents, fifteen of which are considered to be ‘main’ instruments. Some of these instruments either do not feature in sessions or are used in a very limited context. Rarely used instruments are shaded blue in the table below. These refer to instruments that are only seen once in a while in sessions and are all secondary instruments. Instruments that are never used during the observation period, on the other hand, are shaded in orange in the table below.

Instrument	Main	Secondary	Total	Instrument	Main	Secondary	Total
Banjo	0	1	1	Harp	1	1	2
Bass Guitar*	0	1	1	Mandola	0	2	2
Bodhrán	2	2	4	Mandolin	1	2	3
Bouzouki	0	3	3	Melodeon	1	2	3
Cavaquinho	0	1	1	Nyckelharpa	1	0	1
Cello	2	0	2	Piano	2	1	3
Concertina	4	2	6	Piano Accordion	1	0	1
Fiddle/Violin	2	4	6	Recorder	0	2	2
Flute	2	0	2	Triangle*	0	1	1
Frog	0	1	1	Uilleann Pipes	1	1	2
Guitar	6	9	15	Ukulele	0	1	1
Handpan	0	1	1	Voice	5	12	17
Harmonica	0	2	2	Whistle	2	3	5

Table 12: List of instruments and how many play them. Instruments in blue are very rarely heard in sessions, while those in orange are never heard in sessions.

As seen in Table 12 above, the number of respondents reporting any vocal skills is higher than any other instrumental skills. While this reflects the popularity of singing in some sessions such as the ones in the Newborough Arms in Bontnewydd and Tafarn y Glôb in Bangor, none of the sessions along the Menai Strait are specifically song-only or instrumental-only sessions.³⁴ Guitars are also popular as both main and secondary instruments as seen above, although in any given session it would be uncommon to see such a large number of guitars at the same time. Guitars are primarily used as accompanying instruments, and the techniques used range from strumming chords to fingerpicking arpeggios and countermelodies. Playing melodies on the guitar, on the other hand, is uncommon and limited to the more advanced guitar players. Additionally, according to the survey, just under half of those who play the guitar also sing, with six participants declaring having both guitar and vocal skills out of a total of fifteen guitarists. However, in reality, the proportion of guitarists who sing is actually higher than is suggested in the survey, as I have observed some participants who sing in sessions while

* Rarely heard in folk sessions but used a lot more in Gypsy jazz sessions.

³⁴ A detailed breakdown of what kind of music is played in each session community will be given in Chapter 5.

accompanying themselves on the guitar, yet in the survey, they have only declared guitar skills without reporting any vocal skills.

The most popular family of melody instruments belongs to the squeezebox family, with 10 out of 30 respondents having some skills in either the concertina, melodeon, or piano accordion. In terms of individual melodic instruments, the fiddle and the concertina are the most popular with six respondents each reporting to have skills in playing them. Interestingly, five out of the six respondents who declare having skills with the concertina are part of The Bangor Session community, while four out of the six respondents who report having skills with the fiddle or violin are part of the Glôb community. Conversely, of the eight participants in The Bangor Session community, only one participant reported having skills in the fiddle or violin, while none of the participants from the Glôb community reported skills with the concertina (see full raw results in the appendix).

Some of the instruments in Table 12 above are either rarely or never heard in sessions. The rarely heard instruments are the bass guitar, the triangle, and the ukulele. While the bass guitar and triangle are played often in Gypsy jazz sessions, where the bass guitar even plays a central role in the music-making process, these instruments are seldom featured in the more traditional music sessions. The ukulele is used in an extremely limited context: only one participant reported having skills in the ukulele and would only ever use it as an accompanying instrument when singing a specific song. On the other hand, the instruments that are never heard in sessions are the frog, handpan, piano, and recorder. The frog in this survey refers to a wooden percussion instrument shaped like a frog with ridges on its back. This instrument is played by running a wooden stick down the ridges, creating a sound that is reminiscent of a croaking frog. The handpan, on the other hand, refers to a percussion instrument made of metal and inspired by the steelpanns of Trinidad and Tobago.³⁵

3.3 Discussion

3.3.1 Participation across gender and age groups

The survey has revealed that in terms of population, men dominate the session with two-thirds of the sample identifying as male. This phenomenon is not isolated, however. There is much discussion currently surrounding the issue of gender imbalance in the folk and traditional music

³⁵ There is some controversy behind the naming of this instrument, which has led its inventors to discourage people from using the term ‘handpan’ when it comes to describing the instrument (Rohner & Schärer, 2009). I have used the term ‘handpan’ here because this was how the participant referred to the instrument in their survey form.

world in the professional sense, as seen in how female performers face an uneven playing field when it comes to getting booked for professional gigs.³⁶ Even though sessions are not professional settings, and do not require participants to be professional, it is notable that these situations bear some parallels. It suggests that there may be certain underlying factors which discourage, or even bar, the participation of individuals who do not identify as men in sessions in a way that men may not face. Further research is needed to uncover these factors, as well as how these gender identities shape the musickal experiences within a session.

In terms of age, the survey revealed that those within the 60-69 age group formed the largest proportion of the scene, followed by the 18-29 age group. Table 5 showed that the participants were bimodally and leptokurtically distributed. This clearly indicates that session activities are especially popular with the two groups mentioned above. This raises two questions:

- (a) Why do sessions particularly attract those within these age groups?
- (b) Why is there a dip between the 30-59 age range?

In order to approach these questions, the data will be examined and compared with data from outside this survey to see if they are part of a bigger trend. The peaks at the 18-29 and 60-69 age ranges suggest two possibilities: (1) Session activities are not particularly popular amongst outside of these age groups at the time of writing; and/or (2) There was a sudden drop of interest in folk music at some point in time.

If the stark difference between the 60-69 age group and the rest of the age groups was caused by a sudden loss of interest, this would suggest that the popularity of Menai Strait's traditional music scene has always been consistent with the popularity of folk music elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Referring to the results of a survey of the folk club audience throughout the UK he carried out in the winter of 1986-7, MacKinnon (1994) notes that nearly half of his sample were people between the ages of 30 and 39, who would have been in their sixties today, therefore corresponding to the spike in participants along the Menai Strait who belong to the 60-69 age group today.

Additionally, McKinnon also notes that that folk clubs at the time of his survey existed as a youth culture, continuing to attract teenage audiences up to the early 1980s. However, he found a noticeable 'rupture' in his data, stating that the teenagers had 'vanished' from folk clubs (1994, p. 43). Since the generation that made up the majority of MacKinnon's survey matches

³⁶ For example, see Molleson (2017) and Newton (2019).

up with that of my survey, and the decline that MacKinnon had observed is reflected in my findings as well, this suggests that the bulge is moving down the population pyramid, rather than remaining static. This is further supported in the survey I carried out, seeing how all the participants in this age group all have a comparable amount of traditional musical experience. Of course, it is worth noting that MacKinnon's study pertains to the entire UK, whereas mine is limited to the Menai Strait, and therefore there may be other factors worth looking into outside the scope of this research.

On the other hand, the spike in the range of the 18-29 age group is particularly intriguing as it suggests that session activities are beginning to appeal to a younger age group. Indeed, during a survey carried out by trac Cymru during its *Gwerin Gwallgo* and *trac Youth Ensemble* programmes,³⁷ it was found that in both groups, most of the participants would like to take part in more sessions and singarounds than they currently did at the time of taking the survey. Furthermore, those who are already in the traditional music scene highly value the elements that are present in sessions, such as making music together, learning by ear, and being creative. However, despite the positive disposition towards music-making in session contexts, the majority of the participants from both groups did not know if there were sessions in their own local area; on top of that, some of the participants report a lack of time or confidence which prevents them from taking part in sessions in the first place (Watt, 2018). It must be noted, however, that these programmes organised by trac Cymru attract participants from all over Wales, and the results from their survey are therefore generalisations on a national level. Moreover, Watt's (2018) report only reflects the opinions of youths who take part in traditional music activities in their own areas *and* the programmes run by trac; the younger participants from the Menai Strait do not necessarily attend those programmes. As such, Watt's report does not raise any specific issues with traditional music participation amongst the youth on a local community level. Nevertheless, the survey is still valuable because it does suggest that there are youths who are already in the traditional music scene who are keen to continue practising their art in their own communities in Wales.

Returning to the survey carried out for this research, it does not show long-term trends. However, it is still possible to gain an insight into this issue by comparing this with participation numbers in workshops. Between 2008 and 2017, trac Cymru organised the annual

³⁷ *Gwerin Gwallgo* is a residential programme for youths aged 11-18 which offers workshops on traditional instrumental and vocal music, as well as traditional dance. The *trac Youth Ensemble* (known onstage as AVANC) is a follow-up programme for young adults aged 18-25 which aims to train them to be performers of a high calibre.

residential course Big Experiment / Arbrawf Mawr (BEAM): these were three-day courses dedicated to folk music and dancing catered to those who are interested in these arts. The event aimed to be inclusive in nature; it had classes dedicated to practitioners of all levels, and additionally, participants could also attend workshops dedicated to a specific element within the context of folk music and dance. Because of this, during its run, BEAM had managed to bring together the practitioners of traditional music and dance from all over Wales. While not all those who do take part in traditional music activities in Wales attend BEAM, I nonetheless still consider participation at BEAM to be a good indicator of traditional music participation in general in the country.

Between its inception in 2008 and its hiatus in 2017, BEAM saw an increase in the number of participants. This suggests an increase in general interest in traditional music activities. The attendance numbers to Gwerin Gwallgo and Gwerin Iau also indicates a sustained interest in these activities among the young, which reflects the findings from the survey in Watt's report (2018, pp. 20–21). It can be argued that the overall increase in interest in these activities may also be an indication of increased participation in traditional music activities over the course of ten years.

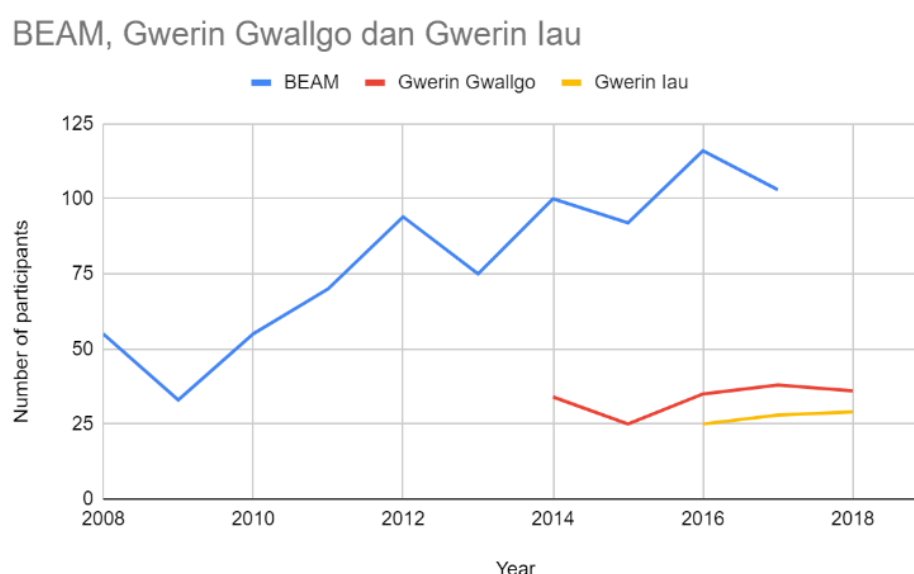


Figure 23: Attendance at the various trac events

These patterns reveal interesting implications on the music made in local sessions along the Menai Strait. Due to the activities provided by artistic bodies like trac, those who are interested in acquiring traditional music skills today have a choice to build their foundations based on Welsh music and culture. This is an opportunity that would not have been available to those

who have started out before the founding of these bodies. This phenomenon suggests that younger musicians would have had more exposure to Welsh music than older musicians. This leaves interesting effects in the actual music produced, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

3.3.2 Language use

The bilingual nature of the questionnaire has indirectly provided further insight into the usage of Welsh within the scene. When adjusted for the oversight mentioned in p.88, the results reveal that 53.4% of the respondents preferred to respond to the survey in Welsh, while the remaining 46.6% of the respondents did so in English. From my observations in sessions, all the Welsh speakers in the session scene have competent skills in English, which means to say that the scene is only partly bilingual in the context of Welsh and English.³⁸ However, if we were to break this data down by looking at the individual age groups, we would see that the use of Welsh to respond to the survey is either less or on-par with the use of English,³⁹ with the exception of the 18-29 age group where a majority of the responses are in Welsh. Taking this into account, together with the fact that those from the 18-29 age group form the second largest age group in the survey, the results suggest that the session scene has recently attracted a younger, Welsh-speaking group of musicians. However, this does not necessarily indicate a growing interest among those from this age group in session activities because the research period is constrained to a very limited amount of time, but this does indicate a momentary trend.

Language use has implications for the session experience itself. In sessions with higher concentrations of younger participants, the dominant language used in these sessions would be Welsh. According to my observations, participants would use the Welsh language to converse about the music itself or about other topics, and Welsh learners would also use the opportunity to practice the language in this situation. English would play a minor role in these situations and would be used for communicating specifically to those who may not be confident in or do not have knowledge of Welsh. Participants would generally switch back to Welsh rather than sticking to English for the rest of the session. On the other hand, sessions with older participants tend to be conducted in English. Welsh plays a minor role in these events, often existing in specific conversations between two Welsh speakers or as song lyrics. Because of

³⁸ A breakdown of how these statistics compare with the percentage of Welsh speakers in the area can be found in Table 16 (p. 22) below.

³⁹ After correction of oversight.

how English dominates in these sessions, Welsh learners may find less opportunity to practice their language skills here.

3.3.3 Travelling

Each session community in Table 4 is made up of a specific set of sessioners. The results of the survey suggest that one of the factors influencing this is the distance between the session location and where the sessioners live. In fact, in any given session, it was found that the majority of the sessioners would be based in the same area, as seen in Table 7 and Table 8. As the number of boundaries between the session and where the sessioner is based in increases, the likelihood of the sessioner attending that session decreases. This is especially significant as it means that there would be elements in one session zone that would be absent in the other. For example, tunes that are popular with those from Dwyfor Meirionnydd might also be played in sessions in neighbouring Arfon West, given the overlap between the traditional music communities of the Menai Strait and of the Llŷn peninsula. However, these same tunes might be unknown in sessions in Bangor because travelling to Bangor might be too far. Conversely, tunes that are played by sessioners from Conwy County may be played in Bangor, but might not be so in Arfon West sessions.

The element of localness also has interesting implications for the diverse nature of the musical landscape in the area. Even though there are sessioners who do cross more boundaries to attend sessions further afield, contact between the two areas of Arfon East and West is relatively low. Reduced contact generally has a preserving effect and creates residual zones where diverse elements are likely to flourish.⁴⁰ In other words, the local nature of these sessions may contribute to the multiplicitous nature of the traditional music scene of the area.

3.3.4 Musical experience

The survey also attempted to capture data on the musical experience of the participants, both in traditional and formal contexts. Before delving into the discussion, however, the limitations of the survey should be addressed. Because a survey is transient, i.e., only taking place in the

⁴⁰ I borrow the term ‘residual zone’ from the field of linguistics, specifically from the work of Johanna Nichols (1992). This used to refer only to mountainous, hard-to-access regions like the Caucasus mountains where linguists have noted to be hotbeds of great linguistic diversity over a relatively small area, although Andresen and Carter (2016) have expanded the definition further, identifying urban centres as new residual zones because of colonialism and globalisation. This is in contrast with ‘spread zones’ where languages tend to be less diverse in relatively flatter areas (Nichols, 1992), or in specific social contexts like business and commerce (Andresen and Carter, 2016).

very instance where the data is filled in by the participants, it cannot effectively capture changes taking place in the scene. As such, it fails to take two things into account. The first is human movement in and out of the area. On one hand, the participants could have begun taking part in music activities outside of the Menai Strait; on the other hand, the survey would not have recorded those who did begin taking part in them in the Menai Strait, but have moved elsewhere and continued participating in those activities in wherever they have moved. The second limitation is that the results captured are cumulative in nature and fails to represent when exactly these activities were carried out. For instance, a participant who has declared 10 years of music experience could have (a) spent those ten years in the past and have not taken part in any music activities since then; (b) spent those ten years in small segments with breaks in between, or (c) been continuously taking part in music activities for the past ten years.

According to the results of the survey, the experience with music in a traditional context is directly proportional to the age of the participants; older participants consistently report having more years of traditional music experience, whereas younger participants report having less. This clearly implies that the likelihood of entering the traditional music scene along the Menai Strait diminishes as the person ages. If we were to examine the results of the older participants while bearing the above limitations in mind, we can formulate two different scenarios based on contrasting assumptions: either (1) older sessioners began taking part in traditional music activities in their earlier years and have continued taking part in them all their lives, or (2) the survey has only managed to record the number of older participants who have not lost interest in traditional music activities and have not moved away from the Menai Strait.

The survey does not show any proportionality between the amount of formal music experience and the participants' age, as is the case of traditional music experience. As seen in Table 10 above, 10 out of the 21 participants of the age of 50 and above have 10 years of formal music or less, including four participants declaring no formal music experience whatsoever. On the other hand, the remaining 11 participants from the same age groups have declared more than 20 years of formal music. As for the younger age groups, the results show a more even spread across formal music experience compared to that of traditional music; for instance, in the 18-29 age group, four out of six respondents declared 5-10 years of traditional music, which is a clearer majority compared to that with formal music experience, where the maximum of the data was two out of six participants declaring 16-20 years of formal music. Overall, these results suggest that most of the participants are bimusical and are able to move from the traditional music sphere to formal music sphere and vice-versa. However, on closer inspection

of the two data sets, it is apparent that participation in traditional music activities does not necessarily correlate with formal music activities, especially in the older age groups. Future research will be needed to examine this further.

In any case, musical experience may relate to participation and access to session activities. Generally speaking, sessioners are experienced in traditional music in relation to their age group. Potentially, this may create mental barriers for newer, less experienced individuals to gain access or to actively take part in sessions. All the sessions I have observed for this research have adopted an open policy that welcomes newcomers to take part in their sessions in all their advertisements. However, I have observed how individuals with less experience play a more background role in sessions and not participate as actively as the others.

Experience can also influence the type of music that is played in sessions. My observations suggest that exposure to certain musical traditions earlier in an individual's journey can influence the interests of the individual, and in turn, influence their personal repertoire. The issue of musical exposure and repertoire expansion will be explored further in Chapter 5.

3.3.5 Multi-instrumentalism and use of instruments

The results from the survey indicate that multi-instrumentalism is normal in the scene, where 93% of the respondents reported having skills in more than one instrument, including vocal skills. This does not mean, however, that changing instruments while the session is in progress is a particularly common phenomenon; this is mostly limited to singers who would swap from their instruments in instrumental sets to their voice in songs. Some of the more multi-instrumental participants have 'assigned' certain tunes or sets with certain instruments, usually because they feel more confident playing those tunes with those specific instruments. Other than these situations, most participants would stick to one instrument, usually their main instrument, during the session.

The diversity of instruments used in sessions along the Menai Strait reflect the influences that local traditional music has received over the years, especially from the Irish music tradition. Instruments that are a direct result of this tradition include the cittern family such as the mandolin and bouzouki, the bodhrán, the banjo, the whistle, and the uilleann pipes. Some of these instruments entered Welsh traditional music through popular Welsh folk bands in the seventies and eighties, building on the surge of popularity in Irish traditional music at the time. Those from the squeezebox family entered the local music scene through its associations with dance music especially from England (Rees, 2007, pp. 309–310). Interestingly, Rees noted

that, in the context of recorded traditional music, the use of free-reed instruments is fairly rare and that the most widely used squeezebox instrument from the 1950s was the piano accordion. However, the results from the survey show that the situation is completely different in the session scene in the Menai Strait today: the concertina is on par with the fiddle for being the most popular melody instrument, and the piano accordion is only played by one person, in stark contrast to Rees' (2007) analysis mentioned above. These differences in instrumentation indicate that recorded music may not necessarily reflect the music that is played in the sessions along the Menai Strait, even though they may fall under the same regional category of Welsh traditional music.

The survey also shows that there are instruments that are used in sessions along the Menai Strait which are not ordinarily used in sessions elsewhere. These include the harp, the cello, the cavaquinho and the nyckelharpa. Based on my prior experience in sessions, the use of harp in Wales in the session context is more common than it is in sessions with Irish music; this is especially visible in traditional music events and workshops such as *Yr Arbrawf Mawr*, and *Gwerin Gwallgo* where there is a significant number of participants opting to use a harp during the sessions. The same goes for the cello, where it appears more in sessions in Wales than it does in Irish sessions.

The cavaquinho and the nyckelharpa, on the other hand, are niche instruments. Unlike the harp and the cello, the cavaquinho and nyckelharpa are associated with the regions where they come from. The cavaquinho is a small four-stringed instrument used in Lusophone nations, while the nyckelharpa is a bowed string instrument originating from Sweden, the pitches of which are notably controlled by wooden tangents rather than directly pressing on the string on the fingerboard like the case of the violin. These two instruments are only played by one person each in the Menai Strait. In the local session context, the cavaquinho is used as both a melodic instrument and rhythmic accompaniment, depending on the player's familiarity with the tune that is being played. The nyckelharpa, on the other hand, is only used as a melodic instrument.

Not all the instruments mentioned in the survey are played in sessions. These instruments are the piano, frog, recorder, and handpan. The lack of use of the piano is fairly straightforward: its impractical nature with regards to its portability, and the fact that none of the session venues that were described in Chapter 2 above has a piano on-site meant that the piano is never used in sessions. As for the handpan, its restricted nature in terms of scale means that most handpan players would find it impractical to play tunes that their handpans are not built for, and those

who do play tunes would often have two to three handpans on stands, which would be unwieldy especially in a session context (JE, personal communication, ~ 2019). The frog is not utilised because it falls outside the context of the session.

The presence of musical instruments in sessions along the Menai Strait that are rarely used in those outside the area means that certain sessions would have soundscapes specific to the area and might influence the types of music that are played in those sessions. According to my observations, this is especially true for the sessions with the nyckelharpa player. These sessions would feature more music from Scandinavia as the player incorporates them into the local repertoire, adding to the diverse nature of traditional music of the area.

3.4 Notable numbers

This segment will examine some interesting trends that were found in the survey and observed in sessions. I had mentioned above that there is an element of localness in the traditional music scene along the Menai Strait (see p.90); this will be explored further in this segment. I will be making some general comparisons between the communities based in Arfon East and Arfon West. There are also interesting trends and differences between the communities based in Arfon East (Bangor), which will also be explored and discussed in this segment.

3.4.1 Regional trends along the Menai Strait

Two regional centres of traditional music can be found along the Menai Strait, situated on or close to both its extremes. Bangor, located on the eastern end of the strait, is home to all the session activity in this area, while session activity on the western end of the strait takes place in the settlements of Caernarfon, Bontnewydd, and Rhosgadfan. This segment examines and discusses interesting similarities and differences between these two regions that were extrapolated from the survey, namely in terms of age distribution, language use, and instrument use. It must be noted that there are respondents who attend sessions in both regions; they have been counted twice in the data presented below. Including those who are included in both regions, the sample size for Arfon East in the survey is 22 while in Arfon West, it is 16.

Age distribution in Arfon East and Arfon West		
Age Group	Arfon East (Bangor) %	Arfon West (all others) %
18-29	27.3 *****	0
30-39	0	6.3 *
40-49	4.5 *	12.5 **
50-59	13.6 ***	12.5 **
60-69	40.9 *****	43.8 *****
70-79	9.1 **	18.8 ***
80 and above	4.5 *	6.3 *

Table 13: Age distribution in Arfon East and Arfon West

Table 13 above shows the age distribution in the two regions. In both cases, those in the 60-69 age range make up the majority of their respective regions, making up 40.9% of all sessioners in Arfon East, and 43.8% of those in Arfon West. However, a closer look at the data reveals that Arfon East also has a base of younger sessioners aged 18-29; in fact, all those who belong to this age group exclusively attend sessions based in Bangor only.

Language preference in Arfon East and Arfon West		
Language	Arfon East (Bangor) %	Arfon West (all others) %
Welsh	59.1 ***** *	37.6 *****
English	40.9 *****	62.5 *****

Table 14: Language preference in Arfon East and Arfon West (after correction of oversight)

Table 14 above shows the language preference in Arfon East and Arfon West, based on the language the respondents used to fill out the survey, after correction of the oversight identified on page 88 above. Here we can see some cultural differences between the sessions in Arfon

East and Arfon West. A majority of the respondents who attend sessions in Arfon East have preferred to use the Welsh language to respond to the survey, at 59.1%. The opposite is true for respondents attending sessions in Arfon West; 62.5% of the surveys were completed in English.

Instrument	Arfon East (Bangor)	Arfon West (all others)	Instrument	Arfon East (Bangor)	Arfon West (all others)
Banjo	1	1	Harp	2	1
Bodhrán	4	1	Mandola	1	1
Bouzouki	2	2	Mandolin	3	1
Cavaquinho	1	1	Melodeon	3	3
Cello	2	0	Nyckelharpa	0	1
Concertina	5	3	Piano	0	1
			Accordion		
Fiddle / Violin	4	2	Uilleann	1	2
			Pipes		
Flute	1	2	Voice	13	6
Guitar	12	8	Whistle	2	2
Harmonica	2	0			

Table 15: Instrument proficiency in Arfon East and Arfon West

Table 15 above shows the instrument proficiency in the two regions. Instrumental proficiency reflects the diversity of instruments that can be found in the respective sessions. The numbers in this table represent the number of respondents who declare proficiency in these instruments; as such, the instruments listed here reflect which instruments can be seen and heard in the sessions of the respective areas. Note that the instruments listed above excludes those that are rarely heard or never heard in sessions; as such, these instruments are session-typical in nature.⁴¹ It also must be noted that because the respondents have the option of indicating proficiency in more than one instrument, there may be overlaps across the data. For example,

⁴¹ Note that session-typical instruments in this case may not neatly apply to other session cultures around Ireland and the UK. The cavaquinho, for instance, is rarely seen and heard in sessions outside the Menai Strait in the context of traditional music, but the individual who plays it in this case plays it often enough in sessions for me to warrant it as a session-typical instrument.

a respondent who plays the fiddle and the guitar and attends sessions in both regions would contribute one point to the fiddle *and* the guitar row, in both the Arfon East *and* Arfon West columns.

Because the sample size in Arfon East is bigger than in Arfon West (22 vs.16), the numbers in the Arfon East column are generally bigger than those in Arfon West. That said, there are exceptions to this trend: the numbers of those who indicate proficiency in uilleann pipes and flute are higher in Arfon West than in Arfon East. Furthermore, the nyckelharpa and piano accordion are unique to Arfon West, although Arfon East has unique instruments as well, namely the cello and harmonica. Some instruments have the same numbers in both columns; these are the banjo, bouzouki, cavaquinho, mandola, melodeon, and whistle.

In both regions, the guitar is the most popular instrument, with twelve and eight respondents reporting proficiency in it in Arfon East and Arfon West respectively. Singing is also popular across the Menai Strait, making up the second-highest number of those reporting proficiency in both regions. Squeezeboxes are popular across the Menai Strait. The number of melodeon players is the same in the two regions; however, the data here also reveals that there are more concertina players in sessions in Bangor compared to the rest of the Menai Strait.

3.4.1.1 Discussion of regional trends

The survey has revealed some interesting characteristics of the session music scene along the Menai Strait. In the general presentation of the survey results earlier, it was found that sessions are most likely to be attended by those who are local to the area; in other words, respondents tend to attend sessions close to where they are based in. Nonetheless, there are a small number of respondents who do take part in sessions across the two regions. Despite the localness of the sessions in the Menai Strait, the two regions bear many similarities with each other. The sessions across both regions are mostly made up of those within the 60-69 age range, although Arfon East notably has sessioners belonging to the lowest age bracket in the survey, i.e., 18-29 years old. The youngest respondent in Arfon West has reported themselves to be within the 30-39 age bracket.

There are some similarities and differences in the instruments that were encountered in these sessions as well. In both regions, the guitar and the voice are popular instruments, suggested by the high numbers of respondents who declared proficiency in them. However, certain instruments are more popular in one region compared to the other. I would like to pre-emptively highlight that the use of fiddles, concertinas, and bodhráns are higher in Arfon East than in

Arfon West; the use of these instruments in the various sessions in Bangor itself reveal some interesting trends that will be discussed further in the segment specifically examining the scene in Bangor below (see p. 109).

Of the metrics that were compared so far, I find the differences in language preference the most interesting. A majority of the respondents who attend sessions in Arfon East preferred to complete their survey in Welsh, while a larger majority of respondents in Arfon West preferred to complete their survey in English. This is especially interesting if we take the prevalence of the Welsh language within these zones of the Menai Strait. Table 16 below compares the percentage of Welsh speakers above the age of three in the community according to the 2011 United Kingdom census with the percentage of Welsh-language responses in the survey carried out for this research:

Comparison of language use		
	% Welsh-speaking population (2011)	% Welsh-language responses in survey
Arfon East	50.6%	59.1%
Arfon West	80.0%	37.6%

Table 16: Comparisons between regional Welsh-language skills and language preferences of sessioners

A detailed breakdown showing the percentage of Welsh speakers by ward can be found in Appendix 6. According to the 2011 UK census, there is a greater concentration of Welsh speakers towards the west of the Menai Strait compared to the eastern end: In the area defined as Arfon East in this research, 50.6% of the population declared being able to speak Welsh, while 80% of those in Arfon West report being able to do so. Interestingly, this means that the preference for the Welsh language among the traditional music scene does not necessarily correlate to the number of Welsh speakers in the area. The relatively low preference for the Welsh language in Arfon West may be attributed to several factors. Firstly, this indicates that sessions in Arfon West do not have the same appeal to local Welsh speakers as they do in Arfon East, for some reason. The higher percentage of Welsh speakers in Arfon West also indicates that sessions in this area are attended by individuals who may have moved into the area. Based on conversations that I had, those who responded in English after the survey, a number of them

had expressed that they had indeed acquired some Welsh after moving to the area, some even attending classes in their own time. Despite this, however, they were less confident responding to a survey in Welsh, either because they felt like their language skills may not be enough to be able to do so, or because they were just more comfortable doing so in English since it is their first language. A more detailed discussion of the use of the Welsh language in Arfon East can be found below in the next segment (p. 110)

The data collected from the survey has shown the two regional centres based on the extreme ends of the Menai Strait are largely similar, although there are some differences in these two places. Both scenes are dominated by those belonging to the 60-69 age bracket. However, in sessions in Arfon East, there is a significant group of younger musicians between the ages of 18-29, whereas the youngest respondent from Arfon West belongs to the 30-39 age bracket. The range of session-typical instruments is also similar in both regions. Only two unique session-typical instruments can be seen in either region: the cello and harmonica unique to Arfon East, and the piano accordion and nyckelharpa unique to Arfon West. The guitar and singing are popular as well, with relatively high numbers of respondents declaring proficiency in these across the Menai Strait. The largest, and perhaps the most interesting difference between the two regions is the use of the Welsh language to respond to the survey. A higher percentage of the respondents did so in Arfon East as compared to that with Arfon West.

3.4.2 Bangor: A tale of two communities

Based on the responses of the survey, this segment will explore and discuss the features of the sessions in Arfon East, which all take place in the city of Bangor. As seen in Table 4 above, Bangor is home to several sub-communities, but have merged into two communities, namely the Bangor Sessions and the Tafarn y Glôb communities. At the time of the survey, there was no overlap between the two communities; those who attended the Tafarn y Glôb sessions did not take part in the Bangor Sessions and vice-versa.⁴² These two communities show interesting dichotomies in some ways. Firstly, there is a notable age difference between the two communities.

⁴² This has since changed at the time of writing.

Age Group	Tafarn y Glôb %	Bangor Sessions %
18-29	62.5 *****	0
40-49	12.5 *	0
50-59	12.5 *	16.7 **
60-69	12.5 *	58.3 *****
70-79	0	16.7 **
80 and above	0	8.3 *

Table 17: Age distribution in the Tafarn y Glôb and the Bangor Session communities

Table 17 above shows the age distribution in the Glôb and Bangor Session communities. The table excludes the 30-39 age group as there were no respondents in this age group who are part of these communities. Table 17 demonstrates a significant age difference between these two communities: the Tafarn y Glôb community is generally made up of younger sessioners, while the Bangor Sessions is made up of older sessioners. In the Tafarn y Glôb sessions, five out of eight respondents (62.5%) report being within the 18-29 years age group whereas the rest belong to the other age groups up to the 60-69 age bracket. In the Bangor Sessions community, on the other hand, seven out of twelve participants report being in the 60-69 age.

Language	Tafarn y Glôb %	Bangor Sessions %
Welsh	87.5 *****	41.7 *****
English	12.5 *	58.3 *****

Table 18: Language use between the Tafarn y Glôb and Bangor Session communities (after correction of oversight)

Table 18 shows preferred language use in the two sub-communities, based on the language they replied to the survey in, and after correction of the oversight identified above (see p.88). The survey revealed an overwhelming preference for the Welsh language in the Tafarn y Glôb, with all the participants except for one (87.5%) responding to the survey in Welsh. In the Bangor Sessions however, there is a marginal preference for English, with seven out of twelve respondents (58.3%) preferring to complete their surveys in English.

Instrument	Tafarn y Glôb	Bangor Sessions	Instrument	Tafarn y Glôb	Bangor Sessions
Banjo	0	1	Guitar	5	6
Bodhrán	0	4	Harmonica	0	2
Bouzouki	1	1	Harp	2	0
Cavaquinho	1	0	Mandola	0	1
Cello	1	0	Mandolin	2	0
Concertina	0	4	Melodeon	0	2
Fiddle / Violin	5	0	Uilleann Pipes	0	1
Flute	0	1	Voice	5	7
			Whistle	2	1

Table 19: Instrument use between the Tafarn y Glôb and Bangor Session communities

Table 19 shows instrument proficiency between the two communities, excluding instruments that are not played or are rarely heard in sessions, such as the piano or upright bass. As such, the table only lists session-typical instruments. The numbers in the cells refer to the number of participants who indicated proficiency in the respective instruments. One can find a considerable range of instruments in both sub-communities; according to the survey, seventeen unique session-typical instruments can be found and heard in both the Tafarn y Glôb sessions and the Bangor Sessions. Both communities also have relatively high numbers of sessioners who sing and are proficient in the guitar. However, there are also interesting differences with regards to instruments in both communities. For instance, there is a higher prevalence of bowed string instruments in the Tafarn y Glôb sessions, with five respondents declaring proficiency in either the fiddle or violin, and one more respondent indicating proficiency in the cello. On the other hand, none of the respondents from the Bangor Sessions report any proficiency on any of these instruments. The Bangor Sessions community, however, has a higher prevalence of percussion and instruments from the squeezebox family; four respondents report proficiency in the bodhrán and the concertina each, and a further two more respondents indicate proficiency in the melodeon. None of these instruments is found in the Tafarn y Glôb community, according to the survey.

3.4.2.1 Discussion

Based on the results of the survey, the traditional music scene in Bangor is made up of two distinct groups of sessioners with little overlap. The survey has found that there are two prominent age groups across the two sub-communities based in Bangor, with the younger sessioners aged 18-29 mostly belonging to the Tafarn y Glôb community, while those aged 60-69 dominate the Bangor Sessions community. It is evident, then, that the momentary resurgence of interest among the younger members of the scene discussed before (see p. 99) are all part of the Tafarn y Glôb community.

Based on the language used in the survey, it can be said that the group of younger respondents is mostly made up of individuals who prefer to communicate in the Welsh language. The nature of Tafarn y Glôb and its relationship with the Welsh language may also be a factor in the popular use of Welsh in these sessions. As one of the centres of Welsh-speaking culture in Bangor, this predominant language seen and heard in this establishment is Welsh. This culture also has left an impression upon the sessions in it and how it is conducted: in my observations, I have seen how sessioners who do not speak Welsh as a first language actively converse in Welsh in the Glôb even though they may speak English when attending other sessions.

These results are significant because the shift in demographics shows the creation of a community that is specifically younger and Welsh-speaking centred around Tafarn y Glôb. The younger age demographic might attract the idea that those in this community may be exclusively students at the university, but my observations suggest otherwise. Of the eight participants from Tafarn y Glôb that chose to take part in the survey, only two respondents are enrolled in the university at the time of writing, with the rest being locals of the area. This is particularly significant because the strong local base implies that this community will be more stable since it does not rely on the membership of transient individuals.

There is still the issue of the minimal overlap between the two communities. It could be argued that the timing of the specific session activities does influence who attends the session. As seen in Table 4 above, sessions in Tafarn y Glôb take place on a weeknight, which might deter some from taking part in it if they had commitments the following morning. The Bangor Sessions, on the other hand, meets on Friday night which may be unfavourable to younger participants since they may have other social engagements on that evening.

Keeping in mind the significance of the Glôb to the Welsh-speaking community and the time in which these sessions take place, I argue that these elements have influenced who attends these sessions, forming the differences between the two communities as captured in the survey.

The presence of two dominant age groups spaced far apart possibly indicates that the differences in the Bangor traditional music scene such as instrumental choice may be influenced by generational factors. We can see that singing and playing the guitar has persisted across generations; however, the split where fiddles being popular with the younger sessioners while squeezeboxes appealing to the older sessioners suggest a generational factor. This is especially interesting if we were to take Rees' (2007, pp. 309–310) analysis into account, where it was found that the use of squeezebox was fairly rare in recorded Welsh traditional music between 1975 and 1979. Considering that all the respondents from the Bangor Sessions community had indicated that they have been playing traditional music for more than 21 years, this may suggest that either the popularity of the squeezebox in this area must have increased in the subsequent period i.e., the 1980s onwards, or that the recordings of the late 70s did not accurately mirror the practices of those from the Bangor Sessions community. Interest in the squeezebox seems to have waned after its peak sometime after the 80s, which would explain the relatively low interest in these instruments in the younger session population. Of course, other factors still may exist, such as the cost of instruments or practicality in sessions may play a part in influencing an instrument's popularity as well.

3.5 Conclusions

The survey carried out at the start of the research period has revealed some interesting indication of the people who make up the traditional music scene of the Menai Strait.

The session scene across the Menai Strait is mostly made up of men, which suggests there are some barriers that may discourage individuals who do not identify as male from participating in sessions in the area. The survey also revealed that most of the participants belong to the 60–69 age group, making up 40% of the total number of participants. Data from both MacKinnon's (1994) and my surveys suggest that those from this age group started taking part in session activities during the height of the folk revival throughout Great Britain and Ireland. This in turn indicates that, for some reason, subsequent generations do not enter the session scene at the same level as it does with people from this age group. My observations suggest that being with more musically experienced individuals may create mental barriers for those who are not as

experienced to gain access or to actively take part in sessions, even if the more experienced individuals outwardly adopt open and welcoming policies for newcomers.

That said, the survey also found a very significant minority of people between the ages of 18-29, making up 20% of the session population. Interestingly, this generation would have had access to resources and workshops run by organisations promoting Welsh folk arts. The rising interest in session activities in the Menai Strait amongst individuals of the 18-29 age range corresponds with the rising interest in folk arts in Wales of individuals of the same age range, as reflected in the increase in attendance in workshops run by *trac Cymru*. Seeing that musical experience and repertoire are closely linked, this has potential consequences in terms of the music played at sessions. Welsh traditional tunes and songs may feature more in the repertoire of the younger participants since they would have more exposure to Welsh material than the generations above, whose repertoire would be shaped by what was available to them when they started their musical journeys. This is further reinforced in the closer examination of the data from sessions in Bangor. Compared to their older counterparts, younger musicians tend to have a closer relationship to elements significant to Welsh culture, which are, in this case, the language and the locale in which sessions take place. Furthermore, the soundscapes of these sessions are different because of the difference in generational exposure and access to instruments.

I have also found that the session space has an element of localness. This is derived from the data suggesting that participants tend to prefer to attend sessions that are easier to get to, although exceptions are made in some cases. This means contact between sessions on Arfon East and Arfon West is low, which in turn creates residual zones which allow for the preservation of diverse practices, leading to the multiplicitous nature of the music in sessions.

So far in this thesis, I have examined the general context in which traditional music exists along the Menai Strait. The remainder of this thesis will now present the processes involved in performing the music.

Chapter 3b: The Welsh Weekend in Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare, Ireland

Thursday, 13th February 2020

It was already dark when Lesley and I arrived at Ballyvaughan in County Clare, Ireland. Our ferry was delayed thanks to Storm Ciara the weekend before; by the time we got to our destination, we had spent exactly twelve hours on the road from Bangor, North Wales. We were there for the annual gathering of musicians in Ballyvaughan, known by some in this community as the Welsh Weekend, so named because of its historical ties with traditional musicians from Bangor. There is a degree of exclusiveness in this event: information for it is spread purely by word of mouth without any advertising.

Ballyvaughan (Irish: Baile Uí Bheacháin) is a village with a population of 258 in 2011, situated roughly seventeen kilometres south-southwest of the city of Galway in Ireland. The village is a relatively major settlement along the Wild Atlantic Way on the west coast of Ireland and is also one of the points on the Burren Way, which passes notable landmarks such as the Cliffs of Moher (Irish: Aillte an Mhothair) and Ballinalacken Castle (Irish: Caisleán Baile na Leacan).



Figure 24: Map of the United Kingdom and Ireland, highlighting the location of Ballyvaughan (marked with a star on the left of the image) and Bangor (marked with a pushpin marker on the right).

This trip was a personal highlight for me I have been a part of the local traditional music community in Bangor ever since I moved to North Wales in the autumn of 2015, and this trip was to be my third time in Ballyvaughan with the community since then. Lesley and I arrived earlier than usual; we had booked ourselves to arrive on the Thursday before the weekend.

The context for the Welsh Weekend has changed significantly over the years. The event began as a small gathering of mutual friends between the Bangor and Galway music scenes in 1982. They met on the weekend closest to Valentine's Day in the Ó Loðlainn's Irish Whiskey Bar in the middle of the village. In fact, they enjoyed themselves so much that weekend, they decided to continue meeting in the village on the same weekend the year after, thus forming the foundations for the Welsh Weekend today.

The weekend that Lesley and I were attending was the 38th anniversary of the first event. Of course, many things have changed since then. To begin with, sessions were no longer exclusively held in Ó Loðlainn's. Music-making events spilt over to the various establishments across the village, particularly because the weekend has become popular with those in the know, so much so that Ó Loðlainn's would not be able to hold that many people on the premises. Other establishments that also had music that year are the Hylands Hotel, the Fountain Bar (itself attached to the Hylands Hotel), and Greene's Bar. Additionally, sessions used to take place in Monk's Seafood Restaurant and Bar and the Wild Atlantic Lodge (often referred to as Logue's by the music community) in previous years, although this was not the case that year. Sessions also would spill over outside the weekend; some musicians and singers would come before the weekend starts and may even leave as late as the Tuesday after.

These days, the sessions in Ó Loðlainn's would be primarily singing sessions over the weekend, although around it, such as on Thursday before the weekend or Monday after, Ó Loðlainn's would be a mixed session which would have tunes and songs. The other locations, on the other hand, feature mainly instrumental music throughout the weekend.

Before our arrival that evening, Lesley had heard from her friend Batty McDermott that Ó Loðlainn's would be open that night at eight o'clock. This naturally meant that there would be singing and music for those who were arriving before the weekend officially started. We went over to the pub after a quick, light supper. It was filled with people when we entered, but it wasn't too crowded that it felt uncomfortable. I saw some familiar faces in there; some of them used to cross the Irish Sea on the ferry from Dublin to attend the monthly afternoon sessions in Bontnewydd, not far from Bangor. George Henderson and Phillip Brennan, two prominent figures in the Ballyvaughan weekends and close friends of the Bangor community, appeared to be pleased to see me and Lesley.

'You came!' they said smiling whilst shaking my hand. 'You are very welcome.'

I had already known George and Phillip for at least three years. I met them in that session in Bontnewydd mentioned above. The session in Bontnewydd is currently run by Gerallt Llewelyn, a long-time member of the Bangor traditional music scene and a regular at the Welsh Weekend. He would always attend the singing sessions in Ó Loðlainn's over the weekend. Unfortunately, however, he could not make it to Ballyvaughan that year.

Most of the people who were in Ó Loðlainn's that evening were singers; there were only five 'musicians' (that was how they referred to instrumentalists) including myself compared to a

room of about twelve singers. The format that evening was identical to most ‘typical’ sessions. There was no organisation whatsoever in terms of music. Instead, anyone was, in theory, free to start a song or tune whenever they wanted, and others would join in if they were confident. Occasionally, George would direct the flow of the session by encouraging the musicians to play tunes to break the chain of songs, or by encouraging the more reserved singers to come forward and share a song with the group.

My experience with Ó Loðlainn’s in past Welsh Weekends was a lot more intense. Especially on the weekend itself, there are more singers who are eager to be singing in the sessions. This meant that there were situations where songs were sung one after another, with very little room in between for conversation or for taking breaks.



Figure 25: Lesley Conran (foreground) at Ballyvaughan 2020. Used with the permission of the copyright holder, John Breslin. Photo credit: John Breslin.

Lesley and I stayed until the closing time. I could not remember exactly how late it was, but it must have been at a little past midnight when we left. George later told me to be at Ó Loðlainn’s again at 3 p.m. on Saturday. Since Gerallt was missing the Welsh Weekend that year, George wanted to organise a video conference with him during a session so that he would be able to share some songs.

3b.2 Confluence of practice

Since the inception of the event in 1983, the Welsh Weekend has expanded considerably in scope. The weekend of 2020 has attracted sessioners from the United Kingdom, Ireland, the

Isle of Man, France, Norway, and Australia. A significant number of these sessioners are associated, or were once associated, with the traditional music scenes in Bangor and Galway. Furthermore, a number of those associated with the Bangor scene have connections with Bangor University. In a way, the Welsh Weekend serves as a reunion for some of them.

Events like the Welsh Weekend provide the opportunity to discuss the concept of communities of practice. Communities of practice are defined by Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner as ‘groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly’ (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Moreover, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner identify three ‘crucial’ elements that further define characteristics of a community of practice: (1) the domain, (2) the community, and (3) the practice (2015). Since sessions are communal music-making, it can be argued that they embody these elements in the context of the traditional music community.

The element of domain is defined as the presence of an identity indicated by a common interest. This identity distinguishes the members of a community from the others (2015). This is seen in sessions that take place in public establishments like pubs or hotels; musicians often occupy a space separate from the other punters during a session. The element of domain can also be seen if we were to examine a session closer. To take part in a session and be a part of a traditional music community, an individual would ideally need to know tunes and songs that are a part of the local repertoire. However, an individual who has not yet learnt these tunes and songs may also take part in the session if they show that they are aware of appropriate behaviours for a session or display good musicianship. These factors ‘other’⁴³ those in the traditional music community from the general public; the session thus embodies the element of domain as defined by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner.

The second element, community, is defined as the sharing of knowledge among the members of its domain through ‘joint activities and discussions’ (2015). In other words, a community of practice is defined by the fact that its members learn from one another. In my experience, a session is a place where members of the community can learn new tunes and songs whilst acquiring and developing their instrumental skills and techniques. Other scholars in the field also report this phenomenon, notably in Waldron’s (2009a) study into informal learning of Celtic traditional music in adults. Waldron (2009a) notes that some of her participants report

⁴³ Used in the sense of *othering*.

learning tunes during the session; one of the participants has even developed personal techniques that facilitate the learning of those tunes. Hence, it is clear that the session provides a space for the sharing and acquisition of knowledge and skills, fulfilling the element of community proposed by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015).

The third and final element, practice, differentiates a community of practice from a community of interest, according to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015). They stress that to qualify as a community of practice, its members must be practitioners. This element is obvious in the context of the traditional music community: its members are musically skilled, and they practice their craft together in sessions.

The presence of all three elements in sessions indicates that the traditional music community is, in fact, a community of practice. However, my experience with sessions in North Wales has shown that each session scene is different from the next. Some sessions, for example, encourage singing, others may be defined by the predominant use of the Welsh language.⁴⁴ The variations between sessions may be small, but this greatly influences their character, resulting in differences such as repertoire and the average age of the participants. It is not unreasonable to assume that these differences manifest themselves in other places. For instance, a session in North Wales may be quite different from any given session in Galway. Unfortunately, an in-depth examination of these variations between the two regions is outside the scope of this paper. That said, the differences between each session are not great enough to warrant them as separate communities of practice within the context of traditional music. However, it is still important to acknowledge these variations. For that reason, I am regarding each session as a *sub-community of practice* of the larger traditional music community.

⁴⁴ A more in-depth examination of the music played in the different sessions across the Menai Strait will be presented in Chapter 5.

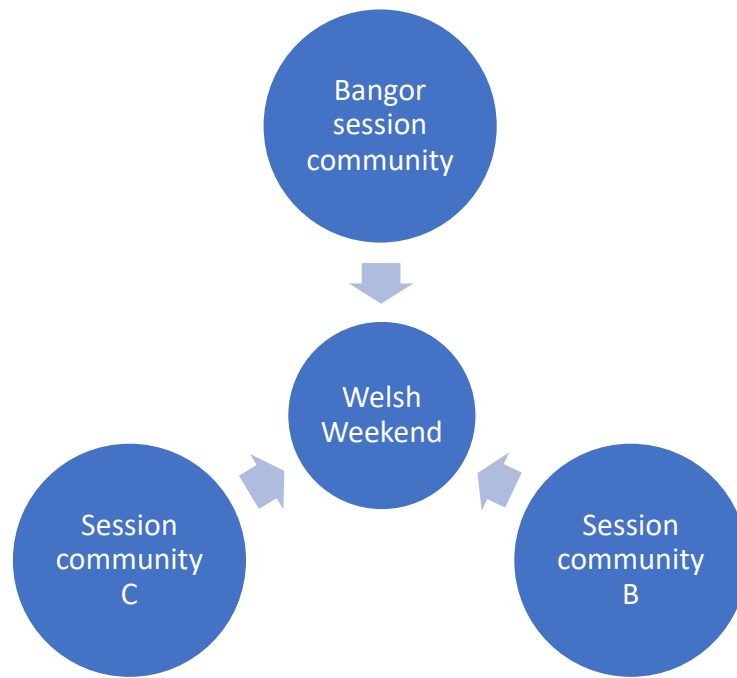


Figure 26: The Welsh Weekend as a confluence of several session communities. Note that this is a simplified representation of the event: In reality, there are many more session communities than what is depicted above.

The Welsh Weekend nowadays attracts an international group of sessioners. More likely than not, these sessioners are active in their own local traditional music scene. This event, therefore, is a confluence of the different sub-communities of practice, forming a new sub-community of practice in its own right.

3b.3 Hybridity (and lack thereof)

Such a situation prompts the question as to whether hybridity is featured in the music produced during the event. Gloag and Beard (citation) note that hybridity is used to ‘account for new cultural forms that have arisen as a result of borrowings, intersections and exchanges across ethnic boundaries’ (p. 119), bringing forth issues of colonialism, cultural appropriation and re-appropriation. In the case of the Welsh Weekend, the markers of hybridity I was looking out for were the mixing of elements from different musical styles present in a single piece of music or song. In terms of instrumental tunes, I had noted that the vast majority of tunes played that weekend were Irish in origin, although I had also heard Welsh and even a few Gypsy Jazz tunes as well. Perhaps surprisingly, there was no hybridity in terms of technique: Welsh tunes were not played in an Irish manner and vice-versa, and the Gypsy Jazz tunes were played with the appropriate musical idioms associated with the genre. These include the use of the

characteristic four-to-a-beat rhythm known as *la pompe* on the guitar, the use of chromatic runs in improvised lines on lead instruments, and the liberal use of extended chords. However, it was worth noting that there is some hybridity in the Gypsy Jazz tunes in terms of instrumentation. I noted that these tunes were played with the guitar, melodeon, harmonica, and fiddle. While these instruments are perfectly suitable for the performance of Gypsy Jazz, it could be argued that this specific combination of instruments is more typical of Irish traditional music than of a jazz ensemble. It can be argued that this is a result of practical logistics of transporting instruments on a road trip rather than creative forces, however.

In terms of song, the most obvious marker of hybridity is where the music comes from one culture, and the words would come from another. The Welsh song repertoire has a few examples of this; for instance, the lyrics of the popular Welsh-language song *Llongau Caernarfon* (English: The ships of Caernarfon) was written by J. Glyn Davies and set by Davies himself to a Norwegian air (Davies, 1923, p. xix). Another instance of a hybrid song would be *Llanc Ifanc O Lŷn* (English: Young lad of Llŷn) as appeared in *Mabsant* (George, 2002), where the Welsh words are set to the Irish air *She moved through the Fair* (2002, p. 103). Another marker of hybridity I was looking for in the singing sessions was the use of different techniques in song, such as making use of *sean nós* style ornamentations in songs not in the Irish language or songs that make use of traditional airs associated with Irish music. This was admittedly difficult to identify when I was observing the session, since singing styles were so personalised.

The situation with the songs was similar to that of the tunes in terms of hybridity. There was variation in terms of language; I had noted that songs were sung in English, Irish, and Welsh, with a handful being macaronic. However, there were no songs that displayed the features of hybridity which were proposed before.

That said, I was curious if introducing elements of hybridity would garner a reaction from the participants of the Welsh Weekend. Prior to leaving for Ballyvaughan, I had selected several verses from the book *Hen Benillion* (Parry-Williams, 1940),⁴⁵ and set them to a melody associated with the *sean nós* song *Amhrán na Leabhar* (English: Song of the books). The product is Welsh-language poetry sung to an air associated with an Irish song. When I was

⁴⁵ This book is a selection of verses that can be used to perform *cerdd dant*, a musical form native to Wales which involves a singer and a melodic and harmonic instrument, usually a harp. The singer sings a poem against a set tune played by the harp. The sung melody is traditionally improvised, but contemporary *cerdd dant* performances may be pre-arranged [for more information, visit the Cymdeithas Cerdd Dant Cymru (The Cerdd Dant Society of Wales) website].

invited to sing in Ó Loðlainn's during the Saturday session, I decided to sing this song in order to see how the sessioners would react to this.



Figure 27: An excerpt of verses from *Hen Benillion* set to the air of *Amhrán na Leabhar*, set by the author.

Perhaps disappointingly, the reaction from that was not as much as one would expect. I received an applause at the end of that song, as did everyone else who had sung in that location that day. While I did receive and appreciate some comments on my singing from those who were sitting close to me, I did not receive any comments about the nature of the song itself. In contrast, I have had conversations in other sessions about the tunes and songs that we play. There was a possibility that the air of *Amhrán na Leabhar* may not be well known enough by the Welsh Weekend community for others to realise what I had done. The format of the singing session in Ó Loðlainn's may have prevented conversation about the song. The pace of the session that day was the intense kind as described in the vignette above: there were many songs with little room for conversation in between them at times. This means that there was little opportunity to discuss what was sung or played, and unless the song was particularly memorable, it tended to be quickly forgotten.

3b.4 Transnational traits of the Welsh Weekend

Based on my observations, hybridity was not a strong feature in the music played in the Welsh Weekend. Instead, we see a situation where the different tunes and songs exist largely as they are within the same space. This rather pluralistic situation brings the concept of transnationalism to mind. In their seminal work on the theory, Basch et. al. (1994) define transnationalism as

the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement (1994, sec. B).

The concept of transnationalism has been theorised in the fields of migration and diaspora studies. This concept has since further expanded into the fields of politics and economics, but one of the products of this concept that is relevant to this paper is the development of the theory of transnational communities (Djelic & Quack, 2010). A transnational community is defined as ‘social groups emerging from mutual interaction across national boundaries, oriented around a common project or “imagined” identity’, which I argue would be the case for the Welsh Weekend.

Parallels can be drawn between the concept of transnationalism and the social situation observed in the Welsh Weekend. The societies of origin and settlement in the definition are very similar to the various sub-communities of practice discussed above. That said, it is important to acknowledge that there are fundamental differences in the peoples addressed in Basch et. al. and those who attend the Welsh Weekend. The first difference is the factor of permanence. The peoples featured in Basch et al. are present in their new countries on a more permanent basis; they are there for the long-term due to various reasons. The Welsh Weekend is an ephemeral experience by comparison; participants of the event rarely remain in Ballyvaughan for more than a week, with a majority arriving on Friday and leaving by the Monday after that. Even the experiences of those who attend the Welsh Weekend year after year cannot be compared to those who have lived and worked in another country for years. The second fundamental difference between these two groups is the benefits that are reaped by being in their new countries. The transmigrants featured in Basch et al. enjoy economic benefits by working in their new countries, while this is not the case for those who attend the Welsh Weekend since they are there for leisure and not for work.

In order to borrow the theory of transnationalism to analyse the context of the Welsh Weekend, a reframing of Basch et. al.’s definition is needed. Bearing in mind the two fundamental differences identified above between the two groups, the ‘societies of origin’ in the context of this study are the local session communities of the individuals who come to Ballyvaughan, while the ‘society of settlement’ refers to the community that is formed by coming together in Ballyvaughan.

The ‘multi-stranded social relations’ indicated by Basch et. al. (1994) are of particular interest because it does manifest itself in the Welsh Weekend. It can be argued that these relations can be seen in the discussion on the sub-communities of practice above. Those who attend the event

would have social connections with at least another, which allows for the Welsh Weekend to continue happening annually without the need for advertising. At the same time, those attendees are also likely to be a part of their session community back home. In some cases, some of these attendees would bring someone from their session community to a subsequent Welsh Weekend. These relations have contributed to the expansion of the Welsh Weekend beyond its original scope since its inception. As a result, a new transnational community has been born out of this event.

This prompted the question of balance in social relations. Are the social relations one maintained with those who attend the Welsh Weekend comparable with the social relations maintained with their session community back home? Conversations with the attendees and my own observations as a participant of both the Welsh Weekend and sessions in Bangor suggest that this is not necessarily the case. In Bangor at least, a number of the more senior members of the community who attend the Welsh Weekend do keep contact with those who go to the event from outside the Bangor community. It must be clarified that these close contacts form a subset of the larger Welsh Weekend community. Maintaining relations and keeping in contact proves particularly helpful when it comes to logistics such as transport and accommodation for Ballyvaughan especially for those who want to save money by renting a cottage together, or by travelling together.

That said, these relations are not as close as the relations that exist amongst the local Bangor community itself. Of course, this can be attributed to the fact that the community is small in number, and its core members are all within close reach of each other. These tighter relations are reflected in certain musickal elements that I have observed in sessions. One visible sign of tighter relations can be seen in how a member of the community expresses familiarity with the personal repertoire of another. This can be done both verbally and non-verbally.

A verbal expression of familiarity may occur when someone wishes to begin a tune associated with another member of the community. This happened during my final evening on the Welsh Weekend. We were having a small, intimate session in Ó Loðlainn's on Monday evening. The musicians were me and three other musicians; all of us are associated with the Bangor community. During the session, one of the musicians suggested playing 'the Welsh tune that Kieran plays'. If that tune were to be initiated by Kieran, we were all able to play along. The problem, however, was that he was not present in the session that evening. It turned out that as individuals, we could not start the tune as none of us knew that tune well enough, but through

collective effort, we eventually figured it out by playing phrases that we could remember from the tune. It did indicate that even though we initially could not begin the tune, we all knew what ‘Kieran’s Welsh tune’ refers to, demonstrating that we did have a degree of familiarity with his sets of tunes.⁴⁶

A non-verbal expression of familiarity, on the other hand, can be seen when music is made. Although it is not a rule, it is customary in a session to be playing *sets* rather than individual tunes. These sets are medleys of two or more tunes played one after another, and the order of the tunes may either be pre-planned or improvised. More often than not, the pre-planned sets are personalised to each individual, so much so that they may be analysed as ‘ownership’ of the tunes. It is in pre-planned sets where non-verbal expressions of familiarity can be seen, specifically in the transitions between the tunes. Transitions with little to no dips in energy when changing tunes suggest that those who are playing are familiar with the initiator’s order of the tunes, whereas those with larger dips of energy usually indicate the general lack of familiarity with the set. It must be noted that this only applies to non-verbal transitions, as I have observed situations where the musicians were announcing either the name or the key of the next tune just before the transition.⁴⁷ I argue that the repeated expressions of familiarity outlined above during the musicking process in a session suggest a degree of mutual closeness between musicians, at least on a musical level. Of course, one would also safely assume that the members of the session community are close enough to be making music together in the first place.

In bigger instrumental sessions during the Welsh Weekend involving a large number of musicians from a wide range of backgrounds, expressions of familiarity as described above did not appear at all. It could be said in this situation that the participants of the session are not familiar with each other’s repertoires as intimately as compared to sessions involving only people from the same community. A close examination of these musickal relationships and the social relationships reveal three levels of relationships that are held by a member of the Bangor traditional music community. This is depicted in Figure 28 below. In the order of closeness, they are: (1) the relationships between an individual and another from the Bangor community, (2) the relationships between an individual with close contacts, and (3) the relationships between an individual with everyone else who attends the Welsh Weekend.

⁴⁶ Kieran refers to this tune as ‘the Welsh tune’.

⁴⁷ Communication strategies addressing these transitions will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

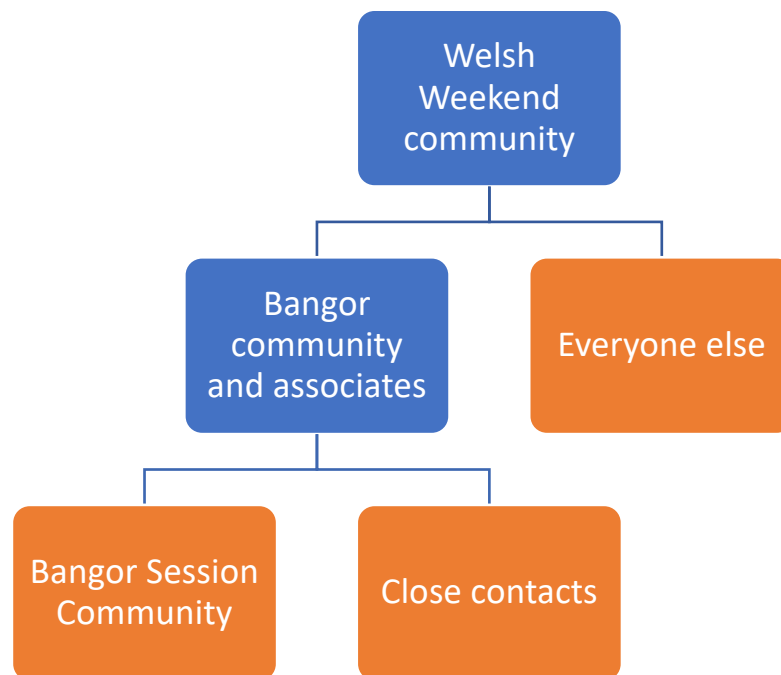


Figure 28: Relationships held by those from the Bangor Session Community with others during the Welsh Weekend.

The multi-tiered nature of the relationships held by a member of the Bangor community is reminiscent of the ‘multi-stranded relations’ as proposed by Basch et. al. (1994). I argue that these relationships frame the social situation during the Welsh Weekend. By taking part in musickal activities in another location with others outside the community, members of the Bangor community are presenting themselves outside the usual context. The success and continued existence of the Welsh Weekend demonstrate that the event provides an optimal space for sharing and participating. However, the event may inhibit processes of learning and collaboration. Sessions in the Welsh Weekend follow certain rules that are observed in other sessions; one such rule that inhibits the learning process is to avoid playing a tune that has been previously initiated by another within the same session. This, coupled with the scale of the event, means that there is not much space to discuss and revise what has been played. This is the main reason why there is not much hybridity in the music in the Welsh Weekend.

3b.5 The outsider at home

So far, the relations between the attendees of the Welsh Weekend have been examined. However, there is still one more group that is essential to the event that is yet to be discussed: the locals of Ballyvaughan itself, particularly those working in venues where sessions took

place, in the hospitality industry accommodating the attendees who stay over the weekend, and in the restaurants and shops which made sure that the needs of participants were met.

It can be argued that the Welsh Weekend has been a significant fixture in the calendar of events in Ballyvaughan and the neighbouring village of Fanore (Irish: Fánóir), located 15 kilometres west by road. In fact, the local singing club based in O'Donohues Pub, Fanore touts its February Songnight as the 'preview' to the Ballyvaughan Welsh Weekend on its website ("Fanore Songnights," n.d.). A search on social media also suggests that some locals do welcome the event in their village. On 13th February 2019, a status was posted on the Ballyvaughan Community page on Facebook, which read:

Just got a query in here: does anyone know where the "Croeso i Ballyvaughan"⁴⁸ sign is, and is it going to be put out for the Welsh Weekend?

Well?

Any takers?

It's that, or Karen standing at the monument waving leeks and daffodils ... (see Figure 29 below)



Figure 29: Screenshot from Facebook

⁴⁸ Welcome to Ballyvaughan in Welsh.

The weekend has also been advertised in print, appearing multiple times in tourist brochures promoting local events, although this was referred to twice misleadingly as the ‘Welsh Music Festival’ (see Figure 30 and Figure 31 below).⁴⁹ The information in the brochures suggests that the Welsh Weekend is the first major tourist attraction of the year.

ANNUAL EVENTS

Welsh Music Festival
15th, 16th & 17th February 2013
Ballyvaughan Opens its Doors and Welcomes the Welsh Community for the Weekend Of Crack Agus An Ceoil. www.discoverballyvaughan.com

Burren Spring Conference
Burren College of Art, Ballyvaughan. www.burrencollege.ie

Ballyvaughan Farmers Market 8th April 2012
Opens Easter Bank Holiday Weekend. St John's Hall, Ballyvaughan 10am – 2pm
www.ballyvaughanfarmersmarket.ie

Burren Law School 30th – 31st May 2012
Aims to Recreate the Tradition of Legal Learning Associated with The Brehon Law Schools.
www.burrenlawschool.org

Burren in Bloom 30th April – 31st May 2012
Celebrating the Burren, a Series of Illustrated Talks and Walks Throughout the Month of May. The Talks will give People an Understanding and Appreciation of the Burren and its Formation, and how it continues to be a source of great botanical, archaeological, and cultural wealth with its unique wild flowers and ancient sites.
www.burreninbloom.com

Figure 30: Excerpt of a tourist brochure detailing events in Ballyvaughan and Fanore in 2012-3. The Welsh Weekend is referred to as the Welsh Music Festival (“Ballyvaughan Fanore, 3rd. edition,” 2012).

⁴⁹ This is highly misleading since an overwhelming majority of the music played over the weekend are not Welsh, but Irish.

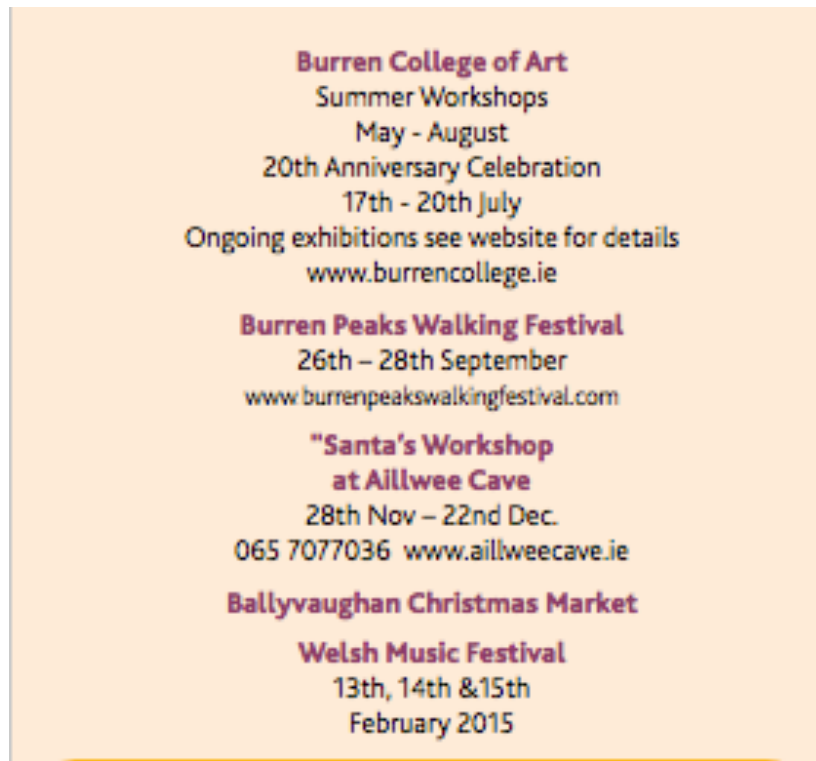


Figure 31: Excerpt of a tourist brochure detailing events in Ballyvaughan and Fanore in 2014-5.

The figures presented above indicate that there is some interest within the locals in Ballyvaughan in the Welsh Weekend. In fact, these materials demonstrate that the village has attempted to commercialise the event by advertising it as an annual fixture in their tourism calendar. This prompts the question of the role locals play in the organisation of the Welsh Weekend. To gain an insight into this question, I had a conversation with George who has been attending the Welsh Weekend since its inception. He insists that there has never been any organisation to begin with:

There is absolutely no organisation at all (with publicans), it just happens on the closest weekend of Valentine's Day every year, and everybody knows when it is, everybody makes their own arrangements, nobody organises anything. I never ask people to come, I only ask people if they were coming, no organisation at all. And that's the way it was intended right from the start, it was an informal gathering (Henderson, personal communication, ~ 2020).

Although George states a few times that there is no organisation involved, a closer examination of his statement implies that the Welsh Weekend is self-organised. This is seen in how plans are made independently based on the knowledge that the weekend was to happen at a specific time every year. Here we can also see a disjunct between George's experience and the tourist brochures. George's account stresses the informal, self-organised nature of the event, whereas the tourist brochures portray the event as a 'music festival', implying the presence of structure

and large-scale organisation. My experience that year was consistent with George's statement: I had made transport and accommodation arrangements with Lesley independently, and there was no organising committee that oversees the running of the event.

It can be argued that the tourist materials suggest that local authorities see the Welsh Weekend as an opportunity to boost the economy. The Facebook post on the Ballyvaughan Community page also shows that there is a sign specifically created to welcome the contingent from Wales, indicating some form of investment into the Welsh Weekend. However, some of the attendees were not keen on having the event publicised:

A couple of years ago, the local people here wanted to put bunting up and advertise the Welsh Weekend...I contacted Ó Loðlainn's and I told them that we've never advertised, we don't want to advertise, we'd be inundated with people if we keep advertising. We don't want to do it. It's informal, it's always been informal. And he (the contact) approached the parish committee, and everything was taken down off the site, and no bunting was put up at all (~ 2020).

George's opposition to advertising stems from his experience of the origins of the Welsh Weekend as an informal gathering of friends. These concerns of the attendees are still heard these days, seeing that there were no buntings or signs that were put up in the 2020 event. However, local businesses still recognise the Welsh Weekend as an important event. In our conversation, George revealed that the proprietor of Ó Loðlainn's consulted him on when to be open for business on Friday of the Weekend:

It was very funny, Thursday night. Thursday night as we were leaving, she (the proprietor) shouted across the room to me, "What time are we opening tomorrow?" (~2020)

This demonstrates a level of collaboration between Ó Loðlainn's and the attendees of the event, indicating that the establishment has a vested interest in the Welsh Weekend. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to see if this was the case with the other pubs in the village.

These interactions and information culled from the Internet give us an idea of what relations are like between the participants of the Welsh Weekend and the locals of Ballyvaughan. The online interaction and the promotional materials show that locals are open to having the event in their village (see Figure 30 and Figure 31). There is even an example of a local business consulting the participants of the Welsh Weekend in order to improve ways to cater to the event. Attempts to commercialise the event by advertising, however, was met with opposition from the participants, indicating that those who take part in the Welsh Weekend were against its festivalisation. This takes the event away from its roots as a gathering between friends.

Seeing that the first Welsh Weekend happened relatively recently in living memory, it is understandable that those who participate in it today are against making it too formal and structured.

3b.6 Postscript: Musicking across boundaries

Saturday, 15 February 2020

I had received a tip from George after our conversation that Ó Loðlainn's would be opening at 1 p.m. Not wanting to miss the video conference call with Gerallt later on at 3 p.m. and wanting a good seat, I went into Ó Loðlainn's a little after opening time. I was not the first to arrive on the scene, however. There was a group of four tourists sitting by the bar and a few singers I recognised from Thursday night sitting in various places in the pub. That said, there were still enough seats to go around. I chose to sit in a corner where I could place my instrument case and also have a good view of the screen.

We started off with a few songs to get the session going. George even managed to encourage one of the tourists to take part in the session and share a song with the group. After the applause we gave her after her song, she revealed that that was the first time she had ever sung in public.

'When someone sings in public for the first time here, we call it a christening' George said to me later.

Just before 3 p.m., George set up his laptop on the bar for the conference call. I was quite intrigued – this was the first time that they were including someone who could not make it to the session through the Internet. In fact, this was my first time musicking across borders using the Internet!

The Welsh Weekend has certainly evolved through the years since its first edition in 1982. Over the years, it has expanded in scope. Its participants used to be a closed group of friends associated with the Bangor and Galway traditional music scenes. These days, the participant base has grown considerably, but the core group associated with the two aforementioned communities still remains at the heart of the event. Those who attend this event are likely to come from their own respective session communities, which are *sub-communities of practice* in their own right. During the Welsh Weekend, we see these communities musicking together, gaining characteristics of a transnational community.

The musickal activities that are observed during the Welsh Weekend suggest multiplicity in the strands of relationships between the participants. Sessioners in the Bangor community of

course maintain social relations within their community, but there is a deeper connection for those from the community who attend the Welsh Weekend together. On another level, there are people from outside the Bangor community who are in close contact with them. There is a special form of relationship here, seeing that these close contacts are often part of the planning and logistics process in the Bangor community when arranging for the trip to Ballyvaughan. Finally, the last layer of relationships is between the Bangor community and everyone else who goes to Ballyvaughan who does not fit in the earlier categories. This relationship is distant compared to the previous levels discussed previously.

This complicated web of relationships, coupled with the relatively short amount of time that is spent in Ballyvaughan each time, has led to the lack of hybridity in the music. The Welsh Weekend represents a space where the different sub-communities of practice can share their music. However, because of the format of sessions, tunes are never worked on after it has been presented, and as a result, there is minimal collaboration in the musicking process. Consequently, no new forms of music were observed to have arisen as a result of the Welsh Weekend during my time there. However, there was an element of hybridity when Gypsy Jazz music was played in the sessions. Because of logistics, the Gypsy Jazz tunes were played with an ensemble of traditional session instruments, such as the fiddle, guitar, harmonica, and melodeon. While these instruments are fit in well in Gypsy Jazz ensemble, it is the combination of instruments that are interesting.

Of course, the locals of Ballyvaughan also play a big part in the running of the Welsh Weekend. The industries that were identified as vital to the event are the hospitality industry which provides accommodation for the participants, and the food and beverage industry which not only provides nourishment but also spaces for the main events to take place. There have been attempts to monetise the event by touting it as a tourist attraction, but this has been met with some opposition by the participants. The festivalisation of the event was seen to be problematic because it takes the Welsh Weekend away from its unstructured and informal roots as a gathering between friends. That said, we have seen how Ó Loðlainn's continue having an interest in the event by consulting the participants on opening times.

Ó Loðlainn's has now provided something unprecedented in the 2020 edition of the Welsh Weekend: This location has now provided access to allow distance musicking. We all quieted down when we heard the characteristic chimes of Skype: George was establishing the video call to Gerallt in Wales.

‘Hello?’ Gerallt’s voice crackled through the laptop.

The next half an hour was lovely. Gerallt sang his signature song about being a man in a campervan, and some in the pub were invited to sing a song as well. The session was going on as if he was physically there. We had to come to a point where he had to go, and someone said, ‘Let’s do Napoleon Bonaparte!’ This song, specifically the version collected by Tommy Flynn of the Ship’s Launch in Bangor, was traditionally the closing song of sessions in Bangor. This is no longer practised in ordinary sessions in Bangor, but it still is the case in the Ó Loðlainn’s sessions during the Welsh Weekend.

Everyone in the pub stood up and held hands, as was the tradition when singing the song, as we collectively belted our last song:

*Oh my name’s Napoleon Bonaparte, I’m the conqueror of all nations
I’ve banished German legions I drove kings from their thrones
I’ve banished dukes and earls and splendid congregations
But now I am transported to Saint Helena’s shore.*

Chapter 4: Musicking

Prelude: The Village Hall Twmpath

6th November 2018

The last bus into Rhosgadfan pulled into the village at a little past 6 p.m. The journey was easy enough; the village was only two buses and an hour and a half away from where I was based. There was a slight breeze and a drizzle of rain. The roads were already empty and quiet, save for a dog barking in the distance. I had alighted at the stop just before the village school with my fiddle and some extra clothes in case I had to stay for the night. I waited for Martin; the plan was for him to take me to their farmhouse further up the road where I could stay for dinner before going to the Mountain Rangers Football Clubhouse for the monthly session.

Rhosgadfan is a small, isolated village nestled 240m above sea level on the slopes of Moel Tryfan. The steepness of these slopes has given this location its extremely contrastive nature: this village is high enough that on a clear day, the Wicklow Mountains across the Irish Sea may be visible, but at the same time, as the crow flies, it is only 7 kilometres away from Dinas Dinlle, the closest settlement to Rhosgadfan that is located on the shores of the Irish Sea. The village is also sparsely populated, with less than 1,994 inhabitants (Cyngor Gwynedd 2013, 1). The majority of the inhabitants of this village are proficient in the use of the Welsh language: according to the results of the 2011 census, 72.6% of the electoral ward where Rhosgadfan is in have responded that they can speak, read and write Welsh (2013).

The sessions in Rhosgadfan take place on the first Tuesday of every month in the Mountain Rangers Football Club, a sports club that is home to the local football team which folded in 2012 but has since made a comeback in 2018. During the hiatus, the clubhouse functioned as a social space for the village, hosting events such as plays and musical gigs for the community. Furthermore, it even became one of the holding locations for the village school when its roof was badly damaged by Storm Barbara in 2017. It was also during this time that the Mountain Rangers sessions began. These sessions were organised by Jan and her partner Martin, and the event attracts a regular crowd who reside in the area. The sessions that take place here are unique – it is the only one along the Menai Strait, and quite possibly further beyond, that has a caller who directs the audience to dance. As such, sessions here also double as social events

for non-musicians, much like the twmpath, cèilidh or céilí, and musicians also function as a scratch band.

After having some food and a cup of tea, Martin drove Jan and me to the clubhouse in the middle of the village at about 8 p.m. “As the organisers, we want to be one of the earlier ones to arrive”, Jan told me. The event takes place in a room approximately 15 metres long and 9 metres wide, with nine tables placed along the long sides of the room. There is also a long bench along the wall, running from the stage to the corner of the room, making a 90-degree turn, and then running along the long side of the room until the end. There is also a bar in the room where drinks can be purchased, and a stage in one corner of the room. This stage is unused when the sessions take place; because of this, musicians use the stage as a place to put their instrument cases away. Additionally, the room has a large, empty space in the middle, which meant that there was no need to move furniture around to make space for the dance later.



Figure 32: Layout of the clubhouse. The bar is just outside the picture on the right

Even though we had aimed to be one of the earliest, there were a few who had beaten us to the place. Some were seated in the furthest side of the room away from the entrance, while others were standing around near the entrance. I recognised those who were seated further away; they are musicians who also take part in the sessions in the Black Boy Inn and the Anglesey Arms

in Caernarfon. They waved at us, beckoning us to come over. They must have arrived shortly before we did; even though they had already bought drinks, I could see they were still unpacking and tuning their instruments. There were also people I did not recognise in the room. They were mostly standing around near the entrance or are by the bar having a chat with the barkeeper, although some were already making themselves comfortable at the tables close to the entrance.

I seated myself on a round stool close to the corner. I took out my fiddle and my research tools while letting everyone know that I was to be observing the session. “Look out now, he’s going to grade us!” one of the musicians exclaimed jokingly. The others laughed. I laughed as well, perhaps relieved that my presence as a researcher had not impacted my relationship with the community too negatively.

I bought myself a pint of lemonade and tuned my fiddle. I chatted with the other musicians, catching up with those who I had not seen for a while. At one point, Martin stood up to address the room.

‘We are beginning the evening with a dance’ he said, his voice booming. ‘Those who are not playing please come up here’.

He insisted everyone take part in the dance, seemingly refusing to move on with the event if anyone chose to sit out of it. He let Jan know which dance he was calling. Jan turned to us musicians.

‘We’re going to play this one’, she said, playing the opening bars of what I recognise to be the *Seven Stars* jig on her piano accordion. This is a tune I know well, having played it with Jan even before beginning this research. I also knew from experience that she was going to change into another jig called the *Plane Tree*. Meanwhile, Martin had managed to get every non-musician except the barkeeper to take part in the dance. There were five couples in total. Martin was describing the steps to the dance while the dancers tried them out slowly. Eventually, when he was satisfied that they had got a hold of the dance steps, he turned to us, indicating they were ready.

Jan began playing a short snippet of the *Seven Stars* jig which served as the introduction. The musicians and I came in on her cue. Martin stood close to Jan, calling out the dance steps to the dancers. In the middle of the dance, Martin turned to us and shouted, ‘didn’t tell you this is a 48-bar one!’

Jan laughed. The tune we were playing was only 32 bars long. Because the dance and the tune were not of the same length, the sections of the dance did not correspond with the sections of the music. Nevertheless, we played on so that the dancers didn't have to stop altogether on our account.

Halfway through, Jan turned to us, attempting to make eye contact with all of us. She then leaned back and stuck her leg out, exclaiming 'chaaaaaange!'

I understood Jan's gesture. This meant that at the end of that a transition was imminent at the end of the cycle of *Seven Stars*. In other words, when at the end of the tune, we were to play *The Plane Tree* instead of repeating *Seven Stars*.

The dancers kept going after we changed tune. My attention turned to the dancers. The dance was energetic and light-hearted. It did not matter if the dancers were not familiar with the steps or could not keep up with Martin's instructions; it was clear to me that having fun was far more important at that time. Martin was also making sure to keep the atmosphere light-hearted as well.

After some time, Martin turned to Jan and held up two fingers. We were still playing *The Plane Tree*. I later understood that we were to play the tune two more times before coming to an end. In the end, everyone in the room clapped as the dancers either returned to their tables before or made their way to the bar to get a drink.

The soundscape of the room was washed with the hubbub of conversation again shortly after the dance was over. I noticed an interesting phenomenon here: musicians and non-musicians did not really interact much with each other when seated. Perhaps the layout of the room had influenced this: we are already seated in a long line thanks to the way the furniture was arranged along the perimeter of the room. Since we, the musicians, had already occupied one section of the room, the non-musicians had to seat themselves away from us. It's not that we were actively trying to distance ourselves from everyone; however, being seated near each other does help when playing music together. I did notice that this is quite the opposite at the bar, where musicians and non-musicians alike were mingling amongst themselves.

As I was taking in my surroundings, I suddenly heard the voice of an older man, coming up to us asking rather shyly, 'Can I sing a song for you?' I recognised him as one of the dancers earlier.

‘Of course you can.’ Martin replied. Turning round to face the non-musicians, he shouted, ‘Song! Song coming up!’

A hush came over the room as people stopped their conversations. The man began singing a song, which I later identified as *The Calico Printer’s Clerk*. Initially, he sang this song without accompaniment in the first verse and chorus. However, when he came to the second chorus, another man joined in, singing in harmony. This other man chimed in at every chorus, either harmonising or singing in unison with the man leading the song. All this while, the musicians began noodling on their instruments, trying to identify the key the song was in, and the guitarists were looking for suitable chords to accompany the song. By the time we came to the fifth and last choruses, some musicians joined in singing either in harmony or unison, even though we may not be familiar with the words of the chorus. I must admit I was among us who did not manage to catch the words of the chorus; I could sing the melody of the chorus, but I found myself muttering the lyrics, vaguely matching the syllables to the original song.

The song eventually came to a close. We all clapped for the man who started the song in the first place, before resuming our conversations again. I heard strains of a fiddle somewhere, while at the same time, I noticed one of the guitarists noodling around, checking if their instrument was still in tune. Jan punctuated the atmosphere by starting to play a tune. Some of us musicians recognised this tune straight away, joining in almost immediately. Some even cut their conversations short to join in playing the music. The non-musicians, however, carried on with their conversations. The flautist sitting opposite me was playing quieter than before. He was playing long notes which I thought he must have predicted would come into the tune. Upon reflection, I realised this was something I did myself whenever I heard an unfamiliar but interesting tune; I found that playing long notes as such allowed me to catch the tune by allowing me to identify key notes in the tune.

I noticed Jan looking around the room, raising her eyebrows as she made eye contact with musicians taking part in her set. At the end of the first tune she was playing, she played another tune in another key without stopping, creating an unbroken string of melodies. Those who were familiar with Jan’s repertoire knew to change to this second tune straight away, while those who were not had to take a moment to figure out what this second tune was. The flautist was playing much more confidently in the second tune: his notes were louder and much more ornate compared to the soft, long notes he was playing earlier. We eventually ended after two tunes. Those who did not directly take part in playing music earlier gave us a round of applause.

Martin turned to a couple of non-musicians sitting next to him, asking if they were ready for another dance. They said yes.

‘Five-minute warning!’ Martin called out to the rest of the room, his voice booming. He then shuffled through some cards from a rectangular box, pulling one out and putting them back in again. Eventually, he picked one and called out to the non-musicians again, shouting, ‘The next is a dance called the Haygrove circle dance. It’s a square dance.’

‘I thought it’s a circle dance?’ one of the musicians piped up.

‘I’m just trying to confuse them’ Martin quipped. The musician laughed at his response.

The flautist in front of me suddenly started playing a tune he was reading from sheet music he had pulled out earlier. It turned out to be mostly a flute solo, sparsely accompanied by Jan who was, this time, quietly figuring out the notes on her piano accordion and a guitarist who was strumming softly, figuring out the chords to the tune. I did not take part in this one myself because I was personally unfamiliar with the tune and feared that since I was sitting so close to the flautist, my fiddle noodling might be distracting to him and others trying to figure out the tune.

He did eventually move on to a second tune, *Hunting the Squirrel*. I joined in here as I was familiar with this tune. However, the other musicians seemed to be unfamiliar with this one as well, seeing that they did not join in as I did. Someone began liltering the tune, singing nonsense syllables to the melody. Perhaps this person was doing so because they were familiar with the tune, but not physically familiar to be able to play it on their instrument. Halfway through the tune, the flautist stopped for some reason. I also stopped, not wanting to steal the tune away from the one who started it. Nonetheless, he started playing the tune again from where he stopped, and the lilter and I began following his lead. When we came to the end of the tune, there was yet another round of applause for the flautist.

Immediately after the applause died down, Martin called out to the room, inviting those who were dancing earlier back to the dance floor to do the Haygrove circle dance. He began to explain the dance steps, but stopped himself halfway and turned to us, telling the dancers that he needed to be clear this time what kind of music the band should be playing.

‘It’s a 97-bar jig, okay?’ he said, cheekily. The musicians laughed, for there was no such tune that would go on for 97 bars. ‘No, it’s a 32-bar polka-reel’ he clarified.

Martin then began to address the dancers again. ‘Right, the Haygrove circle dance. Never called it before, never seen it in my life. Difficulty: 1’ he said, reading from his card. ‘I don’t know if it’s a scale of one to ten, where one is the most difficult.’

We laughed at his remark.

He continued explaining the dance steps again to the dancers, going through the motions while he was explaining them. Meanwhile, I noticed the banjo player passively improvising on his instrument quietly, while someone was tuning their violin in preparation for the set. When the dancers had gone through their motions, Martin called out, ‘Okay, after the introduction’, inviting the musicians to start the dance off.

Jan opened by playing the first bar of Salmon Tails. This was another tune that we were all familiar with because Jan played them at other sessions as well. This time, the dance and the music were synchronised to each other. When it was time to play the next tune in the set, Jan called out, ‘Chaaaange! *Jamie Allen*’, signifying that the next tune was to be *Jamie Allen*, which commonly follows Salmon Tails anyway by those who play these tunes. At around this point on the side of the dancers, there was laughter and confusion at one point because someone had forgotten the steps. Martin turned to me. ‘Irfan, stop taking notes!’ he said in jest. We continued playing to avoid interrupting the flow of the dance. I noticed Martin doing what he did earlier again, putting two fingers up at Jan as if showing a peace sign, which meant the dance was coming to an end after two more cycles. At the end of that set, the dancers gave a round of applause to everyone. ‘Well done!’ Martin praised the dancers.

The evening went on with more dances, tunes, and song. In retrospect, my experience in this session was not any different from other sessions along the Menai Strait, or even outside of it, for that matter. What really set this session apart from others was the fact that we were doubling as a scratch band for the dance event for the village, which meant that this session had relatively more structure than other sessions. Especially when we were playing for dances, there was less flexibility and spontaneity when it comes to playing tunes; we were restricted to tunes that were only suitable for the dances. However, outside the dancing episodes, the way we musicked was no different from how we would be in a pub where sessioners and non-sessioners alike shared spaces. In the next segment, I will be discussing the different kinds of musickal processes that take place in sessions.

4.1 Ecology of interactions

As discussed in the previous chapter, the primary context in which traditional music is practised and transmitted publicly along the Menai Strait is in a session. At its core, a session is built upon how its participants interact and relate to each other through musicking. However, the issue of interaction in the session context is complicated by the paradoxes it presents. Musicians and audience may be one and the same, it is private yet public, and everyone is free to play or do whatever they want except when they are not. To flesh out these paradoxes, the issue of participation and relationships, communication, and etiquette will be discussed. These three elements are components of what I shall refer to as the ecology of interactions.

Ecology of Interactions

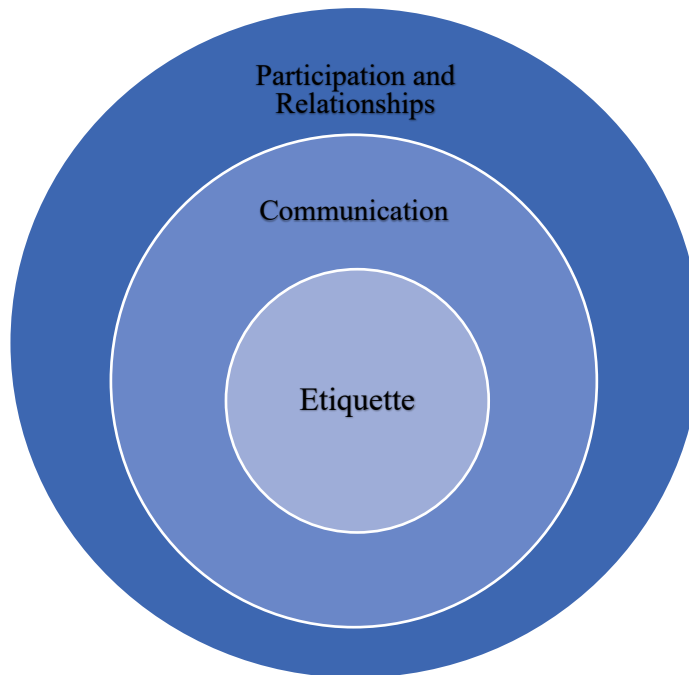


Figure 33: The three components of the Ecology of Interactions

The order of interactions will be used to describe the interactions present in the session. The diagram above shows how the three components of the order of interactions relate to each other in terms of their explicitness. The outer components are more explicit, and the inner components are more tacit. In other words, the further into the circle, the more ‘unspoken’ the components are.

Participation and relationships are the most explicit of the three components because one does not need to be part of the session community to see that the session is a group activity that requires participation. On the other hand, I consider etiquette to be the most tacit component because it is something that is not easily observed. Different sessioners may have different ideas of what session etiquette is. Furthermore, the rules of session etiquette are often unspoken, even when another individual unwittingly breaks those rules. However, it is still worth exploring these unspoken rules because they form the core of all interactions in sessions, thus the placement of etiquette in the middle of Figure 33 above. Etiquette influences the means of communication, and the communication that happens between individuals in a session would in turn influence participation in the event.

In this discussion, I will be using the term *episode* to describe moments in the session. In a session, there are two distinct episodes: the *musical episode* and the *conversational episode*. These episodes would alternate with each other in a session, as demonstrated in Figure 34 below:

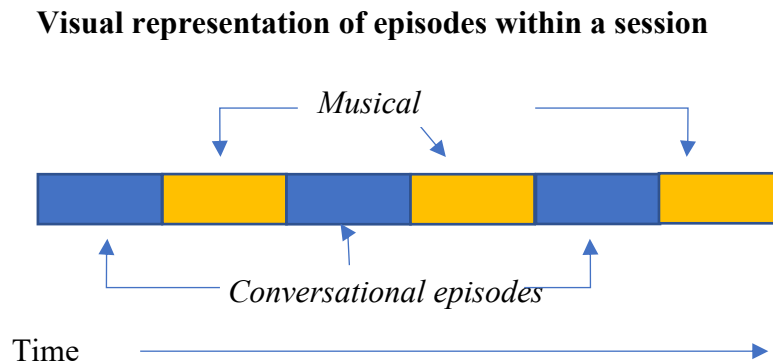


Figure 34: A visual representation of episodes within a session through time. Blue blocks represent conversational episodes and orange blocks represent music episodes

Musical episodes refer to moments where music-making is the main focus of activity for the musicians, whereas conversational episodes are moments where the main focus of activity is socialising through conversation. The distinction between the episodes is important as it also has a significant influence on the interactions that take place in the session.

Allocation of involvement will be explored in this chapter as well. In this segment, I will be exploring how those who attend sessions manage their attention to the situation at any one time. There, I will also be unpacking the differences in social expectations between musical and conversational episodes.

4.1.1 Participation and relationships

In this segment, the issue of participation and relationships will be explored. These represent the first and outermost component in the Order of Interactions, for these are the most explicit elements in the sense that they can be easily observed even from an etic perspective. Before commencing this discussion, however, there is a need to clarify the term ‘sessioner’ which I will be using in this chapter. In the context of this discussion, a sessioner is someone who is either a part of a session community outlined in Chapter 3, or someone who is visiting the area and wishes to take part in local session activities. This does not necessarily mean that they partake in music-making themselves, although this is the case for a majority of sessioners. Those in the sessioner group who do not make music themselves are often seen in close association with those who do make music. This sets them apart from non-sessioners, who are

not associated with the session scene but happen to be present within the same space. Including non-musicians who closely associate themselves with the musicians allows us to further examine relationships within the sessioner group itself. An intermediary group exists in the form of visiting musicians who wish to take part in local session activities.

The session in the Mountain Rangers in Rhosgadfan is a notable exception and deserves a more profound examination in the discussion of participation. As seen in the case study above, the session also functions as a social dance event in the community. This means that the relationship between audience and performer is markedly different from the conventional session situation. In this case, musicians in the session play the role of the scratch band for the dancers, and because of the nature of the event, certain musical episodes actually demand participation from the audience. They do not contribute directly to the music; however, they do take part in the dance which relies on the music that is being played. As such, in these situations the two groups are relying on each other: musicians count on the dancers' participation to make it a social dance event, while dancers rely on the musicians to play suitable tunes. Of course, it must be noted that not all musical episodes in the Mountain Rangers session serve as accompaniments to dance; musicians would start tunes or songs as they do in a normal session between dance episodes.

4.1.1.1 Participation

Participation and music are intimately connected. Christopher Small (2011) invites us to consider music as an action instead of an object. In other words, Small challenges us to find meaning in music in the processes involving collective effort rather than limiting ourselves to analysing its structures. This means that participation should be evaluated in the discussion surrounding music-making. In the session context, participation is especially just as valuable as performance. The performance and perpetuation of the tunes that are played here are dependent on people experienced and inexperienced alike to come together to reproduce these tunes. Sessions occur regularly in public spaces, which means that sessioners and non-sessioners share the same musical space. The previous chapter explores how these spaces are negotiated between the two groups. While the space is often divided into sessioner and non-sessioner zones, the boundaries between them are not physically defined. Furthermore, sessioners themselves are part of the audience themselves if they are not participating in a tune or set they are not familiar with. The blurred boundaries between audience and performer, coupled with the intersection of the sessioner between the two groups, have created an interesting situation with regards to analysing participation in the session context. For this

discussion, I shall be referring to Brynjulf Stige's (2010) model which establishes different degrees of participation. I will take that further by coding significant behavioural cues into Stige's categories. Based on observations made at sessions, I will apply different standards that would have to be given to sessioners and non-sessioners when evaluating their participation. This is because they are in the same space but with different intent. I must admit, however, that since the discussion centres around the session, these standards will have to be sessioner-centric.

In his study of musical participation, Stige makes three interpretations of what participation represents. One of the interpretations he theorised is that participation is a method in which one presents oneself (2010, p. 128). He proposes five categories of self-representation, reflecting to which degree a participant is taking part in the music. These categories are non-participation, silent participation, conventional participation, adventurous participation, and eccentric participation (see Table 20, p.155 below for a summary and explanation of these categories). He acknowledges, however, that these categories neither form a linear spectrum nor are disconnected from one another (2010, p. 132). With this in mind, I allowed for flexibility when coding certain behaviours into these categories.

Non-sessioners do not normally contribute to the music-making process, and their behavioural patterns therefore are more likely to fit in the first three degrees of participation, with are non-participation, silent, and conventional. Sessioners on the other hand, especially the musicians, are by default the more active participants in the musicking process compared to the non-sessioners. As such, their behavioural patterns are more likely to reflect the latter degrees of participation according to Stige's model, namely conventional, adventurous, and eccentric (see Table 20). However, sessioners who are not musicians tend to display behaviours that are reflective of silent participation as described by Stige.

The first level of participation is non-participation. Stige defines this as either not being present physically, socially, or psychologically in the setting (2010, pp. 130–131). For sessioners, this is fairly straightforward. Since sessions centre around the sessioners' activity, the only way that sessioners fall into this category is if they were to not show up to the session in the first place. On the other hand, non-sessioners would be in the category of non-participation if they were either not there, or not listening to the music.

The second category is silent participation. This form of participation is passive on the outside but requires the participant to be mentally attached to the music at hand. Stige's experience

listening to a live performance of Mozart's *Requiem* provides us with his personal account of silent participation:

My eyes wander back and forth, from instrument to instrument, musician to musician, group to group. My ears turn to various parts and take pleasure in how the sounds mingle together and establish larger wholes. Of course I'm not listening with my ears only. Memories, ideas, and emotional responses accompany the sounds that I hear. And my body is central to it all (Stige, 2010, p. 127).

In this account, Stige shows that he is physically passive in receiving the music in this very instant, yet his mind is invested in it. Similar to hyperlinks on a webpage, he was forming complex mental associations anchored around the music. In other words, even though he was not actively making music in that instance, his mind was engaged enough for him to be psychologically present. For sessioners, silent participation is straightforward: since they are there for the session and are closely related to the music-makers in that instance, it can be said that they would always be mentally present in the session even if they are not contributing to the music. Thus, I argue that sessioners who are there but not making music either momentarily or for the whole session are silent participants. As for non-sessioners on the other hand, it is nearly impossible to extrapolate these thought processes merely through observation, but there are behavioural markers which may suggest this. In fact, Stige's account above hints that actively paying attention to the musicians is a marker for silent participation. However, the session is complicated by the fact that the music is secondary to the location, and therefore the audience is not placed against the musicians like in concert settings. This means that silent participation goes beyond looking at the musicians. For this reason, I have looked out for other markers that show mental investment in the music beyond ocular activity. Three further markers were observed suggesting that silent participation was taking place with non-sessioners. The first is body movement. This is easily seen if a non-sessioner were to move their body in time with the music, indicating that they are responding to the music without making any sounds. The second marker is arguably the extension to bodily movement, which is tapping to the music. This can either refer to the tapping of the feet on the floor or of the fingers on the table. Even though the tapping could be said to contribute to the music because of the sound it makes, I still consider it as silent participation in the session context as this is often too quiet to influence the music significantly. Furthermore, the locations in which sessions happen are always loud enough to render these tappings inaudible from the sessioners' perspective. Finally, the clearest marker of silent participation is applause at the end of a song

or a set, which can be argued to hint that there is an awareness of music-making happening and acknowledgement that the music has come to an end.

The third category in Stige's model is conventional participation. For the sessioners, this is simply shown by taking part in the music-making process, or by starting sets that are already familiar to the group. For non-sessioners, however, this issue is slightly more complicated. A key point in Stige's description of this level is that it 'involves joining in and performing *what is expected* in the situation' (emphasis mine) (2010, p. 131). This is particularly interesting because it potentially creates conflict within Stige's model. In some situations, especially so where music is made in a non-collaborative environment, silent participation would be the expected behaviour from those who are not on the music-making side. This means that silent participation is, in fact, conventional participation. This is almost always the case for concerts featuring classical music, for instance. In the session context, the merger of the silent and conventional participation categories can be seen in the case of the non-sessioners. They are not expected by the sessioners to contribute to the music that was being created. It can be said that the session context allows for more liberties in behaviour compared to that of a classical music context. In a session, for instance, tapping of the feet would have been socially acceptable, whereas this might be less appropriate in a classical music concert. The merger of the silent and conventional participation categories also extends to sessioners in the event where a song is being performed by a solo singer in the session. Sessioners and non-sessioners alike are expected to stay silent, even if they are not psychologically present in the situation. Cues defining the merger of silent and conventional participation when a song begins include hushing or announcing the intention that someone would like to sing. This is normally done by someone who is aware that a solo song is either being or about to be performed and the singer is being overshadowed by the activities of others. This is observed in the essay which preludes this chapter:

As I was taking in my surroundings, I suddenly heard the voice of an older man, coming up to us asking rather shyly, 'Can I sing a song for you?' I recognised him as one of the dancers earlier.

'Of course, you can.' Martin replied. Turning round to face the non-musicians, he shouted, 'Song! Song coming up!'

A hush came over the room as people stopped their conversations. The man began singing a song, which I later identified as *The Calico Printer's Clerk*. Initially, he sang this song without accompaniment in the first verse and chorus. However, when he came to the second chorus, another man joined in, singing in harmony. This other man chimed in at every chorus, either harmonising or singing in unison with the man leading

the song. All this while, the musicians began noodling on their instruments, trying to identify the key the song was in, and the guitarists were looking for suitable chords to accompany the song. By the time we came to the fifth and last choruses, some musicians joined in singing either in harmony or unison, even though we may not be familiar of the words of the chorus. I must admit I was among us who did not manage to catch the words of the chorus; I could sing the melody of the chorus, but I found myself muttering the lyrics, vaguely matching the syllables to the original song (p. 139).

This experience demonstrates that expectations can change during a song, meaning that what is conventional in Stige's terms is subject to circumstance. If the song is vaguely familiar to the sessioners, it is not unusual for them to contribute by singing the chorus together in unison or harmony. This demonstrates that even within the same song, there are underlying rules about when to stay silent and when to contribute to the music. That said, there is one behavioural expectation that is read to be non-negotiable in this account: the need to not talk over the song. These behavioural expectations will be further discussed in the etiquette segment.

The situation surrounding the session in the Mountain Rangers Club in Rhosgadfan is exceptional. Because of its nature where the session accompanies a community dance event, the audience is expected to participate on a more active level. This means that for the non-sessioners in this case, they will have to be dancing to the music as prescribed by the caller to be considered participating on a conventional level. This is the only behavioural category for the non-sessioners which does not merge with silent participation.

The next level on Stige's model is adventurous participation. At this level, participation becomes considerably more active and requires a higher degree of mental work compared to the levels of participation that were previously discussed above. This would inevitably create a new centre of attention in the group. Stige defines adventurous participation as 'a deviation which contributes something new to the situation' (2010, p. 131). In other words, adventurous participation is exhibited when the participant does something beyond what is expected of them. These actions result in change, be it temporary or lasting. Bearing this in mind, there are several behavioural cues that could be coded under this category. For sessioners, I consider introducing new material for the community to be a form of adventurous participation. These new materials can either be original in the form of new compositions or tunes borrowed from musical traditions outside the Menai Strait area. Additionally, the introduction of new sets or modified versions of existing sets is also considered to be a type of adventurous participation since it transcends beyond requires the participant to be more mentally present. These sets may be built from tunes from other sets that have already been previously established or even be built from new tunes altogether. A notable form of adventurous participation is what I term set

extending. This is a situation where a sessioner plays another tune after a set initiated by another sessioner has ended without pause, thus extending the original set by another tune or two. This is usually done when there are visiting sessioners to the session. These visiting sessioners may be used to playing the originator's final tune as part of another set, and so they may opt to continue the set as they are used to by playing the next tune in their set following the originator's last tune. Conversely, a local sessioner might do the same to the visiting sessioner's set. Finally, another event that I have coded to be a form of adventurous participation was the act of accompanying songs led by another sessioner. The accompaniment can either be vocal or instrumental in nature. Doing so requires the musician to be able to improvise and respond to the lead singer appropriately; being familiar with the song and perhaps knowing a pre-existing arrangement, as well as familiarity of their own instruments greatly helps with this process as well. This was personally observed during the Mountain Rangers Club session (see extract on p. 140). When the lead singer arrived at his second chorus, the focus of attention shifted slightly away from the singer when a second man sang a harmony line complementing the melody of the chorus. Eventually, more musicians contributed to the song by singing harmony lines or providing instrumental accompaniment. Whilst their actions are also coded as adventurous participation, I would consider the first man who began accompanying the lead singer in the first place to be the most adventurous in this situation.

The final category in Stige's model is eccentric participation. Like adventurous participation above, this results in a shift in attention, but the key difference between the two is, according to Stige, that adventurous participation challenges leadership, while eccentric participation challenges the coherence of the group (2010, p. 131). There is a degree of subversion that cannot escape the attention of those who are observing it in this category of participation. Stige provides an example of this in his observations during the *Cultural Festival* where a group of disabled musicians produced a completely different song to what was arranged by their music therapist. Subversive actions in a session context rarely occurred during the observation period, but they can happen in two contexts: (1) interrupting a set, (2) or purposefully playing an established tune differently from how the other sessioners know it. The first context usually happens when a sessioner interrupts the set of another by playing a tune different to what the set leader had intended. This context differs from extending the set discussed above because in this case, the set leader had intended to play another tune, whereas in extending the set, the other sessioner comes in at the *final* tune of the set. Interruption of the set is usually a product of miscommunication between the set leader and the interrupter. In this case, the interrupter

not only has misjudged the set by perceiving the end of the tune as the end of the set, but they are also not attentive enough to notice that the set leader is probably playing the start of the next tune. There are other factors that cause interruption including the difference in loudness between the interrupter's and set leader's instruments and the disruption of well-established sets. The second context involves a sessioner taking a tune that is well-known to the community and changing it in such a way that the tune is still identifiable, but different enough that it requires re-learning it. This has been observed in a house session where a sessioner began playing *Banish Misfortune*, a generally popular tune among the sessioners, but in the key of D minor instead of the original D mixolydian. These two events mentioned above occur very rarely; in fact, they could be considered isolated events.

As for non-sessioners, they are not expected to participate in the music-making in a normal session, and therefore the conventional mode of participation for them is, in fact, silent participation. As such, when a sessioner does something that goes beyond silent participation, I would consider it as either a form of adventurous or eccentric participation. Of course, the session at the Mountain Rangers Club in Rhosgadfan expects the audience to be invested actively in the music, so this event is an exception to this rule. Adventurous and eccentric participation on the non-sessioners part includes clapping in time to the music loud enough for it to be significantly audible to the sessioners, dancing to the music, or even contributing to the music while still maintaining social proxemic distance from sessioners (see Chapter 1: Locations). This contribution can come in the form of lilting the tune that is being played or singing a song. The intensity of these actions would set apart an act of adventurous participation from an act of eccentric participation. However, I did not observe any acts from the non-sessioners that would be subversive enough to compromise the coherence of the session to be classed as eccentric participation, and therefore the category of eccentric participation on the non-sessioners part is merely theoretical.

For a non-sessioner, clapping, dancing, and contributing to the music would inadvertently shift the focus of attention onto them, as there is now a person from outside the circle adding to the session despite not having expectations to do so. I have not observed sessioners discouraging these actions from non-sessioners; although because non-sessioners are not expected to take part in the music-making, it is also rare for sessioners to encourage non-sessioners to contribute to the music unless they appear to be particularly enthusiastic. I have observed two examples of this: one where an enthusiastic non-sessioner was invited by some of the sessioners to share

a song; and another where the sessioners took a song request from a non-sessioner, on the condition that the non-sessioner would lead it themselves.

Table 20 on the following page is a summary of how the behaviours discussed in this segment are mapped onto Stige's model of participation.

Participation type (Stige, 2010, pp. 130–131)	Sessioners	Non-sessioners
<u>Non-participation:</u> ‘...not being in the setting (leaving or never arriving), or physically being there but with no sign of being psychologically and socially present’	No show	No show Not listening to the music
<u>Silent participation:</u> ‘involves being there but not joining in or taking part in any conventional way... silent participation involves giving some impression of being mentally and socially present.’	There, but not contributing to the music in any way	Looking at the musicians Moving of the body Tapping in time Not talking over the music / song
<u>Conventional participation:</u> ‘involves joining in and performing what is expected in the situation, in one of the roles available... Conventional participation involves imitation of and/ or synchronization with what others are or have been doing.’	Taking part in sets Starting established sets that people in the group would know	Dancing to the music (conventional to Mountain Rangers sessions only)
<u>Adventurous participation:</u> ‘...different from conventional participation in that the individual’s contribution is standing out... It is a deviation that contributes with something essentially new in the situation.’	Introducing new sets/tunes to the community Composing new tunes Building new sets using tunes from other sets Extension of sets Accompanying songs	Clapping to the music Dancing to the music Contributing to the music while still being in the audience (i.e., lilting or whistling to the tune, or singing)

<u>Eccentric participation:</u>	Interruption of sets	
‘...goes beyond transforming what is already happening and it can rarely be ignored. It will usually either establish a new centre of mutual attention and action or it will break up the existing structures.’	Playing an established tune differently	

Table 20: Summary of sessioners' and non-sessioners' behaviours mapped onto Stige's model of self-representation.

4.1.1.2 Relationships

The discussion of the various degrees of participation raises the issue of relationships between the different social groups. Two dichotomies can be extracted from these, namely sessioners vs. non-sessioners, and within the sessioner group, musicians vs. non-musicians. However, a closer observation of the sessioner group reveals yet another level worth observing, which is the hierarchal relationships within the group itself. Bearing these categories in mind, this segment will discuss the relationships between the aforementioned groups by analysing the social processes and interactions between them. Figure 35 below is a visualisation of the different groups and how they are related to each other.

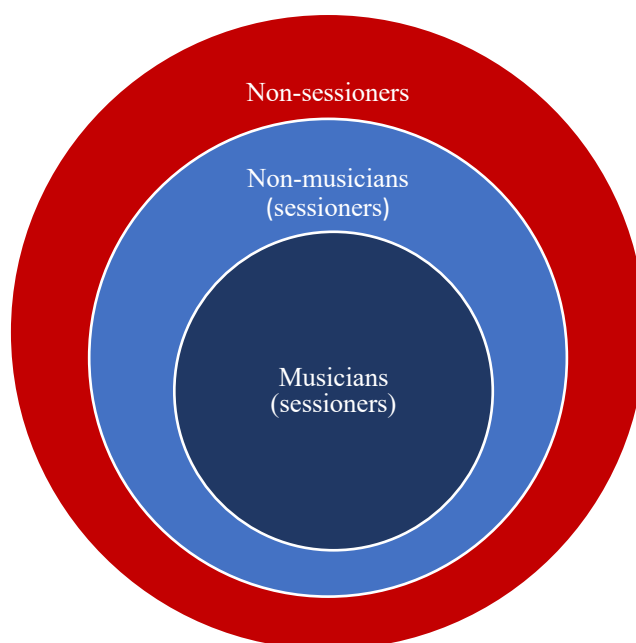


Figure 35: Social circles centred around sessioners

4.1.1.2.1 Sessioners vs. non-sessioners

The first set we are examining will be that of the sessioners and non-sessioners. As seen in the previous chapter on locations, the proxemic distance between these two social groups varies from session to session. This depends on the space in which sessions happen. In places like Tafarn y Glôb or the Black Boy Inn where the space is shared between sessioners and non-sessioners, the distance between the two groups is smaller compared to isolated spaces like The Newborough Arms, where it is larger.⁵⁰ The nature of shared spaces allows non-sessioners to participate in music-making, although they often limit themselves to silent participation. This can be attributed to the phenomenon of zoning within a shared space discussed in the previous chapter (see p. 51). Limiting oneself to certain activities in this context also reveals that there are underlying regulations that influence how one presents themselves in this situation. Goffman's (1966) theories regarding social behaviour shed some light on approaching this issue. Since sessions happen in public spaces which do not demand any degree of formality, it could be said that social regulation in these spaces is loosely defined. In other words, those in this space are not very constrained by social rules. That said, there is a degree of 'tightness' in shared spaces; this is hinted at in the way the two groups position themselves in these spaces: there is a distinct zone for sessioners which non-sessioners do not normally trespass. Since these zones are mostly unmarked, it also indicates that non-sessioners are innately aware of these boundaries. This awareness demonstrates that while social rules are relatively lax in these locations, there is an underlying pressure that discourages different groups of people, sessioners and non-sessioners alike, from crossing into each other's boundaries. This pressure strengthened by the fact that sessioners are making music, an activity that sets them apart from the rest of the patrons in the establishment. This in turn explains why non-participation and silent participation is expected of non-sessioners whenever music-making is in progress.

However, the physical and mental separation of sessioners and non-sessioners does not mean that these two groups do not interact at all. In fact, I have observed members from these two groups interacting in a very specific situation during the Mountain Rangers session:

The soundscape of the room was washed with the hubbub of conversation again shortly after the dance was over. I noticed an interesting phenomenon here: musicians and non-musicians did not really interact much with each other when seated (p. 139).

⁵⁰ To recapitulate from Chapter 1, isolated spaces refer to locations where sessions take place in a room separate from the rest of the clientele of the establishment.

The musicians in this extract are sessioners, while the dancers refer to non-sessioners. The bar area in this example refers to the place where drinks are bought; this particular location does not have bar stools which allows patrons to sit at the bar itself, although other locations do. This example reinstates what was discussed earlier about the separation of the two groups. However, in the bar area, there is some interaction occurring. This implies that the bar area is a neutral zone where it is more socially acceptable to interact with those outside one's social circle. However, there is a degree of liminality associated with the bar area, at least for the sessioners. They will always place themselves in locations where belongings, instruments, food, and drink can be conveniently stored. Because none of the bar areas in the locations discussed in Chapter 1 can adequately provide this storage space, sessioners are never based around the bar. This means that the bar area represents a temporary space for the sessioners, primarily serving as the place for purchasing drinks. The liminality of this location would suggest that any interaction between the two groups here would be minimal: at the very least, the only non-sessioner that the sessioner would interact with is the person working behind the bar.

There are several occasions where I have observed non-sessioners interacting with the sessioners for various reasons. Sometimes, a non-sessioner may approach the sessioners out of curiosity, sit amongst them and quietly observe the proceedings of the session while occasionally asking questions relating to the event. Sessioners would react positively to these kinds of interactions from non-sessioners, as long as the non-sessioner presents themselves in a non-intrusive fashion. Another interaction that non-sessioners might have is to make a request, usually asking for well-known traditional songs such as *Danny Boy* or more locally popular ones like *Tra Bo Dau*. The reactions of the sessioners to this are quite individual: some choose to actively ignore interactions like this while others are quite happy to entertain the requests. I have observed GBR take a request, but on the condition that the person making the request lead the song. On the other hand, Geoff Hardman has expressed that making requests is fine but finds it annoying when the requester does not sit through the song until its completion.

In isolated spaces where sessioners sit in a different room altogether, interaction between these two groups is even smaller. Because of this separation, visibility between the two groups is minimal and the likelihood of non-sessioners participating in the music-making is extremely low, even at the silent level.

There is something to be said about the quality of the interactions between sessioners and non-sessioners in sessions. These spaces are zoned, and both groups have demonstrated to be aware not to cross into each other's boundaries. During the event, interactions between the two groups are low, and are expected to remain that way. Referring to the social theories of Erving Goffman (1966), these interactions are unfocused in nature. Unfocused interactions, according to Goffman, are interactions that happen when a group of people exist in the same physical space but are carrying out separate activities. In his theory, Goffman examines the concept of involvement in unfocused interactions and divides them into two groups: main involvement, and side involvement. Main involvements are major objects of attention and interest to an individual, whereas side involvements refer to concurrent activities an individual can carry out without being a distraction or confusion to the main involvement (1966, p. 43). I argue that the separation of the sessioners and the non-sessioners is a direct result of the differences in involvements: for sessioners, musicking and socialising within the sessioner group would be their main involvement, the main involvement for non-sessioners would be restricted to within their social circles. This stems from the fact that people generally go to these public establishments to have interactions within their own social circles, as opposed to with strangers.

4.1.1.2.2 Musicians vs. non-musicians

The next set of people that will be discussed requires us to take a closer look at the sessioner group. It was mentioned above that not all sessioners are actively involved in making music, and so this segment will discuss the social relationship between the musicians and the non-musicians within the group. Even though non-musicians do not actively contribute to the music-making process, they are nonetheless a part of the sessioner group. They have come to be included in this group via close social connections or relations with the musicians themselves; for example, a non-musician may be a family member or a close friend of a musician who attends at least a part of a session. Since they are also sessioners, they also occupy the same zone with the musicians in a shared space and would sit in with the musicians in isolated spaces. Like non-sessioners, the degree of participation for non-musicians is also restricted to silent participation during music-making, however, the interactions that they have outside of the music-making context with the musicians are deeper than that of non-sessioners. This is hinted at by the social processes that I have observed in several sessions.⁵¹

⁵¹ I am using Bardis's (1979) definition of a social process, namely 'observable and repetitive patterns of social interaction that have a consistent direction or quality' (p. 148)

Apart from sitting with the musicians and having conversations with them when music is not being made, non-musicians also take part in the ritual of buying rounds of drinks. I have observed that when sessioners go to the bar to purchase a beverage, they rarely bought drinks for themselves. Instead, before leaving the session zone and going up to the bar, they would ask about three to four people if they could get a drink for them. These people who were offered are likely to be sitting in the vicinity of the one going up to the bar. These drinks would be paid for fully by the one who offered to get the drinks. The round is over when this group of people have finished their drinks, and the next round would begin when someone else in the group offers to get drinks for them. Buying drinks in this manner would mean that sessioners would minimise having to disrupt their session experience to go to the bar; they would get several drinks in the course of the session with minimal interruptions.

Interestingly, buying drinks in a round as described above fits in with the core premise of social exchange theory, which argues that the exchange of resources, both material and non-material, is one of the most basic forms of human interaction (Blau, 1964). This activity delineates the multiple social circles that may be present in that location. Those within a round are likely therefore to have a degree of social connection with each other in most cases. In other words, complete strangers are unlikely to be within the same round group. Since non-musicians and musicians alike in the sessioner group practice this ritual, it can be said that they bear a closer social relationship with each other as compared to the sessioner and non-sessioner groups.

However, when music is being played, the social situation is markedly different. As mentioned above, non-musician participation levels are not only generally restricted to the silent level, but it can be said that it is expected of the non-musicians to directly interact with musicians when a tune is being played. This suggests that the tightness of the social situation in the session varies between these two groups.⁵² In this case where music is being played, the non-musicians are expected to be mentally present at the moment, taking care not to disrupt the music that was in progress. This is especially so if there was a song in progress. My observations suggest that there are consequences that would follow if this expectation was violated: in one instance, the offender was hushed by a fellow sessioner who was sitting next to them. On the other hand, during phases where music is not being played, the scenario becomes looser. Non-musicians are observed to engage with the musicians candidly and furthermore, they also partake in group

⁵² Here I use the term ‘tightness’ and ‘looseness’ as used by Goffman (1966). Tight scenarios are those which require the individual to be more present and involved in the situation. An example would be that of a formal event, where there is a constant demand for the individual to adhere to societal rules and etiquette. Conversely, loose scenarios are those that do not pressure the individual to adhere to those rules and etiquette.

activities such as buying rounds mentioned above. These suggest that the demand for situational presence on non-musicians is diminished in phases where music is absent.

There is something to be said about the semiotic elements in musicking which influence interpersonal behaviour. In his book, Small (2011) comments upon how the design of the concert hall determine the levels of situational tightness (2011, pp. 23–27). In the hypothetical situation he presents, the foyer is where sociability is designed to be at the maximum: space is provided for individuals to engage with each other, and those who are in it display behaviours that suggest that they are relaxed at the moment (2011, pp. 23–24). On the other hand, the auditorium itself is a space that discourages social interaction and allows for one-way communication from musician to the audience; this is most obviously seen in its design where every member of the audience is forced to view the stage if they were to be seated normally. Small's hypothetical concert even includes a programme booklet that explicitly discourages coughing during a performance. The auditorium space, simply put, is a place where situational presence is demanded, and the audience is made aware of this.

A session environment lacks the physical foyer-auditorium divide as seen in Small's concert hall situation, especially for those that take place in shared spaces.⁵³ However, the difference in behaviour when music is present and absent during a session does indicate that this divide also exists in this situation. It can be said that this divide is purely symbolic, represented by the music itself. This suggests that instead of physically moving from one space to another, sessioners are collectively moving from one mental state to the next as conversational episodes transition to musical episodes. To newcomers to the session, this is a potentially difficult concept to understand because the proceedings of the session constantly move forward without much room for reflection. After all, McKinnon (1994) reminds us of the ephemeral nature of the session, pointing out that 'the session acquires its significance in real time' (1994, p. 100). The impermanence of the moment suggests that in order to acquire the understanding of session behaviour, the newcomer has to be immersed in the experience and navigate the social situation by independently making interpretations of what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. In other words, new members of the session are to acculturate themselves into the community.

The social relationship within the sessioner group can be said to be close. This is reflected in their collective behaviour; they partake in rituals such as buying drinks in rounds together and

⁵³ A detailed discussion into shared spaces can be found in Chapter 2.

participate in the expected manner when music is in progress. I argue that the closeness transcends social relations and friendships; in fact, it stems from having shared experiences in a session, and a common understanding of how it functions and the meanings behind the semiotic elements that the event presents.

4.1.1.2.3 Seniority

Since a session is inherently a musical event, it can be said that musicians form the nucleus of the event. In every session, I have observed a factor that influences how musicians interact with each other and how the session flows. This factor is the underlying concept of seniority among the musicians. Hierarchy among individual sessioners has been acknowledged in previous research on session culture (Fairbairn, 1994; C. Hamilton, 1999; Kearney, 2013), and based on my observations, hierarchy also exists in sessions along the Menai Strait. This segment will explore how elements of seniority emerge in the context of sessions along the Menai Strait.

The concept of seniority is often not explicitly expressed during the session itself, and conversations with sessioners generally imply that musicians are seen to be on the same level socially. However, a closer look at some of the interactions during a session might reveal elements of seniority. A good example of seniority at play came up during a conversation with Kieran Lynch as he recalls how he was offered a good seat in a session despite not arriving on time:

Well I came late last time, and Nerys had a seat right beside the door, beside Gerallt, and she gave it up to me ... I felt rather guilty (Lynch, personal communication, 17th March 2019).

The session in question was the one in the Newborough Arms in Bontnewydd, run by Gerallt Llewelyn who was mentioned in the quote above.⁵⁴ The room where the session takes place influences sessioners to be seated in a manner where the perimeter of the room is occupied first and followed by seats in the middle of the room. When the entire main space is filled up, the latecomers are relegated to a secondary space still connected to the room but partially separated by a partition. In this case, Kieran had expected to be sitting in this secondary space since all the seats in the main area had been occupied. However, Nerys, a non-musician who regularly attends that session, had given up her seat next to Gerallt so that Kieran would not have to be

⁵⁴ A layout of the Newborough Session can be found in Chapter 2 (p. 53).

seated too far away from him. This particular instance indicates that there is a level of awareness of a hierarchy among the sessioners, both musicians and non-musicians.

Seniority was also observed in sessions where a well-respected sessioner is present. This was observed regularly in the Glôb where the session is run and frequented by local musician Gwilym Bowen Rhys. As with other sessions, there were no overt expressions of hierarchy during these sessions, but tacit implications of it can be fleshed out upon reflection. I have observed that due to Gwilym's influence as a professional musician, sessions tend to reflect his musicality. Sessions tend to be faster in his presence, and tunes and songs performed in that session would also mostly come from his repertoire since he would end up leading most of them. Without him, on the other hand, I have observed that the pace of the session is slower: tunes are not played as fast as they would be in his presence, and the overall 'talking space' in between sets and songs is longer. Interestingly, the difference in the flow of the session would not be as great as was described above if a different sessioner were absent.

The difference in the sessions in these two scenarios suggests that there is deference towards GBR as he is seen to be a more seasoned and competent musician. Giving way to him in such a manner shows that there is a tacit hierarchy at play that influences the course of a session.

Interactions like these have also been observed when esteemed guests attend a session along the Menai Coast. The Bangor sessions, for example, regularly have musician visitors due to the session festivals that take place on the final weekend of April and October.⁵⁵ Because of the popularity of these festivals, sessions that take place at these times tend to be quite big, sometimes with about thirty musicians present, compared to the usual session of about five to ten musicians.

Hierarchies like these are not necessarily negative in nature. In fact, it can be argued that junior-senior relationships can be constructive in the session experience. The ability to learn tunes orally is associated with authenticity among practitioners of traditional music of the Celtic world and is therefore prized over the ability to read music (Waldron, 2009b). This attitude towards learning music in this manner means that for many musicians, sessions also represent opportunities to acquire and to pass on music. Constructive junior-senior relationships can lead to thriving scenes where music is not only transmitted horizontally among the members of the community but is also passed down to the next generation of musicians.

⁵⁵ These festivals are like the event described in Chapter 3b, and there is even a considerable overlap of sessioners who attend the Welsh Weekend and these session festivals in Bangor.

4.1.2 Communication

The next component in the order of interactions is communication. This segment explores how ideas and information is conveyed from one individual to the next, specifically within the sessioner group. The importance of communication and interaction in forming the session experience was acknowledged in a conversation with sessioners:

Michael M.: I've been to loads of sessions and I find the least enjoyable, is the ones where people are just thrashing, thrashing, not talking to each other, and just playing tunes. I don't see the point of turning up, if you don't have a chat then ...

Geoff H. & Gerallt LL.: (nodding in agreement) yeah

Michael M.: ...even if you're talking about the weather, (otherwise) it's a waste of time.

Geoff H.: You're just as well practising your tunes and singing your songs at home by yourself.

Michael M.: You do, and you try to engage these people in conversation, they make it pretty obvious they're not there to talk to you.

Kieran L.: Are you talking about me Michael? Because I wouldn't agree to that. I think some sessions, entirely music sessions, there's communication going on all the time. You know, the twitch of an eyebrow and the glance away and all that. And sometimes, that's far deeper communication than words.⁵⁶

This excerpt demonstrates that there are various aspects of communication at play during a session. It also reveals that different aspects of communication are valued differently by different individuals, as seen in the excerpt above. MM places a high value on conversation in a session, GH values the social aspect of playing music together, and KL highly values gestural communication. This disparity indicates that these values are highly subjective, even though all three of them agree that communication is a vital part of the session experience.

In the following discussion, the communication of the sessioners will be explored. Two types of communication will be discussed, namely verbal and non-verbal communication. In this case, verbal communication refers to self-expression with the use of words or sounds emanating from an individual's mouth. Non-verbal communication, on the other hand, refers to self-expression by other means, such as body language and gestures.

4.1.2.1 Verbal communication

During a session, the bulk of the verbal communication takes place during conversational episodes where music is not being played. The main form of verbal communication that takes

⁵⁶ Conference call on Zoom on 4th August 2020.

place in these episodes is in the form of engaged conversation. I refer to these conversations as such because they take up a lot of the participants' attention; examples of engaged conversations are discussion of topical issues such as the weather, politics, current affairs, or even gossip. Lesser forms of verbal communication also exist in this segment; these come in the form of small talk, such as offering to buy drinks for others or announcing the need to go to the toilet, for example. These instances of small talk normally exist alongside the main conversation described above.

Sometimes, verbal communication can signal the start of tunes and songs. I have observed several instances of these, two of which have been described in the essay which precludes this chapter:

Jan turned to us musicians. 'We're going to play this one', she said, playing the opening bars of what I recognise to be the *Seven Stars* jig on her piano accordion (p. 138).

Because the session in Rhosgadfan also functions as a twmpath, the event is more structured than a regular session. The music must complement the dance that the caller has planned beforehand, and therefore there is a need for the musicians to be more organised so that the dance can take place smoothly. In the extract above, Jan gives a heads up on what tunes are to be expected. This happens rarely outside the Rhosgadfan session because the other sessions tend to have a more flexible format. Tunes and songs in other sessions would happen in a more spontaneously and organically, compared to the arranged structure in the scenario described. The few occasions where planning tunes like the above happen outside the Rhosgadfan session is a result of a group of musicians who have been learning a set of tunes together and practising it in their own time at home. During the session, one of them may announce that they were going to initiate their newly learnt set, so that others who have also been learning it may join in.

The precluding essay also shows another example of verbal communication signalling the start of a song:

I suddenly heard the voice of an older man, coming up to us asking rather shyly, 'Can I sing a song for you?' I recognised him as one of the dancers earlier.

'Of course, you can.' Martin replied. Turning round to face the non-musicians, he shouted, 'Song! Song coming up!'

A hush came over the room as people stopped their conversations. The man began singing a song, which I later identified as *The Calico Printer's Clerk* (p. 139).

This excerpt shows someone verbally requesting to contribute a song to the session. The man in this scenario was outside the musician group but has chosen to participate in the music-making. Martin then signals to the entire room that a song was about to be sung, suggesting that everyone in the room should be quiet and settled down so that the man can sing his song. Here we see how verbal communication between non-musicians and musicians can signal the change into a musical episode in the session. Another example of this observed during sessions is when non-sessioners request a song from the musicians. The musicians do not always fulfil the request of a non-sessioner, but when they do, that would be another instance of verbal communication starting tunes and music.

The final instance of verbal communication initiating music during sessions is when a musician invites another individual to initiate a set or a song. The individual who is being invited is usually a newcomer, a guest to the local session, or a musician who has not initiated a set or song for some time. This instance of verbal communication is also central to virtual sessions. On the virtual Bangor Zoom session, the host, usually Geoff or Kieran, would create a running order of participants,⁵⁷ and then inviting them to contribute a song or tune following that order.

In any case, the invitation to begin something can be argued to be a form of verbal communication that initiates music-making.

Verbal communication can also be found during the music-making parts of the session itself. Musicians leading a set of tunes may employ verbal cues to announce changes in the tune within a set. Figure 36 below is a visual representation of an example set with three tunes in it played over the course of time. It also demonstrates where the verbal cues discussed above would be employed, which towards the end of the tune before transitioning to the next tune.

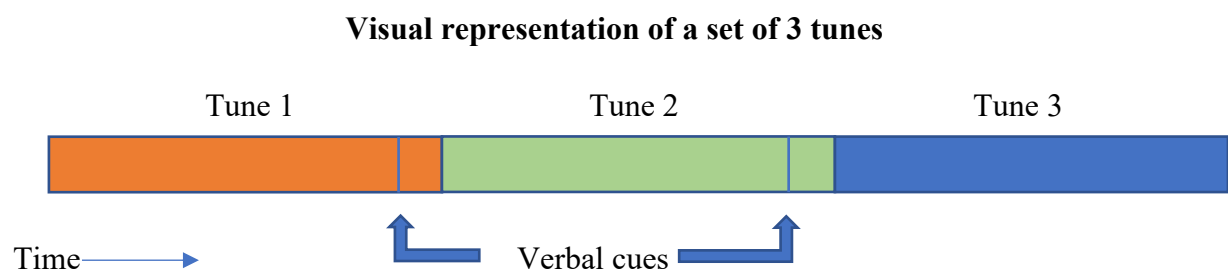


Figure 36: A visual representation of a set of tunes, showing roughly where verbal cues would be employed

⁵⁷ Geoff determines this running order based on how the participants are arranged on the Zoom screen, whereas Kieran determines his based on the order of admission into the virtual meeting room.

An example of a verbal cue can be seen in the essay that preludes this chapter:

When it was time to play the next tune in the set, Jan called out, “Chaaaange! Jamie Allen”, signifying that the next tune was to be *Jamie Allen*... (p. 142).

In this case, the verbal cue was Jan signalling the change by literally calling out ‘change’, followed by the name of the preceding tune. This is the clearest form of verbal cue because it helps the other musicians with the transitions between tunes. A simpler alternative is to simply shout out the key of the next tune to help the guitarist transition seamlessly to it. Another more conventional verbal cue marking upcoming transitions in the set is to simply exclaim ‘Hup!’ near the end of the tune. This practice is also observed outside the sessions in the Menai Strait area, particularly for Irish sessions. The use of this exclamation has been discussed in a thread on the popular online Irish music resource thesession.org (Various, 2007), indicating that this phenomenon is widely heard of. Furthermore, there is an Irish-language television programme on TG4 about Irish traditional music named Hup after the exclamation, further demonstrating how prolific this exclamation is in the traditional music world.

The use of verbal markers such as ‘Hup!’ or announcing the name and/or key of the next tune is highly personal and varies greatly from musician to musician. Geoff Hardman also expressed that the use of ‘Hup!’, and of verbal cues in general, may not be entirely suitable for those playing flutes or whistles. This is because these musicians would have to stop playing their instruments momentarily to employ these verbal cues since it is impossible to do both at the same time. Nonetheless, Geoff acknowledges that he does use ‘Hup!’ from time to time. Using verbal cues can be challenging for some musicians as well, even if their instruments do not cause their hindrance as flutes and whistles do. Kieran Lynch shared his personal experience with playing the concertina in one of our roundtable sessions, expressing that playing the concertina demands a significant amount of concentration. Because of this, he finds that exclaiming ‘Hup!’ is something that he might just about manage. Kieran’s experience may well extend to other musicians, particularly to those whose instruments may require a similar amount of concentration, or to those who are still building proficiency in their instruments.

Other forms of verbal communication also exist during the musical episode of a session. Unlike the verbal forms discussed above, the following forms of verbal communication do not contribute to the flow of music. A sessioner may employ verbal exclamations to express their excitement with the set that is being played. These exclamations are usually short, spontaneous interjections that do not interrupt the flow of the music; an example of such an exclamation is

‘Whoo!’. Quiet conversations can also happen on the periphery of music-making, forming another aspect of verbal communication during the musical episodes of the session. Those who would take part in these quiet conversations in the sessioner group would be the non-musicians or musicians who choose to sit out of that set. These conversations are usually tolerated if they do not overwhelm the music or distract the musicians contributing to the set. I have observed a situation where a group of sessioners were shushed because they were speaking over somebody who was singing. This is probably because both speaking and singing make use of the human voice and would thus pose a bigger distraction for the singer and those who wished to listen to the singing.

4.1.2.2 Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication is particularly important in musical episodes among musicians. The round table discussion I had with prominent members of the Bangor session community revealed that Kieran highly values non-verbal communication in a session, remarking that it is a ‘far deeper communication than words’ (Lynch, personal communication, 24th September 2020). Non-verbal communication in session comes in the form of gestures that communicate a musician’s intents when making music. KL’s assertion regarding the depth of this sort of communication indicates that in the context of making music in sessions, gestures can be just as effective as the verbal communication discussed previously.

Gestures that are employed during music-making are primarily expressed through the face and the head. This is because in almost all cases the musicians’ hands would be occupied handling their instruments, rendering them incapable of making hand signals at the same time. The following is a sample list of gestures I have observed that were used by musicians when playing music.

- (a) Shaking the head
- (b) Glancing around the room to establish eye contact with other musicians
- (c) Establishing eye contact with the guitarist
- (d) Raising the eyebrows quickly and nodding
- (e) Raising and extending one leg outward in a kicking-like motion

These gestures are often employed by the musician leading the set with the intention of having smooth transitions from one tune to another within a set. Of the gestures listed above, raising of the leg (e) is the most visually striking of all under certain conditions. Moving the leg as described above requires a significant amount of unusual movement; furthermore, it can even

be seen in another musician's peripheral vision. Of course, this is especially useful in settings where musicians are seated in a circle without a table in between them, and not as useful in other settings where the musicians' legs might not be readily visible.

Raising the leg is useful for set leaders who want to communicate tune changes quickly and to a large group of musicians, and especially so for flute and whistle players who are unable to make use of verbal cues without interrupting their playing. However, Geoff Hardman raises an issue with regards to using leg movements, saying that 'raising the leg is confusing because sometimes it means change to the next tune, and sometimes it means finish' (Hardman, personal communication, 24th September 2020). Using 'Hup!' on the other hand is more universally precise as it means there is another transition coming up, and never when the set is coming to an end. Therefore, the use of 'Hup!' is less ambiguous in meaning than raising the leg, for instance. However, not all non-verbal gestures bear the ambiguous nature of the leg raise. Shaking of the head at the end of the tune is generally understood to mean that the lead musician is intending to end their set. This information is particularly beneficial to rhythm instrument players like the guitarists or percussionists since they would then know there would be no need to prepare for a transition.

The other gestures listed above require an acute awareness of the set leader. This is because these gestures are limited to the head and to the face, which themselves may not be significant enough to be caught by other musicians via peripheral vision.

Non-verbal communication is the most effective when musicians are familiar with the tunes and the set. Lesley recounts:

for me, it's the more confident I am with a tune, ... if it's what I've been playing for a long time, it ages you know, ... But if it's a fairly new tune, sometimes it's quite difficult, ... if I tried to communicate something to somebody and then it goes you know. So really it does depend more likely to be communicating with the tunes that I am most familiar with... (Conran, personal communication, 24th September 2020).

The roundtable group I was discussing this with verbally agreed with Lesley's account. In this excerpt, Lesley describes how it can be difficult trying to communicate something to another musician when playing a new, relatively unfamiliar tune. On the other hand, communicating is easier when playing tunes that are more familiar as a result of having been played over a long period of time. This suggests that communication is harder when one is busy concentrating while playing a new tune, but over time, familiarity, which assumes a degree of muscle memory, makes communication easier.

Aside from personal familiarity with tunes, group familiarity also influences how communication happens when making music together. According to Lesley,

If I'm playing a certain set of tunes like if it's a set I play with you, Irfan, or I know you know...then [I] tend to get eye contact with people I know to the same next tune. And it's not really formal, it's just a kind of acknowledgement, and you go to the next one don't you? It's not as structured, it's a kind of confirmation that you're going on to the next tune... (Conran, personal communication, 24th September 2020).

In this excerpt, Lesley is describing a situation where the musicians involved are familiar enough with the set to know the order of tunes within it. Here, the instances of eye contact function as an affirmation of what the musicians are anticipating. In this case, the musicians would know what tune would follow the current one that is being played; the guitarist, if any, would be familiar enough with the set to know the key of the following tune as well.

Familiarity with each other's sets also allows musicians to be more flexible and experiment with more advanced things such as changing instruments halfway through a set. The multi-instrumentalists of a session may prefer to play one tune on one instrument, and another tune on another. There are several reasons why this happens. One of them is that certain tunes are associated with certain instruments, and a multi-instrumentalist may wish to express that association. Another reason is that the musician may be more comfortable and familiar with playing a tune on a specific instrument. Kieran notes that in cases where musicians are known to switch instruments halfway through a set, communicating changes is even more crucial:

in my case it's very understandable [for our guitarist to know when to change tunes] because he accompanies me on both guitar and harmonica, so at one stage he puts down the guitar and picks up the harmonica; so, he needs to know when the change is coming and sometimes, he changes harmonicas [within the set] ... (Lynch, personal communication, 24th September 2020).

This situation described by Kieran is similar to the one described by Lesley above. In this particular scenario, both Kieran and the guitarist know the set well enough to know the order of tunes in it. The guitarist anticipates the changes in tunes based on his familiarity of the set and on the gestures that Kieran uses to communicate these upcoming changes.

Knowing the mannerisms and playing styles of other musicians can also foster specific forms of non-verbal communication. In the same roundtable discussion as above, Geoff provides an example of this, describing a situation when playing a tune led by piper KP:

... (at the end of a tune) I look at KP and if he is staring into space, I know we've got to play (the tune) again (Hardman, personal communication, 24th April 2020).

In my experience in sessions, it is easy to follow sets led by KP. He is active when it comes to starting tunes and might lead between three to five sets in a single session. His repertoire of tunes is big enough to avoid repeating playing the same tunes twice in the same session but small enough for one to be able to gain familiarity with it after several sessions. His approach to sets is also very regular: an overwhelming majority of his sets comprise of three tunes. Each tune is always in a different key to the next, and each tune would be played three times through.

There are occasional exceptions to this rule; for instance, one of his usual sets has only two tunes in it because the second tune has six parts and is thus already quite long.⁵⁸ Keith's manner of communicating tune changes is clear and easily caught when paying attention. Towards the end of the third iteration of a tune, he would look around the room nodding, trying to get eye contact with other musicians. This warns other musicians to change to the next tune in the set at the end of that iteration. Towards the end of the set, he would look around the room, this time shaking his head when eye contact is made with other musicians, signalling the end of the entire set. My experience ties back to Geoff's experience above; if no eye contact is attempted, i.e., 'staring into space', then no change is to be anticipated, and the tune gets repeated. This is interesting because for Geoff, the lack of engagement on Keith's part in this specific scenario is itself coded as a meaningful gesture. The connection between staring into space and repeating a tune may not have been made if it involved another musician apart from Keith. This analysis comes from the extensive experience of each other's mannerisms as a result of years of knowing each other and musicking together.

As listed above, non-verbal communication chiefly involves gestures of the face. However, there are some potential problems of gestural communication in sessions, such as (a) significant facial gestures that do not mean to communicate anything; (b) possibly missing meaningful gestures when not paying attention, and (c) the fact that these gestures are not formalised or standardised.

In our discussion, Kieran Lynch brings up potential problems of gestural communication in sessions:

...there's a lot of facial expressions but it's got nothing to do with communicating. It's to do with how close your fingers are to the other parts of the brain, and I know especially with the (anglo) concertina you actually become the instrument, so... so you're blowing and sucking (with the instrument) ... That fascinates me; I like to see

⁵⁸ Most tunes have only two to three parts. This means this six-part tune would be between two to three times the length of a regular tune.

the facial expression of other musicians. It depends on the instrument (Lynch, personal communication, 24th September 2020).

In this excerpt, he warns us not to confuse intentional facial gestures which have a communicative function with involuntary gestures which comes as a result of concentration when playing on their instrument. Kieran describes his personal experience with playing the Anglo-concertina, which has a push-pull action.⁵⁹ In the excerpt above, he describes ‘blowing and sucking’ with the instrument, which suggests that his breathing is directly influenced by the pushing and pulling of the concertina bellows. Another involuntary gesture I have observed with concertina players is moving the head and eyebrows at particularly tricky musical passages. Of course, movements like these are not limited to concertina players, other instrumentalists may make involuntary gestures as well when playing their instruments, especially when concentrating hard on the tune.

Another issue pertaining to non-verbal communication is that it can easily be missed if not paying attention. This can happen if the musicians are simply not aware or are too engrossed in their playing to catch non-verbal cues. One common way in which non-verbal cues may be missed is when musicians close their eyes when playing. According to the participants of the roundtable, closing the eyes when playing their instruments greatly helps with playing the tune. I then asked how they would balance the need to concentrate on their own musical parts and the need to be able to catch non-verbal cues:

Lesley: ...if (the set or tune) is what I've been playing for a long time, ...then it doesn't matter so much whether my eyes are open or closed. But it's a fairly new tune sometimes it's quite difficult (to keep them open) ...

Kieran: Yes, I would agree. When I started off, I used to have my eyes closed anytime I'm playing but then as I became more confident, I could open (them) and then I realised how much I was missing having my eyes closed. It's far better to be able to play and look around... (personal communication, 24th September 2020)

In Lesley's case above, she shares that with new tunes and sets, it can be challenging to balance between having the eyes closed and open to look out for verbal cues. However, this becomes easier with time and practice to the point that after playing the set for a while, she finds it easier to go between the states of inner concentration and outer awareness. Kieran's account, on the other hand, describes his personal experience when he was a beginner, showing that it was not possible for him to open his eyes to receive non-verbal cues initially. As he gained familiarity

⁵⁹ This means each button on the concertina can produce two notes, one when the bellows are pulled apart and one more when they are pushed together.

with the instrument and with the session environment over time, he eventually was able to open his eyes to observe the session.

The accounts above describe how closing the eyes helps with concentrating on playing the individual's instruments. In this case, closing their eyes helps them to remember the tunes better and improves general performance because their immediate environment has been disengaged (Glenberg, Schroeder, & Robertson, 1998). This study suggests that closing the eyes when performing tasks requiring high cognitive processing spares the brain from expending energy into suppressing unnecessary visual stimuli that would be present if the eyes were kept open. However, based on Kieran's and Lesley's accounts, it is apparent that as they gain fluency with the tune, they find that closing their eyes is no longer necessary. This suggests that their muscle memory improves over time, which helps overcome the need to concentrate and eventually allowing them to free up brainwork to receive non-verbal cues. Effectively, this explains the experience shared by the musicians in the roundtable.

The final issue with non-verbal communication is similar to an issue previously mentioned in the verbal communications segment: the gestures seen in sessions are not formalised or standardised. This means that each individual musician has their own interpretation of what a gesture might mean. A musician may also have their own set of preferred gestures and a set of gestures they may choose to avoid. These differences may be confusing for newcomers to the session, but for those who have been playing for a long time together, this does not matter as much. This is because they would have gained familiarity with each other's playing styles, and thus are able to make associations between certain gestures with certain specific meanings.

Having explored the different gestures employed in non-verbal communications, and the problems that non-verbal communications may pose, it is evident that non-verbal communication is most effective when the musicians are familiar with each other. Successful non-verbal interactions are usually a result of (1) musicians knowing each other's musical cues, habits, and styles; (2) being able to differentiate between meaningful gestures and involuntary movements, and (3) being collectively fluent enough on their instruments and tunes to be able to look out for meaningful gestures and not be too occupied on the mechanics of instrument playing itself.

This segment has explored the various communication strategies undertaken by the sessioners, both verbal and non-verbal. Some of these strategies are more effective than others when it comes to relaying information from one sessioner to the next. This is due to the lack of

standardisation when it comes to gestures and vocalisations, leading to many potentially different interpretations of the same action.

4.1.3 Etiquette

The innermost component of the Order of Interactions is etiquette. In this discussion, etiquette refers to a set of behavioural rules present in a session. Out of the components discussed previously, etiquette is the most tacit or the most unspoken. However, its importance must be noted as it forms the idealistic and underlying basis of all the interactions taking place in the session.

In his book *Sesiwn yng Nghymru*, Huw Dylan Owen (2015), gives brief advice pertaining to session etiquette. Owen offers several rules, namely:

- 1) If the instrument needs tuning when the session is in full swing, do so quietly in the background without disrupting the session. However, if the session is about to begin and everyone is tuning, don't begin any sets until everyone is ready.
- 2) Talking should be reserved for moments in between tunes.
- 3) Be mindful of seating – an individual who plays a loud instrument such as the banjo, accordion, or pipes should not sit next to another individual who plays a soft instrument, such as the harp or crwth.
- 4) There should not be more than one bodhran playing at any one time.
- 5) Above all, do not touch another musician's instrument without permission (Owen 2015, 70–71; translation mine).

Owen however notes that each session may have its own customs and rituals, thus reminding us to expect variations in these rules (2015, p. 70). This suggests that there are sessions that demand more situational presence from their participants, and thus would have more behavioural rules. On the other hand, this also suggests that there are sessions that are more relaxed and would have allowed for the things that Owen has cautioned against above. That said, Owen insists that rule number 5 in the list above must never be broken under any circumstances (2015, p. 70).

This segment will expand further on Owen's notes by discussing further rules that Owen did not mention in his book, which will be derived from my observations and conversations with sessioners. Additionally, I will also explore why these rules exist in the first place.

I have observed that rules pertaining to behaviour are rarely discussed openly during the session itself. However, the rules of etiquette may be felt when they are violated. Violations of etiquette often result in disruption of the flow of the session and can be felt as what can be described as general awkwardness and discomfort. Outside of a limited number of situations, those who do violate the rules are often ignored instead of being reprimanded on the spot. These violations may be talked about eventually by the sessioner group, but even these conversations tend to exist outside the session spaces. Because these rules are not immediately discussed when they are violated, unpacking them has proven to be challenging.

In order to gain a clear picture of the unspoken rules which constitute session etiquette, I will be exploring what sessioners may consider good or bad manners in sessions. I argue actions that are perceived as ‘good’ manners would conform to the rules of etiquette, while actions that are seen as ‘bad’ manners would violate it. Using this logic, I will be unpacking the rules of etiquette based on the sessioners’ perceptions of good and bad actions.

In 2018, I was invited to give a workshop on session etiquette at the Gŵyl Tân a Môr festival in Harlech. Keeping the above issues in mind, the aim of the workshop was to piece the rules of session etiquette together with the participants. To do this, I had invited the participants to sit in a circle and to write down their pet peeves on a piece of card. I then put the cards in a bag, shook it, and pulled out the cards one by one, discussing what was written on the cards along the way. This method guarantees the individual’s anonymity and allows the individual to be frank when it comes to criticising the manners of their peers. This in turn eliminates the potential awkwardness or discomfort which may be felt when discussing a topic that might offend their peers. From the responses, I will then unpack the inherent expectations sessioners would have with their fellow members, which I will, in turn, deduce a new rule of etiquette.

The following is a list of pet peeves that the participants have, after eliminating similar responses:

- a) Too many guitarists
- b) Playing too loud
- c) Rushing the tune, or starting too quickly
- d) Not playing in the ‘right’ key
- e) Leading a tune already led by someone else in the same event
- f) Talking over singing and tunes
- g) Checking the phone during sessions

h) Noodling

A few participants agreed that too many guitarists can be distracting. In most cases, the guitar provides chordal and rhythmic support to the tune that is played. One participant expressed that when multiple guitarists are present, there is a risk of them not playing the same rhythm or playing different chords, which may be distracting or unpleasant to other musicians.

Moving down the list, playing too loud is another concern that participants have voiced. Our discussion revealed that this may be particularly frustrating when the set is led by a musician whose instrument is soft in nature, such as the mandolin or harp, but is overwhelmed by another musician who may not realise that others cannot hear the set leader. Some of the participants find that this makes it difficult to follow the set leader. Of course, the concern may be addressed if Owen's advice of being mindful of not sitting next to a soft instrument if one is playing a loud instrument was taken (2015, p. 70).

Rushing, or increasing the speed of the tune, is also a concern that was brought forward, together with starting a tune too quickly. One participant noted that certain musicians like fiddlers are prone to playing too quickly or pushing the tempo of the tune, probably because it is easier to play tunes quicker on these instruments. This may be a problem for other instruments such as the harp, where it would be more comfortable to play slower tunes. I brought up Barry Foy's (2008) guide to the Irish session, who also comments on this phenomenon:

Occasionally, one musician will editorialize on another's choice of tempos by forcing the music up to a speed that he prefers (oddly enough, virtually no one ever slows a tune down). The result is music that is unsure of itself and hard to follow. The only safeguard against this is good manners, and it's good manners – as well as good taste – to finish a tune at the tempo at which it began, whether it suits you or not (Foy, 2008, p. 41).

Of course, this depends on the session itself; some sessions like the Glôb are characterised with faster tunes since the more capable players are able to do so, and the less experienced musicians are creative enough to find ways to keep up. Nonetheless, it is always worth making sure that everyone is comfortable involved, especially if there were visitors or newcomers.

Next in the list is not playing in the 'right' key. This actually applies to two situations: (1) when the set leader plays a tune but in a different key to what others in the session are used to, and (2) when the guitarist accompanies a tune but in a different key from everyone else. The first situation can inevitably happen if the set leader attends multiple sessions because some tunes

are played in different keys in different sessions. For example, the waltz *Bwlch Llanberis* is played in the key of G major by the Bangor session community, and in D major in the Rhosgadfan sessions. This shows that what may be the ‘correct’ key in one session may not be so in another. While some musicians can follow along if the set leader were to play the ‘incorrect’ version, others may find it difficult to participate since they have learnt a tune in a certain way, leading them to feel left out. That said, I have observed that the Glôb session community is notably more tolerant when it comes to playing tunes in unusual keys compared to the other sessions. The second situation happens when a guitarist has misidentified the tonal centre of the tune, leading them to play chords that may be unsuitable for the said tune.

Another music-making-related pet peeve that was reported in the workshop was when a set leader plays a tune that has already been led by someone else within the same event. This can possibly happen when two set leaders have different sets but have one common tune in between them. Some participants expressed that they found this disrespectful to the other set leader who had also played the tune previously. However, there are others who disagreed with this sentiment, instead expressing that the point of not leading a previously led tune is to keep the session going forward with fresh tunes. In my conversations with Geoff Hardman, he recounted a rather interesting practice in the past associated with this situation. Participants who noticed the repeated tune would shake a matchbox at the offending set leader, indicating that the leader had been ‘caught’ (Hardman, personal communication, 2018). This was often done in jest, rather than to reprimand. Shaking matchboxes is no longer practised in any of the session communities along the Menai Strait, although this practice is still regularly referenced to by those in the Bangor Sessions community.

The next concern that was raised during the workshop was talking over singing and tunes. This applies to both sessioners and non-sessioners alike. Interestingly, Owen (2015) commented on this, suggesting that talking should only be done between tunes. The discussion in the workshop revealed that talking loudly whilst a singer is singing can be distracting for both singers and listeners, especially if the song is unaccompanied. The participants of the workshop agreed that when there was a song happening, noise should be kept to a minimum. Participating in the song is also permissible; musicians may choose to accompany the singer on their instruments without overpowering them or to sing the chorus together with the singer. When it comes to instrumental music, talking over tunes is less of a concern as long as it does not overpower the musicians. This is because there are usually multiple musicians playing tunes, making them louder in comparison to a solo singer. Some participants expressed that those who are

disruptive in the session in this manner are mostly non-sessioners who may not be aware of the behavioural expectations sessioners have within the group or are unaware that there is a session going on in the first place since they might be sitting at a considerable distance from the sessioners. In my observations, sessioners who do disrupt the session in this manner are also likely unaware that there may be a song going on, and usually apologise when they do realise their disruptive behaviour. While it was mentioned earlier that sessioners would not normally reprimand those who break the rules of session etiquette, this is one instance where violators would be reprimanded. I have observed multiple occasions where a disruptive individual was hushed by other sessioners.

The six points explored above all pertain to what some participants may find annoying in the music-making phase during sessions. Using these responses, it is possible to deduce some new rules of etiquette. Firstly, there is an expectation to be aware of what other musicians are playing. This can be seen with how the participants have voiced concerns with guitarists not complimenting each other in some sessions, playing too loud, speeding up, accompanying a tune in the incorrect key, playing tunes that someone else has already led. These concerns were brought up because there were instances where musicians may be concentrating on their own playing too much, and as a result, are not aware of what other musicians are playing. Of course, as discussed in the non-verbal communication segment above, this may prove to be especially challenging for newer members of the session community who may not be so fluent on their instruments. That said, once they are more comfortable with their instruments, there are expected to be conscious of the music that is being played. Sessioners also expect other fellow members to respect each other, which is why some are annoyed when others may be talking over a singer. Therefore, one rule of etiquette that can be deduced from this is to **always be aware and listen to the music that is being played, so that one is *with* the music, not *against* it.**⁶⁰

Secondly, the discussions during the workshop reveal a need to be inclusive. This is seen where participants express concerns where other musicians were playing too quickly, rushing a tune, or playing a tune in the 'wrong' key. Playing a tune differently was mentioned previously in the analysis of participation, where this was identified as a form of eccentric participation, or one that changes the centre of attention and breaks up existing structures. It can be argued that

⁶⁰ This rule is not as relevant in the virtual sessions held over Zoom since musicking happens in one direction: participants may hear and play with the set leader, but they cannot hear other fellow participants; the set leader also cannot hear anyone else except for themselves.

the participants who have expressed these concerns are aware of how this extreme form of participation can threaten the cohesion of the session and possibly alienate others. That said, I have observed that the occasional experimentation with tunes or playing fast sets are welcome in sessions, but too much of these within one session may be exhausting to those who may find it difficult to catch up or adjust to playing in a tune in a different key from how they have learnt it. This in turn may lead to a situation where some in the session may feel left out or excluded. A rule that can be deduced from this is to **be aware of others in the session and to make sure everyone is participating at the level they are comfortable with**. Some sessioners are aware of the importance of making the session an inclusive space, which is demonstrated by actions such as encouraging someone who has not been playing with the group to lead a tune. If this person declines, they would not be coerced to contribute and still be allowed to be part in the session.

Returning to the discussion that was had in the workshop, there are three further concerns that participants raised; one of these is checking the phone during sessions. Some participants report that they found that checking the phone during the session can come across as impolite to the others. This is because phone users can come across as not being fully mentally present, since their attention is divided between the session and whatever that was happening on their phones. That said, there were others who disagreed fully with this. Smartphones can be useful tools in sessions; some participants reported using phones in sessions to look up tunes using tune-identification apps such as TunePal, some use their phones to record tunes in order to learn them later at home, and there are those who use their phones to access traditional music-related websites such as thesession.org as reference. Therefore, while using phones during sessions can come across as being distracted, it was agreed that the context for using them is also important.

Finally, the last concern that was discussed in the workshop was noodling. This refers to the act of playing short, musical phrases on an instrument without an intention to lead a set. This would also happen specifically during conversational episodes of a session. Participants of the workshop expressed that this is disruptive to socialising; they find themselves stopping in the middle of conversations thinking that a tune is about to be initiated, only to find that another musician is merely noodling. A closer examination at these comments revealed that this concern directly relates to a point discussed earlier about talking over music. Socialising through conversation generally ceases when music is being played as a sign of respect to whoever is starting a new tune or song, but discussions with the participants clarify that it is

difficult to differentiate between someone initiating music and someone noodling on their instrument. This also reveals that participants expect a clear difference between the music and conversational episodes. Therefore, a rule that can be deduced from this is **to keep music and conversations separate from each other**. Of course, this means that newcomers to the session who wish to start a song or set may find it difficult to gauge how much time to leave for conversation before initiating. Because each session is different, the best way to get around this is to observe the practices of session regulars in order to eventually get an idea of how long conversational episodes should last.

Another rule of etiquette can be deduced from the two points explored above. The discussions reveal that sessioners expect each other to be fully immersed in the session experience together. This would explain why some sessioners may find noodling and using the phones during a session offensive. These two situations imply that the offender's attention is divided. In the case of the former, the person noodling is often not engaging with others at the time that calls for social engagement; in the latter, using the phone during a session is interpreted by some to be uninterested in being engaged with others. A rule that can be deduced from this is **to try to engage with others during the conversational episode**. Of course, this rule may be difficult for newcomers or those who may have certain anxieties with socialising. In order to make sure that everyone feels welcome without being pressured to socialise, it is also important to remember to **be understanding of those who may choose not to engage socially**.

To summarise, these are the rules that have been deduced based on conversations with participants:

- 1) Be aware and listen to the music being played, and play accordingly
- 2) Be aware of other sessioners, and be sure everyone is comfortable participating in their own terms
- 3) Keep music and conversations separate
- 4) Try to socialise with others outside of musical episodes, if comfortable
- 5) Be understanding of those who do not socialise with others

These rules of etiquette represent a very important commonality in session culture along the Menai Strait and are the basis of how all musicking, and by extension music-making, is expected to occur. In other words, the multiplicity of the traditions that exist in sessions in the area are practiced and negotiated in the framework provided by these unwritten rules. Owen (2015) has partially touched upon this by encouraging musicians to be sensitive about seating

and instrumentation, reminding musicians who play loud instruments such as banjos, bagpipes, accordions, and bodhrans not to drown out softer instruments such as small Celtic harps and the crwth (2015, 71, translation mine).⁶¹ Interestingly in his advice, Owen lists instruments that have different associations from different cultures: for example, the crwth is an instrument that has stronger associations with Welsh culture than the other instruments in Owen's list, while instruments like the banjo and bodhran are more closely associated to Irish music. Here, the diverse nature of sessions in the area means that instrumentation is also diverse (see Chapter 3), which means sessioners may have to put in more effort in assessing where to place themselves in a session like Owen describes, or indeed in sessions along the Menai Strait, as compared to a session which may only feature Irish music, for example.

Two of the rules I have deduced from the data I procured also directly relate to negotiating the different musical traditions that are practiced in the area, namely: (1) to be aware and listen to the music being played, and play accordingly, and (2) be aware of other sessioners and to be sure everyone is comfortable participating in their own terms. Because of the many traditions that share the space in sessions, awareness is particularly important when the music is from relatively lesser-known traditions. For example, a tune of Scandinavian origin may have rhythms that may be different from that of Irish origin, and so those who choose to take part in should musick accordingly or risk creating dissonances or tensions which participants in the focus group have pointed out. Furthermore, musicians may have to be more conscious when playing lesser-known music. Sharing rarer tunes is welcomed in all the sessions I have observed, but it is worth thinking about how much space it takes up in the session. Rarer tunes usually have lower rates of conventional participation, and therefore too many of these tunes may risk alienating other sessioners who would like to be more active.

In a more general note, these unspoken rules reflect behavioural expectations that sessioners have of each other. It is interesting to note how each rule would apply to specific episodes in the session. This reveals that sessioners have different sets of behavioural expectations; one set specifically for musical episodes and another for conversational episodes.

These rules of etiquette can be linked back to Stige's model of self-representation. In his model, Stige notes that there is a level of participation that reflects what is *expected* in a given scenario, i.e., the conventional participation. This means, therefore, that the rules deduced in this

⁶¹ 'Mae'n werth cofio sensitifrwydd sŵn hefyd wrth drafod offerynnau. Y rheol amlwg gyntaf yw: os ydych chi'n canu offeryn swnllyd fel banjo, pibau cod, accordion neu gyffelyb, peidiwch ag eistedd drws nesaf i'r gŵr sy'n canu'r delyn fach Geltaidd neu'r crwth traddodiadol...Saif hynny'n wir am y *bodhran* hefyd' (Owen, 2015, 71).

segment so far, together with the ones mentioned by Owen (2015), are deeply embedded social expectations which informs the actions pertaining to conventional participation, and to some extent, silent participation.

What of the higher levels of participation as theorised by Stige? The discussions offered some insights into levels of adventurous and eccentric participation. The discussions that were had in the workshop, as well as Owen's notes, suggest that sessioners value cohesion. This would explain concerns such as playing too quickly or too loud was brought up during the workshop. These actions threaten the cohesive structure of the session and could be counted as actions amounting to eccentric participation. On the other hand, adventurous participation, or actions that introduce something new to the event, are tolerated as they do not threaten to break the social structures pertaining to the session. Of course, it must be emphasised again that these are generalisations. Some sessions, like the Glöb for instance, are more accepting of eccentric participation; those who attend that session tend to have a positive disposition towards eccentric participation.

The behavioural expectations that sessioners of each other are based on larger, dominating cultural constructs that influence interpersonal interactions. The next segment will return to Goffman's (1966) theories relating to behaviour in public spaces in order to put these rules of etiquette into the context of episodes in a session.

4.2. Involvements in sessions

In the context of sessions, the overarching activity is musicking. However, the actions that comprise musicking in sessions can be classified based on the categories of interactions theorised in *Behaviour in Public Places* (Goffman, 1966). These categories are namely: (1) main involvement; (2) side involvement; (3) dominant involvement, and (4) subordinate involvement.⁶² The main and side involvements refer to the degree to which an activity affects the individual; these were already explained in p.158. The latter two involvements refer to how much attention an individual gives, or is supposed to give, to a particular activity. Dominant involvement, according to Goffman, refers to situations that require the individual to give more attention, while subordinate involvements are those where an individual is only allowed to afford a limited focus to it (1966, p. 44). In other words, main and side involvements refer to

⁶² Goffman uses these categories to describe what he refers to as *unfocused interactions*, which are gestures and other forms of interactions carried out by two or more individuals who are simply co-existing without face-to-face interaction. However, for this thesis I have also mapped these categories onto musicking activities which may include both unfocused and focused, face-to-face interactions

actions that influence how a person behaves, whilst dominant and subordinate involvements refer to more personal actions of the individual in each situation.

Using this model, it is possible to classify actions into specific involvements. In the context of sessions, I argue that the main involvement is socialising within the sessioner group, since it takes up the bulk of their attention and interest. This comes mainly in the form of conversation and music-making. Side involvements would be actions outside socialising with each other. These actions may include buying drinks at the bar, going to the toilet, having conversations with non-sessioners, humming along quietly to the music, and numerous other actions which do not constitute socialising within the group, but nonetheless do not disrupt it.

Unlike the involvement categories discussed above, classifying actions into dominant and subordinate involvements requires more situational nuance. In most cases during a session, dominant involvements tend to intersect with main involvements, while subordinate involvements would intersect with side involvements. Sessioners end up devoting the bulk of their attention to socialising among themselves while keeping non-social activities to a minimum. However, in the conversational episode during a session, side involvements may dominate an individual's attention. This means when music is not being made, sessioners may be busy with side involvements such as buying drinks.

The incidence of increased dominance within side involvements during conversational episodes may shed some light as to how involvements are organised during a session. In a roundtable conversation with sessioners, it was revealed that they actively avoid making side involvements dominant during musical episodes. This conversation revealed that there is some pre-judgement associated with this. Lesley notes:

I don't know if it's deliberate, but it's a tendency particularly when somebody starts a song that requires people to listen to and somebody gets up and goes to the bar at the moment, it's a kind of non-verbal communication isn't it? (Conran, personal communication, 24th September 2020).

The excerpt above suggests that there is something to be read into when someone allows a side involvement to be dominant. In this instance, leaving during a song was speculated as an expression of a lack of interest in listening to the song. Geoff then remarks that he tries 'not to get up when somebody is playing or singing' (personal communication, 24th September 2021), indicating that getting up to the bar during a conversational episode was less likely to leave negative impressions on other people. Letting side involvements be dominant can also be a source of shame for some. Kieran admits that:

I think I'm one of the people who get up at the beginning of a long song, I would go to the loo and be back in time to give a round of applause. I won't be missed meanwhile... (Lynch, personal communication, 24th September 2021).

In this excerpt, Kieran describes leaving at the song but making sure to be back before the song ends to give a round of applause, which is likely to avoid giving the impression of total indifference to the others. Lesley notes that sometimes disengaging oneself from socialising is inevitable for certain situations like needing to go to the toilet, for instance:

Everybody does sometimes; you're waiting for a chance to get up, especially if you're more of a musician than a singer. You just see your chance and do it, you know, it's not pointed (out) (Conran, personal communication, 24th September 2021).

The experiences shared by the sessioners strongly shows that domination of side involvements is acceptable only in specific contexts, i.e., during conversation episodes in the session. In Kieran's account, we can also see that he makes use of compensating tactics to lessen the shame he feels in allowing side involvements to become dominant, as seen in how he makes sure to return in time to give a round of applause. It can be argued that doing so is a way to demonstrate to the rest of the group that he is still present and is taking part in group activities, despite taking leave for some time.

These comments from the sessioners, together with those from the workshop participants in the etiquette segment above, shed some light on how involvements are allocated in a session. Goffman (1966) theorises that main involvements usually have a threshold of which minimal attention is needed. Individuals participating in main involvements are usually obliged to sustain interest in it to a certain degree; those who do not give the main involvement enough attention risk being seen as disengaged from the situation (1966, p. 51). We see this theory realised where participants of the workshop raise the issues of the use of mobile phones and noodling during conversational episodes, interpreting them as showing indifference. I also argue that this is reflected in the social rules within musical episodes as well. This is seen in the expectations that musicians have of each other to be making coherent musical choices when making music and to be playing in a way that is inclusive to everyone involved. Not paying attention to the music or other musicians can be read as being disengaged from the situation. Therefore, in the case of musical episodes, the minimal main involvement could be identified as making music as a collective effort. In conversational episodes, on the other hand, the minimal main involvement would be being socially present and engage with others.

That said, in terms of situational tightness, conversational episodes are looser than musical episodes within a session. It is more acceptable to allocate dominating side involvements in

conversational episodes, whereas in musical episodes, this is less acceptable. This is reflected in three instances explored above: (1) how the workshop participants take issue with talking over singing and tunes; (2) how Geoff personally avoids getting up when there is music and therefore only reserves them during conversational episodes, and (3) how Kieran makes compensating gestures to make up for allowing side involvements to become dominant in musical episodes.

4.3 The Ecology of Interactions Revisited

This chapter has examined the three components of what I call the ecology of interactions. These are: (1) relationships and participation; (2) communications, and (3) etiquette. Of the three, relationships and participation are the most apparent, while etiquette is the most unspoken component, with communication straddling between the two. The concept of involvement within sessions was also explored in the chapter. Using the material unpacked from these discussions, we can draw some conclusions about how and why certain interactions happen in sessions.

My observations and conversations with sessioners have revealed that, like most other social scenarios, sessioners have certain behavioural expectations of each other. These expectations reflect the underlying rules of etiquette that frame all the interactions in a session. There are specific rules of etiquette for both the musical and conversational episodes of a session. While the session is found to be bound by these rules of etiquette, this does not mean that there is no flexibility in the session in terms of situational tightness. In fact, introducing Goffman's theory of involvement has shown that in conversational episodes, sessioners are allowed to disengage themselves from the situation to a certain degree, such as getting up to go to the bar or the restroom, but not so far as to be engaged on their phones, for instance. Musical episodes are situationally tighter; sessioners are expected to be present and not allow side involvements to dominate the episode. This indicates that social expectations in sessions are dynamic, rather than static. Interestingly, rules of etiquette also vary from session to session; a rule of etiquette may be more relevant in one session but less so in another. This reminds us that sessioners are not monolithic when it comes to behavioural expectations. Therefore, the rules that were deduced in the etiquette segment of this chapter are not blanket rules that apply in every situation in every session, but rather general guidelines which may be of help to newer members of the session or may serve as a reminder to the more experienced members. It is also worth pointing out that sessioners only reprimand others for breaking certain rules of etiquette in very exceptional circumstances, such as being overly disruptive, for instance. Nevertheless,

social expectations are important because they form the foundation of interactions. They inform the other, more explicit elements in the ecology of interactions, such as communication and participation.

This brings us to the discussion of communication, the middle section of the ecology of interactions. Communication can be both explicit and tacit in sessions, seeing that sessioners make use of both verbal and non-verbal strategies to communicate their intentions. After close analysis of the observations during sessions and the conversations that were had with the sessioners, it was found that certain forms of communication dominate specific episodes within the sessions. For instance, verbal communication was found to be more dominant in conversation episodes, while non-verbal communication was dominant in musical episodes. However, the discussion also offers instances of non-verbal communication in conversation and verbal communication when musicking. Communication can also be responsible for the transitions from conversational to musical episodes, and this can come in both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. It was also found that certain communication strategies are more effective than others in musical episodes; this is because these strategies are not standardised, meaning that different gestures and verbalisations may carry different meanings to different individuals. That said, certain gestures are more universally accepted, such as exclaiming “Hup!” to express changing from one tune to the next. There was also the discussion of meaningless gestures, which are mostly facial gestures that can potentially be interpreted to carry meaning, but in reality, are involuntary gestures that are the result of hard concentration whilst playing their instrument. One important point that was unpacked in the discussion was that communication is often easier and more effective when there is an element of familiarity present. This could come in the form of familiarity with the music, fluency on their instrument, or even familiarity with the playing style and personality of their fellow sessioners.

Moving up into the outermost ring of the ecology of interactions, we come to participation and relationships, which represent the most explicit and easily observable form of interaction. The relationships between different social groups were explored centred around sessioners are musicians who form the core group of the session. Hierarchies are present, but not acknowledged in sessions. These hierarchies can influence how people behave during the session and can also influence the flow of the session itself. My observations have indicated that people can show deference to individuals who are higher up in the hierarchy, reflected in actions such as giving up good seats and giving way to more experienced individuals by letting

them lead more tunes. Hierarchies can also be beneficial and constructive in sessions. This is because in sessions, oral transmission of tunes is held in high regard, and healthy junior-senior relationships allow musical material to be passed on in such a manner.

When discussing the relationship between individuals from the sessioner group, it is also important to acknowledge the non-musicians of the group. These individuals do not participate in music-making but do participate in the other social activities that also exist within sessions. They are socially close to the musicians, as seen in how they would regularly attend sessions, take part in conversations and common social rituals, and seat themselves within the group. Despite not participating in music-making, non-musicians also observe the situational rules that are inherent in musical episodes. This is seen in how they reduce their presence so as not to disrupt the music, for instance. The closeness of non-musicians to musicians can be attributed to the shared experiences they undergo during a session.

The three components of the ecology of interactions represent a commonality that binds the different musical traditions that exist in sessions along the Menai Strait. These interactions all stem from informal musickal practices that are significant in Great Britain, Ireland, and the diaspora of these places. This is especially significant because all the musical traditions that are represented in sessions must exist in the context that is pre-established in the unwritten rules of etiquette discussed earlier, even if those traditions do not have session cultures like that of Great Britain and Ireland. This has interesting consequences on the music itself; tunes from traditions without session cultures usually will be modified to fit into the session context. This will be examined further in Chapter 5.

The relationships between sessioners and non-sessioners were also explored. Non-sessioners are socially distant to sessioners. This is seen in how they sit in zones separate from the sessioners in shared spaces; this is generally maintained most of the time. That said, limited interactions between sessioners and non-sessioners do exist in the sessioners' zone from time to time. Occasionally, non-sessioners may enter the sessioners' zone and hang around out of curiosity. Some may adventure to ask questions or to request for songs. The sessioners I have asked expressed that as long as these interactions are not too disruptive, they did not mind having these conversations with non-sessioners. In isolated spaces where sessioners sit in a separate room, interactions between the two groups are minimal. That said, interactions still can happen in these locations; they mostly take place at the bar area, which is a neutral space for both sessioners and non-sessioners. I have observed that those who work in the

establishments which host sessioners form a sub-group of non-sessioners who interact the most with sessioners.

Participation amongst the different groups was also examined. In this study, I have used Brynjulf Stige's model of self-representation to qualify the different levels of participation. Because there are different expectations of participation between sessioners and non-sessioners, I have created two separate categories for these two social groups. The actions that happen during the session were then mapped onto Stige's model. This model considers how individuals are expected to participate, and therefore some links were formed between levels of participation and rules of etiquette which reflects expected behaviour. The rules of etiquette derived from the discussions during the workshop form the basis for defining which actions constitute conventional participation.

Using the discussions presented in this chapter framed by the ecology of interactions, we have explored the finer details of the interactions that take place in sessions along the Menai Strait.

Chapter 5: Post-revival music

Better be a bit sharp than to be out of tune.

Geoff Hardman, via Joe Noonan

Music forms the nucleus of all activities within a traditional music session; in fact, it can be argued that music is the only condition that differentiates a session from any other gatherings between friends. This chapter discusses the issues pertaining to repertoire and tradition, placing particular focus on instrumental tunes which makes up the majority of the music performed in sessions. This chapter aims to address the central enquiry by identifying commonalities which binds the various traditions, the origins of the influences and their effects on current musical practices, as well as the relationship between place and tradition.

5.1 Repertoire

During my observation period, I noticed different tunes would regularly increase and decrease in popularity at different times. This is not unexpected, however; repertoire is a dynamic cultural object that changes according to specific circumstances affecting the performer and/or their audience (Goldstein 1971; Georges 1994). I have also observed how tunes come from a wide variety of sources; in a single session in Caernarfon, for instance, I heard songs sung in both Welsh and English, as well as tunes from Irish, Welsh, English, and Swedish traditions. The multiplicity of the repertoire raises several questions. How are these tunes selected to be part of the repertoire in the area? What strategies are taken to ‘naturalise’ these tunes into the repertoire?

In order to approach these questions, I will be presenting an overview of the repertoire through a system of categorising music played in the area, presenting the distribution of music, as well as investigating sources of such tunes. Further to that, I will also be examining how tunes become accepted into the repertoire by providing a case study.

5.1.1 Repertoire characterisation

The tunes that are played in the sessions along the Menai Strait come from a wide variety of sources. The system of classification I will demonstrate here was influenced by the repertoire characterisation model presented by Casey et al (1972). Casey et al. proposes two levels of

characterisation: the first level is defined by broad, clear-cut characteristics which can be dichotomised; the second defined by specific elements such as style and form (1972, pp. 398–399). In the case of the session music in the area, I have identified three main categories in which the music can be classified:

- 1) Songs / Tunes (First level)
- 2) Language of songs (First level)
- 3) Origins (Second level)

The first level comprises the type of music and its origins. The first point is straightforward: songs refer to music that is sung, whereas tunes refer instrumental music. In the repertoire, there are songs that can also be played as instrumental pieces, as well as tunes with words set to them, although this is quite rare. Further categories can be added for songs; based on my observations, songs are either sung in English or Welsh.

Approaching the question of origins is comparatively challenging. It is possible to make broad assumptions and make simplistic categories such as Welsh music and non-Welsh music, but conversations with sessioners have convinced me that this is not necessarily the best approach. These conversations have revealed that some sessioners who have been taking part in session activities for at least twenty years have been doing so even before the Welsh folk revival of the 1970s took root in the area. Especially in Bangor, session music in the area at the time mostly featured Irish music, leading to practices particularly unique to the Bangor Sessions community such as the session migrations.⁶³ On the other hand, as revealed in a previous chapter concerning communities, there is the Glôb session community which comprises of young, mostly Welsh-speaking musicians who are born well after the folk revival mentioned above. Pilot observations suggest that there is a greater concentration of Welsh and Welsh-language material in the Glôb community compared to the other session communities.

In the discussion of tune origins, a complication pertaining to this must be addressed. A tune's association of being Welsh or Irish does not always mean that they actually originate from Wales or Ireland respectively, even though it may often be assumed to be so. However, the analysis of Casey et al. (1972) of Newfoundland songs offers an approach to resolve this problem. In their study, Newfoundland songs were categorised as such because of their local significance where the text is associated with its people and place, as opposed to whether their origins can be traced to Newfoundland or not. My approach of categorising music to their

⁶³ See Chapter 3b for a detailed discussion of these session migrations.

origins is influenced by the approach taken by Casey et al. However, there is a problem that still persists with tunes in our discussion. Song texts can be analysed directly to draw some conclusions; tunes, however, lack the same textual clues as songs do that may give light to their origins, although in some cases, tune names do make specific geographical or cultural references. In order to categorise tunes, I have consulted sources such as books, manuscripts, internet sources, and CD cover sleeves, as well as having conversations with practitioners to determine their origins for this study. Tunes that appear in Welsh tune books or dance manuals, for example, would be classed as a Welsh tune, even if there is an older source that suggests or proves otherwise. This, in fact, shows that the tune has been naturalised as a Welsh tune; a case study showing this will be presented later in the chapter.

Another further category that can be considered in terms of origins is locally composed music. These are tunes and songs that are composed by members of the session scene and are performed in the same informal context as the other music played in sessions.

Taking these factors into account, I have determined that in terms of origins, the music of the Menai Strait can be sorted into the following categories: (1) Welsh-language songs; (2) English-language songs; (3) Irish; (4) Welsh; (5) locally composed; and (6) everything else.

5.1.2 Distribution of music

With the categories of tunes established, it is possible to sort the tunes into them. Each of the session sub-communities mentioned in Chapter 3 has its own repertory which contributes towards the general repertoire of the traditional music of the Menai Strait. In order to identify the make-up of the repertoire, I have taken note of what tunes were played in sessions between April 2018 to December 2019 and researched their origins upon compiling the data. During the observational period, the following communities were active: (1) the Bangor Sessions community; (2) the Bontnewydd community; (3) the Caernarfon community, and (4) the Glôb community.

Before delving into the data, a clarification of the method of collecting and processing this data is needed. During the session itself, I noted the number of tune sets and songs performed in it. I also noted the origins of the tune sets, and if I was personally unsure of this, I would ask the leader of that set. Usually, a set would only contain tunes from one category, i.e., a set that begins with an Irish tune would very likely contain only Irish tunes. However, mixed sets may occasionally be performed; these are sets that may comprise tunes from various roots. In this

situation, these mixed sets are counted twice. For example, a set with Irish and Welsh tunes would be counted as both an Irish set and a Welsh set.⁶⁴

Total share of tunes along the Menai Strait	
<i>Category</i>	<i>Share</i>
Irish sets	34.6%
English-language songs	19.6%
Welsh sets	19.4%
Other tunes	13.1%
Welsh-language songs	7.8%
Locally composed tunes	4.1%
Songs in other languages	1.1%
Unknown	0.2%

Table 21: Overall share of music across the session scene

Table 21 above shows the overall share of tunes across the four communities mentioned above heard during April 2018 to December 2019. Most of the music that was heard during the observation period were Irish tunes, making up 34.6% of all the music performed. Songs in the English language and Welsh tunes follow closely, making up 19.6% and 19.4% of the share of music respectively. Interestingly, there is also a significant share of tunes that fall into the Other category. These tunes have roots in a wide variety of places such as England and the Scandinavian countries. Songs in the Welsh language and locally composed tunes generally are not as featured as the other types of music mentioned above, making up only 7.8% and 4.1% of the total share of tunes.

⁶⁴ I have done so to avoid making too many categories for sets which, in reality, are exceptions to the rule.

That said, I have observed how certain communities feature some tune or song categories more heavily than others. I will now present how tunes and songs are distributed on a community level.

Bangor Sessions Community	
<i>Category</i>	<i>Share</i>
Irish sets	61.2%
English-language songs	21.2%
Welsh sets	9.4%
Welsh-language songs	3.5%
Locally composed tunes	2.4%
Other tunes/sets	1.2%
Unknown	1.2%

Table 22: Share of tunes in the Bangor Sessions Community

Table 22 above shows the share of tunes in as observed in the Bangor Sessions Community, whose sessions have taken place in the Waverley, followed by the Boatyard Inn, before moving onto Zoom from March 2020 onwards. I have identified tunes from the six categories above, although there is a small percentage of tunes which I could not identify their origins. In these sessions, Irish tune sets make up a majority of the music that is performed, at 61.2%. The next most common type of music are songs in the English language, at only 21.2% of the tune share. Welsh and Welsh-language material is relatively rare in these sessions making up only 9.4% (instrumental) and 3.5% (songs) of the total number of sets and songs heard in this session during the observation period.

Bontnewydd Community	
<i>Category</i>	<i>Share</i>
English-language songs	50%
Irish sets	22.4%
Other tunes	10.3%
Welsh-language songs	8.6%
Welsh sets	6.9%
Irish-language songs	0.9%

Table 23: Share of tunes in the Bontnewydd community

Table 23 above shows the share of tunes in the Bontnewydd community, whose sessions took place in the Newborough Arms before its forced cessation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Songs are featured more heavily in this community, as compared to the Bangor Sessions community: more than half of the music performed in this session are songs, at 59.5%. Songs in the English language, however, dominate this session, representing half of the musical material during the observation period. The most common tune types in this community are Irish tunes, whose sets make up 22.4% of the music performed here.

Caernarfon Community	
<i>Category</i>	<i>Share</i>
Other tunes	36%
Irish sets	24%
English-language songs	20%
Welsh sets	12%
Locally composed tunes	4%
Welsh-language songs	4%

Table 24: Share of tunes in the Caernarfon community

Sessions in the Caernarfon community feature a wider variety of tunes compared to the other two we have seen before. The numbers in Table 24 come from sessions that take place in the Black Boy Inn, the Anglesey Arms and the Mountain Rangers Club. Interestingly, the tunes that feature heavily in the Caernarfon session community belong to the Other category, i.e., tunes that are neither Welsh nor Irish. These make up 36% of the tunes that are played in these sessions. Sets with Irish music make up the next most common type of music heard in these sessions, at 24%.

The Glôb Community	
<i>Category</i>	<i>Share</i>
Welsh sets	35.5%
Other tunes	16.4%
Irish sets	15.1%
Welsh-language songs	14.5%
Locally composed tunes	10.5%
English-language songs	5.3%
Songs in other languages	2.6%

Table 25: Share of tunes in the Glôb community

The Glôb community is the only community where Welsh and Welsh-language music dominate, making up 50% of the music played in the sessions during the observation period. Welsh tune sets make up 35.5% of the total share of music in these sessions, followed by tunes from the Other category, which makes up 16.4% of the tunes performed. Interestingly, this is also the community with the highest percentage share of locally composed tunes, making up 10.5% of all the music heard in these sessions. English-language songs also do not feature in these sessions as much as they do in other communities, amounting to as low as 5.3% of all the tunes played in sessions.

5.1.2.1 Discussion

The data presented in 5.1.2 indicate that the music in sessions varies considerably from one community to the next. I argue that two elements have governed the choice of repertoire in each community: (1) accessibility, and (2) personal musical interests of influential individuals. In the context of this discussion, accessibility refers to how easily tunes can reach the sessioners, while the influential individuals refer to those discussed above in 2.3.5. Both these elements are closely linked and can feed into each other.

The Bangor Sessions community has a strong base of Irish tunes and English songs. I argue that this is directly connected with the community itself. As explored previously in Chapter 3, the Bangor Sessions community is made up of older musicians who have considerable experience in session music activity. These musicians would have had a strong foundation on Irish traditional music and songs because it was popular at the time when they were interested in learning traditional music. Interest in tunes from the Welsh tradition only happened later when recordings and literature related to Welsh repertoire were more widely available. (Conran, personal communication, ~2019).

On the other hand, this produces the phenomenon where compared to the older musicians, younger musicians would have had easier access to repertoire from the Welsh tradition, such as the ones described in segments 5.1.3.2 and 5.1.3.3 below.⁶⁵ Furthermore, younger musicians would also have access to recordings of successful homegrown traditional bands such as Alaw, Ar Log, Calan and Crasdant, to name a few, all of which are also easier to access thanks to the advent of the Internet. This discrepancy in access in the early stages of musical development has also affected other sessions. In the Bontnewydd and Caernarfon session communities, both of which also comprise of older, more experienced musicians, tunes from the Welsh repertoire also do not feature as heavily as it does in the Glôb, despite being located in the more traditional Welsh-speaking area of the region.

I also argue that accessibility of tunes in their early development feeds into the interests of influential individuals. The survey discussed in Chapter 3 suggests that traditional musicians of the area generally pick up relevant musical skills earlier on in life and continue to apply them in sessions later if their interest in participating in traditional music is sustained. Through the senior-junior relationships formed in 4.1.1.2.3, the music gets passed down from one individual to the next.⁶⁶

Personal interests of influential members of the session can also feed into how certain tune types can become accessible. This is particularly apparent in the Caernarfon session community, based on my observations. This community has several notable members who practice music that is outside the Irish and Welsh traditions who are influential in the community. JE, for example, is a nyckelharpa player who has introduced many tunes from Sweden, Norway, and Finland to the session, and JH has a personal repertoire made of, among

⁶⁵ Note how the reference materials for Welsh repertoire used by the sessioners during my observations in 5.1.3.2 were all published after 1992.

⁶⁶ A closer investigation of this passing-down process is explored in 5.1.4 below.

other things, Morris dance tunes and English folk tunes which she shares frequently during the session. As a result, these tunes become accessible to those who attend these sessions, which has resulted in the findings presented in Table 24.

Of course, influential members of the community can also set the tone of the session and indeed what is played in the session. An example of this can be seen in the case of the Bontnewydd sessions, where Gerallt Llewelyn is the most influential member to the point where he even influences how people are seated in this session (see p. 64 above). According to his response in the survey, Gerallt's role in the sessions is primarily singing, and secondarily accompanying instrumentalists on his guitar. Based on my observation, I argue that his position within this community have made the sessions especially conducive for songs which has accounted for songs being dominant in the sessions in Bontnewydd as seen in Table 23 above.⁶⁷

The distribution of tunes and songs along the Menai Strait show that there is a considerable variety from one community to the next, despite the fact the area of study is not particularly big and that some of these communities overlap one another. In other words, the Menai Strait session scene is not a monolith; even though sessioners across the scene take part in very similar activities, the music that they choose to make an integral part of their interactions varies. This variety suggests that there are various avenues from which tunes are sourced, which will be explored in the following segment.

5.1.3 Sources and transmission

The discussion surrounding traditional music is often accompanied by raising the issues of orality and transmission. Because of the living and constantly evolving nature of traditional music (Harper, 2011, p. xvii), it is especially dependent on its transmission in order to be justified as traditional music. This is perhaps why orality is highly valued in not only the traditional music along the Menai Strait, but of other areas as well. This segment explores the various ways in which the music is transmitted from one person to another, based on informal conversations that I have had with sessioners.

Sessioners along the Menai Strait are generally autonomous when it comes to learning new tunes. This means that the decision to learn any new tunes is taken up by the individual member rather than through a group consensus. That said, in my observations, I have seen how some sessioners motivate each other to learn a specific set of tunes. They then learn the tune(s) in

⁶⁷ Outside the research period, Gerallt's reputation and ties to session communities based outside the research area has even attracted singers from Ireland to come to the sessions in Bontnewydd from time to time.

their own time at home and then play them in sessions when they are confident enough. However, even in these instances, the whole session group would not be involved in this learning process, this is only limited to the small handful of sessioners. Learning tunes is a largely independent process; sessioners would often use various resources and approaches to research the tunes they are learning. In order to contextualise the various sources that sessioners use to learn tunes, I have divided them into three categories: (1) aural-oral sources; (2) textual sources, and (3) hybrid sources.

5.1.3.1 Aural-oral sources

Aural-oral sources are those that are audio/visual. These include audio and video recordings, podcasts, and radio broadcasts. Users of aural-oral sources must have the skills to either learn tunes by ear or by watching someone else play the tunes. In fact, the session itself is a valuable aural-oral source for those who actively learn tunes whenever it is in progress. Besides learning the tunes, those who learn tunes by ear during sessions would also acquire other skills from other sessioners, such as instrumental technique and ornamentation.

Some members of the session community have been observed to record unfamiliar sets. This is often done using their mobile phones if they are comfortable doing so, although some prefer to use digital Dictaphones, which are small, pocket-sized single-use devices specifically used for recording audio. According to one sessioner who uses the Dictaphone to record sets in sessions, the simplicity of operating the device is useful particularly to those who are not comfortable or confident in using more advanced technology (CG, personal communication ~2018). Another sessioner, on the other hand, uses the Dictaphone because of its convenient size, high-quality recordings, as well ease of uploading the audio files into a computer. This suggests that the Dictaphone is also used by those who are comfortable with technology (GN, personal communication ~2018). Of course, advances in smartphone technology also means that some sessioners were also recording tunes that interest them on their phones. However, while recording sets seems to be particularly useful for revising tunes later in the sessioner's free time, some sessioners have mentioned that these recordings often get forgotten in their devices soon after they have returned home from the session (MB and NB, personal communication ~2018).

Another popular source for learning tunes is YouTube. There is a wide range of videos related to the topic of traditional music from all over the world hosted on this site, especially that of Great Britain and Ireland which would be relevant to this research. Content that would be of interest when learning tunes include live performances, instrumental and musical tutorials, and

tracks ripped from CDs and hosted on the site. Since the website allows anyone with an account to upload material onto it, the performances and tutorials range from polished and professionally produced content to amateur videos recorded at home. On top of its ease of access and wide selection of content, some sessioners also found the relatively new option to slow the playback speed of videos particularly useful on YouTube (Lynch, personal communication ~2018), although not everyone who used the website was aware of this functionality (Hardman, personal communication ~2018).

Sessioners have also identified radio broadcasts as sources of learning tunes. Previously, sessioners had to tune in to specific times to catch programmes such as the *Folk Show with Mark Radcliffe* on BBC 2, but one sessioner notes that this does not matter as much nowadays since these programmes would be uploaded onto the BBC website as podcasts (Lynch, personal communication ~2018). These podcasts are only available within a specific amount of time on the website; however, they are up long enough for sessioners to learn any interesting material they may have heard on the programme.

Previous studies have noted the perceived importance of being able to learn by ear in general session culture (for example, see Waldron 2009; Waldron and Veblen 2009; Cope 2005). This indicates that oral-aural sources are important aspects of traditional music culture because they represent the cultural ideal of being able to play a tune just by listening to it and translating it onto their own instruments. This contrasts heavily with classical music which is primarily transmitted through the written medium. The study conducted by Waldron and Veblen (2009) also demonstrates that individuals who were ‘paper-trained’ in their musical upbringing often value the ability to play by ear when learning Irish traditional music later on in life as adults. This is reflected in how they take strategies to wean themselves of notated music and to be more adept in their listening skills.

5.1.3.2 Textual sources

Textual sources are resources that are written down. These texts may be either primary or secondary sources of tunes, and musicians who use these sources to learn melodies must be able to read the music according to how the text presents it. For example, a musician who can read staff notation but wishes to use a source in tonic sol-fa must be able to interpret that notation for it to be a meaningful resource for learning music. However, textual sources that do not require knowledge of reading music also exist; these only display the lyrics of songs. These are often used by singers as *aide-mémoires* to help them remember the words to their songs.

An example of a textual source for learning music is song and tune books. A wide range of tune and songbooks are used among musicians, although my observations, as well as conversations with sessions, suggest that Welsh song and tune books are especially popular in the scene, and some sessioners do carry these books to sessions for reference. Favourite titles include: *Blodau'r Grug* (A. Hamilton, 1992), *Cadw Twmpath* (Bowen, 1993), *Mabsant* (George, 2002), *Hen Garolau Cymru* (Gwilym, 2006), *Canwn!* (Gruffudd, 2004), and *Canu'r Cymry* (Kinney & Evans, 2014). The popularity of Welsh tune and song books in sessions could be linked to the relatively recent revival of Welsh traditional music in the area. This is because the tradition of instrumental music was broken all over Wales, with the exception of the harp tradition which was kept alive by Welsh Roma families who then passed the repertoire onto non-Gypsy individuals via Nansi Richards (Blyn-Ladrew, 1998). These books can be especially valuable when they go out of print, particularly if the book is still widely used beyond the session scene, such as *Hen Garolau Gymru*. This book happens to be a popular reference for plygain carols; in my personal experience with various plygain services, I have observed how many participating parties would use the carols and their arrangements recorded in this book. One sessioner actually laments having lost their copy of the book, because it is now out of print but is still widely used in the larger Welsh traditional music community (GR, personal communication ~2019).

Textual sources can also come in the form of personal notes. These are often handwritten on manuscript paper or in a manuscript notebook. These notes may either represent the full tune or would only show a fragment of the tune, most likely the first few bars of the A and/or B parts. Partial notations, therefore, are not suitable learning resources if the musician does not know how the tune goes in the first place. Instead, these function as *aide-mémoires* for sessioners to help them remember how tunes begin. Muscle memory would then take over, allowing them to play the whole tune.

The Internet is also a resource that provides textual sources of tunes. The Session, a website that describes itself as ‘a community website dedicated to Irish traditional music’, is a particularly popular website that provides textual sources to tunes among those in the Menai Strait session scene. This website contains a repertory of tune settings contributed by users and also features a forum space where users can start discussion threads and advertise local sessions and events. Even though the website is presented as a space for sharing and discussing Irish traditional music, other forms of traditional music can be found here, including those from the United Kingdom and its Crown Dependencies, and beyond in continental Europe, particularly

Scandinavia. Traditional tunes from Anglophone, Francophone, and Métis North America are also shared by users on this website. The Session is particularly useful because not only can users access sheet music of tunes on this website, but they can also take part in discussions concerning instrumental technique with others in the wider Anglophone traditional music community.⁶⁸

5.1.3.3 Hybrid sources

Hybrid sources refer to those that are a combination of the two sources explored above. They are either primarily aural-oral in nature and supplemented by sheet music, or vice-versa, where they are primarily textual in nature and supplemented by audio-visual resources. I have identified four hybrid sources that are used for learning music in the communities explored in this thesis so far: (1) trac workshops; (2) the Alawon Cymru website; and (3) the TunePal app.

Trac is an organisation dedicated to developing the folk arts in Wales. From 2008 until the global lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, trac has held a variety of folk music and dance workshops aimed at different age groups. For the sessioners along the Menai Strait, the workshop relevant to their age groups would be the Big Experiment / Arbrawf Mawr (BEAM), which is targeted at folk practitioners of all ages. BEAM was held over a weekend in September between 2008 and 2017, and participants attend tutor-facilitated workshops of their choice. Participants who take part in the instrumental workshops would learn tunes suitable for their level, and these tunes are taught orally/aurally. Sheet music is also provided during the workshops, but this is often supplementary to the oral-aural instruction given during these workshops.

The Alawon Cymru website, on the other hand, is a hybrid source where the sheet music is primary and audio resources play a subsidiary role. This website is associated with Clera – The Society of Traditional Instruments of Wales. Alawon Cymru differs from The Session website explored earlier in some respects. Firstly, Alawon Cymru publishes monthly tune sets, while tunes in The Session are uploaded individually outside a fixed schedule. Secondly, there is no community aspect in Alawon Cymru; based on the credits given at the end of every tune, they have all been arranged and possibly uploaded by Meurig Williams. This website also lacks the space to discuss these tunes and instrumental techniques in the same way The Sessions website does, although the Alawon Cymru website does advertise sessions and tune club events. Thirdly, the tunes that are featured in Alawon Cymru are always accompanied by two audio

⁶⁸ This is referred to as Anglophone because discussions take place exclusively in English on this website.

MIDI files, one where the tune is played at normal speed, and the other at a slower speed. In this respect, the Alawon Cymru website provides both the sheet music and an audio guide, making it a hybrid source.

The TunePal app is also a hybrid source for learning tunes. This application is described by its developers as a ‘search-by-playing search engine for traditional Irish, Welsh, Scottish, Breton, American marching band and Canadian tunes’ (“About TunePal,” 2019). During a session while music is playing, users can use the app to record a fragment of the tune; the app then analyses this recording and compares it to its database. It then retrieves the sheet music from the database which best matches the recording made by the user. In a way, this app operates similarly to other search-by-playing applications such as Shazam, Soundhound, and Deezer’s SongCatcher. TunePal is available on desktop, as well as on the iOS and Android platforms. Sessioners have reported how TunePal’s functionality can be extremely useful in the process of learning music (PA ~2018, MM ~2018): on top of allowing users to find out the names of the tunes, the app also supplies the sheet music and an audio file of the tune in MIDI format. The app also allows users to save their search history, which can be useful when sessioners are at home wanting to review and learn these tunes in their own time. In a way, TunePal facilitates learning for both aural and visual learners.

5.1.4 Orality and textuality of sources

The expansion of technology today has enabled a wide range of sources to be developed, as seen above. It can be argued that the development of internet-based resources has vastly increased the amount of learning tools available to the practitioners of traditional music today. This demonstrates that the transmission of music is based on literacy and texts, even in aural-oral sources where the need to know how to read music is not necessary. To use those sources, users will have to be literate to begin utilising them since navigating the media requires reading and interacting with text, with the exception of learning tunes actively in sessions. For example, using a Dictaphone or YouTube as oral-aural sources still require the user to be literate in order to use these tools.

That said, some aspects of the music itself still bear aspects of orality identified by Ong (2002). The most significant aspect of traditional music which aligns with Ong’s descriptions of oral cultures is the need to spend energy managing and recalling information. Internalising musical material is particularly important and is highly emphasised in traditional music, especially in the session context where the music is produced *ex tempore* without relying on written materials. In fact, I have observed one of the characteristics of those who are held in high regard

in the session community is that they have a wide repertoire of tunes, demonstrated by the fact that they tend to lead tune sets and influence the flow of the session. This is parallel to oral cultures where older members of the community who have accumulated a lifetime's worth of knowledge and are able to pass it down are held in high regard in their society (2002, p. 41). That said, not every highly regarded member of the session community is old (or would appreciate being described as such); some of them belong to the younger age groups described in Chapter 3. These individuals nonetheless also exhibit the knowledge of a wide repertoire of tunes. Another aspect of traditional music present in oral cultures is its copiousness and redundancy, which Ong describes as the 'repetition of the just-said' (Ong, 2002, p. 39). This is seen especially when sessioners repeat newly learnt tunes more than usual in a set and play them more frequently in subsequent sessions in a bid to encourage others to learn the tune as well. This corresponds with oral cultures where information often must be repeated several times in a single conversation to enable the listener to focus on complex information given by the speaker. Those from literate cultures, on the other hand, do not have the need for copious repetition of complex information since it can always be looked up again later. Of course, since all the practitioners of traditional music belong to literate cultures, they could always opt to not repeat new tunes as they do in sessions, especially since there is an increasing number and quality of resources dealing with musical material. However, the practice of repeating new tunes many times can still be seen in sessions today.

The sources that were discussed earlier indicates the secondary orality inherent to the traditional music of the Menai Strait. This comes as no surprise, however, because of the predominantly text-based nature of European societies in general which has undoubtedly shaped the way oral traditions are transmitted. That said, the traditional music of this area still carries a significant amount of oral residue in terms of practice, performance, and repertoire, as partly seen before where parallels were drawn between traditional music practices and features of oral cultures before the introduction of text. These residues of orality here are likely to endure because of how orality predicates the general discussion of traditional arts, despite textual sources playing a significant part in its perpetuation, especially in the case of revived music.

In the process of learning tunes, session musicians respond to these sources by producing new elements in the music. Hypothetically, for instance, a piper who is learning a tune might choose to embellish the tune with ornamental techniques specific to piping such as taps, cuts, and crans. The sources of learning tunes explored above would not have assigned specific embellishments

to specific notes in the same prescriptive manner in the context of classical music practice; instead, these embellishments are informed by the piper's own technical knowledge of their instrument and established playing styles. In addition to adding new elements, the piper might also remove or replace some elements from the source; for instance, a note that is out of range of the instrument might be replaced by another note deemed suitable by the musician, or not removed altogether. In this scenario, the piper has changed the tune slightly by introducing new elements in the tune that is not described in the initial source; furthermore, these changes reflect on the musicality of the piper. I am referring to the modified tune as the *product* of the piper. If the piper were to teach this tune to another musician, this other musician would do the same as the piper by adding, replacing, or removing the piper's musical elements to fit their musical idiom. The product of the piper has now become a source for the other musician. It can be argued then, that in the process of learning and transmitting tunes, there is a cycle where a source becomes a product, which in turn becomes a source, albeit slightly modified from the original source.

This cycle demonstrates the presence of intertextual relationships between the different versions of tunes. I argue that by examining these intertextual relationships, we can reveal how tunes become localised into the traditional music repertoire of the Menai Strait.

5.1.5 Localisation of tunes into local repertoire

This segment examines how instrumental tunes become localised into the repertoire. As seen in the tables categorising different tunes above, we can see that many tunes can be traced back to cultures outside the Menai Strait and Wales. These tunes have eventually been localised into the local repertoire. This means that these tunes have eventually become well-known among the musicians; a good indicator of a localised tune, in my opinion, is a high rate of participation when the tune is played in sessions.

Seeing that they are played so often in sessions alongside each other, the origins of the tunes have eventually become somewhat less relevant during the session itself. KP's reel set beginning with the Irish reel *The Wise Maid*, for instance, is just as at home as Lesley's Welsh waltzes set beginning with *Morfa'r Frenhines* within the sessions in the Boatyard Inn; at the same time, Jan's polka set with *Y Delyn Newydd* is just as local to the Caernarfon sessions as JE's Swedish tune *Piggelunken*. Of course, in some sessions like the Glôb, there is a preference for Welsh tunes and Welsh-language songs, although, in my experience, musicians are not forced to play only tunes from the Welsh tradition. In fact, the mixing of traditions has indeed

been observed in the Glôb session; one example is where Rhys sings the popular Welsh song *Deio Bach* but sets it to an Irish air instead of to its usual melody.

Researching the origins of tunes have yielded interesting results, but this may inadvertently take away attention from the issue of how session culture allows these different tunes from different cultural contexts to co-exist within the same musical and social space. That said, I must clarify that not all non-local tunes are readily accepted into the repertoire. Those that are accepted tend to have characteristics that are similar to the established tunes. This means that non-local tunes that already sound like those played in sessions are more likely to be adopted by the community when they are introduced than those that do not. Hypothetically, for instance, a Scottish tune may be more adaptable than a tune from Egypt.

5.1.5.1 Adoption criteria

What, then, are the characteristics that make certain tunes more adaptable, and therefore, adoptable? I argue that the most important traits are based on how session-friendly they are. In order to derive these traits, I took note of tunes that sessioners are (1) learning and practising at home, or (2) composing during the observation period. I then took note of the qualities of those tunes. The following is a list of characteristics I have identified:

- 1) Manageable on session-typical instruments
- 2) Made up of relatively short sections of about 8 bars each
- 3) Common time signatures
- 4) Cyclical structure

A tune's manageability on session-typical instruments is the most important of the four characteristics identified above. This means that tunes must be generally within the range that is comfortable and in keys that work well for these instruments. Keys that generally work well with all session instruments are D major, G major, E minor, E Dorian, and A minor. Keys such as A major, D minor, and G minor are also heard in sessions, although these may be challenging for less experienced musicians or for flautists, pipers, and whistlers who may not have an instrument suitable for these keys. Wind instruments in sessions tend to be built for diatonic music, which means that chromatic passages can be very difficult or even impossible on these instruments. Because of their diatonic nature, these instruments are usually available in a variety of keys, but in my experience, most wind instrumentalists would use instruments in D as the default in sessions since most of the tunes already in the repertoire of traditional music are easily played with instruments in this key. Because of this, new tunes in the keys mentioned

above would be more well-received especially in sessions with a significant number of wind instrumentalists.

In terms of range, ideally, tunes should be between D4 to B5 which is playable on all session-typical instruments, although string instruments can play tunes that go down to G3 and competent players generally can play tunes that go beyond the C5 range.

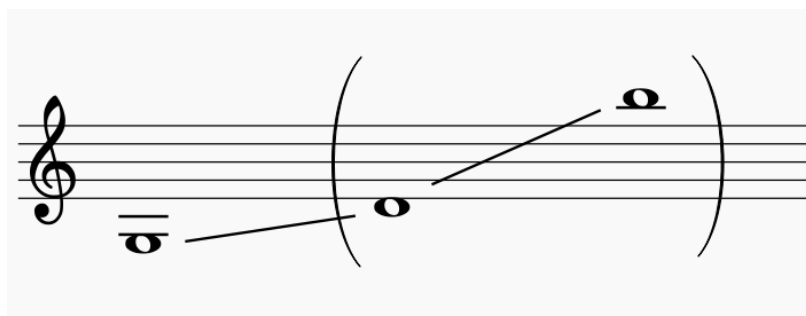


Figure 37: Session-manageable range. Notes within the brackets are playable for all session-typical instruments, while the lower notes are playable on string instruments such as the fiddle, banjo, and mandolin.

Most of the tunes played in sessions originally functioned as an accompaniment to dance music. Because of this, session tunes are segmented according to the dance steps, which are often eight bars long. I have observed that newer tunes that have eventually been localised into the repertoire also tended to fit into this template. Since the eight-bar-segments structure is so pervasive in the established repertoire, other tunes that have the same structure can be argued to be more session-friendly, and thus easier to learn.

The next characteristic I have identified is common time signatures. Table 26 below is a list of what I have observed to be common time signatures; this is accompanied by terms that are used by the sessioners themselves to describe these time signatures.

	List of common time signatures		
Simple	2/4	3/4	4/4 (or 2/2)
	Polka	Waltz	Reel
Complex	6/8	9/8	12/8
	Jig	Slip jig	Slide

Table 26: List of common time signatures

These terms reflect the names of dances that have the characteristic time signatures. This is interesting because, excepting the Mountain Ranger session in Rhosgadfan, dances no longer feature in sessions along the Menai Strait, but these names have nonetheless remained. Classifying tunes using dance terms rather than their time signature is also practised in Irish traditional music. In fact, the terms in Table 26 are also used among Irish traditional musicians. I have found that tunes that have been introduced later and localised into the repertoire tend to have these time signatures. New tunes such as locally composed tunes that do not conform to the above time signatures usually do not end up being localised into the repertoire.

The final characteristic that makes a tune easily adopted is that it must be cyclical in nature, as opposed to it being through-composed. In other words, tunes must be able to repeat themselves indefinitely; this is how tunes are performed in sessions anyway (see Figure 36).

5.1.5.2 Localisation process

New tunes go through a process in which it becomes integrated into the repertoire (Ó hAllmhuráin, 2004, p. 5). In this segment, I will explore this process further, which I will refer to as the *localisation process*. Based on my observations in sessions, I argue that the process in which a tune becomes a part of the repertoire comes in three stages, namely (1) introduction; (2) adoption; and finally (3) full localisation. These stages are determined by how musicians engage and participate when performing the tune.

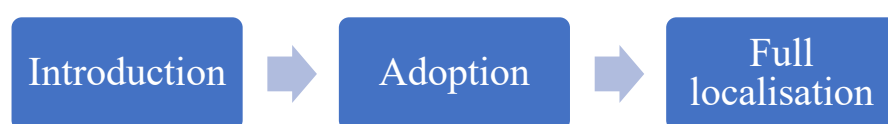


Figure 38: The stages of localisation

The first of these is introduction. This is where the tune is generally unknown to most musicians in the community. The tune is introduced in several ways: it could be a composer who presents the tune to the group, an individual who has learnt the tune in their own time and wants to share it with the rest of the community, or a sub-group of musicians who have taken the time to learn a tune together and then sharing it. At this stage, tunes can undergo certain changes based on

how it is introduced into the community as a result of the processes discussed above in the orality segment.

The introduction stage is marked by low rates of participation; musicians who may usually participate at a conventional level may even opt to participate at a silent level.⁶⁹ In other words, active musicians may choose to not contribute to the music, but still be present in the session space when the tune is being presented. Those who do take part in the music tend to be providers of rhythm and/or chords such as bodhráns and guitars; these instruments allow for more improvisation without intruding too much on the main melody.

If the tune fulfils the criteria for adoption explored above, it then potentially moves on to the second stage, i.e., adoption. At this stage, the new tune has been played enough in the introducer's session community or communities, to the extent that melody players are able to participate conventionally in the performance of the tune, rather than sitting out of it when the tune is in its introductory stage. However, it would still be on the introducer to initiate and lead this tune, since other sessioners may not be entirely familiar with the new material and therefore lack the confidence to lead it themselves. Most new tunes that are composed by local composers would fall either into this stage or the introduction stage before, depending on how familiar sessioners are with their tune. Some tunes will inevitably remain at this stage in the localisation process without ever on to the next stage. When this happens, it suggests that there is either (1) a lack of interest in the tune within the community, thus not giving an incentive to learn it in the first place, or (2) that the tune may be outside the technical abilities of the sessioners in general within that community.

The final stage of the process is full localisation. Tunes at this stage are easy to discern; participation levels for this tune are high for a large number of sessioners, mostly falling in the criterion of conventional participation. Additionally, musicians also usually display a high level of confidence in performing it. This stage marks the point where sessioners generally know the tune enough to be able to start it without the need for the composer or introducer to lead it. In other words, its appearance in sessions no longer depends on those who introduce it to the community. At this stage, newly composed tunes may even lose their association with the composer at times. This was observed in a session where JH's tune *The Weasel's Revenge* was led by SW in a session that JH herself does not attend, and JH was not actively credited as the composer as there is never any expectation that the set leaders would do so. That said,

⁶⁹ A detailed discussion on different participation levels can be found in Chapter 4.

sessioners also would frequently associate tunes with whomever who plays them regularly in sessions. For example, since the set containing *The wise maid*, *A cup of tea* and *The Shaskeen* is often led by KP, it would not be out of place to refer to the set containing these tunes as KP's tunes within the session community. This is despite the fact that these tunes are fairly standard in the Irish traditional repertoire and thus the likelihood of a sessioner knowing these tunes before KP's introduction to the set is high, especially for the more experienced sessioners. What KP has done is to *standardise* the set for the community. I have observed this during a session where KP was leading this set, but for some reason did not transition to the next tune after playing *The wise maid*, stopping altogether instead. However, the rest of the musicians transitioned to the next tune since they had expected the change into *A cup of tea*. This indicates that the sessioners were very familiar with the set to the point that it was able to be performed without the need for the set leader to initiate the next tune.

When a tune embarks on a localisation process into the repertoire, it may lose its original context along the way. The loss of original context is not limited to tunes that are imported from other traditions, however; this can also be seen in tunes and songs that have roots in Welsh traditions, particularly those that are associated with chapel music. One popular hymn that is often sung in the Glôb is *Gwahoddiad*, itself a hymn that has American origins which has been translated into Welsh and became popular on its own right in Wales. By singing this hymn in a secular setting, especially in a pub, this song becomes displaced of its context even though it preserves the lyrics, along with its religious overtones.

Songs can also lose their contexts via the displacement of their seasonalities. Most songs that are sung in sessions do not have seasons associated with them, with the notable exception of plygain carols. These carols are traditionally sung in early Christmas morning services known as plygain services in churches. In some ways, plygain services share many elements in common with sessions: for instance, both are informal in terms of arrangement where the music is performed *ex tempore* and without explicit direction, the songs and tunes are not likely to be repeated again later, and both plygain services and sessions take place in very specific settings. In a session, especially the one in the Glôb, plygain carols are sung mostly around the Christmas season, although some may appear outside this time. An example would be a session in the Glôb where I observed the plygain carol *Teg Wawriodd* sung in June. In this case, not only is the song performed outside the church setting but it is also performed far outside the season it is associated with.

Returning to the theme of localising, composers of traditional tunes may opt to put specific elements in their music in order to localise their tunes, particularly in the titles they give to their tunes. One overt manner in which they do so is to give their tunes Welsh-language names, such as *Y Wennol* by Simon Ager. On a more profound level, composers may even make references to local places and events, such as Ager's *Clychau Hirael* (The bells of Hirael), in reference to the Hirael area in Bangor, and Geoff Hardman's *Y Daith i Ballyvaughan* (The trip to Ballyvaughan), which references the annual weekend trip to Ballyvaughan by the Bangor session community.⁷⁰

I will now present a case study of a tune that has recently entered the repertoire, which demonstrates how the elements discussed above can arise.

5.2 Case study: Intertextual relationships between the various versions of *Polca Rhydowa*

In this segment, we will examine the intertextual relationships between the various versions of *Polca Rhydowa*, a tune that has entered the repertoire of the traditional music scene via the process of transmission. In this context, *Polca Rhydowa* is a tune that is associated with Welsh traditional music rather than Irish traditional music. However, a further investigation of the genealogy of the tune indicates that the tune has been naturalised and localised into the repertoire of the Menai Strait. We will look at five versions of the tune taken from two musicians, one from the local scene and one musician influential to the scene, as well as three printed sources from different authors and periods.

5.2.1 Musical differences

We will first begin by examining two versions of this tune. The first is a version heard in a session held in the Boatyard Inn led by Lesley Conran, a sessioner from the Bangor Sessions and Bontnewydd communities (see Figure 39 below). The other version is by Robert “Bob” Evans, from whom Lesley learnt this tune. It must be noted that Evans utilises a heavy use of variations in his style of playing, and therefore, each variation may sound quite different from the preceding variation, but not different enough for it to be perceived as a different tune by others. As such, the version presented in Figure 40 below is a skeleton of his version of the tune, as played in the web series *Clustfeiniau / Tunechain*. I must clarify, however, that the

⁷⁰ See Chapter 3b for a detailed description of this event.

figures mentioned represent snapshots of how they approach the tune in that particular moment, rather than accurately representing how they actually perform the tune every single time.

Lesley's version does not differ too much from Bob Evans's version. Her interpretation of the A part clearly shows the underlying rhythmic motif; this is demonstrated by the fact that the first four bars of the A part are rhythmically identical to the rest of the four bars in the same part (Figure 1). Bob Evans's interpretation of the A part, however, involves what I consider to be an expansion of the motif with both rhythmic ornamentations, as seen in the ties in the first three bars, and melodic ornamentations, as seen in the group of semiquaver notes in the third and seventh bars (Figure 2). The melody of the B part is also slightly different between the two versions. In Lesley's version, the melody stays in a high register after the first G major arpeggio in bars 9 and 10 and is repeated in the reply in bars 13 and 14. In Bob Evans's version, by contrast, the melody falls to D5 after the G major arpeggio in both halves of the B part. Finally, another difference between the two versions lies in the C part: in bar 20, the melody in Lesley's version has an E5, while Bob Evans's version has D5 in its place.



Figure 39: Polca Rhydowa as led by Lesley Conran in a session

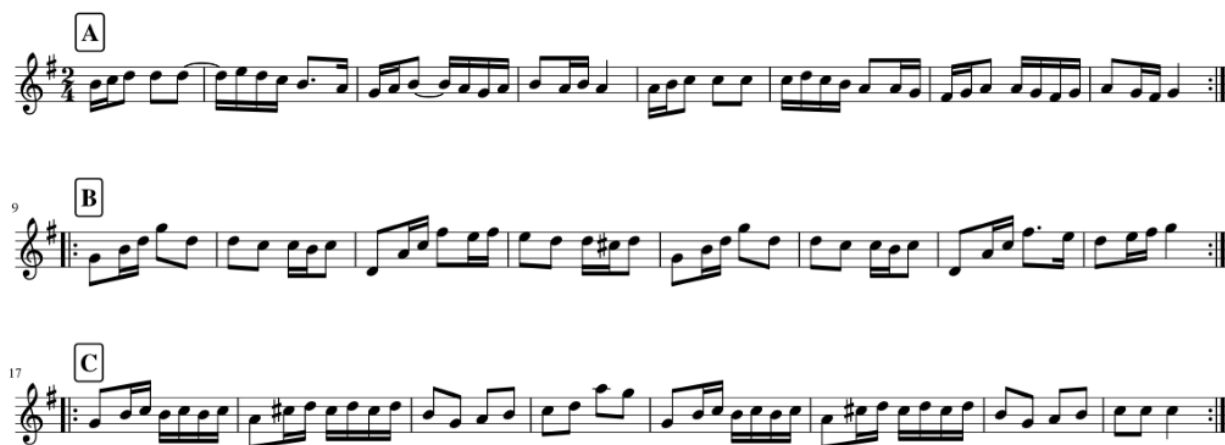


Figure 40: Skeleton of Robert Evans' version taken from the *Clustfeiniau / Tunechain* webseries

The two versions reveal two processes that have arisen as the tune was transmitted from Bob Evans to Lesley. Firstly, the differences between the two versions in the A part suggests an element of return to a base, unexpanded form. Bob Evans's ornamented interpretation of this part has been reinterpreted into a phrasally straightforward form as played by Lesley. This can be traced back to the fact that Bob Evans and Lesley play different instruments which means that approaching the same tune would be very different. This results in differences in interpreting the tune, resulting in variations of its melody, rhythm, and ornamentation from one person to the next, as already hypothesised above. The second process that has arisen from the transmission is one of transformation: Lesley's version makes use of notes in a higher register in the B part, while Bob Evans's version does not. However, Lesley's version does not stray far from the tune; in fact, the two versions are only a third apart; if the two of them were to play their versions of the tune at the same time, it would result in harmony.

Polca Rhydowa is also featured in the book *Cadw Twmpath* (Bowen, 1993). This is tune book is popular with those who are interested in Welsh traditional music in the Menai Strait scene. In fact, the name *Polca Rhydowa* which I have been using so far to refer to this tune comes from this book itself. Figure 41 below is a scan of *Polca Rhydowa* as it appears in *Cadw Twmpath*.

There are some similarities and striking differences between the three versions we have seen so far. Firstly, the A part of Lesley's version is closer to the one in *Cadw Twmpath* (henceforth referred to as CT) compared to Bob Evans's version, although the B parts of Lesley's and

Evan's version are closer to each other than they are to CT in terms of rhythmic structure, especially at bars 15-16. This is highlighted in Figure 42 below. However, as a whole, these versions are not too different from each other that someone might analyse them as two separate tunes. That said, the structure of the tune in CT is markedly different from Lesley's and Bob Evans's version. Unlike the first two versions presented earlier, the CT version lacks a C part, ending instead on the B part. The possible reasons for this will be discussed later in the chapter.

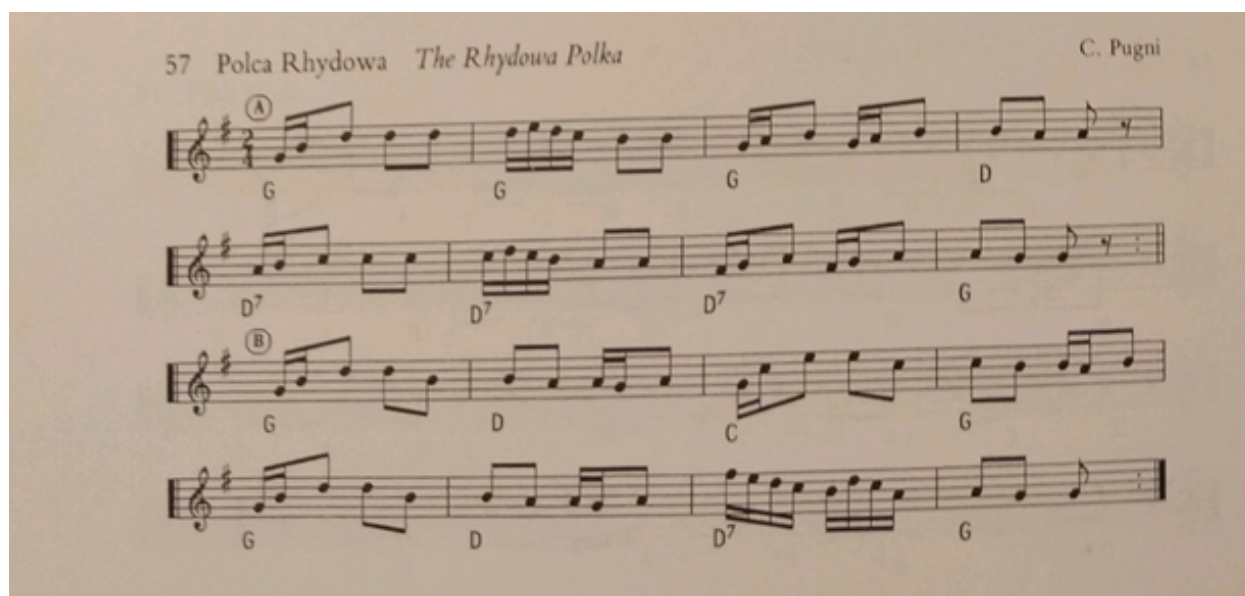


Figure 41: *Polca Rhydowa* as it appears in *Cadw Twmpath* (Bowen 1993)

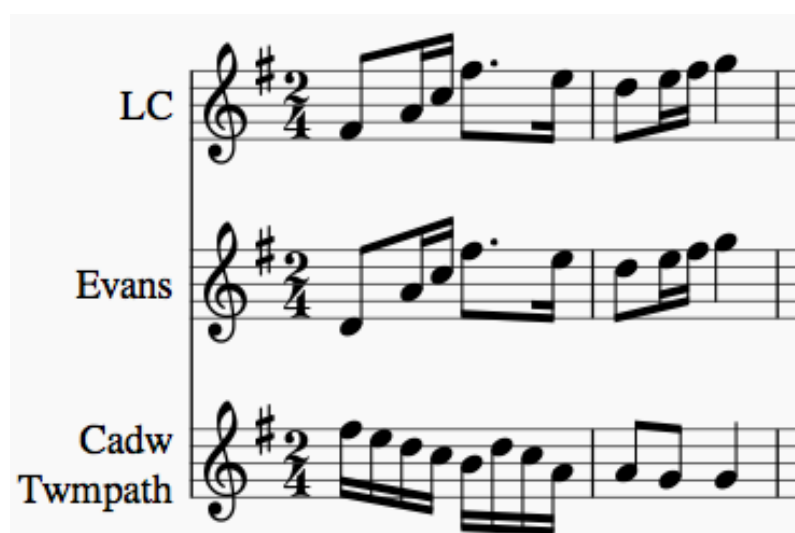


Figure 42: Bars 15-16 of *Polca Rhydowa* across the three versions. Note how the rhythm and contour in CT are markedly different from Lesley Conran's and Robert Evans's versions.

CT is a useful source as it cites C. Pugni as the author of the tune. My investigations have revealed that a version of this tune, in fact, was published as *The Real Redowa Polka, as danced by Mlle. Cerito (sic.) & Mons. St. Leon* (Pugni, n.d.). Even though the document does not give a date to its publication, it is still possible to determine when this happened. The ‘Mlle. Cerito’ as cited in the document is the Italian dancer and choreographer Fanny Cerrito, and ‘Mons. St Leon’ refers to the French dancer Arthur St. Leon. Cerrito and St. Leon danced in Vienna for a one-off event in 1841 before meeting again in London in 1843, where they became regular partners (I. Guest, 1998). They were married in 1845 before separating six years later, both professionally and in marriage. This gives us an estimate as to when Pugni must have published this score; seeing that Cerrito was addressed as ‘Mademoiselle’ in the publication and therefore, was unmarried at the time, the pair must have danced Pugni’s tune between 1843 and 1845. In other words, the publication of Pugni’s score must have happened before or in the year 1845.

Skeleton of 'The Real Redowa Polka' (C. Pagni)

The musical score is presented on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into sections A, B, C, and D, with measure numbers indicated at the beginning of each section. Section A (measures 1-8) is a simple melody. Section B (measures 9-16) continues the melody with some variations. Section C (measures 17-36) features a more complex, rhythmic melody. Section D (measures 37-65) includes a 'D.C.' (Da Capo) instruction and a 'Coda' section.

Figure 43: Skeleton score of C. Pagni's 'The Real Redowa Polka'

Skeleton of 'La Redowa Polka' (Beyer)



Figure 44: Skeleton score of F. Beyer's 'La Redowa Polka'

Upon further investigation, I have found another name that is associated with this tune: Ferdinand Beyer. However, looking at the catalogue of his works, there is a number of tunes and hymns credited to him as an arranger without crediting the original composer, which has led me to believe that Beyer's version is, in fact, an arrangement. Beyer's and Pugni's versions are similar to each other yet structurally quite distinct, and these two versions add another layer of textuality in the tune we have been looking at thus far. The skeleton score for these two versions can be found above (see Figure 43 and Figure 44 above).

Note the differences in key across the different versions of *Polca Rhydowa*, which is summarised in Table 27 below. There is more variation in the older versions of the tune in

terms of key: Lesley Conran's, Bob Evans's, and CT's versions of the tune (henceforth will be referred to as the contemporary versions) are all in G major, while Pugni's version is in A major, and Beyer's is in F major.

Version	Pugni	Beyer	Cadw Twmpath	Robert Evans	Lesley Conran
Key	A major	F major	G major		

Table 27: Comparison of keys across the five versions (arranged from oldest to most recent)

Structure-wise, some interesting comparisons across the five versions can be made here. Firstly, in the contemporary versions of the tune, each part is made up of an eight-bar melody that is repeated once before moving on to the next part. This contrasts heavily with Pugni's and Beyer's versions, where the C part is sixteen bars long and consists of two different melodies. In other words, symmetricalisation has occurred in the contemporary versions, where the melody has been reduced to 8-bar segments.

That said, in all the versions, the parts marked A and B correspond to each other; even though their melodies and rhythms are not identical, I argue that the differences are not distinct enough to regard them as anything more than variations of each other. In a way, the A and B parts have been preserved in all the contemporary versions, while the first eight bars of the C part have been preserved in Lesley's and Bob Evans's version but not in CT.

Finally, differences in structural form can be observed across the versions of *Polca Rhydowa*, which can be seen in Table 28 below. Before examining the differences in form, I must clarify that the repeat signs shown in the contemporary versions below do not mean that the tune is only repeated once; they show that the tune is to be repeated until the lead musician begins another tune in the set; this practice is conventional during a session. This contrasts with the repeats in Pugni's version, which is more through-composed and specifically calls for repeating the section within the signs exactly once.

Version	Form
Lesley Conran	: AA BB CC :
Robert Evans	: AA BB CC :
CT	: AA BB :
Pugni	: AA BB C DD : Coda
Beyer	AA BB AA C AA BB AA

Table 28: Comparison of structural forms across the versions of *Polca Rhydowa*

There are four distinct variations between the versions of *Polca Rhydowa* in terms of form. Lesley Conran's and Bob Evans's versions are identical while CT's version lacks the C part, which makes it binary form. On the other hand, Pugni's and Beyer's versions are through-composed; musicians playing these versions would follow the form explicitly shown on the scores. Pugni's version has four parts which are repeated before finishing on the coda. The form in Beyer's version is ternary, with the C part functioning as a bridge between the ternary section. In summary, the contemporary versions of the tune are cyclical in nature, while Pugni's and Beyer's versions are more linear.

5.2.2 From the ballroom to the pub; from *Redowa* to *Rhydowa*

Apart from structure and form, I have also examined the context in which these versions exist. The dance known as the Redowa initially referred to a ballroom dance of Czech origin. This dance was initially a waltz with three distinct figures, namely: (1) promenade; (2) Redowa waltz; and (3) pursuit (Cellarius, 1846), although later on this would be adapted to polka time, which are the versions I have presented so far. The figures identified by Cellarius would correspond directly to the parts of the music; in other words, the promenade would have been danced at the A part of the tune, the Redowa waltz on the B part, and the pursuit on the C part. This is likely to be the reason why all the versions, barring the version in CT, have at least three parts. However, looking at how the tune is played today in sessions, it is clear that the context and meaning of the tune have changed as it gets handed down to musicians along the Menai Strait today. While part of the melody of *Polca Rhydowa* has remained somewhat intact today, its association with ballroom dancing, and indeed with its earlier waltz form, has disappeared.

I argue that the change in context has also brought about the differences between the contemporary versions and the earlier versions of the tune. CT, in particular, suggests that the changes made to the tune from Pugni's original might have been deliberate to fit it in session context. The publication of CT was motivated by the success of the reprinting of *Blodau'r Grug*, an anthology of dance music also published by the Welsh Folk Dance Society (A. Hamilton, 1992). The editor Robin Huw Bowen notes that *Cadw Twmpath* was intended to be a sister volume to *Blodau'r Grug* and would include tunes that were not set to specific dances but were a part of the local repertoire. The Society likely appointed Bowen with the editing process for both *Blodau'r Grug* and *Cadw Twmpath* because of his work and experience with Welsh traditional music. Some of the source material for *Cadw Twmpath* can be traced to specific manuscripts and books from the National Library of Wales, as well as oral sources. However, I believe that *Polca Rhydowa* comes from the third category, which Bowen describes as

traditional tunes which do not come from any source in particular, but which have become very much part of the repertoire of our folk musicians for some time, but as yet have never appeared in any Society publication (Bowen, 1993).

In the foreword of *Cadw Twmpath*, Bowen's description of the sources indicates that there has been a curation process to determine which tunes were to be featured in it, especially seeing that only a hundred tunes made it into the final product, which can be argued to be a precise and nicely rounded number. Bowen has been careful to cite tunes that were from aural-oral sources, such as recordings of Nansi Richards and *Band y Brodyr*. Composers of tunes, such as J. Gratian and Pugni himself, were also cited if they were known. This suggests that Bowen might have been aware of the unedited versions of the tunes but may have edited them out to reflect how musicians were already playing them at the time of compilation.

There is another element that has changed as a result of the change in context, and that is the name of the tune itself. So far, I have been referring to the tune as *Polca Rhydowa* because that is how it is referred to in CT. However, Pugni and Beyer refer to their versions as Redowa, which reflects the original dance more closely. This raises two questions: (1) are there other names given to this tune?; and (2) how and why is it renamed *Rhydowa* in CT?

Indeed, I have uncovered other names associated with this tune. In the *Clustfeiniau / Tunechain* web series from which I have collected Bob Evans's version of *Polca Rhydowa*, he refers to the tune as the 'Red Hour polka' (Trac, 2013). This is interesting because it sheds some light on the importance of names in the adoption of tunes into the repertoire. In this case, the word

Redowa has been phonetically reanalysed and matched with two English words *red* and *hour*. Other sources also refer to this tune as *The Redower Polka* [for instance, see Carlin (1984, p. 18), and the Old Swan Band album *Old Swan Brand* (2008)]. These sources, unlike Bob Evans, reanalysed the term *Redowa* without the word matching from English vocabulary; in other words, they simply recorded how an English speaker would have pronounced the word. In any case, the original significance of *Redowa* as a specific dance has been lost in this process, and I would argue that this would be the case even if the source calls the tune *Redowa* with no changes in the name whatsoever. Interestingly, these sources regard this tune as part of the English folk repertoire, indicating that this tune has been adopted and naturalised by local practitioners in England.

This leads us to the second question raised above. CT has taken strategies similar to English sources by phonetically analysing the word *Redowa* without matching it with existing words in the Welsh language. I argue that the term *Rhydowa* /r̥ə'do:wa/ is a result of applying Welsh phonological rules to the word *Redowa*. The table below demonstrates this process:

Pugni	R	e	dowa
CT	Rh	y	dowa

Table 29: Sound changes from Redowa to Rhydowa

As seen in Table 29, there are two places where sound changes have been applied. The first is the substitution of <R> to <Rh> in the name. This reflects the phonological rule in Welsh where initial /r/ must be devoiced to /r̥/, which is transcribed as <rh> in Welsh orthography. This rule also affected older loan words from Latin in Welsh, as seen in *rheol* (rule, from Latin *regula*), and *rhyfel* (war, from Latin *rebello*), although later loanwords from English such as *rabbi* and *rygbi* (rugby) seem to ignore this rule. The second sound change observed in this name is the alternation of the vowel <e> to <y>. In terms of phonetics, this is a reduction from /e/ to the schwa /ə/. This reduction can be seen in older loanwords in Welsh from Latin as well, such as *myfyr* (thought, ultimately from Latin *memoria*), *prysur* (busy, ultimately from Latin *pressōrium*), and *synio* (to think, to imagine; from Latin *sentio*). Later English loanwords, however, such as *lemon* and *melodi* seem to ignore this rule as well.

Interestingly, CT presents this tune as *Rhydowa* as the English-language version of the name. Doing so suggests that CT is attempting to recontextualise the tune as a Welsh tune, in a similar way that *Redower* was used in English folk music.

5.2.3 Recap and discussion

In this case study, various elements have been examined as we follow the tune as it is transmitted from one musician to the next. Table 30 below is a summary of the changes explored so far in this case study:

Element examined	Changes from earlier to contemporary versions
Music	All contemporary versions are played in G major Preservation of parts A and B (all versions) as well as the first half of C (Lesley Conran's and Bob Evans's versions only) Reduction of all parts to 8-bar melodies Linear to cyclical forms
Context	Ballroom to traditional music spaces Variations in name: Redowa / Redower / Red Hour / Rhydowa

Table 30: Summary of changes explored so far

These are the changes that have happened to *Polca Rhydowa* as it makes its way into the traditional music scene of the Menai Strait. I argue that the changes in structure and form seen above are a result of adapting the tune to fit the established musical idiom of the area. Generally speaking, apart from a few exceptions, tunes played in sessions along the Menai Strait consist of eight-bar melodies which are repeated once, and Pugni's *Redowa* has been altered to fit in this format. The change from linear to cyclical forms also reflects how the tune has been adapted to match the other tunes played in sessions.

We have also seen how all the contemporary versions are played in G, even though none of the older sources does. It can be argued that the preference to play in G has to do with the instruments used in the session. Instruments such as the squeezeboxes, pipes, keyless flutes, and whistles have certain affinities to certain keys. Because a vast majority of the tunes that are already played in sessions along the Menai Strait are in G, D, A minor, and E minor, musicians who play the aforementioned instruments would play instruments that easily play in these keys. A whistle player, for instance, would play a whistle in D, while melodeon player might elect to use a GD melodeon. Of course, there are tunes outside of these keys in the traditional repertory and it impossible to them on these instruments as well, but musicians

would require more advanced knowledge of their instruments to do so. As such, tunes in other keys are often more exclusive in nature and they tend to be played only by the more advanced musicians. In sum, it can be argued that the changes in the music of *Polca Rhydowa* are a result of making the tune more session-friendly, as noted in the discussion prior to this case study. It is also interesting to note how the more the tune adapts itself into the repertoire, the fewer changes occur over time, which suggest that tunes that have entered the full localisation stage are usually not as volatile as tunes that are in earlier stages of localisation (see p. 207). This is seen in the case study where Bob Evans's and Lesley's versions of the tune are fairly similar to each other, whereas CT's and Pugni's versions are very different from one another.

The changes in context also show how the original context of the *Redowa* as a ballroom dance has shifted over time. The shift of the name itself suggests that while the connotations of ballroom dance disappeared as the tune is transmitted, names can easily be half-remembered or even mistaken for other words altogether.

Keeping these changes in mind, we can examine how the five versions we have seen so far are related. Using Miola's categorisation of intertextualities (2004), I have identified two types of intertextual relationships. In terms of the tune itself, we can see that the melodies of each subsequent version of the tune bear close relation to the version before it, and despite the changes identified in Table 30, the identity of the tune is largely intact. This is seen in how CT cites Pugni as the composer even though the two versions are different upon close examination, for instance. Miola defines this type of relationship as *revision*, a process which he notes 'occurs under the guiding and explicitly comparative eye of the guiding author' (2004, p. 14). In other words, revisions are deliberate processes, whether they happen in the context of publishing or in the context of teaching a version of a tune to someone else. Editors and practitioners have the choice to remove or change elements to suit established styles, as seen in the omission of the C part in CT.

That said, it is worth noting that traditional music practices have a high level of oral residue; this means that elements of primary orality still dominate despite the fact the those who practice it are literate. Miola (2004) asserts that texts where the author has not seen the originary text at all relate to each other differently to texts that are directly mediated by the author. This is arguably the case for Lesley's and Bob Evans's versions; these still bear the same identity musically, but the context itself has been completely shifted. Lesley's and Bob Evans's versions have been adapted to fit in a session by referring to established musical conventions

and style present in other tunes. While the musical features are largely retained, the *Rhydowa* as played in sessions has lost all the original social connotations of Pugni's *Redowa*, although the name of the tune, albeit altered, did provide clues to this upon further investigation.

5.3 (Re)inventing tradition

The discussions above show that meanings can change over time as tunes enter the traditional music repertoire, thus indicating that this tradition is dynamic rather than static. This segment explores the extent of this dynamicity, exploring how far session culture allows for innovations.

5.3.1 Newly composed music

Looking at newly composed music can shed some light on how much the session culture of the Menai Strait allows for innovation. Even though they make up only 2.4% of all the tunes and songs performed in the region during the observation period, they are still significant because they reflect the aesthetics of their composers. They can be a good indicator of which tunes would fit in a session well and which ones would not fit so well. In this segment, we will be looking at three newly composed tunes, one of which is more advanced in the localisation process, and two others that are not as advanced.

Within the session scene, I have identified five individuals who have composed music and shared them in sessions. The majority of these tunes are in the adoption stage in the localisation process (see p. 207), although there are a few that have become fully localised. Some tunes have even become known beyond the sessions along the Menai Strait, such as *Weasel's Revenge* by Jan Hurst and *Barton Island* by Meg Browning. Tunes that are in the adoption and full localisation stages of the localisation process all have the characteristics discussed in p. 205. This means that newly composed tunes that conform to the already-established structures in traditional music are likely to be accepted by the community. In fact, some of these tunes employ so many clichés and idioms from British and Irish traditional music to the extent that it can be difficult to identify them as a tune composed by a local sessioner.



Figure 45: Outline of *Y Trysor*, composed by Geoff Hardman (based on the playing of Meg Browning)

Figure 45 above is the outline of *Y Trysor*,⁷¹ a tune that Geoff composed in reference to his wife. This tune has the four characteristics outlined in p. 205. In terms of structure, this tune would be identified as a reel, as indicated in its time signature. Additionally, it is also composed of two parts of eight bars each. The range of this tune is D4 to G5, which falls within the session-manageable range as shown in Figure 37 (p. 206). Interestingly, upon further examination of this tune, we can see that this tune primarily uses notes from the G major pentatonic scale. This is particularly interesting because the pentatonic scale has particular importance in Irish music, where several well-known tunes are organised around this scale (Cowdery, 1990). Tunes like *Y Trysor* blend in with the other tunes played in sessions very well, so much so that it may not be apparent that this is an original tune composed by a member of the community, since it bears so many tropes found in Irish music.

It is interesting to note that Hardman has given this tune a Welsh name. This is potentially significant because tunes from the Welsh traditional music repertoire are often referred to by their Welsh names, even in the more English-speaking session communities. This contrasts with Irish traditional music practice where names of tunes are very often in English. This raises the question: does the tune also have characteristics similar to other tunes in the Welsh repertoire?

Upon examination of the music, I argue that *Y Trysor* does not typically sound like a Welsh tune. Ironically, this can be attributed to the pentatonic scale that makes the tune sound like an Irish tune in the first place. However, I must clarify that not all Irish tunes are set in the pentatonic scale; a large portion of Irish tunes are, in fact, diatonic in nature. That said, the use of the pentatonic scale is rare, if not used at all, in the established tunes from the Welsh repertoire. In other words, on the surface based on the name itself *Y Trysor* takes on a Welsh identity while the melody itself is more Irish than it is Welsh. This tune is reflective of Hardman's musical background, who sings and plays mostly Irish music on the flute and whistle in sessions. *Y Trysor* reflects these, seeing that it has elements common to Irish traditional music and that the range is composed within a comfortable range for wind instruments.

In terms of its position in the localisation process, *Y Trysor* would fall between the latter two stages of the localisation process, between the stages of adoption and full localisation. This was determined by observing the participation levels when this tune is played in sessions:

⁷¹ This is Welsh for 'The Treasure'.

Sessioners were participating at levels described in the adoption stage discussed above when this tune was led (see p. 208), indicating that they were generally fairly familiar with the tune. However, this tune is also part of a set led by MB, which shows that some sessioners are familiar enough with the tune to lead it independently from Hardman.

That said, not all new tunes advance through the stages of the localisation process as *Y Trysor* has. These tunes tend to push the boundaries of traditional music. Below are two tunes that I have heard being performed in sessions that are composed by local sessioners but have not advanced past the introduction stage of the localisation process. Based on the localisation process, this indicates that these tunes are still in the introduction stage

Gwrach yn y Simnai (Meg Browning)



Figure 46: Skeleton of *Gwrach yn y Simnai* by Meg Browning

Thin Ice (Meg Browning)



Figure 47: Skeleton score of *Thin Ice* by Meg Browning

Swedish Masquerade



Figure 48: Skeleton score of the Swedish Masquerade

Figure 46 and Figure 47 above are skeleton scores of *Gwrach yn y Simnai* and *Thin Ice* by local sessioner Meg Browning. These tunes immediately stand out due to their use of multiple time signatures. This is exceedingly rare in traditional tunes; I have only heard one established tune played in sessions during the observation period which uses multiple time signatures, which is the *Swedish Masquerade* (see Figure 48 above). This tune is used to accompany the dance of the same name which may be performed in community dance events described in the essay preceding the Interactions chapter. In the *Swedish Masquerade*, the A part is a march in 2/4, the B part is a waltz in 3/4, and the C part is a polka in 2/4. In the two tunes presented above, however, the changes in time signatures occur within the parts themselves: in fact, *Thin Ice* changes time signature on each bar. However, apart from the advanced use of time signatures, these two tunes do fulfil the other criteria for adoption. The range of both tunes are manageable for all session-typical instruments; both tunes are made up of short eight-bar segments, and both can be played in a loop, and are therefore cyclical in nature.

Based on my observations in sessions, when these two tunes are led, participation levels among the sessioners are lower than usual. A significant number of musicians would participate silently, while those who would participate conventionally would be Meg Browning herself, NB, and the few others who would be familiar with these tunes. This indicates that these tunes have not left the introduction stage of the localisation process, suggesting that tunes that stray

too far away from the adoption criteria above would not progress far into the localisation process.

5.3.2 Reconstruction and revival

So far, we have seen how dynamic the repertoire of the Menai Strait can be, taking on tunes from cultures outside the area, and modifying them to fit session culture if necessary. This raises the question: (1) is this in line with other session cultures in Wales, and (2) far along the revival movement we are currently in.

The 2018 report on youth activities organised by trac Cymru (Watt, 2018) sheds some light on this. According to the report, trac is committed to the promotion and protection of the music and dance traditions native to Wales. In order to commit to their aims, Welsh tunes and dances are often prioritised during their events and workshops (2018, p. 28). The promotion of indigenous music and dance is a response to the fact that they are not seen as a distinct cultural tradition outside of Wales, and certainly not on par with those from its English, Irish, or Scottish neighbours. The lack of this recognition, according to the report, means that these traditions are not as highly prized as those of their neighbours, which then restricts its access because those who do practice traditional music are not given the opportunity to perform them given its low value (Watt, 2018, p. 28). That said, the report declares that non-Welsh traditions are also given space during trac programmes, as seen in the Gwerin Gwallgo event in 2018 where Scottish dance and Gaelic singing were showcased, and tunes from Ireland and Québec were shared during their Noson Lawen programme. Interestingly, however, some of the younger practitioners of Welsh traditional music between the ages of 11 and 17 who attended this event raised the issue of the lack of variety with the traditional music scene in Wales in general. The report said that they were

... challenging the scene's bias towards only playing Welsh tunes and its lack of variety; and criticism of 'traditionalists' who are perceived to prevent development and creativity in the scene due to their 'claims about authenticity' (emphasis not mine) (Watt 2018, 24).

It must be clarified that the 'scene' mentioned in this report likely refers to the collection of session communities in Wales. It is interesting to note that there is frustration among the younger practitioners of traditional music in Wales with how there is little room to be creative in their practice in their respective communities, according to Watt's report. This contrasts quite strongly with the practices we have seen in sessions along the Menai Strait, which has

been open to playing tunes from outside the Welsh repertoire and allowing for new compositions from local sessioners, albeit limited to the adoption criteria listed above (p. 205).

That said, Watt's report does highlight that for other session communities outside of the Menai Strait, a perceived division of authentic and creative practice persists. However, it must be said that both authentic and creative practices are equally crucial in developing the traditional arts. Sources of traditional music, especially textual sources of Welsh music, tend to be careful in citing older, presumably primary sources [examples include *Tro Llaw* (Bowen, 1987), and *Mabsant* (George, 2002)]. Doing so suggests that the authors are appealing to authenticity; the older sources are seen as providers of the foundational framework which would guide the development of traditional arts. Within the framework of revived musical practices, establishing standards of authenticity is important an important step in garnering wider institutional and public support (Hill, 2014, p. 394).

This raises the question of standard bearing. On the one hand, there are local arts organisations such as Clera and the National Eisteddfod of Wales. These are larger bodies that have institutionalised standards informed by their own organisational philosophies. Session communities along the Menai Strait, on the other hand, are strongly non-institutional. They are loosely interconnected, small, autonomous bodies that operate independently from each other. The community based in the Boatyard Inn in Bangor, for instance, have little to no bearing on the operations of the community based in the Mountain Arms in Rhosgadfan. This means that each of the communities would have different standards from one another, thus questioning if the need to set authentic standards is still necessary at this stage of the revival.

In any case, reducing the definition of authenticity to only historical practice is not productive in the discussion of traditional music. After all, Harper reminds us that traditional music must be actively practised in the community (Harper, 2011, p. xvii), implying that in the discussion of this topic we must examine current practices. This means that authenticity is also about the nature of the activities of the practitioners of traditional music that has organically evolved through local practices, independent of interference or policing from outside forces. I stress the importance of this because sessions are not events that necessarily serve to showcase the re-enactment of old music, or any genre of music in particular per se; they are essentially people gathering to play tunes that are collectively known among the group.

There were many elements discussed so far which help us understand where session music is placed in the larger picture that is the revival movement. One of those elements can be seen in

the localisation process outlined above (p. 207). This process shows how tunes end up being in the local repertoire of the Menai Strait. Some of these tunes can be imported through editorial means, as seen in the case study above, particularly in CT's version of *Polca Rhydowa*. Other tunes are less editorial in nature and have instead entered the tradition by having the introducer exposing the tunes to the community, with the community eventually adopting the tune based on the introducers' interpretations, as seen in *Polca Rhydowa* as introduced by Robert Evans via Lesley Conran. The lack of edition in the latter tunes is indicative of how academic authority is not integral during the localisation process. At the same time, the community as a whole is selective about which tunes would be naturalised into the repertoire. This is supported by the observation noted above in the discussion on the localisation process where it was noted that not all tunes make it to the second or third stage, which would imply increasing acceptance of the tune. In other words, when it comes to the repertoire, the community is observed to be self-regulating in nature. Standards are derived from collective consciousness and praxis, rather than from structured hierarchal authority.

This gives us an idea of the stage we are currently at in the revival movement. Livingston (1999) notes that all revival movements have their own lifespans, theorising that it would come to an end once the question of authenticity is no longer a concern, and if a significant number of the revivalists feel like the concept of tradition becomes 'too constricting of a reference point' (1999, 80). Employing Livingston's suggestions into the observations mentioned above, it could be argued that the revival movement has moved towards the end of its lifespan into the post-revival stage. The former can be seen where the origins of the tunes do not take precedence during the localisation process, while the latter is reflected in the opinions of the younger traditional music practitioners who have begun to feel the tension between creative and traditional practices (Watt 2018, 24). This means that based on Livingston's theory, the traditional music played in sessions is moving towards the end of its lifespan, transitioning into a new phase. This new phase is suggested by Hill and Bithell (2014, 29) to be the post-revival phase, suggesting that new musical genres and practices may arise in this space. This is because the music would no longer be perceived as endangered, thus allowing for new possibilities. However, looking specifically at the session music that is being played along the Menai Strait today, I would argue that it has not fully arrived at the phase described by Hill and Bithell. While innovation can be seen in terms of repertoire and instrumentation, we have yet to see widespread adoption of spin-off genres and practices that Hill and Bithell have theorised. Furthermore, the feedback from the younger musicians about the traditionalists suggests that

traditional music in Wales in general is not yet independent from the political and social factors that spurred the revival in the first place. As such, I argue that the music of the Menai Strait and Wales has significant post-revival characteristics whilst retaining elements that were established in the original revival movement.

5.4 Post-revival music revisited

In this chapter, we have looked at the musical aspects of session culture. This chapter began with the exploration of the origins of the tunes and songs that make up the local repertoire in sessions. My observations indicate that music in sessions can vary quite considerably from one community to the next. Accessibility to a particular tradition and personal interests of influential individuals are two closely related elements that directly shape the types of music that dominate in any given session, contributing to the multiplicity of traditions found in the area.

I then discussed the orality of session culture today, finding that session culture has inherent traits of secondary orality inherent in cultures that are based around literacy. Literacy has provided the tools for individuals to access material from any culture for their personal repertoire to be used in sessions. However, elements of primary orality are still present in session culture; this is seen in the presence of oral-aural sources itself, as well as the perceived privilege of being able to play by ear. The prestige of primary orality is a common trait of the traditions that are represented in sessions, and it does leave effects on the music that is played in sessions. I found four characteristics that were common in music that has entered the repertoire: they are all easily manageable on session instruments; they are made up of short 8-bar phrases; they are in time signatures already commonly found in the repertoire, and they are all cyclical nature. Tunes with these characteristics tend to be easily integrated into session repertoire.

Next, I explored how tunes enter the repertoire. This is demonstrated using a process which I have termed the localisation process. This process is made up of three stages: introduction; adoption; and full localisation. These are determined by the participation levels of sessioners. During the localisation process, tunes and songs may lose their associations with specific meanings such as seasonality or locational context as they become played in sessions. This discussion was then followed by a case study exploring how a tune composed in mainland Europe became a part of the repertoire along the Menai Strait, observing how the tune has changed in different contexts. This case study, in effect, spotlights how commonalities

established by tunes already in the session repertoire can modify tunes entering it so that they acquire these commonalities and therefore facilitate the music-making process.

Finally, I examined music newly composed by those within the community, investigating the extent of creativity allowed on the composer in order to have their tunes accepted into the repertoire. I found that tunes that satisfy the four characteristics explored previously are more likely to be integrated into the repertoire. From here, I also situated the session culture along the Menai Strait with other sessions around Wales, discussing the role that authenticity and creative practices play in shaping the repertoire and session culture as a whole. From this discussion, I reflected upon the stage on which session culture along the Menai Strait sits in the revival movement. I argued that this is situated towards the end of the revival phase and just before the post-revival period because there is a presence of innovation and creativity among the practices of the sessioners. This would suggest that the music is no longer as endangered as it was before during the start of the revival movement in the 70s and 80s. However, there is still a general absence of spin-off genres and practices that would have been present in movements in the post-revival phase, which means that practices observed in the sessions indicate we are currently at the end of the revival phase, but not in the post-revival phase yet.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and reflections

In this thesis, I have explored the diverse nature of sessions along the Menai Strait by examining the four elements central to the session, namely places, people, interactions, and the music itself. These elements have each shed light on the central enquiry of this study.

Despite the diverse nature of the traditional music scene in the area, several commonalities unite the musical practice in sessions. Firstly, one of the common traits of sessions is the choice of instruments. Multi-instrumentalism is common among the musicians who take part in sessions, and the survey revealed certain instruments that I have not observed in sessions. Conversations with sessioners reveal that the choice to use a particular instrument in a session is an active one: an example is where certain instruments do not feature in sessions because they would take up too much space, or that it would not work well with music in a session context. This demonstrates that the commonalities in instrumentation are deliberate, and that unusual instruments like the nyckelharpa or cavaquinho are in sessions because they can play roles similar to other instruments already established in the sessions.

In terms of musical material, it was found that tunes across the different traditions with higher participation rates had similar features, namely (1) being manageable on session-typical instruments by being in a specific range and only using specific keys; (2) made up of relatively short segments; (3) using a specific set of time signatures, and (4) have a cyclical nature. However, these features may not necessarily be latent in the original material; in some cases like the case study offered in Chapter 5, tunes are modified so that they have the four features identified above. In other words, commonalities in musical material may be derivative in the first place.

Observations and conversations related to musicking practices give some insight into why this process occurs, which brings us to another common trait in the session: communicative strategies. These strategies were observed across every session despite the variation of tradition that would be dominant in the individual sessions. The reason for the common communicative strategies is to facilitate the music-making process, regardless of its origin. These strategies are all informed by unwritten rules of etiquette which can be very general in nature, but rules relating to the music-making process is especially important because it informs how to navigate the different traditions present in these sessions.

I have identified several elements which have influenced the musical landscape in sessions. Firstly, this study suggests that folk organisations play a role in shaping a musician's

development and can influence the musician's repertoire. This is evident with younger sessioners who would have had access to resources provided by organisations like *trac Cymru* at an earlier point in their musical development; this is an opportunity that would not have been available to older musicians.

This leads us to another influence, which comes from accessible sources. These sources can come in any form, such as easy-to-obtain books, websites, audio recordings, podcasts, to name a few. In this study, I also considered access to someone who introduces the tunes to the session as an accessible source. These are particularly important because they act as starting points for individuals looking for new tunes to learn which may be introduced and localised into the session in the long run.

Another influencing factor is the personal interests of influential participants. I have observed that influential participants hold a significant amount of control in sessions and can influence which types of music get featured in any given session. Examples given in the study were the sessions in Bontnewydd and Caernarfon; songs feature heavily in Bontnewydd because of Gerallt Llewelyn and his connections to other singers in Ireland, while Scandinavian and English tunes feature in Caernarfon sessions because of the influence of Jan Hurst and JE. These personal interests in particular musical traditions have led to the diversity of the musical landscape in sessions of the area.

One of the interesting findings from the survey is that sessions have an element of localness, as seen in how the regions of Arfon East and Arfon West have different participant bases with a small overlap of participants who attend sessions in both areas. This has created residual zones where sessions do not influence each other. The localness of sessions is particularly important because it potentially sheds light on why there is a multiplicity of traditions in sessions in the region.

Places themselves can influence the type of music that becomes dominant. This was seen particularly in Tafarn y Glôb, where tunes of Welsh origin feature very strongly compared to other sessions along the Menai Strait. The Glôb is an establishment that has a particular history with Welsh language and culture and close links with the Welsh-speaking community in the Bangor area. My observations suggest this has a strong effect on the music that is played in it.

Revisiting the discussion that was had regarding Third Places, one of the characteristics of a Third Place is the regulars who occupy the space. This theory establishes a close connection between people and place. In the discussion earlier in the thesis, it was noted that the meaning

of regularness can go beyond frequent patronage to a particular establishment, it can also refer to the social connections maintained by these regulars in the case of recurring events not bound by physical space. In the case of the sessions, I argued that the regulars influence the sessions they attend through the interactions they have amongst themselves and with potential new members. Of course, as mentioned above, their personal interests also leave effects on the music played in sessions as well, shaping the musical landscape in these events.

Musical spaces in sessions are constructed in both physical and non-physical ways. In the process of creating musical spaces, I have observed how sessioners negotiate the physical spaces around them. One way is through zoning in sessions that take place in shared spaces, where the physical spaces themselves must be negotiated to create imaginary boundaries between sessioners and non-sessioners. This is achieved primarily through distancing strategies. Another method, particularly in sessions in isolated spaces, is to personalise the space itself by moving furniture around. Negotiating the spaces as such allows sessioners to place themselves in ways that are conducive to musicking. Many of these strategies line up with previous studies examining session culture in Ireland, although I have observed how specific cultures established in particular sessions, in addition to the nature of the physical space itself, can play a part in producing seating arrangements different from these studies.

The Third Place nature of sessions can also shed some light on how these musical spaces are constructed. In the discussion, I proposed based on my observations of sessions in the region that there is indeed a relationship between physical space and interactions in the discussion of Third Places as opposed to Purnell and Breede (2018) who have suggested otherwise. This was seen in how sessioners form relationships with their physical environment by actively assessing and agreeing upon the suitability of the spaces where sessions take place and modifying the space to facilitate musicking.

Perhaps in less physical ways, musical spaces are also constructed through communities of practice. This was examined closely in Chapter 3b which examined the relationship of the Bangor Session community with the wider traditional music community based in Ireland. This relationship has produced characteristics specific to this community, specifically the Irish influence that features strongly in the repertoire of the Bangor Sessions. In other words, this relationship has created a musical space where Irish tunes are particularly prominent.

These findings feed back into the central inquiry set out at the start of this thesis namely:

Why is there a multiplicity of musical traditions in sessions of the Menai Strait, and how do they fit in the wider traditional music scene?

The diverse nature of musical tradition in sessions of this area can be attributed to three elements: (1) the insular, local nature of sessions; (2) accessible resources, and (3) diverse interests of practitioners. There is only a small overlap of participants between sessions at either end of the Menai Strait because sessioners are more likely to attend sessions that are personally convenient to them. This has created a situation where sessions are more insular, which in turn means the repertoire of each session is more unique, contributing to the diversity of music in the area.

Secondly, accessible resources have contributed greatly to the multiplicity of musical traditions in the area. Traditional music practices highly prize orality, as seen in how playing by ear is still considered a desirable method to learn new music. However, as noted in the discussion in Chapter 5, because the session exists in a context where its participants are literate in a text-based society, this orality is merely residual. Musicians can make use of their literacy to learn tunes and songs outside the context of passing tunes down directly from one individual to the next. The sources described in Chapter 5 indicate that musicians indeed look for tunes in various sources like books, recordings, websites, and podcasts. Of course, some of these sources are made available through local folk arts organisations such as *trac Cymru* and *Clara* which provide workshops, publish books, and maintain websites that sessioners may find useful.

It can be argued that increasing access to these resources has produced and fostered the diverse interests of practitioners. The observations gathered in this study suggest that this has generational effects as well. Recent efforts from those involved in the Welsh folk revival, such as the local folk arts organisations mentioned above and high-calibre musicians performing and recording Welsh traditional music, have increased the number of resources related to Welsh traditional music. Younger participants would have had more access to these resources earlier in their musical development, which supports the fact that younger musicians would have a bigger repertoire of Welsh tunes compared to their older counterparts. That said, the increasing access to resources has also created exposure to traditional tunes from further afield such as Scandinavia, contributing to the diversity of traditional music in sessions in the region. Finally, some practitioners are also interested in composing music and introducing them in sessions, adding original tunes to the repertoire.

Of course, there is a relationship between any given type of music and the musical spaces where they exist: the more influential a place or an individual is, the more prominent the related that type of music. The insular nature of sessions in this area has further amplified the diversity of musical traditions.

This leaves us with the question of how these traditions fit in the wider traditional music scene. Looking at the repertoire and musical practices in sessions, we can see that the traditions featured in sessions in the region are closely related to each other. Tunes with very specific characteristics tend to be more successful in being adopted into the repertoire, which suggests that in terms of structure at least, there is a close affinity between the music played in sessions along the Menai Strait with traditional music of Great Britain and Ireland. That said, tunes that do not initially share these characteristics can go through a localisation process that would result in them having those specific characteristics, as demonstrated in the case study in Chapter 5.

The way these musics are performed also represents a commonality that is shared across the different traditions. Based on my observations and conversations held with sessioners, communication strategy is fairly constant when it comes to the music-making process across all sessions. In other words, sessioners across the board use very similar strategies to communicate information to one another. These communication strategies are of course informed by unspoken rules of etiquette, which I argued was the basis of all interactions within a session. The rules of etiquette and the communication strategies derived from it forms the framework of performing the different types of music. This is one of the reasons why tunes obtain certain characteristics when being localised into the repertoire; they are shaped by the interactions that take place in sessions. At least in the sessioners' points of view, certain musical cues specific to session music such as changing tunes are easier to communicate.

The way tunes are referred to by sessioners also suggests that the music played in sessions is interpreted through the lens of Irish contemporary traditional music. This is seen in many ways, such as how sessioners use terminology used in Irish traditional music to describe tunes of non-Irish origin. Furthermore, the commonalities that are found in tunes that have been adopted or localised reinforce this, seeing that the specific characteristics of tunes that have gone through this process eventually obtain structural characteristics typical of Irish traditional music. That said, I believe that the reason why Irish characteristics seem to be heavily present in sessions is because of the strong associations a session has with Irish culture in the first place. Especially

in Bangor, the oldest session community has direct relations with other session communities in Ireland, which I argued formed a transnational community of practice which is maintained through events like the Welsh Weekend in Ballyvaughan. The musickal practices in sessions along the Menai Strait have long been established with Irish traditional music session in general, and these practices form the underlying basis in how music from different traditions are performed. That said, Irish traditions have not completely eclipsed the practices of other traditions; Welsh traditions have left a mark as well, especially in renaming tunes such as *Polca Rhydowa* and naming original, locally composed tunes. These practices make the traditional music of the Menai Strait unique in the sense that it is formed of many layers of international influences.

When I first participated in sessions after having moved to the Menai Strait, I had not expected the level of musical diversity that is present in them, and conversations with non-practitioners as well as existing publications about session culture in Wales suggest that this aspect is currently under-researched. Within the context of Welsh music studies, this thesis has advanced the field by establishing firm connections between contemporary Welsh traditional musical practice along the Menai Strait with the wider traditional musical sphere, particularly with that of Ireland and that of our European relatives. These connections are formed not only through social means, such as through events like the Welsh Weekend, but also musical means. This thesis has also established the relationship between informal musicking and the physical spaces around them, bringing new discussions into the field of proxemics and the concept of Third Place. Finally, this study has also introduced a new focus on transnational communities of practice and informal musicking in the process of reviving traditions.

Recommendations for further study

Based on the conclusions presented above, I would like to suggest some areas for further research. Firstly, further research is needed to determine the relationship between the data collected in the survey in Chapter 3 (see Appendix 7) and the data collected from the report compiled by trac Cymru (Watt, 2018) with regards to their youth events. Another area that can be considered for further research pertains to international session gatherings such as the Welsh Weekend that was discussed in this thesis. To better understand the social and musickal processes behind gatherings like these, future studies could address similar informal musickal events, such as the gatherings held in Bangor twice a year.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected session activities greatly since the first UK-wide lockdown of March 2020. I briefly explored how the Bangor Sessions community has moved all activities online onto the Zoom platform. The pandemic has opened another significant field of study as musicking has shifted into a virtual space. Another area that worth researching is how session communities move forward post-COVID-19 as social restrictions are gradually lifted and society learns to live with the virus as it becomes endemic in everyday life.

Reflections

This study has given me valuable insights into traditional music practices of the Menai Strait. I had started out this research project wanting to learn more about the community that has made me feel at home throughout my time in the region. Coming out of this research project, I have learned a lot about the musickal processes that are specific to session culture, which, in some ways, are quite different to other kinds of musickal processes I had been exposed to beforehand personally.

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Appendix 1: Participant Consent Form



PRIFYSGOL BANGOR UNIVERSITY

Bangor University's 'Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards of Research Programmes' (Code 03)
<https://www.bangor.ac.uk/ar/main/regulations/home.htm>

COLLEGE OF ARTS & HUMANITIES

Participant Consent Form

Researcher: Irfan Rais
Supervisor: Stephen Rees & Gwawr Ifan

Title of Study
Abodes of Harmony: An investigation of session culture in Gwynedd

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study, please mark the appropriate response to each statement below with an X and sign the declaration at the end of this form. Please use an electronic signature if you are submitting this copy by electronic means.

	Yes	No
Example: I would like to leave a 'Yes' response to this statement	X	
The objectives of the study have been informed to me satisfactorily.		
I have been given the opportunity to raise queries.		
I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time, and I am not obliged to give an explanation for it.		
I understand that personal information about myself will be treated in strict confidence.		
I understand that you will be discussing the progress of your research with your supervisor.		
I give permission to the researcher to publish my name and relevant data in the final thesis.		
Further concerns that I would like to make in writing:		

I give my consent to participate in this research study and have been given a copy of this form for my own information.

Print Name:

Signature/Electronic Signature:

Date:

Appendix 2: Sample Interview Protocol

NB: The following is a sample of an interview protocol used during the research period to elicit data for Chapter 3b. This is used in semi-structured interviews and helps keep interviews on topic and relevant to the research questions. The methods in which this protocol was created was described in p. 24.

Objective

To investigate the factors that musicians and non-musicians draw upon during their visit to Ballyvaughan during the Welsh weekend

Expected Themes (based on conversations with Bangor people)

1. Motivations
2. Connections (Social, personal, musical etc.)
3. Shared memory, lived experiences

Methodology employed

Micro-ethnography (microanalysis of interactions informed by ethnography) - this is the main methodology for the interactions chapter. Descriptions will be informed by the theories of semiotics and proxemics. The questions will attempt to focus on the participant as an individual musical being, and not to fixate on them as a tourist (Damari and Mansfield 2016, Feldman 2017).

Target sample

Musicians and singers who attend both Bangor and Ballyvaughan weekends; those who attend Ballyvaughan only; possibly non-musicians if the opportunity arises.

Research Questions

1. How do participants maintain social connections with each other outside Ballyvaughan?
2. How do participants relate to this event as a musical (or non-musical) being?
3. How did this community come to be, and what does the future hold for them?
4. What are the implications to the local community based in Ballyvaughan?

Interview Protocol Matrix

Interview questions	Background	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Where/When did you start playing music?	X				
How would you describe your musical community and the community here (in Ballyvaughan)?	X		X		
What was/is your first Ballyvaughan experience like?		X	X	X	
Do you feel like you are part of a community?			X	X	
Do/Will you maintain contact with the people who come here?		X	X	X	
Do/Will you maintain contact with people who live in Ballyvaughan?		X			X
How do you feel about the attempt to commercialise the weekend?		X			X

Appendix 3: Participant Survey Form

(English overleaf)

Diolch yn fawr i chi am gytuno i gyfranogi yn yr arolwg hwn. I archwilio demograffeg y rheina sydd yn cyfranogi sesiynau ar hyd yr arfordir Afon Menai ydy'r amcanion yr arolwg hwn.

Enw: _____ Rhyw: _____

Prif offeryn: _____ Offerynnau eraill: _____

Ticiwch y blwch perthnasol:

Ystod oedran: <input type="checkbox"/> 18 - 29 <input type="checkbox"/> 30 - 39 <input type="checkbox"/> 40 - 49 <input type="checkbox"/> 50 - 59 <input type="checkbox"/> 60 - 69 <input type="checkbox"/> 70 - 79 <input type="checkbox"/> 80 and above <input type="checkbox"/> Byddai'n well gennyf beidio â dweud <i>NB: Yn anffodus, os yr ydych yn o dan 18 oed, ni chewch eich caniatad i gyfranogi yn yr arolwg hwn.</i>	Yn byw yn: <input type="checkbox"/> Ynys Môn <input type="checkbox"/> Bangor <input type="checkbox"/> Sir Gonwy <input type="checkbox"/> Caernarfon neu'r Felinheli <input type="checkbox"/> Penrhyn Llŷn <input type="checkbox"/> Lle arall yng Nghymru*: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Dim yng Nghymru*: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Byddai'n well gennyf beidio â dweud <i>*enwch</i>	Profiad cerdd werin: <input type="checkbox"/> Dim profiad <input type="checkbox"/> <5 mlynedd <input type="checkbox"/> 6 - 10 mlynedd <input type="checkbox"/> 11 - 15 mlynedd <input type="checkbox"/> 16 - 20 mlynedd <input type="checkbox"/> >21 mlynedd <input type="checkbox"/> Byddai'n well gennyf beidio â dweud	Profiad cerdd ffurfiol*: <input type="checkbox"/> Dim profiad <input type="checkbox"/> <5 mlynedd <input type="checkbox"/> 6 - 10 mlynedd <input type="checkbox"/> 11 - 15 mlynedd <input type="checkbox"/> 16 - 20 mlynedd <input type="checkbox"/> >21 mlynedd <input type="checkbox"/> Byddai'n well gennyf beidio â dweud <i>*Gan gynnwys gweithgareddau cerddorol yn a thu allan i'r ysgol (e.e. cor cymuned, gwersi ffurfiol)</i>
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Cydsyniad y Cyfranogwr

Pwysig: Darllenwch y datganiad isod

Bydd eich manylion personol yn cael eu trin yn gwbl gyfrinachol. Gwelir y ffurflen hon dim ond gan yr ymchwiliwr (Irfan Rais) a'i oruwchwilwyr (Stephen Rees a Gwawr Ifan). Er hynny, ysgrifennir y data yn y traethawd terfynol, ond ni chânt eu cyhoeddi mewn unrhyw ffordd sydd yn eich galluogi i gael eich adnabod.

Os yr ydych yn deall a chytuno â'r datganiad, llofnodwch ar y llinell isod:

.....
Yr ydwyf yn dysgu Cymraeg. Os oes gamgymeriadau ieithyddol yn y ffurflen hon, cysylltwch â fi amdano os gwelwch chi'n dda.

Participant Survey

(Cymraeg cyferbyn)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey. The aim of this survey is to examine the demographics of those who attend sessions along the Menai Strait.

Name: _____ Gender: _____

Primary instrument: _____ Secondary instrument(s): _____

Please tick where appropriate:

Age Range:	Based in:	Trad music experience:	Formal music experience*:
<input type="checkbox"/> 18 - 29	<input type="checkbox"/> Anglesey	<input type="checkbox"/> None	<input type="checkbox"/> None
<input type="checkbox"/> 30 - 39	<input type="checkbox"/> Bangor	<input type="checkbox"/> <5 years	<input type="checkbox"/> <5 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 40 - 49	<input type="checkbox"/> Conwy (county)	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 - 10 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 - 10 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 50 - 59	<input type="checkbox"/> Caernarfon or Felinheli	<input type="checkbox"/> 11 - 15 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 11 - 15 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 60 - 69	<input type="checkbox"/> Llyn Peninsula	<input type="checkbox"/> 16 - 20 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 16 - 20 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 70 - 79	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Wales*:	<input type="checkbox"/> >21 years	<input type="checkbox"/> >21 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 80 and above	<input type="checkbox"/> Not in Wales*:	<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say		
<i>NB: If you are under 18, you unfortunately cannot take part in this survey.</i>		<i>*This may refer to musical activities in school and music lessons and activities outside of school.</i>	
<i>*please specify</i>			

Participant Consent

Important: Please read the following statement

Your personal details will be treated with strict confidence. The only people who will see this form will be the researcher (Irfan Rais) and his supervisors (Stephen Rees, Gwawr Ifan). The data, however, will appear in the final thesis, but will not be published in a way that would allow you to be identified.

If you understand and agree to the statement above, please sign on the dotted line below:

.....

Appendix 4: A selection of original song lyrics by Geoff Hardman

Appendix 4.1: President today

Air: I'm 21 today

I'm president today, president today
I've the key to the White House door, never been president before
With the executive orders I'll do as I please, hip hip hip hooray,
For I'm a jolly good fellow, president today!

My cabinet you may have heard, are more than the poorest third
We'll take away Obamacare, for us to pay it isn't fair
We'll lower taxes, drive up debt, we'll be much richer yet
For I'm a jolly good fellow, best president you can get!

I'll keep the bad dudes out, of that there is no doubt
Islam extremist detainees, who masquerade as refugees
There's three hundred million firearms here, we've got enough to fear
For I'm a jolly good fellow, now that's completely clear!

I'm going to build a wall, it's going to cost far too little
Our Mexicans will have to pay they will, I'll only have to send the bill
A global monument to me, from sea to shining sea
For I'm a jolly good fellow, president, that's me!

I don't rate women's wits, I love their physical bits
I judge them by the way that they look, they should stay at home and cook
When I meet the Queen, I won't be fussy, I'll simply stroke her corgi
For I'm a jolly good fellow president, that's me!

*I'll beat the COVID plague, the scientists are vague
They don't know as much as me, I'll work it out just wait and see
You'll soon be much better, drinking and injecting Dettol
For I'm a jolly good fellow, a president of mettle!

*This verse was added after the March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic began to affect the USA and the UK

Appendix 4.2: This is our session

A is the accompanist who goes like a train, this is our session!
and B is the bodhran without any brain, with a toot on the flute, and squeak on the fiddle,
you're welcome, friends, to our session.

C is the chord that is slightly bizarre...
and D is the dulcimer heard from afar...

E is the effort we're getting there soon...
and F is the flute that is always in tune...

G is the guitar that is thrashed to the ground...
and H is the harmony soon to be found...

I is inspiration we'll get some someday...
and J is the joker who won't go away...

K is the kindness we show the inept...
and L is the laughter we laughed till we wept...

M is the emcee who bangs the ashtray...
and N is the noise he hopes we put bay...

O is the one who plays on his own...
and P is the piper with the boring old drone...

Q are the quids at the bar that we spend...
and R is the roar of applause when we end...

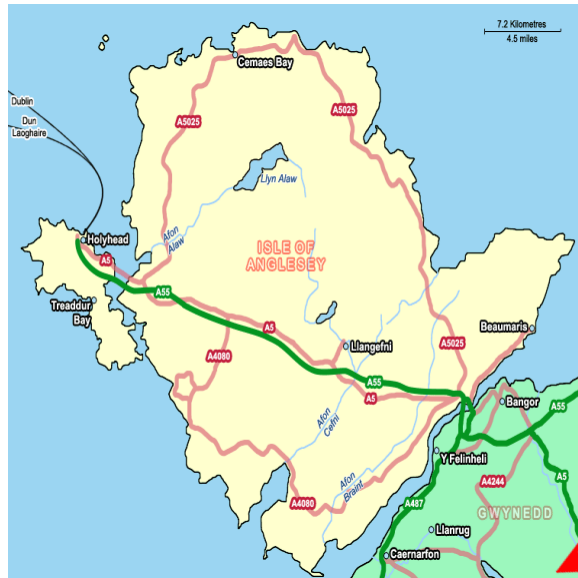
S are the singers their voices don't ring...
and T are the tedious songs that they sing...

U is for you boredom writ on your face...
and V is the vile inn where all this takes place...

W is for why does he drink as he plays...
and X is exactly Y Z is aching for days...

Appendix 5.1: Anglesey



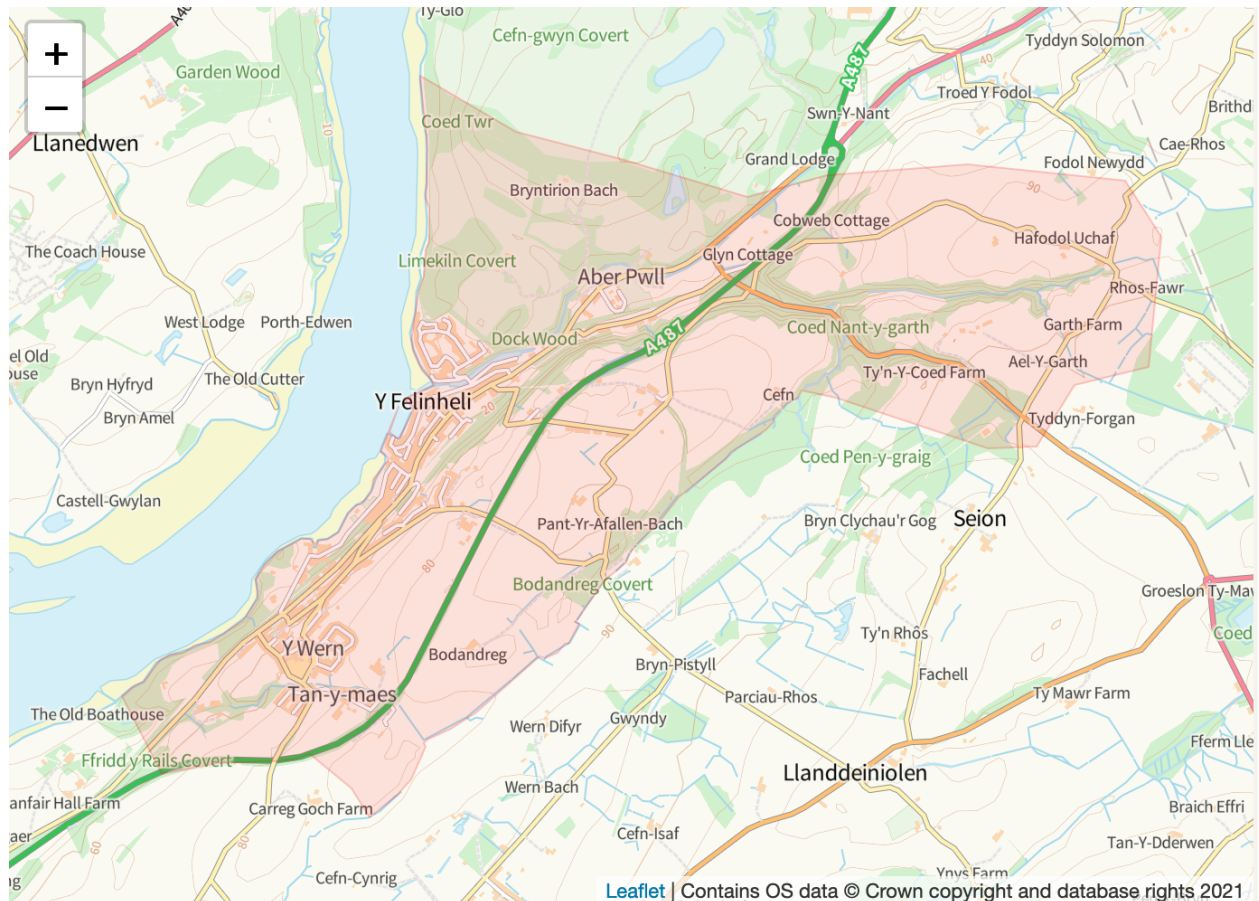


Source: http://www.walesdirectory.co.uk/images/Anglesey_Map.gif

Appendix 5.2: Arfon East

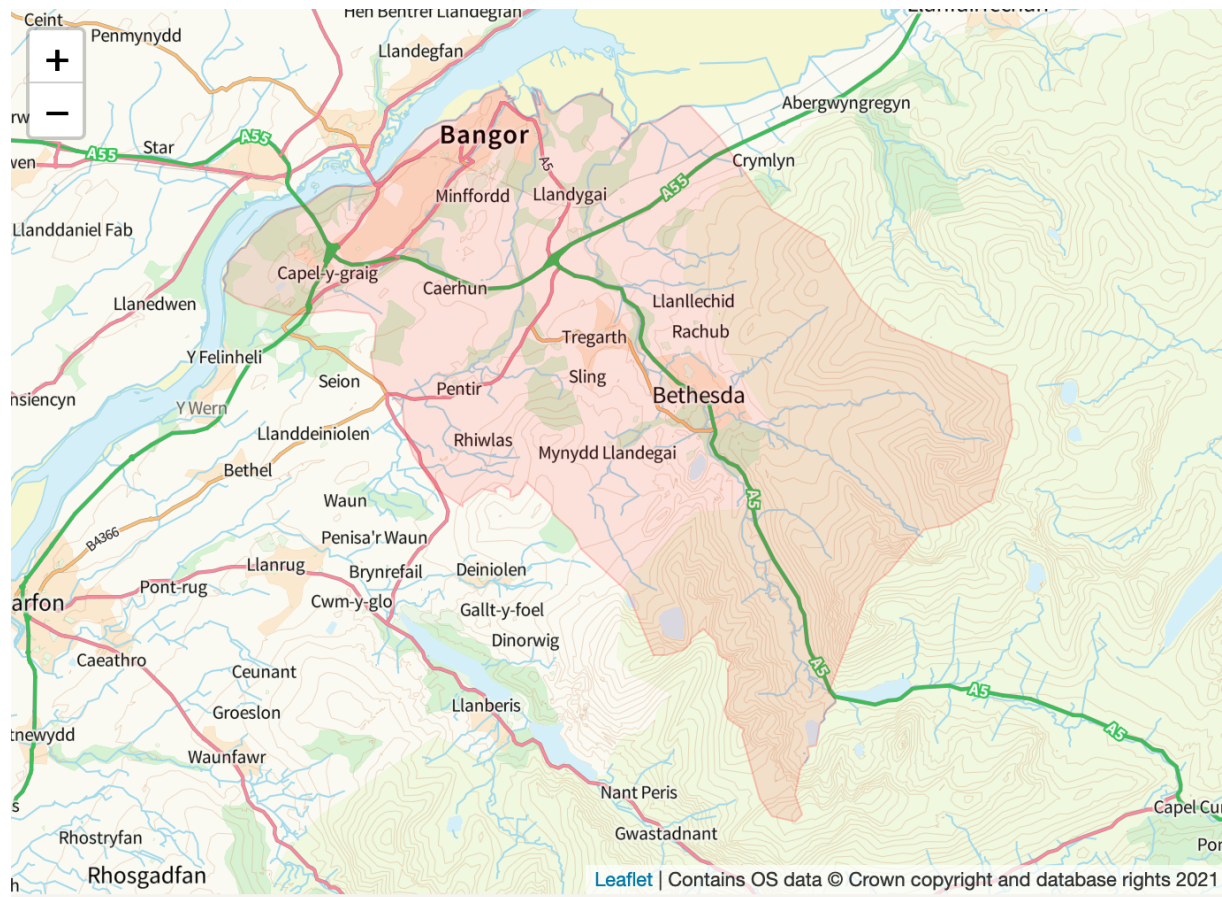
Arfon East falls into the areas covered by the LL56 and LL57 postcodes

LL56 postcode zone



Full resolution image can be found at: <https://www.getthedata.com/postcode/LL56/where-is-LL56> (last accessed 10 June 2021).

LL57 postcode zone

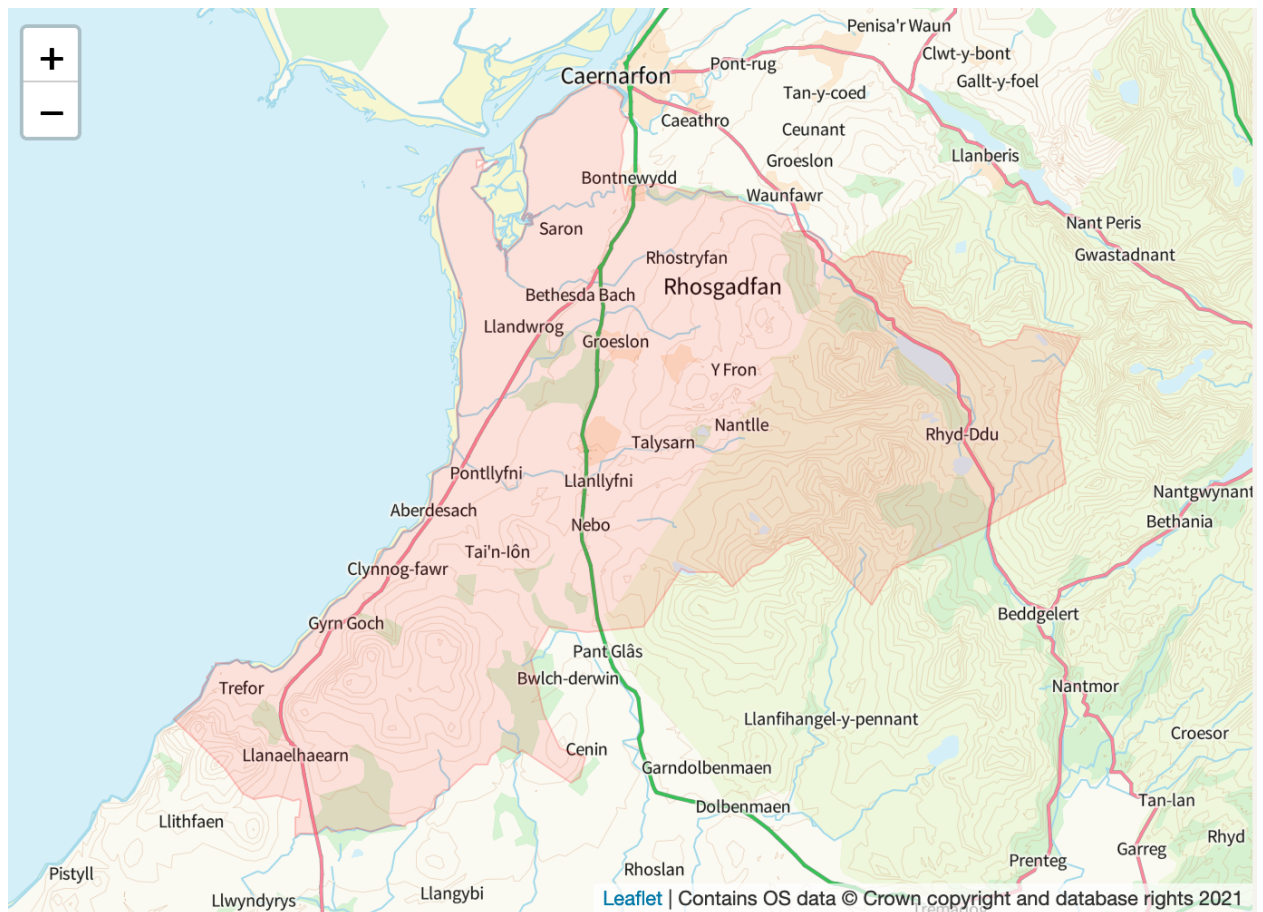


Full resolution image can be found at: <https://www.getthedata.com/postcode/LL57/where-is-LL57> (last accessed 10 June 2021).

Appendix 5.3: Arfon West

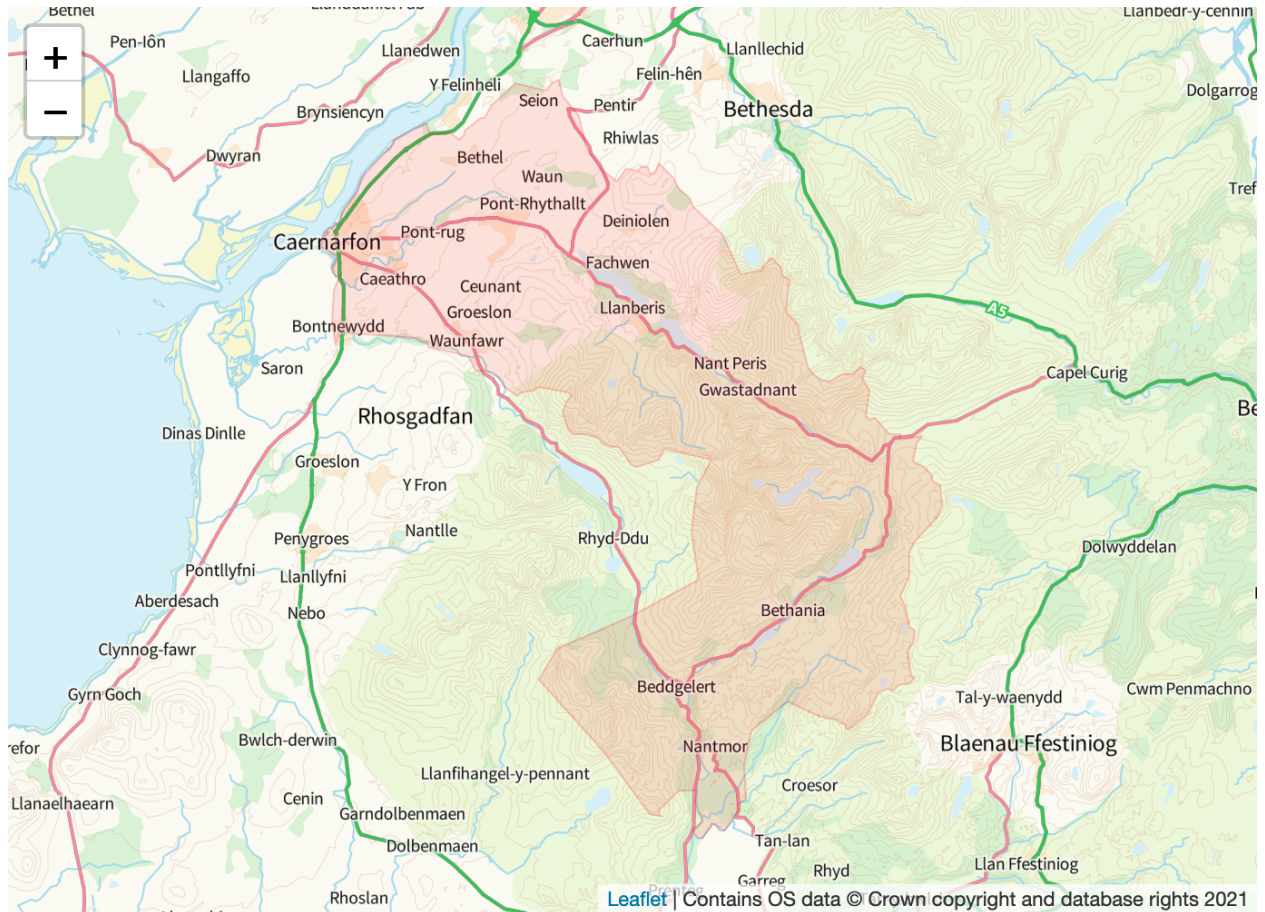
Arfon West falls within the areas covered by the LL54 (not overlapping with Dwyfor Meirionnydd) and LL55 postcodes.

LL54 postcode zone



Full resolution image can be found at: <https://www.getthedata.com/postcode/LL54/where-is-LL54> (last accessed 10 June 2021). Note that for the purposes of this study, areas that overlap with Dwyfor Meirionnydd (p. 267) are not counted as Arfon West, but as Dwyfor Meirionnydd.

LL55 postcode zone



Full resolution image can be found at: <https://www.getthedata.com/postcode/LL55/where-is-LL55> (last accessed 10 June 2021).

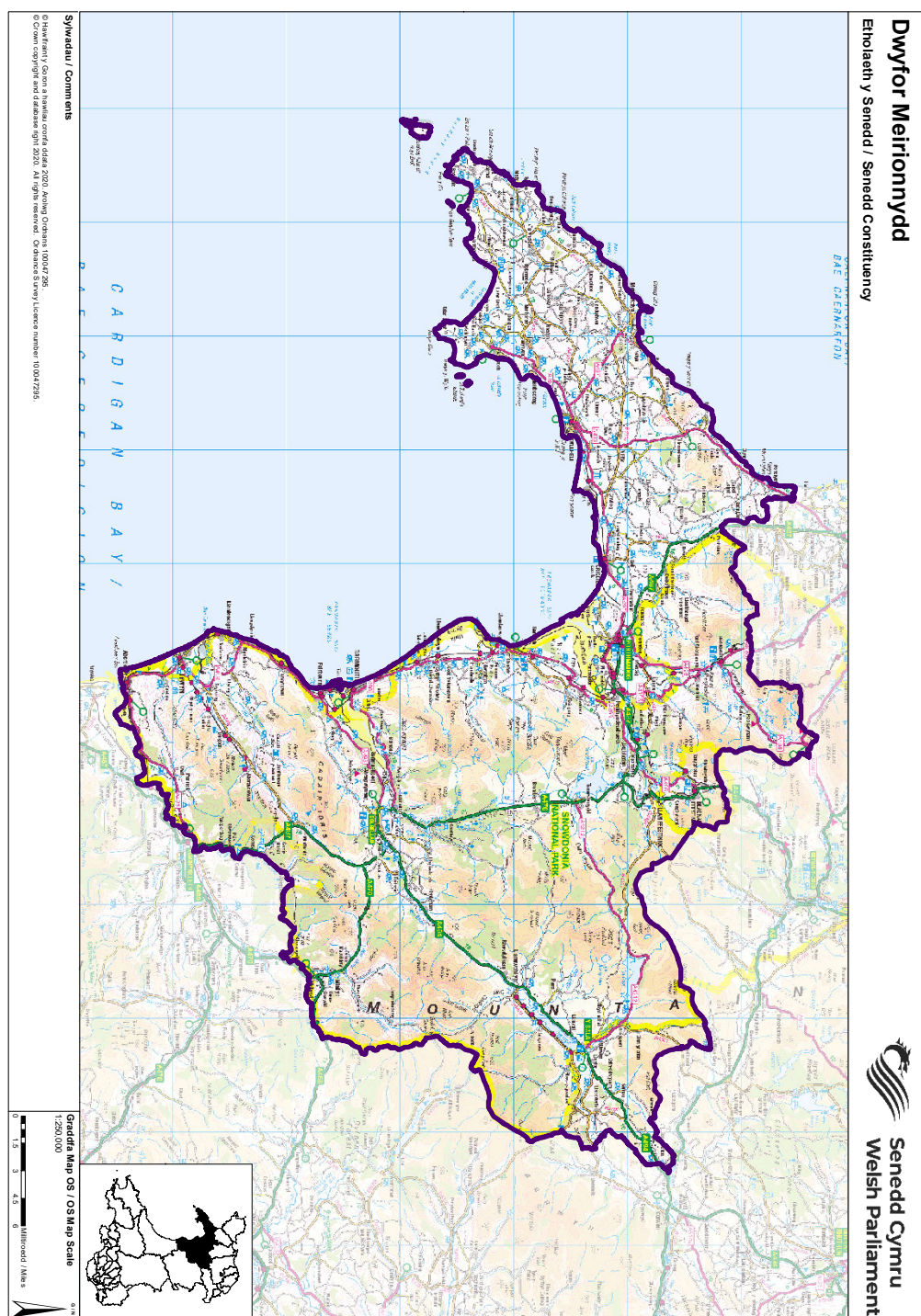
Appendix 5.4: Conwy (County)





Source: http://www.walesdirectory.co.uk/maps/Map_of_Conwy_County.htm (last accessed: 10 June 2021).

Appendix 5.5: Dwyfor Meirionnydd



Full size map can be found here: <https://research.senedd.wales/media/2http2axf/dwyfor-meirionnydd.pdf> (last accessed: 10 June 2021).

Appendix 6: Number of Welsh speakers by ward

ARFON EAST		ARFON WEST	
Ward	% of people with any Welsh skills*	Ward	% of people with any Welsh skills*
Arllechwedd	74.8	Bontnewydd	87.9
Deiniol	31.0	Cadnant	91.4
Dewi	71.4	Cwm-y-Glo	80.4
Garth	48.5	Deiniolen	83.3
Gerlan	82.9	Groeslon	87.0
Glyder	66.3	Llanberis	82.2
Hendre	60.5	Llanllyfni	81.0
Hirael	50.4	Llanrug	91.9
Marchog	71.6	Llanwnda	87.6
Menai (Bangor)	24.0	Menai (Caernarfon)	89.0
Ogwen	87.4	Peblig	93.6
Pentir	71.9	Penisarwaun	80.0
Tregarth & Mynydd Llandygai	78.4	Seiont	91.1
Y Felinheli	72.1	Tal-y-Sarn	79.1
		Waunfawr	81.6

*The census was conducted in 2011 and only counts Welsh skills among people aged 3 and over in Wales. Welsh skills may refer to any of the following: speaking, understanding, reading, writing.

Information gathered from Stats Wales: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Welsh-Language/Census-Welsh-Language/welshlanguageskills-by-ediv-2011census> (last accessed 10 June 2021)

Appendix 7: Full raw results of the survey

Name	Gender	Age	Instrument 1	Instrument 2	Trad Music Exp.	Formal Music Exp.	Based in	Form filled in	Attends sessions in
ADE	M	18-29	Whistle	Guitar, Voice	<5 years	<5 years	Arfon East	Welsh	Arfon East
BLN	M	60-69	Guitar	Voice	>21 years	<5 years	Dwyfor Meirionnydd	Welsh	All areas
CLG	M	60-69	Guitar	Bodhrán, Voice	>21 years	None	Arfon East	Welsh	Arfon East
ELB	N	18-29	Cello	Piano, Mandolin, Melodeon, Voice	5-10 years	16-20 years	Arfon East	English	Arfon East
GLR	M	18-29	Voice	Guitar, Mandolin	5-10 years	11-15 years	Arfon West	Welsh	Arfon East
GRH	M	>80	Flute	Voice	>21 years	5-10 years	Anglesey	English*	All areas
GFL	M	70-79	Voice	Learning guitar	>21 years	>21 years	Dwyfor Meirionnydd	English	Arfon West
GRL	M	70-79	Guitar	-	>21 years	None	Arfon West	Welsh	Arfon West
JLE	F	40-49	Nyckelharpa	Handpan, Frog	5-10 years	5-10 years	Dwyfor Meirionnydd	English	Arfon West
JNH	F	60-69	Piano Accordion	B/C Irish accordion, Recorder	>21 years	<5 years	Arfon West	English	Arfon West
KRL	M	60-69	Concertina	Voice	>21 years	None	Arfon East	English	Arfon East
KTP	M	70-79	Uilleann Pipes	Guitar	>21 years	<5 years	Anglesey	English	Arfon East
KTS	F	50-59	Piano	Violin	5-10 years	>21 years	Arfon East	Welsh	Arfon East
LEG	M	18-29	Guitar	Fiddle, Voice	5-10 years	undeclared	Arfon West	Welsh	Arfon East
LLC	F	60-69	Concertina	Voice	>21 years	>21 years	Arfon East	Welsh	All areas
MMR	F	50-59	Voice	Concertina	>21 years	<5 years	Conwy County	English	Arfon East
MJM	M	60-69	Concertina	Mandola, Guitar, Harmonica	>21 years	None	Arfon East	Welsh	Arfon East
MKJ	M	60-69	Bodhran	Guitar, Whistle	>21 years	>21 years	Conwy County	English	Arfon East
MKK	M	60-69	Guitar	Bouzouki, Uilleann Pipes, Whistle	>21 years	>21 years	Dwyfor Meirionnydd	English	Arfon West
MNW	F	18-29	Harp/Cello	Violin	5-10 years	16-20 years	Arfon East	Welsh	Arfon East

MPB	F	60-69	Melodeon	Bodhrán, Triangle, Bass Guitar	>21 years	>21 years	Arfon West	English	Arfon West
MRR	F	30-39	Fiddle	-	11-15 years	5-10 years	Arfon West	Welsh	Arfon West
NKP	F	60-69	Concertina	Piano, Recorder	>21 years	5-10 years	Arfon East	Welsh	Arfon East
NLB	M	50-59	Melodeon	Banjo, Guitar, Bouzouki, etc.	>21 years	>21 years	Arfon West	English	Arfon West
PLA	M	60-69	Guitar	Harmonica, Voice	>21 years	>21 years	Anglesey	English*	Arfon East
PTL	M	60-69	Flute	Voice	>21 years	>21 years	Dwyfor Meirionnydd	English	Arfon West
RCT	M	50-59	Whistle	Mandola, Concertina, Fiddle, Guitar	>21 years	>21 years	Dwyfor Meirionnydd	English	Arfon West
SMA	M	40-49	Mandolin	Cavaquinho , Harp, Guitar, Piano, Whistle, Ukulele	>21 years	11-15 years	Arfon East	Welsh	All areas
STW	M	18-29	Fiddle	Irish Bouzouki, Voice	16-20 years	5-10 years	Anglesey	English	Arfon East
TDJ	M	70-79	Bodhrán	Voice	>21 years	>21 years	Anglesey	English*	Arfon East

*Form filled in English, but didn't realise there was an option to fill up the form in Welsh

Appendix 8: Ethics certificate

Arts & Humanities

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL BY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
RESEARCH PROJECT – DECISION



Reference Number: AH101

Name of researcher:	Irfan Rais
Name of Ethics supervisor:	Iwan Llewelyn Jones
Research project title:	Abodes of Harmony: An investigation of session culture in Gwynedd
Submission date:	14.03.18
Decision date:	16.04.18

This proposal was approved by Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee, Bangor University.

Signed (on behalf of the committee) by:

Date: 17th April 2018
Dr Peter Shapely, Chair of the Ethics Committee