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Where the snowman meets the sunshine: The tensions between research, engagement and impact in cultural policy

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Abstract:

This article is a reflective piece on the context of a project that arose out of Knowledge Exchange (KE) work and how it became intertwined with a public debate about licensing in Edinburgh. It deals with the different contexts in which research reports and findings exist, and are used. The ‘snowman’ of the title refers to the research output – created within the realm of the academy, and guided by a concern for nuance and methodology. The ‘sunshine’ alludes to the heat of public debate and use by non-academic stakeholders with different priorities and practices. A discussion of the background to the project, and its roots in KE, moves onto an account of the licensing policy debate in Edinburgh, and my role in it. This is less an outline of the research itself than a consideration of the way in which the subsequent passage of its recommendations through public consultation and local policy forums revealed tensions in the processes of KE and engagement that fed into and emerged from it. I consider some of the issues surrounding negotiations between different ‘end-users’ of research – the multiple publics, with sometimes-divergent goals, to whom terms such as ‘impact’ and ‘Knowledge Exchange’ refer but who cannot always be engaged with equal ease. Finally, I reflect on the implications of these tensions more generally as KE and impact become increasingly embedded within academia’s institutional priorities.

Keywords: Knowledge Exchange; cultural policy; local policy; academic impact; engagement

Introduction

There can be little doubt that Knowledge Exchange (KE) is now thoroughly embedded within UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), certainly to the point where operating in the university research culture generally necessitates undertaking KE, but also arguably to an

extent that exceeds a full understanding of the nuances of its actual practice.¹ Universities abound with Knowledge Exchange officers and departments of different stripes and nomenclatures but largely comparable purposes – to facilitate, and encourage, KE on the part of research-active academics. This is partly driven by the natural academic inclination to see research have an effect but also partly from the top down, with the Research Councils UK (RCUK, 2014: 1) stating an expectation that the Research Organisations they fund should ‘develop and deliver a strategy for knowledge exchange and commercialisation within the context of the RO’s mission, areas of research and user communities.’ At the same time, the extent to which the Research Excellence Framework (REF)² has become a lodestone in both the UK academic calendar and, consequently, HEI strategies is well established, in particular the reorientation of both activities and resources towards generating ‘impact’, a key assessment criterion of the REF (Watermeyer, 2012; Stern, 2016).

This article is not primarily focused on the REF, in and of itself. Nor does it seek to problematize ‘impact’ wholesale – many academics, this author included, can see the benefits of their work reaching beyond universities and the value of public engagement. But I would, at least, like to discuss how far impact, engagement and primary research have become intertwined. The somewhat cryptic title refers, in general, to the different contexts in which research projects and findings exist and, more specifically, to the case study of a piece of research and the subsequent report of its findings. In short, what I propose to do is discuss what happens when a piece of research – the ‘snowman’ – leaves the realm of the academy to be exposed to the heat of public debate and use by non-academic stakeholders.

It also, then, is less concerned with the research project itself – though inevitably this pertains – than its institutional and, ultimately, social contexts. In arguing that (in this case-study at least) research, KE and impact are difficult to disentangle, I also hope to reveal some aspects of the shifting nature of academic work and, by extension, some of the tensions that arise in its relationship with non-academics in industry, policymaking institutions and the wider public. I begin with the broader background to the project itself – the Edinburgh Live Music Census (Behr, Brennan and Webster, 2015) – and its roots in a KE initiative before moving onto the interconnectedness of subsequent primary research and KE activities. This involves an account of the simultaneous debates in Edinburgh surrounding the city’s live music ‘ecology’ (Behr, Brennan, Cloonan, Frith and Webster, 2016), in particular a clause in its licensing policy, and leads into a discussion of how the research report’s findings were intertwined in those debates.

This entanglement revealed some of the tensions in KE as a process through the way in which the findings were used, and in particular, how a key recommendation became a contested topic. I consider some of the implications of this episode, especially the problems of negotiating between different ‘end-users’ of research – the multiple publics to whom terms such as ‘engagement’, ‘impact’ and ‘Knowledge Exchange’ refer. Finally, I reflect on what this might mean for such activities more generally as the overlap between autonomous, researcher-driven and institutionally REF-informed motivations for KE widens. I argue that the possibility of such entanglements is likely to increase. Whilst acknowledging

the value of KE and impact, I suggest that the frameworks and terminology in place lack the nuance to capture the whole process and that greater consideration should be given to their relationship with the research process itself and especially the multiplicitous nature of the communities to which they refer.

The Knowledge Exchange context of the Edinburgh Live Music Census

To explain the relationship of the research report in question with broader processes of KE and impact, I need first to explain the background to the project. Notwithstanding that research can often be viewed as an ongoing endeavour, individual projects are to some extent differentiated within broader bodies of work by the process of funding applications and the discrete timeframes for primary work and delivery of outputs that stem from these. The Edinburgh census project was no different in this regard and its history can be both traced back through specific projects and simultaneously viewed as part of a wider tapestry.

The initial basis for this strand of research was a three-year study of the history of live music in the UK since 1950, led by Professor Simon Frith at the University of Edinburgh and Professor Martin Cloonan at the University of Glasgow.³ Although building on extensive work examining the music industries, along with the sociology and politics of music more generally, this was an attempt to place promoters, hitherto sidelined, more centrally within a narrative of British musical history.

That project concluded in April 2011, at a point when the wider research culture was becoming increasingly focused on impact and, consequently, KE. The AHRC's annual report for 2005/6, for instance, whilst making no mention of KE, notes the arrival of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships as part of its portfolio and reports a spend of £228,000 on Knowledge Transfer awards (AHRC, 2006: 63). By 2010, under the umbrella of 'Knowledge Transfer' this had more than doubled to £580,901 (AHRC, 2011: 92) as, over the same period, the Research Assessment Exercise was replaced by the Research Excellence Framework (REF), with its increased emphasis on 'impact'. As part of this shift, the AHRC launched its 'Follow on Funding Scheme' in 2010, 'to encourage creativity and innovation in support of knowledge exchange, active dissemination, public engagement or commercialisation opportunities that arise either during the lifespan of or following an AHRC-funded project' (AHRC, 2011: 25). The researchers on the live music history project applied for, and were awarded, a sum of money from this relatively new stream.

As well as the creation of an online repository for live music research, the stated goals of this new project included, 'organis[ing] workshops/seminars at both local and national level to bring together different interests ... [and] ... act[ing] as a broker between academic research and live music policy makers in the public and commercial sectors'. (Frith, 2013: 298). The KE project – 'capacity building' being a factor in funding applications – also provided a forum for continuing work, particularly for developing KE, for the postdoctoral researcher (Dr Matt Brennan) and doctoral researcher (Dr Emma Webster) from the original project. It was at this point that this author successfully applied for a role

as a Knowledge Exchange Research Associate on the project which, along with the website⁴ which served as its core output, came to be known as the Live Music Exchange (LMX).

The activities were diverse and included organising conferences, a news digest and forays into market research though this latter gave way to a more specifically academic focus as LMX evolved (Frith, 2013: 301). After the initial funding finished, applications were made for smaller pots of money at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow to continue KE activities, a marker of its increased prominence and priority at the level of individual institutions as well as the research council. LMX, then, became a kind of umbrella in itself. It had helped the team – in particular the Early Career Researchers – to strengthen relationships with industry groups and policymakers through its KE activities and the increasing recognition of the website.

LMX had also become a useful ‘calling card’ in approaching participants and partners for other KE and research endeavours. For instance, Matt Brennan and I organised in 2013 a ‘Lively Arts Venues’ one-day symposium bringing members of City of Edinburgh Council together with local musicians and promoters. The work of LMX also fed into research applications: with Brennan as Principal Investigator, Cloonan as Co-Investigator and myself as Post-Doctoral Researcher, we were awarded two grants across 2013 – 2014 as part of the AHRC’s Cultural Value Project (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016).

The first of these concentrated on an Edinburgh venue – the Queen’s Hall – and used the typology of promotional practices that had been outlined in the initial music history project as a prism through which to examine the different kinds of music, and audience, found there (Behr, Brennan and Cloonan, 2016). The second had a broader focus and covered case-studies across Glasgow, Leeds and London to extend the conceptual framework into ecologies of funding (Behr, Brennan and Cloonan, 2014). In line with the AHRC’s funding call, within which ‘Proposals in partnership with cultural and other relevant organisations [we]re strongly encouraged’ (AHRC, 2013: 3), we worked alongside external organisations for both projects – the Queen’s Hall in the first instance and UK Music, the Musicians’ Union and PRS for Music for the second project. There were some synergies and overlaps at play. We were, of course, interested as researchers in examining the economic and cultural contexts that these organisations could help us explore. We also saw the potential for further valuable research in a working relationship with them since, finally, we hoped to help effect longer-term positive change, as we saw it, in the sector. Partner organisations, then, not only provided access to interviewees, but a potential audience for our findings and, hopefully, a means of mitigating the ‘knowledge resistance’ encountered in previous research relating to the music industries (Williamson, Cloonan and Frith, 2011).

A combination, then, of the overarching research culture – the stipulations of the funding call – and our own research trajectories (engaging with external bodies through LMX) pushed towards a closer relationship between KE and primary research. Indeed, Knowledge Exchange and ‘Pathways to Impact’ were linked in both the applications and the research outputs, which included a graphic-designed, public-facing report launched for industry and policy personnel at the Musicians’ Union HQ in the summer of 2014.

LMX as a forum for KE also provided the seed for the Edinburgh census project itself when we posted a blog by Dobe Newton (Newton, 2013) outlining findings from the Victorian Live Music Census (Newton, 2012), in which he had taken a leading role. Additionally, through writing for and editing the LMX blog from its launch in 2012, we had covered some of the travails of Edinburgh's live music scene, including accounts of threatened venue closures (Behr, 2012a) and a comparatively short-lived controversy over Public Entertainment Licenses (Behr 2012b). From 2012 to 2015, we became increasingly concerned with, and embedded in, Edinburgh's musical and policy networks. This process, something we pursued in the service of KE, was further boosted by our primary research. The Queen's Hall project, in particular, included interviews with the Convenor (Richard Lewis) and Vice Convenor (Norma Austin-Hart) of the city council's Culture and Sport Committee, as well as with leading personnel at Regular Music, one of Scotland's largest promoters and based in Edinburgh.⁵

The city policy context to the Edinburgh Live Music Census

Our invitations to policymakers to participate in University-run events, both the 'Lively Arts Venues' workshop and the concluding symposium of the Queen's Hall project, started to be reciprocated as the council's Arts Strategy and Funding Manager and the manager of a council-run venue, the Usher Hall, asked for sources about live music and policy in other countries. I also addressed the Culture and Sport Committee, alongside representatives from Creative Scotland and the Musicians' Union about growing concerns regarding the sustainability of the city's popular music venues. City of Edinburgh Council had, in fact, been making tentative moves to address, or at least investigate, the difficulty that venues were facing and our encounters with them were part of a wider, stated intention to 'consult music sector groups and partners to identify the main barriers to live music in Edinburgh' (City of Edinburgh Council 2014a: 4).

We were relatively pleased with this dialogue with council personnel as constituting both Knowledge Exchange in action, as we saw it and, we hoped, a move towards a more amenable environment for live music in Edinburgh. It is, however, worth noting here that this was ongoing work as part of a broader trajectory, and progress towards the census project itself was more apparent in retrospect than at the time. Although Matt Brennan had secured a tenure-track post in 2012 at the University of Edinburgh's Reid School of Music, Emma Webster and I were still subject to the vicissitudes of Early Career Academic employment patterns, juggling multiple fractional roles across other projects and part-time teaching. Whilst the hunt for stable posts continued, we were on the lookout for smaller projects to develop our interest in live music and keep active within academic research. One of these was to adapt the Victorian live music census model to fit a UK case-study.

Matters in Edinburgh came to a head towards the end of 2014, by which time LMX was well established and Matt and I relatively familiar to key members of the Culture and Sport Committee of City of Edinburgh Council. Discontent had been bubbling through Edinburgh's popular music community with increasing intensity since the announcement at

the end of 2013 that the Picture House venue would close, to reopen as a JD Wetherspoon Pub. Social media protests, petitions and even appeals in the Scottish Parliament (2013) to preserve its status as a music venue had ultimately proved ineffective. Though much of the rhetoric around the closure referred to the long history of the building, it had in fact only relatively recently become a live music venue again, having been a nightclub for much of the 1980s, 1990s and into the early 21st Century. Still, the loss was significant insofar as it was the only venue for rock and primarily commercial popular forms of its size in the city and its loss would put Edinburgh at a disadvantage in terms of attracting touring bands. This was a private sale – its operators MAMA Group were losing money after sponsors HMV withdrew, following their own well-publicised travails (Beeching, 2013). This did not, however, stop fingers being pointed and questions asked of the city council about its commitment to supporting cultural activity, especially popular culture, outside of the festival period (Brown, 2013).

Then, in October 2014, Edinburgh based trio Young Fathers won the Mercury Prize for their album *Dead* and took the opportunity of the media spotlight to launch a scathing attack on the council for what they saw as active hostility towards popular music making:

Edinburgh council are really fucking bad. They shut down anything if you try to make noise. I've been in studios where these guys come with meters and tell you to get out. It's a city for tourists and rich, middle-class people, it's not made for people to be creative. (Jonze, 2014)

Notwithstanding the previous moves to address these concerns mentioned above, the nationwide bad publicity was the catalyst for more concerted public action. The Vice Convenor of the Culture and Sport Committee – Councillor Norma Austin-Hart – called a public meeting at the Usher Hall in November 2014 under the heading 'Live Music Matters' (City of Edinburgh Council, 2014b). The occasionally fractious proceedings saw councillors on the back foot, but acknowledging the concerns of the musicians, promoters and venues present. Among the most prominent of the grievances aired was a condition of the city's licensing policy 'requiring amplified music from those premises to be inaudible in residential property' (City of Edinburgh Council, 2010: 12). This was widely felt to be contributing to just the kind of hostile environment for live music that the Young Fathers had referred to, particularly by tipping the scales against venues in the event of complaints, and prejudicing Licensing Officers against them, even when complainants were the sole or, it was argued, often vexatious source of objection to the music. The meeting concluded with Austin-Hart proposing to set up a working group, 'Music Is Audible' (City of Edinburgh Council 2014b) to investigate the matter of the 'inaudibility clause', as it came to be known, and see what could be done. As with the Cultural Value projects, a confluence of factors drove KE and research together. Matt and I were simultaneously alive to the possibilities for engagement and impact and concerned for the health of live music in the city in which we both (then) worked and I lived, and so volunteered to sit on the group.

The first meeting of 'Music Is Audible' in early 2015 reproduced in miniature the debates and sentiments of the 'Live Music Matters' meeting. But, as the only academics on the group, Matt and I suggested that a useful research contribution from us might be to investigate the actual scale of the problem. The chance to conduct research that aligned with our prior work, and which had a guaranteed policy audience had presented itself. What was the scope of live music in Edinburgh outside the festival? What were the issues for Edinburgh's musicians and venues? The offer to conduct a census of live music in Edinburgh was accepted as an action point for us by the working group: a primary research project emerging directly out of KE. One potential complication fell away at the outset, as the council indicated that they did not have budgetary resources for the project. This made clear the independence of the work. Our findings and recommendations would be made publicly available, and presented to the council, but with no financial input from the council, the control of the project resided with us.

The council did, in the end, consult externally. The 'inaudibility clause' was attracting attention in live music discussion forums beyond Edinburgh as part of a wider debate. Despite live music revenues having overtaken those of recordings (Page and Carey, 2009), grassroots venues appeared to be struggling across the country, often under the weight of gentrification and either hostile local authorities or, often, those with other priorities. In response to this, the Music Venue Trust (MVT) had been set up in early 2014 and had quickly achieved prominence as a campaigning voice for venues, activities which included engaging with local government and conducting its own research. The council, via the Culture and Sport Committee, commissioned the MVT 'to assess approaches to addressing legislative restrictions and provide recommendations specific to Edinburgh' (City of Edinburgh Council, 2015: 1). This research took place across the spring and summer of 2015, but had a slightly different focus to ours. Recommendations to the council across a broad remit of encouraging live music were part of its core purpose, drawn from interviews in Edinburgh but also best practice from other cities. Our own work was more descriptive and primarily focused on presenting the situation in Edinburgh as the basis for our recommendations.

We put together internal applications for small pots of money from the University of Edinburgh for us to engage with the city council, with a view to driving KE and impact included in their remits. This would pay Emma and me to work on the census, a pilot study for a larger project to take place across multiple cities. The general curiosity that often drives research, alongside a specific desire to explore Edinburgh's musical culture, and help to support it, were significant factors in the proposal for a census. At the same time, the academic career structure – with impact and engagement prominent features – also featured. The funding that was available to conduct the work had an engagement and impact component, as well as seeding the potential for further work. Local and institutional priorities aligned, as our research plans fitted into the context of universities seeking to support impact activities and a situation in Edinburgh with obvious scope for relevant

impact. Given that much of our earlier academic work with LMX had also been in KE, this was a natural confluence of motivations.

The story of conducting the census itself is for another time and the methodology of the project, along with more of the context, is described in detail in the report itself (Behr, Brennan and Webster, 2015). In sum, we delivered what we undertaken to do, providing a snapshot census of the live music in the city in June 2015, conducting surveys of musicians, audience members and venues and producing the report for October 2015.

We consulted externally to ensure that our surveys asked relevant questions and were supported by members of the working group to publicise the census and help to collect the data.⁶ We also received some redacted information about noise complaints from the Licensing Officers, facilitated by the councillors and officer on the working group. The final say on both the surveys and the report, however, remained with the project team. Whilst the genesis of the project stemmed from KE activities, the conduct of the census itself, more than any other aspect of its life cycle, was a comparatively discrete piece of research. The goals were relatively straightforward – gather the required data and present it in as clear and transparent a manner as possible.

Once completed, however, the report became subject to attentions and pressures in the public domain that were of a different nature to the processes of data gathering and analysis. Where the boundaries of the research itself were quite clearly defined – the extent and nature of live music activity in Edinburgh and the concerns of practitioners – the debate around licensing in the city involved a larger group of stakeholders and, of necessity, the broader set of concerns that derives from the involvement of wider publics. I turn next to the events that followed the report being made public and the activities of stakeholders in the continuing debate about the ‘inaudibility clause’.

Presenting the findings

The first thing to note is that despite being discrete pieces of work conducted separately, our own report and that of the MVT had a very similar audience. Ours was launched publicly on October 19th, and theirs sent shortly in advance of that to the council in September 2015. Our report also had an additional purpose of laying the groundwork for further censuses – it was explicitly a pilot study – and was therefore written with academic audiences in mind, as well as others. The MVT report was a single commissioned piece of work, for internal consumption at the council in the first instance, albeit that it would be made publicly available through the online minutes of the Culture and Sport Committee. Clearly, however, Edinburgh policymakers were a central audience for both – for the MVT since they had been commissioned for the work, for us as a route to engagement and, we hoped, impact. The research had illustrated that the ‘inaudibility’ clause was a serious concern for musical practitioners, and there was clear potential for the council to address this. Engaging in this process, however, brought with it a set of challenges and concerns that were different to the research activities, which had been more circumscribed in terms of their participants.

This meant a step out into the sunshine away from the more controlled environment in which we had been writing the report and discussing findings internally. Whilst mindful of the wider context, our priority had inevitably been accurate reporting of the findings and methodology. We had worked at length to ensure that the workings and calculations behind our headline figures were both transparent and detailed, but some of these details were a lower priority for stakeholders within City of Edinburgh Council and the local media who were also making use of the findings and for whom the political and institutional timelines militated against the presentation of methodological particulars. In short, we timed our report release to coincide with a Culture and Sport Committee meeting, which would feature an update on the work of the Music Is Audible group and discussion of the MVT report. We also shared key findings, embargoed, with both members of the Culture and Sport Committee and the MVT (who referenced our findings in their own report) before publication. This seemed straightforward but quickly became complicated.

The council were putting out the papers for the meeting a week in advance – including the MVT report and the headline findings we had shared. We therefore, in a bid to maximise our impact, risked being scooped on our own report. Furthermore, we had to engage in hurried and detailed negotiations across multiple council and university departments to attempt to change the wording of the council's original press release, which we felt placed too much emphasis on the 'big number'⁷ – the headline estimate of live music's value to Edinburgh – and too little on both the independence of the research and the challenges facing the city. We successfully negotiated amended wording, and the University and council press teams agreed a mutually approved schedule for their separate releases. Yet this revealed a key faultline, a crack in the user base through which our report fell. The text of the report itself was caveated and contextualised, with numerous footnotes to explain the methodology by which we had arrived at our figures. The council press office, by contrast, was naturally interested in telling a compelling story about the vibrancy of the city. Members of the Culture and Sport Committee were also keen to tell this story, though they – like us – also wished to acknowledge the problems for musicians and venues, in service of the wider goal of amending the 'inaudibility clause'. In all of this, the nuance of our methodology wilted somewhat in the sunlight. Footnotes do not fit easily into newspaper articles.

Sarah Price (2015) usefully describes the difference between what she labels academic and 'commercial' research. She includes in this latter category work by 'arts organisations, market researchers and government bodies' (p.169) although there are some important distinctions between these. Government bodies and arts organisations, especially those that are publicly funded, are much more likely to make their work widely accessible. Market research, for more commercial purposes, may release *only* headline figures, if even these, and is more likely to be behind a paywall.⁸

A further layer of complexity – which I touch on in the final section below – is brought by the myriad intersections of academics and non-academics across different levels of proximity and methodological intersection – such as participatory, action and activist

researches with an explicit 'practical concern for useful outcomes' (Brydon-Miller and Coghlan, 2014: 230). Similarly, Price's (2015) emphasis on writing and presentational style means that, as she acknowledges, the labels 'academic' and 'commercial' are used as broad descriptors for the sake of simplicity (p.173) to cover a range of motivations and organisational types, including on the one hand both arts organisations and policy bodies and, on the other, an array of academic orientations. This pertains to the presentation of our findings since they sit within these currents of complexity. The research was 'academic' not 'commercial' in that it was both funded by, and guided by the priorities of, an HEI and not an external body. Likewise, insofar as it was concerned with external stakeholders, this was with the broader goal of making findings available to facilitate informed change and, therefore, made as quickly and freely accessible as possible.

Nevertheless, Price's key point is about *style* and this too is pertinent. Accessibility involves style as well as availability and for the findings to resonate in the policy sphere we needed to be mindful of the pressures on, and working environment of, that audience. In doing so – a factor of having impact as one of the research goals – we had included the stylistic paraphernalia of 'commercial' research as described by Price (2015: 170): executive summary, bullet pointed key findings, and clearly delineated suggestions for action. As such, it was unsurprising that both press and policymakers picked out the 'big numbers' and bullet points. This was a necessary part of our job in achieving impact, but also introduced complications in that these stylistic components opened the door to a representation of the work that attached less importance to the findings in full and the details of our methodology. As Price (2015: 171) puts it, 'Commercial research may therefore be seen as ... too focussed on the bottom line to explore interesting questions ... whereas academia can be accused of ivory-towerism'. She highlights the tensions that derive from collaboration across these styles of reporting research (p. 170). Yet this illustrated countervailing pulls in the presentation of research brought about by the simultaneous desire for both impact and nuanced presentation of findings *within* one report. We could, in effect, have our cake and eat it when the report was discussed within an academic environment. Even the *Live Music Exchange* website allowed us to present highlights in our own language, to provide context for our figures in terms of what they included or excluded, to note what was approximate and to state that the research was part of a longer conversation. Once the city council and the press became involved, we ceded a measure of control as an inevitable consequence of working towards impact. Whereas the strands of KE, engagement and research had worked synergistically in the formulation and conduct of the project, there were tensions when it came to dissemination.

Recommendation and advocacy

Having illustrated the co-mingling of KE and research, and some of the consequences of this for dissemination, in the pilot census study, I hope now to unpick some less obvious, yet perhaps thornier, tensions that emerged in the public domain. This requires, first, a brief overview of the work of the Music Is Audible group up to September 2016.

Our report included amongst its key recommendations that the City of Edinburgh Council should:

Change inaudibility clause to ‘nuisance’ or decibel-level (through negotiation with Licensing Board). (Behr, Brennan and Webster, 2015: 5)

Similar, though wider-ranging, recommendations had been made by the MVT (City of Edinburgh Council, 2015: 16-21). With over a year of meetings under its belt, the Music Is Audible group had made noticeable, if slow, progress towards an assessment of how ‘inaudibility’ as a criterion could be replaced to put the emphasis on nuisance. A proposal was agreed that included a framework for what would constitute ‘nuisance’ – including factors like the frequency, time and impact of any sound leakage – and was seen by the musicians and venues as viable, and as potentially politically achievable.⁹ This took the form of a small change in wording from: ‘the Board will always consider the imposition of a condition requiring amplified music from those premises to be inaudible in residential property’ (City of Edinburgh Council, 2016a) to ‘the Board will always consider the imposition of a condition requiring amplified music from those premises shall not be an audible nuisance in neighbouring residential premises’ (City of Edinburgh Council, 2016b).

There followed relatively lengthy negotiations across different council departments for a year from October 2015. Councillors on the Music Is Audible Group took the recommendations to the Culture and Sport Committee, which Matt and I also addressed in October 2015 with our findings and recommendations. This was followed by another public forum at the Usher Hall in February 2016 and then representations to the council’s Licensing Forum and Licensing Board.¹⁰ These agreed to hold a public consultation regarding the proposed change running from April 2016 to July 2016 after which (at the end of August 2016) the matter was to be put to a vote by the Licensing Board.

Although further twists in the passage of changing ‘inaudible’ to ‘audible nuisance’ ensued before it was agreed, I pause here to note a shift of emphasis moving into 2016. These events did, indeed, involve presentation of our research findings and recommendations. They were, however, for non-academics. We were addressing, in one case, an audience comprised entirely of policymakers¹¹ and, at the Live Music Matters Forum in February – sharing the stage with councillors, journalists and other members of the working group – an audience of concerned musicians, venue operators and members of the public. While we were careful to include a slide on methodology, including numbers of respondents, this context necessitated prioritising the more goal-oriented aspect of the work with a focus on KE and the recommendations over fine-grained detail, theorising and discursive content.

However, another subtle change also took place, at least in my case, where the boundaries between KE as an academic researcher and membership of the working group became less straightforward. To an extent, as far as its role in illustrating the issues in Edinburgh was concerned, the report had done its job. The figures highlighted by the

Culture and Sport Committee showed both the potential of live music in Edinburgh and the deleterious effect of the ‘inaudibility’ clause. The need for, at least, consultation had been accepted. We continued to build an application to the AHRC for a national census, and to describe in LMX posts the theoretical context of our characterisation of live music in cities as an ‘ecology’¹² (Frith, Cloonan, Brennan, Webster and Behr, 2016). Work around the specific issues facing live music in Edinburgh had, however, shifted gear.

In an inkling of what followed it is notable, with hindsight, that the overriding concern at the public meeting was protecting venues and musicians. Though there was some debate about *how* to move forward, it was generally accepted that amending the ‘inaudibility’ clause was a desirable outcome. The consultation, however, would reveal that this was something of a self-selecting audience along with the existence of a very different perspective within the broader public.

Three points warrant mention here. Firstly, the public consultation received an unprecedented level of uptake – over 500 responses, largely supporting the change. Secondly, this was partly driven by a concerted effort on the part of the Music Is Audible working group members and their networks. Across social media and with support from organisations like the Musicians’ Union¹³ and MVT, the group actively encouraged Edinburgh’s musicians and gig-goers to participate in the consultation. The third point is that of the small minority of those who *did* object to the proposed change, almost all were aligned with the city’s Community Councils.¹⁴ Additionally, these objections were vociferous, not couched as qualms or suggestions for further consideration. Councillors had warned the working group that Community Councils might well be staunch opponents of the proposal and this was indeed the case. Members of the Music Is Audible group attended Community Council meetings but were met with highly sceptical responses. One comment reported from a Community Councillor was that there was no point in meeting to discuss the proposals since they had already made up their mind. The most public response came from the New Town and Broughton Community Council which published the text of its representation to the consultation online along with its meeting minutes (New Town and Broughton Community Council, 2016). I extract this at some length to illustrate the tone and scale of objection to the proposal.¹⁵

We **OBJECT** to the proposal to replace the current licensing condition which requires amplified music to be *inaudible* in nearby residential properties with one which merely requires that it *shall not be an audible nuisance*. Our objection is based on the following reasons...

- the proposal is at variance with the Music Venues Trust recommendations that, when a venue opens up in an existing area, the venue operator as ‘agent of change’ must ensure soundproofing
- We note also Article 1 of the Human Rights Protocol, which entitles every person to the peaceful enjoyment of their property. At a time when the EU is

looking at tighter noise standards, it is bizarre that the Council, who have a duty to protect their citizens, are even thinking of making it worse

- It is also noted that the principal support to date has been from the venue operators and promoters, with no actual musicians present. This must raise the issue of whether the motivation is actually for the benefit of the music industry, or whether it is in fact driven by commercial pressures to relax amenity standards for less responsible operators
- If increased noise pollution drives residents away, we will be left with the same barren crime-ridden streets as too many other cities. (New Town and Broughton Community Council, 2016, emphases in original)

These responses were the cause of some consternation within the Music Is Audible group, not least when it was pointed out that the voices of Community Councils could hold some sway at the Licensing Board, since they represented, in theory at least, part of the city's representative democratic structures.¹⁶ The New Town and Broughton statement was also felt by the working group to be alarmist, to have misrepresented our proposal and, on several counts, inaccurate. Musicians, for instance, had been consulted both in the census and on the working group. Likewise, the specific proposal being voted on had no direct bearing on the MVT's broader recommendation about introducing the Agent of Change principle. I was also somewhat concerned over conjectural points about a vaguely ascribed 'music industry' shot through rhetorical flourishes ('crime-ridden streets'). The danger to the goal of passing the proposed amendment was that the legalistic and official tone could nevertheless strike a chord with busy members of the Licensing Board. In August 2016 the group decided to produce a response to send to Licensing Board members in advance of its meeting at the end of August. Taking a more explicit step into a partisan position, I drafted this, including a lengthy point-by-point rebuttal of the New Town and Broughton Community Council's representation (City of Edinburgh Council 2016c, Appendix 4).

In terms of supporting the proposed change through the consultation and voting process, this was probably necessary. Indeed the vote was postponed once when the Licensing Board passed a motion to hold a hearing for both sides to put their case verbally first. Although this engendered a little controversy, the stated aim of the motion was to achieve a degree of consensus on the matter. This appeared unlikely given the vociferousness of the Community Council responses to the consultation but did illustrate the extent to which opinion had become polarised and clearly this section of the public, absent from the Live Music Matters forum, was determined to be heard.

My composition of the rebuttal, and then role as one of the Music Is Audible group's representatives to address the Licensing Board before its vote in September, also illustrated the extent to which this polarisation had become salient regarding the relationship between Knowledge Exchange, research and the stakeholders involved. My response was replete with the scaffolding of academic work – detailed footnotes and references – and did, to an extent, involve research in itself, pulling together information from a range academic and

policy sources to provide a broader picture than what, I felt, the Community Council had offered. Substantially longer than the representation to which it was responding, it referenced not just the census report but also a wide range of grey literature and academic research on noise in service of countering the inaccuracies and gaps in the Community Council's statements. Whilst I was the main author of this document,¹⁷ which was sent directly to each individual member of the Licensing Board, it was drafted on behalf of the Music Is Audible group as a whole, and signed by most of the non-council members of that group.

On the one hand, this could be said to be engagement and KE in action – a fully-referenced piece of work delivered direct to a policy audience. At the same time, it was also advocacy of a kind. To be sure, this was not directed, as the Community Councils suggested, by commercial vested interests but derived from the research itself and the desire to both defend its findings and advance a solution to a problem revealed therein. Likewise, advocacy – especially for marginalised groups – and academia need not be inimical. However, the processes of engagement and KE to further the impact of the research – its role in the 'inaudibility' clause debate – now also involved a defensive as well as an explanatory role that traversed these related, but distinct, activities. The Community Council responses were not exactly 'knowledge resistance' of the kind described by Williamson, Cloonan and Frith (2011) – they were more opposed to the eventual proposed licensing change than the findings themselves. They were, however, akin to it. In authoring the rebuttal on behalf of the working group, and then appearing at the Licensing Board in September to explicitly argue for the proposed change, I was forced to take account of the fact that 'engagement' may involve an oppositional as well as a conversational aspect.

The limits of Knowledge Exchange

I attempt now to pull together some of the preceding strands to illustrate the tensions between research, KE and engagement – particularly for the purposes of driving impact. The Edinburgh Live Music Census Pilot Study involved, in some senses, aspects of hybridity. Arising ultimately from the KE-oriented Live Music Exchange, and with impact in mind in the planning of the project – as is, in fact, encouraged by Research Councils – it was nonetheless also straightforwardly a piece of primary research. The extent of the complications regarding the full range of stakeholders only became fully apparent once the research was complete. The report's recommendations were aligned with its findings, yet the events following its release marked a change in direction. The impetus to provide evidence for the policy process gave way to the need to *defend* not just the evidence, but the recommendations based on it. Scullion and Garcia (2005: 124-5) describe an overarching issue for academics concerned with cultural policy.

Cultural policy research aspires to undertake 'policy-relevant research', contribute to 'evidence-based research' and applied policy studies, *and*

advance demands to make research critical, reflective, self-aware and rooted within the contemporary theoretical paradigms. (Emphasis in original)

The demands of a policy audience – one set of ‘end-users’ – naturally tends to reduce the extent to which theoretical paradigms can be placed at the forefront of the research outputs. Again, as Price (2015) illustrates, easily-digestible action points become a priority. In the case of the Edinburgh Live Music Census, the context of public debate following the report’s release further highlighted this tendency. The reflective component of the work, especially in the chapter on ‘Research Context and Comparative Sources’ (Behr, Brennan and Webster, 2015: 9-19), while an important bedding in the longer term by providing provenance, took second place in the public eye to the figures selected by the Culture and Sport Committee and Music Is Audible Group as most propitious for making the case for changing the licensing policy. The bright sunlight of press releases, news coverage and, later on, public controversy melted the snow of a 98-page report into a distilled series of key statistics¹⁸ and recommendations, especially regarding the inaudibility clause. Beyond this, both the nature and pace of events necessitated and foregrounded a robust over a reflective response. The process of engagement in this environment, especially if we hoped to achieve impact for the research by seeing through the policy change, enforced a partisan stance. Ultimately, we had made the recommendations and the nitty-gritty of the policy process meant either taking part in defending the recommendations or leaving it to others to do so. Williamson, Cloonan and Frith argue against ‘retreating to the ivory tower’ (2011: 470) in such situations and there were both immediate and underlying reasons to follow this advice. Firstly, a considerable investment of time and resource had gone into the work and I wished to see its recommendations implemented. Perhaps more significantly, I actually did (and still do) believe that the ‘inaudibility clause’ was counterproductive to the health of Edinburgh’s live music scene.

Williamson, Cloonan and Frith also note that academics should ‘have the arrogance of their expertise’ (2011: 470) and this was in effect in both the written response to the Community Councils and my address to the Licensing Board. But the work towards impact, through defending the recommendations, cut across another aspect of the KE process, and Williamson et al.’s framework. I was, and remain, convinced of the inaccuracy of the Community Council’s submissions with regard to their depiction of the how the change in policy would work, and scaremongering over its likely effect. But the verbal presentations to the Licensing Board gave me pause for thought. They included long-standing, and in some cases elderly, residents who were genuinely bothered by noise from the licensed trade. Their objections were predicated on a misreading of the Music Is Audible group’s proposal insofar as all the potential and actual scenarios they depicted would be covered by the revised criterion of ‘audible nuisance’. Likewise, their assertions about what constituted the ‘music industry’ in Edinburgh were rather tenuous. The venues and musicians most affected by the ‘inaudibility clause’ were those at the grassroots. Still, the verbal submissions revealed a gap in the Knowledge Exchange. We had been assiduous in engaging with

policymakers, musicians and venues but less so with regard to those around the venues who were *not* directly involved with music making. Williamson, Frith and Cloonan distinguish between the different ‘users’ of research, highlighting the importance of providing a voice for the ‘citizens (and musicians) who have no one else lobbying policymakers on their behalf’ (2011: 462). This, arguably, was part of the purpose of sitting on the Music Is Audible working group. But the practical reality turned out to be that ‘citizens’ are a wildly heterogeneous, and sometimes disputative, bunch. To the retired piano teacher pleading a case to the Licensing Board, however erroneous, it is unlikely that I – wearing my academic cultural capital more heavily than usual for the purposes of the hearing, a member of a council working group and bearing the weight of as many facts as I could muster – would have been seen as the earthy voice of the citizen.

This divide was perhaps inevitable although we had, in fact, worked quite hard to ensure that both the proposed change in wording and the presentations to the Licensing Board didn’t ‘frighten the horses’ by seeming to endorse a free-for-all over amplified music in venues, something that was, in any case, never on the cards. To this end newspaper coverage was a mixed blessing. A front page featuring the Chair of the Licensing Board photoshopped onto an electric guitarist – and the headline ‘Pump It Up: Noise Nimbys are wrecking Capital music scene, blasts licensing chief Milligan’¹⁹ – was slightly reassuring in terms of what to expect from the hearing but counterproductive in terms of assuaging the fears of the Community Councils. It may also have been likely, as the cold shoulder received by members of the working group who reached out to Community Councils suggests that no accommodation would have been possible. Nevertheless, it remains the case that as academics our primary attention in terms of impact had been on policymakers and the musical community. We had been very clear in the methodology of the research, including consultation to ensure its relevance, but less aware of the need to conduct KE *beyond* these groups. Citizens peripheral to the musical community had the opportunity to participate like everyone else – the surveys were publicly available – but the focus of the KE meant that they did not become involved until it was, in a sense, ‘too late’ and their views had already hardened. By this time the policy process – consultation, followed by representation, rebuttal and finally hearing – meant that the more deliberative aspects of academic work were overshadowed by the need to work more reactively. Clearly it is impossible to devote equal resources in every direction when engaging publicly and it is unsurprising that the natural opportunities for impactful engagement and effecting positive change (addressing the Culture and Sport Committee, sitting on a council working group) took precedence. But the conflict between different segments of Edinburgh’s citizenry revealed a degree of opportunity cost in terms of choosing where to engage that, at one point, looked like it might threaten the very change we hoped to bring about. Again, this may be inevitable to an extent, but it did illustrate that where we had been fairly strategic in planning the research, when it became public, and the direct impact of the work became a matter for debate, we were pushed into acting more tactically.

These tactics, ultimately, worked in relation to the primary recommendation from the census report. On 26th September 2016, following the hearing, the Licensing Board agreed to amend the wording of the licensing policy by a majority of six votes to two of members who were present (City of Edinburgh Council, 2016d). In the straightforward sense implied by the ‘for or against’ nature of the hearing and vote, we won. That this outcome, though, involved a more broadly divisive process within the city points to the complexities of academic involvement in the policy process, even when relatively circumscribed. It also raises questions about who the audience for the report was. Notwithstanding that it was made freely and publicly available, the non-academic ‘end-users’ that I referred to at the start of this article were, primarily, a mixed group of policymakers, journalists, musicians and venues. Also worth noting, however, is that the multiple publics involved in the subsequent debate consisted of a wider group, including those *opposed* to the recommendations and whom neither the council’s public meetings nor our own public dissemination had successfully brought into the process before it became adversarial.

This has implications for how we think about and define the ‘audiences’ for academic work in the public domain. Short of greater resources than are usually available it is at best difficult, and often nigh-on impossible, to give equal weight to every potential constituency to which a piece of work might ultimately pertain, and which might make use of it. Furthermore, many users of the research, including its authors, may occupy multiple positions in the complex web of stakeholders – citizens, residents, musicians, listeners, and so forth.

This kind of complication within academia is not specific to Knowledge Exchange. Participatory and action research, for instance, have long grappled with the co-creation of projects and the hierarchies of knowledge involved in the process even as it seeks to give voice to the marginalised. Indeed, for some, the goals of relevance and social change suggest that, ‘research that is conducted without a collaborative relationship with the relevant stakeholders is likely to be incompetent... the knowledge people gain in the processes of everyday life mak[ing] it impossible for us to ignore what the ‘people’ think and want.’ (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood and Maguire, 2003: 25). Even beyond work explicitly framed as action or activist research, the value of engaging with participants and partners beyond the research itself is well established. As both a practice in itself and as a ‘pathway to impact’, however, KE is increasingly the institutional mechanism through which effecting change is channeled.

This case gave me cause to reflect on the process of selecting the sites of exchange. The gamut of relevant stakeholders may not be obvious, or even particularly accessible, in the design or early implementation phases and it may only be when the pathway to impact is reasonably well trodden that their concerns arise. In many ways, research and KE are iterative, or at least evolutionary, processes and so in the larger picture it becomes possible to consider conflicting attitudes amongst stakeholders. In the heat of immediate engagement, such options are curtailed. It is more difficult to conduct KE retroactively once a particular set of participants has been engaged.

Philip Schlesinger (2013) outlines different incentives for engagement. The first is a supply-led, autonomous drive wherein, 'actions taken derive from an interest in the dissemination of knowledge and a commitment – as citizen-academics – to use our knowledge for the general benefit' (p.33). The second, demand-led model, is informed by the impact agenda and responds to 'an intensifying officially policed obligation to help public agencies, commerce, business and industry and also voluntary and charitable bodies, to operate knowledgeably in a democratic society' (p.34). Although distinct, these are not, as the Edinburgh Census project illustrates, mutually exclusive. But democratic society is predicated on balancing competing aims. There are some clear priorities for academics negotiating such competition when power relations are more obvious, such as not exacerbating inequalities (Cloonan, 2013: 328). When – as with the residents represented by the Community Councils and the musicians and venues trying to protect their livelihoods – there is less of a clear delineation of power then matters are more fraught. This is especially the case when a key locus of the KE – its ostensible 'end user' – the city council, represents both sides.

Conclusion

I have attempted to summarise here what was a long and fairly tortuous process of policy engagement at city council level, essentially two years of direct engagement to change two words on a licensing policy. The case of the Edinburgh Live Music Census illustrates a few aspects of Knowledge Exchange. Firstly, by the nature of its inception, that KE is often difficult to disentangle from the research itself. It was a feedback loop of research interviews (for the Cultural Value project) and KE endeavours (the 'Lively Arts Venues' workshop, as well as Live Music Exchange more generally) that put us in a position to be able to conduct the research in the first place. More directly, it was our presence on the Music Is Audible working group that provided a window of opportunity to do so with a policy audience guaranteed for the findings. Secondly, this case study highlights the way in which engagement and research *shape* one another, and are informed by the prevailing funding culture. My own position as a KE Associate, and the nature of the Cultural Value projects – which ultimately provided the connections to City of Edinburgh Council – were informed by the AHRC's pivot towards Knowledge Exchange as the RAE gave way to the REF. Most significantly, however, this experience illustrated both opportunity cost and an element of loss of control over the research that is built into the engagement process.

In the process of taking the Edinburgh Census findings into the policy sphere, the work was subjected to the glare and immediate priorities of newspaper deadlines, policy meetings and public consultation. This lit starkly the key figures and recommendations pertaining to a specific debate whilst the nuances of our methodology and contextual material somewhat melted into the background. The research had been conducted independently – there was no client relationship to any council or musical organisation – and with a general 'citizen interest' (Cloonan, 2013: 330) in mind. Yet when a clearly defined

goal – the policy change – came into focus, the border between different strands of KE and engagement (representing the research findings while also representing the city’s musical community and pushing for a licensing regime that would support it) became correspondingly less defined.

In one sense, this was an example of highly successful KE, with an easily measurable impact. The research illustrated the scale of a problem – the inaudibility clause had a ‘chilling effect’ on musical provision – proposed a response to it and we then, through KE and engaging with stakeholders, worked to see that response successfully implemented. In another sense, however, it laid bare some of the limitations of KE. We consulted widely in the design and conduct of the research, and then engaged publicly with the policy process once it was complete, yet that very process brought about an oppositional position towards a particular set of stakeholders. I raise this not to suggest that we should not have supported our recommendations but because it exposed a set of quandaries and potential avenues for engagement that the framework for KE and impact could be better equipped to explain. How do researchers negotiate the line between KE and advocacy when managing competing agendas *within* the citizenry, and which may be viewed – as the Community Councils seemed to feel was the case – as a zero-sum game?

Resources are obviously finite and covering every eventuality for engagement impossible. Yet the REF, and its institutional consequences, push towards conceptions of impact that work better in the refrigerated context of measuring academic work than the experiential context of living with its outcomes. Even granted that social and policy research in the field can get messy and are subject to contingencies, there are well-established methodologies and processes for addressing and reporting this. Similar processes for KE, such as identifying who counts as a relevant stakeholder, are less defined. Yet it is in this arena that the ultimate saliency of the research may be established, despite the fact that researchers have less control over a process that, by its very nature, may push them towards a more reactive position.

Schlesinger (2013) notes, with regard to the different drivers for academic engagement and KE, that ‘the normative model of autonomous intellectuality – the ideal of freedom of thought – is in increasing tension with the dominant system and market-driven model of the knowledge class’ (p. 34). To this I would add that, even when there are synergies across these models, there are tensions regarding where to place the energies of Knowledge Exchange when the multifarious perspectives of a variegated citizenry come into conflict over the very product of that exchange.

If KE and impact, as is likely, are to become permanent features of the academic landscape, then such quandaries are likely to emerge correspondingly more often. Their relationship to the wider research process and external complexities of engagement merit closer consideration. The REF and institutional KE measures have established processes for describing research outputs and impacts – the definable features of the snowman – but fewer conceptual resources to account for what happens in the bigger picture when it melts into the surrounding social context.

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Notes:

¹ Knowledge Exchange is part of a wider field of activities associated with academic research, notably Knowledge Transfer (KT) – a more direct, and implicitly one way, process of imparting knowledge from the academy to external stakeholders. For a detailed discussion of some of the tensions inherent in KT, and in particular 'knowledge resistance' on the part of non-academic stakeholders, see Williamson, Cloonan and Frith (2011). The boundaries between KE and KT are, however, porous. I refer throughout here to KE.

² The REF brought 'impact' to the forefront, although the measurement of research outputs and quality was already in place with its predecessor, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

³ <http://gtr.rcuk.ac.uk/projects?ref=AH%2FF009437%2F1>.

⁴ www.livemusicexchange.org.

⁵ There was a prior connection to Regular Music, its Director having been interviewed for the original Live Music History Project.

⁶ We sent drafts of the musician survey to the Musicians' Union and of the survey for venues to the Music Venue Trust. We also consulted with members of the Music Is Audible group.

⁷ We estimated an annual value of live music to Edinburgh of £40m.

⁸ This was notable when we were aggregating live music research for the resources section, which provided access to research from a range of sources, on the LMX website. Ironically, prior to Open Access, it had this in common with academic articles.

⁹ The framework for assessing nuisance was initially worked up by a sub-group of the larger Music is Audible working group drawing on provisions in the Public Health Act Scotland (2008) and are laid out in more detail in the MVT report (City of Edinburgh Council, 2015: 17). The proposed amendment was agreed by the larger group, based on the work of the sub-group along with MVT and census recommendations.

¹⁰ The Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 requires each council to establish a Local Licensing Forum. The Licensing Forum represents the views of people concerned with the operation of the alcohol/liquor licensing system in the City of Edinburgh. Members include license holders, representative groups of the licensed trade, residents' representative groups, the police and so forth. The Licensing Board makes decisions regarding specific licenses and licensing policy and is comprised of elected council members.

¹¹ The address to the Culture and Sport Committee, as a public meeting, was streamed via the council website.

¹² An academic article to this effect was in the process of peer review and revision while the Edinburgh census and follow up activities described here took place.

¹³ The Musicians' Union went so far as to provide a template letter.

<http://www.musiciansunion.org.uk/Home/News/2016/May/City-of-Edinburgh-Council-Licensing-Board-Public-C>.

¹⁴ These are voluntary bodies, and the most local tier of statutory representation in Scotland.

¹⁵ New Town and Broughton's was the most public written representation, although the Association of Community Councils put its name to the Morningside Community Council response, which was similar in tone and content, on the grounds that there had not been sufficient time to address the matter in detail at the Association's last meeting (City of Edinburgh Council, 2016c, Appendix 10).

¹⁶ In practice, many Community Councillors are elected unopposed and participation is often amongst a relatively self-selecting group.

¹⁷ I drafted the response to the Community Council statement though consulted other members of the working group about tone and sent it around for consideration before finalizing. The last section of the finished document also contained statements in support of the licensing change from local musicians.

¹⁸ A rough figure of £40million as the value for Edinburgh's live music and 44% of musicians responding to the survey reporting that their gigs had been affected by noise restrictions

¹⁹ This headline on the front page of the paper referred to an article dealing with the postponed vote, and associated hearing (Ferguson and Connell, 2016)