



## Thinking about Music Cities: Tales from England, Finland and Scotland

Cities have been fundamental for understanding popular music and how it is practised, categorised and conceptualised. Musicians have commonly drawn on cities as a source of creative inspiration, and the relationship between music and the city has been explored in various books and such places as museum exhibitions and film documentaries, as well as across various disciplinary areas (Lashua et al 2014; Holt & Wergin 2012; Scott 2008; Cohen 2007; Krims 2007; Forman 2002). Music scholars and critics have often explained popular music sounds and scenes, by relating them to cities and urban settings, as illustrated by the titles of classic books about popular music such as *The Sound of the City* (Gillett 1970) and *Urban Rhythms* (Chambers 1985).

Increasingly over the past four decades, the relationship between music and the city has also attracted the interest of city policymakers across the world. Keen to use music as a resource for developing and marketing themselves, cities across the globe have competed with each other for national and international titles such as City of Music and UNESCO City of Music. The notion of a Music City has spawned a range of guides and toolkits for building such places (Baker 2019). Leading this at a consultancy level has been the London-based Sound Diplomacy group<sup>1</sup> which has written numerous reports and organises Music City awards, conventions and forums, as well as developing a Music Cities Community. Within academia, a number of works have adopted various approaches to try to unpack the notion of a Music City. This has included work looking at algorithms (Baker 2019), works which contain various approaches from across the globe (Ballico and Watson 2020) and works which look at diverse aspects of a single city (Homan et al 2021).

The idea of varying approaches to one issue informs our focus here. To start with, *how* should the Music City, and the role of music in cities more broadly, be researched? We address this question by reflecting on three approaches to studying music and the city – anthropologically, as cultural history, and via politics. In doing so, we focus on our own experiences, methods and work in Liverpool (Cohen),

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<sup>1</sup> [www.sounddiplomacy.com](http://www.sounddiplomacy.com).

Turku (Kallioniemi) and Glasgow (Cloonan)<sup>2</sup> and aim to use this to stimulate debate and inspire others to consider their own approach and the justifications for this.

While the choice of these cities is driven by our previous work, the three cities have much in common. All three are provincial ports which have seen significant public investment in their creative industries. All three have at some point been awarded the title of European Capital/City of Culture, and all have inspired research into their musical lives. There are nevertheless, of course, important differences between these cities, such as those concerning their location, demographics and economy. For the purposes of this chapter, however, our emphasis is less on differences between the cities themselves, than on differences in our approaches to studying them, and in what we each emphasise. For just as there are various ways to *be* a Music City, there is more than one way to *study* a Music City and the approach adopted will determine what a researcher prioritises. Embracing different approaches to and perspectives on music is particularly important in multidisciplinary fields of study, such as Popular Music Studies, a field in which we all situate our work. We suggest that (i) an anthropological approach involves conducting ethnographic and comparative research into the different ways in which the musical city is lived, experienced and imagined; (ii) a cultural history approach provides a complex and ambiguous terrain for understanding the role of music and music activity in creating the historically-constructed identity of a city; (iii) in its essence, a political orientation ultimately concentrates on questions of power. All three of us accept the importance of thinking about Music Cities, but do so with different emphases and criteria. We freely acknowledge that our different approaches are not pure divisions. Rather, they overlap and interact. However, we are each trying to find out different things, leading to different approaches. We highly respect each other's approaches, but hope that the reflections we make here will help those interested in Music Cities to think about how best to study them, and to think through the implications of their choices. As we now illustrate, we all perceive Music Cities in different ways and with different emphases, and different results.

## **Liverpool: An anthropological lens**

Liverpool is an obvious example of a "Music City". The Beatles made it a city world famous for music, while the success of commercial recordings released by them

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<sup>2</sup>This is a joint article, within which (Cohen) has reflected on their experiences in Liverpool, (Kallioniemi) on Turku and (Cloonan) on Glasgow. The use of first person writing within the relevant sections should therefore be seen as the reflections of the author in question.

and other local artists prompted the *Guinness World Records* (formerly titled the *Guinness Book of Records*) to name it as the world's City of Pop (2001). My research on Liverpool's musical life (Cohen 1985-2023) began despite, rather than because of, this reputation. As a student of Social Anthropology in the early-mid 1980s, I was struggling to decide where to conduct "fieldwork" on the musical worlds of rock musicians when a friend-of-a-friend, who had spent some time living in Liverpool, offered to introduce me to musicians he knew there. His stories of the cultural vibrancy and friendliness of the city, and of its difference from other English cities, made Liverpool an intriguing option as a fieldwork location. I was nevertheless concerned about the notoriety of the city's musical past and did not want people to assume that it was my main interest and reason for going there, particularly since the focus of my thesis was on contemporary, amateur musicians. Having eventually decided to base the research in Liverpool and spend one year living in the city (1985–86), I inevitably had to confront the city's music reputation and people's reflections on the relationship between music and the city.

Created through the development of its maritime port, Liverpool grew in size and wealth during the 19th century to become England's second city. Subsequent fluctuations in its fortunes throughout the 20th century, accompanied by shifts in global trade, and in the global capitalist economy more generally, prompted local patterns of decline and renewal. These historical circumstances are evident in the material landscapes of Liverpool – the places and spaces where music happens – and in the demographics of the city, a source for the richness and diversity of its musical cultures. My interest in exploring these cultures, broadening out from my earlier work on rock culture in Liverpool, was inspired by Ruth Finnegan's seminal anthropological study of music-making in the city of Milton Keynes (1989), but was also a response to the dominant and narrow association of Liverpool with the Beatles in the popular imagination. As I became more familiar with the city's various musical cultures and identities, it was difficult to ignore how Liverpool's reputation as the Beatles city was negotiated by those involved, whether embraced and celebrated, challenged and rejected, or recycled and reinvented. Observing these negotiations encouraged a shift in the focus of my research, from music *in* the city to the different ways in which the city is lived, experienced and imagined *through* music.

In short, thinking of Liverpool prompted questions about how a city shapes and is shaped by music, what music does for a city and in turn, what the city does with music. While addressing these questions calls for a combination of methods, my main emphasis has been on ethnographic research conducted with a wide range of social and cultural groups, businesses and organisations.

## Engaging with the distinctiveness of Liverpool's music

Liverpool's reputation for music has undoubtedly attracted visitors and new residents to the city, particularly university students, music fans, musicians and other creative individuals. It has inspired journalists and critics to propose various, often essentialist, theories to explain why the city is so musical, and the distinctiveness of the music made there. It has enabled the growth of commercial music tourism while also providing a marketing opportunity for music businesses, as illustrated by the use of labels such as the Liverpool Sound, Merseysound and Merseybeat to market the music of local rock groups. The famed Liverpool Sound of the 1960s, the story of the Beatles, and the city's dominant history of post-1950s white, male rock music have, moreover, provided touchstones for the construction of alternative local music sounds, histories and canons. One example is provided by the interplay between rock and hip hop, which is by no means specific to Liverpool (Hennion 2003: 88). Through speech and song, Liverpool-based hip-hop musicians have referenced the city's reputation for guitar-based rock music and the relative marginalisation of hip hop. Lashua and Thompson (2016: 79) describe how the guitar parts were removed from the recording of one particular hip-hop track, because the musicians felt that the guitar was too much of a signifier of Liverpool's rock music heritage. Moreover, the track features lyrics that challenge the construction of Liverpool as a rock music city: "the industry in the 'Pool is fucked. They don't want to see a young dude make bucks. Just because I don't strum a guitar and shit" (Cohen 2012).

As Regev (2006: 2) points out, once established, "canons exert cultural power by influencing memory and heritage and by radiating out onto the work of musicians. That is, canons influence the narration of the past, and they inspire the radius of creativity for the future". The Liverpool International Festival of Psychedelia (Psych Fest) offers another example. Established in 2012, the festival has drawn hundreds of people to Liverpool each year to hear a mix of psych rock and electronic music. A review of the 2015 festival celebrates Liverpool, particularly in comparison with nearby Manchester, as "the natural choice for a festival celebrating all things psychedelic. It's in the place's vibes. The ley lines run deep here. Compared to that of its Northern neighbours, Liverpool's music has always been that bit more vivid and fuzzy round the edges" (Marszalek & McDermott 2015).

Evident across various genre-based music cultures, this kind of "rhetoric of the local" (Street 1995) is commonly mobilised in particular situations to serve particular interests and illustrates how music can be "fixed" to place despite its "fluidity" (Connell & Gibson 2003). For example, despite the ease with which music travels around the world through digital and media technologies, and the participation of musicians in creative networks and collaborations extending across and beyond the

city, musicians involved with rock culture in Liverpool have distinguished between the sounds of North and South Liverpool, Liverpool and Manchester, Northern and Southern England, and so on (Cohen 1994). Getting to know these musicians has helped me to appreciate the social relations that such places come to reify and symbolise, and how music enables these relations to be established and transformed. It has revealed the relations of class, age, ethnicity, gender, genre and style that influence constructions of the city and local identity through music, along with a long-standing tradition of Liverpool exceptionalism (Belchem 2000).

A similar process has been evident in the interplay between dominant, alternative and revisionist music histories, and the politics of remembering and forgetting involved. Rock musicians active in the 1970s, for example, have contributed to books, concerts, and websites describing the 1970s as “the forgotten years” (Bolland 2006: 3), sandwiched between the well-known 1960s “Merseybeat” era and the post-punk electro-pop scene of the 1980s when Liverpool bands were once again at the top of the UK music charts. Musicians identifying with soul or country music, or as women in music, have likewise pointed to their exclusion from or marginalization in dominant accounts of Liverpool music, and to the existence of other “hidden” local music sounds and histories.

## **Branding and developing Liverpool as a music city**

Liverpool’s musical history and character, and its reputation as a music city, have been engaged with not only by music-makers, critics and audiences, but also by policy-makers. The 1970s crisis in the global capitalist economy was experienced more severely in Liverpool than in any other UK city. 350 local factories closed or relocated between 1966 and 1977 (Murden 2006: 428), while between 1961 and 1981 the city lost 32.45 % of its population (Andrews 2018: 30). Liverpool’s musical life nevertheless continued to be lively. Buildings associated with maritime business were repurposed as places for music rehearsal, recording and performance, and by the late 1980s, music had been included in official plans for local recovery (Cohen 1991). In common with “post-industrial” cities in the UK and beyond, policymakers responded to the city’s economic crisis by launching programmes for the economic restructuring of Liverpool. Culture and creativity were positioned by these programmes as drivers for this restructuring (Zukin 1995 and 1989), offering opportunities to observe and participate in efforts to develop music as a resource for urban regeneration.

One early example was City Beat, an ill-informed initiative designed to launch Liverpool City Council's Arts and Cultural Industries Strategy of 1987 and to capitalise on the city's commercial successes in popular music by establishing a council-run music management and production company. Criticised by individuals working in the local music industries (Cohen 1991), the initiative reflected the haphazard and uncoordinated nature of culture-led regeneration in the city (Parkinson and Bianchini 1996). Consequently, music business specialists and music researchers were recruited to report to the council and advise on music industry development. However, these were soon overtaken by the rise of professional consultants specialising in culture and creativity and seeking to act as mediators between local government and the cultural industries. As the city became increasingly dependent on European funding, music industry leaders and consultants sought to use this as an opportunity to develop new strategies and agencies for music development. There were short-lived and somewhat frustrated efforts to strengthen connections between music business, music education and training, and community music and music tourism, while an uneasy partnership emerged between the City Council and businesses promoting Beatles tourism.

The success of Liverpool's bid to become European Capital of Culture 2008 marked the arrival of a more coordinated approach to culture-led urban regeneration. Managed by the newly-established company, Culture Liverpool, a public-private sector collaboration, Liverpool's Capital of Culture celebrations provided a public platform for showcasing the transformation and renewal of the city, its cultural diversity, and the richness of its cultural "heritage". However, for many of those involved with the city's alternative music cultures, Capital of Culture was simply a mechanism for attracting commercial investment and intensifying a process of gentrification that had already led to the displacement of independent music businesses from particular areas of the city centre (Cohen 2007). It fuelled ongoing struggles between commercial property developers and music businesses, particularly independent live music venues, and it renewed efforts to give music businesses and communities a stronger voice in local and regional decision-making, and to create a new development strategy for music.

Charged with "cementing the city region's position as one of the world's music capitals"<sup>3</sup>, the Liverpool City Region Music Board (LCRMB) was established in 2017 as one of several city music boards created through partnership with UK Music, the umbrella body for the UK music industries. The board's mission was supported by two earlier, high-profile initiatives. First, there was the success of Liverpool's

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<sup>3</sup> <http://lcrmusicboard.co.uk>. Accessed 5 October 2023.

bid to become a UNESCO City of Music, one of 19 cities worldwide recognised by UNESCO for their music cultures. Submitted in 2015, the bid documented the musical diversity of Liverpool and its wealth of music venues and festivals, and set out proposals for new music initiatives. Secondly, in 2016 Culture Liverpool established a Beatles Legacy Group to improve the quality of local Beatles tourism. Together, these three initiatives (LCRMB, UNESCO City of Music, the Beatles Legacy Group) provided the city with a stronger infrastructure for music development, a process hampered by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Reflecting global or pan-European trends as well as local circumstances, these long-standing efforts to develop music as an official resource for urban regeneration have not always run smoothly or easily. Along the way, there have been opportunities missed as well as embraced, detours, and initiatives forgotten about or recycled. There have been power struggles and shifting alliances between policy-makers, music-makers, businesses and consultants. There have been disagreements about how the city's reputation for music should be negotiated and managed. At the heart of it all, there have been conflicts over the value of music for cities and how this should be measured, as well as the questions: whose music, whose city? Such questions recur here.

### **Turku: the cultural-historical and Finnish music historical approach**

Which city is the home of Finland's three founding music festivals, its most annoying hit parade stars, many of its alternative scenesters and its first ever raves? Why, Turku, of course, Finland's former capital and the renowned epicentre of its contemporary music scene. (Mattila 2011.)

The above quote – from a Finnish music journalist – encapsulates the ambiguous nature of Turku as a musical landscape. Although the former capital of Finland, Turku has been viewed in Finland as a place located between the West and the East, sharing cultural influences from both Sweden (to the West) and the rest of Finland (to the East), often struggling to accommodate these within what might be perceived as a parochial mental landscape. This struggle to accommodate Turku's identity within the broader context of Finnishness has always been a source of heated media debates and is still primarily an unresearched area of cultural history concerning the city's identity. Thus, as mentioned in the journalist's statement above, the cultural and historical argument concerning the history of Turku as Finland's music or

cultural capital is largely still unwritten.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, this section illustrates the peculiarity and importance of Turku by investigating the particular context of Turku as a music city, based on its cultural history within broader Finnish music history.

## **Between West and East**

Located on Finland's southwest coast, opposite Sweden, Turku provides a central point of access to Sweden and the wider Baltic Sea region. A visit to Turku, especially one that includes the Turku-Stockholm ferry ride (a scenic journey through a 20,000-island archipelago), gives to the visitor a clear sense of the economic importance of seafaring and maritime industries to the city itself and to the nearby shipbuilding town of Naantali. This town adds an essential heavy industrial context to the largely post-industrial region.

Founded in the thirteenth century, Turku is Finland's oldest city. Because of Sweden and Finland's shared history and Turku's place as the centre of a province of the Kingdom of Sweden (Lewis 2005: 25–27, 115–118), reflecting on Turku draws one into comparing Turku with Finland's other regional centres. At the end of the Middle Ages, life in Turku resembled “the Swedish model more than the eastern Finnish districts [...] (and could be) contrasted to the semi-nomadic life' found in eastern Finland (Lewis 2005: 27). When compared to the Finnish capital, Helsinki, the historical depth of Turku's culture becomes apparent: “where Helsinki was taking its first hesitant steps as a cultural city in the 1810s and 1820s, Turku could point to 600 years of experience at the job” (Karttunen 1996: 2). Therefore, the city's road to recovery from the trauma of losing its capital status to Helsinki in 1812 has been long and painful.

In this connection, the birth of the idea of a civilised and semi-civilised Finland is related to the cultural and historical supremacy of the Swedish Empire, which initially established the historical way of constructing the concept and meaning of Turku, especially as a cultural and music city (Lewis 2005: 115–8; Hirn 1997). The idea of Turku as a cultural city introduced a power-bloc model wherein – as the former historical capital of Finland – it suffered from the cultural trauma of relinquishing

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4 Some of this work was done when Turku was chosen as the cultural capital of Europe for the year 2011 (see Sutinen 2011) and some of the cultural capital productions, e.g., rock-opera based on The Great Fire of Turku, were connected to the history of Turku. However, this did not include a concerted, historical analysis of Turku identity, which is still lacking today.



this status to Helsinki after Finland was annexed by the Russian Empire during the era of the Napoleonic wars. Therefore, the Turku mentality might be considered as defined by a specific regional parochialism related to its historical experience. This state of mind, connected to history, heritage, and the golden era when Turku was an essential part of the Swedish Empire and the Hanseatic League, is also a feature of Turku's self-identity as Finland's principal bilingual city.

The geopolitical reality of Finland has often been encapsulated as emphasizing a tension between modernization and the semi-civilised and culturally inexperienced primeval Nordic atmosphere (Kallioniemi 2020: 100–1). However, Nordicness and Nordic ideals of cultural harmonization can be utterly different in Turku when compared to some other regions of Finland: the rhetoric of the North-South and West-East divide puts Turku into a particular cultural imaginary, where Finnish experiences under the rule of western and eastern empires work to Turku's disadvantage in the context of national history. This is partly a populist imaginary, but also a factual tradition, related to the essentially unresearched oral and media sources, which have produced various discourses about Turku. As a result, a specific mental divide is evident between the Turku region and some other parts of Finland, especially those to the East.

## **Turku as historical music city – a brief overview**

Turku's cultural character is ostensibly defined by its two major medieval landmarks, its cathedral and its castle. These landmarks are cultural symbols, representing both Turku's historical connections and a certain Turku parochialism. This parochialism could also be defined in connection to life in Turku during both the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, under Swedish and Russian rule, and the struggle to find a role between these dominating imperial cultures (Lewis 2005: 28–30). Under Swedish rule, the court in Turku Castle and Turku Cathedral, with their services and festivities, were essential places for practising music, extended by the foundation of the Royal Academy of Turku (1640) with its orchestral activities (Academic Capella 1747–1868). All of this paved the way for later musical hobbyism within Turku's middle classes. Following the era of the Swedish Empire and Napoleonic wars, such hobbyism formed an essential part of musical life in Turku, as the city quickly revived its cultural and musical activities. Turku's place as the most prestigious music city in Finland (along with Vyborg in the eastern Karelian region) was defined by its bourgeois class, which emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Dahlström & Salmenhaara 1996: 145–50, 187–246).

This process was partly interrupted by The Great Fire of Turku in 1827, which destroyed a significant part of the Swedish cultural legacy and music-making materials, and moved the university, along with its professors and students, to Helsinki. This academic class formed the elite of Turku society with regard to its interest in memberships of music associations, student choirs and orchestral activities (Dahlström & Salmenhaara 1996: 319–23). The first Finnish music society, Turun Soitannollinen Seura (Turku Musical Society), was founded in Turku in 1790 and soon began to arrange concerts in conjunction with its orchestra. However, because of The Great Fire of Turku in 1827, the association postponed its activities until 1868, when it provided the basis for the formation of Turku's first professional orchestra, officially recognised as the backbone of Turku City Orchestra in 1927. The Orchestra's presence led to the birth of the Turku International Music Festival (1960), the first genuine pop/rock festival organised by the Society in Finland, Ruisrock (1970) and the contemporary Turku Philharmonic Orchestra, which originated from the Turku Musical Society's orchestra. Thus, Turku's longstanding and vibrant music-making tradition can be traced as far back as the end of Swedish rule in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and can be recognised as the bedrock for the city's thriving musical culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the domains of both popular and classical music.

Several books concentrating on the popular music heritage activities of Finnish cities have been published over the past few decades (e.g. Grönholm & Kärki 2017; Vienonen & Lähteenmäki 2009; Järvelä 1997), including accounts of musical associations, local festivals, subcultures, oral testimonies of local musicians, music fandom, and entrepreneurialism. Although providing exciting overviews of the role of popular music activities in the post-war industrial and urban development of Finland, these books quite often tend to overlook the more extensive musical activities of Finnish cities, including art, classical and folk music, as well as the larger historical context and specific cultural-historical conditions briefly described above. Following both Ruth Finnegan's musical pathways argument (1989) and Chris Anderton's concept of cyclic places (2007), the musical city carries a hidden and cyclical history of diverse music-making and activities related to each city's youth and music-cultural identity, both high- and lowbrow, historical and contemporary.

In the case of Turku as a (historical) music city, these arguments can be seen to be recognised by the city's heritage authorities. Examples include the urban and extra-urban locations of Turku's summer rock festivals, its dance pavilions and orchestras, exceptional Ruissalo Island national park, post-industrial harbour and riverside, and the park area around Turku castle. By combining shades of Finland's primeval and industrial experiences, these spaces can provide spaces for different festivals and musical settings, all part of the unique Turku music experience.

## **Turku as the pop city: festivals, alternative scenes and international recognition**

Turku as a musical place, therefore, seems to follow a certain logic, becoming elusive, vague and all-embracing (Negus 1992: 180–3). It encapsulates the Turku experience of being between East and West, and blurs the pop imaginary’s demarcation lines between past and present, and between urban and rural.

Such lines of demarcation have also proven significant, since Turku’s pop music has had difficulties establishing itself within Finland’s national pop music canon and media. Here a comparison can be drawn, most notably, with Tampere in the centre of Finland. Tampere was the first industrial city in Finland – modelled after industrial Manchester. Its musicians and rock media created the term *Manse-rock*<sup>5</sup>, which since the 1980s has been embodied by the term “Red Ochre Rock”.<sup>6</sup> This term has offered one way to describe and understand particular indigenous Finnish rock through urban and semi-urban life: an experience significantly related to Finland’s post-war experience (Lewis 2005: 40–42), the country’s rather late industrialisation (which started in the 1950s) and a long-standing nostalgic attachment to agrarian allusions and simple semi-civilised rural ways of life.

Within the era of rock music, Turku’s historical and cultural heritage seems to have escaped from this sort of post-war experience and from concepts such as Red Ochre Rock. This distinction becomes clear when Turku is compared to Tampere and also to Pori – another industrial city on Finland’s western coast – also possessing a harbour and seafaring tradition, but with a rough working-class industrial image. Thus, Pori was nicknamed the “Liverpool of the Northern Baltic Sea” (Bruun et al. 1998) in the 1980s and produced an exciting pop music hybrid of Red Ochre Rock and Anglo-influences. On the other hand, with its verbally exaggerated working-class identity, Tampere gained its reputation as the first national rock scene in Finland. “Add to that the smallness and insignificance of the Swedish-speaking (upper class) minority... you start to get the idea how blue-collar and typically down-to-earth-Finnish our rock is, though several of its main characters turn out to be rebellious intellectuals under the surface” (Niemi 1998: 27, see also Botta 2020). None of these characteristics can be attached to Turku.

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5 Tampere is nicknamed “Manse” after Manchester.

6 In the early 1990s, the Dutch sociologist Louis van Elderen defined the core of Finnish national popular music: old-fashioned mainstream popular music (humppa, waltz, tango), schlager or evergreen materials, and neo-folk music, all of them influencing *Suomi Rock*, which he called “Red Ochre rock”, referring to the red paint used on the wooden cottages dotted around the Finnish countryside (van Elderen 1994: 53–5). See also Skaniakos 2010.

Indeed, the long line of Turku parochialism and its historical bourgeois experience situates its post-war reaction to rock and youth cultures (Laiho & Andersson 2012) – often defined through the post-war working-class experience – in a different context. When Turku is listed as one of the first crucial places in Finland for the new alternative (youth) culture of the late 1960s (Komulainen & Leppänen 2009), with the Turku underground movement, the launch of the Ruisrock music festival (Into et al 1995), and the range of progressive rock bands originating in the city (Pitkälä 2017: 298–300). All this also tells us how the Turku youth culture had specific musical and cultural aspirations connected to the progressive and countercultural values of the late 1960s and early 1970s. These ideas were often accommodated within a more extended Turku identity and mainstream cultural history. This identity was expressed, for example, by local underground poet Jarkko Laine, who wrote about the unique Turku experience and state of mind, as opposed to that of other Finnish regions, emphasising how Turku respects its traditions (Savolainen 2021: i).

Local student unions, alternative scenes, event organising and innovative cooperation between different individual entrepreneurs and local industry workers (record store owners and labels like Svart and Solina Records), clubs and venues have continued the grassroots do-it-yourself activity during 1980s and 1990s. This activity has also created medium and small-sized city music festivals, such as the Laituri, Koneisto, H2Ö and Kesärauha, concentrating on alternative and electronic music (in the case of Koneisto, H2Ö and Kesärauha, also targeted at an international audience) and more mainstream rock- and popular music style (Laituri, targeted at a national audience). Even smaller scale festivals have emerged, such as Turku Luostarinmäki Outdoor Museum folk-festival and various jazz festivals, which also connect the nearby archipelago and coastline (e.g. Archipelago Sea Jazz). In addition to this, Turku is often fondly remembered for organising the first Finnish techno-raves (Grönholm 2017: 199–222). Given the bilingual areas surrounding Turku, especially around the coast and archipelago, the city is also vital to the music-making industry of Finland's Swedish-speaking minority (Brusila 2021).

The musical past of Turku was deservedly recognised in 2011, when Turku was selected as the European Capital of Culture. The award created new opportunities for using locations and spaces in Turku for music activities. For example, Ruissalo nature park and the maritime industry environment were quickly adopted to serve as new festival spaces, while the city's Aura river environment went through rapid regeneration, while also providing a venue for a fantastic variety of popular music genres (Käpylä 2018; Grönholm & Kärki 2017). Therefore, it could be argued that Turku's marginal industrial history and limited industrial proletariat were compensated for by the speed with which it redefined itself as a city of diverse (popular) music activities.

Because of the challenges involved in producing distinctive, national stars of Finnish popular music before the early 1980s (Grönholm & Kärki 2017: 12), Turku became Finland's festival city, attracting national interest. The traditional communal entrepreneurial spirit of Turku, connected to the city's musical and cultural heritage, reawakened the city's music subcultures, scenes and entrepreneurs "to look for another chord" (Grönholm & Kärki 2017), while also positioned them as competitors in the international music scene. Some of the first post-Cold War Finnish musical exports (e.g. Darude, Bomfunk MCs) were Turku residents. The founding member and singer of the Britpop-style pop group The Crash, Teemu Brunila, began to work as an independent songwriter following the band's demise, eventually working for Kylie Minogue, Jason Derulo and David Guetta (Onninen 2020). In the virtual and Covid-19 lockdown world, Brunila's Turku home studio has functioned as a centre for international music cooperation. This case illustrates how Turku's local music culture has connected itself to the global music industries in the digital era.

## **Glasgow: A political picture**

In common with most Popular Music Studies scholars (and, indeed, musicians), I started out as a fan. From an early age, I *loved* pop music and it was a constant companion. In retrospect, without my realising it, pop was soon also shaping my politics – a growing interest that was to become another obsession. So, when I eventually came to study popular music, it was from the perspective of a political activist. Of course, I loved pop in and of itself, but I particularly liked it when it served what I deemed to be worthy causes. As time went on, I realised that in common with all artistic forms, popular music also had its *own* politics. That fascinated me and ultimately became the focus of my academic work.

Here I reflect on what a political approach to the study of popular music's local politics might entail through an examination of work undertaken in Glasgow, where I was based for eighteen years. Glasgow is located on Scotland's west coast and is the country's largest city, with a population of around 600,000.<sup>7</sup> Initially built on heavy industry, including shipbuilding and mining, the city's economy is now largely based on the service sector. Its famous musicians include Franz Ferdinand, Snow Patrol, Texas and Simple Minds.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.ukpopulation.org/glasgow-population](http://www.ukpopulation.org/glasgow-population). Accessed 13 March 2023.

## Pop, politics and locality

One characteristic of academic (and other forms of) endeavour is that in choosing one approach, we are, by definition, excluding others. My own approach meant that while I loved many popular music texts, my work has largely concentrated on the *contexts*. Such an orientation has meant that I have rarely done much work on “the work itself” and do not consider myself to be a musicologist. Rather, my work was generally concerned with *the politics of music making*. So, when it came to examining music in Glasgow, I was less concerned with whether there was such a thing as a “Glasgow sound”, than with what the material conditions of making music in Glasgow were (Homan et al 2015). My concern with politics chimed with authors such as Lukes (1974) wherein power – its definition, the struggles for it and the uses to which it is put – emerges as a key concern.

If, as I suggest, thinking about politics necessitates a consideration of power, then one way in which power is exercised is via policies. I therefore soon became concerned with *music policy*, which swiftly led to a growing interest in live music. This began with my being commissioned to co-research and write a report on the state of “the music industry in Scotland” (Williamson et al 2003). At this point, it was generally assumed that the term “the music industry” referred to the recording industry and, in particular, the major record companies. However, our research found that while such companies were important as a conduit via which Scottish acts could “make it”, their day to day machinations were of less concern to the majority of Scottish musicians than was live music.

In part, this was due to Scotland’s political location as part of the UK, one effect of which was that, unlike many other small nations, Scotland has never seen significant investment by the major record companies. None of these has ever maintained an office within the country, preferring instead to be London-based. In addition, under Scotland’s current political arrangement of “devolved” power within the UK, political responsibility for key areas within the economics popular music, such as copyright and broadcasting, remains with the UK parliament in London (Cloonan 2007). So in designing policy for Scotland’s musicians, the key section to investigate was live music, with its politics – and exercises of power – being often decidedly local.

For someone interested in the politics of music, an orientation towards live music – rather than the record industry, which had previously dominated academic studies (c/f Negus 1999; 1992), had a number of implications. As I have noted elsewhere (Cloonan 2011), the provision of live music raises a number of concerns which are absent within recorded music, where the main issues concern the conditions under which musicians are contracted to record companies (Barr 2016) and the period

for which sound recordings remain in copyright (Harkins 2012). Within live music, the presence of audiences in dedicated spaces has important implications, something that the Covid-19 pandemic made depressingly stark. A live music event will be covered by regulations in areas such as noise levels, capacity limits, the health and safety of both workers and audience members, the payment of compensation to songwriters for the use of their songs and restrictions on venue opening times. Especially important for the commercial success of events are laws concerning the sale of alcohol. In recent years, politically charged issues such as the ownership of major promotions companies (Competition Commission 2009) and the reselling of tickets (Behr and Cloonan 2020) have also aroused both governmental and academic interest. In short, the provision of live music involves many more power relationships – and is thus more inherently political – than the making of recorded music (Cloonan 2011).

Such things became apparent to me while undertaking work on the history of the UK's live music industry. This research coincided with a time when the recording industry was in some decline following the advent of the digital era and was being surpassed in value by the live sector. The project was funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council and eventually became the History of Live Music in the UK<sup>8</sup> resulting in, amongst other things, a three-part history (Frith et al 2021; 2020; 2013) and an online portal and consultancy, Live Music Exchange ([www.livemusicexchange.org](http://www.livemusicexchange.org)).

Our 2003 report on “the music industry in Scotland” (Willamson et al 2003) inevitably produced a wealth of information about Glasgow – the home to the Scottish music industries' major organisations. Meanwhile, the politics of local music were becoming increasingly commented upon and there are senses in which, as a stateless nation, Scotland is a locality. My orientation also became more “local” as my work on music policy in Scotland (Cloonan 2007) included work on Glasgow (Homan et al 2015). So, when I imagined Glasgow as a musical city, I thought of its local politics – that is, of the power relations within the city's musical environment. The implications of this approach can be illustrated by two case studies.

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<sup>8</sup> [www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/research/music/projectsandnetworks/livemusicproject](http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/research/music/projectsandnetworks/livemusicproject). Accessed 5 October 2023.

## Glasgow UNESCO City of Music (GUCM)

Glasgow has been at the forefront of cities which are rebranding themselves through (popular) culture. An iconic starting point in this development was the award to the city of European City of Culture status in 1990. While the seeds for this development were planted much earlier (Homan et al 2015), henceforth the city became finely attuned to marketing itself as a tourist and residential destination. While music was rarely the focal point for this development, it occasionally played an important role. For example, large amounts of public money have been used in developing venues such as the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre (1985), Royal Concert Hall (1990) and the SSE Hydro (2013) as attractions to draw visitors to the city. The first of these was often used to host concerts and the latter two were specifically designed to do so.

Meanwhile, the commercial success of a number of Glasgow's popular musicians such as Franz Ferdinand, Snow Patrol and Travis in the early 2000s led to *Time* magazine comparing the city to Liverpool and Detroit in their heydays (Porter 2004) and its music scene being lauded as "the hottest in the UK" (McCracken 2004). In short, Glasgow was home to commercially successful artists and a public sector keen to use music to brand the city. These came together in 2006 via the bid for Glasgow to be designated as a UNESCO City of Music. The politics in this case were resolutely top down. A team was assembled by the city's elites that sought to get support for the bid. The application was drawn up by the composer Svend Brown, who reported to a five-person management group and to a 29-person Steering Committee.<sup>9</sup> The latter included one popular musician (Franz Ferdinand's Alex Kapranos), one pop concert promoter (Geoff Ellis of DF Concerts, Scotland's largest promoter) and one jazz musician (Tommy Smith). Their role was as supporters, whose high public profiles helped to give this top-down bid wider credence. Perhaps more importantly the city's Provost, Scotland's First Minister and the UK's Prime Minister all provided supporting statements. The bid was successful and Glasgow duly became a UNESCO City of Music – GUCM.

One immediate problem was that while the award was partly a recognition of the achievements of the city's popular musicians, it did little or nothing to further empower them. The politics here was that of exclusion, via a cultural elite seizing an opportunity, using the city's reputation for popular music to ensure a successful bid, but then ultimately delivering little to popular musicians working in the city. In effect, popular music had empowered an elite to apply for an award to boost civic

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<sup>9</sup> A full list is supplied in GUCM 2008: 5.



pride. To an extent, GUCM was unlucky here since, soon after it was formed, the global financial crisis struck and cutbacks to local government funding soon followed. The full time Director who was appointed, Louise Mitchell, was dismissed and replaced on a part-time basis by Brown. Subsequently GUCM did little to seriously engage with the city's popular musicians on a long term basis and at the time of writing it remains largely moribund, lacking even its own website. This was a top-down initiative that ultimately failed. The politics here were those of using the power of popular music to brand Glasgow as “cool”, while doing little to address the everyday concerns of the city's popular music practitioners. Meanwhile, a more bottom-up approach also had its own politics.

## **A census**

In March 2017, I was part of a team which undertook the UK's first live music census (Webster et al 2018). This was a mixture of online surveys of musicians, venues, promoters and fans, combined with snapshot censuses carried out over a 24 hour period in three case study cities of Glasgow, Newcastle and Oxford. The main findings were that live music has significant economic and cultural value, that smaller venues are a vital part of the live music ecology, and that, despite all this, live music is also facing a number of problems – particularly at its lower end.

Some of the broader politics of this project are dealt with elsewhere (Cloonan 2020), but here I focus on developments in Glasgow. Here, we identified over 80 live music events across a wide range of genres scheduled for our case study night of Thursday 9 March 2017, when we got volunteers to attend 50 of these events and collect various details. I attended 11 separate events covering genres such as jazz, EDM, musical theatre and world music. Ultimately, Glasgow provided more information than the other cities in the project, and in part that was because two of us involved in Glasgow were well known within the lower echelons of the city's music world and could gain access in ways that might otherwise have been more difficult. In effect, we tried to use the little power we had. Meanwhile our methodology allowed us to gather information on local issues in participant cities. In the case of Glasgow we found that:

36% of respondents to the online venue survey [...] said that the increasingly competitive environment between venues and promoters had an extreme, strong or moderate negative impact on their live music events over the past 12 months [...] 34 % cited increased business rates, 31 % cited the increased

size/number of music festivals, and 29 % said that diminishing audiences have negatively impacted on their events in the past 12 months (Webster et al 2018: 181).

We had also produced a toolkit based on that methodology, which is now freely available on the project website for use by any person or organisation interested in assessing the value of live music in their location ([www.uklivemusiccensus.org](http://www.uklivemusiccensus.org)). The Census was supported by a range of music industries organisations, some of which joined in as partners on the project. We also made recommendations that there be a regular UK-wide census and local censuses (Webster et al 2018). Our report provided great insight into the political economy of live music in the UK in general and into our case study cities in particular. However we lacked the power in terms of resources to pursue the outcomes in and beyond Glasgow and ultimately largely left it for others to pick up the mantle. The politics here consisted of providing bullets, which we hoped others would fire. Unfortunately the onset of Covid-19 made that job a lot harder.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have examined three different ways of thinking about the Music City: anthropologically, as cultural history and via politics. We have highlighted the various ways in which we approach the Music City as researchers and have outlined the implications of our different emphases. Studying Liverpool's music anthropologically meant digging below the surface of being The Beatles' city to examine the lives and perspectives of local music makers and activists. Liverpool's music policy initiatives, along with the interplay between local music sounds and histories, showed that the city, its boundaries, and its musical character cannot be taken for granted. Rather, exploring Liverpool anthropologically as a music city has meant attending to different, situated ways in which the city is engaged with, experienced and imagined, to the interests and inequalities involved in this process and what is at stake, and to the interrelationship between its personal, political, cultural and socio-economic circumstances. Consequently, Cohen's argument is for an ethnographic and anthropological approach to the Music City that involves observing and participating in music practices, and learning about the perspectives and experiences of those involved. This approach is important for challenging assumptions, generalisations, stereotypes, and theories about music cities that are not grounded in the realities and complexities of music practice. Moreover, it positions human agency at the heart of the musical city, considering the situations and circumstances that enable and constrain people's active engagement with music, and the multiple

relations and influences this brings into play. Through detailed examination of, and comparison between, particular music practices, perspectives and experiences, it also enables the generation of more general insights into the relationship between music and the city, and why it matters.

Studying Turku's music as cultural history involved locating the city within both its historical, geographical and imaginary spaces and concluding that it is necessary to bring that history up to date. The pioneering role of Turku as a Finnish Music City is appropriately seen as a continuum of Turku's importance as a cultural port, introducing international influences to Finland. This wider historical context is the particular advantage and contribution of a cultural historical approach to the study of the music city. One of the traditional advantages of cultural history has been that it supports a combination of different approaches to historical study and to the examination of cultural traditions and the histories of mentalities. In the case of Turku, adding music and music history to this study enriches the historical narrative of Turku and encompasses the continuum of events within the Turku story, especially when related to the arts and Turku parochialism.

According to both Finnegan's and Anderton's arguments, cited in this paper, the Music City carries a hidden and cyclical history of various music-making activities – related to both high and low, historical and contemporary – which can be revealed using a cultural historical approach. Thus, research can be targeted on phenomena where it creates new knowledge by comparing cultural similarities and cultural differences across the national milieu and in a transnational context.

This transnational context became strikingly evident, when in common with all cities worldwide, the Covid-19 crisis hit Turku's live music spaces and performance infrastructure hard. Prior to this, Turku's urban regeneration processes – especially the massive works undertaken to reconstruct Turku's central Market Square area and its connecting streets – had not always worked to the benefit of live music activities. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, many Turku music clubs were forced to close their doors, primarily because of the rising rents and changing consumption habits among young people. Thus, the aforementioned building of new spaces and places in the city, dictated by local, mainstream economic factors, has also greatly marginalised alternative live music and cultural spaces within the city centre. In this case, urban regeneration – maybe not the most appropriate term to be used in the case of a small city like Turku – is and also was the unfortunate side-effect of becoming a Cultural Capital.

Light appeared at the end of the tunnel, however, in the summer of 2021, with a spirit of future innovation manifested around Turku's most famous historical landmarks.

The Cathedral Square area was converted into a beer garden with intimate and alternative live music sites, while Turku Castle Park hosted the alternative music festival Kesärauha. Performances in the church's park, and at festivities held at Turku Castle represent Turku's earliest and most significant music-making heritage. The idea of using these places as venues for live music, therefore, paid a marvelous testimony to Turku's combining of its ancient and modern identities, and showed a way to escape the rigours of the Covid-19 lockdown. In effect, cultural history was being both recognised and celebrated.

Tracing Glasgow's music via politics places an emphasis on power. For Cloonan what is important in each of the local examples here was to identify the key protagonists and power relationships. In each case, the *politics* – i.e. the ever-changing power relationships – was key. So while the *texts* of popular music remain thrilling and life affirming, they also take place within *contexts* where relations of power must be considered. The politics of popular music emerge when the power relations in music-making, staging, disseminating and rewarding are examined. These originate – and often remain – at a local level. Pop can both give and take politically and *how* this is done is the key to understanding the production of the texts that we love so much. In the case of GUCM, popular music's texts were used to obtain the award, in the census those conducting it lacked the power to move things on. Neither the GUCM nor the census led to the empowerment of local musicians.

In all of this, we are not suggesting a hierarchy of approaches, but we *are* arguing that the different paths we adopt have implications for our research. For example, what if one adopted a political approach to Liverpool, an anthropological approach to Turku, and a cultural history approach to Glasgow? What would the implications be? We invite readers and future researchers to draw their own conclusions about this.

We are also aware that a holistic approach to the Music City and musical life within a city could incorporate all our methods (and more), but are also mindful that focus is often necessary and that more holistic approaches necessitate more time and resources. We have avoided justifying our research practices here and will leave such justifications for another day. For now, we hope that both readers and researchers will continue to analyse the Music City, music and its relation to the city more broadly, and that the remarks we have made here give them some food for thought when they come to undertake such tasks. How we understand the differences between cities' musical outputs and scenes depends as much on our emphasis as it does on their content. In the term "Music City", Music comes first. Nevertheless, in *researching* the Music City, how we conceive of the City takes primacy and we trust that the three different emphases on display here provide some insight into why this is the case.

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