Report on the Social and Cultural Importance of Remote and Peripheral Airports

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Report on the Social and Cultural Importance of Remote and Peripheral Airports

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of qualitative research conducted as Activity 7.1 within Work Package 7 of the SPARA 2020 project. It specifically explores the social and cultural importance of remote and peripheral airports, the effects of losing a local airport on a community, and the barriers which may exclude certain members of the community from using the airport.

The research consisted of five case studies conducted in communities in the Northern Periphery region. Of these five case studies, four were conducted in operational airports: Kirkwall and Benbecula Airports, Scotland; Donegal Airport, Ireland; and Sundsvall-Timrå Airport, Sweden. The other took place on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, where scheduled air services ceased in 1988.

Exhibitions of old and contemporary photographs of the local airports were held in the five communities. Researchers engaged with the individuals viewing the photos, prompting them to share their memories and experiences of using their local airport. These exhibitions were supplemented by focus groups and by face-to-face and telephone interviews. Overall, the researchers spoke to 575 individuals during the five case studies.

The main themes emerging from these discussions were around: the impact of local history and heritage; the airport as a local employer; the airport's serendipitous social function; lifeline services; non-aeronautical uses of airport terminals; and barriers to use of the airport.

Throughout the case studies, participants spoke knowledgably about the history and development of their local airport, and their accounts were intertwined with personal memories of airports and of their air travel experiences. These stories appeared to invoke a sense of pride in, and ownership of, their local airport, making it part of local identity.

The four operational airports were viewed as important employers within the communities they serve, with several examples of long-serving staff members and of generations of the same families being employed by the local airport. In the close-knit communities served by Benbecula, Donegal and Kirkwall Airports, airport staff are often personal friends or acquaintances of airport users, or have at least come to know regular passengers. This appeared to contribute to these airports being described as having "friendly" or "family" atmospheres.

Benbecula, Donegal and Kirkwall Airports were also viewed as serendipitous meeting places, where airport users regularly bump into friends and acquaintances from the local community and exchange news and gossip. The comfortable surroundings and relaxed atmosphere in these airports appeared to facilitate and prolong these social exchanges. Such social encounters were rare in Sundsvall-Timrå Airport, where the majority of passengers are business users.

Respondents in Benbecula, Donegal and Kirkwall also spoke of the importance of their local airport in providing 'lifeline' services, particularly in terms of patient travel to specialist medical facilities. Participants also mentioned the role of the airport in attracting tourists to the area, and in connecting remote communities to the outside world. At Sundsvall-Timrå, the importance of the airport in sustaining the presence of businesses in the region was emphasised.

Heightened security now increasingly challenges the non-aeronautical use of airport spaces, but several good practice examples were found in the case studies, including aviation festivals, charity fun runs and sky dives, and art and photography exhibitions. The cafés/restaurants in the four airports are used frequently by non-passengers, and are seen as social spaces in their own right. While some respondents believed there was additional scope for exhibitions and performances in their local airport, others struggled to perceive the terminals as arts venues. A common theme throughout all four airports was that additional, non-aeronautical uses of the terminals were welcome, but there was uncertainty as to who could (or should) take responsibility for their organisation.

The Isle of Skye was included in this research as a case study example of a community which had lost its airport in the last 30 years. Participants spoke fondly of their memories of using the airport, and of the impact of resuming scheduled services. While some felt that resuming services would be beneficial for the community, others feared the community did not have the capacity to deal with an influx of incomers and tourists or that the airport would only benefit a small, wealthy section of the community.

Several actual or perceived barriers that might prevent or inhibit air travel by particular sections of the community were reported by participants. These included: the financial cost of air travel; the ready availability of other forms of public transport; cuts and changes to scheduled air passenger services; cancellations, delays and disruptions to air services; car parking capacities and charges at the airports; a lack of provision of public transport connections to/from the airports; facilities and services for people with a disability; and poor information provision and communication by the airports.

The report concludes that the remote and peripheral airports in the study do generate social and cultural value for the communities they serve, generating benefits that are not usually reflected in conventional economic analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of airports in the EU are small regional airports serving fewer than 1 million passengers per year and only 58% of European airports are profit-making (European Commission, 2014), yet they play an important social role for the communities which they serve. These small, and often remote, airports provide jobs in areas where sources of employment might be limited, they underpin the wider economic activity of peripheral regions, and they provide vital lifeline air services.[1]

In addition to the wider economic importance, airport terminals can be considered valuable social arenas, where the inhabitants of sparsely populated areas can meet up purposely or serendipitously (thus reinforcing local social networks and social capital). The buildings themselves are likely to have valuable spaces which are underutilised outside airport hours and which have the potential to be put to alternative use.

These airports are also likely to have a role in maintaining cultural identity and sense of place. The ways in which local people inhabit and move through their local airport, and the way that standard airport procedures are mediated by local norms, mean that the social practices and routines that characterise people's use of airports are likely to be ritualistic, nuanced and unique to the community in question. They also can be considered cultural artefacts in themselves, with rich history sometimes stretching back to wartime origins. They have had to closely align with the development needs of their local communities in a number of ways, most notably when attracting business or encouraging tourism.

Thus, the economic, social and cultural significance of remote airports for their hinterland regions is likely to be proportionally greater than larger hub airports and these wider benefits are not usually reflected in conventional economic analysis. For the purposes of this research, cultural factors were considered to be values, norms and beliefs internalised by people who are members of a particular culture or community; and social factors include broader elements which form the structure of societal life, such as family, education, politics, religion and economics.

While some communities have built up a historic relationship with their local airport (with the airport long established in the collective consciousness), other communities have had to cope with losing theirs. Some remote regions have had the opportunity to embrace and benefit from (and deal with the unintended consequences wrought by) a new airport. It is therefore equally important to understand what the social, cultural and economic implications of airports closing or opening are on a local community.

There are, of course, communities within communities, and some social or minority groups might be excluded (relatively), or choose to exclude themselves, from engaging in air travel or taking advantage of the resources and social spaces available at airports. The relationship between minority groups, aviation and air travel needs to be better understood.

In order to respond to some of these questions, qualitative research was conducted as part of Activity 7.1 within Work Package 7 of the SPARA project. This report details work undertaken by a Robert Gordon University research team, who build upon previous analogous research exploring the social and cultural importance of main streets in island communities in Orkney, Scotland.

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[1]There appears to be no universally accepted definition of 'lifeline' air services (see Braathen, 2011; RP Erickson & Associates, 2015). However, the UK Government (2010), in describing Orkney's lifeline air services, defines these as services where there is "no rapid alternative means of transport...for the services (financial, commercial, professional, advisory, health, etc.) which cannot be provided locally and which are essential for the maintenance of the economic and social fabric of the islands".

The research team was tasked with conducting research in five communities in the Northern Periphery region. Of these five case studies, three communities have had a long established airport; one community has benefited from the opening of an airport in the last 30 years; while one community has lost its airport within the last 30 years. With these criteria in mind, photo exhibitions took place in the following five locations, and on the dates indicated:

- Kirkwall Airport, Scotland (10/10/15 – 17/10/15) Orkney's main civil airport since 1948.

- Donegal Airport, Ireland (11/4/16 – 17/4/16) Commenced passenger services in 1986.

- Sundsvall-Timrå Airport, Sweden (17/5/16 – 24/5/16) Passenger services began in 1945.

- Isle of Skye, Scotland (29/8/16 – 3/9/16) Scheduled air services to Skye ceased in 1988.

- Benbecula Airport, Scotland (4/10/16 – 8/10/16) First saw scheduled services in 1936.

The exhibitions consisted of old and contemporary photographs of the local airport. The images were of a variety of subjects, including: aircraft; passengers; airport staff; terminal buildings; celebrity and VIP visitors; special events taking place at the airport; and airline timetables. The images were obtained from a range of sources, including: local libraries, museums and archives; the airports' own collections; local aviation enthusiasts; and various aviation and historical websites.

Four of the photo exhibitions were held in the local airport terminal; while the fifth exhibition on Skye ran for three days each in Broadford Village Hall and Portree Community Library as there are currently no scheduled passenger services from the local airport.

Researchers engaged with the individuals viewing the photos, prompting them to relate their memories and stories of using their local airport. These individuals were journey makers with time on their hands, non-travellers who were using the airport facilities for social purposes, and airport staff during down time (see *Figure 1*). The researchers wrote notes on these discussions immediately afterwards, or, on occasions, recruited exhibition visitors for subsequent, more detailed interviews.

Figure 1: Photo exhibition at Kirkwall Airport

Focus groups involving representatives of local community groups (e.g., business associations, tourism groups, third sector organisations) were also conducted for the first research case study. These produced valuable data, but attendance numbers were low. With this in mind, in the other four locations the researchers instead arranged face-to-face or telephone interviews wherever possible.

Additionally, the research team engaged the five communities on social media. A Facebook page[2] was created, on which some of the exhibition images were posted. Although this page was used largely as a way of attracting visitors to the exhibitions, online users were also invited to post stories and memories of their local airport.

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[2] At https://www.facebook.com/valuesmallairports/

A summary of the engagement with the participants is shown below.

Table 1: Number of participants in the Activity 7.1 case studies			
Airport/Community	**People engaged at photo exhibitions**	**Interviewees**	**Focus group participants**	**Totals**
Kirkwall Airport	108	5	5	118
Donegal Airport	121	21	-	142
Sundsvall-Timrå Airport	138	2	-	140
Isle of Skye	75	3	-	78
Benbecula Airport	96	1	-	97
Totals	538	32	5	575

The main themes emerging from these discussions were around: the impact of history and heritage; the airport as a local employer; the serendipitous social function; lifeline services; non-aeronautical uses; and barriers to use of the airport. These themes will be explored in more detail throughout this report, and will underpin the development of bespoke stakeholder and public engagement strategies that will form Activity 7.2 in Work Package 7.

THE CASE STUDIES

This section of the report contains brief profiles of the five airports and/or communities studied, so that these might be put into some historical and local perspective. Latest passenger figures[3] for the operating airports are included in the table below.

Table 2: Passenger figures for the four operational case study airports			
Kirkwall Airport *(2015-16)*	**Donegal Airport** *(2015)*	**Sundsvall-Timrå Airport** *(2015)*	**Benbecula Airport** *(2015-16)*
177,755	36,552	271,461	33,938

Kirkwall Airport, Scotland

Kirkwall is the largest town and administrative centre of Orkney, a group of 70 islands (22 of which are inhabited) off the north-east tip of the Scottish mainland. Kirkwall has a long aviation history, and in many respects the origins of Kirkwall Airport lie with the exploits of Captain Ernest Edmund 'Ted' Fresson (1891-1963), who is widely regarded as the father of civil aviation in Orkney. A former pilot in the Royal Flying Corps during WWI, Fresson toured Britain in the late 1920s and early 1930s giving aerobatic displays and providing five-minute 'joy rides' for thousands of paying customers. During one tour to the north of Scotland, Fresson saw an opportunity to begin scheduled air services between Orkney and the Scottish mainland, and in 1933 formed his own airline, Highland Airways Ltd. That same year saw the inauguration of Fresson's Inverness to Kirkwall passenger service, and he was also awarded a contract to carry The Scotsman newspaper on these flights. In 1934, Fresson launched an Aberdeen to Kirkwall service, and started a daily inter-island service in Orkney, calling on demand at Stronsay, Sanday, Westray and North Ronaldsay. In 1934, Highland Airways was also granted the UK's first official domestic air mail contract, to carry mail on the Inverness-Kirkwall service; and was contracted by Orkney County Council to operate the first official air ambulance flights in the Northern Isles.

Highland Airways operated out of Wideford Aerodrome, two miles south-east of Kirkwall. Wideford overlooked the site of the current Kirkwall Airport, at Grimsetter (Norse for Grim's 'dwelling place' or 'homestead'), which was originally a WWII military airfield. Built by the Air Ministry, RAF Grimsetter became part of Fighter Command's 14 Group, entrusted with the defence of Britain's main naval fleet at Scapa Flow in Orkney. Grimsetter was first occupied by 132 Fighter Squadron in July 1942. In July 1943, the base was transferred to the Admiralty and became the Royal Naval Air Station HMS Robin.

Following WWII, the airfield reverted back to RAF control, and in 1948 became Orkney's main civil airport under the control of the Ministry of Civil Aviation. British European Airways (BEA) began to operate services to and from Aberdeen, Inverness and Shetland; and in 1967 Loganair reintroduced the pre-war Orkney inter-island services. For many years, the main terminal building at Kirkwall consisted of a Nissen hut, which had originally been the wartime administration block. A new terminal building was opened in 1969.

Figure 2: BEA Dakota, courtesy of Neil Thain

In 1986, Kirkwall Airport (by then controlled by the Civil Aviation Authority) was transferred, along with seven other Scottish airports, to Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL). In late 2001, a new £3.4m terminal was opened, funded partly by the European Regional Development Fund. This funding was secured through a partnership involving HIAL, Orkney Islands Council and Orkney Enterprise.

Kirkwall Airport currently handles scheduled passenger services to Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness on the Scottish mainland, and to Sumburgh on Shetland. Kirkwall also continues to be the hub for the Orkney inter-island services, which are operated under a Public Service Obligation (PSO) contract. The principal airline flying out of Kirkwall is Loganair, with many of these flights operating under a franchise partnership with Flybe (to cease in August 2017). Mail and newspaper flights also operate from Kirkwall, as do Marine Scotland's fisheries protection aircraft, and the Northern Lighthouse Board's helicopter.

Donegal Airport, Ireland

Located at Carrickfinn, Kincasslagh, on the north-west coast of Ireland, Donegal Airport (Aerfort Dhún na nGall, in Irish) has its origins in the mid-1970s, when Gaeltarra Éireann, an Irish state industrial development agency, promoted plans to develop a network of air services in the Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) areas and major offshore islands in the west of Ireland. These proposals were only partly implemented, but one result was the creation, in 1978, of

Figure 3: Old airport terminal at Carrickfinn

a 610 metre grass airstrip at Carrickfinn. The Carrickfinn development was regarded as a vital asset to the area, due to its close proximity to the Gweedore Industrial Estate, the largest in any Irish speaking district. With continued support from Gaeltarra Éireann's successor, Údarás na Gaeltachta, the airstrip was extended and given a hard surface in 1988. Temporary, cabin-like buildings at the airport were replaced by the current terminal building in 1993. Donegal Airport is owned and managed by a private limited company, Aerphort Idirnaisiúnta Dhú na nGall Teo.

The airport commenced scheduled passenger services in 1986, when the short-lived Scottish airline Malinair (1985-87) began a service to and from Glasgow. Malinair had identified a demand for this route because of historic patterns of emigration between County Donegal and Scotland. The Donegal-Glasgow service continues to this day, and is currently operated by Stobart Air on behalf of Aer Lingus. In the 1990s, the Irish Government included Donegal Airport in its first PSO programme; and

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[3]Sources: Kirkwall Airport and Benbecula Airport (Highlands and Islands Airports Limited, 2016); Donegal Airport (Central Statistics Office, 2016); Sundsvall-Timrå Airport (Eurostat, 2016).

in August 1996 Ireland Airways commenced the first flights between Donegal and Ireland's capital city, Dublin. The Dublin PSO service is currently also operated by Stobart Air for Aer Lingus and is one of only two remaining Irish PSO air routes (the other being Kerry-Dublin).

Since the late 1990s, Donegal Airport has also been the main air support base for oil and gas exploration companies working off the west and north-west coasts of Ireland. It also handles private charters, marine surveillance aircraft of the Irish Air Corps, and the Irish Coast Guard's Search and Rescue Service helicopters.

Figure 4: Aer Arann plane at Donegal Airport

Passenger numbers at Donegal Airport reached a peak of over 65,000 in 2008, at the height of an economic boom in Ireland (the 'Celtic Tiger' period), but fell dramatically (to just over 29,000 in 2012) during the following period of recession. Recent years, however, have witnessed an incremental growth in traffic.

Sundsvall-Timrå Airport, Sweden

Sundsvall-Timrå Airport is located in the county of Västernorrland, on the eastern side of central Sweden. Due to its location, it is frequently known also as Midlanda Airport. It lies 21km north of the city of Sundsvall, and 8km east of the town of Timrå, these being the two municipalities from which it takes its name. The airport is situated on a delta, called Skeppsholmen, at the mouth of the River Indalsälven. This delta was created by sediment and debris following an environmental disaster in 1796, when a failed canal-building project 70km upstream contributed to the sudden drainage of Lake Ragundasjön, forcing a flood wave down the Indalsälven.

Concerted efforts to build an airport in the Sundsvall area began when a group of aviation enthusiasts formed the Sundsvalls Motor- och Flygsällskap (Sundsvall Motor and Flight Society) in 1936 and started to lobby municipal and central government. In 1941, as part of a Swedish Government plan to expand civil aviation across the country, work began on the construction of a 1,700m grass airstrip on Skeppsholmen. The new airport, Sundsvall-Härnosänd (the town of Härnosänd lies 32km north-east of the airport), was officially opened in September 1944; and regular passenger flights began in May 1945, when the Swedish airline AB Aerotransport included it in its national line which ran from the south to the north of the country (i.e. Malmö – Göteborg – Stockholm – Sundsvall-Härnosänd – Luleå). The runway was given an asphalt surface in 1946.

Passenger services ceased at Sundsvall-Härnosänd between 1950-1957, but the late 1950s and early 1960s saw significant development at the airport, including the opening of a new terminal building in 1961. Importantly, a bridge to Skeppsholmen was built in 1959, meaning that air passengers no longer had to rely on a ferry to reach the airport. In the 1970s, further expansion included the extension of the runway in order to deal with jet aircraft. And the 1990s saw the construction of a new terminal complex, which opened in 1997. This included the creation of an art gallery, the Midlanda Konsthall, which closed down for economic reasons in the mid-2000s.

Figure 5: Check in at Midlanda Airport 1968, courtesy of Sundsvall Museum

Until 2013, Sundsvall-Härnosänd Airport was under state ownership, by the Swedish Civil Aviation Administration, Luftfartsverket, and latterly by Swedavia. However, a 2007 state investigation had identified ten strategic national airports in Sweden; a list that did not include Sundsvall-Härnosänd. Consequently, in June 2013, Swedavia sold Sundsvall-Härnosänd to the municipalities of Sundsvall and Timrå, resulting in the new name of Sundsvall-Timrå Airport.

Currently, Sundsvall-Timrå handles domestic services to Stockholm Arlanda, Stockholm Bromma, Göteborg, and (in summer) Visby. It is also used by charter operators for holiday flights to Croatia, Greece, Spain and Turkey. Around 80% of passengers at Sundsvall-Timrå are business travellers (Sundsvall-Timrå Airport, 2014). The airport is an important hub for mail and freight carriage, and also handles air ambulance flights, prison transportation, and other general aviation, including forest fire surveillance and basic pilot training. Sundsvall-Timrå also houses the LFV Remote Tower Centre, which, since April 2015, has controlled air traffic at Örnsköldsvik Airport, 110 miles away (the application of remote tower technologies in smaller, peripheral airports forms part of another work package (WP5) in the SPARA 2020 project).

Isle of Skye, Scotland

Situated close to the north-west coast of the Scottish mainland, the Isle of Skye is the largest of the Inner Hebrides archipelago. As civil aviation in Scotland grew in the 1930s, Skye became the focus of some attention. After surveying a number of possible sites, Northern & Scottish Airways established an airfield at Glen Brittle, on the south-west coast of Skye. This location allowed an uninterrupted (and, in bad weather, relatively clear) approach over the sea from the south-west. A twice-weekly service between Renfrew Airport in Glasgow and Glen Brittle began in December 1935, but was short-lived, ceasing in May 1938.

The mid-1960s saw new demands for an air link from Skye to mainland Scotland, although there were disputes over the location of a new airfield. The Ministry of Aviation favoured a site on the south of the island, at Ashaig, around four miles from Skye's second largest settlement, Broadford; but Skye District Council preferred a site much further north, at Borve, just over four miles from the island's main town, Portree. Eventually, the council agreed that Broadford should be the site, and an airfield was constructed there by the British Army's Corps of Royal Engineers between 1969-1971, as part of the Operation Military Aid to the Community (OPMAC) scheme. Broadford Airfield (also known as Ashaig or Breakish Airfield) was officially opened in April 1972. From 1972, Loganair operated a passenger service between Broadford and Glasgow, although this ceased in 1988 for economic reasons. Loganair also ran a service between Broadford and Inverness, from 1972-1974. Although there have been no scheduled services since 1988, the airfield, now owned by Highland Council, is still operational, being used by a flying club, a private seaplane tour company, and the emergency services. Currently, the key access routes to mainland Scotland from Skye are by ferry from Armadale at the south of the island, and by a road bridge opened in 1995.

Figure 6: Disembarking at Broadford 1981, courtesy of Duncan McCallum

Since the late 1990s, there have been several proposals to reopen Broadford, and various consultations and feasibility studies have been conducted. Backed by a number of prominent Skye residents, a campaign to reintroduce air links to the Central Belt of mainland Scotland ('FlySkye') was launched in October 2012. Most recently, Highlands and Islands Enterprise commissioned the consultancy company ekosgen to review the potential benefits of a reintroduced air service. This review concluded that an air service would bring "significant economic and social benefits" to Skye and its environs (ekosgen and Reference Economic Consultants, 2016, p.70). At the time of writing this present report (February 2017), Highland Council had recently approved the business case arising from the commissioned research, and were to enter into dialogue with the Scottish Government and its transport agency, Transport Scotland, in an attempt to progress the proposals.

Benbecula Airport, Scotland

Benbecula is an island in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. It lies between the islands of North and South Uist, to which it is connected by road causeways. Benbecula Airport is situated on the north-west coast of the island, next to Benbecula's main settlement and administrative centre, the village of Balivanich.

The early history of Benbecula Airport is similar to that of Kirkwall. During the pioneering days of Scottish civil aviation a short-lived airline, Midland & Scottish Air Ferries (1933-34), surveyed potential landing sites on Benbecula and on North and South Uist. But it was another company, Northern & Scottish Airways, who first developed a grass strip aerodrome at Balivanich in 1936. This served as part of an extension to their Glasgow Renfrew to Skye service, with on demand stops at Balivanich. In 1937, Northern & Scottish Airways merged with Captain Fresson's Highland Airways to form a new company, Scottish Airways, which proceeded to remove Skye from its Hebridean services and include Balivanich Airport as a scheduled stop.

At the outbreak of WWII, Scottish Airways' Hebridean services were suspended, but reintroduced on a restricted basis in April 1940. However, in 1941, the airfield was requisitioned for military use by RAF Coastal Command, and construction began on three hard-surfaced runways at Balivanich. In 1942, 206 Squadron became the first operational unit stationed at RAF Benbecula, carrying out anti-submarine patrols in Lockheed Hudsons.

Following WWII, the airport returned to predominantly civic use, with most of the wartime buildings, and two of the three runways, being retained. Scottish Airways continued its Western Isles services before being subsumed as part of BEA in 1947. By this time, Stornoway Airport (another former RAF base) on the Isle of Lewis also formed part of the Hebridean service. The Western Isles continued to be served largely by BEA until the mid-1970s, when its successor, British Airways, transferred some of its 'thin' routes with low passenger numbers to Loganair.

Figure 7: Peggy MacPherson at BEA desk, Christmas 1957, courtesy of Benbecula History Society

Benbecula Airport's military associations continued in the late-1950s, at the height of the Cold War, when it became the control centre for the Royal Artillery's Hebrides rocket range on South Uist. This included the construction of an army base immediately adjacent to the airport, which was further expanded in the late-1960s and early-1970s. The military presence at Balivanich was reduced significantly in the mid-1990s, when control of the rocket range was transferred to the Ministry of Defence's Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). DERA was privatised in 2001, and the resultant company, QinetiQ, has since retained a presence at Benbecula Airport. In 2001-02, the airport also benefited from the Eurofighter testing programme, which provided for a £0.5M runway lighting system upgrade.

In terms of civil aviation, Benbecula Airport, like Kirkwall, became part of HIAL in 1986; and with the aid of ERDF money, a new terminal building was opened in 1993. In 2016, Benbecula became the first civil airport in Scotland to have its runway fully lit by LED ground lighting. The airport currently operates just two routes, to Glasgow and to Stornoway, both by Loganair, under their franchise partnership with Flybe. Flights to and from the Isle of Barra ceased in 2013 following a decision by the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) to stop subsidising the service. The Comhairle argued that, when faced with necessary financial cutbacks, the local population had indicated a preference for maintaining education, community transport, and care for the elderly, rather than air services. 2013 also saw the reduction of the Benbecula-Stornoway service from five days to three days per week, although a four-days-per-week service resumed shortly after the researchers' case study visit, in October 2016. At the time of writing this report, the current contract with Loganair is about to expire and the Comhairle is considering the inclusion of a five-day-per-week Benbecula-Stornoway service as part of the tendering process.

The data collected for each case study were analysed thematically. Six themes emerged from the data relating to the social and cultural importance of the airports: history and culture; the airport as a local employer; the serendipitous social function of the airport; lifeline services; non-aeronautical uses of airport terminal facilities; and barriers to use.

History and Culture

Across all four operational airports (and to a lesser extent on the Isle of Skye), many participants spoke knowledgably about the history and development of their local airport. In Kirkwall and Benbecula, for example, several exhibition visitors were keen to share information on the wartime origins of the two airfields; while in Sundsvall-Timrå, some participants told the researchers of the formation of the Skeppsholmen delta on which the airfield was built. In discussing historical aspects, mention was also made of the extent to which local residents cling to former or alternative names of their airports, for example in Donegal ('Carrickfinn'), Kirkwall ('Grimsetter') and Sundsvall-Timrå ('Midlanda').

In many cases, participants' historical accounts were intertwined with personal memories of the physical fabric of the airfields and the airport buildings. Older residents in Kirkwall and Benbecula remembered the waiting rooms in the old wartime buildings, complete with wicker chairs and stovepipe fire and open brick fireplace, respectively. Other, slightly younger, Kirkwall residents spoke of a childhood habit of playing with the wooden rollers on the luggage belt in the subsequent (1969-2001) terminal building. Some Skye respondents spoke of Spartan conditions at Broadford's prefabricated terminal building in its earliest days, with no refreshment facilities, no public telephone, and no connecting bus service. People who had flown out of Kirkwall and Broadford remembered their embarrassment on being personally (and publicly) weighed on stand-on scales at the check-in desk. While some of the

Figure 8: Terminal building at Sundsvall-Härnosänd Airport, used until 1961, courtesy of Sundsvalls Museum

older Swedish participants talked of the catering at the original wooden terminal building at Sundsvall-Härnosänd (see Figure 8), which was simply a large coffee urn that arrived each morning strapped to a bicycle.

At times, when relating personal stories about their local airport, participants noted with regret that certain activities would now be impossible, in an era when airport security is paramount. For example, Benbecula participants spoke of roller skating or learning to drive on the airport's runway, in the days before it was surrounded by security fences. Kirkwall residents spoke of a time when, as children, they could walk around to the apron side of the terminal building to watch the planes taking off and landing. And some Donegal participants spoke of the occasional need to clear livestock from the old grass landing strip, in order to allow aircraft to land. Animal obstructions to landing were also mentioned in Benbecula, where, in the days when the adjacent army camp was at its peak, some of the senior officers' wives and their horses had to be cleared from the runway when out for their daily hack.

Many exhibition visitors spoke of how much more exciting the experience of flying was in the past, when opportunities to fly were rarer and it was regarded as a "big event". Specific journeys were also recalled, particularly those made in bad weather at a time when the aircraft and airports had less sophisticated landing aids, and where, as one Skye respondent put it, "it was real wing and a prayer stuff". Respondents also looked back fondly on an era when the aircraft's flight deck was usually visible and accessible from the passenger cabin. For example, one Donegal participant recalled one of the earliest scheduled flights to Glasgow, when the pilot "clambered through a side window to reach his seat", and when the "in-flight hospitality" consisted of a box full of cartons of juice and different flavoured crisps which was passed along the passengers from the cockpit.

Figure 9: Interior of a Loganair Islander on a Glasgow to Skye flight in 1981, courtesy of Duncan McCallum

Indeed, there were numerous stories of colourful and characterful pilots, particularly in Orkney; and of opportunities for passengers sitting immediately behind the cockpit to engage in conversation with the pilots during the flights (see Figure 9). For example, a small number of the Skye participants, describing flights to Glasgow in the 1970s and 1980s, spoke of their pilot providing a running commentary on scenic landmarks throughout the journey, or of allowing them to choose the route they took when leaving the island:

> *"I said: 'Can you go down the south end of Skye so I can wave to my uncle?', and that's what we did and then we went off to Glasgow. I chose the route, you see. Because we were allowed to do it then. Health and safety these days..."*

The airport as part of local identity

Throughout the four operational airports studied, the exhibition visitors highlighted the importance of air travel for educational, medical, work-related, shopping and social trips ('lifeline' air services are discussed in more detail later in this report). This, coupled with the historical awareness outlined above, appeared to invoke a sense of pride in, and ownership of, their local airport, making it an integral part of local identity. For example, at Kirkwall Airport, one participant noted:

> *"The airport is a part of Orkney, and it's a part that Orkney can't really be without. So, something this essential just automatically gets acknowledged by the local community, because they know how much, or how often, every one of us needs it."*

While at Donegal Airport, one interviewee observed:

> *"There definitely is a sort of pride of ownership type of thing – 'It's our airport'. Clearly it isn't, but it's so much part of our lives. And I think that the people who live in the community feel really grateful that we have an airport."*

This link between remote, peripheral airports and local history, culture and identity was, on occasions, reflected in the design, décor and contents of the terminal buildings hosting the photo exhibitions. This was most notable at Kirkwall Airport where the terminal building contains, for example, several items of memorabilia that illustrate Orkney's aeronautical past, such as a painting depicting Highland Airways aircraft at Wideford Aerodrome in the 1930s, and the original pennant presented to Captain Fresson on the occasion of his first air mail flight. Indeed, when the current terminal building at Kirkwall Airport was being constructed in 2001, conscious efforts were made to ensure that its interior reflected Orcadian heritage and culture. With input from a working group that comprised representatives of HIAL, Orkney Islands Council, Orkney Enterprise and the Orkney Tourist Board, local artists and craftspeople were commissioned to produce a range of artwork that illustrated Orkney's history, landmarks, scenery and wildlife. This included the installation of some large Scandinavian runic text above the terminal's main entrance, reading 'krimsitir', which represents the airport's original name of Grimsetter. As one interviewee (and former working group member) explained, this overall design was aimed at ensuring that "the minute you got off the plane, you knew you'd arrived in Orkney". Indeed, it is worthwhile noting that those photo exhibition visitors who mentioned the terminal's interior design features usually discussed these in positive terms, with one participant going on to describe Kirkwall as "the loveliest airport in Scotland".

*Figure 10: Sheila Scott departure lounge artwork,
courtesy of Neil Thain*

Benbecula Airport also contains some local artwork that was mentioned by the research participants – most notably a piece entitled 'Fichead Eun' ('Twenty Birds') created by the Uist and Barra Children's Parliament, and a painting depicting the 'Our Lady of the Isles' sculpture[4] on South Uist – although these have not been installed as part of any overarching design strategy. At Sundsvall-Timrå, meanwhile, a number of participants spoke about the large 'Y' sculpture, by the famous Swedish artist Bengt Lindström (1925-2008), which stands next to the airport's approach road, or of the permanent display of Lindström's work that was once housed in the terminal's ill-fated art gallery. Although one of Lindström's paintings remains on display in the terminal, locally produced artwork or depictions of local scenery, culture or historical landmarks at Sundsvall-Timrå Airport (and at Donegal Airport) are now largely limited to any appearing in advertising for local businesses or tourism initiatives. Participants at Sundsvall-Timrå, however, did comment on the use of mid-century, Scandinavian-style

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[4]The original sculpture, of the Madonna and Child, was completed in 1957 by Hew Lorimer (1907-1993). It was commissioned by Father John Morrison (dubbed 'Father Rocket') who was concerned about the impact that the proposed missile testing range on South Uist might have on the local way of life, language and culture (see http://www.uist-rc.org.uk/our-lady-of-the-isles.html).

furniture in the terminal, and noted how it echoed the feel of the previous incarnations of the airport illustrated in the exhibition photographs.

Interestingly, the connection between the design of an airport terminal and a sense of local identity and place has recently been explored as part of the FlySkye campaign to re-open the Broadford Airfield on Skye. Here, in work mentioned by a small number of the Skye photo exhibition visitors, architectural technology students from the University of the Highlands and Islands have produced some designs for a potential new terminal hub building, which are described as "unmistakably Skye", take "full account of the local environment and built heritage", and incorporate a tetrahedral roof that echoes the shape of the island's Cuillin mountain range (see Restan, 2014).

Differences from 'other' airports

In the course of the discussions with the participants, the research team explored what, if anything, made their local airport 'different' from other airports they may have used or visited. Here, when compared with the other three operational airports studied, there was a noticeable contrast in the response from the passengers and other users at Sundsvall-Timrå Airport, in that the only perceived difference was that of the size of the terminal, at least when compared to much larger, international airports such as Stockholm Arlanda. It should perhaps be remembered, though, that Sundsvall-Timrå was by far the largest of the four airports studied (in terms of terminal size and passenger numbers), and that the vast majority of its passengers travel for business- or work-related reasons. The point was made by both airport staff and passengers that Sundsvall-Timrå's business users tend to spend very little time in the terminal, usually checking in online and arriving at the airport as close as possible to the departure time. It could perhaps be argued, then, that the majority of Sundsvall-Timrå's passengers have neither the time nor inclination to characterise the airport in any way other than as a functional, practical point of travel.

In the other three airports studied, however, users considered that their airport was, indeed, different from other airports, in a number of ways. Firstly, and most obviously, they spoke about the three airports in terms of their size and scale. For example, in Kirkwall Airport, where the main arrivals gate and baggage carousel are located almost immediately adjacent to the departures gate, respondents spoke positively about its "intimacy" and about being able to see "everything at a glance"; while one respondent spoke warmly of the size of Donegal Airport, describing it as "cute and dinky, like Playmobil". Allied to the size of the three airports was their perceived ambience and "atmosphere". Kirkwall Airport, for example, was described as "just so Orkney", being "more laid-back" than other, larger airports, and with a "villagey, local feel". Benbecula Airport was said to be a "nice, comfortable place" with a "very relaxed atmosphere". While Donegal Airport was described variously as "homely and non-threatening", "uplifting", and having "a real family atmosphere".

One key factor in achieving this "comfortable" and "relaxed" atmosphere would appear to be the provision of large windows in the main, publicly accessible areas of the terminal. In all three of the smaller airports studied, large windows overlooking the aprons allow natural light to enter the terminals, but also allow airport users to obtain good views of aircraft movements and of the surrounding scenery. In Donegal, for example, a number of participants spoke about the value of these windows in awaiting, and welcoming, incoming passengers:

"As soon as the lights'll go on on the runway, everybody's up at the window. Especially the kids and people who are waiting on people."

"My sisters went to America years ago, and their family now has started coming, who we haven't seen. We can be here with posters up in the windows, while they're coming off the plane. And that means a lot to them, because we get so many talking about the welcome they got".

Another important factor in making the three smaller airports 'different' from other, larger airports would appear to be the close relationship between airport staff and the passengers and other airport users, and the resultant levels of customer service. In the small and relatively close-knit communities served by Benbecula, Donegal and Kirkwall Airports, the airport staff are often personal friends or acquaintances of many of the airport users, or have at least come to recognise and know their more regular passengers, and many of the research participants believed that

this added positively to their overall airport experience. This appeared to be particularly the case at Donegal Airport, and also at Kirkwall Airport's inter-island service desk (where staff noted that they work with a limited customer base, and where island residents use aircraft almost as others would a bus service). For example, one regular user of Donegal Airport spoke of its staff in glowing terms, but also suggested that travellers in any small, remote airport will receive a similar, more personable service:

"It's a much more personal service. The staff here have been here for a long time. And everybody is extremely friendly, professional, accommodating. But I think you'll find that in a lot of rural, small places, where people have to be very protective about their customer service, and look after people well. So I think the service that they get here is just really fantastic."

In contrast, though, some of the passengers at Benbecula and Kirkwall reported a less than friendly relationship with airport security staff, describing them variously as being "on a power trip", "too assiduous", "OTT" and "too pernickety", and suggesting that security at these small island airports was often more stringent than at large international airports.[5] As one Kirkwall focus group participant said:

"Even if up here, they would smile a little. We know them. We know they're doing a serious job. You know there's potentially serious threats and I'm aware of that. And appreciate that we've got to go through it. But it [doesn't] mean to say that we've all got to get looked at as if we're suspects."

These disgruntled passengers theorised that the airport security staff were either "bored and looking for something to do", or that they had to meet a certain quota in terms of the number of bags sent to baggage reconciliation for a thorough search. Meanwhile, some of the security staff who participated in the research noted that a balance had to be struck between "being friendly" (particularly with passengers they know personally) and "remaining professional" throughout. Staff at Benbecula Airport reported that they do occasionally receive complaints about security procedures, but that once the airport's obligations under the UK's National Aviation Security Programme are explained, then the complainants usually appreciate the airport staff's position.

Figure 11: Kirkwall Airport's Christmas party for staff's children, 1998, courtesy of Jim Henderson

The "family atmosphere" described by some users of the three smaller airports studied, was also discussed by staff members at these airports, who highlighted the many family ties that exist at the airports (see also the following section of this report) and the close working relationship they have with colleagues. This, they believed, set their airports apart from other, much larger airports, where not all staff would know one another; although this feeling was tempered somewhat at Kirkwall Airport, where it was observed by some staff members that the expansion of the airport, and the contracting out of some services, had resulted in working relationships with colleagues being less close than they had been previously. Some longer-serving staff at Kirkwall Airport also lamented the fact that the staff Christmas party no longer takes place within the terminal itself, since the airport moved to a 7-days-per-week operation in 2002.

[5]Concerns about "intrusive" personal searches at Benbecula and Stornoway Airports were reported in the local and national press in 2010 (see Anon, 2010a & 2010b) and HIAL (who operate both Benbecula and Kirkwall Airports) report that staff turnover remains highest within the security functions (see Highlands and Islands Airports Limited, 2016). HIAL has recently announced a relaxation of security checks at three of its smaller airports, Barra, Campbeltown and Tiree (see Kim, 2017).

This, it was felt, had partly affected the sense of community amongst airport staff. Incidentally, the exhibition photo, shown at Figure 11, of a previous Christmas party for airport staff's children evoked fond memories for many participants; for some, this was their first experience of Kirkwall Airport.

Even at the largest airport studied, Sundsvall-Timrå, where passengers had made little reference to any 'friendly' or 'family' atmosphere, staff spoke about their family connections and the close relationship they have with colleagues. Indeed, one relative 'outsider' (an employee at one of the car hire desks) observed that "there are a lot of long-serving members of staff at the airport and this adds to a family atmosphere", but also that this "isn't obvious to the travelling public".

Some of the staff at Sundsvall-Timrå also believed that their airport was 'different' from others in its use of what is known as the 'Basic Airport'[6] concept, a cost-efficiency model based on airport staff acquiring multiple competencies; where, for example, one individual may carry out a range of duties, including snow clearance, de-icing, refuelling, loading and unloading aircraft, and security tasks. However, Sundsvall-Timrå is not the only case study airport where the staff adopt this approach. At Donegal Airport, too, multi-tasking is viewed by staff as "the only way you can run a small company like this". As one Donegal passenger said:

"Often it is a bit of a one man show at the airport – everyone seems to do everything there and it's the same person checking you in and doing the security!"

The Airport as a Local Employer

One of the key themes emerging from the photo exhibitions, particularly from participants who were current or past employees of the four operational airports, was that of the airport being an important employer in the local community. Table 3 indicates the number of staff employed at the four case study airports in recent years.

Table 3: Number of staff employed at four case study airports[7]		
Airport	**Year**	**No. Staff**
Kirkwall Airport, Scotland	2014	57
Donegal Airport, Ireland	2015	30
Sundsvall-Timrå Airport, Sweden	2016	65
Benbecula Airport, Scotland	2015	34

The point was made by staff respondents that, in remote or island communities with sometimes limited employment opportunities, the airport was viewed as a significant source of relatively secure and "steady" jobs. As one employee at Kirkwall Airport said:

"I've always thought, living in Orkney, if you don't have a trade behind you, or you don't work for the Council, then working here is possibly the next best thing. Certainly, for someone of a young age, it's a good, paying job out here. And it's a good living."

[6]The Basic Airport concept has its origins in the ABC (Attractive, Basic, Connecting) business model adopted by Sundsvall-Timrå Airport's previous owners (i.e. Luftfartsverket, and then Swedavia) for use in airports outside Stockholm (see, for example, Clark (2009)).

[7]Sources: Kirkwall Airport (Marine Scotland Science, 2015, p.16); Donegal Airport (ekosgen and Reference Economic Consultants, 2016, p.35); Sundsvall-Timrå Airport (personal correspondence with airport's CEO); Benbecula Airport (Highlands and Islands Airports Limited, 2015).

Providing further evidence of job security and staff loyalty, the researchers spoke to several long-serving staff members, from across all four airports, who had worked at their respective airport for over 20 or 30 years. Indeed, at Sundsvall-Timrå, the research team encountered three current or former members of staff who had each spent over 40 years working at the airport.

Figure 12: Staff at Donegal Airport, date unknown

At all four airports, staff provided a number of examples of other family members (be they brothers or sisters, cousins, parents, aunts or uncles, or grandparents) having also worked at the airport. With these close family ties, it appeared that some staff members had developed a strong emotional attachment to their local airport, which became most apparent when relatives (some of them now deceased) were identified in the exhibition photographs.

Some participants from across the four airports also pointed out the importance of the airport in providing indirect employment, for example in taxi or car-hire companies. Certainly, during the course of the case studies, the researchers spoke to a number of taxi drivers (particularly at Donegal and Sundsvall-Timrå Airports, where there are no public transport connections and where the airport car parking is fee-based), who all highlighted the importance of the airport to their own livelihoods.

Serendipitous Social Function of the Airport

The researchers' discussions with participants also explored the role of remote, peripheral airports as serendipitous meeting places. In this regard there was again a noticeable difference in the responses from the users of Sundsvall-Timrå Airport, compared with those in the other three smaller airports. At Sundsvall-Timrå where, of course, the majority of journeys are made for business- or work-related purposes, a handful of regular business users noted that they often recognise other regular flyers. However, other than one account of a chance encounter turning into an impromptu business meeting, there was little evidence of any social engagement taking place between these passengers. In Benbecula, Donegal and Kirkwall Airports, however, numerous examples of serendipitous encounters with family, friends and acquaintances, in the terminals or on flights, were recalled. Indeed, there was frequently a general expectation amongst the participants that any visit to their local airport – to fly, to drop off or pick up other passengers, or just to use the café – would result in them bumping in to someone they know from the local community. As one Donegal Airport user said:

> *"My theory is that never will you be long in the airport without seeing somebody, so you're as well to be early."*

And as one of the Kirkwall focus group participants said:

> *"I've been out with my wife to see off our son, or nephew, and there'll be somebody else seeing somebody else off with their kids playing with the toys. You'll sit there blethering [i.e. talking] away until they finally take off. You'll have what they call a newsie, just a catch-up with folk that you might not otherwise have connected with."*

The point was also made by several participants that the comfortable surroundings and relaxed atmosphere in these three airports helped to facilitate and prolong these social exchanges.

Indeed, a number of individuals indicated that, on arriving at the airport, they would make a point of looking around the terminal to see who was there. When close acquaintances are spotted, these reconnoitres will often result in exchanges of news or gossip. But when the people recognised are less well known personally, some participants acknowledged that they might simply think to themselves, "I wonder where they're off to?". Indeed, one Kirkwall resident admitted to a different tactic when establishing who has been using the airport:

Figure 13: Cafe in the terminal at Donegal Airport

> *"In Orkney, you get to know folk's cars, so you'll sometimes see that somebody's car is in the airport car park, and you'll say to yourself 'They must be away somewhere'."*

While most research participants in the three smaller airports spoke positively about these serendipitous social encounters, and that these added to their local airport's appeal, some were less enthusiastic. This was particularly the case if the individual was on a business-related trip and was perhaps attempting to do some work while waiting for their departure; or where the individual worked in the public sector and suspected that any approaches might be work-related. As one Kirkwall respondent said:

> *"I know an awful lot of people, so I would be approached. That sounds very arrogant. There would be several people, probably, who would want to have a conversation about various things, so I would tend to keep my head down."*

And while research participants across the three smaller airports agreed that serendipitous meetings at the airports, or on flights, were commonplace, there was also a sense amongst a number of participants that these occurred less frequently than in years gone by. In Benbecula, Donegal and Kirkwall, it was argued that the likelihood of encountering someone they know had been lessened because of greater numbers of "incomers",[8] "strangers" and tourists. For example, one Donegal staff member, speaking of passengers on the Glasgow route, said:

> *"I've noticed now with the Glasgow flights, I really don't know anybody on the Glasgow flights any more – it's only strangers. Before this, you knew everybody travelling. But there's a lot of strangers travelling now, you really don't know, among the passengers."*

In Benbecula, some respondents spoke of the decline of the airport terminal as a social hub since the significant reduction of personnel in the adjacent army camp. And interestingly, one Benbecula respondent also pointed out that she frequently has serendipitous meetings with friends and acquaintances at those departure gates at Glasgow Airport that serve the Western Isles; these gates, she argued, have a "sense of community" all of their own.

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[8]As broad indicators of inward migration to the three communities studied: in 2009, 20% of Orkney residents were in-migrants who had moved there within the previous 10 years (Hall Aitken, 2009, p.3); in 2011, 31% of County Donegal residents were born outside of the county (Central Statistics Office, 2012); in 2007, 17% of job vacancies in the Outer Hebrides were filled by people from beyond the islands (Hall Aitken, 2007, p.39), although more recent years have seen a decline in in-migration (Gilbert, Malcolm and Sim, 2011, p.8).

Lifeline Services

The four case study airports were considered by most participants to deliver 'lifeline services' to some extent, which could not easily be replaced by other means such as alternative transport or technological solutions.

Medical and emergency services

For the island communities near Kirkwall and Benbecula Airports, modern medical and emergency services (including dental and maternity services) were heavily reliant on access to a nearby airport. Participants noted that local hospital facilities are relatively basic, and that community members must travel to the mainland for specialist treatments and for emergencies. The alternatives such as travelling by ferry, especially for those with a chronic or terminal illness, were deemed to be time-consuming and uncomfortable, and would necessitate longer periods away from home.

Several participants in Kirkwall and Benbecula spoke of their respective health boards' (i.e. NHS Orkney and NHS Western Isles) patient travel arrangements, where, as part of the Highlands and Islands Patient Travel Scheme, the health boards pay most of the patient's travel and accommodation expenses, and sometimes those of an authorised patient escort. Prompted by the exhibition photo appearing at Figure 14, which celebrates such an occasion, a number of Kirkwall participants also spoke of the number of Orcadian babies born 'in the air' when on the way to the hospital.

Similarly, participants in Donegal felt that alternative transport (in this case, by road) was simply not possible for those who were very ill, and who could not manage long car or bus journeys. In Donegal, air travel to and from Dublin is considered particularly important for cancer patients, with a local charity (the North West Cancer Group) helping to arrange discounted fares (subsidised by the health board, HSE West) and raising money for companions to travel with the patients.

Figure 14: Loganair staff at Kirkwall Airport celebrate the birth of a baby 'in the air', courtesy of Orkney Library and Archive

On Skye, meanwhile, although one participant (a former nurse) remembered accompanying patients on flights from the former airport at Broadford to Glasgow in the 1970s and 1980s, there appeared to be less of a sense of need for an airport for medical trips (except in extreme emergencies), due perhaps to the road bridge connection to the mainland. Some respondents pointed out that most patient travel from Skye would likely be to Inverness, only around a two-hour drive from Broadford. Similarly, better road and rail connections for Sundsvall locals, coupled with the facilities provided locally by the Sundsvall-Härnosänd County Hospital, meant that participants there did not speak of the airport having the same 'lifeline' role for medical travel as those in the more remote and island locations in the study.

Connection to the outside world

The idea of remote and rural airports connecting communities to the outside world was repeated throughout the case studies. The sense that smaller, local airports acted as a hub feeding into a larger network of connections was discussed in the island case study locations, Kirkwall and Benbecula Airports. Some participants described these connections as cultural or historical (for example, Orkney's links with Scandinavian countries). Others felt it allowed expats to maintain links with their

families and homes, particularly in Donegal and Orkney. Indeed, many spoke of the important role of local airports in enabling people to readily return home for family celebrations and important life events (such as marriages and funerals).

However, this connection to the outside world was, for some participants, much more of a 'lifeline'. One example would be in allowing quick travel between Orkney and Scotland's political centre, with councillors, local authority officials and Members of the Scottish Parliament being able to easily visit (or receive visitors from) Edinburgh when important local issues arise. At Donegal Airport, meanwhile, the student population is so important that discounts and special packages for student passengers have been developed with carrier Aer Lingus; for Donegal students travelling to and from universities in Dublin and Glasgow, and for incoming students attending various Gaeltacht summer schools that take place throughout County Donegal. Indeed, for many Donegal, Benbecula and Kirkwall participants, the options for commute and for accessing further and higher education were believed to help to stem population drain from these areas.

In Sundsvall, while some participants felt that the airport was a necessary connection to the outside world for the area, others felt that with the proximity of the E4 motorway, and a nearby train station (which would take passengers to Stockholm for an ongoing flight), the airport was simply one of many travel options. However, most participants did note that the airport was vital for maintaining businesses in the area, particularly large businesses and manufacturing; and some commented that if the airport were to disappear, then these businesses would leave, despite the other travel options available. Business links were also deemed important for the other three airport locations. One participant in Donegal said that having the airport meant the best of both worlds for raising a family and operating a business as for example, her brother-in-law:

Figure 15: Linjeflyg moving from the old station building, barracks, to the new building at Midlanda 1961, courtesy of Sundsvall Museum

> *"Flies out on a Monday morning, leaves here into Dublin, Dublin into London, and then he flies home on a Friday. So he can kinda compete on a global level with his business, and his children are being raised here."*

A 'lifeline' connection to the outside world through a local airport was also evident in responses from participants in Donegal who recognised how crucial it is for tourism. With a lack of public transport options in the area, Donegal Airport officially being named as part of the Wild Atlantic Way campaign (a tourism trail along some of the West Coast of Ireland) has been a way to put the Donegal area on the itinerary for travellers. The airport staff at Donegal go beyond simply maintaining the airport for this reason, and they work with local business and tourism in order to put together accommodation and travel packages for those visiting as part of the Wild Atlantic Way trail.

In Orkney, too, the airport was viewed as an important factor in attracting tourists to the islands, particularly those of a specific demographic, which one tourism official described as "aged over 50, educated and with a disposable income".[9] This suggestion that air travel to the Scottish islands is aimed at, and appeals only to, more affluent tourists was echoed by some Skye respondents, who suggested that a re-opened Broadford Airport might help to bring in a different, "more upmarket" type

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[9] The Orkney Visitor Survey for 2012-13 established that only around 17% of tourists arrive or depart by air; the vast majority (83%) arrive and leave by ferry (Scotinform Ltd and Reference Economics, 2014, p.73).

of tourism. Others felt that tourism on Skye was already booming and that businesses were already doing well on the patronage of tourists, and indeed were often over-capacity, with the island's existing infrastructure struggling to keep pace with demand.

Social and Cultural Uses of Airport Terminal Facilities

A common theme amongst participants in the locations with an operational airport was that heightened security now challenges non-aeronautical use of the terminal and of the surrounding land. However, there were many good practice examples of these challenges being surmounted.

Café or restaurant use

At all four of the airport exhibitions, the research team saw visitors frequent the terminal to use the café or restaurant who were neither flying themselves, nor picking up or dropping off other passengers. In this regard, the cafés/restaurants were very much seen as social spaces in their own right, with patrons being drawn by their accessibility, food quality, prices (at least when compared with larger airports' prices), and/or their general "environment", particularly in allowing users to view aircraft movements whilst dining. For example, during the course of the case studies, the cafés/restaurants at Benbecula and Sundsvall-Timrå Airports attracted lunchtime diners who work in nearby offices and businesses; the Kirkwall Airport café was used by care workers with special needs clients who find watching the aeroplanes therapeutic; and Donegal's café was visited by walkers on the adjacent Carrickfinn Beach, and by a group of local youths who arrived at the airport on bicycles and who described the terminal as a "good place to hang out and use the WiFi". The café and shop was deemed particularly important at Donegal Airport, as participants noted that there was a lack of public buildings in the surrounding area, so the airport was the only nearby place to have a cup of tea, use the WiFi, or buy some newspapers or sweets. Staff at Donegal Airport also spoke of once having served Sunday lunches in the airport café, which proved popular with the local community. However, flight timetable changes meant that staff could no longer meet the demand for these lunches and deal with their flight-related duties, so the Sunday lunch menu was discontinued.

In Skye, many felt that the airfield location may discourage people from visiting the terminal to use the café, should the airport re-open, and that a new airport may not be able to compete with the existing range of café and restaurant options in Broadford village. Broadford Airfield is a few miles distant from the village itself, and with numerous café/restaurant options in Broadford village, some participants felt that people would be unwilling to travel beyond the village to use catering or other facilities at a new airport. However, similar sentiments were shared by some participants in Kirkwall, who did not believe people would travel to the airport simply to eat, but evidently this is not the case.

Figure 16: Sundsvall Terminal M sign

Meeting spaces

At Sundsvall-Timrå, the terminal building includes Terminal M, a key conference and meeting venue for the local region, situated immediately adjacent to the airport's restaurant. Here, the airport can offer conference delegates a guided tour of the airport and runway, as well as the chance to "make those childhood dreams come true" by "trying to be a firefighter for a while in the afternoon".

Donegal Airport also has meeting room facilities, albeit on a more modest scale. Although these are used for training

events and meetings by local businesses, tourism groups and Údarás na Gaeltachta, it was suggested by some staff and airport users (a number of whom were unaware of these facilities) that much more could be done to promote their existence.

Meanwhile, at the two HIAL airports studied, Kirkwall and Benbecula, neither airport has meeting rooms, or a similar space, that can be rented out; and no real need for such facilities was expressed by research participants. One Benbecula participant (a local authority official) did observe that he occasionally arranges to meet colleagues at the airport café for work-related purposes, and that a small meeting room at the airport might be useful for discussing what can be sensitive issues.

Use of outdoor space: festivals, air shows and fun runs

There was evidence of outdoor events such as aviation festivals, fun runs, air shows, sky dives, and music events held both at the four case study locations with operational airports, and at the location of the old terminal on Skye. A number of these events were long-standing and featured in some of the exhibition photographs (e.g. Figure 17). Participants were largely in favour of these types of events, and the consensus from staff seems to be that they have been well attended. However, these events require significant input from the local community, from charities and businesses, and from airport staff to organise and manage.

Figure 17: General Aviation Day at Sundsvall-Härnosänd Airport in 1978, courtesy of Sundsvall Museum

The airport staff, particularly at Benbecula and Donegal, spoke of their willingness to engage with the community, as they regard the airports as being very much part of and for the communities they serve. However, there were said to be barriers to using the 'airside' (space outside the terminal) mostly due to change in regulation. This has meant that larger, outdoor events such as music festivals were no longer possible for some of the case study airports. However, local music events on a small scale hosted within the terminal were still viable.

Donegal are also considering other, more innovative ways of using the space in and around the airport terminal there, including as a wedding venue:

> *"It would be great if we could have weddings here... just to have someone get married on the apron... they could even skydive in!"*

Events and exhibitions within the terminal

While some people were receptive to the idea of performing arts taking place in the airport terminals, others worried that it would interfere with the main business of the airport, or that it would be impossible due to security restrictions. The unreliability of flights was also mentioned here, particularly at Kirkwall Airport, as delays often meant that larger than usual numbers of people were in the terminal building, and performers may "get in the way". Some small-scale, indoor performances of (usually traditional) music were reported in Donegal and Benbecula Airports, with minimal disruption to passengers. One Donegal participant (a professional musician) warned that musical performances in small airport terminals would have to be acoustic, because any amplification systems would be

too noisy and might also interfere with any flight or security announcements being made over the terminals' public address systems.

Participants also mentioned competition from other cultural attractions in the area. For example, the town of Kirkwall hosts numerous performing arts events throughout the year, and while these types of events had been popular in other terminals in the Northern Periphery region (for example, at Savonlinna Airport in Finland), it was felt that the space perhaps was not right in Kirkwall. It was also felt that there were other public venue options near to Benbecula Airport, but some participants argued that there might be scope to use the terminal, with one commenting that it was just a case of knowing that the airport might be open to hosting small events. This was a common theme amongst both Benbecula and Kirkwall participants – most of these uses of the airport space were welcomed, but participants were unsure who could (or should) take responsibility for their organisation.

In terms of the terminals hosting exhibitions of some kind, opinions across the four case study airports were again mixed. Donegal Airport had hosted a number of book launches and art or photo exhibitions over the years, but, following a refit, the terminal had lost some wall/exhibition space. There was, however, an appetite for finding a way to continue with displays or exhibitions, particularly those that are local or historical in nature.

As was noted earlier, the use of local artwork in the terminal at Kirkwall Airport was perceived positively by airport users, but there were some doubts as to whether new exhibitions would appeal to those who were not already coming to the airport. Some people struggled to see the airport as an arts venue in itself, and wondered if there

Figure 18: Kirkwall Airport display cases, HIAL

would be any appetite to attend exhibitions away from Orkney's main population centres. It was noted that Kirkwall Airport also currently hosts permanent display cases containing various artefacts from Orkney's museums, and craftwork made by members of the Orkney Crafts Association, although some Kirkwall participants suggested that the latter was targeted toward a particular audience –

Figure 19: Flying Fortress loading up with depth charges at Benbecula, May 1943, Crown Copyright, Imperial War Museum

wealthy, older tourists.

At Benbecula, however, several people visited the airport specifically to view the SPARA photo exhibition, and one came to see the aforementioned 'Fichead Eun' ('Twenty Birds') artwork, which hangs above the baggage conveyor. This participant felt that people would come to the airport to see exhibitions if they were about something local; that visitors wanted to know more about the area and that the airport was a good place in which to start doing that. Indeed, a number of Benbecula participants were particularly intrigued by the wartime photographs on display in the SPARA exhibition (e.g. Figure 19) and felt that the airport could perhaps make more of its military past.

At Sundsvall-Timrå, meanwhile, participants spoke about the airport's purpose-built exhibition space (the Midlanda Konsthall) which is no longer in use. Some commented that it closed because there were only 2-3 visitors per day; that people could not be enticed to the airport just for an art exhibition; and that the type of passenger moving through the terminal there (i.e. mostly business travellers) was not the type that would have time to stop to view an exhibition. As one staff member commented:

"The basic idea was not that correct, because they assumed that persons did want to go before they left for Stockholm. That you should go in and sit and have a relaxing time looking at art. You might do that on a Saturday or Sunday, but not Monday to Friday."

And while recent discussions have taken place about the Midlanda Konsthall temporarily displaying artwork from a major Stockholm gallery that is about to be renovated, a limiting factor would appear to be finding someone with the time and expertise to drive the idea forward, as it was felt that this was beyond the capacity of airport staff.

The Midlanda Konsthall is effectively an annex to the main Sundsvall-Timrå terminal building. Some Sundsvall respondents spoke instead of the potential for the main body of the terminal to be used for exhibitions: they acknowledged that the terminal space was used successfully for commercial purposes, and they felt that there would be scope to use this space for cultural purposes also. In this regard, participants spoke positively about the SPARA photo exhibition, and felt that displaying aspects of local heritage (aeronautical or otherwise) was an important and worthwhile use of terminal space, both for locals and for visitors. Indeed, during the course of the Sundsvall-Timrå photo exhibition, two local air enthusiasts brought in some large-scale models of historical aircraft that had flown out of 'Midlanda', which were to be displayed in the terminal. It is also worth noting that, during the course of the researchers' visit to Sundsvall-Timrå, the SPARA photo exhibition was situated next to two new, E-class Mercedes-Benz cars, located in the terminal as part of a local car dealership promotion.

This theme, that remote, peripheral airports are perhaps better suited for hosting exhibitions or displays that reflect local history or culture, was echoed throughout the four case study airports, when many participants welcomed the suggested use of rolling, historical footage displayed on a screen in the terminal. Although concerns were expressed over the practicalities of anything larger, such as a pop-up cinema, it was noted that some of the airports have unused screens which might readily be used for displaying archive footage, or even slideshows of photos, that illustrate the history of the airport.

School visits and work experience

Staff at Benbecula, Donegal and Kirkwall Airports spoke of organising visits from local playgroups, schools, or youth groups such as the Scouts or Sea Cadets. Engagement with the local community in this way was considered an important part of the job. Staff spoke positively about their experiences and the feedback received; although at Kirkwall Airport, there were issues around obtaining permission to take group photographs of the children in order to promote these visits more widely online. Staff at Benbecula Airport also spoke of the importance of their work experience arrangements for local schoolchildren, where, each year, four students are given a week-long introduction to all aspects of airport work, from fire and rescue to working in the control tower. At Sundsvall-Timrå, meanwhile, the airport helps to prepare students for a potential career as an airport technician through its Airport Academy, an initiative run in partnership with a local high school, Timrå Gymnasium. The Academy covers all aspects of field, ramp and emergency services, plus some security. During the course of the Sundsvall-Timrå case study, the researchers spoke to a number of current and former Academy students, all of whom spoke highly of their experiences.

Barriers to Air Travel

In exploring potential barriers to non-aeronautical use of the case study airports, one common theme emerged: that the airport terminal is often perceived solely as a functional gateway in and out of the local area, rather than as a destination in its own right. However, Activity 7.1 also explored what, if any, barriers exist that might prevent or inhibit air travel by members of the local communities. Here, a number of issues were raised.

Cost

Much of the discussion with photo exhibition visitors revolved around the financial cost of air travel from their local airport. Most participants at Kirkwall Airport were positive about the impact of the Air Discount Scheme[10] (ADS) in Scotland, but were disappointed that the offer no longer applied to business travel (eligibility ceased in April 2011) and only applied to the core fares and not the taxes and other charges. Others commented on a rapid increase in fares, with several stating that it meant they now sought alternative means of transport where they had previously taken a flight because the cost was prohibitive. It was mentioned that not only were the fares set by the airline too high, the landing charges at Kirkwall Airport were perceived to be costly. Some felt that as Kirkwall Airport only really served Scottish destinations and the flights were therefore internal, money had been spent on "unnecessary" services such as security which increased the overall cost of flying from the airport.

At Benbecula, participants expressed similar thoughts about the cost of flying from the airport and most felt that the ADS did not go far enough to reduce it to a manageable price. In both Kirkwall and Benbecula, participants noted that flights purchased very early could be cheap, but it was often not practical to book these so far in advance and it seemed as if there were very few of these low fares. Many participants noted that more people would fly if the prices were more reasonable, however some observed that most of the flights were completely full anyway, even with the current pricing structure.

In Sundsvall, some participants noted that the cost of the flights was prohibitive, while others seemed willing to pay for the convenience. There also appeared to be some disagreement amongst participants about whether or not the flights from Donegal were too expensive. Some participants felt that driving to Derry Airport (around 65 miles away, in Northern Ireland) offered a cheaper alternative; others felt that the prices were competitive at Donegal and liked the convenience of it. One participant noted that there was a "loss of trust after Loganair[11] hiked up the prices", and as a result people had started to look for alternative transport methods and had never gone back. Staff members commented that it was a common thing for new airline carriers to come in "with the perception that they can get a higher yield than they can actually get", but that the pricing structure had now been revised and was competitive. Indeed, Donegal Airport staff emphasised the extent to which they engage with carriers to ensure that the best fares are available for their passengers. In Donegal, local knowledge, knowledge of past fare structures, and feedback from the passengers is relayed to the carriers (and to the Irish Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, which subsidises the PSO services) in order

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[10]The Air Discount Scheme (see http://www.airdiscountscheme.com) is a Scottish Government initiative designed to make air travel more affordable for remote communities in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The scheme, introduced in 2006, applies to registered individuals whose permanent or main residence is in an eligible area, and to registered third sector organisations who have employees or volunteers whose permanent or main residence is in an eligible area. The ADS does not apply to PSO routes, business travel, or NHS-funded trips. At the outset of Activity 7.1, the discount was 40%, but this rose to 50% on 1 January 2016. In 2015, 93% of the eligible Orkney population had registered for the ADS, as had 94% of those in the Outer Hebrides (Scottish Government, 2015).

[11]Loganair/Flybe operated the Donegal Airport services to/from Dublin and Glasgow between November 2011 and January 2015.

to ensure pricing is reflective of what the community is willing to pay. As one staff member put it: "we know what the community needs".

In Skye, meanwhile, participants expressed concerns about the fares that might be charged to fly in and out of a reopened Broadford Airport. Several exhibition visitors felt that the flights would likely be beyond their own budget, affordable only to "rich tourists" and the more "well-heeled" Skye residents. Younger participants with children believed that the cost of transporting an entire family by air would be particularly prohibitive.

A number of Skye residents also pointed to the financial failure of Loganair's Skye service in 1988 and believed that a new commercial service would be equally unviable, describing current efforts to re-open the airfield as "misguided" and "doomed to failure". And on a similar theme, exhibition photographs featuring the aircraft of now-defunct airlines (e.g., Ireland Airways, 1991-98; Highland Airways, 1997-2010) prompted some Donegal and Benbecula residents to talk, sometimes disparagingly, of the efforts of these carriers to maintain passenger services from their airports.

Alternatives to air travel

For the five case study communities, a range of alternatives to air travel are available. Estimated alternative journey times have been calculated and are illustrated in the table below. As shown, the presence of an airport allows a journey time of under two hours from these remote communities to a major population centre. And as the table also illustrates, some of the alternatives can involve long periods of travel.

Table 4: Estimated alternative journey times for case study communities (hours and minutes)

From	To	Flight time	By Car (*inc. ferry)	By Bus (*inc. ferry)	By Ferry (direct)	By Rail (*inc. bus/ ferry) (**inc. bus)
Kirkwall	Aberdeen	00h 50m	*07h 30m	*10h 00m	07h 15m	*09h 00m
	Glasgow	01h 10m	*08h 15m	*16h 00m	n/a	*10h 00m
Carrickfinn, Donegal	Dublin	00h 55m	04h 30m	05h 00m	n/a	n/a
Sundsvall	Stockholm	00h 55m	04h 00m	04h 30m	n/a	04h 00m
	Göteborg	01h 35m	08h 15m	11h 30m	n/a	07h 30m
Broadford, Skye	Glasgow	01h 00m	04h 30m	05h 35m	n/a	**07h 30m
Broadford, Skye	Inverness	00h 35m	02h 00m	02h 35m	n/a	**03h 45m
Balivanich, Benbecula	Glasgow	00h 55m	*08h 15m	*11h 40m	n/a	*13h 40m

0-2h	5h or less	10h or less	More than 10h

The extent to which the existence of alternative modes of travel deterred people from flying out of their local airport was discussed frequently by photo exhibition visitors; although throughout the five communities it is fair to say that opinions were decidedly mixed.

Most participants generally described their local airport as essential and struggled to imagine life without it: but for different reasons. In the island communities of Benbecula and Kirkwall, several people maintained that they simply "haven't got any other option" than to use the airport, with alternatives taking too long and being too unreliable. At Donegal Airport, and for participants in the Skye case study, it was acknowledged by many that airport connections did not quite have the same essential nature of those in Benbecula and Orkney, due to the viable (if sometimes unpopular) travel alternatives. Meanwhile at Sundsvall, the airport was also felt to be vital to the surrounding area, but largely for bringing business in and maintaining connections to global business.

With regard to alternative forms of transport, several participants at Kirkwall Airport mentioned the benefits of using the ferry over flying, especially for families or larger groups, but some felt that the ferry was too slow for their purposes. Others lacked the confidence or ability to be able to take their car on the ferry and drive long distances when on the mainland. At Benbecula Airport, the Uists ferry services were deemed by many to take too long and to be too unpredictable[12] to rely upon completely, but some preferred the flexibility of being able to take their car across.

At Sundsvall-Timrå, many participants felt that the train was a lower-cost, more convenient option. However, some felt that the train took too long (the East Coast line to Stockholm is Sweden's busiest single-track railway and congestion has dramatically increased the travel time), and that journeying to Stockholm by car was a long and difficult drive. Similarly, travelling by car to Dublin from the Donegal Airport area was described as "exhausting" by some participants, with a round-trip taking at least 8-9 hours along some "terrible" single-track roads. There is also a lack of rail network in County Donegal, which further limits travel options.

In Skye, meanwhile, although around two-thirds of the photo exhibition visitors were broadly in support of the reintroduction of passenger services from Broadford Airfield, relatively few indicated that they would personally use these services. Some older participants, for example, pointed out that they are entitled to concessionary bus travel throughout Scotland, and that they can currently make the 5 to 6-hour coach journey from Skye to Glasgow for the price of a booking fee only. It should also be mentioned here that the topic of Skye and the campaign for the reopening of the airport came up frequently amongst Benbecula participants. Many felt that the case for an airport was weaker on Skye as the alternative travel options were more viable than in Benbecula and other remote areas with local airports. As can be seen in the table above, Inverness is around two hours' drive by car from Broadford, and Glasgow can be reached in around 4-5 hours.

Another alternative to air travel mentioned in Kirkwall, Benbecula and Donegal was the use of teleconferencing technology for business meetings. It was felt that while this was a helpful alternative, it was a poor substitute for face-to-face interaction and often the facility was not available for some. One NHS Orkney employee noted that the use of videoconferencing for patient consultations was currently being explored, and that this might have the potential to reduce the need for some patient air travel.

Service cuts

The aforementioned service cuts at Benbecula Airport were also discussed by participants there, particularly in terms of their impact on patient travel. A 5-days-per-week service to Stornoway was reduced to three days per week (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) in 2013. This means that those with hospital appointments on Monday or Friday have to travel overland and by ferry, and those

who are not discharged in time on Thursday often have to stay over the weekend if they are not well enough for the alternative transport methods. The Friday service was due to be reinstated shortly after the photo exhibition for this research took place, with reinstatement of the 5 day service also being considered.

At Sundsvall-Timrå, some mentioned reduced services, which impacted on their decision about whether to fly or to take alternative transport. Indeed, after some years of incremental growth in aircraft movements, 2015 saw a drop in the number of passenger services operating from the airport (see http://www.trafa.se/).

Delays

There were mixed responses regarding whether delays to services were a barrier to airport use. Most participants felt that the flights from Benbecula Airport were fairly reliable, with delays largely due to unavoidable poor weather conditions. Similarly, at Sundsvall, while there were delays reported by participants, most seemed to be able to make alternative travel arrangements when necessary. Some did note that the train was in fact more unreliable than flying.

However, while some participants recognised that delays at Kirkwall Airport were inevitable due to the weather and location, others felt that too many were due to 'apparent' technical difficulties.[13] This was said to have an impact on those flying for hospital appointments, as often flights needed to be booked the day before, and an overnight stay factored-in, in order to ensure the appointment would not be missed. Flights running late and the airport having to close due to staff exceeding their allowable working hours was recognised as a major inconvenience, despite staff efforts to be as flexible as possible. One passenger commented on the unreliability of flights there, saying:

"We don't call them Flybe here, we call them Flymaybe".

In Donegal, high winds had also caused disruption to the flight schedule earlier in the year.[14] Most participants seemed to accept that this was a part of air travel, however.

Disabled use and facilities

Most participants from the four airport exhibition locations felt that airports were well equipped for disabled passengers, and staff noted that there were regulations for airport terminals on access and support for passengers with reduced mobility. For example, at Donegal, passengers with reduced mobility have the option of pressing a buzzer in the car park to request assistance. However, it must be said that the majority of these respondents were able-bodied themselves.

In the Kirkwall Airport case study, participants from a disability access group mentioned a number of issues with regards to access for passengers with reduced mobility. For example: diabetics and those with limited mobility taking their shoes off at security; pain when being patted-down; being able to park in a disabled space and take the disabled badge for use at the other end of the journey; and access to the disabled toilet which is kept locked. Many of these issues, however, already had solutions, but these were not widely known or communicated. It was suggested that more two-way communication was needed here – the person with the disability being able to communicate their needs, and the airport knowing when to appropriately offer help. It was also acknowledged that the

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[12]Ten days before the Benbecula photo exhibition began, a ferry had crashed into the harbour at Lochmaddy in North Uist. This caused significant disruption to the Uists ferry services for around three weeks and may have influenced responses here.

[13]In the week prior to the photo exhibition at Kirkwall Airport, the subject of Flybe/Loganair delays and cancellations in the Scottish islands was debated in the Scottish Parliament (see Scottish Parliament, 2015).

[14]A few weeks before the photo exhibition at Donegal Airport, the Irish Parliament had discussed the number of disrupted flights to and from Carrickfinn (see Dáil Éireann, 2016).

airport had made many adjustments to the space for passengers with illnesses and reduced mobility. For example, special types of flooring to protect diabetics' feet when going through security, and chairs and support for those who cannot stand for long or walk a distance. Additionally, Kirkwall Airport maintains an 'Ambulift' device which boards wheelchair-bound passengers with relative ease, and which is not often seen in airports now as it becomes increasingly difficult to source spare parts.

The communication aspect was also raised in discussions about access to Kirkwall Airport in relation to the special assistance provision, or PRM (Passengers with Reduced Mobility) policy, which can vary wildly from airport to airport. Depending on the size and structure of airports, special assistance can either be given by airline staff, security staff, a combination of both, or dedicated PRM staff in larger airports. It was recognised that despite passengers adhering to the rules for requesting special assistance at least 24 hours in advance, sometimes the correct questions were not asked by the person logging the request and the message was not relayed to the relevant airport staff at all connecting airports. It was noted that Kirkwall Airport itself was usually able to meet these requests, but airports on the connecting flights were not aware of the request.

Communication

Despite the aforementioned communication issues around help for passengers with reduced mobility or living with a disability, communication was generally felt to be good at Kirkwall Airport, with use of local radio to inform passengers of a full car park, good relationships between passengers and staff, and requests for special assistance largely being met, for example. While the airport does make use of social media, some people commented that this is not something they personally engaged with and had therefore perhaps missed information only put out through those channels. However, the lobbying for better services through a Facebook campaign had been used to positive effect here.[15] An airport consultative committee had been formed, but had not met in recent times.

Communication was also generally praised at Donegal, with information being conveyed through multiple channels such as radio, magazines and social media. However, airport staff believed that the personal, one-to-one communication side of things had suffered with the outsourcing of car rental. It was felt that a better, more coherent service was offered if the airport did this themselves.

At Benbecula Airport, it was felt that there was little in the way of information for passengers – no display of flights and times, and no information displays for flights cancelled or delayed. There were also a number of complaints from participants about misinformation, in particular uncertainty over flight times. Incorrect timings had been posted on the website which created confusion for a number of passengers and participants in the terminal who were due to pick up passengers. It is unclear how often this happens at Benbecula. The lack of a manned information desk meant that some visitors to the terminal struggled to find someone to talk to.

Similarly, one participant mentioned that Sundsvall airport was not very user-friendly for older people, or those who did not travel often, as there were a number of screens for information and machines rather than staff. The need for a human face (for example, an information desk) at Sundsvall was highlighted when the taxi offices mentioned people approaching them for help; and the research team witnessed people (largely holidaymakers about to embark on chartered flights) looking 'lost' as they approached or moved around the terminal. The vast majority of Sundsvall passengers, however, are regular business users, comfortable with using the airport and flying.

Parking

Parking was a mixed subject across the four airport case studies. Many participants expressed concerns about the free car park at Kirkwall Airport, which was said to be frequently over capacity. While it was noted that new spaces had been added in recent years, it was felt that introducing charges was potentially the only way to prevent large numbers of people from leaving their vehicles for long periods of time. There were mixed feelings amongst participants about introducing any form of charges at all, with some saying that this would discourage people from coming out to the airport. Parking at Sundsvall-Timrå was also an issue for some participants. While some participants argued that most visitors used taxis, others stated that its charges discouraged people from simply dropping by to use the café or look at an exhibition there. Most felt that parking at Donegal was not too much of a barrier to use. And the main barrier at Benbecula was that the free car park was small and filled up quickly, although other parking options near the terminal made this less of an issue for the majority of participants.

Connecting transport

Participants at Sundsvall-Timrå, Kirkwall and Benbecula Airports commented on the lack of coordination of flight arrivals and departures with bus and/or ferry timetables, which made the onward journey difficult. Many participants at Kirkwall were sceptical about the cost-effectiveness of the airport bus (which runs approximately every 30 minutes to/from Kirkwall town centre) and noted that it ran almost empty much of the time. While at Sundsvall a few participants complained that the most convenient bus service did not drop passengers at the terminal, but on the E4 motorway, meaning passengers had to walk to the terminal with their baggage. Most participants at Sundsvall noted, however, that public transport was not necessary for the majority of passengers as these were business users who usually took taxis. The lack of any public connecting transport was cited by many participants at Donegal as a barrier to using the airport. It was observed that most of the bus services in north-west Donegal are operated by smaller, private bus companies; and while the airport had experimented with a connecting bus service a few years ago, this "didn't really work out".

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[15]In June 2015, a Facebook campaign was launched, entitled 'Islanders Against Flybe & Loganair's Excessive Prices', and subsequently 'Islanders for Fair Air Fares' (this page has since disappeared). In September 2015, Loganair responded with the introduction of a new compassionate travel policy which offers eligible customers discounted fares in times of a family emergency (Loganair, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Conclusions

The aim of Work Package 7.1, and the remit of this report, was to explore the ways in which peripheral and remote airports create social and cultural value – value which is beyond that which is usually reflected in conventional economic analysis. The report also explores the effects of losing a local airport on a community, and the barriers which may exclude certain members of the community from using the airport, or from air travel more generally.

The findings of the research suggest that remote and peripheral airports contribute to social and cultural value in a number of ways:

- Throughout the case studies, participants spoke knowledgably about the history and development of their local airport, intertwined with personal memories and air travel experiences. These stories appeared to invoke a sense of pride in, and ownership of their local airport, highlighting their role as an important facet of local identity and culture.

- The four operational airports were viewed as major employers within the communities they serve, with several examples of long-serving staff members and of generations of the same families being employed by the local airport. This also has an effect on indirect employment in the form of supporting taxi services, attracting tourism to the area, and businesses.

- Benbecula, Donegal and Kirkwall Airports were viewed as serendipitous meeting places, where airport users regularly bump into friends and acquaintances from the local community and exchange news and gossip. At Sundsvall-Timrå Airport, where the vast majority of passengers are business users, there was evidence of a more formal social function through use of meeting spaces.

- The case study airports all provided 'lifeline services' to their local communities. At Benbecula, Donegal and Kirkwall this was particularly evident in terms of patient travel to specialist medical facilities and in connecting remote communities to the outside world. At Sundsvall-Timrå, the importance of the airport in sustaining the presence of businesses in the region was emphasised.

- Heightened security now increasingly challenges the non-aeronautical use of airport spaces, but several good practice examples were found in the case studies, including aviation festivals, charity fun runs and sky dives, and art and photography exhibitions. The cafés/restaurants in the four airports are used frequently by non-passengers, and are much seen as social spaces in their own right. While some respondents believed there was additional scope for exhibitions and performances in their local airport, others struggled to perceive the terminals as arts venues. A common theme throughout all four airports was that additional, non-aeronautical uses of the terminals were welcome, but there was uncertainty as to who could (or should) take responsibility for their organisation.

The Isle of Skye was included in this research as a case study example of a community which had lost its airport in the last 30 years. Participants spoke fondly of their memories of using the airport, and of the impact of resuming scheduled services. While some felt that resuming services would be beneficial for the community, others feared the community did not have the capacity to deal with an influx of incomers and tourists. Some felt that the airport would only benefit a small, wealthy section of the community. There was also discussion of the importance of the design of a new airport terminal, with proposed designs taking "full account of the local environment and built heritage", and incorporating a roof that echoes the shape of the island's Cuillin mountain range.

Additionally, this research found that there were several actual or perceived barriers that might prevent or inhibit air travel by particular sections of the community. These included: the financial cost of air travel; the ready availability of other forms of public transport; cuts and changes to scheduled air passenger services; cancellations, delays and disruptions to air services; car parking capacities and charges at the airports; a lack of provision of public transport connections to/from the airports; facilities and services for people with a disability; and poor information provision and communication by the airports. It remains a challenge for remote and rural airports to find ways to lessen the impacts of these barriers, especially those which are not within the control of the airport staff.

Further research

Building on the research findings presented here, the project team also wishes to develop a theoretical typology of remote and peripheral airports, based on their social and cultural value. This typology will be presented in a subsequent output for Work Package 7.1, in the form of an academic journal article, but an outline of the work is given below.

Typically, existing classifications or typologies of airports have drawn on cluster analyses, and have been based on quantifiable variables such as passenger numbers, seat capacity, destinations, infrastructure (e.g., length of runways, number of gates), financial performance, and operational efficiency. Here, however, it is proposed that the typology be based on four, perhaps less readily measurable, variables or facets:

Gateway. Where the value of the airport is gauged in terms of it being a functional point of travel in and out of the local area.

Venue. Where the airport might be regarded as a social space and venue in its own right, in terms of the use of its café/restaurant by non-passengers, or as a host to exhibitions and events.

Business. Where the importance of the local airport might be measured by the extent to which it helps to attract and retain business (including tourism) in the local area, and serves business users.

Community. Where the airport might be regarded more as an integral part of local identity, as an important local employer, and as a provider of vital, lifeline services to the area.

In relatively densely populated regions, where the airport serves a substantial population and there are a large number of flights per day, the airport primarily acts as a gateway (for the business community, for tourists and/or for the local community). While locals will use it as a meeting place or a café to have lunch, the airport is not regarded primarily as a social arena.

In contrast, in very remote areas, where the airport may only cater for a handful of flights a week, the gateway function - for much of the time - is less important that the terminal's role as a community venue. Many sparsely populated areas struggle to support stand-alone cafes or restaurant meeting places, so the airport becomes an important social focal point and as a destination in itself.

It is important to note that gateway airports will have a social function and that venue or arena airports are still business, tourist and community gateways (when flights arrive or take off). However, airports will have a primary or dominant function. These functions can perhaps best be thought of as two extremes of a continuum or axis.

Similarly, remote and peripheral airports differ in terms of their primary local market. Airports in more densely populated regions, which are also served by good motorway and rail links, are often predominantly business gateways. While very remote or island airports do obviously cater for

business passengers, they are regarded much more as lifeline or community gateways, a vital link to an outside world which is otherwise impossible to reach quickly.

Again, business gateways also serve local families and tourists, while lifeline gateways also serve some business passengers. As with the gateway – arena/venue functions, it may be useful to consider business –community/lifeline as two extremes of an axis also. If these two axes (gateway – arena/venue; business – community/lifeline) are plotted on a chart, the quadrants describe four types of airports (see the diagram below): Business gateway; Community/ Lifeline gateway; Business arena/venue; and Community arena/venue.

Three of these airports types are relevant for SPARA 2020. Airports need to be very large, accessible hubs (such as Heathrow or Schiphol) – close to a substantial amount of hotel and meeting room capacity - before they become a business meeting venue in their own right. This category does not include peripheral and remote airports.

The airports in this study, and - we would suggest - other peripheral and remote airports, therefore appear to fall into three types:

- Business gateway (e.g. Sundsvall)
- Community/ Lifeline gateway (e.g. Kirkwall, Benbecula)
- Community arena/venue (Donegal)

As noted above, all airports will exhibit traits of all three airport types. However, each airport will have a dominant function, which allows it to be characterised a one of these three types. These functions and the airport typology will be discussed more fully in subsequent outputs from WP7.

The findings from WP7.1 will be used to inform the subsequent elements of the work package, and are especially useful in terms of stakeholder and public engagement, which is a focus for both WP7.2 and WP7.3. Stakeholder and community engagement strategy templates will be developed in WP7.2, and the findings from WP7.1 described above suggest that it may be useful to tailor these templates according to airport types. For example, the key stakeholder groups for a business gateway are likely to be different from those of a community arena/venue, and therefore production of separate templates for all three relevant airport types is proposed. Application of these templates will then be piloted in a real airport setting as part of WP7.3.

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