

THE ISLAND SYNDROME

A VIEW ON THE INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS
OF THE ICELANDIC MUSIC SCENE



"IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE ANYTHING WITH A BEAT COULD GROW IN A LANDSCAPE AS OTHERWORLDLY AND PHYSICALLY INHOSPITABLE AS THAT OF ICELAND. MOTHER NATURE, IN ALL HER HARSHNESS AND MAJESTY, IS THE HEADLINE ACT HERE. SHE IS NOT EASILY UPSTAGED."

DAVID FRICKE, ROLLING STONE, 1988

ILANA VAN DEN BERG

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Ilana van den Berg

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Supervisor: Prof. Dr. T.F.M. ter Bogt

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors facilitating the success of the Icelandic alternative music scene. Its main goal is to gain better insight in the question why some local music production centers are more successful than others. It brings together some main findings of studies on the international success of scenes and yields a set of facilitating factors that can be used to analyze the success of local music scenes. The theoretical framework first deals with the concepts *scene* and *success* and subsequently provides a number of facilitating factors to the international success of music scenes in general, extracted from literature on other internationally successful local music scenes.

The data consists of 12 semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Among the respondents are mostly musicians who did or did not (yet) break through internationally, but also people working in the music industry and people who are in other ways connected to Icelandic music and its scene. The respondents were asked for the reasons for the Icelandic scenes international success. This data was supplemented with literature on the Icelandic music scene.

The findings of this study suggest that most factors that have been at work in the success of other scenes also apply to the case of the Icelandic scene. The success of the Icelandic scene is facilitated by a combination of a number of factors that have worked together. In addition, there are some factors that can be designated as typical for Iceland and a new factor, *national characteristics*, is added to the list of facilitating factors that was composed in the theoretical framework. The main conclusion of this study is that it is possible to extract a number of factors that have facilitated international success from literature on music scenes and use these factors to explain the success of other scenes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation

Iceland is a small, isolated country with only 320,000 inhabitants. Despite the size of the population and the isolation of the country, Iceland harbors a strong and productive creative community. This applies for art forms such as movies, literature, and arts, but music in particular. The Icelandic alternative music scene stands out for its innovative character and its international success (Barret, 2008). From the eighties on, it has not only produced big international music acts such as The Sugarcubes, Björk and Sigur Rós, but also many other bands, such as Múm, Seabear, Emilliana Torrini, Hjaltalín, Bang Gang, Mugison, Ghostigital, GusGus and Apparat Organ Quartet, who are all enjoying considerable success outside of their own country. Up to today the scene keeps producing new, young, interesting bands such as Mammút, Retro Stefson and FM Belfast. The internationally renowned showcase festival Iceland Airwaves attracts hundreds of music lovers, music journalists and industry people each year. Furthermore, the scene has been the focus of numerous documentaries, such as *Rokk Í Reykjavík* (Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, 1982), *Screaming Masterpiece* (Ari Alexander Ergis Magnússon, 2005), *Heima* (Dean DeBlois, 2007), and the most recent, *Backyard* (Árni Sveinsson, 2010). It cannot be denied that internationally the Icelandic music scene seems to be “punching far above its weight” (Barret, 2008, para. 6). Media all over the world pay attention to the scene and are all asking themselves the same question: “how can it be that such a small country produces so many bands and can harbor a scene that can become this internationally successful?”

1.2 Delineation

As Bennett indicates in his article *Music Scenes* (2004), popular music scenes have been increasingly examined in the last decades. To know what a popular music scene exactly is, and under what conditions it can flourish, the theoretical framework first deals with literature on music scenes in general. Bennett and Peterson’s book on music scenes (2004) has proven itself a useful work of reference for this purpose. Furthermore, several studies on local popular music scenes were used such as the Manchester rock scene (Bottá, 2009; Brown, O’Connor & Cohen, 2000; Crossley, 2009), the Berlin Techno scene (Bader & Scharenberg, 2010), the Swedish Pop scene (Burnett 1996; Power & Hallencreutz, 2002), and the Finnish Metal scene (Mäkelä, 2009) to investigate the

facilitating factors to the international success of music scenes. Some of the studies that were used for this thesis describe the rise and fall of a particular scene (Spring 2004; Bottà 2009; Bader & Scharenberg 2010), while some focus on the formation of social networks (Crossley, 2008), others deal with governmental support and policy (Brown et al., 2000) and most relevantly for this essay, some of these studies investigate the international competitiveness of local music scenes (Mäkelä 2009; Power & Hallencreutz, 2007; Power & Hallencreutz, 2002; Harris, 2000).

This study focuses on the international success of the Icelandic music scene. This means that it only concentrates on the success of Icelandic bands that have been successful in international spheres and the scene around these bands. Icelandic music and its scene has been the subject of numerous scientific studies. Gudmundsson (1993) gives an outline of the history of Icelandic music and the search for a synthesis between international trends and cultural inheritance. Others are trying to connect Icelandic music to the influence of nature and national identity (Dibben, 2009; Mitchell, 2009). Several studies have investigated the influence of the punk movement in Iceland. Sigurdardóttir (2004) did this for example by examining the rise of record label Bad Taste. There are also studies focusing on the Icelandic music industry: Einarsson (2005) evaluated the economic impact of the Icelandic music industry and Aðalsteinsson and Ragnarsdóttir (2003) tried to give an insight into the Icelandic music industry in numbers. Even though Björnsdóttir (2009) is the only one focusing on international competitiveness by investigating the effects of public funding on the international competitiveness of the Icelandic music and film industry, none of the studies listed above have ever switched the focus onto the different reasons for the scene's international success.

1.3 Central research question

Gunnar L. Hjálmarsson, writer of the book *Eru ekki allir í stuði? Rokk á Íslandi á síðustu öld* which translates to *Are We Having Fun Yet - Icelandic Rock Music in the Last Century* (2001), gives a striking reaction to the question why the Icelandic music scene is as successful as it is: “*This is the question EVERY foreigner asks. No, I have no answer*” (personal communication, 28 august 2010). Notably, this question has been asked many times, but nobody really seems to have a satisfying answer to it. Numerous music journalists have dedicated their writings to the international success of the scene, but there have been no scientific studies on this subject so far. Therefore, the main goal of this thesis is to analyze the international success of the Icelandic music scene, by using other studies on similar popular music scenes that have gone on to international or global

success in the past. The conclusions of the theoretical framework distill a set of facilitating factors that have been of influence on the international success of local music scenes. These factors are processed in interview questions that are presented to different actors within the Icelandic music scene. Next to literature on the Icelandic music scene, the outcome of these interviews is used to analyze the success of the Icelandic music scene. Not only does this contribute to a better understanding of the Icelandic music scene in particular, but also to a better understanding of the international success of local popular music scenes in general and “why it is that certain places have been unusually productive crucibles for the creation of popular music” a question that “research on the music industry has long tried to understand” (Power & Hallencreutz, 2005, p. 3) This study aims to answer the following research question:

Which facilitating factors can be found in literature on music scenes to analyze the international success of popular music scenes and in how far can these factors be used to explain the international success of the Icelandic music scene?

In order to get a complete answer to the central research question, it is necessary to first obtain an answer to the following research questions:

1. What are popular music scenes and how are they described in the scientific literature?
2. What are the criteria for international success of a local music scene?
3. Can the Icelandic music scene be considered internationally successful?
4. What are the factors facilitating international success that are described in scientific literature on music scenes?
5. In how far can the facilitating factors be used to analyze and explain the international success of the Icelandic music scene?

1.4 Structure

The research questions listed above are answered in the following chapters of this study. Chapter two, the theoretical framework, starts with a short outline of the history of popular music in Iceland. Subsequently, the answer to the first research question “What are popular music scenes and how are they described in scientific literature?” is given by using literature on scenes. Existing theories on the concept music scene and its development, as well as different types of scenes (local, trans-local and virtual) are

presented here. An answer to the second and third research question, “What are the criteria for international success of a local music scene?” and “Can the Icelandic music scene be considered internationally successful?” is presented in the second part of the theoretical framework. Paragraph 2.3 contains the list of facilitating factors which could be important in a scene's international success. After having described these factors, which later are used to analyze the success of the Icelandic music scene, the research method and respondents are presented in chapter three and the results in chapter four. The latter is dedicated to the fifth and last research question: “In how far can these facilitating factors be used to analyze and explain the international success of the Icelandic music scene?” Here, a connection is made between the list of factors and the outcome of the interviews. The study proceeds with a conclusion in chapter five. Having answered the previous research questions it should be possible to give an answer to the central research question: “Which facilitating factors can be found in literature on music scenes to analyze the international success of popular music scenes and in how far can these factors be used to explain the international success of the Icelandic music scene?” In this section the limitations of the study and suggestions for future studies on the topic are discussed. The study ends with a list of references and finally an appendix.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this thesis is divided in four sections. It starts with a short outline of the history of popular music in Iceland. Secondly, the concept music scene is explored. The first research question “What are popular music scenes and how are they described in scientific literature?” is discussed here. In addition, the next two research questions are addressed: “What are the criteria for international success of a local music scene?” and “Can the Icelandic music scene be considered internationally successful?” Lastly, a list of facilitating factors to international success of local music scenes that have been extracted from literature on other music scenes is presented, hereby answering the fourth research question: “What are the factors facilitating international success that are described in scientific literature on music scenes?” The theoretical framework ends with a conclusion.

2.1 A short history outline: important events in Icelandic popular music history

Gudmundsson (1993) states that the foundation of Icelandic rock culture was laid between the nineteen-fifties and the mid-seventies. He describes this period as one that came with the rise of youth culture in Iceland, musicians’ search for international recognition and a search for an Icelandic identity in Icelandic pop/rock music. After World War II, Iceland was becoming a richer country. In the fifties the US military base in Keflavík brought in new music and lifestyle images from America. Icelandic bands, eager to make it abroad, adopted the music they heard on the navy radio, often singing in English. Gudmundsson (1993) states that it took several generations of youth culture for Icelandic artists to find a way of making popular music that was true to their heritage and to “bring the spirit of rock’n’roll into the Icelandic language” (p.12). After a while, the music became more personal and original and musicians were able to express their feelings and attitudes through words in their own language. According to Gudmundsson, at this point “Icelandic rock was born” (p. 10).

An important event in Icelandic music is the arrival of punk on the island. The golden *Rokk í Reykjavík era* (1980-1982), named after the infamous documentary by filmmaker Fridrik Thor Fridriksson (1982), started off in the eighties. Punk lasted only three years in Iceland, but meant a big turning point in Icelandic music, since it brought a certain attitude to Icelandic music that was not about making it abroad. In the interviews that were conducted for this thesis and are extensively cited from later on in this paper, a respondent stated that a new generation of musicians arose who turned their backs on the

industry and stopped going to London trying to get deals. They dared to be different and did not long for international recognition as much as their predecessors. “Suddenly, it was all about 'doing it' instead of ‘making it’” (B. H. Hermannsson, personal communication, August 7, 2010).

An important happening in Icelandic music during the punk era is the formation of the group Kukl (Sorcery). Kukl was a supergroup formed with the most cutting-edge musicians from the punk scene thus far for the final show of the alternative radio station Áfangar in August 1983, put together by radio DJ Ásmundur Jónsson from Gramm Records. Among the band members were Einar Örn Benediktsson, vocalist in the band Purrkur Pilnikk and the young girl Björk Guðmundsdóttir, who at that time played in the punk band Tapi Tikkarass (Sigurdardóttir, 2004). The formation of Kukl meant the get-together of some of the most important key figures in Icelandic pop music. Kukl lasted only three years, but its members would later found the pop band The Sugarcubes and record label Bad Taste (Smekkleysa), both defining names for Icelandic pop music. The idea of Bad Taste Ltd. was created around the former members of Kukl and their friends from poetry group Medusa in June 1986. It was more than just a record label: “Bad Taste reacted against the values of corporatism with a combination of *pranksterism* and surrealism (embodying their concerns for absolute freedom), a do-it yourself approach to all their projects and a disregard for financial gain” (Dibben, 2009, p. 12). The here described Bad Taste mentality has been an important influence on Icelandic music. A respondent stated: “Smekkleysa is [...] what started this whole new way of thinking and revolutionized the music scene in Iceland” (J. Pedersen, personal communication, July 26, 2010). The Bad Taste mentality is still strongly interwoven with Icelandic music. Although many record labels have come and gone, Bad Taste is still one of Iceland’s most important record labels.

The band The Sugarcubes (Sykurmólarnir) was founded to earn money to keep Bad Taste going. Although it was not their main goal, they became the first Icelandic band, after Mezzoforte’s hit single *Garden Party* in 1983, to find real international stardom. It all started when aforementioned Einar Örn Benediktsson, a key figure in the Icelandic music scene, sent the music to his close friend Derek Birkett, whom he had met during his study in England. Derek was then just about to found the label *One Little Indian*. The Sugarcubes’ single *Birthday* was published in England in August 1987 and a week later it was chosen as the single of the week in *Melody Maker*. They toured all over the world, sold millions of records on the *One Little Indian* label and paved the road for other Icelandic musicians to try and make it abroad (Guðmundsson, 1993). After some

years, due to some musical disagreements, Björk took her own path and started a solo-career. Björk released her first solo album, titled *Debut* in 1993. It became more popular than any album The Sugarcubes ever released. Over the years, she became the internationally most successful Icelandic artist in the history of Icelandic music. Next to Björk, another Icelandic band reached international stardom; Sigur Rós. Benefiting from by being adopted by Radiohead as their new favorite group and being invited to tour with them, Sigur Rós “has met with an exceptional amount of critical acclaim and commercial success both in Iceland and abroad” (Amico, 2003, p. 17). In the slipstream of Sigur Rós’ success a new generation of Icelandic bands such as Seabear, Amiina, Hjaltalín and Múm, the so-called Krútt¹ generation, was able to receive a considerable amount of international attention and up until today the scene is thriving in international markets. Recently, in 2008, Iceland suffered from a major financial catastrophe. Still, the music scene does not appear to suffer from it. A more extensive view on the influence of the financial crisis is presented in paragraph 4.9.

2.2 Music Scenes

Existing theories on the development of the concept music scene, as well as different types of scenes (local, trans-local and virtual) are presented here. Because the Icelandic music scene can be indicated as an independent music scene, some characteristics of this type of scene are also discussed.

2.2.1 What are music scenes?

Bennett (2004) explains that musicians and music journalists have long been using the concept *scene* in journalistic discourse to designate groups of people around particular genres of music. He notes that the socio-cultural significance of music in our everyday lives has always been an important object of research in popular music studies. Through the years, academics have tried to find ways to measure and describe this significance, but it is only from the early nineties on that scene is also used as an academic model of analysis in popular music studies. Straw, who first introduced the concept as an academic model of analysis in an article in 1991, describes it as “that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and

¹ “Krútt is ‘cute’, even ‘cuddly’, but also ‘clever’ and irresistibly attractive in a childlike way—precocious but still, perhaps, a bit naïve.” Retrieved October 12, 2011 from http://www.artnews.is/artnews_article.php?no=04_02&is=4). It must be noted that the term Krútt is somewhat controversial. Not every artist likes to be labeled as ‘cute’.

cross-fertilization” (p. 373). Bennett and Peterson (2004) state that “the concept music scene is increasingly used by academic researchers to designate the contexts in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others” (p. 1). In sum, a scene is the context in which musical practice (both production and consumption) takes place and can be used as an academic tool to describe all corresponding social and economic relations within this context.

2.2.2 Local, translocal and virtual

Bennett & Peterson (2004) define three different types of scenes: local, translocal and virtual. The Icelandic music scene can be characterized as a *local scene*, because it is largely confined to a specific geographic location. A local scene is the most traditional form of a scene and is, as the word “local” suggests, bound to a specific geographical location. The use of the word scene is frequently connected to a local place, such as the Chicago blues, Seattle Grunge, Orleans Jazz, Norway Metal, Jamaican Reggae or Nashville Country scene. Bennett and Peterson (2004) give the following definition of a local music scene:

We view a local scene to be a focused social activity that takes place in a delimited space and over a specific span of time in which clusters of producers, musicians and fans realize their common musical taste, collectively distinguishing themselves from others by using music and cultural signs often appropriated from other places, but recombined and developed in ways that come to present the local scene. (p. 8)

In addition, they note that a local scene arises in a certain city or region, around a certain style of music and the people involved in it. Face-to-face contact and interaction between fans and music makers is very important. Besides a particular style of music, scenes usually come with other characteristics such as a particular style of dress, dancing or political attitude. The music of a local scene is in many ways, through shared experiences and local history, connected to local identity. Important to know is that despite the fact that a local scene may sometimes seem to want to distinct itself from the global and the mainstream, it is at all times connected to, and in interaction with, the international music industry. In fact, musicians often take widely appropriated music styles from the global music industry and use it to construct and represent their own local identity (Bennett, 2004). Although most scenes rise in a local setting and the importance

of a physical space for the development of a scene should not be underestimated, there are also scenes that have developed themselves at a more global level. Especially in an age of global media and new technologies like the Internet, Bennett (2004) notes that it is hard to deny “the interplay between local and global music-making processes” (p. 228).

A *translocal scene* consists of several local scenes that are in close contact with each other, forming large trans-local networks. Using new technologies such as the Internet, scene members are able to communicate with each other across time and distance. Apart from new technologies, the relative ease of long distance traveling (for both fans and musicians) nowadays has made it easier for trans-local scenes to come into being (Benett, 2004; Kruse, 2003). A *virtual scene* goes one step further than a trans-local scene and can be spread all over the world. Face-to-face contact as in a local music scene is not necessary anymore. Because of the Internet, it became possible for music fans all over the world to share information through blogs, fanzines, chat rooms and online communities. They are widely separated geographically, but come together in a scene through the Internet. Characteristic of a virtual music scene is that it is easier to access, mostly due to the possibility to stay anonymous. The virtual scene is much more in control of fans and thus more devoted to their needs and interests (Benett, 2004).

2.2.3 Independent music scenes

Besides being a local scene, the Icelandic music scene can be characterized as an *independent music scene*. *Indie music* (regularly also known as *alternative music*) is known for its counter reaction against mainstream music and its outsider status. The term indie is traceable to independent, coming from independent record company. Hesmondhalgh (1999) marks this as highly significant because “no music genre had ever before taken its name from the form of industrial organization behind it” (p. 35). Kruse (2003) explains in her book *Site and Sound; Understanding Independent Music Scenes* that it is hard to define indie music, because the boundaries of what exactly constitutes alternative to the mainstream are broad and it is not easy to define a particular musical sound. Here also rises the dilemma whether alternative bands that started out on independent labels, but are later adopted by the mainstream and sign with a major label, can still be called alternative or not. She therefore believes that it would be more useful to describe indie in a broader context than just the music. She notes that indie pop/rock music finds its roots in the *Do-It-Yourself* (DIY) ethic of punk in the 1970s, with its (self-claimed) authenticity and artistic autonomy as important characteristics.

Indie music is not as commercially driven and commercially dependent as

mainstream music, which means that a greater extent of artistic freedom is possible. The independent music scene is assisted by DIY non-profit companies, and a large number of small independent labels rather than just a few corporate major labels. The infrastructure, economic networks and social relations are informal and the distance between audience and performer is minimal (Kruse, 2003). Harris (2000) stated that small local Indie scenes are essential for the renewal of styles. Although Indie does not want to be part of the mainstream, it must be noted that both worlds are dependent on each other, because without mainstream, there would not be anything to react to.

2.3 International success

In this paragraph the evaluative concept *success* is explored and different forms of success are described. In addition, the focus is on the conditions a scene must meet to be internationally successful and the international success of the Icelandic music scene is demonstrated.

2.3.1 Definitions of success

When trying to define success, Zwaan (2009) notes that “success is an evaluative concept, and that judgments about success always depend on the perspective of the person who judges” (p. 10). In his study on careers of pop musicians in the Netherlands, he states that in the literature on career studies, career success are often divided in *subjective* and *objective career success*. Zwaan (2009) defines subjective career success as “the individual’s feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with one’s career” (p. 11). The focus here is on intrinsic indicators of success. For instance, one artist considers him- or herself successful when friends and family like his or her music, the other is only satisfied when he or she is making enough money. Objective career success is defined by Zwaan (2009) as “career success that is observable by others, based on objective and visible criteria” (p. 11). Here, the focus is on extrinsic indicators of success that are objective and quantifiable. For success in popular music, these factors include the amount of money an artist earns, the number of record sales, international releases, the frequency of performing, world tours, sold out shows, positioning in the sales charts and the amount of airplay on the radio. It must however be noted that in times wherein popular music is increasingly being consumed on the internet, the importance of chart positions and the number of album sales is decreasing. Instead, download ratings and the number of hits on YouTube and Google, likes on Facebook, friends on MySpace, listeners on Last.fm, and

plays on Spotify are increasingly important in determining an artist's success.

Zwaan (2009) also mentions an additional conceptualization of career success, especially focusing on artistic careers. This so-called *aesthetic success*, usually referred to as *reputation*, is measured by factors that are indicating the artistic impact of the artist's work such as "the amount of attention that artist's receive from art critics, their inclusion in reference works, or ratings on aesthetic significance by experts or critics" (p. 82). In independent music scenes this form of aesthetic success is often more important than objective success. Indie bands don't usually aim for the kind of commercial success that popular mainstream bands are enjoying. They attach more value to the opinion of music critics and a small specific group of fans than to the opinion of the masses. Therefore, they associate success with the artistic value of their work rather than with value in money such as album sales and number one positions in the charts.

Because subjective success is different for every artist and based on intrinsic factors, it is not suitable for the purpose of determining whether a music scene is successful or not. Factors for objective and aesthetic career success on the other hand can both be used for determining the success of a scene. A music scene can be considered successful when a significant number of artists from the particular scene are enjoying international success. For instance, the Manchester post/punk scene is known for acts such as Joy Division, The Fall and The Smiths (Crossley, 2009) and the Finnish metal scene has produced successful acts such as HIM, Nightwish and the Rasmus (Mäkelä, 2009). The success of these acts, whether this is in objective or aesthetic terms career success, contributed to the international awareness and reputation of the particular scenes and therefore to their success. Aesthetic success is more suitable when it comes to indicating the success of the scene as a whole. Successful scenes such as the Chicago Blues, Orleans Jazz and the Detroit house scene have all left their marks on the history of popular music and are still influencing popular music that is made today. Whenever a scene is enjoying sufficient attention of media and music critics and is able to leave behind an artistic impact or reputation, it can be considered successful. Below, the success of the Icelandic music scene is measured both in terms of objective and aesthetic success.

2.3.2 Measuring the success of the Icelandic music scene

In an attempt to present the Icelandic music industry in numbers, Aðalsteinsson and Ragnarsdóttir (2003) came to the conclusion that statistical information on the music industry in Iceland is regrettably scarce: "accurate information regarding the industries

size, its export and airplay performances are not available” (p. 49). Einarsson (2005) notes that the industry in Iceland is small, but growing. Approximately 0,6% of the workforce in Iceland work in the music sector, and it is estimated that the Icelandic music industry accounts for 1,2% of Iceland GDP , which means that it represents “a significant part of the Icelandic economy” (p.8). Although the Icelandic music industry is small, according to the former Icelandic Minister of Culture, Þorgerður Katrín Gunnarsdóttir quoted in Barret (2008), it has been performing beyond expectations: “The Icelandic domestic market is one of the smallest in Europe but internationally our music industry is punching far above its weight” (para. 6). Numerous institutions, music journalists, and scientists support this statement. The Icelandic Music Export office (IMX) states the following on its website:

Iceland has been known for its high-quality musical exports since The Sugarcubes landed a Top 20 UK Chart position for their single “Birthday” back in 1986. Since then, bands like Björk and Sigur Rós have confirmed their achievement was not one off. Icelandic music left its fingerprint on the international scene a long time ago, and continues to do so today. (IMX, 2010)

Next to IMX, several articles on the Internet and in popular music magazines refer to the Icelandic scene as innovative, disproportionately productive and internationally successful. Rob Young, quoted in Mitchell (2009), states in an article about Sigur Rós in *The Wire* magazine in 2001 that “Iceland, and Reykjavík in particular, harbours a music scene most European countries would kill for” (p. 184). In an article for *Music Week* in 2008 Christopher Barret refers to the Icelandic music scene as “a hot bed of creative energy” (para. 1).

Also in scientific publications about Icelandic music the success of the scene is recognized. Mitchell (2009) states that “Iceland’s musical infrastructures seem disproportionately strong in relation to the country’s sparse population” (p. 184) and Gudmundsson (1993) notes that “the more experimental part of Icelandic rock music has over the last 4-5 years been enjoying a considerable international success” (p. 1). Despite its limited size, the Icelandic music scene has produced at least three super acts; The Sugarcubes, Björk and Sigur Rós. The Sugarcubes toured all over the world, sold millions of records on the *One Little Indian* label and paved the road for other Icelandic musicians to try and make it abroad (Gudmundsson, 1993). Björk is “a platinum selling artist cited as an influence by numerous musicians, and is widely respected for the innovative character of her artistic output; she has won international awards for her music, videos

and acting” (Dibben, 2009, p. 1.). Sigur Rós were adopted by British Indie rock band Radiohead as their new favorite band and were invited to tour with them. Amico (2003) refers to them as “an Icelandic band which has in the past three years met with an exceptional amount of critical acclaim and commercial success both in Iceland and abroad” (p. 17).

In the introduction it already has been said that next to the above described big acts such as The Sugarcubes, Björk and Sigur Rós, the scene has produced many other internationally successful bands, such as Múm, Seabear, Emilíana Torrini, Retro Stefson and FM Belfast. The scene has been the focus of numerous documentaries, such as *Rokk Í Reykjavík* (Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, 1982) and *Screaming Masterpiece* (Ari Alexander Ergis Magnússon, 2005). In addition, the internationally renowned Iceland Airwaves showcase festival attracts hundreds of music lovers, music journalists and industry people each year. Considering all the above said, it cannot be denied that the Icelandic music scene is enjoying notable international success.

2.4 Facilitating factors

Music scenes cannot just rise at every random place. It takes different circumstances and conditions to create the right fertile environment in which a music scene can flourish. And even if it does flourish, it is not self-evident that it will be internationally successful. It must be noted that in the history of popular music only few scenes have gone on to global success (Power & Hallencreutz, 2002). The facilitating factors described in the following paragraph are taken from literature on music scenes that are enjoying or have been enjoying international success. The factors discussed are *networks, leveraging, the music industry, government support and intervention, the urban environment: attractiveness of a city, musicians' professionalism and mentality, and product's quality and distinctiveness*.

2.4.1 Networks

A scene would not be a scene if people are not connected to one another or if everybody would pursue their own goal without influencing each other. Interaction within a scene is important; actors within a scene need to be networked in order to function as an effective entity. “Networks are about how the sector interacts and how knowledge is passed around. Networks are how ideas, sounds, 'products' are tested, validated, given credibility” (Brown et al., 2000, p. 445). Crossley (2009) describes the significance of

networks and interaction in the Manchester music scene:

As people connect, for example, more bands are formed. This allows for more band nights, which generates more opportunities for contacts to form. Likewise, connection breeds trust, in some cases, which facilitates the pooling of resources and thus more adventurous projects. This is especially important in independent music scenes where formal contracts and other legal enforcement mechanisms, at least at this time, were seldom found. (p. 41)

Besides this he describes how Manchester bands such as Joy Division, Buzzcocks and the Fall helped each other out in their early days. “Such cooperation clearly helped both the scene and individual bands within it to develop” he states. “It is just one example of the way in which networks and their emergent properties (trust, norms of reciprocity, etc.) transform and enhance conditions of action” (Crossley, 2009, p. 27).

Kruse (2003) explains that interlocal social networks are especially important in independent music scenes, because of their low-budget nature. Since there is not much money available for the dissemination of independent music, an interlocal social-economic network is crucial in getting a band’s music to receptive audiences. Bader and Scharenberg (2010) note that personal trusted contacts that are made and maintained through networks are important in music scenes and the music business. Power & Hallencreutz (2007) agree that if you want to get something done, you need to have personal contacts at the right place: “The music business is one where trust and personal relationships are central. Gatekeepers filter the enormous amount of music out there by only allowing in material that comes through trusted personal contacts” (p. 18). They continue by saying that the development of networks, or as they call, ‘soft infrastructures’, is crucial to competitiveness in the music business, because the sharing of “conventions, common languages and rules for developing, communicating and interpreting knowledge” helps producing better and more competitive products (Storper, quoted in Power & Hallencreutz, 2007, p. 378).

2.4.2 Leveraging

Burnett (1996) suggests that the international success of other artists can provide leverage and can inspire peers to aim for the same. He compares this situation to the Björn Borg effect for tennis in Sweden:

The success of Borg inspired others, like Mats Wilander and Stefan Edberg, on to success. The same situation is perhaps at work in music with the phenomenal

success of ABBA, Europe and Roxette inspiring other younger musicians to aim for the international market. (Burnett, 1996, p. 131)

It cannot be denied that the success of role-model acts such as Abba (Sweden), Nirvana (Seattle) and Bob Marley (Jamaica) inspired their fellow-artists and helped their scenes to flourish. In the case of Finnish metal, the success of acts such as HIM or The Rasmus, helped solving the inferiority complex of Finnish artists regarding American, British or Swedish music. Mäkelä (2009) points out that the breakthrough of these artists caused a “shower of excitement” and a growing self-confidence with other Finnish artists; she stated that “in Finland, 2000 was a year of national pride and relief in terms of popular music. Since this breakthrough, Finnish popular music has continued to thrive in international markets” (p.369). The international success made Finnish artists believe in themselves and in the fact that they could achieve international stardom just as much as any other artist from every other country. This self-confidence helped them to achieve and maintain international success. Furthermore, the achievements of predecessors do not only inspire and help to grow a greater degree of confidence, they also open up practical possibilities; new doors are opened, contacts, knowledge and information, things that can be useful in an artist’s career, are easily passed on from artist to artist. Leveraging can therefore be an important factor facilitating success in popular music.

2.4.3 The music industry

Bennett and Peterson (2004) note that “scenes are often regarded as informal assemblages, but scenes that flourish become imbedded in a music industry” (p.4). When this happens, it can be facilitating to the further success of the scene. The music industry’s task is to make popular music into a saleable product; it is a complex network of individuals and organizations who are involved in the process of commodification; from the people and companies who create, produce, scout and record the music (musicians, producers, studios, engineers, A&R managers) to the people and companies who promote (record labels, music publishers, band managers), distribute (distributors), broadcast (radio stations, music television), sell (retail and online music stores), report on (music journalists) and present (music venues, booking agents and promoters) the music.

As it is trying to make money out of music, the industry is very keen on international success. Labels, but also distributors and retailers can earn a lot of money from a globally successful artist. Generally speaking, major labels, having access to the right channels, are the ones who are trying to *break* artists internationally. This means

they are trying to achieve success with a particular artist in a particular area by using the right marketing or by creating a *buzz*, something that can be a costly operation, especially in the United States (Power & Hallencreutz, 2007). Bennett and Peterson (2004) note however that the form of industry around a music scene “contrasts sharply with the corporate form dominated by a handful of media conglomerates” (p. 4). Rather than just a few major labels, the indie landscape is filled with more small independent labels and DIY enterprises (Kruse, 2003).

Bader and Scharenberg (2010) state that the role of independent labels has become increasingly important in recent years. They assert that “independent labels have become more attractive to artists, because today, an international commercial success is possible even for independents” (p. 86). The independents' position is closer to the artists themselves than the majors'. They have the possibility to infiltrate in subcultures within the scene and therefore function more as laboratories for experiment, innovation and the discovery of new musical styles. Smaller independent labels who only promote one specific genre of music are also more likely to grow out as a brand themselves and bind loyal customers (Bader & Scharenberg, 2010). However, they usually do not have access to the networks and distribution channels that the majors have. In this respect it is not unusual that independent labels work together with major labels and sometimes even become part of a major label. This kind of cooperation can enhance the success of the more independent and innovative music styles next to mainstream music.

2.4.4 Government support and intervention

In the last two decades, a shift has taken place when it comes to government support and government intervention in popular music (Bottá, 2009; Brown et al., 2000). Popular music has been increasingly recognized as an important source of income for a city. A successful popular music scene functions according to Bottá (2009) as a “booster of local pride and a motor of the local economy”, furthermore, it provides employment and attracts tourists and business (p. 349). Brown et al. (2000) state that “music can be glamorous with a huge local PR potential” (p. 447). It is understandable that the government or city authorities in a lot of countries try to support local music scenes, increase their visibility in international spheres and hereby try to contribute to the international success of a scene. The question is, in what way are they trying to do this? A government can try and boost a scenes' success, but which approach is the most suitable?

Brown et al. (2000) give an example of two different approaches in local music policy in two different cities, Sheffield and Manchester. In Sheffield the council

attempted to establish a cultural quarter more or less from scratch; the Sheffield Cultural Industry Quarter (CIQ). Here, the city council operated with a *top down approach*. This means that the council is active in supporting the scene by providing buildings, facilities and training; they are trying to attract cultural producers and key companies into the area and are actively involved in the music industry. The difficulty in this approach is whether or not the government can meet the needs of a local music industry and if the music industry is attracted to such initiatives.

The music business as described in the previous paragraph has always been skeptical about government intervention. They believe that the scene will survive by itself, without “irrelevant municipal meddling in a sector it cannot understand”, an attitude that is also referred to as “pop music's rebellious and/or Darwinian ethos” (Brown et al., 2000, p. 443). In many cases, the local music industry does not want the government or the council to intervene; they just want them to create a city without barriers where they can operate in more effectively by sorting out issues such as transport and licensing (Brown et al., 2000). Creating a city without barriers by dealing with many non-cultural areas of policy, such as transport, housing, licensing and policing, but with minimum government intervention in the cultural industry is referred to as a *hands-off approach* (Brown et al., 2000). This approach was greatly supported by actors within the Manchester scene:

You know, it's very difficult to put money into this kind of industry - how do you help? ...there's very little you can do. It's like this building a municipal rehearsal room, you know – fuck it! The argument being, if you can decide which ten bands out of the one thousand deserve the rehearsal room, don't be a Councillor be a fucking record company because you'd be a millionaire. (Anthony Wilson, owner of the Factory, the Hacienda and In The City, quoted in Brown et al., 2000, p. 447)

In the end, Sheffield was not successful in creating a vibrant music industry with its top-down approach. Manchester on the other hand, produced a booming popular music scene by handling a hands-off approach. Still, it cannot be said that one approach is better than the other. Because of non-intervention and a lack of coordinated action from different policy areas, the once so flourishing Manchester club scene became threatened by issues of gangs, organized crime and violence (Brown et al., 2000).

Music scenes rise and exist under different circumstances and have different needs. Although the music industry seems to want to be left alone and work freely in a city with no barriers, Brown et al. (2000) state that non-intervention is no longer an

option. They note that “the existence of local networks and creative talent does not necessarily mean that a local industry is secure” (p. 449). Furthermore, they state that the needs of a local music industry are complex and that the government should try and meet these needs as effectively as possible. When a government supports the music scene in a suitable manner, it can be considered a facilitating factor to success.

2.4.5 The urban environment: attractiveness of a city

The attractiveness of a city for young and creative people can be an important factor in determining whether a music scene is successful. A high concentration of talent fosters the formation of local networks of creativity and dynamic subcultures in which more innovative products can be developed:

It is no accident that most music styles are closely connected to certain cities – New Orleans and jazz, Detroit and Motown, Chicago and House, Manchester and Brit-pop, and even Nashville and country. Without the urban density and the specific local conditions, their development would not have been feasible. (Bader & Scharenberg, 2010, p. 77)

Power and Hallencreutz (2002) recognize the importance of “agglomeration in urban areas” in their study on successful music production centers Jamaica and Stockholm. They believe that “geographic proximity based on agglomeration in urban areas fosters intensified transactions and interactions that are crucial to commercially successful creative and innovative product development” (p. 1849). In his book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), Richard Florida stresses the importance of the so-called creative class for the economics of a city. If a city wants to prosper economically, it should attract young and creative people who foster a creative, vibrant, and professional environment that in turn attract more talented people as well as business and capital. Bader and Scharenberg (2010) explain that unlike Florida claims, it is not self-evident that a city's attractiveness for young and creative people correlates with general economic success. On the contrary, Hall (2000) stated that it is mostly cities in decline or cities in transition are the ones that are interesting for this specific target group:

But these talented people needed something to react to. We notice that these [creative cities] were all cities in transition: a transition forward, into new and unexplored modes of organization. So they were also societies in the throes of a transformation in social relationships, in values and in views about the world (Hall, cited in Bader & Scharenberg, 2010, p. 80)

Kruse (2003) mentions the significance of cheap rents of living, studio and rehearsal space, which makes a city more attractive for musicians to reside in, especially because most musicians have limited funds. She stated that “the financial possibilities and constraints that existed in localities – especially in terms of the affordability of practice and living space – were central factors in determining whether an active indie pop/rock music scene was possible” (p. 123).

An example of a city that became a magnet for the young and creative and that illustrates the above-mentioned is Berlin. The city is celebrated by many artists as a creative and inspirational environment. It is an example of a city in decline as Hall describes. Bader and Scharenberg (2010) explain that the deindustrialized inner city areas with its many vacant buildings appeared to be the perfect setting for the Berlin underground techno scene. They state that the relative ease of squatting vacated apartments, the low costs of living, and Berlin’s image as a stronghold of youth and subculture were important reasons for the migration of young and creative people to the eastside of Berlin.

2.4.6 Musicians' professionalism and mentality

Having particular skills and working on a professional level can contribute to the international success of musicians. A high level and concentration of creativity, talent, and entrepreneurial skills amongst people in the scene can be helpful in reaching a certain level of success. Power & Hallencreutz (2002) mention the “high capacity for self-organization” of the actors in the Swedish music business as a factor to its success (p. 1842). Also, Mäkelä (2009) points out that professionalism can be an explanation for international success:

In media texts, the usual explanation for international success has been that contemporary Finnish performers are more professional and cosmopolitan than before: musicians are better prepared in terms of public relationships and language skills. They are competent at writing catchy tunes and willing to work hard, as well as at promoting themselves. (p. 370)

In addition to professionalism, the attitude or mentality of musicians and other actors in the scene can be of significant importance. What are their motivations, and what is the main goal they want to achieve with producing or supporting music? Are they competitive? Do they believe in themselves? Are they ambitious and willing to work hard? Do they aim for commercial success, or are they making music just for their own

pleasure?

Answers to questions like these can be factors facilitating success. If artists are competitive, determined to make it big internationally and willing to work hard, exceptions left aside, it is more likely that this will happen. Mäkelä (2009) points out that the urge for competition triggers musicians to aim for international fame and work hard to achieve this goal. She writes for instance about the Finnish envy of their Swedish neighbors. The Swedes were enjoying huge success with acts such as Abba and Roxette and were the world's third biggest music exporter in the 1990's. This envy fueled a growing longing to win international fame with Finnish musicians and a 'big breakthrough' almost became an obsession. Finnish artists got more ambitious and worked harder, which resulted in an eruption of Finnish music exports. In 2000 the hard work paid off with the success of the acts Bomfunk MC's, Darude and HIM. After this, Finnish bands (especially metal groups) have continued to thrive in international markets.

2.4.7 Product's quality and distinctiveness

Just as in every other industry, if you want to be successful, the product, in this case the music and the image around it, has to be of a certain quality. You have to sell your product, which means the consumer and the media have to like it or be attracted to it in some way. Either because the music is of good musical quality, it is exactly what the consumer wants to hear, or because it is something he or she has never heard or seen before. If you want to make it big, you have to stand out in whatever way possible. Burnett (1996) states that you have to be original to sell internationally: There should be a factor that distinguishes the artist from the majority. He notes that "you have to be original and look exciting. It has to be visual to function internationally" (p. 132). A Polygram A&R man cited in Burnett (1996) stated: "To sell a band internationally you have to give the foreign public something they haven't had before" (p. 132). It is not always predictable which music or band will break through internationally and which will not. It depends on which segment of the market an artist is aiming for. You do not always have to be original to be internationally successful as Burnett (1996) claims. Following trends does not always yield an original or innovative product, but can be successful in the global market as long as it meets a certain quality standard.

The visual element of which Burnett (1996) speaks plays an important role in becoming a successful artist. Most young consumers like to obtain a certain identity from popular music and tend to copy a certain dress or style from the bands they are listening to. Especially in music scenes, which often arise around a certain genre and locality, the

visual element and lifestyle around the music are important factors contributing to the scenes' popularity. It is therefore not only about the quality, innovativeness or distinctiveness of the music, but also about album covers, videos and a certain image or lifestyle surrounding the music.

2.5 Conclusion

After giving a short outline of Icelandic music history, the theoretical framework provides an overview of literature related to the research questions that are presented in the introduction. First, the concept music scene has been explored. From the nineties on, the concept was increasingly used by academics to analyze groups of people around certain types of music. It is possible to distinguish three different types of scenes: local, trans-local and virtual. The Icelandic music scene can be designated as a local independent music scene. This means that it is confined to a specific location and consists of numerous small independent DIY enterprises, instead of being dominated by a handful of major labels. Secondly, the focus was put on international success in popular music. Success is an evaluative concept and can be defined in three different ways: Subjective career success, which is based on intrinsic indicators of success such as the question whether the individual considers him- or herself successful, is not suitable for measuring the success of a music scene. On the other hand, objective career success, based on objective and visible criteria, and aesthetic career success, focusing on the artistic impact or reputation, can both be used for measuring a scene's success. Considering the positive attention of institutions, media, music critics and scientists, the successful artists it has produced, and the number of tourists the country attracts just because of its music, the Icelandic music scene can be considered internationally successful, both in an objective and aesthetic point of view.

As described in paragraph 2.3 there are different factors that can facilitate international success of a music scene or a particular artist. First, collective action in a music scene is made possible through networks. People are connected to one another and new ideas are tested and validated. A well functioning network is therefore crucial to the success development of a scene. Secondly, the international success of artists that has been achieved in the past can work as leverage for other artists' success in terms of a greater self-confidence and the passing on of contacts and personal experience. Thirdly, the music industry can facilitate international success in many ways, for instance by scouting and contracting new talent and investing money in their marketing, trying to break them on the international market. In independent music scenes a fruitful

cooperation between independent labels and major labels can facilitate success. Also, if a government or city council recognizes the importance of a booming popular music scene it can try and boost a scenes' success. This can be done with different approaches, such as a top down approach or a hands off approach. It is not said one approach is more effective than the other, this depends on the particular needs of the music scene in question and in which way these needs are dealt with. Provided that the approach is effective a government can facilitate in the international success of a scene. Furthermore, the urban environment with its facilities and specific local conditions can be the perfect setting for a music scene to develop. The attractiveness of a city for young and creative people is therefore an important factor in determining whether a music scene is possible in the first place. It is not self-evident that prosperous cities are more attractive. Specifically, cities in decline or in transition are interesting for the specific target group. The affordability of living, a dynamic subculture and a vibrant club culture are important factors in determining this attractiveness. In addition, musicians' professionalism and mentality are important in what they can and want to achieve. An artist that works on a high professional level and is more self-confident and motivated to achieve international success, is more likely to actually achieve this success. Also, the music should be of a certain quality, or be original to be internationally successful. Lastly, the visual element, such as videos, album covers and press photos, play a significant role in determining if something is going to be successful, while a large part of music consumers attach value to the identity that can be derived from popular music.

From this paragraph can be concluded that there are a set of circumstances and conditions, discussing different fields of research that can facilitate the success of a music scene. The strength of this study is that it is the first to put these reasons for success in a row. It does not mean that all of the facilitating factors should be at work at the same time to guarantee international success, but together they form a tool that can be used in analyzing the success of the Icelandic music scene. It is not realistic to give a one-sided answer to the question why the Icelandic music scene is enjoying this much international exposure, but the hypothesis is that there have been several important factors that have worked together in facilitating the international success of the scene. Some of the facilitating factors that have been found in other studies will to a large extent also apply to the Icelandic case. It is possible that by analyzing the Icelandic case other factors are discovered and can be added to the list. At the same time, there are factors that apply to the case of Iceland in particular.

3. METHOD AND RESPONDENTS

The following chapter gives accountability on the collected data; where and how they were retrieved and why these specific data are useful for this analysis. Furthermore, the amount and composition of respondents is discussed. The second section pays attention to the used method of analysis; it first gives a short account on the *constant comparative method* (CCM) and then offers insight in the different steps of the analysis.

3.1 Data and respondents

The data for this analysis were collected from different sources. Half of the data used for this analysis consists of literature on internationally successful local music scenes and was retrieved from digital or online catalogues and databases, and the Utrecht University library collection. Among the scenes that were part of this analysis are the Manchester rock scene, the Berlin Techno scene, the Jamaican Reggae scene and the Finnish Metal scene. From this selection of literature a list of facilitating factors was extracted that is used to analyze the international success of the Icelandic music scene. In addition, websites, articles and statistical information from the internet were used to get a complete view of the international impact of the Icelandic music scene.

The other half of the data consists of 12 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with an average length of 45 minutes. Among the respondents were mostly musicians who did or did not (yet) break through internationally, but also people working in the music industry and people who are in other ways connected to Icelandic music and its scene. The search for respondents started with Icelandic musician Benedikt Hermann Hermannsson, with whom first thoughts on the research were shared face-to-face. He and band member Ingi Garðar Erlendsson, provided contact information for most of the informants, predominantly musicians. The list of interviewees was expanded with more industry-related people such as Anna Hildur Hildibrandsdóttir, managing director of the Icelandic Music Export Office, of which contact information was retrieved through the internet. All interviewees were approached via email, introducing the topic and central research question of the thesis and were asked for a Skype interview. Eight out of twelve respondents agreed to set up an interview through Skype, two rather answered questions written via email, and two of the respondents were spoken to in a face-to-face setting. Unfortunately, not all of those approached were willing to set up an interview. Also, some agreed, but failed setting up an interview, due to lack of time or miscommunication. In this respect, the list of the interviewees is not as varied between musicians and music

industry people as planned. The possible complications of this are discussed in the conclusion. An overview of the respondents' backgrounds as well as the interview topic list can be found in the appendix. The interview topic list included open-ended questions about the reasons for the success of the scene and questions about the facilitating factors presented in chapter two. To obtain extra support and to be able to see if the collected data from the interviews corresponded with what has been written by others, the interview data were supplemented with available literature on the Icelandic music scene.

3.2 Method

The method of analysis used in this research is based on the constant comparison method as discussed by Boeije (2002). She explains that “the constant comparative method (CCM) together with theoretical sampling constitute the core of qualitative analysis in the grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss” (p. 391). Furthermore, she notes that “comparison is at the heart of the analysis process” (p. 406). Tesch (1990) agrees that the main intellectual tool is comparison and gives an accurate description of how the constant comparative method works:

The method of comparing and contrasting is used for practically all intellectual tasks during analysis: forming categories, establishing the boundaries of the categories, assigning the segments to categories, summarizing the content of each category, finding negative evidence, etc. The goal is to discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories, and to discover patterns. (Tesch, cited in Boeije, 2002, p. 392)

By presenting a purposeful approach to the constant comparative method Boeije hopes to make the complicated process of constant comparative analysis more transparent. To achieve this, she advocates an approach that divides the analysis into a number of steps. The number of steps is dependent on the material that is used. Important activities in the execution of these steps are fragmenting and connecting, meaning that coded pieces are taken out of the context of the interview or text (fragmenting) and are subsequently connected to coded pieces taken from other texts or interviews and interpreted as a whole. To analyze the data, open coding (recognizing themes and coding them) and axial coding (comparing code segments within and between texts or interviews) are used. A more detailed insight in the coding process of this study is provided in the appendix. Below, the different steps of this analysis are presented:

1. Comparison within a single text.

Literature on local music scenes was analyzed. Important themes were recognized and coded (open coding). Among the codes were *financial, facilities, mentality, policy, government support, attractiveness, and networks*.

2. Comparison between texts.

The coded segments from the different texts were compared both within and between texts (axial coding). Patterns were recognized and combinations of codes or categories were made. The eventual goal of this step is to create a list of factors that facilitate the success of local music scene.

3. Comparison within a single interview.

The interview data were analyzed. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were analyzed by hand. The transcripts were also coded (open coding), to find out which themes emerged from the interviews. Among the codes were *facilities, mentality, government, music industry, national identity, geographic location and music education*.

4. Comparison between interviews.

Codes from the different interviews were compared both within and between interviews. Patterns were recognized and combinations of codes or categories were made. The goal of this step is to create a similar list of facilitating factors to the success of the Icelandic scene, seen from the objective of the respondents.

5. Comparison between texts and interviews.

The list of facilitating factors of the Icelandic case was compared to the list of facilitating factors from other music scenes. The remaining codes that could not be grouped under the list of facilitating factors found in the literature on music scenes were categorized into a list of facilitating factors that are specific to Iceland.

After having executed the above described steps, all collected data has been systematically compared to each other. The conclusions that can be drawn from these comparisons are described in the next chapter.

4. RESULTS

The facilitating factors that are discussed in chapter two were processed in interview questions that were presented to 12 respondents. The outcome of these interviews, together with the information found in scientific literature on the Icelandic music scene, form the fundament for this chapter. After giving a short outline of important events in Icelandic popular music, the facilitating factors are discussed in order of significance; the most significant factor first, the least significant last (see table 1). The most significant factor is the one that most respondents have designated as a factor that has contributed to the international success of the scene, the least significant factor is the one they have designated as the factor that has the least, or, not at all, contributed to the success of the scene. Facilitating factors that have not been discussed in chapter two, but have been, according to the respondents and literature on the Icelandic music scene, of significant importance in the success of the Icelandic scene are discussed in the last paragraph of this chapter.

Table 1 Facilitating factors acknowledged by respondents

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Professionalism and Mentality	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Leveraging	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Product's quality and distinctiveness	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Networks		X			X	X	X	X	X	X
The Urban Environment		X		X		X		X		X
The Music Industry	X									
Government Support	X									

Notes: This table is based on the outcome of the interviews that were analyzed by hand. An X indicates that the respondents mentioned or acknowledged the corresponding factor as being facilitating to the international success of the Icelandic music scene

4.1 Artist's professionalism and mentality

In chapter two is recognized that the artist's professionalism and mentality can contribute to success. The respondents were asked about the professionalism of Icelandic musicians and whether this has contributed to the success of the scene. They were also asked if it is possible to speak of a typical Icelandic mentality among musicians. If so, what are the characteristics of this mentality and has it contributed to the success of the scene?

Several respondents mentioned the relatively good music education system in Iceland as a facilitator to the professionalism of musicians. Especially music education for young children is regarded as of good quality. Many children are sent to music schools at a young age to get acquainted with a diverse range of musical instruments and grow up with music from childhood on. One respondent believes that this is a huge reason why there are so many bands in Iceland. Another reason for the high percentage of people involved in music and arts according to one respondent is that “it's pretty acceptable in Iceland to become an artist as a way of living and as means of living” (A.H. Hildibrandsdóttir, personal communication, July 21, 2010). In contrast to developed musical skills, several respondents mentioned the lack of organization skills among Icelandic musicians. It is striking that this property was often not considered a bad thing:

People are very disorganized and chaotic, but very good at disaster management. They're doing things without thinking whether it's possible or not, or if you should be doing it at all. You get an idea, you do it and if you get a problem, or don't have the money, the problem gets fixed by some means. People don't give up. And I think this makes things happen. (B. H. Hermannsson, personal communication, August 7, 2010)

Besides being chaotic and disorganized, most respondents agreed that another characteristic is that Icelandic musicians work hard. “Iceland is very good at working and doing,” stated one respondent, “people work like animals” (S. K. Jónsdóttir, personal communication, July 11, 2010). Sindri Már Sigfússon of the band Seabear states: “I think it's more of some sort of ‘Icelandic spirit’ that pushes a lot of bands – a ‘work hard and do your best’ kind of feeling” (Hua, 2011, para. 13). A respondent explained that this working and doing mentality is deeply embedded in Icelandic culture. Iceland was very poor in the old days. Natural resources were scarce so they had to rely on the little they had and make the best out of it. “It's necessary to have the skill in order to survive on this island” (J. Pedersen, personal communication, July 26, 2010). ‘Making it yourself’ is still something that is strongly embedded in Iceland's culture and history. This mentality is acknowledged by the majority of the respondents. “The typical Icelander is totally Do-It-Yourself; from building your house to releasing a cd, not asking for any permission for nothing” (S. K. Jónsdóttir, personal communication, July 11, 2010). When punk came to Iceland the DIY attitude became even more important in Icelandic popular music. It became defining for the style. Covers and posters are often homemade looking and the productions are noisy and made at home.

Another factor, according to some respondents is the individualism of Icelandic artists. Because of this individualism and nonconformity, you do not see bands copying each other in Iceland; there is only space for one Björk and one Sigur Rós. To most respondents, it is important to be original. “There is no marketing or major label that is trying to mold everyone in the same pose. People are really brave to create what they want to create”, a respondent stated (A.H. Hildibrandsdóttir, personal communication, July 21, 2010). The large amount of artistic freedom and originality has also a lot to do with the fact that most Icelandic artists are not as commercially driven as most other musicians. Many respondents mentioned the impossibility of making a living out of music in Iceland as a reason for the artistically innovative music:

You're not doing music because you think you're going to make money, you're not doing music because you not have any expectations or desires to be famous, you're not competing with anybody. I think it brings a kind of [...] honesty [...]. It's not contaminated with anything else than the joy of making music. (I. G. Erlendsson, personal communication, July 12, 2010)

Two respondents considered a great self-belief as typical Icelandic. One respondent stated: “A lot of bands think that they're the best in the world. If you genuinely believe that, you have some extra power to get your music out” (B. H. Hermannsson, personal communication, August 7, 2010). They both speak of an Icelandic minority complex, something that has to do with living on a remote island and the anxiety of not being noticed. One respondent refers to this inferiority complex as ‘the island syndrome’. He believes that because of this syndrome, Icelandic musicians are eager to get themselves out there and looking for international recognition. This urge for competition or maybe even fear to be overlooked combined with a great belief in your own competence, which was also at work in the Finnish pop scene described by Mäkelä (2009) discussed in chapter two, results in the willingness to work hard to achieve this recognition.

4.2 Leveraging

As described in the introduction, in the history of Icelandic music, The Sugarcubes, Björk and Sigur Rós are considered the most successful artists in the history of Icelandic pop music. Nine out of ten respondents agreed that the success of these acts have been of great influence on the Icelandic music scene. Leveraging or the Björn Börg effect, as Burnett explains in his book *the global jukebox* (2006), makes that the success of

particular acts can inspire others on to success. Most of the respondents pointed out that these acts have been, and still are, a great example, help, and inspiration for other Icelandic bands. They were the people that put Iceland on the map and created a brand or even an identity for Icelandic music. They got the attention of the world, a sudden interest where other bands could benefit from. A respondent stated: “The Sugarcubes and Björk opened the door, Sigur Rós opened it more, and now everybody can slip in. They did the same for Iceland as The Beatles did for Liverpool or Nirvana did for Seattle” (G. L. Hjálmarsson, personal communication, August 28, 2010).

Most respondents recognized that the success of these acts helped inspire other bands on to success just like Burnett (1996) explained that the success of tennis player Björn Borg inspired others on to success. Many respondents regard to them as role-models; they have shown that it is possible to make it outside of Iceland, hereby giving Icelandic artists a self-confidence they did not had before. Björk is known to be very helpful when it comes to sharing her knowledge and letting others benefit from her success. Mitchell (2009) states that Sigur Rós’ international success was obviously assisted by the success of Björk. A respondent stated that Sigur Rós has meant a lot for Icelandic language in popular music: “A lot of people are saying you have to sing in English to become something, but then they showed the world that they sing in Icelandic, and their huge so it works. That definitely helped a lot” (A. Pétursson, personal communication, July 14, 2010). Another respondent pointed out that after the breakthrough of Sigur Rós, there was a whole generation of bands, the Krútt generation, that could benefit from their success, resulting in a big wave of bands breaking through outside of Iceland.

4.3 Products’ quality and distinctiveness

In chapter two is explained that quality, innovativeness or distinctiveness of the music can be factors facilitating international success. Also the visual element is important; album covers, videos and a certain image and lifestyle around the music can largely contribute to the popularity of the music and its scene. Being internationally successful, there must be something special to Icelandic music that has caught the attention of worldwide media, music lovers and music critics. Is it possible to speak of a specific Icelandic sound and image and if yes, why is it special and what are its qualities?

From the interviews it seems that there are limitations to defining the Icelandic sound. Several respondents agreed that there is something but that it is hard to pinpoint what it is, especially in academic context. A number of respondents believe that Icelandic

music is original and unique and one respondent states that Icelandic music is “something you have not heard before” (U. M. Stefánsson, personal communication, July 14, 2010). Another respondent believes that Icelandic music is melancholic and emotional compared to other popular music and yet another respondent describes Icelandic music as raw and less produced. One respondent believed that the Icelandic language in Icelandic music might be interesting or fascinating, because there are so few people speaking it. He also believes that living on an island brings something special to the music:

“Living on an island, the atmosphere, the music gets special. It develops into something unique. Maybe it’s different from what the rest of the world is listening to. All the bands that have done well outside of Iceland are bands which usually play different kind of music, like Sigur Rós, like Múm. They all play like not mainstream pop/rock or whatever. That seems to be what be foreigners like the best. (A. Pétursson, personal communication, July 14, 2010)

Not all respondents agree on the fact that Icelandic music is special. “I think there's nothing magical. I think it's just normal music.” stated one respondent. He stresses on the diversity of Icelandic bands, which makes it impossible to speak of one Icelandic sound. “I guess it’s not just the music”, he stated, “it’s sort of a lifestyle, it’s the way you dress, it’s the art around it” (I. G. Erlendsson, personal communication, July 12, 2010). As discussed in chapter two, the visual element around popular music is sometimes just as important as the music itself. A respondent stated that the way people think about Icelandic music becomes a selling point. People have a certain image of Iceland and Icelandic music, something that attracts their attention and arouses their fascination, something exotic. A respondent stated: “Perhaps in people's imagination the music conjures up an image of Iceland as a fairy tale land, unspoiled and unpolluted. An exciting, exotic place. And yes, compared to most other countries this is an accurate description” (G. L. Hjálmarsson, personal communication, August 28, 2010). Dibben (2009) explains that landscape and nature have always been an important aspect in Iceland’s national ideology and reflects in contemporary popular music:

Iceland’s distinctive topological features (mountains, volcanoes, glaciers, lava fields, waterfalls, geysers, hot springs, cliffs, black sand beaches, and the sea) frequently appear in music videos and documentaries and form part of Iceland’s rural landscape ideology of ‘pure’ nature free from human intervention. (p. 135)

Ideas of Iceland with its wild landscape and fairytale land find expression through

visual elements, using photo shoots, videos, album covers and clothing (Dibben, 2009). Björk, as explained by one respondent, is the personification of this mysterious and fairytale-like image: “It's this creature, you do not know what she is: is she from another planet? Is she an elf? Does she live in an igloo? People are interested in fairytales, we've been telling stories forever. She's a very strong character and that burns through no matter what” (J. Pedersen, personal communication, July 26, 2010). In addition, Sigur Rós' documentary *Heima* inextricably connects the music to the landscape and between Krútt generation bands such as Sigur Rós, Seabear, Múm and Amiina, it is not hard to discover similarities in the way they present themselves. Numerous band photos are shot in Iceland's rough and wide landscapes, or in the cozy warmth of their homes. Also the clothing meets a certain image or lifestyle; on band pictures musicians are wearing colorful knitted sweaters and caps, warm jackets and patterned dresses.

It must be noted that although the above outlined image around Icelandic popular music arouses the fascination of outsiders and distinguishes the Icelandic product from other music products (and therefore contributes to the international success of the scene), Hua (2011) argues that there is a danger in the assumption that all Icelandic music is inspired by nature and that the influence of nature is overstated: “Iceland's natural surroundings have become hard to separate from the ‘Icelandic’ music style”, she states (Moter nature's role, para.1). She believes that the international music community is too focused on one particular sound and seems to forget about the diversity of music that Iceland has to offer. Furthermore she notes that two-thirds of the population lives in the city and “life is not spent herding sheep, breeding horses, or reading by Candelight” (para. 9). Her statement is strengthened by the fact that only one respondent actually mentioned Icelandic nature as inspiring.

4.4 Networks

In chapter two is discussed that a strong network can contribute to a scene's success. The Icelandic music scene has its center in the city of Reykjavík and is very small. Some of the respondents speak of it as one big family. This family forms a tight-knit community and a strong network with many advantages. People interact in an informal way, which makes connections short and things are easily managed. People help each other out and inspire one another. Because there are so few people in Iceland, people start collaborating more easily. According to one respondent people are dependent on each other in a whole different way than in Europe: “Because it's a small place, because there could be volcano's erupting, I do not know what, there's a stronger network going on here” (J.

Pedersen, personal communication, July 26, 2010).

A number of respondents talk about the advantages of the scene's strong network. No matter what you need, concerts, or festivals, recordings, most things are only one phone call away. Band managers or booking agents are hardly needed, stated one respondent, bands talk directly to the organizers. He furthermore stated that the relative ease of organizing a gig might be a reason for the large number of bands. Other respondents believe that the advantage of such a close community is the way people inspire each other and help each other out. Many musicians play in different bands at the same time and borrow instruments and gear from each other. A respondent stated that helping each other is more important than money.

Because of the small musical community, there is an organic mix of musicians from different genres, musicians that are academically schooled and musicians that are self-learned. A number of respondents mentioned this mixture as a positive thing for the Icelandic scene. A respondent stated: "When you have a too academic scene, with academically learned people, they will only go the academic way. But people who have not been shaped like that, they are a lot more, not so afraid to just do things" (S. K. Jónsdóttir, personal communication, July 11, 2010). Another respondent stated that is good to not be stuck on one thing. He believes that if people play in different bands at the same time, playing different genres at the same time, it is less likely they will get fed up with it, hereby keeping the music scene longer alive. Björnsdóttir (2009) believes that the tight internal network helped "creating a capability of special creative output giving the music industry a competitive advantage over its rivals, i. e. foreign music products" (p. 67).

In contrast to the many advantages of the scene's strong network, a small disadvantage of the tight and family-like network is that it might be hard for an outsider to blend in. A respondent stated that the energy in the music scene is something like a big inside joke: "It makes it really special and really attractive, but also hard to understand for people who are not in the middle of the scene" (B. H. Hermansson, personal communication, August 7, 2010).

4.5 The urban environment: attractiveness of a city

In chapter two is discussed that many local music scenes are connected to cities. The urban environment can be fertile for the development of a music scene. Local conditions and the attractiveness of a city for young and creative people can be important in determining whether a booming music scene is possible. Regarding this subject, Iceland

is a peculiar case. The location of the island is remote and isolated. The total surface of the area is 103,000 km² with a population of only 320,000 inhabitants (www.statice.is). The largest city, and one of the few, is the capital Reykjavík, situated in the southwestern region of the country. Almost two thirds of the population lives in the city and its surrounding areas (www.statice.is). It is therefore not surprising that most of the music scene is set in Reykjavík and not in the rural areas. “I'd say Reykjavík has 80% of the action”, a respondent stated (G. L. Hjálmarsson, personal communication August 28, 2010). “Downtown Reykjavík is the place where most of the musicians live and breathe” (www.icelandairwaves.is). A number of respondents stated that people who are in arts and music will move to the center: “After high school everybody is just dying to move to Reykjavík. All the young people live there, there's a lot of creativity and such” (A. Pétursson, personal communication, July 14, 2010).

From the above said it becomes clear that the center of Reykjavík is where the music scene happens and that a lot of young and creative people are attracted to this area. According to most respondents, the presence of facilities such as rehearsal space, studios and record stores is sufficient. Venues, however, are a problem to some respondents. There are many bars, film houses and theaters where concerts are organized, but according to a number of respondents there seems to be a lack of proper medium sized venues in Reykjavík: “One could fit 200 people, and then a few that fit 1000 people. But we need maybe venues for 500 people” (U. M. Stefánsson, personal communication, July 14, 2010).

In chapter two is stated that a lively club scene can contribute to the success of a scene. Despite the shortage of proper venues, there seems to be a lively club scene going on in Reykjavík.

A respondent stated that it has not always been like that. He believes that an important factor for the rise of the nightlife in Reykjavík is the fact that they lifted a ban on strong beer: “I think it was in '88 [...] that they lifted this ban and immediately bars started shooting up everywhere. And that of course also had an impact on the music life. All of a sudden there's venues. And people want to be entertained also.” After that, he continues, the nightlife flourished and Reykjavik became the place to go party: “It had a really hot nightlife. Damon Albarn from Blur owned one of the most popular bars at the time. It made people come to Iceland. There was a lively club scene and it still is actually” (J. Pedersen, personal communication, July 26, 2010). Another younger respondent confirms that Reykjavík has a lively club scene, even today: “Usually on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, there are always concerts around town. The venues are most often packed with

people. People seem to really love going to concerts” (A. Pétursson, personal communication, July 14, 2010). It must be noted that the lively club scene is predominantly a summer phenomena. One respondent stated: “It is light all the time, it never gets dark, and so the nightlife gets really crazy. And that of course also puts a demand on music. So it all feeds off each other” (J. Pedersen, personal communication, July 26, 2010).

The peak of the Reykjavík nightlife is *Iceland Airwaves*. This internationally renowned festival, that held its first edition in 1999, attracts hundreds of music lovers and industry people to Iceland each year (www.icelandairwaves.is). Although the festival has offered a stage to numerous young Icelandic bands, has in some cases functioned as a springboard, and draws the attention of the international music community to Iceland, not many respondents believed that the festival can be designated as an important factor in facilitating the success of the scene.

Although Reykjavík seems to be an attractive city for musicians and other creative people to reside in, the limited size of the scene and the isolation of the country make that over time many musicians develop the urge to move out of Iceland. A respondent stated: “I think most people at a certain point feel the need to move out of Iceland for just a few years. Just to broaden their perspectives, see cultures and not to be stuck in Iceland” (H. I. Guðnadóttir, personal communication, July 23, 2010). A number of respondents mentioned the limited crowd in Iceland as a reason to get out of Iceland “Only 320.000 people live in Iceland so it gets tiring very soon to play for such limited crowd. Every musician wants to expand their fan base, so everybody tries to play in other countries, make it abroad,” stated one respondent (B. H. Hermansson, personal communication, August 7, 2010). Not only musicians tour a lot outside of Iceland, many of them move abroad to study or to work. The fact that Icelandic musicians frequently tour abroad and the fact that many of them even move outside of Iceland, contributes to the success of the music and the scene. Foreign contacts that are useful in the way to international success are made and maintained. Many Icelandic bands have signed with foreign labels such as *Morr Music*. One respondent stated: “I think it would not be as big if people would not go abroad” (S. K. Jónsdóttir, personal communication, July 11, 2010).

4.6 The music industry

In chapter two is discussed that if there is an active music industry operating around a music scene, with labels that are investing a lot of money in the marketing of artists and with independents and majors cooperating in a successful way, this can be a facilitating

factor to the success of a scene. Most respondents stated that the music industry in Iceland is small and at some points underdeveloped. The Icelandic music industry consists of 16 independent labels and one major label called Sena, which has the major market share in production and distribution (Björnsdóttir, 2009).

Respondents put little faith in the Icelandic music industry and Icelandic record companies. Several respondents state that people in the Icelandic music industry are not necessarily business orientated or have a good sense for it. Björnsdóttir (2009) states that “a lack of co-work between record labels and distributors to systematically attack foreign markets is evident and hindering its growth and expansion to bigger markets” (p. 67). A respondent stated that people do things more out of ideals than actually try to make money from it: “I think they always end up going bankrupt. It's like a pattern with Icelandic music record labels. They start out really good, being really ambitious and nice and then they cannot afford to pay anyone. I mean people get a bad attitude towards them” (S. M. Sigfússon, personal communication, July 12, 2010). Another respondent explains that because of the low level of trust in record companies, the DIY ethic in the Icelandic music industry is stimulated and the organization and promotion of concerts is often done by the bands themselves. The benefit of an underdeveloped music industry without major labels or marketing machines is the larger extent of artistic freedom: “So when people start making music, they do not start with a formula, they start with creativity and the space which is around that creativity” (I. G. Erlendsson, personal communication, July 12, 2010). A number of respondents believe that the absence of a developed music industry is actually a good thing for Icelandic music, because it makes it easier to think outside of the box. One respondent stated: “It's easier to plan things and to tour spontaneously if you're not stuck in some kind of structure” (S. M. Finsson, August 4, 2010).

Several respondents stated that Icelandic music is not driven by the same kind of market factors as it is abroad. Because of the small domestic market it is hard to make a living solely out of making music. Some respondents believed that this influences the music. Many musicians have jobs on the side and make music more an art out of passion rather than trying to let it pay the bills. People are more focused on doing what they want to do rather than selling a lot of records. The fact that the domestic market is relatively small is certainly an important reason for many Icelandic bands to try and broaden their market on international level. It can therefore be seen as one of the explanations for the large number of Icelandic bands aiming for the international market.

Together with a raising awareness of the importance of a vibrant popular music

scene, the Icelandic Music Export Office (IMX) was founded in November 2006. IMX, a business and marketing office for export of Icelandic music, is a music industry initiative supported by the government. Its goal is to increase the visibility of Icelandic popular music abroad. Anna Hildur Hildibrandsdóttir, managing director, claims that IMX had a large stake in the success of Icelandic popular music in the last few years. They have helped bands such as FM Belfast, Seabear, Olafur Arnalds, Hjaltalín, For a Minor Reflection and Ölof Arnalds with travel support, marketing, websites and direct marketing at showcase festivals. “Although I cannot say that this alone provides them with all the success they're having, but this is part of building success for more bands in Iceland” (A. H. Hildibrandsdóttir, personal communication, July 21, 2010).

However, opinions are divided about the usefulness and success of IMX. One respondent believes it is a shame that bands that have not yet reached the popularity to tour outside of Iceland are encouraged to go touring anyway. Another respondent on the other side, took part in several IMX courses, and is very positive about it. Björnsdóttir (2009) states that “consulting and networking with foreign distributors will in the future be the biggest advantage musicians and record labels will gain from the office” (p. 63). She states that IMX’s existence is too short to estimate the effect it had on the music industry competitiveness, but believes that it is an important step in the professionalization of the music industry.

4.7 Government support

In chapter two is discussed that governments or city authorities are increasingly aware of the economic and cultural importance of a vibrant popular music scene. According to Bottá (2009), a successful popular music scene functions as a “booster of local pride and a motor of the local economy”; it provides employment and attracts tourists and business (p. 349). Authorities can try and boost a scene’s success with different approaches and can, in some cases, contribute to its international success. Most respondents believe that the Icelandic government has not yet realized the importance of the music scene. Björnsdóttir (2009) states that the music industry in Iceland has not been enjoying many institutional support up until recently. She states that “the awareness of the economic importance of the music industry has been growing for the last few years, but the industry is still very immature in terms of business knowledge” (p. 60). As an example of increased awareness Björnsdóttir (2009) designates the government sponsored initiative IMX, discussed in the previous paragraph. In addition, Dibben (2009) notes that “state support for the music industry increased with a reduction of tax charged on recorded

music (from 24.5% to 7%) in March 2007” (p. 134). About government support, Björnsdóttir (2009) says that the Icelandic Music Fund, launched in 2004, is the only public fund earmarked to support Icelandic musicians and the music industry, divided in a music part and a marketing and promotion part. It makes 54 million ISK available each year and is accessible for applicants from all genres, from classical to punk. Due to the collapse of the financial sector in October 2008 private funds run by banks and corporations are not as numerous and easy to access as before. Additional support comes from Kraumur, an independent private fund set up in 2008 (Björnsdóttir, 2009).

Regarding the form and amount of government support for popular music, respondents’ reactions are predominantly negative. Most of them believe that the amount of money that is made available is too low compared to other sectors. Others believe that the approach of the government lacks strategy and aim. One respondent stated: “They have this musical fund that you can apply for every year. I do not have the numbers. It's basically the same fund, for every kind of music, everything you're doing, touring, recording, and so on. You never get the sense that there is any strategy behind it” (S. M. Finsson, personal communication, August 4, 2010). Several respondents point out that the success of the Icelandic music scene is not due to support from the state, but was achieved on its own:

All the successful music in Iceland is basically the music that has grown by itself. Björk is someone that really has done things her way. Sugarcubes, they just never had any official, supplementary funds, they never had to compromise to anything. They did things their way. Without any big support or help. (S. M. Finsson, personal communication, August 4, 2010)

Not all respondents are negative about government support. One respondent stated that there are some good initiatives, such as Reykjavík city providing employment for musicians over the summer, that have helped musicians grow further in their career, another respondent speaks of government funded rehearsal space. Also, the government-backed IMX, discussed in paragraph 4.7, is a good thing according to some respondents: “IMX they are definitely doing a great job. They are supportive to bands who are trying to do things and they're advertising Icelandic music, and of course that's a great thing, but I think the government should support it even more” (A. Pétursson, personal communication, July 14, 2010).

The above stated shows that the Icelandic government is operating in a way that has similarities with the hands off approach as described by Brown et al. (2000, p. 445).

They make money available, but do not seem to interfere much with the Icelandic music scene and its musicians. One respondent clearly agrees with this approach: “They do not really know much about the music industry or the music scene. They should just provide the money and we take care of the rest” (A. Pétursson, personal communication, July 14, 2010). In the example of the Manchester music scene it showed that the lack of intervention created a risk-free environment, a city without barriers, in which the Manchester music scene could operate freely. It does not show from the interviews that the lack of intervention in Iceland means that this same risk free environment is created. The overall believe is that the support the government is giving popular music is not sufficient and could be improved in many ways.

In her study on the effects of public funding on the international competitiveness of the Icelandic music scene, Björnsdóttir (2009) comes to the conclusion that public funding plays a minor role in the competitiveness of the Icelandic music industry: “A resource gap is detected in the music industry, being that the industry has too weak business process infrastructure. The weak business infrastructure hinders efficient use of the public funding in order to create capabilities and improve the industry competitiveness” (p. 2). Furthermore, she states that the procedure of the Icelandic music fund (possibility of applying only twice a year, complex applicant forms, and long administrative procedures) does not fit the mentality of the music scene.

4.8 Factors specific to the Icelandic case

After having compared the facilitating factors taken from literature on music scenes to the facilitating factors found in the Icelandic case, there are remaining factors that particularly apply to the Icelandic case. These factors mainly relate on national and geographical issues. The fact that Iceland is a relatively young nation (it became a republic in 1944 after being colonized by Denmark for 600 years), brings according to Panagiotopoulos (2009) a certain “creative freshness” to the scene. He states that “nobody is afraid of experimenting and music is one major outlet. Everything is possible” (para. 3). The short period of independence fueled feelings of nationalism and a search for a new national identity, which also articulates through popular music (Dibben, 2009). Björk stated in the documentary *Screaming Masterpiece* that “it still took two generations to develop a real confidence”. She stated that when punk came to the island in the late 1970s Icelandic musicians discovered that “what really mattered was not what you could do but what you really did and used this power to state a musical declaration of independence” (cited in Dibben, 2009, p.133). Dibben (2009) notes that the articulation

of national identity through popular music (which is mainly expressed in the connection between music, land and nature as described in paragraph 4.3) contributes to the international success of Icelandic musical output:

The national character of Icelandic popular music operates within the global music market, and as such provides differentiation from other music products. Contrary to the tendency for a record company to play down the national origins of performers to create the idea of a rock star who transcends their national background, Icelandic popular music has retained aspects of its affiliation to place. (p. 146)

Another factor that plays an important role is the geographic location, which is an advantage, but at the same time a major disadvantage. Björnsdóttir (2009) stated that the location of the country, being on the edge of the American and the European culture, is considered an important resource for the music scene because it has played “an important role in nurturing the creative resources” (p. 67). On the other hand, the geographical isolation makes touring more difficult (it is impossible to load up a van and ‘hit the road’) and getting a hold of new equipment may be expensive. Until the 20th century, due to poverty and geographic isolation, there were hardly any musical instruments to be found on the island. “As a result”, Hua (2011) states, “Iceland’s musical history is quite distinct, founded upon untraceable native a cappella and folk songs originating from nearby European countries” (A country in musical infancy, para. 2). Daniel Bjarnason cited in Hua (2011) sees the short musical history of Iceland and the non-existence of musical instruments as something positive. He stated that “in some ways, I think this is a good thing, because we are not weighed down by it, and we do not feel that we need to continue any tradition of a certain music. So there is freedom!” (A country in musical infancy, para. 2)

In October 2008, Iceland’s financial sector collapsed. Because of this, private funds run by banks and corporations are not as numerous and easy to access as before and there is less money available for the music industry in general. Nevertheless, a number of respondents believed that the crash had a positive influence on the music scene. A respondent stated: “bands in Iceland are just used to having no money to work with. It does not matter if all the money disappears when we did not have any money to begin with” (B. H. Hermansson, personal communication, August 7, 2010). The crash has only motivated musicians to work harder and see things in a positive light. A respondent stated:

I think it had a very positive influence on music and arts in general in Iceland. It just meant a big boom. I think it's interesting the bands that made it after the crash like Retro Stefson and Fm Belfast (it is this new generation of bands, they are not in the Krútt generation), they just want to party and have a good time. That is a totally new thing. They turned their backs on the generations before them, that were more into the melancholy and singing in falsetto, making an excuse for themselves. They just want to party, have fun. I think that's really healthy. (J. Pedersen, personal communication, July 26, 2010)

It is self-evident that the financial crash cannot be seen as a factor facilitating the success of the whole Icelandic music scene, because it is a relatively recent phenomenon and only applies to a small generation of bands. Nevertheless it appears to have had a positive influence on the continuation of the scene's success. It can be seen as an illustration to the in chapter two discussed phenomenon of cities in decline that attract young and creative people. It shows that unlike Florida claims, a city does not always need economic prosperity to be attractive, inspirational, or a fertile soil for a scene to develop.

5. CONCLUSION

As described in the introduction, the Icelandic music scene is a small and isolated scene that somehow has been enjoying considerable international success in the past decades. Opinions about the reasons for this success are divided and the question often seems to be surrounded with a touch of mystery. This thesis has made an attempt to give an insight in the different reasons for the success of local music scenes in general, and the Icelandic music scene in particular, by extracting a list of facilitating factors to success from literature on several local music scenes and comparing it to facilitating factors found in the Icelandic music scene. A short outline of the theoretical framework, answers to the research questions, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research are presented below.

5.1 Theoretical framework in short

The theoretical framework of this study has dealt with four different subjects. First, a short history outline of the music scene was provided. Secondly, the concept music scene was explored, hereby discussing different types of scenes and determining the characteristics of the Icelandic scene. In addition, the concept success was discussed and different types of success were defined. The success of the Icelandic music scene was measured on the basis of these forms of success. The last and most important part of the theoretical framework addresses the different factors that have facilitated international success in different local music scenes. This set of factors was used as an analyzing tool to investigate and compare the success of the Icelandic music scene in relation to other scenes.

5.2 Answering the research questions

Icelandic music history has known a series of key events that helped the scene to flourish and contributed to the international success that the scene has been enjoying over the past two decades. The most important turning point in Icelandic music is the arrival of punk on the island and the formation of Bad Taste. The Bad Taste mentality has according to some respondents revolutionized the music scene in Iceland. Punk brought a certain attitude to the music that focused more on “doing it” instead of “making it”.

The Icelandic scene was defined as a local and independent music scene, meaning it is confined to a specific location and consists of numerous small independent DIY enterprises, instead of being dominated by a handful of major labels. A scene’s

success can be measured in terms of objective career success, based on objective and visible criteria, and aesthetic career success, focusing on the artistic impact or reputation. Considering the positive attention of institutions, media, music critics and scientists, the successful artists it has produced, and the number of tourists the country attracts just because of its music, the Icelandic music scene can be considered internationally successful, both in an objective and aesthetic point of view.

The mentality of Icelandic musicians was mentioned by all of the respondents as a factor that has contributed to the success of the scene and is therefore considered a key resource in this analysis. Icelandic musicians are often not driven by the same market factors as abroad, and are not afraid of being noticeable and different. Their originality and free-spiritedness is typical for Icelandic music and contributes to the success of the scene, because it leads to a musical product that distinguishes itself from the majority. A great self-belief, competitive urges and a fear to be overlooked (the island syndrome) result in a willingness to work hard for international recognition, thus enlarging the chance of actually achieving this purpose. Furthermore, respondents mentioned that the professionalism regarding musical skills seems to be on a high level, partly due to good music education, especially for young children. Organization skills on the other hand are not as developed. People are said to be disorganized and chaotic. However, according to some respondents this chaotic way of working brings a certain freedom and surprising results in the form of original and innovative products.

Nine out of ten respondents mentioned leveraging as a contributing factor. According to the respondents, acts such as The Sugarcubes, Björk and Sigur Rós, have opened up many doors and have raised international awareness about Icelandic music. Their success worked as leverage and inspiration for the international success of the scene. Besides physically helping bands getting contacts and passing on knowledge and experience, they also made sure that the eyes of music lovers and the media turned to Iceland. They created an Icelandic brand for popular music and fostered an increased self-confidence, which made it possible for many other artists to break through internationally. The quality and distinctiveness of the music and the image around it often contributed to the success of other scenes. From the interviews it shows that it is hard to define the Icelandic sound and respondents do not agree on whether there is to speak of one sound. The music does meet certain characteristics such as raw, experimental, melancholic and original. Its success is mostly due to the fact that it is different from the mainstream, 'something you have not heard before'. The majority of the respondents agreed that it is not just the music but also the image around it that takes the interest of the foreign public.

The exotic image of Iceland arouses a certain fascination with outsiders. Although not everyone is as happy with the somewhat stereotypical image, eight out of ten respondents state that it has largely contributed to the success of the Icelandic scene.

Seven out of ten respondents mention the strong network as a positive aspect of the scene. The Icelandic music scene is a tight-knit community with many advantages. People inspire each other and do each other favors. Gear, instruments, contacts, and even band members are happily shared. Things are easily managed; most things are only one phone call away. Organizing gigs in Iceland is easy, which could explain the large number of bands. A disadvantage is that it might be hard for an outsider to blend in. The tight internal network has helped the scene become a strong and productive community for popular music and has directly contributed to the international success of the scene.

The Icelandic music scene is set in the center of Reykjavík. The area is attractive for young and creative people. Facilities such as rehearsal spaces, studios and record stores are sufficient. According to a number of respondents, the only things that could be better are the venues. There are a lot of small venues, but a middle sized venue with a capacity of 500 people is not present. The nightlife on the other hand is lively, especially in summer when it stays light all night. The peak of Icelandic nightlife is the annual Iceland Airwaves festival. According to many respondents the festival has played a part in the promotion of Icelandic music, but has not directly made a big difference for the scene. The Icelandic scene is a peculiar case when it comes to the attractiveness for young and creative people, because it works in two ways: young people that have just graduated from high school are eager to move to the capital, because this is where the creative heart of the scene lies, but despite the booming nightlife, sufficient facilities and creative environment, over time, the limited size of the scene and the isolation of the country, makes that many musicians develop the urge to go abroad. Five out of ten respondents believe that the fact that a large number of Icelandic musicians tour, work and study abroad has contributed to the international success of the scene.

Furthermore, from the interviews can be concluded that the Icelandic music industry is small, not as well organized and not as commercially driven as in other countries. There are no major labels (Sena is the only major label) trying to break Icelandic artists internationally, or controlling their artistic input, which facilitates a greater artistic freedom. According to a number of respondents music is more an art made out of passion, than a commercial good out of which to make a living. The majority of musicians have jobs on the side. Because the domestic market is limited, many artists aim for the international market, an important reason for the large number of Icelandic bands

releasing their music in foreign countries. Although the success of Icelandic bands in the last couple of years is not solely the work of IMX, it can certainly be said that they have contributed in many ways (marketing campaigns, travel support, courses for musicians and other industry people, website, etc.) to the awareness of Icelandic music abroad.

According to a majority of respondents, the government is not fully aware of the importance of a booming popular music scene. The Icelandic music scene gets little support from the government; there is only one fund of 54 million ISK a year that artists can apply for, but the approach of the administrators of this fund lacks strategy and aim. Many artists do not even apply for this fund and are completely self-supportive. From the statements of the respondents it appears that the government is most likely operating with a hands-off approach with minimum interference. As Brown et al. (2000) discussed in their article on Manchester and Sheffield, more government support and interference is not necessarily better for a music scene. Several respondents believe that the Icelandic music scene has reached its level of international success on its own, without any big support from the government. In other words, the authorities have not significantly contributed to the international success of the Icelandic music scene.

After describing the facilitating factors from the theoretical framework from an Icelandic point of view, there are also a number of factors that are specific to the Icelandic case. Because Iceland is a relatively young nation, feelings of nationalism and a search for a national identity reflect in popular music. Dibben (2009) states that the articulation of a national character in the music distinguishes Icelandic music from other music products around the world and therefore contributes to its success. Another factor is the geographic location, which is both an advantage and a disadvantage. The advantage is that Iceland is situated on the edge of two different cultures, the European and the American, which has played an important role in nurturing the creative resources. The disadvantage is that the isolation of the country makes it harder for bands to go on tour and attaining new equipment may be expensive. According to several respondents, the crisis did not have a negative, but a positive effect on the music scene, creating a positive attitude, that has made it possible for the scene to keep being successful in international markets.

Having answered all the consecutive research questions it is possible to give an answer to the central research question:

Which facilitating factors can be found in literature on music scenes to analyze

the international success of popular music scenes and in how far can these factors be used to explain the international success of the Icelandic music scene?

The main conclusion is that it is possible to extract a number of factors that have facilitated the success of music scenes and use these factors to explain the success of other scenes. This not only provides a better insight in why certain music scenes break through internationally, it also provides a set of factors that can be used to analyze the success of music scenes. By producing this set of factors, the study brings together and structures some main findings of studies on the success of popular music scenes. Five out of seven facilitating factors were mentioned by five or more out of ten respondents as contributing to the success of the Icelandic scene. This suggests that most factors that have been at work in the success of other scenes also apply to the case of the Icelandic scene. The research propositions that were presented earlier in the paper suggesting that not all of the facilitating factors have contributed to the success of the scene and that it would be likely that a number of factors have worked together in facilitating the success of the Icelandic music scene are supported. The success of the Icelandic scene is indeed facilitated by a combination of factors that work together. In addition, there are some factors that can be designated as typical for Iceland. Given that these remaining factors found in the interviews and literature on the Icelandic scene often deal with national and geographical issues, it is possible to add *national characteristics* to the general list of facilitating factors that was composed in the theoretical framework.

5.3 Limitations & suggestions for further research

Although this study has made an attempt to explain and understand the reasons for the international success of local music scenes, and the Icelandic scene in particular, as thoroughly as possible, it is beyond the purpose of this paper to provide a complete view. Because the literature out of which the facilitating factors were extracted are all dealing with different fields of research, it is not possible to deal with them as elaborate and profound as would have been done in a study focusing on only one research field. It is possible to expand the list of factors with resources from other music scenes that were not investigated. Furthermore, systems of distribution, retail and market dynamics, considered highly important in the competitiveness of music products by Power and Hallencreutz (2007), are not extensively discussed.

Another limitation of this study is the representativeness of the respondents. Nine out of ten respondents are Icelandic and five out of ten respondents are musicians. This means

that the here presented view is largely the view of Icelandic musicians. The view of people from the Icelandic music industry and the government are underrepresented in this study. It would be interesting to compare the findings to the perspectives of government and industry representatives. It is likely that the order of facilitating factors will change. It is also likely that, seen from the perspective of non-Icelanders, the mentality of Icelandic musicians would not be considered as important as it is in this study. Therefore, to complement these views, the industry's and government's perspective and the perspective of foreigners are in need of further academic attention. Also in need of further academic attention is the influence of IMX on the international competitiveness of the Icelandic music industry. Björnsdóttir stated in 2009 that it was too early to measure the effects of the Icelandic Music Export office, since its existence was too short. Unfortunately, this study was not able to further investigate these effects. Furthermore, as has been stated in chapter three, statistical information on the music industry in Iceland is regrettably scarce. Another limitation of this study might therefore be the difficulty to underpin the obtained results with numbers.

As a suggestion for further research, the set of facilitating factors designed for this study can be used to investigate the success of other local music scenes, in order to continue the investigation on music scenes' and contribute to the important question why some places are unusually productive and successful centers for popular music. Furthermore, this study has concentrated itself around Iceland. That *Nordic* music and image is popular at the time of writing, and is not limited to Iceland only, is visible in the fact that even a popular Indie artist and Grammy winner from outside of Iceland such as Bon Iver, is using the wide Icelandic landscape and atmosphere in his video *Holocene* (2011). Also, the existence of festivals such as *Reykjavik to Rotterdam*, *Explore the North*, *Nordic Delight*, *Nordic Gold*, and initiatives such as *Nordic by Nature* illustrate the current interest for Nordic culture in alternative popular music. Another suggestion for further research is to investigate why this Nordic image enjoys such popularity in independent popular music.

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7. APPENDIX

1. Respondent background information
2. Interview topic list
3. An insight in the coding process

7.1 Respondent background information

In the table below, background information on the respondents' occupation and connection to the Icelandic music scene is provided.

Respondent background information

<i>Name, interview date</i>	<i>Occupation and connection to the Icelandic music scene</i>
Sigrún Kristbjörg Jónsdóttir, July 11, 2010	Classically schooled trombonist, member of the Icelandic Wonderbrass that has toured with Björk, has also toured with Seabear
Ingi Garðar Erlendsson, July 12, 2010	Member of the composer collective S.L.Á.T.U.R., member of bands Benni Hemm Hemm and Stórsveit Nix Noltes,
Sindri Már Sigfússon, July 12, 2010	contributed to recordings of Amiina and Sigur Rós Founder and singer of the band Seabear and solo project Sin Fang Bous
Arnar Pétursson, July 14, 2010	Guitarist in the band Mammút
Unnstein Manuel Stefánsson, July 14, 2010	Started the band Retro Stefson when he was 15 years old
Anna Hildur Hildibrandsdóttir, July 21, 2010	Managing director of Iceland Music Export, owner of management and consultancy company, has worked with several Icelandic bands, festivals and record labels
Hildur Ingveldardóttir Guðnadóttir, July 23, 2010	Cellist and composer, member of the band Múm and think tank Kitchen motors, solo project Lost in Hildurness,
Jesper Pedersen, July 26, 2010	has written music for plays, dance performances and films Composer, sound artist, performer. Master's thesis on Bad Taste and how this organization has influenced the modern Icelandic music scene, also member of S.L.Á.T.U.R
Sigurdur Magnus Finnson, August 4, 2010	"Fly on the wall", has been the tour manager of bands such as Múm, Seabear, Benni Hemm Hemm, Borko, Amiina. Has been promoting concerts and helping out in all various aspects.
Benedikt Hermann Hermannsson, August 7, 2010	Front man of the band Benni Hemm Hemm
Wim van Hooste, August 8, 2010	Fan and collector of Icelandic music, owner of the blogs http://icelandicmusic.blogspot.com and http://icelandicmusicmaffia.blogspot.com
Gunnar Llárus Hjálmarsson, August 28, 2010	Also known as Dr. Gunni, writer of the book "Are We having fun yet - Icelandic Rock music in the last century". Pioneer in the Icelandic music scene, was very active in several bands during the punk years and after

7.2 Interview topic list

The first part of the interview focuses on the respondent's background (personal questions are adapted to the respondent in question) and provides open questions about his or her ideas about the reasons for success of the scene. The questions in the second part of the interview were classified in topics based on the facilitating factors that were found in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

Part I:

Personal

1. How did you get involved within the Icelandic music scene and what is your role?
2. When and why did you start playing in a band/making music? What was your main goal? (optional, musicians only)
3. Did you aim for commercial/international success? (optional, musicians only)
4. How did you break through internationally? (optional, musicians only)

Reasons for the scenes success

5. It has been said many times that internationally the Icelandic music industry is punching far above its weight. Do you agree?
6. Under what circumstances do you think a small local scene like the Icelandic music scene could flourish and become this internationally successful? What could be key elements to its success?

Part II:

Networks

7. How do people interact within the scene?

Leveraging

8. Do you think the international success of many Icelandic bands is partly due to the success of Björk and/or Sigur Rós and do you think their success inspired other musicians to aim for the international market?

The music industry

9. Can you describe the music industry in Iceland?
10. Who or what in the Icelandic music industry decides which Icelandic music breaks through internationally? (Who are the gatekeepers?)

Government support and intervention

11. Does the Government support the export of Icelandic music, if yes, in what way?
12. Does the government recognize the importance of a vibrant music scene?

The Urban Environment: attractiveness of a city

13. Does the Icelandic music scene concentrate around Reykjavík, or is it spread around the country?
14. Could you say there is a lively club scene in Reykjavík?
15. Are there sufficient rehearsal spaces, venues, studios, record stores, etc?

Musicians' professionalism and mentality

16. What is the quality of the music education in Iceland?
17. Could you say Icelandic musicians are professional and competent in making and promoting their music?
18. Do Icelandic musicians work from a particular mentality, if yes, what are the characteristics?

Product's quality and distinctiveness

19. Do you think Icelandic music comes with a particular image, lifestyle or attitude of mind?
20. Do you think there is such a thing as authentic Icelandic music? If yes, what are the characteristics?
21. What do you think is the thing that attracts foreign public to Icelandic music, in other words, what makes it different?

Remaining questions

22. What does the geographical isolation of the country mean for making music and trying to sell it overseas?
 23. Can you explain the relatively high percentage of people involved in music and arts
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in Iceland?

24. Does Icelandic Music Export (IMX) contribute to more International exposure for Icelandic bands?
25. What is the role of Iceland Airwaves in the international success of Icelandic music?

7.3 An insight in the coding process

To give an insight in the process of coding, two interviews are attached below. In both interviews, a number of themes was recognized and labeled with a color (open coding). After having extracted these themes from all interviews the coded segments were taken out of the context of the interview, put together, compared and connected to one another, and interpreted as a whole (axial coding). The themes taken from the interviews were also compared and connected with themes taken from literature on the Icelandic music scene. Finally, this resulted in a list of main themes that can be seen as a list of facilitating factors to the international success of the Icelandic scene. Then, these factors were compared to the list of facilitating factors for music scenes in general that was extracted from literature on music scenes, described in chapter four. By doing this, it becomes clear how the facilitating factors that were extracted from the literature correspond to the facilitating factors for the success of the Icelandic music scene taken from interviews and literature on the Icelandic scene. It also shows if there are factors remaining that are specific to the Icelandic case or yields new factors that can be added to the list of facilitating factors for success of music scenes in general. Furthermore, the number of times that a facilitating factor from the theoretical framework was acknowledged by the respondents, gives an insight in the significance of the different factors contributing to the success of the scene according to the respondents (see table 1).

Table 1 Facilitating factors acknowledged by respondents

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Professionalism and Mentality	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Leveraging	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Product's quality and distinctiveness	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Networks		X			X	X	X	X	X	X
The Urban Environment		X		X		X		X		X
The Music Industry	X									
Government Support	X									

Notes: Repeated from p. 30. This table is based on the outcome of the interviews that were analyzed by hand. An X indicates that the respondents mentioned or acknowledged the corresponding factor as being facilitating to the international success of the Icelandic music scene

7.3.1 Interview with Hildur Ingveldardóttir Guðnadóttir, July 23, 2010

	Networks
	Mentality
	Geographical isolation
	Attractiveness of the city
	Government support
	Facilities, urban environment
	Government recognition
	Distinctiveness
	Music industry and market
	Image
	Leveraging
	IMX
	Iceland Airwaves
	Professionalism
	Music education

How did you get involved within the Icelandic music scene and what is your role?

I have been around in the music scene for a long time. Both of my parents are musicians, so I kind of grew up playing music and performing live. So I've been playing and performing since I can remember. I guess I started playing in pop bands when I was around fourteen, then I got into the scene that you're probably interested in. So I had a band and when I was in this band we got in a music competition that is kind of like Battle of the Bands. And the same year that I was in this competition there was another band playing which I really really loved. Those guys are now Múm. It's just a beautiful way how the scene works, because at the time I was like fifteen or fourteen and I saw this band that I really loved, they really loved what I was doing and then we met randomly at a bar and we started talking and we really wanted to play together, so I've been playing with them since I was around fifteen, sixteen, since before Múm. It's just like a classic example of how the music scene works in Iceland. You just meet people randomly, it's very small and local. This was like a competition like, you know there's no competition in it because everyone was like "whoah, we should play together!"

So I was playing with Múm since I was very young and you know, we just meet other people that know other people, you know it kind of escalates, because there's so few people in Iceland, you just start collaborating. It's like a really beautiful kind of

collective. Nobody is thinking about getting famous or making money, you know that's not the drive. People are more like helping each other out and having fun.

So this is my start of getting into the music scene. So since then basically I've been playing with bands and the last years, you know I'm still working with the Múm guys, we've been touring a lot, but recently I have been playing a lot more solo shows, writing music for films, theatre and dance, installations, you know. I try to not get stuck anywhere. I have not been in the same place for longer than two weeks for the last four years. So I almost cannot say that I live anywhere. I kind of live out of a suitcase. From here I'm going back to Berlin and I'll be home for a little while, and in the winter I'm actually going to spend most of my time in Iceland, because I'm doing the music to *In the Air* in the National Theatre.

This urge to travel around, has it something to do with coming from an island?

I think when you live on an island like Iceland, I mean it's beautiful but very small you know. It's pretty isolated, so I think most people at a certain point feel the need to move out of Iceland just for a few years. Just to broaden their perspectives, see cultures and not to be stuck in Iceland. It's good for everybody to keep open-minded and see what's happening in the world. But the reason why I travel so much, is because I have so many different projects. And these projects, like Múm for example, we tour a lot, we travel a lot and most of my solo works is also abroad, I work with a lot of people outside of Iceland. So a big part of what I do is just traveling and being in airplanes. And it's just very inconvenient actually to be in Iceland to do that, because you pretty much always have to change planes, and you add like an extra 7 hours to your journey. So it's easier to be in the middle. This is why I do not live there anymore. Most people move for a few years, and a lot of them move back. They go back to their roots. I guess it's very common for people to do this.

Can you describe the Icelandic music scene, what are its characteristics?

Almost 90% of the population lives in Reykjavík. The interesting thing about the Icelandic music scene is that it gets very little support from the government. So actually there are very few rehearsal spaces. It think this is changing a little bit. We have a new major, I hear he's trying to support musicians now, so it has changed, but it is very hard for musicians to get money for what they are doing. I mean we get very little support. For

example I have lived in Sweden for a while and I say all the support the people are getting there, it is just crazy, the difference between how the government in Iceland does not support the musicians there.

Does the government recognize the importance of a vibrant music scene?

I think to a certain extent they know how important it is. I mean it is definitely without a doubt that artists from Iceland have been the best and best the country has ever had. I mean, there are so many people that are world known musicians. People would think that the country, you know with their arts and music, that the government would recognize it more, but they really do not seem to realize how good it is, which is very strange. I hope this is changing now, but I'm not so optimistic. Once a year there is an artists salary, pretty much all we got as an artist in Iceland. Every year when this artists salary is handed out, there's always like a big debate in Iceland about why are we paying these fucking lazy artists, they should just get a real job. It's probably the same debate as people have everywhere, but in Iceland it's particularly sad to hear people say this, because you know, I think the artists have done so much just to promote it, it increases tourism and general interest. I hope it will change.

Being a musician in Iceland, because of this being a musician in Iceland, we basically do not expect money for what we do. When I got started I never even dreamed of that I was going to get money for playing music; that was such a far-fetched idea. I thought when I was going to be a musician I would always have to teach or have another job. I would never be able to support myself only from music, because this is how it works in Iceland, you do not get money for playing. I think this also brings a special attitude to the music. You're not doing music because you think you're going to make money, you're not doing music because you not have any expectations or desires to be famous, you're not competing with anybody. I think it brings a kind of I don't know, maybe honesty is the good word for it. It's not contaminated with anything else than the joy of making music. I think this is a good thing. And I think that's probably the reason why we have a lot of bands in Iceland who are, you know they sound unique and in a way different, because people are doing it from the pure of desire. And this is at least how it starts and then you know they can develop their sounds further. And it's actually funny that I think that the musicians that are most known outside of Iceland, are actually not very popular inside of Iceland.

So there are two different scenes?

The Icelandic market is so small. You never ever expect to make money from selling records for example. If you're making music and solely releasing it in Iceland you could never dream of making a dime. So there are definitely two different markets. I think the stuff that is most popular in Iceland is especially country ball music, bands that are playing covers. But Múm for example, I see it so strongly through that band. You know we play, we tour the world, we play in Australia or Japan for 10.000 people, and when we come to Iceland we're only hoping that somebody will show up. It's really bizarre. For example I tried doing something for the Icelandic market, but people mostly said: "You're always doing such strange things, why can't you do something normal?"

What makes Icelandic music interesting for foreign people?

This I really don't have an answer to. It just kind of happened. We did an experiment in Berlin. I was out with some friends. Every time people asked you where you were from and you'd say I'm from Iceland, everybody would go: "WHAT?" Everyone got very excited because you were from Iceland. All of a sudden it became very cool to be from Iceland. And we once did an experiment, when people asked us where we're from we said that we were from the Faroe Islands, and nobody responded! They would just say "ok". It should be much more interesting to be from the Faroe Islands because nobody knows anything about that. But when we said Iceland again they were like "Oh really? Wow! What's it like there?"

You know, I've been travelling the world and everywhere you go people ask you the same questions: Why is there so much music coming out of Iceland? You always try to come up with some answers to the same questions but it's really really hard for us to say why this is because none of us who are like in the music scene or doing the music probably think that anything more special than anything else. We're doing what we do and for us the music is totally normal. You don't know why it is you do the things you do. Our opinion is always coloured.

Do you think that the success of Björk and Sigur Rós has helped the Icelandic scene?

Yeah definitely! I think that The Sugarcubes and then Björk, that they really opened up

the gate. They opened up people's interest in Iceland and Icelandic music. And you know after that with Sigur Rós. So it's kind of like a snowball effect. Yeah, sure, Sigur Rós is definitely raising awareness about Iceland and Icelandic music for sure.

Do you think IMX has contributed to the international success of the Icelandic music scene?

Well, I personally don't know so much about what they do. I have actually really never gotten any support from the Icelandic government or any Icelandic fund. So I don't really know what it is they're doing. I mean I know that they did an interview with me once. But that's as far as my personal experience goes. But I don't know, I think they've been organizing some shows in Germany for some bands.

You can't say if it helps in the international success?

No, in my case absolutely not. They did absolutely nothing to help me personally, but I mean maybe they've helped somebody else. I don't really spend much time in Iceland anymore, so I don't really know what's happening there at this moment you know. I never took one of these courses or anything.

Do you think Iceland Airwaves has contributed to the success of the Icelandic music scene?

Airwaves definitely helped a lot of young bands getting international press. I think it helped some people. But like me for example, besides Múm, I'm in a bit different scene. Múm is the only project that I do what's kind of... it's the only pop band that I play in. So I have never personally played at Airwaves, I think for me it would probably not help me very much, because I'm in an bit different scene than this pop scene. I'm more kind of like in the arts scene, contemporary, well experimental music, classical music.

What does the music industry in Iceland look like?

The market in Iceland, I wouldn't hardly call it a market, it's so small. You only have to sell 5000 records to get a gold record. I guess it's pretty similar to the music scene itself, there's very few labels, and they work pretty locally, it's not really big business. Or people with a really good sense of business necessarily. People start doing things more out of ideals than actually making any money from it. It's a bit local and chaotic I would say. It's a bit strange. The people are not specifically business orientated.

What do you think of the music education in Iceland?

We have a lot of good musicians so I think for the size it's pretty decent for the size and facilities we have. The education is to some extent pretty good, but what usually happens is that people get their basic education in Iceland, and then if they're going to go further, you know for their master's degree they usually go abroad to do that. I think it's an OK place to start learning your basics. I think that my father is a musician, he started a music school. Their aim is to bring the education into the schools so that kids actually study their instruments in elementary school instead of going to a separate music school after spending a whole day at school when kids are tired in the afternoon. He's kind of hoping to change the way that music is taught to children. I hope this is going to work, because I think this is really going to help music education, if kids have more opportunities to actually study their instruments in the elementary school instead of having to go to music schools. I think from what I hear from my sister who has kids, it's actually very hard for young children to get into music schools. There are long waiting lists and it's expensive. But hopefully this will change and it will get more into the school. And it's also more normal for kids to practice an instrument as part of their education.

7.3.2 Interview with Anna Hildur Hildibrandsdóttir, July 21, 2010

	IMX
	Promotion, marketing
	Leveraging
	Iceland Airwaves
	Quality and distinctiveness
	Mentality
	Music industry, market
	Exotic
	Small community
	Professionalism, skills
	Music education
	Dark winters
	Government support
	Government recognition

What is IMX?

Iceland Music Export was founded in november 2006 and that was after years of thinking of the importance of having an office that would be able to maintain the international interest for the Icelandic music scene, after the success of Mezzoforte, The Sugarcubes and Björk and then lately Sigur Rós. This has been initiated by Samtónn, an umbrella organization working with the music scene in Iceland for about 3 or 4 years then, back in 2006, working together with 3 ministries in Iceland, to set up what is described to be a business and marketing office for export of Icelandic music. And our role is to support strategies that help Icelandic music developing and grow a sort of export business and also to promote Icelandic music within its own environment and in the international scene.

In what way do you promote Icelandic music?

We do several different kind of promotion. We run a website, which is a very active news site as well. And we do a biweekly newsletter, where we reveal what is happening and what Icelandic bands are doing mainly abroad, but also there's bands that have sort of actual strategies but are releasing in Iceland. So that sort of one of our basic roles and the constant role. We also run a campaign in the US called *Made in Iceland*, where we do a compilation of Icelandic tracks every year and we promote it with iTunes in the US and we also send this compilation through a radio pluggger and through to about 500 college radio stations and we will have a conference in LA where we promote Icelandic music to

US music supervisors. We have been running for over a year now, a campaign in Germany where we've been doing monthly tours with Icelandic bands and the support has been that they get the flights and we offer them the cost of PR as well and a little bit of transport. And then we choose several showcases and offer tour support and marketing support to those bands chosen to be on this showcases. So this is Eurosonic in Holland, by:Larm in Norway, SPOT festival in Denmark and The Great Escape in the UK. We look at individual cases for South By South West and Canadian Music week but we do not actively encourage bands to go there unless they have a very strong plan in the US. And then we look at all the other suggestions that people come with. And we're also looking now in other genres of music, for example we built up a network with a classic music festival, so we are working now with the Huddersfield along with a festival in Denmark and Belgium and Germany about creating a network for classical composers. And we also work in a similar way with the Jazz community, looking at working with a festival in Germany, doing things for the Jazz, and on the other hand we also work with some main festivals in Iceland and business. Iceland Airwaves, which we have actually taken over the management of Iceland Airwaves this year. We always worked with them on strategy of media and promotion around Iceland Airwaves because that's been particularly successful in having international media and industry people at this festival in Iceland and we work in a similar way with Reykjavík Jazz festival and the Dark Music Days, which is a classical festival. On top of that we worked with a community festival which is where Mugison is from, a famous artist in Iceland. It's a festival called Aldrei fór ég suður (Never Went South) in Ísafjörður, that's in the North of Iceland, so it's an isolated one. We've taken journalists there to sort of show them Icelandic music in a very unique environment. And this year we've also worked with Eistnaflug which is on the East coast of Iceland and is a Metal festival. So, these are some of the regular things that we do, but we're always doing different kind of things that come up which we think are worth doing. And also on top of that we run a conference called 'You're in Control' and I don't know if you noticed it on our website, it's been well introduced on our website. That conference started as a music conference back in 2007, but is now a conference for the whole of the creative sector looking for future opportunities and developments in the digital era. We are looking at the overlapping elements of all the creative industries. So, we're looking at future business models for creative industries and future opportunities at the same time.

On a monthly basis we do workshops in music business and how to do music business,
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you know, sort of help people develop their export readiness. This could be courses of how to make deals, what deals are about, what publishing is about, it can also be courses on PR and marketing etc., etc. This is for musicians, but also for other people who work in the music industry.

We also do special nine weeks courses on Internet marketing with an American PR person. So I think that is pretty much everything we do on a regular basis there. And then we do several projects that sort of as they rise spontaneously.

What are the results of all this?

We definitely have seen results, I mean part of and alongside this we provide support on a project basis. I can very happily say that the support we gave to a project called Maximus Musicus, which is a classical program for children was very successful. We assisted them in shaping up their PR and marketing for the project and doing a showcase in Iceland for some of the main orchestras in Europe. And they did that with the symphony orchestra in Iceland in may 2009 if I remember correctly and the work that we put in has resulted in ten concerts around the world.

We've also done consultancy with, I supported, I can only say all the bands that are getting results outside of Iceland now, this includes FM Belfast, Seabear, Olafur Arnalds, Hjaltáin, For a Minor Reflection, Olöf Arnalds, etc, etc. So all of these bands we help supported in one way or another. **Both with a little bit of travel support, but also with marketing, website and direct marketing at showcase festivals.** Although I can't say that this alone provides them with all the success they're having, but this is part of building a reputation for more bands in Iceland.

Can you designate other reasons for international success?

The main reason is the previous success of Icelandic artists such as Mezzoforte, The Sugarcubes, Björk and then Sigur Rós. And of course the success of these bands then led to the attention of Iceland Airwaves and that festival was set up to bring media people and industry people from abroad to Iceland. That actually was, it was almost like a craving or a need, for the international community to come and discover Björkland and Sigur Rós land and Sugarcubesland. **So of course from that perspective the Iceland music export office is just a continuation of trying to channel that kind of interest and push it a bit further, to use the opportunities that we have because the doors have been opened and it's the artists that have been successful outside of Iceland that have opened these doors.**

So now we are just kind of trying to be a big help at working in through all the doors that have been opened through the Icelandic music scene. And that's just a tool. It's not a reason for the success, it's just a tool that has been built, to increase the success of the Icelandic bands. But of course when you have that kind of success and when you have got such unique quality artists like Björk and like the Sugarcubes and like Sigur Rós, you create a kind of curiosity in the whole environment of these kind of artists. And that's of course mainly then by the quality that has been there. I think then Iceland Airwaves has played a really big part in giving an annual celebration of Icelandic music where people can actually come and discover that there is much more than Björk and Sigur Rós in Iceland. And of course we've had many other successful artists who haven't maybe reached the level of Björk or Sigur Rós, but you have like GusGus and Emiliana Torrini, etc. And also a lot of artists apart from that are working outside of Iceland, without creating a tension. And I think for me, I've often been asked this question, why Iceland attracts this attention, why does Iceland have such a unique music scene, and the only conclusion I've come to is that there is such a high level of individualism within the Icelandic music scene. It's a small community, it doesn't have any major labels or major marketing machines. So when people start making music, they don't start with a formula, they start with creativity and the space which is around that creativity. And their role models are people like Björk and Sigur Rós, so they just think, ok if they can do it, so maybe we can do it as well. And I think that this is a penchant for individualism which you don't see in other places. You don't see bands copying each other in Iceland, because there is only space for one Björk in Iceland and there's only space for one Sigur Rós so nobody really tries to be the same and there's no marketing or major label which is trying to mold everybody in the same pose. I mean that is the only conclusion I've been able to come to which explains some of it, but of course it's not simplistic, there is a variety of factors that come in here. Iceland is exotic, it's a very small community, it has had the attention of a lot of big artists, with Björk and The Sugarcubes etc. so people who come there they seem to love the spirit that is there and I think my kind of one-word conclusion has been the individualism that exists there. That people are really brave to create what they want to create.

And the goal is never commercial success?

Well, it might be, but I mean in so far we haven't seen any successful formula or project being internationally successful from Iceland. It's not a bad thing if it happens, but in so
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far, Iceland has been successful in the more alternative scene and that's been the strength of the Icelandic scene. But I think people are also learning that there is space for alternative marketing so bands can live from being not being necessarily super commercial but just being really good at what they do. **People have also said that that's one reason, that the level is so high, that the skills are also really high. The music education in Iceland is regarded at on a very high level.**

How is the music education organized?

I haven't lived in Iceland for twenty years so I'm not familiar with the ins and outs of it, but **I believe that there's access to some kind of music activities in most schools and there are music school in every town and village in Iceland and it is a very popular activity to play an instrument.**

Can you explain the high percentage of people involved in music and arts?

Some people have said that it's got to do with the dark winter nights and the long hours that you have. I mean of course Iceland is small so it doesn't take long to go to school or work and you have a lot of time on your hands and somehow you have to kill this time, but I think in some stances as well there is some kind of energy in Iceland which fuels creative activities. And again, people are not stuck on any rules on what is good for you and what is bad for you. I think it's pretty acceptable in Iceland to become an artist as a way of living and as means of living.

Is it possible to live from art only?

It doesn't take a genius to calculate that in a market of 320,000 people, that's not a big market to sell your art.

Could this also be a reason why people go abroad?

I think of course people want to broaden their market and I think if you are an artist of course you always trying to reach out with your message and when you live in such a small community of course it's tempting to broaden that market.

What is special about Icelandic music? Why do foreign people like it?

I guess I'm not the best person to answer this question. What do you like about Icelandic music? Why are you doing your thesis about Icelandic music? What is it that makes

Icelandic music curious? I guess, for a country of 320,000 people, on our website alone, we have 200 bands, and most of these bands are sort of trying outside of Iceland as well. And I guess when you look at such a small population which is just the size of a medium city in Europe and you see the extent of quality bands that come from it, I mean that alone I think attracts attention straight away. There are over 200 cd's which are released in Iceland every year, which is extreme for such a small community. And for this project that we do in the US, we have no problems. There are US people who choose the artists that go there and we have said we want to choose between 15 and 20 tracks, I mean we always have a lot to choose from every year. So in that sense I think you just have a lot and then you have success from somebody who are the role models of the music industry in Iceland. It somehow escalates and it gives some kind of ambitions to the people that are out there. And I think it's the quality of the artistic vision of these bands, that are attractive.

Is IMX a government initiative?

No, this was an initiative from the music industry itself, but it has been governmentally supported. And the annual support that we have from the government is not big, it's approximately € 70.000, that's what we get as a fixed support, so that is not a lot to run all the activities that we work on. We fund-raise for some of our projects and we do have some contribution from the music industry itself as well and we are working on strategies which we hope that we can convince the government to comprehend as well.

Does the government recognize the importance of the music scene?

I think people have started recognizing it, but sometimes it needs courage to change your way of thinking and that takes a little bit of time.