

BREAKING THE PERCEIVED BARRIERS OF THE ICELANDIC ART SCENE: IS THE RURAL ASSOCIATION OF THE ARTIST FROM A REMOTE FARMING COMMUNITY AN ASSET OR A HINDRANCE?

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ABSTRACT

The Icelandic art community is a small, interconnected group that often presents challenges for newcomers, especially those lacking formal training, established contacts, or family ties in the field. This paper adopts an autoethnographic approach to explore how an emerging artist in rural Iceland constructs her identity and develops her brand. Although the findings may not be broadly generalizable, they provide a detailed case study illustrating how an enthusiastic amateur artist shapes her identity. Storytelling plays a crucial role, helping the artist express her position and abilities, and showing how she uses her life story to emphasize her artwork. Despite only 10% of Icelanders living in rural areas, the country's pristine nature and rural charm have recently attracted more artists and entrepreneurs; however, the number of local artists with rural roots remains small. The ethnographic data analysis reveals the complexities of navigating Iceland's often exclusive art scene, with the artist perceiving herself as an 'outsider' due to limited ties to Reykjavík's institutional art networks. This prompts questions about the significance of such networks in shaping artistic identity and whether a rural background and the socio-economic status of an artist from Iceland's South Coast could be advantageous rather than limiting. Studies of creative work in rural and peripheral areas challenge traditional core-periphery views, showing that artists actively build networks and merge rural and urban benefits through trans local processes [14]. Icelandic storytelling traditions also demonstrate that, even in geographically and socially limited environments, individuals—particularly women—have played key roles in shaping communal narratives and cultural identity. By framing personal artistic growth within these broader contexts, this paper highlights storytelling as both a creative and strategic tool for identity and career development within Iceland's contemporary art scene. It also expands the discussion beyond Reykjavík, considering other regions and demographics of Icelandic artists.

Keywords: Artist's identity, storytelling, rural artists, visual arts, cultural identity

INTRODUCTION

The Icelandic rural art scene is a phenomenon that has not received extensive academic attention, and research on this scene is limited in the existing literature. Although there is substantial research on rural artists in other Nordic countries and on urban Icelandic music scenes [8] [9], previous research specifically addressing the professional strategies, networks, and challenges of artists in rural Iceland remains scarce. A comparative study from Denmark and Sweden offers practical frameworks for understanding how rural artists balance their lifestyles, livelihoods, and professional ambitions, often through