Sgrùdadh-cùise: Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

Tha an rannsachadh o chionn ghoirid air luach na Gàidhlig mar so-mhaoin eacnamach is shòisealta, a’ sealltainn dhuinn eisimpleirean air ciamar a bhios gnimhachasan, iomairtean sòisealta, agus coimhearsnachdan a’ cleachadh Gàidhlig, agus de cho cudromach sa tha i ann an conaltradh, amasan sòisealta agus coimearsalta. Tha an sgrùdadh-cùise seo a’ taisbeanadh ciamar a tha Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach a’ cleachadh Gaelic mar so-mhaoin.

Tha leasachadh Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO) teagaisgeach a thaobh mar is urrainn do bhuidheann a bha air fhaicinn an toiseach mar ionad cultarail stèidhe ann an seann togalach – ann an sabhal mòr Ostaig – agus a bha ag amas air cùrsaichean goirid agus leabharlann a thabhann, air siubhal cho fada agus air fás gu bhithean thràgh a bha air fheàrachd. Chaidh a stèidheachadh ann an 1973, agus chaidh na ciad cùrsaichean leabharlann a’ taisLEAN ann an 1983.
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean

An-diugh, tha e air thaicinn mar Ionad Nàiseanta airson cànán is cultar na Gàidhlig ann an Alba agus na phàirt de dh'Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean, le Foghlam, Teagasg is Ionnsachadhaich aig bunail g a' ghnothachais, cho math ri rannsachadh, agus cultar, ealain agus leasachadh eacnonachadh.

Tha timeall air 125 luchd-obrach aig SMO air an làraich, a’ mhòr-chuid dhiùbh boireann, le teadh-a-steach air a thuairmise a còrr is 237 milliméar gach bliadhna anns an Eilean Gheàitheachan fhèin. Tha e cuideachd aig teis-meadhain nam molaidean gus baile a chruthachadh aig Cill Beag, fòs air a’ cholaiste, le 75 dachaigh airan gan togal, cho math ri ionad co-labaist, gòraesan spòrs agus gnuthachais eile air an làraich. Tha an-dràsta 6 buidhnean eile ag obair air an làraich, comapanaidhe meadhàn nan Cànain, Sealladh thag an MG Alba nam measg.

Ged nach gabhadh leasachadh SMO agus a’ bhualadh a bh’ aig e air ceann a deas air an Eilean Gheàitheachan a dhèanann a-raitheachd ann an àite sam bith eile chun na h-aon ire, tha feartan de chùisean aig SMO g a tha ga dhèanamh teagaisgeach a thoabh a’ cheist gu Mhàighlidh mar so-mhasaoin eacnochain am scéala.

Tha e stèidh’ ann ann an sgìre den Eilean Gheàitheachan far an deach a’ choinnseachadh thràidiseanta Ghàidhlig anns a’ chomrainn a-rithehch ann an àite sam bith eile chun na h-aon ire, air sgàth a bhualadh aig SMO a tha ga dhèanamh teagaisgeach a thoabh a’ cheist mu Ghàidhlig mar so-mhasaoin eacnochain am scéala.

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The recent research into the economic and social value of Gaelic as an asset, highlights some key examples of how businesses, social enterprises and communities are using Gaelic, and its significance in fulfilling their communication, commercial and social objectives. This case study demonstrates how Sabhal Mòr Ostaig use Gaelic as an asset.

The development of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO) is instructive in terms of how an organisation originally seen as a cultural centre based on derelict property – the big barn of Ostaig - and aimed at enabling short courses and a library, has taken wings and grown into Skye's third largest employer. Originating in 1973, the first full time courses – an HND in Business studies and commerce took place in 1983.
Today it is the National Centre for Gaelic language and culture in Scotland and part of the University of the Highlands and Islands with its core business Education, Teaching and Learning plus research, together with culture, arts and economic development. SMO has approximately 125 staff on campus, the majority of whom are female, with an estimated income impact of over £3million per annum on Skye itself. It is also currently at the heart of proposals to create a village at Kilbeg adjacent to the College, with the construction of 75 new houses, in addition to a conference centre, sports facilities and other elements of development. SMO currently has 6 other organisations active on campus, including the media companies Canan, Sealladh and MG Alba.

Although the development of SMO and its impact particularly on the South of Skye is not something that can be replicated elsewhere in detail, there are aspects that make the SMO experience an instructive one in respect of the issue of Gaelic acting as an economic and social asset.

It is based in an area of Skye where the traditional Gaelic community has been (like elsewhere) marginalised but due to the development of the college, there now exists a very strong stratum of Gaelic in the wider community. The college is the 3rd largest employer on the Island, after the Council and NHS, so has had a very important direct impact on jobs. Linked to the development of SMO have been the developments in the local area – the population of Sleat having doubled since 1971, from 450 to almost 900, with the school population having trebled – the local school is a Gaelic Medium School with an English unit attached. SMO’s childcare facility Fàs Mòr has 70 children on its books now, freeing up parents for employment, and ensuring a Gaelic language environment for the children.

As well as its Higher Education function, the college is seen as a community asset, with the local arts association running 45 events during the year, 90% of which are staged in the college. The local Fèis an Eilein takes place at the same time as the College short courses, resulting in accommodation being totally full for this period. Off-season, it is a hub for locals.

The work of the college has many social impacts – it attracts artists to the area, there is an Artists in Residence programme, and there has been a growth in longer term links to Scotland’s arts, such as a member of staff hosting the Radio nan Gàidheal Gaelic books programme. In general, people are now coming to the area, recognizing that SMO is a special facility, with Gaelic at its heart.

It has increased Gaelic related job opportunities – on the facilities side, people are employed there who would otherwise struggle. It pays better than local hotels, and it provides an opportunity to return for people previously born and brought up in Skye, who continue to be attracted to the lifestyle and the environment. The prospect of building 75 houses, 25% of which will be affordable houses, over the next 20 years within the Kilbeg project will allow it to make the type of impact previously created by the growth of Eilean Iarmain estate elsewhere in Sleat. The aim is to create a highly attractive local environment that will offer sustainable living standards, attract families to, and retain highly skilled people within Skye.

Future prospects include an extension of the media work undertaken by organisations such as Young Films and Sealladh in the Fàs studios in the SMO Media Centre, together with developments around the ‘Connect G’ initiative, which amongst other things aims to promote Gaelic tourism, raise ambition in the Gaelic media sector, and show best practice in using Gaelic to enhance community enterprise.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig’s vision is one which is profoundly Gaelic – all academic staff speak Gaelic as do 85% of the support staff (with the remainder currently learning the language). Courses are all delivered through Gaelic, and there is a focus on linking their increasingly important media work to their continuing and deepening research and teaching of Gaelic heritage and culture, to provide a new generation of Gaelic speaking graduates, informed of their heritage and able to communicate this in the language and methods of today and tomorrow.