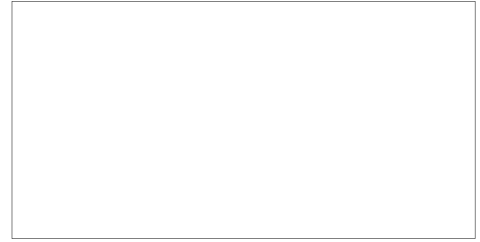

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Considering approaches towards sustainability through reflexive ethnographic research into two international music gatherings.

Abstract

In this article, I consider how community music-making can help people become more engaged in climate action and responsible consumption. These are two of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations. Through ethnographic fieldwork, I demonstrate how my lived experiences at two Ethno gatherings impacted my engagement with climate action (SDG 13) and consumption and production (SDG 12). "Ethnos" are JM International's annual multi-sited, youth folk-music gatherings. They are active in over 40 countries. Their mission is to revive, invigorate and disseminate global traditional musical heritage, and to promote ideals such as peace, tolerance and understanding.

Following a critique of the concept of sustainability, I explore how two musical gatherings impacted my responsiveness to environmental sustainability. This postdoctoral ethnographic research was conducted in 2019 and 2020 at Ethno England and New Zealand as part of Ethno Research (https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/research/international-centre-for-community-music/projects/ethno-research/). I demonstrate how these gatherings addressed environmental concerns through organisational processes, and how the location of the gatherings solidified the relationship between participatory music-making and nature. Finally, I consider the value of the broader social impact of these gatherings in relation to the climate emergency.

Keywords

climate action; Ethno; sustainability, community music facilitation

Considering approaches towards sustainability through reflexive ethnographic research into two international music gatherings

Introduction

My awareness of the importance of integrating environmental sustainability into community music practice began with a long journey. In January 2020, I travelled from York, England to Auckland, New Zealand to conduct ethnographic research. While I was on the train to Manchester airport, I received a text message from my airline announcing a change to my flight schedule. Flash floods in Dubai meant that Emirates Airlines was dealing with severe delays. I was now to be rerouted via a connecting flight at Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport in China.

Upon arrival in Dubai, I encountered a 24-hour delay before boarding a China Airlines flight to Guangzhou. Other passengers were not as fortunate. Some waited an entire week before the next available flight. During those 24 hours, I became very aware of the generosity of the local community. They provided hundreds of stranded passengers with places to sleep, and food to eat, when it was clear that there was a shortage of resources. Availability was stretched so thin that passengers on busses to one hotel were being rerouted to another one while still enroute. Passengers waited anxiously as rooms were prepared and spaces were found to accommodate them. I was given a brief glimpse into what life as a 'climate refugee' might look like.

My connecting flight was full of people travelling to China for the Chinese New Year. From Guangzhou, I flew on to New Zealand. Little did I realize that the world was mere weeks away from a viral pandemic, originating in the country via which I had travelled.

Through this experience, I became aware of humanity's vulnerability to natural disasters and the vital hospitality required to accommodate climate refugees. It resonated with a comment by one of my research participants:

> As the climate emergency gets worse, the social problems are only going to get worse as well, especially if we have climate refugees coming from India or Africa to Europe because it is the only land that's habitable anymore. Then we're going to need to be welcoming and peaceful and less divided than we are now to cope with it. (Megan, Interview, 12th March 2020)[1]

In this article, I demonstrate how two intercultural music exchange camps, Ethno England and Ethno New Zealand, model effective strategies for environmental awareness and sustainability in a positive and responsive manner. Climate action and Responsible consumption are two of the seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGs) from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This framework was adopted by the United Nations Member states in 2015 (United Nations, N.D.). The SDGs

> recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve oceans and forests. (United Nations, N.D.)

The literature review provides an overview of the concept of sustainability in ethnomusicology and ecomusicology as a springboard for how the field of community music might consider this issue. I suggest that community music, a field with a focus on social change, may be in a strong position to address climate action. Following my methodological

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[1] All participants' names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

approach, the article is divided into an ethnographic account that is separated into three sections: connections to the environment; composing and creating in and with local natural resources; and modelling stewardship. I conclude with a reflection on the broader social impact of the gatherings from an environmental sustainability perspective.

Ethno

Ethno is JM International's folk, traditional and world music programme (https://jmi.net/programs/ethno). It is a residential music gathering, much like a summer camp, where young musicians between the ages of 13 and 30 come together to share and learn each other's culture and music. The 10-day programme of sharing and exchange culminates in a series of performances - usually at local folk festivals. Currently, there are Ethno gatherings in over forty countries world-wide (https://ethno.world/). The organisation encourages participation by both local and international musicians, focusing on intercultural exchange through music. At the time of research, Ethno did not have a policy regarding environmental activism. Instead, they allowed each gathering to make its own decisions (Gibson, 2021). For this reason, I am focusing specifically on two gatherings that have clear approaches towards environmental sustainability, rather than on the broader organisation.

Central to this article is the consideration of the paramusical impact of attending such a gathering. The term 'paramusical' refers to the phenomena that occur alongside a musical experience (Camlin and Reiss, 2021). As the gatherings are residential, the organisers of the event have some influence on how participants engage with each other, and with their natural environment. Ethno England 2019 and Ethno New Zealand 2020 chose to draw attention to sustainable living choices when it came to social activities, choice of location and catering.

Sustainability

Sustain-maintain or sustain-change

The term sustainability has become a ‘buzzword’ in industries, education, and politics. The wide usage of the term causes concern that ‘if it is (re)defined continually, it may mean everything and nothing’ (Allen, 2018: 43). For this reason, I am drawing on literature in the fields of ethnomusicology and ecomusicology to foreground debates that may be become relevant within community music. Aaron Allen, a prominent ecomusicologist (2023: 97) suggests that,

> on the surface, the term *sustainability* gives the impression of stasis and the comfort of knowing that we can carry on doing things the same way in a particular place for a long time. For some, sustainability means simply maintain.[2]

The concern with this stance is that certain behaviours and actions are having a negative impact on the natural environment (Allen, 2018, 2020, 2023; Grant 2012b). As Allen (2021: 94) argues,

> The very systems we use to feed, clothe, and shelter ourselves have been fundamentally tethered to exploitative, globalized neoliberal capitalism, which has done amazingly well at enriching some while increasing inequity, creating social strife, and causing environmental crises—all of which together create feedback loops that make life on Earth increasingly perilous for humans and everything else.

Allen (2019: 44) proposes two approaches towards sustainability: sustain-maintain and sustain-change. The first works towards ‘maintaining current lifestyles and dominant

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[2] Ecomusicology is a critical study of the relationship between music/sound, culture/ society and nature /environment (Allen, Leapaldt, Pedelty and Titon, 2023: 144).

cultural practices’. The second considers what changes need to be made in order ‘to do things differently so that human and nonhuman life may continue to flourish on Earth’ (Allen, 2021: 98). As community musicians consider the sustainability of their practices, they need to critically reflect on the motivations behind their usage of the term. They should consider whether they hold a ‘sustain-maintain’ or sustain-change’ mindset. This is something widely debated within ethnomusicology.

Sustainability and music cultures

The term ‘sustainability’ has been used widely in ethnomusicology to refer to the maintenance and preservation of music cultures in decline. For some musical cultures, this is due to the extreme rate of global change (Schippers, 2016). However, ethnomusicologists advise caution when it comes to considering sustainability from a self-preservation, or sustain-maintain stance (Bithell, 1996, Titon, 2009, Grant, 2012b). If the desire to sustain a musical practice leads to wanting to collect and preserve it in an ‘unchanged state’ it may impact how local communities engage with the practice. For example, research into a community choir that has been in existence for over 100 years revealed that their longevity was largely due to their willingness as a collective to adapt to the changes they were encountering socio-economically. This meant changing where they rehearsed and performed, and who they recruited within their social networks. At times, it also meant changing their musical repertoire. For this group, sustainability related to how effectively they were able to adjust to the changes within their local community, rather than preserve or maintain their original practice (Gibson, 2023).

Titon (2009: 135) encourages us to consider musical cultures as a ‘renewable daily resource among us’ drawing us to consider discourse surrounding sustainability as one of

change. Thus, research into the area of sustainability within ethnomusicology largely suggests the need to respond and adapt to remain sustainable - a *sustain-change* approach.

Connections between environmental sustainability and music culture

Critiques of sustainable music frameworks in ethnomusicology often relate to the lack of incorporation of the natural environment into frameworks. For example, Grant and Schippers (2015) developed a framework that explores how elements within a music culture are interconnected, demonstrating how a change in one element can impact sustainability. However, the framework did not explicitly consider the natural environment. This is something which Allen strongly advocates, arguing, that ‘when studying, deploying, advocating, or referencing sustainability in music studies, we too should move beyond analogy and rely on the foundational aspect of nature/environment’ (Allen, 2018: 51). In other words, when considering sustainability and musical practice, there needs to be a move towards more ‘eco-centric (ecological systems centred) perspective instead of anthropocentric (human-centred)’ (Allen, 2020: 305).

Jorritsma (2023) considers how some music cultures have been in decline because of the loss of the natural environment in which they practice. This is notable in the walking songs of women in the borderlands of Southern Africa. As particular pathways have become unavailable for the women to walk, they have stopped singing the songs relating to those pathways (Impey, 2018). Some academics argue that demonstrating connections between music-making and the natural environment can be seen as activism (Jorritsma, 2023; Burnard, Cook, Jasilek, and Bauer-Nilsen, 2018; Bithell, 2018). This is seen in the way the Vanuatu, who use the natural resource of water to create Etëtung music, are using their music to highlight the impact the climate emergency is having on their locality (Grant, 2019). Grant

(2012b: 158) has argued: ‘the protection and rehabilitation of diverse natural ecosystems can bolster efforts to preserve and revitalise cultural diversity. Conversely, strategies that foster cultural diversity can encourage and stimulate biodiversity’. Ultimately, the protection of the environment and cultural practices are intertwined. Therefore, the natural environment needs to be drawn into conversations surrounding sustainable development of musical practices or cultures.

Community music and sustainability-change

Community music is already well placed when it comes to considering how to incorporate environmental sustainability-change into practice and research. Many community musicians are already working towards social change through collective music-making (Higgins, 2012; Bartleet and Higgins, 2018, Hesser and Bartleet, 2020; Higgins, 2024; Veblen, Messenger and Silverman, 2013; Camlin, 2023). There are also close links to social justice with a call towards ‘disrupting’ and ‘shifting’ inequitable and unjust systemic structures (Bartleet, 2023: 37). It is already recognised that the most vulnerable communities are disproportionately affected by climate changes (Grant, 2018; Manzanedo and Manning, 2020). Therefore, drawing environmental sustainability into community music projects only further solidifies its social justice aims.

Hesser and Bartleet’s (2020: 17) analysis of music projects and how they aligned with the UN’s SDGs reveal a lower percentage aligning with Climate Action (8%) and Responsible Consumption and Production (6%) compared to the highest alignment of Good Health and Wellbeing (80%) and Reduced Inequalities (55%). This suggests that there is scope for better incorporation of environmental sustainability into community music activities. As community musicians are challenged to reflect on their ‘intentions, values,

processes, and practices' (Bartleet and Higgins, 2018: 9) this is a critical moment in time for facilitators to reimagine their practice in relation to a climate emergency.

Allen (2018) proposes considering whether an action or practice is beneficial by asking ethical questions regarding the environment, equity, economy, and aesthetics.[3] Garrett (2018) suggests two elements for arts-driven sustainability: to measure environmental impact and to make good art. Considering artistry as climate action is also reflected upon by Burnard et al. (2018: 129) who, like Bithell (2018), suggests performance is a way of 'raising awareness and responding to globally shared problems'. Burnard et al. (2018: 142) sensitively recognise that through performance 'we are permitted and encouraged to experience that which we may normally fear'. Here is an opportunity for community musicians to use their knowledge, skills, and expertise in creating 'safe spaces' (Higgins, 2012; Higgins, 2024). These facilitation skills could be used to support participants in exploring and moving towards new experiences and understandings in relation to climate action.

It is this notion of community music activities as a space to feel safe enough to explore new ideas that I wish to focus upon. Higgins considers how community music 'sets up and ignites a learning experience that is active, rather than passive' (2020: 233). During my participant observation at two specific community music activities, Ethno England and Ethno New Zealand, I noted a personal transformation regarding my attitude towards climate

[3] Allen refers to the American naturalist Aldo Leopold when considering what may be right or wrong. Leopold writes, 'a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise (Leopold, 1989: 225 in Allen, 2018: 53).

action. I am not a radical activist, and the climate emergency can make me feel fearful, but the structure of these two specific events enabled me to consider how to practice more responsible behaviours when returning home. The resultant social outcome was on an individual level, rather than a macro one (Bartleet 2023: 40). However, it was my first observation of how community music activities might create spaces for participants to better respond to the need for environmental sustainability. The following research findings are intended as an opening for community musicians to consider how they might move towards environmental sustain-change that could embolden and empower their participants.

Methodology

Ethno Research was a four-year grant led by Lee Higgins that ran between 2019 and 2022. The aim of the project was to study the 'value and impact of Ethno pedagogy and the related social processes on the lives of participating musicians' (Higgins and Gibson, 2024: xviii). The project had eight focus areas: Arts and Culture; History; Pedagogy and Professional development; Trauma-informed practice; Ethno organisers; Sustainability / Covid-19; Ethno USA; and Majority world. The research project was made up of a team of international interdisciplinary researchers and was funded by a grant from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies through JM International.

The 2020 COVID-19 crisis brought international travel to a stand-still. With Ethno-Research entering its second year of a project investigating international residential musical gatherings, the impact of the border closures resonated deeply. One by one, the musical gatherings at which we were to conduct fieldwork were cancelled. As a research team, we had to re-design our methodological approach in a matter of weeks. More palpably, the organisers and musicians engaged in the organisation were scrambling to resolve the social

and financial implications of the cancellation of these events. As part of this response, we developed a research package known as the ‘sustainability report’ exploring how Ethno was responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on international travel (Gibson, 2021).

Previous project outputs have focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the sustainability of the Ethno programme and the tension between international travel (which results in carbon emissions) and sustaining intercultural connections (Gibson, 2021; Gibson, 2024). However, this article focuses specifically on the practice of environmental awareness at two gatherings that were attended just before international borders began closing. Research findings for this article are drawn from two ethnographic studies at Ethno New Zealand in January 2020 and Ethno England in June 2019. I travelled internationally for the former, whilst the latter was within my region and only required a train journey.

Ethnographic fieldwork is a research strategy frequently used in social anthropology. It is defined as ‘the recording and analysis of a culture or society, usually based on participant-observation and resulting in a written account of a people, place or institution’ (Simpson & Coleman 2024). Przybyslski (2021: 175) notes that ethnography is never a strictly linear process. This was extremely evident in the Ethno Research project. Whilst the broader project needed to adjust to online interviews, questionnaires and to document and video analysis, this article is drawing on more ‘traditional’ approaches to ethnography: that of the lived experience of a researcher through participating in activities alongside other participants. In other words, it is through engaging in activities alongside participants that knowledge is drawn.

I was a participant observer and sole researcher for the entire Ethno gathering in New Zealand, where I shared accommodation with participants, participated in the music workshops as well as all other social activities, and performed in the band for all performances. At Ethno England my role was more that of an observer. I attended two workshops and joined the group for one dinner alongside the Ethno research team based in York. During Ethno New Zealand I also had some semi-structured interviews with participants that I recorded and transcribed. Usually, this was when I wanted to understand a participant's perspective in more detail. After both gatherings, I followed up with a selection of participants for online semi-structured interviews.

Both Ethno England and New Zealand had approximately 20 participants. Participants ranged in age from over 18 to 36. Ethno England occurred alongside the Tandem Festival on a farm site near Oxford. Ethno New Zealand took place in two venues: The Piritahi marae on Waiheke Island for one week; and then the Auckland folk festival for three days.

Ethno New Zealand

One of the unique features of Ethno New Zealand is the way it connects with Māori cultural practices. Ethno New Zealand takes place in a Māori community space, known as a marae, where participants are hosted by the Māori community. Participants are thus embedded in Māori culture through day-to-day living, even though the main program activities focus on the music-making of a multitude of different musical cultures. Central to Ethno New Zealand's approach is that Indigenous perspectives become the framework of the gathering to recognise the bicultural nature of their country. In other words, the Ethno

organisers choose to reimagine the European origins of the gathering within the Māori context.[4] An Ethno organiser explained their reasoning:

> when you bring a framework from Europe, you must be very mindful as to how you adapt it. We have thought a lot and received a lot of feedback and support from the leaders in the Māori community as to how we integrate our responsibility as non-Māori New Zealanders to the Treaty of Waitangi, an agreement between the Māori and the original settlers of New Zealand. The treaty states the need to acknowledge that the Māori are the guardians of this land, and we need to speak with them before we bring in particularly traditional music. This is the other thing. We're bringing gifts or treasures, known as 'taunga' from other cultures onto this land, which has been kind of stripped of its 'taunga' over the many years. In some ways, that's all being rebuilt. So, we have to be careful of what we're bringing here. And we need to ask the people of the land for their blessing on that. (Anna, Interview, 19th January 2020)

The organisers of Ethno New Zealand grapple with Māori-European relationships and attempt to create a space where Indigenous perspectives frame the intercultural music-making experience. As such, all participants live within a framework that has a sympathetic approach to the environment (Atleo, 2011).

Ethno England

At Ethno England, participants were camping in a field and using a large barn for their rehearsals and meals. Bathroom facilities were in the form of a compost toilet and outdoor shower. The shower drained straight into the land. The organisers provided biodegradable soap from a local company who provided some sponsorship as well as biodegradable shower gel to put in all the showers. They included signs requesting that participants use the shower gel provided, as well as one at the compost toilet explaining the

[4] For further research into working with the Māori community and cultural framework in New Zealand, see Rakena, 2018.

benefits to the environment. Their aim was to ‘not put anything bad into the land’ on which they were camping (Megan, Interview, 12th March 2020).

Ethno England used food that came from food banks. To address carbon emissions and travel, the organisers also offered a 10% reduced fee for participants who did not fly to the event. Participants were asked to bring their own coffee cups and drink bottles, to prevent the use of plastic bottles.

At the time, Ethno England was connected to the Tandem Festival, an organisation which focused on using environmentally sustainable infrastructures for their activities. So, much like Ethno New Zealand, Ethno England chose to work with an organisation that focused on a particular ethos which then became the framework for the gathering.

Connections to the environment

One of the key elements of community music practice is the act of welcoming participants into the space (Higgins, 2012; 2020; in press). Community music facilitators are asked to consider how to create spaces that are accessible and inclusive. This enables participants to feel comfortable to engage in music-making and with one another (Higgins, 2020). Higgins (2024) refers to the gesture of ‘the welcome’ as an open invitation to build a relationship with another person. The ‘welcome’ at Ethno New Zealand comprised several activities. The first activity was the welcoming protocol of the Māori.

Anyone who visits a marae must go through a welcome ceremony. The Ethno participants learned a song, which was sung as we processed through an entrance way and up a hill towards the main hall of the marae. Greetings were shared in Māori between one of the Ethno facilitators and the leader of the marae. The members of the marae then sang to us. The

ceremony ended with a personal greeting between each person in attendance. This involved holding the right hand of each member of the marae, touching our foreheads together, and breathing in at the same time. Once the ceremony was complete, we shared a meal together. We underwent a similar ceremony when we left the marae.

Following the meal, we sat in the main hall and were told about many aspects of Māori culture and the expectations connected with living on the marae for a week. We listened to the stories of the ancestors. We heard the history of the carvings that surrounded us in the beautiful building. Before we settled down to sleep, we began an 'ice-breaking' activity. Ice-breaking activities, where participants are each asked to offer some information about themselves, are not unusual occurrences at residential gatherings or community music events. However, the three questions we were asked at Ethno New Zealand immediately emphasised participants' connection to the natural environment and to a particular place:

What is your mountain?

What is your river?

Where are you from?

The opening introduction immediately connected all of us in the room to a place, and a natural resource. By asking us to reflect on our own identity in relation to the environment around us, a framework was created by which participants then began to perceive the rest of the week. During my conversations, participants shared that they were thinking about where they were from, what their cultural heritage is, and how they might express themselves through that cultural heritage. Participants reflected carefully on musical choices they were bringing into the space. Those people who were born in New Zealand, but whose ancestral

heritage was from the United Kingdom shared experiences about respecting Māori culture. Rebecca, for example shared ‘as a Pākehā I'm telling the story of my ancestors. And in a way if I acknowledge it, I feel like it can become something that's really honouring the treaty because it’s a real important thing to Māori culture: to acknowledge your roots’(Recorded conversation during the gathering, January 2020)[5].

On the other hand, the Māori music of New Zealand, which has suffered significant decline due to the colonisation of the land, resulted in deep consideration of where music should be played and of who the audience should be. Tom, for example, explained ‘I picked that song and I felt it was appropriate to do in the context of this marae and Ethno because of it being about the dawn chorus of the birds. Out here on Waiheki there are so many birds and so much pristine nature’ (Record conversation during the gathering, January 2020.

As demonstrated in this ethnographic account, one method of incorporating nature into a space is through the framing of the initial ‘welcome’. As participants reflect on their connections to the natural environment, it may begin to deepen their awareness of how they influence and are influenced by the spaces within which they live.

Composing and creating in and with local natural resources

In this section, I consider how an awareness and appreciation of the natural environment is developed by creating music in areas of natural beauty. This was achieved through a composition project set by Ethno New Zealand. Participants were divided into

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[5] Pākehā is a Māori word referring to New Zealanders of European descent.

groups according to a natural theme: mountain, river, ocean, air, or land. They then had a morning to create a piece of music that would be performed that evening. The group I worked with sat outside close to the subject of our composition. We were a group of four musicians, creating a piece of music about ‘Moana’: the ocean.

Part of this assignment was to incorporate natural sounds around us. I used shells. Creating music using shells as my instrument caused me to reimagine how I conceptualized what constituted a musical instrument and musical sound. This also drew attention to what musical resources our local environment can offer and the environmental cost of many contemporary instruments (Allen, 2018; Allen, Leapaldt, Pedelty, and Titon, 2023).

This process of creative music making through nature is not new to music education. References to this type of project are suggested by John Paynter and R. Murray Schafer as early as 1970. Mark Pedelty (2012: 183) argues that music can be an important tool for environmental sustainability in that it integrates material and cultural environments, keeping ecological systems vital in the cultural imagination. The only concern with this approach is how effectively creating music within and through the environment develops into climate action (Jorritsma, 2023).

One method of addressing climate action through music inspired by, or using, natural resources is by using the music as advocacy statements (Grant, 2019; Burnard, et al; Garrett, 2018). A piece of music written by participants at Ethno New Zealand in 2019 could be considered as environmental advocacy, with lyrics that include an acknowledgement of the connection between the earth and humanity (Young, Mooks and Slabb, 2019). The piece was eventually recorded and is part of promotional material for Ethno New Zealand. It is an

example of a musical composition that focuses on our responsibility to our local environments and the importance of universal connections.

Modelling stewardship

Within the context of Ethno England and New Zealand, organisers modelled behaviours that supported more sustainable living. At Ethno New Zealand, I observed the Māori community in their role as stewards of the earth, only ever taking the resources they needed. I observed sustainability as an exchange: taking resources but then also restoring those resources, emphasising the interconnectedness of humanity and nature.

For example, on the afternoon before our first performance, we had an opportunity to do some basket weaving using flax. This experience was facilitated by one of the members of the marae community. We sat together outside in the sunshine, weaving small little baskets together using the natural resources around us. As we wove, we talked with one another and learned about the practice. In this activity I was experiencing an engagement with nature that was quite different to my usual encounters. We were taught how to collect leaves and what the appropriate conditions were to pick them. Then, we were shown how to return the leftovers back to nature. We were participating in a very practical demonstration of an attitude towards the environment that seemed more sustainable and respectful than typical Western approaches.

Another instance occurred in an informal conversation. I was walking alongside a woman who was talking about how she collected water from the rainfall on her roof. The recent rainfall had been low and so she was needing to get some extra water from the marae. I was immediately struck by how, even though her home was connected to water pipes, her

approach to using water was making her so much more aware of the rainfall levels than the way I used water in my own home.

My experience was not unique. One of the Ethno New Zealand organisers noted how he had observed a lot of conversations between participants from the Global North and South surrounding climate change. Through conversing with people living in Polynesia, Global North participants became more aware of the impact of climate change because they heard how it was impacting people from Polynesia in immediate terms. This contrasts with some common outlooks for Global North participants who tend to perceive climate change as 'somewhere in the future' (Alex, January 2020).

Incorporating Indigenous perspectives into Western practice has both positive and negative connotations. Whilst it is possible to learn from such approaches, it is important to be aware of how Indigenous knowledge is being used for non-Indigenous benefit, so as not to repeat injustices of the colonial period (Harrison, 2020: 31). As mentioned in my opening section on Ethno New Zealand, it is vital to recognise the role of the Māori community as stewards of their land. But, when it comes to how Western society may learn from Indigenous attitudes towards nature, it is important to ensure the approach is cognisant of the needs and wishes of those communities.

Both gatherings served only vegetarian food. This was cost-effective but also a means to introduce a more sustainable lifestyle to their participants. Ethno England further highlighted food sustainability by holding a 'Ready Steady Cook' evening. Organisers took the ingredients that they had gathered from the food bank and arranged it into different boxes. They then put the participants in four teams each with a 'random' box of ingredients from the

foodbank. The teams had to try and make something tasty out of the ingredients they had been given. The facilitator explained the intention behind the activity:

> It was to really foreground the message about food waste and how much supermarkets throw away. Participants got a chance [realise]: "hey, this food is really tasty and we made it out of food waste"'. (Megan, Interview, 12th March 2020)

The Ethno England organiser explains that activities such as these are 'trying to encourage the participants to notice and think about what they can take away into their lives' (Megan, Interview, 12th March 2020).

The organiser of Ethno England reflected on feedback from participants saying that people felt it was 'alright' to eat vegetarian food for a week and use green energy more. She reflects: 'I think it has helped people to think about [sustainable living] a bit more.' The organiser sees two aspects to their approach:

> doing it right ourselves and not having as much of an [environmental] impact ourselves. And then there's more nebulously trying to spread the values of doing lifestyle changes through the way we present things to participants. (Megan, Interview, 12th March 2020)

Ethno England's decision to use compost toilets was also a strong statement about the importance of sustainable living. To be using these in an area where it was easy to access plumbing systems drew awareness to sustainable living, and to what it might look like should residential music activities be more actively seeking to create camps and festivals which minimally impact the natural environment within which they are temporarily living.

The Ethno England organiser reflects on the importance of giving people the opportunity to practice new behaviours. She commented, ‘there's the people who think they're convinced, but who aren't really practising it in their daily lives. Which is sort of all of us to some extent, really’. It is important for her to give examples and inspiration for what environmentally sustainable habits can be incorporated into people’s daily lives.

As a participant observer, these models of living have fed into my own life. Being shown how to live my life in a more sustainable way encouraged me to look at my own habits and behaviours at home, and to think about how I might change. By modelling sustainable living at Ethno England and Ethno New Zealand, I was able to see how it might be done. I found it to be inspirational. Whilst in some respects, the changes I am now making feel slow in comparison to the environmental crisis within which we live, it has allowed for some sense of empowerment. Through my actions, and the collective actions of other Ethno participants who felt inspired by what they observed, we can create a better future.

Sustain-change or sustain-maintain?

For the Ethno England organiser, holding a gathering is only justifiable if they are achieving their social justice and environmental aims (Megan, Interview, 12th March 2020). She explains,

> On the one hand, I feel as though the social impact is a greater gain than the negative carbon impact if Ethno is really achieving what it aims [...] the other feeling I have in totally the opposite direction is that we could be doing this project without anybody flying anywhere if we just got better at reaching out to the migrant communities where we are. (Megan, March 2020)

This article highlights an important issue from Ethno Research and perhaps a wider concern within community music: the scope of the impact of a project. I have presented an

example of personal transformation through my experiences at two community music activities, demonstrating a social impact on an individual level (Bartleet, 2023). My experience aligns with the bulk of our findings exploring the impact of Ethno over its 30 years: participants largely attested to personal transformations, but it was difficult to find conclusive evidence of social impact at a macro level, where societal structures were changed as a direct impact of attendance at an Ethno gathering (Gibson et al. 2021).

From a reflexive perspective, I have wondered if my awareness of environmental sustainability at Ethno New Zealand may have been because of the delay I encountered on my way to the gathering. Or perhaps it was because of the journey back home in the context of rising concern about an unknown virus that was just starting to impact international travel. If impact is only on an individual level, does it justify the environmental cost of carbon emissions caused by international travel?

At the time of the research, the organiser of Ethno England was spear-heading conversations within the wider network surrounding environmental activism. The wider network leaves policy surrounding climate action to the local context, and, due to the higher cost of alternative types of travel, still chooses to fly participants to different gatherings (Gibson, 2021). The carbon emissions created by international air travel suggest that Ethno gatherings are not environmentally sustainable. However, there are alternatives to international travel which have been recommended to the network and researched: connecting online; connecting with the local immigrant communities; and, where relevant, connecting with Indigenous communities (Gibson, 2024; Gibson 2021).

Secondly, the gatherings largely draw participants from middle-class backgrounds. This represents a challenge to claims that the gatherings achieve equity (Gibson et al. 2021).

If Ethno was ensuring that people from areas with low-cost carbon emissions were being given opportunities to engage on a global platform and limiting flights for people living in higher carbon-uses areas, their cultural aims of intercultural understanding may balance carbon emissions cost and address some of the systemic barriers that cause social inequity (Bartleet, 2023: 37).[6]

In terms of programme sustainability, Ethno England has not held a gathering since 2019. Two of the co-ordinators now run a community music activity which follow many of the guiding principles of Ethno but is structured as weekly or monthly sessions in London. The new model demonstrates a change in approach that holds to an ethos of intercultural understanding but rejects the need for regular international travel by connecting with international communities already living in England. This could be described as a *sustain-change* approach.

Ethno New Zealand continues its gatherings, but the focus remains centred on biculturality within the country. They held a 'national' camp during the lockdown period. And, more recently, they appear to be focussing on equity by enabling international travel for members of the Māori community. At the time of writing, several Māori community

[6] This discussion surrounding carbon emissions and international travel may seem cautious to some. As a first-generation immigrant I rely on international flying to maintain relationships with immediate family members. As such, I feel it would be unethical for me to advocate to stop international flying. However, further debate into this issue is essential. I suggest that international flying needs deeper analysis in terms of *who* is flying, for what reasons and whether limiting international flying would create further barriers, particularly for the Global South. For further reading, Catherine Grant (2018) highlights some of the complex issues of academic flying in a reflective and forthright article.

members were in Sweden to support and encourage Indigenous perspectives in Ethno Sweden.

Conclusion

In this article, I have shown two ways of considering sustainability: *sustain-maintain* or *sustain-change*. I have drawn attention to whether considerations of sustainability are in relation to climate action (SDG 13) or to maintaining a community music activity. I have demonstrated how Ethno England and Ethno New Zealand drew attention to climate action in three ways. Firstly, by how they situate their event. Ethno New Zealand framed its gathering within the Māori cultural framework, supporting the concept of humanities role as stewards of the earth. Ethno England was framed within the Tandem festival that showed a responsible attitude towards consumption (SDG 12) through environmentally sustainable approaches towards the infrastructure of the event. Secondly, the natural environment was used as inspiration for creativity, drawing awareness towards the spaces we are inhabiting as well as how natural resources are used to create music. Finally, the organisers of both gatherings modelled stewardship. They demonstrated how one might engage in more sustainable lifestyles.

Through a critique of the term sustainability, I have explained the importance of approaching sustainable development from a *sustain-change* perspective (Allen, 2018). I have suggested ways in which environmental awareness could be incorporated into community music practice. For music cultures to continue to exist, societies need to change how they engage with the natural environment (Allen 2018). The two ethnographic examples within this article demonstrate how to incorporate environmental awareness into programmes

in an inspirational manner, enabling participants to feel they can make a difference in a global crisis that can sometimes feel overwhelming.

Notes

<$--ENDNOTES-->

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