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The evolution, transformation and the current landscape of the recording studio industry

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis was to explore the current state of the recording studio industry and the historical causes that have led here. The aim was to collect information on the operation of commercial recording studios in the current landscape of the industry and find ways different types of facilities have adapted to the challenges of lower budgets and changing ways of working. This study was carried out using a mixed methods approach, which included written sources, data from self-conducted surveys sent to Finnish and European studios, as well as first hand experiences gathered from discussions with studio professionals.

The first part of the thesis examines the history of recording studios from the invention of sound recording in the late 19th century, to the current day form of the industry. This history section explores the recording studios' relationship with the rest of the music industry and maps out the steps and technological innovations which have led to the current state of the industry. The second part of the thesis investigates different aspects of running a commercial recording studio today and different means of adapting to the changing industry.

The results suggest that while the industry of recording studios is no longer as essential or large part of the popular music industry as it was in the past, it is still a relevant part of music production as a whole. Reduction in budgets, emergence of home studios, and changing musical trends have all resulted in income for recording studios to decrease, while expenses rise.

The findings indicate that the decline of the recording studio industry is the effect of larger trends within the music industry and would require fundamental change to correct. Still, the consensus from the participants in the study was that running a recording studio can be made viable, but requires extremely hard work, and should only be done by those passionate about the work itself.

Key words: recording studios, history of recording, music production, technological evolution

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1 INTRODUCTION

Since the invention of audio recording, recording studios have been a crucial part of the industry of recorded music. As decades went on, recording studios started to disconnect from the whole of the recording industry as the previously lucrative model of vertical integration and label-owned studios started to dissolve. This natural change, caused by changes in industry-wide trends and technological evolution, meant that recording studios started to become its own industry. instead of being a vital internal part, studio services are now out-sourced when needed.

The early 2000s saw a culmination of technological evolution and drastic change in consumer habits resulting in a dramatic shift and a sort of depression in the whole recording industry. The introduction of ever-cheaper and more powerful digital audio workstations and recording equipment aimed at consumers democratized music production giving rise to the home studio boom. Simultaneously, drastic changes in the consumption of music by customers, driven by file-sharing, and later streaming led to plummeting record sale revenues. This resulted in reduced recording budgets for both label backed and independent artists. The decline for the recording studio industry was further amplified by stylistic trends in popular music in which the use of a traditional recording studio is not as needed.

Nevertheless, professional recording studios today still fulfill their essential role within music production, raising questions about their viability and sustainability. This thesis explores the operational realities of the industry as it stands today. The aim is to gather information about the overall state of the industry as a whole, as well as dive deeper into the operation of recording studios of different types and sizes. The research question for the thesis is: What is the current state of the recording studio industry, with sub-questions of what caused the industry to evolve into its current state, what are the operational norms of commercial recording studios in the current landscape, and in what ways are studios adapting to current challenges?

2 Structure and Methodology

To answer the research questions, this thesis employs a mixed-methods approach. It uses written sources, both historical and current, to study the evolution of the recording studio industry, data gathered from surveys aimed at commercial recording studios in Finland and in Europe as well as insights and experiences gathered from discussions with studio owners actively working in the industry today.

This thesis is divided into two main investigative sections. Chapter three, The History of Recording Studios, is meant to give context to the rest of the thesis in a few different ways. It acts as a sort of literature review, and is a starting point for the future research in chapter four. The recording studio industry has developed in the intersection of technological innovation and the music industry. Accordingly, chapter three traces key developments in both. Chapter three also means to give context to how recording studios operated during its history, to give comparison to the current state. And finally, the chapter goes through the important steps which led the industry to where it currently stands.

In chapter four, The Current State of the Recording Studio ndustry, the thesis aims to look at the recording studio industry today to find what the current difficulties and the operational norms are. Chapter four is mainly based on answers from two self conducted surveys and personal communication with studio owners, with additional information from written material. This chapter gives an overview on different aspects of the industry using answers from the surveys as a baseline, with more specific information on the operation of a few specific studios based on the communication with the owners.

chapter four is divided into eight different sub-chapters, setting the scene, facilities, personnel, viability of recording studios, different types of work at recording studios, clientele, ancillary sources of income, and future. These sub-chapters dive deeper into their respective sections of the industry, summing up answers from the surveys, discussions as well as ancillary material.

This thesis uses a mixed methods approach, with different chapters focusing more on specific methods. Since the subject of the thesis is examined from a historical perspective, chapter three is mostly based on written material, which is also used to support the findings in chapter four. The industry of recording studios goes hand in hand with the whole of the music industry and technology as a whole, meaning it was possible to draw from sources not directly related to the recording studios themselves. The written material consists of primary sources such as articles and documentaries about specific studios and their personnel, secondary sources such as books and thesis about the history of the industry.

For chapter four of the thesis, data was gathered via survey. Survey was chosen as the method, for its accessibility to the answerer. Via survey, more participants were reached than would have been possible through individual interviews. Originally, the focus was on the industry domestically, but eventually, the research was extended with a separate, but similar survey aimed at European studios. The surveys were made using Google Forms, and distributed via email.

The surveys are a combination of open ended and closed ended questions, designed in a way that the answerer may complete it very quickly to lower the time burden, but with the option to go more in depth with the answers. Even though the initial aim of the survey was to gather concrete quantitative and qualitative data about the current state of the recording studio industry in Finland, the relatively small number of active professional studios, and the different ways they are operated, means the survey data itself cannot be used to make any objective conclusions, but should be used as a collection of examples of different styles of studios. As the surveys contain information about the financials of the answerers' businesses which some may consider sensitive, it was conducted in confidentiality. The thesis will not include names, or other identifiable information when referring to the survey results.

The surveys were aimed at commercial recording studios, which was defined as a studio that has a recording space and at least some presence on the internet where it markets its services. This excludes small project and production studios, as well as personal studios owned by musicians or hobbyists. The Internet was my main way of finding qualifying studios, as finding the studio online was a

qualifier on its own. For Finnish studios, the search focused on specific cities, instead of the whole country, so that smaller studios would not get buried under pages and pages of the larger studios' internet presence. For the European survey, the search targeted studios in specific countries. This meant that as the search field was larger, naturally it was the larger studios that showed up first.

The domestic survey was sent to 80 studios, from which 20 answers were received. The many different styles and sizes of the answerers' studios meant that the answers could be applied for most of the studios in Finland. All participants also answered the questions more thoroughly than had been asked for. The European survey was sent to 160 studios, from which 22 answers were received. Again, answers came from many different styles and sizes of studios, but on average the studios that answered were larger and more established than those in the domestic survey. Because of this, the overall results are not directly comparable, but by comparing specific studios of similar size some parallels can be drawn.

In addition to these self conducted surveys, a report by the UK Department of Culture, Music and Sport from 2021 was used, which details the current state of the industry in the United Kingdom. This report researches the same questions as the surveys conducted by myself, meaning a separate survey for the UK was not needed.

In addition to the surveys and written material, discussions were conducted with studio owners in Finland and Europe to gather their first hand experiences related to owning and running a studio. These discussions were informal and unstructured, with the intention to gain overall "real-world" experiences and anecdotal information to support the information gathered from the surveys and written material. The discussions also gave me as the author the chance to see if my research aligns with what the people actually working in the industry think and feel. Including these first-hand experiences also gives the research a closer look at the topics, as an alternative perspective to the more broad-nature of the surveys and written material. The discussions were conducted via online video call and via email.

To gain insight from as many different perspectives of the industry, the people consulted represent a diverse range of studio types, sizes and locations. Following are brief descriptions of the people and their studios, to gain context and a better understanding of each of their, and their studio's positions within the industry.

Jussi Vuola, founder and co-CEO of V.R. Studio in Turku, Finland, founded the studio in 2009. Vuola had previously run a home studio as well as worked in other studios. He notes building a studio had always been a 'crazy dream' of his, and after coming across a potential space he decided to go for it. V.R. studio is a mid-sized studio, consisting of a single control room, a larger live room, vocal booth as well as storage rooms that double as isolation rooms for amplifiers. V.R. Studio mostly works with underground and indie artists, and represents a common type of smaller studio in Finland. (Vuola 2025.)

Jyri Riikonen, studio manager of E-Studio, in Sipoo, Finland. E-studio was founded in 2004, and the first iteration of the studio consisted of a single control room and live room. In 2009 they moved to larger facilities, where the studio scale significantly increased, now consisting of a large live room, booths, and three control rooms. In 2017, the studio moved to their current, and largest, facilities, consisting of four control rooms, live room, large booths, and importantly, added accommodation facilities. The newest iteration has solidified its place as one of the more premium facilities in Finland. (Riikonen 2025.)

Anssi Kippo, founder and CEO of Astia-studio in Lappeenranta, Finland. Kippo founded the company in 1994, when he started to gain notoriety by recording local bands. The current facilities were built 1998, and features two separate studios, Studio A, where Kippo works in strictly analog format, and Studio B, a digital studio that is rented out to other engineers. Kippo and Astia-studio has profiled for analog reel-to-reel recording, after Kippo switched to fully analog recording in 2017, after realising that analog recording offers authenticity and fidelity digital recording cannot achieve. (Kippo 2025.)

Malik Berrabah, CEO of Wisseloord Studios in the Netherlands. Wisseloord was founded in 1978 by the electronics company Philips, for their record label

PolyGram, and the studio became one of the top studios in Europe. A major refit of the studio began in 2010, and was finished in 2012, before being sold to Berrabah. The studio consists of three separate studios, each with their own live rooms and booths, as well as two mastering studios. Berrabah diversified the operations of the studio by launching Wisseloord house of music, a creative publishing house, as well as Wisseloord academy, an educational institution, alongside the studio. Wisseloord represents the transformation of a large scale legacy-studio into a modern multi-faceted operation. (Berrabah 2025.)

Rasmus Bredvik, founder and owner of Tapetown studios in Denmark. Tapetown was founded in 2013 by Bredvik who had a history of playing in, and recording, local bands. The studio consists of a control room and a medium sized live room. Bredvik shifted the studio's focus from traditional recording, towards recording and shooting studio-live style live sessions. (Bredvik 2025.)

By employing this type of triangulation approach, using multiple different research methods and different styles of sources to seek consistent evidence results in improved reliability of the findings. The limitations of the methods, such as survey sample sizes and limiting the scope only to commercial studios is to be acknowledged. Ethical considerations were present throughout the research process. Participation in both the surveys and discussions were voluntary, and the participants were informed of the study’s purpose and how their answers were going to be used. Participation in the surveys was strictly confidential, with all collected data used solely for the purpose of this thesis.

3 The History of Recording Studios

3.1 Early Years of Recording

In the sixth century BCE, Pythagoras studied how the length of a stretched string affects its pitch, and determined the mathematical ratios that form different notes, creating the basis of the modern tempered scale. In the 17th century, Galileo Galilei and Marin Mersenne deepened our understanding of sound with their respective studies. (Burgess 2014, 2.) In the century to follow, Joseph Sauveur laid the groundwork for the study of acoustics. The 19th century saw more and more scientists and mathematicians investigating different properties of sound, culminating in the invention of the phonograph. (Chanan 1995, 1-2.)

In 1877, Thomas Edison invented the first instrument to ever record and play back sound, the phonograph, as seen in Figure 1. The phonograph worked by capturing soundwaves with a horn-like mouthpiece, which caused a stylus attached to a vibrating diaphragm to move up and down, making indentations on a sheet of tinfoil wrapped around a rotating drum. In playback, the stylus traced those indentations, causing the diaphragm to vibrate recreating a recognizable version of the original sound. (Stephens, C. E. 2023, 486.) In the following couple of decades, the rotating drums evolved into discs, mass production of records was made possible, and the recording business was born (Steffen 2014, 28-34).

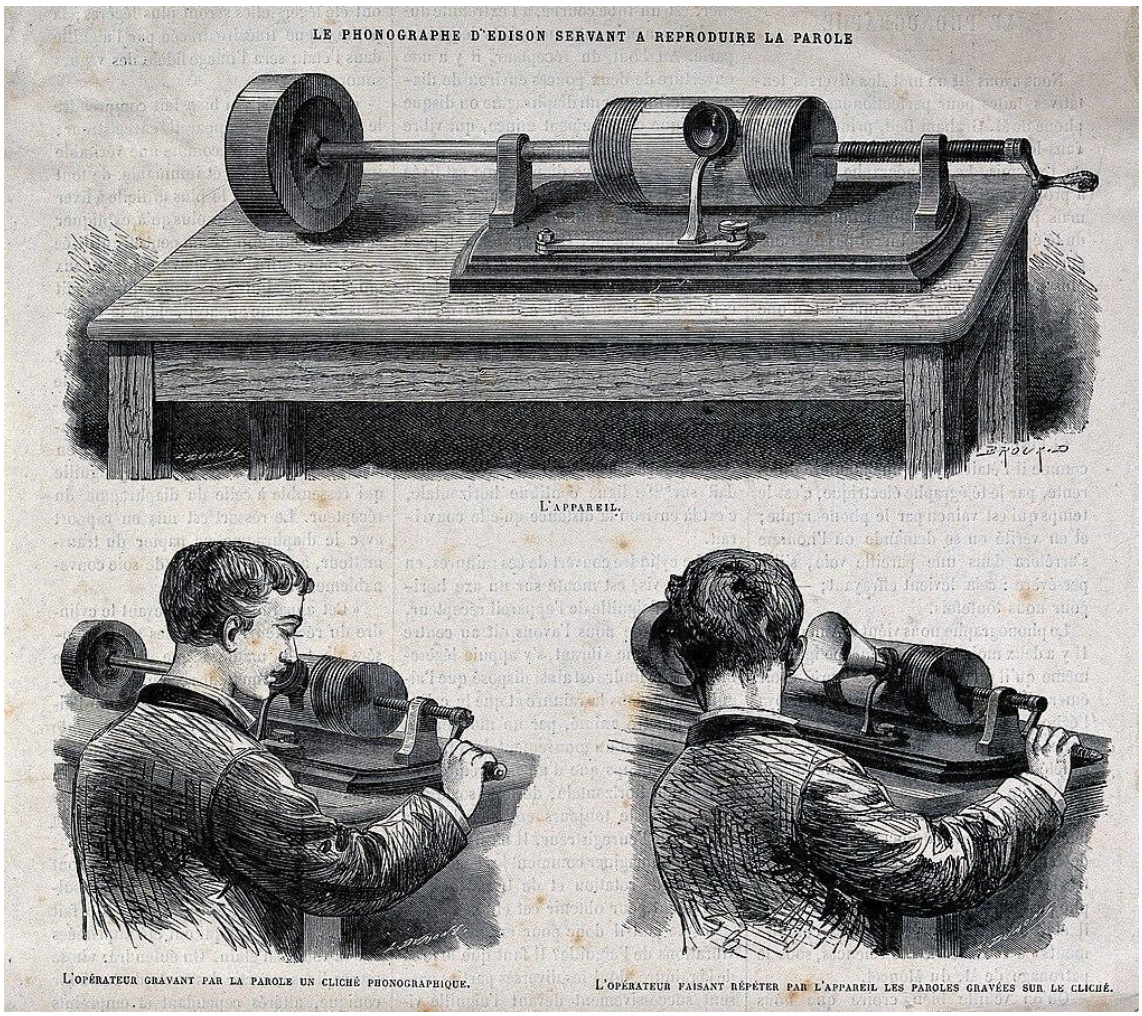

Figure 1. Illustration of the Edison wax cylinder recorder. (Wellcome Collection 47036i)

For the first forty-eight years since Edison's invention, recording music involved musicians playing directly into an acoustic horn or an array of them. The entire signal path was acoustic and mechanical, meaning the only way to control the relative levels of the musician was by asking them to play louder or quieter, or by changing their proximity to the horn, or horns. Loud instruments such as drums and percussion could overload the system, so they were either excluded from the session, moved to the back of the room, or the players were required to modify their instruments or playing style. This era also saw the emergence of the modern recording engineer. The recording engineer, or recorder, would not only oversee running the recording device but would also choose the type and placement of the recording horns for the best possible result. (Burgess 2015, 16.)

In the acoustic era of recording, the studios in which records were made were nothing more than bare rooms with a partition between the operator of the recording machine and the performer. In figure 2, the musicians can be seen performing in one room, while the horn feeds into a separate space in the left side of the picture. The spaces used were often just the laboratories inventors and mechanics were using to experiment with different methods of capturing sound. Before refining mass production of records, recordists and performers simply made multiple copies, one after another, to fill the demand. The recordist might also use multiple recorders simultaneously, starting and stopping the separate recorders simultaneously, before swapping an empty cylinder to all of them, and doing the whole process again with another take. (Schmidt Horning 2013, 4-13.)

Figure 2. An early recording made for Columbia in 1922 using an acoustic horn in a less than ideal location (EMI Archive Trust)

In this era of the recording studio, the studio was merely a part of the manufacturing chain. The early recording industry was dominated by a few companies with vertically integrated business models, meaning the same company controlled every step of the process, from developing the recorders,

recording the music, to pressing and distributing the records and finally to manufacturing the record players (Kirby 2015, 42). This meant that these labels had full control over everything, from raw materials, to the personnel, to the finished product. Recording equipment was so expensive and often bespoke, that it was impossible for independent labels and studios to enter the market (Leyshon 2009, 1420).

In the 1910's and the 1920's, the recording industry started moving towards going electric. Vacuum-tube amplifiers, electromagnetic disc cutters, the moving coil speaker and the condenser microphone were all being worked on (Burgess 2014, 30). The communication technologies developed during World War I made a further transformation of the recording studio possible, as engineers started employing microphones and amplifiers. This electrification of the studio became the most revolutionary improvement in sound recording to date.

The new advancements meant that the recording engineers had more control over the recording process. The recording horns were replaced by microphones allowing better positioning and the inbound signal could now be monitored from a visual meter and adjusted with a volume control, unlike before, when the only way was to play back the wax master. The audible improvements were immediately apparent to the listener, most noticeably the presence of bass and higher harmonics, as well as larger dynamic range. (Horning 2013, 32-37.) The development in technology also influenced the art. The acoustic system favoured rambunctious mid-range music, like Sousa marches and opera singers, while the electric system allowed the use of drum sets and richer vocal tones (Burgess 2014, 31).

With the invention of electric recording, studio conditions also improved and purpose-built facilities became more common. Microphones replacing the recording horn eased the cramped conditions in the studio, and the signal could be monitored from a separate room that was now more soundproof than before. (Horning 2013, 33-41.) Acoustic design of recording studios was still at its infancy, and the acoustic properties of the room largely determined the sonic quality of the recordings (Kirby 2015, 40). The recording engineers of this era were still primarily technicians (Horning 2004,1).

Before the next big step in recording technology, magnetic tape recording, the ‘20s and ‘30s saw a lot of groundwork being done. In Germany, in 1928 Georg Neumann began production of the first mass-produced condenser microphone, while at the same time, also in Germany, Dr. Fritz Pfleumer patented a process of applying magnetic powder to a strip of paper or film. In 1929, Harry Nyquist published his sampling theorem that would prove fundamental to digital audio. In London, Abbey Road Studios, or EMI studios as they were then known, opened on November 12, 1931. At the time it was the largest sound recording studio in the world. Alan Blumlein invented binaural recording, though it would take a quarter century for stereo recording to become standard practice. During the 1930s, record sales were at rock bottom, due to the popularity of jukeboxes. (Burgess 2014, 33-35.)

3.2 The Magnetic Tape-Era of Recording

During World War II, British and American radio monitors wondered how Hitler’s recorded speeches managed to sound like live broadcasts. The answer was magnetic tape, which German scientists had developed a couple of years before the war. (Fantel 1994, 37.) Magnetic tape consists of a length of plastic material which is coated in a material capable of being magnetized (Rumsey & McCormick 2006). In addition to its superior audio quality compared to its predecessors, magnetic tape could also be cut, spliced, erased, reused, and manipulated in ways no format before could (McMurray 2017).

After World War II, the recording industry experienced multiple significant technological developments in quick succession (Burgess 2014, 42). First of them was the magnetic tape, quality of which had been improved upon even more with the invention of AC biasing (McMurray 2018). The second was the introduction of the 33 RPM LP record, which allowed the release of longer recordings on one disc. The third was the development of overdubbing, starting with sound on sound and evolving into multitrack tape recording. (Burgess 2014, 43.) RCA Viktor also began experimenting with stereo recording in 1954, and before the decade was over, stereo recording and reproduction had become reality (Horning 2013, 104).

Recording engineers now had more control during recording, and the ability to manipulate the recording after it was made. With stereo recording becoming more common, it was often the engineer who artists and recording directors looked to as the authority on what was or was not possible in the studio. (Schmidt Horning 2013, 105) Recording engineers of this era performed many tasks that would be separated into distinct roles as the industry and technology developed and required more specialization on individual processes. Mixing was still a part of the basic engineering process and was performed live. (Burgess 2014, 43.) Prior to the introduction of magnetic tape, the final master disc was cut live but with magnetic tape, mastering was now a separate part of the project (Burgess 2014, 49).

The studios around this time were commonly larger spaces with very basic acoustic treatment and no isolation screens or booths. When moving towards stereo releases and multi-track recording, these spaces designed for monaural recordings were no longer satisfactory. Multi-track recording required dryer rooms, so musicians and performers were not used to the lower reverberation time, and some felt studios were too dry. The Monaural control rooms were not suitable for monitoring stereo sound. A typical monaural control room was too small and had unsatisfactory acoustics, non-symmetrical room geometry and overall poor-quality monitoring conditions, as seen in Figure 3. (Putnam 1980, 2-10.)

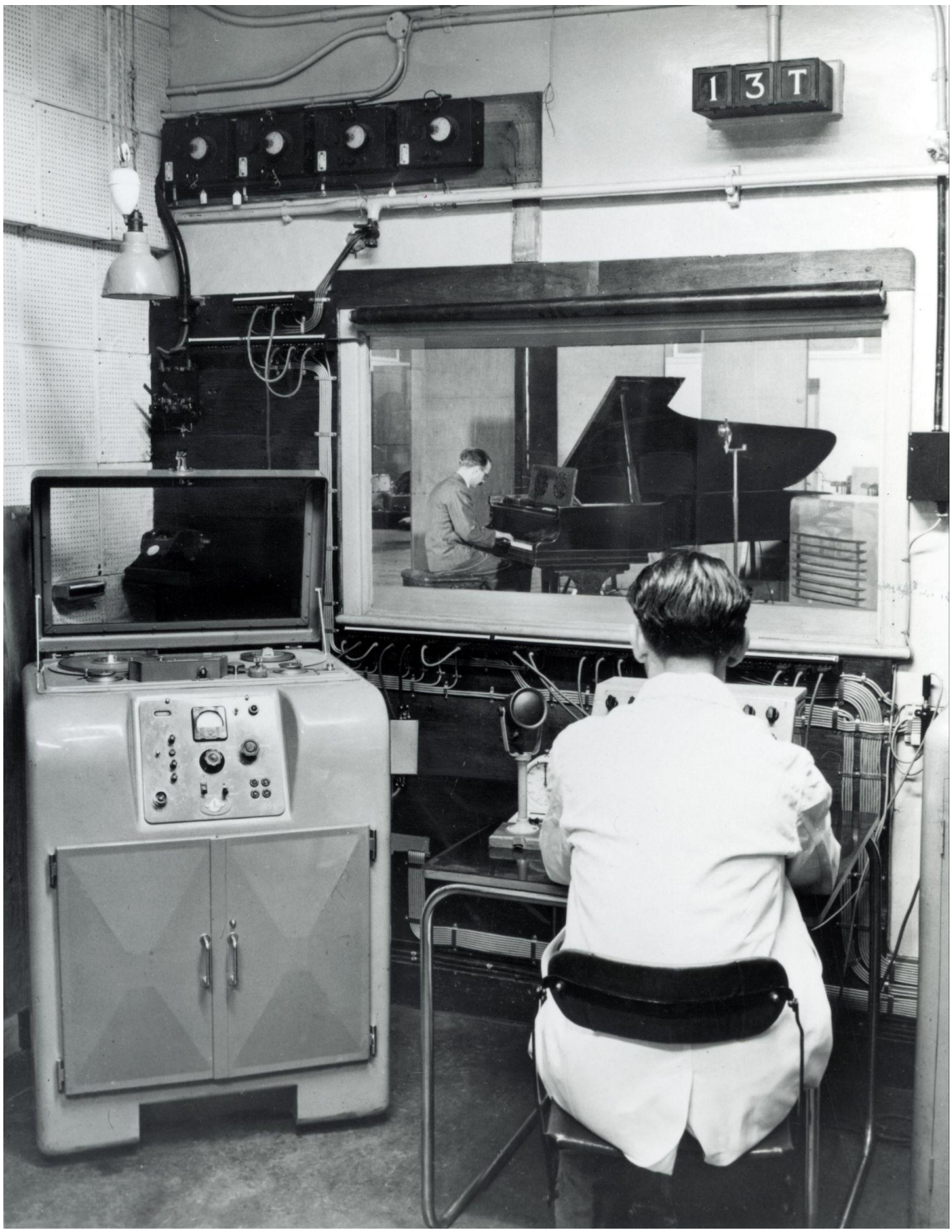

Figure 3. EMI Studio Two control room in the 1950s with the BTR 1 mono tape machine. (Abbeyroad.com)

The fifties and early sixties saw the introduction of many tools and techniques we still use to this day. Pultec introduced the first passive program equalizer, the EQP-1. Decca recording engineers developed the Decca tree miking technique used in classical music recording to this day. Bill Putnam developed the UA 1176

FET Limiter, UREI 813 studio monitors and his Universal 610 laid out the template for future recording consoles. Dr. Walter Kuhl developed the plate reverb. John C. Koss developed the first stereo headphones. (Burgess 2014, 61-63.) The sound of 1960s and ‘70s records is still sought after. The analog equipment from this era is being used to this day; People pay tens of thousands of dollars for originals, and hundreds of contemporary companies build analog and digital emulations of them. That is to say, the basic tools and techniques were more or less used the same way they are now, sixty years later.

In the mid 1960s, the role of recording studios started to change. Artists yearning for more control over the sound of their music moved from corporate studios to independent studios, where working was less formal and more creative and collaborative (Kirby 2015, 46). During the 60s, experimentation became a large part of recording, and the studio became an instrument in and of itself. Corporate, major label studios also had their part in musical innovation. Major label studios of the time were usually only being used by the labels’ artists, resulting in a lot of downtime that the engineers could then use to experiment (Leyshon 2009, 1322).

As professional recording equipment became cheaper and more readily available, the amount of independent recording studios also grew. The availability of independent studios, combined with the artists’ need for control and new sounds, meant that the whole structure of the industry behind recording studios started to shift. Since the dawn of the recording industry, the labels relied on bureaucratic control with a clear division of labour. The emergence of independent studios, entrepreneurial producers and freelance engineers reduced the amount of control the labels had, and blurred the lines between different roles (Kirby 2015, 378). The A&R role shifted from actively overseeing recording sessions, to seeking new talent, and overseeing the artists’ careers (Horning 2013, 139). In the US, this shift happened in the mid 1950s as a result of rock ‘n’ roll music and new independent actors in the field (Tschmuck 2006, 221). In the UK, This happened in the following decade, with the success of “the british invasion” further helping the recording studio sector expand, as there was more work once the labels invested in new artists. The additional business for both major and independent labels encouraged studios to invest in new technology,

resulting in independent recording studios in many cases surpassing the major studios in terms of quality of equipment. (Kirby 2015, 106.)

In the late 1970s, early 1980s, the recording studio industry started to stratify. As larger studios upgraded their equipment, second hand equipment became readily available for smaller studios to purchase. (Kirby 2015, 153.) Home studios and smaller, cheaper professional studios started to appear. Standardization of the studio resulted in more competition, and a decline in rates (Leyshon 2009, 1324). This combined with a decline in recording budgets and the high inflation of the period, resulted in the studio sector becoming less profitable.

Towards the digital age, the number of tracks available on multi-track recorders increased (Hardisty 2015). Analog recorders up to 32-tracks were built. The speed of tape in the machines also increased, resulting in better sound quality (Reveillac 2021). The increased number of tracks meant that engineers no longer had to mix recorded material down to a single track during the recording phase, meaning they could process the material later and with more precision. The late 1970's saw another innovation that shaped the recording industry. Solid State Logic, Ltd. (SSL), introduced the SL 4000 B console in 1977. The console featured automation and a dynamics section along with parametric EQ on every channel. With these new intuitive tools, mixes began to be highly processed, resulting in a noticeable shift in the sonic quality of this era. (Burgess 2014, 107.)

3.3 The Digital Era of Recording

Digital recording got its start in the early 1970's when Denon, a Japanese electronics company, experimented with a helical scan video recorder. Two commercial albums were released from their tests: Something by Steve Marcus in January 1971 and The World of Tsutomu "Stomu" Yamashita. (Burgess 2014, 104.) Dr. Thomas G. Stockmann has been described as the father of digital sound. He founded the first digital audio recording company Soundstream Inc. that worked on creating the first digital audio recorders (Barber 2012). In 1979 Sony and Philips began a joint development of digital audio discs, which resulted in the creation of the CD and the DVD (Burgess 2014, 104-105). In the seventies,

the recording industry had experienced a recession, but in the 1980s, record sales increased again, due to consumers reacquiring their LP collection on CDs (Pras, Guastavino & Lavoie 2013, 616).

Digital instruments including sequencers, drum machines, and sampling technology developed concurrently with hip hop during the 1980s (Burgess 2014, 105). Sampling allowed producers to for example take the drum part from a drum fill and loop it creating the beat for the whole song, or even sample entire parts of pre-existing songs and create mashups (Katz 2010, 146-155). Sampling became the basis of Hip-Hop as we know it today. The ethics and legality of sampling another piece of music has been the subject of many legal battles.

By the 1980s the professional studio sector had matured and was no longer expanding as it was in the 1970s, the technology had become advanced and the costs of running a high-end studio had increased. Many studios were on equal footing, due to the ubiquity of SSL and Neve consoles, which led to a competition of rate cutting. (Kirby 2015, 229.) With the introduction of digital technologies, like MIDI, the 1980s started to see the number of independent productions increase and studio professionals in some cases being hired only for post-production (Pras, Guastavino & Lavoie 2013, 616). Digital equipment also meant that artists could produce music alone at home by playing drum machines and synthesisers and recording themselves. Recording studios started to diversify their services moving into the area of music videos and other video work, due to the rise in popularity of music videos (Wadsworth 2007, 60).

The 1990s were a turning point for the music industry. The almost entire market share was controlled by six multinational corporations (Burgess 2014, 120). Introduction of the CD boosted the revenues of record companies from the late 1980s up until the rise of Napster and other file-sharing services at the end of the 1990s (Kirby 2015, 271). This started the dramatic decline in record sales that can be seen in Figure 4.

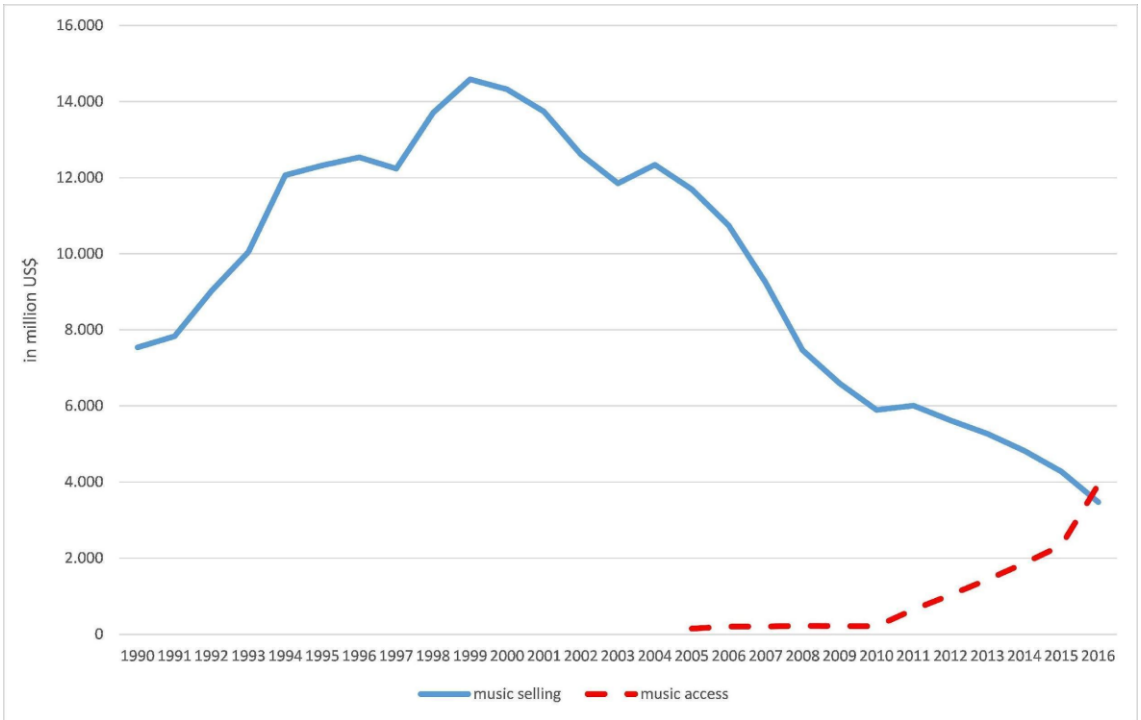

Figure 4: RIAA Year-End Industry Shipment and Revenue Statistics, reports 1990-2016. (Music Business Research. 2017)

The 1990s saw the start of the decline that resulted in where the recording studio industry is now. There were multiple causes to this. The reduced profits meant that labels were more careful with their money, resulting in smaller recording budgets. Electronic music had become a significant part of the global music business, and there was no need for traditional recording studios in productions that were primarily using MIDI instruments and samples. (Kirby 2015, 273-274.) Equipment became more affordable and accessible, which led to a surge in the amount of home studios. Even though home studios weren't necessarily directly competing with the professional studio, a lot of the work previously done at the studio could now be done at home (Kirby 2015, 273). With peer-to-peer file-sharing and portable players, MP3 became the standard way of listening to music. The MP3 format itself didn't sound great, as it was a lossy, compressed format with audible artifacts. This common lack of interest in sound quality also motivated artists and labels not to invest in the production process. (Pras, Guastavino & Lavoie 2013, 617.)

The Digital Audio Workstation had become the standard medium for recording in studio as well as at home. Advancements in computer technology meant that

anyone anywhere could run a DAW on their computers. More processing power meant that processing audio could be done natively on the computer, without the need for expensive equipment. New tools allow instruments and vocals to easily be re-timed and re-pitched making music more clinical and polished than ever. (Kirby 2015, 312-313.)

The trend of decline that started in the end of the 1990s continued into the 21st century. By 2012, there were only three major labels worldwide (Kirby 2015, 302). Peer-to-peer music sharing got replaced by iTunes and legal downloads, which then got replaced by streaming services. Though iTunes managed to help bring back some of the profits lost from the loss of record sales, streaming services didn't. (Burgess 2014, 160-161.) Spotify, the most popular streaming service, for example, pays on average $0.0013 per stream, meaning to earn the U.S. monthly minimum wage of $1160 from streaming alone, one would need 892,307 plays per month (Lee 2015, 180).

4 The Current State of the Recording Studio Industry

4.1 Setting the Scene

Since the invention of Edison's phonograph, recording studios have lived in a symbiotic relationship with the music industry. For the first hundred or so years, to make music, you needed a place to record it, which naturally meant that when a lot of records were made, studios had their fair share of business. But what happens when record profits are down, and you no longer need professional facilities to create chart topping songs? Due to the change in the structure of the recording industry as a whole, recording studios went from being an integral part of the machine that is the music industry, to being an outsourced service record labels and artists may or may not have to use. In the 1990s and early 2000, the increased expenses and decreased revenue reached the point of major labels deeming their in-house studios no longer lucrative. Labels sold their studios and the business models switched from labels offering artists studio time, to labels offering artists a recording budget. (Daley 2017.)

Even though the shift in the industry has led to recording studios becoming more obsolete, it has also led to the democratization of music production. The equipment and software needed to create music has gotten more and more affordable, meaning more and more people have the possibility to create music without having access to studios or expensive equipment. Releasing music to the masses is also easier than ever, with hundreds of different websites and services to release your music to. While a lower barrier of entry is a net positive for the industry, this has also led to a massive surge in the amount of released music.

In 2024, Spotify’s former chief economist Will Page revealed that that year, there were more songs being published daily than there were in the entire year of 1989 (Ross 2024). Even if the large majority of the songs made at home are not on par quality-wise with professionally made ones, there has been a large enough number of chart-topping songs made in the artist's bedroom to prove the legitimacy of making music at a home studio. This further undervalues the professional recording studio and record labels may be more hesitant to allocate budget for recording at a professional facility.

The accessibility of music means that the music industry is close to reaching the heights of the 1990's. According to the IFPI Global Music Report 2025 (IFPI 2025), global recorded music revenue grew for the tenth consecutive year in 2024, with every region experiencing revenue growth. Streaming accounted for 69% of total recorded music revenues, and was also the largest growing format. A more detailed overview of the revenues' changes can be seen in Figure 6. While the overall trend of the music industry revenue has been upwards, the way streaming services operate means that the trend doesn't reflect on the average musicians and artists themselves.

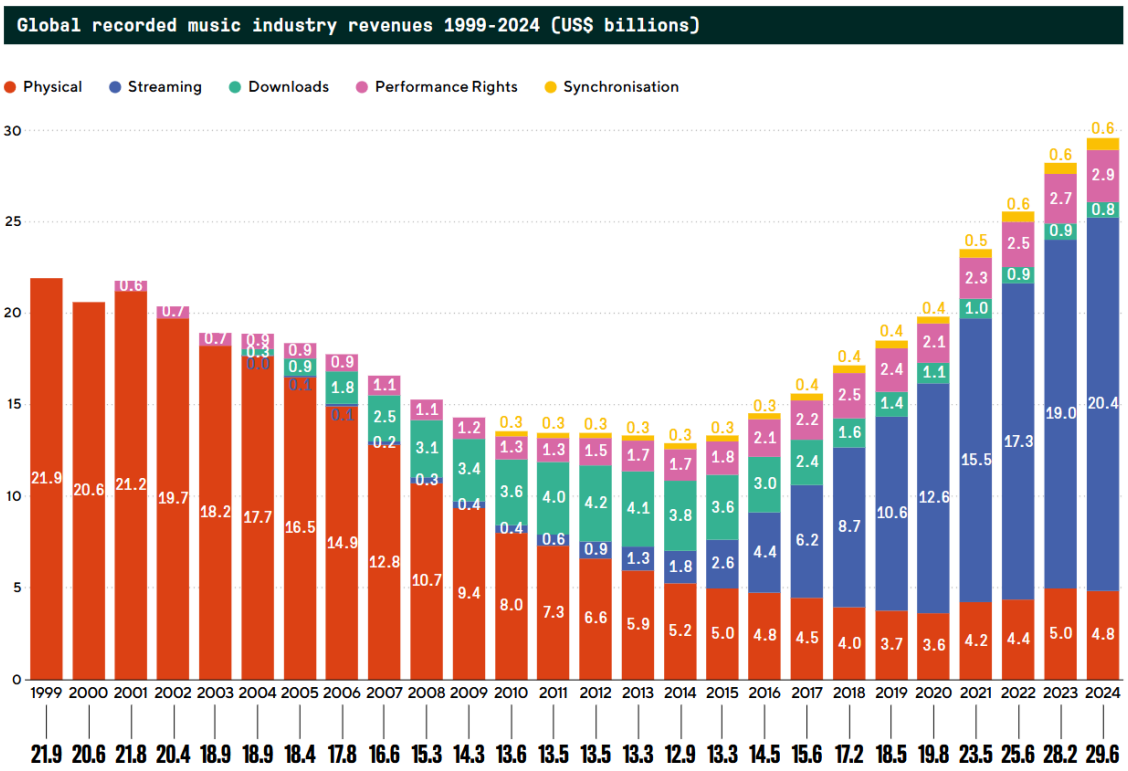

Figure 5:Global recorded music industry revenues 1999-2024 (Source: IFPI)

Consuming music has shifted from physical to streaming. By buying a physical album, the consumer is able to direct their money directly to the artists, but with streaming, the distribution of the users subscription fee is dictated by the streaming service. In the current model, the royalties are paid per stream, even though users pay a monthly rate, resulting in the majority of the royalties going to the artist with most streams. In this "pro-rata" model, the distribution of royalties

always favors the most listened artists on the platform, instead of who the user themselves streams.

The pro-rata model further increases inequality in the music business, as data shows that 90 percent of streaming revenue goes to the top one percent of artists (Blake 2020). Royalties being paid strictly per stream means that users who stream less, distribute a smaller amount of royalties, even though paying the same amount for the service. Because of this, indie-artists and artists from niche genres receive next to nothing from streaming royalties. Even though releasing music has never been easier or cheaper, the money coming from streaming is near zero for the large majority of artists, meaning the money needed to make music has to come from other sources.

4.2 Facilities

It has never been easier to set up your own simple studio or recording space. The current norms in recording, the digital recording medium and the ease of use of the DAW means that overdubbing and manipulation of the recorded material is common, simple and quick (Burgess 2014, 145). Simple recording spaces do not necessarily need multiple rooms to fully acoustically separate the instruments, as the musicians will often just play separately, one after each other (Bell 2015, 132). Digital audio also makes transmitting audio signals from one room to another simple, sometimes without needing any physical alteration to the facilities. Because of this, suitable facilities to build a studio in are easier to find, and require less modification, thus lowering the cost.

While a professional studio geared with top-of-the-line equipment might result in an objectively higher quality, the increased cost of a premium facility delivers diminishing returns compared to a more affordable small studio. The current zeitgeist of popular music heavily relies on electronic music production (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2021). The productions often feature no recorded acoustic instruments, and if they do, the elements are often so processed and only a small part of the whole arrangement, that the modest equipment and the space in which they are recorded is irrelevant. This raises the

barrier of renting a premium facility, when a more modest facility may be so much cheaper, and an adequate home studio even free.

Thanks to digital audio and the internet, it is now easy to work on the recording from multiple locations, which makes it possible to only rent out a real studio for a small part of the recording process (Kirby 2015, 387). Low budgets also mean that studio time is scarce and comes with a lot of time pressure (Pras, Guastavino & Lavoie 2013, 621.). This further encourages artists to work mostly from their own home studios or practice space. A hybrid solution like this allows focusing the studio time for recording instruments that most benefit from the space and the equipment of a professional studio, while at the same time allowing artists to work on the process without time constraints (Kirby 2015, 338). This greatly reduces the time needed to book at the studio, which then again translates to less revenue for the studio.

Even though recording elsewhere is easier and cheaper, musicians often prefer to record in a professional studio. According to Kippo (2025) the reasons musicians prefer a professional studio, is a culmination of multiple factors. He notes that in a professional studio, the musicians can trust that their vision can be executed, because of the staff's expertise and the high quality equipment. In a world where it is easy for all musicians to record their own parts at home, working at a studio as a group can yield better results. Kippo believes that music is best when it is recorded live, which is something that often can not be done in a smaller studio, with physical space and the amount of available recording inputs becoming an issue

The overall atmosphere of the studio is also an important factor. Moving outside your everyday environment can give the musicians the feeling they are doing something special and significant. Working at a studio can also help the musicians isolate themselves from their normal everyday lives, leaving whatever worries they might have outside (Kirby 2015, 135). This is especially true for residential studios, where the clients may stay for a longer period of time. Staying at a residential studio may also do wonders to the group chemistry, as it forces the musicians to socialize outside work hours.

Having the recording spaces, as well as the social spaces be comfortable and atmospheric is important for the musicians to actually want to be there. When designing the latest iteration of E-studio in Sipoo, the staff had experience from previous studio spaces and knew what to take in consideration when building a studio to be comfortable to visit as well as work in. As the studio is located in the middle of Finnish countryside, the rooms all have large windows to let in natural light as well as see the views. The studio is easy to load equipment into, as there are no steps, and is designed so that it is easy to move around in. (Riikonen 2025.)

Both E-studio, and Astia-studio, offer accommodation at the studio. Riikonen (2025) and Kippo (2025) both mention making the extra effort to make sure longer stays are pleasant. E-studios accommodation consists of multiple separate rooms in the studio building, as well as a separate smaller building with extra accommodation and a sauna, which Riikonen notes was done purely to facilitate comfortable longer stays.

In both, the survey aimed at the Finnish recording studios (Appendix 1), as well as the European ones (Appendix 2), the largest costs of running the studio were mostly related to the facilities. A large majority of the answerers were renting their studio space, and cited rent being their largest expense. The most common style of facility in the Finland survey was a medium sized studio, located in an urban environment. The layout of such a studio was usually a single control room, with one larger live room. This style of studio often cited rising rent being one of the largest changes in the expenses. The other archetype of a studio featured in the survey was a larger, separate, purpose built studio, often located outside urban areas. These types of studios did not rent the space, but still facility related costs, such as heating, electricity, tenancy and maintenance charge were among the largest expenses. In the survey aimed at the European markets, this larger style of studio was most common, explained by the fact that overall the studios featured in the European survey were larger and more established.

According to Riikonen (2025), renting a space for a recording studio is a bad idea, as the rent period would need to be long enough to cover the amount of investment needed to make the space suitable. Then again, buying the facilities

requires an amount of capital that is not possible to provide by only operating the recording studio, which is why building a studio from scratch often needs the initial capital from a separate source.

Jussi Vuola, the founder and co-CEO of V.R. Studio, managed the costs of building the studio with the help of friends and a business incubator. Vuola managed to use his connections to distributors to purchase initial equipment for the studio, and a friend working at a wood center got him a discount for the lumber. A lot of the construction was done by Vuola himself and his friends and bandmates, only hiring professional builders for a couple of weeks to construct the larger walls and structures. Due to managing the costs in the building phase, he was only left with a reasonable amount of debt that he was able to pay off in the first decade of operation. Vuola mentions that though the rent was affordable initially, it has increased like with everyone else. Though the studio is built in a rented space, Vuola just renewed the lease for another ten years, securing the imminent future of the studio. (Vuola 2025.)

Astia-studio was built in a former truck maintenance hall, and features two separate studios, Studio A and Studio B. The initial capital for building the studio was loaned from a bank. Kippo notes that to make the loan happen, family members set their houses and summer cottages as collateral in a move that worked out, as the studio was highly successful from the beginning. (Kippo 2025.)

4.3 Personnel

In the survey aimed at Finland, the studios were mostly operations run by a single person, but the Europe survey featured multiple studios with several employees. These larger studios often cited wages as being the largest expense. The changes in technology, as well as the industry has led to reduction of the number of staff needed at a studio. Recording on tape took a lot more effort, compared to recording digitally, which meant that recording engineers required an assistant engineer in charge of running the tape machine (Jubb, 2023). Editing takes on tape was also a time consuming task, often left to the assistant engineers. The

fully analog, and sometimes bespoke, equipment needed constant servicing and maintenance, which justified the employment of full time maintenance engineers.

Riikonen (2025) notes that because it is not viable to have a person doing maintenance on staff, but it is also not possible to pause operations because something stopped working, the studio has had to invest in high quality equipment in hopes of it requiring less maintenance. E-studio replaced their old Studer console with a brand new Neve, because of the constant need for maintenance on the Studert. At Kippo's fully analogue Astia-studio, Kippo has done all the maintenance himself, noting to have changed over 9000 capacitors total in his Trident console (Kippo 2025). Kippo notes that while the need for maintenance is regular, it has never been an issue, as he has spare equipment and spare parts.

Schmidt Horning (2013, 212) states that top-of-the-line recording facilities required a large amount of audio engineers, including experts in acoustics and studio design, recording director, console operator/mixer, tape recordist, mixdown mixer, disc recordist, maintenance engineer, and engineers in charge of tape, cartridge, and cassette duplication. In addition to the technical crew involved in making a record, the production personnel also involved more people than today, including a financial producer paying for the album, the record producer in charge of the album artistically, as well as an executive producer interfacing between those two (Pras, Guastavino & Lavoie 2013, 619).

Salaried positions are now rare in the studio sector. Studios have been moving towards a more flexible and freelance model of employment, where the relationship between the employer and the employee is more transactional (Watson 2013, 8). With today's technology, engineers can more-or-less easily handle multiple responsibilities, most times working the session completely alone. Engineers make the coffee, prepare and set-up the sessions themselves, sit behind the console and press record the whole day, edit the takes when the band takes a break, and possibly mix and even master the song in post production. The line between a recording engineer and a producer is also blurred, often being handled by the engineer, or the engineering handled by the producer. In a way, this can be seen as a natural result of the combination of easy-to-use

technology and the reduced recording budgets. These two factors can be seen as one of the culprits to the whole shift in the recording studio industry from corporate studios, to a more entrepreneurial form.

In both of the surveys conducted, most of the studios that answered were single person run operations. The European survey featured more studios with more than one person, most likely due to the fact that on average the studios were larger than in the Finnish survey. Some of the European studios featured a dozen or so employees, but after investigating, most of the employees were music producers, as the studio also offered production services. In the Finnish survey, these recording studio-production house hybrids were not present.

According to the report by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2021),the workforce in UK studios is similar to the results in the other surveys. 54% of all studios had a workforce of zero, one or two people, meaning most studios are smaller operations run by an individual. The total distribution between studio types and sizes can be seen in Figure 6.

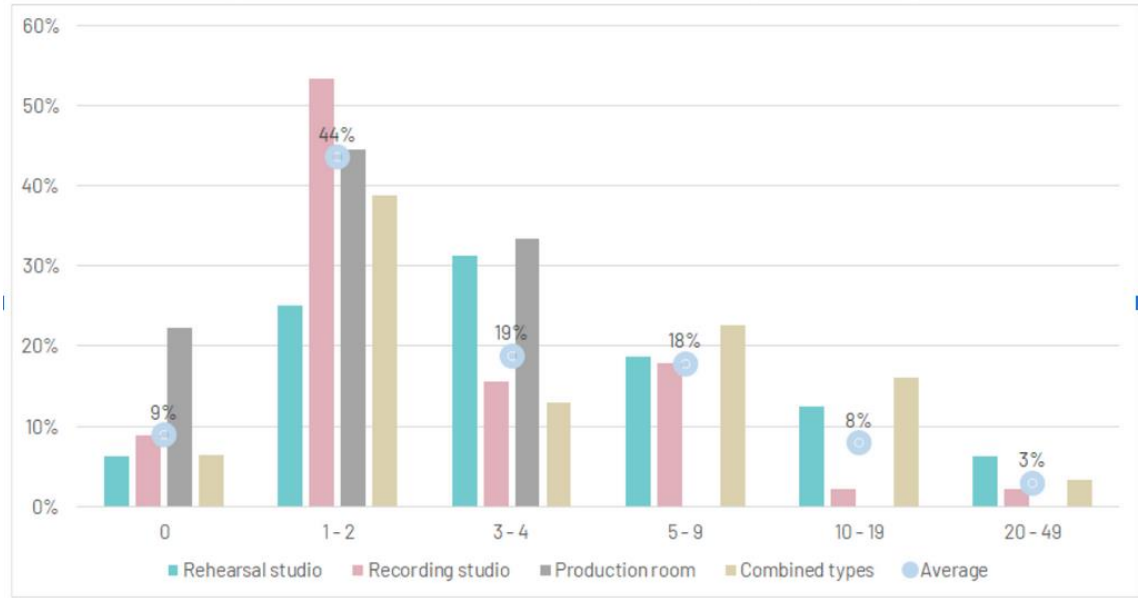

Figure 6. Size of studio market businesses, per studio type. (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2021)

E-Studio employed at best 6 people, during the time right after moving to their new facilities in Sipoo. The staff during that time included three people working on the music side, two on the game audio side and a person doing administrative

work. This has since decreased to three, two on the music side, and one on the game audio side, and the administrative work is shared between all of them. The decrease happened naturally, as people moved to different jobs or otherwise couldn't continue working at the studio, and there was no need to hire replacements. (Riikonen 2025.)

Kippo has run Astia-studio on his own from the beginning. Kippo works out of the studio's A-studio, where he only works in fully analogue format, while B-studio is reserved for lock-outs and digital recordings. Kippo has a separate freelancing engineer working on the sessions at the B-studio, who is sometimes paid by the band recording, and sometimes by Kippo. (Kippo 2025.)

Vuola originally ran V.R. Studio alone for a decade, before taking on a partner. Taking on a partner has allowed both of the owners to split work at the studio and do other types of work in the meantime. This has allowed for less financial stress and let Vuola to pass on projects he doesn't find interesting. According to Vuola this arrangement has worked great for both parties involved. (Vuola 2025.)

Malik Berrabah, the CEO of Wisseloord studios notes that the most challenging, and also the most important, part of transitioning the studio from its previous ownership was to build a new team and find the right leader. According to Berrabah, the team is now internationally very solid, and the company has been successful with the growth of their international activities. (Berrabah 2025.)

The reduced personnel and budgets can directly impact the quality of recording sessions. In a study by Pras, Gustavino and Lavole (2013, 619), a producer noted that "the more pairs of ears, the more chances you have to do constructive work". In a sense, quality control suffers, when there is less collaboration between studio professionals. In the same study, multiple producers expressed concerns about the lack of time allocated to recording due to the low budgets. Less time in the studio may lead to rushed decisions, or simply running out of time to fix things. This leads to the production having to pick their battles and make compromises. Another knock-on effect of the reduced budgets is its effect on the development of young recording engineers. As recording studios no longer have the budget to pay for assistant engineers or trainees, it makes specializing in the type of

recording you can not do at home more difficult. This also locks training at a studio behind a sort of paywall, as not everybody can afford to work without pay, even for a limited time. Ironically, the democratization of music production as a whole might have caused de-democratization for specializing in recording.

According to Riikonen (2025), the decrease in budgets fundamentally changed how to approach a recording session. Time restraints meant that the sessions needed to be faster and more efficient. Riikonen mentions that sometimes this was a positive; before, drum sound check might have unnecessarily taken a couple of full days, whereas today there is no budget for that. The reduced budgets also means that engineers and producers do more work for free in their off-time, to achieve the same quality as before to make up for the lack of time in the studio. As the budget to pay for a separate producer is often not there, this role is often either taken by one of the band members, or put on to the recording engineer. Kippo (2025) echoed this sentiment, saying musicians and producers often do not value their personal time. He notes that people do hours of unpaid work thinking they are saving money, while they could be spending that time doing something more productive, if they paid someone else to do the work.

4.4 Viability of Recording Studios

The trends of reduced viability in the recording studio sector can be observed in the surveys conducted. In Finland, many of the studio owners that answered the survey, only work part time in the studio, due to it not being viable. In most, but not all cases, the work at the studio still fully covered the running costs of the studio. Most common scenario among the answerers was that the studio was self-sustaining, but only amounted to a part of the owners income. The largest running costs were facility related, and many answerers mentioned that their equipment had already been paid off, reducing the running expenses. When comparing the income and expenses from the founding of the studio, the general consensus was that income had dropped and expenses had risen. Studios founded after 2015, seemed to exhibit less of a drastic change in the profitability of their operation, compared to older studios. This can be explained by a couple of factors. First, the drastic change in the structure of the industry happened

before their founding, and second, the newer studios are better keeping up with the market in terms of operational style and clientele.

In the survey for European studios, most answerers were larger, more established studios, with larger studio facilities and more personnel than in the Finnish studios. This alone does not mean that the recording studio industry is in a better shape than in Finland, but rather that most of the answerers' studios were from the more successful end of the spectrum, whereas in Finland, the survey covered the entire spectrum. With these European studios, a large majority of the answerers worked at the studio full time. Interestingly, more studios in the Europe-survey, than in the Finland-survey, did not cover their expenses fully, in many cases even though working full time at the studio. This might be explained by the fact that many of these studios were located in large Central-European cities, where costs may be higher, or it can just be attributed to the operation of these specific studios. Just like in Finland, the general consensus with European studios was that expenses had risen and budgets had gone down. Quite a lot of the answerers had still been able to keep their business growing, stating that their income has raised more. Some of the answerers also noted that day-rates had gone down, but the amount of clients had risen.

The general consensus was that the recording studio industry is tough, and only viable if you do it "for the love of the game". Rasmus Bredvik (2025) from Tapetown studios notes that while he did acknowledge that it is difficult to make money in music, he underestimated just how difficult it would be. He follows up, saying that though it is not impossible, you need to be very resilient and willing to put in the time. Riikonen (2025) had similar thoughts. According to Riikonen, you need to be constantly putting in effort to make it work, and jokes that if money is what you're after, a label might be a better place of work.

Many answerers to the surveys mentioned, that they would not establish a studio, if starting over now. Some mentioned that to them music had become worthless, while some said that the financial stress was too much. If starting over now, multiple studio owners noted that they would rather build a studio with multiple collaborative production rooms, and not focus on recording bands.

The covid pandemic also took its toll on the recording studio industry, According to the Music Studio Market Assessment research paper by the UK Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (2021). The impact on the gross income of studios from the beginning of the Covid pandemic (2020), to when the survey was conducted (2021) can be seen in Figure 7. 55% of studio businesses taking part in the research had a decrease in staff, as can be seen in Figure 8. Studio service rates were also affected, in some cases rising and some cases lowering. Rising the costs was attributed to increased operating costs, while lowering the costs was attributed to keeping prices competitive versus new competitors. In order to recover economically from the pandemic, 79% of the studios were planning to seek new clients, 57% planned to look for other forms of revenue within the music industry, 49% were looking to apply for grants and 31% were willing to look for other streams of revenue from outside the music sector. (Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2021, 58-62)

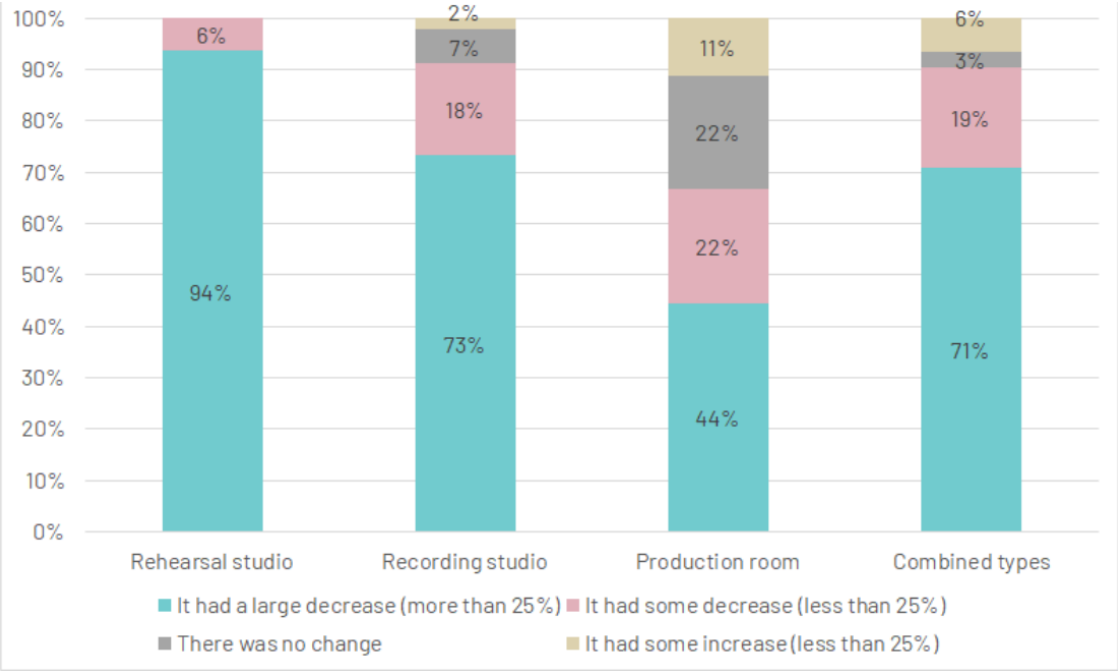

Figure 7.Impact on businesses average annual gross income since the onset of COVID-19 (2020), per studio type. (Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2021)

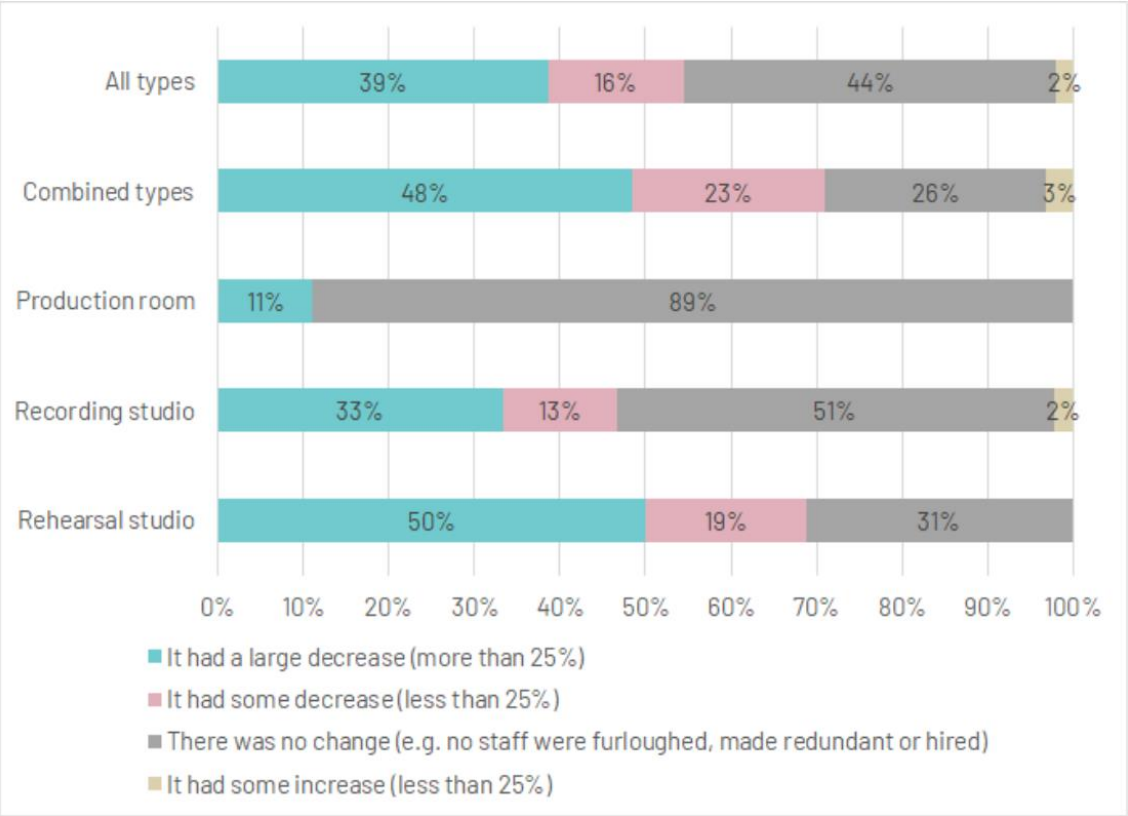

Figure 8. Type of impact of measures to contain COVID-19 (2020) on the employment within businesses, per studio type. (Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2021.)

Riikonen (2025) notes that generally studio prices are very cheap in Finland, and that with the current pricing, E-studio is running at practically no profit, even though they are almost continually fully booked. According to Riikonen, the cheap studio prices, combined with the high quality of the studio, location in the Finnish country-side not too far from Helsinki means that the studio might attract a lot of foreign clients, if pursued. Since the studio has continually a lot of bookings, they have not yet focused on foreign marketing.

The day rate at Astia-studio has also stayed the same for 17 years, and still too high for many, according to Kippo. He notes that competition in the field is skewed, as people offer their services for free, which has resulted in him not being able to raise the day rates. Kippo keeps his day rate slightly higher than many other studios, due to working solely on magnetic tape, but notes that due to the nature of working on tape, bands will often end up spending less in total, as tape doesn’t allow for endless re-takes and manipulation, resulting in less time spent in the studio. (Kippo 2025.)

4.5 Different Types of Work at the Recording Studio

In the current state of the industry, engineers and studio owners, as well as the studio facility, need to be able to work multiple roles. In Finland among the answerers of the survey, Recording and mixing were the main type of work, as expected. Almost all studios in the survey did recording and mixing. Of those who offered the service, recording covered on average 36% (all percentages rounded to nearest percent) of their work, and mixing covered 31%. Lock-outs were offered by only around half of the studios, and made up 14% of their work. Production was only offered by four studios, as modern production is often done outside the type of professional recording studio at which the survey was aimed at. For those who did offer production services, it was a significant chunk of their work, averaging at 60%, with the rest being recording and/or mixing. Mastering was offered by four studios, and was an extra service on top of their normal recording and mixing work, averaging at 13% of their work. Eight answerers included other types of work than aforementioned. Two of the studios had a large part of their work, 80% and 95%, being done to a single customer. Other types of work done by the studios included coaching, podcast production, video production and working as a session musician.

In total, the distribution of different types of work among the Finnish studios which answered the survey is seen in the following Figure 9. From these numbers, it is clear that recording and mixing have still remained as the two core services of the studios, making up almost two thirds of the total. The larger studios showed more focus on recording and mixing, while the smaller single person operations most often had a more diverse set of work. Lock-outs were the next largest fraction, but only made up 13.56% percent. This correlates with the findings that in the current state of the industry studios are more of a personal workspace rather than a co-operative business. Studio owners might not want to rent out their personal work space for lock-outs, or the studio may not be large enough or widely known enough for clients to want to rent out. When most producers and audio engineers have at least some sort of personal working space, they may only need to rent a studio on special occasions when you need the space, equipment or other services of the high-end studios. There are a number of

residential studios in Finland, where it is expected lock-outs would constitute a larger share of the total, which did not answer the survey. Production, which includes songwriting, amounted for only a small portion of the total, because like mentioned earlier, production studios were left out from the scope of this survey.

Figure 9. Different types of work at Finnish recording studios.

The results of the survey on the European studios were mostly similar to the survey on Finnish studios, as can be seen in Figure 10. The slight differences between the European studios' answers and the Finnish studios' can mostly be explained by the aforementioned fact that the European studios were on average larger and more successful than the Finnish studios. Similarly to the Finnish studios, recording and mixing was around two thirds of the work done at the studios. Many European studios leaned more to the songwriting and production side. While the total percentage of production is relatively small, many of the studios offering production services combined production and mixing and/or recording into one service, which was separated for their own columns for the sake of clarity. In modern music production, the recording and the mixing process is more closely intertwined with the production process, one happening along the other. While the percentage of lock-outs is lower for European studios, many studios did offer lock-outs. The difference can be attributed to random variation

of the different operating models. The European studios relied less on other types of work. This can be due to the European studios being larger and more successful, meaning they have a stable operating model and a stable clientele, but some of it can be attributed to randomness as well.

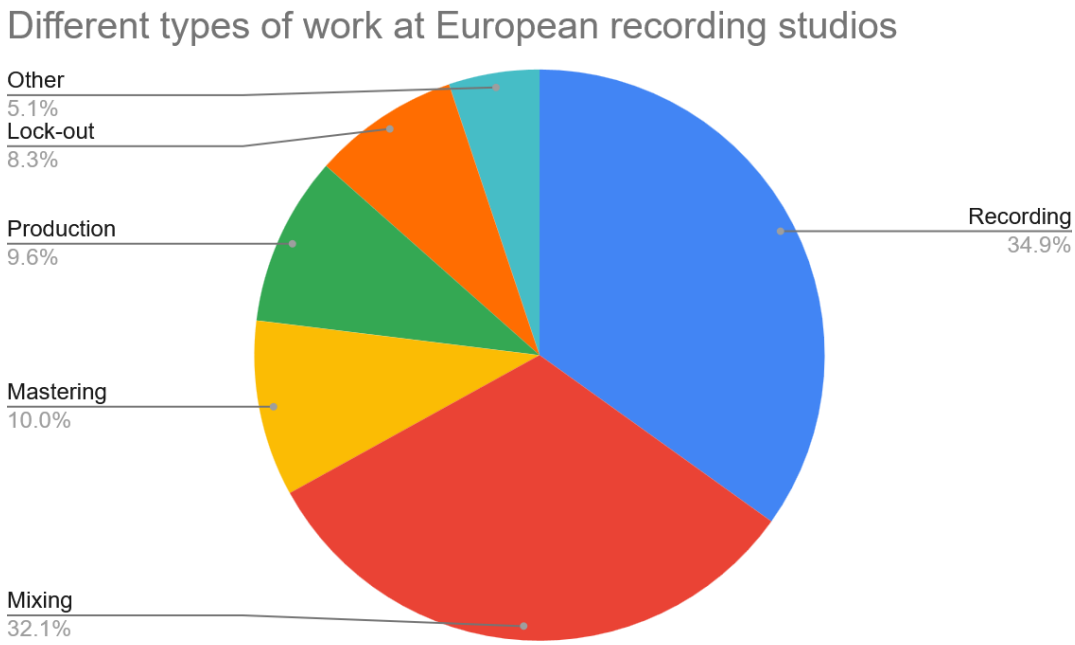

Figure 10. Different types of work at European recording studios.

According to the Studio Market Assessment, by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2021), the UK studio sector seems to be following the same trends seen in the surveys to Finnish and European studios. As seen in Figure 11, the distribution of different sources of income is very similar to the ones seen in the Europe and Finland surveys.

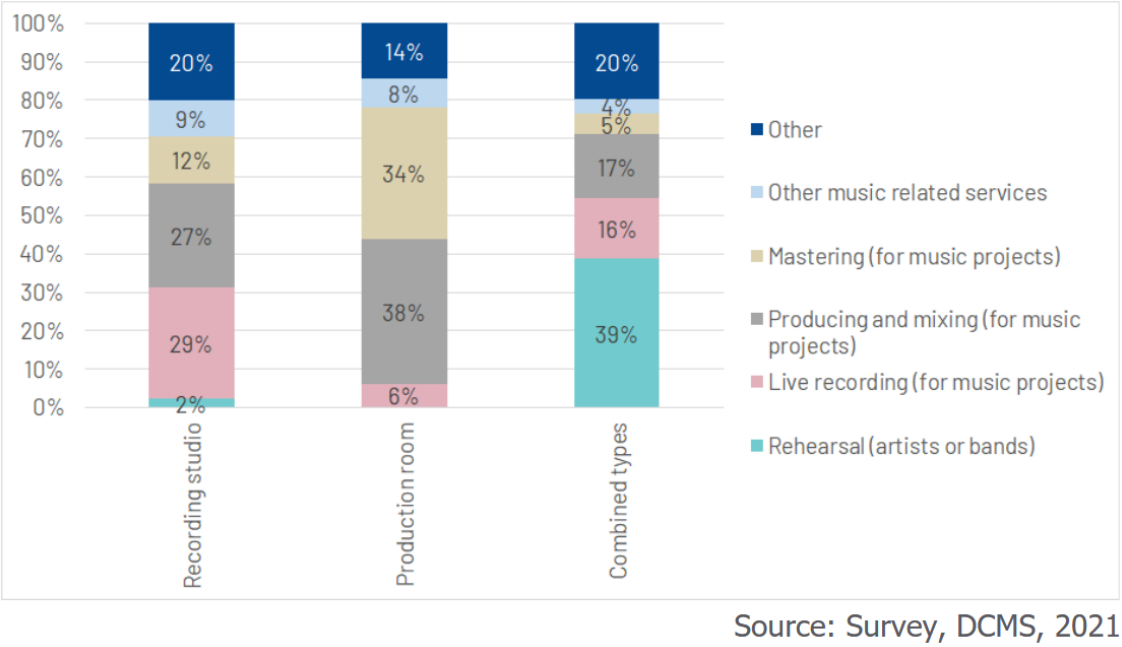

Figure 11. Sources of income prior to COVID-19 (2019), per studio type excluding Rehearsal Studios. (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2021)

At E-studio, Riikonen (2025) notes that the distribution of different types of work is a three way split between recording, mixing and mastering, and tending to lock outs. Astia-studio has adopted a unique position, due to the niche of working solely on magnetic tape. Because of the rarity of analog tape recording, working on an album at multiple locations is not viable, meaning Kippo handles the production from recording, through mixing, to mastering. He notes that though it isn't a decision made to keep most of the work to himself, but rather has been disappointed in the end results of other engineers, it is still an extra way of keeping the studio viable. (Kippo 2025.)

4.6 Clientele

As the recording studio industry changed, so did the clientele. As business models shifted and technology got cheaper, major label owned large studios shut down, and smaller independent studios popped up (Daley 2017). Though this has been a major contribution to the reduction in day rates, and thus, profits for studios, it has also made recording studios more accessible to amateur and semi-professional musicians.

According to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport studio report (2021), the past 20 years has seen the studio clientele being shifted away from young emerging bands, with clear musical merit, towards older, affluent, amateur artists, colloquially referred to as “weekend warriors”. The distribution of all different types of clients can be seen in Figure 12.

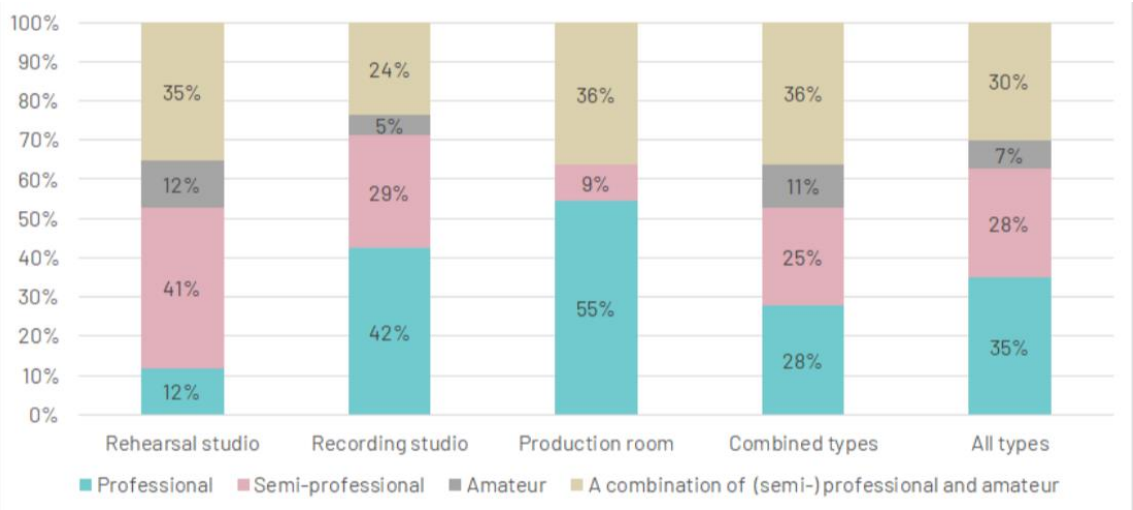

Figure 12: Composition of clients based on their level of professionalism, per studio type. (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2021)

Studios rely a lot on returning clients. In the survey sent to Finnish studios, on average, owners estimated that 70% of customers were returning, while in the survey for European studios, the average was 63%. This difference is negligible and most likely due to the small sample size and different sizes and operational styles of the individual studios. Most studio owners noted word of mouth as the main way customers find the studio, and believed the quality of their work is the best form of marketing. Many studios used social media to market, with some using paid schemes on the social media platforms. A lot of the studios mentioned having a website as their only form of marketing. Having at least some online presence was a prerequisite to qualify for the survey, meaning studios with no marketing online were automatically excluded.

According to Riikonen (2025), The clients of E-studio are 50/50 split between independent and label backed artists, with only 10% being major labels. During the early years of E-studio, it was more around 80% labels, 20% independent. Back then, the bookings were also much longer, meaning less clients brought in more money. Even though E-studio is one of the better known studios, the

running of the studio still relies mostly on the personal clients brought in by the two engineers. Riikonen approximates that the engineers' own clients pay for their salaries, while lock-outs at the studio pay for the facilities and other costs.

Kippo (2025) states that practically all of his clients are independent artists, and practically none produce music aimed at the mainstream. Though Astia-studio is often perceived as a studio specializing in heavy music, Kippo notes that they work with a very diverse range of musical genres, with heavy music being a minority. Because of his niche of fully analog recording, Kippo has attracted bands from all over the world. During the early years of the studio, the studio hosted a large number of Russian bands, because of its location close to the Russian border.

Vuola (2025) mentions that the clientele of V.R. Studio primarily consists of indie and underground bands, mostly in the progressive rock, metal and punk genres. He notes that this type of music has been the focus of the studio from the beginning. According to Vuola, Many of the bands coming to record at V.R. Studio do so at their own expense, with the intent of selling the finished masters to a label. The model of co-ownership and working other jobs on the side means that Vuolas income is no longer tied directly to the studio. This means he doesn't necessarily need to take in the type of projects he is not interested in doing.

At Wisseloord Studios, the clients booking the studios are approximately 50/50 label-based and independent, According to CEO Berrabah (2025). He notes that a lot of the clients are urban music, but also music competitions and TV shows. Berrabah mentions that the largest part of bookings are for two to three days, but sometimes longer. He follows up saying that at the time of the discussion there was a booking of 25 days in one of the larger studios.

Rasmus Bredvik (2025) from Tapetown studios notes that his clients are mostly indie bands doing live sessions or longer bookings. He notes that he has kept the studio successful by focusing on specific genres and getting really good at capturing the specific sound and energy in a live session. Bredvik notes that for his circle using social media to market the studio was deemed un-cool, but at a

certain point he decided to fully commit to running his social media like a business.

4.7 Ancillary Sources of Income

Diversifying services has become an important factor in staying profitable for many studios. A majority of the answers to both the Finland survey and the Europe survey, offered additional services other than just music related. When asked about what special services the studio offered, Teaching or organizing music production and audio engineering courses was the most common answer. Using the studio space for the space itself was a common theme, as studios offered the space for writing camps, rehearsals or private events.

Many studios in the surveys did other audio-related work, when they were not working with music. Studios for example recorded and edited podcasts and audiobooks or mixed sound for video productions. Some studios even moved away almost completely from recording music, focusing only on spoken material or video productions.

Tapetown studios, in Aarhus, Denmark, switched focus from normal studio work to almost exclusively doing studio-live style session videos. The studio's owner Rasmus Bredvik (2025) notes that this move was the result of a couple of different factors. Bredvik states that recording albums, EPs and singles, was not giving him enough of the "in the moment energy and chaos" he enjoyed when touring with a band. Early on in his career he realized how hard it was to make it in the industry, and he would rather do work he found most interesting. Bredvik also notes that he's always looked to find ways to collaborate, rather than compete, with other studios, and doing these live sessions allowed for that.

The engineering part of audio engineering came up multiple times, as many answerers did equipment repairs and maintenance. Some only barely knew how to solder and helped out doing repairs when asked, and some had a more dedicated business. Two European studios also ran companies that build audio hardware, such as compressors and microphone pre-amplifiers. One studio, that

specializes in vintage gear, runs a museum of their equipment. Many studios also rented out their gear.

At E-studio, the studio runs a game sound operation alongside its recording studio work. The game side of the business accounts for approximately one third of the studio's income. While the game audio work is mostly done by the single person, the studio handles a lot of the behind the scenes work, like contract negotiations, invoicing and payroll. The move to game audio was a conscious decision, as there were not many other studios offering dedicated game audio services in the same comprehensive way E-studio aimed for. When starting the venture, the studio decided on a trial period of a couple of years to assess the viability of game audio. (Riikonen 2025.)

Riikonen (2025) notes that success in the game industry has come partly from fortunate coincidences, but that they also made significant investments into the development of the venture. Compared to the music industry, the video game industry gives larger potential for financial gain. It generally has much higher budgets but also has much higher potential for significant financial success for small independent creators. The game industry also more commonly offers royalty and percentage-based agreements, allowing for the potential of larger pay, if the project is a success. (Riikonen, 2025.)

While V.R. Studio’s main source of income is recording, mixing and mastering music, the studio offers multiple different types of services. Vuola (2025) mentions recording audio books, as well as sound design and voice-over recording for advertisements. He notes voice-over work for companies being quite profitable for the relatively small amount of time it takes. In addition to recording work, Vuola also runs a small record label, V.R. Music, but notes that it is more of a hobby of his, though it does generate some revenue. Vuola also imports a specific brand of cymbals, though he doesn’t actively market this, more so supplies acquaintances and himself through these import deals. Vuola notes that having additional income streams has become important as studio work has become less financially viable.

Kippo (2025) also mentioned multiple different ancillary sources of income, though they were all minor parts in the total income of the studio. Like Vuola, Kippo also imports equipment. Kippo Imports magnetic tapes and C-cassettes, as well as high quality audio cables. He notes that the income from importing is not significant, but he mostly does it to provide other analog studios in Finland by making tapes available locally and at a better price they might get elsewhere.

Kippo (2025) also offers experiences for hearing analog sound, where individuals, often musicians, come to Astia-Studio to learn to distinguish between analog and digital audio. He also offers healing sessions using analog sound, which have reportedly had a positive effect on individuals with pain and other conditions. Like importing, Kippo notes that these services are not a significant part of the studio's income, even though they generate some.

Many renowned studios are now offering audio engineering and music production courses of many different shapes and forms. Abbey Road studios has the Abbey Road Institute operating in six locations across four continents, which offers courses from year long diplomas, to two day masterclasses (Abbey Road Institute n.d.). Metropolis Studios has the Metropolis Institute of Sound Technology, offering Virtual courses, as well as collaboration with the Academy of Contemporary Music (Metropolis Institute of Sound Technology n.d.). Wisseloord studios has the Wisseloord Academy, which offers singular courses and masterclasses as well as full scholarships across six different locations (Wisseloord music academy n.d.).

The CEO of Wisseloord Studios, Malik Berrabah, Founded the academy in 2020. In addition to the studio itself and the academy, the studio operates a restaurant in its premises, as well as the Wisseloord House Of Music, a hub for music creatives, created in partnership with BMG rights management (Wisseloord. N.d.). According to Berrabah (2025), the company slowly integrated new activities into the operation, and keeps investing into developing new programs every year. Berrabah notes that all the programs and activities of the company are interconnected, and work in tandem with each other, though some may be prioritized at a given time.

Many of the answerers worked other music industry related jobs on the side, as many noted that studio work was not their only source of income. The most common work outside the studio was working as a musician, getting income from gigs as well as royalty payments. Some answerers mentioned that playing in a band was also how their work as an audio engineer started, recording their own and friends' bands. Doing live sound engineering was also a common answer, as was AV system design and installation. Many answerers also taught audio engineering on the side, either by themselves in the form of mentorship, or in official institutions. Couple of people worked in label and publishing related jobs, as well as production for festivals.

Vuola (2025) mentions that during the Covid-pandemic, doing AV-installations for cruise ships at a shipyard in Turku saved him financially, while work at V.R. Studio was slow. He has continued the AV-installation work after the pandemic, finding the design and physical installation was something he enjoyed. According to Vuola, splitting his time between the studio work and AV-work has been the optimal situation for him, as it has reduced financial stress, and let him limit the work at the studio only to projects he enjoys.

Kippo (2025) notes that while it does not necessarily count as work outside the studio, he’s actively involved in studying analog sound through collaborations with universities. He mentions that Astia-studio has been involved with four bachelor's theses and one or two master’s theses with LUT University, and is currently collaborating with the University of Helsinki. Kippo expresses that while they have a lot of information, they lack the funding and time to push the scientific research forward faster.

4.8 Future

Historically the recording studio industry has reflected on the ebbs and flows of the larger music industry, but now, due to the emergence of home studios, and other industry trends, things appear to have changed. In the discussions with studio owners, as well as the answers to the surveys, a common trend could be observed. Many noted that the value of music had gone down, and that the

current landscape of the music industry needed some sort of change for things to get better.

As the current music streaming model only favours the top percentages of all artists, the user-centric model has long been discussed as an alternative. This model takes into account the listening habits of the users and distributes royalties according to usage. The simplified versions of both models can be seen in Figure 13. (Tschmuck 2024)

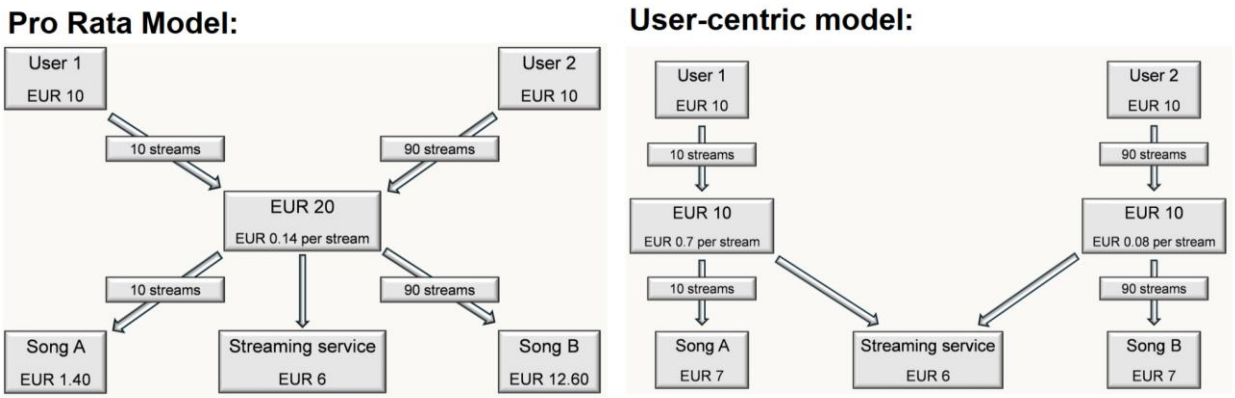

Figure 13: The difference between the Pro Rata, and the user-centric models. (source music business research)

In his web article, Tschmuck (2024) compares four scientific studies' results on the differences of the pro rata and user-centric models. In two of the studios, conducted by Pedersen and Maasø respectively, the results concluded that changing from the pro-rata model to the user-centric model would result in virtually no redistribution effect between top artists and less established artists, but domestic artists in both their studies would receive a larger cut. In the study by Muikku, he concluded that pro-rata does favour the top artists, but did not find clear results for or against the user-centric model for smaller artists. Muikku still concluded that the user-centric model gives more direct power to the users to target the money they pay to the artists they favour.

The fourth study Tschmuck (2024) mentioned, conducted by the Centre National de la Musique, also concluded that a switch to the user-centric model, would redistribute revenue away from the top 10 artists. They also suggest that the

switch would positively impact the diversity of music genres streamed as well as redistribute the revenue contributed away from the heavy users towards the average and occasional users. Riikonen (2025) believes that a change to the user centric model alone could be a significant step towards a healthier music industry in Finland, as domestic artists are most likely to benefit from the switch.

The general feeling seemed to be that the recording studio industry has settled into its place in the current landscape of the music industry. Vuola (2025) notes that for the time being, work at V.R. Studio will continue in the same style it has now. He doesn't have any strong financial expectations, and he acknowledges that running the studio has become essentially cultural work. Vuola also hopes for a broader change in the entire music industry and changes in the income structure of the industry.

Kippo (2025) strongly believes that if the general public became aware of the difference between analog and digital sound quality, people would start to value music more. He believes that scientific evidence, such as his ongoing collaboration with the University of Helsinki, could be the turning point. Kippo notes that this change would deter home recording enthusiasts, thus favouring professional studios.

Due to the fact that recording studios can no longer offer paid internships, the transfer of skills from generation to generation is harder. Riikonen notes that finding a young engineer to replace a soon to retire staff member has been difficult. He states that though young engineers often have the technical ability to work at the studio, they often lack experience on the social and day-to-day aspects of running a studio. The transfer of studio professionals' knowledge has transferred away from on-the-job learning, towards tutorials, master-classes and formal educational programs on the internet (Pras, Guastavino & Lavoie 2013, 618).

The use of AI has been a topic of large conversation not only in the music industry, but the whole world. Helmut Bems (2025), CEO of sonarworks, wrote in length about the future of AI in music production. He estimates that AI will further move the music business away from the legacy music industry, towards big tech,

and result in an overall boost in the amount of content produced, and a decrease in costs of production. Bems (2025) believes that the role of sound engineers, as well as session musicians will be challenged, as AI further democratizes music making. Spotify is already being filled with AI generated music, many receiving hundreds of thousands of listeners per month without any presence outside Spotify (Stokel-Walker 2024). Whether or not AI will remain a staple technology, or just a hype-bubble, remains to be seen, but low-effort AI music will not help with the underlying issue of devaluation of music.

5 DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis was to explore the evolution and the current state of the recording studio industry, with specific focus on how studios have adapted to the challenges of the current landscape. The study used findings from written material, surveys aimed at recording studios based in Finland and Europe, as well as discussions with studio owners themselves, offering a diverse perspective on the subject.

The research underscores several key developments in the evolution of the industry, often largely driven by technological advancements. The role of the recording studio has changed from being an integral part of major labels to operating mostly as independent establishments. The era of large commercial recording studios has now transitioned to a more fragmented landscape of smaller independent studios, home studios, and diverse operational models.

As is evident from chapter three, the recording studio industry has always adjusted to technological innovations and changes in the music industry. Parallels can be drawn between the developments that resulted in the emergence of independent studios and downturn of label owned studios, and the developments that lead to the emergence of home studios, and the difficulties of professional recording studios. Both can largely be attributed to the increased accessibility of music production. While it is a net positive that each step of democratization has led to breaking down the paywalls associated with making and releasing music, this time, the recording studio industry is caught in the crossfire with the music industry wide difficulties brought on by small profit margins from streaming.

The contemporary recording studio industry presents a complex scenario. The consensus among the participants in the thesis was that running a studio was not financially viable, due to reduced recording budgets and competition from smaller studios and home studios. The current economic structure of the music industry, where physical record sales have declined, and streaming services generate next to nothing for all but the largest artists, means that many artists simply cannot afford the luxury of a professional studio, or see the benefits, when the alternative

of a friend with a home studio might be free. When artists do opt for a professional studio, the sessions need to be conducted faster and more efficiently than ever. This translates to less revenue for these studios, more work for musicians and producers outside the studio, and possibly worse results.

Popular music consumer habits have also shifted the preferred genres towards styles in which there might not be any need for recording acoustic instruments that normally necessitate the use of a proper recording studio. This leaves out large amounts of major-label backed profits for recording studios. That doesn't necessarily mean that the type of music that does need a recording studio is being done any less, but rather that it has shifted from A-list pop music towards indie-bands and niche genres. This again creates a difficult situation, as now the clientele who most use these professional facilities are often the same people who face the greatest financial pressure from the current revenue distribution models. Because of this, many artists need to fund their studio time with work other than music, which goes to show the problem with revenue distribution within the music industry.

This paradoxical situation means that while studios may still experience consistent traffic, they have had to keep their rates so low due to competition, that the studios are hard to keep profitable. The nearly unanimous answer among all of the participants was that since founding their studios, income has decreased, while expenses increased dramatically. On the other hand, due to equipment becoming cheaper, better, and more readily available, it has never been easier for just about anyone to make their own small scale recording setup. Due to this, home studios and smaller scale production studios have become common, especially for music that does not center around acoustic recording because this sort of studio often does not facilitate recording larger ensembles.

Owners of commercial recording studios are mostly running these studios out of passion for the craft, often only working part time, having to come up with ancillary sources of income, or by having an external benefactor investing in the studio, not expecting a profit. Studios are implementing various strategies for adapting to these changes, such as diversification of services beyond just recording music. Studios and studio owners are taking work from outside the music industry, or

working completely different jobs to facilitate running a studio. Participants noted that while many of these ancillary sources of income were not significant amounts of money, the margins are so thin that every bit is needed. Studios participating in the study were most often run by a single person, whose merits as an engineer or a producer the studio's success is based on. In cases where studios did employ multiple people, usually these people were co-owners, where all were responsible for bringing in their own clients. Purely salaried positions are now rare, as the profit margins are too thin to warrant employees.

As the current streaming dominated chapter has been going on for a decade or so, it is safe to say the studio industry has had time to settle. As the studio professionals were quite adamant that this current state of the industry is not sustainable, the future may see larger studios becoming even rarer, where recording a band live is a niche on its own. Since rent and facility related costs were often the largest, another possibility of approaching the issue is further adoption of collaborative spaces, such as larger studio complexes featuring multiple smaller production studios, and a common live recording space. Though there are bandage solutions to make the industry viable, it still doesn’t fix the root cause of devalued music and skewed profit shares. As the industry has gone through the different chapters driven by technological and cultural developments, it has changed forms to adapt. The current form of favouring smaller production studios might change to something completely different with future developments.

Though this thesis explored the industry from multiple points of view, some limitations need to be acknowledged. The sample size in the surveys is too small to gather any sort of quantitative data, as all studios are unique in their operational styles. Due to this, it is not possible to draw any sort of objective conclusions from the survey data alone. To gather quantitative data the sample size would have had to be tens of times larger and be expanded to include more types of studios. Study that size would have been both out of the scope of this thesis as well as near impossible to achieve without help from some sort of agency or association, similarly to the study conducted by the UK Department of Culture, Music and Sports.

In conclusion, the recording studio industry has been caught in the crossfire of many different natural developments. Multiple factors, such as more accessible technology, current music trends, and the reduced share of profits to artists, has caused a large part of music production to shift away from the traditional recording studios, into a new era of home studios and smaller production studios. Even though studios are still constantly used, the shift in the industry takes away a crucial margin of income from the large scale professional studios. The reduction in profits due to competition and lower recording budgets, as well higher expenses, has led studio owners to have to find ancillary sources of income to stay afloat. Though recording studios occupy a less central position in the broader popular music industry, it still remains a significant part of the overall music industry. The financial stalemate of balancing between staying viable, and keeping day rates low enough for artists suffering from the overall reduction in profit shares, is a by-product of an issue that needs fundamental change in the music industry to fix. Stil, running a commercial recording studio can be made viable with a lot of hard work, planning and proper cost management.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey for Finnish recording studios 1(5)

Äänitystudiokysely opinnäytetyöhön

* Indicates required question

1. Studion nimi / Oma nimi

2. Perustamisvuosi *

3. Lisätietoja (Esim. sijainti, studion koko, henkilönnan määrä...)

Kannattavuus:

4. Kuinka monta prosenttia tuloistasi tulee studiotoiminnasta? *

Mark only one oval.

- Studiotyö on päätoimista
- ~75%
- ~50%
- ~25%
- <25%

(continues)

5. Kuinka monta prosenttia **studion kuluista** studiotoiminnasta saadut tulot kattaa? *

Mark only one oval.

- >100%
- ~75%
- ~50%
- ~25%
- <25%

6. Miten ovat studion tulot ja kustannukset muuttuneet studion perustamisen jälkeen? *

7. Mistä studiotyön ulkopuolisesta toiminnasta saat tuloja?

8. Mitkä ovat studion suurimmat kustannukset?

Studion toimintamalli

9. Mistä osa-alueista studiotoiminnasta saatu tulo koostuu, arvioi prosentteina jos mahdollista. (esim. 35% äänittäminen, 25% lock-outit, 20% miksaaminen, podcast-post production 20%) *

10. Tarjoatko jotain tavallisesta eroavia palveluita? (Esim. opetus, laitehuolto, laitteiden vuokraus, maahantuonti) *

11. Miten on studion toimintamalli muuttunut perustamisen jälkeen?

Asiakkaat

12. Kuinka monta prosenttia asiakkaista on palaavia? *

Mark only one oval.

- ~100%
- ~75%
- ~50%
- ~25%
- <25%

13. Mitä kautta asiakkaat tulevat? *

14. Markkinoitko studiota aktiivisesti? mitkä ovat olleet toimivimpia tapoja?

Muuta

15. **Vapaa kenttä:** tarkenna vastauksia / kerro mistä syistä studionne on menestynyt? / Jos perustaisitte studionne nyt, mitä tekisitte erilailla? / Muita terveisiä

Opinnäytetyöstä:

16. Saako teihin olla yhteydessä jatkokysymyksien tai haastattelun tiimoilta? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Kyllä (Lisää sähköposti alas)
- ◯ Ei

Appendix 2. Survey for European recording studios 1(5)

Recording studio survey for thesis

* Indicates required question

1. Name of the studio / your name

2. Year studio was established in *

3. Location

4. Other information (size, number of staff...)

Viability

(continues)

5. How many percent of your income comes from studio related work? *

Mark only one oval.

- Full-time at studio
- ~75%
- ~50%
- ~25%
- <25%

6. How many percent of the expensess of the studio does the work at the studio cover. *

Mark only one oval.

- >100%
- ~75%
- ~50%
- ~25%
- <25%

7. How have the expensess and income changed since establishing the studio *

8. What work do you do outside the studio.

9. What are the biggest expenses of the studio

Operating model:

10. What parts of studio related work does the income consist of. Estimate as percentages (ie. 40% recording, 25% mixing, 25% lock outs, 10% podcast editing) *

11. Do you offer any special services? (ie. Equipment repairs, Teaching, content creation...) *

12. How has the operating model changed since the establishment of the studio?

Clientele:

13. How many percentage of the customers are returning customers? *

Mark only one oval.

- ~100%
- ~75%
- ~50%
- ~25%
- <25%

14. What are the main ways customers find you? *

15. Do you actively market the studio? what have been the most successful ways?

Other

16. **Blank space:** Specify an answer / what are the main reasons your studio has been successfull / If starting over now, what would you do differently / Other thoughts?

About the Thesis: