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Cecilia Björk

Editorial – Special issue on music education and sustainability

The focus of this issue is sustainability, understood as the ecological, cultural, social and economic conditions that constitute the foundation for human existence. Sustainability is the global challenge of our time. With the midpoint of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development already passed, the United Nations are urging world leaders and civil society to intensify efforts to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, Renn et al. (2020) have argued that the global indicator framework for the SDGs is not sufficient in itself, as the indicators can neither identify why targets are not being met, nor do they provide means to resolve value conflicts. It is up to societies and scientific communities to find future pathways that lead to positive results. As music educators and music education researchers, we share the responsibility for renewed efforts, renewed hope, and transformative action.

An individual's opportunities for developing a musical and meaningful life are influenced by numerous interactions and interdependencies within the micro- and macrosystems that sustain teaching and learning. The ecological conditions necessary for meeting basic human needs and for the arts to flourish are the same. Some connections are immediate and glaring, as expressed in the motto "No Music on a Dead Planet" chosen by the international group Music Declares Emergency, a collective of artists, music industry professionals and music organisations that stand together to call for climate action.[1] But in music education, there are also complex societal, professional, and personal contexts in which the tenable needs to be distinguished from the untenable. "Systems integrity", Renn et al. (2009, 296) point out, does not refer to a rigid state of equilibrium, but instead depends on the capacity of a social or ecological system to develop and change for the sake of continuity and endurance.

In order to encourage the creativity needed to understand and envision possible future scenarios in an uncertain world, UNESCO has developed the concept and practice of "Futures Literacy" (Miller 2018). This concept emphasises that the future is not predetermined but can be shaped by human narratives, actions, and collective decision-making processes.[2] "A futures literate person", Miller writes, "has acquired the skills needed to decide why and how to use their imagination to introduce the non-existent future into the present. These anticipatory activities play an important role in what people see and do." (Miller 2018, 1). The authors in this issue share a similar commitment to such anticipatory imagination and to the deeper understanding that comes from questioning assumptions, analysing evidence, and reflecting on assumptions and values that shape our perceptions of the past, the present, and the future. Contributors include researchers and scholars from Denmark, Sweden, Brazil, Bulgaria, Portugal, Australia, Canada, Estonia, Finland, and Spain. Several of the texts originated as presentations during the 3rd European Music School Symposium, *Music Schools and Their Ecosystems: Building Sustainable Futures*, organised in October 2023 at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, Austria.[3] This special issue of the Finnish Journal of Music Education is published as the University of the Arts Helsinki is preparing to host ISME 2024, the 36th World Conference for the International Society for Music Education, with the theme of *Advocacy for Sustainability in Music Education*. It is our hope that international readers and conference delegates will find encouragement and inspiration in this issue for endeavours related to progress on sustainable development goals.

The Articles section opens with a report from a development programme in Denmark, where the Ministry of Culture is aiming to broaden access to music and arts activities as part of national aims to promote social sustainability. **Kim Boeskov** analyses how music and art school leaders and project managers involved in the programme respond to issues connected to social sustainability. He finds a readiness to take on opportunities and challenges that can expand the purpose of these schools to include a concern for the general well-being of students and their communities. Central to this transformation are cross-institutional collaboration as and the development of flexible and accessible spaces that favour experiences of community and belonging. Next, **Ida Knutsson** examines how a number of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals might be reflected in practices of small-group instrumental teaching in Sweden's schools of music and performing arts. Drawing on concepts of democratic teaching (Biesta 2017) and expansive professionalism (Westerlund & Gaunt 2021), Knutsson argues that there is indeed potential in music education to help achieve the SDGs, but also draws attention to the risks of wishful thinking and the unintended negative effects of rhetorics of salvation through music. In addition, music education professionals who are not inherently interested in social issues but consider themselves musicians or music teachers first may find it unsettling to shoulder expectations and responsibilities related to sustainability. Higher music education can play a significant role in supporting the development of a democratic ethos in the profession. Both Boeskov and Knutsson acknowledge multiple social and cultural reasons behind decisions not to partake in art and music school activities, and discuss the opportunities and challenges involved when navigating a field where policy and practice are influenced by a range of different stakeholders. In their article, **Linn Hentschel** and **Cecilia Ferm Almqvist** focus on caring practices in the musical theatre project Togetherart in Sweden to show how an ethics of care (Noddings 1984/2013) can promote sustainable social development. The process of creating a professional musical production through collaboration between professionals and nonprofessionals (in this case, a group of adults with intellectual disabilities and/or autism) is described as grounded in a belief that all participants' knowledge should be seen as resources, leading to "deep listening" within the project's ecosystem (Smith 2023) and building a sense of unity instead of a divisive "us and them" mindset. The authors examine human, artistic, and pedagogical aspects of care within the project, and conclude with a discussion of implications in terms of lifelong learning, human rights, and the aim of a sustainable world for all.

In the first of the Reports, **Renan Santiago** applies a decolonial framework to discuss how sacred Afro-Brazilian songs and musical instruments can be taught to raise ecological awareness and increase respect for natural elements and biomes. Through his analysis of the beliefs and sacred music of Candomblé, a set of diasporic and syncretic religions still widely practised in Brazil, Santiago argues that Candomblé, similar to practices in many other traditional and/or Indigenous groups, represents an eco-ontological way of life. Drawing on the sustainability of life approach (Agenjo-Calderó 2023), Santiago cautions against sustainability discourses that prioritise the continued extraction of resources without considering the risks of environmental degradation. He suggests that the intrinsic relation between nature, humans, and the sacred can be elucidated and explored in music education by studying "sacred music from/to nature" from diverse cultural and geographical contexts. The second report, written by **Nikolay Demerdzhiev**, investigates challenges associated with the transformation process of Bulgaria's music schools into a culture and art education system. Acknowledging the influence of unfolding stories and narratives for driving sustainable change in music education (Westerlund 2020), Demerdzhiev shows how voices from the field can provide constructive and important corrective narratives to counterbalance official "success stories" which may impede professional collaboration among

stakeholders. One particular music school project in Sliven stands out as a potential model for transforming the Bulgarian music education system through collaboration between music schools, performing arts institutions, and tertiary education providers, nurturing students' passion and motivation as key factors in sustaining a long-term interest in music. In the third report, **Paulo Esteireiro, Carolina Faria, Natalina Cristovão** and **Carlos Gonçalves** revisit a large-scale educational initiative that aims to maintain and promote the teaching and learning of Madeiran traditional instruments. Using the music vitality and endangerment framework developed by ethnomusicologist Catherine Grant (2014; 2024, 104–112), the authors show that the impact of the initiative in Madeira has remained stable for more than three decades and has extended far beyond school contexts. From a cultural sustainability perspective, offering lessons in traditional instruments as an extracurricular activity in schools has been important not only because it engages new generations in the intangible cultural heritage of the region but also because it has created new professional opportunities for musicians and luthiers, prompted the need to preserve traditional repertoire and create new repertoires, and increased the number of community concerts based on local traditions, some of which were at risk of disappearing.

Catherine Grant, author of the book *Music endangerment: How language maintenance can help* in which she developed her music vitality and endangerment framework (Grant 2014), and co-editor of the volume *Sustainable futures for music cultures* (Schippers & Grant 2016),[4] was one of the keynote speakers at the 3rd European Music School Symposium in Vienna in 2023. We publish a verbatim transcript of the keynote talk in which Grant presents her most recent iteration of the framework, connects it with UNESCO's representation of 46 common threats to music and other intangible expressions of culture, and discusses how the framework could be employed in music education to better support "small", local music practices, especially those of minority and Indigenous peoples. Grant suggests that music education institutions could engage more deeply with music sustainability endeavours for the sake of supporting the rich diversity of musical expressions around the world as well as for the considerable educational, cultural, and social benefits that this may generate. Work by the second keynote speaker, Ortwin Renn, a leading international expert on transdisciplinary sustainability research, is cited in this editorial and several other texts in the issue.

Kaisa J. Vähi and **Antti Snellman** report from the music school symposium in Vienna. In addition to discussing topics that were presented, including those in both Grant's and Renn's keynotes, they take the opportunity as doctoral researchers and first-time conference participants to raise questions about conference cultures, seeing the established traditions with fresh eyes and providing concrete suggestions for more democratic, effective, and sustainable practices. The issue of academic flying is obviously central (see Grant 2018; Knutsson 2023), but as Vähi and Snellman argue, the urgency of global questions currently discussed at international gatherings makes it even more important to engage academic and nonacademic audiences alike.

The final section features three current research projects related to music education and sustainability, all funded by the Research Council of Finland. **Katja Thomson** and **Danielle Treacy** present the project *Music education, professionalism, and eco-politics* (EcoPolitics, 2021–2025). This project aims to envision eco-politically oriented futures for higher music education as a field, and to find ways of increasing ecological systems awareness together with higher music educators from three continents. The researchers work towards these aims by exploring the values, beliefs and underlying mental models, as well as the wider societal forces, policies, and politics that have shaped higher music education. **Tuulikki Laes** and **Taru-Anneli Koivisto** present the four-year project *Performing the political: Public pedagogy in higher music education* (2023–2027). The project aims to initiate and explore transformative alternatives to enable future music professionals

in higher music education to survive, reform, and thrive in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. In the project, led by Academy of Finland research fellow Tuulikki Laes, the notion of the "political" in music professionalism extends beyond advocacy, with societal engagement being conceptualised as part of institutional practice. The researchers promote ecological-artistic imagination and transformative systems thinking with higher music education students, teachers, and leaders. Finally, **Guadalupe López-Íñiguez** presents her project *The politics of care in the professional education of children gifted for music* (2022–2027). This large-scale study will include data from over 50 countries and 200 music institutions which offer specialised education programmes for gifted learners. The research addresses the understudied goal of responsible and ethical education for children highly gifted for music, seeking to cater for these children's socio-emotional, physical, mental, and moral/ethical needs and support them to live as agentic and healthy individuals while pursuing desirable educational outcomes in caring ecosystems.

It has been a distinct privilege and honour to guest edit this special issue of the Finnish Journal of Music Education. I would like to express my gratitude to the editors for their kind invitation and my deep appreciation to the authors for their commitment and their dedication to the topic. I also wish to thank the international group of external reviewers for their excellent work, and the Department of Music Education Research and Practice at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna for invaluable support during the editorial process. Dear readers, may the insights on music education and sustainability shared in this issue serve as catalysts for continued learning, anticipatory imagination, and resourceful professional collaboration in local and global music education communities. ■

Notes

[1] https://www.musicdeclares.net/

[2] https://futuresliteracy.net/

[3] https://www.mdw.ac.at/european-music-school-symposium/?PageId=3716

[4] https://experts.griffith.edu.au/7847-catherine-grant/about

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Articles | Artikkelit

Kim Boeskov

Social sustainability in Danish music and art schools: Findings from a national development project

Introduction

Denmark has a fairly comprehensive, publicly funded system for voluntary arts education that, in principle, should make arts activities available to all children and young people. However, reports have shown that these opportunities primarily benefit white, middle-class families (Danish Ministry of Culture 2017). This has led many in the music and art school sector to realize that schools need to develop a more inclusive and socially responsive way of working that allows for a more diverse group of children and young people to engage in arts activities.

In 2021, the Danish Ministry of Culture launched a national development program with the aim of broadening access to music and arts activities. The program was titled *Seize the Engagement* and provided select municipalities opportunities to experiment with new approaches, formats, collaborations, and institutional practices. Through the program, the municipalities developed new knowledge on how to include more children and young people in arts activities. In this article, I discuss the findings of the program, paying attention to the possibilities and challenges for music and art schools to respond to issues connected to social sustainability. In an analysis of interviews with 15 music and art school leaders and project administrators, I ask, 'How are Danish music and art school leaders and project administrators responding to issues connected to social sustainability, and what opportunities and challenges are identified in this process?'

What is social sustainability?

Sustainability theory is thematized in three pillars: the environmental, economic, and social, with the latter often described as the 'neglected' one (Partridge 2014). Social sustainability is often studied in relation to the environmental and economic aspects of sustainability, but as a growing body of literature on the topic indicates, social sustainability can also be regarded as a domain in its own right, one with intrinsic value and of necessity for developing and maintaining a viable society for future generations (Colantonio 2009; Åhman 2013). As many scholars note, social sustainability is a contested or 'fuzzy' concept lacking clear-cut definitions, as the concept is still emerging and is approached from a range of disciplines and perspectives (Colantonio 2009; Ly & Cope 2023; Partridge 2014). Following definitions from scholars such as Partridge (2014) and Ly and Cope (2023), social sustainability is here taken to concern equity, quality of life, democratic and participatory processes, and a 'futures focus', which implies attention toward social justice for present as well as future generations.

According to Partridge (2014, 6182), equity is regarded as both essential and central to any definition of social sustainability (see also Colantonio 2009). Equity is connected to a vision of social justice in which equal opportunities are ensured for all members of a community, especially those in the most vulnerable groups. The equity dimension can, therefore, also be connected to terms like 'inclusion' and 'access', meaning that working toward

social sustainability means eliminating the barriers that hinder individuals and groups from participating fully in communal life and the social and cultural practices of society (Bossert et al. 2007). Quality of life refers to working for the well-being of people and communities, with a focus on improving the conditions for a meaningful life. This dimension is central to many definitions of social sustainability and "indicates the need for a holistic view of the human being, where not only physical needs but also psychological and relational aspects are necessary in order to promote social sustainability" (Åhman 2013, 1157). Thus, social sustainability work can be seen as related to enhancing experiences of well-being, social connectedness, and feelings of belonging for individuals and communities.

Democratic and participatory processes of governance are also important dimensions of social sustainability, which means that social sustainability cannot be measured merely in terms of the outcomes of specific policies. Rather, it also concerns societal processes themselves and the degree to which members of society are involved in deliberative decision-making. Robinson argues that social sustainability work recognizes a "need to develop methods of deliberation and decision-making that actively engage the relevant interests and communities in thinking through and deciding upon the kind of future they want to try and create" (Robinson 2004, 380). This vision can be connected to "a futures focus" as an important dimension of social sustainability, which implies a "concern with the future as well as the present" (Partridge 2014, 6183). Ly and Cope discuss this dimension as adaptability, which "refers to the competency and learning ability of a society to stay sustainable, especially during crises" (Ly & Cope 2023, 11). In this way, social sustainability is seen as an effort to build structures and processes that support socially just conditions for present and future generations.

Social sustainability addresses how society and its institutions should be structured and is therefore fundamentally a normative and politically charged concept (Åhman 2013). However, it is difficult to arrive at a single definition of what constitutes social sustainability. While themes commonly connected to the concept might be more or less agreed upon, applications of the term are always conditioned by context. Thus, the dimensions most important in social sustainability work may differ from context to context and change over time. Furthermore, as Robinson (2004, 382) argues, sustainability is not to be seen as "a set of future conditions of society" or a state to be reached but rather as "the emergent property of a conversation about what kind of world we collectively want to live in now and in the future". In this article, I examine how this conversation unfolds among Danish music and art school leaders working on issues connected to social sustainability. The focus is on understanding what possibilities and challenges institutional leaders identify while involved in social sustainability work.

Social sustainability work in Nordic music and art schools

This article discusses issues of social sustainability and institutional change in Danish municipal music and art schools. These partially state-funded institutions are found in every Danish municipality and offer extra-curricular music and arts activities to children and young people aged 0–25 years for a relatively low fee. The history of these institutions dates to the 1930s when music schools were founded with an ambition of creating opportunities for musical participation for all (Holst 2020). Music is still by far the most common subject in these institutions, and music activities are often offered as individual lessons or in small groups. In recent years, many institutions have begun offering lessons in other subject areas, such as dance, theater/drama, arts and craft, or film, yet, the law-stated purpose for the schools is due to their historical background solely connected to music educational activities; it therefore does not reflect recent changes in the field. Similar institutions exist

in all Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland), and although the institutional framework differs somewhat from country to country, the many similarities make it relevant to regard the field as one (see also Björk et al. 2018; Rønningen et al. 2019). In the last decade, issues connected to social sustainability have been pertinent to Nordic music and art schools, especially with regard to inclusion and access. The schools are part of a comprehensive, publicly funded system for arts and culture found across the Nordic region, based on an inclusive ideal that holds that art and culture should be available to all, regardless of social, cultural, or geographical background (Duelund 2003; Sokka & Johannisson 2022, 10). However, research has clearly indicated that the services offered by music and art schools are not equally distributed. In 2017, a report by the Danish Music School Think Tank revealed that the children and young people who take part in the schools' activities are likely to have parents with an income that is higher than average, a longer education, and a cultural majority background (Danish Ministry of Culture 2017). Similar findings have emerged from studies of music and art schools in the other Nordic countries (e.g. Bjørnsen 2012; Gustavsen & Hjelmbrekke 2009; Jeppsson & Lindgren 2018; Kleppe 2013; Vismanen et al. 2016). This has led to questions of whether the music and art schools are in fact 'for all'.

Across the Nordic region, a wide range of policy initiatives and recommendations have addressed issues connected to social sustainability in the music and art school sector (see Kulturskolen som inkluderende kraft i lokalsamfunnet 2020; Kulturskoleutredningen 2016; Laes et al. 2018; Rønningen et al. 2023); however, significant institutional changes have not yet materialized. One reason for this could be competing interests within the music and art school field. Researchers have identified a tension in the practice and discourse of music and art schools between a focus on inclusion—'arts activities for all'—and specialization, where attention is directed toward 'the talented' who might embark on professional careers as artists (Berge et al. 2019; Björk et al. 2018; Di Lorenzo Tillborg 2017, 2021; Jeppsson 2020b). In an analysis of how Swedish music and art school leaders relate to questions of inclusivity and access for all, Jeppsson (2023) finds that the vision of an inclusive music and art school is widely shared among the leaders, but the leaders position themselves differently in relation to how this vision is actualized in the institutional practice. In a related study, Di Lorenzo Tillborg (2021) identifies a struggle between inclusionary and exclusionary discourses in an analysis of how Swedish music and art school leaders talk about the democratization of the institution. One of the most important resources for change is the teachers. However, in a study of teachers' professional identities in Norwegian schools of music and performing arts, Jordhus-Lier (2018) shows that while policy documents focus on breadth, diversity, and inclusion, many teachers are more interested in specialization and working with the most talented. Aglen (2018) discusses how the role of the music and art school teacher is changing in response to an increased focus on the institution's societal responsibilities. This requires a high level of adaptability as teachers are expected to be able to work and collaborate in a range of contexts, which teachers find demanding. In studies regarding Swedish music and art school teachers' understanding of working for equality and inclusion through music educational practices, Kuuse (2018) and Jeppsson (2020a) show how teachers are unable to find meaningful connections between the musical and the social or democratizing dimensions of their work. Yet, as Brøske (2017) and Cedervall (2020) have pointed out, collaborations between music and art school teachers and primary school teachers may have potential for transformative learning and for expanding existing practices.

Westerlund et al. (2019) argue that social innovation is needed for publicly funded music schools to retain legitimacy in an increasingly complex social and cultural environment. However, recent research has depicted music and art schools as social systems reluctant to change due to the structures and logics upon which they are built. Väkevä et al. (2022) ar-

gue that while the Finnish music school system appears to be egalitarian and based on free choice, it rests on a hidden elitism that reproduces social privilege and inequality. Likewise, in the Norwegian context, Karlsen et al. (2023) find that the Norwegian schools of music and performing arts are embedded within a pattern of cultural domination, which means that the schools tend to reproduce a middle-class logic, rendering other values and logics illegitimate. Ringsager et al. (2023) discuss the institutional logics and professional self-understandings underpinning a Danish music school; they find that current practice needs to be expanded for it to be open to a more diverse student population.

Case: Seize the Engagement

Certainly, within the Nordic music and art school sector, a strong current is impelling institutions to work with issues connected to social sustainability. This current also underlies the case for this study, the national development program Seize the Engagement in Denmark. The program was initiated by the Danish minister of culture with the aim of developing sustainable models for including more children and young people in arts activities. Through the program, 27 local projects were established in 2021 and 2022, each experimenting with how to include children and young people in arts activities and strengthen participation for specific target groups. The projects developed new formats and approaches to educational arts activities, and these experiments were locally implemented by cross-institutional and interprofessional groups in which a range of institutions, organizations, and arts education professionals participated. Municipal primary schools, kindergartens, leisure time institutions, museums, theaters, concert venues, libraries, and community culture centers have been involved as well as music and art schools which played a central role in most of the projects.

While conducting experiments in their local settings, projects have also been part of a shared process evaluation facilitated by researchers and teachers from the Rhythmic Music Conservatory in Copenhagen. The process evaluation was structured through monthly network meetings where leaders from all projects gathered with the aim of supporting local efforts. A central purpose was to support evaluation of the activities and ensure that project evaluations were conducted in a way that would allow them to contribute to an overarching national evaluation report, which was published in the spring of 2023 (Boeskov 2023). The report builds on the local evaluations as well as the insights generated in the monthly process evaluation meetings. The report also contains insights generated from an independent research strain that, among other themes, investigated opportunities for developing practice and policy within the music and art schools. The current article elaborates on this part of the evaluation of Seize the Engagement by exploring how music and art school leaders and project administrators involved in the national program respond to issues connected to social sustainability.

Methods

The empirical data consist of interviews with music and art school leaders and project administrators acting as leaders in local projects under the national program. In many cases, the music and art school leaders/principals would coordinate and evaluate the project activities themselves, but in some cases this responsibility was delegated to a project administrator. The interviews were semi-structured (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015) and conducted as either solo or group interviews. Group interviews were held in cases where music and art schools worked together in local projects or where multiple persons from the same school had leadership roles in a project. A total of 15 leaders and project administrators participated in six inter-

views, which were 60 to 90 minutes in duration. The interviews were conducted online using the Zoom platform, recorded, and subsequently transcribed. The interviews centered on the leaders' understanding of institutional purpose, potential for development, and challenges in responding to issues of social sustainability. Relying on the definitions provided by Partridge (2014) and Ly and Cope (2023), the dimensions of social sustainability found to be most relevant in the context of music and art schools were employed as lenses in an initial theory-driven process of analysis. This led to four structuring categories: equity/access, participation, quality of life/well-being, and future focus. Interviews were coded according to these categories, and afterwards an inductive analysis was performed in each category to identify emerging themes and to understand in greater detail the opportunities and challenges that the music and art school leaders connected to each dimension of social sustainability.

The current study highlights how music and art school leaders and project administrators respond to issues of social sustainability; however, it cannot be seen as representative of the views of music and art school leaders in general. The interviewees were involved in projects supported by Seize the Engagement and must therefore be seen as particularly committed to the specific political goal of democratizing music and art schools. Even if this ambition is shared by many leaders within the music and art school sector, one should not take a common understanding of what this work entails for granted. Further, as all the informants were participating in the same national program, it is likely that their perceptions of the issues connected to social sustainability were somewhat aligned in the process. In addition, as many of the interviews were conducted as group interviews, some informants may have been reluctant to share viewpoints that differed from socially accepted expressions. However, the purpose of the study is not to map or represent how music and art school leaders in general relate to issues of social sustainability or to bring forth differing opinions or potential disagreements. Rather, the aim is to identify the themes that leaders committed to sustainability work regard as important when responding to this challenge and to learn about the opportunities and difficulties they experience in this process. In the discussions cited below, statements by the leaders are anonymized. The interviews were conducted in Danish, and the statements were translated by the author.

Findings

The analysis of the interviews is presented using the four structuring categories as headlines. Each category is connected to a dominant theme appearing in the analysis; the theme of equity/access is connected to cross-institutional collaboration, participation is coupled with challenging institutional logics, quality of life/well-being refers to an expansion of the institutional purpose, while future focus relates to structural changes. However, these categories are not easily held apart; for example, when talking about participation, the music and art school leaders refer to the need to develop pedagogical approaches that support feelings of community, which could just as well be connected to the theme of well-being. Keeping in mind that themes and dimensions overlap, the following analysis attempts to present the main characteristics of how the music and art school leaders and project administrators respond to issues of social sustainability.

Access and cross-institutional collaboration

In the context of Seize the Engagement, the question of social equity was addressed particularly through attention to access. The local projects worked with the geographical, economic, cultural, and pedagogical barriers regulating access to music and arts activities—for example, by experimenting with new formats for accessible arts activities that are free of charge and where participants do not have to sign up in advance. Several of the

leaders argue that there is a need to develop a diverse range of activities and entry points into the institution. A common strategy for overcoming barriers to access is to conduct arts activities in contexts where children and young people spend most of their time—for example, in kindergartens, schools, leisure time institutions, youth clubs, or in the middle of the children's neighborhoods. One leader summarizes this as follows:

> *In terms of access, you need to be present in the places the children are, especially if you want to reach out to new target groups. I think it's crucial to think broader and to be present in some of the places where we're usually not present.* (Project leader 1)

Creating access for a wider and more diverse group of participants is for many of the music and art school leaders connected to expanding the presence of the school. For the music and art schools to achieve a wider presence in other arenas, the leaders point to cross-institutional collaboration as an essential tool, even if partnering with other institutions is challenging:

> *You ask about the potential [for widening access], and we all totally agree that there's a huge potential in cross-institutional collaboration, but we need to know more about how we support genuine collaboration. This is sometimes really hard.* (Project leader 2)

A genuine collaboration is here to be understood as an institutional partnership in which all participants feel ownership and invest time and resources in order for the collaboration to work. One of the leaders argues that municipal primary schools do not necessarily prioritize collaboration with music and art schools, which makes it difficult to rely on such partnerships. While some leaders point to the difficulties of working with 'the others,' one talks about how the music and art schools themselves are also difficult to collaborate with. Talking about the need to develop collaboration skills, one of the leaders points out the following:

> *You need to be aware that you're entering a different context. […] You need to be able to collaborate, and to do the job you need to understand that context. When you work together with a primary school teacher, it's another world, and you need to learn how to talk to each other.* (Music and art school leader 1)

The leaders thus acknowledge that cross-institutional collaboration is an important tool for more children and youth to gain access to arts educational activities. However, the leaders identify obstacles connected to establishing and supporting well-functioning collaborations, both institutionally and in terms of interprofessional relations.

Participation–challenging institutional logics

For the music and art schools to become more socially sustainable, the interviewed leaders referred to issues connected to the participatory dimensions of the institution's work. A central theme emphasized by all the leaders is how music and arts activities need to be based on experiences of community and togetherness. While dance, drawing, and theater activities are offered as group activities and therefore more naturally emphasize the social aspects of participation, in many schools, music instrumental tuition is based on one-to-one lessons. Several of the leaders describe this teaching format as unsustainable and problematic, from a social as well as from a pedagogical point of view:

> *Children need to learn together with others in learning communities. We can't have children sitting alone by themselves, because you don't see that in any other places in society. It can even be intimidating for a child to be placed alone in a room with an adult.* (Music and art school leader 3)

Several leaders talk about activities in which the children themselves create music and art and explore relations with each other and the teachers through such creative activities. According to one of the leaders, such activities generate experiences of ownership:

> *I think we've really worked with [participation] in the way the children are making their own music. This is what creates ownership in that the children make their own stuff. I see that as a cornerstone in our project—to create ownership and show them, 'you'll get some tools and in no time you can make music by yourself and create something.'* (Music and art school leader 4)

One leader underlines the need to challenge institutional logic by transforming the music and art school from a static institution with fixed subjects and structures into a more flexible and versatile organization capable of running short- and long-term projects based on students' interests and needs. Such an idea also guides the leader's vision of the day-to-day activities in the future music and art school, which she imagines consists of more open workshop spaces without a set curriculum. Open workshops will allow more children and young people to explore different arts activities, and this idea prompts one of the leaders to reflect upon whether 'teaching' is still the right word to use when talking about the activities:

> *Yeah, it might be teaching, but a different kind of teaching. It's an expansion of the concept of teaching.* (Music and art school leader 5)

The leaders thus point at a need to develop new pedagogical approaches that are more attentive to student involvement and ownership. However, there is no consensus among the leaders as to whether the traditional one-to-one teaching format should be preserved or discarded, as they acknowledge that a significant portion of the teachers as well as many students thrive in being part of a more traditional structure with one-on-one tuition and small group teaching. Nevertheless, there is strong agreement among the leaders that the social and relational aspects of arts activities need more attention for the institution to become relevant to more children and young people. Some of the leaders talk about teachers' professional identity and self-understanding as a fundamental barrier to change. Most of the teachers received their own education at conservatories and music academies in which the master–apprentice type of teaching was dominant. One of the leaders explanes,

> *It has something to do with the professional identity. You know, the music school teachers' identity because we are raised up with this apprenticeship style of teaching. […] So, this is our identity, this is what we have been taught, this is also how you go on to teach.* (Project leader 3)

According to the leaders, the master–apprentice style of teaching is connected to the idea that every teacher has "his or her students" and that the primary task of the music and art schools is to develop the artistic abilities of the individual student to the fullest extent—ideally for the student to become a professional artist. It can be very difficult for teachers to move away from the ways in which they were taught themselves. While some teachers will happily explore and develop different approaches to teaching that accommodate experiences of participation and belonging, others are neither equipped nor motivated to develop new ways of working.

Well-being–expanding the purpose of music and art schools

For music and art school leaders, the theme of quality of life and well-being is connected to an ongoing expansion of the purpose of the music and art schools. The leaders recognize that the institution is in a process of change:

> *The music and art schools have fundamentally changed during the past ten to fifteen years. We used to be institutions that should teach students some music, mostly one-to-one tuition and of course also some ensemble lessons, but now we're also doing a lot of other stuff. So you could say, the thing that used to be our primary task is now only a part of other important tasks because we also work closely together with the primary schools, work cross-institutionally, work with health, kindergartens, public libraries. It's just something else, and it has become normal to do all these different things.* (Music and art school leader 1)

The leaders generally embrace these changes and the expansion of the primary task of the institution from focusing on teaching music and art to mostly middle-class children into a more socially engaged institution, working for the general well-being of all children and young people in the local community. One of the leaders talks about the community at the music and art school as an alternative to the communities in the primary school, where many children are not experiencing success or a sense of belonging. Generally, the leaders are aware that music and art schools can and should contribute to solving the current mental health crisis among children and young people. One leader explains,

> *The theme of well-being is on the agenda. I think it's exciting to enter into this area as a cultural institution. This is something we can really work on, and it's interesting to explore how we could go about that. Talking about well-being among young people as well as adults—and also the field of arts and health in general—will surely become more and more important in our institution.* (Music and art school leader 3)

Generally, there is consensus among the leaders that an expansion of the institutional purpose is inevitable and that it is crucial for the future legitimacy of the music and art schools as publicly funded institutions that they be capable of taking on a greater responsibility for reaching out to a more diverse group of participants and respond to the needs of a modern welfare society, for example by connecting cultural work to health and well-being. While the leaders acknowledge this as a big challenge in terms of developing new ways of working, they also identify great potential for the institutions to make a greater contribution to the well-being of the community. According to the leaders, the music and art schools could take on this role by facilitating engaging communities among local youth as well as supporting pedagogues, kindergarten teachers, and municipal primary schools in using arts activities for social and educational purposes. However, there is also a clear recognition that the traditional purpose for the music and art schools—working to develop the musical and artistic abilities of children and young people—is still a fundamental one, which should not be disregarded even if the institutional task is expanded to include other commitments as well.

Future focus–structural changes

As Partridge (2014) holds, an important part of social sustainability is a "future focus" and making structural changes that benefit both present and future generations. In the interviews, it becomes clear that the music and art schools are undergoing significant changes in terms of redefining their institutional purpose. However, the national law regulating the schools sets up a relatively narrow purpose for the music and art schools—to provide extra-curricular music activities, support the musical life of the local community, and collaborate with municipal primary schools (Executive Order on Music Schools 2013). Several of the leaders argue for a need to revise the law-stated purpose of the music and art schools as well as the model through which the institutions receive financial support from the state, which for historical reasons solely targets music tuition. This would push music and art schools to pay greater attention to social sustainability.

> *The state funding of the music and art schools is currently directed to a small part of our activities [instrumental tuition]. That's a problem. It's not helping us think in new ways. It motivates us to keep on with the traditional music school practice.* (Music and art school leader 3)

At the local level, the leaders describe how music and art schools are facing increasing demands from municipalities, as the local governing bodies expect publicly funded institutions to contribute to delivering the general services of a modern welfare state and to work cross-institutionally around matters connected to health, education, and social issues. Yet, some of the leaders express how municipalities need to create strategies and policies that enable the music and art schools to develop and expand their area of influence, for example by establishing sustainable frameworks for cross-institutional collaboration. Thus, the leaders point to important structural changes and policy development that could support the institutions in their efforts to become more socially sustainable.

As discussed above, the opportunities for change identified by the leaders are connected to cross-institutional collaboration, a more flexible and open structure for activities, and an increased focus on broader social and educational aspects and facilitating experiences of community. Reflecting upon the capacity of the music and art schools to adapt to such potentials, several of the leaders observe that development projects like Seize the Engagement represent an important opportunity to experiment with new approaches, collaborations, and structures. However, while development projects are held to be important, some leaders argue that the schools need to be better at learning from such experiments and turning experiments into institutional change.

> *If we're to do this in a sustainable way, we need to make sure that we're not developing isolated pedagogical practices in a few projects, but that we're integrating the new approaches into our organization.* (Music and art school leader 2)

Integrating learning from development projects into institutional practice is recognized as challenging. For example, while acknowledging the need to develop more flexible organizational structures, some leaders note how teachers are often employed part-time in different music and art schools, which challenges flexibility and the ability to collaborate in new ways within and outside of the institution. Some point to a competence gap among the teachers, who may also be reluctant to change how they work. For several of the leaders, this has led to changes in what they look for when employing teachers. Increasingly, the leaders look for broader social and pedagogical competences and skills in project management, rather than focusing only on the artistic skills of applicants. Yet, several leaders identify teachers' participation in cross-institutional development projects as catalysts for building teacher competences, as such projects spur reflection and new perspectives:

> *For us, it's been crucial to devote time for competence development in which you insist that people with different professional backgrounds sit down and reflect together on what's working and not working when being involved in cross-institutional collaboration. […] This has been really important for making progress in our work.* (Music and art school leader 6)

The policy structure and legal framework of the institutions as well as teacher competences are identified as barriers to adapting to new opportunities and developing more socially sustainable ways of working. At the same time, the leaders point to a potential for increasing the institution's adaptability, which is connected to practice experiments in combination with a forum for professional development in which people with different skillsets and professional backgrounds work and reflect together.

Discussion and conclusion

The conversation among the music and art school leaders concerning the central dimensions of social sustainability identifies several issues. One implication seems to be that when engaging in social sustainability work, the music and art school leaders are navigating a field influenced by a range of stakeholders. Each of these stakeholders represents opportunities and challenges when seeking to develop a more socially sustainable music and art school sector. This resonates with arguments presented by scholars such as Björk et al. (2018) and Di Lorenzo Tillborg and Schmidt (2024), who point out how policy practices within the music and art schools must be seen as enacted by multiple actors and connected to both local and national policies and contexts.

Central stakeholders include local and national policymakers and administrative authorities. The music and art school leaders talk about expectations from their local municipalities, which are the main funders of the institutions, to respond to social issues and contribute in the delivering of welfare services to the local community. By focusing on how the music and art schools can contribute to such broader social and educational purposes, local policymakers are impelling them to develop socially sustainable practices that benefit diverse groups of children and young people. However, national policies regulating the music and art schools can be seen to work against this transformation. The law-stated purpose for music and art schools and how they are financially supported by the state do not encourage the schools to explore more socially sustainable approaches to teaching and learning. The schools are therefore navigating conflicting policies at local and national levels, where change is legitimized with reference to a new reality within local settings; however, the national framework for the schools has not been updated to fit this new reality and is thus not found by the music and art school leaders to support the development of a more socially sustainable institution.

Another group of important stakeholders is the teachers. Music and art school teachers are essential when seeking to develop more socially sustainable practices; yet, the question is whether they are willing and capable to respond to issues connected to social sustainability. The interviewed leaders describe how some teachers happily engage in this work and explore alternative ways of teaching and facilitating music and art activities, while others are more reluctant to change how they work. One of the leaders identifies the teachers' professional identities as being based on an master–apprenticeship model, which needs to be expanded for more socially sustainable institutional practice to develop. The music and art schools are thus in need of new professional ideals and models for what it means to be a music and art school teacher. In this regard, Ringsager et al. (2023) suggest that music and art schools look to the field of community music in which the teacher is replaced by a facilitator, which can be understood as an alternative professional identity. Another possible expansion of the teachers' professional identities is formulated by Laes et al. (2021), suggesting that music and art school teachers identify with the position of *civic professionals* "who strive towards reconnecting high-quality music school practices with the support and strengthening of the democratisation of society" (Laes et al. 2021, 16).

Another question concerns whether the teachers have the skills and knowledge necessary for developing more socially sustainable practices. The leaders talk about how teachers need to be able to emphasize the social aspects of participation, respond to the needs of different target groups, engage children and young people in the creation of art, work in interprofessional teams, and navigate and work across different institutional contexts. This question directs attention toward another stakeholder, namely the higher arts educational institutions responsible for educating teachers for the music and art schools. To what degree does higher art education equip teachers with the necessary competencies and attitudes to

develop socially sustainable practices in music and art schools? While it is outside the scope of this study to answer this question, it is relevant to point to research in the field of music teacher education suggesting that for teachers to become "change agents" (Westerlund et al. 2020, 1) and develop deep understanding of what inclusive and socially just arts education might entail, they benefit from real-life experiences of diversity challenges in which their taken-for-granted beliefs and habitus are disrupted and challenged (Ballantyne & Mills 2015; Kallio & Westerlund 2020; Sæther 2020). Yet, higher arts education has been criticized for reproducing exclusive structures, marginalizing voices and artistic expressions that represent the social and cultural diversity of larger society (Hovde 2021). In this way, higher arts education can be said to constitute an important resource for developing necessary teacher competence; however, the problems connected to social sustainability may just as well be reproduced within this system.

Cross-institutional collaboration stands out in this study as the central dimension through which music and art schools will be able to respond to issues of social sustainability. Partnering with other organizations working with children and young people will help the music and art schools expand their reach and include new target groups in arts activities. Partnerships between institutions may also serve as sites for competence development courses in which professionals with different backgrounds and skill sets explore what socially sustainable arts activities might look like in the specific context they work in. Researchers like Brøske (2017) and Cedervall (2020) find cross-institutional collaboration to hold a potential for expansive learning for the teachers involved; however, the realization of such potential is dependent on the interprofessional relationship being based on equality and acknowledgment of difference as a productive and valuable starting point for developing a common practice. As one of the leaders pointed out, supporting a genuine collaboration where partners work together in a cooperative and inclusive manner can be difficult, which implies that more knowledge of and experience with cross-institutional collaboration is fundamental to the development of more socially sustainable music and art schools (see also Hahn et al. 2024).

The present study reports a range of opportunities and challenges for music and art schools seeking to respond to issues of social sustainability. For the leaders included in this study, key aims in this response include the development of flexible and accessible learning spaces based on experiences of community and belonging, paying greater attention to cross-institutional collaboration, and a transformation of the institutional purpose so that broader social, cultural, and educational dimensions of arts education are considered as the schools work for the general well-being of students and their communities. However, the findings also show how responding to issues of social sustainability is dependent on and influenced by a complex entanglement of policies, structures, professional identities, and collaborations that together constitute a range of opportunities and challenges for development. Admitting that this adds to the complexity of the issue at hand, it hopefully also encourages a necessary exploration of new alliances and approaches, what Westerlund et al. (2019, 20) term "social innovations", that might disrupt existing practices and show a path toward more socially sustainable music and art schools. ■

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Abstract

Nordic music and art schools are working to develop socially sustainable practices allowing for a more diverse group of children and young people to engage in arts educational activities. In 2021, the Danish Ministry of Culture launched a national development program with the aim of broadening access to music and arts activities. This article reports on the findings of the program. Through an analysis of interviews with 15 music and art school leaders and project administrators involved in the program, the article explores how music and art school leaders respond to issues connected to social sustainability. Key themes in this response include greater attention to cross-institutional collaboration, the development of flexible and accessible learning spaces based on experiences of community and belonging, and a transformation of the institutional purpose toward the general well-being of students and their communities. The study shows that when engaging in social sustainability work, music and art school leaders are navigating a field influenced by a range of stakeholders, each posing opportunities and challenges when moving toward more socially sustainable music and art schools. ■

Keywords: access; music and art schools; participation; social sustainability; well-being

Abstrakti

Sosiaalinen kestävyys tanskalaisissa musiikki- ja taidekouluissa: Kansallisen kehittämishankkeen tulokset

Pohjoismaiset musiikki- ja taidekoulut pyrkivät kehittämään sosiaalisesti kestäviä toimintatapoja, jotka mahdollistavat entistä monipuolisemman ryhmän lapsia ja nuoria osallistumaan taidekasvatustoimintaan. Tanskan kulttuuriministeriö käynnisti vuonna 2021 kansallisen kehittämisohjelman, jonka tavoitteena on laajentaa musiikki- ja taidetoiminnan saavutettavuutta. Tässä artikkelissa raportoidaan ohjelman tuloksista. Analysoimalla 15 ohjelmaan osallistuneen musiikki- ja taidekoulun johtajan ja projektivastaavan haastatteluja artikkelissa tarkastellaan, miten musiikki- ja taidekoulujen johtajat käsittelevät sosiaaliseen kestävyyteen liittyviä kysymyksiä. Keskeisiksi teemoiksi nousivat muun muassa suurempi huomio musiikki- ja taidekoulujen yhteistyöhön muiden toimijoiden kanssa, joustavien ja helppokäyttöisten oppimistilojen kehittäminen yhteisöllisyyden ja yhteenkuuluvuuden kokemusten pohjalta sekä oppilaitoksen tarkoituksen muuttaminen oppilaiden ja heidän yhteisöjensä yleiseen hyvinvointiin tähtääväksi. Tutkimus osoittaa, että sosiaalisesti kestävään kehitykseen sitoutuessaan musiikki- ja taidekoulujen johtajat liikkuvat kentällä, johon vaikuttavat useat eri sidosryhmät, joista jokainen tarjoaa mahdollisuuksia ja haasteita pyrittäessä kohti sosiaalisesti kestävämpiä musiikki- ja taidekouluja. ■

Asiasanat: saavutettavuus; musiikki- ja taidekoulut; osallisuus; sosiaalinen kestävyys; hyvinvointi

Ida Knutsson

The 2030 Agenda: The potential of Sweden's art and music schools to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

This article considers the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2015) and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in relation to music education and specifically small-group instrumental teaching. Sweden ranks high in democracy indices and was recently judged to be the fourth-most democratic country in the world according to Economist Intelligence (EIU 2022). Nonetheless, the Swedish society struggles with issues such as inequality and segregation. The 82 Swedish billionaires' wealth amounts to USD 2 418 billion, which equals 49 per cent of Sweden's GDP (Cervenka 2022), while 9.2 per cent of all children and their families in Sweden are financially vulnerable (Rädda Barnen 2021). The definition of poverty differs between countries. Those living in poverty in Sweden can usually pay their bills and afford food, but may not be capable of paying for children's leisure activities – their quality of life is negatively affected and there is a risk of social exclusion. Swedish music education researchers (for example, Di Lorenzo Tillborg 2021; Jeppsson 2020) have taken an interest in how leisure time music education might contribute to a more democratic society through broadened recruitment and increased availability and access.

This article will also discuss teachers' professional duty to enact social responsibility (Westerlund & Gaunt 2021) and democratic teaching (Biesta 2017). Teachers are to implement sustainable education, and thus their professionalism affects the degree to which in practice their teaching aligns with the SDGs. To make the democratic dimension explicit by linking Swedish art and music schools (*kulturskolor*) to the 2030 Agenda could strengthen music education's legitimacy and future relevance.

The issues at stake are universally agreed to be desirable, namely the 2030 Agenda's ambition to create a better world. Any tensions between normative and epistemic ideals must be dealt with responsibly. Renn (2021) describes how a goal-oriented research approach should work to systematically produce knowledge that is oriented towards a specific problem; the research provides background knowledge on which policymakers can base their decisions, and which thus helps society reach its predefined goals or address its problems. The researcher's task is to propose strategies and assess their effects and side effects while adopting an analytical and ideology-critical approach to the analysis to counter wishful thinking or researcher's bias (Renn 2021).

Background

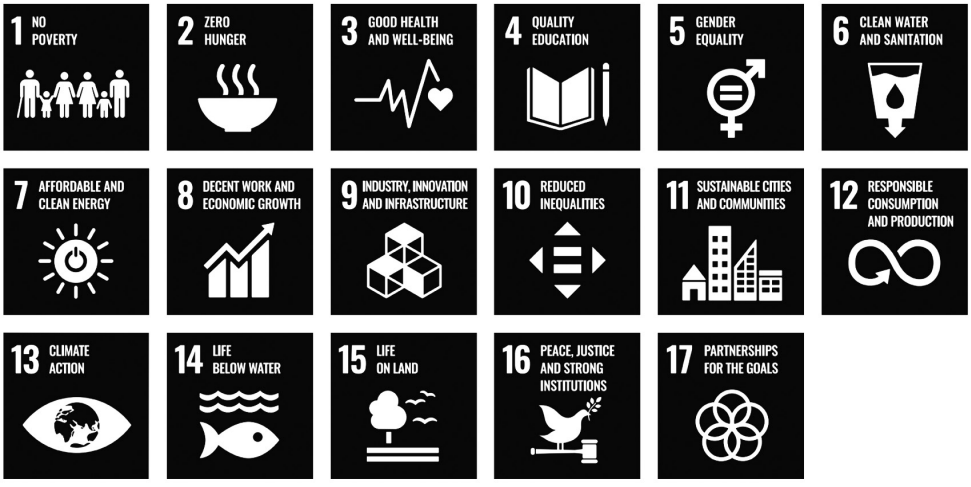
I begin with brief descriptions of, first, the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs and, second, the Swedish art and music school system. The social dimensions of music making are then outlined to explain the current focus on small-group instrumental teaching instead of general music education. Lastly, the literature on social justice in music education is discussed as the backdrop for interpretations of democracy in small-group instrumental teaching.

The 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs

> *On behalf of the people we serve, we have adopted a historic decision on a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative goals and targets.* (United Nations, 25 September 2015)

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs. The document has high ambitions for making a better world, a "rescue plan for people and planet" (UN 2015), albeit not legally binding. Even though one of the primary goals is to end poverty and hunger, the 2030 Agenda states that all goals and targets are of equal importance and have equal priority in implementation efforts. The 2030 Agenda is underpinned by democratic principles and emphasises that vulnerable groups, for example children and youth, must be empowered (UN 2015). This child-centeredness is also addressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989). Thus, the 2030 Agenda and the UNCRC sometimes overlap. Unlike the former Millennium Development Goals, which targeted only the global south, the 2030 Agenda is truly global and includes the global north which should also have high ambitions for working towards the SDGs (UN 2015). However, in 2023, the halfway mark to the target year of 2030, it was concluded that so far there have been both setbacks and reversals, and the UN has called for an acceleration to reach the ambitious goals.

Figure 1. The 17 SDGs at the core of the 2030 Agenda.



One of the contributing factors mentioned in the 2030 Agenda is sport, because it promotes tolerance, respect, and the empowerment of women and young people (UN 2015). Sport contributes to good health, education, and social inclusion; thus, it is beneficial on both the individual and community level. However, neither music nor culture (as an aesthetic form of expression) are mentioned in the context, even though the 2030 Agenda states that all humans should be able to enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives, and that children and youth must be provided with an environment where their rights and capabilities are nurtured. Like many others, however, I would argue that these aspects can and should be connected to music education.

There have been efforts to connect culture and the SDGs. For example, a report by the international non-profit Center for Music Ecosystems (2023) has connected music to all 17 SDGs, while the Swedish Arts Council (Kulturrådet 2022) has reported on how their work

connects to the 2030 Agenda. However, these reports are focussed on artistic activities and cultural experiences, not music education for children. The Swedish Arts Council does give financial contributions to support projects, for example when art and music schools collaborate with compulsory schools, but does not frame it as working towards the 17 SDGs.

Sweden's art and music schools

Sweden's art and music schools were established in the 1940s to give children the opportunity to learn a musical instrument or to sing, regardless of social or economic background (Kulturrådet 2022). In Sweden, municipalities (*kommuner*) are self-governed local authorities and 286 out of these 290 municipalities offer art and music tuition that is mainly funded from local authority budgets (Kulturrådet 2022). Pupils pay only a fraction of the actual tuition costs, which differs between local authorities: 14 per cent of art and music schools are free; 10 per cent have a fee of SEK 1,000–1,500 per term; and the most expensive local authority is Täby, where the tuition fee is SEK 1,700 per term (Myrstener 2022). Since tuition is publicly funded, there is political pressure to increase participation, reflecting the democratic ambition of all children's right to cultural expression and a meaningful leisure time stipulated by the UNCRC (1989), which in Sweden became law in 2020. The UNCRC specifies, for example, that the best interest of the child must be considered in all decisions about the child (Article 3). The child shall have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting the child (Article 12). The convention also stipulates that all children have the right to participate in cultural activities and meaningful, recreational leisure activities (Article 31), which is highly relevant for art and music schools.

In spite of the art and music schools' efforts to promote diversity, there is still a disproportionate under-representation of children from marginalised urban areas (Kulturrådet 2022). To address this inequality, in 2015 the Swedish government appointed an official commission of inquiry to draw up proposals for a national strategy for more inclusive art and music schools (Kulturdepartementet 2015). The inquiry's report (SOU 2016:69) proposed, among other suggestions for greater inclusiveness, a change from traditional one-to-one teaching to group teaching. Group teaching was also suggested as a way of shortening queues for places at art and music schools and of reducing fees (SOU 2016:69).

Social dimensions of music making

Music is social and communicative (MacDonald et al. 2012). It creates an immediate relationship between performer and listener and between performers (Burnard 2015; Trondalen 2023). Even though music has a social dimension, instrumental teaching in art and music schools has traditionally been offered as one-to-one lessons (SOU 2016:69). The increasing interest in group tuition as method – both in Sweden and globally – is often referred to by its advocates as a pedagogical tool; group tuition's social dimension takes advantage of the positive effects for learning (Hallam 2010). Children are also said to enjoy doing things together (SOU 2016:69).

Music making is said to lead participants to become more tolerant, accepting, and socially ethical (Hallam 2010). It is also argued that musical activities build reciprocity, thus strengthening peer acceptance (Ratliff 2021). Burnard (2015) finds that group music making can create a sense of inclusion, because everyone contributes to the collective musical result.

Social justice in music education

Music education researchers argue that because of music education's social dimension it has the potential to convey democratic values to pupils, fostering socially responsible future citizens (for example, Burnard 2015; Cooke 2015; Horsley & Woodford 2015; Jorgensen 2015; Karlsen 2014). Social justice, however, is a concept that has many definitions and is

often mentioned in discussions of class, ethnicity, and gender equality. The skewed population of after-school music programmes, where children from marginalised urban areas are under-represented, has in recent years been a focus not only for Swedish research on art and music schools, but also internationally. Obstacles to children's equal participation are primarily a lack of financial resources, a lack of knowledge about the activity, a feeling that the activity is not for them, and difficulties for pupils to travel to (distant) locations for lessons (Benedict et al. 2015; Westerlund et al. 2018).

One effort to reduce the skewed population attending art and music schools has been the implementation of the "visionary global movement" El Sistema in programmes which in Sweden are usually run by art and music schools (El Sistema n.d.). The basic principle of El Sistema is that all learning takes place in group settings and the goal is to develop musical and extra-musical skills and abilities in children from marginalised areas. Historically, music education has had a problematic relationship with social justice. Music has been viewed as intellectually and morally beneficial for, for example, marginalised children: music education would enrich their lives and lead to children becoming civilised citizens (McCarthy 2015). Research shows that El Sistema in Gothenburg presents a picture where music is linked to sound moral values; by offering music education to those previously not reached by it, their lives are expected to change in an obviously good way (Kuuse et al. 2016). As an example, Bergman et al. (2016) cite one teacher who states that if the children learn to bow in the same direction, they do not go out and fight afterwards. Music teaching is seen more as a method for social work and behavioural change. But, according to Bates (2016), offering the dominant culture as a way to defeat poverty serves first and foremost as a justification of dominance and thus can have the opposite effect, consolidating inequalities. Targeted efforts, such as El Sistema in Sweden, may thus have negative, unintended effects, strengthening socially unjust structures.

According to Borchert (2012) and Bull (2016), the El Sistema programme has distinctly neoliberal overtones, emphasising everyone's individual responsibility for success in life through discipline and hard work. Equally distributed resources should, in a neoliberal perspective, allow everyone to reach the same goal. With the eagerness to target vulnerable social groups through music education comes the risk of a rhetoric of salvation. The members of the community concerned are excluded from decision-making; supposedly, they do not understand what is in their best interests (Borchert 2012). Additionally, it may be downright unethical to define a demarcated area as deficient or marginalised (Creech et al. 2013).

The difficult question of how to enact social justice in music education is better addressed to music student teachers already in higher education. However, there is no clear, unanimous picture of what social justice is and how it should be implemented in the curriculum. In Salvador and Kelly-McHale's survey study (2017), 10–15 per cent of American music teacher educators rejected the need to address social justice in their courses, either because they did not consider it their job or they thought it was pointless and would only eat into the time for what they believed was more important content, while 29 per cent of the music teacher educators said they lacked knowledge to cover social justice in their music education courses.

Theoretical framework

Biesta's theoretical philosophy of education (2017) and how it affects teachers' expanding professionalism (Westerlund & Gaunt 2021) serves to direct the focus of the present study. Biesta (2017) argues for a teaching that is emancipatory and leads to democratic education. Additionally, the teachers who are to perform this democratic mission must expand their professionalism to include a democratic ambition (Westerlund & Gaunt 2021), and, in the

case of music education, not only transfer and convey musical and instrumental knowledge. This is not to say that teachers have no ambitions to provide a democratic education, but rather that teachers are responsible for acting as role models of democratic citizenship, which makes the implications of instrumental music teachers' expanding professionalism a key point to discuss, along with what social responsibility might bring to the practice.

Biesta (2017) argues that the primary task for the teacher is to help the pupil's personal development, and that education, as a project of formation in the broadest sense, should lead to the acceptance of others through constant dialogue. The ideal forms of collective living do not strive for consensus, but accept the presence of disagreement, and by extension he argues that education should evoke a desire to exist in the world in a 'grown-up' way, meaning a non-ego approach to the world that leaves room for other living beings, accepting that their desires may not be yours and they may not respond in the way you would like them to.

The discussion about equality in music education has concentrated on equal access (for example, Jääskeläinen & López-Íñiguez 2017). Equality in education is usually connected to the idea that everyone (individuals or groups of people) is given the same resources or opportunities, while equity recognises that there are different needs. Achieving equity requires targeted efforts to reach an equal outcome (MPH 2020), but even when resources are allocated according to the principles of equity, this may not mitigate the inequalities derived from historical power relations and social structures, leaving these structures unchallenged (Spruce 2017).

Method

The 2030 Agenda's policy document was subjected to a qualitative content analysis, a systematic and flexible method (Schreier 2014), which is designed to be analytical but not rigid (Krueger & Casey 2015). Selection criteria were stipulated beforehand, based on their applicability in instrumental group music education for children – thus excluding targets which could be relevant for singing (for example, making music with lyrics with the possibility of addressing all 17 SDGs), or artistic, community work. Table 1 shows the SDG targets deemed relevant.

Table 1. The 17 SDG targets with a direct bearing on education.

SDG	SDG Target	Description
SDG 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well- being for all at all ages.	3.4	By 2030, reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and promote mental health and well-being.
SDG 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.	4.1	By 2030, ensure all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
	4.2	By 2030, ensure all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
	4.5	By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations

	4.7	By 2030, ensure all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development
	4.a	Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all
SDG 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.	5.1	End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
	5.5	Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life
	5.c	Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels
SDG 10 Reduce inequalities within and among countries.	10.2	By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
SDG 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.	11.a	Support positive economic, social, and environmental links between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas by strengthening national and regional planning.

Sustainable small-group instrumental teaching

In this section, sustainability in small-group instrumental teaching will be discussed in terms of the 2030 Agenda's SDGs. Five SDGs were found to be especially relevant for small-group instrumental teaching.

SDG 3 Good health and well-being

Making music has many potential health effects (Burnard & Dragovic 2015; DeNora 2007; Lindblad et al. 2007; Skånland 2013; Theorell 2009). It can promote sound mental health and well-being (SDG Target 3.4) and reduce stress, both through the music making itself and through its social context. When it comes to promoting well-being, group teaching may be an even more useful tool than one-to-one teaching. Feeling a sense of belonging in a group means that the pupil feels accepted, respected, included, and supported by others (Goodenow & Grady 1993).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO n.d.), well-being is a positive state that encompasses quality of life and a sense of meaning and purpose. Children's perceived mental health and well-being are strongly connected to their feeling of inclusion or exclusion in society (UNICEF 2023). Providing resources in the form of music education could reduce the health risks that come from living with a lack of resources. However, music and music education may not be solely good. Music may lead to reduced health and well-being; it can induce or exacerbate negative emotions or behaviour and auditory impairment (Chen 2023). Children who struggle with learning an instrument or experience tension

and discomfort when playing are more likely to stop (Kaladjev 2000; McPherson 2005), which can lead to a feeling of failure and negatively impact the child's well-being. Muscular tension and discomfort obviously affect children's well-being negatively. In more advanced settings, competition and pressure can lead to stress and anxiety; high expectations and the demands of performance may have a detrimental effect on children's mental well-being.

SDG 4 Quality education

Under Agenda 2030, gender disparities in education must be eliminated by 2030 and all levels of education must be accessible for all. SDG Target 4.7 emphasises all learners' right to acquire adequate knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development. UNICEF (2023) states that education is one of the most important factors in breaking social exclusion among children. Music education should thus convey both musical skill and knowledge and democratic values for a sustainable lifestyle.

Music education has the potential to contribute to SDG 4. Playing a musical instrument could promote stamina, foster creativity, and transfer self-assurance to other areas of life, which could affect outcomes in school. Hallam (2010) finds that social benefits such as making friends in a music group may increase an individual's self-esteem, which could lead to intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. Group teaching, as opposed to individual teaching, could thus potentially enhance learning and strengthen motivation.

There is, however, a risk of overestimating the potential of music education to increase overall academic achievements. There may be other reasons for the correlation between children playing an instrument and their successful school performance: it could be the result of inherited characteristics, home environment, socioeconomic status, or certain personality traits (Hattie & Yates 2014; Klingberg 2011). Music education risks being regarded merely as method for supplementary teaching for primary school. The intrinsic value of music may disappear.

SDG 5 Gender equality

Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls can be discussed in an art and music schools' context in multiple ways. Gender equality in music education could affect and transform gender equality throughout society. Art and music schools are in a unique position to address issues such as the historical male dominance in composing and performing music.

Although Sweden is one of the most gender-equal countries in the world (World Economic Forum 2023), there are still improvements to be made in its art and music schools (Kulturrådet 2022). Gender inequality remains a problem in Western music education and not enough is being done to address the issue (Zimmerman et al. 2022). Doubleday (2008) argues that musical instruments are gendered because of tradition and social context – and not only in Western countries – and that stereotypes dictate which instruments girls and boys ought to play, with the flute often mentioned as a female instrument, while low brass is considered male (Conway 2000), affecting children's choices. Gender constructs in the music classroom, reproducing gender values and norms, hinder identities from being shaped and reshaped (Zimmerman et al. 2022).

SDG 10 Reduced inequalities

Like all countries, Sweden is struggling with segregation and the growing gaps between socioeconomic groups. SDG Target 10.2 states that social inclusion must be prioritised, irrespective of age, sex, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. When pupils are able to express themselves and wield influence, they sense the potential for changing their circumstances, that society cares for them, and that they are socially included.

Music can thus be a tool to amplify marginalised voices. It is also possible to engage pupils in projects that address social justice issues. Since any art and music school is an educational institution, it can reduce inequality by providing an accessible and democratic education. Targeted efforts to ensure equal access to art and music schools are fundamental.

Targeting groups that rarely attend extra-curricular music education could be unintentionally stigmatising, however, reinforcing their oppressed situation with the rhetoric of salvation. There is also a risk of oversimplification: there are multiple reasons for social exclusion and the main factor is unlikely to be a historical lack of music education.

SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities

Cultural activities can help build a stronger sense of community and engagement in the local geographical area. Targeted efforts to reach communities who rarely attend art and music schools activities could help achieve this. Equally, though, there is a risk that targeting certain communities makes them negatively distinctive groups. There is also a risk of a top–down approach, where the community's needs are disregarded. Additionally, targeting specific urban areas that are labelled as marginalised does not address inequalities within urban areas that are considered rich. It could also be questioned whether real integration occurs if these targeted efforts are limited to specifically demarcated geographical areas where children only meet and socialise with children with similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

The downsides

The SDG targets are strongly interrelated and interact reciprocally. There is the potential for achieving the SDGs through music education (Table 1), but an awareness of the unintended side effects is important (Table 2). The SDGs can be a double-edged sword.

Table 2. The ramifications of SDGs for small-group instrumental teaching.

SDG	Potential benefits	Potential risks or limitations
SDG 3 Good health and well-being	Mindfully playing an instrument could ***reduce stress***. Feeling a ***sense of belonging*** in a music group could enhance pupils' ***wellbeing***.	Risk of ***hearing impairment***, the more musicians the louder the volume. ***Physical tensions*** or ***difficulties*** learning an instrument may cause pupils to quit, which could harm their well-being due to ***feelings of failure*** if not successful.
SDG 4 Quality education	Engaging in after school music programmes could have a transfer effect to compulsory school subjects, leading to ***empowerment*** such as building ***resilience*** and ***confidence***.	Risk of an ***instrumental view*** of instrumental music education, losing its intrinsic value. Risk of ***overestimating*** music education's potential impact.
SDG 5 Gender equality	Boys and girls cooperate on ***equal terms*** when playing together.	Risk of reproducing musical instruments' inherently ***gendered connotations*** and the ***skewed gender participation*** ratio in art and music schools in general and impacting which subject boys and girls choose based on tradition.

SDG 10 Reduced inequalities	Amplify marginalised voices and ***promote inclusion***.	Risk of ***overestimating*** music education's potential impact and ***simplifying*** the multifactorial causes of marginalisation. Risk of a ***rhetoric of salvation*** and ***stigmatisation***.
SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities	Promote ***community engagement*** through targeted after school music programmes. Build a stronger sense of ***community***.	Risk of certain communities becoming ***negatively distinctive***. Risk of a ***top–down*** approach, where the community's needs are disregarded.

Discussion

Turning to the potential of small-group instrumental teaching, the democratic education philosophy according to Biesta (2017, 2021) and expanding professionalism according to Westerlund and Gaunt (2021) offer fresh ways of thinking about music teachers' social responsibility in terms of the 2030 Agenda. The question remains of how best to balance good intentions and potential effects and side effects.

The potential of small-group teaching

This article's focus on small-group instrumental teaching is based on the notion that this form of teaching has the potential to emphasise human rights and equality and to convey democratic values, so contributing to the global commitment of the 2030 Agenda. This democratic potential could be enhanced by teachers expanding their professionalism to include social responsibility and political ambitions to reduce inequality.

The hierarchical relationship between adult teachers and young pupils may be reduced when multiple pupils are taught simultaneously, creating a sense of safety for the children, which in many ways makes group teaching more democratic than individual teaching. To act democratically, teacher–pupil interaction should be grounded in mutual respect, and pupils should contribute to the shaping of music lessons. Musical democracy entails pupils listening to one another and adapting to the group. This is very much in line with Biesta's philosophy: education should ultimately result in global citizens who approach the world with respect and acceptance of every living being. Since every child has different learning abilities, teachers must balance the pace of progression to offer all pupils attainable, meaningful teaching. If children quit because they cannot keep up with the group, there will probably be negative consequences if they feel as if they have failed. One of the immanent risks of group teaching is of course the reduced possibility of individualising the teaching.

Children participating in an instrumental music group learn that everyone (regardless of gender or ethnicity) is equally important for a successful musical result. They learn to accept one another's different abilities while working towards a musical goal, creating a sense of belonging. Teachers who act democratically in their teaching convey democratic values; their understanding of social justice may influence didactic, pedagogical decisions (Spruce 2017).

Music teachers' social responsibility

A changing society and contemporary challenges mean that the idea of professionalism must expand to include an emphasis on professional ethics and code of conduct, and greater sensitivity to social and civic responsibility, accountability, and purpose (Cribb & Gewirtz

2015; Westerlund & Gaunt 2021). Much, if not all, of the responsibility of creating a democratic ethos in music education falls to teachers. However, the new challenge of taking on its socially responsible dimensions may be unsettling for teaching practice (Westerlund & Gaunt 2021), at least for professionals who are not inherently interested in social issues, but think of themselves as musicians or music teachers first. According to Sloboda (2015), most people who become music teachers do so for the love of music, not for a love for social justice, but since UNCRC (1989) is enshrined in the Swedish constitution, art and music schools teachers are required to take on this social and moral responsibility. That said, music educators can hardly be expected to pursue democratic teaching unless they have some sense of what democracy might mean to them, to their pupils, and to the society in which they operate. Teachers' ideas of social justice and democratic teaching can be developed through critical reflection. Central here is music teacher education, which can play a significant role in the transition to a more socially responsible instrumental music education.

Balancing good intentions and potential outcomes

Music and the arts, according to Bergman and Lindgren (2014), can never be politically neutral, because they are always anchored in a social or cultural context. Even classical music has normative connotations of what the 'fine arts' might be. Music cannot be assumed to be universally good; it is often used as a powerful political propaganda tool or medium (DeNora 2004; Gaunt et al. 2021) by anti-democratic forces.

What the literature identifies as the potential risks of El Sistema can spark critical reflection on the programmes or efforts to address social change through music education. Music education's potential for social change may be overestimated – expectations must be kept in check. There is also a risk of simply viewing music education programmes as beneficial for an entire social group, evaluating the overall picture such as the number of children reached by the targeted effort, but downplaying the impact on the individual child.

The democratic, inclusive potential of instrumental music education can be achieved only through equal access and equal output. The questions of the redistribution of resources, equality, and equity thus emerge. Today there are still no obstacles to attending an arts school; there are equal opportunities for all children in Sweden. However, due to the skewed recruitment and differing economic, cultural, and social conditions in society, there is a need for specifically targeted efforts and affordable – and equal – tuition fees. The cost discrepancies between local authorities are an issue that needs to be addressed, since this can impact democracy. However, it is uncertain that implementing the same tuition fee for all art and music schools will address the issue of skewed recruitment; there may be underlying social and cultural reasons for choosing not to partake in art and music schools activities, which cannot be addressed by only economic measures. Equality may not always be synonymous with equity.

Conclusion

This article sets out the links between small-group instrumental teaching and the 2030 Agenda's 17 SDGs. It is important to make the connections visible, because by definition the 2030 Agenda should permeate society, including art and music schools. Policies such as the 2030 Agenda stake out desirable courses of action. Critical reflection on the possible effects and side effects confirms the potential of small-group instrumental teaching to enhance quality of life and increase equality.

The identified risks cannot be easily eliminated with one simple solution, though. Local circumstances must be considered. The 2030 Agenda is not legally binding, which could result in vague, imprecise work towards meeting its goals. The UNCRC (1989), which is

enshrined in the Swedish constitution, emphasises children's right to express themselves. In art and music schools, this aim entails a focus on children's co-determination. The 2030 Agenda, however, is more holistic and comprehensive than the UNCRC in its democratic ambitions, covering all parts of human life. Therefore, it is important to actively work on several levels – research, policymaking, teacher education – to implement the 2030 Agenda in art and music schools. Highlighting the relevant aspects of the 2030 Agenda's 17 SDGs for small-group instrumental teaching calls for responsibility and accountability, but it remains essential if art and music schools are to reflect and defend democratic values and norms. ■

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Abstrakti

Agenda 2030: Ruotsin taide- ja musiikkikoulujen mahdollisuudet saavuttaa 17 kestävän kehityksen tavoitetta

Tässä artikkelissa tarkastellaan pienryhmässä annettavan instrumenttiopetuksen vaikutuksia musiikkikasvatukseen suhteessa kestävän kehityksen Agenda 2030:een ja erityisesti sen 17 kestävän kehityksen tavoitteeseen, joissa korostetaan ihmisoikeuksia, tasa-arvoa ja demokratiaa. Agenda 2030 ja pienryhmässä annettava instrumenttiopetus Ruotsin taide- ja musiikkikouluissa voivat mahdollisesti liittyä toisiinsa. Tutkimustuloksia voidaan soveltaa myös kansainvälisesti.

Kvalitatiivisen sisällönanalyysimenetelmän avulla valittiin SDG:ien olennaiset näkökohdat. Biestan (2017) demokraattisen opetuksen filosofia toimi linssinä, jonka kautta tarkasteltiin SDG:ien mahdollista yhteyttä soiton pienryhmäopetukseen. Westerlundin ja Gauntin (2021) esittämän laajentuvan ammatillisuuden teoreettisen käsitteen avulla käsiteltiin musiikinopettajien vastuuta sovelletusta demokratiasta käytännössään.

Keskeinen havainto on, että musiikkikasvatuksella on potentiaalia auttaa saavuttamaan kestävän kehityksen tavoitteita monin tavoin, ensisijaisesti lisäämällä terveyttä ja hyvinvointia (SDG 3), vähentämällä eriarvoisuutta (SDG 5, 10, 11) ja tarjoamalla helposti saatavilla olevaa, laadukasta koulutusta (SDG 4). On kuitenkin tärkeää olla tietoinen paitsi musiikkikasvatukseen liittyvistä mahdollisuuksista myös rajoituksista ja mahdollisista riskeistä. Kriittinen pohdinta on välttämätöntä. ■

Asiasanat: Agenda 2030, ammatillisuuden laajentaminen, ryhmäopetus, sosiaalinen vastuu, Ruotsin taide- ja musiikkikoulut

Abstract

This article considers the implications for music education of small-group instrumental teaching in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and specifically its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasise human rights, equality, and democracy. There is a potential connection between the 2030 Agenda and small-group instrumental teaching in Sweden's art and music schools. The research findings may also be applicable internationally.

Using a qualitative content analysis method, relevant aspects of the SDGs were selected. Biesta's philosophy (2017) of democratic teaching served as a lens through which to view the SDGs' potential connection to small-group instrumental teaching. The theoretical concept of expanding professionalism posited by Westerlund and Gaunt (2021) is used to address music teachers' responsibility for applied democracy in their practice.

The key finding is that music education has the potential to help achieve the SDGs in multiple ways, primarily by increasing health and well-being (SDG 3), reducing inequality (SDG 5, 10, 11), and providing accessible, high-quality education (SDG 4). However, it is important to be aware of not only the possibilities that come with music education, but also the limitations and potential risks. Critical reflection is essential. ■

Keywords: 2030 Agenda, expanding professionalism, group teaching, social responsibility, Swedish art and music schools

Linn Hentschel & Cecilia Ferm Almqvist

"We are simply better together" – Human, artistic, and pedagogical aspects of care in a collaborative musical theater project

Introduction

Project coordinator: *I think that the motivation is to open people's eyes, to show that we are better together. That we need each other, that we have the same dreams, the same longings, and the same fears. We should look beyond barriers; it's so easy to have preconceptions about each other.*

Songwriter and actor: *"Alone is strong", that's bullshit.*

The quotes above are from a national TV show in Sweden, *Go'kväll* in which two originators of the upcoming musical theater production *Level 7* at the big opera stage in Umeå are interviewed about their motivation and hopes regarding the premiere of the performance. The two individuals, the project coordinator and producer of the culture organization Kulturverket, and a songwriter/actor from Level 7, describe their excitement about the premiere of the project called *Sammankonst* (referred to by the English translation "Togetherart" below). The project involves members of Fritid för alla, an activity center for adults with "mainly intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorders" (https://www.umea.se/omsorgochhjalp/funktionsnedsattning/fritidsaktivitet-erochmotesplatser/fritidforalla, our translation),[1] and students from Musikalakademien, a musical theater artist program at an institution for adult education (*folkhögskola*/folk high school).[2] The two organizations have previously collaborated with Kulturverket. The interview cited above occurred during a three-year project conducted by Kulturverket, a municipal organization located in the northern part of Sweden. Kulturverket hires professional artists and educators to work on arts- and culture-based projects in collaboration with children and adults who do not work professionally as artists. Over the years, the organization has developed a working model known as the relay model: "Kids tell the pros what to do", where artistic ideas generated by one group of participants are passed on to and developed by another group or professionals (Ferm Thorgersen & Georgii-Hemming 2012). All participants are considered creators who collaborate, visualize, and generate ideas under the guidance of Kulturverket. The Togetherart project strives to create a professional performance where people meet and work collaboratively in a safe and trustful atmosphere. More concretely, the goals for the project are to see participants' knowledge as a resource in the project, enable democratic processes where the participants influence decisions – working against a mindset of "us and them" towards building a "we" – and striving towards producing a final professional performance.

The present study aims to present and contribute to understanding of how caring can promote sustainable social development, focusing on the caring practices in the musical theater project Togetherart led by Kulturverket. Interest in caring pedagogies in music education research has grown in recent years, as shown, for example, by a recently published international handbook: *The Oxford Handbook of Care in Music Education* (Hendricks, 2023). From our frame of reference, there are no studies investigating how care can enable sustainable social development in musical theater settings. Hence, we hope that our pres-

ent study regarding collaboration between persons with disabilities and music students in higher education can provide new insights into the subject. Our analysis was guided by the following questions: How is care constituted in the project? What does Kulturverket care about? How does Kulturverket perform care in its artistic-pedagogical activities? To explore this, we rely on definitions found in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (https://sdgs.un.org/goals) as well as Noddings' ethics of care (1984/2013, 2015). Firstly, we present the outlines of sustainable social development and how that relates to the project, and secondly, we present Noddings' ethics of care.

Sustainable social development

Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the UN's Agenda 2030 (United Nations 2015), Goal 4 (Quality education) and Goal 10 (Reduced inequalities) are relevant to Kulturverket's caring activities in Togetherart. Goal 4 aims "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", and relates to the study both in a wider and a narrower interpretation of (musical theater) education and learning opportunities. Goal 10 is to "reduce inequality within and among countries" and relates to Togetherart seen as an example of an effort towards promotion of social inclusion. Based on the goals and context of the project, we have identified three targets within Goal 4 and one target within Goal 10 as significantly relevant to the study of the Togetherart project (4.4, 4.5, 4.a, 10.2), as presented below.

Target 4.4 calls for increasing "relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship" within education. This target is pertinent to the present context as some of the participants pursue musical theater education. Although other participants attend a local institution or work as professionals in the music/musical theater field, all participants can be regarded as being involved in situations that offer learning opportunities. Earlier research shows that the process of musical theater production can function as a structure for mutual learning among all involved (Kolaas 2021), which may, for instance, result in increased self-confidence (Penna 2021; Warren Cook Stokes 2010), musical learning (Mars 2016; Upitis 2001), and lifelong learning (Ogden 2008). Musical theater projects invite teachers to use their entire register of action, as participants, facilitators, leaders, and artists (Törnqvist 2006), implying that competence where artistic and pedagogical skills are intertwined must be trained and continually developed, together with the insight that artists and teachers must work together (Howard 2011). Collaboration with local institutions and professional musical life is crucial for musical theater projects (Aris et al. 2019; Edberg 2019; Remer 2020).

As some of the participants in Togetherart present as persons with disabilities, there are several SDG targets relevant to our study of how the project enables sustainable social development. Target 4.5 underlines that education should be able to ensure "equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities (…)". Target 4.a states that education facilities should be "child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all". As Ineland and Sauer (2014) show, there can be pedagogical challenges in enabling prerequisites for sustainable social development in projects including adults with disabilities on equal grounds. Also, Laes and Westerlund (2018) have shown how workshops run by musicians with disabilities can encourage reflective discursive learning, and thereby disrupt, expand, and regenerate normative discourses that exclude social groups and instead transform inclusive thinking.

Target 10.2 states that to reduce inequalities, education should "empower and promote social inclusion irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or econom-

ic or other status". We find this target relevant to the study of Togetherart, as the project strives for democratic processes, participant influence, and work against a mindset of "us and them" towards building a "we". When it comes to musical theater activities involving persons with disabilities, positive therapeutic effects of participation in musical theater work have been presented by Mino-Roy et al. (2021), who cite physical, emotional, and cognitive, as well as spiritual effects. Nevertheless, in projects involving adults with disabilities, the risk of limiting the conditions for the participants' full participation is prevalent (Kalman et al. 2016). To prevent dehumanization it is crucial to secure the participants' full participation and their right to articulate experiences and contribute to knowledge production. Such conditions for participation can be seen as an example of how human rights are necessary to develop a sustainable social world (United Nations Development Programme 2023).

In arts education settings, the relational aspects of care can contribute to sustainable social development. Vist and Holdhus (2023) place respect and care for others at the core of arts education settings focusing on social inclusion. By focusing on participants' well-being as well as their need for bonding, inclusion, communication, meaning, and care, "outsiderness" and exclusion in arts education can be avoided. The authors express a wish for "relational arts education to (re)present democratic ways of socially responsible and sustainable participation and expression – through artistic and educational means" (Vist & Holdhus 2023, 21). By extending the view of caring and sustainable social development with an anthropocentric perspective, Smith (2023) stresses that music teachers must care *with* the world, where nature and culture are seen as impossible to separate. According to Smith, dominating standards and value hierarchies have weakened interdependent relations within both social and biological ecosystems over the world, suggesting the "caring with" approach as a way of restoring the relations. "Caring with" in the music education ecosystem could mean to practice "deep listening" in the ecosystem. For example, this could involve developing an understanding of the amount of space required for music creation and the willingness to share that space within the musical ecosystem, as when collaboratively creating music that incorporates all aspects of heritage, experience, and expression for everyone involved in the process.

Noddings' ethics of care

To analyze the results of the present study, we use the theory of care by Nel Noddings (1984/2013). Noddings' theory of care is based on directing yourself emotionally towards others. Caring, according to Noddings, is the interdependent dialogic relation between *the one-caring* and *the cared-for* (Noddings 1984/2013, 58). One-caring refers to taking responsibility for and attending to other's needs, thereby entering a *caring relation*. In pedagogical situations, we can define the teacher as the one-caring and the students as the cared-for. According to Noddings, one-caring is central to teaching (Noddings 2013; Silverman 2012). As Silverman (2012, 111) underlines, "When we engage in relational care as teachers, when we are at our caring best, we do not need to invest inordinate amounts of energy because our actions and reactions are motivated by empathy, compassion, and concern". Noddings (2015) argues that because caring-for requires a personal relationship, institutions or large organizations such as schools or social services cannot provide direct care. However, they can provide conditions that may enable caring relations.

Noddings emphasizes that the roles of being one-caring and cared-for are not separate and permanent; instead we all experience both roles in different situations throughout our life. The term "caring" can refer to both the action of caring-for someone and the possibility of caring-about something, a distinction underlined by Noddings. The act of caring-for differs from the act of caring-about, as caring-about involves no investigation into the response from the cared-for, whereas caring-for does. The caring relation is only completed

when the one-caring recognizes the cared-for, and to do so, all involved need to know each other (Silverman 2012). Otherwise, it will become an act of caring-about. Noddings uses donating money to a charity as an example, where the donor does not care where the money goes. Conversely, caring-for would involve an interest in finding out where and to whom the money went.

The motivation for caring is to enable "welfare, protection, or enhancement of the cared-for" (Noddings 2013, 22). A prerequisite for acting as one-caring is the ability to apprehend the reality of the other as a possibility for my own reality, which in turn is a move from one-self. To feel what s/he feels as closely as possible, "I feel also that I must act accordingly; that is I am impelled to act as though in my own behalf, but in behalf of the other" (Noddings 2013, 16). To act, in one-caring, demands commitment and an interest in the reality of the other that lasts over time. As Silverman (2012) underlines, it is possible to sustain the caring relationship even in more difficult times if the cared-for experiences care from the carer.

Acts of caring can vary in intensity depending on situation and context. As humans take on specific roles and functions, they develop the ability to care based on past experiences. Noddings (2013, 17) refers to this as "chains of caring". Noddings also identifies limitations of caring, which she explains through the concepts of engrossment and motivational displacement. Regardless of the formal setting, all caring involves engrossment and motivational displacement. Engrossment takes place when the caregiver becomes fully focused on the person being cared for, allowing for reciprocity. Motivational displacement refers to the shift between caring for oneself and caring for the other person. Conflicts can arise in one-caring scenarios, such as when engrossment is divided between multiple people or when the caregiver's perception of what is best for the cared-for differs from the carer's own desires. These conflicts can cause guilt and require a significant amount of courage from the caregiver. As such, conflicts are connected to risk, which in turn demands courage – one-caring is demanding.

The relation between the one-caring and the cared-for can be defined as dialogic. In situations where the cared-for experiences the one-caring acts as a positive addition to themself, it signifies genuine caring (Noddings 2013). In turn, oftentimes the one-carer experiences a similar addition, strengthening the dialogical flow within the caring relationship. Although it may be difficult to articulate, the pursuit to achieving this addition is central to caring within social institutions. Noddings (2013, 19) emphasizes the importance of deepening relationships to achieve these types of situations, as "The attitude characteristic of caring comes through in acquaintance". The attitude of the one-caring is of utmost importance to the cared-for, as it demonstrates the one-carer's interest in the cared-for.

Noddings (2013) proposes the concept of *aesthetical caring*, which refers to caring about non-personal content and form such as artistry, artistic quality, and pedagogical philosophy. She emphasizes that caring shifts from *ethics* to *aesthetics*, which can limit the ethics of caring if aesthetics becomes the primary concern. Noddings also highlights the similarities between "one-caring" and caring for aesthetics. In both cases, the caregiver can become deeply engaged. Additionally, Noddings (2013, 155) suggests that intuition plays a crucial role in responding to art, as a "cast of mind". Response expressed by either a human being, or an artistic work, contributes to understanding in one-caring. According to Noddings (2013, 158), "the quest for understanding establishes a direction in the intuitive mode, and this direction is both sure-and-clear and continually subject to minor changes". Therefore, flexibility and attention are necessary in one-caring, related to cared-for objects or arts, to be able to stay on track.

Noddings defines education as *moral education.* Such an education strives to "meet all those involved morally, and it refers to an education that will enhance the ethical ideal of

those being educated so that they will continue to meet others morally" (Noddings 2013, 171). Hence, educators must think effectively about what they should do in response to the other, without falling into self-interest or unfeeling rationalization. The teacher, or the educator, is not a role, Noddings states. Instead, teachers enter specific caring relations that include responsibilities of one-caring.

Within the field of music education there are several researchers who have interpreted and used Noddings' ethics of care, aiming to understand and develop various aspects of situations in music education. Marissa Silverman uses Noddings' theory of care in exploring how music teachers and students can establish and maintain caring relations in the music classroom. Collaborative work between teachers and students that fosters caring relations can provide opportunities for "transformative musical-affective experiences, positive interpersonal relationships, and democratic agency" (Silverman 2012, 112). Furthermore, Silverman notes that caring relationships can create safe and trusting environments where the educational and personal needs of all participants are recognized and valued. Both Jorgensen (2023) and Silverman (2023) underline the need for "caring *about* caring *for* music education" (Silverman 2023, 31) per se, and how such an approach can contribute to a better world. Music educators must take care of music, themselves, and those they lead to heal societal wounds, according to Jorgensen (2023). Jorgensen claims, "By embodying a search for truth in all our musicking, encouraging our students to express themselves musically and providing them with the skills to do so, their hearts and minds may be enriched in ways that ripple out into their families and communities" (Jorgensen 2023, 27). In the same spirit, Silverman explores intersubjective relational teaching and learning music through Noddings' caring theoretical perspective, which offers possibilities of "teach[ing] music musically, effectively, and meaningfully" (Silverman 2023, 37). Silverman concludes that music teachers who facilitate relationships based on Noddings' ethics of care – through music making and exchange of experiences in collaborative classrooms – create opportunities for life-changing experiences, and for individual, common, and equal agencies.

Method

To come close to the lived worlds of the participants, we conducted participant observation (Fangen 2005) of rehearsals and performances, and conducted interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Field notes from observations (written by Hentschel), SMS conversations (between one of the project leaders and the researchers) and transcribed interviews created research material for analysis which generated the results presented in this article.

The participants in the Togetherart project are around 60 members of the Fritid för alla center (FFA), 16 students from Musikalakademien (MA), leaders from both institutions, and four artist-educators from Kulturverket (KV). The latter are one composer/arranger and music teacher acting as one of two project leaders, a music/Swedish teacher with extensive art and craft experience acting as the other project leader, one poet, and one filmmaker. On Togetherart, the participants are also collaborating with professionals from the field of culture such as sound engineers and musicians at the opera. During the processes of creating the musical production Level 7, all participants from MA, FFA and KV had access to an online drive where they could anonymously contribute ideas for the manuscript and the music. These contributions are not analyzed in this article.

Analysis of observations and field notes as well as individual and group interviews formed a basis for understanding Kulturverket's caring practices in the musical theater project Togetherart. Two observations were conducted at Norrlandsoperan (the opera house in Umeå) of one rehearsal (two hours) and one performance (two hours) in which all the above-mentioned participants took part. During the rehearsal, one researcher also chatted

informally with participants from MA, FFA and KV. During the observation of the performance, one group interview was performed (nine FFA visitors). In April, two one-to-one interviews were conducted (one MA leader, one FFA leader) as well as two group interviews with MA students (eight students/group). In late May, one group interview with the four KV leaders was conducted. All interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes and focused on experiences of participation in the projects.

The transcribed materials, describing our access to the participants' lived experiences of care, were analyzed in a phenomenological hermeneutical manner in four phases (Lindseth & Norberg 2004; van Manen 2016). In the first phase, the naïve reading, the transcribed material was analyzed by the two researchers together, focusing on Kulturverket's caring practices. van Manen's five intertwined modes of life-world experience, or "existentials" – corporeality (lived body), relationality (lived relations), spatiality (lived space), temporality (lived time), and materiality (lived things and technology) – were used as a way of directing our focus onto possible modes of lived experience where the phenomenon could present itself. We were then able to cut parts of the material that did not appear to be related to the phenomenon, which resulted in text excerpts representing various aspects of the phenomenon.

In the second phase, the thematic structural analysis, we sought to identify and formulate themes. "A theme is a thread of meaning that penetrates text parts, either all or just a few" (Lindseth & Norberg 2004, 149). The objective was to convey essential definitions of lived experience of how care was constituted in the project, what Kulturverket cares about, and how Kulturverket performs care in its artistic-pedagogical activities. The emerging themes were reflected upon in relation to the naïve understanding until the themes were validated through the structural analysis.

During the third phase, the comprehensive understanding, the two researchers collaboratively read the thematic material thoroughly, summarized the themes, and related them to the aim of the study and the research questions. Thereafter the themes were related to Noddings' theory of care (2013), aiming to bring out the essence of the phenomenon in an accessible way and help readers understand the social context of the project.

The fourth phase was mainly conducted by one of the researchers who created a narrative formulated chronologically in everyday language, as close as possible to the lived experience of Kulturverket's caring practices in the project (van Manen 2016). The period chosen for this chronological narrative is the last months of the project, when all participants met and started rehearsing and performing together after spending two and a half years collaborating only online due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the participants share thoughts about the whole three-year project in interviews, making it possible to treat their described experiences as reflections on the whole project and not just the last months. These reflections are interwoven in the chronological narrative.

Principles of ethics were taken into consideration according to guidelines for research that involves humans (Swedish Research Council 2017). All participants involved in the research project were informed according to the regulations of informed consent, received information on how to withdraw from the project, and consented to participating in the study by completing a written consent form. The ethical considerations and the methods used to produce the empirical material together with the participants from FFA were explained to the participants in the same way as to all other participants, with no specific adaptations in relation to accessibility. This was motivated by a request from their leaders. However, if anything seemed unclear during the research process, the participants were able to ask us researchers, their leaders or Kulturverket for clarification. The data produced within the study were anonymized and stored in a secure location.

Narrative discoveries

The result is firstly presented as a narrative told through one of the researchers' voices, by adaptation of interviews, observations, field notes and SMS conversations. The narrative focuses mainly on the weeks before, during and after the premiere of the final product of Togetherart: the professional musical production Level 7. Afterwards, the aspects of the phenomenon appearing in the narrative are related to Noddings' theory of care. In the discussion, the care aspects are related to sustainable social development.

Tuesday

On a cold Tuesday evening in March, I visited the local opera house to observe the project on site. In the room named the "Black box", I found around 20 people engaged in varied tasks seemingly related to the musical theater production, including sound and lighting engineers, the director, conductor, and others. One of the artist-educators from Kulturverket who was also in charge of the special effects told me that one of the MA participants had contracted COVID and had been replaced by an understudy. Before Act 1, the MA leader explained that the project would depend on every single one of the MA students who were participating on stage, since the production was built around everybody playing a separate role and formal understudies were missing. The artist-pedagogue from Kulturverket seemed worried that even more of the MA participants would fall sick during the week. The director announced through the speakers that the rehearsal would soon begin and go from start to finish. "Today we will take care of each other, we will take care of the props and we will take care of the understudy." The understudy had been given a folder with lines, choreography, and lead sheets to use during the performance. The musical was to be performed in two acts, and both MA participants and FFA participants were involved in the performance. In the first act, the FFA participants participated through filmed sequences, while in the second act, they joined the MA participants on stage. We were informed by Kulturverket that they used filmed sequences with the FFA participants because they had previously found in a project called *Det tillåtande rummet* ("The allowing room") that this format allowed for participation based on the varied wishes and needs of the participants.

When observing the rehearsal, I realized that the goals of the Togetherart project – promoting human engagement in creative meetings and encouraging a change of perspective to understand the other – also came across as the main message of Level 7. In the final scene, all participants from MA and FFA joined hands on stage, singing. They were grouped in "themes", with two FFA participants joining one MA participant in characteristic clothes and using specific gestures. I observed how one MA participant playing the part of a hard rock character helped one of the FFA participants to raise his hand up to the ceiling, performing their signature hard rock move together. On my walk home, I felt touched and excited about joining them the coming Thursday at their last rehearsal before the premiere.

Thursday

On Thursday morning, I received a message from one of the artist-educators at Kulturverket:

> *Hi! Yesterday was a tough day, four of the MA participants tested positive for COVID and today we have a meeting with the opera house about how we should proceed… Yesterday the director worked on adapting the production as a concert, but I'm not sure if it will work due to the quality aspects. And who will be sick tomorrow…? It is all so sad! I will come back to you after the meeting.*

After the meeting, one of the project leaders told me that the project leaders and the director of the play had decided to push the premiere one week forward to use the time until then to rehearse (if possible), and that Level 7 should be performed as planned (as a musical theater production). The remaining MA students would fill in for the five participants sick with COVID by playing more parts during the rehearsals. In the evening rehearsal, personal friends and visitors to FFA and some local politicians had been invited to watch the performance as a test audience. I decided to conduct a group interview with participants from FFA before their preparations for the rehearsal of act 2. When I arrived at the opera house, I placed myself at a table in the staff canteen for the group interview with the FFA participants. Those that took part in the interview explained that they had been involved in the project in several ways. Some had contributed ideas to the manuscript, lyrics, and music of the musical theater production during weekly meetings, developing existing ideas that had come from the MA participants as well as bringing in new ideas. Some of them had worked in closer collaboration with the Kulturverket artist-educators. All the participants in the group interview acted in the filmed sequences and performed on stage. In addition, several FFA participants described experiences of participation in the project as "coming out of your comfort zone" and as quite challenging. The FFA participants thought that their collaboration with Kulturverket was central to their participation in the project, describing how the artist-educators always ask them first if they *want* to participate and giving them positive encouragement and reassurance. Some of the FFA participants explained that Kulturverket had "faith" in them:

A: *They often believe in us more than we do, from the start.*
B: *Exactly! For some strange reason… (laughs) They really do!*
A: *And it's such a kick when you realize afterwards that, wow, they were right. I got this.*
B: *Maybe, maybe, maybe, I should start believing in myself in the same way that they do? Could I do that?*
A: *…to realize that you can do more than you think.*
B: *Exactly.*

As the FFA participants left the group interview and got ready for their entrance in Act 2, I found myself a seat in the crowded audience. The performance ran smoothly from start to finish.

Friday

On Friday my research colleague messaged me: "It's off! Seven of the cast are sick!" Again, COVID created an unforeseen change in the project. It was decided that the cast would take COVID tests the following Monday morning, and based on the results of the tests actions would follow.

The following week

The weekend passed and on Monday morning we received information that although some of the participants were sick, the remaining cast would become additional understudies during the coming performances. On Tuesday, MA and FFA performed Level 7 for a school with specialist music classes, and the premiere finally took place on Wednesday. The show closed on Thursday evening with all members of MA and FFA on stage performing as their original characters.

Talks in April

During the following month, I conducted interviews with MA students while they were taking their final classes before graduation. During the interviews, it became evident that

despite initial uncertainty about the methods, goals, and expected artistic quality of Togetherart, several students were satisfied with the outcomes, particularly the interactions between project participants. The students described their initial uncertainty as a "collision" between Kulturverket's approach and their past experiences. Typically, musical theater artists would join the process late, after the characters, script, score, and choreography had already been established by someone else. Moreover, the students had not previously collaborated with others on arts projects guided by the relay model, or with persons with disabilities. Kulturverket's more open, creative, and collaborative approach was initially challenging for the students. However, despite the COVID-19 pandemic making physical meetings between MA and FFA impossible until the very end, the MA students spoke warmly about the project. The students appreciated meeting others in person as the most significant outcome of Togetherart.

A: *Even though the project went on for three whole years, the last half year was the fun and beautiful time for me. To experience how a person who normally doesn't open up easily, but for every stage performance, every meeting, you see how that person dares to talk. Dares to become more. And then you know how important this project* really *is.*

B: *I agree, and I think it extends outside of the stage as well. Like, if you have become friends on Facebook or Instagram, and see how open they are in writing about how important and nice it was… that warms my heart, because you can see that, oh, this was important to me, and it was important to you too! We did this together.*

The aspect of togetherness also relates to another outcome of Togetherart, namely the feeling of being part of something unique, a collaborative narrative based on the participants as a joint group – a "we". As one MA student expressed it: "Together we created something that we wouldn't have been able to create if it had been only us or only them". I also interviewed the teacher at Musikalakademien over the phone during April, and she confirmed experiencing the MA students' frustrations and fears as a collision between Kulturverket's methods and the students' previous expectations. The MA teacher described, like the students, the meetings between the participants in the project as the main outcome. She emphasized that the meetings had enabled all the participants to see each other as both humans and professional colleagues, and that their longing and love for the stage united them in the project.

In April, I visited one of the leaders of the Fritid för alla center at work, in a room which she shared with the other staff member of FFA. The room was wallpapered top to bottom with posters from previous projects between FFA and Kulturverket. She told me that her work assignments include enabling visitors to decide on, plan, and participate in activities at FFA independently, instead of FFA offering a "set menu" of activities. Kulturverket's projects have always been a good fit, according to her, in the sense that their working methods allow for participant contributions and decisions within creative processes. The FFA leader had been involved with almost all Kulturverket's and FFA's earlier collaborative projects, and described Togetherart as the first project where she and her colleague could take a step back because of the participants from FFA.

In the past, me and my colleague have been quite involved in planning and preparing what everyone should do in the projects. But now, in the musical theater production, what did we actually do? (laughs) Of course we participated, but it ran itself in a way. They (FFA) have such a good connection with Kulturverket now. They have their own attachments now, their own contacts. We weren't needed in the same way as before.

The FFA leader explained the FFA participants' increased responsibility as related to a sense of being accustomed to or feeling "safe" with Kulturverket and their methods, after collaborating for several years before. Kulturverket and the visitors at FFA have created longstanding relations, she said, based on a view of the visitors as capable individual human beings, not as a homogeneous group within a similar diagnostical spectrum.

Another outcome mentioned by the FFA leader related to the reoccurrence of the projects between FFA and Kulturverket. She told me that several participants who have been involved in the earlier projects seem more "daring" – for instance going from not daring to go up on stage at all to joining in on stage for all performances.

> *There is one participant from FFA in Togetherart who needed two personal assistants just to be able to visit FFA for five minutes before he left in anxiety, but who now, several years later together with Kulturverket, performs on stage without assistants. Of course, this is a result of other factors in his life as well, but it has a lot to do with him having the possibility to compose music about his feelings, to come out in different way than before.*

Like the teacher and students at MA, the FFA leader described how Togetherart and Kulturverket enabled the participants to meet and develop both human and professional relationships. She pointed out that most visitors at FFA rarely meet other people than the ones who are, like themselves, defined as persons with disabilities. They often live together in group housings with former special school classmates, share the same assistants and participate in the same activities. The participants' experience of "meeting over borders" was, in the FFA leader's opinion, the most important outcome of the project. She also stressed that the visitors at FFA had become more daring in terms of taking part in activities and social gatherings outside their "circle" because of their experiences in the projects with Kulturverket.

> *It is about every human's equal value. It can give you confidence in that, I dare to go outside among other people. And I see this with our visitors, despite their age, that lately they can go out to eat at a restaurant and sing karaoke at night, and there's nothing weird about it. Looking back, I'm not sure they would have been able to do that seven years ago.*

Further, the FFA leader emphasized that she shares Kulturverket's view that even though FFA participants feel that they cannot do something they should try it, because once they succeed, "your confidence shoots through the roof". This can be related back to how FFA participants describe Kulturverket's faith in them. As we fast forward through April and May and arrive in June, we present our last interview with Kulturverket.

A final talk with Kulturverket

In June, we conducted the last interview with the artist-educators from Kulturverket. They told us that despite of all the adaptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, they were very satisfied with Togetherart, especially with reaching their goal of becoming a "we" rather than an "us and them" by focusing on the participants meeting and getting to know each other. Kulturverket also affirmed that the process of going from two separate groups of participants (MA and FFA) to a "we" is visible when comparing how the MA students initially told KV that they would "take care of the participants from FFA", although this had changed in the final stages of the project.

If you compare it with how it felt at the end when we played at the opera, it was more focused on relations between individuals, so something had absolutely changed. I think they saw each other in a totally different way.

The success of the Togetherart project seems dependent on the participants' relational process, as described above. The collaborative process of creating and performing a professional musical theater production would have failed if the participants had not taken each other's perspectives and developed a collective "we". In fact, the project relied on acknowledging the participants both as individual human beings and as part of a collective. One of the KV leaders mentioned the moment when participants moved from "us and them" to a "we" as a crucial insight. It became clear that all participants were equally important, like "building blocks" in a construction. The COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions were challenging for Kulturverket, as MA and FFA were unable to meet until the end of the project. Nevertheless, they managed to keep the project going, which they attribute to their joint ability to adapt to changing conditions. They were not afraid of change or situations that did not go as planned, which is a part of the relay model where the creative process is not decided beforehand.

The KV leaders involved in the Togetherart project had to balance ethics and quality while collaboratively creating the characters, script, score, and choreography. They had to make decisions on which contributions to keep and which to discard, while considering the given context such as timeline, access to professional staff and stages, and so on. Kulturverket managed this balancing act thanks to their own professional skills and past experience of running similar projects. Their choices were influenced by using the relay model during the creative process, handling the process and final products within professional settings, and acknowledging varying skill levels within the group. Although all participants were seen as equal contributors, the KV leaders and other professional staff were defined as being on a higher professional level. All involved in the project were treated with the same respect, and all contributions to the manuscript, music, and characters were treated as equally relevant. Moreover, a setting in the online drive enabled blind unbiased selection as MA and FFA posted all their contributions during the creative stages. Lastly, Kulturverket described how they were somewhat surprised about the MA students' reactions to the first phase of the project, namely how they experienced the task of working creatively as challenging. Kulturverket concluded by saying that they hoped this experience gave MA a sense of another way of working, and maybe some inspiration for their future as prospective musical artists.

Aspects of caring

The narrative presents examples of Kulturverket's philosophical grounds for caring, as well as examples of how this is visible in their caring practices in the Togetherart project. Overall, caring seems to influence the whole project. There seems to be a common understanding that all involved are taking risks, being brave, and that such fragility must be treated with respect to contribute to the welfare, protection, and enhancement of all involved, resonating with Noddings' (2013) motivation of caring. In the following we reflect upon the examples described above, taking the perspective of the artist-educators Kulturverket as one-carers, the ones who balance the relation to themselves and the cared-for, and the balance between ethics and aesthetics.

One-caring

Kulturverket is, on an organizational level, only able to provide the conditions that enable caring relations and not care itself (see Noddings 2015). As such, we only refer to one-caring

on a personal level, between the individuals that are employed as artist-educators in Togetherart and the other participants. As one-carers, Kulturverket's employees were challenged to apprehend the reality of the participants and move away from themselves. The above narrative presents how Kulturverket strives towards this in several ways, as visible in quotes from participants in the project as well as in the project title, the summarized meaning of the musical production, and in comments about taking care of each other and the stage settings. The results also show how Kulturverket engages in relations over time in the project, which is another prerequisite for one-caring, as Silverman (2023) also discovered in her exploration of intersubjective relational teaching and learning music through Noddings' theoretical perspective. Also, it becomes evident that flexibility in changed conditions (such as adapting to a pandemic event) was required to run a project like Togetherart.

The relation between one-carers and the cared-for

The analysis suggests that caring is key in several relations between Kulturverket, MA and FFA. As mentioned, it can be risky to care for someone, since engrossment and motivational displacement will always be present at some level in the caring relations (Noddings 2013). One example of caring and engrossment is Kulturverket's decision to let FFA participate in the production through mostly filmed sequences. On the one hand, this can be seen as a one-caring action, whereby Kulturverket tried to offer an "allowing room" for FFA to participate in. On the other hand, the example is connected to the risk of falling into engrossment (Noddings 2013) if the FFA participants had felt humiliated (the caring act did not reflect the wishes of the cared-for). This also ties in with how FFA participants describe how they experienced their participation as encouraged but never forced by Kulturverket. Another challenge for Kulturverket was to create relations between themselves and the cared-for that would be open for dialogues and equal contributions. The relational aspect is similar to what Jorgensen (2023) points out as important from a caring perspective, connecting to music teachers' responsibility to encourage and equip students with the abilities to express themselves musically and to enrich their hearts, lives, and communities. If we want to broaden perspectives on arts and life, we need to enable the cared-for to develop their own approaches, to be active in the caring relation.

The anonymous setting in the online drive was used to ensure equal contributions and to maintain Kulturverket's principle of treating all project participants with equal respect. In the collaborative creative processes during development of the musical theater production, Kulturverket encouraged all participants to become self-determined and independent in taking responsibility themselves in relation to individual prerequisites within all participants' lived realities. However, during the initial phase of the project, the MA students expressed uncertainty about the project's methods, goals, and artistic quality. The Kulturverket artist-educators were surprised by this reaction but hoped that the experience would inspire the MA students to work in a new and exciting way as musical artists. The artist-educators may have viewed this situation based on their experiences of successful outcomes of similar collaborative projects driven by the relay model. They allowed this uncertainty to run its course, knowing that the next phase would become clearer, which was not reassuring for the MA students. In this part of the project, even though Kulturverket's intentions built on past experiences of successful projects, caring for MA students become a sort of engrossment since the students wished for more certainty and felt that this was not being offered to them. The overall uncertainty caused by the constant adaptations of the project due to COVID-19 restrictions may have made it difficult for Kulturverket to manage the situation, which added to the students' concerns.

The relay model seemed to work as a tool for caring, enabling the cared-for to become active in the creative collaborative processes. Caring within the group of participants in

Togetherart was encouraged by Kulturverket and the leader from MA, both as a goal to maintain through the relay model and as a verbalized instruction during stage rehearsals. In these situations, it could be said that the cared-for became the one-carers for each other. This is also evident in the way the MA students seemed to have initially positioned themselves as one-carers to FFA.

The ethical-aesthetical balance

One challenge that Noddings (2013) underlines is balancing between ethics and aesthetics in caring approaches. She draws upon similarities between being possessed, totally engaged, in caring relations and being possessed in relation to the arts. The balance concerns the risk that aesthetics limits ethics. Silverman (2023) also emphasizes the need to teach music musically, effectively, and meaningfully through creating opportunities for life-changing experiences in collaborative creative music classrooms. The above narrative includes examples of how that risk is handled. The artistic quality is important to Kulturverket, which is also an aspect of caring, as they want the participants to perform something they are proud of while feeling involved as equals. For example, Kulturverket decided to ask a former student from MA to act as an understudy in the performance when COVID prevented the original actors from participating to make the artistic level acceptable. At the same time, they have created an atmosphere where it is possible for a new "skilled" person to join in without losing the sense of togetherness. We can also see how the MA students care about the artistic quality, for example in how the MA students initially worry about the artistic outcomes of the project. Another example is that the participants work hard with the agreed-upon choreography to underline the production's message, even if it is hard for all to perform the choreography perfectly. The atmosphere of caring has also spread to the MA participants who help the FFA participants to follow the choreography, which in turn implies that the student acting as the hard rock character from MA has either taken the perspective of the FFA participant in his group or taken a risk when reaching for the FFA participant's hand to join in the signature gesture of their group in the final act.

In sum, the way care has influenced the whole project could, in accordance with Smith's (2023) view of caring *with* the world where culture and nature are inseparable, be defined as a sustainable project. The Kulturverket employees provide, through their way of acting when planning and performing the project, an example of how to contribute to the participants' awareness of how to occupy a specific niche in the social (and biological) ecosystem to which they are interrelated.

Final words

Returning to UN's Sustainable Development Goals, we observe aspects in Togetherart relating to the targets of Goals 4 and 10 in how Kulturverket strives to promote social sustainable development by using caring practices in the project. By providing a safe and inclusive learning environment, Kulturverket has promoted social inclusion and empowered individuals, in line with Target 4.a and Target 10.2. This is exemplified in their use of filmed sequences to allow for diverse ways of participation in the stage production. By implementing the relay model and anonymous setting in the online drive, Kulturverket promoted equal access for all participants in the early stages of the project's creative learning process. This initiative aligns with Target 4.5 of the SDGs which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all. According to the results, Kulturverket's approach to Togetherart is centered around caring for the participants. Although the project was deemed successful, some parts of the process were not entirely positive. Fritid för alla and Musikala-

kademien both reported negative feelings such as uncertainty, self-doubt, and isolation. The participants also expressed concerns about the artistic quality at the beginning and end of the project. This raises the question: In a creative collaborative project like Togetherart, could Kulturverket's way of supporting the participants to move through their uncertainties, self-doubts, and isolation be interpreted as a caring act aimed at apprehending the reality of the other?

We see Togetherart as a valuable learning opportunity for everyone involved. In this regard, it aligns with the aim of Goal 4, which is to provide fair and inclusive access to quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Unlike traditional musical theater productions, the process of creating and performing a professional musical theater production through Togetherart involves not only professionals but also non-professionals. The statement raises concerns about the type of knowledge that is considered significant in the development of musical theater skills, and who is perceived to be capable of acquiring these skills leading to suitable employment opportunities, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship. This issue aligns with target 4.4. If we refer to Kulturverket's goals for Togetherart, they believe that all participants' knowledge should be seen as resources in the project. They organize democratic processes where the participants have an influence on decisions, and they work towards building a sense of unity instead of a divisive "us and them" mindset. By doing so, they have successfully produced a final professional performance. In relation to the goals for sustainable social development presented above, we argue that several of Kulturverket's caring acts promote sustainable social development. Although it was beyond the scope of our study, it would have been interesting to explore how Kulturverket, as an organization, facilitated the conditions for their employees to care for the project's participants and the aesthetic aspects of the project (Noddings 2015). However, we can conclude that a long timeline of three years and working with the relay model seemed to have contributed significantly to these conditions.

Turning back to Smith (2023) we conclude that Kulturverket's caring practices can be seen as a way of enabling the participants to work collaboratively through a "caring with" approach, and as mentioned, leading them to "deep listening" to the project's ecosystem. As in the words of Smith, these kinds of acts have the potential to restore social and biological ecosystems. Since it has resulted in several participants describing having expanded their knowledge and views of what a musical theater production can be, and their role in it, it is possible to say that Togetherart seems to have offered both verbal and artistic possibilities for articulating the participants' lived conditions and experiences (Kalman et al. 2016). These are, as mentioned, human rights necessary for developing a sustainable world for all (United Nations Development Programme 2023). ■

Notes

[1] Aware of the manyfold definitions of intellectual disability (Grace Malapela & Thupayagale-Tshweneagae 2020), we refer in our article to the definition that the activity center Fritid för alla uses to describe their visitors, as well as the use of the concept in the social development goals as stated in Agenda 2030. (https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/%20envision2030.html).

[2] The Swedish educational form folkhögskola translates as "folk high school" with vocational courses and programs open for everyone over 18 years of age. (https://utbildningsguiden.skolverket.se/languages/english-engelska/folkhogskola)

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Abstrakti

“Olemme yksinkertaisesti parempia yhdessä” – Välittämisen inhimilliset, taiteelliset ja pedagogiset näkökohdat yhteistoiminnallisessa musiikkiteatteriprojektissa

Tässä artikkelissa esitetään tutkimus siitä, miten välittäminen voi edistää kestävää sosiaalista kehitystä. Artikkelissa keskitytään Togetherart-musiikkiteatterihankkeen välittämiskäytäntöihin. Uumajassa, Ruotsissa sijaitsevan kulttuurijärjestön (Kulturverket) johtamassa hankkeessa on mukana pääasiassa kehitysvammaisille ja autismin kirjon aikuisille tarkoitetun toimintakeskuksen jäseniä sekä ruotsalaisen yliopiston musiikkiteatteritaiteilijaohjelman opiskelijoita. Harjoitusten ja esitysten osallistuva havainnointi, litteroidut haastattelut, kenttämuistiinpanot ja tekstiviestikeskustelut tuottivat analyysia varten aineistoa, josta analysoitiin tässä artikkelissa esitetyt tulokset. Analyysi perustui Noddingsin (1984/2013) “välittämisen etiikkaan”. Tulokset osoittavat, että Togetherartin voidaan katsoa edistävän kestävää sosiaalista kehitystä tukemalla välittäviä käytäntöjä suhteessa turvallisen ja osallistavan oppimisympäristön luomiseen, sosiaaliseen osallisuuteen ja voimaantuneisiin yksilöihin, kaikkien osallistujien tasavertaiseen osallistumiseen sekä oikeudenmukaiseen ja osallistavaan pääsyyn laadukkaaseen koulutukseen, mikä edistää elinikäisiä oppimismahdollisuuksia kaikille osapuolille. Tulokset ovat linjassa YK:n kestävän kehityksen tavoitteiden 4 ja 10 kanssa. Päätelmämme on, että Togetherart antoi osallistujille mahdollisuuden artikuloida eletyt olosuhteet ja kokemukset, mikä on välttämätöntä kestävän sosiaalisen maailman kehittämiseksi. ■

Asiasanat: välittämisen etiikka; kehitysvammaisuus; musiikkiteatterikasvatus; narratiivit; fenomenologia; sosiaalinen kestävä kehitys

Abstract

This article presents an investigation of how caring can promote sustainable social development, focusing on the caring practices in the musical theater project Togetherart. Led by a culture organization (Kulturverket) in Umeå, Sweden, the project involves members of an activity center for adults with mainly intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorders and students from a musical theater artist program at an institution for adult education (*folkhögskola*/folk high school). Participant observation of rehearsals and performances, transcribed interviews, field notes, and SMS conversations created material for analysis which generated the results presented in this article. The analysis was based on Noddings’ (1984/2013) “ethics of care”. The results show that Togetherart can be seen as promoting sustainable social development by using caring practices in relation to provide for a safe and inclusive learning environment, social inclusion and empowered individuals, equal access for all participants as well as fair and inclusive access to quality education, promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all involved. The results align with several targets in Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 10 of the United Nations. We conclude that Togetherart enabled the participants to articulate their lived conditions and experiences, a necessity for developing a sustainable social world. ■

Keywords: ethics of care; intellectual disability; musical theatre education; narrative; phenomenology; social sustainable development

Reports | Katsaukset

Renan Santiago

Sacred songs from/to nature: Afro-Brazilian music, decoloniality, and sustainability of life

Introduction

Decolonial criticism is understood as an epistemological, ontological, political, and identity approach that aims to identify and deconstruct the results of the colonial process in subjects from the Global South, i.e. countries of South America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia that were colonies in the colonial era (Grosfoguel 2023; Kallio 2020; Shifres & Rosabal-Colo 2017; Walsh 2012). Maldonado-Torres (2023) argues that the characteristics of colonization have generated a cultural and epistemological hierarchization through the imposition and overvaluation of the culture and knowledge of the Global North (countries from Western Europe and the United States) and also led to the construction of the general and mistaken perception that there is a superior race, a superior gender and a superior sexual orientation, namely, white race, male gender and heterosexual orientation. In other words, colonization generated racist, sexist, and discriminatory social thinking.

In previous work (Santiago 2021), I have suggested that the decade from 2010 to 2020 was characterized by an epistemological turn in music education research, considering that academic publications increasingly discussed the relation between music teaching and decolonial issues such as race (e.g., Batista 2019), gender (e.g., Hess 2019; Treacy 2019), sexuality (e.g., Oliveira & Farias 2020) and other related subjects. This change indicates that music education as an academic field (Bourdieu 1996) is gradually becoming more attentive to contemporary needs such as the fight against racism, male chauvinism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination that were strengthened by colonization and are also produced and reproduced in various music education practices (Santiago 2020). In short, there seems to be a growing understanding that music education is not something unrelated to cultural differences, but is influenced by them. Decolonial thinking can therefore offer a theoretical framework to help researchers, scholars and teachers in this field continue thinking about shaping a music education that takes identity issues into account (Santiago 2022; Shifres & Rosabal-Coto 2017).

However, while the topics mentioned above are now present in the music education literature, the field does not seem to consider cultural aspects that were also influenced by colonialism: environmental and ecological issues (Di Nascia 2017). Grosfoguel (2023) claims that capitalism also interferes with our perceptions of the environment and leads to *ecologicide*: a set of actions that may bring about the destruction of nature. In other words, colonial thinking is not only racist and discriminatory (Shifres & Rosabal-Coto 2017), but also ecologicidal. This kind of self-destructive thinking is the opposite of South American Afro-Indigenous perceptions of the environment that, first, reject the binarism human/nature, and second, propose a concept of the environment as something that must be preserved because it is sacred.

These last two points require further explanation. Modern/capitalist thinking usually divides humans and nature (Eagleton 2000), creating a hierarchy where humans are the dominators and therefore have the right to exploit nature. However, many traditional perceptions reject the binarism of human/nature and consider humans as a part of nature and not something separated from it (Tiriba 2010). Many Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous

religions believe that the elements of nature are gods or are something that came from them (Caputo 2015; Cardoso 2006). Hence, the seas, rivers, forest, swamps, and other biomes must be preserved and valued in order to respect the gods.

This paper aims to apply a decolonial framework to discuss how sacred Afro-Brazilian songs and musical instruments can be taught to support the ecological cause. For many traditional peoples from South America, there is an identity relation between humans and nature. For example, according to Candomblé beliefs, which will be the focus of the discussion, being a Candomblé follower necessitates maintaining contact with nature in a spiritual relationship. Understood from the perspective outlined above, the concept of a decolonial music education that ignores the effects of colonialism on nature/humans is not possible. As I will also argue, the field of music education has much to learn from South American Afro-Indigenous identities about how to teach music for the sustainability of life.

Sustainability of life

The concept of sustainability, while important, has been met with criticism in many parts of the world. Reflecting on the concept in a Brazilian context, Ailton Krenak (2019, 12), an indigenous leader and writer, formulates some important questions: "Natural resources for whom? Sustainable development for whom? What do we need to sustain?"

The discourse of sustainability is indeed often applied by those who destroy nature for the sake of profit. As an excuse for extracting natural resources from seas, rivers, forests and other biomes, they claim that it is perfectly reasonable to degrade nature in order to generate "progress" and "development" (Rufino et al. 2020). Krenak's questions are then answered from a capitalist perspective: "Natural resources for whom?" For the companies that pollute and destroy the environment. "Sustainable development for whom?" Not for the poor people, who do not receive the profits of the exploitation of the environment. "What do we need to sustain?" Only what can be transformed into money for the companies. The rest can be destroyed.

Many other Brazilian authors see the concept of sustainability as something negative. According to Rufino et al. (2020, 8),

> *[s]ustainable development can be understood as a strategy of reproducing the interests of the corporations . . . being, many times, a repetition of the colonial phenomenon, assisting the maintenance of its traumas and acting as a continuum. Thus, the proposals of education for sustainable development boost the construction of societies against nature.* (Author's translation).

Even though the argument above is valid, it only considers sustainability from a capitalist point of view. It is possible to consider the concept from a different perspective. The term "sustainability" implies that something must be sustained. But what? Krenak's questions can be answered differently: "Natural resources for whom?" For all, especially for the eco-ontological traditional peoples, like many Black and Indigenous South American groups. Those groups live in an identity dependency on the local ecosystem, because they need the natural elements to proceed with rituals that characterize their culture and identity. Furthermore, they often carry practical knowledge about how to coexist with the natural resources without devastating them (Rufino et al. 2020). Figure 1 shows a satellite image from the Indigenous Land *Sete de Setembro*, located in Brazilian Amazonia. While nature is well-preserved inside the Indigenous land, the devastation outside it is plainly visible.

Figure 1. Comparison of nature preservation inside and outside an Indigenous Land in 2024. Retrieved from: https://maps.app.goo.gl/2qrHKyWSRenhkxte6

As this example shows, Indigenous people may have better abilities and conditions for protecting nature than subjects who only see nature as something to exploit. While we must use natural resources because we need them to live, eco-ontological traditional peoples know how to benefit from natural resources without destroying the environment.

"Sustainable development for whom?" For all, especially for traditional peoples. The terms "development" and "progress" are often associated with infrastructure and digital technologies, but what kind of progress is it that leads humanity to self-destruction? Seen from this perspective, the traditional peoples can be considered much more developed than Western societies. For millennia, they have lived in coexistence with nature and their "less technological lifestyle" did not prevent the development and progress of their societies, because they managed to survive, create new things, and produce culture (including music).

"What do we need to sustain?" The life of nature, including humans. In Brazil, the Indigenous people called Guarani Mbya has an interesting saying in their native language, *Nanhamombai Ka'á Guy Nhandere kove râ*: "Preserving nature is preserving life". In effect, something must be protected, preserved, and sustained. There is nothing inherently wrong with the concept of sustainability, but it is necessary to clarify what it is that needs to be preserved. From a decolonial perspective, the answer is: life itself.

Sustainability of life can thus be understood as a decolonial concept that is the opposite of the capitalist concept of sustainability. In a literature review of the concept, Agenjo-Calderon (2023) argues that this theoretical approach was coined in a Spanish, Latin American, and Caribbean feminisms context, aiming to sustain the "good collective life" continually threatened by capitalist and colonial oppression:

> *From a political standpoint, the SL [sustainability of life] approach is committed to a structural change in the system of multiple domination, drawing new forms of co-existence based on the value of the common. It moves toward an Emancipatory Feminist Economy . . . understood as a political proposal that allows us to think about strategies to confront the logic of the dominant reproduction of life and the construction of feminist autonomies associated with the integral transformation of the world-system.* (Agenjo-Calderon 2023, 116).

According to Carrasco and Tello (2012, 3), leading authors within the sustainability of life approach, the discussion about nature preservation is central to preserving life and good living:

> *At the most basic level, nature always appears, as it could not be otherwise. Ultimately (or in the first instance), human life depends on the resources and environmental services which natural systems provide, and the continuity of this provision depends on its good or poor ecological condition. The relationship with other areas of this chain of sustenance is very basic: to exist or to do anything, we need to use natural energy and material resources, and the waste must be returned.* (Author's translation).

All in all, while capitalist sustainability seeks to maintain social inequalities, sustainability of life seeks equality. While capitalist sustainability seeks profit, sustainability of life seeks social justice. While capitalist sustainability seeks to benefit only the owners and shareholders of corporations, sustainability of life is sought for the benefit of the whole society, including the poor. While capitalist sustainability seeks destruction, sustainability of life seeks preservation. Finally, while capitalist sustainability is killing the environment, the core of the concept "sustainability of life" is to preserve the life of nature/humanity.

Even though the sustainability of life approach was developed in an ecofeminist context, the eco-ontological Black and Indigenous South American epistemologies may bring new insights to the discussion, especially because they elevate nature, considering it as alive, divine, sacred and a bearer of rights. These points will be further discussed in this text.

Summarizing this section, I argue that by supporting and representing a decolonial view of sustainability, music education can support the environmental cause. The article aims to propose a possibility for music education to teach and promote sustainability of life through songs and beats from traditional peoples whose religion considers nature as something sacred, raising cultural awareness about those peoples and about the importance of preserving nature.

Among different subjects that could be analyzed here, this text, which was written from a Brazilian context, will discuss *Candomblé* (a set of diasporic and syncretic religions still widespread in Brazil), and its practitioners. It can be said that Candomblé is an eco-ontological way of life (Rufino et al. 2020), that is, the basic beliefs of Candomblé are ecological in essence, so it is natural for Candomblé practitioners to preserve the environment. I will first set out a theoretical framework for decolonial thinking in music education. Then, I will provide a more substantial description and discussion of Candomblé belief, including some core characteristics of Candomblé music. Finally, in the concluding remarks, I will argue that "sacred songs from/to nature", not only from Brazil but from the whole world, can be used to promote a sustainability of life approach in music education.

Decolonial music education: A theoretical framework

Decoloniality theory argues that the colonial thinking brought by the colonizers in the colonial era is the reason for many kinds of social inequalities, prejudices, and discriminations (Bernadino-Costa et al. 2023; Shifres & Rosabal-Colo 2017; Walsh 2012). In order to better understand the urgent need for decolonial music education, it is necessary to go back to the 1500s when Brazil began to be colonized by Portugal. The colonizers brought with them their religion, Christianity, which was imposed upon Indigenous and enslaved people. It is not my intention in this paper to argue against Christian beliefs *per se* or to criticize Christians as individuals, but to remind the reader of the connection between the colonizers' religious convictions about non-Whites and how Black African people in Brazil were forced

to work in inhuman conditions (Pereira et al. 2023). The argument used for enslaving Africans was that they were empty bodies with no soul, like animals. As a horse or a bull could be forced to work because they were not considered to have souls, an enslaved African in colonial Brazil could face the same treatment (Caputo 2012). In this way, coloniality of the being (Walsh 2012) emerged, trying to take away the humanity of non-White people.

When African people came to Brazil, they did not bring only their bodies and capacity for work, but also their cultures, knowledge, and religions. Despite having to face the imposition of Christianity, they were strong enough to resist.[1] Currently, Afro-Brazilian religions are still present in all Brazilian regions. However, colonial thinking and religious racism, including prejudice against Afro-Brazilian matrix religious practitioners (Miranda 2020; Pereira et al. 2023), are still common in Brazil (Pereira et al. 2023; Santiago 2022). According to Walsh (2012), while the colonial era is gone because Brazil is no longer a colony, it has left profound marks on social thinking. These marks could be summarized as *coloniality* which has some axes that keep it strong and at work in countries that were colonized. According to Walsh (2012), the axes of coloniality are:

a) coloniality of power: the power, in general, is concentrated in the hands of white Christian men, that is, the race, religion, and gender of the colonizers,
b) coloniality of knowledge: in general, only Western knowledge, brought by colonizers, is esteemed by society. Other types of knowledge, such as Indigenous and African knowledge, are undervalued,
c) coloniality of the being: the characteristics of the race and ethnicity of the colonizers are seen as an ideal to describe all of humankind. Therefore, other races or ethnicities are seen as less capable of representing humanity or, in the worst cases, considered inferior or even non-human,
d) cosmogonic coloniality: the cosmogonic coloniality is a set of ideas and actions that reinforce the idea that the religion brought by the colonizers is the right one, while Indigenous, African, and Afro-Brazilian religions are designated as just myths, legends, fantasies, and/or witchcraft. Thus, still today, Afro-Brazilian religious practices are seen as demoniac by the major part of Brazilian society, and therefore their practitioners usually become targets of prejudice (see also Pereira et al. 2023).

All in all, decoloniality invites us to first of all observe music education practices in order to identify where the axes of coloniality are present. Next, those axes must be deconstructed in order to build new ones that are more inclusive, plural, and fair. For instance, through a decolonial lens, if the axes of coloniality prevent Brazilian music education from valorizing Afro-Brazilian music, then scholars, teachers, and researchers must do what is necessary to implement this kind of repertoire and its instruments in the classroom, considering also the potential of creating environmental awareness through the songs and musical instruments. This suggestion will be further explained in the next section.

Candomblé and cosmogonic coloniality in Brazilian music education

The word Candomblé comes from the Yoruba and Quibundo languages and its literal meaning is "house where people dance with atabaques". As a collective noun, it includes a variety of Afro-Brazilian religions, such as Candomblé Jeje, Angola, Ketu-Nagô, Jurema, Quimbanda, Xangô do Recife, Batuque, Tambor de Mina, etc. (Graeff 2018; Pereira et al. 2023; Santiago 2022).

Even though these religions are different from each other, they have similarities that make it possible to classify them in the same category: 1) they are all Afro-Brazilian reli-

gions; 2) they worship divinized ancestors (called *Orishas*, *Nkises,* or *Vuduns*), including some that had lived in Africa or that were enslaved people in colonial Brazil; and 3) their ceremonies are centered around music. Through the beat of the atabaques, a set of three sacred drums, as shown in Figure 1, a mediunic trance is induced in which it is believed that the divinized ancestries that are worshiped come from the spiritual world to Earth and incarnate in some Candomblé practitioners. Those ancestors then dance and lead the celebration party (Graeff 2018). In other words, without music, it is not possible to have a Candomblé ceremony.

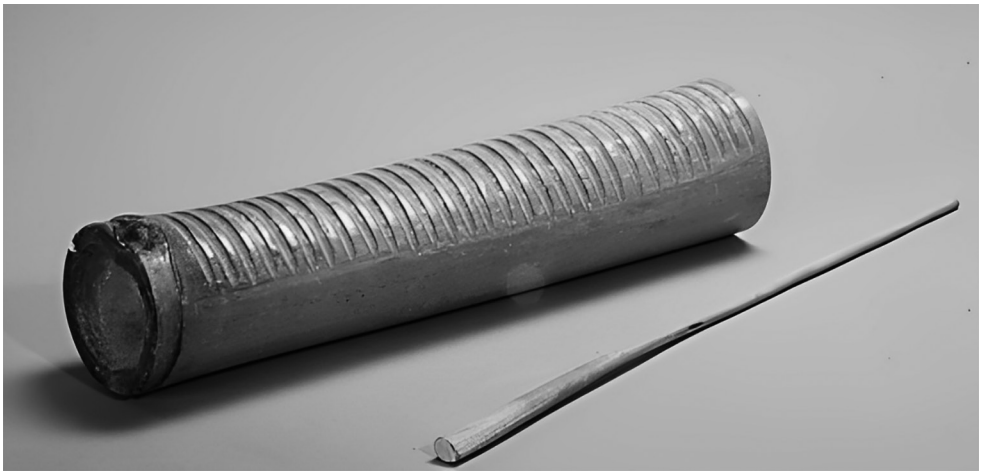
Figure 2. Set of atabaques (Santiago 2021).

The atabaque beat is very complex, characterized by syncopation and polyrhythms, and only a priest (called *alagbé* in the Ketu tradition) is allowed to play it (Cardoso 2006). Importantly, Candomblé music has had a strong influence on Brazilian popular genres such as ijexá, samba, pagode, choro, maculelê, and bossa nova.

Cosmogonic coloniality (Walsh 2012) also influences music education, as will be explained in the following paragraphs. Despite its centrality to Brazilian music, the Candomblé culture and the Candomblé practitioners themselves are rarely esteemed in schools and universities. Caputo (2012) shows that Candomblécist children are often mocked in schools, being called *macumbeiros* – a pejorative term that means demoniac or evil – and, as a strategy for avoiding religious racism, the children frequently do not say that they are Candomblécist; instead, many of them, in order to align themselves with the religious norms of the society, say they are Catholics.

Although Candomblé music has had a major influence on Brazilian popular music, the topic is not as present in music education as it should be. I, the author of this paper, was one day rebuked by my former superior because I tried to teach a Candomblé song in elementary school. She yelled at me, in front of the children: "Why are you teaching *macumba* here?" Macumba is a musical instrument as shown in Figure 3, but it is also a pejorative and racist term directed toward Candomblé.

Figure 3. Macumba (Souza 2015).



On another occasion, I was summoned to the principal's room to explain to her why the mother of a student said that I was showing the children some "*macumba* instruments". In fact, I was not. I had shown them a picture of a percussion instrument called *djembe*, which is not used in Candomblé but is from Africa. Unfortunately, many Brazilians associate everything that comes from Africa, including musical artifacts, musical traditions, and cultural practices, with Candomblé, and they also correlate Candomblé with evil.

Why? As mentioned above, in the colonial era, enslaved people were prohibited from practicing Candomblé. As a way of preserving their religion, they started to pretend that they were worshiping the Catholic saints, but, in fact, they were worshiping their ancestors that were related to those saints. This phenomenon is called religious syncretism (Caputo 2012). The Orishas were related to Catholic saints through similarities between them. For instance, Ogun were related to Saint George, because they were both warriors. Another example is the Orishas called Ibejis who are twins and were syncretized with the saints Cosmas and Damian, who are also twins. But one Orisha called Exu was syncretized with the Christian devil. This is the origin of the so-called "demonization or satanization of the Orishas" (Silva 2021, 64), a misunderstanding that makes some Brazilians believe that Orishas correspond to the demons of the Christian tradition. Hence, some Brazilians avoid studying or even listening to Candomblé music, because they believe it is something evil, even satanic (Pereira et al. 2023). A reported incident that occurred in 2019 at a music faculty in Rio de Janeiro illustrates this belief. The professor had brought to class a song called "Xangô"[2] by Heitor Villa-Lobos.[3] Xangô is also an Orisha. Some Christians present in class refused to sing the song, afraid of Xangô becoming incarnated in them. These fears reveal the ignorance of many Brazilians, including preservice music teachers, of Candomblé culture. According to Candomblé belief, not everyone singing a Candomblé song will incarnate an Orisha, but only a person who believes in it and has been prepared for it (Caputo 2012).

Candomblé and nature

But if Orishas are not demons, who are they? According to the decolonial view, this answer must be given by Candomblé practitioners themselves. Caputo (2015) has interviewed many believers. According to her research, the Orishas are also thought to represent the forces of nature and some biomes. Prandi (without date, 1) argues that

> *[a]t the beginning of its civilization, the African people that later would be known as the Yoruba . . . believed that supernatural and nonpersonal forces, spirits, or entities were present or embodied in objects or in nature's forces. Afraid of the dangers of nature, dangers they could not control, those ancient Africans offered sacrifices to calm the anger of those forces, donating food that sealed a pact of submission and protection, establishing a relation of faithfulness and filiation between humans and nature's spirits. Many of those spirits came to be worshiped as gods, later called Orishas, that have the power to control aspects of the natural world, like thunder, lightning, and the fertility of the Earth, while some of them were worshiped as guardians of mountains, streams, trees, forests etc.* (Author's translation).

In fact, many Orishas are linked with natural elements. Iemanjá, for instance, is seen as the queen of the oceans. Oxum is responsible for all kinds of freshwater, such as rivers, streams, springs, and waterfalls. Nanã, on the other hand, is the goddess of waters that do not flow fast, such as swamps, wetlands, marshes, and mangroves. Another female Orisha, called Iansã, is the goddess of storms, winds, and thunder. Xangô is also responsible for thunder, but in addition he is known as the Orisha of justice. A special kind of wind is the power of Obá: the swirls. The rain forests are the domain of Oxossi, as is the hunting that takes place in them. Ossain is also a very important Orisha because he is the god of plants and leaves.

The ancient habit of offering food sacrifices to the Orishas is still alive today. A Candomblé believer who wants to worship Oxum, the goddess of freshwater, may leave a clay plate with plenty of foods that this Orisha is thought to like (for example white beans, olive oil, and shrimps) in a waterfall as a gift, as seen in Figure 4. A sacrifice to Iemanjá must be offered on the oceans and to Oxossi in the forests. It means that each Orishas' domain has to be respected.

Figure 4. Food sacrifice to Oxum (Omolokun). Retrieved from: @kathiarejane_oya Used with permission.

We might ask how a spirit with an immaterial body can receive a gift made from solid food. In fact, because Candomblé is an animistic religion, its practitioners claim that everything in the world, not only humans or animals but also objects and food, have a divine energy called *axé*. Thus, the Orisha feeds herself not with the material elements of the food, but with the axé that is present in the food (Caputo 2012, 65).

Plants and leaves are also important in different ceremonies and rituals. Prandi (without date) writes :

> *Candomblé also holds the idea that plants are fountains of axé, the vital force without which there is neither life nor a Candomblé ceremony. The Yoruba maxim kosi ewê kosi Orishá, which can be translated as "one cannot worship Orishas without using leaves", defines well the role of plants in the rituals. Plants are used to wash and transform objects into something sacred, as well as to purify the head and the body of the priests, to heal illnesses, and to ward off forces of evil.* (Author's translation).

Plants thus have the power to clean, heal, and sanctify through their axé. To preserve nature and its seas, its rivers, its swamps, its forests, its animals and its plants is, at the same time, to preserve Candomblé and its wisdom. In other words, Candomblé practitioners respect nature because it is sacred to them and because without it, they would lose their religious identity.

No wonder then that today, Candomblé temples are also considered institutions for learning about environmental education. Candomblé practitioners have a way of life that respects nature (Caputo 2012). Prandi (without date) claims that

> *[w]ith the recent concerns about the environment, Candomblé has been said to represent the "religion of nature", and many temples have been seen as examples of environmental preservation. Some Candomblé leaders have tried to enter preservationist movements, alerting Orishas' practitioners to the necessity of defending the sacred places like waterfalls and springs, lakes and meadows from environmental pollution. Some of them also advocate that Candomblé must offer food sacrifices in biodegradable materials.* (Author's translation).

Considering that Candomblé rituals depend on the existence of natural elements, nature degradation may make Candomblé impracticable. For instance, if a rain forest is completely devastated, it will not be possible to give Oxóssi a food sacrifice. Moreover, Candomblé cannot exist without music. Each Orisha has specific atabaque beats, rhythms, and songs that make them come to Earth. Hence, teaching about Candomblé culture, repertoire and musical instruments is a way to raise awareness about Afro-Brazilian music, religious racism, and sustainability of life, all through music education. The next section will connect music, education, Candomblé, and sustainability of life.

Songs from/to nature: teaching sustainability through Candomblé music

As mentioned, each Orisha that represents a nature element has a specific atabaque beat that is played in Candomblé ceremonies in order to induce a mediunic trance in some celebrants. Those beats are accompanied by songs that, in general, are sung in Yoruba (Caputo 2015), an African traditional language which is today primarily spoken in Nigeria but also in Togo, Ghana, Republic of Benin, Sierra Leone, and Cuba. Teaching those beats, songs, and musical instruments is a way of teaching about sustainability of life through music education.

Many instruments are used in Candomblé celebrations, including *xequerês*, *agbés*, *berimbaus*, *caxixis* and *agogôs* (Figure 5), but the set of three atabaques (Figure 6) is central in the

ceremonies (Cardoso 2006). The big one is called *rum*, the medium one *rumpi*, and the small one *lé*. Bass sounds are more important in Candomblé, so the *rum* is the solo instrument while the others provide the accompaniment. The priests who play the atabaques (see Figure 6) are called *ogan* or *alagbé*, which are also Yoruba words.

Figure 5. Some instruments used in Candomblé ceremonies: 1) *Berimbau*, 2) *Caxixi*, 3) *Agogô* or *gã*, and 4) *Xequerê*. (Santiago 2021)

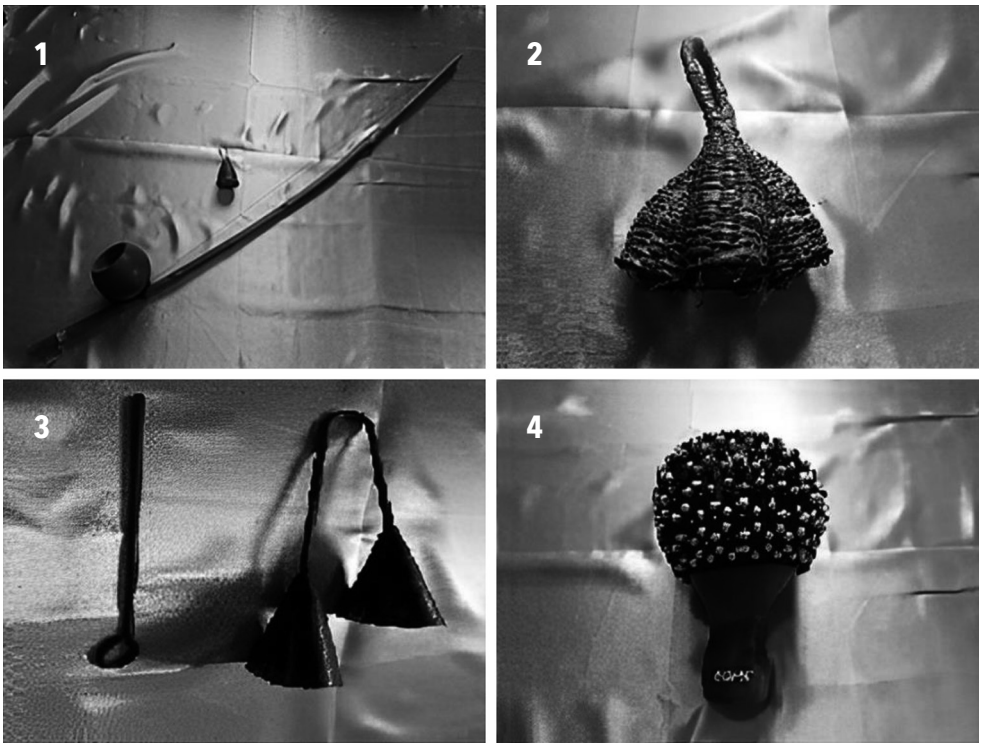


Figure 6. Atabaques (*rum*, *rumpi* and *lê*), and an *alagbé* (the third person from the left) in a master class at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Photo by author.

Learning to play the atabaques is easy and complex at the same time. Since this instrument is not taught in schools – because of the cosmogonic coloniality and religious racism that still exist in music education in Brazil (Santiago 2022) – ogans learn how to play in the *terreiros* (Candomblé temples) not using music notation or learning about music theory, but only by observing alagbés (more experienced ogans) and by an exhaustive repetition of what is seen (Cardoso 2006, 37). Graeff (2018, 18) writes that the Candomblé musicians learn "by heart".

> *What does "to learn by heart" mean? Is it simply to memorize information, to be able to reproduce it anytime and anywhere? This widespread expression alludes to embodying knowledge to the point that reproducing it dispenses with intellectual reflection. It becomes part of one's body, transforming and enriching it – and knowledge itself – at each new reproduction.*

This kind of music teaching and learning through observation of masters and repetition is observed in various traditional groups (e.g., Marsh 2000) and also in popular music (Green 2000). In preparation, the ogans play the two small atabaques (rumpi and lé) and the alagbé, the ogan chief, plays the rum, the most important one.

The atabaques are considered particularly sacred instruments for two main reasons: it is believed that they make the connection between the natural world (in which we live, called *Áiyê*) and the spiritual world (*Orum*, where Orishas are). They work by directing the axé produced in the ceremony to Orum, calling out to the gods to come. Thus, the atabaque is considered to be an instrument that establishes communication between humans and the gods (Caputo 2012; Cardoso 2006). The other reason the atabaques are seen as sacred is because they are held to be alive, for they come from a tree. In Candomblé Jeje, trees are seen as sacred. This is because, in this worldview, ancestors can be reincarnated into trees. Marcelo, an ogan interviewed in a previous study (Santiago 2021), states that

> *[w]e respect the atabaque because it is taken from a tree, and a tree is an ancestor, it is alive. Thus, we give food [sacrifices] to the atabaque, in the same way that we bring food to a Vodum [the Orisha from Candomblé Jeje], we give food to an ancestor . . . and from him, we communicate with other ancestors. [Therefore] the atabaque is one of the greatest ancestors because it is a tree. We revere Vodum a lot, but we at Jeje-Mahi (a form of Candomblé) revere trees because Jeje without nature is not Jeje* (Santiago 2021, 210).

Given this belief, instruments made of wood should receive special treatment. Marcelo states: "A tip that I always talk about and that I mention to people who work with the atabaque . . . is that after using the atabaque, you should put it away and cover it with a white cloth, in a respectful way" (Santiago 2021, 210).

Without disregarding musical content, a music teacher who demonstrates respect for Candomblé precepts and leads students to have this same feeling will be contributing to the creation of a new perception: that trees can be conceived as personal beings and can therefore also be seen as having rights, including the right to existence.

Rufino et al. (2020, 8) express a similar idea, stating that the natural elements of the environment must be respected and that they are worthy of rights, including the right to live.

> *The idea of seeing the environment as a subject of rights comes from the understanding that the environment can be seen as a non-human person – and this is one of the lessons that the decolonization of mother nature, of the biocosmic living complex, can help us achieve by defending [it] and shifting the logic of development, which prioritizes the economic dimension, to assume enchantment as political/poetic action in favor of the diversity of ways of feeling, being and vibrating in the world. Bringing the perspective of*

a non-colonized cosmogony [Krenak 2019] points precisely to the possibility of seeing the environment as non-human beings, even admitting the need to recognize its rights[.]

This view strongly rejects irresponsible exploitation of nature by humans. Considering that natural elements are non-human persons that have the right to live and exist, we must interact with them respectfully.

In the statements below, the idea of taking students to *terreiros* (Candomblé temples) or simply bringing elements of Candomblé ceremonies to the classroom also emerges. For example, instead of music classes taking place within four walls, they could take place in a *terreiro* or outdoors. In this way, at one time or another, the need to respect the environment would be taught.

Our religion, the Candomblé Jeje, is very "barefoot", literally. [They put their feet directly on the Earth to connect with nature] (Marcelo)

Do you think it would be nice, maybe, in nursery school, to teach music outside schools? (Researcher)

Sure! What is said nowadays about sustainability can be learned in the terreiros, where children can see fruits, see different herbs, and identify sacred trees. (Marcelo) (Santiago 2021, 212).

The beats produced by atabaques have influenced Brazilian popular music. For instance, the "Oxum beat", called Ijexá, is also a Brazilian popular genre, exemplified by influential singers and groups such as Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, Clara Nunes, Mariene de Castro, and others. Many Brazilians are unaware that this popular genre is in fact Candomblé music. Explaining that these songs have nothing to do with "the devil" but are a part of Brazilian culture is a way of fighting against cultural and religious racism through music education.

The lyrics of Ijexá songs are usually about Oxum and her domain: freshwater, as in the Oxum song presented below:[4]

I saw mother Oxum at the waterfall
Sitting on the riverbank
Harvesting lilies, lilies ê
Harvesting lilies, lilies ah
Harvesting lilies to adorn your altar[5]

Almost all Orishas' songs have references to nature. Another example is the Iemanjá songs. This female Orisha is also called Janaina, and she is usually represented as a mermaid. She is known as the goddess of salt water. Her songs influenced another Brazilian music genre, Ciranda, that is usually sung and danced on beaches, Janaina's domain. The Ciranda lyrics below illustrate this:

I went to the beach to see the sea rocking
I saw a portrait in the sand, and I remembered the mermaid, I started calling
Oh Janaína, come to see, oh Janaína, come here,
Receive your flowers, which I come to offer you[6, 7]

A music teacher who is interested in teaching sustainability of life could explore the sacrality of Candomblé's musical instruments and the natural elements that appear in those

songs in order to raise awareness of the need for the world to take care of nature, because if nature is severely degraded, an important part of Brazilian culture (the Candomblé) will also disappear.

Summarizing, Candomblé is a very rich source of ancestral knowledge about Afro-Brazilian culture. Teaching about its songs, instruments and culture is a way both to raise awareness of the importance of preserving the environment and to fight against religious racism. Through songs about the seas, the rivers, and the forests, students may be able to realize that nature is not something to be exploited but to be respected, valued, and protected.

A decolonial music class that teaches Candomblé songs and instruments does not have to be proselytistic, but only shows the centrality of Candomblé in Brazilian culture. Based on the argument developed above, I suggest that the role of the music teacher might be to teach that: 1) according to Candomblé, nature is sacred, because it comes from gods; 2) all natural elements are alive because they have axé, and therefore seas, forests, meadows and all biomes have rights that must be respected; 3) if nature is severely degraded, we will lose a very important element of Brazilian culture, that is, the Candomblé; 4) the ancestral wisdom of Candomblé can offer clues for how to preserve the environment and, therefore, Candomblé itself and its practitioners must also be respected; and 5) religious racism is nocive and must be eliminated from music education and our lives.

Concluding remarks

As stated earlier in this paper and as shown through the case of Candomblé, the music education literature, although it now contains some decolonial topics, does not seem to consider cultural aspects that were also influenced by colonialism: environmental and ecological issues (Di Nascia 2017). Therefore, the music of traditional peoples who worship nature might be used in music classes in order to teach about sustainability of life.

Candomblé music can be considered "sacred music from/to nature" because it is a music that is believed to come from gods that represent nature and it is also used as humans worship biomes, natural elements, and their gods. Candomblé represents an intrinsic relation between nature, humans, and the sacred. Therefore, if the cultural and spiritual aspects that permeate this sacred repertoire are explained and explored in music classrooms, students may develop respect and care for the environment.

It is important to say that Candomblé is not the only eco-ontological way of life that exists in the world. Many traditional and/or Indigenous groups also have a sacred and religious mindset (e.g., Marsh 2000; Santiago 2023; Westerlund & Partti 2018). Considering that many of those groups regard nature as something sacred, their religious music could also be termed sacred music from/to nature, and it is certainly possible to find sacred musics from/to nature outside Brazil. In order to enhance the cause for sustainability of life, a suggestion for further studies is for researchers worldwide to look for traditional or Indigenous sacred music that could be taught widely in formal contexts with the purpose of leading students to respect nature through music education. ■

Notes

[1] Currently, the concept of Black resistance is central in Brazilian Black studies (Pereira 2023). Initially, the studies related the numerous tragedies that occurred to Black people after colonization. More recently, studies have focused on valorizing the history of Black people, presenting them not only as oppressed, but as subjects who were strong enough to resist. It is not the force of oppression that must be shown, but the force of the Black resistance.

[2] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_hvQJB2FFA&ab_channel=Villa-LobosChannel

[3] https://www.brasil247.com/cultura/evangelicos-de-escola-de-musica-da-ufrj-se-recusam-a-cantar-villa-lobos-por-intolerancia-religiosa

[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oSJvFFN- K8&ab_channel=acessomariene

[5] Original lyrics in Portuguese: Eu vi mamãe Oxum na cachoeira, Sentada na beira do rio, Colhendo lírio, lírio ê; Colhendo lírio, lírio ah; Colhendo lírio para enfeitar o seu congá

[6] https://youtu.be/bn2wNvW1kqQ?si=QvjbDTtUz6wLT-za

[7] Original text in Portuguese: Eu fui na beira da praia, pra ver o balanço do mar Eu fui na beira da praia, pra ver o balanço do mar Eu vi um retrato na areia, e lembrei da sereia, comecei a chamar Eu vi um retrato na areia, e lembrei da sereia, comecei a chamar Ó Janaína vem ver, ó Janaína vem cá, receber suas flores, que venho lhe ofertar Ó Janaína vem ver, ó Janaína vem cá, receber suas flores, que venho lhe ofertar

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Nikolay Demerdzhiev

Culture and arts schools in transformation: Narratives from Bulgaria

Introduction

The Bulgarian music school system has a rich history, marked by significant changes over the years. Prior to 1989, the system consisted of seven specialized classical music schools, two schools specializing in folklore and folk music, and one military music school. Following the political changes in the early 1990s, the music schools were integrated into a larger framework and faced challenges such as decreased autonomy, changes in curriculum, and reduced cultural infrastructure. To adapt to these changes, the schools introduced new majors and were transformed into art schools, aiming to create a sustainable system by ensuring that a sufficient number of students would continue to choose to graduate in the performing arts.

According to Bazaytova (2018, 256; 2020, 194), the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture considers the outcomes of this transformation process a "success story". As evidence of a wholly satisfying and motivating situation, Bazaytova cites financial opportunities such as special scholarships made available for students and salary bonuses or specific grants for school principals. However, more critical perspectives have also been voiced, including those cited in my dissertation (Demerdzhiev 2017). For instance, in my research, interviewees expressed concerns about a perceived neglect of music schools for children, conflicts between music universities and music schools, and a lack of communication with the Ministry of Culture. Bazaytova (2020) offers a differing viewpoint, suggesting that my critical observations could be attributable to my physical absence from the country and lack of comprehensive information. According to Bazaytova (2020, 3), "the study . . . suffers from a series of inaccuracies, many of which arise from the distance of the author from Bulgaria and the one-sidedness of the information that reached him". Furthermore, Bazaytova (2020, 42) criticizes my comparisons of music schools in Bulgaria, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, and Chile, arguing that the study gives the "wrong impression that art education in Bulgaria is not so popular" compared to other countries.

While interpretations of data can certainly vary, my concern is that Bazaytova's study from 2020 seems to lack critical voices, possibly as a result of the research design. The questionnaires sent to principals of music and art schools returned predominantly favorable answers, contrasting with my interviews published in 2017 that present a more mixed picture. It is conceivable that the survey eliminated critical voices from the outset by including only principals currently employed by the Ministry of Culture in the sample. This selection may have limited the respondents' ability to express their opinions freely. Furthermore, the format of the questionnaire, allowing primarily "yes", "no", and "don't know" answers to six questions and with only four open-ended questions, may not effectively address the problems at hand. Instead, it appears to aim at confirming the correctness of the official policy (Bazaytova 2020, 162).

When Bazaytova comments on the answers, she tends to focus on the positive feedback and generalizes the problems as "general for the educational system" or "problems imposed from outside" (Bazaytova 2020, 168–169). However, she fails to trace the origin of these problems. For instance, although she acknowledges that the principals identify problems caused by the implementation of the "money follows the students" policy imposed

on culture and art schools by the Ministry of Culture, she neglects to discuss any potential flaws in this policy. Similarly, when she states that "there are fewer professional opportunities with full-time positions for music school graduates" (Bazaytova 2020, 213), she overlooks the fact that the Ministry of Culture has been involved in the closure and merging of professional music and performing arts institutions over the last three decades, failing to improve the situation for these graduates.

The existence of divergent views relating to experiences on the ground and the narratives presented by the Ministry of Culture is a topic that Aleksandrov (2016) explores in a study on Bulgarian cultural policy. In his study, Aleksandrov examines and describes the discrepancies between the official discourse promoted by the Ministry of Culture and the experiences and perspectives of individuals involved in the cultural sector. This suggests that contrasting narratives are not limited to music schools alone but extend to the broader context of Bulgarian cultural policy.

In this article, I revisit and complement data from previous studies both in response to the narrative presented by the Ministry of Culture, represented by Bazaytova's study (2020), and in order to gain an updated perspective of the transformation process through narratives within the current discourse on Bulgaria's music schools. The study presented in this article also aligns with international initiatives for developing transformative professionalism in music education (see e.g., Hahn, Björk & Westerlund 2024, Westerlund 2020, and Westerlund et al. 2019). The primary objective is to identify narratives within the current discourse on the Bulgarian music school system that can serve as "agents of change" (Westerlund 2020, 8) for the country's music education landscape. The study employs document analysis of previous studies and qualitative analysis of new interview data to examine the transformation process of the Bulgarian music school system. By doing so, it seeks to gain a deeper understanding of what can be considered "successful" and "sustainable" within Bulgaria's culture and art schools. The research draws on the assumption by Renn et al. (2009) that creating meaning for the future aligns with the basic understanding of sustainability, which involves improving the quality of life for people and planning for future generations. The Bulgarian music school system, which has a nearly century-long tradition of aspiring for excellence in education services, can build on this strong foundation while continuing to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of society.

Previous research

According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003, 99), the initial phase of conducting a follow-up qualitative study involves articulating concerns that have arisen from previous studies and existing research literature. For the purpose of this article, I will outline five topics that have emerged in studies conducted between 1996 and 2018 and that justify further research.

Bulgaria – still a leading cultural nation?

In the mid-1990s, an evaluation of Bulgarian cultural policy conducted by Landry (1996) on behalf of the Council of Europe concluded that the music schools in Bulgaria could be considered as a highly successful project within the national cultural policy system (Landry 1996). As evidence of this success and in order to highlight the impact of Bulgarian cultural policy on the global stage, the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture has frequently referred to the many Bulgarian artists who emerged from these music schools and have gone on to achieve worldwide fame (see Bulgarian Ministry of Culture 2023). However, 30 years after Landry's study, the time seems right to ask whether the description of Bulgaria as a leading cultural nation is still accurate and whether the success criteria are still both

relevant and sustainable. Retaining a reputation as a "cultural nation" requires sustained effort by policymakers (Hofecker 2017, 1–2) and adaptation to changing conditions (Westerlund et al. 2019). Aleksandrov (2016, 215) argues that "if politicians claim that culture is important for Bulgaria", research should set out to scrutinize the reality of this "cultural industry" and how it is reflected in "legislation and life".

No stable cultural policy after 1989

In 1989, the Bulgarian Communist Party stepped down, marking a turning point as the country transitioned to a newly elected democratic government amid broader changes in the former Eastern Bloc. A distinctive political feature of Bulgarian politics since then is the absence of re-elected governments in the country. With each mandate typically lasting four years, but often cut short prematurely, there have been frequent changes in governments, political parties, and political programs. New administrations consistently seek to distance themselves from their predecessors, leading to cultural policy becoming entangled in political intrigues and disruptions (Koprinarov 2017). However, research on how this instability has impacted music schools is still scarce.

Funding is reduced in the short and long term, only basic needs can be covered with the state funding and there is no money for innovation or professional development

Instead of reforms, cultural life in Bulgaria is experiencing drastic cuts and layoffs. Opera houses, philharmonic orchestras and other music institutions have merged or even closed since the early 2000s. As a result of these negative tendencies, artistic training is becoming less and less attractive for the population (Bachmaier 2017).

The music professions are losing their reputation in society and young people are rarely interested in becoming professionals, since the opportunities for starting a career after graduation are very limited

Fewer and fewer young people are interested in musical training and some instrumental subjects have therefore been removed from the music schools' curriculum. Even traditionally popular subjects such as violin, cello, flute and guitar have difficulty finding newcomers, and instrumental teachers have to get by with part-time work. Cities with rich musical traditions are losing their regional importance; only in the capital do artists have a reasonably secure future. Consequently, culture is losing its polycentrism and becoming highly centralized again (Alexandrov 2017).

Brain drain

Gifted children in Bulgaria prefer to complete their music education abroad where they also have better chances of pursuing a career. Alexandrov (2017, 99) suggests that part of the explanation for this tendency seems to be the "inexperience and ignorance" that young people face when approaching different levels of government administration.

The five topics listed here, namely the current status of Bulgaria as a cultural nation, Bulgarian cultural policy, music professionalism, reduced funding, and brain drain, highlight weaknesses and risks within the Bulgarian music school system. These challenges have the potential to undermine the new goal of the music schools, which is to ensure their ongoing relevance to the local community. This goal aligns with the concept of "institutional resilience" proposed by Westerlund et al. (2019) for music schools as crucial agents for creating and promoting a sustainable understanding of culture. Westerlund (2020, 7) emphasizes the significance of stories and narratives as important drivers of change in envisioning professional futures. This justifies the chosen methodology, which analyzes the themes deemed important by the interviewees as described in their narratives from the field.

Method

Conducting qualitative interviews with experts from the field

To inquire further into the current state of music schools in Bulgaria and gain more insight into the five topics described above, I approached three experienced music education professionals based in Burgas and Stara Zagora. These two cities were selected because of their rich music education traditions with roots going back to the early 20th century. The respondents were a former school principal from the music school in Burgas, the principal of the music school in Stara Zagora, and a Bulgarian musicologist who has had a significant influence on Bulgarian musicology in both secondary and tertiary education over the last 50 years. The interview questions, compiled as a list sent to the interview partners in advance, aimed to follow up on issues which interview partners in previous studies by Demerdzhiev (2017), Alexandrov (2017), and Bazaytova (2020) had considered important, as well as questions highlighted in two earlier studies (Hlebarov 1994; Koprinarov 1997).

The interviews were conducted in June and July 2023 and lasted an average of 30 minutes each. The interviews were recorded on video and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in the data collection process. All persons interviewed expressed their willingness to participate in the study and consented to being identified by name. This decision allowed for more personal and engaging narratives to be shared, providing a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of those involved in the Bulgarian music school system. The data generated in the interviews encompassed topics such as the current challenges faced by music schools, the impact of cultural policies, the potential sustainability of current practices, and the alignment of political agendas with the cultural sector.

Interview questions and analysis

The interviews were framed by theory-driven research questions that define the research project as part of broader theoretical strivings to develop transformative music education professionalism (Hahn et al. 2024; Westerlund 2002; Westerlund et al. 2019). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), it is important that "the questions outlined are considered before and during thematic analyses" (Braun & Clarke 2006, 86). By doing so, the researcher is able to adjust and redefine the questions that arise during the different stages of the study. Initially, these are the questions focusing primarily on the research objectives (Braun & Clarke 2006, 85). Second, there are the interview questions that end up being asked, and finally, there are the questions that guide the coding and analysis of the data. As pointed out by Braun & Clarke (2006, 85), "there is no necessary relationship between these three, and indeed, it is often desirable that there is a disjuncture between them". Consequently, work in the current study shifted flexibly back and forth across the entire data set following the six-step approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 87): (1) becoming familiar with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3–5) searching, reviewing, defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report, which in this case is structured as thematic narratives combining the views of the interviewees.

The power of stories within institutions, as highlighted by Faber (2002) and cited by Westerlund (2020), lies in their ability to act as mediators between social structures and individual agency. Stories provide a space for new narratives, granting us new forms of agency and offering fresh choices and options (Faber 2002, 25; Westerlund 2020, 16). Importantly, as Westerlund (2020, 16) points out, the change that may occur is not sudden and irreversible, but rather a process that involves acknowledging differences and recognizing new possibilities. It is not about striving for a utopia, but rather a promise that requires continuous work and progress in a specific direction. This aligns closely with Bode's (2013) concept of nodal situations, as cited by Westerlund (2020). Bode refers to trans-

formative events as "nodal situations" or "nodes" – they are game-changers that occur within uncertain contexts. Nodal situations go beyond mere mention, and actively present and stage these nodes, creating opportunities for individuals to enter and take action (Bode 2013, 2).

The narratives below highlight several such "nodes" or nodal situations that, according to Bode (2013), could serve as future narratives. These nodal situations do not predict the future of the music school system in Bulgaria, but they embody the transformative power that can shape music education into a new, improved model. By drawing on Westerlund's theoretical framework and summarizing themes derived from the recent interviews, my aim is to identify nodal situations and provide the necessary theoretical background to potentially reshape the narrative surrounding music schools in Bulgaria so that collective goals and meaningful change can be achieved.

Narratives from the transformation process of Bulgaria's music and art schools

The following six themes emerged consistently across all three interviews. The frequency of statements indicates which themes received the most attention. In the sections below, these themes are presented as combined narratives.

Table 1. Number of thematic statements provided by the interview partners.

Interview partners (number of statements):	Julian	Julia	Krasimir	Total
The transformation process: overcoming challenges	12	5	8	25
Solving problems and understanding successes by identifying reasons	9	5	10	24
Comparing approaches by identifying their similarities and differences	9	4	5	18
Embracing motivation for progress through diversity and artistic growth	3	7	7	17
Examples of cooperation and/or competition between different stakeholders	2	4	5	11
Examples of transdisciplinary education	7	1	1	9

The transformation process: Overcoming challenges

Interview partner Julian

According to Julian, who is a musicologist and university professor, the major political changes in Bulgaria in the 1990s also had an impact on the music school system in the country. One day after the fall of the Berlin Wall, on November 10, 1989, Bulgaria witnessed a peaceful revolution that led to the removal of the leader of the Communist Party, Todor Zhivkov. The Communist Party had been in power for 45 years at that point. In the wake of the revolution, the newly formed government embarked on a series of reforms with the aim of establishing the foundations of a democratic state. These reforms included new education policies and resulted in a shift in the profiles and national curriculum of music schools. However, Julian says, the reforms implemented during this time failed to bring

about substantial improvements in the music school system and resulted in a reduction of hours allocated to music subjects. Before the reforms, the music schools in Bulgaria had clear profiles and strict specializations.

> *The curriculum used to start with specialized training – piano, violin, as well as music theory disciplines – which was the most important and mandatory part. Then came the general education part. And here is where there is a difference... The difference from the later, current state. Education in general subjects was not at the same level as in other schools under the Ministry of Education and Science. I mean this specificity: these schools were created to produce music specialists, and it was judged that the students did not need to study the other subjects in full, such as mathematics and physics.*

Interview partner Julia

According to Julia, who is a former music school principal, the transformation of music schools in Bulgaria into art schools occurred in several stages. Initially, the schools expanded their offerings to include a broader range of musical subjects, such as pop and jazz singing. Subsequently, drawing and art education were introduced, followed by a major in drama. Later, during the pandemic, online education became an inevitable part of music education. However, Julia expresses concerns about the limitations of online education, particularly in performing arts: "While online formats like competitions and performances proved to be acceptable, online education did not provide sufficient assistance and even complicated matters."

Julia also thinks that changing learning environments have influenced students' approaches to learning. With abundant information available online, some students may not fully understand the need for dedicated practice to acquire genuine musical skills. According to her, "this generation of learners, accustomed to quick and easy results because of the internet, struggles with the challenges of hard work and perseverance required in music education". Consequently, she says, students may become easily frustrated when they do not achieve their goals quickly, leading them to give up playing their instrument or switch to perceived "easier" majors.

Interview partner Krasimir

Krasimir, who is a current music school principal, describes the situation of the music school in Stara Zagora as similar to that of other music schools worldwide in terms of social environments and the motivation of the younger generation to study music and pursue careers in the performing arts.

The school, originally established as a music school in 1957, has undergone a transformation into an art school that encompasses various performing arts disciplines. It has been a consistent source of talent for Stara Zagora's performing arts institutions, including the opera, state theater, and puppet theater. As part of its development plan, which emphasizes growth and diversification, the school envisions expanding its fields of study to include a diploma program in puppet theater, aligning with its mission to educate skilled individuals who can contribute to the work of local arts institutions.

One of the global challenges mentioned by Krasimir is the ambiguous impact of new technologies on music education. While the internet provides an avenue to reach an unlimited audience, it has also led to what he considers to be negative effects. According to him, many young people have developed a fatigue towards practicing and instead seek quick success, which is incompatible with the demands of the artistic profession. Krasimir highlights concerns about the psychological dependence on screens, such as laptops and phones, which can affect children negatively and has raised concerns among psychologists. To address these challenges, the school emphasizes the importance of involving parents in

the educational process. Krasimir believes that a successful collaboration between teachers, students, and parents is crucial. He concludes by sharing an old Bulgarian proverb that encapsulates his philosophy for sustainability through investment in future generations: "Give in order to receive; sow in order to harvest."

Solving problems and understanding successes by identifying reasons

Interview partner Julian

As mentioned in the previous section, Landry's evaluation of Bulgarian cultural policy conducted in the mid-1990s identified the culture and art schools as one of the most successful projects within the national cultural policy system (Landry 1996). However, in 1998, the Minister of Culture implemented a reform that merged existing philharmonic and opera orchestras into "opera-philharmonic" societies. According to Julian, this decision had a detrimental impact on the quality and capacity of cultural music institutions, resulting in significant reductions in the number of students who pursued a career path in music at the secondary and tertiary levels.

To address sustainable talent attraction, recruitment, and retention in the performing arts sector, Julian proposes the introduction of a law similar to the national library law. This law would establish musicians' professional institutions as state institutions, ensuring long-term government support independent of changes in local government. Implementing such a law would secure the future of musicians and create opportunities for graduates from art schools and academies.

Interview partner Julia

According to Julia, the music schools in Bulgaria are prestigious institutions known for their comprehensive approach to performing arts education. They have gained national recognition for their commitment to nurturing and developing talents and preparing students to pursue professional careers in the arts. However, during the pandemic, online education proved unsuitable for providing arts education. Julia points out that many aspects of performing arts cannot be effectively addressed through online platforms. The poor quality of internet connections and available equipment posed further challenges to the overall effectiveness of online education in music schools. Julia describes online education for arts specialties as highly inadequate, restrictive, and frustrating.

Another issue mentioned is the tendency of some students to switch from music majors to other disciplines that they perceive as easier. While this may present long-term challenges, Julia views the education these students receive in music as valuable cultural enrichment. Even if they pursue different career paths, she says, their advanced education in music can contribute to creating a more knowledgeable audience in the future.

Interview partner Krasimir

Krasimir attributes the success of his school's graduates to the longstanding tradition of arts education at the institution. However, he expresses concerns that this tradition has been increasingly disrupted by the reliance on online education during and after the pandemic. He believes that restoring the in-person arts education experience is crucial for the continued success of the school and its students. He emphasizes that the arts, particularly instruments like the piano or the violin, cannot be effectively taught remotely. Krasimir notes that his school has successfully reversed the declining trend in student enrollment in recent years by implementing new strategies such as changing their advertising strategy to reach potential students and their parents through various channels in online social networks and performing in various formats to increase visibility and engagement with the

local community. However, for further growth, the school requires adequate space and infrastructure. For instance, while the expertise of the teachers remains a primary reason for students to apply to the school, the presence of a boarding house might provide additional incentives that attract students from different parts of the country. Krasimir remarks that the current lack of appropriate infrastructure poses a significant challenge to the school's development and desire to expand and grow.

Comparing approaches by identifying their similarities and differences

Interview partner Julian

According to Julian, there are notable differences in learning outcomes before and after the curriculum changes implemented by the Ministry of Education since the early 2000s. Specialized subjects in music schools, such as instrumental lessons, music theory, and chamber music, have been reduced or removed from the curriculum. In other words, musical training is gradually being reduced because the students must cover the same breadth of subjects as their peers in general education schools, both in terms of general subjects and specialized areas, "which is impossible". Julian also mentions that while there are success stories of students winning prestigious competitions and finding recognition in performing arts institutions worldwide, these achievements are rarely a result of the support provided by the music education system. Rather, they occur despite the system's lack of a comprehensive vision for its evolution: "There are undoubtedly successes in the schools, successes of teachers and students who win prestigious competitions worldwide . . . They achieve recognition. However, when it comes to a holistic vision of how this system will evolve, I personally do not see it."

Regarding the role of governments in shaping cultural policies, Julian mentions that during the socialist period there was a system called "distribution" in which graduates were allocated jobs by the state: "A concept from socialism. It had its negatives, of course, but also positives . . . However, the state provided employment for graduates . . . All graduates, regardless of their specialization, were allocated a job." However, after the transition in 1989, cultural policies shifted, and musicians were encouraged to enter the free market to determine their salaries. Furthermore, since delegated budgets were introduced under Minister of Culture Vezhdi Rashidov (in 2009), the policy of "the money follows the student" lowered expectations in terms of behavior, academics, and artistry, as schools hesitated to remove students who could not meet higher cultural and artistic standards. Additionally, a controversial reform implemented by the Ministry of Culture under Emma Moskova involved merging the philharmonic and opera orchestras, resulting in a significant reduction in the number of orchestras and orchestra positions in Bulgaria, further "degrading the professional opportunities for music graduates". Julian states: "Music education should be part of the cultural policy, it should be. But it is not."

Interview partner Julia

According to Julia, artists have faced challenges throughout history, and the current situation is no different: "I see no significant differences between the overall situation of artists in the past and nowadays. The work of artists has never been highly valued and has often been accompanied by great effort, labor, and dedication. Their work has frequently been misunderstood or underestimated."

According to Julia, Bulgarian music and art schools stand out because they offer a unique combination of general education and specialized music or arts education under one roof. She describes this educational system, which merges arts and general education, as originating in Russia and later adopted and promoted in Bulgaria. "The type of school

we have, which I believe is not present in other countries, is unique. In other parts of the world, there are schools that focus solely on the arts, while general education is taught separately. Besides Russia, I'm not aware of any other country that has this model."[1]

Interview partner Krasimir

Krasimir believes that financial stimulation alone is not an effective way to boost motivation in schools. He argues that while financial stability is important, it should not be the sole driving force: "I've come across people who are solely motivated by financial gain . . . True motivation usually stems from a combination of factors. When someone's motivation is solely centered around money, it distorts their mindset. Such individuals aren't seeking personal growth or contributing to an educational institution; their focus is solely on taking."

In Krasimir's opinion, the most effective approach to boost students' motivation is through stage performance. According to him, this approach is not specific to a particular school, city, or country. He argues that while details may vary between different locations, the main concept remains the same. Performing arts students benefit from opportunities to perform in diverse settings and ensembles, regardless of the geographical context. As he states, "This is just geography, whether it's Austria or Bulgaria. But the problem is the same, only the conditions are different, but the life of an artist is the same".

Krasimir emphasizes the importance of showcasing the stage and the presence of students on it through their school years. He believes that this visibility makes the music school easily recognizable and instils confidence in the school's educational quality and long-term commitment. He states:

> *We can proudly showcase our stage. Our children are on it, from first to twelfth grade. This makes our education easily recognizable. This is what we are trying to achieve, as you can see from this poster about our next performances. Take a look . . . And I believe we are on the right track.*

Embracing motivation for future progress through diversity and artistic growth

Interview partner Julian

Julian reflects on the challenges faced by music schools in Bulgaria and the decreasing number of students pursuing music majors. He highlights the lack of prospects and opportunities in the field of music, leading many talented musicians and instrumentalists to leave Bulgaria and pursue education abroad:

> *The decrease in the number of students interested in enrolling in music majors is a highly significant issue. Why is this happening? Well, it is due to the lack of prospects . . . Once they go [abroad], most of them do not return.*

This trend creates a negative cycle which contributes further to the decline in the number of students enrolling in music programs. Julian emphasizes the importance of preserving the legacy of music schools while actively revitalizing their environment to ensure sustainable development in terms of students' integration into the job market. He advocates the development of a comprehensive concept that considers the individual strengths of these schools and their connection to job realization:

> *It is indisputable that there is a need for such schools. However, we need to go back to the point that a comprehensive concept needs to be developed, mapping out these schools and considering their individual strengths. Because all of this is interconnected with job realization, which is crucially important.*

Interview partner Julia

According to Julia, educators have a crucial role in nurturing the artistic development of students. She explains that dedicated teachers should continuously inspire students and emphasize that artistic growth is more significant than material possessions, a conviction that in her case has spiritual dimensions:

> *In a person's life, it is important to prioritize spiritual growth rather than accumulating material possessions. This is because when people depart from their physical body, they leave behind all material acquisitions in this world. They transition to the next dimension with only what their soul has developed and acquired. Therefore, in today's world, prioritizing spiritual growth can be seen as an act of heroism.*

The music school in Burgas is described by Julia as a place that primarily caters to gifted students who aspire to become professional artists. However, it also has a strong history of commitment to providing education to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, minority children, and those with special needs or impairments. As an example, she mentions that the school indirectly participates in the "Music Instead of the Streets" project in the city of Sliven through its alumni. The project Julia is referring to was founded and is led by Georgi Kalaidzhiev, a former student of the music school in Burgas who now works as a musician in Germany. Kalaidzhiev is deeply committed to this initiative and actively collaborates with children from the Roma community in Sliven (Schwanitz 2022). Together with his German wife, he dedicates a significant amount of time to the project, both in Germany and Bulgaria. To ensure the project's visibility and accessibility beyond Bulgarian borders, it has been officially registered as a non-profit organization in both countries. Through the Music Instead of the Streets project, Kalaidzhiev aims to provide high-quality music education and performance opportunities to the Roma children of Sliven.

According to Julia, Kalaidzhiev feels that his personal journey has empowered him, and now he seeks to empower his own community of origin through the transformative power of music. By engaging with the Roma community and offering the children the chance to explore and express themselves through music, Kalaidzhiev aspires to make a positive impact and create opportunities similar to the ones he has experienced himself.

Furthermore, Julia mentions that the music school in Burgas is committed to ensuring that students with various health issues receive individualized assistance on a long-term basis. This includes providing medical, mental, and professional support to help them complete their education: "By providing support to these children, even if they don't possess special musical giftedness, they are given an opportunity for future development in some capacity." As a result, the music school in Burgas is seen as an exemplary and reliable partner that fosters diversity, creativity, and talent growth in the local community.

Interview partner Krasimir

According to Krasimir, motivation is a crucial factor for progress. His own motivation to contribute to the school's success was the main reason for accepting the position of school principal. He emphasizes that working with enthusiasm and encouraging students to make deliberate decisions is essential in his roles both as a teacher and as a principal. Himself a graduate of the school, he feels a moral responsibility to support and guide the students. Krasimir observes a common problem among younger generations, which is a lack of motivation: "One of the problems is a lack of interest . . . We live in times where generations lack motivation for anything . . . this is a significant problem. Generations are not familiar with this word. What does it mean to be motivated?" To address this issue, the school is actively using online platforms and social media to engage with the students and generate interest. The goal is to promote the school in the online environment, where young people are

almost always present. "Currently, our school is working very seriously to . . . position our school in that environment which is very popular right now. In the online environment."

Krasimir identifies the experience of being on stage as a powerful stimulus for students to work hard and achieve their goals. He recalls his personal journey of being involved in stage performances since childhood and how it continues to motivate him:

> *My life has unfolded in such a way that I have been on stage since I was little. And perhaps this is still a strong motivation for me to this day. That's why, coming to the school, agreeing to be the school's principal, I said that we are all heading towards the stage.*

Examples of cooperation and/or competition between different stakeholders

Interview partner Julian

According to Julian, there is a consensus among teachers, students, and alumni that the number of students pursuing music majors is decreasing. As a result, former music schools are now referred to as culture and art schools and this adaptation reflects a cooperative effort to attract students. However, in smaller towns like Shiroka Luka and Kotel there are folklore schools that only attract students specifically interested in studying folklore arts and music. But if larger schools in major towns and centers introduce the same subjects and majors, he argues, many students may choose to attend those schools instead. This creates a competitive situation where the interests of smaller schools can be directly affected by the introduction of new subjects in larger schools.

On the other hand, he points out, there used to be only two schools dedicated to folklore – in Kotel and Shiroka Luka. There have also been folklore classes for some time in Pleven, but this was more of a Pleven tradition, specific to northern Bulgaria. Nowadays, folk singing and folk instruments are taught in all schools, including those in Sofia and Plovdiv. Because Kotel and Shiroka Luka are very small towns, their schools have little chance of developing new specialties, especially the one in Shiroka Luka. Consequently, the lack of student attraction to folklore education in these schools, combined with the availability of the same subjects in larger towns and cities nearby (such as Plovdiv), creates an imbalance within the education system. This, in turn, poses significant challenges for the survival of these folklore-specific schools.

Interview partner Julia

Interview partner Julia mentions several examples of cooperation in the field of music education. In recent years, leading higher education art institutes and performing arts institutes have actively strengthened their collaboration with the local music school in Burgas. For instance, the Art Academy in Sofia has established a branch in Burgas, which has inspired many students to enroll in art majors at the music school. Moreover, the State Opera of Burgas has formed a robust partnership with the music school's ballet and dance classes, allowing ballet students to participate in various projects organized by the professional opera house. Furthermore, graduation exams of students from the local music school are accepted as entrance exams for the National Music Academy (NMA) in Sofia. This cooperative effort eliminates the need for additional entrance examinations and enables many students to continue their education in higher education institutions.

Julia also highlights the collaborative efforts of the National Music Academy (NMA) in Sofia.

> *For the past few years, there has been a young and fresh leadership at the National Music Academy (NMA) in Sofia, and they are doing many wonderful things. For example, for the past three–four years,*

the NMA's academic orchestra has given concerts with student soloists from all music schools in Bulgaria. ... On the other hand, for the past two years, there have been concerts featuring prize-winning child laureates from competitions throughout the year, held on the stage of the Music Academy. Through these concerts, which I had the chance to attend twice with two of my students, we could witness the high level of performance.

Interview partner Krasimir

Krasimir provides examples of cooperation and competition between different stakeholders in the field of performing arts in Stara Zagora. He remarks that Stara Zagora is home to three major professional institutions—the State Opera, the State Drama Theatre, and the State Puppet Theatre – and that all of them have various collaborations with the local music school. Krasimir, who has served as a conductor and artistic director of the State Opera in Stara Zagora for 35 years, has developed close professional ties with these institutions, facilitating collaborations, joint projects, and performances.

The interest of Stara Zagora's children in performing arts education has motivated the local music school to expand its educational offerings with various performing arts programs. One of the programs sought by the school and the students is a study major in puppet theater:

The director of the puppet theater has promised me a teacher . . . This is another reason, meaning that the children have shown interest [in puppet theater], but there hasn't been a way for them to enroll. That's why I want to open this major next year, to have admissions and see what the interest is.

Examples of transdisciplinary education

Interview partner Julian

Julian explains that between 1992 and 1994, he and his team (all employees in the Ministry of Culture at the time) introduced transdisciplinary education in Bulgarian music schools. This was in response to the challenges faced by music school students who had heavy workloads in specialized education, which made it difficult for them to follow the same curriculum as general schools. To address this, Julian and his colleagues developed learning workbooks that integrated subjects like math, literature, history, and applied arts with music. However, after a few years, the initiative came to a halt because the Ministry of Education required all students to graduate with the same scope and sequence of subjects to receive a graduation diploma, and the need for transdisciplinary connections to the subject of music lost its relevance, a development that Julian regrets.

Interview partner Julia

According to Julia, in a school where different art forms coexist, intentional and unintentional transdisciplinary interactions among students are common. She highlights student-led events where students exchange ideas and showcase their works. Additionally, group projects are organized, allowing students from different majors to collaborate and create joint artistic productions.

Interview partner Krasimir

According to Krasimir, students in the music school are constantly surrounded by various forms of art, fostering continuous interaction, which inadvertently leads to transdisciplinary learning. It is common practice, Krasimir points out, that students become involved in joint projects where different performing arts are represented. "So, they can switch

unintendedly or even on purpose to try different arts and so enrich their expertise and experience."

Discussion and conclusion

The interviews reveal several nodal situations that can be significant for the future of Bulgarian music education. One such situation is the development of Kalaidzhiev's music school project in Sliven. The project is unique as it incorporates new practices and standards that are not yet established in the Bulgarian educational system. While the music schools have a strong history of providing education to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, minorities, and those with special needs or impairments, these policies are not formalized and often stem from the dedication of individual teachers and staff. Kalaidzhiev's project, on the other hand, can promote new practices that could potentially change the entire system, similar to two cases of system resilience described by Westerlund et al. (2019): the Resonaari music school and the Floora project, both in Finland.

Furthermore, the interview partners highlight collaboration as a crucial factor in the success of music education in Bulgaria. They provide multiple positive descriptions of collaboration within and beyond local communities – including music schools, performing arts institutions, and tertiary education providers – all of whom recognize the importance of working together to address the challenges faced by music schools and to navigate the changing educational landscape. Collaboration with the local puppet theater might offer another example of a nodal situation where transdisciplinary art education can serve as an agency of change for all the institutions involved, and as a recourse for developing transformative music education professionalism (Westerlund 2020).

The narratives in this study's findings challenge Bazaytova's (2020) "success stories" regarding music education in Bulgaria. The interviews, conducted in the summer of 2023, provide a more nuanced perspective on both successes and challenges experienced by music schools in the country. The insights gained from these interviews suggest that topics from previous research, even dating back a decade, remain relevant in the current environment as young musicians grow and develop their talents.

The interviews shed light on a shifting music educational landscape in Bulgaria which in the mid-2020s is characterized by emerging transdisciplinary opportunities. They highlight the need for contemporary approaches that embrace transdisciplinary learning and sustainable practices for talent recruitment, retention, and integration. In contrast to the predominantly financial criteria for success put forward by the Ministry of Culture, the narratives in this study involve a greater emphasis on service to the community as evidence of success. The interviewees go beyond merely identifying the problems mentioned in Bazaytova's study and offer suggestions for resolving them. One notable proposal put forward by the interviewees is the introduction of a law to address these issues and ensure the long-term success of music education in Bulgaria. Overall, the interviews provide valuable insights that challenge existing narratives, emphasizing the importance of contemporary and transdisciplinary approaches, as well as the need for comprehensive strategies to enhance music education in the country. ■

Note

[1] There are other countries in the former Eastern Bloc, such as Romania and Ukraine, that also offer similar types of education, combining general education subjects with specialized music or arts education at the same institutions.

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Interviews

Prof. Julian Kujumdjiev, musicology professor. Interview conducted by the author on 09.07.2023 in Burgas, Bulgaria.

Krasimir Kushev, music school principal. Interview conducted by the author on 03.07.2023 in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria.

Julia Nenova, music school principal. Interview conducted by the author on 30.06.2023 in Burgas, Bulgaria.

Paulo Esteireiro, Carolina Faria, Natalina Cristovão & Carlos Gonçalves

Cultural sustainability through the opportunity to learn traditional instruments in schools: Understanding an educational initiative in Madeira through Grant's music vitality framework

As stated by UNESCO (2003a), the intangible cultural heritage has an invaluable role in bringing human beings closer together and ensuring exchange and understanding amongst them. Article 14 in Section III of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage emphasizes the importance of creating means to raise awareness and inform the general public, particularly the youth, about intangible cultural heritage.

In previous studies, we have discussed methods to engage young Portuguese pupils with regional culture through art education (Cristóvão 2013; Esteireiro 2007; Gonçalves et al. 2016). We also conducted a study on how traditional instruments could be preserved through education, as detailed in Gonçalves et al. (2018). Historically, the Portuguese national curriculum has overlooked regional specifics, which distanced local communities from schools (Formosinho et al. 2005, 20). However, Decree-Law No. 6/2001 provided schools with greater autonomy to include regional content, supporting Article 47 of the Basic Law of the Education System (1986).

Several years before the enactment of this law, between 1987 and 1988, the Department of Artistic and Multimedia Education in Madeira launched an initiative to promote local folk instruments in schools. This ongoing project demonstrates how artistic education can uphold and enhance local culture on a global scale. Before the initiative, there was a noticeable decline in student engagement with Madeiran folk instruments; however, interest in these instruments has since experienced a remarkable resurgence. A significant number of pupils are now actively involved with local folk instruments, both within school environments and beyond (Gonçalves et al. 2018). Particularly noteworthy is the focus on traditional chordophones, such as the *braguinha* (Figure 1), the *rajão* (Figure 2), and the *viola de arame* (Figure 3), which have been extensively integrated into educational programmes.

Figure 1.
Braguinha

Figure 2.
Rajão

Figure 3.
Viola de arame

Recognising the historical significance of instruments like the braguinha and rajão, which laid the foundation for the globally famous ukulele, the Madeira government deemed their preservation in education crucial. In the 1960s, studies by Portuguese researchers Jorge Dias and Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira described the migration of these instruments to Brazil and Hawaii, underlining their impact on music worldwide (Dias 1967; Oliveira 1966). Further research in regions where these instruments have become integral to local music cultures, such as Alberto Ikeda's work in Brazil and the studies by John King and Jim Tranquada in Hawaii, has confirmed their wide popularity (Ikeda 1992; King & Tranquada, 2008). In recognition of their cultural value, the Madeira Parliament established a regional day in 2019 to celebrate Madeira's traditional instruments and promote their historical importance and ongoing relevance in schools across the island.

In 2018, Gonçalves et al. collected data on the number of pupils in basic education who learned Madeiran traditional instruments in school. In Table 1, data for the years 2017/2018 to 2021/2022 have been added, showing that the trend of the use of Madeiran traditional instruments within educational settings remains stable. Currently, approximately 1,300 pupils are learning the braguinha in the first cycle of basic education as part of extracurricular activities. Although fewer pupils play traditional instruments at higher levels of education, each year, several hundred continue to practise these instruments in Madeiran schools through extracurricular programs. This demonstrates a sustained interest and commitment to preserving these traditional musical instruments.

Table 1. Number of schools in which traditional Madeiran string instruments are taught as extracurricular activities, and the number of pupils who are learning these instruments.

	1st Cycle of Basic Education (6–9 years)		2nd and 3rd Cycles of Basic Education (10–14 years)	
Year	**Schools**	**Pupils**	**Schools**	**Pupils**
2011/2012	23	843	11	334
2012/2013	27	853	10	256
2013/2014	27	989	9	189
2014/2015	23	825	10	174
2015/2016	27	1299	9	141
2016/2017	23	1082	9	122
2017/2018	24	1143	11	115
2018/2019	22	1068	10	153
2019/2020	21	1129	12	139
2020/2021	25	954	11	108
2021/2022	26	1129	12	109
2022/2023	19	869	11	109

One of the main findings from the first phase of this study was the significant link between the success of the project and its leadership model, as summarised below. Reflecting on the success of the braguinha instrument in its various forms (cavaquinho, ukulele, machete) and its systematic use in education over the past three decades, we have identified a number of elements that we consider key contributors to the positive development:

a) the clearly defined roles and responsibilities of the project leaders,
b) the variety and nature of events that have been developed and organised,
c) the integration of the project into extracurricular activities through the allocation of specific hours for schools to dedicate to the project,
d) ongoing teacher training and the types of training activities provided,
e) the repertoire used with the pupils, and
f) the purchasing of instruments.

Leadership is the pivotal element of this model. The project operates under a structured hierarchy with three main leaders: the director of services, the regional coordinator of artistic modalities, and the coordinator of traditional musical instrument activities. Their joint objective is to continuously improve the activities by pinpointing the strengths and addressing the challenges of the project. These leaders are tasked with promoting regional events in partnership with the various schools where the instruments are taught, allocating hourly credits to schools that develop successful projects, providing continuous training, fostering the creation of new repertoire by publishing works with new compositions for the instruments, and supplying schools with instruments for children who may otherwise lack the means to obtain them.

As a result of this renewed appreciation in the school environment, the instruments are now taught in various cultural associations and since 2008 at the Conservatory - Professional School of the Arts of Madeira. The importance of preserving Madeira's traditional instruments and musical genres within an educational context is a direct reflection of the principles established by the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003a). The aim of the project is not only to protect and promote the rich tapestry of Madeira's cultural heritage but also to serve as a vital strategy for education and the formation of community identities. Introducing Madeira's traditional instruments such as the braguinha, rajão, and machete along with regional musical genres like the *Bailinho da Madeira*[2] in schools gives pupils the opportunity to learn about their local culture. Additionally, based on our experience as educators, we argue that learning local instruments opens the door for pupils to explore musical instruments and genres from other cultures. Thus, the approach also aims to enhance the pupils' awareness and respect for cultural diversity and to expand their musical knowledge and skills by introducing them to a variety of musical traditions.

Furthermore, teaching Madeira's traditional instruments and music in schools encourages the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation, a cornerstone of the UNESCO convention. This helps to keep cultural traditions alive and encourages young people to actively participate in preserving their intangible cultural heritage. Through this educational practice, pupils can acquire practical skills in musical performance while gaining a theoretical understanding of the origins, history, and evolution of Madeira's instruments and musical genres. Incorporating these cultural elements may thus foster a rich and diverse learning environment in which pupils can explore and celebrate their heritage while gaining a broader understanding of the global importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. The project is currently one of the Portuguese references in the field of art education and in the preservation and dissemination of popular instruments in an educational context (Mota & Abreu 2014; Gonçalves et al. 2018).

Objective and method

Following the interesting results of the first research phase, we decided to conduct a new analysis, using a framework developed by ethnomusicologist Catherine Grant (2014) to further understand the sustainability and impact of this large-scale educational initiative in Madeira. This framework enables those working in the field to detect whether a musical genre from a particular region is at risk of extinction, to help identify interventions that may benefit the maintenance of the genre, and to monitor whether the situation progresses or regresses over time. In her book *Music Endangerment*, Grant presents a twelve-factor "music vitality and endangerment framework" (Grant 2014, 105–126), drawing on the UNESCO framework for determining the vitality of an endangered language (UNESCO 2003b). The factors of Grant's framework, slightly modified to reflect the iteration she presented at the 3rd European Music Symposium in 2023 (Grant 2024, 104–112), are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors affecting the vitality of a music genre (Grant 2014).

Factors affecting the vitality of a music genre (Grant 2014)
1. Intergenerational transmission
2. Change in the number of proficient musicians
3. Change in the number of people engaged with the genre
4. The pace and direction of change in the music and music practices
5. Change in performance context(s) and function(s)
6. Response to mass media and the music industry
7. Accessibility of infrastructure and resources for music practices
8. Knowledge and skills for music practices
9. Governmental and institutional policies affecting music practices
10. Community members' attitudes towards the genre
11. Relevant outsiders' attitudes towards the genre
12. Amount and quality of documentation

These factors were used as predefined categories for the analysis of the Madeira case, aiming to enrich our insights into how such a large-scale project has maintained engagement with traditional music genres among young people, and thereby justified public investment. The objectives of the subsequent analysis were:

a) to apply Grant's framework to acquire a deeper understanding of the model and implementation of the educational project for the defence and preservation of Madeiran folk musical instruments in schools
b) to assess the risk of extinction of these musical traditions before and after the project's implementation, using the analytical structure provided by Grant's framework.

To achieve these objectives, we adopted a qualitative approach, using data from our previous study and from additional interviews conducted in March 2023. The data set includes

semistructured interviews with project leaders, a selected group of teachers who are currently teaching the instruments as well as those who were involved when the project started, and with pupils who participate in the project. Extensive documentation was also available at the project organisation, allowing us to examine legal guiding documents based on current legislation, pedagogical supervision records made by project leaders, and various data related to the activities, including the annual training plan issued by of the artistic department, an inventory of schools with the number of instruments currently available, and the organisation's records of original editions, such as manuals with pieces for traditional string instruments. In addition, we had access to records of observations and video recordings of performances in schools and during regional concerts.

Our new analysis was designed to align closely with Grant's framework while being designed to take the unique aspects of our project into account. By incorporating data and insights derived directly from the project's outcomes, we aimed to provide a more detailed and nuanced explanation of how and why the project achieved its success. This approach allowed us to apply theoretical concepts in a practical context and also to refine our understanding of these concepts as they relate to the specific circumstances of the intervention.

The risk of extinction of traditional instruments: From the beginning of the project to the present

The application of Catherine Grant's music vitality and engagement framework (2014) facilitated a comprehensive analysis of the various factors that influence the vitality of Madeira's traditional instruments. This analysis highlighted not only the risks these instruments faced but also the necessary steps for their revitalisation. In 1987, the situation concerning Madeira's traditional instruments was critical, with evidence showing that only older musicians were still playing them. As pointed out by Virgílio Caldeira, one of the teachers involved in the initial phase of the project, "Regarding the chordophones themselves, their survival was in jeopardy because […] they were mostly played by people who were from 60 to 70 years of age".[3]

Testimonials from teachers at that time emphasise the risk of extinction and the urgency for an intervention focusing on cultural transmission and encouraging new generations to take up the instruments. In basic education and teacher education programmes, traditional instruments such as the braguinha, rajão and viola de arame were not taught; only the recorder was predominant. Teachers were not adequately prepared to practise traditional instruments and schools also lacked instruments to provide to pupils.

In addition, since the early 1980s, there was a tendency in folklore groups to move away from using traditional string instruments. Many were transitioning to the accordion, a trend observed by Vitor Sardinha, who was among the pioneering musicians dedicated to teaching traditional instruments: "[the] folklore groups . . . replaced all Madeiran chordophones with 120 and 100 bass accordions […]. Only the [folk group] of Camacha and the [folk group] of Ponta do Sol kept the rajão, the viola de arame and the braguinha."[4] Consequently, the production of traditional instruments was also in decline.

An episode recounted by Helena Camacho, who also participated in the early years of the project, illustrates the limited acceptance of traditional instruments at the time, demonstrating the initial cultural resistance to reintroducing chordophones in new musical settings:

> Those who played these instruments were the peasants. I still remember in *Largo do Colégio* [in the centre of Funchal] when these collections [of traditional music] were mixed with new arrangements with these instruments. I remember, the first time I sang

> a [traditional] lullaby, the booing we received, people were not used to hearing that type of music in that way, and they booed.[5]

At the governmental level, there was no systematic policy aimed at preserving traditional musical genres or instruments. At the beginning of the project, with a few exceptions attributable to individual efforts, the teachers involved reported encountering a lack of resources, a shortage of available instruments for teaching, and a complete absence of documentation and musical scores. Given this scenario, introducing Madeira's traditional instruments into the educational context not only helped mitigate the risk of extinction but also sparked cultural change.

Currently, the situation has improved significantly; a development that can be attributed to the educational initiative and the activities since its inception in 1987. Schools are now actively offering traditional Madeiran instruments, leading to a substantial increase in the number of children and young people learning to play them. Additionally, there is a growing development of original repertoire and publication of pedagogical resources, alongside regular teacher training and various collaborations with government entities. These efforts aim to promote the practice of traditional Madeiran instruments both in schools and to the wider public.

Intergenerational transmission is ensured in schools through the allocation of hours for extracurricular activities, facilitated by the Regional Department of Education. A specific number of hours is allocated to schools for the implementation of the project, depending on the number of pupils and the nature of the projects proposed by the schools themselves. Consequently, schools are able to offer more extracurricular artistic activities and employ additional music teachers if desired, thus broadening the range of artistic educational opportunities available to pupils.

The Department of Artistic Education has also effectively created conditions that have enhanced the availability of resources for music teachers. This strategic initiative has led to a significant increase in the accessibility of infrastructures and resources for music practices, fostering a supportive environment for both teachers and pupils.

A pivotal element of this initiative is the promotion of new and diverse repertoire. This encompasses the publication of editions that include both new and traditional compositions, thus enhancing the musical resources accessible to teachers. The project has supported the preservation of traditional musical heritage but also encouraged the creation of new works by contemporary composers and the revival of classical 19th-century repertoire for these instruments. Consequently, the repertoire has become remarkably eclectic, covering a range of musical styles including traditional, popular, classical, pop, rock, and pedagogical compositions written by Madeiran educators, significantly enriching the scope of musical education. These pieces are specifically crafted to refine various techniques such as fingerpicking and strumming which can be used across many genres.

Teachers also acknowledge the improvement in the quality and variety of the repertoire available for these instruments, reflecting a growing appreciation of the versatility and depth that traditional instruments can bring to musical education. The expanded repertoire enhances the learning experience by introducing pupils to a broader range of musical styles and, at the same time, elevates the status of the traditional instruments within the educational setting and ensures that they are seen with respect. Fernando Pires, who is currently a teacher involved in the project, notes: "They see instruments like the braguinha or rajão as more serious than the recorder, partly because the braguinha allows them to play a variety of music, unlike the recorder which is more entrenched in school music education."[6] There has also been a substantial improvement in the provision of musical instruments and an increase in the number of orders placed with luthiers for traditional instru-

ments, one of the most significant impacts of the project. The resurgence in demand for traditional instruments is reflected in the following account from Vítor Sardinha: "When I told [the luthier] that [the order] was for twenty instruments, the man clasped his head in disbelief."[7] The upsurge is probably driven by new demand from the pupils involved in the project. For instance, in the participating schools, there is currently a total of 500 traditional instruments such as the braguinha, the viola de arame, and the rajão. These figures do not include the number of instruments purchased by pupils themselves, which is difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the yearly increase in the number of pupils playing these instruments in schools has led to great demand, thereby fostering a new generation of luthiers.

The project also promotes active pupil participation in both school and regional events. Document analysis and interviews with key stakeholders suggest that these events facilitate informal knowledge sharing between pupils and their teachers. The interaction includes sharing repertoire, musical techniques, and pedagogical activities. During teacher training sessions, educators engage with new repertoire and exchange ideas for activities that can be implemented with pupils. This collaborative environment allows pupils to partake actively in a diverse array of artistic events organised at the regional level by the Department of Artistic Education or by the school itself, in community events, or within the school setting.

The project promotes active student participation and fosters the consolidation of traditional musical knowledge and skills alongside more modern techniques. Teachers have the opportunity to receive training in traditional instruments on an annual basis. This enables those who are unfamiliar with these instruments to learn them and allows those who are already skilled to enhance their abilities and become acquainted with new techniques and repertoires, facilitating continuous improvement of their skills. The Guiding Document for Artistic Modalities (*Documento Orientador para Modalidades Artísticas*), which regulates the project, specifically recommends that all teachers in preschool and basic education in Madeira participate in at least one training session each year. Access to continuous training has also contributed significantly to the musical vitality of traditional instruments.

In recent years, the project has been accompanied by a series of publications and supporting documentation, edited by the Department of Artistic Education. An examination of the list of publications promoted by the Department of Artistic Education confirms the strong commitment to creating new pedagogical materials to support the teaching of Madeiran traditional instruments. From beginner manuals to music books with CDs and multimedia products, original publications have regularly been produced to assist teachers of traditional instruments.

Understanding the cultural sustainability impact of an educational project

The aim of maintaining and promoting teaching and learning of Madeiran traditional instruments has had important consequences from a cultural sustainability perspective: it has created employment opportunities for musicians in the field of education; it has ensured that the art of instrument making did not vanish, resulting in more professional opportunities for luthiers today than at the beginning of the project; it has prompted the need to preserve traditional repertoire and create new repertoires; and it has increased the number of school concerts for the community based on local traditions, some of which were at risk of disappearing.

This effort has catalysed a paradigm shift over a period of 35 years, markedly differentiating the initial state of affairs in 1987 from that observed in 2022, as detailed in Table 3. In 1987 the situation surrounding traditional instruments was characterised by several challenges that threatened their continued use and preservation. First, there was a noticeable

lack of interest amongst younger generations in learning to play these instruments, which led to a decline in both proficient musicians and audiences for traditional music. Second, there was a notable difficulty in accessing instruments and the resources necessary for music practice, which hindered new learners and seasoned musicians alike. This situation was compounded by a decrease in the knowledge and skills required to maintain traditional musical practices, creating a gap in transmission between generations. Furthermore, the documentation of traditional Madeiran music, including recordings and writings, was poor, making it difficult to engage with and preserve this rich musical heritage effectively.

By 2022 the situation has improved significantly, with regularly organised training sessions, schools teaching traditional instruments, and about 1,300 children and young people learning these instruments in a school context every year. Furthermore, hundreds of original works for traditional instruments have been composed and compiled, musicological studies and publication of editions with pedagogical activities have been published, partnerships have been forged between associations and government agencies for the promotion of the instruments, public awareness has been raised, and there is high demand for acquisition of instruments both within and outside the region, with a waiting time of up to 6 months to receive an order. These improvements correspond with the factors included in the music vitality framework proposed by Grant (2014), as shown in Table 3. Thus, most of the observed changes of Madeira's model fit into Grant's framework and have indeed contributed immensely to the aim of ensuring a longer life for traditional music and traditional instruments.

Table 3. Grant's music vitality framework as a lens for understanding the impact of the educational project to preserve traditional popular instruments in Madeira.

Grant's music vitality framework as a lens for understanding the impact of the educational project to preserve traditional popular instruments in Madeira		
Music vitality and engagement framework (Grant 2014)	**Popular instruments in Madeira: the situation in 1987**	**Popular instruments in Madeira: the situation in 2022**
1. Intergenerational transmission	Few young people learning to play traditional Madeiran instruments	Allocation of hourly credits for extracurricular activities in schools has increased pupils' engagement with traditional Madeiran instruments
2. Change in the number of proficient musicians	Decline in the number of proficient musicians who play traditional instruments and fewer people involved in traditional music as audience	Increase in concert opportunities for musicians
3. Change in the number of people engaged with the genre		Growth in audience and public interest in traditional Madeiran instruments
4. Change in the music and music practices	Progressive decline of the cultural contexts in rural areas that sustain traditional musical instruments	Shift towards a variety of musical styles including traditional, popular, classical, pop, rock, and pedagogical compositions
5. Change in performance context(s) and function(s)		Concerts in educational environments Regional events sponsored by the tourism and cultural departments
6. Response to mass media and the music industry	Music industry and mass media neglecting traditional Madeiran music	Production of televised videos, music videos, and CD recordings

7. Accessibility of infrastructure and resources for music practices	Difficulty in accessing instruments and resources for music practice	New repertoire encouraged Publication of editions with repertoire Improved supply of instruments Increase of orders placed with luthiers
8. Knowledge and skills for music practices	Decrease in the knowledge and skills required to maintain traditional musical practices	Ongoing teacher training
9. Governmental and institutional policies affecting music practices	Institutional policies that do not support traditional music	Government department leading project partnerships between associations and government entities for the promotion of these instruments and public awareness The Madeiran Government's establishment of Regional Chordophones Day
10. Community members' attitudes towards the genre	Disinterest from community members towards traditional music	Celebrating Regional Chordophones Day has impacted community involvement and public interest in traditional music
11. Relevant outsiders' attitudes towards the genre		
12. Amount and quality of documentation	Poor documentation about traditional Madeiran music, including recordings and writings	Increase in research and publications

Our approach, which involved applying Grant's analytical framework in a school context and taking the unique aspects of the educational initiative into account, confirms the framework's relevance and effectiveness while also illustrating its applicability in basic education.

Despite the success of the systemic strategy implemented by the Department of Artistic Education department in Madeira, certain elements of Grant's framework reveal some possible weaknesses and ongoing difficulties. For example, despite more than a thousand pupils annually practising these instruments, musical groups that include these children, an increase in the number of concerts, and a strong investment in intergenerational transmission, there does not seem to be a significant increase in the number of professional musicians in the domain, and successful artists of high calibre have not yet emerged.

Nevertheless, the contribution of this project in raising awareness among children about traditional music and traditional Madeiran instruments is undeniable. This significance is underlined by one of the current project teachers, Élvio Jesus:

> *"[The pupils] feel that they are part of a group, part of a culture. I always start my classes with a demonstration video that includes various artistic performances involving chordophones. I emphasise the importance these instruments hold for the culture of our region, as they are part of the folklore of the people, and highlight how essential it is that these instruments are not forgotten."* [8]

This transformation reflects the educational project's remarkable success in revitalising and preserving the practice of traditional instruments, enriching the musical heritage, and fostering a vibrant cultural ecosystem that extends far beyond the region's borders. The approach taken in the Madeiran project can serve as a model for how culture and tradition

can be preserved and valued in contemporary societies, in line with the objectives and values of the UNESCO Convention. ■

Notes

[1] The authors wish to express their gratitude to Robert Andres and Honor O'Hea for proofreading the manuscript.

[2] "Bailinho" is a genre of traditional music and dance from the island of Madeira.

[3] Virgílio Caldeira, personal interview, April 2018.

[4] Vítor Sardinha, personal interview, April 2018.

[5] Helena Camacho, personal interview, April 2018.

[6] Fernando Pires, personal interview, March 2023.

[7] Vítor Sardinha, personal interview, April 2018.

[8] Élvio Jesus, personal interview, March 2023.

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Keynote

Catherine Grant

Sustainable futures for music practices: Opportunities for music education

***Note**: This is a verbatim transcript of Catherine Grant's keynote presentation at the 3rd European Music School Symposium, 6–7 October 2023 in Vienna, Austria (and online). The symposium was themed "Music schools and their ecosystems: Building sustainable futures". Selected visuals from the presentation are provided here as figures.*

Hello everyone. My name's Catherine Grant, and it's my great pleasure to be joining you for this sustainability-themed European Music School Symposium. I'm joining you from Brisbane, Australia. As is customary in Australia, I'd like to begin my talk by acknowledging the First Nations peoples of this place where I am now, the Jagera and Turrbal peoples. I pay my respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging, and extend that respect to all First Peoples around the world.

Fifty years ago, in the early 1970s, the American folklorist and ethnographer Alan Lomax published what he called "an appeal for cultural equity" (1972). Lomax was worried about how fast local musical and other cultural expressions were disappearing. He believed that cultural loss and homogenisation were leaving the world culturally and intellectually impoverished, and diminishing people's capacity to enjoy rich and fulfilling cultural lives. Lomax partly blamed the mass media and entertainment industries for this cultural "grey-out": for example, they were profiling only a few standardised, commercialised music genres. But he also found fault with what he called the "brutal educational approach" (1972, 9) that, to his mind, did just the same: celebrated a small handful of strong musical traditions to the exclusion of thousands upon thousands of others. In effect, he was saying: "Why disregard the world's musical diversity like this?" Lomax pleaded for an educational system that held the music of all peoples in equal value. He wanted local, orally transmitted musical practices to be given, in his words, "the status and the space they deserve" (1972, 13). In short, for reasons of cultural sustainability, Lomax wanted cultural equity in music education.

In my keynote today, I'd like to take Lomax's appeal for cultural equity as a provocation to explore the intersection of music sustainability and music education. Was Lomax fair in criticising music education in this way? What's changed in the 50 years since then—for music education, but also for music sustainability? Are we still facing cultural grey-out, cultural loss? Could or should music education institutions support music sustainability? If so, how should they go about it? And what are some opportunities and benefits of music sustainability endeavours for music schools and institutions? These are the questions I'd like to explore in this keynote.

My talk is in two parts. In the first part, I'll explore the matter of *music sustainability*, and why I and many others believe it needs our attention. In this part, I'll also share a framework I developed to help us better understand music sustainability, and act in support of it. In the second part of my talk, I turn to music education, and reflect on the obligations and opportunities that I think music sustainability presents for music learners, teachers, and education institutions. Running through both parts of my talk is the theme of cultural equity.

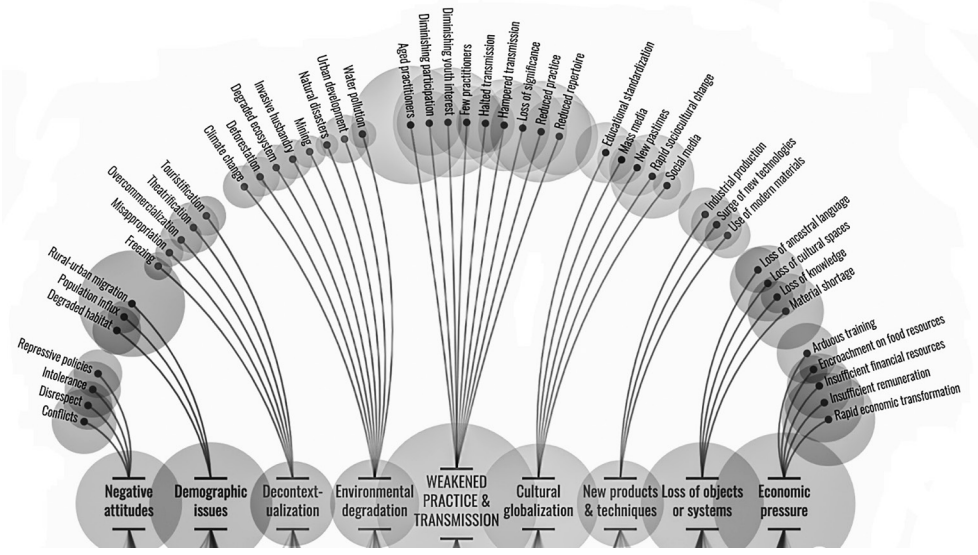
Part 1: Music sustainability

It was UNESCO's *Convention on the Urgent Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2003 that brought the widespread endangerment of music and other forms of intangible cultural

heritage to international attention (UNESCO 2003a). UNESCO's Convention stated that cultural practices across the world were under serious threat from a range of local and global forces; the music of minority groups, and Indigenous peoples, and other marginalised or minoritised groups, was particularly at risk.

UNESCO subsequently compiled this representation of 46 common threats to music and other intangible expressions of culture (UNESCO n.d.; see Figure 1). It grouped these threats into 9 categories, which you see along the bottom of this diagram—from negative attitudes like repressive policies or racism on the left, through to economic pressures on the right. (We might add health threats like pandemics now too.) UNESCO urged widescale action to mitigate these cultural losses. It noted that education has a critical role to play in supporting the sustainable future of music and other cultural practices. I'll return to that matter later in my talk.

Figure 1. Threats to cultural sustainability. (UNESCO n.d.)



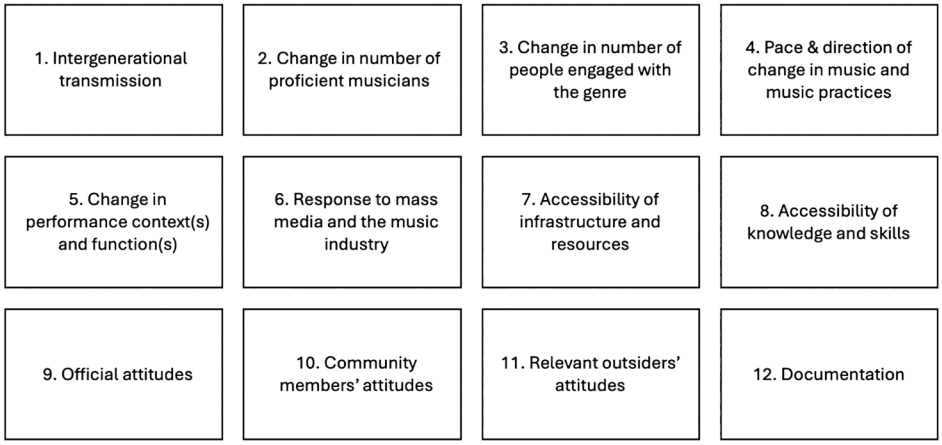
Since then, a range of conventions, declarations and other proclamations have drawn attention to the urgency and need to support local cultural traditions (or what I'll call cultural "practices"), ones that don't enjoy the profile or resourcing of many bigger, better-known practices. About a decade ago, for example, here in Australia, the regional committee of the International Council for Traditional Music released a statement about the performance practices of Australian First Nations people. The statement proclaimed that an estimated 98 percent of those performance practices had disappeared since colonization, and those that remained were "in crisis" due to the ongoing impacts of colonization (ICTM-ANZ-RC 2011, paras. 1 and 3). Keeping "small"[1] local musical practices strong is important for so many reasons. These cultural practices express the shared identity of a group of people. They are important for the wellbeing of individuals and communities, and especially for those who are marginalised or minoritised. They can carry important cultural, historical, environmental knowledge, sometimes even a whole worldview; and it's important for us to maintain a rich global diversity of cultures and cultural practices, because as UNESCO argues, that diversity is valuable for its own sake. The matter of music sustainability, and cultural sustainability more broadly, is something we should all care about—it's in all our interests.

UNESCO continues to urge us to support cultural practices in danger of disappearing. This has led to many initiatives around the world that aim to support small local music practices—documentation and archiving initiatives, performance events and festivals, even longer-term educational and community projects (see Schippers and Grant 2016). Many of these music sustainability initiatives are collaborations between communities and local cultural organisations, educational institutions, sometimes also researchers or governments. Many are making wonderful contributions to keeping musical practices strong. But the matter of music sustainability still often gets forgotten when decisions are made in areas like music education, or the music industry, or cultural policy. When institutions make decisions, I think it's crucial for us to remember the importance of cultural sustainability, and to consider what implications our decisions could have for the strength and viability of small, local cultural practices. In the second half of my talk, I'll return to this point, and consider in more depth what this could mean for music schools and music education.

Before I do so, I'd like to share with you something emanating from my own research, if I may: a simple tool I developed to help us better understand matters of music sustainability at local as well as global levels. Since the UNESCO Convention, ethnomusicologists (in particular) have increasingly recognised the need for such tools. How do we know when a musical practice in our local region or our country is endangered, or might benefit from targeted support? How could we identify specifically what challenges it faces, so that we better know how to support it? How could we track whether its situation improves or deteriorates over time? When I first started researching the topic of music sustainability, it struck me that sociolinguists had developed many tools over decades to help them identify and understand situations of language endangerment.[2] Through these tools, linguists were able to estimate, for example, that around half of all the roughly 6000 languages spoken in the world might no longer be spoken by the end of this century, and that those languages most at risk were those of Indigenous and minority peoples (UNESCO 2011, 4). Linguists could also identify, through these tools, some of the factors causing the endangerment of certain languages. All this was useful knowledge. For one thing, linguists could then use it to advocate to educational and research institutions and governments for action.

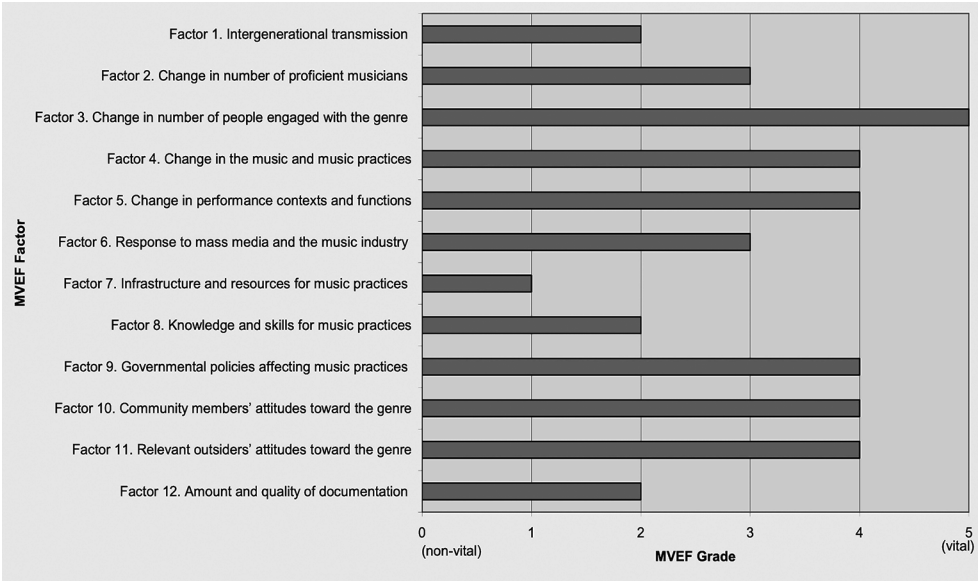
No comparable tool existed yet to gauge the strength of musical practices, so I decided to try to create one. I called it the *Music Vitality and Endangerment Framework*, and I describe it in detail in my book *Music Endangerment* (Grant 2014, chapter 4). For reasons I give in the book, I decided to base my framework on a certain tool that UNESCO had developed for languages: the Language Vitality Framework (UNESCO 2003b). That language framework identified 9 factors in language vitality, or the strength of a language. My first step then was to carefully compare language and music in relation to their vitality—there are similarities, but many differences too. (One example of a difference is that first languages are typically acquired at a young age with minimal or no formal teaching, whereas that is certainly not true of all musical practices, in all cultures.) Taking into account these differences, my framework proposes twelve factors in the vitality of any given music genre—you see those here (see Figure 2). Some of these factors are the same as UNESCO's factors for languages, like intergenerational transmission and community attitudes, and some quite different, like the interaction with the mass media and the music industry. With this framework, a musician, community member, researcher, or cultural worker, can carry out an assessment of strength against each factor. If it's appropriate for the context and purpose, this could comprise a both a qualitative assessment and a quantitative measure on a scale of 0 (non-vital) to 5 (vital). Taken together, these data build a picture of the overall strength of any given genre.

Figure 2. The twelve factors of the Music Vitality and Endangerment Framework.



In my book, I test this framework out against the music genre *ca trù*, a vocal chamber music of north Vietnam that was banned for some decades and is now undergoing a revitalisation (Grant 2014, chapter 5). The graph you see here is my assessment of *ca trù* (see Figure 3). It shows some areas where *ca trù* is facing challenges, which may then be useful areas to support through sustainability initiatives. You'll notice Factor 7 is infrastructure and resources for music practices: the *ca trù* community had had trouble securing appropriate spaces for teaching, rehearsing, and performing; also the key instrument, the *đàn đáy*, was quite difficult to come by. Instruments were quite expensive and instrument-makers very few.

Figure 3. Assessment of *ca trù* against the twelve factors of the Music Vitality and Endangerment Framework (Grant 2014, 162).



It's possible to use this framework with Western classical music too. If I were to ask you each to consider the situation of Western classical music in relation to these twelve factors, your answers would probably differ depending on the situation in your own countries or regions. But I suspect some broad themes might emerge: for example about the prestige of the genre, or the changes and challenges relating to its funding, resources, government support, and so on. So the framework could help us better understand the situation of Western classical music too, and perhaps inform our decisions about how best to support it.

In addition to using the framework to look at a single musical practice, I also wanted to test how the framework might be used comparatively. To do this, I took inspiration from UNESCO again: it distributes a survey about language strength, based on its Language Vitality Framework, to communities, linguists, governments, education and research institutions, and others, then makes that data available via the Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (UNESCO 2011).[3] In 2014–2015, I invited music researchers and musicians around the world to fill out an online survey about a musical practice of their choice. I asked them to comment on its vitality against the twelve factors of the Music Endangerment and Vitality Framework.

I received 101 responses, on a wide range of musical practices: Hip Hop in New Zealand, Dinka ox songs in Sudan, the Bosnian urban folk song genre *sevdalinka*, Aboriginal women's ceremonial songs from central Australia. My primary intention was to evaluate the usability and reliability of the framework and the survey instrument: the survey responses of course only gave one person's *perspective* about the vitality of the genre they were reporting on. I also wanted to explore the advantages and challenges of representing data about music vitality on a map, following UNESCO's parallel effort to do so for endangered languages.

Elsewhere I've published some critical reflections about this project (Grant 2017), including its subjectivity and other limitations and risks, urging that a tool like this should only be used critically, reflexively, collaboratively (with musicians and communities), and with due acknowledgement of its limitations. But I also make the case that tools like the twelve-factor framework, and the survey and the mapping exercise, could serve some very useful purposes. They could:

- build understanding about local and global changes to the strength and sustainability of music practices, and in this way build a stronger basis for research, policy, and action;
- inform initiatives to support specific music practices, guiding local community, policy and stakeholder decisions around best use of resources and funds for sustainability efforts;
- help track changes to the vitality of specific music practices over time;
- help monitor and evaluate the success of sustainability initiatives, through longitudinal use;
- support advocacy efforts for music sustainability, and
- help educate children, youth, and adults about the situation of their own musical practices, as well as those of other cultural groups living in their communities, societies, nations, and regions.

They could also help educate people more broadly about music endangerment, music sustainability, and cultural sustainability at large (Grant 2017).

And on that note, regarding education, I turn now to the second part of my talk, where I'd like to reflect more generally on music education in relation to music sustainability. What does the matter of music sustainability mean for music education and educators?

Part 2: Implications for music education

In the last decades of the twentieth century, music education began to embrace major "world music" traditions: think gamelan, for example, or Indian Carnatic music, or "African drumming" (as if there is such a generic thing)! This certainly introduced some cultural diversity into formal music education, and it had educational and cultural benefits. But some music institutions still point to programs in these major traditions as their answer to cultural diversity, yet they continue to overlook the enormous global diversity of music. And I would claim that teaching a handful of major global music traditions, which are often geographically distant from students, is not the best way for music education to contribute to cultural equity or cultural sustainability. Local music practices don't enjoy the profile or resources given to those major world music traditions; ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl refers to these small music genres as ones that are at the weaker end of global distributions of power (2005, 168). These "small" music practices may be far more in need of support, through music education and in other ways.

In my own experience, learning more about the need for cultural equity and cultural sustainability has made me think hard about some of my own educational practices:

- What musical practices am I profiling in my classes, and why? Am I adequately representing small, local musical practices, or do I tend to take the easy route and profile music for which there are plenty of teaching resources and recordings available, which are already familiar to me and probably some of my students too, and/or which are immediately pleasing to the Western ear?
- Are there small music genres, perhaps those of local minority or minoritised groups, or those of the Indigenous peoples on whose lands I teach, that I might introduce to my classroom? Could I invite a representative of these groups to share their knowledge and skills with students?
- What are the musical and cultural backgrounds of my students? Might any of them be willing to share their insights into music that isn't typically represented in formal music education? If so, how could I encourage them, through my teaching practices and behaviours, to feel that their musical and cultural knowledge and skills are valuable and valued in the classroom?

In addition to teachers reflecting in these ways, there are many more structural ways for music education to support music sustainability. Institutions might decide to actively support specific local musical practices (for example, drawing on tools like the Music Vitality and Endangerment Framework to identify those practices and develop actions to support them). Let's say for example that a music school finds, through the framework, that a particular local musical tradition is no longer being passed on from older to younger generations; then perhaps it decides to run a small music education program to support intergenerational transmission. Or maybe a local musical practice is suffering from limited resources—a lack of musical instruments, perhaps. Then, the school might decide to invest in some instruments for learners to access. If a musical practice is relatively unknown within its local community, a music school might choose to profile or celebrate it in some way, in its programs or community performances. And so on. There are so many ways for music educators and music education to contribute locally to the global cause of music sustainability! We are perfectly placed to respond.

One little example: A few years ago, in the province of East Sumba in Indonesia, a non-government organisation called Sumba Integrated Development used the Music Vitality and Endangerment Framework to better understand the cultural situation of the local

Marapu people (Sumba Integrated Development 2020). Through the framework, they determined that cultural documentation was urgently needed. They developed an initiative with the Marapu community to record Marapu songs and other musical practices. Those recordings and other materials were made available in a local online repository. Then, public schools across East Sumba began integrating those materials into the curriculum, so that young people could learn about the unique culture of the local Marapu people, who have historically been underrepresented in formal education (Lamont et al. in press). For the first time, Marapu people are now being invited to lead school workshops and other educational cultural activities. Marapu children see themselves represented in school for the first time. The prejudice of non-Marapu children is decreasing, as they learn more about the Marapu culture and religion (Lamont et al. in press). The music sustainability benefits are clear, but so too are the educational and social benefits.

Of course, funding and resources for music education are limited, and some of you may be thinking: well, in Western countries, Western classical music is in some trouble, and we need to ensure that it has a sustainable future too. I agree that's important, and as I mentioned earlier, I think that music sustainability tools could help guide decisions about supporting Western classical music too. But as to whether we support Western classical or "Other" music: I don't think we need to think in a binary. I am confident that we can continue to provide Western classical music education (as best we can with the resources available) while also recognising and celebrating the full diversity of music in our communities and societies. We *can* think pluralistically! We don't have to support one musical practice at the expense of another: when we value music in all its diversity, we are doing all music a favour.

So by expanding the musics that we teach in our classrooms and education institutions, we are advancing the cause of music sustainability, by helping students learn about underrepresented musical practices that might even depend on education and awareness-raising for their survival. But there's a great educational benefit here too. Around the world, as you know, music educators and their institutions are striving toward a more equitable, diverse, representative, and inclusive model of music education, and many believe we have an ethical imperative to expand the musics, cultures, histories, and worldviews represented in music education. When we consciously invite lesser-known musical practices and their practitioners (the musicians) into our classrooms, we're taking a little step towards disrupting oppressive systems of education. We are recognising, honouring, and celebrating the knowledge, histories, and cultural practices of those peoples who are still too often silenced within our educational institutions.

For music education, this is not only an ethical imperative: it is also a magnificent opportunity, on two counts. First, it gives us educators the opportunity to significantly contribute to advancing music sustainability and cultural equity, a goal that remains as important and urgent as it was fifty years ago when Alan Lomax made his appeal for cultural equity. Second, it gives us the opportunity to make music education itself fairer, more inclusive, more equitable. Embracing diverse local music in music education unlocks a multitude of educational opportunities for music students, their teachers, their schools and institutions, their societies. Everyone benefits.

In closing, I return to Alan Lomax's appeal for cultural equity, fifty years ago. In many ways, we've come far since then. We better recognise the importance of cultural diversity in music education. We better understand the urgency to support endangered musical practices, as UNESCO's Convention demonstrates. We have a growing number of tools and frameworks to help us understand how to support these musical practices. And we're becoming increasingly aware of the roles and responsibilities of music education institutions regarding matters of cultural sustainability and cultural equity. I notice that Lomax's

appeal still reverberates today in the values of ISME, the International Society for Music Education. ISME proclaims that music education programs should be founded on a paradigm of cultural equity, whereby a wide variety of musics are taught and learnt, and *all* musics are worthy of study and respect; it professes its commitment not only to education, but also to the conservation and sustainable development of our shared cultural heritage (n.d., 'ISME core values' section). For us music educators, to my mind, all the justifications we need for supporting music sustainability are already at hand: the cultural, the social, the educational benefits. And all the groundwork is in place for us to choose to take small actions—in our classrooms, our schools, our communities—that support music sustainability and cultural equity. Now it's up to us. ■

Notes

[1] Elsewhere I define "small" music genres or practices as those "which by virtue of their non-dominance (culturally, socially, demographically, or otherwise) may face particular challenges to their viability" (Grant 2014, 2).

[2] Prominent examples include Fishman (1991), Edwards (1992), UNESCO (2003b), and Lewis and Simons (2010).

[3] The most recent iteration, launched in 2021, profiles all known languages, not only those "in danger" (UNESCO 2021).

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Abstract

About fifty years ago, American folklorist and ethnographer Alan Lomax published an impassioned "appeal for cultural equity", prompted by the rapid and widespread extinction of musical and other cultural expressions. Cultural homogenisation, endangerment, and loss were not only leaving the world culturally and intellectually impoverished, Lomax argued, but also diminishing people's capacity to enjoy rich and fulfilling cultural and social lives. Three decades later, UNESCO's *2003 Convention for the Urgent Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* urged educators, researchers, governments, policymakers, and cultural organisations anew to urgently implement measures supporting the sustainable futures of musical and other cultural practices. Another twenty years on, music sustainability concerns remain largely peripheral to policies and practices in music education, although various tools now exist to help music teachers and their institutions make informed decisions and act in support of music sustainability. In this keynote talk, I present one such tool—the twelve-factor *Music Endangerment and Vitality Framework*, based on a UNESCO model—and illustrate how it has been (and could be) employed by music education institutions to better support "small", local music practices, especially those of minority and Indigenous peoples. I suggest that music education institutions more actively engage with music sustainability endeavours, for two main reasons: first, the moral imperative to support the continued rich diversity of musical expressions around the world, for the sake of cultural equity and cultural sustainability; and second, the considerable educational, cultural, and social benefits that may thereby accrue. ■

Conference report

Kaisa J. Vähi & Antti Snellman

The paradox of a conference on sustainability – a report:

"Music schools and their ecosystems: Building sustainable futures"

(Vienna 5–7 October 2023)

Intro

The University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (mdw), in collaboration with the European Music School Union (EMU) and the Conference of Austrian Music School Associations (KOMU), recently organised their 3rd international two-day symposium in the beautiful city of Vienna. The symposium was preceded by a doctoral forum held one day earlier, which hosted 14 doctoral candidates from seven countries presenting their ongoing research on music schools. The symposium itself featured 40 presentations, two keynote speeches and workshops, and four panel discussions, with 170 participants including music school principals, teachers, researchers, and policy makers from 26 European countries. The organisers' efforts towards sustainable event management transformed the symposium into a hybrid event, allowing participation both online and onsite throughout the entire conference. As a result, around 30 online participants were able to engage with the keynote speeches, panel discussions, and evening events streamed live, along with accessing pre-recorded presentations for the entire following month. As an evening event, KOMU had organised a highly entertaining concert showcasing student ensembles spanning various ages and musical instruments, which highlighted the musical prowess and collaboration among the families and friends on the stage. In addition to the concert, a small number of students were also engaged in a few discussions and the closing ceremony.

The symposium exuded a welcoming atmosphere throughout these sunny October days, fostering friendly exchanges and inspiring discussions with people from diverse countries and backgrounds. The presentations covered a broad spectrum of topics, ranging from early childhood education to various projects within music schools, and even delved into the complexities of policy making. Witnessing the rich variety of approaches, concepts, and practices employed in European countries was particularly fascinating, offering fresh perspectives that encouraged us to re-evaluate our own teaching and research.

We, the authors of this report, are doctoral researchers, music school instrumental teachers, and first-timers at an international conference. Although attending the symposium carefully orchestrated by Cecilia Björk and Michaela Hahn from mdw was all in all a positive learning experience for us, our inexperience with this type of event gave us a unique opportunity to analyse it from a student-centred viewpoint, considering how much impact the symposium will ultimately have on the practices in European music schools, teachers' daily work, our own practice as music professionals and, above all, on the individual students' experience of making music.

Our report aims to provide a summary of the symposium's content, share our personal experiences as participants, and offer practical suggestions for fostering a more democratic, effective, and sustainable conference culture. In doing so, we question established conference practices along with the possible impact of this symposium on promoting a more sustainable way of life.

Keynote speeches: A theme with few variations

The symposium started with an opening speech from the president of the EMU, Philippe Dalarun, who highlighted the importance of art and music in benefiting sustainability in all its forms (ecological, social, and cultural) in this era of global challenges and the ongoing war in Europe. After these important remarks, the organisers gave a heartfelt welcoming speech, introducing the sustainable approaches implemented during the event that were underscored by online presentations and environmentally friendly choices concerning the coffee breaks.

There were two keynote speakers: Dr. Catherine Grant (Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, Australia) and Professor Ortwin Renn (International Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, IASS, Potsdam, Germany). Dr. Grant gave a prerecorded online presentation, *Sustainable futures for music practices: Opportunities for music education* (published in this issue, see Grant 2024), and joined live from Queensland for the subsequent question and answer (Q&A) session. The presentation concentrated on issues such as the position of minorities' music in formal music education and enhancing the vitality and viability of different music practices through equity, diversity, and inclusion – which she elaborates on in her music vitality and endangerment framework (Grant 2014). Two important and extensive topics were addressed during the Q&A session: "Who decides what kind of music should – or should not – be learned at music schools?" and "What does sustainability mean in music education?". Unfortunately, time constraints prevented any meaningful discussion on these matters, leaving the audience anticipating further exploration of these issues in the future.

Professor Renn's keynote presentation, *Sustainable culture(s): A major component for a humane future* (broadcast live from Warsaw), dealt with the theme of sustainability in a very broad manner. Renn looked at the topic of sustainability in music education from four perspectives: 1) as a role model for a more ecological way of life concerning issues of energy; 2) the increasing diversity of cultures, people, and musical traditions; 3) music as a universal language transcending cultural barriers; and 4) music schools as educational institutions. The subject matter was somewhat surprising, especially given Renn's considerable expertise in sustainability rather than music education. Regrettably, the potential of this keynote was not fully realised, as it predominantly reiterated conventional perspectives on the importance of Western classical music, rather than offering insights into the broader context of sustainability. Consequently, during the Q&A, the highly relevant remark regarding the very purpose of the music education system ("Do we still concentrate more on preparing future professionals than creating a space and time for students to enjoy and experience the positive impacts of making music together?") was left without an answer or further discussion.

The two speeches made us wonder whether the potential of the keynotes of a conference could be better realised if they were followed by a panel discussion with stakeholders of diverse – or even contrasting – knowledge in order to encourage a critical, sufficiently lengthy discussion on the topic at hand. Another aspect to be considered from the sustainability standpoint is whether there might be valid reasons for the audience to attend in person if the speakers present their keynotes online, but we will revisit the arguments for and against 'academic flying' later.

Panel discussions and paper presentations: Virtuosos of the symposium

Dr. Grant's keynote on the opening day of the symposium was followed by a panel discussion (also broadcast online) that set the bar high for considering sustainable approaches to music education as well as creating a captivating discussion between all participants and the

audience. The panel, which discussed the study *Green music school: A pilot project,* included Judith McGregor and Hans-Peter Manser (researchers from mdw), Thomas Albæk Jakobsen (principal of the Frederikshavn municipal music school in Denmark and freelance researcher), Alexander Blach-Marius (principal of the regional music school of the municipality of Wolkersdorf, Austria), Ela Jezovic (music school student from Wolkersdorf), and Vivianne Pirker (collaborating researcher from University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences in Vienna). Interestingly, despite stemming from the question "What could music schools do in terms of climate crisis?", it soon offered a much wider perspective on sustainable music education.

The panel began with a presentation of the pilot study, conducted in Wolkersdorf, Austria, where it was shockingly discovered that despite being well connected to the surrounding areas by public transport, the teachers and parents of the school's 600 students drive a distance equalling more than five trips around the world every year. As the panellists pointed out, "Imagine the amount of travelling just to play the clarinet"! The discussion developed further from the topic of carbon footprints to different aspects of sustainability in music education, such as the demand for updated teacher preparation to match the transforming needs of today's students, and music schools' opportunities for collaboration with other institutions to encourage systemic changes for increased cultural, social, and ecological sustainability. It also became apparent that in order to meet the expectations of the current society, music schools should be far more flexible – for example, they could better support students' motivation and well-being by having an open-door policy and providing opportunities for informal music making, which has immense social potential for community building.

The observation about music schools' currently unused potential resonated in several other presentations. Kim Boeskov (Denmark) suggested broadening the institutional purpose of music schools to include a wider range of people as a response to social sustainability issues, while noting current barriers to change such as rigid institutional logic, the continuing master-apprentice tradition, and teachers' conservative professional identities. Along the same line, Hanna Backer Johnsen (Finland) introduced social innovation as one possibility for making music education more accessible, based on the example of the Finnish *Floora project*, which combines music education with social work in a mutual quest for social sustainability. Martin Galmiche (France) and Anna Kuoppamäki (Finland) approached the same problem from another angle by inviting the audience to rethink the social and physical spaces in which musical learning might happen – to address the issue of children's absence from learning or composing music, we must first provide a place for that.

One good example of a down-to-earth, feasible solution for a more sustainable future of music schools was introduced in the presentation on a Greek music school, *Greening the sounds, one note at a time: A case study of MusEcological Education at the music school of Karditsa,* by Polyxeni Tseligka and Zoe Athanasiou (Greece). Their project was about making a music school's environment more ecologically sustainable by using heat pumps and solar panels, setting up school gardens, and implementing recycling and composting. Naturally, all of these ideas cannot be applied in every music school, but the number of improvements they had made (and especially their sincere enthusiasm for making these changes) gave a perfect lead for all of us to follow: change is possible – but only if we are proactively involved in it.

Helle Munksgaard Petersen from Musik & Billedskolen (Denmark) gave another excellent example of an easy-to-make and low-cost solution for a more (socially) sustainable music education. Her presentation focused on the opportunities for children at public schools to make music according to their own interests. The simple idea of the project, called *Creative Containers – a space for seizing children's own curiosity and engagement in music,* was to place containers filled with musical instruments in school yards so that students could use

them for playing together during their breaks. The containers also served as places for music school teachers to give instrumental and group tuition. This clever free-for-all solution enables all children at public schools to enjoy music making, which, in turn, breaks down socioeconomic barriers and also establishes closer links between the music schools and the local community.

Students' opinions: *sempre tacet?*

While the presentation by Tuulia Tuovinen (Finland) addressed the longstanding issue of omitting children's perspectives in the construction of music education policies, the majority of the contributions focused on the perspectives of teachers, school leaders, and researchers. A few exceptions aside, it appeared that the most important people – children and young adults learning music – were too often missing from the picture.

For the final event of the symposium, the stage was fortunately given to Swedish and Austrian music school students who had participated in a one-day workshop, *Student Voices*, with Christine Bouvard (Switzerland), Dorothy Conaghan (Ireland), Michaela Hahn (Austria), and Peter Renshaw (England, online). The students' voices were finally truly heard in two short films that addressed the topic of cultural sustainability in the context of local minorities' musical heritage; a strikingly accurate stand-up on the outdated teaching practices in music schools; and an emotional joint singing of a Sámi yoik that transcended the boundaries between the performers on stage and the audience in their seats, bringing together every person in the room in a harmonious expression of culture and unity. The underlying message of the symposium could not have been better summed up than by the students' question "Who has the power in music schools?". We would like to expand that by asking: Are we all doing everything in our capacity to create a sustainable future for music schools and their students, or are we simply sustaining the current practices and power hierarchies without even noticing it?

Mission Impossible: Engaging every member of the audience

When trying to politely ignore someone showing you pictures of their grandchild during a conference presentation, you find yourself pondering the reasons for their apparent boredom. Perhaps it has something to do with the rigid structure of academic conferences?

Most of the presentations at the symposium were organised into traditional 90-minute sessions consisting of three 15-minute presentations followed by a 15-minute Q&A session (40 presentations in total, of which 5 were online). Three sessions took place simultaneously, giving the audience the flexibility to choose the presentations that interested them most. However, occasionally seeing people fiddling with their phones, leaving the room during a presentation, or not showing up at all indicated that there is room for improvement. While we acknowledge the difficulties in engaging such a diverse audience, consisting of teachers, school leaders, and researchers, events like this symposium are one of the few places to get through to all of them in a mutual quest for culturally, socially, and environmentally sustainable music education. We cannot help but wonder whether the current efforts are enough. While we fully support our fellow researchers in their work, we believe that improving the dissemination of research benefits everyone involved. Our intention is not to dictate what should be researched, but rather to emphasise how it is presented, so that our messages as researchers can resonate better with the 'non-academic' participants. Nonetheless, we recognise that the latter also have an important role in contributing to the conference culture.

As the effectiveness of lecturing as a teaching method remains debatable, particularly

within higher education contexts (e.g. Freeman et al. 2014; Kozanitis & Nenciovici 2023), we raise the question: why does the continuing tradition of conferences primarily focus on presentations that may fail to critically engage the audience and risk having a limited lasting effect on their thinking and practice? This concern becomes even more crucial when considering sustainability in (music) education. Drawing from our experience, future symposia could enhance the traditional short lecture format and slideshow presentations by incorporating more creative ways of disseminating research, such as PechaKucha or a pitch talk competition, among others. As this is the only conference we have attended so far, we acknowledge our limited perspective regarding general academic traditions versus the specifics of this event. Hence, we emphasise our constructive criticism aimed at collectively enriching the conference culture to avoid (re-)experiencing every presenter's worst nightmare – the awkward silence following your presentation.

Reverie: dreaming of sustainable conferences

In our experience, a lot could – and should – be done to make conference presentations more engaging, and thus sustainable. Helle Munksgaard Petersen's presentation on using containers in music education was a beautiful example. In addition to the precise and relaxed articulation, she used free speech (always difficult but very engaging), clear slides (balance of text and visuals), physical expressions (gestures, eye contact), videos with kids talking and playing (both too often missing when researchers are talking about children and music), and handouts (highly refreshing in this era of digitalisation). While we as musicians and researchers recognise the challenges of performing in front of an audience, as teachers we value clear messages and constructive ideas for improving our practice. The presentations we personally found most interesting were the ones that suggested practical solutions to the sustainability-related obstacles that music schools encounter, or that offered new opportunities for a more democratic and accessible music education. However, there were also several presentations that did not seem to deal with sustainability apart from the title, often leaving the audience with more questions than answers.

In response to the observed challenges, we propose some practical solutions to enhance the overall conference experience. For example, presenting in big halls without an amplifier system was sometimes problematic, as the audience tended to spread out in the room and some presenters simply were not audible in the back rows. This technical issue could be easily solved by encouraging the audience to fill the room starting from the front row seats, which would also inspire more active participation in the discussion while at the same time reducing the temptation of finding other – often digital – sources of entertainment during a presentation. Instead, the ever-growing urge to play with digital devices could be employed by using any mobile application or Internet site that enables the audience to submit comments and questions to the presenter already during the presentation (e.g. Mentimeter, WordClouds).

Since the majority of the participants were not native English speakers, many people were struggling to follow the presentation when sometimes dauntingly scientific jargon was employed. While we recognise researchers' right to present academic work using scientific language, it is important to note that this symposium differs from many academic conferences where researchers discuss their work among peers. Instead, the presence of practitioners makes it a unique opportunity to integrate theory with practice, which would greatly benefit from presenters using a more accessible language. Aside from the language barrier, cultural differences occasionally led to challenges in comprehending the theoretical foundations and context of the presentations. Therefore, we suggest arranging the presentations thematically, with several representatives from the same country or similar edu-

cational systems in one session, which would begin with a brief introduction outlining the characteristics of the specific setting. In this manner, people could understand the context of the presentation better and focus instead on the actual content, in order to have a more meaningful discussion in the Q&A session.

It would also be helpful if the presentations were, for example, colour-coded in the program according to the current stage of the research (e.g., early-stage/green, on-going/red, results/blue), as the titles of the presentations are usually creative and impressive, but at the same time potentially misleading. Also, the maximum length of a presentation could be worth reconsidering, depending on the phase of the research – 15 minutes can be enough for introducing a research plan, but it is most likely insufficient for presenting or discussing the results of a completed full study.

To fly or not to fly, that is the question

The 3rd international symposium in Vienna was aimed at finding solutions for a more sustainable future for music schools, but as Thomas Albæk Jakobsen aptly pointed out in the *Green music school* panel, sustainability requires changes in current practice. Although he was suggesting this in the context of reducing travelling for learning music, we would like to take this idea one step further by asking – what could be done for the sake of more ecologically sustainable conferences?

Despite increasing concerns regarding this practice, the tradition of 'academic flying' seems to be an indication of yet another system that is reluctant to change, as flying often makes up most of academics' carbon footprints (Fox et al. 2009). While attending conferences in person has traditionally been preferred for various reasons, the keynote speakers and online participants of this symposium set an example by making sustainable decisions in their academic careers – so, why not follow their lead? With a growing emphasis on environmental awareness within the music education research community (e.g., Grant 2018; Knutsson 2023) and innovative policies from universities (such as Lund University and the mdw) prioritising sustainable event management or staff activities, the logical next step could involve minimising travel for stakeholders from each country. In addition to its ecological benefits, online attendance also reduces financial barriers to participation – a primary goal for the organisers in hosting this hybrid event. Drawing inspiration from Grant (2018), scholars do not necessarily need the opportunity to fly; rather, they need the opportunity to engage in academic discussions.

From our purely practical point of view, in-person attendance would only be necessary if the audience was required to cooperate in joint activities such as participating in workshops, composing or improvising in a group, demonstrating effective sustainable practices, or collaborating with the local people. In our opinion, most of the on-site discussions did not differ from the usual online events that we have all experienced in recent years.

Coda

The numerous critical opinions we have expressed in this article do not mean that the participation was in any way a negative experience for us. On the contrary, we found taking part in this well-organised symposium very thought-provoking, as it helped us see the field of music education from a much wider perspective and to understand the complexity of making real changes in current practices – whether on the grassroots or systemic level. The first step toward innovating traditional conference practices could be to find out what works and does not work from the perspective of the participants. Instead of sending only a general questionnaire after the event, a more productive practice for all parties would be

a quick QR-coded survey on-the-spot after each presentation. In this way, the feedback is more direct and genuine, and can aid in identifying blind spots and preventing sticking to familiar practices (e.g., Brookfield & Preskill 2016).

In conclusion, the opportunity to be part of this conference provided us an interesting learning experience and made us reconsider our practices both as instrumental teachers and researchers. Our intention in critiquing the current conference culture and presentation traditions was to foster constructive dialogue and contribute to the ongoing improvement of academic gatherings, and we find it essential to recognise the collective dedication to progress that unites us in these scholarly pursuits. We are grateful to the organisers from the mdw, EMU, and KOMU for orchestrating this event, providing a platform for exchange, and facilitating an environment that encourages reflection and growth. We hope that our shared commitment to advancing the field will continue to guide future conferences towards even greater inclusivity, innovation, and collaboration. ■

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Current research projects

Katja Thomson & Danielle Treacy

Music education, professionalism, and eco-politics: Towards socio-ecological sustainability through changing mental models

Sustainable development has become a central concern globally. However, it remains unclear how teachers in higher music education could respond to our current age of uncertainty, eco-crises, and systemic 'wicked problems'. This challenge formed part of the impetus for the Research Council of Finland funded project *Music education, professionalism, and eco-politics* (*EcoPolitics*, 2021–2025). This research project aims to envision eco-politically oriented futures for higher music education as a field, and to find ways of deepening ecological systems awareness together with higher music educators from three different continents. The project works towards these aims by exploring the values, beliefs and underpinning mental models, as well as the wider societal forces, policies, and politics that have shaped higher music education. By mental models we refer to the human tendency to create simplifications of the real world, "abstracted pictures about how the world is and will be" (Meadows et al. 1982, 7) that we use every time we act and make decisions. Mental models range "from the most temporary and shallow summaries of trivial recent events to the most deep, enduring descriptions of the basic nature of the world" and include paradigms, the "unquestioned and nearly subconscious beliefs that serve to screen, order, and classify incoming impressions and thus to shape subsequent mental models" (Meadows et al. 1982, 8). The problem, Meadows et al. (1982, 7–8) point out, is that our mental models are not only often biassed and incomplete, but also hard to change.

One mental model that the project interrogates is that music is a socially and politically neutral discipline. Instead, we take as a starting point that music, music education, and music teacher education operate as social systems that can have both positive and negative consequences. This starting point encourages a shift towards seeing musicians and music educators as outward-looking, socially engaged, and responsible professionals, who are ecologically aware of the interconnectedness of the music field with other areas of the social and material environment; in other words, a shift from an *ego*-logical to an *eco*-logical perspective (Barrett & Westerlund 2024). While it is becoming more common to perceive of musicians and music educators in this way, at least in higher music education institutional strategies, the connections tend to be addressed more on a rhetorical rather than concrete level. Simultaneously, those (higher) music educators who do have the desire to connect with environmental and social concerns in their artistic and pedagogical work have limited examples from the field to draw upon. The ecocrises might be presented thematically in artistic products, while institutional core practices continue without critical reflection and renewal. At the same time, issues of sustainability are often reduced to preserving particular musics, musical practices, or professions, without considering how such practices may be in tension with socio-ecological values.

The EcoPolitics project uses systems thinking to bring into being connections between higher music education and local and global socio-ecological issues, and envision the way forward. Systems thinking is useful for this, because, as Donella Meadows (2009) describes,

> *[t]he future can't be predicted, but it can be envisioned and brought lovingly into being. Systems can't be controlled, but they can be designed and redesigned. We can't surge forward with certainty into a world of no surprises, but we can expect surprises and learn from them and even profit from them. We can't impose our will on a system. We can listen to what the system tells us, and discover how its properties and our values can work together to bring forth something much better than could ever be produced by our will alone.* (Meadows 2009, 169–70)

The research team is based at the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki and collaborates with Monash University in Australia, North-West University in South Africa, and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Austria. The research team has six members: the principal investigators are Heidi Westerlund and Margaret Barrett, and the researchers are Albi Odendaal, Katja Thomson, Danielle Treacy, and Leena Ilmola-Sheppard. So far in the project we have interviewed teachers in higher music education in three different contexts – Australia, Finland, and South Africa – both individually and in groups. The three programmes in which these higher music educators work are quite different. One is a music teacher education programme, one is a performance degree programme, and one is a general music programme that includes both performance and education aspects. Our research design focuses first on looking backwards – drawing on Meadows' suggestion that "[b]efore you disturb the system in any way, watch how it behaves. …watch it work. Learn its history. Ask people who've been around a long time to tell you what has happened" (Meadows 2009, 170–71) – and then on looking forwards. In the "looking backwards" interviews, we asked about key developments and changes in the programmes; what instigated these changes; responses to these changes; and the values underpinning them. In our first "looking forwards" interviews, we asked the teachers how they saw the United Nations (2015) Sustainable Development Goals in relation to their present and future work as music educators. We are currently planning additional "looking forwards" workshops to explore how systems thinking can be used for envisioning relational music education, and to support higher music education teachers' agency as change agents.

Until now, the project has been represented in several conference presentations and the project's principal investigators' recently published monograph titled *Music education, eco-political professionalism and public pedagogy: Towards systems transformation* (Barrett & Westerlund 2024). This monograph was part of the transdisciplinary theorisation and mapping of theoretical ground in music education. It explores how systems thinking can expose and transform underlying professional beliefs, values, and culture within music teaching and teacher education and how music practitioners can become systems practitioners. The project also has two edited volumes and a number of book chapters and articles currently in preparation and in press. Two book chapters will soon appear in the edited volume *The transformative politics of music education* (Laes et al. in press). In the chapter *Music educators as imaginative designers for socially responsible transformation* (Westerlund et al. in press), we explore the case of the World in Motion ensemble in Helsinki, Finland to show how one attempt to expand interactions and educational and artistic spaces beyond the established boundaries of higher music education could generate novel structures and opportunities without losing the focus on music and music making. The chapter *Expanding the 'expert gaze' of music education: Towards a transformative systems view* (Westerlund & Odendaal in press) challenges the structured and stepwise model common to formal institutional music education. Additionally, we have conducted research in collaboration with the project *ArsADAPT – Artists for a sustainable future*[1] exploring the reflections of higher music education teachers and the tensions that emerged from a transdisciplinary arts-science integration involving teachers and students from the Sibelius Academy and sustainability scientists.

To summarise, the preliminary findings from the interviews and workshops suggest that despite how different the three contexts and higher music education programmes are, all interviewees expressed a desire and will to engage with socio-ecological issues. Their desire, therefore, was not related to whether the programme in which they taught was more focused on music education or music performance. Rather, the realities of their local contexts, related for example to student well-being and their future livelihoods, was part of the fuel for their motivation. We acknowledge that this desire could have been because participants had been informed about the aims and themes of the EcoPolitics research project, and may therefore have self-selected based on their level of interest. Discussions in the interviews, however, suggested that these were also issues discussed within the programmes, for example, in teacher meetings. Another preliminary finding is that due to the above mentioned lack of examples in the field of how to engage with socio-ecological issues in higher music education, those teachers who are particularly committed to such issues are doing so in a rather experimental, isolated way. In terms of key changes in programmes of higher music education, the contents of all three programs had diversified, for example, to include a wider array of musical traditions and pedagogical approaches, and to respond to issues of social justice and professional responsibility. Despite the benefits, such diversification of programs was seen to have a tendency of adding to curricula rather than taking anything away. In our interviews with leaders from the Sibelius Academy, one approach to countering this additive tendency was a past decision to add cross-cutting *themes* into the curriculum (e.g., collaboration, digitisation, composition), rather than adding new *subjects* or *courses* for the students. These leader interviews were also interesting because they illustrated how music teacher education in the case of the Sibelius Academy had gained autonomy within a classical music conservatory setting. While this music teacher education programme is known for its musical diversity and versatility, feedback from scholars from a range of contexts on our presentation during the 2023 Cultural Diversity in Music Education conference (CDIME XVI) showed that they appreciated hearing the story of how the programme had come to be the way it is today, as it highlighted the struggles, tensions, persistence, and sometimes toll on personal life, that can be involved during processes of institutional change. In other words, the musical diversity and versatility of the music teacher education programme at the Sibelius Academy is not something to take for granted but is the result of years of work. We look forward to continuing our work in the EcoPolitics project so that its findings can contribute to music education professionalism and create an open-ended reflexive discourse on the 'civic purpose' of professional education in music. ■

Note

[1] See https://www.uniarts.fi/en/projects/arsadapt-artists-for-a-sustainable-future/

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Tuulikki Laes & Taru-Anneli Koivisto

Performing the political: Public pedagogy in higher music education

As public professionals, musicians can make a significant impact on society. Especially in the political turbulence of recent times, we have seen many examples of how musicians and artists participate in societal debates and activism. At the same time, political neutrality has become the starting point and even a professional virtue in higher education, as it requires adhering to a practice of neutrality and balance, refraining from political debate, and ensuring a neutral, spiritually safe environment for all (Davids & Waghid 2021). The political aspects of music performance are not limited to community art, arts activism, or creative struggles for social justice. They also encompass the ways in which any performance can perpetuate hegemonies and power hierarchies. Thus, even when artwork or performance is said not to be political, unintended dimensions may become visible when the performance is viewed critically and in broader socio-cultural contexts (Gluhovich et al. 2021).

Performing the Political: Public Pedagogy in Higher Music Education (Research Council of Finland 2023–2027) is a four-year research project that challenges the understanding of the political nature of musicianship by initiating and exploring transformative alternatives for future music professionals in higher music education to survive, reform, and thrive in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. The political aspect of this project extends beyond issues of personal opinion or advocacy to societal engagement as part of institutional practice. In the project, led by Academy of Finland research fellow Tuulikki Laes, the notion of the 'political' in music professionalism is revisited by promoting ecological-artistic imagination and transformative systems thinking with higher music education students, teachers, and leaders.

In addition to the training of future performing artists and the teaching of musical skills and knowledge, music programmes in higher education should also include education in the social and ethical dimensions of musicianship, which can be addressed, for example, by making music in different contexts or by experimenting with interdisciplinary work. This outreach work is approached in the project as *public pedagogy*, a new field of pedagogy that conceptualises and re-imagines educational encounters in the public space (Charman & Dixon 2024). Organisations such as universities can play a methodological role in exploring the links between learning, teaching, and the public sphere in public pedagogy research.

Drawing on public pedagogy, systems thinking, the sociology of professionalism, and ecological design theory, the project asks: How might higher music education be envisioned and instituted when eco-artistic imagination, ethico-political professionalism, and transition design in music are reconfigured through the idea of higher music education as a site of public pedagogy?

A three-phase transepistemic and collaborative inquiry

In the first phase of the project, identifications of socially engaged public pedagogical work in music performance degree programmes in Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark will be mapped in collaboration with a Nordic research team: Professor Sidsel Karlsen at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo, Professor Emerita Eva Saether at the University of Lund in Malmö, and Professor Maria Westvall at the Rhythmic Music Conservatory

in Copenhagen. The second phase will include artistic-pedagogical interventions initiated through participatory processes with the students and teachers from the Sibelius Academy's folk music, jazz, global music, and music technology departments. These interventions will be organised using public spaces and in cross-sectoral, transepistemic collaboration with experts, artists, activists, and diverse contexts. The third phase of the research project involves higher music education leaders invited to workshops stimulated by systems mappings, systems stories, and other boundary objects drawn from the previous phase of the project to co-envision transformative strategies and scenarios for higher music education curricula and practice.

Through these artistic-pedagogical interventions and participatory processes, *Performing the Political* aims to construct new practices for music professionalism and visions for responsible higher music education that is significant to society. The project, therefore, seeks to explore how all academic, artistic, and pedagogical thinking and action within higher music programmes are intertwined with the environmental, social, and political events outside the university, in the world in which we all live our lives and also serve society as future professionals, artists, and citizens. The task and challenge for higher education, then, is to provide a high level of musical, pedagogical, and artistic education and to help connect and engage this education with existing social, political, and global dimensions and tensions.

Pilot: *Sustainable Artists for the Future*

The project leader piloted artistic-pedagogical interventions in collaboration with Sibelius Academy teachers in 2022–2023 as part of the pedagogical research collective ArsADAPT. Funded by the Jenny & Antti Wihuri Foundation, the collective planned and carried out the one-year transdisciplinary study course *Sustainable Artists for the Future* which involved a group of environmental scientists, and teachers and students from the music performance programs experimenting art-science dialogue and new performance practices integrated with science communication. The collaboration resulted in an interactive public performance, a documentary film, and a follow-up project with a group of students and a scientist. The learnings from the pilot will be used in the design of the participatory processes at the Sibelius Academy in the second phase of the research project. Ultimately, the ArsADAPT pilot showed that rather than centering the musical process/product on educating *about* sustainability, higher music education could seek ways of disrupting consensus and revealing gaps between various individual experiences of how to adapt to sustainable futures in, and through, music practices. (Laes et al. 2024). This tangible approach to experimenting with the multisensorial and ontological connections between music performance and socio-ecological crises will be developed further and theorised in the current project.

Expected contribution to higher music education

Overall, *Performing the Political* initiates an exploratory and formative process in which theory, practice, and research intersect and formulate a new transformative politics of higher music education. The expected outcomes of this project will contribute to the international field of higher music education by fostering the emergence of systems thinking and supporting the exploration of alternatives to the current depoliticised and siloed professionalism, potentially leading to, for instance, new curriculum designs, epistemically hybrid artistic spaces, and co-constructed performance practices. The Sibelius Academy as the context for experimental *transition designs* (Escobar 2017) may thus contribute to a global vision of a more democratic, sustainable, and ecologically responsible social and political order within the institutional realities of higher music education. Furthermore, the project will provide

practical tools, such as system visions, policy proposals, and shared practical examples for bridging the gap between abstract institutional strategies and concrete transitional, student- and teacher-led collaborative processes. Thus, the project has significant implications for the expanded social and political potential of music culture and promotes musicians as responsible transformative professionals in society. ■

Figure 1. Panelists in the project's opening event, *Musicians in Society – Society in Musicians*, Musiikkitalo, Helsinki, February 8, 2024: moderator Tuulikki Laes, PI of the project; Lukas Stasevskij, cellist and filmmaker; Merzi Rajala, lecturer at the global music department, Sibelius Academy; Susanna Välimäki, professor at the department of philosophy, history and art studies, Helsinki University; Vilma Jää, folk/ethnopop musician and composer; and Jenni Lättilä, vice dean for artistic activities, Sibelius Academy. Photo: Eeva Anundi

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Guadalupe López-Íñiguez

The politics of care in the professional education of children gifted for music: A sustainable ecosystem worth advocating

This report corresponds to the author's large-scale, ongoing project, *The politics of care in the professional education of children gifted for music* (2022–2027), based at the Sibelius Academy and funded by the Research Council of Finland. The research addresses the inexplicably understudied goal of ethical education for children gifted for music, who are typically involved in music education aimed at professional careers. Overall, this transdisciplinary, intersectoral, cross-cultural, and multimethod research includes data from diverse cohorts of participants in multiple contexts internationally. The project seeks to support children gifted for music to live as agentic and healthy individuals while pursuing desirable educational outcomes in caring ecosystems. In this project, which has a global reach, it is argued that musically gifted children's pedagogy can reveal the fundamental mental models of expert culture in music and that *ethics of care* in gifted education (i.e., Slote 2013) could provide a more reflexive space in higher music education to deconstruct the practices that demean these children's agency and autonomy—treating them exclusively as high-achieving performers and servants of a "hungry" society (López-Íñiguez 2022; López-Íñiguez & Westerlund 2023).

This project takes as its first research-based starting point the most comprehensive theory on talent development, the Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) by Gagné (2021), which considers the range of natural abilities, environmental and intrapersonal catalysts, and developmental processes that have so far been associated with this issue. The DMGT acknowledges that while 10% of children display unusually precocious "intellectual, creative and/or physical maturity well before the majority of their peers" (Gagné 2021, 77), (*giftedness* as outstanding potential; e.g., working memory, coordination, perceptiveness), they do not necessarily correlate with the 10% of talented adults who eventually "make it" as top-notch professionals (*talent* as outstanding achievement, e.g., competences). Giftedness is thus conceived of here as a multi-faceted concept that manifests in different ways among young individuals who seem to be extremely intrinsically motivated in what they learn (e.g., Gottfried et al. 2005).

The research reported here argues that music education needs to nurture the wellbeing of children gifted for music by suggesting a transformative politics of care in higher music education (López-Íñiguez & Westerlund 2023), where more specialist knowledge and ethical approaches to their education are provided (Smith 2006). Such an approach is aligned with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 2010), where it is stated that gifted children in any domain deserve a future as well-rounded, healthy, and agentic individuals. The report delves into the premises, findings to date, and current and future steps of the research. The main dissemination updates can be found on its dedicated website.[1]

Research premises: Have children gifted for music been cared *for* and *about*?

Global discourses on humanitarian and developmental issues have widely advocated for the quality of education and special care of exceptional early achievers (UNICEF 2010). Yet, it

is known that diverse educational and political systems and societies are failing gifted children globally in a multiplicity of domains, and they remain underprotected and exploited, too often denied their own thriving future (Slote 2013; Smith 2006). Their dramatic stories include being exposed to "extra emotional challenges, such as over-anxious and pushy parents, teacher put-downs, social trip-wires, loss of fun time, boredom and bullying in school and conflicting life choices" (Freeman 2010, 1; in music, see López-Íñiguez 2019; 2022). Addressing this challenge within the system of professional education in Western classical music—a field particularly connected to the needs of prodigiously gifted children (McPherson 2016)—this research articulates a transdisciplinary ethical, educational, philosophical, psychological, and socioeconomic vision to explore how the politics of care could better support the professional education of children gifted for music by developing safe, tailored, and caring higher music institutions and advanced non-formal tuition internationally. In other words, this is the first research project to address the applicability of caring educational ecosystems in nurturing the gifted for music, going beyond the few theoretical attempts made in other fields (as discussed in Slote 2013) and attending to the ecological agendas of human development in the 21st century (Barnett & Jackson 2020; UNESCO 2019).

Based on the above-mentioned challenges and need to support gifted music learners, the research builds on two main premises. On the one hand, (1) international discourses regarding caring values in education and society are heavily opposed to the recognition of giftedness and the ability to develop superior talent. In essence, contemporary 'anti-elitist' and 'anti-ableist' research agendas have been primarily concerned with the rights of disabled and marginalised individuals (see Slote 2013). Therefore, the field of music education has adopted narrow views of special education and social exclusion (Smith 2006), where there is a clear "reluctance to reward or promote policies that would cause some individuals to excel more than others" (Persson et al. 2000, 718). Consequently, international discourses regarding ethical or caring values in education and society have been heavily opposed to recognising special or superior kinds of talent(s), inborn giftedness, intelligence, and creative achievements (Slote 2013). This is exemplified, for instance, in the lack of special needs education courses for pre- and in-service music teachers tackling giftedness or in the discourses where these children are blamed for being part of (and feeding) the supposed elitist system of gifted education and, therefore, suggested to be put 'on hold' while others 'catch up'.

On the other hand, (2) socio-educational systems exploit gifted children in the name of prestige. This has led to a dramatic situation in music environments worldwide, as evidenced by the underachieving able and gifted dropouts, the abuse of gifted children, and the traumatised adults who were once singled out as outstanding "prodigies". This means that 'pro-ableists' and 'pro-elitists' who are aware of the existence of gifted children might want to profit from these children's extraordinary potential and performances. This type of behaviour has been argued to lead to "lifelong trauma and abuse . . . parental oppression and exploitation . . . authoritarian behaviours of teachers . . . exposure to public scrutiny . . . child labour" (López-Íñiguez & Westerlund 2023, 117). Extreme manifestations of such exploitation may even include sexual abuse, as is known from recent discussions in the media (e.g., Fetters et al. 2020). As López-Íñiguez and McPherson (2023, 2–3) argue, this is partly explained by the fact that

> *the education of young, gifted music learners has been based on widely spread reductionist and stereotypical beliefs concerning giftedness/talent, wherein the notion of childhood ethics is missing from the notion of gifted child (e.g., Beauvais & Higham 2016). Thus, when a child demonstrates an exceptional ability in music—e.g., cognitive, creative, affective, sensorimotor—, the socioemotional troubles tend to be seen as an inevitable side effect inherent to their persona. (Gagné & McPherson 2016, 2–3)*

As a result of the extremely polarising positionings above, gifted learners are typically conceived of as successful stars from elitist backgrounds who can cope very well by themselves and for whom no additional support is needed (Brown et al. 2005; Moltzen 2009). Tackling the vulnerable and high-risk situation of gifted, underage music learners and providing them with more caring futures is at the core of this project. Thus, the research applies the critical lenses of care ethics, justice, and equity to the many substudies of the project, which span across four main stages: 1) mapping the ground through literature reviews and theoretical writings, 2) empirical substudies with all stakeholders surrounding gifted children and the children themselves, 3) pedagogical in-service learning interventions, and 4) systems thinking (Luhmann 1995) as an overarching approach to all substudies findings towards the end of the project.

Findings to date: Mapping the ground of (caring) gifted education in music

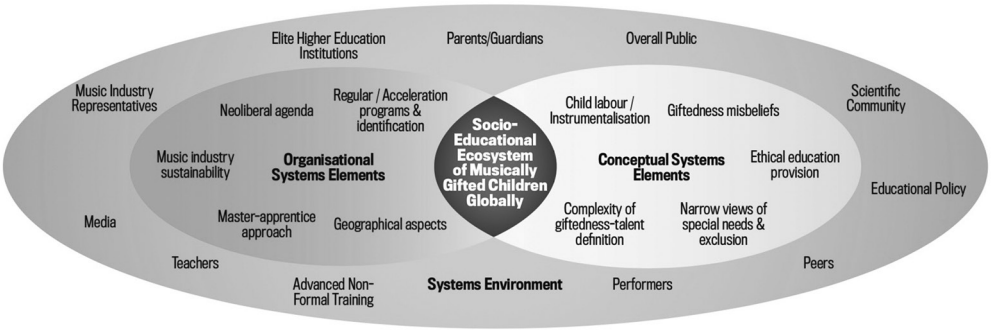
During the first stage of the research, a plan was designed to unmask: 1) the professional frames of music education institutions for the gifted and, 2) the empirical evidence of research studies which would address any form of caring *for* and caring *about* gifted children. This stage was planned to create research-driven materials for empathy-based in-service learning interventions, large-scale surveys, focus-group discussions, and one-on-one interviews with various groups of participants (see next subsection).

In the first of these studies (López-Íñiguez & Westerlund 2023), the education of children gifted for music was approached from the perspective of ethics of care with systems reflexivity, suggesting that this group of learners can be seen as a special case of democracy, social justice, and children's rights. The study discusses the need to better recognise the moral space for these children to develop and how musically gifted children's pedagogy can reveal the fundamental mental models of expert culture in music. As pointed out in the study,

> *children gifted for music, when selected for advanced programs, may enter an "ableist" regime of technically defined and authoritatively prescribed musical competence goals instead of being cared for as genuine partners in human relationships and authors of their own lives.* (López-Íñiguez & Westerlund 2023, 119)

The study acknowledges that ethics of care in gifted education could provide a more reflexive space in higher music education to deconstruct the mental models that demean these children's agency and autonomy, treating them exclusively as high-achieving performers—and that this reflexive process could transform not only gifted children's education but the education of all music learners in contemporary societies. However, it is not only up to educational institutions and their stakeholders to provide a more caring ecosystem for these children. For instance, Figure 1 shows an example of the many stakeholders surrounding children gifted for music (i.e. systems environment) and the larger conceptual and organisational elements that shape the entire system of professionalising gifted children. The research project attends to all these elements and tries to establish the interconnections between them to ascertain how and in which ways the system should change and what is preventing this much-needed transformation process from happening.

Figure 1. Socio-educational ecosystem of children gifted for music (adapted from López-Íñiguez 2023a).



Building on the previous study, there was a need to investigate how research studies discuss caring values in the education of children gifted for music, for which a literature review was undertaken (López-Íñiguez & McPherson 2023). The review considered hundreds of research outputs of diverse nature related to formal, non-formal, and informal educational settings, from which only 11 publications were selected. The review highlighted some positive elements identified in the selected publications, such as

> *addressing inequalities in the opportunity to access gifted programs; identifying socio-emotional needs of the gifted (and twice-exceptional) students; offering a nurturing environment; focusing on intrinsic motivation; developing coping strategies for overall wellbeing; and cultivating healthy attitudes toward competitions through a spirit of peer collaboration and humility.* (López-Íñiguez & McPherson 2023, 1)

However, the study also suggested that

> *[t]he existing research on caring approaches to musically gifted children's learning and development [is not only] scarce [but] current knowledge is based mostly on single one-off studies rather than systematic research, and on studies that examine a selection of aspects but not adopting a larger-scale theoretical framework.* (López-Íñiguez & McPherson 2023, 1)

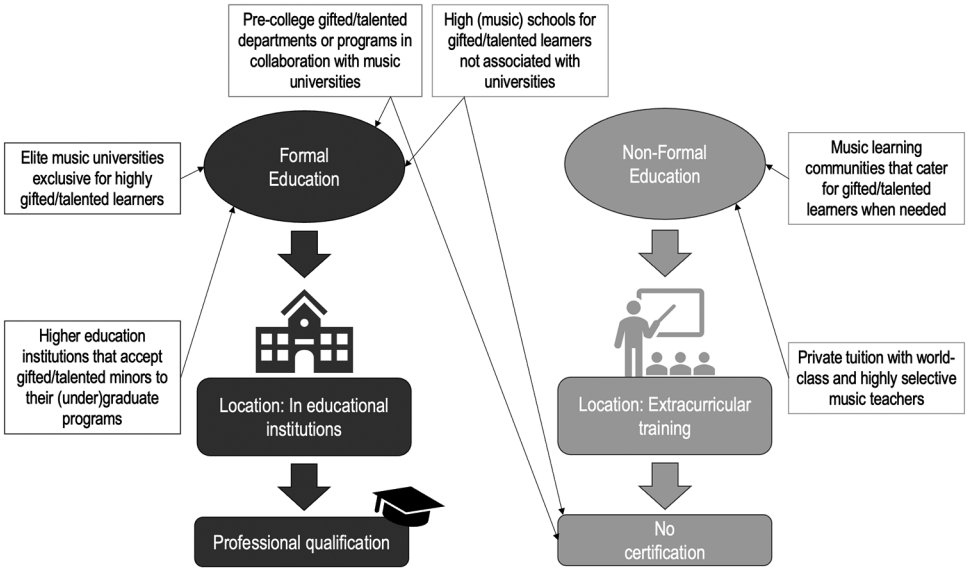
Considering the findings from the studies mentioned above, it became clear that individuals must expand their (narrow) conceptions of talent development, inclusion, and diversity by creating more caring ecosystems that cater for the socio-emotional, physical, mental, and moral/ethical needs of gifted children in music schools, music conservatoires, and music universities globally. For this, current and future stages of this project aim at linking the previously generated knowledge with "broader national and international concerns such as human rights, ethics of care, and responsibility and laws that might protect highly gifted youth" (López-Íñiguez & McPherson 2023, 13).

Current and future steps: Towards more sustainable and caring gifted education in music

In the second stage of this research, besides being immersed in an edited volume on caring for gifted and talented young music learners (featuring scholarly work by several international researchers and practitioners; López-Íñiguez & McPherson in preparation), the principal investigator devised large-scale surveys for leaders responsible for over 200 music institutions which offer specialised education programs for gifted learners in more than 50 countries. Although specialised music education can be observed in formal and non-formal

settings, the survey has mostly attended to the ones aimed at professionalism in music (i.e., formal education). As shown in Figure 2 below,[2] these institutions primarily respond to formal systems in which, often, "access is controlled through a quota of limited available places" (Gagné 2021, 97). Within these formal education settings, students are accepted after a highly competitive audition process. These programs have a variety of names across the world, such as 'Talent Department/Lab', 'Pre-College', 'High School', 'Gifted/Talent Program', and 'Junior Academy/Department', but they are also commonly referred to as 'acceleration', 'enrichment', 'streaming', 'tracking', and even 'hot' programs. Students in these programs can show particular physicalities, high levels of creativity, overly charismatic/shy behaviours in public, and sometimes come from a long line of gifted family members. These programmes are vocational and aim at achieving professionalism in a discipline (Gross 2016) "at rates faster or at ages younger than conventional" (Pressey 1949, 2).

Figure 2. Formal and non-formal music education systems for underage gifted learners talent development (adapted from López-Íñiguez 2023b).



The survey was designed following various international frameworks of care ethics and empathetic pedagogical approaches from diverse gifted education fields that aim to nurture underage gifted learners. Specific aspects within the survey attend to environmental, intrapersonal, and developmental aspects of gifted children's holistic development across their educational pathways. The survey aimed to identify current and past challenges in gifted education in music, as well as caring practices that are taking place in these settings, hoping to devise educational principles regarding caring ethics and gifted children for music institutions. At the time of writing this report, the principal investigator has reached well over 20% of representation and started analysing the data. The findings of this substudy will form the basis of further publications.

In addition, adaptions of the survey are now being spread to diverse stakeholders within the music industry internationally (e.g., coordinators of music competitions and festivals). Contents within the survey are also transformed into open-ended interview questions for legal-age musicians with retrospective experience as gifted for music in their childhoods and for vocal/instrumental teachers who have specialised in gifted education for decades. The

interviews are being undertaken at the moment of writing this report in both developed and developing countries globally. The findings from these substudies will also be included in publications of diverse nature. This stage will be followed by data collection in elite higher music institutions with specialised departments for the gifted in various OECD countries, where the author of this report will carry out pedagogical service-learning interventions including gifted children, their parents/guardians, main teachers, and the people responsible for curriculum and decision making within those institutions.

Once all data from the three first stages of the project have been gathered and analysed, the last stage of the research will aim at promoting conceptual shifts in the field of music education using systems thinking to suggest a new ethical agenda for the education of gifted children. In systems thinking, the music education of gifted children is conceptualised through a complex interconnection and interdependence between systems, subsystems, and their environment, not only to understand how certain values, beliefs, and assumptions shape the system's structures and educational practices but also to show what needs to be changed in the system (Gonzales 2020; Jackson 2019). All in all, the project acknowledges the larger connecting elements between educational ecosystems and gifted children by employing an ecological theoretical approach (e.g., Barnett & Jackson 2020) through a broad geographical empirical coverage that attends to a child's socio-educational ecosystem and expands the critical angles for educational reflexivity to reveal and reconstruct the prevalent ethical-giftedness dichotomy in the field of Western classical music. The project is already doing so by challenging anti-ableist conceptualisations of special needs education, critically assessing elitist and instrumental justifications of the musically gifted in socio-educational contexts, and impacting diverse societies by raising awareness of the rights of gifted children. ■

Notes

[1] https://www.uniarts.fi/en/projects/caring-for-musically-gifted-children/

[2] Note: For this study, we have not attended to private, non-formal education, since that particular system will be part of another substudy of the project involving purposeful, one-one-one interviews, given the close nature of this type of instruction.

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