Opening Urban Social Spaces Through the Arts

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Abstract
Ongoing turbulences in many parts of the world, which raise concerns about the lack of security and an uncertain future, could also be seen as a challenge providing a plethora of opportunities in the search for better systemic solutions. Even though we live in a technologically developed world, it is clear that neither improved machines nor the pharmaceutical industry could provide sustainable solutions to conflicts and their negative consequences on human lives and values. Could the arts and music in particular, provide a cross cultural understanding beyond their sole aesthetic impact and contribute to a betterment of the circumstances? This article provides a limited introductory search for an answer to this question by providing a qualitative analysis of three case studies rooted in the author's first-hand experience in Slovenia. Based on the research of the dynamics of the processes and the resulting outcomes, it advocates the development of art-related strategies suitable for augmenting urban renewal processes.

Keywords: *Children With Special Needs, Music Therapy, Multiculturalism, Applied Ethnomusicology, Marginalized People*

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Introduction

Turbulences in many parts of the world, which question some of the basic security and prosperity issues that we use to take for granted, raise understandable and justifiable concerns about our very existence. These concerns can be approached passively - as acceptable due to their perceived unavoidability and strength - or actively - as a stimulus for search of better systemic solutions and as a plethora of opportunities for mobilization of our capacities. My position clearly favors the latter approach, which brings to the forefront the question whether the arts can make a difference? In search for an answer, I participated in either creation or identification of urban spaces in my country of residence, Slovenia, with the intention to use them for art-centered activities. In concordance with the notions developed within the realm of applied ethnomusicology (Pettan and Titon, 2015), I decided to use music as a tool for active artistic communication with focus on marginalized individuals and communities. This idea corresponds with Sheila Woodward and Catherine Pestano's notion that "Individuals and groups marginalized by society present unique challenges for community music programs. Participants who may have no illness or disability, but who fit into societal norms, may be excluded from opportunities as a result of their ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or gender. […] Whatever the contributing factors that led these young people to have been excluded from other opportunities, community music can make a great difference in these populations" (Woodward and Pestano, 2013:185).

Ian Cross, who points to the potency of musical arts for both cohesion and social flexibility, claims that "The reinforcement of group identity or the instantiation of a form of intersubjectivity can function in collective musical behaviors not only because of the music's capacity to entrain but also because music allows each participant to interpret its significance individually and independently without the integrity of the collective musical behavior being undermined" (Cross, 2006:36). According to Jane Davidson and Andrea Emberly, »Ethnomusicologists, music psychologists, sociologists, and educators have identified a plethora of ways in which musical engagement contributes to successful socialization, including when it is used for: mother-infant bonding, developing the capacity to unite people, and providing material from which sharing and learning can take place" (Davidson and Emberly, 2013:137).

My presentation rests on three case studies, distinctive in their own rights, but with shared intention to empower marginalized people and to contribute to the harmonization of the society. My own position of a foreign-born (Sri Lankan) musician and researcher in Slovenia was a bonus in the course of the work and my specific cultural knowledge and skills were regarded positively by the participants in all three projects. The principal research method was participant observation. Interventions were based on interviews and constant communication with the participants.

The three case studies are:
1. A singing workshop series featuring ethnic minority musics and musicians
2. State musical review for children and youngsters with special needs
3. Musical performances in homes for elderly people

The following table provides simple answers to six fundamental questions: Who (is in charge of each case study), What (is the substance of each of them), Where and When (did they take place), How (were they conceptualized) and Why (i.e. what was the primary aim).

	1. Singing workshops featuring ethnic minorities	**2. State musical review for children with special needs**	**3. Musical performances in homes for elderly people**
Who?	A society in public interest	Governmental institute	Individual initiative
What?	Minority singing workshop	Rehearsed stage performances of minors with special needs	Music performances involving elderly people
Where?	Hostel Celica in Ljubljana	Various public spaces	Homes for elderly people
When?	In 2015 (workshops with majority repertoire from 1997 on)	2010-2015 (as an event with no advisory body since 1991)	From 2009 on (inspired by passing away of a closely-related elderly person)
How?	Minority – majority interactive communication	Advisory attendance, involving minors and their mentors	Performance of agreed repertoire of known and unknown songs
Why?	Empowerment of minorities, art-centered education	Empowerment of minors with special needs, de-stigmatization	Empowerment of elderly people, intergenerational communication

Figure 1. Basic information about the three case studies.

Case Study 1

The society in charge of the singing workshops - Cultural and Ethnomusicological Society Folk Slovenia - was established in 1996 by folk music revivalists, researchers and pedagogues around the idea of performance, preservation, promotion, and share of Slovenian traditional song and dance heritage. Its activities include annual thematic concerts, workshops focused on singing traditional songs, playing traditional musical instruments, and dancing traditional dances, lectures, round-tables, symposia, and production of CDs.

Singing workshops with focus on ethnic minority repertoires were introduced as late as 2015, which is fifteen years after the historical symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Music and Minorities took place in Ljubljana. This study group defines minorities as "groups of people distinguishable from the dominant group for cultural, ethnic, social, religious or economic reasons" (http://ictmusic.org/group/music-and-minorities). The first edited volume published by the study group features the following statement: "What impact may this scholarly meeting have for Slovenia? It will hopefully cause its ethnomusicological practice, firmly rooted in folk music research of ethnic Slovenes in Slovenia and across political borders, to broaden up towards the legitimacy of research in non-folk music phenomena and of non-Slovene musics" (Pettan, Reyes and Komavec, 2001:16). Just as predicted, the self-centered research attitude gradually opened up to multicultural ideas and the Folk Slovenia society broadened up its original focus towards the inclu-

sion of musical cultures of various ethnic groups cohabitating in the country. Folk Slovenia's proposal for a "minority singing workshop" received requested financial support from the Ministry of Culture and managed the project with utmost success. There were all together four well-attended workshops focused on Italian, Sri Lankan, Japanese, and Macedonian musical legacies. Figures 1 and 2 depict the Sri Lankan and Japanese workshops respectively.

Figure 2. Sri Lankan minority music workshop with Lasanthi Manaranjanie. Ljubljana (Hostel Celica), 2015. Photo credit: Svanibor Pettan.

Figure 3. Japanese minority music workshop with Nagisa Moritoki. Ljubljana (Hostel Celica), 2015. Photo credit: Svanibor Pettan.

Even though a few members of the Cultural and Ethnomusicological Society Folk Slovenia would still prefer an exclusive focus on Slovene folk song repertoire, its Executive Board appears determined to give voice to ethnic minorities, too, as evident in the annual concerts, lectures and workshops. As a foreign-born musician and scholar, I appreciate this attitude and do not find it hard to explain to interested individuals from time to time that I perform Slovene folk songs as well, because I like them and because they enable me to express appreciation for my country of residence. The notion of Slovenia as the meeting point of Slovene and several other musics, expressed on the latest CD of the Folk Slovenia society (2016), waits to be applied to several other spatial and temporal contexts. The need for such application in Slovenia and the neighboring countries is augmented by the relatively recent migrant wave that increased cultural diversity and raised heated debates.

The attendants of the singing minority workshops were both the members of the Folk Slovenia society and the general public. They participated actively, by learning the cultural context, pronunciation, meanings of the pre-prepared songs, singing, clapping, playing musical games etc. The workshop leaders – insiders to the given ethnic minority cultures – succeeded in providing knowledge and understanding about the minorities, their cultural values, customs, and attitudes to the participants, by using music as a tool.

Case Study 2

The state musical review of children and youngsters with special needs named Let's Sing, Play Musical Instruments, and Dance started in Ljubljana in 1991. About forty schools and institutions with over a thousand individuals with special needs, accompanied by their mentors, take part in the event on an annual basis. For the initial two decades, it was a useful but unpretentious cultural showcase limited to those directly involved. In 2010, the organizers came to the idea of evaluating mentors' and their subjects' achievements and thus appointed a three-member advisory board, which included Dr. Inge Breznik - a representative of the governmental office for education, Prof. Dr. Svanibor Pettan - ethnomusicologist, and me – ethnomusicologist/practical musician.

Figure. Audience and the advisory board at the state musical review Let's Sing, Play Musical Instruments, and Dance. Ravne na Koroškem (Cultural center), 2010. Photo credit: Aleksander Ocepek.

According to Edith Hillman Boxill, "[…] as an agent of therapy, music has the power to contact people on multidimensional organismic levels, wide applicability for the acquisition of living skills, and normalizing effects that make the modality particularly efficacious for developmentally disabled individuals, who are usually isolated from the ordinary stream of life. The humanistic approach to music therapy […] gives full attention to the holistic person. This approach encompasses a broad spectrum of musical experiences that are designed to enhance all domains of functioning – motoric, communicative, cognitive, affective, and social – always with a view to nurturing the human being as an entity, as a whole that is greater than its parts" (Hillman Boxill, 1985:15). Her notions are complemented by Steven Brown and Töres Theorell who claim that "Studies to date have provided cautiously encouraging indications that musical training for children can lead to improvements in reading, verbal memory, spatial-temporal reasoning, mathematics, and social-interaction skills" (Brown and Theorell, 2006:137). These and other related arguments were used in our Case 2 to further encourage, sensitize and improve from the musical point of view the work of the mentors with youngsters with special needs. Due to various kinds and levels of inborn deficiencies, the youngsters responded differently to musical stimuli. Our position rested on the confirmed fact that music has capacity to influence human mind and our aim was to improve its use as a tool in developing emotional responses and communicational abilities.

Figure 5. Some participants in the state musical review Let's Sing, Play Musical Instruments, and Dance enjoying time after the official performance. Ravne na Koroškem (Cultural center), 2010. Photo credit: Vojko Veršnik.

Evaluation of the mentors' achievements and common search for the improvements gave to the State musical review a new dimension, which clearly improved

the quality of the educational process. The government's initial idea from the 1990s to support this annual event was motivated by the wish to provide a platform for bringing children with special needs to public attention and to remove a kind of stigma associated with mental disabilities in order to encourage more efficient social inclusion. Musical activities contributed to the development of children's physical, psychological, emotional, social, and cognitive abilities and nevertheless to their status in society. We should look at the result as a part of the process that requires further improvements (see also Stouffer et al., 2007:449).

Case Study 3

Performances in the homes for elderly people were inspired by the commemoration of my mother-in-law's passing away in the nearby home for the elderly in 2009. A concert that the Sri Lankan-Slovenian ensemble Lasanthi gave there a month after her death was marked by a more active participation of the inmates than expected and as such inspired me to continue and focus on search for the improvements. Sri Lankan part of the repertoire offered to the inmates a new cultural and artistic experience enriches them with culturally different artistic experience, while Slovenian and broader former Yugoslav part of the repertoire (Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian and Macedonian) provided them with musical substances related to their own identities and memories associated with their young-hoods. The latter part enabled them to interact with the musicians by clapping, singing or at least humming. In some places, the elderly inmates prepared and sang some songs to us, as a sort of artistic exchange, thus creating a welcome balance of getting and giving. Such situations allowed them to express themselves artistically, to share musical entertainment, to recollect their past memories, and nevertheless to feel respected and dignified.

Many inmates of elderly homes feel being distanced from their closest relatives and home environments. Various diseases, disorders, and disabilities additionally burden some of them. What they long for are love, care, security, and sense of belonging. Cultural activities such as music, dance, drama and games can influence their state of mind, often dominated by sorrow, anger, insecurity and other negative feelings. In the words of Theresa A. Allison, elderly inmates "engage in localizing processes and are able to create a temporary sense of neighborhood. Through song and music, the elders can reach beyond the walls of the building and bring in the emotions and relationships of other neighborhoods. Since they are in a new place (the Home) during the potentially transcending musical experience, it is as though they can bring a little bit of their old neighborhood to their new home. [...] The participants have brought the Home national recognition and acclaim and have provided music to their neighbors within the institution" (Allison, 2008:239). Kenneth Brummel-Smith's research supports the claim that "Music may be an effective method of communication once cognitive abilities have deteriorated to the point that normal conversation is impossible. Alzheimer's disease also affects the

hippocampus, a brain structure essential to memory. Music can facilitate reminiscence and help recall to both pleasant and unpleasant memories…" (Brummel-Smith, 2008:189).

In their discussion about the patients affected by dementia and the role of music in such situations, Steven Brown and Töres Theorell state that, "Dementia is a condition in which traditional medical interventions – pharmacological, surgical, physiological, psychotherapeutic – offer little hope for long-term recovery and in which treatment is directed toward maintaining the day-to-day functioning of patients. Music is used extensively to ameliorate communication difficulties with confused, mute, and often aggressive patients. In fact, music is as effective as any intervention for the treatment/care of dementia, and has assumed a major role in helping improve communication between patients and their caregivers, including family members" (Brown and Theorell, 2006:134). In fact, "Music is widely used to promote a sense of well-being and to distract patients from pain and other unpleasant symptoms, thoughts and feelings, while being convenient and readily available" (Kemper and Danhauer, 2005:282).

Interactive concert experiences in the homes for elderly people in various parts of Slovenia, built upon examples of good praxis within the realm of medical ethnomusicology, continue to contribute to the variety of musical life in the elderly communities and to the improvements in the use of music as a tool for the quality of their well-being.

Figure 6. Performance of the Lasanthi ensemble at the Poljane home for elderly people. Ljubljana, 2009. Photo credit: Svanibor Pettan.

Figure 7. Performance of the Lasanthi ensemble at the Zimzelen home for elderly people. Topolšica, 2013. Photo credit: Alenka Šeher.

Figure 8. Performance of the Lasanthi ensemble at the home for elderly people in Nove Fužine. Ljubljana, 2014. Photo credit: Krka, d. d., Novo Mesto, Slovenia.

Discussion

Even though the three case studies differ from each other in several respects, their basic aim is the same: to check whether the arts – and specifically music – can be efficiently used as a tool in pro-active artistic communication for the benefit of marginalized individuals and communities. In all three case studies musicking

exceeds the music's solely aesthetic qualities and addresses the awareness about social and cultural diversity through the interaction with people who are often excluded from the mainstream public scene due to their ethnicity, psychophysical factors, or age. These showcases document the investment of music in building a more sensitive and inclusive social environment. The fact that "music is so central in the lives of so many people that it helps shape their world-view and basic values" (Davies, 2005:510-11) makes it a suitable agent in raising compassion and in bringing people together. Music sessions offer "a unique and secure framework through which many of the skills and disciplines of social interaction (such as listening to others, turn taking, and making a relevant contribution) can be experienced and developed" (Ockelford and Markou, 2013:296) and bring to public attention the negotiations of ethnicity, disability, and age. The presented case studies take into consideration all four varieties of applied ethnomusicology (action ethnomusicology, adjustment ethnomusicology, administrative ethnomusicology and advocate ethnomusicology), pointing to the necessity of constant collaboration rather than top-down directed projections. Table 2 features the results in the form of a SWOT analysis, with named strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the three case studies. Some comments can be applied to more than a single one, while the others are case-specific. Ideally, strengths point to the positive outcomes, weaknesses should be minimized, opportunities indicate possibilities for further development, and threats warn about unwilling consequences.

Case Study	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
1. Minority Singing Workshop	*Dignifies the featured minority *Provides insight into another culture through music *Opens up communicational channel	*A few workshops cannot make a major difference *Spatial and temporal limitations *Not all ethnic minority groups were featured	*Such events could be an eye-opener for the mainstream society *Continuity of such events at various locations *Creation of inclusive social networks	*"Nationalisation" of local features *Emphasis on frozen presentation of traditional culture *Emphasis on "own" rather than "shared"
2. The State Musical Review of Children and Youngesters with Special Needs	*Dignifies people with special needs *Communication through the arts helps to develop memory power, ear training, stage confidence and responses to musical stimuli *Building awareness of social responsibility and inclusivity	*Lack of media promotion contributes to the current ghetto-like situation *Annual meeting is not enough to make a major change *Current organisational patterns do not enable participants to experience preformances of all other participants	*Understanding and acceptance of people with special needs as members of society *Media coverage could help in opening public discussions about disabilities *Promotion of teamwork and happiness through music-making, while fighting isolation and providing health benefits	*Legislative and specific parental opinions may cause restrictions *Children could hurt themselves if stage sets and props are not suitable for them *Musical examples selected for performances should take into account the suitable level of difficulty

Figure 9. SWOT analysis of the case studies.

Case Study	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
3. Performances in Homes for Elderly People	*Dignifies elderly people *Brings joy and enthusiasm to the elders and at least temporarily distracts them from their medical conditions *Complemets efforts of the staff in homes for elderly people	*It is hard to create a repertoire that would satisfy diverse musical tastes of the inmates *Time limitation of a performace is determined by medical conditions of elderly people *It is often impossible to analyse impact of the performances due to medical conditions of the audiences	*Such events create a platform for elders to express and share their emotions by singing along, clapping etc. *Elders should be encouraged to show their own artistic talents at such occasions and otherwise *Intergenerational learning could be attached to the events, both before and after the actual performance	*Exposure to performance can be counterproductive if the mentioned specifics are not given serious consideration *Diverse medical conditions affect the events in terms of attentiveness, communication, and duration *There should be a reasonable level of flexibility on performer's behalf

Figure 9 cont.. SWOT analysis of the case studies.

Conclusion

In the words of Jeff Todd Titon, "applied ethnomusicology is best regarded a music-centered intervention in a particular community, whose purpose is to benefit that community - for example, a social improvement, a musical benefit, a cultural good, an economic advantage, or a combination of these and other benefits" (Titon, 2015:4). As a musician and scholar I feel privileged to be involved in music-centered actions in public interest, where the accumulated knowledge, understanding and skills can be freely shared. The three cases discussed in this article do benefit from my scholarly competencies and musicianship, have clearly defined aims, and rest on conscious methodological procedures, but I still think of them in a first place as open-ended communicational frames. They allow me to reach marginalized people - ethnic minorities, people with special needs, and elderly people - and with the help of the arts contribute to their well-being in my country of residence, Slovenia. My own positioning in them in several regards owes inspiration to the work of Kjell Skyllstad (e.g. 1993, 1997).

In my own capacity as a musician, scholar, and educator, I consciously build bridges of understanding through the arts. I sing Sri Lankan music in an ensemble consisting of Slovenian musicians, teaching them and our audiences about Sri Lankan cultural idioms, but at the same time take every opportunity to learn Slovenian and also other Slavic cultural and specifically musical features. Even though my primary artistic realm is Indian classical music, which I perform on violin, I seek for new musical encounters that cross ethnic, religious and cultural boundaries. My Buddhist background does not prevent me from singing Christian songs with Macedonian minority musicians in Slovenia. Equally so, my Sri Lankan background does not make me feel unfaithful to my roots when performing of a variety of Slavic songs (Croatian, Slovak, Ukrainian etc.) in Astrakhan, Russia. To the opposite, communication through the arts is above that, for it allows me to

better feel, understand and appreciate other people through an open-ended teaching and learning process.

Our world of today, burdened by existential ecological challenges, political instabilities, religious radicalism, wars and forced migrations, calls for our active involvement. Creating urban social spaces through the arts is certainly one of the ways in which we can actively contribute to the betterment of the circumstances.

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