RESEARCH REPORT

Amateur Music-making as Urban Politics

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In this research I consider four different case studies of cities and the role of music as a form of collaboration between people. In particular, my work focuses on amateur music and its role in partnership-building in Caracas, London, Milan and Brussels. Four dimensions of making music politics - sociality, work, culture and governance - are found in all the cases under study.

Through an analysis of amateur music-making projects in these cities, I show how collaboration can be different, with different motivations. In Caracas, music is created to develop the country; here we assist observe a strong centralization of decisions. However the various music projects not only help to solve problems, such as reducing poverty and generating new energies or a new sense of participation in building the common goods; they also generates problems, such as cultural conflict between ethnic and classical musical traditions, the emigration of talents due to the lack of musical work, the local governance of the '*nucleos*', the different perspective in which musical activities are seen by students, families, music teachers and managers, who have different ideas about the musical or social aim of El Sistema.

In the London case I analyse the South Oxhey Choir project, a BBC project based on the idea of creating a link between two different sides of town, which divided in two by the railway line. The wealthy part, Carpenders Park, is characterized by the presence of middle class people, who own their houses. The poor part of the city, South Oxhey, makes a rare case of social housing in a large estate built and managed by the London City Council in the '50s. The choir, after the direct involvement (also financial) of the BBC, survives and continues to play its role as a link between the two parts of the city.

In the Milan case study, I address the social consequences of the Italian approach to music. I focus on the 'Milan Accademia Morigi Orchestra'. Through a set of decisions made in the assembly, the association's structures were bypassed and musical control given to the conductor, generating the collapse of the democratic life of the association in the name of musical quality. This way of addressing amateur music-playing as a form of activity without social meaning generates a sense of guilt among the musicians, which marks to a larger extent the Italian '*marchetta*'. The word *marchetta* is used for performances in which musicians may be paid but have the feeling of not playing at the expected level of musical quality.

Finally, in Brussels case study, I look at another form of collaboration among musicians, embodied by the Cambristi Association. This association is structured simply as a group of people who enjoy playing chamber music. Members can freely keep in touch with each other, and form duos, trios, quartets, and so on. Nothing is requested of the members,

who choose whether to play in public. In spite of such loose network, the links among musicians are strong and involve people, such as for example EU managers, who speak different languages and structure their life in the city as occasionally dwellers, voluntarily outside the flow of local life,.

In all those four cases, I study not only the specific forms of collaboration that music can produce, but also the complex processes that generate the final form of the project (which, in reality, is never reached). In some cases, such as Caracas and Milan, the motivation works as a generator of aims, which over time have shifted from nationalism to social cooperation. In other cases, such as Brussels and South Oxhey, there are established aims (just play music or create a link between twos part of the city) that generate different motivations for people to participate. In all the four cases the development of the projects remains open; interestingly the original plans rooted in different traditions and experiences may well produce for unexpected results. Therefore I conclude that any strategic plan, however carefully laid and precise, is subject to modifications due both to the context and to the unexpected results that it always generates.