

CONFERENCE REPORT

Special Feature | Music therapy in dementia and end-of-life care: Mediterranean perspectives

First Mediterranean music therapy meeting 'Dialogues around dementia and end of life in music therapy: Voices beyond the sea'

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CONFERENCE DETAILS

First Mediterranean music therapy meeting
22nd September 2018, Padova, Italy

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INTRODUCTION

The First Mediterranean music therapy meeting focused on dementia and end-of-life care, and it was called 'Dialogues Around Dementia and End of Life in Music Therapy: Voices Beyond the Sea'. It took place on 22nd September 2018 in Padua, Italy, and was organised by the Giovanni Ferrari Music Therapy School in Padua.

Throughout human civilisation, Italy has been a place of presence, passage and meeting of different peoples; a borderland as well as a centre of culture. The Mediterranean Sea, that washes its shores, is a global symbol of the encounter between different peoples and cultures. With this culture and awareness behind us, in our roots – we can say – we began to think about the realisation of the first Mediterranean music therapy meeting. The first word we thought for describing this event was the term 'harmony', whose birth and growth of meaning takes place in the waters of the Mediterranean.

The term harmony encompasses multiple meanings; its history over the centuries starts from its root, 'ar', from which 'ararisko' derives. This verb can be traced back to the term 'connect' and to the verb 'harmòizen', which is attributed the meaning of tuning, both of musical instruments and people. Here, from the first moment the meeting was established, the purpose was to connect and 'tune' people; a ground for exchange and enrichment and growth using new perspectives for dialogue. In this context, music therapy, as a resource, is vital: it serves as a means by which different people and realities can meet, each of them with their identity, history and differences. Music therapy can promote dialogue and trigger positive processes of change and growth.



Photograph 1: The conference venue



Photograph 2: Padua by night

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The meeting was organised to be part of the training course for the students of the Giovanni Ferrari Music Therapy School and for all those interested, including music therapists, students from the local music conservatory, and professionals in other fields. Overall, 120 people attended the meeting.

The Giovanni Ferrari Music Therapy School was established in 1999 as a private school, and, since 2001, it has been directly affiliated to the Université Européenne Jean Monnet (UEJM), an institution authorised by Belgian Royal Decree to issue professional qualifications; in our case the Diplome de Specialisation Professionnel en Musicotherapie Jean Monnet.

The main objective of the UEJM is to promote and certify post-secondary training courses of high professional quality and to issue the corresponding qualifications in all sectors not covered or partially covered by the traditional training system, especially those relating to new professions. UEJM is not a training institution. It is responsible for certifying non-academic training courses.

The Giovanni Ferrari Music Therapy School adheres to the Italian Confederation of Associations and School of Music Therapy (CONFIAM). The School has a long history of organising events. In 2005 we organised the first national conference on 'Music Therapy in the Path of Rehabilitation in Hearing Impairment'. In 2007, with the patronage of the University of Padua, we

organised a study day on 'Music Therapy and Coma', with international guests. In 2013 we organised the VIII Confiam National Congress of Music Therapy, lasting three days, entitled 'Sounds, Tempos and Rhythms in Care Relationships'. In the following years we organised music therapy meetings on specific topics, such as in 2018 when we brought together Daniele Schoen, Laura Ferreri and Elvira Brattico on the theme of musical perception and neuroscience.

The aim of the First Mediterranean music therapy meeting in 2018 was to provide an insight, a glimpse into music therapy in the Mediterranean countries, starting from applications of music therapy in dementia and end-of-life care contexts. The aim was also to create space for comparison and exchange of research and practices with music therapists within and around the Mediterranean region and to build dialogues which could strengthen a network of professional relationships and to spread and accelerate knowledge in the music therapy field.

Experts from the Mediterranean region who had experience in the aforementioned field were invited to the meeting. We did not try to ensure that there was at least one expert per country, or that all Mediterranean countries were, in some way, represented; the vision was to create a day event. The scientific and organising committee (Enrico Ceccato, Cristina Roveran and Luca Xodo) identified and invited individuals who, based on their academic record in the field, could represent the state of the art of music therapy in the Mediterranean area. As such, experts from Turkey, Greece, Israel, Italy, Tunisia and Spain were invited, and we also had the participation of the president of the Italian Association of Professional Music Therapists (AIM). Melissa Mercadal-Brotons was invited as a Spanish and world-renowned expert on music therapy in dementia care. In her capacity as the president of the World Federation of Music Therapy (WFMT) at the time, she opened the meeting with a keynote offering an overview of music therapy in the Mediterranean countries with a special focus on dementia care. The meeting was organised locally, adopting a bottom-up approach; and, despite its international reach, we did not seek the involvement of the World Federation of Music Therapy (WFMT) and the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC).

Oral presentations as well as discussion and one workshop formed the core of the meeting. From our perspective as co-organisers of this event, we have provided a brief summary of the programme below.

PROGRAMME SUMMARY

As mentioned, Melissa Mercadal-Brotons opened the meeting with a keynote regarding 'Music Therapy in the Mediterranean Countries with a Special Focus on Dementia Care.' Her talk provided a vision on how to help people with dementia through specific music therapy interventions (both with the patient and with caregivers alongside the patient) and on music-based interventions that can be performed by caregivers, both family and professional.

As well as introducing the state of the art of music therapy with people with dementia in Israel, Ayelet Dassa gave a talk on the role of the music therapist in daily care, illustrating musical projects for people with dementia in a nursing home not inside the music therapy room but, rather, in the dining room, in physiotherapy group work and in bedside therapy. Moreover, she detailed musical projects involving families, such as a piano café for residents and families and a residents' choir. At the end she described a nationwide training programme for staff in nursing homes, day centres, and

caregivers in the home to use recorded music, singing and rhythm to alleviate caregivers' burden.

Giorgos Tsiris, given his connection both with the Greek and the UK music therapy community, presented about music therapy at the end of life by outlining some local and international paths of development. He described the concept of spirituality as a 'boundary object' that needs to be considered in music therapy practice, the necessity of expanding professional boundaries, as well as revising the role of hospices in light of the fact that we have to work with communities to integrate the concepts of dying and death into their everyday lives more healthily. He described three examples of death education and health promotion projects in palliative care.

Rihab Jebali gave an overview on clinical applications of music therapy in Tunisia. Beyond the fact music therapy is a young but growing discipline in Tunisia, Rihab illustrated the activities of the National Association of Music Therapy (established in 2014) with patients with dementia, autistic children and oncology patients. Regarding music therapy with dementia, she illustrated an ongoing longitudinal study with eight patients with early and moderate dementia.

Burçin Uçaner gave an overview of music therapy and music medicine in Turkey. She mainly described the need for professional development in Turkey, pointing to the lack of qualified music therapists working officially in healthcare or other related institutions. She said in some private nursing homes, as well as in some hospitals, musicians give concerts for entertainment and nurses play music for the patient and call it 'music therapy'. She discussed the professional confusion created by this situation, and the need for qualified music therapists in the country.

Lastly, Italian music therapist Paolo Pizziolo presented on his ongoing doctoral research on group music therapy in relation to the reduction of behavioural symptoms associated with dementia. His presentation involved a participatory improvisation workshop.



Photograph 5: Improvisation workshop led by Paolo Pizziolo (from right to left: Melissa Mercadal-Brotons, Rihab Jebali, Burçin Uçaner, Giorgos Tsiris and Paolo Pizziolo)

The meeting was accompanied by a series of musical interventions organised by the students and teachers of the Giovanni Ferrari Music Therapy School. Choral songs and body percussion improvisations actively involved the participants between presentations.

REFLECTIONS

This meeting presented an overview of music therapy in some countries of the Mediterranean area. The different presentations offered a colourful picture of music therapy and its applications in dementia and end-of-life care in the Mediterranean area. The meeting did not contain presentations representing all the Mediterranean countries, but it offered an insight into a little-known area and a platform for further dialogue.

There are countries like Spain, Greece and Italy where music therapy appears to be more widespread and applied, and countries like Tunisia and Turkey where music therapy has taken its first steps and is trying to grow with the efforts of committed associations and professionals. Throughout the meeting, it became apparent that music therapy varies according to the musical and 'caring' traditions of each country; for example, in countries such as Turkey and Tunisia musical instruments which are linked to tradition are used, and treatments are closely linked to the religious culture and involve more movement and dance. Participatory and receptive methods are commonly used in the different countries, and the relationship between music therapist and patient appears to be a distinct element across all practices.

From a professional point of view, after the meeting, students recognised how music therapy is linked to the traditions and culture of peoples, not only with regard to the musical repertoire and the instruments used but for the sense for which they are used; to reduce symptoms, to enhance well-being and/or to get closer to God. This theme could perhaps be the focus of a future meeting focusing on the socio-cultural dimension of music therapy practices across the Mediterranean region.

Overall, it was a meeting that laid the foundations for deeper knowledge among the participants and created an impetus resulting in the publication of this special feature of *Approaches*. Following the success of this event, we developed this into an annual meeting. We organised the Second Mediterranean Music Therapy Meeting, centred on music and community, in 2019, however, the 2020 event was suspended due to Covid-19. We hope to resume these meetings in 2021.