



Special issue

**Music therapy in Europe:
Paths of professional development**

in partnership with the
European Music Therapy Confederation



GREECE

Country report on professional recognition of music therapy

Evangelia Papanikolaou¹

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Traces of the first music therapy reports take us back to the 1980s when various professionals developed an interest in the broader sense of music therapy and tried to promote it through their own experience and perspectives. Although these people were not formally trained as music therapists, “music therapy” was introduced as a new concept and inspired several young people who developed an interest to study abroad. Over the last 20 years, there has been an outburst of people travelling mainly to Europe and the USA to undertake an official training in music therapy, in order to return and develop their services according to international standards of practice. Nowadays, there are approximately 40 certified music therapists in the country, trained in various approaches such as psychodynamic, humanistic, music-centred music therapy, neurologic, vocal psychotherapy and Guided Imagery and Music (GIM-Bonny method).

The first organised effort to form an organisation supporting music therapy was made by the Hellenic Music Therapy and Creative Expression Society, an institution comprised of various professionals with an interest in the field. This organisation represented Greece at the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC) until 2007; however, it does not appear as an active organisation any more. In 2004, the Hellenic Association of Certified Professional Music Therapists (ESPEM) was established and until now is the only official professional body of music therapists in Greece. Since 2007, ESPEM has officially been representing Greece at the EMTC (Tsirir 2008).

Education

To date, there is no academic music therapy programme either in undergraduate or post-graduate level provided by a university in Greece. Music therapy is offered as an elective, introductory course in some university departments. “Music therapy in special education” is taught as a module at the Aristotle University, Musicology Department. This was the first music therapy position to open in a state university, while an introductory module runs at the Department of Music Studies of the Ionian University. The Hellenic American University/Hellenic American College which is a private university also offers a Minor in Music Therapy available to all undergraduate students. All the above are offered by qualified music therapists.

RECOGNITION AND APPROVAL

The music therapy profession in Greece is still in a state of formation. The main difficulty is the lack of an officially recognised training course that would allow the alignment of professionals to a certain academic level of studies. Hence, music therapists do not have state-recognition nor are their services covered by the national health system.

In October 2008, the Special Education Act was the first one in Greece according to which music therapists were formally acknowledged as professionals and eligible to work in special education needs settings. Although this initiative was a very welcoming first step, the prerequisites regarding who could be considered as a qualified music therapist were very different to the international approved standards requiring an academic degree. The standards set by the Special Education Act were also inconsistent with those set by ESPEM, which required an officially recognised academic degree (valid in the country obtained) in order to register as a professional member of the association.

Recently (May 2014), a second effort to include music therapy services in special education has been made in the new Special Education Act. This time, the standards are closer to the international ones; however, the new Act is still under revision and remains uncertain whether it will be put in action in the near future.

IMPORTANT STEPS IN THE RECOGNITION PROCESS

Upon the establishment of ESPEM, the association accepted as members both people who were graduates from foreign universities as well as those who had fulfilled a private course in Greece. However, as explained above, from 2009 onwards ESPEM accepts as members only certified professionals with academic degrees from universities that would qualify them to practice in their respective countries. ESPEM primarily aims to achieve official recognition of the profession, setting and safeguarding professional standards of practice in the country. Up to now, music therapy is more established in special education settings followed by mental health

¹ Sonora: Multidisciplinary Organisation for Music Therapy and Research; Hellenic American University/College; Representative of the Hellenic Association of Certified Professional Music Therapists (ESPEM).

Email: evangelia@sonora.gr

settings and only a few places in hospitals, whereas most of the professionals do not hold a full-time, permanent job (Papanikolaou 2011).

Amongst ESPEM's goals is also to promote research and clinical work in various settings, deliver accurate information about music therapy to the public and maintain a valid register of certified professionals.

In 2007, the not-for-profit organisation 'Musical Movement' was founded in Athens. Its projects aim to support infants, children and families through the therapeutic use of music and to ensure emotional stability, healthy development and wellbeing. The main goal of the organisation is the treatment of early mental disturbances and the prevention of the underlying social problems that these might cause, through a holistic approach that refers to the infant, the parents and the community.

In 2014, another not-for-profit, fund-raising organisation was created, entitled 'Sonora: Multidisciplinary Organisation for Music Therapy & Research'. Sonora is a joint effort of music therapists and a network of other health-related professionals, scientists and academics from Greece and abroad, with the intention to design, develop and support high-standard clinical, research and educational projects, within a multi-disciplinary perspective. Sonora also represents the Greek and Cypriot community of Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) practitioners, with 35 active members to date.

More emphasis on research activity and funding is needed in Greece so that the effectiveness and reliability of music therapy as a therapeutic discipline becomes overt to the scientific community and the public. Certified music therapists have created posts in public hospitals, and music therapy modules have been created in universities, while conferences, scientific meetings and publications in books and journals take place. *Approaches: Music Therapy & Special Music Education* is the first Greek peer-reviewed open access journal which is published both in Greek and English.

The music therapy profession is still under formation though in a flourishing stage with concurrent developments in different areas of education, clinical work and research. Well-coordinated actions will lead to further growth and hopefully to the recognition of music therapy as profession and discipline.

SELECTED LINKS

- ❑ Approaches: Music Therapy & Special Music Education (open access peer-reviewed journal): <http://approaches.primarymusic.gr>
- ❑ EMTC country information: <http://emtc-eu.com/country-reports/greece/>
- ❑ Hellenic Association of Certified Professional Music Therapists (ESPEM): www.musictherapy.gr

- ❑ Sonora: Multidisciplinary Organisation for Music Therapy & Research: www.sonora.gr

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Official Journal of the Hellenic Democracy (2008). Law 3699 "Special Pedagogy and Education of Individuals with Disabilities or with Special Educational Needs", 199/vol.A/02.10.2008
- Papanikolaou, E. (2011). Μουσικοθεραπεία στην Ελλάδα: Δεδομένα και εξελίξεις [Music therapy in Greece: Facts and developments]. In the proceedings of the 1st one-day conference of ESPEM, *Approaches: Music Therapy & Special Music Education, Special Issue 2011*, 9-13. Retrieved from http://approaches.primarymusic.gr/approaches/journal/Approaches_Special%20Issue_2011/Approaches_Special%20Issue%202011_Papanikolaou_Foreword.pdf
- Tsiris, G. (2011). Music therapy in Greece. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*. Retrieved from <https://voices.no/community/?q=country-of-the-month/2011-music-therapy-greece>