

CONFERENCE REPORT

The 1st Panhellenic Conference on Community Music: 'Music and musicians for a better society: Beginnings, experiences, perspectives'

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CONFERENCE DETAILS

The 1st Panhellenic Conference on Community Music:

'Music and musicians for a better society:

Beginnings, experiences, perspectives'

29-30 April 2023, Greece

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OVERVIEW

In the main auditorium of the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki, Greece, community musicians, educators and researchers gathered to exchange views and reflections at the 1st Panhellenic Conference on Community Music. Entitled "Music and musicians for a better society: Beginnings, experiences, perspectives," the conference took place on April 29 and 30, 2023. It was organised by the Department of Music Science & Art of the University of Macedonia with the support of the International Centre for Community Music, York St. John University, U.K., and the Greek Society of Music Education. As Lida Stamou, the president of the conference expressed, the aim was to promote conversations among international and national presenters by sharing projects, educational perspectives and experiences with the goal to support the development of Community Music (CM) in Greece.

THE PRESENTATIONS

The conference followed the structure of a symposium, with three keynote addresses and a total of ten invited speakers from Greece and abroad. With the main question of how one might understand CM in Greece, Lee Higgins, professor at York St. John University and director at the International Centre for Community Music, presented the diverse work that is implemented internationally under the umbrella of CM (see Photograph 2). He described CM as “conscious active action” that promotes a “cultural democracy” by ensuring the right to musicking for everyone. Following a five-fold framework, he elaborated on the elements that allow CM to provide music education at non-formal settings: people, places, participation, inclusivity and diversity.



Photograph 1: Lida Stamou's opening speech



Photograph 2: Lee Higgins

Catherine Birch, senior lecturer at York St. John University, elaborated on trauma-informed practices in CM (Holford, 2020) and expanded on the wide spectrum of competencies for university students who study CM. Students should learn how to plan and run CM groups in a variety of contexts, have good musical skills, articulate on how CM functions, develop a philosophical perspective on the broader concept of CM, understand key attributes of a community musician and grow as self-reflective practitioners. She highlighted issues around teaching, administration, placements and values as well as curriculum content. Alicia de Bánffy-Hall, professor at the University of Applied Sciences Düsseldorf, presented the development of CM in Germany (de Bánffy-Hall, 2020) and, in parallel to the procedure followed by her colleagues of mapping and defining, she emphasised the importance of mapping CM in Greece.

Eleni Lapidaki, professor in the Department of Music Studies at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, argued on the limitations of empathy, the concept of otherness and how radical intimacy gives community musicians a way to regulate how they are in the presence of the ‘other’. Olympia Agalianou, specialised educational staff at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, focused on music as a comprehensive art that unites speech, music and dance, giving special merit to the act of networking and group work. The pedagogy of listening was pointed out by

Peter Gouzouazis, professor at the University of British Columbia, and Margaret O' Sullivan, PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia in Canada, raised questions on difficulties, such as biases, vulnerabilities and discomfort that might accompany the groups, and also arise when one does research reflectively. Maria Varvarigou, lecturer at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Ireland, introduced the specialisation of health musicians, leaving some queries in the air. Focusing on sites of confinement, I (the first author), assistant professor at Ionian University, analysed various aspects that require to be considered by the CM facilitator, such as the need for social consciousness, openness and acceptance of diversity, appropriateness, positionality, issues of power and ethics. The outline of the CM course in the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens was clearly presented by Christina Anagnostopoulou, associate professor at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, who also described CM projects that were offered during the lockdowns brought in by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Student sessions permitted for a change of pace and energy. A total of 10 graduate and postgraduate students from various Greek Universities and abroad, presented their research in seven-minute lightning talks (see Photograph 3). Diverse CM projects were reported, including projects with refugee children, unaccompanied minors, people in the third and fourth age span, and people with disabilities as well as the use of technology and more.

During the conference, experiential CM projects from Thessaloniki, Greece were presented. In particular, a group of about 10 older people from a long-term assisted living facility performed accompanied by their caregivers and facilitated on stage by a doctoral candidate (see Photograph 4), and a drum group of 11 former substance dependent adults, framed as a CM project, was coordinated by a music therapist and two members of the interdisciplinary team of the non-residential program "ARGO – Alternative Therapeutic Program for Addicted Individuals".



Photograph 3: Students' sessions

REFLECTIONS AND THOUGHTS

We would like to acknowledge that our understanding, positioning and views are informed by our professional music therapy backgrounds as practitioners and researchers. From this standpoint, it was helpful that all invited speakers conducted an in-depth exploration of the theoretical frameworks and addressed their perspectives on various critical factors that may be illuminated in order to improve the practice of CM. Such factors may include the need for defining, mapping, and organising fields of practice, and forming networks among musicians, music educators and community musicians. However, it was observed that most presenters refrained from providing explicit

definitions of CM, supporting Veblen's (2013) narrative on the multitude of CM conceptualisations. The majority of the presenters did not provide comprehensive definitions of their practice, which seemed to challenge participants with limited exposure to the concept of CM. This could be due to the diversity of approaches of CM evident among the presenters. It may have been beneficial if each presenter articulated their positioning on CM, thus providing attendees with a contextualised overview of the field. This would have allowed for a deeper grasp of the fundamental principles of CM, while enabling attendees to develop their own perspectives on this practice by gaining insights from diverse viewpoints. Moreover, multiple definitions would have encouraged discourse and potentially generated novel ideas.



Photograph 4: On-stage facilitation of a CM group

Furthermore, the presenters analysed the diverse range of contexts within which CM may be situated. The emergence of CM in settings with marginalised or underrepresented populations such as maximum-security prisons, refugee camps, addiction treatment centres and so on, was of noteworthy distinction. The field of CM may need to carefully address the potentially multifaceted needs of these underrepresented groups. Additionally, the importance of a safe space was emphasised in the majority of the presentations. Therefore, it is deemed critical to define the concept of safe space (Lai et al., 2020) and how to maintain it during CM practice. Although the issue was not discussed during the conference, we (the authors) recommend that supervision by licensed psychologists or music therapists should be included, especially within trauma-informed approaches in the CM field, to reinforce and support music facilitators in the creation of safe and nurturing environments for participants. Adequate supervision would also provide them with the necessary preparation in order to navigate challenging situations that may arise in the course of their practice, when working with marginalised minorities.

Lastly, it is also worth noting that despite the varying proposals presented by the speakers regarding the application of CM in Greece, one might question the extent to which the efficacious practices that are applicable to the UK and Germany could serve as a guide for the progress of CM in Greece. “Not everything needs to be anglicised” was an interesting point raised by de Bánffy-Hall during her presentation, which gives important feedback concerning the implementation of CM. This stresses the need to observe and learn from effective practices but also to adapt, modify and restructure for a culturally meaningful and contextually informed CM practice.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Since 2016 graduate programs on CM have been offered by Ionian University, the University of Macedonia and the National and Kapodistrian University in Athens (Oloktsidou et al., in press), but with no substantial collaboration among them. This conference has made a promising beginning to promote a joint effort to delineate the field of CM in Greece, to work collectively towards defining its practices, and to form a network of practitioners and educators. As Lida Stamou mentioned in her concluding remarks, the 2nd Panhellenic CM conference will be organised soon, under the auspices of the Department of Music Science & Art of the University of Macedonia. In addition, she announced the creation of a Greek Special Interest Group in CM and the future publication of a journal titled *Journal of Research and Practice in Community Music*, with the aim to establish an environment that fosters open and constructive dialogues between educators, facilitators and researchers. Taking into consideration that these three Universities also offer undergraduate or graduate courses in Music Therapy, furthering an interuniversity collaboration might prove promising for the solid development of the Music Therapy profession. Until then, we look forward to all these actions as they show great potential toward the future advancement of inclusive and collective approaches in CM in Greece.

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