

Exploring the field of music education: Illustrations from Trentino

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Drawing upon the case of Trentino, in this paper we propose a view of music education as a social practice involving multiple actors in a specific subfield. While being distinctive, music education is also located at the intersection of several larger fields, comprising artistic production as well as educational activities, a plurality of publics, and a significant involvement of both private and public, for-profit and not-for-profit actors. Admittedly, the study of artistic practices as fields is far from new and has been located in the context of different theoretical paradigms (major examples include Becker 1982; DiMaggio 1986; Bourdieu 1994; White 2018; for a recent assessment, Crossley 2020). Our own take on fields relies heavily on our previous work on inter-organizational relations between for-profit and cooperative organizations (Sacchetti and Sugden 2003; Sacchetti and Tortia 2016) and on the structure of urban collective action fields (Diani 2012; 2013; 2015; 2018). Accordingly, we focus on the network patterns that connect actors in the field to each other, with special attention to the role of local government. Having been for decades a distinctive feature of music education in Trentino vis a vis other areas of Italy, the massive involvement of public authorities appears to be particularly relevant at a time when covid 19 is putting extreme strain on the working (and indeed the living) conditions of so many people in the arts world.

The province of Trento in Italy provides an excellent and at the same time peculiar case to explore the phenomenon we are interested in. Back in the late 1980s, twelve private nonprofit music schools (henceforth, MS) were founded by musicians and in cooperation with the Province administration defined a public-private system for the production of diffused musical education. This is the only region in Italy where the public sector contributes massively to the production of diffused musical education by private nonprofit organisations (with 5 million Euros in 2018), besides institutional education offered by Conservatories and Music Lyceums. In parallel, we observe a number of schools which are not included in the Province system of regulation and funding, offering different approaches to music education, teachers' and users' preferences and costs (Sacchetti and Marchesin 2020). This system is oriented to fostering the supply of a typical meritorious good, lowering access prices, partly contrasting the policy orientation of the last decades, when the active promotion of industry-oriented education and productivity-oriented policies has excluded music from public high-school education (we should not forget that Baumol (1960) did not consider the arts as productive but subject to a "cost disease" as they cannot benefit from the reduction in unitary production costs allowed by technical progress, cf. also Finioia 1997).

The presence of different actors (private nonprofit, private for profit, and the public sector) makes an interesting case for approaching MS from the perspective of resource coordination (monetary and non-monetary), and from the role of stakeholders (e.g. teachers, administrators and students in their multiple roles, and policy makers) in defining the boundaries of MS, of their activities and aims (Diani 2013; 2018). For instance, teachers may be also performers, composers, producers, event organisers or they may have other occupations besides that as musicians. And likewise music students. Coordination is necessary because resources, including formal and experiential knowledge, are dispersed and because MS encompass specific publics, to say it à la Dewey (1927), their passions and their interests (Hirschman 1977).

Resource coordination occurs through a mix of modalities (Diani 2015; Sacchetti and Sugden 2009; Sacchetti, Borzaga, Tortia, 2019 WP), which we identify as market exchange (for instance between the MS offering the service and the students demanding), cooperation (for instance among musicians within their MS, between musicians and students, among MS, or between the Province and MS), and authority (as for instance inside MS as organizational hierarchies, as well as authority regulating the relation between the Province and the MS).

Each of the publics, through the framework designed by the mix of coordination modalities, contributes not solely to the production of music education, but also of art and culture, relationships, economic prosperity. Each actor may retain a different status and degree of access into decision-making processes. Where the publics' preferences towards these multiple dimensions vary substantively there may be unsatisfactory coordination mixes, or even conflict (for instance between MS and the Province, between musicians and the MS where they work, among MS). (Here we must specify that when referring to preferences we refer to a specific culture, to the sense and meaning that each actor attaches to the publics' participation in the activities of a MS). For example, on the one hand, the Province, through the authority mechanism, guarantees service standards, and some degree of income stability for teachers (which has been proving important following the health crisis and the consequent lock-down). However, rules can be stringent from the point of view of musicians' autonomy, artistic sustainability and creativeness. Hence, musicians (but the same could be hypothesized for students) may develop some sort of "dissonance" with respect to their own system of preferences: on the one hand, the search for involvement and space for expressing creativeness and, on the other hand, the resignation in the face of a consolidated system that ensures stability but takes away part of their influence in shaping activities, thus experiencing a fall in their vitality

Provided that MS encompass multiple publics, that these publics are made of individuals with multiple roles and multivalent interactions (cf. Diani, 2015; Crossley, 2020), we argue that a re-consideration of the idea of MS is necessary. MS activate publics which cannot be confined within the basic education box. Rather, the interactions among these multifaceted publics shape and are shaped by the evolution of those same interactions (ibid.) While for the public actor the mission of private music schools is to provide basic musical education and promote musical culture, MS should be considered as part of an intertwined socio-economic system that – by means of multiple coordination modalities – can increase (or hamper) the vitality of actors and localities. From this perspective we suggest to study MS from three analytical levels (Diani, 2015; 2018):

- a) Organisations (MS and other interconnected actors focusing on their governance features, memberships, practices) and their networks;
- b) Individuals (musicians, music students, administrators, policy-makers, music industry and event managers)
- c) Events (as temporary contexts where interconnections between MS and other actors may manifest themselves)

with the aim of detecting not only the structural features of the MS system but also the opportunities, constraints and degree of cultural proximity that individuals in multiple roles share.

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