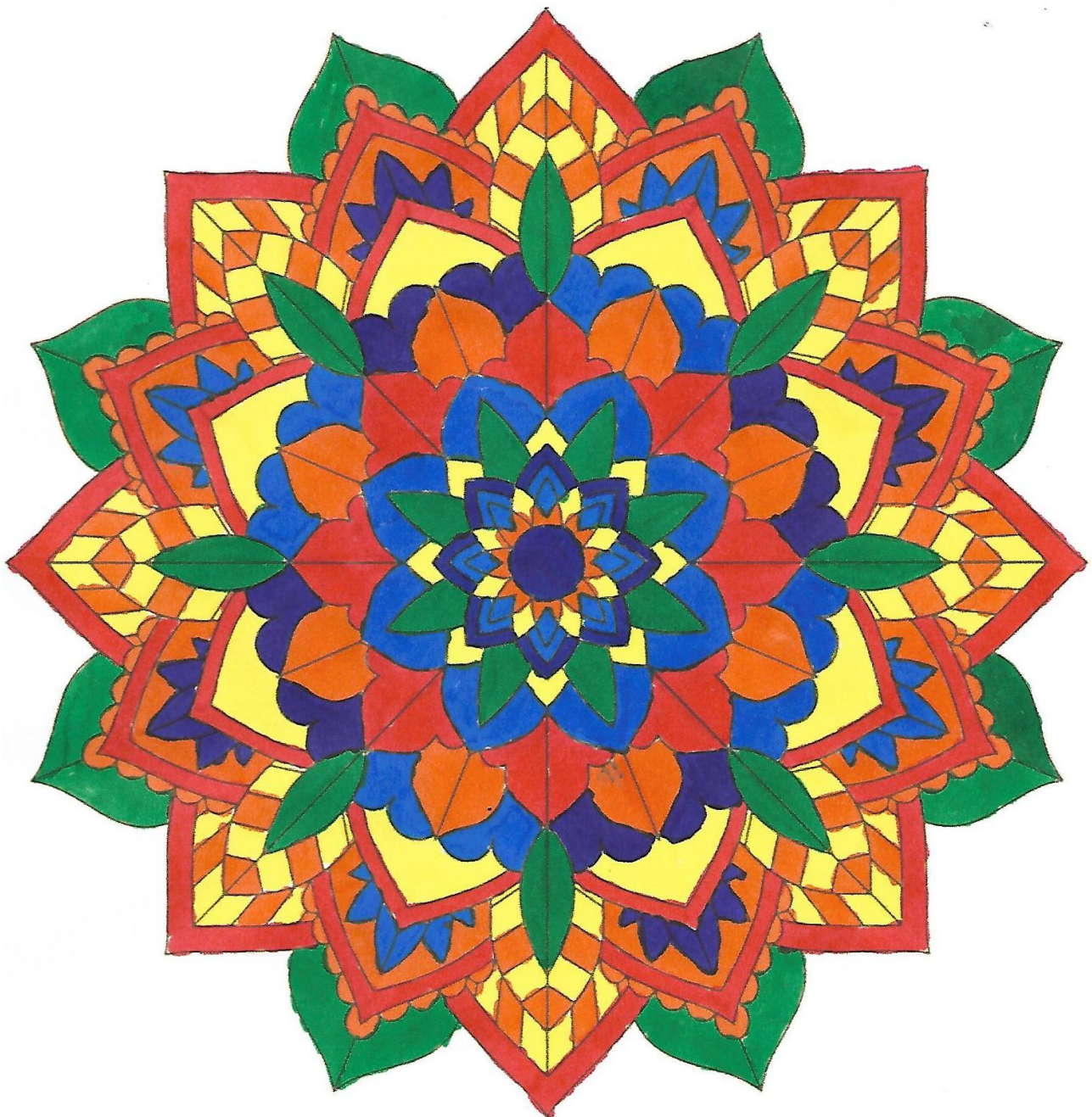


Meeting in Music

Facilitating empowerment and sense of ownership through musical activities with vulnerable groups.



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Abstract

Within higher music education artistic citizenship is being mentioned still more often and the interest in the term is increasing rapidly both in Denmark and internationally. This is part of a bigger discussion about the artist's role in society and how they can or should contribute. Community music practitioners are highly engaged in society and advocate equality of opportunity and cultural democracy, but community music practice very rarely takes place in formal educational settings. Instead, it takes place in informal educational settings like courses or programmes run by NGOs or individuals. With this thesis, I seek to contribute to bridge this gap by addressing how musical activities can potentially have a positive effect on the well-being of vulnerable people with refugee or immigrant backgrounds. I explore and describe methods to facilitate musical spaces that allow participants to feel valued and empowered through active participation; describing these spaces, what they ask of the facilitator and what potential they hold firstly for vulnerable groups in society, but also as a way to increase well-being for other groups.

Sammendrag

Inden for højere musikuddannelse bliver kunstnerisk medborgerskab nævnt stadigt oftere, og interessen i begrebet er stærkt stigende både i Danmark og internationalt. Det sker som følge af en større diskussion omkring kunstnerens rolle i samfundet, og hvordan de kan eller bør bidrage til det. Praktikere inden for samfundsmusik er meget involverede i samfundet og går ind for lige muligheder og kulturelt demokrati, men denne praksis finder meget sjældent sted i formelle uddannelsessammenhænge. Den findes snarere i uformelle uddannelsessammenhænge som forløb og kurser drevet af ikke-statslige organisationer, foreninger eller enkeltpersoner. Med denne opgave ønsker jeg at bidrage til at bygge bro mellem disse sammenhænge ved at adressere, hvordan musikalske aktiviteter potentielt kan have en positiv effekt på sårbare mennesker med flygtninge- eller immigrantbaggrundes velvære og trivsel. Jeg udforsker, hvordan musikalske rum, der gennem aktiv deltagelse får deltagerne til at føle, at de har værdi, og som styrker deres personlige ressourcer, kan faciliteres. Jeg beskriver disse rum, hvad de kræver af facilitatoren, og hvilket potentiale de har for at fremme velvære først og fremmest for sårbare grupper i samfundet, men også for andre grupper.

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Introduction

The title of my Master's thesis, *Meeting in Music*, is a good reflection of what has been my approach to this project as a whole. The aim of my project has been to explore how to facilitate musical spaces or meeting places that allow for participants to feel valued and empowered through active participation, hence having a positive influence on their well-being. It is central to my approach that the participants are meeting *in* music and not *about* music. The difference is that the musical spaces I seek to facilitate are centred around the participants firstly and the music secondly. However, this does not mean that I consider music to be of less importance. On the contrary, I consider it a crucial part of creating the musical spaces I aim for that all musical choices are made with the context and the participants in mind.

I have chosen to describe these musical spaces because I believe that there is a need for more detailed and specific descriptions of what elements to consider within community music practice. I use the idea of the musical space as a framework to visualise these elements and how they affect each other. I hope that this can help provide more clarity for other community music facilitators when working with vulnerable people in highly complex intercultural contexts.

I base this thesis on two very different projects, each lasting two months. Here, I have explored how to facilitate the musical spaces in practice. In both projects, I have been collaborating with Danish organisations – one in a refugee centre and the other in a community centre. The outcome of these projects are two case studies. The case studies are the product of this thesis along with a description of the musical space, a list of skills that the facilitator should ideally possess and concrete examples of musical activities. In both projects, I have been working with highly vulnerable groups and the work has therefore involved a lot of ethical considerations. In agreeing to collaborate with me, it was important to both organisations that the anonymity of the participants was ensured. Therefore, I will not share details in the case studies that reveal where they took place or who participated. In order to ensure complete anonymity, it has not been possible to interview participants about their experiences or to document them using video. To support my findings, I will therefore use observations I have made in my work with the participants, statements that they have shared with me and the feedback that I have received from staff and volunteers from the two organisations.

The work presented in this thesis has also been inspired by a close collaboration with Eline Accoe who is doing her Master's in music education at Luca School of Arts in Leuven, Belgium. We share a common interest in trying to create meaningful musical experiences for people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds and have worked together for almost two years around this topic. We have had countless discussions, read the same literature and shared our experiences from the projects we have done. Together, we have spoken to PhD Kim Boeskov who is a community music practitioner working with refugees and shared our thoughts and ideas. This talk has inspired both of us and helped us to find the right direction in our work. My collaboration with Eline has been truly inspiring and has helped me to continuously reflect on my own work.

Since working with vulnerable groups with immigrant or refugee backgrounds is a highly complex matter, I consider this thesis to be the starting point of exploring how we can meet in music and

what potential these meetings might hold. With this work I have only scratched the surface, but I hope that the experiences and reflections that I share in the following can contribute to others who wish to do similar work and to a broader discussion about how artists can contribute to society through music.

Vulnerability in this context

Since this thesis is centred around working with vulnerable groups, I find it important to clarify what vulnerability implies in this context. I cannot and do not intend to provide a detailed understanding of the different psychological diagnoses that existed in the groups but rather a general understanding. Also, it is not uncommon that some of these diagnoses are present in an individual simultaneously. I know for a fact that I had participants in both case studies whose lives were affected by the diagnoses that I will describe in the following, but I do not have a complete list. Having a general understanding of these diagnoses will give context to the considerations that I have made during the case studies and in this thesis in general.

High levels of stress

Refugees generally experience immense amounts of stress. It can be caused by not knowing where their relatives are, by the uncertainty of their future and many other things. Even if the reasons behind their stress disappear they may still continue to feel distressed. This affects them both mentally and physically. Mentally it can cause anxiety, anger, sadness, helplessness, fluctuations in mood, poor concentration and degraded memory. Physically it can cause intense tiredness, lack of energy, headaches, tense muscles and pain in multiple places in the body (WHO, 1996).

Trauma

The word trauma originates from Greek and means wound (Blauenfeldt & Priskorn, 2013). Traumatic events are characterised by involving the death of others, the threat of one's own death or that of others, the threat or reality of serious harm and overstepping one's physiological or psychological integrity or threatening to do so. People who have experienced war, torture or rape may have endured trauma. Traumatization can occur when an individual is not able to act in any way to get out of a harmful situation. When neither fight, flight or freeze is possible, the human self-defence system gets overrun. There is then a risk that the stress reaction caused by the traumatic event will stay with the individual long after it took place and potentially develop and get worse. The Danish Refugee Council (2017) has made a flyer about the typical reactions to having experienced war and escape. This list gives a good overview of the consequences of trauma. They are shown below;



THOUGHTS

- Find it difficult to make decisions
- Find it difficult to remember things
- Struggle to concentrate
- Experience too many thoughts at once
- Confusion
- Self-recrimination
- Suicidal thoughts
- Flashbacks of distressing experiences
- Recurring nightmares

BODY

- Recurring nightmares
- Difficulty sleeping
- Struggle to relax
- Tired and exhausted
- Cry easily
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Stomach problems
- Chest pain
- Back and neck pain

FEELINGS

- Fear and anxiety without knowing the reason
- Distrust
- Feeling inferior
- No interest in doing things that you would normally enjoy
- Discomfort associated with loud noises
- Helplessness and hopelessness
- Feeling alone and lonely
- Fear of losing control of your life
- Fear of going insane
- Feeling loss

SOCIALLY

- No desire to be in the company of others
- Lack of trust in others
- More inclined to become frustrated or irritated with others
- More frequent and severe feelings of anger
- Berate others, perhaps without reason
- React strongly even to insignificant things, perhaps even by hitting
- Substance abuse

The Danish Refugee Council 2017

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is a condition that can occur as a delayed or prolonged reaction to having experienced a traumatic event which was exceptionally threatening or catastrophic in character and would affect practically everyone (WHO, 2019). It is a psychological and physiological condition that contains feelings of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control and the threat of annihilation. Both the body and the mind are affected by having experienced highly traumatic events with hypersensitivity, high levels of stress and existential problems as a consequence. The many different symptoms of PTSD can be divided into three main categories; increased stress, reliving the traumatic events/flashbacks and avoidance. Flashbacks can be triggered by for example scents or sounds (Blauenfeldt & Priskorn, 2013). They can be so realistic that the person experiencing them can find it difficult to separate the present from the past. In order to avoid thoughts or feelings that could trigger these flashbacks, people suffering from PTSD often isolate themselves in an attempt to feel safe and feel in control of their anxiety. In general, the symptoms of PTSD are the same as those of trauma but they do not go away and can get gradually worse.

Depression

Depression can be caused by many different things the loss of a family member or friend, the sickness or death of a child, serious physical illness, long-term stress and major life changes (Psykiatrifonden, 2019). Many refugees can experience an intense feeling of hopelessness because

of their situation, but that does not necessarily mean that they have a depression. The most common symptoms of depression are overwhelming sadness, hopelessness, thoughts of self harm, crying easily, worrying constantly, anxiety and tension, lack of energy, feeling worthless or less respected than other people, difficulty in paying attention and in remembering (WHO, 1996).

Personality disorders

There are a range of different types of personality disorders, but in general they are all long term patterns of behaviour and inner experiences that differ significantly from what is expected. Personality disorders affect at least two of the following areas (American Psychiatric Association, 2018);

- Way of thinking of yourself and others
- Way of responding emotionally
- Way of relating to other people
- Way of controlling one's behaviour

They can involve challenges like anti-social behaviour, extreme shyness, extreme sensitivity to criticism, excessive emotion and attention seeking, lack of empathy, perfectionism, suspiciousness towards others etc.

Like with all the other diagnoses presented here, a close collaboration with staff is important in order for the facilitator to gain relevant knowledge about how to take the vulnerability of the participants into consideration. The facilitator should never attempt to diagnose anyone.

Capturing community music practice

The work I have done in relation to this thesis belongs within the framework of community music practice. I will therefore present the guiding principles and characteristics of this practice in the following based on the book *Community Music in Theory and in Practice* by Lee Higgins.

Perspectives on community music

According to Higgins, there is a general resistance within the community music field towards having a clear definition of the practice (Higgins, 2012). The resistance is based on the claim that the activities within the practice are too diverse, multifaceted, complex and contextual for a universal definition to do it justice. Some people even find the act of trying to define it a violation of the practice itself and would rather leave it up to individual interpretation. With the aim of providing a framework that the practice can be understood within, but without forcing a universal definition on it, Higgins suggests three broad perspectives on the term community music (Higgins, 2012, p. 3);

1. Music of a community
2. Communal music making
3. An active intervention between a music leader or facilitator and participants

The first perspective uses the term community music to describe the musical identity of a specific group of people. An example could be styles of music that originate from specific places around

the world and are perceived to be part of the local identity, tradition and social interaction. The second perspective, communal music making, is closely linked with the first one, since they both describe music that is being made by any community at any time, but the emphasis is different. While the first perspective identifies different styles of music, the second perspective focuses on being part of or exposed to that music (Higgins, 2012). The aim of communal music making is to bind people together through performance and participation by building on a sense of a common musical identity.

The third perspective stands a bit out from the first two, although all three will always overlap and exist simultaneously. Quoting Higgins; *“It suggests that community music can be understood as an approach to active music making and musical knowing outside of formal teaching and learning situations”* (Higgins, 2012, p.4). By formal he refers to music that is being taught by professionals within a formalised curriculum, for instance within higher music education institutions. This third perspective implies an understanding of community music as an intentional intervention where music leaders facilitate group music making in environments that do not have a set curriculum. Within this third perspective the emphasis of the practice is on people, participation, context, equality of opportunity and diversity. The two case studies that I will present later are both examples of environments that fit this description. Therefore, it is mainly this third perspective on community music that my work is centred around.

Key characteristics of community music practice

Although the community music practice covers a broad and diverse palette of projects and initiatives, Higgins presents fourteen key characteristics that are considered to be at the heart of community music activities. These characteristics were produced at a meeting initiated by the Commission for Community Music Activity (CMA) in Toronto in 2000. They are quoted below;

1. Emphasis on variety and diversity of musics that reflect and enrich the cultural life of the community and of the participants
2. Active participation in music making of all kinds (performing, improvising, and creating)
3. The development of active musical knowing (including verbal musical knowledge where appropriate)
4. Multiple learner/teacher relationships and processes
5. A commitment to lifelong musical learning and access for all members of the community
6. An awareness of the need to include disenfranchised and disadvantaged individuals and groups
7. A recognition that participants' social and personal growth are as important as their musical growth
8. A belief in the value and use of music to foster intercultural acceptance and understanding
9. Respect for the cultural property of a given community and acknowledgement of both individual and group ownership of musics
10. An ongoing commitment to accountability through regular and diverse assessment and evaluation procedures
11. Encouragement of a personal delight and confidence in individual creativity
12. Flexible teaching, learning, and facilitation modes (oral, notational, holistic, experimental, analytic)

13. Excellence/quality in both the processes and products of music making relative to individual goals of participants
14. The honouring of origins and intents of specific musical practices (Higgins, 2012, p. 84)

The characteristics above are meant to capture what community music does, rather than what it is. This also means that this list is not a checklist for every musical activity performed, but rather a general framework for the activities to take place within and a general understanding of community music practice. These key characteristics of practice are linked to an overarching term in community music practice, namely the idea of cultural democracy.

Cultural democracy

A general aim for practitioners in the community music field is to facilitate activities that encourage and support people in expressing themselves through music (Higgins 2012). This is both linked to the empowerment of participants on a personal level, but also to empowerment on a cultural and political level with the aim of providing a medium for social and political change. Higgins quotes Webster (1997) who suggests that; *“the Arts have the power to transform communities and to change the lives of people¹”* (Higgins, 2012, p. 32). The concept cultural democracy has widely been considered a key factor in achieving social and political change and it was adopted by the European ministers of cultural affairs who in 1976 issued a statement that read; *“The theory of cultural democracy assumes that there is not one culture, but many cultures in a society²”* (Higgins, 2012 p. 33). Higgins states, quoting Graves (2005), that people who worked under the banner of cultural democracy attempted to offer; *“a system of support for cultures of our diverse communities that is respectful and celebratory, that gives voice to the many who have been historically excluded from the public domain, and that make no claim of superiority or special status³”* (Higgins, 2012 p. 34).

This idea is very much present at the core of community music practice, which seeks to celebrate diversity and work from the standpoint that every person can contribute with something of value. I would presume that most people today acknowledge the existence of many cultures in a society, but how they affect our social relations on a deeper level is much harder to notice. It is, however, crucial to take into account when considering how we can meet in music, since all meetings are based on social relations and structures both on a personal level, an inter-personal level and a societal level. It is therefore important for me to underline that I am approaching the term cultural democracy on a personal and inter-personal level, and not on a societal level. This means that my focus is on cultural democracy as a way to empower participants individually and as a group, but not as a way to achieve social and political change.

¹ This quote is originally from Webster, Mark. (1997). *Finding Voices, Makin Choices*. Bramcote, Nottingham, U.K.: Educational Heretics Press.

² This quote is originally from Graves, James Bau. (2005). *Cultural Democracy: The Arts, Community, and the public*. New York: University of Illinois Press. p. 11.

³ This quote is originally from Graves, James Bau. (2005). *Cultural Democracy: The Arts, Community, and the public*. New York: University of Illinois Press. p. 17.

Returning to the quote from Graves about celebrating and respecting different cultures, there is an important question to be asked. If an important part of meeting in music is advocating and performing cultural democracy, what are we actually referring to when we use the word culture? In his book, *Culture*, Terry Eagleton, professor of English Literature at Lancaster University, seeks to explore the concept.

Perspectives on culture

According to Terry Eagleton culture is a highly complex word, but four major perspectives on it stand out. They are (1) a body of artistic and intellectual work; (2) a process of spiritual and intellectual development; (3) the values, customs, beliefs and symbolic practices by which men and women live; or (4) a whole way of life (Eagleton, 2018, p. 1). The word culture can embody everything from food, poetry or music to religion, voting rights and infrastructure. This makes the concept of achieving and promoting cultural democracy desirable, but also somewhat detached from the reality of practice and the conflicts that can and probably will occur where intercultural meetings are happening. These challenges or conflicts are rarely mentioned within community music literature and therefore I find it important to contribute to consider and discuss this aspect of the practice. I am not in any way stating that cultural democracy is a worthless concept. However, because it is rather abstract and complex I believe there is a need to consider whether we unconsciously tend to choose particular aspects of a culture, with the aim of promoting cultural democracy, that are not conflictual or challenging to our own beliefs. As Eagleton states; *“truth is just what some group or individual holds to be true – what makes sense from their local perspective”* (Eagleton, 2018, p. 41).

This implies that we all view the world through a cultural lens. Again referring to Terry Eagleton (2018), culture is the invisible colour of everyday life, the texture of our existence that we take for granted and which is too close to the eyeball to be fully objectified. The combination of striving for cultural democracy in the musical space while simultaneously possibly taking a lot of cultural aspects for granted, because they might not occur to be cultural aspects at all, puts the musical space in danger of being based on utopian ideas. This is something that the facilitator of the space needs to be aware of and aim to avoid by always taking her own cultural lens into consideration.

Liminality and the liminal space

I first came across the concept of liminality in a research project carried out by PhD Kim Boeskov⁴. His research offers many interesting perspectives on community music practice, but in relation to the musical space I seek to describe, I find liminality especially interesting.

The concept originates from the anthropologist Victor Turner who adopted it from ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep's theory of rites of passage. Turner describes the concept of liminality as being placed in the margin of the old or on the threshold of the new. More concretely, to be in liminality is to be;

⁴ Boeskov, K. (2019). *Music and social transformation. Exploring ambiguous practice in a Palestinian refugee camp*. Oslo: Norges Musikkhøgskole.

“betwixt and between two modes of existence, free from the old structures of society and culture, and not yet bounded by the new; a place of desire, possibility, supposition, and play” (Boeskov, 2019, pp. 42-43).

This in-betweenness means that the liminal space is set apart from everyday life and holds a transformative potential, since it temporarily suspends social structure. This allows participants to access the cultural frames in which they conduct their lives, see their own reality in new ways, experiment with it, and potentially alter it.

The concept of liminality and the idea of the liminal space is interesting to consider in this thesis because sociologist Arild Bergh suggests that music can potentially provide a liminal space (Boeskov, 2019). He describes this space as a *“temporary and transient space where new and different ways of interacting can be safely tried out”*⁵ (Boeskov, 2019, p. 27). He also points out that the liminal spaces created in musical activities or events depend on the context within which they are placed. Also, while they might create the opportunity for new social relations to be established and tried out, the question of whether it is possible to translate these relations into everyday life still remains.

Nevertheless, I find the idea of liminality in the musical space and the transformative power it might hold very interesting.

I believe that it is in the liminal space that a sense of ownership and empowerment can be fostered, because they can both be said to originate from some level of personal transformation. To take ownership within the musical space means putting a musical contribution and thereby a piece of yourself forward for the rest of the group to see and interact with. This contribution, along with the contributions of other participants, creates a common third that is not you, but not not-you either. This is the reason why it holds transformative power. Meeting within and contributing to this common third, which is music, creates a feeling of having value and that is empowering. In other words, I do not consider the musical activities themselves or ‘the power of music’ to be the source of empowerment and ownership, but rather how liminality and the act of meeting in music as a common third can transform, if only temporarily, our social relations. This, however, raises the question of how the liminal space can be facilitated. To answer this, we must look into the term musicking and the role of the facilitator.

Musicking the way to liminality

Musicking is a term invented by music-educator and musician Christopher Small. He defines the term; *“To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing”* (Small, 1998, p. 9). The idea behind musicking is that it constitutes music as (1) an action first and foremost, but also (2) as a form of human encounter. Everyone who is present is playing a part whether they are listeners or performers. They therefore share a collective responsibility of the musicking. Small very clearly states that musicking is not concerned

⁵ This quote is originally from: Bergh, A. (2010). *I'd like to teach the world to sing. Music and conflict transformation*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Exeter). <http://hdl.handle.net/10036/97884>. P. 200.

with valuation. It is descriptive, not prescriptive and it covers all participation be it active or passive (Small, 1998). This is interesting because it implies that there is more than one way to contribute to the musicking. This gives room to personal expression and gives the facilitator the possibility to encourage different contributions from individual participants. Musicking is about seeing each individual participant and what they have to contribute, rather than the facilitator determining what a contribution should ideally look like to be valuable. If participants feel that they can contribute with something of value, following Arild Bergh, there is a safe space where new social relations can be trialled. To see the individual participants and to help bring forward their individual contributions means that the facilitator has a very important part to play in creating the liminal musical space.

The role of the facilitator

The word facilitation comes from the Latin word 'facilis' and means to make something easier or to move freely (Loon, Andersen & Larsen, 2017). PhD and head of a research group at Aarhus University, Ib Ravn, describes facilitation as "*Channelling the energy and communication of a group of people in such a way that their output is greater and better than if they had been left to themselves*⁶" (Loon, Andersen & Larsen, 2017, p. 20). This definition implies that the facilitator affects the social relations in the group, since the outcome is different than if they had been left to themselves. The role of the facilitator is to create an intentional disruption in the given context. In many cases, this disruption is caused by just the presence of the facilitator since she is a new face and therefore out of the ordinary. It is impossible to step into a new context without affecting it in some way, which is relevant to consider.

Higgins describes the community music facilitator as performing an act of hospitality to create a "*community without unity*" (Higgins, 2012, p. 147). This may seem like an odd concept, but it implies a constantly ongoing, open, and encouraging dialogue between individuals with different viewpoints rather than a collective harmony that is not to be challenged or questioned. This approach means that the facilitator has the potential to host participants so that neither the individual or the group nor the power of the facilitator is diminished. It also means that the facilitator must lead the group rather than control it and find a balance between being prepared and able to lead and being prepared and able to hold back and let go of control. The goal is to create, what Higgins describes as "*safety without safety*" (Higgins, 2012, p. 150), which I would argue could be translated directly to liminality. In other words, this is the kind of safe space that challenges and invites participants to contribute, take ownership and step into the in-betweenness of the liminal space where empowerment and transformation can happen. The community music facilitator must therefore set boundaries that are clear enough for the participants to feel safe, but at the same time open enough for liminality to occur. It is about creating a safe climate for risk-taking and it cannot only be the participants who are taking risks, the facilitator must be able to do so as well.

The musical space

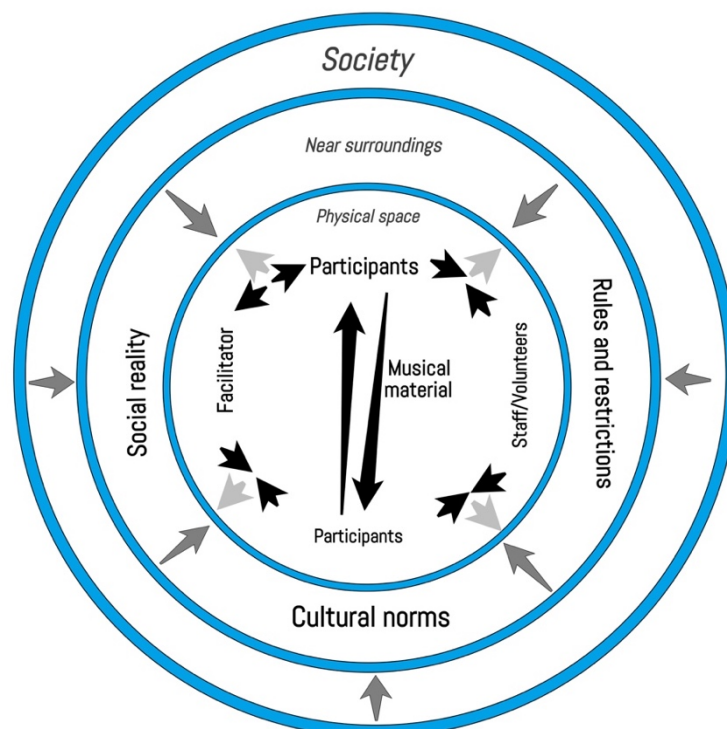
⁶ This quote is originally from: Ravn, Ib. (2011). *Facilitering: Ledelse af møder der skaber værdi og mening*.

In the following, I aim to describe the musical space, which I have set out to explore with this thesis. Up until this point, I have presented some of the overarching concepts that I believe are relevant to understand this musical space. I have presented Higgins' perspectives on community music and the key characteristics of this practice to which my work belongs. I have presented the concept of cultural democracy as a general aim within community music practice and challenged it based on Eagleton's perspectives on culture. I have outlaid Turner's term liminality, how it can potentially transform social relations in the liminal space, and how focusing on these social relations necessitates considering music to be an act and a human encounter, bringing Small's verb musicking into play. Lastly, I have linked Small's perspective on music to the role of the community music facilitator in the liminal musical space.

The musical space and its near surroundings

Since the musical space is highly contextual and never will or should exist in a completely fixed form, I seek to describe it rather than define it. When I say "it" I thereby do not intend to imply that there is one musical space, but rather that I am referring to the *liminal* musical space. I seek to present and analyse the elements that make up and influence this musical space with the aim of providing a general overview of what to consider when facilitating empowerment and a sense of ownership through musical experiences with vulnerable groups.

Below, I have made a diagram showing the different elements which I believe make up the musical space and how they affect each other. Before I present each of them, I will first explain the line of thought behind this diagram. The inner circle resembles the physical space where the musical activities take place. In here, people interact with each other and the musical material. One might quickly conclude that this is the space of interest to the facilitator since it is where the participants meet and the musical activities take place. Based on the work I have been doing with this thesis, this is where I disagree.



The next circle resembles the near surroundings in which the physical space is placed. The physical space cannot be seen as

isolated from its near surroundings, but is rather likely to be heavily affected by them. The near surroundings are, to some extent, where the everyday lives of the participants and staff take place. Here, the social reality might be different than in the musical space the facilitator seeks to create. For instance, a different hierarchical structure, a different set of rules, or a different idea of what is considered socially acceptable behaviour. The near surroundings should therefore not only be understood as the physical near surroundings, but also as the social reality of the participants and staff outside the space where the musical activities take place. Having an insight of the near surroundings provides the facilitator with a better preunderstanding of the context. This is a way to nuance the cultural lens presented earlier in the section “perspectives on culture” through which the facilitator herself sees the world. This preunderstanding is crucial, especially when working with vulnerable groups, since there are a lot of considerations to be made in order to create a safe space for the participants.

The third circle of the diagram resembles society at large. I will not go into this in depth, but it is included for the purpose of making a point, which I think is relevant to consider. This is that the facilitator of the musical space, in most cases, does not come from the near surroundings but even further away from the middle of the circle. This further entails a different social reality and a different set of cultural norms. This again underlines how important it is that the facilitator is aware of the context she is stepping into and takes both the physical space, its near surroundings and her own cultural lens into consideration. The third circle also represents the political currents in society, which will of course affect the near surroundings and the participants themselves. People with refugee or immigrant backgrounds are often displayed in the media and are a highly political topic. This is an important part of the social reality of all levels in the diagram as well.

The elements of the musical space

Now that I have provided an overview of how the musical space is situated within a wider context, I will go more into depth with the concrete elements that make up the musical space – the elements of the inner circle. The point of doing this is to bring forward concrete considerations to be made regarding each element in order to facilitate the musical space.

Physical space

It is not surprising that the physical space in which the musical activities take place affects the musical space. There are the obvious boundaries that the physical space sets in terms of how many people it can hold and whether there are chairs or instruments available. The facilitator should take the size of the room into consideration, since a very small room can hold a limited number of people and a very large room might make it more difficult to create a safe space. When working with vulnerable and elderly participants it is also important to make sure that there are chairs available, so they have the possibility to participate sitting if that is necessary. When working in a refugee centre, some participants might have suffered physical trauma due to torture or war that makes sitting down necessary.

In collaboration with staff, it is also a good idea for the facilitator to consider how the physical space is placed in the participants’ near surroundings. When working with vulnerable participants, who might not have very much mental surplus, it is beneficial that the space is as accessible as possible. At the same time, it is also a good idea that it is a bit closed off. This way having spectators that can disturb the focus and potentially make the participants feel unsafe can be

avoided. Again, what is considered normal and socially acceptable behaviour in the musical space, might not be experienced the same way in the social reality of the near surroundings.

Participants

When working with vulnerable participants it is, as stated earlier, important that the facilitator has a prior understanding of what special needs and considerations are implied by this vulnerability. This does not mean that the facilitator has to become an expert on all kinds of psychological diagnoses, but rather that having a general understanding is necessary. As an example, it is not a good idea to maintain a high energy level in the musical activities for a long time. People who have suffered trauma may not be able to tell the difference between whether their blood is pumping and their heart is beating fast, because they are having fun or because they are in danger. At the same time, activities that are very calm and involve self-reflection can also be a challenge, since it might be too much for some participants to feel their own bodies this way. As mentioned earlier, traumatisation also makes it more difficult to learn something new and affects memory, so things generally take more time. This is the kind of preunderstanding the facilitator must acquire through careful preparation and in close collaboration with other professionals who have a deeper knowledge about the participants and their challenges. A general rule when working with people who have refugee backgrounds is never to ask where they are from and why they are here. This is something that can be very painful to talk about and it should be left to participants to bring it up if they want to. At the same time, it is useful for the facilitator to have a general idea about what countries and cultural backgrounds the participants come from. This again underlines the importance of collaborating with staff.

With all this said, the most important thing when working with vulnerable groups is to see the individual participant as a person and be very aware of individual reactions when facilitating the musical activities. It is important to gain a preunderstanding, but it is just as important to put it aside and see the people in the room. Participants should not be labelled by their diagnoses or challenges and this is why awareness in the moment is so crucial. Empowerment and ownership comes from seeing and supporting the potential in a person and not from determining what they cannot do.

Staff/volunteers

As I have already mentioned, the collaboration with staff and volunteers is an extremely important aspect in working with vulnerable groups. It is the staff and volunteers who can provide knowledge about the near surroundings and the participants themselves. It is important that the staff and the facilitator develop a common language about the activities and their aim in order to avoid misunderstandings that could later result in participants feeling unsafe and misinformed. The communication between the staff and the facilitator is also important, because the facilitator is not present all the time. I have found that the effect of the musical activities and how the participants talk about them will very often show itself, when the facilitator is not there. Therefore, the feedback from the staff and the volunteers is valuable. Returning to the diagram on page 13 the light grey arrow pointing towards the near surroundings resembles how the transformative potential in the musical space affects the participants and their social relationships outside the space. In both of the case studies which I will later present, the feedback from staff

and volunteers gave me insight about the effect of my work, that I would never have received otherwise.

The staff and volunteers can also play an important role in communication with the participants if there is a language barrier, especially if they speak the mother tongue of the participants. They communicate with the participants much more often than the facilitator and sometimes even on a day to day basis. Therefore, they can also remind the participants that the musical activities are taking place and encourage and support them in participating.

Facilitator

I have already mentioned the facilitator many times, but in this section I intend to make a summary and present an overview of the facilitation process and what concrete skills and approaches I believe to be necessary when facilitating empowerment and a sense of ownership through musical experiences with vulnerable groups. In other words, when facilitating the liminal musical space in contexts like the ones I will later present in my two case studies.

The safety of the facilitator

Before I go into the facilitation process, I would like to make a point concerning the facilitator. The facilitator herself should never compromise her own safety in the work, she is doing. When working with vulnerable groups there is a risk that participants overstep the personal boundaries of the facilitator and potentially cause harm. This can be through physical confrontation, violent communication and threats or by sharing traumatic events that the facilitator cannot and should not handle. This is where it is important to remember that the facilitator is *not* a healthcare professional. Therefore, the safety of the facilitator should always be discussed with staff and both parties should know what do to if an uncomfortable and potentially dangerous situation should arise. Difficult situations could also arise between participants and here the facilitator should not be left alone to handle the situation. When meeting with staff, it is important to have this conversation even if it can seem overly cautious. It is not a question of the facilitator being judgemental towards participants, but rather acknowledging where the professional and personal limits should be drawn. My experiences of having conversations like this with staff have only been positive and I have been met with respect for knowing my limits.

The facilitation process

The table below is meant to provide an overview of the facilitation process. It also summarises the considerations regarding preparation and the facilitation itself that I have brought forward until now, adding evaluation.

Before (Preparation)	During (Facilitating activities)	After (Evaluation)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collecting relevant knowledge about the context At least one preparatory meeting with staff – preferably on site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting clear terms for participation Being aware of participants' reactions to activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following up on ideas/suggestions brought forward by participants (from week to week) Making time for feedback with staff/volunteers and

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting participants in advance if possible • Planning the musical activities • Discussing musical activities with staff/volunteers – developing a common language • Communicating activities to participants • Making sure that the physical space is accessible and cover participants’ special needs • Considering how to leave the context responsibly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including staff/volunteers in the activities • Seeing the participants as people first and foremost • Providing different ways of participating according to participants’ needs • Creating a safe space for everyone – including the facilitator 	<p>participants if possible (from week to week)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with staff/volunteers for final evaluation
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There is one point in the table that I would like to draw extra attention to. This is the point in the preparation about considering how to leave the context in a responsible way. Participants might have built a strong relationship with the facilitator over time. Leaving the context responsibly includes making sure that participants are well informed and reminded about the duration of the project and what will happen afterwards. Will the facilitator be replaced by someone else? How can they continue the musical activities if they wish to do so? These considerations should be discussed with staff to avoid misunderstandings and frustration.

Skills and approach

Up to now, I have presented many different aspects of the facilitator role. In summary, the facilitator must be the host of the musical space performing an act of hospitality and welcoming participants to contribute. She must lead rather than control and strive for multiple learner/teacher relationships and processes in the space. In collaboration with staff, she must develop a common language and a preunderstanding of the vulnerability of the participants, their cultural backgrounds and their near surroundings. At the same time, she must also be aware of her own cultural background and the different social realities that surround herself and the participants. She must aim to create a safe space for the participants and for herself as well but also dare to take risks and improvise. Most importantly, she must approach the participants as capable people and not victimise them in any way.

In collaboration with Eline Accoe, I have made an overview of concrete skills and approaches that we believe are necessary to facilitate the musical space;

<p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening • Accountability • Credibility • Reliability 	<p>Approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping calm • Awareness of the community and the context • Trusting in the process
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility • Creativity • Empathy • Non-verbal communication • Broad range of musical skills • Critical thinking • Able to trust in the ability of others • Leadership skills • Facilitation skills • Confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting professionally • Valuing everyone's participation • Trusting in the ability of others • Seeing participants as capable rather than in-capable • Being able to always reflect on what you are doing (lifelong learning) • Having a genuine interest in the people
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Musical material

With this section I seek to provide some general guidelines for choosing musical material for activities with vulnerable groups. In the two case studies, I provide concrete examples of the musical material that I have used in each specific context. I have developed these general guidelines in collaboration with Eline Accoe based on our joint experiences from the projects we have done. Musical activities should ideally;

- be accessible for everyone.
- have different energy levels.
- have the potential to develop in many directions.
- correspond with the resources of the participants.
- inspire ownership.
- not involve very loud or sudden noises.
- inspire creativity.
- reflect the age of participants.
- inspire social interaction between participants.
- give space to different levels of participation.
- give space to different cultural norms – for instance regarding physical contact.
- have responsible/appropriate content.

By stating that the content of the musical activities should be responsible and appropriate, I specifically refer to the lyrics. It is generally a good idea to avoid songs that have political or religious content or that could potentially trigger flashbacks of traumatic events. For instance, singing about a boat on the sea is not responsible with a group of refugees. Since flashbacks can potentially be triggered by things that the facilitator could never have guessed, it is not possible to know exactly what is appropriate and what is not. This being said, it should still be considered and potentially also discussed with staff.

Inspiration for musical activities

- Workshop manual created by Musicians Without Borders and Peace One Day
http://www.peaceoneday.org/sites/default/files/sounds_of_peace_workshop_toolkit.pdf
- Pass The Sound is a shared learning resource, offering free warm-up, skills, creative, and workshop exercises for musicians to use while facilitating group music-making contexts.
www.passthesound.com
- Repertoire guide from the project Sing Me In: Collective singing in the integration process of young migrants.
https://europeanchoralassociation.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/08/EN_SingMeIn_handbook4.pdf

Presentation of case studies

In the following, I will present a joint summary of the main findings from my two case studies. The case studies themselves can be found in the attachments⁷. I strongly recommend reading these before continuing into this section. This will provide a better understanding of the contexts and what I base my findings on.

In the table below, I have presented some general information about the two case studies to show how they differ.

	Case Study 1	Case Study 2
Location	A Danish refugee centre	A Danish community centre
Time period	8 weeks: October-December 2019	8 weeks: January-March 2020
Duration of activities	1 hour	20-30 minutes
Target Group	Women with refugee backgrounds	Elderly people with refugee or immigrant backgrounds
Number of participants	Very fluctuating	Consistent
Partner in the project	Red Cross	Private NGO

Summary of main findings

First, I would like to emphasise that doing two different case studies with different target groups, different partners, and under different circumstances has meant a lot to my development as community music facilitator. The contexts that I have worked in are undoubtedly highly complex and four months is nowhere near enough get the full picture – if one ever can. That being said, I have definitely gained more insight in the target groups and developed my facilitation skills a lot. Doing two different case studies has helped create nuance within my experiences and findings but has also made it possible for me to see what they had in common, despite the differences. It is these commonalities that I consider my main findings.

From both case studies, it is clear that a good collaboration with the other professionals around the target group is important on many levels. It helps to ensure the safety of both the participants

⁷ Attachment 1 – Case Study 1 – Working in a Danish Refugee Centre
Attachment 3 – Case Study 2 – Working in a Danish Community Centre

and the facilitator and gives the opportunity to share knowledge across professions. I have no doubt that the quality of the collaboration and this shared knowledge are key factors in how much participants will benefit from the musical activities. Developing a common language about the musical activities and their aim is an important part of ensuring high quality and it is also necessary in dissemination to authorities or other interested parties. Having a common language also helps create clarity and security for participants which makes it more likely that they will choose to participate.

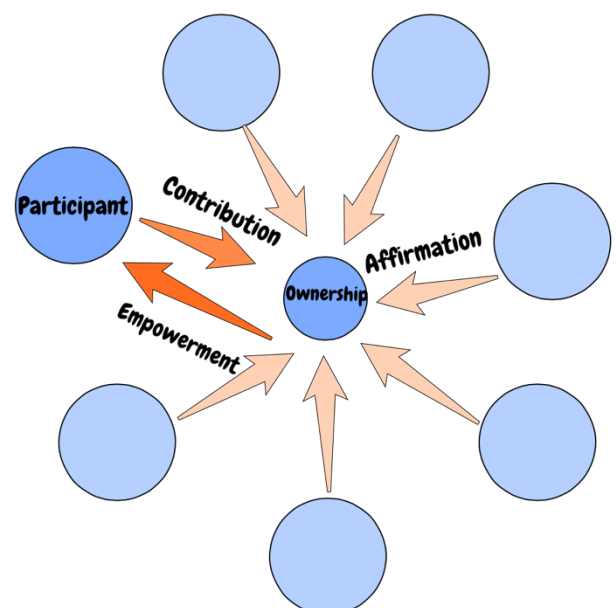
Regarding participation, one of my main findings has been that this kind of work is long term. It takes continuity and a lot of time to build consistent participation especially if the musical activities stand on their own, as was the case in my first case study. My estimate would be that the duration of a project should be at least four months, provided that the facilitator has the opportunity to meet the participants outside the musical activities. In general, I believe that it is beneficial to include musical activities in already established routines in the near surroundings of the participants, where this can be done in a meaningful way. This allows participants to slowly become familiar with the activities and the facilitator to build stronger relationships with them. Once these relationships are established the activities can better stand alone.

The most important part of my findings is of course how the activities affected the participants themselves. In both case studies some of the participants became more open and social outside of the musical activities. I assume that this change in behaviour can be directly linked to participants feeling a sense of ownership and empowerment in the musical space. I base this assumption on having observed that the participants who showed changes in behaviour were also the ones who contributed very actively in the musical space. As displayed in the model below, having their contributions affirmed by the group created an added value which led to the participants feeling empowered.

Having your contributions confirmed is linked to a feeling of having value and being a capable and resourceful person. When someone else sees you as capable it helps you see yourself as capable as well. This is also why I find it so important that the participants are always approached by the facilitator as being capable, resourceful people and that they are never victimized. The facilitator needs to look for resources in the participants and help to create a space where they can become visible both to the group and to the individual participant.

Having staff participate in the musical activities meant that they could reaffirm, support and encourage the participants to contribute in other contexts as well. This transfer effect from the musical space to the near surroundings of the participants would have been much more difficult to create if the staff had not participated.

There were of course also participants who did not show notable behavioural changes. Since I could not interview participants about how they



experienced the musical activities, it is difficult to know what effect they had. Still, I would argue that the fact that the participants and staff had a shared experience of meeting in music affected their relationship and made them see new sides of each other. This is also something that was emphasised by staff members in both case studies. Also, I have seen playfulness, laughter and creativity unfold amongst participants in both case studies and even though I cannot present concrete evidence I am convinced that they had a positive experience. This brings me to consider what effect the musical activities might have had on the general well-being of participants.

The effect of musical activities on the well-being of participants

Firstly, I want to state very clearly that the work I have done related to this thesis has not had a therapeutic aim. Work of that kind belongs within the field of music therapy and involves evidence-based treatment through the systematic use of sound-making and musicking. Therapeutic work should always be left to healthcare professionals or others who have the relevant training. The work I have done has been centred around creating positive musical experiences with a social aim. In order to create these positive experiences, I have taken the vulnerability of the participants into careful consideration but never attempted to treat anyone. Furthermore, I have made sure to collaborate closely with other professionals in order to ensure that my engaging with the participants was conducted in a safe and responsible way. I have first and foremost aimed to facilitate a meeting between a group of people in a musical space that was accessible to everyone who wished to take part. To do this, I have used what I consider to be the core values in my artistic education, namely curiosity, creativity, open-mindedness, community, dedication to music and interest in people.

In the following, I will discuss what effect my work can potentially have had on the well-being of the participants, but before I do so I will clarify how I understand the term.

Defining well-being

In their paper *The challenge of defining wellbeing* (Dodge, Daly, Huyton & Sanders, 2012) published in *The International Journal of Well-being*, the authors propose a definition of what constitutes well-being. They state that the term has often been described but not really defined because it is complex and multi-faceted. From what I have read in relation to this thesis, I recognise that well-being is often described but not defined.

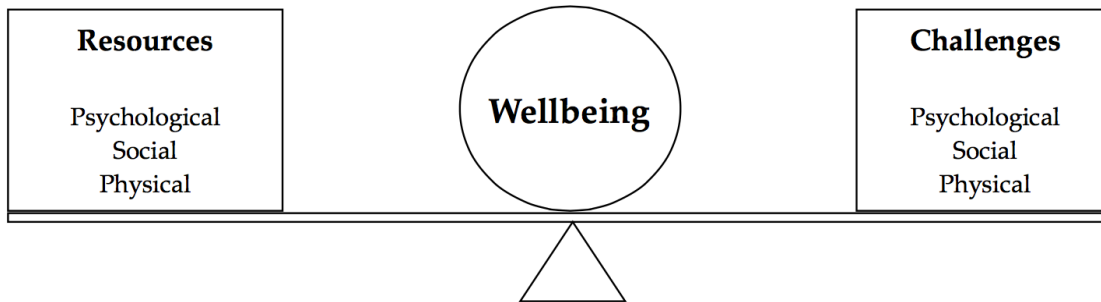
In the report *'What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being?'* well-being is presented as multidimensional subjective well-being and includes (WHO, 2019, p. 21);

- Affective well-being (positive emotions in our daily lives)
- Evaluative well-being (our life satisfaction)
- Eudemonic well-being (our sense of meaning, control, autonomy and purpose in our lives)

This provides a good overview of what elements subjective well-being consists of. The definition of well-being brought forward by the authors mentioned earlier also refers to subjective well-being - meaning well-being from the perspective of the individual and not on a societal level.

They define well-being as the balancing point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced;

Figure 4. Definition of Wellbeing



(Dodge, Daly, Huyton & Sanders, 2012, p. 230)

This means that well-being is not static but rather a continuous balancing between the challenges the individual faces and the psychological, social and physical resources that the individual can respond with.

[The effect of musical activities on the well-being of participants](#)

From the definition of well-being that I have just presented, I will argue that musical activities can have a positive effect on the well-being of participants by giving them new resources or strengthening resources they already possess. As presented in my main findings from the two case studies, supporting participants to take ownership and contribute can lead to empowerment. This feeling helps to strengthen a number of psychological resources like the feeling of having value, self-worth, confidence, self-acceptance, capability and self-esteem. Apart from this, taking part in the musical activities also strengthens creativity and playfulness which again belong to the category of psychological resources.

In the section about liminality and the liminal space, I presented the potential that these spaces hold for participants to form new social relations. Furthermore, the social aspect of the musical activities was brought up in the evaluation of both case studies as being one of their main strengths. In the activities, participants communicate with each other both musically, verbally and non-verbally thereby strengthening their social resources. The musical space also puts emphasis on collaboration, co-creation and intercultural understanding again adding to the social resources of the participants.

Based on the report from WHO (2019), physical activity through arts engagement can reduce sedentary behaviour which affects chronic pain positively. Most of the musical activities presented in the case studies were performed standing and involved movement. For example, the warm-up activity, the body percussion and the paper dance. Even though the participants were being physically active, their main focus was on the music. Thereby, the physical activity was a natural consequence of the music rather than something that was being asked of the participants. This way, the musical activities can also strengthen the physical resources of the participants.

WHO (2019) underlines the value of engaging in art activities because they operate simultaneously on the individual level, the mental level, the physical level and the social level thereby addressing the full complexity of well-being. By enhancing and adding to the psychological, social and physical resources of participants, the musical activities can contribute to tipping the scales in the positive direction of well-being. However, this positive effect is not given by the musical activities alone. Throughout this thesis, I have presented the elements of the musical space and how the space itself is affected by the near surroundings of the participants and by society in general. The musical activities themselves are only one part of these elements and cannot affect the well-being of the participants in their own right. The positive effect can only be achieved by considering the musical space with all its elements and how they interact. I strongly believe that meeting in music has a lot of potential to benefit the well-being of both vulnerable groups and other groups in society but it is not because of “the power of music” as it is often portrayed. Rather, it is because of music’s ability to serve as a meeting place in which the full complexity of well-being can be addressed. Addressing it then takes dedicated music facilitators with the necessary skills and preunderstanding in close collaboration with other professionals, together creating a safe space for the participants. Without this, meeting in music could potentially also have a negative outcome.

Conclusion

With this thesis, I set out to explore how to facilitate musical spaces that allow for participants to feel ownership and empowerment through active participation and how it could potentially influence their well-being.

Through this exploration I have;

- provided an overview of community music practice and discussed the idea of cultural democracy.
- analysed and described the musical spaces and their elements and found liminality to be a key aspect of their transformative potential.
- presented general guidelines for choosing musical activities for this context.
- provided a list of skills that I believe are necessary for the facilitator to possess.
- presented two practical case studies and summarised my main findings.
- discussed how musical activities can affect the well-being of participants.

As I stated in my introduction, I have only scratched the surface with this work but it has helped me to develop a better understanding of how I can contribute to society as an artist. It has also helped me develop a more accurate language for what I do, how it affects the participants and why. I believe that there is a need for this kind of work to be explored further and I intend to do so in the future. The idea of artistic citizenship holds a lot of untapped potential and the awareness about this is rapidly increasing both in Denmark and internationally on many different levels. At the same time, there is also a growing interest in how to increase well-being in different groups in society. I hope that this thesis can serve as an example of how these currents can meet. Meeting in music is highly complex because people are highly complex, but if we leave these meetings understanding ourselves and each other just a little bit better, there is a lot to be gained for everyone.

Attachments

1. Case Study 1 – Working in a Danish refugee centre
2. Posters
3. Case Study 2 – Working at a Danish community centre

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Case Study 1

Working at a Danish Refugee Centre

To ensure the anonymity of participants, personal details, and the location of the project have been omitted. The main focus of this case study is to describe the project's primary outcomes, as well as my preparation, my experiences, and details of musical activities.

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Introduction

This case study is the outcome of my eight-week project at a Danish refugee centre. The project took place between October and November in 2019 where I collaborated with the organisation Red Cross. Red Cross runs a number of refugee centres in Denmark. The primary target group of my project were women living in the refugee centre who were considered especially vulnerable. A number of these women were human trafficking victims or had been given new identities due to their lives being threatened. On top of this, traumatisation and physical injuries from torture and war were also common.

Background

Small barracks surround the main building where staff members of Red Cross have a shared office space. In the barracks, people live with their family, a partner, or alone. All barracks have a chip lock so they can be accessed by staff if necessary. This is the kind of centre where people wait to know whether they will be granted asylum or not. Some people have stayed here for up to eight years and have children who are born in Denmark and speak Danish fluently. The threat of being denied asylum is always there and it is impossible to imagine what that feels like without living

through it. Living in the refugee centre means living with this uncertainty every day and that puts a lot of strain on people. When someone gets their request for asylum denied, they are not sent away immediately but must now wait again, knowing that they will be at some point.

The staff in the centre aim to support the people living there in having an active and normal everyday life, to the extent that this is possible, and to create a sense of community. They initiate different activities which involve a lot of volunteers coming into the centre to lead or participate. Examples could be gardening, cooking, physical exercise, and a dance class for women. These initiatives take a long time to build up since it can be quite hard to engage the people in the centre. This is understandable considering the burden that they are constantly carrying. I admire the staff for their patience, persistence, and creativity in coming up with initiatives to benefit the residents even though it is often an uphill battle.

Preparation

My preparation before going into the refugee centre was crucial. It did not only involve preparing for the musical activities, but also preparing myself by gaining a preunderstanding of the context I was stepping into. In July 2019 I attended a training seminar with the organisation Musicians Without Borders¹ in The Netherlands. This training prepared musical facilitators for working with people who had experienced trauma. Doing this was an important part of my preparation and provided me with concrete examples of musical activities, some of which I later used in the centre. Apart from this, I also prepared by reading three books². Two of them were about traumatised refugees, one from a clinical angle and one based on personal stories from traumatised refugees. The third³ was about some of the specific challenges women with refugee backgrounds are facing. Before contacting the refugee centre, I had decided that my target group would be women. I made this choice because women are often less engaged in activities since they have the main responsibility for the children and the duties in the home. Also, women from some cultures prefer to take part in activities that only involve other women since can feel safer and for some, also more appropriate.

In my initial phone call with a staff member from Red Cross, I presented my thoughts about making the musical activities for women only. This was encouraged by the staff member for the reasons stated above. Once the target group was decided, we discussed what the terms of participation should be. I suggested that we kept the activities completely open so the women didn't have to sign up and commit to the full eight weeks that my project lasted. This of course made my planning more challenging since I didn't know in advance how many participants I had. Nevertheless, I prioritised giving the women the opportunity to enter the activities at any point during the eight weeks. The staff member asked me whether the women could bring their children along for the activities since that might make it easier for some of them to participate. I said yes to this knowing that it could be challenging to have both grown-ups and children at different ages participate. My focus would still be on the women, but I had to plan for the possibility of including children in the activities without them becoming the main focus.

¹ <https://www.musicianswithoutborders.org>

² *Traumatiserede flygtninge og socialt arbejde*

Min tabte barndom og udenfor rækkevidde: To beretninger – en bog om traumatiserede flygtninge

³ *Kvinder i krydspres*

I visited the refugee centre two times as part of my preparation. On the first visit, I met my primary contact person who showed me around and we decided where the musical activities would take place. She also provided me with a lot of relevant information about the refugee centre and the everyday life of its residents. I learned that most of them spoke English and were able to speak and understand some Danish and got an idea of what nationalities were represented in the centre. During this first visit, we also decided that I would visit again and join a women's club that the centre was running. Here I would have the chance to meet potential participants and they could get an impression of me as well.

On the 25th of September, I visited the refugee centre for the second time and joined the women's club. Beforehand, I had sent posters in Danish and English⁴, with my picture and an invitation to join the musical activities, to my contact person. She then saw to it that they were distributed amongst the women in the centre. I brought my ukulele for this second visit, because I found it important to make it clear from the beginning what my role would be. When I arrived, the women quickly recognised my face from the posters. After we had some coffee, they told me; "if you're here to do music with us, why don't we do some music?" Off the top of my head, I therefore taught them an African song with some movements, that I knew from a project called Sing Me In⁵. We also sang a Danish children's song and I played them 'Hey Jude' on ukulele. Apart from having a lot of fun, I learned something very interesting from singing and dancing with the women. Their reaction afterwards was to ask when there would be music. This question made it clear to me that their perception of having music in the room was having recorded music in the room. They simply didn't consider just singing ourselves to be real music. Having learned this, I saw a need to incorporate recorded music in some of my activities. I later did this by using a small Bluetooth speaker. I didn't intend to use it in all activities but rather aimed for a balance between singing ourselves and engaging with the recorded music. To me, this experience underlines the importance of preparation and of understanding the context very well.

Physical space

Close to the barracks where the most vulnerable women lived, there was a very small building. It was almost a shed and had been used for multiple purposes. At some point it had been a wood shop and latest it was used as a hairdresser salon. It had one room which was around 25m² in size with a small kitchen, a table, a couch and the leftover hairdresser set-up with chairs and mirrors. On one of the walls there were pictures of some of the women and staff members doing gardening and physical exercises together which created a cosy atmosphere in the room. The space could hold a maximum of around fifteen participants if the table was moved away. The building had very few windows and it was placed in a part of the centre where people didn't really pass by. This gave privacy to the musical activities which was a good thing since having spectators to our activities would have disturbed the focus too much.

⁴ See attachment 2

⁵ <https://europeanchoralassociation.org/cooperation-projects/sing-me-in/>

Participants

The women who participated in my musical activities were somewhere between 25 and 60 years and came from many different places. I communicated with them in English, speaking a bit slower than I usually would, and communication generally wasn't an issue. When participants showed up they were engaged and very open minded. They rarely showed up on time and it wasn't uncommon that some of them showed up halfway through the activities. This was due to meetings with staff, doctor appointments, feeding their kids, and sometimes just forgetting when the activity actually started. I had decided from the beginning that I would always welcome participants no matter when they showed up and that I wouldn't comment on them being late. Instead, I stated very clearly at the end of the activities, when we were starting next week.

On a couple of occasions, participants also brought their kids along. The kids were between 6 months and up to around 14 years old. It was an interesting challenge to include them in the musical activities together with the grown-ups. Not all of the kids were participating, but some of them either actively tried to sing along and follow the movements or intensely watched what we were doing. The kids that didn't participate sat calmly on a couch in the room and played with an iPad.

Generally, the number of participants varied a lot. The highest number of participants I experienced was around eight, but it also happened that no one showed up. The average number of participants were two or three.

Staff and volunteers

The staff member who was my primary contact participated in the musical activities a couple of times. She wanted to participate more but unfortunately she had too many other tasks to be able to do so. Luckily, there was an anthropology student at the refugee centre who was doing field work for her Master's thesis and she participated in my activities throughout the project. She was working in the centre on a daily basis and therefore she knew the women quite well. Every week before the activities started, she went around the barracks and reminded the women that I was coming. I am almost certain that this was the reason that I had any level of consistent participation. Her presence was also helpful if only one participant showed up which happened a couple of times. Being three people gives the feeling of being a group whereas being only two people is a much more intimate experience. The anthropology student also had an important role in collecting feedback. She was present every day and could hear how participants expressed their experience of the musical activities outside the activities themselves. This insight was very helpful. Since this was my first experience with working in a refugee centre, it was also nice to have someone to discuss my experiences with and to have an extra set of eyes on what I was doing.

My experiences as facilitator

Before the project began, I had decided that I would only include equipment in my activities that the participants would have access to themselves. This meant that I had to be creative and use everyday objects in making music with them. It was actually possible to have the musical activities take place in the music room of a nearby school, but because it was further away from where the women lived I decided against this. The reason that I wanted to use everyday objects was that it made it possible for participants and staff to do the activities themselves when I wasn't around. I

also believe that it made the music feel more accessible to everyone since using instruments can easily give the impression that you need special skills to participate.

Planning the musical activities for this project was challenging since the number of participants varied so much. I needed to prepare for many possible scenarios, which I did by bringing activities that could be used in different ways and worked well with both larger groups and a few people. These activities were quite difficult to come up with and I therefore sought inspiration in many different places. A complete list of these can be found in the section on musical activities in my thesis. Doing this, it quickly became clear to me that it is much more challenging to find activities for grown-ups than for children. Of course, some activities can be used with both groups but a lot of them can easily become too childish. This balance is difficult to find since it very much depends on the individuals taking part. If participants are asked to do activities that to them feel too childish, it can give them a feeling of being considered incapable or talked down to. This scenario does not foster empowerment nor a sense of ownership. Therefore, I was very aware of how the participants reacted to what we were doing. This awareness is always important when working with vulnerable groups because activities can potentially trigger strong emotional responses in the participants.

For me in the role of facilitator this meant that I had to know the activities very well. Being well prepared enabled me to focus on the participants and still lead the activities. By saying this, I don't mean that the facilitator is unable to make mistakes. On the contrary, my experience was that my mistakes actually strengthened the relationship between the participants and myself. Firstly, they found it very funny and secondly it made it clear that we all fail sometimes no matter what level of musical skills we possess. That being said, I always stayed calm and continued the activity when mistakes occurred on my end. I consider this a big part of creating a safe space for participants to fail but also in general. If I had acted very insecurely or panicked when something went wrong, I would have passed on this feeling to the participants. Even though I often felt very insecure, I always appeared calm. The musical space I wanted to facilitate was about the participants. Therefore, I was aware of and worked on my own insecurities outside the musical space and focused my awareness on the participants inside it.

The musical activities

In the following I will go through all the musical activities I did with the participants as part of this case study.

Warmup

Every week, I started by doing a warmup activity with the participants. This involved doing some light stretches while standing in a circle with some relaxing music playing on the Bluetooth speaker. The aim of doing this was to collect focus and start off in a calm way. For the warmup I always used this track⁶.

⁶ https://open.spotify.com/track/7BYeAlF1Rk94HlyVxPSNFp?si=cbn0_LthSFSTVBCumuVCOA

Key findings

I experienced the warmup activity as a positive way to start every week. The fact that there was music in the room immediately but that the activity didn't demand very much of the participants helped create a safe space. It also provided consistency in the project as a whole that we always began with this activity. Having at least one element that is familiar to the participants is also part of creating a safe space and provides structure.

Belle Mama

Belle Mama is a song that I learned as part of my training with Musicians Without Borders. The song only has three words (Belle Mama Hee) which makes it very easy to learn. Considering both how trauma can degrade memory, and how the participants speak many different languages, this is important. The song has four phrases, the first and the fourth being identical, which makes the structure of the song very clear and easy to rehearse. It can also be used to make a canon and works well with body percussion.

Participants stood in a circle and I taught them a body percussion rhythm. They found it a bit difficult in the beginning, but they all got it after some tries. While they did the body percussion, I sang Belle Mama for them a couple of times. Then I stopped the body percussion and taught the song through call and response while using hand gestures to identify each phrase. When the participants had learned the song well, I slowly added the body percussion and they ended up being able to do both simultaneously. We also did the song as a canon in two groups. Even though it was a bit difficult for the participants not to get too heavily influenced by the other group and start singing with them we eventually ended up succeeding. This is a video of the activity⁷.

Key findings

The participants enjoyed the challenge of doing the song and the body percussion at the same time. They found it hilarious when I made mistakes myself and there was a really good atmosphere in the room. For some participants, singing and doing body percussion at the same time could be far too much. This wasn't the case with the participants I had, but I was constantly very aware of how they were reacting. If the participants had found it too difficult to do both, I would have split them in two groups and let one group do the body percussion while the other was singing and vice versa.

Rhythmic imitation

I did quite a lot of rhythmic imitation with the participants. I mostly used this as a way to recapture attention between activities and a little pre-exercise to rehearsing body percussion for the Belle Mama song.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zzt4IbK-KMA&feature=youtu.be>

Key findings

The rhythmic imitation worked well and participants seemed to enjoy themselves very much while doing it. There is a lot of value in having smaller activities like this one on hand as links between other activities, to re-capture attention and to have a variety of different options when facilitating.

Paper dance

The paper dance activity involved using the Bluetooth speaker again. I was inspired to do this activity from my training with Musicians Without Borders. Participants stood in a circle and were each given a blank piece of paper. I then put some music on and started moving my paper around to the music. The rest of the group had to mirror my movements with their papers. The leadership was then passed around the circle, so everyone tried leading the movements at least once. It was passed on by participants making eye-contact with each other and signalling that they wanted the next person to take over by using body language only.

I used this song for the activity⁸.

Key findings

I was a bit worried that the participants would find this activity too childish but this turned out not to be the case at all. They were all very creative in coming up with movements to do with the paper and they enjoyed themselves doing the activity. Since the focus of the group was always on the papers and not directly on the person leading the movements it was a good way to have participants in a leading role without being put on display too much. The contact between participants when passing on the leadership was also a nice way of emphasising the social aspect of the activity.

This aspect can be developed even further by having participants do it in pairs. This way the contact between them is a lot closer, but it is also a lot more intimate. I found it too intimate to use with the women in my context, but it could work very well in other contexts.

Song sharing

The song sharing activity had a very open format. I simply asked the participants if someone wanted to share a song with the group and then waited to see whether someone brought something forward. After waiting a bit, one of the participants suddenly started to sing. When she had finished her song, I asked her if she could teach it to all of us. She started singing the song for us again one phrase at a time which we then repeated. We had done the Belle Mama song just before this, which meant that the participants had just seen me demonstrate how to do call-response. I guided the process a bit by helping the participant judge how many times the group needed each phrase repeated and support her in taking the lead. She grabbed a piece of paper, wrote the lyrics for the song down in her language and translated them for us as well. When we had finished learning this song, a group of participants started singing another song together and

Roj Bash
chowakam Ey #
henawakam Taku
Dey Bo Lam chawachaw
sakan

⁸ https://open.spotify.com/track/4GAWvH5pHbs91bQsmt9R2l?si=3_sH-JlcSyyMkdtNsfXuMg

they also translated the lyrics for the rest of the group. Then another participant stepped forward and wanted to show us a song on YouTube that she knew a dance to. I tried to put it on the Bluetooth speaker, but unfortunately my internet connection was too bad. This made the participant a bit frustrated, because it clearly meant a lot to her to be able to share her song as well. We ended up trying to play it on her phone, but it was difficult to hear it well enough. I promised her, that I would make sure that we could hear her song on the speaker the next week, but the experience was clearly a bit disappointing to her.

Key findings

The song sharing activity was a really positive experience and I have no doubt that the participants who shared their songs felt a strong sense of ownership and empowerment. This came from participants having a leading role in the activity and from the feeling of being able to contribute to the group and be recognised. At the same time the activity also underlined how important it is that participants are heard when they contribute, since there are many emotions linked to their contributions. Here, I am referring to the woman who wanted to share a song and a dance, but wasn't really able to do so successfully due to the bad internet connection. I was worried that she wouldn't come back the next week, but luckily she did.

African dancing

This activity was the outcome of the situation I have just described. The next week, the woman was the only participant who showed up. Therefore, the anthropology student and I spent a whole hour with the woman teaching us the dance to her song. We did this for two reasons. Firstly, because I had promised the week before that we would listen to her song and wanted to deliver on that promise, and secondly because this prepared her to teach the dance to the rest of the participants the next week. She agreed to do this and I kept my fingers crossed that more participants would show up.

Luckily, they did and the woman taught everyone the dance. I had made sure to download her song before hand so the internet connection wouldn't be a problem. Furthermore, I had brought foot rattles for all the participants adding a percussive element to the dancing as well. The song we danced to was this⁹.

Key findings

It was clear to me that it meant a lot to the woman to teach the dance to the group. Again, I have no doubt that she felt a strong sense of ownership and empowerment in doing this. She was a good dancer and this gave her the opportunity to show that. I later learned from staff that it had been very difficult for them to engage this woman in other activities. After leading the dancing, she became more open, more social, and even stepped up and led dance activities outside my musical workshops. The staff didn't know that she was able to dance, but now that they did they could encourage and support her in taking the lead. This experience shows how valuable it can be for staff to see new sides of the participants and what the effect of having participants leading activities can be.

⁹ <https://open.spotify.com/track/16hivbAazfd7Li5o5WFguM?si=XV-nDpioTfSd6nvn7s5MEw>

Plastic cup beats

In my attempt to base the musical activities on the use of everyday objects I made a plastic cup beat activity with the participants. It consisted of two different beats and a section where participants switched cups. When doing the activity, participants sat at a table. This was a way for me to create variation in how we were using the physical space. I also included a small improvisatory section where participants would make a small solo on their cup. This is a video of the activity¹⁰.

Key findings

The participants clearly found the activity a bit strange in the beginning, but they slowly began to be quite inventive with the cups. They found ways to avoid that the cups broke when we were hitting them and did some creative moves and sounds in their solos as well. In retrospect, this activity could have been developed further if I had written a song we could do on top of the beat. That would have been a nice way to extend the activity and could also have provided a better link between the plastic cup beats and activities on the floor.

Creative lyric writing

This activity was very much an experiment. The idea behind it was to end up with a song that the participants had written together using the beat from the activity with the plastic cups and the lyrics from this activity. Participants were given some post-it notes and a pen and asked to write down two words that described something they did every morning. They were allowed to write these words in any language. Afterwards we went through all the words and the participants translated them and taught the rest of us the correct pronunciation. We then placed the post-it notes in front of us and the whole group said one word at a time on a common beat. While we were going around the group and saying all the words, each participant automatically had a moment where the focus was on them individually, since the words were theirs. This created little moments of ownership without demanding very much of the participants.

My idea was to continue the next week by finding a melody for the words and turn them into verses bound together with a chorus saying "this is what we do in the morning". Unfortunately, this never happened, because I didn't have the same participants the next week and therefore the sense of ownership in the words was lost.

Key findings

I still believe that this activity could potentially work well, but it depends very much on having the same participants show up from week to week. What I take away from the part of the activity that I was able to do, was that participants actually seemed to feel a sense of ownership towards the words that they had chosen and that it created conversation about their everyday lives. In this sense, the activity worked well even though it didn't end up with the result I was hoping for.

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWSO-eV3bbU&feature=youtu.be>

Evaluation of the project

At the end of the project I had two different meetings to evaluate. One meeting was with the anthropology student, who had been present for all activities, and the other was with my contact person from Red Cross. Since the topics that came up in these meetings were generally the same I see no reason to present them separately. One topic that quickly came up in the evaluation was the number of participants. It was good in the beginning but very low by the end. Both the staff member and the anthropology student expressed that the participants had been very positive about the musical activities, but that gaining consistent commitment was an issue they often faced. They also pointed out, that the women's club was still at an early stage of development when I took part in it in September. This meant that I didn't have the opportunity to meet as many of the women as they had hoped for. Being a familiar face means a lot when you are trying to convince participants to join. I asked the anthropology student if the participants seemed to be aware that the musical activities were going on when she came knocking on their doors every week. To this question she responded that it didn't feel like they remembered that the activity was going on. Also, when she came knocking, many of the women were in the kitchen cooking for their children who had just come home from school. This might very well have been a big part of why they didn't show up. We also all agreed that two months was simply too little time to really build a community around the activities and to make them an integrated part of the participants' everyday reality. In retrospect, it might have been better to have the musical activities integrated in the women's club for a while and then separate them later. This way, I could have had more interaction with the participants outside of the musical activities themselves and could have had more staff members present.

All of this being said, both the anthropology student and the staff member found the musical activities valuable. They both specifically mentioned the woman who led the African dance and how this experience had made her more social and had empowered her in other contexts as well. Both of them also found it valuable to have seen new sides and resources in the women that they didn't know existed. The staff member told me that she had actually used the Belle Mama song and the paper dance activity herself after my project had ended in order to continue with some of the ideas. She also let me know that the centre and herself would be very interested in collaborating with me again in a funded and more long-term project. The anthropology student also commented that she felt, that I had succeeded in creating a safe space for the participants in my activities and that I had managed to include everyone without overstepping their personal boundaries.

Concluding remarks

It was quite challenging to work in this context. It wasn't because of the participants themselves, whom I found to be very open-minded and engaged when they showed up, but rather due to the fluctuating number of participants. It demanded a high level of preparation but also a high level of improvisation on my part, which was really interesting but also quite demanding. The refugee centre can be a very chaotic place with a lot of things going on at the same time and a lot of unforeseen issues arising on many levels. One day a representative from the government is visiting and the whole centre is turned upside down in preparing the welcome and the next day someone's request for asylum has been denied and the atmosphere is very heavy. To work in this context one must learn to keep calm in the middle of the unforeseen and accept it as part of the

work. Planning will only get you so far and the rest is creativity, a positive attitude and a genuine interest in the people.

The women that I have met can be considered vulnerable in many ways. Still, it is important to keep in mind that it took an incredible amount of strength, courage, and persistence for every one of them to even get to the refugee centre in Denmark. Their vulnerability and needs should be taken into consideration, but they should never be victimised. They should always be met as capable people who have something to offer.

I look forward to further explore working within this context and I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this case study.

Musik for kvinder!

Kan du lide musik?

Så kom og vær med om mandagen fra kl. 14:30-16:00!

Jeg hedder Camilla, og det er mig,
der skal lave musik sammen med jer.

Alle kan være med og vi skal synge,
spille og danse sammen.

Jeg glæder mig til at se jer!



Datoer:

Mandag d. 30/9	kl. 14:30-16:00
Mandag d. 7/10	kl. 14:30-16:00
Mandag d. 14/10	kl. 14:30-16:00
Mandag d. 21/10	kl. 14:30-16:00
Mandag d. 28/10	kl. 14:30-16:00
Mandag d. 4/11	OBS! Ingen musik
Mandag d. 11/11	kl. 14:30-16:00
Mandag d. 18/11	kl. 14:30-16:00
Mandag d. 25/11	kl. 14:30-16:00

Vi mødes i fællesrummet!



Music for women!

Do you like music?

Com join me on Mondays from 14:30-16:00!

My name is Camilla, and I'm here to make music with you.

Everyone is welcome to join and we will sing, dance and play together.

I'm looking forward to seeing you!



Dates:

Monday d. 30/9	kł. 14:30-16:00
Monday d. 7/10	kł. 14:30-16:00
Monday d. 14/10	kł. 14:30-16:00
Monday d. 21/10	kł. 14:30-16:00
Monday d. 28/10	kł. 14:30-16:00
Monday d. 4/11	OBS! No music
Monday d. 11/11	kł. 14:30-16:00
Monday d. 18/11	kł. 14:30-16:00
Monday d. 25/11	kł. 14:30-16:00

I'll see you in the common room!



Case Study 2

Working at a Danish Community Centre

To ensure the anonymity of participants, personal details, the name of the NGO I collaborated with, and the location of the project have been omitted. The main focus of this case study is to describe the project's primary outcomes, as well as my preparation, my experiences, and details of musical activities.

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Introduction

This case study is the outcome of my eight-week project at a Danish community centre. The project took place from January to March 2020 in a major Danish city. I collaborated with a private NGO which focuses mainly on vulnerable men and women with refugee and immigrant backgrounds and with different psychological diagnoses like PTSD, anxiety, depression, and personality disorder. I became a part of an already existing project run by this NGO, where elderly people above the age of sixty with refugee or immigrant backgrounds were the main target group. My musical activities were part of a weekly meeting at the community centre hosted by the NGO, and did not stand alone as was the case in my first case study.

The NGO always referred to their participants as guests, and I will therefore refer to them in the same manner during this case study.

Background

Tuesdays from 11-14 o'clock, the NGO runs a project for elderly people with refugee or immigrant backgrounds in a community centre. Here guests and staff from the NGO meet for coffee or tea, board games, painting mandalas and conversation. Generally, there are four staff members and around eight guests present during the three hours. The number of guests varies a bit from week to week and not everyone participates the entire session. The format is open and guests can come and go as they wish. Around 12 o'clock, the guests are invited to join a small session of physical

exercises instructed by a staff member. Participation is always voluntary but I never experienced that someone chose not to participate, which was also the case with the musical activities. The NGO has been hosting these meetings since August 2018. They have tried a variety of different activities to foster relationships and to create positive experiences for the guests, but they have had challenges with gaining steady commitment.

When I approached the NGO with the idea of 'meeting in music', they therefore found it interesting to see whether this could be a way to attract more people to the project. They had already been doing the physical exercises for some time, with success, but the more social element was still lacking. Due to the high vulnerability of their target group, the NGO rarely agrees to collaborate with students, but because of my experience at the refugee centre, my approach to the work and my preunderstanding of the context, they agreed to take part in this case study.

Preparation

Half an hour before my first visit at the community centre, I had a meeting with the two staff members responsible for the project to get some general guidelines and information. This included:

- General code of conduct for staff and volunteers: "We act friendly but professionally around the guests." This means handshakes and not hugs and not providing guests with personal details like phone numbers or home addresses.
- How to respond if guests did not wish to shake hands.
- Information about special challenges in relation to the psychological diagnoses and physical injuries that some guests have.
- General code of conduct not to discuss religious or political matters.
- General guidelines on how to dress.

Afterwards, I was introduced to the guests as a musician coming to do musical activities with them as part of this thesis. This introduction was important in order to make it clear why I was there and what my role was. It was also made very clear that the anonymity of the guests would not be compromised in any way and that the activities did not require them to have any musical skills. The aim was to have a good experience with music in which everyone could participate. Almost immediately after the introduction, a number of guests started talking about music with me, many of them sharing their love for it and showing curiosity about my education. This quickly provided common ground for conversation which lasted throughout the whole project.

Physical space

The physical space in which the musical activities took place is a fairly large room, but still with a cosy and welcoming atmosphere. The room is equipped with chairs, tables, some couches by the windows, and a grand piano in the corner. The windows all face the street, which means that the room can be sealed off from the rest of the community centre, when the door is closed. Just outside the room there is a café where a lot of elderly people gather to have lunch or coffee, meaning that there is a lot of activity. The door is generally left open all the time, except during the physical exercises and the musical activities.

Most of the time, the guests are sitting together around a long table in the middle of the room, where they are playing board games, painting mandalas and talking.

Participants

As mentioned in the introduction, guests taking part in the project, were elderly people with immigrant or refugee backgrounds. They were mostly male, but there were a few women as well. Most guests were challenged by conditions such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, Parkinson's disease and personality disorder and/or suffered from permanent physical injuries as a result of being subjected to torture and war, making them very vulnerable. On top of this, most guests were living alone and didn't have a very big social network, making loneliness very common. The languages spoken were Farsi, Arabic, French and Danish – the latter being the common language. The level, at which guests were able to express themselves in Danish, varied a lot and therefore speaking loudly, clearly, slowly and accompanied by gestures was in many cases a necessity. That being said, guests often stepped in and translated for each other when communication in Danish began to stagnate.

Every week, guests have approached me with questions or stories of their own relation to music and I feel convinced that this common interest made it easier for me to gain their trust. These conversations also gave me a lot of input for my musical activities. Some guests expressed their love for certain instruments, which included guitar and piano, and I responded by playing those specific instruments the next week as a surprise, which made them really happy. I also learned about two artists who were famous in the Arabic world through these conversations and I later included songs by them in the musical activities.

Staff and volunteers

There were three members of staff and one student doing an internship with the NGO present for all activities. Three out of four were female, which made the gender balance in the room almost even. Three out of four also spoke Arabic which was helpful in many cases. The staff members had professional backgrounds in social work and anthropology and one had done a lot of interpreting and had actually been a musician for many years as well. All members of staff, including the intern of course, were very supportive and engaged in my activities. They prepared me very well before I met the guests for the first time and continually shared their knowledge and experience with me throughout the project, which was very helpful. At the same time, I also felt that they were interested in and respected my professional background and contributions and I felt welcome from our first meeting. This made me feel safe and confident despite my still relatively limited experience with vulnerable groups.

My experiences as facilitator

My role as facilitator in this case study was quite different from the first one. This was due to the fact the musical activities were integrated in an already existing framework. This was a very interesting experience, because it meant that I had to be attentive towards creating good and natural transitions in and out of the musical activities. I also had to take into consideration how the guests were using the physical space outside of the musical activities. When facilitating the musical space, I wanted to use a different part of the space to clearly separate it from where the guests were doing other things. As mentioned earlier, they mostly sat at a long table in the middle

of the room, so in order to create a separate space for the musical activities, I had to get them away from that table. What would be considered normal behaviour in the musical space, would not be perceived the same way in the social reality around the table. This was the reason I wanted to separate the two. It was after this consideration that the idea of using the physical exercises as a transition into the musical activities originated.

Another interesting aspect of my facilitation in this project was that the musical activities only lasted around 20 minutes every week, but that I was present for the full three hours of each meeting. When I was not leading the musical activities my role was somewhere in between still being the music facilitator and being a guest myself. This gave me the opportunity to share small musicking moments with some of the guests one to one. As an example, I one week brought the Arabic lyrics for the children's song Brother Jacob. I sat with one of the guests who taught me how to pronounce the lyrics and we tried singing it together. Then another guest joined in with a version in French and afterwards asked me to teach both of them the lyrics in Danish. This took place outside the framework of the musical activities, and I find it very unlikely that it would have happened between the guests alone or between guests and staff members. The reason it happened here was because I represented the social reality in the musical space, also outside of the musical activities themselves. In general, I believe it would have been much more difficult for me to facilitate the musical activities if I hadn't been present the full three hours every Tuesday. I acquired a lot of insight while playing board games, painting mandalas or talking to the guests, and as mentioned earlier I got a lot of input for the musical activities from talking to the guests as well.

Musical activities

In the following, I will go through all the musical activities I did with the guests as part of this case study. It may not seem like many considering the time span of the project, but I had to start small and very gradually increase the duration and number of musical activities so that the guests were not overwhelmed. I only observed and spoke to the guests the first week and I spend the following two weeks only doing the relaxation music. On top of this, activities were of course also repeated from week to week.

Relaxation music

As mentioned earlier, there was a small session of physical exercises just before the musical activities. When this session was finished, guests were offered a glass of water and we used this moment to create a natural transition into the musical activities. This way, the staff member could 'hand over' the leadership to me after the physical exercises and the guests were already collected in the space. While the guests were relaxing and having their water, I played them a song. Before I played the song, I always invited them to close their eyes if they wanted to, but to keep them open if they preferred that. People who have experienced traumatizing events can feel very unsafe with their eyes closed, which is why I always gave both options.

The first time I played for the guests, I chose to bring a pentatonic kalimba, on which I had written a song for the occasion¹. The choice of the kalimba was a very conscious one. Since it is a very softly spoken instrument, the amount of sound wasn't overwhelming and its size meant that I

¹ <https://soundcloud.com/camilla-overgaardmusic/i-lae-for-regnen/s-Gy5AijWVYpp>

could sit amongst the guests and play. The kalimba is also an instrument that not everyone is familiar with and it therefore served as a good conversation starter as well. When I had finished playing my song, I left the kalimba on the table and invited the guests to play around with it if they wanted to. Since it was pentatonic, it was pretty much impossible to play something on it that sounded terrible and it was easy to handle as well. This meant that guests could actually play around with it without fear of failure. At the same time, the dynamically gentle nature of the kalimba meant that it didn't disturb any other conversation going on while it was being passed around the table. Everyone actually ended up trying to play, staff included. I noticed a number of guests who seemed to have a moment playing the kalimba and not really noticing what else was going on or whether was anyone listening to them.

The relaxation music was repeated every week and always served as the transition from the physical exercises to the musical activities. Within the framework of this activity I created variation by playing different instruments, kalimba, ukulele, guitar and piano, and by playing songs in different languages, Danish, English and Arabic. The latter I tried out in week six when I knew the guests quite well and felt certain about the way it would be received if I struggled to sing in Arabic. As I expected, I failed miserably, but the guests clearly valued my efforts and ultimately it led to them teaching me how to pronounce the lyrics correctly and singing other songs in Arabic to me as well.

The following songs were performed within the framework of the relaxation music activity:

- I læ for regnen (kalimba) – Camilla Overgaard
- Standfugl (guitar) – Camilla Overgaard
- Can't Help Falling in Love (ukulele) – Elvis Presley
- Stille Før Storm (piano) – Sebastian
- De Vildeste Fugle (piano) – Michael Falch
- Ana Le Habiby (piano) – Fairuz
- Ahwak (piano) – Abdel Halim Hafez

Key findings

What I take away from doing the relaxation music activity is the importance of having a good starting point or transition into the musical activities. It was also really nice to be able to include elements, be it instruments or specific songs, referring back to some of the conversations I had with guests, since this clearly made them feel seen, heard and hopefully valued. A member of staff also pointed out the fact that these small performances on my end, helped validate my musical skills, which was important from the beginning. This was not something that I had considered myself, so it was very interesting to learn that this was also an important part of gaining the trust and respect of the guests.

I also want to highlight my experience of performing the two Arabic songs, Ana Le Habiby and Ahwak. In the first one I tried to sing the lyrics, as mentioned earlier, and the second one I played



in an instrumental version. In both cases it was clear to me that it meant something special to the guests to hear these songs performed. Many of them asked if they could film me playing Ahwak, which they were of course welcome to do. Both songs really engaged the guests in telling me about them, translating the lyrics for me and helping me with pronunciation. It switched the roles around, making me the learner and them the teachers and I felt that this gave them a strong sense of ownership and empowerment.

Belle Mama

Belle Mama is a song that I learned as part of my training with Musicians Without Borders. The song only has three words (Belle Mama Hee) which makes it very easy to learn. Considering both how trauma can degrade memory, and how the guests speak many different languages, this is important. The song has four phrases, the first and the fourth being identical, which makes the structure of the song very clear and easy to rehearse. It can also be used to make a canon and works well with body percussion.

I taught the song through call and response while using hand gestures to identify each phrase. In the beginning it was a bit difficult to communicate the concept of call-response, even though I used very clear body language, but after some tries and a bit of translation support from one of the staff members, we succeeded. I also experimented with adding a bit of body percussion, only clapping on the beat, but this turned out to be very difficult for a single guest, resulting in another guest trying to correct him. The guest facing difficulty with the clapping didn't seem to mind, but it was clearly uncomfortable for the other guest, that another member of the group didn't get it right. I therefore chose to abandon the clapping and stuck to the singing. Instead, we worked with singing in different dynamics, first whispering, which guests found very funny, and afterwards singing very loudly. This worked well since it was a way to let the guests explore their own voices in a playful way.

We repeated the song again in the next session and this time I accompanied it on guitar. This time I just started singing and the guests quickly joined in. I also tried turning the song into a canon with the guests singing the first entrance as one group and me singing alone as the second entrance to demonstrate the concept. This didn't really work in spite of a heroic effort from one of the staff members who stepped up and led the singing in the group of guests, so I abandoned the idea after some tries. However, one guest suddenly suggested that we should also sing Belle Papa to ensure gender equality, so I immediately adopted that idea and we did the song again with Belle Papa which only made it more fun.

Key findings

What I take away from this activity is the value of simplicity. Belle Mama works really well, because it is simple yet still holds a lot of potential developing the activity in many directions and on many levels. It also works well that the song doesn't really have a clear nationality. Since it only has three words, they present themselves more as a sound palette, rather than connected to a certain language.

Rhythmic imitation

Since guests were generally challenged with keeping a common pulse going, I experimented a bit with doing very simple rhythmic imitation. I tried clapping a rhythm with the guests repeating but also just having the whole group keeping a common pulse by clapping on their thighs.

Key findings

Again, it was difficult to get the call-response approach working and actually in this case even more so, than with the singing. This again led to a situation where one of the guests clearly found it difficult to handle when the whole group didn't understand what I was trying to communicate. The guest felt embarrassed on behalf of the whole group, even though he himself clearly understood my instructions and the rest of the guests were enjoying themselves. The staff had informed me about this in advance, so I was aware of how the guest reacted from the beginning. I responded to this by reminding everyone, that it wasn't the aim to get it right immediately, but that the point was to have fun while trying. This helped a little bit, but it wasn't enough to enable me to continue the activity as long as I would have liked. Unfortunately, I didn't get the opportunity to repeat the activity again, but it would have been interesting to explore how to support the guest who felt embarrassed on behalf of the group, in letting go of this embarrassment within the musical space over time.

Evaluation of the project

By the end of the project, I had a meeting with the staff members to evaluate and discuss the outcome of this case study. Since we had been doing short evaluations every week, I already had a good idea about how the staff members had experienced the musical activities and the collaboration with me. Still, this 45-minute final evaluation provided me with new insights about the progression in the project as a whole.

I asked what the staff members felt had been gained by collaborating with me and including the musical activities in their already existing project. They emphasised the value of music as a way of connecting without having a common language. In the musical space the guests could meet in music as a common third without being limited by their ability to express themselves in Danish. Somehow, where the guests were from and what they were struggling with became less important because the focus was not on them individually but on me and the music, while they were connecting with each other in new ways.

Referring back to my section on liminality, this is an example of the in-betweenness within the liminal musical space, where you are not yourself but not not-yourself either. The staff members also generally felt a greater interest in their project as a whole as a direct result of both the physical exercises and the musical activities. More people were participating and their participation was more consistent.

They also told me that the guests had specifically asked whether I was coming and had encouraged other guests to come and join the activities. The combination of the physical exercises and the musical activities also provided more structure to the Tuesday meetings at the community centre and made them stand out from the other activities that the NGO was running.

Since both the physical exercises and the musical activities helped connect the guests and created a feeling of togetherness, I asked the staff members what they believed the musical activities

could provide that the physical exercises could not. Their answer was that musical activities asked more of the guests, because they were exposing themselves much more when singing than when rolling their shoulders. Combined with the fact that I had the guests standing in a circle where they were facing each other, this created a social aspect, and therefore the feeling of togetherness was stronger in the musical activities. They also considered the musical activities, especially the relaxation music, a way for the guests to connect with their inner selves without it becoming too much for them. It can be very frightening and challenging for the guests to connect with their inner selves, because it can awaken all the feelings and experiences that they are distancing themselves from and potentially make them relive their trauma. In the framework of the relaxation music activity they could have a peaceful moment, but still have their main focus on me which enabled them to let their guard down for a couple of minutes, without it becoming too overwhelming. To the staff members, this made the guests more open both in the Tuesday meetings, but also when they met them in other contexts.

The staff members also expressed that they themselves felt more connected with the guests as a result of taking part in the musical activities together. In my opinion, this can again be linked to the possibility of trying out different social relations that the liminal musical space provides. The staff members felt that they had seen new sides of the guests, for example a man who was usually very introverted suddenly sat down and played Ahwak on the piano even though everyone could hear him. A woman also sang two verses of a very well-known Arabic song solo to share it with me, even though five other people were sitting around her. I personally also believe that the fact that the staff members themselves also stepped out of their comfort zones and exposed themselves in the musical activities made the guests see other sides of them and feel a stronger connection as well.

An important part of creating a safe space for the guests was how they were addressed in the activities. The staff members shared with me that their biggest concern before starting the project was that the musical activities would become kindergarten-like in character and that I would accidentally talk down to the guests in an attempt to acknowledge their vulnerability. I completely understand this concern and it was something that I was very aware of from the beginning. Being overly cautious or overly aware can easily lead to an overly positive or protective way of acting, which actually diminishes the idea of the recipient as a resourceful and capable person, which is the exact opposite of empowering them. Luckily, the staff members did not at any point feel that the guests were addressed in a child-like manner, on the contrary they felt that I managed to acknowledge them as capable grownups. I am very happy about this, since it can be a difficult balance to find.

I also asked the staff members how they had experienced the collaboration with me throughout the project and if there was anything I should do differently. To this, their response was that my openness towards the guests and my attitude when receiving feedback from staff had made the collaboration a very positive one. They felt that I had approached them with a respect for their professional backgrounds and ways of working, while at the same time contributing with ideas from my own perspective and field. This respect meant that we could take new steps together. The importance of how well prepared I was and my ability to reflect on what I was doing, also sharing these reflections with staff for feedback before I acted and not only in retrospect made

them feel that they could relax. They also pointed out that it was very important for the guests that a person was credible, authentic and genuinely happy to spend time with them in order for them to feel safe and invest something in the relationship and that they felt that I had indeed been that person.

Concluding remarks

I have enjoyed every minute of doing this case-study and I have been very moved by the number of guests who have approach me every week and told me how much they appreciated that I was there. There is no doubt in my mind, that there is something to be gained from doing projects like this one. At the same time, it is also important for me to point out that the collaboration between the music facilitator and the other professionals involved is absolutely crucial for such projects to succeed. Developing this kind of collaboration takes time and effort from everyone involved, but I am happy to have experienced that it can be done.

I would like to thank all members of staff and all guests involved for meeting me in music.