



# Adjusting the Pitch

## An ethnographic exploration of action learning in an international music exchange project

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### Abstract

The article traces the development of eight years of “Music and Resilience,” a project of international cooperation between a Palestinian NGO in Lebanon and an Italian CBO, with the aim of building music resources with, and for, the refugee communities of Lebanon.

Supported epistemologically by ethnography, sociology, psychology, and community music pedagogy, the paper narrates and analyzes the project’s development as a multi-layered, organically orientated response to the specific geopolitical and social context, in which continuous monitoring and evaluation inform the necessary “adjustments” of the project’s “pitch.” Using the paradigm of Action Learning within the framework of Theory of Social Change, the authors draw on the experience and research “Music and Resilience” has stimulated, to identify some “cardinal points” relevant to cross-cultural cooperation in general.

*Keywords: community music, psycho-social support, music therapy, refugees, social change, action learning, resilience, international cooperation*

### 1. Setting out

Beginnings are important. “Music and Resilience” (M&R) came to life in 2012 as a support project for the development of music resources within the Palestinian refugee community of Lebanon, targeting two spheres of activity concerning children and adolescents: community music-making and clinical music therapy. Eight years later, the project has expanded to sustain not only these two aspects, but also psycho-social music support for the young, and music in the community’s nursery school curriculum. M&R has also spawned a European-based online resource and training centre for music interventions in marginalized communities worldwide<sup>1</sup>. These new articulations and adaptations bear witness to the most important lesson learnt during the project’s lifespan,

1. MARS (‘Music And Resilience Support’)—[www.musicandresilience.net](http://www.musicandresilience.net)—was an EU funded Erasmus Plus project led by the International Music Council during the period 2015–17.



evoked in the title metaphor of “adjusting the pitch”; namely, the development of a *modus operandi* of continuous monitoring, observing, reflecting, learning, and re-planning, in order to maintain relevance and efficacy in response to the needs of the specific context.

The project owes its conception not to an application call or a funding approval, the origin of so many cooperation projects; rather, its initiatory thrust was provoked by the Italian Embassy of Beirut’s refusal to issue entry visas into Italy for fifteen young Palestinian musicians invited to participate in a cultural exchange in Summer 2011. This refusal, while justified by Italian law, effectively amounted to a denial of civil rights for those young students, and epitomized exquisitely the intolerable lot of the Palestinian refugees of Lebanon, which will be addressed in Section 2. The response of the Italian CBO Prima Materia<sup>2</sup> (PM), was a direct demonstration of solidarity with the offended party through an institutional visit to the Palestinian NGO Beit Atfal Assumoud (“House of the Children of Resilience”: hereafter referred to as *Assumoud*)<sup>3</sup>, by PM’s musical director Henry Brown in September 2011. The purpose of the visit was purely and socially *human*: if Palestinian students from Lebanon had been deprived of the possibility to come to Europe, European students would try to go to Lebanon, in order to retrieve the lost music exchange. Firm conviction that music had to be made was expressed by both PM and Assumoud, the former as a promoter of positive social change through music, and the latter as a protector of the young generations of Palestinian refugees and other vulnerable subjects in Lebanon. Effectively therefore, the partnership of M&R was founded on an ethical consensus in response to a small but nevertheless significant crisis of socio-political nature. This has remained a characteristic of the project’s driving force and has drawn support through the years from numerous other partner organizations, sponsors, donors, and volunteers in sympathy with the project’s ethos. In 2013, M&R’s significance was highlighted through the concession of the Musical Rights Award by the International Music Council, in recognition of its advocacy of the universal right of children to have access to, and be creative through, music. Similar projects are often considered within the context of music and conflict transformation (Urbain, 2015). In this instance, the conditions for conflict transformation do not exist (Robertson, 2010), given the context of the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon. The European team aims to express solidarity with its friends overseas, by helping them to develop resources which, in their life situation, are extremely problematic. The reason for this difficulty is only due to the fact that they are deprived of their basic rights. It is essential to keep one thing in mind always: if the Palestinians of Lebanon had civil rights equal to their European counterparts, they would be able to develop their rich cultural potential, for the benefit of the community, without foreign aid. M&R is configured therefore as an exchange project, which supports strategic planning for the development of music resources, through interventions which benefit both operative partners.

2. Associazione Prima Materia, based in Montespertoli (province of Florence, Tuscany) is the lead partner of M&R: [www.primamateria.it](http://www.primamateria.it); [musicandresilience.wordpress.com](http://musicandresilience.wordpress.com).

3. Beit Atfal Assumoud is registered in Lebanon under the official name of National Institution of Social Care and Vocational Training: [socialcare.org](http://socialcare.org).

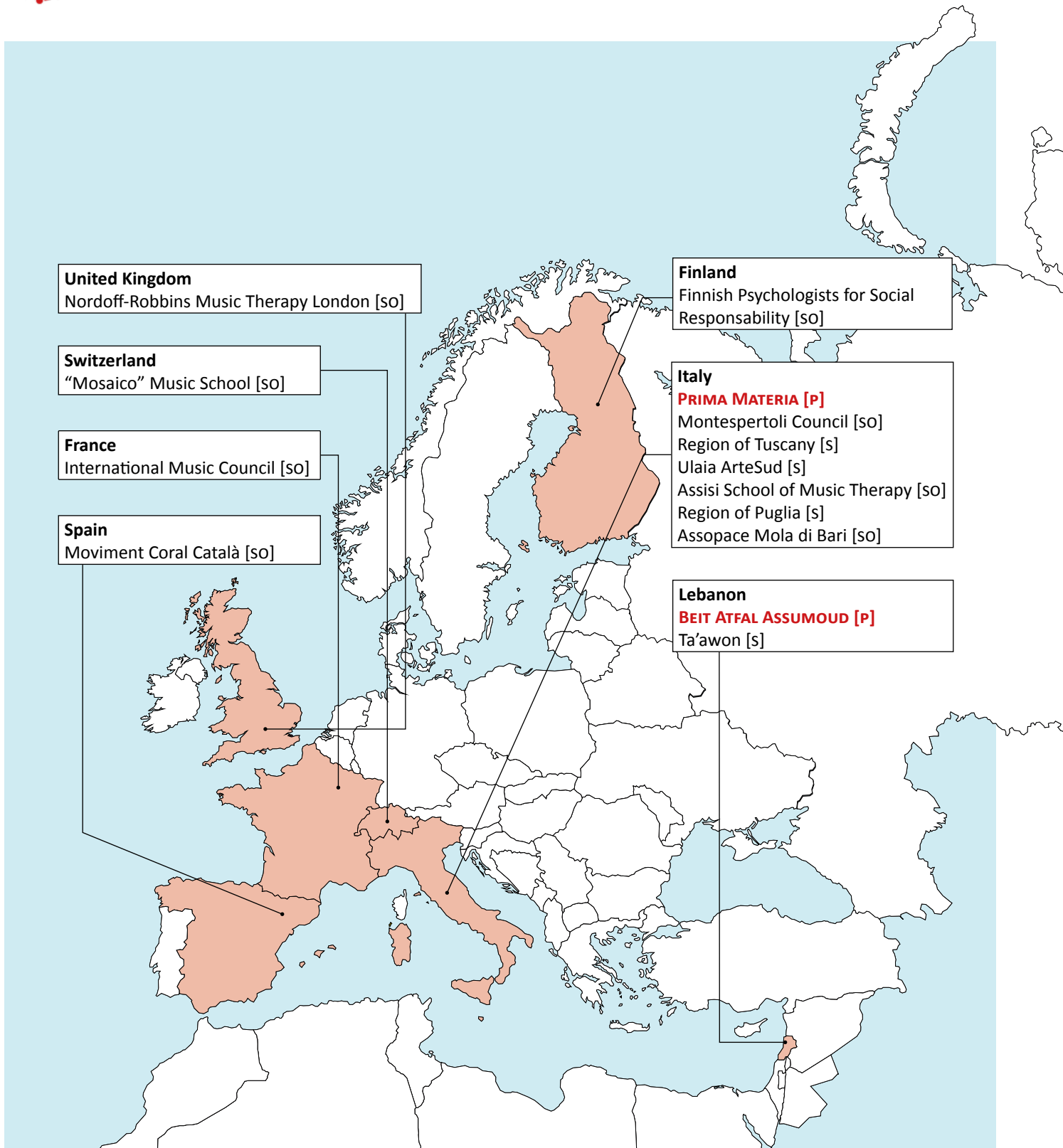


Fig. 1: International synergies supporting M&R: main partners [P], sponsors [S] and supporting organizations [SO]



## 2. Charting the Terrain: Understanding the Context

For strategic planning to be in any way effective, it must be informed by at least a conscious attempt at coherent understanding of the context in which the project develops. In the case of M&R, far from being a convenient “point of departure,” the context in question was, and continues to be, a highly complex process influenced by a fatal constellation of historical and socio-political factors, which can be defined in two main categories: firstly, the circumstances leading to the presence of a Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon, and secondly, the unique political characteristics of this host country.

The first wave of around one hundred thousand Palestinian refugees fled from Northern Palestine into Southern Lebanon in 1948–49, during the Israeli “War of Independence,” prior to the founding of a Jewish State in Palestine. For Palestinians this moment is al *nakba*, which translates into English as “catastrophe,” as does the Hebrew term *shoah*. As a result of the Six-Day War in 1967, a second wave of Palestinian refugees flooded into the camps which had been set up by the UN on small plots of land (no more than 1,5 km<sup>2</sup>). Since then, despite considerable population growth, the areas allocated have not been increased; the inhabitants have substituted the original makeshift tents with buildings of bricks and cement, expanding only vertically within the perimeters. These districts remain isolated within, and from, the cities, surrounded by walls and/or barbed wire, permanently controlled by the Lebanese army, with virtually no possibility for interchange with the host society.

Official records of Palestinian refugees resident in Lebanon are contrasting: according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency<sup>4</sup> (n.d.) the figure is 475,075, whereas a recent census, the first ever for this population, gave the figure as only 183,255 (LPDC et al., 2019). An explanation for this contrast can be found in the politics of the host state, for whom the presence of Palestinian refugees has always been extremely inconvenient, precluding any plans for their effective assimilation. The Lebanese population is clustered into no less than eighteen state-recognized religious sects, reflected in the confessional nature of the country’s political system. All political positions are appointed on the basis of proportional religious representation within the population, based on a census dating back to 1932, which defined around 52% Christians and 48% Muslims out of a population of 793,396 (Maktabi, 1999). Since the Palestinian refugees are mostly Sunni Muslims, their inclusion in civil life would certainly upturn these proportions. No Lebanese statesperson has ever assumed this responsibility; on the contrary, legislation consistently aims to maintain their marginalization, not only physically in the camps, but also socially, through the denial of all basic civil rights<sup>5</sup>.

Other reasons for the systematic exclusion of Palestinian refugees from Lebanese civil life include the “Right of Return” to Palestine (UN Resolution 194), which would be lost in the event of full naturalization. Furthermore, the historic presence of the PLO in Lebanon is associated with dramatic events relating to

4. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is responsible for providing registered refugees with primary benefits including educational, vocational, and health services.

5. This includes the Ministry of Labour Decree n° 17561 (1964), prohibiting PRs from working in more than 70 jobs, including all liberal professions and those requiring state registration or syndicate membership. In 2005 the Minister of Labour issued a Memorandum that was meant to ease access to a broad range of professions, but it had scarce impact on the ground.



the twenty-five years of bloodshed of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90). Indeed, many Lebanese hold the Palestinians directly responsible for the war, thus nurturing a widespread distrust towards this population (Haddad, 2004).

### ***3. Reviewing Tools: Engaging With Social Change, Resilience and Action Learning***

M&R's local partner in Lebanon, Assumoud, was founded in August 1976, following one of the most tragic pages of Palestinian history in Lebanon, namely a Lebanese military action, which razed to the ground the entire refugee camp of Tel Elzaatar (North Beirut). Assumoud was among the first organizations to offer assistance to the many orphaned refugee children. Since then, Assumoud has extended and consolidated its actions, maintaining its focus on children and adolescents in a community approach closely involving family and other social entities. As a humanitarian, non-sectarian organization with no political affiliations, its mission is to provide social care and support development for Palestinians and other disadvantaged people.

Over the last decades, the determinants of social development have been investigated within the theory of social capital. In the view of American political scientist Robert Putnam, this term refers to “social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity” (Putnam, 2000, p.21). The accumulation of its positive consequences—“mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness” (Putnam, 2000, p.22)—is a prerequisite for political integration and economic health in any given society. Putnam identifies voluntary organizations, or “third sector organizations,” as essential in the construction of social networks; both of the principal partners of M&R fall into this category. For French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, social capital implicates inevitable power relationships and “becomes a resource in the social struggles that are carried out in different social arenas or fields” (Siisiäinen, 2003, p.2). It interlinks with cultural, economic and symbolic forms of capital, to form a context-based aggregate of resources available to each individual, determining their “social trajectory.” The conversion factor of these resources qualifies them as capital, supporting a continuous, transformative and generative mechanism, particularly evident and significant within a migration context (Erel, 2010).

The Palestinians in Lebanon live in a double absence: firstly from their homeland, and secondly from a host society which denies the “settled” refugees recognition and inclusion (Sayad, 1999; Hanafi, 2008). The camps bear witness to this suspended existence in a spatial sense; they have become “spaces of exception,” within which national law is suspended and replaced systematically by temporary or emergency regulations (Agamben, 1998), typical of humanitarian response to sudden crises. The inappropriateness of such governance in this context is blatant. For four generations, in these enduring spaces of exception,



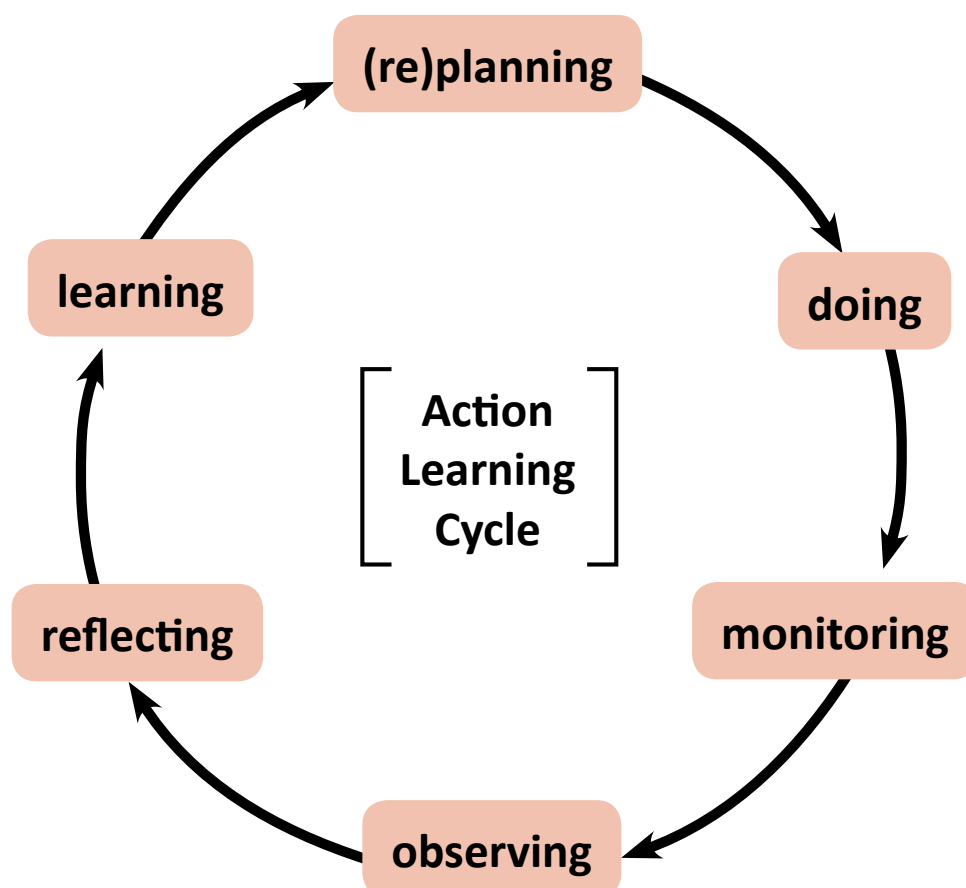
Palestinians have been forced to reconstruct their identity based on “otherness,” and to invest in the struggle for social capital by means of a “quotidian and never-ending practice of constructing home” (Taylor, 2013, p.136). In so doing, the foundation stone is laid for reclaiming agency and demanding full recognition of their double status as Palestinian nationals in exile and as resident refugees in Lebanon. This is the essence of *assumoud*, which encompasses adaptation to harsh life conditions whilst preserving the community’s long-term objective. The term, which translates as “resilience,” denotes a collective and therefore social skill, performed in the community:

“resilience is ... a dynamic process embedded in agency and everyday practices. The capacity to endure has to be understood within a micro context of ordinary life, ... [and] is rooted in the capacity to make life as normal as possible.”

(Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008: 296)

Resilience represents the core of the daily performance of Palestinian identity in forced and permanent exile—an ongoing process of negotiation between tradition and adaptation. Cultural expression is fundamentally important in affirming the collective self, and guaranteeing new, shared “social trajectories” which constitute that collectivity. Culture promotes social engagement and participation, contributing to general well-being and resilience, which can be strategically transformed by the “community of practice” into social capital.

Fig. 2: the Action Learning Cycle





Throughout more than forty years of nurturing this community of practice, Assumoud has consolidated strategies for responding sensitively and adequately to the emergence of social change. First and foremost, the institution adopts a “person-centered approach,” defined in the words of this concept’s founder as “based on the premise that the human being is basically a trustworthy organism, capable of evaluating the outer and inner situation, understanding herself in its context, making constructive choices as to the next steps in life, and acting on those choices” (Rogers, 1990, p.382). This respectful approach to the individual is complemented at project development level by the framework of the “Action Learning Cycle,” described within the Theory of Social Change as: “an approach that accompanies and seeks to enhance existing change processes and to surface potential through continual learning” (Reeler, 2007: 21).

By means of these processes, the community affords trust to its individuals, who are encouraged to grow into the social space, and to contribute to the appraisal of emergent change through reflection, which will inform subsequent choices. These characteristics are shared by PM as a promoter of social change through music, thus creating a common framework for the development of M&R. As this study seeks to demonstrate, the phases of documentation, observation, and reflection support the learning necessary for “adjusting the pitch” of the project appropriately.

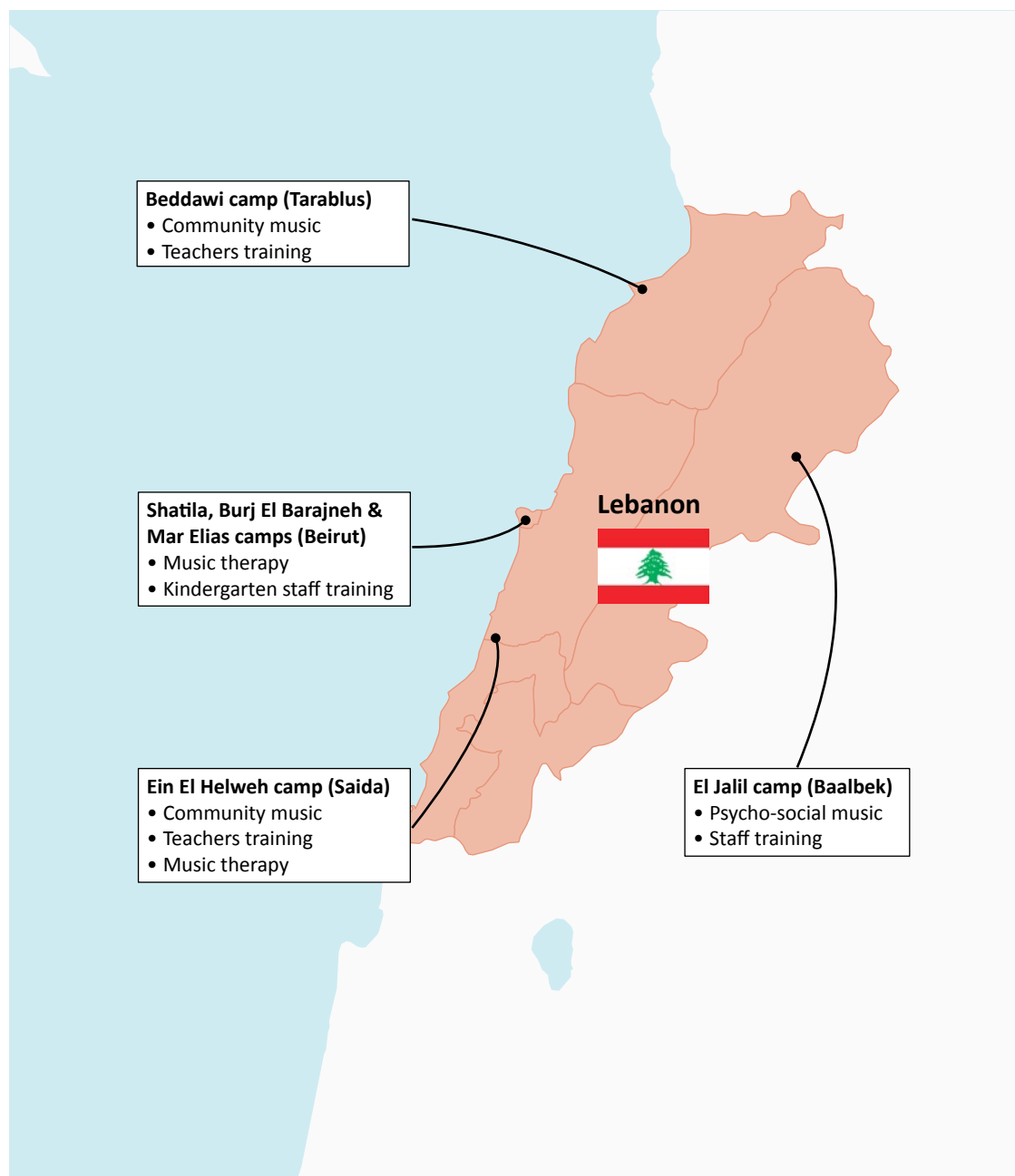
The sustainability of Action Learning lies in the “the ability of practitioners to develop trusting relationships” (Reeler 2007, p.19), calling for marked attention to ethical considerations for the protection of all participants in project actions. While Assumoud ensures adequate information to families, and monitors procedures guaranteeing privacy for the youngsters involved, including protection and support if necessary, PM has developed a number of safety mechanisms for the preparation and protection of European professionals, volunteers and students before and during interventions in Lebanon. These include orientation seminars and community and family awareness and discussion groups in Italy prior to traveling, observation and reflection groups during visits, and availability of Assumoud healthcare workers for the tutoring of European participants in Lebanon.

#### ***4. Checking the Log-Book: Monitoring Progress***

In January 2020 PM organized a public seminar in Montespertoli entitled “Music & Resilience Lebanon-Italy, achievements and challenges,” supporting community participation in the Action Learning phases of observation, reflection and learning. The contents of this seminar form the basis of this section of the present study and provide an account of where M&R is to date. The seminar consisted of a “team narration” to a public which included members of the local music community and representatives of the local council under whose pa-



Fig3: Location of camps where M&R is present



tronage M&R runs. The narration occurred through music and film, verbal accounts by the authors of this article and others, and witness stories from both partner communities; this constellation of diverse communication modalities, which allowed the music to speak for itself in ways which words cannot convey, has been maintained in this article, where the audiovisual elements are intended as substantial elements of the text. All participants in the seminar gave informed consent for audio recording of verbal discourse and audiovisual recording of musical contributions, and for the subsequent publishing of these contents. Use of audiovisual documentation from M&R actions in Lebanon was permitted by both partner organizations following informed consent from the families of the children involved.





Since M&R is considered first and foremost an exchange project, such occasions offer opportunities for participants in the actions in Lebanon to connect with children, students, and families who experience the project only on home-ground in Italy. As often as the Italian embassy allows, these events include the participation of a key figure from the PR community in Lebanon: in January 2020, Mohamad Orabi, Palestinian psychologist working with Assumoud since 2010, was present, together with Italian staff, music students, and trainees who had participated in Summer 2019, and the youngest orchestral group from PM's local community project. This latter group, comprising twenty children aged 8–10, opened the seminar with a performance of two Arabic songs—"Al Maya" and "Nassam Alaina el Hawa," arranged for them by Henry Brown, who contributes in a similar way in Lebanon (discussed in more detail in section 4c), providing purpose-built arrangements of both Arabic and European repertoire.

Video excerpt 1:  
Nassam Alaina  
el Hawa played  
by 'Orchestra  
Musicatoio'  
[https://youtu.be/  
IWCuF4uWi18](https://youtu.be/IWCuF4uWi18)



This first, musical “narration” was a simple and direct way of underlining one aspect of the riches which M&R brings to PM's local community: the promotion of knowledge of the Palestinian culture through its music. Other Arabic pieces were played during the seminar by the older student group which had participated in the exchange program in Lebanon in July 2019, forming an orchestra with their Palestinian counterparts. The seminar performances included a new member, a young Swiss clarinetist from the Mosaico music school in Wattwil (Zürich), which had recently joined the M&R partnership. The continuous development of the European network indicates an important protection factor for the project's health and sustainability.

As in the seminar, the following narrations of groundwork in Lebanon are articulated by the different, but not distinct actions, reflecting the framework for planning and monitoring the project's development.



#### 4a. Music Therapy

Video excerpt 2:  
Music Therapy  
<https://youtu.be/iZ-kJF6Jlko>

This video excerpt,  
and the following  
two, are part of  
a complete video  
available at: [youtu.be/zXta5blclU4](https://youtu.be/zXta5blclU4).



The attention and determination of Assumoud to develop clinical music therapy is a remarkable achievement, considering the contingent challenge that Lebanon, even to date, has no training program for this discipline, and the profession is virtually non-existent in the country.

Bearing witness directly from the Palestinian refugee community of Lebanon, Mohamad Orabi explains the motivation behind this development (seminar discourse):

“Assumoud was the first association to address mental health in the Palestinian refugee community, but in 2012, [with five Family Guidance Clinics serving the majority of the camp locations] provision was nowhere sufficient to respond to the very long waiting lists. We were addressing many problems psychosocially, but this was not enough; we needed more resources. M&R offered a framework in which to integrate music therapy into our mental health program; a team of psychologists, speech and motor therapists and social workers began training in psycho-dynamic improvisational music therapy, and subsequently treating children individually. In 2013 the Syrian crisis caused the arrival of large numbers of traumatized Palestinian refugees from Syria in our already overcrowded camps. The training was adjusted to equip us to be able to work with short-term music therapy groups, treating children’s trauma from loss of family and experience of atrocious violence; many of the children treated were orphans. We were trained periodically by high-level professionals from Italy, UK, and Germany, who offered their expertise to the project. In 2015 M&R received additional sponsorship<sup>6</sup> in order to fund formation to diploma level, in the Music Therapy School in Assisi (Italy) for two of Assumoud’s employees: myself, and Liliane Younes, Lebanese clinical psychologist and coordinator of mental health services for Assumoud. This training, completed in March 2019, not only equips us professionally, but it represents a significant empowerment for me and for my entire community.”

6. Mohamad Orabi was sponsored by Ulaia ArteSud ONLUS ([www.ulaia.org](http://www.ulaia.org)).

Mohamad’s reference to the diploma reiterates not only the concept of promoting self-sufficiency in his community, but also significant exchange opportunities for fellow students in Assisi, who were able to learn about one of the world’s



most notorious refugee communities. Similarly, to date, 11 European music therapy students (from Italy, France, Spain and UK) have participated in internships in Lebanon and five dedicated theses have been discussed in European universities. Fruitful exchange has resulted also for the European trainers involved in Lebanon, bringing them into contact with the generational trauma of “veteran” refugee communities, and with the raw trauma of “new” refugees from Syria. This learning has been immensely helpful in responding sensitively and appropriately to the newly arrived asylum-seekers of recent years in Europe.

The M&R music therapy team attends to research projects, with the objective of contributing scientifically to the body of knowledge pertaining to the psycho-social well-being of refugee communities<sup>7</sup>. The team also presents frequently at conferences, sharing experience with other health-profession colleagues around the world. Familiarity with music therapy has definitely increased in Lebanon, since Assumoud works with many Lebanese nationals as mental health specialists. An indication of this lies in the fact that interest is now being expressed by a private Lebanese university to establish the country’s first BA degree course in this subject.

Introducing music as a medium for mental health care within the Muslim community constitutes a significant challenge, since some interpretations of the creed consider music as a potential negative influence. The team responds by working hard to gain trust in the community, explaining the roots of musicality in human communication and therefore music’s power to repair neuropsychological, affective, and social difficulties. A further challenge affecting sustainability lies in the instability of the workforce. Paradoxically, the 70 years’ “stagnation” of the Palestinian refugees is clearly evident in the waywardness of professional development, which can effectively lead nowhere. Changing jobs from association to association appears to be a coping strategy for people who can only move in this way, laterally. This results in continuously losing workers who have been partially trained, while starting from scratch with newly arrived staff. However the fact that Assumoud now has two qualified music therapists is indeed an achievement not to be overlooked.

#### ***4b. Psychosocial Support (PSS) Workshops Using Music***

This action, situated conceptually between clinical and artistic applications of music, comprises a multi-disciplinary and flexible psycho-pedagogic approach, based on two important premises of community music practice:<sup>8</sup> the innate musicality of human beings, and the potential of music to promote well-being, both individually and socially. PSS music workshops attend to connections and promote nurturing interactions between participants, stimulating positive social change that expands, like the ripples created by a stone thrown in a pond, to the surrounding society (Pavlicevic and Ansdell, 2004). The inclusive nature of making music together supports development of the perception of the self in

7. Currently in print: results of research on the efficacy of music therapy for improving social and emotional functioning in disturbed PR children aged 7–11 resident in Lebanon.

8. These are explored in detail in section 5.



Video excerpt 3:  
Psycho-Social  
music workshops in  
Baalbeck  
[https://youtu.be/  
wCEylbFGmgI](https://youtu.be/wCEylbFGmgI)



relation to others, improving modulation of personal expression. Non-competitive ways of achieving satisfying common goals can be demonstrated. These processes simplify the acts of *sharing* and *cooperating*, bringing the various participants closer to each other, whoever they may be.

The focus on psychosocial support in the workshops does not require specific musical skills or equipment; it is therefore very useful where more articulated forms of music education are not possible, as in the case of El Jalil refugee camp in Baalbek (Beqaa valley: see Fig. 3 at beginning of Section 4). This was the only camp devoid of musical activities of any kind (maybe due to its more isolated location, with respect to all the other camps on Lebanon's coastal strip); there were no musical instruments and no evidence of formal musical competence in the community. In 2017 the M&R team, with the involvement of European students on field training for the MARS<sup>9</sup> diploma, was able to offer the first PSS music workshops for the children of El Jalil.

9. See note 1, p.1

The camp is very small, with no playing spaces other than its narrow streets. In the safe and welcoming environment of the Assumoud Centre, workshops were held that offered inclusive activities aimed at promoting fun and mutual trust, and supporting emotional expression and modulation. Despite the large number (dozens) of children in each group, it was possible to work on the proposed objectives, using musical games and local or international songs, providing simple musical instruments (including "home-made" sound objects), and combining physical movement with sound production and expressive creativity, as the video documentation has shown.

The challenge of sustainability for this action was met the following year, by complementing the children's workshops with a training for their local educators. The premises of psychosocial support using music make preliminary training feasible even for those without previous musical education. In the case of El Jalil, this has determined both the positive impact and the sustainability of the project during these first years. However, once a stone has been thrown into the pond, the ripples expand freely. In response to the insistent requests of the teenagers in the program, a local music teacher has recently been found in



Baalbek, with availability to give specific music training. This not only raises the level of musicality within the camp community, but improves the prospects for the eventual development of a community music group in El Jalil.

The video documentation bears witness to the style of facilitation adopted by the European trainers during the workshops, with respect both to the children and the local educators. These latter subjects could be thought of as fully equipped members of an exploring team discovering a new terrain, accompanied by guides who are more familiar with the area. The route is not pre-set by the guides; rather, through inviting involvement in games, songs, and creative assignments, they indicate possible pathways and vistas, adopting an attitude of “deep listening” (Pavlicevic and Impey, 2013) in order to observe and, as far as possible, comprehend the group’s reactions, proposals and requests. Their role requires them to alternate sensitively and flexibly between guiding, pointing out interesting details (often using mimesis, without interrupting the musical flow), and taking a step back to follow someone else’s lead, ready to support when necessary. Embedded within this process, and running parallel to it, is the training of the local educators, for whom the workshops with the children afford the “doing” step of their dedicated Action Learning cycle. The complementary steps of observation of documentation, reflection, learning, and re-planning take place in regular sessions without the children. These are facilitated by the European musicians when they are in Lebanon, and set a framework for weekly monitoring sessions for the local education team throughout the year. With his competence as psychologist and music therapist, Mohamad Orabi is well placed to provide supervision and support for the El Jalil educators. For him, this project action is particularly significant, as he related at the seminar:

“ ... since it affords a wonderful opportunity for observation of children’s behaviour in Kindergarten and school by their teachers, and subsequently for feedback to psychological and medical figures. Psychosocial observation in the child’s natural environment gives a more authentic view of the child, whose behaviour may well be influenced by fear or anxiety in clinical settings. Musical games and exercises promote more regulated behaviour and have a positive impact on global cognitive functioning, improving competences such as attention, concentration, memory, spatial and temporal perception and organization, helping the children to develop their general learning skills.”

#### **4c. Community Music (CM)**

The pedagogic concept informing CM activity in Lebanon does not differ substantially from PM’s locally based project in Italy. It stems from “an understanding of music and its role in empowering the person” (Ruud, 2008) and from the conviction that music is not just an entertaining pastime, but that it really can promote social change and thus transform quality of life for people. However, as Boeskov (2017) points out, in complex and compromised social



Video excerpt 4:  
Community Music  
activities  
[https://youtu.be/  
xh1R74oRyKk](https://youtu.be/xh1R74oRyKk)



contexts such as that of M&R, it should not be assumed that impact will be exclusively positive; on the contrary, Action Learning has revealed that, alongside clear benefits, many ambivalent relationships emerge, which need to be recognized as “ambiguous or even conflictual” (Boeskov, 2017, p.89). Theory of Change explains this challenging phenomenon by acknowledging the complexity of transformation processes, in which moments of crisis offer opportunities to rethink relationships and structures, leading to new phases of development. “Transformation requires and is borne out of the ripening and surfacing of crisis” (Wheeler, 2007, p.16).

Participating in music, be it through singing, playing or listening, is a characteristic of humankind, and there is virtually no society that does not have some kind of collective music-making. Yet in our society, a large proportion of music learning happens on a one-to-one basis, in contradiction to its social nature. This kind of teaching often focuses on affirmed repertoire and the competence to reproduce it, fuelling a selective system of competitions to define the best, most technically brilliant young musician. All this works against music as a promoter of an inclusive and cooperative society. It is, however, possible to teach music differently. Rather than focusing on Pink Floyd, Beethoven, or Fairuz, CM places the person who is learning at the centre of the learning experience; the challenge then is to understand the musician inside that person and to *educate*<sup>10</sup> this inherent quality. Here again we meet the person-centered approach to care and learning that was discussed in Section 3. There is no such thing as an a-musical person. Life pulsates in us through vibrations, and vibrations are sounds; people are sounds. When this philosophy is put into practice, the starting point for music-making is the creation of a togetherness, exactly as in a society. A healthy society needs people who fulfil different roles: a clarinetist, a percussionist, a cellist. Music can bring together musicians of diverse capacities; groups can include people who have been learning for only a few months with those of many years’ experience.

10. **Educare**, from Latin: “e” (out) and “ducare” (to lead), hence “to lead out, to draw out”.  
[english-ingles.com/etymology-of-education](http://english-ingles.com/etymology-of-education)



CM actions tend towards inclusion, in the sense that no line is drawn between those who are “musical” and those who are not. As Brynjulf Stige writes:

“This change in perspective has implications for the conception of musicality, which no longer could be thought of as a gift for the happy few but rather as a shared capacity of the human species”

(Stige, in Stige, Ansdell, Elefant and Pavlicevic, 2010: 7)

This is appreciable in PM’s local community in Tuscany, where the CM project struggles to guarantee access to music formation and participation to diversely able people, disadvantaged families, immigrants, and asylum seekers. However, within the context of marginalized communities such as that of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the concept of *inclusion* demands more attention. For these communities, it is *exclusion* which defines existence at all levels; exclusion dictated by the hegemony of a hostile “host” state, which condemns the younger generations to grow without self-esteem and with countless difficulties which begin in the home and influence their entire lives. Despite this, Assumoud, as a non-sectarian and humanitarian organization, offers its services to all disadvantaged people, irrespective of nationality, creed, or political affiliation. As a protection factor contrasting the chronic state of exclusion experienced by the Palestinians, CM offers hospitality, as defined by Higgins: “unconditionality, a welcome without reservation, without previous calculation, ... an unlimited display of reception towards a potential music participant” (Higgins, 2012a, p.108) The inclusion factor therefore comprises an unconditional invitation to Palestinian refugee children and their local trainers, to take their rightful place as community musicians beside their European counterparts, exploring, and learning together.

M&R develops CM in two camp locations: Tripoli, in the north of Lebanon, and Sidon, in the south (see Figure 3 at the beginning of Section 4). These two camps are very different; Beddawi Camp (Tripoli) is “open,” allowing free access without particular tensions. In Sidon the camp of Ein El Hilweh is permanently controlled by the Lebanese forces and entry permits are extremely difficult to obtain. The M&R team has never been inside, and the children living in the camp often cannot leave to come to the CM locations (the Assumoud Centre, or the local UNRWA school), where training takes place.

Sessions begin with musical games, as in the PSS music workshops, using body percussion, voice, and instruments to create rhythms and musical forms. The concept of “making a mistake” is avoided, since it is counter-productive. Ensemble work begins from the community’s cultural heritage, Palestinian and Arabic repertoire, an essential resource for a population uprooted from its historical and social background, and is complemented by Italian and Western repertoire. Suggestions for pieces come from students and teachers alike, and choices are made collectively. As for the Italian young orchestral group (video



excerpt 1), repertoire is arranged by PM's musical director, carefully calibrating instrumental parts to fit the very varied technical levels of the players, so that no one is left out. The project brings students from different camp locations to play together, since the opportunities for interaction with peers from other camp communities are otherwise virtually non-existent. It also focuses on developing teaching skills in older students, who can then teach the younger musicians. This strategy contributes to the project's sustainability at a local level, and promotes skills and competences in the Palestinian student teacher trainees, which, in turn, supports their self-esteem and sense of value in the community. For the younger children, there is a great difference between training with an external European musician, and peer-learning with more experienced members of their own community, who become models representing new possibilities of growth and development. Recognizing and nurturing this potential in the teacher trainees fosters a sense of self-sufficiency and agency in the community, in healthy contrast to the status quo of total dependency in which it has been forced to live for over 70 years.

Mohamad Orabi has observed the benefits of CM for children, many of whom have come through the clinical music therapy services and have been subsequently integrated into the music groups, as he explained at the seminar:

“This project action is highly significant as an educational resource for the teenagers. We should consider the extreme deprivation in which these children grow up, which leads many of them to become members of armed groups. All our youth are vulnerable to stress and risk factors such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse. They need protection, and this project represents a real resource in this sense. The young generation faces a significant challenge to find a healthy identity and sense of belonging; the CM project offers a safe environment in which they can share and enjoy a group activity. The stories of two students are indicative. Both have severe problems; one suffers from selective mutism and the other from epilepsy. Both have language difficulties and cannot speak English. For both of these teenagers CM has proved to be a great resource; the first adolescent, from Sidon, has been able to overcome his anxieties for the first time, to find courage to make positive relationships with peers and to play an instrument with them in a contained and gratifying way. The second teenager, in Tripoli, after completing a MT treatment, learnt his instrument and teaching competences well enough to become one of the student teachers of the group.”

This latter student has told his story in his own words, as a contribution to the 2018 Annual Report of Assumoud's main sponsor for M&R, Ta'awon<sup>11</sup>:

“I was 13, a stubborn and troublesome child. Most of my friends had been detained by the police many times. One day, I hit a boy with a sharp instrument while defending myself. It was then that I was referred to the Beit Atfal Assumoud institution to receive psychological assistance... I was advised to enroll in music therapy classes and after a while, as I was doing well, I moved to normal music classes and started playing the flute... I became less anxious; even the number of epileptic

11. Ta'awon (Welfare) is Palestine's largest NGO, with headquarters in Ramallah, London and Lebanon: [www.taawon.org](http://www.taawon.org).





12. Ta'awon Lebanon, 2018. "Towards Constructing a better reality, Annual Report 2018", p. 32: [www.taawon-lebanon.org](http://www.taawon-lebanon.org).

seizures that I suffered dropped. I built new friendships and felt like I belonged to a new family who cared about me."<sup>12</sup>

The final part of the project narration is entrusted to three of the younger European participants in M&R's 2019 actions; testimonies which concluded the seminar in January 2020. Their words bear witness to the quality of reflexive thinking promoted by this very intense exchange experience.

Michele (15 years old):

"I was in Beddawi and made good friends with Hadi, 12 years old, who plays clarinet, like me. Hadi came on the residential course during our 2nd week, where we prepared the program for the final concert. We spent a lot of time together and became very close; we were both the youngest members of our respective groups. He was a very serious learner, and would often continue practising difficult passages without taking a break. His determination paid off; in the end he managed to play everything, which was amazing considering that he has only been playing for a year or two. The whole experience led me to discover and value aspects of myself of which I was unaware, such as spending time with children and teaching them music, which I really enjoyed. It was an incredibly enriching experience, at a cultural and a human level."

Emilio (28 years old, professional clarinettist):

"In addition to being a worthwhile and enjoyable activity, music-making can often be a very pertinent metaphor for life in general. During one of the rehearsals one of the Palestinian guitarists was playing out of time with the rest of the group. Henry did not tell him that he was wrong, but simply observed that he was so highly concentrated on playing a difficult passage, that he had forgotten the group, and that listening to the others, learning to trust the group, could help him to resolve his difficulties. What a caring and important message for someone living in his situation!"

Hanna (17 years old):

"I couldn't avoid comparing my, our life to theirs. There are of course similarities between us; the music we listen to, the films we watch ... but their view of life is completely different from ours. For example, they can't run in a field of grain and be free. Everything is narrow and crowded for them. Maybe they have never experienced the openness of the sky or the infinity of Nature as we do here. I love Nature, and the fact that they don't have this ..."

[Hanna is overcome by emotion and not able to continue; the audience, also visibly moved, responds with a long applause].



## 5. *Building Resources: Why Music Must be Made*

Hanna's reflection reiterates the human ethic driving the project and reminds us of the importance attributed to emotion in person-centered interventions, which, in the case of M&R, are framed and channeled by and through music. That music is potentially a powerful generator of social change is borne out by diverse theories. Community music practice (Higgins, 2012) recognizes music as a primary resource for individual expression, communication and social well-being. Music is extensively present in everyday life (Tagg, 2013)<sup>13</sup>, whether purposely or casually, and serves an infinity of interconnected purposes, including pure enjoyment, relaxation, education, artistic expression, and therapeutic care (MacDonald, 2013). Music is also significantly present in terms of its effects on the individual, ranging from basic metabolic changes (Yamasaki et al., 2012) to more complex neurological and psychological influences, including perception, memory, and emotions (Baumgartner, 1992). Without denying the fact that music can be a chosen profession, necessitating adequate training, community music celebrates the universal human inclination towards creating, discovering, and learning with sound, whether this be a baby gurgling to a parent, a hungry toddler discovering the potential of a fork bashed on the table, or an amateur musician playing with friends. Innate musicality has extremely deep roots, which start to develop before birth, laying the foundations for "communicative musicality" (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009), which colors all human interactions throughout life. Humans are intensely musical animals, and music is part of what defines humanity.

Contemporary community music practice has developed over the last eight decades into a globally present and highly complex constellation responding to the concept of music as a primary resource for individual expression, communication and social well-being (Higgins, 2012b; Bartleet & Higgins 2018). Veblen (2007) writes of "CM typologies" and underlines the fact that "Community music is always shaped and defined by particular social settings" (Veblen, 2007, p.2). As an alternative to the restricting nature of a definition, Veblen proposes five domains in which general characteristics common to all CM practice can be discerned: "(a) the kinds of music and music making involved in a CM program; (b) the intentions of the leaders or participants in a program; (c) the characteristics of the participants; (d) the interactions among teaching-learning aims, knowledge, and strategies; and (e) interplays between informal and formal social-educational-cultural contexts" (Veblen, 2007, p.2). Some of the salient features arising from these domains are that: music-making is active, embraces all genres of music and styles of music-making, and takes place in an unlimited range of social, cultural, and educational locations; the educational context is that of open access and permanent education, prioritizing process over product and nurturing individual and collective well-being; the range of participants is unlimited, conditioned only by specific context; similarly, a wide

13. An estimate, for an urbanized western inhabitant, is 4 hours and 17 minutes of active and/or passive daily musical exposure (Tagg, 2013: 36)



range of terms denotes the leaders, reflecting their social and relational functions alongside their musical competence; action learning is characteristic and involves teachers and learners alike in a flexible and non-hierarchical sharing of responsibility; the complex and ambiguous term *community* defines not only what is inside, but also, by default, the surroundings which are outside, evoking the mosaic of resulting inter-relations between informal and formal structures, both implicit and explicit.

Huib Schippers (2018) offers a useful distinction between three main contexts for CM, the first of which, “Community music as an ‘organic’ phenomenon,” reminds us that from the beginning of human culture, and long before the term came into being, communities have been making their own meaningful music. “Community music as an intervention” denotes the social need “for active interventions to establish or restore practices” (Schippers, 2018, p.23) which arose during the last century and continues to be relevant in many contexts, and where the project under examination in this study is situated. Schipper’s third context, “institutionalized community music,” reminds us that most formal music making originated from the need to create long-term structures for music making, and reflects the challenge of sustainability of music resources and services within every socio-cultural context.

One of the most important institutions nurturing CM is the Community Music Activity Commission (CMA), affiliated to the International Society for Music Education, which promotes music education and music making for all. CMA’s vision states that: “Community music activities ... provide opportunities to construct personal and communal expressions of artistic, social, political, and cultural concerns” and “contribute to the development of economic regeneration and can enhance the quality of life for communities” and “can complement, interface with, and extend formal music education.”<sup>14</sup>

Community music projects seek to develop inclusive and accessible music resources within the context of their local territories, in recognition of the valued contribution which every member of the community can offer. Higgins’s interpretation of “community” as unconditional hospitality, discussed earlier in relation to communities living in perennial exclusion, identifies an essential component for inclusion and accessibility “that results in an experience of a greater sense of connectivity among and between participants, and between participants and the music” (Higgins, as cited in McPherson & Welch, 2012, p.109). The generation of richer social relations and sense of belonging can be understood within the concept of social capital, and community music activities are recognized as having inherent properties supporting and facilitating this, as Simon Procter has stated:

“The cycle of risk and reciprocation required for the generation of social capital requires people to enter the cycle at some point: ... Crucially, musicing<sup>15</sup> doesn't leave people alone to throw themselves into the circle. Instead it actively supports them in a number of ways:

14. Source: [www.isme.org/our-work/commissions-forum/community-music-activity-commission-cma](http://www.isme.org/our-work/commissions-forum/community-music-activity-commission-cma). Accessed August 2020.

15. The term refers to Christopher Small’s theory, discussed in the subsequent paragraph.



- Musicing's norms are culturally constructed...
- Musical structure acts as a physical framework for participation...
- Musical participation offers new experiences of time and hence of being together...
- We are hard-wired for musical participation."

(Procter, 2011: 252-3)

Finally, musician Christopher Small (1998) reminds us that the primary significance of all music lies in the field of action it affords for those who participate in it. His provocative statement "There is no such thing as music" (Small, 1998, p.2) is strategic in moving our attention away from the "product" and towards the "process", as he specifies: "Music is not a thing at all, but an activity, something that people do" (Small, 1998, p.2). Accordingly, Small transforms the substantive "music" into the gerund "*musicking*," where the sense of action is explicit, and invents the verb "*to music*." Furthermore, the field of action afforded by musicking is identified clearly in terms of its social significance and potential: "... for whatever else it might be, all musicking is ultimately a political act" (Small, 1998, p.213). Small invites us to consider musicking as "an aspect of the language of biological communication... part of the survival equipment of every human being" (Small, 1998, p.210). If music is understood as a primary human resource, generating protection for social well-being, then it will be invoked with justification where well-being is threatened and risk factors abound.

## **6. Keeping Safe: The Perils of International Cooperation**

In the best of all worlds, social capital represents one of the unlimited, renewable, and therefore sustainable resources available to humanity, and its accumulation provides the fuel for the motor of positive social change supported by international cooperation. Unfortunately though, as envisaged by Bourdieu, the relentless power of globalization and neoliberalism has found ways of controlling and exploiting this precious resource. The mechanisms behind this appropriation are described by South African social facilitator Doug Reeler. "Development has become a global project" (Reeler, 2007, p.3), sweeping economic resources up into the capitalist spiral, and under the control of world corporate management, thus destroying the hitherto more local, and direct relationships between administrators, donors and third sector organizations. Civil society organizations are no longer seen as the legitimate promoters of change, but as "puppet agencies," delivering programmes and "solutions" decided by a distant central corporate commission, within a global design which has no time or space for local niceties. The funding of development is transforming into "a marketplace governed by tender processes and business-talk" (Reeler, 2007, p.3), forcing operative organizations into the stressful position of having to deliver results, with aggressive requests for accountability. Reeler sees this as a further threat to the quality of work:



“It is the season of accountability. Projects promise this. But over the past few years, almost every organisation or project I have visited is stressed with issues of monitoring and evaluation, anxiously shopping around for methodologies to measure and report on impact to satisfy donors. Adverts for M&E specialists abound as donors seek to further outsource this function to experts, robbing organisations of rich learning processes to which M&E should contribute.”

(Reeler, 2007: 4)

The principle challenge here is whose agenda should be followed. *Monitoring* and *evaluation* are indeed ugly and frightening words, when they are associated with the threat that projects “can be turned on and off, like taps” (Reeler, 2007, p.4). But there is a far simpler significance of these processes, which have been refined and mastered by humanity and indeed all forms of life since the beginning of evolution. Monitoring and evaluation have to do with understanding what is working and what is not, whether this be internally through means of neurobiological feedback, within the context of relationship to the environment, or within sophisticated social relations. The ensuing information serves to “adjust the pitch,” to “change direction” if necessary, in order to keep on course with respect to the aims (Cozolino, 2014). These mechanisms are therefore essential aspects of all “goal-set” processes.

The promotion of positive social change depends on keen attention to the specific social context and therefore cannot be aligned with an impersonal, global view. People are people, communities are communities; respect for the diversity and complexity of the human condition, in whichever place and time it dwells is the baseline for humane development.

M&R has learnt to develop many defense strategies as protection against these risks, in order to keep the project out of the marketplace and safely in the hands of the community it seeks to support. These include:

- *a careful structuring of the financial framework.* Although initial funding (2012-15) was secured by PM through local Italian regional invitations to tender, in parallel, all possible pathways for direct funding to Assumoud were investigated, resulting in 2016 in a funding contract between Assumoud and the NGO Ta’awon Lebanon, which has been consolidated and formalized into a long term collaboration. This has meant that Assumoud has been empowered to take financial ownership of the project, with a view to future autonomy and sustainability,
- *keeping coordination costs to a minimum, with no management costs.* M&R exists due to the community participation in its actions, both within the local Palestinian community in Lebanon and within PM’s music community which extends over Italian borders into many other European countries (Germany, Belgium, France, UK, Switzerland, Spain). There is no need for management, but coordination is necessary for both of the principal partners, in order to give form to all emergent aspects of the project as it proceeds,



- *at an operational level, recognizing first and foremost the “exchange” quality of work.* Whilst the project is clearly one of international cooperation, any sense of hierarchy (PM is helping Assumoud) or dependency (Assumoud needs PM) needs constant contrasting at many different levels. For example, European musicians and trainers, who arrive in the camp locations to work together with the local staff, are often treated by the latter as inspectors, coming to judge the quality of the local work; we have learnt to verbalise this immediately and clearly with our Palestinian colleagues, in order to clarify that we are with them to learn together, and that they are far more qualified than us in terms of knowledge and understanding of the local community and how the project can grow there, and
- *attending to monitoring and evaluation internally and constantly.* Simple and direct ways are used, within the context of Reeler’s “action learning” cycle (Reeler, 2007: 20-21). The seminar illustrated in this study is one such example; such events reflect the various actions, and involve participants and representatives at operational, coordination and funding levels. This is like good house-keeping, and is the job of the members of the project’s extended “family,” in order to make the best possible use of the available resources. Avoiding the marketplace of international cooperation, by maintaining a small-scale, local and direct structure, brings the advantage of avoiding also the fear of accountability to a global master.

## **7. Looking Ahead: Reflecting on the Future**

This article has adopted a number of different epistemological lenses to narrate and assess where M&R is after eight years of development. The frames of thinking, from ethnography and sociology to psychology and community music pedagogy, reflect the range of competences within the project team, all of which are essential in supporting and refining the team’s capacity to carry out the steps in the Action Learning Cycle. Constant attention to improving skills in monitoring, observing, reflecting, and learning is a protection factor for the capacity to “adjust the pitch” appropriately in the re-planning of the project’s actions.

Community music pedagogy underlines the importance of context, which is unique to each situation and activity. The ethnographic lens is essential here, in order to bridge the experiential and existential gap between the two cultures involved, particularly in consideration of the asymmetry between Europeans who enjoy full civil rights and Palestinian refugees in exile who are denied them. Acknowledgment, awareness and knowledge of this imbalance permits the building of a shared music community where exchange can occur. Frameworks of thinking from sociology contextualize the way the music-making evolves within social and cultural development, keeping view of the broader horizon of possible social change to which community music-making can con-



tribute. Psychological competence informs the relational essence of the project's actions, and works hand in hand with community music pedagogy within the psycho-social music workshops and the clinical areas of music intervention. Fortunately, M&R is just one of a number of projects developing music resources together with Assumoud in Lebanon. It is by no means the first; for almost twenty years now, the Norwegian Academy of Music has led a similar project in one of the Southern camps (Storsve et al., 2010), pioneering the discovery of music's benefits in this context: "A project that was initially implemented as a 'cultural' activity has thus become a health promotion strategy." (Lenette & Sunderland, 2016). Another project runs in the Beirut camps under the direction of Al Kamandjati association<sup>15</sup>. In recent years, students and teachers from these projects have come together with M&R participants to work and study together, in an exchange of best practices, which represents a significant protection factor for the future of music-making for PRs in Lebanon.

15. [www.alkamandjati.org/en/article/933/Lebanon](http://www.alkamandjati.org/en/article/933/Lebanon)

M&R gives form to human relationships based on solidarity and empathy, providing a musical framework for standing shoulder to shoulder with one of the world's most marginalized communities. While striving to increase the musical resources of this community, in order to improve the protection of the younger generations and, through them, to lay the way for a better future for the whole community, actions bring young people together to make music of many kinds in real time. These experiences represent positive bio-psycho-social building blocks, irrespective of what will happen in the future. The project continues to run because of the many people who believe in this quality of togetherness, despite the countless contingency problems of a marginalized community within a chronically unstable host country. Assumoud's Director General, Kassem Aina, is used to large scale global projects starting up and then ending suddenly; he is thankful for this small project which endures and which continues to accompany the fate of his largely "unheard and unseen" community<sup>16</sup>.

16. Personal communication, July 2015.

As a protection factor against the uncertainty of the future, M&R aims to promote self-sufficiency in music resources for this community, in the hope that one day the project will no longer be a necessity, but that collaboration and exchange can continue with fully competent young Palestinian musical colleagues.



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