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Promoting a musical lifecourse towards sustainable ageing: A call for policy congruence

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Abstract

Today, individually perceived quality of life for a growing ageing population could be said to be significantly dependent on meaningful life experiences, social connectedness and a sense of purpose. In this article, we argue for a wider theorization of policy and the politics of ageing. The central aim is to reflect on understandings of ageing within music education and musical participation, and, in particular, shift the focus from *active ageing – and* the ways it might support the narrow agenda of music for older adults – to the potentials of holistic and sustainable learning and participation in music. To do so, we draw from the concept of policy congruence, presenting a vision of policy as a critical catalyst that may amplify parameters for concerted initiatives among multiple constituencies within music education. We argue these amplified parameters may afford renewed efforts towards transdisciplinary action that can support the actions of community musicians and strengthen their role as networked actors labouring in consonance with others in the growingly significant areas of lifelong learning and ageing populations. Our stance is that, if we can assume that music education and musical participation have a serious contribution to make in the lives and well-being of individuals across the lifespan, including older adults, then we ought to consider how systematic policy engagement may actively contribute to appropriate allocation of resources and renewed pedagogical and organizational framings, which more directly use lifelong learning to support sustainable ageing.

policy congruence

music education

older adults

Introduction

Improving the quality of life of ageing populations is of growing interest among researchers and policy-makers. Along with the increased life-expectancy, medical advances, urbanization, education and economic growth, western societies have worked to ensure that certain cornerstones of well-being (reasonably good physical health and satisfaction of material needs) are largely fulfilled as people are ageing. However, physical health and economic well-being are not the only measures of 'good ageing'. Indeed, in our current high welfare societies, the shortcomings and problems related to well-being have by no means disappeared, but rather changed their shape. It is plausible to argue that individually perceived quality of life (interpreted here as a proxy for well-being) is – particularly in our current context – very much dependent on meaningful life experiences, social connectedness and a sense of purpose. What is more, it is not only a matter of how ageing individuals see themselves but also, how they feel that others see them (Hunt 2017: 264). In other words, in supporting a more critical engagement with quality of participation and services in later life, issues such as ageism and social marginalization, as well as the interconnectedness between generations and the risks related to the lack of it, cannot be ignored. In order to ensure a good quality of life for older individuals now and in the future, it is important to more precisely and convincingly articulate a holistic and multidisciplinary perspective, which also requires policy involvement.

While human well-being is still treated predominantly from a material point of view, in recent decades the 'sociology of ageing' has developed aspects of *active* and *participatory* citizenship (Phillipson 2013; Hunt 2017). This approach is based on a positive lifecourse design that entails optimal cognitive and physical functioning through engaging in multiple social activities, framed within general aims of preparing and planning for later life (Hunt 2017: 259; see also Boudiny 2013). While this view challenges earlier sociological views on ageing, by suggesting that ageing should be 'recognised as an integral part of the life course that should be socially valued' (Hunt 2017: 259), active ageing has been also widely criticized for creating stereotypes that do not necessarily have a positive effect on how ageing individuals perceive themselves (e.g., Walker 2008, 2017; Katz 2013; Phillipson 2013; Estes et al. 2003). Indeed, the goals of active ageing are largely based on external demands, regularly aligned with and incorporated into political rhetoric that views participation and activity as duties rather than rights by emphasizing productivity (Walker 2008; see also Biesta 2006).

In the attempts of approaching the goals of quality of life more broadly, we see potential in musical participation that enables the incorporation of all aspects of self-defined well-being (social connectedness, meaningful self-perception and a sense of purpose) that can also be harnessed to resist stereotypical perceptions of ageing (Laes 2015). A *lifecourse* perspective on music education and musical participation becomes useful when looking at the possibilities more broadly than those universally designed for just one cohort. Indeed, lifecourse theory takes into account social transformations and cultural variation and abandons social construction of 'life stages' such as childhood, youth or old age (Hunt 2017). While lifecourse can be examined on biological, psychological and social dimensions, here we focus on later life by approaching lifecourse first and foremost as a social construction,

which is to say by focusing on how understandings and expectations regarding ageing are constituted through words and actions.

Ageing indeed does not happen in a void. Uncertainty and lack of predictability shape our lives and warrant critical analysis of any activity designed for one age cohort. Lifecourse theory takes into account social inequalities and demographic variables that may have an impact on life experiences as well as the construction of personal agency due to the increasing variety of choice in late-modern western societies (Hunt 2017; see also Bauman 2000). For us, two compounding central issues emerge here. The first concerns the diversification of standpoints through which community music education research and practice engaged with the arena of lifelong learning and ageing could approach the sociopolitical realities of how discourse informs policy debate and decision-making. This first issue thus potentially impacts how our research and practices are perceived and received or how our programmes may be funded. The second issue concerns the question of how to expand and support integrated approaches that might support the development of an agenda whereby music education in and through community can become a further legitimized aspect and space in the social construction of ageing. If we can assume that music education and musical participation have a serious contribution to make in the lives and well-being of individuals across the lifespan, including older adults, then we ought to consider how systematic policy engagement may become a more embedded parameter for analysis and consideration, actively contributing to appropriate allocation of resources and renewed curricular, pedagogical and organizational framings, which more directly use lifelong learning and more directly foment older adult learning.

This is not simply rhetoric, nor an academic exercise. If we look at the historical changes in the ways in which community music projects were funded in the last three decades in the

United Kingdom, we see, clearly, the manner in which politics and policy significantly altered the space, reach and labour conditions of professionals and users in that area. In Canada, the serious and integrated work developed by music therapists, and their embeddedness into the health and civic support systems made available by the government is another example of how professional action, mindful of policy realities/contexts/frameworks, can have tangible results; established by a tangible structure. On the meso/micro level, our own work (Laes and Schmidt 2016) shows the ways in which policy awareness and policy dispositions (Schmidt 2017) can, over time, re-organize in productive ways the relationship and co-dependence between an organization's own policy discourses, practice renewal, communication with stakeholders and, consequently, how resources are used, and support is sought.

With an interest in the wider theorization of policy and politics of ageing, the aim of this article is to reflect on understandings of ageing within music education and musical participation, and in particular, shift the focus from active ageing – and the ways it might support the narrow agenda of music for older adults – to the potentials of holistic and sustainable lifelong learning and participation in music throughout the lifecourse.

In order to do this, we will first offer a brief overview on how ageing is approached in recent music education discussions. Then, we will examine shifts in the lifelong learning policy discourse and its impact on the current understandings of the 'need' for educational efforts and resources directed to older adults. We will discuss our observations on the effects that the new language of learning (Biesta 2005) might have on the policy and practice of music education in later adulthood. Finally, by offering a case of the complex dynamics between policy, service system and educational needs, we examine what could actually be done in order to harness musical participation and music education for the needs of the ageing people

in a sustainable and ethical way. Thus, we aim to construct a policy framework for sustainable ageing that could be put in action in and through musical participation and music education.

Fresh perspectives on music education and musical participation in later life

Recent studies, especially in the UK context, have shown the vast cognitive, physical and social benefits of active musical participation for older adults (Creech et al. 2013; Hallam et al. 2013; Hallam and Creech 2016; Perkins and Williamon 2014). While these studies do not particularly emphasize the educational task, or learning, as a central goal of the activity, music education among older adults might often achieve the same goals, even if the activity is described as primarily learning-oriented rather than focusing on the well-being effects. Music educators have long addressed the need for music education frameworks in later adulthood that do not merely replicate existing music programmes for children (with some minor adjustments). Instead, several authors address the need for a renewed set of aims and practices that align with contextual requirements of ageing societies. These, it is said, can only be achieved by expanding and deepening our pedagogical understandings of teaching and learning interactions among older adults, and the justifications for the relevance of music education in later adulthood (Dabback 2010; Laes 2015; see also Myers 2008).

Current social, educational and political discourses regarding ageing are largely grounded by some version of the *active ageing discourse* that emphasizes being physically and socially active without necessarily defining how these goals should be achieved and what kind of resources would be needed (Phillipson 2013: 45). Hence, as it has been argued, the activity discourse has been used as a way for transforming lifelong learning from right to obligation (Biesta 2006). This risk seems to also penetrate music education through the increasing emphasis of operating efficiency and health benefits of music for older adults (Laes 2015). However, more recently, it has been also suggested that the significance of music for the

perceived quality of life among older adults could be evaluated in the context of *creative ageing* (Creech et al. 2020). This welcomed perspective seems to turn the focus more towards the lifecourse and away from the assumed neurological effects used as an advocacy for music without considering the repercussions of advancing this kind of discourse.

Issues of the legitimacy of musical participation and learning indeed become interesting when viewed from the perspective of people in the post-employment phase. In many ways, people in retirement are at risk of being socially marginalized when they leave working life behind. Categorizing and treating people on the basis of calendar age can unintentionally increase the risk of exclusion and negative self-perception. The same risk may occur when justifying the need for musical activity among older adults through the assumed health benefits, thus drawing attention to the medical aspects and 'problematisation' of ageing (Estes et al. 2003). However, there is no doubt that the wider paradigm shift of lifelong learning has had an impact on music education and how we address the needs of ageing populations in our field. Hence, in the following, we will broaden the insights on the legitimacy issue by scrutinizing the paramount and intractable shift in the global lifelong learning policy.

Lifelong learning paradigm shift

Over the last 40 years, policy paradigms guiding lifelong learning have moved from the holistic idea of *learning to be* (Faure et al. 1972) to those strongly reliant on utilitarian and economic values. In practical terms, this has meant a shift from personal meaning-making and social network goals to the establishment of adult learning as related to workforce training and upgrading, legitimized by the needs of political economy – learning to be productive and employable (Biesta 2006). Following the introduction of the new OECD policy framework 'Lifelong learning for all' (1996), such discourse shift has been identified and widely criticized within educational policy research (e.g., Field 2000; Biesta 2005,

2006). Critics have stated that this educational policy development and political experimentation has led to a *new educational order* (Field 2000) that can be described as the survival of the fittest within the learning economy. Here then, individuals no longer just have the right to build their own educational paths through the lifecourse. Rather, they find themselves framed by a *duty to engage*, legitimizing the opportunities afforded in and by lifelong learning by demonstrating themselves to be useful players in society and, in particular, within the labour market. Accompanying such views – and establishing them further – is the emergence of a new *language of learning*, which in postmodernist fashion has altered both the meaning of learning and emphases in education, making *alternatives* more difficult to be articulated (Biesta 2005). Significantly to community music, frameworks such as active citizenship, while ostensibly designed to incentivize participation in 'services', have narrowed pathways for participation and programme development, while making it harder to advocate and justify the age-old potential of art as a source of human development; even when it is not a matter of professional development or the utilization of special talent.

As a result, adult education has become adult learning, changing the focus of lifelong engagements within the educative process from everyone's right to everyone's duty (Biesta 2006). If indeed this reading is apt and pervasive, the outcome is a foreclosing in individuals' abilities to construct their own educational paths throughout the lifespan. Alongside other scholars, we see this as a further encroachment of labour into personal realms of life, extending the 'responsibility' to engage in lifelong training and prove oneself 'useful' onto older adulthood and retirement. In other words, the language of lifelong learning has shifted from the egalitarian justification of growth, towards the obligation that emphasizes the role of education as serving the needs of wage-work society. Unsurprisingly, such views are part and parcel to larger, ever-more prescriptive education policy structures where education is

seen as a transaction or a commodity between the learner (consumer) and the educator or education institution (provider) (Ball 2006; Biesta 2005).

Troubling also is the fact that scholars in the field of older adult education have raised their concern regarding how the fields of lifelong learning and later life have been differentiated (Findsen and Formosa 2011), making it increasingly difficult to convince policy-makers that lifelong learning is worth investing in. Following the demands of critical gerontologists (e.g., Estes 2001; Walker 2017; Findsen and Formosa 2011), reducing the discourse of ageing to the issues of physical decline on the individual level and economic burden on the societal level must be challenged also in music education. In our own considerations, we believe this requires developing a critical later adulthood music education (Laes 2015) in order to enable the construction of new ageing identities and intergenerational spaces, while regaining agency in all dimensions of life and society throughout the lifecourse. To develop a critical and responsive view, we need to begin by uncovering and understanding how 'ageism' is maintained in music education through the social construction of ageing. Complementary, in order to construct relational understandings for a new and sustainable lifelong learning agenda in music educational contexts, it is necessary that we fully situate our argument through an account of ageing in music education based on social and political dimensions, moving away from the current individualistic focus (Walker 2017).

Setting the agenda

In this article we ask:

> What new ways of thinking can we reach through the lifecourse perspective when considering the needs and potentials of musical participation and music education in later life?

> Following the lifecourse perspective, what kind of policy congruence can we build for musical participation and music education in later life in order to promote sustainable ageing?

Through these explorations, we aim to establish a policy congruence in order to challenge the path dependency (i.e., persistent institutional and structural conditions that may be resistant to change, see Laes et al. 2021) of a musical lifecourse – possibly one of the most crucial points when shifting the theoretical perspective away from life cycle towards lifecourse. Indeed, lifecourse as a methodological approach requires taking into account fundamental sociocultural transformations and variation (Hunt 2017: 10–11). Hence, in our policy analysis, we use an integrated approach that is based on the multidisciplinary nature of the lifecourse perspective and the recognition of the importance to connect macro and micro levels of theory and analysis (Hunt 2017: 33).

Establishing policy congruence

Available literature and changing social reality points to the notion that the usual three-stage division of human life – education, career, retirement – will change towards a multi-staged life along with the expanding life expectancy (e.g., Gratton and Scott 2016). Thus, ageing populations (we) need to gain transformational skills to allocate time in meaningful ways throughout the lifecourse, including acquiring new knowledge, building new networks, exploring new identities, and letting go of old roles (Gratton and Scott 2016). This is in fact considered one of the most crucial components of handling the ageing population challenge along with medical and economic divisions. Along the same lines, the World Health Organization (2003) has identified different psychosocial factors that are imperative to the protection and promotion of adults' well-being, including a sense of purpose and direction in life, emotionally rewarding social relationships, and social integration. Indeed, these goals can be seen to connect with self-directed adult education in terms of emancipatory learning

and social action (Merriam 2001). Hence, in constructing a sustainable frame for music education throughout the lifecourse, we suggest it to be imperative to include lifelong learning at the centre of an integrated, cross-disciplinary understanding of policy and politics of music education in an ageing society.

The notion of path dependency might be significant here to understand why we suggest more close considerations as to how arts and community music as a field might consider policy practice and policy knowhow (Schmidt 2017, 2018, 2020a, 2020b) when undertaking complex intersections as those integral to lifelong learning and older adulthood. As we argue below, professional practice and programmes that disregard the variance of older adulthood as a category and fail to consider flexible programming with pluralistic aims and structures, are more likely to be seen as lacking in salience (from the standpoint of government) and resonance (from the standpoint of participants/users). The problem might be (at least) dual. First, as we exemplify below, our concern is that ideological path dependency (e.g., Kay 2005) has come to frame social and health services for ageing adults, determined by the paradigmatic and political discourses articulated in the previous section. Second, but just as significant, is the problem of congruence that emerges both from a misalignment between policy promises and policy outcome, as well as a mismatch between policy assumptions and the nuanced and highly variable realities of this population. Lastly, it is worth highlighting that we see these having applications at all levels of practice. At the personal and programme levels, with decisions about content, approach, targeting populations, understanding limitations, designing adaptable offerings, etc. At the organizational level both the field – its practitioners and scholars – would be implicated here, but also and particularly, professional organizations, non-for-profits, councils and so on. Lastly, this has implications too for how formal policy texts are framed and guidelines for action, funding, professional standards, reporting, to cite a few, are developed.

Understanding and *translating* literature such as the one on policy congruence (Dingler 2018; Lesschaeve 2017; Kehoe 2003) might be just one example of a meaningful connection with policy practice that can prove influential towards strategic planning, grant writing, and of course, programme design. At a local level of policy practice, congruence means a matching of expectations between say, what programmes promise and deliver – not just in terms of participant relations but also in terms of reportable data on that work. High levels of congruence are more likely to be perceived as having high levels of responsiveness – and ability to follow through – which in turn can become a key factor in determining both sustainable funding as well as equitable access to services (Lesschaeve 2017). Naturally, we as practitioners and scholars cannot address the whole of such a complex environment, but we can contribute meaningfully to it, developing a voice, practice and activism that are informed in ways that are more likely to find resonance with non-music/arts disciplines, organizations and again, government.

The ramifications of this kind of framing could be rather constructive. In terms of scholarship, a policy congruence approach to developing an agenda for *sustainable ageing* might mean a more global exploration of preferences and expectations of older adults in relationship to the arts (see below in Finland). To cite a brief example, one could follow the notion of 'substantive representation' as developed by Dingler (2018), which might help us understand complex and adapting groups, but also could facilitate better pathways for advocacy on behalf of older adults through music/arts-based programmes/engagements. Below we describe how framing an analysis of 'hidden' elements such as social status – which are actively influencers but often unaddressed – might help in *agenda construction* for sustainable ageing, facilitating points of intersection with other fields, while placing music within important social contract discussions regarding wide-reaching issues such as inequity and social justice. As Kehoe (2003) has articulated, policy congruence is also

critical in the formation of trust; a factor that is observable in health and social sciences in both interpersonal and systemic (organizational) ways. Naturally, and finally, understanding *degrees of congruence* between interests and preferences of groups such as older adults could have significant implications in how practitioners and their organizations actually construct and facilitate voice and agency. If our programme and our assumptions are congruent only to a limited degree or to a limited portion of a group such as older adults, not only participation will likely be impacted, but we might be, unintentionally, building systems of *exclusion* where *representation* goes unaddressed.

Challenging path dependency

Within this broader context, it might be significant to remember that the kind of sociologically informed approach that permeates this discussion and its policy framings (see more below), remain an important connector between specific populations – such as older adults or music educators, here – and larger social patterns and mechanisms, with consequences for professional action and activism. To make this more explicit, we might consider diverse ways to articulate and make evident how and why the challenges in establishing critical policy and pedagogic practices towards sustainable ageing are entangled with and may derive from larger social constructs. Take for instance, the manner in which lifelong learning and education among older adults may be structured by, say, social status.

Cecilia Ridgeway (2014) defines social status as centrally located in explaining how inequality can be 'based on differences in esteem and respect' as much as and together with 'those based on resources and power' (2014: 4). We argue alongside her that key in dismantling mechanisms that hide or actively construct inequality – that is, 'how inequality is *made*' and could therefore 'be *unmade*' (Ridgeway 2014: 1; italics in the original) – is one's willingness to consider and frame one's professional work in relation to notions such as social status. Understanding as sociologists do that 'status, like resources and power, is a

basic source of human motivation that powerfully shapes the struggle for precedence out of which inequality emerges' (2014: 8) and that 'status stabilizes resource and power inequalities' (Ridgeway 2014: 4) should make clear to us music educators how issues that may seem abstract or 'not directly related' to one's practice, are in fact observable on a daily basis and have consequences in terms of policy as well as pedagogy. Indeed, social status manifests itself in the structures in which, for instance, music schools maintain a path dependency that determines the 'appropriate student' according to their age, background and characteristics, hence calling for the professionals' use of imagination of breaking these institutional bounds (Laes et al. 2021).

Our aim here is not simply to highlight the usefulness and absence of theorizing, as even a cursory look at the literature currently available – in this journal alone – presents a historic growth in theorizing and a robust engagement between practice and theory within specific areas of community music. Central, and to our estimation still missing, is alignment between conceptual and professional-policy orientation that can explore and thus further reveal how complex intersecting mechanisms, such as social status (again, as an example, but we could replace it with others), function independently and facilitate the interpenetration of levels of inequality among complex factors such as race, class, age and context. Of further significance might be to find 'coalescing' discourses or spaces where policy congruence can find some ground. The embedded potential for marginalization that is, unfortunately, already present in categories such as 'older adults' as well as 'arts practitioners' could be approached as grounds for policy activism that is perceived as congruent, when informed by the coalescing discourses of the two. Complexities and effects of a frame such as 'social status' may further aid the approximation of the two in various and complementing areas – from curricular and pedagogical design, to grant writing, to advocacy, to research analysis. We see this holistic approach as critically informed by policy knowhow (Schmidt 2020a, 2020b)

and central to those who see programme development or analysis in the absence of political gauging, social theorizing and policy framing as less and less sustainable today.

Reconsidering assumptions on the ageing cohort: A case from Finland

As we are discovering through other research, complexity of response to community engagement and stratification issues are compelling elements of analysis when addressing older age engagement, particularly where the arts are concerned. A recent study carried out among over 500 pensioners in Finland showed that the arts and culture service systems appear to serve those who have already a socially active lifestyle in retirement. This raises the question of whether it is more important to enable inclusion in participatory arts for all by strengthening the positions of the arts as the universal source of well-being in old age, or, rather, to *optimize* the supply of art and culture in line with each subcohort's supposed role in society? Optimization refers, on the one hand, to measures that ensure the inclusion of those who are at risk of exclusion from the arts services and more broadly social life as a result of illness or unemployment. On the other hand, it also raises the question of whether those who are potentially able to continue in work life beyond the minimum retirement age and already have an active lifestyle should *not* be offered additional opportunities for arts and cultural participation – if we are to dismantle the sometimes implicit social construction of inequality patterns in later life.

Nevertheless, when we look at the arrangements of art programmes and cultural policy from the perspective of the equal realization of fundamental social and cultural rights, this study shows that *habit* is the most significant mechanism of inequality in the confluence of the ageing population and arts and cultural services, displacing other parameters such as socio-economic differences. If these data are representative and translate into other contexts, full accessibility and inclusion for all become important sociopolitical questions. If the potential of the arts and culture is to be harnessed to improve the self-experienced well-being of future

retirement cohorts, exploring how to disrupt the path dependency that currently defines agency within arts is likely to become more central.

This issue of how we might harness the potential of the arts to improve self-experienced well-being is important from an 'intra' perspective in that it may impact how we frame programmes, establish communication and privilege pedagogical approaches over others. In an 'ultra' or external manner, placing our practices in relation to complex but real mechanisms such as status, framing access and equity in policy and pedagogical-programmatic terms, can be essential for professional practice that is socially responsible. It would not be unreasonable to argue that such efforts might amplify the impact our programmes can produce and the legitimacy they may help generate within communities, intersecting professional practices or even governments. In policy terms, this also means an increase of attention and concerted efforts towards policy salience (Wlezien 2004), that is, the manner in which we inquire, understand personal realities and group preferences and thus adjust programme direction and prioritization. Data from the pensioners in Finland point to the need for flexibility and plurality of opportunities and choices, which derive from a better understanding of how un-monolithic the social category of *older adult* really is, at least in Finland. From the policy, practices of arts and community music educators should adapt accordingly, as would the re-organization of practices, based on potential mismatched assumptions, framed by the rather narrow pathways established by *active ageing* discourses.

This simple example might help us ask: who defends the right of older adults to participate in music in broader terms, while taking that role with an advocacy efficacy that goes beyond an ideological positioning of rights? Our central point here is that our research and practice might do well to look internally and relationally. In other words, if we are concerned with the negative impacts of 'new languages of learning', as Biesta and others articulate, we might

do well to be concerned about them in internal ways (intra), that is, how they impact or shape musical practice with and for later adulthood. But also, in relation to other concerns, we ought to consider how music education may contribute to the social structuring of ageing in positive or deleterious ways. Both outlooks might generate propositions that, in tandem, may make contributions to practice and policy. Following Mantie (2012), for example, we might develop a critical stance on leisure as a form of adult learning beyond the labour market age, establishing how music can become a substantive venue for individual growth and meaning-making and social integration. Understood from a policy stance, we might more clearly and systematically articulate how and under what conditions participation and learning within music and arts becomes utilitarian or when 'our instructional activities as music leaders are oriented towards "teaching people" rather than facilitating their desire to make music' (Mantie 2012: 226). Research can better integrate real-world need and lead to adaptation of practice, but if developed in atomistic ways, it may never impact structural conditions, and thus further contribute to instrumentalism and disenfranchisement.

What can music educators do to promote sustainable ageing?

We suggest that policy thinking and critical political positionings can contribute in practical ways to the issue of *lifecourse learning* in music without it being dismissed as privileged, inconsequential or dispensable. By taking a policy framework as a starting point, we are likely to come to an understanding that the concept of social rights to citizenship is 'grounded by the notion of lifecourse interdependence' (Twine 1994: 24). In other words, how public policy defines us, and our rights, are highly determinative of our 'life chances'. This framing disposition (Schmidt 2017, 2020a) can establish a practice and a research agenda that can be rather distinct from one solely focused on intra-disciplinary concerns, where musical outcomes are central or where musical access is conceived naïvely. Understood even in the simplest of terms, as the wherewithal (individual or organizational) to generate opportunities

and put innovative projects to practice, such a framing disposition developed constructively, can also place music education for later adulthood in contraposition to the 'problems of old age' contributing to a discourse that pushes against the medicalization of this segment of the population, and facilitates a complex view – and hopefully successful policy and practice – designed to promote successful and sustainable ageing. Placing it within the community music practice environment, Schmidt (2018) suggests that a framing disposition is amplified when counterbalanced by three other practices – policy-knowhow, geographic awareness, and activism. Drawing from Lewis and Miller (2003), a critical element in taking on a policy practice and developing an area's knowhow in policy is that 'once we introduce notions of policy [they] assists us in excavating the structures that push cultures in certain directions' (Lewis and Miller 2003: 19). Schmidt (2018) argues that in such intersectional processes we come to better ask ourselves,

> what are the non-negotiables of our own musical and educational endeavours, and in what ways can we establish conversations that attempt to define such non-negotiables on the basis of clear and contextually based criterion, rather than on a priori determinations, reverence to tradition, or structural inertia.

> (Schmidt 2018: 341)

Here too, we encourage intersectionality which may invite music educators to link the micro-level work they are familiar with, and larger interlocking systems that may disenfranchise and even oppress (Collins 1990).

The point is that *floating* practices, those that operate in the absence of the four elements outlined earlier (i.e., a framing disposition, policy-knowhow, geographic awareness and activism), can easily become inconsequential and, at times, counterproductive, particularly in relation to socially just educational action. If this is true in disciplinary and pedagogical terms, it is amplified when gearing those educational practices towards goals such as

sustainable ageing and *lifelong learning*, where sociopolitical intersectionalities are very present. Indeed, while income, for instance, is palpable it also has a class implication, which in turn establishes that many individuals enter older age with experiences and forms of capital (social, economic, symbolic) that can be drastically contrasting. This is (or should be) significant to music education researchers, practitioners and programme leaders to the extent that such considerations might place us in the position to consider who is likely to walk into our doors, who are today's older adult music learners and how/why they access music education. If we approach our work from a *political economy* standpoint, we might also be asked to consider the rights of the ageing individuals in intersectional ways, and thus invite the field to reflect in what ways our programmes might be beneficial at the individual level, but at the same time inscribe social inequalities. The point here is, of course, not the deletion of successful programmes (take, for instance, New Horizons Bands in North America), but the need to identify that there is further, structural work that needs to be done. This might lead us to consider not just the institution of access to music, but how that access can be planned to include larger diversities rather than considering older adults as one homogenous group.

In terms of practice, another way forward implies an understanding of policy practice as an intrinsic part of, and contributor to our own pedagogical, content and programmatic efforts (Schmidt 2020b) while not dissociating these 'local' efforts – within our organizations, for instance – and their characteristics from those of larger social commitments, for instance, those embedded in deliberative democratic work (Gutmann and Thompson 2004). Productive policy and curricular leadership towards *lifelong learning* and *sustainable ageing*, should find greater resonance in a field such as community music, already historically inclined towards forms of distributive leadership. Systematization and modelling that can lead to scaling, parameters for action, and become clear enough to be easily

'acknowledged' by government or funding sources, is a challenge that seems worth the effort.

A critical challenge is that traditional strategic planning often not only promotes a singular vision, incentivizing and enforcing it, but also pushes for the systematic suppression of alternatives (Lees-Marshment 2016). Models and methods of practice, or a singular discourse regarding say, *Lifelong learning*, tends to gain preference. Its scaling then tends to dampen diversity and forego context-specific needs, and that tends to lead to haphazard development, unequal programmatic outcomes, and of course, decline – let alone the perception by government or funding sources that 'results' were mismatched with 'promises'.

Fischer and Forester concur with this stance, writing that policy and leadership directly benefit when there is an understanding that 'the interplay of competing frames is a source of new knowledge rather than an impediment to it' (1993: 12). The urgency of policy thinking and leadership that is educated through a framing disposition lens is the growing need for practice that is capable of 'exposing and counteracting manipulation of agendas, illegitimate exercises of power, skewed distributions of information, and attempts to distract attention' (Dryzek 1993: 228). Just as significant to us, however, is that the point of a framing disposition is to facilitate the expansion of this same disposition in others. If the emergence of *lifelong learning* and *sustainable ageing* within music education is to establish a healthy and productive level of 'competing frames', stronger engagement with policy practice as a form of professional knowhow is advisable, if not necessary.

Final considerations: Towards sustainable ageing

Policy language that insists on active ageing can haphazardly overlook situations of dependency that are common in old age and become blurry from its meaning, leading to

oppressive rather than empowering ageing policy – indeed, 'being engaged in life and being dependent are not mutually exclusive' (Boudiny 2013: 1087). Boudiny, among other critical gerontologists, calls for a comprehensive strategy of ageing that we like to think of as the idea of sustainable ageing. According to the United Nations' (2017) *Agenda for Sustainable Development*, sustainable ageing entails that older persons themselves are considered important and active agents of societal development towards inclusivity, transformation and sustainable development outcomes. Moreover, in a recent report on *World Population Ageing*), the United Nations (2019: 27) states, '[p]opulation ageing can spur economic growth while maintaining fiscal sustainability, but policies and behaviour play critical roles'. The report lists the goals of achieving and improving sustainable development and investing in everyone's well-being through lifelong learning.

We find this agenda important and something to be exported to discussions of music education in later adulthood to become more aware of the current social constructions of ageing. Indeed, many of the major issues among the elderly that maintain their social invisibility – anxiety, isolation, depression – are still, to a large extent, products of our perceptions of ageing, including the policy language we use: What is done for and about the elderly, as well as what we know about them, including knowledge gained from research, are products of our conceptions of ageing. In an important sense, then, the major problems faced by the elderly are the ones we create for them (Estes 1979: 1) – for us.

We observe two compounding realities in the field that merit consideration. First, that both lifelong learning and sustainable ageing are areas where much framing and interrogative space remain to be explored. There is a gap within our field that deserves greater attention. Second, literatures where policy conceptualization and enactment analysis are considered remain underdeveloped. This is an emerging area that requires both greater training, but also

greater investment in translating and approximating existing in-practice expertise (developed by many practitioners in the field) and systematic scholarly/research output.

The demographic change in the context of ageing populations urges music educators and community musicians, service producers and other stakeholders to rethink their roles, as well as the content they provide and to whom they are directed. Approaching this question for the viewpoint of sustainable ageing might be helpful in order to shift from advocating our own field to think and act as policy savvy professionals (Schmidt 2018) in a socially responsible way. Furthermore, the re-positioning from traditional advocacy translates the potentials and significance of the field for individuals outside the profession; it promotes a move beyond 'outreach' and 'service' towards crossing systems boundaries through collaboration and encourages music education professionals towards a more trans-disciplinary, hybrid and network-embedded knowledge generation and political activism.

In closing, we hope to draw critical attention to the type of music education in later life that is constructed for older adults to become more active, more positive, more able, and so on. Indeed, there is something to be said about our capacity to develop organized collectivity and how individuals, programmes and the field of music education as a whole can present a vision of sustainable ageing – by thoughtfully researching older adult music learning and thus contributing to social and cultural policy – manifest as a mindful complex space where music education can thrive throughout the lifecourse.

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