

Sustainability in Music & Music Education

Since *Sustainability* emerged as an issue for discussion almost half a century ago and slowly evolved into a guiding paradigm of social action, music and the arts had a hard time to paint a convincing picture of their role as a driving force of sustainable societal development. It has been known for a long time that, for example, the festival and concert system is an ecological nightmare, but among the community of fans and musicians it is understood that soothing their ecological consciences both individually and collectively is delegated to other fields in society such as agriculture, energy supply or healthcare.

In addition, many musicians and artists are wondering whether it should at all be the duty of art and music, in a society which is based on the principle of the division of labour and tasks, to contribute to reducing the global ecological footprint. And indeed, if we take the idea of the purpose-free character of the arts really seriously, we cannot at the same time demand or expect the arts to be for purpose or to serve a specific need. One might even go so far as to argue that in the past 200 years, it has been the particular added value of art in terms of ensuring sustainable social development, to escape from being misused for political, economic, ideological, etc. purposes - and successfully did so even despite many setbacks in detail.

In fact, the *raison d'être* of the institutions we represent (HME institutions, orchestras, opera houses, music schools, museums etc.) is based on this idea. It can therefore also be argued that it is the explicit social mandate of all these institutions to counter the universe of values as set by the economy - coined by values such as effectiveness, growth and profit orientation - through promoting an alternative set of values. These two different sets of values, however, are not seen as antagonisms, but as interrelated poles whose individual components will not function if they are not in balance with each other.

In the value system of East Asian cultural tradition, this is exemplified by the principle of yin and yang. More than 100 years ago, Max Weber aptly described the significance of protestant social ethics for the functioning of Western economies (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; first published as *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* in 1905). However, part of the story is also that there is a common sense that the innovative and creative forces of a society would degenerate if the balance of values described above no longer exists. But there is also another common sense: It can be no sustainable economic growth without innovation and creativity.

It is not a new idea that the 'higher-faster-further' attitude rather bars the way to sustainable further development of our societies than accelerating it. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974) by Robert M. Pirsig and *Slowness (La lenteur)* by Milan Kundera (1995) became iconic novels of their generations. Both have in common that they are telling fictional stories that are imbued with philosophical reflections and autobiographical elements culminating in a praise for contemplation, deceleration and deep thinking. In the 1980s, the so-called *Slow Food Movement* emerged in Piedmont (cf. Petrini, Carlo: *Buono, Pulito e Giusto*).

Milano: Einaudi, 2005) which has prompted a comprehensive Slow Movement affecting countless areas of everyday life (Città Slow, Slow Fashion, Slow Travel, Slow Journalism, Slow Parenting, etc. etc.).

Art, humanities and pedagogy were not spared by this movement. In the introduction to an anthology on the topic that has been recently published in the USA (Chambers, Jonathan & Gearhart, Stephanie: *Reversing the Cult of Speed in Higher Education - The Slow Movement in the Arts and Humanities*, New York: Routledge, 2019), the editors note that an educational system that "has come to value productivity over contemplation - or, put a different way, rapidity over slowness" is not suited to appropriately prepare its graduates to cope with the social challenges of the future (p. 2). It further states: "How might the arts and humanities, we ask, offer a critical counterpoint to the widely accepted dictum, faster is better?" (p. 2). Innovation, deep thinking and creativity - this is how the essence of the articles presented in this anthology can be summarised - do not arise under the conditions that are the prerequisite for the creation of economic added value. Their breeding ground is a culture of esteem for detours and experiences of failure. What they need are 'counterpoints' in the sense of providing space for contemplation and slowness.

The current social climate gave rise to a debate that now has reached the AEC membership. Increasingly it is asked, what music and music education might contribute to make our societies more sustainable. In this context, however, it is also asked what the difference is between music that can be considered to be a bearer of values related to the idea of sustainability in contrast to music to which such characteristic is not attributed. In other words: What are key characteristics of a music or a way of encounter with music that enables contemplation, deep thinking and openness of the aesthetic experience?

Earlier than elsewhere, this debate sprung up in Norway. A few years ago, a [study project](#) run by the Bergen-based Nordic Network of Music Education NNME dealt with the topic of sustainability in music education. At the beginning of March 2020, just a few days before the corona lock downs came into force, Øivind Varkøy from the Norwegian Academy of Music Oslo and Hanne Rinholm from the Oslo Metropolitan University presented a paper at the Annual Conference of the Nordic Network for Research in Music Education NNMPF entitled *Focusing slowness and resistance: Music education as contribution to sustainable development*. Also Varkøy and Rinholm take their starting point from the idea that music and music education embody values that are directly opposed to modern culture's ideals of effectiveness and smoothness. The text that the authors see - and want the reader to see - as an essay rather than a research report, is expected to be published later this year in the *Philosophy of Music Education Review* (ed. Estelle Jorgensen, Indiana University Press).

The AEC is committed to take up this debate and to promote broad-scale awareness of the issue among its members in the coming months. We are deeply convinced that Varkøy & Rinholm's text, together with others, can be a valuable contribution to the continuation of this debate. Whomever it may concern is warmly welcome to be part of it.

Stefan Gies, AEC Chief Executive