

Chapter 9

NEW POINTS OF DEPARTURE: THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND POSSIBLE FUTURE(S) OF THE *ORQUESTRA*

GERAÇÃO

JOÃO TEIXEIRA LOPES, GRAÇA MOTA

This study, with its conclusions sketched in this chapter, does not represent, in the strict sense, an evaluation of the implementation of the *Orquestra Geração* (OG) in Portugal. In fact, it strives to understand just how the orchestra might act as an agent of socialisation and a mechanism for social inclusion and mobility, a territorially rooted community of practice. If this were a technical monitoring report, it would have to rigorously compare the results obtained in view of the proclaimed objectives without overlooking the conditions prevailing and the resources available, while also constructing instruments of measurement in the form of indicators.

This underlying intellectual effort focuses rather on the *comprehension*, embracing the concern to redeem the entirety of the OG functioning but also its intrinsic *multidimensionality* as well as the *relationship* that is established between the various components of the program. In summary, we believe that the OG may best be approached as a configuration in the broad sense that Norbert Elias endows: a whole made up of interdependent parts undergoing permanent and tense interactions.

However, we also acknowledge that many readers are seeking an evaluative overview. Although this may be seen as somewhat emerging from the multi-scale analysis that we have carried out, our ambitions are better grasped as shuttling between the history of the project, the concerns of the founders, the organisational matrix of the structure, and the overlapping representations of the participants, with a particular emphasis on the "voices" of the young members.

The adopt/adapt tension

From the outset, this is a project with its own particular historicity. The OG traces its origins to the Venezuelan *El Sistema* (ES), which was itself founded and grew

in highly specific sociocultural conditions. Hence, this origin imposes a set of limitations and opportunities: a "founder phantom" as an inspirational matrix that compares, demarcates, locates and demands. Furthermore, the ES is frequently present in the discourses of the founders as an inspiration, as a pedagogical benchmark and as a model to be attained.

Therefore, it is worth perceiving the translation mechanisms into the Portuguese context, especially as regards its national dissemination, financial sustainability and the stability of its human resources. The decentralisation, in particular, as well as the multiplicity of associated school groups drives constant re-contextualizations, especially as the territories and their peoples, while in many cases sharing peripheral conditions and socio-spatial disadvantages, are diverse and poorly permeable to overly centralised prescriptions. There are a number of logistical questions that may not be directly adopted by the OG and that imply a simultaneously methodological and ideological positioning as regards the ES: class timetables, material conditions and human resources, the relationship with the teaching of music in Venezuela as well as the unconditional and successive support of the Portuguese state from both the symbolic and financial points of view. For those who perceive the ES as the archetype, the distance gets measured by, among other dimensions, the lower intensity and coordination of the pedagogical work and the orchestral dimensions in the respective nuclei; by the financial limitations; by shorter weekly classroom learning loads; by the dispersion/lack of interaction between the different nuclei; by the lower number of students at each nucleus; by teachers with various training backgrounds and with different teaching timetables; by the high number of students quitting, especially in the first year even while also varying from year to year.

A (nuanced) improvement in the levels of family and school integration

The different research techniques applied throughout this study enable us to acknowledge, with a reasonable degree of certainty, improvements in the family integration of participants as a consequence of their families' involvement, particularly their participation at auditions and concerts. These moments are assumed as

privileged occasions for overcoming stigmas and affirming some symbolic capital. Belonging to the OG brings prestige and endows visibility.

Furthermore, it seems that we encounter in the OG a strengthening of dispositions already established in the domestic universe, especially the direct and/or implicit incentives to learning. This particularly holds for families that even while not in possession of high levels of academic capital nevertheless still foster supportive routines around school learning efforts.

Additionally, even while it is impossible to demonstrate that there were improvements in academic results, there is strong evidence of significant changes in the attitudes and behaviours of the young persons that get systematically referred to throughout all the discourses that we analyse here. The OG experience produces some type of dispositional effect in nurturing skills favourable to academic achievement (self-discipline and space-time organization, coordination, mutual help and an *ethos* of collective learning).

These incorporated dispositions may be transferred to contexts of action that lie beyond the school environment, and potentially enabling more qualified and more qualifying integration in adult lives, particularly in working spheres.

Potential for social mobility

These forms of family and school mobilisation contribute both towards avoiding objective and subjective situations of exclusion and social declassification and towards paths marked out by the tendency for distinction within the stigmatised contexts of belonging (neighbourhood, peer group), favouring the emergence and/or consolidation of social mobility projects. Belonging to the OG selects the networks of socialisation in spheres of life beyond the orchestra (school, neighbourhood, family). In expanding the scope and range of future trajectories of the young participants, facilitating access to certain positions in the social and socio-professional environments, these dispositions/skills become resources that boost individual capacities for action fostering their opportunities for social mobility.

Equally, for some students, the OG disseminates aspirations to become future professionals in the field of music although, taken as a whole, there are no significant changes concerning the cultural and musical practices: tastes generally continue to be shaped by the universe of *the initial cultures*, with great attention paid to the icons of the moment, with an over-investment in computer mediated communication, and widespread usage of social networks that, cumulatively, induces a focus around domestic-receptive practices.

Meanwhile, there is a not negligible intensification of musical practice in a musical genre that emerges as highly distant from both their own consumer habits and cultural context. In a reduced number of cases, OG socialisation proves consequential for the tastes of participants, expanding the scope of the musical repertoire that they listen to and developing reflective dispositions about musical art and techniques, potentially enabling them, whether as future concert audiences or as professional musicians. Hence, the OG creates and/or strengthens some professional career projects in the world of music not uncommonly associated with, to a greater or lesser extent, explicit intentions of social mobility. Furthermore, in terms of the parents and guardians, there were common references to how they had begun consuming, with some regularity and even pleasure, a type of music (high art) hitherto completely unknown to them.

While the orchestra management does not systematically foster the regular practice of other musical genres, the young players, due to the fact of having learned how to play a specific instrument, organise themselves into groups, whether to play in the street or in other non-formal contexts.

The construction of musical meaning

One of the axes underpinning this research was the objective of understanding the way in which musical meaning gets systematically constructed and conveyed within the scope of the OG. The analysis undertaken over the course of this book, with a particular emphasis on chapter 6, allows for the identification of some concluding lines as regards the characteristics of the musical learning that coherently and

systematically takes place in the different nuclei and, ultimately, emerges out of the various moments of performance by the *Orquestra Geração*.

Firstly, the orchestra effectively represents the major catalyst for all of the teaching. Everything learned is designed to converge around direct application in the orchestral working practices. This is clearly reflected within the scope of two subjects of the OG curriculum besides Orchestra: the teaching of *Ear training and sight singing* and the teaching of the *Instrument*. *Ear training and sight singing*, as a training resource for the development of instrumental practice, tends to be fundamentally oriented towards the development of reading music without singing competences, taking exclusively into account collective musical practices, thus, orchestra performances. As regards *Instrument* classes, the learning is intrinsically associated with the context of each nucleus and dependent on the Orchestra repertoire. While the program sets out the techniques and works for each of the various instruments, the repertoire defined for the orchestra seems to dominate the time available for individual classes. Some teachers did take the opportunity to express regret over the reductive nature of this reality which, based initially upon a model of imitation, repetition and memorisation, ends up advancing only in accordance with the demands made by works in the repertoire of each nucleus orchestra. In other words: learning to play the instrument is intimately bound up with and is dependent upon the performance of the orchestra's works.

This finding leads us to conclude that these two curricular subjects, found within the context of any specialized music institution, end up losing, in the OG context, their autonomy and identity, even though they are essential components of the overall preparation of a musician. This would also seem to explain the reason some young orchestra members, in the transition to secondary and professional music teaching, experience major difficulties to meet the curricular demands that are centred on learning instrumental performance and mastering *Ear training and sight singing*. Within this framework, it would seem desirable for the OG, rather than modifying the current teaching and learning system, to plan for the setting up of one or more tutoring figures able to accompany and support young students making this transition.

However, we also need to emphasise the collective musical practice skills that young OG musicians acquire, and that are valuable for the training of any musician, whether wanting to engage with a professional career or merely to maintain an amateur musical practice throughout life.

Attachment capital

Participants highlight their strong sense of belonging and the team spirit at the OG, which undoubtedly constitutes an indicator of social integration. This generally encapsulates a deep bond with a project that gains recognition and respect– “it’s the music gang”; as well as the representation that participating in the orchestra will produce certain ‘things’, potentially leading to raised self-confidence levels and instilling the capacity to act and transform one’s own conditions of existence.

This dimension is the most relevant as generating inclusion requires “playing at various tables”, creating contamination and pull effects in different spheres of life, nurturing affiliation and social integration, being and feeling “part of” and “an inside member”. In other words, without this having to be granted or conceded by someone else. This is why we also may infer that the three crucial characteristics of communities of practice as defined by Wenger-Trayner¹⁰¹ - the domain (sharing of a common interest), the community (a set of activities, discussions and relations that enable shared learning) and the practice (gathering the participants in search of a repertoire of resources that constitutes a shared practice) – are present and interconnected within the OG, gaining some coherence within the scope of a musical practice that, despite being very hierarchically pre-determined, anticipates the active intervention of its participants.

Final note

The OG would gain another dimension were it to create an authentic *territorial effect*. To achieve this, the involvement would have to overcome the excessive centralisation of decisions and procedures as well as go beyond the engagement of

¹⁰¹ Cf. Chapter 1

teachers, students and their families. The extremely ambiguous idea of “community” should lead us towards thinking about “communities” interwoven and articulated by their territory, in a decentralised and non-hierarchical structure working through multi-institutional partnership networks. Territories are not socially and culturally homogenous nor do they consist only of school based actions. Thus, the objective has to be to maximise the *OG effect*, building alliances with local associations, creative informal groups of creativity, the decentralised state organisms, the churches and the social movements (established or emerging), and (whenever relevant) the private sector.

Currently, the *Orquestra Geração* management is engaged in developing various actions designed to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the project. This is being done, above all, through public events in which many Portuguese artists loan their image to provide support in recognising the project’s meaning and importance within the Portuguese musical panorama. We do believe that this also takes into due consideration the perspective that all young persons, irrespective of the socioeconomic context, class, ethnicity, religion, gender or linguistic and cultural heritage, should have access to musical education of high quality.

Finally, and as we questioned in chapter 1, based upon a reflection by Jonathan Govias, we also believe that the future of *El Sistema* may develop outside of Venezuela to the extent that the various programs taking place inspired upon it, alongside the researchers studying their implementation in the field, are able to establish a connection between collective musical practices and clear social benefits. We believe that the *Orquestra Geração* represents an important part of this movement and we hope that this study has contributed towards clarifying some of the most relevant features of the relationship between music and social inclusion.