

## **Creating a Ripple Effect. Higher music education institutions as agents for development**

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### **Introduction**

Many higher education institutions in Norway have been and are still engaged in development projects. This is also the case for the Norwegian Academy of Music. We have participated in several projects through the years in South Africa, Georgia, East Africa, and Lebanon.

What reasoning lies behind the institution's engagement in such projects? We cannot take for granted that everyone will see the relevance of including development activities in the Academy's portfolio. Even if the projects are mostly funded by external sources, the Academy must nevertheless invest time and energy in the projects. It is therefore important that the reasons for any engagement in such projects are thoroughly deliberated and articulated. In this article, I will discuss the reasoning behind the Norwegian Academy of Music's engagement in development projects. In my role as Vice Principal (2006–2013), I was actively involved in the decision processes behind several of these projects. Therefore, this article does not aim to give a neutral analysis but rather to give some insight into the kinds of arguments on which we based our decisions. In the following, I will use the project in Lebanon as an example.

### **Culture as a human right**

The UN defines cultural rights as a *human* right:

Everyone has the right fully to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.  
(UN, 1948, article 27)

This is followed up by the UN convention on economic, social and cultural rights (UN 1966a) in which the need for actions to preserve, develop and disseminate culture is emphasised. The right to experience, express and further develop *one's own* culture is stated in the UNESCO convention on cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2005), which underlines that cultural diversity is necessary for peace and security on the local, national and international levels.

This forms the basis for a Norwegian strategy document for cultural cooperation with countries in the South, where it is stated that it builds on 'a recognition of the right of every people to develop and nourish its own culture, and that every culture has values that must be respected and preserved, as a precondition for global diversity' (UD/Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2005, p. 7, *my translation*). The quote illustrates that Norwegian development policy defines itself as based on human rights. Two White Papers, *Felles kamp mot fattigdom (Fighting Poverty Together)* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004) and *Regjeringens internasjonale kulturinnsats (The Government's international actions on culture)* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013) focus on the responsibility Norway has to safeguard human rights. They both refer to the UN declaration (1948) and the conventions on economic, social and cultural rights (UN, 1966a) and on civil and political rights (UN 1966b). Cultural rights are therefore part of this policy. Both White Papers underline that Norwegian support for cooperation on cultural development must promote human rights. This will be implemented through different activities, including building up and supporting institutions that play a vital role in securing a free and diverse cultural life and cultural heritage management. Being a wealthy nation also leads to responsibility:

Norway has a special responsibility as one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We are facing an ethical demand to do something about the injustice, and influence the development in a positive direction since we have the possibility to do so. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003–2004, p.1, *my translation*)

In *Kulturutredningen 2014 (Report on Culture 2014)* (NOU/Official Norwegian Report 2014:4), it is argued that cultural activity is not only a human right but can help in *safeguarding* human rights; it can help facilitate freedom of speech and information. The role of art as a critical voice in society is emphasised:

Art can turn around taken-for-granted perceptions of reality, which underlies political decision processes. This can, for example, happen when art makes marginalised groups visible to the political community (*my translation*, *ibid.*, p. 66)

The same belief in the important role culture can play for democracy and change in society can be found in the White Paper *Regjeringens internasjonale kulturinnsats* (*The Government's international actions on culture*) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013, p. 49):

To strengthen cultural rights is a goal in itself, as well as a means to strengthen civil society as a driving force and a change agent for development towards more open and democratic societies (*my translation*).

When we look at the cultural rights of Palestinian refugees, it is evident there are numerous challenges in that respect, as this group of people can definitely be defined as marginalised. They are exiled from their land and must live in refugee camps. They have no right to education in Lebanese schools and are relegated to schools run by the UN (Ghandour, 2001). The quality of these schools is not always good, and there is no music education there (Jordhus, 2010). They have few opportunities to develop and nourish their own culture, and there are no educated musicians or music teachers who can communicate and further develop their traditions or serve as critical voices. The cultural centres in the refugee camps established and run by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) *Beit Atfal Assumoud* therefore play a pivotal role in securing the cultural rights of the Palestinian refugees. They also constitute a type of cultural infrastructure in the camps and can function as change agents. A substantial part of the Norwegian Academy of Music's engagement in Lebanon has therefore been to support the work of *Beit Atfal Assumoud* in the camps.

## **The importance of culture for personal and social development**

As indicated above, the right to culture is a human right, and culture has a role to play as a building block in society. This points to the specific function culture and the arts have in developing a society; arts and culture act as channels for freedom of speech and information and can contribute critical perspectives and in making marginalised groups visible. Cultural activities also contribute to a vibrant democracy by providing

arenas and meeting places that enable public life; concert venues, festivals and events give people an opportunity to meet and therefore take part in and contribute to society. This is underlined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its strategy document:

Cultural institutions and organisations are of vital importance for a vibrant civil society and a functioning general public based on a wide public participation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005, p. 19, *my translation*).

Cultural centres, such as the ones *Beit Atfal Assumoud* has established in the Palestinian refugee camps, will from this perspective function as important infrastructure for different cultural activities and can act as meeting places where ideas and impulses can be shared and opinions debated.

An important element in establishing infrastructure is to secure local access to cultural expertise. There is no formalised education for cultural workers or teachers in the arts in Lebanon; therefore, an important part of the project has been to educate some of the older teenagers who have taken part in the project for some time so that they can act as assistant teachers. Another important component has been the three-year long X-Art programme in which the Norwegian Academy of Music has been involved. Here, Lebanese and Palestinian cultural workers and teachers in the arts have received further education in pedagogy and the arts. This has contributed to strengthened competency in the area, but it has also facilitated better contact between groups of people who normally do not cooperate. Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, Christians, Lebanese and Palestinians have had to cooperate and visit each other's 'territories' thanks to the programme. There is a great need to continue this educational programme. The Norwegian Academy therefore applied for funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for another three-year competency development programme precisely because it is so important to build up an infrastructure to achieve sustainable and self-directed development in the long run. Unfortunately, the application was denied.

*Kulturutredningen* (NOU/Norwegian Official Report 2014:4) also emphasises culture as a 'social glue', something that strengthens cohesion between people and helps in creating an identity and a sense of belonging. Using cultural heritage as a positive resource for identity formation is one of the goals of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' strategy for cultural cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005). This has also been a fundamental principle underlying the Lebanon project. Kippernes' (2007) survey among participants in the Rashidieh Palestinian refugee camp clearly indicate that the project is important in this respect. These results are also confirmed by interview

studies by Jordhus (2010) and Ruud (2011) conducted in the same refugee camp. Several of the informants point out that they experience a strong sense of togetherness with the other participants and see them as family. It is also underlined how the music activities contribute to affirming their Palestinian identity.

Ruud (2011) also finds indications of health benefits from taking part in music activities in the refugee camp, benefits that might stem from the fact that these are *cultural* activities. Here, health is understood as ‘a subjective experience of increased well-being and increased quality of life’ (ibid., p. 63, *my translation*). By engaging in music, the participants experience what Ruud labels ‘vitality and self-experience’. They have aesthetic experiences; the music can change their mood and give them energy. They experience the joy of mastery and recognition by learning to play an instrument. They also experience a greater meaning in life by cultivating their own music tradition and by being given the opportunity to pass it on to the next generation; they are offered hope for the future.

Based on this, it can be argued that the project has a specific value stemming from the fact that it offers performance opportunities and creative music activities. Cultural projects therefore have a potential that other projects do not have. This is also underlined in the White Paper *Felles kamp mot fattigdom (Joint struggle against poverty)* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004), where it is stated that cultural exchanges between Norway and countries in the South are based on the fact that arts and culture activities can benefit development in themselves, but they also represent *added value*. This ability to add value, for example in relation to health, makes culture an important area for development policy.

The need for actions to support identity and health among Palestinian refugees is clearly illustrated by Ghandour (2001). She takes as her starting point Erickson’s theory on human development and describes how the Palestinians in each developmental stage end up on the negative side of Erickson’s dichotomies: ‘First mistrust, then shame, which moves on to guilt, inferiority and identity diffusion...’. She points out how difficult it is for young Palestinian refugees to build up a positive identity when living conditions are so challenging:

How can a Palestinian child become a Palestinian? From where can he or she acquire a strong belief in continuity? What will he or she believe in—poverty, abuse, trauma, and insecurity? Who serves as his or her role model—an unemployed father, an exhausted mother, an unjust rule, or a

hostile neighbour? Barring such identification, shame and guilt seep easily into the formulation of Palestinian self-identity (ibid., p. 157).

From this viewpoint it becomes important that the Lebanon project offers the participants new and more positive roles. Kippernes (2006, p. 60) gives an example of this when she says: ‘The music group is an arena where the children can try out new roles and present a different image of themselves’ (*my translation*). Storsve, Westby and Ruud (2012) also underline the importance of offering new and empowering roles through the music activities; girls can move the boundaries for the stereotype gender roles they find themselves in, and the young assistant teachers are offered roles as leaders.

Regardless of what views we have on the conflict in the Middle East, we must relate to the fact that we are facing a humanitarian challenge of huge dimensions in terms of the Palestinian refugees. Among other things, the challenge consists of a lack of cultural rights and the infrastructure to safeguard such rights. At the same time, we have seen that cultural activities in particular are important means to improve the situation—not least because they can enable marginalised groups to express hope for the future:

Why does culture matter (...) for development and for the reduction of poverty? The answer is that it is in culture that ideas of the future as much as of those of the past are embedded and nurtured. Thus, in strengthening the capacity to aspire, conceived as a cultural capacity, especially among the poor, the future-oriented logic of development could find a natural ally, and the poor could find the resources required to contest and alter the conditions of their poverty (Appadurai, 2004, p. 59).

The question remains: Who is it that the White Paper *Felles kamp mot fattigdom* (*Joint struggle against poverty*) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004, p. 1) refers to when it states that ‘We are facing an ethical demand to do something about the injustice, and influence the development in a positive direction since we have the possibility to do so’ (*italics added*). Is the Norwegian Academy of Music part of this ‘we’?

## Having a social responsibility and taking it on board

The strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that the competency and engagement of Norwegian cultural institutions and organisations have played a decisive role in development projects and that future engagement is expected (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005). The important roles Norwegian academic and professional communities play in securing the quality of the projects is underlined. It is also stated that ‘...through direct cooperation between academic and professional communities, it is possible to establish broader interfaces for contact and alternative access to important target groups for foreign and development policy’ (ibid., p. 13, *my translation*). In other words, if Norwegian development policy is to be realised, Norwegian cultural institutions and organisations need to be involved in development projects. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs cannot do this job by itself.

In the same way, the Ministry of Education and Science expects all Norwegian higher education institutions to take on their social responsibility. This is evident from one of the aims common to all institutions in the sector, formulated by the Ministry:

Universities and university colleges shall be distinct actors in society and contribute to international, national, and regional development, dissemination, innovation, and added value (Ministry of Education and Science, 2013, p. 4, *my translation*).

Based on this, one must conclude that the Norwegian Academy of Music, both as a cultural and an academic institution in one of the world’s wealthiest countries definitely has a social responsibility to contribute in different ways to the development of countries and regions that are less fortunate.

At the same time, many artists and cultural workers who have been involved in development projects underline that there is a greater degree of reciprocity between the ‘provider’ and the ‘recipient’ within the area of culture. This reciprocity is also expressed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ strategy:

What cultural cooperation and different forms of sports cooperation have in common is that the activity is basically communicative and creates contact between people. It contributes to an enriching exchange of impulses, building of networks, and competency development for all parties involved. Cultural activities and sports create arenas for mutual and equal cooperation between



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actors in Norway and in the cooperating countries in the South, in contrast to a more one-sided transfer of competency and resources from North to South. This is unique in the context of development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005, p. 7, *my translation*).

For the Norwegian Academy of Music, taking part in development projects such as this one in Lebanon is therefore not only perceived as a duty but is also experienced as an enrichment for the staff and students involved. This will again create ripple effects in Norwegian society, because one can benefit from the competencies generated by the project. In the following, I will elaborate on the benefits.

## **Development projects as learning arenas**

Teaching practice for students has been a central component in the Lebanon project from the very beginning, and the Norwegian Academy of Music has seen this as the primary justification for its engagement. Every year since 2005, the third-year students in the four-year bachelor's programme in music education have spent about 10 days in Lebanon. They have taken part in teaching and other music activities in the Rashidieh refugee camp and have also performed at concerts in Lebanese schools. In some years, a few music therapy students also participated. Brit Ågot Brøske Danielsen (2012) has studied the significance of this type of professional placement compared to regular placements in Norwegian schools. She describes how the traditional thinking on placement is to create situations with 'reduced complexity'. The placement project in Lebanon represents the opposite. Students are confronted with a very complex situation; they lack a common language with the children, the frame factors are challenging, they are expected to use many other instruments than their principal instrument and they must collaborate with many more of their fellow students than in the usual groups of two to four students. It is therefore worth noting that students claim this project is the most important learning experience during their studies. It seems as if this type of placement, precisely due to its complexity, triggers important processes in developing a professional identity. 'It seems as if the students' experiences of themselves when confronted with a foreign culture contributes to raising awareness about their own perspective, their own choices and actions' (Danielsen, 2012, p. 99, *my translation*). The teaching practice also gives them a feeling of mastery. The students in Danielsen's study experience themselves as competent teachers precisely because they are able to master this complexity, and they perceive themselves as suitable for

the profession they have chosen. Most importantly, their practice is experienced as significant because it is evident that their contribution as music educators has great value for the children. They realise that they can actually make a difference.

Danielsen's analysis is based on the reflective journals of 13 students during one specific year. The benefits of the project are also documented by an evaluation carried out in 2011 (Norges musikkhøgskole/Norwegian Academy of Music, 2011) in which all students who had taken part in the project at one point or another were asked to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire, which was completed by 52% of the students, consists of both fixed statements that students signal their agreement with using a scale, and questions they respond to using their own words. The results clearly support Danielsen's findings, particularly that students gain confidence by mastering complex situations and thus feel competent. This is how one of the students expressed his thoughts on the subject:

...I feel that I am less afraid to meet children regardless of who they are and what their background is. I had to try to do things I had never done before in Lebanon, and that has given me a greater belief in that I can handle things even if they are unknown and I have no experience (Norges musikkhøgskole/ Norwegian Academy of Music, 2011, p. 12, *my translation*)

Exposing the students to a situation, which is very complex and challenging compared to their placements in Norway, seems to have a value in itself when it comes to developing their confidence as professional practitioners.

The students' comments also support Danielsen's findings that the professional placement in Lebanon triggers their reflections about their own professional identity and strengthens their conviction that they have chosen a profession where they can contribute positively to other people's lives. There are also quite a few comments on how the experiences in Lebanon are perceived as transferable to Norwegian reality. This is one example of a student comment:

This project is so important. Students at the Norwegian Academy of Music get a broader competence, which far exceeds what other institutions can offer. This competence makes students more qualified to meet the multicultural schools we have in Norway today, and it creates an understanding and acceptance for different religions and cultures. In addition, it contributes to

giving students teaching practice that is broader and of high quality (Norges musikkhøgskole/Norwegian Academy of Music, 2011, p.21, *my translation*).

Students also state that they have developed more patience, respect, tolerance, communication skills and cultural understanding in addition to more concrete skills, such as the ability to use flexible musical arrangements, leadership skills, didactic improvisation, methods for teaching bands, etc. Norwegian society is becoming increasingly multicultural, and music educators are increasingly facing the challenge of including non-ethnic Norwegians in music education and music activities. There is very limited participation by immigrant communities in choirs, bands and music and art schools. Therefore, there is a great need for music educators with a broader cultural competency to meet these challenges.

## The need for new competences

As Even Ruud (2011) points out, the Lebanon project can be characterised as a ‘community music’ project. This concept captures a wide range of music activities that take place outside traditional educational arenas, where ‘...the intention that personal and social wellbeing is as important as learning music and that music is a source for joining people together and strengthening collective and personal identity’ (Ruud, 2011, p 60, *my translation*). Ruud shows how many new practices and arenas have emerged, such as rock bands in jails and music activities at reception centres for asylum seekers to name a few. Such activities and arenas require that leaders have a different set of professional skills. Based on this, Ruud argues that there is a need for a new profession— ‘health musicians’:

I would suggest, however, that in the near future, we will need a new kind of musician, therapist, community musician, and music educator—*a health musician*, if you will—with the necessary musical and performative skills, the methodological equipment, and the theoretical familiarity, and, not the least, the personal, ethical, and political values to best carry out these health-musicking projects (Ruud, 2012, p. 95)

The Norwegian Academy of Music has for the last several years started to focus on community music with the aim of enabling not only future music educators and music therapists but also music performers to work with new target groups and in new

arenas, such as jails, reception centres for asylum seekers, youth clubs, etc. Projects such as the one in Lebanon seem to be well suited for developing the necessary skills in this context. In addition, they seem to trigger students' reflections about what Ruud calls 'personal, ethical and political values' and their professional identity.

The teachers at the Norwegian Academy of Music, who have participated in the project have also obtained a specialised competency in guiding music education students who work in such complex teaching practice situations. This competency has also proven to be transferable when guiding music performance students participating in community music projects in Norway.

The research projects that have followed have also had a huge impact both in developing a knowledge base in relation to cultural projects as development aids and in relation to how different forms of practicums can contribute to professional development. The teachers involved have also developed methods, workshop models and teaching materials that can be used in developing countries and in different community music projects in Norway. Consequently, not only the students but also the teachers at the Norwegian Academy of Music have broadened their competency through this project, and this can certainly create a ripple effect in Norway.

## **Creating a ripple effect**

When faced with huge challenges in society, such as poverty, suppression, war, marginalisation, unemployment and so on, one can easily feel powerless. One can, with good reason, ask what a small music academy located in the far north can do about all this. I have tried to make the case that what little we can do actually does make a difference for the people involved and that we have an ethical responsibility to contribute in whatever way we can. For the Norwegian Academy of Music it has always been important to think in terms of creating a ripple effect. This is best achieved by focusing on *building competence* among the next generation of teachers and cultural workers. This is achieved both in Lebanon among the young participants who learn to work as assistant teachers and among the Lebanese and Palestinian teachers and cultural workers who receive further education through the X-Art programme. In addition, teachers and students at the Academy will further develop their competence through the Lebanon project, thereby becoming better prepared to take part in other

development projects. Most importantly, however, they will be better prepared to meet the challenges here in Norway when it comes to providing an inclusive cultural life.

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