

# Music as a challenge for social work in Slovakia

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## Abstrakt

*Príspevok stručne načrtáva súčasný stav využívania hudby v sociálnej práci v Slovenskej a Českej Republike. V príspevku taktiež predkladáme zahraničné príklady takéhoto spojenia hudby a sociálnej práce, ktoré môžu byť výzvou pre dnešnú modernú sociálnu prácu na Slovensku pri dosahovaní sociálnej zmeny.*

## Kľúčové slová

*Hudba. Hudobno-edukačný sociálny program. Sociálna práca. Sociálna inklúzia. Sociálna zmena.*

## Abstract

*This paper briefly outlines the current status of the use of music in social work in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The paper also provides foreign examples of such connection between music and social work, which can be a challenge for today's modern social work in Slovakia in the intentions of social change.*

## Key words

*Music. Music-education social program. Social work. Social inclusion. Social change.*

**M**usic is old as mankind itself. We can find it in every existing culture and nation in world. It accompanies us throughout life from prenatal development to death. It is a universal language, understood by everyone regardless of what language is he or she speaking. It has mainly communicative and manipulative function, in terms of influence of emotions (Juslin & Sloboda, 2001). From the bio-psycho-social aspect, music (active or passive) affects all three parts.

In helping professions are these benefits used mainly in music therapy. It is also an unavoidable part of education in general or more specific therapeutic or special education. Recently, due to the increasing findings about the effects of music in chronic pain reduction (Kenny & Faunce, 2004) or postoperative pain and faster convalescence after surgery (Bradt, 2010), less consumption of pharmaceutical treatments in hospital (Cepeďa at all., 2006) and other benefits, its effects are used in a comprehensive approach in modern medicine.

In this paper, we will try to answer the question, whether music has a specific place in a profession such social work.

Currently, in Slovakia, music has no important place in academic social work. Social work itself, as an official profession is in Slovakia still in its infancy, the last one hundred years has been undergone a very crooked road and its competencies are still changing and try to specify. Regarding to music in Slovakia, it is based on long tradition, whether on academic ground, focusing on the purely artistic or educational dissemination, or out of school. Nevertheless, music as part of the helping professions has not stable position. Psychology of music is very slowly starting to get into awareness of psychology academics, with the exception of some Slovak pioneers in this area who have begun to pay attention to this in the second half of the twentieth century (for example Holas, 1990; Krbaťa, 1994; Sedlák, 1981; Poledňák 1984). Music therapy as an academic discipline or profession is in our country also not established. As part of the official competencies, music fall only under profession called therapeutic education.

As regards the use of music generally, or music therapy in social work, in Slovakia and Czech Republic, we find very little literature available. This is mainly Zuzana Vitálová (2007) and Zdeněk Šimanovský (2007). As an example is the Social work department at Komenského University in Bratislava (Katedra sociálnej práce, 2006), which has incorporated into the study program subject called Music therapy for social workers. Unfortunately, not yet has been carried out monitoring of such study subjects involving all departments of social work in Slovakia. However, we presuppose that sporadically we can find in teaching at social work departments some incorporation of music, but it needs further study. We also lack some kind of monitoring of use of music by social wor-

kers in practice. Therefore, in Slovakia, we have not too much, what we can rely on and we needed to look abroad for resources on this theme.

To find a link between music and social work, we use definition of social work how it is defined by International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] (2000), as a social change and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. We can find support of this definition also by such authors like Malcolm Payne (2006) or Lena Dominelli (2004).

Can be music a good tool for social change and promotion of well-being?

In the world is probably the biggest example of application of music in order to achieve social change, project called El Sistema (National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras of Venezuela, n.d.). It is Venezuelan state-supported music-education and social program, now funded by the Venezuelan Health and Social Development Ministry, which operates more than 180 community-based centers called "Nucleos" wherein orchestral and choral programs, as well as the educational, artistic and cultural activities of the communities, are developed. Original title was Social Action for Music. Current official title of the program is „Fundación del Estado para el Sistema Nacional de las Orquestas Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela“ [Fesnojiv], which currently covers more than 350,000 poorest children changing their life trajectory and the communities in which they live. This program has its roots in voluntary work of Dr. José Antonio Abreu, composer, conductor and professor of economics, and later minister of culture in Venezuela, when he, in 1975 in Caracas, in Venezuela, did brought 11 children into the parking garages to play musical instruments. Number of children who had come to these music meetings has grown every day until still in the same year, he was able to established a National Youth Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela, with a debut concert after three months of rehearsal. In 1979 this program began to be officially supported by the Government. During 35 years of its existence, this program managed to get in 1993 UNESCO International Music Award as well as countless other awards and were made few movies about it, for example "Tocar y Luchar" (To Play and to Fight) (Arvelo, 2006) or "El Sistema" (Smaczny & Stodtmeier, 2008). José An-

tonio Abreu, among other awards, received also the honor becoming a UNESCO goodwill ambassador in 1998 (UNESCO, 2006).

Into the program are coming children already in the age of two or three. Despite main workers in these centers are music teachers (mostly former students of the program) in addition to teaching music, they are doing activities, which in Slovakia could be part of the competences of social workers. They cooperate with families of their students, they visit them regularly at home and help them to solve social problems. Jose Abreu initial idea was to combat poverty and social exclusion by music. The program aims to use music for child protection, rehabilitation and prevention of criminal behavior, as these children come from extremely underprivileged families, from the environment where drugs are often abused, and where crime is high.

According to the research report of the Inter-American Development Bank (2007), which in 2007 loaned Venezuela \$ 150,000,000 for the construction of other music centers, students in the program have significantly higher class attendance, better academic achievement, lower school dropout rates, fewer behavior problems and are more employable after leaving school than those in a control group.

Also, a case study Diane Marie Hollinger (2006), focusing on the Venezuelan music program confirms the benefits in the system of solving social problems.

Success of this program reached out also people in other countries. In Brazil, in the State of Bahia, uprised on the basis of El Sistema a similar program “NEOJIBÁ-The núcleo of Youth and Children's Orchestra of the State of Bahia” (2009)<sup>1</sup>. Similar programs have been launched in the U.S. (El Sistema USA, 2009), in England (In Harmony, 2009) and Scotland (Sistema Scotland, n.d.).

From May 6–8, 2010, the LA Phil hosted an international symposium in partnership with the League of American Orchestras and El Sistema USA entitled “Composing Change: YOLA and the El Sistema Movement” (League of American Orchestras, 2010). Report from the symposium claimed, that it is necessary to build beside music teaching also

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<sup>1</sup> In Brasil exists also another similar program called Guri Santa Marcelina (n.d.) that has been launched in 1995.

support system. „Have strong support systems in place for children, families and staff so that issues beyond music class can be addressed through the program. A parent liaison, social worker and/or connection to social service organizations create this support. Care for the child holistically, as a musician and a person. The use of an on-site social worker or parent liaison helps facilitate this care“ (Los Angeles Philharmonic Association, 2010, p.1). Despite great outcomes achieved by the leaders of the program in solving social problems of children, they are aware of the need for more vocational assistance of social workers. This type of program with professional knowledge of graduated social workers may be one of the possibilities in combating poverty and social problems.

In some similar projects, they are using concept like social inclusion. In Peru is now running a project supported by the Japanese Poverty Reduction Fund, a special program entitled Music: A Strategy for Social Inclusion (Inter-American Development Bank, 2010). The project is in the implementation phase, so far there are no official results of the fruitfulness of project. They think similarly about music as an effective instrument of social inclusion in Ireland, where Cork City Council ordered a research examining the work of community and voluntary organizations offering music programs in Cork City (Cork City Council, 2009). We found another interesting example of how music can promote social inclusion in Morocco, where the International Organization for Migration [IOM] in cooperation with Morocco Ministry of Social Affairs, Solidarity and Family had recorded hip-hop song with young artists Khouribga and that way transferred to young Moroccans message about the trap of illegal immigration and stimulated between them discussion. It is not just about one song, but it is project that encompasses an awareness campaign about danger of illegal immigration using the input of local youth to inform and promote social services for young people in the region (IOM, 2010).

In 2008, with the support of the Seventh Framework Programme started up project of 6 European universities, entitled “Usability of Music for the Social Inclusion of Children” (UMSIC, n.d.), which will last until 2011. Although this project focuses primarily on promotion of social inclusion for children in preschool and school facilities, there is a possible potential use in school or community social work.

Better connection between music and social work can be found in Germany. The largest German Center for street work<sup>2</sup>, seating in Berlin, called "Gangway", established by German Senate for Education, Science and Research and district offices of Berlin, uses hip-hop music. Through their one project "Gangway Beatz", they are trying with hip-hop music to help socially disadvantaged young people. Nevertheless, they use its ability to tell stories of street and individuals. Hip-hop music has for social workers great importance in the context of more effective communication with young people in borderline situations in the streets of Berlin. The Centre among other things also organizes regular workshops of hip-hop music and through the project, they support recording own songs of these young people in the music recording studio. This year was released already second CD with their own production. The first CD was released in 2008 (Gangway, n.d.). In addition to this example, we need to point out that Germany has generally a strong tradition in the application of music in social work. Perhaps the best known names in this field are The Hartogh and Hans Herman Vickel with their publication "Handbuch Musik in der Sozialen Arbeit" (2004). To the music in social work are devoted also Burkhard Hill and Elke Josties (2007) or Jutta Jäger and Ralf Kuckhermann (2004). However, when applied to the Slovak social work, we must calculate with fact, that German social work is based more on the discipline "social education" and thus is tuned also work of these authors. Anyway, it can be very helpful inspiration for future social work in Slovakia.

We must be careful with the application of music in solving social problems in Slovakia also within the other mentioned cases. This is mainly in financial terms, because as has already been referred, mentioned project are mostly financially subsidized by the government or through financing projects. One interesting option in the effective help of social inclusion and community development can be with using voluntary music groups, as it is mentioned in the report from six month research project looking at social inclusion issues „Making music together“(Simpson, 2005) in Great Britain. Here is certain inspiration for voluntary work in

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from german term „Strassen Sozialarbeit“ that would be in Slovak conditions better recognized under the term „Terrain social work“.

Slovakia. Although, we can not say that in Slovakia are no voluntary activities in collaboration with several musical ensembles, there is a challenge for the Slovak social work to start cooperating more with the music departments at universities, local art schools, or local musicians and collaborating together, whether by volunteering or through proposing for new financial projects.

The aim of this paper was not to bring comprehensive report about the situation of use of music in solving social problems in the world, but to show few examples of this phenomenon. As demonstrated by previous examples, music appears to have a power to promote social change. If a musician or music teacher can effectively induce social change, we should take it into consideration for the use in social workers practice. Of course, it would be reckless to use some of these musical projects from other countries thoughtlessly in the Slovak conditions, but we can see the potential that can be used in work for example with the Roma people, in the school social work, community social work, social work with youth, seniors, terrain social work, or in issues about prevention or social exclusion.

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