Living the Arts in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Over the centuries, changes in technology and education have transformed people's attitudes towards the arts, making them more accessible. Bohemianism and modern art in the 18th century challenged the elitist perception of the arts, democratizing access. Digital tools and online resources have further opened doors to creating and experiencing visual and performing arts. However, despite this accessibility, society is increasingly moving away from the arts due to a focus on technology, capitalism, individualism, materialism, and instant gratification, leading to rising mental health issues. Engaging in the arts, which connect us to the physical world through our senses, can counteract these issues by promoting self-fulfilled artistic experiences. The 20th and 21st centuries have brought new ideologies to the arts, emphasizing discovery and inquiry. Yet, these values can sometimes be overshadowed by past knowledge. Striking a balance between traditional prestige and modern experimentation is crucial. Making art experiences accessible to all, fosters sensitivity, interpretation, critical thinking, feeling, and expression—essential qualities in the current generation. For instance, Michael D. Higgins has highlighted the role of creativity in fostering an engaged and innovative society. In one of his addresses, he mentioned "the Arts have clear economic potential but, even more important, they are vital indicators of the spirit of the times as well as being enablers of positive

change" (Higgins, 2012). The art of our time reflects our current self-perception and creative language, shaping our cultural identity. Individual creative expression today can define tomorrow's national cultural identity. The arts continue to evolve as a mirror of our society's values and beliefs. All this will be explored through two artistic projects, one focusing on music composition and performance, while the other focusing on visual art. Both projects have a strong element of community practice, which give the opportunity for further investigation into hands-on workshops.

Introduction

The paper comprises two studies that exemplify the role of the arts in an educational process aimed at cultural development and well-being. The two presented projects aim at promoting arts education as having transformative potential to embark on a life-long learning journey that stimulates curiosity, cultivating critical thinking skills and personal growth. The first study, conducted by visual artist and educator Charmaine Zammit, focuses on research proposals that can guide freelance educators in harnessing the potential of a national art museum collection as a space for holistic learning practices. Thereby fostering and sustaining meaningful community relationships. The second study conducted by composer and educator Mariella Cassar-Cordina delves into a multidisciplinary collaborative project in which research into fundamental elements and post-production techniques associated with both recorded music and video art becomes an integral part of the compositional process. This process encompasses sociological, philosophical, and aesthetic dimensions. Inspired by visual imagery and multifaceted spaces, the objective is to create music that complements and interacts with other art forms, leaving an impact on both performers and audiences.

Research Context-Study 1

The Museum Holistic Educational Outreach (2016-2017) consisted of three participatory action-research projects with three different communities of young adults in Malta. The projects explored holistic educational strategies prioritising young adults' lifelong learning and wellbeing through personal and social connection, within the context of Malta's national art museum – MUŻA. The investigation focused on the participants' own learning strategies rather than assessing their learning content from the museum collection. Overall, the projects specifically aimed to address the social and learning needs of three communities of young adult participants (aged 21-30 years) (Zammit, 2020). Due to their unique set of multiple needs, young adults are a challenging demographic for museums to reach out to. This age group's interests and schedules can be highly variable, due to career ambitions, and evolving personal tastes. Furthermore, young adults typically seek interactive, engaging, and socially relevant experiences that resonate with their own identities. Due to their unique set of multiple needs, young adults are "a difficult group for museums to cultivate" (Sommers, 2018:15). Thus, they are often excluded from local cultural projects and events, which focus mainly on families, school children and teenagers.

The first project was carried out with residents at a drug rehabilitation centre. The second project was carried out with university students enrolled in a Bachelor's in Art Education (B.Ed.) course and thus had an art background. The third project was held with inmates at a correctional facility. Of the three communities, Zammit's expectation was that the participants of the second project, the art education students, would be most acquainted with the art museum collection. However, she found that they were unfamiliar with the national art collection and just like the other two communities of young adults they were going through personal challenging times due to stressful students'

lifestyle facing exams and constant deadlines. The participants said that the project's sessions were allowing them time to slow down and reflect on themselves and life to make meaning.

Given that "…objects do not speak for themselves…they are given meaning…" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007: 236), the research concerned scenarios of holistic art education providing meaningful engagement experiences through visual art. Based on the research results obtained through the participants' observations captured via interviews (prior and post projects) and their journals, the study indicated that a sense of well-being can be achieved by engaging in visual art through making meaning. This is because the participants, regardless of their artistic background, skills in art appreciation and art making, could experience connection to the physical and inner world, by using their basic sense of 'seeing' while looking at art (their own and that of others). Indeed, looking carefully at artworks helps to shift one's focus to the present moment, and for a short while, slowing down from unnecessary thoughts/ worries/ future projections and the constant distractions especially those emerging from the addictive scrolling on digital devices.

The Arts' Unexpected Learning Outcomes

Zammit's findings indicate that the main factor making the projects relevant to the participants was the trust placed in them, allowing for active participation in constructing their approaches to dealing with art and thematic interpretations. This trust also facilitated connections to their multiple identities, the museum collection, and their lives. The Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) namely knowledge and understanding, skills, attitudes and values, enjoyment, inspiration and creativity, action, behaviour and progression, were considered at the planning stage of the projects. They were aimed to structure the assessment criteria of the projects' impact. While researching the projects' activities and

analysing the impact of educational strategies applied throughout, eventually the GLOs served as predictive criteria. Meanwhile, unexpected learning outcomes started to emerge, which were mentioned by the participants themselves during interviews and recorded in the researcher's field notes. After all, the projects' aim was to explore the participants' own learning strategies rather than assessing their learning content from the museum collection. As reported in RCMG (2004), the outcomes of learning are individually experienced as one learns using one's own preferred learning styles, in response to what one wants to know. Hence, the evaluation of the impact of the three projects included the observations of the transferable skills as applied by the participants throughout their creative process. Moreover, the impact was also evaluated through the participants' verbal and documented feedback on the learning strategies they discovered during the projects.

The three projects' findings indicate the participants' awareness of transferable skills they had been practising combined with their constructive learning process. The participants mentioned the following skills which they believe will serve them throughout life (life-wide and life-long learning): mind-mapping; art journaling; time-management; evaluation; thinking (creative and critical); communication; social skills; observation; interpreting; problem-solving; decision-making; and resilience. These skills recall the "multiple process of meaning-making in the museum context… as paths to life-long learning" (Kristinsdotteir, 2017:433). After all, the final goal of a constructivist approach is to cultivate lifelong learners (Wang, 2009).

While the projects' results reveal that participants found the workshops enjoyable and expressed a desire for their duration to be extended, they also noted that the knowledge gained could have practical applications in their daily lives beyond the projects. However, to ascertain whether any participants

continued to utilize these transferable skills after the projects ended, additional research would have been required.

Arts Education for Lifelong Learning

The research findings prompted Zammit to undergo a complete re-evaluation of arts' educational outreach. The study revealed that in the context of planning and implementing community arts outreach programmes, the role of an arts educator is to foster the development of individual multiple identities and promote holistic learning by facilitating social interaction in connection with artworks or a museum collection.

The research indicated that to facilitate social interaction, establishing a foundation of trust among participants is crucial for nurturing a community of inquiry. Within this community, individuals can openly question and challenge each other's interpretations of life and the museum collection. Over time, their knowledge exchange encourages them to reexamine their preconceived beliefs and acknowledge any misconceptions related to their identities, art, museums, and life. Ultimately, this process gives rise to new perspectives on themselves, others, art, and life (Fig. 1). This research outcome recalls the definition of museum learning as "a transformative experience" which leads to the development of "new attitudes, interests, appreciation, beliefs" (Lord, 2007:17). The outcomes of the research also align with a contribution to the participants' lifelong learning purpose "for personal development and fulfilment" (Aspin and Chapman, 2001:39) through art education.

Figure 1 Participant exploring identity, inspired by the museum collection.

Arts serving as Digital Detox for the Digital Natives

Zammit's research originated from her personal awareness of the growing demand for human connection in today's digital era. Media professor Sherry Turkle (2015) spent the last 30 years researching the social and psychological effects of digital technology. She argues that in an age where we constantly communicate in a technological universe, electronic devices are threatening to make us less social as humans. Turkle (2015) insists that with an increasing awareness of the decline in social intimacy due to digital technology, it is time to regain face-to-face conversation through the most basic technology - talk.

Ironically, while attempts are being made on programming robots with algorithms to mimic human emotions and senses (Kurzweil, 2012), one often observes people increasingly being hypnotized with digitalization to the point of exhaustion. According to well-being expert and teacher Holly Niemela (2018), global companies, hospitals and governments such as the Mindful Nation UK, have been striving to provide a balance to people's digital lifestyles.

Although the task for the participants in the second project involved creating virtual art exhibitions, which required the use of technology devices, most of them expressed a preference for freehand drawing and the tangible development of their ideas through the manipulation of textures and materials. In fact, they primarily created their mind-maps in their sketchbooks (Fig. 2). On multiple occasions, participants mentioned that the actual use of tools such as pens, scissors, glue, and materials gave them a sense of slowing down and nurtured their creativity, something they greatly appreciated during their stressful final year of the university course.

Figure 2 Participants' tangible mind-maps on art journals.

Despite the immediate stereotypical suggestion of digital technology being the main contemporary attraction for young adults—the so-called digital natives (Prensky, 2001), the participants of the first and third projects could not access internet or digital devices due to their particular contexts. Nevertheless, they still engaged with the national art museum collection. Media professor Sherry

Turkle (2015), who has researched the social and psychological effects of digital technology, states that due to the electronic devices depriving people of social intimacy, it is necessary to rediscover and promote face-to-face dialogue. Similarly, across all three projects, participants frequently deliberated upon what they perceived as the irony of becoming inundated by the demands of constant digital connectivity, consequently missing out on physical connections with both each other and the tangible world. The following two quotes were excerpted from the focus group discussion conducted during the second project:

"I think we miss the simple joys in life as we worry about staying connected through social media all the time…"

 "…the joy of life is not only found on the internet."

Meaningful Connections

For the purposes of the study, the term 'meaning-making' refers to an educational process, where the participants engaged in constant dialogue not only with themselves but also with others. They negotiated their relationship with art, connections with their own life experiences and social themes that emerged while dealing with the projects' task development (Fig. 3).

Figure 3 Participants engaging in dialogue throughout their creative process.

According to the participants, the project's learning process, centred around meaning-making, offered them a profound sense of satisfaction. Making sense of and expressing their own perspectives while remaining open to having their viewpoints challenged and expanded helped to restore their overall well-being. Instead of focusing solely on measurable learning outcomes, the participants acquired skills that enhance their ability to confront a world that might challenge their preconceptions, resist their initiatives, and overlook their desires. This echoes Biesta's (2017) assertion of the function of education to prepare the individual's desire to be-in-dialogue with a world which at times interferes with one's ingrained beliefs.

Although Zammit's community projects did not aim at providing art therapy, being "liberating processes in themselves" (Gutierrez, 2016:61) by prioritizing the participants' knowledge agenda, interests and needs, they still have led to transformations. Her overall aim of the research projects was to explore young

adults' own ways of using a national art collection to acquire lifelong learning through which they could make meaningful connections to others, life, and art.

The transformative approach proposed here embraces the participants' own narratives and meanings, which are inspired by their meaningful engagement with art. This begins with a shift in mindset, considering the engagement with an art collection and art-making as a lifelong educational resource—one that belongs to the public, rather than exclusively serving a select group of talented artists or art connoisseurs.

The following list summarizes suggestions for art educators, gathered from Zammit's research findings that emerged from the participants' exchange of knowledge regarding their learning strategies while engaging with artworks from the national art collection:

· choosing a theme that resonates with one's interests and beliefs will help one to reflect on oneself and life;

· drawing mind-maps guides one to explore ideas, memories and connections;

· reflecting on ideas, plans, discoveries and discussing them with others provides development of new meanings on art and themes;

· keeping an art journal helps to store the creative process of ideas, observations of artworks for inspiration, reflections, connections, mind-maps, different ideas, plans, related pictures and experiments with art materials and techniques;

· showing others' pages from one's art journal facilitates group discussions, the exchange of discoveries, ideas, plans and feedback to explore alternative ideas for improvement;

· choosing works of art from the museum collection related to a chosen theme keeps the inspiration evolving;

· keeping the chosen theme in mind while exploring an art collection raises questions about life issues;

· taking time to slow down and observe an artwork provides more details to look at, and to find connections with thoughts about life;

· while looking at artworks with others, ask questions related to one's chosen theme or theirs to discuss and develop further interpretations;

· taking time to develop an artwork provides deeper learning as the creative process leads one to think and understand further;

· presenting work-in-progress generates feedback from others, which can provide alternative ways of developing an artwork and alternative ways of seeing.

Communicating Narratives

Based on the constructivist educational model, which posits that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences (Piaget, 1957; Vygotsky, 1978), Zammit's study aimed to offer guidance to arts educators focusing on the well-being of young adult communities. This approach, also known as 'transformative learning' according to Mezirow (1996), emphasizes the participants' sense of achievement derived from constructive and interpretive learning while engaging in contextualized tasks. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) argues that all interpretation is historically situated, and meaning is constructed within culture. Zammit's research projects encouraged the participants to consider their own historical context and culture in shaping their interpretations when engaging with the museum collection.

Aligned with Tilden's (2009) interpretivist learning concept, the educator's role was to facilitate the participants' creation, maintenance, and transformation of their understanding of reality through the interpretation of life issues via art observation. This perspective resonates with Hooper-Greenhill's (2000)

comprehensive view of culture, which considers culture holistically, encompassing all aspects of daily life in the construction of meaning. Allowing participants to communicate their own understanding of culture made their connections to art and life feel valid. Their participation in the study also bolstered their confidence in looking at and discussing art (Fig. 4). Furthermore, their involvement in evaluating and documenting their learning process through their art journals provided them with a sense of self-worth.

Figure 4 Project 1's Participants engaging with the museum collection.

Research Context-Study 2

This section identifies another community-based artistic project entitled *Ġgantija 2013*. Premiered in 2013, this multidisciplinary work, conceived by the Ars Vitae Ensemble[1], engages in a dialogue with the Ġgantija Temples in Xaghra, Gozo, and integrates literature, music, and visual art. The project aimed to explore new forms of artistic practice, particularly where digital and instrumental sources intersect. Indeed, the project was entirely based on collaboration with musicians, writers, and in particular visual artists, generating a process of experimentation, live performances and soundscapes and combination thereof. The project was based on an artistic intersection that has consistently regenerated the compositional and artistic process from new

perspectives, maintaining a fresh and exciting creative environment. Inspired by visual images and multifaceted spaces, the main intention was to create music that complements and interacts with other art-forms, and that impacts performers and audiences alike.

The shift to open to a more liberal artistic language can be credited to new freedoms enjoyed by artists due to the dominant influence on the arts from mid-1970s to the end of the century (postmodernism). This was itself largely a product of the new intellectual movements of the 1960s. All this is best seen as part of a general challenge to older authorities and a general upheaval in human relationships affecting both young people and adults, giving rise to movements—namely postcolonialism—which had strong effects on the arts. The granting of Maltese independence in 1964 was particularly important in that it inspired artists to represent the language of the people through their creativity, as in the case of Maltese composer Charles Camilleri (1931-2009), and Estonian composer Arvo Pärt (born 1935) and Polish composer Henryk Gorecki (1933–2010) whose music stirred nationalist sentiments in their respective countries.[2] This project relates observations in relation to the impact a nation's past and traditions can have on an artist. Indeed, the creative process induces self-reflection on the relationship between the environment, community, and the artist through a contemporary artistic approach.

From the end of this 'cultural revolution' onwards, the most distinctive medium in art is assemblage, often incorporating technological elements such as computers.[3] Concurrently, an ever-increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of pre-existing works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use available cultural products or works created by others. A vivid example lies at the museum in Padua where, without overshadowing or endangering the historical *objet d'art*, some of the artists'

exuberant works became a modern extension of the artefacts exhibited.[4] This post-production culture implies a profound transformation of the status of the work of art: going beyond its traditional role as a receptacle of the artist's vision. As is with this project, what matters is the equality, an assumption of same capacities, the possibility of an equal relationship, between the composer and the other collaborators. In this new form of culture, the artwork functions as a temporary terminal of a network of interconnected elements (Fig. 5).
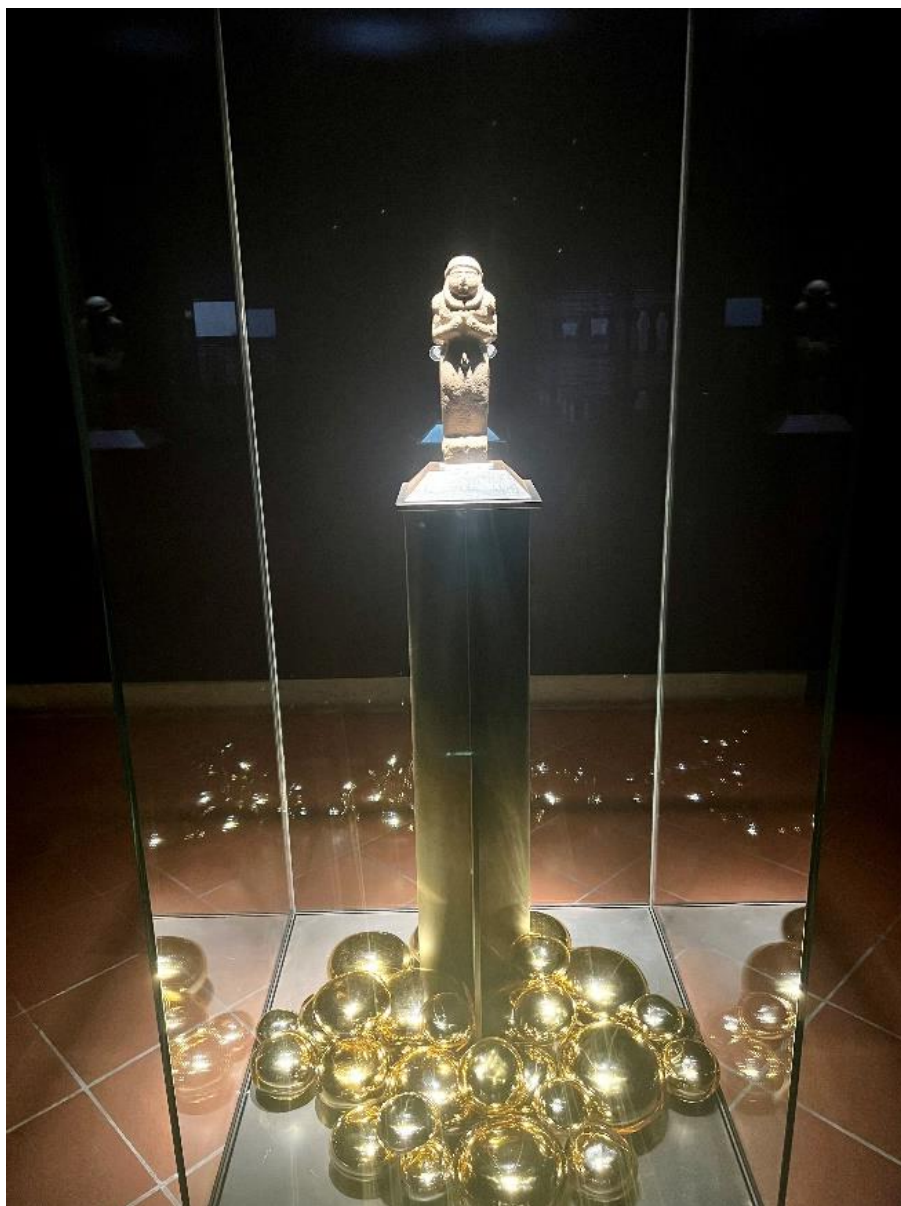
Figure 5 Statue in the museum showing the fusion between different epochs.

Ġgantija 2013

Ġgantija 2013 was part of a distinctive project that sought to engage audiences from different backgrounds and age groups. The research project was three-fold, comprising a set of workshops for different audiences, including educators, a number of performances at the Ġgantija Temples, and a final performance and exhibition at St James Cavalier, Valletta with links to the live performances in Gozo through video art. This recalls what Barrett (2001:27) in his article *Interdisciplinary Work and Musical Integrity* states, "a comprehensive music education embraces valid interdisciplinary relationships."

The multidisciplinary art-specific work *Ġgantija 2013* was born after discussions between Cassar-Cordina and Agius. The idea was to work on a proposal which would give free rein to the artists' artistic freedom, with the involvement of other participants, whilst at the same time blending the diverse mediums of visual art and sound into one cohesive language. Inspired by the historical implications bound with this prehistoric site, the lyrics for the music composition were written by Maltese writer Immanuel Mifsud in the form of free style. In this work music and visual art were perceived as an analogy or metaphor in artistic expression. Most of the sculptures could be defined as 'non-representational art', reflecting their relationship with music and the belief that, like music, art is created from the depths of one's inner self and the purest way to express this is without recognisable imagery. As with art, the music composition is abstract in its expressive qualities, with the fusion of electroacoustic effects and acoustic sounds that relate to the different types of material used by Agius (clay, wood, and metal).

The musical piece responds to qualities tied to the Temples. Hence, initial discussions between the artist, percussion player and the composer, led to build instruments that could generate sounds emanating from clay, a *materia prima*

commonly used for domestic and agriculture utensils from the Neolithic time up to the early Middle Ages (Evans, 1971). These instruments gave a particular identity to the composition. The irregular rhythms of the composition were reproduced and re-enacted in the artist's way of working when modelling the crude clay and applying the earthy pigments and dry roots to his art pieces. The result of this collaborative effort was an artistic display of Agius's works and a set of live performances delivered in one multi-media work (Fig. 6).

Figure 6 Showing some of Agius's artistic works positioned inside the Temples.

Similar projects have been undertaken by Italian composer and paleorganologist Walter Maioli. Maioli, the founder of Il Centro del Suono, has undertaken a lifelong exploration of the relationship between nature, sound and music through the recording of sounds of different environments and their inhabitants as a sensorial experience.[5] As was the case with *Ġgantija 2013*, Maioli's concerts took place in the prehistoric sites of Toirano and Borgio Verezzi, Italy. Another interesting art-inspired music project was the interdisciplinary initiative curated by the McNally Smith Music College (USA) faculty member William

Franklin, a Liberal Arts instructor, with the help of the Department Head of Music Composition, Chris Cunningham. Similar to this work, the project features nine compositions based on Minnesota artists' paintings, photography, sculpture and the architecture of The Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St Paul, USA).[6]

The outcome of *Ġgantija 2013* can be understood in terms of 'influence and effect'—the 'influence and effect' that the composer, lyric writer and visual artist transmitted to each other as diverse artists and 'the influence and effect' which have been conveyed to and from the performers and the audience. During the artistic process, Agius's sculptures and paintings kept on changing as a result of the music, having operated within a context of ideas and adopted working practices, which were given yet another meaning by the audience, with a direct impact on the work itself. Moreover, as indicated on the score, performers were only directed up to a certain extent since they also had the possibility to add new material within a pre-set musical framework. This made the composition open to interpretation every time it was performed.

Figure 7 During the initial stages of the process: experimenting with sound at the Temples.

The creative process led to the exploration of the relationship between nature, sound and music through improvisation and the recording of sounds of different environments and their inhabitants as a sensorial experience. Discussions of thoughts and feelings were integral to the work as they engendered a sharing of experiences between the musicians and the composer of the piece. This made it possible for the music to develop in response to the feedback given, which further informed the development of the musicians' improvisations within an organised framework. Furthermore, during the performances, the performers had to play outside in a non-conventional setting as they were placed at different areas inside the north and south Temples (Fig. 7). Playing on site, close to the Ġgantija walls added another important layer to the performance, as the players could feel the bareness, sacredness and simplicity of the place and listen to the beautiful natural echoes that the site translates.

According to the participants, the whole process was 'uplifting' and 'engaging', transmitting a feeling of empathy with the place, which translated into a deep sense of meaning and purpose. Violinist Emese Tóth, one of the participants in this project, claimed that as a foreigner musician who lives in Malta, she has special feelings when she plays Cassar-Cordina's works. She stated that she feels the uniqueness of Gozo and she gets closer to the soul of the inhabitants. She added that in Cassar-Cordina's works she can feel the presence of the unspoiled nature, the innocence of the people, and the insularity of Gozo. (Emese Tóth, 2011, January 6). Through photography, a member from the audience, was able to capture a number of instances where people attending the live performances were dancing and creating artistic shadows on the massive walls of the Temples, others were joining in with the music and creating new rhythmic patterns, whilst others were reflecting and meditating amidst the ritual atmosphere the participants managed to create.[7]

In the influential work "The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life," Erving Goffman (1959) conceptualizes a performance as a fluid scenario devoid of rigid roles or established power dynamics, describing it as "all the actions performed by an individual on a particular occasion which serve to influence any other participants in any manner" (Goffman, 1959:8). Contrasting this, a public rendition of Western classical music typically involves skilled musicians who deliver and perform a piece for an indeterminate audience, as noted by Small (1998). Christopher Small was critical of the way Western classical music is often taught and valued over other forms of music. He argued that music education should not just focus on the "great musical objects" performed in concert halls but should also treasure the act of "musicking"—the human encounter where people come together to make meanings and celebrate their common humanity (Small, 1990). This perspective implies a recognition of the value in all forms of music-making, whether it be in the classical tradition or popular music genres.

In formal concert venues, the spatial arrangement clearly delineates the hierarchy between musicians and the audience, as noted by Nightingale (1996). The architectural design of these performance spaces often pre-establishes such power structures. In *Ġgantija 2013* the people attending could move and interact with the musicians. This flexibility made them feel, part of the performance, giving a personal meaning to the experience. Indeed, the sounds created by their actions created yet another dimension to the composition and performances. The performances at the Temples were 'fluid', making sure that all stakeholders embrace their own creative skills, and experience some sort of empowerment (Fig. 8).

Figure 8 Soprano Miriam Cauchi performing amidst the audience during the live performances.

In this framework there was a sense of equality, an assumption of same capacities and equal relationship between all stakeholders. (Auslander, 2008; O'Reilly, Larsen, & Kubacki, 2014). Indeed, as the project progressed, participants developed fresh understandings of their own performance and the work itself. This was achieved through engaging with the audience, leading to varied interpretations, forging new narratives.

Figure 9 Youths experimenting with spiral designs.

Holding to the same artistic idiom of the performances, during the workshops, participants had the possibility to invent art works and explore and create rhythms and sound effects that are not commonly explored in traditional settings (Fig. 9). As facilitators in these workshops, the composer and the visual artist made sure to loosely organise the group giving space to the group to take the lead when needed. This enabled the participants to feel welcome and take charge of their own experiences. The project sought to foster the creative and innate musician in each participant, focusing on inclusion, creativity, and ownership. Performing arts audiences are communities, defined by "publicness" and "co-presence", as David Hesmondhalgh has argued (Hesmondhalgh, 2013:86, see also Dearn, 2017). O'Sullivan (2009) suggests that audiences perform three essential characteristics of community: shared consciousness, collective rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility.

Barker (2006:129) refers to an audience as an "interpretative community", while Karlsen (2014) found music festivals to be a source of informal learning and a potential community of practice. In 2016, another project *Layers*,

composed and organised by Ars Vitae Ensemble, was performed locally at St Agatha's Catacombs, Rabat. Embracing the same concept, the participation of both performers and audience was an integral part of the identity of the performances. Hopefully, through such projects we can begin as Small (1998:10) believes in: "to see a musical performance as an encounter between human beings".

Paths and Interceptions: a unified process

In this research project, the visual and the auditory influenced each other from the very beginning of the working process leading Cassar-Cordina and Agius to discuss the possible compromise between the visual and the auditory in order to obtain the best solution for a collaborative project that give reign to all stakeholders to feel part of this artistic process and cultivate a sense of historical empathy. This gave the project an identity of its own where the original artistry of the space, as the main component of the work, and the original recordings conducted on site were manipulated in a way so as to create an artwork which functions as a net of unified components. The artistic development in this project went beyond its traditional role as a receptacle of the artists' vision, it functioned as an active agent, a musical score, an unfolding scenario, a framework that possessed autonomy and materiality to varying degrees. The collaboration process in all scenarios was an informal and accidental one, where research goals happened to coincide to mutually enriching each other.

Conclusion

The paper advocates the establishment of partnerships between arts practices (such as music and visual art) and community well-being programmes. These programmes could be recommended as referrals by health and social care organizations, offering an alternative to the often-stigmatized settings of mental health institutions and arts therapies, which can sometimes deter individuals

from attending. Arts practices and workshops provide inclusive spaces that encourage individuals to embark on a journey of self-discovery, leading to self-connection and fostering connections with others.

The two community projects presented in this paper encompass various aspects of questioning and processes combining innovative hybrid practices. Concepts stem from the political and geographical context of Malta, characterised by the insularity that comes from being a small island nation. Simultaneously, both projects exhibit a contextual fluidity and nomadic quality—representing open-ended and inquisitive journeys rather than final conclusions. The two projects defy permanence and explore the concept of 'territory' through the lenses of temporality and 'viatorisation'[8] embracing themes, materiality, personal narratives, and artistic navigation as the foundational elements of well-being and the potential seeds of discovery.

"…the potential of multiple minds is greater than one". (Prestini, 2014)

Most of the artistic experiences can only be unlocked with multiple minds working in tandem to realize a larger goal. Community multidisciplinary projects are closely tied to a wider artistic legacy that aims at reaching that ideal; an expression of cultural democracy (Higgins, 2012). Similarly, both projects lead to the exploration of cultural identity through the encouragement of curiosity, critical thinking, collaboration.

Notes

[1] Ars Vitae Ensemble, led by composer Mariella Cassar-Cordina and visual artist Victor Agius is a Maltese NGO established in 2013. The Ensemble aims to create collaborative projects that use contemporary art and music composition as a primary medium to interact with cultural, social, and historical concepts trough research and re-invention. The ensemble aims at fusing aspects of multiculturalism to its projects and draw up educational initiatives through hands-on activities and workshops that involve various sections of the community (https://www.facebook.com/ArsVitaeEnsemble).

[2] The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 was particularly important in that it permitted the release, particularly in music, of Russian and East European influences (Marwick, 2003).

[3] Leading figures in the first wave of assemblage are the German, Josef Beuys (1921–1986), a curator for early postmodernist exhibitions and the Italian, Michelangelo Pistoletto (born 1933), one of the first artists to incorporate mirrors in his exhibitions (Acton, 2004).

[4] Example from the museum Civici Eremitani, Anime di Sasso (2013) by Giorgio Vigna, part of the Mesopotamia Statue which dates to the second half of the Fourth Century B.C.

[5] Refer to http://www.soundcenter.it/

[6] Refer to http://www.mcnallysmith.edu/news-and-events/186

[7] Valerie Morgan, a British art therapist resident in Gozo attended the performances at the Temples and managed to capture images showing people fully immersed through different artistic practices. She passed on these images to members of the Ensemble.

[8] 'Viatorisation' refers to travelling (from Latin, viator means traveller). This term actually offers an interesting starting point for discussing dynamic working processes where it is no longer possible to state where the work begins or ends. Forms manifest themselves during, as well as before and after the production (http://youngarthistorians.blogspot.com/2009/05/altermodern.html).

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