

Kertz-Welzel, Alexandra

## **What we should consider before proposing music education for social change**

Martin, Kai [Hrsg.]: *Zukunft. Musikpädagogische Perspektiven auf soziale und kulturelle Transformationsprozesse*. Weimar : Hochschule für Musik FRANZ LISZT Weimar 2025, S. 36-43



Quellenangabe/ Reference:

Kertz-Welzel, Alexandra: What we should consider before proposing music education for social change - In: Martin, Kai [Hrsg.]: *Zukunft. Musikpädagogische Perspektiven auf soziale und kulturelle Transformationsprozesse*. Weimar : Hochschule für Musik FRANZ LISZT Weimar 2025, S. 36-43 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-325330 - DOI: 10.25656/01:32533

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-325330>

<https://doi.org/10.25656/01:32533>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Die Nutzung stellt keine Übertragung des Eigentumsrechts an diesem Dokument dar und gilt vorbehaltlich der folgenden Einschränkungen: Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

### **Terms of use**

We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document.

This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. Use of this document does not include any transfer of property rights and it is conditional to the following limitations: All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

### **Kontakt / Contact:**

peDOCS  
DIPF | Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation  
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung  
E-Mail: [pedocs@dipf.de](mailto:pedocs@dipf.de)  
Internet: [www.pedocs.de](http://www.pedocs.de)

Mitglied der

  
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Kai Martin (Hrsg.)

---

# Zukunft

Musikpädagogische Perspektiven auf soziale  
und kulturelle Transformationsprozesse

---

## **Impressum**

Dieser Band versammelt Beiträge, die im Nachgang eines musikpädagogischen Symposiums an der Hochschule für Musik FRANZ LISZT Weimar verfasst worden sind.

Das Copyright der Beiträge liegt bei den jeweiligen Autor\*innen.

Herausgeber: Kai Martin

Hochschule für Musik FRANZ LISZT Weimar

Platz der Demokratie 2/3, 99423 Weimar

Weimar 2025

Redaktion und Layout: Jonas Brehm

# Inhalt

Vorbemerkung	3
<i>Oliver Kautny</i> Das <i>Cologne Hip Hop Institute</i> . Ein universitäres Projekt im Kontext musikpädagogischer Forschung	5
<i>Alexandra Kertz-Welzel</i> What we should consider before proposing music education for social change	36
<i>Kai Martin</i> Inneres und äußeres musikalisches Handeln. Aristoteles' Handlungstheorie aus musikpädagogischer Perspektive	44
<i>Stefan Orgass</i> Zur wissenschaftlichen Vernunft im Umgang mit dem konstitutiven Werten in Handlungen und Interaktionen musikpädagogischer (Forschungs-)Praxis	63

Alexandra Kertz-Welzel

## **What we should consider before proposing music education for social change**

In recent years, in international and especially in Anglo-American music education, there have been many calls for music education to aim at societal transformations. Activist music education or artistic citizenship are examples for this approach (Hess, 2019; Elliott et al., 2016). While the social impact of the arts and particularly music education is well known (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008), the intensity and the repetitiveness with which music education for social change has been brought up might be new. There could be various reasons for this fact, for instance global crises such as wars or a pandemic, economic or social problems, or the feeling of helplessness in view of autocratic politicians. In situations when no one seems to have a solution, the arts are often invoked as panacea, supposedly being able to help when nothing else seems promising. Certainly, this is a problematic approach.

When taking a closer look at concepts of music education and social change, it becomes obvious that most of them are relatively uncritical reflections presenting a wishful dream - with which most music educators and scholars would agree because it makes us important for society. This is somehow paradoxical since many investigations concerned with music education and social change (e.g., Hess, 2019) refer to critical theory and critical pedagogy – but have problems to criticize their own approaches and to follow basic scholarly standards such as clearly defining significant terms, concepts (e.g., social change) or utilizing knowledge and methods from related fields of research (e.g., political studies, sociology). To develop a promising and critical concept regarding music education and social change, going beyond the often superficial claims that music will “heal” the world, a more complex approach is needed, addressing various dimensions which have so far mostly been overlooked.

This is exactly the topic of this chapter. It critically sketches some scholarly preconditions for a concept regarding music education and social change. In what follows, issues such as what social change is, the arts’ relation to social change, how society is transformed, and the role music education could play are addressed. All of these ideas, however, will be presented only in snapshots because there exists a more comprehensive discussion of the various issues presented here (Kertz-Welzel, 2022).

## What is social change?

Social change is an ambiguous term. While in international music education (e.g., Elliott et al., 2016; Hess, 2019), social change is mostly seen as something positive, this is, in fact, not generally true. Dictators or autocrats caused social change, significantly transforming the societies they were in charge of. Generally, social change “in the broadest sense is any change in social relations” (Strout & Corbin, 2008, p. vii). Likewise, it can be understood as “the alteration of mechanisms within the social structure, characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behavior, social organization, or value system” (Wilterdink & Form, 2020) or “the existence of significant differences in social life and social phenomena” (Schatzki, 2019, p. 16). This indicates that social change can concern different levels of society, no matter if societal structures or individual lives.

Additionally, there are different kinds of social change, as sociological research indicates (Sabonnière, 2017; Schatzki, 2019). It can be fast or slow, gradual or sudden, sustainable or superficial. It can concern different levels of society, e.g. the micro, meso or macro level. There are also different models describing how social change happens: the evolutionary or conflict model, organic growth or cyclic change. There can be different reasons for social change, ranging from natural causes such as a pandemic to social movements, revolutions or the efforts of individuals. Likewise, there can be different goals or intentions of social change such as social justice, freedom or human flourishing. The notion of social change is flexible and can be connected to various aspects, addressing urgent issues of specific times such as environmental issues since “social theory that is environmentally blind is as potentially problematic as social theory that is gender-, race- or class-blind” (Lockie et al., 2014, p. 3). It will be interesting to see how our notions of social change will develop in the future.

But social change is not only positive. It can also aim at societal changes implementing an ideology such as during the Third Reich in Germany. Hitler and Mussolini certainly caused social change – and many more dictators or autocrats. The COVID-19 pandemic also caused social change, significantly transforming various parts of public and private life. However, in international music education, social change is often regarded as something positive, something everyone wants without clarifying what exactly they want. When proposing music education for social change, it is crucial to determine what it means and to take into account its ambivalence. Even though this might on the one hand seem to weaken the significance of music education, on the other hand, it will strengthen it because we have a more realistic perspective, knowing about the opportunities, but also the limits of the arts and music education in relation to social change.

## The arts and social change

When considering music education and social change, it is important to take into account the long tradition of the arts' social impact. Belfiore and Bennett (2008) offer a comprehensive perspective on this issue and identify six arguments describing the power of the arts as they have been presented in intellectual history. These arguments are also often points of reference for arts advocacy today, even though in slightly changed versions: catharsis, personal well-being, education and self-development, moral improvement and civilization, political instrumentalization, social stratification and identity construction. Many of these aspects are well known. While there are certainly also different ways of describing the social impact of the arts, e.g. from the perspective of psychology of music (Hallam, 2015), Belfiore and Bennett (2008) cover most of the significant dimensions: music was always connected with individual development and moral improvement, with the state, with music symbolizing higher or lower social classes, with propaganda or community.

It is, however, too simple to only see the positive impact of the arts or of music's transformational power. Music can not only help or heal, but can also be misused for propaganda, indoctrination or torture, as indicated in some of Belfiore and Bennett's (2008) arguments. There is not only a long history of music's positive impact on people and societies, but likewise about its negative effects. In recent years regarding music education, this negative impact has become more prominent, for instance concerning the music program El Sistema (Baker, 2014).

To better understand how music supports transformation, it is paramount to investigate music's relation to the social. Born (2012) offers a useful model, presenting four planes of music's sociality. The first plane concerns music making and the variety of relationships developing and emerging during this process. The second plane describes music's capacity to create imagined communities, for instance when listening. The third plane is focused on music's ability of identity building, both for groups and individuals. The final one positions music in relation to institutions. Born's model offers valuable insights into the complex relationship between music and the social. The social is inherent to music, it is part of what it is. Music has thus the power to transform, support building new relations or identities. But at the same time, music can also confirm the Status Quo and rather be about stability and continuity instead of dynamic change. Born's model clearly underlines music's ambiguity which we need to consider when thinking about the transformative power of for instance participatory music making or the misuse of music education for ideologies, e.g. during the Third Reich in Germany, or possibly in El Sistema (Baker, 2014). This means that a concept aiming at social change through music education needs to take into account the ambiguity of music.

## How is society transformed?

When we think about changing societies through music and music education, it is important to understand how transformations of society generally happen. While there are many different models, two perspectives could be particularly useful for music education: the sociology of change and the politics of change.

Sociologist Szomptka (1994) considers sociology to be the field best suited to analyze how societies are transformed. He claims that societies are in constant move and thus, can easily be changed. Individuals, events, social movements, innovations or revolutions – there can be many different agents of change, given the right moment. Transformations of society can happen on different levels, for instance on the micro, meso or macro level. Social change can concern the structure of society, but likewise relations. Toennies' (1963 [1887]) famous description of societal change regarding the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, from a community with close relationships to a more anonymous and well-structured way of social life, e.g. in big cities, is just one example sociology provides. However, while sociology is certainly concerned with explaining how society works, it also knows how it could be different. But the question has often been, if sociology should be more concerned with the analysis of what is or what could be – regarding projections of a better future, thus possible understanding sociology as a utopian field. While in the beginning, sociology was a field very much concerned with utopia (Levitas, 2013, pp. 65-127), during its further establishment as a scholarly field, this dimension has been lost. There are, however, still utopian elements in sociology offering perspectives on how the world and societies could be different. The concept of everyday utopia, for instance, as developed by sociologist Cooper (2014), is one such model, showing how everyday life can be transformed by realizing one idea of how society could be improved for a certain amount of time - may it concern free speech, a trading system without money or musical instruments publicly available for everyone as in the campaign "Play me, I'm yours."<sup>1</sup> While for everyone, implementing the good life for a limited time might mean something different, everyday utopias offer at least a glimpse at how society could be improved – and are thus a critique of the Status Quo as well as an implementation of possible changes, even though only for a short time. For sustainable changes, politics would be the means of choice.

The politics of change offer political models which explain how societal transformations work. They are attempts to describe the processes happening – and there are different ways to understand them, and thus different models. The *Advocacy Coalition*

---

<sup>1</sup> Like it happened in Augsburg in September 2022: <https://www.augsburg.de/kultur/festivals/play-me-im-yours>



*Model*, for instance, emphasizes that there are political partnerships for specific purposes (Rosenow, 2013, p. 14). They have a specific goal and after it is reached, there is no joint interest and collaboration anymore. But even if, on a political level, promising decisions are made, there is always the problem of implementation. The reality often looks different from what has been decided on the level of those in power. Leung (2008, p. 8) writes:

Policy implementation involves unavoidable constraints, complex net-working and co-ordination, negotiation and communication, attitude changes of various stakeholders, mobilization of resources and provision of support, and timely schedule planning and sequencing.

This means that the implementation of political decisions which can lead to social change, often takes time. If it is about faster ways of change, there are other means, for instance social movements.

Social movements have always been important drivers of social change. They start with the fact that people do not trust politicians to be able to do the necessary changes – or that the political structures do not allow that in an appropriate time frame. Thus, like-minded people go on the streets to fight for equal rights, changes in the environmental policies and many more causes. Sometimes, social movements are carefully orchestrated, while at other times, they can be spontaneous, driven by citizens' dissatisfaction. Social movements have been powerful in history, but they can also be misused for various ideologies, for instance for turning the Monday demonstrations of people in the former Democratic Republic of Germany, fighting for their freedom from political oppression, into demonstrations against democracy and its representatives. In a heated political climate, social movements can be related to social change in a good or bad way, again exemplifying the ambiguity of social change which certainly affects music education when connected with it.

Social movements often use technology to facilitate communication to support their interests. Thus, technology can also play a role in how society is transformed. Brescia (2020) investigated the impact of technological inventions on turning points in U.S. history. He identified various kinds of new technologies at critical turning points of U.S. history which supported social change. Brescia (2020, p. 120) states that "from the postal system in the early republic, to the television in the mid-twentieth century, social movements used technology to build trust, foster collaboration, and spur social change." If we could take a look at various countries and the turning points in their respective histories, we might discover a similar impact of technology. But it is also crucial to see the problems of technology, as for instance regarding social media and fake news.

When considering music education and social change, another important aspect is the goal we have – for instance our notion of the just society (Carlton, 2006). While many people think we might agree in this regard, that we all want for instance social justice, the situation might not be as simple as it seems. If we further investigated what our notions of the just society are, we would most likely be surprised that there is indeed not one solution, but many different ones – and that we do not agree in our concepts of what social change should achieve. Is the just society the fair society, the religious, the democratic, autocratic, alternative, pacifist, or carbon dioxide neutral society? Which values are important? Which ideologies might determine our notions of what the just society should look like? In times of intense political fights between conservative and progressive political forces, it might be useful to further investigate what our vision of the good society is – and thus to a certain degree destroy the notion that we all want the same good for everyone.

At the core of thinking about meaningful social change is also the notion of human flourishing. It is a kind of life satisfaction which gives people a deep fulfillment and meaning in life. Since antiquity, human flourishing has been connected with ethical and political issues because it is the task of states, their constitution and rules to create the conditions under which human flourishing is possible. Understanding social change in this way certainly adds interesting dimensions – and music education can significantly support human flourishing (Bartels, 2018; Smith & Silverman, 2020).

## Conclusion

In order to create a scholarly foundation for music education and social change, what social change is, the social impact of the arts, and how society is transformed should be considered. Certainly, music education and social change is an emotional topic, and criticizing it might seem like not being interested in a better world which music education could facilitate. While criticizing the social impact of the arts is not unproblematic and has often been seen as weakening the societal meaning or the power of music education (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, p. 4), it is rather the opposite: it strengthens, in fact, music education's societal significance. We cannot continue romanticizing about music education's power (Rinholm & Varkoy, 2020) – or what we imagine it could do. Music education, community music or any other kind of concept or approach cannot change societies on its own. There are clear limits, as has been indicated above, concerning the power of music education given the mechanisms and processes of how society works. We need to take this into account and use critique to refine what music education can actually do in society.

This does not mean to give up hope that music education has a societal impact, but rather emphasizes its opportunities and limits. This is a more pragmatic approach,

even though it might not be popular with advocates of music and transformation because it is easier to simply propose music's and music education's transformative power without differentiating what can be done and what cannot. Maybe, Jorgensen (2003, p. 45) is right, that "a hope-filled pedagogy can help to improve the situation even if it does not reach the ideal." We should certainly have hope and believe in the power of music and music education, but also be well aware of their limits. Only then can music education unfold its power, within limits, but still contributing to the overall societal processes of transformation<sup>2</sup>.

## References

- Baker, G. (2014). *El Sistema: orchestrating Venezuela's youth*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bartels, D. (2018). *Musikpraxis und ein gutes Leben. Welchen Wert haben ethische Konzeptionen eines guten Lebens für die Musikpaedagogik?* Augsburg: Wissner.
- Born, G. (2012). Music and the social. In M. Clayton (Ed.), *The cultural study of music* (pp. 261-274). New York: Routledge.
- Brescia, R. (2020). *The future of change. How technology shapes social revolutions*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Cooper, D. (2014). *Everyday utopias: the conceptual life of promising spaces*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Elliott, D. J., Silverman, M. & Bowman, W. D. (Eds.) (2016). *Artistic citizenship: artistry, social responsibility and ethical praxis*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goodwin, B., & Taylor, K. (2009). *The politics of utopia. A study in theory and practice*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Hallam, S. (2015). *The power of music. A research synthesis of the impact of active music making on the intellectual, social and personal development of children and young people*.  
<http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/735337/25902273/1422485417967/power+of+music.pdf>
- Hess, J. (2019). *Music education for social change. Constructing an activist music education*. New York: Routledge.
- Jorgensen, E. R. (2003). *Transforming music education*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kertz-Welzel, A. (2022). *Rethinking music education and social change*. New York: Oxford University Press.

---

<sup>2</sup> In my book „Rethinking music education and social change“ (2022), I propose such a hope-filled pedagogy, utilizing utopian thinking and (a)esthetic education.

- Leung, C. C. (2008). A theoretical framework on effective implementation of music/art education policy in schools. In C. C. Leung, L. C. Rita, & T. Imada (Eds.), *Music, education policy and implementation: international perspectives* (pp. 8-17). Hiroshima: Hiroshima University Press.
- Levitas, R. (2013). *Utopia as method. The imaginary reconstitution of society*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lockie, S., Sonnenfeld, D. A., Fisher, D. R. (2014). Socio-ecological transformations and the social sciences. In S. Lockie (Ed.), *Routledge international handbook on social and environmental change* (pp. 1-12). London: Routledge.
- Rinholm, H., & Varkoy, O. (2020). Music education for the common good? Between hubris and resignation: a call for temperance. In I. M. Yob & E. R. Jorgensen (Eds.), *Humane music education for the common good* (pp. 40-53). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Rosenow, J. (2013). *Politics of change: energy efficiency policy in Britain and Germany*, [http://eng.janrosenow.com/uploads/4/7/1/2/4712328/phd\\_thesis.pdf](http://eng.janrosenow.com/uploads/4/7/1/2/4712328/phd_thesis.pdf)
- Smith, G. D. & Silverman, M. (Eds.) (2020). *Eudaimonia. Perspectives for music learning*. New York: Routledge.
- Sztompka, P. (1993). *The sociology of social change*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Stroud, B. H., & Corbin, S. E. (2008). Preface. In B. H. Stroud & S. E. Corbin (Eds.), *Handbook on social change*. New York: Nova Science Publishing, p. vii.
- Sablonnière, R. de la (2017). Toward a psychology of social change: a typology of social change. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00397/full>
- Schatzki, Th. R. (2019). *Social change in a material world*. New York: Routledge.
- Toennies, F. (1963 [1887]). *Community and society*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Wilterdink, N., & Form, W. (2020). Social change. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-change>