

Music Appropriation in Informal Learning Contexts

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INTRODUCTION

In this article, I will shed light on the phenomenon of music appropriation in informal learning contexts by drawing, mostly, on my own research, conducted alone or in collaboration with colleagues during the past decade. I will unpack three different contexts or cases in which such appropriation takes place, namely a music festival (Karlsen 2007), an online music community (Partti/ Karlsen 2010), and the everyday life of immigrant students (Karlsen 2012). Furthermore, I will draw on two types of theoretical frameworks for exploring the various modes of learning and appropriation found in these particular contexts, namely socio-cultural learning theory and cultural and music sociology. Each of these frameworks and their related concepts and tools will be further explained alongside the empirical exemplifications below.

First, however, I wish to dwell for some time on the word *appropriation* and explain why I think it is an appropriate choice when speaking about what happens within the learning contexts often described as informal, in other words those that exist outside the realm of the kind of education that is very obviously planned or outside of formal schooling. Knowing full well the theoretical implications of the word, as denoting a process through which individuals construct knowledge from social and cultural sources, and mediate it by their own “idiosyncratically structured knowledge” (Billett 1998: 23), in this article, I choose to take as my main point of departure one of the meanings that *appropriation* may take on when occurring in everyday speech. According to the dictionary installed on my computer, the verb *to ap-*

appropriate can be explained like this: It is “the action of taking something for one’s own use, typically without the owner’s permission” (Appropriate n.d.). If we nominalise this understanding of the word and translate it to the world of music, I would say that *music appropriation* could then be considered as the action of taking, learning and using music for one’s own purposes, regardless of the permission of external authorities, be they manifested as teachers, parents or even peers. Hence, appropriation understood in this particular way implies *use* more so than learning, but does not in any way exclude the possibility of individuals and groups of people learning while being vividly engaged in the act of using. I will revisit this idea later on.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK I: SITUATED LEARNING WITHIN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Before I delve into the first two cases of this article – the music festival and the online music community – I will present the theoretical framework that enabled my exploration into these contexts and their respective participants’ modes and ways of learning, namely the theory of situated learning within communities of practice first put forward by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in 1991 and then further developed by Wenger in later contributions. According to this framework, learning can be understood as a “part of generative social practice in the lived-in world” (Lave/ Wenger 1991: 35), and is also integral to such practice in the sense that it happens, not just as planned or conscious acquisition of knowledge, but also through individuals’ *legitimate peripheral participation* within specific *communities of practice*. I will use a few words to define these two – for this theory – very significant concepts.

First, a community of practice can be understood as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (ibid.: 98). It is, above all, a *working community* in the sense that all its members are engaged in a particular kind of enterprise or social practice; therefore, the community also carries and disseminates particular kinds of knowledge integral to this practice. Furthermore, the community’s historical trace of “artefacts – physical, linguistic, and symbolic – and of social structures” (Wenger 1998: 58) is what constitutes and reconstitutes the practice over time. In Lave and Wenger’s (1991) seminal work on this phenomenon, named *Situated learning. Legitimate peripheral participation*, the communities of practice under

scrutiny were those of midwives, tailors, quartermasters, meat cutters and nondrinking alcoholics. Later on, numerous scholars have worked to extend the concept to include a wide range of social practices, and in my own research it has been utilised to frame and conceptualise the development and exchange of knowledge that goes on within practices such as music festivals and online music communities.

According to Lave and Wenger, learning within any community of practice happens through the mode of participants' legitimate peripheral participation. That is, by "being located in the social world" (ibid.: 36) that the community constitutes, its participants learn because the social practice "entails learning as an integral constituent" (ibid.: 35). Furthermore, learning occurs in the encounters between community newcomers and old-timers, and by the participants engaging in and with the activities, identities and artefacts available in the community in question. An important characteristic of the concept of legitimate peripheral participation is that, in reality, it denies any distinction between the core and the periphery of the community of practice. *Peripheral* simply refers to the mode of being in the social world, and this concerns each and every participant in the community. Still, extended peripheral participation might lead to a mature stage, which is described by Lave and Wenger as "*full participation*" (ibid.: 37, italics in original). In order to reach this stage, newcomers need access to all that the community membership entails – to the widest range possible of the ongoing activities of the practice. In addition, the newcomers need to accept the full members as role models, and practise "learning how to talk (and be silent) in the manner of full participants" (ibid.: 105) as well as "ways of being a person in that context" (Wenger 1998: 149).

An additional feature of this particular socio-cultural theory of learning, worth mentioning, is the close connection drawn between the phenomenon of learning and the different components of practice, community, meaning and identity. According to Wenger (ibid.: 5), learning can be understood both as mastering specific doings, conducted within certain fields of practice; as belonging, to a specific kind of community in which our doings are recognised as competence; as experience – our ability to find our life and the world meaningful; and as becoming, which allows for a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and how it forms our perception of our selves – our identity. With these connections in mind, I now move into the first case – the music festival.

INFORMAL LEARNING CONTEXT I: THE MUSIC FESTIVAL

The event that came to form the empirical case of my doctoral thesis (Karlsen 2007) was a music festival situated in the north of Sweden and named *Festspel i Pite Älvdal*. This festival featured a variety of musical styles and genres, among them western classical music, Swedish folk music, Sami traditional music, jazz, world music, and various kinds of popular music like folk rock, Latin music and pop. The main aim of my research was to explore this particular music festival as a possible source of informal learning with implications for the festival's audiences and for its host communities. This aim was further pursued through looking into how the festival affected the development of the audience's musical identity as well as in what ways it influenced the audience's relation to their local community. The research project was designed as a case study (Yin 2003), and the data used for my explorations encompassed field notes from observations of 21 festival concerts and other events; a questionnaire survey among 350 of the festival attendants; 16 interviews with festival attendants and municipality representatives; and documentation and archival records.

As can be seen from the research aims above, the deep connections between learning, community and identity formed a starting point for my research. Moreover, it was also an important point of departure for the study that a festival like this could be understood as a community of practice, encompassing members of different kinds and who occupied different roles, but who had in common that they were all needed for making this large musical event happen. As such, for the purpose of the research, the festival staff and board members, the performing musicians, the master-class teachers and students, the festival's sponsors and other stakeholders, and the newcomer and old-timer audience or attendants were all seen as festival community members who engaged in various ways of legitimate peripheral participation. In the following I will zoom further in on the audience members' engagement with the festival, and describe some of their modes of learning within the social world constituted by the *Festspel i Pite Älvdal*.

Previously, I described encounters between newcomers and old-timers as one possible mode of learning within a community of practice. This mode was also present in my data. Iris, one of the festival audience interviewees, described how she had once learned to trust her own musical and aesthetic judgment through being seated close to an acknowledged musician – more of a full member of the festival community than Iris was herself – during a

recital with a famous Swedish singer. The performance did not go very well, and Iris was disappointed:

She [the singer] was not dedicated, and that was a disappointment [...] I usually applaud out of courtesy, even if I don't think it sounds well. But this time, I was so disappointed [...] that I did not applaud. I turned around and saw that [name of acknowledged musician] did not applaud either. Since then, I have learned to trust my own senses and my own judgment. (Karlsen 2007: 127)

In other words, Iris – who had never attended any kind of higher music education, and who saw herself as somewhat of a festival community newcomer – learned, indirectly through the full member or old-timer *who knew music*, that her perception of what constituted quality in a recital performance was valid.

My data also showed numerous examples of how festival attendees learned through engaging with the various activities, identities and artefacts available to them within the festival community of practice. Betty, one of my oldest interviewees (she was about 80 years old when the fieldwork was conducted), was special in this sense, since she was a full member of the festival community of practice and had attended *Festspel i Pite Älvdal* ever since the start – at the point of our interview the festival had existed for 25 years. Betty certainly had access to a “wide range of activity” (Lave/ Wenger 1991: 100) of the community, and she knew her way around. Not only did she visit an impressive number of festival concerts each year; she was also personally acquainted with several of the festival administrators and often seized the opportunity to influence the programme through these acquaintances. Furthermore, she had worked as a festival volunteer for several years, and through this activity learned a lot by engaging with the musicians off-stage. This again had influenced her ability to interpret their performances *on* stage. She put it this way: “It [to be able to socialise with the performers off-stage] gives another dimension to their music, when you see them talk, laugh, socialise, and make a fool of themselves; it gets so human, even if it is so grand” (Karlsen 2007: 110). Consequently, by engaging in community activities and associate with people who occupied other identities within this community than she did herself – such as the positions of administrators and musicians – Betty’s musical knowledge and perception deepened. Talking about her habit of concert attendance, she said: “I go there and sit down, and it becomes like a trance or something. I push away the reality outside, and go into the music and listen, and then I experience

and learn a lot” (ibid.: 109). Here, in this quotation we can also see how Betty learns from engaging directly with what is perhaps the most important artefact of a music festival, namely the music itself. This mode of learning was widespread among my interviewees, who reported learning both the music *per se*, *about* music and *via* music. In the following I will present one example of each aspect.

Chris, an interviewee with a special interest in chamber music, more specifically string quartets, told me that he used the concert situations to develop what he called a *live musical experience library*. A passionate listener, one of his joys was connected to being able to grasp how the music was put together; the structure of a piece. However, that was not all there was to it. In Chris’ own words: “[I]t’s mainly an emotional experience, listening to music. It’s beautiful, it’s dramatic, it’s all those adjectives you can think of, actually [...] it’s this experience, that’s what it is, of course” (ibid.: 118-119). Since Chris had no formal training in music, both his emotional and structural listening was that of a layman’s, as he put it himself. However, he had learned, through attending numerous music festivals and concerts, and engaging with the musical artefacts presented there, to recognise music and to collect and store live music experiences of particular pieces in his memory in order to compare these with other live performances of those same pieces later on. That was Chris’ *live musical experience library*, which enhanced his learning of music and gave him much emotional and intellectual satisfaction in repeated encounters with that specific music.

The aspect of learning *about* music was first and foremost touched upon by interviewees in relation to *facts*, such as historical backgrounds of the music presented or information about particular composers, performers and pieces of music which was disseminated either through concert programmes or through presenters before and in-between the various performances.

Engaging with the musical artefacts of the festival could also lead to audience members learning *via music*. One example is narrated above, where Iris explained how she learned to trust her own judgment by relying on the behaviour of a more experienced or full member of the festival community of practice. Another example was given by the interviewee Leo, who pointed out that attending the festival could be related to some kind of *Bildung*, and that he learned things that were useful for him as a human being, broadly speaking:

[Attending the festival] increases the general education and the base of experience, and that is the base you stand on every day. It influences the decisions you make and the things you do as a human being [...] it is [part of] what makes you who you are, so these are important things, somehow, they are. (Ibid.: 121)

In the run-through of the main characteristics of the theory of situated learning above, I pointed to the close connections that this theoretical framework reveal between learning and the components of practice, community, meaning and identity. While the quotation from Leo above only hints at such connections, other parts of my data made them strikingly clear. As might be remembered from above, my research aims were concerned with music and identity on the individual as well as on the communal level. Furthermore, I hypothesised that these interdependent relationships would bear potential for the music festival functioning as an arena for informal learning. Consequently, summing up and discussing my findings I created a model of the various identity dimensions found within the festival community of practice (see Figure 1). In the following, I will briefly go through three of these dimensions and elaborate on the forms of learning that they entail.

	OUTWARD DIMENSION	INWARD DIMENSION
INDIVIDUAL	<p>Arena for lifestyle choices</p> <p>Displaying, staging and choosing <i>who to be and who I am</i></p>	<p>Basis for self-regulatory strategies</p> <p>Feeling, remembering and knowing <i>who I am and how I came to be this way</i></p>
MUNICIPALITY	<p>Outward manifestation of community identity</p> <p>Deciding <i>who we want to present ourselves as to the outside world</i></p>	<p>Occasion for reinforcement of social and cultural community identity</p> <p>Telling, retelling and celebrating <i>who we are</i></p>

Fig. 1 The four identity dimensions of music festivals. (Karlsen 2007: 199)

Starting on the upper right-hand side, the dimension of using the music festival as a basis for one's self-regulatory strategies with music entails feeling, remembering and knowing *who I am* and *how I came to be who I am* through individual engagement with particular kinds of music. The content of this square can be related to Tia DeNora's (2000) concepts of emotional and memory work in relation to music, and to the understanding that engaging in such work enables a person to construct, reinforce and repair the inner thread of self-identity (ibid.: 62). Consequently, what festival community participants or members learn from such engagement is connected to what Wenger (1998: 163) denotes as the work of *becoming* by incorporating "past and future into the meaning of the present."

The upper left square is dedicated to the dimension of using the festival as an arena for lifestyle choices, highlighting the event as a place in which the audience members display, stage and choose *who to be* and *who they are* through outwardly directed actions in the social space constituted by the festival. Here, taste and distaste are acted out in a manner that can be framed for example by Bourdieusian thinking (see e.g. Bourdieu 1984). However, this dimension is not only about making distinctions; it also allows for the important work of learning how to behave as a full member or participant of the festival community of practice, or in Wenger's (1998: 149) words, the "ways of being a person in that context."

The lower, right-hand square of the model visualises the dimension connected to the collective and communal use of the festival as an occasion for reinforcing social and cultural municipality or community identity. Throughout the *Festspel i Pite Älvdal*, musicians and administrators created several opportunities for all participants to convey and draw on shared stories and local practices and ideals in order to tell, retell and celebrate *who we were*, the ones of us who participated in this particular event. Thus, as Simon Frith (1996) puts it, the festival became an "experience of collective identity" (ibid.: 121) in which we came to know ourselves as a group "through cultural activity" (ibid.: 111). In the socio-cultural framework of Lave and Wenger (1991) such experiences are connected to learning whatever is necessary for "making sense of [the practice's] heritage" (ibid.: 58) and thereby for making sense of its future.

The remaining dimension or square of my model is not as easily connected to experiences of learning as the first three ones, so I will leave it for now. However, I think the above elaboration serves as a strong example showing that in an informal arena, such as a music festival, learning and identity work are inseparably connected, and the music appropriation – the

utilisation of music for one's own purpose in such a context – may take many forms and also entails various ways of learning, the outcome of that learning being both intra- and extra-musical.

The *Festspel i Pite Älvdal* exemplifies one particular type of music festivals, the one being arranged in rather small municipalities and containing a variety of musical genres and styles. Still, I find it valid to claim that all or at least most of the modes of learning and music appropriation described above can be found fairly independently of the particularities of the festival context. Hence the findings carry great potential for “analytic generalization” (Yin 2003: 10) and for exploring the transferability between the modes found in this particular festival community of practice and other, similar ones.

INFORMAL LEARNING CONTEXT II: THE ONLINE MUSIC COMMUNITY

While the festival example featured a variety of different kinds of music, the second informal learning context chosen for presentation in this article – the Finnish online music community *Mikseri* – focused on popular music as its main musical artefact and content. In collaboration with my colleague at the *University of the Arts Helsinki, Sibelius Academy* in Finland, Heidi Partti, I explored this particular community and its modes of music appropriation (Partti/ Karlsen 2010; see also Partti 2012). Before I go into elaborating on our findings in more detail, I will explain what *Mikseri* is about and approximately how it works, or rather worked, in 2006-2007, at the time when Partti conducted the fieldwork of this research¹.

Mikseri is an open online community that specialises in copyright-free music made by its members. Established in 2001, it was the largest Finnish music portal when we researched it. At that point, it had approximately 140,000 users, many of them using nicknames. Like most online communities, *Mikseri* provides certain services for those who choose to use it. At the

1 Partti, who now works as a professor at the University of the Arts Helsinki, Sibelius Academy, was a PhD student when the fieldwork was conducted, and I was one of her supervisors. While she gathered all the data, analysed it, and designed most of the theoretical framework for the study conveyed here, the writing up and conceptualisation of the findings as an article (Partti/ Karlsen 2010) were done in close cooperation between the two us (see Partti 2012: 13-14).

time of conducting the fieldwork, anyone visiting the community online could listen to the music uploaded there, read the reviews of the music and also the ongoing discussions within the portal. However, if you chose to become a registered member, you had more benefits: You could upload your own music; you were allowed to create a profile page; other members could post comments on your written work, pictures or pieces of music; and you had access to a message board, which functioned as a medium for social interaction, in-depth conversations and discussion, as well as for the sharing and distribution of information. Despite all the features available in the *Mikseri* community, the uploaded pieces of music were the main interest of its members. By 2007, the website contained more than 80,000 musical works of various kinds.

The *Mikseri* fieldwork was conducted using a virtual ethnography approach (Hine 2000), Partti observing the activities of the community during a period of seven months. As with the music festival above, the main theoretical framework used in order to make sense of what went on in *Mikseri*, in terms of music appropriation and learning, was that of situated learning, proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991). In the following, I will describe some of the features of the online music community that became visible when we conceptualised it as a potential community of practice.

First of all, *Mikseri* appeared as a crucial arena for constructing musical identities in web-based reality, and an important part of its members' activities was focused on either staging themselves as *a particular kind of person* – a musician or composer of music – or on keeping themselves updated on how other members profiled themselves. One particular member wrote:

What I like most about *Mikseri* is to surf the profile pages, read diaries and browse photo galleries. Even if I have never sent any messages to them, and not to even mention met them in person, I feel like I know many of the *Mikseri* members just based on their profile. (Partti/ Karlsen 2010: 374)

The opportunity to create a profile page allowed many *Mikseri* members to participate in this outward staging of their musical self, and to display aspects of themselves that might, or might not, have corresponded with their non-virtual appearance. From previous research (Salavuo 2006) we knew that only a minority of the *Mikseri* members had formal musical training, so there is a good chance that many appeared as musicians and music-makers on their profile pages despite the fact that most of their real-life acquaintances may not have recognised them as such.

Secondly, the discussions found within the threads of the *Mikseri* message boards revealed that sometimes this space was used for telling and sharing musical life stories. Through detailed biographical tales, members gave accounts of their lives with music and hence reflexively constructed their music-related identities. For example, one member chose to share a narrative that largely constructed him as a self-taught composer. Inspired by a music teacher who moved into his neighbourhood and brought with him a computer designed to do audio work, this member soon bought his own equipment:

I acquired a MIDI sequencer program and a Scream Tracker [...] and already next Christmas, I was hoping to get a MIDI keyboard for a present. I haven't had any instrument lessons mainly because my own enthusiasm and practicing have been so intense [...] I am simply not interested in studying ready-made stuff; I actually just want to come up with new things. (Partti/ Karlsen 2010: 374)

As in the festival community of practice, the *Mikseri* community also allows its participants to perform a kind of memory work in and through music and, to a large extent, display, stage and choose who they are, and, perhaps even more importantly, who they want to be. As such, their learning is similarly connected to Wenger's (1998) notion of the work of *becoming* and also to what it means to be a legitimate person within the context of this particular online music community. However, in *Mikseri* the learning extends beyond these modes and takes very concrete forms, related to two of the artefacts available within the web-site, namely the music itself and the message board. As concerns the first of these artefacts – the music – one of the *Mikseri* members said: “Music is *the* thing in *Mikseri*. Like sharing my own music, receiving feedback, as well as listening to music and giving feedback” (Partti/ Karlsen 2010: 375). In other words, the *Mikseri* participants spent a lot of time actively commenting on each other's musical pieces and engaging in peer-to-peer evaluations. Thereby, they negotiated experiences and meanings, and also had access to vivid discussions about the meanings of music and musicianship in a forum that extended widely beyond what was accessible in school or in their local communities. The discussions, comments and suggestions were not only about the musical pieces per se, but they also concerned what equipment to buy or use, what techniques to employ, for example for singing high notes, as well as other kinds of musical knowledge and skills. As evidenced by the following quotation, comments received from other community members were often experienced as beneficial for one's own musical development:

Getting feedback is always positive, especially if it comes from another person involved with music either professionally or just for fun. Constructive feedback about dynamics, mixing et cetera is always helpful, and one tends to try out the received suggestions and improvements in the next project. (Ibid.: 376)

As such, *Mikseri* can be conceptualised as a community of practice, actively engaged in negotiating “meaning, learning, the development of practices, and the formation of identities and social configurations” (Wenger 1998: 133), to use Wenger’s own words. In addition, it may be understood as what James Paul Gee (2001) terms an *affinity group*, which is constituted by its members “participating in specific practices” (ibid.: 105) although they are “dispersed across large space” (ibid.). In this particular online community, the affiliation is connected to sharing music and various kinds of information about music. As such, *Mikseri* offers quite easy access to self- and peer-directed music-related learning and appropriation, and is also perceived by its members to have significant impact on their development of musical skills and knowledge.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK II: MUSICAL AGENCY

Before entering into the third empirical case – the everyday life of immigrant students – I will present the second theoretical framework of this article, derived from cultural and music sociology, and explicate the notion of *musical agency* which was central in mapping out the findings of this particular study.

The relationship between structure and agency has been central to sociological debates for many decades, and it is one that has made several highly acknowledged sociologists struggle to provide an all-convincing account of the phenomenon. Their task, simply put, has been to find a link between social structures on the macro-level of society and acting human beings on the micro-level, and to reach a decision on to what extent “occurrences and processes on the micro-level determine macro phenomena” (Guneriusen 1999: 277-278, my translation) or vice versa. While not denying the existence of structuring social forces altogether, the view of agency as conveyed here, and which forms the point of departure for outlining that of *musical agency*, holds that everyday experience constitutes the foremost ground for exploring how individuals execute, negotiate, and expand their capacity for

acting in the social world. Furthermore, combining the perspectives of the sociologists Anthony Giddens (1984) and Barry Barnes (2000), I build on an understanding of agency which takes into account both individuals' power to act independently and freely as well as their capacity to transcend individualism (see Karlsen/ Westerlund 2010).

Building from this broader view of individual and collective agency, I constructed a more fine-grained understanding and lens of musical agency (for a more elaborate description of this lens, see Karlsen 2011) based on the works of DeNora (2000), Kari Batt-Rawden and DeNora (2005), and Christopher Small (1998). This musical agency lens comprises eleven different aspects. Six of these are categorised as belonging to the individual dimension. That is, they denote the music-related practices and actions that are mainly used for negotiating and extending one's own room for action; namely, using music for: self-regulation, the shaping of self-identity, self-protection, matters of being, as a medium for thinking, and for developing music-related skills. The remaining five aspects are categorised as belonging to the collective dimension, and encompass practices and actions that allow for experiences and negotiations of shared and collaborative forms of agency; that is, using music for: regulating and structuring social encounters, coordinating bodily action, affirming and exploring collective identity, the purpose of *knowing the world*, and for establishing a basis for collaborative musical action. With this methodological tool in hand, I set out to explore the third empirical case presented here, namely immigrant students' use of music in their everyday life, both inside and outside school (Karlsen 2012, 2013). However, in agreement with the main headline, for the purpose of this article I will focus mainly on the students' appropriation of music *outside* of schooling contexts, in the informal realm.

INFORMAL LEARNING CONTEXT III: THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

From 2009 to 2011 I was employed at the *Sibelius Academy* in Finland as a postdoctoral researcher in order to conduct the study *Exploring democracy. Conceptions of immigrant students' development of musical agency*, funded by the *Academy of Finland*. The methodological design was that of an educational ethnography (Pole/ Morrison 2003), and I spent in all six months observing and interviewing music teachers and their students in three classroom practices in lower secondary schools in immigrant-rich areas in Hel-

sinki, Stockholm and Oslo. As such, the data comprises field notes from 24 music lessons, six interviews with the three teachers involved and 19 interviews with a total of 30 students, aged 13 to 16. From this rich base the students' development of musical agency was explored from several angles. As mentioned above, in this article I will focus on what the students told me about their use of music outside school and also connect these various modes of use to the different aspects of musical agency outlined above. Generally, the students that I interviewed listened to a wide range of what one would denote western popular music, often intermingled with traditional and popular musics from their own or their parents' homelands. This wide-ranging musical diet fulfilled a multiplicity of purposes and needs, some of which I will now describe in more detail.

Many of the students' music-related practices were related to the musical agency aspect of using music for self-regulation. These practices contained a variety of modes in which the students engaged in emotional and memory work (DeNora 2000) and in regulating bodily comportment in and through music. Most of the students reported listening to music *almost all the time*, and they were also quite articulate in telling about what this constant use of music *did* for them. For example, it had an important function in adjusting their perception of time – especially in making boring events go faster – and it provided a sense of comfort. Hung said that for her, music was “like a friend, always close and ready to comfort when it is needed” (Karlsen 2012: 140). Moreover, Rona emphasised music's possibilities for becoming a vehicle for imaginary travels of the mind: “You can be in your own world with music [...] forget everything around you [...] like a bubble” (ibid.). Music was also used for acts of remembering: childhood, relationships, and the homeland – the country from which the students or their parents originated. Eduard, for example, was in the habit of putting on Russian rock whenever he hated Finland, his new country of domicile, and needed to recall living in Russia:

Sidsel: So, how does it [the Russian rock] help you?

Eduard: When I hate Finland.

Sidsel: Yeah...?

Eduard: Or when I want to go to Russia, and I ask my mother, “can I go to Russia?” and she says “no”, [and I say] “OK”, and then I go and listen to Russian music or write messages to Russian people on the internet. (Ibid.: 141)

Besides the memory work, the students that I interviewed used their every-day practices with music to perform emotional work of different kinds; to express emotions they already had, to arrive at or enhance a certain mood, or to shift from one emotional state to another. Joyce, for example, described a practice of *taking the emotions out on the music*:

- Joyce: It is kind of like going in and out of the car.
 Sidsel: OK, so you go into the music, and then...?
 Joyce: Yes, and then out again.
 Sidsel: And then you leave your emotions behind, in the music?
 Joyce: You could say that I take it out on the music. (Ibid.)

Regulating bodily comportment was also an important part of using music for self-regulation. The students told me that they used music for relaxing, falling asleep, getting more energy, and for coordinating movements when engaging in sports or dancing.

Another musical agency aspect that was clearly evident in the students' everyday life was that of using music for self-protection. At school, music could be used for creating a sonic bubble allowing an individual to concentrate in the midst of a rowdy classroom. Or, as I observed through my fieldwork, it could be a quite effective means for shutting yourself off from whatever went on in music classes. Many students reported preferring to do their homework surrounded by music, because of the enhanced concentration it afforded them, and some saw music as a welcome escape from unpleasant social situations. One student pointed to the protection music gave her from heated discussions which she did not want to join:

If something happens [that has to do with religion] we talk about it a lot, right, and then it may just be that people start to quarrel, and then I stay away. I put on music and stay silent and pretend that I listen [to the music]. (Ibid.)

Furthermore, music was widely used for the shaping of self-identity and had an important function in the youngsters' efforts to articulate their own sense of self. Phrases like *music is part of who I am* or *music describes who I am* were common and such utterances often related to the homeland music, which was also described as *part of their genetic make-up*. Rona, whom I also quoted above, used music very consciously to envision her *future* self, knowing very well that because of where she came from – which was one of Stockholm's most socioeconomically disadvantaged areas – she would have

to work hard and be extremely determined in order to fulfil her ambitions. Listening to music was part of her plan and preparations:

What I listen to, is often what I wish will happen in my future [...] [the singers] tell a story, it might be a story of their lives written as a song, and then [I am thinking] “Yes, I too want to be a person who reaches my goal in the end.” (Ibid.)

Very few of my student interviewees had received any kind of formal music education by attending municipal music and culture schools, which is a system otherwise well developed in the Nordic countries. Still, this did not prevent them from engaging with music for developing music-related skills. Several had learned to play instruments, either through previous schooling in their respective homelands or by receiving one-to-one tuition from a teacher who shared their cultural or ethnic origin. Others had learned to play or sing from family members. Some students used the internet quite actively in extending their musical skills by attending communities similar to *Mikseri* or watching tutorials on *YouTube*. In general, technical devices such as computers and mobile phones played a big part in these youngsters’ appropriation of music, and their composition practices using such tools often went far beyond what was offered as part of their music lessons in school. For Joyce, for example, writing songs included drawing on technical devices and family members’ competence requiring her to engage in practices which extended halfway around the world:

Joyce: My cousin [who lives in Norway just as Joyce does] writes the melodies and I write the lyrics [...] sometimes I ask her to record a melody that I put into the computer in order to fix it.

Sidsel: So she records with the computer and you edit it with the programme [GarageBand®]?

Joyce: Mm, because my cousin in the Philippines, he owns a recording studio ... she [the cousin living in Norway] sent me the files...

Sidsel: [...] and then he fixed them and sent them back?

Joyce: Yes, and when we visited the Philippines he used to fix it all. (Ibid.: 142)

All in all, the lower secondary school students interviewed appeared to possess multiple repertoires of being and acting in music. Their experienced and enacted musical agencies were rich and vivid, and each student’s *agency trajectory* seemed to weave in and out of a multitude of musical cultures, practices and ways of learning and using music, and it was also deeply in-

tertwined with the multicultural contexts and circumstances that formed the backdrop of each student's life. As such, this third empirical case, too, exemplifies the importance of exploring music appropriation taking into account the sociocultural surroundings of the appropriators, since it is these conditions that frame and regulate what is usable and obtainable for use.

MUSIC APPROPRIATION AND INFORMAL LEARNING CONTEXTS: ACCESS, AGENCY AND POWER

From my three empirical cases, it is clear that informal learning contexts offer rich opportunities for engaging with music and for learning – more or less consciously – in and through musical *use*. All of my study participants had the ability to engage in music appropriation – they knew how to use music for their own purposes and needs, and they seemingly knew how to access what they needed. Defining the verb *to appropriate* in the beginning of this article, I pointed out that its everyday meaning might imply taking something without the owner's permission or, in the case of music appropriation, taking, learning and using music regardless of the permission of external authorities. Curiosity about the extent to which such anti-authoritarian musical freedom was allowed to just anybody was one of the reasons why I first extended the framework of sociocultural learning theory towards an exploration of musical agency, asking “who, within an informal learning context, has access to what is learnable?”, and furthermore, “who are the strong musical agents?” (see Karlsen 2009). Digging into my festival data from this particular angle, I found, perhaps not surprisingly, that the learners with the most extensive access and the strongest musical agency – in other words, those that were most skilled in freely appropriating what they needed in this particular context – were middle class people, well off economically, well-educated and with quite a bit of cultural capital. Moreover, they had in common the fact that during childhood and adolescence they had been fortunate enough to have access to a variety of musical styles and genres and also active engagement with music in the form of singing or playing an instrument. These resources had empowered them to be independent musical agents later in life, making their own choices without some authority's *permission*.

When celebrating music appropriation in informal learning contexts, we should not forget the uneven distribution of access, agency and power often found within such arenas. Neither should we downplay the role that formal

music education might have in enhancing access and agency through providing musical resources and experiences for all children and adolescents. As Göran Folkestad (2006: 135) reminds us: “Formal – informal should not be regarded as a dichotomy, but rather as the two poles of a continuum.” Consequently, strengthening an individual’s ability of music appropriation at one pole of this continuum might mean impacting positively on the other end as well. In my opinion, this is what music educators should aim for.

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