

Community Singing, a Pathway to Social Capital: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Assessment of the Benefits of Singing Communities in South Tyrol and South Africa

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Abstract : This quantitative study investigates different approaches of community singing, in building social capital in South Tyrol, Italy, and South Africa. The impact of the various approaches of community singing is examined by investigating the main components of social capital, namely, social norms and obligations, social networks and associations and trust, and how these components are manifested in two different societies. The research is based on the premise that community singing is an important agent for the development of social capital. It seeks to establish in what form community singing can best enhance the social capital of communities in South Tyrol that are undergoing significant changes in the ways in which social capital is generally being generated on account of demographic, economic, technological and cultural changes. South Tyrol and South Africa share some similarities in the management of their multi-cultural composition. By comparing the different approaches to community singing in two multi-cultural societies, it is hoped to gain insight, and an understanding of the connections between culture, social cohesion, identity and therefore to be able to add to the understanding of the building of social capital through community singing. Participation in music contributes to the growth of social capital in communities, this is amongst others the finding of an ever increasing amount of research. In sociological discourses on social capital generation, the dimension of community music making is recognized as an important factor. Trust and mutual cooperation are products when people listen to each other, when they work or play together, and when they care about each other. This is how social capital develops as an important shared resource. Scholars of Community Music still do not agree on a short and concise definition for Community Music. For the purpose of this research, the author concurs with the definition of Community Music of the Community Music Activity commission of the International Society of Music Education as having the following characteristics: decentralization, accessibility, equal opportunity, and active participation in music-making. These principles are social and political ones, and there can be no doubt that community music activity is more than a purely musical one. Trust, shared norms and values civic and community involvement, networks, knowledge resources, contact with families and friends, and fellowship are key components in fostering group cohesion and social capital development in a community. The research will show that there is no better place for these factors to flourish than in a community singing group. Through this comparative study, it is the aim to identify, analyze and explain similarities and differences in approaches to community across societies that find themselves in a rapid transition from traditional cultural to global cultural habits characterized by a plurality of orientation points, with the aim to gain a better understanding of the various directions South Tyrolean singing culture can take.

Keywords : community music, multicultural, singing, social capital

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