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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1944-7334> (2020) Ethno Flanders: Impact: Inside and Outside of the Ethno Bubble. Project Report. York St John University, York.

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# Case Study: Ethno Flanders

Impact: Inside and Outside of the Ethno Bubble



Author: **Linus Ellström**



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# Pilot Case Studies

## July–August 2019

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During July to August 2019, Ethno Research commissioned seven ethnographic case studies at camps located in Europe and the Nordic countries. The purpose was:

1. to ascertain an approach to the fieldwork that would produce discrete stand-alone documents reflecting the uniqueness of each site whilst providing a format to extract, analyze, and understand key themes across multiple sites;
2. to construct an appropriate ethics procedure;
3. to publish and disseminate seven individual case studies and one meta-analysis.

Reflective of the Ethno Camps, the researchers were multicultural in their representation hailing from Croatia, Estonia, France, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, and the UK. The final reports have gone through a light touch editing process and are conceived as a collective work that reflects different languages and different styles of expression. In December 2019, all the researchers met in York, UK, to discuss the experience and to help the core team with planning the next phase. The reports were used as a springboard to determine future strategies surrounding approaches to research methodologies, key questioning, and thematic analysis.

The 3-year Ethno Research project, led by the International Centre for Community Music (ICCM) at York St John University in collaboration with JM International (JMI), is made possible through a grant from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This pilot case study investigates Ethno, a concept of intercultural learning and dialogue that has been existing for nearly 30 years. In particular, this study focuses on Ethno Flanders 2019.

Three lines of enquiry guided the research:

- 1) pedagogy
- 2) experience
- 3) reverberations

Utilizing qualitative data collection processes and Grounded Theory as an approach the hypothesis of this enquiry was: In what way do the experiences of attending an Ethno affect life, what parts of the experience appear to be the most meaningful, and more generanelly generally what are some of the narratives surrounding Ethno?

The research shows that attending an Ethno might have an impact on several different levels, especially as personal development, musical development, and creating a network of contacts around the world. This creation of meaning is made possible through the intensity of the camp, openness of the participants and the bubble-like immersion manifested through aspects of camp life.

# Impact: Inside and Outside of the Ethno Bubble

## INTRODUCTION

This pilot case study is set to explore Ethno, a concept which started in Sweden in 1990, and that has been growing in grand proportions, especially over the past ten years (Ethnoworld, 2019). Although Ethno has a three-decade history the amount of academic research is relatively limited. In 2019, Ethno Research set ‘to explore the hypothesis that Ethno music camps provide transformational socio-cultural and musical significances for those that engage in its activities.’ This case study is a small part of an ongoing 3-year research project set to investigate three main areas connected to the concept of Ethno:

### 1) Pedagogy and professional development

What defines the pedagogic approach of an Ethno camp?

### 2) Experience

How do its participants experience Ethno?

### 3) Reverberations

In the weeks, months, and years, that follow an Ethno experience, what, if anything, are the lasting impacts?

These three lines of enquiry formed the foundation and framework for my hypothesis, and by using grounded theory, a tangible and focused hypothesis emerged:

In what way do the experiences of attending an Ethno affect life, and what parts of the experience appear to be the most meaningful? From a broader perspective, what are some of the narratives that are created around Ethno?

To explore this hypothesis, I was asked to gather data and conduct my research on a single Ethno camp, the 2019 edition of Ethno Flanders, situated in Oostende, Belgium. For the sake of making the terminology a bit more simplified, I will hereafter refer to Ethno Flanders 2019 as ‘EF19.’ I begin presenting the findings of this case study by giving a brief overview of the history of Ethno Flanders, an explanation of how the funding works, and a rough sketch of the schedule. Following that, I’ll discuss the demographics of the participants, alongside examples of reasons to why they are attending EF19. Next I will cover my approach to this research, methodological considerations and theoretical framework. The next section will include three short portraits of participants,



with the purpose of acting as a bridge into the thematic analysis and results of the data collection. Most participants will remain anonymous and have been labelled D1-D6, in reference to the order of when the interviews were carried out. The last section will feature the conclusion of this case study, and answer to the initial research question presented in this section.

**Image 1: Welcome to Ethno Flanders. Photo, Linus Ellström.**



## CAMP OVERVIEW

Ethno Flanders was created in 1999 by Ivo Lemahieu, which makes it one of the oldest camps up to this day. Ivo was one of the few people attending the earliest Ethnos in Sweden and was inspired to expand the concept to Belgium. Through an annual music festival in the town of Gooik, Ivo recruited a small group of young musicians to form a Belgian delegation each year, that in turn could attend the first couple of Ethnos during the 90s. This was seen as a logical step in order to get a grasp of the concept and how it would work, before actually trying to implement it in Belgium (W. Claeys, personal correspondence, August 2019).

Since its birth in 1999, Ethno Flanders has gone through several head organizers. Most people that have led the event have been involved as artistic leaders and participants of several different Ethnos before being asked to take on the role of head organizer. Although, each one of the organizers has been involved actively with Ethno Flanders at different points of their lives. The current head organizer since 2017 is Joachim Brausch, and the organizing team of EF19 consisted of 5 other people.

During the past few years, Ethno Flanders has been organized in Oostende, on the west coast of Belgium. The venue and facilities used during the week was a school, unoccupied during the summer holidays, with a fully equipped kitchen and big room to rehearse in. Since the part of the school didn't feature any showers, they had to be added in the form of a festival shower-wagon. Several classrooms were used as sleeping halls, divided in to 'Men-only', 'Women-only' and 'Mixed' sleeping rooms.

A terminological aspect that makes Ethno Flanders stand out is the changing of the name 'Artistic Leaders' to simply, 'Coaches.' Joachim Brausch explains this by stating that 'we want to make the participants feel that they are carried, not that there are leaders or masters that control everything' (J. Brausch, personal correspondence, August 2019).

### Funding

Ethno Flanders is organized with support from a number of partner organizations, with a varied level of involvement depending on the organization, but not entirely without complications. Currently, most of the funding for Ethno Flanders is from *Muziekmozaiek*, an organisation that works to support folk and jazz music in Flanders, with support from the Flemish government. During previous years, JM (*Jeugd en Muziek*) or JMI (*Jeunesses Musicales International*) had been involved in the financial support of Ethno Flanders. Still, as of 2019, that collaboration ended with the reorganisation and dismantling of JM-Flanders. Due to the complicated political structure and government of Belgium,



the relocation of JMI headquarters to Brussels created difficulties in creating collaborations and funding options with Ethno Flanders, since the Flemish government primarily funds them, and is based in Flanders. This complex political and governmental structure is one of the reasons why the name Ethno Belgium does not exist. The total budget of Ethno Flanders 2019 was €12000, with most money being spent on food, lodging and scholarships (J. Brausch, personal correspondence, August 2019).

## Activities

Below is a rough schedule for the activities that took place during Ethno Flanders 2019. This schedule represents the first half of the Ethno Camp before the official concerts and excursions started.

**Figure 1: Activity schedule EF2019**

Time	Activity	Time	Activity
<b>08.00</b>	Wake up	<b>14.30–15.45</b>	Workshop
<b>08.30–09.15</b>	Breakfast	<b>15.45–16.15</b>	Tea break
<b>09.25</b>	Crew announcements	<b>16.15–17.30</b>	Workshop (all together)
<b>09.30–10.45</b>	Workshop	<b>17.30–18.30</b>	Free time
<b>10.45–11.15</b>	Coffee break	<b>18.30–19.30</b>	Dinner
<b>11.15–12.30</b>	Workshop	<b>19.30–20.30</b>	Free time
<b>12.45–13.45</b>	Lunch	<b>20.30–</b>	Evening program
<b>13.45–14.30</b>	Free time		

Since the group and organizers did not know the music beforehand, a workshop could consist of 1–3 tunes or songs being taught, both in full group and in divided smaller sections. In total, 23 instrumental tunes and songs were learned, arranged and performed at the end of the camp. Free time was normally spent socializing, jamming, going to the beach, resting and occasionally rehearsing the material being taught throughout the day, up to each of the participants to decide. The evening program usually featured a particular theme or activity, as seen below:

**Figure 2: Evening program EF2019**

Day	Evening program	Day	Evening program
<b>Sunday</b>	Presentation of coaches, games	<b>Friday</b>	Open rehearsal
<b>Monday</b>	Dance evening, jam	<b>Saturday</b>	Ghent concert
<b>Tuesday</b>	Free evening	<b>Sunday</b>	Dranouter festival
<b>Wednesday</b>	Open stage	<b>Monday</b>	Belgium themed evening
<b>Thursday</b>	Bar at the beach	<b>Tuesday</b>	Going home

# PARTICIPANTS

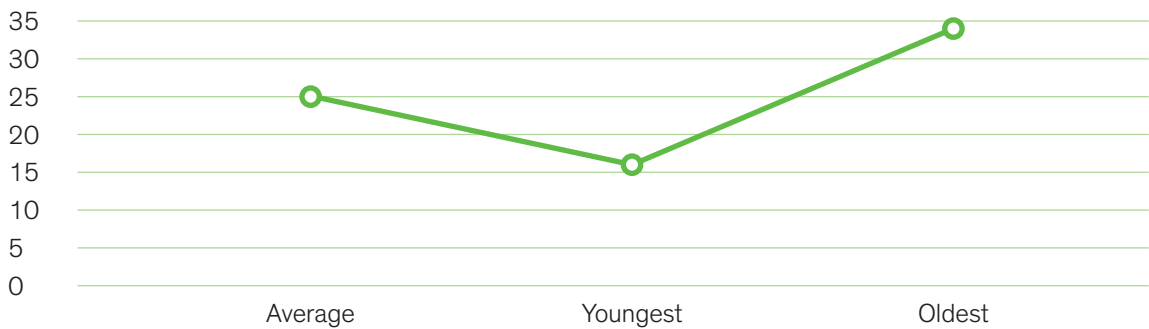
To get a more panoramic view of who were involved in EF19, here is an explanatory table.

**Figure 3: Participants EF2019**

Accepted admissions	Attending participants	Coaches	Organizers	Barcrew	Kitchen staff
63	47	5	6	3	4–6 per day 10 in total

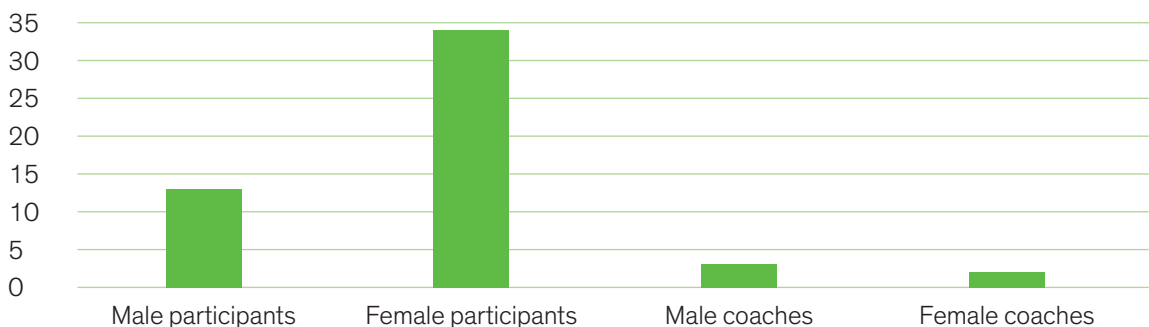
As presented, the number of accepted admissions for EF19 exceeds the actual number attending. This is due to a large number of visa applications being rejected (mainly from African countries), along with a small number of participants not being able to attend for unknown reasons.

**Figure 4: Age EF2019**



In total, there were 19 different nationalities represented in the group of participants at EF19. Initially, it would have been 25, but for reasons (previously explained above) the final number of attending participants was less than expected. The nationalities represented in the participant group were: Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Scotland, France, Germany, Portugal, Cyprus, Armenia, Tunisia, Kenya, Brazil, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina and India.

**Figure 5: Gender EF2019**



## Reasons

The majority of people attending EF19 had previous first-hand experiences of Ethno, although roughly a third attended Ethno for the first time. Almost exclusively, participants had first heard of Ethno through others via word of mouth or attending an Ethno concert as an observer, and thereby feeling inspired to participate themselves. When further investigating their reasons for attending the most common answers were all describing different ways of learning, discovering or challenging themselves in three main areas: musically, socially and culturally. On being asked ‘for what reason did you apply to EF19?’: ‘Meet people from other cultures, learn music from other cultures, exchange attitudes and thoughts about music’ (Anonymous survey response, September 2019).

Some of the participants went a little bit deeper in their reasoning as to what kind of effects attending an Ethno can have:

**[...] it’s a very constructive atmosphere that is a big contrast towards destructive tendencies in society. Ethno is about connecting with yourself and other people from different cultures through music and once you experience that connection, it becomes addictive because it brings out a lot of strength, passion and life in an individual. (Anonymous survey response, September 2019)**

Whether or not the participants had previous experiences of Ethno or not, everyone seemed to have a similar understanding or expectations of what they wanted to achieve from attending, and what the official foci of the Ethno camps are. Some answers from the organizers tended to differ slightly since most of them had a lot of experiences of participating in an Ethno and wanted to have a varied experience, but still being part of the group. It was also mentioned as an asset to the Ethno itself if the organizers had previous experience from attending the very same Ethno, and at the same time making the experience deeper or more profound for themselves as organizers. With the mentioning of previous experiences, only one of the coaches had prior experience of inhabiting that role during an Ethno; the others had previously only attended Ethnos as participants.

## METHODOLOGY

This section features descriptions and motivations of how the case study was formed and implemented. All informant data was collected between July 28th and September 25th, 2019. This case study didn’t begin with a well-formulated research question,

the closest being the three lines of enquiry provided by Ethno Research. The aim from the start was to construct a very open and broad approach as is typical with grounded theory (Bryman, 2008, p. 514), to put the focus of this case study in the hands of the participants, letting a theory form during the process of gathering and analyzing the data.

## Methodological Considerations

From previous experiences and inspiration from similar ethnographic research, I decided to make this case study with a qualitative approach. Knowing that the research would lead to investigating different processes, experiences and social reality from the eyes of the participants and organizers. Previous experiences and research suggested that I needed to be as much of a participant as possible. This was to create an immersive experience for me, making the surroundings, and those in them, comfortable with my presence (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 81). Furthermore, previous research on Ethno suggests that it might be favourable in questioning participants after the camp has ended, to see whether or not the perspective on Ethno changes while being immersed at the camp or not. These aspects led me to decide on using the following methods of data collection:

- Participant observation (video recordings and field notes)
- Semi-structured interviews (audio and video)
- Online survey

By using this fluent form of building up a theoretical framework through grounded theory, the aim is to diminish my influence over the direction of this case study, decreasing my subjectivity and leaving as much as possible in the hands of the participants. By combining different data drawn from various sources, at different times and from different people, the purpose of this triangulation of data is to increase the validity of this case study (Flick, von Kardorff & Steinke, 2004, p. 174).

## Participant Observations

By being a participant observer, I had the hopes of being considered a natural part of the Ethno camp and establishing enough rapport that the participants would act naturally around me. I participated fully in every activity, making short video recordings during workshops and documenting my observations in my field note journal in between activities.

## Interviews

Apart from countless informal conversations with participants in the field, a total of 12 participants and organizers were interviewed on eight separate occasions. Every interview featured only audio, apart from two interviews that were recorded on Skype, a few weeks after the Ethno camp had ended. The interview guide was constructed with an aim to encompass and cover elements of all three lines of enquiry provided by Ethno Research, only one question being added for the interviews that were carried out after the camp.

For the purpose of analysing the data, the interviews have been transcribed into text and then followed up with doing a thematic analysis of the transcriptions, looking for recurring themes and making notes on what wording is used to describe the content. This process was done multiple times on several occasions in order to ensure the certainty of my analysis (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2019, p. 177).

## Online Survey

In order to expand on the variety of data collected for this report, an online survey was sent out to both organizers and participants on the 30th of August, roughly three weeks after the end of the camp. It was posted in the facebook group for Ethno Flanders 2019 and had received 21 responses when closing the survey on September 25th. Out of the total responses, 6 of them were from organisers and the rest from participants. Another reason for using the survey was to make it easier to reconnect to my role as a researcher, especially after a data collection process that required immersion (Bryman, 2008, p. 390). The survey responses were analyzed with the use of thematic analysis, similar to the method used to analyze the interviews. Ideally, the number of participants and organizers to answer the survey should have been higher.

## Selection

The aim when selecting informants was to achieve a broad sample base with diversity in gender, age, nationality and previous experiences of Ethno. Also, having a mix between organizers, coaches and participants for the interviews to get as much variety in the sample base as possible (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2019, p. 41).



## Validity and Limitations

There are several dangers of becoming the phenomenon that you are studying, and there is the risk of 'going native.' I knew it would be a difficult process, since I had previous experiences of participating in Ethnos, and it was possible that I would know some people in the group. Instead of putting my 'research-self' into the context of Ethno, the reverse had to occur. In order to mitigate this as much as possible, I decided to divide my research into three separate periods; before, during and after. The guiding interview questions were prepared and 'locked' before attending the camp. Whilst attending the camp I kept notes in my field journal as much as possible and was mindful of my fluctuating role. Lastly, the survey was sent out after the camp with questions based on the interview guide. The process of analysing the data started six weeks after attending the camp. In this way, I could strengthen my role as a researcher before and after the camp, whilst still being a 'participant' and being granted access to both immersions of self and with the participants. While my level of immersion might have run the risk of having effects on my data collection, it is compensated by the depth of the material I was able to access through my role as a full participant (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 82).

The results of this research can be transferred to other contexts, both outside of Ethnos, and in comparison to other Ethnos. A complicated factor is how different each Ethno is to another, despite having the same foundation of values and concept. This research could, therefore, be repeated through different Ethnos, yielding both similar and completely different results. Lastly, many of these participants have participated in multiple different Ethnos, and have an extensive database of experiences to describe their views and thoughts, strengthening the generalizability of the data (Bryman, 2008, p. 169).

## Ethics

In the early stages of the research, an ethics form was submitted to the YSJU ethics committee, declaring the safety and protection of both participants and data. Furthermore, a consent form was signed by all participants who were interviewed, ensuring their anonymity and security of personal information (Bryman, 2008, p. 135). Most participants will have their names switched to pseudonyms except for the head organizer and coaches, since this information is public. Also, the people featured in the upcoming narratives section will be using their real names, after giving consent to do so.

## LITERATURE

### Ethno

One of the few full academic reports written about Ethno was authored by Roosioja (2018), and features the history and background of Ethno, along with a discussion on its growth in popularity during the past ten years. Roosioja also mentions how *communitas* might be developed during Ethnos (p. 87), even though people sometimes don't know each other from before. The thesis suggests that the lack of strict guidelines between Ethno and JMI might give the Ethnos necessary freedom in their organization. Among the reasons for why Ethno has spread so much internationally, Roosioja lists openness from participants, intense interactions, learning about aspects beyond just music, learning by ear and many more. For a detailed description of what Ethno is and the underlying goals, there is a description on the official website (Ethnoworld, 2019).

A few of these aspects are also mentioned in Ellström's (2016) thesis, which investigates on the surface what is happening musically, socially and culturally at an Ethno camp. He indicates that not only are these aspects important in the creation of an Ethno, but the constant interplay between these are equally important. For example, the potential cultural clashes between participants might be mitigated by the process being incredibly intense, that the group has to work together and be close for the project to succeed. Although Ethno is typically described as a music camp or a festival, there is a lot more going on than just learning music. Discussions on identity, cultures, experiences and challenges are frequently used, both internally and externally.

### Place meaning

What makes a place emotionally meaningful to a person? For many people, the concept of home is considered to be very meaningful. Some people might interpret the metaphor of home as an experience of connection, stability and belonging. For others, the process or journey can create the same feeling. Manzo (2015) argues that people's stories about places (emotional or geographical) 'describe their particular journey in the world, as important and meaningful places can act as symbolic milestones in their life journey' (p. 83) When the journey and personal evolution itself becomes a place of significant meaning, it can enable us to see how feelings of comfort, belonging and self-affirmation become our home in a variety of settings, sometimes more illustrative than the traditional notions of home (Manzo, 2015, p. 83).

An example from another context where place meaning is reinforced or perhaps even materialized by social processes, Chick & Kyles (2007, p. 222) study of recreationists, tenting at an agricultural fair, demonstrates this. Results from this study show that the informants ties to place meaning was 'ground in memory, experience and social relations', and not so much the physical environment. Even though the physical environment can play a large role in creating place meaning, the foundation of attachment for this setting focused more on attributes within the group.

Another point of view is when several place meanings are part of a community, and when that community belonging itself transforms into a place of meaning. For example, a skateboard-ramp in a large or small city, where both skateboarders and breakdancers might socialize and practice still makes them part of both the skateboard and breakdancing community. These communities are world-wide. This process can 'forge a series of finely drawn connections to a place, establishing a sense of community, belonging and meaning' (Duff, 2010, p. 882). Duff also emphasizes the importance of this creation of communities and place meaning, especially in regards to young people in urban environments.

### **Transmission and Identity**

Byrne (Green et al. 2011, p. 239) presents a study that explores how young musicians and students in Scotland view the transmission of traditional music and the effects of it. Music is usually transmitted to the young musicians from a variety of places like music schools, ceilidh bands or jams. Once the material has been 'delivered' to the young musicians, another process starts. A process labelled 'musical identity in teaching and learning.' Byrne explains that professional musical identity can be created in several different ways, and mentions three: performing, teaching and composing. An example containing all three would be participating in a band who perform regularly, learns new tunes from other sources but also writes own compositions or arrangements. Describing musical identities through narratives is a commonly used method, see Belliveau, Gouzouasis & Henrey (2008, p. 81).

## NARRATIVES

In this section, you will find portraits of three Ethno participants and organizers.

### Wim

Born: **1972**  
Started playing: **Diatonic Accordion at 20 years old**  
First contact with Ethno: **Ethno Sweden 1994**

#### *What happened after?*

An artistic leader in Sweden 1996–2002, and ever since Ethno Flanders started in 1999, returning as an artistic leader in Flanders until 2003–2004. Between 2010–2016, organizer of Ethno Flanders, but is part of the bar crew of EF19.

Every year at Dranouter Festival, we move people to tears. People don't know what they hear, but in a subconscious way, they can feel that this is special. Hope that people of JMI think seriously about Ethno and that the world does too. Every country should try to organize one. What we are doing is, we are connecting people.

#### *What is your favourite Ethno Tune?*

#### **Link to Video 1: Wim**

**[www.ethnoresearch.org/ellstrom-video-1-wim](http://www.ethnoresearch.org/ellstrom-video-1-wim)**

### Joachim

Born: **1988**  
Started playing: **Violin at 8 years old, but then stopped at 14. Picked up the violin again ten years later when he discovered folk music.**  
First contact with Ethno: **Through a folk music jam session around 2012**

#### *What happened after?*

Attended Ethno Flanders 3 more years, Riila Music Exchange 2 years, Ethno Estonia, Ethno Sweden, Ethno India, TradinEthno, and then Ethno Flanders recruited him into the crew. Now Head Organizer of Ethno Flanders he met his wife through events and projects connected with Ethno.

Ethno changed me from being really closed to being really open, after attending Ethno Flanders in 2012. Socially and musically. For me, Ethno changed my life.

*What is your favourite Ethno Tune?*

**Link to Video 2: Joachim**

**[www.ethnoresearch.org/ellstrom-video-2-joachim](http://www.ethnoresearch.org/ellstrom-video-2-joachim)**

## **Judith**

Born: **2000**

Started playing: **Violin at seven years old**

First contact with Ethno: **Got recommended about Ethno via a crewmember and friend 2017**

*What happened after?*

Have been returning as a participant to Ethno Flanders for three years in a row. Curious to attend other Ethnos like Germany, Denmark and Catalonia. Plans to start a band with three other Ethno participants after EF 19.

It doesn't matter how complicated the melody is or how technically advanced I play. The most important thing is the story and the feeling. In Ethno, everything fuses, and its more about having the same feeling and expressing the music together, and having fun with it. It also gives an opportunity to have this blend of cultures.

*What is your favourite Ethno Tune?*

**Link to Video 3: Judith**

**[www.ethnoresearch.org/ellstrom-video-3-judith](http://www.ethnoresearch.org/ellstrom-video-3-judith)**



## THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This section will present the primary findings from the data material collected. It will be structured by presenting the data results from the topics and themes that arose during the data analysis.

### More than music

Many people, both outside and inside of the Ethno-experience, describe Ethno as a music camp or a festival. It is implied and often heavily accentuated by both participants and organizers that the underlining purpose of Ethno lies in something else other than the music. Every person interviewed, and many responses to the online survey define Ethno as an incredibly open, warm and safe environment. When asking about how this closeness or trust can be created in a group that has known each other for less than a week, the most common answer was that the people attending Ethno are interested in 'people', and come to Ethno with a wish to 'learn' and 'connect' with others. When asked about what moments he would remember and cherish the strongest, a first time-participant answered that conversations with other participants had made the most significant impact on him:

**Something about the presence in the people speaking, and the interest was shown in what I am and what I do. I've never felt it as intense before. Maybe it is just an illusion of the Ethno camp (Interview D1, September, 2019).**

This type of quote or description was a frequent recurrence during many of both the interviews and survey responses. When being asked the question 'what moment from EF19 meant the most for you?', one informant explained the complexities of what is contained within the activities:

**It's hard for me to answer this question because, to me, ethno was about a process of opening up my heart through connecting. I felt quite stressed in my life before arriving at Ethno. During Ethno, every day, I felt a release of tension that was built up inside of me. While playing music, while dancing, while talking, while swimming in the sea- I felt more and more freedom in my own body and mind. There is not one moment that meant the most for me. Every experience was liberating; it just became more and more profound day by day. I remember now there was one moment where a girl said "we should be extremely grateful for doing this, because this community of music we try to create together, is rare in this world". I realize that Ethno gatherings can be small revolutions of love. (Anonymous survey response, September, 2019)**

Image 2: Dancing in circles. Photo, Maarten Marchauw.



Without being incorporated into the interview guide, a discussion of whether or not Ethno is political arose during several interviews, mainly during talks with the organizers or coaches.

**Politics always ruin things. I don't want to have a sticker on Ethno; it doesn't need to be people from right or left, poor or rich, diversity is important. Everyone should be here. In other countries where political freedom is not as easy to acquire, it might create difficulties with the inclusion if there is a political stamp on the Ethno concept. (J. Brausch. Personal correspondence. August, 2019)**

Many of the other organizers agreed that Ethno should try to stay out of the political, that it shouldn't be the purpose of Ethno. On the other hand, defining what is political or not seems to be filled with as many variants and interpretations as there are people:

**Ethno is highly political. Ethno is about breaking the borders and sharing this earth as a human race. We are facing a structural crisis right now, with a lot of borders. With that comes a lot of fear, and through that racism.**

**Ethno is a beautiful way of co-existing. If we have a common goal and work together as a group, it becomes very easy instead.**  
(Interview D5. August, 2019)

## Challenges

A frequent challenge mentioned by the participants was considered to be the lack of sleep, staying up late each evening because of the fear of missing out on activities. For some, there were worries at the start of the camp, fears that their own musical or technical level wouldn't be as high as needed, or compared to everyone else. One of the coaches confirmed that this is a common fear for first time-participants, but that the real challenge doesn't lie within the music. He explained that it is rather how people come together and accept each other's differences, and not about the music, primarily.

**I was scared of not being able to follow the music because I'm not musically trained like most of the people there. But I overcame it in favour of seeing it as a giant opportunity' (Interview D2. September, 2019)**

A group of organizers agreed that the lack of sleep is a possible challenge, especially during the intense days of attending an Ethno camp. The same group also mentioned that there can be and has been a language barrier at occasions. Mostly when the level of speaking and comprehending English has been very different between the participants: '[...] but we share the music as a common language, so it doesn't matter anyway.' (Interview D6. August, 2019). One participant even signed up for an intensive course learning the English language after finding out he would be participating at Ethno. His motivation is that he wanted to be prepared to communicate freely with participants.

Unexpected events can also happen at any time. During a workshop, one instrument owned by one of the participants accidentally broke, which was quickly reacted to by the coaches after seeing how emotionally shaken the participant became. The coach in question just called out for a 15-minute break for the full group and proceeded with talking to the owner of the instrument and giving the person in question some emotional support, and space afterwards. (Field notes. August, 2019). The biggest challenge for organizers was said to be dependent on the group composition and communication within the organizing team. There had previously been some troubles and challenges happening in the previous year's edition of EF, the reason for it being lack of communication between organizers and a number of unexpected things happening. The current year's organizing group and mix of coaches were described as a 'dream team' by the head organizer (J. Brausch. personal correspondence, 2019).

I Image 3: Musical explanations. Photo, Linus Ellström.

Argentina:  
Vidala del Apacho

~~C/G~~ - ~~C/F~~

**V1:**  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  Arpeggio **A**: G C D G B G  
 " **B**: F G C D F B  
 " **C**: F G C D G B

- Intro: 2A
- A (4)
- B (2)
- C (2)
- B (2)
- C (2)
- A (4)

BASS + CELLO + VLA

**V2:**

C	B	A	G	F				
G				C				

pizz: VL: G - C - G C ACC: G C G C

## Immersion

**[...] Playing our last concert on the beach. I just observed everyone playing with a close eye as if I were a painter. Wanted to captivate everyone's look on their face and energy, and paint a little portrait of everyone at that moment. So that I could keep it with me for a very long time. While doing that, I felt a stream of gratefulness, and it was pulling me directly to the present because that moment will never be again. And that only gives more value to that specific moment to me. (Interview D2. September, 2019)**

It would be a logical assumption that an orchestra that has never played together is undergoing a very intense process when learning, rehearsing, arranging and performing 22 songs and instrumental tunes during only ten days. Especially when the workshop for learning the final tune is being held on the day before the first concert. The sheer amount of material in such a short time period was seen as a challenge by many of the participants, but according to the organizers and many of the more experienced Ethno-attendants, it is an important aspect in making the whole process function.

**Intensity helps with the connection in the group, with too much free time, people fall out. Music is a connection from the first note. You are busy doing the same thing, even if you're socially not fast, you're still part of the group, doing the same thing. (W. Claeys. Personal correspondence. August, 2019)**

Another important aspect that both intensifies the experience and increases immersion according to the participants was the focus on folk and world music and learning music or songs by ear. Since there is no actual sheet music, the participants are forced to listen to each other and be present in the moment of learning, rather than focusing on the paper in front of them. Each phrase is repeated only a limited number of times. And since there is no sheet music to rehearse from in between workshops, the participants are encouraged to help each other learn the material properly. 'Learning by ear brings you closer to the music. You can learn something from everybody. You have 60 teachers, teaching you their expertise' (Interview D4. August, 2019).

This ongoing process doesn't become a finished 'product' (when the tune is arranged and comfortably played) until a very late stage of the Ethno camp. A participant expressed: 'The tunes didn't feel truly comfortable or "done" until the very last concert. Up until then, it was a process. It was sort of uncomfortable to have a process shown on stage, but I liked it. I learned a lot from that' (Interview D1. September, 2019).



A different kind of immersion is the type the immersion of a foreign culture, and being able to convey that to a context outside of the Ethno camp. Several participants explained that by learning the material by ear, specific nuances in the music are more readily transferred, small details that might get lost if the music was being taught by reading sheets. When discussing one of the instrumental tunes with the participant teaching it, he expressed that:

**It sounds like our home country when we play, but we are from all over the world. Our song is for the carnival, and I can easily go with my imagination to these parties of the carnival when it is being played by this group. (Interview D3. August, 2019)**

One participant mentioned a similar 'side-effect' within the learning process, that while being taught a tune from a representative, he would also be immersed in the person teaching it:

**A very personal experience, the humble [Name] teaching us his love song. During the workshop, I felt a little bit out of myself. Appealed and drawn into [Name]. When he played, he was soooo focused, deep into his playing. And then he stopped and interacted very humbly with the others. (Interview D1. September, 2019)**

On the topic of immersion, the field notes from the data collection process while participating all show an increasing level of participation from (me), the researcher. Both physically and emotionally. As early as on the third day, my notes describe how difficult it is not being engulfed by the whole atmosphere, and reminding myself to schedule interviews and keep my objectivity strong. A couple of days later after the second concert in Ghent, my notes give a short but explanatory description:

**I really have started to care a lot about this group, the people in it and the music that we play. It is incredibly hard thinking about things outside of this bubble. It is almost as if the outside world didn't exist. (Field notes. August, 2019)**

## **Post-Ethno**

What happens after an Ethno? In two weeks? Two months? Two years? Two decades? During the data collection process, constant mentionings and examples were being presented that Ethno builds a robust networking community, both professionally and emotionally. Some attendants call it family, some call it close friends, some call it a

professional community of folk music. All these are different examples being given by the attendants. A participant working as a teacher in a symphonic orchestra expressed his excitement to try and use the new methodologies and pedagogic approaches he had learnt at this Ethno, whereas another younger participant had been given confidence in being able to teach and lead a full group of musicians. The same participant also expressed gratefulness towards the friendships and bonds that had been created during the camp:

**The experience is also good because you have friendship here, inviting people to their own countries. Discovering that the world is open to receive you, and not that it is a 'no.' So I'll go back home with new friends in my heart, and more knowledge about the world. (Interview D3. August, 2019)**

Sometimes, Ethno also brought people to break free from old ways of thinking or inspired them to make changes in life. Former head organizer, artistic leader and participant Wim Claeys was raised in a political environment that was very heavily leaning upon the opinions of extreme right-movements. After attending Ethno, he became inspired to take steps away from those political views, and go from being a nationalist to internationalist (W. Claeys. Personal correspondence. August, 2019).

One of the coaches pointed out to acknowledge the fact that Ethno has grown immensely during the 30 years it has existed, and for what purpose: 'Look at the impact Ethno had in 30 years. It is a political grassroots movement. A global movement of spreading love' (Interview D5. August, 2019). Nearly every Ethno has an age limit of 30 years old for participants, but there are ways to attend Ethno or similar projects that are interconnected, even after that age limit has been reached. Being part of organizing an Ethno could be a way to extend the experience, as it was for many of the organizers of EF 19. Many participants expressed that Ethno is 'highly addictive', and that attending one usually means wanting to participate in many more.

But what if you don't want to organize and have reached the age limit? Throughout the years, other camps and events have been created with the philosophy of Ethno in mind. They might not be called Ethno, but the more experienced participants seemed to consider them as much, despite having another name. The camps and events mentioned during the interviews and discussions were: Rila Music Exchange, Ethno Histeria, Vethno, TradInEthno, ChilEthno, Ethno Cahuil, Folkmarathon and Ethno Histeria Umeuropa Caravan. These camps or events are often organized and attended by Ethno participants, old and new.

There have also been several examples of bands that have been formed at Ethno, some that continue playing for a very long time after the camp has ended. This was confirmed by an organizer stating that ‘there is an Ethno participant in every folk music group in Europe..’(W. Claeys. personal correspondence. August, 2019). In fact, one participant stated that she was going to start a band together with three other participants from EF19.

A number of informants also shared stories of people falling in love during an Ethno and sometimes meeting their long-term partner there. Joachim Brausch met his wife through Ethno-related contexts, and are now co-organizing Ethno Flanders with the support from her (J.Brausch, personal correspondence, August, 2019).

There were mentions of an expression called ‘Ethno Blues’ at several occasions, which led to discussions on the emotional aspect of coming out of an Ethno, how it feels. One experienced participant described Ethno blues:

**Ethno Blues is a very serious trauma that eventually happens to everyone. Because of the severed connection after being 100% attending physically, mentally and spiritually, it really hits you hard. Because of this intense bonding, you feel like you just lost your family once you come home. It’s a beautiful thing. (Interview D5. August, 2019)**

The definition of Ethno blues varies with each person, but the informants seemed to have some consensus in defining certain aspects of what it means to be struck by the Ethno blues. Wim Claeys described when his version of the blues is at its worst:

**When there’s been a really good group, awesome music that you really fall in love with, and falling in love with another person. I had the blues for several months after that. I Couldn’t stop thinking about Ethno, couldn’t stop listening to the recordings, could not reconnect with my hometown, or my friends. Each time at the pub I was talking with them about Ethno, how I felt, and how much I wanted to go back. A disconnection from the real world. You want the bubble to follow you, but it doesn’t. (W. Claeys. Personal correspondence. August 2019)**

This comparison of a bubble bursting and sipping out into the real world was used by other informants as well. ‘It is like living in a bubble, living in a dream’ (Anonymous survey response. September, 2019). The group dynamics are not gone but redefined and different from the time when attending the camp. Experienced participants that have gone through this process many times before, know this well: ‘At the time of participating, your life is Ethno. It is very easy to romanticize it immensely. You cannot keep up this bubble forever’ (Interview D6. August, 2019).

Other informants compare Ethno blues to having a really big hangover, and some even compare it to going cold turkey from being addicted. As with the end of many camps and projects, most informants described a feeling of emptiness or loneliness when coming back from participating in an Ethno, but also that the feeling itself is not necessarily a bad one: 'You feel really lonely after the Ethno. It hits you quite hard. But it is also nice. You think back on it with fond memories. I am still in touch with people, even started exchanging letters with some of them' (Interview D1. September, 2019).

A more tangible after-effect of Ethno is that the music being played also spreads, and is transferred back to each participant's homes. Expressed by some informants was that the music has an underlying purpose, that the former participants of Ethno become a protector or a voice of cross-culture. That the music and the stories from Ethno can act as a window to the outside world, that shows how similar everything is when it comes to music and culture, points of easy connection between contexts and differences. 'As these kinds of ambassadors, we can speak up when faced with prejudice' (Interview D1. September, 2019).

**Image 4: The floating Ethno flows through the city of Ghent. Photo, Maarten Marchau.**



## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this case study has been to explore how the experiences of attending an Ethno affect life, and what parts of said experience appear to be the most meaningful. In addition, the purpose was also to find narratives that are created around Ethno. There is no question that Ethno may have a huge impact on peoples lives since the number of narratives and life stories told about the experiences and reverberations after attending an Ethno are varied and numerous, as is normal with any narrative (Belliveau, Gouzouasis & Henrey, 2008, p. 86). Despite being a challenging and ambitious project, the challenges that are encountered are met with optimism, constructive approaches and expeditiousness. Also, since most people that involve themselves with Ethno tend to inhabit a high level of tolerance and openness (Roosioja, 2018, p. 88), which creates a very high ceiling where mistakes or accidents can happen, and be dealt with in a speedy and comfortable manner. As stated in the interviews, the focus on musical expertise is not the primary one but to have fun and explore cultures, learn and teach music, learn from and about people but also develop yourself (Green et al., 2011, p. 249). Cultural clashes can and do happen, sleep deprivation is almost guaranteed, but the intensity of working together as a group for such a short time in these particular circumstances creates a focus that often mitigates and dampens a negative outcome (Ellström, 2016, p. 77). Learning the material by ear also keeps the participants in the moment, and together with the sheer intensity and amount of material learnt, it increases the level of immersion for everyone involved during the whole process.

Ethno creates a place of meaning, and what that meaning entails might differ from person to person. Similar to what Manzo (2015, p. 83) is describing, this meaning might be the memories and experiences that are created within the Ethno camp, the people that are involved, the music that is played, the actual geographical area or it might even be the process itself. This sense of meaning can travel to places and be transferred through people, creating a number of different examples of meaningfulness. Some more abstract and some more tangible. It is part of several interconnected contexts of place meaning, and in constant movement (Duff, 2010, p. 882). There has been examples and implications of what the potential reverberations from attending an Ethno are, ranging from becoming an ambassador against prejudice, starting a band, meeting the love of your life, learning to become more open as a person, growing confidence in your own musical skills, a network of friends and professional musicians that sometimes are referred to as 'family', the creation of several similar camps or being granted the courage to break norms of society. The stories are as many as there are people, and the connections made creates the same kind of meaningfulness that is mentioned by Chick & Kyle (2017, p. 222).



The incredible force of being part of the Ethno experience can be life-changing or dramatic, at least. At several points during the camp, I could feel my role as a researcher being pushed aside, in favour of being an Ethno participant. However, it's not certain that the trust built between informants and me would be the same if I hadn't been a full participant (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 82). Therefore, I would highly advise that research or at least data collection on Ethno should be done in pairs of at least two people. One being a full participant throughout the whole camp, and the other having a more defined role as a researcher.

To summarize, the level of immersion that participants experience at Ethno creates a bubble of meetings, intense emotional experiences and bonds that are connected with exploring music, people, cultures and places. Most experiences inside of this bubble are considered meaningful by the attendants, and the reverberations and narratives that are produced from that experience spread to other contexts, continuing and creating new places or contexts of meaning.

For future research, it would be highly interesting to see a full narrative study on Ethno. We have noticed that narratives are being created and remembered, and it would be interesting to see what could be learnt from them. On a completely different topic, it would also be interesting to see in what magnitude Ethno could be transferred to different contexts. Could the concept of Ethno be taught in music schools? Or would certain elements make it into something completely different?

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Linus Ellström is a music educator currently situated in Stockholm. He came into contact with Ethno in 2014 while studying at Malmö Academy of Music, and became so interested in the musical, pedagogical and social aspects that he decided to write his master thesis on the topic. Since graduating in 2016, he has been involved in organizations and conferences that address the topics of music education and cultural exchange, both as an organizer and participant. Linus has been a participant and organizer of the EAS (European Association for Music in Schools) Student Forum, and as a presenter on the CDIME (Cultural Diversity in Music Education) conference.



I Image 5: Linus Ellström. Photo, Maarten Marchau.



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