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# Case Study: Ethno Portugal

Crossing the Threshold



Author: Lee Higgins

**ETHNO**  
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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

Ethno Portugal 2019 had 62 participants: 50 musicians and 12 dancers from 28 countries. Using an ethnographic strategy, data collection included participant observation, interviews, and visual documentation. Using inductive coding key themes were explored and analysed in response to three lines of enquiry set for these pilot projects, (1) pedagogy and professional development, (2) experience, and (3) reverberations.

The research suggested that participants arrived at the camp with a high level of motivation in two main areas: an eagerness to share music in an open and respectful environment, and a desire to meet and be-with people from cultural contexts other than their own. Participants arrived at camp with a good level of musical skill and in some cases some prior knowledge of what to expect.

The site created a bounded residential space through which the everyday could be suspended through both communal living and intensive arts practice. Mitigated through the 'suspension of the everyday,' 'respectful musical exchange' alongside 'being-with-people' provided participants with the Ethno Portugal experience.

Beyond the camp itself, participants placed a strong emphasis on professional development, for example, increasing repertoire, networking, and potential work opportunities. The value participants put on the cultural experience meant there were some significant moments of intercultural understanding leading to more in-depth insights into societies other than their own. For some, Ethnos of this nature provide a lens through which to think and reflect on both current contemporary affairs and broader aspects of personal life. As a critical window, those that had felt this way understood, or at least began to understand, how Ethno experiences might, or do, play a part in their decision making within the everyday. This might be one of the most critical dimensions for Ethno Research to explore.

# Ethno Portugal: Crossing the Threshold

## INTRODUCTION

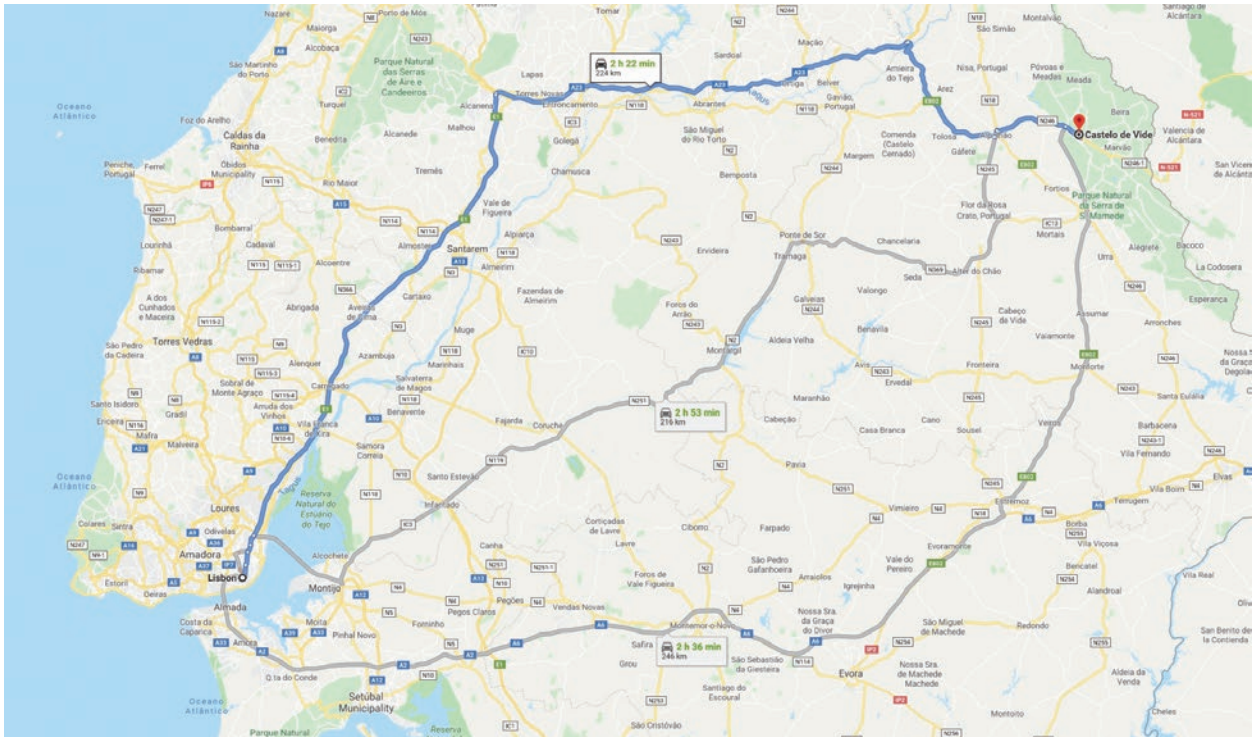
### Location

Ethno Portugal 2019 took place in a school within the small town of Castelo de Vide (Image 1), 225 kilometres from Lisbon, and close to the Spanish border (Figure 1). Sometimes described as the best-preserved medieval town of Portugal, this picturesque town is located in the Alto Alentejo region and lies on the slope of one of the northern foothills of the Serra de São Mamede.<sup>1</sup>

**Image 1: Castelo de Vide**



Figure 1: Lisbon to Castelo de Vide



Starting in 2014, Ethno Portugal is now in its sixth year. It has the support of JM International and Associação PédeXumbo, a cultural association located in Évora, Alentejo which has been promoting traditional folk music and dance since 1998. Closely associated with the Andanças Festival<sup>2</sup>, this annual event usually serves as the last concert of the residency and the first performance of the Festival; however, this year the festival did not run. Attending the camp during July 15–26 2019 were 62 participants: 50 musicians and 12 dancers<sup>3</sup> from 28 different countries.<sup>4</sup>

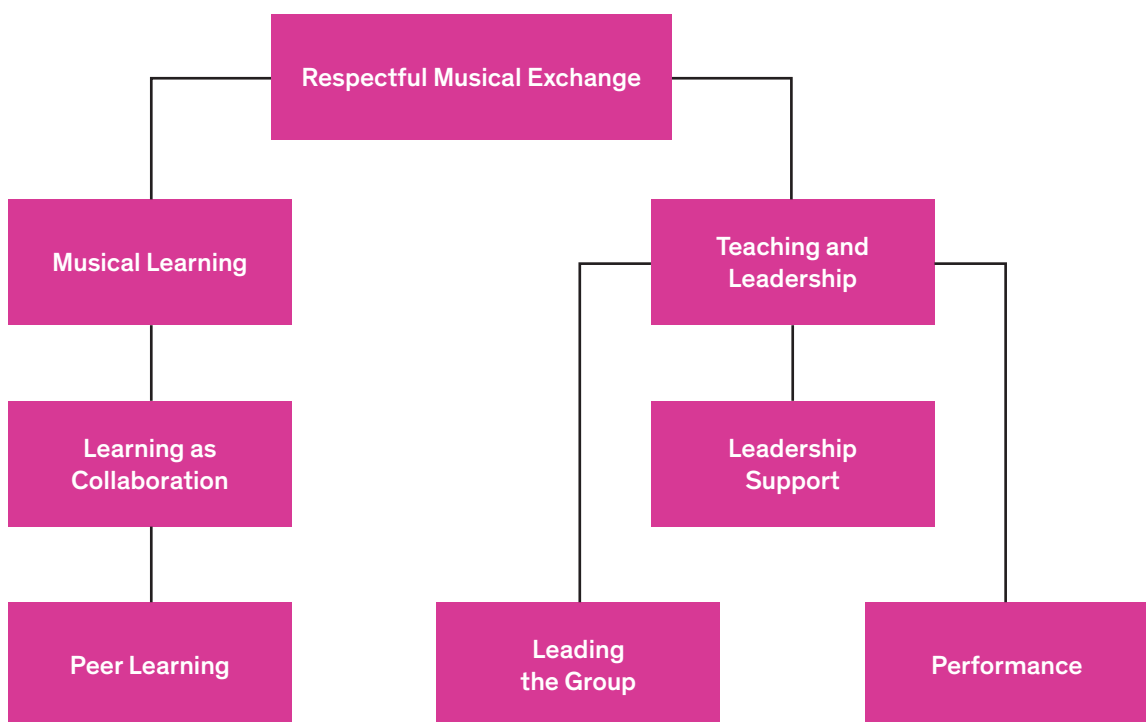
## Research Design

The primary research was predominantly collected in 5 days between July 15–19. The overall research approach is reflective of ethnography.<sup>5</sup> As a qualitative research method directed towards producing what is often referred to as ‘theoretical’, ‘analytical’ or ‘thick’ descriptions’, the ethnographic account has been the principal research method adopted by ethnomusicologists.<sup>6</sup>

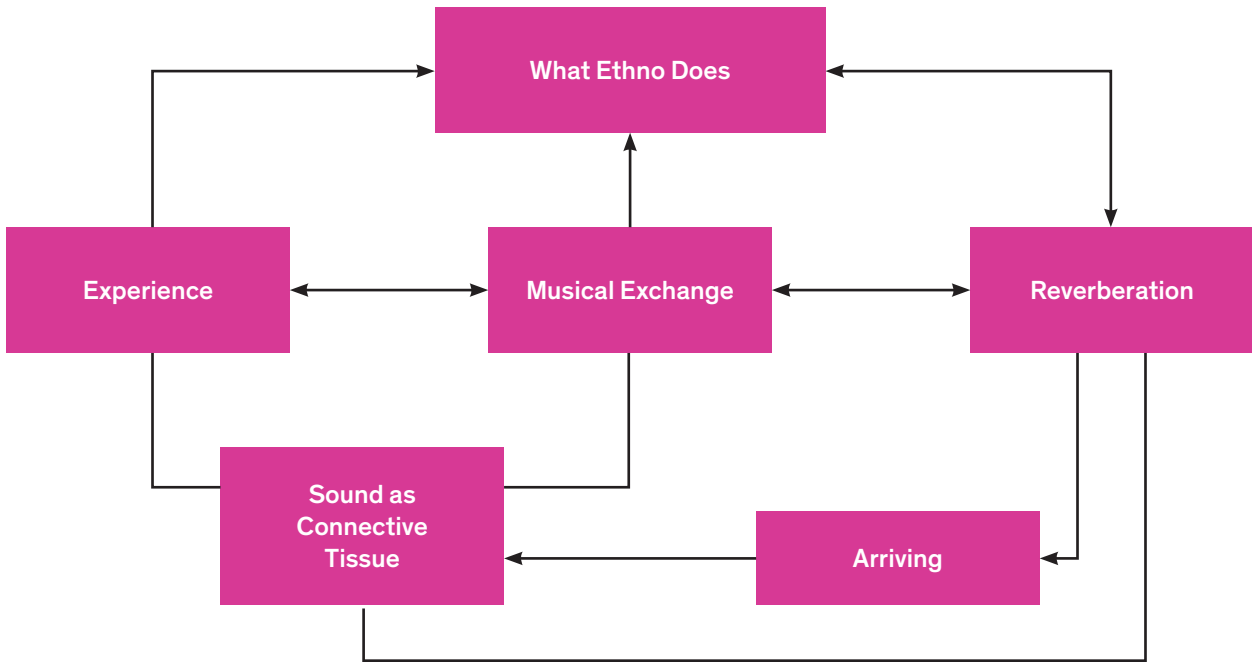
During the fieldwork, 'data' was collected using the following methods: participant observation, one-to-one interviews, focus groups, field notes, and visual documentation.

Interview questions were open but followed the three lines of enquiry developed during the first Ethno Research meeting in May 2019: (1) pedagogy and professional development, (2) experience, and (3) reverberations.<sup>7</sup> Interviews were predominately carried out at the camp, but several participants further explored 'reverberations' two months later in Skype conversations. All participants signed consent forms and were made aware of the project's ethical protocol which includes changing individual names and disguising any details of the interviews which may reveal their identity.<sup>8</sup> Following the transcription of 30 interviews, an inductive coding method was used within Nvivo, a qualitative data software program.<sup>9</sup> Initial coding established broad code names within the interview transcriptions, field note, and visual data. This was followed by line-by-line coding exploring the material in more detail. Producing a collection of around 40 codes were initially categorized using the themes reflective of the three lines of enquiry. Through careful analysis of the broader categories, the nuances of the data were teased out. The analytical work also included visual mind maps (Figure 3) and concept mapping (Figure 4). Figure 5 represents the concept map that determined the structure of this report.

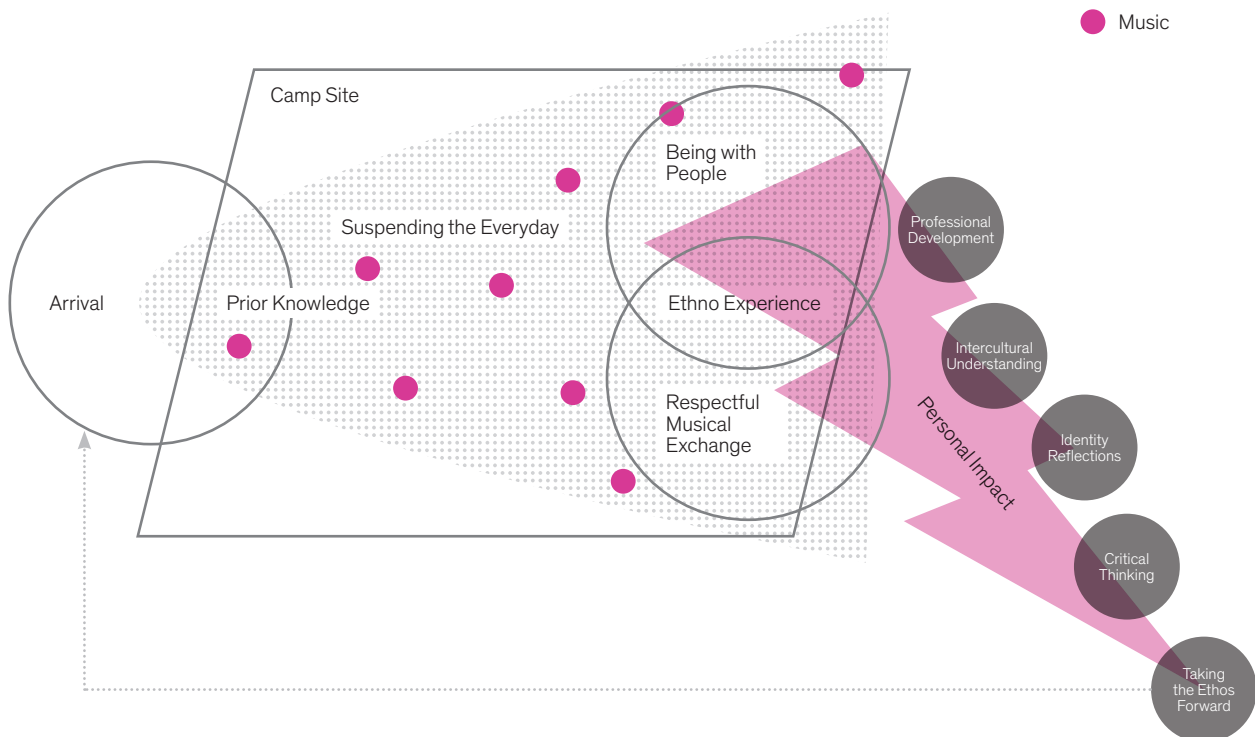
**Figure 2: Mind Map**



I **Figure 3: Conceptual Map**



I **Figure 4: Ethno Portugal: Crossing the Threshold**



## Why People Attended

Right from the start, it was clear that those attending Ethno Portugal had a high level of motivation and were committed to the residency. I sensed an excitement amongst the participants of looking forward to being with fellow attendees, both old and new. The desire to make music was particularly palpable. As Julia told me ‘[I’m here because of the] enthusiasm, the excitement and eagerness to share music in a group.’ Artistic leaders and participants told me that ‘everybody is motivated to be here’ (Mateo, interview 18th July) there is a ‘passion’ (Julia, interview 16th July) to be exposed to ‘lots of different backgrounds and influences and to be able, in a short space of time, [to] pick up things I don’t normally have a chance to’ (Cecylia, interview 17th July). I was told that ‘people are here for the music’ (Cecylia, interview 17th July).

Responses to why participants were attending Ethno Portugal can be categorized in three ways: (1) the music, (2) professional and/or personal music development, and (3) the accepting environment.

(1) For many participants I interviewed, there was an emphasis on Ethno Portugal offering opportunities to learn ‘different types of music’ (Arjun, interview 17th July). Like other Ethno camps, Ethno Portugal sought to create an environment that enabled exposure to a variety of the World’s musics. Without extensive travel, you can get a rich multicultural music experience within one location: [Ethno is a] place where you don’t have to go to every single country place [to find the music] (Berat, interview 17th July). In the words of Arjun, you can ‘learn and observe how all the people around the world listen and play music – how they think of their music and how they think of my music.’

(2) Professional development can be understood to mean learning, earning, and/or maintaining professional credentials such as academic degrees, attending conferences, and informal learning opportunities situated in practice. For many of the participants, the Ethno camp acts as an opportunity for professional development. Ethno Portugal created ‘a place for exchange’ (Hannah, interview 18th July), a space where musicians could replenish themselves away from the stresses of working in high pressured environments, such as music conservatoires, gigging orchestras and bands, and national contexts where the pressure to earn money and conform to others’ expectations is high. Potential ‘teaching’ opportunities afforded by Ethno camps were particularly singled out. These were valued experiences and understood by some as giving Ethnos a distinction in relation to other folk music camps.

(3) Participants expressed that they were drawn to Ethno Portugal and Ethnos more generally because of the ‘supportive’ atmosphere. The welcoming and inclusive messaging started long before participants arrived, with communication via email at first, broadly advertising the event and then by corresponding to those that had registered.

These ideals appeared to be carried throughout the duration of the residency, and for some, Ethno Portugal has become a must-do activity in their annual calendar. Generating a culture of support, musically and emotionally, was a reason people attended. Some participants had experienced the 'support' on other camps, for others, they had heard about it, and this was a factor in deciding to attend. Descriptive words and phrases such as 'they [the artistic leaders] take all your fears', 'receiving the acceptance', 'no matter what you will show its OK', and 'you can [always] find a solution' reinforced the sense of security felt by the participants.

## Artistic Backgrounds

Most of those I spoke to had a significant background in playing and performing music both professionally and in amateur contexts. The majority of those I interviewed had a background in studying music within a formal setting such as a music conservatoire, university, music schools, and individual instrumental lessons. They were a very skilled group of musicians.

Describing the collective as having a 'good' technical and playing level, Berat, an artistic assistant,<sup>10</sup> emphasized that the group had 'mixed ability' but 'as a whole sounded very good.' He said that 'the most important thing at Ethno is that you discover amazing musicians that have never stepped into a [music] school who have learned at home or on the street and you realize that they all sing and they all play more than one instrument.' I did not speak to anyone at Ethno Portugal who particularly fitted this description. Still, I was aware of one or two musicians who had developed their craft from outside of formal institutional structures. As well as performance, some participants were either studying or had completed degrees, Masters, and in one case a PhD in ethnomusicology and musicology more generally.

The artistic leaders I spoke to also hailed from a formal music background. The leader most visibly facilitating and organizing the musical content of the camp had a significant track record as a participant before he moved through the Ethno ranks:

**My first Ethno as participants [was] 12 years ago, and I participated in maybe ten or twelve Ethnos before I led one [...] I was at the first Ethno Portugal as a participant and then they called me at the third edition to help with the leadership and then I began my leadership as conductor and I have been coming the last 4 years and then we started Ethno in Catalonia – we wanted to bring it to Spain so I have been involved in many Ethnos (Mateo, interview 18th July).**

Ethno Portugal is unusual in relation to the majority of Ethno camps because dance is a specific feature, meaning that there is a discreet dance strand with dedicated artistic leadership. Dance is significantly smaller than the music; in 2019 there were 12 participants compared to 50 musicians. Dance created an additional dimension and had its practice rooted in what I would describe as contemporary dance. The participants came from folk, ballet, contact improvisation, theatre and music backgrounds. For example, Molly said 'I've been into folk music all my life, and now I'm in education where I specialize in folk dance' (Molly, interview 18th July). Participants told me that their classical dance training was too restrictive and as Cecylia said, '[I'm] rebelling against it', further explaining that 'In dance, you can be dedicated to one style and not really get the chance to explore other things'. She continued, 'I was hoping that here there would be more people like me that have a dance background but not just fully committed to one style of dance' (Cecylia, interview 17th July).

## THE EXPERIENCE

### Suspending the Everyday

Music-making plus the broader social interactions constitute the 'here and now' experience of the Ethno Portugal camp and is mitigated through the suspension of the everyday. If we consider the camp as a site through which you arrive and agree to partake in, participants on the first day crossed a threshold between two domains, the 'outside' – the everyday world they live in – and, the 'inside' – the residential camp bounded between two fixed dates. The musicians (and dancers) decide to leave their 'everyday' and move into a space bounded by an 'alternative' approach to doing both music and living. Loosely guided by a particular set of principles that seeks to bind the participants in an atmosphere of hospitality, the hosts of Ethno Portugal, the artistic leaders, camp organizers and staff, invite the participants towards a kind of social contract for the duration of the project. The invitation given to the participants from the hosts is a cordial reception, a welcome towards both familiar guests and those less so. There was a liberal beckoning from the Ethno Portugal team that has all the hallmarks of a generous and open welcome into a temporary lodging.<sup>11</sup>

Following an initial welcome, the process of creating a functional working group begins. This facilitated process is vital to both the aims and objective of the camp. After finding a place to sleep within one of the large classrooms decked out with basic bunk beds and mattresses, the participants head for dinner in a hall just over the road from the school. Offering a variety of simple but tasty home-cooked food, plus a little red wine, the eating space creates time for conversation and some respite from the day's activities.

The communal eating and sleeping spaces are essential in generating a sense of 'in-this-together' vital for nurturing a sense of community. (Image 2)

### Image 2: The Communal Eating Space



As darkness falls on the first evening, everybody congregates in one of the classroom spaces for the initial evening circle. Following the introductions and the history of the camp, principles through which the 10-day schedule will operate are outlined. The approach to 'being-musical-together' becomes much clearer when the whole group assemble outside for some initial music-making. As the group waits in anticipation, there isn't a plan from the leaders but a hopeful expectation, a trust, that some of the participants will come forward and offer some starting points. It was here, close to midnight and standing outside on a hilltop town in the Alto Alentejo region of Portugal, that the suspension of the everyday began. Various musicians, both regular and first time Ethno attendees, came forward introducing themselves through their music-making. For some they had done this before, you could see that, but for others, it was a risky moment of sticking your head above the parapet and saying 'I'm here!' One participant explained that it was a new experience for her, but she 'expected' that the group would support her emphasizing that 'people were listening and open' (Ulyana, interview 17th July).

In concert with the participants, the leaders set out to create an environment that was 'special' and 'different' from the participants' everyday. With participants' consent – in the sense that they chose to be at the camp – the everyday is suspended and the 'outside' is left temporarily behind. It is through the suspension of the everyday that the Ethno 'experience' can take place. Described in terms of a 'dreamland' (Gabriel, interview 18th July) it is understood by some as a 'unique opportunity' (Hannah, interview 18th July) because the regular day-to-day does not enable such intense interactions. Ophelia notes, 'when you are here, you are really in the present – something we don't have in our [daily] lives very easily.' She describes by way of an analogy: 'living in the presence – I am here with you under this tree, and I don't think of Greece suddenly. So, I try to keep with this, and this is the beginning for joy and creation [...] it is not easy but this is what I try to keep, the sense of being present and focus on what I have to do.'

This temporary bounded space was often referred to by using the adjective 'magic.' As Ulyana affirms, 'this is one closed magical space [...] here is a kind of feeling that everything is possible – there are no borders – we can do whatever we want and most of the cases it will go for good.' Others talked about Ethno as a place that welcomes 'the whole spirit.' There was a reflection on the everyday stresses of living in a particular European country, referring to the Ethno camps as an environment where time could be slowed down (Hannah, interview 18th July). Molly made the associating between Ethno camps and festivals but differentiating them by saying 'Festival may be more [about] chance encounters – but here [Ethno] is more creating together a communal goal', a 'suspended reality' as she called it. Other comments revolved around the camp's 'very special [...] ingredients' something that could not be replicated outside a potential state of being that is preferential, 'a world they [Ethno participants] want and it [the camp] makes me believe in the power of dance and music' (Molly, interview 18th July). Some participants thought about whether the Ethno magic could be implemented into society and thoughtfully felt that 'if we try to put here some structure maybe we will lose the thing that we found' (Gabriel, interview 18th July). Others felt that if those in powerful positions were to witness 'these kinds of reunions [Ethnos]' they would be exposed to some processes that are effective as ways to generate peace and harmony (Mathias, interview 18th July).

Whilst thinking about the group dynamic Alejandra wondered, 'How have they gone from a group of mostly stranger to this?' She cites the reason as 'the music for sure', but also acknowledges that the social context plays a key part suggesting, with a rather romantic and idealistic vision, that some cultures dance and sing all the time and it is the Europeans that could learn a thing or two from this way of being. Other participants also

saw the Ethno ‘magic’ as a world they would rather live in – a desired world brought alive by the power of music and dance (Molly, interview 18th July). Although some participants saw the Ethno-life as ideal, others understood its temporary locus and wondered whether its model could be successfully transported beyond the camps themselves (Gabriel, interview 18th July).

The suspension of the everyday, understood in terms of conscious human construction, provides the means through which the next sections, respectful musical exchange and being-with-people, were able to operate.

## Respectful Musical Exchange

### *Learning*

Participants attending Ethno Portugal were focused on the making and learning of music. Understood by those I spoke to as a respectful musical encounter, the camp was understood as an opportunity to share something without ‘ego’ and competition (Ophelia, interview 17th July) as Gala noted, ‘no one thinks their music is better than anyone else’s.’ This was seen in contrast to other experiences of music teaching and learning. For example, the music Academy where the environment was often highly competitive and in some instances, seen to reduce creative possibilities. One of the artistic leaders commented that ‘the musicians are all very humble [...] it is about finding the balance of learning, having fun, and having a good final result’ (Mateo, interview 18th July). The emphasis on respect was reinforced by the use of the words ‘supportive’ and ‘communication’; ‘The other participants never let you down [...] they are supportive even if you make a mistake’ (Arjun, interview 17th July) and ‘to have a communication with the people that play’ (Ophelia, interview 17th July).

The style of music learning is predominantly aural transmission through peer-to-peer learning. For many I spoke to, this was a familiar way of working. For a regular Ethno attendee, the ‘patterns’ were things she had witnessed before, ‘over and over again all of these years’ (Molly, interview 18th July). For others, Ethno Portugal offered a new approach to music learning: ‘I find it surprising how everybody just grabs the music, [it is a] really fast learning curve’ (Santiago, interview 17th July).

For those out of their comfort zone, the approach was initially hard to follow, ‘It’s so hard to grab it and it’s going to be a huge challenge but I really like it’ (Santiago, interview 17th July). Although many of the musicians displayed considerable musical skill they appeared willing to be guided by the artistic leaders. One leader particularly felt an

acute responsibility in trying to understand how all the individual participants learnt, emphasizing that 'it's not so much about the musician themselves but more about the music we are trying to share' continuing that, 'this is important because sometimes the technical skills are not amazing' finally suggesting that through skilful facilitative processes they can have great musical experiences (Mateo, interview 18th July).

The learning was, however, a collaborative endeavour; being professional 'is how [well] you collaborate' (Ophelia, interview 17th July). Participants noted the desire to 'find something together' (Beatriz, interview 18th July) and as Ophelia explains, 'there is a duel willing to create something together.' The participants spoke of a non-hierarchical space which provides an environment where collaboration can be learnt, 'you're not learning the instrument, but you're learning to have a tool so when you go out, it's easier to communicate with people you know' (Zoe, interview 18th July). For some, this was the very heart of being 'professional' – 'because professional for me is how you collaborate' (Ophelia, interview 17th July). Molly explains how the process of learning together sets the Ethno ethos apart from other types of events such as festivals: 'but to actually go through this process of learning material together, learning a tune, learning to know the culture together, [...] that is the big difference.' (Image 3)

**Image 3: Working Collaboratively**



## **Teaching**

During Ethno Portugal, teaching was not generally understood as what the artistic leaders do. They wanted to be seen as guides on the side, acting as facilitators,<sup>12</sup> supporting and developing musical sharing. Mateo spoke explicitly about this saying, ‘the word leader I don’t really like it – more like facilitator.’ There was strong support for the skills of the leaders and praise for what was described as a ‘strong feedback loop’ (Berat, interview 17th July) that is regular, clear, and respectful; ‘I’m not good at the notes, so they just take you by the hand as you are and they help you understand them [...] If you are standing there thinking I don’t get it – someone will pick you up (Hannah). More traditional styles of teaching did take place between the participants. Songs and tunes were taught from the front and often seen as a ‘mini cultural exchange’ (Ulyana, interview 17th July). The teaching ability varied; some were more skilled in being able to communicate the material for an international audience while some relied on more support from the artistic leaders.

A process commonly used involved participants sharing a song or tune from their cultural background. It was imperative that the participants, who were seen as representing their culture, shared the music material rather than it coming from the leaders (see Image 4), ‘that’s the most important thing about Ethno I think within the teaching’ (Molly, interview 18th July). From my vantage point, I saw the artistic leaders playing a key role in organizing and in some instances developing the music ideas. Arrangements were critical, and there was an immense skill in pulling these together and then communicating it to the larger group. These were done in consultation with the originator – ‘[I had] support from the leaders [...] They meet after and make logic of what you are teaching. [They] structure the song that you may propose’ (Ulyana, interview 17th July). As an artistic leader explained, ‘the Chilean girl knew what she wanted – she has been working in lots of social projects – we had a chat before it was like Ok – it is all yours’ (Mateo, interview 18th July).

In some instances, the artistic leaders played the role of the arranger, often crafting out something quite different from how the original was presented. Although this ‘recontextualization’ was taking place, the participants pointed out that everyone had heard the first version.<sup>13</sup> As one artistic leader said ‘as leaders, we have the responsibility to ensure that everybody has their voice to share’ (Mateo, interview 18th July). It was, in the words of Molly, ‘process-based but a counterweight because we are supposed to be making a concert.’ This was confirmed by an artistic leader who stated that ‘it’s about finding the balance of learning, having fun and having a good final result’ (Mateo, interview 18th July).

Image 4: Sharing a Turkish Song



The 'final result' in the form of a concert is a crucial aspect of Ethno Portugal, and the level of importance giving to this depends on who you talk to. Mateo said, 'we like to present a very nice result – but we are aware this is not the main objective of the Ethno because the really important thing is the process' (Mateo, interview 18th July). There was a recognition that for some of the participants, this was their holiday:

**You have to consider that these people are paying to be here, for some of them it's kind of holidays that give you some extra information – we have as well some professional musicians – but even the professional musicians come here to learn and share they don't come here to make a perfect concert, they are doing this the whole year – they come here to share and learn (Mateo, interview 18th July).**

I think it was well understood from this particular artistic leader that process and product operate on a continuum rather than competing forces. This long quote underlines this:

The final result is for me very important as well because it leaves you with a good taste in your mouth and as a participant I have experienced leadership that has been weak, and you don't like it because you have been rehearsing for 6 days and this arrangement is still not close but the concert is in one hour, and nobody knows what to do – it's about finding the balance of learning, having fun and having a good final result – but if we have to sacrifice something from this it would be the final result (Mateo, interview 18th July).

### Being-with-People

Working alongside people from different parts of the globe was undoubtedly an important aspect to why people attended Ethno Portugal: '[it's] not just the music it's like the human being – music is the best way to bring people together' (Fadi, interview 17th July). As I was told on several occasions – Ethno is a site where you can meet diverse cultural peoples as well as interact musically (see Image 5). It was often referred to as a 'democratic' space and should be valued because it 'creates a very democratic spirit' (Molly, interview 18th July), a project of hope and a place where stereotypes can be challenged.

**Image 5: Learning Together at Break Time**



### ***Valuing each other.***

High value is placed on the relationships built within the camps, and there is a general recognition amongst the attendees that those that frequent Ethnos are 'open-minded' and 'ego-less.' Participants told me that there is an emphasis toward you as a person and what is going on in your life, an 'acceptance' of each other rather than tolerance. Tolerance was understood as having to give something up, whilst the Ethno ethos promoted validation of each other, a welcoming modality with no judgements (Hannah, interview 18th July). Ethno Portugal acted as a junction, a focal point through which people could come together from different countries and different cultural backgrounds:

**They come together to start talking together during the breaks, during the pool time, during free time when they are working on the tunes together – it's a very nice way for people to get open if someone is very introvert (Arjun, interview 17th July).**

Hannah, for whom this camp was her first Ethno experience, was worried about settling in and finding her place amongst other participants but told me that the atmosphere and musical exchanges alleviated her concerns, stating that, '[the] anxiousness quickly dispersed.'

There was a general expectation from participants that they would meet like-minded people at the camp. For everyone I spoke to, this anticipation appeared to be realized. There were, however, moments of reflection on the realities of camp living. One participant emphasized the need to 'like people – because you are with people all the time!' (Cecylia, interview 17th July). This observation was supported by others who noted how their privacy was 'crowded' both 'living in the same space' and 'eating in the same place' (Berat, interview 17th July). The intensity was not always natural, Ulyana told me that, 'I like people, but I'm not so quick to make a deep connection – I like deep connection or no connection.' There were awkward moments for some of the participants as they negotiated the intensity of this type of residency.

It was clear from those who had attended multiple Ethnos that there was a significant advantage of the resident model in that they had been able to build a robust network of 'friends.' It was sometimes the case that they were able to visit in each other's respective countries. In one focus group participants emphasized the fact that they had found 'a lot of friends,' it's not just the music; it is the 'exchange between then people' (Hannah, interview 18th July).<sup>14</sup> Some were initially worried about finding their place amongst the group: [I was] excited but at the same time afraid – behind every fear, there is desire [...]. I was really surprised the people are very welcoming – no judgement' (Elisa, interview 18th July). In one case, the anxiety quickly dispersed because 'as the music flows the vibes between the people flow really easily' (Nora, interview 18th July). Ethno Portugal

was seen as a space to be with people equally, 'a way of being accepting [towards] the other [...] carrying the other without thinking about ourselves, to know we will be carried in the moment as we will need' (Gabriel, interview 18th July).

Within conversations about relationship building and the importance of valuing individual participants, a sense of what might be described as an Ethno ethos was revealed. This ethos was sometimes described in terms of an Ethno 'spirit.' One key element ascribed to the ethos, or spirit, is that of 'hope.' Ethno camps more generally were understood as 'projects of hope.' For example, Cecylia described Ethno Portugal as giving her, and her generation, hope. This is to be understood against the turbulent political background these young people are currently growing up in. This group of young people showed real concern for issues repeatedly reported in the news, for example, political unrest, climate change, the rise of the alt. Right, and terrorism. Ethno camps were described as an opportunity to share something in a specific moment, a respectful encounter infused by hope for a better future. As Ophelia explains, 'to share something in time and space and it's not egotistic [...] I cannot explain with words in a good way, but it has respect, has a space to play, it is something really human.' Committing to the Ethno process is key to its success, there needs to be a trust, as Gabriel puts it 'to know we will be carried in the moment as we will need.'

## **SOUND AS CONNECTIVE TISSUE**

Maybe unsurprisingly, music was a significant reason for being at the camp. As I have already noted, the participants attending Ethno Portugal were highly motivated in terms of learning new music skills and repertoire. Stepping away from the notions of Ethno representing a folk music genre and the various sub-cultural identities associated with this, some participants talk in terms of how 'sound' can be treated as material through which new music can be created. For example, Gala describes this in the following way: [there is] a lot of music from different countries [and] no one thinks that their music is better than anyone else. A lot of time we don't understand the words; we just absorb sounds with our bodies.'

As I both understood and experienced the camp, the sound was the connective tissue, it was the ubiquitous feature of the residency, and as so many participants told me, this was the language they used, the principle thing that brought people together. Ethno camps do, however, actively promote 'folk' music. This was described to me as the 'base', the starting point for everything going forward. The tradition of folk was important, 'a platform for this culture to exist' (Molly, interview 18th July)

the 'perfect place to explore the traditional and the new' (Cecylia, interview 17th July). From those engaged in Ethno Portugal, traditional tunes were not approached in a 'rigid' way. This meant that through interpretation, the adaptations of technique, instrumentation, and arrangements, the 'traditional' offerings were recontextualized. I asked whether there were any potential problems with cultural representation. From those I interviewed, there was a strong feeling that the 'base', the traditional tunes as initially shown, were the blueprints. Participants made the point that nearly everybody recorded the initial session and as such had an audio copy of the original as performed by the person who was offering it to the group. This was undoubtedly the case; I saw more or less everybody recording the first workshops with either phones or digital audio recorders. For many, this was vital in enabling practising the pieces outside of the formal sessions. I have subsequently been told that these 'original' recordings are often revisited months and years after the camp has finished.

An interesting question results from all of this. Does Ethno have a sound? Do the processes employed by those facilitating the music-making result in the generation of an identifiable sound? Can Ethno music be understood as a 'genre' in and of itself?

## REVERBERATIONS: PERSONNEL IMPACTS

### Professional Development

Many participants talked freely on how the Ethno camps provided music skill development. These were seen as invaluable to broader musical ambitions, particularly within a professional performance or music education context, but occasionally referring to music as a leisure pursuit.<sup>15</sup> Learning collaborative ensemble skills was one of the main areas participants discussed. There were two aspects of this: (1) a general working together – figuring out how to effectively make music amongst diverse approaches and instrumentations, and (2) the opportunity afforded to have a large orchestra on-site and the possibility to influence it through your musical contribution.

Ethnos also provided an enhanced repertoire of tunes from around the world, and one participant commented, 'I've started to compose some music, but it doesn't sound like my music really – I'd say it's mostly Bulgarian inspired. The first time I heard Bulgarian music was at my first Ethno in Germany' (Julia, interview 16th July). A number of the participants I talked to were engaged in social projects where music played a key element, for example, organizing a migrant band, working with refugees, in prison, with young people in poverty, and within a hospital. These projects could be understood

in terms of the practice and theory of ‘community music.’<sup>16</sup> It is clear from those I spoke to that Ethno camps provide skill development and modelling in areas such as facilitation and workshop leadership, vital attributes for those working within the field of community music. One artist leader discussed how the skills he had learnt through many years with Ethno had influenced his teaching of classical music, mainly referring to an emphasis on aural skills rather than Western notation.

## Intercultural Understanding

Ideas surrounding what might be described as ‘intercultural understanding’ appeared to be a crucial part of the experience for many participants.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, Ethno becomes an opportunity to learn how to be ‘open’ to peoples’ differences. This possibility is intensified because Ethno camps attract many people from different cultures to work alongside each other within one bounded space. This year’s Ethno Portugal had representatives from 28 countries. Participants noted the advantages of this, repeatedly saying that these types of experiences afforded an opportunity to develop enhanced intercultural understanding.

Julia expressed how she had developed stereotypes of various peoples and the time at the camp had changed these. Gala talked of how Ethno was a ‘journey into’ different philosophies and outlooks whilst avoiding any sense of nationalism and Molly noted how her experiences helped her ‘believe in how to not differentiate people according to just a first sight of who they are or where they are from.’ As mentioned above, Ethno can be a space for those who are struggling with the current rise of racism, ‘[There] shouldn’t be a border between people because we are all people you know (Ulyana, interview 17th July).’ As Gabriel puts it, the ethos of Ethno is ‘what our society needs right now.’

One of the artistic leaders noted that Ethnos ‘are amazing for the development of society’ affirming that this is because they introduce you to different cultural perspectives. Continuing, he stated, ‘this project shows you to learn about [different people] and not to be scared’ (Mateo, interview 18th July). This sentiment was further exemplified through personal stories of everyday life experiences:

**I go to the Indian hairdresser, I sing the Indian song repertoire – and then he is super happy – I was speaking with a friend about this – we go to the Turkish kebab, and we sing the songs, and he is really smiling because they feel like you are invested in their culture and you can speak some words – it very inclusive’ (Mateo, interview 18th July).**

A standout story amongst those told to me revolved around one participant and her struggles with people from a neighbouring country where violent tensions are often experienced. Whilst at Ethno Portugal she ruminated on her experience and wondered how she might now greet somebody from the said country, how she might confront 'two different ideologies, one in front of another' (Ulyana, interview 17th July). She reflected on how through talking and playing music people from the two countries might say 'we have nothing to do with the fight', in fact, 'we have something in common [and] we can create something [together]'. Following up this initial interview some three months after the camp, the participant was possibly facing a situation of sharing a room with a national of the country currently at war with her own. She told me she was drawing on her Ethno experience to potentially find a way to interact and coexist peacefully.

At the heart of comments about intercultural understanding was the idea of valuing each other. The suspension of the everyday enabled an openness, as one participant put it, an 'egoless' environment where one genuinely inquires 'what is going on in your life' rather than who are you, where do you come from, and what do you do? (Berat, interview 17th July). There is 'acceptance' rather than 'tolerance', a space of 'no judgement' and a commitment to a process that sets out to value people's personal gifts and attributes. This is supported by Ebba when he suggests that Ethno 'brings [out] the best of the people.'

Ethnos are then, 'junctions' and 'windows' through which people can come together and those that attend appear to be ready to engage in relationship building, creating friendships through an initial commitment to have a musical exchange. There were many accounts of deep and lasting friendships. Some stories suggested cultural meetings outside of the camps, taking the form of travelling to each other's countries or meeting up in another space entirely. Sometimes these encounters were affectionate friendships, occasionally with romantic interests, whilst other meetings might be described as network opportunities, a chance to extend one's professional circle.

### Critical Thinking Tool

In conversation, it was apparent that for a smaller number of participants the Ethno experience was actively being utilized as a lens through which to think and reflect on both current contemporary affairs and broader aspects of personal life. In some cases, the reflections were not expanded beyond statements of peace, hope, and collaboration, but for a few participants, Ethno had provided a critical window or validated an existing philosophical position. Molly explained that Ethno had provided a way to more fully

understand the tensions she had with her art education and how it helped her reflect on the prejudices that humans are all susceptible to. Ulyana discussed Ethno in relation to Orientalism<sup>18</sup> and post-colonial theory, reflecting on how Ethno might help us understand those different to us in terms of meeting the Other. These were fairly fleeting discussions amongst a tight schedule of music and dance making but were perhaps pointers towards some of the most critical aspects of the Ethno 'project.' Those that expressed deeper reflexivity revealed how Ethno had contributed to their sense of self-identity. Ethno became a pathway through which to discover personal roots through music (Gala, interview 16th July), an opportunity to consider modern history and how they might respond to it (Ulyana, interview 18th July; Gabriel, interview 18th July), and a means to validate professional work and a way of being (Ophelia, interview 17th July). In one case, an artistic leader stated that 'my life has changed after Ethno – I can say' (Mateo, interview 18th July).

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

After making their decision to attend a folk music camp in Portugal young musicians and dancers arrived at a local high school in Castelo de Vide. Participants for the 2019 Ethno Portugal congregated around the tree-lined school carpark. They hovered at the sill of a doorway awaiting the invitation to walk across the invisible demarcation that marked the start of the residency. As a frame that divided the outside (the everyday) from the inside (the music camp) this threshold was an opening onto a hospitable space that offered a passage pregnant with musical, social, and cultural possibilities. From the moment participants found their personal living space, amongst the dormitory-style accommodation, their regular day-to-day living routines were temporarily suspended. The everyday was not forgotten, but partially parked, a place to return in the near-by future. Described as 'beautiful in its own way' (Cecylia, interview 17th July) the residential aspect of the Ethno camps becomes a key feature in mitigating the Ethno experience. Albeit through choice, participants are 'thrown' into a space that enables minds to focus and reflect on musicking.<sup>19</sup> Being together in this 'out-of-the-ordinary' situation creates an environment through which the two elements of the Ethno Portugal experience can be understood, respectful musical exchange and being-with-people.

Firstly, respectful musical exchange as a way to describe both the intent and the process of the approach to music teaching and learning. The style of music learning is predominately aural transmission through peer-to-peer interactions. There is a strong emphasis on collaboration where individual and group musics are each valued and respected for their musical form and content as well as the cultural context they represent. Music learning is facilitated both through artistic leaders and the participants.

These processes are generally understood as inhabiting a continuum that has informal learning at one end and formal instruction at the other with the majority of learning taking place through non-formal processes. Some artistic leaders and some participants show high levels of skill in group work and facilitation. In these situations, participants are exposed to models of 'teaching' that resonate with aspects of the Ethno ethos, for example, inclusive and accessible sharing. Often these approaches reflect constructivist learning models exposed through skilful scaffolding and supportive facilitation.<sup>20</sup>

The second key aspect of the Ethno Portugal experience was being-with-people. High value is placed on the relationships built within the camps. There is an emphasis on accepting everybody for who they are and what they bring to the situation. Inclusion is paramount and where there are instances of participants appearing to be disconnected effort is made to understand what the issues might be in the hope of rectifying it and bringing the individual, or group, in question back to the fold. Participants are actively looking for intercultural exchanges, the opportunity to interact with people from other countries, but they are also seeking people like themselves. In this context, this might mean those involved in the folk music scene, but it might also mean those with a sensitivity toward cultural diversity. Several participants found each other because they had resonating political perspectives. These were predominantly centred around current world topics such as climate change, terrorism, racism, and homophobia. As I experienced it, Ethno Portugal did not create structured time to explore these themes and as such, I wondered if this was a missed opportunity to connect issues of music and social justice, a potential key idea for Ethno World more generally.<sup>21</sup>

Mitigated through the suspension of the everyday and stitched together through the sound as connective tissue, respectful music exchanges coupled with being-with-people created the Ethno Portugal experience. What is arguably more important is the residue beyond the temporary time frame of the camp itself. From this perspective, Ethno does not stop after the residency. The personal impacts, or reverberations, go beyond the threshold and might be understood across three broad themes, professional development, intercultural understanding, and Ethno as a critical thinking tool.

For all of the participants I spoke to, first-timers and seasoned attendees, making meaningful connections with like-minded musicians was a significant reason to attend. Generating professional networks plus building both temporary and lasting friendships was a tangible outcome everyone could point to. Increasing your repertoire of musical tunes was the most basic take-away, but for many, being exposed to ideas surrounding

arranging, orchestration, conducting, and teaching increased their economic potential. Another reason to attend was the chance to meet people from different contexts and cultures. The research does suggest that the learning of music was the initial driving force, but the opportunity to come face-to-face with difference was a motivation also. For those that reflected deeply, their insights seem to suggest that this was the 'gem' of their experience. Ethno became the chance to break preconceived ideas of what 'other' people are like. When previously learnt perspectives were challenged, there were startling moments of realizations that human beings were more similar than different. These 'surprises' turned out to be joys, moments of insight that could potentially have life-changing effects.

Through the prism articulated above came a final category, critical thinking tool. I think this theme, for this moment at least, is the most out of reach and least understood. My feeling is that Ethno as a critical thinking tool might be the most important aspect of Ethno Portugal, and as a consequence, it might also be relevant to the wider Ethno World. Here Ethno becomes a lens through which one might use to navigate aspects of life. In some senses, this already plays out in the last two themes, professional development and intercultural understanding, but this category has more intensity, it requires deeper thinking and more profound reflection. As a critical window, those that had thought this way had understood, or at least began to understand, how Ethno experiences might, or do, play a part in their decision making within the everyday. Those participants who were able to articulate an Ethno experience in this way were few, and this includes the experienced Ethno goers. To some extent, this surprised me but supported the evidence that suggests that the significant focus for attending was, in fact, the excitement of music-making. It is clear that questions surrounding Ethnos' more profound reverberations have not been asked before, but I am left wondering if this might be one of the most critical dimensions for Ethno Research to explore.

Finally, the point made above directly relates to the image of the threshold presented at the opening of my concluding remarks. The threshold is, in principle, porous, at its best, a revolving door enabling two-way traffic, an opportunity for the inside to penetrate the outside and vice versa.<sup>22</sup> This notion might help create some opportunities to explore a concern of mine. A question I had soon after arriving at Ethno Portugal was whether or not this group, and maybe Ethnos more generally, were populated by the privileged few. If we consider the uptake of music education beyond compulsory schooling and more specifically music instrument tuition, there is a clear picture that those engaged are most likely to be from more wealthy backgrounds in terms of economic power but also supportive and stable living environments. In other words, those that attend Ethnos are speaking to themselves. In this scenario, Ethno isn't much more than an opportunity

for like-minded people, already invested in issues of cultural diversity and intercultural understanding, to hang-out for two weeks and indulge in their passion. I'm not suggesting this is necessarily a problem, but the possibility should be acknowledged, and the sentiment behind it explored. During a group discussion with the members of Varldens Band<sup>23</sup>, a 13 piece 'transglobal roots fusion' group that grew out of Ethno Sweden in 2010, I was alerted to the projects that they have been involved in over the years. This is one potential example of how the inside has touched the outside. Maybe there are many others?<sup>24</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castelo\\_de\\_Vide](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castelo_de_Vide)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.festicket.com/festivals/andancas/>

<sup>3</sup> Although the camp had both musicians and dancers, I will mainly refer to the group as musicians or participants.

<sup>4</sup> For further information see the Ethno Portugal Supplement written by Helena Reis.

<sup>5</sup> As 'the work of describing culture', ethnography has been chosen here as 'a method that one might use as and when appropriate' rather than a 'philosophical paradigm to which one makes a total commitment' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Spradley, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> For example, see (Barz & Cooley, 2008; Gilman & Fenn, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> The full brief can be seen in Appendix 1

<sup>8</sup> Ethical clearance for the project was given in May 2019

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/what-is-nvivo>

<sup>10</sup> Artistic leader refers to the group of people responsible for the participants' creative activities.

<sup>11</sup> For a philosophical discussion on music and hospitality see (Higgins, 2012a).

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion surrounding music facilitation in the context of non-formal education and young people see (Higgins, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion on music, recontextualization see (Schippers, 2010)

<sup>14</sup> For a philosophical discussion on friendships within participatory music projects see (Higgins, 2012b).

<sup>15</sup> The Oxford Handbook series provides an excellent place through which to contextualize some of these larger fields See (Mantie & Smith, 2017; McPherson & Welch, 2012a, 2012b)

<sup>16</sup> For a broad understanding of the field of community music, see (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018). For a more practical sense of how community musicians operate see (Higgins & Willingham, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> For discussions about issues of intercultural understanding see (Bremer, 1996; Deardoff, 2009; Pillar, 2017; Roudometof & Kennedy, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Orientalism is a term developed by Edward Said that sought to capture the West's patronizing representations of 'The East.' See (Said, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> In this context, 'musicking' is to be understood as a verb describing an activity, something that people do. Following Christopher Small, the word also suggests a more extensive sphere which includes the social aspect of making music. See (Small, 1998)

<sup>20</sup> Constructivist theorists, such as Vygotsky (social constructivist) and Bruner and Piaget (cognitive constructivist) support the notion that individuals construct meaning as the result of prior experiences, interests, social connections and where they are situated. 'From a constructivist perspective, music leadership is viewed as a shared process between facilitator and musicians' (Higgins & Willingham, 2017, p. 10).

<sup>21</sup> For discussions surrounding music education and its relation to social justice see (Benedict, Schmidt, Spruce, & Woodford, 2015)

<sup>22</sup> Once someone crosses the threshold they "affect the very experience of the threshold" (Kant, Derrida, & Fenves, 1993 [For an essay that expands on this idea see (Seshadri, 2011 #6708).])

<sup>23</sup> See [www.varldensband.com](http://www.varldensband.com)

<sup>24</sup> One participant raised the question of the limited 10-days Ethno operate in suggesting that it might be worth thinking about how Ethno programmes might operate all year round. This idea was in response to the participants work with refugee communities.

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