

Journal of Music, Health, and Wellbeing

Journal Homepage: www.musichealthandwellbeing.co.uk



A time for action? A time for change? The music profession and musicians' rights in urban and rural areas in Greece during the COVID-19 pandemic

A. Balandina, and L. Efthymiou

Institution Ionian University
 Ιόνιο Πανεπιστήμιο

Article Info.

Abstract

Date Submitted:
 December 2020

Date Accepted:
 June 2021

Date Published:
 September 2021

Although COVID-19 is a global pandemic that has affected almost everyone in the planet irrespectively, we argue that the pandemic has brought distinctive effects and changes to music-making and musicians across cultural and geographical borders. In Greece, the country's lockdown has functioned as a magnifying glass to portray the longstanding precarious state of the music profession and the lack of musicians' rights. We demonstrate how under the COVID-19 shadow, musicians unite for the first time in order to claim their workers' rights. In the first part of this article we will show how art workers in the urban centers, in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, emerged, united and created the Support Art Workers movement to put pressure on the government in order to claim rights for the workers in the art industry (particularly music and theatre). In the second part, we focus on music-making in the rural areas of Greece and particularly Epirus, a region in north-western Greece where many music and dance festivals have a largely seasonal character. We thus examine comparatively the effects of the restrictive measures due to COVID-19 on music-making practices and the lives of musicians in rural and urban areas.

Keywords: musicians' rights; Support Art Workers movement; music and pandemic; seasonal musicians.

1. Introduction

Six months after the quarantine, unemployment and uncertainty have reached rock bottom. There is no plan for tomorrow or at least no one we know. The silence of the Ministry is and will be responsible for the unprecedented unemployment and misery we face and will continue to face. Even if today they announce some policies regarding the opening [of venues], it will already be too late. The Support Art Workers join the artistic unions and associations and invite all art workers to the pan-artistic mobilization.
 (Support Art Workers, 2020c).

In the midst of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, during the autumn of 2020, art workers joined their forces once again to ask the Government to issue necessary health protocols so that performances, events and exhibitions can proceed safely. They also demanded a series of financial, institutional, copyright, cultural, and tax policies and plans to support all art workers

Since the beginning of the first wave of illnesses from COVID-19, that began in March 2020, musicians, along with other art workers in Greece, have shed light on the precarious state of their working conditions. They also demanded urgent government economic support for all unemployed art workers, whether they have official and valid work contracts, or not. On numerous occasions, the art workers have criticized the government for ignoring the working force in the culture sector and have been fighting for their rights by putting pressure on the Ministry of Culture (MOC) to announce both a short term and long term support plan for art workers. They also demanded that the government to immediately deal with issues of music royalties, after the collapse of the national music rights collection system.

‘Support Art Workers - Initiative of Workers in the Arts’ (SAW) was the first initiative to attract art workers. SAW started in April 2020 on Facebook, during the first lockdown. It was founded by a small group of art workers with the aim of “declaring a massive presence in the face of the state's systematic and persistent indifference to culture and its employees’ (Support Art Workers, 2020a). It quickly became widespread among Greek artists and attracted many supporters and followers. One important reason for this was that they are independent of party factions, unlike the Panhellenic Music Union that is identified with a specific political party, a situation well known in the Greek music world. Within one week they grew to 12000 members. Currently, SAW has a membership of more than 25000. Its yellow-black banners have been added to thousands of Facebook profile pictures.

In the first part of this article, we will show how, in the immediate aftermath of the coronavirus lockdown, musicians in Greece alongside other art workers mobilized and organized themselves in order to gain visibility and demand their workers’ rights. The art workers criticized the government for their misdoings in the culture sector and asked for their accountability. Moreover, the art workers put pressure on the Ministry of Culture to include them in their support plans and spread messages of solidarity across the globe.

In the second part we will focus on the negative impact of COVID-19 measures on music-making in rural Greece and particularly in the Prefecture of Arta, a part of the Region of Epirus in the north-west, where mostly traditional rural musicians make earnings as professional performers. These musicians are considered seasonal workers as the region is known for hosting mainly summer music and dance festivals, organized by local authorities and collectivities. These local authorities, gain political benefits by fully controlling the whole festival organization, deciding which art workers participate in each event. We thus consider it necessary to comparatively examine the effects of the restrictive measures due to COVID-19 on music-making practices and the lives of musicians in rural and urban areas. Moreover, we suggest that the government needs to apply different policies to rural and urban musicians, due to the specificities of the regional areas and the seasonal work that is undertaken by these performers.¹

2. Making a living as a musician in Greece: the background

‘Musician: Occupation or Degradation?’ One of the professions that tends to disappear in recent years - although many believe that it has already disappeared - is that of the musician. In the last

¹ This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork done by Alexandra Balandina in Athens and qualitative field research conducted by Lampros Efthymiou in Epirus. They both did participant observation, interviews, and social media research. Moreover, Alexandra as a musician herself, is an “insider” in the Athens music scene.

decade, many musicians due to the difficulties they face, turned to a second morning job, not for 'supplement' of their salary but purely for survival. Even more gave up music altogether.

(Vindiniotis, 2012).

Vindiniotis (2012) reflects that 'the survival of a professional musician today seems like an elusive dream', but the precarious state of the music profession is not particular to Greece. Many research reports demonstrate the precarity of musicians worldwide, their long periods of low pay and employment insecurity, and poor pension provisions, even in the largest music markets in the world.² However, the ability of musicians to manage precarity is greatly affected by structural factors, specifically socio-economic background, political policies and institutional factors in each country.

In the Greek case, musicians have been forced to accept undeclared work for decades now, which is legal in nature, but is not declared to the public authorities with the consequent avoidance of taxation and corresponding security contributions.³ The reasons musicians choose undeclared work are complex and influenced by a wider range of economic, social, cultural, political and institutional factors. The main socio-economic factors include the sharp decline of the Greek economy since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, which brought recession and unemployment, and which in turn favored undeclared work (see also Tsioulakis 2020, 112-138). The latter, has been apparent in many work sectors and is due to employers' manipulation and arbitrariness, turning workers' lives into a precarious state.

The main politico-economic factors are the insufficient welfare state (low social benefits), and more importantly, the large amount of taxes and insurance contributions that in Greece are particularly high for self-employed individuals. As most musicians work part-time or as seasonal workers, they cannot afford paying full national insurance contribution and are compelled to choose undeclared work. This, in turn, makes the music profession non-viable. Institutional factors include low trust in state and culture organizations that create clientelism and favoritism discriminating against some musicians and often coercing them to choose undeclared labor.

According to Ross Daly (2020), a composer and multi-instrumentalist living in Greece for the last 40 years, two more factors related to the decline of the music industry have negatively affected musicians' employability and consequently their labor rights. The first issue, a glocal phenomenon, is the complete collapse of the recording industry, which offered work not only to musicians but to a wide range of professionals in the music and culture sector. The second serious blow, particular to Greece, was the collapse of the Greek royalty collector AEPI (Hellenic Society for the Protection of Intellectual Property), that acted as a monopoly in Greece for almost 80 years representing around 14 540 Greek artists and 2 200 000 foreign artists. Amidst mismanagement scandals, owing millions in unpaid royalties, and no new structure to effectively replace it, musicians lost one more source of income. Therefore, as Daly (2020) concludes, with the payment of royalties from copyrights in question and income from recording music shrunk to a minimum, the primary potential source of income is live performance and teaching, which were harshly hit by COVID-19.

Among the cultural factors that compel musicians to work underpaid and undeclared is the diachronic negative image of the musician in Greece. Musicians are treated as entertainers rather than professional musicians, a perception that is widespread among employers as well, be it municipalities or owners of private music stages. Thus, it is not by chance that musicians, compelled to have other jobs not related to the music industry in order to survive economically in a social, political, cultural, economic

² For Canada see Chafe and Kaida (2020), for UK see Umney and Kretsos (2015) and the online report of the Musicians' Union (2012), and for Germany see Mühlbach and Arora (2020).

³ Generally, the Greek economy, at least since the outburst of the economic crisis in 2008, has large percentages in undeclared work. In inspections carried out by the Labor Inspection Body in 2011, undeclared work was reported in 30% of cases. See research published by the Foundation for Economic and Industrial Research (2012).

and institutional environment that does not favor them, demand today, due to the devastating effects of COVID-19, that their profession be treated with respect.

Despite these longstanding struggles within the music profession, musicians in Greece have never had a strong representative labor movement like other professions. According to Ross Daly (personal communication, 12.08.2020), musicians have never united their voices to demand their workers' rights because 'Musicians, they see themselves mainly as artistic beings, and not workers, and this has been working against them'.

3. Claiming workers' rights: The rise of initiatives in support of the professions in the performing arts sector during the coronavirus pandemic

From the very beginning, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the precarious working conditions of artists and showed the flaws in the state support apparatus. More importantly, it stressed the need to build organizational structures and representative bodies that can put pressure on the government to undertake both immediate actions and long-term approaches to support the performing arts sector.

In mid-March 2020 in Greece, like in many other countries in European Union, live music, concerts, theater plays, festivals, and large gatherings even in open spaces (such as the carnivals and *panigyria*, i.e. outdoor religious assemblies) were some of the first events to officially be postponed and cancelled, to mitigate large crowds of people and control the spread of the virus. The decision for initial governmental furloughs came without input from musicians and art workers.

On the 7th of May, after the call to action of the Panhellenic Federation of Spectacle and Auditory, representing employees working in audio-visual performing arts, hundreds of cultural workers – actors, musicians, puppeteers and other artists - gathered in Syntagma Square in Athens and at the White Tower Square in Thessaloniki, calling for the government to 'Support Art Workers' after being excluded from the monthly 800-euro one time support allowance arranged by the state for most furloughed employees.

The atmosphere at Syntagma Square was one of uneasiness since the quarantine had ended only few days before. We were all wearing masks in an open space, trying to keep physical distance, but finally not being able to because of the large number of participants. At the same time, the atmosphere was revolutionary: there was a sense of communion, with many different professions from the arts participating - puppeteers, performers, musicians, actors - with words and music coming from the loudspeakers, voices and banners. Some of the banners and posters were telling 'Culture is not a hobby', 'We are not beggars' or the slogan 'No to humiliation, no to degradation, music is a profession and it needs respect', written on a banner of the Greek Musicians' Union.

The same day as the protest, the Minister of Culture, Lina Mendoni, announced that artists would be included in a 100-million-euro support fund. The Ministry of Culture replied to an earlier letter - that has been also uploaded as a petition on the online campaigning community AVAAZ - sent to the MOC on the 2nd of May and signed by hundreds art workers, including famous Greek popular musicians.

However, not all musicians managed to benefit from this support fund. As Kostas (personal communication, 05.08.2020), a music producer mentions, only half of the musicians received the allowance:

In the beginning, only those who received the seasonal allowance last year were entitled to get the 800-euro allowance. After receiving pressure, they gave the allowance to those who had either 50 working days of national insurance contribution within the previous 9 months or those who had even few working days in March. But despite these changes and inclusions, around 50% of the musicians and technicians I work with have been left out.

The Panhellenic Music Union (PMU), together with the Hellenic Actors Union and the Panhellenic Federation of Spectacle and Auditory, also held a protest of complaint on April 30th in front of the building of the Ministry of Labour, demanding further actions from the Governments for all workers in the culture sector as long as the pandemic crisis is active. Such protests made widely known inadequate governmental policies in the culture sector, attracting responses and alliances from a wide variety of the Greek population. They also provided constructive criticism to the state for the years of negligence towards art workers and for the current misdoings. For example, Support Art Workers (SAW) criticized the Ministry in May regarding the 100 million euros' fund that was aimed as an exclusive support package for culture saying that the fund is 'one-off hasty and sudden government measure that do not aim at the long term support for culture workers' (Support Art Workers, 2020a).

Figure 1. Photography taken by Alexandra Balandina when attending the Support Art Workers Protest on May 7th, 2020. Banner saying 'Culture cannot be silenced', signed by Support Art Workers.



At the end of May, the government announced the project "All of Greece - One Culture" which initially presented a program of 200 cultural events. SAW criticized that it was eventually only 55 productions and 251 performances presentations, which were assigned directly to producers without any public call for proposals. The MOC replied that this was done due to lack of time. However, there were many other shortcomings that were detected and published in the press about the way the project "All of Greece - One Culture" was designed. For example, it was assigned to a centralized committee with

specific artistic directors, that favored some artists by giving them the opportunity to work in multiple productions, at a time when the unemployment rate was extremely high and many other artists were out of job. According to SAW, the project continued to devalue the modern dance industry (with the exception of the lyric ballet) and it was indifferent to contemporary music and songwriting; it was sloppy in the artistic program with productions that have already been presented in the past (Support Art Workers, 2020b).

In an open letter published by The Northern Greek Music Union (NGMU) (2020) on social media to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Culture and Minister of Labor, they criticized the way the government is allocating money for music events:

How is it possible in the midst of this crisis for the Municipality of Thessaloniki to organize a concert entitled 'secret concert' with the Mayor and 3 spectators and to pay almost 24000 €, of which 6000 are for sound coverage? (With 6000 € the Herodeion is covered with sound)! With € 24000, at least 5 concerts could take place! Is this a way of distributing the € 20,000,000 granted by the Ministry of Culture?

In this tragic period for musicians, the Panhellenic Music Union (PMU) was also actively participating in voicing issues related specifically to the music profession. Its General Assembly, on 22 June 2020, attracted many new musicians who expressed the specific difficulties musicians face in the Greek market, that are diachronic rather than endemic to COVID-19. Theodora, a singer, for example, said that:

We musicians would benefit if we had official license to practice, in that way we can establish the profession of the musician and we won't need to compete with non-competent musicians.

Seray, an oud player, declared

We need to work legally, with employees paying our national insurance contributions, we should not work if not insured. I am not sure what to do, because I declined working in a music venue without national insurance, but maybe I lose the job if someone else accepts.

Giorgos, another musician, stated

We are not beggars? Does society need us? We should start a strike everywhere, in orchestras, in music schools, in music venues, on TV!

Vagellis, a jazz musician, repeated what others mentioned

We need collective agreement governing our employment, we should not be working without national insurance, and like other Greek workers we should also have Christmas and Easter bonus';

Panagiotis, a long term member of the PMU said:

The pandemic is focal. What seemed to be coming has been accelerated with the coronavirus. The Panhellenic Music Union has gained esteem at this stage. Today we see here a climate of warmth and trust. We should take advantage of the massive response to the Union. The Union is us.

Perhaps for the first time, musicians, either self-employed/unemployed or under contract, belonging to the popular or traditional music scene, being famous or not, united their voices demanding government support. 'Only the *skylades* [dog musicians] didn't come out', according to Kostas (personal communication, June 2020), music producer who is 'inside the music business' and closely monitors the government policies in the music and art sector. According to him:

There are two music worlds in Greece. In the first one belong musicians like Sokratis Malamas who upload each day one piece on Youtube, and then there are those who have houses with swimming pools. The *skylas* businessman⁴ is not going to go to Support Art Workers, he will go directly to the Minister.

⁴ The owner of a *skyladiko* music venue, where *skyladika* music is performed live.

These *skylades* musicians belong to a higher economic class working in large musical scenes and nightclubs associated with mass entertainment of lower quality. Not only they have enough to sustain themselves for a long time, but they also have their own lobbying practices to influence governments. According to the same music producer during the first months of the coronavirus epidemic:

the government doesn't issue clear policies about live music venues, the working conditions...we are all waiting for the *skyladika*⁵ to open and let us know how to work. What applies to them, will apply to us as well.

Indeed, on August 12, a newspaper article with a telling title corroborated his opinion: 'The *bouzoukia*⁶ in Thessaloniki found the solution to the new measures - They will open in the afternoon!' (Iefimerida, 'Ta bouzoukia').

Ross Daly (personal communication 12.08.2020) also believes that there are two music worlds in Greece, that both cannot belong to the Support Art Workers initiative.

All over Greece we see musicians who are playing in weddings and *panigyria* and are earning 50 000 Euro per year and they are working on the black, avoiding paying taxes. And then there are musicians who practice every day 8 hours, who work legally and are paying their taxes. These two people do not belong in the same category. I cannot say for the first musician 'Support Art Worker'.

In the midst of such turmoils, the Ministry of Culture (MOC) and Ministry of Labour have detected an uncharted landscape of workers in the cultural sector. They decided thus, to open a platform to register all artists, creators and professionals of art and culture. Again, SAW criticized MOC for ignoring the diversity of professions in the art sector by not including them in the dysfunctional platform. As a consequence, many art professions were left out. To register all art workers, MOC made a public appeal asking for advice regarding the variety and complexity of professions. In a few months, 40 additional professional specialties were added, as well as the possibility of choosing multiple specialties and the ability to modify the registration. Regarding the uses of this platform, in the first months of the pandemic, MOC was not clear why they want to register art workers. However, soon it became clear that this was one way to include art beneficiaries in the subsidy programs of the Ministry of Labour.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic brutally affected the earnings of art workers in the Greek cultural sector and brought to the fore their longstanding precarious working conditions, as well as the ineffectiveness of the state to provide immediate, clear and just support and policies both for the short and the long term in the culture and creative sector. According to research done by Tsioulakis and FitzGibbon (see FitzGibbon, 2020) in Greece, Ireland and the UK, this ineffectiveness of the state is due to the fact that governments and public agencies fail to understand the nature of the music profession or the gaps in existing support systems.

This situation has made art workers realize that they need today, more than ever, to raise their voice, through civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations or collective initiatives, and demand non-discriminatory state support that alleviates the negative impact in the short term and provides or helps identify new opportunities in the medium term for the professional art workers – public, private and non-profit – in the cultural and creative sector.

The MOC seems to be responding to many of the public critics raised by civil society organizations. In a conclusion, when art workers were excluded from the 800-euro support scheme, after

⁵ Live music venue where *skyladika* music is being performed is also called *skyladika*.

⁶ Synonym to *skyladika*, but politer expression.

receiving letters of complaints from SAW and other initiations and associations, the government made amendments so that many art workers were included in this government benefit. Nevertheless, in a country where tourism is one of the most important sectors of the Greek economy and a key pillar of economic growth, we witness the government making choices to boost tourism at the expense of the performing arts.⁷ Many musicians to whom we spoke, believe that the decision of the government to open our borders to tourists after the end of the lockdown, when the country was almost clear of COVID-19, would be devastating for the performing arts, as tourism would be a source of COVID-19. Indeed, in mid-August, Greece was formally in the midst of a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, with tourism playing an important role for the dramatic increase. Already, all cultural events planned by the Attica Region in co-organization with the Municipalities were suspended from mid till end of August due to the coronavirus, a suspension that will last until summer 2021.

4. Music-making in the Prefecture of Arta in the first five months of the pandemic: the fate of rural musicians in the Epirus musical landscape

In the second part of this study an attempt is made to depict the impact of the pandemic on the music life in the southern part of the Region of Epirus, focusing on the Prefecture of Arta. A comparative study between the rural area and the capital of the country will shed light on the deficiencies of the governments' decisions when applying the same policies all over the country without taking into account the seasonal nature of the profession of rural musicians and the particular character of the rural music markets. In this context it is considered necessary to analyze the distinct conditions which affect the work of musicians belonging to small local communities during the pandemic crisis. The choice of the Prefecture of Arta gives us the opportunity to highlight exactly the existing contrasts between urban and rural areas.

Arta is a mountainous and semi-mountainous area in the Epirus region, in western Greece, where the main employment of the inhabitants is agriculture and animal husbandry. About forty thousand people live in the urban center of the city of Arta. Arta hosts a student campus which houses few departments of the University of Ioannina, including the Department of Music Studies (formerly the Department of Folk and Traditional Music), which enroll more than 100 students annually, contributing decisively to the creation of a new music life in the city.

In Arta, during the winter and spring months both in the surrounding area and within the city, music events are very limited since there is no public closed space for concerts. The only two venues are a conference center of the Municipality and the hall of the historical Association 'Skoufas', which are unsuitable for music events. Therefore, during these months, the music life of the area is limited to live performances of bands that usually consist of two to three musicians, organized in smaller private places such as bars, coffee shops and small entertainment venues in the city of Arta or in the larger villages of the area.

The main period for live music events is summer. It is the main time for traditional musicians to generate income to sustain themselves throughout the whole year. June is, by tradition, the month during which most music and dance events take place in open public spaces in the area. On the one hand, the Municipality of Arta organizes music events in the context of the celebrations of the liberation of the city from the Ottoman rule and the accession to the Greek state. These events usually include a 'grand' concert by artists of national renown. On the other hand, the majority of cultural associations in the area present music and dance events that include folklore performances, often accompanied by live music. These events used to take place in outdoor spaces formed within the city, or in the open-air theater located inside the castle, at the historic center of Arta.

⁷ There is no research for the performing arts, but the cultural and creative sector in Greece in 2014 account for 1,4% contribution to the GDP (Mapping the Cultural and Creative Industries in Greece) whereas Tourism for 2019 accounts for 20, 8 % of Greece's GDP (Hellenic Republic. Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2014).

However, due to the imposition of restrictive measures in March 2020 and despite the gradual lift of measures, no music events took place in the city nor in the other communities of Epirus region in June 2020. The constant procrastinations and delays of the Ministry of Culture (MOC) to establish a clear protocol for the realization of public events, contributed to this situation.

Finally, on June 23, the MOC issued guidelines for the safe conduct of outdoor concerts across Greece. According to these guidelines, venues should be open-air, the audience should only be seated, and occupancy should not exceed 75% of the seats. They also suggested a series of measures concerning the observance of distances among spectators both when entering the space and when sitting, along with the obligatory social distance from the stage, the mandatory use of masks by spectators at the entrance, the use of electronic or prepaid tickets, the use of antiseptic alcoholic solutions as well as measures related to the safety of people working in the production in such areas. In the context of such measures, the appearance of vocal music groups is considered extremely difficult as a distance of 1.5 meters is required among choristers. This is similar with the use of wind instruments and percussion in the ensembles, where the distance among musicians should exceed two meters (Government Gazette, 2020b).

These vague and general guidelines regarding performances made it impossible to plan music events in the city of Arta, who postponed them in June for a month later. Finally, on July 17, the Municipality of Arta decided to hold the main concert outdoors, in the courtyard of the Byzantine church of Parigoritissa. The confusion over the holding of music events was evident as the concert was canceled three days before the scheduled date, while two days after the announcement of its cancellation, it was announced again that the concert would finally take place. Eventually, the concert was carried out with strict safety and hygiene measures and the obligatory use of face masks by the audience, and it was relatively successful in terms of attendance.

The next scheduled event was the *Arta Street Festival* which took place in the city centre on July 21 and 24, organized by the Municipality of Arta. Five music events were located at respective points on the walkway of the city center, with the support of sound projection. The participating musicians were artists and students from Arta while their music styles varied: duets with popular and folk music, rock trio bands and a solo musician singing with a guitar. At each point, there was an audience of about 15-25 people, which was not fixed but alternated while passers-by crossed the walkway and stopped for a few minutes to watch.

Two additional music events were organized by another public body, the Archaeological Service, at the castle of Arta on July 24 and at the Archaeological Museum on August 4 respectively. The concerts, although held in an open space, had a limited audience. In addition, in July, a folk music event in which a trio band appeared, dedicated to the song writer and bouzouki player Vassilis Tsitsanis (1915-1984), was organized by the City Labor Union. In this concert, the participation of the audience was also limited and there was no response of the audience to the calls for dance, which would have been customary before the pandemic.

Given that there were only two recorded cases of people with COVID-19 in the area of Arta at the end of March and two in mid-July and both cases were immediately placed under home confinement, there was no spread in the community and there was quite a relaxed and cheerful mood, although somewhat numb, in the behavior of the audience and the musicians alike. On the part of the organizers, there was care for social distancing and use of masks during all events except for the *Arta Street Festival*.

It is interesting to note that in the first two mentioned music events, that is to say, the main concert of the Municipality and the Arta Street Festival, the advertisement for the music events was deliberately insufficient both on the Internet and in the local press, so as to not attract too much crowd. Similar events of the pre-pandemic era were advertised repeatedly by the Municipality.

The only music events that have taken place in the city since the end of June and throughout the summer, which were not under the auspices of a state organizer or official body, was street music,

performed by the busking music students of the Department of Music Studies of Arta, with none of them having local origins. In a city where students used to support their livelihood by performing in small venues, busking was now the only music activity they had to support themselves.

Figure 2. Photography by Lampros Efthymiou. July 17th, 2020: The Labor Center's event in Cine Orpheus.



Figure 3. Photography by Lampros Efthymiou. July 21th, 2020: Capture of Arta Street Festival.



The *panigyri* is the main music event that takes place in most of the rural communities during the summer months, not only in the area of Arta but also in the whole Epirus Region. The *panigyria* (pl. of *panygyri*) takes place in the context of the celebration of the community church and is the main music event of each community, closely associated with dancing. The *panigyri* (together with weddings) are the

main source of income for traditional professional musicians in rural Greece, which is also true for the Epirus region. The musicians come from the wider region of Epirus and perform a repertoire from the music traditions of various regions of Greece, but often focus on the Epirus repertoire.

The first *panigyria* after the end of the quarantine, organized by local associations, began at the end of June in local communities with limited audience attendance and limited dance, usually restricted to members within a family and not a collective activity, as it used to be before the pandemic. But very soon, on July 13th, the *panigyria* were banned. The Greek government considered that the overcrowding in this type of event, although taking place in the open, would be a source of spread of COVID-19. Therefore, the government banned this informal rural institution initially until the end of July and, with a new decision, the ban was prolonged until the end of August, with a policy published in the Government Gazette (2020c).

5. Being a seasonal musician in rural Greece: repercussion of the pandemic

This ban on *panigyria*, the main income in rural Greece for traditional professional musicians, had devastating economic and social consequences for musicians (and organizers alike), despite the government decision to extend the deadline for payment of musicians' insurance contributions. According to Ilias Plastiras, a famous traditional clarinetist from Arta (personal communication, 6.08.2020) 'the postponement of the payment of insurance contributions simply prolongs and inflates the amount of debts'. This results in the accumulation of musicians' debts and their inability to pay since they cannot perform in live music events.

The inability to perform in summer live performances caused the loss of most of musicians' annual income. In some cases, the only way for musicians to meet their needs was to find a job that was not related to music. Alexis Petsas, guitar and bouzouki player, explains that he was forced to do a job that was totally unrelated in order to ensure the necessities for his survival (personal communication, 8.8.2020). The issue of livelihood seems to be even more pressing in the case of musicians who have not completed the working days required to receive the low government support. In many cases, musicians work without a contract. The government made certain legislative interventions in the context of the pandemic, in which the adequate financial support for the survival of this category of musicians was not accommodated (shown also in a research done by FitzGibbon and Tsioulakis, 2020 in Greece, UK and Ireland). The situation is expected to get even worse in the winter season of 2021, as the music events in which the musicians of the area participate are scarce, making musicians wonder how they will cope with their basic financial needs and obligations.

Busking musicians are one of the few cases of musicians still working, but it's an activity pursued mainly by music students and not traditional professional musicians. In the city of Arta, street music performances were halted from mid-March to the end of June, while from the first days of July performances were resumed on the main walkway of the provincial city. However, according to Konstantinos Nikoletos (personal communication, 9.8.2020), a first year student who performs keyboards on the walkway of the city, their income is now clearly reduced compared to the period prior to the quarantine as the passers-by now keep physical distance from the busking musicians.

Thus, professional rural musicians in the wider area of Arta, also like their urban counterparts, found themselves in an increasingly precarious situation, which was even more pressing due to the seasonal character of their work. Many made personal announcements regarding the situation on social media and a few of them turned to the Union of Musicians of Ioannina (UMI) and the Northern Greek Music Union to complain. In the city of Ioannina, which is the leading urban center of Epirus, with larger numbers of musicians working in traditional music bands, the Union of Musicians of Ioannina 'Allilovoithia' (Mutual Aid) was also quite active. These local unions, in coordination with the PMU and the NGMU, took a series of actions to inform the public of Epirus about the issue of the interruption of

the musicians' work and the stagnation they have reached after the cancellation of all music festivals. In the protests that took place in the city of Ioannina, on May 7th as elsewhere in Greece, the protesting musicians asked the state to take immediate support measures. They indicatively asked for the monthly payment of benefits for the entire period during which they could not work, as well as the payment of the lump sum to all artists even retroactively without the imposition of terms and conditions (Tsantikos, 2020; Union of Musicians of Ioannina, 2020).

This need for mobilization and common confrontation of the serious issues that seasonal rural musicians faced was evident from the beginning of the pandemic in Greece. However, in the case of a small town like Arta, and unlike the large urban center of Athens and Thessaloniki, no organized mobilization was noticed and any intervention was made only through the nearby urban center and the vigorous local Union of Ioannina.

In conclusion, in a rural area like Arta, there is distinction between the professional traditional musicians and the younger musicians who perform on the streets, in little places, such as bars and so on. The main occupation of a large part of the musicians that belong to the first group is the performance in *panigyria* or similar social events (marriages etc.) that take place mainly from May to October. As a consequence, these seasonal musicians will generate no income from their work until the summer of 2021. They are obviously more vulnerable to precarity and the state should apply appropriate policies for their work and survival. As far as the younger street musicians are concerned, the local authorities, such as the Municipality of Arta, could encourage them by forming the necessary space in the centre of the city to perform, thus strengthening the connection and the “osmosis” between the local population and the young student musicians of the Music Department.

Our research has also shown that, in a small local community like Arta, COVID-19 became a springboard for the aspirations and purposes of each local authority to secure its powers by supporting a specific network of musicians and performances. Music activities became the exclusive purview of the local Municipalities or the Prefecture, due to the rule regarding the undertaking of civil liability by the organizers of public events. As a consequence, hundreds of small associations in the local communities and in the city of Arta have chosen not to hold any events at all, as the measures set by the government and the transfer of responsibility to the organizers make any thought of those associations to hold music events prohibitive (Government Gazette, 2020b). Under such circumstances, official local authorities, such as the local Municipalities and the Archaeological service, had almost absolute control of music events held in the region of Arta.

The fact that the power to organize music events is concentrated towards a few local authorities makes the situation *de facto* problematic. Each local authority, as is the case already, makes discriminations in selecting specific music performances and supporting selected musicians. At the same time, the most interesting and appealing festivals organized by the local associations, that used to take place in the previous years, both in the city and in smaller communities, did not take place this year, omitting many types of music performances and generating more unemployed musicians. Taking into account the events that have been held to date, we infer that there is an effort to feature the organizers' aesthetic by promoting only a part of the available musicians or bands. In this context, it is obvious that there is a need for more transparent procedures in the choice of the musicians that participate; if not, many music styles and artists are in danger of being marginalized and losing state funds.

6. Concluding remarks: A time for action? A time for change?

While the COVID-19 pandemic has wrought havoc in the music industry and the lives of thousands of professionals working in the Greek arts sector, at the same time it gathered thousands of art workers who began public campaigns demanding visibility, recognition, support and a clear plan for the future of the performing arts from the government.

At the same time, we have seen our newly established government (elected July 2019) try to enact art workers' demands, establishing some immediate relief actions in the culture sector, falling at the same time into inconsistencies, generating discriminations, inadequate formulation of short term relief for all art workers, mid-term solutions for the performing arts, and long-term approaches for the culture sector, be it in the cosmopolitan urban cities or the deprived Greek peripheries.

In Greece we have also witnessed the emergence of initiatives such as Support Art Workers (SAW), the revitalization of the Communist Party of Greece-lead Panhellenic Music Union (PMU), alongside with other culture organizations and associations, both in the urban centers and in the prefectures, such as the Hellenic Actors Union, the Northern Greek Music Union (NGMU), Chamber of Fine Arts of Greece, and the Panhellenic Association of Spectacle and Auditory, which have been voicing systematically their opinions concerning the rights of art workers.

The SAW initiative has shown that art workers, including musicians, have worked hard to gain visibility; criticizing existing governmental cultural policies, asking for accountability from the government, claiming bonuses, better working conditions, and current and future interventions in culture.

As our analysis has shown, perhaps it is the first time that so many Greek musicians - represented mainly by SAW, PMU and NGMU - gathered with such intensity, consistency and solidarity. They have united their powers to provide constructive criticism to the government and express the specific needs for the musicians and the music industry.⁸

Our personal opinion is that musicians in these transitional and liminal times should be alert. This is a moment for musicians to act, not only like performing artists, but like activists and art workers. Together with art workers, who are very active, they can raise their voices and clarify the specific difficulties of the music profession to governments, policy makers, and the general public. Like other art workers, they should be also providing needed guidance to the government to formulate 'roadmaps' for the performing arts.

Having done research in both rural and urban areas, we witness the different categories of musicians and different performance opportunities in the periphery and the capital due to the seasonal nature of music in the rural areas. Thus, rural-musicians, who work in such distinctive conditions, either as seasonal workers or in areas with limited performance opportunities, should voice their opinion as well, in order to illuminate their working conditions and make demands according to the specific needs of the character of their work.

Our research has also shown that both in rural and urban areas, it is essential to reform institutional structures in the culture sector. We need new, effective, transparent, fair and objective structures for copyright protection to replace AEPI (Hellenic Society for the Protection of Intellectual Property) in accordance with international standards. Also, there is a pressing need for transparency of decision-making processes and procedures in allocating resources for culture events, in choosing musicians and art workers and setting up performance events, either by government structures (be it municipalities or concert halls) or private institutions (be it venues or cultural organizations) who allocate state funds. Such decisions need to be made public and easily accessible.

The government needs to immediately integrate all music professions affected by COVID-19 crisis and provide direct financial support to all musicians and cultural professionals. Indeed, this is the first demand written in a letter to the government by the NGMU (2020).⁹ Another immediate action is to make

⁸ In the past, we have seen musicians participating in social movements in Syntagma Square in 2012 using music as an act of resistance, communication and interaction. See Papapavlou (2015).

⁹ See also research by FitzGibbon in her research with Ioannis Tsioulakis who support the idea of the Universal Basic Income (FitzGibbon, 2020).

reforms in the tax system, by providing temporary relief from regulations and tax incentives. In addition, national insurance contributions should adapt to the particularities of the music and culture profession and take into account the part-time and seasonal character of art workers. According to Ross Daly, the government should:

delimit and re-establish this profession from scratch in such a way that every musician can work within a legal framework with reasonable terms. We need simple and flexible procedures that will allow musicians on the one hand to work with dignity, and on the other hand be consistent in their obligations towards the state (Daly, 2020).

According to the same line, the state needs to review and reinforce legislation on musicians' rights to ensure that social security and pension systems are applicable to all artists, performers and different categories of musicians. It should also take into account the seasonal character of the work of professional musicians in rural centres and apply suitable policies to support them. In the long term, more research is needed to map the performing arts industry, to monitor the working conditions of musicians and art workers in the music and culture industry, in both rural and urban Greece. Strengthening of public funding for music professionals today, after the pandemic and a decade of economic crisis in Greece, is more than necessary.

We also believe that the government should be more prepared and creative in finding immediate and mid-term solutions for the performing arts in both rural and urban Greece.¹⁰ For example, outdoor performances – be it street music, car-parking concerts, concerts on wheels - with limited and socially-distanced audiences, may be one such solution. Concurrently, as live performances are the main source of income for many professional musicians, the government needs to outline under what conditions indoor theaters and performance venues can get up and running safely.¹¹

In such liminal times, musicians in Greece, perhaps for the first time, are recognizing the importance of specific and non-discriminatory state aid measures to mitigate unemployment risk. What is more pressing at the moment is the need for musicians to acknowledge their position as music workers in order to demand, in these times of crisis, full state support for the music profession.

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¹⁰ German scientists for example study the air circulations closed venues to investigate the conditions under which indoor events can be carried out despite the pandemic (see Noack 2020).

¹¹ The UK government, for example, has devised a 'five-stage roadmap' for live music's return. See Laing (2020).

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