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Competing economies of worth in a multiagency music and reconciliation partnership: The Sri Lanka Norway Music Cooperation (2009-2018)

Keywords: Legitimation work, values, cultural development, reconciliation, music, economies of worth, festivals

ABSTRACT

The Sri Lanka Norway Music Cooperation (2009-2018) was launched to “stimulate the performing arts in Sri Lanka, thus contributing to the peace and reconciliation process” in the aftermath of almost three decades of civil war between the Tamil minority and Sinhala majority populations of the island. Funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the project had many local and international stakeholders, from artists and civil society organisations, to government institutions, to a general public eager for enrichment through arts and culture. But despite high engagement and financial investment, the achievements of the SLNMC were generally unremarkable and short-term. This article argues that competition and incompatibility between stakeholders within the SLNMC were major reasons for the project’s equivocal legacies. We analyse stakeholder investments in the SLNMC through the lens of Boltanski and Thevenot’s theory of justification (2006) and their conceptualization of worlds of legitimation (‘Economies of Worth’). Our findings indicate that while artistic practices have promising compatibility and complementarity with social goals like reconciliation, the accommodation of political interests, donor agendas, and domestic pressures can undermine the possibility of artistic-social projects reaching a higher common good.

Competing economies of worth in a multiagency music and reconciliation partnership: The Sri Lanka Norway Music Cooperation (2009-2018)

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Notes on the contributors

Bringing two different sets of data to the table, the authors have contributed equally to the data interpretation, discussion and finalization of the current article with a 50/50 share.

Introduction: The Sri Lanka Norway Music Cooperation

The Sri Lanka Norway Music Cooperation (SLNMC) was launched immediately after three decades of civil on the island³. Between 2009 and 2018, through several successive project periods, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) annually invested 235,000 USD⁴ in the SLNMC. They contracted Concerts Norway (hereafter CN), a Norwegian governmental music organisation, as the main responsible project owner, who again made sub-contracts with the local partners in Sri Lanka⁵. The SLNMC used music and arts as sites for cooperation, exchange, discovery and—ideally—reconciliation between Sri Lanka’s different ethnic groups, particular those that had been divided by the country’s three decades of war. Focused on reviving, celebrating, and strengthening Sri Lanka’s diverse folk music traditions, it offered training workshops, concerts, and strategic investments in music sector infrastructure. The project rationale was that a strong music scene in itself would be beneficial for a vibrant and creative Sri Lankan society, in addition to the assumption that music could offer viable space for the reconstruction of peaceful relations between previously belligerent groups.

However, after nine years of activities, its legacies are limited. While the establishment of a national Folk Music Conservation Centre, strengthened regional networks and enhanced capacity among local sound engineers are evidence of positive outcomes, most cultural infrastructure associated with the SLNMC that remains in place was already in existence prior to the Cooperation. There is also no significant evidence that its activities have led to substantive improvement of interethnic and interreligious relations. The objective of this study is to identify and analyse the reasons for this apparently small legacy after so much financial investment, hopes and passion among the stakeholders and participants of the SLNMC: Why did the Music Cooperation largely fail to leave a lasting legacy behind? A partial, yet crucial answer is found in the many supplementary values and interests that were attached to the project on behalf of its various stakeholders. While the initial project goal was to stimulate the musical performing arts in Sri Lanka (CN 2009), each funder and stakeholder

³ The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a Tamil militant organization founded in 1976, waged a secessionist nationalist insurgency from 1983 to create an independent state of Tamil Eelam in the north and east of Sri Lanka. This claim led to a civil war that lasted until May 2009, when the LTTE was eventually defeated during the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa (Sorbo, Goodhand & Klem, 2011). UN has stated that between 80.000 to 100.000 people died in what was one of Asia’s longest modern wars (Charbonneau 2009).

⁴ NOK at rate 9,2 to USD. The total amount invested by the MFA was is 14 500 000 NOK (from 2009-2017. 2018 was a no- cost extension year).

⁵ See *ultimo* Figure 1.

brought additional agendas of how the project could help them realize their *own* values and interests. From 2011, the reconciliation agenda became official through a supplement in the contract (our emphasis): “... stimulate the performing arts in Sri Lanka, *thus contributing to the peace and reconciliation process*” (CN 2011).

Even when there appeared complementarity and compatibility between the various stakeholder lenses, critical points of diversion existed that ultimately limited the program’s capacity to reach a ‘higher common good’ (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006). In their well-known theory of justification, Boltanski and Thevenot outline six different ‘worlds’ or ‘orders of worth’, each comprising an internal logic of worth, represented as articulated states of worthiness, ideas about human dignity, worthy subjects, worthy objects, relations of worth and potential deficiencies and falls (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006, Guilianotti and Langseth 2016: 137). Each of these elements becomes a tool in the work of legitimising, i.e. the ongoing positioning of one’s efforts within the wider political, economic and sociocultural context in order to “adjust to the expectations and needs of separate actors and audiences” (Larsen 2016: I). The higher common good is a shared good or benefit upon which all its subscribers agree and that is the justification for action. Communication and negotiation between different worlds are perfectly possible and uncontroversial; we do this all the time in everyday life. Yet Boltanski and Thevenot claim that such agreements can only lead to lower forms of good, since weakening compromises are then staged between them (2006: 275-335).

In our research into the SLNMC, we observed constant negotiation between the six worlds outlined by Boltanski and Thevenot, with the weighting of each world shifting depending on which stakeholder agenda or objective was prioritised at various stages of project. In the SLNMC, performances of legitimacy and negotiations between worlds happened openly—such as in the form of explicit policy statements—but also covertly, within the drivers and root motivations of program partners, and through the stalemates that arose when organisational practices from one ‘world’ were imposed upon another. Ultimately, the SLNMC produced a number of lower forms of good that differently benefitted each stakeholder, but that reduced the project’s legacies on the island.

Outline of article

We begin by outlining the scope of our study and some methodological concerns before establishing the key relationships within the SLNMC. We then show how Boltanski and Thevenot’s six worlds of legitimisation were articulated at key points within the SLNMC.

Three key tensions between competing worlds are then presented for more detailed discussion, through which we argue that the wide array of supplementary interests and agendas within the SLNMC ultimately constrained its achievements, resulting in a more subdued legacy than its sizeable investment warranted.

Origins of the study, methods, and researcher positionality

Our study draws together data and analysis from two independent yet connected research projects into the SLNMC. Gillian Howell's externally funded investigation in 2016 examined the relationships between the SLNMC's music development activities and its donor-required goals of inter-ethnic reconciliation (Howell 2016). Solveig Korum's research is part of PhD research (2016-2020) into the international music cooperations of CN⁶. It draws upon both autoethnographic material derived from her work as project manager in the SLNMC from 2009 to 2013 and ethnographic fieldwork in Norway and Sri Lanka between 2017 and 2019. Both researchers presented findings at a research forum on music and reconciliation in Colombo in February 2018⁷, an event organised to conclude the activities of the SLNMC. That forum seeded the idea of this co-authored article.

Both studies generated qualitative data in the form of interviews, focus groups, participatory observations, informal conversations, and in-house documentation of the SLNMC between 2009 and 2018. Korum's research participants were stakeholders in instigation, organisational and implementation roles in the Music Cooperation (n=34), while Howell's research focused on the experiences of Sri Lankan folk musicians within the Music Cooperation (n=6 groups of 3-5 musicians and 1 artistic advisor representing the Northern, Eastern, and North-Western provinces of Sri Lanka, and participant observation of two inter-ethnic artist collaboration projects). The researchers' recognition that their informants frequently attached divergent goals, goals, and justifications to the SLNMC prompted an analysis of both datasets using Boltanski and Thevenot's 'economies of worth' theoretical framework.

The two authors occupy different positions within the field. Korum is an 'insider', a longstanding program manager within CN's International program who was involved in the

⁶ In 2017, CN received a new mandate from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture (<http://www.kulturtanken.no/a-new-mandate/>) and changed its name to Kulturtanken- Arts for Young Audiences Norway.

⁷ The forum took place on February 27th2018 at the Hector Kobbekaduwa Agrarian Research and Training Institute in Colombo.

SLNMC project from its inception. At the time of her data collection, she was still a CN/Kulturtanken employee but in a period when the International program was closing down and completing all of its projects. Informants were aware of the research project’s independence from CN/Kulturtanken and that this was an opportunity for critical learnings from the field to be acquired. This helped offset the possibility that participants might feel obliged to say only favourable things about their experience. In addition, insider status offered advantages in the form of access to archival documentation and key people. Howell is an ‘outsider’ who became engaged in the project through an external funding source. Though she built close working relationships and friendships within CN and Sevalanka during her five-month ethnographic fieldwork and write-up period in 2016, her interviews with SLNMC folk musicians were as an independent researcher, at arms-length from the SLNMC and its influence.

About the SLMNC: Organizational structure and milestone events

Before we systematically outline how the values and interests of the different SLNMC stakeholders align with Boltanski and Thevenot’s six worlds, some further contextualization of the SLNMC is necessary. Figure 1 shows an organizational map, placing the main stakeholders in hierarchical relation to each other.

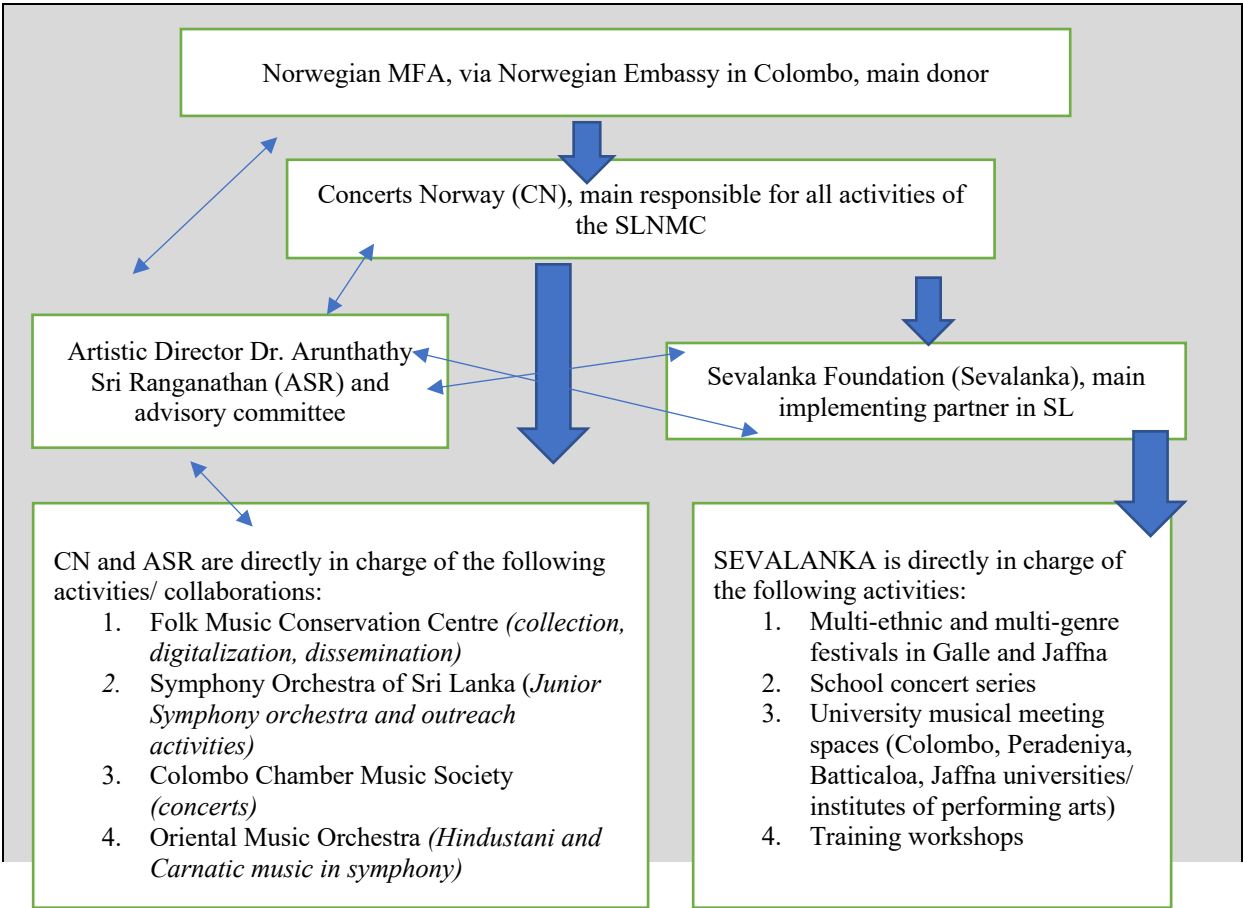


Figure 1: Organizational map and activities of the SLNMC.

The Norwegian Embassy in Colombo was the main funder of all activities, and the SLNMC design reflected the development and foreign policies of the Norwegian MFA. USAID was a significant funding partner for the festivals in Jaffna and Galle between 2011 and 2013; however, the program conceptualization and implementation remained the responsibility of the Norwegians and their associated Sri Lankan partners throughout.

CN was in charge of overall project planning, implementation and reporting to the Embassy. Sevalanka, one of the largest non-government organisations (NGO) in Sri Lanka in 2009, was the main implementing partner in Sri Lanka. We refer to both Sevalanka and CN as ‘organisers’ in this article. They implemented all of the activities that did not exist prior to the cooperation’s inception, including the Jaffna/Galle Music Festivals.

Additionally, the SLNMC had an advisory committee lead by a senior Tamil artist and former Director of the Sri Lankan Broadcasting, Dr. Arunthathy Sri Ranganathan. A range of pre-existing local partners such as the Sri Lankan Symphony Orchestra (SOSL), the Chamber Music Society of Colombo (CMSC), the Folk Music Conservation Centre/ Sri Lankan Ministry of Culture and the Oriental Music Orchestra, also received funding and delivered activities.

Milestone events

Norway’s desire to take on such a role has geopolitical significance, connected to the centrality of peace diplomacy to Norwegian foreign policy (Bandarage 2011). In the early 2000s, Norway was asked by the belligerents in Sri Lanka’s civil war to be an independent peace negotiator (Sorbo, Goodhand & Klem 2011). With Norway’s help, a ceasefire was reached in 2003 and lasted until 2008; however, the Norwegian mediators’ efforts to reach a negotiated settlement between the government and the LTTE ultimately failed, and violence resumed. Both parties accused Norway of partisanship and bias. There was much rage among the population, with protest marches in the streets that involved burning effigies of the main Norwegian negotiators (Ryste and Hedeman 2009, Salter 2015). By the time the Sinhala majority government forces defeated the LTTE and declared a military victory in May 2009, Norwegian diplomats were still unpopular.

The SLNMC was launched in 2009, mere months after that military victory. There were several pre-cursors to its establishment, in the form of a series of Norwegian-funded ‘harmony-concerts’ and events involving Norwegian and Sri Lankan performers between 1999 and 2008⁸, the years during which Norway was an active and prominent (but ultimately unsuccessful) peace broker in the Sri Lankan conflict. This collaborative program established a sympathetic and mutually inspiring partnership between CN and Dr. Arunthathy Sri Ranganathan, leading to her role as Chair of the SLNMC Advisory Board.

In 2011, the second phase of MFA funding began and the SLNMC gained momentum. This was the year of the first Jaffna Music Festival. Additional financial support from USAID enabled a 3-day program of events in Jaffna 2011 and its counterpart Galle Music Festival in 2012. The USAID funding then ended, resulting in a shorter, 2-day Jaffna Music Festival in 2013.

In 2014, following a rationalization of Norway’s aid program, the *development deliverables* of the SLNMC gained prominence. First, an external evaluation of the SLNMC (Fernando and Rambukwella 2014) noted the lack of a clear development goal and a well-founded results-based framework on how to reach this goal, and recommended these should be incorporated into the next project phase. That evaluation report coincided with the release of White Paper 19 by the Norwegian MFA (2013) that emphasized increased instrumental approaches to culture in their foreign- and development policy (Korum and Subramaniam 2020: 7-8). Hence, the legitimizing logics of the development industry came to prevail from that time. The third and final funding agreement and program phase was from 2015-2018.

The ‘worlds’ of the SLNMC

The decade-long music cooperation between Sri Lanka and Norway offers a rich laboratory for examining the performance of legitimacy in an arts-based reconciliation project. In this section of the paper, we examine the openly expressed and more hidden agendas of the SLNMC stakeholders, positioning them in each of Boltanski and Thevenot’s six worlds and analysing the negotiation and compromises between them.

Inspirational

⁸ Including a NORAD-conference on Norwegian international music cooperation in 1999; a week of joint music activities between Norwegian and Sri Lankan performing artists in Norway in 2000, with performances for state functions, schools, and the general public; development opportunities in the form of joint music camps for young Sri Lanka and Norwegian musicians in 2002 and 2003 (“Talent”); and multi-ethnic performance roadshows during the ceasefire period 2003-2008.

When the idea of a music cooperation between Sri Lanka and Norway was born in the early 2000s, it was grounded in the Inspirational World. In this world, artistic imagination, creation and passion are central elements of value (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006: 159-164) and the parties' shared convictions of this value formed the basis of the cooperation. Under the banner of "stimulating the musical performing arts in Sri Lanka" (CN 2009), the first official SLNMC document proposed to focus on the following core areas: Transfer of knowledge and competence development in music; Strengthening exchange and international networks of Sri Lankan artists; Collection, documentation and dissemination of Sri Lankan folk music (from all ethnic groups and religions) (CN 2009).

The unambiguous focus on arts, artists, and dissemination of artistic goods as valuable in and of themselves situated the SLNMC in the Inspirational world, and characterized the project's legitimizing discourse in its initial phase of operations (2009-2010). However, by the end of 2010 additional motivations were more directly stated, based on a civic logic prevalent in the aftermath of war that required all civil society efforts to be consciously working towards reconciliation and the reintegration of society. These efforts were framed by a larger political economy of reconciliation in Sri Lanka that includes government agendas relating to 'reconciliation' and public distrust or scepticism towards these. The international economic and humanitarian assistance was also questioned with potentially overlapping goals (Bandarage 2011). This imperative indicated an emerging – though highly delicate – alignment with a different set of justification principles, contained in the Civic World.

Civic

The justification principles that characterize the Civic world are grounded in values of collective welfare, equality and solidarity between citizens and attention paid to fundamental rights (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006: 107-117). The Civic world values building an inclusive society that looks after minorities. While such values and goals were in ascendance in post-war Sri Lanka, in 2009 it was challenging for Norway to state this kind of civic goal overtly. Norway's diplomatic and political role as mediator in the conflict had created a strong public aversion towards Norway and the country's presence in Sri Lanka. Because of this, the rhetorical shift towards the Civic World language of reconciliation and harmony only surfaced in the SLNMC from 2011, when the main project goal was formally changed from "stimulating the performing arts in Sri Lanka" to "stimulating the performing arts in Sri Lanka, thus contributing to the peace and reconciliation process" (CN 2011).

This terrain between the Inspirational and Civic worlds had already been explored during the aforementioned series of ‘harmony-concerts’ in Sri Lanka. This series declared arts and culture to be “one of the best methods to use in order to build bridges between human beings with different ethnical, religious and national origins” and “one of the best ways to create identification, recognition, mutual respect and understanding among people” (Sri Ranganathan quoted in AruSri Art Theatre Harmony concert brochure, October 13, 2005). Therefore, while initially, the mutual appeal of the SLNMC dwelled entirely in the Inspirational world, with artistic concerns and agendas, there was a significant overlay of civic ambition that was present before the original agreements were signed in 2009; this was then formalized when the music cooperation entered its second funding phase in 2011. The goal of ‘contributing to the peace and reconciliation process’ was arguably little more than idealistic intention and rhetorical flourish, as the stakeholders did not substantively change their course of action when moving from *musical development* to a music *for* development approach (Fernando and Rambukwella 2014). The knowledge base about *how* music would deliver on the new reconciliation goals was vague. The uninterrogated pairing of these two worlds is a topic that we shall critique in our forthcoming discussion.

Fame

Boltanski and Thevenot present the world of Fame as defined by public opinion: “Worthy beings are the ones that distinguish themselves, are visible, famous, recognized” (2006: 179). In the wake of its failed peace brokerage, the Norwegian MFA as well as the Norwegian Embassy in Colombo saw sponsorship of Sri Lankan music development as an uncontroversial and practical way to rebuild a positive public image. Hence, in spite of the SLNMC being defined as an inspirational and civil society-project in all official documents and discourses, the Fame world provided a compelling legitimation for the damaged national ‘brand’ within the MFA.

As one informant noted, “if you wanted to get rid of bad reputation, you would start this music cooperation big way” (former Sevalanka project manager, interviewed in Colombo, December 2017). For the Norwegian Embassy in Colombo, the arts and artists of the SLNMC offered them a pragmatic public diplomacy tool for restoring their image and relations, particularly among members of the general public who had been critical about Norway’s role in Sri Lanka. In addition, it could help to strengthen their strategic connections with political-civil society leaders in a depoliticized cultural space.

Domestic

The Norwegian MFA turned to a trusted partner to take the lead in this music cooperation. CN had a strong track record for implementing state-supported international music programs in the South Asian region. They had proven well organized and reliable, able to function as the “Foreign Ministry's extended arm in a field that they themselves did not have in-depth knowledge of” (former MFA officer, personal communication at Voksenåsen Oslo, 2016; repeated in research interview January 19, 2018). Their value as a known entity hails from the Domestic world, a world where trust and loyalty are highly ranked so that the same actors, the actors *that we know*, are used again and again (see Boltanski and Thevenot 2006: 90-97).

However, CN's previous experience in managing international music cooperations did not include any previous involvement in ‘music for reconciliation’ projects. Additionally, CN's understanding of the complex political, social and economic climate in which the SLNMC would take place was weak (Fernando and Rambukwella 2014). They entered Sri Lanka in 2009 with their “usual toolbox” (former Head of International Projects in CN, workshop in Oslo, May 2016): a set of goals and methods that, according to this informant, had proven successful in similarly complex contexts, including Palestine and Pakistan. The toolbox focused on building cultural infrastructure and increasing professional artists' competence and networks in communicating with young audiences, festival development, training of sound engineers, establishment of music clubs and more (CN 2013).

The same Domestic world legitimization applied when Sevalanka was chosen as the main contractor and implementing agency on the Sri Lankan side. The Norwegian Embassy in Colombo had worked with the Sevalanka leadership on previous projects including the earlier peace talks. Sevalanka's chairman had close personal links to Mahinda Rajapaksa, president of Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2015, and his brothers Gotabhaya Rajapaksa and Basil Rajapaksa, who held Ministry posts in the Sri Lankan government in this same period, links that would open up doors for the SLNMC. However, these factors provoked criticism and suspicion of the Music Cooperation from Tamil communities both inside and outside Sri Lanka, who argued that they rendered the SLNMC biased, and the Sevalanka leadership untrustworthy. These were not the only tensions that the selection of Sevalanka triggered, as the next ‘world’ shows.

Market

While it may seem counter-intuitive to link a not-for-profit Music Cooperation to the Market world, donor-funded economies can be lucrative operational environments for some entities.

The Market World values money, competitiveness and freely circulating services, all of which became particularly prevalent during and in the aftermath of the civil war and the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. These events transformed Sri Lanka into a highly aid-dominated society. International and national NGOs competed to win lucrative missions and aid contracts from international and national governments and non-government and private donors, and Sevalanka's successful bids established them as an organization with island-wide reach.

In the Market world, organizational survival depends on new contracts. Engaging in a Norwegian-funded cooperation that would guarantee a long-term stable income was hence of interest to Sevalanka. As noted above, Sevalanka was a trusted entity for Norwegian Embassy staff. It had political connections, logistical resources and grassroot networks all over the island, and therefore, the operational capacity to deliver the project.

However, they had no track record in arts programming or delivery⁹, and many artists in Sri Lanka questioned their selection, concerned they would be out of their depth. At the operational level, Sevalanka's inexperience was acknowledged but accepted, given CN's competence in international music development and seniority in the SLNMC hierarchy (former CN project manager, interviewed in Oslo May 2017). Therefore, in winning the SLNMC contract, Sevalanka secured for itself a steady (Market) income. This income strengthened Sevalanka's position in the "NGO marketplace", endowing it with legitimacy in a new field of development action, and elongating its survival and sustainability in the highly competitive development marketplace¹⁰.

(Development) Industry World

In 2013, the right-wing coalition government of Erna Solberg assumed office in Norway. This political shift brought not only major policy changes, but also considerably reduced investment in the development field¹¹. White Paper 19 (MFA 2013) was released during this era and set a far more instrumentalized agenda for cultural development than had existed previously, following the logics of a (Development) Industrial World. This world is

⁹ Apart from the chairman, who had made films in his past. However, there was no organizational experience in arts administration or curatorial fields.

¹⁰ In 2015, Sevalanka also won the bid to deliver a UNICEF project *Music for All*, based on its references and experiences from the SLNMC.

¹¹ Corresponding with what Yanguas (2018: 33) observes is a consistent pattern among conservative governments of ideological opposition towards foreign aid as "an extension of the welfare state".

characterized by values based on the “efficiency of beings, their performance, their productivity and their capacity to ensure normal operations and to respond usefully to needs” (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006: 204). White Paper 19 prompted new requirements for planning and reporting that required the translation of the SLNMC’s musical activities into results-based management goal hierarchies and strategies. Rather than the SLNMC’s value being drawn from intrinsic ‘goods’ of capacity-building in the arts, its work now needed to ‘respond usefully to [human development] needs’, bringing the SLNMC’s reporting and deliverables into line with other MFA-supported development projects in the Global South.

This framework and way of thinking was some distance from Dr. Ranganathan and CN’s initial (Inspirational) vision of the higher common good. Nevertheless, the stakeholders managed to present a project proposal that was approved by the Embassy for the period 2015-2018. The goal formulation “*Reconciliation strengthened between Sri Lankan communities across ethnic and religious boundaries through music activities*” (CN 2015) was not substantively different from the previous contracts, but was now articulated through a results-based management matrix (planning, monitoring and evaluating the processes) that communicated a highly utilitarian understanding of investment in arts and artists, and presumed a predictable and linear trajectory of change.

In this section we have shown how each of Boltanski and Thevenot’s six worlds of justification and legitimization established roots within the SLNMC. Table 1 summarizes the ‘higher common goods’ associated with each world.

World	‘Higher common good’
Inspirational	High-quality artistic outcomes as an uncontroversial public good
Civic	Social cohesion, cooperation, dialogue and understanding
Fame	Recovery of (Norway’s) good reputation and public image
Domestic	Delivery of goals by familiar and trusted entities
Market	Organizational survival through access to new income sources
(Development) Industrial	Accountability and value-for-money through tracking of measurable, predictable and linear relationships between development inputs and results.

Table 1: Summary of Worlds of Justification in the SLNMC

While these do not reveal any glaring incompatibilities, they do not necessarily find an easy co-existence, particularly in projects with differing power dynamics between stakeholders. The next section examines three tensions in particular that arose between the worlds and their associated economies of worth within the Music Cooperation.

Negotiating the higher common good across Boltanski and Thevenot's 'worlds'

Considering the SLNMC through the logics of these different worlds helps to illuminate the many agendas that were a fundamental part of the SLNMC. Boltanski and Thevenot argue that this is expected: Worlds of justification are often installed in tandem and therefore may compete with each other in a given situation. However, they caution that the higher common good in each world—a major part of the legitimising arguments and attendant aspirations of sponsors of a particular world—is inevitably compromised and essentially unreachable when the worlds and their corresponding values are expected to co-exist (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006: 215-236). In this section, we consider some key dilemmas and tensions that arose between the co-existence of worlds in the SLNMC, the ways that different actors responded, and the implications for arts and artists.

The Inspirational versus the Civic Worlds

The SLNMC was in its origins a music development program. It engaged in activities to develop the music sector and supported a stable of public-facing arts organizations both financially and artistically: the Sri Lankan Symphony Orchestra, the Chamber Music Society of Colombo, the Folk Music Conservation Centre and the Oriental Music Orchestra (see Figure 1). All of these organisations hailed from the Inspirational (art) world.

At the same time, it was working in a context in which Civic world values were in ascendance. The great civic challenge of reconciling the communities divided and isolated from each other during the recent war, reinforced through monolingualistic education systems and media, was paramount. Linking the two worlds was a set of optimistic and uncritical ideas about the inherent 'power' of music, dance, and other artforms to inspire better societies (Bergh 2010), but without any substantive engagement with *how* music and other arts might contribute to a social transformation such as reconciliation. The goal of "contributing to the process of peace and reconciliation" (CN 2011) was all-encompassing in its scope and direction. The concept of reconciliation was not defined nor contained in any policy

documents, proposals, or program plans, the parties to be reconciled were never specified, and the mechanisms that would facilitate the intended reconciliation were not articulated. For example, project documents did not differentiate or prioritize between *symbolic contributions* (as might be offered by presenting intercultural performance groups sharing the same stage in musically-harmonious collaborations to a general public audience (Korum 2020)) and contributions to *interpersonal reconciliation* (through the transformation of individual or community relationships with other ethno-linguistic groups through intercultural learning and forming friendships; see Howell 2016). Both were possible—but by no means guaranteed—outcomes of the music development activities.

This lack of specificity gave little guidance to SLNMC organisers about how to integrate the higher common goods of the Inspirational and Civic worlds. In the absence of a more articulated theory of change, the SLNMC organisers simply followed the intuitive logic of the Inspirational World. The Civic World aspirations were presumed both compatible with and a likely by-product of the higher common good of the Inspirational World (i.e. music development). The naïve presumption was that representation (of diverse communities, presented to diverse audiences) and proximity (gathering diverse artists and audiences in a single site and event) were the key mechanisms supporting reconciliation in the SLNMC artists (Howell 2016, 2019).

Additionally, the SLNMC organisers paid little attention to the multiple ways that messages about reconciliation can be communicated to performers and audiences through musical action, such as through the organising and ordering of sounds, space, symbols, and people (Howell 2020). The focus on representation and proximity as the main mechanisms for strengthening reconciliation prioritised ‘equal representation’ as a goal, but in practice, this often gave greatest prominence to the already-strong Sinhala majority. During fieldwork, both researchers observed how Sinhalese dominance was maintained across multiple SLNMC projects. For example, most of the Folk Music Conservation Centre’s archived material comes from Sinhala traditions (observed 2017; discussed in Korum 2020); a drumming collaboration between Sinhalese and Tamil drummers gave greater space and time to Sinhala traditions and authority (Howell 2019); and Buddhist blessings preceded Hindu blessings in collaborative performances (Howell fieldwork journal, 2016). With its great enthusiasm and financial investment, the SLNMC could have provided a counterweight to Sinhala-dominated cultural life in Sri Lanka and the government-led imagining and representing of the Sri Lankan state (as described by Rambukwella 2018). It did not. Thus, through its focus on representation, the

SLNMC presented a contested version of reconciliation, a peace in which Sinhala dominance prevailed, reinforcing the established government position.

In addition, the festival model proved limited in its capacity to facilitate new intergroup relationships among the performers. The earliest iterations of the SLNMC festivals provided opportunities for positive inter-ethnic relationships to form through informal sharing and exchanges, as well as structured collaborations. However, as SLNMC funding reduced, so too did the festival timeframes and the space for these interactions. The relationship between funding, festival length, and artist interactions is important as it shows that the intuitive expectation of improved intergroup relations was not so much *wrong* as poorly understood. Our analysis suggests that the higher common good of the Inspirational and Civic Worlds can be realised if there is a clearly-articulated set of social goals that specify the intended target of the change efforts ('who will be reconciled?'), the mechanisms within the music development activities that support this change ('how/when/under what conditions will the music activities produce change?'), and therefore, what kinds of music development activities and priorities will best engage these groups and mechanisms. When there is sufficient space and time for prolonged, repeated and informal social exchanges, new relationships may flourish somewhat organically (i.e. without a targeted strategy). But in situations where time constraints limit the amount of intergroup interaction that can occur, realisation of the higher common good depends on strategic selection of artists, activities, sites, and development of content: in other words, a strategy supported by a clear theory of change.

This section has illustrated how the SLNMC was negotiated and communicated as a compromise between the Inspirational and Civic worlds. The higher common good of the Inspirational and Civic Worlds also interacted in tense ways with the Fame world, as the next section explores.

Navigating the demands of the Fame World over those of the Inspirational and Civic Worlds

As acknowledged above, the SLNMC was in part a strategy to repair Norway's public standing and 'brand' among Sri Lankans. This strategic interest meant that the visibility of the Music Cooperation and its activities was an important deliverable for the MFA and the Norwegian Embassy in Colombo. The MFA's support for Sri Lanka's cultural development and revitalization of music traditions was not an act of altruism; like most gifts, it served the

interests of the giver (Kowalski 2011). Indeed, the festivals were flagship events to which Embassy guests and dignitaries would be invited and entertained, as well as public events that many Sri Lankans enjoyed.

Recognizing the ‘fame’ priority, Sevalanka and CN invested a significant proportion of the annual budget into staging these annual festivals as major events. Production values were high, including a large, purpose-built outdoor stage with elaborate lighting and high-quality sound (see Photo 1). In 2011 and 2012, USAID was an additional funding partner, and that boost in funding allowed for a range of performance experiences and venues under the festival banner. These included pre-festival events in villages and rural areas, artist training and development workshops, and a temporary artist ‘village’ during the festival in which the performers lived and demonstrated their traditions and instruments to audiences during the day. Post-2013, USAID significantly reduced their donor presence in Sri Lanka (USAID 2016: 10) and the range of activities and performance platforms associated with the annual festival rapidly contracted. It became a one-day event with daytime, family-focused informal performances and an evening concert on the large, purpose-built stage.

The big stages worked better for some artists than others. The festivals always included folk traditions associated with rural dwellers in small, remote villages, traditions that were part of participatory village rituals that were traditionally performed ‘in the round’ using only local infrastructure. The transition from village-level performances to the large performance stage and higher-stakes festival context was not always easy to deliver. Many artists and artforms struggled to connect with audiences across such a distance. There were of course exceptions to this, and some memorable performances experienced by audiences. But it raised the question of how appropriate the big national festival event was as a music development activity for the majority of performers and performances being presented.



Photo 1: Galle Music Festival stage, 2016 (Photo: G. Howell)

Perhaps with the Fame World demands in mind, there was an increasing tendency to prioritize the inclusion of more professional performers in the festivals, i.e. those with the greatest experience performing beyond village contexts and those with the greatest audience (and media) appeal. However, Howell's fieldwork in 2016 found that this strategy undermined reconciliation (Civic World) goals. Interviews with festival artists with established professional performance profiles revealed that this particular cohort were unconcerned with the SLNMC reconciliation goal of artists building friendships with musicians from other ethnic groups. In contrast, most 'village-level' artists considered their inter-ethnic interactions in the SLNMC a particular highlight and significant experience (Howell 2019: 238-239).

The festival organizers had little guidance for resolving this incompatibility between the demand for big, visible, national events, the civic goals of supporting reconciliation, and the music development needs of many of the festival performers. With the total funding for all SLNMC activities reduced from 2013 and its lack of competency in artistic and aesthetic matters, Sevalanka focused its attention on the technical delivery of its stated goals. However, as the next section explains, this was yet another site of tension between worlds and values.

Mainstreaming the SLNMC into development: Unexpected (Inspirational) encounters versus (Industry) effectiveness and measurement

The third tension that we address in this article arose from 2015 when the SLNMC was mainstreamed into the Industrial World of international development. The tensions between Inspirational and (Development) Industry logics are largely built on differing concepts of *how change happens*: whether it is linear and accessible through planning and adherence to ‘proven’ formulas and templates, or whether it is complex and ephemeral, requiring trust in process and space for emergence. The Inspirational world with its embrace of holistic and multi-layered processes accords with the latter, while the (Development) Industrial world favours defined “production chains” where a result is produced from a given set of *inputs* (financial input, human resources) transformed into *outputs* (concrete delivery of activities) and *outcomes* (changes in capacity and performance of the target groups) and ultimately *impacts*, i.e. changed conditions for the target groups.

From 2015, a new results-based framework for the SLNMC was drafted, following White Paper 19 and the MFA policy shifts from two-track cultural exchange to a focus on the development needs of the recipient country. This new structure transformed the culture and practices of all of CN’s international music cooperations in ways that many artist partners felt were to its detriment (Korum and Subramaniam 2020). CN staff had to fast-track their competence in development goal setting, monitoring, and reporting. Sevalanka, on the other hand, as one of the largest Sri Lankan NGOs, was already well-versed in such development language and reporting, and this familiarity saw them increasingly sideline artistic concerns in favour of efficient delivery. Moreover, the new framework altered the power dynamics between the artists and the Cooperation implementers. Where the previous two-track cultural exchange approach emphasised equity between SLNMC organisers and the artist partners, the new reporting model emphasised ‘needs’ and ‘delivery’. Some artists lost interest in the SLNMC at this time, finding it too instrumental and uninspiring (musician and SLNMC advisory board member interviewed in Colombo, October 2017).

The results-based framework quickly revealed a fundamental opposition between the ordered Industry logics and the creative dynamics of the Inspirational World. The post-2015 festivals became increasingly formulaic. All the checklists of ethnic and religious representation were ticked, the project management followed expected standards, in-house reports claimed every success; yet CN program staff and former SLNMC local staff observed that it had lost much

of its spirit, its initial enthusiasm and artistic legitimacy. Several informants illustrated this by comparing the Jaffna Music Festival 2011 with the Galle Music Festival 2016. In 2011, the year of the first-ever SLNMC festival, everything was new. The idea of bringing folk artists together from across the island felt bold and visionary and all the people associated with CN, Sevalanka and the funding bodies were excited and highly motivated. This created a powerful synergy of meaning, purpose and curiosity about what could happen, and a conviction about the significance of the event. But with each subsequent year and festival iteration, that energy was reduced. It transformed from a euphoric festival of social transformation (Jaffna 2011, Galle 2012) to a 'showcase' festival that presented diverse artists but that had lost its passion and beating heart (Jaffna 2015, Galle 2016).

We might understand this negative transformation in terms of an increasing focus on *solutions*, ahead of development *space*. The SLNMC began as a program focused on music development, an investment in reviving, restoring, and strengthening Sri Lanka's traditional music and dance practices. Music development in this context does not presume a pre-determined set of solutions. It intervenes to build capacity and then recedes, allowing space for these capacities to connect and network and take their own shape. But the adoption of the results-based framework and its explicit development goals encouraged a corresponding preoccupation with delivery and solutions. By 2016, staff within the Norwegian Embassy in Colombo were increasingly results-focused, anxious to see 'action' in relation to particular areas of MFA policy concern. They began to make ad hoc requests of Sevalanka for additional activities (Howell, fieldwork journal, 2016), adding further pressures to an increasingly strained festival program and implementing organization.

The policy shift towards result-oriented practices ultimately privileged the technocratic elements of development action ahead of more holistic aspects of the work. Paradoxically, this worked against the SLNMC delivering on its stated goals in two ways. First, the presumption that the success of artistic events was found in their technical delivery led to a sidelining of artists from artistic decision-making, and therefore a loss of artistic nuance and vision about connections and the more subtle unfolding stories within the festival event. The focus on technical efficiency meant less time for pre-festival professional development events, and less time and space for informal knowledge exchanges during the festival event. Second (and following on from this), privileging the 'deliverables' like the big festival spectacle concomitantly diminished the space available for the more intangible aspects of the Music Cooperation. It stifled those aspects of the artistic and collaborative practices and

processes most likely to stimulate transformations of intergroup relationships towards reconciliation and meaningful encounters. In the end, the Industrial World overwhelmed the idealism of the Inspirational World. When combined with the absence of clarity about the Civic World goals, this emaciated the SLNMC over time, undermining the elements that were central to its effectiveness and impact and contracting its artistic and development legacies.

Conclusion

In this article we set out to examine how it was that, despite a decade's commitment and sizeable investment in music development, the SLNMC largely failed to leave a lasting legacy. Only one of the infrastructure initiatives was picked up by the government. Other institutions (e.g. universities) have not continued partnerships or exchanges between performing arts students to the best of our knowledge, and the flagship festival events ended when the Cooperation ended. While there were many accomplishments, there were also many interests and agendas attached to the SLNMC and an absence of leadership that was fully cognisant of the complex task of finding a higher common good across them all.

We have shown the way that, across the six worlds, an increasingly utilitarian position was created for arts and artists. In the Inspirational world, arts and artists were the focus. The development of music practices was seen as a public good, and a way to express shared humanity. In the Civic world, this expression was instrumentalized as a way to draw divided people together into collaborations and dialogue and recognition. In the Fame world, the generally non-political and uncontroversial nature of folk arts and folk artists helped a powerful donor country rebuild a damaged national brand, allowing them to be seen to be doing good in an uncontroversial arena of action. Meanwhile, the logic of the Domestic world saw donors embrace arts and artists as long as the relationship was mediated through familiar rather than arts-specialist actors. In the Market world, arts and artists were a route to financial survival, and in the Development Industrial world, they were elements to be corralled into logical frameworks and linked to goals and outcomes, in ways that deflated creative agency and energy, and left little room for new imaginaries to emerge.

This trajectory brings two observations to the fore. First, that arts projects for peace and reconciliation will likely draw support from a wide array of stakeholders: from government bodies, to civil society seeking diverse approaches to development needs, to a general public eager for access to arts and culture and all that these practices represent. Furthermore, the project must legitimize its actions in relation to that mix of interests. Therefore, at the outset

of a multiagency cooperation like this, competing goals, pre-existing relationships and obligations, contrasting ideologies, political interests, and oblique policy objectives should be assumed and carefully managed.

Second, in the context of arts in international development, care must be taken to ensure that the voracious demands of the (Development) Industrial world remain in check, particularly in arts-based reconciliation and cultural development cooperations between the Global North and South. While we recognize there is broad adoption of results-based management practices in development because they support Value for Money and Accountability agendas, our findings indicate that these instruments are poorly-suited for monitoring or measuring social or non-linear change efforts in projects like the SLNMC.

Ultimately, the SLNMC experience suggests that artistic practices have promising compatibility and complementarity with social goals like reconciliation. However, this should be understood as a *delicate* potential, rather than robust and assured. The wider the array of stakeholders and their levels of authority, the more delicately poised it becomes. Careful and informed negotiations across the competing economies of worth are required for these artistic-social projects to realise their higher common good.

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