**Pedro Quintela[[1]](#footnote-1)\***

**Innovation and Experimentation in Cultural Mediation Strategies: The Case of the Casa da Música Education Service[[2]](#footnote-2)**

In the last three decades the theme of cultural mediation has reacquired considerable relevance in political and programmatic discourses that call for audience development in the arts and culture. This call, closely linked to the principles of “cultural democratisation”, also reflects the sustainability concerns of cultural agents and institutions, in a context in which the State tends to withdraw its funding for culture. In Portugal these concerns have triggered the development of so-called “education services” and new cultural mediation strategies in many institutions and facilities.

This article focuses on the Casa da Música Education Service and analyses the specificities of some of the projects it has developed. It aims at understanding how these projects include an “experimental” dimension in the ways they connect with audiences and in the development of new ways of promoting the approach to creative practices in the field music. Finally, it discusses broader trends towards change in cultural mediation strategies in arts organisations, of which Casa da Música is a good example.

**Keywords:** artistic training, Casa da Música Education Service, cultural facilities, cultural institutions, cultural mediation, cultural policy, innovation.

**Introduction**

During the last decades, the sphere of culture has undergone a number of important changes, gaining political recognition and unprecedented social and economic centrality. These changes are related, in part, to the way the State has sought to reorient its policies on this matter. Recent years have seen new intervention strategies, themes and agendas emerge, within which the arts and culture are expected to provide significant answers and contributions to the socioeconomic development of cities and territories. On the other hand, the idea that access to culture should be seen as a central part of contemporary citizenship, an important tool to enhance social integration and cohesion, has become widespread.

In this context, the role of *mediation* in the development of cultural practice and in the relationship individuals establish with the arts and culture gains renewed interest, not only for the social sciences (sociology in particular)[[3]](#footnote-3), but also for politicians, institutions and agents dealing with this sector. In Portugal, this interest has been reflected in the development of education services in several types of cultural institutions. This trend has been particularly noticeable during the last years, as a result of public investment in the creation/rehabilitation of cultural infrastructures, both at local and national level, often accompanied by the realisation that audiences are reduced or insufficient for the cultural activities provided by these new facilities (Santos, 1998; 2005). The creation of education services in Portugal started becoming relevant in the 1980s, following the countrywide museum boom, and gradually spread to other cultural and artistic fields during the next decades. Nowadays, there are educational and/or audience-specific projects and activities in different fields: museums, libraries, theatres and movie theatres, cultural centres and heritage spaces (Gomes and Lourenço, 2009). Besides these different cultural facilities and institutions, public funding of professional arts organisations increasingly takes audience development into account, either directly or indirectly, regarding it as a political priority.

 In this way, the investment in education services has proved to be increasingly diverse and therefore needs to be studied in terms of its objectives, procedures and effects. As a changing field of cultural activity, although still little studied in our country, it is important to research how education services are reinventing the relationship of audiences with cultural institutions and, more broadly, with artistic and creative practice.

 This article stems precisely from this field of research, focusing on Casa da Música and on the cultural mediation strategies that this cultural institution dedicated to music has developed through its Education Service[[4]](#footnote-4). Owing to its nature, the case studied here allows us to research innovative and experimental forms of mediation, with effects both in terms of audience building and in terms of how audiences relate to music and the creative practice (i.e. artistic education, in its most substantive sense). Analysis of this Education Service allows to show how some institutions, in their cultural intermediation strategies, try to adapt their service offer to the profound changes that today affect their specific field of activity and, at the same time, try to understand some of the factors favourable to the adoption of innovative or experimental mediation strategies within the context of a major cultural organisation.

**Cultural Mediation and Education Services: from Museums to Music Institutions**

Since the 1970s, cultural mediation has gained clear political and programmatic relevance in Europe. This is reflected in discourses and practices that highlight the importance of working on audience development programmes for the arts and culture. In this context, cultural mediation is understood as a social imperative (Lamizet, 1999), a view that underlines the importance of culture as the basis of civilization. Culture is associated both to the maintenance of a certain social and historical memory and to the construction of specific canons on sociability within the public space - here understood in an ideal-typical sense. Furthermore, it is particularly favourable to the development of collective practices of sociability and active citizenship.

 Despite the growing criticism directed at this somehow sacralised view of culture, it is still the ideological basis for the development of many contemporary cultural policies. This understanding is deeply linked to the French Republican principles of "cultural democratisation" and defends the importance of widespread access to the arts and culture, increasingly seeing cultural practices and consumption as elements of social cohesion and qualification of individual skills. Historically, this conception of cultural policies is inseparable from the establishment of the welfare state in Northern and Central Europe, following World War II. During this process, the cultural sector started being considered, alongside others, as one of the fields of competence and direct intervention of the State, fundamental for creating better welfare conditions and strengthening social cohesion (Henriques 2002: 66-67).

Despite the more recent context of the State's withdrawal from its role as an agent boosting artistic and cultural activity, this conception of cultural policies, of French and Republican origin, still seems to be the most adequate today to understand the importance gained by education services, as mechanisms of cultural mediation, in most dissemination and audience development programmes proposed by cultural organisations. However, it is also important to note the growing importance of the roles of cultural intermediation, here understood in a more political and programmatic sense, in terms of the sustainability of cultural institutions. This is an increasingly decisive aspect in the present context of the State’s withdrawal from cultural policy. Also noteworthy is the impact of the involvement of marketing and management professionals in the staff of these institutions, aimed at outlining strategies that may give those spaces greater visibility and thereby better "sell" the cultural service, increasing these institutions’ audiences and potential sponsors/patrons (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). Finally, the dissemination of education services by different types of cultural institutions - some of which with little experience in this field, such as theatres or opera houses - cannot be dissociated from the greater relevance, at least in terms of political rhetoric, that seems to be assigned to the contribution of artistic and cultural activities for the strengthening of social cohesion and integration.

Initially envisaged specifically for museums, concerns about the institutionalisation of education services and the cultural intermediaries working therein gradually became widespread since the mid-1970s, following broader changes in cultural and educational policies, which reflect a redefinition of the understanding of education, learning and knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999; Hein, 1998, Martinho, 2007). Therefore, the mission and aims of many museum education services are gradually changing, gaining increased autonomy in relation to their traditional roles of conservation, research and improvement of collections and exhibitions. Concerns with audience development and widening the access to culture[[5]](#footnote-5) have been accentuating multiple pressing calls for a change in approaches to exhibitions and the way museums deal with education (Black, 2005; Sandell, 1998 and 2003), contributing to a more experimental attitude and the search for innovative strategies. Sometimes these changes give rise to conflicts within those institutions, as a result of the need to reconcile professionals’ traditional responsibilities and competences with the new view that sees these facilities as active agents in promoting social inclusion (Sandell, 1998 and 2003).

In view of this context, in which cultural institutions are increasingly led to adjust their programming to new political, economic and social imperatives, a growing number of professionals and researchers question what they consider to be a subversion of the reasons grounding the existence of some facilities, which tend to "readjust" their aims in order to justify public funding (Sandell, 1998: 416; Belfiore, 2002: 103).

The effort to establish guidelines for the intervention and institutionalisation of education services is clearly more advanced in the museum field. In other areas, the development of educational structures within cultural institutions has also taken place, but in a heterogeneous way that generally contrasts with the museum approach for being less structured both in political and technical-scientific terms. This is the case of cultural organisations connected to music, whose educational intervention is less structured and less institutionalised. In Portugal, although there are some initiatives to develop educational programmes in institutions connected to music, they are usually sporadic and dispersed. On the other hand, attempts to establish links between the spheres of culture and art education (including music education) - another of the essential paths for developing audiences and fostering artistic and creative activities – are very isolated and occasional, despite broad political consensus on this issue and even three inter-ministerial working groups created in Portugal in 1996 to present concrete proposals in this area (Gomes and Lourenço, 2009: 50).[[6]](#footnote-6)

The music field has undergone a series of deep changes mainly linked to the intense and fast globalisation processes and the opportunities associated with technological innovation. Music practice and consumption has been witnessing an unprecedented expansion, closely linked to the extensive use of technologies in the creation, production, distribution, consumption and dissemination of music (Théberge, 2001 and 2004; Bijsterveld and Pinch, 2004; Milner, 2009). New technologies - increasingly sophisticated, miniaturized and economic - are today catalysts for this change. By transforming production, distribution and consumption modes, they are contributing to the technical and aesthetic redefinition of music. As Théberge has stated (2001), the development of home studios, connected with the dissemination of digital composing and recording software, is one of the most striking features of the contemporary music industry and of what he terms the "democratisation" process of the audio market, through the proliferation of a do-it-yourself aesthetics guiding production and distribution.

In this context of profound changes, analysing an education service such as the one of Casa da Música is particularly relevant, since it allows us to assess some of the latest ways in which individuals relate to music, either as consumers or as producers.

Furthermore, as we shall see, the specific characteristics of this service were a privileged ground to survey a few of the emerging - innovative or experimental – cultural mediation strategies conceived and implemented by some contemporary cultural organisations in response to broader changes in the cultural sphere.

**Casa da Música and its Education Service**

Casa da Música is a cultural facility dedicated exclusively to music. It was created within the context of Porto 2001 - European Capital of Culture. Presented as one of the main projects that Porto 2001 would leave to the city and country, it was inaugurated four years later, on 15 April 2005. In January 2006 the Casa da Música Foundation was created, its founding parties being the Portuguese State, the Municipality of Porto, the Metropolitan Area of Porto and 38 private institutions.

Conceived from its very start to be "the home of all music", in the official discourses on the mission and programmatic philosophy of Casa da Música we find explicit references to a vocation for *openness to a plurality of audiences and music genres, experimentation and innovation* - aspects which, as we shall see, also structure the discourse on the mission and aims of the Education Service. The institution’s programming is characterised by a strong eclecticism, featuring a wide range of activities: concerts, recitals and performances, the promotion of academic meetings and seminars, and a strong commitment to music education.

From early on, education has been part of the programmatic concerns of Casa da Música, with activities of the Education Department having begun before the facility was created, still within the context of Porto 2001.

It is quite revealing to see that the first performance presented at Casa da Música was a community intervention project: the opera “Demolição – A história que ides ver” (Demolition – The story that you will see), conceived from scratch, which was the outcome of work with the population from the Aldoar neighbourhood. As Helena Santos (2003: 76) emphasised, the project intended to demonstrate "a strongly symbolic openness regarding the construction of the institution’s image by giving priority to the work of the Education Department rather than to the hosting of professional music performances".

With the creation of the Casa da Música Foundation, the Arts and Education Management becomes part of the Education Service. In the period analysed here (2006-2009), the Education Service had one coordinator and five hired employees, plus a permanent team of creators responsible for conceiving and implementing most of the activities (designated as Fator E) and a diverse group of other professionals, who would take part in specific projects when necessary. This human resource structure, when compared to other sectors of Casa da Música, was relatively big, surpassed only by the Arts Programming and Production departments. Based on the idea that "education is not a synonym of school and Music is much more than an activity of musicians that others are destined to contemplate" (S/A, 2009: 23), the Education Service of Casa da Música develops a regular programme consisting of very diverse projects and activities.[[7]](#footnote-7) These activities aim at giving expression to a programmatic philosophy rhetorically grounded in the ideas of experimentalism, eclecticism and innovation in relation to conventional and more common practices in music education or music-related training. This project has a more ambitious mission than that of most education services: besides promoting audience development, it aims at intervening, in an innovative way, in the very field of music making and training.

One of the areas of intervention of the Education Service are regular activities (workshops, concerts, training activities and conferences) that it promotes during each school year. During the period analysed here, the Education Service clearly invested in strengthening the quantity, quality and diversity of workshops, which were organised bearing in mind specific audience segments. During the week, the workshops provided are mainly directed at primary and secondary schools, and at some specific communities (for example, care centres for the elderly, ATLs[[8]](#footnote-8) and IPSSs[[9]](#footnote-9)). Designed for different age groups, the contents of the workshops are varied, covering rhythmic aspects, composition, exploring the relationships between music and mathematics, music and movement/body, among other issues.

As shown by the interviews carried out within the scope of the research supporting this article, from the perspective of the organisers – the members of Fator E, the team that is responsible for designing and running these activities - the workshop is a type of cultural and artistic intervention that is particularly flexible and adaptable to different audience segments, allowing monitors to change their approach according to the specific interests and knowledge of each group. On the other hand, the interviewees stressed the advantages linked to the fact that these approaches are extremely playful and practical (emphasising the importance of *experiencing* music making) and often involve the use of new technologies.

The extensive use of technology also allows the Education Service to find new areas of intervention, diverging from more theoretical and traditional approaches that essentially make up the core of schools’ music curriculums (in which the use of the computer as a musical instrument, for example, is still practically absent). Besides the use of technology, many interviewees emphasized the importance of proposals addressing different music genres, in a deliberate choice of a strong aesthetic and technical eclecticism. This choice is often associated with a very critical stand regarding the teaching of music in Portugal, accused of being too conservative and outdated. We will return to this issue further ahead. However, for now it is important to note that the Education Service team is mainly made up of composers and/or professional musicians, many of whom are also teachers and researchers, which means they have specific authority, as "experts" in this field of ​​knowledge, to develop this type of critical assessment of the music teaching practices in Portugal.

Although schools are one of the main target audiences of the Casa da Música Education Service, for most (if not all) members of Fator E, there seems to be no concern about structuring the content of the workshops with school programmes. On the other hand, the Education Service is concerned about not overlapping - or competing with – music schools. Therefore, its work is largely assumed as being parallel to that of schools, which ultimately strengthens the autonomy of both institutions.

The workshops provided by the Education Service are not limited to schools. During weekends (a period off school) there is a big concentration of several workshops directed at other audience segments. Among these segments, the offer directed at families and musicians - both professionals and amateurs – stands out.

Widening the regular training offer is one of the priorities of the Casa da Música Education Service. It has invested in a linkage/complementarity between training and several projects that, with different durations, present less conventional or more experimental approaches (in terms of their techniques and the local contexts in which they are integrated), generally assuming a set of specific concerns towards their target audiences.

**Mediation as Intervention: An Instrument at the Service of Inclusion and Social Cohesion?**

Throughout the year, the Education Service promotes other projects, time-bound and variable in duration, directed at more specific segments, different than those targeted by the regular activities already mentioned. These are essentially community intervention projects, one of the fields in which cultural activity has been gaining significant political, economic and social relevance.

Eleonora Belfiore (2002) mentions that we have been witnessing a certain "instrumentalisation" of cultural policies that justify a large part of public investment with the (supposedly) positive social impacts of this kind of projects. This is a recent trend in cultural policies, which should not be dissociated from a certain failure and frustration before the scarce results of some experiments that, in the 1980s and 1990s, insisted on a close association between cultural policies and the rhetorics of urban regeneration, seeking to demonstrate the potential of culture as a lever for the development of cities and territories. However, the expected results often fell short of initial expectations. In recent years, this reasoning has been redirected and the concept of urban regeneration now includes new concerns with populations’ quality of life and the social cohesion of cities and territories. Concerning the situation in England, Belfiore shows how the increasingly important role of local authorities in promoting and developing policies to support culture is closely linked to the importance cultural policies assign today to the social impact of artistic activities.

Although debate on the social impact of cultural projects and organisations has not been much developed in Portugal, the truth is that here too the rhetorics of social inclusion have been gradually invading cultural policies. This change necessarily entails other changes in the missions and intervention strategies of cultural institutions – or in their needs for public legitimacy. In this context, culture professionals, particularly those who act as cultural intermediaries, are required to develop new skills and to be able to reinvent their role and working methods and, therefore, reposition themselves. At Casa da Música, both in its projects and in the rhetoric that justifies them, we find a strategy to meet these challenges.

Programming at Casa da Música is still very focused on concerts. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Managing Director of the Casa da Música Foundation considered, during an interview, that "the Education Service is an extremely privileged vehicle for establishing partnerships in the society in which we live". This highlights the strategic importance, for the cultural organisation he manages and directs, of the growing visibility of many of the community intervention projects in the media – owing to the audiences involved and the technical and artistic solutions intended to be original and innovative:

Which is very positive, for example, from the point of view of our sponsors and patrons, who see our work also in this field be publicly acknowledged and with great originality, creativity, etc. [...] But, even better, the fact that we have an experimental attitude, that we try new things, etc., that has also attracted a lot of attention from people outside of Portugal, who study these matters, and several of our projects [...] have become reference projects within organised networks in Europe dealing with this sector.

(Excerpt of the interview with the Managing Director of the Casa da Música Foundation)

One of the medium-term projects of the Education Service is the Music Leadership Course, directed at music teachers, professional musicians and music students enrolled in higher education. Throughout a school year, the aim is to provide tools for future leaders to develop work, through music, with different types of communities. At the end of each year, there is the public presentation of a show, "Sonópolis", including a set of ensembles coming from very diverse (social and musical) contexts, which gather to present part of the work developed with the trained music leaders.

Another of the regular activities of the Education Service is “A Casa vai a casa” (The Home visits your home), directed at several institutions that, for different reasons, cannot go to Casa da Música.

This project has developed specific work, with a variable number of sessions, in places such as Private Institutions of Social Solidarity, rehabilitation centres, hospitals or prisons - one of the most cited examples, presented at conferences and academic gatherings, is the project "Bebé Bábá” (Baby Nanny), which in 2008 involved babies and mothers of female inmates at the Women’s Prison of Santa Cruz do Bispo.

Therefore, we see that in many of the projects of the Education Service there are clear concerns with Casa da Música’s ability to intervene at the level of what is commonly called "cultural democratisation" and "promotion of social inclusion" through the arts - in this case, the access to practices of music making and enjoyment - whose target audiences are, in the words of those responsible for the institution, "citizens who usually have limited access to enriching artistic experiences" (S/A, 2008b: 30). For many members of the Education Service, the community intervention projects are some of the clearest examples of the "pioneering" character – referring back to the first community intervention experiments developed by Casa da Música, still within the context of Porto 2001 - and "innovation" sought by the institution.

Attention to people with disabilities is another area in which the Casa da Música Education Service has distinguished itself. Since 2007, the Festival “Ao Alcance de Todos – Música, Tecnologia e Necessidades Especiais” (At the Reach of Everyone - Music, Technology and Special Needs") is carried out in April, involving a wide group of associations and institutions, as well as researchers and musicians who have worked on approaches to different types of disabilities through music.

In the 2009 edition of "At the Reach of Everyone", the Education Service promoted the project "Instruments for Everyone", developed by Rolf Gehlaar, Rui Penha and Luís Girão. The project involved four institutions, with people with different types of disabilities, for whom specific - and so far unprecedented – solutions were sought, during months, so as to enable them, with these instruments, to produce and create music. The Festival included several presentations related to the project and targeted at two different types of audiences: workshops explaining the instruments, with the aim of allowing individuals with different types of special needs a first contact with the production of sound; and technical sessions for musicians and therapists on how those instruments are made and used. Later on, manuals with instructions on how to make the instruments were made ​​available online, for free. The prototypes made by the Education Service were given to the institutions involved in the project.

"Instruments for Everyone" is just one example of the projects carried out by the Education Service, which allow us to rethink about the cultural intermediation strategies implemented by cultural organisations of this kind, within which new ways of bringing mediation, creation, research and development closer to each other are being developed. It is important to highlight the role of technology as a key element in the process of cultural intermediation, allowing certain segments of the population to create, produce and enjoy music, an aspect stressed by many of the interviewees. It is also important to note that to carry out an event with the innovative features of "At the Reach of Everyone" necessarily implies a strong investment on the part of Casa da Música. This is one of the areas in which the cultural (and social) activities of the Education Service tend to establish themselves as a true "brand image" of the institution, reiterated and consolidated project after project. This seems not only to reinforce the importance of the "social reach" of its activities, but also to demonstrate the strategic relevance of a strong investment in the research and development of innovative and original educational contents.

**Technology, Innovation and Experimentation in Cultural Mediation**

"Instruments for Everyone" and other projects developed by the Education Service raise the question regarding the growing importance of technology in the contemporary production and consumption of music.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Authors such as Antoine Hennion (1997, 2003) and Sophie Maisonneuve (2001a and 2001b) have highlighted the need for analysis of the social relations surrounding music to include a wide range of "technical" mediators that, in addition to the "human" ones, can decisively influence the social processes through which different predispositions and tastes regarding cultural practices and consumption are shaped. In this context, Hennion (1997, 2003) proposes a "relational sociology” capable of understanding artistic work as mediation, whose result it the product of including a wide range of - human and "non-human" – actors that combine and interrelate.

Considering this analytical approach, some of the projects of the Education Service that most use technologies allow us to broaden the discussion on the multiple ways in which individuals relate to music. In this context, technology is regarded as an essential tool in the search of new solutions, capable of meeting the different needs and interests of the various audiences. At the same time, by focusing on creating and providing its own original solutions, this Education Service stands out in relation to most of the existing approaches in this field.

This cultural mediation strategy is deeply rooted in the idea of freely exploring music, mainly through the use of new technologies. We will now focus on "Digitópia - Platform for the Development of Computer-Based Music-Making Communities", one of the most paradigmatic projects of the Casa da Música Education Service in this field. Digitópia includes a series of dimensions that, as we shall see, are in line with some of the main, ongoing changes in cultural mediation processes and, particularly, with the way these are manifested in the practices of artistic creation and production in the field of music.

Located in the entrance hall of Casa da Música, Digitópia is a space for creating and experimenting with music, where various tools are made available: computers, headphones, different types of MIDI controllers, microphones, speakers, etc. The idea is to allow access to the space and to the existing technical resources without the need for supervision or prior booking. Nevertheless, a monitor is always available to provide support/guidance. The space is also used for workshops and short-term intensive training sessions, aimed at more specialised audiences.

The first experiments carried out by the Education Service in the field of computer-based music making started in 2005, with the opening of Casa da Música, namely with the workshops for schools "Cybersound" and "Hyperscore", a software developed by Tod Machover from the MIT Media Lab. The Digitópia project included the design and development of different open-source music-making software ("Políssonos", "Narrativas Sonoras" and "Digital Jam"), developed by the composer Rui Penha, a member of Fator E). This is one of the most innovative aspects of the approach taken by this Education Service, which sets it apart from more common approaches, reflecting new interactions between the spheres of creation, applied research, and cultural intermediation and action.[[11]](#footnote-11) Furthermore, since 2007 Digitópia has regularly taken part in academic conferences and other international specialised forums.

In the context of Digitópia, just as technological mediation is ubiquitous and decisive in the relationship users establish with music, human mediation is equally relevant, giving rise to complex processes of shared learning and creative work between the several participants (software designers, people responsible for conceiving the platform, users and monitors). In such a setting, the boundaries between intermediation, creation and training/reception become increasingly blurred.

The work of the Digitópia monitors gains, at this level, a particularly interesting meaning. As research on Casa da Música progressed, the importance of mediators in the relationship between audiences, the Digitópia space and the technologies contained therein gradually became clearer. Focusing on making users familiar with computer-based music making, they act as mediators of the relationship between audiences and that other "non-human” mediator, technology, according to the specific interests and prior knowledge of each person. However, both direct observation and the interviews showed how some monitors assumed new responsibilities and developed different activities as they gained work experience, expanding their role as mediators.

In fact, providing technical support to users is a type of work that gets quickly exhausted after a few sessions, since users gain autonomy in the use of technology, being able to manipulate it in other contexts, such as their home studios. However, monitors extend their action onto other very relevant areas of the relationship of Digitópia audiences with music and creation. They act as agents capable of making aesthetic judgments and providing certain guidelines - for example, by opening up dialogues around musical references, giving advice on different options for mixing sound, using sound effects, or choosing the most appropriate software for the type of music manipulation the users are interested in.

During interviews, monitors greatly valued these complementary aspects of their role, seeing them both as central elements of the self-representation of their role as mediators and as decisive factors for securing the loyalty of Digitópia audiences. Their profile contributes decisively towards this reconfiguration of their role that makes the boundaries between the technical work of mediation and its creative side become increasingly blurred. As most of them are composers and/or musicians, they can easily bring relevant repertoires for the creative work, projecting their experience and artistic predisposition onto the relationship they establish with audiences, expanding the largely technical and assisting role originally assigned to monitors.

**Fator E and the Design of Innovative Products**

The profile and role of Digitópia monitors raises another issue of great strategic importance for the way cultural institutions develop mediation work, namely within their education services: the size, profile and qualifications of the work teams and their greater or lesser adequacy to the mission and objectives of the institution. The establishment of a permanent creative team within the Education Service, responsible for designing, implementing and promoting the educational activities - Fator E - reflects precisely this concern. Furthermore, it reflects Casa da Música’s strategic intention of including in its educational offer a set of specific - "innovative", according to the interviewees – solutions, capable of distinguishing this Education Service from other education departments of similar cultural institutions. The choice of the team was guided by the intention to gain legitimacy for the institution, and especially for its Education Service, based on the assertion of an original and distinctive character within the cultural sphere, but also on the strong presence of artistic, technical and creative skills, linked to the music field.

The diverse profiles of the ten members who, in the period analysed, made up Fator E, prove exactly that: some are closer to the teaching of music, others to composition, others to new technologies, singing, percussion, others yet to design and multimedia. This heterogeneity reflects the deliberate intention to, without giving up a strong component associated with the area of expertise (music), diversify the range of possible approaches, investing in the crossing of different perspectives and, simultaneously, seeking to encourage artistic creation and production at several levels: designing workshops and educational activities; creating and developing original technical and technological solutions; and seeing Fator E as a fully-fledged artistic ensemble, capable of creating and presenting original pieces. Important to note is, for example, the establishment of monthly meetings - the "Residencies" – with the purpose of contributing to new approaches, encouraging experimentation and stimulating internal discussion and debate on the various proposals presented.

The creation of Fator E should be understood in the light of the idea that "the educational activities are an area of programming", as the former coordinator of the Education Service, Paulo Maria Rodrigues, argued. During his interview, he stressed that the educational activities "have their own identity, audiences, their own philosophies, their own aesthetic" and refused the subordination to other areas of arts programming, following a logic of "audience development". This understanding, which combines the call for the Education Service’s autonomy within the institution, stating that mediation work is also original creative work, is a central topic that cuts across the discourse of the overwhelming majority of interviewees. They see the autonomy of the Education Service and the opportunity to develop, as Fator E, approaches that are both artistic and educational as two conditions that clearly contribute to the emergence of "innovative solutions". However, this also contributes, we would say, to consolidate the particular place of the team and its members within the music field, grounded in that ability to innovate that they claim for their work.

Xavier Castañer and Lorenzo Campos (2002) draw attention to the importance of, when analysing the determinants of artistic innovation, looking at the organisational structure and seeking to understand the "difference" between the cultural organisation’s actual performance and its aspirations/ambitions, trying to understand how they foster (or constrain) artistic innovation. These authors argue that the available human resources, their personal motivations and the way they are integrated within the organisational structure are decisive factors for the emergence of artistic innovation.

At Casa da Música, it was possible to understand how both the multidisciplinary environment and the strong interaction between the several members of Fator E contribute to the emergence of new solutions, how their own professional/artistic experience and interests positively influence the emergence of the different approaches. It is important to highlight that many members of Fator E develop research or intend to carry out postgraduate studies in academic areas closely linked to their work at Casa da Música. When interviewed, some members also stated that this professional experience was directly reflected in their work as artists and teachers (outside Casa da Música), considering that the practice of multidisciplinary – and, as some claim, "laboratory" - work has been a strong creative stimulus. Finally, the fact that the former coordinator of the Education Service is also a musician and university teacher, whose professional and artistic experience is associated with community intervention projects not only connected to music but also to multidisciplinary artistic approaches, should not be neglected.

These different aspects, associated with the professionals’ profiles, experience, motivations and integration within the organisation, are crucial to understand the factors that foster the emergence of new approaches and the innovation dynamics generated within the Education Service. As Castañer and Campos (2002: 43-44) argue, the analysis of innovation in cultural organisations should pay special attention to the background of each of the agents, particularly managers and directors (in terms of artistic and academic training and professional experience), realising how these aspects can somehow determine the strategic orientations regarding the place of the institution and foster (or not) the emergence of artistic innovation. The aspects analysed here indicate a specific set of conditions that foster practices of artistic and educational experimentation and innovation, contributing decisively to differentiate Casa da Música’s cultural mediation strategies in the field of education from strategies followed by other cultural organisations.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the article, we tried to analyse the Casa da Música Education Service, starting by looking at the way its objectives and intervention strategies are structured, and then highlighting the aspects that seem to be most relevant to understand the role of experimentalism and innovation, but also of programmatic autonomy, in its activities and in the rhetoric on the basis of which it builds its own identity and seeks to gain legitimacy as a cultural and educational actor in the music field.

As we have seen, education services are today a strategic area for many cultural organisations, both because they allow implementing a programmatic view of the arts and culture as tools for social cohesion and integration, and because it is through them that the paths and reputation of the institution and its members are built. The case of the Casa da Música Education Service and the programmes it develops proves to be especially interesting as it highlights growing concerns with providing a varied offer, directed at increasingly broad audiences. The ability to structure and provide a heterogeneous offer of services seems to indicate a trend towards the increasing autonomy of this type of educational structures within cultural organisations, as the case studied here clearly shows.

In fact, while education services were traditionally intermediaries between the contact with audiences and the institution’s arts programme, the research carried out on the Casa da Música Education Service found that this service develops an educational programme with a reasonable degree of autonomy, a relatively independent logic of production (in terms of human, logistic and financial resources, but also in creative terms) and strategies directed at specific target audiences, aimed at consolidating a position in the cultural market.

The centrality and autonomy of this Education Service seems to reflect the increasing complexity and hybridization of cultural mediation strategies, which largely results from the growing complexity of the cultural sector (Benhamou, 1996). The multiple forms of dissemination that today coexist, particularly in the world of music, involve a diverse set of agents that develop the work of cultural mediation in distinct institutional and organisational contexts and with very different working conditions. Cultural mediation thus tends to encompass "a universe of activities with very porous and fluid boundaries", as stated by Claudino Ferreira (2006: 71), who speaks about "a field of analysis built around a set of activities and actors spread throughout different fields of culture, organisational contexts and areas of professional activity".

As the mission, objectives and strategies of cultural organisations expand, new skills seem to be demanded from these cultural intermediaries, who are asked to reinvent their role, working methods and ways of acting. The hybrid character of the Casa da Música Education Service and its agents - Fator E - demonstrates precisely the overlapping of skills and the demands made today to cultural intermediaries: they should be (or want to be) at once performers, composers, teachers and technical experts. Some projects of the Education Service, owing to the complex artistic, technical-scientific and teaching skills they require, reflect precisely this and reveal claims for authorship, analogous to those typical of artists. In fact, a lot of the cultural intermediation work carried out by the members of Fator E - the self-called "educational ensemble of Casa da Música" - is developed at the confluence of pure artistic creation and more educational aims, such as the development of contents introducing the world of music. The predominant lines of action turn some activities of the Education Service into hybrid objects, located somewhere between a workshop, a performance, a show, and even applied research, bearing in mind the Service’s active presence in academic discussion forums and its partnership work with universities and research centres.

This hybridity, associated to the multiple, flexible approaches, is one of the basic principles of the programmatic philosophy of the Education Service, and appears to be a strategy to deal with the changing environment cultural organisations are faced with today. Considering the structural changes that have been affecting the world of music, the area within which this institution is culturally positioned, we have given special attention to two main aspects: the interaction between human actors and technology in cultural mediation and the role played by the search for innovation in the work of mediation. In the programmatic strategy of the Casa da Música Education Service, these two aspects are clearly interconnected and are one of the cornerstones of the identity on the basis of which the team seeks to gain legitimacy and recognition in the field of culture. The interconnection between human and technological mediation in the design of the strategy to connect with audiences (and, therefore, attract them to music) is in fact one of the main strategies behind the Education Service’s search for an experimental and innovative attitude. However, the emphasis on experimentation and innovation is also closely connected to the specific features of the organisational environment and the profiles and experience of the professionals involved, which make this service stand out in relation to most offers provided by similar structures. Regarding the professionals, we tried to show that their profiles and experience make them particularly prone to embrace an experimental attitude, focused on the search for innovation, which is largely associated with the way they conceive mediation work as creative work. Regarding the institution, the autonomy and the experimental and innovative philosophy of the Education Service is line with the mission of Casa da Música. This explains why, from its very start, it invested in the Education Service as a strategic element of that mission, providing it with a budget of its own, similar to the budgets assigned to the other departments included under the Arts and Education Management. The fact that there are no major economic constraints gives its professionals the privilege to rarely be confronted with strong limitations to the development of their ideas. On the contrary, as some of the interviewees mentioned, to have logistic and financial resources at their disposal stimulates their creativity, encouraging them to be more "daring" and to "experiment" with new types of approaches.

All together, these several factors make Casa da Música and its Education Service an especially challenging context to survey the ways in which cultural intermediation has been reinventing itself, under the pressure of a broader set of dynamics that govern the redefinition culture and its role in contemporary societies. In its uniqueness that, as we tried to show, makes it stand out in the current national context, the Casa da Música Education Service illustrates how this reinvention implies today the hybridizing dialogue between spheres that sociology for long set apart, both analytically and conceptually: between mediation and creation, between the institutional and the individual, between the human and the technological, between the artistic and the non-artistic.

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**Other sources of information**

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2. Originally published in *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, no. 94 (September 2011) pp 63-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a review and extensive discussion of the importance being given to the concept of mediation in sociological literature, cf. Ferreira (2002, 2006 and 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The analysis presented here is the outcome of research carried out within my Master's thesis on Cities and Urban Cultures (Faculty of Economics, University of Coimbra) between 2009 and 2010. An intensive approach to the Casa da Música Education Service was favoured and a qualitative methodology was adopted. 23 individuals, working in different areas, were interviewed: Management Board of the Casa da Música Foundation (arts management and programming); Education Service (Coordination, Project Management and Public Relations; Fator E; Digitópia monitors); institutional partners involved in some of the projects of the Education Service. Informal conversations with people connected to the Education Service were also relevant. Fieldwork was carried out, namely by attending different workshops, concerts, lectures and other events organised by the Education Service both inside and outside Casa da Música. Finally, institutional documents (produced by the Casa da Música Foundation and its Education Service), academic articles written by some members and institutional partners of the Education Service, and articles from the press were analysed. This analysis focused on the activities developed by the Education Service between 2006 and 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. These concerns should also be understood in the light of a broader context in which public investment in culture is increasingly required to prove the direct and induced impacts it can generate, namely in economic and social terms (Belfiore, 2002; Matarasso, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See also Santos (1996), Silva (2000), Xavier (2004) and Fernandes (2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The programme of the Casa da Música Education Service includes three types of activities: the regular ones, carried out throughout each school year; short-term and long-term projects directed at specific audience segments; and finally, permanent spaces (Hot Spots), where it is possible to explore new artistic and musical languages through the use of technology. Between 2006 and 2008, the Education Service promoted a total of 2456 educational activities, in which 101 816 people took part (S/A, 2008a: 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. After-school centre. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Private Institution of Social Solidarity. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Concerning this issue, see the work of Jones (2002), Throsby (2002), Abreu (2000), Pinch and Bijsterveld (2004), Théberge (1997, 2001, 2004) and Taylor (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. It is important to note that Digitópia emerged from a partnership between Casa da Música, a research centre and two higher-education institutions from Porto: Instituto de Engenharia de Sistemas e Computadores do Porto (Institute for Systems and Computer Engineering of Porto), Escola Superior de Música e das Artes do Espetáculo (High School for Music and Performing Arts) and Escola das Artes da Universidade Católica Portuguesa (Arts School of the Portuguese Catholic University). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)