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Social Sustainability and Education Reform

Based on research on how Malmö is developing into an increasingly segregated city, Malmö started an ambitious work – The Malmö Commission – in order to prevent even larger gaps, and promote inclusion, a sustainable Malmö. The commission suggests more democratic processes by so called alliances of knowledge, inviting different types of knowledge. This gave more attention to the arts and culture, and paved the way for El Sistema in Malmö. El Sistema started in Malmö in 2013, at two schools in a segregated area, with 450 children involved.

Research on how El Sistema challenges current discourses in Swedish music education (Lindgren & Bergman 2014), points at the unexpected focus on classical music – in a time when popular music is the hegemonic genre in Swedish music class rooms, and how El Sistema can be interpreted as a community music project, within institutional frames, asking new competences from the involved music teachers.

It is too early to say anything about the long term effects of El Sistema in Malmö. To the music teachers, El Sistema has offered a possibility to expand the frames for the music teacher profession, to develop collaborative teaching methods, and to reflect on moral and political dimensions of being a music teacher. This is done in music, legato – softly connected (or loosely coupled) with the official rhetoric.

The fieldwork period was designed with inspiration from the concept sensuous scholarship introduced by the American anthropologist Paul Stoller. The concept implies that researchers need to include all senses in their work, and to rethink their being in the field “culture, society and power are continuously, negotiated, renegotiated, foregrounded, backgrounded, remembered and forgotten in our relations with one another in our orientation to a greater whole” (p. 820). In my fieldwork I chose to include my fiddle to help in the negotiations of these relations.