CultureCase

Reducing violence through music in Colombia

This research was conducted by **Jonathan Daniel Gómez-Zapata, Luis César Herrero-Prieto** and **Beatriz Rodríguez-Prado** at the **National University of Colombia in Medellin** and the **University of Valladolid, Spain**

Summary

This paper examines the economic and social impact generated by the Medellin Music School Network. The programme comprised 27 music schools concentrated in the poorest neighbourhoods of the large Colombian city. The research found that the programme significantly reduced the probability of participants becoming involved in conflict, added to which they perceived a better quality of life. Students achieved better academically and intensified their interest in culture by having it become part of a solid social network to which they felt a part.

The study used a technique of ‘matching’ enrolled students to their non-enrolled equivalents

The researchers used this to track the outcomes of young people in two groups: those inside the Music School Network and those outside it. They served a questionnaire to a carefully selected sample of students (and non-students) which measured the likelihood of getting involved in conflict, the chance of moving to a better neighbourhood, academic and employability indicators, and levels of cultural participation.

‘Those who play an instrument will never wield a weapon’

This is the slogan of the programme which has been running for 23 years in a city which has been plagued by drug-related violence for many decades. The music schools are open to any young person aged between 7 and 24 who is also in formal education. They are not selected for musical ability. The programme offers personal development alongside the technical aspects of music training. All of this is extracurricular takes place outside of regular school attendance. Taken together, the schools offer the means to participate in concerts in the city which form part of a wider public programme designed to bring people together and celebrate their achievement. The programme costs about $2m USD a year, during which an average of 5,000 students are enrolled.

Keywords

Colombia **violence** **survey** **music** **control group** **children**

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