

## 6.7 Legitimization: Cultural mediation to compensate for social injustice

Almost every statement advocating the funding of cultural mediation credits it with great potential to combat, or at least mitigate social problems. This provides the rationale for using cultural mediation projects for therapeutic purposes in the health sector, in community, youth and social work and in connection with urban planning processes. In this context, advocates cite effects on participating individuals, including enhanced self-confidence, greater willingness to perform or take risks, or positive changes in social behaviour. The effects for the relevant social context and society as a whole are also highlighted – for example, pointing out that cultural mediation projects enhance solidarity, promote a desire to become involved in shaping the environment, encourage the formation of local networks or contribute to conflict resolution (Matarasso 1997).

One case widely discussed in recent years is the → *Rhythm Is It!* project. In that project, the Berlin Philharmonic, along with choreographer Royston Maldoom, staged “Le Sacre du Printemps” as a ballet with Berlin secondary school students. The documentary film about the project emphasizes the effects the project had on the students’ behaviour. The project inspired many other dance projects in schools in the German-speaking world. A similar rationale has been presented for the project → *Superar*, and since 2012 *Superar Suisse* as well, which are modelled on the growing network of youth orchestras in Venezuela, Fundación del Estado para el Sistema de Orquesta Juvenil e Infantil de Venezuela [FESNOJIV: State Foundation for the National Network of Youth and Children’s Orchestras of Venezuela], often shortened to → *El Sistema*. That network provides instruction in classical music to children from poor districts in Venezuela, including orchestral performance. There has also been a → *film* made about *El Sistema*, which attempted to depict the life-changing impacts on the participating children and thus document them.

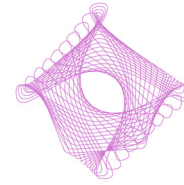
The success of these films points to comparatively large-scale public interest in cultural mediation projects which base their legitimacy on social grounds. This is not coincidental, because this particular legitimization strategy met with fertile soil in the collective memory. It has a long history, as does the argument that art is an important part of humanity’s educational heritage: in the early 20th century institutions known as “philanthropic galleries” began to open in industrial cities in England – founded by members of the clergy, social workers or even factory workers themselves. Their purpose was to use art to keep destitute city-dwellers from turning to alcohol consumption, and teach them to appreciate bourgeois protestant values.

→ *Rhythm Is It!* [http://www.rhythmisit.com/en/php/index\\_flash.php](http://www.rhythmisit.com/en/php/index_flash.php) [15.4.2012]

→ *Superar* <http://superar.eu> [15.4.2012]

→ *El Sistema* <http://fundamusical.org.ve/>[15.4.2012]

→ *Film El Sistema* <http://www.el-sistema-film.com> [15.4.2012]



Even back then, this legitimization strategy was criticized for the fact that “cultural participation” frequently served as a substitute for a genuine voice in political decision-making and that cultural projects served more calming or prettifying purposes than to combat real problems. Critics saw them as a substitute for expensive or controversial policy interventions, such as legislative reform or the redistribution of resources.

Another critique relates to the instrumentalization of art. In this view, the real potential of art lies in its very engagement with that which is provoking, the uncomfortable, the imponderable, that which rejects utility. Max Fuchs, then Chairman of the German Cultural Council, pointed out in a 2004 paper that “it is this very respite from efficiency and pragmatic effectiveness which makes art, as a form of action, so effective” (→ [Fuchs 2004](#)). From this viewpoint, one of cultural mediation’s duties is to promote this engagement rather than use to the arts as a means to combat society’s ills.

→ [Fuchs 2004](#) <http://www.kulturrat.de/dokumente/texte/DieFormungdesMenschen.pdf> [24.8.2010]; see Resource Pool MFE060701.pdf