

Listening All Around: What Could the Fluid Conceptualization of Artistic Citizenships Do?

Sergio Garcia-Cuesta

Rytmisk Musikkonservatorium (Denmark)

Abstract

This article explores and develops possible additional understandings of the term *artistic citizenship* as: 1) a lens to promote critical reflection; 2) a developing inclusive artistic identity; and 3) action for change. First, I provide a general overview of artistic citizenship in order to familiarize the reader with its current definitions and critiques. Second, I propose and develop three possible complementary understandings of the term by drawing parallels between different aspects of scholarship in citizenship and in the arts, exploring existing connections between the two fields, and developing new links between them by extrapolating relevant shared challenges, critiques, and possibilities from discourses about the former into the latter. Finally, I discuss how other conceptualizations of artistic citizenship could have been possible, and how replicating the processes presented in this article with other multidisciplinary terms—that link music with different fields of knowledge—may expand their possibilities as evolving, multifaceted, flawed, and “full of potential” assets that can keep enriching music education practice and scholarship.

Keywords

Artistic citizenship, multidisciplinary, artistic identity, inclusive artistry, the arts in society

How could frozen concepts and ideas stay relevant in societies that keep changing if they stop adapting? How could they reach their full potential without exploring different perspectives or being influenced by the world around them? In this essay, I aim to expand and develop a fluid understanding of artistic citizenship by exploring the potential lying in the bridges between disciplines that this hybrid term, which links citizenship and arts together, can create if understood fluidly.¹ This text is written with the hope that examining the interesting parallels between the complex and problematic concepts of “citizenship/citizen” and the equally problematic Western conceptualizations of “the arts/artist”²—both of which artistic citizenship brings forward—can provide important expanded perspectives in music education, scholarship and practice.

I begin by giving a general overview of artistic citizenship in order to familiarize the reader with its original definitions and critiques. I then propose and develop additional possible complementary understandings of the term by drawing parallels between aspects of scholarship in citizenship and in the arts, exploring connections between the two fields, and developing possible new links by extrapolating relevant shared challenges, critiques, and possibilities from discourses about the former into the latter. My goal is not to argue for or against artistic citizenship, thoroughly review or contrast all its existing definitions, develop new fixed or rigid conceptualizations, or invalidate established ones; rather, I aim to showcase how the process of examining the term from multiple points of view—that can coexist and enrich each other—may contribute to understanding its possibilities as a multifaceted, evolving, fluid, and flawed concept that keeps providing important challenges, questions, and potentials. I propose this text trusting that it can exemplify how listening all around to other disciplines for new inspiring sources of reflection might help developing more diverse, hopeful, and critical paths forward for artistic practices.

The Artistic Citizen

As a relatively new and evolving concept, artistic citizenship does not have a fixed and established definition, and new conceptualizations of the term are still being discussed and developed (Thompson-Bell 2022). While most definitions of artistic citizenship focus on the common themes of personal and communal flourishing, social goods, participation, and social responsibility (Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2016), there exist significant differences in phrasing, focus, and priorities. To familiarize the reader with the most common understandings

of the term, I divide these definitions into two general currents based on their focus: The artist as an artistic citizen, and a society of/with artistic citizens. Rather than placing each definition or scholar in just one of these categories, I use this classification to clarify the main values of artistic citizenship. As such, definitions from the same author might be found in both categories.

Definitions of the artist as an artistic citizen set their focus on the individual “artist,” with different ways of defining “artist” depending on the author. They explore both the artist’s value—reimagining what the artist can personally contribute to society—and the artist’s social and ethical values—bringing forward the ethical and social repercussions and responsibilities derived from, and implied in, the artist’s personal practices as an active agent for social good through the arts. An example that showcases these values is Bowman’s (2016) definition of artistic citizens as “socially engaged, socially aware, and socially responsible. Artistic citizens—as distinct from ‘mere’ artists—seek not just to produce better art but to use their artistic pursuits to change themselves and the world for the better” (66). Similarly, Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman (2016) wrote: “Artistic Citizenship focuses on the social responsibilities and functions of amateur and professional artists and examines ethical issues that are conventionally dismissed in discourses on these topics” (back cover).

Alternatively, definitions that argue for a society of or with artistic citizens focus on the empowering and transformative potential that participating and interacting with the arts can have as means for social and communal flourishing. These definitions move their focus away from the individual “artist.” Instead, they center the value and repercussions that reimagining the role that artistic practices, including citizens’ everyday interactions with them, could have for transforming and improving society more broadly.³ Examples of definitions forwarding these values include: “This citizenship chooses art as a form of playful creative action, creating beginnings that engage with the public sphere, explore the world, expose the private, position subjects, and raise questions that test new possibilities” (Caris and Cowell 2016, 467) and “pursue life-long and life-wide fulfillment and flourishing through making and partaking of the arts and, in doing so, to live a ‘good life,’ a life of meaningfulness and significance for themselves and their communities” (Silverman and Elliott 2016, 81).

However, neither of these sets of definitions are free from controversy.⁴ On the one hand, they can be criticized for their reliance on terms such as “social good” or “personal improvement,” which are not universal. As such, they might encourage the reader to forget that “it is not clear what the just society is—neither in general nor in music education and we might well discover that we

do not all agree in our visions, even though we might have thought we would” (Kertz-Welzel 2023, 7). This can be especially worrisome given that social good and personal improvement are frequently externally defined,⁵ normative terms that follow without questioning established definitions of what “good life” or “good society” mean. These dogmatic understandings can result in upholding a social status quo that often enables discrimination, inequalities, and the silencing and alienating of minorities.

Another point of controversy is that these definitions may instrumentalize the arts, keeping “limited attention to artistic concerns” (Gaunt et al. 2021, 5) and, in some cases, removing “the art” from considerations about the arts’ value and ignoring its possibilities as a sanctuary away from the world (Biesta 2019; Kertz-Welzel 2022). Furthermore, they can instrumentalize artistic practices as “always good” tools for personal and communal thriving, often taking for granted positive extrinsic values of the arts. Assuming such unproven positive values ignores research arguing that artistic practices can at times maintain or worsen the status quo that they aim to contest (Boeskov 2018; Bowman 2010).

Furthermore, the wording of artistic citizenship and the contexts in which people often wield the term can unwillingly reinforce the dichotomous distinctions between artist and non-artist. Discourses on artistic citizenship are often presented—usually by art scholars, renowned academics, and professional artists—in specialized journals and books, artistic institutions, conservatories, and other exclusive cultural and academic settings. Even when they explicitly attempt to challenge commonplace understandings of terms such as artist—“conventionally used to designate special creative and productive skill, exceptional fluency in or mastery over materials, or extraordinary imaginative capacity” (Bowman 2016, 65)—or audience—that promotes “hierarchical relationship between artistic producer and aesthetic respondent ... that is not universal, nor is it necessary” (Bowman 2016, 65)—these insiders’ position as recognized artists or preestablished experts within the field, together with the deeply entrenched normative meaning of these words, and the exclusive and elitist context in which these discourses are often presented, might reinforce the exclusions that artistic citizenship is trying to challenge. It can unwillingly perpetuate normative and narrow understandings of who and what an artist is, placing the ability and responsibility (Bowman 2016) for leading social change through the arts in the hands of just a privileged few.

While these critiques do not invalidate the values that artistic citizenship can bring and has brought to Western societies, they provide important opportunities for discussion and reflection, enriching the concept. Given the bridge

that artistic citizenship creates between citizenship and the arts, and the parallels between the challenges that pervade both of these terms, I suggest that it should be possible to draw from literature about citizenship to enable new learnings for the arts by exploring the following: how scholars have adapted their conceptions of citizenship to tackle similar critiques to the ones affecting artistic citizenship; how this has brought new points of view, objections, and discourses for the field of citizenship; and how this process can be extrapolated and applied to develop new possibilities and challenges for the arts. Following this train of thought, I propose and develop additional complementary conceptualizations of artistic citizenship with the aim of expanding, updating, and further discussing its challenges and potentials. Specifically, I put forward artistic citizenship as: 1) a lens to promote critical reflection, 2) a developing inclusive artistic identity, and 3) action for change.

Artistic Citizenship as a Lens to Promote Critical Reflection

Citizenship is a term often related to matters of political rights, duties, and formal membership (Delanty 2003; Elliott, Silverman and Bowman 2016; Tully 2014), and it is therefore typically connected to issues of exclusion and marginalization (Tambakaki 2015; Yarwood 2014). This means that being a citizen can be understood as a privileged status that entails a series of rights and duties and excludes those who the state defines as non-citizens: individuals with no voice, protection, or rights for participation. By being associated with the concept of citizenship—even if it attempts to do so just metaphorically—artistic citizenship risks bringing these issues and limitations to itself, to the conceptualizations of “the arts” with which it gets intertwined, and to artistic practices. Drawing from literature about citizenship, Bradley (2018) argues against the language of “artistic citizenship” by stating that it is “inextricably linked to concepts of nation, statehood, and exclusion” (84). While a strong deterrent against using this nomenclature, understanding the negative normative meanings attached to troublesome terms and associating them with specific conceptualizations of “the arts” could also have a potential upside for the implementation of more critical and caring artistic practices.

Regardless of whether we associate them with “citizenship,” common Western understandings of “the artist” (Assefa 2015; Gaztambide-Fernández 2008) already exhibit parallels with the aforementioned issues pervading “citizenship,” including underpinnings of exclusion, elitism, unbelonging, and lack of

formal recognition. Since these matters are unavoidably present in many artistic practices, considering them should be imperative in the implementation of initiatives that, by remaining aware of these important challenges, are caring towards their participants.

The term “citizenship” can magnify otherwise partially or completely overlooked challenges within artistic practices. It can promote critical reflections and provide a body of literature that dives into, expands, and attempts to find alternatives and solutions for the similar predicaments impacting both of these terms. When shared, discussed, and disseminated, these reflections have the potential to raise awareness, impacting the thoughts and practices not only of scholars but of arts practitioners, leaders of cultural institutions, and policy-makers.

These potentials are not just hypothetical, but already being realized in multiple contexts. Texts such as Bradley (2018) and Caris and Cowell (2016) exemplify how connections facilitated by artistic citizenship promote criticality and enrich scholarship in the arts. They showcase how the field of “citizenship” can inspire important discussions, critiques, and insights in a way that promotes reflection, foregrounds caring for participants and practitioners, and brings critical perspectives for artistic practice and education. Additionally, symposiums, such as the one described by Thompson-Bell (2022), exemplify how this criticality not only impacts scholarship but can also reach music practitioners, educators, leaders of conservatories, and policy makers.⁶ In these gatherings—which directly involved decision makers and practitioners currently working in the field in the reflection process—questions on citizenship identity prompted discussions about artistic identity, inequity, and whose voices are being excluded from the arts. Furthermore, the addition of artistic citizenship themes to the curricula within arts education centres and conservatories, such as the artistic citizenship project-week at the Rytmisk Musikonservatorium in Copenhagen, engages students directly in these discussions. In this pedagogical initiative teachers and students collaboratively aimed to revise artistic citizenship—and the baggage that the term carries—as a gateway to critically review and reconsider the role and potentialities of their own artistic and educational practices.⁷

Having the additional critical tool for reflection that artistic citizenship can provide becomes especially relevant for a field in which, as stated by Belfiore and Bennett (2008), believing in the transformative power of the arts has become something close to orthodoxy. Regardless of the fact that in recent years claims for criticality within arts-scholarship have risen to a point in which “the

need for reflective practice has become almost a cliché” (Bowman 2009, 4), the need for criticality has not diminished. Dominant discourses still forward the unquestionable belief that the arts always function as a positive agent for social transformation, often clouding the judgement of practitioners, participants, and outsiders alike.

It is important to clarify that the potential for critical reflection invoked by “artistic citizenship” does not invalidate or negate any of the aforementioned pitfalls associated with the term, but rather coexists with them. Using “artistic citizenship” can promote feelings of exclusion, worsen experiences of unbelonging, and feel harmful to people who experience discrimination or marginalization (Bradley 2018). As such, the term should not be forced upon anyone, adhered to unreflectively, or wielded as an Excalibur of righteousness and truth for the arts. However, using the term both caringly and critically, embracing the value lying in its negatives, shortcomings, and criticisms while also embracing the richness and knowledge that can be bridged over from the field of citizenship to arts practices, might encourage revision and ease forward motion.

The connection between citizenship and utopia also strengthens the claims for conceptualizing artistic citizenship as a tool for critical reflection. Scholars such as the sociologist Levitas (2013) and the political scientists Goodwin and Taylor (2009) have proposed the use of utopian thinking for analyzing the current state of our world and envisioning new possibilities towards a better future. Citizenship is a prime example of how utopian values—regardless of historical and widespread understandings of utopia as unrealistic or unobtainable (Kertz-Welzel 2022; Levitas 2013)—can promote the critical revision of reality and enactment of change. Not disregarding that much remains undone, what were considered impossible utopian egalitarian or feminist ideals for citizenship in the past,⁸ might be slowly growing to become more widely spread in many contemporary societies (Fernando et al. 2018). By linking citizenship and artistic practices, artistic citizenship facilitates learning from the transformative power that utopia has had in citizenship scholarship and action as well as extrapolating and applying these potentials to the arts. It highlights the potential of using utopian thinking as an effective tool for change in artistic fields, promoting the use of critical, yet idealistic reflections to uncover new paths forward.⁹

At the same time, the connection between citizenship and utopia can warn against the dangers of unthoughtfully following externally imposed ideals. Just as groups have used utopian ideals of citizenship to promote fascist and discriminating agendas (Kertz-Welzel 2022), dogmatic ideals and orthodoxies in the art—such as narrow or elitist depictions of what the arts and artist are—can

promote harmful (Wright 2019), dangerous, and negative practices and beliefs (Hess 2019). In order to alleviate some of these issues and foster a safer path for critical utopian thinking in the arts, I suggest that developing an increasingly fluid and diverse definition of artistic identity might first be needed. A more inclusive understanding of artistry could empower people to believe in their own agency to self-reflect “as artists,” opening up increasingly accessible spaces for dialogue and dissent. It could not only relieve the dangers of following dogmatic ideals for individuals, but also introduce new critical voices and utopian perspectives into the field, widening and expanding who artists are and what artists can do.

Artistic Citizenship as a Developing Inclusive Artistic Identity

As shown by Blacking’s (1973) research and in the work of Dissanayake (2006), there exist cultures in which the category of artist applies to nearly all members of society. Since common Western depictions of artists as elitist, exclusionary, and individualistic (Assefa 2015; Gaztambide-Fernández 2008) are not universal, it should be possible to challenge and contest them. However, how can the arts be disconnected from such entrenched uninviting and restricting meanings? Through exploring how scholars have attempted to separate “citizenship” from its exclusionary normative understandings, it might become possible not only to extrapolate more inclusive understandings of what artistic practices can be, but also to learn from the challenges and potentials that can arise during this process.

Scholars, including the sociologist Delanty and the political philosopher Tully, propose inclusive definitions of citizenship, describing it not only as a legal status but also as a constructivist learning process mostly performed through patterns of socialization developed during everyday activities (Delanty 2002, 2003; Tully 2014; Warming 2012). Delanty (2003) wrote: “Research has documented how citizens learn citizenship, which mostly takes place in the informal context of everyday life and is also heavily influenced by critical and formative events in people’s lives. Citizenship is not entirely about rights or membership.... It concerns the learning of a capacity for action and for responsibility but, essentially, it is about the learning of the self and of the relationship of self and other” (602).

Scholars also explain that these everyday interactions not only include political participation, but also participation in other social and cultural settings (Rovisco 2019; Tully 2014). For example, Tully (2014) described citizenship as

praxis in context: “Rather than looking at citizenship as a status within an institutional framework backed up by world-historical processes and universal norms, the diverse tradition looks on citizenship as negotiated practices, as praxis—as actors and activities in contexts” (35).

These conceptualizations of citizenship emphasize shared lived experiences and togetherness as constituting pillars of the citizen’s identity, focusing on the process of “citizen becoming” instead of the status of “citizen being.” By doing so, they have the potential to facilitate a feeling of belonging in otherwise excluded individuals. Moreover, these conceptualizations blur the line between politics and non-politics. By avoiding the previously discussed issues of exclusion and marginalization related to definitions based on formal rights, they can potentially include people who either rejected or were unable to legally partake in political activities (Rovisco 2019).

Nevertheless, stating that citizen becoming might be defined through relationships and interactions instead of institutions does not guarantee a feeling of belonging in individuals. Even within inclusive conceptualizations of the term people who experience marginalization or social exclusion might still feel like non-citizens. However, foregrounding a plural understanding of the process of citizen becoming places more agency both to identify as a citizen and to define what citizen means on the individuals and less on institutions. It allows for more diverse and flexible definitions of citizen that people and communities might keep transforming and adapting, diminishing the rigidity and exclusion derived from the dominant legal and institutionalized definitions of the concept.

Artistic citizenship provides a bridge to extrapolate these alternative conceptualizations of citizenship. Music educators, practitioners, and students can use them to develop increasingly inclusive conceptualizations of “artist” that shift the focus from the exclusion and dichotomies common in the Western category of “artist-being” to an ongoing process of “artist-becoming” developed through everyday interactions. Music therapists and educators commonly claim that “everyone is an artist” (Stige 2021, 91). Supporting this statement with insights from inclusive citizenship contextualizes it by highlighting that, rather than a fixed concept, “artist”—like “citizen”—can support multiple meanings that go beyond normative understandings of professionalization or skill.

Dewey (1934) argued that artistic creation results from continuous and ongoing experiences in everyday life; these everyday informal events constitute a vital part of creative artistic processes. If everyday experiences¹⁰ constitute the raw materials needed to create and connect to artistic works and processes,

then the embodied knowledge needed to “be an artist” is not an exclusive asset held by a privileged few, but universally learnt through everyday interactions. Furthermore, even if one only considered commonly accepted forms of Western art, constant exposure to everyday stimuli provides meaningful sources of artistic knowledge for the learning and building of one’s artistic identity. From films to music to photography to paintings, artistic engagements and participations constitute part of everyday routines. Individuals experience them when walking to work while listening to music, watching TV or a film when resting at home, or seeing beautifully crafted images in advertisements. These artistic interactions can inadvertently create a significant amount of intrinsic artistic knowledge¹¹ that individuals can later perform in a multitude of ways, from singing, painting, or writing to cooking or choosing clothes.

Extending these parallels between inclusive citizenship and the arts, I propose that artistic citizenship could be understood as an ongoing, inclusive, everyday-learned and everyday-performed process in which individuals’ personal, social, and artistic identities develop through the arts during daily life experiences. This approach to conceptualizing artistic citizenship as a *developing* artistic identity—that is “two-fold developing” by both constantly developing through ongoing interactions and by developing more inclusive understandings of what “artistic” means—is full of potential. It could blur the lines between formal and informal artistic participation by placing artistry in everyday life. It could tackle the artist/non-artist dichotomy by turning “artist” from an identity into an accessible ongoing process. And, by placing the artistic voice for creation and participation within the reach of everyone, this conception of artistic citizenship could lift the ability and responsibility for determining the role of the arts away from the shoulders of the previously “few chosen artists,” distributing and sharing it with others in a more universal way.

By placing artistic knowledge in personal experiences and everyday informal interactions, this conceptualization of artistic citizenship does not take away from the relevance of formal artistic training, but could synergize with it by. It could tackle issues of accessibility by tearing down barriers of entry to arts education, counteracting discourses of genius and perceived elitism, and turning arts training into a more diverse, welcoming, and accessible space where those who choose to can focus on expanding and nourishing their personal artistry.

Nevertheless, inclusive claims for artistry or artistic citizenship can also be problematic. Since “no conceptualization of artistic citizenship can be infinitely inclusive” (Bowman 2016, 77), it becomes especially relevant to examine the

limitations and flaws of all-inclusive notions of artistry. By drawing from literature that problematizes inclusive notions of citizenship, artistic citizenship can also raise awareness about some of the possible pitfalls and challenges linked to developing inclusive definitions of the arts.

Drawing on Tambakaki's thoughts (2015), I propose that critiques of inclusive citizenship can warn about the risks associated with forgetting unequal participation and cancelling "non-artist" as an analytical category. Expanding the understanding of what an artist is to an all-inclusive identity risks becoming oblivious to issues of exclusion, marginalization, and accessibility. Tambakaki (2015) noted that "non-citizenship is not just a necessary category, but also a useful one. It alerts us to the exclusions, inequalities, marginalizations and naturalisations that accompany citizenship politics" (930). Consequently, the category "non-artist" can warn and remind about issues connected with marginalization and unequal participation in artistic practices. Stating that people have the knowledge and possibility to express themselves artistically is not the same as saying that everyone has the same possibilities and skillsets¹² to do so. From this perspective, the category of non-artists should include not only people who cannot create or partake in art, but also individuals lacking the means or time to focus on creating or performing, considered unskilled, denied recognition or access by arts education institutions, left behind by genius narratives, with unheard or unrecognized voices, or without the agency and resources to participate. Understanding non-artist as a non-dichotomous spectrum that intersectionally considers these and other forms and degrees of exclusion can expand people's understandings about the multiple factors limiting artistic accessibility and participation. It turns "non-artist" into an analytical category to inspire new artistic practices and policies that can revise and resist inequalities.

Scholarship on citizenship also notes the importance of considering the lack of personal and social recognition of the individual as an artist. Being recognized is essential to the feeling of belonging in citizenship (Delanty 2003; Warming 2012). This not only refers to formal recognition from a state, but also to being valued and recognized by others and the community, as well as the personal feeling of belonging for each individual (Honneth 2003, 2006). Similarly, the possibility of feeling belonging as an artist often lies beyond both the individual and the theoretical potential for artistic knowledge or expression. It is a negotiation between the individual who identifies and feels that they belong (or not) as an artist and the society that acknowledges them (or not) as one. Defending an all-inclusive artistic identity risks ignoring external factors, such

as recognition from the community, institutions, and society, which strongly contribute to feeling like and belonging as an artist. Even if everyone has the same possibility for participation in the arts, and even if everyone values their own artistic selves and artistic creations, people may still feel like non-artists who do not belong when their artistry is marginalized, depreciated, or unrecognized.

Critiques of citizenship also illuminate dangers related to the primacy of the arts and eliminating the choice to not be an artist. As Wright (2019) observed, “Ethnomusicologists and anthropologists from Blacking (1974) onwards have concluded that being human is being musical” (218). Equating musicality with humanity becomes harmful when people understand “artist” as an exclusionary and exclusive identity. By placing musicality as intrinsic to being human, claims such as this one may lead to the alienation or even mistreatment of people who do not identify as artistic, making them feel broken and less than human. At the same time, by automatically including everyone as artists, these discourses may force people into an unwanted identity. Just as people may choose to reject being considered citizens as a way to oppose the rights, responsibilities, or stigmas associated with citizenship (Tambakaki 2015), “non-artist” can also exist as a way of not conforming to specific definitions of what being an artist means. From this perspective, choosing to name oneself a “non-artist” can become an empowering self-identification, a self-imposed title to protest against and defy established one-way road definitions of the arts, while claiming for more diverse understandings of what artistic practices and artistic identities can be.

Luckily, the aforementioned challenges pervading inclusive definitions of “artistic” might not be unavoidable or universal. Since they result from specific normative understandings about what art and artists are, acting critically and slowly bringing change to the construction of these understandings might gradually open new possible paths forward.

Artistic Citizenship as Action for Change

Scholarship on citizenship can also illuminate additional implications for the language of “artistic citizenship” to act and transform the world beyond the theoretical. When exploring “global citizenship,” Tully (2014) described how the conjunction of the words “global” and “citizenship” creates a new concept that, while related to established historical uses of these terms, can challenge both their normative use and the practices connected to them. He stated that “The creation of the conjunction ‘global citizenship’ could be seen as a prime example

of the innovative freedom of citizens and non-citizens to contest and initiate something new in the practice of citizenship” (6).

Tully (2014) defended that “initiating something new” becomes possible because diverse understandings of “global” and “citizenship” exist, and the normative language attached to them is just one choice amongst many. By choosing to link “global citizenship” with diverse practices and understandings that diverge from dominant meanings of modern citizenship—those based on “membership codes, rights, duties and institutional preconditions” (9)—people can contextualize and de-universalize them. Tully wrote:

The kind of critical attitude that accompanies practices of diverse citizenship and contextualizes or ‘provincializes’ modern citizenship and its universalizing language... frees us from the hold of the globally dominant language of modern citizenship as the pre-emptive language of disclosure of all forms of citizenship and enable us to see it as one language among others. In so doing, it de-universalizes modern citizenship (for, as we have seen, its claim to universality is internal to the globally dominant language of modern citizenship) and de-subalternizes other modes of citizenship (discloses them in their local languages and histories). Modern citizenship can thus be put in its place as one singular (and imperious) mode in a global field of diverse alternatives. (10)

Understanding that “global,” “citizenship,” and “global citizenship” can take diverse and complex meanings opens up a path not only to reconceptualizing them theoretically, but to transforming how people perform them. Tully (2014) stated that “This pragmatic linguistic freedom of enunciation and initiation—of contestability and speaking otherwise—within the weighty constraints of the inherited relations of use and meaning is, as we shall see, internally related to a practical (extralinguistic) freedom of enactment and improvisation within the inherited relations of power in which the vocabulary is used” (5).

He explains that language users learn how to use and perform a concept via “apprenticeship,” which involves: connecting it to the practices that give it name in their everyday life; contrasting their similarities and dissimilarities with their personal already-established understanding of the term; and enacting these concepts practically in their daily life in accordance with this understanding. As such, a person gradually learns what being a citizen means via encountering the use of the word in their life, contrasting their current understanding of what a citizen means to the new situation where the language is used, adjusting their idea of what being a citizen entices, and then acting as citizens in accordance with this transformed understanding. Since “global” and “citizen” accept different meanings, when people choose to enact their “pragmatic linguistic freedom of enunciation and initiation, of contestability and speaking

otherwise” (Tully 2014, 5) to use “global citizenship” in reference to diverse practices that move away from normative and dominant meanings of citizenship—such as citizenship as a developing and inclusive identity—they not only change the definition of these words, but also change what acting as a citizen can be, who citizens are, and what they can do in the world.

Drawing on Tully’s assertions, I propose that “artistic citizenship” has a similar potential. As previously argued, the terms “artist,” “citizenship” and “artistic citizenship” also involve multifaceted understandings. By linking the language of “artistic citizenship” to diverse meanings and to alternative artistic practices that move away from dominant depictions of Western artistry as elitist or exclusionary, people can contextualize and de-universalize them. This shows that other ways of “being an artist” are possible and that normative depictions of artists are just a few amongst many, opening the field to new possibilities and perspectives. This change in understanding can go beyond both words and theory (parallel with Tully 2014, 5), acting to transform artistic practices.

In parallel with citizenship, people learn who an artist is and how to “be artistic” themselves via apprenticeship. A person gradually learns what being artistic involves by encountering the use of the word in their everyday life, contrasting their previously established understanding of what being an artist means with new situations, adjusting their personal ideas, and then deciding how to “act artistically” in the world (or decide not to do so) in accordance with this transformed understanding. As such, when a participant encounters the words “artistic citizenship” tied to an artistic project that chooses to speak otherwise—by, for example, challenging exclusion through contesting the nature of excellent music or valuing participants’ artistic voices and artistic personas as meaningful in their diverse forms—their understanding of “art” and “artist” expand. This changes both how they relate to their own artistic-self and to the arts in their everyday life, in the process transforming what they can do through the arts in society.

Furthermore, because of the two constituting words of “artistic citizenship,” these transformations not only impact people’s understandings and enactments tied to the term “artistic,” but also how they understand and perform “citizenship.” As such, choosing to use artistic citizenship facilitates that values emphasized through artistic practices can impact society beyond traditionally artistic contexts. Just as using “artistic citizenship” risks bringing issues of privilege or exclusion to the arts (Bradley 2018, 84), linking artistic citizenship to artistic practices in which people remain critical and caring, aware of diverse

voices, and concerned with inclusion and agency can make these experiences and values expand into and transform performances and understandings of citizenship. Opening up paths for more diverse, caring, and inclusive forms of artistic citizenship may therefore foster more diverse, caring, and inclusive citizens and societies. This showcases not only that “through music it is possible to imagine an alternative social model” (Levitas 2013), but that through critical and caring artistic practices it is possible to start enacting this transformation.

This might appear to be a small and maybe meaningless effort in comparison with the historic and constant everyday exposure to commonplace normative understandings of these terms. However, opening up a small crack in the entrenched uses of these concepts and linking them to new hopeful experiences—even if only for a moment—can make a difference. It might turn utopian¹³ possibilities in both arts and citizenship into a reality. It is a step towards transforming the world through words and artistic practices, making “choosing to name it artistic citizenship” in itself an act of activism.

Conclusions

This article has explored and developed the term artistic citizenship to argue for how notions of citizenship can provide new avenues for critical discussions, imaginings, social repercussions, and practices in the arts. However, these enriching potentials are not unique to the analysis and reconceptualization of artistic citizenship. The same process could be replicated with other multidisciplinary terms and other transdisciplinary connections, further expanding artistic practices with new insights and possibilities. Moreover, the three coexisting depictions of artistic citizenship that I presented are not the only possible ones. They exemplify just a few of the extra possibilities that can be enacted through exploring artistic citizenship fluidly. Therefore, they are not meant to be understood as absolute, fixed, or uncontestable, but to showcase the added value that multidisciplinary terms can provide when not put into a box and not adhered to unconditionally.

There is much that artistic practices, including music making, can address.¹⁴ The conceptualizations presented in this article tackle issues of inclusion, elitism, multidisciplinary, and subjectivity in the arts. However, drawing from other important aspects of citizenship—such as its connection with environmental issues or diaspora—and extrapolating them to the arts could have fostered other possible conceptualizations of artistic citizenship addressing different, yet just as important, issues. Inspired by Goble’s (2015) use of “musics,”

this multiplicity of coexisting definitions creates multiple coexisting “artistic citizenships” that are not only possible, but desirable. It promotes understanding each possible lens for looking at artistic citizenship as partial, updateable, and context based. It embraces the troubled, complex, and sometimes paradoxical nature of the concept. “Artistic citizenship”—as well as “citizenship” and “the arts”—can be at the same time critical and utopian, hopeful and harmful, a tool for social change or a sanctuary to escape from the world. Accepting this ambiguity¹⁵ and plurality of meaning allows ideals to remain relevant and keep evolving, expanding, and adapting to the different contexts, needs, and goals of the people who can learn and make use of them. It opens the possibility to learn from more diverse sources of knowledge and to explore nuanced and troubled concepts and ideals without being forced to dogmatically accept or totally reject them, curiously listening around for them, discerning the notes that resonate with each of us, and using them to inspire the writing of the passages that are yet to come.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank professors David G. Hebert, Maria Westvall, Tatiana Chemi and Kim Boeskov for helping me refine the arguments and conceptualizations that I present in this article. I would also like to thank the reviewers and editors of ACT for their inspiring and generous comments and revisions that have deeply enriched this text.

About the Author

Sergio Garcia-Cuesta is a PhD. fellow at the Rytmisk Musikkonservatorium of Copenhagen where he teaches courses on music education, and seminars exploring the role of the musician in society. His teaching and research interests include accessibility, meaningfulness, care and feeling of belonging within musical practices, as well as bringing forward the uncertain, the contextual, and the critical to research. Sergio has worked for over fifteen years as a music teacher in different music schools and academies in Spain, Ireland and Denmark. With a Master in Music Education and a background studying jazz piano and composition, his focus has now shifted to exploring the potentialities of music for social change and research.

References

- Assefa, Kalkidan. 2015. Artist's statement: What decolonization of art means to me. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 4 (2):1–5.
- Bamberger, Jeanne. 2003. The development of intuitive musical understanding: A natural experiment. *Psychology of Music* 31 (1): 7–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735603031001321>
- Belfiore, Eleonora, and Oliver Bennett. 2008. *The social impact of the arts: An intellectual history*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230227774>
- Biesta, Gert. 2019. What if? Art education beyond expression and creativity. In *The international encyclopedia of art and design education*, edited by Richard Hickman, John Baldacchino, Kerry Freedman, Emese Hall, and Nigel Meager, 1–10. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Blacking, John. 1973. *How musical is man?* University of Washington Press.
- Boeskov, Kim. 2018. Moving beyond orthodoxy: Reconsidering notions of music and social transformation. *Action, Criticism and Theory in Music Education* 17 (2): 92–117. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act17.2.92>
- Boeskov, Kim. 2022. Ambiguous musical practice: Rethinking social analysis of music educational practice. *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 30 (2): 163–82. <https://doi.org/10.2979/philmusieducrevi.30.2.06>
- Bowman, Wayne D. 2009. No one true way: Music education without redemptive truth. In *Music education for changing times*, edited by Thomas A. Regelski and J. Terry Gates, 3–15. Springer.
- Bowman, Wayne D. 2010. Envisioning the impossible. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 9 (3): 1–7. http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bowman9_3.pdf
- Bowman, Wayne D. 2016. Artistry, ethics, and citizenship. In *Artistic citizenship: Artistry, social responsibility, and ethical praxis*, edited by David Elliott, Marissa Silverman, and Wayne D. Bowman, 59–80. Oxford Academic.
- Bradley, Deborah. 2018. Artistic citizenship: Escaping the violence of the normative (?). *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 17 (2): 71–91. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act17.1.71>
- Caris, Arthur, and Gillian Cowell. 2016. The artist can't escape: The artist as (reluctant) public pedagogue. *Policy Futures in Education* 14 (4): 466–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210316633379>
- Garcia-Cuesta. 2024. Listening all around: What could the fluid conceptualization of artistic citizenships do? *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 23 (1): 80–101. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act23.1.80>

- Delanty, Gerard. 2002. Two conceptions of cultural citizenship: A review of recent literature on culture and citizenship. *Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1 (3): 60–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14718800208405106>
- Delanty, Gerard. 2003. Citizenship as a learning process: disciplinary citizenship versus cultural citizenship. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 22 (6): 597–605. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0260137032000138158>
- Dewey, John. 1934. *Art as experience*. Minton, Balch, & Company.
- Dissanayake, Ellen. 2006. Ritual and ritualization: musical means of conveying and shaping emotion in humans and other animals. In *Music and manipulation: On the social uses and social control of music*, edited by Steven Brown and Ulrich Volgsten, 31–56. Berghahn Books.
- Elliott, David J., Marissa Silverman, and Wayne D. Bowman. 2016. *Artistic citizenship: Artistry, social responsibility, and ethical praxis*. Oxford Academic.
- Gaztambide-Fernández, Ruben A. 2008. The artist in society: Understandings, expectations, and curriculum implications. *Curriculum Inquiry* 38 (3): 233–65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2008.00408.x>
- Gaunt, Helena, Celia Duffy, Ana Coric, Isabel González Delgado, Linda Mesas, Oleksandr Pryimenko, and Henrik Sveidahl. 2021. Musicians as “makers in society”: A conceptual foundation for contemporary professional higher music education. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.713648>
- Goble J. Scott. 2015. Music or musics?: An important matter at hand. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 14 (3): 27–42. http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Goble14_3.pdf
- Goodwin, Barbara, and Keith Taylor. 2009. *The politics of utopia. A study in theory and practice*. Peter Lang.
- Fernando, Julian W., Nicholas Burden, Adam Ferguson, Lean V. O’Brien, Madeline Judge, and Yoshihisa Kashima. 2018. Functions of utopia: How utopian thinking motivates societal engagement. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 44 (5): 779–92.
- Hess Juliet. 2019. *Music education for social change: Constructing an activist music education*. Routledge.
- Honneth, Axel. 2003. *Behovet for anerkendelse*. Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Honneth, Axel. 2006. *Kamp om anerkendelse*. Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Garcia-Cuesta. 2024. Listening all around: What could the fluid conceptualization of artistic citizenships do? *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 23 (1): 80–101. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act23.1.80>

- Kertz-Welzel, Alexandra. 2022. *Rethinking music education and social change*. Oxford University Press.
- Kertz-Welzel, Alexandra. 2023. In search of a better world? Reconsidering sociology and music education as utopian fields. *Visions of Research in Music Education* 41. <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme/vol41/iss1/3>
- Levitas Ruth. 2013. *Utopia as method: The imaginary reconstitution of society*. Palgrave.
- MayDay Group. 2021. Action ideals. <http://www.maydaygroup.org/about-us/action-for-change-in-music-education/>
- Rovisco, Maria. 2019. Staging citizenship: Artistic performance as a site of contestation of citizenship. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 22 (5): 647–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877919849962>
- Silverman, Marissa, and David J. Elliott. 2016. Arts education as/for artistic citizenship. In *Artistic citizenship: Artistry, social responsibility, and ethical praxis*, edited by David J. Elliott, Marissa Silverman, and Wayne Bowman, 81–103. Oxford Academic.
- Stige, Brynjulf. 2021. Artistic citizenship and the crafting of mutual musical care. In *Music education as craft*, edited by Kari Holdhus, Regina Murphy, and Magne I. Espeland, 89–104. Springer.
- Tambakaki, Paulina. 2015. Citizenship and inclusion: Rethinking the analytical category of noncitizenship. *Citizenship Studies* 19 (8): 922–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2015.1110285>
- Thompson-Bell, Jacob. 2022. *Artistic citizenship: Co-creating a flexible definition*. Leeds Conservatoire.
- Tully, James. 2014. *On global citizenship: James Tully in dialogue*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- Warming, Hanne. 2012. Theorizing (adults' facilitation of) children's participation and citizenship. In *Participation, facilitation, and mediation: Children and young people in their social contexts*, edited by Claudio Baraldi, and Vitorio Iervese, 42–60. Routledge.
- Wiles, David. 2016. Art and citizenship: The history of a divorce. In *Artistic citizenship: Artistry, social responsibility, and ethical praxis*, edited by David Elliott, Marissa Silverman, and Wayne D. Bowman, 22–40. Oxford Academic.
- Wright, Ruth. 2019. Envisioning real utopias in music education: Prospects, possibilities and impediments. *Music Education Research* 21 (3): 217–27.
- Garcia-Cuesta. 2024. Listening all around: What could the fluid conceptualization of artistic citizenships do? *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 23 (1): 80–101. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act23.1.80>

Yarwood, Richard. 2014. *Citizenship*. Routledge.

Notes

¹ A fluid concept evolves and adapts. It is not fixed or static but has multiple possible understandings that coexist. Like a body of water, a fluid definition might not allow one to build a rigid and eternal structure on top of it, where it can forever stay immobile, but it can create a space in which new ideas are born and evolve, where new discussions and new life—that might eventually move completely out of this water—can keep developing.

² This article considers art and artist as concepts co-constructed between individuals and society (see section on Artistic Citizenship as a Developing Inclusive Artistic Identity) that accept multiple, diverse, and coexisting possible understandings. It is therefore counterintuitive for this text to bring forward any set definition of these concepts. However—and even though this text does not aim at promoting them—“common Western conceptualizations” of the arts and artists (Assefa 2015, Gaztambide-Fernández 2008) will be relevant to some of the discussions that will be presented. For a more historical exploration of the connection between the arts and citizenship, see Wiles (2016).

³ What improving and positively transforming society means varies for each author. However, themes such as community building, inclusion, personal and communal flourishing, etc. seem to be important for most scholars. In the next section of the text possible critiques derived from these statements will be discussed further.

⁴ These critiques brought forward by different scholars are nuanced and complex. Since it goes beyond the scope, and outside the focus, of this article to thoroughly explain them, I encourage the reader to further explore the original texts that are referenced to get a deeper understanding of these interesting discussions.

⁵ The meaning of “good life” or “good society” is not a universal but socially constructed. What these ideas mean is often not decided and reflected upon by each person, but it is established by society, by politics, by the media, etc. and in many cases just assumed as a given by the individual.

⁶ This report is a summary of a multidisciplinary forum that brought together researchers, practitioners, and policy makers from different fields to discuss themes related to artistic citizenship. It was followed up by different online meetings (one of which I attended) that included the insights of people not involved in the original meeting and where artistic citizenship inspired critical discussions on the role and state of the arts. This report concluded with a series of recommendations for arts practitioners and institutions, including: promoting transdisciplinary partnerships, arts education centres rethinking the skills that adaptable graduates should develop, and promoting an ethic of care towards their graduates.

⁷ I have facilitated lectures on artistic citizenship with an international group of students in which the term—and the natural adversity that it produced in international students who do not feel that they are “citizens” (even though as a European I have many rights and privileges in Denmark, I am myself not a Danish citizen, with no right to vote in this country)—brought forward inspiring considerations about the elitism and exclusion that might also be linked to the arts.

⁸ Such as universal vote or legal access to equal rights.

⁹ The connections between utopian thinking and the arts are too extensive to be described in this text and are explored in Alexandra Kertz-Welzel’s (2022) inspiring book, *Rethinking Music Education and Social Change*.

¹⁰ These include everyday exposure to any source of artistic inspiration and life events, such as our interactions with others, our culture, our personal feelings and experiences, as well as inspiration from nature, the environment, or other non-human phenomena.

¹¹ This is supported by research findings showing that even before any artistic training has taken place, individuals exhibit a significant innate artistic knowledge (Bamberger 2003).

¹² I used the word skillsets, instead of capabilities or talents, to describe that people have different skills or unique characteristics—different ways of being musical—that are diverse and cannot (or at least should not) be hierarchized.

¹³ Here I am playing with the double meaning of the word, transforming what are considered “just” utopian possibilities now—meaning unobtainable—into real utopias.

¹⁴ To showcase some of the ideals and values that music can strive towards refer to the MayDay Group’s (2021) Action Ideals.

¹⁵ This wording was inspired by Boeskov’s (2022) article “Ambiguous Musical Practice: Rethinking Social Analysis of Music Educational Practice.”