

Diffusion, Adoption, and Adaptation:

El Sistema in the United States

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Introduction

Inspiration from a social program fighting poverty in Venezuela sponsored by that country's socialist government — El Sistema — is blossoming in the United States. In an era of political disunity, economic distress, severe cuts in public sector support for arts, culture, education, social welfare, as well as television programs warning of socialist takeovers of the United States government, it seems improbable that a socialist cultural program dedicated to bettering the lives of the country's poorest communities through youth music education would capture the American¹ imagination. But El Sistema-inspired programs are multiplying quickly in the United States, and are supported by public charter schools, orchestras, community organizations, and universities in most regions of the country, including Hawaii and Alaska. Fifty-four programs have appeared since 2007. Frequently citing the Venezuelans as their inspiration, program leaders are using the core philosophy and practices of El Sistema's teaching methods but also adapting these ideas to their own specific environments. Institutional pressures and resource dependence shape the environment of El Sistema in the United States and Venezuela differently; the degree of unity between individual programs in each country affects the degree to which and specifies which of those institutional pressures apply; and different organizational

¹ The term "American" applies to the entire Western Hemisphere, including both the United States and Venezuela; however, for the purposes of this paper, the term will be used in the colloquial sense of "pertaining to the United States" unless otherwise stated. Unlike in Spanish, which uses the term "estadounidense" to describe people from the United States, English offers no such term. "United Statesian" is non-standard and awkward.

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forms produce different kinds of leadership, each exerting its particular brand of institutional pressures.

Organizational processes help explain why El Sistema² is being reshaped in the United States. Inspiration from Venezuela, and now, from successful American offshoots,³ is an oft-cited reason why Americans have started their own “El Sistema-inspired” programs,⁴ but strong and frequent international press has made the program known to the American movement’s current leaders. Leadership also heavily impacts the movement. Lastly and perhaps the principal reason many programs have embraced the Venezuelan philosophy, organizational survival has been explicitly cited by organizations, particularly struggling American orchestras, as a motivator. Others do not, but in all cases, building an El Sistema-like program has implications for organizational health and longevity. Other organizational principles describe how El Sistema is moving to the United States: diffusion, early adopter syndrome, scaling techniques, and open systems theories are specific examples. But underlying these principles are several of the broad theories from the discipline, and institutionalism, population ecology, and resource dependence are among them.

This thesis explores the adaptation of El Sistema to the United States first by laying the groundwork for these principles. Then, narrating the history, philosophy,

² Officially, El Sistema is called the *Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar* (officially shortened to *FundaMusical Bolívar* and also known by the names *FundaMusical* and *Fundabol*. Formerly called the *Fundación del Estado para el Sistema Nacional de las Orquestas Juveniles e Infantiles*, or *FESNOJIV*, the name may have been shortened for brevity, to dissociate from the “state,” or some combination. El Sistema was formally established as “FESNOJIV” in 1979 (www.fesnojiv.vz).

³ “Now, we are inspired by ourselves, not just by Venezuela.” 2011-2012 Abreu Fellows Presentation to the Take a Stand Symposium, 30 January 2012.

⁴ A term frequently used to describe programs in the US that have taken inspiration from the Venezuelan program.

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pedagogy, and organizational processes of Venezuelan El Sistema will provide a historical basis for the discussions of their transfer to the United States. Next, an in-depth analysis of the movement in the United States reveals how this diffusion occurs from the perspective of an El Sistema “site.” This perspective is drawn from my three-week experience with an El Sistema site in Los Angeles. Then, the study of partnerships illuminates the value of El Sistema programs to the organizations that adopt them. Finally, a conclusion describes how understanding these major organizational processes can impact managerial decisions within El Sistema programs and within other organizations looking to partner with them. Blending oft-considered opposing theories in this discussion unites and strengthens the field of organizational theory.

To be clear, as an organizational studies thesis, this paper focuses on the implications of El Sistema’s diffusion, adoption, and adaptation for organizations, not for the students participating in the programs. Pedagogy is discussed as it relates to the diffusion of ideas and in assessing the consistency between El Sistema principles and their enactment through pedagogy in individual programs. I do not consider its efficacy since I have little experience in music education theory.

Diffusion, Adoption, Adaptation, and Organizational Environments

The history of El Sistema in the United States identifies who is currently involved in the American programs, the ways by which many of these people became aware of the Venezuelan program, and several notable recent developments. Several important aspects of El Sistema have transferred to the United States and are evident

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in American programs. Among them are several teaching techniques and a shared philosophy that reflects the Venezuelans' original conception of the program. In this paper, the term "diffusion" describes this transfer of ideas and innovations from one organization to another. It is not actor specific in that it describes a process rather than an action. Adoption will be defined as an organization's concerted emulation of another organization's idea or innovation. Adaptation, on the other hand, will be defined as an organization's active seeking and reformatting of another organization's idea or innovation. The difference between diffusion, adoption, and adaptation can be described in the context of El Sistema: Brighton, Massachusetts' El Sistema-inspired *Conservatory Lab Charter School* adopted an innovation called the "paper orchestra" (discussed in Part II of this document) from Caracas, Venezuela's *La Rinconada* núcleo and *adapted* it to its own needs by altering the pedagogy to fit its students. The paper orchestra can be said to have "diffused" from *La Rinconada* to the *Conservatory Lab Charter School*. As a second example, the El Sistema philosophy has *diffused* to programs in the United States, which have *adopted* El Sistema's basic philosophies and have *adapted* them to their own communities.

Whether organizations should adopt and adapt El Sistema programs is contentious. Orchestras, as some of the most prominent founders, hosts, and partners of El Sistema in the United States, are good examples for studying organizational processes in the diffusion of El Sistema principles to the United States. Some orchestras, such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, have determined that adapting El Sistema to the needs of their city community is important for organizational survival.⁵

⁵ Deborah Borda closing remarks at the Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

Others, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, see education as extraneous to the orchestra's core purpose of making music.⁶ An organization's definitions of its core purpose and organizational domain, or area of expertise, determine its willingness to adapt. Whether the orchestra should engage its community through educational programs depends on where that organization believes its boundaries with its environment lie. If an organization believes its core features are independent from its environment, it is unlikely to adapt, whereas if the organization considers itself interwoven into that environment, it might.

Two prominent frameworks for evaluating whether an organization ought to adopt the Venezuelan philosophy and invest in adapting it for its American context are organizational ecology and institutionalism. Ecological frameworks follow the natural selection logic of biological evolution; that is, they focus on how well organizations "fit" their natural environments (Hannan and Carroll 1995). As with a species, an organization's fit with an environment is critical to its survival. If an organization's mission, form of authority, basic technology, and marketing strategy do not align with the demands of its environment, it likely will fail (Hannan and Freeman 1989, in Hannan and Carroll 1995: 27). Organizations may try to adapt these "core features" to their changed environment; however, they still often fail due to a quality called "structural inertia" (Hannan and Carroll 1995). It is difficult for organizations to restructure their core features accurately to match their new environments and consistently enough to survive multiple changes in the environment. The ecological view of organizations also requires a clear delineation

⁶ Stanford Thompson, in email correspondence with Michael Mauskapf, 21 September 2011. In Mauskapf 2011: 232.

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between an organization and its environment. If an organization can change independently of its environment, it must be considered distinct from that environment; conversely, if an environment can shift around an organization to the detriment to that organization's fitness, the environment is distinguishable from the organization.

Recently, orchestras have had to reevaluate their core features because of the struggling market for classical music.⁷ Orchestras that once were dedicated solely to making great art are now looking at including community development among their priorities. These days, it is common for orchestras to commit to community development through El Sistema programs. Accordingly, these orchestras' missions and marketing strategies will need to change. Also needing to change will be an orchestra's definition of its environment and the actors in it. Acknowledging and expanding an organization's conception of the boundaries of its organizational habitat can protect an organization's core features without compromising its quality. However, some orchestras doubt their ability to adapt, or that there is any reason to do so, and define narrowly the organization's boundaries with its environment. Change is destabilizing and can be risky for organizations. The Philadelphia Orchestra seems to have taken this perspective, overlooking an opportunity to include community development into its mission. It seems, regardless of whether founding an El Sistema program is a good strategic choice for orchestras, orchestras like the Philadelphia Orchestra most likely will fail⁸ unless they can redefine their

⁷ Mauskopf 2011: 210

⁸ The Philadelphia Orchestra declared bankruptcy in April 2011, perhaps corroborating the basic tenants of organizational ecology.

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organizational field as broader than the current conception.

Unlike ecological frameworks, institutional frameworks blur the line between organization and environment. The line itself may be socially constructed and therefore arbitrarily defined because organizations and environments are so interdependent (Scott 1995). What is socially acceptable for an organization to do depends heavily on the social pressures of its peer organizations and society at large, suggesting that the organization is deeply connected with its environment. DiMaggio and Powell (1993) call the process by which organizations change according to such social pressure *isomorphism*. In their view, three categories of social forces are involved: coercive, mimetic, and normative. In the context of El Sistema, governments and powerful civilian organizations can coerce El Sistema to adopt certain practices and technologies. The tax code is one example of an externally imposed rule that compels compliance. When organizations are uncertain (Meyer and Rowan 1977) about technologies appropriate to their goals or if those goals are not well defined, they are likely to “model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152). This mimetic process is present in the way early adopters of the Venezuelan philosophy looked to Venezuela both for inspiration and for practical ways to found a program. In the long run, continuing this mimetic process could model organizations after just a few others, which can result in homogeneity of organizational form and technologies. Normative pressures are those that come from within the profession: “the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define

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the conditions and methods of their work.”⁹ El Sistema programs are about to face an increase in normative pressures as they work to build an association. The three social forces may operate alone but most often work in unison (Mizruchi and Fein 1999: 657), and an organization is most likely to engage these social forces when it is uncertain about its future (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Institutional theory has great implications for orchestras. If an orchestra adopts an open systems philosophy, it will consider itself more embedded in and interpenetrated with its environment (Scott 1998: 145). As such, it is likely to realize the many contributors to its success. This nuanced understanding can lead an organization to adopt a strategic plan aligned with stakeholder theory, or the idea that supporting its stakeholders does not necessarily detract from its bottom line and could even improve its financial health (Freeman, Wicks, and Parmar 2004). But until an organization is sure of its standing in society and relationship to its environment, it will likely mimic the organizational structures and strategies of successful organizations. The Los Angeles Philharmonic, in founding multiple El Sistema programs in Los Angeles, showed an open systems-style environmental awareness and demonstrated isomorphic mimesis. For reasons which will be discussed later, the Philharmonic determined that including education programs in its work would help it carry out its artistic mission and social obligation to its community, presumably reinforcing its finances at the same time.¹⁰ As one of the first American organizations to explicitly adopt the Venezuelan philosophy, it modeled its El Sistema program

⁹ DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152

¹⁰ Recall that Deborah Borda spoke about “responsibility” and “survival” in her closing remarks to the Take a Stand Symposium audience, 1 February 2012.

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significantly off of the Venezuelan model.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic may also have identified the implications of resource dependence theory. The theory has two principal tenants: that organizations become interdependent because of the degree on which they rely on one another's resources, and that their actions deeply affect and even create their environments (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). A third theoretical development linked resource dependence with institutional thought: "the degree of dependence on societal resources is a crucial step in defining the organization as one serving societal resources, and thus existing in an institutional environment" (Zucker 1980). El Sistema in the United States provides an example for all three. When the Los Angeles Philharmonic decided to adopt El Sistema, it had taken stock of the crumbling fortunes of American orchestras. It also knew how closely tied its success was to public opinion, especially given that modern orchestras cannot cover their costs in ticket sales and so depend heavily on private money. Adopting El Sistema signaled to the rest of the orchestra industry that they were going to change the social role of the 21st century orchestra to align more with societal interests.

When organizations create, or "enact," their environments, they notice what is occurring around them and adapt to what they see. Their adaptations then, in turn, affect the environment, for the organization is a part of the environment and its actions are, in essence, actions of the environment. The many organizations in that environment all act independently to define and together shape the environment (Zucker 1980). Organizations then perceive that new, "enacted" environment and once again adapt. This cyclical structure is foundational to conceptions of the

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institutional environment, and its implication that an organization can help create an environment that is hospitable to its work corroborates the Los Angeles Philharmonic's adoption of El Sistema.

Another implication of the enacted environment for the Los Angeles Philharmonic and other orchestras that adopt El Sistema programs is creating a new field that includes organizations they are not used to encountering. Founding education programs has brought symphony orchestras closer to both educational institutions and nonprofits working for social good. With expanding into these fields come additional institutional pressures, since the orchestra's educational programs must now live up to the standards of these other fields. Rather than just the mimetic pressure to emulate the Venezuelans, orchestras with El Sistema programs now must conform somewhat to the normative pressures of peer educational and social work institutions and public expectations about education and the public good and also to the coercive pressure of local, state, and federal governments that have rules and regulations regarding what organizations involved in education and public work can and cannot do. Having to respond to these pressures changes orchestras' organizational structures to meet the demands of these external organizations and social influences.

A natural extension of both ecological and institutional conceptions of organizational environments is a debate about the extent to which organizations can control their futures. The resolution of this debate has clear implications for El Sistema programs and supporters in the United States. Orchestras, for one, have a large stake in the outcome of the ecological-institutional debate. Depending on its

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conclusions, to an orchestra El Sistema represents either an opportunity to create a new institutional environment that supports its newly-defined educational, community, and artistic work, or a distraction from other kinds of adaptive changes, such as innovative programming, that might realign the organizations with their environment without compromising the artistic mission of the organization.

Ecological and institutional perspectives have been useful in identifying the structural reasons not to and social pressures to adapt El Sistema programs, but they also show how individual practices have diffused from Venezuela to the United States. As was the case with the Philadelphia Orchestra, an ecological view of an organization's adaptability in relation to its environment might lead an organization to adopt relatively few practices from an institution perceived outside that environment. Those organizations that do try to adapt actively model their behavior on the strategic and technological moves of their similar and successful predecessors (Rao, Greve & Davis, 2001, in Ansari, Fis, and Zajac: 70) in the sense of early American El Sistema programs adapting the paper orchestra technique to their own purposes. A third conception argues that organization leaders scan their environments for optimal solutions to the problems they face and choose the one that seems best (Strang and Macy 2001), as was the case with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, which may have adopted El Sistema in part to attract superstar conductor and El Sistema alumnus Gustavo Dudamel to its podium. These three pressures assume that organizations make decisions rationally and as independent actors.

Institutional theory suggests a social framework for making decisions. As a

new idea or innovation, called a “technology” in the literature, is adapted by an increasing number of firms, the technology becomes part of the social identity of the industry such that other firms hoping to join the industry are also likely to adapt the technology to become “legitimate” within that changed field (Tolbert and Zucker 1983). For instance, that the Los Angeles Philharmonic and other orchestras have adopted and adapted El Sistema for their own communities, they may be changing the social definition of an orchestra’s role in its community, putting normative social pressures on organizations like the Philadelphia Orchestra to conform to this new industry standard.¹¹ These social pressures to adopt programs are strong enough to encourage organizations to adopt a technology even if it does not match the organizations’ needs. Meyer and Rowan (1977) call this the adoption of a “myth,” a decoupling of the reality of reasons for a program’s success from practices that are but peripheral to that success. If American El Sistema organizations identify the paper orchestra technique as one of the reasons El Sistema has been successful in Venezuela, they will have adopted a myth since the practice is used in only one Venezuelan núcleo.

Ecological and institutional accounts for adaptation have been reconciled by analyzing the timeline of diffusion. Early analysis suggested a two-stage model in which early adopters of innovation are motivated by efficiency (a rational decision making framework), but later ones are motivated by legitimacy (a social decision

¹¹ Evidently, the Philadelphia Orchestra finally tried to adopt an El Sistema program once it identified the potential success of Philadelphia’s Play On, Philly, but the program’s leadership had already determined not to work with the orchestra because of its initial reluctance to partner. See: Stanford Thompson, in email correspondence with Michael Mauskopf, 21 September 2011. In Mauskopf 2011: 232.

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making framework) (Tolbert and Zucker 1983). Efficiency is somewhat difficult to define in the adoption of a new social program because, unlike the adoption of an expensive but potentially lucrative streamlined manufacturing process, social programs by definition should serve society at large. However, El Sistema programs offer orchestras and other adopting organizations closer and more stable ties to their communities, and through improved public relations El Sistema programs might make an orchestra more attractive to donors and prospective audience members. Orchestras like the Los Angeles Philharmonic have adopted El Sistema early for these efficiency reasons, and some organizations like the Philadelphia Orchestra tried to adopt later for social ones.

More recent theorists (Cebon and Love 2008; Donaldson 1995; Lounsbury 2007, in Kennedy and Fiss 2009: 911) have criticized and extended the two-stage model, contending that it is possible and even likely that firms desire at once both efficiency and legitimacy (Kennedy and Fiss 2009). Such a hybrid also makes sense for the adoption and adaptation of El Sistema programs and practices: the Los Angeles Philharmonic paved its own way for its legitimacy by expanding and enacting a new organizational environment, and the Philadelphia Orchestra probably identified that El Sistema programs would not drain but rather bolster its resources. In a sense, it is efficient to adopt a useful program, even if social pressures are the underlying reason. Some data also suggest the social benefits of adopting a successful strategy before others motivates firms to adopt an innovation, but fears of economic or social losses motivate later adopters (Kennedy and Fiss 2009). This pattern was clearly present in the cases of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and

Philadelphia Orchestras.

Adaptation can result in faddish cycles of innovation adoption and abandonment, especially when organizations succumb to confirmation bias by exclusively focusing on success stories (Strang and Macy 2001). While this research assumes competition for high performance motivates firms to erroneously model behavior on successful organizations, the problem is consistent with the reasons organizations succumb to mimetic pressures. Under this theory, American El Sistema programs would do well to notice the imperfections in the Venezuelan program, which are rarely shown in public, and learn from the ways the Venezuelans have approached these imperfections.

In general, an organization's conception of its environment and its role in that environment are foundational to the ways it operates. Organizations in technical environments, or those with more "materialist, resource-based features" (Scott 1998: 131), are more likely to conceive of and actually exist in a world that is best described by ecology. In many technical environments, like manufacturing, organizations exist in an extremely turbulent world (Emery and Trist 1965) and are forced to compete for survival. Institutional environments, or those featuring more "symbolic, cultural factors" (Scott 1998: 131), affect organizations more beholden to public interest (Zucker 1980). Ultimately, all environments are at once technical and institutional, for an organization cannot exist independently of its environment, whether it is dependent on its resources (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) or bending to its social pressures (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). El Sistema programs similarly inhabit both realms, and their seat at this nexus will be explored in the following pages.

Part I: El Sistema in Venezuela

Brief History

As the story is often told, El Sistema began in a Caracas parking garage in early 1975. Economist and musician José Antonio Abreu, then thirty-six, was frustrated that Venezuelans could not participate in classical music. Caracas, at the time, was blossoming as a cosmopolitan city, partly due to the Europeans who immigrated there after the Second World War.¹² An oil boom attracted and built a wealthy class and the resulting increase in tourism further benefited the economy. But despite the proliferation of European art and culture, there were few classical music conservatories in which Venezuelan music students could study, and the few orchestras in Caracas were almost entirely filled with European musicians, including many Italians, lured by high salaries.¹³ To Abreu, the situation was “painful to see as a music student,” Abreu said at a recent conference in Los Angeles.¹⁴ That few Venezuelan classical musicians could study and perform in the country’s orchestras “undermined the country,” he felt.¹⁵ The prospects for Venezuelan classical musicians were so bleak that a bassoonist, upon graduating from the Caracas conservatory in the 1970s, reportedly burned his bassoon in front of the conservatory, saying, “Why not? I will never be able to play this bassoon in a symphony orchestra

¹² María Guinand, director of the international touring choir Schola Cantorum, in Tunstall 55

¹³ Tunstall 55

¹⁴ José Antonio Abreu speech to Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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in my country.”¹⁶ “The incident,” according to El Sistema’s deputy executive director, Valdemar Rodríguez, “made a lasting impression on Maestro Abreu. He vowed to find some way that Venezuelan musicians could actually do something with the music they learn and love.”¹⁷ So Abreu announced his plans to start a youth orchestra in Caracas, further planning to expand the program once it was established.¹⁸

The day came and Abreu waited in the garage with a collection of fifty music stands, expecting or at least hoping to fill the room with one hundred students.¹⁹ In his words, Abreu was “pompous” to expect “hundreds” to attend²⁰, but to his dismay, only eleven young kids arrived.²¹ But when a small boy entered the room with his violin as if nothing had happened, and he opened his case and sat down, and I said, “No, I have to do it.”²² Abreu resolved to build the program and, in his words, “asked them to come with me on this journey”²³ to “evolve into a world class orchestra.”²⁴ Word of the orchestra spread, and more young Caracas musicians came every day. By the second rehearsal, there were forty musicians, by the third, seventy-five, and by the fourth, young people began coming from beyond Caracas.²⁵

¹⁶ Tunstall 57

¹⁷ Tunstall 57

¹⁸ Tunstall 73

¹⁹ José Antonio Abreu, acceptance speech for TED Prize, 2009.

²⁰ José Antonio Abreu speech to Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

²¹ Tunstall 36

²² Alberto Arvelo, “Tocar y Luchar.” Video documentary, 2006.

²³ Tunstall 59

²⁴ José Antonio Abreu speech to Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

²⁵ Ibid.

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The program grew quickly and right away. By April 3rd, 1975, Abreu's orchestra, which he called the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra (SBYO),²⁶ was ready to perform its first concert.²⁷ The Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited the group to perform a concert in its building, which Abreu credits with having an "enormous impact" on the program.²⁸ As a result of his new international connections, Abreu began thinking about how his program could grow and exist in other cities.²⁹ In July, Mexican President Luis Echeverría Álvarez visited Abreu's program and called the orchestra to Mexico, launching SBYO's international career.³⁰ Mexico subsequently built a youth orchestra, which visited Caracas within a month.³¹

Within a year, Abreu took the SBYO to an international youth orchestra festival in Scotland. The group performed to critical acclaim, and many of his students auditioned successfully into a select all-festival orchestra, an impressive feat for a new youth ensemble.³² Upon their return, Venezuelan president Carlos Andrés Pérez worked with Abreu to incorporate El Sistema into his Ministry of Youth to combat poverty.³³ Abreu identifies his program's rapid success and early government support as the foundations for the long-term growth of El Sistema.³⁴ El Sistema's continued positive international image and influence have helped the program persist

²⁶ Abreu named his orchestra after Venezuela's famous second president, who was partially responsible for Venezuela's independence from Spain.

²⁷ José Antonio Abreu speech to Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ José Antonio Abreu speech to Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

³⁴ Tunstall 2012

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through seven political administrations, ranging from center-right to the current populist Chávez administration that took office in February 1999.

By the 1980s, there were more than fifty El Sistema sites — called “núcleos” in Spanish — in Venezuela that provided buildings and music instruction to its students. And today the institution, now called the Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar (FundaMusical), maintains ninety sites occupying almost every state in Venezuela. Some cities have three or four programs and El Sistema officials roughly estimate that 310,000 students are involved.³⁵ The Chávez administration contributes the equivalent of \$64 million to El Sistema programs yearly, and foundations and donors contribute additionally.³⁶ Originally an orchestral program, El Sistema now boasts a burgeoning national choral music program, and some sites also focus on jazz and traditional Venezuelan music. In Barquisimeto, Abreu’s hometown, a choir of special needs students includes a large section of deaf students, who participate through choreography using signature white gloves. Other performers have Down syndrome.³⁷ “White Hands Choirs” have since developed in fourteen other states and serve over seven hundred special needs students.³⁸

El Sistema Philosophy

Analyzing the steps to El Sistema’s proliferation across Venezuela suggests that the program’s inspiring ideals are the motor behind its growth. From the start,

³⁵ Eduardo Méndez in Daniel J. Wakin, “Fighting Poverty, Armed with Violins.” *The New York Times*, 15 February 2012.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Alberto Arvelo, “Tocar y Luchar.” Video documentary, 2006.

³⁸ FundaMusical, “Ensembles of Venezuela.” 2012.

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Abreu had a philosophical grounding for his work. His own background as a music student fueled his passion for community: he first learned to play the piano in class settings with other students; students were expected to help their peers achieve mastery. When he attended conservatory, however, he found that his peers “studied and practiced alone,” a “very hard and arid way of studying.”³⁹ Abreu built his program on group learning and peer teaching, which favored the success of the group more than the individual. He also intended these interactions to benefit students as individual contributors to society:

To me, an orchestra is first and foremost a way to encourage better human development within children. That is why I always said, and I say today, that this is not an artistic program but a human development program through music. It is very important to be clear about this. Because everything that happened then, and everything that has happened since then, has been a direct consequence of this concept.⁴⁰

Human development has always been principal goal of El Sistema, and over the years its meaning and methods have been further explained. The Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar has determined seven philosophical foundations for its work:⁴¹

³⁹ Tunstall 57

⁴⁰ José Antonio Abreu, in Tunstall 71

⁴¹ FundaMusical, “Mission and Vision.” 2012.

- Art as a Social Right
- Training, Rehabilitation and Social Integration
- Individual, Family, and Community
- Physical Poverty is Overcome by the Spiritual Richness Music Provides
- Music Finds Its Way into the Peoples' Daily Lives
- The False Popular-Academic Music Dichotomy Solved
- A Flexible, Open, Democratic Managerial Style

The philosophical underpinnings of El Sistema focus on personal development as a way to build community and Venezuelan culture. Music, FundaMusical believes, “nourishes and is nourished by that day-by-day pace, awakening its aesthetical sense, encouraging without artificial postures the emergence of harmony and beauty in places such as the city, the country and even within the very individual.”⁴² It supports its own youth through the philosophy that music can provide “self-concept, self-esteem, self-confidence, discipline, patience, and commitment,” helping them see how their actions impact collective goals, and building a supportive environment of families and community members. At the root of its community philosophy is the idea that music provides “spiritual” richness through keened “state of mind, ethical principles, and intellectual and emotional skills conducive to overcom[ing] poverty.” Frequent performances integrate music further into Venezuelan culture and bridge the divide between elite, “academic” classical music and the majority of the Venezuelan population. Within its claim that art is a social right, FundaMusical contends, “The democratization of music, its conception as a fundamental social program for the education of the new generations, is imperative as a means of social organization and

⁴² FundaMusical, “Mission and Vision.” 2012.

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development.”⁴³ It further builds Venezuelan society by training its students, including many abandoned children, in instrument repair and manufacture, as well as gives special needs students opportunities to participate in music.

Because its organizational structure is branched, featuring a strong central government with many satellite núcleos, FundaMusical ultimately holds executive power over its núcleos and can choose how much autonomy to grant them (Dees Anderson, and Wei-Skillern 2004). This power dynamic allows FundaMusical to control many aspects of its núcleos’ operations, including the degree to which the aforementioned philosophies are implemented and the ability to enforce quality.

Community development is at the core of El Sistema’s social mission, and organizational theory demonstrates the ways music can build society. In an “open system” conception of organizational environments, little distinction can be made between an organization and its environment: “all of the “materials” used to create organizations — resources and equipment, but also personnel and procedures — are obtained from the environment” (Scott 1998: 145). Arbitrarily focusing first on the non-organizational environment, in this case defined strictly and arbitrarily as anything that exists or happens when people are not working, people are shaped by the interactions they carry on with other people and institutions outside of work. Those people return to work changed, perhaps looking at old problems in new ways. Work, in turn, shapes those people, who return to and change their communities. In reality, the process is not so dyadic: of course, interactions between an organization’s personnel and its outside environment occur constantly, so frequently, in fact, that the

⁴³ Ibid.

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interpenetration of these two worlds makes them nearly indistinguishable.

Organizations are, whether they like it or not, part of their surrounding communities.

El Sistema programs are no exception, and Abreu's philosophy has embraced this role. Music has the profound ability to affect people and perhaps even effect great and positive change in their personal development. An El Sistema núcleo "partly interacts with and constitutes the object" of its surroundings,⁴⁴ and by releasing musically affected people back into their communities promotes positive change in those communities. But it should only make sense that because people are constantly exchanged with the environment, an organization that aligns its work with serving its immediate and extended communities should look very different from place to place and cannot be precisely replicated. Organizations that focus on technical aspects, such as manufacturing and other organizations that define their work as more separate from societal resources than organizations dependent on social approval (Zucker 1980), can better be transplanted, for even though their members make up and interact with their communities, their products do not make up the communities themselves. (Coca-Cola products are sold in and affect behavior in communities, but clearly they are not the people that live there). But organizations that focus on social work produce changed people, who naturally change their communities, both of which vary from place to place. Different organizational structures are required to build and serve communities differently. When Abreu and FundaMusical articulate and implement their philosophy and pedagogy regarding their organization's embeddedness in their communities, these theories come to life.

⁴⁴ Karl Weick 1979 "The Social Psychology of Organizations": 165, in Scott 1998

El Sistema Pedagogy

FundaMusical's — and therefore all núcleos' — pedagogical priorities reflect its philosophies of personal growth and community advancement. All are welcome to attend El Sistema programs and the most dedicated and skilled may enter advanced classes or audition into one of the program's higher-tier regional or national orchestras. In this sense, El Sistema's pedagogy is rooted in a decidedly “meritocratic” system.

FundaMusical also identifies as “key elements for El Sistema's social and musical successes” the rehearsal of sectionals, or small subunits of the orchestra, to then assemble to the larger group, as well as “an original orchestral repertoire sequential program designed according to the characteristics and needs of the youngsters involved.”⁴⁵ The repertoire used includes many canonical classical works, including works by Beethoven, Brahms, Mahler, and Sibelius. Reports conflict whether the Venezuelans arrange these pieces to the level of their ensemble,⁴⁶ or whether they introduce entire pieces in original form that are of appropriate levels to their students.⁴⁷ It is likely that both are the case, depending on the location, since núcleos often adapt techniques and practices specifically for the needs of their students. Less standardized repertoire choices include both classical and popular

⁴⁵ FundaMusical, “Mission and Vision.” 2012. The sequential approach to repertoire learning is consistent with the Suzuki Method, a Japanese music education philosophy that diffused throughout the United States in the late 1950s and that is still popular today. The Venezuelans were aware of and actively incorporated Suzuki practices, among others, into their pedagogy. See Tunstall 78.

⁴⁶ Tunstall 2012

⁴⁷ Take A Stand Symposium session with FundaMusical Executive Director Eduardo Méndez and Institutional Development Officer Rodrigo Guerrero, 31 January 2012.

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Venezuelan styles,⁴⁸ as well as themes from American popular culture such as “The Simpsons” and “The Pink Panther.”⁴⁹

Instrumental techniques are similarly standardized. Early in El Sistema’s development, “master teachers” established the basic pedagogy for each instrument, passing it down to their students, who passed it to theirs, and so on.⁵⁰ The central organization also stipulates repertoire “bowings” — that is, the type of bow strokes that string players should use when they play certain pieces.⁵¹ Both instrumental techniques and the repertoire are said to be meticulously codified in a document hundreds of pages long.⁵²

Standardization, broadly speaking, increases an organization’s process efficiency, makes its product and service quality more predictable, and defines its processes and product quality quantitatively (Ritzer 2002). In the Venezuelan El Sistema’s unified curriculum, standardization positively affects efficiency, calculability and predictability. In terms of efficiency, the core canon and standard bowings (calculable — or uniform — pedagogies) mean that when they travel to play with others across the country, students and teachers can make music immediately using the same pieces and without taking time to discuss technical details. When families move to other cities and become involved in new núcleos, their children can predictably expect a similar pedagogy and can continue learning from where they left

⁴⁸ FundaMusical, “Mission and Vision.” 2012.

⁴⁹ Abreu Fellows, “The Fellows first week in Venezuela!” *YouTube*.

⁵⁰ Tunstall 86

⁵¹ FundaMusical, “Mission and Vision.” 2012; Leon Botstein speech to the Take a Stand Symposium 30 January 2011.

⁵² Tunstall 176, although this document appears not to be readily available to the public.

off. In that some technical decisions are made centrally, standardization does eliminate the creative “problem-solving” lesson of devising one’s own bowings, but some defend the practice’s use and contend that it does not limit higher-level imagination “because the music is indeterminate” and “people make different things out of it.”⁵³

Beyond these significant but few standardizations, the Venezuelans remain fiercely committed to teaching autonomy and the creative process of developing new teaching techniques, so much so, in fact, that they are reticent to write any of it down⁵⁴ for, as Abreu said, “the day we define a system, it’s already dead.”⁵⁵ Núcleos invent their own complementary pedagogies in response to the kinds of students involved in the program, their abilities, and sometimes to make up for a lack of resources. For example, White Hands Choirs developed a pedagogy of body movement for its special needs students who could not sing because they were deaf or had Down Syndrome, and the first Venezuelan núcleo built an orchestra of papier-mâché instruments because it did not have access to sufficient numbers of real instruments when it opened.⁵⁶

Of course, these innovations themselves are not critical to the success of El Sistema in Venezuela, and it would be a mistake to think that either the White Hands Choir or paper orchestra is at the pedagogical core of the Venezuelan program.

⁵³ Leon Botstein speech to the Take a Stand Symposium 30 January 2011.

⁵⁴ Reinforced three times at the 2012 Take a Stand Symposium by: Eduardo Méndez, 31 January; Josbel Puche of La Rinconada, 1 February; José Antonio Abreu, also 1 February

⁵⁵ José Antonio Abreu, in Tunstall 173

⁵⁶ Tunstall 156, 202. Presumably, the Venezuelan núcleo had some instruments; otherwise the eleven students in the garage would not have been able to play.

Neither is ubiquitous: only one núcleo in Venezuela uses the paper orchestra technique, and while White Hands Choirs have multiplied throughout the country, they are a special program designed for an important but small section of El Sistema's students.

El Sistema was founded as an orchestral program and naturally that portion of its pedagogy is most strongly developed. Because they are comparatively new, choral curricula and pedagogy often lag behind in development and are of less uniform quality.⁵⁷ To improve its quality, precedence suggests it is likely that FundaMusical will increase its standardization and monitoring of its choral program.⁵⁸

Leadership

Abreu is the leader of the El Sistema movement. He has served as the spokesperson for the program and articulated El Sistema's hallmark philosophy locally, nationally, and abroad for thirty-six years. In addition, Abreu, who founded the program, personally oversees its development in each núcleo, and even takes part in the Venezuelan government. Having already supported El Sistema through its Ministry of Youth for seven years, in 1983, the Venezuelan government appointed Abreu Minister of Culture.⁵⁹ That year, as minister, Abreu built a university-level music school to give ambitious Venezuelan classical musicians the long-awaited opportunity for professional study in the country.⁶⁰ By connecting El Sistema to both ministries, Abreu strengthened El Sistema's chances for longevity and made clear its

⁵⁷ Tunstall 209

⁵⁸ For more on program quality monitors, please see p. 74.

⁵⁹ Tunstall 82

⁶⁰ Ibid.

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dual role as a cultural and social health organization.

As he does today, in El Sistema's early years Abreu blended his deep philosophical convictions and vision for his program with impressive political adroitness,⁶¹ persuasive ability, and formidable management skills, which perhaps stemmed from his graduate-level training in economics.⁶² Whatever skills he did not have or roles he did not have time to fill, Abreu was able to recruit individuals whom he thought possessed the necessary attributes. Many of his recruits, however, doubted their own abilities, but he was able to convince them to serve his mission anyway. Abreu told Bolivia Bottome, now the FundaMusical's director for institutional development and international affairs, "you must come and work with me" even though she knew nothing about music. Lydie Pérez similarly had little experience with music, but Abreu supported her through financial and administrative tasks. Lennar Acosta, now the conductor of a núcleo orchestra, "told the Maestro I couldn't possibly do that, but he insisted-and I discovered I could."⁶³ Abreu supported these individuals in their new roles and helped them succeed; all three are now pillars of the El Sistema leadership.

Abreu also supports his program's students. There is perhaps no more visible an example than Gustavo Dudamel, an El Sistema alumnus who now conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic as well as the Gothenburg Symphony and El Sistema's crown jewel, the Simón Bolívar Orchestra of Venezuela. As Dudamel tells it, "the Maestro came to Barquisimeto to hear us play, and he said to me 'You are very

⁶¹ Jeremy Eichler, "There is Magic in the Music." *The Boston Globe*, 11 July 2010.

⁶² Abreu earned his PhD in Petroleum Economics from the Venezuelan Universidad Católica Andres Bello.

⁶³ Tunstall 79

talented. I want to support you.’ So I went to Caracas and became the concertmaster of the National Children’s Orchestra. I was sixteen years old... And he soon said to me, ‘Okay you are my conducting pupil now.’ And I worked with him every day, and when I was eighteen I became conductor of the orchestra.”⁶⁴

Just five years later, in 2004, Dudamel was touring the world as a conducting phenomenon. He spent time with the world’s great conductors, including Daniel Barenboim and Claudio Abbado, and guest conducted the world’s great orchestras, such as the New York Philharmonic. His high energy and joyfulness were often compared to Leonard Bernstein, prompting the New York Philharmonic to encourage Dudamel to use one of Bernstein’s batons when he conducted the orchestra.⁶⁵ The next year, Dudamel took his first full-time international conducting position as conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony and became music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 2007.⁶⁶

Dudamel’s meteoric rise in popularity has made him an unofficial spokesman for El Sistema. He is the face of the LA Philharmonic’s *Youth Orchestra LA* (YOLA) program, perhaps the most influential American El Sistema-inspired programs, and has been featured in many documentaries and TV specials, including a CBS News *60 Minutes* program that gave YOLA and El Sistema recognition in the United States.⁶⁷ As spokesman, Dudamel credits his success to El Sistema, which, in his words, “has

⁶⁴ Tunstall interview with Gustavo Dudamel, Tunstall 21-22

⁶⁵ Anthony Tomassini, “When Expectations and Exuberance are Both Running High.” *The New York Times*. 1 December 2007.

⁶⁶ Tunstall 14

⁶⁷ Bob Simon, “Gustavo Dudamel’s Musical Vision.” *CBS News*, 16 May 2010.

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made everything possible for me.”⁶⁸

Part of El Sistema’s influence on Dudamel were the many conducting opportunities and the musical lessons it gave him, but Dudamel sees an even stronger impact. “I studied music since I was four years old, and from that moment I entered a family, and that family has taught me things; not only musical things but the things I have to face in life.”⁶⁹ Dudamel references El Sistema’s community focus, one of Abreu’s founding philosophies. Excellence, another part of Abreu’s community vision, is also important to Dudamel: “Any community without results has no reason for being.”⁷⁰ And, at its most basic level, Dudamel echoes Abreu’s concern for human development when he said, to a packed amphitheater at his opening night as music director of the LA Philharmonic, “Music is a fundamental right.”⁷¹

Although Dudamel is now arguably the most recognized champion of El Sistema, he reminds his followers that Abreu is the program’s mastermind. In an interview with researcher and author Tricia Tunstall, Dudamel explained Abreu’s leadership as the sole reason for the program’s success:

“There is one simple reason that the Sistema is so successful,” Gustavo Dudamel says to me when we speak about his musical roots in Venezuela. “It is the Maestro. He is the soul of it — not only the creator, but also the soul. From the very beginning, he has had the capacity to know everyone’s needs, to take care of everyone. He gives this care not only to the people closest to

⁶⁸ Tunstall 24

⁶⁹ Gustavo Dudamel in Tunstall 2012

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Gustavo Dudamel, quoted by Deborah Borda in opening speech to Take a Stand Symposium, 30 January 2012

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him, but to everybody! He knows the little boy in San Juan de los Morros, six years old, playing the violin. He knows the little girl in Merida, beginning the clarinet.” Dudamel spreads his arms wide as if to embrace a great orchestra. “He has time for everybody,” he says. “I don’t understand how it is possible, but it is very beautiful.”⁷²

Abreu is at once the founder, inspiration, general operations supervisor, international symbol, and grandfather of the program. A more compelling public speaker is hard to find; Abreu speaks with extraordinary polish, frequently delivering inspirational speeches such as the one he presented to the international community on receiving an award from the TED foundation:

We hope that TED can contribute in a full and fundamental way to the building of this new era in the teaching of music, in which the social, communal, spiritual and vindicatory aims of the child and the adolescent become a beacon and a goal for a vast social mission. No longer putting society at the service of art, and much less at the services of monopolies of the elite, but instead art at the service of society, at the service of the weakest, at the service of the children, at the service of the sick, at the service of the vulnerable, and at the service of all those who cry for vindication through the spirit of their human condition and the raising up of their dignity.⁷³

His rhetorical power, ability to influence others through his words, and understanding of economics have helped Abreu build the program. That he has been the principal driving force in this development naturally organized El Sistema into a “unitary

⁷² Tricia Tunstall interview with Gustavo Dudamel, Tunstall 89

⁷³ José Antonio Abreu, acceptance speech for TED Prize, 2009.

context” (Warren 1967, in Scott 1998: 127-128). Final authority rests with Abreu at the top of the organizational structure, making Abreu very difficult to replace. Abreu, however, is not an aloof manager; rather, he personally founded many of the country’s núcleos, attends openings often, visits functioning núcleos frequently, and keeps in constant contact with them. That Abreu both manages on the highest level and also works directly with the núcleo leaders and music teachers on the ground further consolidates organizational power into the unitary context Warren described. Well-developed organizations can survive leadership transitions by decreasing the importance of individuals within the organization (Max Weber, in Hannan and Carroll 1995), but it seems Abreu may be too embedded in all aspects of the institution to replace so easily when he can no longer lead.

It is unclear how well FundaMusical is organized for the post-Abreu years. FundaMusical seems to have developed a highly bureaucratic system,⁷⁴ which should insulate it from a major leadership change. The power-mitigating role of high bureaucracy contrasts strongly with the strength gained by concentrating power in one person, such as Abreu, and the interplay between these forces is unpredictable. However, what becomes of FundaMusical once Abreu leaves remains to be seen. Abreu and FundaMusical recently appointed Eduardo Méndez executive director, but Abreu still travels the world with his orchestras, speaking about his program’s virtues, and reportedly is still involved in the daily work of the organization. He continues to be the program’s “soul”— a role he may continue even after he can no longer travel

⁷⁴ FundaMusical explains its organizational structure, too: a Board of Directors, Executive Board, and General Management; among mine planning and budget, administration and general services, human relationship, production, and development.

or lead. But, now in his seventies, Abreu reportedly does suffer from several health problems, which makes the need for “planned durability” (Hannan and Carroll 1995) all the more important to ensure El Sistema’s long-term survival. It is possible that Abreu divided the tasks he once undertook among several people, and if he also built a communication structure that will help these several people function as one; however, if Abreu has been as perceptive and skilled choosing the next generation of leaders as he has been in choosing a supporting cast in the past, FundaMusical may be in good hands even beyond the term of Abreu’s active day-to-day leadership.

International Reactions

Abreu’s influence on classical music through El Sistema has two main components: addressing the social problems of his country and the world, and rejuvenating classical music internationally through excellence and joyful performances. When the Venezuelan government incorporated El Sistema into its social plan in 1976, it signaled its belief that the program could improve national welfare. Mexican conductor and former Dallas Symphony Orchestra music director Eduardo Mata explained the benefits of the program and its transferability to other countries: “The Youth Orchestra project has the potential to change the sociological profile of a country with the characteristics like those found in Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, or Mexico. I thought the project was fabulous in itself, fabulous in its potential to be applied in other countries.”⁷⁵ Today, El Sistema programs can be found in over twenty-five countries, and not just those with Central and South American

⁷⁵ Eduardo Mata in Alberto Arvelo, “Tocar y Luchar.” Video documentary, 2006.

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characteristics.⁷⁶ Anglo countries, such as England, Scotland, Australia, Canada, and the United States, have adopted the philosophy, as have the European countries Austria, Italy, and Portugal. South Korea and India also have programs. Since 2008, international notoriety from the Asturias Prize, Glenn Gould Prize, Harvard School of Public Health and Q Prizes, Latin Grammy Doctorate Honoris Causa, Polar Music Prize, Frankfurt Music Prize, Erasmus Prize, and the Seoul Peace Prize have contributed to the program's international expansion.⁷⁷

Many prominent musical figures have endorsed El Sistema, both a boost for the program and a propaganda coup for the Venezuelan government. Leading international conductor Simon Rattle, who serves as music director of the Berlin Philharmonic, recognized the musical quality of El Sistema and its potential impact on classical music. Praising El Sistema's high musical standards while quietly critiquing the quality of orchestras internationally, Rattle said during a visit to Venezuela, "To hear yesterday an orchestra of eight hundred not only playing Tchaikovsky wonderfully but all phrasing in the same way and all being able to communicate backwards and forwards...[pause]...is unusual enough."⁷⁸ As an ensemble, El Sistema's premiere group rivals premiere international orchestras not just in technique but may surpass their internal cohesion. Such strong musical values and social consciousness led Rattle to claim, "the future of classical music" is "here, in Venezuela"⁷⁹ and conductor Claudio Abbado to call the program "the most

⁷⁶ FundaMusical, "El Sistema as a Model." 2012.

⁷⁷ Listed in Tunstall 93

⁷⁸ Alberto Arvelo, "Tocar y Luchar." Video documentary, 2006.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

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important project in the music world in our time.”⁸⁰ The high musical caliber of the Bolívars and their joy for music led legendary tenor Plácido Domingo to say he “never felt so moved, not only because of the emotion [in their playing of the music] but also, I must say, because of the quality.”⁸¹ Sensing quality and joy, audiences around the world have received the Bolívars with standing ovations.

In February 2012, the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra and the Los Angeles Philharmonic performed Mahler’s Eighth Symphony in both Los Angeles and Caracas. The trip may prove to cement El Sistema’s place in history as a political ambassador. Between the generally anti-socialist American public and a socialist Venezuelan government, musical performance can apparently bypass political differences. *The Los Angeles Times* commented that this partnership was creating “international and generational well-being,” what one might consider the greatest extension of Abreu’s philosophy of community. It might, in Abreu’s words, “accomplish more than any diplomatic mission.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Tunstall 121.

⁸² José Antonio Abreu speech to the Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

Part II: El Sistema in the United States

History

Almost immediately at its founding, El Sistema inspired citizens of countries around the world to form their own programs; however, it was not until Dudamel's appointment to the directorship of the Los Angeles Philharmonic for the 2009-2010 orchestra season that many Americans became aware of the Venezuelan program. In February 2008, *60 Minutes* featured Dudamel in a special edition, "Gustavo the Great,"⁸³ a video that many at the Take a Stand Symposium credited with first exposing them to El Sistema.⁸⁴ The first portion of the interview focused on Dudamel, his skill, and his arrival on the international scene, but the second showcased his Venezuelan roots and announced that he will work with the LA Philharmonic to bring El Sistema to Los Angeles. In July 2008, Abreu spoke at the National Performing Arts Convention in Denver, Colorado, and shifted the conversation from what is going on in Venezuela to what can happen in the United States.⁸⁵ Jesse Rosen, president of the League of American Orchestras, commented on the experience, "He elevated people's aspirations about what it means to be an artist."⁸⁶ Because Dudamel inspired them to think about music this holistic way, interested Americans began looking to his roots in Venezuela as a new model for music education and the orchestra.

⁸³ Bob Simon, "Gustavo Dudamel's Musical Vision." *CBS News*, 16 May 2010.

⁸⁴ Informal poll at Abreu Fellows Needs Assessment Presentation, 30 January 2012.

⁸⁵ Tunstall 92; see also "Denver, Colorado: National Performing Arts Convention, Taking Action Together." *Participedia*, 23 December 2011.

⁸⁶ Tunstall 93

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In 2009, Abreu accepted the TED Prize for his work with El Sistema. TED, or Technology, Entertainment, and Design, annually offers three individuals the \$100,000 prize and “One Wish to Change the World” by leveraging the “TED community’s exceptional array of talent and resources.”⁸⁷ Abreu wished that TED:

Would help create and document a special training program for at least fifty gifted young musicians, passionate for their art and for social justice, and dedicated to developing El Sistema in the US and other countries.⁸⁸

Abreu’s wish came true. With the help of Mark Churchill, then dean of Preparatory and Continuing Education at the New England Conservatory, who founded a support organization for El Sistema programs that he called *El Sistema USA*, the fundraising efforts of TED members, and a documentary, TED launched a fellowship program to carry Abreu’s vision forward.

Annually, ten young, gifted musicians are invited to participate in the “Abreu Fellows Program” at the New England Conservatory. As Fellows, these musicians undergo one year of intense training in sociology, teaching, and program development. The experience climaxes with five to six weeks immersed in the Venezuelan El Sistema, during which time Fellows visit núcleos across Venezuela. Fellows teach in the núcleos, bringing their American conservatory and education training to Venezuela, and absorb teaching techniques particular to each núcleo with the idea of bringing both the techniques and their spirit back to the United States. Upon concluding their time in Venezuela, each Fellow spends a short internship period with an American El Sistema program before leaving to start his or her own or

⁸⁷ TED, “About the TED Prize.” 2012.

⁸⁸ TED, “José Abreu.” 2012.

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to work full time at an existing program.

Fellows have been successfully placed in important El Sistema programs around the country. Currently in its third year, most of its thirty graduated Fellows are teachers, executive directors, and researchers in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Atlanta, West Valley City, Utah, Durham, North Carolina, Brighton, Massachusetts, and Canada, among others. Many of these Fellows are leaders in the national and international movement: of the first class alone, conductor Jonathan Govias is a prolific researcher, writer, and symposium organizer, and he maintains an active presence on his personal blog and El Sistema USA website; trombonist Dan Berkowitz was hired midway through his Abreu Fellowship year to manage the Los Angeles Philharmonic's YOLA program; French hornist Christine Witkowski was hired by a YOLA partner, the Heart of Los Angeles, Inc., an educational and athletic community organization, to be executive director of the *YOLA at HOLA* El Sistema program; Dantes Rameau founded the *Atlanta Music Project* and is its executive director; Stanford Thompson founded *Play On, Philly* and was recently awarded a \$1 million grant from the Seed the Dream Foundation to open additional sites within Philadelphia; Lorrie Heagy was named "Alaska Teacher of the Year" in 2011 for founding and teaching an El Sistema program in Juneau; Álvaro Rodas founded a program in Corona, New York; and David Malek and Rebecca Levi are program directors at Boston's Conservatory Lab Charter School.

Orchestras and community organizations have taken interest in El Sistema and have founded, hosted, and partnered with El Sistema programs. The Los Angeles Philharmonic hosts one of the most prominent American El Sistema programs. In

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2007, the LA Philharmonic started *Youth Orchestras LA*, a program that manages two youth orchestras in Los Angeles. YOLA partners with community organizations and public civic centers to build these orchestras. The Philharmonic also has taken an important role in the American El Sistema community, using the web to share research documents, philosophical essays on El Sistema, and internal draft documents on joint venture agreements and job descriptions, all for other El Sistema programs to adapt to their own purposes. It also has organized professional conferences on El Sistema, attracting visitors from around the world.

The most recent conference, called the Take a Stand Symposium, took place over three days at the end of January 2012. The symposium was an important event in the history of El Sistema in the United States. About 300 people from thirteen countries and twenty-seven states attended the conference representing many of the El Sistema programs across the country. Deans of American music conservatories, interested retirees, researchers, and young people looking to start their own programs also were in attendance.

Administrators and núcleo teachers from Venezuela's program gave talks and hosted workshops, and founder José Antonio Abreu gave the keynote speech. Workshops covered the history and social mission of El Sistema, teaching techniques, new directions in American El Sistema repertory choices and technology to share repertory remotely, international, community center, after-school, and school program structures, building positive organizational cultures, and ways to communicate program vision and impact with the public. Some attendees visited local Los Angeles music and social programs. The Philharmonic also officially unveiled a new

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partnership with Bard College and the Longy School of Music — a music teacher training program modeled on the philosophies of El Sistema. The event was capped with several musical performances, including a joint performance of Simón Bolívar Orchestra and a select group of YOLA students, as well as a concert of Mahler’s “Symphony of a Thousand” by the SBO, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and over eight hundred singers from local Los Angeles-area choirs.

The long-term impact of the Symposium remains to be seen. It may have galvanized the American El Sistema movement. Arguably, the most important conversation at the symposium focused on developing an association of El Sistema programs with the purposes of sharing information, facilitating interactions between programs, investing in formal program evaluation, and approaching major foundations as a united organization capable of receiving, managing, and dispersing large donations. An official association would be an important step in promoting and sustaining El Sistema programs nationwide.

The Abreu Fellows, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and many other community, civic, and individual leaders are working to establish El Sistema-inspired programs across the United States. As of February 2012, fifty-four programs existed throughout the United States, and new ones soon to begin functioning were announced at the Symposium.⁸⁹ The next sections of this paper will discuss the challenges to adaptation, the specific techniques individual program use to overcome them, and the large scale diffusion processes involved in El Sistema being adapted to the United States.

⁸⁹ 2011-2012 Abreu Fellows, “Needs Assessment.” Presented to the Take a Stand Symposium, 30 January 2012.

Challenges for Adaptation

“There is nothing really to import,” said Leon Botstein of the original Venezuelan El Sistema at the Take a Stand Symposium in January. “There’s a lot to emulate, there’s a lot to think about in terms of objectives.” Botstein offered these comments as a “caution” during his first speech to the Take a Stand assembly. His intent was to be the voice of cold rationality in the otherwise optimistic and idealistic milieu of inspired individuals working to bring El Sistema to the United States, and to help the audience “look beyond the rosy part of the picture.”⁹⁰

“The differences between our country here and Venezuela overwhelm the similarities,” he continued. Not least of these differences is that the populist Venezuelan government supports El Sistema to an extent unthinkable in today’s anti-socialist American political culture. Central support of El Sistema not only funds the program but also puts unusual coercive pressures on El Sistema. Recently, these pressures have appeared in the form of duties to the nation’s political leaders.⁹¹ Also, a branched organizational structure gives FundaMusical enough centralized control to exert coercive pressure on individual núcleos (Dees et al. 2004), and it also gives it the benefits of standardization (See Scott 1998).⁹² American El Sistema programs have no official leadership, offering them room to independently adapt the models and resources of others to their own local communities (Dees et al. 2004), but lack the

⁹⁰ Leon Botstein speech to the Take a Stand Symposium 30 January 2011.

⁹¹ Daniel Wakin, “Music Meets Chávez Politics, and Critics Frown.” *The New York Times*, 17 February 2012.

⁹² As with its curriculum, efficiency, calculability and predictability are to be expected throughout Venezuelan El Sistema.

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cohesion and benefits of branched models and standardization. Furthermore, poverty levels in Venezuela are more than double those in the United States,⁹³ and therefore Venezuela's dire need for a nationwide social rescue dwarfs that of American society.⁹⁴ Another implication of the need created severe poverty is that young people often are able to rehearse longer hours and even commit to frequent travel.⁹⁵ Long rehearsals may explain the musical unity of the Venezuelan orchestras that impressed Simon Rattle. American youth, on the other hand, are typically unavailable for long rehearsals, which could negatively impact musical quality in comparison with Venezuelan programs.⁹⁶

With Botstein, Abreu believes that beyond its philosophy and technology of classical music, El Sistema cannot be an organizational model for the rest of the world.⁹⁷ At the close of the Take a Stand Symposium, Abreu reminded his American followers, "Our realities cannot be yours."⁹⁸ As Abreu founded his Venezuelan núcleos, every city and town had its different problems and own focus, and even though his model emulated the "greatest experiences of Europe," he adapted them to

⁹³ Venezuelan rate (2005): 37.9% compared to 15.1% in the United States (2010). Poverty rates are not directly comparable; according to the CIA, "Definitions of poverty vary considerably among nations. For example, rich nations generally employ more generous standards of poverty than poor nations." This statement should exacerbate, not mitigate, the differences in poverty rates. Source: *CIA World Factbook*

⁹⁴ This is not to say that El Sistema is not "needed" in the United States; clearly, poverty must be addressed in all its forms. But as a point of comparison, basic poverty levels—and therefore need—are not even close.

⁹⁵ Tunstall 2011

⁹⁶ Many American programs last just a few hours after school, and a recent convention of American El Sistema program leaders set the minimum threshold for an organization to qualify as an El Sistema program as just five hours.

⁹⁷ José Antonio Abreu speech to Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

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make them distinctly Venezuelan.⁹⁹ Each Venezuelan núcleo has something unique; for instance, Caracas' Montalbán núcleo features an ensemble of Venezuelan folk music's guitar-like, four-stringed instrument, an ensemble that does not exist at most núcleos. In this way and in his words, Abreu's program is "not a system,"¹⁰⁰ instead, it is an inspiration for the rest of the world to see what can be accomplished through community.

Botstein then made a strong case for why the technology—or fundamental way El Sistema achieves its ends—was appropriate in both countries. One of Botstein's fundamental but unsaid assumptions, which merits no challenge in this paper, is that people in Venezuela and the United States can be similarly intellectually and emotionally stimulated. Classical music, even as, in his words the music of "dead white men," was an appropriate way to grow the intellect and emotional capacities of young people in the ways Abreu articulated. Classical music is appropriate principally because it is "subject to personal ownership." Audiences and, presumably, students everywhere can hear and interpret it differently regardless of their "race, height, gender, or...age."¹⁰¹ Furthermore, training in the precise but subjective art of classical music opens a student to criticism, which "is the biggest respect one can show a child."¹⁰²

There is historical precedence for Botstein's idea that Venezuelan technology can be used successfully in the United States in that the Venezuelans themselves adapted classical music, a European art form, to their South American culture. On

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Leon Botstein Speech to the Take a Stand Symposium, 31 January 2012

¹⁰² Leon Botstein Speech to the Take a Stand Symposium, 31 January 2012

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their surfaces, the cultural and political differences between Venezuela and Europe in the 1970s may be similar to those the American El Sistema movement now faces.

Some, like musicologist Michael Mauskapf, feel that the relationship between high art and American culture is similar to 1970s Venezuela in that “orchestral performance was perceived as elitist by a majority of the population.”¹⁰³ In a sense, some of the same environmental conditions were present in Venezuela and the United States, and because ideas, like programs, must “fit” their environments, Americans can also use the orchestra as the foundation for music learning.

Philosophical and Pedagogical Adaptation in the United States

That Abreu adapted European classical music to his communal philosophy, a change that is sonically evident in Simon Rattle’s astonishment that the Venezuelan orchestras perform with such unity in musical phrasing, suggests it can be done again. Abreu also threw out the traditional, classical orchestral model, which encouraged individual practice over group learning. Because of the long history of Western classical music in the United States, adapting classical music for an American context is less of a concern. However, American programs are faced with the challenge of adapting, rather than importing, for the United States the Venezuelan socially rooted philosophies and pedagogies even though the European classical tradition is well established in the United States.

The El Sistema philosophy has diffused to the United States intact, with moderate adaptations. American and Venezuelan El Sistema leaders together

¹⁰³ Mauskapf, 2011: 210; see also McManus 2005

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specified a core set of values in 2010:¹⁰⁴

- Every human being has the right to a life of dignity and contribution.
- Every child can learn to experience and express music and art deeply and receive its many benefits.
- Overcoming poverty and adversity is best done by first strengthening the spirit, creating, as Dr. Abreu puts it: “an affluence of the spirit.”
- Effective education is based on love, approval, joy and experience within a high-functioning, aspiring, nurturing community. Every child has limitless possibilities and the ability to strive for excellence. “Trust the young” informs every aspect of the work.
- Learning organizations never arrive but are always becoming—striving to include more students, greater musical excellence, better teaching. Thus, flexibility, experimentation, and risk-taking are inherent and desirable aspects of every program.

The bullets can be reorganized into a unidirectional logic relating to “art as a social right:” a highly adaptive organization creates a nurturing and high-functioning community, from which music contributes to an “affluence of the spirit” that leads to a life of dignity and contribution to society.

The same leaders further reduced these core values into principles:¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Fundamental Elements of El Sistema Venezuela Which Inform and Distinguish El Sistema-related Programs in the USA. May 2010.

¹⁰⁵ The “CATS” Teacher Model was developed by 2010 Abreu Fellows Rebecca Levi and David Malek. See <http://necmusic.edu/cats-concert>.

1. Mission of Social Change
2. Access and Excellence
3. A Positive Learning Environment
4. Intensity
5. The Use of Ensemble as a Metaphor for Civil Life
6. The CATS Teacher Model (Citizen/Artist/Teacher/Scholar)
7. The Multi-year Continuum
8. Family and Community Inclusion
9. Connections and Network between Sites

These core values principles have been adopted by organizations in the United States.

YOLA at HOLA, as one of the premiere examples of a well-adapted El Sistema program, has adapted and integrated these principles into its daily structure.

Case Study: Experiencing Principles and Pedagogy at Youth Orchestra LA at Heart of Los Angeles¹⁰⁶

Youth Orchestra LA (YOLA) at Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA) is an El Sistema-inspired partnership between the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Heart of Los Angeles, Inc., a community organization that features high-quality academic, musical, and athletic programs.¹⁰⁷ Both YOLA and HOLA share the goal of serving socioeconomically disadvantaged children and their families and the social mission El Sistema presents an opportunity for both organizations to work together to achieve that goal. YOLA at HOLA serves the Rampart District of Los Angeles. The Rampart District is the second most densely populated region in Los Angeles and is home

¹⁰⁶ YOLA at HOLA graciously allowed me to study its programs for three weeks in June 2011. The case study synthesizes field notes and observations taken during that time.

¹⁰⁷ Heart of Los Angeles, Inc. "Homepage." <heartofla.org>.

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mainly to Korean and Latino people. Seventy percent are Latino,¹⁰⁸ of whom 36.8% are Mexican and 17.2% are Salvadorian, and YOLA@HOLA reflects this composition. Most of YOLA at HOLA's families also have low incomes: according to HOLA, 80 percent of its students come from families making less than \$20,000 annually.¹⁰⁹ Because of this, all services are rendered free of cost to students and their families. In the summer of 2011, YOLA@HOLA served approximately 80 1st and 4th grade students. Now, the program serves 180 students in 1st through 6th grades. 67.6% of residents are immigrants,¹¹⁰ and some were not legal residents. Many parents worked multiple jobs and are unable to drop off their children at the facility and instead asked their other children to do so. Most live within walking distance of the facility, although one student who moved from the neighborhood during the academic year took the bus for more than an hour each way to attend YOLA@HOLA classes.¹¹¹

In its programming, YOLA at HOLA provides musical and academic training and considers both critical to the educational success of its students. Music teachers at YOLA@HOLA are rigorously selected. Each was selected for a complete profile of twelve qualifications, which range from extraordinary musicianship to significant teaching experience, academic qualifications, commitment to the El Sistema philosophy, conducting experience even for sectional coaches, and powerful mentorship potential. As highly trained musicians, at least four of the instructors had

¹⁰⁸ Christine Witkowski,

¹⁰⁹ Kim Kowsky, "YOLA at HOLA: El Sistema-like Program Begins Taking Root." *Strings Magazine*, January 2011.

¹¹⁰ Christine Witkowski, "El Sistema USA Organizational Case Study – YOLA Heart of LA Youth Orchestra," *El Sistema USA*, 2010.

¹¹¹ Notes, Summer 2011; see next page for explanation.

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master's degrees in music, and one was earning a doctorate in performance. One had a degree in music education and another had two degrees in the same.¹¹² Academic teachers all were certified to teach in California public schools. These teachers are asked to collaborate with YOLA@HOLA faculty “to create a shared curriculum, pedagogy, and culture inspired by the ideals of *El Sistema*.”¹¹³

I had the good fortune to spend three weeks with YOLA at HOLA in June 2011. During my time at YOLA at HOLA, I took notes on the daily activities of the program, its pedagogy, and the stated and apparent philosophies present. I interviewed parents, students, teachers, and administrators on their time with their programs, and I spent time with teachers and administrators after hours to learn their thoughts apart from busy class time. I also taught music lessons to students, taught two music appreciation classes to parents, and designed a yearlong curriculum for that parent class for YOLA at HOLA to use. My time with YOLA at HOLA allowed me to compare the El Sistema movement's publicly stated goals to the pedagogy, curricula, and philosophies evident in a high-functioning El Sistema program.

YOLA's curriculum, pedagogy, and culture reflect the El Sistema philosophy. The themes of music as an agent of social change, excellence, community, and supporting the personal growth of students are present in YOLA's programming. YOLA@HOLA faculty distilled the core values and principles further for its own purposes:¹¹⁴

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ YOLA at HOLA Sample Job Description – Beginning Strings Specialist. Available online at: <<http://www.laphil.com/education/yola-resource-library.cfm>>.

¹¹⁴ Christine Witkowski, “El Sistema USA Organizational Case Study – YOLA at Heart of LA Youth Orchestra,” *El Sistema USA*, 2010.

- Fostering the idea that an orchestra is a community where everyone supports each other
- Tocar y Luchar: Holding high expectations in musical and academic excellence for each child
- Developing the whole child, not only as a musician, but as a citizen and scholar
- Providing a flexible, fun, and safe learning environment
- Recognizing that every child is an asset and brings different and unique strengths
- Understanding that education can provide empowerment, liberation and pride
- Believing that music and art can be powerful agents of social change

YOLA at HOLA's core values can be distilled further into four principles that are useful in analyzing how the program reflects its own and Venezuela's core values: purpose, excellence, community, and the concept of the whole child. These values are apparent throughout the following selection of ethnographic reflections:

Purpose: Students dedicatedly applied themselves to their work and also visibly enjoyed themselves. It was common for students to arrive early, get their instruments out, go to their seat and begin practicing their parts. Daily, students would approach one another to practice sections together. Frequently, it seemed the ensemble would be directing itself with no conductor. At the end of a weekday's programming, one first grader child told me, "I like YOLA because it makes me feel good about who I am."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Field note, June 2011

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Teachers also found meaning in their work. One expressed that it is often difficult to make a living as a musician, and that the absence of steady employment made finding purpose difficult. That teacher went on to say that not only did YOLA@HOLA provide gainful employment, but also it was an opportunity to do something good. If hearing teachers talk about appreciating their work were not enough, the passion they had for their work was evident daily on their faces and in the care with which they mentored their students. At dinner after classes and even late into the night at clubs, teachers would discuss their work. Each was concerned over not just the direction of their classes but also the successes, struggles, and home life of their individual students.

Excellence: There was no question that every student and faculty person was committed to creating the best music and highest personal growth possible. From rehearsing on their own to supportively helping one another with instrument fingerings, students demonstrated commitment to success. Individual students with solo parts would practice those parts daily from the minute they walked into the rehearsal room. When they arrived for their final concert, many of the older students carried themselves with intention. They clearly had come to perform, and to perform their best. After the concert, both older and younger students carried themselves with pride. The faculty held the students to very high musical standards. Teachers, while always supportive and quick to point out where students were succeeding, constantly presented students with the next level of accomplishment to be achieved. Students listened to recordings of their performances and discussed what they heard with

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guidance from their teachers. Some questions were very open-ended (What do you think? How does that sound to you?), and others were quite directed (How do you feel about the articulation in this section?). In either case, students eagerly offered their thoughts. When commenting on a peer's performance, students were supportive in their comments but also very direct. Even in the face of mild criticism, students often were appreciative of their peers' recommendations, a sign I took to suggest students were more committed to the excellence of their group than to their own glory.

Faculty members also were constantly trying to improve their own work. One teacher in particular very frequently asked colleagues for feedback, and it was consistently and overwhelmingly positive. Still, this teacher strove to serve students in increasingly effective and supportive ways. Other faculty noted that even though they felt this teacher was fantastic at the start, the teacher had made extraordinary gains over the course of the year and was an outstanding contributor to the program. Faculty also maintained their Citizen/Artist/Teacher/Scholar profiles. Citizenship often was evidenced by their commitment to the broader philosophy of El Sistema as a social movement, and to enacting the specifics of what that means. Artistry came through clearly in several teachers, and I was able to attend a professional concert in which one faculty member performed. Another faculty member would bring an instrument to the site early every day to practice, and it was clear that this person committed many hours daily to personal artistic growth. Others also practiced on site and worked professionally. Perhaps most telling of the organization's commitment to individual artistry was that one condition of my residency was that I continue to

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practice (saxophone) while there. I was asked to come to the site in the morning to prepare for the upcoming day's classes and also to write a curriculum for the 2011-2012 Saturday parent music class. But daily, the director asked me to go to the rehearsal room to practice, or to stay in her office to do so while she went to a meeting. By doing this, the director stressed the importance of the CATS model. I believe it worked with me, since I immediately became more committed to my own artistic growth and teaching as a social duty, and I worked hard to make sure the curriculum I delivered to the director was the most useful document I could produce.

The director of the program also strove for excellence. She brought in an outside evaluator to measure the learning taking place in her classrooms. The director explained that she did this for two reasons: first, it was important to document progress so that she could demonstrate success to potential donors funding partners; and second, she owed her kids the best experience possible, and evaluating the efficacy of their program could help them improve their educational approaches.

Community: Community was felt deeply on many levels. The teachers felt part of a community within themselves. In informal interactions laid out above and during the formal Friday faculty meetings, it was clear teachers clearly felt as though they were a team. In meetings, it was common for one to offer another suggestions for how to approach a particular concern, and for another to accept them.

Teachers also worked hard to ensure a positive learning environment for their students. Teachers constantly maintained high standards of musicianship, scholarship, and behavior. They encouraged students to help each other when

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struggling, and they also hugged their students daily. Through games and minor competitions such as jeopardy for composer facts and learning to read music, teachers encouraged scholarship and made sure learning was fun. In one class, the teacher offered a woodwind accessory of the student's choice to everyone who could play their part perfectly in front of the class. If a student attempted to perform but was unsuccessful, students could try again every day thereafter until they had mastered the part. Teachers elicited suggestions from a performing student's peers for how to improve for next time, and students often showed great appreciation for the struggles and successes of their peers.

YOLA at HOLA's Saturday morning parent music class drew parents together into tighter community. Weekly, a group of fifteen to thirty parents met to learn basic musicianship and become familiar with the musical tradition. In these classes, parents seemed engaged and happy to be there. Several discussed how the class and having their children enrolled in the YOLA@HOLA program inspired them to rent violins themselves and practice them at home. Also, simply waiting in the hallways to pick up children after classes and chatting was a key community-building time for parents.

Community also extended beyond the walls of YOLA@HOLA. Because the philosophy and content of YOLA@HOLA's programs are international, there was a strong sense among students, parents, teachers, and administrators that YOLA@HOLA was part of something larger. Perhaps most emblematic of this consensus was LAPA Music Director Gustavo Dudamel. Dudamel, as an alumnus of the original Venezuelan program and as a major musical figure in Los Angeles and

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around the world, was great inspiration to all involved. When they heard Dudamel was going to visit them, students made welcome signs. After he had left, they created thank-you cards and continued to talk about his time with them for weeks. Parents expressed their appreciation for Dudamel's work with the their children, but also there was a sense from the Latino parents that they felt personally connected to him. Teachers were giddy when talking about having met him and taken a picture together, or else were deeply moved by his commitment to art and education.

The Whole Child: The program provides both academic and musical instruction, an act that itself symbolizes the program's philosophy that more than musicianship must be nurtured. Teachers cared about each student, knew each students' family members, and were willing to gauge concerns in individual students' family lives and to strive to create a learning environment that often quite opposed to the few learning opportunities at home. Teachers cared about what students thought on any number of topics, cared for their success, and worked to make the less skilled feel as proud to be in the group as the very skilled, and to make the very abled proud to play next to their less-skilled peers. Each student was valued on his or her own terms, noting his or her own skills, abilities, and personalities.

YOLA at HOLA is meeting its stated goals and those of its Venezuelan counterparts. It also adapts the Venezuelan programs to fit its own convictions. One example is the CATS model for teaching is evident not only in teachers but also in students. That students were so eager to help on another demonstrated their willingness to teach and their excitement and dedication to their art. Connecting

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students to the larger community encouraged citizenry, and educational games encouraged scholarship. Thus, everyone in the program, including students, teachers, administrators, and the parents who attended the Saturday morning classes, was held to similar standards. That everyone shared goals in common built community and potentially improved the community beyond YOLA at HOLA. Parental also involvement was important at YOLA at HOLA and was approached with the philosophy that involved parents raised more committed students. The Saturday parent class is uncommon in Venezuela and represents a YOLA at HOLA innovation.¹¹⁶

Other programs have adapted the El Sistema philosophy, principles, and pedagogy in different ways. Stanford Thompson of Play On, Philly, has included jazz and improvisation into the regular curriculum alongside classical music, citing its benefits to musical creativity.¹¹⁷ Kathryn Wyatt of KidZNotes in Durham, NC, described how her organization uses diverse musical genres at the start of its students' musical education but that the "pinnacle of our program is performing great classical music." Her program's philosophy of the relationship of classical music to underserved populations is clear:

Our partners and families have shared that their great passion for El Sistema is

¹¹⁶ Parental involvement is a fundamental component of the Suzuki Method for music education, a pedagogy that the Venezuelans adapted somewhat. According to Witkowski (2010), Venezuelan núcleo Valle de la Pascua, there was a choir for fathers of the núcleo's students. YOLA at HOLA features a much more robust parent curriculum, which charts a two-year course for parent music education. While the foundations of the curriculum relate to Suzuki and the Venezuelan núcleo, its expanded form shows the extent to which the practice has been adapted.

¹¹⁷ Conversation with Stanford Thompson, Executive Director of Play On, Philly, December 2011.

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to bring the "elitism" of classical music to their neighborhood, and into the hands of their kids. Our families see this as core to their support of our program, and how they understand El Sistema.¹¹⁸

KidZNotes has taken the stance that just because its music “comes out of a European context” and is serving a largely non-European-American population does not mean “it should flinch because of its utility in this century.”¹¹⁹ To the contrary, Wyatt believes that because of its association with elitism, classical music can bridge cultural divides in ways popular music cannot.

In contrast, the San Diego Youth Symphony’s *Community Opus Project* has integrated popular music more consistently throughout its program. Community Opus Project (COP) “always use[s] Mexican folk songs that are familiar to students and parents” when first teaches its students how to play their instruments. COP does this partly for practical reasons: “it helps with practice at home since the families are familiar with the music, while also creating a deeper connection to the learning process and the program.” But COP also take a philosophical position in saying that “A Beatles song can be just as important in the learning process as is Ode to Joy,” demonstrating a commitment to all music as both beneficial to learning and meritorious on its own account. COP hopes to guide its community to “appreciat[ing] music from all different genres...to expand their world through music.”¹²⁰

Both the KidZNotes and COP perspectives are philosophical adaptations that

¹¹⁸ Kathryn Wyatt discussion post on League of American Orchestra’s El Sistema site, League 360. March 7th, 2012.

¹¹⁹ Leon Botstein Speech to the Take a Stand Symposium 30 January 2011.

¹²⁰ Lauren Widney discussion post on League of American Orchestra’s El Sistema site, League 360. March 7th, 2012.

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fit their communities. Families in Durham evidently see access to elite culture as the major benefits of participating in the program. In San Diego, families benefit from beginning music education from a musical framework they can already relate to. The Los Angeles Philharmonic's YOLA site at the Heart of Los Angeles, Inc. community center features programs of mainly classical music, and often it is music that is shared with the original Venezuelan programs,¹²¹ but its plans to show parents classical instruments in other genres suggests an adaptation to an American context.

The success of the Venezuelan program is that each site accurately and sensitively reflects the community it serves, and no one technology dominates the organizational structure or teaching of all programs. One site may have a Venezuelan folk music program when another has an American-style jazz big band. Other programs, such as the Montalbán núcleo in Caracas, are known for their early childhood education programs.¹²² The pedagogies that accompany these programs, such as the paper orchestra, vary naturally with the kind of program and are constantly finessed to tailor to the núcleo's own educational situation.

Several of these innovations may well work in the United States, but Botstein and Abreu's comments should be remembered. The part of El Sistema that is most worthy of emulation is not its individual programs, pedagogies, or technologies but rather the kind of innovative spirit that prompted Abreu to adapt a European musical and cultural phenomenon to a completely different cultural and political climate and to make it, in the words of Venezuelan conductor Eduardo Maturét,

¹²¹ "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, Brahms's "Hungarian Dance" and Wagner's Overture to Tannhäuser are among YOLA at HOLA favorites.

¹²² Tunstall 79

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An expression of Venezuelan beauty in a pure way, and most importantly, in a noble way without distinctions but with an identity. A Venezuelan identity that gives the movement and the sound of the orchestra a fingerprint impossible to erase.¹²³

Australian El Sistema leader Chris Nicholls summed up this perspective in a recent blog post:

I don't think that creating an El Sistema-based program is necessarily about "imitating" Venezuela, it's about taking the lessons they learned, the practice they are still developing (37 years in the making), the fundamentals they set up, and the model they established and applying that to our own situations. As we all know, the "System" is less a concrete methodology and more a set of principles, ideas, and a key philosophy and approach on how to positively change our society, to a better one. Everything else is less important than that.¹²⁴

Discerning this difference as Nicholls has will help American programs create an El Sistema that is "distinctly American," but focusing too closely on individual technologies without seeing the underlying reasons for success could lead American programs to mimic an organizational model that cannot function in the American environment. In fact, because they were developed thirty years ago, the Venezuelan pedagogy could be outdated or even disproven. Organizational ecology and common sense suggest modeling a program on disproven technologies would kill such

¹²³ Alberto Arvelo, "Tocar y Luchar." Video documentary, 2006.

¹²⁴ Chris Nicholls response to Jonathan Govias' blog article, "The Morality of Pay-to-Play." January 14th, 2012.

programs.

Case Study: Adapting Pedagogy for the United States: the Paper Orchestra

The Take a Stand Symposium tightened connections between American and Venezuelan El Sistema programs. As these relationships become more interconnected, the risk of institutionalizing myths about the Venezuelans' success rise. Meyer and Rowan (1977) describe this process in the context of business organizations:

In modern societies the relational contexts of business organizations in a single industry are roughly similar from place to place. Under these conditions a particular effective practice, occupational specialty, or principle of coordination can be codified in myth like form. The laws, the educational and credentialing systems, and public opinion then make it necessary or advantageous for organizations to incorporate the new structures.¹²⁵

The “relational contexts of business organizations” becomes more similar as organizations become more interrelated, as is the case with the American El Sistema movement. In the “single industry” of Venezuelan El Sistema programs, effective practices in one núcleo do not necessarily translate to another. In the expanded “single industry” of El Sistema programs worldwide, the environmental variation within which must be much greater, effective practices may have even less chance of functioning in another part of the world. The differences enumerated by Botstein and others suggest that this is true between Venezuela and the United States.

¹²⁵ Meyer and Rowan 1977: 347

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The famous “paper orchestra” teaching tool is one practice that has been transferred to United States, perhaps under this assumption. The first Venezuelan núcleo taught its beginning Caracas strings students on paper instruments because they did not have access to real instruments at the time it opened. Over the years, the núcleo, called *La Rinconada*, has kept this practice as part of its training sequence, beginning all its students on the paper instruments to safely teach them to respect their instruments, to instruct them in proper playing technique without building bad playing habits, and to keep the classroom quiet while an instructor works a large group of eager learners. The núcleo recognized the benefits of this happy accident and has developed a complementary teaching method.

Several American El Sistema-inspired organizations have incorporated the paper orchestra practice into their structures. At the Take a Stand Symposium, one session was dedicated entirely to paper orchestras. The session enabled participants to learn more about the technique to share their own variations on the original idea. Leading the workshop were one representative from *La Rinconada* and representatives from two American El Sistema programs, YOLA at HOLA and *Juneau, Alaska Music Matters*. The Venezuelan representative presented the history and current techniques of the paper orchestra and her núcleo’s successes with the practice. She also explained that her núcleo was the only one in Venezuela using the paper orchestra technique.¹²⁶

Many American programs had created variations on the original paper

¹²⁶ Tunstall mentions that the idea for the technique may have originated in Montalbán, another Caracas núcleo, and that more than one example exist in Venezuela. These data do not match the *La Rinconada* teacher’s comments, but both show that the technique is uncommon in that country. See Tunstall 161.

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orchestra idea that were particular to their own communities and they shared these variations with the Venezuelans and one another during the Symposium session. Variations included changing the shape of the instrument, when in a child's development they would add new parts, the songs that accompanied paper orchestra lessons, and the ways sites involved their parents in making the instruments to create positive connections with and within the community. Why, then, did the practice become popular in the United States but not in Venezuela?

The principal reason, it seems, is one of institutional pressures. As Abreu moved about the countryside founding núcleos, he no doubt learned from the organizational trials of his previous núcleos. However, this strategy of branching (Dees et al. 2004) from a centralized location did not encourage núcleos to look at other programs as organizational models. Individual programs were encouraged to develop pedagogies beyond the central curriculum that reflect the needs of their own communities. Structural and pedagogical similarities between programs thus typically stem from central coordination rather than mimesis.

Innovations, such as pedagogy, have occasionally traveled between núcleos without central coordination, and indeed the paper orchestra may have a background at another site.¹²⁷ If this account is accurate, though its seed germinated in another program it did not adopt the practice, presumably because it did not relate to the needs of the original núcleo's program or constituents. Montalbán has also been described as an innovator in early childhood education, and most likely its pedagogical innovations are finding their way to other núcleos.

¹²⁷ See previous footnote.

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One way these innovations diffuse within Venezuela is by physical nearness. FundaMusical encourages *seminarios*, or musical meetings between sites. From its inception, Abreu has taken his students to visit other núcleos, frequently rehearsing and performing together.¹²⁸ Because these visits bring organizations closer together, núcleos are more likely to share and even accidentally develop “good ideas” (Burt 2004). Geography can help or hinder an idea or innovation’s ability to diffuse, and the propinquity resulting from these seminario interactions facilitate diffusion (Pfeffer 1992). Because Venezuela is a large country and núcleos may be quite isolated, this travel is important to achieve diffusion. The simple nearness of organizations does not necessarily account full for the diffusion of ideas, but because núcleos share the same fundamental interest in musical and social growth and are both “eager” to learn information that promotes this growth (Martin 2009).

American programs, on the other hand, are new and are looking for ways to adapt existing pedagogies to their own needs. The three sites using paper orchestras listed above all are led by first-year Abreu Fellows. These early adopters of the Venezuelan philosophy naturally sought model programs, and *La Rinconada*, where they saw the paper orchestra’s benefits to that program during their trip to Venezuela, provided such a model (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).¹²⁹ No nearer model existed, forcing the Americans to look thousands of miles away. As these and other American programs age and become more established, a lesser geographical distance is likely to shift new programs’ attention from the Venezuelan original to American programs.

¹²⁸ Seminarios benefit from the predictable quality, calculable performance techniques, and efficiency of teaching resulting from standardization.

¹²⁹ This visit overcame geographical separation (akin to an international seminario) and also demonstrates the “intent” argument of Martin 2009

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This concerted but uncoordinated effort to seek optimal solutions (Strang and Macy 2001) through the experiences of other programs (Rao, et al. 2001, in Ansari, et al. 2010) also may be met by institutional pressures. Along with the efficiency of being an early adopter (Tolbert and Zucker 1983) comes the cache of being modeled on an original. With individual El Sistema participants, YOLA program director Christine Witkowski was concerned that whether some of her employees had been to Venezuela could create a cultural divide at her site, although this seems to not have been the case so far.¹³⁰ It is likely that the same social legitimacy is derived from reflecting the originality of Venezuelan pedagogy. Social legitimacy can be a powerful force for organizations, encouraging them to adopt organizational structures and technologies even when they are not efficient (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Practices like the paper orchestra signal unity with the established Venezuelan program (Zucker 1980). That American programs have adopted the paper orchestra technique even though they are able to afford instruments suggests that signaling and legitimacy may, indeed, be at work. Whether adopting practices because of legitimacy is problematic depends on the quality of the technology itself (Strang and Macy 2001). Evidently, the three aforementioned programs believe the paper orchestra does have the quality required and that American programs are legitimating the practice internally by evaluating its efficiency. Time will tell whether the integrity is there.

Social legitimacy also applies beyond the internal borders of the El Sistema movement. Legitimacy affects the El Sistema movement's public image, and the

¹³⁰ Christine Witkowski, Notes from Summer 2011

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distinctly Venezuelan paper orchestra is part of this image. Public opinion in the United States is critically important. Because American El Sistema programs do not enjoy the government support afforded to Venezuelan núcleos, and because most do not charge tuition, American programs often rely on private donations for a large portion of their income. For longer than most countries, the United States government has supported its citizens in determining on their own to what charitable organizations they would like to give their money by granting these organizations certain tax designations. Giving to organizations that fall under tax code 501(c)3 allows a person to deduct the amount given from their total taxable income. These “tax breaks” encourage wealthy individuals and profitable organizations to establish foundations that can support the public good the person or company cares about. Foundations, along with individual donors, are an important funding source for nonprofit organizations like most El Sistema-inspired programs. That foundations and individuals may choose to whom to give their money and how much to give makes public opinion of El Sistema programs both inside and internationally important. Public interest in the program was based on its success in Venezuela, its international repute as a social change agent in other countries, the corroboration by the world’s best classical music that the program was both excellent and exciting, and the hope that it could work in the United States. Public opinion was such an important part of the program’s development in the United States that one wonders whether a dip in public opinion could derail the movement’s progress.

The paper orchestra is a distinctly Venezuelan — or, truly, “Caracasian” — invention and its image is unmistakably “El Sistema.” American program websites

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prominently feature photographs of their paper orchestras, signaling to interested parties the program's alignment with its Venezuelan parent.¹³¹ Signaling to and garnering social legitimacy in the outside world through practices like the paper orchestra are important because a shift in public opinion can radically reorganize the distribution of funds available to El Sistema programs. Resource redistribution destabilizes organizations in that environment and also creates new funding opportunities. The paper orchestra affirms the El Sistema movement's attraction to people who are impressed by the novelty of the innovation, especially those with musical backgrounds. Traditional donors to classical music are among them. Dropping the practice and aligning pedagogy more with traditional music education could increase legitimacy and access to resources in that field. But regardless of how public opinion shifts, the number, concentration, and location of resources, such as funding sources, is bound to move with it, shaping the organizational structure and pedagogy of El Sistema programs in the United States.

The paper orchestra demonstrates many of the pressures that apply to El Sistema programs in general. Raising questions about legitimacy both within communities of organizations like that of American El Sistema programs and to their outside funders, as well as pedagogy as a signal of this legitimacy, the diffusion, adoption, and adaptation of the paper orchestra technique in the United States also shows how individual programs struggle with the institutional pressures associated with their environments. The environments themselves are not easily defined, since a shift in public opinion can reorganize them overnight. The paper orchestra serves as

¹³¹ Examples include the websites of YOLA and JAMM

an example of the relationship of individual programs with organizational theory.

Institutional Forces in a New Association of American El Sistema Programs

To date, American El Sistema programs are all independently founded and operated. However, just five years into El Sistema's presence here, program leaders have identified the need for concerted interactions and more formalized systems, and to avoid "reinventing the wheel" when it comes to program design, best practices for approaching funders, and other mundane tasks such as writing job descriptions for teaching artists, parental involvement coordinators, and so on.¹³² Leadership, unlike the unitary context (Warren 1967, in Scott 1998: 127-128) of Venezuela, is in a state of "social choice," in which individual programs make all decisions independently. Building a tighter network of programs into a "federative" context, requiring unified strategic priorities approved by ratification by member programs, could provide the interaction and unity many American El Sistema programs currently seek.

Leaders in the American El Sistema movement have identified these benefits of a more federative network and have begun to form an association. The association these programs are building is analogous to Etienne Wenger's conception of a "community of practice" (2006). Communities of practice are groups of organizations sharing a specific domain of interest that form to "engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information" about a specific organizational objective (Wenger 2006). Communities of practice are distinguished from clubs and interest groups by the motivation of their members to act on what they gleaned from their interactions, creating a "shared repertoire" for that practice

¹³² Take a Stand Symposium Session, Word press site for Associations

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(Wenger 2006). Into this repertoire, El Sistema organizations hope to build the following strategic priorities:

1. The Association should first focus on capacity-building within the core membership through shared learning, program resources and materials, data, and outcomes evaluation;
2. Next, the Association should promote external opportunities for advocacy, fundraising, and public awareness;
3. Finally, the Association should create platforms for future core member development through support for established standards of quality, shared performance and learning for students, and member growth and expansion.

Enumerating and acting on these “specific and limited goals” gives organizations “public legitimation and social support as agents for accomplishing these stated goals” (Hannan and Carroll 1995). As social good organizations dependent on public approval for financial stability, external legitimation is critical to their survival. Legitimacy is socially defined, and because the social values that define legitimacy can shift (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975), the degree to which these strategic priorities conform to those social values determines the amount of social support El Sistema programs and their association will receive.

The social perception of internal quality most likely plays into the degree to which society supports an organization. Having membership standards, systems to evaluate and prove the quality of member programs, and a formal way to publicly display the rigor of the standards will be important for El Sistema programs and the association to gain the legitimacy required to carry out their work. For the El Sistema

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association, defining core membership has been a struggle. A January 2012 summary of discussions to date identified the following criteria:¹³³

Core members of the Association will be organizations:

- Whose primary mission is to achieve social change through music;
- Whose programs are inspired by or based upon the values of El Sistema (as described in the Association Values Statement above);
- Who provide ensemble-based music education in an intensive and high-quality manner;
 - “High Quality” is defined as a minimum of (current discussion-five) hours per week of student contact with program aspiration to increase that contact as the program develops
- Whose main student population is children with financial or other access-barriers to more traditional music education programs;
- Who have explicit program designs or policies in place dedicated to making their programs accessible to all children regardless of their barriers.

These criteria fundamentally stress social mobility for the underprivileged; only one of the five categories has to do with curricula. The “Working Group” of El Sistema leaders developing the association evidently also struggled to define a standard of program quality. One option identified by the working group is the number of hours of instruction. Of course, program hours do not actually report quality, but the team is counting on the idea that more study increases mastery and therefore program quality. Also, because the new movement is so new, some programs may not have much funding or institutional support forcing them to limit the hours of instruction.

¹³³ Compiled by Elisabeth Babcock, MCRP, PhD, volunteer consultant to American El Sistema programs

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The working group tried to include these programs by setting the minimum hours of instruction hours at only five. The criteria make the assurance of quality the purview of each program, requiring no commitment to submit to centralized oversight.

One month later, the working group reexamined its criteria for core membership. The working group's fourth survey was administered,¹³⁴ the results of which were announced during the following conference call, ranked by importance:

Elements recommended for core membership

- Striving toward excellence
- Frequent performances
- Parental engagement
- Outcomes measurement
- Serving children for a minimum of 3 years, aspiring toward lifetime

Elements that were not recommended for core membership (these just had lower agreement among the group and might be important in their own right)

- Operating with high administrative standards
- Being an independent 501c3
- Community based location
- Support through tutoring
- Requiring enrollment in school

¹³⁴ El Sistema USA Professional Association Survey 4

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The changes reflect important developments in the group's thinking. These core elements now focus on measurable goals. Serving children for a minimum of three years is easy to tabulate, as is performance frequency. However, excellence is now highlighted as an aspiration, and the group is moving toward specifying exactly what that means. The problem of defining evaluation criteria is nothing new. Zucker (1980) discusses a process that maps closely to the self-definition struggles of American El Sistema programs, especially as relates to evaluation criteria. American El Sistema programs, as hopefully is clear by now, exist in a socially defined institutional environment. Organizations in institutional environments, unlike those in technical ones, use evaluation not so much for assessing and improving programs internally but "to indicate compliance to institutional rules" (Zucker 1980). In the case of the El Sistema programs the association hopes to serve, this institutional environment includes both the normative pressures of the new association and the transparency and accountability demands of funders and potential funders. Evaluations assure these individuals and foundations that El Sistema programs and, indeed, the movement at large are accomplishing the personal growth and social goals they claim. Needing to prove themselves in this way leads organizations to not clearly define what needs to be measured when evaluation is the basis for societal support and funding. The results of this ambiguity are:¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Zucker 1980. Text box is a direct quote.

- (a) They will define the environment as more variable, increasing the scope of activities and making more aspects of the environment appear relevant to their tasks (e.g., range of pupil characteristics);
- (b) They will define tasks as more ambiguous and difficult (e.g., how can “good” teaching be defined, let alone regulated?; and
- (c) They will use evaluation information primarily as signals to the external environment.

The current stage of the association reflects these three results. For the Working Group, defining excellence continues to be a struggle. The group has postponed defining criteria for excellence in favor of leaving them more “generalized”¹³⁶. Program hours still are the only (false) measure of quality proposed, partly for this reason. The results do stipulate that some kind of outcome measurement system should be in place. Most likely, outcome measurements will include measures of personal and musical growth; however, these topics, too, have been identified as difficult to assess.¹³⁷ Often, “goodness” of a musical program is a subjective determination. Certain aspects, such as intonation, timing, the presence of phrasing, speed, and other technical qualities of music are simple to record by a well-trained ear; however, communicative ability and the extent to which “art” is created is less easily calculated. Most likely, quality assurance programs would need to hire experts impartial to the movement to evaluate a program’s musical “worth” and progress over time.

¹³⁶ El Sistema USA Professional Association meeting minutes, 29 February 2012.

¹³⁷ “Assessment/Documentation” workshop at the Take a Stand Symposium, 31 January 2012.

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The Venezuelan El Sistema leaders, due to their close relationship with the Venezuelan government, have different institutional pressures. Evaluation teams from FundaMusical travel the country to ensure program quality, but they are beholden primarily to the coercive institutional forces of the government rather than to the normative pressures of the young and therefore weak association and the demands of funders. Similarly, centralized administrative control, which applies coercive pressure to individual núcleos, defines the technical qualifications of a program through its standardized pedagogy, a much simpler process than the Americans must undertake. In contrast, the American programs are left to defining their own professional standards, a process that will eventually produce normative isomorphism and reform organizational structures and technologies to match the standards of the association. But until El Sistema programs ratify the standards of core membership of the association, it is likely that the normative influence of the association will be weak.¹³⁸ Coercive pressure from government standards for nonprofit organizations, including transparency and accurate financial reporting, and the will continue to affect individual organizations regardless of the status of the association.

Instead, mimetic pressures will be strongest. Until an American association influences El Sistema organizations through normative pressures, or a strong El

¹³⁸ The February 29th, 2012 conference call about forming an association ended with a call to “narrow down the core membership issue.” The team, whose membership fluctuates, has met ten times since the end of November, including three in February and one already in March, and plans to meet three more times by April first. A three-day live meeting for the express purpose of drafting bylaws and other founding documents for an association is scheduled for the end of April. It seems that normative standards may, indeed, begin quickly.

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Sistema program or government of El Sistema programs applies coercive pressures to the majority of programs, programs will continue to look to Venezuela both for inspiration and for program models. Their eagerness to listen to Venezuelan leaders and adopt their philosophies, pedagogical principles, and teaching techniques suggests that this is, indeed, happening now.¹³⁹ However, it is likely that while the Venezuelans will always inspire the American programs, American El Sistema programs will begin to turn away from the Venezuelans as programmatic models as they become more established. In fact, this process may have begun. Lorrie Heagy of the *Juneau, Alaska Music Matters* program, noticed this refocus from Venezuelan to American programs for inspiration taking place:

We inspired a program in Denver to start a similar model. There are other schools in the country who have been looking at our model.¹⁴⁰

The demand for national conversation as evidenced by the sold-out attendance of the Take a Stand Symposium and the fluid exchange of ideas over the course of those three days further corroborates the phenomenon. While the Venezuelans led several workshops, the vast majority was run by American organizations. Apart from the Symposium, that leaders are working to associate also suggests such a refocus, and even without an association, El Sistema leaders were sharing best practices and other planning documents online, surveying each other for input, communicating via conference call, Skype, email, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook, and visiting one

¹³⁹ The Take a Stand Symposium session with El Sistema's leaders was exceptionally well attended; Berkowitz stated "our inspiration is always Abreu" (in Mauskapf 2011); several programs have adopted paper orchestras.

¹⁴⁰ Sarah Day, "In a JAMM," *Juneau Empire*, 23 February 2012.

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another in person.¹⁴¹ The rich communication between programs shows that American sites already are turning to one another for advice, community, and inspiration, and will likely impact sites' organizational structures, pedagogies, and specific teaching techniques.

Because of their continued interaction and their plans to interact more, American El Sistema programs may be said to be “enacting” a new environment. Open systems theory already showed a deep connection between organizations and environments, but the same process is occurring in the increasingly dense network of El Sistema programs. By forming an association, these organizations are obviously modifying their environment, an idea Weick (1979) proposes to be the foundation for enacting environments. But the organizations also are formalizing attention structures (March 1994: 10 in Scott 1998: 140) or information systems (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) that help the organization gather and report on statistics and facts about their environments. Should the association take on the role of central evaluator, these actions will be all the more explicit; however, even by releasing an online publication or needs or opinion survey, or by promoting or facilitating certain activities like visits between sites, the association will focus its members' attention on that content (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). If the association has any role or credibility in credentialing organizations as “El Sistema-inspired,” its normative influence will increase dramatically, perhaps keening a far greater percentage of American El Sistema programs' to a centrally-selected set of topics. With attention from a broad base of American El Sistema leaders focused on a common set of ideas, discourse

¹⁴¹ “Staying Connected” workshop at the Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

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likely will affect organizational form and behavior.

These processes of self-definition and quality definition should, if institutional theory plays out, mature and shift the balance of mimetic and normative pressures toward the normative. The development of the association is occurring rapidly, and it is likely that this shift will begin soon. In addition to the normative pressures of an association, increased interaction should promote mimesis of other American programs. Already, American programs are inspiring one another, sharing teaching techniques, funding strategies, and organizational models with one another at the Take a Stand Symposium and elsewhere. The association, by encouraging programs to further share information and best practices with one another, should lead to greater unity, and it might even lead programs to look increasingly like their fellow programs (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Part III: Partnerships in the United States: A Common Organizational Form

Field Overview

The Fellows Program is introducing the El Sistema philosophy in many American locations. While each faces its own struggles, most communities have received their efforts with open arms. Communities include not just the clients of the organization but also its partners. The 2011-2012 Abreu Fellows recently concluded a nationwide “needs assessment” of the programs in the United States and presented it at a Los Angeles symposium, called “Take a Stand,” of international El Sistema programs. In this assessment, the Fellows determined that all El Sistema programs in the United States functioned in partnership with other organizations. Seventy-one percent of the fifty-four American El Sistema programs were partnered with schools in either “in-school” or “after-school” formats. Twenty-six percent of programs connected with community centers, while three percent were affiliated with churches.¹⁴² These organizations presumably identified El Sistema programs as benefits to their community and their own educational programs.

The nation’s economic recession has negatively affected education funding in general, creating greater need in the community and for the schools serving them. There are many examples: Wisconsin teachers refused to work; teachers in Pennsylvania offered to keep working without paychecks even when their district ran

¹⁴² 2011-2012 Abreu Fellows, “Needs Assessment.” Presented to the Take a Stand Symposium, 30 January 2012.

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out of money to pay them;¹⁴³ and Minnesota schools began allowing advertising on school lockers,¹⁴⁴ to name three. Music education has not been spared during the recession and, as a program requiring “specialist” teachers often considered peripheral to the core functions of the school, may have seen worse cuts. Among the programs affected is Alaska Teacher of the Year Lorrie Heagy’s El Sistema program, *Juneau, Alaska Music Matters* (JAMM).¹⁴⁵ School and district officials have tried to avoid affecting JAMM, but their mandatory budget cuts “in anticipation of a \$5 million deficit” forced them to do so.¹⁴⁶ The school board decided to fire a half-time specialist, which means that other teachers will have to split time in other areas. Lorrie Heagy, to this point a full-time music teacher, will now spend time teaching in the library, a position that will affect her ability to organize, teach, and fundraise for JAMM. School and district officials hear and sympathize with protests by Juneau parents but are unable to offer a more favorable solution.

This situation is not unusual. Schools around the country face similar issues, and as music budget are cut, El Sistema programs may be an attractive alternative.¹⁴⁷ For these schools El Sistema programs offer additional security created by funding beyond what their districts are able to provide. Some El Sistema-inspired programs, such as *Play On, Philly*, use school facilities after hours to provide music instruction, while others, such as *El Sistema Colorado*, are held at public schools both during and

¹⁴³ NBC News, “Teachers Volunteer to Work Without Pay.” TV Special. *Education Nation Website*, 13 January 2012.

¹⁴⁴ Norman Draper, “Schools open lockers to advertising.” *Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune*, 18 October 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Sarah Day, “In a JAMM,” *Juneau Empire*, 23 February 2012.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Thirty-eight schools have adopted El Sistema programs, according to the Abreu Fellows’ “Needs Assessment.”

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after the school day.¹⁴⁸ All either are nonprofits of their own right or are owned by nonprofits, making them eligible for private grants that can support teacher salaries, among other needs. Traditional school music programs often subsidize their educational experiences through parent-run “booster” programs that give the community opportunities to sponsor trips, purchase supplies, fund guest teacher clinics, and provide other in-kind support, such as volunteering. Booster programs are unable to support teacher salaries and similar program costs, which public money funds. Private fundraising most likely cannot bring back the half-time specialist in Juneau to let Heagy return to full-time status with JAMM. Private grants often financially support El Sistema teachers, which can pose problems because such private funding can be unstable; however, El Sistema programs have the benefit of being able to articulate their value in multiple ways,¹⁴⁹ opening them for funding by multiple kinds of foundations, including those specializing in social programs, music education, education, arts, and music more broadly, and poverty reduction. JAMM, while it has raised over \$78,000 in community support, has earned the respect of the Alaskan government,¹⁵⁰ and is one of the most respected programs in the community of El Sistema programs.¹⁵¹

Other El Sistema programs, like the Atlanta Music Project, Cleveland’s *El Sistema@Rainey* program, and YOLA at Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks’ EXPO Center, are held at community centers and attract students from schools around the city. The schools the students attend during the day can lack music

¹⁴⁸ El Sistema Colorado, “Mission.” 2012.

¹⁴⁹ They straddle different organizational fields, as described Scott 1998.

¹⁵⁰ Sarah Day, “In a JAMM,” *Juneau Empire*, 23 February 2012

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

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programs of any kind, and the Atlanta Music Project provides their students with a similar music education at little to no cost to the district. These El Sistema programs build relationships with the school districts to make students aware of the offerings available to them.

The Abreu Fellows presentation accounted for the kinds of locations El Sistema programs inhabit, but it did not discuss the more complicated nature of these partnerships. For the purpose of this analysis, partnerships will be categorized into “tiers” by degree of separation. First tier partnerships include the El Sistema program and its host organization; for example, the El Sistema-inspired program *CityMusic Cleveland* and its host community organization, the Rainey Institute, are in a first-tier partnership. Second tier partners are the schools whose students attend *CityMusic* at the Rainey Institute, regardless of any funding connection they might have, and other organizations that sponsor *CityMusic*’s programming. The Abreu Fellows’ needs assessment focuses on first tier partnerships.

Some second tier partnerships extend beyond the “youth development” and “music education” organizational field – a socially recognized group of organizations (Scott 1998). Other fields, such as higher education institutions and symphony orchestras, have partnered with and even helped found El Sistema programs. In higher education, the University of Texas at Austin has partnered with the Hispanic Alliance for the Performing Arts to build *Austin Soundwaves* at the East Austin College Prep School,¹⁵² and Carroll University of Waukesha, Wisconsin has partnered with a local elementary school to build an El Sistema music program and

¹⁵² Hispanic Alliance for the Performing Arts, “Austin Soundwaves.” 2012.

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has committed to pursuing grants through its university fundraising office¹⁵³. Bard College of Avondale on Hudson, New York and the Longy School of Music of Boston have partnered with a public charter school in Delano, California to build an El Sistema program for middle school students that will serve as a training ground for Bard/Longy graduate students in music education.¹⁵⁴ Symphony orchestras, such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Diego Symphony, Santa Barbara Symphony Orchestra, Hartford Symphony, Miami Symphony, and San Antonio Symphony, have built similar partnerships.

Some partnerships can be problematic. Outsourcing music education from the school system through outside partnerships is unwise for many reasons, one of which is that school system-provided programs ensure that all students have access to the programming, whereas outside organizations may limit the number of students they serve. One of the benefits of outsourcing music education from the school system, however, is that many levels of bureaucracy can be avoided. El Sistema programs, if in a weak, second-tier relationship with a school district, have much more autonomy in making its decisions than a traditional music program. Highly developed school bureaucracies, while intended to streamline processes, can become unwieldy. Play On, Philly hoped to partner with the public schools, but found there was “too much red tape, and there were no really effective partnerships or collaborations going on.”¹⁵⁵ Some would-be public school philanthropists have noticed this problem, including Steve Jobs of Apple Computer, who concluded after giving technology to

¹⁵³ El Sistema USA, “El Sistema at Carroll University.” *ElSistemaUSA.org*. 2012.

¹⁵⁴ Bard College, “Paramount Bard Academy.” *Bard.edu*. Accessed 9 March 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Michael Mauskapf Interview with Stanford Thompson, 14 March 2011, in Mauskapf 2011: 229.

schools, “What's wrong with education cannot be fixed with technology,” he said. “The problem is bureaucracy.”¹⁵⁶ Some El Sistema programs offer a minimally hierarchical organizational structure that might overlap individuals’ roles in the program but let them respond to its needs much more quickly.

There are many arrangements of El Sistema program partnerships, but few, if any, El Sistema organization operates without a partner. The Abreu Fellows accounted for all American El Sistema programs in their survey of first tier partnerships, and many of those partnerships are embedded in a more complex network of second tier partners. Partners are important to El Sistema programs for two reasons: first, partners provide institutional stability; and second, partnerships build community after Abreu’s philosophy.

Partnering for Stability

The arts world is turbulent. Arts organizations are often deeply connected artistically and share similar visions, but they also compete for the same resources. The resources depend heavily on public opinion, which can change overnight. Furthermore, arts organizations, and especially symphony orchestras, often cannot make a profit or even break even on a project without substantial donated income. That these organizations depend on the same resources reduces how able they are to control their futures (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). With so many actors contributing to and borrowing from the shared environment, the environment itself is constantly in motion, and the parallel variability in resource availability further destabilizes the arts

¹⁵⁶ David Salisbury, “Private Giving to Public Schools: Does it Work?” 2002.

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environment. Emery and Trist (1965) designated this type of environment “turbulent” and problematic for organizations that operate in such environments.

Stability within this context is important, especially for El Sistema programs that cannot be certain about the shape of their future environments because they are currently in the process of defining those boundaries. Other organizations in the field, including orchestras, also seek refuge from environmental turbulence. Partnering can open organizations to other resources previously pertaining only to the field that that organization once could claim as its own. But beyond additional funding streams, partnerships provide larger, less-localized organizations with enough money to invest in El Sistema programs the opportunity to work with local organizations that better understand the communities they serve.

Abreu Fellows often do not end up teaching where they were raised, and community organizations give El Sistema leaders important windows into their new communities. Dantes Rameau, director of the *Atlanta Music Project*, is from Ottawa, Ontario, and Stanford Thompson of *Play on, Philly*, grew up near Atlanta; and Christine Witkowski of *YOLA at HOLA*, is from Michigan, to name a few. It is also possible for a program’s teaching staff to be from outside the community: in May 2011, only one teacher on the *YOLA at HOLA* faculty was from the Los Angeles area.¹⁵⁷ El Sistema programs around the world stress peer mentorship as a way to deepen ties to the community, but in the United States those ties often are not immediately available. Partnering with an existing community organization that knows its neighborhood and the neighborhood’s politics, temperament, needs, and

¹⁵⁷ Informal conversation with YOLA at HOLA faculty, May 2011.

desires and that has both experience and a positive reputation in serving its neighbors can help an El Sistema program forge these ties more quickly.

Building partnerships with community organizations in this way is both smart and sensitive: smart because it allows the new program to borrow some of the goodwill and respect accrued by its older partner until it builds its own and sensitive because it gives the new program the chance to hear more accurately what the community needs and wants. A new organization of outsiders might be seen as intrusive without these discussions, and a partner can guide a well-intentioned newcomer through this process. Longy School of Music President Karen Zorn, in discussing her institution's partnership with Bard College and a public charter school in Delano, made clear that Longy and Bard "did not design the program from Boston but got to know the community," an action that prompted the three partners to first form a Mariachi program.¹⁵⁸ Of the same relationship, Bard College President Leon Botstein said, "the core of our success is in the community."¹⁵⁹ "Our art," said Botstein, "...is made locally in real time and real space."¹⁶⁰

Case Study: The Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra

As is the case with independently run El Sistema programs, an orchestra interested in founding an El Sistema program gains credibility and adaptability by partnering with community organizations. But orchestras have their own reasons for partnering. Deborah Borda of the Los Angeles Philharmonic summed up both in her

¹⁵⁸ Karen Zorn closing remarks at the Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012

¹⁵⁹ Leon Botstein closing remarks at the Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012

¹⁶⁰ Leon Botstein Speech to the Take a Stand Symposium, 31 January 2012

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closing remarks to the Take A Stand Symposium: “Responsibility,” and “Survival.”

Borda meant responsibility of two kinds: operational, and moral. Operational responsibility is not a reason to found an El Sistema program; it is simply a commitment to strive for excellence, both musical and organizational. Smart decisions, proper resource allocation, and functioning boards all are operational commitments the Philharmonic is willing to make to its program. Moral responsibility, on the other hand, prompts the Philharmonic to build a program that gives back to its surrounding Los Angeles community.

Speaking about the Los Angeles Philharmonic but perhaps implicating orchestras across the country, Deborah Borda said her organization took on the El Sistema project because it was concerned with its “survival.”¹⁶¹ National interest in classical music has waned over the past decades, and the orchestra has not been spared. But while some would bemoan the shift in culture, Borda asked her fellow classical musicians, “How did we allow ourselves to become so marginalized?”¹⁶² Leon Botstein, who is a conductor and pianist in addition to being president of Bard College, offered the theory that most classical music institutions were founded in a very different time, including symphony orchestras, universities, and music conservatories, and that the role of the artist in society has changed.¹⁶³ Artists have a new need in society: to address, in Botstein’s words, “the uneven distribution of what makes life worth living.”¹⁶⁴ Traditional orchestras, universities, and music conservatories have institutional structures that mirror their classical roles and do not

¹⁶¹ Deborah Borda closing remarks at the Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Leon Botstein closing remarks at the Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

support the changing economic and moral landscape presented to classical musicians.¹⁶⁵ Organizations like the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Bard College have recognized that if their goals and actions do not align with a changing environment, their relevance in the future classical music and higher education fields will wane.

What are “the conversations that matter” and “actionable steps,” Borda wondered, that could align organizations like the Philharmonic with the future of the struggling orchestra industry?¹⁶⁶ A cynic might conclude that the backward “organizational form” of a symphony orchestra, when confronted with the current environmental conditions in the market for classical music or art or entertainment in general, will soon die give way to a fresher species of organization that better addresses the demands of that market.¹⁶⁷ But Borda’s actions at the helm of the Philharmonic suggest that she believes in her organization’s ability to affect — and, indeed, effect — that market.

Whether organizations at once both respond to and create their environmental conditions has been a contentious topic in modern organizational theory. Some theorists (Hannan and Carroll 1995) have determined that an organization’s core features, including mission, form of authority, basic technology, and basic marketing strategy are essentially unchangeable, and a mismatch between this “organizational form” and its surrounding environment will result in the organization’s failure. Attempts to change these core features to match a new environment are death knells

¹⁶⁵ Hulting-Cohen 2011

¹⁶⁶ Deborah Borda closing remarks at the Take a Stand Symposium, 1 February 2012.

¹⁶⁷ Hannan and Carroll 1995

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for any organization. Other features are peripheral and may be changed without ruining an organization's survival prospects. Hannan and Carroll offer the example General Motors "switching its goals to be similar to the Catholic Church:" the mission, form of authority, basic technology, and general marketing strategy are mismatched.

Other theorists (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978, Scott 1998, DiMaggio and Powell 1983) posit that organizations play a more active role in their environments. In an "open systems" view of organizations' relationships with their environments, "the boundary separating the organization from its environment is somewhat arbitrarily drawn and varies with the flows or activities being examined" (Scott 1998: 144). Organizations and their environments influence each other so greatly and are so deeply interconnected that they can hardly be separated from one another. Like its leaders, who work to change their fortunes, an organization "partly interacts with and constitutes" its environment.¹⁶⁸ Organizations produce things, which result in changes to the environment. Organizations then note these changes and act based on their findings.

Both theoretical camps are helpful in explaining the dire situation orchestras find themselves in and how they can manage their ways through them. For instance, the Philadelphia Orchestra says the following about itself:

Renowned for its distinctive sound, desired for its keen ability to capture the hearts and imaginations of audiences, and admired for an unrivaled legacy of "firsts" in music-making, The Philadelphia Orchestra remains one of the

¹⁶⁸ Weick 1979: 165

preeminent orchestras in the world.¹⁶⁹

No more specific mission statement is listed, but one might assume from this statement's focus on musical sound, rapturous performances, and innovation, the mission of the orchestra is along the lines of, "to present brilliant and innovative orchestral performances with the intention of capturing the hearts and imagination of its audiences." Hierarchy is its form of authority: ultimately, everyone in the organization is replaceable, which decentralizes power away from any one individual. The orchestra's basic technology is orchestral performance and its basic marketing strategy, as surmised from its website, is to reach young college students and traditional audiences.

The organizational environment around the Philadelphia Orchestra shifted dramatically from the time of its founding in 1900. According to Mauskapf, in the orchestra world in general, "volatile markets combined with stagnant ticket sales and declining corporate support have made for an especially arduous environment in recent years."¹⁷⁰ In Philadelphia, the global economy and changing consumer tastes also may have reduced the ability of wealthy patrons to support the orchestra.¹⁷¹ Other institutions, including symphony orchestras with broader missions, are more "fit" for the new conditions, since a broader mission necessitates a wider set of basic technologies and a more comprehensive marketing strategy. Indeed, the Philadelphia Orchestra, which became the first major orchestra file for bankruptcy in April

¹⁶⁹ Philadelphia Orchestra, "About." *Philorch.org*, last accessed 8 March 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Mauskapf 2011: 253

¹⁷¹ Mauskapf 2011: 256

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2011,¹⁷² has not been able to adjust to its new environment.

The bankruptcy may demonstrate that the organization's core features were inadequate for the new conditions, but another symphony orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, was able survive and even flourish in this new environment. Its current mission statement sheds light on why:

To perform, present, promote music in its varied forms at the highest level of excellence to a diverse and large audience, both at Walt Disney Concert Hall and the Hollywood Bowl. LAPA is dedicated to the work required to achieve pre-eminent status in the music world of the 21st century.¹⁷³

Like the Philadelphia Orchestra, LAPA is a hierarchical organization. It is also in the business of classical orchestral music, evidenced by its name. Its basic technology is orchestral performance, and its basic marketing strategy is mass appeal.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic is much more financially sound than the Philadelphia Orchestra,¹⁷⁴ One reason for its financial stability is that LAPA runs the Hollywood Bowl, a summertime concert venue that features artists from many non-classical genres that are more popular with the mainstream public, whereas the Philadelphia Orchestra, plays summer concerts at the venue of a separate arts organization that brings in guest artists but keeps the resulting income. However, a potentially more powerful reason is the forward-thinking perspective of the Los Angeles Philharmonic that led it to adapt El Sistema for Los Angeles.

¹⁷² Mauskapf 2011: 256

¹⁷³ Los Angeles Philharmonic, "Jobs." *LAPhil.com*.

¹⁷⁴ A comparison of Charity Navigator Data reveals that while the Los Angeles Philharmonic finished the fiscal year 2009/2010 with an excess of over \$16.8million, the Philadelphia Orchestra finished the same year with a deficit of over \$10.3million.

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Whereas the Philadelphia Orchestra still touts its past heritage, the LA Philharmonic's mission statement is now "targeting future preeminence in the music world." In fact, it is redefining the criteria for preeminence. Orchestras everywhere focus on producing exceptionally highly critically acclaimed orchestral performances remain among them and creating a positive experience for their audiences; however, the Philharmonic has included education and community engagement among them. Hiring Dudamel gave the Philharmonic a perfect opportunity to change its organizational model, using his star power, connection with El Sistema, and El Sistema's growing national influence to signal to the public and to others in the field its new definition of preeminence.

Accordingly, press coverage has been frequent since the Philharmonic founded YOLA in 2007. According to YOLA manager Daniel Berkowitz,

The value that it adds to the organization publicly, to the perception of what this organization does, is [huge], giving kids from these communities opportunities ... they wouldn't otherwise have.... It heightens the visibility of what we do without a huge financial burden.¹⁷⁵

The press coverage YOLA garners raises the Philharmonic's public profile, not just as an orchestra but also as a community institution. Because of its higher public profile, the Los Angeles Philharmonic now has the potential to approach preeminence not only in the music performance world but it also in music education, social work, and community action circles.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Daniel Berkowitz, July 8 2012, in Mauskapf 2011: 220. YOLA's financial burden on the Los Angeles Philharmonic is less than one percent of its \$100 million operating budget.

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The Philharmonic's "open systems" perspective of its relationship to its community fulfills both its moral and survival interests. Identifying its potential connections to new communities gave it new imperatives beyond those of maintaining an arts organization. While the Los Angeles Philharmonic has purveyed classical music for nearly a century,¹⁷⁶ it is only now making a name in music education, social work, and community action. As such, it must prove its legitimacy in each of those circles. Doing so is important for the public image of the Philharmonic, both within those circles and without, since news of the Philharmonic as insensitive steward of its community could compromise its funding stream from donors and ticket buyers. To gain legitimacy in any of these areas, the Philharmonic has to submit to the normative pressures of its new institutional environments. For instance, the Philharmonic, as not an "official" member of the music education community, does not need to fulfill the membership requirements or participate in national music education associations, but it must maintain a certain quality of programming and produce expert-approved music results to be taken seriously as truly committed to music education. Its students' personal development and community change results must also measure well against the rubrics of social work and community action for similar reasons.

It was not easy for the Los Angeles Philharmonic to adopt this open systems perspective and to include education and community engagement. Originally, according to YOLA manager Daniel Berkowitz, its board was concerned about

¹⁷⁶ The Los Angeles Philharmonic was founded in 1919. Los Angeles Philharmonic, "History of the Los Angeles Philharmonic." *LAPhil.com*.

moving too far from the organization's core features:

A big scare that our board had at the beginning is how do you create this program and then take it away from a community if it fails? You can't, so when you create something like this you need to make sure that it is going to happen forever. So the initial plan was to invest heavily in the first five years of the program and then scale back, and let the community take over. At some point ... the board shifted direction and said this is something we need to support and have as core of part of what we do. If we were to back out, it wouldn't feel right.... There's no endowment for this, but we've invested in the program through funding from the operating budget and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.¹⁷⁷

That there was originally any question at all about the extent to which the Philharmonic would support its new education initiatives suggests that the board was not sure how well the new programs fit with the orchestra's principal purpose of making great music.

It is easy to see why this might have been the case. Conservative views of an organization's relationship with its community hold that "the social responsibility of a firm is to increase its profits" (Friedman 1970) and that engaging in non-profit increasing activities is actually harmful to the economy and therefore to American communities (Berle 1931; Sundaram and Inkpen 2004). These perspectives on "corporate social responsibility," though often mentioned in the context of for-profit corporations, can also describe perspectives of any organization leader concerned

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Daniel Berkowitz, July 8 2012, in Mauskapf 2011: 221

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about cash flow and funding streams, including those in the nonprofit sector. The theories share the fundamental premise with organizational ecology that organizations are best served keeping close to their core features and purposes (Hannan and Carroll, 1995). Such actions make sense in environmental conditions that support the work of the organization; however, as Deborah Borda and the Los Angeles Philharmonic's board evidently noticed, the environment has changed. While including education and community engagement among the Philharmonic's priorities is new, it is not a fundamental shift in the organization's core features. Instead, including education and community engagement allows the Philharmonic to keep its core purposes intact while redefining preeminence and success in the field and enacting a new environment in which old definitions of organizational fit are obsolete. What was once financially risky suddenly became much safer in comparison to doing nothing at all.

Perhaps it was the potential for extraordinary press coverage of the orchestra's activities and the hope of an ensuing uptick in income that prompted the board to reimagine education as part of the Philharmonic's core purpose. Every nonprofit and, indeed, for-profit organization hopes to secure its funding stream. In the especially *turbulent* arts world, funding is all the more questionable. But whether organizations can make money from social responsibility is debatable (Margolis and Elfenbein 2008), and it may be unlikely that El Sistema programs will encourage its students and faculty to purchase tickets to Philharmonic events.¹⁷⁸ Others contend that social

¹⁷⁸ Mauskapf quotes Baltimore Symphony Orchestra-affiliated OrchKids' executive director Dan Trahey as saying,

“There have been studies done that show people who don't study music attend

responsibility can and perhaps does increase an organization's profits (Prahalad and Hart 2002), in the case of the Philharmonic's El Sistema by "creating a culture of participants" that cares to make music and pay to hear others make it, too.¹⁷⁹ Either way, positive relations with the Philharmonic's neighboring communities and a positive and formidable presence in the press can only build community support for the Philharmonic and increase the awareness of people already in the Philharmonic's target audience of the Philharmonic, its goals, its successes, and its care for its neighbors. Maybe they will subscribe to another concert series.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic has no real conflict of interest in entering the field of education and no tension in its organizational goals. In the perhaps unlikely scenario that entering this field raises the public profile of the orchestra and increases its audience base and therefore revenue, it only does so with steady board support. The Philharmonic also has no incentive to underfund its educational programs since press coverage of low quality, underfunded, or inactive programs would harm the Philharmonic's reputation. To the contrary, greater investment of resources in its El Sistema initiative would most likely increase any benefits the Philharmonic derives from YOLA. Because preeminence and cultural relevance are socially-defined, and because the Philharmonic is building a new culture around the expectations of orchestras, raising its program quality to meet those expectations, and reevaluating its role in its neighborhood and institutional communities, it seems Borda's dual purpose of responsibility and survival are, indeed, the driving forces behind the

just as many concerts as those that do....So I have a really hard time believing that we're building a generation of ticketbuyers." Mauskapf 2011: 242

¹⁷⁹ Leon Botstein speech to the Take a Stand Symposium, 31 January 2012

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Philharmonic's adoption and maintenance of its El Sistema programs.

Other orchestras have followed suit; since the LA Philharmonic founded its YOLA in 2007, orchestras in Baltimore, Atlanta, Newport News, Waterbury and nearby San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Stockton have begun youth orchestras of their own. There is no provable link between the founding of these programs and the preeminence of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and it is likely that these orchestras have identified the same "survival" rationale Borda mentioned. However, with the help of extensive news coverage, they may be creating together a public that expects orchestras to be more closely connected to their communities than in the past. The Los Angeles Philharmonic and other orchestras working to change the definition of a twenty-first century orchestra are, in this sense, building this goal and its method of attainment, education, into the society as institutional rules (Meyer and Rowan 1977). By affecting its environment and enacting new qualities about it, the Los Angeles Philharmonic is able to skirt the danger of becoming obsolete faced by the ecologically stymied Philadelphia Orchestra and move forward into the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Implications for The El Sistema Movement

The resource dependence, ecological, and institutional processes have all been adept at describing what is happening in the El Sistema movement. Because of the resources they share, including public perception and other socially based resources, organizations and their environments are deeply connected. They also are accountable to each other: what organizations do effect their environments, and these environmental changes demand particular organizational forms. An organization that is not fit for its environment, although it may have taken part in enacting that environment, cannot survive.

The environments El Sistema programs and their supporters belong to are constantly shifting, at least until an association defines the movement's core philosophies and exerts certain normative or even coercive pressures on individual programs. Some programs, like the Los Angeles Philharmonic, straddle several established environments, including orchestral, educational, social, Los Angeles, and even Venezuelan through their close connection with that country's El Sistema leadership. Such programs are able to access resources in each of these environments.

Because of the resources they share, including public perception and other socially based resources, organizations and their environments are deeply connected.

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This deep connection through resources has great implications for El Sistema program managers and those interested in adopting the movement. An organization in need of stability might benefit from the additional security that comes with a broader set of accessible resources, some of which might have previously been inaccessible because they existed in an environment the organization defined as “other.” By defining its own location in that new environment (Zucker 1980) and even expanding it to include more resources, an organization can achieve that stability. However, the process also could destabilize an organization. By redefining its environment, an organization might make its purpose and abilities obsolete. The question is one of managerial daring or conservatism, and each choice involves considerable risk.

Community organizations have much to gain from adopting El Sistema programs, principally because El Sistema represents the kind of community engagement they desire. Their expertise in understanding and addressing the needs of the community they serve makes them good partners for El Sistema programs and other organizations, like orchestras, who might previously have been disconnected from that community. To these community organizations, El Sistema can open doors to new resources, including those of major symphony orchestras. As is the case with the Heart of Los Angeles community center, splitting program costs and responsibilities with a larger and financially-sound institution can promote stability in what otherwise can be a turbulent nonprofit funding economy. Partnerships can be difficult and their power dynamics can be trying, but with dedicated parties each identifying the resources, capabilities, and institutional arrangements of the other, it

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seems partnerships can help programs maintain stability and thrive here in the United States.

As new orchestras notice the work of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the extraordinary press coverage that organization is receiving, it is likely that they will have to decide whether to adopt an El Sistema program. The decision is difficult and each has its risks; however, orchestras must ask themselves three questions: First, will adding this program help our attendance, donor interest, and ultimately our bottom line? Second, is this movement a fad, and will adopting it simply drain resources only to become outdated? And last, will not adopting El Sistema cause more problems than joining the movement?

The answers to these questions depend on several things. The economic efficiency of adopting an El Sistema program has not been studied concertededly. There have been attempts at judging program quality, including an in-depth study of YOLA at HOLA,¹⁸⁰ but because of the deeply interconnected nature of the orchestra's institutional environment, the extreme degree to which it is dependent on public opinion as a societal resource, and that American El Sistema programs have not become long-enough established to ensure that they are not just a "fad," the direct benefits to orchestras are not yet determined beyond hunches. The orchestras that wait to find out whether the movement dies as a fad will themselves live or die by that decision. If El Sistema dies in a few years, orchestras that did not adopt programs might outlive those who spent fortunes on maintaining programs peripheral

¹⁸⁰ In June 2011, YOLA at HOLA was undergoing a major evaluation by an external consultant.

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to their core features. If El Sistema thrives, it is likely that the newly enacted environment and conception of twenty-first century orchestras will apply enough normative pressure to all orchestras, regardless of whether they have defined their environment more broadly and identified for themselves a larger set of institutional partners, to meet its new demands. Those adopting El Sistema late will be doing so for legitimation, but although joining so late may protect long-term survival, such a reactionary strategy might not help an orchestra's bottom line so much as maintain it, and it likely will drain resources because it earns a lower return-on investment than those who benefitted from adopting early.

But there would be nothing for orchestras to adopt were it not for the programs themselves. El Sistema-inspired programs are cropping up all around the United States, and the degree to which they match their Venezuelan is shaped by not only the institutional pressures of their partnering organizations but also those of the new organizational field of El Sistema programs. Many of the same institutional pressures on orchestras are analogous to those on individual programs. While all organizations, whether El Sistema programs or their partners, exist in institutional environments, local El Sistema programs are even more deeply embedded in them than their partners in that they are one level more specific. Individual programs are beholden to the institutional pressures not only of their partners but also their partners' fields, as well as their own fields, which span societal environments including education, music education, health, and social welfare.

Since American El Sistema programs span multiple environments, the pressures they feel are complex and often conflicting. The actions they take might

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satisfy the pressures of one environment while dissatisfying those of another environment. These actions also might not actually benefit programs; legitimating an action externally may not benefit it internally. The paper orchestra is one example of a practice that may have been adopted for external legitimacy, but it is clear that in trying to found a program in an uncertain and new, synthetic organizational field, El Sistema programs were searching for a technique with a record of success. Seeking individual innovations has been an important part of El Sistema's development and is a key component of its future plans through its new association. The association should provide both the propinquity and weak ties to spread both philosophical inspiration and technological innovation.

The realities of resource dependence govern all organizations' actions and are often cited within the El Sistema movement as a real concern, but because the delineation of organization and environment is so nebulous, organizations may redefine their environments to include additional resources. Of course, competing for these new resources comes with the same institutional pressures as were in the organization's narrowly-defined field, but determining which new fields are least crowded should help managers secure additional funding for their programs beyond partnership.

Implications for Organizational Theory

This exploration of El Sistema and organizational theories suggests that some combination of theories is required to make sense of the world. An orthodox approach would not be appropriate since ecology oversimplifies the social forces

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acting on organizations and institutional theory does not account well for structural inertia. Indeed, much of the work of organizational theorists has been in evaluating, combining, and extending the ideas of those who came before them.

Synthesizing these perspectives has implications for managers in the nonprofit sector. The case of El Sistema suggests that socially oriented nonprofits that span several pre-existing environments function in a highly institutional environment. Because of this extreme institutional situation, partnering poses a challenge for these organizations. Partner organizations often need to fundamentally question their organizational fit with their environments and weight the risks of adaptation and how soon they should adopt a new innovation to adapt to a new environment. By their open systems connection to their environment, these partner organizations have an opportunity to shape the future of their changing environments to ensure a proper organizational fit. The degree to which managers adopt this view determines their organizations' ultimate fate. Rather than adapting to meet the environment, a reactionary approach to maintaining organizational fitness, these organizations would do well to corral others to join in enacting a new environment that fits their needs. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, they can "be the change [they] wish to see in the world."

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